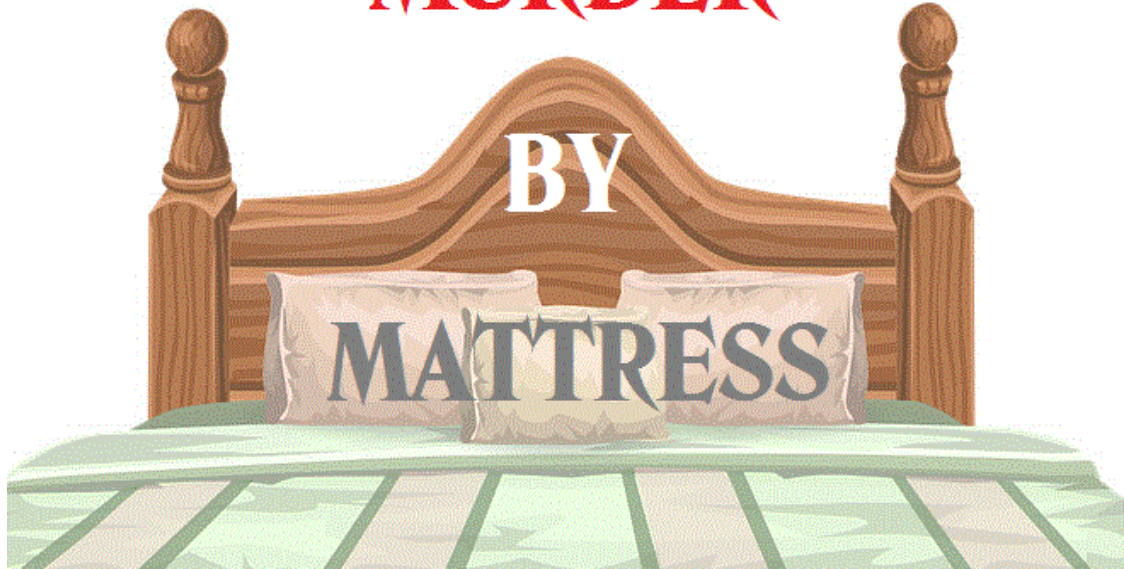


Moody & Sullen Investigate:

MURDER



A Dinner Theatre Murder Mystery

by

Lesley Gunn



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Customer Taster

Murder by Mattress

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About the pack

This is a scripted murder mystery that will also require the cast to answer questions put to them by their audience, however all the information needed by the audience is contained in the script, so the cast do not need to deliver further clues. A full script is provided, as well as “accusation sheets” for the audience to write their answers.

Murder By Mattress is set in the mid-1920s, over two acts, with two possible endings and approximately seventy minutes of scripted dialogue. The murder evening is designed to be played by ten actors in a venue with a stage or suitable acting area, with tables around the hall for your audience. The actors perform Act One, followed by an interval, and a second act. The audience, divided into teams/tables, are then invited to ask the suspects questions, and are given time to solve the mystery before the guilty party is revealed.

The script contains an interval to allow the audience to enjoy a meal and/or drinks, as well as the opportunity for audience questions and deliberation before the final scene.

Structure

The full murder mystery pack contains:-

- **The Organiser’s Overview** [*excerpt in this Taster*]
- **The Script** [*excerpt in this Taster*]
- **The Accusation Sheet** - for the audience to enter their solutions

Organiser’s Overview Contents

- Synopsis
- Character Descriptions
- General Staging Notes
 - Brief description of each step of the production
 - Suggested Show Timings
- Production Notes
 - Props List
 - Set Description
 - Costume Suggestions

Synopsis

Inspector Harry Moody and his sidekick, PC Joe Sullen, return to investigate a second murder at Rothersfield Hall when a body is found during Victoria Rothersfield's birthday party. But as with all events at the Hall, life, and death, is never straightforward. The police learn about a stolen pocket watch, a long standing feud over a prize herd of cattle and quite a few glasses of champagne. Can Moody and Sullen solve another murder and another mystery amidst the strange characters at the Hall?

Character Descriptions

Inspector Harry Moody – straight forward, straight thinking, straight talking detective. He likes things to be black and white, and Joe can be a bit 'grey' at times, which throws Harry.

PC Joe Sullen - The local constable and Moody's right hand man, although he seems to be distracted easily.

The Dowager Lady Dorothy Rothersfield – An elderly lady but still very astute and spritely for her age (80 years). She disinherited her own children after they were involved in a plot to kill her over the provisions of her will, and she now lives in Rothersfield Hall with her only niece.

Victoria Rothersfield – Dorothy's niece and now sole heir to Rothersfield Hall. What she lacks in academic achievement she makes up for with her very pleasant and generally happy personality. She does have a habit of drinking a bit too much champagne from time to time, which can get her into trouble.

Lord Charles Kilbourne – Dorothy's brother in law. He is a loud, grumpy man who is stuck in his ways. He sees the bad in everyone and has no qualms about telling everyone exactly what he thinks. He has trouble with some words when he gets angry and doesn't like being corrected.

Lady Elizabeth Kilbourne – Dorothy's younger sister. A very amicable and intelligent lady, but obviously stuck in an unhappy marriage. She and Lord Kilbourne did not have any children, so Victoria is also heir to their estate.

Florence Amberley – Victoria's friend. A very amicable and bubbly person and very much her father's daughter. Victoria's father and Lord Kilbourne have been in a long-standing feud.

Mr Butler – the butler. The Butler family have been in the employ of the Rothersfield's for many years. Following his brother's sudden and dramatic departure from the Hall, Mr Butler took up the role of butler.

Mrs Cook – the cook. She has worked for Lady Rothersfield for years. Everyone loves Mrs Cook and she is considered almost part of the family.

Edie – housemaid. (Pronounced 'ee-dee') Edie is fairly new to the household staff and keen to impress Lady Rothersfield.

Extras - Party guests and waiting staff for the party, as space allows on stage.

General Staging Notes

Murder By Mattress contains non-speaking parts for guests and waiting staff extras during the party scene as space allows on stage. You should allow just over two hours for the production, including the interval meal and/or drinks, as well as the audience interrogation and deliberation before the final scene. The final scene contains two possible endings to accommodate productions over two nights, or for the performing group to select whichever ending they prefer.

The production notes include stage settings and props, costume suggestions, timings and an accusation sheet for the audience.

Consider beforehand how you want the audience participation segment to work - it is usually better to divide the audience into teams or tables if your venue is suited to this. If you are including audience interrogation then make sure you provide paper and pens to your audience at the start of the evening. You may also want to explain before the show starts that there will be a chance for one question per team later in the evening, so that the audience can formulate their questions during the performance.

During the audience interrogation, only the culprit should be allowed to lie. All other characters should speak the truth as they know it. Once audience questions are complete, announce that there will be approximately ten minutes for deliberation. Remember to rehearse the sort of questions you might be asked. It can be difficult in a hall-type venue for all of the audience to hear the audience's questions, so it can be a good idea to repeat each question to the character, e.g. "A good question there from table seven, why did you need to hide the serviette you took under your shawl?"

Accusation sheets, included with this pack, should be distributed by a member of the cast at the end of the interrogation. Once the allotted time is up, the accusation sheets should be collected by a crew or cast member. Ensure that the winning team has been established prior to Act Two Scene Two, as this will be announced by PC Sullen as part of the character's dialogue. All the accusation sheets should be given to the actor before the start of the scene, as he will be bringing them on to the stage.

Timing

All timings are approximate:

Act One

Scene One: 5 Minutes

Scene Two: 25 Minutes

Scene Three: 15 Minutes

Interval: As required

Act Two

Scene One: 25 Minutes

Audience Interrogation and deliberation: 15 Minutes

Scene Two: 10 Minutes

Production Notes

Set Description

The play is set in the same room throughout. It is intended to be in quite a grand house. Any background set, if available, could include panelled walls for example, maybe with a family portrait picture, or a fireplace. You may also wish to have an ornate rug on the floor. Art Deco standard lights were new in this era and were considered a sign of wealth. Cocktails were also very popular around this time, and so you may consider a small cocktail cabinet with drinks/glasses if you have space.

At the side of the stage towards the front should be a table, which you may need to cover if it is not 1920s style (or earlier). For this you could use a plain white cloth to cover any modern parts of the table you wish to hide.

Any decorations or table contents are at your own discretion but should be in keeping with the period and bear in mind the props which will need to be placed on the table throughout Act 1, scene 2.

Six chairs are also required in Act Two.

These should be dining or similar type chairs, again in keeping with the time period. If you do not have that type of chair available consider covering other chairs.

Costume Suggestions

The setting is 1920s, and therefore each character needs to be dressed according to the age. All characters remain in same costume throughout.

Downton Abbey-style party dresses would be suitable for the female characters (excluding the staff).

Lord Kilbourne: Smart three piece suit, or morning suit, and bow tie.

Harry: Smart suit, possibly pin stripe, plain shirt and tie. He could also wear a hat of the period and an outdoor coat.

Joe, Butler, Cook and Edie should all be wearing uniform that befits their roles and the era.

Murder by Mattress

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Script Excerpt

Characters

Inspector Harry Moody – straightforward, straight-thinking, straight-talking detective
PC Joe Sullen - the local constable and Moody's right hand man
The Dowager Lady Dorothy Rothersfield – an elderly lady, astute and spritely for her age
Victoria Rothersfield – Dorothy's niece
Lord Charles Kilbourne – Dorothy's brother in law, a short, loud and grumpy man
Lady Elizabeth Kilbourne – Dorothy's younger sister
Florence Amberley – Victoria's friend
Mr Butler – the butler
Mrs Cook – the cook
Edie - Housemaid
Optional extras - Party guests and waiting staff for the party

Act One

Scene One

(Lights on. Curtain remains closed.)

(Enter Harry and Joe, front of curtain.)

Harry: So we've arrived at Rothersfield Hall, PC Sullen.

Joe: So it would seem, Inspector Moody.

Harry: Another murder to investigate. What is it about this place?

Joe: It could be the name Sir, it encourages them.

Harry: What?

Joe: The town name, being Killington. I mean, it doesn't exactly sound like a summer day with birds on the wing and blossoming flowers does it?

Harry: What do you want to call it then Sullen? Midsomer? Is that flowery enough for you?

Joe: It does have a certain ring about it Sir, maybe they should consider it.

Harry: Let's just stick to the plot Sullen.

Joe: Yes Sir.

Harry: Have you identified the body?

Joe: Oh yes Sir. That was the easy bit.

Harry: And it is?

Joe: It's the still, lifeless thing under the sheet Sir.

Harry: I know it's the still, lifeless thing under the sheet Sullen!

Joe: That's why you're the detective Sir.

Harry: That's why I'm the... Enough! Where is the body?

Joe: In one of the bedrooms Sir.

Harry: Right, we're getting somewhere. And the suspects, who do we have lined up for us?

Joe: Lady Rothersfield, the Dowager Lady Rothersfield that is, she is still at the Hall of course and the guests have arrived for Miss Victoria Rothersfield's birthday celebrations I believe.

Harry: Well, all I can say is that I hope that, being from good breeding, this lot are easier to deal with than some of the people we get.

Joe: I wouldn't like to bet on that Sir. That is the cause of most of today's problems. We'd be a lot better off if people didn't breed in my opinion. You wouldn't catch me breeding.

Harry: Quite right Sullen, and clearly our jobs would be easier if there were no criminals too. So where are the suspects?

Joe: In the drawing room Sir.

Harry: Good, let's go and find out what happened earlier this evening and see if we piece this jigsaw together.

Joe: Shall I call Mrs Sullen Sir?

Harry: Why on earth would you call your wife?

Joe: She's good at jigsaws Sir. Has a marvellous one of the Houses of Parliament, took her a week, but...

Harry: **(Interrupting)** It's a metaphorical jigsaw Sullen!

Joe: Oh. I don't think she's done one of those before Sir.

Harry: No, I mean, oh never mind Sullen. Come on, there is work to do and we must be off.

Joe: I thought there was an odd smell Sir. I didn't like to say anything.

(Exit Harry and Joe.)

Scene Two

(Lights on. Curtain opens.)

(Enter Victoria and Dorothy.)

Dorothy: All set for your party Victoria? Your guests should be arriving soon.

Victoria: Yes thank you Aunt Dorothy. It seems ages since I had a birthday party at Rothersfield Hall, such happy memories.

Dorothy: It is ages my dear. You were twelve years old last time.

Victoria: Oh how time flies. Who would have thought that just a mere ten years later...

Dorothy: **(Interrupting her. Coughs very loudly.)** How many?

Victoria: Oh silly me! Maths was never my strong point at school. Still, what's the odd year or two between family and friends?

Dorothy: Well it depends how odd those years were. If they were odd in the fact that they each contained sixty months then it might have some significance. Nevertheless, we are here to celebrate your birthday, however many you wish to admit to.

Victoria: And I'm so looking forward to seeing my Aunt Elizabeth again. Although I do admit there is a large price to pay for that delight.

Dorothy: Now then Victoria, for all you know Lord Charles may have changed since you last saw him, although I too have my doubts.

Victoria: I hope he has changed, Aunt Dorothy. He'd be very smelly if he hadn't.

Dorothy: I meant in his ways dear.

Victoria: Oh silly me! English was never my strong point at school. But I do hope he has changed his ways. Last time we met he said that I looked like the back end of a horse!

Dorothy: That was probably to do with your long legs and the way you used to have your long hair dangling in front of your face.

Victoria: Oh do you think so Aunt Dorothy?

Dorothy: Yes, and they've taken the word gullible out of the dictionary too.

Victoria: Have they really Aunt Dorothy? **(Looking confused.)** I'll have to check that later, how odd.

(Enter Florence.)

Victoria: Florence! My dear friend! I'm so glad you could make it.

(Victoria hugs Florence.)

Florence: I wouldn't miss this for the world. It is years since you had a birthday party at Rothersfield Hall. How old were you last time?

Victoria: Twelve.

Florence: Crikey Victoria, that's, **(counting on fingers)** um, sixteen, twenty, oh um, I've run out of fingers and toes, well it's a long *long* time ago anyway.

Victoria: It's not *that* long ago Florence!

Florence: Oh it is, I mean...

Victoria: **(Interrupting her.)** No Florence it *isn't!*

Florence: No, of course not. Silly me. Maths never was my strong point at school.

Dorothy: It doesn't seem to have been anyone's strong point.

(Enter Edie, carrying tray of glasses with champagne.)

Edie: Mr Butler has asked if you would like some drinks before the party Madam.

Victoria: Oh super! Champagne. My favourite! **(Takes a glass from the tray.)**

Florence: Yes, I remember when you got very sozzled at Lilian Churchman's engagement party on champagne. I seem to recall that you told Biffy Hatfield that you loved him and was going to marry him. **(Takes a glass from the tray. Then wistfully.)** Whatever happened to Biffy? He was such a good looking chap, very charming, all the girls admired him so much.

Dorothy: If you mean Bertie Hatfield, he ran off to Australia.

Florence: I say, that's a bit drastic, just to get away from Victoria

Victoria: He did not *run off* to Australia Aunt Dorothy!

Dorothy: No, to be fair, he sailed off. He may have been a charming chap but running on water probably wasn't in his repertoire.

Victoria: And no Florence it was not just to get away from me. He said he had business there he had to deal with. It was just a mere coincidence it was less than a week after I'd announced my love for him. Anyway that was just a silly evening, everyone knew it was the drink talking.

Florence: (Mockingly and very melodramatic.) Oh Biffy, Biffy, you are my one true love, my only love, my life, my everything.

Victoria: I didn't say...

Florence: (Interrupting Victoria and in same mocking manner.) Let's just sail off somewhere into the sunset and get married and have lots of Biffy babies, what do you say?

Victoria: Oh dear, did I really say that? I can't remember much about that night.

Dorothy: I'm not surprised he ran off to Australia! Biffy babies? It's enough to scare off even the most ardent of admirers!

Victoria: It was the champagne talking Aunt Dorothy. I'm not myself after three glasses of champagne.

Dorothy: Sounds like you're anyone's after three glasses of champagne!

Florence: Sorry Victoria. It was funny at the time though.

Victoria: Well, let's agree not to talk about it any more. It is going to be bad enough with Uncle Charles being here tonight. I may need three glasses of champagne to get through the night.

Florence: Not *the* Uncle Charles?

Dorothy: You've met my sister's husband before Florence?

Florence: I have Lady Dorothy. I'm afraid he and my father do not see eye to eye.

Victoria: That's because your father is six foot seven and Uncle Charles is only five foot six. **[Or other height]**

Florence: No, I mean there is a bit of history between them over the grazing rights of some cattle. It is just as well my father isn't here tonight. He has a dreadful temper and would just as likely knock Lord Charles' lights out.

Dorothy: I think you'll find there is a queue my dear. Plenty of people would like to see Lord Kilbourne have his lights knocked out as you so eloquently put it. Victoria, I suggest you limit your champagne intake. We don't want you announcing your love to anyone tonight, or knocking anyone's lights out for that matter. **(To Edie.)** Edie, could you ask Mrs Cook to pop up here for a moment please?

Edie: Yes your ladyship. **(Curtsey and exit.)**

(Enter Butler.)

Butler: Excuse me your Ladyship.

Dorothy: Yes Mr Butler?

Butler: Lord and Lady Kilbourne have arrived Madam. I've taken the liberty of showing them to the red room on the first floor.

Dorothy: Thank you Mr Butler. Please show Lady Kilbourne through and leave Lord Kilbourne on the doorstep.

Butler: I have tried your Ladyship, but for some reason he insists on being let inside. Something to do with it pouring down with rain outside I believe.

Dorothy: Damn this English weather, it always ruins the best laid plans. Well Mr Butler you'd better show both of them through here.

Butler: Yes Madam. **(Exits)**

Dorothy: Here we go. Now Victoria, Florence, try not to knock his lights out, or otherwise maim or attack him. We've already had enough trouble with those sort of things at Rothersfield Hall for one lifetime.

Victoria: I'll try Aunt Dorothy.

Florence: Me too. Although I hate to disappoint my father.

Dorothy: Quite understandable, just do your best dear.

(Enter Butler, followed by Charles and Elizabeth.)

Butler: Lord Charles and Lady...

Charles: (Interrupting him.) She knows who we are you blithering idiot! Make yourself useful and go buttle something elsewhere where you don't make the place look untidy. And while you are out there, sort out that wretched clock in my room!

Butler: What exactly is wrong with the clock Sir?

Charles: It keeps ticking!

Butler: It's a clock Sir. That is its role in life.

Charles: It's too loud! And it tocks when it should tick! **(Pause)** Well? What are you waiting for? Off you go man!

(Butler does not move, but looks to Dorothy.)

Dorothy: Thank you Butler. Please see if you can do anything about the tock in Lord Charles' bedroom.

Butler: Yes Madam. Miss Victoria, Miss Florence, Lady Elizabeth, if you will excuse me, I have some *buttle-ing* to do. **(Exits)**

Charles: Damn insulant! Dorothy, you have let this place go, you can't control your staff, and the place is just one complete mess from start to finish. It's falling apart at the seams! Not to mention tocking clocks when they should be ticking! You're not fit to run this household! What do you have to say?

Dorothy: (Ignoring him and goes to Elizabeth.) Elizabeth! My dear sister. **(They hug.)** You look well considering what you have to put up with at Kilbourne House. How is the whining old boiler?

Charles: WHAT?

Dorothy: (Still ignoring Charles.) I hear you have problems with the heating?

Elizabeth: Dorothy. How lovely of you to ask. Yes, we do still all suffer. But nothing a good whack with a blunt object couldn't fix I'm sure. It's just getting the right person for the job. **(Pause)** And hopefully we'll get the heating sorted too.

Charles: Oh that's right. You two old crones get together and it's like I don't even exist. Well I'm not putting up with it tonight I tell you. I came here under duress you know!

Dorothy: Shame it wasn't under a bus.

Charles: And where is that idiot niece of mine?

(Charles goes over to Florence and stares at her.)

Charles: Good grief, what happened to you? You bear no resemblance to your father at all these days. I said your mother spent too much time with the staff. No doubt your real father was one of the stable boys!

Victoria: I'm here Uncle Charles. That is my friend Florence.

Charles: What? Are you sure?

Dorothy: Of course she's sure!

Charles: Oh, well. I suppose you look a bit more like your father than **(pointing at Florence)** her. How long is it since I saw you last? It was at your last birthday party here.

Victoria: I was twelve Uncle.

Charles: Good grief that must have been the dark ages! You must be pushing forty by now.

Victoria: I don't think so!

Charles: (Peering at Victoria.) In that case you're wearing as badly as this house, and you're still not married. What's wrong with you?

Dorothy: (To Victoria.) Count to ten dear.

Victoria: Ten. **(Takes short pause and deep breath.)** I've just not met the right man yet Uncle.

Florence: Well, you did, but he ran off to Australia.

Charles: Right man? *Right man?* What the hell has the right man got to do with marriage?

Elizabeth: Yes Victoria, look at your Uncle as an example. He's never been right.

Charles: Time is running out girl! You need to get married and get an heir. You have a duty now you have this place and Kilbourne House to inherit. Although heaven help us all when you do. Handing everything over to a woman? It wouldn't have happened in my time.

Dorothy: Times have changed Charles, moved on. Unlike some people I could mention.

Elizabeth: Well Victoria I must say that the move to Rothersfield Hall seems to have done wonders for you. You are looking delightful, I'm sure that any eligible young man would be delighted to have you as his wife.

Victoria: Thank you Aunt Elizabeth. I'm glad someone appreciates the effort I have gone to.

(Enter Cook.)

Cook: Sorry I took so long Lady Rothersfield.

Charles: Good grief! What on earth are you doing here woman?

Cook: I work here Sir.

Charles: In the kitchen woman! You work in the kitchen! What makes you think you can come upstairs to this room?

Cook: It was the mixture of being asked by Lady Rothersfield to come here, and the ability I have to climb stairs Lord Kilbourne.

Charles: This house is full of idiots!

Dorothy: Not quite full Charles, although the count did increase when you arrived.

(Victoria and Florence both giggle.)

Dorothy: (To Cook.) Thank you Mrs Cook. **(To Charles.)** Charles, you may talk how you wish to your own staff, but I will remind you this is my house, and they are my staff. I will thank you to leave them out of bellowing range. Unlike you I value my staff and wish them to remain at Rothersfield Hall.

Charles: You are useless with house and useless with them! And they are all insulant!

[Continued in the full script.]