



A Murder Mystery Scenario
By Jenny Gilbert

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Customer Taster

Poison by Numbers

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Everyone in the village who has money has been invited to artist Charles Crimson's workshop, to have an advanced viewing of his paintings and sculptures. An event which should be a social highlight turns to a disaster when 'someone' drops dead!

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About the pack

The full pack should provide everything you need to produce your very own murder mystery event.

The pack is intended to be used at a sit down meal where the principal characters will act out a set of events and arguments to the assembled guests.

Please remember from the outset that the pack is intended for an **improvised performance**. There is no script or set lines included for the cast to learn. Instead, your cast is expected to use the information included in the pack, develop their 'back stories' further and, staying completely in character throughout, improvise the action, dialogue and arguments themselves. This means that your performers are less constrained and restricted, can react and interact with the audience and guests at will and should have a lot more fun!

The full document includes:

A **Plot Overview**.

General Staging Notes on how best to plan and stage your Murder Mystery event.

A **Plot Narrative** to show how plot should flow and how the events should be woven in.

Overview of the Characters (including a summary of each character's motive for the murder)

An Appendix containing detailed **Character Back Stories** on each character.

This Customer Taster includes excerpts of the full pack.

You can feel free to customise the details of the scenario. Names and titles of the characters are more fixed if you choose to use the resources provided but should not cause any problems for you.

This murder mystery can be played as a light-hearted affair or a more serious one, depending on the production. The plot subject, the secret pasts of the characters and the characters themselves can be given a humorous or a dramatic spin!

All the characters have been given motives and reasons to commit murder and in fact it could have been any of them that did the deed. As such there are no complicated or involved clues for the audience to have to try and deduce or follow!

Plot Overview

Everyone in the village who has money has been invited to artist Charles Crimson's workshop to have an advanced viewing of his paintings and sculptures, which he intends to exhibit to the public the following week.

Present at the viewing are:

Charles Crimson - the Host, late 20s to early 30s.

Oliver Ochre - single, early 30s to late 40s.

Professor Cadmium - could be male or female, late 40s.

Monica Mauve – a single artist, in her late 30s.

Sandra Sienna - in her late 20s. She acts the dumb blond, but is far from it.

Sidney Sienna - in his mid 40s, a 'Lovejoy' type, who can't stop flirting.

Vicky Vermillion – a model, in her mid 20s.

Charles is hoping to get sponsorship from them by inviting them to the gallery. The only exception is Vicky, who has told him she wants to be there to mix with the rich; he has no choice but to allow her entry as she's blackmailing him.

One painting is of a Nude, which bears a close resemblance to ... [hinted at by everyone, but never admitted], and another of a Cat, who seems to be owned by several characters.

All his guests have arrived and the viewing is just starting to warm up. But it comes to an abrupt halt as 'someone' drops dead - poisoned!

There was Arsenic in the red wine, the poisoning effects of which are recounted by ... to ... (and, of course, the audience) whilst poor ... mimes each one as they are mentioned; all effects of slow arsenic poisoning, but for the sake of drama, speeded up until ... finally succumbs (dramatically!).

Staging Notes

The venue to be set up for an art review, with buffet table in the hall area for the audience to help themselves, before sitting at tables and chairs, facing the stage area. Ensure there is a centre aisle for the rest of the cast to approach the stage from the hall entrance, as late guests.

Art items to be arranged around the Hall, as if in a gallery.

A raised area, or stage accessed by steps, at one end of the hall; to have 3 tables with 2 chairs at each, and a table of odd glasses containing red wine behind a screen, one with a twisted stem. Also to have several items of art so that the Late Arrivals may have something to view, including the Cat, and the Nude paintings. The Nude should be up stage centre on an easel, covered.

Audience's tables to have notes sheets/pencils, etc, provided.

Cast Preparation:

Everyone must read everyone else's briefs as well as their own, plus this Outline. ... will need to have a wig on, plus gloves, with her nails painted with one distinct white line. Everyone else needs to dress according to your character. Consider having 'extra cast' planted amongst the audience, to help encourage them with questioning at the end.

Improvisation

As already explained, there is no set script for this Murder Mystery scenario. Your performers are expected to improvise their dialogue, interactions and behaviour based on their back stories and knowledge of the plot and their interpersonal relationships. This is not as daunting as it sounds! Your performers need to get into character and remain in character throughout. All conversations with guests should be as the character they are playing.

You are bound to get some comments about 'who dies first?', 'are you the murderer?' at the start of the evening. The trick is to act confused and surprised! What are they talking about? This is a special occasion!

If guests start asking you questions that you don't know the answer to, then you can simply make excuses and walk away, or steer the conversation in a different direction.

You don't have to admit your feelings outright, but can hint at your relationships with the other characters, make passing comments about your reaction to something to trigger a response and a question.

The most common difficulty is when someone slips up and gives the wrong info from their back story (and guests will sometimes probe into your 'past' in depth). Sometimes this is not of consequence but other times it could be important, a date, a place or something that your character should know too. If when quizzed you give the wrong corroborating account of events, this can lead to red herrings as the guests think you are lying deliberately. Therefore, if possible, if you realise you have let slip something on the spur of the moment that is nonsense, try and draw the other character (s) aside in time and tell them the new story. And if you don't have time to do so, and you get 'caught' out, make light of the situation and play for a laugh; "Have we really been married for 5 years and not 8, well it seemed like even longer to me...!"

You will find there is plenty of opportunity to whisper in corners with the other performers (and when out of the room) to check tactics, prompt actions and arguments ('right, we need to reinforce our hatred of one another, let's go and have a fight in the middle of the room'). This is often necessary to keep things on track!

Excerpts of Plot Narrative

The Greeting:

Charles Crimson to greet audience, as far as possible, as they come in through the door, welcoming them to his viewing session.

Sandra and Sidney Sienna to mingle around the hall and buffet table, talking to the audience.

After half an hour, Charles, Sandra and Sidney to take to the stage. Charles to get the audience's attention, asking them to take their seats as several late guests are about to arrive. Sandra to sit at a table, and Sidney to join her after his brief talk with Charles [see 'Timings'].

The guests arrive, one by one. Each to approach the stage in character. To have 5 minutes conversation with Charles, before taking their seat at one of the stage tables.

Conversations: Timings and brief outlines

After the half an hour settling in:

2 minutes

Charles and Sidney, before Sidney sits down

Points to cover:

- Charles to comment to the audience that he hopes most of them have now met Sidney, and, of course, his lovely wife, Sandra, explaining what an art connoisseur he is; then in conversation with him:-
- Charles to congratulate Sidney on his recent marriage, and what a catch Sandra is, with her father being Isaac Indigo, the well-known owner of Aristo Antiques.
- Sidney to say, in an aside to Charles, that it would be great if there wasn't a pre-nuptial agreement hanging over his head.

Sidney should now move to sit at the table with Sandra, but smiling in a flirty manner with a female in the audience (one he would have talked to during the half hour settling in time). As he sits, Sandra should glare a warning, and he should respond with a laugh and pretend he doesn't know what she's upset about.

As each new guest arrives, Charles must introduce them to the audience, as they walk towards him, by welcoming them to his viewing, saying how pleased he is to see them.

2 minutes

Charles and Vicky need to cover...

3-4 minutes

Charles, Professor Cadmium and Oliver need to cover...

2 minutes

Charles and Monica need to cover...

The following conversations are shown to be heard only by the audience; the other actors to mime conversations and so not appear to hear:

2 minutes.

Sandra and Sidney

Points to cover:

- Charles always drinks red wine when painting, and has a habit of accidentally dipping his brush into the glass, instead of his water. Consequently often breaks them, so never ends up with two glasses the same. Everyone knows this...

1 minute
Vicky and Monica...

2 minutes
Professor Cadmium and Oliver...

2 minutes
Sidney and Vicky...

15 minutes
Charles and **Monica** should then produce the drinks, all stand to receive them.
The Professor and **Oliver** move up centre of the "stage" area, possibly between the paintings.
Sandra notices ... and drags... to one side.
Vicky ...
Charles, with a very brief speech, unveils the Nude painting, to which the cast react in their characters.
He then unveils the Cat...
Sidney...
Professor Cadmium...
Vicky ...

All the cast should stare in horror...

Oliver should then call for the screens to be brought to give ...

...contd...

He should then announce that there will now be a break, after which he hopes the audience will assist him with his enquiries.

During this interval, behind the scenes, **the Director** should pull a name of a cast member out of a hat, to be the murderer. He/she should then discreetly let that person know the result; **Oliver** should also be told, so that he may help the audience by 'loading' his questions during the interrogations.

Break

3 minutes
After a suitable comfort break for the audience, **Oliver** becomes Master of Ceremonies, and begins by giving his own background. He then explains that it has become clear that ... was poisoned, and that it was probably in ... He should say that, from the way ... reacted, the poison ... Also to add that the symptoms of ... were normally experienced a lot more slowly, but that Dramatic Licence seemed to have speeded up the death! He should then state that everyone with access to ... and with a motive, will be a suspect.

Each suspect is then interrogated by him, covering the background and briefs of each, so that nothing has been missed. He should also ask each:

What contact did you have with ...?

What access have you to ...?

The audience are then invited to submit their questions, with help from any 'plants'.

Two minutes should be allotted to each suspect...

There should be a break for the papers to be collected, then the murderer is announced, along with the winner.

It is suggested that, as a suitable way of ending the whole evening, **Oliver** arrest the culprit, dragging them away, as the rest of the cast lead the applause. In the event that **Oliver** is the murderer, **Charles** could do the honours.

Customer Taster of Characters Overview

Charles Crimson

Charles is the Host, late 20's to early 30's. He is being blackmailed by ..., has a much-gossiped about rivalry with ..., and, in his 'teens, inadvertently ... whilst somewhat inebriated.

He has a cat named Monet, however he is also believed to be owned by ... and ...; but Charles knows the cat is really his, and wants him to himself. Monet's painting is on display, next to the Nude.

Oliver Ochre

Oliver is single, early 30's to late 40's, friend of ..., and has helped him with ... Invited tonight by the ... as he was staying with him/her. Once had a brief fling with ..., well before his marriage. It was a big mistake, especially as ... caught them once, when she was a child.

His true identity is not revealed until ... dies, when he will take on the role of Master of Ceremonies.

He has a cat named Ricochet, however he is also believed to be owned by...

Professor Cadmium

The Professor could be male or female, late 40's. Head of the local Natural History Museum, specialising in Medieval History. The Professor cheated in an exam at University, which ... found out about.

Monica Mauve

Monica is single, and in her late 30's. An artist, working with wood, using old and new materials, sculpting and designing modern works. Now very rich as recently won the lottery, but feels money isn't everything; she craves fame!

Sandra Sienna

Sandra is in her late 20's. She acts the dumb blond but is far from it. Really very astute, sussing out ... from the first time he stepped into her father's establishment. She competed with ... for a big modelling contract, which is her *real* passion, but ... won, with ... as runner up. She will automatically be the substitute should anything happen to ...

Sidney Sienna

Sidney is in his mid 40's, a 'Lovejoy' type, who can't stop flirting. He was a regular visitor to Aristo Antiques, owned by ..., and started an affair with ... in order to get the best deals. Now...

Vicky Vermillion

Vicky is in her mid 20's, and a model. She worked her way into modelling by hard graft, but whatever she achieves, she always wants more. She's blackmailing ...

Partial Summaries of some Motives for ...'s Murder

Charles – ... is blackmailing Charles for money and he is becoming increasingly worried he won't be able to pay. Desperately wants to stay in his workshop and will do anything to avert being thrown out.

Sidney - Sidney needs to stop ... telling ... that she's his lover, and the model for the Nude painting. There is a pre-nuptial agreement, insisted upon by ..., stating that if he has an affair then he gets nothing in the ensuing divorce. ... also saw him together with ..., years before his marriage to ... which he's not too worried about. However, if it upsets ..., he may take revenge by blabbing about an art fraud deal, which ... has bribed him to forget.

Sandra - Sandra and ... competed for a big modelling contract, which is her *real* passion, but ... won, with Sandra as runner up. She will automatically become the substitute should anything happen to...

Example of a Character Profile

Charles Crimson

Background:

Charles is an artist, late 20's to early 30's, who dabbles in everything, as he's still not made up his mind which to concentrate on. He sees himself as a conceptual artist who applies his thinking to portraits and landscapes, and vomits up his feelings into sculpture. He tends to speak like this. He often uses adjectives to describe his art and applications, which may also be used to depict bodily functions [it's a phase he's going through, everyone hopes! Like Picasso and his Blue Period, but nowhere near so pleasant!]. Words such as puke, belch forth, disgorge, heave, bring up, regurgitate, throw up, defecate, and discharge.

There is a heated rivalry between Charles and Monica, but he is aware that she has recently acquired a lot of money through the Lottery. He's invited her tonight to try to get her tipsy enough to put a temporary hold on their rivalry, long enough for him to get a firm hold on some of it.

Charles has put together this viewing, hoping to gain the interest of local wealthy people. His Backer is Sidney, who is doing so because Charles flattered him into thinking that he's got a great eye for art, but he hasn't.

Charles has given pride of place to his Nude painting, the first he has done. He couldn't afford to pay for a professional model, so asked a friend of a friend, who did it for a dare . . . but he won't admit it was ... ! He also buys up old works, of no value, and recycles them.

He's always "Charles", and visibly dislikes being called Charlie or, worse still, Chaz!

He has painted his cat, Monet, which he has proudly displayed next to the Nude. However, Monet is also ...

Charles always drinks red wine when painting, and has a habit of accidentally dipping his brush into the glass, instead of his water. Consequently often breaks them, so never ends up with two glasses the same. He is aware that ... prefers to drink out of a glass with a twisted stem.

He appears to be an absentminded sort, but is actually very sharp; just likes to give the opinion of being dithery and amiable, to hide his true self; feels it's a form of self-preservation in the cut-and-thrust world of art.

In his late 'teens, he and three mates went on a canal holiday. They took four minis, each holding a barrel of beer. Whilst heavily under the influence, they sank another boat, but got away with it as the only witness was the owner of the other boat. That owner was the ..., who wasn't insured, but adored the vessel and vowed to get revenge. Charles may remember the incident, but does not recognise ... as being the victim, because ...

... is blackmailing him for money, which he's struggling to pay..., etc...

Excerpt of Charles' Outline for the Evening:

Charles to greet as many of the audience as possible, welcoming them to his review.

Include: "So glad you could make it / don't you look *lovely*"

Do they like the way he's set out his workshop as a viewing gallery?

Jokes about how he hopes they've brought fat wallets and so forth.

Once they all appear to be in then Charles is to carry on mingling.

Points to emphasis:-

- Charles is desperate to be the sole owner of his cat, Monet, and would do *anything* to make it so. The cat seems to have at least 5 homes.
- Sidney has actually no idea about art, but Charles flatters him so that he thinks he does. Consequently he believes Charles is wonderful, a great artist, and can do no wrong. As a result, he's renting out his workshop to him at a ridiculously low rent.
- Charles is an artist, who dabbles in everything, as he's still not made up his mind which to concentrate on. He sees himself as a conceptual artist who applies his thinking to portraits and landscapes, and vomits up his feelings into sculpture. He tends to speak like this.

After half an hour, Charles should go on to the stage and get everyone's attention. He should ask them to be seated, and to note that there are sheets of paper/pencils for their use. To then explain that himself and a few other guests, including Sandra and Sidney Sienna, had been invited for a pre-viewing drink at [*local pub*], and that he's hoping the rest will be arriving very shortly.

As each guest comes in, through the hall, and comes up on the stage, Charles is to have a 5 minute conversation, and introduce each to the audience.

e.g. "Hallo Everyone. I'm sure most of you will recognise Monica Mauve, a fellow Artist".