



The Hit Man

A Murder Mystery

by

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Customer Taster

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The Vestals were once an all-girl pop group. They had a number of hit records but broke up 25 years ago. Their manager, Orson, has invited them to his house for a reunion, as he fears he has not got long to live. During the evening a lot of secrets from the past come out and it seems that there may well be something in Orson's premonitions...

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About the Murder Mystery Pack

The pack provides the full script and guidance to enable you produce a successful murder mystery event. The event will work well if delivered to an audience enjoying a meal, with courses served before the performance and during the intervals.

The Pack Contains:-

A producer's guide (extract in this Taster)
The Full Script (extract in this Taster)
Audience working sheets and Solution Sheets

Characters

Narrator - Any age, either gender.

Laura - Secretary to Orson. Middle aged. Smartly dressed in a suit.

Constance - A former member of the Vestals pop group. Middle aged. Dressed casually.

Sue - Constance's daughter. Age 25. Dressed casually.

Evanne - A former member of the Vestals pop group. Middle aged. Dressed smartly with too much make-up.

Justin - Songwriter. Middle aged. Dressed smart casually.

Rhoda - Former publicist for the Vestals, married to Justin. Middle aged. Dressed smart casually.

Phyllis - A former member of the Vestals pop group. Middle aged. Slim. Dressed scruffily but with immaculate hair.

Jean - Record producer. Middle aged. Dressed in scruffy jeans. Wears fairly large earrings.

Joe - Recording engineer, long term partner of Jean. Middle aged. Dressed in old jeans.

Orson - Former manager of The Vestals. More elderly. Smartly dressed.

Detective Inspector **Tom** Bowler. Around 30. Smartly dressed in suit. Could be female with change of name.

Scene of Crime Analyst, **Anna** List. Any age. Smartly dressed. Could be male with change of name.

Plot Overview

The Vestals were an all-girl pop group from 25 to 30 years ago. They had a number of hit records but broke up 25 years ago.

All the characters – except Laura and Sue, and, later, the police - were connected with the Vestals as members of the group, producer, sound engineer, publicist and songwriter. Orson was the Group's manager.

Orson has invited them all to his house as he fears he has not got long to live. During the evening a lot of secrets from the past come out and Orson is found dead. Who is Sue's father? Who was swindling money from Orson? What was the secret about who sang on the records? Why did the drug smuggling not make the expected profits? Why did one of the group still visit Orson regularly? Who had the abortion and why? Are the cats dead?

That is for the cast to know and the audience to find out as all is revealed during the evening, culminating in the audience trying to work out the answer to the final question - Who killed Orson Cart?

The Mystery is written for a cast of 13, of whom 8 are female and 4 male. The narrator can be either gender. The Police Inspector and the Crime Scene Analyst can be either gender, with name changes if required.

Event format

This murder mystery has been successfully produced with the audience at tables enjoying a meal but could be adapted to other formats. There is a narrator who explains the format of the evening to the audience and what is expected of them.

There are no other items for them to expect - the clues are all in the script. The audience use their skills to watch the action carefully and decide who killed the victim and why. The more accurate and comprehensive their explanation set out on their Solution Sheet, the better will be their chance of winning the prize.

The audience need to complete and submit their Solution Sheets during the interval after Scene 3. The solution is revealed in Scene 4 after which the prize-winning team will be announced.

The Organiser needs to decide who will judge the submissions; usually the deceased and any members of the production team who are not involved in Scene 4.

Normally teams comprise of people sitting at the same table, who can confidentially discuss their opinions and suspicions before completing and submitting their Solution Sheets.

The audience needs to recall actions and dialogue to help identify the murderer and the motive. If this is being done very seriously, then the optional “evidence sheet” could be distributed to the audience before the start of the performance to help them structure their note-taking.

When choosing a prize it is worth bearing in mind that it will probably be shared between several people. The suggested timetable can be varied to take account of how the evening is planned.

The author has tried to inject a degree of humour into the script. There are some very mild adult references.

Suggested timetable

(This gives an example structured around a meal. This can be changed to meet local circumstances.)

7.30 – Narrator introduces the evening and starters/drinks are served

7.50 – Scenes 1 and 2

8.20 – Main course is served

8.45 – Scene 3

9.20 – Dessert is served and audience completes the Solution sheets which are then collected in.

9.40 – Scene 4

9.55 – Teas and coffees are served, the winners are announced and prizes distributed

Preparation and Performance

Note that you need to purchase a Performance Licence from the Lazy Bee Scripts web site.

A read-through is an enjoyable way to start rehearsals. At this stage it might be useful for the actors, having been provided with their copy of the script, to describe how they see their characters and how they interact with the others before reading through the script together. It is, of course, preferable that the cast learn their lines and movements, however it could be done as a “rehearsed reading”, with the cast holding scripts, and the audience being told by the narrator that this is due to the necessity for accuracy of the carefully scripted work and the need to get all lines right so that the audience is not misled.

The production is totally scripted and does not call for improvisation by the cast, as sufficient information is provided for the audience to identify the killer without additional clues or questioning of the characters.

None of the language used is excessive and almost all the words used are in the English dictionary. However, the author recognises that some groups might wish to modify the one word of mild profanity and he gives his permission to do so.

Decisions Needed Prior to Performance:

- There is an optional “evidence sheet”; decide whether to distribute that to the audience or just to give them blank sheets of paper. (This is a trade-off between giving the audience structure and making it too easy!)
- Who will collect the accusation sheets from the audience. (Either non-performing members of the company or the scene-of-crime officer.)
- How to evaluate the winner. Usually, this is done by the deceased and any members of the production team who are not involved in Scene 4. The judgement should be on the best combination of murderer, means and motive. In the event of a tie, there is a tie-breaker question. In the event of a tie after the tie-breaker, will multiple awards be made, or the winner drawn at random?
- Will the worst answers be shared with the audience? Will booby prizes be awarded?
- Who will announce the winner and award the prizes? (A good option is to bring the deceased back to the stage – possibly as a ghost! – for this purpose. This has the advantage of bringing the whole company back to the stage for a final bow.)

Production notes

Set

Table with drawers upstage left

Coffee table downstage right

9 casual chairs, 3 behind coffee table, 4 together in centre stage and 2 downstage left

These are the essential items for the set. Otherwise it can be dressed as the producer thinks best to reflect the morning room of a millionaire. Please bear in mind that characters need to move between the sets of chairs and, at times, there will be 11 actors on stage at the same time.

The Hit Man - Script Extract

Scene 1 – The morning room of Orson’s mansion, 3.40 p.m.

(The set is the morning room in Orson’s mansion. There is a coffee table stage right with three casual chairs behind it. There are another six casual chairs placed in a row of four, then a gap and two further chairs stage left. There is a door each side of the stage. Another small table with drawers in it, is at the back of the stage, and various bottles of alcohol and glasses on it. The drawer of the table contains a will, a bank statement, a schedule of drug deliveries and mild compromising photos of Phyllis and Rhoda - it doesn’t matter what the photos are as the audience is told, not shown, what they are.)

Narrator: (Enters from right and stands centre stage.) Good evening, ladies and gentlemen and welcome to our Murder Mystery event. It is my pleasure to introduce the evening, so firstly, I will tell you how things will go. *[Your first course will be served now.]* This will be followed by the cast acting out the first two scenes of the mystery. This will take about thirty minutes. There are pens, pencils and paper on your table for you to take any notes you want.

[Following the first two scenes, the main course will be served.]

Then we will act out scene three of the mystery, about another thirty minutes, when the evidence will be uncovered.

After this *[we will serve the dessert, and]* each table will have the opportunity to decide who they think committed the murder and the reasons: motive, means and opportunity. The results of the discussion are to be written on the forms which are on each table. Please remember to put your table *[name or number]* on the sheet. These will be collected up and our expert judging team will determine the winner. The detective will reveal all and *[over tea and coffee]* the winning table of the Murder Mystery will be announced and stunning prizes presented.

(Exits right.)

(Constance and Sue enter from right with Laura. They look around.)

Laura: You must be Constance and Sue. My, don’t you look alike. Could be sisters.

Constance: That’s right. I mean the Constance and Sue bit. Not so sure about the other bit, Sue’s my daughter.

Laura: Really! Well, I’ll leave you alone for a while. Everyone else is due shortly. (Exits right.)

Constance: Well, looks like he’s done pretty well for himself off the back of our talent and hard work.

Sue: I still don’t understand why I’ve been invited here, it’s nothing to do with me.

Constance: It’s a mystery to me, I haven’t had anything to do with him since we lost the lawsuit about our contract and he walked off with all the money that should have been ours.

Sue: How much was it you sued him for? I was very young then, I don’t remember it and you’ve never talked about it.

Constance: Three million – that was a million each. He could have afforded to pay it and still lived like a king.

Sue: Wow! That would’ve made a big difference to us.

Constance: Yes, darling. From being a pop star it was a big shock to have to become a school cleaner. Orson just gave us pocket money – quite a lot for us poor girls from a council estate in Essex – but we spent that and I ended up with nothing. Except a baby to bring up on my own.

Sue: Sorry I was a drag on you, Mum.

Constance: Oh, I don’t mean it like that. I loved you and you never went without. Since you were born, you’re all I’ve ever lived for – you and your happiness.

Sue: Thanks, Mum. One day I’ll be able to repay you for everything you’ve done.

Constance: Well, now I’m here, I’m going to have a look round. (Exits left.)

Sue: (Looks round again, goes to table and pours a drink. Drinks it in one gulp.)

That’s better, first of the day, but not the last. (Puts glass back on table)

(Evanne enters from right. She and Sue meet centre of stage.)

Evanne: Who are you?

Sue: I'm Sue, Constance's daughter, and you are?

Evanne: Evanne, the one that could sing in tune.

Sue: Sorry?

Evanne: The one that could sing. Your mum and Phyllis were really backing singers for me, I did all the real singing.

Sue: Oh.

Evanne: Doesn't matter now, I suppose, we all ended up with nothing. I was really angry at the time, but I've got over it. Still rankles though. I mean they would have been nothing without me. Talent didn't seem to count for much. I carried that group for all the years we were together, and I know some of the secret manoeuvring that went on behind the scenes, I might write a book about it. That would put the cat among the pigeons and shatter a few illusions people have about the group.

Sue: Doesn't sound like you've got over it.

Evanne: Anyway, tell me about your mum, we haven't seen each other for years.

Sue: She's okay, still working at the school, living in the same flat where I was born. She's had it rough, but she's – what's the word – persevering. She never gives up. Been a good mum to me.

Evanne: Didn't she get married?

Sue: No. Dunno why, better ask her yourself. She's around somewhere.

Constance: **(From off stage.)** Sue, come here and look at this, it's extraordinary.

Sue: Coming Mum. **(Exits left.)**

(Justin and Rhoda enter from right with Laura.)

Laura: You all probably know each other, so I'll let you get reacquainted. **(Exits right.)**

Justin: Hey there Evie!

(Justin goes to kiss Evanne who turns away.)

Justin: What's up, girl, don't like your old Justin any more?

Rhoda: Leave it Justy. She was always too self-absorbed, doesn't want to mix with the likes of us.

Justin: Okay Roady, sweetie. Just old, just trying to be friendly.

Evanne: Get lost, both of you. I came to see what Orson wanted. I don't want to rekindle old friendships. That's all behind me now.

Justin: **(Looks at Evanne's bottom.)** You've got quite a lot behind you now, if you ask me.

Evanne: **(Gives Justin a withering look.)** You ain't no great shakes yourself. **(Moves to stage left.)**

Justin: I know, but I don't care.

Rhoda: Well, Evanne, how've you been? I read about you in the papers. Real roller coaster for you since it all fell apart in ninety-one. Big marriage, yacht and houses everywhere, husband turned out to be a crook and left you penniless for the second time in your life when he was sent down. How long was it for?

Evanne: Ten years, he came out five years ago and is a reformed character. Honest, hard-working, born again Christian. No fun anymore so I kicked him out when he wanted me to go on a retreat to a croft in Scotland for six months. No electricity, no Facebook or Twitter, no heating, no bars, no fun. What did he think I was, a monk or something?

Rhoda: I think you meant nun, darling!

Evanne: Whatever. What's up with you two? Holding hands, looking at each other like you were sixteen again.

Justin: We got married, didn't you know?

Evanne: How was I supposed to know? I don't follow your lives like you seem to follow mine. Don't suppose anyone was interested anyway. I'm going to get myself a drink. **(Goes to table and pours herself a drink.)** Written anything recently, Justin?

Justin: No, not a thing since the break-up of the Vestals. Rhoda wasn't well, I spent two years looking after her when she wasn't in hospital, and sort of lost the muse. Then we got married and we've been our sort of self-help group ever since.

Evanne: Depression, wasn't it, Rhoda? So someone said.

Rhoda: Yes, but I don't really like to talk about it.

Evanne: No more publicity work, then?

Rhoda: No! After a couple of years out of the loop, never quite picked it up again, most of my contacts had moved on and I wanted to start a family.

Evanne: No joy there, then!

Rhoda: No, but I don't want to talk about it.

(Justin gives Rhoda a hug.)

Evanne: I heard you had some trouble just before we all broke up.

Rhoda: **(Angrily.)** I said I don't want to talk about it, no raking up old gossip. **(Begins to break down.)**

Justin: **(To Evanne.)** Can't you leave it alone! You were the cause of all the trouble in the first place.

Evanne: I'm going to powder my nose, must look good for old Orson. **(Puts glass down and exits left.)**

Justin: I'm sorry love. She'll never change. Hopefully we won't have to see her again after this afternoon.

Rhoda: I don't think I could take much more of her.

(Phyllis enters from right with Laura.)

Laura: Nice to see you again, Phyllis. Come on in. Everyone's here, somewhere.

Justin: **(To Phyllis.)** Do you know Laura then Phyll? How come.

Laura: Phyllis comes round from time to time, about three or four times a year.

Phyllis: That's right, I have a business arrangement with Orson.

Rhoda: Sounds intriguing, tell me more.

Phyllis: Can't. I'm afraid.

Laura: Can I get any of you a drink? You look like you need one, Rhoda. Is it okay if I call you Rhoda? I've never met you, but I feel like I know you – bought all the Vestals records, had a picture of the group in my bedroom, between David Hasselhoff and Jason Donovan.

Justin: We've all got problems, you more than most with that sort of taste for your bedroom wall.

Laura: I was only young.

Justin: And I was only kidding.

Phyllis: Have you got a light dry white wine?

Laura: Sure. **(Pours out a glass and gives it to Phyllis.)** Anyone else, it's free. Don't often get things free from Orson!

Rhoda: **(To Laura.)** I hope you don't mind me asking, but what's Orson like to work for. He was a real monster as the group's manager. Nothing was ever right and he treated us like skivvies, never as real people.

Laura: Well, to be frank, and I'm sure he wouldn't mind me saying, he is the most obnoxious, overbearing, lecherous, self-obsessed, ill-mannered, pig I've ever met.

Justin: Why do you work for him, then?

Laura: I keep asking myself that. He was fine when I started, but has got worse over the years, and it's a sort of habit turning up every morning.

(Doorbell rings.)

Laura: One or two more, as expected. **(Exits right.)**

Rhoda: This is all a bit mysterious, don't you think. I wonder what comes next.

Phyllis: Well it won't be fireworks in the garden.

Justin: But it might be in here!

(Laura enters from right, with Joe and Jean - holding hands.)

Joe: Hi Phyll. How are you? Are the rest of the gang here? God, it's good to see you again. How long is it now?

Phyllis: Over twenty years, Joe. And Jean, good to see you too. Still looking good and stuck like glue to Joe.

Jean: Five kids now, still not married though! Stopped living the hippy life when the twins came. Too difficult to keep moving around with that lot in tow. So we've settled down. Proper house and everything. Joe's still in the studios but I gave up and looked after the family.

Justin: Hi Jean, Joe.

Jean: Justin, so you're still alive. I'd heard you'd gone abroad and no-one had heard anything of you.

Justin: No, looked after Rhoda for a while, then we got married.

Rhoda: Yeah, I had some difficult times. Got over them now, but today's bringing it all back. You'll have to forgive me if I get a bit teary.

Jean: No probs, sweetie. Just stick to me if you need to. I'll look after you.

Joe: Anyone know what's happening? I can't think why we were called here.

Phyllis: No idea. Can't be a social reunion, can it?

Joe: Doubt it, how is Orson? Not that I care much, probably no more than you do.

(Bell sounds.)

Laura: That's his signal. He wants me to get everyone in here as soon as possible to talk to you. I'll go and see if I can round them all up. **(Exits left.)**

(Lights down.)

[Continued in two further scenes plus denouement presented by Detective Inspector Tom Bowler.]