

A Brief Period Of Rejoicing

A Dinner Theatre Murder Mystery

By Jane Morris

Customer Taster, Extracts from the full pack

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It's VE day, 1945, and Winston Churchill declares "a brief period of rejoicing" to celebrate the end of the war with Germany. Street parties are organised all over the country. In Eney terrace, the period of rejoicing comes to an abrupt end with the murder of a local black-marketeer...

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A Brief Period Of Rejoicing

The Role Packs Contain:-

- A brief overview
- A list of characters
- The full script for the “opening scene”
- A character profile for the role (which hints about questions to ask of the others)

Overview

The scene is set in June 1945 at a street party to celebrate VE Day. The street is Eney Street (pronounced Any Street) in Eneytown (pronounced Anytown). Eney Street is a row of Victorian terraces with back yards and outside toilets. The house at the corner of the street has been hit by a bomb and is now a derelict site where the children like to play. Round the corner from the bomb site is the pub, the Fox and Hounds and beyond is the “big house” where the Thomas’ live. The room is decorated with Union Jack flags and red, white and blue bunting.

Edna, Bernard, Ivy and Len will enter on one side as they come from their houses.

Henry, Grace, Joe and George will enter on the other side as they come from the “big house” or the Fox and Hounds, passing the corner.

Characters

Edna Phillips - aged about 50, a widow from WW1, a very nervous lady

Bernard Phillips - aged 28, Edna’s son, a conscientious objector

Major Henry Thomas – aged between 50 and 55, pompous, upper class accent, walks with a limp and a stick, has a gammy leg

Grace Thomas – aged about 40, very stylish and classy lady, dresses well, thinks she’s a cut above the residents on Eney Street

Ivy Martin – aged about 25, a Land Army Girl, engaged to George

Joe W Flight – aged about 25, an American airman, very dishy

Private George Evans – aged about 25, a down to earth squaddy who has seen action, engaged to Ivy

Len Cousins – aged about 55, father of Bert, a docker, saw active service in the trenches in WW1

Unseen Characters

These are people relevant to the story, even though they do not appear in person!

The Smiths - family who lived on the corner of the street who were killed when bomb hit their house

Douglas Phillips deceased - Edna’s husband

Mrs Evans - George’s mother

Mr and Mrs Martin - Ivy’s parents

Bert Cousins - Len’s son, also a docker, but also a black-marketeer

Running the script in front of an audience

Note that you need to purchase a performance licence from the Murder Mysteries page of the Lazy Bee Scripts web site.

Preparation

Initial preparation can be done by distributing the character briefs, then running a first rehearsal in which the actors have to guess the identity of the murderer before they see the script for the Final Scene. (It's fun! Why not?)

After that, the cast need to learn the dialogue, develop character and get comfortable with the (improvised) interrogation.

Consider:-

- Developing more detailed "background briefs" for each character, elaborating background, but not changing any of the plot points. This allows the actors to accommodate more irrelevant questions from the audience!
 - Developing "get-out strategies" so that an irrelevant line of audience questioning can be curtailed. (This can, for example, be direct "that has no bearing on the case", jokey "I couldn't possibly answer that without my lawyer present" or via an interruption which introduces a new line of questioning from the character brief.)
 - Giving "seed questions" to the audience by way of selected information from the background briefs. (This could be done as "hearsay" briefs, or "police lines of enquiry")
- Decide on the format for declaring the winner and using the tie-breaker question.

Open the event by acting out the scripted dialogue.

Interrogation

Open the interrogation to the audience. Depending on the size of the event, this can either be done in front of the whole audience, or by the cast members circulating amongst the audience. If the latter, then it is the responsibility of the players to ensure that all relevant information is disclosed at each "location" in the audience, and a strategy is needed to ensure that all the actors visit every "location".

Accusations

At the end of the interrogation (when all the relevant information has been disclosed), distribute the "solution sheets" on which each member of the audience should be asked to write down who they think is the murderer, and why. The solutions should be collected, read and graded by the cast (whilst the audience is eating and drinking!)

Solution

Act out the final scene.

There may be an option to read out some of the (more bizarre) audience solutions!

Declare the winner, if necessary by reference to the tie-break question.

Award a prize to the best solution! (And possibly a prize for the worst.)

Running the script with the actors as “participants”

Note that you need to purchase a performance licence from the Murder Mysteries page of the Lazy Bee Scripts web site.

Preparation

- Distribute the relevant Role Pack to each actor
- Rehearse the scripted opening scene
- Each actor should prepare his or her own background brief but the discussion at rehearsals should be limited!
- Decide if the cast are allowed to interrogate one another during the event!
- The person taking the murderer’s part will not know from the opening script nor the character profile that they have committed the crime. Their identity will not be revealed until the script for the final scene is distributed during the event!

Open the event by acting out the scripted dialogue.

The scene opens with Winston Churchill’s radio broadcast (supplied with the full pack as an MP3 file)

Interrogation

Open the interrogation to the audience. This needs to be done in front of the whole audience, so that the actors understand the background and motivations of the other characters.

Accusations

At the end of the interrogation (when everyone believes that all the relevant information has been disclosed), distribute the “solution sheets” on which then each participant (including the actors) should write down who they think is the murderer.

Solution

Distribute the final scene amongst the actors. (Ideally this should not have been seen by the organiser beforehand, therefore if it cannot be printed during the event, it should be printed and put in an envelope by a trusted third party before the event!)

Read/Act-out the scene.

Break (whilst the audience continues to eat and drink) to review the solutions.

There may be an option to read out some of the (more bizarre) audience solutions!

Declare the winner, if necessary by reference to the tie-break question.

Award a prize to the best solution! (And possibly a prize for the worst.)

A Brief Period Of Rejoicing

Opening Scene - Customer Taster sample

(It is May 8th 1945. Offstage Winston Churchill's voice can be heard making a radio broadcast to the nation.)

Churchill: (Voice-over) Yesterday morning at 2.41 am at General Eisenhower's Headquarters, General Jodel, the representative of German High Command and of Grand Admiral Dönitz, the designated head of the German State, signed the Act of Unconditional Surrender of all German land, sea and air forces in Europe to the Allied Expeditionary Force and simultaneously to the Soviet High Command. We may allow ourselves a brief period of rejoicing. (Pause) But let us not forget for a moment the toils and efforts that lie ahead. Japan with all her treachery and greed remains unsubdued. The injuries she has inflicted on Great Britain, the United States and other countries and her detestable cruelties call for justice and retribution. We must now devote all our strength and resources to the completion of our task both at home and abroad. Advance Britannia! Long live the cause of freedom! God Save the King!

(Cheers offstage)

(Edna and Bernard enter. A trestle table has been set up. Edna is carrying a pile of white tablecloths or sheets. Red, white and blue bunting and Union Jack flags decorate the room.)

Edna: Come on son, give us a hand with these cloths will you?

(Edna and Bernard cover the trestle table with one or more cloths.)

Bernard: (Looking around) Where is everyone. The street's deserted?

Edna: Well it's early yet. They'll all be out soon when the party gets going.

Bernard: The little 'uns looked like they were already having a grand time playing in the bombsite on the corner. Shame the poor folks who lived there won't be joining in the fun.

Edna: Ah son, it's just like you to think of the poor Smiths. What a night that was when they bombed the docks and some of them fell round here, do you remember?

Bernard: Yes of course I remember. I remember how busy you were that night down at the WRVS.

Edna: We just got on and made the best of it. It was lucky not more of us got killed that night. Anyway, let's forget about the war and be thankful it's all over.

Bernard: It's *not* over for everyone. Remember what Mr Churchill said in his broadcast – we've still got our boys out in the Far East and it sounds like they're going through hell. I won't feel like celebrating until we've all stopped this damned fighting.

Edna: Oh Bernard, I know how you feel about this war, but please, just for today, can't you forget your principles. You know how all this has upset me, all this bad feeling. I wish you'd never got involved with those folk at the Peace Pledge Union.

Bernard: I'm sorry mother but I've stuck to my view that no one has the right to force me into doing something my conscience tells me is wrong. What about "Thou shalt not kill". I thought *you'd* agree with me, after all you ended up a widow after the last war.

Edna: (Getting flustered) Yes I know all that but well someone had to fight the Nazis oh my poor nerves

(Henry and Grace arrive carrying a wicker picnic hamper between them. Henry has a walking stick and is limping and Grace is tottering in high heeled shoes)

Edna: (Regains her composure) Ah good, here come the Major and Grace. They said they'd bring some plates down from the big house.

Henry: Good day Mrs Phillips. I see you're here nice and early to get the show on the road.

Grace: (Looking at Bernard – in a sarcastic tone) Well are you going to take this load off me or will I be left standing here all day? Or would that be against your principles too? (To Henry) I don't know why you couldn't get one of the staff to carry this lot. I can't imagine why I was expected to help you carry it.

Henry: I think all the lads have gone up to town to join in the celebrations, my dear. If only I had the use of two good legs

Edna: Oh Major, I'm sure my Bernard would have helped you if you had asked him. Wouldn't you Bernard?

(Bernard nods)

Bernard: Yes of course I would, you only had to ask.

Grace: Right, in that case you can get yourself up that hill and bring down the box of cutlery. Go on, get a move on, do your bit for the war effort, even though it's a bit late now.

Bernard: Now you listen here, I've done my bit. Not in the army I know but I've done my share of hard graft

Edna: (Steering Bernard away from the confrontation) Please please please, no more arguing, my poor nerves can't stand it. Go on Bernard, off you go son. The kids can't eat jelly without spoons. If only we could give them ice cream as well.....

(Bernard leaves)

Grace: (Shouting after Bernard) Make sure you keep to the path. Don't go trampling all over my flower borders. (She begins unloading the plates from the hamper, leaving them in a pile on the table.) I hope none of this get broken. It's my best china.

Edna: (To Grace) Perhaps today of all days Mrs Thomas, you wouldn't mind keeping your comments about Bernard to yourself. You know how all this has made me ill. The doctor keeps giving me more pills but I don't think they're helping – some days I just don't know what I'm doing. Now what do I need to do next? Ah yes.

(Edna shakily takes the plates from the pile and begins to set them round the table.)

Grace: It's a shame Bernard didn't think what effect his decision would have on his family before he signed up with those conchies.

Edna: Well it certainly hasn't been easy. But perhaps, now it's all over, we can face everyone again and join in the celebration.

Henry: A brief period of rejoicing is, I believe, what Winston called it, but a period of rejoicing none the less. You know my feelings about the COs Mrs Phillips but I bear no ill will towards you. Your Douglas did his bit for his country in the Great War.

Edna: Yes, he lost his life and never came home to see his son. So much for the war to end all wars.

Henry: Well we'll be seeing our boys home from Europe soon. I bet Mrs Evans will be delighted when young George comes back.

Edna: He's already back safe. I was talking to his mother in church last Sunday. He was on leave when the Jerries decided to surrender.

Henry: His young lady will be delighted too. It wouldn't surprise me if there wasn't a wedding soon.

Edna: You talking about Ivy? I'm not so sure about that Major. Ivy and the girls have been having a grand time with the GIs up at the camp, jitterbugging and all that. From what Mrs Martin told me, her daughter's been coming home with nylons and chocolate and lipstick and food we haven't seen in the shops for years. Every little helps to feed all those kids of hers.

Grace: But there's no more blackout's now, they won't be able to get up to their tricks. But at least now the war's over we'll be able to live decently. Can you believe it Edna, I was reading an article in a magazine the other day and they had the audacity to suggest we used beetroot to stain our lips. Thank goodness I have been able to get all the cosmetics I need. I made sure I'm wasn't seen in public looking like a common street girl like...

(Ivy arrives)

Ivy: Like that Ivy? Is that what you were going to say? Well we can't all be lady mucks can we, some of us live on this street. But we do know how to have a good time don't we Edna? You won't see a better party at any of your lah de dah do's when us lot get going.

Edna: You're looking a bit peaky love.

Ivy: I'm fine – just had to get away from Mam's kitchen. The sight of all that food was turning my stomach.

Henry: It sounds as though you ladies are doing us proud today. It was so generous of you to invite us to join in your celebrations, wasn't it darling?

Grace: Huh.

Henry: Are you absolutely sure you wouldn't prefer to take up my offer to host the party on our lawns? It won't take us long to carry everything up to the house?

Grace: After we've lugged all this down!

Ivy: Don't worry Mrs Thomas. You can't have a street party if you haven't got a street can you?

(Joe enters carrying 2 large brown paper bags in his arms. He puts them on the trestle table and gives Ivy a squeeze round her waist. She looks a little embarrassed.)

Joe: Hi guys. How's the party coming along?

Ivy: Oooh stop it Joe. What've you brought for the party?

Joe: I've got peanut butter – and as a special treat for my special ladies – doughnuts.

Grace: Doughnuts! Where did you manage to get them from?

Joe: There's loads down at the base – and I've brought some candy for the kids.

Ivy: Oh thanks Joe, the kids'll love it.

Grace: **(Peering into the bags)** Is *all* of that for the party?

Joe: Yes, Ma'am. Nothing for you today but Bert's coming along later. I don't know what he's selling today. You'll have to ask him if you need anything. I've just left him in the Fox and Hounds, complaining as always about the watery beer.

Ivy: I came out here looking for strong men to carry the chairs out. Can you go and knock on some doors? And Joe, can you drop the bags round at me Mam's. They're getting all the food ready there and the smell is making me feel queasy.

Henry: No more Woolton Pie I hope. I'll give you a hand with the chairs. At least I've got one good leg.

(Joe picks up the bags and leaves with Henry.)

Grace: Chairs, now that would be a good idea. Surely I'm not expected to stand on my feet here all day, VE Day or no VE Day.

Edna: Tell you what why don't you come round to mine and help me finish off decorating the party hats. You can put your feet up there and I'll make us a nice cuppa. It's not as posh as your place, but it's clean and it's home for Bernard and me.

Ivy: Go on you two, you deserve a cuppa. You've done a great job here with the tables.
(Edna and Grace leave)

Ivy: All we need now is the food and the kids.
(George walks in)

George: Do you want me to go down to the corner and give the kids a shout?

Ivy: Oh hi George, didn't expect to see you yet. I thought you were going down the Fox with Bert and Joe.

George: **(Tries to give Ivy a kiss and cuddle.)** I did but I wanted to come and find you so I left them there. Come on love, give us a kiss. I've missed you.

Ivy: **(Tries to wriggle away)** Not here in the street, someone might see us.

George: From what I've heard down the Fox, that's not bothered you much recently.

Ivy: **(Looks worried)** What do you mean?...



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Customer Taster sample

Edna Phillips: Character Profile

You are very close to your son, as you have brought him up on your own. His father, Douglas, was killed in 1917 before Bernard was born.

You are embarrassed that Bernard is a conscientious objector but on the other hand, he's all you've got, and you are pleased that he is safe. In fact life is a bit of a struggle for you at the moment as you are living on your nerves. The doctor has given you some tablets and Bernard keeps telling you to watch how many you take as they are apparently quite strong but you can't always remember if you have taken them or not. Some days you don't know what you've been doing – but now the war's over in Europe you're hoping to get better. You are particularly upset that Bernard's old school mates, George and Bert, are shunning him. You can understand George's attitude as he was called up and had to go away and leave his Ivy back home. You're incensed about Bert's attitude though as he was in a reserved occupation so didn't have to go and fight but has still given Bernard a hard time. And he's been tormenting you too, suggesting the Phillips family are all cowards.

You've been helping the WRVS during the war and Bernard has been useful too. He was allocated work at the munitions factory and has been taking first aid courses so has been helping when the bombs fall. You and Len are good mates but nothing more than that despite what folk in the street might think. You don't like his son Bert. You think he's a good for nothing layabout and have told Len what you think. You're not sure about Henry's "war wound" and have heard that it might be gout. You think Grace has ideas above her station, just because she lives in the big house rather than in the terraces on Eney Street, it doesn't make her any better than the likes of you. But you do wonder sometimes how Grace manages to look so glamorous all the time.

You were a little surprised that Grace agreed to come into your house for a cup of tea when you were finishing off the hats – but you had to smile when she asked for the lavatory and you had to tell her it was out in the back yard. She seemed to be gone for a long time, so you thought she must have found it very comfortable after all.

