

A Fashionable Murder



A Murder Mystery

by

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Customer Taster

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Today is Saturday 13th August 2016 and you are getting ready for the latest fashion show from Harpers Fashion House; The Siddlington Collection. A select audience and members of the press have been invited to witness this exciting event. However all is not running smoothly behind the scenes and tension and tempers are running high.

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About the Pack

A Fashionable Murder is a scripted murder mystery that will also require some background character knowledge to enable the cast to answer questions put to them by their audience. The full script and character notes are provided, as well as a pack of ‘table clues’ for each team within your audience.

There is a cast of nine as well as one narrator who will guide your audience and help organize the questioning sections of the evening.

The murder evening is intended to be run in a hall with a stage or suitable acting area, with tables around the hall for the audience. The set-up is much the same as you would have for a quiz evening, e.g. teams of 6-8 people per table. Each table has a set of table clues to read through and the audience will also have the opportunity to ask questions as the evening progresses.

The full pack includes:-

- The Organiser’s Overview [*Extract in this Taster*]:-
 - Plot Overview and Cast List
 - General Staging Notes
 - Suggested timetable
 - A cheat sheet showing the clues and red herrings within the table clues
 - Example questions
 - Props list and set description
- The Main Script [*Extract in this Taster*]
 - Scripts for Act 1 and Act2
 - Final Character Statements
 - Character background notes, including motivation and opportunity
- A set of “table clues” for the audience
- An Accusation sheet (for the audience to put forward their suspicions and deductions)

Plot Overview and Characters

Today is Saturday 13th August 2016 and we are at Twin Lakes Country Club to witness the launch of the new collection from Harpers Fashion House, The Siddlington Collection. It has been quite a while since Harpers launched any new designs, not since Penny Harper left the House, so expectations are running high. The collection is due to go on sale at The London Boutique within days of this show and Harpers are hoping for lots of orders. Julia Harper, the owner of the House, has teamed up with Aaron Powers Enterprises to promote the show and the collection as hard as he possibly can.

The Cast consists of (in order of appearance):

Narrator, one extra person to ensure the smooth running of the evening

Julia Harper, owner of Harpers Fashion House

Aaron Powers, financial backer of the fashion show

George Milton, Julia's boyfriend

Penny Harper, Julia's sister and fashion designer

Nick Jones, security guard

Timothy Holden, fashion critic

Sam Jones, fashion designer at Harpers

Philip St John, artistic director

Lucy Temple, model

We are backstage in the green room area approximately ninety minutes before the fashion show is due to start. Julia is being very difficult and annoying or upsetting everyone; Aaron is trying to keep the peace; George is already on the lookout for his next sexual conquest; Penny is there to see if Julia is up to her old tricks of exploiting young and talented designers; Nick is Sam's brother, although no one else knows that, and they have hatched a plot to steal the entire collection and leave Julia with egg on her face; Timothy is there to write a piece on the show as well as catch up with his old friend Penny; Sam has designed all of the clothes for the show, although Julia has taken all the credit; Philip has been employed to direct the show despite his fiery temper and short fuse; and Lucy is an up-and-coming young model who sees this as her big opportunity.

Tempers are frayed as Julia manages to wind up everyone in sight. There are threats, bribes, blackmail, jealousy and, ultimately, a death.

Everyone is quick to accuse someone else. Can the audience deduce whodunnit?

General Staging Notes

Casting and Rehearsal

Choose your performers and issue them with a copy of the entire pack.

You should hold as many rehearsals as you feel comfortable with.

The first rehearsal should concentrate on reading through the pack and familiarising yourselves with the characters, backgrounds and format of the evening, before moving on to a readthrough.

Subsequent rehearsals should be used for moving or blocking the action. This may need to be revised to suit your venue.

It is impossible to rehearse the question sections of the evening as you can never tell exactly what people will ask, but have a read through the example questions sheet as this details some of the questions encountered in the past.

Facilities required for the performers

You will need a separate and private room in which performers change and are based when not required on stage. The victim will also use this room after being murdered.

The performers should also be given the same food as the audience.

It is always a good idea to visit the venue a few weeks before the performance and to tailor the performance to suit your venue.

Hall layout and event format

The acting area represents a backstage area and so doesn't need to look pristine; in fact a 'rough and ready' look would be good. There needs to be a three-seater sofa centre stage with a table in front of it and maybe a rail with a couple of costumes behind it, a drinks table to one side of the stage, and a few chairs dotted around for the cast to sit on. The exact layout can be flexible to both your cast and your venue's needs. You can dress the set as elaborately as you wish, but all you really need is the sofa, tables and chairs. It is also fun to encourage your audience to enter into the spirit of the evening and dress appropriately. You could even design your tickets in the style of a fashion show invite.

Suggested Timetable

7:30 pm	Guests arrive and are seated.
7:50 pm	Once all have arrived, the Narrator will explain the format of the evening.
8:00 pm	Act One
8:25 pm	End of Act One, Narrator wraps up and supper is served.
9:15 pm	Cast returns and Narrator organises questioning.
9:25 pm	Act Two
9:35 pm	End of Act Two and short break.
9:45 pm	Cast returns and Narrator organises questioning.
9:55 pm	Short break while guests complete Accusation forms.
10:05 pm	Cast call for a spokesman from each table to read their accusation.
10:15 pm	The big reveal.
10:30 pm	End.

Table Clues

The full pack includes a series of written clues which need to be printed and distributed to each ‘team’ or ‘table’ in the audience. The following summarises the contents of each clue.

<i>Document</i>	<i>Information to be gleaned</i>
Aaron background	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gives some details of the real beginnings of AP Enterprises • Shows that Aaron has a temper and can be violent
Fashion fundraiser flops	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A review by Timothy showing that he can be cutting
First Knight letter	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Details of the security that will be provided on the day • Mentions the death threats
Harpers invitation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • States Julia is the designer • Mentions the tight security
Harpers & Power	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Report on AP Enterprises financing the show • Gives the version of AP’s beginnings that Aaron created • Mentions Aaron’s temper and ruthless streak • Mentions the death threats
Key trends	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Includes examples of Philip’s temper and previous run-in with Stella McCartney
Letter to Penny	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Julia’s letter inviting Penny and having more digs at her
Letter to Julia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Penny’s reply accepting the invitation • Gives more detail on her leaving Harpers
UHSM magazine	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sam’s success at a graduate fashion show • Julia was a guest • Names Sam’s brother as Nicholas
Widow conned	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Details about a con man who preys on wealthy women

Additional Materials in the Table Pack

Intro Sheet	A basic introduction to the evening and how it will run
Accusation Sheet	To be filled in by each team

Example Questions

Although you can never tell exactly what an audience is likely to ask, the pack includes a few of the questions that have been thrown at past performers.

It is important to remember that non-guilty parties *must* tell the truth, although they are not required to volunteer any information if they are not directly asked for it. The guilty parties can lie, although they should stick to the truth where to do so will not incriminate them.

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Act One [Extract]

(The lights in the main hall dim, leaving only the curtains lit. The Narrator steps through the curtains and addresses the audience.)

Narrator: Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. You join us this evening at the Twin Lakes Country Club for an exclusive viewing of the new season's wardrobe from Harpers Fashion House; The Siddlington Collection. You have all received a special invitation to the event and the collection is due to go on sale at The London Boutique in a few days' time. Shortly you will get to see what's going on backstage in the green room; however, all is not as it seems. At some point this evening, a crime will be committed and it will be up to you to solve it, so make sure you watch and listen very carefully. On your tables you will find numerous items, which may or may not help you. You will get the chance to ask questions as the evening progresses, but I will give further instructions later on. So I'll leave you to it for now. Good luck.

(Narrator then exits stage. A few moments later, the curtains open to reveal the set: a backstage lounge area. There are various chairs, a small sofa, a drinks table and a couple of side tables dotted around. There is also a clothes rail on wheels upstage with one or two dresses on it. Julia is seated centre stage on the sofa talking to Aaron, who is pacing next to her. George and Penny are also seated, having a quiet conversation. Sam is sitting alone, idly flicking through a magazine.)

Julia: And there's not enough champagne. This is supposed to be my big launch party. How would it look if we ran out of champagne halfway through the evening?

Aaron: Relax Julia, it's not a problem. I'll get on to the caterers.

(He moves towards the front of the stage and takes out a mobile phone.)

Julia: Make sure they don't forget the caviar. God, do I have to think of everything myself?

Aaron: Don't worry, it's all taken care of. **(Speaking into the phone.)** Hello Archie? About the party tonight. We need another dozen crates of champagne, okay? Yes... That's fine...

(He continues his conversation, but turns and heads upstage so he cannot be heard. George and Penny both laugh at something and Julia glares at them.)

Julia: George, get me a drink, will you?

(George smiles and gets to his feet. When Julia turns away, he raises his eyebrows at Penny and she giggles. Julia whips her head back towards them and glares at Penny. George crosses to the drinks table and pours out a large glass of wine. As he moves back to Julia to hand over the glass, Nick enters, holding a nervous Timothy tightly by the arm.)

Nick: The collection has been safely delivered, Miss Harper. It's under lock and key in the storage area.

Julia: Good. At least one thing has been done properly today.

(She casts a withering look at Aaron, who is still on the phone at the back of the stage. He smiles and continues his silent conversation. George steps back behind Julia's sofa and watches as Nick gives his report. Sam puts down her magazine and both she and Penny also watch intently.)

Julia: Who has the keys to the storage area?

Nick: There are two sets and I've got them both, Miss Harper.

Julia: Give one set to me and you keep the other. You don't need me to tell you what I'll do to you and your firm if anything happens to those dresses.

(Nick hands her a set of keys.)

Nick: Very good, Miss Harper. Oh, I found this guy lurking around out the back. He says he knows you. Do you want me to get rid of him?

(Timothy looks quite worried as Nick thrusts him forward. Julia gives a laugh.)

Julia: No, there's no need for that. This is Timothy Holden, the eminent fashion critic.

(Nick shrugs and lets him go. Timothy quickly steps away from Nick and brushes himself down.)

Nick: I'll check the auditorium and then do a quick sweep of the outside again. Just holler if you need me.

(Nick turns, nods to Sam and exits.)

Timothy: So, what's with the gorilla?

Julia: That's Nick Jones, isn't he a sweetheart? He's here to make sure no one interferes with my creations or my body... apart from you of course, Georgie.

(She smiles up at George, who gives her shoulders a gentle squeeze. However, as soon as she looks away, he raises his eyebrows at Penny again.)

Timothy: I wouldn't have thought you'd need any protecting.

Julia: You know how it is when you have something that everyone else wants.

Timothy: **(Dryly)** I take it we're talking about the new collection now and not your body. Where are they then?

Julia: All in good time, Timmy. All in good time.

(Timothy visibly winces - he hates anyone shortening his name. Aaron finishes his phone call and returns to centre stage, just in time to be introduced.)

Julia: Let me introduce you to everyone first. This is Aaron Powers, I'm sure he needs no introduction. He has kindly offered to fund this little fashion show for me.

(Aaron steps forward and shakes Timothy's hand.)

Aaron: Holden, right? Tim Holden? I've read some of your stuff.

Timothy: Timothy, yes. Well, it was your office that invited me.

Aaron: Was it? Was it? How interesting.

(Aaron is obviously not interested at all. He drops Timothy's hand and crosses the stage to sit next to Sam. She looks at him nervously, wondering what to say, but he takes his phone out again and is soon talking business without even acknowledging her.)

Julia: This is George, a very good friend. Nick guards my creations, Aaron pays for absolutely everything and Georgie here looks after my more intimate needs.

(She smiles up at George, who is a little shocked, but laughs it off.)

George: Pleased to meet you Tim, I've heard a lot about you.

Timothy: Timothy. Only the good points, I hope?

George: Sure. So you write about these fashion shows, eh? Sounds like a barrel of laughs.

The only people I've met in the fashion world so far have been woman or gays, apart from Aaron of course. Nice to meet a straight guy for a change.

(He shakes Timothy's hand warmly. Julia gives a short, loud burst of laughter and looks at Timothy mockingly. Timothy tries to hide his embarrassment.)

Julia: Penny you already know, of course, and this is Sam Jones, my assistant designer.

Sam: Pleased to meet you, Mr Holden.

(Timothy crosses to shake her hand and she stands, looking slightly awkward.)

Timothy: Oh, call me Timothy, please.

Sam: Oh, okay. Erm... are you looking forward to the show?

Timothy: I certainly am! I'm very interested to see exactly what Julia's been up to recently.

(At that moment, Philip storms in, in a temper.)

Philip: That's it. I've had enough. Either she goes or I do!

(He strikes a pose and defiantly glares at Julia. Lucy follows him on and slumps into a chair, acting as if nothing has happened.)

Julia: Who goes? What do you mean, Philip?

Philip: That woman! **(He points at Lucy.)** She calls herself a model. A model! I mean, just look at the way she sits in a chair. She's like a bloody hippo on the catwalk! No poise, no grace.

Julia: I'm sure she's not that bad.

Philip: An elephant, that's what she is!

Lucy: What did you just call me?

Philip: **(Ignoring her.)** The only modelling she would be any good at would be taking her clothes off, not wearing these beautiful creations. Not that anyone would be interested in that body!

(Lucy is furious. She leaps to her feet and advances on Philip.)

Lucy: How dare you, you talentless little...

(George steps forward into Lucy's path.)

George: Come on now, let's all just calm down a bit, shall we?

Lucy: Calm down? Did you hear what he just said about me?

Julia: Speak to Aaron, he'll sort it out. I can't take all of this; I'm going to make sure the designs are hung the right way up. I can't trust anyone to do anything today. Sam?

(Sam jumps as though she's been caught doing something she shouldn't.)

Sam: Yes, Julia?

Julia: Well? Do you want to check these designs or not?

Sam: Oh, of course. Yes. I was just...

(But it's too late, Julia has left already. Sam scuttles after her and everyone watches her go.)

Philip: So, Mr Powers, what are you going to do about her?

Aaron: Tell me all about it, what's wrong with her?

(He leads Philip to one side of the stage where they can speak quietly. George leads Lucy off to the other side of the stage, trying to calm her down. Penny smiles at Timothy and he gets up to join her.)

Timothy: Nice to see things running smoothly, as usual.

Penny: That's Julia for you, never a dull moment. So, how's Timothy, or is it Tim these days?

Timothy: Don't! Why do people insist on shortening your name as soon as they've met you?

Penny: Tell me about it. I've lost count of the people who call me Pen.

Timothy: So what are these designs like? What's she calling it, the Siddlington Collection?

Penny: I've no idea, she's been very secretive about it all. I can't imagine that she's suddenly discovered a hidden talent. It was me that did all the designing at Harpers. I'm worried that she may be exploiting Sam; she seems like a nice kid.

Timothy: Well, let's face it, it wouldn't be the first time. You were always the talented one of the family. I could tell that from the first moment I saw your designs at uni.

Penny: Flatterer!

Timothy: It's true. I was only there to please the paper I was working for at the time. Pop along and take a look, they said, it might be fun. I hated the thought of going, but I'm glad I did. I'd never have found you if I hadn't.

Penny: You know how to cheer a girl up, Timothy. I'm glad you were there that night too. You're a great friend and have always been very supportive.

Timothy: Now who's doing the flattering?

(They both laugh and continue their conversation in mime. Philip breaks away from Aaron and heads to the drinks table to pour himself a drink.)

Philip: Well okay, but this is the last time. I'm an artist and I can't work with people like that.

Aaron: I know, and we really do appreciate it Philip.

(Aaron crosses to join Philip.)

Philip: Well, okay then. We'll say no more about it... for now.

(Aaron claps him on the shoulder, but Philip shrugs him off and heads offstage. Aaron takes his drink and sits on the sofa, where he becomes engrossed with sending texts and emails on his phone. Lucy and George sit together in two of the chairs.)

Lucy: He's so arrogant, I can't stand him.

George: He's the artistic type, very highly strung.

Lucy: He should be! Strung high up in a tree.

George: **(Laughs)** Now, now. Play nice.

[Continues in the full script.]