



A Dinner Theatre Murder Mystery
by
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Published by Lazy Bee Scripts

Customer Taster

A Silent But Deadly Auction

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A Silent But Deadly Auction

About The Pack

The full Murder Mystery pack should provide all the information you need to produce your very own murder mystery event. A Silent But Deadly Auction is intended to be performed from a stage, to an audience seated around tables. The performance is accompanied by a silent auction, and by opportunities for the audience to interact by questioning the suspects and making an accusation.

The Pack Contains:

- The Organiser's Overview [*excerpt here*]
- The Script [*excerpt here*]
- An Accusation Sheet for the audience to fill in

Organiser's Overview Contents

- Putting On Your Murder Mystery Evening
 - Overview
 - Character Descriptions
 - Notes on Conducting a Silent Auction
 - Procedure for Handling Audience Questions and Accusations
 - Suggested Timing Guide
- Production Notes
 - Set Description
 - Props List
 - Costume Notes

Putting On Your Murder Mystery Evening

Overview

Jacob Thorbridge, a wealthy businessman, has passed away. According to his will, some of his personal possessions are to be sold to raise money for one of his favorite charities (a local theatre group or church, perhaps). This sale, done by silent auction, is coupled with a dinner. A few acquaintances have been asked to say a few words about him. There are several pre-set items included in the silent auction to serve as clues. In the middle of the evening a homicide detective arrives after determining that Mr. Thorbridge's death was not an accident. The detective questions the speakers and then asks the audience to come up with some questions while [s/]he leaves to make a few phone calls.

After intermission, the detective accuses the winner of a silent auction gift basket of being an accomplice. When that fails, the gift basket is awarded to that person as the first door prize of the evening. The audience is then instructed to ask their questions of the suspects. The detective receives a phone call that gives him/her the information to finally arrest the real murderer. Before being taken into custody, the murderer must draw the name of the door prize winner of the evening from amongst those who named the killer correctly.

Character Descriptions

Louis Grainger (M): Half of the clown entertainment duo Louis & Louise. He is married to Louise. They work schools, birthday parties, etc., but they want to be country music singers. He is angry at Mr. Thorbridge for tricking them into signing a contract with him about their career and wants out of it. Clown or country costume is optional.

Louise Grainger (F): The other half of the clown entertainment duo Louis & Louise. She is married to Louis. They work schools, birthday parties, etc., but they want to be country music singers. She doesn't like Mr. Thorbridge because of the contract they signed and because he wanted to "clown around" with her. Clown or country costume is optional.

Lyle Lance (M): Sells real estate on Mars. He's out there. His father was a partner with Thorbridge and it didn't go well. Lyle holds a grudge. He has a bandaged hand from breaking into Thorbridge's home to retrieve any files that may hurt his business ventures. He also helped Joan Bentley inventory the estate as another way to check for documents.

Coach Judy (F): Athletic director and chemistry teacher at the orphanage. She dislikes Thorbridge for how he took advantage of the orphanage and uses the place for money laundering. In spite of this, she keeps quiet so she and the athletic program can benefit. She will do anything not to get caught or lose her situation.

Joan Bentley (F): She is Mr. Thorbridge's attorney, financial advisor and executrix of his estate. She dislikes Thorbridge for how he treated the orphans and profited off them. She wants justice. So, she uses his money without him knowing to fund projects that she believes in. She is also the MC for the evening.

Detective Anderson (M or F): A determined and no-nonsense homicide detective.

Notes On Conducting A Silent Auction

A silent auction can be thought of as a high-class yard/garage sale without the haggling. It is high class only because of the presentation. Each item should have a **Place Card** beside it and a corresponding **Auction Sheet**. It may be a prudent policy to post that items are sold "as is" and that you do not guarantee the quality of any service provided nor should you be held liable for any problems that may result from using said service.

The **Place Card** should give any pertinent information concerning the item. For a service, it should also serve as a temporary replacement for any certificate or pledge card relating to that service. Keep the actual certificate, pledge card or coupon with you and exchange it at checkout. Shoplifting can occur even at a fundraiser.

The **Auction Sheet** should have the same title or description as the place card and list a starting bid. Leave a pen or pencil beside each sheet and let the patrons haggle among themselves. You may want to state on the form that subsequent bids must be of a certain increment. The rest of the form consists of two columns. One column is for the bid amount and the other for the bidder's name.

During Intermission:

It is suggested to allow thirty minutes for intermission. The Joan Bentley character, the host, should provide notice to the patrons every ten minutes or so that the silent auction is coming to a close and that they should have their questions ready for the characters. Detective Anderson's return to stage marks the beginning of the second act and the close of the silent auction.

During Act 2 :

The silent auction should be closed at the end of intermission. During Act 2, the Auction Sheets should be collected and sorted alphabetically by the highest bidder's name. Multiple purchasers should have their Auction Sheets stapled together with the total due calculated and written on each bid sheet.

Checkout:

As the patrons leave, they are to look for their names among the alphabetized auction sheets. Upon finding a sheet that shows them to be the high bidder, they are to take it to the cashier. (It would be nice to have at least two people collecting the money, a third person in charge of the certificates, pledge cards or coupons and several others retrieving the items for the patrons.)

If possible, have boxes, bags and wrapping paper on hand for the convenience of the patrons. Also, make sure that the cashiers are aware of any policies you may have for accepting checks or cards.

Silent Auction Preset Items

1) The **single bookend** should be displayed as a silent auction item for bidding. However, Lyle Lance's name should be first on the list with an incredibly large bid listed beside his name so no one else will outbid him.

2) A grouping of **used sports equipment**. This is for Coach Judy's benefit and is more of a prop. However, if you can sell it, that would be great.

3) A **cat gift basket** needs to be created for the "accomplice" award. It is to be a legitimate collection of items for the cat lover. The highest bidder for this basket will be called to the front and accused of helping the murderer. After a few questions from Detective Anderson, [s/] he will exonerate this person and offer the basket as an apology for the accusation. This will be the first of two door prizes. The second door prize will be for the winner of the correct accusation draw.

Procedure For Handling Audience Questions

The audience should be allowed one question per table, or whatever allows for a quick and orderly inquisition. They may ask the characters or Detective Anderson anything they feel is pertinent. The actors should create their own character histories so they can field any question. After an appropriate time has elapsed, Detective Anderson will ask the audience to make their choice for the murderer via the accusation sheet.

Note that there might be one accusation sheet per table or one for each member of the audience. (If it's per table, then the prize will need to be shareable.)

Collecting The Accusation Sheets

After time for questions has been called, the accusation sheets will be collected. They will then be sorted into separate baskets for each accused suspect. Each character could collect the accusations corresponding to them - a basket of everyone's name who voted for Lyle, collected by Lyle, etc. - or all could be collected together and then sorted.

After The Accusation Sheets Have Been Collected

Detective Anderson will accuse the highest bidder of the cat gift basket of being an accomplice. After a few questions, the basket will be given to the bidder as a door prize for being such a good sport. Next, the detective receives a phone call that provides the final clue to name the murderer. The murderer is then asked to draw the name of an audience member (or table team) from their basket. That person wins the second door prize.

Suggested Timing Guide

7:00 Doors open. Patrons are greeted and instructions are given about the evening. The silent auction begins. Refreshments are served and characters interact with patrons if desired.

7:30 Dinner is served. Participants may continue to make their bids on silent auction items.

8:00 Act 1 begins.

8:15 Intermission - allows patrons to take a break, place their final bids in the silent auction, get dessert and formulate questions for the suspects.

8:30 Silent auction closes, Act 2 begins.

8:45 Murder mystery concludes. Door prize for "accomplice" is awarded. Revealed murderer draws a winning accusation sheet from amongst those that gave the correct answer. Patrons check out with silent auction items.

A Silent but Deadly Auction

Script Extract

Act 1

(The head table has five chairs and a podium. Louis, Louise, Lyle, Judy, and Joan are seated in these chairs.)

(Joan moves to the podium to address the guests.)

Joan: Ladies and gentlemen, thank you for coming out tonight to honor a man of our community with a heart of gold.

Judy: He had a heart? You sure about that?

Lyle: I'm sure he had gold though. Don't know about the heart.

Louis: Tell me about it.

Joan: **(Talking over them.)** A generous man who always thought of others.

Louise: Louis, are we at the wrong dinner? That doesn't sound like Jacob.

Joan: That's why we're having this fundraiser. So Jacob Thorbridge can continue supporting some of his favorite charities even after his death.

Judy: I thought he was his favorite charity.

Joan: Not this time. We're raising money for *these* folks with a dinner and silent auction. And according to the terms of his will, he also wanted a eulogy so people could say something nice about him.

(Everyone starts laughing.)

Joan: I know, I know, but you four were the only ones who agreed for some reason. So since you're here, let's just get on with it. Lyle?

Lyle: What?

Joan: Lyle has been assisting me with inventorying Mr. Thorbridge's estate. Lyle's father and Jacob Thorbridge were business partners at one time.

(Joan motions Lyle to the podium and then sits down. Lyle moves to the podium.)

Lyle: Jacob Thorbridge was a hard working, industrious man. He would get up each morning with the chickens... why his wife wouldn't let him sleep in the house I don't know. He was an ugly kid, but he had a lot of godparents. Every time someone would look into his crib they'd say my god, child.

Joan: Lyle, what are you doing?

Lyle: A eulogy. You know, with the jokes and stuff.

Joan: That's not what a eulogy is. Try to say something nice.

Lyle: Oh. Well, uh... Before I do, let me hand out my business card. **(He hands one to each person on the stage with him.)** And I'll be putting my card in each one of your bags... those of you who win the auction. Because I want to talk to the winners in this room. I'm the president of Red Planet Realty. All the land on Earth is owned by someone, but that's not the case on Mars. That's right, folks, tonight is your opportunity to own some Martian soil.

Joan: This is not the time.

Louis: People will never go to Mars, and even if they did, you can't live up there.

Louise: Are the taxes too high? Get it? Too high.

Lyle: You guys do comedy? Really? Anyway, you don't have to live on Mars. Just own the property. Then you can sue NASA for trespassing when they drive a rover across your yard. Pretty cool, huh?

Judy: Wait a minute... Lance... I know your father. He tried to help the orphanage by giving a percentage of his moon real estate sales. What happened?

Lyle: My father was a pioneer. He worked for the Lunar Land Company, but Thorbridge shut him down. That's why you're not getting a monthly check from Neil Armstrong for littering. But I guess everything turned out fine.

Judy: What are you talking about?

Louise: It's all those buildings with his name on them. Thorbridge Lodge, Thorbridge Cafeteria, and Jim.

Louis: What? No that's Thorbridge Gymnasium. His name was Jacob.

Lyle: It should have been Lance Lodge, and the Crater Cafeteria. Jim was fine with us. But the point is, Thorbridge ruined my father. He kept bogus records on Dad, caused him to lose his real estate license. Thorbridge got rich from Dad's moon money then cut Dad out. I can't say anything nice. **(He sits down.)**

Joan: I believe he was after you too, wasn't he?

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[Continued in the full script.]