



A Murder Mystery

by

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Customer Taster

A Vintage Murder

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It is the late afternoon of Saturday 21st August 1926. George and Mary are having an engagement party at his family home, Siddlington Hall, hosted by his parents Sir Charles and Lady Jane Trumpington-Smyth. Family, staff and a few close friends have gathered to set up the ballroom and attend to any last-minute finishing touches before the party guests arrive. However, there is more than just a party on some people's minds. Old wounds have been opened, new grievances aired and suspicion abounds. Sir Charles's past seems to be catching up with him, and his recent behaviour only fans the flames of an already volatile afternoon. Will he be able to placate everyone before the party starts, or will tensions boil over before then?

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About the Murder Mystery Pack

This 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. A 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 organise the questioning sections of the evening.

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

Although intended for a performance on stage, this murder evening could also be performed over a video conference program such as Zoom or MS Teams. The table clue pack would need to be made available to your audience via email prior to the performance. It would be helpful to have your audience split into household teams rather than tables in a hall. The narrator’s role would also need to be expanded to provide the written stage directions. Your audience can still ask questions via the video conference at the appropriate times.

What’s included?

- The Organiser’s Overview [*Extracts Here*]
 - Plot overview and character list
 - General staging notes
 - Suggested timetable
 - Props list
 - Example questions and answers
 - A cheat sheet showing the clues and red herrings within the table clues
- The Main Script [*Extracts Here*]
 - Scripts for Act 1 and Act 2
 - Final character statements
 - Character background notes, including motivation and opportunity
 - Where all the characters were when the shot was fired
- The Table Pack, to be given to audience members
 - Introduction to the evening
 - A set of clues to study
 - Accusation sheet, to be filled in

Plot Overview and Characters

Today is the late afternoon of Saturday 21st August 1926 and we are in the drawing room of Siddlington Hall. Later this evening is the engagement party of George Trumpington-Smyth and Mary Strafford. Family, staff and a few close friends have gathered early to set up the ballroom and handle the last finishing touches for the party before the guests arrive.

Your cast consists of (in alphabetical order):

Dotty Mayfield, American film star

Helen Southern, lady's maid

Mary Strafford, fiancée of George

John Tallis, valet to Sir Charles

George Trumpington-Smyth, only son of Charles and Jane and fiancé of Mary

Lady Jane Trumpington-Smyth, wife of Charles and mother of George

Sir Charles Trumpington-Smyth, husband of Jane and father of George

Annette Webster, assistant to Archie

Archibald Williams, famous archaeologist

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

George is marrying Mary and his parents have offered to hold the engagement party at the ancestral home, Siddlington Hall. Sir Charles isn't as pleased about the wedding as Lady Jane and has made his feelings known. Archie and Nettie have been invited to arrive early to give Sir Charles an update on their archaeological dig in Egypt. They also want to speak to Sir Charles about the disappearance of a valuable artefact from the dig site. Helen and John are staff at the hall and are helping to set up and make sure everything runs smoothly. Invitations have been sent and the guests are expected to start arriving within the next two hours.

However, Dotty turns up unannounced to confront Sir Charles and the family over an affair that she and Sir Charles had earlier in the year. She is persuaded to leave, but breaks back in and cracks the safe in the study, where she finds the missing artefact and a small amount of cash. The burglary is discovered almost immediately and the police called. Suddenly, a shot is heard and ... That's where the audience sleuthing really takes off.

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 read-through. 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 shows some of the questions we have encountered in the past.

Facilities required for the performers

You will need a separate and private room in which to change and base yourselves 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

This is the drawing room of Siddlington Hall, but you can dress your stage to suit your venue. There should be some chairs mid-stage and a table towards the back, but with enough room to allow free movement between them. The exact layout can be flexible to both your cast and your venue's needs.

Suggested Timetable

7:30 pm	Guests arrive and are seated
7:50 pm	Narrator explains the format of the evening
8:00 pm	Act One
8:40 pm	End of Act One, Narrator wraps up and supper is served
9:20 pm	Cast returns and Narrator organises questioning
9:30 pm	Act Two
9:40 pm	End of Act Two and short break
9:50 pm	Cast returns and Narrator organises questioning
10:00 pm	Short break while guests complete Accusation forms
10:10 pm	Cast call for a spokesman from each table to read their accusation
10:20 pm	The big reveal
10:30 pm	End

Properties List

Act One:

Folded tablecloth (set offstage for Helen)

Tray with decanter of whiskey and two glasses (set offstage for Helen)

Act Two:

Ruby pendant (John)

Example Questions

Although you can never tell exactly what an audience is likely to ask, the pack contains a few of the questions that were thrown at the cast of the original production.

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.

Table Pack

The table pack comes in three parts (for reasons of formatting). The pack includes a series of nine written clues which need to be printed and distributed to each 'team' or 'table' in the audience. One of the clues needs to be customised with a picture of Dotty Mayfield.

A Vintage Murder

[Script Extract]

Act One

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

Narrator: Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. You join us in the drawing room of Siddlington Hall. Sir Charles and Lady Jane Siddlington are hosting an engagement party for their son George and his wife-to-be Mary. Members of the house staff and a few special guests are preparing for the party, which is due to commence in around an hour. Shortly you will get to meet our players; however, all is not as it seems. At some point, a crime will be committed and it will be down to you to solve it, so make sure you watch and listen very carefully. On your tables, you will find various items, which may or may not help you. You will get the opportunity to ask questions as the evening progresses, but I will give further instructions later. So, I'll leave it to you for now. Good luck.

(Narrator steps back through the curtains and, a moment later, curtains open to reveal the ballroom of Siddlington Hall. The stage is decorated for an engagement party. There are a few chairs around the stage and a table towards the back. Lady Jane, Mary and Helen are on stage, adding a few final touches to the decoration.)

Jane: There, I think that just about does it. What do you think?

Mary: I think it looks wonderful. You are so kind to allow us to hold the party here.

Jane: Nonsense. Where else would you hold it? This is our home and will be your home one day when George inherits the estate.

Mary: It certainly is a somewhere I would be proud to call home, but I hope not for a long time yet.

(Lady Jane takes another look round.)

Jane: The tablecloth! I knew there was something else. Helen, would you mind?

Helen: Of course not, Lady Jane.

(She drops a curtsy and exits.)

Jane: How are the wedding plans coming along? You won't be getting much help from George, I suppose?

Mary: Oh, he has his uses. In fact, he booked the church just last week.

Jane: You must be a good influence on him. I could never get him to lift a finger to help out. Have you picked a local church?

Mary: Yes, St Geraldine's in the village. It's such a quaint old place and has obvious connections to the family.

Jane: Oh, I am pleased. Yes, there are generations of Trumpington-Smyths in the church yard. I'm sure Charles will be glad to hear he doesn't have too far to go.

Mary: And you're sure that Sir Charles won't mind us holding the reception here at the hall?

Jane: He'll be delighted. He'll take the opportunity to sneak off to the library with a few of his friends for a quiet drink and game of cards. He'll be happy that he doesn't need to organise anything as it will all be on hand. Now, tell me all about the dress.

(Before Mary has a chance to reply, Sir Charles and George enter.)

Charles: But the bloody thing had already jumped the fence!

(He laughs and slaps George on the back. George smiles, but obviously doesn't find the story amusing. He spots Mary and crosses to her.)

George: Mary, I didn't know you were already here.

Mary: Where else would I be? There is still lots to do and the guests will be arriving in less than an hour.

(They smile and he kisses her cheek. Helen enters, carrying a tablecloth.)

Jane: Yes, so I hope you two aren't going to be getting in our way.

George: Of course not mother. **(Kisses her cheek.)** It's looking wonderful in here.

(Mary helps Helen to put the tablecloth on the table at the back of the stage. Sir Charles watches them both intently.)

Jane: Thank you. Helen has been working hard since early this morning, but there's still lots to be done. **(Glances at Sir Charles.)** I can see that we'll be getting no help from the pair of you, so if you'll excuse us, we must get on.

Charles: Of course, my dear, you run along.
(Lady Jane gives him a withering look and sighs.)

Jane: Come along, Helen, let us take a look at the sitting room. Some people might need some sanctuary from the party later on.

Mary: Let me join you, I'd like to be useful.
(Lady Jane smiles and the three ladies exit. Sir Charles watches them go.)

Charles: I still don't understand what you see in that shop girl.

George: I've told you before, she's not a shop girl. Her father owns Strafford's of Knightsbridge.

Charles: New money. Where's the history, the ancestry?

George: We all have to start somewhere, father. Even the Trumpington-Smyths must have been new money at some point in the past.

Charles: **(Spluttering.)** Not the same thing at all! We are landed gentry. We can trace our family back generations.

George: Exactly, and in a couple of hundred years' time, the Straffords will be able to say the same. It's all a matter of time, father.

Charles: A shop owner is hardly the same as a knight of the realm. If you ask me...
(John enters and clears his throat.)

John: Mr Williams and Miss Webster have arrived, sir.

Charles: Mr...? Oh, you mean Archie. Show him in, Tallis.
(John nods and exits.)

Charles: We'll continue this later, George. It's not too late to change your mind, I'm sure she'd understand.

George: No, father, it's you that needs to understand. I love Mary and I am marrying her and none of your prejudices or outdated beliefs are going to stop us.
(George turns on his heel and exits. Sir Charles looks furious and starts to follow, but John enters, followed by Archie and Nettie.)

John: Mr Williams and Miss Webster, sir.
(Sir Charles stops and takes a moment to compose himself. When he turns to greet his guests, he has a welcoming smile on his face.)

Charles: Archie! How good to see you, glad you could make it.

Archie: Thank you for inviting us. You remember Nettie, my assistant?

Charles: Yes, yes, of course. A bit early for the party, I'm afraid, I hope there's nothing wrong.

Archie: Well, actually I had hoped to have a quiet word before the other guests arrived, Sir Charles.

Charles: Really? Well, it is a little inconvenient just at the moment. So much to do and all that.

Archie: It will only take a moment of your time, Sir Charles, and it is quite important.

Charles: I think that Jane wanted me to... ah, now what was it? Tallis, what was it that Lady Jane asked me to do?

John: To stay in here and keep out of her way, if I remember correctly, sir.
(John exits.)

Charles: Ah, right, yes. Well it looks like I'm all yours, old boy. What was it you wanted to ask?

Archie: Jolly good. Well, the thing is that... ah... this is a little awkward.

Charles: Spit it out, man.
(Archie is very embarrassed by what he needs to ask.)

Nettie: The thing is, Sir Charles, is the Eye of Amun.

Charles: The eye of...?

Nettie: Amun? The large ruby pendant belonging to Siamun's father? We found it in the tomb.

Charles: Of yes, of course. What about it?

Archie: It's gone missing from the safe in Cairo, sir.
Charles: Missing?
Nettie: Stolen.

...
[Continued in the full script.]

Character backgrounds including motives and opportunity **[Extract]**

The evening

Lady Jane has persuaded her husband that their son's engagement party should be held in the ancestral home. Sir Charles isn't keen, but agrees. He also invites the archaeologist who has been working for him to come along a little early so they can discuss the dig and plans for the future.

Sir Charles Trumpington-Smyth

The latest in a long line to own Siddlington Hall and plenty of land in the surrounding area. He is married to Lady Jane, but has a reputation as a gambler and womaniser and has come close to ruining the family name on more than one occasion. Only the strength of character of his wife has seen off disaster.

During the second Boer War, he was given command of a small regiment and sent to South Africa to help defend the town of Kimberley. He needed an orderly and chose John Tallis from the ranks to fill the role. Sir Charles was very inexperienced, but wanted to prove a name for himself. He disobeyed direct orders and sent his regiment out to engage the enemy. It was a disaster and many of his men were killed or badly wounded. He told everyone that he was only following orders, but he was soon sent back to England once Lord Kitchener took over. John went with him and stayed on as Sir Charles' valet once they were back on home soil.

When he saw the success of the discovery of Tutankhamun, he became jealous and wanted the same for himself. He found an up-and-coming archaeologist and offered to back a dig hoping for a big find. Last year, his luck finally paid off and Archie discovered the tomb of a little-known Egyptian King, Siamun. Most of the treasure was still in place, including a huge ruby known as the Eye of Amun. Sir Charles made sure he was there when the tomb was opened, but has been disappointed that his discovery hasn't received the accolade that Carnarvon's did.

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[Continued in the full murder mystery pack.]