

Amdram is

Murder



A Murder Mystery
by

Karen Ince

Customer Taster

Am dram is Murder

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*A murder mystery delivered as a play,
followed by additional witness statements and
audience interrogation of the cast
before the murderer is finally revealed.*

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Overview

Am dram is Murder is a Murder Mystery for a company of nine, designed to create an evening's entertainment (probably with a meal included) with audience participation to solve the murder. Five actors perform a short script in two acts, ending with a murder. Under the guidance of a master of ceremonies, the audience then receive additional information in the form of statements from three witnesses. The audience is invited to interrogate the suspects. There are 4 possible endings to the play, so it can be presented on a number of consecutive evenings without the audience knowing who the culprit is.

Structure

The full murder mystery pack contains:-

- The Organiser's Overview including brief character overviews, a rough guide on how to structure your event, notes on setting, and a props list.
- One "Role Pack" for each of the five members of Marchfield Amateur Drama (MAD) containing a character profile and the two scripted acts
- A map of the village of Marchfield (for the benefit of both cast and audience)
- Four "scenarios", one for each of the endings, containing the witness statements and specific briefs for each suspect

This Customer Taster contains:-

- Brief character overviews, a rough guide on how to structure your event, notes on setting and preparation
- An extract from one "Role Pack" (showing Derek's character brief and a few pages of the first scripted act)
- An extract from one of the four "scenarios"

Setting

The script assumes that the events take place in a village hall (where MAD rehearses and stages its shows). Since the events take place at MAD rehearsals, no scenery is required. A stage and a little furniture is assumed. If you are performing without a stage, then adjust the script accordingly.

Murder Mystery Evening Format

A possible suitable format for an evening in which the mystery is played around a meal is as follows:

- Act 1 (should take less than 45 minutes)
- Main course
- Act 2 (should take less than 20 minutes)
- Dessert
- MC announcement (time, place, method of murder)
- Eye witness testimony.
- Questioning of suspects
- Coffee
- Audience solutions
- Revelation of the guilty party

Characters:

The victim and suspects are all members of Marchfield Amateur Drama (MAD). The scenes they act-out take place during their rehearsals of a murder mystery.

Cathy James Producer of the murder mystery evening, a leading light in MAD. A very organised lady who likes to organise other people too. Age flexible, but preferably in the middle of the other female characters.

Derek Sharp Leading man. Age flexible, but preferably similar to Cathy. Considered (by himself) to be quite good-looking, suave and sophisticated. Plays the detective, Hercules Carrot.

Fiona Barnes One of the actresses. Kind-hearted, gentle. Age flexible. Plays the part of Lady Honoria Wimpole.

Jenny Morris One of the actresses. Cynical, brash, even hard. Can appear aggressive at times, but doesn't mean it. Age flexible but should be the youngest member of the cast. Plays the part of Honourable Henrietta Wimpole, Lady Wimpole's niece by marriage.

Shelagh Harris One of the actresses. At first appearance very typical British middle class. Has a lively imagination and sense of humour. Not as uptight as she might appear. Age flexible but should be the oldest member of the cast. Plays the part of the Honourable Margaret Forsythia, Lady Wimpole's spinster aunt, who as a poor relation, acts as her companion in exchange for a home, and small income.

In addition, there are

Three eyewitnesses for each scenario – can be played by the same people, but need not be! The testimony they give will be different each evening, so they need to be able to improvise a character who can deliver information provided on a fact sheet.

Master of ceremonies. Will keep the audience informed of the events of the evening, give information regarding the murder and take charge of the questioning of eyewitnesses, and suspects.

The Scenarios

There are four scenarios, each giving a different ending to the mystery!

Each scenario includes information for the MC to announce, a fact sheet for each eye witness, and a fact sheet for each suspect.

The clues differentiating one ending from the others are provided by the announcement made by the MC, the information given by the eye witnesses and the information known to each suspect.

The MC announces the time, place, and method of the murder and introduces the witnesses.

The eye witness fact sheets detail who they are (there are different roles and information for each scenario), and what they saw/heard. This should be delivered to the audience 'in character'. They do not need to be questioned by the audience. (This could be an option, particularly if the suspects process around the audience to be interrogated, but the witnesses have a small brief which they need to deliver completely to each part of the audience.)

Each suspect will receive a fact sheet detailing their evidence, starting with whether or not they are guilty. If guilty they will be given the motive, and an explanation of the events prior to the murder. If not guilty, they will be given facts of who/what they saw or heard, and their own movements. This information, together with information from the character profile should be used to answer questions from the audience. Only the murderer is allowed to lie, all other cast members should tell the 'truth' of their character.

Preparation

Initial preparation can be done by distributing the “Role Packs” and then running a first rehearsal in which the actors have to guess the identity of the murderer. (It’s fun! Why not?)

If you take that approach, then the MC, the victim or one of the “witnesses” will need to take charge of distributing the components of one of the scenarios, so that the suspects do not see each other’s evidence!

There is a character profile for each member of MAD in the role pack, giving them more information about their character which will prove valuable before rehearsals start, and as a refresher before performances as it will help them to answer audience questioning. This is additional information that is relevant to the character. Just as in real life we don’t know everything about everybody, this information should only be read by the cast member playing that part.

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.)
- Preparing “seed questions” for the audience (which might be fed by the MC if the audience are slow to participate.)

Decide how the interrogation will be carried out.

- Interrogation in front of the full audience, so everyone gets the same information
- The suspects (and, optionally, the eye witnesses) process around the “tables” in the audience, pausing at each to be interrogated. (This ensures more participation, rather than being dominated by one or two eager questioners, but takes longer!)

Decide on how and when the scenario will be chosen for each performance.

Decide on how the guilty party will be revealed

- MC announcement (“The police have just arrested...”)
- Confession by the guilty party (“Now that I’ve been found out, I should explain...”)

Decide whether the event will be competitive or not. Consider:-

- Non-competitive events (a show of hands for each of the suspects before the solution is declared).
- Competitive events - collection of “solution sheets” from the audience, backstage judgement of the best (and worst) solutions and draw from a hat in the case of a tie before declaring the solution and declaring the winner.

Time and effort will need to go into preparing the sound effects.

Character Profile: Derek

You are a happily married man. You have a lovely wife, two wonderful children, a nice house, a good job which is interesting and fulfilling, and a mistress. The only way life could get any better would be to win the lottery and / or have another mistress. You enjoy being involved in the local am dram, it gives you the opportunity to get up on stage and wow the audiences. You love the applause, the attention. You don't understand why more people don't want to get up on stage, but are grateful that there is no real competition for parts.

You have no intention of telling your wife about Cathy, though Cathy doesn't realise that. She thinks you're going to leave your lovely life and live with her. You hope to be able to string her along for quite some time yet. You do love her, just not quite enough to give up everything else for her. You also love your wife, and wouldn't want to hurt her by leaving her. You wouldn't want her to find out about Cathy. She did find out about one of your earlier affairs, but you managed to convince her it was a one-off, a big mistake that you would regret for ever. Actually you only regret being found out, and having to finish the relationship. Maria said that if it ever happened again she would leave you, and you would never see the kids again. You would be devastated if that happened. Since then you have been much more discreet.

Am dram is Murder

Act 1

Scene 1 – Marchfield Village Hall Stage, Monday evening

(It is the rehearsal night for Marchfield Amateur Drama - Mad. As the curtain opens, the cast are rehearsing a spoof murder mystery. However in spite of the lack of set and costumes, it should appear initially that this is the play the audience are here to watch. Overacting in a bad Victorian melodrama fashion is recommended. There is a table or similar improvised desk set centre stage, angled slightly towards SR, with a chair behind it. A second chair is set at an odd angle to the left of the table. Fiona is on stage, sitting at the ‘desk’.)

(Jenny enters (SR) at a run.)

Jenny: Aunt Honoria! There you are! I was looking for you.

Fiona: Henrietta! How many times must I tell you, not to come bursting into the room like some hoyden. You are a young lady now, and should act as such.

Jenny: Sorry Aunt. (**Emphatically**) But I have to talk to you.

Fiona: Very well, then take a seat and compose yourself.

(Fiona gestures as if to invite Jenny to sit to the right of her. There is a moment of confusion as they both realise there is no chair there. Jenny sighs, walks round to the other chair, picks it up and moves it to the correct place)

Fiona: Now what is it that is so important you must disturb me, while I do my household accounts?

Jenny: I want to talk to you about the house party, this weekend

Fiona: What of it, my dear?

(Shelagh enters, and stands, uncertainly, somewhere close by. Evidently unsure as to where she should be, and whether she should be standing or seated, she can move around or shift from foot to foot.)

Jenny: I hear that you have included Mr Hercules Carrot, the famous Welsh detective, among the guests.

Fiona: This is true. What of it?

Jenny: Well, really Aunt! How could you?

Fiona: I might remind you, young lady, that this is my house, and I will invite whom I wish. Should you have any objection on this matter, then I will be happy to listen to your opinion, (**forcefully**) when it is correctly expressed!

Jenny: Of course, Aunt.

Fiona: Very well, then. Speak.

Jenny: I really think...

Shelagh: (**Interrupting**) I, too, have grave misgivings on this matter, Honoria.

(There is a moment of confusion as Fiona looks in the wrong direction, Shelagh moves to a different place, blocking Jenny, who coughs meaningfully. Shelagh looks round, realises what she has done, and moves again. During this time, Fiona is speaking while also trying to follow Shelagh’s movements. As a result the start of her speech is disjointed, She looks and sounds annoyed.)

Fiona: That’s as may be Aunt Margaret. However, I cannot possibly listen to you both at the same time... listen to you both... Er, kindly allow Jenny, um, Henrietta that is, to finish speaking. It is hardly surprising she is finding it difficult to master correct decorum when she is given such an appalling example. (**To Jenny**) Carry on, my dear. You were saying?

Jenny: No, Great Aunt Margaret should speak first.

Shelagh: (**graciously**) Thank you child.

(Jenny looks annoyed at being referred as child!)

Shelagh: Now then Honoria, you cannot be serious about inviting this man to stay, on the same weekend as (**she ticks off on her fingers**) Lord and Lady Fitzpatrick; Lady Rose; the Earl of Northumberland and his wife; your husband’s brother, sister-in-law, and niece; *and* young Peter De Montfort.

Fiona: Really Aunt, I see no reason why not. After all, with a house already full, one more makes little extra work.

Shelagh: But my dear, I mean, who is he? Do we know him? Does anyone know him? And Good Lord, he's Welsh!

Fiona: (Firmly) Aunt Margaret, I am fully aware of his origins. And Wales is, after all, part of England! As for whether *we* know him, he is extremely well known, and has solved many famous cases, involving many members of Society. I should think he will make a most interesting and entertaining guest, and get on well with all our other guests.

Shelagh: (Dismissively) Hhhm! A celebrity! Hardly a person in the same class as our other guests!

Fiona: I would like to remind you that this is *my* house, and *I* shall decide who is suitable to invite. I shall expect you to make him as welcome as you would make any other visitor. Now then, Henrietta. Did you have anything to add?

Jenny: Yes, Aunt Honoria. I most certainly do. You can't possibly invite this man for the weekend. It just won't do at all.

Fiona: (Drily) Really, *Child*, and why is that?

Jenny: Because, whenever he stays anywhere, especially when it's a house party with titled guests, there's always (dramatic pause) a murder!

(Blackout)

Scene 2 – The Same

(The 'desk' has been pushed hurriedly to one side, and several chairs arranged to imitate a living room set. Fiona and Derek are on stage. Fiona is seated. Derek speaks in an appalling pseudo-welsh accent. This is a rehearsal, and while the actors rehearse this scene the sound and lighting people are experimenting with various FX, not necessarily related.)

Derek: It really is a most unfortunate incident, My Lady, but rest assured I shall do all in my power to assist. (He twirls an imaginary moustache)

Fiona: Thank you Mr Carrot. I am sure, (uncertainly) I am sure, (pause) Oh, yes! I am sure that the police will find your assistance most valuable.

Derek: The Police! Bah! They are useless! Bumbling idiots. (He strikes a pose) It is I, Hercules Carrot, who will solve this crime, and bring the murderer to justice. Police! huh!

(FX: Dog bark.)

Jenny: (Entering) I have left Great Aunt Margaret sleeping. The doctor has left some powders for you too, Aunt Honoria, should you wish to take them.

Fiona: I shall be unable to sleep until I know who has committed this heinous crime. I... I... I have no wish to take... To take what? Oh, yes, vile powders from the doctor. Mr Carrot, I beg... no, sorry, I beseech you to find who has done this terrible thing.

(FX: Half the stage lights go out. Fiona looks up, briefly, annoyed.)

Derek: A wise choice My Lady, if I may say so. In my experience, many who commit murder do not stop at one single crime.

(Fiona & Jenny scream)

Derek: (Dramatically) And sleeping powders are, so very often, the weapon of choice!

Jenny: You see Aunt. I warned you! Now none of us will be safe, even in our own beds.

(FX: Lights go back on, the other half go off then on again.)

Derek: You warned your Aunt of what? (Suspiciously) What is this, Lady Honoria? (Peers at Fiona, then Jenny, back to Fiona, questioningly) You're Lady Honoria aren't you? Vital information that you have withheld from me?

Fiona: I don't think so...

Derek: With respect, you are not the one who thinks! (Dramatically, boasting) I am the one who thinks. It is *my* brain that will provide the answer to this puzzle, (accusingly) and if you do not provide me with all the necessary information, even the smallest piece of the jigsaw, then I cannot be expected to solve it, can I?

Jenny: I merely warned my Aunt, that if she insisted on inviting you to stay, then there would be a murder while you are here, because that is what always happens, isn't it, Mr Carrot?

(FX: Gun shot, blood curdling scream.)

Derek: So, you think you are clever then, do you? Maybe, you thought this was the very time to carry out a murder, so you could try to blame me? Well, many have tried that little game before, but it won't pull the wool over the eyes of one as dedicated to Truth and Justice as I! May I enquire just where *you* were when the foul deed was committed?

(They strike a dramatic pose, which they need to hold as there is a pause before...)

(Blackout.)

Cathy: **(Loudly, from offstage)** Thanks Paul, can we have the lights back on please! And can you please sort out the sound effects?

(Lights go back up)

Voice: **(Offstage.)** Sorry – I think I've found the right disc now!

Cathy: **(Bustling on stage, looking at her watch)**. OK, thank you, well done everyone, that's finally starting to come together! We'll have to stop there for tonight, I think. **(Calling off-stage)** Shelagh? Are you there?

(Shelagh enters)

Cathy: Fiona, you're getting better with your words, but you still need to do more – we're really close, and there's a lot you're still not sure of. It's not really good enough. Derek, could you listen to those tapes again please, your accent still needs some work.

Cathy: Shelagh, in the study scene, you need to be more sure of your entrance and your moves. You looked a bit lost there.

Shelagh: **(Sharply)** If you saw me looking lost, why didn't you say something! That would have been more helpful than raking it up now.

Cathy: **(Crossly)** I didn't want to interrupt the flow. I want to start seeing some character development, from all of you, and you can't get the chemistry if we keep stopping and starting.

(Calmly) Anyway, we'll go through the moves again first thing on Wednesday, but you really ought to know them by now. And we *must* get going sooner. **(She turns to stare at Fiona)** Fiona, I know you've got a new man in your life, but you really must make an effort to get here on time. Everyone else manages it, and we can't start without you. I gave you the main part on trust that you'd put the effort in! Now, I'm beginning to think that was a mistake! I've put a lot of time and effort into this, and to be honest, I'm feeling let down!

Jenny: **(Abruptly)** What's happening with costumes? I never really feel right until I've got a costume! Especially for a period piece like this.

Cathy: It's OK, calm down! Sylvia's working on the costumes, and should have them ready for final fitting Monday next week.

Fiona: Oh good, I'm really looking forward to all that finery! What's happening about the set?

Cathy: Paul and Rob are set-building at the weekend, and Shelagh of course is going to come and work her usual magic with the painting...

Shelagh: **(Nervously)** Hardly magic! I do my best, but if anyone else wants to have a go?

Cathy: Nonsense, you know you're brilliant. I reckon you could have been a professional artist, some of the stuff you've done. I've seen some of your pictures.

Fiona: Didn't you exhibit some recently?

Shelagh: Not recently. I did put some in the village art fair a couple of years ago. But I don't really seem to get around to painting as much as I used to.

Fiona: Really? I was sure I heard someone... **(Tails off uncertainly)** Oh, maybe not, Perhaps I misheard! But what a shame! I thought you were really good. I particularly liked your impressionist style.

Jenny: Oh yes! I remember you did some pictures for the set last year didn't you! **(Warmly)** They were really good!

Shelagh: **(Hurriedly)** Well, I'm sure there are plenty of other people who could paint just as well or better. To be honest I don't even really get around to doing any painting these days. I've lost interest a bit I think...

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Scenario 1

Contents

The full version of this document contains

- Briefing for the Master of Ceremonies containing crucial information about the time and manner of the death of Fiona Barnes
- Witness briefings for the three eye-witnesses
- Individual briefings for each of the four suspects, including movements around the time of the murder and (for the guilty party) information about motive and method

MC Briefing - Information to be shared with the audience:

The local police are investigating the murder of Fiona Barnes. They have issued this statement.
“The body of Fiona Barnes was discovered at about nine o’clock last night by the victim’s boyfriend, Martin Knight. She was lying on the floor of her living room, and had been stabbed with a pair of scissors, apparently belonging to her. Time of death has been estimated at about seven-thirty pm. We have ruled Mr Knight out of our investigation. We have reason to believe that the murder was committed by someone well known to the victim, probably someone connected with Marchfield Amateur Drama group, of which she was a keen member. We are anxious to solve this crime as quickly as possible, and call on members of the public to assist us. Anyone who knows anything that may help, should come forward and share their information with us.”

Three people have come forward with information that they believe may be relevant. They are:

1. A neighbour of Cathy James (director of the current MAD production)
2. A neighbour of Fiona Barnes, the victim
3. A neighbour of Derek Sharp (member of the MAD acting company)

Eye-Witness 1: Cathy's Neighbour

You saw the ambulance outside Cathy's house the other day, and wondered what on earth was going on. So you popped over to see if there was anything you could do. She'd hurt her foot, and they were taking her to hospital. You've noticed that Clive isn't around much, in fact you haven't seen him for months, and his car's never there. So you offered to go down and pick her up when she was ready to leave, which she was very pleased about. You were quite shocked when you picked her up – that great big bandage! It's lucky that you did go – it's not clear how she'd have got home otherwise. She was clearly in a lot of pain, and the painkillers were making her ramble a bit incoherently. You saw her safely into her house. You didn't like to ask outright whether Clive was coming back to look after her, so you said you'd pop in, see how she was. You felt you should keep an eye on her as you know that people need a bit of looking after when they're injured.

The next night, Wednesday, you were just closing your curtains when you saw a car pull up. One of her friends from the drama group, probably, you've seen him there before. You didn't see what time she got back. The next morning (Thursday) you popped over to see how she was. She said she was OK, except that it was a nuisance not being able to drive. Of course you said you'd be happy to drive her anywhere she needed to go, doctor or hospital, anything like that, or to pick up shopping for her. She still didn't seem her normal self though, quite emotional, and a bit distracted. She said she didn't think the painkillers were doing her any good. That evening, you thought you'd check up on her. But rather than go over, you phoned her. Didn't want her hobbling to the door if she didn't need to. But there was no answer. She'd probably already gone to bed, as when you looked over there weren't any lights on. That was probably about 8.00 or maybe a bit earlier. She obviously wasn't sleeping well though, because when you went up to bed at about 10.00 or 10.30, you noticed lights on then, so she must have got up again. It was too late then though to ring her.

Then the next morning, Friday, you were going to do some shopping anyway, so you thought you'd ask if she needed anything. When you went round, she asked if it was possible to drop her off at her friend's house, and then pick her up on the way back. She seemed quite worried about this friend, said she'd just had a really odd phone conversation. Naturally you agreed, but when you dropped her off, there were police everywhere, and it turned out the woman had been murdered!