



A Dinner Theatre Murder Mystery

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Customer Taster

Downtown Crabbey

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Synopsis

It is around 1900. A Hotel Inspector is due to inspect Downtown Crabbey, a hotel designed for young American travellers to feel at home in London. His arrival is causing something of a panic, but unfortunately (for him) he is found dead before he can begin his work...

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Downtown Crabbey

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About the pack

The full pack provides the background information needed to produce your very own murder mystery event or stage production. It is designed to be used at a sit-down meal where the principal characters act out a set of events for, and interact in-character with, the guests.

This show is mostly a scripted performance. The cast have set lines to learn, which contain the clues and information the audience need to work out Whodunit. There is also opportunity to interact with the audience between Acts and while questioning the suspects.

Structure

This murder mystery pack contains:

- **The Script** - *[Extract in this taster]* - with five possible endings.
- **The Organiser's Overview** – a guide to help you produce a successful Murder Mystery Event. *[Extracts in this taster]* The full document contains.
 - **Plot Overview**
 - **Production Notes** – procedures that will make the show easy to produce
 - **Character Overview** – a list of more in-depth character descriptions
 - **Props Lists**
 - **Original Production Photographs**
- **The Accusation Form** - for the audience to enter their proposed solutions

Plot Overview

The action takes place in the dining room of the Downtown Crabbey hotel in about 1900.

Murphy and **Lady Roberta** welcome guests (audience members) as they arrive at Downtown Crabbey for a Preview night as an American-style hotel in the midst of London. While Murphy is positive and pleasant in greeting audience members, Lady Roberta is a bit snobby. **Meryl** and **Maisy** announce (and subsequently resolve) the issue of a missing fork. Hotel Inspector Thomas Grint is discovered dead in the alley behind the hotel.

Murphy reveals that he was in law enforcement in America, and he proceeds to question Lady Roberta, Meryl and Maisy. He recaps that Hotel Inspector Thomas Grint was found dead with a fork sticking out of his mouth. (Aha! The missing fork!) Following the questioning of each cast member, the audience is given the chance to interrogate them.

Meryl gave Grint a serving of Shepherd's Pie, served with a small dessert fork, but not the fork found in Grint's mouth. She reveals that she is Lady of Patmore Manor. Her husband passed away, and she must work in order to pay the taxes and retain ownership of the property.

Maisy knew about Grint because twenty years ago, her mother was a scullery maid at another hotel. Grint was a brand-new Hotel Inspector at the time, and he refused to let the owner install indoor plumbing or gas lines into the scullery and kitchen. She did give Grint a glass of water with Salt of Sorrel, because he had indigestion, and in small amounts, it is supposed to be good for the digestion.

Lady Roberta was hiding in the alley because she did not want Grint to see her. Unfortunately, he was already there. She knew Grint's father. In 1857, she was in India, at the Siege of Lucknow. Grint's father was an artist, and her lover.

Murphy admits that he lied; he went out to the alley to smoke a cigar, and Grint was in the alley, inspecting the trash bin. Audience members are instructed to fill out their Accusation Forms.

After a brief break, Roberta, Murphy, Meryl and Maisy collect the Accusation Forms. Roberta has the option to sing during this intermission – this is optional, depending on the vocal capacity of the actress.

There are five possible endings. **You must choose your preferred solution in advance!**

In the final Accusation scene, Roberta, Murphy, Meryl and Maisy each reveal personal secrets which add to the intrigue of the murder. Once the true murder situation is revealed, the audience member winner is randomly selected from the best answers on the Accusation Forms.

General Staging Notes

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

Preparation

Read the **Organiser's Overview, Script and Production Notes** prior to the **First Rehearsal**. This show includes improv and audience interaction, which may involve irrelevant audience responses. To counteract this, develop possible character get-out strategy responses.

Choose one of the Alternative Endings as your ending, prior to the actual production.

First Rehearsal

The first rehearsal is a Table Read, or Read Through. Distribute copies of the script to the actors. The actors sit around a table, and read the play aloud from beginning to end, according to their characters. Directions (noted in parentheses) are read aloud by the Stage Manager. This allows the cast to get a feel for the script.

At the end of Act 1, distribute a copy of the **Accusation Form** to each cast member, and have them fill it out. Collect the Accusation Forms prior to resuming the Table Read.

Once the Table Read is complete, read all of the completed Accusation Forms aloud, to see what ideas the cast members has as to the murderer's identity. Award prizes – a bar of candy perhaps – to *all* cast members. Make it fun!

Homework Assignment

At the end of the First Rehearsal, before the actors leave, give them a copy of the **Character Overview** for the character they play. They must learn their backstories prior to the next rehearsal. This makes it easier for actors to interact with audience members during Improv and audience interaction.

Learn the Script

The Cast members learn their lines, develop their characters and get comfortable with the (improvised) interrogation.

Improv

There are portions of the show in which the actors interact with audience members while remaining in character.

Open the event

The event should open by acting out the scripted dialogue.

Evidence

Throughout the script, pieces of evidence are discovered and revealed by the actors.

Interrogation

During the Interrogation, the actors are seated onstage and may be questioned by the audience. After the person playing Murphy Crawley asks questions of each suspect, he then prompts audience members to raise their hands so they may ask questions. The audience should be permitted to ask questions every time Murphy Crawley completes his questioning, since the audience idea of who the murderer is may change during the course of questioning.

Make Each Character Seem Guilty

Casting suspicion and using misdirection is a terrific way to ensure the audience is challenged in figuring out who the murderer is.

Also, whenever possible, it is always fun for the character to proclaim their innocence, and then throw the blame on someone else. That usually works in reverse, and the audience tends to become more suspicious.

Accusation Form

Murphy Crawley tells the audience when to fill out the **Accusation Form**, which was handed out to every audience member/group table at the beginning of the show. The actors, remaining in character, collect the completed forms before the final scene takes place.

Determine the winner (backstage)

The cast collects the completed Accusation Forms, bring them backstage, and count them up. The person who comes closest to figuring out the actual murderer is the winner. The winner is not announced immediately; first, the Solution must be performed.

Solution

Act out the final scene.

Declare the winner (onstage)

Now that the show is over and the killer revealed, Murphy Crawley announces the Winner. If more than one person and/or group of people guessed correctly, place all of the winning Accusation Forms in a hat or other container, and have an audience member select a random winner from the hat. Award the prize.

Facilities required for the performers

The performers need a separate private room for their use, which they will use prior to the event for costume change and throughout the event if necessary. Also, the cast needs a dining area which is separate from the audience (if dining at all).

Recommended event format

This production is structured to work best in a sit-down meal atmosphere. Some options for staging may include the use of a Head Table for the actors; seat the actors with the audience and have them improvise in character with the people at their table throughout the show; or, use a stage if available should you wish to have a more traditional theatrical format.

Pre-dinner drinks

Pre-dinner drinks provide the opportunity for guests to mingle with the characters informally before the action begins.

Show Timing

Although structured around a meal, there is no predefined timing for the action and the courses. If this is a restaurant based event, the servers should just be instructed to serve the courses as normal and not wait for any events or action. This keeps the Chef happy!

As a broad guide your event should run as follows:

7:30 to 7:50	Pre-dinner drinks; guests are seated
7:50 to 8:00	Meal is served
8:00 to 8:20	Act One
8.20 to 8:30	Intermission and dessert is served
9.00 to 9:10	Act Two
9:10 to 9:35	Dessert served, winner announced and prize given

Character Overviews

Victim: Thomas Grint

Occupation: Hotel Inspector

Age: 40ish

Residence: Whitechapel, the poor and dangerous art district in East London

Secret relationship with another Character: Maisy's illegitimate father

Favorite Food: Shepherd's Pie

Why he is there: to inspect the hotel

{Further information, depending on the chosen ending}

Suspects: Meryl Patmore

Occupation: The Cook

Age: 48

Family History: The women in her family are all excellent cooks, and have been household cooks for upper class and royalty for a very long time. The family name can be traced back to the time of Edward the Confessor, in 1176.

Residence: Downtown Crabbey

Relationship to the victim: She worked as a cook in another hotel, and knew the inspector from her previous employment.

Secret reason for being at the event: If she loses her job, she loses her family home.

Secret relationship with another Character:

Secret she would like revealed in first questioning: She is the owner of Pedmore Manor in Stourbridge, the family property. Her husband passed away two years ago, and she must work in order to pay the taxes and therefore retain ownership of the property.

Secret they would like to remain hidden: When she was a cook at the other hotel, Thomas Grint visited on a day when a large party was planned, and the woodsman had failed to deliver fuel for the stove.

Meryl was forced to provide a table of cold meats, tea cakes, which Grint found unseemly and disgusting. He failed the hotel, and Meryl was fired.

Why she was in the alley: Meryl came out to the alley to get to the basement steps to the pantry, which is outside.

{Further information, depending on the chosen ending}

Extract from the Script

Scene 1 - The Dining Hall

(It is around 1900. The Dining Hall of Downtown Crabbey, a Boarding House-Gymnasium-Hotel designed for young American travellers to feel at home in London. Note: before guests come in, there must be one place setting missing a fork. It is also important that each character enters and exits at least once before the announcement is made that Hotel Inspector Thomas Grint is dead – that way, since each character was not in the room at some point prior to the start of the show, they are each suspects.)

(Murphy and Roberta welcome audience members as they arrive. Murphy has invited all guests here tonight because Downtown Crabbey could be frowned upon by upper crust British Society, and Murphy cannot afford such negative publicity. While Murphy is positive and pleasant in greeting audience members, Lady Roberta is a bit snobby.)

(Murphy and Roberta exit. Maisy enters, nervously runs into the dining hall to check on the table settings. She is carrying a fork; she frantically goes from table to table. Just in case there are any problems, she should also have a pocket full of extra forks in her apron pocket.)

Maisy: Do you have all of your forks? Do you have all of your forks?

(Meryl enters. She has a box marked ‘salt of sorrel’ in her hands.)

Meryl: Maisy! Maisy, girl! How many times have I told you not to mix up the Salt of Sorrel with the regular salt? You don’t want to be poisoning the guests! Don’t worry, folks, I discovered the problem before I seasoned your food.

Maisy: Sorry, Miss Meryl!

Meryl: What are you doing up here, anyhow? You know a scullery maid should never be seen in the dining room. I shouldn’t have to come up here to get you. The guests shouldn’t have to see the cook, either! It simply isn’t done that way! What are you doing in here, anyhow?

Maisy: Oh, Miss Meryl, I am so sorry, but after setting the tables today, I just now found this one left-over fork in the kitchen, and I thought maybe someone didn’t have all of their forks! So I ran up here just as fast as I could, to make sure everyone had their forks. (To the audience.) Could everyone please check your table settings and make sure you have all of your forks?

(The missing fork is discovered; Maisy gives her fork to the audience member. Meryl fetches her and drags her back into the kitchen, scolding as they go.)

Meryl: Maisy, if I lose my job as the head Cook, I will never forgive you!

Maisy: Sorry, Miss Meryl, I truly am sorry!

(Maisy and Meryl exit. Murphy enters.)

Murphy: Welcome, ladies and gentlemen. How very kind of you to visit on the night before the Grand Opening of Downtown Crabbey! I am Murphy, proprietor of this hotel. Please allow me to introduce my Aunt Roberta, Dowager Countess of Gravenshire.

Roberta: Nephew, I do believe you have selected entirely the wrong name for this abominable place, Murphy. Did you see the *hullabaloo* created by the Scullery Maid and the Cook? It should be called the London Loony Bin.

Murphy: I am sorry, Auntie, but Downtown Crabbey is a venerable old building, and its name is rooted in local history. You see, back in the 1700s when this building was erected, the owner was a retired fisherman who used his nets to go crabbing in North Sea. When he moved to London, he became upset when he discovered that there are no crabs in the River Thames. He became so grumpy about it, and helpless that he spent all of his savings on a home in the middle of London, that everyone near and far started calling him Downtown Crabbey.

Roberta: Well, that certainly is quite a story! I may be all for tradition, but even I have been known to go too far sometimes. Downtown Crabbey, indeed! I never imagined any nephew of mine could be such a *dunderhead*.

Murphy: Dunderhead? Me? It’s downtown, it’s a hotel, we have a gymnasium and a restaurant, and it’s USA-friendly. What I want to do is establish a welcoming place in London, where American travellers feel right at home.

Roberta: Perhaps I should reconsider my hesitations. After all, anything that keeps you Loud Americans out of sound, sight and mind can’t be all bad.

Murphy: (Murphy approaches Roberta, flirting.) Loud Americans? At least that's better than Ugly Americans!

(Roberta smacks Murphy with her purse. She is grumpy but amused at the same time – Murphy has her wrapped around his little finger.)

Roberta: Down, boy! Don't be a *simp*! You may be attractive, but your behavior certainly is ugly. Now, let's get on with the evening.

Murphy: We're just waiting for the arrival of Thomas Grint, the Hotel Inspector. Once he approves everything, we can officially open the Downtown Crabbey for business!

Roberta: Yes, he is rather late. Whatever could be keeping him?

Murphy: Perhaps you would help out, Auntie. Grint was supposed to inspect The Royal Horseguards Hotel right before he came here. Would you ring up the hotel and see if he left there yet?

Roberta: I don't ring up anything, young man, much less use that telephone thing. How vulgar!

Murphy: Since I am a man of modern times, I will take that as a compliment.

Roberta: A compliment? Hmm. I must have said it wrong.

(Maisy enters, staying just inside the room and signaling to Murphy.)

Maisy: (Coughs twice, then hisses.) Psst! Psst!

Roberta: (To Murphy.) That Scullery Maid seems to be hissing at you, like a cat. Whatever could that mean?

Murphy: Either she's hacking up a hairball, or she wants to get my attention.

Roberta: Let's hope it's the latter.

(Murphy gestures for Maisy to come to him. She rushes to his side.)

Maisy: Oh, Mr Murphy, he's dead, he's dead!

Murphy: Who's dead, Maisy?

Maisy: The Hotel Inspector! He's dead! He's dead!

(Roberta smacks Maisy with her purse; Maisy calms down.)

Maisy: Thanks, Mum, I needed that.

Roberta: Any time, young lady. Now, what seems to be the problem?

Maisy: I told you, the Hotel Inspector. Mr Grint. He's dead.

(Murphy puts his arm around Maisy's shoulder; she leans on him ever so slightly. Roberta looks at them; Maisy straightens up as Murphy removes his arm from Maisy's shoulder, and stands up as well. Meryl enters.)

Roberta: A total stranger, dead in our hotel? How impertinent. And I thought he came from a good family.

Meryl: No disrespect, m'lady, but it's true. Hotel Inspector Thomas Grint is *dead as a doornail. Food for worms. He gave up the ghost. Hopped the twig. Kicked the bucket*, right in the alley out back.

Maisy: And it looks suspicious! *He's come to a sticky end.*

Murphy: What makes you say that?

Maisy: Well, he did die in the trash bin. That's sort of sticky, isn't it?

Roberta: Indeed.

Meryl: Mr Murphy, sir, would you like me to call for the Bobby?

Roberta: The Bobby? Who or what is the Bobby?

Meryl: The police, ma'am.

Roberta: Lord love us, no, dear. I do not want any person addressed with such intimate familiarity as *the Bobby* inside this building. Come along now, we must go and sort this out, before it all goes to *hell in a hand basket.*

Murphy: Auntie!

Roberta: I can toss out a good slang term as well as the next person, nephew. Just remember to *mind your P's and Q's.* Let's go!

(Murphy, Roberta, Meryl and Maisy exit.)

[Script continues.]

