

I'd Sooner See Him Dead

A Murder Mystery
by Richard Adams



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Customer Taster

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About the Murder Mystery Pack

The pack provides the full script and guidance to enable you to produce a successful murder mystery event. The usual format, including a light supper, is given below. The author has no objection to this format being changed to suit, for instance, a three-course meal with courses served before the play begins, between Acts One and Two, or any other variation.

The Pack Contains:

- The Organiser's Overview [*excerpt here*]
 - Event format & timings
 - Plot overview
 - Character list
 - Choices for learning lines or performing a rehearsed reading
 - Allocating responsibilities
 - Adjudication of the accusation sheets
 - Tie-break questions
 - Production notes (set, props and sound effects)
- The Full Script [*excerpt here*]
- Accusation Sheets for the audience to formulate their suspicions

Suggested Event Format

- Act One
- Act Two
- Interval and light supper – during this time, the audience complete their Accusation Sheets, which are then collected and assessed by the scrutineers
- Act Three
- Presentation of certificates and prizes to the winning team

Approximate Timings

- Act One: 25 minutes
- Act Two: 20 minutes
- Interval and light supper: 30 minutes (this being dependent upon the complexity of the catering)
- Act Three: 10 minutes
- Prize-giving and closing announcements: 10 minutes

Plot Overview

When Benny Parsons announces he is going to marry Candy Bristol, it is the last straw for his family, who have been estranged from him for so long they don't know where he is or what he's up to – but his chauffeured Daimler is enough to raise suspicions of criminality.

His father Tommy knows about Benny, because for some time Tommy has been living on the streets amongst the city's lowlife, having been thrown out by wife Lily. Lily calls the family to an emergency meeting to decide what to do about Benny, who they all agree has brought shame on the family. Plus there are personal reasons held by Benny's sister Brassica and his Aunt Marie, who has lost her whimsies.

After a murder is committed, D.I. Sandra Thornton arrives, with her own reasons for wanting to find Benny, along with Detective Constable Sally Moon and creepy Detective Sergeant Edward Parker who has his own reasons for wanting to track Benny Down.

It's all so complicated that it's a wonder that Thornton eventually makes an arrest.

Characters

Tommy Parsons – a rejected husband living on the streets, 50s/60s.

Sandra Thornton – Detective Inspector, 30s/40s.

Sally Moon – Detective Constable, 20s/30s.

Edward Parker – Detective Sergeant, 30s/40s.

Lily Parsons – Tommy’s wife, 50s/60s.

Benny Parsons – Lily and Tommy’s son, 20s/30s.

Marie Bright – Lily’s sister, 50s/60s.

Jessica ‘Brassica’ Parsons– Lily and Tommy’s daughter, 20s/30s.

Learned Lines or Rehearsed Reading?

The play will work best if lines are learned. This gives the actors more freedom of movement and interaction with one another. It will be difficult, for instance, for Lily to handle the tray of tea things if she also needs to handle a script. Brassica will similarly struggle with pouring tea if she has a script in her hand.

However, D.I. Sandra Thornton has a number of long speeches to the audience. Provided she is sufficiently familiar with her lines, so as not to be glued to the script, it might be helpful to have the speeches in her notebook, to which she would then appear to be referring quite naturally as a detective would in the course of the investigation.

If it is decided to perform the play as a rehearsed reading, this should be made clear in the publicity and reflected in the ticket prices. Note that even if it is a rehearsed reading, you need to purchase a Performance Licence from the Lazy Bee Scripts website.

Allocating Responsibilities

Amongst other things (described in the full pack), the producer will need to decide who will distribute, collect and scrutinise the accusations sheets to determine the winning team from the audience.

Adjudication

The full pack includes suggestions on how the accusation sheets should be marked.

The Set

The set requires three locations:

- A city street with a bench.
- Sandra Thornton’s office, with desk.
- Lily Parsons’s living room, having a table and three chairs (and a fourth borrowed from Sandra’s office).

For reasons of pace, if the stage is large enough to permit it, the three locations are best contained in one set, with changes from one location to the other indicated by lighting crossfades as noted in the script.

I'd Sooner See Him Dead

[Script Excerpt]

Act 1

Scene 1

(A city street. Tommy is on a bench, wrestling with a large, dismantled cardboard box with which he will cover himself. He is homeless, shabby, and unshaven. A bag of his belongings is under the bench. Eventually he settles down for the night. After a pause, D. I. Sandra Thornton approaches. She is scruffy, with tousled hair and a shabby raincoat, but not as scruffy as Tommy.)

(SFX: Opening music.)

(FX: Lights up on street bench.)

Sandra: Evening Tommy.

Tommy: Get lost. Can't a man get a night's sleep round here?

Sandra: I need a word, Tommy.

Tommy: **(Sitting up.)** Just the one? I've only got two.

Sandra: And what might they be?

Tommy: Bugger off.

Sandra: There might be some compensation if the word is of assistance.

(Tommy throws the cardboard off and makes room on the bench for Sandra.)

Tommy: You'd better sit down then. Where's the dosh?

(Sandra goes to sit next to Tommy, but recoils at the stench and moves to the other end of the bench.)

Sandra: I'll give you the money for a shower, Tommy. After that, we'll see.

Tommy: I can do without a shower. I *do* need a bed.

Sandra: She thrown you out again?

Tommy: Never let me back in. She's changed the locks.

Sandra: How did an intelligent man like you get into a state like this?

Tommy: I was a man of great aspirations and ambition, but my wife said I should leave 'em alone.

Sandra: Aspiration and ambition?

Tommy: No. The kids. Leave the kids alone.

Sandra: Tommy. You never...

Tommy: No. You're offending me now, Miss Detective. What I wanted was for my kids to be successful. I encouraged 'em. Filled their rooms full o' books. *Wuthering Heights*, *War and Peace*, *The Cat in the Hat*.

Sandra: They didn't want to know?

Tommy: No. Lily said I should stop nagging them and let them find their own way. When it got to screaming matches, she said I should get out before there was World War Three. So I got out. Couldn't find anyone to give me a bed. Lost my job. Here I am, mingling with the low life. It might make a bestselling novel one day. Then I shall be able to afford a bed. **(Rubbing finger and thumb to indicate money.)** What do you want, Miss Detective?

Sandra: I'm looking for the Vicar.

Tommy: Time for midnight mass, is it?

Sandra: No, Tommy. You know who I'm talking about. *The Vicar*. High Priest of the Protection Racket.

Tommy: Ohhhh. That Vicar. Benny Parsons. That Vicar.

Sandra: Yes, Tommy. Benny Parsons.

Tommy: **(Rubbing thumb and fingers together.)** Never heard of him.

Sandra: **(Hands him a twenty.)** What *have* you heard?

Tommy: He's getting married.

Sandra: Married? Who to?

Tommy: Don't you mean "To whom"?

Sandra: All right. You were an English teacher once. To whom, to when and to where?

Tommy: Bristol.

Sandra: The Vicar's in *Bristol*?

Tommy: No. He's marrying a Bristol. Candy Bristol. You remember her?

Sandra: I do! She ran a baker's shop and a domestic cleaning outfit.

Tommy: That's the one. Scrubbit and Moppit – we clean up for you. Baker's shop was kosher but the cleaning outfit was a bit dodgy, if you ask me.

Sandra: **(Disappointed.)** She's marrying Benny Parsons?

Tommy: Probably the only way she could get him to stop breaking her windows. If you can't beat 'em, join 'em.

Sandra: So where's the wedding? Where's the marriage bed going to be? I can't find him anywhere round here, so I need to know where he's setting up home.

Tommy: No idea.

Sandra: **(Waving another twenty.)** Sure?

Tommy: Might be... Bath. **(Takes the twenty.)** Only *might be*. It's definitely somewhere he can set up an empire – betting shops, casinos, all the usual money-spinners.

Sandra: And all seemingly legit., no doubt. But he had all that round here once. Now he's completely off the radar. What happened?

Tommy: The Vicar fell foul of the Bishop. I'm sure you know the Bishop.

Sandra: As in Geoffrey Bishop, scrap merchant and entrepreneur. Yes, I know the Bishop. One day I'll pin something on him and clap him in jail. But meanwhile, you reckon, he's taken over the Vicar's patch and the Vicar's moved on. How come you know all this?

Tommy: Cos Benny's one of the family. He's an embarrassment. While I'm wondering what to do about him, I keep my ear to the ground, don't I? More to the point, how come *you* don't know?

Sandra: Good question, Tommy. Maybe I should join the church.

Tommy: Congregation's a bit rough round here, Miss Detective.

Sandra: Tell me something new, Tommy. Now. Candy Bristol, you said.

Tommy: So rumour has it. Are you staying here all night?

Sandra: Not likely. I'll be going as soon as I've had a word with these people.

Tommy: What people?

Sandra: There's a crowd here. Hadn't you noticed?

(FX: House lights come up.)

(Sandra moves forward to address the audience. Tommy follows her and surveys the audience.)

Tommy: When did they come in?

Sandra: A short while ago. They've come to see a murder mystery.

Tommy: Have they paid?

Sandra: I expect so.

Tommy: A murder mystery, you say.

Sandra: Yes.

Tommy: Am I in it?

Sandra: We're both in it, Tommy. How long have we been rehearsing it?

Tommy: Not long enough.

Sandra: Very likely, but will you let me get on? They need to know what the set-up is.

Tommy: You'd better tell 'em then, Miss Detective, and I'll find myself another bench.

(Tommy gathers his belongings and exits, dragging his cardboard.)

Sandra: (To audience.) Good evening, and welcome to our murder mystery evening. I'm Detective Inspector Sandra Thornton, and it's my pleasure to welcome you to this performance of *I'd Sooner See Him Dead* – which, being a murder mystery sort of play, is one in which you watch the comings and goings up here, where in due course a murder will be committed, and as you watch, you will gather clues to determine who might have done it. You have accusation sheets for this purpose... You do *have* accusation sheets? Good. (Ad lib as necessary.) There will be an interval at about [time] when supper will be served and you can discuss with the other members of your team how and why the murder took place, and who the murderer was. Then you will commit all your findings to your accusation sheets and hand them in before the beginning of Act Three, when all will be revealed and you will discover if you were right, and – if *you are* – you may be awarded a prize. Isn't life exciting? Now. If you'll excuse me, I have a call to make. (Takes out mobile phone and punches a number.)

(FX: Crossfade to Sandra's desk. House lights down.)

... *Continued in the full Murder Mystery Pack.*