

# Letters in Evidence



**A Dinner Theatre Murder Mystery**

*By Jane Morris*

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*Morris Murder Mysteries*



*Published by Lazy Bee Scripts*

## Customer Taster

# **Letters in Evidence**

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# Letters in Evidence

## Organiser's Overview

***Read this THOROUGHLY before touching, printing or distributing the rest of the material!***

### ***Overview***

*Letters in Evidence* is a Murder Mystery designed to be played by 10 actors. The actors perform a formal scene, then the audience receive additional written clues from which they try to solve the mystery before a final set of declarations from the actors reveals the guilty party.

### ***Characters***

**Marjorie Taylor:** Pearl's 60 year-old daughter. Lives in Worthing looking after her mother. Volunteer at CAO (**Citizens Advice Office**)

**Julian Taylor:** Marjorie's 60 year old ex- husband. Lives in a flat in London and shares a house in Brighton with his male partner – works in the City.

**James Taylor:** Marjorie and Julian's 35 year old son

**Rosa Richmond:** Pearl's 50 year old daughter. Lives in Sydney Australia. Divorced from Bruce Ramsey. Currently “between jobs”

**Josh Ramsey:** Rosa and Bruce's 30 year old son

**Howard Richmond:** Pearl's 55 year old son. An archaeologist

**Raymond Rendall:** Crime writer, aged 60. Next door neighbour to Marjorie and Pearl

**Amy Greenwood:** Pearl's carer

*Final Scene only:-*

**Coroner**

**Police Constable**

*Mentioned, but not appearing on stage:*

**Pearl Richmond** - the deceased

*Note: the ages are approximate and may be varied within the limits of credibility to suit your company.*

## **Structure**

The murder mystery pack contains:-

- The Organiser's Overview
- The "Main Scene" to be performed by the actors [Extract included in this Taster]
- Seven pieces of evidence for the audience to examine [One included in this Taster]
- "Accusation sheets" for the audience to enter their solutions (including a "tie break" question).
- "Final Scene" - in which the murderer is revealed.
- The solution (and the answer to the "tie break" question).

## **Setting**

The Scene 1 takes place in two domestic settings - Worthing UK and Sydney Australia. A split stage is assumed, but the sets need not be lavish - a chair and a desk in each location.

The Final Scene takes place in a coroner's court - this requires a desk and chair for the coroner and chairs for the rest of the cast.

## **Props**

### **Main Scene**

Desk/table and comfortable chair (set on stage for Marjorie)

Phone (set on Marjorie's side of the stage)

Desk/table - covered in clutter - and comfortable chair (set on stage for Rosa)

Framed photo of father and son, though picture need not be visible (set on Rosa's side of the stage)

Rosa's purse containing one coin (set on Rosa's table)

Pen and at least two sheets of writing paper and envelopes (set on stage for Marjorie)

Pen and at least two sheets of writing paper and envelopes (set on stage for Rosa)

Handkerchief (Marjorie)

Reading book (Rosa)

Pile of letters - mainly bills, but including one airmail from the Marjorie (Josh)

Rosa's first letter (set offstage for Marjorie)

Bouquet of flowers (Raymond)

Large box - supposedly containing Pearl's papers (set offstage for Julian)

Marjorie's second letter (set offstage for Rosa)

Door key (Amy)

Envelope - supposedly containing Amy's wages (set on Marjorie's desk)

Magazine (set on Marjorie's desk)

Tray with two teacups and saucers plus plate of biscuits *not chocolate* (set offstage for Marjorie)

Back Pack (Howard)

Engagement ring (set offstage for Marjorie)

### **Final Scene**

Coroner's desk and chair (set on stage)

Bible (set on Coroner's desk)

Card with the court oath (set on Coroner's desk)

Chairs for the rest of the cast (except Rosa)

Court papers (Coroner)

Notebook (Constable)

Covering note and letter (Constable)

## ***Running the script in front of an audience***

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

### **Preparation**

Initial preparation can be done by distributing the opening scene, then running a first rehearsal in which the actors have to guess the identity of the murderer (evaluating the written evidence) before they seen the script for the Final Scene. (It's fun! Why not? It also ensures that the actors become familiar with the logic of the mystery - they will learn more about themselves and their roles from the evidence.)

Decide on the format for declaring the winner and using the tie-breaker question.

**Open the event by acting out the scripted dialogue.**

### **Distribute the written evidence**

Announce that you wish them to evaluate a selection of the evidence gather by the police.

Give the audience a specified time to evaluate the evidence.

### **Accusations**

At the end of the evaluation period, ask the audience to fill in the accusation sheets, including the tie-breaker question. (Make sure you have some spare pens or pencils!)

### **Solution**

Act out the final scene.

### **Prize giving**

There may be an option to read out some of the (more bizarre) audience solutions!

Declare the winner, if necessary by reference to the tie-break question.

Award a prize to the best solution! (And possibly a prize for the worst.)

### ***As a broad guide your event might run as follows:***

7.30 to 7.45	Meet and greet; pre-dinner drinks
7:45 to 8.25	First Scene [this runs for around 40 minutes]
8.25	Serve starters
8.40	Distribute evidence and "accusation sheets" to each member of the audience
8.50	Collect Accusation sheets
8.55	Main course (during which the cast/crew evaluate the audience answers and choose the winning answer - by reference to the tie breaker and drawing from a hat if necessary)
9.25	Final Scene
9.40	Desert
9.55	Prize giving

# Letters in Evidence

## *Opening Scene*

(Marjorie is sitting in a tidy room at a desk/table writing a letter. She is reading it aloud as she writes.)

**Marjorie:** Halifax House, 24 Marine Parade, Worthing. Dear Rosa., (She stops writing and sighs) Oh dear, this is going to be such a difficult letter to write. But it's got to be done. Rosa must be told and no one else will do it. (She starts writing again) I know this will come as a shock to hear from me after all these years but I felt I must contact you and let you know that our dear Mother passed away yesterday. (She stops writing again) Well she was certainly our mother, Rosa, even though it might be difficult to use the term "dear". (She starts writing again) Mother had a fall the day before yesterday and didn't regain consciousness. James and I were at her bedside and she slipped away peacefully last night. Even Julian dragged himself away from the City and came to see her yesterday afternoon although I don't suppose she knew he was there. The hospital did everything they could but she got a nasty head injury and they didn't hold out too much hope.

(She stops writing for a moment to dab her eyes with a hanky)

**Marjorie:** I feel so guilty as I wasn't at home when she fell. It was one of my days on the volunteer rota at the Citizens Advice Office, and while I was at the CAO, the carer came to help her cook her lunch and found her at the bottom of the stairs. I'm a bit shaken up at the moment – I know Mum was nearly eighty, but it's still come as a shock as she was so fit and well before... this happened. Anyway I thought it was time to let bygones be bygones and get in touch with you. We're sisters after all and sisters should be friends. Life's too short for silly family arguments. I hope this letter reaches you. The only address I have is one in Sydney which Josh gave James when they last met up. I hope you haven't moved on again. I felt I had to let you know as soon as possible so you can make arrangements to fly home for the funeral.

(She stops writing)

**Marjorie:** I wonder if she'll make it. I hope she does. Please Rosa, please make the effort this time. (She writes again) We haven't got a date for the funeral yet but give me a ring as soon as you get this letter and I'll give you all the details. It would be so nice to see you again, Rosa, even though it won't be a happy occasion. Perhaps Josh could come too. I'm sure James would love to catch up on his news. Well, I'll have to finish now and get this airmailed to you before the post office closes. Marjorie folds the letter, places it in an envelope, seals and addresses the envelope. She stands up, puts on her coat and leaves the stage.

(Focus moves to Sydney, Australia.)

(Rosa is sitting in an untidy room reading at an untidy table when Josh bursts in carrying a pile of letters)

**Josh:** G'day Ma.

**Rosa:** (Surprised, looking up from her book) Oh hi there Josh, I didn't expect to see you this week. I thought you said you were in New York or London or somewhere like that.

**Josh:** Strewnth ma, don't you ever listen? That was last week. This week the band played a couple of gigs in Brizzie.

**Rosa:** So you thought you'd come down and spend some time with your mother. What a sweet boy you are. Have you any plans - why don't we take a trip today. I haven't got anything on. How about going up to the Blue Mountains – it would be lovely and cool up there. We could get away from this heat and it would only take an hour or so to get there.

**Josh:** Jeez, Mum, I was only passing and I popped in to say g'day. It's Todd's buck's night tonight so I'm in Sydney till Wednesday and then we're off to Europe. The tour's a sell out there. I might look up that cousin of mine when I'm in the UK. You haven't got his mobile number have you? He did give me his number once but I've no idea where I put it.

**Rosa:** Don't be so ridiculous. How would I have James' phone number? I haven't seen him since he was a child. You know I've never had anything to do with the folks back home.

**Josh:** This is home, here where we live, where you can go surfing every day of the year and not freeze to death, not like that cold miserable place full of old people you still insist on calling home.

**Rosa:** How do you know? You've never been to Worthing.

**Josh:** Yes I have, I went there with James.

**Rosa:** (**Looking puzzled**) Did you? When? Anyway there's nothing wrong with the place.

**Josh:** Well why did you leave then?

**Rosa:** You know why I left, I had to get away. They made it impossible for me to stay.

**Josh:** Well stop whinging then. If you hadn't come here, you wouldn't have met Dad and you wouldn't have had me – and what a loss that would have been to the world! Anyway, gotta go, gotta get some surfing in before I get stonkered tonight. See you ma. (**He starts to leave**) Oh nearly forgot, the postie's been. (**Looks through the letters**) This one's got a UK stamp. Looks like one of your folk back home have written to you. Perhaps they're inviting you for Christmas so you can enjoy their winter.

**Rosa:** Stop it. You know I can't afford the trip. Let's have it then.

(**Josh hands over the pile of letters with the airmail one on top and Rosa looks at the envelope**)

**Josh:** Well, who's it from?

**Rosa:** It looks like your Auntie Marjorie's writing but I haven't heard from her for years.

Why would she be writing to me?

**Josh:** Open it and find out then. I'm off, bye. (**Exits**)

(**Rosa opens the letter and reads it**)

**Rosa:** Oh dear... Mum's died... Oh dear... Julian – what was Julian doing there? I thought he left you... too right we're sisters but you didn't stick up for me when I needed you... fly home for the funeral, you must be joking! (**Rosa looks through the pile of unopened envelopes that arrived today**.) Not unless I win the lottery or one of these letters is telling me I've been left a fortune. Just as I thought, more final demands. (**She throws the envelopes down and reads the final section of Marjorie's letter out loud**) "We haven't got a date for the funeral yet but give me a ring as soon as you get this letter and I'll give you all the details. It would be so nice to see you again, Rosa..." Yes, I bet it would, so you can all gloat and see what a mess I made of my life. I suppose I really ought to reply but I can't speak to her on the phone. I know what I'll do, I'll write and by the time the letter arrives the funeral will have taken place and it'll be too late.

(**Rosa fetches a pad of paper and a pen and sits down and writes**)

**Rosa:** Two Kinross Road, Sydney, New South Wales twelve twenty-three. Dear Marge, Thanks for letting me know about Mum. Sorry I wasn't able to make the funeral but I... (**Rosa stops writing and puts the end of the pen in her mouth and while she thinks up her excuse**) I... Um... I had a fantastic part in a play and couldn't get away... Um no, I was up on the Gold Coast for a holiday, no... Um... I was struck down with some tropical virus... No that won't do. Marge won't believe any of those excuses. (**She starts writing again.**) I... I hope it all went off OK. I'm sure you organised it perfectly - you always were the organiser, weren't you Marge?, and I was always the scatterbrain. You'll have to write and tell me all about it. I guess you'll miss Mum now that you have the house to yourself. Or are you back with Julian? You did mention in your letter that he visited Mum in hospital. I didn't know you were back together again. But then I don't know much about what has been going on back home since I left thirty years ago. It's hard to believe that thirty years have flown by. A Christmas card once a year would have been nice with some news but then Mum.... Presumably put a stop to any idea of that. (**Rosa looks a little sad but then bucks herself up.**) But I've been far too busy out here enjoying life to dwell on the past. I've had some wonderful parts in plays all over Australia, and I met a real life surfie, a gorgeous hunk called Bruce and we had a son Joshua, whom I think you must have met. Josh tells me he meets with James sometimes when he's in the UK. Joshua has a fantastic job as a roadie for a group called Fritz Fernando and he travels all round the world with them. He's thirty now and is just like his Dad, tall and tanned with a fantastic physique...

(**She stops writing, picks up and speaks to a photo in a frame.**)

**Rosa:** And I miss both of you. Especially you Josh, so you'd rather spend the day with your friends than with your own mother. A bit like me I suppose...

(**She puts down the photo and starts writing again.**)

**Rosa:** But he always finds time to visit me whenever he's in Australia. My marriage to Bruce unfortunately didn't last. He moved on to pastures new when Josh was a little boy, that's why we're so close. I expect James was a comfort to you when Julian left. Or have you and Julian got back together again? And how about that nomadic brother of ours? Do you see much of Howard these days? I've had the odd post card from him over the years from whatever exotic place he's working in. At least *he* bothered to keep in touch. Has he made any amazing discoveries? Has he left home yet? I supposed he hasn't managed to find a wife who could put up with his strange ways?

(**She stops writing.**)

**Rosa:** No stop, that won't do. Too many questions. I must stop or Marge will think I've gone all soppy and nostalgic.

(**She starts writing again.**)

**Rosa:** Maybe now that Mum isn't around, we can keep in touch. Sorry I missed the funeral. I'm sure you got on fine without me – you always did. Must fly, I have a date with a gorgeous hunk so have to make myself beautiful. (**Stops writing.**) I wish!

(**She folds the letter, puts it in an envelope and addresses it. She leaves the stage.**)

*[This continues, oscillating between the locations.]*

*[The taster pack concludes with the first of the letters...]*

Halifax House,  
24 Marine Parade,  
Worthing

Tel 01234 272930

*Dear Rosa.*

*I know this will come as a shock to hear from me after all these years but I felt I must contact you and let you know that our dear Mother passed away yesterday.*

*Mother had a fall the day before yesterday and didn't regain consciousness. James and I were at her bedside and she slipped away peacefully last night. Even Julian dragged himself away from the City and came to see her yesterday afternoon although I don't suppose she knew he was there. The hospital did everything they could but she got a nasty head injury and they didn't hold out too much hope.*

*I feel so guilty as I wasn't at home when she fell. It was one of my days on the volunteer rota at CAO (that's the Citizens Advice Office) and the carer found her at the bottom of the stairs when she came to help her cook her lunch. I'm a bit shaken up at the moment – I know Mum was nearly 80 but it's still come as a shock as she was so fit and well before this happened. Anyway I thought it was time to let bygones be bygones and get in touch with you. We're sisters after all and sisters should be friends. Life's too short for silly family arguments.*

*I hope this letter reaches you. The only address I have is one in Sydney which Josh gave James when they last met up. I hope you haven't moved on again. I felt I had to let you know as soon as possible so you can make arrangements to fly home for the funeral.*

*We haven't got a date for the funeral yet but give me a ring as soon as you get this letter and I'll give you all the details. It would be so nice to see you again, Rosa, even though it won't be a happy occasion. Perhaps Josh could come too. I'm sure James would love to catch up on his news.*

*Well, I'll have to finish now and get this airmailed to you before the post office closes.*

*Love, Marjorie*