



A Dinner Theatre Murder Mystery
by
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Customer Taster

Murder on the Overnight Express

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Organiser's Overview – Read this First!

About the pack

The full pack should provide everything you need to produce your very own murder mystery event. 'Murder on the Overnight Express' is intended to be used at a sit down meal where the cast will act out a set of events for the assembled guests. The mystery is intended as a **scripted performance**; the cast have set lines to learn or read, which contain the information the audience will need to work out whodunit!

Structure

This murder mystery pack contains:

- The **Organiser's Overview** (*extract here*)
- The **Script** (*extract here*)
- **Accusation Sheets** for the audience to enter their solutions.

The Organiser's Overview Includes

- An overview of **Plot** and **Characters**.
- **General Staging Notes** on how best to plan and stage your murder mystery event.
- **Production Notes** - Set, Costume, Props, Sound Effects.

Plot Overview

The action takes place in the early nineteen-sixties, when great changes were being planned for the British Railway system. The overnight express from Sloth in Scotland to Saint Vitus station in London has come to an emergency stop. The body of a Government Minister has been discovered in his First Class sleeping berth.

Once the railway headquarters and police have been contacted by radio, the train is shunted onto a disused branch line. As there is no connecting door between the First Class carriage and the rest of the train, the Second Class carriages have been allowed to continue on their journey. Detective Inspector Pluckett of the Plodshire Police and his team of officers arrive on a commandeered train to take control of the enquiry. The First Class passengers and crew are ordered off the train and into the old waiting room on Platform One in order to await interrogation by the Inspector.

The passengers include Brigadier Sir Arthur and Lady Ffinch-Fortesque, American film star Dolores Delgado, and the Minister's secretary Miss Brenda Grubbley. The crew are Williams the train guard, Wee Jeanie McMumble the stewardess, and Monsieur Alphonse the chef. The killer has to have been one of these suspects and all will prove to have some motive for the murder. Will the Inspector and the audience solve the mystery?

Character Overview

Inspector Pluckett – An authoritative Police Officer who is sometimes exasperated by the unhelpful passengers and crew.

William Williams – A Welshman. Train guard. Nosy, talkative and gossipy.

Brigadier Sir Arthur Ffinch-Fortesque – Bombastic, upper-class ex-military man. Completely ruled by his wife.

Lady Brig – The Brigadier's wife. Authoritarian, domineering.

Wee Jeanie McMumble – Stewardess. Scottish. Constantly sobbing and terrified.

Alphonse le Chevalier – Chef. Cockney who pretends to be French. Cannot cook or speak French.

Brenda Grubbley – Secretary to the deceased. Grim, stern and fascinated by murder.

Dolores Delgado – American film star. Brash, conceited and a man-hunter.

General Staging Notes

Note that you need to purchase a Performance Licence from the Murder Mysteries page of the Lazy Bee Scripts website.

The script takes the form of a conventional play, with entrances, exits and other basic stage directions included. Please rehearse, even if you are going to read the script as opposed to memorising it. If performers are familiar with their characters, it will help to make the production run so much more smoothly. There is no in-built question and answer session with this production, so it is not necessary for the performers to ad lib. Performers can, if they wish, provide backstories or fill in their characters, but these do not form part of the script.

The audience are invited to consider the motives and evidence against the characters involved. The case can be discussed during and after the various courses of the meal. The Inspector can announce this before the food is served and time should be allowed for this.

The Accusation Sheets should be supplied for each table, together with pens or pencils. Each table must fill in who they accuse to be the killer and the evidence that led them to this decision. The sheets are then collected during the Coffee Break.

Someone needs to assess the Accusation Sheets to find the best answer(s). If this is done by the cast, then it needs to be completed before the start of Scene 5. This needs to be built into the timing (perhaps by serving coffee only when the accusation sheets have been collected. If it is done by a supporting team, it might be done during Scene 5, but there are only 5 minutes available!

A designated person – perhaps the Inspector, the play’s director, or the group’s chair - will announce the winner, and prizes can be given. In the case of two or more tables correctly identifying the murderer, it is the one with the clearest analysis that is the winner.

Suggestions for a Welcoming Atmosphere

- A greeter at the main entrance.
- Pre-dinner drinks.
- Flowers, tablecloths and candles on tables, all perhaps with a railway theme (e.g. menus in the form of railway timetables).
- Introductory music, maybe from railway films, played before the performance and during the meal break.
- A short welcome from the Chairperson including an explanation of the structure of the evening. The floor is then given to the Inspector and the performance follows.
- At the end of the evening’s entertainment, the audience can be thanked for attending (and, if the setting allows, invited to remain until the bar closes!)
- In addition to the actors and Chairperson, additional catering, bar staff and waiting staff would be needed if, as suggested, the performance is to be structured around a meal.

Presenting the Production Remotely

Although intended for a performance on stage, this murder evening could also be performed over a video conference programme such as Zoom or MS Teams.

Most of the play consists of the Inspector interviewing one or two people at a time, so actors can turn off their cameras when ‘offstage’.

A common basic backdrop could be used for each recording location, such as a sign saying ‘Little Messing Halt Waiting Room’.

Accusation sheets should be sent to audience members via email. There should be a pause between each scene to allow viewers to weigh up the evidence and, between Scenes Four and Five, fill in and return the sheets.

The prize or prizes could be a choice of emailed vouchers for national or local stores/services.

Suggested Timing

- 7:00 pm - Guests arrive and are seated. Drinks and/or starters can be provided.
- 7:20 pm - Scenes One and Two
- 7:50 pm - Main Course
- 8:20 pm - Scene Three
- 8:35 pm - Dessert
- 8:50 pm - Scene Four
- 9:05 pm - Coffee Break. Accusation Sheets to be filled in and collected.
- 9:15 pm - Scene Five, followed by announcement of the winning team.
- 9:30 pm - Finish.

Murder on the Overnight Express

Script (Excerpt)

(Before the scripted material begins, starters are served.)

Scene 1

(SFX: Steam train.)

(Enter Inspector, Stage Right.)

Inspector: Good evening, Ladies and Gentlemen, and welcome to our Murder Mystery, entitled Murder on the Overnight Express. The action takes place in the early nineteen-sixties, when great changes were being planned for the British Railway system.

Our drama begins when the express train from Sloth in Scotland to St Vitus Station in London is dramatically forced to an emergency stop.

Following the sound of a loud gunshot from one of the First Class sleeping berths, the train guard discovered the body of a gentleman who appeared to have been killed by a single bullet between the eyes. The guard immediately pulled the communication cord and radioed the news to his headquarters.

The victim was none other than a Government Minister, the Right Honourable Steven Carlisle, Member of Parliament for Sloth South. The unfortunate Mr Carlisle was a regular passenger on this express service, travelling between Scotland and London for matters of State.

The First Class carriage, where the incident took place, has now been separated from the rest of the train, there being no connecting door between the two. The Second Class coaches have been allowed to continue on their journey, and the First Class passengers forced to disembark at this remote disused station known as Little Messing Halt.

As soon as the Police were alerted, I, Detective Inspector Pluckett of the Plodshire Police, together with a team of my officers, arrived to take charge of the case.

I will now interview the passengers and staff here in the waiting room. The suspects are being held on Platform One and will be shunted off, pardon my little joke, to Platform Two after the first interviews. So let us now begin.

(The Inspector will make notes throughout the interviews.)

Inspector: Guard!

(Enter Williams, Stage Right.)

Inspector: You are the guard who discovered the body, are you not?

Williams: Yes, Sir. Williams, Sir. Nobody uses my first name, because it's William. So I'm William Williams – that's two Williams, really, isn't it? So everyone calls me Williams because Williams means more than one William anyway and it saves them from saying William twice. D'you see?

Inspector: Yees, I think so. How long have you worked for the railway, Williams?

Williams: Forty-two years, man and boy. You see, my father and his father before him worked on the railways too. We are very proud of our respectable, hard-working tradition, us Williams.

Inspector: What did your great-grandfather do?

Williams: Stole sheep and was hanged for it.

Inspector: (Writing) Criminal background. Right, we appear to be in an extremely remote location, Williams.

Williams: In the middle of nowhere, we are. Nothing for thirty miles in any direction. And dangerous too. Deep ditches, marshes, loose bulls.

Inspector: So, anyone wanting to leave would take their life in their hands. No passing trains at all, then?

Williams: None. Little Messing Halt is stood on a disused branch line. Hasn't been used for years and years. Until today, of course.

Inspector: What about Platform Two?

Williams: That used to be the up line, and you won't get no up-train leaving the main track to stop here now. How did you get here so quickly with all your men, if you don't mind my asking?

Inspector: I got an up-train to leave the main track to stop here.

Williams: Right.

Inspector: Now Williams, I want you to be my right-hand man and bring in the passengers and crew one by one. Think you can do that?

Williams: Oh yes, Sir. Bless you, Sir. I can do that, Sir.

Inspector: Good man. Off you go then, and bring in the first one.

Williams: Right you are, Sir. Right away, Sir. **(Exits, Stage Right.)**

Inspector: I do so admire efficiency.

(Enter Brigadier, Stage Right.)

Brigadier: What the deuce do you mean by this? You've mucked up my travel plans and turfed me off my train. Who are you, anyway?

Inspector: Detective Inspector Pluckett, and I regret the inconvenience, Sir, but this is a murder enquiry. May I ask who you are?

Brigadier: Brigadier Sir Arthur Ffinch-Fortesque, Retired. That's two effs with the Ffinch.

Inspector: Right, Sir, I would like to...

Brigadier: There isn't even a coal fire lit in here. I suppose those bloody Bolshevik miners are on strike again. If I had my way, I'd horsewhip the lot of them.

Inspector: What a great disappointment that you can't, Sir.

Brigadier: I don't like your attitude. What did your Father do?

Inspector: He was a bloody Bolshevik miner.

Brigadier: By heaven, if you were under my command you'd learn the hard way. When I gave an order, it was obeyed at the double.

Inspector: I would remind you that I am giving the orders now.

Brigadier: And what did that damned Sergeant of yours think he was up to?

Inspector: When?

Brigadier: When he was manhandling the wife's armour-plated nightdress. Fellow should be court-martialled.

Inspector: He was searching for the murder weapon.

Brigadier: Well, he won't find it fondling the wife's underpinnings. Even I daren't do that. Now, I demand that...

Williams: **(Voice off.)** No, I'm sorry, Madam, but you can't go in there.

Lady Brig: **(Voice off.)** Out of my way!

Brigadier: Oh lor!

(Enter Lady Brig, Stage Right.)

Lady Brig: There you are, Arthur. What do you think you are doing in here?

(Enter Williams, Stage Right.)

Williams: I'm very sorry, Inspector, I just couldn't stop them; they're very posh and English.

Inspector: It's all right, Williams. Off you go.

(Exit Williams, Stage Right.)

Lady Brig: And who is this? **(Indicates the Inspector.)**

Brigadier: Pluckett.

Lady Brig: Language!

Brigadier: This is my...

Lady Brig: I am Lady Brigadier Ffinch-Fortesque, Retired. That's two effs in the Ffinch. But you can call me Lady Brig if you're feeling bone idle.

Inspector: Thank you, but I want to...

Lady Brig: Arthur, kindly escort me out of here; I wish to smoke my Meerschaum.

Brigadier: But my dear, I'm dealing with this plod.

Lady Brig: Now!

Brigadier: Yes, dear.

Inspector: **(Sighing and indicating Stage Left.)** Platform Two. I'll speak to you both later.

Lady Brig: Come along, quick march, pick up those feet. **(Exits smartly, Stage Left.)**

Inspector: Your wife is rather scary, Brigadier.

Brigadier: Yes; runs the Brownies' Terror Squad. **(Exits dejectedly, Stage Left.)**

Inspector: Williams!

(Enter Williams, Stage Right.)

Williams: Yes, Sir.

Inspector: Do we have someone a little less bombastic that I can interview next?

Williams: A little less what, Sir?

Inspector: Noisy. I seem to have the beginnings of a headache.

Williams: Oh, that's just like my Missus. A martyr to the migraine, she is. Always got one of her heads, she has. Especially when I get home from the pub on a Saturday night.

Inspector: Really. Just show someone else in, if you please.

Williams: Right you are, Sir. I'll send in Wee Jeanie, the stewardess. She's like a little mouse.

Inspector: Quick as you like, then.

(Exit Williams, Stage Right.)

(Enter Wee Jeanie, Stage Right. She is sobbing into a large handkerchief.)

Inspector: And who might you be, young lady?

Jeanie: Wee Jeanie McMumble Sir, and I didna do it deliberately.

Inspector: Didna do what deliberately?

Jeanie: It was just a wee nothing, really.

Inspector: Well, a wee nothing is not a hanging offence, so...

Jeanie: Hanging! Oh, oh. **(Exit sobbing, Stage Left.)**

Inspector: Hey, wait a minute. Come back here at once!

(Enter Alphonse, Stage Right.)

Alphonse: Mon Dew! What 'ave you done to ze Wee Jeanie?

Inspector: And which part of the East End of London do you hail from, Mon Sewer?

Alphonse: Oh give over mate, I am ze French chef.

Inspector: Name?

Alphonse: Alphonse le Chevalier.

Inspector: NAME?

Alphonse: Fred Buggins. **(Moves to exit Stage Left.)**

Inspector: Now where are you going?

Alphonse: Platform Two. Before Wee Jeanie throws herself under the next train. **(Exits, Stage Left.)**

Inspector: If that's her intention, she'll have a long wait. Williams!

(Enter Williams, Stage Right.)

Williams: Yes, Sir?

Inspector: Who else is waiting on Platform One?

Williams: There's just the actress and the secretary.

Inspector: Whose secretary?

Williams: The deceased's.

Inspector: Well, well, that might prove to be interesting. A Government Minister and his secretary on a long-distance journey. With sleeping accommodation too.

Williams: Oh, no I don't think...

Inspector: Oh just send her in, will you?

Williams: Right you are. **(Exits Stage Right.)**

Inspector: Let's see what dirt we can dig up here.

(Enter Brenda, Stage Right.)

Inspector: Oh, I say, I wasn't expect...

Brenda: Brenda Grubbley; that's *Miss* Brenda Grubbley.

Inspector: I would never have thought otherwise. You must be devastated that your employer has been so brutally killed, Miss Grubbley?

Brenda: Not at all. A decent killing helps to reduce the population and add entertainment for murder aficionados, such as myself.

Inspector: Even though, in this case, it is your boss who is the victim?

Brenda: One person is as good as another. And of course, it keeps you and your ilk in a job, Inspector.

Inspector: Speaking of which, it looks like you will need to find another position.

Brenda: I will soon get one. There are plenty of bosses around who would employ me.

Inspector: Why would you be so in demand, if you don't mind my asking?
Brenda: It's not the bosses who actually want me; it's their wives. They know that there'll be no hanky-panky with me as secretary. I place a high regard on my respectability.
Inspector: So there was never a hint of anything, err, extra-curricular between yourself and Mr Carlisle?
Brenda: Certainly not! Which is more than I can say for that floozy Dolores Delgado. She certainly exerted her faded charms on him.
Inspector: Oh? Tell me more. How did they meet?
Brenda: At some Government shindig. He overdid the eggnog and ended up with her draped all over him.
Inspector: Interesting. Could you please wait on Platform Two until I can conduct further interviews?
Brenda: Of course. I shall look forward to hearing all the gory details. **(Exits, Stage Left.)**
Inspector: That's all I need; a suspect with a taste for the macabre. Williams!
(Enter Williams, Stage Right.)
Williams: Last one, Inspector, this is...
(Dolores sweeps in majestically, Stage Right.)
Dolores: Of course you know who I am.
Inspector: No. Perhaps you'll enlighten me.
Dolores: Enlighten him, Williams.
Williams: The actress.
Dolores: Film star.
Inspector: Thank you, Williams.
(Exit Williams, Stage Right.)
Inspector: Now, tell me your name and let's see if it rings any bells.
Dolores: I am Dolores Delgado.

[Continued in the full script...]