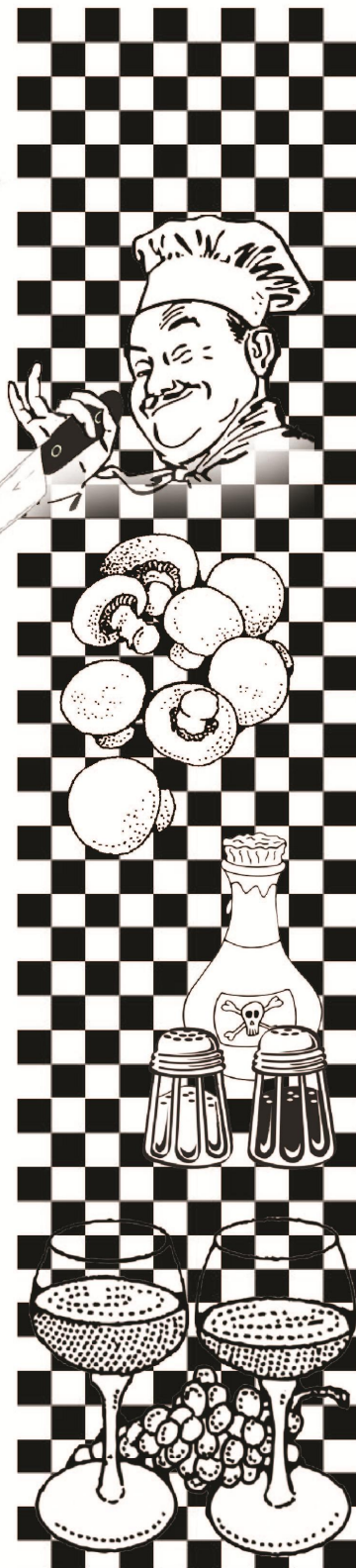


MURDER IS SERVED

a murder mystery by Jo West

Agatha Christie meets Fawlty Towers as audience members find themselves guests at cantankerous Clarissa's surprise party. Someone is about to die, but who will it be? With excitement, intrigue and foul play - trickery is most definitely afoot.



designed by paul villa 2012

Customer Taster

MURDER IS SERVED

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Welcome to Lindsay's Restaurant where today we are celebrating the birthday of Clarissa Hopgood. In honour of this occasion, in addition to our usual menu, as an extra special treat we are serving-up murder...

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Customer Taster

Overview

Murder is Served is a Murder Mystery designed to be played by 11 actors (9 main parts plus two extras to help manage the event). The actors perform a scripted mystery. The audience are given the opportunity to interrogate the witnesses and try to solve the mystery before a detective leads the actors through a final scene to reveal the guilty party.

Dramatis Personae

Juan Gonzalez - Proud, Spanish chef. Very emotional

Delilah White - An incompetent waitress, a bit tarty, fiercely in love with Toby

Toby Lindsay - restaurant proprietor. A bit of a Basil Fawly type, quite rude and arrogant but can be charming.

Clarissa Hopgood - wealthy old lady. Rather deaf, cantankerous, pretends to be a bit dotty, rude to all and sundry

Alice Roper - Clarissa's companion. Downtrodden and dowdy, hopelessly in love with Toby

Clive - an entertainer. Not a very successful singer, a bit of a Mummy's boy and scared of Gloria

Gloria - An unexpected arrival. Pretends to be American heiress, then comes out with broad Welsh accent; quite feisty

Julia - a normal and pleasant party guest

Reverend Green - an old friend of Clarissa's. A bumbling vicar with hiding an unexpected side

Two Waitresses - "extras" to help with collection of the clue sheets and to work out which table of diners win the prize for having guessed the murderer and motive correctly

Structure

The full murder mystery pack contains:-

- The Organiser's Overview
 - Plot synopsis **
 - Character overview *
 - Handy hints for staging *
 - Suggested timings *
 - A props list
- The "Main Script" to be performed by the actors **
- Sample menu (for use as prop)
- "Accusation sheets" in two formats (one per page and two per page)

* Included in this taster

** Extract included in this taster

Suggested timings:

7.00 Guests arrive and have drink in bar

7.20 Guests take places and starters (if there are any) or nibbles can be served.

Rev Green and Julia to take their places among the other guests

7.30 Play starts

8.00 Main meal served

8.20 Play continues

9.00 Dessert is served, followed by coffee. Guests make final ruminations on "who dunnit"

9.30 Denouement. Prize awarded and final sing-song for guests.

Plot synopsis

Juan and Delilah circle the tables depositing water jugs and Juan intimates that he is unhappy that the restaurant proprietor (Toby Lindsay) has been interfering with his dishes and “adding” things; we also learn that he has had to leave his old job in Spain in a hurry due to a “misunderstanding”. The play then officially “opens” with Toby advising the guests (the audience, plus Julia and Reverend Green) that they have been invited to celebrate the birthday of their old friend Clarissa Hopgood; the lights are dimmed and the audience are told to shout “surprise!” when the lights come back on and Clarissa (a very wealthy old lady) and Alice (her carer and companion) are in the room. Clarissa initially appears to dispute the fact it’s her birthday and wants to send everybody home. We learn that she was very ill the last time she ate at the restaurant, but is reassured that there is now a new chef. Alice is sent to look for Clarissa’s reading glasses in the car, and in her absence, Delilah the waitress serves two glasses of Sangria – one meant for Alice and one for Clarissa. Clarissa makes such a fuss about not wanting “a bloody fruit cocktail” that the glasses are removed and in the confusion one of the glasses ends up being given to Julia. Julia chokes and collapses onto the table and is subsequently taken to hospital. Alice reappears and seems concerned that Clarissa has not drunk the Sangria. Clarissa is mistakenly served gazpacho and her churlish behaviour causes a noisy altercation between Toby and Juan which results in them fighting. Toby then announces that the chef is unwell but that he and the rest of the staff will cobble something together for the meal. The main course is then served (not by the actors). (After the meal,) Gloria enters and we learn of her relationship to the Tom Jones impersonator, Clive, who has had two false cues to start singing earlier in the evening and is now a bit worse for wear having been sulking in the bar. Juan by now very drunk and upset disappears outside with a large knife and most cast members are absent for various reasons. Juan reappears covered in blood saying he has found a body in a car with a knife sticking out of its back. It’s up to the audience to work out whodunnit - but it seems there is unexpected help on hand...

Handy hints for staging

1. The play is entirely scripted, so there is no need for improvisation
2. The setting is a “restaurant” with the actors mingling with the audience. No further set is required.
3. Round tables are suggested for seating the audience, and you will need four reserved places to seat cast members. Two places on one table for Alice and Clarissa and one place each on a further two tables for Rev. Green and Julia. You will need to organise six spare chairs to be set up in the “interrogation” area later in the evening.
4. There is no lighting required as you will have the venue lighting and the only “effect” is the switching off and back on of the lights at the beginning when Clarissa arrives.
5. You will need a sound system (and a backstage member of your crew to operate this) and a microphone for Clive, the Tom Jones impersonator. You will need Karaoke backing tracks for “It’s Not Unusual”, “Delilah” and “What’s New Pussycat?”
6. You will need props and appropriate costume for all actors.
7. You will need clue sheets for the tables – a couple per table and pens for the audience to fill them out. It also helps if you make some table numbers or names. The original production used numbers, plus Cluedo graphics of revolver, lead piping, dagger etc. to help identify the tables.
8. Birthday decorations on the tables – sprinkles, party blowers, coloured napkins etc. If you use screens to hide the sound system or “off-stage” areas, those might also be decorated with banners etc.
9. You will need to organise a prize, preferably something that can be shared amongst the winning group. Also consider awarding a booby prize.
10. You will need to decide in advance how the winners will be determined in the event of a tie. (Possible methods include “best description of the method and motives”, “best group name” (if they choose their own) or drawn at random from the winning solutions.)

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Script Extract

(Juan and Delilah enter from the kitchen)

Juan: I cannot work here I tell you!

Delilah: Sssh! Not in front of the diners! **(She drags him to a discreet corner perhaps half-hidden by a convenient screen)**

Juan: It is terrible! Signor Toby – he is a monster! He is always interfering with my work!

Delilah: Come on Juan, you're being too sensitive. He is the owner, he's bound to want everything to be just so. You'll like him when you get to know him. He's always been very kind to me.

Juan: In Spain I ran my own kitchen, with ten staff under me.

Delilah: Really?

Juan: Yes, yes it is true! And here I am reduced to- how you say- chief cock and bottle washer.

Delilah: Well, why did you leave Spain then?

Juan: I had to leave in a hurry... there was a misunderstanding... I er... Well, anyway, I do not trust this Signor Toby... his eyes are too close together... I see him creeping about the kitchen, stirring my sauces and I'm sure that I see him adding things...

Delilah: Adding things?

Juan: Yes, yes! Are you sure that no one is listening to us? Come... I tell you some more...

(Juan and Delilah exit)

(Toby enters)

Toby: Good evening esteemed guests. Allow me to welcome you to "Chez Lindsay." I am Toby Lindsay, the proprietor. As you know, you have been invited here tonight to celebrate the birthday of your old friend Clarissa Hopgood. She has no idea about this evening's party, so it will be a complete surprise to her. I'm sure she will be delighted that so many of you were able to come. She will be arriving at any moment with her companion Miss Alice Roper, so if I can ask you to be quiet for a couple of minutes as we extinguish the lights, and when the lights come on again I would like you all to shout "Surprise!"

(Lights off. Enter Clarissa Hopgood an elderly, batty and rather cantankerous woman with Alice her downtrodden companion. They are dressed similarly)

Clarissa: Where on earth have you dragged me to? It's obviously closed, it's all dark in here you silly...

(Lights go on and everybody including Alice shouts "Surprise!" – possibly party blowers and party poppers going off too. Clarissa just stands there looking bemused as everybody falls silent and there is an awkward pause)

Alice: (Weakly) Surprise!

Clarissa: What the hell's going on?

Alice: Well, as it's your birthday, I thought it would be nice to throw you a surprise party.

Clarissa: It's not my birthday. And who are all these people? I don't know any of them. Ugly looking bunch. Did they bring me any presents? **(Walks over to random audience member)** Did you bring me a present? No? Well there we are then. **(To Alice)** Tell them all to bugger off!

Alice: They're your friends and relatives dear. Look there's Uncle Horace **(she points at another random audience member.)** Look dear he's waving at you! Wave back and say hello!

Clarissa: **(Hissing at Alice.)** But I've never liked Uncle Horace and anyway I thought he was dead! **(Out loud.)** Hello there, lovely to see you! **(To audience.)** Look I'm sorry but you're all here under false pretences. It's not my birthday. I think you'd better all go home. Birthday indeed! As if I'd forget my own birthday!

Alice: Well you did forget it was Christmas Day last year! You wouldn't even believe it when you saw the Queen giving her speech –you swore blind it was Julie Walters in a wig! And only last week you accused me of stealing your monogrammed silver compact. **(Raising her voice a bit.)** So you do forget things dear... it's not unusual...

(Sound of music starting up, as intro gets louder it becomes clear it is Tom Jones' number "It's Not Unusual")

Alice: Damn, that was the cue!

Clarissa: Queue, who's queuing for what? The toilets probably

(Enter Clive dressed up as a Tom Jones impersonator, singing "It's Not Unusual" – this can either be a very good impersonation or a very bad one! He sings to the audience for a couple of lines while Alice is making "cut" gestures which Clive eventually sees and the music stops abruptly.)

Clive: What's the matter?

Alice: You were too early.

(Enter Toby)

Toby: Is everything alright? Hello again madam! Happy birthday!

Clarissa: Oh for goodness sake! What's going on now? Have I overdone my medication or something? I feel like I'm in a Dennis Potter play, **(to Toby)** you're not going to start singing at me as well are you? Hmm ... wait a minute I recognise you...

Clive: You do?

Clarissa: Not you! Him!

Alice: **(Whispers to Clive)** Look, we'll do it later... your cue next time is... **(She whispers something)**

Clive: Are you sure she hasn't recognised me? She gave me a very funny look just now

Alice: Don't worry she does that to everybody. She has absolutely no idea. As far as she knows you're still in the States!

Clive: Do you think it was a good idea, me turning up like this out of the blue?

Alice: Well we'll soon find out. Off you go now, otherwise you'll ruin the surprise!

(Clive speedily exits behind screen)

Clarissa: **(To Alice)** What are you whispering about? Trying to pick him up, were you? Far too young for you! I can't think why you brought me to this hell hole. I nearly died the last time I was here.

Alice: Oh don't be so melodramatic, some of the food didn't agree with you that's all. It'll be lovely this time you'll see.

Clarissa: Ohhhh... I know what it is – you want to polish me off. You want me dead. Cold and in my box. Then you wouldn't have to be bothered with me any more. Well don't think you're going to see a penny of my money! I shall change my will and I shall leave it all to the dogs' home instead!

Toby: Perhaps I can show you to your seats.

Alice: Thank you, Toby.

(He leads them to a table, possibly with other diners at it.)

Clarissa: Have you got rid of that awful chef you had here last time?

Toby: Yes, yes. He's gone now. We got shot of him.

Clarissa: Shot him eh? Didn't think one was allowed to shoot chefs these days. But good job too. I was sick as a parrot after that muck you served us up last time we were here. Thought I was a goner. Threw up in the car on the way home, didn't I Alice?

Alice: **(Trying to shut her up.)** Yes, yes mostly into my handbag, but never mind. They've got a new chef now, so I'm sure it'll all be marvellous.

Clarissa: **(Increasing in volume.)** Spewed my guts up in the car park, over my own shoes. Pink suede they were too. What was it I ate? I should send you the cleaning bill. Those shoes were very expensive.

Alice: It was the sea food chowder. My evening bag's never recovered. The beadwork's ruined. Still covered in sicky squid.

Clarissa: Sixty quid? They were a damn sight more than that.

Toby: **(Looking around anxiously at other customers and desperate to change the conversation.)** Well no need to worry. There's no chowder on the menu tonight. Our new chef's Spanish. Arrived this week. A bit temperamental, but a fabulous chef.

Clarissa: It's a good job I've got the constitution of an ox. If I'd died I'd have sued you to kingdom come. Then where would you be?

Toby: **(Sotto voce.)** For God's sake, just belt up you old cow

Clarissa: What was that?

Toby: (**Much louder.**) I was just saying we've got cod, hake and um... a belting bit of cold fowl.

Clarissa: (**Eying him suspiciously.**) Hmm... Do you have any soup?

Toby: Gazpacho

Clarissa: Bless you!

Toby: What? No... gazpacho ... it's a cold tomato soup

Alice: It's lovely Clarissa. Very tasty.

Clarissa: What would you know! Cold soup indeed! Yuk!

Alice: It's supposed to be chilled. It enhances the flavour.

Toby: Perhaps you should have a look at the menu and a waitress will take your order in a few moments.

Clarissa: Well I suppose so. And bring some champagne. If it's supposed to be my birthday, then I bloody well want some champagne!

Toby: Certainly madam and many happy returns of the day.

(Toby exits. Delilah and Juan emerge again from behind the screen.)

Juan: He is a menace! If he mess with my food tonight I kill him!

Delilah: Look we must get back to the kitchen, we'll be missed! Do try to calm down.

(Juan and Delilah exit)

Clarissa: (**Trying without success to read the menu.**) Drat! I've left my glasses in the car. You'll have to go and get them.

Alice: Well I could read the menu out to you.

Clarissa: Just go and fetch my glasses! Goodness woman! Get off your lazy backside. You're the hired help after all, so be helpful! It is, after all, apparently my birthday.

(Alice stares at her.)

Clarissa: Well off you go, chop, chop!

(Alice exits looking upset.)

Clarissa: (**Clarissa cackles with glee and announces to diners in general.**) Hang on a minute, what date is it today?

(Someone in audience hopefully responds with correct date and Clarissa does complicated looking sums on her hand before exclaiming)

Clarissa: It is my birthday today! And I'm eighty-two, you know!

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