



A Dinner Theatre Murder Mystery
by
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Customer Taster

MURDER AT RANCHO MUCHO DENAROS

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MURDER AT RANCHO MUCHO DENAROS

By Joanne Mercer

Organiser's Overview - Read this first!

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 for the audience to question the suspects.

This pack is written in American English (which, for example, *colors* the spelling of *license*).

Structure

The murder mystery pack contains:

The Organiser's Overview [Extract included in this document]

The Script - for the actors to memorise before the event [Extract included in this document]

Character Backstory Outline – actor worksheet to create their own character backstories

Audience's Who's Who Suspect Guide – so audience members may keep better track of the various characters and their respective backgrounds [Included in this document]

The Accusation Form - for the audience to enter their solutions

Murder Mystery Bribe Bucks – print-and-cut-out “money”, for the audience to bribe the cast!

Private Investigators License for Billy Clyde Moonshine

Organiser's Overview Contents

- **Plot Overview** - a one-page synopsis of the play
- **General Staging Notes** – brief description of each step of the production
- **Event Guide**
- **Character Overview** – for cast reference, a list of more in-depth character descriptions
- **Production Notes** – procedures that will make the show easy to produce:-
 - **Props Lists**
 - **Pre-set props (prior to the audience arrival)**
 - **Audience props**
 - **Scene-by-scene props**
 - **Quantity/Item**
 - **Sound Effects List**
 - **Costume List**

Plot Overview

Every year, **Mary Moonshine** invites guests (including the audience) to celebrate the anniversary of her **Uncle Stinky** who fell comatose after taste-testing his new moonshine recipe. The family hopes Stinky will finally awaken, so they may safely launch their new moonshine, Stinky's Revenge. Also this evening, Mary and **B. S. Shawshank** plan to announce their engagement. Mary's twin daughters **Betty Jo Moonshine** and **Betty Jean Moonshine** argue over who gets to wear Mary's sparkly red dress, while Mary's mother **Granny** tries to sell her own recipe, "Granny's Reflux – Guaranteed to Cure What Ails Ye" to members of the audience.

The party is interrupted by the unexpected arrival of **Miss Fulla Cornpone**, who had a fling with B.S. one evening at Mardi Gras. An argument ensues, with fatal consequences... **Billy Clyde Moonshine, P.I.**, vows to solve the murder.

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 Improvisation and Audience Interaction, which may involve irrelevant audience responses. To counteract this, develop possible character "get-out strategy responses." More information on this is included in the **Production Notes**. Then decide on the winner's prize.

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 which cast members were able to correctly guess the murderer's identity. Award prizes – a bag of candy – to *all* cast members. Make it fun!

Cast Homework Assignment

At the end of the First Rehearsal, before the actors leave, give them a copy of the **Character Backstory Outline** for each character they play. The actors should fill these forms out and bring them to every rehearsal for reference.

About the Character Backstory Outline

A Backstory is a history of the character which does not change any of the plot points, and allows the actors to respond quickly to audience questions. The Character Backstory Outline makes it easier for actors to interact with audience members during Improvisation and Audience Interaction.

Learn the Script

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

Rehearsals

The Director schedules practice times for the actors, and 'blocks' the show. Actors learn their entrances and exits.

Improvisation

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

Facilities required for the performers

The performers need a separate private room for their use. They will use this prior to the event to get changed and prepared, and will use the room during the event if necessary. The murder victims will also use this room once deceased. Also, the cast needs a dining area which is separate from the audience (if dining at all).

Act 1

Open the event by acting out the scripted dialogue.

Evidence

Throughout the script, pieces of evidence are discovered and revealed by the actors. (These include pieces of evidence planted before the show starts.)

Interrogation

During the Interrogation, the actors are seated onstage and may be questioned by the audience. After the person playing Billy Clyde Moonshine, P.I., 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 Billy Clyde completes his questioning, since the audience idea of who the murderer is may change during the course of questioning.

Making 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. Use blocking to help cast suspicion on every character. For example - make sure that every character has the same gun (a thirty-eight special)...

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. Some responses could be:

[redacted from the taster]

Accusation Form

Billy Clyde tells the audience when to fill out the **Accusation Form**, which was handed out to every audience member or 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 quickly eliminate all incorrect guesses. The person who comes closest to figuring out the actual murder scenario 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, Billy Clyde announces the Winner. If more than one person - 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.

Event Guide

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 pre-defined timing for the action and the courses. If this is a restaurant-based event, then timing of the serving of food should be discussed with serving staff and chef - about when to serve the various courses. It should be possible to keep the Chef happy!

As a broad guide your event could run:-

7:30 to 7:50	Pre-dinner drinks; guests are seated
7:50 to 8:00	Meal is served
8:00 to 8:50	Act One
8.50 to 9:00	Intermission and dessert is served
9.00 to 10:00	Act Two
10:00 to 10:15	Winner announced and prize given.

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Who's Who Suspect Guide

Mary Moonshine - This gutsy backwoods lady of the house loves her fiancé B.S. Shawshank. She keeps the family and the Moonshine business running as smoothly as possible, no matter what she has to do.

Miss Fulla Cornpone - Cornpone had a romantic fling with B.S. Shawshank during Mardi Gras. She is an unexpected, uninvited and unwanted guest at the Engagement Party for Mary and B.S.

Billy Jack Binkley - Billy Jack and B.S. Shawshank grew up together in West Virginia. He resents B.S. for past events.

B. S. Shawshank - A good old boy from the mountains of West Virginia, B.S. won a plot of useless land in while cheating in a card game. B.S. Shawshank and Mary were reunited at Mardi Gras. They plan to be married.

Buck Board - A greedy cuss, Buck is engaged to Betty Jo. He is independently wealthy, and smooth with the ladies.

Betty Jean Moonshine - Mary's oldest twin daughter - Betty Jean is stunning and too smart for her own good. She is having an affair with Buck Board, who is engaged to marry her twin sister Betty Jo.

Betty Jo Moonshine - Mary's youngest twin daughter - Betty Jo is a sweet girl, in love with her cheating fiancé Buck Board.

Granny - A self-trained back-woods mountain gal, Granny uses her special brand of moonshine to cure what ails you.

Stinky - Mary's uncle, Stinky developed the recipe for Stinky's Moonshine, the source of the family's great wealth. He is sleeping off the effects of his latest recipe.

Billy Clyde Moonshine, P.I. - Billy Clyde earned his Private Investigator license through a mail-order catalogue. He is smarter than he seems – or is he?

MURDER AT RANCHO MUCHO DENAROS

Act 1

Scene 1 - The Family Room, Evening

(The Family Room of the Rancho Mucho Denaros, a country ranch in Big Liquor City, Texas. Center stage - a seating area with sofa, chairs and a coffee table; upstage - a writing desk. Additional small seating areas are placed around the stage as required by blocking.)

(Mary Moonshine, B.S. Shawshank, Buck J Board, Betty Jean Moonshine and Granny greet the crowd in character, and welcome audience members as they arrive. Mary has invited all the guests here tonight because every year, on the anniversary of Stinky's taste-test of his new moonshine, they celebrate in the hopes that the comatose Stinky will finally awaken and launch their new liquor - Stinky's Revenge. Granny strolls through the crowd, offering check-ups for a fee. Betty Jean exits and then Buck Board exits. These exits cue Mary to begin.)

Mary: Well howdy, y'all! Welcome to Rancho Mucho Denaros! Let's start things off with a bang!

(Multiple gunshots. Mary, Shawshank and Granny pull out their guns and shoot them into the air.)

Mary: } (Together) Yahoo!

Shawshank: } Yeehaw!

Granny: } Gidee-up!

Shawshank: What a happy occasion!

Granny: I got something to make them happy, right in this here bottle! Granny's Reflux, bedroom brewed and five hundred proof! That'll set 'em on their ears!

Shawshank: We'll make a toast with it later, Granny. This is a very special evening for Mary and me. I just want everybody to know I love you, Mary Moonshine!

Mary: I love you too, B.S. Shawshank.

Granny: All of this sugar is very high fructose corn syrup. You two are so sweet, it makes my teeth hurt.

Shawshank: Granny, I thought you wore dentures.

Granny: I do.

Shawshank: (To Mary.) Excuse me, darling, I'm gonna go check on your Uncle Stinky.

(Shawshank exits.)

Mary: He's so darling. Can't help lovin' that man of mine!

(Betty Jo enters, wearing a pink bathrobe.)

Betty Jo: Mama, I can't find my pink gown. Can I wear your sparkly red thing?

Mary: Yes, of course, Betty Jo. Oh my, you're still in your bathrobe! Scoot on upstairs now!

(Betty Jo exits. Backstage, she changes into Betty Jean's blue bathrobe; the actress's next entrance is as Betty Jean.)

Mary: I do hope Betty Jo and Betty Jean don't start arguing about what dresses to wear. I always heard twins got along well together, but those two fight like wild cats in a burlap sack!

(Cornpone enters.)

Cornpone: Yoo-hoo! Hello! Is my B.S. Shawshank here? I'm Miss Fulla Cornpone.

Granny: I'll bet you are.

Cornpone: I cannot wait until I see B.S. We have business of a personal nature.

Mary: How personal?

Cornpone: Very! Oh dear, you're sweet on the old fella!

Mary: More than just sweet, Miss Cornpone. We're to be engaged tonight!

Cornpone: So you're the one he's cutting loose. You just haven't got a clue, have you? Listen, darlin', it simply won't work out for you. About eight months ago, B.S. asked me to marry him, and I said yes! We set the date... for this evening!

Mary: But eight months ago is when B.S. and I were reunited at Mardi Gras.

Cornpone: Uh-huh. Ever wonder why B.S. kept going out for lemonade? It was the only way he could get away from you long enough to rendezvous with me!

Mary: I just thought he was thirsty.

(Billy Clyde enters. Cornpone uses Billy Clyde's entrance as a diversion; she inconspicuously wanders towards the desk, takes a folded up paper out of her purse and places it on the desk. This is the paper which reads "bath, hath, math, path, wrath.")

Mary: Billy Clyde P.I., you're just in time. Do you have your investigator get-up with you?

Billy Clyde: Sure do, ma'am.

(Billy Clyde reaches into his pockets and pulls out his detective badge and a thirty-eight special handgun.)

Billy Clyde: Always be prepared.

Cornpone: Quite the boy scout, aren't we? Hello, young man. I don't believe we've met.

Billy Clyde: Billy Clyde Moonshine, Private Investigator, at your service, ma'am. Mary, where's my precious Betty Jo?

Mary: Now, Billy Clyde, you know very well that she's not your Betty Jo. She's engaged to marry Buck Board. So give up that childish fantasy about getting married, 'cause it just ain't going to happen. Besides, you're cousins!

Billy Clyde: Kissin' cousins! Nothing illegal about that!

Cornpone: *Kissing* cousins? I might enjoy being part of this family. Exactly where did you go to detective school?

Billy Clyde: Down in the distilling room. The *[Local Town]* Correspondence School of Private Investigating. It was a correspondence course.

Cornpone: The hick dick can read! My my, aren't you talented! Come on, show me the dungeons and tell me more!

(Billy Clyde and Cornpone exit together. Betty Jean enters; she wears her blue bathrobe.)

Betty Jean: Mama, my formal yellow dress is still at the cleaner's. Can I borrow your pretty sparkly red thing?

Mary: Sorry, Betty Jean, but Betty Jo already asked me.

Betty Jean: What! I hate her! I wish she wasn't my twin sister!

Mary: You have always hated her, but I've got too much to think about without having to worry about you two forever fighting, and whatever you're going to wear tonight!

(Betty Jean exits; Billy Clyde rushes back in.)

Billy Clyde: Mary! Miss Cornpone said I should announce the launching of Stinky's Revenge tonight!

Mary: No! Stinky made us all agree that no matter what happened; he would be the only one to introduce Stinky's Revenge to the Still Waters Company Reserves!

Billy Clyde: But Mary, he's been in a coma since he first taste-tested the stuff. It's been two years!

Mary: I'll think about it.

Billy Clyde: Well, that's better than nothing. I'd better get back to Miss Cornpone. Ain't good to neglect our guests!

Granny: I'd better keep an eye on those two.

(Billy Clyde exits. Granny exits after him, obviously acting like a very bad spy by flattening herself up against a wall, ducking behind a chair, hiding behind a plant, etc. Buck enters.)

Buck: Looks like Granny's been at the sauce again. Mary, have you seen Betty Jo?

Mary: Hey, Buck. She's getting changed. She asked if she could borrow my sparkly red dress.

Buck: Think I'll just go check on her. Maybe she's got a zipper stuck or something.

(Buck exits. Shawshank enters.)

Shawshank: Mary! Give your B.S. a big old smooch!

(Shawshank kisses Mary just as Cornpone enters, wearing a Mardi-Gras style mask.)

Cornpone: Bonjour, baby.

Shawshank: What? That voice!

Mary: You really do know this woman?

Shawshank: Do I *know* her? Uh... in what sense?

Cornpone: Now, don't you give me any of your B.S., B.S.

Mary: What is she talking about?

Shawshank: Lots of people tell me not to give them any B.S., honey. It's just an expression.

Mary: That's a load of B.S.!

(Mary breaks away from Shawshank; Cornpone speaks with a bad French accent as she flirts with Shawshank.)

Cornpone: I knew you would remember. The parade we see, the lemonade we drink, the love we make.

Shawshank: Love? It's all a sort of a blur, honey...

Mary: Honey!

Cornpone: Honey!

(Cornpone kisses Shawshank. Shawshank, struggles, then enjoys the kiss, then breaks away, breathless. Cornpone gives Mary a look of smug triumph.)

Shawshank: No, I mean, I was just about to announce my engagement...

Cornpone: Yes, sweetheart, that is exactly why I am here!

Shawshank: Okay now, Fulla...

Mary: Okay? Really? That's the last straw! He's all yours, Miss La-De-Da Mardi Gras.

Cornpone: Merci beaucoup!

Mary: Murky buckets to you, too.

Cornpone: My goodness, your blatant anger has me all in a tizzy. I must go put a cool cloth on the back of my neck. I suggest you cool it too, Miss Moonshine!

(Cornpone starts to exit. Mary addresses the audience. While Mary speaks, Cornpone stops at the desk and picks up the yellow paper she had placed there previously. Cornpone exits with the yellow paper.)

Mary: I'm sorry you had to witness this, folks, but I do sincerely thank you for coming to the second anniversary of my Uncle Stinky's taste testing of his special moonshine - 'Stinky's Revenge'. I will never forget that fateful night in the Distilling Room. Steam was blowing. Horns were tooting. Stinky held out his little battered tasting cup. A single drop of moonshine dripped into it. He smiled and said these beautiful words - "over the lips and past the gums, look out tummy, here it comes". Then he went into a stupor, with a big ol' grin spread across his face, and he hasn't awakened since. Poor Stinky.

(Betty Jo enters wearing Mary's red gown.)

Mary: Betty Jo, you look gorgeous!

Betty Jo: Thank you, Mama. Betty Jean seems a bit ticked off, though.

(A gunshot rings out. Betty Jo is shot. She dies a comically dramatic death; clutches at her chest, moans out loud, falls over the furniture, clings to Mary and Shawshank, and flops around on the floor before she finally dies. Billy Clyde runs in, carrying his thirty-eight special handgun.)

Billy Clyde: I heard a shot. Is it varmint season already?

Mary: My poor sweet Betty Jo! Oh, Billy Clyde! A shot rang out... and she died.

Billy Clyde: Was it a quick death?

(Sarcastically responds in reference to Betty Jo's long death scene.)

Mary: } **(Together)**

Shawshank: } No...

Billy Clyde: Is there a doctor in the house?

(Granny enters with a bottle of "Granny's Reflux: Guaranteed to Cure What Ails Ye.")

Granny: Somebody holler for me? Betty Jo! What in 'tarnation happened here?

Shawshank: She was shot.

Granny: I got just the thing to fix her right up. My own special brand of West Virginia Moonshine. Granny's Reflux: Guaranteed To Cure What Ails Ye.

Billy Clyde: Does that stuff work?

Granny: Well, if it can't cure you, you're more than likely dead already!

(Granny pours Granny's Reflux into Betty Jo's mouth. Betty Jo sits up straight.)

Betty Jo: Yummy!

(Betty Jo falls back down dead.)

Granny: Nope. She's dead all right.

Mary: Billy Clyde, take her body out of here. I don't think I can bear the sight any longer.

Billy Clyde: Don't you think we should call the police?

Mary: What are you talking about?

Billy Clyde: Any Private Eye worth his salt makes sure that in case of a murder, the scene of the crime is left undisturbed until the authorities arrive.

Mary: This is my house. I am the authority.

Billy Clyde: Right. I'll move the body. But I'm still the P.I. around here! I'll be right back.
(Billy Clyde is dragging Betty Jo out of the room as Buck enters.)

Buck: Betty Jo is dead?

(Billy Clyde drags out Betty Jo.)

Mary: She was so young.

Shawshank: So innocent!

Buck: So boring!

Granny: Buck, get out of my sight.
(Buck exits.)

Mary: So, what an interesting beginning to the evening here at Rancho Mucho Denaros!
(Mary takes a swig of Granny's Reflux.)

Billy Clyde: **(Sings to the tune of 'Oh My Darling Clementine'.)** Oh, my darling, oh, my darling, oh, my darling Betty Jo, you are lost and gone forever, dreadful sorry, Betty Jo.

Granny: Quit your caterwauling, you dumb dick.

Billy Clyde: Sorry, Granny. Folks, it is a true tragedy that on the evening of the second anniversary of Uncle Stinky's stupor, and the very night that B.S. Shawshank and Mary Moonshine or Miss Fulla Cornpone were to announce their engagement, poor Betty Jo Moonshine should perish from the face of this earth. I will not allow her death to go unsolved, for I am Billy Clyde Moonshine, P.I., recent graduate of the *[Local Town]* Correspondence School of Private Investigating! I became a Private Eye so Betty Jo would learn to love me. What better way to prove myself worthy of her eternal love than to solve her murder!

(Betty Jean enters wearing Mary's red dress.)

Granny: She's alive!

Betty Jean: Of course I'm alive.

Mary: No, Betty Jean, not you. It's Betty Jo. She's been shot!

Betty Jean: Oh, no!

Shawshank: I'm afraid so, honey.

Mary: Darling, I have to ask you - Betty Jo was wearing my red dress. How did you...

Betty Jean: Well, she was just lying there in the hallway. I thought she was taking a nap.

Mary: Betty Jean, you took the dress right off of your dead sister's back?

Betty Jean: It's not like she took very good care of the dress, Mama. Do we have moths in the house? There's this little hole in it, right here...

Mary: That's the bullet hole, Betty Jean!

Betty Jean: It's going to cost a fortune to get that little baby patched up.

Mary: Is that all you can think of at a time like this?

Betty Jean: No. At least you won't have to worry about getting the blood stain out, the dress being red and all.

Billy Clyde: All right, you two, that is quite enough. We've got a dead girl on our hands, and everyone is a suspect. So I, Billy Clyde Moonshine, P.I., am about to officially conduct my investigation. Betty Jean, didn't you hear the shot?

(Betty Jean pulls her thirty-eight special handgun out and waves it in the air.)

Betty Jean: Yes, but I thought it was varmint season. Looks like I was right.

Billy Clyde: And where were you when the shot was fired?

Betty Jean: In my bedroom, upstairs.

Mary: Well, if you heard the shot, then why are you coming down here only now?

Betty Jean: I was... freshening up.

Mary: Betty Jean, it's as if you didn't even care.

Betty Jean: Hey, I care. I am so distraught that I can't even show my emotions for fear of having a nervous breakdown.

(Cornpone and Buck enter, arm-in-arm. When they see Betty Jean, Buck drops Cornpone's arm.)

Granny: Looks like the Buckster's exploring new horizons.

Buck: I was just helping Miss Cornpone to keep her balance, it being so dark down in the distilling room and all.

Granny: Seems more like she's keeping *you* off balance, boy.

Mary: Miss Cornpone, why don't you pack up your little act and hit the road?

Cornpone: I'll leave, Mary Moonshine, after I've harvested the seeds I've planted. And when I do leave, B.S. will come with me. You just wait and see!

Granny: Say, you're a feisty one.

(Granny plucks a hair from Cornpone's head.)

Cornpone: Ow! What did you do that for?

Granny: Got me a little Old West Virginia Love potion to mix up. Figure a little of what you got can't hurt.

(Granny exits.)

Billy Clyde: That Granny is some doctor! Remember, until the murderer is apprehended, you are all suspects. But now, I must be alone to think.

(End of Scene 1)