



A Murder Mystery

by

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Customer Taster

Murder on the Home Front

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It is August 1941 and the Women's Institute of Siddlington are holding a day of events to raise money for the Spitfire Fund. The fete took place this afternoon in the grounds of Siddlington Hall and the dance is about to get underway in one of the larger rooms of the big house. The organisers, the owners of the house and some locals have gathered to ensure that tonight's dance goes with a bang. However, raising money to help win the war isn't all that is on the cards.

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About this Pack

This is a scripted murder evening that will also require some background character knowledge to enable the cast to answer questions put to them by their audience. A full script and character notes are provided as well as a pack of ‘table clues’ for each team within your audience.

There is a cast of nine as well as one narrator who will guide your audience and help organise the questioning sections of the evening.

The murder evening is intended to be performed in a hall with a stage or suitable acting area, with tables around the hall for your audience. The setup is much the same as you would have for a quiz evening; i.e. teams of around 6-8 people per table. Each table has a set of clues to read through and will also have the opportunity to ask questions as the evening progresses.

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. The table clue pack would need to be made available to your audience via email prior to the performance. It would be helpful to have your audience split into household teams rather than tables in a hall. The narrator’s role would also need to be expanded to provide the written stage directions. Your audience could still ask questions via the video conference at the appropriate times.

What’s included?

In the Organiser’s Overview [extract here]:

- Plot overview and character list
- General staging notes
- Suggested timetable
- Character background notes, including motivation and opportunity
- Props list
- Example questions and answers
- A cheat sheet showing the clues and red herrings within the table clues

In the rest of the pack:

- The Full Script *[extract here]*
 - Scripts for Act 1 and Act 2
 - Final character statements
- The Table Pack, to be given to audience members
 - Introduction to the evening
 - A set of clues to study
 - Accusation sheet
 - Posters for the event and the Spitfire Fund

Plot Overview and Characters

Today is Saturday 16th August 1941 and we are in one of the large rooms at Siddlington Hall. The local WI has organised a fundraising day to raise money for the Spitfire Fund. Earlier this afternoon, there was a fete in the grounds of the hall, and this evening, there is to be a dance. Some of the organisers and other locals have gathered to discuss this afternoon's proceedings and to ensure that the dance runs smoothly.

Your cast consists of:

Sir George Trumpington-Smyth, Lord of the Manor, lives in Siddlington Hall,

Lady Mary Trumpington-Smyth, Sir George's wife,

Annie Robertson, Head of WI and organiser of these events,

Rev. Obadiah Harper, vicar of St Geraldine's in the village,

Joan Whittaker, Chair of the Parish Council,

Major William 'Bill' Wilkins, Platoon leader of the Home Guard,

Gladys Cole, postmistress and runs the telephone exchange,

Dr David Worth, doctor for this and the surrounding villages,

Florence Middleton, nurse working at Siddlington Hall,

Narrator, one extra person to ensure the smooth running of the evening.

Some months ago, Annie was approached by the War Office, in her capacity as head of the local Women's Institute, to help raise money for the new Spitfire Fund. Sir George and Lady Mary up at the big house offered their grounds for a summer fete and Lady Mary offered to help with the organisation. In fact, it was Lady Mary's idea to organise a dance in the evening.

This afternoon, the fete took place in the grounds of Siddlington Hall and was a roaring success. Most of the village turned out and the weather had been glorious. Annie and some of her band of helpers have now gathered in the ballroom of Siddlington Hall to prepare for the dance this evening. The Hall has been partially taken over by the Red Cross as a hospital, but the beds have been cleared from the ballroom just for tonight.

There have been some blackmail letters sent to various people in the village, which has caused tension and fear. No one knows who is behind it all, but most of the people gathered here tonight have received one. There are rows and confrontations, secrets and lies revealed, and then one member of the assembled company dies, poisoned. Everyone is quick to blame someone else and deflect any accusations against themselves.

General Staging Notes

Casting & Rehearsal

Choose your performers and issue them with a copy of the entire pack. You should hold as many rehearsals as you feel comfortable with.

The first rehearsal should concentrate on reading through the pack and familiarising yourselves with the characters, backgrounds and format of the evening, before moving on to a read-through.

Subsequent rehearsals should be used for moving or blocking the action. This may need to be revised to suit your venue.

It is impossible to rehearse the question sections of the evening, as you can never tell exactly what people will ask, but have a read through the example questions sheet as this shows some of the questions encountered in the past.

Facilities required for the performers

You will need a separate and private room in which to change and base yourselves when not required on stage. The victim will also use this room after being murdered.

The performers should also be given the same food as the audience.

It is always a good idea to visit the venue a few weeks before the performance and to tailor the performance to suit your venue.

Hall layout and event format

This is a ballroom in a stately home, but doesn't need to be too opulent. There should be some chairs and side tables dotted around the stage, but with enough room to allow free movement between them, and a larger table toward the back. The exact layout can be flexible to both your cast and your venue's needs.

Both the stage area and the rest of the room should be decorated to show that a dance will be taking place, for example with bunting and with the posters provided in the Table Pack. This can be as elaborate or as low-key as you like. You could even design your tickets in an appropriate style for a 1940s dance invite.

It is also fun to encourage your audience to enter into the spirit of the evening and dress appropriately.

Suggested Timetable

7:30 pm	Guests arrive and are seated.
7:55 pm	Narrator explains the format of the evening and Act One begins
8:25 pm	End of Act One, Narrator wraps up and supper is served
9:15 pm	Cast returns and Narrator organises questioning
9:30 pm	Act Two
9:40 pm	End of Act Two and short break
9:50 pm	Cast returns and Narrator organises questioning
10:00 pm	Short break while guests complete Accusation forms
10:10 pm	Narrator calls for a spokesman from each table to read accusations
10:20 pm	The big reveal
10:30 pm	End

Character backgrounds including motive and opportunity

The Events

Earlier this year, the War Office wrote to all branches of the Women's Institute to ask for help to raise money for the Spitfire Fund. Annie Robertson, as head of the Siddlington WI, received the letter and believed it to be a personal plea for her assistance. She loves to be in control and so took it upon herself to organise the fundraising events. She approached the Trumpington-Smyths and arranged for the grounds of Siddlington Hall to be used for a summer fete. Admission was free, with money being made on the various stalls and sideshows. Lady Mary suggested a ball on the same evening at the hall to raise even more money. Any patients and staff of the hospital were to attend free of charge, but the locals were to be charged a two shillings and sixpence entry fee. There would also be refreshments available to buy, all in aid of the Spitfire Fund.

Siddlington Hall

Known locally as The Big House, this is the ancestral home of the Trumpington-Smyths and has a prominent position on the outskirts of Siddlington village. Sir George and Lady Mary are the current residents, although they now only occupy a few rooms in the west wing. Last year, the house was commandeered by the Red Cross and it is now used as a hospital for the three services as well as civilian victims of air raids. Lady Mary has arranged for the ballroom to be cleared of beds for one evening to hold a fundraising ball.

(Continues in the full pack.)

Murder on the Home Front

Script Extract

Act One

(The lights in the main hall dim, leaving only the curtains lit. Narrator steps through the curtains and addresses the audience.)

Narrator: Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. You join us this evening at Siddlington Hall where, later this evening, a dance is to be held to raise money for the Spitfire Fund. Shortly, you will get to meet Sir George and Lady Mary Trumpington-Smyth and some of the local villagers. However, all is not as it seems. At some point this evening, a crime will be committed, and it will be up to you to solve it, so make sure you watch and listen very carefully. On your tables you will find numerous items, which may or may not help you. You will get the chance to ask questions as the evening progresses, but I will give further instructions later on. So I'll leave you to it for now. Good luck.

(The curtains open on the ballroom at Siddlington Hall. Mary and Annie are centre stage, talking. Annie is holding a clipboard and ticking items off as they speak. George is further back on the stage with a small glass of whisky in his hand. He is half listening to their conversation, but isn't really interested. Annie is in charge of the event, but speaks to both Mary and George with deference and feels slightly awkward in their company.)

Annie: The band have confirmed that they will be arriving around thirty minutes before the doors open. Are we still happy to have them set up at this end of the hall?

Mary: That seems the best place for them. What do you think, George? This end for the band?

George: What? Oh yes, this end definitely. It's where we've always had the bands in the past.

(Annie ticks an item off her list and tucks her clipboard under her arm.)

Annie: I think that's about all we can do for now. I have roped in some helpers from the village who should be here soon, so we can divvy up the jobs when they get here.

Mary: You've worked extremely hard, Annie. I'm sure the dance will be a roaring success.

Annie: Thank you, Lady Mary. You and Sir George have been a great help. I'd better check up on where everyone has got to, there's still a lot to be done.

(Annie almost drops a curtsy, but thinks better of it. Instead she nods and exits.)

George: Who was that?

Mary: Oh George, you know perfectly well who she is.

George: That ghastly WI woman.

Mary: Yes, no... well yes, she is the WI woman, but she's not ghastly.

George: Seems ghastly to me.

Mary: Everyone seems ghastly to you, George.

(David and Harper enter.)

George: Here's a couple more of them.

Mary: George! **(Turning to greet the others.)** Doctor Worth, Reverend Harper, how good to see you. Are you here to help set up?

David: Lady Mary. **(He briefly takes her hand.)** We are indeed. Two able bodied men, as requested.

Mary: Just Mary is fine, Doctor, you are my physician after all.

(Mary becomes a little flustered in his company.)

David: Well, in that case, Mary, you must call me David. This is a social visit rather than a professional one. Have you fully recovered from your bout of flu?

Mary: I have, thank you David. I had a first-rate doctor looking after me.

(They both laugh politely. George rolls his eyes. Harper just watches, looking a bit awkward.)

Mary: And Reverend Harper, how are things with you?

Harper: Good, Lady Mary. Thank you.

Mary: Splendid. Well, I'm afraid Annie is off somewhere organising at the moment and I'm not sure what she had planned for you two gentlemen.

David: I'm sure we can find something useful to do.
(He looks around and then moves downstage to look around the hall. Harper joins him and they move to one side to begin a hushed conversation. David points around the hall and Rev Harper nods. Annie enters. Joan, Gladys and Bill follow her on. Bill crosses to George and they shake hands and begin chatting.)

Gladys: And then she managed to get extra eggs too, there's definitely something going on there.

Annie: Yes, well, as I was saying, we'll need to make sure that there's plenty of room for the band to set up. I thought it best to have them at this end. **(Notices David and Harper.)** Oh, there you are, you must have sneaked past me.

David: Yes, here we are. How can we help?

Annie: Well, we've managed to set this room up, but we still need to move some beds out of the side room next door and set that up as a cloakroom.

David: Say no more. Come on, Harper.
(He claps Harper on the shoulder, who jumps and follows David offstage.)

Annie: Right, there are more posters and bunting to go up. Can I leave that with you, William? William? Oh, there you are. Can you organise the bunting?

Bill: What? Oh right, of course. Excuse me, Sir George.

George: Oh course, old boy. Wouldn't want to stand in the way of a man and his bunting.

Annie: You can take Joan with you to help. All the decorations are by the front door.
(Joan shakes her head, but joins Bill and they exit. Annie leads Gladys downstage.)

Annie: I thought you might be more suited to working behind the bar this evening.

Gladys: Behind the...

Annie: It's what you're used to, serving people.

Gladys: Being the postmistress is hardly the same as a servant or barmaid.

Annie: Oh, it's all the same at the end of the day. You spend your day behind a counter selling stamps, now you'll be behind a bar serving drinks.

Gladys: There's a bit more to it than just selling stamps, you know.
(Gladys is fuming and takes Annie to one side to continue to remonstrate, although now in hushed tones. Florence enters and crosses to Mary.)

Florence: Lady Mary.

Mary: Florence, my child. What can I do for you?

Florence: Sister has sent me to ask if some of the men might be allowed to join the dance later this evening. She felt it might do them some good.

Mary: That's a wonderful idea. But it's Annie's event, so we'd better ask her.
(They make their way towards Annie and Gladys, but George calls Mary back. Florence continues, not realising she is on her own.)

George: Mary! Mary, who's that little cracker?

Mary: That's Florence, one of the junior nurses. Now you leave her alone, George. Go and find yourself something useful to do.
(George drains his glass, takes a last appreciative look at Florence and exits. Florence has now reached Annie and Gladys, and interrupts their conversation. Mary walks slowly over to join them.)

Florence: Mrs Robertson, I'm sorry to interrupt.
(Annie breaks off talking to Gladys and turns to see who has dared to interrupt her. She looks Florence up and down disdainfully.)

Annie: Yes? What is it?

Florence: It's just that Sister has asked if some of the more able-bodied men might to permitted to join the dance this evening.

Annie: Join the dance? Oh, I don't think that's a very good idea, do you?
(Florence is a bit lost for words, but Mary has just arrived and steps in to help.)

Mary: Really? I thought it was a wonderful idea. It might be good for their rehabilitation and is sure to be good for morale.

(Annie is mortified that she has inadvertently disagreed with Mary and does her best to backtrack.)

Annie: Oh well, of course, if you put it like that. Yes, a wonderful idea. We must all do our bit to boost morale.

(Mary smiles sweetly at this. Gladys can hardly contain her laughter at Annie's discomfort.)

Mary: You run along, child. And tell Sister that Annie would be delighted to accommodate some of the men tonight.

(Florence curtseys and exits. Mary puts a hand on Annie's arm and nods a thank you, then she too exits.)

Gladys: Very noble of you to agree with Lady Mary like that.

Annie: Well, we must all do our bit for the war effort. If you'll excuse me, I must see how William and Joan are getting on.

(Annie makes a hasty exit.)

Gladys: Yes, of course you must. **(To herself.)** What a loathsome individual you are. Always have been, always will be.

(David and Harper enter.)

David: Ah, Gladys. She's roped you in too, has she?

Gladys: I thought it only right and proper to volunteer. Reverend Harper, I'm surprised to see you here.

Harper: We must all pull together at a time like this. As the bible says, "How good and pleasant it is when God's people live together in unity."

Gladys: Indeed. And what does the good book say about dealing with obnoxious people?

Harper: Luke six-twenty-nine says "If someone slaps you on one cheek, turn to them the other also."

Gladys: I think I'd prefer to give her a good slap back, to be honest.

Harper: Matthew of course says, "An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth."

Gladys: That's more like it. Right, I'd best make a start on setting up the bar. Can you give me a hand, Reverend?

Harper: Oh course, gladly.

(Continues in the full pack.)