

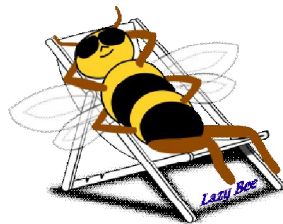
Mystic Myrtle

A Dinner Theatre Murder Mystery



By

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Customer Taster

Mystic Myrtle

A Murder Mystery

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When Laura Dent visits Mystic Myrtle, the fortune teller confides that she is a fraud, and that she hates her husband Hubert. Meanwhile, Laura's husband Lionel, an insurance agent, is having an affair with Laura's sister Joyce. Joyce wants Lionel to divorce Laura and marry her. Hubert discovers the affair and threatens to tell Laura unless Lionel produces an insurance policy designed to benefit him when Mystic Myrtle dies.

One way or another each of them has a motive for killing one of the others. Who kills whom and how?

Detective Inspector Cleveleys guides the audience through this web of intrigue until a body and a murderer are revealed.

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Mystic Myrtle

By Richard Adams

Organiser's Overview - Read this first!

About the Pack

The full pack provides the full script and guidance to enable you to produce a successful murder mystery event. *Mystic Myrtle's Murder Mystery* was written for a Drama Group which has staged a number of such events and the usual format, including a light supper, is given below. The author has no objection to this format being changed to suit, for instance, a three course meal with courses served before the play begins, between Acts One and Two, or any other variation. Chief Inspector Cleveleys' dialogue may be added to or amended to accommodate any changes.

Structure

This murder mystery pack contains:

- The Organiser's Overview [*Extract in this taster*]
- The Script - for the actors to memorise before the event. [*Extract in this taster*]
- Accusation Forms, for the audience to formulate their suspicions.

Organiser's Overview Contents

- Plot Overview
- Event Guide
- General Staging Notes
- Production Notes
 - Props List
 - Sound Effects List
 - Lighting Plot
 - Character Descriptions
 - Setting
 - Costume Notes

Plot Overview

When Laura visits *Mystic Myrtle*, the fortune teller confides in Laura that she is a fraud, and that she hates her husband. Meanwhile, Laura's husband Lionel, an insurance agent, is having an affair with Laura's sister Joyce. Joyce wants Lionel to divorce Laura and marry her. *Mystic Myrtle's* slob of a husband, Hubert discovers the affair and threatens to tell Laura unless Lionel produces an insurance policy designed to benefit him when *Mystic Myrtle* dies, and as long as Lionel pays the premium. One way or another each of them has a motive for killing one of the others. Who kills who and how? Detective Inspector Cleveleys guides the audience through this web of intrigue until a body and a murderer are revealed.

By the end of Act Two, the victim's body is found in a locked cubicle in a Ladies toilet in the local park. Each of the possible suspects had motive and opportunity. Which one was it? Did more than one of them have a hand in it? Each of the teams in the audience is given a chance to ask one question of a suspect of their choice. Over supper they have opportunity to discuss with their team members, work out their conclusion and complete their Accusation Sheets. Whether they are right or not is revealed in Act Three.

Event Guide

- Introduction by Chief Inspector Cleveleys (partly scripted, partly improvised to suit the circumstances).
- Act One.
- Act Two (including an opportunity for the audience to question the cast).
- Interval and light supper (the audience completes the Accusation Sheets which are then collected and assessed by the acting company).
- Act Three.
- Presentation of certificates and prizes to the winning team.

Approximate Timings

Act One: 40 minutes

Act Two (scripted) : 15 minutes

Act Two (audience interrogation) : 10 minutes

Interval/Supper: 30 minutes (of course this is highly dependent on the complexity of the catering)

Act Three: 12 minutes

Epilogue: 10 minutes for prize-giving and closing announcements.

General Staging Notes

Learned lines or rehearsed reading?

The play will work best if lines are learned. This gives the actors more freedom of movement and interaction with one another. It will be difficult, for instance, for Myrtle to manage the attache case, or bring in three coffees on a tray if she has a script in her hand. Lionel will similarly struggle with his laptop and papers if handling a script.

However, Chief Inspector Cleveleys has a number of very long speeches which include references that need to be delivered clearly and smoothly to the audience. Provided he is sufficiently familiar with his lines, so as not to be glued to the script, it might be helpful to have the speeches in his notebook, to which he would then appear to be referring quite naturally as a detective would in the course of his investigation.

If it is decided to perform the play as a rehearsed reading, this should be made clear in the publicity and reflected in the ticket prices.

Note that even if it is a Rehearsed Reading you need to purchase a Performance Licence from the Lazy Bee Scripts web site.

Allocating responsibilities

The producer will need to appoint those who are to be responsible for various aspects of the event:

- A Director - whose job will be to audition, select and direct the actors, and to advise on the set.
- Set Construction team
- A Stage Manager to co-ordinate all aspects of the set, and generally keep the show on the road during the performance.
- A Property Manager - to acquire all properties and ensure they are in the right place at the right time.
- Costume supervisor: the play is set in the present and there are no special costume requirements, but the producer may wish to appoint someone to ensure that each character is dressed appropriately. (Myrtle needs suitably exotic clothing for her role as a fortune teller, and Joyce is initially dressed in a track suit, and in Act One Scene Four appears to be wearing nothing but a dressing gown or bathrobe).
- Sound Manager to acquire all sound effects and music, and play them as required
- Lighting Manager to set the lighting rig and operate cues as per script.
- Continuity assistant (Prompt).
- Catering Team.

- Publicity Manager to arrange for posters, fliers, tickets and ticket sales.
- Scrutineers - who will distribute the Accusation Sheets before the play, collect them in after supper, read them during the performance of Act Three to determine the winning team (see Adjudication below) and give the result to Chief Inspector Cleveleys for him to announce. In the event of a tie they will provide Cleveleys with a set of tie-break questions to be put to the tied teams, the winning team being the first one to shout out the correct answer. Suggested questions are given below, but the scrutineers may devise their own. If the scrutineers are members of the cast, then the collection of the accusation sheets has to be done with sufficient time for scrutiny before the start of Act Three.

Adjudication

A full answer should include the following six elements; allow one point for each

- The murderer
- The motive
- The means and murder weapon
- How the body was concealed and by whom

Suggested Tie-break questions

The full Organiser's Overview contains a set of suggested tie-break questions (which are not listed here in case an enterprising audience member notes them down in advance. If you're here for that purpose, shame on you!)

Programme Notes

The full Organiser's Overview contains a set of suggested notes which might be useful in a programme or a table card.

Interrogation

The script allows for interrogation of the cast by the audience. This is, of necessity, improvised.

The rules are:

- Normally, only the murderer is allowed to lie but in this mystery, other characters may wish to cover their backs. They should be as truthful as possible, but may be economical with the truth and only lie if absolutely necessary.
- Responses should be based on the script. There is no information needed by the audience that is not in the script, although some information is made more specific in Act Three (after the interrogation).
- The audience may ask questions that go beyond the script. The cast may make up answers, provided that these do not have material influence on the plot! There is an option to answer "I don't think that's relevant" or "I'd prefer not to comment" or for Cleveleys to step in with "That's not a line of enquiry we are pursuing at this time."

The cast should prepare for and practice this interrogation, particularly dealing with difficult and irrelevant questions.

Creating (mutually agreed) back-stories for the characters may help, however these need to avoid details that might confuse the plot.

Production Notes

Setting

The stage is divided into three, each space capable of being lit independently, so that scene changes can be made quickly and smoothly by cross-fades. If lighting arrangements will not allow for this, the stage should be fully lit and scene changes denoted by linking music. Upstage centre is Mystic Myrtle's Fortune teller's arcade: there is a table covered with a cloth that goes right to the floor, and two chairs; Myrtle's table has on it, a teapot and cups, playing cards, and a crystal ball. An overhead sign reads 'Mystic Myrtle - Your future in her hands - Fortunes Told'. Downstage left is a small table and three chairs which serves both as Katie's Coffee Shop, and the Crown and Anchor Pub; a reversible sign may be used to denote the change of scene. Downstage right is a small sofa, chair and coffee table to denote Joyce's flat. The whole multiple set should be dressed appropriately, but without clutter, allowing a reasonable acting space mid-stage. Action in one scene should if necessary be allowed to spill over into the other areas. Do not allow the designated spaces to restrict the action. Assuming that apart from the minimum of constructed set, the play is performed against black drapes, entrances need not be practical doors: gaps in the drapes will suffice. Alternatively, if the stage permits, black-painted flats can be arranged stage left and right, panto-fashion.

Character Notes:

With the exception of Detective Inspector Cleveleys, each one is, in their own way, slightly barmy and should be played as such without overdoing it. Ages may be adjusted to suit the availability of cast members but the possibility of Joyce being pregnant should be plausible.

Mystic Myrtle

Prologue

(Lighting Effect 1)

(Cleveleys makes any necessary announcements, ad lib.)

Cleveleys: Good evening and welcome to *Mystic Myrtle's Murder Mystery*. I'm Detective Inspector Cleveleys, and it's my pleasure to guide you through the evening and instruct you as necessary to help you work out, as the play goes along, who kills who, how and why. More of that later. Does each team have an Accusation Sheet? Good. Then let me introduce you to Laura and Lionel...

(Lighting Effect 2)

(Cleveleys exits.)

Act One

Scene One - Tuesday afternoon 4.30 p.m.

(Lighting Effect 3)

(Enter Lionel and Laura stage left, walking arm in arm. They are strolling home. Laura has an identity badge pinned to her lapel. As they pass the entrance to Mystic Myrtle's, Laura holds back, tempted to go in. They stop.)

Lionel: You don't want to go in there.

Laura: Why not? Just a bit of fun.

Lionel: You don't want to be parting with good money to hear a load of nonsense.

Laura: I'm just curious. Our Joyce went once.

Lionel: Did she? Well she's daft enough.

Laura: Lionel! That's my sister you're talking about.

Lionel: I know. I went out with her before I went out with you. I *think* I got the best part of the bargain.

Laura: (Moved) Oh, Lionel...

Lionel: Just!

Laura: Oh Lionel! Now you've spoiled it... Am I going in or not?

Lionel: You got money to fritter?

Laura: We could *both* go in. See what's in store for us *both*.

Lionel: Yes – on the other hand...

Laura: What?

Lionel: You could go in there, and I could go round the corner to the Crown and Anchor. I'll see you in there when you've done.

Laura: Oh... right.

(Lionel departs. Myrtle enters her arcade, dressed as a fortune teller with elaborate robes and a turban. She sees Laura. She sometimes speaks as though her voice is coming from a strange and distant place, at other times completely down to earth.)

Myrtle: Come in, Laura. Come in.

Laura: How did you know that? I never said.

Myrtle: Mystic Myrtle *knows* these things.

Laura: Oh, yes. I suppose you would, I've never been to a fortune teller before.

Myrtle: No, dear, not a fortune teller. I'm a mystic. I read signs.

Laura: Oh.

Myrtle: Perhaps you'd like to sit down.

(Myrtle points to the chair and they sit down facing each other.)

Laura: Oh, yes, thank you. How much will it be?

Myrtle: Well that depends. Would you like a cup of tea?

Laura: Oh, that'd be nice. Are you going to read the tea leaves?

Myrtle: No, love. Tea bags put paid to that.

Laura: Oh, yes, I suppose they would. Actually, I'd sooner have coffee.

Myrtle: (Calling aggressively.) Hubert! Two coffees! (To Laura.) Black? White? Sugar?

Laura: Oh, white please. No sugar.

Myrtle: (Calling aggressively again.) One black, one white, no sugar. (To Laura.) Now then, I can read the cards, I can read the palm of your hand, I can look into the crystal ball. Which would you like?

Laura: You've not said how much.

Myrtle: No, no I didn't, did I? Well, let's see. Each one on its own is five pounds, but I can do all three, if you like, and that'll be twenty four pounds fifty. That's three for the price of two and a half.

Laura: Ooh. Yes. Sounds like a bargain. Go on then.

(Enter Hubert, shabbily dressed. He brings two mugs of coffee, and bangs them down on the table.)

Myrtle: I wish you wouldn't do that, Hubert. You've slopped it all over.

Hubert: (Sniffs loudly and sighs, looks at Laura.) She treating you right, is she?

Laura: (Bewildered) Erm... erm...

Hubert: She treating you right? Not rippin' you orf, is she?

Laura: Well, I don't know...

Myrtle: Hubert! Just let me get down to business with my client.

Hubert: (To Laura.) See how she orders me about? Tell me, if you were a feller, would you wanna be married to someone like her?

Laura: Erm... I... well... it's not for me to say.

Myrtle: (Fiercely) Get out Hubert!

(Hubert looks daggers at Myrtle and sidles out.)

Laura: He works for you, does he?

Myrtle: Work? Never done a day's work in his life.

Laura: Sorry. I shouldn't have asked. None of my business is it?

Myrtle: I should never have married him.

Laura: (Incredulously) He's your husband...?

Myrtle: (World-weary) Fifteen years.

Laura: Fifteen. Must be something keeps you together.

Myrtle: Wallpaper paste.

Laura: What?

Myrtle: Wallpaper paste. If it ain't wallpaper paste, I don't know what.

(Pause)

[The full script continues...]