

Sugar & Vice



A Murderous Victorian Melodrama
by

Patricia Gay

Customer Taster

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A Murderous Victorian Melodrama

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About the Murder Mystery pack

The full pack should provide everything you need to produce your very own murder mystery event.

It is intended to be used at a sit down meal where the principal characters will act out a set of events for the assembled guests.

The mystery is fully scripted performance; the cast have set lines to learn, which contain the information the audience will need to work out whodunit – if they are thinking clearly enough!

Structure

This murder mystery pack contains:-

The Organiser's Overview [*excerpt in this Taster*]

The Script (to be distributed to the individual characters before the event), including the denouement, in which the murderer is revealed [*excerpt in this Taster*]

Accusation sheets for the audience to enter their solutions.

Quiz sheets for the optional confectionary quiz.

This document includes:

- A Plot Overview [*excerpt in this Taster*]
- A Character Overview [*included in this Taster*]
- General Staging Notes on how best to plan and stage your murder mystery event [*excerpt in this Taster*]
- Props, Costume and Set Suggestions.
- An introduction to Assessing the Winners (including the Confectionary Quiz) [*included in this Taster*]

Plot Overview

The year is 1888 and in the house of a prosperous sweet manufacturer something stirs. The stirring is done by the Cook, Mrs Enid Baggins, who is putting the final touches to the secret recipe for the Davenport Dreadnought Drops. Sales of this new product are expected to enhance the fortunes of the Davenport family and bring social recognition to an upwardly mobile Rolo Davenport, head of the household.

But Mrs Baggins is found drowned in her own concoction and foul play is suspected. Inept Police Inspector Arthur Pratt is seconded from Scotland Yard to solve the case. He has reluctantly been called away from investigations into the Whitechapel murders, reportedly being carried out by the mysterious Jack the Ripper. Inspector Pratt moreover, is not alone in his enquiries. A lady by the name of Millie Fry, one of a new breed of lady journalists, turns up to look for a story. Far from being grateful for Miss Fry's assistance, Pratt regards her as an intrusive nuisance. However, Miss Fry uncovers some very interesting evidence indeed.

The family Matriarch, Great Aunt Edna Rowntree is a gambling and sherry addict. Her embittered and taciturn Lady's Companion, Miss Treadwell has another job to bolster her meagre salary – she works at the Turkish Delight Baths in Soho, and is otherwise known as Miss Walnut Whiplash. Rolo's daughter, the delightful Delphinia, is a fluffy, gossamer, tremulous little spendthrift, who plans to marry Rolo's impoverished delivery boy, Willie Mackintosh. Willie is going to get on, as he says many times. The family Butler, Frobisher, takes nocturnal walks to soothe his deep, deep depression but he keeps Edna well-supplied with her favourite liquor in ever-increasing quantities. Lastly, Delphinia's approved suitor, Lord St John Snearing, is not as rich as he maintains. Rolo Davenport himself is a go-getting, on-the-make, conniving, underhand, money-making, scoundrel. Apart from that he is quite the aspiring gentleman.

Against a background of intrigue, misunderstandings and devious climbing in through windows, it seems impossible that the case will be solved in order for Inspector Pratt to return to Whitechapel. Can the audience find the solution?

Character Overview

Detective Police Inspector Arthur Pratt of Scotland Yard – Egotistical but inept. Introduces the proceedings.

Willie Mackintosh – A young Northern lad employed as Rolo Davenport's Delivery Boy and in love with Delphinia Davenport.

Delphinia Davenport – Rolo Davenport's daughter. An ingénue, in love with Willie but a shopaholic airhead.

Rolo Davenport – Delphinia's Father and Sweet Manufacture – social climbing self-made man who will stop at nothing to increase his status and wealth.

Great Aunt Edna Rowntree – Matriarch of the Davenport Family – cranky, tyrannical, addicted to sherry and gambling.

Miss Treadwell – Edna's Paid Companion – sour, mean, moonlights as a dominatrix.

Frobisher – Davenport's Butler – obsequious, deferential, with mysterious dark habits.

Lord St John Snearing – Delphinia's approved suitor – aristocratic, snobbish, two-timing and secretly impoverished.

Millie Fry – Lady Reporter – go-getting new breed of professional female journalists.

General Staging Notes

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

Preparation

Actors can learn lines, in which case personal props can be carried, e.g. Delphinia's fan or St John's cane. If actors are reading from the script, they may find it easier to dispense with these props and find their stage positions before commencing their dialogue. Also if reading from the script, actors should familiarise themselves thoroughly with their roles. Rehearsals are of prime importance in any case.

Staging

This is a scripted Murder Mystery, intended to be performed throughout a set meal.

The audience is invited to consider the evidence after each stage of the meal and to arrive at their own conclusion as to the identity of the killer. Tables compete against each other with a prize for the winning table. There is also a built-in quiz to be used as a tie-break and/or as an activity with a prize.

This play is intended to be performed on a conventional stage or in alternative locations such as clubs or restaurants, although in the last two, there should be clearly defined acting and retiring areas.

The action is fast-moving with multiple entrances and exits; however it is not necessary for the stage to be clear before another set of performers enter.

Although two of the characters sing songs from *The Mikado*, this is for the characters' own amusement; the songs are not intended as production numbers and no music is required.

Song 1 – Scene 2 **Rolo and the Inspector**.

Song 2 – Scene 4 **Inspector**.

Both songs by WS Gilbert and Arthur Sullivan.

Costume

Ladies

Women of this era wore what became known as the 'upholstered' style, that is, more suited to furnishing a room than trimming a dress.

Delphinia Davenport – The only really fashionable lady in the play. An overly-decorated frilly dress, with a tight bodice. The skirt flat at the front with a large bustle. Long gloves if the dress is short-sleeved. Lots of jewellery and hair ornaments. Carries a fan, if possible.

Great Aunt Edna – Deep mourning dress trimmed with jet bugles and fringes. A smaller bustle than Delphinia's. A toque hat with feathers and veil at the back. Black lace gloves.

Miss Treadwell – Sombre grey attire. A long skirt, flat at the front, fuller at the back but with no bustle, short jacket, shirt with high collar, no ornamentation apart from a fob-watch.

Millie Fry – Long plain skirt, no bustle. Shirt with short fitted jacket and severe hat. Costume similar to, but more relaxed than Treadwell's and slightly dishevelled. Carries a notepad and pencil.

Men

Colour had almost disappeared from the male wardrobe, successful industrialists not dashing military men, were the ideal.

Inspector Pratt – Sherlock Holmes attire.

Willie Mackintosh – rough shirt and trousers, leather or sacking apron, cloth cap.

Rolo Davenport – the master in his own home – a morning coat (tail coat) or smoking jacket, dark trousers, shirt with upturned collar and cravat.

Lord St John Snearing – Dark suit with top hat and cloak. Carries a cane, if possible.

Frobisher – pinstripe trousers, tail coat or waistcoat, shirt and tie.

Suggested Timings

7.00 pm – Welcoming drinks. (Distribute Accusation Sheets)
7.30 pm – Introduction, Scenes 1 and 2.
8.00 pm – First Course.
8.30 pm – Scene 3.
8.45 pm – Dessert.
9.00 pm – Scene 4.
9.15 pm – Coffee. (Collect Accusation Sheets, Distribute Confectionary Quiz)
9.30 pm – Scene 5
9.45 pm – Announcement of winners and prize giving.

Assessing the Winners

The Murder Mystery

Distribute the Accusation Sheets at the start of the evening. (These include a reminder of who's who.)

Collect them (after a reminder to the audience to complete them) at the interval after Scene 4. (Someone needs to do this. If there isn't a back-stage crew, then it has to be the cast.)

Unless there is a back-stage team available to do the job, the accusations need to be checked by the cast who do not have much time for the activity!

The answers which identified the murderer correctly need to be assessed for the best summary of means, motive and opportunity.

In the event of a tie, then either draw the winner from a hat or use the Confectionary Quiz as a tie-breaker.

The Confectionary Quiz

Throughout the production, the names of sweets and their manufacturers (known in Britain - not necessarily familiar elsewhere) are embedded in the dialogue. There are fifty-two examples.

To avoid distracting the audience from the main event - the murder mystery - the Confectionary Quiz should not be announced, and quiz papers should not be distributed until the interval at the end of Scene 4. (This should be done as the Accusation Sheets are collected.)

You need to decide whether or not the quiz will be used as a tie breaker for the murder mystery, and whether additional prizes will be awarded for the most correct answers to the quiz (independent of the murder mystery).

The Confectionary Quiz continues throughout Scene 5.

The Quiz papers can then be swapped between tables for marking.

The answers will be read to the audience as part of Scene 5. (This could be accompanied by a chalkboard, flipchart or projected list, if such facilities are available.)

The Inspector can then ask if any table has scored the full 52 and work down until the highest scorer is identified.

Prizes

Prizes can range from a round of applause to something more tangible!

There is also the possibility of awarding booby prizes for the worst answers to the murder mystery and the lowest score in the confectionary quiz. (Wooden spoons are a good option.)

Sugar And Vice

Welcome and Introduction

(The action takes place in the conservatory of Rolo Davenport's home.)

(Inspector Pratt enters.)

Inspector: Good evening ladies and gentlemen and welcome to our murderous Victorian melodrama. The year is 1888 and we are at the impressive London home of the confectionary manufacturer, Mr Rolo Davenport. The body of his loyal cook, Mrs Enid Baggins, has been found in very unusual circumstances; drowned in a huge vat of boiling sweet mixture.

In order to solve this murder, I Detective Inspector Arthur Pratt of Scotland Yard, have been seconded from a far more important case. A serial killer is stalking the Capital's streets, bringing fear and alarm to the population. Parliament and the press are clamouring for an arrest to be made yesterday. And although my superiors were obviously loath to lose me, they were insistent that they send their very best to wrap up this case. However, I realise that they are in great need of my immense expertise, so I shall find the murderer of Mrs Baggins in next to no time and return in triumph to Whitechapel.

Now, Ladies and Gentlemen, I would ask you to consider the evidence which will emerge throughout the evening, and to come to your own conclusions as to the identity of the killer. In addition, we have included, for your delectation and delight, a quiz. Hidden in the dialogue are the names of sweets, types of sweets and sweet manufacturers and a prize will be given to the table which lists the most. The table which correctly guesses the murderer will be the overall winner with the quiz used as a tie-breaker, if necessary.

But let us begin by meeting the main suspects just before our murder is discovered. I would introduce them all, but as you will see, they are more than capable of doing that for themselves.

(The Inspector exits.)

Scene 1 – Introduction of Characters

(Willie Mackintosh and Delphinia Davenport enter.)

Willie: Psst, Delphinia! Over here, lass.

Delphinia: Willie! Why are you hiding behind the potted palm in our Victorian-style double-glazed deluxe conservatory?

Willie: I came to see thee, Delphinia, and to declare my love for thee.

Delphinia: But Willie, you are only a poor delivery boy, who works for my Father, Rolo Davenport, Chairman and owner of the family's prosperous and immensely rich confectionery firm.

Willie: Aye, I know lass, but I'll not always be scrapin' at bottom of barrel. I'm goin' to get on, I am.

Delphinia: Oh, well that's all right then. I shall marry you.

Willie: Oh Delphinia!

Delphinia: Oh Willie!

Willie: Just think; we could name first born son after thy Great Aunt.

Delphinia: What Edna?

Willie: No Rowntree.

Delphinia: Rowntree Mackintosh? Oh, Willie, that's so sweet.

(Rolo Davenport enters.)

Rolo: What is this; my daughter Delphinia, the protected progeny of a social-climbing dynasty, brought up to be a lady by being sent to expensive finishing schools, entertaining a gentleman without a chaperone?

Delphinia: No Papa, it's only Willie.

Rolo: Willie Mackintosh, my delivery boy? Who pushes a bike, laden with wares, up a steep cobbled hill to the irritating strains of The New World Symphony?

Willie: Aye Mr Rolo Davenport, I'm goin' to get on and I want to marry thy daughter.

Rolo: Begone, and never darken my door again.

Delphinia: But Papa, I am expecting (...)

Rolo: Begone and never (...)

Delphinia (...) a proposal of marriage from a man that I cannot abide; the dastardly Lord St John Snearing.

Rolo: He of the gigantic castle, massive moat, enormous lands?

Willie: And little tiny pr (...)

Rolo: Get out!

Willie: (...) privet 'edge.

(Willie exits.)

Delphinia: Papa, I wouldn't marry Lord St John for toffee. He has a filthy habit of eating all sorts.

Rolo: What sort of all sorts?

Delphinia: The liquorice ones, made by our rival, Mr Basset.

Rolo: The creep! But this I shall overlook as he is so noble. Delphinia, you will marry Lord St John and I will brook no argument. It is time that our industrious and thriving manufacturing enterprise was linked to the aristocracy.

Delphinia: But Papa (...)

Rolo: No more shall we be looked down upon for being in trade. Our family may have risen from the great unwashed, but we now have running water and indoor khazis and we shall take our rightful place at the apex of society.

Delphinia: Oh Papa, you're so 1870s!

(Delphinia exits sobbing.)

Rolo: Good grief; I can't have Delphinia marrying a common delivery boy called Willie.

(Great Aunt Edna and Miss Treadwell enter.)

Edna: I'm an old, old woman and I can't be doing with talk of Willies.

Rolo: Good morning, Great Aunt Edna Rowntree, cranky and eccentric matriarch of the innovative and upwardly mobile Davenport family, and how are you?

Edna: What's it got to do with you?

Treadwell: We're feisty Sir. We've had a bad night.

Edna: Thank you Treadmill (...)

Treadwell: Treadwell.

Edna: (...) I don't need your commentary on my fragile and feeble condition, even though you are my dowdy, low-paid and overworked companion with a sour and moody disposition.

Rolo: Oh come on Aunt Edna; I've got enough problems as it is.

Edna: Problems, problems? You don't know the meaning of the word. Why, when I was a girl the house burned down but were we downhearted?

Rolo: I don't know; were you?

Edna: No, we moved into the pigsty.

Treadwell: There, there Madam. We'll be alright, once we've had our glass of sherry.

Edna: Treadmill, go and fetch my shawl, my hands are cold.

Treadwell: And our feet? Are our feet all right? I'd hate to think of us getting chilblains on top of all our other ailments.

(Treadwell exits.)

Edna: Sometimes I think that woman hates me. Now, what were you saying?

Rolo: It's Delphinia; she won't marry Lord St John Snearing. Says she doesn't like him.

Edna: What's that got to do with anything? I didn't like any of my husbands.

Rolo: Yes, you have been widowed quite a lot, haven't you Auntie?

Edna: Where's Frostbite?

Rolo: Frobisher!

(Frobisher enters.)

Frobisher: Coming Sir.

Edna: My sherry, Frostbite; in a pint glass, if you please.

Frobisher: Yes Madam.

Rolo: Oh Frobisher, toadying and obsequious Butler, with sly and mysterious habits, before you go, how is Cook getting on with the recipe for our new product?

Frobisher: She's experimenting with the amount of Viagra to put in it, Sir.

(Frobisher exits.)

Edna: Not long now! Soon we shall be ready to unleash the Davenport Dreadnought Drops onto the market.

Rolo: The War Office will buy millions of them to issue to our gallant troops. That'll put lead in their rifles as they go off to subdue defenceless natives in far-off lands, rich in natural resources.

Edna: I hope nobody else gets their hands on that recipe; our fortune depends on it.

Rolo: Oh don't worry Auntie; Mrs Baggins keeps it all in her head, although I'd rather she kept it in her chest of drawers.

Edna: I'm an old, old woman. I can't be doing with talk of chests and drawers.

(Frobisher enters with sherry in a pint glass.)

Frobisher: Your sherry, Madam.

Edna: Thank you Frostbite. Now see me to my skateboard; I want to take a turn about the estate.

Frobisher: Yes Madam.

(Edna and Frobisher exit.)

[And the play continues...]