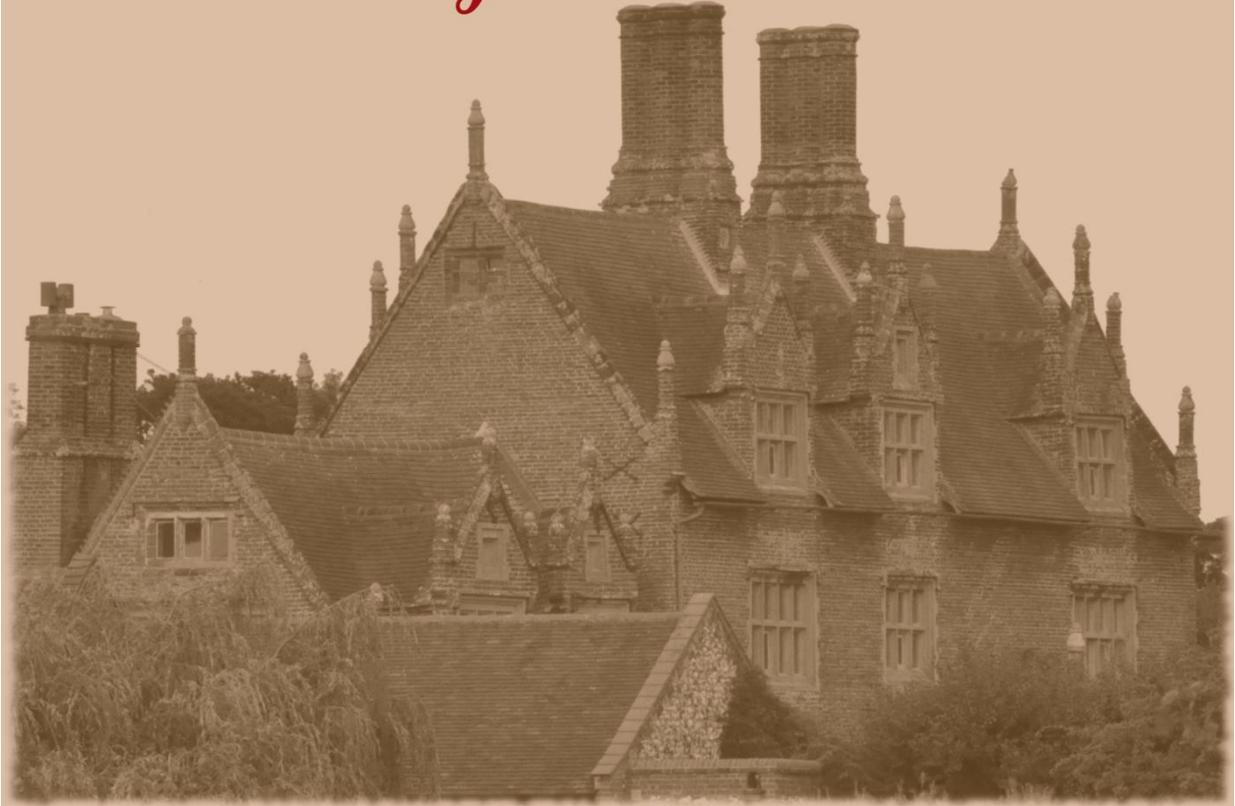


The Hadleigh Hall Inheritance



A Murder Mystery
by
Jos Biggs

Customer Taster

The Hadleigh Hall Inheritance

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Miss Frobisher is dying, and she has changed her will one final time, to benefit her live-in help and her dog, cutting off her family entirely. The will won't be legal until the signing tomorrow and, in advance of that event, the family has gathered.

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About the pack

The Hadleigh Hall Inheritance is a scripted murder mystery.

Characters may require some background character knowledge to enable the cast to answer questions which may be put to them by their audience. A full script and character attributes are provided.

The whole pack includes:

- General staging notes [*extracts included in this taster*]
- Three fully-scripted Acts [*extract from Act 1 included in this taster*]
- The 'Epilogue' script
- Props list
- Final solution information (if needed).

Casting & Rehearsal

Choose your performers and issue them with a copy of their pack - the character backgrounds, character descriptions and the script. 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...

Characters:

This play needs a cast of 10; 4 women, 2 men and a dog. The mathematics are correct – the Solicitor, the Police Inspector and the Officer can be equally well played by women, and the dog does not have to appear on stage, it's 'disembodied and computer-generated bark' could be sufficient!

Miss Frobisher, elderly, in poor health.

Sarah, her maid, naive and dim. At curtain up she is using a feather duster.

Barry, or Baz, Sarah's boyfriend. Fashionable but cheap clothes, shifty, untrustworthy manner.

Gregory Frobisher, Miss Frobisher's nephew. Heavy drinker, deeply in debt. Jumpy in manner.

Cora Frobisher, Miss Frobisher's niece. Flamboyant, given to exaggeration in manner and dress. Dresses far too young for her age.

Jan Frobisher, Miss Frobisher's niece. Dental receptionist. Clever and malicious.

Mr Jenkins, Miss Frobisher's solicitor. He carries a briefcase containing sundry papers and another Will. Could be played by a woman as Mrs Jenkins.

Grabham and Bailey, Inspector and Police Officer. Could be played by women.

Miss Frobisher's dog. Any dog of guaranteed behaviour. For convenience is called Rufus, but dog's own name can be used. It is not essential for the dog to actually appear on stage, but if wished it can have a couple of cameo appearances!

Effects:

There are no scene changes, and no extra props required other than the cup and saucer.

It is essential that the light can be dimmed in the performance area, and the sound effects of the stairs creaking and the dog barking are clearly audible and on cue!

This Murder Mystery can be performed in a theatre or in a dining room with a small space left clear for the cast, and will take approximately 45 minutes. All 3 Acts can run through with as much or as little of a break as is convenient.

Audience participation:

If there is to be audience participation, it should take place after Act 3, during the Epilogue, and is conducted by Inspector Grabham. Members of the audience are free to question all the cast members, who will be on stage.

A sheet of paper, and a something to write with, should be provided for the audience to make notes during or after the play and before the denouement - Epilogue.

If a meal is to be served in conjunction with the play, then the convenient time is after Act 3. This gives the audience time to think about whodunnit!

A quiz sheet requiring written answers could be handed out at this time...

The Hadleigh Hall Inheritance

Act 1

(The sitting room of Hadleigh Hall)

(Sarah is absentmindedly flicking a duster over the furniture and humming happily. Her attention is drawn to the window. She sees Barry outside, and goes excitedly over to the window. Throughout the scene Sarah keeps trying to embrace and kiss Barry, while he keeps moving about the stage to keep himself out of her way.)

Sarah: **(Looking through the window)** Barry! **(Gestures excitedly for him to come in.)**
(Barry enters, and she throws her arms around his neck as soon as he is on stage. While she is speaking he is trying to unwrap her from his neck.)

Sarah: Barry, Baz, I've got such news, ooh it's wonderful, you'll never guess, it's so marvellous, I'm so excited, it's wonderful, it's so exciting, it's so wonderful, it's the answer to all our problems, it's so wonderful, I'm so excited...

Barry: **(Succeeds in getting her off his neck. Holds her hands to keep her still and to prevent her from embracing him again.)** Yeah, OK, it's wonderful, I got that. What happened? Your sister win the Australian lottery and you're going to emigrate and live with her?

Sarah: **(Momentarily draws away from him)** Barry! I said wonderful – I couldn't possibly leave you and go to live in Australia, it would break my heart!

(Barry makes an oh-my-goodness face which she doesn't see)

Sarah: No, silly, I mean really, really, wonderful! We're going to be rich! Really rich!

Barry: **(With a note of caution)** What?

Sarah: Yes, rich! I'm going to inherit the Hall! All of it!

Barry: **(Incredulous)** What?

Sarah: Yes, and you know how you said we couldn't afford to get married - well, now we can!

Barry: **(Guardedly)** Exactly when do you plan to inherit the Hall? Won't Miss Frobisher have something to say about that?

Sarah: When she's dead, of course! Barry, you did mean it when you said you wanted to marry me, didn't you? You did mean it when you said that you loved me, but you couldn't marry me unless you could give me a life of luxury like what I deserve, didn't you?

Barry: Yes, yes, honey lips, of course I meant it. But, you know, Miss Frobisher could go on for years yet, and then there's her nephew and nieces to consider, they'll expect to inherit...

Sarah: No, silly! She's made a new Will, **(Waves her hand towards the table)** and I inherit the Hall and everything! I seen it, she showed it me. All I've got to do is **(Pause)**

Barry: **(Cautiously)** Yes?

Sarah: Look after Rufus, her dog, for the rest of his days! That won't be a problem, will it?

Barry: **(Abstractedly)** No... No, the dog won't be a problem.

Sarah: **(Making a determined grab for him and succeeding)** There, I thought you'd be alright with the dog. After all, he's a very nice dog, and good with children.

Barry: **(Trying to free himself)** What the hell have children got to do with it?

Sarah: **(Holding him tight)** Oh Baz, darling, that's the best bit - I'm pregnant! Won't it be wo...

Barry: **(Interrupting and breaking free)** What! Hells bells, Sarah, I thought... You said...

Sarah: Yes, I was taking the Pill... But a girl can always forget, you know. And they are only reliable if you take them every day. I thought you'd be pleased.

Barry: Yes, honey lips, of course, it's just a bit of a shock, that's all. Yes, yes, wonderful news... Are you sure?

(Off-stage Miss Frobisher calls "Sarah")

Barry: Oops, I'd better get lost! **(Rushes off the same way as he entered.)**

Sarah: Sometimes I wonder if he really does love me. Sometimes he seems a bit... Almost as if he's got someone else. Still, as soon as I get the inheritance and I'm rich he'll marry me, I'm sure he will. Perhaps Miss Frobisher will die tonight, you never know. **(Putting her hand on her stomach and speaking to it)** And you'll have a handsome Daddy and a properly married Mummy, won't you?

(Miss Frobisher calls again, "Sarah".)

Sarah: Coming.

(As Sarah leaves the stage on the side opposite the window Barry re-enters and begins to look for the Will. The dog barks once off-stage.)

Barry: Christ Almighty, the stupid cow! I'll have to do something - if my wife finds out about her, she'll kill me. **(Sees both Wills, picks them up and begins to read out loud, as if to himself.)** Ah! Last Will... I... Frobisher... Sound mind... Bequest and bequeath... **(Discards one Will)** No, that's the old Will, everything goes to the family. **(Begins to read the other Will)** All my worldly... Thank you God! It's not signed! Oh, thank you thank you God! The stupid bitch never noticed! **(Notices the diary and picks it up)** Christ, I haven't got time to waste, the solicitor is coming tomorrow to witness the signing of the new Will. As soon as it is signed I'm a dead man; if one of these women doesn't kill me, then the other one will. What shall I do? **(Picks up the Will)** Take it and destroy it? Nah, the solicitor will have a copy... No, there's nothing for it, the old girl will have to meet with an accident before tomorrow morning.

(A doorbell sounds off-stage and the dog barks.)

Barry: Dammit, I'm trapped! I'll have to scarp through the kitchen. **(He rushes off stage on the side opposite the window.)**

(Miss Frobisher enters with Sarah. She sits down wearily.)

Miss Frobisher: Show them in, will you please Sarah?

(Sarah leaves. The dog barks again. Sarah is heard telling him to shush, and there is muffled general conversation off-stage. Gregory, Cora and Jan enter, greet Miss Frobisher as is appropriate for their characters. They sit down.)

Cora: Aunty, darling, you look wonderful! **(Air kisses Miss Frobisher)**

Jan: No you don't. You look old and ill.

Gregory: How are you Aunt Agnes? Are you well?

Miss Frobisher: Thank you for asking, but I am not very well at the moment. I seem to be quite weak and easily tired these days, and Doctor Spencer is quite concerned for my health – which is why I have called you all to Hadleigh Hall this afternoon.

Gregory: Oh dear, Aunt Agnes – what does the doctor say? You are going to get better, aren't you? You're not going to... Er...

Jan: He says keep taking the tablets, that'll be fifty quid. Another fifty quid off our inheritance. He's leeching away at your money, and you'll end up penniless. Or possibly he'll step in with a nice overdose quite soon, just to hurry you on your way, so to speak.

Cora: Shush Jan. Aunty, take no notice of her – you look fantastic, don't listen to Jan's horrible talk. You're not going to die, of course not, you'll be with us for years yet.

Miss Frobisher: Why are you all talking about me dying? I don't think I'm quite ready for that yet, but the way you are talking I'm beginning to wonder if any of you **(Looks pointedly at Jan)** have plans to murder me.

(Gregory, Cora and Jan exchange uneasy glances.)

Miss Frobisher: There now, only joking! I'm sure none of you would even think such a terrible thing. After all, I am your only living relative, and we are all family, aren't we?

Cora: **(Looking round accusingly)** Nobody is talking about dying Aunty. We are all delighted to see you, even if you do look a bit pecky, but I'm sure a little fresh air and you will be fine. Take no notice of Jan, she's only joking.

Miss Frobisher: I've never known Jan joke before.

Jan: No, I wasn't joking. I'm not delighted to be here, and I reckon the only reason that we're here is to talk Wills. So let's get on with it.

Gregory: Sorry Aunt Agnes. I didn't mean... er... But I'm in a spot of bother at the moment, and I was just wondering if you could see your way to lending me a small, you know, just to tide me over...

Jan: Just to tide you over until your next hot tip horse comes in last. Whom do you owe this time? And how much?

Gregory: **(Goes over to the decanter and pours himself a drink)** Never you mind. **(Addressing Miss F)** May I have a drink, please?

(Miss Frobisher waves an assent.)

Gregory: I've had an unfortunate run of bad luck playing cards, socially, of course, with the Bogdanovich brothers. And of course, with them being foreign, it's a little awkward to explain my current circumstances. I have to meet them by the canal tomorrow evening. But I'm sure they will understand when I explain **(Speech tails off weakly)**

Jan: Ha! In hock to the Russian Mafia! Ha ha! Reckon you are in line for a new pair of boots in a fetching shade of concrete!

Cora: Jan!

Jan: You can Jan me as much as you like, but he's really done it this time! Bogdanovich brothers, eh? Don't fancy your chances, heh-heh!

(Gregory looks miserable and pours another drink. Cora jumps to her feet.)

Cora: Jan, be quiet. You are upsetting Aunty.

Jan: Aw, shut up Cora. I bet you've come along hoping for a handout as well. What do you want? **(Gets up and walks around her sister looking at her critically.)** About time you had a few more nips and tucks, isn't it? Things are beginning to sag a bit, aren't they?

Cora: I don't know what you are talking about! **(Pats her face)** I'm a little tired, that's all.

Jan: A little tired? Having trouble keeping up with the new toy boy, are you? I don't know why you bother – once they've seen you with your eyelashes off and your teeth out they soon scarper! Why don't you settle for a nice shortsighted pensioner?

Cora: Jason is only a couple of years younger than I am.

Jan: Maybe. **(Shakes her finger at her sister)** But how old did you tell him you were?

Miss Frobisher: Please, children, stop bickering. I'm not feeling at all well, and all this nasty talk is making me feel worse. Now there is something that you all should know, so will you all sit down and listen.

Cora: Certainly Aunty. See, Jan, you've upset Aunty. Shame on you.

Gregory: What do you expect, Cora? She's always been a nasty little minx. If there's trouble to be caused or money to be got, she's in the middle of it.

Cora: Gregory, you are so right. She would do anything that would allow her to give up her job as a dental receptionist and nurse. Dental receptionist! Imagine! You've got toothache, you have to go to the dentist, and just when you think it can't get any worse, there's Jan sitting at the reception desk like a vulture in a white coat!

Jan: Say what you like, but I'm sure **(Goes over to the table and picks up the new Will)** this is what we are here to discuss. **(Short pause as she reads the Will to herself. She is shocked, and uses as strong an expletive as the audience will stand. Turning to Miss F.) (****)** You miserable old crow, what have you done?

Miss Frobisher: Well, now you know.

Gregory: What is it?

Jan: The old bitch has changed her Will. She's left everything to that halfwit maid and that mangy mongrel.

Gregory: } **(Together)**

Cora: } What?

Gregory: No, Aunt Agnes, no! It's not true, it can't be. Oh my God! **(Snatches the Will from Jan)**

....

[Script continues in the full version. That's all you're getting by way of the taster!]