



# **The Knife Before Christmas**

*A Murder Mystery*

*by*

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## Overview

The Knife Before Christmas is a Murder Mystery designed to be played by 7 players (including the “narrator” who comperes the event). The actors perform two formal scenes, then the audience receive additional written clues and have the opportunity to interrogate the suspects and try to solve the mystery. A closing speech by a narrator reveals the guilty party.

## Structure

The full murder mystery pack contains:

- The **Organiser’s Overview** [*extract here*] including a rough guide on how to structure your event, notes on setting, and a props list.
- A **Full Script** [*extract here*], featuring Acts One and Two, to be performed by the actors, and the Solution, to be read out by the Narrator.
- Six pieces of **Evidence** for the audience to examine.
- **Accusation Sheets** for the audience to enter their solutions.

## Premise

Fry & Boyle is an old fashioned department store in Snogsbury, a quaint market town in Widdleshire. Founded in 1893 by Horace Fry and Jacob Boyle, it has always been in the Fry and Boyle families, and is now owned and run by Lance Boyle. Lance only took control a few weeks ago, but has already upset, annoyed or insulted most of the staff. He also has a drink problem, and, to make matters worse, he has decided that this year’s staff Christmas party is to be the last. However, he has reluctantly agreed to maintain a long tradition of Fry and Boyle and, for one last time, the boss will play Santa to a few selected staff members on Christmas Eve, but only because he has a few surprise presents of his own to give. It’s a miracle any of the staff are attending... unless one of them has an ulterior motive.

## Character Descriptions

**Lance Boyle:** The new Managing Director of Fry & Boyle department store, and a lecherous bully with a drinking problem.

**Dan Gleebitz:** The security officer and general handyman. His main duties are to unlock and lock the store, general maintenance, and to keep an eye on the premises when it’s closed. He usually works nights, and has just come on duty. He doesn’t know Lance is planning to sack him and use a dodgy security firm to do his job on the cheap... or does he?

**Henrietta Berger:** Lance’s personal assistant. Known to some as Harry, she worked for John Boyle, the previous boss, but she can’t stand Lance, and is in the process of applying for a new job. Unfortunately, Lance knows, and is planning to sack her as an act of spite.

**Anna Glypter:** A new sales assistant in Ladies’ Underwear, she has only worked at the store for two weeks, but has already been subjected to unwanted attention from Lance. He has told her that unless she ‘co-operates’, she won’t get past her probationary period.

**Nora Bone:** Head of Ladies’ Underwear, Nora has worked for the firm for years, and is Anna’s immediate boss. Nora suspects Lance intends to get rid of her and bring in a younger head of department.

**Ed Gaskitt:** Anna’s boyfriend, he drives the Fry and Boyle delivery van. He helped Anna get the job, but knows Lance is harassing her. Ed wants to know why Lance has refused to have his van serviced, as it’s well overdue.

**Narrator:** Guides the audience through the evening, and reveals the solution at the end.

## Guide on Staging to an Audience

It is worth considering the provision of a meal for the audience, and adjusting the ticket price accordingly.

**A suggested format for the evening could be as follows:**

**Introduction** by the Narrator, who gives an overview of the evening's entertainment.

**Act 1** is then performed – this takes around 10 minutes.

**If a two course meal is being provided**, the **first course** is served following Act 1, and the audience are given the first three written clues.

**Act 2** is then performed – this takes around 15 minutes, and is followed by the **second course**, and the audience are given the **remaining written clues**.

**If a one course meal is proposed or a buffet is provided** - the two Acts can be performed without an interval, as there is no break in the action.

**After the conclusion of the play**, the Narrator calls the suspects back on stage and invites the audience to put questions to them. This session can last as long as the Narrator chooses, assuming the questions keep coming.

An optimum period of twenty minutes is recommended.

The Narrator then invites the audience to complete an **Accusation Sheet**, naming the guilty party and providing supporting evidence drawn from the action on stage and/or the written clues

Allow twenty minutes for all the answers to be submitted.

As soon as all the answer sheets have been submitted, the cast/director/Narrator must quickly review them all, and select the best answer. There may also be a number of wildly inaccurate or humorous answers, and the Narrator may wish to keep a few of those aside to share later with the audience.

Once the winning answer has been selected, the **Narrator will ask all the suspects to return to the stage, and require the guilty party to reveal themselves**.

The Narrator then reads the **formal solution** to the audience – this will take around five minutes. After this, the Narrator can read out a selection of wrong or humorous answers, followed by a formal announcement of the winner.

If a two course meal is offered, allow **a total of two and a half hours** for the whole event, but this can be shortened by perhaps twenty to thirty minutes if the meal is only one course, or consists of a buffet.

# The Knife Before Christmas

[Script Extract]

## Act 1

**(Narrator stands front of curtain.)**

**Narrator:** Ladies and gentlemen, good evening and welcome to our murder mystery event, The Knife Before Christmas. In a few moments you will see a short, two act play, during which one of the characters is murdered. Your task is to discover the identity of the killer. You will be assisted in this by a number of written clues, which will be revealed to you later, and you will also have an opportunity to question the suspects. So without further ado, please give your best attention to the first act of The Knife Before Christmas.

**(The Narrator exits as the curtains open, and there is nobody onstage.)**

**(Dan enters, carrying a toolbag. He is wearing a polo shirt and chinos, and has a single black leather glove sticking out of a back pocket. He is whistling 'Jingle Bells' or another Christmas tune. He moves to Santa's chair, takes a screwdriver from his toolbag and appears to tighten something on the chair.)**

**(Enter Henrietta. She is dressed in smart business clothes and is carrying a handbag.)**

**Henrietta:** What are you doing?

**Dan:** Nothing.

**Henrietta:** Yes you are! Is there something wrong with Santa's chair?

**Dan:** No, I'm just making sure it's plugged into the mains.

**Henrietta:** Oh, very funny! Mind you, the way I'm feeling about the old scrote, I'd be more than happy to check the wiring for you.

**Dan:** So it's true, then?

**Henrietta:** What?

**Dan:** I heard a rumour you're applying for another job.

**Henrietta:** I might be.

**Dan:** Is it another PA job?

**Henrietta:** It might be.

**Dan:** Come on! You can tell me.

**Henrietta:** **(Looks round to check nobody is listening.)** Alright, yes I am. But keep it to yourself. I don't want it getting back to *him*.

**Dan:** He won't hear it from me. Anyway, where is everyone? It was supposed to start at six.

**Henrietta:** His Highness will be here any minute. He's just topping up in the King's Head.

**(Enter Lance. He is wearing a Father Christmas outfit. He is a little drunk.)**

**Lance:** What did you say?

**Henrietta:** Oh, I'm just popping up to ring Ed, and remind him about the party.

**Lance:** Well, get on with it, I haven't got all night. And round up the others while you're at it.

**(To Dan.)** You can help her. Then get back here. The sooner we get this over with, the better.

**Henrietta:** You're full of the Christmas spirit, aren't you?

**Lance:** And what's that supposed to mean?

**Henrietta:** Nothing. **(To Dan.)** Come on.

**(Exit Henrietta and Dan.)**

**(Lance slumps down in Santa's chair and takes out a hip flask.)**

**Lance:** **(Toasting himself.)** Merry Christmas, Lance! **(He takes a drink.)** And a Happy New Year! **(He takes another drink and puts the flask back in his pocket.)**

**(Enter Anna. She is smartly dressed in a white blouse, black skirt and high heels in the manner of a sales assistant, and is carrying a handbag. She stands as far away from Lance as possible.)**

**Anna:** Has the party started?

**Lance:** It has now! Come and make yourself comfortable. **(He pats his lap.)**

**Anna:** I'm fine over here, thank you.

**Lance:** Come on! It's Christmas.

**Anna:** No, thank you!

**Lance:** Nora's written your probation report. She says you're doing fine. But I disagree.

**Anna:** Why?

**Lance:** I told you why yesterday.

**Anna:** You mean after I refused to go into the lingerie storeroom and help you with what you called a special delivery?

**Lance:** Yes. I don't think you're a team player. And you don't have a future here unless you start to show a little more respect for senior management.

**Anna:** And by respect, you mean...?

**Lance:** Come over here and I'll whisper it in your ear.

**Anna:** I don't think so.

**Lance:** Well, in that case... **(He starts to get up, a little unsteadily.)**  
**(Enter Ed. He is wearing a polo shirt, chinos, and a sleeveless gilet.)**  
**(Lance sits down.)**

**Ed:** What's going on?

**Anna:** Nothing. It's okay.

**Ed:** **(To Lance.)** Have you been trying it on with my girlfriend again?

**Lance:** Be very careful what you say, Gaskitt. Assuming you want a decent reference, that is.

**Ed:** And what's that supposed to mean?

**Lance:** You'll find out soon enough.  
**(Enter Henrietta, Dan and Nora. Nora is dressed in a similar outfit to Anna, and is carrying a handbag and a small Christmas gift bag.)**

**Lance:** Ah good! We're all here. The party can start. **(He sees Nora's gift bag.)** Oh, is that for me? You shouldn't have bothered!

**Nora:** **(Putting the bag down behind the Christmas tree, so Lance can't see it.)** I didn't!

**Lance:** What's *your* problem?

**Nora:** To tell you the truth, *Mister* Boyle, I'm not really in the mood for a Christmas party.

**Lance:** Who mentioned Christmas?

**Nora:** But you said...

**Lance:** I said a party. And so it is. But it's got nothing to do with Christmas. **(He takes out his hip flask.)** It's a leaving party! So let's have a drink! **(He takes a drink.)**  
**(The rest all look puzzled, and look at each other.)**

**Henrietta:** Do you mean you're *leaving*?

**Lance:** Not me, you dozy tart! You!

**Henrietta:** Me?

**Lance:** Got it in one. You're fired!

**Henrietta:** What! Why? You can't just...

**Lance:** If you shut up for a minute, I'll tell you why!

**Nora:** Are you drunk?

**Lance:** No, you old boot! I'm just sick of the sight of her. In fact, I'm sick of the sight of *all* of you! So you're *all* fired! **(He takes another drink.)** Merry Christmas!

**Ed:** Well, if I'm being sacked, let's make it for a good reason. **(He takes his gilet off, drops it on the floor, clenches his fists and moves towards Lance.)**

**Anna:** **(Grabbing hold of Ed.)** No!

**Dan:** **(Also taking hold of Ed.)** Don't do it, mate!

**Ed:** **(Shrugging them off.)** Okay, okay! **(He picks up his gilet and puts it on.)**

**Henrietta:** You can at least have the decency to explain why I've got to go.

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*[Continued in the full script]*