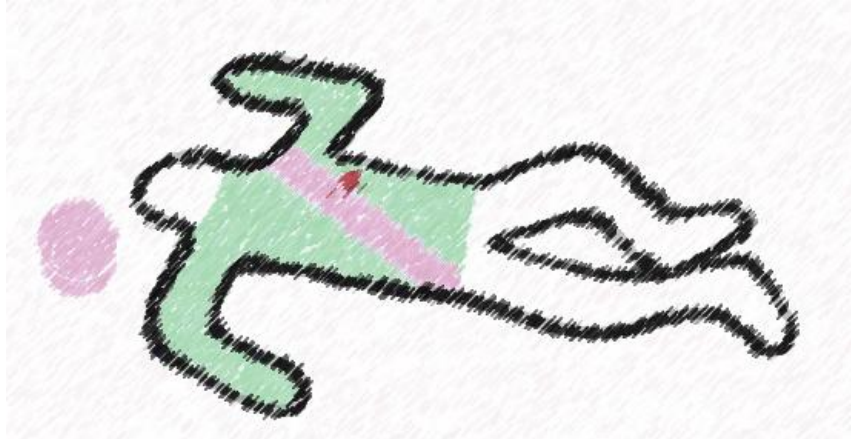


The Murder Stakes



A Dinner Theatre Murder Mystery

by

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The Murder Stakes

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Jim Carner is one of England's most successful racehorse trainers... and one of the richest. He lives in considerable luxury with his girlfriend in a beautiful old Georgian manor house in the Widdleshire countryside. It's no secret that he has made a will, in which there are very generous provisions for his girlfriend, his sister, and even his housekeeper. So do any of them have sufficient motive to hasten his death? You bet they do - it's a racing certainty!

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About the murder mystery pack

The Murder Stakes is a murder mystery designed to be played by seven actors. The actors perform two formal scenes, followed by the audience receiving additional written clues from which they try to solve the mystery. At the end of the play, a speech by the Narrator reveals the guilty party. A full script and character notes are provided as well as a pack of clues for each team within your audience.

This show is mostly a **scripted performance**. The cast have set lines to learn, which contain the clues and information the audience need to work out 'Whodunit'. There is also opportunity for the audience to question the suspects.

The cast of seven includes one narrator who will guide your audience and help organize the questioning sections of the evening. The Murder Stakes can be performed as a stage play, or as entertainment during a meal for the audience.

Structure

The full murder mystery pack contains:

- **The Organiser's Overview** (extract here)
- **The Script** (extract here)
- **A Set Of Clues**
 - extract from a newspaper report
 - a wine order
 - a forensics report
 - a coroner's report
 - a letter
- **The Accusation Sheet** - for the audience to enter their solutions.
- **The Solution** – a detailed explanation for the narrator to read out at the end of the play.

Organiser's Overview Contents

- Character List (included here)
- General Staging Notes (included here)
- Character Briefs (included here)
- Production Notes
 - Set Description
 - Props List
 - Required Sound Effects

Character List

Jim Carner: A wealthy man, who discovered yesterday that his live-in lover has been cheating on him.

Anna Conder: Jim's housekeeper, who knows he has left her a tidy sum in his will.

Anita Bush: Jim's girlfriend until yesterday, and also a beneficiary in his will: at least for the moment!

Carrie Oaky: Jim's sister, a one-time pop queen, hoping to make a comeback, if she can raise the money to fund it very soon.

Tom Bowler: Carrie's husband, and her greatest fan, who may be willing to take any risk to further Carrie's ambitions.

Drew Peacock: Jim's nearest neighbour, a keen baker, and a bit of a nerd by all accounts. But is he what he seems?

The Narrator: Introduces the players, and provides further evidence.

General Staging Notes

If performing this to an audience, it is worth considering the provision of a meal for the audience – and adjusting the ticket price accordingly.

After Acts 1 and 2 have concluded, the Narrator calls the entire cast (apart from the corpse) back on stage and invites the audience to put questions to them. This session can be as long as the Narrator wishes, assuming the questions keep coming. An optimum period of 20 minutes is recommended:

The Narrator then invites the audience to complete an accusation sheet, naming the guilty party, and providing supporting evidence drawn for the action on stage and/or the written clues. Allow 20 minutes for all the answers to be submitted.

Once all the answer sheets have been submitted, the cast/Director/Narrator must quickly review them all, and select the best one. There may also be a number of wildly inaccurate or amusing responses, and the Narrator may wish to keep those aside to share with the audience later.

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 will then read out the formal solution to the audience and, at his or her discretion, read out some of the less successful answers previously identified. This is followed by a formal announcement of the winner, who can be presented with a prize if desired (a bottle of Champagne is suggested).

A suggested format for the evening:

7:30 pm Introduction by the Narrator, who gives an overview of the evening's entertainment:

7:35 pm Act 1 is then performed

Option One: One Course Meal

7:45 pm First course – audience members are given the first two clues.

8:10 pm Act 2

8:20 pm Audience are given other three clues.

8:25 pm Audience interrogation

8:45 pm The narrator invites audience to complete accusation sheets

9:05 pm Solution announced and prize presented.

Option Two: Two Course Meal

7:45 pm First course – audience members are given the first two clues.

8:10 pm Act 2

8:20 pm Second course. Audience are given other three clues.

8:45 pm Audience interrogation

9:05 pm The narrator invites audience to complete accusation sheets

9:25 pm Solution announced and prize presented.

Character Briefs

Jim Carner: A successful and wealthy racehorse trainer, Jim lives in considerable comfort in a rambling old house deep in the Widdleshire countryside with his girlfriend and housekeeper. But Jim's world was shattered yesterday, when he discovered his girlfriend had been having an affair. There was an almighty row, Jim told her to pack her bags and leave the next morning. He also plans to change his will.

Anna Conder is Jim's long time housekeeper and cook, and generally keeps the place going. Jim has always appreciated her hard work and dedication, and has left her a considerable sum in his will. Enough to tempt her to bump him off? And is there any truth in the rumour that she's been on the fiddle with Jim's household accounts? She could be first past the post...

Anita Bush is Jim's live-in girlfriend. Or at least, she was – until yesterday, when Anna showed Jim a note seemingly from Anita's secret lover. Jim was furious, and told Anita to pack her bags and leave the very next day. And he made it quite clear he'd be changing his will as soon as possible, and *she* wouldn't be getting a penny. She has a powerful motive to stop him changing his will. So she must surely be the favourite...

Carrie Oaky is Jim's sister. In earlier days, she was what has been described in popular music circles as a One Hit Wonder, and enjoyed a few weeks of fame and glory in the '90s. Who can ever forget that smash-hit single 'I'm going gooey for your love'? Her career took a bit of a dip after that, but Carrie has been talked into making a comeback by a dubious showbiz agent – provided she can come up with a quick fifty grand to cover up-front expenses. If only Jim's inheritance was available to fund it. She's definitely among the starters, but can she stay the course?

Tom Bowler is Carrie's loyal, devoted husband. He didn't make a fuss when Carrie insisted on keeping her showbiz name when they got married, and is fully supporting her attempted comeback. But would he go so far as killing his brother-in-law? Or helping Carrie to do it? As far as The Murder Stakes go, Tom looks a bit lame, and may have to be pulled up, but you never know...

Drew Peacock is a near neighbour of Jim's, and a bit of a nerd by all accounts. But he has always been available to help Jim with those little jobs that need doing, such as cleaning out the gutters, and washing Jim's Bentley. Drew's also a wizard in the kitchen, and when he told Anita that he'd baked a special horse themed cake for Jim, she invited him round for coffee, and to present the cake. It's unfortunate that he's coming on the very morning after Anita's infidelity has come to light: or is it? Could Drew be a bit of a dark horse?

The Murder Stakes

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Characters

Jim Carner - A wealthy man

Anna Conder - Jim's housekeeper

Anita Bush - Jim's ex-girlfriend

Carrie Oaky - Jim's sister

Tom Bowler - Carrie's husband, and her greatest fan

Drew Peacock - Jim's nearest neighbour, a bit of a nerd.

Narrator

Act 1

(As the curtains open, Jim is seated at his desk, looking through his morning post. He is clearly distracted.)

(Enter Anna, carrying a mug of coffee. The mug bears either the initial J.)

Anna: (Cheerfully) Coffee time. (She puts it down on his desk.)

Jim: (Looks up.) Eh?

Anna: (Pointing at the mug.) Coffee!

Jim: Oh... thanks. (He stares blankly at the mug.)

Anna: Well drink it, now I've taken the trouble to make it.

Jim: Sorry. (He takes a sip.) It tastes bitter – have you put sugar in?

Anna: Of course. Don't I always?

Jim: Maybe I'm just *feeling* bitter this morning. (He continues to drink the coffee during the next few lines.)

Anna: She's not worth it, you know.

Jim: Eh? What?

Anna: Anita. She's not worth you losing any sleep over. You know that. I gave you the letter, and you read it for yourself.

Jim: I know. And she's got to go. (Pause) I wonder who wrote it?

Anna: Well, don't expect that scheming bitch to tell you.

Jim: Anna! She was the love of my life!

Anna: Balls!

Jim: Pardon?

Anna: Balls! There – I've said it again! Look, I know you thought the world of her. But let's face it, at the end of the day she turned out to be just another two faced bimbo who was cunning enough to get a rich bloke to look after her until it suited her to move on.

Jim: Oh don't hold back, Anna, speak your mind!

Anna: Well I'm sorry. But I've always been here for you, haven't I?

Jim: You have. For eighteen years.

Anna: I've seen a few women come and go. And I have to say you deserve better than *her*.

Jim: (Sighs) Maybe. But it'll take a while to get over her.

Anna: Of course it will. But you've got to move on. We are where we are, as they say. Just get rid of her and focus on the rest of your life.

Jim: Have you been watching the Jeremy Kyle Show?

Anna: No. But I know someone who has. (Pause) Now let's get on. Have you been through the post?

Jim: Sort of.

Anna: So you've seen that bill from Wines R Us? (She pulls it out from the pile of post.)

Jim: Do you read all my post?

Anna: Only the bills. How else would I keep you in order? It needs paying now, otherwise they won't let you have any more of that expensive claret, will they?

Jim: I could have sworn I paid that.

Anna: That was last month's, not this month's. Let's get it done now, and I'll drop a cheque in to them when I go to Waitrose after lunch.

Jim: Okay. **(He just sits there.)**

Anna: Come on! Write the cheque!

(Jim takes his chequebook and does as he's told.)

Jim: What's the date?

Anna: The twenty third. Hurry up, I haven't got all day.

Jim: Just remind me who the boss is here?

Anna: You know you love it when I get strict with you.

Jim: Of course. I forgot for a moment.

Anna: Now clip it to the bill.

(Jim does as he's told, with the stapler.)

Anna: Envelope! **(She points at the stationery on the desk.)**

Jim: Yes Miss! **(He puts the bill and cheque in the envelope, licks the envelope and seals it.)**

Anna: Just write Wines R Us on it, to remind me for later.

(Jim writes the name on the envelope and gives it to Anna.)

Anna: Well done! Now finish your coffee while I get ready for the visitors. They're due any minute.

Jim: Oh bugger! I'd forgotten all about them. **(He finishes the coffee, and gives the mug to Anna.)** Can't we put them off?

Anna: It's too late for that. But you could try to get rid of Jezebel before they arrive.

(She starts to exit.)

Jim: Don't call her that.

Anna: No, that's not fair, is it? How about Slapper?

Jim: That's enough, now. And make sure I ring my solicitor this afternoon. I need to make a new will as soon as I can.

(Anna is about to exit, when Anita enters. The two ladies look daggers at each other, then Anna exits.)

(Anita sits down.)

Jim: Have you packed?

Anita: Not yet. Look – can we talk about this?

Jim: No. I said all I wanted to say last night. You've been having it off behind my back, and I can't forgive you. **(Pause)** So who is it? **(Anita stays silent.)** The least you can do is tell me who he is. It is a he, I presume?

(Sound Effect - Doorbell.)

Anita: That's probably Carrie.

Jim: Good! I'll be able to tell her why you're going. Or would you prefer to tell her yourself?

Anita: We'll finish this conversation later.

Jim: It's already finished.

(Enter Anna, with Carrie and Tom.)

Anna: It's Happy Families time!

Carrie: What are you talking about?

Anna: **(Pointing at Anita.)** Ask *her!* I'll make the coffee.

(Exit Anna.)

Carrie: **(To Jim.)** There's an atmosphere in here you could cut with a knife. What's going on?

Anita: It really isn't any of your bloody business!

Tom: Now steady on, Anita. No need for bad language, is there?

Anita: And you can piss off as well!

Jim: **(To Anita.)** That's enough! This is my house, and you will *not* be abusive to my sister while you're in it! Do you understand?

Anita: **(Pause, as she controls herself.)** Yes!

Jim: Right! **(To Carrie.)** Unfortunately, you've arrived at a bad time. I found out yesterday that Anita's been deceiving me, and she's leaving soon.

Tom: Deceiving you? What do you mean?

Carrie: He means shagging someone else, dear.

Tom: Oh good heavens!

Carrie: **(To Anita.)** So who was it? Anyone special? Or just a random male who's richer than Jim?

Anita: That was a cheap shot, even for you!

Carrie: Well darling, you're the expert on cheap!

(Sound Effect - Doorbell.)

Jim: Oh no! That's all I need.

Carrie: Who is it?

Jim: It'll be Drew.

Carrie: What, Drew from next door? The one I've heard so much about?

Jim: Yeah. Anita invited him round this morning for coffee.

Anita: He's baked a special cake for Jim.

Tom: Does he know about... you know?

Jim: No. And he doesn't need to know. So let's eat his cake, tell him it's wonderful and I'll get rid of him.

(Enter Anna, followed by Drew, who is carrying a cake on a plate. He is using both hands to carry it. Drew speaks and acts like a nerd.)

Drew: Oh I say! Quite a party. Good job I've got a large one. Oh, I don't mean I've got a large... *thingy*, I mean I've baked a large cake. **(He laughs inanely.)**

Jim: Morning, Drew.

Anna: I'll get the coffee, and some plates. **(To Tom.)** You can give me a hand.

Tom: Oh... Right.

(Exit Tom and Anna.)

Drew: What a jolly gathering. **(To Jim.)** Are you having a party?

Jim: Not exactly. This is my sister Carrie.

Drew: How nice to meet you. **(He goes to shake her hand, but realises he's holding the plate.)** Umm... **(He looks round for somewhere to put it.)**

Jim: Just put it on the table, it'll be fine there.

(Drew puts the cake down and shakes Carrie's hand enthusiastically.)

Drew: Jim's always talking about you. **(He stares rudely at her, then the penny drops.)** I've got it! You're Carrie Oaky!

Carrie: That's me!

Drew: I was such a fan! I've got loads of your records.

Carrie: I only made one.

Drew: I know! But I loved it so much I bought lots of copies in case I broke the first one and couldn't get another. It went to Number One, didn't it?

Carrie: Yes.

Anita: Many, many years ago.

Jim: **(To Anita.)** Behave! I warned you!

(Enter Anna with plates, and a large cake knife. She puts the plates down next to the cake and, still holding the knife, swings round suddenly and very close to Anita, who flinches at the sight of the knife.)

Anna: **(Pretending to be sorry.)** Oh sorry!

Jim: Anna!

Anna: **(Still brandishing the knife.)** Cake, anyone?

Drew: I'll cut it.

Anna: Why you?

Drew: Because there's a special way of cutting it.

Anna: Really? **(She reluctantly gives him the knife.)**

(Drew begins to very carefully cut the cake.)

Jim: Where's the coffee?

Anna: Tom's bringing it. I couldn't carry everything.

Anita: What's he doing? Roasting the beans?

Drew: Oh, I shouldn't think he is, because...

Carrie: **(Interrupting.)** Drew... It was a joke.

Drew: Ah. I see.

(Enter Tom, carrying a tray with mugs, including Jim's special mug, milk and sugar. He puts it down on the table.)

Carrie: **(To Tom.)** You took your time.

Tom: Ah well, you see, I was in the kitchen, looking round as you do, and I saw this great tit.

Anita: There's a mirror in the kitchen, is there?

Tom: **(Oblivious)** No, I don't think so. You see, I'm a bit of a twitcher – a birdwatcher. I saw this marvellous male great tit out in the garden, so I watched him for a while.

[Continued in the full pack...]