



Customer Taster

Torturellini

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Torturellini

A Murder Mystery Dinner by E. C. Chapman

Structure

The full murder mystery pack contains:

- The Organiser's Overview [*excerpt here*], containing:
 - Guidance on Running your Murder Mystery Evening
 - Character Descriptions and Motives
 - A list of characters to assign to Guests (the audience)
 - Approximate Timetable for the evening
 - Guidance on 'Wedding Invitations'
 - Props List
 - Suggested Recipes
- The Full Script [*excerpt here*]
 - Acts 1 to 5
 - Four alternative versions of Act 5 with different murderers
- A document of Additional Materials for the organiser
 - Table Plan
 - Name Cards for the table
 - Wedding Menu template
 - Example Wedding Invitation
 - Record of Tickets Sold
- A Table Pack of documents to be handed to Guests
 - Six pieces of evidence to be studied
 - Witness Statement forms, to fill in their accusation

Running your Murder Mystery Evening

Introduction

'Torturellini' is a murder mystery dinner in five acts to be performed outdoors during the summer months. It is intended mainly as a (ticketed) fundraising event for up to twenty-one dinner guests (excluding actors), but could also be used for larger private parties or smaller corporate functions.

Props are minimal and there is virtually no stage management as there are no scene changes and all the visible action takes place around a table. A wet weather plan, to move the table indoors or under a marquee, should be considered ahead of time.

The Story

It is the summer of 1930. Chicago has become the capital of organised crime in America. Soaring immigration has seriously compromised law enforcement. Prohibition has backfired, giving the upper hand to the lawless mobs which now control the city.

Mafia boss Jimmy Mancini is hosting a wedding reception in his garden. His family, every member of his gangland elite, and all the wedding guests have axes to grind.

A murder takes place toward the end of the evening and FBI Agent Eliot Mess and his assistant Agent Ellen Highwater, working undercover as a wine waiter and a waitress, must quickly find the culprit before gang warfare ensues.

Actors

The script requires twelve actors in total, comprising six female and six male roles. Nine actors participate in the meal, two act as waiting staff, and one makes a brief appearance in Acts 2 and 5.

Jimmy and Pontella should be older than Abbazia and Alessandro, and Ellen younger than her boss Eliot.

Essential Requirements

The play requires a garden or outside space and the use of a kitchen. It is imperative that the dinner guests can hear the dialogue clearly. At an outdoor event, involving up to thirty people seated around a long table, sound may be an issue. The actors may therefore need to wear microphones and so some technical support may be required.

Costumes

Costumes should reflect the era. Wedding dress is preferable for the bride and groom. The dinner guests are expected to dress and act according to their borrowed personas and stay in character throughout the event.

Prizes

At the end of the evening, the guests are invited to solve the murder (and win a prize). A Witness Statement form is provided for this purpose.

Table Plan

The Table Plan is designed to facilitate the script and the guests seated in a way which encourages lively debate – for example, the optimist is placed opposite the pessimist.

The name cards provided as part of this pack (in the Additional Materials document) should be printed off in card, guillotined, folded in half and placed on the table in accordance with the table plan.

NB: P. St Love (the gatecrasher) does not have a name card and sits at the very end of the table (opposite Jimmy).

Video

A humorous video or some kind of picture slideshow needs to be prepared in advance to introduce the dinner guests to the host characters, as Eliot talks about them, in Act 1. A large screen and some kind of projection equipment is therefore required.

The Interrogation

There are essentially nine murder suspects, all of whom have a motive but only seven of whom generate an opportunity (i.e. go into the kitchen) during the meal. The written clues provided, expanding on character information given in the script, should narrow this down to six.

The script includes four alternative endings for serial events, all of which are intended to be equally credible. A certain amount of guesswork is therefore inevitable in picking the murderer. While it is important the murderer is not made too obvious, the dinner guests should feel they have been given a fair chance to guess correctly. The interrogation plays an important part in this. While essentially an improvised session, the actors should familiarise themselves with the written clues and anticipate what type of questions they are likely to be asked. For example: Why was Abbazia buying rat poison for the nuns? Whichever ending is used, during the interrogation, the actors will have an opportunity to influence the outcome by throwing in their own clues or red herrings as they see fit.

The pens (given out by Ellen in Act 4) could be personalised if the budget allows and the organiser wants to give participants a memento of their evening.

Food and Drink

An outside caterer could be used, but this will obviously increase production costs and therefore ticket prices. Alternatively, family, friends or non-acting group members may wish to help out.

The script assumes an aperitif on arrival, a three-course meal (ideally with an Italian influence), a toast (essential to the plot) and a choice of tea or coffee. The menu could be humorous to add to the light-hearted theme.

An example of this, together with some simple recipe suggestions, is included. These recipes have all been tested, found to work well, and at least two of the three courses suggested can be prepared ahead of time and kept in the fridge or freezer. To add authenticity, any helpers or waiting staff should dress appropriately.

American Spelling

While the script is written in British English, for authenticity, the handouts include American spellings.

The Characters

Overview

Jimmy 'The Shooter' Mancini – patriarch.

Pontella Mancini – Jimmy's wife.

Abbazia Rossini – the bride, Jimmy and Pontella's daughter.

Alessandro Rossini – the groom.

Kevvy 'The Heavy' Bartonetti – Jimmy's loyal bodyguard.

Mickey 'The Wheels' Di Angelo – Jimmy's driver.

Paolo 'The Diamond' Currero – Jimmy's trusted accountant.

Loretta Currero – Paolo's wayward twin.

Erica Mancini – Jimmy's embittered sister.

Carina 'The Night Nurse' Benposto – the only female 'boss' in Chicago, Erica's best friend.

Eliot Mess – FBI Special Agent, undercover as a wine waiter.

Ellen Highwater – Eliot's assistant, undercover as a waitress.

The Guests

All pertinent information should be printed or written on each ticket/invitation so the guests know how they should dress and act to fully bring their characters to life.

Female (9)

001 – ANNA GLYPTA

American, Pontella's interior designer, flamboyant.

Grievance: She once allowed Jimmy and his friends to use her luxury condo in Palm Beach. They trashed the place and threatened to give her "the mother of all makeovers" if she ever attempted to sue.

002 – NOVELLA DAY

English, friend of the bride, chick lit writer, girly.

Grievance: Her publisher dropped her after the mob 'badmouthed' her in the press. She now makes a pittance as the agony aunt of a second-rate women's magazine.

003 – LETTA MEETHAY

American, Abbazia's horse-riding instructor, bloke-ish.

Grievance: A staunch supporter of animal rights, she strongly suspects the mob of doping their horses ahead of each race.

004 – FRAN G. PANNI

Italian, friend of the family, celebrity chef, gushing.

Grievance: Reviews of Fran's latest cookery book, *If Life Gives You Lemons* turned sour when the family publicly described her recipe for 'spatchcocked chicken en croute with confit pigeon heart and wild boar foam in a soused blueberry and lime reduction' as over-complicated.

005 – SUE YURASOV

Russian, Jimmy's lawyer, humourless.

Grievance: She was illegally smuggled into the country by the mob. She has secretly made a deal with the FBI. They will grant her US citizenship if she informs. She knows this arrangement puts her life in danger.

006 – PAM PERDOUX

American, friend of the family, nightclub singer, sultry.

Grievance: During a brief but passionate affair, and the promise of Hollywood stardom that never materialised.

007 – SISSIE-ANN MEETWELL

American (Deep South), Jimmy's distant cousin, playwright, intense.

Sissie-Ann's off-off-off-Broadway production, *A Streetcar Named Desirée*, crashed after the first performance when mob sponsorship was switched to a rival show.

008 – PAULA BLOOD

FBI agent posing undercover as a distant relative.

009 – LAURA NORDER

FBI agent posing undercover as a distant relative.

Male (9)

010 – HEINZ ZWEIDREI

Swiss, Jimmy's former accountant, investment banker, has a nervous tick he struggles to control.

Grievance: An accounting error caused Heinz to be exiled whilst his family remained Stateside. Heinz was never allowed back into the country (until today).

011 – HUGH BRICE

English, Abbazia's lifestyle coach, arrogant.

Grievance: When his aristocratic family fell on hard times and had to sell the stately home, Hugh moved to America to avoid public humiliation. He has been unable to rise in a Chicago society where an underclass rules and would love to see the mobsters brought to book.

012 – SHOMAR PALMA DE SILVA

New Yorker, Business Associate of Jimmy, Corrupt Mayor, Crass.

Grievance: Compromising photographs of Shomar locked in a mob safe.

013 – SHAW TORLONG

American, Pontella's hairdresser, camp.

Grievance: A law suit after failed colouring caused Shaw to lay off most of his staff. He is now seriously overworked and struggling to keep his business in the black.

014 – PER MATTAN

Swedish, Abbazia's personal fitness trainer, tanned.

Grievance: When Per damaged his humerus using a faulty dumbbell in the Mancinis' gymnasium, compensation was denied. With other work hard to find, Per was forced to move from his penthouse apartment with a view over Lake Michigan to a dismal basement bedsit with a view over the bins.

015 – EVAN JELLICOE

American, friend of the bride, born again Christian and charity worker, hopelessly optimistic.

Grievance: Despite his usually optimistic outlook, Evan fears for Abbazia's spiritual wellbeing and believes that she will be corrupted by her family and their associates.

016 – HANS ZUPPE

FBI agent posing undercover as a distant relative.

017 – HANK CUFFEM

FBI agent posing undercover as a distant relative.

018 – SMITH N. WESTERN

FBI agent posing undercover as a distant relative.

Unisex (3)

019 – PAT A. CAKE

American, owner of Pontella’s favourite bakery, hopelessly pessimistic.

Grievance: Pat and son (also Pat) run a shop on the notorious west side of the city (Pat A Cake, Pat A Cake). The mob demands cash in return for ‘security’ and his price keeps going up. The business is under severe strain and Pat fears for their future.

020 – ROBIN M. BLIND

American, friend of Pontella, realtor (estate agent), insincere.

Grievance: Robin sold his house to the family but the price was cut in half when they discovered the term ‘open concept’ meant a wall had fallen down, forcing Robin to forego commission.

021 – P. ST LOVE

American, unemployed free spirit, cool dude.

Ahead of his/her time, P believes that only love will save the world; has gate-crashed the wedding reception, and has no idea who anyone is.

Additional unisex invitations (6)

To be used only if ticket sales show a significant disparity between the sexes.

022 – CHRIS ELLIS

American, friend of the bride, lepidopterist, nerdy.

Grievance: The study of moths and butterflies is his/her sole passion in life. Chris is never without his/her net and has even taken it to the wedding reception. Chris knows the mob are over-fond of insecticide.

023 – ISA FRONT

American, friend of the family, security advisor, extremely right-wing.

Grievance: Ex-military and a committed Republican, Isa has done the odd job for the mob in the past but has mixed feelings. He/she would secretly love to see justice served - one way or another.

024 – JAN N. TONIC (PRONOUNCED TONICH)

Czech, owner of Jimmy’s favourite bar, a drunk.

Grievance: When Jimmy and his friends started to frequent his/her bar, Jan’s long-term partner walked out. Jan is too weak and too greedy to turn down mob business and has sought consolation in the bottle ever since.

025 – VAL KERRY

Irish, friend of the family, failed opera singer, bitter.

Grievance: When the influential mayor of Chicago came to see Val perform in Wagner’s fifteen-hour epic ‘The Ring Cycle’, Val thought his/her career had at last taken off. He/she later found out that the family had taken the Mayor to Jan’s bar before Val even got onstage and secretly blames them for his/her continued lack of success.

026 – YULE LOVETT

American, friend of the family, theatrical agent, very persuasive.

Grievance: Yule became estranged from his/her actress daughter when the off-off-off-Broadway play in which she was starring was forced to close after the first night when the mob shifted sponsorship to a rival production.

027 – I. R. ESTEW

FBI agent posing undercover as a distant relative.

Approximate Timetable

(Timings will also be partly determined by numbers attending and how quickly the dinner guests can be served.)

Guests arrive (nibbles and aperitifs are served) – 20 minutes.

Guests are seated at the table – 5 minutes.

Act 1 (during which the Wedding Party arrive) – 10 minutes.

Starter is served – 15 minutes.

Act 2 – 5 minutes.

Main course is served – 15 minutes.

Act 3 – 5 minutes.

Dessert is served – 15 minutes.

Act 4 (includes the toast) – 5 minutes.

Break for guests to peruse written clues (coffee/tea can be served here) – 10 minutes.

Act 5 (includes interrogation) – 15 minutes.

(Approx. 120 minutes in total.)

The Wedding Invitations

For fundraising purposes, invitations should double as tickets and take the form of serialised wedding invitations allocated as per the guest list and sealed inside envelopes, so the person buying cannot choose their character. In order for the seller(s) to easily differentiate between the different types of invitation, these need to be marked M(ale), F(emale) or U(nisex) and the relevant serial number written on the outside of the envelope. The seller(s) will have to ask the buyer who the tickets are for in order for the identities to match up. The Unisex invitations should only be sold after all the Male or all the Female invitations have gone. This need not be too onerous a task as a maximum of twenty-one tickets would be on sale for each dinner. Additional unisex characters are included in case there is found to be significant disparity between the sexes. If invitations are sold online, this process should be easier.

For private dinner parties and corporate events, it is assumed that invitations will be sent to a group of known individuals, with the opportunity to match the character identities to the personalities and acting capabilities of friends or colleagues.

Whatever the function, each invitation should give the dinner guest all the information they need, namely:

- The date of the event (put the year as 1930 or omit it altogether).
- The time and venue.
- Some background to the story.
- Their character identity.
- The reason for their grievance.

Invitees to private dinner parties or corporate functions will need to be asked to RSVP in order for the host or organiser to keep a record of who will attend.

A dinner menu should be enclosed with the invitation and contact details given for those with special dietary needs (this may not be considered necessary by private dinner hosts and corporate event organisers).

An example is included in the Additional Materials document.

If guests are expected to bring their own alcohol, this also needs to be made clear.

Torturellini

Script Extract

Act 1

Starter

(Chicago, Illinois. Summer 1930. A garden. A long table is covered with a red and white chequered cloth set for up to thirty people. Matching napkins and name cards mark the places. Fairy lights and bunting are spread around the trees. A large projector screen has been set up where everyone can see it from the table. The wedding party is not present when the audience arrive in their roles as guests. Eliot Mess, Ellen Highwater and other waiting staff hand out aperitifs and the guests are left to mingle until all have arrived. Actors should speak with American accents. Eliot's script could be attached to a clipboard.)

Eliot: Welcome everyone. May I ask you to take your places at the table please? You'll see your name card if you look around. That's right, help each other.

(When all the guests are seated.)

Eliot: The wedding party is running a little late, which gives me an opportunity to introduce myself. My name is Eliot Mess, FBI Special Agent. Tonight, I'm working undercover as your wine waiter. This charming lady is my assistant, Agent Ellen Highwater. She'll be helping to serve you this evening. We've run background checks on all of you. I know, it's hard to take, but that's what keeps America safe, and keeping America safe is my job and one I'm proud to do. So, let's cut to the chase. For one reason or another, you all hate the Mancinis and wanna see them brought to justice as much as we do. Let me tell you, a more immoral, corrupt and conniving group of individuals it would be hard to find. I know it's been a while for some of you, so let me refresh your memories.

(Run video or picture show, which displays the characters as Eliot lists them.)

Eliot: *Jimmy*, aka Jimmy 'The Shooter' Mancini. Head of the family and involved in most of the organised crime that goes down in this city.

His wife, *Pontella*. She's broken a few hearts in her day, and quite how she ended up with Jimmy I'll never know.

Abbazia, the bride and only child of the happy couple. *Abbazia* is *extremely* religious.

Alessandro Rossini, the groom. A nice enough kid, don't get me wrong, but remember, this evening, all is not what it seems. Now *Alessandro* has taken quite a gamble by marrying into this family, for reasons you'll find out later.

Kevvy, aka *Kevvy 'The Heavy' Bartonetti*, Jimmy's loyal bodyguard. I guess you could call *Kevvy* a bear of little brain, but I'll give him credit for being streetwise at least. In his line of work, he wouldn't still be breathing if he didn't know how to take care of himself, and those around him.

The *Currero* twins, *Paolo* and *Loretta*. *Paolo*, aka 'The Diamond' on account of his particular expertise in fencing stolen jewels, which you sometimes see hanging around his sister's neck.

Paolo is Jimmy's accountant and most trusted friend, although you'd never guess it if you listen to 'em talk, which hopefully you will. Now you've all heard of the term *inventive accounting*, right?

Well, let me tell you, this guy's the Thomas Edison of that world. He don't so much cook the books as turn 'em into cordon bleu recipes. You know what I mean? And *Loretta*. Ah, *Loretta*. She was quite the socialite in her time but she made a fatal mistake early on. She fell for Jimmy. Trouble

was, Jimmy didn't fall for her. Best way to describe *Loretta*? Let's just say she's damaged goods.

Erica Mancini, Jimmy's sister. There's no two ways about it. *Erica* hates Jimmy. I won't go into detail. Suffice to say, she has her reasons.

Carina *'The Night Nurse' Benposto*. Now she's a piece o' work. What a broad. If I was into criminals, I don't mind telling you, I'd be into Carina. Why the Night Nurse? Well, she's been known to help out in operations after hours. She's had a colourful past. Started off in the theatre. She can hold a tune pretty good and her future could have been bright, but it seems criminality runs in families. When her brothers met with an untimely bullet (**pointing to the centre of his forehead**) right about here, Carina had to take over the family business. She's a powerful woman... oh... and Erica's best friend. Now, trust me, you don't wanna get on the wrong side of *that* sisterhood.

And finally, *Mickey Di Angelo*, aka *Mickey The Wheels*, Jimmy's driver. Now it's hard not to like Mickey and, as far as I can tell, he don't do much other than drive Jimmy around, sometimes *really* fast. He's got a past though, a history. He likes the horses a little too much. Let's just say that takes most of his pocket money. I guess desperate people sometimes gotta do desperate things to survive and Mickey's an example of that.

So, there you have it. Your hosts for this evening. Now, we'll be busy so I'm relying on you to be my eyes and ears. Make sure you don't miss a thing. We need to put these folks away. With the city expanding as fast as it is, and all the new people flooding in, well I don't mind levelling with you. Law enforcement is pretty stretched and what these people do for a living... is just *un-American*. Agent Highwater, synchronise watches.

Ellen: Yes Sir. [*Exact time using 24-hour clock*] precisely.

Eliot: Okay. Here they come. Now remember, eyes and ears. Oh, and one other thing... *act natural*.

(Eliot and Ellen set about their duties. The wedding party arrives and takes its places at the table.)

Jimmy: Well, ain't you a sight for sore eyes? Welcome one and all. Apologies for being late. The pictures went on a little longer than planned. (**Looks disapprovingly at Pontella.**) Hopefully you've been entertained and given a little something to break the ice? Anyway, like I was sayin', welcome all o' yous to the weddin' o' the year, at least for me it is. Waddy know? My beautiful daughter and only child Abbazia went and growed up while I wasn't lookin' and got herself wed to Alessandro here. How the heck did that happen? Stand up, Abbazia, so everyone can see how beautiful you look.

(Abbazia reluctantly stands. She doesn't look happy.)

Jimmy: And smile, goddammit! This is your big day, remember? The most special day in a girl's life. Ain't that right, Pontella?

Pontella: Don't pick on her, Jimmy.

Jimmy: Show the people your lovely teeth, Abbazia. Tell me I didn't pay for all that expensive dental work for nothin'.

(Abbazia forces a rictus grin and remains standing.)

Jimmy: And Alessandro, the splendid young man to my left. My shiny new son-in-law. Take a bow.

(Alessandro nervously stands, nods towards the guests, and awkwardly remains standing.)

Jimmy: Pity his own family couldn't make it...

Pontella: Don't pick on him, Jimmy.

Alessandro: They wanted to come, Jimmy. They just...

Jimmy: What was it? Don't tell me. Lemme guess. Ya Ma had to wash her hair maybe? It's your Pa's bridge game? Or maybe it's just their big bath night, huh? Which is it? Waddy say?

Alessandro: (**Embarrassed.**) Well...

Jimmy: I'll tell you what it was, ladies and gents. I'm not one for keepin' secrets. The truth is they can't stand me.

Pontella: Jimmy, that's enough.

Jimmy: The truth is, they wouldn't give me their last doughnut even after they sucked all the jelly outta the middle.

(Kevvy sniggers.)

Pontella: Jimmy! You're embarrassing the boy.

Jimmy: Here's the thing. Our families have been at war for years, and this weddin', *my* peace offerin', was meant to bring us all together. Trouble is, it's not welcomed by them.

Pontella: That's enough now, Jimmy.

Jimmy: Well, that's families for ya. Thank God you can choose your friends, huh, people?
Least that's what I say.

Kevvy: **(Laughs.)** Oh. That's a good one, Jimmy.

Jimmy: Kevvy.

Kevvy: Yeah, Jimmy?

Jimmy: Shut up.

Kevvy: Yes, Jimmy.

Abbazia: Can we sit down now?

Jimmy: Sure you can. I wouldn't want my only daughter to be uncomfortable on my account.
The fact I spent most o' my life being uncomfortable on her account is neither here nor there...
(Abbazia and Alessandro glare hatefully at Jimmy and then sit down.)

Jimmy: Tell me, Pontella, have I been such a bad husband, huh? Such an appalling father?
Tell me. I can take it. Where did I go wrong?

Abbazia: You know perfectly well! This is no better than an arranged marriage. Sorry,
Alessandro, you're as much a victim as I am. **(To Jimmy.)** You knew I never wanted this. You
knew I had a higher calling. Ever since I was a little girl, I only ever wanted one thing – to dedicate
myself to the Church, to become a bride of Christ, to help the poor and the downtrodden.

Jimmy: So start a charity.

Abbazia: You refuse to understand!

Jimmy: Your allowance would feed a small country...

Abbazia: Sometimes I swear I don't know you. Ma and me, we're a little alike, but you?
You're a complete stranger, always have been, as far back as I can remember. We couldn't be more
different, you and me. Hell, it feels like you're from another damned planet!

Jimmy: Now that's no way for a religious person to talk...

Abbazia: You've ruined my life. I was never supposed to marry Alessandro, nor any man. You
made me do it, and I hate you for it. I'll always hate you. You're despicable!

(Abbazia bursts into tears and runs into the kitchen.)

Pontella: **(Standing.)** You just couldn't let it go, could ya, Jimmy? Now d'ya see what
happens when ya keep pushin' and pushin' against somethin' weaker than yourself? Finally it
breaks.

Paolo: **(Raising a glass.)** I'll drink to that.
(Pontella runs into the kitchen.)

Jimmy: **(Laughing, to Alessandro.)** Ah, women. You gotta love 'em. Can't live with 'em.
Can't live without 'em.

Kevvy: You think you went too far there, Jimmy? Pontella looked pretty upset.

Jimmy: **(Unconcerned.)** Nah. That's just her natural expression. Like mother like daughter.
They share the same miserable gene.

(Kevvy hurries off to the kitchen.)

Alessandro: Maybe I should go too?

Jimmy: Let 'em be. Your place is beside *me* now. 'sides, they'll come back when they're
hungry. Meantime, everyone should just relax, drink some wine and have a good time. It's a
celebration, for Pete's sake!

(Alessandro heads off to the kitchen. Jimmy cups his hands around his mouth and yells after him.)

Jimmy: TELL 'EM TO BRING OUT THE ENTRÉE... BEFORE THERE'S A NEW POPE!
(Break for Starter. Abbazia and Pontella return after a few minutes. Kevvy and Alessandro return a few minutes after them. Act 2 begins when the plates have been cleared.)

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[Continued in the full script.]