



A Dinner Theatre Murder Mystery
by
Gareth Humphreys



Published by Lazy Bee Scripts

Customer Taster

An Inspector Falls

Copyright 2024 by Gareth Humphreys

COPYRIGHT REGULATIONS

This murder mystery is protected under the Copyright laws of the British Commonwealth of Nations and all countries of the Universal Copyright Conventions.

All rights, including Stage, Motion Picture, Video, Radio, Television, Public Reading, and Translations into Foreign Languages, are strictly reserved.

No part of this publication may lawfully be transmitted, stored in a retrieval system, or reproduced in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, manuscript, typescript, recording, including video, or otherwise, without prior consent of Lazy Bee Scripts.

A licence, obtainable only from Lazy Bee Scripts, must be acquired for every public or private performance of a script published by Lazy Bee Scripts and the appropriate royalty paid. If extra performances are arranged after a licence has already been issued, it is essential that Lazy Bee Scripts are informed immediately and the appropriate royalty paid, whereupon an amended licence will be issued.

The availability of this script does not imply that it is automatically available for private or public performance, and Lazy Bee Scripts reserve the right to refuse to issue a licence to perform, for whatever reason. Therefore a licence should always be obtained before any rehearsals start.

Localisation and updating of this script is permitted, particularly where indicated in the script. Major revisions to the text may not be made without the permission of Lazy Bee Scripts.

The name of the author must be displayed on all forms of advertising and promotional material, including posters, programmes and hand bills.

Photocopying of this murder mystery constitutes an infringement of copyright unless consent has been obtained from Lazy Bee Scripts and an appropriate fee has been paid.

FAILURE TO ABIDE BY ALL THE ABOVE REGULATIONS, CONSTITUTES AN INFRINGEMENT OF THE COPYRIGHT LAWS OF GREAT BRITAIN.

Published by Lazy Bee Scripts

Cover images: AXP Photography via Pexels / TheUjulala via Pixabay

An Inspector Falls

Organiser's Overview

About The Murder Mystery Pack

An Inspector Falls is a scripted murder mystery set in a country manor in 1936, with approximately 1 hour 5 minutes of scripted dialogue. The audience, divided into teams or tables, are invited to ask the suspects questions and are then given time to solve the mystery before the guilty party is revealed. The murder evening is designed to be performed by eight actors (3M, 5F) in a venue with a stage or suitable acting area.

Structure

This murder mystery pack contains:

- The Organiser's Overview [*Excerpt Here*];
- The Script [*Excerpt Here*];
- Accusation Sheets, to be filled in by the audience.

The Organiser's Overview

- Author's Introduction;
- Character Descriptions;
- Guidance for Staging your Murder Mystery Evening:
 - Setting;
 - Effects;
 - Suggested Timings;
 - Audience Interrogation;
 - Props List.

Author's Introduction

This play is intended both as an entertaining murder mystery in its own right and as an affectionate parody of J.B.Priestley's masterpiece (by someone who has taught the play to students for several years). Some of the characters have certain similarities with the characters from that play, and there are many similar plot devices.

Unlike *An Inspector Calls*, however, there is no intended political message in this play, and the denouement of the story is meant for comedic effect and not for dramatic impact. Our detective – Inspector Bouchard – is much more Inspector Clouseau than he is Inspector Goole.

It is entirely possible for an attentive audience member to work out the identity of the murderer, the reason that their alibi must be false, and the secret that they wished to conceal, by the end of Act One. This is by design. In my humble opinion, a good murder mystery should be like a crossword clue: tricky enough to pose a challenge, but not impossible to solve. This also means that, should the director wish to skip the audience interrogation of the cast, the audience can still work out the solution.

I have always had a soft spot for Doctor Watson. He is always flummoxed and humiliated by Holmes' deductive leaps, and I feel sorry for him. I often wish that he would get a chance to solve a mystery of his own, and perhaps even bring Sherlock Holmes down a peg or two. This explains WPC Penny Entwistle.

Character Descriptions

Lt. Col. Albert Braddock

A man of around fifty, he is reserved and polite, but can be prickly and defensive. Once a man of great physical courage on the battlefield, he has a tremendous fear of his private affairs being made public. He should be well-groomed and sharply if conservatively dressed, and may smoke a pipe.

He was a regular officer in the Hampshire Regiment before the war, although he was seen as unpromising by his seniors and unlikely to be promoted beyond the rank of Lieutenant. It was at the Battle of the Marne in 1914 that all this changed. Despite being cut off from the rest of his company, he and his sergeant, Harrison Hutchinson (who died in the action), held their machine-gun post against repeated German attacks over several hours until they could be relieved. This led to him being awarded the Distinguished Service Order and sent home to England with a shrapnel wound in his belly.

After this, Lieutenant Braddock's career changed dramatically. He married Victoria Lewes, a wealthy heiress. He transferred to a new regiment, recovered from his wounds, and went back to the Western Front. His superiors found him a highly competent soldier, and he was aggressively promoted, finishing the war a Lieutenant Colonel. Back at home, he settled down to run his family's estates in Berkshire, and to enjoy a prosperous life, free from war.

Victoria Braddock

Albert Braddock's wife of twenty-two years. A lady in her late forties, she is every inch the product of a Late Victorian upper-class upbringing – prim, decorous, highly self-disciplined and class-conscious. She is the sole heir of the Lewes family's vast fortune, and combined with her husband's estates, has managed to carve out a reasonably successful place for herself in English society – she even has some modest influence at court. She guards this success jealously. She is hopeful that one day, one of her grandchildren, or great-grandchildren, might even be able to marry into royalty.

James Braddock

James is the eldest son of Albert and Victoria Braddock. He is around twenty and fancies himself quite the dandy. He is spoiled, decadent, and a womaniser. He does have some superficial charm, and has managed to attract the attentions of the society beauty Azalea Astor. Through much string-pulling and arm-twisting on his mother's part, the two are now engaged. In reality, of course, he constantly feels the shame of failing to live up to his father's reputation.

Eleanor Braddock

Eleanor is around sixteen years old. She is studious, idealistic, and rebellious. She feels ashamed of her family's privilege, and longs for a world in which she can be seen to succeed based on her own merits and not on her family connections. A deeply committed feminist and socialist, she wishes to be the first woman to study at the prestigious St. Jude's School in Oxfordshire, and finally escape from her mother's disapproval. Notwithstanding all of the above, she does enjoy the comforts that her life of privilege affords, and is self-consciously aware of this contradiction.

Azalea Astor

Azalea is in her early twenties, beautiful, and very much a society 'it' girl. She loves high fashion, swing music, parties, the Lindy Hop, and expensive food and drink. She is most famous in London society for a short-lived affair she had with a Dutch prince. Her family name is prestigious (her great aunt is a Member of Parliament), of course, but Azalea is not one to rest on her laurels – behind the facade of decadence lurks a fierce intelligence and a ruthless streak. She has her eyes on the Braddock family fortune, and if she needs to wrap that idiot James around her little finger to get it, then so be it.

Detective Chief Inspector Louis Bouchard

He is middle-aged, self-confident to the point of arrogance, loves the sound of his own voice, and is convinced that he is the greatest detective in the world. In reality, he is nothing of the sort.

W.P.C. Penny Entwistle

Bouchard's long-suffering assistant and partner – the Hastings to his Poirot, the Watson to his Holmes, the Lewis to his Morse, etc. etc. She is from working class stock, down-to-earth, unflappable, observant, and intuitive. It comes as no surprise that she is the real detective of the pair, but being a humble sort of person, she doesn't mind if Bouchard gets the credit. Besides, like Columbo, she enjoys being underestimated.

Sarah Brown

A young servant in the Braddock house.

Newsreader

A BBC radio newsreader (voice from offstage).

Guidance for Staging your Murder Mystery Evening

Setting

The play is set in 1936, as can be seen from references to historical events in the script. The setting is a country manor somewhere in Berkshire. The action takes place entirely in the sitting room, and there should be no need for scene changes. The set needs to include a wireless set, a telephone, and a fireplace, upon which is a framed photograph of a young sergeant from the First World War. It should also include enough chairs for most of the cast to be able to sit down.

Effects

At one point, the script calls for an abrupt change of mood signalled by music or lighting. As there is a wireless set on stage, perhaps the director could decide that there should be appropriate diegetic background music playing for most, if not all, of the action.

At another point, the script calls for a flashback scene, which can be in the form of a silent film, projected onto the wall of the stage. If this is not possible, then perhaps a similar effect can be achieved with sound effects.

Suggested Timings

The below timings are suggested for an event that runs for two hours, but this may vary depending on factors such as audience size, type of meal served, and whether you want to include the optional audience interrogation.

Act 1 – 50 mins.

Scripted action.

Interval – 25 mins.

A chance for the audience to discuss the event and decide on questions to ask the suspects. Food can be served.

Audience Interrogation – 10 mins.

Unscripted session. Led by the detectives, the actors improvise responses to the audience's questions/comments.

Interval – 15 mins.

The audience consider the suspects and fill in their accusation sheets, which are then collected (by the investigators). Dessert can be served. During dessert (or, if not serving food, during the interval), the cast assess the accusation sheets and decide on a winning team.

Act 2 – 15 mins.

Scripted action, in which the killer is revealed.

Conclusion – 5 mins.

The winner is announced and prizes awarded.

Audience Interrogation

During the interval, there should be a time for audience members to interrogate the characters, after which the teams should make their final submissions as to who they think the killer is. We recommend that the interrogation is allowed to go on for no more than ten minutes.

It should be stressed again that the play is written such that the audience interrogation is not essential to working out the mystery, and if the director wishes so, it can be omitted.

The details of the interrogation are, of course, up to the discretion of the director, but it is recommended that the suspect characters take centre stage, and the Inspector and WPC Entwistle direct the questioning. They can keep an eye on time, ensure that no one team asks too many questions, and generally direct the proceedings. All of this should be in character.

As a general rule, only the murderer is allowed to tell an outright lie; however, the other characters can be as vague as you like, and if the actors feel that their characters would not wish for their darkest secrets to be known, then they can simply refuse to answer the question – most of these characters are aristocrats and would resent being asked impertinent questions by riff-raff in any case. The actors should prepare for this by knowing their characters well, and by practising extensively during rehearsal.

An Inspector Falls

[Script Extract]

Act One

(The sitting room of the Braddock family home on their estate in Berkshire. It's early evening, and there is a comfortable, relaxed atmosphere; perhaps a fire in the hearth. Eleanor, James and Azalea are onstage. Sarah, the servant, brings around glasses of red wine. James flirts with her as she does. Azalea is unimpressed. Eleanor stands near the wireless set, listening intently to it.)

Newsreader: (Voiceover, fades up.) With a statement in the House of Commons. Earlier today, German military forces crossed the river Rhine and occupied positions in the demilitarised area on its west bank, in contravention of the terms of the Treaty of Versailles. It is understood that Herr Hitler has issued diplomatic communiques to both the British and French ambassadors, stating that it was the French who were first to violate the Treaty of Locarno by virtue of having signed their recent agreement with the Soviet Union. And now the cricket...

Azalea: (Interrupting.) Oh, do turn that awful thing off, Ellie!

Eleanor: (Turns off the wireless. Crossing to her seat.) Don't either of you care? It's truly dreadful news. There may be another war.

Azalea: (Acidly.) Hardly the sort of thing I want to be thinking about this evening.

James: If you ask me dear, it's all just hype. There's no chance of Germany starting another silly scrap. This Hitler chap never seemed so bad to me. Anyway, everyone knows that it's the Reds who we've really got to watch out for, don't we, Ellie?

(Eleanor rolls her eyes and lets out an exasperated sigh.)

James: Of course, Ellie loves the Commies. Her and Uncle Joe Stalin are like that. (Mimes with his fingers.)

(Eleanor sticks her tongue out at James.)

Azalea: Do we really have to talk about politics, my love? It's all so very boring.

(Enter Victoria and Albert.)

James: Ah, it's the Colonel! Come on, Father, give us the benefit of your wisdom. What do you think about the situation in Germany?

Albert: I think...

(Victoria silences him with a look.)

Albert: It's terribly rude to talk politics on an occasion such as this.

Victoria: Indeed. We are gathered for a much more pleasant purpose this evening, are we not, James?

Azalea: Yes, we are. I'm sure you have something really quite important to say, don't you, my dearest?

James: (Looks around.) I suppose you're right – no time like the present. (Gets down on one knee, brings out an engagement ring.) Azalea Astor, will you make a poor rascal more happy than he has any right to be, and be my wife?

Azalea: Oh, of course I will, my darling.

(Warm applause from everyone at this. James puts the ring on Azalea's finger, and the two embrace. Victoria rings the service bell. Enter Sarah.)

Victoria: Sarah? The champagne please.

Sarah: Yes, ma'am. (Curtsies, goes to exit.)

Albert: Where's Anna? Wasn't she supposed to be on duty tonight?

Sarah: She didn't turn up, if you please, sir. (Exits.)

Albert: That's damned odd, now.

Victoria: Awful girl. I really think that we ought to let her go, Albert.

Albert: Not a chance, Victoria! (To Azalea.) Welcome to the Braddock family, my dear!

(They embrace awkwardly, and Azalea repeats the same pleasantries with Eleanor and Victoria. Sarah arrives with a tray, distributes flutes of champagne, and exits. All raise their glasses, give a chorus of 'cheers', and take a sip.)

James: I'd like to say a few words, if you wouldn't mind.

Albert: If your fiancée has no objections...

Azalea: Okay, but please don't go on, James.

James: Wouldn't dream of it. Well, as you all know, I am the black sheep of the family.
(Eleanor snorts derisively. An awkward moment.)

Victoria: Oh, don't be so ridiculous, James.

James: It's not so ridiculous. After all, it's not easy growing up in the shadow of a man such as Father.
(Albert starts to object.)

James: **(Continues over him.)** Please, old boy, just this once, let me say it out loud. Everyone knows what you did in the war, and what you went through for old Blighty. And I know that, if I'm honest, I have struggled to live up to that reputation. Indeed, I've acquired something of a different sort of reputation, much to the chagrin of Mumsy. I must have been like that prince chap in that ghastly Shakespeare play...

Eleanor: Prince Hal. Henry the Fourth Part One.

James: Took the words right out of my mouth, sister dear. But my years of being a wild rover are at an end. And with my darling Azalea at my side, I promise that I will be the heir that the Braddock family needs.

Victoria: Hear, hear. Now, perhaps the gentlemen would like to retire to the smoking room for a brandy? I'm sure that you have much to discuss, and please do allow us ladies a little moment to ourselves.

Albert: Quite so, my dear.
(Exit Albert and James.)

Victoria: Now, my wonderful girls. How splendid that the two of you are going to be sisters!
(Eleanor and Azalea look at one another and smile simperingly. An awkward pause. Sarah enters with a wine bottle.)

Azalea: Oh, thank you... **(Can't remember Sarah's name.)**
(Sarah refills Azalea's glass of wine.)

Victoria: No, thank you, Sarah, you know red brings me out in a rash.
(Sarah curtsies and exits.)

Victoria: Azalea, darling, would you mind if I spoke to Ellie alone for a moment?

Azalea: Of course... Mother!
(Azalea and Victoria embrace. Azalea exits.)

Victoria: **(Makes sure the coast is clear.)** Now, now, Miss Eleanor Braddock. Do you know of what matter we are about to discuss?

Eleanor: Mother! I'm not twelve any longer! Please don't speak to me like I'm a child.

Victoria: Well, if you are so very mature, my dearest, why is it that I heard you arguing with the servants earlier? **(Pause.)** Well?

Eleanor: It was the maid, Anna Hutchinson.

Victoria: Yes, it was. Doesn't it violate your socialist principles to talk to girls of that class in such a way?

Eleanor: At least I have principles!

Victoria: That was uncalled for and you know it. Now, please tell me what it was about.

Eleanor: Oh, it wasn't really about anything!

Victoria: But that's the third time this week! What has poor Anna ever done to you?

Eleanor: Nothing! I know! But you must have seen the way father treats her?

Victoria: **(In an affected voice.)** What on earth do you mean?

Eleanor: He dotes on her! She is the girl who can do no wrong! He even talks about her. Anna this, Anna that. He practically treats her as one of the family! Well, if she is so wonderful, why doesn't he just adopt her and let her be his perfect daughter?

Victoria: Listen, Eleanor. Your father cares about you very deeply. And despite what you may think, your mother is not as blind as all that! You needn't worry about Anna Hutchinson. The situation is being taken care of. **(Exits, triumphantly.)**

Eleanor: **(Through gritted teeth.)** Yes. It is. **(Exits.)**
(Enter James, swilling a brandy glass. Enter Azalea with mock stealth.)

Azalea: Psst!

(James looks around and is delighted to see Azalea. The two embrace clandestinely.)

Azalea: Where is your father?

James: He's gone to answer the door. Beggars, no doubt. **(Archly.)** We are all alone.

Azalea: **(Takes hold of James by the lapel or tie. Seductively.)** Are we, indeed? Well then... **(Changes manner suddenly, grips him threateningly.)** You can tell me just exactly what you were doing earlier with that little strumpet!

James: Nothing, my love, really!

Azalea: You truly are a dreadful liar. Who is she? In case you should deny it, I should say that I've even seen the sappy little love note she wrote to you.

James: No-one! No-one at all!

Azalea: You are absolutely correct. No-one. She's just a servant girl. I am Azalea Astor, and now I am your fiancée. You do know that I once walked out with a Dutch prince!

James: Truly, my love, I don't know what you are talking about.

Azalea: Well, it hardly matters. I know what sort of Don Juan you think you've been up until now, but if I see you having another fumble with a maid, then I might be less than discreet with certain... secrets. Is that quite clearly understood?

(James begins to respond suavely.)

Azalea: Is it?

James: Perfectly, my honey dove.

Azalea: Wonderful, my precious lamb. **(Releases him.)**

(James practically falls to his knees.)

Azalea: I am perfectly capable of taking matters into my own hands, you know. Perhaps you should get to know that fact. We have our whole lives ahead of us.

(Azalea exits. James gets to his feet, steadies himself, finds his glass of brandy, and drains it. He begins to pour himself another.)

James: I'm no slouch either, in that department. **(Drains second brandy, exits.)**

(Enter Albert, followed by Sarah.)

Sarah: Please, sir, I've tried to send them away, but he just insisted that he must talk to you.

Albert: And you are sure it's the police?

(Sarah nods.)

Albert: Very well then, send him in.

(Sarah exits. A moment later, Inspector Bouchard and WPC Entwistle enter.)

Bouchard: Thank you for agreeing to talk to us, Lieutenant Colonel Braddock.

Albert: It's no hardship. I and my family have nothing whatsoever to hide.

Bouchard: Of course. **(Takes off hat and coat.)** Please allow me to introduce myself. I am Detective Chief Inspector Louis Bouchard, of Scotland Yard.

Albert: **(Raises eyebrows.)** Bouchard of the Yard, eh? But I would ask you to please make this quick, Inspector. We are somewhat in the middle of a rather important family celebration.

Entwistle: Oh yes, sir? Please do tell us.

Albert: I beg your pardon?

Bouchard: Do please excuse my assistant, WPC Penny Entwistle, my dear Colonel. She is prone to speak bluntly, although I find that she is an invaluable support when it comes to the science of detection. She is the Watson to my Holmes, the Hastings to my Poirot, the... erm...

Entwistle: Panza to your Don Quixote, sir?

Bouchard: Precisely! ...

[Continued in the full murder mystery pack.]