

DEADLY ENCOUNTER

A Dinner Theatre Murder Mystery
by
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Customer Taster

Deadly Encounter

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About The Pack

Deadly Encounter is a scripted murder mystery set among a fledgling theatre group in 1949. There are 4 female and 2 male roles, plus a compere is needed to run the evening. There are approximately 45 minutes of scripted dialogue, divided into two acts, with lots of laughs along the way. This is followed by the opportunity for the audience to interrogate the suspects and work out whodunnit, before the killer is revealed. There is also a short quiz, which can optionally be included in the evening.

Structure

This murder mystery pack contains:

- The Organiser's Overview [*Extract Here*];
- The Script [*Extract Here*];
- Character Bios;
- Accusation and Quiz Sheets, to be filled in by the audience.

The Organiser's Overview

The document contains:

- Introduction to Deadly Encounter:
 - Synopsis
 - Characters
- Guidance for Staging your Murder Mystery Evening:
 - Outline of the Evening
 - The Killer
 - Rehearsals
 - Suggested Timings
 - Other Notes
- Production Notes:
 - Set
 - Costumes
 - Props List
- Quiz Answers

Introduction

Synopsis

Bunty Parlington-Dormer wants to create a 'theatre venture' in her small village, but before the set has been finished or rehearsals have even begun, tensions run high, and someone is bumped off!

Characters

Bunty Parlington-Dormer has moved from London to marry Robert, wanting financial security now she is getting older. After years of gadding around claiming to be an actress, conning men out of money, and petty crime, life with Robert in the countryside is proving dull in comparison. She has started a drama group as an excuse to spend time away from her husband and to entertain herself. She also fancies herself as a proper actress, now she is respectable, so plans to play all the leading parts.

Nancy 'Tuppence' Briar is an old friend of Bunty's who used to live with her in London. She has come to the village at Bunty's invitation, believing that Bunty has opened a theatre bankrolled by Robert and that they will both be starring in productions. She is also hoping to escape her life of petty crime and to find a rich husband. Bunty and Nancy are very good at putting on airs and graces in front of others, but these slip when they are on their own. They aren't young women, and they are not naïve – they've been around a bit and have had to live on their wits.

Robert Parlington-Dormer is Bunty's husband, and is older than her. Not the brightest of men, being somewhat aristocratically inbred, it is only now dawning on him that Bunty may have married him for his money and that she isn't quite what she appears to be.

Betty Buckland was previously housekeeper to Robert, a role that gave her considerable status locally. But she has recently lost her job, due to being suspected of theft when Bunty's jewellery started going missing. She must now work several cleaning jobs to make ends meet; this includes responsibility for the village hall, where she is always hanging around hoping to secure the evidence that will clear her name. She is vaguely related to most of the villagers, or at least claims to be.

'Young' George is a simple soul who has somehow found himself being a member of the group without wanting to be, and Bunty won't allow him to leave. He is made responsible for any stage work that needs doing, by virtue of the fact he is the only man in the group, and now a bullying Bunty is insisting he acts as well.

Joan Smith has turned up to audition for the drama group's first production, at the request of Betty, who wants her to help gather evidence to clear her name. She is desperate to become an actress and fanatical about the movies, so always quotes lines from her favourite films. But, a jealous Bunty will not cast her appropriately, and then she discovers Bunty's jewellery hidden in plain sight – perhaps she can turn this to her advantage?

Guidance for Staging your Murder Mystery Evening

Outline of the Evening

This murder mystery works well in a venue such as a village hall or school hall, where the audience can sit in small teams around tables, cabaret style. Food and drink may be served, perhaps a vintage tea to fit in with the theme. It's a great way to raise charity funds.

At the beginning of the event, the compere welcomes the audience and introduces the evening. This is then followed by the performance of the scripted sections – Act One, an interval, then Act Two.

There is then another break, during which the audience are given time to think of questions to put to the suspects.

The suspects are brought onstage and stay in character while being interviewed by the audience, with the compere hosting this section and facilitating questions.

There is then another interval, during which the compere hands out accusation sheets, and the audience are asked to fill them in, saying who they think the killer is, how they did it, and what the motive was. The quiz can also be given to the audience at this stage.

At the end of this interval, the compere should collect in the sheets. The cast and any other helpers should then mark the audience's answer sheets. You may want to award a prize for the closest accusation, or use the quiz answers in the event of a tie-break.

There is then a denouement, in which the compere invites the killer to confess. The company then announce the winner(s) and present prizes.

The Killer

The mystery has been written so any of the suspects could be the killer. As outlined in the Character Bios document, all suspects have clear motivations, as well as explanations of their movements the evening of the murder – which may or may not include lies to conceal their guilt. This has been left flexible, as - if you're presenting multiple performances - you may want to have a different killer at each one.

The actor playing the killer may, with the aid of the director, decide how they did it. The set is littered with clues – a pistol, dagger, rope, etc. – which you could incorporate.

At the beginning of rehearsals, all actors (except the victim) can draw lots to see whether they are the killer, or the director may decide who they wish the killer to be. You could even arrange it so that only the killer and the director know whodunnit, to keep the rest of the cast on their toes.

Rehearsals

To prepare for the improvised sections of the evening, the actors playing the suspects should study their character bios and potential motivations. These bios also include alibis, with the sequence of events as they themselves would recount them – though if they are the murderer, this will not be entirely true!

It is worth rehearsing for the interrogation sessions by asking each other questions in character, and preparing 'get out' strategies for awkward or irrelevant questions, such as "I couldn't possibly answer that without my lawyer present".

Suggested Timings

The following timings assume the event is staged around a two-course meal.

7:00 pm	Doors open, drinks served, teams seated.
7:30 pm	Act 1.
8.00 pm	Main course.
8.30 pm	Act 2.
8:45 pm	Dessert served, audience asked to think of questions for suspects.
9:00 pm	Interrogation.
9:15 pm	Interval – audience fill in accusations/quizzes, which are then collected and marked.
9:30 pm	Denouement – killer announced, prizes awarded.
10:00 pm	End of evening.

Alternatively, there can be shorter breaks between Acts 1 and 2 and the interrogation, and the evening can end with a 'tea dance' or 'swing band', depending on the venue.

Other Notes

You could try to create a 1940s-style ambience, such as by:

- Asking the audience to get into the spirit by dressing up in '40s or '50s gear,
- Having other company members such as front of house staff dressing up,
- Decorating the venue with bunting,
- Serving a vintage tea,
- Extending the evening with a tea dance.

The script was originally set in Kingston Bagpuize, as it was first performed there in 2019. Groups are welcome to localise their production and set it in their own village or town, changing any references to local areas and groups to suit.

Deadly Encounter

[Script Extract]

Act 1

(With curtains closed, Betty and Nancy enter the auditorium. Betty leads. Nancy is wearing a light coat and carrying a couple of suitcases.)

Betty: Here we go, she's in here somewhere – well, she should be, doing all whatever it is she says she's doing... messing around, mucking about, play acting.

Nancy: Rehearsing.

Betty: If that's what you want to call it. George? George! George, is you here? Who knows what she's got him doing; he's probably stuck up a ladder somewhere crying out for help. George!

Nancy: It's not what I was expecting, I must say.

Betty: Must you.

Nancy: (Looks around, disappointed and put out.) No, it really isn't what Bunty described at all, it's... well, it's not a theatre, that's for sure.

Betty: There's a stage.

(Bunty peeps her face out from between the still drawn curtains. Spotlight on her.)

Bunty: Cuckoo!

Betty: Oh Lord.

Bunty: Cuckoo! Cuckoo! George? George! Open the curtains!

(Curtains open to reveal a simple set. There are some items of furniture – e.g. a chaise longue, a chair, a writing desk or bureau. This set isn't finished, as indicated by an incongruously placed ladder and a pot of paint. Lying around the set are a couple of scripts and props, including a small pistol and a dagger.)

(Bunty runs to stand centre stage, opening her arms wide. She is massively over-excited.)

Bunty: Ta dah! Dum de dum-dum duuuuuuuuuuuu! Darling Nancy – it's so gorgeous to see you! What do you think? Isn't it totally and utterly divine? My very own little theatre! A theatre and it's mine, mine, mine, oh mine! Oh, but we are going to have *so* much fun. Come on, come on up here and have a look around.

Betty: Bloomin' nonsense.

Bunty: I'm sorry, did you say something, Mrs Buckland?

Betty: I said, I'll go and clean the lavs, Mrs Parlington-Dormer.

(Betty exits the auditorium as Nancy comes up onstage.)

Bunty: Ignore her, darling. Come up here and give me a hug. Let's look at you, I can't tell you how pleased I am to see you. You look wonderful, darling, and you're finally here – it's been far too long, I've missed you terribly.

Nancy: And I've missed you, Bunts. London is just so dreary without you, and nothing is fun or worth doing at all without my old partner in crime to adventure with.

(Nancy and Bunty hug.)

Nancy: So, *Mrs* Parlington-Dormer, how's married life treating you? I have to say I never thought I'd see the day. What's he like? Tall, dark and handsome, I hope.

(Betty enters and crosses the stage behind them, carrying a bucket.)

Betty: He's rich.

(Betty exits.)

Nancy: Lord, she gave me a terrible fright, creeping out of nowhere like that. Who is she?

(Bunty checks Betty has really gone. Bunty speaks with all airs and graces gone.)

Bunty: Nance, she has been a right royal pain in my backside since the day I married his nibs. I swear to God she somehow manages to be everywhere all of the time. She's spying on me, I know it. She seems to be related to anyone half human within a five-mile round radius, so she's got them spying on me as well. Oh, she acts like she's whiter than white, "I'm just a little innocent, hardworking old skivvy", but she's a bleedin', thievin', no good con woman.

Nancy: Takes one to know one Bunty.

Bunty: Shush! Walls have ears...

Nancy: Oh, I don't think we need to worry about that anymore, thank God.

Bunty: No, you don't understand – round here they really do.

(George appears, right on cue. He is about to speak but Bunty immediately interrupts him.)

Bunty: George, I need you to sort the wings out, sweetheart. They're utterly impossible, there simply isn't going to be enough space to bring the coffin on for the final act.

George: Ummmmm... see, thing is...

Bunty: Just run along and do it.

(George exits obediently. SFX: A crash offstage. George enters again, carrying a wrench or spanner. He limps across the stage, nods at the women, and exits the other side.)

Bunty: He's a marvel!

Nancy: Is he?

Bunty: No.

(SFX: Another crash, from where George has just exited.)

Nancy: I'm going to be straight with you, Bunty.

Bunty: You always are.

Nancy: I'm not happy. You told me you was opening a blummin' theatre. "Come and join me," you said, "we're going to be stars."

Bunty: It is a...

Nancy: No, it bleedin' isn't! I thought you meant the proper thing – you know, plush red seats and the swish of the curtain, cocktails 'n' posh frocks at opening nights, eligible bachelors queuing up to deliver red roses to the stage door.

Bunty: Listen...

Nancy: I don't need to listen, 'cos I can see well enough, without listening to your blummin' tales, this isn't a theatre. It's nothing but a mean, cold, creaky shed in the middle of bleedin' nowhere, with something that vaguely looks like it might pass as a stage, assuming you'd never seen one before.

(During Bunty's next speech, Robert enters in the auditorium.)

Bunty: Now hang on, don't you snap your cap at me, Nance! I've heard tell, from those in the know, that you've been struggling on your own without me so... **(Sees Robert.)** Oh, fresh hell! Robert, darling! What on earth are you doing here?

Robert: Why shouldn't I be here?

Bunty: Don't be silly, darling, there's no reason in the world why you shouldn't be here, but remember, if you keep on popping in like this so *unexpectedly*, it might ruin the surprise! Now, come up onstage and meet the lovely Nancy.

Robert: Delighted to make your acquaintance, Mrs...?

Nancy: Briar, and it's Miss. Miss Nancy Victoria Tuppence Briar.

Robert: Tuppence? That's a most unusual name.

(Nancy is in full flirtatious mood. Robert looks blanker and blanker as she speaks. He is an incredibly dull man.)

Nancy: Well, Robert, you know I am a most unusual lady! I'm only teasing, it's just a silly stage name. From *The Secret Adversary*. The Christie novel? Agatha Christie?

Bunty: Robert doesn't read, darling.

Robert: It's overrated.

Bunty: Of course it is, sweetheart. Now, why don't you just run along and leave us girls to our gossip?

Nancy: Oh, but before you go, Robert, Bunty, I have a present for you both, to say thank you in advance for your generous hospitality. Now where is it? Ahh, here we are. **(Passes Robert a present.)**

Robert: Thank you, Miss Briar.

Nancy: 'Nancy', please. Go on then, open it!

Bunty: It's exciting, isn't it, Robert? I want to wriggle, it's so exciting – wriggle, wriggle, wriggle... Quick, open it!

Robert: I do not wish to wriggle, Bunty. **(Opens the present – it's a candlestick. Stares at it blankly.)** What is it?

Bunty: Oh, you are the most amusing little man. It's a candlestick, Robert. See, a-can-dle-stick, for candles...

(Robert can't comprehend. Bunty sighs.)

Bunty: Look, why don't you take it home and put it somewhere safe? There you go, off you run, chop chop, and leave us girls alone so we can catch up.

(George enters, still carrying the wrench. Robert looks suspicious.)

Robert: Who's this?

Bunty: Oh Robert, you are funny. You know very well it's Young George.

George: Mr Parlinton-Dormer.

Bunty: He's part of my company.

Nancy: Drama group.

Bunty: Theatre company.

George: Ummmmm, see, thing is...

Bunty: George, be a love and shimmy up that ladder. The lights need to be angled more towards centre stage otherwise we won't get a good view of the coffin.

Robert: Love?

George: Ummmm, see, thing is...

Bunty: Now, George.

(George goes up the ladder and stays there; he should be far enough up that the audience can see his legs and feet, but that Nancy and Bunty forget he is there.)

Bunty: Goodbye, Robert.

(Robert exits obediently.)

Bunty: Nice gift, Nance. Got to be worth a bob or two by my reckoning, but you can't kid a kidder. How did you get your hands on that?

Nancy: Well, I may have 'accidentally' found myself in possession of it the morning after the night before, shall we say.

Bunty: You're a deceitful dame...

Nancy: I use my wits!

Bunty: And well-laced lies.

Nancy: I can see you remember the score well, Bunty, but don't change the subject. Where were we?

Bunty: I was saying that I'd heard on the grapevine that you've been struggling without me.

Nancy: It's not been easy, I'll admit.

Bunty: Well, it's not been easy here, either.

Nancy: One person trying to pay the rent where once there were two.

Bunty: I may have money now, Nancy, but my God it's still hard work.

Nancy: A woman can't as easily flirt and con when she's striving on her own.

Bunty: He's old and dull...

Nancy: I need an accomplice, but there's none as good as you.

Bunty: And the boredom is killing me.

Nancy: So, what's the plan then, Bunty? I presume you have one, which is why I'm here? You always had a good scheme or two all ready for the off.

Bunty: It's a killer-diller one, Nance, one that will sort us both out – and for good. I'm acquiring *assets* and they're hidden in plain sight. I just need a few more weeks and your help, but we're going to need more moxie than most. Come on, let's go for a wander and I'll spill the beans.

(Bunty and Nancy exit one side of the stage. Betty enters from the other with Joan, just missing them. Joan is carrying a bag; it appears heavy and clunks when she sets it down.)

Betty: She was here a few minutes ago, along with her fancy pants friend from London. "My very own little theatre." Makes me sick, she does, so you keeps your ears to the ground and see what you can find out.

Joan: Will do, Betty.

Betty: She's up to no good, mark my words, and I need to clear my name. Where's George got to now? He's probably stuck up a ladder somewhere crying out for help. George?

Joan: So, the auditions are this afternoon?

Betty: That's right. She's been pushing notes through people's doors! Good hard-working people who don't need the bloomin' aggravation. All hoity toity 'advising' of her auditions and asking for men, as bold as brass!

Joan: Asking for men?

Betty: Shockin' innit?

Joan: I'll say!

Betty: What kind of a man is going to want to spend his spare time messing around playing theatricals? No, she's up to summat, I know it for sure.

Joan: It certainly sounds suspicious, Betty.

Betty: *She's* a minx and *he* didn't see what was coming.

Joan: Mr Parlinton-Dormer?

Betty: Turned his head, she did, with her fancy clothes, fancy ways and fancy talk. 'Darling' this and 'sweetheart' that. Course, I saw straight through her straight away, but Mr Parlinton-Dormer... Well, he's proper posh, isn't he? And the proper posh are never really quite, you know, right in the head.

Joan: Aren't they?

Betty: It's a fact. Inbreeding.

Joan: Oh!

Betty: So, there you have it, she saw him coming and fancied her chances. He's too dim to understand what's what, so before you know it, Bob's your uncle, Betty's your aunt, and she's marching him up the aisle.

...

[Continued in the full *Murder Mystery pack*.]