

DRESSED TO KILL



A Dinner Theatre Murder Mystery

by

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Customer Taster

Dressed to Kill

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Dressed to Kill

Organiser's Overview

About The Pack

Dressed to Kill is a scripted murder mystery set among a drama group in 1983. There are 6 female and 3 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 and a musical skit. 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 [*Excerpt here*];
- The Script [*Excerpt here*];
- Character Bios (which also includes two potential solutions);
- Accusation and Quiz Sheets, to be filled in by the audience.

The Organiser's Overview

- Introduction to Dressed to Kill:
 - 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
 - Music Suggestions
- Quiz Answers

Introduction to Dressed to Kill

Synopsis

The local drama group are getting ready to stage their first ever musical fashion show, to raise money for new stage lighting in the village hall. The latest in high street fashion will be 'modelled via performance' by some of the group's members to a ticket-paying audience.

It's an ill-thought-out hybrid mess of a production, and as the clock ticks towards curtain-up, tension is mounting. Before the audience have taken their seats, rivalry, discord, and conflict bubbles over and one of the members ends up murdered.

Characters

Larry 'founded' the group with Barbara several years back. He's desperate for the group to perform Shakespeare and shoehorns in quotes from the Bard wherever he can, with little context and sometimes getting them wrong. His relationship with "darling Barbara" is best defined as frenemies. He's a dreadful ham.

Barbara, the other founder of the group, won't allow "dear Larry" to direct "just one teeny tiny, little Shakespeare", certain that the village won't like it. Barbara has a daughter, Julie, who is not seen but heard an awful lot about, because she 'does' musical theatre and had a line in *Emmerdale* once. This riles Ruth, Lisa and Shirley and causes a lot of eye-rolling from Larry.

Shirley Worthington is bad-mannered, bossy, and brash. She is used to getting her own way and believes her daughter Lisa is exceptionally talented, with a glittering future in showbusiness ahead. She joined the drama group to ensure Lisa gets all the plum parts, which she sees as part of the journey in managing Lisa's career.

Lisa Worthington, fuelled by her mother's belief in her abilities, is cocksure and annoying. She's Shirley's 'mini-me', but stick her onstage and she turns to wood.

Ruth has, underneath her exterior, a core of steel. She's as ambitious for her daughter Karen as Shirley is for Lisa – but she's much, much smarter and prepared to play the long game.

Karen would rather be anywhere than at a rehearsal. She loathes drama, music, fashion and being put in the spotlight. She wants to be a scientist and always has her head in a book. She'd prefer to be known as Kaz, but Ruth absolutely won't allow it.

Young Peter is the group's much-put-upon unsung hero. He's desperate to leave and retire, but Larry and Barbara won't let him. The musical fashion show might just be the straw that breaks this dark horse's back.

Gerald is loud and flamboyant. He joined the group assuming at some stage there would be an opportunity to dress up as a woman – panto, surely? However, this hasn't happened yet. Now he learns he's prohibited from performing at the musical fashion show. He may just have to take matters into his own hands.

Marigold has been a member of the drama group for several years, and is a very talented actress. Unfortunately, because of the group dynamics, she rarely gets her turn onstage and is consigned to supporting the group via monotonous and menial tasks, which she does gloomily in the hope that one day her efforts will be rewarded with a leading role. The worm may turn.

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. It's a great way to raise 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. Two potential solutions are detailed, but all suspects have clear motivations – and alibis, which may or may not be true. This has been left flexible, as if you're presenting multiple performances, you may want to have a different killer at each one.

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 be a lie!

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 an '80s-themed disco or music, depending on the venue.

Other Notes

You can add to the evening's ambience by asking the audience to get into the spirit by dressing up in '80s gear, having other company members such as front of house staff dressing up, and by decorating the venue.

The script was originally set in Kingston Bagpuize, as it was first performed there in 2024. 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.

Dressed To Kill

Script Extract

Characters

Larry – one of the drama group’s founders, 50+
Barbara – the other founder, 50+
Shirley Worthington – 40+
Lisa Worthington – Shirley’s daughter, late teens-early 20s
Ruth – 40+
Karen – Ruth’s daughter, teenage
Young Peter – 60+
Gerald – 40+
Marigold – 60+

Act One

(Music 1. Peter enters via the auditorium. Steps are in situ and rostrum positioned as a mini ‘catwalk’ centre front of stage. Curtains are closed. Peter hops up onto the stage and slips between the curtains, which he then opens.)

(Barbara, Shirley, Ruth and Lisa are busy sorting props, costumes, and paint, and generally creating chaos. Marigold is tidying up after them. Karen is sitting on top of a ladder, trying to keep out of the way, reading a book about poison. A couple of flats are propped up, with posters for the drama group’s plays pre-1983 displayed. There’s an old-fashioned vacuum carpet cleaner onstage amongst the chaos.)

(Larry enters in a grand theatrical manner and positions himself centre stage.)

Larry: To be or not to be, now that is the question. My darling Barbara, looking totally delicious, as ever – to thine own self thou are always so true. So, how are we doing? Have all the costumes arrived? It’s nearly showtime!

Barbara: Peter has just informed me there’s a glitch with the sound system, a leak in the ladies’ toilets, and he can’t light the catwalk.

Shirley: Lisa, when the costumes arrive, make sure you choose an outfit for the opening number that really shows off your legs.

Lisa: Don’t worry, Mum. I’ve got this.

(Gerald enters flamboyantly, but is totally unnoticed or ignored by the others.)

Ruth: Karen, make sure you go with Lisa and choose your costumes as well when they arrive.

(Karen groans.)

(Peter enters left, carrying a plunger.)

Peter: I’m getting too old for all of this.

(Peter exits right, still carrying the plunger. Marigold pulls some Marigold gloves out from her pinny, and with a resigned, gloomy look, picks up a bucket and mop and follows him offstage.)

Gerald: Karen, Lisa and I will *all* go and choose costumes when they arrive. I too would like to show off my legs.

Larry: All the world is a stage with many parts...

Barbara: Larry, this is not the time for Shakespeare.

Larry: Some just for bit players. Barbara, darling, we do need to elevate the level of our productions. No more of this fluff, darling.

Barbara: Larry, dear, we’ve been over this. The village does not want Shakespeare. They just want to see the latest fashions and hear some catchy tunes.

Larry: I vehemently disagree, I believe the village not only wants to see my Lear, but needs to see it.

Barbara: Not now, Larry.

Larry: Just one teeny tiny titchy Shakespeare, is it too much to ask?

Barbara: Larry, *darling*, can we please just focus on the problems at hand?

Shirley: Yes, exactly, and can we please hurry up? Lisa needs to rehearse her walk down and both numbers. **(Yells offstage.)** Peter, you need to make sure the lighting is perfect for Lisa's big moment. **(To Barbara.)** It's just not good enough, Barbara.

Lisa: I don't need to rehearse, Mum. Stop worrying. I was born to walk in heels.

Shirley: I know, darling, you're such a natural and it's crystal clear you'll steal the show, but remember...

Ruth: The six Ps!

Shirley: And what are those, Ruth?

Ruth: Perfect practice prevents piss poor performance!

(Shirley is not impressed.)

Barbara: Yes, Shirley, I have to say that Ruth is right. The key to getting on in *professional* showbiz...

(Larry creeps up and jazz hands behind her.)

Barbara: Is practice, practice, practice. I remember when my little Julie was only four, she'd be up right at the crack of dawn practicing her tap routines on the patio...

Ruth: I bet the neighbours loved that...

Barbara: Tap, tap, tapping, beat, beat, beating and brush, brush, brushing from dawn to dusk – she was utterly committed, and now look at her!

Shirley: Indeed.

Barbara: A doyenne of the professional musical theatre scene.

Lisa: What's a doyenne?

Larry: And where is the divine Julie performing currently, darling Barbara?

Barbara: Southend-on-Sea.

Larry: Ooooooh! Southend-on-Sea! How exciting! Although it's not exactly Stratford-upon-Avon, is it, darling?

Barbara: Entertainment comes in all sorts of different forms, Larry. Not everyone wants Shakespeare. Anyway, once we are all sorted and ready for this evening's performance, I have an exciting announcement to make!

Ruth: What sort of announcement?

Barbara: A very special announcement, but I want to wait until everyone is present. It's really rather exciting, it's going to elevate this drama group to the next level...

Lisa: What's the next level?

Shirley: Sounds interesting, come on, Barbara. Spill the beans. Don't keep us all in suspense.

Barbara: Patience, patience... I think it's important that we are all here.

Larry: Patience was Scottish and became a dog...

Gerald: Barbara, can you stop distracting everyone? This is getting ridiculous, we must get on, we've only got a few hours before curtain-up and we still need to decide who is modelling what, the creative performance aspect for each piece, the music, the order of events, and get some practice in. At least I know what I'm doing!

Shirley: Well, let me assure you, Gerald, that my Lisa is already pitch-perfect and performance-ready. Lisa Worthington will steal the show!

Larry: Don't put your daughter on the stage, Mrs Worthington...

Barbara: The profession is very overcrowded. My Julie said at her Emmerdale audition there were...

Larry: My God, Emmerdale, Emmerdale, Emmerdale. She had one line in Emmerdale six years ago! Em-mer-dale – it's not exactly Ham-e-let, is it?

Barbara: Well! Really!

Gerald: Please, please, please can we just focus on today? It's all feeling very last minute, and it's making me extremely nervous. I have multiple guests coming – multiple – and the lack of organisation is getting me totally flustered. Has Young Peter sorted out the soundtrack yet?

Karen: I think he's still sorting out the bogs...

Ruth: Karen – toilets, please!

Karen: Mum – Kaz, please!

Lisa: Why does he always call Peter 'Young Peter'?

Barbara: It's his superiority complex.

Karen: If Peter can be called Young Peter, when he's sooooo old, why can't I be called Kaz?

Ruth: We've been through this, it's not becoming.

Barbara: My Julie's career rocketed once she chose her stage name...

Larry: What's in a name? That which we call... **(Freezes theatrically as he's interrupted.)**

Gerald: Oh God, please no, Larry.

Shirley: **(Yelling from off.)** Peter? Peter! Peter!

Larry: That which we call a rose, stills smells so sweet.

Barbara: Will you please shut up?

Larry: Really! Barbara, darling, I know we are all under considerable pressure, but the show will go on and it will be alright on the night, it always is. You must calm down and learn to control that temper of yours, or we will never get anything done. Sweetheart.

(Peter enters, followed by Marigold.)

Larry: Ah Peter, the hero of the day! Have you conquered the toilets and returned to us victorious with your trusty plunger?

Peter: The toilets are fixed.

Marigold: And clean.

Barbara: Oh, you two, spare us the hysterics and the dramatics please! Don't you understand we have a show to put on?

Larry: Peter! Your plunger shall go down in history as the weapon that saved the show!

(Karen sniggers.)

Ruth: Are you going to be able to sort the soundtrack, Peter?

Shirley: And the lighting – are you going to be able to properly light the catwalk?

Lisa: Yes, just make sure you don't accidentally plunge us all into darkness, Peter. We don't want a literal blackout.

Gerald: Yes, the lighting needs to be very good if we are *all* to be wearing heels – we need to be able to see where we are going, and we can't afford to put a step out of place.

(The others onstage give Gerald some odd looks.)

Peter: I think you're forgetting that our lighting isn't very good.

Marigold: Quite right, Peter. Don't forget, Gerald, the whole point of tonight's performance is to raise money for new lighting. Peter can only do his best with what he's got.

Gerald: A bad workman blames his tools!

Peter: That lighting is older than I am!

Barbara: Peter, please! Less of the histrionics, it's not becoming from crew! Can you just get the techie stuff sorted so the talent can relax? Now. Lighting, then sound. In that order. Once it's fixed, report back, I have an important announcement to make.

(Peter storms off.)

Larry: **(Beaming, arms outstretched.)** Behold the power of Peter!

Shirley: Did you make sure the lavatories are properly clean, Marigold? I'm germophobic.

Ruth: Do you think you could put the kettle on, Marigold? I'm gasping.

Lisa: Did you remember to bring the biscuits, Marigold? I'm ravenous.

(Marigold stalks offstage, head high but furious.)

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[Continued in the full Murder Mystery Pack]