

MERRIWEATHER'S **MURDEROUS** WEEKEND

BY

GARY DAVIS

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## Cast

Barry Merriweather	40/50	Warm friendly and a never-say-die attitude, eager to please
Violet	55/70	Cynical old soul, speaks her mind and doesn't suffer fools
Doreen	50/60	The Peacekeeper, game for a laugh and tough as old boots
Bernice	50/60	Dotty, forgetful, not the full shilling, everything confuses her
Joan	50/60	Kind, caring and Bernice's babysitter.
Maggie Plotter	45/55	Petite, Mad, wacky and too many years at boarding school!!
Jane Plotter	40/50	Just as mad as sister but sillier also naive and gullible.
Annie Church	55/65	Wise old bird, inquisitive and untrusting, straight talking.
Don	40/50	Happy go lucky joker doesn't take anything serious.
Brad	20/25	Jack the lad, not as clever as he thinks
Suzy	18/20	Spoilt little daddy's girl, trying to impress Brad.
Sergeant Flowerday	40/55	Over the top pretend policeman
Constable Williams	20/50	Local copper

## MERRIWEATHER'S MURDEROUS WEEKEND

Dafful hall is the National Trust's most prized possession. The building houses some fine antiques. The play takes place in the private lounge which has been set aside for the mystery weekend. There are three doors to this room and it is furnished with two sofas, two chairs a coffee table and a sideboard. It can also be embellished with other furniture to suit the size of the stage. Paintings should be hung on the walls. THE PLAY IS SET IN THE PRESENT DAY.

*ON STAGE WE HAVE BARRY MERRIWEATHER, THE MURDER MYSTERY HOST. HE IS FUSSING AROUND SETTING THE SEATING AND ADDING IN ONE MORE CHAIR. HE EXITS DOOR STAGE LEFT AND RE-ENTERS WITH 4 WOMEN WHO HAVE SIGNED UP FOR THE MURDER MYSTERY. THEY ARE DRESSED AS THEIR FAVOURITE SLEUTHS. VOILET JOAN AND DOREEN SIT DOWN WHILE BERNICE AIMLEESLY WONDERS AROUND BEFORE SITTING DOWN NEXT TO JOAN.*

Barry: Good evening everyone, my name is Barry Merriweather and I am the organiser and host of the Dafful Hall murder mystery. Now I am here to make sure your weekend is a murderous success. (*TRIES TO GET A LAUGH*) Now I hope you all had a pleasant journey to Dafful Hall

Violet: Yes, no thanks to Bernice's rubbish Sat Nav.

Bernice: Well it didn't like the post code.

Barry: (*A BIT NERVY*) Fine, Lovely, super and now you're all here safe and sound.

Violet: Yes, no thanks to Joan's driving.

Joan: Well you know I'm not good with long distances.

Barry: (*TRYING TO BE THE PEACEMAKER*) How about some refreshments before we start.

Violet: I hope it's better than that dump Doreen found.

Doreen: (*TO VIOLET*) Here we go again

Violet: What?

Doreen: You! (*ANNOYED*) Upsetting everyone, before we've even started!

Violet: What have I said?

Doreen: Well you've just had a go at all of us.

Violet: (*FOLDING HER ARMS*) I'm only speaking my mind.

Doreen: Well don't! Not unless you've got something nice to say.

Violet: (*ALL HUFFY*) Well if you can't take a bit of criticism

Doreen: We don't mind a bit, it's just you don't stop. (*TO THE OTHERS*) Next time we'll leave her behind.

Joan: But it's always been the four of us.

Doreen: 3's a nice number.

Bernice: But we can't change. (*TO JOAN*) I don't like change Joan I don't!

Barry: Ladies I'm sure after a nice cup of tea we can all get on with this weekend's festivities. I will read out the itinerary, rules and regulations as soon as the other guests arrive and then I'll hand you out your character cards.

Violet: *(PUZZLED)* Character cards?

Barry: Yes you must have your character cards; you can't have a murder mystery without the characters, a plot and the murderer.

Bernice: *(GETTING SLIGHTLY WORRIED)* But we are a team." Lady's that like to sleuth."

Joan: What? But where are all the actors your murder mystery promised? It's always been acted out and then WE have to solve the murder.

Doreen: We don't act, we sleuth.

Violet: I knew it, you pays your money and you get a 2 bit amateur show in which you have to do your own blooming acting as well as solving the blooming murder.

Barry: I'm sorry but I was let down at the very last minute that's why it's half price and a free lunch buffet tomorrow.

Violet: You mean we would have had to pay for that as well?

Barry: Look, I'm really sorry. But I'm sure we'll all have a really great time and we will have some actors to play some of the other parts. *(ENTER MAGGIE AND JANE PLOTTER, SISTERS AND MAD AS A BAG OF FROGS AND BOTH DRESSED AS DETECTIVES, THOMPSON TWINS(TINTIN) WORKS BUT COULD BE ANYTHING WACKIER THAN LADIES THAT LIKE TO SLEUTH!)*

Maggie: *(GRAND ENTRANCE AND VIRTUALLY SINGING HER LINE)* We're here! So let the sleuthing begin.

Jane: You can't start a sleuthing until the Plotter sisters are here.

Violet: Oh great you two!

Joan: *(CHEERFUL)* Hello Maggie, hello Jane.

Maggie: Ah "Ladies that like to sleuth." This is going to be a great weekend.

Bernice: Hello girls.

Barry: Do you know each other?

Doreen: Oh yes, these two are our greatest rivals. "Sisters are sleuthing it for themselves"

Jane: Many a good mystery solved between the 6 of us.

Violet: Not this time, Old sappy bugger here has changed the format so it's no teams' this time just characters and working it out on our own.

Maggie: *(IN A BAD GERMAN ACCENT)* Zis sounds interesting.

Jane: Wow, not done this before, might be a bit tricky but hey ho! This is going to be great fun! What with all the lies, subterfuge and the dirty double crossings. *(BOTH MAGGIE AND JANE FIND PLACES TO SIT)*

Barry: No! No, (*GETTING ALL FLUSTERED*) you've got to stay in character and you can't lie or it will cause all sorts of problems and then you won't find out who the murderer is.

Doreen: So it might be one of us.

Barry: Yes it'll be all self-explanatory when you get your characters and the plot.

Bernice: But I don't want to be the murderer, (*TO JOAN*) I'm not a murderer Joan I'm not.

Joan: I'm sure you won't be the murderer.

Violet: (*LOOKING AT BERNICE*) Well, we've narrowed it down by one already and we haven't even started.

Doreen: (*GOES OVER TO COMFORT BERNICE*) Look Bernie I know you don't like change but just this once we'll have to play this game and you'll have to be a character.

Bernice: But what about the team?

Joan: We're on our own this time.

Bernice: But I've never done it on my own before.

Violet: I don't know you might enjoy being on your own for once.

Doreen: Violet, pack it in. Look let's just enjoy the weekend and may the best girl win. (*DOOR OPENS AND IN ENTERS ANNIE, SHE'S DRESSED AS A FEMALE COLOMBO*)

Annie: Yes! May the best girl win and this time it'll be even, one on one.

ALL GIRLS: Granny Annie!!!

Annie: You didn't think you could have a murder mystery without me.

Jane: (*RUBS HER HANDS*) Now the competition begins in earnest.

Barry: Ah our final guest has arrived. You must be Annie Church.

Maggie: Oh, no, this is "Grannie Annie murder missions impossible"

Barry: Sooo... (*REALLY NERVOUS*) you've done murder mysteries before then, (*ALL THE GIRLS LOOK AT HIM*) bit of a hobby is it.

Annie: (*STERNLY*) Oh it's more than a hobby, we go to all the murder mystery events.

Jane: We travel all over the country...

Violet: ...and we've been to all the top events and this one as well.

Bernice: A murder mystery's not a murder mystery unless one of us is there.

Maggie: We've won the lot.

Barry: So I have the privilege of having the best sleuths in the business honouring my event.

Violet: Yes... (*STANDS UP AND WALKS OVER TO BARRY*) so this better be good or this will be last one you'll ever do.

Barry: Riiiiight (*REALLY REALLY NERVOUS*) Now, I'm going to hand out your envelopes with all your characters details, your story and the plot. Just read them and try to remember as much of it as you can. You can keep it with you but don't let anyone see them. Oh and one of you might be the murderer.

Bernice: Except me.

Barry: Not necessarily (*STARTS TO HAND OUT THE ENVELOPES*) There will be other guests in the hall who are characters to the murder mystery, so get to know these as well as they could be the murderer or just accessories. (*WHEN BERNICE GETS HER CARD SHE LOOKS AT IT AND BREATHES A SIGH OF RELIEF TO VIOLET'S ANNOYANCE*) Now if you would like to go to the dining room and have some refreshments while you read and digest your characters. We will start in a little while. (*ALL EXIT MAIN DOOR AT THE BACK EXCEPT BARRY*)

*(EACH TEAM WILL HAVE MATCHING NOTEPAD WHICH THEY WILL CARRY AROUND WITH THEM ALL THE TIME. PENS CAN BE NOVELTY OR NORMAL)*

*DOOR OPENS STAGE RIGHT AND ENTERS DON DEADMAN, BARRY'S PARTNER IN THIS ADVENTURE. HE IS A JOBBING ACTOR FALLEN ON HARD TIMES AND IS HELPING BARRY OUT.*

Don: Oh well that's torn it.

Barry: (*PANICKING*) What are we going to do? I've got 7 Miss Marples, 7 dodgy characters, a bad plot line and you.

Don: Thanks a bunch.

Barry: What happened to the cast? I thought you were going to have 8 wonderful actors who'd be ACTING OUT this flaming murder mystery. Where are they?

Don: Well, the girls got a job on a cruise liner.

Barry: What, all of them?

Don: Well, they needed a Spice Girls Tribute Act.

Barry: But you only had the 4 girls on your book?

Don: Well, they said they could do without Posh as she could never sing any way and do it with the 4 of them.

Barry: (*PAUSE*) OK? But who's playing Scary.

Don: Oh Debbie, she did a couple of hours in the tanning booth.

Barry: So it's not one of the big cruise liners then.

Don: Nah, Titanic Cruises I think (*PAUSE*) Still it's a job for the summer!

Barry: Hang on a minute, I thought you got them on a contract.

Don: Yeah it was one of those zero hour's contract.

Barry: What?

Don: I gave them Zero hours of work and they gave me back their contract.

Barry: Brilliant, what about the men, surely old Bill didn't manage to get a job?

Don: Bill's in hospital. Fell off the wagon.

Barry: Oh no! Not drunk again?

Don: No, he was doing Oklahoma at the hippodrome and fell of the wagon. He needs a new hip now, soppo old sod. I told him no running or jumping.

Barry: Especially not at his age!

Don: Yeah, at 82 he should be slowing down.

Barry: Oh well no Bill then, so, what about Geoffrey and Philip.

Don: Bloody turncoats those two, old Marvo the magician said if they could manage to look like twins they could be in his new magic act.

Barry: But isn't Geoffrey bald and fat and Philip's skinny as a rake?

Don: They've got a compromise, Geoffrey's getting a wig and Philip's got a cushion.

Barry: Marvellous!

Don: Look I know there are a few teething problems with casting at the moment, but I'll get it sorted.

Barry: It better be, as this Company of yours isn't exactly exuding the professionalism or reliability you promise to give me if all your actors are getting jobs elsewhere.

Don: Not to worry, Brad hasn't let me down and he's got a friend, *(SMILES)* a young lady who is going to liven up the proceeding. Anyway, for a start there are 3 of us to get this party going.

Barry: It's not a party it's a murder mystery.

Don: I know but can't we give those old girls a bit of excitement.

Barry: No! I don't want you causing problems, you heard them. They are serious sleuths.

Don: Isn't that "sleuths?"

Barry: I don't care what they are. Just don't go upsetting them. Right you go and sort out Brad and his friend and I'll sort out the ladies.

Don: What - the loo blocked again.

Barry: Very funny, just keep that humour to yourself. *(BARRY EXITS STAGE DOOR RIGHT, DON STAGE DOOR LEFT)(SLIGHT PAUSE THEN BRAD AND SUZY ENTER)*

Brad: *(BRAD IS IN HIS TWENTIES – A COCKNEY, FULL OF HIMSELF AND A BIT OF A CHARMER, SUZY IS HIS SIDEKICK - LATE TEENS DADDY'S GIRL BUT NOBODY'S FOOL. BRAD LOOKS TO SEE IF THE COAST IS CLEAR)* Right you, cock this up and you're on your own.

Suzy: Yeah, but I didn't know he was a copper.

Brad: I told you I'm the brains, so just follow orders and we won't go wrong.

Suzy: *(SMUG)* We didn't get caught though.

Brad: No but we ended up doing 2 weeks work with nothing to show for it.

Suzy: I won't mess up this time, promise.

Brad: I know you won't or it's back home to Daddy.

Suzy: You wouldn't.

Brad: *(GETS PHONE OUT OF POCKET)* Just follow my plan, do as I say and I'll let you stick around. *(SUZY GOES TO HUG HIM)* And I don't do that, it's strictly business, find yourself another mug if you're looking for a boyfriend.

Suzy: Suit yourself. *(SULKES OFF TO SIT ON A CHAIR)* Anyway what are we doing here?

Brad: Nicking anything of value in this old gaffe and that includes anything those old loonies have who are doing this murder mystery.

Suzy: How are we going to do that?

Brad: I've told Don we're actors looking for work. He told me about this job and when he was let down by everyone else he asked if you were available.

Suzy: But I don't do work and I certainly don't act.

Brad: That's the beauty of this, stupid.

Suzy: I'm not stupid.

Brad: Look, you just have to be yourself and they won't know, cos they think you're an actor playing a part in this murder mystery. And while they are thinking that, we are going to rob them and this place of everything that's worth robbing.

Suzy: Right! I get it.

Brad: And it gets easier.

Suzy: How?

Brad: Well I'm going to tell everyone that there is a thief going around stealing things as part of the murder mystery but not to worry as they will get it all back at the end.

Suzy: Won't they suspect, it is supposed to be a murder mystery?

Brad: Not if we say the thief and the murderer could be connected.

Suzy: But isn't that a bit confusing.

Brad: It doesn't matter as we are not playing there game. We've a better game with better prizes. *(NASTY LAUGH)* And while they are sorting out who the murderer was and who the thief was, we'll be safely away with all the goodies.

Suzy: Where are we going to stash it all?

Brad: *(PRODUCES A KEY)* I've found a small cupboard, in that room *(POINTS TO DOOR STAGE RIGHT)* so we take it in turns to nick something and put it in the cupboard.

Suzy: *(GOES OVER TO SIDEBOARD PICKS UP VASE)* This vase will do for starters.

Brad: Not yet *(GOES OVER TO SUZY TAKES VASE AND PUTS IT BACK)* we've got plenty of time to do that, let's just mingle with the crowd and get to know them and them us. *(PULLS OUT 2 ENVELOPES)* Right *(OPENS ENVELOPE, READS AND LAUGHS)* you are Lord Wigton's long lost grand-daughter from his illegitimate son who went to live in

Essex. So just play yourself and remember use some of these clues (*HANDS OVER ENVELOPE*)

Suzy: So who are you?

Brad: A newly ordained vicar with a past connected to Lord Wigton?

Suzy: You - a vicar! Ha they've got that wrong.

Brad: I always knew I was a bit of a Jekyll and Hyde (*PUT'S ON VICAR STRIP*)

Suzy: What if I forget?

Brad: Who cares. We're in it for the goods not the murder.

Suzy: Oh good, I'll just make it up.

Brad: Just don't get caught nicking there stuff. Right let's mingle. (*BOTH EXIT*)

*10 SECONDS ELAPSE AND BERNICE ENTERS THE ROOM. SHE SITS DOWN AND REMOVES HER ENVELOPE AND STARTS RECITING HER CHARACTER AND STORY TO HERSELF*

Bernice: (*MUMBLES TO HERSELF*) Miss Peabody, 62 and a spinster. Good. Just play yourself. I have a gambling problem and owe Lord Wigton £30000. Oh heck I don't even do the lottery. Now I'm also running a book on how many illegitimate children Lord Wigton has, what's running a book? Oh no! it all too confusing! (*URNS PAGE*) Oooh there's more, no I can't do it. I just can't (*START TO GET UPSET*) (*ENTERS JOAN*)

Joan: Bernice what are you doing hiding in here?

Bernice: I can't do it Joan, I just can't. There's too much to remember. I'm as much a gambler as I am a murderer. (*UPSET*) I'm just going to stay here and hide.

Joan: Look you can't do that or you'll spoil it for the others.

Bernice: I don't like change, I just want to have a normal murder just like all the other ones.

Joan: Just stick with me. Barry did say you can look at your notes as long as you don't show anyone.

Bernice: But what have I got to do and when do I do it?

Joan: Do what?

Bernice: It says here (*GOES TO HER NOTES*) I've got to blackmail Miss Fotheringale; I don't even know who she is and make friends with Julia Frobisher.

Joan: This is where we have to go around and find out who everyone is and then decide who to talk to.

Bernice: Have you got things to do?

Joan: Yes.

Bernice: So what have you got to do?

Joan: Well, I shouldn't be telling you.

Bernice: I told you mine.

Joan: That was different, you were in a panic.

Bernice: Ah but what if my character said I had to do that.

Joan: Did it.

Bernice: No...I mean yes...oh that's not fair I can never fool you.

Joan: Bernice don't tell me anymore and then we can go round together until you find your feet. (*ENTER MAGGIE*)

Maggie: Ello. Ello. Ello. What going on here then?

Joan: I was just having a word with Miss .....miss

Bernice: Bernice!

Joan: No - Bernice who are you?

Bernice: Oh, oh sorry! (*LOOKS AT CARD*) Miss Peabody, 62 and a spinster.

Maggie: Nearly got it right.

Joan: Just your name, soppo.

Maggie: And you are?

Joan: Miss Fotheringale!

Bernice: (*LIGHT BULB MOMENT*) Miss Fotheringale so I've got to... (*JOAN NUDGES HER*)

Joan: ...Go and look for Lord Wigton. Must dash, Mrs or is it Ms?

Maggie: Ms Saddlesworth. Who made up these silly names? It's as though Charles Dickens was in cahoots with Catherine Cookson.

Bernice: I know it's hard enough remembering my own name let alone remembering everyone else's.

Joan: Come on Miss Peabody 62 and a spinster we must have a chat with Lord Wigton.

Bernice: Yes, Joan (*JOAN AND BERNICE EXIT AND IN COMES VIOLET*)

Violet: What were they up to?

Maggie: Are we in character or normal?

Violet: Normal!

Maggie: I think Bernice has wimped out and Joan has taken her under her wing. So it seems those two will be working together or Joan will be using Bernice to her advantage.

Violet: Now, I could get angry and be disgusted at your accusations but you're absolutely right. Those 2 are as needy as each other.

Maggie: They're more like mother and daughter

Violet: More like an old sheep dog and a lamb to the slaughter.

Maggie: You always did look on the bright side.

Violet: It needs a cynical old soul like me to look after them.

Maggie: I must admit after all these years you're amazingly all still together.

Violet: That's more than I can say for the men in our lives.

Maggie: Come on let's face it if it wasn't for the men who else could we blame for everything.

Violet: That's true. Now what do you think about this effort that's called a murder mystery.

Maggie: I think this Barry is way out of his league. The plot's got more holes than his string vest. The characters are from "Mills and Boone" and unless the murderer is a good liar we should have this done by lunch time tomorrow.

Violet: So you don't think there is anything fishy going on?

Maggie: Well, I'm going to keep an eye out just in case; it'll give me something else to do whilst struggling to keep this going all weekend.

Violet: Good idea and I'll try to liven this up a bit. *(BOTH EXIT)*

*GRANNY ANNIE AND DOREEN ENTER*

Annie: Right - all bets are off, let's put this fiasco down to a weekend jolly and make sure this idiot never runs another murder mystery again.

Doreen: I'm afraid you're right this time. It's a total botch job; he'd have done better getting Cluedo out and gone with that.

Annie: I'm sure all the other girls have come to the same conclusion.

Doreen: I don't think Bernice would have, she'll be too busy panicking.

Annie: I forgot about Bernice. Any slight detail change and she goes all Rainman on us.

Doreen: And Joan will be too busy trying to calm her down to be bothered. How Bernie copes with her old mum is beyond me!

Annie: Yes! Well let's try and make the most of this charade, there is supposed to be a murder at 9pm sharp.

Doreen: I wonder how they're going to do this.

Annie: It's either going to be a dummy or Barry?

Doreen: What's the difference? *(BOTH WOMEN LAUGH)*

Annie: I suppose we'd better go and be surprised.

Doreen: I'm going to wind up the actors see how good they are, give them a good grilling see if there characters hold up. It might add a bit of fun to the occasion and this certainly needs a bit of fun.

Annie: I'm going to shadow Barry and see how far his nerves can stretch.

Doreen: You wicked old lady.

Annie: Let's see how far we can wind this lot up before it all goes belly up.

Doreen: This is going to be more fun than a real murder mystery. (BOTH EXIT STAGE DOOR BACK)

ENTER BRAD STAGE DOOR LEFT WITH STOLEN GOODS. HE WALKS OVER TO THE OTHER DOOR EXITS AND AFTER 20 SECONDS RE-ENTERS AND AT THE SAME STAGE DOOR LEFT OPENS AND IN ENTERS JANE

Jane: So you're the Vicar of Middlemiss.

Brad: Call me (*LOOKS AT HIS CARD*) Malcolm, MALCOLM!! Gordon Bennett.

Jane: Hello Reverend Malcolm, Malcolm Gordon Bennett.

Brad: No it's just Malcolm.

Jane: Sorry, I wasn't sure. This is all a bit of a rum do? Not used to doing all this acting lark as well as sleuthing, need a bit of time to get used to it.

Brad: Bit of a virgin myself. But it should be okay once we get into the swing of it.

Jane: Is that Malcolm talking or you? This is so confusing.

Brad: Let's start again as characters. Hi I'm the Rev. Malcolm Marchbank - the new Vicar of Middlemiss.

Jane: Pleased to meet you and I am Lady Wigton, wife of Lord Wigton. You're very young for a vicar.

Brad: I'm not as young as I look anyway this is my first parish after being ordained.

Jane: So, you're new here?

Brad: Yes, first day.

Jane: Then, let me show around the house and fill you in with the local gossip.

Brad: Should you be telling me.

Jane: Yes, it says so on my card.

Brad: No. I'm the new vicar. Should you be spreading gossip to me?

Jane: Oh, sorry, thought you meant... sorry Um (*GOES BACK INTO CHARACTER*) I thought as being the new vicar you should like to know what's what.

Brad: I suppose it does make sense, you can fill me in whilst showing me your wonderful house. (*JANE NOT LADY WIGTON HAS FALLEN FOR THE VICAR NOT BRAD*)

Jane: (*DREAMILY*) Wonderful. (*TAKES HIS ARM AND THEY BOTH EXIT THE ROOM*)

ENTER SUZY WHO GOES TO TAKE THE VASE AND HAS SOMETHING IN HER POCKET READY TO PUT IN THE CUPBOARD BEFORE SHE DOES BARRY ENTERS

Barry: What the hell are you up to?

Suzy: (*TURNS AROUND NEARLY DROPPING THE VASE*) What do you mean?

Barry: Have you had a look inside that envelope I gave you.

Suzy: Yeah!

Barry: So what are you doing going around telling everyone different clues and deviating from the story line.

Suzy: I...I...I

Barry: You haven't read it, have you?

Suzy: No, I'm sorry.

Barry: *(ANGRY)* Call yourself a bloody actor. I have 2 minds just to kill you now and change the plot all together, I still have time you know.

Suzy: No please don't kill me. Look I'm sorry but I haven't done this type of acting before. I just need a little more time to get used to improvising.

Barry: Okay..okay, just take yourself off somewhere and learn your character and don't come back until you know what you're doing.

Suzy: Thank you. I won't let you down *(EXITS AS DON ENTERS)*

Don: Hello!! A bit too young for wife number 4?

Barry: Pack it in. I've just had to tell her to get her act together and learn her part or I was going to kill her off.

Don: What?

Barry: Her character, not her, though I was tempted.

Don: Phew, I knew things were going a bit pear shaped but a real murder.

Barry: Tut, I've got enough on my plate without killing her, anyway speaking of murder, how are we going go about killing you off.

Don: Don't worry I got it all sorted out. We'll do it here in this room. I've got my fake blood in place, now have you got the gun.

Barry: *(GETS THE GUN OUT OF HIS POCKET)* Yes. *(LOOKS AT THE GUN)* This is fake isn't it?

Don: Of course it is. It's from the props department where they're doing Oklahoma, Bill got it for me, and it has the special caps for an authentic noise.

Barry: *(COCKS THE GUN)* So I just pull the trigger and it will fire like a proper gun.

Don: Yes but not yet, let me get in position. When you fire the gun I'll set off the blood and slump into this chair *(WALKS OVER TO THE CHAIR)* Don't forget to hide the gun.

Barry: If I go out this door *(POINTS TO OTHER DOOR)* I should have enough time to run round and join the others.

Don: Whatever, now are you ready?

Barry: Ready. *(POINTS THE GUN AT DON AND FIRES, THEN DROPS IT)*

Don: That's torn it *(DON SLUMPS INTO THE CHAIR AND BLOOD SEEPS OUT OF HIS SHIRT)*

Barry: Bigger *(PICKS UP GUN HIDES IT UNDER SOFA AND EXITS OUT THE OTHER DOOR)*

THE OTHER DOOR OPENS AND MAGGIE JOAN VIOLET AND BERNICE ENTER MATTER OF FACTLY

Violet: What a surprise. Lord Wigton has snuffed it.

Bernice: *(WALKS OVER TO THE BODY IN THE CHAIR)* Oh! there's quite a lot of blood.

Maggie: Don't worry. It'll probably be ASDA's own. It's more runny than Heinz.

Joan: Come on, let's give him a tickle.

Bernice: Oh no, don't spoil it.

Violet: Yes, Joan leave him, as it's the only bit of acting his done all evening.

Maggie: And you're saying the others are acting.

Joan: Oh come on, we are all trying.

Violet: ...and paying for the privilege while this lot are getting paid.

ENTER ANNIE AND DOREEN

Doreen: Who's getting paid?

Maggie: Old Lord Wigton here, I hope he gets paid by the hour.

Annie: Well I hope the other 2 get paid by the facts as I'm not getting much out of either of them.

Doreen: I know! Jane seems to be hogging the poor vicar and I haven't seen neither hide nor hare of the girl since Barry took her in here for a chat.

Violet: What?

Doreen: He caught her telling 2 different clues to Maggie and Annie so he frog marched her into here and gave her a right telling off.

Annie: How do you know that?

Doreen: I've been snooping around picking up clues, it's what we're supposed to be doing isn't it.

Violet: You're not taking this seriously are you?

Doreen: I'm trying to make the most of this fiasco and have as much fun as I can and if it means snooping around and getting more than I should then I might find more than a murderer.

Joan: What is she on about?

Bernice: Am I missing something? *(GOES TO SIT DOWN NEXT TO DEAD BODY THEN REALISES THEN SITS NEXT TO JOAN)* I thought this was just a murder mystery. Joan it is just a murder mystery. *(STARTS TO PANIC)*

Annie: Oh gawd, who set her off?

Joan: No Bernie, nothing's changed. It's still a murder mystery and now we have the dead body and the crime to solve.

Bernie: Oh good, does it mean we can stop acting?

Violet: No sippy, one of us is still the murderer and hopefully with all the clues we should manage to find out who done it.

ENTER JANE AND BRAD

Jane: Done what.

Bernice: Murdered Lord Wigton.

Jane: *(SCREAMS AND GOES OVER TO DON IN THE CHAIR)* Oh Ronald *(OVER DRAMATIC)* who could do such a dastardly deed. *(STARTS TO SOB, BRAD MANAGES TO EXIT)*

Violet: Blimey I didn't know she had it in her.

Jane: Please who is going to help find my darling Ronald's killer.

Bernice: It's okay, Jane we'll find whoever it is.

Jane: It has to be someone here today.

Annie: Well done Sherlock!

Maggie: Don't spoil the moment, I've never seen her so emotional before.

Bernice: *(QUICKLY LOOKS AT HER CARDS)* You can't think I had anything to do with his murder.

Violet: We know you didn't do it because you've already told us.

Bernice: When?

Violet: When you opened your envelope.

Bernice: I'm sorry but I was so relieved it wasn't me, as I'm not a murderer Joan, am I?

Joan: No, dear.

Jane: So who can it be if it isn't Miss Peabody 62 and a spinster?

Doreen: Look, this is getting confusing. Who's in character and who can't be bothered?

Maggie: I think we should all be in character. If not you should hand over your envelopes and go home.

Violet: What! Don't be daft. We've paid for the whole weekend.

Maggie: So, let's get into character and solve this murder.

Annie: We'd better do something as this poor sods going to die of over acting.

Joan: He's been still for quite some time.

Violet: Well apart from Jane....I mean Lady Wigton who's been pawing all over him.

Doreen: At least the vicar's having a break from her.

Maggie: Right let's all go to the dining room for a cuppa and work out a plan of action and let old Barry sort this mess out.

ENTER SERGEANT FLOWERDAY - A REAL LOOKING POLICEMAN BUT EVERYONE THINKS HE'S PART OF THE MURDER MYSTERY

Flowerday: Nobody leaves until I've got all your names and addresses. And nobody leaves this house until I say so.

Violet: And who are you?

Flowerday: Sargent Flowerday from the Metropolitan Police.

Annie: Flaming hell - another stupid name

Doreen: Did they run out of normal ones?

Flowerday: Sorry, I didn't quite catch that?

Annie: Such an unusual name.

Flowerday: Yes dates back to the 18<sup>th</sup> century North Yorkshire region.

Maggie: Ah he's really getting into his character.

Violet: So Sergeant, what names do you want?

Flowerday: Your full names, if you don't mind and addresses.

Bernice: I don't think I've got one.

Joan: For crying out loud, Bernice look in your envelope.

Bernice: (*LOOKS AT CARD*) Miss Peabody, 62 spinster. Thatch cottage, Mill Lane, Oakley.

Flowerday: Local, I see. (*BERNICE GIVES A SHEEPISH LOOK*) And you are Madam...? (*LOOKING AT JOAN*)

Joan: Miss Fotheringale, Mill pond, Duck Lane, Oakley.

Flowerday: Right, to save a bit of time are you all local to Oakley? (*THEY ALL NOD*) Right can I ask what you are all doing here at Dafful hall?

Violet: We were invited by Lord and Lady Wigton to spend the weekend with them.

Flowerday: For what occasion?

Doreen: We don't know it doesn't say.

Flowerday: Sorry?

Jane: It was an anniversary weekend.

Annie: Why would you want to invite 7 women a vicar and a distant relative to an anniversary weekend?

Jane: I don't know. It doesn't say.

Maggie: Because Lord Wigton has changed his will.

Violet: Oh that old chestnut!

Jane: He never told me.

Annie: So, to solve the crime we have to find who benefits from the will and who loses out.

Flowerday: Hold on ladies, that's my job.

Joan: Not really! that's why we are here, to solve who murdered Lord Wigton.

Maggie: You see we are famous sleuths who go around the country solving murders.

Flowerday: What, professional detectives?

Violet: I suppose you could say that.

Bernice: I'm getting confused again.

Joan: Just play along with this, MISS PEABODY.

Flowerday: Wait a minute let me get this straight. You've come to Dafful hall for the anniversary of Lord and Lady Wigton and solve a murder mystery.

Violet: In a nutshell - yes.

Flowerday: And you are?

Violet: Miss Wittersham, Blah blah blah in Oakley.

Flowerday: Can I have your proper address?

Violet: *(SIGHS)* Pink Cottage. *(OTHER WOMEN LAUGH)*What's so funny?

Doreen: You!! Pink Cottage my ar...

Joan ...you'd have knocked it down and built a barn.

Bernice: *(SHEEPISHLY)* ...or a pub.

Violet: Shut up. It's Pink Cottage, Rosewood Lane *(SNIGGERS FROM THE WOMEN AGAIN)* Oakley.

Flowerday: So I've got 7 Miss Marples right here to help me with this murder investigation.

ALL WOMEN: Yes!

Jane: But one of us could be the murderer.

Flowerday: What?

Bernice: But it's not me.

Violet: Yes and it's not Miss Peabody 62 and a spinster.

Flowerday: Look I want you all too clear this room while I call in the forensics but stay close as I'll need to interview you all separately so I can get a clearer picture. *(EVERYONE EXITS APART FROM FLOWERDAY)*That's all I need 7 amateur sleuths getting in the way. *(OVER THE TOP)* Oh well let's have a look at you and get the ball rolling. *(FLOWERDAY STARTS TO EXAMINE THE BODY AS CURTAINS CLOSE)*

ACT 2

THE NEXT MORNING

THE CURTAIN OPENS WITH SARGEANT FLOWERDAY AND BARRY MERRIWEATHER ENTERING THE ROOM. THERE ARE A FEW THINGS MISSING INCLUDING A PAINTING ON THE BACK WALL

Flowerday: Now Mr Merriweather I want the room closed off so I can get forensics in an...where's the body gone.

Barry: What body?

Flowerday: Lord Wigton's body.

Barry: Oh, that body? Don's probably tidied up and gone.

Flowerday: What did he do that for?

Barry: He always does that. He doesn't like to leave a mess.

Flowerday: But what about the forensics?

Barry: It doesn't matter, we know how he died, shot, they now just have to find the murderer from all the clues.

Flowerday: Clues, what clues?

Barry: Hopefully all the clues I've been giving them.

Flowerday: What? So you know who the murderer is then.

Barry: I hope so. I did write the damn thing.

Flowerday: What damn thing?

Barry: The murder mystery!

Flowerday: So you think this is a murder mystery?

Barry: Yes, and what do you think this is?

Flowerday: A murder you fool, you've been set up.

Barry: Set up, give over. Don was pretending to be dead.

Flowerday: Well he's a very good actor as he didn't move for a good 10 minutes.

Barry: Ah, that's our Don plays a very good dead man. I've lost count of the amount of times that man's died on stage.

Flowerday: So, who shot him then?

Barry: It was... *(PAUSES AND THINKS)*...I'm not telling you. You have to solve it like the rest of them, you've got the rest of the weekend.

Flowerday: Look this is a proper investigation you know.

Barry: *(SMILES)* Sure it is. If you can find the body, you can have a proper investigation.

Flowerday: Enough of that or I'll arrest you.

Barry: For what, running a rubbish murder mystery! Phwah. I don't think so.

Flowerday: Right I'm warning you, as soon as I find the body you'll be my number 1 suspect.  
(EXITS)

Barry Good luck! (*GETS HIS PHONE OUT AND STARTS DIALING*) Come on Don, answer your phone. Bugger voice mail (*STARTS TO PACE UP AND DOWN*) Don where are you. Ring me as soon as possible. You better not have died on me or I'll murder you myself. (*GOES OVER TO SOFA AND RETREIVES THE GUN AND PUTS IT IN HIS POCKET*)

ENTER VIOLET AND DOREEN

Violet: (*WALKS OVER TO BARRY*) A word if you don't mind.

Barry: Certainly err... miss ...erm...Mrs...err...how can I help?

Violet: This interrogation youR Police officer is conducting it's a bit OTT you know. Poor old Bernice is going to have a nervous breakdown before the weekend's over.

Barry: OTT, well, this is a murder investigation and now to make matters worse the body's gone missing.

Violet: The body's gone missing? Oh I see.

Doreen: You sly old dog, you duped us into thinking this is a dodgy old murder mystery and all the time you've planned it this way.

Barry: (*BIG GRIN OF A PERSON THINKING HE'S GETTING AWAY WITH IT*) We aim to please.

Doreen: I must say that Policeman looks the real deal.

Violet: Yes but tell him to lay off Bernice as she totally hasn't got a clue.

Barry: I'll have a word (*PAUSES THEN RUBS HIS HANDS*) Well I'd better go and spread the news about the missing body. (*SMILES AND EXITS*)

Doreen: Well I never, this is totally different from any murder mystery we've ever done.

Violet: Ye...es, But I still can't get my head round it though. Are we supposed to be characters, or us, or both?

Doreen: (*THINKS*) Both I think.

Violet: But that's just confusing, then who's been murdered, Lord Wigton or the man that played him and who's the murderer? Now is it one of us or an actor or is it Mr Merriweather?

Doreen: Hahahaha, (*SLOWLY*) This is very clever.

Violet: You'll have to explain as I'm totally lost.

Doreen: Look we must work as a team or that policeman is going to work it out before us.

Violet: Do you think he's an actor or a guest?

Doreen: We'll treat him as both and try and get as much info out of him as we can.

Violet: I like you're thinking Doreen, now that's why we are the best.

Doreen: Shall we include Joan and Bernice?

Violet: Not just yet, not unless they have any key information that'll help us.

Doreen: Come on let's find that copper. *(BOTH EXIT)*

ENTER BRAD AND SUZY

Suzy: Why have you dragged me in here?

Brad: Just to warn you about that copper.

Suzy: What copper?

Brad: The one that's doing the investigation into the murder.

Suzy: He's not a copper. He's an actor.

Brad: He's not, well he's not a part of Don's lot as we're the only ones left in his group.

Suzy: Perhaps Mr Merriweather's hired him separately as your Don's let him down.

Brad: Don never said.

Suzy: Perhaps Don wasn't told, so as not to upset him.

Brad: Well he definitely isn't one of Don's as he's too good an actor.

Suzy: Really, I thought you were really good.

Brad: No this guy's method. He's got it off to a tee. Had me fooled? Oh well let's get back to what we came here for but be careful as it might go to his head and catch us out.

Suzy: *(PASSES BRAD THE KEY)* You can have the key as I've just deposited a purse, watch and a lovely little paperweight.

Brad: Paperweight.

Suzy: It's a Lalique.

Brad: I'll take your word for it.

Suzy: Mummy had a couple and they are worth £500 each.

Brad: If you keep coming up with little nuggets like that maybe we might have a partnership. Just partners though nothing else.

Suzy: Okay! I'll carry on snooping then and wait until you give me the key back. *(EXITS)*

Brad: *(PUTS KEY IN POCKET AND LOOKS AROUND THE ROOM, HE SITS DOWN JUST AS DOOR OPENS AND JANE ENTERS)* Hello Lady Wigton.

Jane: Hello Vicar. But you don't have to call me Lady Wigton you can call me Jane.

Brad: Okay, Jane, but you must call me Malcolm.

Jane: Have you been interrogated by that nasty policeman yet.

Brad: No, I've managed to avoid him so far.

Jane: He seems very thorough and I'm not sure he's an actor.

Brad: Really, what makes you think that?

Jane: The type of questions he asked. He seemed to know too much about my character and what was in my envelope.

Brad: A bit too much like a real policeman.

Jane: Yes, but he was that good he might even be a ringer.

Brad: A ringer.

Jane: Yes a sleuth in disguise pretending to be an actor but solving the clues and winning the prize.

Brad: Do you get many ringers at murder mysteries?

Jane: Oh yes, but we always manage to solve it before they do.

Brad: *(SIGH OF RELIEF)* So our policeman is not an actor but a ringer.

Jane: Or a policeman. Come on let's go before he catches you, you naughty vicar.

Brad: What do you mean, naughty. *(BOTH EXIT JANE IS BEHIND BRAD, YOU HEAR A SLAP)*  
Jane. *(JANE GIGGLES)*

ENTER JOAN AND BERNICE

Joan: Right, you'd better calm down before you have a breakdown.

Bernice: I couldn't help it. It was that nasty policeman.

Joan: He was only pretending, he's an actor.

Bernice: Well, it felt real to me, all those questions, I mean, he kept telling me off for looking at my envelope. I had to look at the envelope to try and remember what I told him and whether I was allowed to tell him.

Joan: It didn't matter what you told him as long as it went with the plot.

Bernice: He kept on asking me whether I knew the deceased. I said I didn't.

Joan: Well, did you?

Bernice: *(LOOKS AT HER ENVELOPE)* No....well yes....but I wasn't supposed to tell anyone.

Joan: Then you was right not to tell him.

Bernice: But I was lying. You know I don't like lying Joan, I don't.

Joan: But this is acting.

Bernice: But it didn't feel like it, that's why I didn't like it.

Joan: *(TAKES A DEEP BREATHE PAUSES)* Right let's try it this way. Did you, know the guy who was playing Lord Wigton?

Bernice: No!

Joan: Then you wasn't lying.

Bernice: Really!

Joan: Really!

Bernice: Oh thank you, Joan. (*PANTING*) That makes me feel much better. I didn't lie to the policeman so I can't get done for pervading the course of justice.

Joan: No Bernice, your conscience is clear.

Bernice: Lovely, I think a nice cup of tea and a biccy is in order then. (*GETS UP TO GO*)

Joan: A Valium, a gin and a large slice of cake for me. (*BOTH EXIT, BERNICE FIRST OBLIVIOUS TO JOAN'S COMMENT*)

ENTER BARRY WITH MOBILE GLUED TO HIS EAR

Barry: Don, stop messing about and answer your phone. Look everybody thinks you're dead and now I'm beginning to think so too. How the police found out I don't know. What's more your body's gone missing; obviously you know that as it's you that's gone AWOL. Just pop back and tell everyone you're okay and soon or I will murder you myself for real this time! (*ENTER BRAD WHO GETS STARTLED WHEN HE SEES BARRY*) Hello, Brad isn't it? (*HE HASN'T NOTICED THAT BRAD HAS A PAINTING BEHIND HIS BACK*)

Brad: Oh, hi Mr Merriweather.

Barry: Everything okay?

Brad: Yes fine, just hiding from Jane....Lady Wigton. (*HIDES PAINTING BEHIND SOFA*)

Barry: Oh I see, yes she does seem to be having a bit of a monopoly on you.

Brad: A bit too intense. I think she's fallen for me.

Barry: Isn't she a bit too old for you?

Brad: No! Not me the Vicar.

Barry: Oh right, well you shouldn't worry too much it'll be all over tomorrow and then you can get back to being normal.

Brad: I'm not worried about tomorrow, its tonight, now she's single again she wants me.

Barry: Cricky she's a bit of a goer. O;d Wigton's only been dead less than a day and she's at it already....hold on what am I talking about? This isn't real.

Brad: I know that but I'm not sure whether she does. I don't know whether she's Jane or Lady Wigton but what I do know she's in love with the Vicar.

Barry: You are in a bit of a fix. Look you go hide out for a while and if it gets worse we'll kill you off.

Brad: Won't that change the plot a bit and confuse everybody?

Barry: No I don't think anyone will notice. They'll just think it's another twist.

Brad: So the plot's still the same.

Barry: Yes, yes nothing's changed. Now off you pop.

Brad: Right I'll just hide out for a while and hopefully Jane will get distracted elsewhere. Thanks, Barry (*EXITS STAGE DOOR BACK*)

Barry: Plot! What plot! Ahh It's all gone to plot! (*EXITS STAGE DOOR RIGHT*) (*ENTER JANE AND MAGGIE STAGE DOOR LEFT*)

Maggie: Jane you've got to snap out of it.

Jane: Snap out of what?

Maggie: This infatuation with the vicar. (*WHILE IN CONVERSATION SHE FINDS THE PAINTING AND TRIES TO HANG IT BACK ON THE WALL. MAKE SURE HOOK IS JUST OUT OF REACH*)

Jane: (*DREAMILY*) Oh Malcolm, isn't he a dish?

Maggie: Yes and young enough to be your son and he's just an actor pretending to be a vicar.

Jane: Is he, Oh he is (*SIGHS*) I thought it was too good to be true. (*PENNY DROPS*) Oh cripes I hope I haven't scared him off, I threatened to take him to my room tonight.

Maggie: What?

Jane: I've asked him up to my room

Maggie: What did you do that for?

Jane: I just got carried away.

Maggie: I say you did. What's he going to think, when he finds two sad old spinsters in winceyette nighties, curlers in and tucked up in bed with a cocoa doing the Times crossword.

Jane: Speak for yourself I have my penguin pyjamas and my polar bear onesie and I've got my Sudoku with me.

Maggie: Exactly! Not a particularly alluring sight for enticing a young man is it?

Jane: Oh pooh, I never thought of that. What am I going to do? (*IF MAGGIE IS STILL HAVING TROUBLE WITH PAINTING JANE GOES OVER TO HELP*)

Maggie: You'd better try and avoid him at all cost and hope he forgets about your midnight rendezvous.

Jane: Do you think I've made a fool of myself?

Maggie: (*SIT DOWN AFTER EXPLOITS*) Of course not, we'll just say that your character had to act like that to thicken the plot.

Jane: Are you sure it will work? What about Mr Merriweather?

Maggie: He's enough on his plate trying to keep this fiasco going. Now I'm not quite sure whether this man is a genius or an idiot but theoretically this man's been juggling knives and someone keeps throwing him extras

Jane: So we've got to solve this mystery before he realises he's not a juggler.

Maggie: Exactly.

Jane: Well, how do we start unravelling this mess?