



ELEMENTAL THEATRE COMPANY

MURDER AT
Redrum
MANOR

An original play by Elemental Theatre Company

A note from Elemental Theatre:

“Murder at Redrum Manor” is a piece of theatre like no other, and as such, requires some explaining before you read the script. The entire play is presented as a play within a play, with the actual storyline starting from Scene Two onwards as we get to know the amateur actors and backstage crew putting on their new production, “Murder at Redrum Manor”.

This means that, whilst the first scene sets up your standard murder mystery, it is also very over the top, and badly written. It should be acted in this way too.

The entire premise of “Murder at Redrum Manor” is to lure the audience into a false sense of security – to make them wonder exactly what they’ve come to watch, and then pull the rug from under them at the end of Scene One. As such, the entire promotional campaign leading up to performance should reflect this – the audience should think they’ve come to see a traditional murder mystery, set in the 1920s, in the style of Agatha Christie.

In order to properly hoodwink our audience, this means that the characters that are portrayed from Scene Two right through to the end of the play share the same names as our actors and crew. We strongly encourage you to change the names of these characters to fit your cast, and also to rewrite parts of the script to make it relevant to the actors you have available. Include in-jokes, references to previous productions, anything you think the audience will enjoy. It is entirely possible to chop and change the script as you see fit without removing the essence of the story.

Some technical issues: Scene One is meant to lead us to believe that the play is going wrong. As such, lights should flicker, sound should cut in and out at random times. We had our opening announcement about fire exits and mobile phone usage cut out halfway through, only to play again from the beginning. Our front of house team were dropping hints about sound issues as the audience entered – our actors were talking about flickering lights from a week before curtain up. Anything to make the “disastrous first scene” as believable as possible.

The montages between each scene should play backwards. These should be carefully choreographed to music, to allow set to be deconstructed whilst we see the scene we have just watched in reverse i.e. Godber and Whitefeather “undrinking” their whiskies, Brookfield walking Lady Whitefeather out instead of in, Lord Whitefeather falling asleep instead of waking up. All the while, parts of the set, be it a coffee table, an armchair, a painting, whatever, are disappearing and being replaced with “rehearsal props”. Everything should come together to give the audience the sense that they are travelling backwards in time, and convince them that, rather than the diabolical first scene they have just witnessed, they are about to watch something very special indeed.

Tom Morley, Elemental Theatre Company, 2019.

Cast List

Director Tom – Founder of the theatre company, and director of “Murder at Redrum Manor”. Very passionate about the play, but has a habit of turning people against him.

Elise – Technician for the theatre group, hiding a dark and destructive secret

Luke – Actor, portraying Lord Whitefeather. Has some anger issues, and enjoys eating.

Paula – Actor, portraying Lady Whitefeather. As someone who used to direct another drama group, she is not particularly happy with the way Tom has been running things.

Ezra – Actor, portraying Lord Claymoore. The newest member to join the theatre group, Ezra has a secret past that is about to be found out.

Rhian – Actor, portraying Lady Fulton. A bit of an outsider with a strange obsession for murder and true crime.

Chris – Actor, portraying Detective Godber. He tends to alienate himself from the rest of the group as he tries to stand up for Director Tom.

Tom – Actor, portraying Brookfield, and also the company’s backstage manager. Ignored by the director, Tom longs for a bigger acting role.

Act One

Scene One - Performance

The stage is set for a murder mystery – Murder at Redrum Manor. Director Tom sits in the audience with a drink. Elise the technician is in the lighting booth.

The show begins and we are treated to the opening minutes of Murder at Redrum Manor. Music plays briefly.

The parlour. An armchair, a three seater sofa and a coffee table, a rug of a skinned bear on the floor. Towards the back of the stage, a dresser, upon which sits a decanter of whisky and glasses. Portraits hang on the walls. Behind the sofa, a picture of Director Tom, dressed to look like one of Whitefeather's ancestors. A big clock hangs in the centre of the stage.

Lord Whitefeather is asleep in the armchair. The door opens and in walks Brookfield, followed by Claymoore and Fulton, who are already deep in conversation.

Claymoore: Of course it was me! It was all my idea! I persuaded Lady Whitefeather that a celebration must be held, after all, it's not every day you get to meet a detective as accomplished as Godber.

Fulton: And what a splendid idea it is as well! I've been so looking forward to this ever since I received the invitation last weekend.

Brookfield: If you'll take a seat, I'm sure Lady Whitefeather will be with you shortly. She's just getting ready.

Fulton: It's been a long time since we've had a gathering at Redrum Manor.

They spot Lord Whitefeather asleep.

Fulton: Although it's nice to see things haven't changed.

Claymoore: If anything, he's got worse. You should hear the stories Lady Whitefeather tells about him!

Fulton: Are these stories unpleasant?

Claymoore: No, not unpleasant exactly. But they say that he's a miserable oaf. Always sleeping.

Fulton: So, what did you make of the Detective's work? When Lady Whitefeather told me, I couldn't believe it.

Claymoore: I was the same. After all that time, to find a lost pocket watch so far from home.

Fulton: Madagascar, wasn't it?

Claymoore: Where exactly is Madagascar?

Fulton: Just off Australia, I think.

Claymoore: Is that near Torquay?

Fulton: Yes, it is. The pocket watch was very important to them, you know? Lord Whitefeather was beside himself when it went missing. It was thought lost forever. For a long time, it was believed to have been stolen by the butler.

Claymoore: Brookfield?

Fulton: The very man!

Claymoore: But why would he want to steal a pocket watch?

Fulton: Why would anyone want to steal a pocket watch? Thank goodness it was found, that's all I can say.

Brookfield re-enters, to announce Lady Whitefeather.

Brookfield: Lady-

Lady Whitefeather bursts in and interrupts him.

Lady: Hello, my friends! Roger, Ida! It's been so long! It's so good to see you! *To Brookfield.* Well, don't just stand there, man, fetch them some drinks. How long have they been sitting here? They must be parched. We're expecting top service tonight, only the best for Detective Godber.

Lady Whitefeather takes her seat on the sofa between Claymoore and Fulton.

Lady: There's something about that butler that I don't like. His eyes are too close together. I told Edward that we should get rid of him, but he insists on having him around. Why, I'll never know. He never wakes up long enough to talk to him. He never wakes up long enough to talk to anyone.

Lord: I am awake, dear.

Lady: Oh, so you can hear me then? I just thought it would be nice for you to make our guests feel welcome.

Lord: They're hardly guests. They're here so often they might as well let themselves in.

Lady: Often? We haven't had a get together in months. And you're to blame, Edward. If only you could wake up for more than five minutes to organise anything. We're the wealthiest people for miles around, people expect us to host. They expect it of us! Don't you, Roger, Ida?

Fulton: Oh yes.

Claymoore: Indeed.

Lady: Brookfield, where are those drinks?

Brookfield: Here, m'lady.

Lady: You took your time with them. I thought the clock was going to strike midnight before we got a drink. Now, go and wait in the hall. The detective should be here before long. I want this night to be perfect.

Brookfield exits.

Lady: See? This is what I mean, Edward. I told you years ago to get rid of that good for nothing butler. He's a waste of time, that man. And don't try to defend him! He's worked here for years and never shown a single sign of improvement. Much like yourself.

Brookfield re-enters, this time followed by Godber.

Lady: Agh, Brookfield, what do you want now!

Brookfield: Detective Inspector Godber.

Brookfield exits. Everyone stands.

Lady: Oh, welcome Inspector, welcome, do come in.

Godber: Thank you, thank you.

Claymoore: We've been hearing all about your recent adventures, Inspector.

Fulton: In Madagascar, so we're told.

Godber: Yes, indeed, it was quite a journey.

Lady: And to find my husband's pocket watch, after all this time! It was a Whitefeather heirloom, you know? Now, Detective, make yourself at home, I must go down and check on cook, make sure everything is going well with the dinner. I shan't be long.

Lady leaves.

Fulton: So tell us, then, Inspector. The pocket watch. Madagascar. It all sounds rather extraordinary.

During the following speech, some sort of technical glitches occur – perhaps this is as simple as the lights dimming, or perhaps music plays, or some static from microphones. Regardless of the nature of the interruption, the cast ignore any slip-ups and continue.

Godber: It is indeed. The story started right here in Buckinghamshire. Lord Whitefeather had told me previously about his pocket watch, and I'd made it my mission to recover it! I travelled south – to Scotland! There I received news from a reliable source that the watch had been sighted in Vancouver, Canada. It took me several weeks to travel there by canoe, and it was clear when I got there that the lead was a dead end. Instead of returning home, I spent a few days living amongst the moose – mooses – meese. A friendly Canadian fellow told me over a game of Chinese whispers that he had recently heard of a pocket watch sent across seas from Texas to Wyoming. I immediately left Canada and began to head north – to America! Once there, I found a suspicious package addressed to a man named Prince Julian. Inside the package was a clue – a receipt! Someone had purchased the pocket watch and it was set to be displayed in a gallery in France. I went to France via the great wall of China and there it was – the pocket watch I was searching for! However, there was

something amiss. This watch was not the same watch owned by Lord Whitefeather! I'd been following the wrong leads all along! Feeling dejected, I decided to take a holiday, and went to the deepest jungles of Madagascar. And there, hidden in the dirt amongst the snakes and the sheep, was the watch! I couldn't believe my eyes! I picked it up, dusted it off, and brought it home to where our story began, right here in Devon.

Claymoore: That was a very exciting story, Detective.

Fulton: I can't believe you were so brave! Living amongst the meese!

Godber: I was just doing my job.

Claymoore: Well, where is Lady Whitefeather? She simply must hear this.

Lord: I'm sure she won't have gone far. Why don't you two go and look for her? I'm sure I can entertain the detective for a while.

Claymoore: What an excellent idea. Come along, Ida!

Claymoore and Fulton exit.

Lord: Thank goodness for that, I thought we'd never get any peace and quiet. Do you know, you'd have thought after all these years, I'd be used to living in a house full of my wife's friends, but it doesn't get any easier. Thank goodness I have Brookfield, that's all I can say. Would you like a drink, my friend? We have the finest whisky.

Godber: Is that so? Then it would be rude of me not to have a tippie, if it's as fine as you say.

Lord: Haha, that's my man! Brookfield! Brookfield! Wherever has that butler got to? Never mind, never mind.

Lord Whitefeather jumps up and pours Godber a drink.

Lord: Here, get that down you. I must say, Godber, I am forever in your debt. Lady Whitefeather almost *murdered* me when I lost that pocket watch. It had been passed down from grandfather to grandfather. It was said, you know, that the pocket watch was first given as a present to my great great grandfather as he rode off to battle during the civil war. Handed to him by King Charles I himself, so the story goes. My wife used to enjoy showing it off to friends and family at Christmas time. The things that watch must have seen! 3 centuries. It must be worth a lot of money. I do wonder how it came to be in Madagascar.

Godber: Maybe we'll never know.

Lord: It must have been stolen, surely?

Godber: Perhaps. But there have been no break-ins. If it was stolen, it must have been stolen by someone with access to the manor.

Lord: But the only person with that sort of access is Brookfield.

Godber: Or someone that Brookfield trusts.

Lord: Someone like.... Lord Claymoore or Lady Fulton?

Godber: Where is the pocket watch now?

Lord: Upstairs, my friend, safe and sound. In fact, I should go and fetch it, show it off at the dinner. What an excellent idea! I shan't be a moment. You'll be ok by yourself, I trust?

Godber: Of course, of course. *Gesturing to the portraits.* I find that one is never truly alone when they have art to keep them occupied, anyway.

Lord: Indeed, indeed! I won't be a moment, old chap!

Lord Whitefeather leaves. Godber on his own a moment, studying the paintings.

A scream should be heard, from Lady Whitefeather. This is a sound effect, but the sound effect does not immediately play. Godber, played by Chris, is left standing onstage for a while before the sound effect eventually is heard.

As soon as the sound effect plays, Claymoore bursts in.

Claymoore: Did you hear someone scream?

Godber: I did indeed.

Claymoore: Where did it come from?

Godber: Over here, I think...

Lady Whitefeather runs in.

Lady: Detective! Oh Detective! Come quick!

Godber: Whatever's the matter, Lady Whitefeather?

Lady: It's Brookfield! I think he's dead!

Godber: What do you mean? Why do you think that?

Lady: I found him in the pantry. There was a lot of blood... and he didn't have a head!

Claymoore: Are you sure?

Lady: I'm fairly sure, dear. I wouldn't be screaming like this if he did have a head.

Lord Whitefeather enters.

Lord: I heard screaming, is everything ok?

The stage lighting goes completely out. This is intentional, of course, but the audience do not realise this. The actors freeze, and struggle for a moment to compose themselves before starting to continue awkwardly. They're lit only by the light of the lamp onstage.

In the audience, Director Tom stands up and goes to talk to Elise. They have a quiet conversation at the back of the hall.

The following part of the scene plays out like this while Tom is talking to Elise, until the actors are stopped by Director Tom.

Godber: Not exactly. Lord Whitefeather, could you show me to your pantry?

Lord: Of course. It's this way.

He leads Godber out. Lady Whitefeather pours a drink.

Claymoore: Sit down, Lady Whitefeather. What a shock.

Lady: I know. Who could have done such a thing? Poor Brookfield.

Claymoore: You don't think it was... you know... someone in the house?

Lady: I hadn't even thought of that. Where's Lady Fulton?

Claymoore: We were looking for you, but we got lost. There are so many corridors. I came back to the parlour, but Fulton decided to continue looking upstairs.

Lady: Quick, we must lock the doors, to make sure the murderer doesn't escape!

Claymoore: Are you crazy? We'll be locking them in with us. I don't particularly wish to be murdered, thank you very much.

Fulton Enters

Fulton: Ah! Lady Whitefeather, there you are. Where on earth have you been, is everything alright?

Claymoore: She returned to the parlor after she had found the servant, Brookfield, dead!

Lady: He was sans head! Laid out in a pool of his own blood. Murderer! In my own home, oh my. Where has the Detective Inspector gone?

Detective Inspector Godber enters.

Detective: Fulton, there you are - Lord Whitefeather is just contacting the station to alert them of what has happened. We have found a few clues: a pipe, a candle-stick holder and a rope. But first I must interview you each one at a time; starting with you Lady Whitefeather.

Lady: Me? Surely you wouldn't suspect me inspector?

Simultaneously, Director Tom and Elise are having the following argument. Throughout his dialogue, Director Tom is heard coughing.

Director Tom: Elise! What's going on? What's happened to the lights?

Elise: I don't know! *Tries a few things - nothing happens.*

Director Tom: Put them back on! We're in the middle of a performance!

Elise: Maybe the fuse has blown, I have no idea I've never done tech before! I'm trying!

Director Tom: *Angry* Well maybe if you came to more than one rehearsal, you'd be fine.
Calming Can you get them working again?

Elise: Yeah, give me a minute, I'll have a look.

Director Tom: Fine... Just hurry up, will you. Are you doing it?

He storms to the front of the hall, stopping the action on stage regardless of where the actors have got to.

Director Tom: Can we have the houselights up?

Elise obeys. Throughout the next speech, Director Tom's cough worsens.

Director Tom: Sorry, everyone, sorry. As you can see we've had some technical issues. The system has crashed, or something. Just needs to be rebooted. Our technician has promised us that she can sort things out. So we'll take a quick break and recommence the show in five minutes or so. *He is by now coughing so badly, he can hardly breath.* Sorry, I can't seem to get my breath, has anyone got a drink or something---

Suddenly, Director Tom pulls his hand from his mouth. Blood. He looks up at the audience, maybe back towards the stage, and then collapses. He is dead. Silence. Actors that are not present onstage re-enter, and stand in a line – our suspects. They stare at the director's body in shock.

Scene 2 – Dress rehearsal

We enter a scene transition and rewind time. Music plays, something to signify time moving backwards. The actors move from where they are stood in a line at the front of the stage, backwards to their character's initial positions onstage. As they move, the actors quickly replace the props where they're meant to be—eg. whiskey glasses and decanter are moved back to the dresser. A big clock reverses in time (one of the actors can do this manually). Director Tom regains his seat in the audience.

The parlour as before. The portrait resembling Director Tom has been replaced with one that's damaged and been badly taped back together. A bottle of cleaning fluid stands to one side of the stage.

Lord Whitefeather (or Luke, as we shall now call him) is meant to be asleep in the armchair; in reality, he's sat there, eating some crisps, relaxing while the others act out their lines. Luke doesn't see the point in pretending to be asleep this whole time considering it's just a rehearsal.

The door opens and in walks Brookfield (Tom), followed by Claymoore (Ezra) and Fulton (Rhian), who are already deep in conversation.

Ezra: Of course it was me! It was all my idea! I persuaded Lady Whitefeather that a celebration must be held, after all, it's not every day you get to meet a detective as accomplished as Godber.

Rhian: And what a splendid idea it is as well! I've been so looking forward to-

Director Tom: Come on, everyone, we need more energy! This is the dress rehearsal - do I need to make myself any clearer? We need some oomph! Ezra, your voice is so monotone I would rather die than listen to that. Right, come on, back out, let's take it from the top!

They all leave, and then Ezra and Rhian enter, as before, being led by Tom.

Ezra: Of course it was me! It was all my idea! I persuaded Lady Whitefeather that a celebration must be held, after all, it's not every day you get to meet a detective as accomplished as Godber.

Rhian: And what a splendid idea it is as well! I've been so looking forward to this ever since I received the invitation last weekend.

Tom: If you'll take a seat, I'm sure Lady Whitefeather will be with you shortly. She's just getting ready.

Rhian: It's been a long time since we've had a gathering at Redrum Manor.

They spot Luke "asleep".

Rhian: Although it's nice to see things haven't changed.

Ezra: If anything, he's got worse. You should hear the stories Lady Whitefeather tells about him!

Rhian: Are these stories unpleasant?

Ezra: Erm... line?

Director Tom: Come on, Ezra, this is next week. Next week. Can I not stress that enough? This needs to be perfect. Perfect! Do you hear?

Ezra: *Angrily* I'm doing my best! And it doesn't have to be perfect; it's only amateur!

Director Tom: Only amateur? Only amateur? Well, if that's your attitude, you might as well forget it now. Shall we do that? Eh? Forget it all?

Ezra: I didn't say that.

Director Tom: You didn't say much. You know, I'm beginning to wonder if I've made a mistake casting you. I mean, look at you. You call this acting? Even Rhian's better than you.

Rhian: Oi.

Ezra: Will you just give me the line?

Director Tom: *Grabbing the script* No.

Ezra: What?

Director Tom: No.

Ezra: I need the line.

Director Tom: Your line is "No". You should hear the stories Lady Whitefeather tells about him. 'Are these stories unpleasant?'. No, not unpleasant exactly. But they say that he's a miserable oaf.

Tom: You definitely are.

Director Tom: What's that? Got something to say, Tim? Something to add?

Tom: Tom, my name's Tom.

Director Tom: Whatever. And can you change that picture? We can't have it looking like that on opening night.

Tom: Who, me?

Director Tom: Yeah you. You're backstage manager. *Tom doesn't move.* Now? *Tom moves.* Oh, and Elise! Elise! Can you move that light? There's too much shadow on Luke's head! Luke! What have I told you? No food onstage!

Luke finishes his sandwich.

Luke: Food's gone!