

A Murder Mystery
(*Who done it!*)

Truly a wine induced short story.

I think the butler did it.

Or maybe:

It was done in the conservatory with a candlestick by Mr Mustard! Do any of you remember the game "Clue"

I have never written a murder mystery. This is new territory for me. I am just starting out and I don't know who the victim is, who the murderer is, what weapon was used, or the place where it happened.

Please Mr. Cabernet, give me some guidance. Maybe I am asking the wrong source. OK, please Stephan King or Anne Rice give me guidance.

Let's get right to it.

This is all my fault. I should never have been out walking on a rainy night in New York. I had just gotten dumped by my latest girlfriend. Just like many men before me, I sought solace from the bottom of a whiskey bottle. Too bad it was not my own whiskey bottle. At \$10 a shot, I spent all my available cash and now still wanted more. Drinking alone is not good practice either. Why not bare my sorrow to the local bar tender? Isn't that his job to console me. He consoled me out of my last \$100.

As I staggered out the bar, it was just by chance that I happened upon the scene of a murder. In an adjacent alley, I saw a prone figure on the ground. Still reeling from too many shots of 100 proof, I wasn't sure if it was real. I cautiously approached and even in my inebriated state, I could tell that this woman in a sexy red dress was not moving. I bent over to check her pulse when someone spotted me on the walkway I had just left. Before I knew it, police had arrived, handcuffed me and gave me my Miranda rights.

Normally I would have been thrown in a drunk cell, but murder suspects are usually jailed in separate cells. Finally the alcohol took over and I passed

out. I awoke the next morning with a splitting headache and no Advil or aspirin to give me relief.

Author's note:

Each year a bunch of my former workmates and I would spend four days up in the Sierra's fishing. Well, fishing was one of the activities, but drinking was #1. We would start early morning with a breakfast Bud. Proceed all throughout the day on various alcohol concoctions. Bloody Mary's being one of our favorites. We were young and had lots of drinking endurance. Two o'clock was not an uncommon time to quit. About 4 AM I woke up with a splinting headache. Take too aspirin with water. What water? The campground facet was frozen. Not one to give up easily, I stumbled down to the creek and drank directly from it. I was lucky I didn't get giardia. This is an intestine bacterial condition resulting from drinking water contaminated with animal waste.

To continue:

The deputy came around at 10 AM with a plate of scrabbled egg and bacon. He also gave me some coffee. Oh! You are my savior. You are going to need more than me to save you. What do you mean? When am I going to be released from here? You might never be released. What do you mean? Your arraignment is scheduled for tomorrow morning in the Superior Court downtown. Arraignment for what? Didn't you listen to the arresting officer. You are charged with first degree murder. What? I was just walking by when I entered that alley. They found your fingerprints on her neck. She had been strangled. I was just checking her pulse to see if she was alive. That's a good one. You should use that at your trial.

My arraignment went just about as I expected. I was assigned a lawyer appointed by the state. This usually is the case when they asked you to phone your lawyer and you don't have the money to hire one and don't know any. I pleaded not guilty of course. That was the truth and I was sticking to it. My lawyer advised me to plead guilty and hope for a reduced sentence. Reduced from what to what? Reduced from life in prison with no possibility of parole to 25 years, unless you raped her. We might be able to argue a case of manslaughter based on your alcohol blood level. We could say you did not

know what you were doing. I was just walking by. You can try that, but they found you bent over the victim with your hands around her neck. Her body was still warm and she had been strangled. This kid looked like he had just got out of law school yesterday. The judge set my bail at \$200K. Usually the bail was 1 mil for murder cases, but since I didn't have a prior record and this was a blue state, the judge set it at \$200K. I was surprised they didn't release me for free. I should have told them I was an illegal alien. Sorry, make that migrant refugee. It didn't matter much. If he had set it a \$1000 I would still be locked up.

So I thought I would be spending many days and nights locked up here before I found out what was going on. I was surprised when a couple hours later the deputy informed me I was being released.

I was baffled and even more so when a beautiful woman presented herself with a bail ticket for \$200K.

Her name was Gail. She looked to be about 25, but I expected she was much older. Rich girls can do that. I didn't see any evidence of plastic surgery, but her demeanor indicated older. No complaints on my part. I would have welcomed Rosanne Barr if she had paid my bail.

I got in her Mercedes and she drove me to a brownstone building in the rich part of New York. To me, all of New York was the rich part, but this was a really really rich part. I followed her up the steps and into a luxurious foyer. This was almost as big as my little apartment in the Bronx. She indicated that I should sit down at a nearby table. She walked over to a bar setup and poured two glasses of Bourbon with ice. Her locomotion on the way to the bar showed that she knew how to move to make any man take notice. I did notice. If she had bailed me out just to have sex with me, I was all in. I soon learned that was not her purpose. When she sat down, I asked the foremost question on my mind. Why did you bail me out? She said, because I am sure you are innocent. Why would you help me? Because, if they clear you, I am the next most likely suspect. Please explain. The woman who was murdered was my husband's mistress. You and I have a vested interest in finding the real killer.

A Murder Mystery
(Chapter 2)

Why did you pick me to help you? Good question. With your Bohemian scraggly looks and disheveled dress, you don't appear very intelligent. I did research on you before I wasted my time and money. You have an extremely high IQ, although getting your self arrested on a rainy New York night in a back alley challenges that assessment. I just got dumped and was feeling morose. Not thinking straight after drowning my sorrows. What could I do to help? I need you to infiltrate my family. Get to know their personalities and figure out who is the most likely killer. I am sure he or she is among them.

Gail gave me the run down on all the characters I should look at. Here is the list and what motive they might have.

#1 Jeff, her husband. She is the wealthy one who inherited her father's fortune. He had warned her before marriage to be sure to draw up a prenuptial agreement. Not wanting to taint her true feelings of love, she only had one condition. If he was unfaithful, the agreement was void. So of course he had the best reason to oft his mistress.

#2 Her younger sister Mary, who was always jealous of her for being awarded total control of the family's finances. Her motive would be revenge. Pin the murder on her sister.

#3 Uncle Frank, Mary's husband. Same motive as Mary.

#4 Gail's son Gary. He adored his mother and hated his father. If he knew of his father's adultery, he would want to make him pay for hurting his mother.

#5 Anytime this much money is involved, motives fall from the sky. We're talking \$\$\$ billions here.

I needed to get more information from Gail. Who is the victim? Oh, that is

Madelyn. She had become part of our inner circle several months back. My cousin Jack had introduced her as his girlfriend. We all had excepted her based on his input. She was from a wealthy family, educated at Bryn Mawr, and really a delightful person. That was up until I had found out she was cheating with my husband. How did you find out? Did you catch them in the act? No, nothing like that, Henri (a french name pronounced “onrey”) told me about it.

Author's note:

Tony from the Francine story told me that is the correct pronunciation. He was fluent in French, in case you didn't know.

Who is Henri? Oh, he is our French butler. OK, stop the presses. The case has been solved. I can finish this story right now? Everyone knows that the butler did it.

Henri is aware of all the gossip that goes around at the mansion. The mansion, what is that? It is where the family usually interacts for our weekly gatherings. Does this mansion have a conservatory, are there candlesticks on the fireplace mantle, and do you have any mustard in your fridge? Yes, I have all of those things, why do you ask? Nothing, it is just something from my past. I imagine you all get Plum (Professor Plum) tired of me injecting these Clues (the game) into my stories.

So now I added Henri and cousin Jack to the growing list of suspects. I didn't inform Gail of these additions. After all, she invited me to be like a fly on the wall. Just listen, but don't give out my opinion.

I decided to take Gail's request. I would find out later that there were plenty more suspects than the ones she mentioned. If she thought she was off of the list, she didn't know me very well. I am not that naive.

So what is the first thing I need to do? You need to clean yourself up otherwise there would be no chance any of my family would even talk to you, let alone let down their hair. Your Bohemian style and grubby looks won't work.

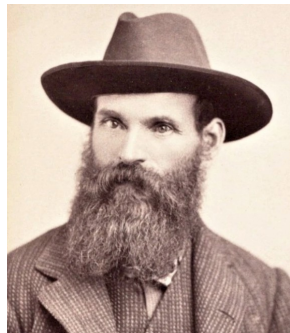
She sent me to her finest tailor after a complete make over at a spa and hair salon. I could get used to this. I have only three months until my trial date, I might as well make the best of it.

Before



Actually I looked far worse than this picture. Remember, I had spent a couple nights in jail without a shower and a change of clothes.

After



Sorry, wrong picture!

Really after



When I returned and entered her brownstone, she said wow! You clean up nicely. I could tell that she was impressed. She made another trip to the whiskey bar. Her motion was even more sultry and alluring than before. When she returned, her smile was much brighter too. Maybe my chances of being hired for sex were improving.

Don't judge me. Her and her husband are separated and sleeping in separate rooms. I was just dumped. As far as I am concerned, we are both single adults. Besides, who knows what my future might be. I may be spending the next 20 years or so rejecting advances from my fellow inmates.

As it turned out, I needed not to have worried about her. Others, not so sure.

So how are you going to introduce me to your family? You majored in finance at school true? Yes, I also dabbled in the stocks and the bond market. Perfect! That will be your profession. All my family like money guys. At first you will be accompanied by my best friend. Everyone will assume you are her latest squeeze. I don't think you will be disappointed being her partner. Her name is Fiona.



A Murder Mystery (Chapter 3)

I met the family during the next meeting at the mansion. And what a mansion it was. I couldn't count all the rooms and it was situated on an expanse of land rare in Manhattan. I won't even guess at its value.



I was received fairly warmly, but only because I was accompanied by Fiona. Gail was correct. I did indeed feel privileged to be associated with such a charming beauty. Fiona informed me to keep my hands off of her. Gail had given her strict rules regarding me and also told me to play it cool with her. I treated her to the proper attention someone of her stature deserved, but did not go around displaying overboard amorous affection. Don't you think we should at least embrace a time or too just for show? Nice try Romeo, but I will stick to the plan. I found out that the family meetings centered around their current investments. I was asked my opinion on several of them. I suspect they were testing out my knowledge to see if I was worthy of their company. I think I held my own.

I wanted to wander around the spaces. I excused myself saying I needed the restroom. Fiona pointed me to a staircase to the upper floor. That was exactly what I wanted. I didn't need any company. At the top of the stairs there was a long hallway. There was another set of stairs to the third floor. As I slowly walked down the hall, someone approached me from behind. I

didn't know her. She grabbed my hand and tried to pull me into one of the many bedrooms that lined the hall. Suddenly another voice called out. Rosalyn, no no! She turned and abruptly walked back toward the stairway. That was the first time I met Ashlee. Sorry Mr. Rydell, Rosalyn always forgets her place in our home.

Rosalyn, an Irish beauty



What is it with all the women in this family? Did they capture all the most perfect women on the planet and import them here? Fiery red hair and those captivating green eyes.

I am Ashlee, Gail's daughter. Gail was stunning in her own right, but a younger version of her was absolutely breathtaking. I learned later that she is 20 years old. Her younger brother is only 15. My original assessment of Gail's age was a little off. I thought she might have been 35, but now I imagine she is approaching 40. So at 27, I am right between a voluptuous cougar and a fresh young kitten. Not that I was expecting invitations from either. Doesn't keep me from hoping. Gail must have prepped her daughter on who the new stranger in the group was. Ashlee had spotted me going up the stairs followed by Rosalyn. I was thankful she had saved me from an embarrassing situation. How could I have brushed off Rosalyn's advances without bruising her ego. I should have whispered, "there is always later".

I did need a bathroom stop. Then I descended the stairs and tried to mingle. The others were polite enough, but I could feel the distance each one safeguarded themselves with. It would take time to gain their confidence. The occasion for that presented itself in the offer by Uncle Frank to go

fishing on his yacht. Have you fished before Mr. Rydell? Please call me James. I haven't for a while, but I always liked it. Would you care to join us this weekend? I would be most delighted to participate. So that was my opening to get to know most of the guys. Some of the women were going to join in too. Gail and her daughter were among them. Rosalyn and Fiona said they always get sea sick so they begged off. Gail's husband Jeff and several other of the men cousins and their wives would be going too. This is good. Uncle Frank's yacht was something dreams are made of. At least for me it was. Here is a picture.



So the morning arrived and we all came aboard. Uncle Frank was the captain, but Jeff was clearly in charge as he directed where we were supposed to find the biggest schools. I made the most of the voyage trying to get acquainted with as many family members as I could. I was doing OK, but not really making an impression on anyone that I could tell. We spent four hours cruising up and down here and there and no one was catching anything. It was time for me to step up. My father had been a commercial fisherman and I had accompanied him on enough trips to know how to catch fish. None of these guys knew how to really fish. Finally, I had had enough. I said, if you really want to catch something you have to slow down. Also, the rigs you are choosing are all wrong. This did not go over very well. I stepped on their pride. So mister expert, what do you recommend? I bet you I can catch something if you let me try. You want to bet? I bet you \$1000 you can't catch anything either. Now I was in a dilemma. I didn't have \$1000. You are on, I challenged. I need to find the right lure. I motioned for Gail to step aside. Can you back me? I hope you know what you are doing, but yes I

can. Don't worry, your money is safe with me.

I chose a yellow feathered lure. I asked Uncle Frank to reduce the speed to 3 knots. I knew that trolling at a low speed with leaded line would bring up some big fish from the depths. We were almost back at dockside when my pole bent in half and I hooked something big. It took me 45 minutes to land it. A 50 pound blue-fin tuna. If iced up, boxed and sent to Japan, this would sell for \$12,000. Suddenly I was a big hero. One thing I learned about rich people. They don't think anything about putting down hundreds of \$\$ for a gourmet meal, but if you give them something for free, they are just as delighted as a poor person. I was now the hero of the fishing trip. Gail raised a glass of Champaign to me as we headed back toward shore. Ashlee approached me and sat down beside me. She said, well done Mr. Rydell. Please call me James. I kind of like Mr. Rydell. There is something strange about you though. What is that? I don't believe you are Fiona's type. What type is that? She likes the nerdy types. You don't fit that mold. It seems that Ashlee is more astute way beyond her years. Well nothing is as it seems in this family as I can tell. Why should I be any different?

Gail came over to sit by us. What are you two talking about? Your daughter has told me a little about your beginnings. You were a fashion model when your husband zeroed in on you. From what I have observed of you in your bikini, you could still do that. Also, I don't believe you could have a daughter the age of Ashlee here. You really must be sisters. Wow, what a silver tongue I suddenly acquired. Even though both new that I was spouting BS, I could see that my words were well received. Gail was even blushing.

Later back in the mansion, I even made a bigger impression in the kitchen. My mother was an Italian chef. I instructed Antonio on how to prepare the ahi tuna steaks that were being served for dinner this night. Both my parents had passed away before I was 19.

While I was the talk of the day, I took the chance to talk to Henri. He congratulated me on my day. I brought up the subject of Madelyn. I said that I had read in the paper that one of the former ladies in the mansion group had been murdered. He said, she was no lady. It was well known that she had

seduced Mr. Stafford. I am so sorry for Mrs. Stafford had to face that embarrassment. Knowing that he was the source of Gail's info, I said, did you witness his infidelity? No, not exactly, but I saw how he looked at her flaunting her body back and forth like a whore. I detected some hostility here toward Jeff. I was starting to think that maybe Henri had more of an interest in Gail than receiving a paycheck. He continued on. If they end up getting a divorce it would be well deserved. I heard that they apprehended the murderer. Yes, I suspect that he will spend many years behind bars. Well I guess that is what he deserves.

Now if Henri had killed Jeff, I would pin that on him. But I can't see him killing Madelyn. So moving on to other suspects. Who is next?

A Murder Mystery (Chapter 4)

I needed to get closer to Uncle Frank. He had kept himself aloof from me. One sure way to become these types best friend is to give them some money making tips. I had a friend in the stock market. I tapped him for a favor he owed me. Do you have any good stock tips? I have and insider trader tip, but I can't use it. I am too close to the source. OK, give it to me. I am in need of something like that. I will explain later, if I am still a free man. What gives James? Are you in some kind of trouble? You could say that. I think facing life in prison constitutes some kind of trouble. What? Never mind. I am trying to work my way out of this. No more questions please. So I was in possession of an almost sure bet. Gail had let me keep the \$1000 I won from Tim. He was the cousin who had challenged my fishing prowess. Before I gave Uncle Frank the tip, I used that \$1000 to buy into the stock. A successful pharmaceutical company was on the verge of getting FDA approval on a drug they had spent years and tons of money developing. It was on the level of statins that every doctor in every clinic pushed on their patients. So I showed Uncle Frank my own bid of the buy. I told him this was going to be huge. Putting my own money where my mouth was is a good way to show that my tip is not just lip service.

A week later, at the next family gathering, I was up \$10K. Frank had

invested \$10K in the same stock. He was up \$100K. I was now his best friend.

I suggested we get together to celebrate our financial success. Alcohol is a good toxin for loosening the lips. It is also a bad toxin for straight thinking. How many guys have experienced beer goggles? This is a term used to describe making a date late at night at a bar with someone who you thought looked like Jessica Alba. The next morning you open her door and there stands Rosanne Bar.

Author's note: I had an experience not quite like that, but along the same line. Before the Internet, there was a publication called the Singles Register. You posted a photo of yourself along with a short paragraph describing your hobbies and interests, etc. I saw this picture of an Asian princess. I called up and made a date for dinner and a movie. I drove all the way from Beaumont to Arcadia. When I knocked on the door an older looking woman opened. I kind of looked around her and almost asked, "Is your daughter home?" As it turned out, she was my date. The picture was at least 15 years old. False advertising for sure. I still took her to dinner and a movie.

To continue:

So we were at a downtown bar sitting in a booth. No other family members present. I was plying Frank with shots of good bourbon. I pretended to keep up with him, but was just faking it. After awhile, I slipped the subject of Madelyn into the conversation. Frank was really upset over her death. He let out that Madelyn had gotten a bad rap from the family. She was not really the hussy others portrayed her as. She was just a friendly soul and some took that the wrong way. I prodded him on. I heard from Henri that she had seduced Mr. Stafford. No way. Henri is full of it. He started to slur his words. He is rumor mill #1. In case you are wondering. This is what Madelyn was wearing when I found her. Another angel sent down from heaven. Hopefully she has returned.



There is no way someone of Madelyn's character would associate with the likes of Mr. Stafford. So my impression was that Frank was kind of infatuated with Madelyn. Not surprising. Maybe his wife noticed his amorous view toward this striking beauty. Perhaps I should move Frank's wife Mary up a notch on the suspects list. I thought it was enlightening of his opinion of Mr. Stafford. Maybe Frank had some interest in both Madelyn and Gail. Food for thought.

With the money I had received from my stock win, I moved into my own flat not too far from the mansion. Cost me a pretty penny, but I thought I was making progress. I created a poster board and listed all the suspects. Actually, I posted photos of all the family members regardless of my suspicions. Previously, Gail had let me stay in her brownstone. I told her I appreciated her bailing me out of jail and giving me a place to stay, but I needed my own private space. I told her she was welcome to visit me anytime to discuss the case. The implied invitation was that I am available to you for any services you require. No explanations needed.

Gail never took me up on that offer. That was because Henri turned up as the next victim. Someone was systematically removing possible witnesses of their own crimes. I had just had a discussion with Uncle Frank, who did not like what Henri had said about Madelyn. Uncle Frank's position on the suspects list was moving up and down like a bobber tied to a line getting continuous bites.

Since this involved a member of the same group as Madelyn, the same two cops who had arrested me were sent out to investigate the crime. I was not at the mansion at the time of the murder so they did not need to interview me.

That was fortunate. Even though my entire look was altered, they would probably have seen through that and arrested me for the second crime.

Of all the mansion family, (don't get mixed up, I didn't say the Manson family, one of the most notorious criminal cults in history), the least one I expected to visit me in my flat was Ashlee.

I might have hoped for Gail, Fiona, or even Roslyn, but Ashlee? Total surprise. I invited her in of course. What brings you to my lair? I was trying to act cool. I wanted to talk to you about current events. I figured out what your purpose was being introduced into the family. Did your mother turn me out? No, actually I deduced it myself. I was following the news about Madelyn's death and I read that the murder suspect was out on bail. From the looks of your picture, I guessed that you wouldn't have had the money to bail yourself out. Even after your makeover, I could still see the resemblance. I told you she was a lot smarter than people gave her credit for. Most would not see past her looks to realize there was more to her than that beautiful face and sensuous figure.

So what have you deduced? You are trying to figure out who killed Madelyn and now Henri. Why would I do that? Because you are the prime suspect in Madelyn's murder and I would imagine you will be accused of Henri's too. Why have you come to me with this information? I also think you are innocent and I am afraid that I may be in danger too. Too many coincidences have occurred in the past months. There has been more hanky panky going on in the mansion than you can imagine.

She gave me a run down on who was jealous, who was meeting in secret, who had the most to gain, and who would be bold enough to carry out their vendettas.

This whole scene was turning in to one big Peyton Place. In case you were too young to have seen.

Fifty years ago, the novel Peyton Place shocked America with its tale of secrets, sex, and hypocrisy in a small New Hampshire town, becoming one of

the best-selling dirty books ever, a hit movie, and TV's first prime-time soap.



Note prime actors Mia Farrow and Ryan O'Neal

Ashlee left after giving me her opinions. As I saw her to the door, I said, you can come visit me anytime even if it is not to discuss murder. She turned and gave me a radiant smile that could have melted a million hearts. I just might do that Mr. Rydell.

I had been acting like a detective for one month and I still had no idea who the murderer was. I might as well throw darts at the poster board of suspects I had pinned up on my flat wall. Why not? It can't be any less accurate than my detective methods so far. I had all the family members photos up there. I also had drank a considerable amount of wine before my trial test. Actually, it is in this state that I come up with my most probable solutions. I grabbed my finest championship quality dart and sent it flying toward the poster board. Ha! It hit right in the center of Ashlee's crotch. I guess you can figure out where my mind was centered. OK, that was not a fair toss. Let's get serious here. Maybe blind would be more effective. I covered both eyes with my hand and fired away. The dart hit Ashlee in the heart. Am I getting some message from some unknown entity or spirit giving me clues that I hadn't thought of? It wouldn't be the first time.

Author's note: I had just woken up from an hour slumber in my recliner chair when I heard a noise emit from a dancing figure with her arms waving in the air. This vision very clear near the hallway next to my fridge in the darkened part of my kitchen. I thought it was my wife and I called out her name. The figure then moved into the hall and disappeared from my sight. A bright flash of light from my computer room ended the sequence. My wife was fast asleep in the closed bedroom door. The whole thing lasted about 15 seconds.

(This is not fiction)

In fact, I think someone from beyond is giving me my story lines. The line between reality and illusion is getting really thin. Ooh, ooh! Halloween is just around the corner.

A Murder Mystery
(Chapter 5)

I was half way through my three months grace period and was not any closer to solving the case. I texted Ashlee and told her that I needed more intel. I also said it was kind of an emergency. She arrived at my flat 20 minutes later. I let her in the door and she said, OK, what is the emergency? I said I have a pan of chicken scallopini on the stove, garlic bread toasting in the oven, and an unopened bottle of Chianti sitting on the table. I need some quick action to take care of that. She saw through my ploy, turned around and was about to leave. Then she turned back around and said, OK Mr. Rydell, show me what you've got.

I don't know if it was my cooking, my charm, or the empty bottle of Chianti, but she didn't leave until the next morning. As she left my apartment she said, see you later Mr. Rydell. Was this a one night stand on her part? That was still uncertain.

After processing Ashlee's inputs, I felt I needed another event to get closer to the family members.

Uncle Frank came through again. Everyone wanted another fishing adventure. I hoped they didn't expect to land a 50 lb blue fin tuna at each outing. Of course I was invited. I was the new celebrity among the family members. Uncle Frank had spread the news that in addition to my fishing talent, I was also a genius stock picker. I wasn't going to be able to pull that kind of magic out of a hat every time. I did do some homework though. I had some safe investment tips that might appease the hungry money grabbers.

Once again we ventured out in Uncle Frank's yacht. No one was listening to Mr. Jeff Stafford, much to his dismay. Maybe I should be cautious on who I offended. I might be the next victim. My dear old dad's wisdom came back to me just when I needed it. He always told me to watch for the birds. They are feeding on bait fish. Where the bait fish are, the bigger ones are too. I did some research on where the best area to fish close to New York was. I asked Frank to head toward that place. This time I rigged our poles for surface fishing. I spotted lots of birds feeding where the water was boiling with activity. I directed Frank to head in that direction. One hour later, everyone had exhausted themselves pulling in yellow fin tuna, flounder, cod, and sea bass. I had once again proved my expertise as the fishing king.

During the trip, Ashlee keep her distance. She acted kind of cold toward me. I guess my assessment of the night before was fairly accurate. A one night stand for sure.

Later that evening, I was once again the prince of the ball. The French were not the only ones who knew how to make Bouillabaisse. My mother's Italian version could rival any French chef.

Author's note: I have made this soup myself several times. One of my favorite recipes.

I was truly tired after all that excitement, drink, and food. I returned to my flat kind of depressed. A knock on my door changed all that. Ashlee told me that she had to act that way to avoid any suspicion from her mother. I thanked my lucky stars that I had moved out of Gail's brownstone. Ashlee

and I could spend time together away from prying eyes.

I wanted to spend some time with Ashlee somewhere else besides my flat. We needed to be discrete. Not that we needed anyone's permission to be together. There is still a killer loose and who knows what feathers would be ruffled if our relationship was found out. I imagine Gail would not be too please nor her father Jeff. Fiona and Roslyn could care less.

There were several place near NYC that we could go and not be scene. Central Park was not one of them. We managed to get away for one day to see Niagara Falls and a few other New York romantic sights.



Top of the Rock Observation Deck



Gourmet Evening Dinner Cruise
One of my favorites



I would feel like I was in heaven if it wasn't for that possible pending jail sentence.

So where am I so far? Uncle Frank and Mary were still at the top of my list. Jeff and Gail Stafford were not far behind. I needed to bait the killer into making a desperate move. My plan was risky, but only to me.

At the next family mansion meeting I told everyone I had an announcement to make. I could see Ashlee's face. She was afraid I was going to make our relationship known. I saw her give a slight shake of her head back and forth. That is not what I did. I told everyone that Gail had introduced me to the family to find out who had killed Madelyn. I now know who the killer is. My next step is to bring the evidence I had accumulated to the police. I walked out of the room leaving everyone in a state of shock.

I am sure Gail informed everyone of my whereabouts. I had prepared myself for the inevitable attack. No one contacted me and I was now a pariah to the family. Even Ashlee did not come to see me. So the one thing I did not expect happened. Nothing. I spent the next month paranoid, seeing every person as my executioner as the countdown to my court date approached. I had let myself fall back into my old habits. I discarded my fancy clothes, went unshaven, and even bought a wig for my trial appearance to look like my old self. I was back to the same guy who had been captured in that alley with his hands around the victim's neck. My prospects did not look good. I could not rely on Gail to bail me out of this one.

At my trial. My junior lawyer was trying his hardest. He brought up the fact that I had just left a bar where I had donned at least 10 shots of whiskey over

a period of a couple hours. There were collaborating witnesses to this fact. How could I have the strength to strangle anyone? The prosecutor objected. Is the lawyer a fitness expert? Objection sustained.

He also called as witnesses the police officers who had arrested me. Did you read Mr. Rydell his rights? Yes we did. Did he acknowledge that he understood. Yes he did. What did he say? He said "Right on!" My lawyer objected. Does this sound like someone who was coherent? We have heard all kinds of affirmations in our line of work. Objection over ruled. How is it that you apprehended the suspect so quickly? We had an anonymous caller who said it looked like a woman had been accosted. No further questions your honor.

The county coroner was also a witness. When did you determine the time of death? It was somewhere between 10 PM and 11PM. My lawyer jumped in. My client didn't even leave the bar until midnight. Basically you are saying that the victim had already been dead before my client found her. The prosecution objected. The police officers found the defendant with his hands around her neck. That is pretty conclusive. Before the judge could rule on the objection. My lawyer piped up, objection your honor. Is the prosecutor more knowledgeable of time of death than the coroner? I was starting to gain more respect for him. Mr. Rydell already testified that he was checking her for a pulse. Objection your honor, is Mr. Rydell claiming to be a doctor now? The court erupted in shouts and pandemonium from the spectator's gallery. Order in the court, as the judge slammed down his gavel. We will take a short recess.

As everyone returned to the court room, I asked my lawyer, what do you think of my chances? Right now it is 50/50, but I have a surprise witness who might turn the tides in your favor.

Hoping to not have to use his ace in the hole, he asked the judge for dismissal of the charges based on insufficient evidence. The judge looked like he was about to grant that request when the prosecutor called for a side bar.

I couldn't hear what was being said, but my lawyer came back saying that the

prosecutor convinced the judge to let the jury decide.

There was no other move to make. My lawyer called for the final witness. Everyone in the courtroom turned and was mesmerized by the stunning female who approached the bench. They led her through the promise to tell the whole truth and nothing but the truth ritual. I was just as stunned as everyone else as my eyes riveted on the woman I was madly in love with. State your name. I am Ashlee Stafford. The prosecution objected again. This witness was not on the list. She had just come forward and I didn't have time to inform the prosecution, my attorney put forth. The judge said he would allow it.

Under oath, she told the following story:

I was in a taxi at 10:30 on the night of the murder. As we drove by, I saw a man in a suit emerge from an alley. The very same alley where the victim was found strangled. What did you do? I called the cops. The arresting officers said that they had received an anonymous tip, was that you? It must have been. We will need to subpoena your phone to check the records. That is not possible. I lost my phone while on a fishing trip a couple months back. I had bought a new one since then.

I remember seeing Ashlee leaning over the gunwales of the yacht. I did not know what she was doing, but seeing her bent over in a bikini was unforgettable. Now I am thinking that is why the cops arrived so soon after I entered the alley. They were already on the way and had been notified.

Why did you wait so long before telling this? I was afraid. You may know that the victim was associated with my family and recently our butler was murdered too. I came forward because I did not want to see an innocent man go to jail. The prosecution had no recourse but to believe this woman from such a prodigious family. My lawyer asked the judge to dismiss the case. Case dismissed as he slammed down his gavel. The defendant can leave. I couldn't believe it. I was a free man.

As I left the courtroom, Ashlee said let's get you cleaned up. You look disgusting. I don't have a place to stay. I had to give up my flat. Don't

worry, I rented the same flat. We can go back there after you visit the spa and hair salon. First being saved by the mother, now the daughter. Why did you save me? Maybe I like you a little. Maybe it is the reason I told the judge. I didn't want to see a innocent man go to jail. Maybe I need you to find the real killer. He or she is still around and close by.

So Ashlee and I were back together. I invested some money, I borrowed from her, and with my friends wisdom in the stock market was soon an independent man again. I didn't want to be seen as leaching off of my girlfriend. We even made our relationship known. As expected, Gail and Jeff were not thrilled, but learned to accept it. Uncle Frank was more than willing to have his financial guru and fishing expert back in his company.

I don't want to drag this mystery on much longer. I know who the killer is. I am just wondering what your guess is. Here is the list, in the order I thought was the most promising:

#1 Uncle Frank

#2 Mary, his wife

#3 Jeff Stafford

#4 Gail Stafford

#4 Henri (Even though he is dead, he may have committed the first murder)

#5 Tim, the cousin who challenged me on my fishing expertise

Why him? I just didn't like him.

#6 Marilyn's Ghost

#7 Fiona

#8 Roslyn

Here is what happened.

Uncle Frank was arrested for the murder of Henri and Madelyn. The police were sure this time they had captured the real killer of both crimes.

Uncle Frank was subsequently convicted and given a life sentence because his defense attorney argued that this was a crime of passion, not appropriate for the death penalty.

Please tell me who you think the murder or murderers were and what you think happened. If you don't want to answer, that is OK.

What led the police to suspect Uncle Frank? These are things you might want to consider if you give me your analysis.

At this point, I don't have any more insight into the murders than was presented in my earlier chapters.

I will tell you all my answer in an epilogue after I think of my own conclusion and receive any of your guesses. Maybe your explanation of why your candidate did it is better than mine.

A Murder Mystery (Epilogue)

Ashlee and Henri killed Madelyn because she was going to expose Ashlee's plot to take over the family's inheritance and she was going to share it with Henri. Even though her mother was rich, they had her on a meager allowance. She didn't want to wait years to inherit the fortune. Henri strangled Madelyn during a drive to a restaurant where they had invited her to dine. He had worked for years as a butler and felt that he had been treated more like a slave. He thought he was entitled. It was true that Ashlee was in the vicinity of the murder, because her and Henri had stowed the body in the alley. Then when she saw James stagger into the alley, she called the police. During James' trial, she made up the part where she saw a man in a suit leave the scene of the crime. This was the crucial testimony that had freed him. Ashlee convinced Uncle Frank that Henri had killed Madelyn knowing that Frank was secretly in love with her. So Uncle Frank killed Henri out of anger. Ashlee had recorded the exchange between the two and anonymously forwarded the video evidence to the police. The police never found out who sent it and didn't really care as long as they could close the case. Uncle Frank hit Henri with a candlestick he had grabbed from the conservatory fireplace mantle. How he had mustered the courage to do this was not clear. (There you go, The Mustard encouraged killer had used a Candlestick from the Conservatory to commit the crime). I had already given the same Clues to

you all in the beginning of this story. This worked out in Ashlee's favor because Henri could have exposed her crime. She could have let James rot in prison, but she had fallen in love with him.

At first, she thought her mother would be accused of the murder and then she would take over the estate. But that didn't work out as she had planned. She hadn't planned on James. Her and James continued their relationship and eventually married. In their first year of marriage, a tragic accident took both her parents lives. Ashlee, being the oldest heir, inherited the total estate. The traffic investigator said that a mechanical failure of the brakes on their car resulted in it gaining too much speed on the curve and it had careened off the cliff. Here is a picture of the curve and cliff.



Do you think James was naive enough to believe the total story? He loved Ashlee, but he kept one eye open and slept lightly the rest of their life.

So why would he even take the chance? As a relatively young 27 year old, would any male miss the chance to hook up with billionaire Ashlee? Love is blind and sees no faults.



The End