

DOLORES DE L'AMOUR

Character Booklet

Hello and welcome to Mistletoe Manor – and to the murder mystery set to unfold under its ancient roof. I am author Ruth Ware and I will be guiding you through the events of the night.

Your host is the bestselling writer Aubrey St Clair, author of more than forty books starring his celebrated sleuth Eric Argent, and founder of the Detective Club, whose members comprise the crème de la crème of crime writers. Tonight is the fiftieth annual meeting of the club, and you are one of the honoured guests.

First of all, an explanation about this character booklet. Anything written in italics is for your eyes only, so please don't read it aloud. It may contain secret information or clues to your motive, if you are guilty. However, you may choose to share this information as part of the discussions at the end of the evening.

The night begins with a draw determining who is the murderer and who is an innocent bystander. Whatever your status, keep this information to yourself! But when you come to the paragraph in the character booklet marked 'if you are innocent' or 'if you are the murderer', then you must read the appropriate section.

If you are innocent, you win by collaborating with your fellow bystanders to correctly figure out the murderer. If you are guilty, you win by tricking the other participants into accusing the wrong person.

You are elderly glamour puss Dolores de l'Amour, the author of 141 steamy crime novels starring the Las Vegas showgirl turned sleuth Clea Claudette. Clea shot to fame in the 1960s and ever since has been using her sultry feminine wiles to seduce, wheedle and sleep her way to the solutions of the crimes she encounters. Unfortunately, recent reviews suggest that neither you nor Clea have kept up with the times, and that the loving descriptions of her ample curves and habit of falling into bed with police and suspects have no place in a modern crime novel.

INTRODUCTION

Read the paragraph below to your fellow guests when you are invited to introduce yourself.

Hello, gentlemen, and what a pleasure it is to be in the company of such fine, handsome fellows. Dolores de l'Amour, amour by name, amorous by nature, as my late husband was so fond of telling everyone! You might know me from my Clea Claudette novels, books that bring you to the heart of sparkling Las Vegas in the company of one of its most luscious showgirls. Clea shimmies, hustles and seduces her way to the top – and even solves a few crimes along the way. But that's enough from me – for the moment at least. Perhaps we could discuss the crime world further in my boudoir?

CHAPTER 1 REVENGE IS A DISH BEST SERVED COLD

Read the paragraphs below when the narrator instructs you to do so.

Aubrey – Aubrey *dead*? Tell me it isn't true! Oh, my dear, sweet Aubrey! It seems like only yesterday that he was waltzing me around the ballroom in the Ritz Carlton New York, and we were consoling each other over the loss of my dear husband. As for any suggestion that I killed him, well, it's quite absurd. Everyone knows that I adored Aubrey, simply adored him. Look at the rapturous quote I gave his forthcoming novel, *Eric Argent and the Secretary's Revenge* – 'No one writes like Aubrey, he is simply the king of suspense.'

Yes, it's true that I went up to his study when I arrived – I wanted to speak to him about something – but he was with that secretary of his, so we agreed we would catch up in my boudoir after dinner. I went along to my room – I'm staying overnight, you know – to freshen myself up, and then went straight down for drinks in the hall where the other guests were waiting. I have no idea what time – who cares about petty details like that when darling Aubrey is lying in a pool of his own blood for heaven's sake? If only I'd sent that secretary packing and told him how I really felt – and now I'll never have the chance.

CHAPTER 2 A QUESTION OF MOTIVE

After the narrator has finished, it's time for you to ask some questions – and answer them!

Below are the questions you might wish to ask your fellow guests. Each guest can ask TWO questions, so choose wisely. They don't have to be directed at the same person. At the end are the questions you may be asked yourself. The answers may be different according to whether you are the murderer or an innocent bystander, so take a moment to read through all the questions and answers, and familiarise yourself with what you should say in the event that you are questioned.

If you are innocent, then your job is simple: to figure out the murderer. You need to get other people on your side, so don't be afraid to point out holes in the stories of your fellow guests! If you are the murderer, then remember you cannot lie – you must read out the 'if you are the murderer' answer if you are asked that question. However, your job is to deflect suspicion onto your fellow guests, by rousing suspicions against them. Be ready with some red herring theories!

Questions for Valerie Chime

- 1) You said you're something of a 'scribbler' – can you tell us a bit more about your literary ambitions?
- 2) Sir Aubrey always gave his speeches off the cuff. Why would he be writing out notes this time? Was that really what he was writing?
- 3) Can you tell us anything about the murder weapon? The maid said it was a letter opener. Do you know the one she meant?

Questions for Alex Masters

- 1) You said that you had last seen Aubrey at a writing retreat. Did anything happen there that we should know about?
- 2) What is your next book about?
- 3) You told us that you arrived on the 5.20 train from London, but other guests said the London train was late. Did you really take that train? How is it that you arrived ten minutes before them?

Questions for A. N. Andrews

- 1) What did you say in your letter to Sir Aubrey? It seems a big leap from writing one fan letter to being invited to join the Detective Club.
- 2) You told us that your train from London was late. Other guests who were on the same train arrived ten minutes before you. What were you doing in the interim?
- 3) What is your novel about?

Questions for Tuffy Farqueson

- 1) You seem awfully eager to make hay out of Aubrey's death with special editions and so on. Isn't that a little macabre?
- 2) You told us that you went up to see Aubrey before dinner but that he was dressing. Other people have told us he was in his study. Can you explain the discrepancy?
- 3) You mentioned Aubrey wrote to you about his forthcoming novel, *Eric Argent and the Secretary's Revenge*. What was the novel about?

Questions for Kick Carmichael

- 1) You mentioned that you drove down from London. Did anyone actually see your car arrive?
- 2) You don't seem very sure of the plot of your own books. Why is that?
- 3) How long have you been a member of the Detective Club?

Questions for Rowan McTaggart

- 1) You seemed very reluctant to look at Sir Aubrey's body. As a doctor, didn't you want to see if there was anything you could do?
- 2) You told us that your train from London was late, and you were one of the last to

arrive at the party, but other guests who were on the same train arrived considerably before you. How do you explain the difference?

- 3) In your opinion, as a medical examiner, would it have taken much strength to stab Aubrey?

Questions for Clive Barking

- 1) You said in your statement that you usually stay with Aubrey but you didn't this time – why was that?
- 2) You said that you co-founded the Detective Club alongside Sir Aubrey – I never knew that. It's very generous of you to let Aubrey take all the credit.
- 3) You mentioned that Sir Aubrey was stabbed with a letter opener you gave him – can you tell us a bit more about that?

Questions for YOU!

- 1) You told us that you gave Aubrey's forthcoming novel *Eric Argent and the Secretary's Revenge* a glowing quote. Other guests have told us that this book wasn't finished yet. How did you manage to give a quote for it?

If you are innocent, say: Aubrey told everyone that the book wasn't ready because he hadn't finished editing it, but the truth is that he had completed a first draft. I was always his first reader, and this was no exception – he sent me the manuscript by post a couple of weeks ago and it was a masterpiece – simply a masterpiece. Strictly *entre nous*, I've felt that his most recent novels have been becoming a little tired, but this was vintage Aubrey – audacious plotting, witty dialogue – it was like being transported back to Aubrey at his prime.

If you are the murderer, say: I don't know what you're getting at. If you're implying that I would give a quote for a book without reading it – well, that's absurd. I would be putting my professional reputation on the line for a book I hadn't read, and more to the point, what reason would I have for giving a professional rival a glowing quote for a substandard novel?

2) What was Aubrey's forthcoming novel about?

If you are innocent, say: Oh, it was simply vintage Aubrey – a classic, twisty plot about a downtrodden secretary who poisons her overbearing employer. The most remarkable thing is that she gets away with it – quite a departure for Aubrey who was usually punctilious about bringing the murderer to justice.

If you are the murderer, say: I don't think that that's any of your business. I read dozens of novels a week – I can't be expected to remember the plot of every single one. It was about Eric Argent and a secretary who got revenge – I don't see what more there is to say, or what relevance that has to Aubrey's death.

3) How did your late husband die?

Answer: It was a terrible tragedy – he was stabbed to death with a sharpened croquet marker, after a particularly heated match. The murderer was never found. I miss him every day.

CHAPTER 3 J'ACCUSE!

After the narrator has finished, it's time for you to share your theories with the other guests – and vote. The accused is decided by majority vote.

If suspicion has fallen on you, then read out the appropriate passage below.

If you are innocent:

Oh my days! I've never heard of such a thing. Oh, where are my smelling salts? This is too, too preposterous.

No, I didn't kill Aubrey, and I certainly didn't kill my darling husband – his death has haunted me every day for years, and for you to throw it in my face like this, oh, it's too much! I feel faint – someone, get me a brandy, quick!

If you are the murderer:

Curse you, you damned busybodies. Yes, I killed Aubrey and I don't care who knows it. My husband was a pig of a man, and I put up with him for more than twenty years, until I finally snapped during a game of croquet right here at Mistletoe Manor. I hit him over the head with a mallet and then hammered the croquet

marker through his chest. God knows how Aubrey found out – I suppose he must have suspected, and then one night I got drunk and he wheedled the truth out of me somehow.

Since then my life has been a living hell. Aubrey's been blackmailing me for quotes and puffs for his dismal novels for years, as well as bleeding me for money and favours. And I can't afford it any more! My Clea Claudette sales aren't what they used to be, and Aubrey's novels are getting so bad it's impossible for me to praise them without hurting my own reputation.

So tonight I told him – no more. When that snooty butler showed me up to my room, I waited for him to leave and then slipped along to Aubrey's study. And then I laid it all out. No more money, no more puffs. You can do what you want – no one will believe you after twenty years anyway.

That's when he told me that he still had the hammer I'd used to whack the croquet marker home – covered with my husband's blood, and my DNA and fingerprints. He laughed, and told me if I didn't want to spend twenty years inside, I'd better put *Eric Argent and the damned Secretary's Revenge* in my book-of-the-year round-up.

Well, I lost control. I stabbed him with that cursed letter opener, and I don't care who knows it. He deserved it, just like my husband!