

VALERIE CHIME

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 Sir 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 mousy, bespectacled Valerie Chime – Sir Aubrey St Clair's meek, long-suffering secretary. For years you have typed up his manuscripts, posted his letters and answered his correspondence, all the while secretly cherishing your own literary aspirations. Unfortunately the manuscript you have been scribbling in your meagre time off has disappeared from your desk.

INTRODUCTION

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

Oh, hello, everyone. Valerie Chime – you won't know me. Gosh, I feel a bit of an impostor here, I must make it clear, I'm not really a writer at all, I mean I scribble a little in my time off, who doesn't?! But really I'm just Sir Aubrey's secretary. Well, I say 'just' – it's really a very important position, in fact Sir Aubrey always says he would be quite lost without me! He still writes his manuscripts out longhand, you know – I'm the one who types them up for his publishers, I handle his letters, arrange his diary. I'm not one to boast, but I don't think it's an exaggeration to say that I'm really quite indispensable.

CHAPTER 1

REVENGE IS A DISH BEST SERVED COLD

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

Oh! Oh my goodness. This is – well, it's just terrible. Whatever shall we do? Stebbings, you must call the police at once. And as for you, Clara, flinging these wild accusations around – I never heard of such impertinence. When I left Sir Aubrey's study he was alive and well, sitting at the desk drafting his after-dinner speech for the evening. I offered to type it up for him, but he said there was no need, as he could read quite well from his handwritten notes.

That was at six o'clock – and after that I popped along to my office to close up my typewriter, and then went straight down to the hall where the first of the writers had already arrived. Since then I've been engaged in conversation all evening with Sir Aubrey's guests. Ask them if you don't believe me!

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 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 Dolores de l'Amour

- 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?
- 2) What was Aubrey's forthcoming novel about?
- 3) How did your late husband die?

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 said you're something of a 'scribbler' – can you tell us a bit more about your literary ambitions?

If you are innocent, say: Oh, well, gosh, I suppose I've always been a bookworm, right from when I was a little girl! Always scribbling away little stories and so on. But I never had the courage to do anything with them. I'm not writing anything just at the moment. Actually my most recent manuscript went missing a few months ago – a novel about a maid who falls in love with an archduke. Very vexatious, but I wasn't satisfied with it, so it's probably for the best. I would only have put it in the bottom drawer anyway.

If you are the murderer, say: Oh, well, gosh, I suppose I've always been a bookworm, right from when I was a little girl! Always scribbling away little stories and so on. But I never had the courage to do anything with them. I'm not writing anything just at the moment. My most recent manuscript, a crime novel about a downtrodden secretary, went missing a few months ago, and I was so upset, it's made me quite unable to carry on. I really think this might have been 'the one'. Sir Aubrey read it and said some really quite complimentary things about it.

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?

If you are innocent, say: You know, that's quite true, and I didn't even think about it at the time, but since then I have been pondering it and I have come to the conclusion that Sir Aubrey was writing something that he didn't want me to see. Which is very unusual, since I typed up all his manuscripts and correspondence. Oh dear – do you think – do you think it could have had something to do with why he was murdered? Oh, poor dear Sir Aubrey!

If you are the murderer, say: I have no idea what you're getting at. If you are implying that I am lying then pray come out and say it. What else would he be writing – something he didn't want me to see? That's manifestly absurd. Sir Aubrey kept nothing from me. Nothing!

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?

Answer: Oh yes, I know it quite well. It was very long and sharp, a present from Sir Aubrey's dear friend Clive Barking. It was presented to him on the occasion of his third Bloody Nib win, and was engraved with *Congratulations, Aubrey, three times the writer any of us are!*

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:
Goodness me, I feel quite overcome. This is just awful! I don't know *what* you're talking about. Yes it's true that I cherished literary ambitions for years, and yes Sir Aubrey could be a little acerbic at times, but I would never have let that sour our relationship. He was the perfect employer and a dear man, and I am just devastated at his death. You may think what you like – but I didn't kill him, and that's the truth!

If you are the murderer:

Ha! It's true. I killed Sir Aubrey and good riddance! I stabbed him with that horrible letter opener that he cherished so much – goodness knows how many ridiculous fan letters I must have opened over the years, full of silly, gushing readers going on about Eric Argent – when all the time the books were getting more and more derivative. The truth is, my own novels were so much better than anything Aubrey St Clair could even imagine – but even then I wasn't bitter. I swallowed rejection after rejection – until tonight, when I came into Sir Aubrey's study and found him writing a page of his new novel, *Eric Argent and the Secretary's Revenge*. He tried to cover it up – but I saw a paragraph over his shoulder. And it was from my novel. My novel, that went missing from my desk a few weeks ago! He was plagiarising me!

I charged him with it – I said, 'Sir Aubrey, what is the meaning of this? Are you stealing my work?'

At first he blustered and tried to deny it, said it was just a passing similarity of theme, but I snatched the sheets from his hand and began to quote whole passages of dialogue at him – passages lifted verbatim from my manuscript! And then do you know what he did? He just laughed! He said that I was a silly foolish secretary, and no one would believe my story, and besides, I hadn't an ounce of proof that I had ever written a word.

Well. I'm afraid I saw red at that. I snatched up that nasty old letter opener and I plunged it into his chest. And I'm not sorry!