

CLIVE BARKING

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 Clive Barking, author of a long-running series of historical crime novels starring the priest turned detective Father Benedictus. You and Aubrey have known each other since your very first novels were published in the same week, fifty-two years ago, when you were both in your twenties. Since then, the Father Benedictus novels have graced the New York Times bestseller lists, the Sunday Times top ten, and have been adapted for film and TV. The one feather in your cap that you have never managed to attain is a Bloody Nib Award – and to add to the sting, Aubrey has won three times. Could this be your year?

INTRODUCTION

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

Good evening, all, good evening. Clive Barking, at your service. What a pleasure to be back under Aubrey's roof. It seems like only yesterday that Aubrey and I met over sherry in our editor's office. That very week saw the first appearance of my austere medieval sleuth Father Benedictus, and of Aubrey's debonair man-about-town Eric Argent. Little did either of us know that more than fifty years and almost one hundred books later, we and our two detective protagonists would still be here. Since that fateful day we've been colleagues, rivals, collaborators and most of all friends – though perhaps it is fortunate for our friendship that Aubrey wrote contemporary whodunnits, while I write historical! But I jest – for I am proud to call a writer as fine as Aubrey St Clair my friend, and I am proud to be here on the fiftieth anniversary of a club I helped to found. To Aubrey – and the Detective Club!

CHAPTER 1

REVENGE IS A DISH BEST SERVED COLD

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

Aubrey! Aubrey! Aubrey! Oh, my old friend and hunting partner, what a black day this is. I blame myself of course – if I had only been staying the night as I usually did, I would have been in the house all day, and in a position to spot any hanky-panky. And to hear that he was stabbed with the very letter opener I gave him myself – that only makes it all the more bitter.

As it was, I drove down from London late and arrived at the party in full swing. I did think about going up to see Aubrey, of course I did – but his secretary told me he was busy writing his speech, and I accepted that. Now I wonder if she was putting me off.

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 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 YOU!

- 1) You said in your statement that you usually stay with Aubrey but you didn't this time – why was that?

If you are innocent, say: Oh, well, I'm getting on a bit, don't you know. Someone my age likes their own bed and their own slippers. Aubrey kept a pretty comfortable ship here, but it doesn't take much to keep me awake these days, and it's a dashed sight more comfortable in my own bed. I'm just getting to be old bones, I suppose. Oh dear, that's made me think of poor Aubrey, cut down in his prime. Now you'll set me off again. Where's my handkerchief?

If you are guilty, say: I suppose that damned secretary told you about our falling-out. Yes, it's true, Aubrey and I had a quarrel a couple of weeks ago and he rescinded the invitation to stay over. I dare say he would have uninvited me from the dinner too, but as the co-founder of the club, I'm a core member and can't be struck off the guest list. Nothing serious of course, all old friendships have their ups and downs, but some things were said that I regret, and it makes it all the more heartbreaking for me that I didn't get a chance to speak to him before dinner and apologise for my part in the row.

- 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.

Answer: Yes, Aubrey and I had the idea for the club at our very first joint launch party, but I'm not one for schmoozing and keeping up with all the gossip and tittle-

tattle so I was happy enough for Aubrey to handle all the membership side of things, while I took a back seat. He did all of that so well – selecting new members based on the strength of their reputation, and inviting those who were no longer a good fit to leave. I would have hated all of that politicking, so our arrangement was one I was very happy with.

3) You mentioned that Sir Aubrey was stabbed with a letter opener you gave him – can you tell us a bit more about that?

If you are innocent, say: Oh God, don't, it makes me feel so terrible! Yes, it's true – I presented the letter opener to Aubrey on the occasion of his third Bloody Nib win. The inscription was something of a joke – because Aubrey had won three times, but I had only ever made the shortlist. I had no hard feelings over it, but of course, there's no denying I would have loved to have won. You know, Aubrey was on the judging panel this year, and I confess I had allowed myself to hope that his presence on the jury might make this my lucky year. Now of course, I have lost not just my best advocate on the jury, but my best friend as well.

If you are guilty, say: Yes, it's true, it was my present that killed Aubrey and believe me I take no pleasure in that at all. I presented the letter opener to Aubrey on the occasion of his third Bloody Nib win. The inscription was something of a joke – because Aubrey had won three times, but I had only ever made the shortlist. I had no hard feelings over it, but of course, there's no denying I would have loved to have won. You know. Aubrey was on the judging panel this year, and I confess I had allowed myself to hope that his presence on the jury might make this my lucky year. But I found out a couple of weeks ago that I had lost out again, this time to that jumped-up young A. N. Andrews. C'est la vie. That loss pales in comparison to the death of my best friend.

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:

Me? You have the nerve to accuse me, Aubrey's best friend? When his body isn't even cold? Dammit, if Aubrey's body wasn't lying dead upstairs I'd be inviting you to step outside to settle this like gentlemen!

I didn't kill Aubrey – I wouldn't have harmed a hair on his head. Yes, we had ups and downs in our friendship, and yes, we had a healthy professional rivalry, one we'd kept up for fifty years. But the truth is, that was what kept us both going. I don't know what I'll do without him. I really don't.

If you are the murderer:

Ha! Yes, I killed Aubrey, and my only regret is that I didn't do it years ago. God knows how I suffered that pompous old fool for so long. He's always been an insufferable self-publicist ever since that very first day in our editor's office. 'Aubrey St Clair,' he said as he held out his hand to me. 'The best crime novelist you've never heard of.'

Well, I made up my mind there and then that I'd outsell, outshine and outwrite that coxcomb, so imagine my fury when year after year, it never quite happened.

First I'd be on the *Sunday Times* bestseller list, then Aubrey would be on the New York Times bestseller list. I'd be nominated for Book of the Month, Aubrey would win Book of the Year. I'd be longlisted for the Bloody Nib, Aubrey would be shortlisted.

And yet every single review confirmed to me that I was getting better, and Aubrey was getting worse – lazier, more clichéd, scraping the barrel for ideas he no longer had. Every year I told myself this would be my year. And it never was.

Three times he's won that damned Bloody Nib, and only ever because the writers on the jury want to be invited to join the Detective Club, a club I helped set up.

But this year he wasn't eligible. *This* year he was on the jury. And he told me straight, at last year's Christmas drinks party, that he felt I'd been robbed of the Nib so far, and that he was going to make it his business to set that straight this year.

So imagine my shock when I met one of the other judges in London last week, and she told me how sorry that she hadn't been able to push me through to the shortlist. She'd tried, she said, but one of the other writers had voted against me, said he didn't think it was my strongest work.

Well, there was only one man on the jury. Aubrey. And when I charged him with it last week, he had the nerve to laugh and say he was sure I understood – did I want to win it for a book that wasn't my best?

Yes, I *did*. Yes, I bloody did. But at least if I wasn't going to win it, I could ensure Aubrey never got it a fourth time. So I came to the dinner in spite of our fallout, with one object in mind. To kill him with that bloody letter opener, the one I had given him. And I did. I stabbed him as hard as I could. And I'm not sorry. Not for a moment.