

## The Perfect Crime?

On that fateful, crisp Fall morning at the Evergreen Country Club, Diane Dickenson, poor soul, met an untimely, and rather gruesome death. The horror of discovering Diane's body fell upon Joe Lewis, her weekly golfing partner. Joe had stumbled into the men's room after downing several shots of Tennessee Whiskey along with his Belgian Waffle. He'd been trying to deaden the pain that had arisen like bile in his gut after losing to her at yesterday's Member's Tourney. As Golf Pro at the club, the ribbing Joe took from the members was almost more than he could bear, and now, here she was, legs splayed on the Pine-Sol-streaked floor, and it scared him. He bent over to touch Diane's wrist, and finding no pulse, Joe ran screaming for the manager, while fumbling for 9-1-1 on his cellphone.

As the wailing sirens approached, the crowd of brunch patrons had formed, squeezing in between urinals and peering over stalls for a closer look. Gasps and murmurs rippled out and down the hallway, creating quite a stir in the dining room as word got out.

Henry Lapisse felt a sudden sense of panic welling up along with fathomless angst, as he'd been genuinely in love with Diane for years, sadly, unrequited. She'd been toying with his affections lately, and had even threatened, as a member of the Club's Board of Directors, to have him fired for dereliction of duty. Henry was the all-around handyman at Evergreen, and relied heavily on the income his job provided. Henry had come in to clean the restrooms not 30 minutes before Diane's body was discovered, signing his name on the clipboard hanging behind the door. When had she come in? And why? As the sweat forming on his brow threatened to drip from his face, Henry reached into his pocket and suddenly realized his handkerchief wasn't there....had he dropped it while cleaning the bathroom?

Silence fell as the paramedics rolled Diane out to the rig on a gurney, her body and face covered by a white linen sheet. While others watched in stunned disbelief, Maude Lewis glanced over at her husband, Joe, as he slowly sunk to the floor, pale and wet with perspiration. Though she despised him, she wondered what, exactly was ailing him. As Maude approached Joe, he lost the entire contents of his stomach onto the red, Persian rug. Observers summoned the medics back in to check on Joe, as he became increasingly sicklier. Maude had a twisted smile on her lips as Joe received medical attention, a look that did not go unnoticed by Rae Grayson, the area's local mystery writer and Bridge champion at the Club. Rae also noted that Maude, with her severely tight bun atop her head, wore only one pearl earring, the other of which she noticed clasped in Diane's hand when she was being lifted onto the gurney in the Men's room. Rae, in fact, had been quietly watching the entire morning unfold, discreet as a spider in a newly-formed web. She saw that Maude had emerged from behind the door of her office where she acted as Food and Beverage Manager, and noticed her peculiar gait, as if she were hiding something under her coat. Rumors that Maude was plotting to do away with Joe were nothing new, and many at Evergreen

were aware of her desire to kill him. Maude's bull-peddling ramblings of deriving poison from apple seeds were well-known while she boasted about her family's ownership of apple farms throughout the Pacific Northwest.

Rae scratched some notes on the pad she always carried in her purse. As a writer of mysteries, Rae was well aware of the many manners of death. She knew all about forensics and evidence, motives and means, having created intricate homicide plots for years. She jumped into her car and followed the (now victim's) body to the local morgue. Because it was a Sunday with no pressing work on his docket, the medical examiner got right to work, unaware of Rae peering in through the window.

The County Coroner's findings indicated that Diane had ingested a synthetic poison chemically similar to Strychnine, aka nux vomica. The autopsy revealed cake crumbs under her fingernails, red wine droplets covering her chest and abdomen, and undigested cake in her gullet, rife with the poison. Rae could hear the grim details as he dictated his discoveries and conclusions. Having taken scrupulous notes, Rae rushed home to her laptop and began writing in earnest. Here she had the makings of a nearly perfect crime, but first she'd have to analyze all she had seen and heard. She felt like Columbo, as she speculated and surmised all the data. Burning questions, like the possible motivation for Joe, Henry or Maude to commit such a crime pervaded her every thought. Henry's handkerchief had been discovered inside the bathroom's paper towel dispenser...and there was Maude's earring that was imbedded in Diane's palm, the earring's post puncturing her skin. And what about Joe's personalized golf tee that must have dropped from his pocket when he bent over to check Diane's pulse? Interesting that Rae was privy to these details, one might think. How much did she actually witness that morning?

Well, please allow me to introduce myself. I am Brina Bankard, the IT Manager at Evergreen Country Club, coming forward to let you, the intrigued reader, in on my little secret. Two weeks ago, at the behest of the Board, I was tasked with installing a security system at the Club. I was to work in complete secrecy, under the cloak of darkness, to set up cameras covering the entire 15,500 square feet of the facility, including Locker Rooms, Restrooms, Kitchen, Dining areas including all Banquet Rooms, Pro shop and Administrative offices as well as the entire perimeter of the property. Not only do I know what happened to Diane Dickenson, I witnessed her murder with my own eyes, and it is all recorded on our new surveillance system.

On the morning in question, Maude Lewis arrived early to work, closing herself in the Food and Beverage office, but not away from my all-encompassing view. She spent an hour behind her desk, mixing various powders into 4 separate mason jars, stirring, shaking, smelling and (almost funnily) sneezing. She then hoisted her skirt and slid each jar into her pantyhose, filling each leg, uncomfortably, with cold, glass containers of heavy, dark-colored concoctions.

Maude's husband, Joe Lewis, dropped her off early at the Club's front entrance, but returned an hour later, heading straight into the Pro shop where, according to my spying eyes, he studied his drawer-full of long-saved score cards, adding, and re-adding the numbers on a pocket calculator.

Finally, head bent in shame, he went to the back, took a used nine-iron, and trashed the store room with every ounce of strength in his body.

When Henry Lapisse got to work, he set about his regular morning chores. He emptied all the dishwashers from the night before, put fresh linens on all the Dining Room tables, set up the flatware and dishes, placed floral centerpieces about the room, and then vacuumed before the members were due to arrive for the Sunday Brunch. He then cleaned both Men's and Women's restrooms, but not before pulling out a picture of Diane Dickenson from his pocket, staring at it for quite some time, and then tearing it to pieces over the trash bin.

Of most interest to me, however, was Rae Grayson, who is known at the Club for her expertise in Bridge and Gin Rummy. Word has it that she is a local mystery writer. Her arrival took me by surprise, however, as she appeared at the back entrance of the Women's Locker Room. I saw her slink along the back wall, and sneak into the kitchen. She wandered around in the still-darkened room until she came upon a row of Bundt cakes along the counter near the ovens. She pulled a small vial from her purse, along with what appeared to be a toothpick, and began making small holes in the cakes, followed by the contents of her vial...it appeared that she was pouring the substance directly into the holes she'd made in the cakes. She then disappeared quickly from a side door, just before Maude walked in.

When the Club officially opened at 9:00, Diane was the first one in the door. She maintained a small mailbox in the front office for Board-related correspondence, stopping there momentarily to check the contents of the box. She then proceeded to see what the Chef had on today's menu, eyeing the bundt cakes in the back of the kitchen. Her stomach was already growling with hunger, and she decided to help herself to a little sliver of the Chocolate bundt that seemed to be calling her name. It was so delicious, she took one more piece, guilt-faced while stuffing it quickly into her mouth. Off she went to see Maude, remembering a question she'd meant to ask her about a shipment of apples for a friend. Appearing in Maude's doorway, and seeing the office empty, she noticed that Maude had somehow lost a pearl earring on the floor, so she scooped it up to give it to her later...

Rae had not expected Diane Dickenson to enter the kitchen that morning and eat bundt cake. Rae had anticipated that **all** members and patrons would partake of cake. She loaded enough nux vomica in those bundts to kill an army, and she didn't care. She'd been angry at Evergreen's policies and procedure for quite some time, and in her mind, she'd finally devised the perfect murder. This little Peyton Place disgusted her, and with careful observation and listening, she knew that others easily had motives and possibly the means to kill half the members of the Club. With that many suspects, she'd never be caught. She saw no flaws in her plot, and despite all her wile and wits, was unaware of my hidden cameras absolutely everywhere. It seems that Ray Grayson has been outdone, and undone.

There is no such thing as the perfect crime, my friends...