

The Murder Game

Mr. Hopkins leaned against the mantle and took another puff from his pipe. He looked around the room. The atmosphere was cozy, that of a typical Connecticut inn. A warm fire was burning in the fireplace beside him keeping out the chill of the early December day. On the wall were animal heads of different sorts, deer, moose and other smaller creatures. The floor was decorated with a bearskin rug. This was evidently the late innkeeper's husband's study, but served well as a private place where Mr. Hopkins could ponder his task away from the suspects in the living room. Mr. Hopkins had just examined the scene of the crime in room 25.

"Read me the facts again Charlie." Mr. Hopkins said breaking the long silence.

"Alright, so the innkeeper, Mrs. Diggins, hears screams coming from room 23 at around four-twenty in the morning. She runs upstairs to see what the matter is. She opens the door to find the room cleaner than it was when she cleaned it that morning. Then she goes back to bed thinking maybe she just had a bad dream; however, she is not in bed more than five minutes when she hears a gunshot from room 25. Hoping she's not off *her* rocker, she runs into the room and finds a man sitting in the rocking chair across the room. kinda staring into space. After she asks if he heard the gunshot too and he doesn't respond or even move a muscle, she assumes he's asleep. Then she calls the station. When our boys find nothing out of the ordinary, she goes back to bed, but at about seven-thirty in the morning, she wakes up to a women's scream. For the third time, she gets up and walks down the hallway. At this point, she's expecting to see nothing and is planning on turning herself in to the loony bin, but when she runs back into room 25, she sees the following scene: The same man she saw last night, who has been identified as a Mr. John Daniels, who had been staying at the inn for the previous two weeks is slumped over in the chair with blood all over his back and a bullet hole run straight through him. Standing next to him is a Ms. Clare Cunningham, who had checked into the inn just the night before. She immediately called 911. She did the right thing and kept everyone from leaving, so here we are now.

"What do you think Jim?" Mr. Hopkins asked his partner, Jim Morris.

“I don’t know Ted. This one seems pretty clear cut to me. That old rat, Clinton Bentworth, had it out for Daniels. Daniels owed ‘em a whole lot o’ money, and Bentworth was seen by Ms. Cunningham sneaking out of his room late last night.”

“That’s just it Jim, it’s too simple”

“Aw, c’mon Ted, does everything have to be a great mystery with you? This isn’t Sherlock Holmes. Sometimes things really are what they appear to be.”

“Something still feels wrong. What do you think, Charlie?”

“Oh I don’t know Mr. Hopkins. I’m just here to take your notes,” Charlie replied humbly.

“You wanna be a detective someday, don’t you kid? Well here’s your chance to impress somebody. Tell me what you’ve deducted from all this,” Mr. Hopkins replied.

“Well sir, it seems to me that Bentworth had a lot of motive, and all the evidence seems to point to him. I mean 25 is his room, and that’s where the body was found. On top of that, he left his room at around one in the morning to get a snack. That speaks guilty to me,” Charlie responded.

“Charlie could you read me Mr. Bentworth’s statement again?”

“Sure thing, Mr. Hopkins. Bentworth said, ‘I don’t remember anything from last night. You’re a fool if you think I did it though.’ And he refused to make any further comment.”

“Were you on duty last night, Charlie?” Mr. Hopkins inquired.

“No sir, I didn’t get here ‘til this morning. Why do you ask?”

“I wanted to know if you saw anything when you got here. Who did dispatch send the first time Mrs. Diggins called the station?”

“It was Tom and Hank,” Charlie retorted from his notes.

“And they saw nothing out of the ordinary at all?” Mr. Hopkins inquisitively confirmed.

“Nope, not a thing. You want me to get ‘em down here so you can speak to them yourself, Mr. Hopkins?”

“No, that’s not necessary, Charlie. I just need a couple minutes for questions with the suspects to confirm what I already know, and we’ll make our arrest. All the people who are currently staying here are still in the living room correct?” asked Mr. Hopkins.

“Yes sir, Mr. Hopkins,” Charlie confirmed.

The living room’s decor was much like that of the study minus the animal skins and heads. In it, sat twenty nervous looking suspects. Mrs. Diggins had made them lunch which consisted of beef stew, homemade bread and warm cider, but most of them were just picking at the bread and sipping the cider nervously. When Mr. Hopkins entered the room, you could have heard a pin drop and the tension in the air was abundantly evident.

“I’m sorry to have kept you all waiting so long,” Mr. Hopkins began. “But if you cooperate just a little longer, most of you will be released shortly. Okay, I’d like to know, did any of you know that Mr. Bentworth was in the kitchen at around one o’clock this morning getting a snack?”

“I do not see how this has anything do with this murder!” Mr. Bentworth yelled.

“Just an inquiry that’s all,” Mr. Hopkins responded. “Now I know who did this heinous act of murder. It was you Ms. Cunningham.”

“What? This is ridiculous!” Ms. Cunningham cried out. “What proof do you have? Plus how would I have known that he had a fortune! I never met him before!”

“Ms. Cunningham, no one ever said anything about Mr. Daniels being wealthy, so I’m afraid unless you can come up with an excellent excuse as to why you knew that, you will be coming with us.”

“Wait a minute! I don’t understand. I thought that Daniels owed Bentworth a lot of money. If he was rich like you say, he could have easily just paid Bedford his due,” Jim said.

“Mr. Daniels had just come into a fortune; He had just discovered oil on his property and had come here to pay his debt to Bedford. I found his diary in his dresser drawer when I examined his room.”

“Mr. Hopkins, if I did do such an act, what kind of proof do you have?” Ms. Cunningham replied.

“Oh I wouldn’t be so sure that I don’t have proof Ms. Cunningham; in fact, I think things will become much clearer when I expose your accomplice.” At that, Ms. Cunningham tried to make a run for the door, but Mr. Morris easily stepped in her path and intercepted her.

“Should I cuff her, Mr. Hopkins?” inquired Charlie.

“Sure, Charlie, and while you’re at it, you may want to put a pair on your own hands, since you were the accomplice. I’d wager you were the one that actually did the act of killing him.”

“What are you talking about, Mr. Hopkins? Why would I kill Daniels?”

“Because you found his diary too,” said Mr. Hopkins confidently.

“This is preposterous! If I had, then why would I not have gotten rid of it after,” Charlie cried.

“Because you didn’t have time. Here’s what happened: You were on duty last night. I called the station today to verify that. In fact, you got here first. While you were patrolling, you heard the scream come from inside. You found the front door unlocked. You ran in and immediately went to room 23. In the room, you found Ms. Cunningham struggling with Mr. Daniels. You probably didn’t know who was attacking who at that point, but it didn’t matter. Once Ms. Cunningham told you of the fortune, and that Mr. Daniels had obtained, it only took a brief look at his diary and you had all the proof you needed that she was telling the truth. She explained to you that she had already hatched a plan and taken care of all the details. She had snuck out and followed Mr. Bedford on his way to get his daily late night snack, and then she drugged him with something that would knock him out and probably erase his memories from the prior few minutes. At this point, Mrs. Diggins was coming down the hallway, and you had to

move fast. You killed Mr. Daniels right there with something that would be silent, probably the candlestick to the back of his head. Then you and Ms. Cunningham hid in the closet with the body. Once Mrs. Diggins had returned to her room, you moved the body into room 25, placed him on the chair and shot him to make it look like the murder had not taken place some minutes earlier. By the time Mrs. Diggins came, you had safely snuck out of the window. All that was left to do was return Mr. Bedford, still unconscious, to his bed and have Ms. Cunningham “find” Mr. Daniels in the morning. However, your fatal flaw was that in your haste to conceal yourselves in the closet, you dropped the diary. A quick dusting for prints should reveal your fingerprints on the book.”

Mrs. Diggins looked astonished. “How did you know it was Charlie?” she asked.

“He mentioned to me earlier that he thought Mr. Bentworth did it, and one of his reasons was that he was seen going downstairs to get a snack. Ms. Petrof, who had seen Bentworth, said nothing of the purpose of his going downstairs. So Charlie had to have seen it himself, or in this case, speaking off-the-record, talked with the person that had seen him.”

“Good job once again, Ted! Mr. Morris exclaimed. “I should have never doubted your instincts, but I have just one last question, how did Ms. Cunningham know that Mr. Daniels had come into the money?”

“Easy, she’s his wife. Ms. Cunningham is actually Mrs. Daniels. She knew about the fortune and knew that Daniels had to pay it to Bentworth. So she thought she could take them both out of the picture by killing her husband and framing Bentworth. Thus, getting the money for herself,” Mr. Hopkins responded.

“How did you figure that one out?” Mr. Morris asked.

“She is wearing a wedding ring that matches that of the one on Daniels. It was a careless mistake, one that cannot be made if you’re interested in playing the murder game, Mrs. Daniels.”

“Well, Ted, I guess I was wrong about more than just this case. You are Sherlock Holmes.”

