
BRINDLEWOOD BAY

Complexity: 7

Presenting the Mystery

It's the holiday season, and the Murder Mavens are out caroling as part of the Brindlewood Bay Lunch Club's annual Ugly Christmas Sweater Carol-a-thon fundraiser. Go around the table and ask each player to describe their Maven's ugly Christmas sweater.

The carolers arrive at the grand home of Amelia Hawthorne, and are a few bars into a rousing rendition of "We Three Kings" when a tall, middle-aged woman in a red suit steps out onto the porch and asks the group if they'd be willing to sing a funeral dirge instead. The woman will introduce herself to the group as Caroline Hawthorne, Amelia's niece. It seems Amelia was just found dead in her bedroom, strangled with a strand of pearls.

If the Mavens go inside the house, they'll find all the Suspects gathered in the foyer. Amelia was in her late sixties, and very wealthy after shrewdly investing her inheritance decades ago. She never married and, apart from her beloved Pekingese, Chestnut IV, lived alone. The Suspects are all family members from out of town.

The rest of the carolers will leave to get help from the police, but the Mavens should stay and begin an investigation. Caroline will introduce herself and the other Suspects by name and relation to Amelia.

Establishing Question: *Amelia Hawthorne is a pariah in Brindlewood Bay. She's known to be miserly and cruel, and more than happy to throw her weight around with the town council in order to get her way. In short, very few people will be sad to hear she's dead. But you once saw a different side of her, a moment that humanized her to you. What happened?*

Suspects

Caroline Hawthorne, the niece

Assertive. Wry. Well-tailored women's suit. Caroline is, practically-speaking, the head of the Hawthorne family. While the family's money can be traced back to Aunt Amelia, it's Caroline who organizes everything, gives it form. She makes

sure everyone is taken care of, financially-speaking, and that this annual pilgrimage to kiss Amelia's ring takes place. Caroline is the daughter of Thomas, wife of Avery, and mother of Everett and Skyler.

Quote: *"We certainly have our differences, but the thing you need to understand about this family is that we are, first and foremost, Hawthornes. That comes before everything and everyone."*

Thomas Hawthorne, a brother

Cautious. Soft-spoken. Plum-colored smoking jacket. Thomas was Amelia's brother and financial adviser. He quietly resents Amelia since he's the one who helped her with the investments that made her rich, and if not for the fact that he was cut out of their parents' will, would have been able to make those investments for himself. Thomas is the father of Caroline and grandfather of Everett and Skyler.

Quote: *"My sister was a very complicated woman. She had a depth to her—a secret way of being that very few people understood. As much as I'm loathe to admit it, I will miss her."*

Jimmy Hawthorne, a brother

Red-faced. Drunken. New England Patriots t-shirt. Uncle Jimmy was Amelia's brother, a thrice-divorced black sheep of the Hawthorne family. He can't hold down a job, and is always begging the other family members for money. He and Amelia hated each other with a white-hot passion, though the exact reason why has always been unclear.

Quote: *"Ding-dong, the witch is dead!"* Takes another drink and passes out.

Magdalena Hawthorne, the sister-in-law

Knowing smile. Constantly shuffling a deck of tarot cards. Ridiculously large silver cross around her neck. Magdalena is one of Jimmy's ex-wives. She is a deeply spiritual woman who blends her Catholic faith with more esoteric beliefs. Amelia gave her the money to open her Los Angeles occult shop back in the late '80s. Magdalena is generally considered to be the only friend Amelia had.

Quote: *"I arrived earlier today. I drew a card from my deck as soon as I crossed the threshold of the front door: the Nine of*

Jingle Bell Shock

Swords. That's a very bad sign—a sign of conflict—and I knew right away something terrible was going to happen. The cards never lie..."

Everett Hawthorne, the great-nephew

Ridiculously handsome. Excessive use of "finger guns." Oversized cashmere sweater. Everett is a movie star, and likely the only Suspect the Mavens immediately recognize. He's most famous for the Turk Huntington series of spy films, each of which has been a global blockbuster. Everett is the son of Caroline and Avery, and the brother of Skyler.

Quote: *"Trust me: everyone in this room—except me, because I'm rich as fuck—wants to know how much Aunt Amelia left them in her will. But knowing her, she left every red penny to Chestnut IV and all the other Chestnuts to come."*

Skyler Hawthorne, the great-niece

Tall. Beautiful. Bohemian chic. Skyler is a runway model who has worked for some of the biggest fashion houses in the world. She dislikes the other Hawthornes, but especially her brother, whom she believes received preferential treatment from the family elders. Skyler is the daughter of Caroline and Avery, and the sister of Everett.

Quote: *"My brother wasn't always a leading man in life. Growing up, he was chubby, he had a huge nose, and he stuttered really badly. But Aunt Amelia loved him—almost as much as she loved those damn dogs—and she helped him. It turns out you can turn a frog into a prince with enough money."*

Avery Partridge, the nephew by marriage

Bitter. Sneering. Golf shirt and khakis. Avery runs a successful real estate business with his wife, Caroline. He doesn't have much love for any of the Hawthornes, but he absolutely despises Amelia, who made giving his children the Hawthorne name a condition of getting seed money for the business. Avery is the husband of Caroline and father of Everett and Skyler.

Quote: *"Have you been to Amelia's horrid Christmas room yet? A candy-colored nightmare. I think she collected all that tacky crap in an effort to somehow own the idea of Christmas, to dominate it."*

Mother Hawthorne, the grandmother

Ancient. Blind in one eye. Buried in furs. Mother Hawthorne is Amelia's grandmother. No one remembers her real first name, and no one knows exactly how old she is. She has managed to outlast a whole generation of Hawthornes one branch below her on the family tree. She rarely speaks and can barely get around on her own. It would have been impossible for her to strangle Amelia. Mother Hawthorne is the grandmother of Thomas and Jimmy.

Quote: "..."

Paint the Scene

The Chestnut room

The front room of Amelia's house is a temple dedicated to Chestnuts I-III. What do you see that shows how much Amelia loved her precious Pekignese dogs?

Amelia's bedroom

What do you see in Amelia's bedroom that indicates she had a much softer heart than her public persona would have you believe?

The Christmas room

This room is decorated for Christmas year-round. Does the room feel warm and inviting to you or does it feel oppressive to you? Something else? What do you see that reinforces how you feel?

The dining room

What do you see in the grand dining room that shows just how lonely Amelia truly was?

Clues

- ☐ A shattered eggnog glass.
- ☐ A bundle of racy Christmas cards.
- ☐ A secret crawlspace.
- ☐ A suicide note from years ago, preserved as a keepsake.
- ☐ A stack of unpaid bills.
- ☐ A parody version of "The Twelve Days of Christmas," the lyrics of which are a scathing indictment of the Hawthorne family.
- ☐ A bottle of pills that have been tampered with.
- ☐ An argument between Amelia and her lawyers.

- ☐ A slip and fall accident that went unreported.
- ☐ A Christmas tree ornament that mocks a Suspect.
- ☐ Droplets of dried blood in a strange place.
- ☐ An old yearbook from Amelia, Thomas, and Jimmy's high school days.
- ☐ Amelia's rejection of a Suspect's request for money.
- ☐ A security camera hidden in a papier mache statue of Frosty the Snowman.
- ☐ A stack of old board games, each missing a pawn of a particular color.
- ☐ A Hawthorne family portrait with one person carefully cut out of it.
- ☐ Amelia's parents' will, leaving her nearly everything and cutting out Thomas.
- ☐ A plane ticket to Rio de Janeiro.
- ☐ A Christmas wreath festooned with poison oak, nightshade, and holly.
- ☐ An extravagant gift for Chestnut IV.

Void Clues

- ☐ Magdalena's tarot deck is just The Devil, one after the other.
- ☐ A nativity scene features a Baby Jesus that suddenly bleats like a goat.
- ☐ A thick, tar-like substance begins oozing out of all the nutcrackers' eyes.
- ☐ Chestnut IV is whispering to an unseen entity in the corner of the room.
- ☐ An advent calendar, behind each door of which is an occult symbol or picture of someone who was brutally murdered in Brindlewood Bay.
- ☐ Evidence that Amelia is a member of the Midwives of the Fragrant Void (only if Layer Two of the Dark Conspiracy is unlocked).