MURDER, OF COURSE

A MYSTERY JIGSAW THRILLER WITH A SECRET PUZZLE IMAGE

STORY BY DENIS J. HARRINGTON
A glistening rind of water coated the small white ball as it bounded across the rolling expanse of the green. Ever so gradually the thick, wet grass robbed it of momentum until at last, it trickled down a sharply defined rise and fell into the cup with a hollow rattling sound.

Alan Pendergast stooped to retrieve the ball as Martin Asher came running up behind him brandishing a pitching wedge. In a brief glint of sunlight, they cast grotesque shadows which seemed to indicate murderous intent. For a moment, the club poised overhead. Then descended... harmlessly.

"Hah!" Asher exclaimed, arms raised in a gesture of triumph. "I ask you, what are the odds I'd sink that approach shot?"

Pendergast's bland features betrayed no emotion. "The odds hardly matter now," he said evenly. "What does matter is that you made it."

"Yes, indeed," Asher added with a grin. "My seventh birdie of the day. I need just one more to beat your beloved course record."

"I wish you well, of course," Pendergast replied, feigning a smile. "But nothing is sure in this game so long as there's a shot to be played."

Their eyes dueled briefly then Pendergast turned and walked away. On the surface the man was inoffensive enough, Asher thought. A well-educated snob of some social grace who had little talent for anything except golf. Now, at forty, he had become dependent upon others for his lifestyle. So beneath that calm exterior lurked both resentment and a sense of desperation. A situation which could prove to be dangerous.

Storm clouds were gathering once more as Asher headed for his cart. "If no one else is going to congratulate you, Martin, I will," Rebecca Lindsay said. "That was an absolutely brilliant shot."

"Thank you, my dear."

Asher's gaze followed her as she rode off with Pendergast to the next tee. Rebecca was attractive, though her beauty was fading. Still smooth but unexciting. She possessed drive, intelligence and a capacity for ruthlessness almost the equal of his own, but even that no longer stirred him. She was ten years his junior, but Asher now realized she was just too old for him. She wouldn't let go easily. Such a pity, he concluded with a shake of his head.

"If no one else is going to congratulate you, Martin, I will," Kate Hawthorne cooed in disdain. "Oh, brother, give me a break."

So saying, she tromped the accelerator pedal of the cart. It lurched forward with a jolt, forcing Asher to hold on.

"Well, it's true, isn't it?" He cast a furtive glance at the pretty, young woman seated beside him. "She was the only one to acknowledge my rather spectacular effort."

"Big deal," Kate replied, staring straight ahead. An angry frown pinched her smoothly sculpted profile.
Asher chuckled. "You have long claws for so small a kitten."
"Rebecca's as bogus as a three dollar bill," Kate shot back. "She's strictly on the lookout for number one."
"Many people would call that ambition," Asher said.
"And those are people just anxious to get taken." Kate brought the cart to an abrupt halt and got out. "Do you still want me to drive first?"
"By all means."
He watched as she took a few practice swings. Her easy, fluid motion was the envy of even the most titled players. Despite her small stature, she hit the ball far enough to score well on any course. But equally important, she had that killer instinct which is the hallmark of every champion. He paid her way through college. And she more than justified the investment, winning all the major amateur championships for women. Now, at twenty-one, she planned to turn professional. The world of golf lay at her feet. What's more, she was developing into quite a beauty. He smiled to himself.
"My ball should be in good position," Kate said, returning to the cart.
Asher nodded. His full, tanned features were set in a pensive expression. The seventeenth hole was a long par-5 that wended its way past a bordering creek and a dense stand of woods. It challenged the adventurous at heart.
"What do you think about my trying to cut one around those trees?" He inquired at length. A thick hand indicated the intended line of flight. "I could reach the green from there with my second shot."
Grimacing, Kate replied, "I don't know, it's kind of risky. And we might win the hole anyway. So why chance it?"
"Because taking chances is what this game is all about," Asher replied.
"It's quite a long way around that bend," Pendergast responded, carefully choosing his words. "I think you should play it safe."
"Yes," Asher said dryly. "I thought you would. And what do you think Rebecca?"
Delicate fingers swept back a stray sprig of hair. "I think you can do anything you set your mind to, Martin," she simpered.
It didn't become her. But the sweetness of her expression was quickly soured when she saw Asher wink at Kate. Rebecca had seen that look before. She had seen the little affectionate pats Asher had bestowed on the young woman he called his "niece." She knew only too well that Martin Asher and Kate Hawthorne would soon be more than merely golf partners.
Asher prepared to play his tee shot. He took a last look at the tree line then swung the driver back with a sweeping movement of his powerful arms. The club paused overhead momentarily, before descending with a glint of metal. A sharp cracking sound resulted and the ball climbed high against the sky, veered off into the woods and vanished.
A groan went up from the foursome, the same groan that had echoed on this spot for the last forty years.
"Bad luck," Pendergast said, fighting the satisfied smile that wanted to play
around his lips.

"Bad shot, you mean," Kate said lightly, with her usual candor.

"Poor darling," Rebecca said, with pouting sympathy. She touched Asher's arm, but he shrugged it off angrily.

"Come on," he said gruffly. "Help me find that ball."

"It's probably in the creek," Kate said.

"And it's starting to rain," Penderyast noted. "There's a storm moving in. Maybe we should just call it a day."

"We'll do no such thing!" Asher cried. "I'm playing the best game I've ever played, and I intend to finish the round!"

Reluctantly, they set about searching for Asher's ball. They spread out through the woods and the dense underbrush. With each step spiny branches and the deep, muddy grass whipped their legs. The minutes passed slowly as the storm drew nearer.

Suddenly, Asher began waving his arms. "There it is," he shouted, "on the other side of the creek."

Penderyast reached the spot first. It was Asher's ball, all right. But how could it have gotten through all those trees without a mark or a scratch?

"And look there," Asher said, pointing to a gap in the surrounding foliage. "I'll be able to play through that opening and reach the fairway!"

A blinding flash of lightning punctuated his sentence, and the rain pelted down.

"That's it for me!" Kate said. "I'm going to make a run for the clubhouse."

She headed toward the carts with Penderyast close in her wake. Rebecca turned to Asher and said, "You'd better come along, Martin."

"No, I'm staying here," he replied adamantly. "Just leave my bag and umbrella behind."

"But tall trees are the worst place to be in an electrical storm," she persisted.

"Why gamble with your life?"

"I'm not a quitter like the rest of you," he said, his voice barely audible over the thunder. "That's why I'm rich and you're all dependent on me."

Rebecca shook her head in dismay and started to leave.

"When the storm passes," he yelled, "can you come back out and pick me up?"

She nodded and hurried off. At the carts, she unstrapped Asher's bag and leaned it against a tree. Then she quickly removed her umbrella and climbed in beside Penderyast.

"Where's Martin?" he asked.

"Back there in the woods," she replied, raising the umbrella. "Come on, let's go."

Momentarily, they were speeding through the downpour. Up ahead Kate's cart was nearly lost to view in the gloom.

There was only one thing to do when they reached the clubhouse.

"I'm soaked!" Kate said, examining a deep scratch on her leg. "I'm going to get
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into some dry clothes. Let's say we meet in the grill for a drink in about an hour?"
 "Sounds good to me. I'm going to change and make a few phone calls,"
Pendergast replied.
 "Rebecca?"
 "All right," she said after some hesitation. "An hour it is."

After drinks the threesome decided to see if they could catch up with Asher. The sky was nearly clear of clouds when they reached the woods. They paused to look around then noticed the golf bag leaning against a tree, exactly where Rebecca had left it.
 "Martin," Pendergast called out. No one responded.

Puzzled, they gingerly made their way through a dense clump of brush. Just beyond they saw a man slumped over on the bank of a creek. An open umbrella drifted upside down in the nearby water. Blood streamed down from a gash on the left side of the man's head.
 "Martin!!" Rebecca screamed.

The man bent closer to the display case. His attention was attracted to a large loving cup. An ornate engraving identified it as the "Highland Dunes Club Championship Trophy." Prominent among the names inscribed there was that of Alan Pendergast. He had been the men's winner on no less than five occasions.
 "Sir, your party is waiting in the executive lounge."

The man nodded and followed the waiter.
Kate, Rebecca and Pendergast greeted their visitor with a mix of studied frowns.
He smiled and introduced himself. "I'm Lieutenant Arthur Heagan of the Metropolitan Police."

"Quite frankly, Lieutenant, I consider this an imposition," Pendergast blustered.
"I gave your people a complete statement yesterday as did Ms. Lindsay and Ms. Hawthorne." He gestured in their direction.

"Murder is always an imposition, Mr. Pendergast," Heagan replied, his manner indulgent. "Particularly so for the victim." He opened his valise on a table and removed a sheath of papers. "Now then, let's begin by reviewing your relationships to the deceased. Suppose you start the ball rolling, Mr. Pendergast."

"Well, we were essentially business acquaintances. As director of the Natural History Museum I knew him as chairman of the board."

"My understanding," Heagan said, "is that Asher used his influence as the museum's principal stockholder to obtain your appointment?"

"Uh, why... ah..."

"For heaven's sake, Alan, admit it," Rebecca interjected. "It's all a matter of record anyway."

"She's quite right, you know," Heagan said.

"Okay, Lieutenant, I got the director's job because Martin Asher liked the way I played golf. His style was to cultivate people who could do something for him."

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“What did Asher want from you, Mr. Pendergast?”
“He was a real golf nut. I was helping him with his game. He decided to help me with my career.”
“From what I’ve seen of your awards,” Heagan said, “it would seem he had a most competent instructor. No doubt he appreciated your assistance.”
“His score definitely improved,” Pendergast said.
“Even if he needed more than just your instruction,” Kate added.
Heagan frowned. “What are you suggesting, Ms. Hawthorne?”
“Just before the storm hit, Martin claimed to have found his ball in the woods. But it was much too clean. We think he dropped another one rather than take a penalty stroke.”
“He also had a perfect opening to the fairway for his next shot. But let’s not speak ill of the dead.” Pendergast added.
“You just did,” the detective grunted. “You implied he was a cheat.”
Kate smiled thinly. “He also cheated on his wife.” She looked pointedly at Rebecca, who glared back.
“Mr. Pendergast, isn’t it true that your appointment as director has to be renewed every two years?”
“Yes, that’s the arrangement.”
“And isn’t the time very close, for the next decision?”
“Yes. Next month.”
“Did you have any reason to think that Mr. Asher may not have renewed your appointment?”
“Certainly not!” Pendergast snapped. “We’ve had our differences, but none of them serious. If you think that was motive for murder, Lieutenant, then you don’t know your job!”
Heagan took the remark in stride, and looked at Rebecca.
“Now, Ms. Lindsay, what was your relationship to the deceased?”
“His personal secretary.”
“According to Mrs. Asher you were also emotionally involved with her husband. Is that correct?”
“Why... ah... I...”
“Oh, admit it, for heaven’s sake!” Pendergast interjected. “Everybody knows the truth. You and Asher had been playing house for years.”
Rebecca shrugged, but stopped denying it.
“Mrs. Asher told us something else,” Heagan said carefully. “She said she actually felt sorry for you. That she knew her husband well enough to know that he was... well, ‘tiring of you’. Those were her words.”
“It’s a lie! She hates me, of course, with good reason.”
“She said you were about to be ‘dumped’. Still quoting her, of course. She said that Martin lost interest in his mistresses after they reached... a certain age.”
“It’s a lie!” Rebecca said hotly. “Martin loved me. He would have married me if
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his wife would consent to a divorce. He told me I was even included in his will..." She stopped. Lt. Heagan waited a few seconds, and when she didn't continue, said:
"There was just one other thing Mrs. Asher stated." He turned his attention to Kate.
"She was less certain about it, but she had the idea that her husband had already chosen his next... love interest."

Kate returned his gaze boldly.
"Why Lieutenant," she said sweetly. "Martin was like an uncle to me. A very... loving uncle," she laughed.

"Mr. Asher often called you his 'protégé', didn't he?"
"That's the word for it," Rebecca said dryly.
Heagan went on unperturbed.
"Your late father was his business partner in a real estate development corporation, many years ago. He felt an obligation to his only child, to help you with your schooling and all that. Would that be a fair statement?"
Kate was still smiling.
"Touching, isn't it?"
"Didn't you leave something out?" Pendergast questioned Kate. "George Hawthorne died in prison. He was serving a six-year sentence for income tax evasion."
"My father was innocent!" Kate answered sharply.
"That's not what Martin told me," Pendergast said, almost with a smirk. "He said he was lucky that he didn't go to jail himself, thanks to your father."
Now the last traces of Kate's smile vanished, and her blue eyes were suddenly glistening with tears.
"He was a rotten liar! My father was a dupe! He was framed for that crime! He was blamed for something he didn't do."
"And who framed him, Ms. Hawthorne?"
"You know damned well who! It was Martin Asher!"
"Why would he do that to his own partner?"
"To keep the IRS off his back! Martin cut a private land deal and didn't pay taxes on the income. When the government found out, Martin cooked the books to make it look as if Daddy took the money!"
"That's what your father told you, of course," Rebecca said.
"It's the truth! I know it is!"
"So you think it was only a bad conscience that made him take care of you so well?" Heagan questioned.
"That," Rebecca said, "or her baby blue eyes."
"You accepted his favors," the Lieutenant said. "But did you stop hating him for what he did?"
Kate Hawthorne didn't answer.
"Well," Heagan smiled. "I think that answers all my questions. At least how you all felt towards Mr. Asher."
Pendergast snorted. "If you're implying that we had motives to want him dead,
Lieutenant, that doesn't mean any one of us is responsible. The whole idea is ludicrous!"

"We were all back at the clubhouse when Martin was killed. Isn't that right, Kate?" Rebecca looked to Kate for reassurance.

"We all met here, but we didn’t stay together. We met an hour later at the grill," Kate replied.

"And after you separated, perhaps only minutes later, one of you might have slipped back on the course under cover of the storm. That person might have taken a club from Asher’s bag, crept up behind him, and struck the blow that killed him."

"How horrible," Rebecca shuddered.

"If you will all follow me," Heagan said as he led the threesome out of the lounge and down a long hallway.

"We sent the clubs to a laboratory," he continued, "and it didn’t take them long to find a six iron with minute particles of flesh and hair embedded in the backside of the club head. It took but one stroke. Quite possibly, by one of his foursome."

Heagan paused. The dead quiet emphasized his words. He led Pendergast, Rebecca and Kate into the trophy room. Then he concluded, "Nearly an hour elapsed between the time Asher was left behind in the woods and when the three of you discovered his body. During this period you were out of contact with one another. So each of you had an opportunity to do the killing."

Again Heagan’s gaze swept the room while he pondered the facts of the case. Slowly, a smile of satisfaction crept across his lips. But of course. The answer to the murder of Martin Asher was right there before his eyes.

Can you find it? Assemble the jigsaw puzzle to see if you can determine how Lieutenant Heagan knew the killer.
The Solution:

"Two murder motives became obvious. "Hessman said. "Rebecca Lindley was found near one of her shoes' origins. The Suspect was抓获 in the course."..."

"Rebecca Night's..." Hessman finished.

"But cessus fell out of the time and I did bring Martin's picture when he suggested that out in the rain and I took my umbrella and made the case happen. Why go out? You're supposed to be on the blood stain on the wall. The bad motive as well."

Rebecca Night's identity revealed.

"As well as saying that you brought me. Lindley's two motives seemed...

"Mud your piano and Heusman's..." Hessman suggested a similar mode. "Martin took his hand in the business."

Theฐsleeves identity as L. Heusman's second son is each one of the suspects.

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GLOSSARY OF TERMS

APPROACH SHOT: A shot made from near the green with a short, lofted club.

BIRDIE: One stroke fewer than par (i.e., if par is 4, a birdie is 3).

CUP: A metal or plastic container positioned within a hole cut in the green.

DRIVE: To hit a golf ball from a tee.

DRIVER: The wood club generally used to hit the first shot off the tee.

FAIRWAY: The closely cropped playing area lying between the tee area and the green.

FOURSOME: Golf match in which two teams of two golfers play against each other.

GREEN: The putting surface identifiable by the lightly clipped grass.

IRONS: Clubs with metal-bladed heads that may include everything from No. 1 through 9 iron, plus the pitching wedge and the sand wedge.

PAR: The number of strokes it should require to play a golf hole.

PENALTY STROKE: A stroke added to a player’s score when a ball is lost and must be replaced; or dropped away from some obstruction.

PITCHING WEDGE: A short, lofted club especially designed for approach shots.

TEE: The wooden or plastic stand on which the ball rests before it is hit. A tee is used only on the first stroke of a hole.

TEE SHOT: The first stroke of a given hole.