Sweet Revenge
A Jigsaw Puzzle Mystery

Read the story, assemble the puzzle and find the clues. Can you solve the mystery?
Story by Alan Robbins
List of Characters

DELLA CASEY – president of the Chocolate Connoisseur’s Club.

WILKIE MAY – vice president of the Club. He was responsible for arranging the chocolate-filled tasting table.

EMMA NEMM – secretary of the Club. Rumor has it that Emma and Armande were, at one time, a pair.

ARMANDE DeCoca – the murdered three hundred pound gourmand and chocoholic. He had the reputation of being the toughest chocolate critic around. He continually reinforced this by writing some of the most destructive reviews imaginable.

CHANDLER RAYMOND – the bright and beautiful chief of security at the hotel which hosted the chocolate convention.

MURPHY – Raymond’s not-so-bright assistant.

TERRENCE CABLE – a freelance dessert chef and the contributor of a magnificent chocolate bombe. Terrence was a repeated victim of DeCoca’s critical reviews.

SHELLY SYKES – a respected food writer who was carrying on a notorious feud with DeCoca.

ANNE LOUISE TUFFLE – DeCoca’s assistant. She openly admitted that her boss was a difficult man and had made her life miserable.
It looked like any other party. The usual gathering of some thirty people in a hotel room, chatting and clinking glasses. But this one was different. There was a secret lurking. A mystery waiting to be solved, right in the next room.

It had nothing to do with the dead body. No one knew about that yet. Except the murderer of course. This mystery concerned something much more compelling than a simple murder.

It was about chocolate.

“People! May I have your attention?” Della Casey shouted. She had to clap her hands three times to hush the crowd. “The moment has arrived. So if you will all follow me into the tasting room, we can begin.”

There was pushing as she opened the door, laughter as everyone tried to remain calm. A rush of excitement, not unlike a sugar surge, passed through the group. That was to be expected, given what was waiting for them on the other side of the door.

It was not unusual for a mound of chocolate to cause such a fuss. After all, it was the annual meeting of the Chocolate Connoisseur’s Club; each of the members had brought a selection to be tasted by the others. The choice could be a homemade concoction, an old standby, or an exotic new treat. Any shape, any size. As long as it had the one key ingredient. The Big C. Chocolate.

Wilkie May, the vice president of the Club, had spent two hours alone in the tasting room unwrapping all the selections and placing them on the table. When he was done, and had fought the urge to remove a nibble from the underside of the Black Forest cake, he returned to the party, where the others noted his smudged hands with envy.

The pile he created formed a decent scale model of the Ozarks in truffles, cakes, cookies, candies and bars. That was the secret awaiting the rush of fingers and tongues. That was the mystery — a delightful riddle of taste.

“And so, without further ado,” Della Casey said with flourish as she flipped on the light, “I present to you this year’s . . . aaagh!”

“What did she say?” someone at the back of the crowd asked.

“Aaagh,” a wag repeated.

“Meaning what?”

But the answer to the question was as plain as a caramel to anyone standing in the room near Della Casey. Under the table, with its mass of sweet treats, was the body. Completely prone and quite dead. The eyes were open, gazing into an unknown future. The tongue, resembling nothing so much as an unchewed brownie, was protruding from the mouth. In the opened hand was a delicate chocolate shell that would never be savored.

“What’s going on?” said people from the rear who couldn’t see into the room.

“Good lord,” Wilkie May shouted, pushing through, “it’s Armande DeCoca!”

“Are you sure?”

That answer was too obvious. All three hundred pounds of chocolate-loving girth gave the body away. Once the initial shock wore off, it was clear that the obese DeCoca had sneaked into the tasting room ahead of time, then collapsed under the table. A heart attack seemed the most obvious explanation and it soon became the only acceptable theory.

Della Casey, gathering her wits quickly, went to the phone. She was about to call for an ambulance but decided to alert the hotel management first. A series of knocks on the door seemed to start the moment she put the receiver back in place.
“Is there a problem?” said the woman entering the room. She was an attractive brunette in a neat suit and introduced herself as Chandler Raymond. A badge on her lapel indicated that she was the chief of hotel security. She was followed by an assistant, a nervous young man named Murphy.

“In there, there is,” Casey said, and wiggled her finger towards the dead man.

If Chandler was shocked by the sight, she didn’t show it. She moved coolly – first examining the body, then the array of delicacies, and finally the room itself. Then she mumbled something to Murphy and returned to the main room with the others, closing the door gently behind her.

“I was going to call an ambulance,” Della Casey said.

“No need,” Chandler answered. “Has anyone left this party yet?”

“Only him,” someone said, meaning the departed.

“Good,” Chandler said. “I must ask all of you to remain in this room. We need to ask you some questions.”

“What kind of questions?” Wilkie May asked, trying not to sound suspicious, even though he was.

“Just questions. To help the police.”

“Police? We don’t need the police.”

“We’ll see,” Chandler mumbled.

The questioning took almost two hours. One by one the members of the Club were taken out into the hallway and interviewed. When that was done, Chandler returned to the tasting room with her assistant and Wilkie May, who had set the chocolates up on the table in the first place.

“Aren’t we going to a lot of trouble over a simple heart attack, chief?” Murphy asked. The theory had stuck to him like icing.

“We would be if it was.”

“You mean it wasn’t a heart attack?”

“Look at his eyes,” she answered, pointing to the late DeCoca. “The whites are blue. That’s very common in cases of poisoning.”

Murphy looked surprised. “Maybe he always had blue whites.”

“And the position of his tongue, as if he was choking.” She bent down over the body for a closer look. Murphy did not. “Then there’s this odd foam at the corners of his mouth. I once read about a poison made from the same tree that cacao beans come from. It causes paralysis. The victim has about two minutes to stand there and choke to death. I’m betting that’s what we’ve got here.”

“No kidding,” Murphy said, not getting the point at all.

“Chocolate comes from cacao beans. The poison smells like chocolate. It’s a perfect way to murder someone who’s just eaten a lot of chocolate. No one would suspect. They’d think he had a heart attack and leave it at that.” Then she turned to Wilkie May. “Do you know which member brought which dessert?”

“I do. I made up a list before setting them out.”

The list accounted for every item on the table except for a trio of truffles sitting in the middle of another tray of goodies. The truffles mysteriously did not link up with a name. An empty paper wrapper indicated that one of the three truffles had already been eaten.

“Who brought them?” Chandler asked.

“I have no idea. They weren’t here when I left the room. Someone must have put them here later,” Wilkie May explained.
“Truffles?” Murphy said, inspecting them up close. “You mean those things the French pigs dig up?”

“Same name,” Wilkie May said, “but very different taste.” He joined Murphy at close range near the tray and sniffed. “My guess is these are cognac-scented, fudge-cream, double-dipped, cocoa-tossed truffles.”

“Holy cow,” Murphy said, and went to pick one up to test the hunch.

“Murphy, that’s evidence,” Chandler admonished. “Besides, all three were probably poisoned.”

“Sorry chief.”

“Other than those truffles,” Chandler continued, “is the table the way you left it?”

“No. Those were still in a stack.”

May was pointing to a line of white tasting plates that had been set out along the edge of the table. Each one had a different chocolate selection on it.

“I left those in a pile on the table. They weren’t supposed to be used until the tasting,” he explained. “I guess Armande set them out for his own little spree and it looks like he was a bit sloppy too.”

“You mean he sneak ed in here to pig out on all this stuff and took the time to put each selection on its own tasting plate?”

“Of course,” he answered. “To prevent the intermingling of flavors.”

“Did you see anyone enter this room through the adjoining door once you had returned to the party?”

“No. Against the rules. We were all waiting in there for the tasting to start.”

“Then someone must have gone into the hallway,” Chandler surmised, “and entered this room through the hallway door. Possible?”

“Yes. It wasn’t locked.”

“They left those poisoned truffles on the table, maybe waiting for a chance to push them on DeCoca during the tasting. But DeCoca stole into the room first and ate it here.”

“But there’s a lot of stuff here. How could the murderer be sure DeCoca would eat one of the poisoned truffles?” Murphy asked.

“DeCoca was obsessed with them,” Wilkie May explained. “It was common knowledge. He was always searching for the perfect truffle. The European kind. Big ones with powdery coatings.”

“Hope for his sake that one was it,” Chandler said. “Did anyone leave at any time during the party?”

“Five people left at some point,” Murphy said, consulting his interview notes.

“I want to talk to them. Go next door and send them out one by one. I’ll be in the hallway.”

“Only four of them will talk to you, chief.”

“Why is that?”

“He’s the fifth,” Murphy said, pointing under the table.

Chandler left the room and sat down at a desk in the hall to gather her thoughts. The first to interrupt the silence was Terrence Cable. He was a tall man with brash manner. A dessert chef who wore his ego like an apron.

“You knew Armande DeCoca?” Chandler asked, motioning for him to sit down, but Cable stood defiantly.

“Everyone knew that fat phony. And his pathetic newsletter.”
“What newsletter?”
“The Chocophile,” he intoned dramatically. “And his absurd rating system. Imagine, giving me a twenty-six two years in a row.”
“What’s a twenty-six?”
“A Z rating. Too sweet he called my best mousse. Lacked subtlety. As if that bloated goat would recognize subtlety. The man was a raging chococrat. Nothing was good enough for him.”
“According to this list you brought a bomb to the tasting this year. Care to explain that?”
His nose turned up so high she could see into his wounded pride.
“Bombe,” he said, in his best French accent. “I’m a chocolatier, not a terrorist. Ecstasy in three levels. Icing, cake, and at the center, my masterpiece. A double-whipped mousse that is an homage to Toulouse-Lautrec.”
“Was he into bombs too?”
“He was the inventor of the chocolate mousse. He called it chocolate mayonnaise. A brilliant invention. Why he is better known as a painter is beyond me.”
“Why did you leave the party?”
“To make a phone call. Unfortunately there’s no phone on this entire lousy floor.”
“What about the one in the room?”
“Too noisy.”
“Did you try the one in the tasting room?”
“I did not. When I couldn’t find one, I went back to the party.”
“Talk to me about truffles,” Chandler said bluntly.
Cable’s eyebrows bounced once at the mention.
“I don’t do truffles.”
“No? And why is that?”
“Because of him. That awful fat man. He was obsessed with them. And I refuse to have anything to do with anything he liked!”
Cable swept back into the room with the others just as Shelly Sykes, a food writer, stepped out. An amiable young man with the manner of a professor, he sat down in the chair and lit a pipe. The smell of mocha filled the narrow hallway.
“Hope you don’t mind,” he said fanning the cloud, “I’m a bit of a cocoa-nut. Love the odor of the stuff. Mix it with the tobacco. You think DeCoca was murdered?”
“Who said anything about that?”
“Just a thought. Everyone hated him for one reason or another. All good reasons too. He was obnoxious. I’d call this a case of just desserts.”
“Yours?”
“DeCoca and I were well known rivals. But only in print. He tried to discredit me every chance he got. He was jealous. I’m writing the definitive work on the history of the ochre goo.”
“The what?”
“Chocolate. Starting with the Aztecs. They drank fifty cups of the stuff a day. Believed a prophet brought it back from paradise and that it bestowed wisdom. Thought it was an aphrodisiac too.”
“What about DeCoca?”
“Of course their idea of chocolate was different from ours. The word chocolate means warm
beverage, but an Aztec cup of it was like a quaff of battery acid. No sugar, laced with ground peppers, and served tepid. Thick as molasses. And dyed red to look like blood. Hard to believe the Spaniards thought it was worth bringing back.”

“What about Armande DeCoca?” Chandler insisted.

“What about him?”

“Did you kill him?”

“Me? Never! I wouldn’t waste my time. I’m a writer not a maniac.”

“Then why did you leave the party?”

“To get some air. Smoke my pipe.”

“And leave the truffles in the tasting room?” Chandler said, taking a stab.

“Truffles? No, I’m the kisses. Chocolate kisses. That was my selection this year.”

“You thought that would win the contest?”

“It’s not a contest. You don’t judge chocolate. You savor it. And kisses are underrated. Especially for me. I’m a gourmoo. I love milk chocolate.”

“Then who do you think killed him?”

“Wilkie May was in there for a long time. He could have pulled it off.”

“Motive?”

“He was DeCoca’s cousin. That’s reason enough.”

As Sykes got up to leave, a small sliver of red and silver foil fell from his pocket, remnant of a candy wrapper. He quickly picked it up, then bumped into the next suspect coming out to the hallway. It was Anne Louise Tuffle, a prim woman wearing a black hat. She was DeCoca’s assistant and claimed to have left the party for a few minutes simply to look for him.

“I came right back when I couldn’t find him anywhere on the floor,” she said.

“Where did you think he had gone?”

“Out for a walk. I never suspected he would sneak into the tasting room like that. Poor Armande. Poisoned by his favorite treat.”

“What makes you think that?”

“He couldn’t resist truffles. The murderer must have known that.”

“Who said anything about truffles?”

“Come now, my dear,” she said, adjusting her glasses. There was a reddish brown smudge on her sleeve. “It’s all quite plain. Someone poisoned one of the truffles, knowing full well Armande would eat it. It’s obvious, isn’t it?”

“You tell me.”

“I was one of the first in the room. I noticed that a truffle was missing from a group of three. I saw the empty wrapper. He must have eaten it. And it killed him. Such a tragedy.”

“You liked DeCoca?”

“I meant the truffle. It was a terrible crime. But only because it wasted an entire European truffle.”

“And what makes you think it was poisoned?”

“You said it was.”

“No I didn’t. You did.”

“Did I? Oh well, I just don’t buy the heart attack theory. He had low blood pressure, not high.”

“I don’t suppose they were your truffles?”
“Oh, no. I brought a lovely bouquet – toffee Bavarian cream injected into delicate flowers of paper-thin suede chocolate. To be bitten gently, like a first kiss, with the eyes closed, of course.”

Her voice caressed the memory and lingered for a moment before being yanked back to reality by the next question.

“Who do you think killed DeCoca?” Chandler asked.

“Good heavens, I have no idea. So many people disliked him.”

“Not you, though.”

“He was difficult to work for, but I put up with his eccentricities.”

“Why?”

“Beans.”

“I beg your pardon?”

“The world is full of beans, my dear. Lima, string, coffee. All very fine beans I’m sure. But then there is the cacao. Not really a bean but a miracle. Take the seed, dry it, roast it, polish it, crush it. Remove the fat, cool, add sugar – and voilà! Chocolate. By working for Armande I was able to devote my life to it. And for that, I will put up with anything!”

Emma Nemm came out next. She was a formerly thin woman who had widened with her desires. Her manner was shy and quiet as she slumped down in the chair. Not at all Chandler’s image of a murderer, a speculation supported by the fact that Nemm was the only one who seemed upset about DeCoca’s demise.

“I must admit,” she said sheepishly, “that I did peek into the tasting room. When I was out here in the hall. I know it was wrong to do but I couldn’t resist. The door was partly open.”

“It was?”

“Yes. Just a crack.”

“According to the others, you’re the only one who left the party after DeCoca. So his body must have been in there when you looked.”

“I didn’t see it. I took a quick glance, then turned off the light and left.”

“The light was on?”

“Yes.”

“And you didn’t see the body lying there?”

“No. Does that matter?”

“We’ll see.”

“But if he had a heart attack, I don’t see how . . .”

“No heart attack. This is a case of chococide. Murder by truffle.”

“Oh my!”

Emma Nemm seemed to struggle with that idea before breaking down in sobs. Thinking a confession was in the offing, Chandler leaned forward and waited. But she was disappointed.

“I’m sorry,” Nemm said, “this is all so upsetting. You see, Armande and I were in love. But he ended the affair just last week. He told me he had fallen for another woman.”

“A member of the club?”

“No. A horribly thin thing. Who never even eats dessert. What could she and Armande possibly do together?” she asked pathetically. “If only you knew him as well as I did. He was so gentle, so eloquent.”

"I just can’t imagine who would strangle him."
"Who said anything about strangling?"
"Please! Don’t ask me any more. I’m so upset, I don’t know what I’m saying."
As Nemm returned to the room with the others, Chandler led Murphy back into the tasting room where she stood before the table, studying the bronze formation like a sculptor.
"Why are we here?" Murphy whined, trying to focus on the table rather than the body under it. "Because," Chandler said, as her suspicion slowly turned to conviction, "we know who did it."
"We do?"
"We do," she said.
Murphy stood next to her to see what she was seeing. But it didn’t help. He still had no idea who killed Armande DeCoca.
Do you?

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Try to solve the mystery without reading the hint below.

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Hint

This hint is for the totally puzzled.
Read it only if you do not know who murdered Armande DeCoca.
The hint will point you to the exact location in the puzzle image that contains the clues.

I looked at those chocolettes lined up "Chandler suggested.
"I'm looking," Murphy said. "He lined them up before we left them. So what?"
"There's something odd about those chocolettes. He stood at the corner of the table, but things were meant to taste on the plates, then lined them up before we left them."
"Right."
"Then shouldn't he have started eating from left or right? Most people would."
"Guess so."
"But he's still in his pants. From the left plate, that suggests he started from the right.
"...Sure, but..."
"And why isn't the watch on the truffle, which is in fact the first thing he ate—and he last."
"Why isn't that bar of chocolate too?"
"I give up, Quis."
"Well, I don't. That line of chocolettes means something. He wasn't tasting them. He put them on the plates to distinguish them from everything else. Take a careful look at them."

Solution

Murphy took a careful look at the line of chocolates on the plate, but the secrets they contained were not on him. Chandler saw him in this expression and was disposed.

"I keep wondering," he explained, "why you bought the chocolates in this way. It's a strange arrangement. Three cookies, one on each two precious, twice-ten-two.

Twelve-your. What does that mean to you?"

"How?"

Chandler looked for a hint or insight in Murphy's simple face, grew a blank instead.

"Do you think it's Decora's habit to put the letters of the alphabet under a number? Was there a letter C one is?

"So?"

"...so do also use that system here to tell us who the number was. There is the letter C. One is..."

"The letter A, two stands for B. Murphy shouted, exactly.

"Right. He copied before he copied the initial spell in the place for the letter E."

But Chandler's summary was interrupted by a commotion from the other room. She opened the door to find five of the men holding Tension Cape in place. He had wished to turn our when he

...dearest Murphy spoke from near.

"Yes, I killed him," Cape said definitely. "I couldn't take it anymore. His poisoning. His death.

"How?"

Cape frowned. "How did you find out?"

"He told us his secret. "Chandler said simply."

"Did you?" Cape shouted. "But how did you know?"

"I guess we're right about your. Don't those poison until. You make. He must have known." the men were yours.

"How?"

"I like being at the subject. Then were too sweet," Chandler suggested. She was tying
to do better than careful. But the assumption sent Cape into a binding rage.

"I don't need your advice! I want a trial! A trial of my people! The living to possess cakes in the country! I can't hide my chocolate! Let go of me, you fools!"

But they were more secret than from the portal and managed to help suppress the tainting co,

"He's lost his mind," Murphy said softly.

"Sure hope he likes his business," Chandler offered. But she was already writing the Rush of the crowd into the fasting room as they jumped over the night and disappeared to continue a more important mystery near was still unanswered: how did those chocolate notes taste?