MURDER AT THE MUSEUM

MYSTERY SOLVER

Original Story
by Claudia Busto

Assemble the puzzle, read the story booklet, search for clues and solve the crime at the Museum.
You have been dying to go to Cloister Manor for ages, but work and family responsibilities have not permitted you to do so. When your good friend Alexander hears about an upcoming special anniversary tour there, you joyfully decide to take a week-long holiday together, and sign up for the tour.

Cloister Manor is known throughout all of England. Part museum, part gorgeous landmark, and part life experience, it is primarily devoted to the art and architecture of medieval Europe. Exquisite paintings, carvings, column capitals, and interactive exhibits offer sightseers a wealth of information, education, and adventure. Whereas the museum usually gets hundreds of visitors a day, the anniversary tour is closed to all but eight people. It is somewhat expensive, but you and Alexander will be getting the most intimate look at Cloister Manor ever given, and agree that it will be money well spent. Just off the museum’s property, about a five-minute walk away, is Cloister Chalet, a charming inn and resort where guests can stay in little individual bungalows abounding in luxuries. It has quite the reputation among travelers, and by booking the anniversary tour, you were given a free night at the chalet. All in all, it is shaping up to be quite the perfect trip, and you count the days until departure time.

When you and Alexander arrive at Cloister Manor a full two months later, you pause and gasp in awe at the sheer loveliness of it. Standing before you is the massive limestone mansion with ornamental turrets and arches that you had previously only seen in books. “Let’s go, let’s go,” Alexander says impatiently. “The others are already here.”

Hurriedly you put your coat and luggage in the cloakroom and dash to the entrance. A group of about eight people are waiting underneath a giant statue of a snarling lion.

A hostess dressed in a long purple capelet with an old-fashioned gold brooch greets all of you warmly, and announces herself as Elizabeth. “You are in for a treat this week,” she smiles. “Usually one of our highly competent guides leads the tours, but for this special anniversary, our very own museum curator, Mr. Beazley, will be showing you every last facet of Cloister Manor.” She points to the curator as your group applauds.

Mr. Beazley claps his own chubby hands enthusiastically. “Greetings, medieval enthusiasts and art and history lovers. Half, those that are interested in learning about days gone by. Welcome, ladies and gentleman, to the finest museum in all of existence. We at Cloister Manor pride ourselves on the utmost attention to detail. Everything you are about to see is authentically medieval—from the herbs in our garden to every last sculpture. Only at Cloister can you completely immerse yourself in a different time period and feel as if you are truly living in it. Never before has any place been so thoroughly dedicated to preserving a whole era. I am confident that you will leave Cloister Manor an entirely new person.”

You and Alexander smile at each other excitedly, sure that you are about to embark on the excursion of a lifetime.

“Now, let us meet each other, as we will be spending a lot of time together this coming week. I hope we all get along,” Mr. Beazley jokes. You gaze at the others as they begin introducing themselves.

“Hello, I am David,” a tall, distinguished-looking gentleman introduces himself. “This is my wife, Hannah. We are history connoisseurs and this is our third trip to Cloister Manor.”

There is also Beatrice from Corning, a pleasantly plump, jolly older woman dripping with colorful gems; Simon, a small, bespectacled, reclusive-looking man from London; and Henry and his gregarious wife, Emma, who all say that they have never been to Cloister Manor before. Everyone is very much looking forward to the tour. There are a few minutes of mingling and getting acquainted, during which Hannah confides in a gossipy tone to the women that she has heard Cloister Manor is not doing as well financially as it used to be, and Simon says not a single word.

“Well, then, let’s begin, shall we?” Mr. Beazley asks finally, and whirls around.

He leads the group to the museum’s first wing, a stunning chapel with enormous stained glass windows.

Mr. Beazley starts, “The stained glass in this chapel was taken from a church in Austria dating back to the mid-1300s. The builders of medieval chapels took care to bring light inside through the use of stained glass windows because light was equated with heaven and considered the golden gleam of divinity.”

On a wooden shelf, several aged books are displayed. “These are illuminated manuscripts containing excerpts from The Bible. These books were usually hand decorated by monks and made from parchment or vellum, the skin of young calves or sheep. Note that gold and silver leaf are employed for the text.”

He points out several other charming features of the chapel, much to the tour’s delight.

“This is just like being in a chapel of yore,” Henry announces to the group.
“How absolutely fascinating.”

“Indeed,” Emma agrees, clapping her hands with pleasure. “I simply cannot wait to see more! This is even more spectacular than anything I could have ever pictured. It makes our house look positively shabby, doesn’t it, Henry?”

“It certainly does,” he concurs. “Let’s see what awaits us next. Perhaps, Emma, we can be inspired by some decorating ideas to make our home look smarter.”

Mr. Beazley leads the tour to a large room with several woven hanging tapestries in threads of various colors—glorious golds, resplendent reds, and dramatic greens.

“Are the tapestries just merely decorative?” Beatrice inquires.

“What a good question!” Mr. Beazley exalts and starts to answer, but David interrupts him.

“That’s a very easy question,” he sniffs. “Tapestries actually were originally designed with a purpose—to keep cold and dampness out of medieval rooms. Later on, because they were so intricately designed, they became signs of wealth and power. Frequently, you will find initials and names sewn into the tapestries, another symbol of status.”

The rest of you look around at each other, appalled by David’s rudeness at not letting the knowledgeable curator answer the question himself.

Mr. Beazley appears to not even notice the interruption. “On to the next exhibit!” he enthuses. “This next one is a personal favorite of mine—the paintings.” You love art, so this is one of the parts of the museum that you have been most looking forward to seeing.

“Now,” Mr. Beazley cautions, “a lot of the art contains religious deities and themes, or displays images of beauty and nature. Some of the other subject matters, however, are a bit disturbing and gory, but it’s all beautiful art nevertheless.”

You look around in wonderment at the huge room before you. There are again stained glass windows all around, and shelves of artifacts, plaques, coins, and jewelry against the arched walls, but it is all the canvases hanging that are the most breathtaking. You stop in front of a large representation of a young knight dressed in chain armor sitting atop a horse with his shield and sword resting on the ground. His hands are clasped in prayer, and behind him, the sky is swirled in red and golden hues. “The colors of this are just magnificent!” you say to the rest of the tour. “Come see!”

“Ahh,” David says, pleased by your obvious appreciation, “wait until you see the next one.”

The following painting is one of the grim, gruesome pictures Mr. Beazley had mentioned. Several knights are standing together, looking at a knight that they have slain. The victim is lying on the ground with a giant crossbow penetrating his armor. A pool of dark blood lies beneath him.

It is a most morbid image, yet you find yourself strangely drawn to it, and cannot stop staring.

When all of the paintings have been viewed, analyzed, and discussed, the tour walks through to the next room, which only contains a red door. Opening the door, you arrive at a path that takes you to a courtyard with an herb garden so beautiful you can scarcely believe your eyes. Lush greenery of all different shades and types is mingled together in a fragrant, visual splendor. It is the most aromatic, sensory place you have ever seen. Sculptures of unicorns and animals are bountiful, and there are even medieval poems displayed in small gilt frames around the flower beds.

“This,” Mr. Beazley says, “is medieval perfection. It contains more than 250 species of plants that were grown during the Middle Ages. All plants are historically accurate, including those fruit trees over there. Often, monasteries were surrounded by orchards.”

“What’s inside those decorative pots?” Alexander asks, pointing to a row of them.

David answers again in the same pompous tone as before. “Aloe, lemon, and bay leaves. Medieval persons believed in using plants and herbs for a variety of purposes, including healing.”

You deliberately turn to the curator. “Why is that, Mr. Beazley?” you ask, hoping that David will stop being so impolite and let your host properly answer the question.

“Well, it is important to know that the medieval period is one that was saturated with superstitions. People at the time believed in elves and goblins, and thought that the air contained invisible evil powers. They thought nature was a way to thwart the evil. You may have noticed the herbs hanging with pieces of red wool all around the garden. These herbs are being used as amulets to protect the garden from these forces. Herbs were also used in beverages to treat diseases or medical conditions, and we are going to sample one of these concoctions now, Elizabeth?” he asks, looking around for the hostess.

Elizabeth is standing nearby with a tray of pewter containers. “These drinks, a medieval specialty, contain assorted herbs, ale, milk, honey, and vinegar, and are guaranteed to cure whatever ails you.”

You look skeptically at the tray, reluctant to try such a bizarre assortment of
ingredients, but of course David and Hannah immediately help themselves.

“Don’t be shy, everyone,” David growls. “It’s a delicious drink.”

“It really is good, one of my favorite refreshments,” Henry assures everyone before grabbing one off the tray. After everyone has taken one and admired a wall with various robust stone figurines carved into it, you all walk over to a pond containing fish.

“Why is that parsley in the pond?” Alexander questions.

Mr. Beazley laughs. “I told you we were authentic down to the last detail! They threw parsley into fish ponds in medieval times to cure the sick fishes.”

Everybody chuckles, but there is also a strange groan-like sound. Suddenly Elizabeth shrieks and points. Beatrice, the chubby visitor from Corning, lies on the ground. A crossbow is sticking straight through her pink dress and a small pool of crimson blood is slowly starting to spread beneath her. Just as you are thinking to yourself, this looks exactly like that painting we were just admiring, Alexander whispers the same thing to you.

“Everyone, please!” an agitated Mr. Beazley pleads. “There must be some mistake. This has to be a bizarre joke or illusion.”

“Actually,” the formally quiet Simon says while leaning over Beatrice’s body, “I’m a doctor, and I am afraid this is not a joke. She is very much dead from the crossbow.”

“How did we not see anyone come in here and do this?” Hannah demands, burrowing herself against the crook of David’s arm.

“No, no,” Mr. Beazley says, and you notice he is shaking considerably. “This whole week the manor and museum are closed to the public. Everything is completely locked up, and I am the only one with keys, and so the only people with access to here are all of us on the tour.”

“But that means one of us is the killer!” you cry out. “What if something else happens?”

“Now see here,” David demands. “We paid a lot of money for this tour, and I intend to get every schilling’s worth. Yes, what a most unfortunate thing it is that just happened to Beatrice, but let us just ring for the police and be done with it. They will figure everything out so we can get on with it.”

You are shocked at the callousness with which he is talking.

“Really, David,” Alexander says coldly. “Anyone who can speak so cavalierly about a woman’s death must have a pretty relaxed attitude about murder—especially someone who appears so obsessed with that painting. This murder scene is completely reminiscent of that painting you love.”

Are you implying that I am the killer?” David asks indignantly. “Because I assure you that I am not. I simply want to resume the tour. This is my third trip to Cloister Manor and I thoroughly enjoy it here. I came on this tour because I usually have to see everything here amidst crowds of people and this was a chance to see everything a bit more intimately. The last thing I wanted was for this to occur and derail us from our trip.”

“Why are we standing here discussing this still?” Emma asks. “He sounds guilty as could be!”

“I do? Well, I apologize to everyone in this room,” David says, sounding downright remorseful. “What you all must think of me! I realize that I did just sound utterly heartless and unfeeling. I did not mean to; I am just rattled. I have never been good at dealing with death and morbid circumstances. I suppose I lost my head for a moment due to all the excitement and confusion. Again, I am sorry, and I assure you that I am not ordinarily so unsympathetic. Might everyone accept my apology so we may move on and think about this logically?”

Everyone murmurs consent.

“Thinking it through,” Simon says, “right before the death occurred, we were standing by the fish pond. One of us must not have been there. One of us must have been hiding someplace in the garden, such as behind that wall, in order to shoot the crossbow without the rest of us noticing.”

There is a chorus of “I was there,” “We were right there by the pond,” “I saw her,” “I didn’t see him.”

Hannah holds her hands up. “What would any of us have to gain with killing someone on this tour? Wait,” she gasps. “Mr. Beazley, I have heard that this museum has not been doing so well financially. Perhaps you thought a little gory murder and a case of art imitating life and life imitating art would bring in some thrill-seekers, thus guaranteeing that this museum will continue to do well. No such thing as bad publicity, now is there?”

“That’s preposterous!” Mr. Beazley explodes. “I am not a murderer and would never harm another person or this museum. Elizabeth, who has been working for me for years, will vouch for me. I am as trustworthy as they come.”

“Where did the crossbow even come from?” you wonder aloud.

Mr. Beazley replies, “It is part of the armor exhibit. It is the next wing after this one and we were just about to get to it.”

“See,” Hannah says triumphantly. “It must have been you. Only you know so much about this stuff and knew where the crossbow was. You could have hidden it behind that wall. You probably plotted all along to kill one of us with it on this special tour to drum up some more interest in your museum. Besides, I bet using a crossbow is very complex, and only you would know how to use it.”

Mr. Beazley sighs wearily. “Actually, a crossbow is heavy, but it takes little physical strength to use it. It was widely used during the Middle Ages because,
in addition to the fact that it can even penetrate armor, a relatively untrained person could use it.”

You ask, “Do you mention these facts about crossbows in your standard museum tours?”

“Why, yes,” Mr. Beazley answers, surprised by your curiosity. “Anyone who has been here before would know all about the crossbow and how easily you can use it to kill someone. Any one of us could have snuck off and gotten a crossbow and hidden it for later. Think about that. We have been sticking pretty closely together for most of this tour. Inside the painting wing, though, we were all spread out for the most part and admiring the artworks on our own. Someone could have slipped away during that.”

“Well, then that settles it,” Simon says. “We've narrowed it down to those that have been here before—someone who would know where to get the crossbow and be fairly confident that they would be able to use it readily enough. That leaves us with Mr. Beazley, Elizabeth, David, and Hannah!”

You look around at each person in turn and scan the whole garden. Again it occurs to you how beautiful and truly authentic the garden is, from the parsley-dotted fish pond to the rare species of plants. You think how amazing a place Cloister Manor is for going to such an extent to make sure its visitors really experience the era. Spotting the silver tray of empty pewter drink cups still sitting on a stone ledge, you answer Simon, “Not necessarily. In fact, someone is lying. I know who it is, and I therefore think that person is the killer!”

“You do?” Alexander asks. “Well, who is it?”

**So... who is it? WHO was the murderer at the museum?**
The Solution

You turn to Mr. Beazley.

“What was in that drink?” you ask. “Ale, milk, honey, and vinegar, along with assorted herbs, correct?”

“Yes,” he answers. “The herbs were a blend of vervain, hollyhock, birthwort, and mallow.”

You look over at Henry.

“Henry is a liar and I think that makes him the killer.”

“Are you mad?” Henry exclaims. “What on earth did I lie about?”

“Henry, don’t you remember your fatal error?” you ask. “While concoctions of ale, milk, honey, vinegar, vervain, hollyhock, birthwort, and mallow, were a popular part of cuisine in the Middle Ages, they are not often to be found in modern day England! You claim to have never been to Cloister Manor before, yet you assured us that the drink was one of your favorites before even trying it—a dead giveaway! Why else would you lie about having been here before unless you had something to hide?”

Everyone gasps and turns to glare at Henry.

“That’s true,” Mr. Beazley says, giving you an admiring glance. “However did you recall that?”

“Well, it was easy,” you say modestly. “I just looked around to gauge the situation and saw the empty drink tray still sitting there. I was thinking what a nicey it was that we were provided with those beverages, and then I remembered Henry’s comment. I figured if he was lying, he was guilty. So now my question, Henry, is why?”

“Because,” he angrily spits out, “I have always had a taste for the more macabre aspects of the Middle Ages. I have been here several times, and each time makes me thirst for more knowledge. I have started researching every facet of that time period, and I have even begun my own collection of medieval artworks and knickknacks. I plan on someday opening up my own museum, which is going to be every bit as authentic as this one. I just need this place to come first, so I don’t have the competition and so I can acquire some of the artifacts from here. I thought a murder would be one way to shake things up around here and make it so that nobody would want to come. I completely disagree with your theory, Hannah, that any publicity is good publicity. Murder will not make guests want to flock here; it will in fact make them completely apprehensive about visiting. I have lots of other tactics too that I intend to follow through on in order to destroy Cloister Manor and its reputation.”

“However did you use the bow unseen by the rest of us?” Alexander wonders aloud.

“It was simple,” Henry brags. “I had planned this thing all along, and since I have been here before, I was quite acquainted with all the exhibits and their locations. I also knew all about the crossbow and how it is easy to use. When the rest of you were looking over the paintings, I simply snuck through to the armor exhibit, grabbed the crossbow, hid it in the garden, and rejoined the rest of you on the tour. I knew the garden would completely mesmerize everyone. When everyone was again busy, this time staring at the stone carved wall and the fish pond, I snuck behind the wall, and aimed and fired. Really, it was pretty effortless, because I instantly noticed that you were all so taken with the décor and art that you were noticing little else. Nobody even observed that I was missing.”

“So you’re just a medieval enthusiast who has a whole slew of ideas to ruin this place and murder was one of them?” you snort derisively. “Seems to me like you are a bit demented, and enjoyed actually killing someone in the authentic fashion of the Middle Ages.”

Emma sneers at you. “You’re a smart one, but what are you going to do with all this knowledge?” she asks. “The police have not been called and we can just leave.”

“So you are in on it too?” Alexander queries.

“Oh, yes,” she responds. “It’s really too bad that there is nobody of authority around to properly deal with this. We can go and pretend the whole thing never happened.”

“Oh, no, we can’t!” Simon thunders and whips out a gun.

Everyone simultaneously screams, as you shriek, “But you’re a doctor!”

“Well, I do have some medical training,” Simon admits. “But I actually work for the government as a special agent at Scotland Yard.”

You are astonished. This quiet, reclusive man is a special government agent? You blurt out, “I don’t believe it!”

“It’s true. Henry and Emma, you’re under arrest. Simon says,” and he turns to wink at you.