

THE UNFINISHED MYSTERY

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FADE IN:

EXT. MANSION - NIGHT

On the main floor, the shadows of two women slowly pace behind the closed curtains. They appear to be holding smartphones.

Upstairs, we see a dimly lit bedroom.

INT. MANSION, BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

In the same dimly lit master suite filled with flowers and get-well cards, rests M.T. WHITLOW (45) in silk pajamas and full makeup. Her eyes are closed. Posters of her most famous murder-mystery novels and films fill the walls. We see a comfortable chair with a lamp, and an end table covered with a Mac Book laptop, a bottle of whiskey, a coffee cup, and an empty prescription bottle.

She wears a smartwatch that blinks her pulse which slowly falls from 80 to 60.

We HEAR the voice of the dying woman.

M.T. WHITLOW (V.O.)

I carefully crafted the murders of over two hundred people in my novels using poisons, knives, pistols, and every accident imaginable only to see the irony in that scariest murder weapon of all time is... hospice.

Her voice weakens as her watch reads "40," and she turns her eyes to an unfinished manuscript printout resting on the seat of the chair.

M.T. WHITLOW (V.O.)

Sure, I have unfinished business!
But I have everything arranged.

Her voice weakens more as her watch reads "30."

M.T. WHITLOW (V.O.)

All my wife and son have left to do is find a writer to finish my last mystery novel without a hitch.

Her watch reads "20."

M.T. WHITLOW (V.O.)
How hard could it be?

BEGIN FLASHFORWARD

INT. MANSION - NIGHT

SUPER: "Two Weeks Later."

We see the HAND of a female Asian butler, Xian Xi (AKA CEE-CEE; 28), open the coat closet door that is slightly ajar.

We hear her SCREAM as we see the trunk of a dead man fall toward her and crash to the floor.

INT. MANSION, DEN - NIGHT

SUPER: "Two hours after that..."

We see the chest of ARTEMIS BERTRAND TRENT (60) on a couch in a white shirt being stabbed in the heart by a long kitchen knife held by a gloved hand (yellow plastic kitchen cleaning gloves).

END FLASHFORWARD

M.T. has greater difficulty breathing, her eyes are glassy, and her head weakly moves from side to side. Her voice is incredibly weak.

M.T. WHITLOW (V.O.)
Without a hitch? Ha! They'll mess
up, won't they?

Her smartwatch blinks as her pulse rate declines precipitously to zero, where a bright red message reads, "ALERT."

EXT. MANSION - NIGHT

SUPER: "Two Weeks Later"

It's a dark, cloudy night when a gorgeous widow in a little black dress and pearls, MARGOT WHITLOW (30), swings open the door of the dimly lit mansion to glare at her empty driveway. She has a sweet, romantic Russian accent that everyone loves.

She glares back through the open door as Cee-Cee walks by in a black butler uniform with white EarBuds.

MARGOT
Cee-Cee, where is everyone?

Cee-Cee shuns eye contact and keeps strolling to tunes.

MARGOT (CONT'D)
Cee-Cee! Can you please remove
EarBuds?!

Margot sees headlights approaching.

MARGOT (CONT'D)
Flynn, they coming! Can you please
pour Champagne?!

We hear FLYNN WHITLOW (18), a childish and comical black teen making the most of a sad situation.

FLYNN (O.S.)
Yes, Mom #2.

Margot turns in a flustered but forgiving voice.

MARGOT
Please not to call me that in front
of guests, and I won't call you our
underachieving son.

FLYNN (O.S.)
Yes, Mommy Dearest.

MARGOT
Flynn!

Flynn peeks out the door with a weak smile.

FLYNN
I'm nervous and sad.

MARGOT
(smiles warmly)
That, they will understand, da.

Margot turns back to approaching cars and collects herself by smoothing out dress wrinkles that aren't there.

ARTEMIS BERTRAND TRENT (60) drives up in a new SUV with tinted windows.

Margot is all smiles until she sees it's Artemis.

MARGOT (CONT'D)
New car, da, Artemis?

Artemis speaks in an aristocratic Australian accent if there is such a thing.

ARTEMIS

I got paid when your husband died,
mate.

MARGOT

M.T. was my wife!

ARTEMIS

You know what I mean. You get paid
only after you find a suitable
writer to finish her last
manuscript.

Margot turns angry.

Artemis snickers.

ARTEMIS (CONT'D)

I get paid either way.

(whispers)

The Will clearly specifies that you
have to pull tonight off without a
hitch or the orphan gets it all.

Margot pulls Artemis by the sleeve away from the door.

MARGOT

We both signed a confidentiality
agreement not to mention that! da?

Artemis looks puzzled.

ARTEMIS

Flynn doesn't know?

Margot gets in Artemis's face.

MARGOT

M.T. didn't want him, how you say,
sabotaging tonight. He turns 18
tomorrow, leaves home, and joins
Army, da? It's your job to help me
get my inheritance if you want to
keep living on sleazy street.

ARTEMIS

That's easy street.

MARGOT

Without hitch tonight. Those are
M.T.'s last wishes. da?

ARTEMIS

Wishes. I got it. I hope your guests, Flynn, and that whacky butler of yours gets it, da?

MARGOT

I handle Cee-Cee. You control Flynn.

Artemis snickers and heads into the house.

ARTEMIS

He hates me almost as much as M.T. did. And you know why!

Margot raises a finger to Artemis with a warning.

MARGOT

No phones or laptops tonight.

ARTEMIS (O.C.)

Blimey, mate! They are in the car!

A limo pulls up and the Driver exits and opens the door for ROBERT KNOLLS (50), a charming British gentleman, and seasoned author.

Margot spins around and races to meet him.

MARGOT

Sir Robert Knolls, I'd know you anywhere from the awards shows.

Robert reads from the gold and black bordered invitation.

ROBERT

You have me at a disadvantage, Ms...?

MARGOT

Mrs. Margot Whitlow.

ROBERT

You are the portrait of courage for caring so lovingly for my favorite author of all time during her long illness.

Margot moves in for a hug and Robert hugs her briefly and then steps back and puts out a hand to shake.

ROBERT (CONT'D)

How forward of me. I apologize. I should have politely requested the hug.

MARGOT

(flirting)

Now you have me at disadvantage, Robert.

She stares at the hand.

MARGOT (CONT'D)

(laughs)

Am I supposed to kiss it or shake it?

He lifts his nose for a laugh, then shakes her hand.

ROBERT

I'm so sorry for your loss.

They both laugh awkwardly and shake hands again.

ROBERT (CONT'D)

Did I mention I was M.T.'s biggest fan?

Margot nods 'yes' and looks deeply into his eyes.

MARGOT

She was big fan of yours. All your murder mysteries with royals dying left and right.

ROBERT

(laughs)

Yes, the "*Palace Murders Series*" was my bread and butter. Have you read them?

MARGOT

I don't read English so fast.

ROBERT

(smiles)

Well, it's a wonder there is anyone left in line for the Crown, I'll tell you that!

(whispers in her ear)

Confidentially, of course, M.T. told me by phone before she passed that she wanted me, and only me, to complete her unfinished manuscript.

Margot whispers into his ear.

MARGOT

I would like that, but let's keep secret between us. M.T. wanted democratic battle of wits. But best of luck in voting to you.

Robert heads into the house with a perplexed look.

ROBERT

Voting? Who the bloody hell else was invited?

A Volkswagen bug pulls up and sputters after it stops.

DEDE FLETCHER (40) leaps up to meet Margot. Dede wears blue jeans, a tank top, a floppy hat, and flip-flops. Dede talks very fast.

DEDE

Margot Whitlow, thanks for the invite. I'm Dede Fletcher.

Margot's eyes open wide.

DEDE (CONT'D)

From San Francisco, where the news reporters killed my career by proclaiming me the next M.T. Whitlow after my debut bestseller.

Margot look more perplexed.

DEDE (CONT'D)

The Seaside Strangler. If it wasn't for the film rights, I'd be homeless right now, but M.T. would keep texting me to keep writing.

The women eye each other like competitors.

MARGOT

How old are you? You look twenty! Way too...

DEDE

Forty this May.

Margot studies Dede's flawless skin and then looks at her arms and puts them behind her as Dede heads into the mansion.

DEDE (CONT'D)

Abe Lincoln said, "In the end, it's not the years in your life that count. It's the life in your years."

MARGOT

(snickers)

He got shot in head, da?

(mumbles)

I hope she loses!

Margot doesn't see or hear SAMIRA RAM (21), peddle up on a silent electric bike. She's dressed in semi-formal Indian garments. She removes her bike helmet to unleash long beautiful hair and a smile to die for.

SAMIRA

(bows)

I'm so sorry for your loss, Mrs. Whitlow.

Margot smiles, smitten by the exotic young woman.

MARGOT

Спасибо, Thank you. You're the young writer from Berkeley, da?

SAMIRA

Samira Ram. M.T. asked me to convince your son to go to Berkeley her alma mater too. I was shocked to get your invitation to her memorial.

MARGOT

No memorial. We vote to give away M.T.'s unfinished manuscript, no? Could make someone millions, da?

SAMIRA

Not me, I assure you. I've never won anything.

MARGOT

Please do convince Flynn go to college. He needs somewhere to go when he turn 18 tomorrow. We toss him out of nest to learn to fly.

Samira looks puzzled at Margot as a silver SUV pulls up with heavily tinted windows.

SAMIRA
 (mumbles, sarcastic)
 That's some birthday present.

MARGOT
 Samira, help yourself to Champagne
 while I greet our last guest from
 South America.

Samira's eyes are glued to CARLOS DIEGO (45), the well-dressed man exiting the SUV in a tailored gray suit.

Margo pushes Samira into the mansion and turns to Carlos.

MARGOT (CONT'D)
 You must be C. Diego. You're male?

Carlos gently holds Margot's hand and kisses her on both cheeks. She swoons with Carlos's Latino accent and rugged three-day beard.

CARLOS
 Mrs. Whitlow, I've heard so much
 about you. Sorry for your loss.

Carlos looks up and makes the sign of the cross.

CARLOS (CONT'D)
 The C is for Carlos. M.T. always
 called me C since she was known as
 M.T.

MARGOT
 (whispers)
 You are M.T.'s closest confidant
 among writers. I had no idea.

CARLOS
 She called on me all the time for
 book advice, it is true. We will
 both miss her.

Margot looks perplexed.

MARGOT
 You are famous writer yourself, no?

CARLOS
 Yes. My "*Hitman Series*" did well in
 Spanish-speaking countries, but
 M.T. knew I was capable of much
 more and I'm very interested in
 getting my hands on her unfinished
 manuscript.

Margot looks concerned.

MARGOT

It will be democratic vote.

Carlos extends his arm to guide Margot into the house.

CARLOS

I know. Let's hope I win, or I'll
kill everyone and steal it!

Carlos laughs maniacally. Margot looks concerned.

CARLOS (CONT'D)

I was kidding.

INT. MANSION, DINING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Margot and Carlos enter the dining room and are met with stares from the others who are holding near-full glasses of Champagne. There's a large painting of M.T. Whitlow next to a glass cabinet filled with awards and trophies. The place settings have "tent" name cards for assigned seating with full names, except for Carlos whose tag reads "C. Diego."

FLYNN

Everybody's afraid to say something
that might influence the number of
votes they receive so I'll start.
I'm Flynn Whitlow, Mom #1's
underachieving adopted then
disinherited son. I barely got out
of high school but I've loved all
of Mom #1's books and living here
for 17 of my almost 18 years. I'll
thank Mom #1 and...

(toasts Margot)

And our host, Mom #2, for putting
up with a kid they never wanted.

(toasts the others)

I love a good mystery and tonight
should be no exception. Thank you
all for coming.

AWKWARD SILENCE

Robert toasts Margot.

ROBERT

Thanks again for the invitation.
I'm Robert Knolls a mystery writer
from London.

(to Flynn)

(MORE)

ROBERT (CONT'D)

If you're anything like my favorite author of all time, you'll do fine.

Dede smiles at Flynn and Robert.

DEDE

Holy shit! Robert, you're like the king of mysteries, but I've never heard the words adopted and disinherited in the same sentence. I'm making Flynn the lead character in my next novel!

Everyone chuckles and the mood is light.

CARLOS

I agree. Your charisma will take you far... or get you killed.

Everyone laughs.

MARGOT

Carlos Diego is mystery writer from Columbia. Remember Flynn, our guests do murder for a living.

Everyone chuckles.

Samira points to the locked box on the dining room table.

SAMIRA

Is that first prize, the printout of M.T.'s unfinished manuscript? I'm Samira Ram, a creative writing student at Berkeley. I'm so excited to be here.

MARGOT

Flynn, did you hear that? College student.

Flynn smiles at Samira and pretends someone is twisting his arm.

FLYNN

You're one of Mom #1's dirty tricks on me from beyond the grave.

They all chuckle as Samira and Flynn share a moment.

Margot stands at the head of the table. Flynn stands opposite her.

MARGOT

If you all be so kind to sit down.

Everyone sits down in their pre-assigned seats.

Cee-Cee serves water and Champagne with EarBuds distracting her with music.

MARGOT (CONT'D)

This is our butler, Cee-Cee, who also given vote for being good caretaker in my wife's final months.

Margot points to the locked box on the table.

MARGOT (CONT'D)

You meet M.T.'s lawyer now.

Artemis stands in a pompous manner to address the crowd.

ARTEMIS

I'm Artemis Bertrand Trent, Esquire. M.T. included me in the voting as long as, in M.T.'s words, "everything goes on without a hitch."

The group snickers.

ARTEMIS (CONT'D)

You've all read M.T.'s unfinished manuscript that I sent you the day she died.

They all nod 'yes.'

DEDE

So why is the box locked?

ARTEMIS

For reasons I cannot begin to understand, M.T. designated her son...

MARGOT

(interrupts)
Adopted son.

Flynn glares at Margot.

ARTEMIS

Her adopted son, is her
spokesperson for tonight's
activity.

Artemis sits and pouts as Flynn stands and hands out
"Detective Notebooks" and a pencil to everyone.

FLYNN

I don't have a dog in this fight.
I'm not really in the running to
win Mom #1's unfinished manuscript.
I mean, I could win it if you all
vote for me, but that's highly
unlikely. I've never written a
book.

ARTEMIS

What are the notebooks for?

FLYNN

The rules specified you had to
leave your phones, smartwatches,
and laptops in your cars. The
computers and Wi-Fi in the house
have been disabled. This is a test
of wits.

Everyone grumbles and fidgets.

FLYNN (CONT'D)

These are your notebooks to write
down what you're thinking, and the
smartest things that your
competitors say.

SAMIRA

That's how we decide who to vote
for?

MARGOT

Exactly. Very American Democratic,
da?

FLYNN

That's right. At the end of the
night, we each vote for the
smartest Detective-slash-writer in
the room. The person with the most
votes wins the manuscript and the
other things Mom #1 put in the box.

DEDE
 (to Margot)
 You and Flynn don't know the full
 contents of the box?

Margot and Flynn shake their heads, 'No.'

ROBERT
 (laughs at Artemis)
 The lawyer doesn't know either?
 Jolly good!

ARTEMIS
 (glares at Margot and
 Flynn)
 She didn't trust me, that's
 obvious!

ROBERT
 You can't seriously expect us to
 vote for anyone but ourselves.

MARGOT
 M.T. considered that! If everyone
 votes for themselves or if ends in
 tie winner, then I win.

FLYNN
 It may take only two or three votes
 to win a prize worth millions. But
 if you try to bribe someone or
 coerce someone into voting for you,
 you get disqualified and will be
 asked to leave. Mom #1's rules.

CARLOS
 What can we say to sway votes our
 direction?

FLYNN
 Just be the most brilliant
 detective-slash-writer in the room.

Dede laughs.

DEDE
 Slash-writer? That sounds fun!
 We're suddenly in a slasher movie.

Flynn holds out nine small envelopes as has each person take
 one.

FLYNN

These envelopes contain one of nine of Mom #1's rules for writing murder mysteries. Don't share them with the others unless you want to make them look smarter and you look dumber. But each of you should try to record all nine rules in your notebooks by the end of the night.

There are two cards remaining so Flynn takes one and tossed the other one on the box.

MARGOT

M.T. must have miscounted, unless...

FLYNN

She was expecting company?

Everyone looks around suspiciously.

DEDE

Did M.T. leave any clues around the house?

FLYNN

Yes, I forgot to mention that Mom #1 may have left some clues on the main floor of the house, but you may not touch anything outside the dining room.

MARGOT

You may go look for clues.

The guests disperse.

SERIES OF SHOTS

-- Dede looks at the awards in the glass cabinet and takes notes about the title of an award-winning book.

DEDE (V.O.)

(laughs)

"The Butler Didn't Do It." Ha! She was a hoot!

-- Robert finds a postcard that he sent from London on the mantle in the parlor. He smiles, writes a note, and moves on.

-- Shamira is in the kitchen and spots a note held with a magnet on the fridge.

SAMIRA (V.O.)
"Don't let your eggs get too old?"

She smiles back at Flynn who is closely following her.

-- We see the others looking for clues all over the main floor and begin to pass the hall closet as they enter the dining room.

As Cee-Cee passes the hall closet, she sees that the door isn't shut completely.

She attempts to shut it, but something is stuck behind the door.

She opens the door and sees Robert dead and holding his throat with both hands.

Cee-Cee SCREAMS as Robert's body falls to the floor.

Everyone races to Cee-Cee's aid. They momentarily gasp at the sight of Robert's body, and many hands collide at his neck to check for pulse.

SAMIRA
He's dead.

CEE-CEE
I didn't do it.

They all see Robert's notebook reads, "Women use poison, men use guns (or knives)."

They all make a note in their notebooks.

FLYNN
I'll call 9-1-1.

Everyone glares at Flynn. Margot gets in Flynn's face as everyone closes in around him.

MARGOT
Da. Da. But in a few minutes. We must conclude our business.

Samira sees this from the back of the group and she slips out the front door. This is only seen by Flynn.

CARLOS
Or the police will muck this all up.

ARTEMIS
We must call the police!

MARGOT
(angry, pushes Artemis)
Stay out of this, Artemis. You are
just observer!

Dede pulls Cee-Cee aside and whispers with a laugh, but everyone is listening in.

DEDE
Don't worry Cee-Cee, "the butler
didn't do it" is one of T.M's nine
rules.

Flynn works his way to the center of the group and speaks with authority but in a low voice.

FLYNN
I know none of us have our phones
with us, but delaying our call to
the police does two things.

They all lean in to hear Flynn.

FLYNN (CONT'D)
First, It's obvious that Robert
Knolls, the most experienced
mystery writer here, was murdered
by one of us.

Everyone gasps as Flynn points to Robert's notebook.

FLYNN (CONT'D)
And two: the murderer is leading us
to believe that the killer is a
female!

Flynn whispers to Margot.

FLYNN (CONT'D)
I have to go, Mom, number two.

Margot looks confused as Flynn sneaks upstairs.

A pushing match begins, while Samira sneaks back into the house.

SAMIRA
Anybody could have poisoned him.

Carlos pushes Margot.

CARLOS
You have the most to lose!

MARGOT

Everyone could have tried to reduce competition!

Cee-Cee pushes Dede.

DEDE

Hey, what did I do?

CEE-CEE

Not sure yet. But I'm watching you?

Carlos pats Margot on the back.

CARLOS

See what you've started! Good work.

Carlos whips out a "prop pistol" (red paint on the barrel tip, clearly a fake gun).

CARLOS (CONT'D)

We know it's a woman. A man would have shot him.

Everyone glares at the females in the room.

Dede pushes Carlos, but there is sexual electricity there.

DEDE

(smiles)

With a fake gun? Good one, Carlos.

CARLOS

It helped me write "*The Hitman's Girlfriend*," "*The Hitman's Second Wife*," and "*The Hitman's Cousin, Once Removed*."

DEDE

(flirts)

I love a man with a strong title.

Everyone shrugs like they are totally unfamiliar with Carlos's novels. This makes him angry.

CARLOS

My novels are big in some circles. You should all read more and watch less television!

Artemis yells in frustration.

ARTEMIS

I'm going to my car, getting my phone, and calling the police!

Margot gets in his face.

MARGOT

Later! If you call the police now, you're fired!

Another argument ensues as they stare at Robert's body.

CARLOS

M.T. liked to use Aconite poison in her books.

DEDE

(smiles at Carlos)
From the monkshood plant. Too slow. No. I'd guess Cyanide. One to fifteen minutes.

MARGOT

Hemlock?

CARLOS

No. You'd need 100 milligrams and he would have tasted it in the Champagne. My money is on Arsenic, the King of Poisons.

SAMIRA

It was good enough for Napoleon Bonaparte.

Artemis paces angrily and yells.

ARTEMIS

Are you people nuts? A man is dead!

They all ignore Artemis.

SAMIRA

We'll need a complete tox report on Robert.

DEDE

No one should touch his glass.

Cee-Cee stares at the body as Flynn sneaks back downstairs.

CEE-CEE

What do we do with him?

MARGOT

Put him back in closet for now.

Cee-Cee opens the door and Carlos stands Robert up and puts him in the closet.

Flynn glances at the closet and smiles at the group.

FLYNN

Anyone for more Champagne?

They all shake their heads 'no,' as they return to the dining room table.

Artemis shakes his head in disgust.

MARGOT

On to next activity.

INT. MANSION, DINING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

The guests take their assigned seats and stare at the chair vacated by Robert. The mood is solemn.

MARGOT

We move on to how you end
unfinished manuscript, da? Did you
have 200-words on unfinished
mystery?

Margot sees no one is listening to her. Everyone stares at the open chair.

Flynn stands and looks back toward the closet.

FLYNN

I don't see how I can concentrate
on the unfinished murder while a
killer goes free on the murder of
Robert Knolls! Everyone knew their
poisons, and had the means; we
need a motive.

DEDE

We need to ask if anyone saw
anything suspicious before Cee-Cee
found Robert.

SAMIRA

I saw Mrs. Whitlow whispering to
him.

Margot stands angrily.

MARGOT

I asked if he needed something stronger to drink. I was told he was partial to fine Scotch.

ARTEMIS

So you poisoned him with scotch?

MARGOT

He turned it down. I didn't see him again until he dropped out of the closet.

CARLOS

Interesting choice of words, Mrs. Whitlow. Did you know he was gay?

MARGOT

No. No. How could I?

CARLOS

The tabloids, ol' girl!

FLYNN

Can we focus on the motive?!
(angry)
Tonight!

DEDE

To reduce the competition for the grand prize.

SAMIRA

That's gotta be it.

CARLOS

That's it!

MARGOT

What else could it be?

Cee-Cee enters with a pitcher of water.

CEE-CEE

Ask the lawyer.

Cee-Cee places the pitcher of water on the table and begins to exit.

FLYNN

Cee-Cee, what did you see or hear?

Artemis glares at Cee-Cee.

CEE-CEE

Don't ask me. Ask the lawyer.

Cee-Cee exits and everyone turns to Artemis.

TENSE SILENCE

ARTEMIS

We had words. Nothing more.

Flynn gets in Artemis's face.

FLYNN

Can you be any more evasive? Tell us what was said.

Artemis smiles.

ARTEMIS

You can't intimidate me, orphan boy!

Flynn controls his temper and walks back to his seat.

FLYNN

I'm not buying reduced competition as the motive. The police will be questioning you soon enough, butthead.

MARGOT

We must move on to decide who gets M.T.'s manuscript.

Everyone squirms in their seats, uneasy.

SAMIRA

Wait! I have something to say.

Samira stands and moves behind Flynn. She rests her hands on his shoulders. She commands the room.

SAMIRA (CONT'D)

Flynn is right. It's always about the motive. Let's each of us come clean. I thought that I was invited to a memorial for M.T., my favorite mystery writer, but instead, I was invited to a flock of greedy vultures and a murder scene.

MARGOT

Greedy vultures, no!

Samira paces slowly around the table.

SAMIRA

Everyone here wants to be voted as the winner of M.T.'s unfinished manuscript worth millions in book and film rights. That's a motive to kill.

ARTEMIS

Robert Knolls would agree.

Margot stands to protest.

MARGOT

My task is to get the manuscript into the most deserving hands.

Dede stands, angry.

DEDE

It's a popularity contest determined by a vote!

Cee-Cee enters with a plate of cookies.

CARLOS

Where writers and non-writers are given a vote... even the butler.

Cee-Cee sneers at Carlos and puts the plate of cookies in front of him.

Carlos pushes the cookies away.

CARLOS (CONT'D)

Probably poison!

Everyone stares at the cookies and then glares at Cee-Cee.

Dede stands upset.

DEDE

Why not vote now so we can call the police to investigate Robert's death and take one of us murderers to jail?!

Artemis stands and sounds like a reprimanding judge.

ARTEMIS

Because we haven't determined who is most deserving of the manuscript.

(MORE)

ARTEMIS (CONT'D)

If we call the police, Margot and Flynn will lose their inheritance.

Margot and Flynn are shocked and collapse into their seats.

MARGOT

What?

FLYNN

What the hell?!

ARTEMIS

More than a few hundreds of millions of dollars are at stake! Not just one lousy book deal!

Margot leaps from her seat and goes for Artemis's throat.

MARGOT

You never told me...

ARTEMIS

You never read the fine print.

Flynn covers his face with his hands.

FLYNN

I never read the big print.

Artemis walks slowly to the coat closet.

ARTEMIS

If someone could help me move Robert so I can get my coat, I'll be leaving. I'll call the police when I get my phone from the car.

Flynn races to violently restrain Artemis as Margot races to retrieve her copy of the Will.

FLYNN

Not 'til you tell us what the hell is going on here! What hundreds of millions of dollars?!

ARTEMIS

The morality clause.

Margot races back waving her copy of a thick document. She reads furiously as Flynn drags Artemis back to the dining room table and forces him into his chair.

MARGOT

Morality clause?

FLYNN

What's the...
(stops himself)
Is a morality clause?

Artemis glares at everyone.

ARTEMIS

You all need to hear this.

He holds out a hand for Margot's copy of the Will and turns to the second to the last page.

He reads the clause quickly as if perfectly memorized.

ARTEMIS (CONT'D)

If any heir shall commit any act or do anything which might reasonably be considered: (1) to be immoral, deceptive, scandalous or obscene; or (2) to injure, tarnish, damage or otherwise negatively affect the M.T. Whitlow Brand or the reputation and goodwill associated with the Brand...

FLYNN

Immoral's not a problem, but obscenity...

ARTEMIS

There's more.
(continues reading)
Or (3) if any heir is accused of any act involving moral or ethical issues, dishonestly, theft or misappropriation, under any law, or any act which casts an unfavorable light upon the M.T. Brand, they will be disinherited, prosecuted, and legally bound to repay the Trust with interest.

CARLOS

This doesn't concern me or the other guests.

ARTEMIS

I'm afraid it does.

He shows them the fine print.

ARTEMIS (CONT'D)

You are all listed as potential heirs because of the unfinished manuscript.

DEDE

(laughs)

I assume it covers murder!

ARTEMIS

And probably delaying the reporting and investigation of a murder, contaminating a crime scene, and...

CARLOS

Committing the actual murder for one of us.

They all sit back in their chairs and sulk.

Artemis flings the copy of the Will back to Margot.

FLYNN

How many of you smelled cyanide when we examined Robert?

Only Dede raises her hand.

DEDE

I guessed cyanide, but I confess, I didn't smell it.

FLYNN

I remember from one of Mom #1's books, "The Murder in Venice," that cyanide has a distinct smell.

(paces)

It's fast acting and dissipates quickly making it difficult to detect after even minor delays.

SAMIRA

That's right! The blood lactate levels would give it away if immediately analyzed, but with a delay in testing, the murderer almost always gets away with it.

(gazes into Flynn's eyes)

But I've never smelled it.

Flynn and Samira share a moment.

FLYNN

I'd never smelled it either, and I didn't want to say anything because it might incriminate me or cast a light on the murderer, making me a target for the next murder.

Dede and Samira look sadly at Flynn.

DEDE

But you had to come forward because not doing so would be immoral.

Samira races to hug Flynn.

SAMIRA

Even if it makes you more of a target.

FLYNN

(laughs)

I'm not eating any cookies and I'll drink bottled water for a few days, if that's what you mean. And I think we should call the cops.

Flynn heads to the staircase, but Margot pulls him back.

MARGOT

Maybe we call ambulance and they call police. We have your word for smell cyanide, and you never smell it before. Maybe Robert have health condition.

ARTEMIS

A heart attack?

FLYNN

In a closet?

CARLOS

Or suicide?

Margot guides Flynn back to the table.

MARGOT

I'll go call an ambulance and none of us will be breaking morality clause, no?

Margot heads upstairs while the others stare at each other suspiciously.

Samira pulls Flynn aside.

SAMIRA
 (whispers to Flynn)
 Suicide in a closet? I'm not buying
 it either. I'm voting for you.

Flynn whispers back, surprised.

FLYNN
 Me?

SAMIRA
 You're the only one who picked up
 on the cyanide, and you read people
 better than any of these seasoned
 mystery writers.

They gaze into each other's eyes and share a moment.

Margot comes downstairs.

MARGOT
 Ambulance here soon. Time for next
 M.T.'s activity, da?! She want to
 know how each of you end her novel -
 - in two hundred words.

ARTEMIS
 Thank God there's a word limit.

MARGOT
 Oldest to youngest, da? With no
 questions or feedback until
 everyone has chance.

ARTEMIS
 Fine. I hated the unfinished book
 but read it anyway. I think Ahmed,
 the terrorist-in-training kills the
 singer by slicing his throat with a
 butcher knife. I say we send him
 straight to Guantanamo Bay and
 torture his butt 'til they find the
 diamonds he stole. Good redden,
 Ahmed.

Dede, Samira, and Flynn look horrified but don't respond.

MARGOT
 Robert would be next, but...

ARTEMIS
 Robert felt the same way.

FLYNN

We all signed Non-Disclosure
Agreements and weren't supposed to
discuss...

ARTEMIS

(interrupts)

That's enough out of you, orphan
boy!

MARGOT

Next, Carlos?

CARLOS

I agree, Ahmed kills the singer,
but not with a butcher knife. He
uses an AK-47. The diamond heist is
an inside job, but totally separate
from the murder of the singer. I
know how M.T. thinks and feels. The
diamonds are stolen by the singer's
manager who had a steamy affair
with Ahmed. She smuggled the
diamonds back to the U.S. in
speakers and amplifiers, but the
Customs Guard nails her during the
sexy trip search.

Again, Dede, Samira, and Flynn look horrified but don't
respond.

MARGOT

Thank you, Carlos. Very vivid, da?
Dede is next.

DEDE

This is a love story. And M.T. is
playing a masterful game of
misdirection. Ahmed is no killer.
He was in love with the cheating
manager, an unrequited love. The
singer is killed by the unpopular
bass player and songwriter who
deserved to be center stage. The
diamond thief is never caught.
Heist criminals are too smart for
murder, and it sets up a sequel. In
the end, the singer finds love,
something he secretly desires more
than fame.

Everyone is nodding 'yes,' taking notes, and smiling. Dede
did great!

MARGOT

I had what Dede said, but she said
it best.

CARLOS

You haven't heard the others yet.

MARGOT

(yells)
Cee-Cee? Get butt in here!

No answer.

MARGOT (CONT'D)

She has EarBuds in. I get her!
(turns back to the group)
Better get Robert out of the closet
before the ambulance arrives.

Margot races to the kitchen.

INT. MANSION, KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Margot races into the kitchen to find Cee-Cee reading a horse
racing newspaper and racing form.

Cee-Cee shoves the racing materials behind her back with one
hand and removes one EarBud with the other.

Margot is fuming mad but whispers and points to the door.

MARGOT

They want hear how you end M.T.'s
book.

Cee-Cee stands kissing-close to Margot, who gets flustered.

MARGOT (CONT'D)

Not now, Cee-Cee.

Cee-Cee smiles seductively.

CEE-CEE

What, Boss?

Cee-Cee reaches her hands up to caress Margot's face.

Margot melts with desire and pulls Cee-Cee closer, but her
attitude changes to "mean."

MARGOT

Have you thought about ultimatum?

CEE-CEE
To marry you?

MARGOT
Or be fired and banished forever!

CEE-CEE
Would I still have to call you
Boss?

MARGOT
Of course not!

CEE-CEE
I have 'til midnight to decide,
Boss?

MARGOT
And you tell them how to finish
book.

Cee-Cee kisses Margo squarely on the lips.

CEE-CEE
I will win M.T.'s unfinished book
first. She told me so in private.

Cee-Cee smiles and then storms out of the kitchen.

INT. MANSION, DINING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Cee-Cee storms in and jumps to Robert's empty chair.

Margot glances toward the front door and sees Robert on the
floor face-up.

Margot is flustered but joins Cee-Cee and the group at the
table.

Cee-Cee still has one EarBud in and her blouse is unbuttoned
which everyone sees.

CEE-CEE
M.T. and I discussed this long
before the NDAs were signed.

FLYNN
That's so unfair!

DEDE
Insider trading or Inside Her,
Training? Which was it?

Cee-Cee gazes at Margot and smiles before turning to the group.

CEE-CEE

Ahmed is a serial killer, but the R&B singer has Stage 4 throat cancer that spread to his brain.

The others gasp. They HEAR a siren in the distance but Cee-Cee keeps speaking and they are captivated.

CEE-CEE (CONT'D)

The bass guitar player will be too impatient to wait out the singer's medical death sentence. He will take matters into his own hands and fires the cheating manager before quitting the band to tour with the Stones.

Everyone looks perplexed by Cee-Cee's proposed ending, and Margot's eyes open wide in fright. Flynn sees this.

The SIREN is louder, but everyone is captivated by the story.

CEE-CEE (CONT'D)

The equipment manager for the Stones is the diamond thief who gets caught and hanged on the spot.

Everyone is disgusted with Cee-Cee's ending. After a moment of silence, two EMTs (30s) race through the open front door.

EMT #1 (O.C.)

This must be him.

(yells)

Is anyone gonna tell us what happened?

Everyone starts to get up from the table.

SAMIRA

Flynn and I haven't had a chance to tell you our story endings.

EMT #2 (O.C.)

No pulse. I'll call the police.

Everyone calmly surrounds the EMTs.

MARGOT

We found him here. His name is Robert Knolls.

EMT #2 goes to the front door and calls the police.

FLYNN

He was a guest. This is, was, M.T.
Whitlow's house.

EMT #1

The famous author? Huh?
(studied Robert's head)
No one heard him crash to the
floor? Why isn't his head bruised?

Everyone moves in for a closer look.

EMT #1 (CONT'D)

Stand back, everyone. Looks like
he's been dead for a while.

EMT #2 returns to the group.

EMT #2

Police and Coroner are on the way.

CARLOS

Heart attack, maybe?

EMT #1

Doesn't look that old...

ARTEMIS

Mystery writer from London. He'll
be 51 in December.

Everyone stares at Artemis. Flynn takes out his notebook and writes a note. The other guests, except Artemis, see Flynn and do the same.

Artemis gets a little defensive as the group slowly returns to the dining room table.

ARTEMIS (CONT'D)

We've known each other for years.
(flustered)
Professionally.

They retake their seats with Cee-Cee in Robert's chair.

MARGOT

I think we continue, da?

They hear a SIREN in the distance,

SAMIRA

It's a little distracting, but okay.

Samira gazes at Flynn as she speaks.

SAMIRA (CONT'D)

M.T. was sharing an intimate story of love, betrayal, and murder. Ahmed secretly cared for the R&B singer but would face death in his country for admitting it as a gay Muslim. M.T. was telling us we are all one people. Humans with feelings of compassion.

CARLOS

That's good. Go on.

The SIREN is louder.

SAMIRA

The singer was torn between love for his manager, and the love for his fans, including Ahmed. Plus, his style of music was dying and he was too old to change to hip-hop. He has to die to end his torment, but by whom? The bass player had the most to gain from the singer's death, but he was a Buddhist who respected all life.

FLYNN

That's right! Good catch from the second chapter.

The others nod approvingly.

SAMIRA

The singer must be killed by his wife who secretly loved the bass player and stood to gain from life insurance. The bass player captures the manager who is the diamond smuggler and returns the diamonds to an orphan charity in South Africa.

Everyone sits back in their chairs fighting back tears as SERGEANT ELLIE CAIN (30), a black, snarky police officer glares into the room.

SERGEANT CAIN

Looks like you've lost a dear friend in there. Sorry for your loss. I'll have to get statements from each of you. Who found the body?

Cee-Cee raises her hand.

MARGOT

Our butler.

SERGEANT CAIN

You're kidding, right?

The Sergeant studies Flynn.

SERGEANT CAIN (CONT'D)

I remember you. Nice to see you, Mr. Whitlow. It was your mother who died two weeks ago?

Flynn nods, 'Yes,' then head-points to Margot.

FLYNN

One of them.

The Sergeant spins to Margo.

SERGEANT CAIN

Sorry for your loss too, Ma'am. Can we speak privately?

Flynn looks worried as Margot leads the Sergeant to the Den.

INT. MANSION, DEN - NIGHT

The Sergeant sits at the desk and Margot sits on a small couch facing the desk. The Den is filled with M.T.'s Books and awards. The Sergeant looks at her copious notes.

SERGEANT CAIN

Let me see if I got this straight. Two weeks after your wife's passing, you convened a group of mystery writers to give one of them an unfinished manuscript of M.T.'s potentially worth a few million dollars.

MARGOT

Da.

SERGEANT CAIN

One of these mystery writers was the deceased, Robert Knolls, from London.

MARGOT

Da. The oldest one.

SERGEANT CAIN

And everyone was out looking for clues that would make them look smarter in the eyes of their competitors to win the prize.

MARGOT

Da.

SERGEANT CAIN

And nobody saw Mr. Knolls have his heart attack and crash to the floor?

Margot shrugs like she doesn't know.

SERGEANT CAIN (CONT'D)

Did you make the 9-1-1 call right away?

MARGOT

We were in shock, da? I don't recall.

The Sergeant shakes her head in disgust.

SERGEANT CAIN

Send in the butler, will ya?

INT. MANSION, DINING ROOM - NIGHT

The Sergeant addresses the group who are seated (with Cee-Cee in Robert's seat).

SERGEANT CAIN

First, I should let you know that I noticed a slightly bluish tone to the lips and hands of the diseased indicating...

CARLOS

I'd say it was decreased oxygen levels prior to death. Probably asthma?

DEDE

I agree difficulty breathing prior to a heart attack is very common and he mentioned to me privately that he had asthma.

CEE-CEE

He was breathing very hard when he came in. I gave him water, not Champagne.

The others are about to interrupt but the Sergeant cuts them off.

SERGEANT CAIN

The possibility of cyanide poisoning.

Everyone but the Sergeant gasps.

SERGEANT CAIN (CONT'D)

Come on now. You all are familiar with the use of cyanide in mystery novels...

CARLOS

In a purely academic sense.

ARTEMIS

I wouldn't know it if it bit me.

The Sergeant looks suspiciously at Trent.

SERGEANT CAIN

I doubt that, Mr. Trent. I remember you being a pretty smart fella.

SAMIRA

Surely, Sergeant, you don't suggest...

SERGEANT CAIN

I'm not suggesting anything. It just seems suspicious that you were all walking around drinking Champagne and no one saw Mr. Knolls having a heart attack and collapse!

Everyone has a blank look, except Flynn who secretly indicated with his head to the Sergeant to look in the kitchen.

SERGEANT CAIN (CONT'D)
 And where are these Champagne
 glasses?

CEE-CEE
 I washed them.

The Sergeant gets angrier as Cee-Cee speaks.

CEE-CEE (CONT'D)
 Champagne gets sticky if it sits
 too long. I think Mr. Knolls drank
 water anyway. I'll get the glasses
 from the dishwasher if you'd like.

SERGEANT CAIN
 Don't bother!

The Sergeant glares at the group.

SERGEANT CAIN (CONT'D)
 And because of the silly games you
 were playing being super-
 detectives, none of you had your
 smartphones with you to call 9-1-1
 immediately.

The group weakly nods 'yes.'

ARTEMIS
 I wanted to go get my phone out of
 my car but...

Artemis pauses and looks around.

SERGEANT CAIN
 But what, Mr. Trent?

Artemis stares glassy-eyed at the Sergeant and freezes.

SERGEANT CAIN (CONT'D)
 Mr. Trent?

ARTEMIS
 What were you saying, Sergeant?

MARGOT
 He's little forgetful, da?

CEE-CEE
 I had to show him twice where the
 bathroom was.

MARGOT

And he's been here many times
before.

Artemis sneaks a glaring look at Margot and Cee-Cee while the
Sergeant is taking notes.

SERGEANT CAIN

Fine. Fine. Well, it looks like we
have a bit of a storm coming in so
I'm going to ask all of you to
stick around for the night, while I
have the Medical Examiner peek at
Mr. Knolls.

ARTEMIS

I can't stay here. I need my meds.

SERGEANT CAIN

I'll have an officer swing them by,
Mr. Trent.

CARLOS

I have an airplane...

SERGEANT CAIN

Reschedule, Mr. Diego.

DEDE

(glances at Carlos)
I didn't bring a sexy nightgown.

SERGEANT CAIN

You'll just have to sleep naked. No
excuses. You're all staying put
'til I say so! Something's rotten
here, and I'm gonna find out what!

The Sergeant begins to exit.

SERGEANT CAIN (CONT'D)

I'll be back tomorrow morning!

She stomps away.

INT. MANSION, KITCHEN - NIGHT

Everyone stands around a large island in the kitchen, as Cee-
Cee brings snack foods out.

ARTEMIS

How do we know they're not
poisoned?

Dede grabs a box of crackers.

DEDE
 (laughs)
 Last one standing has to bury us
 all!

They watch Dede eat a cracker then she passes the box around.

MARGOT
 (glares at Flynn)
 You did not tell me you met with
 police.

FLYNN
 When Mom #1 was alive I knew it
 would upset her. This didn't
 concern you.

Margot gets in Flynn's face.

MARGOT
 Everything you do until age 18
 concerns me. That no good birthday,
 da?

FLYNN
 No. That's tomorrow.

Flynn takes out three folded copies of documents from his
 back pocket as Artemis moves to the corner of the kitchen.

FLYNN (CONT'D)
 M.T. pulled me aside after she
 found out her cancer was terminal.
 She told me she didn't have the
 strength to tell me the truth and I
 should drop it. "Don't rock the
 yacht," she told me.

Samira moves to comfort Flynn,

MARGOT
 You had a very good life! Big
 house. Plenty of food. Best
 education.

FLYNN
 She would not share my birth
 certificate, adoption papers, or
 anything about my past.

DEDE
 She was protecting you.

SAMIRA

She was hiding something?

FLYNN

Exactly. I knew I wasn't 18 yet,
but there were some things I needed
to know.

MARGOT

You go to family lawyer?

Everyone turns to glare at Artemis.

FLYNN

He never exactly cared for me.

ARTEMIS

You should have been placed in a
middle-class foster home, you
ungrateful...

FLYNN

I went to the police station to see
what my rights were. Everybody
there ignored me except for
Sergeant Cain. She walked me over
to a friend of hers at county
records.

MARGOT

You not say.

FLYNN

(to Margot)

None of this was on you. Honest. My
guess is, you didn't know.

Margot steps back, embarrassed.

FLYNN (CONT'D)

County records had my foster care
records and my adoption papers from
M.T. They rarely let a single
parent adopt, but M.T. could be
very persuasive, they said.

MARGOT

She got her way.

FLYNN

My birth certificate showed my real name, Deshawn Jamal Brown, and my parent's names, Maya and Willis Brown, who died in car accident when I was one.

Samira hugs Flynn.

MARGOT

You like other name?

FLYNN

No. I've been Flynn Whitlow for 18 years, and M.T. was the only mom I ever knew until Mom #2 came into the picture 12 years ago. Then Sergeant Cain marched me back to the police station to see if there was a record of the car accident that killed my parents.

Artemis collapses to the the floor.

ARTEMIS

It was me.

(yells)

I was never issued a citation.

Flynn picks up Artemis and gets in his face.

FLYNN

Layers don't get citations do they, Mr. Trent? Professional courtesy, they call it.

ARTEMIS

(fights back sobs)

I confessed to M.T. and got her to sponsor you as a foster parent. You should thank me.

FLYNN

For killing my parents?

TENSE MOMENTS

Flynn lets Artemis go.

FLYNN (CONT'D)

I needed my actual records to change my name tomorrow, my actual birthday, and to move as far away from here as I could.

MARGOT
You join army?

FLYNN
(laughs)
No. Killing isn't for me.

SAMIRA
You'll become a Buddhist, go off to college, and wage peace!

FLYNN
(laughs)
Or join the circus. So many tough decisions.

Margot hugs Flynn and they share a moment.

Margot points angrily to Artemis.

MARGOT
You're fired!

ARTEMIS
Fine, but I'll still be rich, and I can still win the unfinished manuscripts if enough people vote for me.

Everyone glares at Artemis.

Cee-Cee kicks Artemis in the shin as she gets more snacks.

ARTEMIS (CONT'D)
Ow! I'll be in the den!

Artemis exits.

INT. MANSION, DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Dede takes the seat next to Carlos, while Samira takes a seat next to Flynn. Margot is at the head of the table, and Cee-Cee sits next to her.

MARGOT
Flynn next to tell ending of M.T.'s book.

Flynn smiles at Margot as he speaks, which irks Samira.

FLYNN

I liked a lot of what Dede and Samira said in their proposed ending of the book. I thought it was a love story too, but with a more tragic ending.

Everyone is intrigued.

DEDE

Tell us.

FLYNN

It would sadden me too much.

(to Margot)

And my mom. I'll just let it rest in my head for now.

Samira reaches out to hold Flynn's hand.

SAMIRA

Will you help me make a cup of tea?

FLYNN

Sure.

Cee-Cee stands immediately, but so do Flynn and Samira.

CEE-CEE

I'll get it.

FLYNN

We'll get it, Cee-Cee. You've got to be off-duty after this long day!

Flynn and Samira head toward the kitchen but they can still hear Margot speaking.

MARGOT

Flynn not interested to win vote for finish M.T.'s book. Not writer. Not even reader. He do audiobooks and podcasts.

Samira turns to glare at Margot before following Flynn to the kitchen.

CARLOS

Ms. Fletcher, maybe we can sit by the fire in the parlor and discuss the weather.

DEDE

I'd like that.

Carlos grabs two glasses of Champagne and Dede follows him to the parlor.

CEE-CEE

I will change into something more comfortable.

Margot grabs a bottle of Champagne.

MARGOT

Maybe I will too.

Margot and Cee-Cee disappear upstairs.

INT. MANSION, KITCHEN - NIGHT

Flynn gets water boiling in an electric tea pot.

SAMIRA

Did you like Dede's ending better than mine?

FLYNN

All art is subjective. We each have a different way of expressing ourselves. Dede's version isn't better than yours, it's just different in a way I thought Mom #1 would appreciate.

Samira moves in kissing close.

SAMIRA

Very diplomatic of you.

Flynn laughs.

FLYNN

I've never been accused of being diplomatic before.

SAMIRA

Will you ever go to college?

FLYNN

I don't know. Textbooks on tape sound a little harsh.

Samira laughs and smiles seductively.

SAMIRA

I could teach you.

Flynn pushes back as the water boils.
 He grabs two tea cups and a container of different tea bags.
 Samira lunges at the plastic container.

SAMIRA (CONT'D)
 That is wonderful.

FLYNN
 Mom #1 loved different teas, so I
 got her this last Christmas.

SAMIRA
 Very thoughtful. Personal. Sweet.

FLYNN
 Cheap! She wasn't one for showy
 gifts,
 (looks away)
 But she wasn't one to say 'thank
 you' either. She never spent much
 time with me. So for Christmas, I
 would ask for a half-day together.

SAMIRA
 Did you get it?

Flynn looks away.

FLYNN
 Not often enough.

SAMIRA
 I think you made Mr. Trent feel
 awful.

FLYNN
 That was wrong. He probably did the
 best he could for me after the
 accident.

SAMIRA
 You should apologize.

FLYNN
 I know. I should. I'll go fetch us
 Cee-Cee's cookies from the dining
 room table and stop off at the den
 and give him a few.

SAMIRA
 Good idea. I'll sip my tea.
 (snickers)
 (MORE)

SAMIRA (CONT'D)

You don't think the cookies have
been poisoned, do you?

FLYNN

(smiles)

No way!

They giggle as Flynn exits the kitchen.

INT. MANSION, DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Flynn sits peacefully in a chair eating a cookie with his
back to the rest of the house. He turns toward the parlor and
doesn't hear a sound.

He peeks back toward the kitchen and it is silent too.

He turns his neck to listen upstairs. It too is silent.

FLYNN

That's the quietest it's been all
night.

He looks toward the den.

He looks slowly around the table, enjoying the quiet.

A LITTLE LATER

FLYNN (CONT'D)

I'd better take Artemis a couple of
cookies as a peace offering.

He stands and places the glass plate of cookies in his open
palm on his shoulder like a waiter's tray.

EXT./INT. MANSION, DEN - CONTINUOUS

He saunters to the den and knocks lightly.

SILENCE

He knocks louder.

No answer.

He turns the knob, opens the door, and leads his entry with
the plate of cookies.

His eyes open wide and he drops the plate of cookies.

He SCREAMS.

FLYNN
Help! Everybody help!

On the couch rests Artemis Trent, stabbed in the heart.

Flynn quickly assesses the scene as he HEARS footsteps and voices approaching.

Artemis's shirt is stained red with blood. A sharp, long kitchen knife is next to his open right hand where it has fallen partway into the back of the couch cushion. His eyes are open wide.

Samira and Cee-Cee arrive first and SCREAM.

DEDE
Call 9-1-1.

FLYNN
My phone's in my room. I'll go.

As Flynn exits the room, he pushes past Carlos, Dede, and Margot.

FLYNN (CONT'D)
I'm calling the police.

INT. MANSION, DINING ROOM - LATER

A CSI Crime Team (4 officers in PPE) races back and forth behind Margot, Carlos, Cee-Cee, Samira, and Flynn who sit in chairs with their heads down in silence.

Finally, Sergeant Cain stands tall and angry in the archway to the dining room.

SERGEANT CAIN
I suggest you call your attorneys.

MARGOT
(points to Flynn and Cee-Cee)
Our attorney is dead.

CARLOS
Mine is in Columbia.

DEDE
I can't afford one.

SAMIRA
Me either.

The Sergeant looks around, disgusted.

SERGEANT CAIN

I don't know what twisted game
y'all are playing tonight, but
you've done it now! Murder!

DEDE

He seemed suicidal...

SERGEANT CAIN

(glares at Dede)

Don't say another word!

(glares at the others)

I'll speak with you one at a time
in the kitchen. The storm is too
bad to get out of here now. We had
a tough enough time getting here.

She turns to walk to the kitchen.

SERGEANT CAIN (CONT'D)

Mrs. Whitlow, I'll speak with you
first!

Margot follows the Sergeant like a scolded puppy.

INT. MANSION, KITCHEN - NIGHT

Margot sits calmly about four feet away from Sergeant Cain,
who is observing her every move.

SERGEANT CAIN

We'll have a formal interview
downtown later when the weather
clears. I just have a few questions
about what transpired related to
your attorney's death. I'll record
this if y'all don't mind.

MARGOT

Fine with me.

SERGEANT CAIN

Y'all don't have to answer
questions that make y'all
uncomfortable.

MARGOT

I understand.

Sergeant Cain records with her phone and takes notes on her
iPad. She drops the "y'all's" for formal interviews.

SERGEANT CAIN

This is Sergeant Ellie Cain with Mrs. Margot Whitlow who has refused her right to an attorney for the time being. What was your relationship with the victim, Mr. Trent?

MARGOT

He was family attorney long before I come into picture twelve years ago.

SERGEANT CAIN

You were some kind of mail-order bride from Russia?

MARGOT

No. We met online, and she invited me over.

SERGEANT CAIN

And secured your citizenship and million-dollar lifestyle?

MARGOT

Da. You could say that. But it was love.

SERGEANT CAIN

How did you get along with Mr. Trent?

MARGOT

No like him, but he did good job.

SERGEANT CAIN

His file on the family says he did not approve of your sexual orientation.

MARGOT

He was old man. Stuck in ways.

SERGEANT CAIN

Did you hate him enough to kill him?

MARGOT

Not hate him. Not buddy-buddy. But he hated poor Flynn, always calling him "orphan baby."

SERGEANT CAIN

Is that so?

MARGOT

Even tonight. Guests horrified.

SERGEANT CAIN

I see. Where were you prior to your son finding Mr. Trent dead?

MARGOT

Upstairs. In room. Try to rest.

SERGEANT CAIN

Can anyone vouch for you?

MARGOT

Cee-Cee checked twice. If I wanted tea. I say no.

Sergeant Cain holds up an envelope with a card in it.

SERGEANT CAIN

I see everyone was handed a card in an envelope tonight.

MARGOT

M.T. did those. I hand to Flynn to hand out. Nine rules for mystery writers.

SERGEANT CAIN

What did yours read?

Margot shows her the card.

SERGEANT CAIN (CONT'D)

First one suspected and arrested didn't do it?

She tosses the card on the kitchen counter.

SERGEANT CAIN (CONT'D)

That's not true at all. The spouse or a family member is often the murderer.

MARGOT

Is why I don't write mysteries.

SERGEANT CAIN

Did Mr. Trent have a wife?

MARGOT

No. Single. Not a lovable man.
Mean.

SERGEANT CAIN

Do you know if he had enemies who
would want to harm him?

Margot turns her head away.

SERGEANT CAIN (CONT'D)

I know the story about Flynn's
parents being killed in a car
accident involving Mr. Trent and
M.T.'s subsequent adoption.

MARGOT

Flynn told us all that story
tonight. Right here.

SERGEANT CAIN

What was Flynn's mood and Mr.
Trent's reaction?

MARGOT

Both angry.

Sergeant Cain takes a few notes.

SERGEANT CAIN

Did anyone have a pistol in the
house?

MARGOT

Carlos showed his toy pistol to us
earlier. Had rubber holster, I
think.

SERGEANT CAIN

One more question. Was Mr. Trent
right-handed or left?

Margot pauses to think.

MARGOT

Left handed. I witnessed him
signing M.T.'s Will a few years
back. He was definitely left-
handed. Why?

SERGEANT CAIN

No reason. We're done for now.

Margot stands to exit while the Sergeant studies her iPad.

SERGEANT CAIN (CONT'D)
Send in Mr. Carlos Diego.

INT. MANSION, KITCHEN - NIGHT

We join Carlos's interview in progress.

Sergeant Cain hands Carlos his passport.

SERGEANT CAIN
You're in a bit of trouble.

Carlos looks away.

SERGEANT CAIN (CONT'D)
You're a mystery writer of little
acclaim and you brought a fake gun
to a party. Assuming you didn't
bring the pistol on an airplane.
Where did you get it?

CARLOS
Guns 'R Us or Toys 'R Us store.
Same thing in America. I don't
remember.

SERGEANT CAIN
How convenient. Good thing your
weapon wasn't used in the murder.

CARLOS
I have an alibi too. I was with
Dede in an upstairs guest room. I
think Mr. Trent walked into the
kitchen, borrowed the knife, and
killed himself.

SERGEANT CAIN
Borrowed? Like he was going to
return it?

CARLOS
I think he suffered guilt by
killing Flynn's parents.

SERGEANT CAIN
That's the smartest thing you said
all night.

Carlos shrugs, unconcerned.

SERGEANT CAIN (CONT'D)

I see everyone was handed a card in an envelope tonight. What did yours read?

CARLOS

"Never kill off the wildcard."

(beat)

You know, the unpredictable one or the comedian in the cast.

SERGEANT CAIN

What the hell does that mean?

CARLOS

I'm not sure.

SERGEANT CAIN

Of the people present tonight, who would say is the wildcard? The most carefree and unpredictable character. The character everybody loves from the start.

CARLOS

I have no idea.

SERGEANT CAIN

Just guess for me.

CARLOS

Okay. Certainly not Robert or Artemis because they were killed.

SERGEANT CAIN

I never said Robert was killed.

CARLOS

You know what I mean. He's dead. Suicide.

SERGEANT CAIN

Two suicides in one night, in one house full of murder-mystery writers? What are the odds of that?

Carlos sits back and turns away.

SERGEANT CAIN (CONT'D)

Who did you say was the wildcard?

CARLOS
 Not me. Not Flynn, he's got a
 temper. He went off on the attorney
 tonight.

Sergeant Cain takes notes.

SERGEANT CAIN
 Did he now?

CARLOS
 Samira is too proper. I'd say the
 wildcard is Dede.

SERGEANT CAIN
 (taking notes)
 Interesting.

Carlos points upstairs.

CARLOS
 She was wild tonight.

SERGEANT CAIN
 One more question. Was Mr. Trent
 right-handed or left?

Carlos pauses to think.

CARLOS
 He drank Champagne from his left
 hand.

SERGEANT CAIN
 That's all for now. Send in Ms.
 Dede Fletcher.

INT. MANSION, KITCHEN - NIGHT

The Sergeant conducts shorter interviews with some of the
 others.

-- Dede buttons the top button of her blouse and blushes as
 the Sergeant questions her.

-- Dede points upstairs.

The Sergeant studies her notes.

SERGEANT CAIN
 And earlier in the evening, Mr.
 Whitlow and Mr. Trent were at each
 other's throats?

DEDE

Kind of...

SERGEANT CAIN

(interrupts)

And, you and Mr. Diego took turns showering individually even after...

Dede seems embarrassed.

DEDE

A girl likes her privacy.

SERGEANT CAIN

And you went first?

DEDE

He's very polite.

SERGEANT CAIN

You were each handed a note in an envelope to start the night. What did yours read?

DEDE

Mine said, "The most unlikable character is always the first to die." That was BS. Everybody loved Robert Knolls.

SERGEANT CAIN

Not everybody. One more question. Was Mr. Trent right-handed or left?

Dede answers quickly.

DEDE

How should I know?

SERGEANT CAIN

Send in Ms. Samira Ram, please.

Dede exits. The Sergeant studies her notes.

Samira enters and sits with a terrified expression.

SERGEANT CAIN (CONT'D)

Nothing to be nervous about.
Routine questions.

SAMIRA

Oh. Okay.

SERGEANT CAIN

Where were you when you heard Mr. Whitlow call for help after finding Mr. Trent?

SAMIRA

I was here in the kitchen, drinking tea.

SERGEANT CAIN

Alone.

SAMIRA

I was with Flynn for a while, but he left to get us cookies from the dining room.

SERGEANT CAIN

How long were you alone?

SAMIRA

Five or ten minutes, no more.

The Sergeant takes notes.

SERGEANT CAIN

You were each handed a note in an envelope to start the night. What did yours read?

SAMIRA

"The best clues are in what people don't say."

SERGEANT CAIN

Now that one is interesting! One more question. Was Mr. Trent right-handed or left?

Samira pauses to think.

SAMIRA

When Flynn handed out the envelopes with the cards in them, Mr. Trent reached for the envelope with his right hand but opened it with his left hand suggesting he was left-handed or ambidextrous.

SERGEANT CAIN

Very observant, Ms. Ram. Y'all are free to go. I need to review my notes. After five or ten minutes, send in Mr. Whitlow... Flynn.

SAMIRA

Yes, Ma'am.

Samira exits.

INT. MANSION, KITCHEN - NIGHT

Flynn sits a few feet away from the Sergeant who records the interview on her phone and types into her iPad.

Leans in and whispers sweetly.

SERGEANT CAIN

We may have to do this again
downtown when the weather clears.

Flynn nods.

FLYNN

Yes Ma'am.

She begins to record and her tone becomes ominous.

SERGEANT CAIN

This is Sergeant Ellie Cain with
Mr. Flynn Whitlow who has refused
his right to an attorney for the
time being.

Flynn's eyes open wide.

SERGEANT CAIN (CONT'D)

Walk me through how you found the
victim... the same man who killed
your parents in a car accident 17
years ago.

Flynn's stunned and defensive.

FLYNN

You think I did it!

SERGEANT CAIN

Just answer the question!

FLYNN

I opened the door to the den...

SERGEANT CAIN

(interrupts)
What time?

FLYNN

Just after 11 p.m. That's what my phone read when I called it in from upstairs.

SERGEANT CAIN

Upstairs?

FLYNN

None of us have our phones or smartwatches with us. It's the rules.

SERGEANT CAIN

Of your silly game? How did you react and what did you see when you saw the body?

FLYNN

I dropped the plate of cookies I brought in to share with Mr. Trent. I saw the knife hole and his bloody shirt and I screamed for help.

SERGEANT CAIN

You didn't check for a pulse or touch anything?

FLYNN

I shut his eyes like they do in the movies. I didn't want him to scare the others like he did me.

SERGEANT CAIN

And the knife?

Flynn is more defensive and yells.

FLYNN

I never touched that knife!

SERGEANT CAIN

Calm down. Was the knife in his hand?

FLYNN

It looked like it fell out of his hand and was wedged in the cushions.

SERGEANT CAIN

Do you think it was suicide?

FLYNN

That's your job. I'm just a kid.

The Sergeant holds up a card that reads. "No one believes in the right to remain silent."

SERGEANT CAIN

Mr. Trent's card. That one's mostly true. Idiots.

FLYNN

We each were given a card of Mom #1's nine rules for writing murder mysteries. There was one extra.

SERGEANT CAIN

I found it.

She tosses the card down. It reads, "Four motives for murder are lust, love, loathing, or loot - but lunacy is a close fifth."

See gets in Flynn's face.

SERGEANT CAIN (CONT'D)

What did your mother mean by that last one?

Flynn turns away in anger.

FLYNN

You're the lunatic if you think I killed Mr. Trent!

SERGEANT CAIN

I'm concerned about your mental status tonight.

Flynn leans in and whispers angrily.

FLYNN

What do you mean, my mental status tonight? I'm the only one who called the police after the first murder!

SERGEANT CAIN

Mrs. Margot Whitlow, Mom #2 as you call her, pulled me aside and told me about the reading of M.T.'s Will a week ago right there in the den. Would you mind telling me your side of the story.

BEGIN FLASHBACK

INT. MANSION, DEN - DAY

Artemis sits behind the desk and reads the "Last Will and Testament of M.T. Whitlow."

Margot and Flynn sit on the couch. Margot is confident. Flynn is nervous.

Cee-Cee enters with coffee and scones on a silver platter.

Artemis waits for Cee-Cee to exit before reading, but Cee-Cee keeps the door open and stands outside the door to eavesdrop.

ARTEMIS

I, M.T. Whitlock, being of sound
mind and body...

Margot wipes tears from her eyes as Flynn's eyes gloss over and look slightly away. Artemis's voice fades.

ARTEMIS (CONT'D)

...Except where otherwise noted, I leave the bulk of my estate to my loving wife, Margot Petrov Whitlow, in Trust, including my real estate assets, literary empire, business and private bank accounts, and my copyrights, on the condition of electing the appropriate writer to complete, copyright, and publish my unfinished manuscript. The instructions were given to Margot on the day I died.

MARGOT

We followed instructions and hold election one week from tonight.

ARTEMIS

(chuckles)

I find it odd that Flynn, Cee-Cee, and I were included as participants and potential winners, but M.T. never failed to surprise me.

FLYNN

(snickers)

Right.

Artemis ignores the comment and reads on.

ARTEMIS

"The toughest decision in my life was to largely disinherit my adopted son, Flynn Whitlow, from the Will, following the precedent set by Bill Gates, Warren Buffett, George Lucas, Jackie Chan, Sting, Elton John, Sean Connery, Tony Curtis, Ted Turner, and Marie Osmond who didn't want their children to grow up "entitled."

Flynn is stunned and frozen on the couch until Artemis glances at him and smiles.

ARTEMIS (CONT'D)

No more gravy train for you, Orphan Boy.

Flynn lunges at Artemis and chokes him.

FLYNN

This was your idea!

Cee-Cee rushes in and Margot leaps from the couch to pull Flynn back from Artemis, but Artemis is terrified.

END FLASHBACK

Flynn stands and rants.

FLYNN (CONT'D)

What kind of twisted rich folks do that to their kids?!

The Sergeant stands and settles Flynn down.

SERGEANT CAIN

I know your mother had lots of motives for murder. I have one! Money! You probably thought that dead lawyer in there cheated you out of your inheritance. It's always money!

FLYNN

How does killing Mr. Trent get me money?

SERGEANT CAIN

Revenge then. You threatened Mr. Trent last week and tonight. I know and you know he probably killed your parents in that car accident.

(MORE)

SERGEANT CAIN (CONT'D)

That's called motive. You were the closest person to the murder weapon and that's called means. You were the closest person to the victim when everyone else was in other parts of the house. That's called opportunity.

(deadly serious)

Mr. Flynn Whitlow, I'm arresting you on suspicion of the murder of Mr. Artemis Trent. You have the right to remain silent...

They HEAR thunder.

SERGEANT CAIN (CONT'D)

We'll do this later. It's cold outside in the car and I couldn't watch you from here so I let you stay inside.

Sergeant Cain slaps handcuffs on Flynn.

Flynn shakes his head in disgust.

SERGEANT CAIN (CONT'D)

I'll just put you in the dining room with the others until I get a confession from the person who poisoned Mr. Robert Knolls. But you say even one word, and I'll lock you in the car. Got it?

She forces him to the door.

INT. MANSION, DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Sergeant Cain pushes Flynn into the room and into his chair. The others are at their seats with Cee-Cee in Robert's chair.

Flynn rests his handcuffs on the table.

Everyone's head hangs low. The Sergeant sounds tough and determined.

SERGEANT CAIN

I've arrested Mr. Whitlow on suspicion of murder, but remain very suspicious of Mr. Robert Knoll's death earlier tonight.

Everyone avoids eye contact with the Sergeant.

Margot raises her head, smiles, and pulls out her card that reads, "First one suspected and arrested didn't do it."

MARGOT

Don't worry, Flynn. You no do it.

Everyone looks up to see the note.

SERGEANT CAIN

That's only true in murder mystery movies.

Their heads drop again.

SERGEANT CAIN (CONT'D)

I want to talk about what happened leading to the death of Robert Knolls.

DEDE

I thought that was a heart condition.

The Sergeant's iPad dings with a message. She studies the message.

SERGEANT CAIN

My office notified me of some important information.

(she looks around)

M.T. Whitlow's financial records show that she was paying a ghostwriter, on contract, every month.

Everyone is shocked as Carlos raise his hand slowly.

SERGEANT CAIN (CONT'D)

Really? How much was she paying you?

CARLOS

Two-thousand dollars, but I edited every page she wrote and sent back copious notes.

SERGEANT CAIN

She was paying Robert Knolls five thousand dollars a month.

Dede yells at Carlos.

DEDE

No wonder you thought he had the rights to M.T.'s unfinished manuscript in his back pocket.

SAMIRA

(laughs)

I wonder who those two are voting for?

SERGEANT CAIN

Thanks, Carlos, for volunteering that information.

Carlos puts his head down.

Cee-Cee points to another of M.T.'s cards on the table.

CEE-CEE

No one believes in the right to remain silent.

SERGEANT CAIN

I was referring to M.T.'s monthly payments to Robert Knolls...

(glares at Margot)

who won't be getting those checks any longer!

Everyone gasps.

SERGEANT CAIN (CONT'D)

It seems M.T. was using material from her two favorite mystery writers to complete her last three novels.

Flynn's eyes open wide.

Dede gets up and slaps Carlos.

DEDE

You told me that you were going to vote for me, you son of a bitch!

SERGEANT CAIN

Good Lordy.

(glances at Flynn)

I forgot about y'all's silly vote that makes a millionaire out of one of you!

Sergeant Cain paces around the table and postulates.

SERGEANT CAIN (CONT'D)

What if Carlos found out that M.T. was using Robert as a ghostwriter and wanted to reduce the competition?

Samira points to another note on the table.

SAMIRA

Four motives for murder are lust, love, loathing, or loot - but lunacy is a close fifth.

(glares at Carlos)

Follow the money!

SERGEANT CAIN

You people are good. We should have this solved in no time.

Margot glances at Carlos, stands up, and backs away from the table.

MARGOT

I feel very uncomfortable. We should all feel very uncomfortable accusing anyone of anything.

A Policewoman enters with a dripping-wet raincoat.

POLICEWOMAN

Mudslide down the road. We're not going anywhere for a while, Sergeant.

CARLOS

I swear to God, I did not kill Robert Knolls. I didn't know he was M.T.'s ghostwriter too! I want my lawyer.

Margot sits down again.

FLYNN

You checked bank records. Did you check phone records? Everyone left their phones in their cars.

The Sergeant spins and yells at Flynn.

SERGEANT CAIN

I told you not to speak. Officer, secure this suspect in the back of your patrol car.

(yells)

(MORE)

SERGEANT CAIN (CONT'D)

Yes, we checked everyone's phone records. Nothing suspicious!

The Policewoman begins to cart Flynn away.

FLYNN

Some criminals are known to use burner phones. Did you check everyone's cars for burner phones?

Flynn is almost at the front door.

SERGEANT CAIN

You know we can't do that without...

FLYNN (O.C.)

(interrupts)

You can search Artemis's car! He's dead! Probable cause.

SERGEANT CAIN

(yells)

Officer, check Mr. Trent's car for a burner phone.

(to the group)

Y'all have to keep quiet until we get downtown, and until y'all have a lawyer present! Got it!

Everyone nods 'Yes.'

The Policewoman returns with a burner phone in her hand.

POLICEWOMAN

The kid was right. Not only that, the phone wasn't locked. You're gonna wanna look at his last text message.

The Sergeant reads the message and her face lights up.

SERGEANT CAIN

Go ahead and bring the kid back in where it's warm.

MARGOT

What text message say?

SERGEANT CAIN

I'm not at liberty to discuss an open investigation.

SAMIRA
I bet Flynn knows.

The Sergeant snaps her head to Samira.

SERGEANT CAIN
What the hell makes y'all say that?

SAMIRA
He's been right about everything
the entire night.

Everyone nods their head in agreement as Flynn returns with the Policewoman.

FLYNN
I'm betting the text message
suggests Artemis wanted to kill
Robert.

Everyone gasps.

The Sergeant's eyes open widely at Flynn, but Flynn frowns.

SERGEANT CAIN
What's the matter now?

FLYNN
I was hoping I was wrong this time.

Margot stands to take control.

MARGOT
I still have job to do! We must
vote, but not before we hear how
Flynn end story, da?

Everyone nods 'yes.'

SERGEANT CAIN
I'm curious.

Flynn stands.

FLYNN
First, Mom #2 said that Mom #1. may
have hid some clues around the main
floor to guide us in the right
direction for finishing her
manuscript.

Flynn, still in handcuffs, points to the den.

SERGEANT CAIN

That's a crime scene, no one gets in.

EXT. MANSION, DEN - CONTINUOUS

Flynn leads everyone to the den. Yellow tape crisscrosses the door.

FLYNN

We'll just peek in the door.

(smiles)

Sergeant, what do you see behind the desk, lying flat on the bookshelf?

The Sergeant stares.

SERGEANT CAIN

It appears to be a softcover book with the cover and back removed.

FLYNN

I examined it closely when we were all looking for clues. It's a copy of Robert Knoll's fifteenth novel in the "*Palace Murders Series*" titled "*The Fingerprints of Wales.*"

CARLOS

So what?

FLYNN

It's filled with pink sticky notes on internal inconsistencies M.T. found while reading through it. The Duchess had an alibi that she was out riding, but in another part of the story, it said she'd never ridden a horse and Mr. Knolls never explained the inconsistency.

MARGOT

But M.T. read all his books.

FLYNN

And marked up each one. He was an excellent writer but a bad storyteller.

SERGEANT CAIN

And he wound up dead.

FLYNN

I'll get to that, but let's check out the parlor first.

Flynn leads everyone to the parlor.

INT. MANSION, PARLOR - CONTINUOUS

Flynn stops at a stack of four softcover books (without covers or backs) on the floor behind a lamp table.

Flynn points to the top book.

Dede examines it closely.

DEDE

That's the last page of *The Seaside Strangler* where I promised a sequel still isn't finished.

FLYNN

Nine years later.

MARGOT

Is scary, like M.T.'s ghost still here.

FLYNN

I'm sorry, Dede, but I think this message from beyond was meant for you.

Dede collapses in a chair.

DEDE

She brought me out here to insult me?

SERGEANT CAIN

Or maybe inspire you.

FLYNN

That's what I think also. Now to the kitchen.

INT. MANSION, KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Flynn leads them to the Panty and points to the recycling bin.

Cee-Cee pulls out a handwritten note from M.T. in an envelope.

CEE-CEE

These were my instructions for tonight that M.T. left me and promised not to tell. Flynn and Mrs. Whitlow knew nothing about this.

In the otherwise empty recycling bin is Carlos's Last Hitman Series Book titled "*The Hitman's Cousin, Once Removed.*"

CARLOS

I get the message. I'm glad she's dead!

Margot tries to comfort Carlos.

MARGOT

She make joke, da?

CARLOS

(angry)

That's no joke. She was being mean, like always.

FLYNN

That was mean. All these clues were mean. I'm sorry.

Samira gets kissing close to Flynn.

SAMIRA

Why do you think I was invited?

FLYNN

To avoid making the same mistakes as your career takes off.

Flynn and Samira share a moment.

MARGOT

But how you think M.T.'s story ends?

Flynn glares at Margo.

FLYNN

I'm getting to that. Back to the dining room.

Everyone follows Flynn.

INT. MANSION, DINING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Everyone returns to their seats.

FLYNN

How would I end M.T.'s manuscript?
Good question. First, Artemis was
wrong about Ahmed being a
terrorist. M.T., always showed
Muslims as being humanitarians.
It's what she believed was the
case. This is where I think Carlos
went wrong too. And Mom #1 would
never use any weapons of war.

CARLOS

It's time we toughen her writing
up, then!

Flynn ignores the comment.

FLYNN

Cee-Cee's version was very creative
and insightful. She said...

BEGIN FLASHBACK

CEE-CEE

The bass guitar player will be too
impatient to wait out the singer's
medical death sentence. He will
take matters into his own hands.

END FLASHBACK

Cee-Cee smiles.

FLYNN

But she didn't understand
misdirection, as I'll explain
later.

The smile leaves Cee-Cee's face.

Flynn turns to Dede.

FLYNN (CONT'D)

DeDe was mostly right. It is a love
story, but music and money weren't
the grand prize. It was all about
fame. The limelight. Mom #1 was
addicted to it.

(MORE)

FLYNN (CONT'D)

And like the singer in her story, the more fame she received, the less her family and friends saw of her. The less she cared about everything else, including her health. Ahmed was a simple man who thought his love for the R&B singer was enough, but it never could be.

Samira smiles at Flynn and everyone is captivated by his story.

SAMIRA

That's powerful.

FLYNN

The singer's manager had money, but not the spotlight, kind of like Mom #2, so she became the diamond thief.

Margot glares at Flynn and he continues quickly.

FLYNN (CONT'D)

Dede was right that the amplifiers and speakers would be a great way to move the diamonds but this story is not about the diamonds. The bass player was like us all; too busy living life to observe any of it.

SERGEANT CAIN

(interrupts)

It's why y'all missed so many clues around the house.

FLYNN

The bass player kept the rhythm but lost the lyrics to his song. The title of their biggest hit was "Don't Let Love Pass You By." I think Mom #1 was the rich and famous singer who ultimately died of loneliness. He died of natural causes.

(ominous)

or so everyone thought.

Margot stands in anger.

MARGOT

My wife, and your mother, died of cancer. She was in hospice care!

(MORE)

MARGOT (CONT'D)

The Coroner agreed! We heard your ending. Let's get vote over with!

The Sergeant gets in Flynn's face.

SERGEANT CAIN

Confine y'all's remarks to what happened here tonight or you'll be back in the squad car in a New York minute!

(to the others)

Get your goddamn vote over with!

MARGOT

Everyone get one vote. Most vote win M.T.'s unfinished manuscript.

Margot holds up two pieces of notebook paper.

MARGOT (CONT'D)

Robert and Carlos voted before they hear endings.

FLYNN

Let me guess, they voted for themselves.

Margo glares at Flynn.

MARGOT

That is legal and democratic! So I vote for me.

DEDE

That's not fair. You're not even a writer!

Margot ignores the comment.

MARGOT

Cee-Cee? Your vote?

CEE-CEE

I vote for you, Boss.

Dede stands in anger and yells at Margot.

DEDE

Then I vote for Carlos. Now you and he are tied.

Margot looks smug.

MARGOT

Artemis showed me his vote on a piece of notebook paper like the others...

CARLOS

So where is it?

MARGOT

It must be in his pockets.

SERGEANT CAIN

Only his car keys were in his pockets.

MARGOT

Then it was stolen.

DEDE

No evidence! No vote!

MARGOT

Two more votes to count. Samira?

SAMIRA

I vote for Flynn.

Flynn smiles as Margot sounds demanding to him.

MARGOT

Flynn? Your vote will decide winner, da?

Flynn paces as the thinks.

FLYNN

I can't vote for myself, that would be too self-serving, and I'm not a writer. My vote will go to the only writer here tonight who sees the world like Don Quixote who does not see the world as it is, but as it should be.

(smiles at Samira)

I vote for you.

Margot is furious.

MARGOT

No good. Stalemate. No can finish my job!

CARLOS

We could share the prize and work on the unfinished manuscript together.

FLYNN

That won't be necessary.

SERGEANT CAIN

What do y'all mean?

FLYNN

If you'll allow me to speculate on what I think went on here tonight and why.

SERGEANT CAIN

Be my guest.

Flynn leads everyone to the hall closet.

INT. MANSION - CONTINUOUS

The Sergeant uses a booming voice.

SERGEANT CAIN

I have a strong suspicion about the death of Robert Knolls thanks to the incriminating text message sent by Artemis Trent. First, Artemis wanted the unfinished manuscript to end up in Mrs. Whitlow's possession, to provide longer employment for himself.

CARLOS

Good old-fashioned greed!

SERGEANT CAIN

Exactly. And second, he'd been around M.T. long enough to learn all there is to know about cyanide.

Flynn works himself to the center of the crowd.

FLYNN

I hate to curtail the speculation on who killed Robert Knolls, but I think it makes more sense to take you through the murder of Artemis Trent first.

Flynn leads everyone to the Den.

EXT. MANSION, DEN - CONTINUOUS

The door to the den still has yellow police tape crisscrossing the doors.

SERGEANT CAIN

Again, no one goes in that room.
It's a crime scene,
(to Flynn)
And I'm sure you did it!

Everyone's eyes are on Flynn.

SERGEANT CAIN (CONT'D)

It was M.T.'s lawyer, who all but cut you out of M.T.'s Will.

MARGOT

I'm sorry, Flynn, but that's true.

SERGEANT CAIN

M.T. and I spoke six months ago after I helped you track down your birth parents. She admitted being in the car with Mr. Trent the night your parents were killed, and adopted you with Mr. Trent's help out of guilt.

Flynn looks devastated.

FLYNN

I get that, but I had everything to lose by killing someone. My last hope was for you all to vote for me to finish Mom #1's novel. That would pay for college.

Flynn looks around then glares at the Sergeant.

FLYNN (CONT'D)

Look around. Look how well I've lived for 17 years. I didn't like Mr. Trent, but he and Mom #1 set me up here, got me a safe place to sleep, and three meals a day. I held a grudge when you and I both learned about my past in the county records, but I'm not crazy. I couldn't rock this yacht since I was adopted, but I got nothing to lose now.

(MORE)

FLYNN (CONT'D)

I don't have any inheritance to take care of me, especially if I break the morality clause.

The Sergeant is intrigued.

SERGEANT CAIN

The what?

FLYNN

If anybody mentioned in M.T.'s Will does anything immoral or illegal, they get dropped from any part of the inheritance.

The others look around suspiciously.

SERGEANT CAIN

At least two people should get dropped right away.

SAMIRA

The two murderers.

FLYNN

Wait, you're getting ahead of me.

The Sergeant paces.

SERGEANT CAIN

Right! So, who killed Artemis Trent?

FLYNN

I didn't know until after we voted.
(beat)

It made sense that Robert, Carlos, and Mom #2 voted for themselves, and for Cee-Cee to vote for Mom #2 out of loyalty or to keep her job.

(beat)

But why would Dede vote for Carlos?

DEDE

Maybe I think he'd do the best job finishing M.T.'s novel.

FLYNN

Or maybe you made a secret pact with him to share the spoils. Maybe as co-writer? But there was one vote standing in your way. Artemis Trent, who might have voted for Mom #2.

MARGOT

He whispered to me that was his plan.

FLYNN

So he had to be eliminated, didn't he Carlos?

Carlos's eyes open widely.

CARLOS

I was with Dede.

SAMIRA

So you could be each other's alibi? But stabbing victims often scream, so he needed help.

SERGEANT CAIN

Ooooh, this is getting good. Y'all see, they told me they were upstairs doing the dirty deed in the guest room and needed to shower one at a time afterward. That made no sense to me.

FLYNN

They probably thought Mom #2 might logically make Carlos the winner. They just had to stop Artemis from voting.

BEGIN FLASHBACK

INT. MANSION, DEN - NIGHT

Dede is naked and sneaks into the Den to see Artemis sleeping on the couch. She has a towel in her hands.

Carlos enters right behind her in tight boxers. He shuts the door quietly and hides a long kitchen knife behind his back.

FLYNN (V.O.)

If they were in their underwear there would be no blood splatter on their clothes.

Dede sneaks around to Artemis's head as Carlos readies the blade above Artemis.

Dede covers Artemis's mouth with the towell while Carlos stabs him in the heart.

END FLASHBACK

FLYNN (V.O.)

They could have showered away any minor blood droplets on their bodies, but I bet a good lab workup on the underwear will prove effective.

Dede yells.

DEDE

You have no proof.
(to Carlos)
You told me it was a foolproof plan!

CARLOS

(yells at Dede)
Shut the hell up!

The Sergeant steps between them.

SERGEANT CAIN

Remember your right to remain silent!

The Sergeant uses her radio.

SERGEANT CAIN (CONT'D)

I need backup. And two sets of cuffs.

FLYNN

Better make that four sets.

Margot's eyes and Cee-Cee's eyes open wide as Flynn leads them all back to the coat closet.

CARLOS

We had nothing to do with Robert's death!

DEDE

(yells at Carlos)
Shut the hell up!

Samira and Dede whisper to each other.

SAMIRA

Remember Carlos's card from M.T., "Never kill off the wildcard?" You were clearly the wildcard. He didn't kill you but he'll get you life in prison.

DEDE

They'll never find blood stains on my undies. I go commando! I showered and I'll deny being in the den.

SAMIRA

I think he'll blab to cut a deal.

DEDE

I'll cut a deal first and be out in five with a book deal.

(evil wink)

I'll make you the wildcard character.

Samira's eyes open wide.

The Policewoman enters with extra sets of cuffs.

FLYNN

This one had me stumped until I snuck upstairs to call the police after Robert was murdered.

SERGEANT CAIN

Ms. Samira Ram also called me right away from outside. I knew those two were probably not involved, while the rest of you were immediate suspects for impeding a police investigation by being aware of a suspicious death and not informing the police.

Margot, Cee-Cee, Carlos, and Dede stare at each other suspiciously.

FLYNN

That's against the law, isn't it, Sergeant?

SERGEANT CAIN

Why, yes it is Mr. Whitlow, but it's just a misdemeanor, maybe not enough to get tossed out of the Will.

Margot and Cee-Cee breathe a sigh of relief.

SERGEANT CAIN (CONT'D)

I'm guessing you have other information for me.

FLYNN

Smelling cyanide on Robert's mouth made me wonder why Mom #1 was given six months to live, but died in just three months.

MARGOT

Many people die sooner than expected in Hospice Care.

FLYNN

Especially if they get helped along by prescription medication... or something more sinister. I remember how Cee-Cee wanted to end Mom #1's unfinished story.

BEGIN FLASHBACK

INT. MANSION, DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Cee-Cee provides her ending to the story, with Flynn taking careful notes.

CEE-CEE

The bass guitar player will be too impatient to wait out the singer's medical death sentence. He will take matters into his own hands.

END FLASHBACK

FLYNN

Cee-Cee wasn't just telling us what she would do, she was telling us what she did. She knew how to deliver the cyanide bringing Champagne and water to Robert. But how could she have acted alone? Picking Robert up from the floor and standing him up in the closet took help.

SAMIRA

The butler did do it! With an accomplice, but that's funny. What would M.T. think about that?

Flynn glares at Margot who looks away, which the Sergeant sees.

FLYNN

Neither of you fully understood how misdirection works.

SAMIRA

Why didn't they leave him on the floor when he fell?

FLYNN

They were buying time for the obvious smell of the cyanide to dissipate.

SERGEANT CAIN

That's also why Mrs. Margot Whitlow didn't want anyone to call the cops right away. They were buying time.

Flynn pulls out two folded airplane tickets from his back pocket. He glares at Margot and Cee-Cee.

FLYNN

Explain these tickets departing in two days as my Mom #1's caretakers.

MARGOT

Little reward for exhausting job caring for dying wife.

Cee-Cee nods 'Yes.'

FLYNN

Two non-refundable one-way tickets to Belize purchased one month ago, two weeks before Mom #1 died?

Margot and Cee-Cee are stunned.

FLYNN (CONT'D)

Sergeant, autopsies are generally not performed after hospice deaths, but I'd like to request that Mom #1's body be exhumed and tested for water-soluble potassium cyanide, my Mom's poison of choice in many books. There's a new lab technique described in the Journal of Forensic Science that should be able to match the exact signature from her sample to... Robert's sample.

MARGOT

I want see attorney.

FLYNN

He's dead too!

Margot breaks down in tears.

MARGOT

I knew M.T. wanted to die, I just
move up.

SERGEANT CAIN

But euthanasia is a crime here
unless an adult diagnosed with a
terminal disease, who meets certain
qualifications, and request the aid-
in-dying drugs from their attending
physician. Without that note, it's
murder. And buying those one-way
plane tickets early makes it
premeditated.

(beat)

I'm booking you both on suspicion
of murder. The storm is letting up
and...

(winks)

There was never a mudslide. Let's
take 'em downtown.

CEE-CEE

I'll talk. It was all Boss's idea.

Sergeant Cain looks back at Flynn and Samira.

SERGEANT CAIN

Thanks for all your help, Flynn.
Due to that morality clause, you'll
be the sole heir. All this is yours
now, including finishing your mom's
novel.

Flynn hooks an arm with Samira as the Sergeant and others (in
handcuffs) exit.

FLYNN

(laughs)

I think I'll make it a comedy.

(to Samira)

You know what they say, "To heir is
human and it feels divine."

They kiss warmly.

EXT. MANSION - DAY

Flynn and Samira walk out the front door holding hands and
smiling.

SAMIRA

Finding all that cash in the box with the unfinished manuscript was a surprise.

FLYNN

Somehow, I think Mom #1 wanted me to win it.

They turn and look at the house.

He spots an open window on the top floor of the mansion. The curtains wave.

FLYNN (CONT'D)

I can't help but think my Mom #1 set us up.

M.T. WHITLOW (V.O.)

Damn straight!

SAMIRA

Do you think you'll stay here?

FLYNN

You don't think it will be haunted?

SAMIRA

Maybe a little.

Flynn turns serious.

FLYNN

Funny thing, though.

SAMIRA

What?

FLYNN

Artemis showed no sign of a struggle.

SAMIRA

Maybe they used chloroform on a rag.

FLYNN

It's not instantaneous like they show on movies and TV. It can take up to five minutes to knock somebody out. Plenty of time for a struggle.

Samira looks away.

FLYNN (CONT'D)

And there was very little blood
loss from the stab wound.

Samira looks him in the eyes coldly and doesn't speak.

FLYNN (CONT'D)

I think he was dead already and
they might have arrested the wrong
people.

TENSE MOMENTS

Flynn recalls Samira in the dining room.

BEGIN FLASHBACK

INT. MANSION, DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Samira points to another note on the table.

SAMIRA

Four motives for murder are lust,
love, loathing, or loot - but
lunacy is a close fifth.
(glares at Carlos)
Follow the money!

END FLASHBACK

FLYNN (V.O.)

It was Samira's burner phone in
Artemis's car!

She bats her eyelashes and flirts with him.

Samira mumbles an odd question.

SAMIRA

Happy Birthday?

Samira puts on her helmet and straddles her e-bike.

SAMIRA (CONT'D)

Are you serious about that trip to
Belize?

FLYNN

(weakly)
Call me!

Samira leans to kiss him, but Flynn looks up to the open window with a worried look.

FADE OUT.

THE END