

A digital illustration of a woman with dark, wavy hair, topless, sitting on a dark-colored couch. She is holding a glass of red wine in her right hand. The background is a solid, warm brown color. The text 'CHAPTER 5' is written in a glowing green, serif font in the upper right corner.

CHAPTER 5

MURDER AT
PALMER LODGE

FICTION

Rawly Rawls

Murder at Palmer Lodge 5

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"Oh, I know of you. Yes, I do." Milo entered the billiard room carrying a flute of champagne and watching Clarissa take a shot on the shuffleboard table.

Clarissa gave a start. With the rain pelting the windows, she hadn't heard the man approach. Her puck knocked into others with a clack-clack down at the other end of the table. She put a hand to her chest. "Hello." She flexed her bare feet on the cold, hardwood floor. "Wait, you know me, Milo?"



"I see you know me, too. Yes, you do." He nodded, smiled, and walked up to Clarissa. "Of course, your knowledge has an incentive. You're the amateur detective. Solving crimes, breaking rhymes."

"Why are you talking like that?" Clarissa looked into her uncle's eyes and saw ... that this man wasn't her uncle. His crazed, wide eyes danced as he looked at her. She slowly put the shuffleboard table between herself and this man. "You're insane, aren't you?" Lightning flashed and Milo's eyes seemed even more manic in the sudden light.



"Mad as a hatter and ever growing fatter." He hefted an imaginary gut. "Pleasant day, my pretty young sleuth. I hope you find the truth." Milo saluted her with the champagne flute, gave the bear a wary glance, and ambled out of the room. Distant thunder rumbled upon his departure.

"I'm a fucking amateur detective?" Clarissa didn't like the sound of that. Wherever amateur detectives went, people died. She'd seen enough television to know the formula. She looked up at the ceiling. "I'd like to go home now." She waited. "Please?" Her only answer was another bolt of lightning and a peal of thunder that shook the lodge. The lights in the hall went out completely for several seconds. But thankfully, they came back on. The only thing worse than being in that terrible lodge would be being there in the dark.

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Austin lay naked on his side, his soft cock resting its weight on the mattress. He watched the person who was and wasn't his mother as she sat in an armchair by the fire. She was naked as well, basking in the warmth of the hearth. She smiled at him when she saw him looking. He smiled back. "I love this lodge," he said.



"It seems the sort of place you would be familiar with." Alexis raised an eyebrow. "Opulent and mysterious, filled with beautiful women and deadly men."

"Be a dear and touch yourself while we talk." Austin felt like he was getting the hang of this character. His cock gave a lurch when her free hand dropped to her pussy and idly played with her labia. He could barely hear her wetness over the cracking sounds of the fire and the rain drumming on the lodge.

"Your essence is still leaking out of me. My husband would not be pleased to find another man's seed in his property." She blew Austin a kiss.

"Well, maybe don't tell him then." Austin thought back a moment. "Wait, did you say 'deadly men'? Is Brad deadly?" *Would I know how to fight if it came to it? Do I have my character's skills?* He thought for a moment and decided that he couldn't fight any better than he always could. Which meant getting beaten up by bullies.

"My husband is no more dangerous than any man. Which, of course, makes him deadly." Alexis smirked at her lover. She took a sip of brandy, continuing to play with her vagina as they talked. "Honestly, it will be hard to hide our rendezvous from my husband. She opened her vagina with her fingers, giving Austin a full view of the gape. "When I do my wifely duties, he will surely notice that I am no longer tight. How long do you think it will take me to revert to my former self?" She wagged her eyebrows at him. "My vagina I mean."



Austin didn't like where this was going. But she was so hot playing with her pussy by the fire that he couldn't bring himself to worry about it. His dick engorged, and he rose from the bed. "Maybe if I have another go at your pussy, your husband won't ever feel you again." He smiled. That was exactly what his character would say. It felt so right. And what did it matter if Brad found out? He was in a game. Nothing could hurt him.

There was a knock on the door. Austin froze halfway across the room toward his mother. He turned his head to the door, suddenly afraid to hear Brad's voice. "Yes?" Austin said.

"Pardon." Woofers voice came through the door muffled. "The mistress asks that guests come to supper in fifteen minutes. Me and Sub are serving in the restaurant."

"Sounds good," Austin said.

Alexis removed her hand from her vagina. "It seems it's time we freshened up. Not sure what you'll do about that." She pointed with wide eyes at his giant penis. "Might I suggest some sort of harness to keep it confined?"

“Yes, well, I’ll see what I have for that.” Austin frowned. He had wanted to hump his mother again. He hoped the game would give him another opportunity.

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All nine guests were seated at a long table with the three Palmers. Eloise sat at one end, her husband sat at the other. Rain drummed on the windowpanes. The brilliance of lightning flashed every now and then, outshining the steady glow of the electric sconces. The restaurant was decorated for Christmas in festive colors, with ornaments hanging from the ceiling.



The gathering was on its second course, a robust mushroom soup. Woofer worked hard in the kitchen, while Subwoofer moved swiftly to serve everyone. Conversation was vibrant and overlapping. The group of mostly strangers were becoming well-acquainted.

Austin's mother sat across the table from him, making what he would have considered bedroom eyes at him. Her husband, who in the real world was his sister's fiancé, seemed to be aware that something was going on. He stared at Austin through much of the first course. When Milo engaged Brad in rhyming conversation, Brad continued to glance Austin's way from time to time.



Beatrice leaned her lips over to her employer's ear, cupped her hands around her mouth, and whispered. "Did you kill Mr. Delacross's dog or something? The man positively hates you."



"Hmmm." Austin shrugged.

"Oh, no you didn't," Beatrice hissed. "My ass wasn't good enough for you? You had to have her, too?" She laughed and tried very hard not to look at the recently cuckolded husband across the table from her. She just knew he'd pick up on her mockery. Fortunately, they were all interrupted by Frederick Palmer.

"May I have your attention?" Frederick stood and slowly looked around the table with displeasure. He adjusted his tie and sighed. "I built this lodge to be a place of retreat and purification. I am always saddened when it is stained by heathenism. Pathetic leches and harlots are -"

"Are you talking about us?" Eunice rubbed her cheek where this horrible man had struck her not that long ago.



"Quiet, dear." Melanie took her daughter's hand and held it tight. She didn't want to get on the wrong side of Frederick's temper. "Sorry for the interruption," she said to her friend's vile husband. "Please continue."

"Mr. Smithfield, the saber, please." Frederick turned toward the kitchen.

Woof entered the room through the service door, carrying a sword reverently in two hands. There was silence while he made his way to the table, handed the blade to his master, and retreated to the kitchen. Lightning flashed, the sconces dimmed, and thunder rumbled. The rain continued to beat at the windows.



Once the electric lighting had returned to normal, Frederick held the sword aloft. “This is a symbol of virtue, once held by Stonewall Jackson in battle.” He lowered the sword and carefully rested it on his soup bowl, balancing it in front of him.

“Oh, Frederick. Please don’t do this. These are my friends.” Eloise put a hand over her face.

“Let all who renounce Satan come to my end of the table and lay their hands on the sacred saber.” Frederick held his hands up in the air, seemingly pleading with God. “Let us be your instrument against corruption. On this holy eve, let us –”

Lightning flashed at the same moment as thunder boomed and shook the lodge. The electric lights went out, casting them all into darkness.

There were several shouts and screams.

“Stay calm dearies, the generator will be back in a moment,” Eloise said.

“What the ... how dare you?” Frederick bellowed.

“Austin? Austin? What’s happening?” Clarrisa called out for her brother. “This is your game, make it stop.”

There was a wet squelching thump, a gargling cry, and the sound of something heavy hitting the table, shattering and rattling the fine dinnerware.

“What was that?” Alexis had fear in her voice. “Brad ... Bradley ... where are you?”

“Oh ... my sweet Clarissa,” Rob shouted.

“Get your hands off me, Mister,” Eunice said.

The lights came back on to find the guests spread out around the table. Only Austin and Beatrice were still seated. She was holding onto her boss protectively.

When all eyes moved to Frederick’s end of the table, there were several screams and horrified groans.

Frederick Palmer lay face forward on the table, the saber sticking out of his back. His eyes were open and unseeing. Blood pooled on the tablecloth under him.



When the clamor of terror died down, Eloise made her way back to her chair and sat in it heavily. “Oh, Frederick darling, what have you done?”

“This is murder!” Austin said. It seemed the right thing to say. He watched Eloise slump in her chair as if she’d fainted, but he thought she might be peeking under her eyelids. Her son quickly moved to her side.

“It’s horrible.” Rob stepped away from his wife. He was so revolted by the bloody scene that he didn’t feel the least like groping Clarrisa.

"The play's the thing. Wherein we'll catch the conscience of the king." Milo stood gaping at the dead man.

"Oh, my poor dear." Melanie moved over to her unstable husband and hugged him tightly.

"What do we do?" Clarissa could see the man had been murdered. She found her brother's declaration unhelpful. It looked very real from where she was standing. She turned pale and tried not to throw up. *There's no way out of here. We're going to have to solve the murder.* That thought helped her find her ballast. She looked around the room, taking mental notes of what the guests were doing. Most people appeared as she would expect when present at a murder. *They look freaked the fuck out.* But not Thomas Palmer. He was fanning his unconscious mother with a napkin, and Clarissa could have sworn he was smiling. Not what you'd expect when your father lay skewered at the other end of the table.

Eloise slowly came back to herself and rose to her feet again with the help of her son. "Smithfields, we need you." She clapped her hands and whistled.

Woof and Subwoof came bounding out of the service entrance. They stopped in their tracks with mouths hanging open when they saw their dead master.

"Woof, kindly check his pulse." Eloise pointed at her husband, although it was clear there was no need to check on his vitals. Lightning flashed and thunder rumbled

a few seconds later. The lights flickered but stayed on. "Sub, please make sure everyone gets to their rooms safely." She scanned the restaurant. "I'm afraid there's been a monstrous act of violence here tonight. Our lives will never again be the same. I encourage all of you to lock your doors tonight. I don't know who could have done this, but it must have been someone in this very room."

The guests glanced wearily at one another.

"Fortunately, there are two detectives among us." Eloise nodded to Austin, and then Clarissa. With the storm, there will be no ferries off the island tomorrow. I will not be able to alert the police. We are all trapped here. Tomorrow we must puzzle out what happened. My husband's poor soul must find justice." She pointed a pale finger at the grisly scene at the other end of the long table.

