



A FREE MURDER MYSTERY DINNER FOR 4 TO 6 GUESTS

The Missing Ledger

Quire & Lantern Books turns forty tonight. Before the cake, the manager went downstairs for the shop's very first ledger — and never came back up. Its back page is gone.

4–6

GUESTS

40–50

MINUTES

2

ACTS

Free

COMPLETE GAME

QUICK START FOR THE HOST

- 1 Choose 4, 5 or 6 guests. Rowan, Jules, Sasha and Avery are always played; add Kit and Pat for 5 or 6.
- 2 Send each guest the invitation and the name of their character. Do not send dossiers yet.
- 3 Print the pages for your guest count (page 2). Hand each guest their own two dossier pages, unread.
- 4 On the night, read the opening (page 3), then run Act 1 and Act 2 — about 15 minutes each.
- 5 Everyone fills in a ballot. Then, and only then, open the solution on the last two pages.

Content: A fictional death that happens offstage and is never described; secrets about money and a bookshop rivalry. No alcohol, food, costumes, acting or moving around is needed to play. Adults and teens 14+.

Hosting The Missing Ledger

Everything here is safe to read: it never says who did it.

WHICH PAGES TO PRINT

Host pages (keep)	1, 2, 3–4 — 1 copy
How to play, cast	5, 6 — 1 copy for the table
Invitations	7 — 2 invitations per sheet
4 guests: dossiers	Rowan 8–9, Jules 10–11, Sasha 12–13, Avery 14–15; plus Kit’s page 17 and Pat’s page 19 for you to read as statements
5 guests: dossiers	the four above + Kit 16–17 (or Pat 18–19); read the other one’s Act 2 page as a statement
6 guests: dossiers	Rowan 8–9, Jules 10–11, Sasha 12–13, Avery 14–15, Kit 16–17, Pat 18–19
Large print (optional)	the same dossiers at about 17 pt, for any guest who wants them: Rowan 20–22, Jules 23–25, Sasha 26–28, Avery 29–31, Kit 32–34, Pat 35–37
Evidence	Act 1 38–39, Act 2 40–41 — 1 copy, cut out
Notes, ballots	notes 42 — 1 per guest; ballots 43 — 1 sheet
Solution	44–45 — print last, fold shut, open after the ballots

Print on US Letter at Actual Size (100%), single-sided. Every page’s footer says who it is for, so you can sort the stack without reading it. Hand each guest their two dossier pages, the second one folded printed side in, so the Act 2 card stays closed.

IF YOU WANT TO PLAY TOO

- You can play one of the characters too. Print the whole file without paging through it: open it, press Print, close it.
- Sort the print-out by the footers only. Each footer says who a page is for — never what is on it.
- Ask a guest to cut out the evidence cards, or cut them without reading. Evidence is shared with everyone anyway; your own role’s secret is the only private thing you will know early.
- Seal the solution pages (the last two) in an envelope and do not open them until every ballot is in.

IF SOMEONE CANCELS

- Kit or Pat cancels: just leave the role out. Print that character’s Act 2 page and read it aloud in Act 2 as their statement to the police. Nothing the detectives need is lost.
- Rowan, Jules, Sasha or Avery cancels: give that role to your Kit or Pat player (hand over the dossier unread), and read the dropped role’s Act 2 page as a statement. With only three guests the game does not work: wait for a fourth.

QUIET GUESTS AND SEATED PLAY

Nobody has to act, stand or walk around. Guests can stay seated and read their lines; everything they must share is on their cards, so a quiet player still gives the table every clue.

The evening, step by step

About 45 minutes from the opening to the reveal.

OPENING

READ ALOUD

Welcome to Quire & Lantern Books, forty years old tonight. Supper is over and the toasts are done. At 8:44 the manager, Morgan Vale, went down the back stairs to fetch the shop's very first ledger. Upstairs, Sasha Linden took the lectern for a reading streamed live to the book club. At 9:05 Jules Marlow went down to hurry Morgan along — and shouted for help. Morgan is dead, the ledger lies open, and its back page has been torn out. The police are here. No one goes home until we know who went down those stairs.

- ☐ Then ask each guest to read their introduction aloud, in order: Rowan, Jules, Sasha, Avery, Kit, Pat.

ACT 1 — THE BACK PAGE · ABOUT 15 MINUTES

READ ALOUD

The police have found five things in the stockroom and on the phones. Here they are.

- ☐ Lay the Act 1 cards C1 to C5 face up in the middle of the table.
- ☐ Let the table talk for about 15 minutes. If it goes quiet, use a nudge.

IF THE TABLE GOES QUIET, ASK

- What was written on the back page — and whose initials are on it?
- Rowan, why would the shop's owner be on a list of debts?
- Who knew Morgan was going to read the back page aloud?
- Everyone: who sat where when the reading began?

ACT 2 — WHERE WAS EVERYONE? · ABOUT 15 MINUTES

READ ALOUD

The officers have pulled the shop's live camera log, the volunteer photographer's pictures, the café and till tickets and the front-door camera — and they looked in every bag before anyone left.

The evening, step by step (continued)

- ☐ Lay the Act 2 cards C6 to C11 face up in the middle.
- ☐ Everyone may now unfold and read their own Act 2 card.
- ☐ If no one is playing Kit or Pat, read their Act 2 card aloud now as their statement to the police.
- ☐ Remind everyone of the walking times on the floor plan.

IF THE TABLE GOES QUIET, ASK

- Who can be seen, minute by minute, between 8:44 and 9:05?
- How long does it take to go down the back stairs, do something, and come back?
- A phone log shows a call. Does it show where the caller was standing?
- Who had green on their sleeve — and where was the only wet paint?

ACCUSATIONS · ABOUT 5 MINUTES

READ ALOUD

Time is up. On your ballot, write who did it, why, and the numbers of two clues that prove it. Fold it and hand it to me.

THE REVEAL · ABOUT 5 MINUTES

READ ALOUD

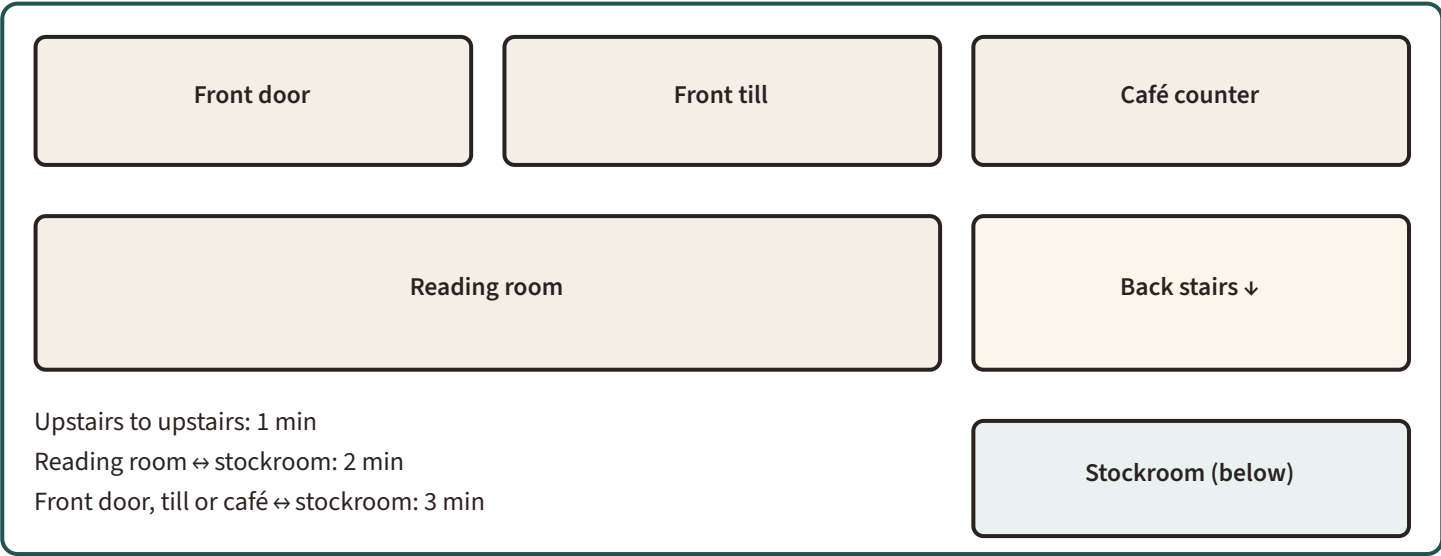
Open the solution (the last two pages) and read “What happened” aloud. Then read each ballot. Anyone who named the right person with two clues that really prove it is this evening’s Best Detective.

How to play

Read this aloud, or pass it round before Act 1.

- ☐ One person killed Morgan, alone. That person knows it. It might be you.
- ☐ Only the culprit may lie about where they were or what they did tonight. Everyone else tells the truth about the evening, but may keep their own secret until their card says to share it.
- ☐ The evidence cards are facts. Each has a number (C1, C2...): on your ballot you will name two that prove your answer.
- ☐ Times matter. Use the floor plan's walking times to test every story.
- ☐ No acting, costumes, food, alcohol, props or walking around is needed. Read your lines or say them your own way.

QUIRE & LANTERN BOOKS — THE SHOP FLOOR



- The back stairs beside the reading room are the only way to the stockroom. Its alley door was bolted on the inside.
- The front door is the only way in or out of the shop.

Content: A fictional death that happens offstage and is never described; secrets about money and a bookshop rivalry. No alcohol, food, costumes, acting or moving around is needed to play.

The guests

Choose a character for each guest. Rowan, Jules, Sasha and Avery are always played; Kit and Pat join for 5 or 6.

ALWAYS PLAYED

Rowan Quire

Owner of Quire & Lantern Books

The founder's grandchild, who inherited a shop, a mortgage and a manager who knew everything.

ALWAYS PLAYED

Jules Marlow

Bookkeeper

Keeps every number in the shop in order — except one.

ALWAYS PLAYED

Sasha Linden

Author of “The Lantern Streets”

Ashmere's favorite local historian, reading tonight to an audience and a camera.

ALWAYS PLAYED

Avery Hart

Rare-book dealer

Knows the price of every old book in Ashmere, and the value of a few people.

OPTIONAL (5-6 GUESTS)

Kit Okafor

Runs the café counter

Makes the best coffee in Ashmere and hears every conversation at the counter.

OPTIONAL (5-6 GUESTS)

Pat Delacroix

President of the Ashmere Book Club

Reads everything, forgives nothing, and arrived late for the first time in eleven years.

Every character is written as “they”: anyone can play any role, and you can change a name or pronoun on the dossier before printing.

YOU ARE INVITED TO A MURDER MYSTERY SUPPER

The Missing Ledger



Quire & Lantern Books is forty years old tonight – and its manager has just been found dead. Come as yourself, or dressed as your character.

WHEN	Saturday, November 14 · 7:00 PM
WHERE	1 Example Street, Your Town
YOUR CHARACTER	
RSVP	Your name · your phone or email

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WHEN	Saturday, November 14 · 7:00 PM
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YOUR CHARACTER	
RSVP	Your name · your phone or email

Rowan Quire

Owner of Quire & Lantern Books · plays as they/them

READ THIS ALOUD TO INTRODUCE YOURSELF

Good evening, and welcome to forty years of Quire & Lantern. My grandmother opened this shop with one shelf and a kettle. Tonight it’s all of you, and a cake we can’t afford. Let’s enjoy it anyway.

WHO YOU ARE

You grew up between these shelves. When your grandmother died you took over the shop and, quietly, its debts. Morgan Vale has managed the floor for twenty years; you trusted Morgan more than your own accountant.

PEOPLE YOU KNOW

Jules Marlow	keeps the books for you; nervous lately
Sasha Linden	the author whose book keeps the lights on
Avery Hart	rare-book dealer; your grandmother’s old friend
Kit Okafor	runs the café counter
Pat Delacroix	book-club president, never late until tonight

YOUR SECRET — KEEP IT UNTIL YOUR CARD SAYS OTHERWISE

Last spring you borrowed \$12,000 from the shop’s account to pay a personal debt, and you have not paid it back. Morgan found out and wrote it on the back page of the old ledger. If the page turns up, everyone will know.

ACT 1 — YOUR GOALS

- ☐ Welcome everyone and read your introduction.
- ☐ Find out what Morgan meant by “the back page.”
- ☐ Keep the loan quiet until Act 2 — but don’t lie about where you were.

WHERE YOU WERE FROM 8:44 TO 9:05

You introduced Sasha at 8:45 and stood at the back of the reading room. At 8:53 the doorbell went and you let Pat in; you chatted at the door until 8:56, then walked back to the reading room for the signing.

FOLD THIS PAGE IN HALF ALONG THE DASHED LINE, PRINTED SIDE IN. OPEN IT ONLY WHEN THE HOST STARTS ACT 2.

Rowan Quire

ACT 2 CARD

fold here

C17

YOUR ACT 2 CARD

Rowan's evening

You stood at the back of the reading room from 8:45. At 8:53 you let Pat in at the front door and talked there until 8:56, then went back for the signing. You never went near the back stairs.

ACT 2 — YOUR GOALS

- ☐ If anyone asks about the loan, tell the truth: you were going to repay it this winter.
- ☐ Tell the table where you were between 8:45 and 9:05.
- ☐ Decide who had the time to go down the back stairs.

Jules Marlow

Bookkeeper · plays as they/them

READ THIS ALOUD TO INTRODUCE YOURSELF

I'm Jules. I do the books, which means I know exactly what that cake cost. Happy anniversary, everyone. I mean it. Mostly.

WHO YOU ARE

You have kept the shop's accounts for six years. In September you found a mistake you had made in last spring's figures — \$2,300 entered twice — and fixed it without telling Rowan.

PEOPLE YOU KNOW

Rowan Quire	your employer; you owe them the truth about the error
Morgan Vale	spotted your mistake and promised to keep it between you
Kit Okafor	makes your oat latte without asking
Avery Hart	pays late, always with a story

YOUR SECRET — KEEP IT UNTIL YOUR CARD SAYS OTHERWISE

You made a \$2,300 bookkeeping error and corrected it quietly. Morgan knew, and wrote "J. M. — spring figures corrected" on the back page.

ACT 1 — YOUR GOALS

- ☐ Read your introduction.
- ☐ Learn what is on the back page without admitting your own line.
- ☐ Watch who keeps glancing at the back stairs.

WHERE YOU WERE FROM 8:44 TO 9:05

At 8:48 you went to the café counter for an oat latte and waited there until Kit called your name at 8:54. You were back in the reading room by 8:56 and asked Sasha a question at 8:58. At 9:03 you said you would hurry Morgan along, went down the back stairs and found Morgan at 9:05.

FOLD THIS PAGE IN HALF ALONG THE DASHED LINE, PRINTED SIDE IN. OPEN IT ONLY WHEN THE HOST STARTS ACT 2.

Jules Marlow

ACT 2 CARD

fold here

C16

YOUR ACT 2 CARD

What Jules saw

You waited at the café counter from 8:48 until Kit called your name at 8:54. At 9:03 you went down the back stairs to fetch Morgan; you found Morgan on the stockroom floor at 9:05 and shouted for help. The ledger lay open, its back page gone, and the stockroom door frame was smudged where someone had brushed the wet paint.

ACT 2 — YOUR GOALS

- ☐ You found Morgan: tell the table what you saw at 9:05.
- ☐ Say where you were from 8:48 (the café counter).
- ☐ Admit the error if pressed — it is embarrassing, not criminal.

Sasha Linden

Author of “The Lantern Streets” · plays as they/them

READ THIS ALOUD TO INTRODUCE YOURSELF

I’m Sasha. This shop sold my first book when no one else would stock it. Tonight I’m reading chapter three — the one with the shipwreck — and I promise to sign anything you put in front of me.

WHO YOU ARE

Your history of Ashmere’s old harbor became the shop’s best seller. When your publisher went bankrupt last year, your advance never came; Morgan arranged for the shop to lend you \$7,500 so you could finish the book. Someone calling themselves “HarborReader” has posted three anonymous one-star reviews of it, and you have a guess who.

PEOPLE YOU KNOW	
Morgan Vale	believed in your book before anyone
Pat Delacroix	runs the book club; has never said a kind word about your book
Rowan Quire	host and friend
Avery Hart	collects old harbor maps; wanted to buy your notes

YOUR SECRET — KEEP IT UNTIL YOUR CARD SAYS OTHERWISE

The shop secretly lent you \$7,500 when your publisher folded. You are embarrassed that your “success” was propped up by a loan, and it is on the back page.

- ACT 1 — YOUR GOALS
- ☐ Read your introduction.
 - ☐ Be gracious — and find out who knows about your loan.
 - ☐ You were on camera the whole reading: you can say so.

WHERE YOU WERE FROM 8:44 TO 9:05

From 8:45 to 9:03 you read and answered questions at the lectern, live on the shop’s camera, without stepping away. Then you sat down at the signing table in the reading room.

FOLD THIS PAGE IN HALF ALONG THE DASHED LINE, PRINTED SIDE IN. OPEN IT ONLY WHEN THE HOST STARTS ACT 2.

Sasha Linden

ACT 2 CARD

fold here

C12

YOUR ACT 2 CARD

What Sasha noticed

When Avery brought a book to the signing table at 9:02, you noticed a smear of wet green paint on Avery's left cuff.

ACT 2 — YOUR GOALS

- ☐ Share what you noticed at the signing table (your Act 2 card).
- ☐ Ask Pat about the anonymous reviews — you have a guess.
- ☐ Decide who could have reached the stockroom.

Avery Hart

Rare-book dealer · plays as they/them

READ THIS ALOUD TO INTRODUCE YOURSELF

Avery Hart, Hart’s Rare Books. I’ve bought and sold this shop’s treasures since before some of you could read. Forty years! Morgan promised us a surprise from the first ledger — I can hardly wait.

WHO YOU ARE

Two years ago you took six first editions from the shop on consignment, sold them for a good price, and never paid the shop its \$18,400. Over dessert tonight Morgan leaned over and told you: “I’m reading the back page too. It’s time.”

PEOPLE YOU KNOW

Morgan Vale	discovered the unpaid consignment
Rowan Quire	trusts you because their grandmother did
Sasha Linden	you once offered to buy their research notes
Kit Okafor	gave you a napkin tonight

YOUR SECRET — KEEP IT UNTIL YOUR CARD SAYS OTHERWISE

YOU ARE THE CULPRIT. At 8:47 you followed Morgan down the back stairs. In the stockroom you begged Morgan not to read the page; the argument ended Morgan’s life. You tore the back page out of the ledger and brushed the wet green paint on the stockroom door frame on the way out. Climbing the back stairs (8:53–8:55) you rang the auction house so your phone would show a call. At 8:57 you bought “A Field Guide to Ferns” at the till to have a bag for the folded page; at 8:58 you asked Kit for a damp napkin.

ACT 1 — YOUR GOALS

- ☐ Read your introduction and act delighted about the anniversary.
- ☐ Steer talk toward Rowan’s loan and Jules’s nerves.
- ☐ You may lie about the crime — no one else may.

WHERE YOU WERE FROM 8:44 TO 9:05

TRUTH (keep it to yourself): reading room until 8:47; stockroom 8:49–8:53; up the back stairs on the phone 8:53–8:55; at the till by 8:56; bought the fern guide at 8:57; back in the reading room at 8:59. YOUR STORY: “I was outside on a call from 8:48 to 8:56.”

FOLD THIS PAGE IN HALF ALONG THE DASHED LINE, PRINTED SIDE IN. OPEN IT ONLY WHEN THE HOST STARTS ACT 2.

Avery Hart

ACT 2 CARD

fold here

C15

YOUR ACT 2 CARD

Avery's story

Your story: you stepped outside for a phone call from 8:48 to 8:56. Your phone's call log shows an outgoing call to the auction house from 8:53 to 8:55 — show it to anyone who asks.

ACT 2 — YOUR GOALS

- ☐ Tell your story from your Act 2 card, and show the call log if anyone asks.
- ☐ Explain the paint as “something on the banister.”
- ☐ Get through the vote without being named.

Kit Okafor

Runs the café counter · plays as they/them

READ THIS ALOUD TO INTRODUCE YOURSELF

Kit Okafor, café counter. If you want something hot and not alcoholic, I'm your person. Tonight's special is a cardamom latte called "The Plot Thickens."

WHO YOU ARE

You have run the shop's café counter for three years and want to buy it outright. Two weeks ago you met Rowan in secret to make an offer — and Morgan walked in on the meeting.

PEOPLE YOU KNOW

Rowan Quire	you made them an offer for the café
Jules Marlow	your most loyal oat-latte customer
Avery Hart	asked you for a napkin at 8:58

YOUR SECRET — KEEP IT UNTIL YOUR CARD SAYS OTHERWISE

You secretly offered to buy the café counter from Rowan. You do not know whether Morgan approved.

ACT 1 — YOUR GOALS

- ☐ Read your introduction.
- ☐ Ask Rowan, casually, whether the shop needs money.
- ☐ Notice who orders what, and when.

WHERE YOU WERE FROM 8:44 TO 9:05

You stayed behind the café counter all evening. You rang up Jules's oat latte at 8:49 and called Jules's name at 8:54.

FOLD THIS PAGE IN HALF ALONG THE DASHED LINE, PRINTED SIDE IN. OPEN IT ONLY WHEN THE HOST STARTS ACT 2.

Kit Okafor

ACT 2 CARD

fold here

C13

YOUR ACT 2 CARD

What Kit saw

At 8:58 Avery came to your counter and asked for a damp napkin, then scrubbed at a green mark on their sleeve. You also confirm Jules waited at your counter from 8:49 until you called “Jules!” at 8:54.

If no one plays Kit, the host reads this card aloud at the start of Act 2 as Kit’s statement to the police, saying “I” for “you”.

ACT 2 — YOUR GOALS

- ☐ Tell the table about Jules’s latte (8:49 to 8:54).
- ☐ Mention the napkin Avery asked for at 8:58.
- ☐ Help the detectives — you were behind the counter all evening.

Pat Delacroix

President of the Ashmere Book Club · plays as they/them

READ THIS ALOUD TO INTRODUCE YOURSELF

Pat Delacroix, Ashmere Book Club. I am never late; tonight the ferry was. I trust I missed nothing but the cake.

WHO YOU ARE

You have run the book club for eleven years. Under the name “HarborReader” you have posted three one-star reviews of Sasha Linden’s book. You think it is overrated and you resent that the shop displays it everywhere.

PEOPLE YOU KNOW	
Sasha Linden	author of the book you secretly panned
Rowan Quire	let you in at 8:53
Morgan Vale	always saved you the best chair

YOUR SECRET — KEEP IT UNTIL YOUR CARD SAYS OTHERWISE

You are “HarborReader,” who posted three anonymous one-star reviews of Sasha’s book.

- ACT 1 — YOUR GOALS
- ☐ Read your introduction.
 - ☐ Be politely unimpressed by Sasha’s reading.
 - ☐ Find out who sat where during the reading.

WHERE YOU WERE FROM 8:44 TO 9:05

The ferry was late. You reached the shop at 8:53; Rowan let you in and you talked at the front door until 8:56, then went through to the reading room.

FOLD THIS PAGE IN HALF ALONG THE DASHED LINE, PRINTED SIDE IN. OPEN IT ONLY WHEN THE HOST STARTS ACT 2.

Pat Delacroix

ACT 2 CARD

fold here

C14

YOUR ACT 2 CARD

What Pat heard

Rowan let you in at 8:53 and stayed talking with you at the door until 8:56. At about 8:55, standing in the doorway, you heard quick footsteps and a low voice coming up the back stairs — you saw only a dark sleeve turn toward the front till.

If no one plays Pat, the host reads this card aloud at the start of Act 2 as Pat's statement to the police, saying "I" for "you".

ACT 2 — YOUR GOALS

- ☐ Say when you arrived: Rowan let you in at 8:53 and you chatted at the door until 8:56.
- ☐ Mention what you heard from the door at about 8:55 (your Act 2 card).
- ☐ If Sasha guesses your secret, admit it with dignity.

Rowan Quire

Owner of Quire & Lantern Books · plays as they/them

READ THIS ALOUD TO INTRODUCE YOURSELF

Good evening, and welcome to forty years of Quire & Lantern. My grandmother opened this shop with one shelf and a kettle. Tonight it's all of you, and a cake we can't afford. Let's enjoy it anyway.

WHO YOU ARE

You grew up between these shelves. When your grandmother died you took over the shop and, quietly, its debts. Morgan Vale has managed the floor for twenty years; you trusted Morgan more than your own accountant.

PEOPLE YOU KNOW

Jules Marlow	keeps the books for you; nervous lately
Sasha Linden	the author whose book keeps the lights on
Avery Hart	rare-book dealer; your grandmother's old friend
Kit Okafor	runs the café counter
Pat Delacroix	book-club president, never late until tonight

Rowan Quire (continued)

YOUR SECRET — KEEP IT UNTIL YOUR CARD SAYS OTHERWISE

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ACT 1 — YOUR GOALS

- ☐ Welcome everyone and read your introduction.
- ☐ Find out what Morgan meant by “the back page.”
- ☐ Keep the loan quiet until Act 2 — but don't lie about where you were.

WHERE YOU WERE FROM 8:44 TO 9:05

You introduced Sasha at 8:45 and stood at the back of the reading room. At 8:53 the doorbell went and you let Pat in; you chatted at the door until 8:56, then walked back to the reading room for the signing.

Rowan: Act 2

Keep this sheet face down until the host starts Act 2.

C17

YOUR ACT 2 CARD

Rowan's evening

You stood at the back of the reading room from 8:45. At 8:53 you let Pat in at the front door and talked there until 8:56, then went back for the signing. You never went near the back stairs.

ACT 2 — YOUR GOALS

- ☐ If anyone asks about the loan, tell the truth: you were going to repay it this winter.
- ☐ Tell the table where you were between 8:45 and 9:05.
- ☐ Decide who had the time to go down the back stairs.

Jules Marlow

Bookkeeper · plays as they/them

READ THIS ALOUD TO INTRODUCE YOURSELF

I'm Jules. I do the books, which means I know exactly what that cake cost. Happy anniversary, everyone. I mean it. Mostly.

WHO YOU ARE

You have kept the shop's accounts for six years. In September you found a mistake you had made in last spring's figures — \$2,300 entered twice — and fixed it without telling Rowan.

PEOPLE YOU KNOW

Rowan Quire	your employer; you owe them the truth about the error
Morgan Vale	spotted your mistake and promised to keep it between you
Kit Okafor	makes your oat latte without asking
Avery Hart	pays late, always with a story

Jules Marlow (continued)

YOUR SECRET — KEEP IT UNTIL YOUR CARD SAYS OTHERWISE

You made a \$2,300 bookkeeping error and corrected it quietly. Morgan knew, and wrote “J. M. — spring figures corrected” on the back page.

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- ☐ Learn what is on the back page without admitting your own line.
- ☐ Watch who keeps glancing at the back stairs.

WHERE YOU WERE FROM 8:44 TO 9:05

At 8:48 you went to the café counter for an oat latte and waited there until Kit called your name at 8:54. You were back in the reading room by 8:56 and asked Sasha a question at 8:58. At 9:03 you said you would hurry Morgan along, went down the back stairs and found Morgan at 9:05.

Jules: Act 2

Keep this sheet face down until the host starts Act 2.

C16

YOUR ACT 2 CARD

What Jules saw

You waited at the café counter from 8:48 until Kit called your name at 8:54. At 9:03 you went down the back stairs to fetch Morgan; you found Morgan on the stockroom floor at 9:05 and shouted for help. The ledger lay open, its back page gone, and the stockroom door frame was smudged where someone had brushed the wet paint.

ACT 2 — YOUR GOALS

- ☐ You found Morgan: tell the table what you saw at 9:05.
- ☐ Say where you were from 8:48 (the café counter).
- ☐ Admit the error if pressed — it is embarrassing, not criminal.

Sasha Linden

Author of “The Lantern Streets” • plays as they/them

READ THIS ALOUD TO INTRODUCE YOURSELF

I’m Sasha. This shop sold my first book when no one else would stock it. Tonight I’m reading chapter three — the one with the shipwreck — and I promise to sign anything you put in front of me.

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PEOPLE YOU KNOW

Morgan Vale	believed in your book before anyone
Pat Delacroix	runs the book club; has never said a kind word about your book
Rowan Quire	host and friend
Avery Hart	collects old harbor maps; wanted to buy your notes

Sasha Linden (continued)

YOUR SECRET — KEEP IT UNTIL YOUR CARD SAYS OTHERWISE

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ACT 1 — YOUR GOALS

- ☐ Read your introduction.
- ☐ Be gracious — and find out who knows about your loan.
- ☐ You were on camera the whole reading: you can say so.

WHERE YOU WERE FROM 8:44 TO 9:05

From 8:45 to 9:03 you read and answered questions at the lectern, live on the shop’s camera, without stepping away. Then you sat down at the signing table in the reading room.

Sasha: Act 2

Keep this sheet face down until the host starts Act 2.

C12

YOUR ACT 2 CARD

What Sasha noticed

When Avery brought a book to the signing table at 9:02, you noticed a smear of wet green paint on Avery's left cuff.

ACT 2 — YOUR GOALS

- ☐ Share what you noticed at the signing table (your Act 2 card).
- ☐ Ask Pat about the anonymous reviews — you have a guess.
- ☐ Decide who could have reached the stockroom.

Avery Hart

Rare-book dealer · plays as they/them

READ THIS ALOUD TO INTRODUCE YOURSELF

Avery Hart, Hart's Rare Books. I've bought and sold this shop's treasures since before some of you could read. Forty years! Morgan promised us a surprise from the first ledger — I can hardly wait.

WHO YOU ARE

Two years ago you took six first editions from the shop on consignment, sold them for a good price, and never paid the shop its \$18,400. Over dessert tonight Morgan leaned over and told you: “I’m reading the back page too. It’s time.”

PEOPLE YOU KNOW

Morgan Vale	discovered the unpaid consignment
Rowan Quire	trusts you because their grandmother did
Sasha Linden	you once offered to buy their research notes
Kit Okafor	gave you a napkin tonight

Avery Hart (continued)

YOUR SECRET — KEEP IT UNTIL YOUR CARD SAYS OTHERWISE

YOU ARE THE CULPRIT. At 8:47 you followed Morgan down the back stairs. In the stockroom you begged Morgan not to read the page; the argument ended Morgan's life. You tore the back page out of the ledger and brushed the wet green paint on the stockroom door frame on the way out. Climbing the back stairs (8:53–8:55) you rang the auction house so your phone would show a call. At 8:57 you bought "A Field Guide to Ferns" at the till to have a bag for the folded page; at 8:58 you asked Kit for a damp napkin.

ACT 1 — YOUR GOALS

- ☐ Read your introduction and act delighted about the anniversary.
- ☐ Steer talk toward Rowan's loan and Jules's nerves.
- ☐ You may lie about the crime — no one else may.

WHERE YOU WERE FROM 8:44 TO 9:05

TRUTH (keep it to yourself): reading room until 8:47; stockroom 8:49–8:53; up the back stairs on the phone 8:53–8:55; at the till by 8:56; bought the fern guide at 8:57; back in the reading room at 8:59. YOUR STORY: "I was outside on a call from 8:48 to 8:56."

Avery: Act 2

Keep this sheet face down until the host starts Act 2.

C15

YOUR ACT 2 CARD

Avery's story

Your story: you stepped outside for a phone call from 8:48 to 8:56.

Your phone's call log shows an outgoing call to the auction house from 8:53 to 8:55 — show it to anyone who asks.

ACT 2 — YOUR GOALS

- ☐ Tell your story from your Act 2 card, and show the call log if anyone asks.
- ☐ Explain the paint as “something on the banister.”
- ☐ Get through the vote without being named.

Kit Okafor

Runs the café counter · plays as they/them

READ THIS ALOUD TO INTRODUCE YOURSELF

Kit Okafor, café counter. If you want something hot and not alcoholic, I'm your person. Tonight's special is a cardamom latte called "The Plot Thickens."

WHO YOU ARE

You have run the shop's café counter for three years and want to buy it outright. Two weeks ago you met Rowan in secret to make an offer — and Morgan walked in on the meeting.

PEOPLE YOU KNOW

Rowan Quire	you made them an offer for the café
Jules Marlow	your most loyal oat-latte customer
Avery Hart	asked you for a napkin at 8:58

YOUR SECRET — KEEP IT UNTIL YOUR CARD SAYS OTHERWISE

You secretly offered to buy the café counter from Rowan. You do not know whether Morgan approved.

Kit Okafor (continued)

ACT 1 — YOUR GOALS

- ☐ Read your introduction.
- ☐ Ask Rowan, casually, whether the shop needs money.
- ☐ Notice who orders what, and when.

WHERE YOU WERE FROM 8:44 TO 9:05

You stayed behind the café counter all evening. You rang up Jules's oat latte at 8:49 and called Jules's name at 8:54.

Kit: Act 2

Keep this sheet face down until the host starts Act 2.

C13

YOUR ACT 2 CARD

What Kit saw

At 8:58 Avery came to your counter and asked for a damp napkin, then scrubbed at a green mark on their sleeve. You also confirm Jules waited at your counter from 8:49 until you called “Jules!” at 8:54.

If no one plays Kit, the host reads this card aloud at the start of Act 2 as Kit’s statement to the police, saying “I” for “you”.

ACT 2 — YOUR GOALS

- ☐ Tell the table about Jules’s latte (8:49 to 8:54).
- ☐ Mention the napkin Avery asked for at 8:58.
- ☐ Help the detectives — you were behind the counter all evening.

Pat Delacroix

President of the Ashmere Book Club · plays as they/them

READ THIS ALOUD TO INTRODUCE YOURSELF

Pat Delacroix, Ashmere Book Club. I am never late; tonight the ferry was. I trust I missed nothing but the cake.

WHO YOU ARE

You have run the book club for eleven years. Under the name “HarborReader” you have posted three one-star reviews of Sasha Linden’s book. You think it is overrated and you resent that the shop displays it everywhere.

PEOPLE YOU KNOW

Sasha Linden	author of the book you secretly panned
Rowan Quire	let you in at 8:53
Morgan Vale	always saved you the best chair

YOUR SECRET — KEEP IT UNTIL YOUR CARD SAYS OTHERWISE

You are “HarborReader,” who posted three anonymous one-star reviews of Sasha’s book.

Pat Delacroix (continued)

ACT 1 — YOUR GOALS

- ☐ Read your introduction.
- ☐ Be politely unimpressed by Sasha's reading.
- ☐ Find out who sat where during the reading.

WHERE YOU WERE FROM 8:44 TO 9:05

The ferry was late. You reached the shop at 8:53; Rowan let you in and you talked at the front door until 8:56, then went through to the reading room.

Pat: Act 2

Keep this sheet face down until the host starts Act 2.

C14

YOUR ACT 2 CARD

What Pat heard

Rowan let you in at 8:53 and stayed talking with you at the door until 8:56. At about 8:55, standing in the doorway, you heard quick footsteps and a low voice coming up the back stairs — you saw only a dark sleeve turn toward the front till.

If no one plays Pat, the host reads this card aloud at the start of Act 2 as Pat's statement to the police, saying "I" for "you".

ACT 2 — YOUR GOALS

- ☐ Say when you arrived: Rowan let you in at 8:53 and you chatted at the door until 8:56.
- ☐ Mention what you heard from the door at about 8:55 (your Act 2 card).
- ☐ If Sasha guesses your secret, admit it with dignity.

Act 1 evidence

The scene and the back page

Cut out these five cards and lay them face up in the middle of the table at the start of Act 1.

C1

DOCUMENT

Tonight's running order

QUIRE & LANTERN — 40 YEARS

7:00 Doors and supper

8:30 Toasts

8:45 Sasha Linden reads from "The Lantern Streets" (live on the shop's camera)

9:00 Questions

9:05 Signing in the reading room

9:15 Morgan reads from Ledger No. 1 — the anniversary surprise

C2

DOCUMENT

Morgan's last message

Text from Morgan Vale to Rowan Quire, 8:48 PM:

"Found the old ledger. Up in five — and I'm reading the back page too. Time they all heard it."

C3

DOCUMENT

Police notebook, 9:20 PM

Jules Marlow found Morgan Vale in the stockroom at 9:05 PM and shouted for help. The officers say Morgan's death was no accident. Ledger No. 1 lay open on the table; its back page had been torn out. The stockroom's alley door was bolted on the inside: the only way in was down the back stairs beside the reading room.

Act 1 evidence (continued)

C4

PHYSICAL EVIDENCE

Sign on the stockroom door

FRESH PAINT

Door frame painted green this afternoon. Wet until midnight — mind your sleeves!

(Only the stockroom door frame was painted. The stockroom stayed locked all evening until Morgan unlocked it at 8:44 to fetch the ledger.)

C5

PHYSICAL EVIDENCE

What pressed through from the back page

The torn page was written hard enough to leave marks on the page underneath. Rubbed with a pencil, it reads:

PRIVATE ACCOUNTS — M.V.

R.Q. — \$12,000, personal loan, spring

J.M. — spring figures corrected (\$2,300)

S.L. — \$7,500 advance, lent by the shop

A.H. — 6 first eds. on consignment — unpaid \$18,400

Act 2 evidence

Where everyone was

Cut out these six cards and lay them face up in the middle of the table at the start of Act 2.

C6

DOCUMENT

The shop's live camera log

8:45	Rowan Quire introduces Sasha Linden.
8:45–9:03	Sasha reads, then answers questions, at the lectern; Sasha never leaves the picture.
8:58	Question from Jules Marlow (“Will there be a sequel?”).
9:03	Jules: “I’ll go and hurry Morgan along.” Stream ends.

C7

DOCUMENT

The volunteer photographer's log

8:44	Morgan Vale heads down the back stairs to fetch Ledger No. 1, alone.
8:46	Reading room, back row: Rowan, Jules, Avery.
8:50	Reading room, back row: Rowan. (Jules's and Avery's chairs empty.)
8:58	Reading room, back row: Rowan and Pat; Jules standing to ask a question. (Avery's chair empty.)
9:02	Signing table: Sasha signing; in the queue Rowan, Jules, Pat, Avery.

C8

DOCUMENT

Café counter tickets

- Order 38 — cardamom latte — rung up by KIT 8:44 PM
- Order 41 — oat latte, name JULES — rung up by KIT 8:49 PM — collected 8:54 PM
- Order 42 — mint tea — rung up by KIT 8:58 PM
- Order 43 — hot chocolate — rung up by KIT 9:01 PM

Act 2 evidence (continued)

C9

DOCUMENT

Front-door camera

The shop was locked for the private supper, and the front door is the only way in or out of the shop floor (the café counter has no outside door). The front-door camera records it opening only three times all evening:

7:00 PM guests arrive.

8:53 PM Rowan Quire opens the door for Pat Delacroix; they talk in the doorway.

8:56 PM Rowan and Pat walk toward the reading room.

(Next opening: 9:12 PM, the police.)

C10

DOCUMENT

Shop till receipt #2207

QUIRE & LANTERN BOOKS — 8:57 PM

A Field Guide to Ferns \$24.00

Paid by card: A. HART

Bagged at the till.

C11

PHYSICAL EVIDENCE

Found during the bag check, 9:40 PM

The police looked in every bag before anyone left. Folded inside the paper bag that held “A Field Guide to Ferns” was a page torn from Ledger No. 1. Its torn edge matches the stub left in the ledger.

Detective notes

Who could have gone down the back stairs between 8:44 and 9:05?

SUSPECT	MOTIVE (BACK PAGE)	SEEN WHERE, AND WHEN?	CLUES FOR OR AGAINST
Rowan Quire			
Jules Marlow			
Sasha Linden			
Avery Hart			
Kit Okafor			
Pat Delacroix			

TIMELINE — TICK WHERE EACH PERSON WAS

WHO	8:44	8:48	8:50	8:53	8:56	8:58	9:02	9:05
Rowan								
Jules								
Sasha								
Avery								
Kit								
Pat								

MY ACCUSATION

Who killed Morgan Vale?

Why? (the motive)

Two clues that prove it: C ____ C ____

Your name _____

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Who killed Morgan Vale?

Why? (the motive)

Two clues that prove it: C ____ C ____

Your name _____

MY ACCUSATION

Who killed Morgan Vale?

Why? (the motive)

Two clues that prove it: C ____ C ____

Your name _____

The solution

Read it aloud after the ballots.

STOP

Open this only after every ballot is in. Fold this page and the next one shut along the middle until then.

WHAT HAPPENED

Avery Hart did it. Two years ago Avery took six first editions from the shop on consignment, sold them, and never paid the shop its \$18,400. Morgan found out and wrote it on the back page of Ledger No. 1, beside everyone else's private debts. Over dessert Morgan told Avery the back page would be read aloud tonight. At 8:44 Morgan went down to the stockroom; at 8:47 Avery slipped down the back stairs after them. They argued, and it ended Morgan's life. Avery tore the back page out, brushed the wet green paint on the door frame on the way out, and rang the auction house while climbing the back stairs (8:53–8:55) so the phone would show a call. At 8:57 Avery bought "A Field Guide to Ferns" to have a bag to carry the folded page out of the shop. At 8:58 Avery asked Kit for a damp napkin to scrub the green off a sleeve, and was back in the signing queue by 9:02. The call was real — it just was not made on the street.

THE PROOF, STEP BY STEP

1. Morgan was alive at 8:48 and found dead at 9:05, so the crime happened between 8:48 and 9:05 — in the stockroom, which can only be reached by the back stairs. (Even if someone else sent that 8:48 text, Morgan went down alive at 8:44, and every step below still holds from 8:44.) [C2, C3, C7]
2. Sasha was on the live camera at the lectern from 8:45 to 9:03, then at the signing table: never free. [C6, C7]
3. Rowan is in the 8:46 and 8:50 photos, at the front door from 8:53 to 8:56 on the door camera, and in the 8:58 and 9:02 photos. No gap is long enough to walk two minutes down, act, and come back. [C7, C9, C6]
4. Jules is in the 8:46 photo, at the café counter at 8:49 and 8:54 (tickets), asks a question on camera at 8:58, is in the 9:02 photo, and goes down at 9:03 to find Morgan at 9:05. No gap is long enough. [C7, C8, C6, C3]
5. The café tickets put Kit at the counter at 8:44, 8:49, 8:54 (Jules's latte collected), 8:58 and 9:01: never away long enough. Pat was outside the locked shop until Rowan let them in at 8:53, then in the doorway until 8:56 and in the 8:58 and 9:02 photos. [C8, C9, C7]
6. Avery is in the 8:46 photo, missing from the 8:50 photo, and next appears at the front till at 8:57: eleven unaccounted minutes, enough to go down, act and come back. Avery's "phone call outside" cannot be true: the door camera shows the locked front door opening only for Pat at 8:53, and a call log shows a call, not a place. [C7, C10, C9, C15]
7. Two independent pieces of evidence tie Avery to the stockroom: the torn back page was found inside the bag from Avery's 8:57 purchase, and wet green paint from the stockroom door frame was on Avery's cuff (seen by Sasha at 9:02; Kit saw Avery scrub it off at 8:58). [C11, C12, C13, C4]
8. Motive: the back page recorded the \$18,400 Avery never paid for six consigned first editions (C5). Motive alone proves nothing — everyone on the page had one — but only Avery had the time and the paint and the page. [C5]

The solution (continued)

WHY NOT THE OTHERS

Rowan Quire	Rowan had a motive (the \$12,000 loan) but is accounted for all evening: 8:45 on camera, 8:46 and 8:50 photos, the front door 8:53–8:56, the 8:58 and 9:02 photos.
Jules Marlow	Jules found Morgan, which looks bad, and had a small motive (a corrected error). But the café tickets put Jules at the counter at 8:49 and 8:54, the camera at 8:58 and 9:03, and the 9:05 discovery leaves no time to act.
Sasha Linden	Sasha had a motive (the \$7,500 loan) but read live on camera from 8:45 to 9:03 without leaving the picture.
Kit Okafor	Kit’s secret offer for the café is not on the back page, and the café tickets keep Kit behind the counter at 8:44, 8:49, 8:54, 8:58 and 9:01.
Pat Delacroix	Pat’s anonymous reviews are a secret but not a motive, and Pat was outside the locked shop until 8:53.

RED HERRINGS

- Jules found Morgan, and finding the body always looks suspicious — but Jules’s time is accounted for from 8:46 to 9:05.
- Avery’s phone call log (8:53–8:55) is real, but it shows that a call was made, not where Avery stood.
- Pat heard someone on the back stairs at 8:55 but saw only a sleeve: suggestive, not proof.

BEST DETECTIVE

Anyone who named Avery Hart with two clues that really prove it wins Best Detective: the page in the fern-guide bag (C11), the green paint on Avery’s sleeve (C12 or C13), or the eleven unaccounted minutes between the 8:46 photo and the 8:57 receipt (C7 with C10). A right name with the wrong reasons earns a lucky-guess cheer.