

## CURTAINS IN THE CAYS

The Sulzar family was having breakfast on a cool fall morning in the Coronado Cays. Ryan, 19 and home from college due to the COVID-19 pandemic, noticed that his mother Ann was missing from the breakfast table, which was weird as she was usually the first person out of bed. Gary, Ann's husband of 22 years, went upstairs to their bedroom to check on his wife. She looked to be resting peacefully, which seemed odd to him because she was always a restless and noisy sleeper. The family would joke that the only thing louder than the aircraft landing at the navy base was Ann's snoring. Gary's heart began to pound as he reached for his wife's wrist. He felt nothing, no pulse. The only noticeable injury was a small puncture wound near her temple which had some dried blood around it. Ann was dead.

The authorities later placed her death at about three in the morning. The murder weapon, the icepick from the family boat docked beside the Sulzar home, was found outside under Ryan's

bedroom window. Ann would have died quickly from the strike. There was no blood at the scene other than what was on her temple. The police questioned everyone in the house: Gary, Marie, their 17-year-old daughter, Ryan, and Linda, Ann's widowed sister who lived alone in Imperial Beach. When the stay at home order was issued, Linda decided she would stay with Anne and her family during the quarantine to not be completely alone. Plus, Linda never needed a reason to see Gary.

Linda and Gary had known each other for a long time, in fact Ann had met Gary through Linda. Linda had had feelings for Gary since they met. And he had always flirted with Linda, even after he married her sister. While Ann and Gary seemed to have a happy relationship, neither one was particularly in love with the other. They stayed together for the now mostly grown children, but he often thought of Linda and what could have been. Linda, too, often thought of what life would have been like if she had married Gary instead of Paul. Paul was an awful husband. In fact,

she always seemed more relieved than saddened after Paul died of an apparent suicide five years ago.

Autumn gave way to winter and Gary called a family meeting in the living room. The attendees were Gary, Marie and Ryan, who both sat on the couch, and Linda in her sister's favorite recliner. After Ann's death, Linda had quietly returned to Imperial Beach, distraught and unaccompanied. Gary had asked her to return to the Cays for this meeting.

Gary stood and addressed the small gathering, "One of us murdered Ann." He hated having to do this to his children, but the police had no leads and unless one of them could remember something about that night, there would be no justice for Ann. "Did anyone see or hear anything out of the ordinary that night?" he asked the family. Everyone looked at each other but no one could think of anything that was abnormal about the evening. Ryan was the first to answer. Standing up, he said "I was playing video games in my room until about one in the morning. When I

left my room, all the lights were out in the house and I assumed everyone was asleep. I came down here and watched a movie. I went to bed around 3 or so. Like I told the cops, I don't know how the icepick ended up outside my window." "Weren't you on the boat that day?" asked Marie. "Just for like a second, I left my headset in the cabin and needed them for my game," he replied. This was a lie. He had been sneaking on the boat daily to drink the liquor and beer that the family kept there. Ann found him there the afternoon before she died and told him she was going to tell his father. He pleaded with her not to and promised to stop drinking if she kept the secret. She relented and promised to keep this secret if Ryan never drank at the house or on the boat again. After telling this fabrication, he sat back down.

Marie rolled her eyes and stood, "I was texting with my friend Courtney and was on TikTok all night. I probably went to sleep at about 3:30 after I heard Ryan finish his movie and come upstairs." Gary gave his daughter a cold stare as he and Ann had told her

several times that they didn't want her to be up so late on her phone. "Remind me to talk to you later about that blasted phone young lady," said Gary. Marie gave her father a guilty look and slunk back into the couch. Gary turned to Linda and asked, "What about you?"

"I turned in at midnight and never left the guest room," she said through a thin smile. "I heard Ryan watching a movie and thought about joining him, but I realized he was watching some horror film with all kinds of screaming and blood. I hate all that violent scary stuff, you know that. What I didn't hear was anything coming from your room, Gary." Linda gave Gary a hostile look.

Gary replied, "I was in bed at 11:30. I woke up briefly when I heard Ryan come back upstairs but went back to sleep. We were both deep asleep after that I suppose. I didn't notice anything peculiar in the morning as I'm usually bleary-eyed until my morning coffee."

“I need a break!” shouted Marie and ran upstairs with her phone. Marie sat on her bed staring at the device in her hand. Marie’s life was her phone, her only connection to the outside world during the pandemic. One could rightfully say she was addicted to it. Marie started thinking about the night of her mother’s murder. The two had a fight over her grades, and Ann told her that if they didn’t improve, she’d take her phone again. “Do you want me to be a social outcast? I’d die without my phone!” Marie yelled at her mother. “Everyone is online! I NEED MY PHONE!”

After a while Gary called for the meeting to resume, and everyone came back to the living room.



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