

Murder in straight sets

The story is set in the late nineteen sixties, in the days when Wimbledon was ceasing to be amateur. The Mount Pleasant Tennis Club was formerly mostly social, but Brian has encouraged an interest in local leagues and has raised the standard of play to new heights, coaching the younger players. He has plans to improve the facilities and introduce all-weather courts for close-season practice. He is also keen to open membership to encourage a meritocracy of players.

For props the following are required:

Tennis racket (with press), old-style cassette recorder, large handbag, bucket for line-marking paint
box of Beacham's Powders

Brian Taylor:

I am the Tennis Club Captain – I hope that everyone appreciates the work I do. When I joined this club it was mostly just social, and membership was only for people of the better sort. I have opened the club up to less wealthy but better players. Now we are top of the mens and womens leagues. At the moment I am coming down with a cold.

Claudia Gibson-Hope:

I am the Club Secretary, and am the ex-captain of ladies, from a time when we only allowed the better sort in. Frankly I would rather resign than let the hoi-polloi through the club gates. My son, Henry, plays in the mens team.

Jennifer Balderstone:

I am the current Ladies Captain and work closely with Brian. Recently I have become rather fond of the young mens Captain, Colin Tranter. My day job is as a Pharmacist in the town.

Colin Tranter:

I have just become mens Captain, despite being the son of a cabby and coming from a council estate. Without wishing to boast, I am the star player in the club, but I am still not socially acceptable to Claudia and Henry. Recently I had an approach from an agent who wants me to turn professional.

Henry Gibson-Hope:

I am the Fixtures Secretary and a member of the men's team. Whilst I may not be as good a player as Colin, Brian has been coaching me and I have come on very well. My girlfriend is Tara Simpson, who plays for the Ladies Team. Her father is a property developer looking for land near here.

Harold White:

I am the Groundsman and green-keeper and have worked here over twenty years. In a few years I shall be retiring. The grass courts are my pride and joy, and I would not like them replaced by hard courts.

Tara Simpson:

I am the best player on the ladies team, but the social demands mean that I have not been doing much training recently. My boyfriend, Henry plays for the Men's Team. If we had a bit more money, we could get married.

Lizzie Brown:

I play for the ladies team when I can and really enjoy the atmosphere of the club. There are times I cannot get to some matches because of my job as a Detective Constable with the local force.

Scene 1

Claudia: It really is TOO much. All these changes. I mean, Brian is a wonderful chairman in so many ways, but he does seem set on turning everything upside-down.

Henry: Yes, mummy, he has certainly turned the club around. Before he became chairman we were more of a social club than a tennis club. Now we are top of the league, and have a healthy waiting list. But I really don't like what he's done about letting in those awful people from the council estate. I know there are some good players, but they are really not quite our sort.

Claudia: You know I'd rather see the club closed than let people like those in. Tennis is supposed to be for people with a certain social status. This is the thin end of the wedge, and I am going to tell Brian to change the membership rules. Either that or I resign.

Henry: But mummy, you're not Ladies Captain any more. What can you resign from?

Claudia: I can resign my membership, and a lot of people would follow me.

Henry: Oh, don't do that. I'll have to resign as well, and you know how much I am enjoying my tennis. Brian really is an excellent coach, and my game has really come on in the last couple of years. I used to be a bit of a duffer, and now I'm quite good.

Claudia: Its about more than just tennis. One has to maintain certain standards.

Henry: Perhaps if we were to move the club to a better area, a bit further out of town we would attract a better sort of person. And this bit of land must be worth a good deal. I'm sure we could get more land, more courts and a better club-house if we sold it at the right price. In fact I know someone who might be interested in a bit of re-development.

Claudia: But it would not have the tradition we have here. And the suburbs are so full of the lower middle classes. Besides, I understand that Brian has his own plans for the courts. He's planning to turn the main courts over to a hard surface. That won't please our Mr White. He is very proud of his grass is Harold.

Henry: I think we have to move with the times. We could play a lot more games on hard courts that we can on grass.

Claudia: The game is called Lawn Tennis, not Tarmac Tennis!

Henry: Well, unless we move to bigger grounds it makes a lot of sense to me.

[Jennifer and Lizzie enter SR]

Jennifer: Oh, hello Claudia, Henry. Hows things?

Henry: Oh, pretty good. Must go and change, practice for the match on Saturday. I'm playing the second singles. I'm going to try out my new raquet. Its the same as Rod Laver uses.

Lizzie: Is it a left-handed raquet?

Henry: What?, Oh yes, good joke that. [He exits SR]

Scene 2

Jennifer: I'm glad that you are here, Cluadia. I want to pick your brains about the ladies team for Saturday.

Claudia: Well, I do know a bit about team selection. Glad to help if I can.

Jennifer: Its about Tara. Her form has really dipped recently, and she has failed to turn up for training. I know she is supposed to be our best player, but she realy has a bad attitude in the doubles, always blaming her partner and not really taking responsibility. I'm thinking of dropping her for a couple of games and maybe giving her a bit of a kick up the backside.

Claudia: Don't be coarse, Jennifer. You are Ladies Captain now, and it must be your responsibility to make these decisions. If you think that success is your measure, by all means drop her. But she does come from a very good family.

Lizzie: We were wondering if she has some problems that we don't know about, and what with

Henry being her boyfriend, we thought he might have told you something.

Claudia: I'm sure I would never tell any such details, even if such confidences had been made to me, which they haven't.

Jennifer: Well, I think I will drop her. Lizzie here can open the singles. You're not on duty on Saturday, are you Lizzie?

Lizzie: No it's my day off, and I would be glad to play. It's such a good way of relaxing after work.

Claudia: In my days young women didn't have jobs, especially not in the Police.

Lizzie: But I have to earn a living, and I am very good at my job. I'm doing the Sergeant's exams next month. If I pass, which I will, that would make me the first female detective sergeant in the district.

Jennifer: I don't believe that Claudia thinks it a suitable job for a woman.

Scene 3

Claudia: I am much more upset about the way that Brian is managing the club. I need to have a serious word with him.

Lizzie: Well, here he comes now.

[Brian enters stage left, from his office]

Brian: Hello, ladies. Oh, good, Jennifer. I don't suppose you have something for a cold and a headache. I'm beginning to feel decidedly rough, and I have several things to deal with before I go home.

Jennifer: I'll fetch you a Beacham's powder; I'm certain to have some in my bag.

[Jennifer exits stage right]

Claudia: Now, Brian, I want a word with you about these new courts.

Brian: Ah, so you heard. Well I was trying to keep it a bit quiet until I had a word with Harold. It does affect him most, you see.

Claudia: Well I think it is entirely against the traditions of the game.

Lizzie: But hard courts would allow us to practice even out of season. That would help us with the league.

Claudia: As I keep saying to people, there is more to tennis than winning. Tennis is part of my way of life, and I am getting rather angry about the way this club is going.

Brian: Well, Claudia, perhaps you could tell me what is worrying you, and I'll try to put your mind at rest.

Claudia: Well, for one thing, I don't like hearing cockney accents around the place, it really lowers the tone of the whole place.

Brian: Do you mean Colin? I know he's father is a cab driver, but he is really very well spoken.

Claudia: Well, I for one think that breeding will out. And now you have started this scheme to bring in the youths from the council estate. They really have no idea how to behave; no respect for their elders and their betters.

Brian: Well some of them may be a bit lively, I grant you, but we'll soon knock the rough edges off of them, and the youth team has never been better. There is a lot of talent coming through, which is good news for the future of this club.

Claudia: And what is this obsession with winning all the time? I was taught that it was the taking part that was important.

Brian: Well, what with Wimbledon allowing in the professionals, I think that we have to recognise that tennis is changing, even in the most traditional places.

Claudia: I don't care what other people do, I want this place to have some sense of tradition and shared values. If that means your kind of progress, I warn you that I shall not put up with it. I give you fair warning, I am not someone to be trifled with. [She storms out SR]

Brian: Well, that went well!

Lizzie: Don't worry about her, she's a dreadful old snob. Perhaps you can get her to resign.

Brian: But I don't want her to take Henry with her, and he's a real mummy's boy. He's come on so well this year I reckon he will make a useful player.

Lizzie: But not in Colin's league, eh?

Brian: Well who is? He was asking me if I thought he could turn professional. He is still inexperienced, but I think he might make it. I had hoped that he would keep playing for us for a few more years, but if he decides to turn pro I will do my best to help him.

[Jennifer enters SR, carrying a box of Beecham's powders]

Jennifer: Here you are, Brian. This should do the trick. [She hands Brian the package]

Brian: Thanks, Jennifer, its sometimes useful having a pharماسist around. And my head is really pounding now. Claudia has been turning on her usual charm.

Lizzie: We were just talking about Colin turning professional.

Jennifer: I know, he was talking about it to me. It would be a great loss to the club if he were to go.

Lizzie: Have you been seeing much of him recently?

Jennifer: As much as time will allow. He's a very sweet boy, far too young for me really. If he turns professional then I imagine he will move away.

Lizzie: And how do you feel about that?

Jennifer: Well, I have grown very fond of him, but it had to end sometime I suppose. I shall be very sad if he leaves.

Brian: I've said I will help him if I can, but I think he needs a bit more experience first, a bit more coaching. Not that there is much that I can teach him. Lets hope that he will decide to stay on for a little while. Look, I think I'll get some water and take the medicine. I've got Harold coming round in a minute to discuss the new courts.

Jennifer: Are you sure that you really need to take that medicine, I mean you shouldn't take medicine if you're not sick.

Brian: No, I really am going down with this cold quite badly. [He goes into the office, SL]

Lizzie: Come on, Jennifer, time for a bit of practice.

[Jennifer and Lizzie leave SR]

Scene 4

[Harold comes in carrying a bucket of line-marking paint, which he places in the corner, shaking his head in sorrow. He then goes up to the office, SL and coughs. Brian emerges from the office]

Harold: You wanted to see me.

Brian: Yes, Harold. I've been meaning to have a word with you. I've been thinking about getting the main courts paved over to have an all-weather surface, and I wanted to know what you feel about it.

Harold: Pave the main courts?

Brian: Yes, turn them into hard courts.

Harold: But what about my beautiful grass? It takes years to get a decent bit of turf. Sowing, weeding, watering, cutting and rolling. You can't get a surface like that without it taking years. Can't get a true bounce.

Brian: Yes its a lot of hard work, I know. How long is it before you intend to retire, Harold?

Harold: I stayed on past retirement age already.

Brian: Wouldn't it be easier for you if you didn't have to do all that mowing and rolling?

Harold: Of course it would, but I wanted to leave that grass and pass it on to someone else, sort of to show just how good I was, a sort of a legacy, if you like.

Brian: Now look, Harold, this hasn't been decided yet, I've still got to take it to the committee, but I would like to know that I am not causing you too much difficulty. You could take on lighter duties, and the court lines would still need marking up.

Harold: I can't believe it. I put my heart and soul into getting those courts just about perfect and you just up and tell me that you are going to dig them all up.

Brian: I told you, nothing has been decided yet, and there is bound to be a lot of opposition to the

plan. I just wanted to include you in what is going on.

Harold: And here's another thing, someone has been messing about with the line paint, been putting something funny in it. You have to be very careful what you use so as not to kill the grass. I've brought the bucket in to show you . It smells funny.

Brian: Is it that bucket over there?

Harold: Yes, its wrong, somehow. You get to know these things.

[Brian goes over to the bucket, stirs it and smell it]

Brian: Sorry, Harold, but I've got a cold, and I can't smell a thing. But leave it with me and I'll get someone to sort it out. Is there anything else you can be getting on with?

Harold: Oh, there's always work to be done. Those young scamps have left the nets up and wound too tight. And the netting around number three court needs a bit of repair.

[Brian comes back to the table]

Brian: Well, if you would like to think about what I said about those hard courts, and how much easier it would be for you, I'll keep you informed about any decision the committee makes.

Harold: When does the committee meet, then?

Brian: This evening. I'll tell you the result tomorrow.

Harold: Before I go, Mr Brian, are those french windows in your office opening alright now?.

Brian: Perfectly, thak you, Harold, but I have not used them yet.

Harold: Thank you, Mr Brian, well, I'll get on with those repairs, now.

[Harold exits SR, Brian goes into office, SL]

Scene 5

[Henry enters with Tara SR. He is carrying a new raquet in a press]

Tara: I can't believe it, dropping me like that. All I did was miss a couple of training sessions. I mean, I do have to have a life outside. And its a dreadful decision for the league; I'm easily the best player. Its absolutely beastly. And after the favours that I've done for her.

Henry: Its only for a couple of games, Tara sweetheart, you just need to show willing.

Tara: Show willing! Being talked to like that by that ghastly Jennifer. The woman is a pharmacist for heaven's sake. What would she know about the season? I am coming out this year. Its not like I can spend all my time at a second rate tennis club.

Henry: I shall have a word with my mother, make sure they understand what is happening.

Tara: I blame Brian for this. It was so much better before he came here. All these changes he has made, its ruined the whole nature of this club. Promoting that harridan, Jennifer to women's captain, and bringing in that ghastly oik, Colin.

Henry: He is a good coach, though, and a good manager. He even manages to calm my mother, sometimes.

Tara: I'd like to kill him, he's a hateful man.

Henry: But the team is doing very well. And he has plans for the club, though your father seems interested in getting hold of this land for development and re-locating the club out from the town. He doesn't seem interested though, which is a pity, because your father thinks it could earn us a lot of money. He sticks to his plans, does Brian. Oh, and by the way, can I borrow your cassette recorder? There's a Procul Harem concert on the radio tonight.

Tara: How can you defend Brian? You know he is planning to bring in some other players from the juniors. Our little friends from the council estate. If he gets his way, your days will be numbered too. And you can't borrow the cassette recorder. Someone's already borrowed it. And if Brian gets his way he'll probably make up the whole team with people like Colin!

Henry: He wouldn't do that! I've been really loyal to him, and I'm not a bad player, you know.

Tara: There is a boy in the juniors, Kevin – eughh! What a dreadful name. He is Brian's little favourite, and he's doing really well. You'd better watch your back. Brian is not one for sentiment when it comes to results.

Henry: Kevin? But he is an absolute horror. Talk about bad attitude. You should have heard him swear when his partner double-faulted. Talk about bad language, and he was so cheeky to poor old Harold. What a dreadful prospect!

Tara: And Brian would put him in the team like a flash. Its bad enough having that dreadful Colin around.

Henry: Oh, Colin's not so bad, most of the time. But I wanted to ask you about when we might get married.

Tara: Well, Daddy says that if you were to prove helpful in getting his development plans going he might look a bit more favourably on you.

Henry: You know Brian will never agree to moving the club. I would have to find some way of getting rid of him before we can get any development plans underway. And there is no guarantee of getting planning permission even then.

Tara: Oh, don't worry about that, Daddy has a few friends on the council who owe him some favours. And I'm sure I can think of a few ways to get rid of Brian. But, Henry, its probably best that you don't know the details.

[Colin enters SR]

Colin: Hello Henry, hello Tara, sorry to hear that you've been dropped.

Tara: Hateful of you, gloating like that! I'm not staying here to be insulted. [She storms out SR]

Scene 6

Colin: Ooops! I seem to have put my foot in it there. Sorry about that, Henry.

Henry: I don't think she like you very much. Oh, and have you seen my new raquet? Its just like the one Rod Laver uses.

Colin: I wish I could afford a new raquet, my old one has gone past it's best. The frame is starting to get a bit warped.

Henry: I understand that they are coming out with some new frames made of aluminium or fibre-glass. There is no chance of them warping.

Colin: Well there is certainly no chance of me being able to afford one of those. I'll just have to hope the press keeps the old raquet in reasonable shape. In the meantime I want a word about the fixture on Saturday against Harrow Hill.

Henry: Am I still doing the second singles?

Colin: How would you like to do the doubles instead?

Henry: You're not thinking of bringing in Kevin, are you?

Colin: I thought I'd like to try him out. He 's very promising, you know.

Henry: Brian's the Mens Captain. Is that his decision?

Colin: He's giving me a bit more responsibility about team selection. I think he wants to keep me at the club. I've had an approach from another club in a higher league, with a few benefits, if you know what I mean.

Henry: You mean thay are offering you expenses? If I was to report that to Brian you would lose your amateur status.

Colin: Brian already knows. What I really want to do is turn professional, but Brian seems to be getting in my way, he seems to think I'm not quite ready, or at least that is his excuse. He just wants me to stay and play for this little club. But I can't just stand still, I haven't got a good job or anything, and I need to earn a living at something I'm good at. And If I leave we will need to have players who have already got some first team experience.

Henry: If you go, there will be more chances for me to play.

Colin: You'd better take that up with Brian. I'm not sure I want to talk to him, if he's going to get in my way. All I will say is that you need to improve a bit. Just remember that coaching will only take you so far. Without a bit of talent you will never be much good, even with a tennis raquet like Ken Rosewall's.

Henry: That's Rod Laver, and you really are a rotter, Colin. You won't let anyone get in your way, will you? I've had enough of your company for now. [He flounces off SR]

Scene 7

[Jennifer enters SR – she goes to Colin and kisses him]

Jennifer: Hello darling.

Colin: Hello, Jennifer.

Jennifer: [Sounding hurt] What's the matter? You seem so cold towards me.

Colin: I was just thinking about my future.

Jennifer: But not our future?

Colin: About my turning professional, if you must know.

Jennifer: Would that mean you moving away?

Colin: That depends. Brian has said that he will help me, but I think he really wants me to stay.

Jennifer: But he won't get in your way if you decide to turn professional.

Colin: That's what he said, but I'm not sure if I can trust him.

Jennifer: I thought he was helping you, that he had arranged for an agent to see you.

Colin: But he would rather that I stayed a year, and he has said that he thinks that I am not quite ready. Maybe he has my best interests at heart, or maybe he is just thinking about the club. As it happens, I'm not even sure that it matters, another agent has approached me.

Jennifer: But I was certain that Colin was arranging it.

Colin: No, its nothing to do with Colin. Anyway, I'll have to decide whether to leave now or at the end of the season. I think the agent Brian knows is better than the one who came to me. He seemed a bit of a shark. But I could do with some money now.

Jennifer: But, darling, I could help you out. I have some money saved.

Colin: That is very kind, but I really can't accept. You know that would put me in your debt.

Jennifer: I don't mind

Colin: But I do. Listen, Jennifer, I'm not sure we should be seeing each other anymore. There has been quite a lot of talk, and you are a bit older than me.

Jennifer: So you are dumping me, then. Had your fun and now you are leaving. Well I can certainly do without you.

[Lizzie enters SR]

Lizzie: Hello you two. Oops, hope I'm not interrupting anything.

Jennifer: Not at all. I must go and see if Brian is alright now.

[Jennifer goes out SL to Brian's office, carrying her bag]

Lizzie: Jennifer seemed a little upset.

Colin: Yes, I suppose so. We had a little fling, you see, and I've just stopped it. I thought it was just a bit of fun, but she was taking it a bit seriously.

Scene 8

[Claudia enters SR and marches up to confront Colin]

Claudia: Ah, Colin, still with us, I see.

Colin: No, I disappeared completely. Of course I am still here!

Claudia: There's no need to take that tone of voice with me. I want a word about you getting my son out of the next singles. I don't like your attitude, and I don't like your manner.

Colin: So Henry has gone running to mummy, has he?

Claudia: No, it was Tara who told me about your plans.

Colin: It may have escaped your attention, but you are not Women's Captain anymore. If you have any problems, I suggest that you take them up with Brian.

Claudia: Right, I shall. [She starts off towards the office]

Lizzie: Jennifer is in there with Brian, but I'm sure that she will be out in a minute.

[Jennifer emerges from the office, without the bag]

Brian: [voice off-stage]: I've said I will help him if I can, but I think he needs a bit more experience first, a bit more coaching. Not that there is much that I can teach him. Lets hope that he will decide to stay on for a little while. Look, I think I'll get some water and take the medicine. I've got Harold coming round in a minute to discuss the new courts.

Jennifer: Well, make sure not to take too much.

Claudia: Brian, I want a word with you.

Jennifer: Could you just give him a minute, he's not feeling very well.

Claudia: He'll feel a whole lot worse after I've spoken to him.

Jennifer: Have a bit of sympathy, Claudia, Brian has to run every aspect of this club, he's very busy.

Claudia: I will not be fobbed off like that, I'm going in!

[Claudia goes in office SR and returns a moment later, looking shocked with hand over mouth, suppressing a scream]

Lizzie: What is it, Claudia?

Claudia: Its Brian, He's dead.

Jennifer: Let me see! [She rushes in, then returns carrying her bag] He's been hit on the head. I think this is your job now, Lizzie. [Jennifer and Lizzie both go into the office]

Claudia: Oh, my God! Who could have done it?

Colin: Well, you were the last one to go in there.

Claudia: But why would I want to murder Brian?

[Jennifer comes back out of the office, still carrying the bag]

Jennifer: He was hit over the head with a racket, with the press still on.

Colin: It must have been Claudia. Brian was still talking until just before, and the only other way in or out of the office are the French Windows, and they haven't been opened in years.

[Lizzie comes back out of the office, looking concerned]

Lizzie: Jennifer is right, he was hit over the head with a raquet, but I think that he was already dead when that happened, as there is not enough blood on the raquet press.

End of Act 1

Act 2

Lizzie: While we are waiting here for the inspector, I thought that I would go through some procedures, as a sort of practice for my sergeant's exams. If anyone has any objections, I will stop right now.

Colin: I've got no problems with that, but don't you think that there is a conflict of interest here. You have to be as much a suspect as any of us.

Lizzie: That is a very good point. In fact, if anyone has anything to say about there suspicions about me, please let me know as I go through the questions. And I don't see the point of questioning everyone separately, so let us all stay in here.

Claudia: I want to state from the beginning that I only agree to this charade for the good of the club, and to get it sorted out before the inspector comes.

Tara: I think that you are speaking for us all, Claudia.

Lizzie: Right, lets get on with this. What we have to work out is how the crime was committed. From the time Jennifer left the room there was only a very short time before Claudia discovered the body. There were two ways into the office, the door here and the french windows that face the courts. The french windows were locked, but the key was not in the lock. I've never known those

windows open. Does anyone know anything about those windows?

Harold: I oiled the hinges and locks last week. Mr Brian wanted to be able to use them to get to the courts quickly.

Claudia: Or to avoid me!

Lizzie: So who had a key to the french windows?

Harold: Mr Brian had one in his office drawer. But there are probably several copies of the key around. Those doors have been there longer than I have been at the club. You know how these things work, somewhat gets a copy of the key and never returns it.

Lizzie: You've been at the club a long time, Claudia, do you have a copy of the key?

Claudia: So what if I do. I had no idea that the french windows were being used again. As far as I was concerned the lock was rusted up.

Lizzie: But you know where your copy of the key is?

Claudia: Of course, I have always made a point of labelling all keys and keeping them in a safe place. But I have not touched that key for at least a decade.

Lizzie: Well lets presume that you are being honest, and lets discuss the timing of the murder. Now you were only in the office a few seconds, so you could not have hit him during that time, and we would have heard you if you did. On the other hand, you would not be likely to be the murderer if you called us in.

Colin: I thought that the person who called the police was the most likely suspect.

Lizzie: Only in thrillers, I'm afraid. In real life most murders are domestic affairs and the murderer confesses before investigation has begun.

Tara: We heard Brian speaking when Jennifer was in the room, and as she came out, so she can't be the murderer.

Lizzie: Yes, she does seem to have a cast-iron alibi. But then I haven't really thought of a motive for Jennifer either. So she fails on two of the three tests: means, motive and opportunity. Lets get on to motives next. Quite a few people might have wanted Brian removed from his position here. Lets go through the list. How about you, Tara? Your father would like to buy the land the club is on, and you want the money involved in order to marry Henry.

Tara: That's ridiculous.

Lizzie: But you did threaten to kill Brian, didn't you?

Tara: That was just a figure of speech. I couldn't really kill anyone.

Lizzie: And your father wants to redevelop the land the club stands on. My brother works in the Council Planning department. So you and your father and Henry all have some interest in getting rid of Brian, who would stand in your way.

Tara: That is just plain ridiculous.

Lizzie: And you, Henry, you might have been working with Tara.

Henry: But I wasn't. And I liked Brian. He was a really good coach.

Lizzie: But you were demoted to the doubles to allow a new player into the senior team. You can't have been happy about that.

Henry: It was only for one match, and the way I was brought up means that it is only a game, not something to make too much of.

Lizzie: Perhaps you did not care too much, but your mother did. Just how far would you go, Claudia, to keep the club the way you want it to be?

Claudia: It is true that I thought Brian was quite hateful. It is just that there is too much change these days. As far as I was concerned this club was always a haven of continuity in the tide of change. But I would rather the club stayed here rather than move to the suburbs, so I really had no desire to see Brian removed. And I think you ought to ask Harold how he felt about the changes.

Lizzie: Yes, Harold, how did you feel about having your wonderful grass courts paved over?

Harold: Well, It upset me a lot. Not for meself you know, but for future of the club. Its so much hard work getting a really good surface, and just to pave it over seems such a waste. But I'm overdue to retire, and I suppose I shall just have to accept that that is the way of the world.

Lizzie: You could have entered Brian's office through the french windows. And having oiled the locks you would know that they would open easily.

Harold: I saw enough of death in the war. I would never lift a hand even to defend myself these days.

Lizzie: And with your unarmed combat skills you would snap his neck, not hit him over the head. But why did you bring the line paint in to show Brian?

Harold: It looked wrong, too smooth, and it smelled a bit funny. I asked Brian to smell it, but he said he couldn't smell anything because of the cold he had.

Lizzie: This piece of information is for everyone here. I believe that Brian was poisoned. Scalp wounds bleed freely, but there was hardly any blood to be seen, so he must have been dead before being hit. Perhaps he breathed in the poison when trying to smell the line paint.

Harold: But I sniffed it first, and it didn't do anything to me.

Lizzie: Good point. I'll take a sniff. [She goes to the bucket and smells the contents] And I know that smell, it is cloves! Now why would the line paint smell of cloves? I'll have to keep thinking about that.

Colin: Don't you want to ask me anything?

Lizzie: Yes, I have a few questions for you. You were thinking about turning professional, weren't you?

Colin: That's right. I'd been approached by an agent. But Brian wanted me to stay on here for a while. We'd had a bit of an argument, because I could do with the money atr the moment, but Brian convinced me that the agent was a bit of a shark, and that I should wait to get noticed by a better agent. He was trying to arrange for someone to see me, using his contacts, provided I stayed on until the end of the season.

Lizzie: Why did you need the money?

Colin: My father has been ill, and I needed to do my bit for the family. If he can't drive we don't have much money coming in.

Jennifer: I told you that you could borrow some money from me, you silly boy.

Colin: I don't want to be in your debt, Jennifer. Not when I wanted to break up with you.

Lizzie: I've just thought of a motive for you, Jennifer. We all knew of your relationship with Colin. If you thought that he was persuading Colin to turn professional, to move away, you knew that your relationship would end, and by getting rid of Brian, you might be able to keep being together with Colin.

Jennifer: But you have already said that I have a cast-iron alibi. Brian was still talking to me when I left his office.

Lizzie: I'm not so sure that he was. In fact I think I know now how it was done. Remember that the line paint smells of cloves? Well, you know a white powder that smell of oil of cloves? No? Well its Beachams Powders. Exactly the same as you gave Brian for his cold. You emptied the powders into the line-paint bucket and replaced them with a poison. Arsenic is a white powder, isn't it. And a pharماسist would know that, and would have access to a supply.

Jennifer: But you still have'nt explained how it was that Brian was still talking when I left his office.

Lizzie: What is it that you have in your shoulder-bag, Jennifer? When I went in to look at Brian's body you didn't have a shoulder bag, and after you came out you did. Please show us what is in your bag.

Jennifer: But what if it is embarrassing?

Lizzie: But what is embarrassing about about a cassette recorder?

Jennifer: Ah, so you did work it out.

Lizzie: You must have recorded the conversation Brian had with Harold, then played it back when you went into his office, when Brian was already dead. And you hit him with the raquet with the press to make it look like it was an assault rather than a poisoning. When we went in together you waited until I was distracted looking at Brian and used the time to switch the machine off and carry it away.

Jennifer: It's true. And I din't need to do it after all. When I swapped over the Beachams Powders for the arsenic I thought that Brian was trying to get Colin away from me. But after talking to Colin I realised that Brian was trying to get Colin to stay on, but it was too late by then, and I had to carry out the rest of the plan. I'd borrowed the cassette recorder from Tara a few days ago and realised that I could use it to give myself an alibi. They are brand new, run on batteries and are much smaller than old-fashioned tape recorders. They fit easily into a big handbag. Now Brian is dead, and there was no need for me to kill him. I'm so sorry. I've lost everything, and all for a mistake.