

Lady's Guide to Etiquette and Murder Discussion Questions

by Dianne Freeman

Author Bio: (from Fantastic Fiction & author website)

Dianne Freeman is a retired accountant who always wanted to be a mystery author. (After all, accounting is just solving a mystery using numbers.) Her debut novel, [A Lady's Guide to Etiquette and Murder](#), is the first in the Countess of Harleigh series, for which she won the Agatha Award for Best First Book in 2018.



Dianne and her husband divide their time between Michigan and Arizona.

Characters: (Set 1899)

- **Frances Price Wynn** – (27) – “Lady Harleigh” – Dowager Countess. An American whose birth family was rich and has a large endowment from her father. She married into British nobility. Daughter, Rose (7). Husband, Reggie Wynn, died 1 year prior. She is just out of mourning. Frances has decided to leave Harleigh and permanently move to London.
- **Viscount Ainsworth** – Just inherited his title and the estate. Used to live in South Africa where he was looking after a family mine and other investments. New to London.
- **Bridget** – Frances’ personal maid. Left Harleigh for Frances’ London home.
- **Capshaw** – Servant of Alicia Stoke-Whitney who wanted to talk to Frances. Was killed in her garden before they could.
- **Aunt Hetty Chesney** – Frances’ widowed aunt. Business smart and good at finding investments. Considered “a little mad.”
- **Inspector Delaney** – Metropolitan police. Officer told to investigate the letter implicating Frances in Reggie’s death.
- **Mr Daniel Grayson** – Lily’s suitor. Third son of a noble family. Lawyer trained, but does not use his profession.
- **Haverhills** – Noble family where first theft occurred. A few snuffboxes and “something more” were taken from manor during a party.
- **Honorable George Hazelton** – Frances’ neighbor. Helped move Reggie’s body 1 year prior. Trained as a lawyer and works on and off for the Crown. Fiona’s younger brother.
- **Jenny** – Housemaid. Left Harleigh for Frances’ London home.
- **Mr Kendrick** – Lily’s suitor. Second son of a wealthy family.
- **Tomas Martin** – Servant who moved to South African and worked for the Ainsworth mining business.
- **Lily Price** – Frances’ younger sister. Debutant. Just starting her first Season.
- **Alicia Stoke-Whitney** – Reggie’s mistress, who was with him when he died. Alicia is married to Stoke-Whiney. Lost a bracelet during a party.

- **Mr Stone** – Frances' lawyer.
- **Delia Wynn** – Frances' sister-in-law. Current Countess Harleigh. Very aware of protocol and social rules. Wants Frances' money to help maintain Harleigh house.
- **Graham Wynn** – Frances' brother-in-law. Current Earl of Harleigh. Keeps trying to get at Frances personal money to help maintain his investments.
- **Reggie Wynn** – Former Earl of Harleigh. Died 1 year prior of an apparent heart attack in his mistresses bed.

Discussion Questions:

1. Did you like the book? Why or why not?
2. Who was your favorite character in the story? Your least favorite? Why?
3. The theme of family duty plays a large role in the story. The oldest son will inherit wealth and property, but also the responsibility for caring for it, growing it, and passing it on to the next generation. Younger sons must make their own way in the world. Daughters are expected to make advantageous matches, hand everything they own to their husbands, and live a blameless life. All are expected to keep the family name respectable. If you had to choose, where would you want to be in this hierarchy?
4. Do you think hiding the circumstances of Reggie's death played a part in what happened later or would it all have happened in the same way if it had been revealed? Why?
5. Once "everything started to happen", why do you think Frances did not tell the truth about her husband's death to the inspector?
6. What do you think of the tradition of "mourning" where family must wear black, have no visitors, attend no parties, do no traveling, etc.? Is it a good idea? Why or why not?
7. Frances has a rare advantage for a woman in 1899 because she has a small fortune of her own which allows her some independence. Do you think women of today have a more independent spirit? Or did women of that era simply lack the opportunity to express it?
8. What is the purpose of having a "social season" (from March to September) in London? Do you approve? Disapprove? Does it still happen today?
9. Did you know who was stealing the valuables (snuffboxes, necklace, bracelet, etc.) before it was revealed? Did you figure out why the thefts were occurring?
10. Did you figure out who killed Capshaw and why?
11. It turns out that Reggie's death was no accident. Why was he killed? Did you suspect his murderer?
12. The villains in the story aren't just "bad guys" but people who see no other way out of a bad situation. Do you feel any sympathy for them despite their poor choices?
13. Frances and Graham decide to tell no one about Delia's actions because "it would hurt the children". Do you think that was the right move? Should they have exposed her?

14. In the Victorian aristocracy the persona a person showed publicly was often different from who they were at home. Everyone in this story is hiding something from the general public. In our era of social media, we tend to put everything “out there,” yet because we’re online we can be anonymous. Is the public/private persona still prevalent today?
15. Were you satisfied with the ending of the story? If you could change it, what would you do to make it better?
16. Many of the books we read are heavy, thought provoking, and dark. A Lady's Guide to Etiquette and Murder is a light, fun read. What type of book do you prefer and why?
17. A Lady's Guide to Etiquette and Murder was Freeman’s debut book, the second of the series has been published, and a third is due out soon. Will you read any of them?

References:

- Fantastic Fiction – <https://www.fantasticfiction.com/f/dianne-freeman/>
- Dianne Freeman – <https://difreeman.com/>
- GoodReads – <https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/36630895-a-lady-s-guide-to-etiquette-and-murder>
- Novelist – <http://web.b.ebscohost.com.ezproxy.clevnet.org/novp/detail?vid=2&sid=04abf125-53a7-4723-ac05-ffd772276c06%40pdc-v-sessmgr01&bdata=JnNpdGU9bm92cC1saXZl#UI=10664724&db=neh>

Dianne Freeman Books

Countess of Harleigh

1. A Lady's Guide to Etiquette and Murder (2018)
2. A Lady's Guide to Gossip and Murder (2019)
3. A Lady's Guide to Mischief and Murder (July 2020)

If you liked A Lady's Guide to Etiquette and Murder, try...

- Death Below Stairs – Jennifer Ashley
 - Butterfly Conspiracy – Vivian Conroy
 - Garden of Lies – Amanda Quick
 - Study in Scarlet Women – Sherry Thomas
 - Crowned and Dangerous – Rhys Bowen
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