



A Mystery

As Dave made his way into the library through the heavy wooden door, he heard the voice of Inspector Lestrade, who was giving his summation of what was known of the case so far.

"... and through our analysis of the schedules of everybody in the workshop at the time, we have eliminated all other possible suspects in this murder; the criminal *must* be one of you three printers. And as we have heard, all three of you have an excellent motive for wanting your manager gone. He never paid you what you think you are worth, he always asked for the work to do be done under extreme time pressure, and his criticism of the quality of your printing work was unceasing. I can certainly understand such things, even though they hardly justify such a terrible murder as we have seen here on this occasion."

The three suspects shifted slightly in their seats, and looked at each other. It was clear that there had been no love lost between them and their manager.

Lestrade continued, "It simply remains for us to ascertain which of the three of you is responsible for this crime. We did give early consideration to the idea that it might have been *all of you*, but this is not an Agatha Christie story, and we are expecting no sudden plot twists here. Whoever did it was careful to remove all traces of fingerprints, no cigarette butts were left behind, and in fact the only clue we have is the woodblock-printed note stabbed into the body with the carving knife.

"Our early inspection of this note tells us that it was indeed printed by a very experienced worker: the colours are smooth and deep, and the registration is perfect, exactly what we would expect from any of you three."

Despite the circumstances, smiles were seen on the faces of the three men. Even while involved in committing an atrocious murder, their professionalism shone through - they would not be careless with their printing!

Lestrade turned to greet Dave, "Ah! Mr. Bull, very glad that you were able to come down to offer your advice on this case. I understand that you know our three suspects quite well."

Dave turned to look at them, sitting in a row: M-san, who had been one of the first printers to offer him advice, back when he was still a struggling beginner; S-san, who had also been unstinting with advice and encouragement, even giving him an old baren on one occasion, and O-san, who had been somewhat cooler in his approach to Dave, never letting him feel quite welcome, even going so far as to hide his tools when Dave made his occasional visits.

They all looked back at him steadily, all meeting his gaze, none of them sweating or fidgeting. There were no obvious clues as to which one of them might be the murderer.

"Yes inspector, I have known them all for more than twenty years. I am familiar with their work, and we have enjoyed a ... a little glass or two together at the craftsmen's meetings held a few times each year."

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Lestrade outlined the situation, "Well, let's get to it. I understand that my assistants have brought you up to date. The manager of the workshop here, whom I believe you also knew, was murdered last night in his office, and it is quite clear to me that one of these three men must be responsible. The only real clue we have is this woodblock-printed note left behind by the criminal." The inspector gestured towards a sheet on the desk, encased in a clear storage file.

Dave moved to pick it up, but one of the other officers stopped him, "Please don't touch the evidence, sir."

Dave turned to the Inspector, "If you expect me to tell you anything of value here, you are going to have to let me look at this print properly - to pick it up, touch it, sniff it ... Please trust me, a print like this is not so fragile, and it needs to be held in the hand and appreciated up close."

Lestrade gestured his assent, and the officer allowed Dave to open the case and pick up the print.

Dave moved towards the window, calling as he did, "Turn out the lights please. I need gentle and natural light for this." The officer again looked questioningly at Lestrade, and again, the Inspector gave his approval. The lights were turned out.

Dave stood by the window inspecting the sheet, then turned to Lestrade, "Come and look, Inspector."

[What has Dave seen? Will he be able to solve the mystery? Come back next week to find out!]