

The Foreshadowing Detective

PROLOGUE

“It’s your move,” the woman spoke in an impassive voice, as she lethargically pressed her weight onto her right hand and tapped her knee with her left.

“Why are we even playing if you don’t care?” the waitress inquired impatiently. It was an overcast autumn day, and a public park was placed amongst an endless modern metropolis. Two people were seated at an outdoor chess table within this same park. The landscape was barren. Most of the usual suspects who could be found loitering around a park in the late afternoon had been driven away by the fear of an oncoming downpour. However, this particular odd couple could still be found playing chess in such weather. It was the waitress’ routine to play chess at this park on her afternoon breaks, and she usually could recognise most others who did the same as regulars. However, this time her opponent was a complete stranger.

“Isn’t it rather conventional for the detective to play a game with the culprit like this in the climactic scene? Although, that might be a bit of a Sherlockian supposition. Since I am a modern detective, maybe it would be best for me to play the role of a more driven avatar of justice without the patience for games. However, I think there is a nostalgic desire for that outdated kind of game of wits these days. For that reason I could not help but join in when I spotted the culprit was herself playing.”

A puzzled look was all that the waitress could manage at this bizarre statement. ‘A detective?’ And didn’t she mention a culprit? She thought on the woman’s words and could not come to any credible explanation. It is hardly uncommon to have a blemish or minor legal infraction at some point over the course of one’s life — yet, the waitress really had absolutely no criminal history of any kind, not even receiving a traffic ticket in her life.

The self-proclaimed detective continued speaking, “unfortunately, I have no talent for chess. Yet, I cannot deny that it has served its purpose admirably. The detective and the criminal sitting are across from each other, taking turns striking at one another in an intellectual sparring match. It is everything I could hope for. Even saying that, do not put any needless worry into your current performance: Regardless of whether you achieve victory or not in this game, I will solve the subsequent case. That is not a matter of predestination or anything. That fate is still within your hands. But I can afford to make brash predictions as the detective. Even if I turn

out to be in the wrong, it will only build upon the suspense. Still, planning a murder is grisly business, I would not ordinarily take you for the type.”

At this, the waitress finally lost her patience. “Planning a murder?! What the f—” she caught herself before unloading further and returned to the usual calm demeanour most becoming of a service professional, “what are you talking about? Is this some metaphor, or some trendy game? I don’t get it.” The waitress sighed and simply continued focusing on the chess board. At a certain point, she had come to realise, accepting that extreme eccentricities are beyond concerning oneself with is an essential skill in customer service.

However, the other woman was far from done. “Is it not premeditated, then? Considering the location, I thought for sure it must be... Well, in that case, the difficulty is unlikely to be outrageously high. I do hope I am not walking into a spontaneous massacre where I myself will be in danger. I have to always be cautious of something improbable like that in my line of work.”

“I guess a cop would be worried about terrorism and mass shootings and the like these days,” the waitress mused.

However, the person sitting opposite her was offended by her throwaway comment. “Cop?” She said, “weren’t you listening in the slightest? I am the detective, and you are going to be the murderer.”

CHAPTER 1

It was the twilight of the dinnertime rush hour and I was completely overwhelmed. The speciality of The Blue Cross was the lunch menu, yet the business was making an ambitious push into the competitive world of evening dining. Rushing out the meals was one thing, but quickly retrieving finished dishware and utensils, and then preparing the tables for new customers, was an essential skill in order to maximise turnover. Nothing complicated this rhythm quite to the same degree as when a customer returned food for whatever reason. That was enough to sour my mood instantly.

In the midst of one such case, I was dashing between tables with the grace and elegance becoming a long-time service professional. I reached the kitchen, and yelled out to Keith, our sous-chef, to notify him that the couple at table seven wanted a newly cooked lamb chop. Such returns always turned the atmosphere of the kitchen melancholic since they represented both past failure and future effort, so I quickly grabbed a finished order to get out of there and set about waiting on more customers. I was followed by the sound of station chef Clemence yelling after me. “Keep up the pace Jordan,” she bellowed.

I was soon back in the rhythm of moving between tables at a lightning rate. My mind had become saturated by the hectic mood of the place, so it was hardly a surprise when I failed to notice Edgar, the head waiter, bolting up behind me. We were both moving rapidly in the same direction, but neither of us were prepared to avoid a man in his mid 50s when he abruptly stood up from his seat. I managed to slow down in time, but Edgar jostled into the back of me. Were he slightly less skilled, the wine glasses he was carrying would have spilt their contents all over my back. Still, despite his miraculous efforts to catch them, a small amount of the liquid did splash across part of my uniform. It was rare that any mistake hampered the efficient operation of any of our staff, let alone the immaculate Edgar, so I was momentarily stunned. Edgar immediately formulated a plan: He took the dishes I was carrying, told me to go to the change rooms and replace my uniform, then to retrieve some wine from the cellar and take it to the bar because they were nearly out. As he instructed, I handed the food over, and then headed for the change rooms. However, it was a fact that I had no backup uniform available.

Luckily, I had managed to work out a plan. I took out my phone and called Gilbert, a kitchen hand, for assistance. Gilbert had worked with the waiting staff until two months ago, so I figured he might have kept his uniform in a locker here. Fortunately, my intuition was correct. It was not long before he arrived. Gilbert guided me to his old locker, opened it, then he went off to return to his duties. I did not need him to unlock it, because

I had the peculiar habit of memorising every locker combination in the building, but it would have been unspeakably embarrassing to steal someone's clothes without asking. Wearing someone else's old clothes was an understandably discomfoting sensation, but I would just have to get used to it. His pants were a little long, but I could still pull off the look. I tidied up my short, brown hair and set off on my way back to Edgar in order to receive further instruction.

A thought raced back into my mind — the replacement wine, I had not picked it up from the cellar yet. I headed back where I had come from and went up the cellar door. However, I failed to open it. I ran towards the kitchen in order to fetch the key. I found Gilbert there, and asked him if he could explain things. “Why was the wine cellar locked?” I inquired.

“Locked?” He repeated, quizzically, “that's odd.” He thought for a moment before an uneasy expression suddenly overtook his face. “Oh shit, the stock for the corporate booking this Friday is in there. I better check on that if someone's been messing around in there. Hey Jordan, d'ya mind if I come along?” I assented immediately, fetched the key that was visibly sitting on display in the kitchen, and then went off towards the wine cellar with Gilbert. We raced down the halls and straight up to the wine cellar door. I once again tried messing with the door handle, but it would not open as I expected. I took out the key, placed it in the keyhole, and turned it. I pushed on the door more forcefully this time, and it opened effortlessly.

The lights had all been turned off within the wine cellar, which was now as dark as night. Gilbert fished around for a light switch, while I took a few steps into the room. Suddenly the room was bathed in fresh light, and my eyeballs were filled with the red colour of wine. However, this colour was not limited to the rows of wine kept on the walls. The floor was soaked with the distinct shade of burgundy typical of the associated varieties of red wine, and nearby that puddle was a pile of smashed wine bottles and a collapsed rack — presumably the source of the bottles. The spilling of so much expensive wine was a shocking sight, but what truly drew my eyes was the lighter rosé shade that was splashed across the ground a few metres further into the cellar. In that case, it was obviously not coming from a smashed wine bottle. This was because the source was all too visible to me. Before our eyes was a bleeding lump of flesh that we both recognised as the smashed in corpse of Allan, the barman.

Without hesitating, Gilbert ran up to the corpse, hoping to offer some kind of aid. However, it was an obviously fruitless effort with only a glance. Allan's face had been smashed in, and his crimson blood was all over the floor. Gilbert turned towards me and shook his head, tears forming in his eyes. I reached into the pockets of my pants and pulled out my phone. Calming my voice as best as I could, I then dialled the emergency number to contact the police. Once we had both calmed down a little, Gilbert and I both took notice of a peculiar object that was placed a few metres away from the body: A blood soaked piece of a garment could

be seen on the floor. It was immediately recognisable as being torn from the cuffs of a waitress uniform at The Blue Cross. I told Gilbert to stay with the body while I notified everyone else of what had happened.

I soon ran into Edgar, who understandably made a fuss. After Carter, the owner, was notified, service was immediately cancelled for the rest of the evening. Disappointed customers were forced to leave one after another, some not even able to finish their meals. I was sure it would leave a stain on the reputation of the business — however, they could hardly expect us to stay open after a murder. Through the disciplined efforts of Edgar and the two waitresses, a steady stream of people were led out of the building as the police were presumably racing towards the location at any moment. Suddenly, I noticed a particular customer going the opposite direction from the rest of the crowd. She was a woman that appeared to be in her mid-30s and was dressed in a bizarrely upscale tan white pantsuit, and was carrying a briefcase in her hand. She confidently strolled up to the staff and asked “who is in charge here?”

Immediately, Carter offered himself forward and asked the customer “did you need something before leaving?”

“Leaving?” The woman queried, with a slightly mocking tone, “oh, no, not that at all. I would like you to take me to see the crime scene. My name is Henrietta Moneydew, and I am here to solve the murder that was committed tonight.”

“What on earth—”

“The murder. There was a murder here tonight, wasn’t there? I am the detective, and I am here to solve the case. I do hope it wasn’t an overly simple affair merely because it was improvised.” The woman continued speaking without much respect for Carter, nor respect for general manners. She turned towards the waiting staff, a group composed of Edgar, the two identical twin waitresses Emily and Joy, as well as myself, who were all standing together. Henrietta closed her eyes, smiled brightly and waved in our direction. “Hello again!” She beamed. I could count the number of people I had ever met on one hand with such an inherently eccentric air.

She continued speaking, “I will now explain my full terms for carrying out my investigation. I have just confirmed the central fact; the integrity of the closed circle remains complete. In other words, I can declare with certainty that the culprit is standing among us in this very room. The reason for this deduction is terribly simple — I already know the identity of the culprit, and I spotted them among the group that stands before me now.” She suddenly placed the briefcase on a table near her and opened it. Inside were countless stacks of banknotes. I had no means to count them accurately from a distance, but I could credibly say that enough money was held inside to make the carrier a millionaire instantly. “If I am unable to solve the case, I shall hand over the contents of this case, which are equivalent to two million US dollars, in full to the owner of this establishment. Do I have your full attention now?” Her devious smile

revealed a complete confidence that the incredible sum of money in front of us would change the mood very quickly. She was entirely correct.

Carter seemed less concerned about her disrespectful demeanour and was only worried about the terms of Henrietta's game. This was understandable, now that he had witnessed the reward in the circumstance of his victory. "You just said that you know who the culprit is, does that not completely defeat the purpose of your so-called investigation? It seems to me that there is no way for us to 'win' whatever this is." He spoke in a calm, rational manner despite the bizarre premise being put forward by Henrietta. After all, logically speaking, if she knew the identity of the culprit she had to be an accomplice to the crime. Yet, she was offering to solve that same crime. Everything about it had the air of deceit, so it was only natural that Carter sought to understand her motive in full.

"Indeed. You are absolutely correct," Henrietta mused in response, "that is precisely the kind of detail that should be settled immediately. You have a good head on your shoulders. So, here are the facts, but it is up to you to determine for yourself how much you will believe in my words: Although I am currently entirely aware of the culprit's identity, I have absolutely no knowledge regarding how they committed the crime. And I offer to elucidate both of these features: I will not merely solve the whodunit, but also the howdunit. If I fail to achieve both of these, you will gain this full sum of cash. This is the only sensible thing to be done, because even if I told you the identity of the killer, that information would

be functionally useless without any associated proof. It would be nothing more than a baseless accusation.

“In addition to this, in the spirit of fair play, once I begin my investigation, I shall erase all memories of the identity of the suspect from my mind. I am aware that there is absolutely no way to prove I have done something as outlandish as this. However, if you can find the willpower to believe me, you can trust that I will solve this case with precisely the same information that is available to any of you. Regardless, I have sent a timed, encrypted message to the police with the name of the culprit which will arrive at midnight tonight, and cannot be viewed by any of us anymore. So, whether or not we play this game, and whether or not I win, the culprit shall be caught eventually. If the police have such a big hint, their own evidence will allow them to completely corner the culprit regardless of our actions.

“Now, as for my reward, it is quite simple: I merely request that I am paid the equivalent of a week’s wages for the average among your employees, so long as I am able to solve the case. In other words, this is a bet, plain and simple, and you will be given the odds of an overwhelming underdog. If I win, I will only be paid the kind of sum that is ordinary for hiring a private detective, but if you win, you will become a millionaire.” She finally quieted her voice and ended her thoroughly and mind-boggling explanation. She followed by simply asking if there were “any questions?” Then she looked at each of us in turn.

CHAPTER 2

Sensibly, Carter was more than a little reluctant to take up Henrietta's bet, and so they spent a good five minutes quibbling over technicalities and various tangents until the police arrived. Carter greeted the first three officers who entered the room, and was about to leave Henrietta behind in order to direct them to the crime scene, when a particularly well dressed man entered the dining room. He was flanked by two officers, giving his entrance a vaguely aristocratic atmosphere. My immediate impression based on various crime dramas I had seen in my life was that he must have been a homicide detective, and that proved to be precisely correct once he introduced himself.

"Detective Andrew Tindle, at your service." He said, briskly. Suddenly his eyes that were surveying each of the staff members froze at the visage of Henrietta. "Miss Moneydew's here as well, I see." He seemed to grimace a little.

"You know each other?" Carter seemed entirely shocked at this development. "Excuse me detective, but who exactly is this woman?"

"I am afraid she is exactly who she claims to be," Detective Tindle sighed, as though resigned to some disastrous fate. "I suppose you ought to know that she is being entirely serious with the contents of that briefcase. But I still think you should boot her out the door before she gets up to

trouble. I have seen plenty of folks take that bet, and basically all of them come to regret it.” It was obviously intended as a warning, but Carter could not ignore the severe implications of this new information. Prior to that moment, Henrietta’s bet represented an unacceptable bargain precisely because her origins were so suspect. Regardless of whether one thought that she could solve the case or not, anyone with experience in gambling would notice that you must also take into account the odds of her telling the truth or not. Carter knew the wages of his employees the best, and so he knew that even if it was certain that Henrietta could not solve the case, only being able to rely on the one in one thousand odds that this wasn’t some kind of targeted scam made it impossible to make such a bet. Now, the situation was exactly reversed. Regardless of the chance that she would solve the case, we had learnt that the police were fully aware of her identity and that she had done this exact kind of thing before. This massively decreased the chances of her being a simple con-artist. It was now possible to risk a reasonable amount in order to open the door to the possibility of two million dollars.

So, we reached a conclusion that had seemed inevitable ever since Henriette opened that briefcase. Carter hired the private detective and her investigation began. Henrietta and Detective Tindle were both taken to see the scene of the crime by Edgar and Carter, while the rest of the staff stayed behind to give statements to the remaining officers. When it was my turn, I repeated my recollection of events exactly as recorded in this

document. That seemed to intrigue the man taking my statement and he often interjected with comments like “how interesting,” or “doesn’t that make it a locked-room?” What an odd statement, of course the room was a locked room, that’s why I used the key to open it. I figured it must have been some police joke that I had never heard before.

After a short wait, I heard a boisterous conversation echoing throughout the hallway, and then Carter and the others returned, although some forensic investigators had evidently stayed behind to thoroughly check the scene over. Before any of the others had a chance to speak, Henrietta spoke in a booming voice that was directed towards everyone in the room, “it is unfortunate that I must force you all to repeat yourselves, but it will take far too long to wait to read the reports for each of your testimonies. So, I am going to ask everyone to give their stories right here in the open, such that we can all hear them. We’ll start with those who haven’t spoken to the police yet, let’s get to it.”

There was a great deal of hesitancy among us all, since we were still unclear exactly whether the police or Henrietta was really in charge of this situation. But, before long people started to share their accounts. Edgar scratched his serious, middle-aged face and then shared his account. Initially, he had simply declared that he was waiting tables between the dining room and the kitchen and had not seen anything of note to the police, but Henrietta forced more detail out of him. Firstly, he told of how he had spilt wine on my uniform, causing me to head to the changing

room. This was a meaningless anecdote on its own, but it confirmed that Edgar had seen Allan at the bar when he first had filled those glasses with wine. In other words, Allan was alive at 6:53 PM, when Edgar last saw him at the bar. Emily and Joy each claimed to have been waiting tables along with Edgar the whole time, and Edgar confirmed that he had seen each of them on various occasions throughout the night. In this way, those three members of the waiting staff all confirmed each other's approximate alibis for the time period between around 6:55 PM and the discovery of the body.

Henrietta's eyes seemed intent on extracting every piece of information out of the waitress sisters that she could, but their stories remained simple and unchanging: They claimed that they were waiting tables the whole time between when Allan had last been seen and when his body was found, and other witnesses confirmed that no one had seen either of them anywhere else during that time period. Next, Henrietta questioned Carter directly about his whereabouts. He claimed to have been in his office preparing invoices the whole time. Because his office door was easily visible from the kitchen, the kitchen staff confirmed that the door to Carter's office remained closed between 6:30 PM and the discovery of the body, and Carter did not leave even once.

Speaking of the kitchen staff, they gave their accounts next. There was Ashton, she was the head chef, and under her were Keith, the sous-chef, Clemence, the single station chef, as well as Gilbert and Chester, the

jack-of-all-trades kitchen hands. As the senior kitchen staff gave their accounts, two key facts became clear. Firstly, since the wine cellar key was kept on a rack along with the keys for the freezer and other storage rooms, and this rack was conspicuously placed on a wall just past the grills. Not just Ashton, but also Keith and Clemence, were resolute that all of the keys were still on that rack and not a soul took from or placed a key on there until Gilbert and I raced off to the wine cellar where we found Allan's body. Secondly, all of the kitchen staff had all seen one another at extremely regular intervals with the exception of Gilbert, who left to meet me at the change room. In other words, all of the kitchen staff except Gilbert had ironclad alibis.

In other words, all of the staff of The Blue Cross who had access to the crime scene, with the exception of Gilbert and myself, seemed to have some form of alibi. And even if they weren't as rock solid, Gilbert and I could attest to each other's innocence for at least some of that time, not to mention that Gilbert had returned to the kitchen relatively quickly — too quickly to pull off a crime it seemed. Once you considered the matter of the key, it appeared as though not a single person among the ten of us could have killed Allan and locked him in the wine cellar in the twenty minutes between approximately 6:55 PM, when Edgar last saw him, and around a quarter past seven, when Gilbert and I discovered his body. It was an impossible crime. It was—

“A locked-room, is it?” Henrietta suddenly spoke to herself. “Not my favourite, physical tricks tend to be so overly elaborate and contrived. Anyway, onto the next speaker.” The remaining member of the kitchen staff was Gilbert. Given that his alibi was the weakest along with my own, and that he had also discovered the body, he had risen up to become the star witness of our confessional circle. Indeed, I myself had not heard his account of the facts, so I expected it to clarify a great many things.

“Well, as Chester already mentioned,” Gilbert began, “we were both on expedition and cleaning together. So I suppose I can also account for the fact that I saw Edgar, Emily, and Joy come back to the kitchen regularly whenever I was at my station there. That would have been between 6:55 PM and 7:05 PM approximately, since we’re trying to keep track of the timeline. Wait, I can check exactly when Jordan called me and I left my station on my phone...” After fishing around in his pockets, he pulled out his phone and showed the call log to Henrietta and the people nearest. It showed my call as being received at 7:07 PM.

He continued speaking, “anyway, for those ten minutes I was at my station in the kitchen, and saw Edgar, Emily, and Joy taking dishes out to customers. As the log said, I got a call at seven past and headed towards the change rooms to meet with Jordan.”

“Did you ever see several of the waiting staff in the kitchen at once?” Henrietta suddenly interjected with a bizarre question.

“Uh, no, I don’t think— yes, actually, Edgar and Joy came in at the same time not long before Jordan called.”

“Same question to everyone else in the kitchen.” Henrietta barked. The rest of the staff gave questioning looks and gave uncertain answers, as was natural. No one would notice or remember something like that. “Edgar, what about you?”

My mind suddenly caught up with the new line of questioning. I thrust myself into the conversation. “You’re not suggesting that only one of the sisters was actually waiting tables at that time, are you?”

Henrietta turned towards me. Her face did not reveal particular surprise at this comment. “I am not suggesting anything,” she clarified, “I am just investigating the case thoroughly. When there are twins, such a possibility must be considered. Even if it is an outrageously improbable means of concocting an alibi, so long as they were never seen together during those twenty minutes, it is not impossible.” Even if it was improbable, I had to admit it was not impossible, as she had said. If one of the sisters changed their hair every few minutes, it might well appear as if there were two people on the floor for those twenty minutes — so long as no one checked carefully.

It was at that moment that I truly came to understand that this so-called detective was not going to leave any stone unturned. No matter what happened, she intended to solve the case by midnight. I had also realised

exactly why we were all being questioned at once. If she separately questioned witnesses, away from the police, we all had an incentive to obscure the facts of the case. After all, she was no police officer, and a great deal of money was at stake if those who were unrelated to the incident merely prevented her from reaching the conclusion that the police would reach on their own. However, by creating this situation where all questioning was done publicly, they would have to lie to the police in order to lie to Henrietta, which would get themselves into trouble. However, this situation also meant that the culprit could ensure their own story matched with the testimony of the others. This was all according to her plan. She had created a situation where the only one who would lie and obscure facts was the culprit themselves. She was a devious detective far beyond what I had imagined.

“More importantly, answer the question Edgar,” Henrietta ordered.

Edgar shook his head, “I am afraid I cannot recall in particular whether I did or not, and at what times I saw anything. It was not my priority at the time, after all.” Edgar answered calmly and rationally, such that there was no further room for discussion.

“That’s fine. Good enough. Anyway, Gilbert, please continue.”

“Sure thing,” Gilbert did not seem enthused at the newly antagonistic mood that had spread across the room. “Well, after the phone call, I let Keith know where I was going and told Chester he was going to have to

expedite all of the dishes for a few minutes. I raced off towards the change rooms immediately, since I didn't want the kitchen to fall behind pace. Once I arrived there, I found Jordan waiting, whose uniform was covered in red wine stains on all sides."

Henrietta perked up suddenly, with visible curiosity. "You are absolutely sure they were wine stains? After all, that would be pretty hard to tell apart from blood." She inquired, with a devilish gluttony for the answer.

"Absolutely," Gilbert gave an unexpectedly self-assured answer. "I cannot claim to have done any scientific tests, and I had no reason to question what they were at the time — so I suppose there is still the chance that I am wrong. But, I have seen plenty of wine stains in my time, and I have also seen blood stains a fair deal ever since I started dealing with raw meats in the kitchen. I am as confident as I can be that the uniform Jordan was wearing was covered in wine stains, not blood stains."

"Is that so?" Henrietta was unfazed at Gilbert's strong declaration. "What happened next?"

"We both entered into the male change room, and I opened my old locker for Jordan. My old waiter uniform was in there, so I figured it could serve as a suitable change of clothes since we were roughly the same size — and it seems like I was correct." He glanced at me slightly before continuing, "I returned to the kitchen and got back to work. I glanced at

the clock once I was back, to see how much time I had missed, it was 7:11 PM.

“Did you pass by the wine cellar on the way there or back?”
Henrietta interjected.

“Yes,” Gilbert responded curtly.

“Was it locked at either time?”

“I can’t say, you can’t really tell if the door is locked or not unless you try to open it, and I just walked past it both times.” Henrietta nodded in recognition and then let Gilbert continue. “At almost exactly 7:14 PM, Jordan entered the kitchen, wearing my uniform. Apparently, the wine cellar was locked and Edgar had requested more wine for the bar. I was worried about the aged wine we were keeping for a corporate customer, and also figured I should grab some more cooking wine, so I decided to come along. We fetched the key from the rack, and headed to the cellar. Jordan tried to open the door but it would not budge, so we unlocked the door and—”

“Hold on, hold on,” Henrietta jumped back in. “Who grabbed the key, and who unlocked the door?”

“Both were Jordan, but I can confirm that I saw the key on the rack before Jordan went over there.”

“I see... Continue.”

“Inside we... Well, we found Allan. And we also found that one of the racks of wine had been pulled down, smashing a bunch of bottles in the process. This was a few metres away from the—” Gilbert froze up in trepidation, and then found the will to continue, “where we found the body. Allan was a mess, but I still ran straight over and attempted first aid, since I had been trained. But, after checking his pulse and looking for signs that he was breathing, I became sure... Allan was dead. Close to the body I found the piece of fabric that was left there, I am sure that police confirmed this, but it looked like a piece of fabric from the cuff of one of the... one of the, well,” he hesitated before speaking the last two words in a softer voice, hoping to escape responsibility for their meaning, “waitress uniforms.”

“I am assuming the body was still warm?” Henrietta sought clarification.

Gilbert sat in silence and then firmly answered in the affirmative, “yes, it was as though he had died only a few minutes earlier.” Gilbert finished by sharing his experience waiting with the body while various people rushed in a few minutes later, and that was the end of his story. With that, the testimonies of all ten so-called “suspects” were completed, and Henrietta sat in silent composure.

“Well, did you do it?” Carter roared impatiently.

“Do what?” Henrietta replied calmly.

“Did you solve the case? Do you know who did it.”

“Oh yes. Of course I did.” Henrietta’s answer was positively shocking. “I guess we may as well relocate for the big reveal.”

“Relocate?” Carter inquired, “relocate to where?”

“The girls’ change room, of course.”

CHAPTER 3

The number of women standing in the cramped change room was already excessive. Adding in the number of male employees and police officers made it an absurd sight. As we stood shoulder to shoulder, some of us became impatient. “Listen lady, if we’re going to all be in here, you better make this quick. There’s nowhere left for most of us to sit,” said Keith roughly.

“Of course,” answered Henrietta. “However, in order to arrive at the truth we will need to synthesise every available fact, and exclude every false possibility. Doing so may take us down a luxurious road, so I cannot truly promise that it will be truly brief. In lieu of this promise, we shall begin immediately with why we came to this room. I would like to take an anonymous ballot. I am going to search a single waitress’ locker before we begin, if you would please write which one you believe is the culprit on the pieces of paper I will provide, we can continue immediately.” Henrietta produced ten small pieces of paper, ten pens, and a hat to keep them all in. It was as if we were playing a game for children, but the atmosphere could not have been heavier.

It was difficult to obtain any true privacy, yet we all spread out as best as we could and started writing on these small pieces of paper. It went

without saying that forcing each of us to single out someone as the culprit was exceedingly cruel. I myself was having great difficulty deciding which of the waitress sisters would have the dishonour of being written on my sheet. However, after some thought, I managed to write a name down on the sheet and place it in the hat that Henrietta was holding. After all ten pieces of paper returned to the hat, Henrietta carefully read each one silently, and then she offered us a tally.

“The final results were nine, one, and zero,” she declared, “nine votes for Jordan, one vote for Joy, zero votes for Emily.” The results were exactly as I expected. As if repeating my thoughts, Henrietta continued speaking, “not a single surprise. Of course, this proves nothing — when push comes to shove, it is basically impossible for most of you to vote for either of the twins, even if their alibis are not perfect. However, this final vote is crucial. It is time to reveal how the culprit thinks. Joy, if you could open your locker, please.”

Joy was bewildered by this request, but after Henrietta repeated her name again, she jumped to attention, ran over, and opened her locker. Its contents were utterly ordinary. One spare uniform that was utterly spotless, a hanger for the clothing that she was currently wearing, and a few miscellaneous items that were too private to bear repeating. Without warning, an energetic laugh that I had never heard before was unleashed across the room. “Hahahahaha! Incredible! So, you chose that locker! What a gamble! There was every chance we would fail to check the necessary one

until the very end, and yet you took that risk in order to avoid selecting it yourself. What insanity! I shall be ever so considerate and follow the pattern that you most desire!” Henrietta’s voice was, in a word, terrifying.

I had never felt such true fear in my life.

“The most efficient way to get this done is obvious: Jordan, if you would open Emily’s locker, please.”

Emily herself made an uproar about this comment, “hold on! Jordan?! Why would Jordan open my locker?” However, there was no debating Henrietta. I had been completely cornered. After preventing Emily from approaching her own locker, Henrietta pulled me forward. I resigned myself to my fate, and entered the combination for the locker that I had memorised over time. It was now unlocked. I opened the door, and inside for everyone to see was a waitress uniform from The Blue Cross. It was soaked in bright, crimson blood stains. The right-hand cuffs were torn and missing a large piece of fabric. However, what only the police and I would likely notice, was the red wine stain that was barely visible on the back of the uniform. From there, Henrietta explained the crime in full — after the suitable declaration.

“Miss Jordan Murray, you are the culprit,” said Henrietta, pointing her index finger directly at me.

“Although this crime was inventively complex for an improvised occasion, the method for uncovering the identity of the culprit was

remarkably simple. Indeed, I am sure many of you saw through it to some degree. This is to say that on its own, the identity of the culprit was not a particularly well kept secret. The culprit had no alibi whatsoever, and so they were naturally suspected. However, there was one particular pair who could serve as red herrings if the culprit took suitable preparations. So long as they behaved normally, the twins Joy and Emily were extremely unlikely to secure absolutely ironclad alibis. Having an identical twin is a deadly weapon for a would-be criminal, but it has the opposite effect for a twin that is instead entirely innocent.

“However, that alone would not be enough. While the twins would both have their alibis weakened due to their particular biological features, the culprit was also fully aware that their own alibi was even weaker than this. As a result, they expected that there was nothing they could do to avoid suspicion after committing such a hasty crime. They could not make themselves appear innocent, but they could create sufficient confusion to ensure that the investigation would be drawn out — this would allow them to flee from the arms of justice entirely. I have no doubt the culprit was eagerly thinking about how far they could drive in a single night as soon as they escaped from this restaurant and the attention of the police.

“This was precisely why the clues left behind in this crime did not seem to cooperate with one another: The body was badly beaten, yet the wine cellar was set up to appear as though an accident had occurred. There was fabric from the cuff of a waitress planted at the scene, but all three of

the most suspicious employees were waitresses, making the clue redundant. However, the biggest mistake was the creation of the locked-room. It was intended to create the impression that the crime was impossible, and thereby delay the police so that the culprit could escape. However, the locked-room had the inverse effect of making it absolutely impossible for the red herring suspects to commit the crime. Even if we entirely reject the alibis of Emily and Joy, we cannot explain how they created that locked-room. On the other hand, another suspicious person could have created that locked-room easily.

“Throughout all of the testimony of ten different people, from the owner to the ones who discovered the body, I did not hear anyone supply any convincing evidence that the door to the wine cellar was even locked to begin with. If we supposed that the twin waitresses committed the crime, we would have to explain how they infiltrated the kitchen in order to steal the key, locked the door, and then returned the key to the rack all without being seen. In contrast, if the culprit was the one who unlocked the door, they did not need to steal the key at all. They merely had to walk into the kitchen, grab the key, and pretend to unlock the door where they would find the body.

“It is a fact that the door to the wine cellar shows absolutely no difference in appearance whether it is locked or unlocked, the only difference is whether it opens or fails to open. This is why the culprit made a deliberate show of trying to open the door and failing before they

‘unlocked’ it with the key. However, if the door were actually locked, this action would make no sense. One would check if the door was locked before going to fetch the key, and therefore once they return they would simply unlock the door and open it. The failed attempt at opening the door only makes sense as a performance intended to trick any witnesses into believing that the door was already locked.

“So, Jordan Murray could have breached the locked-room, but what other proof do I have that they committed the crime? Well, let us reconstruct the events of the crime in order, then the truth will become entirely self-evident. Given the short time between death and discovery, brutal cause of death, the location, and the clear — yet indecisive — suspicion placed on the culprit, I will posit that this crime was not premeditated. The culprit was heading to the change rooms after having wine spilt on their uniform. However, they were also instructed to obtain a bottle of wine from the cellar, and so they likely headed there first. While the culprit was in the room, the victim, Allan, arrived and some disagreement or altercation occurred. The motive for which could only be known by the two parties involved.

“The victim was beaten to death, likely by a wine bottle, and the culprit fled to the change room in a panic. They changed out of their uniform, which was now soaked in blood. When they first fled the crime scene, they likely intended to play off the blood stains as stains from the wine spillage that had occurred in the dining room. However, there was

altogether too much blood for that. Killing a human being is a much dirtier affair than most people realise. So, they formed a plan. They took the blood-soaked uniform, and swapped it with the clean uniform in Emily's locker. This was not in order to convincingly frame Emily, but merely to create sufficient doubt that they could themselves escape complete suspicion.

“The culprit then tore a piece of fabric from the cuff of the blood-soaked uniform, adorned themselves with their remaining clean waitress uniform, and then returned to the crime scene. They planted the piece of fabric at the scene. At that point, they tore down and collapsed a wine rack near the body, this allowed the clean uniform they were wearing to be stained with wine when dozens of bottles suddenly smashed on the floor. They could then return to the change room, and call on a male colleague in order to borrow a uniform. This cross-dressing was the most innovative trick of all. They were able to manufacture the testimony that they had no spare uniform available, and they were able to be seen by a witness as they were wearing a uniform that was not torn at the cuff and was only stained with wine — in accordance with Edgar's testimony about spilling wine that would surely come to light. Finally, the culprit could then change into a male waiter uniform, of the kind that could not have been the source of the fabric at the crime scene, which they would wear for the remainder of the night as they created the fake locked-room, pretended to discover the body, and as they would be subjected to police investigation.

“By cross-dressing, the culprit had set their trap: They did not need to create a convincing red herring and actually frame Emily. Instead, they ensured that the police would investigate both Emily and Joy fully before themselves. Both Emily and Joy had ironclad alibis — but the actual facts around those alibis were sufficiently chaotic that the police would be forced to eliminate them first. In so doing, they would check their lockers and uncover the planted uniform. Close investigation would undoubtedly reveal hair fibres and other evidence that would exonerate Emily, but the culprit only needed one night of doubt. In that single night of doubt, their obvious guilt would give way to a state of confusion, and they could dispose of the remaining uniform which was hidden in their own locker, and likely flee the country entirely at the earliest opportunity.

“What evidence do I have, then? It is simple. Jordan, please open your locker for all to see.”

There was no escape now. I had nowhere to go. I entered the combination for my locker and opened it in front of everyone. Inside, one could clearly make out a waitress uniform which was covered in wine stains across the front, and a completely spotless waitress uniform that I had yet to dispose of.

Henrietta looked at me and simply said “that’s game, missy.”