

A Murder in the Theatre



By Natasha, Year 7

It was getting quite late, but Scott still had a couple of questions for Lawrence, the director of their newest play. It was a murder mystery, and Scott had been cast as the victim. Backstage of the Old Vic Theatre was like a rabbit warren but luckily Scott had been here for years and despite not paying attention didn't make a wrong turn. It was a miserable night and felt very eerie as he kept walking. Every step causing the floor to creak. As he approached Lawrence's office, he heard him talking to someone on the phone. Scott not being a naturally nosy person decided to come back later, and started to walk away. Until he heard his name.

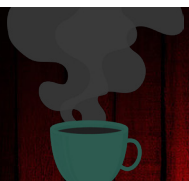
Trying to walk as lightly as possible, and avoid the creaks, Scott approached the office and pressed his ear against the door. Lawrence talked in a soft voice that tickled the hairs on the back of Scott's neck. Despite the muffled and hushed conversation, he was able to pick out a few words. He felt a shiver run down his spine, and wondering if he was hearing correctly, Scott leant even further against the door. As he did so the floor beneath him let out a loud moan and the door swung open.

Scott froze and his face turned as white as the snow that had started to fall to ground outside. His insides were squirming, knowing he had just been caught eavesdropping, and the fact that him and all the other actors might be about to lose their jobs, throwing them into poverty. A thousand thoughts started racing through Scott's pounding head but the sound of the Lawrences voice brought him back. "How much did you hear?" hissed Lawrence through gritted teeth. "N n noth nothing" stuttered Scott. "You're lying! You heard everything didn't you?"

Regaining composure, Scott said quite truthfully "I only heard some of it. I didn't mean to eavesdrop; see I was coming to ask you a question about the script and then I heard you were on the phone so started to walk away but then I heard my name and I just got curious and..." His voice trailed off. "I see. Well, what was the question then?" Lawrence's voice was calm but there was something slightly sinister about the look in his eye, that made Scott realize that he hadn't forgotten or been forgiven. Nervously Scott started backing out the door and cheerfully said "Actually I um errr well actually I don't have a question anymore so I'm just going to go home now. Have a nice evening."

Needing a good distraction, he decided to go to the local pub, where he crossed paths with someone quite unexpected. Also at the pub, was Jacob Johnson Brown, a really rather terrible detective. After spending the day roaming the streets of London, looking for anything out of the ordinary, he had found absolutely nothing, except a stray cat that bit him when he tried to take it to an animal shelter. The two met and had an instant connection and a few drinks later, Scott had told Jacob everything he'd heard.

The two men left to go home, it had been snowing the whole time they were there, and every step they took, made footprints in the white blanket of snow covering the streets. It took a while for Jacob to fall asleep. It was a cold windy night, and with being a detective his only job, he wasn't very well off. He lived in a run-down block of flats and it was very draughty in the long winter nights. He could hear the window panes rattling and shivered.



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Jacob always managed to stay positive, and didn't stop telling himself that one day, very soon, he would solve a case. His big toe peeking out from threadbare blanket, Jacob snuggled down on the lumpy mattress and eventually drifted off to sleep.

The next morning was a Saturday. Quite the opposite of the previous day, the sun peeked through the clouds, brightening up the London streets and melting the snow into slush that would soon disappear. After a lot of careful consideration (and the lack of breakfast), Jacob realized he needed to get an actual job. After sitting through a morning of interviews, he realized exactly what the perfect job for him would be, while he waited for a mystery to solve. He could work at The Old Vic Theatre, where Scott worked. He could do some backstage jobs, or bookings, but he would be able to study a murder mystery play, whilst working with one of his friends.

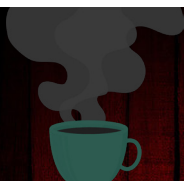
He was interviewed by an actor called Robert, who was Scott's understudy, and had badly wanted his part. In a completely monotone voice, Robert read out word for word the interview questions, with nothing more than a nod or a grunt in response. Until Jacob mentioned knowing that Scott worked at The Old Vic, and that is what made him think to come in for a job. Robert's face clouded over at the sound of his colleague's name, and there was definitely a lot more tension throughout the rest of the interview. In the end Jacob got the job and would start working on Monday.

Monday dawned cold but sunny, frost dusting the grass like icing sugar. Jacob put on his best (and only suit), grabbed his bag that holds anything he might need in case of a crime, (He had read somewhere that a good detective is always prepared) and walked out the door and to The Old Vic. His first job once he arrived, was ironing the costumes. They were having a dress rehearsal the very next day, and all the costumes had to be ready. He ended up scorching someone's skirt, and caused so much smoke, the fire alarm went off and the fire brigade were called.

There was a lot of chaos and confusion, as everyone was evacuated but the fire brigade found nothing and everyone was able to go back inside. The cost of the scorched skirt, and the fire brigade taken off his wages, meaning Jacob wouldn't get paid for another month, they were then able to get back to the rehearsal. Lawrence, the director, had Jacob sit upstairs with Lucas, the sound and lighting manager. From the sound and lighting, they could see and hear everything that was happening.

"Right everyone let's go from the beginning of Act 1 Scene 4. Please be off book. Alice, Scott, and Sam you three are on stage Lucas and Mark, please be ready as well with the music and props, and set." Everyone started running around to get everything ready, and Lawrence took a seat in his chair and started reading his newspaper, somewhat oblivious to everything else going on around him.

Scott suddenly remembered that A1S4 was the murder scene and he had forgotten to prepare his poison for when he gets murdered. It was really a cup of water with some food coloring, but the audience wouldn't know any better. Alice and Sam were already on stage and Lawrence was not a patient man. He called out to one of the other actresses in the play, "Rosie, can you prepare my fake poison for this scene? Thanks!"



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Rosie went to prepare the poison, hoping if she helped Scott out enough, he'd forget she owed him quite a lot of money. A while ago, she had needed to pay a large sum of money and had borrowed it from Scott, not having enough herself. She had promised to pay it back but a year later she still hadn't done it, nor did she have any intention to. Putting the glass out on the props table, she went into the green room to look over her lines.

On stage, things weren't going very well. Sam kept forgetting his lines and seemed extremely anxious. He kept peering over his shoulder like he was waiting for something or someone. Scott didn't have the fake poison he used in the scene ready on stage and Alice had arrived late to rehearsal which just added to Lawrence's general frustration.

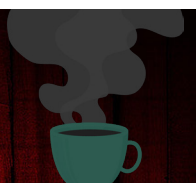
Even from where they were in the lighting booth, Jacob could hear Lawrence's voice "Get a grip of yourself Sam! We have three more weeks to prepare, and I can't have you making a fool of yourself like this! Lawrence rolled his eyes. "And Scott, I told you to have poison ready on stage so we could try with props today!" Lawrence gave an exasperated sigh and pinched the bridge of his nose. "In fact everyone take five and PLEASE be ready to work when we come back!"

Scott noticed the glass of water he was using as poison was sitting on the props table so didn't worry about that and went to get a breath of fresh air. Lawrence was a very punctual man and so exactly five minutes later everyone was back in position. Scott had got his water, gave it to Alice who was playing the murderer. Everything was going smoothly, and there was only one slight hiccup when Mark, the props and set manager, had forgotten to have ready one of the chairs needed for the scene. "Your drink my lord" Alice announced in an overly sickly-sweet voice, completely in character with an evil glint in her eyes.

Scott took a sip of his water and his whole body started twitching. The glass in his hand fell to the ground, shattering into thousands of tiny shards that reflected the light, creating a crystal-like effect. He then stopped moving entirely, his body slumped and went limp and his head hung over the back of the chair. Everyone started clapping at such a spectacular and convincing performance, although Sam and Alice, tried to stay in character. "Scott, can you get up now and go backstage, after we get the glass cleared up, we can go from when the investigation starts."

Scott stayed exactly where he was. Lawrence cleared his throat "Scott, I just asked if you would go backstage now so we can continue our rehearsal." Scott still didn't move a single muscle. That's the moment everyone realized something was really wrong. After having a closer look, everyone realized that the murder scene was not acting. Someone had actually poisoned the water and Scott was actually dead.

In all the commotion, of realizing that one of the crucial actors for the play was now dead, Jacob was able to start investigating, well sort of. He picked up one of the tiny shards of glass and examined it for finger prints (while covering it with his own). Checked backstage for footprints and was about to see if he could smell anything odd, because he had read somewhere that a good detective uses all their senses, when someone else walked in.



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Jacob eyes went wide with shock as his archnemesis and rival detective walked in. Oliver Wilson. At that moment so many emotions rushed through him. He was upset and angry, that finally he had a case to solve and an excellent private detective was just going to walk in and most likely solve it before him. He felt smug, knowing that since he now worked at the theatre (for now), he would be able to gain some inside information. He also just didn't like Oliver due to their history.

Sticking his nose up in the air Jacob walked straight past Oliver who looked so perfect. His whole outfit looked like it had been ironed on him. He didn't have a hair out of place or a speck of dirt anywhere. In comparison, Jacob's suit was tatty and shiny, with several holes. His hair stuck up like the spikes on a hedgehog, and the soles of his shoes flapped about with every step.

This deeply frustrated Jacob but he just kept walking, acting like he had something important to be doing. checking his watch, tapping his foot, peering into his bag, and looking around. Generally trying to appear busy and important.

Oliver was looking around for any sort of clues. Remembering this was what he was actually supposed to be doing, Jacob continued looking for anything that might be considered a clue as well. Around two-ish, he had found nothing and was feeling extremely hungry. Grabbing a turkey and cheese sandwich off of the cast and crew snack table, borrowing some pieces of scrap paper from Mark, and using a pen he found on the floor, he tried to write down everything he already knew.

Unsure where to begin, Jacob decided to go through any suspects in his head. Top of his list was wait he had no idea who could have done it. "I mean it could be anyone, the glass was just lying on the table and he might have not even been poisoned by there being something in the water!" Jacob let out a long sigh. This was certainly going to be harder than his detective novels. He started writing on a piece then rolled it into a ball and threw it at the wall. He was starting feel really frustrated at this point, until he noticed a receipt amongst the bits of paper.

Having a closer look, it was for the fruit and vegetables stall down the road from the Old Vic. Turning it over, he saw it was just for lots of apples. This did seem odd that someone wanted so many apples! Deciding it had to be a clue, he practically inhaled the rest of his sandwich and tried to think how that many apples could be used in a murder.

In a different part of the theatre, Oliver Wilson was talking to some of the cast and crew about what happened before, during and after the murder. One of the things he found out was how Rosie was the one who prepared the poison, and she owed Jacob money. That gave her a motive, and proved how easily she could have done it. Killing him would eliminate any possible blackmail.

His other suspect was Robert. He had wanted Scott's part and while Oliver wasn't sure how he could have done it, he had a very strong motive. Oliver also found out no one had seen Robert until after the murder had happened, meaning he had no alibi. He wrote Robert's name down next to Rosie's as his prime suspects.



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Finally, there was Lawrence. Oliver was an extraordinary detective, and had already seen on security footage that they had had an argument. Although the CCTV didn't pick up any sound so he wasn't sure how serious of an argument it was. That also meant, he couldn't be sure of how strong the motive would be, and since he hadn't moved from his chair the entire rehearsal, according to some of the people he had spoken to, Oliver decided to rule Lawrence out for now.

He now had two suspects and realized to get any further to the truth, he would need to have a chat with both of them and then re-evaluate the evidence. It was getting a quite late and only a few people were left at the theatre. Oliver knew he wouldn't be able to find anything more out today so got a taxi back home.

