The Unfortunate Death of Mr. Kingsley

Nathan Cox
Mr. Darby turned to the woman by his side, “You know Ms. Colette, I believe he is dead.”

Ms. Colette nodded in agreement, examining the man on the floor as she did so. He lay at the bottom of a large staircase. The staircase itself was inside a large mansion, the largest in all of London, which belonged to the man on the floor, Mr. Kingsley.

“Ms. Colette, I am going to fetch the Commissioner, we will have to move the body down to the yard where it can be properly examined, and the house will have to be cordoned off, and the maids and butlers collected for interview, and the dogs fed.” Mr. Darby left the room via the very ostentatious front door.

Outside he approached the Commissioner and said the following:

“Commissioner, Mr. Kingsley was murdered!”

“Dear Mr. Darby,” replied the weary Commissioner, “please tell me that this is not another one of your grand adventures. Mr. Kingsley was a close friend of mine and I will not have you running about his estate without reason.” As the Commissioner well knew, Mr. Darby had a habit of overreacting to situations. He cast a sideways glance at his head detective, Mrs. Shireham. She shook her head and looked at Mr. Darby.

“No, no, good fellow, he was most certainly murdered. He received a knock on the head, which was fatal, and then someone carefully placed him at the foot of the stairs to throw off your brilliant detectives. But they could not fool me!” With the last statement Mr. Darby pointed his finger into the sky and returned to the house.

Behind him the Commissioner and Mrs. Shireham stared at him. As always, he never ceased to leave his audience incredulous. The Commissioner rounded up his officers and instructed them to secure the grounds. He ordered that armed watchmen patrol the large fence on the border of the property, each patrol was to have two men and a dog. He then asked Mrs. Shireham to receive the reports of the patrols as the dogs would no doubt
aggravate his allergies.

“Ms. Colette, the Commissioner has been informed of my conclusions. We have permission to begin our investigation. We shall have to find a suspect first. Have the maids and butlers been collected?”

Ms. Colette again nodded at her partner and then moved out of the room towards the servant’s quarters. Mr. Darby, exasperated, as usual, by his partner’s silence took to ordering the newly arrived police officers. Under his guidance they carefully placed the body of Mr. Kingsley on a stretcher and carried him away.

“Mr. Kingsley was the richest man in all of London,” Mr. Darby spoke to himself, “which gives plenty of motive to a killer. But the house has not been broken into. I believe that the killer must have been someone Mr. Kingsley knew, someone he trusted!”

Mr. Darby, firm in his belief that he was alone, turned around to find Mrs. Shiresham occupying the front doorway. He gave a start and then quickly collected himself.

“Mr. Darby, the Commissioner requests that you return to the yard and confirm your beliefs with the coroner. If you cannot prove that Mr. Kingsley did not simply fall down the stairs then you will be asked to stop making ridiculous accusations.” Mrs. Shiresham spoke with an undertone of ingratiated annoyance.

“Of course, of course, Mrs. Shiresham, I can’t have the Commissioner thinking I am incorrect, now can I? I trust you to stay here and maintain the scene of the crime in my absence. But don’t uncover too many of the great secrets before I return!” He bid her adieu and left the house once more.

Meanwhile Ms. Colette had spoken with all of the servants and also returned to the yard. Upon seeing Mr. Darby there her face registered no surprise.

“Ah, Ms. Colette, good to see you here, I have only just come back to see the body. What did you find out from the maids and butlers?” Mr. Darby,
as was proper, led the investigation.

Ms. Colette told him of the ins and outs of the Kingsley mansion; over the last few days there had been many visitors, members of state, bank officials, even Mrs. Shireham had called on Mr. Kingsley in response to his stolen dog. It had been his favorite German Shepherd. Upon her return the previous day she had been turned away, shortly before the realization of Mr. Kingsley’s death. None of the visitors had stayed longer than their business required them to, as Mr. Kingsley was not known for his ability to entertain.

Besides the visitors to the mansion all had gone as it regularly did. Mr. Kingsley woke in the morning and took his breakfast in bed with the morning paper. Afterwards he would go to the kennel and tend his dogs until lunch. Lunch was promptly at noon, and after lunch visitors were allowed to make appointments. When not seeing visitors Mr. Kingsley tended to his large company, something he managed to do without ever leaving the mansion. When the time came for dinner Mr. Kingsley dined alone in the large dining room of the mansion. He would then sit by the large fireplace in the sitting room and smoke his pipe for exactly one half hour before retiring to bed. The daily schedule did not vary any day of the week, not even Sunday, as Mr. Kingsley was not a very religious man and believed it better to continue working on Sundays.

“Excellent work, Ms. Colette,” Mr. Darby said, “why don’t you come see the body with me? It never hurts to have an extra pair of eyes along.”

Ms. Colette followed Mr. Darby into the basement where the coroner worked. Whereupon they were informed, just as Mr. Darby had suspected; that Mr. Kingsley could not have died from a fall down the staircase. In fact, the coroner went so far as to say that Mr. Kingsley must have received a blow to the head that was entirely unrelated to stairs.

“Exactly as I suspected!” Mr. Darby again pointed his finger at the sky, or rather, the ceiling, as they were now in the basement of the yard, “Ms. Colette, we must return to the mansion at once and look for a murder weapon.”

With that Mr. Darby rushed out of the room and back upstairs. Ms. Colette followed him a moment later. After they had gone Mrs. Shireham and the
Commissioner both arrived in the coroner’s office to hear his report.

“Mrs. Shiresham, I have no doubt that Mr. Darby will be invigorated by this news, you shall have to return to the mansion and monitor him. See that he does not cause any irreparable harm to himself or the estate.” The Commissioner blew his nose in a handkerchief and then returned it to his pocket.

“Indeed Commissioner. We can’t have him ruining a national landmark.” With a steely look Mrs. Shiresham shook the Commissioner’s hand and left to follow Mr. Darby.

Back at the mansion Mr. Darby drew ever closer to revealing the truth behind Mr. Kingsley’s death. He called out through the mansion for Ms. Colette to join him in Mr. Kingsley’s office.

“Ms. Colette! Look at this,” she looked, “it has to be the murder weapon.” In his hand he held a good sized bust of Mr. Kingsley. It was made of solid gold and perfectly sculpted, all but for the large dent on top, which, oddly, coincided with the place in which Mr. Kingsley had been struck.

Mrs. Shiresham entered the room then. Mr. Darby held up the bust for her to see and explained his suspicions.

“Mr. Kingsley was cleared killed by a business partner! They must have had a disagreement over money and Mr. Kingsley was murdered with his own statue.”

Mrs. Shiresham bore his explanation and then offered a counterpoint.

“Mr. Darby, this is an excellent conclusion, but what if it was not a business partner? Perhaps Mr. Kingsley was struck by one of his own servants; after all they have access to the entire mansion. Would it not be easy for one of them to come in without Mr. Kingsley’s notice?”

Mr. Darby paused for a moment; he was not used to having people second guess his conclusions.

“Of course, Mrs. Shiresham, this is a possibility, but look about. There is no tray, if a servant had killed Mr. Kingsley would there not be evidence of
a servant in the room? The desk is covered in papers, which would imply business dealings, and there has been no space cleared for the arrival of a servant. A man such as Mr. Kingsley would have to have made space for tea, had a servant entered the room. There is no way that the killer could have been a servant!"

Satisfied with his rebuttal Mr. Darby exited the room to review the list of visitors. Ms. Colette scanned over the papers on the desk, which were all pedigrees for Mr. Kingsley’s large collection of dogs. On the very top was the impressive pedigree of his missing German shepherd. With a neutral look at Mrs. Shiresham Ms. Colette left the room. Behind her Mrs. Shiresham quietly took the top paper from the desk and put it in the pocket of her dress.

Mr. Darby stood at the bottom of the staircase with his notebook out and pencil in hand. He was reviewing the list given to him by Ms. Colette. There was one name on it which particularly puzzled him: Mrs. Shiresham. Of course, he knew she had been investigating the missing dog, but why had the Commissioner himself not taken the case?

“Ms. Colette,” Mr. Darby said in a low voice, “I don’t believe we can trust Mrs. Shiresham any longer. Her presence at the mansion the day of the murder is too great a coincidence.”

Ms. Colette nodded at Mr. Darby, as he had come to expect, and then directed him back towards the yard.

When Mr. Darby and Ms. Colette arrived at the yard they rushed to the Commissioner’s office.

“Commissioner!” Mr. Darby shouted through the halls, “Commissioner I believe I know what has happened to Mr. Kingsley!”

Mr. Darby burst into the Commissioner’s office, throwing the door against the wall.

“Mr. Darby, this is entirely unprecedented, what are you doing here?” The Commissioner stood, putting down his handkerchief, and gave Mr. Darby an angry glare.
“Commissioner I’m sorry to make such an entrance but I believe I have discovered Mr. Kingsley’s killer.”

The Commissioner looked at Mr. Darby with incredulity, and then looked at Ms. Colette, who nodded.

“Mr. Kingsley was killed by someone he knew, someone that he trusted. I investigated his office and found the murder weapon, a bust of the man himself! But the killer was not a servant, there was no space made on Mr. Kingsley’s desk for receiving tea. Other than tea there would not have been a servant in the room and Mr. Kingsley would sure have known something was amiss. Instead I conjecture that the killer is Mrs. Shiresham!”

“Mrs. Shiresham! Mr. Darby this is ridiculous.” The Commissioner sat down again.

“No! It had to have been Mrs. Shiresham, she was investigating the disappearance of Mr. Kingsley’s prize dog, and the last thing on his desk was the pedigree of that dog. He must have been discussing the case with Mrs. Shiresham when she killed him. She is not only the murderer but also a thief!”

As Mr. Darby made this exclamation Mrs. Shiresham entered the room.

“Mr. Darby, I applaud you efforts, but you are gravely mistaken.”

Mr. Darby whirled around to stare at Mrs. Shiresham, the killer was now in the room with him!

“Commissioner, Ms. Colette, although Mr. Darby has made an excellent case I know who the real killer is. Mr. Kingsley’s dog was stolen a week ago, as we all well know. That German shepherd was his prize dog, the most purebred German shepherd in the world. The dog is said to be so purebred that it would not even induce an allergic reaction! Which is why, Commissioner, you are the murderer.”

“Me! Mrs. Shiresham this is a terrible defense, clearly Mr. Darby has outwitted you.”

“No Commissioner, you are the murderer. When I was assigned the case of
Mr. Kingsley’s missing dog I requested to see the pedigree of the animal in question. I realized almost immediately that the pedigree was a fake! The dog was not, in fact, the most purebred German Shepherd in the world. Which is why, Commissioner, when you stole the dog your allergies gave you away; I realized in the coroner’s office when you began to blow your nose. The closest you had been to dogs that day was at the mansion, but you had me handle the patrols so that you would not come in contact with the animals. When I shook your hand I found black hairs on your sleeve. The sort of hairs which a world class German Shepherd would have.”

Mr. Darby stood dumbly in the center of the room, listening to Mrs. Shireham’s explanation. Ms. Colette listened carefully, but showed no signs of exasperation. The Commissioner showed a large amount of exasperation.

“When I returned to the mansion Mr. Darby had found the bust which was used to murder Mr. Kingsley. This bust, made of solid gold, would have been much too heavy for me to lift with any ease, let alone use as a bludgeon. But as Commissioner you have regular access to the police gym and are often seen there. The last piece of evidence is right here in my pocket; the true pedigree of Mr. Kingsley’s missing dog. I believe that you went to speak to Mr. Kingsley about his dog and that he showed you this pedigree. In embarrassment at your mistake and anger at Mr. Kingsley’s pride you took up the bust and killed him.”

“That’s brilliant Mrs. Shireham!” Mr. Darby let out an impressed exclamation. Ms. Colette nodded her agreement.

“Yes Mrs. Shireham, well done.” The Commissioner had stood up again. “But I cannot allow you to compromise my position as the Commissioner of London. You are all under arrest for treason!”

With this two large police officers entered the room. But instead of arresting Mrs. Shireham and Mr. Darby and Ms. Colette they stepped around the desk and each of them clapped a large hand on the Commissioner’s shoulder.

“Commissioner, it is you who is under arrest, for the murder of Mr. Kingsley, the richest man in London.” Mr. Darby pointed his finger at the Commissioner with a triumphant look on his face.