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# The Locked House of Pythagoras

by Sōji Shimada

translated by Yuko Shimada

*Sōji Shimada is one of the top contemporary writers specialising in impossible crimes and locked rooms, along with Paul Halter. Both authors appeared on the May 21, 2012 Radio 4 programme Miles Jupp in a Locked Room, which attracted 500,000 listeners.*

*On January 29, 2014, Shimada’s The Tokyo Zodiac Murders was listed in second place (just behind John Dickson Carr’s The Hollow Man) in Adrian McGinty’s Top 10 Locked Room Mysteries. The novel, published in 1981, was credited with sparking a Japanese renewal of interest in novels featuring the classic Golden Age puzzle plot, known in Japan as honkaku (“authentic” or “orthodox”). Prior to his arrival on the scene, Japanese detective fiction was dominated – as is western detective fiction to this day – by the shakaiha, or social school, which focused on motive and police procedure rather than the classic detective fiction of the 1930s.*

*Shimada worked tirelessly with “detective clubs” formed in Japanese universities and with selected Tokyo publishers to create a cadre of young writers such as Yukito Ayatsuji, whose The Decagon House Murders was a phenomenal success, to the point that honkaku novels now dominate Japanese mystery fiction and mangas (graphic novels intended principally for young readers).*

*As Ayatsuji himself says, through one of his characters: “To me, detective fiction is a kind of intellectual game: a logical game that avoids readers’ emotional feelings about detectives or authors.... The point is to take pleasure in the world of reasoning. But intellectual prerequisites must be completely met.”*

*Two of Shimada’s short stories have already appeared in Ellery Queen’s Mystery Magazine – “The Executive Who Lost His Mind” in August 2015 and “The Locked House of Pythagoras,” which appears here, in August 2013. “Pythagoras” is remarkably complex for a short story and, as with all his work, highly ingenious.*

IT HAD RAINED HEAVILY ALL DAY. BECAUSE SHE HAD BEEN assigned to clean-up duty, Eriko and a friend were still in the classroom after school, removing posters and students’ projects tacked to the walls.

A tall, skinny boy stood awkwardly by the entrance to the classroom.

“Are you throwing that away?” he asked Eriko.

He pointed to a large, torn poster in vellum paper taped to the rear wall. The homeroom teacher had asked that it be taken down.

“Yes,” Eriko replied. The boy seemed a couple of years younger than she was.

“Oh...then can I have it?” asked the boy, meekly. Eriko helped him bandage the tear and roll up the large vellum paper into a scroll.

“Thanks,” said the boy. When Eriko asked him what he needed the paper for, he blushed a

little and told her that he was going to fold it into a helmet.

“A helmet?” repeated Eriko, taken by surprise but handing him the paper. The skinny boy said nothing more, however, and walked out of the room.

Eriko’s classmate, who had overheard them talking, told her that the boy’s last name was Tsuchida and he was the son of the famous artist who had been on the selection committee for the Mayor’s Award, given to the winner of an art competition involving works nominated by Yokohama’s elementary and middle schools. Eriko’s friend Kiyoshi Mitarai had previously been one of the nominees in the contest, although he wasn’t a particularly talented painter.

Eriko was surprised to hear of the boy’s identity, because she knew that the Mayor’s Award had recently been cancelled due to a tragic event involving the boy’s father, the famous painter Tomitaro Tsuchida.

At first, the Awards Committee had declined to give the reason for the cancellation, but it quickly transpired that Tsuchida had been murdered, along with his mistress Kyoko Amagi, during the time he was judging the submissions in his house in Uguisuoka.

It was not just the murders that caused the cancellation of the Mayor’s Award, for replacement judges could have been found. There was another reason: The paintings, which had been found alongside the bodies of the murdered couple, were said to have been “tainted,” but no further explanation had been given. Naturally, that aroused the parents’ curiosity, particularly when it was learned that none of their children’s paintings had escaped damage and therefore none would be returned.

So when Eriko realized that she had been talking to the son of the late artist, she was surprised at the boy’s nonchalant attitude, given the recent loss of his father. She had lost her own father at a young age, and while she couldn’t exactly recall how she behaved following his death, she knew for certain she wasn’t as relaxed about it as the helmet boy had been. His shy grin remained engraved in her memory.

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Eriko knew Kiyoshi liked crime mysteries, so she gleaned what she could of the Tsuchida case from conversations she overheard between her mother and the customers at their family-owned bar.

Tomitaro Tsuchida had been a good-looking man in his fifties, constantly involved in scandals with female models, pupils, and admirers. But it was his relationship with Kyoko Amagi, an accountant at the Yokohama city board of education, which remained the strongest. He paid for her apartment in Honmoku, where she lived away from her legal husband Keikichi Agami, a racehorse trainer. Before he rose to national prominence Tsuchida had lived with his wife Haruko and their son Yasuo – the helmet boy – in a tiny house across the river from the studio where he was found, but he had long since abandoned them.

It had been a month since the murders, but no progress was being made in its resolution. According to Eriko’s mother, the Tsuchida murders were anything but ordinary, and the police were up against a brick wall for two main reasons.

- First, the couple were murdered in a house that was completely locked from the inside. All the doors and windows were secured and none showed any evidence of tampering.
- Second, the murders took place just after a heavy rainstorm, when the grounds surrounding the property were still wet. Yet the only sets of footprints found circled the house but did

not enter or leave. One of the sets belonged to the estranged husband, Keikichi Amagi; despite the fact that his footprints didn't lead into the house, the police arrested him anyway. Although the police did not yet know it, the problems involving the locked building and the footprints in the mud were the least of their worries. An even greater mystery concerning the Tsuchida house was about to surface. Locked rooms and footprints in the mud were only the beginning.

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Eriko and Kiyoshi attended The Wadayama School, located at the foot of the "Amerika zaka" ("America Slope"), so named because of the U.S. army base nearby. Every morning, Eriko waited for her friend near the entrance to the base, and the two of them then headed down the slope towards the school.

As they walked to school the day after her encounter with Tsuchida's son, Eriko told Kiyoshi about his strange request for the vellum paper to fold into a helmet, and also the latest information she had collected from her mother about the Tsuchida murders: its peculiar locked-room situation and the perplexing case of the footprints around the house.

"A helmet?" asked Kiyoshi, ignoring the news about the locked room and the footprints.

"Huh? Oh, yeah, he said he was going to make one," she replied.

"Hmm."

"Kiyoshi, is that something important?" Eriko was a bit surprised.

"Hey, wait up kids!"

A voice called out from behind them. It was Mr. Sakata, the homeroom teacher, who had been the Wadayama School representative on the Mayor's Awards committee. Mr. Sakata wore glasses and had a jocular demeanor. Never boastful and very friendly, he was popular among the students.

"Mr. Sakata, you chose the works of the awards finalists, right?" Kiyoshi asked.

"Well, I chose the ones from our school. Goodness, that must've been early May."

"There were a lot of finalists, weren't there?" Kiyoshi continued.

"That's right. Each school was given a quota."

"How many in total?"

"Seventy from all the elementary schools in Yokohama, and seventy from the middle schools. It was a nice round number, so I remember it very well," said Sakata.

"So one hundred forty total?" asked the boy.

"Yes, but this year they cut it back to one hundred and thirty-something."

"Do you know why they did that?"

"I don't know. They wanted to increase the number of elementary school submissions and reduce those from the middle schools. The committee proposed ninety and fifty respectively, but Mr. Tsuchida suggested eighty-eight and forty-eight. Since he was doing the final judging, the committee went along with his request."

"Strange, one thirty-six isn't a very round number, is it?"

"Apparently, by taking out four pictures, Mr. Tsuchida was able to make the process a lot easier somehow. It was a mystery how he could judge all those pictures inside his own house, which wasn't all that big, instead of using the school gymnasium. I guess he wanted privacy."

"I bet if we could work out why he took out four pictures, we could solve the whole mystery: the footprints, the locked room, and all the rest of it," Kiyoshi said, as they entered the

school.

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When Eriko came into Kiyoshi's classroom after classes were over, she found him leaning over his desk measuring the dimensions of a piece of drawing paper. Then he pulled out a magnifying glass from his pocket and began to look hard at its surface.

"Kiyoshi-kun, what are you doing?" she whispered. Without looking up, he said, "Examining a picture."

"A picture of what?"

"This piece received an honorable mention at last year's awards," he said, nonchalantly.

"What are you doing? What are you looking at? You know that's the back of the picture, don't you?" she asked him.

"Yeah."

"So that picture wasn't returned to its owner?" This time there was no reply. "You're not going to look at the front? Isn't the picture important? What's on the back? Kiyoshi-kun, why do you need a magnifying glass for that?"

"I'm pretty much finished. It's exactly what I thought," he said.

"What is?"

"The numbers. Three hundred sixty-four and five hundred fifteen. Now let's put this back in its place...." Kiyoshi lifted the back cover of the frame and put the picture back on the glass. He hung the picture back on the wall.

"Were you able to solve something?" asked Eriko.

"Yup, I've solved what Mr. Sakata was talking about this morning, about how Mr. Tsuchida was able to select one finalist out of one hundred and thirty-six pictures."

"You're so smart, Kiyoshi! So have you solved the murders?"

"I've only got the general idea. I still need to go to the site. If only I could get inside the house – that's going to be difficult. But let's go anyway."

"What, where?"

"To Mr. Tsuchida's house. Where is it, exactly?"

"My mother told me it's in the fourth block of Uguisuoka, by the river in the Honmoku district. A really weird-looking house with three two-story blocks arranged around a triangle, right next to a tall steel tower. But why are we going? We're only kids, we can't go to a real-life murder site!"

"We've got no choice. The police officers need me."

"Really? They can't solve it?"

"This case is too difficult. They don't even know how Mr. Tsuchida managed to select the finalists from inside his house! That's why they don't know who the murderer is, even after a month on the case. They're all confused and don't know what to do. That's why I've got to go."

\* \* \*

The two left school and went up the hill towards the Honmoku district. They walked past trees with branches dripping rain and fields of tall weeds, and came to a narrow, winding road through green farmland. Eventually they could see a tall silver tower on elevated ground.

“That must be Mr. Tsuchida’s house. Let’s get closer,” Kiyoshi said. Eriko shivered, partially because of the cold, but also from fear. It was the site of a double murder, after all.

“See, a river. Mr. Tsuchida’s son – the boy you met yesterday – lives in one of those little houses on the opposite bank. His name’s Yasuo, and he lives with his mom, Haruko. They don’t have a telephone in their house,” he continued.

“They’re not living with his father?”

“No, they’re living apart. The dad was living in the big house in front of us.”

“Kiyoshi-kun, how do you know so much about this?”

“I asked the teachers. Adults follow this kind of stuff,” Kiyoshi said, smirking.

Although it had been a month since the murders, there was still police tape at the entrance to the house. There was one uniformed police officer holding an umbrella and one detective wearing a raincoat over his hat. The moment he saw the men, Kiyoshi called out to them.

“Hello officer, did Mr. Amagi explain how he killed Mr. Tsuchida?” The man stopped and looked back at Kiyoshi curiously. Eriko nervously awaited his reaction. The detective was fifty or so years old, old enough to be their father. He was skinny and had protruding buckteeth.

“What do you want?” he demanded.

“Can we have some information about the room where Mr. Tsuchida was murdered? What were his surroundings like?” Kiyoshi asked.

The detective gave a condescending sneer, as the two had anticipated.

“Who do you kids think you are? Go back home,” he said and began to walk away.

“Hold on, Mr. Amagi hasn’t told you how he did it, right?”

“He doesn’t need to, we already know.”

“Then how?” Kiyoshi asked, and the detective scoffed.

“Why do I have to tell you kids? Get lost.”

“You want to know, right? I know you’re having trouble finding the killer. I can help you, and I can tell you how he did it.”

The bucktoothed man, reacting to such a bold declaration from a mere boy, burst into loud laughter.

“Hey kiddo, you best stop your jokes right there, or I’ll really get angry. I told you we’ve already got the killer.”

“I hope so.”

“What did you say?!” With a frightening glare he began to walk towards them. Eriko shrank away as far as possible.

“Look here, brat. You’d better watch what you say, huh? This is a real-life murder, not a detective game.” His gaze was serious and menacing, but Kiyoshi didn’t flinch.

“But I’m serious about this. You’ve got to listen to me, if you want to solve the case!”

“I’ve told you that we’ve got the killer!” the man’s face grew red with fury.

“But the footprints, they only circle the house, don’t they? They don’t go in. And every window and door is fastened on the inside, right? How was Mr. Amagi able to kill them?”

“We know all about that, kid. So are you telling me Tsuchida committed suicide?”

“I’m sure there are people who think that.”

“Well that’s impossible. Tsuchida was stabbed in ten places, and the weapon is nowhere to be found.”

Kiyoshi was visibly pleased with this statement. He had been able to extract a valuable piece of information. He continued:

“I know it’s not suicide. The pictures, they were dirty, right? How were they dirty?”

“That’s confidential info, kiddo. Haven’t even told the press about that,” he said, starting to walk away.

“Please, you don’t need to tell me everything. I already know about most things. I’m doing this for your sake!”

The detective stopped again in his tracks, and with a contemptuous, cold smile on his face, he spat out in the cruelest way possible:

“All right, why don’t you tell me how he was killed, huh?” He turned his head back and called out to his fellow police officer. “Hey, you got the dimensions of the room? We’ll see if we need them later, but do you have them with you now?”

“Five thousand one hundred and fifty millimeters!” screamed the boy suddenly. The detective froze. The officer in the distance heard, too, and stopped dead in his tracks.

“The two were killed in a square room, each side five meters and fifteen centimeters long.”

The detective slowly turned around and faced Kiyoshi. His little eyes were bulging and his jaw had dropped wide open.

“And although there were tatami mats over the floor of the room, you couldn’t see them when you went in. Why? Because every space on the floor was filled with the pictures for the Yokohama Mayor’s Awards. Am I right?”

The men didn’t answer. They heard only the sound of the rain beating down.

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The police received a call at 5:43 p.m. on May 25. Suspicions arose from the fact that Kyoko Amagi had not returned home to her apartment on the evening of the twenty-fourth, nor had she attended the educational board meeting in the city hall the following morning. Minetaro Nagaoka, a member of the city council, had tried to phone the Tsuchida residence but there had been no reply. Sensing something was wrong, he had gone to the house and then phoned the police.

The estimated time of death was between 3 p.m. and 5 p.m. on the twenty-fourth. Up until two-thirty in the afternoon of the same day, it had been raining nonstop. The soggy ground would have captured the footprints of anyone who had entered or left the house after that time. No decorative ornaments or stepping stones were to be found around the Tsuchida home; there was nothing but soft, bare earth.

Muraki and Hashimoto of the Honmoku police department, accompanied by two crime scene investigators, arrived on the scene at six-twenty on the evening of the twenty-fifth and immediately placed caution tape around the house.

The investigators shone their flashlights on the sodden soil and identified two separate sets of footprints, as evident from the differences in the depth of the imprints. One set of shoes had left their mark immediately after the rain, and the other set long after it had ceased. The lab investigators made plaster molds of the prints, which were later identified as belonging to Minetaro Nagaoka and Kyoko’s estranged husband Keikichi Amagi.

Because every door and window was tightly closed and locked from the inside, the officers had to break the glass door of the front entrance and force their way in. They found themselves in a roughly triangular hallway, widening out towards the rear, with a staircase to their right. They took off their shoes and proceeded up the stairs. They found themselves in a hallway that was a perfect right-angled triangle with the shortest wall directly ahead of them and a longer wall, perpendicular to it, on their left. The doors in both walls were open.

The policemen went into the room to their left. Due to a large skylight, the square room was eerily bright; the moon and stars illuminated an empty easel, a wooden box containing tubes of oil paint, an empty vase, and a tall, decorative set of shelves. When they switched on the light, they could see a pair of sliding windows in front of them and another pair to their left. All the windows were framed by half-drawn dark, floral-printed curtains and locked with half-moon latches. On closer inspection, the curtains were found to be speckled with paint, which suggested the room was Tsuchida's principal studio. Otherwise the room was very clean, with no traces of blood anywhere.

The two detectives proceeded next to the adjacent smaller room. It, too, was square with a skylight and had curtained sliding windows on three sides of the room, all fastened shut with the same half-moon locks. Through the window straight ahead of them they could see a row of beech trees, behind which they could make out the lights from the houses on the other side of the river. There was another view of the river and some flat fields from the window to their right. When they crossed the room and opened the third window, they were startled to see a steel pylon obstructing the view. It stood about three meters away from the window; looking down, they could see the steel fence surrounding it at the base, bedecked with danger signs. The room itself was empty except for a couple of watercolors on the walls, an easel, and an empty vase. Tubes of paint, brushes, palettes, and drawing paper were scattered around on shelves fitted to the walls; curiously, all the red tubes of paint looked to have been squeezed dry. The room appeared to have been an ancillary workshop to the main studio and was, if anything, even cleaner; a mop lay under the window.

Muraki and Hashimoto made a brief examination of the remaining two upstairs rooms whose open doors were set on either side of the stairwell. The first appeared to be a bedroom with a couch, a table, and a television set. There was a nude portrait of Kyoko Amagi on one of the walls; she sat vacantly on the same couch that was in the room.

The second appeared to be a storage room with a glass-fronted alcove but no furniture. Each room had several sliding windows, all firmly locked in the same manner as the others. They went downstairs.

At the foot of the stairs, along the longest wall, was a door which was locked. They decided to inspect the other rooms first. Immediately opposite the locked room was an open door leading to a kitchen which, in turn, led out into a garden. The kitchen was empty except for a stack of cleanly washed paint dishes stacked on the stainless steel sink, and appeared to be spotlessly clean. The windows over the sink and the door to the garden had been locked from the inside. Adjacent to the kitchen was a dining room with only one set of windows, firmly locked. The connecting door between the kitchen and dining room was open.

Almost perpendicular to the dining room, and directly beneath the workshop on the floor above, was a suite of bathrooms. The men's room, women's room, and main washing room were all empty and all had securely locked windows. The two detectives returned to the room with the locked door at the foot of the stairs and one of the investigators broke down the door.

They stopped dead in their tracks at the sight that greeted them.

Tsuchida and Amagi were lying side by side in a sea of red. Almost the entire floor area was colored with a blinding hue of red. At the same time, the two detectives were assaulted by an intense odor which rushed out the moment the doors were broken down.

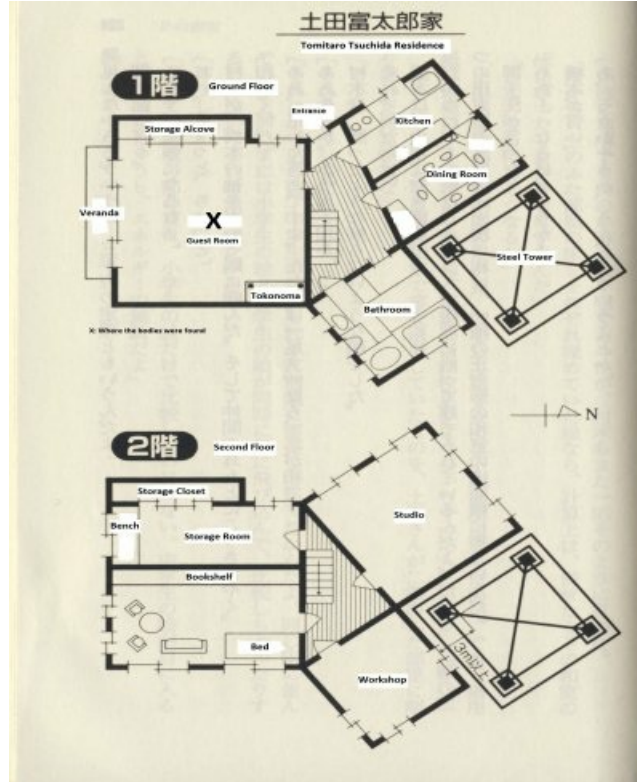
"What a foul smell, I wish I could open the windows. What is this red...?" said Muraki.

The combination of the smell and the blinding red color made them feel faint, even though they were veterans accustomed to seeing blood. Speechless, they stared at the panorama of red

for several moments.

The room itself was the largest in the building and was perfectly square except for a narrow south-facing veranda directly in front of them, which stuck out into an equally narrow garden, and a storage alcove which ran most of the length of the wall to their right and contained zabuton floor cushions, a couple of low tables, a flower vase with a needle point holder, and other paraphernalia for *ikebana* flower arranging. In the corner to their left was a small *tokonoma*, a ceremonial display space whose four corners were lined with bamboo sticks. There were several staggered shelves on its walls, on which were placed small wooden chests. The wall of the *tokonoma* to the policemen's immediate left featured a wooden transom with two small rectangular openings separated by a thin bamboo rod.

As they stared, the reason for the redness began to dawn on them. The floors were lined with red paper. It seemed to be thick paper, and upon close observation it became clear that it was drawing paper. Each paper was colored red and carefully placed on the floor, without gaps and without overlap, just like tiles. The paper reached from wall to wall, except for the *tokonoma*, the storage alcove, and the veranda.



The *tatami* mats which normally covered the floors in a Japanese-style guest room were not visible.

“Muraki-san, I think this may be children’s artwork,” said his partner, Hashimoto. “I can vaguely see pictures beneath the red. My guess is that they are the finalist pieces for the Mayor’s Awards.”

“Why are the pictures on the floor?”

“Tsuchida-san was in the process of choosing the winner. The rumors said he always did the selection process in this house by himself instead of an open space like the school gymnasium, for privacy.”



“Let’s pull out some of this paper and form a path so you can get to the bodies,” suggested one of the investigators. He used white gloves to remove ten pictures, which he gently placed in order by the broken door.

After a narrow path had been created, it could be seen that the light-brown *tatami* didn’t seem to be tainted at all; no blood had leaked between the papers.

Hashimoto led the way to the bodies and squatted down.

Tsuchida and Amagi were lying close to one another, but no part of their bodies was touching; they were not even holding hands. There was no sign of their clothes having been pulled off or being in disarray. The color of their clothes was almost unidentifiable because their bodies were soaked in blood, now darkened and caked onto the fabric. Tsuchida was holding a paintbrush in his left hand.

“This is awful,” said Hashimoto.

“What is?” Muraki said as he crouched by his side. “Ahh,” he grunted in understanding: there were simply too many wounds on the two bodies. They had been pierced just about everywhere, and the blood had caused the paper beneath them to harden onto their clothes.

“They’ve each been stabbed through an artery. Especially Tsuchida, on his chest, underarms, thighs, arms, you name it. At least ten stabs. The woman has slightly less, but she’s still stabbed through and through.”

“The room was locked on the inside. Tsuchida must have killed Amagi and then himself,” said Muraki.

Hashimoto looked at Muraki. “So, what are you saying? Tsuchida first stabs the woman all over her body, then uses his brush and paints all of the artwork with her blood. Then he comes back to the middle of the room without leaving any footprints and commits suicide by stabbing himself ten times?”

Muraki stayed silent.

“Just from seeing these wounds, that’s clearly impossible. Tsuchida has slashes all over his body, all extremely deep and each stab potentially fatal. Even if he were able to stab himself with such force, at the very most it would be twice. The same goes if the woman kills Tsuchida first. So this can’t be suicide. And where’s the knife anyway?”

They looked around. No weapons or other objects were to be seen anywhere in the room. Muraki became pensive. Hashimoto’s analysis was difficult to deny.

“And another thing: There’s very little trace of the blood that oozed out of the bodies. Most of it has been used to cover the paintings, and yet the blood from two bodies couldn’t possibly stretch to the area of this whole floor.”

“If it’s not suicide, then why was the entrance to this room locked from inside?”

“Well that’s obviously a problem. But I can guarantee you that this isn’t suicide. Not only is there no weapon, there’s no water cup nearby to clean up the spilled blood on the *tatami*, and there are no paint dishes or palettes in sight. To paint the whole room, the brushes would have to be cleaned at least once, and the blood would have to be thinned to spread it all over the ‘canvas.’ The reason why these supplies are missing is because someone else did it. Whoever it was washed the cups and dishes and put them away.”

“What about the locks?” Muraki asked again.

“It’s gotta be some kind of trick.” Hashimoto kneeled down and investigated another sheet of paper. “Wait a minute, this is only red paint!”

“Some of the red is watercolor paint,” said the investigator. “They used both blood and paint to cover everything. It looks as though some pictures are covered with only blood, and

some with only paint. You can tell because the gloss is different.” He pointed with his gloved hand.

“See, this part – it’s got a whiter hue. That’s paint, most likely watercolor. That paper there is somewhat darker and browner, so it’s blood. If you look closely, you can see a clear distinction.”

“What is used more, blood or watercolor?”

“At a glance, I’d say watercolor.”

Muraki crossed his arms. Hashimoto asked:

“Why were the paintings laid down side by side, in such orderly fashion? If this were a murder, I’d expect the paper to be everywhere, crinkled and torn at the very least.”

“That’s true,” Muraki agreed.

“But each painting is neatly arranged, without any trace of damage.”

“Well either they were arranged after the murder, or put in place before the murder.”

“Why’d they do that?”

The two became quiet again.

From a quick scan of the room, there seemed to be no trace of even blood-tainted scratches or marks, much less fingerprints. Also, there was no blood on the white curtains which had been drawn closed. They counted the paper sheets: There were forty-eight pictures in the area surrounding the bodies which were covered in blood and eighty-eight pictures on the periphery which were covered in red water color, for a total of one hundred thirty-six.

“Why forty-eight with blood and eighty-eight with paint? What do these numbers mean?” asked Muraki.

“I don’t know.”

“And why are they carefully spaced apart? Why’s everything so damned organized? Why can’t the paper be strewn all over the place?”

“Again, I don’t know.”

“And why the hell does this room have to be locked from the inside too?!” Muraki often thought out loud by yelling at his partner.

“Really sir, I don’t know.”

“This is completely incomprehensible. I’ve never seen anything like this in my life!” Muraki had completely lost it.

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The next morning, Muraki and Hashimoto went into the city to visit Kyoko Amagi’s apartment in Honmoku. Kyoko had been living there for six months already, kept by Tomitaro Tsuchida.

Kyoko’s husband had adamantly refused to accept a divorce. Of course this bothered Tsuchida, but it especially affected Kyoko. After she moved out, Keikichi visited her apartment every night. When Kyoko refused to see him he would eventually retreat back home, but not before throwing rocks at her window and screaming abusive language. Already the neighbors were predicting it would end in murder.

The detectives next visited the racetrack in Negishi, because Keikichi Amagi had listed his profession as trainer. But when they got there, his fellow workers said he had been absent for several months. He had been living alone in the Amagi marital home in Sasashita city.

Muraki and Hashimoto visited the Amagi house the following day. Even though it was early afternoon, Amagi was already inebriated. When asked to accompany them to the police station

for further questioning, he vacuously answered that he didn't mind. When they took his shoes and compared them to the plaster molds they had created from the footprints around the Tsuchida residence, they matched perfectly.

The footprints, plus his motive for killing Kyoko, strengthened the case against him and he was arrested the day after the police visit. At this point the Tomitaro Tsuchida murders had already made the headlines nationwide. Amagi was put in a detention center and subjected to intense interrogation for twenty-three days.

He initially denied killing his estranged wife, but eventually, after many days of violent accusations by the police, coupled with lack of sleep, he finally gave in and admitted to the double murder. He obediently signed the written statement affirming his crime. Thus the Honmoku police station was able to accomplish a speedy arrest.

However, while Keikichi admitted to the murders, he gave no explanation about the footprints, the locked rooms, or the blood on the paintings. When given the details of the red paper laid out on the first floor, he expressed astonishment. The investigators were in a quandary: They had reached the conclusion that Amagi was the killer, but they could not come up with a valid explanation for the execution of his crime. This meant that they were unable to accuse Amagi in court. That being so, they would need to release him from custody. The prosecutors would need an opening statement, but this would be impossible to construct, considering they had no explanation. The Honmoku police would become the laughingstock of the nation. Muraki and Hashimoto were truly stuck.

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Kiyoshi Mitarai visited Muraki and Hashimoto in the rain again just when they were at a complete dead end and desperate for any help they could get. If someone could save them from a lifetime of shame, they were willing to swallow their pride and even accept the advice of amateurs. With the exception of children.

"Kid, how did you know the dimensions of that room?" Muraki demanded of Kiyoshi, piercing him with a threatening glare.

"It was deduction. You just needed to think a little."

"He knew the dimensions of the room. Five meters fifteen centimeters square."

This time it wasn't Muraki, but the other detective, who had just walked out of the house. He was a younger man and bigger-boned, with large eyes.

"Let me look around the house and I'll tell you how it was done."

"You're just a kid. We don't need any help from you," said Muraki.

Hashimoto held up his hand as if to quiet him.

"There's a lot of blood inside the house, kid. Are you all right with that?" he asked Kiyoshi.

"I'm fine. You can't solve murder mysteries if you're afraid of blood."

"Okay. Tell me how you knew that the dimensions were five meters fifteen centimeters," Hashimoto asked as a test.

"Five hundred fifteen times ten. You can do it in your head."

Hashimoto's gaze suddenly turned serious. Muraki, too, stared.

"What's five hundred fifteen?"

"The centimeter length of a B3 sheet of drawing paper. The Mayor's Award submissions were all on B3-size paper."

"And?"

“Mr. Tsuchida brought all of the finalists’ pictures into his house, laid them on the floor of the guest room, and walked on top of them to decide the winner.” The two were completely flabbergasted.

“What the – “ They hadn’t thought of that.

“Now that I – so that’s why they were on the floor!” said Muraki.

“Tell us more, how many of those B3-size sheets were there?” Hashimoto pulled out his notebook. The boy continued:

“On a square floor, you would have to lay down one hundred forty such rectangular sheets of paper to fill it up. So, it would be fourteen rows of ten sheets per row. That would just about fill a room five meters fifteen centimeters square.”

“But there weren’t one hundred forty. There were only – “

“One hundred thirty-six. Four were missing.” Kiyoshi interrupted.

Hashimoto paused, nodded, and turned to the boy.

“You’re exactly right. Four were missing. Why was this?”

“I don’t know, I can’t just deduce this, I have to go see the place. That’s why I’m here.”

Hashimoto nodded twice.

“All right, come with me.”

The guest room looked hardly different from how it did a month ago. Not knowing what to do with such an unprecedented crime scene, they had left it the way it was. Kiyoshi was in luck, for the police had been planning to clean it all up that night.

Kiyoshi put his umbrella in the stand by the door. There was an old, battered black one already there.

“What’s this?” he asked.

“It’s been there since we broke in. Probably Mr. Tsuchida’s.”

“Was it wet when you found it?”

“It was.”

Kiyoshi stepped into the hallway and looked around. The rooms were getting dark, so Hashimoto turned on the light.

Muraki said, “I’ll show you the upper floor in a minute. The hallway’s not quite the same.”

“It’s a right-angled triangle, isn’t it?” said the boy. Muraki gave a grunt.

Hashimoto went in and turned on the light in the guest room. Even fearless Kiyoshi paused for a minute, absorbing the disturbing sight before him. The bodies had been carried away, but the sheets of red paper had all been left the way they were.

Kiyoshi stepped past Muraki, took one of the sheets and examined the back of it with his magnifying glass. “There’s not much blood there, on the *tatami*,” he said, pointing to the center of the room. “Tell me, was there any paint?”

“There was.” Hashimoto replied. His tone was dead serious.

“And the paint was...watercolor.”

“That’s...right. Forty-eight were blood, eighty-eight were paint.”

“Just what I thought!” said Kiyoshi. “That’s why there are four missing.”

“So, have you figured it out?”

“Yup, just a bit more to go.”

“How? You figured out the locked-room part too?”

“Locked room?”

“Ha, so you don’t even know about that? A locked room is when these doors are locked from the inside – “

“Oh, I figured that out at the very beginning!” Kiyoshi cut him off, waving his hand. “That’s how I was able to solve it.”

“So it’s Amagi?”

“So it’s not Amagi.”

“It’s not?”

“Of course not, how can he kill two people if he never stepped inside the house?”

After a slight pause, Hashimoto said, “Good point...”

“They shouldn’t have made this a locked room. Then I might not have been able to solve it. The killer must have panicked, after committing the murder. Can I go upstairs now?” Kiyoshi asked coolly.

“First tell me the dimensions of the second floor! Prove to me that you’ve used your brains for this.”

“The dimensions for what?”

“The...well, how about the triangular hallway?”

“Approximately three meters nine centimeters, four meters twelve centimeters, five meters fifteen centimeters.”

Muraki looked desperately towards Hashimoto. “Is that right?”

Hashimoto took out his notebook, flipped through the pages, and slowly nodded.

“Exactly right.”

Muraki gritted his teeth.

\* \* \*

They went upstairs and entered the larger of the square-shaped rooms. It was relatively bright, because it was still light outside. Kiyoshi saw some patterns moving along the wall, and realized they were caused by water slithering down the skylight. The rain was coming down hard again. He looked around the room and said, “This must be the room Tsuchida used to do his watercolor paintings. The wallpaper is vinyl coated, and there’s an easel, oil painting kit, flower vase – are they exactly where they were when you first came in?”

“Yes.”

Kiyoshi went to one of the windows. “Aluminum sash sliding windows with half-moon latches,” he announced.

“All you can see is fields and forests,” said Hashimoto. “It’s like that from every window. You can see some houses, too, but they’re a long way away.”

The three stayed a little while longer, staring at the landscape through the rainy haze.

“Okay, next room.” The boy led the way to the smaller room and the two detectives followed suit.

Kiyoshi walked first to the window to their left and stared at the wet, silver tower.

“This tower’s pretty far from the window isn’t it?”

“Yes, about ten feet.”

“There’s a steel frame on the tower here just at eye level. And what’s that small roof down there?”

They looked down. A rectangular tin roof could be seen adjacent to the tower.

“That’s a storage shack. Mr. Tsuchida just renovated the house, and they’ve stored some of the extra construction supplies in that shack, like wooden planks and plywood.”

“What’s this mop?”

“It was on the floor.”

“On the floor where?”

“Just there, at the foot of the wall,” said Hashimoto.

“So the handle was facing towards the latch. What can you see out of the other windows?” Kiyoshi walked over to the window opposite the door.

“Ah, the stream. And the trees along it. They’re in leaf but you can see the houses behind through the branches. Is that a kitchen window? Oh look, there are people. You can easily see what’s going on from here.”

“Hey, enough of that, did you figure it out?”

“Yup, completely solved.” Kiyoshi’s face was glowing. The detectives didn’t say a word. They were waiting for him to speak.

“Thank you, both of you, now I’m completely satisfied. I’ve got to go now, Eriko must be scared out there alone.” He began to walk briskly out of the room. The detectives followed him.

“You don’t need to see the other rooms?” Muraki said, curious.

“Nope. I’m in a hurry.”

“Come on boy, can you please tell us what you know before you go?” Hashimoto said. “We made a promise earlier didn’t we?”

“What’s going to happen to Mr. Amagi?” asked Kiyoshi.

“He’s scheduled to go to court,” answered Hashimoto. “And then jail. Then he’ll be put to death. He’s charged with double murder.”

“Without proof?”

“He’s confessed,” Hashimoto said.

“He confessed? He said he killed them?”

“He did.” The three arrived at the front door. Eriko beamed with relief, seeing that Kiyoshi was back. He silently put on his shoes. Then he stood at the entrance without saying a word.

“Can you tell us what you discovered?” Hashimoto asked. The boy didn’t answer. He pulled out his umbrella from the rack.

“You really want to know?”

“Yes,” nodded Hashimoto.

“What about you?” he turned to Muraki, who said nothing and kept a smug face. Kiyoshi turned his back on them again.

“Wait, just wait. You don’t want to help Amagi?” Hashimoto asked. “You said it wasn’t him, right? He’s going to die, you know!”

The boy stopped. He turned his head to the side, silently.

“If you really want to know, come at noon to the front gates of Wadayama School. And bring this umbrella.” He pointed at the worn, black umbrella left limply in the rack.

“This? To your school? Why?”

“I’ll show you the killer. I’ve solved it, but I have no proof. I can confirm it using this umbrella.”

“Really?”

“Yes, but I need the umbrella. Please bring it. If you don’t, I can’t tell you anything. All right, I’ll let you two decide whether you want to visit tomorrow. Thank you for your time today, and for showing me the house. Let’s go, Eriko.”

The two walked outside, the rain beating down upon them. They left the detectives standing by the entrance, speechless.

\* \* \*

The next day the clouds hung heavily in the sky above, but there was no rain. The two detectives were standing by the sycamore trees near the front gates of Wadayama School, looking bored and detached. One of them held a large black umbrella. It was five minutes to noon.

Kiyoshi, who had been sitting on a bench near the water fountain, stood up and walked over to the detectives. Eriko followed.

“Here’s the boy genius!” Hashimoto exclaimed. Muraki was silent.

“Let’s go,” said Kiyoshi. “Follow me.”

He walked into the school. They took off their shoes in the entrance hallway and Kiyoshi led them to one of the classrooms.

“Eriko, which one is Yasuo?”

“That’s him!” she said and pointed to a tall, skinny student buttoning the pocket on his white long-sleeved shirt.

“Can I have the umbrella now? Okay, I’ll be right back.”

The detectives stood near the lockers, and Eriko hid behind a column. Kiyoshi walked up to Yasuo and showed him the umbrella. After a brief conversation, the boy took it. Kiyoshi came back, and the boy went away with the umbrella in hand.

“He took it,” he said. “He shouldn’t have, but he did. All right, now it’s confirmed. Let’s go everyone, let’s get out of here.” They headed back to the school gates.

“So tell us,” said Hashimoto. “Is he the suspect? That boy?”

“No. He was the accomplice.”

“With the killing?”

“No, with the cleanup. He was summoned.”

“By who?”

“The killer, of course.”

“Who is that?”

“Hold on a second,” said Kiyoshi, and became lost in deep thought.

“In any case, Amagi isn’t the suspect, right?” Hashimoto asked.

“Definitely not, let him go now, the longer you wait the more complaints you’ll get.”

“That’s only when we find the real suspect.” Muraki said. “Who was that kid, anyway?”

“Yasuo Tsuchida. Mr. Tsuchida’s son.”

“Ah, he’s the one living away from Tsuchida. He’s the kid who doesn’t have a phone in his house.”

“All right, if you want to know everything, pick me up by car at 7 p.m. tonight. We’ll go together to the site and I’ll explain everything there.”

“What about me?” asked Eriko.

“You stay at home. I’ll explain everything tomorrow.”

“There’s no fear of the suspect escaping?” Muraki asked sternly.

“No.”

“Can’t you just tell us now?” asked Hashimoto.

“I have to do it there,” Kiyoshi insisted.

“Let’s go now, then. We’re busy people you know, we can’t waste time. I know you kids might have homework or something – “

“I don’t care about homework. I just can’t confirm anything unless it’s dark,” Kiyoshi said.

“You just did with the umbrella, didn’t you? Isn’t that enough? How much longer do we

have to wait?"

"Just a few more hours! I've worked out the situation, but it's only a theory. The umbrella's not enough proof. Please, I'm about to accuse a grown adult for murder. Don't you want to confirm that everything I say is right?"

After a pause, Hashimoto said, "All right." He seemed resigned. Even Muraki seemed convinced.

\* \* \*

At 7 p.m. that night, the two detectives collected Kiyoshi as planned. He sat in the back seat with a spray bottle on his lap.

"What is that?" asked Hashimoto.

"I'm using this to prove whether my theory is correct," Kiyoshi said rather excitedly.

"I sure hope you're not going to set the house on fire," Muraki grumbled.

The caution tape still surrounded the house. The detectives walked over it, while Kiyoshi ducked underneath. The driver remained in the car. When the engine was shut off, the entire place was dead silent. A crescent moon glowed in the sky.

Muraki had the keys to the house. When he turned it, the glass door made a deafening crack, throwing them off guard. Even the smallest sound was like a gunshot in the quiet of the house.

Muraki turned on the switch to the entrance. Hashimoto and Kiyoshi followed him inside.

"I want to go upstairs first," said the boy and led the way up to the smaller studio. He flipped on the switch, then sprayed the walls, shelves, windows, curtains, floors, door, doorknob, easel, and vase with his bottle. He sprayed the entire room without missing a spot.

"Hey...hey! What are you doing?" Muraki asked.

"It's not gasoline, don't worry! Just let me do this first and I'll explain everything."

They went to the room next door, then the triangular hallway and down the stairs into the guest room, finishing up in the kitchen.

"All right, finished!" said Kiyoshi. "Now I'm going to show you two something cool. Let's go back upstairs."

He led the way again, back to the door of the smaller room, which he opened slowly.

"Wow!" The detectives exclaimed. It did not look like the room that they had just been in.

"What is this?" Hashimoto asked.

"It's like phosphorus glowing," observed Muraki.

A bluish-purple glow was being emitted from all around the room.

It was as though blue, moonlit water droplets had fallen from the skylight. The light created a pattern all along the room as if the walls were doused with rainwater, which dripped along the window frame and formed pools near the shelves. The most striking part was the floor, where there were several puddles forming designs like geometric art. The easel and vase remained dark.

"What is this?" Hashimoto asked, entranced.

"These are traces of blood," said Kiyoshi.

"Blood? What do you mean?"

"This is a reaction called chemiluminescence. When certain types of chemicals are mixed, they form a chemical reaction in the form of light. The chemical I sprayed over the rooms was a liquid called luminol. It glows when it comes into contact with acids like ferricyanide in blood." The two detectives were speechless at the beauty of the scene.

"The splashes of blood are like fireflies!" Muraki exclaimed.



“Luminol’s not widespread in Japan yet. But very soon it will be used by the police too,” said Kiyoshi.

“So you’re saying there was all this blood in the room?” Muraki asked.

“Right. It was wiped clean after the blood got all over the place. This was possible because the wallpaper was vinyl. Though we couldn’t see it then, we can now, using luminol.”

“So there was a bloodbath in this very room?” Muraki asked.

“Probably an artery. Or the jugular vein,” said Hashimoto.

“But everything was wiped clean...so what does that mean?”

“The two were murdered here,” explained Kiyoshi.

“Then what about the guest room?” Muraki wanted to know.

“It wasn’t there, it seems,” said Hashimoto.

They walked into the triangular hallway. Kiyoshi turned off the lights.

“See?” They needed no explanation. When the lights turned off, the floor was suddenly aglow with fireflies again. There seemed to be an army of them, leading out of the room they were just in outside, and down the stairs.

“So the bodies and paper were dragged outside and down to the guest room. They went back and forth so many times, forming a path.” The detectives sighed.

“Look here, you can just about make out footprints.”

“You’re right!” a pair of bare feet glowed through the blood trail. They led to the staircase. Hashimoto compared the mark to his own foot.

“It’s small! Is this a woman’s?”

“It might be Kyoko’s,” said Muraki.

“Where did you get this chemical, boy?” Hashimoto asked.

“I live on a university campus. I borrowed some from the lab – after I asked for permission, of course.”

Hashimoto whispered into Muraki’s ear. “This is like a science lecture,” he said.

Kiyoshi opened to the door to the second, larger room. This room remained completely dark. Not a single drop of blood could be seen there. Compared to this room, the neighboring room was like a city full of neon lights.

“So the two were not killed in this one but in the smaller room, and the bodies were carried down the stairs and into the Japanese guest room?” Hashimoto asked, and the boy nodded.

The three went downstairs to the guest room and turned the lights off. Compared to the city glow upstairs, it was much like an aerial view of a quiet town in the countryside. None of the walls, doors, curtains, or panels was glowing. The pool of blood in the middle remained dark and black because Kiyoshi hadn’t sprayed that area, for obvious reasons.

“Not very dark. So this must mean not much blood had flowed here.”

“Just the blood that spilled after the trip downstairs.”

“Right, that’s why it’s only on the mats. The walls were untouched.”

“Wait, I still don’t understand,” said Muraki. “So the murderers dragged the slaughtered bodies down here into this room. Then they placed them on the paper and colored them with the remaining blood, is that what happened?”

“I suppose so,” said Hashimoto. “Is it, boy?”

“Actually, no,” Kiyoshi shook his head. “Let’s go upstairs again.”

He walked back inside the luminescent room. “See the floor? See these lines, sort of like the grids of a checkerboard? Do you know what that is?”

“No,” said Hashimoto. Muraki was silent but he didn’t know either.

“It’s the blood that seeped between the drawing paper!”

“Oh, wow, I see!” Hashimoto exclaimed.

“So the artwork was originally here too?” Muraki asked.

“That’s right. The thin lines indicate that the blood dripped between the paper. The puddles indicate that the paper became disarranged and the blood seeped onto the floor. The killer and the victims must have had a wrestling match here.”

“Hmm, but didn’t Tsuchida always judge the artwork in the guest room downstairs? I thought that was what you told us.”

“This year was different. He decided to do the judging in this room and the one next door.”

“In two rooms?”

“To separate the elementary and middle school divisions.”

“I’m completely blown away. So, what exactly happened on the day of the murder?” Hashimoto asked.

“First, Mr. Tsuchida sorted out all finalists from the middle school division and placed them here on the floor. He did the same thing with the elementary school division in the next room, which is larger. But he was killed in this room.”

“On top of the artwork?”

“That’s right. That’s why there was blood all over it, and it splashed on the walls.

“There was so much blood they were able to paint all the pictures here with it. But, there was a reason why the killers didn’t want to leave the bodies here.”

“Killers? Plural?”

“Yes. I think so. Yasuo Tsuchida isn’t the killer for sure. But legally he would also be accused. So yes, plural.”

“Why isn’t he an absolute suspect?”

“I’ll explain that later. In any case, the killers didn’t want to leave the bodies here. So, they dragged them downstairs.”

“Why didn’t they want to leave them here?”

“Because of that,” he said and went over to the window opposite the door. “See those lights?”

The detectives followed the direction the boy was pointing.

“That house? What’s that?”

“Yasuo’s house. His mom lives there too.”

“Ah, Tomitaro Tsuchida’s former residence.”

“Yes. His mom stood here, opened the window, and summoned her son after she’d killed Tsuchida and Amagi.”

“What? By yelling?”

“Yup, the neighbors are too far away to hear.”

“Why didn’t she just call?”

“They don’t have a phone,” said Hashimoto.

“Oh, right.”

“The two of them are very poor. So then, Yasuo came over to this window by climbing up the tower.” Kiyoshi moved over to the window opening on to the tower.

“That’s about ten feet away, you can’t jump.”

“Exactly, so he went to the storage room at the base of the tower. And he brought back several wooden boards that were over ten feet long, stood on the frame there, and handed one end of each of them to his mom. He then set them across between the window and the tower and

walked into the room.”

“Why did Haruko kill Tomitaro?”

“I don’t know. You’ll have to find that out. There was probably an argument that he wasn’t giving them enough money. Anyway, they realized that leaving the bodies here wasn’t a good idea. First of all, this is the only window in the entire house that looks out over their house, and this room also has the only window that faces the tower. If the bodies were left here, there was a chance that they would be accused immediately.”

“True. We detectives would have quickly deduced that,” Muraki asserted, modestly.

“And so they moved the paper and bodies to the first floor guest room.”

“Yes.”

“Can you really do that? You said the room next door was also filled with artwork from the elementary school division, right?”

“Right.”

“So they combined the two sets of artwork, and laid them down in the guest room? How did they know they could do that? It would be a pain to deal with if they had some extra artwork. Or worse, if they had too little, it might reveal the fact that they were moved from the room upstairs,” Hashimoto said. The boy shook his head.

“No, that wouldn’t have happened. That’s where the Pythagorean Theorem comes in.”

“What’s that?”

“You should have learned this in middle school. With any right-angled triangle, the area of the square whose side is the hypotenuse is equal to the sum of the areas of the squares of the other two sides.”

“Huh?” Muraki said, so Hashimoto took out his notebook and drew a picture. He drew a right triangle, and three squares that bordered the edges of the triangle.

“Like this?”

“Yes,” Kiyoshi said.

“The sum of the squares of the two smaller sides is equal to the square of the large one.”

“Is that possible with a triangle of any size?”

“If it’s a right triangle, definitely.”

“This is very interesting,” said Hashimoto.

“It’s a very old theorem developed by the ancient Greeks. A mathematician named Pythagoras discovered this,” Kiyoshi said.

“Amazing.”

“This house is built using the Pythagorean concept. The sum of the areas of the two studios upstairs is equal to the area of the guest room downstairs.”

“Oh! I get it!” Hashimoto exclaimed.

“Hmm, I see, that’s how it was done,” Muraki also affirmed, though it was unclear whether he fully understood.

“Yasuo knew that, because of the right-angled triangle, if the artworks fit into the two rooms upstairs, they would fit into the room downstairs. That was true. But there were only one hundred thirty-six pictures this year, by design, so they didn’t fill the room. In fact there were four pictures short. I knew that, if Tsuchida had judged the pictures in the guest room, he would have used all the space and there would have been one hundred and forty as there were last year. That’s why I knew the guest room wasn’t where the pictures were judged this year, and so it couldn’t have been the crime scene.”

“Wow...you’re truly amazing, kid,” said Hashimoto, genuinely impressed.

“When I came here yesterday, you told me that forty-eight pictures had been covered in blood and eighty-eight had been covered in paint. As soon as I saw the rooms upstairs I realized that they must have been killed in the smaller room – the workshop. Then, because they didn’t want anyone to figure that out, they covered all the pictures that were in the larger studio with paint mixed to match the color of the blood.”

The two detectives said absolutely nothing. Hashimoto was silent from admiration, Muraki from incomprehension.

“So I knew that there had to be some determining factor that made it necessary for the murderers to go through all this trouble. That’s when I saw Yasuo’s house through one of the windows and the steel tower through the other.”

“After Haruko and Yasuo carried all the painted bodies and pictures downstairs, they carefully cleaned the entire house, wiping away every speck of blood, every fingerprint. They wore gloves so they wouldn’t leave their fingerprints behind and washed all the rags and gloves in the kitchen. You saw the sink glowing.”

“What about the keys?” asked Hashimoto.

“When they were cleaning up, they probably locked every door from the inside and drew the curtains so no one could see inside. Then no one would come in when they were cleaning up.”

“Ah, I see. The mother must have washed the dishes and brushes then.”

“Hey wait, how can you say she was responsible for all of this?” Muraki said.

“I think we’ve proved that already, sir,” Hashimoto said. “First, Haruko Tsuchida’s home and the tower could be seen from the window in the smaller studio, and secondly she knew, as his wife, the detailed dimensions of this house enabling her to carry out this plan. Do we need further evidence? Her case is much more credible than Keikichi’s, to say the least. All that is left to do is gather more detail, do a quick search of the house for the knives, rags – “

“The umbrella,” said Kiyoshi.

“Umbrella?”

“The black one you brought today. Yasuo and his mother shared that umbrella. The day it rained, Haruko used this umbrella to come here. Then after she killed the two and called her son over to do the cleaning, they forgot to take it. They went out the window down the tower anyway, and it was no longer raining. It was the one defect in the entire plan.”

“Oh!” Hashimoto exclaimed. “So then you gave Yasuo the umbrella – “

“It was their only umbrella. The next time it rained, Yasuo constructed a huge hat with vellum paper, and used that to go home.”

“Why?”

“They couldn’t afford to buy another umbrella, since they’re a fatherless family. Earlier today I asked him if the umbrella was his. He asked where I found it, and I told him it was near the path on Uguisuoka. He seemed a bit confused, but he took it. That’s when I knew my theory was correct. He shouldn’t have taken it. But I guess he took it from me because I was older than him, and he really needed another umbrella.”

“I see...” Hashimoto began to feel pity.

“That’s also when I realized he wasn’t the killer. Yasuo was just an accomplice. If he were the killer, he would never, ever have taken the umbrella from me.”

“So they are poor,” Hashimoto said to himself.

“That’s probably the reason behind this mystery too. You should investigate that.”

“Hey, why didn’t he just come back to the house to get the umbrella? He used planks to get

to the second floor, right? Why didn't he just come back up to retrieve it?" Muraki seemed in a perpetual state of bewilderment.

"He had locked the window from the inside when he left, so he couldn't get back in."

"How did he do it?"

"He used this mop." Kiyoshi picked up the mop that had been found on the floor the day before.

"I'll show you. He held the mop upright with one hand while he lifted the lever on the half-moon lock on the inside window with the other. Then he slid the outside window to within inches of the closed position and quickly pulled his hand away from the mop and shut the outside window. When the mop fell, it struck the lever of the half-moon latch. You only need to give it a gentle tap for the window to be secured."

"Does that really work?"

"He kept picking up the mop until he succeeded. It probably took a dozen tries. Then he went back down the tower, returned the wooden boards to the storage shed, and went back across the river to his home."

"All right then, how was the guest room locked from the inside?"

"Oh, that's the easiest one! He climbed up the shelves of the tokonoma, and squeezed through the transom. He's a very skinny kid, remember, and his mom stood in the hallway and helped him down."

"I suppose young boys have plenty of practice climbing about."

"That's right. Can we go now? I'm going to be late," said Kiyoshi. "I don't want to get into trouble at home." ●

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