

Composer Cage (4) → No energy, Sad_Liquor (3-6)

There were many theories about her murder. None were alike, yet all were perfectly plausible.

As a retired detective, it kept me up at night. Sometimes, images of the scene would flash into my mind, as fresh as when I first laid eyes on it in the report.

The cold, crisp air stung me a bit, as I pulled up to the house and knocked three times. “Just a moment, please,” shouted someone from inside the house. After a while, she opened the door slightly.

“Yes?” she asked inquiringly.

“I’m Parker. We met last week at the neighborhood barbecue,” I smiled.

“Oh, right. I talked to you about the Harlans, didn’t I? Come in, come in,” she said, as the door was opened further.

I stepped in with a genial smile.

“So what brings you here, Parker?” she asked, as we both sat down with a mug (mine coffee, hers tea).

“Well, I was hoping I can talk to you about that woman we saw at the barbecue,” I replied.

“Charlotte? She does look a bit sickly that day, I remember,” she pondered.

“Have you seen her since then?” I inquired.

“We don’t interact much, Charlotte and I. We’re both too busy with our respective lives,” she mused. “Hard to find common ground when you don’t know much about someone.”

The next few minutes were spent in silence, only accentuated by silent sips and sighs.

The slightly bitter coffee mixed well with the condensed milk, creating quite a harmony of flavors.

“I heard you were asking around about Charlotte the other day,” she murmured. “Any particular reasons?”

“Well, I haven’t seen her since, so I just want to check on her, you know,” I replied.

“She’s an enigma, that woman,” she raised her voice slightly. Not in an angry way, mind you, but jarring all the same, coming from a usually soft-spoken person.

“An enigma, you say?”

“Of course. In a neighborhood like this, where everyone knows everyone, she’s an anomaly. She’s like a one-way mirror: information goes in, but nothing comes out. An enigma, that’s what she is.”

She laid down the mug on the table, and I proceeded to do the same.

“I think you should leave, Parker,” she said, in that all-too-familiar tone of someone who realized they have talked too much.

I nodded and departed.

The snow hadn’t let up in the time I was inside. Conversely, it only seemed to be falling more and more with each passing minute.

I hurriedly walked up to my car and drove off.

The ever-heavier snowfall started to become a challenge by the time I got to the Harlans. I knocked on the door, quickly mumbled a prayer that someone is home.

“Come in!” shouted someone.

I quickly got in, making sure to close the door behind me.

That was a mistake, as the moment the wind stopped, the smell of permanent marker filled the air, hanging heavily. I stumbled forward and fell on the carpet.

“*She’s an enigma, that woman,*” echoed someone in my mind.

“You got that right, Emma,” I whispered.

And I knew no more.

Someone was shouting at me. Who was it?

“-ker. Oh thank lord, he’s awake now,” shouted someone else, and suddenly a boom of sounds assaulted my ears.

I looked around at the wooden panels lining the wall, at the ceiling lights that shined just that bit too brightly, and then at myself on the bed.

“W-where am I?” I asked shakily.

“You’ve been here for three days, Mr. Parker,” said somebody in a white blouse.

A doctor? I’m in the hospital?

“Mr. Harlan saw you unconscious on his front door, and drove you here,” they continued.

That’s right. I was at the Harlans.

“And what of Mrs. Harlan?”

The white blouse looked slightly mournful. They hesitated, before handing me a newspaper.

Right there in big, bold letters is the headline “Burning House in Snowstorm”.

A few days later, I was discharged from the hospital, and immediately caught a cab to the burnt-down house.

Standing from afar, I looked at its unnatural angles, seemingly jutting angrily towards the sky. A trap from below, ready to close its mouth any moment.

I read the police report there, envisioning the night of the fire. How the winds swallowed the screams of anyone who might have been inside.

When they finally calmed down the fire, there’s nothing left to salvage. From the debris and ashes, there’s only a body, blackened and charred beyond recognition. All there was of Charlotte Harlan.

The fire became the central talking point of the town. Nobody knows what happened, yet everyone has a theory.

But most people agreed it broke Mr. Harlan. He moved away soon after, saying it was too much for him. The final straw.

The police chalked it up to an accident. The stove was on, and right next to it was a towel. That was enough evidence.

Nobody knew about the smell of permanent markers permeating the house. And probably for the better.

After all, what's more permanent than fire?

- Snowy
- Answerless Riddle
- Single-use
- Pet
- ~~"There were many theories about her murder."~~
- Use all five senses
 - Smell
 - Taste
 - Sight
 - Touch
 - Hear