

I don't know if it is true that the crime follows the detective, but it was becoming distressingly common for my travels to be interrupted by alarms and screaming. In this case, as I stumbled out of my sleeper car into the hallway, I saw a small crowd gathering in the car ahead of mine, outside one of the cabins, where one young train attendant was recoiling from the open door in shock. As I made my way to the front of the group, I suspected I already knew what I'd find.

There, lying face down on the floor in the center of the cabin, was a middle-aged woman, surrounded by a pool of dried blood. I rushed to her side, but she wasn't moving.

"Is anyone here a doctor?" said the train attendant. I knew it was too late for the victim, and I suspect he did too. The crowd of three started murmuring. Someone near the back - in overalls, perhaps the train's engineer? - mentioned that there was a doctor in first class.

"Please bring him here immediately," I said. "In the meantime, it is important that nobody tampers with the body or evidence."

"And who are you to say what we should do?" said a young woman near the front of the crowd.

"I'm a private detective," I replied. "I've dealt with murders before." I crouched down next to the body.

"So, do you have a badge, or paperwork, or anything like that?"

I sighed and fished around in my jacket pocket and passed her my license. "Well, I'll be damned," she said. "You are a private detective. How very lucky for us."

"Alright. I'd like to ask everyone here to leave for the time being. I'll be around to take your statements soon. It's not like you can go anywhere, unless you want to wade through four feet of snow."

The crowd started to disperse, but the young woman stayed behind, arms folded. "Well, I don't have anywhere to be, so I might as well just give my statement now."

"Right here? In the crime scene? Next to the dead body?" I gestured at the corpse.

"Where else?" She seemed totally unconcerned about the situation.

"Fine. Can we at least go into the hallway?" I said. She wordlessly slipped out. I followed her and pulled my notebook from my jacket. "Alright," I said, clicking my pen. "What's your name?"

She twirled and twisted her arms around her upper body to frame it in a large circle. "I am, of course, the great and illustrious Willow H. Wright. I can't blame you if you haven't heard of me."

"Right. Well, Ms. Wright-

“Just call me Willow. Or Willow H. Wright. Ms. Wright feels way too formal, but also not cool or important.”

“Okay, Willow. What’s your occupation?”

“Extraction.”

“Come again?”

“You know, mineral extraction. Mining. Or rather, that’s *mother’s* job. Occasionally, I am an art tourist - I just spent a year touring the museums of France.”

“That doesn’t seem even remotely related to the mystery at hand.”

“Okay, well, if you have to compress my beautiful, varied existence down to a single squalid word, ‘Extraction’ will have to do.”

I wrote down “heiress”. “Okay, Willow. Can you tell me what you did last night?”

“Ooh, am I a suspect? I’ve always wanted to be a suspect in a murder.”

“That depends on your answer to these questions.”

“Well, I unfortunately have to say that my last evening was quite boring. So after the train stopped at 8 PM and they announced we were going to be stuck in the snow for a long haul, I spent the evening in the bar car until 1 AM, and then I retired to my room. I woke up at 6 AM, when the alarm was sounded, and you know the rest from there.”

“So you just spent the evening sipping Manhattans? Nothing interesting happened?”

“Please. I would hardly describe the swill they’re serving as a Manhattan. But I did see everyone who came through the car.”

I raised an eyebrow. “Everyone?”

She gave me an almost condescending look. “I have a very good memory. Even one sidecar in, which was all I had because apparently some people think that orange bitters are an acceptable substitute for lemon juice. Also, this train is almost empty, so it wasn’t too hard to keep track of. I can tell you who came in or out of the dining car at any point.”

I wrote down her answers. “Right, so if you don’t mind, I’d like to ask you to leave the cabin so that I can-”

“No, I’m sticking around to make sure you don’t tamper with any evidence.”

I sighed. “Fine. If you’re going to hang around the crime scene, at least wear some gloves so you don’t contaminate anything.” I handed her a pair of gloves.

She put them on, dramatically making a snap with the elastic. “Right. Let’s get to work.” We stepped back into the cabin.

I turned to look at the body. She was still dressed in business clothes and had a single, clean cut across the neck - it was precise. “Is there anything in the room that looks like it could be a murder weapon? We’re looking for a small blade.”

Willow scoured the room. “No, doesn’t look like it. Nothing sharper than a dinner knife. Have you tried looking for a cigarette butt?”

“Why a cigarette butt?”

“I don’t know. So you can compare it against the brands everyone on the train smokes?”

“I don’t think most people on this train smoke - that kind of trick would never work.” The room was surprisingly tidy, aside from the corpse. Nothing strewn out of place, no overturned furniture or smashed glasses. The victim’s belongings weren’t present either - perhaps they were in the cargo car at the rear of the train.

I opened up the victim’s purse. The only thing in there of note was a small wallet, with an ID. “Looks like our victim is one Lynette Van Dine. Ever heard of her?”

Willow stroked her chin. “I think she was at a party in San Francisco one time? Lawyer, I think.”

A walking stick near the body was engraved with the victim’s name - and was slightly bloodied. A small wound on the back of her head indicated that she had been struck from behind with it. “I think she must have been struck with her own walking stick - but it seems that the true murder weapon, the blade, is not present in this room.”

Loud footsteps from the hallway signaled arriving people - the doctor from first class, as well as the train attendant who opened the car.

The doctor was carrying a small bag, but he only took one look at me next to the body before he dropped his head. “I’m Doctor Wong. It looks like I’m a bit late for medical care. I suppose I should confirm the time and method of death, then. Would you mind leaving the cabin?”

I nodded. The investigation wasn’t going to get anywhere in this room alone. I motioned Willow to leave the room. We saw the train attendant heading towards the back of the train, and we followed after him.

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We caught up with the attendant in the crew car. He was sitting nervously at a table, fiddling with a button on his neatly-pressed coat and staring out the window. "Excuse me," I said, taking a seat opposite him.

He startled, but quickly regained his composure. "Hello," he said. "I assume you have some questions for me?"

"If you don't mind," I replied. Willow opted to stand near the entrance to the car, as though she was preparing to catch him if he ran. "Could I get your name and occupation for the record?"

"Jack Gehrlisch. Train attendant, obviously," he said.

I wrote his answer down. "I understand you were the one to find the body?"

He nodded. "Yes. When I unlocked the door and saw her there, I sounded the alarm immediately. You showed up right after."

Willow frowned. "Unlocked the door? What were you doing breaking into a passenger's room?" she said.

Jack was taken aback by the question. "I - er, uh. She asked me to. Kind of." I looked at him, expecting a follow up. "Last night, around 10 PM, she asked me to wake her up early the next morning. 6 AM sharp, which was why I was there. I knocked on her door, but there was no response."

"So, you thought that justified breaking into her room?" Willow said.

Jack seemed to shrink even further back into his chair. "I, uh, was concerned for her safety. It's unusual to hear absolutely nothing after you knock on the door. So I used my master key to unlock her door, and well, I screamed when I saw her."

"So the door was locked - what keys can open the door?" I said.

"Every passenger has the key to their room - you've got the key to yours right there, I see. The crew - that is, the attendants and the engineer - we have keys which work on every door. I-I realize now that saying that makes me sound much more suspicious."

I nodded. "Can you tell me where you went last night?"

"Sure. I started my shift at 8 PM in the crew car. I went to the dining car to work, until I returned to the crew car for my break at 10 PM. That's when Lynette - the victim, that's when she asked me to wake her up early tomorrow. At 11, I went to the bar, where I worked until the morning."

"I can corroborate that," Willow said. "He was working the bar, and does not know how to make a sidecar. It's a good thing that I'm here - the evildoers stand no chance against not one, but two detectives!"

"You're not a detective, Willow. That's not how these things work - it wouldn't be fair," I responded.

"If I'm not a detective, I'm going to be an agent of vengeance. I'm going to go all Code of Hammurabi on the culprit's ass when we find them."

"I don't see how your vengeance is relevant to the case right now."

"It's not. I'm just going to defeat all evildoers as soon as I know who to fight." She glared at Jack as she said it, and Jack seemed to make himself even smaller.

"I'm sorry," I said to Jack. "I'm not used to dealing with such... outbursts during cases."

Jack nodded and gave a weak smile. "No problem, detective." He was sweating bullets. "If I find anything else, I'll be sure to let you know."

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As we continued towards the back of the train to continue our search in the cargo car, I started sizing up the suitcases and bags, but I still had one thing on my mind from the conversation with Jack.

"Did you notice it?" I asked Willow.

"Notice what? Well, obviously not," she replied.

"Her coat - that is, the victim's coat was in the crew car, with his belongings," I said. "She wasn't wearing one when we found her. And it matched her style."

"So you think he was lying."

"Maybe? But he is hiding something. I suspect he knows more about the victim than he lets on. Either way, let's search the cargo car." I hunched over and opened a red bag, apparently belonging to Louis Washington, while Willow surreptitiously opened mine.

"Jesus, how many of these blue overcoats do you have in here?" She asked. She saw my look, and followed up: "Hey, if you're gonna go through everyone else's stuff I'm gonna go through yours."

"None of your business, and that's not important to the mystery," I replied. "Look here - a pocket knife, some papers, a spare change of clothes - pretty normal stuff. Looks like some copies of a labor law proposal. Something about working hours?"

Willow had moved onto the victim's belongings. "What exciting papers are we going to find here? Ooh - I bet that she was a member of a secret society. Like the Freemasons. Or the Illuminati. There's a big conspiracy at play here."

"Willow, what the hell are you talking about? There's never a secret society involved. It's not how these things work. Pay attention to what you're actually looking at."

Willow sighed and handed me a small folder of paper. "Well, here's something for you to look through."

"A hotel booking, for San Francisco, for tonight. Well, knowing that she was planning to be in San Francisco tonight doesn't help. Legal documents, for a case tomorrow at 10 AM. That's two hours after the time the train is now scheduled to arrive. She would be cutting it close, if she wasn't dead." I pocketed the folder and stood up. "I don't think there's any further leads we can follow up on in here for now. We can always come back later if we need more evidence."

"So where to, then?" asked Willow.

"Well, we started in standard class and worked our way back - let's go to the front of the train and have a chat with the engineer."

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As we entered the locomotive, I asked Willow a question which had been sitting on my mind for ages. "What are you even trying to get out of this?"

She shrugged. "It's more fun than sitting around and waiting for the cops to show up. I get enough of that at parties. Just be glad Ms. Knox isn't here instead - she'd just accuse the first Chinese person she saw."

"She some kind of nemesis of yours?"

"Oh yeah. We compete in everything. I hate her guts and her stupid red outfit."

"Sounds like a piece of work, but she - and especially her proclivities or rules - don't seem relevant to this mystery."

Inside the locomotive, the engineer was busy minding the boiler - the train wasn't moving, but someone needed to keep the heat on. The engineer was shoveling coal into a fire as we entered. "Hey," she said.

"Hello yourself," Willow said as she took a seat on a stool.

The engineer refused to look at us. "If you're here to take my statement, I'm not going to do so until the police arrive. I understand you have no legal authority to force me to give a statement?"

I sheepishly hid behind my notebook. "It's true."

"Come onnnnnn," said Willow. "You gotta help us get the bad guy."

The engineer pursed her lips. "Fine," she said, "but be quick about it."

I clicked my pen and pulled out my notebook. "Name and occupation?"

"Millicent Green, train engineer."

"I understand you were the one who made the call to stop the train?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"No comment."

"Can you walk me through what you did after that?"

"Yeah, I stopped the train at 8, then after making sure everything was fine, I went to get something to eat at 9, which lasted an hour."

"She had pasta!" Willow interjected.

Millicent ignored her and continued. "Then, at 10, I went back to the locomotive to make sure the engine didn't freeze over."

"Is that a danger?" Willow asked.

"In this kind of weather? You can get all kinds of mechanical issues. Afterwards I went to the crew car at 11, and at midnight, I went to meet with Mr. Washington in standard class to have a talk. At 1 AM, I returned to the crew car to get some sleep."

"What did you talk about?"

"None of your business."

"What was your relation to the victim?"

"Personally? I didn't know her. But I saw her on the train really often - she was on or off this route every week or so. Even then, I saw her way more often than you'd expect."

“What do you mean?”

“Well, more than one crew works this train line. But to our crew - we all work together - it seemed like she was always on the same train as us.”

“And that was the extent of your relation to the victim?”

“That’s it,” she replied, and turned to the boiler. “Any other questions about myself can wait until after the police arrive.”

I decided to take the opportunity to search the compartment. I saw a map of the train route. Our current location was circled in red. The locomotive was getting hot and uncomfortable, so we took the chance to slip out onto the small outdoors connecting segment.

“So detective,” said Willow. “Is there anyone on this train who catches your eye?”

“I’ve got my eye on everyone on this train.”

“No, I meant ‘is there anyone who you’ve got your eye on’. Like, *romantically*.”

“I keep my work and romantic life separate.”

“Maybe even... me?” Willow had a horrible grin on her face.

“Romance and mysteries don’t mix, Willow.”

“You’re no fun, detective.”

“Correct.”

“So, we go one car back again, visit first class?”

I nodded. “Time to talk to the doctor.”

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The doctor, as it turned out, was sitting furtively at his sofa, leaned over as though he was deep in thought.

“Excuse me doctor,” I said as I knocked on the doorframe of the cabin. He looked up at me.

“Have you completed your examination?”

“I have!” he said, “and I think you should be quite interested in what I have to say.” He produced a small pile of handwritten notes. “The victim was clubbed in the back of the head by some blunt instrument no more than an inch in diameter, then had her throat cut by some short blade. She



expired from blood loss soon after, and without any struggle - she was likely taken by surprise. Quite a nasty way to go.”

“Ooh, sounds like the work of a professional killer,” Willow said.

“It’s never a professional killer. Not in a case like this,” I replied. “Do you know the time of death?”

Dr. Wong nodded. “I believe she died between midnight and 1 AM last night.”

“I think this is as good a time as any to take your statement. Would you mind answering a few questions?”

“Not at all!” He reclined on the sofa.

“Alright, can I get your name and occupation for the record?”

“Doctor Thomas Wong, Surgeon. I was traveling to San Francisco to assist a friend’s practice. I had a hotel for tonight, not that I’ll be using that reservation any more.”

“Can you tell me what you did last evening?”

“Naturally. When they announced we’d be stuck at 8, I decided to take the opportunity to eat in the dining car. Afterwards, at 10 PM, I went to retrieve my belongings from the cargo car.” He motioned to his bags - a suitcase, as well as a collection of surgical instruments. “I returned to my room in first class just before midnight, and then went directly to the bar until 1 AM, when I retired to my room.”

“He was there,” Willow said. “He had a drink.”

“What was your relation to the victim?” I asked.

“We were work acquaintances. I had testified in a few of her cases - usually on behalf of the prosecution. That wasn’t my first autopsy back there, you know.”

I made a note of his testimony. “Thank you doctor. If your examination produces new results, please let me know.”

“Of course,” Dr. Wong replied.

I slipped out into the narrow hallway and Willow followed suit. “Y’know,” she said.

“Is this going to lead into another one of your irrelevant diatribes?”

“Apparently on one of these trains, someone was caught smuggling contraband - weapons, I think - under the floorboards in first class. You think that’s happening here?”

“I’m quite sure that has nothing to do with this case,” I replied. “This car doesn’t have any space for that. And I was right, it was one of your inane diatribes.”

“Eh, worth a shot. One car back, to second class? That’s where I’m staying.”

I shook my head. “No, we’re paying a visit to the dining car first.”

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The dining car was mostly empty. The news had sent most passengers to their rooms, even though a public space like the dining car was probably the safest. One train attendant was at the bar, and one passenger was seated at a table by himself. He motioned for us to sit across from him.

“I hear you’re the ones investigating this case,” he said.

“I’m investigating,” I replied. “She’s mostly just spectating.”

“Spectating and commentating,” Willow replied.

“Louis Washington,” he said, offering a handshake. I shook his hand. “I’m a congressional aide. I work in D.C., but I’m returning home to visit family in San Francisco.”

“Hey, that takes care of three of your questions!” Willow said.

“Right, onto the next one then. Can you recount your movements from last night?”

Louis looked straight at me, hands clasped together on the table. “Yes. At 8 PM, I visited the victim in her room.”

“What for?”

“She is - was - an acquaintance of mine. We both worked in legal fields, and she wanted to review her upcoming case with me. She mentioned that she was going to present something that might have had an impact on the results of her previous cases. After that, I got a drink in the bar at 9 PM.”

“Whiskey sour,” Willow said. “Although I don’t think there were any egg whites in it.”

“There were not,” Louis continued. “I returned to my room in standard class at 10 PM to work. Afterwards, at 11 PM, I went to the cargo car to retrieve some belongings of mine.”

“What belongings?” I asked.

“They are unimportant,” replied Louis. “At least to the murder at hand. I returned to my room at midnight. Millicent - the train engineer - came to talk to me.”

“What did you talk to Millicent about? She didn’t want to tell us.”

Louis frowned. “I suppose it’s natural. She may, after all, end up in court for her actions last night. Let’s just say she’s not a fan of some legislation our office is sponsoring. At 1 AM I returned to the cargo car to replace my belongings, then returned to my room to sleep.”

I nodded to Willow, and we stood up at the same time. “Thank you, Mr. Washington.”

He flashed a smile. “No, thank you for investigating.”

We took the chance to look once over the room. I noted the knives behind the bar - several of them, in easy reach. But a receipt on a table was what really caught my eye. “Looks like our victim ate lunch here yesterday,” I said. “A lunch receipt with her name on it.”

“Is there anywhere else to eat lunch?” Willow asked.

I shook my head. “No, but look here - two mains, two drinks. Looks like our victim had company.”

“Oh, I wonder what they’re brewing up in those witch’s cauldrons in the kitchen,” Willow said.

“Soup, I think. Don’t see what that has to do with the mystery, Willow.”

“I think soup is very mysterious, detective. What goes into those pots, nobody knows. It’s like murder - a whole lot of secret ingredients. Hey, what if everyone on the train teamed up to kill her?”

“This isn’t *Murder on the Orient Express*, Willow. This mystery doesn’t seem to match up with anything to do with Agatha Christie. No, this murder reminds me of another author entirely.”

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We finally arrived in second class, the only car on the train we hadn’t yet investigated. There were two cabins, but only one was occupied - by Willow. The cabin was more spacious than my own and had its own bathroom, but was otherwise similar in luxury.

“Okay, time to dig through my own belongings with the person who’s totally the murderer. I would say something about my statement, but you already took it.”

“Willow, are you going to continue throwing around baseless accusations, or are you going to help me figure things out? The detective is never the killer.”

Willow held her hand to her mouth in mock scandalization. "Hey! They're not totally baseless. It's worth questioning exactly why we've all placed our trust in you. But I don't think you'll find anything too exciting in here."

I pointed to a revolver sitting on her luggage. "Oh, that?" she said. "That's mine."

"I would call that somewhat exciting."

"Oh please. It's not like the victim died via gunshot wound." Willow was busy staring out the window, instead. "The moon is unusually bright tonight, even though it's just rising."

"That's hardly relevant to this case."

"It's still pretty."

I continued to search the room, but true to her word, nothing particularly interesting showed up. "Well, that was a bust," Willow said, lounging on her bed. "We still have a lot of interviews to get through with everyone on this train, and we still don't know who the killer is. Everyone's movements through the bar line up with what I saw last night."

"On the contrary," I said. "We've already interviewed the killer. This whole mystery has been by the book. It has followed all the rules, despite your claims otherwise."

"What?" shouted Willow, incredulously. "You mean you've already worked out who killed Lynette Van Dine?"

"Indeed. And I know how and why they did it, too. They acted alone."

"So the murder weapon -"

"We saw it, in a way."

"Can you give a straight answer for once?"

"Sorry, it's a detective thing. You wouldn't understand."

"And why kill someone on a near-empty train?"

"The killer had a good reason it had to be here and now."

"And what about all the lies everyone told us?"

"Only the killer lied to us. Everyone else told the truth - well, not always the whole truth, but nobody else outright lied."

“Any chance of sharing your wonderful deductions with us?”

“But of course. The culprit is -”

## Questions for Sleuths

Check your knowledge with these questions! This is a lower case on the difficulty scale, but good luck!

Who do you think killed Lynette Van Dine? Who do you think had lunch with her? Turn to the page in the table as a key to see the results of your guess!

Lunch\Killer	Willow	Thomas	Jack	Millicent	Louis
Willow	53	54	55	56	57
Thomas	58	59	60	61	62
Jack	63	64	65	66	67
Millicent	68	69	70	71	72
Louis	73	74	75	76	77

What is Willow even talking about?

In which car is the murder weapon? How about the evidence which explains the motive? Turn to the page in the table as a key to see the results of your guess!

Motive\Weapon	Locomotive	First Class	Second Class	Dining Car	Standard Class	Crew Car	Cargo Car
Locomotive	52	53	54	55	56	57	58
First Class	59	60	61	62	63	64	65
Second Class	66	67	68	69	70	71	72
Dining Car	73	74	75	76	77	78	79
Standard Class	80	81	82	83	84	85	86
Crew Car	87	88	89	90	91	92	93
Cargo Car	94	95	96	97	98	99	100

What evidence explains why the train stopped? (3)

What evidence explains why the murder had to happen on the train? (2)

Who has the key? (3)

What did the killer lie about? (1)

Who opened the door to the victim's cabin? (4)

What is the murder weapon? (1)