

“And what would the equation of the tangent be?” Mrs. Garrison glanced around the room for her next unsuspecting victim before her eyes landed on me. “Lilah, what do you think?”

“Uhhh, could you repeat the question?” I stammered. The back of the class exploded with snickers, and I sank as low as possible into my seat. First, I had forgotten to do my homework, and now I was getting called on? How much worse could this day get?

A sharp knock sounded at the door, cutting my public humiliation short. I sat back up, grateful for the distraction. Mrs. Garrison sighed loudly, muttering about “this generation” while sauntering to the door. Just as she was about to grasp the door knob, it slammed open.

“Oh my! Ever heard of something called patience?” Mrs. Garrison exclaimed, shaking her head and quietly continuing her rant. The man at the door cleared his throat.

“Who is,” he glanced at the paper, “Ms. Lilah Rives?”

I gulped. He was neatly dressed in a pressed suit, with shined shoes and perfectly rolled-up sleeves. I could’ve been able to pretend as if I wasn’t the individual in question, but my classmates’ traitorous eyes gave me away. His ice blue eyes shifted their gaze toward me. His glare pierced me like a knife lined with poison.

“Uh, that’s me?” I stammered, slowly raising my hand.

He sighed defeatedly before responding.

“Please join me at the office when you’re ready.” He didn’t bother to give me another glance before coldly storming out.

The sound of his dress shoes echoed through the hallway. I briskly stuffed my overflowing backpack, nervously chuckling as everyone stared at my struggle to zip it. After the backpack finally decided to cooperate with me, I hurried out, cringing when the navy blue door slammed shut behind me.

“Take a seat, Ms. Rives,” the man from before said. “I’m here to discuss your grandfather’s will.” At my bewildered look, he elaborated. “I’m Mr. Perko, his lawyer. Mr. Blackwell passed away yesterday, as you know, and his will has directed me here.”

“So, uh, the thing is,” I laughed nervously. “Mr. Blackwell is my mom’s estranged father. My dad and my mom eloped against my grandpa’s wishes, and he cut them off. I think you have the wrong person, because he would never add me to his will.”

Mr. Perko forced a look of pity, but his hidden eye roll displayed his real emotions. He must have dealt with many similar cases.

“Your grandfather may have had a change of heart, because it is clear that you are the beneficiary,” Mr. Perko slid a paper to me, pointing to one of the lines. “As you are a minor, I have notified your father of your inheritance, and he has agreed to supervise it until you are of age.”

“Mr. Perko, I don’t think you understand how much my grandpa hated us. When I was born, my parents sent a picture of me to him, and he literally ripped it up and mailed back the fragments. Grandpa would *never* add me to his will, let alone give me his entire estate.” I blurted out, my voice trembling with frustration. How much more did I need to explain for this man to understand that this was probably a mistake?

“I’m sorry, Ms. Rives, but you are the sole beneficiary listed in Mr. Blackwell’s will. I suggest you speak to your father about your concerns, because he seemed to expect my call

about this inheritance.” Mr. Perko stood up, pulling out a business card from his suit pocket. “If you have any further questions, please contact me in the future. Have a good day, Ms. Rives.”

My mouth was left agape as he strolled past me.

“Please refrain from making this matter public. The investigation is ongoing.” Mr. Perko stopped at the threshold of the door.

“What investigation?” I stammered, my pulse quickening.

“The investigation for Mr. Blackwell’s murder.”

A weed peeked through one of the numerous cracks in the concrete. I scoffed. Our school didn’t even have the budget to add an air-conditioning system to our gym; they would never even think about filling in the cracks in the school sidewalk.

I had decided to just leave school for the day. After Mr. Perko’s unexpected visit, what was the point in going back to class? It’s not like I would be able to focus on Mrs. Garrison chattering about tangents and ranting about our disrespectful generation.

All I could think about was Mr. Perko’s last words. Murder? Grandpa was famous, but not *that* famous. He didn’t have any rivals who hated him enough to commit a felony. And why was everything in the will left to me? Mr. Perko said that Dad knew about this, so I could ask him. But of course, he was on a business trip in Singapore, so that was a dead end.

I decided to look online. To my surprise, Grandpa’s death was a popular topic in the news. “Andrew Blackwell, businessman, murdered at 76,” read the most recent article from 2 hours ago. I clicked on it, tripping on air as I read the first few sentences.

“Mr. Blackwell, a well-known entrepreneur, was found gruesomely murdered in his bungalow in Singapore. Reports indicate that the cause of death was consumption of raisins, a fruit that Mr Blackwell was deathly allergic to. Police have confirmed that signs of struggle were visible, ruling out suicide and classifying this case as murder,” the article read.

I gasped. Who could’ve known about Grandpa’s allergy? He was such a reclusive person, rarely accepting any interviews. As far as I knew, Grandpa didn’t have any friends either, only business partners.

I remember one of my many futile attempts to send Grandpa a Christmas card. I wanted to send a pack of trail mix in the package, but Dad had snatched it away.

“You can’t send that! Your grandfather’s allergic to raisins!” Dad had shouted.

Mom was an only child, so we were Grandpa’s only family after Grandma passed away when I was three. If he didn’t have any other family, who else could’ve known about his allergy?

Deep in thought, I stumbled into the door of my house. I pinched the bridge of my nose, feeling the impending headache. I knew that if I lingered on this topic, I would spiral and obsess over it until I figured out what happened. I typed in the password to unlock the door and stepped inside.

Dad still wasn’t home yet. 8 texts, with no response to any of them. Three days since I learned about Grandpa’s death, and three weeks since Dad left for his trip. I’d been operating like a machine. Wake up, eat breakfast, go to school, come home, eat dinner, sleep, repeat. The

thirst to figure out what happened to Grandpa was killing me. Each time I thought about it, I said that I would ask Dad when he came back. But he never did.

I couldn't stand it anymore. I couldn't focus on anything without obsessing over the investigation. So, I grabbed my bag and left for the library.

The library was relatively loud, but still better than the house. I sat down at an empty table at the corner of the room, near the computers.

"What should I do first?" I muttered to myself, looking around the library before an open news website caught my eye. "I'll check the newest articles."

I was shocked to see numerous articles from a couple of hours ago. As I skimmed through them, I realized that they all talked about one main thing: a new suspect for Grandpa's case. Grandpa's butler was supposedly the only one in the house who knew about the raisin allergy, and many maids claimed that he was acting suspicious in the days before the murder.

It seemed like everything lined up. Purl, the butler, murdered Grandpa. He also found Grandpa after his death and alerted the authorities. But what did he gain from Grandpa's death? He didn't get anything in the will, so what motive would he have to murder Grandpa? There was most likely someone else behind this.

Photos had also been released from the scene. I looked into them, curious to see where Grandpa had been living. Disappointingly, the pictures only showed a wooden table covered with paperwork and a rocking chair in the background. I was about to close the pictures and go back to browsing when something in the back caught my eye.

A coat was draped over the rocking chair, with its sleeves being carefully folded in. What caught my eye was the small wrist watch that seemed to have been thrown onto the chair. But it wasn't the watch itself that surprised me; it was who it belonged to.

Dad.

There was no doubt that the wrist watch belonged to Dad. On the seventh anniversary of their marriage, Mom had gifted Dad this watch right after cutting their two-tier cake. She died two months after, in a car crash on the highway. Every year on Mom's birthday, we watch the video of her giving the watch to Dad, reminiscing about those memories. The watch symbolized his and Mom's relationship; he would never give it to Grandpa.

There was no way I was mistaken either. The watch definitely belonged to Dad. Mom had gotten it custom-made with Dad's favorite colors and an engraving of her name on the leather wrist-band. So how did it end up in Grandpa's office? Were Dad and Grandpa in contact before his passing? Is that why Dad expected the inheritance?

I needed to talk to Dad. I decided to try calling him one more time. I tapped on his contact and listened to the robotic ring, fidgeting with my fingers under the table.

Of course, he didn't pick up this time either. I was done waiting patiently for him to answer my calls. Dad had told me to call James, his colleague, if there were any emergencies and he didn't pick up. I scoffed. This was considered an emergency now, after three weeks of no contact.

"Hello?" a male voice spoke into the phone.

“Uh, hi, this is Lilah Rives?” I chastised myself in my head. Why was I asking a question? I needed to be more confident. “Lilah Rives, Raymond Rives's daughter? He told me to call you if there were any emergencies.”

“Oh yeah, Raymond’s daughter. Sorry if this comes off as rude, but uh, why are you calling me?” James hesitated, seemingly confused.

“Uh, isn’t Dad with you right now? You guys usually go on business trips together, so I thought that you would’ve gone to Singapore with him too,” I elaborated. Did James not go with Dad? How else was I supposed to contact him now?

“Yeah, we did go to Singapore together, but the business trip ended a while ago. Raymond should’ve gotten back a week ago,” James continued, clearly confused. “Maybe he’s still exploring Singapore, I don’t really know.”

“Uh, well thanks for the information!” I quickly hung up, holding the phone close to my chest. I took a deep breath. Dad was supposed to be home a week ago? Then why was he still not home? The wrist watch, the raisin allergy, the inheritance. All of them had something to do with Dad. Something didn’t add up. I needed to talk to Dad. Now.

I strolled past the withering petunias, about to open the door when I noticed something.

The light was on. I was sure I had turned off all the lights when I had left for the library. How could they be on now? My heart skipped a beat. I slowly looked down. Dad’s worn down loafers were carelessly tossed on the ground. He was back.

My fingers shook as I reached for the doorknob. Every little sound made me look around. I could hear the old lady next door watering her plants, the little kids across the street arguing with each other, my heart beating at an unnatural speed, the leaves crunching as the mailman stomped over them – I could hear everything.

The light seeping through the crack between the door and the frame taunted me, mocking my inability to just open the door. I took a deep breath, quickly typed something on my phone, and twisted the doorknob.

The door creaked open, letting out the most horrendous sound known to mankind. I flinched as Dad walked out from the kitchen with his cringy apron on. “Best Flippin’ Dad Ever!” it read.

“Hey Liles! Sorry about not replying to your texts, but I just got home from the trip and I decided to just surprise you,” Dad opened up his arms for a hug.

“Dad. We need to talk.” I declared, avoiding eye contact. I turned away from him and sat down at the dining table.

“Is this about the inheritance? I thought you would be happy!” Dad sputtered, leaning on the counter.

“Dad.” He kept rambling. “Dad.” He didn’t stop. “Dad!” I shouted, slamming my hands down. He finally turned to look at me, eyes wide at my outburst.

“Did you kill him?” I questioned, watching as his eyes widened in shock. He quickly tried to deny it, but I exploded. “I saw the watch in the pictures. The raisin allergy. We were the only ones who knew about it. Your supposed business trip. I called James, and you know what he said? The business trip ended a week ago. Where were you after that? Huh? Now you can’t answer. Of course, you can’t. You murderer!”

“Shut up, you brat! I did this all for you and you have the audacity to call me names like this?” he shoved me by my shoulders, putting his face up close. “I did all of this just so you could have a better future, just so money wouldn’t be a problem for you like it was for me! I made him change his will to give everything to you. And look how you repay me! By threatening me like this? What are you going to do now, go to the police? Go ahead. It’s not like they’ll believe a brat like you anyway. What proof do you have? They already think that the butler killed him. Why would they ever believe you?”

Dad was acting like a maniac. His eyes were dilated, he was panting loudly; I didn’t even recognize him anymore. I frantically got up and grabbed my phone, rushing toward the stairs.

“Yeah, run away! That’s all you can do!” Dad yelled after me.

I slumped against my room door, sobbing into my arms. My phone was my only hope now. With shaky hands, I typed in the password. Fortunately, the app was still open.

Through my blurry gaze, I pressed the bright red button. The recording was complete.