

The Mystery of the Dead Brother

It was dark. Pitch black. Darkness seemed to fill the frosty night air, broken only by shards of silvery moonlight. Chris Tomilson glanced up at the rickety hotel building and sighed. It would have to do for the night. As a middle-aged detective, Chris had been traveling back to his home after solving a particularly difficult case about a mysteriously disappearing girl. Now he needed somewhere to spend the night before continuing on his way home.

Striding inside the building and pushing his sopping mouse-brown hair out of his eyes (it was raining), he asked for a room. The tired receptionist glared up at him with bored eyes. “Room 216,” the receptionist muttered. Chris nodded curtly, took the card that was the key to his room, and proceeded to climb the multiple flights of stairs.

When he reached his room and shoved open the door, a horrible stench slammed into him with an almost tangible force. Wrinkling his nose and gagging, he pinched his nostrils closed and tried not to vomit. But even with his nose squeezed shut tightly, the overpowering stench crept inside his nostrils. It smelled of festering, rotten flesh. The smell was coming straight from his room.

But where in the room was it coming from? Chris checked the fridge, the cupboards, the closet. Nothing. Too exhausted to investigate any further, Chris crawled under the clean white bed sheets and waited for sleep to come.

But it didn’t come. The stench was filling his nostrils, almost suffocating him. It was particularly strong from where he was now. Irritated, sleepy, and frustrated, Chris stumbled out of bed and was stomping furiously toward the door to report the smell to the receptionist when he tripped over something that glinted silver in the dim light of his hotel room. It was a long, curved knife. Chris’s stomach, already feeling queasy from the rotten flesh smell filling the room, convulsed when he saw dried blood smeared on the knife.

“What the—?” As he bent to pick up the bloodstained knife, a dark shape underneath the bed nearby caught his eye. Chris groped blindly around under the bed for a moment before triumphantly tugging out . . . a dead body. There was a long, jagged wound across its chest. *Murder*, Chris thought. This was where the smell had been coming from.

Panting for fresh air through the choking stench of the corpse, Chris rifled around in the body’s jacket pocket and fished out its wallet. The ID read, “Max Bane,” and above that, a picture of the once-alive victim glowering, stony-faced, into the flashing camera. Glancing at the body’s face, Chris noted how the ID and the real body were both similar-looking, except for the fact that the dead body’s lifeless face was a lot paler than the picture.

Flinging the corpse over his shoulder, Chris was about to report the dead body to the receptionist when he stopped in his tracks. “You’re a *detective*,” he reminded himself. “You would be able to figure out this case much quicker than that lazy receptionist.” So he began to carefully inspect every inch of his only clue: the knife. There, etched into the polished wooden handle, was a series of cursive words. Chris felt a rush of recognition when he realized it was the brand name of the knife: Chef Joe’s Cooking Supplies.

Thirty minutes later, Chris barged into the dark shop. “Has anyone recently bought a knife like this?” he demanded the owner, who was busy straightening the rows and rows of clean cooking materials.

The owner stared in horror at the slick crimson blood on the blade for a moment, flashed Chris a fearful glance, and searched through his sales records. Finally, he announced, “The most recent customer to buy that knife was Roger Bane.”

“Roger Bane . . .” Chris repeated thoughtfully. “*Bane!*” The victim shared the same last name as the owner of the knife! Perhaps they were related!

Chris strode out of the shop, leaving the bewildered owner staring after him, and flung himself inside his car. Several minutes later, he pulled up at a magnificent driveway shrouded in colorful flowers. The actual house was completely breathtaking. No, it wasn’t a house; it was a *mansion*, which was a glowing, flawless milky white color all over. There was a maroon Mercedes parked in the driveway. Glancing inside the tinted windows, Chris saw that the backseat was covered in sticky, dried blood. “Yep, this is the place,” Chris muttered.

He rapped his knuckles sharply on the heavy oak front door. The door was snatched open promptly, revealing the snarling face of a man in his mid-thirties. His dirty blond hair was ruffled, and he was wearing flannel pajamas. Chris almost toppled off the front porch in his surprise. The man looked exactly like the dead body.

“What do you want?” the man snapped warily, his tall frame filling up the entire arched doorway. “If you’re one of those salespeople, I’m not interested—”

“I am *not* a salesperson,” Chris retorted in an equally brusque tone, steadying himself and trying to cover up his surprise. “In fact, I’m a detective, thank you very much.”

The man snorted through his long, hooked nose. “Well, why are you here, then?”

“Are you Mr. Roger Bane?” Chris questioned, staring evenly up at the man’s dark, unwelcoming eyes.

“Yes,” the man spat.

“And are you in any way related to Mr. Max Bane?” Chris waited for the man to shift uncomfortably at the mention of the man he had murdered, waited for any telltale twitch of the muscle, but the man remained indifferent.

“Yes, I’m his twin brother.” Ah. Chris relaxed his tensed muscles. So *that* explained why the corpse looked so similar to this man.

“He was found dead this morning. Perhaps you have something to do with this?” Chris pressed on.

Now, Roger twisted his gaze away from Chris’s and suddenly became very interested in his bare, gnarled feet. “No, no, no, sir, I have nothing to do with that,” he answered hastily.

“Oh, really?” Chris said, forcing Roger to look at him again. “Well, I found this knife—” He dangled the bloody knife in front of Roger’s face. “—near the death site of Mr. Max Bane. Have you ever seen this knife before?”

“No!” Roger practically shouted. He frantically attempted to slam the door in Chris’s face, but Chris easily shoved it back open. “I never saw a knife like that! Never, never, in my *life!* Go away!” Roger screamed, trying again to close the door, but Chris nudged it back open.

“So you *didn’t* kill Max Bane?” Chris asked.

“No! I didn’t, no, no, I didn’t, I swear! Please—*please* don’t put me in jail, I never did it, I never killed Max—”

“Then perhaps you can explain the blood in that fine car of yours?” Chris broke in roughly.

“I—I, um, I—” Roger struggled desperately to find an excuse. “I had a really bad nosebleed—in this hot weather, you know—”

“It’s the middle of December,” Chris pointed out coldly. He had heard enough of Roger’s feeble excuses. Whipping out a pair of shiny iron handcuffs, he shoved Roger in the backseat of Chris’s car to take him to the police station.

“Alright, alright!” Roger wailed, finally realizing that he might as well admit his guiltiness now since he was already caught. “I admit I killed him! It’s just—my father’s about to die and he’s going to give half his fortune to Max and the other half to me . . . but I needed all of the money to pay off a gambling debt!”

“Don’t gamble,” Chris spat as he clambered behind the wheel. Chris felt a rush of satisfaction that he had been able to figure out this challenging crime and put another rightful criminal behind bars. *Case closed*, he thought.