

The power of

Sharpe Thinking

The problem-solving adventures of Scott and Angie Sharpe



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Mystery #5:

Who Stole the Carnival Money?



The twins' dad and Mayor Avery had been good friends as long as Scott and Angie could remember. But they could recall only once or twice when the mayor had been as upset as he was now.

"The full moon is making everyone crazy, and having a criminal on the loose doesn't help," said the mayor, as he and Mr. Sharpe and the twins got out of the mayor's car at Town Hall. Fern Hollow was a small town with very little crime. Two weeks ago at the annual carnival, someone had made off with a box full of cash that was supposed to go to charity.

The mayor unlocked the door to his office, and led them into a large room bathed in

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moonlight. It was unusual for Mayor Avery to be here at this hour unless the town council was meeting, but he wanted to get an envelope the police department had dropped off after he'd gone home for dinner.

"It's a photo that provides an alibi for the only suspect we really had a good lead on," the mayor had said gloomily when he came to pick them up. "I want to get a look at it. But I'll tell you the truth, I don't know where we'll go from here."

Switching on the overhead light, the mayor went to his desk and picked up the envelope. "This," he said, "is what our one suspect, Bennie Bascomb, is using to clear himself."

"Who's Bennie Bascomb?" Angie asked.

"Nobody really knows. He moved to town a few months ago. He doesn't have a criminal record. He pays his rent. He claims he does freelance computer work at home. The only reason people notice him is because he's a new face – and in a place like Fern Hollow, you don't see that many new faces. Maybe that's why a couple of folks think he was the one casing the tent at the carnival where the money was kept. They aren't a

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hundred percent sure. But until this came” – he shook the envelope in his hand – “I thought we were onto something.”

Taking a letter-opener from his desk, Mayor Avery slit open the envelope, pulled out the photo inside, and set it on his desk so they could all examine it:



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The photo was of a man sitting at a table in front of a birthday cake. Behind him were a clock and calendar on the wall, and a big window that framed a full moon outside. “He *is* a strange looking character,” the twins’ dad said. “But that doesn’t mean he committed any crime.”

The mayor nodded. “Bennie said his birthday party was the same day as the robbery. And when we checked his driver’s license, sure enough, his birthday was that day.”

“Did he have witnesses? Other people who were at the party?” Mr. Sharpe asked.

“Just his girlfriend, who is the one who made the cake and took the picture. He says he hasn’t been here long enough to have other friends.”

“That much makes sense,” Mr. Sharpe said.

“And look.” The mayor pointed to the dates on the calendar in the photo. “The days are crossed off until two weeks ago.”

“And the clock on the wall reads 8:20, just about the time the robbery took place,” Angie said.

“Everything seems to be accounted for,” Mr. Sharpe agreed.

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The mayor sighed wearily. “Ever since this happened, my phone has been ringing nonstop. People who never locked their doors before are buying deadbolts and putting in alarm systems. They think they’ll be the next victims.”

“They’re talking about cancelling next year’s carnival,” Mr. Sharpe said. “And since the children’s clinic gets most of the carnival’s profits, there’s no telling what will happen to it.”

While the two men were talking, Scott and Angie were studying the picture. Angie pointed to the window in the photo, then to the calendar. Scott nodded. “I don’t think the carnival is in any danger,” he said.

“Or the children’s clinic, either,” Angie added.

“What do you mean?” the mayor asked.

Scott showed him the photo. “The evidence is right here. Bennie Bascomb is lying. And so is his girlfriend. There’s no way this can serve as an alibi.”

The mayor took another good look at the picture. “Well, of course!” he said. “I should have seen it right away. The photo is a fake!”

HOW DO THEY KNOW THE PHOTO IS A FAKE?

(answer on page 77)

Mystery #5:

Who Stole the Carnival Money?

Answer:

The man in the picture is guilty.

As they entered his office, the mayor said, “The full moon is making everyone crazy.” The full moon is the proof that the picture is a fake.

Bennie Bascomb claimed that the picture (*page 31*) was taken two weeks earlier.

However, there wouldn't have been a full moon two weeks ago like there was in the picture. It had to have been taken that night.

Instead, almost everything was faked in the picture, including the clock and calendar, in order to form an alibi. He just forgot to close the blinds to hide the full moon (which occurs only once a month).

The fact that the robber's birthday was the same day as the robbery was a lucky coincidence for the thief – but not quite lucky enough.





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