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A Wells and Wong Mystery

Written by

Robin Stevens

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A MURDER MOST UNLADYLIKE MYSTERY

MURDER MOST UNLADYLIKE

THERE'S BEEN A RATHER SHOCKING MURDER AT DEEPDEAN SCHOOL FOR GIRLS...

ROBIN STEVENS

MURDER MOST UNLADYLIKE: A WELLS & WONG MYSTERY
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This is the first murder that the Wells & Wong Detective Society has ever investigated, so it is a good thing Daisy bought me a new casebook. The last one was finished after we solved The Case of Lavinia's Missing Tie. The solution to that, of course, was that Clementine stole it in revenge for Lavinia punching her in the stomach during lacrosse, which was Lavinia's revenge for Clementine telling everyone Lavinia came from a broken home. I suspect that the solution to this new case may be more complex.

I suppose I ought to give some explanation of ourselves, in honour of the new casebook. Daisy Wells is the President of the Detective Society, and I, Hazel Wong, am its Secretary. Daisy says that this makes her Sherlock Holmes, and me Watson. This is probably fair. After all, I am much too short to be the heroine of this story, and who ever heard of a Chinese Sherlock Holmes?

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That's why it's so funny that it was me who found Miss Bell's dead body. In fact, I think Daisy is still upset about it, though of course she pretends not to be. You see, Daisy is a heroine-like person, and so it should be her that these things happen to.

Look at Daisy and you think you know exactly the sort of person she is – one of those dainty, absolutely English girls with blue eyes and golden hair; the kind who'll gallop across muddy fields in the rain clutching hockey sticks and then sit down and eat ten iced buns at tea. I, on the other hand, bulge all over like Bibendum the Michelin Man; my cheeks are moony-round and my hair and eyes are stubbornly dark brown.

I arrived from Hong Kong part way through second form, and even then, when we were all still shrimps (*shrimps*, for this new casebook, is what we call the little lower-form girls), Daisy was already famous throughout Deepdean School. She rode horses, was part of the lacrosse team, and was a member of the Drama Society. The Big Girls took notice of her, and by May the entire school knew that the Head Girl herself had called Daisy a 'good sport'.

But that is only the outside of Daisy, the jolly-good-show part that everyone sees. The inside of her is not jolly-good-show at all.

It took me quite a while to discover that.

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Daisy wants me to explain what happened this term up to the time I found the body. She says that is what proper detectives do – add up the evidence first – so I will. She also says that a good Secretary should keep her casebook on her at all times to be ready to write up important events as they happen. It was no good reminding her that I do that anyway.

The most important thing to happen in those first few weeks of the autumn term was the Detective Society, and it was Daisy who began that. Daisy is all for making up societies for things. Last year we had the Pacifism Society (dull) and then the Spiritualism Society (less dull, but then Lavinia smashed her mug during a séance, Beanie fainted and Matron banned spiritualism altogether).

But that was all last year, when we were still shrimps.

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We can't be messing about with silly things like ghosts now that we are grown-up third formers – that was what Daisy said when she came back at the beginning of this term having discovered crime.

I was quite glad. Not that I was ever afraid of ghosts, exactly. Everyone knows there aren't any. Even so, there are enough ghost stories going round our school to horrify anybody. The most famous of our ghosts is Verity Abraham, the girl who committed suicide off the Gym balcony the term before I arrived at Deepdean, but there are also ghosts of an ex-mistress who locked herself into one of the music rooms and starved herself to death, and a little first-form shrimp who drowned in the pond.

As I said, Daisy decided that this year we were going to be detectives. She arrived at House with her tuck box full of books with sinister, shadowy covers and titles like *Peril at End House* and *Mystery Mile*. Matron confiscated them one by one, but Daisy always managed to find more.

We started the Detective Society in the first week of term. The two of us made a deadly secret pact that no one else, not even our dorm mates, Kitty, Beanie and Lavinia, could be told about it. It did make me feel proud, just me and Daisy having a secret. It was awfully fun too, creeping about behind the others' backs and pretending to be ordinary when all the time *we*

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knew we were detectives on a secret mission to obtain information.

Daisy set all our first detective missions. In that first week we crept into the other third-form dorm and read Clementine's secret journal, and then Daisy chose a first former and set us to find out everything we could about her. This, Daisy told me, was practice – just like memorizing the licences of every motor car we saw.

In our second week there was the case of why King Henry (our name for this year's Head Girl, Henrietta Trilling, because she is so remote and regal, and has such beautiful chestnut curls) wasn't at Prayers one morning. But it only took a few hours before everyone, not just us, knew that she had been sent a telegram saying that her aunt had died suddenly that morning.

'Poor thing,' said Kitty, when we found out. Kitty has the next-door bed to Daisy's in our dorm, and Daisy has designated her a Friend of the Detective Society, even though she is still not allowed to know about it. She has smooth, light brown hair and masses of freckles, and she keeps something hidden in the bottom of her tuck box that I thought at first was a torture device but turned out to be eyelash curlers. She is as mad about gossip as Daisy, though for less scientific reasons. 'Poor old King Henry. She hasn't had much luck. She was Verity Abraham's best friend, after all, and *you* know what happened to Verity. She hasn't been the same since.'

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'I don't,' said Beanie, who sleeps next to me. Her real name is Rebecca but we call her Beanie because she is very small, and everything frightens her. Lessons frighten her most of all, though. She says that when she looks at a page all the letters and numbers get up and do a jig until she can't think straight. 'What did happen to Verity?'

'*She killed herself*,' said Kitty in annoyance. 'Jumped off the Gym balcony last year. Come on, Beans.'

'Oh!' said Beanie. 'Of course. I always thought she tripped.'

Sometimes Beanie is quite slow.

Something else happened at the beginning of term that turned out to be very important indeed: The One arrived.

You see, at the end of last year Miss Nelson, the Deputy Headmistress and our dull old Music and Art mistress, retired. We were expecting her to be replaced by someone else quite as uninteresting – but the new Music and Art master, Mr Reid, was not uninteresting at all. He was also not old.

Mr Reid had rugged cheekbones and a dashing moustache, and he slicked his hair back with brillantine. He looked exactly like a film star, although nobody could agree on which one. Kitty thought Douglas Fairbanks Jr, and Clementine said Clark Gable, but only because Clementine is obsessed with Clark Gable. Really though,

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it did not matter. Mr Reid was a man, and he was not Mr MacLean (our dotty, unwashed old Reverend whom Kitty calls Mr MacDirty), and so the whole school fell in love with him at once.

A deadly serious half-secret Society dedicated to the worship of Mr Reid was established by Kitty. At its first meeting, he was rechristened The One. We all had to go about making the secret signal at each other (index finger raised, right eye winking) whenever we were in His Presence.

The One had barely been at Deepdean for a week when he caused the biggest shock since Verity last year.

You see, before this term, the whole school knew that Miss Bell (our Science mistress) and Miss Parker (our Maths mistress) had a secret. They lived together in Miss Parker's little flat in town, which had a spare room in it. The spare room was the secret. I did not understand when Daisy first told me about the spare room; now we are in the third form, though, of course I see exactly what it must mean. It has something to do with Miss Parker's hair, cut far too short even to be fashionable, and the way she and Miss Bell used to pass their cigarettes from one to the other during bunbreaks last year.

There were no cigarettes being passed this term, though, because on the first day Miss Bell took one look at The One and fell for him as madly as Kitty did.

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This was a terrible shock. Miss Bell was not considered a beauty. She was very tucked-in and buttoned-up and severe in her white lab coat. And she was poor. Miss Bell wore the same three threadbare blouses on rotation, cut her own hair and did secretarial work for Miss Griffin after school hours for extra pay. Everyone rather pitied her, and we assumed The One would too. We were astonished when he did not.

'Something has clearly *happened* between them,' Clementine told our form at the end of the first week of term. 'I went to the science lab during bunbreak and I came upon Miss Bell and The One *canoodling*. It was really shocking!'

'I bet they weren't, really,' said Lavinia scornfully. Lavinia is part of our dorm, too – she is a big, heavy girl with a stubborn mop of dark hair, and most of the time she is unhappy.

'They were!' said Clementine. 'I know what it looks like. I saw my brother doing the same thing last month.'

I couldn't stop myself blushing. Imagining stiff, well-starched Miss Bell *canoodling* (whatever that meant) was extraordinarily awkward.

Then Miss Parker got to hear about it. Miss Parker is truly ferocious, with chopped-short black hair and a furious voice that comes bellowing out of her tiny body like a foghorn. The row was immense. Almost the whole

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school heard it, and the upshot was that Miss Bell was not allowed to live in the little flat any more.

Then, at the beginning of the second week of term, everything changed again. We could barely keep up with it all. Suddenly The One no longer seemed to want to spend time with Miss Bell. Instead, he began to take up with Miss Hopkins.

Miss Hopkins is our Games mistress. She is round and relentlessly cheerful (unless you happen not to be good at Games) and she marches about the school corridors brandishing a hockey stick, her athletic brown hair always coming down from its fashionable clipped-back waves. She *is* pretty, and (I think) quite young, so it was not at all surprising that The One should notice her – it was only shocking that he should jilt Miss Bell to do it.

So now it was The One and Miss Hopkins seen canoodling in form rooms, and all Miss Bell could do was storm past them whenever she saw them, her lips pursed and her glare freezing.

General Deepdean opinion was against Miss Bell. Miss Hopkins was pretty while Miss Bell was not, and Miss Hopkins's father was a very important magistrate in Gloucestershire while Miss Bell's was nothing important at all. But I could not help being on Miss Bell's side. After all, it was not *her* fault that The One had jilted her, and she could not help being poor.

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Now that she could not stay in the flat, of course, she was poorer than ever, and that made me worry.

The only thing Miss Bell had to cheer her up was the Deputy Headmistress job, and even that was not the consolation it should have been. You see, Miss Griffin had to appoint a new Deputy, and after a few weeks the rumour went round that Miss Bell was about to be chosen. This ought to have been lucky – once she was formally appointed, Miss Bell's money worries would vanish for good – but all it really meant was that the mistresses who were not chosen began to despise her. There were two others really in the running. The first was Miss Tennyson, our English mistress – that is her name, really, although she is no relation to the famous one. If you've seen that painting of the Lady of Shalott drooping in her boat, you have seen Miss Tennyson. Her hair is always down round her face, and she is as drippy as underdone cake. The second was Miss Lappet, our History and Latin mistress, who is grey and useless and shaped like an overstuffed cushion, but *thinks* she is Miss Griffin's most trusted adviser. They were both simply fuming about the Deputy Headmistress job, and snubbed Miss Bell in the corridor whenever they saw her.

And then the murder happened.

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