A MURDER MOST UNLADYLIKE MYSTERY

A SPOONFUL OF MURDER

NOT EVERYONE'S PLAYING HAPPY FAMILIES...

ROBIN STEVENS

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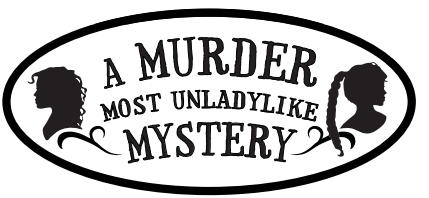

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To Nat and Gemma,
the other mothers of my books.

Being an account of

The Case of the Jade Pin Crimes,
an investigation by the Wells and Wong Detective Society.

Written by Hazel Wong
(Detective Society Vice-President and Secretary), aged 14.

Begun Monday 24th February 1936.

HAZEL'S COMPOUND

HARBOUR

GATE

TIERS

DRIVE

GUARD HUT

MAIN ENTRANCE

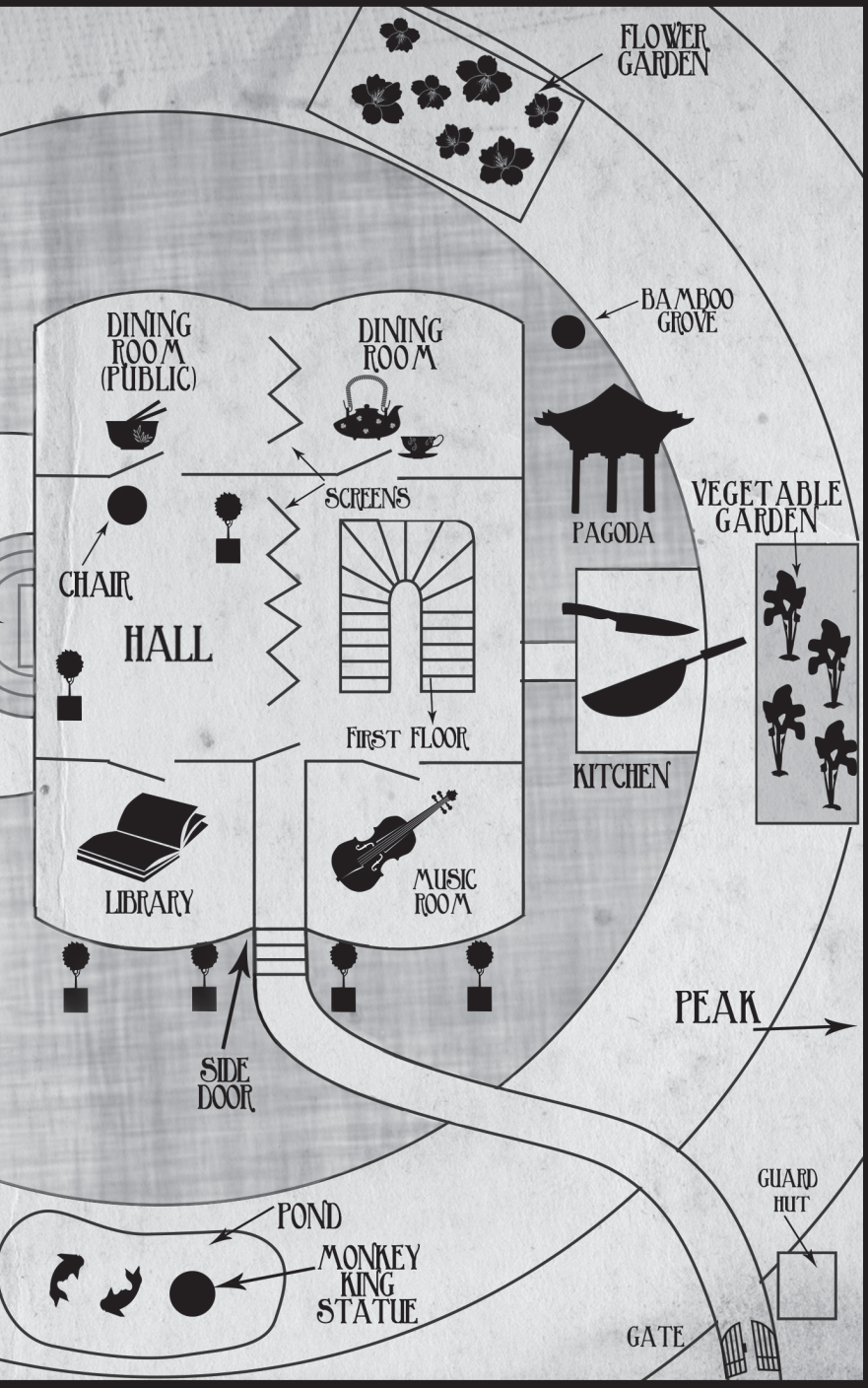
ROBINSON ROAD

GARAGE

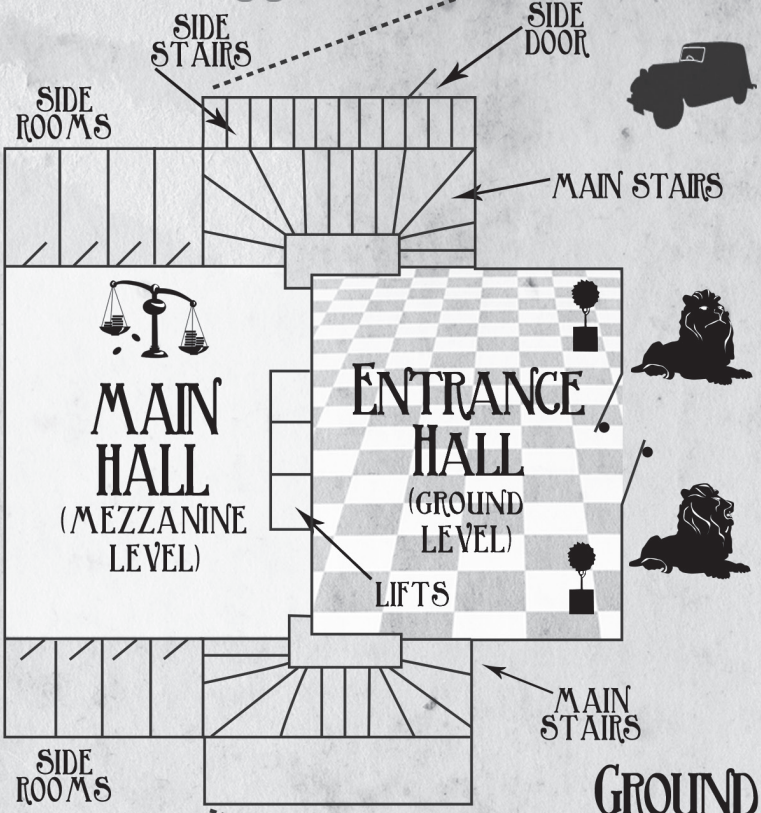
A NOTE ON THE COMPOUND:

The main house is made up of three floors – the ground floor, as shown here; a first floor, which contains the senior family members' bedrooms, the family dining room and the male servants' quarters; and a second floor, which houses the junior family members, the female servants' rooms and guest bedrooms.

On the ground floor a corridor connects the main house with the kitchen. On the first and second floors a small bridge connects the main building with the servants' quarters (which are above the kitchen).

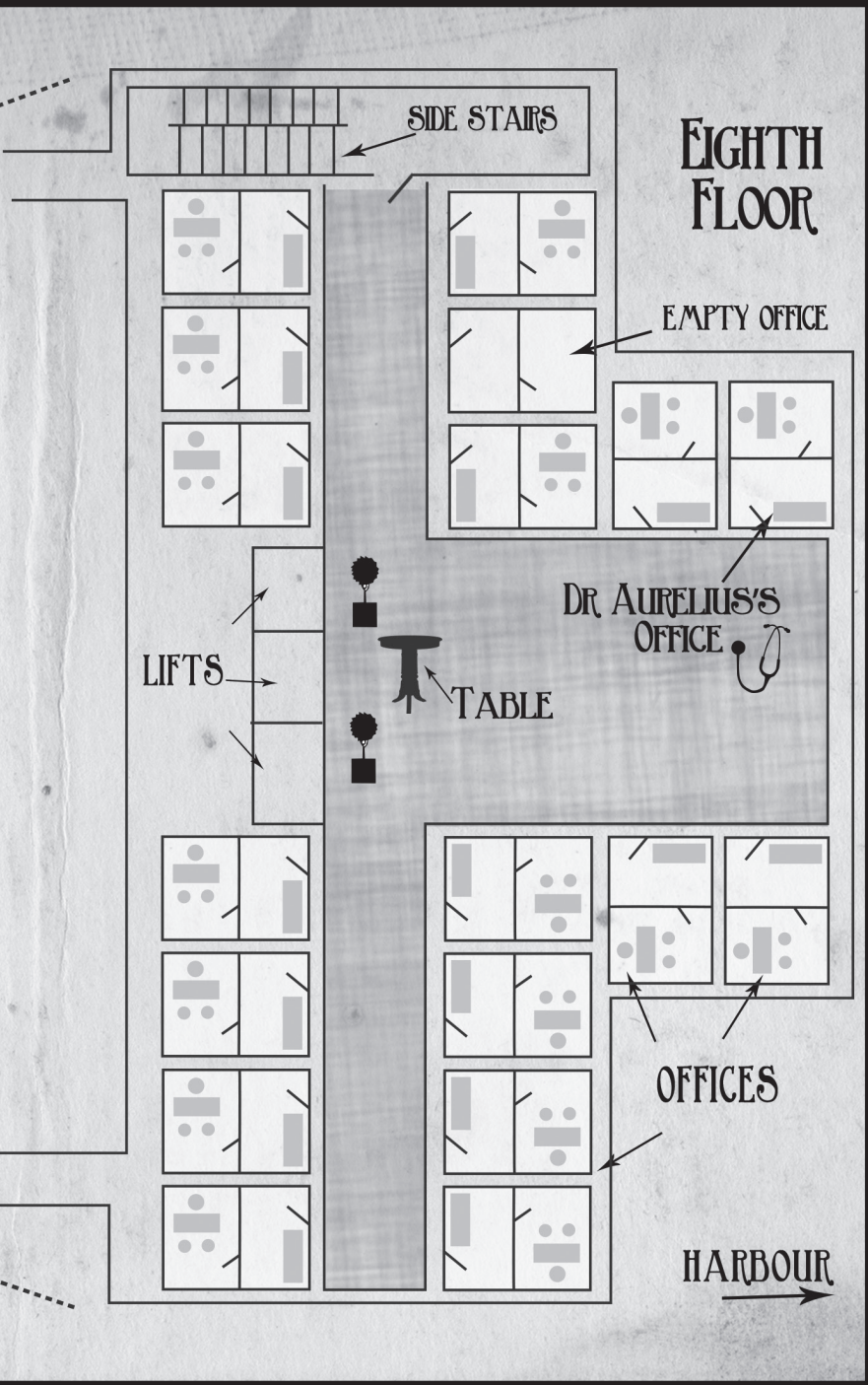

FLOWER GARDEN
BAMBOO GROVE
DINING ROOM (PUBLIC)
DINING ROOM
SCREENS
PAGODA
VEGETABLE GARDEN
CHAIR
HALL
FIRST FLOOR
KITCHEN
LIBRARY
MUSIC ROOM
PEAK
SIDE DOOR
GUARD HUT
POND
MONKEY KING STATUE
GATE

Hong Kong & Shanghai Bank



Ground / Mezzanine Floor

PEAK


SIDE STAIRS
EIGHTH FLOOR
EMPTY OFFICE
DR AURELIUS'S OFFICE
LIFTS
TABLE
OFFICES
HARBOUR

CHARACTER LIST

THE WONGS

Vincent Wong (Wong Lik Han 黃力漢)
June Wong (Wong Ka Yan 黃嘉欣, also known as Ah Mah) – *Mr Wong's first wife*
Jie Jie (Wong Min Su 綿素) – *Mr Wong's second wife*
Hazel Wong (Wong Fung Ying 黃鳳英, also known as Ying Ying) – *Vice-President and Secretary of the Detective Society*
Rose Wong (Wong Ngai Ling 藝玲, also known as Ling Ling) – *Hazel Wong's half sister*
May Wong (Wong Mei Li 美麗, also known as Monkey) – *Hazel Wong's half sister*
Edward Wong (also known as Teddy) – *Hazel Wong's half brother*

THE BIG HOUSE

Su Li 素李 – *Teddy's maid*
Ping 萍 – *Hazel's maid*
Wo On 和安 – *Hazel's chauffeur*
Assai – *Ah Mah's maid*
Ah Kwan 阿昆 – *May's maid*
Pik An 袁琵安 – *Rose's maid*
Ng 吳兄 – *A cook*
Ah Lan 阿蘭 – *A gardener's boy*
Thomas Baboo – *A guard*
Maxwell – *Mr Wong's secretary*
Daisy Wells – *President of the Detective Society, a guest of the Wongs*

HONG KONG

Mr Peter Svensson (known as Sven) – *A businessman*
Mrs Kendra Svensson – *His wife*
Roald Svensson – *His son*
Mrs Bessie Fu – *A businesswoman, owner of the Luk Man Teahouse*
Mr Kai Wa Fan 啟華燻 – *A businessman*
Wu Shing 胡城 – *A lift operator*
Dr Crispin Aurelius – *A doctor*
Sai Yat 細一 – *A Triad gang leader*
Detective Leung 梁 – *A private investigator*

PART ONE

Sailing To Adventure

1

Somehow, even though Daisy and I had seen the body with our own eyes, I did not quite believe that the crime was real until we came back home from the doctor's office this afternoon.

Before that moment, it all just seemed like a bad dream, the very worst sort – like the one I have sometimes where we're investigating a case and I realize, like a slow shiver going up the back of my neck, that the murderer is after Daisy, and there is nothing I can do about it.

But, unlike those dreams, this time I cannot wake up, no matter how hard I pinch myself. And I know that I ought to have been able to stop what happened.

Daisy says that this is nonsense. She says, wrinkling her nose, that I could not have stopped anything – and, in fact, if I *had* been on the spot, I might have ended up murdered too. Like much of what Daisy says, this is

true, though not particularly comforting. But all the same I cannot shake the feeling that I've failed.

You see, I have come back to Hong Kong. Here it is beautiful and bright, the air is warm and heavy and I am at home. No one looks at me oddly. I'm not strange, and that is a wonderful feeling, like opening up your hand and realizing that you have been clenching the muscles of it for far too long.

But, all the same, some things have changed in uncomfortable ways. I have been in England for almost two years, and while I was there I learned how to be not only an English schoolgirl and a best friend but also a detective. That is what the friendship between Daisy and me is all about, after all. We are secretly detectives, and have solved five murder cases so far, and, although it is not exactly true to say that we helped the victims, we did at least find out the truth about their deaths when the police could not.

But in Hong Kong I am with my family, who remember me as the smaller, younger Hazel I was when I stepped onto the boat to go to Deepdean. It's harder to be brave and grown-up and sensible when all I'm expected to be is dutiful, a good daughter and a good older sister. It's particularly hard to be the second, because— But I am getting ahead of myself. Daisy says to tell things in order as much as possible, and she is right. At least I have not forgotten how to lay out a case in a new notebook, the one Daisy gave me for Christmas.

All I will say, before I go back to the moment when everything started – this journey, this crime – is that a terrible thing has happened, a thing that the Detective Society must investigate. And we will – but this time I am stuck in the very middle of the case. I am not just a detective, I'm a witness. And I think that I might even be a suspect.

2

It all began with a telephone call in January, during the first week of our spring term at Deepdean School. There was snow on the ground, and my head was still full of Cambridge at Christmas, and the rather shocking thing that had happened at Daisy's Uncle Felix's wedding in London on New Year's Day. So, when I was summoned to Matron's office to speak to my father one morning, Hong Kong seemed very far away indeed.

The line crackled and boomed. 'Hello?' I said, and heard my voice echo away from me, halfway across the world. There was a pause, and then my father began to talk.

'Wong Fung Ying,' he said, and his voice sounded hollow even through the telephone. 'Prepare yourself.'

Wong Fung Ying is my Chinese name. To everyone in England, and usually even to my father, I am Hazel

Wong. He only uses my other full name when something very serious has happened, and so my stomach dropped in anticipation.

'It's Ah Yeh. Your grandfather. Hazel, you know he has not been well. I'm afraid he has passed on. It happened yesterday. We did not think – we did not think it would happen so soon, but it has.'

'Father!' I said. 'Are you sure – *really*?' I clutched the telephone, and the mouthpiece trembled against my lip. I felt a rush of impossibility. I could smell my grandfather's pipe, the tobacco on his breath, feel his hand heavy on my head.

'I would not lie to you, Hazel. Now, listen to me and be calm. You must come home. You'll miss the funeral, of course – that will happen next week – but if you leave in the next few days you'll be here for at least part of his mourning. Do you understand? You can't miss that.'

'No, of course I can't,' I whispered. My throat was full of things to say, but all that came out of my mouth were those words. I remembered, so clear and strong I could taste it, sitting next to Ah Yeh, watching him peel an orange into segments and pass me every third one. He was too big and important to have gone. It could not be. 'What does Ah Mah say?' I asked.

'What? Your mother agrees with me, of course. You must come home,' said my father, sounding confused. I knew it had been an odd thing to say – but I had to ask.

'Now, Matron will arrange your transportation. You'll catch the boat at Tilbury Docks, and it shouldn't take more than a month—'

'I want Daisy to come,' I said. I was rather surprised at myself for being so bold. I had almost not known what I was going to say until it was already being said. But, as I spoke, I realized how much I meant it. If I was to come home (if I was to face my mother, a voice whispered in my head), I needed Daisy with me.

'Hazel!' said my father, sighing. 'It's always *Daisy* with you. A more unsuitable friend for you I couldn't imagine, even if she does *appear* to be a lady. Do you think she'll be able to manage Hong Kong?'

He did not think so, but I knew she could. Daisy adapts to wherever she is, like a brightly coloured lizard. So I took a deep breath and gathered all the bravery I had found on the Orient Express to overcome my father's will. 'I'm not coming without her,' I said, and my hand holding the telephone receiver trembled even more.

My father sighed again, and made an impatient noise. 'I shall speak to the school,' he said. 'If they agree, and if her family does too – well, I suppose you may bring her. But, Hazel, I do not want you to be silly about this, do you understand? Don't let Miss Wells put any of her wild ideas into your head. Your Ah Yeh was old. Old and tired. It was his time. He is not another *case*

like – well, like the one last summer, or any of these other ridiculous things you've got yourself mixed up in. Do you understand?'

'Yes,' I choked out, wiping my eyes. I *did* understand, and that was not why I wanted Daisy there. I did not need her for detection. For once, I simply needed her because she was my best friend.

'Good. Now, hand me back to your matron. I need her to put me on the line with that headmistress of yours.'

I handed the receiver back to Matron, and went stumbling out of her study. Daisy was waiting in the echoing, chilly House hallway outside, her blue eyes wide and her nose wrinkling with curiosity.

'What's up, Hazel?' she asked, but I pushed past her without a word. I went rushing up the threadbare carpet of the House stairs and along the narrow, dimly lit corridors to our fourth-form dorm. The window was open, even though there was frost on the grass outside, and I wrapped my scratchy grey wool blanket around my shoulders and lay down on my bed, shivering.

I knew Ah Yeh had been ill. But he was not supposed to die with no warning, when I was not even there. I was supposed to be with him – and anyway he should not have died at all, because he was Ah Yeh. He was as much a part of our house and Hong Kong as the columns in our hall, the pond in our garden, the steps up to our front door. He could not *die*.

I wrote Daisy a note. Sometimes, when I cannot say something, I write it. This was one of those times. I wrote it in several different codes, because Daisy and I have been practising (and she is fearfully bad at sticking with it), and I folded it up and put it on her bed. Then I went to lie down again.

Daisy came in. I knew it was her because she walked softly, one foot in front of the other, like a thief. There was a crumpling as she opened the note, and then an annoyed noise. I heard her pull open her school bag and rip a piece of paper out of an exercise book, and then I heard the scratch of her pencil as she began to work on the codes.

I counted seconds, and then minutes.

'Hazel,' said Daisy at last. 'The note was unnecessary. You might have just *told* me.'

'I couldn't,' I said into the blanket. I could feel my eyes stinging, but I told myself it was just the wool making them smart. 'Not out loud.'

'I'm going to sit on your bed,' said Daisy. 'If you don't mind.'

I knew that this was her way of saying that she was sorry about my grandfather. Daisy doesn't usually ask for permission for anything. She just thumps down on my stomach or my legs and doesn't care whether it hurts me or not.

‘All right,’ I said.

‘So,’ said Daisy after a pause, ‘I suppose I’m coming to Hong Kong with you, then?’

I leaped up and threw my arms around her. That was when I really began to cry.