

The detective scrutinized the clue on the table before flicking his gaze to Linus. Middle-aged paunch hung over his waistband, hairline receding, stained fingers played a nervous staccato on his thigh as Linus tried to ignore the lifeless body in the nearby chair.

“Any visitors?” the detective asked.

“No one visits the old bat.”

“Tea?” the Detective pointed at a mug.

Linus nodded, eyes twitching.

“There’s tobacco leaves floating amongst the dregs.”

“I added ginger!”

“Yes, to mask the tobacco. It probably stained your fingers.”

The color drained from Linus’ face, and he jammed his hands deep into his pockets.



This is probably the hardest micro story I’ve written. The prompts I had to work with were mystery, solving a locked room murder, and clue. It helped that we’d watched an episode of Macguyver — the original version, the only version that should exist — in which Mac took four guys from the Phoenix Foundation on a hike to reduce stress. They all died, which in retrospect must have been an absolute nightmare for the Phoenix Foundation. As for the plot of the show, it helped me keep in mind what a locked room murder could look like.

I toyed with a few ideas like a thorn from a rose that could have toxins on it. Choking on a

hard candy or piece of ice that might melt by the time help arrived. In the end, I went with research from a story where one of my characters was being slowly poisoned. Since the story changed, why not put all that research to work here? Perhaps not as believable in such a simple story as something like deadly nightshade, but that feels overused.

It took me eight versions to get this story where it is. In the first, I failed to include the word clue. In order to sneak it in, I had to rework a few sentences to make room. Then I panicked about suspending your disbelief, but believed that for such a small amount of words it would work.

The Reluctant Author

