

# **MYSTERY AT ST. LUIS SCHOOL**

*How Everything Connected*

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Schools are always noisy. All schools, all over the world. A constant confusion reigns: doors slammed shut by the wind, screaming teachers, chatty students, windows opening and closing, the sound of infinite bells ringing declaring the infernal beginning of everything or its glorious end. It isn't anybody's fault, it's only the truth, a matter of fact, and neither students nor teachers can do anything about it. Schools are a group of messy lives mixing together, and the only thing they have in common is that place: the school. This makes the school a unique place, that everyone will remember for the rest of their lives. It is a total, beautiful mess. But one day, in one school, things got so out of control, that someone needed to put everything right again.

In 2015 I started at St. Luis school, in Doyle Street. That was the beginning of three long years of school. Or at least, what I thought would be three years. It was a normal October morning at school, we were having our History lesson with Mr. Charles. I was still half asleep when he called me to the board and asked:

“Jack Wotton, can you please tell me something about World War I?”

I was just about to answer, when suddenly we heard a shout. Then approaching steps, someone was running in the hallway. We were very worried, so we went out and we saw the secretary coming fast towards us with a terrified face. When she finally stopped, she almost fainted, but with the help of Mr. Charles, we brought her into the classroom and we helped her to sit down. Just enough time to catch her breath and then, in a whisper, she said:

“I... I was entering the Headmaster's office as I do every morning to remind Mr. Hunt of his appointments and... he was there, on the floor, dead.”

A few moments of silence and then the whole room was full of screams. Worried about the noise, all the teachers with their students arrived and they couldn't believe what they were hearing. Mrs. Smiths, a Maths teacher, almost fell to the ground and Mrs. Walker, Science, helped her. The panic

spread fast, no one was able to take control of the situation, as Mr. Hunt always used to do. That's when a voice rose from the noise and managed to stop it, it was Mrs. Mudgett. The deputy head stood up on a chair and asked for silence. No one focused on her words, but everyone looked at her, at her strange expression and at her red face. Her nose, in particular, had some red shades, probably because, like everyone else, she was crying. Despite the tragic circumstances, Mrs. Mudgett had the strength to give instructions to everybody:

“All the teachers must come with me to the Headmaster's office, we need to call the police and make some important decisions. In the meanwhile, you guys, will go to the gym with the secretary and the janitors. We will call your parents and tell them to come here as soon as they can.”

When she finished talking, all the students started to walk towards the gym. I looked at my friend Simon Harp and I saw it in his eyes that he had the same idea as mine. In the confusion, it would have been impossible for the teachers to realise that someone was following them. And that's what we did. We hid behind the columns of the hallway until we reached the door of the Headmaster's office. We stopped there and, being careful not to make any noise, we tried to overhear the conversation.

“Who was the last one to come here?”, Mrs. Mudgett was asking with an inquiring tone.

“Please Mrs. Mudgett, it's not the moment to investigate, how can you ask these questions now?!” - replied a voice, maybe it was Mr. Charles - “I know you are frustrated, but I trust everyone in this room, and I hope all of them trust you. We can't find the murderer ourselves, it is police duty. Now we have to think about our students and the school, maybe we should close for some time”.

“Noo! The students have to learn and to study, we can't close!” said Mrs. Mudgett.

A long discussion followed, but in the end they decided to send the students home with homework for a week. At this point, the teachers came out from the Headmaster's office. We feared that they would see us, but luckily they didn't notice we were right behind the door. We couldn't help our curiosity, we decided to be brave and enter the room. Everything was in its place: the documents were in order, the room was normal, there wasn't anything strange. Only one thing stood out in the room: Mr. Hunt's dead body, left there on the floor. We spontaneously started taking photos of the room and of the corpse, we were shocked but at the same time a strange energy took over us, we wanted to understand. We didn't find anything on the body of our dear principal, except from a blood patch on his chest and some red spots on his neck: maybe the murderer had fought first and then stabbed Mr. Hunt in the chest. If this was the case, it couldn't have been a woman or a student,

as they aren't strong enough. I told my friend Simon what I was thinking, but he didn't seem convinced. At the end we left the room and we reached our classmates in the gym. There, we pretended to be surprised when Mrs. Mudgett told everybody about the decisions she had made with the other teachers and then, like all the others, we went home.

The week at home became a month, a month became two months. The school sent an email to our parents saying that it would have re-opened after the Christmas holidays: the first three months were cancelled! During the first week at home, I tried to do my homework, but I couldn't stop thinking about the murder. I decided to call my friend Simon, I knew he was feeling the same. Without telling our parents, we started meeting almost every day to investigate. We first focused on the murder, but after a few weeks we also started wondering why the school wasn't opening: maybe another crime had been committed?! The answer to our question came when the school reopened in January. Everybody was still talking about the case, so it was easy for us to hear the secretary saying that the police had still not identified a suspect for the murder of Mr. Hunt. We also discovered that our dear Religion teacher, Father Geordie, was so upset for what had happened that he had resigned. We were very sad for Father Geordie, so we went to see him at his church with a group of friends, but we didn't find him. We asked another priest if he knew where Father Geordie was, and he answered:

"Poor guys, I am sorry to give you such sad news, but your dear teacher has died"

"What?! It can't be true, we don't believe you" we answered.

We spoke a lot with the priest, he answered all our questions. We discovered that Father Geordie had died a week after the first murder, he was found by a policeman in the Headmaster's office during the night: he was investigating and he seemed very close to the truth. So this was the reason why the school had been closed for so many months! This discovery gave us new material to investigate on, but after some weeks we were tired and we hadn't reached a possible solution: if the police couldn't even solve the mystery how could we?

We got back to our normal lives, we focused on our subjects, after all, we had to prepare for our final exam. Everything seemed to be as it was before, when one day at the end of his lesson Mr. Charles called us out with him because he wanted to talk. When we were out of the classroom, he told us:

“Jack, Simon, I need your help!”

“Our help? Why?” I answered.

“Because you followed the teachers the day of the crime and you also discovered Father Geordie’s death.”

“How do you know that?”

“You should be more careful when you take photos, I heard the noise of your cameras and while we were in the Headmaster’s office I saw the door ajar and someone spying on us, so I understood everything.”

“Ok, but how did you know that we had found out about the second crime?”

“Oh yes, that wasn’t my doing. I went to the church to talk to the priest, I wanted to give him my support. He told me about your visit to the church. Now, let’s think about more important things: I need the photos that you took that day in the Headmaster’s office. The policemen gave up and the new Headmistress works in that room, so I can’t investigate there.”

That day I invited Simon to my house to find and print the photos.

“How do you think he knew that it was us who entered the Headmaster’s office and took photos that day?” Simon asked me.

“Don’t ask me, I didn’t even think that someone could see us spying that day, but I am happy that Mr. Charles wants to solve the crime with us” I answered.

The day after we gave the photos to our teacher and we talked about the crimes. I asked him what he had discovered, but he answered:

“I can’t tell you much because I still have a lot of doubts, but I can say that certainly the Headmaster died by strangulation and the murderer is a woman.”

“A woman?! And what about Father Geordie’s death?”

“The killer is the same, but this time he used poison. I am quite sure it was thallium that killed the priest, in fact when they found him his hair was all over the floor. Then he stabbed the priest to conceal the real reason behind his death.”

How could he be so sure about all those things? We were in the same room and we saw the same things, but he understood more than we did. What surprised me the most is that, like Simon, he didn't share my deductions, he concluded that it was a woman who had killed our teachers.

From that day, we began to spend a lot of time with Mr. Charles. Once a week, after school we stopped to talk about the clues. He explained that he understood that the killer was a woman because on the day of the murder he had noticed some small nail marks on Mr. Hunt's neck, a man would never have such long nails. From the pictures we took, we realized that there were some blurred footprints next to Mr. Hunt's corpse. It took a few days before we could figure out the size of the shoe that had left them. Knowing that, we also found out the height of the killer. The person must have been quite tall. Moreover, there weren't any wounds on Mr. Hunt's body, except the one on his neck, so someone must have choked him. The signs were more visible on the right side of his neck, so we also realised that the murderer had to be left-handed. Every day we discovered something new. For example, we spoke about the strange case of the stain found on Mr. Hunt's body that seemed to be the deadly cut, we had to discover where the blood had come from. Thanks to numerous testimonies of secretaries, janitors, and teachers, we also discovered that no one had entered the school that day: the killer had to be a person inside the school. The investigations was going smoothly, it was as if we were spinning a web around the murderer and every day it got tighter. Soon, we would know the truth. However, as we were very nearing the solution, the investigations stopped due to another tragedy.

As always, we were investigating with the our teacher after school, when he left us to attend a meeting with other teachers. We had been waiting for him for an hour and a half when Simon said:

"When do you think the meeting is going to end? If Mr. Charles had known it was going to last as long, why did he tell us to come today?"

"I don't know, maybe something is wrong, we'd better go and check."

So we went to the room where he told us he would be. When we arrived, we found the door wide open. The classroom was empty. Where was our teacher then? We started looking for him, but we couldn't find him anywhere, so we decided to go back to our classroom. While we were walking there, we saw a group of teachers looking at something. We couldn't believe our eyes when we saw

that it was Mr. Charles lying on the floor, murdered. I almost screamed looking at him. It could not be true, not now that we were so close to solving the case. I could not believe it, how could a person be so cruel to kill three people? How could we keep on investigating when our guide wasn't with us anymore? How could I continue to look for the killer if all I could think about was Mr. Charles's dead body? I had to decide what to do. The following days were difficult, a new History teacher came to our class, but it wasn't the same as having Mr. Charles. I was sitting next to Simon at the back of the class during one of his boring lessons and I whispered:

"I'm so sad... How can we go on this way? I can't find the strength to go on..."

His answer surprised me. He was sure and with a resolute voice he said:

"We must go on, we can't stop now. This school is falling to pieces and I can't stand it."

He was right, we could not give up. I knew it would be difficult, but someone had killed three men and we had to find out the truth. That day, Simon and I met at my house.

"This case is getting harder and harder... How many other deaths will there be until we find out the truth?" I said.

"Harder? As far as I'm concerned, it is actually getting simpler. Think about it: the Headmaster has been murdered, and two other teachers have been killed, right when they were about to catch the killer. The murderer must be panicking, he is going on killing just because he knows he will be caught."

"You are right. Let's think about the clues we have found. A tall left-handed woman who works in the school... Who can it be?"

"Do not forget about the blood spot, if no wound has been found on the body, it must be the assassin's."

"But if the killer was strong enough to strangle Mr. Hunt, how could he have possibly been so seriously injured during the struggle? Where did all that blood come from? Certainly not from her nose!"

"Oh God, Jack you're a genius! Why didn't I think about it before?!"

"What??"

"We have to get to school, now."

We ran downstairs, we jumped on the first bus we could find and in ten minutes we were in front of our school. We went in and I followed Simon walking quickly towards the Headmaster's office. When we got there, he threw the door wide open:

"Mrs. Mudgett, confess! You killed Mr. Hunt, Mr. Charles and Father Geordie."

"How dare you?"

I couldn't believe my ears, but what I did know was that things might get worse and that we might need some help, so I sneaked out of the room and secretly I called the police.

"I know it was you so you'd better confess everything immediately!" I could hear my friend saying.

I went back into the room just in time to see the teacher bursting into tears:

"It's true, it was me, but it wasn't my intention... I shouldn't be saying these things to you but... Oh God, the longing for power overwhelmed me! I've been the deputy-head of this school for a couple of years now, but Mr. Hunt never considered me as such. He didn't listen to my suggestions and he talked to me as if I were just a normal teacher. The dream of being the Headmistress of the school and the hate towards the person that never accepted me grew stronger and stronger until that day. I was with Mr. Hunt in the Headmaster's office and again, he wasn't listening to my ideas. I couldn't stand it anymore, I was so stressed that my nose started bleeding. A strange feeling took over me and I assaulted him, we fought and I took his neck, I strangled him. When he fell down I realised there was a big stain of my blood on his shirt. I panicked, at first I wanted to clean it but then I stopped and thought. Maybe if I had distracted the police for a while, it would have given me more time to find a way out. When the dead body was found, I took charge, I convinced my colleagues to close the school for a week only, so that when it reopened I would have been the official Headmistress. However, during that week, Father Geordie, who already knew how I felt about Mr. Hunt, started to investigate. I had to kill him: I didn't want to do it, but I couldn't take the chance of being discovered. After this, the school was closed for the entire trimester, I was so nervous about it, but I had to pretend to be as shocked as everybody else. When we finally came back to school I took on the role of Headmistress, and things went well for a while. But then, after a few months, I realised somebody else was investigating. During a meeting, I heard Mr. Charles saying that he had almost solved the case. The school was empty that day, I had to kill him."

While she was pronouncing these last words, the police arrived. They entered the room and arrested her in front of our eyes. From that moment, we didn't hear anything else about her. The police asked me and Simon to follow them to the police station to ask for our statements. We told them

everything we had discovered with Mr. Charles and how we carried out our investigations. They were impressed. Then Simon told them how he had realised that the murderer was Mrs. Mudgett and I listened carefully, it wasn't yet clear to me how he had reached that conclusion:

“When Jack ironically said that the blood couldn't have come from anybody's nose I thought about the day of Mr. Hunt's murder and I remembered seeing red stains on Mrs. Mudgett's nose. Everything made sense to me then, so I also realised that she had killed the other two teachers to cover her traces.”

When we finished, our parents came to pick us up. They had no idea that we had been investigating for all that time but, instead of being angry, they felt happy and proud. They wanted to celebrate our victory so they decided to go out for dinner together that same night. When I went home that afternoon I found myself alone in my room. I don't know why but I didn't feel like celebrating that evening. I called Simon:

“I don't know Simon... I feel kind of sad... I mean, I can't really see why we did what we did. Now the school will open again, we will have to get used to new teachers. The year will soon end and then we won't come back to this place ever again. Was it worth it to risk so much?”

“Worth it? Of course it was... But I have to admit I'm feeling sad, too. Well, not sad but actually empty, that's how I feel. Of course I'm sad for all our dear teachers who died, but in some kind of way I enjoyed these past months investigating. I felt useful... No, it's not actually that... I just enjoyed seeing how everything connected in the end. What will we get up to now?”