

LITTLE MURDER MATHS

Not another one. Murdered. Chopped into eleven pieces. How gruesome.

I loved Brian. He was my favourite. And now he's gone. Who could have done this? Why would somebody do this? What a sicko.

It all started the night before last. I was at home with my family on a stormy night. A night so stormy the storm unplugged our house, and we had to wait for the professionals to plug it back in – that's what Dad told me. Dad said it wasn't a normal plug like for our TV, but a high-tech piece of equipment. We would wait for the professionals. And we would wait by candlelight.

A candle's a treat. That's what Mum said. It wasn't every day we got to use candles. Apparently that's how people used to see in the dark. Why didn't they just get lights? No matter. They worked well enough. And they smelled like lovely fruit. But you had to be careful. That's what happened to Steve.

I found Steve with his face melted off. Parts of his nose were touching his toes. Totally disgusting. What a mess. His back had been melted too, and inscribed into his flesh was the number six. Six is a sicko's number.

I yelled for Mum. "Mum! Stanley has destroyed Steve. He's totally ruined him. Mum! Look at his head and everything. I hate you Stanley!"

I cried.

But Mum said that Stanley, my little brother, was with her the whole time. And that he couldn't have murdered Steve. He had an alibi.

Nothing more could be done, and I went to sleep sobbing that night. Nobody could make me feel better – not even Mum.

The next one was a shock. Poor Mr. Robbins. I had known him since I was little. Mr. Robbins had a huge heart, and was like one of the family. He was always there.

And now he wasn't.

Now he was a pile of old white hair. His one and only big red heart had been ripped from his chest like a burst button.

I found him the morning after my second sad sleepless night. And screamed. "Mum! Look what Stanley did. He's ripped up Mr. Robbins. Mum! He's ripped everything off him."

"Dear," Mum sighed. "Stanley isn't big enough to do this."

I couldn't believe it. Mum never believed me. Stanley that egg, had everybody fooled – everybody but me.

I was going to catch him. Before it was too late.

The following night I waited. From the evidence, I knew the attacks happened only at night - when nobody was watching. And with attacks the past two nights, I thought it was probable there was going to be another attack tonight. Killers never stop. And neither do sickos.

The plan was simple. I was going to stay awake, but pretend I was asleep. When the killer egg came, I was going to catch him once and for all.

Simple.

I lay in bed and waited with my eyes closed. I could hear my own breath. I thought it was strange that it was louder when I

breathed out than when I breathed in. And breathing in was slow and sounded like when I filled up a glass with water.

I heard the clock ticking from outside my room and down the hall. It was a lovely sound. Usually I couldn't hear the clock, and even then it was a small tick, and a small tock.

From the clock, I was carried into the lounge. Mum and Dad were watching TV. They always set the volume low so Stanley and I can't hear it from our rooms. But I could hear the TV that night. A silent sound. The sound only a TV can make.

I could smell the faint fragrance of some lovely fruit. But had no idea why.

I slowly opened one eye to have a sneaky peek. It was dark. But soon I could see all the shapes. Some shapes changed into other shapes. And other shapes that I thought were there, weren't there at all.

My grey rectangular door and my grey cubic toy chest. There are no colours in the dark.

I keep most of my toys in my toy chest. But my favourite ones are up on my shelf. My favourite toys.

My eyes began to silently water as I looked at the empty spaces.

Steve the gun-slinging cowboy used to live up there. He had lived up there for five years. Awesome birthday. Steve was awesome and had an awesome move. The move was triggered by a secret button underneath his poncho, and it drew his six-shot revolver out super quick.

Mr. Robbins used to live up there too. Mum said she had placed Mr. Robbins in my crib when I was a baby. He was a lovable teddy. Soft white fur and a big red heart stitched to his chest. There was fancy writing on his heart that read MY FIRST BIRTHDAY. Mum said he was the only one who could stop me from crying – and let her sleep.

And now they were gone forever.

To the left of the two huge empty spaces sat Brian. Brian was my most favourite. I got him for my birthday this year. I wanted to be like him when I grew up. Brian was a great detective. He didn't have big guns. He had a bag full of useful things. I couldn't actually open his bag to see inside, but whenever Brian was solving a tricky crime, he would know exactly what to pull out of his bag, and know exactly how to use it. Brian was awesome.

To the right of the two massive empty spaces was the Mathematician. I couldn't remember when I got him. He was OK. He wasn't as cool as my favourite toys, not in the top three, but he looked smart. One good thing about the Mathematician was that he was a man and a calculator. That was the reason I had him on the shelf – I could grab him when I needed to do my homework. I would switch him on and say "six plus four," and he would say "ten." He needed charging often.

Beside the Mathematician was his charger cable. I thought I had plugged him in a few days ago. No matter.

As I thought about the toys I had, and the toys I had lost, I heard a terrifying cry come from Stanley's room.

WAAAH.

Who was he killing?

I jumped out of bed, opened my rectangular door, and rushed towards the screams.

WAAH. WAAH.

I was going to catch the killer!

"Stanley! What are you doing in here?"

WAAH. WAAH.

"Where is the thing you've got?"

WAAH. WAAH.

"Why are you crying?"

WAAH. WAAH.

"Shush, Stanley, Mum's coming. You are going to get me in trouble."

Stomp. Stomp. STOMP.

"What is going on in here?" Mum said, unimpressed. "What are you doing to your brother?"

"I wasn't doing anything," I whimpered. "I was catching that egg wrecking my toys."

"Don't call your brother an egg."

"But he looks like one!" And in that moment, I realised I had been wrong.

Not about Stanley being an egg. He definitely looked like one. Small, pale, and elongated. He was a baby. No. I had been wrong about him being a murderer. Because, he was a baby.

I had no idea what was going on.

"Dear," Mum said. "Your brother is going to need you as he gets older. And he is going to love you. Remember, he is not yet one, and you are growing up so fast – you are already eleven. It is true that your Father and I spend a lot of time with Stanley. We love you both very much. You do not have to worry."

"Yeah," I agreed. "I'm sorry, Stanley."

"He's stopped crying," Mum whispered. "He only stops crying when you are here. Let's let him go back to sleep."

"Yeah," I agreed.

After Mum let me have a midnight treat, we headed to bed.

I started walking to my room.

Mum had been right. I had been blaming Stanley for everything. Even things he couldn't do. It was all so new. It used to be only us. Mum, Dad, and me. And now I had to share. I guess I could share, I thought. I did have a new baby brother to take care of.

But if it wasn't Stanley murdering my friends, who was it? I still didn't know what was going on. And this scared me.

I opened my rectangular door—it was blue from this side-and the light revealed a grave scene.

Brian! Murdered! Chopped into pieces. How gruesome.

I was about to scream when I saw a small shape move in the shadows. *There is a monster in my room! A hairy little beast that's come to eat me!*

I was petrified.

"Close the door," a little voice said. "It's over now."

My arm felt heavy. But I managed to move it a little, and closed the door. Everything was black. I was really scared. *Make no sudden movements. Stay calm. STAY CALM.*

"It is just you and I," the little voice said.

"Wh-wh-what are you?" I stuttered.

"You know who I am," it giggled. "I am your favourite."

Like earlier, my eyes needed time to adjust to the dark. I saw familiar shapes come together. Like my bed, and my toy box. And my shelf. But my shelf was empty - except for a charger cable.

And then the shadowy shape changed from a hairy little monster, with sharp claws and murderous eyes, into the shape of a small smart-looking man. The Mathematician.

"You aren't my favourite!" I declared. I was feeling less frightened.

"I am now," the Mathematician giggled. "Everybody else is gone. Their days were *numbered*."

"You're the one! The sicko!" I announced. "You're still not my favourite. I even like my little brother more than you."

"That egg?" the Mathematician joked.

"Don't call my brother an egg." I demanded.

"Well, once he is gone . . ."

"Stay away from my brother!"

"OK," the Mathematician smiled. "Let us play a game."

"What game?"

"A numbers game. If I win, I will be your favourite. And you will play with me every day for the rest of your life."

"And if I win?"

“I will leave your little brother alone.”

I didn't like the terms. The rest of my life sounded like a very long time. But to protect my brother, I agreed.

“OK,” the Mathematician started. “As I was *counting* down the others, I left a code behind.”

I remembered the number carved into Steve.

“Therefore,” he continued. “Tell me what the meaning behind my numbers was. Crack the code!”

I could only remember Steve having the number six carved into him. Mr. Robbins didn't have any numbers on him. He was just ripped up. And it was too dark to read anything from the pieces of Brian.

“Do you give up?” the Mathematician giggled.

“Shush,” I said. “I'm thinking.”

I have to figure this out, I thought. I have to – for Stanley. There must be more to the murders.

I re-examined the gruesome scenes in my mind.

Steve's was obvious. Six is a sicko's number.

Mr. Robbins was a pile of old white hair. With his one big heart pulled off. I got him on my first birthday and he stopped me from crying. When I was one. One big heart. ONE. It had to be the number one, I decided.

When did I get Steve? He had lived up on my shelf for five years. Awesome birthday. Memories as a cowboy. I was eleven now, Mum had told me. She said Stanley needed me. Five years ago I got Steve, when I was turning SIX.

I was one when I got Mr. Robbins, and six when I got Steve. I got Brian for my birthday this year. If the murderous numbers were linked to which birthday I got each of my favourite toys, then the last number had to be eleven, I thought. But I couldn't be sure. Because I couldn't see much in the dark. For Stanley's sake, I couldn't be wrong.

“Time is running out,” the Mathematician giggled. “How fun!”

I had to get this right. I crouched down and began feeling around on the floor. My hands pushed body parts. I couldn’t see the pieces of Brian, but I could feel them. I started to collect up Brian.

“Having fun are you?” the Mathematician giggled. “He did pull apart so easily!”

I picked up an arm and a leg. *One, two.* A torso. *Three.*

“You better get this right,” the Mathematician giggled. “I really did enjoy the last candle trick!”

I found a foot. No, two feet. *Four, five.* A couple of hands, and another arm and a leg. *Six, seven, eight, nine.*

“Quickly. I am getting impatient,” the Mathematician snarled. “You better not be trying to waste my time!”

I found Brian’s special detective’s bag. *Ten.*

But nothing else.

I slid my hand around on the floor, but couldn’t find anything.

“That is it,” the Mathematician snarled. “Answer time!”

“Wait,” I pleaded, as I slid my hands furiously.

What would Brian do? He’d pull something out of his bag. But I couldn’t actually do that.

I felt completely lost.

“Well I guess you lose,” the Mathematician giggled.

I had been wrong. Again. I rolled the stupid toy bag around in my fingers. I would never be like Brian. Brian was a great detective. Brian was a stupid toy. And playing stupid games with stupid toys was stupid.

“It is a shame you could not even come up with an answer,” the Mathematician heckled. “It really does take *some* of the fun out of it.”

I rolled the stupid toy bag around in my fingers, and felt something. There was a rip in the bag that I hadn't noticed.

"What should we do first?" the Mathematician giggled excitedly. "Go see your little brother?"

I poked a finger inside the bag, and found what felt like a little egg. I scooped out the egg wondering how the stupid little thing was going to help me.

But it wasn't an egg. It was Brian's head! Totally disgusting. *ELEVEN*. I was right.

"You really are a sicko," I said. "But I've cracked your code."

"Oh?"

"Yeah," I started. "From the evidence, and by my calculations, you murdered my friends based on which birthday I got them."

Brian would've been proud.

"Yes. You are right," the Mathematician said, disappointed.

"So you'll leave my brother alone?"

"Yes. I will leave him alone."

I felt relieved.

"But," the Mathematician snarled. "I never said I would leave you alone. And since I will never be your favourite, I think it is time to subtract you!"

I heard the little man scuttle underneath my bed.

I tried to stand up but fell onto my bottom in the dark, and dropped Brian all over the floor.

The patter of tiny feet came out from underneath my bed, and I heard the stroke of a match. I saw the light of a small flame. The Mathematician lit a candle he had. He dropped the match, gripped the candle with two little hands, and began creeping towards me.

I could see his murderous eyes. He didn't look so smart anymore – but psychotic.

All I could do was back away. Until I backed into my closed door.

As the Mathematician crept forward, I could see his murderous grin growing bigger and bigger on his shiny little face. I could smell a lovely fruit, and the fragrance grew stronger and stronger as he neared. He had been hiding Mum's lovely scented candles under my bed.

I pushed my back into the door, but had nowhere left to go. I sunk down as far as I could. I was almost lying down. And my legs were tucked right in.

The sicko walked to the side of me, and up to my face. As soon as I felt the warmth of the candle on my face, I turned to stone. I was petrified.

"This really is my favourite way to do this," the Mathematician giggled. "Let us count to three!"

I felt the warmth turn to heat.

"ONE!"

And closed my eyes to prepare for the end.

"TWO!"

I'm sorry, Stanley.

"THR— "

Long seconds passed.

I slowly opened one eye to have a freaky peek, and saw the Mathematician frozen in a murderous grin.

There was a little light blinking on his chest. I knew that light. It was the light that tells you to connect a charger. He was flat!

I got up, turned on a light, snuffed out the candle, picked up the Mathematician, opened my window, and tossed him out into the black.

It's been five years since those harrowing nights. I never did find the Mathematician again. Hopefully a hairy little monster ate him.

Dad still talks about the storm, and the power cut. The professionals told him there had been a huge power surge into our house. They said it should have fried all of our electronics and blown up our TV. But everything was fine. The professionals said that something had to have absorbed all of that energy, but they had no idea what.

Stanley is six now. It's his birthday. All he wanted was a toy digger. He says he wants to be a digger driver when he grows up. He is outside playing with it right now.

I don't want to be a cowboy or a detective anymore. I want to go into forensics. So I am taking all of the science and maths classes I can.

Here comes Stanley. He's finished playing outside.

"Hey look what I found," Stanley said proudly.

"It looks dirty, what is it?"

"I don't know," Stanley said. "I found it under the house. With a trail in the dirt like it had dragged itself there."

"It's rubbish." I didn't really look at it.

"Nah," Stanley disagreed. "It might still work. It has a place to charge it. I'm going to plug it in."

That's when I looked over and saw the frozen murderous grin.

"Watch this!" Stanley said happily.

"No! Stanley you egg! DON'T!"