

Story by Morgan Geddes

Tyler and Talia Teech were the last to enter the party. They were one of the neighbors of the Mapstones who lived on the coast of Florida in a large manor filled with clocks. It was reasonably nicknamed, “Tick – Tock” Manor. The party was held to celebrate the end of summer and the start of autumn.

Tyler rang the doorbell and it was soon answered by Millard Mapstone who was 57 with a white beard and a shining bald head. Tyler was a man with black hair and a large black beard. His sister, Talia had her black hair in a ponytail and had gold earrings.

“Welcome,” greeted Millard, “It’s wonderful to have you here.”

“The pleasure is ours, Mr. Mapstone,” said Tyler in a formal way.

“Oh, please,” replied Mr. Mapstone, “Call me Millard” And with that they entered the house.

“So why is this manor covered in these clocks?” Talia asked curiously.

Millard answered, “A common question, I simply enjoy clocks.” His voice was like that of an excited school boy or girl to answer the teacher’s question. His face, though, was like a parent whose child seems to have continuous amnesia about his chores.

They entered the living room to see two men in the middle of a poker game. One man had glasses, brown hair, and a moustache. The other man had black hair, a clean face, and was smoking a cigarette.

“These are my other two guests,” explained Millard. He gestured to the man with glasses, “Mütin Moor, college technology professor,” said Millard.

Mütin stood up, shook Tyler’s and Talia’s hand and asked, “How do you do?”

“And Zendry Zinery, journalist,” said Millard.

Zendry stood up as well but simply waved and said, “Hello,”

At that moment, Millard’s only daughter, and child, came into the room. She had her long brown hair free of any buns, pins, clips, or curls. She said very politely, “Excuse me, father.”

“Yes, Maria,” answered Millard.

“Mother told me to tell you that dinner is served,” said Maria.

“Ah, yes,” Millard said, “My wife, Minnie, has cooked a delicious dinner of roasted pork chops, roasted potatoes, and a fresh garden salad with carrot cake for dessert.”

And with that, they left the living room and headed for the dining room for the supper party.

At the dining room, everyone was silently eating the delicious meal Minnie had prepared. Minnie had her gray hair in a bun on the back and was too enjoying the truly scrumptious meal she had cooked. The real spark of a conversation was when dessert was served. “So,” asked Talia, “How did you get the house?”

“Well,” said Minnie, “The house itself was built recently but it was constructed over a sinkhole aging to the 17th century. It was covered with a wooden roof that had a trapdoor. The construction workers covered the roof with cement except for the trapdoor. We still have access to it but Millard and I are too old to bend down and investigate. Besides, it really hasn’t been any interest to us.”

Only Zendry Zinery noticed the malicious look passed between Tyler and Talia.

That evening, Minnie was putting curlers in her hair late at night. She didn’t know she wasn’t the only one awake.

Millard was asleep when he was awakened by a gunshot, a crashing of glass and a loud – *Thud!* He knew Maria was at her friend’s house so he correctly assumed it was Minnie. “Minnie!” he cried and rushed to the bathroom. He opened the door and there was his wife’s inanimate body in her blood stained robes, never to breathe again.

The police came a minute after Millard called them. Millard opened the door to two men. One was obviously a policeman as he was dressed in a blue uniform with a badge that read, “CHIEF”. The other man had a gray hat, a gray coat, and a badge pinned on it which read, “DETECTIVE”

“Hello,” greeted the police chief, “I’m Chief Semipe and this is our new detective, Quin Quintoch.”

“How do you?” asked Millard in a morose voice, his eyes were wet with tears.

“Okay,” answered Quin, in a modest way trying not to offend Millard.

They approached the bathroom, the door was closed. “I left everything the way it was,” said Millard.

“Good,” said Chief Semipe, “We’ll do a check on the room and body and go back to the lab.”

As they entered the room and closed the door, Millard sighed and said, “I hope they succeed.”

In the lab, Quin gave the small, round bullet to the lab scientist who examined it for an hour. When, he gave Quin back the bullet he told Quin that the bullet matched no other bullets. Quin then did a search for people with gun licenses in the surrounding area. He found none. Quin frowned. From the information he had now, a person from somewhere out of the city had come and killed Minnie with a custom bullet. This case was getting stranger and stranger.

“Quin!”

Quin turned around and saw Chief Semipe walking to him with a notebook and pen in his hands.

“I got all the witness accounts,” he said.

Quin became excited and asked, “What do they say?”

“Here is Mütin’s account,” said Chief Semipe and flipped open his notebook, “*I went to bed after the party. I don’t know how long I slept but I was awoken by a gunshot. I quickly called Zendry Zinery. ‘Zendry,’ I said, ‘I heard a gunshot!’ ‘Calm down,’ he said, ‘Call the Mapstones and the Teeches and I will call the police’-”.*

“So that’s the other call we received,” interrupted Quin.

“Yes,” agreed Chief Semipe, “That must’ve been it. Anyway, Zendry’s account is almost the same as Mütin’s so I won’t bother you with it. Here is Tyler’s account; *After the party, Talia went to bed and I watched some TV. I heard a bang and I thought it was one of the car tires. So I went outside and checked the car. Then, I heard my phone ringing so I answered it. It was Mütin saying-*”.

“That there was a gunshot outside and all that jazz,” Quin interrupted one more.

“Yeah that’s basically it,” said Chief Semipe, “I hope you have found any helpful evidence, Quin.”

Quin told him about the bullet and gun license problem. Chief Semipe’s frown grew larger.

“What we should do,” he said, “is revisit Tick – Tock Manor and the neighboring houses for more evidence.”

And without another word they left for the manor.

As soon as Quin entered the manor he noticed something different. Then he realized it.

“Some of the clocks are not here,” said Quin.

“I see you’ve noticed.”

Quin looked up to see Zendry. He was wearing an auburn jacket and brown sweat pants. His cigarette was in between his middle and index finger.

“Some of the clocks broke,” explained Zendry, “Tyler offered to fix them for free. I was just going to the Teeches’s house myself. Care to join me?”

“I’ll go,” said Quin. Maybe he could find more evidence with Zendry or in the Teeches’s house.

Chief Semipe said, “I think I’ll pay Mütin a visit.”

“Well then,” replied Zendry, “Farewell!” Quin and Zendry left for the Teeches while Chief Semipe went to see Mütin.

As they walked to the Teeches’s house Zendry asked Quin, “Who do you suspect?”

“I don’t know, yet. There isn’t enough evidence,” said Quin and then asked, “Why? Do you know something?”

“It’s like this,” said Zendry and he told Quin about the trapdoor and his suspicion of Tyler and Talia.

“It’s reasonable for that look to arouse your suspicion,” said Quin, “But it is more of a hunch than good hard evidence. However, I will remember what you said.”

They soon reached the Teeches’s house. Quin rang the doorbell. It was soon answered by Talia.

“Ah,” she said, “Zendry and Detective Quin, it is good to see you.” And she let them in.

“My brother, Tyler, is working on the clocks,” she explained, “So I’ll show you are...er...museum.”

Talia opened the door and they entered. Inside was a glass case. In the case was a cutlass, a knife, a bottle of rum, a pistol and some ammunition. By the wall was a cannon with a few cannonballs. On the opposite wall was a portrait of a man with a pirate hat, a black beard that had flames on the end, and a stern look. On a shelf next to the portrait was a model ship with red sails.

“Who is this painting of?” asked Zendry.

“That,” said Talia, “is Blackbeard, the pirate. We are descendants of him.”

“Blackbeard got married?” said Zendry in an incredulous tone.

“Yes,” said Talia, “He had fourteen wives in fact. He named a ship of his after one of his wives; the *Queen Ann’s Revenge*. There’s a model of it on the shelf.”

“I see,” said Zendry, “Interesting isn’t it, Quin – Quin what are you doing?”

“Just looking at the items in here,” said Quin gesturing to the glass case. The bullets intrigued him. They were small and round and looked quite familiar.

“I have some cinnamon rolls and some coffee if you’d like some,” said Talia.

Breaking away from the bullets Quin said, “Yeah, I’ll have some.”

“So will I,” said Zendry. And with that, they left the room.

Chief Semipe arrived at Mütin’s house and rang the doorbell with no answer. Chief Semipe knocked on the door to no avail. Then, he heard a loud sound that seemed similar to a shot. The next sound was a cry. *Someone must be killing Mütin* thought Chief Semipe. Chief Semipe backed up and rushed into the door. WHAM! CRASH! The door was still standing perfectly fine – minus the fact it had a big hole that was shaped like Chief Semipe. The sound rang again. Chief Semipe went outside and saw Mütin with a long air rifle with a scope. Mütin was wearing a metal vest over his gray jacket. Mütin had his gun pointed at a target that had four holes already in it. Mütin took aim and fired the sound similar to one Chief Semipe heard earlier. Then, Chief Semipe hit his forehead with his hand. The sound he heard was Mütin target practicing and the cry was Mütin’s whoop of success.

“Chief,” said Mütin lowering his rifle, “I didn’t expect to see you here.”

“I just came to visit,” replied Chief Semipe, “So, how long have you had that gun?”

“I just got it this morning,” answered Mütin, “A friend of mine interested me with this sport and got me this vest. He also offered to take me hunting during Thanksgiving. But let’s get inside.”

Chief Semipe watched as Mütin placed his vest and rifle next to a box of small round bullets. As they walked into the living room Mütin asked, “By the way, how did you get inside with the door locked?”

Chief Semipe turned red. “Yeah, about that...”

Mütin had stopped walking, looking forward, a shocked look on his face. He cried, “What happened to my door?”

Zendry and Quin sat themselves each on one couch facing each other with a coffee table between them. Talia came in a platter that had two mugs of steaming coffee with two cinnamon rolls. She placed it on the table and left the room. Zendry took his cigarette and with a – *click!* – it stopped smoking.

“How did you do that?” asked Quin.

“A special kind of electronic cigarette,” explained Zendry, “It can be shut off in a few seconds. Soon ashtrays will become extinct.”

“Impressive,” said Quin watching Zendry drink his coffee (Quin had drank none).

“Yes it is,” said Zendry and without another word Zendry closed his eyes, fell off the couch, knocked over the tray, and grew horribly still. Quin was so shocked he froze in his seat feasting his eyes on the limp body of the journalist. Coming to his senses, he yelled, “Talia! Talia! Come quickly!”

Talia rushed in and when she saw Zendry’s body she turned as white as a sheet.

“Listen,” said Quin, “Call the ambulance; I need to head to Tick – Tock Manor.”

Talia grabbed Quin around the waist and said, “No, please don’t leave.”

“I know this is hard but please call the paramedics,” said Quin, his tone a bit angry. As if Quin was on fire, Talia quickly took her hands off his waist and put her hands behind her back. Quin quickly left the house.

Quin was going so fast, he ran into the door because he didn’t have time to stop. The door was opened by Maria and after a quick greeting Quin went to look for Chief Semipe. He found Chief Semipe bending over a hole in the cement floor.

“What are you doing?” asked Quin, trying his best to control the wave of emotion he had experienced at the Teeches’s house.

Chief Semipe got up and said, “I found this trapdoor here and I thought there might be something here that’s important. I’m trying to open it.”

“Let me try,” suggested Quin, “I’m good at slide puzzles.”

“What do you mean?” asked Chief Semipe.

“There’s a slide puzzle over there,” replied Quin.

So Chief Semipe got up and Quin started working on the puzzle. After a while, Quin solved it. The picture was of a skull. The trapdoor slid opened.

“I got my gun,” said Chief Semipe.

“Hey, mine is gone,” realized Quin, putting his finger in his empty holster.

“That’s okay,” said Chief Semipe, “You can hold your flashlight. Check what’s in there.”

Quin took out his flashlight and checked the hole of the trapdoor. The only thing there was a wooden ladder.

“Let’s go,” said Quin, “I’ll go first.”

Quin climbed down the ladder with ease though he thought that the ladder would snap.

“It’s safe, Chief,” said Quin, “You can come down now.”

Chief Semipe was climbing down when one of the steps snapped and Chief Semipe fell and landed on Quin which ended with them both on the floor with sore body parts.

“Well we better be careful on that ladder,” said Chief Semipe, rubbing his sore back, “But let’s continue. Quin turn your flashlight on.”

Quin did so and they continued on. They came across a wall that seemed to have a thin outline of a door. Next to it was a winch. Chief Semipe unraveled the winch causing the “wall” to open and form a bridge over a gorge.

“I’m starting to think this isn’t a sinkhole,” inferred Quin.

“Me, too,” Chief Semipe, “I think it is manmade.”

After they crossed the bridge, there at the end was a chest, a pirate flag, and a piece of parchment. Chief Semipe tried to open the chest but there was a broken key in the lock. He took out his nine millimeter pistol and shot the lock. The debris was blasted into the air. Chief Semipe opened the chest. Quin gasped and his eyes widened. The chest was filled with jewels and precious metals and stones. Chief Semipe picked up the parchment that was next to the chest.

“Maybe this will explain something,” he said, “This parchment says, ‘Dear Peter, I am writing to you to say I have been caught by the British. My ship and crew are lost and I am to be executed. They know nothing about our base or what is inside. I need you to empty it. You have my permission to use what is inside. Sincerely, Blackbeard’”.

Quin noticed something in the dark so he shined his flashlight on it. It was a human skeleton with a sword sticking through the body. It appeared that the person stabbed themselves and died. In the white bony hand was a broken key.

Quin said, "Chief Semipe".

"Yes".

"I think we found Peter."

"Can you explain this?"

"Okay, I'll try," said Quin, "So two men come in. One is Peter and he has a sword with him. After finding the chest, Peter tries to open it but breaks the key in the lock. He is so depressed he commits suicide and falls on his sword. The other runs away but resets everything."

"That makes sense," agreed Chief Semipe, "But how in the world does this connect to the murder?"

"I don't know," Quin responded, "Perhaps we'll explore here tomorrow."

"No, we can't," rebutted Chief Semipe, "We both have to guard a Mapstone, because the police believe they might be targeted by the murderer. I have to guard Maria while she goes with her friends. You have to stay here and guard Millard."

Quin swore and added, "We are getting closer and closer to solving this mystery, but we are losing more and more time!"

After exiting the "sinkhole", Quin and Chief Semipe found Maria crying on the couch. She had her cellphone in her hand.

"What's wrong?" asked Chief Semipe.

Maria said, choking on her sobs, "I got a call from Talia saying she got called by the hospital about Zendry's condition."

Quin's heart sank as Maria continued.

"They say they don't what happened to him but that he must have had a stroke of heart attack from all that smoking. The thing is they say that Zendry...that Zendry died."

Quin clutched his heart, Chief Semipe's face turned pallor, and Maria started to cry again.

The next day, Quin was at Tick – Tock Manor on his guard duty. Millard had gone to sleep after helping Tyler put up the ten clocks that were rejuvenated. Quin was walking around, quietly. *If I am quiet, enough* he thought, *Maybe I can go to that “sinkhole” and get more clues.* Unfortunately, he was careless and accidentally knocked one of the newly repaired clocks. It fell onto the floor and it shattered releasing gears, springs, and a cylindrical object that broke off a wire...that had the words “TNT”. Quin was shocked and then realized, *If one of the replaced clocks is an explosive, then the other nine are all time bombs!*

Quin ran up the flight of stairs to Millard’s bedroom. It was a pretty simple bedroom. It had a bed with a clock on the wall and a nightstand with a lamp on top. Quin rushed to Millard and shook violently yelling, “Millard, wake up! Wake up!” Quin then noticed two more items on the nightstand; a glass of water and a pill container that had a label that read, “SLEEPING PILLS: FOR THOSE WITH INSOMNIA”. Millard wouldn’t wake up again until the pill’s effect wore off. Quin would have to diffuse the clocks himself.

Quickly he went to work. Clocks two to four were round clocks with two sticks of dynamite in each. Clock five was a grandfather clock with six sticks of dynamite. Clocks six to eight were square clocks with three sticks each. Clock eight had “McKinley’s Soda” on it.

“Two more to diffuse,” said Quin, sweat dripping from his forehead. He didn’t know when the clocks would explode so he had to hurry.

Clock number nine was a rectangular clock with a Mexican from Don José: Mexican Restaurant. It was high on the wall. Quin took a mighty leap, but missed. He fell to the ground his head making a hole in the wall. The clock was vibrated by such a force, that it fell off its nail and hit Quin’s head. As he diffused the clock he stated, “Well that’s one way of doing it.” One clock was left but Quin couldn’t find it!

“Where could it be?” Quin asked himself.

He thought hard until an image came to his mind: *Quin ran up the flight of stairs to Millard’s bedroom. It was a pretty simple bedroom. It had a bed with a clock on the wall...* “The tenth clock is in Millard’s bedroom!” realized Quin.

Quin bolted up the stairs where Millard was still asleep. The clock (a cuckoo) was there. Quickly, Quin took the clock off the wall where there was an electronic bomb with a bunch of colorful wires. The screen read one minute. Quin ripped a wire. It became ten seconds. Quin looked out the window and saw the Mapstone’s pool. Quin chucked the clock out the open window into the pool. As it sank into the water the screen read zero. PSSCCH! Quin gave a sigh of relief and fainted.

The next day, Quin called everyone to the Manor. Quin still hadn't gotten a new gun because of the fear he might be punished by the Commissioner. He thought that after solving the case the Commissioner wouldn't be so harsh on him. Mütin had a look of confusion. Maria and Millard looked excited. The Teeches looked worried. Tyler had a towel over his hands.

Quin cleared his throat, "I called you here to tell you I have solved this case."

"Who did the murders?" asked Chief Semipe.

With a sense of suspense in the air, Quin bellowed, "I accuse Tyler and Talia Teech for the murders of Minnie Mapstone and Zendry Zinery, and the attempted murder of me and Millard Mapstone!" His finger was pointing dramatically at the Teeches.

With unusual calmness for an accused man, Tyler asked, "And what proof do you have of this?"

Quin explained, "The attempted murder of Millard and I, there is obvious proof for it. You were the one who was "fixing" the clocks, Tyler, and unless Millard was trying to commit suicide and kill me, which of course he didn't, you put the explosives in the clocks! For Zendry's murder it is simple too. Zendry died after drinking the coffee. Why? The reason is lucid; Talia poisoned the coffee. That's right he didn't die from a heart attack or a stroke from smoking. How come? He only smoked electronic cigarettes!"

"I'll accept that proof," admitted Tyler, "But you still haven't explained how I could possibly have killed Minnie."

"Easy," responded Quin, "The bullet used to kill Minnie was from your pirate relics. A clever idea, I must say Tyler, because our lab scientist doesn't think you'd use any type of guns from the Renaissance. You loaded the pirate pistol and fired, killing Minnie when she was in the bathroom."

"Very good, Mr. Detective," said Tyler, "Very good."

Suddenly, Tyler did a quick movement nobody was prepared for or thought it was fated to happen. One second, Tyler was sitting calmly with the towel over his hands. One second later, Tyler had stood up; the towel on the floor revealing what was in Tyler's hand.

A nine millimeter pistol.

"Everybody stand up and reach for the sky!" demanded Tyler, "And you, Chief, not one finger to your gun or you'll be the first to die!"

Tyler no longer looked calm. His eyes were full of satisfaction, his face was wild, and his voice was loud and full of vengeance. He was now a perfect imitation of his pirate ancestor (minus

the fact his beard wasn't on fire). After they all stood up, hand in the air, Quin noticed the gun looked familiar. Then, it hit him –

“That’s my gun!”

“Yes, Mr. Detective,” responded Tyler, “Talia stole it from you while you were at our house, but right now it’s the time for *my* explanation. You see we were trying to get this house all along. Not for the glory of it, but for the secrets inside. That trapdoor Minnie told us about contains Blackbeard’s treasure. And being descendants of him; we are the rightful owners of it, but how to get it? We were going to kill Millard and Minnie. Then I’d marry Maria and after getting the rights for the house kill her. Zendry Zinery and Mütin Moor, though, could get in our way. So we’d have to kill them too.

“Now what are we going to do with you? Well, Millard told me that you, Mr. Detective, and the Chief have already explored the trapdoor. So we are going to have you get the treasure and give it to us. We will then shoot you all and set fire to the house. Your bodies and the Manor will be incinerated to ashes, destroying any evidence the firefighters might find. If they find anything that the police will find useful, which I doubt very much, we’ll be far out of the country.

“But first I’ll have to disarm you, Chief. Talia, do you mind getting the Chief’s gun? Then take him and Mr. Detective to the trapdoor.”

“Of course not dear brother,” she said.

Talia walked over to Chief Semipe – and would’ve disarmed him – if Mütin hadn’t stuck out his foot and tripped her. Tyler was so surprised; he lowered the gun as Talia fell and went sprawling on the floor. Quin took this as an advantage and punched Tyler. Tyler hit the couch which flipped over on its back with Tyler on it. He, however, remained conscious.

The next thing was pandemonium. Mütin and Chief Semipe was wrestling with Talia, who had proven herself a good fighter. Maria and Millard had taken cover behind a couch. Quin was grabbing Tyler’s right arm (which was holding Quin’s pistol) and they were fighting over it. Bullets were shooting everywhere as sometimes Tyler would accidentally pull the trigger. One blast shot the ceiling causing a piece of drywall to hit Mütin in the head. He was knocked out, but Chief Semipe and Talia were still fighting. One bullet nearly shot Millard in the forehead as he was trying to peek over the couch. Luckily, he ducked just in time and the bullet hit a lamp on a stool.

Finally, Talia slipped from Chief Semipe (without his gun). Tyler kicked Quin in the stomach knocking the wind out of Quin. Just as Chief Semipe pulled out his gun, Talia and Tyler left Tick – Tock Manor.

Quin and Chief Semipe left the Manor to see Tyler and Talia drive away in their car.

“Quickly!” ordered Chief Semipe, “Into the police cruiser.”

Quin got into the driver seat and Chief Semipe sat passenger seat and drove away with the siren blazing with obstreperous sounds and flashing lights. Chief Semipe grabbed the two way radio and said, “This is Chief Semipe on patrol car 27 calling all cars, calling all cars. A Harbor Nissan purple minivan that contains two murderers is heading on US – 41.”

“There it is!” cried Quin and indeed there it was.

Chief Semipe handed his gun and baton to Quin and told him, “Take these weapons, you might need them.”

“Thanks,” said Quin, “Take over the wheel will you?”

As Chief Semipe leaned over to hold the steering wheel Quin rolled down the window and took aim. He fired shot after shot. One bullet nearly hit the rear, but Talia (who was driving) swerved to the right. The car behind her had no premonition of Talia’s action and did a u – turn to avoid being hit. However, the driver collided on another car and they both crashed. The last bullet hit the back window of the car and out the windshield.

Quin sped up and when his window was level with Tyler’s he yelled, “Stop!” pointing the gun at Tyler.

Tyler (whose window was also open) took a cutlass, knocked the gun out of Quin’s hand, he took another swipe at Quin but missed. Quin took the baton and parried Tyler’s next blow. The sword and baton clashed again and again. Quin missed a parry and the sword cut the back of Quin’s hand. Quin lifted his hand with the baton in pain. By chance, the baton hit Tyler’s hand and knocked the sword out of Tyler’s hand. The sword fell and burst both tires of Tyler’s and Talia’s car. Talia lost control and car spun into a tree.

Shortly later the authorities arrested Tyler and Talia for larceny of a weapon, murder, and attempted murder. A funeral was held for both Zendry and Minnie. A year later Maria and Mütin got married and had two kids. Quin got a new gun from the Commissioner without any punishment but with a slap on the back and a handshake and a reminder next time he should ask for a replacement if needed.

And that was the end of the mystery of Tick – Tock Manor

THE END