

Assignment: To write your complete mystery story



Stalking the boy, misty clouds hung eerily above the half-deserted Russian town, eagles eyeing their prey. Like fingers, gnarled trees prodded the bitter evening air. Ali walked on. Weary and underwhelmed, he grimaced at houses folding in on each other like they were boxes topped with rubbish.

And then he paused. Scanning the street robotically, he was certain that he had heard something - a muffled angry Russian voice, its echoes rushing through his ears like a stream of polluted water. Ali's eyes stopped at a large house, overlooking the others and hogging a vast shadow over a run down garden of browning blades of grass. It had a peaked roof clinging onto a clock with hands drooping mournfully. Littered with gravestones, the garden had a cobbled path running unevenly through it. Ali was sure that whoever had built it would have been reluctant to live there. Like a leathery claw, some strange force clutched him vigorously and hurled him at the door, the door that then appeared to have opened.

Cautiously, Ali stepped inside, as a whirlwind of sorrow slapped him menacingly around the face. Eyes adjusting to the dim light, he made a mental note of the statues lining the hallway, their deformed faces twisted into a grim smile. He went through all the statues, studying every detail on their armoured bodies.

Clutching a spotted tail of a Jaguar, the one closest to him was captured in a cackling laugh, and his nose had half crumbled off - he'd call that one Mr Violent. Another one had a sword that had snapped long ago and a decaying finger on his right hand. The next one was...

Ali paused. It was new, there was no doubt about that. The glinting helmet and the shimmering sword told him everything: someone had been here, not long ago.

Heart whipping his chest, he retreated back a step. Previously, he hadn't realised what danger he had so carelessly stepped into. Turning around with a jolt, Ali fumbled frantically for the door. His thoughts had turned into a storm, thrashing around in his mind as if they were trying to escape. He had just about lost hope now.

A shadow. On the landing. Ali had seen it.

Without thinking, he made his way up the snaking steps that creaked in unison. He wiped his brow and resumed his ascent.

43, 44, 45...

Five more steps to go.

46, 47, 48, 49...

And he waited. Coarse and sore, his throat throbbed. His eyes were heavy too; he had to go on.

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Ali screamed, the noise piercing the empty silence. An elderly man was sprawled across the floor like another carpet, a crimson book lying in his hand. The culprit could have escaped through anything: the chimney, the window? The window. It had a bullet hole in it. But there was no blood. The situation was worse than he had expected. Ali wasn't stuck here with a man; he was stuck here with a dead man.

"Be calm, Ali," he wheezed. "Be calm." Sight blurring dramatically, his head filled with unpleasant thoughts invading every corner of his mind. Searching for the stairs, one thought managed to survive: he needed to get out of here. Nearly losing his sense of direction, he tumbled down the flight of stairs as the banister escaped the grasping grip of his hands.

He fell.

*Landing back in the hallway, he sighed, before scrabbling up and limping towards the door. It was closed. Ali blinked, but he was right: the door had been closed. Someone *had* been there. Hurling the door*

open, the Russian air did not attack him, this time it embraced him lovingly, swirling into his veins.

“Привет.”

Ali froze, and everything went black.

Ali woke to the sound of his friends who were joining him on holiday.

“Hello Ali,” they chuckled. “How are ya?”

“Alexandre, Alyosk!” Ali replied, bewildered by what he had seen earlier that evening.

“What’s up with you recently, Ali? I can’t believe you fainted on hearing my voice,” Alyosk sighed.

“I don’t half blame him,” his brother retorted.

“Di...”

“Hello lads,” their dad cut in, just arriving from shopping.

“Hi Dad,” Alyosk and Alexandre chorused, their faces erupting with excitement. “You’re home!”

Later, as they sat before a tea of jam sandwiches, Ali pondered. Enveloped in his thoughts, his mind howled questions he did not know the answers to. Who was that man on the landing? How could there have been a moving shadow when the man was definitely dead? Dead. The word throbbed throughout his body. As if a knife was wedged into his spine, he squealed uncontrollably as a scene of the house’s locking door unfolded in his mind; that wasn’t true. He had escaped. He was fine.

Returning to reality, he prodded his sandwich reluctantly. Surveying the untouched plates in front of his friends, he guessed they were in the same mood. Or maybe it was just that the empty chair sitting next to him reminded his friends of their mother.

The sandwiches were drooling strawberry jam that started seeping from the edges, reminding him of the blood that should have been draining out of the man but wasn't, and the crimson book, lying in his hand.

"So, Mr Wallick, what did you buy at the shops?" Ali asked, leaning forward in his chair, breaking out of the uneasy silence.

"Well, I bought some clothes..." he began, then trailed off.

"I want to go to bed," Ali croaked; he needed to think alone.

Gazing at his auburn lamp, he thought again. Why did this have to happen? If it hadn't, he would have the next day to enjoy before heading home, to his mother, where it was safe. At least his mother was alive. Not like the brothers' one who...

He couldn't finish. Ali's eyes flickered shut, and plunged into a pool of darkness.

He dreamed. He dreamed that he was staring absent-mindedly out of the cottage's window. Catching his eye, an inky black silhouette skimmed the horizon. Thoroughly intrigued, Ali narrowed his eyes and watched the dark figure grow as it glided towards him. Faint echoes of a voice ventured into Ali's ears. Stepping into the moon's dim spotlight, shimmering shards of light danced over the man. Ali stared...

And the man, Mr Wallick, stared back.

Ali sat up, beads of sweat tumbling down his back. Clutching his stomach like the dream of Mr Wallick had stabbed him, he rolled out of bed and darted towards the front door. As he opened it, a wave of morning breeze swept over him. He was going to solve this mystery. Then there would be no more nightmares; no more unsettling thoughts and no more pain.

An eye filled with anger, the sun had begun to send the first streaks of light creeping over houses. As he raced along the paths leading to the house, the flaming ball framed Ali's figure perfectly. Ali knew the house

was just a building, but it was as if it was alive, growing rapidly as he approached it. Then he was there, staring at the door. Screwing up his eyes, Ali dived in, because there was no point waiting. The two possibilities would still remain: he would come out alive, or dead.

Counting the steps again, he stumbled over the winding staircase, clutching the banister desperately.

Bom! Bom! Bom!

43, 44, 45...

Five more steps to go.

46, 47, 48, 49...

He didn't pause this time; the two possibilities would still remain.

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*The man was still there, forgotten. His face was still pale, and the book was still crimson. Cautiously, Ali reached out for it. Covers leathery and creased, he brought the book to his chest, a taste of dust erupting in his mouth. Opening it, on the first page, ancientness and courage leapt out at him. Written in a scruffy handwriting, four words were scrawled in the centre of the page: *A guide to killing.**

This man was a killer too. There was no blood because he wasn't shot, he was strangled. The dead man had shot the bullet that tore through the window. With the dream starting to make sense, he realised that Mr Wallick didn't buy the clothes at the shops, but he put them on in order to blend into the shadows. He was the one who had escaped through the open door, and had shut it behind him. The dead man had killed someone, and it cost him his life. Thinking of why Mr Wallick would do it, one person came to mind: Mrs Wallick. The man had killed Wallick's wife from that very window. It all made sense.

Ali watched the police car as it drove into the sunset, spluttering and coughing as it went. Scarlet streaked across the yellow-tinged sky, paint frolicking across its canvas. Alexandre's whines echoed through the streets, his last attempt to reach out for his father. Like diamonds, tears glistened in the brothers' eyes. The car had disappeared.

It was all over.



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