WHAT’S THE DIFFERENCE?

Mystery and Urban Fantasy

Lieutenant Derrick Johnson assaults the doors to the Detective Division of the Colorado Springs Police Department. His demeanor matches the gloom of the weather; overcast… building to a full-on thunderstorm.

The turbulence began ten days ago with the disappearance of Rebecca Pringle, a single woman who taught in a local grade school. She was universally admired for her affection for all her young students and the entire staff.

Forensics of Rebecca’s house surrendered not one clue as to how she disappeared or who might have been involved. Her parents, friends and co-workers were of no help. This case was bupkus for leads.

Lieutenant Johnson steams to his office barking to Detective Sergeant Myers, “Grant, I need a cup of coffee. Get it and come into my office.”

Detective Sergeant Myers is accustomed to the brusque manner of his boss. After more than ten years in the same department he is pretty good at predicting the weather and knows how to ride out the storm.

In record time, Myers is in Johnson’s office with the coffee. He collars the seat he always occupies. Turning to his boss he gauges the Lieutenants pissed meter and judges it to be over the top. “Okay boss, what’s the next step?”

Johnson locks eyes and vents, “Damned if I know. Hell, I’m just a lowly Lieutenant Detective that can’t tell shit from shinola. Get the hell out of my office and let me think.”

Myers tucks tail and ambles to the door. Before he closes it Johnson swallows hard and mumbles, “Don’t mind me Grant. I’m an ass with no hole to blow steam through. You just happened to be in ear shot.”

“Understand boss. I’ll go over the forensics report again. Maybe we missed something.” He softly closes the door and leaves Detective Johnson with his demons.

Johnson pulls out the only proven remedy to his mental block. The only reliable crutch he has is concentrating on the picture puzzle, What’s the Difference? One of those puzzles where two cartoon-like scenes are drawn but with just a few differences. The mind and eye must focus to detect the subtle changes between the two. And if ever there was need to focus, it was now.

He turns to puzzle one hundred and starts to methodically scan small areas of each cartoon, then circles three differences within ten seconds. Maybe he isn’t such a dunderhead after all.

Upon identifying clue number four his eyes bug out. Banging furniture and his knees on the way to the door, he bellows, “Myers. Get your ass in my office.”

Sergeant Myers heart skips a beat along with his feet racing into the office. “Tell me you have a lead for us.”

“Myers. Look at puzzle one hundred. It’s open on my desk.”

“Okay, what am I looking at? I see you circled a few things.”

“Right. It’s a basement. Look at the way it’s laid out.”  
 Myers scans the cartoon again. He sees the clues but can’t fathom the significance. Then, “AW SHIT! Shit, shit, shit.”

“That’s right. Grab your keys, this puzzle, and the crime photos. Let’s do some detecting.”

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Johnson and Myers navigate through the living room and kitchen of Rebecca’s house, heading for the basement. The two men check the crime scene photos and are satisfied that everything is exactly in its’ place the way the forensics team had left it. Stopping at the door that leads to the basement, Detective Johnson slowly opens it and flips on the light switch. They ease down the stairs. There’s no sound, no movement. Dead silence.

Detective Johnson spent hours in this house, including the basement and never found a single piece of evidence that hinted at how or where Rebecca disappeared. Yet, here they were inspecting the all too familiar house because of a damn puzzle.

Sergeant Myers clicked on a flashlight. Their eyes dart from the puzzle to the cinder block wall that is no more than four feet from the furnace and water heater. So unremarkable it never would catch the attention of the most observant cop on the force. Even Lieutenant Detective Johnson.

Scanning the work bench Johnson grabs a sledge hammer and hands it to Myers. “Start wailing on that wall.”  
 Grant clamps two meaty paws around the handle and strikes center mass of his target. Punching through the first block releases a putrid stench of decaying flesh.

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Twenty-four hours later in Lieutenant Detective Johnson’s office, Myers finally verbalizes the question weighing heavy on both their minds. “Derrick, what the hell is up with that damn puzzle?”

“I don’t know. Both of us walked that basement five times and never noticed that wall. Then, when I saw that freaky puzzle I got scared. And curious. There on the damn cartoon puzzle is the same exact basement in Pringles house. In one drawing it’s four feet from the furnace. In the other it’s eight feet. What’s the difference? Four feet!”