

Partridge Missing from Local Pear Tree - Suspects Held for Questioning

A Short Story

By

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The local news elf reporter, Ronny McJingleberry, adjusted his candy cane colored tie, gave his best ‘yes, I’m very important and famous’ smile, shuffled his papers and spoke directly at the camera.

“Late last night, a report was filed by the North Pole Village Police Department concerning the disappearance of the local partridge. The partridge, known for its distinctive plumage and melodious song, was last seen knocking around the village pear tree late last night after allegedly having one too many festive ‘Nogs’ at the Drunken Reindeer Pub.”

Ronny paused and laughed before adding, “we’ve all been there,” and gave a sly wink to the camera. “The authorities were alerted after concerned residents noticed its absence and reported the disappearance to the local constabulary.”

With one smooth motion, the newscaster swivelled to look directly into another camera, the bell on his hat jingling ever so slightly, and said, “Now let’s go to Michael Tinselbottom on location in the North Pole Village. Michael, what do you have for us?”

The picture split into two halves with Ronny on the left and, on the right, an elf standing next to a tree—the little creature bundled up so heavily against the cold and blowing snow that you could just make out a tiny flushed face framed beneath a bright red hat. The caption read ‘Michael Tinselbottom, Elf on Location’.

“I’m freezing my baubles off out here!” shouted Michael against the wind.

“No one cares about your baubles, Michael, report the news!” said Ronny sternly.

“Well, as you can see, I’m standing next to the pear tree in question. I’m not sure why we have one to be honest, it’s never warm enough to grow anything.”

“The news!”

“Right, right! Well, it’s anarchy out here, Ronny. The North Pole Village Police Department is actively investigating the disappearance of the partridge. They urge anyone with information regarding the incident to come forward and assist in the investigation. The authorities are determined to solve this case and ensure the safe return of the missing bird.”

“Thank you, Michael. Try to stay warm out there, okay,” said Ronny with a grin.

“You can shove a candy cane right up your a—”

The picture switched back to Ronny in the studio. “Oh ho, that Michael. He’s a character. The community is advised to remain vigilant and report any suspicious activities or sightings related to the missing partridge. Further updates will be provided as the investigation progresses.”

Ronny put a hand to his ear and paused, listening intently, before continuing. “This just in, reports and tips have been flooding in regarding the missing partridge and a number of suspects are being held for questioning.”

“Turn that off, Sergeant Twinkletoes!” shouted Captain Sugarplum.

Sergeant Maria Twinkletoes flicked off the TV and turned to face the reddened, slightly overweight character of Captain Sugarplum. The old elf stood three feet tall, wore the customary uniform of the North Pole Village Police Department, and sported a silver bell atop his pointy hat. He was more weathered around the eyes these days having seen his fair share of reindeer theft, assaults with candy canes, and inappropriate elf-on-elf public indecency. The big man himself, Kringle, had appointed Sugarplum to the post almost two-thousand years ago and the job was beginning to wear on him.

Twinkletoes on the other hand was young (barely seven hundred years-old) and shapely (like all elves, the shape in question was round-ish), with long flowing hair, a jolly disposition, and a can-do attitude.

“Sorry about that, sir. Just seeing if the media had any additional information.”

“We’re drowning in suspects here, Twinkletoes, we need to start the interrogations or we’ll be here all Christmas,” said Captain Sugarplum sourly.

Twinkletoes leapt to her feet, it was a short leap as she was barely two feet tall, and grabbed her notepad. “Where do we start?” she said with the sort of enthusiasm that tickled Captain Sugarplum’s ulcer.

The captain rolled his eyes and motioned the young elf to follow him toward the interrogation rooms.

“We’ll tackle them one by one. I have to report back to the boss by the end of the day and the last thing I want is to show up empty handed.”

“Chief!” shouted Gizelle Sprinkleberry, the North Pole Police Department receptionist.

Sugarplum steered his ample frame around and looked back down the hallway from whence they came. Gizelle, an old elf with a hooked nose, half-moon glasses, and a stooped frame stood with a clipboard affixed under one arm.

“Yes, Ms. Sprinkleberry?”

“The boys are bringing in that dancing troupe you wanted to speak to, the piping band is refusing to come inside and are playing for tips out in the parking lot, but they’re largely getting drowned out by all the drummers.”

Captain Sugarplum could feel his blood pressure rising. All he wanted was some hot chocolate and a nice meal, but this was shaping up to be a disaster of a day. “Is that all?”

“Well . . . no, actually. The geese are making a terrible mess in interrogation room six, I think they’re trying to build a nest, you’ll find the swans in the department’s pool, and we’re not entirely sure where to put all the cows. But we do have a lot of fresh milk.”

“Just put them wherever they’ll fit,” said Sugarplum, his patience quickly dissipating. “I swear, Twinkletoes, this time of year brings out all the crazies.”

“Yes, sir,” said Twinkletoes, feverishly taking notes.

“Don’t write that down,” sighed Sugarplum and shoved open the door to interrogation room #2.

INTERROGATION ROOM #2

“Where were you last night?” said the Captain with the air of strict formality.

The two turtle doves stared at each other, then turned back to the captain and simultaneously said, “coooo.”

“I don’t think they speak,” whispered Sergeant Twinkletoes.

“Oh, they speak,” said the Captain, his eyes narrowing.

“Coooo?” said the turtle doves.

They were both beautiful creatures. The subtle shades of greys and orange in their feathers ruffled slightly as they cocked their heads to this side and that.

“Coooooooo,” they said again.

“Look! Don’t play games with me. We received a tip that you were hanging around the pear tree last night.” The captain hammered a fist on the table for effect and the turtle doves shuffled closer to each other, eyes wide.

“I really don’t think they can talk,” said Twinkletoes. “I think you’re scaring them.”

It was true, not all animals at the North Pole held the gift of speech, but Sugarplum could sense deception in the room. He stood up and loomed over the turtle doves. Even as an elf, he was an imposing figure to a couple of small birds.

“Now you listen to me,” said the Captain, “You have a good hard think about speaking up. And don’t leave town!”

He hopped down from his chair, the bell on his hat jingling melodically, and stormed from the room.

“I’m so sorry,” said Sergeant Twinkletoes to the two doves. “He’s under a lot of pressure.” And with that she scurried out of the room.

Once the door swished closed, one of the turtle doves turned to the other and said, “Well, that was a close one.”

INTERROGATION ROOM #3

“Imbécile!” shrieked one of the French hens. There were three of them and not one of them spoke English.

“Ta tête est clairement dans ton cul!” shouted the second.

“J'exige un appel téléphonique!” screeched the third, flapping so hard feathers started to float around.

“Well this is getting us nowhere,” said the Captain. “Make a note that we need to hire a translator.”

Twinkletoes nodded and scribbled a note before following the captain from the room chased by a lot of unnecessary clucking and flapping.

INTERROGATION ROOM #4

“Are you beginning to notice a pattern?” said Captain Sugarplum, standing in the doorway of interrogation room #4.

“There’s a lot of birds?” said the sergeant.

The four birds were small black, with yellow beaks. They all spoke at the same time on cell phones, pacing back and forth across the room in an agitated fashion.

“What do you mean there’s only five left?” said the first bird into its phone.

“You need to sell all the stocks we have in gold!” shouted the second into its phone.

“Rings, you moron, there’s going to be a run on the market in gold rings!” said the third.

“I have someone on the other line, I’ll have to call you back,” said the fourth.

The pair of elf police stared as the crow-like birds continued their individual conversations.

“And who are they again?” asked the Captain.

“Calling birds,” said Twinkletoes, consulting her notes. “They work in the stock market. Someone reported they were working late in the office near the pear tree, but I don’t imagine they know anything, they seem very distracted.”

“Time is money!” shouted the fourth bird into his phone.

INTERROGATION ROOM #6

“PA-CAWWWW!” screeched the geese as Sugarplum opened the interrogation room door and quickly closed it again.

“What in the holiday chocolate sprinkles was that?!” said the Captain.

“It looks like they were laying eggs,” said Twinkletoes.

THE NORTH POLE POLICE DEPARTMENT POOL

The seven swans were swimming laps. Each swan wore a small swim cap and goggles.

“What are they doing?” asked Twinkletoes.

“Looks like the backstroke,” said the Captain, exhaustion seeping into his tone.

“Excuse me!” shouted Twinkletoes over the splashing. “Can you tell us anything about the missing partridge?”

One of the swans swam up to the edge of the pool and slipped off its goggles. “Can’t you see we’re trying to practice?”

“For what?” asked the Captain.

“For what? Listen to you,” said the swan, “for the Olympics!”

The swan slipped its goggled back on and resumed swimming laps.

INTERROGATION ROOM #8

The smell was overpowering, and Captain Sugarplum had to climb on top of one of the cows to make himself heard.

“Ladies, if I can please have your attention.”

The sound of the occasional ‘moo’ and eight cows being deftly milked was the only reply he received.

“You and your cows were all reported to be drinking at the Drunken Reindeer last night. Do any of you remember seeing a partridge? Possibly inebriated?”

“Can’t talk,” said one of the milk maids somewhere beneath the sea of black and white.

“We’re busy milking.”

And so they were.

THE NORTH POLE POLICE DEPARTMENT WAITING ROOM

“Let me guess,” said the Captain rubbing his temples. “These are the Ladies and Lords dance troupe?”

“What gave it away, sir?” said Twinkletoes, thoroughly enjoying the show.

There were indeed a number of men and women dancing and leaping around the waiting room, much to the enjoyment of the police department staff. Elves were gleeful clapping and whooping.

“They were performing at the Drunken Reindeer last night and they say they witnessed the partridge stagger out of the bar, but that’s all,” said Twinkletoes reading from her notes.

THE NORTH POLE POLICE DEPARTMENT PARKING LOT

It quickly became apparent, after Captain Sugarplum and Sergeant Twinkletoes exited the building, that the competitive music performance between the pipers and the drummers had devolved into an outright battle. There were numerous drumstick and pipe-related injuries, and all twenty-three of the musicians found themselves in handcuffs sitting on the snow-covered floor. None of them reported having any knowledge of the missing partridge.

“Well this whole evening has been completely fruitless,” said Captain Sugarplum, flopping down into the chair in his office.

“Much like the pear tree,” said the Sergeant with a grin.

The Captain, who was beyond the ability to recognize humor, waved a dismissive hand and said, “Read me what we’ve got so far.”

Twinkletoes flipped through her notepad as she perched on the stool on the other side of the Captain’s desk. “Well, we had seventy-two suspects. Several people saw the partridge at the bar, and a few saw him leave the bar. No one has admitted to seeing him in or around the pear tree.”

The Captain sighed. “Anything else?”

“According to the calling birds, we should all be investing in gold rings.”

Captain Sugarplum pulled on his jacket. "Get them all out of here. And have maintenance clean interrogation room six. Those geese made a hell of a mess."

"Where are you going, sir?"

"To tell the boss," said Captain Sugarplum dejectedly.

The Kringle Mansion looked warm and inviting as Captain Sugarplum trudged up the driveway, past the reindeer, who all eyed him with the suspicious nature common among reindeers, and rang the doorbell.

The door swung open, candle and firelight streaming out into the world as a rotund gentleman with a gloriously bushy beard swung his arms wide and proclaimed, "Captain Sugarplum! Won't you join me for dinner?"

Santa Claus ushered the half-frozen elf into the hallway and helped the little man out of his coat.

"I'm sorry to drop in on you at this hour," said the Captain. "I don't want to intru—"

"Nonsense!" boomed the symbol of Christmas everywhere, and led the elf into a large dining room with a long table that was already set for two people.

The Captain climbed up into a slightly raised chair designed to accommodate elven folks and was about to explain the day's happenings, when the jolly large man plated several scoops of potatoes, cranberry sauce, vegetable, and three succulent cuts of meat, laying the small feast before Sugarplum, whose eyes grew wide. All thoughts of the day's case fled from his mind as his small nostrils inhaled the delightful meal that lay before him.

Santa was already tucking in when Captain Sugarplum said, "This smells amazing, what is it?"

A gleam in his eye, Santa spoke evenly and calmly through a mouthful of food and said, "roast partridge."