

distractions

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Christmas book issue

CHRISTMAS BOOK ISSUE

CHAPTER XVI: WHY GIVE A STUDENT A BOOK?

Inspcctor Cringle was stumped. Miss Elizabeth, the beautiful Sociology major, was still comatose. His only hope was to flush the guilty parties out in his usual suave, rational manner.

The central question still burned in his mind—why would anyone give a college student a book for Christmas? Everyone knows college students abhor the sight of books. Nine months out of the year they're surrounded with them, always toting a backpack of them around. During finals week, students see more of their books than anything else, including their eyelids.

Cringle knew all that. Whoever had given Elizabeth that book must have known what it would do to her. They must have known she would lose her marbles, bite the big one, go round the bend. It was a perfect crime.

And that's why Chris Cringle had to break it. He crossed the library floor slowly. He looked the suspects up and down, and gave Miss Eltoe an extra look up and down. "All part of the job," he told himself.

"I think we all know why I asked you here," he said. "Someone slipped Miss Elizabeth that book, and I'm going to find out who."

No one budged. This was going to be more difficult than he'd anticipated. He was going to

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have to get rough. "You love a mystery, don't you Professor Klaus?" The old man nodded. "I notice you have quite a collection in your room. Some of which have old library cards in the back, right Professor? Or should I say 'Sandy'?"

Klaus' face froze in horror. "No von's called me zat in years! How did you find out? Ach, nein, I am finished in zis county! But I swear, I did not give Elizabet zat book! I loved her like a daughter!"

"Like a daughter, eh, Klaus? That's fitting, since she was your daughter. Yours and Mrs. Frosty, the cook!"

Frosty was cold as ice. Her head slowly fell, and she looked at the ground. "But I didn't give her a book. Why, all I know about is cooking, and she was found with a humorous novel."

Cringle knew he was stumped. He looked back over his list of characters, their motives, and their personalities. Then he did what any good mystery writer would do—fake it.

"That only leaves you, Rudy. You talk funny, you're pretty obnoxious, and you've been seen enough to be familiar, but have never been an actual suspect. You must have done it!"

Rudolph's face grew crimson, and his bulbous nose was afire. "OK, OK, so I gave da kid da book. So how was I ta know she didn't like dat stuff? She came running at me, see, and then I saw that huge sack of presents there, see, and this little chubby guy, so's I figure if I don't do something, I'm gonna end up wid a Random House sticking outta my forehead. So's I pick up the sack, just ta kinda deflect her, and next thing I know they're peeling her off da wall. I didn't mean ta do it, honest I didn't."

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