

experiment six-two. henry pov

Hello, I'm Henry Gaspard, the Greatest Detective the World Has Ever Known (according to the April 2012 issue of *The New Yorker* magazine), and you are reading *Measuring Shadows, or How We Know What We Don't Know*, a personal account of the investigation of the disappearance of one Ms. Nada Dufrene in the late summer of 2016.

The more genre-savvy amongst you may recognize that it is far more common for the detective's grand investigation to be written by an assistant—a Watson to a Holmes. This narrative structure allows the author to present a mystery without giving away all the juicy details and deductions at once, minimizing spoilers and thus preserving the game of whodunit for the reader. While this approach may be fine for some detectives—and while it is true that I have an assistant—really, would you trust the story of the Greatest Detective the World Has Ever Known to anyone but the man himself? More so than the joy of figuring things out on your own, I will allow you to luxuriate in the pleasure of figuring things out *through me*—the vicarious opportunity of seeing the world through the eyes of the Greatest Detective the World Has Ever Known. Also, my assistant, Sue, is a teenager, and the case reports she submits to the authorities are boring. I am neither a teenager nor boring. I am Henry Gaspard.

The bottom line is this: there are already too many stories that don't get told from my perspective. This is one is special, so buckle in, bucko.

Now, at the risk of making things un-fun, I do want to let you know upfront that this story is not a whodunit. I already know whodunit. Whodunit is a bad question. Idunit. Youdunit. He; she; it; theydunit. We all dun did it. And we're all gonna keep dundidit-ing from now until the heat death of the universe, just like we have in every moment of linear time since the start of this whole shebang. But I'm getting lost in the minutia here.

Let us instead begin at a higher level. In the spirit of building suspense, I will reveal to you the soupçons of capital-T Truth that lies at the succulent center of this chef's tasting menu of a case—the revelation that gives rise to this work's title...

We cannot measure our own shadows, for in doing so, we change their shape.

I am not a very sentimental man. But when I tell you that this story, and how we get to learning this lesson, involves the bravest man I have ever known, I want you to know that I am being deathly sincere. There is no action more beautiful and more worthy of respect than when a man throws away his pride and everything he has come to cherish in his life—all for the sake of another. Our vain struggles against the chaos of an uncaring universe are beautiful. When some men are faced with Truth, they turn away from it; others instead twist it for their own convenience (or sanity); but only the rarest amongst us accept it without reservation and forge on in spite of it.

The man I speak of and whom I hold in so high regard is the deuteragonist of this tale: Junichi Mori, a Metrobus operator in our fine capital city. I hesitate to regale you with all the details of our initial consultation; after all, I am a professional, and I do have some tact. But what I can tell you is that he came to me on August 10th having exhausted himself of all other investigators available. I was the investigator of last resort—the only one who did not laugh him out of the room.

It was three-o'clock on a Tuesday (which is to say 3:00 AM on Wednesday) when I saw him, via security camera, pacing outside my office (located conveniently adjacent to Penn Quarter and Chinatown). You will agree that this behavior is odd. I knew I had never met this man before, but, then again, I hadn't met most people before, so I reasoned he couldn't be that suspicious. Typically, prospective clients wait until daylight before trying to reach me.

As a person whose sleep schedule is best described as spontaneous, I considered his timing serendipity. To his apparent surprise, I opened the roll-up storefront doors and invited him in. I won't bother ruminating on the layers of psychology that take a man to the doorstep of help, not even expecting to be acknowledged there.

I knew almost immediately that he was a bus driver, likely having just finished his shift. I deduced this information from the fact that he was wearing a bus driver's uniform. You may hold your applause.

I served gin and tonic over freshly cracked iced. I spent almost two hours with the man and learned a lot about him. He lived in D.C. now but was from somewhere else. He preferred driving the night shift, and he had not missed work once in over eight years—not even the holidays. He did not like driving the X2 or 96 routes, because he did not like going over the river. He did not drink coffee. Eventually, when his desperation overcame his shame, we got to talking about what actually drew him to my office.

"I'm searching for someone. I don't know if it's someone I've lost, or someone I've never even known, but I just know I have to find them." He looked off the side, where the windows were.

Junichi Mori was pudgy and somewhat nondescript man with an amorphous face and neck folds—not really wrinkles—that became apparent when he turned away from me. His hair was still all black but had lost its vibrancy, and it was thinning. He had not shaved for several days, and his natural facial hair growth patterns were not flattering. But he was articulate, at least when he felt like it, and at least about the things he cared about—a generic genteel schlub. He was not unlike John Adams or a gloomy turtle. By my estimation, about 15% of the population of Washington, D.C. was this exact man.

"We're all searching for someone, guy. Here I am: a confirmed bachelor of 38 years, in spite of my accomplishments."

He let out his breath. "You don't understand. All I know is that I found myself in a hotel bar in Arlington, alone, and feeling emptier than I ever have in my life. A part of me was gone. And this feeling came over me all at once—like there was some fundamental shift in my cognition of everything I knew before."

"Stranger things have happened in hotel bars in Arlington. You don't want to know what kinds of things important people have lost there. There was this one time—"

"I wasn't even drinking alcohol." It was not the first time he had cut me off in this conversation. Being the magnanimous sort, I did not pay it much mind. "One moment I was getting ready for work, and the next I was there with two cups of coffee in front of me."

"Coffee?"

"And the bartender just said I'd been there alone all night." He ruffled his hair with both hands. "I had no reason to be in Arlington in the first place. I don't even know how I got there."

"If you were in a fugue state, you need a psychiatrist—not a private investigator."

He was silent for a little while. "I haven't left D.C. proper in over a decade. I almost had a panic attack when I figured out where I was."

I drank the rest of my gin and tonic. "What does that even mean—that you haven't left the District at all? Why?"

There was a silence again—even longer this time. “That’s why I need to know who it was. Whoever brought me there must have been important to me somehow.”

The condensation from his glass wet the paper coaster underneath, darkening it. From my vantage point, I almost mistook it for a shadow.

“I bet you don’t draw a lot of attention, do you, guy?”

This time, I received nothing in return.

“What you’re saying is preposterous. You’re either insane, or you somehow think you’re so special that, even though the universe has established a retro-causality of sorts and changed history itself and everyone’s memories to erase the existence of this person who’s disappeared into the ether, you alone know they’re out there somewhere.”

The ice in his glass shifted as it melted.

“Maybe so.”

I stood up and stared out the window—or tried to, but all I saw was the faint reflection of my face in the darkness. And I saw his reflection, too. And our eyes caught each other there. I thought of turtles and smiled. I love turtles.

“You’re psychologically troubled, clearly suffering from some form of underlying mental or neurological illness, and in need of as much sleep as I am. This case is a downright silly thing to bring to the Greatest Detective the World Has Ever Known.” I poured myself another gin and tonic, admiring the drink’s clarity and the way the room’s fluorescent lights bounced in and around the carvings of the glass as I turned it. I turned to him (dramatically). “I accept. Why wouldn’t I?”

He frowned now. “I *am* being serious about all of this.”

“So am I. Feelings change, turtle man—sometimes suddenly, sometimes dramatically, and sometimes for silly reasons. But just because something is silly doesn’t mean it’s not also serious.”

An open mind receives the world as it is; a closed mind tells the world what it is. I will let no one accuse Henry Gaspard of being closed-minded. What Junichi Mori purported to have happened sounded impossible, and that is precisely why I needed to solve it.

Let us pause here. You see, I consider myself something of an engineer. When engineers design something, they must consider the constraints they are working with—the parameters that will eventually define the solution. Consider, for instance, a car: it must be below a certain weight so as to avoid additional taxation; the bill of materials must fall below a certain dollar value to maintain profit margins; it must have such-and-such fuel efficiency; and so on. For the engineer, designing a car is a matter of working within these constraints and optimizing for each one. To the engineer, every problem has exactly one best solution. To find this solution, the engineer need only identify all his constraints and eliminate all degrees of freedom. This process is my process. I am an engineer *of mysteries*. I start with infinite possibilities and investigate for clues; using these clues, I subtract incrementally from the infinite space of possibility until one Truth prevails. A mathematician will tell you it is impossible to subtract integers from infinity and arrive at one. I will tell you that no mathematician ever designed a good car. I do the impossible on a daily basis. I drive a Mazda Miata. I am Henry Gaspard.

So, anyway, that’s how Jun-boy and I met, and now I’m going to talk about what we did afterwards.

But before we dive into this whateverdunit in earnest, I have a secret *second* thesis that I must convey to you—one that didn't make its way into the title of this story. My secret second thesis, paradoxically, and a little provocatively, but nonetheless genuinely, is simply this: THIS STORY IS A LIE.

It may or may not come as a surprise considering my line of work, but I don't believe in testimony—any testimony, in fact. The very act of telling a story is an act of lying, no matter how true or objective it may seem to be. Even when you're telling the truth, it means being at least a little bit wrong. It means leaving out details. It means simplifying for comprehension. It means telling it from one perspective to the detriment of the entire rest of the universe. Sadly, I lack complete knowledge of the entire rest of the universe. At any rate, I would keep this secret second thesis in mind as you read my testimony herein. Okay, are you ready? Then let's get started.