

STUDENT HANDOUT

Unit 3 Mystery Synopsis: Renters Beware

THE SET UP

"I'm going down to the basement to, uh... check on the laundry," Gerald yelled to his mother as he walked out of their apartment.

"Thanks!" his mother answered, thinking her 16-year-old son was simply helping out with household chores. What he really wanted was an excuse to prowl around the basement of their building.

Ever since Gerald and his family moved to New York City, he had helped out with the laundry a lot. The washing machines and dryers were in the basement, and the basement was where he might find . . . well, he could find anything. Gerald didn't expect to find suitcases of cash that some crook had stashed in the bowels of the building, but he thought he'd at least see a rat — one of those New York rats that's so big it says, "Here kitty, kitty."

He'd been doing the laundry and looking around for over a month now, but still hadn't found anything very exciting. A couple of times he had walked in on some other tenants flirting in the laundry room, like maybe they had a regular rendezvous in the basement. Another time he saw a guy pounding and kicking a washing machine. He didn't seem embarrassed when Gerald appeared — he just said, "For what we pay in rent, we shouldn't have to worry about busted equipment!" Rent, it figures. His mom was already stressing a little bit about the rent. Too bad she didn't have the deal that some of the older tenants had — it had something to do with rent control.

Whatever. Gerald still thought it would be cool to find a suitcase of cash hidden in one of the storage rooms or whatever those other rooms were down there. Maybe the reward money would cover a month's rent.

When he rounded the basement corner, something caught his eye. A door that always drew his attention and was never unlocked was — open! It was barely cracked, but it was open. He almost didn't know what to do. He felt an adrenaline rush and got shaky hands — this could be his big break. After loads and loads of laundry he finally arrived at the moment he'd been waiting for, but he hesitated. His mind began to trick him by telling him all the reasons why he *shouldn't* open the door.

Instead he ignored those thoughts, took a deep breath, and slowly pushed open the door. Gerald was ready for anything but prepared for nothing. He exhaled when he realized that nobody was in the room. It wasn't empty, though. He peeked around. A single light bulb revealed a maze of water pipes on the wall and some sort of makeshift chemistry lab in the middle of the room.

He saw a lot of flasks and beakers with tubes connecting them, and burners and other things that he recognized from his chemistry class. But what really caught his eye was the broken flask. It was broken off about halfway down the neck, and its contents were slowly dripping onto the floor. It appeared to be the only flask containing any liquid. He could see that there was a sheet of paper next to the flask. More curiously, there was also what appeared to be a bloody rag on the floor a few feet away, and what looked like a napkin with blood on it on the counter.

STUDENT HANDOUT

Gerald didn't really know what to make of it, but he had a hunch why the door was usually locked. Somebody didn't want other people in there fiddling around; they clearly wanted to keep the place secret. It looked like maybe someone had left in a hurry. Did whoever it was hear him coming down the stairs? He really wanted to check it out, but he had watched enough TV to know that you *don't disturb the evidence*. Still . . . he smiled at the thought of blowing the cover off a terrorist plot.

He left the room and the laundry and went upstairs to tell his mom what he'd found. He debated keeping it to himself, but something about the way that whole scene looked just wasn't right. His mom agreed, and together they called the police.

PEOPLE OF INTEREST

In this day and age, anything that may be remotely connected to terrorism takes a high priority, so the police arrived immediately. The lead investigator, Detective Glover, interviewed Gerald about how he had stumbled upon the scene. "So you saw that the door was unlocked, and you opened it?"

"Yes, ma'am." Gerald knew that now was the time to be very polite.

"It's normally locked then, I take it?" The detective didn't seem to suspect Gerald of any part in it, but he was taking no chances.

"Yes, ma'am," he repeated. "I come down here a lot to do the laundry for my mom. And ever since we moved here, I've always kinda wondered what was on the other side of that door, but it was always locked, so I never, you know, knew what it was."

Detective Glover asked him how long they'd lived there, and whether or not he'd ever noticed anything suspicious. One question in particular surprised him. "Gerald, what do you think is in there?" the detective asked, motioning in the direction of the dimly lit room.

"I don't know. My mom and I were afraid it might be connected to terrorism. That's why we called." Then Detective Glover surprised him again. She touched his shoulder reassuringly and thanked him for calling. As the detective turned away, one of the other investigators approached her and said something in a low voice. Gerald overheard the word "poison," which really got his mind racing.

After interviewing Gerald, other tenants, and people who worked in the building, Detective Glover had a short list of people she deemed "persons of interest." At that point in the investigation there was no hard evidence associating anyone with the lab, so there were no official suspects. However, since there were no signs of forced entry, the investigation centered on the six people who would have had access to the key that could unlock the door to the room. Mysteriously, the key was missing from the maintenance room rack where keys to all of the different utility rooms were kept. Interviews with each of the six people didn't reveal much, since all of them denied knowledge of the chemistry lab and the missing key.

STUDENT HANDOUT

Here are some notes that **Detective Glover** compiled on each of the persons of interest:



Dave Lowry, building superintendent – Mr. Lowry is an outgoing, older man. He is in charge of maintenance for two adjacent apartment buildings, and though he is not required to do any of the actual work himself, he frequently does. He has a large cut on his hand that he claims is from replacing a tenant's window the previous day.



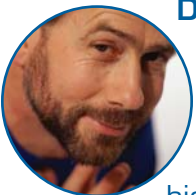
Elizabeth Green, secondary superintendent – Ms. Green tends to keep to herself. Quiet but extremely reliable and superb with tools, she is usually the person who handles the difficult maintenance jobs. She has numerous small cuts on her hands and has an explanation for most of them. None of the cuts seem big enough to bleed very much, if at all. One tenant claims to always hear her grumbling under her breath and swears she once kicked his cat. She also has a widely known phobia of dogs.



Harold Manning, plumber – Harry is pretty well known to most of the tenants, and most of them like him. He has worked there for 20 years. He is also a part owner of the building, having been paid with owner's shares in the building when they couldn't afford to pay him cash about six years ago. Like most plumbers, his hands and arms are pretty banged up.



Jeff Knight, majority owner – Jeff is not well-liked by several of the older tenants, who claim that he has tried to break their leases. Their maintenance problems always seem to be the last ones fixed. Newer tenants seem indifferent. He claims that the gash across his palm is the result of a recently broken air conditioning unit, which he returned early from a vacation to fix.



Derrick Jensen, custodian – Derrick doesn't really like the tenants, and they are pleasant to him only because they feel they have to be. In general, he thinks that the people who live there are unnecessarily dirty, intentionally leaving him messes to clean up. They think that he is too grumpy but treat him nicely because he does clean up a lot of messes. He has no obvious injuries. Derrick used to be a custodian at a local high school.



Kirsten Knight, co-owner – Kirsten isn't very well known. She is married to Jeff Knight and is also part owner of the building. Because she is a radiologist, she reportedly does nothing in the day-to-day operations of the building. She has access to the key, however. The tenants who live in the room directly below the Knights have said that the two of them argue frequently.

STUDENT HANDOUT**THE EVIDENCE**

The pieces of evidence collected at the scene confirm that Gerald was very observant. Since no one claims any knowledge or ownership of the lab, investigators have the following to go on: a rag and a napkin that may have blood on them (which could indicate that more than one person is involved if both test positive for blood and each sample contains a separate blood type); an unidentified liquid; and a sheet of printed paper that lists suspicious information about certain metal compounds. As the investigation begins, detectives are still trying to find a fingerprint anywhere in the lab.

YOUR TASK

Based on the information available at the scene, you must conduct a series of forensic experiments to help investigators determine the user and purpose of the lab.

