

THE JUNIE HARPER CRAFT MYSTERIES



# THE BRIAR CREEK CASE FILE

*A paper-trail puzzle from Harper's Handycrafts*

*Six documents. One quiet theft. Everything you need to solve it is already in your hands.*

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JUNIPER REED

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## HOW THIS WORKS



Junie Harper has never chased a criminal down an alley. She reads the paperwork. Sign-in sheets, supply orders, receipts, delivery logs. People lie in conversation all the time. They lie much less carefully on a form they filled out weeks ago, when they had no idea anyone would ever compare it to anything else.

That is the whole method, and it is the whole of this puzzle.

On the pages that follow you will find six documents from a single week at Harper's Handycrafts. Somebody walked out of that shop with something that did not belong to them. No one saw it happen. Nobody has confessed.

But the paperwork does not match itself, and that is always where the truth is hiding. Read the documents in order. Compare them against each other. When you think you have it, turn to the solution at the back.

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### THE SITUATION

On the evening of Thursday, March 14, Harper's Handycrafts hosted an eight-person beginner workshop, *Simple Shelves*. At closing on Friday morning, Junie discovered that a cordless drill, a set of forty-eight brass bin pulls, and one full box of walnut stain were missing from the back storage shelf.

The back storage shelf is not visible from the register. It is visible from exactly one place in the shop: the sink at the rear of the workshop floor, where students rinse their brushes.

Nothing was forced. Nothing was broken. The shop was locked at 8:40 p.m. and unlocked at 7:15 a.m.

#### Your job

*Name the person who took the missing items, and name the document that proves it.*

## EXHIBIT A

*Workshop sign-in sheet*



| NAME           | TIME IN | TIME OUT | STATION |
|----------------|---------|----------|---------|
| M. Alvarez     | 6:02    | 8:05     | 1       |
| D. Rooke       | 6:04    | 8:05     | 2       |
| P. Sundell     | 6:05    | 7:40     | 3       |
| J. Hobart      | 6:11    | 8:05     | 4       |
| C. Wren        | 6:15    | 8:05     | 5       |
| T. Bellweather | 6:15    | 8:05     | 6       |
| R. Okonjo      | 6:28    | 8:05     | 7       |
| L. Prine       | 6:31    | 7:15     | 8       |

Sheet initialed by N. Finch at 6:35 p.m. Class ran 6:00 to 8:00 p.m. Cleanup until 8:05.

## EXHIBIT B

*Station assignment card, posted at the door*



| STATION | LOCATION ON FLOOR         |
|---------|---------------------------|
| 1 - 2   | Front window bench        |
| 3 - 4   | Center island, north side |
| 5 - 6   | Center island, south side |
| 7       | Rear bench, by the sink   |
| 8       | Rear bench, by the sink   |

Stations 7 and 8 are the only positions with a sight line to the back storage shelf.

## EXHIBIT C

*Supply order, placed Monday, March 11*



| ITEM              | QTY | FOR            |
|-------------------|-----|----------------|
| Pine board, 1x8x6 | 10  | Simple Shelves |
| Brass bin pulls   | 48  | Simple Shelves |
| Walnut stain, qt  | 2   | Simple Shelves |
| Wood screws, #8   | 200 | Simple Shelves |
| Sanding blocks    | 10  | Simple Shelves |

Ordered for eight students plus two spares. Delivered Wednesday, March 13. Signed for by J. Harper.

## EXHIBIT D

*Register receipt, Thursday, March 14*



| TIME   | CUSTOMER   | ITEM                 | AMOUNT  |
|--------|------------|----------------------|---------|
| 7:12 p | L. Prine   | Brass bin pulls (6)  | \$14.40 |
| 7:14 p | L. Prine   | Walnut stain, qt (1) | \$18.00 |
| 7:38 p | P. Sundell | Sanding blocks (2)   | \$7.00  |
| 7:39 p | P. Sundell | Shop apron           | \$22.00 |

Register operated by N. Finch. No other sales recorded after 7:00 p.m.

## EXHIBIT E

*Note left on the workshop whiteboard*



Junie,

Took my drill home to finish the bracket at my own bench.  
Will have it back Saturday. Dont let anyone tell you the  
cordless is better, it isnt.

T.B.

Undated. Junie photographed the board Friday morning at 7:20 a.m.

## EXHIBIT F

*Junie's own inventory notes, Friday morning*



### MISSING FROM BACK SHELF

Cordless drill (the shop's, not the loaner). Charging base still here, battery gone with it.

Brass bin pulls. Forty-eight ordered, ten used in class, six sold. Thirty-two should be on the shelf. Shelf is empty.

Walnut stain. Two quarts delivered, one opened for class and still on the bench, one sold. The full box the second quart came in is gone, and so is the quart.

*Note to self: the back shelf cannot be seen from the register. You have to be standing at the sink. And you have to be standing there when Nora is looking the other way, which on Thursday means after seven, because that is when the register gets busy.*

## WORK IT OUT



Junie would take a legal pad and three questions. Try them in order.

1. Who had a sight line to the back shelf?

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2. Who was still in the building after seven, when the register was busy?

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3. Whose paperwork contradicts itself?

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My answer

The person who took them

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The document that proves it

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## THE SOLUTION



*Read no further until you have your answer.*



## WHAT THE PAPER SAYS



It was L. Prine, and Exhibit D proves it.

Start with sight lines. Only stations 7 and 8 can see the back storage shelf, which narrows eight people to two: R. Okonjo at station 7 and L. Prine at station 8.

Okonjo signed out at 8:05 with the rest of the class, in a room full of people, during cleanup. Prine signed out at 7:15, alone, while everyone else was still working. That is the only window in the evening when one person is moving through the shop unobserved.

Now the contradiction. At 7:12 and 7:14, Prine bought six brass bin pulls and one quart of walnut stain at the register. Those are the two items that went missing in bulk from the back shelf.

People do not pay for six of a thing and then steal thirty-two of the same thing on their way out. That would be absurd. Which is exactly why it works. The receipt is not a purchase. It is an alibi, bought for thirty-two dollars and forty cents.

The receipt puts Prine at the register, hands full, in Nora's sight, holding a bag that already contains bin pulls and walnut stain. Anyone who later saw Prine leaving with bin pulls and walnut stain would remember the purchase, not the theft. The bag was papered before it was filled.

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## AND THE OTHER TWO

P. Sundell signed out at 7:40 and also bought something on the way out, which makes for a tidy second suspect. But Sundell worked station 3, center island, north side. No sight line to the back shelf. Sundell never knew the shelf was worth walking to.

T. Bellweather left the whiteboard note about the drill, which looks like a confession until you read it properly. Bellweather took a drill, said so in writing, signed it, and promised a return date. Thieves do not leave initialed notes on a whiteboard for the owner to photograph. Exhibit F settles it anyway: the missing drill went with its battery and left the charging base behind. Bellweather, a bench woodworker with strong opinions about cordless tools, would have taken the base too.

*"The receipt was the mistake. Not because it was wrong, but because it was too well timed. Nobody buys six bin pulls at seven twelve and forgets they needed forty. You buy six because you already know where the other forty-two are, and you want a piece of paper that says you paid for the ones in your hand."*

*Junie Harper*

# THE METHOD

*How Junie reads a paper trail*



Compare two records of the same hour.

One document is just a claim. Two documents covering the same window either agree or they do not, and the gap between them is where the truth lives.

Ask who could see, not who could reach.

Access is easy to argue about. Sight lines are fixed. A floor plan settles in ten seconds what an argument cannot settle in an hour.

Notice what was paid for.

A receipt is a story someone chose to tell about themselves. Ask why they wanted that particular story on file.

Trust the boring document.

Nobody forges a sign-in sheet. Nobody thinks to. The dulllest page in the folder is usually the honest one.

Watch for the too-tidy explanation.

A signed note, a helpful volunteer, a witness who offers an alibi you did not ask for. Tidiness is a decision, and decisions have reasons.

*Junie learned all five of these the hard way, in a shop that had just been wrapped in police tape. That story is Duct Tape & Dead Ends.*

## BEHIND THE WORKSHOP DOOR



You have just solved a case the way Junie solves them. With paper, patience, and a stubborn refusal to let two documents disagree in peace.

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#### Duct Tape & Dead Ends · *Book One*

*A sold-out DIY workshop turns into a crime scene, and Junie's own tools are logged as evidence.*

#### Yarn Over Yonder · *Book Two*

*The Pop-Up Craft Fair loses its organizer, and the ledger that could explain why has gone missing.*

#### Glittered Guilt · *Book Three*

*A high-end commission ends in a death, and Junie's glitter is the trace evidence tying her to it.*

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# Behind the Workshop Door

Junie's prequel story first, then four more from Briar Creek over the following week and a half. Spoiler-free, so it does not matter where you are in the series.

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## **The Second Key - A Junie Harper Prequel**

The first thing Junie Harper ever solved. Before the workshops, before the police tape.

## **Welcome to Briar Creek - Town Guide**

Who runs what, and who has stopped speaking to whom.

## **The Measure Twice Project Planner**

Junie's own planner, for projects and for everything else.

## **Harper's Handycrafts Project Cards**

Five projects from the workshop, on cards you can print.

## **The Morningside Coffee Companion**

Recipes from the corner table.

**OPEN BEHIND THE WORKSHOP DOOR**

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