

# The Case of the Missing Gazette

## A Maplewood Mini Mystery

*One edition vanished before sunrise.  
One article disappeared without explanation.  
And somebody clearly didn't want the town to read it.*



# Saturday Morning in Maplewood

Rain tapped softly against the windows of Maplewood while Bud waited patiently beside the front door with yesterday's newspaper folded neatly in his mouth.

Saturday mornings usually followed a dependable rhythm in town.

The bakery opened first.

The street sweepers arrived second.

And by seven-thirty sharp, the newest edition of the *Maplewood Gazette* appeared in every newspaper stand across town.

Except this morning.

This morning, the newspaper boxes were empty.

Every single one.

Harlene noticed it immediately.

Bud did too.

The old green newspaper stand outside Grover's Pharmacy rattled quietly in the wind while rainwater dripped from the metal roof overhead. Usually, the stand would already be half empty by now.

Today, there was only one newspaper left behind.

Just one.

Harlene carefully pulled the damp paper free and unfolded it beneath the pharmacy awning.

That was when she noticed something strange.

One section of the newspaper had been carefully removed.

Not torn.

Cut.

A perfect rectangle was missing directly from the center of page three.

And near the bottom corner of the surviving page, someone had circled a classified advertisement using a red carpenter's pencil.

Bud tilted his head.

Harlene narrowed her eyes.

"What in the actual mystery?"



# Inside the Gazette Office

The Maplewood Gazette building always smelled faintly like rainwater, coffee, and fresh ink.

Harlene liked that.

It smelled like stories.

Warm amber lights still glowed inside the office even though the morning edition should have been delivered hours ago. Rows of old filing cabinets stretched toward the back archive room while stacks of bundled newspapers sat neatly beside the press area.

Mr. Bellamy, the night press operator, stood near the printing machine holding a coffee mug with both hands.

He looked tired.

“The press jammed around midnight,” he explained quickly. “Delayed the whole run.”

Harlene studied the room quietly.

The printing machine looked clean.

Too clean.

No scattered paper.

No spilled ink.

No torn pages near the rollers.

Even Bud seemed uncertain.

Instead of sniffing around the machine, Bud wandered toward the delivery cart parked beside the back hallway.

Then he stopped.

His ears lifted slightly.

Harlene noticed immediately.

“Bud?” she asked softly.

Bud sniffed the empty newspaper bags carefully.

Then he sat beside the cart without moving.

Interesting.

Very interesting.

# The Clues Begin to Gather

Harlene carefully unfolded the surviving newspaper again beneath one of the green banker's lamps.

The missing article had been removed with remarkable precision.

Almost carefully enough to preserve it.

That mattered.

Most people destroying evidence worked quickly.

This felt deliberate.

She examined the red pencil circle again.

"Community Gathering — Tonight At 7 PM

Maplewood Riverside Pavilion

Bring Lanterns"

Nothing dangerous.

Nothing secret.

At least not at first glance.

Across town, Edith Vale waited beside the delivery counter wearing a raincoat dotted with tiny water droplets.

"The papers were already gone when I arrived," she explained. "Every delivery bag was empty."

"Did you see anyone else here?" Harlene asked.

Edith hesitated.

"Walter Finch stopped by earlier."

"The hardware store owner?"

Edith nodded.

"He looked nervous."

That was the second time Walter Finch's name had appeared connected to the missing article.

Bud wagged his tail once.

The mystery was beginning to narrow.

# Finch Hardware

The bell above the hardware store door jingled softly as Harlene and Bud stepped inside.

Walter Finch stood behind the counter organizing boxes of nails with unusual intensity.

Too unusual.

People stacking nails normally did not glance toward the front window every few seconds.

Harlene noticed something else immediately.

A fresh streak of red carpenter's pencil marked the edge of Walter's coat pocket.

The same color used to circle the classified advertisement.

Walter noticed her staring and quickly folded his arms.

"You kids need something?"

"Just answers," Harlene replied calmly.

Walter sighed.

"I already told everybody. I don't know anything about missing newspapers."

"But you knew there was a missing newspaper," Harlene said quietly.

Walter froze.

For one small moment, the store became perfectly silent except for rain tapping against the front windows.

Bud looked up slowly.

Walter rubbed the back of his neck.

"That doesn't prove anything."

"No," Harlene agreed. "But it proves you're worried."

# Something Doesn't Fit

Back inside the Gazette archives, Harlene spread the clues across the large investigation table.

Bud rested beside the chair with one paw stretched across the town delivery map.

The room glowed warmly against the rainy blue-gray afternoon outside the windows.

Harlene reviewed the evidence carefully:

- The article had been removed neatly.
- The printing press showed no signs of jamming.
- Walter Finch carried the same red carpenter's pencil.
- The classified advertisement pointed toward the riverside pavilion.
- And Bud had reacted more strongly to the delivery cart than the printing press itself.

That was the detail everyone else missed.

If the newspapers had disappeared because of a press problem...

Why did the fresh ink smell remain strongest near the delivery bags?

Harlene leaned back slowly.

Then she smiled.

"I think I know what happened."

Bud wagged his tail once.



# Detective Review

## Before You Read Captain Harlene's Findings...

Stop here.

Something happened inside the Maplewood Gazette before sunrise.

One article disappeared.

The delivery bags were empty.

Walter Finch acted nervous.

And somebody clearly wanted one story hidden before the newspapers reached the town.

Now it's your turn.

## Detective Questions

- Who removed the article?
- Why remove only one story instead of the entire newspaper?
- Why did Bud react to the delivery cart?
- Which clue changed the timeline of the mystery?
- Was this really a crime?

Take a moment and study the clues one more time.

Write your theory below before turning the page.

## My Findings:

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# Captain Harlene's Findings

Walter Finch removed the missing article himself.

But not because he wanted to hide a crime.

The missing article contained details about a surprise lantern gathering planned for that evening beside the river pavilion.

The event had been secretly organized for Mr. Harper — the retiring editor of the *Maplewood Gazette* — after more than thirty years of writing stories about Maplewood and the people who lived there.

Walter helped organize the celebration.

When he realized the newspaper accidentally printed the surprise too early, he panicked.

He quietly removed the article before the delivery route began.

Mr. Bellamy agreed to help delay the papers by pretending the press had jammed.

That explained why the machine looked spotless.

There had never been a jam at all.

And Bud noticed the truth before anyone else.

The fresh scent of ink remained strongest near the delivery cart because the newspapers had already been stacked for delivery before the article was removed.

The press room itself had been inactive for hours.

Walter lowered his head slightly.

“I didn’t want to ruin the surprise,” he admitted quietly.

Harlene folded the surviving newspaper carefully.

“Not every missing thing is stolen,” she said softly.

“Sometimes people hide things because they care about them too much.”

Bud wagged his tail once in agreement.

Outside, the rain had finally begun to slow.

And across Maplewood, porch lights were beginning to glow warmly against the foggy evening streets.

# Case Closed

## **CASE FILE SUMMARY**

### **Mystery:**

A missing newspaper article vanished before the morning delivery.

### **Key Clue:**

The fresh ink scent remained strongest near the delivery cart, not the printing press.

### **Detective Observation:**

The missing article had been removed carefully, not angrily.

### **Final Conclusion:**

The article was hidden to protect a surprise community celebration.

### **Official Status:**

## **CASE CLOSED**

Investigators:

### **Captain Harlene & Bud**

Maplewood Gazette Archives

Case File #001