

The Case of the Borrowed Baby



You drive to one of the city's fanciest addresses in response to a phone call about a kidnapping. You ring and the door is opened by a distraught-looking housemaid. "Thank goodness, you're here!" she cries.

"Mr and Mrs Tan are away for the weekend," she goes on.

"I was left in charge of Jerry. He's two years old. I left him playing in his room with all his toys, and went downstairs to the kitchen. Then I thought I heard some footsteps upstairs, so I rushed up to the baby's room – and there a man was climbing out the window with Jerry in his arms! I just stood there in a state of shock. Then I screamed and ran to the window.



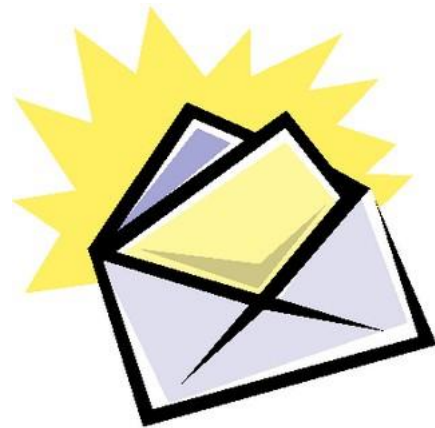
"I saw the man jump off the ladder when he was about 3 metres from the ground – with the baby! He almost dropped Jerry when he landed! Then he ran to a black car, tossed the baby in, and raced away." She bursts into sobs.

You look at the crumpled blankets on the baby's bed, and the spilled baby powder all over the floor. A set of a large man's footprints in the powder lead from the bed to the open window. Everything else in the room is neat and orderly.



You go outside the house and around to where the ladder leans against the house, under the baby's window. There are a few faint footprints in the soft dirt around the foot of the ladder, but nothing else of any interest, on the ground or on the ladder.

The maid joins you and shows you a piece of paper she says was in the mailbox. You read: "Your baby will come back alive for \$50 000. You'll hear from us soon."



"Do you think we should phone Mr and Mrs Tan?" she asks.

"By all means," you say. "As soon as you tell me where the baby is!"

Why do you suspect the maid?

Solution:

First, because you found only a man's footprints in the powder on the floor. If the maid rushed over to the window as she said, her footprints would have been there too.

Secondly, you found no traces of powder on the rungs of the ladder; and, on the ground below, you found only faint footprints. Yet, if the man had jumped from the ladder while 3 metres off the ground, as she said, there would have been deep impressions in the soft dirt. Finally, the maid said she had left the baby playing with toys in his room. But, except for the powder and messy blankets, the room was all in order.