

What's in a Name

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It may not seem like it, but names actually mean a great deal and can often say something about one's personality - and boy, does Jessica Fletcher's name say a lot about her, as her good friend Seth points out to her. I'm pleased to say that this is my first-ever Murder, She Wrote fanfic - but it definitely will not be my last!

"Father's joy! Just what I was looking for!"

Seth Hazlitt looked up from his newspaper when his best friend cried out in delight. Jessica, aka J.B. Fletcher, had spent the better part of the morning poring over a book – a book of baby names, no less – in research for her newest novel. "You're looking for a father's joy? I always thought you would've been your daddy's darling since the day you were born, Jess."

Jessica laughed. "No, Seth. Although I was lucky enough to have a father who loved me, I'm actually looking for a name that means 'father's joy,' and did I ever just find one. Abigail. Abigail means 'father's joy.'"

Seth nodded once and took a swig of the coffee that Jessica had brewed for breakfast. "You writing about fathers and daughters?"

"Something like that. This story is about a patriarch who is stabbed to death in his bedroom, and the only suspects are his daughters. The eldest is Amelia, a sensible girl who has always worked hard to provide for the family, and that is exactly what her name means: 'industrious.' The middle child, Perdita, is unfortunately the forgotten one, and her name fittingly means 'lost.' The youngest of the sisters, being the baby of the family, is and always has been the apple of her father's eye – hence the name Abigail, 'father's joy.'"

"Sounds like you've got it all together, Jess. Heck, you probably already know which one of them did it. But just so you know, my money's on the middle girl."

"Wager away, Seth, but watch yourself. I just might surprise you," Jessica said with a sly grin.

"You always do." Seth gazed thoughtfully at her, nursing his mug of coffee in quiet contemplation. "Just out of curiosity... is my name in that book?"

"I don't see why it wouldn't be. Here, let me take a look." Jessica slipped her glasses back onto her face and rifled through the thick book of names, flipping pages until she came to a listing somewhere in the S section of the boy names. "Aha, here we are!" She rose from her typewriter at the opposite end of the kitchen table and slid around to the chair next to Seth, setting the book in front of them so they could both read it. "Right here," she said, pointing her index finger at an entry near the top of the left-hand page. "The name Seth is of Hebrew origin, originally the name of the third son of Adam and Eve, and roughly translates to 'appointed.'"

"Appointed, eh? Nobody appointed me the town doctor."

"No, but you're my self-appointed chess partner – and protector, upon occasion. I think your name suits you perfectly."

Seth grinned. Jessica always knew exactly what to say to make his day. Aside from her obvious talent for crafting stories, her greatest gifts were compassion and encouragement. She was the kindest woman he'd ever known and had a heart of pure gold, going out of her way to comfort anyone who was hurting and never at a loss for words of faith and praise to boost even the lowest of spirits. She was a blessing to all who knew her, and Seth loved her all the more for it.

"Well, I'm glad you think so." His eyes darted down to the book and back up to her face. "While we're at it, how 'bout we look up your name?"

"My name?" Jessica's big blue eyes widened behind her glasses. "What on Earth could be so special about my name?"

Her and her modesty. "Well, we won't know until we look, will we?" He took the book in hand and leafed ahead to the girls' names until he got to the Js.

"Jessica, Jessica... here it is! Well, your name is a Hebrew name, too. Holy crow, it has two meanings. 'Rich' and 'gift from God.' If those don't fit you to a T, I don't know what does."

Jessica, in typical self-effacement, shook her head. "Oh Seth, just because I've made a decent living writing books doesn't mean I'm rich!"

"Maybe not, Jess, but everybody's richer for knowing you. And you sure are a gift from the Almighty."

"Seth, for goodness' sake! You're making me blush!"

Her cheeks were indeed getting pinker, but Seth ignored her plea and continued on. "As long as I'm on a roll, let's look up your middle name." He flipped back to the *Bs*. "Well, Beatrice is a Latin name, and it means both 'she who blesses' and 'bringer of joy.' Boy, your parents were right on the money when they named you."

This was too much for Jessica, who buried her face in her hands, blushing to the roots of her blonde hair. "Oh, Lord," she chuckled, "I don't know how much more of this I can take!" She straightened herself up and tried not to laugh, but her face was still flushed a brilliant pink and her eyes were sparkling like bright sapphires. "So... I'm rich, a gift from God, a blessing, and a bringer of joy. I don't think I've received quite this much praise from the critics who review my books!"

Seth couldn't help smiling. She'd lifted him up so many times that it felt wonderful to return the favor. "Get set, because I've got more where that came from. You bring joy to everyone who loves your books, and to darn near everyone who knows you. You bless all of us when you offer your shoulder for someone to cry on, a kind word for anybody down in the dumps, or a hug for anyone who needs it. You've got a beautiful heart, Jess. Anybody'd be blessed to have you as a friend."

Jessica looked as though she might cry. "Do you mean it?"

"Ayuh. Every word. I know I'm blessed to have you."

"Oh, Seth..." Jessica pushed her chair even closer and wrapped her arms around him. "Have I told you how much I love you?"

The question took him by surprise... and filled him with a rush of hope. No matter how she had meant it, she had just brought him joy again, true to her name. "No. But I think I'm getting an idea of just how much."

"Oh!" Jessica's warm laughter filled the kitchen as the two of them embraced – the appointed protector and his gift from God, blessed beyond measure with love and joy.