

Dan's English Student Original Story

Starter

THE OLD MAN AND THE TILES



The Old Man and the Tiles

Mr. Tanaka and Mahjong

Mr. Kenji Tanaka is an old man. He is eighty years old. He likes to play Mahjong. He plays Mahjong every day. He plays at the Community Center. The Center is a big, old building.

Every year, the Center has a big Mahjong competition. The winner gets a gold cup. Mr. Tanaka wants the gold cup. He is the best player. He is always happy when he wins.

This year, the final game is near. Mr. Tanaka feels good. He thinks, "I will win this year. The gold cup will be mine."

He sits at his small table. He looks at the Mahjong tiles. They are smooth and cool. He smiles. He loves the game.

But on Monday, something changes. Mr. Tanaka does not smile. He looks worried. His friend, Mrs. Eiko Sato, sees him. Mrs. Sato is seventy-five. She is a good friend.

"Kenji," she says. "You look sad. What is the matter?"

Mr. Tanaka looks around the room. Many people are there. He speaks quietly. "I have a problem, Eiko. A bad problem."

He tells her his secret.

The Bad Message

Mr. Tanaka has a letter. It is a bad letter. He gets it two days ago.

"The letter is not from a friend," Mr. Tanaka says. "It is from an anonymous person."

Mrs. Sato is surprised. "Anonymous? What does it say?"

Mr. Tanaka opens his small bag. He takes out the paper. It is printed on a machine. The writing is big and black.

Mrs. Sato reads the words. They are terrible.

The letter says: "Do not play the final game. If you play, something bad will happen. You will be very sorry."

Then, the letter says more. It has death threats. Terrible words about his family. Mr. Tanaka's hands shake when he holds the paper.

"Death threats!" Mrs. Sato whispers. "This is a serious problem, Kenji. Who does this?"

"I do not know," he says. "The writer is anonymous. I cannot see a name. I do not know who is angry with me."

The Three Rivals

Mr. Tanaka has three big rivals. They are the other players in the final game.

The first is Mr. Hiroshi Mori. Mr. Mori is eighty-two. He is always quiet. He never smiles. He wants the gold cup very much. Mr. Mori needs money. The Center gives the winner money too.

The second is Miss Aiko Nomura. Miss Nomura is seventy. She is a strong player. She often argues with Mr. Tanaka about the rules. They do not like each other.

The third is Mr. Toshiro Kato. Mr. Kato is the youngest player, only sixty-eight. He plays Mahjong like a fast train. Mr. Tanaka always says, "Toshiro is too fast! He does not think!" Mr. Kato does not like this.

Mrs. Sato looks at the three rivals. "One of them sends the anonymous letter," she thinks. "One of them sends the death threats."

The Big Day

It is Saturday. The day of the final game. The Center room is full. Many old people sit and watch. The gold cup is on a small table. It shines brightly.

Mr. Tanaka, Mr. Mori, Miss Nomura, and Mr. Kato sit down. They all look at the tiles.

Mr. Tanaka feels sick. He is scared because of the death threats. But he wants the cup. He decides to play.

The game starts.

Mahjong tiles click. Click, click, click.

Mr. Kato plays fast. Miss Nomura plays carefully. Mr. Mori plays slowly. Mr. Tanaka is trying to play, but he feels tired.

After one hour, Mr. Tanaka feels very bad. His head hurts. His hand shakes more than before.

"Stop!" he says. "I must stop."

He stands up. He feels dizzy. He cannot stand straight. He falls back into his chair.

A doctor comes quickly. "He is sick," the doctor says. "He must go home now."

Mr. Tanaka cannot play. The game stops. The final is over for him.

The Detective

Mr. Tanaka goes home. He is sad and tired. He does not get the cup.

Mrs. Sato stays at the Center. She is angry. "Someone does this," she thinks. "It is not just sickness. It is the letter. It is the anonymous person."

Mr. Mori wins the gold cup. He does not look happy. He just takes the cup and the money.

Mrs. Sato goes to Mr. Tanaka's house on Sunday. "How are you, Kenji?" she asks.

"Better," he says. "But still angry. Who sends the death threats? Why do I feel sick?"

"I will find out," Mrs. Sato says. "I will be the detective."

The Phone Clue

Mrs. Sato begins her investigation. She talks to the rivals.

First, Mr. Mori. He says, "I know nothing about letters. I just want to win. The money is important for me."

Second, Miss Nomura. She says, "I do not like Mr. Tanaka, but I do not send death threats. That is bad."

Third, Mr. Kato. He looks nervous. "I am fast, not mean," he says. "I do not send the anonymous paper."

Mrs. Sato thinks about Mr. Kato. He looks very nervous. She looks at his table near the door. There is a small, plastic bag on the floor.

She asks him, "Toshiro, what is in the plastic bag?"

Mr. Kato looks at his feet. "Nothing," he says. "Just trash."

But Mrs. Sato looks closer. She sees a small box in the bag. The box is for a phone. A very small, cheap phone.

"A cheap phone?" Mrs. Sato thinks. "The kind of phone people buy and use only once?"

The Disposable Devices

Mrs. Sato goes to a small shop near the Center. It is a phone shop.

She talks to the young man in the shop. "I am looking for a special phone," she says. "A very cheap one. People call them burner phones."

The young man looks surprised. "A burner phone? Yes. Many people buy them. Use them once, then throw them away. Why do you need one?"

Mrs. Sato does not tell him about the death threats. "It is for a game," she says. "A secret game."

"We sell many of those phones," the young man says. "Last week, an old man buys one. He is short, maybe sixty-five to seventy years old. He pays cash. No name, no ID."

Mr. Kato is sixty-eight. He is short. He pays cash for things. Mrs. Sato's heart beats fast.

"Did he buy any other things?" she asks.

"Yes," the young man says. "He buys a lot of printer paper. Black paper for printing letters."

The anonymous letter is printed on black paper!

The Simple Truth

Mrs. Sato goes to Mr. Kato's house again. She sees Mr. Kato in his garden. He is digging a hole.

"Toshiro," she says. "I know about the paper. I know about the cheap phone. The burner phones."

Mr. Kato drops his small shovel. His face is red.

"The anonymous letter is from you," Mrs. Sato says. "The death threats are lies. You just want Mr. Tanaka to stop."

"Yes," Mr. Kato says sadly. "I want to win. I am tired of Mr. Tanaka calling me 'fast' and 'not thinking.' I want to show I am the best. The cup is important."

"And the sickness?" Mrs. Sato asks.

"Just a little medicine in his tea," Mr. Kato confesses. "It makes people tired. Not dangerous. Just very tired. I put it in his cup before the game. I am sorry, Eiko. I am very, very sorry."

The Last Move

Mrs. Sato does not call the police. The Center is for old friends. She is not a judge.

She makes Mr. Kato tell Mr. Tanaka the truth.

Mr. Tanaka is very angry. "You cheat, Toshiro! You send death threats with a burner phone! You are a bad man!"

Mr. Kato cries. He gives the gold cup back. He gives the money back.

Mr. Mori is the next best player. He gets the cup and the money. He finally smiles.

Mr. Tanaka and Mr. Kato do not play Mahjong together for one year.

After one year, Mr. Tanaka invites Mr. Kato to the Center.

"The game is better with four people," Mr. Tanaka says. "And Toshiro, I have a new rule. Think fast, but play slow. And never send an anonymous letter again."

They sit down at the table. The tiles click. Click, click, click.

The game is on. The secret game is over.