

Case #1: The Great Maple Syrup Heist

World famous detective Atlas Salta was walking home from school when the familiar red magnifying glass started flashing across the screen of his smart watch. He poked at the screen. “Atlas Salta,” he said. “Heists handled hastily.”

“Oh, thank goodness,” came a voice over the watch. “This is Inspector Kerfuffle and I’ve got a bit of a sticky situation here in Canada. It seems someone has stolen several thousand gallons of maple syrup. Can you help?”

At only 12 years old, Atlas was already the world’s leading expert in heists of all sorts. His parents didn’t mind him consulting on cases as long as he finished all his homework and got home in time for bed.

“Send me your location and I’ll be there as soon as I can.”

Minutes later, Atlas arrived home. Instead of going inside, he went around the house to the treehouse in the backyard. His dad was a nuclear physicist and had built him a transporter there that could take him anywhere in the world in just a few seconds. To anyone else, the transporter looked like an ordinary plastic tube slide.

Atlas quickly punched in the location on the keypad next to the slide. Blue lights started flashing inside the slide. He climbed inside and pushed off.

There was a bright flash of light. In the next moment, he found himself standing inside a huge warehouse filled with shiny steel barrels. People in police uniforms were all over the place. A tall man in a black trenchcoat walked quickly toward him.

“Thank you for coming so quickly,” the man said. “I’m Inspector Kerfuffle.”

“I’m happy to help,” Atlas said. “What do you know so far?”

“As you can see, this warehouse is used for storing maple syrup,” said Kerfuffle. He pointed all around them where huge barrels were stacked five and six high, nearly to the ceiling. “Earlier today, a local auditor tried to pull himself up on a barrel and it toppled over. He nearly did as well, but thankfully he was not injured.”

Atlas studied the nearest barrel. “A barrel this size full of maple syrup should be very heavy, right?”

“Yes, about 600 pounds. Plenty heavy to support the man’s weight. But when he opened it, he found it was empty. He went on to find many more empty barrels. We suspect the thief pumped the syrup into separate barrels and left the empty ones here to cover the crime. In all, we estimate the loss to be over a million dollars.”

Atlas whistled. “That’s a lot of money.”

“Indeed,” said Kerfuffle. “That’s why around here, maple syrup is known as liquid gold.”

“Do you have any ideas who did it?” Atlas asked.

Inspector Kerfuffle handed him a sheet of paper. “We’ve identified these five potential suspects.”

THE SUSPECT LIST

- **Sticky Sue:** She’s a local businesswoman known for driving around in a big black SUV and dealing in black market maple syrup. Her license plate reads: LQD GLD
(5’8” * Right-handed * Blue eyes * Blond hair)
- **Guzzling Gus:** He’s a former security guard at the warehouse and claims he’s had maple syrup with every meal since 1983.
(5’7” * Left-handed * Brown eyes * Brown hair)

- **Sweet Stan:** He's the owner of the town bakery where the not-so-secret ingredient in every delectable treat is...you guessed it, maple syrup.
(5'2" * Right-handed * Blue eyes * Blond hair)
- **Ron Around:** He's a real estate investor who owns the warehouse where the syrup is stored. He's developing a theme park called Syrup World but his contractor is having trouble sticking to the schedule.
(6'2" * Right-handed * Green eyes * Black hair)
- **Yoga Jane:** She runs the town yoga studio and also sells a line of lotions made from syrup that claim to give your skin "that healthy maple-y glow."
(5'4" * Right-handed * Brown eyes * Red hair)

"Once I have a list of suspects," Atlas said, "I always rely on M.O.M. to narrow it down."

Inspector Kerfuffle's eyebrows pressed together. "Er, we're going to ask your mother?"

"Not exactly," Atlas said. "M.O.M. stands for Means, Opportunity, and Motive. Once you figure out which suspect has all three of those, you've found your crook."

"Oh, of course," Kerfuffle said, chuckling awkwardly. "That's just what I was thinking."

WHO HAD THE MEANS?

“Let’s start with Means,” Atlas said. “Or in other words, who had the ability and tools to carry out the crime? Based on your investigation, what was needed to steal the syrup?”

After consulting with his detectives, Inspector Kerfuffle provided the following list:

- A really big pump: Because an ordinary drinking straw just won’t cut it for guzzling that many gallons of syrup.
- A large truck: Sure, maybe you could do like the old song says and “Roll Out the Barrel,” but moving a lot of 600-pound containers of syrup that way isn’t exactly a barrel of fun.
- A barrel opener: You need more than sticky fingers to open one of those steel behemoths.
- A key: Whoever it was would have needed to be able to get into the warehouse in the first place.

Inspector Kerfuffle also provided the following clues that he and his team had collected.

CLUES:

- Ron reported that he couldn’t locate his warehouse key. He’d first noticed it was missing after his weekly session of goat yoga.
- A recent water leak had filled the bakery with several inches of water that needed to be pumped out.
- A search of the dumpster behind the warehouse turned up a barrel opener designed for left-handed people.
- Sue and Ron were overheard outside the town diner arguing about which is better: trucks or SUVs.

	SUE	GUS	STAN	RON	JANE
BIG PUMP					
TRUCK					
BARREL OPENER					
KEY					
RESULT					

WHO HAD THE OPPORTUNITY?

“Based on the evidence,” Atlas said, “it looks like we can eliminate Sue from our suspect list.”

“Indeed,” said Kerfuffle. “I suppose we can’t *stick* the blame on her.” He chuckled at his own joke.

Atlas glanced at him, then continued, “Let’s look at Opportunity next. What do we know about who was in the area on that night and therefore could have committed the crime?”

CLUES:

- Just before the security cameras at the warehouse malfunctioned, they picked up someone with red hair creeping around the area.
- A traffic camera downtown spotted a van with a muffin painted on its side speeding away from the direction of the warehouse on the night of the crime.
- A local woman out walking her dog saw someone enter the warehouse at midnight. She wasn’t close enough to recognize any details but noted that the person didn’t have to duck to walk through the six-foot-high doorway.

	GUS	STAN	RON	JANE
EYE WITNESS				
SECURITY FOOTAGE				
TRAFFIC CAMERA				
RESULT				

WHO HAD THE RIGHT MOTIVE TO STEAL THE SYRUP?

“It appears that Ron didn’t do it either,” Atlas said after reviewing all the evidence.

“That leaves us with three suspects.”

“How do we figure out who our thief was?” Inspector Kerfuffle asked.

“The last step is to look at motives,” Atlas said. “That should point us to the right person. Based on my experience, these are three of the most common reasons for committing crimes:

1. Money: You can buy a lot of stuff with that kind of cash. Like, maybe a giant pitcher to hold all that syrup.
2. Revenge: They say it’s a dish best served cold. Preferably with a side of maple syrup.
3. Love: It makes the world go round. It also occasionally makes people commit felonies.”

“Okay,” Inspector Kerfuffle said, “I think we can use these clues to connect our suspects to their motives for wanting to steal all that maple syrup.”

CLUES:

- The warehouse had to fire its only security guard for “sampling” too much syrup. That might have put a bee in his bonnet.
- The rumor is that the town’s mayor, Ivan A. Waffle, is sweet on someone. Whoever that is, he’s been practically glowing lately.
- Based on the size of the crime, Atlas guess the thief was likely motivated by money.

	GUS	STAN	JANE
MONEY			
REVENGE			
LOVE			

WRAPPING UP THE CASE

When Atlas and Inspector Kerfuffle went to Sweet Stan's bakeshop and confronted him with the evidence, Stan quickly broke down and confessed to the crime. His bake shop had been underwater lately, both literally with the broken pipes and figuratively with bills piling up due to the high price of maple syrup. When he noticed Ron drop his key to the warehouse during their goat yoga session, he saw his chance to solve all his problems.

"But what about the barrel opener for lefties?" Inspector Kerfuffle asked.

"Oh, that," Stan said. "I accidentally ordered the wrong one, so I threw it in the trash."

"I see," Kerfuffle said, eyeing the donut case. "Then there's still the matter of the security cameras that saw a red-headed individual lurking around the warehouse on the night of the crime right before the feed cut out."

"Oh, heh heh," Yoga Jane chuckled apologetically. She'd been eavesdropping from the door of the bakeshop. "I was looking for my goat, Maple. I found her just as she was starting to snack on the electrical lines going into the warehouse. Goats will eat anything, you know."

"That must have killed the cameras," Atlas said. "A lucky break for our culprit, then."

"But thanks to you, his luck has run out," Inspector Kerfuffle said around a bite of a maple-frosted cream stick. He snapped a pair of handcuffs around Stan's wrists. "As someone whose main ingredient is maple syrup, you might say he's made some *pour* choices lately." His cheeks turned pink when nobody laughed.

Atlas checked his watch. “If you’ve got it from here, I can still make it home for dinner.”

“Oh yes, of course,” Kerfuffle said. “Thank you so much for your help. We couldn’t have solved the case without you.”

Atlas pressed the button on his watch labeled “Home.” The bakery dissolved in front of him, and moments later he found himself sitting at the end of his treehouse slide. He grabbed his backpack and jogged across the yard to his back door.

“Welcome home, son,” his mother greeted him from the kitchen. She was whisking some batter in a bowl. “You’re just in time for dinner.”

“Hey, Mom,” Atlas said. “What are we having?”

“Buttermilk waffles,” she said. “Would you like maple syrup with that?”

Atlas looked at the bottle on the kitchen counter. He’d had plenty of maple syrup for that day. “I think maybe I’ll do blueberry syrup instead.”

THE REAL-LIFE HEIST BEHIND THE HEISTOGRAM

The Great Canadian Maple Syrup Heist

Where: Saint-Louis-de-Blandford, Quebec, Canada

When: 2011-2012

Did you know that around 75% of the world's maple syrup comes from Canada? That's right. More than 7 out of every 10 bottles of the sweet, sticky breakfast topping comes from America's neighbor to the north. There's even a so-called "Maple Syrup Cartel" that controls the production and pricing of this tasty Canadian export. That same cartel—its official name is the Quebec Maple Syrup Producers—owned the warehouse that the one in this Heistogram was modeled after. The warehouse had more than 10,000 barrels of maple syrup. What it didn't have? Surveillance cameras. Guards. Or really any security system at all. Because really, who would want to steal maple syrup?

So they were completely caught off guard, so to speak, when a routine annual inspection uncovered the crime. As an inspector climbed among the barrels to check for leaks, he tried to pull himself up on one but instead both he and the barrel toppled over. That shouldn't have happened if the barrel was full of maple syrup. He was fine, but the same couldn't be said for the syrup supply. As he opened more and more barrels, he found many more empty ones and others where the syrup had been replaced with water to hide the theft. A total of 9,517 more barrels, to be exact.

Still, you may be wondering what anyone would want with all that syrup. Did they have a LOT of waffles? Well, as it turns out, maple syrup is worth a lot. As much as 15 to 30 times more than the same size barrel of crude oil. That's anywhere from \$1,300 to \$2,500 per barrel. That's why in Canada, it really is known as "liquid gold."

As the investigation into the heist continued, police uncovered a scheme where over several months a group of thieves transported the barrels to another location, pumped out the maple syrup, replaced it with water, then put the barrels back. If the thieves hadn't gotten sloppy and started putting back empty barrels, the discovery of the crime would have taken much longer, if it was ever discovered at all.

In the end, 17 people were arrested. And while no bakery owners were arrested, the ringleader was a dealer in black market maple syrup named Richard Vallieres, the inspiration for Sticky Sue from the Heistogram. The total value of the heist was \$18.7 million dollars which, adjusted for inflation, makes this the largest heist in Canadian history. That's one sweet haul. It's just too bad for the thieves that this story ended up with them stuck in jail.