

Creating a Solid Mystery:
Solving the Case for Plot

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Abstract

When it comes to mystery, one of the most key figures of the genre is the Queen of Mystery Agatha Christie. This beloved author has written over 60 mystery novels in her lifetime. Studying her work has shown that Christie put much time and effort when crafting her stories. The Queen of Mystery carefully planned to ensure her stories had a solid plot her readers could easily follow and enjoy. This thesis focused on analyzing Christie's process and looking at how the process could be applied in a mystery manuscript.

Keywords: mystery, plot, Agatha Christie

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Special thanks to Professor Anderson and Professor Christian for encouraging me throughout this course. Without them, I would not have been able to have the motivation to finish out this course.

Dedication

To my sisters and best friends, thank you for supporting me and making sure I saw my thesis project through to the end!

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One of the most published authors of all time is a mystery writer. Agatha Christie is known as the Queen of Mystery not only because she is known as “the most widely published author of all time and in any language, outsold only by the Bible and Shakespeare” (AgathaChristie.com, “About the Author”) but also because she made a great contribution to the mystery genre. Agatha Christie is an author to review and study because she was a “writer who knew how to masterfully think through her plots, develop rich characters, and create tidy endings” (Akersten 15). Her works have become popular through other mediums such as radio drama adaptations, film and tv series adaptations, and even computer games. However, it is the plots in her mystery novels that started it all. Through studying Agatha Christie and her works, one can see how she was able to contribute to the genre of mystery.

Ever since its initial creation, the mystery genre continued to evolve, and today, there are still areas that mystery writers struggled with. However, looking to mystery writers like the Queen of Mystery, writers of today can discover to overcome those struggles of creating a solid mystery plot that engages their readers. Mysteries are interesting pieces to work with since there has to be a problem that is solved. The problem cannot just be any problem; it must be one that can engage readers and have them curious about how this problem will get solved. However, the problem or mystery cannot be too complicated lest it be seen as unbelievable. In every genre of fiction, there is a bit of truth woven in. J. Madison Davis, elected president of the International Association of Crime Writers, noted how “the mystery, like every other genre, is based upon certain paradigms about the nature of our world” (11). When writing a mystery, there will be fictitious elements, but there must also be that bit of truth included to draw readers in the novel.

The concept for this thesis is focused on the genre of mystery. The critical paper covers my research and opinions on how Agatha Christie has addressed the issues of plot in her mystery

works. In my creative manuscript, I tried to practically explore how my research of Christie and her works influences my story and helped me create a solid mystery with no loose ends.

My creative manuscript is a novel tentatively titled *Let No Dog Bark*. It is a fictional piece that was originally entitled *Villain's Consultant* and was first drafted in the WRIT 610: Writing Fiction course. The original concept followed Kip Emery as he unknowingly becomes a villain's consultant. However, while writing the story, I found myself changing its direction entirely. The story still followed Kip Emery, but instead, of being a villain's consultant, he is an amateur detective thrown into a strange case of the possible murder of a dog.

Background

The genre of mystery has always been a well-loved genre as Agatha Christie's success as an author clearly shows. Although it is a popular genre, there are still writers who struggle with creating plots that leave their readers satisfied of a case well-solved. To address the issue of plots in mystery, I have researched and analyzed Agatha Christie and her works to see how she wrote her mysteries and how she chose to address plot issues. Through my creative manuscript, I will show how my research helped me create a mystery story with a solid plot.

The initial idea for the creative manuscript *Villain's Consultant* came from my sister who once commented on how police have consulting detectives they can go to for help and how she wondered if villains had a similar person they could go to. The main idea played with the concept of how some villains are just unable to come up with devious plans and could use a consultant to help them pull off their evil crimes. When I began my M.F.A. in Creative Writing, I was given the opportunity to expand this villain concept into a working plot. However, as I worked on writing and revising, the story took a different turn and changed to the manuscript *Let No Dog Bark*.

The course WRIT 610: Writing Fiction played a major factor in helping me draft the prologue and first chapter for the *Villain's Consultant* manuscript. The course textbook *Plot & Structure* by James Scott Bell also played a key role in my initial writing process. Both the course and course textbook helped lay a foundation for my initial ideas for the manuscript. As I worked on revising my story, I created an idea map which helped me get a broader view of my plot and pinpoint the main parts of the mystery. The visual picture through the idea map helped me connect concepts more clearer and understand where my clues and motives were for this case.

Through the course and textbook as well as feedback from Professor Christian and my peers, I was able to solidify my initial idea into a working plot. Bell presented several concepts of outlining the plot of a story, and I chose to follow his suggestion of utilizing parts of the Borg Outline (166). This outline helped “create the overall structure” for me and gave me a better understanding of how to “keep track of [my story’s] scenes” (Bell 167). While I utilized this process, I also adjusted the outline to fit my writing process while still staying true to the concept of outlining my plot in a clear manner. The idea map helped to keep the plot on track and organize the who, where, when of the crime.

During the revision process, the outline was somewhat replaced by chapter summaries. Instead of outlining the entire story in a sentence outline, I looked at the story as a whole and wrote brief paragraphs summarizing what would happen in each chapter. This planning gave me a better vision for the manuscript while still having somewhat of an outline for the story.

Vision for the Work

The mystery genre can be a complicated genre to work with since it must have a believable crime and brilliant resolution. While the crime and resolution must be believable, every mystery

writer must also consider the reader pay-off as well. The story must end well, leaving the reader satisfied with a well-written mystery.

It is important for me and any other hopeful mystery writers to understand the different aspects to this genre such as how the mystery will occur and how it will be solved. The solution for the mystery cannot be too easy to follow, or the audience will lose interest in the story. However, the solution must also not be too complicated for the readers to understand. A complicated mystery can cause a writer to create plot holes in their story and, once again, lose their audience's interest.

The main vision for the creative manuscript *Let No Dog Bark* is to address how a mystery can be written well and avoid the accidental plot holes. While writing my creative manuscript and making edits and revisions, I have referred to Bell's *Plot & Structure* for advice on making sure my manuscript's plot stays true to my outline and is a plot that will keep my audience interested in the story.

I looked at the various research found in my critical paper to help guide me and to help prevent me from creating plot holes. Mysteries can be difficult to work with, especially when it comes to creating a good plot. I focused on looking at articles and other academic sources that related to Agatha Christie and her works as well as to what style she used to narrate her stories.

In his article "Genre in Transit: Agatha Christie, Trains, and the Whodunit," Chris Ewers noted how "the solution [of a mystery novel], like a problem of algebra, needs to be worked out in order" (100). Ewers studied the great mystery queen Agatha Christie in his article, breaking down how Agatha Christie evolved the mystery genre and create well-written stories. Through research on articles like Ewer's articles, I was able to grasp a better understanding of how the

mystery genre has evolved and also consider how it can be improved to bring solid mystery plots.

Looking closely at Agatha Christie and the Golden Age of Detective Fiction, the era where the mystery genre was at its highest, will also give me better understanding of the genre. I studied Agatha Christie's mystery works as well as looking at various articles and biographies on her to learn more about how she crafted her mystery plots. Studying the Golden Age provided insight on how Agatha Christie and other mystery writers helped the genre evolve. Several of these mystery authors were contemporaries and were a part of a group known as the Detection Club. It was in this club that Agatha Christie and other mystery writers worked together to improve and evolve the mystery genre. They discussed the issues that the genre had and focused on how they could fix those errors. J. Madison Davis, author of mysteries *The Murder of Frau Schütz* and *Law and Order: Dead Line*, quoted the Detection Club's solemn oath that stated:

“Do you promise,” it asks, “that your detectives shall well and truly detect the crimes presented to them using those wits which it may please you to bestow upon them and not placing reliance on nor making use of Divine Revelation, Feminine Intuition, Mumbo Jumbo, Jiggery Pokery, Coincidence, or Act of God?” (30)

This oath illustrates how serious these mystery writers were about crafting their novels. The mysteries they wrote would not be solved in a careless way. The writers of this club were, in essence, promising to create solid mystery plots that would not contain plot holes that would be solved flippantly. The authors were not going to use magic or random coincidence to solve the mystery or to explain away problems that arose during their mystery plot. No, these writers were determined to create quality mysteries that could be explained and solved in a logical matter.

Just like the oath that they took in the Detection Club, I wish to be able to create a solid mystery plot without possible plot holes. The manuscript will be a quality mystery that is both clear and logical. A truly good mystery should leave the readers satisfied with a case well-solved.

Literary Context

While Agatha Christie is one of the most well-known mystery writers, there were other writers who wrote in this genre. She was able to build upon the works of others to expand and popularize the genre. Ever since Edgar Allan Poe first introduced the mystery genre through short story, the world has become enamored with the concept of mystery. From Sherlock Holmes to Hercule Poirot, Nancy Drew to Lord Peter Wimsey, Adrian Monk to Kudo Shinichi, detectives are well-known and well-loved characters in not only literature but also in film, comics, and manga. The detectives often act as the main characters of mysteries, but it is not always true for every mystery novel. Still, in every mystery, there is usually a character who acts as the role of detective. This role is a key part of any mystery novel. It is through this detective character that many people recognize the mystery genre.

From the way the story is told to the characters' roles in the story, The mystery genre has evolved in many different ways. In her article "Cozies, Capers, and Other Criminal Endeavors: Utilizing Taxonomies of Mystery Fiction to Improve Genre Access," Catherine Oliver noted in 2016, the Library of Congress expanded the genre catalogue to include more mysteries, showing that "mystery fiction has long been a genre popular with the reading public" (152). There was once a time when this genre simply did not exist when it came to organizing and filing the different genres of literature, specifically fiction. Over the years, libraries and other catalogers have worked together to create specialized general specifically detective or spy stories. However,

soon “narrower terms for ‘Detective and mystery stories’ include[d] ‘Gothic fiction (Literary genre) and ‘Noir fiction’” (Oliver 155) which helped narrow the main genre of mysteries into subgenres. As the genre has grown and created subgenres, it is easier for readers and writers to determine why a story or novel is considered a part of the mystery genre.

Choosing the Mystery Genre

Because this genre is so well-known, my creative manuscript will have a fairly large audience. Almost everyone loves a good mystery novel. Researchers Hill et al. noted how “curiosity, the desire to know, has been implicated as a motivation relevant to human behavior, and leads individuals to seek methods to resolve the arousal it elicits” (1029). Readers who read one mystery are often rather likely to read more mysteries because of the satisfaction the genre brings of a well-solved case.

However, this genre is also a good choice to consider for my critical paper due to its rich history. With authors such as Edgar Allan Poe (who is said to have created the genre) as well as the mystery writer Agatha Christie from the Golden Age of Detective Fiction, it is not difficult to find mystery works to study. Throughout the years, these authors were able to hone their craft and create several mystery novels and books. By studying the history of the mystery genre, I was able to grasp a better understanding of the genre and used that information to support my critical paper as well apply that understanding to my creative manuscript.

Significance of Topic

It is important for Christian writers to create works of excellence that bring glory to God. The topic for the thesis project and manuscript is important because Christian writers need to create works of excellence. Paul noted in Scripture that “whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do everything for God’s glory” (*Holman’s Christian Standard Bible*, 1 Cor. 10.31).

When a writer works on a story, he or she should bring his or her best work to the table. It would not honor the Lord if the work was not well done. Christian writers should always be working on improving their skills to create works of excellence. While their works might not always be strictly categorized in the genre of Christian works, they still can apply God's desire for them to work hard and submit works of high quality. I have a strong interest in the mystery genre and have created a mystery manuscript that not only bring enjoyment to my readers but also, more importantly, bring honor to God. Working hard and pushing for my very best will help me avoid plot holes and write a clear and well thought-out plot.

Stories that have plot holes are not necessarily bad stories. Many people enjoy stories even if there may be questions about how certain things were never addressed, even at the end of the story. Some mystery novels are considered as unsolved because the culprit or crime is never fully revealed or solved. Unless authors intended to leave certain aspects of their stories as open-ended, a mystery story is typically better when plot holes are addressed and resolved. Most plot holes occur due to poor planning or carelessness. Authors sometimes miss sharing important information for a plot because they did not take some careful thought and consideration to make sure they had covered everything they needed to. Often times, plot holes could be avoided if writers took the time to carefully analyze their plots and make sure they addressed all the strange events or characters that appeared in their story. Just taking the time to check a plot outline alongside the finished manuscript could help writers see where they might have forgotten to address a concept or character development, thus avoiding a dreaded plot hole.

I applied this concept by carefully thinking and planning my plot. It was important for me to carefully look over my craft to make sure I am making every effort to create a piece that was of worthy of excellence. Solomon reminds us how "the plans of the diligent certainly lead to

profit, but anyone who is reckless certainly becomes poor” (*Holman’s Christian Standard Bible*, Prov. 21.5). Thus, through careful planning, a writer can profit and submit a work that is of good quality and worth reading.

Jesus also reminded Christians of the importance of planning ahead: “for which of you, wanting to build a tower, doesn’t first sit down and calculate the cost to see if he has enough to complete it?” (*Holman’s Christian Standard Bible*, Luke 14.28). When writing any book, and not just a mystery book, it is important for Christian writers to sit down and calculate to make sure their plot is in place before they begin the publication process. Writers should also consider where they want to go with the book: what is the plot, what is the theme, and what is the direction.

It is not always easy to sit down and look over a manuscript to make sure it does not have any errors or mistakes regarding grammar and formatting, and it can be even more difficult to check the same work over for plot holes. However, while the task may seem tedious, it is important for Christian writers to realize the importance of such a task. The purpose of the task is to make sure the writers are presenting their very best work. I have applied what I have learned not only in my college courses but also what I have learned from Scripture to my writing. As a Christian, I understand that whatever I write, whether it is a thesis assignment or a book manuscript, it should be something that clearly shows careful thought and consideration. The themes and topics should show that I am not treating them flippantly but rather showing the ideas and lessons that God has placed on my heart.

Through the WRIT 689: Thesis Proposal and Research course, I have written a critical paper and creative manuscript that will support my idea that writers need to understand the concept of creating plots to avoid creating plot holes in their mystery stories. I have used various

research to help support my critical paper's ideas and to guide my manuscript's plot.

The main vision for my manuscript is to create a mystery novel that solves any possible plot holes that occur in the story. I hope that through my research and practical application of that research in my creative manuscript, I can demonstrate for other writers how they can avoid plot holes in their works. If writers are more aware of how to avoid plot holes, they can develop a better focus for writing good stories that people can enjoy.

The mystery genre is a beloved genre that I have always enjoyed reading. I believe that this genre is one that can clearly support my thesis and is relative to writers today. There is almost always a mystery book being published or in the works. My thesis and creative manuscript will not only help me develop as a better writer but will also contribute to the legacy that Agatha Christie began strengthening and evolving and improving the mystery story.

Solving Plot Through Creative Manuscript: Let No Dog Bark

My manuscript for *Let No Dog Bark* was written to explore how to effectively write mystery plots. This manuscript seeks to create a solid mystery plot through careful research and planning that could help inspire other writers to delve into creating plots that end satisfactorily, with all loose ends tied. The work *Let No Dog Bark* falls under the mystery fiction subgenre of cozy. The story of *Let No Dog Bark* follows the main characters Kip Emery and Min who act as amateur detectives in solving the strange death of a dog. While murder and deaths are mentioned, these events occur off screen, staying true to main elements of a cozy. Similar to Agatha Christie's cozies with Miss Marple, the main characters of my story are not detectives by profession but have an interest in detectives and mystery. Just like Agatha Christie, I have also chosen to use the free indirect speech style for my story. This style matches my writing style and will give my readers insight to my characters without the use of dialogue or direct thoughts.

Leaving a Case with Satisfaction

One of the most important parts of any book is to leave the reader satisfied. When the book has finally ended, the reader should not be wondering why certain elements of the story were not resolved in the end—of course, there are exceptions for series, but overall, all loose ends should be tied at the book's ending. This concept of a satisfactory ending is especially true for a mystery novel.

Álvarez noted in "Criminal Readings: The Transformative and Instructive Power of Crime Fiction" that people enjoy mysteries because:

procedurals offer the public a sense of security and reassurance as they show a predictable development of the investigation and a final resolution of the crime that often culminates with the restoration of the status quo where evil is punished: The detective can finally rest, the victim gets justice, and the criminal is put behind bars or somehow punished. (142)

The genre of mystery implies that the reader will have a satisfactory ending in which the criminal is apprehended and justice is served.

The purpose of this paper was to address the issues some writers have with creating solid mystery plots. They must find a solution that is not only believable but also one that addresses all the details described about the crime. Many writers may be tempted to avoid directly fixing issues in their story by using the excuse of magic or science. Others may choose to completely ignore the issues and just focus on the main solution to the crime: arresting the culprit.

While it can be very tempting to just ignore the plot holes that sometimes appear while writing, this critical paper shows that it is possible for writers to avoid these sorts of mistakes in their mystery writing. Through careful study and research, writers can see how mystery writers

like Agatha Christie have faced these same issues and addressed them. Some authors found that changing the narration helped them stay focused and true to their plot. Other authors like Agatha Christie used careful planning to keep track of their plots and make sure that their plots were solid and believable.

I have described the manuscript that would illustrate my personal approach to solving the issues surrounding mystery plots. The key point of creating a good plot is careful planning. My manuscript *Let No Dog Bark* will show how I approached planning by using two main tools: a chapter outline and background notes.

The *Let No Dog Bark* would follow a chapter outline with the main points of the plot given for each chapter. This chapter outline was designed to help keep the author focused on main plot points throughout the story. Using this outline will guide me and help remind me of important aspects of my story. The outline will act as a constant reminder of everything that needs to be addressed when the story comes to an end.

Through the chapter outline, an idea map, chapter summaries, and other notes, I hope to show that I was able to create a well-thought-out plot that meets my readers' expectations for a mystery novel. Creating the chapter outline and background notes will take much careful thought and planning. By utilizing these tools, I will be able to stay focused on my plot and follow some of the tips on how Agatha Christie approached the same problem. The Queen of Mystery was known for "spen[ding] the majority of time with each book working out all the plot details and clues in her head or her notebooks before she actually started writing" (AgathaChristie.com, "How Christie Wrote"). Just like Christie, I will take the time to work out my plot in detail through various notes and outlines.

Álvarez stated how the mystery genre has "become one of the most popular and beloved

types of stories in the 21st century” (148). This genre is one of the most popular because the stories are compelling, but more importantly, they meet the expectations of the readers. These stories follow the set structure that writers have been following for decades, but the same time, the genre’s structure has evolved over the years. Mystery writers no longer follow the way Poe first introduced the genre. Instead, they have changed the structure to give a clearer explanation into the mystery. Despite the evolution of the mystery genre, one thing has stayed true: all mysteries revolve around a crime that must be solved.

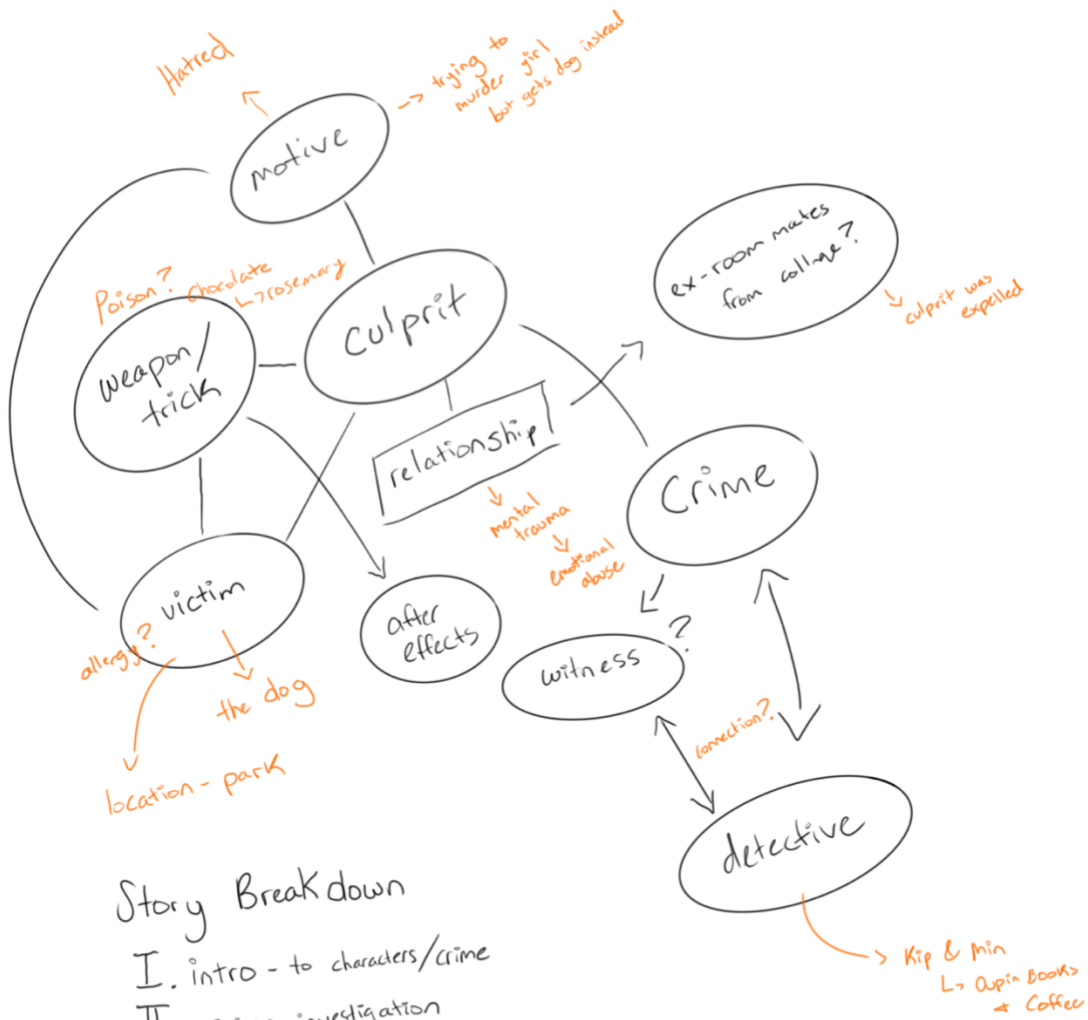
The genre of mystery has changed over the decades with authors adding and improving the genre. While there have been additions, it is important to note the improvements writers have made to ensure that the genre has solid plots that will engage readers for years to come.

Creative Manuscript Outline

The outline for my creative manuscript was loosely based off of Bell’s Borg Outline. I adjusted the outline to fit with my personal thought process and style. The initial outline was created during the fall 2021 semester. While working on the creative manuscript, I found the story was not getting anywhere and made some major changes. Instead of using a sentence outline, I mapped out a rough plan using an idea map. This map gave me a visual of how the different parts of the story and crime needed to connect.

Once the idea map had been created, I was able to plan out the story. Keeping my previous sentence outline in mind, I created paragraph summaries for the chapters I had in mind for my story.

Idea Map



- Story Break down
- I. intro - to characters/crime
 - II. crime investigation
 - III. solution - epilogue

Critical Paper

Crime fiction researcher Elena Avanzas Álvarez noted how the genre of mystery (sometimes known as crime fiction) has been a well-read and loved genre by many throughout the years (141). When it comes to this well-loved genre, one of the most well-known mystery writers is Agatha Christie, who has been called not only the Queen of Crime but also the Queen of Mystery. She has often been credited as being the most published author after Shakespeare and the Bible and was a part of the Golden Age of Detective Fiction. Newcastle University senior lecturer in 20th century literature and culture Stacy Gillis noted that the Golden Age of Detective Fiction began “in the early decades of the twentieth century, [with] a number of writers, scholars, and intellectuals sought to understand precisely what a detective story was” (9). Agatha Christie, Queen of Crime and Mystery, united with other mystery writers of this Golden Age to help improve the genre and created their own Detection Club. To grow their mystery stories from more than just quick entertainment into quality or timeless literature, authors like Christie believed that it was important to create a plot that readers could not only follow but also a plot that would give them satisfaction at the end of the story. Their readers should be able to solve the case alongside the detectives they were reading about.

History Behind the Mystery Genre

Edgar Allan Poe is often considered as the creator of the first mystery short story. In the article “‘One of an Infinite Series of Mistakes’: Mystery, Influence, and Edgar Allan Poe,” Nataalka Freeland, author of several articles on mystery writers Edgar Allan Poe and Wilkie Collins, mentioned that “there is no doubt that Edgar Allan Poe plays a singular role in the history of detective fiction” (123). Poe is an important figure in the history of detective fiction because he introduced the idea of mystery short stories and developed the beginnings of the

mystery story structure that we know and love today. Poe's three short stories introduced the idea of mystery stories, creating a genre that has readers eager to turn the page to discover the solution to the mystery. Poe's short story "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" is considered the very first mystery short story which introduced the concept of "track[ing] down the culprit, and narrat[ing] the story of the criminal's actions and attempts at concealment, without being able to alter the fact that the crime took place, or its more or less irreversible consequences" (Freeland 124). The narration of Poe's short stories has the shape of virtually every subsequent mystery story. He laid the foundation for what the role of a detective character should be. This character should be knowledgeable and aware of his or her surroundings. This knowledge and awareness are key for the character to solve the crime or murder.

In his research on Poe, Richard Kopley noted how Poe's invention of the mystery genre not only "conquered... the world" but also "taught the world" (5). Poe's short story mysteries gave birth to a whole new genre that taught authors and readers alike a new way of telling stories. Naeeni and Rami, professors in Foreign Languages and Literature, noted that "Poe's 'empathy' earned him the opportunity to transform the multitude signs that existed in nineteenth-century American culture in order to create his invented genres including detective tales" (97). Poe was able to use his skill and knowledge of existing literature to create the new genre of mystery that captivated his audiences. The people in his day were fascinated by the mystery of his story and how his detective was able to solve the various cases thrown at him.

Poe's short story character C. Auguste Dupin is one of the first known detective figures in literature. With the rise of Dupin, many authors were inspired to create their own detectives and write mystery novels. This character, the detective, is known in most mystery stories as often having the occupation of detecting. However, not all detective characters work as a detective.

Some have other occupations and merely dabble in detection while other characters have somehow been thrown into the role by mere chance. While these characters are not always detectives by trade, the singular role of the detective is always the same: discovering the truth of the crime.

Poe's Dupin was not strictly a detective by trade, but the character of Dupin helped form the idea of the main role of the detective character. Poe's role for Dupin had its flaws. Some researchers have noted that Poe's "act of inviting his readers to unravel his entwined web is only a trap he has outspread for his readers" (Naeeni & Rami 98). Poe seemed to never actually let his readers try to solve the mystery themselves. Ph.D. student at the University of Alabama Nathanael Thomas Booth studied detective stories and mentioned in his article "'Seeking Truth in Detail': 'The Mystery of Marie Rogêt' and Its Structure of Revision" that "all the evidence indicates that Poe either *thought* he had solved the mystery or (which is more certain) wanted *other people* to think he had" (47). It seems as if Poe himself struggled with understanding how he could solve the mystery and help his readers solve that mystery. To solve this problem, Poe chose to create Dupin as a sort of know-it-all type of character. Readers see the crime scene but are not really given clues or hints to solve the crime. Instead, Dupin reveals his solution by retelling the action of the crime, describing key points that the audience was never given. In Poe's short stories, it appears that only his detective Dupin can know the truth before it is revealed to the readers. Kopley pointed out in his book *Edgar Allan Poe and the Dupin Mysteries* how Dupin gives a "recounting [of] the evidence" (9). The readers are not given the chance to follow Dupin as he goes over the facts. The main role of Poe's detective is merely to give a brief overview of the evidence that he references later when he actually solves the crime.

However, authors like Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and Agatha Christie evolved the detective

character into less of a know-it-all and into a more human sort of character. Dupin reveals the solution without the readers ever seeing the clues, and in some ways, Doyle's Sherlock appears to be cut from the same cloth. Sherlock often goes off screen and then reveals things we do not know about. However, in Sherlock's case, Doyle provided a character (aka. Dr. Watson) who follows Sherlock around providing a more solid narration that allows some hints and clues to be revealed. With Poirot, what he sees and knows is typically already there for readers, but readers do not have the advantage of his little grey cells. Readers still need his reveal to fully solve the mystery; however, unlike Holmes who usually introduces new information, Poirot points out the obvious or removes the little distractions or biases to show the full picture.

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and Agatha Christie provided more room for the solving the case as a reader by creating characters like Dr. Watson and Captain Hastings. These characters were ones that worked alongside the detective and served as the reader's eyes and guide the reader throughout the story. Both Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and Agatha Christie created new characters to give readers the chance to follow the detective and to solve the mystery with the main characters. Agatha Christie discovered new ways to avoid the flaw without having to create another Hastings-like character for each and every mystery story she wrote. Brown University adjunct lecturer Mary Anne Ackershoek noted in *Theory and Practice of Classic Detective Fiction (Contributions to the Study of Popular Culture)* how Agatha Christie "transformed the genre not only by [her] presence but also by the possibilities for female characters as detectives, victims, and murderers [she] depicted" (120). From new characters to different narration styles, Christie as well as other authors have discovered new ways of solving how to tell a mystery story that readers could try solving as well.

Mystery authors throughout the years have developed and improved the mystery genre by developing new plot structures and methods of telling the story. These writers understood the difficulties of writing mystery, figuring out how to solve a case and present that solution clearly to their readers. The most well-known mystery writers come from the age of fiction commonly known as the Golden Age of Detective Fiction. Golden Age detective fiction researcher Andrew Green noted that this age should be “defined as the works of writers of detective fiction who produced their work largely—although not exclusively—in Britain during the period between the two World Wars, represent a substantial endeavor to ‘shape the world’” (42). These writers had a strong desire to represent the world they were living in as well as the world they desired to create.

During these golden years, mystery writers like Agatha Christie redefined the role of the detective in mystery. The detective came in new shapes and forms. Sometimes the detective was a man and other times this role was played by a woman. The role of the detective was no longer just some highly educated bachelor with spare time on his hands. Agatha Christie and other mystery writers of the Golden Age discovered new ways to use “playful engagement with the telling of story [which] explains part of the appeal of their work” (Green 45). These writers often worked together to help evolve the genre. In the introduction of *Floating Admiral*, a collaboration among the Detection Club members, Dorothy L. Sayers noted how the book was written with the intent “to approach as closely as possible to a program of real detection” (3). Each writer was to write a chapter of the story, providing his or her solution to the problem. Sayers also noted that “each writer was bound to deal faithfully with *all* difficulties left for his consideration by his predecessors” (3). In this way, the authors were able to keep each other accountable and stay true to their collaboration’s plot. Working together and discussing plots

helped the mystery writers of the Golden Age flesh out plots and learn the ins-and-outs of their genre.

Subgenres of Mystery

The genre of mystery has often been categorized into a few subgenres based on the plot structure or the intensity of the story. Gary Warren Niebuhr, in his book *Make Mine a Mystery: A Reader's Guide to Mystery and Detective Fiction*, helped organize the mystery genre into several subgenres. Niebuhr, along with Catherine Oliver, a metadata and cataloging services librarian, divided the genre into the subgenres of the detective novel, crime novel, intrigue, thriller, suspense, cozy, and inverted detective (Niebuhr xiii; Oliver 155, 157).

The most well-known of the subgenres is the detective novel. This subgenre of mystery follows a simple plot structure quite familiar to most mystery readers: crime, investigation, and solution. The typical detective novel plot follows the action of a crime in which a detective is called to investigate and solve the case. Most of Agatha Christie's Poirot books would fall under this subgenre. The character of Hercule Poirot acts as the detective not only by role but also by profession. In *Labors of Hercules*, a young man noted how he "read a piece about [Poirot] in the paper" and wondered if it was true that he was "the detective gentleman—you're Mr. Hercules Pwarrit?" (Christie 67). Poirot is known throughout the Poirot books as a detective by profession and skill.

The crime novel is similar to the detective novel; however, it is a story that "observes the undertaking of a criminal act, but does not necessarily have a detective who pursues either the criminal or a sense of justice" (Niebuhr xiii). In other words, this subgenre typically follows the same plot structure as a detective novel. It just lacks a detective character to solve the crime. Instead of a detective figure, the story may be narrated by the victim or a person of interest in the

crime. There is no detective solving the crime because it is his profession. Rather, the characters following the crime in a crime novel are investigating because they are either personally involved or interested in the case that they have been thrust into.

Retired policeman Luke Fitzwilliam plays the role of observer and assistant detective in Agatha Christie's crime novel *Murder Is Easy*. This character is thrust into a case after meeting an elderly lady on a train. This lady, Miss Pinkerton, informs him of "a good many [murders], I'm afraid" (Christie 9) that have happened in her village. Fitzwilliam decides to take on Miss Pinkerton's case out of curiosity and a desire to get to the bottom of these strange murder cases.

In *The Pale Horse*, Mark Easterbrook is pulled into a strange case after seeing a girl's hair pulled out from the roots. This singular event leads him down a strange set of events to the inn of the Pale Horse. He has no real connections to the murder of a priest, but he develops a strong desire to get to the bottom of why the priest was murdered and how the priest's murder was connected to the Pale Horse.

Both *Murder Is Easy* and *The Pale Horse* are examples of crime novels because the story is focused on a crime (or murder). However, unlike the detective novel, these novels do not feature a detective. Instead, the story is narrated by a person of interest somehow related to the crime.

The intrigue, thriller, and suspense subgenres focus on how they will make the reader *feel*. The intrigue works on attracting the reader's curiosity while the thriller focuses on the reader's emotions (Niebuhr xiii). The suspense subgenre strives to pull the reader along for a ride of constantly wondering what how things will be solved because they are aware of the actions of the criminal. In suspense, the reader should be eager to know how the characters will react to the

danger hovering right behind them. All three of these genres focus on feelings while still following a similar plot structure to the detective novel. What separates these subgenres is the addition of certain scenes or moments.

In the intrigue, the story will have scenes that keep a reader wanting to know more. Each chapter may end in a cliffhanger to keep the reader curious. The purpose is to keep the reader interested in the story by focusing on their curiosity of how the crime was committed or how the detective will solve the case. Agatha Christie's famous *And There Were None* has often been considered an intrigue. At the end of almost every chapter, another person ends up being murdered. Philip Lombard declared that the two sudden deaths at the end "fits too damned well to be a coincidence" (Christie, *And Then There Were None* 103). Early on in the story, Christie introduced the poem "Ten Little Indians" which created a mysterious and ominous tone which leaves the characters and readers wondering how things are connected and how things will be resolved.

The thriller, however, is focused on the thrill of the plot. This subgenre will typically have many action scenes and give their characters harrowing experiences. The case is often solved after many twists and turns that may make the case seem unsolvable. However, at the end, the case will be solved. Agatha Christie's *Death on the Nile* is classified as a thriller due to the excitement and thrill of the story. The author hinted at the harrowing experiences to come, noting "but there [Mrs. Otterbourne] was quite wrong—for a matter of life and death was exactly what it was" (Christie, *Death on the Nile* 221). Throughout the thriller, Christie hints and teases about events just around the corner.

Suspense is a subgenre focused on "keeping[ing] the reader waiting for particular outcomes" (Niebuhr xiii). The story may follow a detective, but what separates this subgenre

from detective fiction is the fact that the main character is in grave danger and the readers are aware of this fact. There is something that might prevent the detective from solving the case, or there might be someone after the main character who is a part of the main case of the story. The key point of the suspense subgenre is to motivate the readers to continue reading because they want to know if the detective character will be able to discover the clues the readers are already quite aware of. The *Third Girl* by Agatha Christie is a suspense that follows Hercule Poirot's journey to find a young woman who "[consulted him] about a murder she might have committed" (3). For this particular book, the main suspense of this book is wondering if the girl was really a murderer or not.

The cozy subgenre is mostly recognized by its content. In her dissertation "The Importance of Being Cosy: Agatha Christie and Golden Age British Detective Fiction," student of philosophy at the Graduate School of the State University of New York Wu Chia-ying noted that the subgenre of cozies is defined by not just "the comfortably recognizable pattern, [but also] murder and death by murder are treated as if they were harmless" (88). A cozy mystery is told more of casual, calm way than the other subgenres, and while the crimes tend to be less violent in most cases, there may be murders and death, just mentioned more calmly or casually than they would be in other stories. Oliver defined cozies as "characterized by traditional structure, lighthearted perspective, and frequently comic or romantic elements" (155). This subgenre of mystery tends to follow the same plot structure as the detective novel except the story is not as dark or scary. Instead, the cozy story will include scenes that may be more romantic or comedic in nature. The crimes found in cozy stories tend to move away from murders and towards crimes that are less bloody and violent. There is often a character that plays a role similar to one of the detective. However, this character is usually not a detective or police

by trade. In Agatha Christie's Miss Marple stories, the character of Miss Marple acts as the detective in these more cozy stories. "The Case of the Perfect Maid" in *Miss Marple: The Complete Short Stories* shows how Miss Marple is able to reveal the true identities of a pair of thieves from her armchair.

Finally, the inverted detective story or "howcatchem," as defined by English language and literature professors Nozen et al. (1990), is a subgenre of mystery that is classified by its story structure. Unlike classic or typical detective story, this subgenre 'inverts' the standard "whodunit" conclusion by revealing the culprit early in the story. Nozen et al. explained that in inverted detective stories, "The manner of committing the crime is first described and the person who has committed the crime is also introduced" (1990). Thus, the reader is not reading to find out who the culprit is or how the crime was accomplished. Instead, the story's focus is on the successful escape or the eventual capture of the criminal. Agatha Christie never wrote a mystery story in this genre; however, authors Jerry B. Jenkins and Chris Fabry collaborated together to write *Haunted Waters*, the first book in their Red Rock Mysteries series. This book begins with the perspective of the culprit who notes "if only those annoying kids hadn't forced this" and describes how "he could see the fright in the kids' eyes when he pulled beside their Land Cruiser... and rammed his vehicle into theirs and sent them swerving" (Jenkins and Fabry 1). From the very beginning of the story, the readers know what is going to happen to the main characters and who the person is who will commit the crime.

These subgenres may be different in the ways they are told and plotted out, but the subgenres all fall under the main genre we know as mystery fiction: there is still a crime committed, a mystery to be solved, and clues to discover. Carl Rollyson, editor of *Critical Survey of Mystery and Detective Fiction*, noted that "in this complex history of continuity and

change, what never flags—what never can be removed from the genre—is the pursuit of crime.” No matter the subgenre, the main focus on the crime and its resolution always remains the same. Thus, whether the mystery is classified as a thriller, suspense, cozy, or howcatchem, the core of the story is the mystery plot.

The Mystery of Plot

A mystery’s plot is typically a fairly simple one. Often, the plot will revolve around a crime that is committed and someone trying to solve the crime and arrest the criminal. However, putting the plot together is far from simple.

When creating a plot for mystery, it is important for the writer to have a set structure that will guide the story. James Scot Bell, author of *Plot & Structure* and *Super Structure: The Key to Unleashing the Power of Story*, expanded on the importance of structure in plot, stating that “structure is what assembles the parts of a story in a way that makes them accessible to readers” (22). A good plot will have a solid structure that clearly tells the story and is easy for readers to follow along.

Chris Ewers, a researcher of eighteenth century to contemporary literature, noted how Agatha Christie’s “narrative structure teaches the reader the importance of roaming through her texts, rather than obeying the sequential thrust of narrative” (115). In her story, Christie leaves clues for her readers to find as they roam, similar to the structure of an open world game. The structure she uses to guide her readers is known as narration structure. Christie sometimes allowed the reader to slip into her characters’ thoughts by using a literary style known as free indirect speech, a style introduced by Jane Austen. In the article “A Scientific Justification for Literature: Jane Austen’s Free Indirect Style as Ethical Tool,” authors Angus Fletcher and Mike Benveniste noted how it “offers a ‘cue to the reader to imagine himself or herself into the

minds' of Austen's characters, fostering 'better abilities in empathy and theory of mind' (Oatley 148, 114)" (3). This style allowed Agatha Christie to give her readers a deeper connection with her characters as well as provided structure to her plot even as the readers roam through the characters' thoughts in a seemingly nonchalant way. By connecting readers with characters' inner thoughts Agatha Christie was able to avoid the problem of having to create a Hastings for every mystery. Through this style of narration, the reader does not need a Hastings to ask questions or give voice to inner thoughts. Instead, readers can look into the mind of the character and think and solve alongside them. In her books, Agatha Christie cleverly weaves the free indirect speech style in her narratives, allowing readers to get a glimpse of characters' thoughts without having to use dialogue. In *Pale Horse*, Agatha Christie used this style to show some of Mark Easterbrook's inner thoughts on a young woman's fashion, noting that "she was said, according to my friends, to be very attractive. Not to me! My only reaction was a yearning to throw her into a hot bath" (4). The inner thoughts are shown in normal narration without the use of dialogue to allow readers to see what Easterbrook is thinking.

This style or structure allowed her to avoid some of the mistakes found in Poe's short mystery stories. Instead of having the detective explain everything, Agatha Christie and many other authors had a narrator who would be able to share the details of the crime, allowing the readers to follow along and try to solve the case. However, at the same time, mystery writers like Agatha Christie understood that the narration did more than just fix the issue created by Poe's short stories. The narrative structure also teased and hinted at things, revealing things to the readers if they would just look closely at the hidden text.

Plot As Foundation

Plot is the foundation for all stories. It helps the writer know where the story needs to go and shows the reader what will happen next. In a mystery, the plot typically follows a set structure: a crime is committed, an investigation is started, and a resolution is given.

J. Madison Davis, author of eight mystery works, noted how “the existence of a genre implies a set of expectations in readers” (28). This concept is true of all genres, especially the genre of mystery. Readers will be expecting there to be a crime—whether it be a murder or a robbery—and that crime must be solved by the final page of the book. However, some authors have boldly attempted to write unsolved mysteries, stories where the case is never actually solved. These types of stories are not very popular because they often frustrate readers. The expectation of having questions answered is never met in unsolved mysteries.

This expectation is usually addressed by the plot of the typical mystery story. The story should follow the set expectations by sticking to a clear and detailed plot. In the article “The Mystery of Agatha Christie,” Teresa Akersten expanded on the concept of a clear plot, stating:

Marcia Talley, president of the mystery writing organization Sisters in Crime, explains the commandments. She says, “You play fair with the reader. You provide the clues. You might have red herrings in there. ... In the end, you should be slapping your head and saying, ‘Oh, I should have seen that.’” (15)

Throughout the mystery, the writer’s narration should provide all the information needed for the reader to solve the case alongside the detective or main character of the mystery novel. The information that needs to be provided is part of the plot: the steps that help create the story. First, the crime is discovered. The police or even a detective is often called to the scene of the crime where an investigation will take place. There may be clear suspects to the crime but that is not always the case. The police or detective (or the character acting as a detective) will investigate,

searching for the clues and hints that will lead them to the criminal and ultimately the solution. Through these clues and hints, the reader can make guesses and form expectations on how the crime will be solved and who committed the crime. When the final resolution of the mystery is revealed, all those hints and clues should tie together to create a solution that not only makes sense to the reader but also fulfills the expectation of a case well-solved. The writer will be able to set up a wonderful plot when he/she take the time to make sure they meet their readers expectations by carefully weaving important clues and hints that point to the crime's solution.

Solving the Case for Plot

When creating the resolution of the case, writers must be careful to avoid using poor explanations of why certain details were not addressed. Agatha Christie and other mystery writers firmly believed that as mystery writers, they should never use poor reasoning to explain crimes or explain away inconsistencies. These writers formed the Detection Club to hold themselves accountable in their mystery writing. Dorothy Sayers created their solemn oath that they all held to when creating their mystery plots:

“Do you promise,” it asks, “that your detectives shall well and truly detect the crimes presented to them using those wits which it may please you to bestow upon them and not placing reliance on nor making use of Divine Revelation, Feminine Intuition, Mumbo Jumbo, Jiggery Pokery, Coincidence, or Act of God?” (Davis 30)

However, it is not always easy to follow such an oath. Sometimes, it can be very tempting to use a simple solution like magic or fancy scientific terms to solve a problem in one's mystery plot. Bell noted how “sometimes even the best laid plans are not enough—we look at the immediate horizon and see just lifeless scene cards lying there” (200). Writers can easily be discouraged when trying to find solutions that follow their set plotline. It takes a great effort to

ignore the temptations of poor solutions. While the temptation can be great, hopeful mystery writers can look to past mystery writers and learn from their mistakes and successes. The past authors of mystery also struggled as they worked on their mystery stories and did their best to improve on the genre, fixing the mistakes of mystery writers of their past.

Agatha Christie understood that the key to writing a good mystery novel was one that had a solid plot and tidy endings. Her final resolutions concluded with all elements of the case being explained and solved. Agatha Christie herself commented on the importance of organizing plot and having clear endings. The readers should not be left wondering how the crime was solved, and they most certainly should not find the crime implausible. As Christie stated in her autobiography *Agatha Christie: An Autobiography*,

I had written the book [*And Then There Were None*] because it was so difficult to do that the idea had fascinated me. Ten people had to die without it becoming ridiculous or the murderer being obvious. I wrote the book after a tremendous amount of planning, and I was pleased with what I had made of it. It was clear, straightforward, baffling, and yet had a perfectly reasonable explanation.” (491)

Looking at Agatha Christie’s work, it is easy to see how much planning she did to ensure that her readers were given a reasonable explanation for not only how the crime was committed but also how that crime was solved. Her focus on planning and realism is what helped prevent her from falling into plot holes and using poor solutions to make up for those plot holes.

Agatha Christie could create reasonable explanations that felt realistic because “like many aspiring writers are taught to do, Christie wrote primarily about what she knew” (Akersten 15). Plots can easily turn into a tangle of confusion when the author is unfamiliar with the subjects that they are writing about. In a mystery novel, it is important for writers to write about

what they are familiar with and have knowledge in. Herbet Kinnell, author of “Agatha Christie’s Doctors,” noted how Agatha Christie used her knowledge in medicine to create characters like Dr. James Sheppard and Dr. Robert Ames who murdered their victims by using medical approaches (1324). Her familiarity with medicine allowed her to create murder plots that the readers could believe. In her article “How Agatha Christie’s Wartime Nursing Role Gave Her a Lifelong Taste for Poison,” Vanessa Thorpe explained how Agatha Christie was well-versed in the medical field due to her service as a nurse during World War I. Christie’s experiences allowed her to make the descriptions of medical crimes sound realistic and plausible.

Creative Manuscript

Let No Dog Bark

Michelle G. Cannon

Adult Young

Mystery

PROLOGUE

Summer in New York City was always a little hot. The sun just blazing and hitting the concrete and spreading the sweltering heat in all directions. She would rather be on an Alaskan cruise where the air was crisp and where she'd be served ice-cold beverages. Instead, she was in the middle of Central Park, questioning life.

She *should* be on that cruise. It had been promised to her, but thanks to a certain blonde, all those plans were turned to dust. All because her little roommate had to tattle. Thanks to her roommate, she was missing out on a cruise and had been basically disgraced. Her own family was ashamed of her. It wasn't her fault that she had gotten expelled. It was that roommate of hers.

She was seething with rage as she sat down on a bench. What was she to do now? Graduation was supposed to take place next year, but she wouldn't be able to graduate since she was no longer in college. And it wasn't like she could simply transfer to another college. They wouldn't accept her once they saw her transcript. A once-beautiful transcript was now marred with an ugly red stamp showing that she had cheated her way to the top. If only her roommate had kept quiet. Things would have been fine. Her family would still be fawning over her, praising her good grades, and planning her graduation. Instead, she was stuck in New York City trying to figure out what she ought to do with her life.

"You seem lost in thought."

The young lady looked over her shoulder in surprise. After all, he was the last person she would have expected to see in such a place.

"Professor—"

"Tsk, tsk. I'm not here as your professor. I'm here as a friend. May I take a seat?"

She was puzzled by the professor's behavior. He had never really liked her. Even though she only had one course with him, she could sense that he didn't think much of her. In fact, she wouldn't be surprised if he had been one of the professors to have confirmed her plagiarism. She had been stupid to think she could fool such a man. But still, she nodded. It was probably going to be one of those long, tedious lectures about cheating and whatnot.

"I hear you have quite the dilemma."

It had been a week or two after meeting the professor that she finally decided what she was going to do. Revenge. She hadn't even realized that was a choice until something the professor said gave her the perfect idea. Sure, she was angry with her roommate. The very thought of the ex-roommate gave her a bad taste in her mouth. Yes, she was angry, but she hadn't thought of revenge. At least, not seriously. She had only silently fumed about how she wished the roommate would get her just deserts. But now? Thanks to her professor, she now had the power in her hands to make sure her ex-roommate got what she deserved.

She hadn't been sure how she'd go about it, but by a rather happy coincidence, she saw her old roommate jogging with a dog by her side. That little dog would be the key to her plan. She simply had to learn her roommate's schedule and match it to create the perfect revenge.

CHAPTER ONE

Kip yawned as he flipped open the sign on the entrance door. He regretted staying up late watching mystery documentaries. The last one that played had been on Sherlock Holmes, so he couldn't go to bed without finishing it. His roommate and co-worker, Min-soo "Min" Carson, had just gone to bed, stating that he preferred Lord Peter Wimsey to Sherlock. Min had made the wiser decision. While he enjoyed the documentary, Kip was extremely sleepy, and it wasn't even quite nine o'clock. He found himself yawning again as he glanced around the shop. Who would come to this little Korean American bookstore café this early in the day? Anyone that came in this early would be over at the café side bothering Min with orders of coffee and pastries.

Where was Min anyways? He normally came over to check on the bookstore, making sure that Kip hadn't accidentally changed up the display of the new Korean book imports. Then, his friend would offer him a cup of coffee or something. Kip squinted over the various bookshelves, seeing if he could spot his friend. Alas, he must be in the kitchen.

Kip stifled another yawn as he fiddled with the new releases' display. The newly published books and mangas were nicely displayed near the front of the store. He just wanted to give it a few tweaks to make the display really pop. Though, maybe he was trying a little too hard. Min often mentioned that he put too much effort into it, saying that sometimes, simpler is better. Still, Kip couldn't resist trying to give the bookstore a little flair. After all, this place didn't belong to them. The little bookstore café was owned by Min's parents. They were just lucky to be in charge of the place for the whole summer. He didn't want to disappoint Mr. and Mrs. Carson, so a little more adjusting to the display couldn't hurt.

"Kip!" a voice called out cheerfully.

Kip glanced up from the display. Oh, it was only Matt. Only Matt. That was how people often referred to the poor bloke. It wasn't a personal jab. It was just that Matt didn't stick out. He was plain through and through and easily passed over despite his towering height. Kip looked up into the bright green eyes curious as to why Matt was even there.

“Hullo, Matt. What's up?”

The taller man brightened at the question and put a newspaper into Kip's face. “This! I wanted you and Min to be the first to see.”

Kip squinted. “Uh, what am I supposed to be seeing exactly?” he asked, trying to focus on the tiny letters that were barely an inch away from his face.

“Oh right...” Matt gave his friend a sheepish look as he pulled the newspaper away so he could point to an article on the side. “Look right here. It's for my grand opening.”

“Your grand opening?”

Kip glanced over the article. The words grand opening rang a bell, but he couldn't quite recall why.

“For my dog park. I was finally able to get a small section of Central Park blocked off for a little doggie daycare park on the weekends. I know I have my summer walking business and my part-time job at Curly Cuts, but this is something I was really wanting to pull off for the dogs.”

“Uh huh...” Kip nodded, not really interested. He had never been much of an animal person. He had never been allowed to have a pet, so he never developed a desire to have one. Yet, he somehow managed to become close friends who were pet people. Min had two cats while Matt had three dogs—four if he counted the puppy Matt was fostering at the moment. “I guess a ‘congratulations’ is in order.”

Matt beamed. “Thanks! You’ll have to stop by and see the grand opening. It’s on a Saturday, so you should be able to be there. I was even able to get some dog-safe decorations and snacks for everyone to enjoy for the big grand opening party.”

Kip couldn’t help making a slight face at the mention of snacks. For everyone? Uh, no thank you. If it was made for dogs, there was no way he was going to put it anywhere near his mouth. Nope, not him.

“Min said he was good with creating new cookies and is going to help make them for me,” Matt continued, oblivious to his friend’s aversion to the idea. “So, I wanted to stop by and show you two the article and see how the cookies were coming along.”

Well, Kip wouldn’t want to ruin his friend’s excitement over a trivial dislike for dog snacks.

“Glad you stopped by. Min’s probably in the kitchen working on making a fresh batch of coffee. Why don’t you grab a table for yourself, and I can have Min swing by with a coffee on me.”

Kip smiled at Matt and nudged him toward the café. He wouldn’t take no for an answer! It wouldn’t a problem to let the man have a free coffee. Min wouldn’t mind either. After all, his parents thought highly of Matt. He was one of their favorite customers, or something like that.

Once Matt had been seated, Kip made his way to the kitchen. “Oh Miiiiiiin!” he called out, finally spotting his friend was working on baking cookies or maybe scones. Kip couldn’t really tell. The baking and coffee and all such things were left to Min since he was familiar with his mom’s various pastry recipes. Kip couldn’t tell the difference between a scone and a cookie...

“You need something, Kip?”

“Matt’s here.”

Min brightened, looking up from his work. “Oh, is he? Did he want to taste-test his snacks?”

Kip did his best not to gag at the mention of doggy-safe snacks.

“No, he just wanted to talk. I told him he could have a coffee on me.”

Min hummed thoughtfully. “I’ll grab some of the snacks just in case.”

“You... do that.” Kip would just have to be sure not to be around lest *he* be forced to eat one of those snacks. The thought alone was enough to make him sick. “I’ll be in the bookstore if you need me!”

“You do that,” Min called out cheerfully, placing a few cookies on a plate as he headed out to greet their friend.

“Matt!” he greeted. “Want to try these cookies? They should be dog safe.”

His friend looked up from his seat with a smile. “You sure about that?”

Min pouted. “Yes, I remember what you told me. No chocolate. No raisins. No dairy products. No yeast. No caffeine.” He waved his friend off with one hand and set out the plate of cookies. “I made sure to make them completely doggy safe.”

Matt didn’t look quite convinced as he inspected one of the cookies. “No spices?”

“Well, I did use a little nutmeg.”

“Min!” Matt gasped. “You didn’t! Spices can be dangerous to dogs. Nutmeg can be poisonous while other spices can cause seizures.”

And then... Min was given a long lecture on *all* the things dogs cannot eat, and the list was very extensive.

Over the next couple of days, Min busied himself in the kitchen. Whether it was at their shared apartment or at the café, Min was in the kitchen baking like crazy. And Kip had never seen Min more irritable. The typically laid-back and cheerful man was like an angry storm cloud on the verge of breaking into a raging storm. And Kip had no idea why Min was so...

SMACK SMACK SMACK.

“Ah... there he goes again,” Kip mumbled to himself, peeking into the café’s kitchen where Min was angrily hitting some sort of dough with a rolling pin.

SMACK!

Well, as long as Min was angry at the dough and not him, all was well. He’d just go back to the bookstore side and—

“KIP!!!”

Or not.

“Y-yes?” Kip hesitantly popped his head back into the kitchen. “Do you need something?”

Min looked up at Kip, revealing the darkest of circles under his eyes. Somehow... Kip had missed that earlier in the day. But then, when do you really look at someone’s face? Especially one that is incredibly familiar? It was easy to miss things that were out of place when you just expect to see the familiar.

“Get me... a doggy cookbook.”

“A what?”

“You heard me the first time!” Min pounded the dough with his fist this time. “I tried doing it by scratch, but it tastes awful. It needs to taste a little good so people can eat it too.”

“Eat what?”

“The cookies, Kip. The *cookies*,” Min groaned. “Matt wants both people and dogs to eat it at his opening... I wanted to try to make them from scratch on my own, but it’s not working!”

“And so, you want to borrow a book?”

Min nodded fiercely. “Please Kip. I won’t damage it, and if I do, I’ll buy it. My parents don’t have to know. Just please give me a doggy cookbook.”

His friend seemed quite determined. And looking at the deformed lump of dough told Kip that they could sacrifice one book rather than his own head. Min always had a bit of a temper on him, “from the Korean side” was what he’d say. That and something about his blood type and personality making him more vocal about his feelings. Whatever the case, Kip knew better than to anger his friend further.

“I’ll get the book...”

Hopefully, the book would help. He was afraid Min might go crazy if it didn’t. This was exactly why he had encouraged the crazy friend *not* to help Matt. Sure, they were all close friends, but there were still limitations between what favors could or could not be done. And this? It was looking like it might be one that couldn’t be done. Or so Kip thought.

After three days of angry baking, Min finally had gotten the cookies to taste good and be dog-friendly. All at the expense of Kip’s stomach... he should have thought twice before accepting cookies from Min. But his friend was a little on the sly side and had been able to trick him eating several batches of cookies every single time. It was a miracle he wasn’t sick. Some of those cookies were absolutely *not* meant for human consumption. At all. Kip couldn’t be more eager for Matt’s grand opening to finally happen.

For both his friends' sake, he hoped it hit off well. Both of them worked hard, and despite his whole stomach issue, he could wish Min the best of luck with delivering the snacks on the opening day. And after that, he thought that would be the end of the discussions of the dog park. After all, neither he nor Min were dog people.

CHAPTER TWO

It was like clockwork. Matt would always come by the café precisely at six o'clock in the evening every Monday. He got off work around five and made his way straight to the café for a cup of tea and a chat with Kip and Min. At the moment, he was happily chattering away with Kip as Min worked on wiping down some of the nearby tables.

“And so you see, my cousin Genevieve moved in next door and has been bringing her dog to my park!” Matt explained. “Maisy. That’s her dog’s name. Brightest and smartest dog in the whole city, I swear.”

Kip tried to look interested, but it was hard. After almost five or six Mondays in a row of this discussion on dogs, he was so done. He had never been an animal person, and by the end of this month, he was certain he never would be. Still, he needed to be polite to his friend and try to listen.

“That’s nice.”

“You should see Maisy sometime! Genevieve brings her every Saturday in the afternoon. You’d love her,” Matt insisted.

“The dog or Genevieve?” Min interrupted, pouring some more tea into the empty mugs.

“Maisy!” Matt corrected and shot Min a warning look. He wasn’t offering his cousin for any meetups. Besides, he was pretty sure she preoccupied with her senior project to be even thinking of dating. Though, he was pretty sure her parents would be happy to hear that she was finally doing something more than locking herself up in her apartment slaving away with schoolwork when it was summer break.

“Ah yes. The dog,” Min nodded in approval. “I’m sure Kip will love her. I’d offer to come, but since I have cats, it might not be the best idea.”

Kip coughed a little as he sipped his tea. “Um, aren’t you forgetting that I’m your roommate? I’d be around cats too!”

Min waved off his friend. “You don’t even touch them. You’ll be just fine.”

“*Traitor!*” Kip glared at his friend, but Min just smiled as he headed back towards the kitchen.

Apparently, delivering the cookies for the grand opening was the only bit of goodwill Min had in his heart for Matt’s dog park. Well, considering that Min *was* a cat person, it made sense. But *still!* Why did he force this visit onto him? He didn’t like cat *or* dogs.

Central Park was always a sort of bustle of energy. Not quite as energetic as New York City, but still a rather busy and active place. The main park in the whole city. Well, probably the *only* park. Kip didn’t really visit the park, and neither did Min. Cats didn’t need walks after all. They never really had a reason to explore the place, both being busy with college and uninterested in outdoor activities.

Which meant Kip was not entirely familiar with the layout of the park. He thought he had found the right path, but he ended up circling past the William Shakespeare statue *twice*. He had been so certain that Min had said to turn left past the statue. But where was left?! This statue was sitting near a sort of roundabout. Left could be any of the paths sticking out from the circle path. How was he supposed to know where to go?

“And so doth the mighty Caesar fall!”

Kip paused, turning back to face the statue. He recognized that thick Russian accent. But what on earth would *he* be doing here? Kip didn’t really want to see him, but his curiosity got the

best of him. And soon, he was walking back to the Shakespeare statue to locate the owner of the Russian voice.

“You too Brute? Yes, even Brutus shamelessly stabbed the mighty Julius Caesar!”

Kip didn't even know why he was surprised to see the familiar figure standing just in front of Shakespeare, eagerly explaining Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* to a few passing individuals. The man had been (and probably still was) a professor of world literature at New York University. Professor Lonki. A highly academic figure but very eccentric. Emphasis on *very*.

Kip had no interest in getting involved with his professor. He was... plain weird if Kip was bluntly honest. Since he wasn't in college at the moment, he'd just continue on his way and pretend he hadn't seen Professor Lonki.

“Ho, Kip. Why doth thou leave with such haste?” the professor called out much to his ex-student's dismay.

“Ah... Professor Lonki...” was the reluctant reply.

“You have passed by me twice and would not have given me as much as a greeting if I had not called out to you,” the professor scolded.

Kip rubbed the back of his neck sheepishly. “Sorry, Professor. But I'm afraid I'm a bit lost and have somewhere I need to be.”

“The dog park.”

Kip gave his professor an incredulous look. “How did you know?”

There was a slight twinkle of mischief in Professor Lonki's eye. “Well, young Kip, I know you are close friends with a certain young man who just happens to run a little dog park not too far from here. And,” he added, “I heard you mumbling about directions to said park as you passed me.”

For a moment, Kip had almost seen Professor Lonki as a shrewd observer of his comings and goings... in the end, it was a lucky guess and sharp hearing. There was no way his professor could be seen as clever and smart outside the fields of literature.

“Do you by any chance know which path leads to the dog park?”

He might as well ask for directions since it seemed the professor was somewhat familiar with the park.

“Down that way.” Professor Lonki pointed to a path that curved away from the statue. “Keep on that path and you will find your signs to your dog park.”

“Ah, thank you!” Kip gave his old professor a quick wave of goodbye and hurrying down the path.

Through what did Professor Lonki mean about signs? He was pretty sure that people weren't allowed to put up signs for their businesses. Maybe he was talking about how he was starting to see more and more dogs as he continued on the path? After all, this was Professor *Lonki* he was talking about. The professor had never really given a normal straightforward answer before, so why should he expect one now?

He shook off the strange feeling as he made it to the dog park, brushing past a policeman. No, two policemen.

“*Odd, what would they be doing at this side of the park?*” Kip thought to himself as he finally spotted his friend.

“Hey Ma—” But he stopped short. His friend was talking to *another* policeman? Had something happened to the park? But he was so certain that Matt had gone through every precaution and made sure to follow every rule in the book.

He quickened his pace, dodging a few dogs and their owners as he made his way over to Matt.

“Are you sure you can’t do anything?” Matt was asking the officer. “It just doesn’t make sense!”

The policeman sighed apologetically. “I’m sorry, but there’s nothing we can really do. You will just have to wait to get any answers. If you’ll excuse me, I must go back to the scene.”

Matt looked glumly after the policeman, not noticing that his friend was now beside him.

“Are you okay?”

Matt looked down at his friend surprised but relieved to see him. “Kip! You’re exactly who I need to talk to.”

Somehow... that phrase made him uncomfortable and rather nervous. “I’m not a lawyer. I just—”

“No, no!” Matt waved him off. “I don’t need a lawyer. I need a detective. You and Min are perfect.”

“Huh??” Kip certainly wasn’t expecting this sort of request. “What do you mean detective?”

“It’s about Maisy.”

“Maisy?” Oh, *Maisy*. The dog that Matt had been constantly jawing about the past couple of weeks. His cousin’s dog. “I don’t see how we can help. Min’s a cat person and I—”

“What? No, it’s *about* her not about her,” Matt explained hastily. “I want you and Min to investigate this little problem that involves her. You see...” He lowered his voice. “Maisy suddenly ran off from Elodie, and we found her not too far from here and she was suffering from seizures. We managed to get her to the vet, and they say she’s stable... but I just don’t understand how

Maisy could suddenly just have a seizure. The police won't help since Maisy's accident isn't serious... they just came because people made a fuss."

Matt sighed. "Genevieve isn't here, but I know she'll be upset and want to know what happened with Maisy... I'm worried too because this could be bad for my park. People might not trust my park thanks to this incident."

"I don't see how Min and I can help though," Kip pointed out.

"Please, Kip! You and Min were always interested in mysteries and even have a detective club at college. I need to know why Maisy suddenly got a seizure. The police won't do anything... they say it was just an accident, but I can't accept that! What if someone's purposefully targeting dogs and trying to harm them?"

Kip sighed. "Matt, please. I'm your friend, but I really don't think I can be of any assistance. Same with Min."

Matt gave him the best puppy dog eyes that green eyes can give, but Kip would not be moved. He didn't play detective. Matt would just have to face the fact that his cousin's dog just had a seizure. It wasn't something to investigate. It was just a fact of life. Maybe the dog just ate something it wasn't supposed to.

It wasn't a case to be solved. It was just some sick dog. Okay, Kip could admit that it was a little heartless to say that. This dog was someone's pet. A friend, a companion. But the facts remained the same in his mind. It wasn't something to investigate. The police seemed to think it wasn't worth looking into. It was just a strange incident. And he didn't need to solve it. End of story.

But Matt sure was persistent... instead of showing off his park like he had normally done, he had just kept asking Kip to think about taking on the case. To reconsider! Matt had even gone as far as texting Min, asking if he would help.

And knowing Min, he probably said yes. Okay, fine! If Min wanted to play detective, then he could do that. But him? No, Kip was not interested in this problem. Matt and Min could work on it together. They didn't need him to figure out that this was just an accident. If they just looked at things closely, they'd see what he clearly saw.

At least, that's what he thought until he got to the apartment to be greeted by Min who also tried his hardest to recruit Kip to help Matt as a fellow detective. But the answer would be the same: no. He did not want to get involved. He repeated it over and over again, until it had seemed like Min had given in. *Seemed...* Kip couldn't be certain with Min after all.

The only thing that made him wary was that Min suggested they head to the shop.

CHAPTER THREE

“Matt is really upset over it.”

Kip groaned. “I know that.”

“We should look into it.”

Kip huffed, shooting his friend an annoyed look. “I told you already. We’re not detectives. And besides, Matt already said the police weren’t going to look into it. Why should we?”

Min raised an eyebrow. “And as Matt’s friends, we should.”

“For the love of... Min, we aren’t detectives.”

“So? Who says we have to be?” Min pointed out. “Matt just wants us to look into it and see if we can find answers. It would mean a lot to him, and you know it.”

Kip made a grumbling sound, deciding to ignore his friend’s urgings and just focus on stocking books. The shop was typically closed on Saturdays, but sometimes, the two of them would come by to stock up or just tidy things up for Monday. Since they were both there, they decided to let the shop be open for a couple of hours.

His friend gave him a disappointed look before returning to the café side. Seriously, sometimes, he just didn’t understand Min. They may have been roommates for years. Back then in college and now as business partners. But there were times when he found his half-Korean friend simply frustrating. It was like Min somehow always knew something. Perhaps that was why he felt a little bit guilty for being so adamant against looking into Maisy’s sudden seizures. It was just a dog. Why should they worry about it? The police certainly didn’t see a reason to cause a fuss.

“It would mean a lot to Matt.”

Even in his thoughts, Min was invading his headspace! But he knew his friend was right. Matt would really appreciate if they could figure this mess out. And if he was being honest, the dog's seizures did seem out of place. After all, he had actually seen the dog and learned how smart she was through all those stupid videos Matt forced him to watch. Matt had always gushed about her IQ and her cute little habits. There was something there, but why did he and Min have to be the ones to look into it?! Why couldn't Matt just go and *hire* a private detective? It wasn't like he and Min had any experience in solving cases. The silly little cooperative criminal investigation board games they played were just *games*. No way could *that* be counted as experience or interest. Sure, Kip had dabbled in mystery writing and may have even studied the great writers of the Golden Age of Detection, but that didn't mean anything. Really. It meant absolutely nothing. He hadn't even graduated yet.

Kip distracted himself from the mystery of Matt and Maisy by focusing his attention on stocking books. It was amazing how many books needed to be replaced.

The bell to the café rang, signaling the entrance of a potential customer. He could faintly hear Min's cheerful voice calling out a welcome to the guest. Though, the rather boisterous words of the customer threw Kit off.

“Who wrought with them, and all things else that might to half a soul and to a notion craz'd? Say ‘This did Banquo!’”¹

What sort of customer would be quoting *Macbeth* of all things? Kip couldn't help peeking over the shelves to see the strange customer and try to catch what was being said. There was something familiar about that voice now that he thought about it.

“Oh, Professor Lonki!” Min greeted.

¹ Direct quote from *Macbeth*, Act III, Scene I, Lines 81-83

Kip almost tripped over the book cart at this declaration. Professor *Lonki*?! What was their professor doing here of all places? First the park, and now here?!

“You made it known to us!” the professor responded, *still* quoting from Macbeth. Kip had forgotten how strange the Russian man was, again. And so full of theatrics.

“Yes, it was rather nice of the college to put an advertisement for the shop in their school paper,” Min responded. “My parents will be very grateful.”

Did... that even make sense? Kip peered into the café, still hiding behind the bookshelves. Although now, he was much closer to the café and could clearly see the form of his former professor conversing with Min.

“I did so; and went further, which is now our point of second meeting. Do you find your patience so predominant in your nature that you can let this go?” Professor Lonki continued.

It was amazing that Min was keeping a straight face. Kip didn't think he could keep a poker face with the professor babbling about in Shakespeare.

“Well, it was difficult at first, but I think Kip and I didn't mind that it took this long for them to finally make an ad.”

Kip didn't understand how to follow this strange conversation. Here, Min was responding as if it were a normal conversation while their professor was just spouting off Shakespeare. Either they had their own secret code, or Min was just playing it off very well. He had just been turning to go back to his books when the professor quoted another line.

“As hounds, and greyhounds, mongrels, spaniels, curs, shoughs, water-rugs, and demi-wolves, are 'clept. All by the name of dogs: the valued file. Distinguishes the swift, the slow, the subtle, the housekeeper, the hunter, every one according to the gift which bounteous nature hath in him closed!”

With all the talk about dogs with Matt, maybe he was only now more heavily aware of discussion on dogs, and that was why he even noticed the quote mentioning different breeds of dogs. He would never have really thought about dog breeds if it weren't for Matt... maybe this was a sign for him to simply take the case? Not that he *believed* in signs, but he had to admit the coincidences really had him wondering if he'd go crazy if he didn't help Matt out this once.

"You'll do it? For real?" Matt looked at Kip then at Min with bright eyes. "I can't thank you enough! This means so much... Genevieve will be so upset when she finally comes back, but at least with you two, we'll be able to know why Maisy was targeted.

Kip cleared his throat. "We don't know if Maisy was targeted... it could have just been an accident."

"I'm positive she was a target," Matt insisted. "Maisy is smart dog. She wouldn't just run off like that for no reason and get sick."

"I'm not denying her IQ, just stating facts. You said yourself that the police didn't think it was anything worth investigating," Kip pointed out. "We will look into this... incident, but we can't just say someone's targeting the dog or dogs."

Matt huffed, mumbling, "I still think it's a targeting issue..."

Min gave Kip a light jab in the ribs with his elbow, mouthing, "*Be nice.*" Then, he turned to their friend, "We'll do our best to figure out what really happened to Maisy."

Matt beamed at his two friends. "Thank you it means so much to me. And you'll need this."

The taller man proudly placed a bag on the table.

"What's... this?" Kip eyed the bag suspiciously.

“Evidence!” Matt grinned, pulling out a Ziploc bag and a large envelope. “This,” he explained, handing the Ziploc bag to Min, “is Genevieve’s hat. It was found on a bench where I found Maisy.”

“And this?” Kip picked up the envelope, peering into it curiously.

“Medical records.”

Kip glanced at Min. The half-Korean hadn’t batted an eyelash and was investigating the hat through the plastic wrapping.

“Medical records?”

“Probably to determine why Maisy had a seizure,” Min answered, setting the hat back down. “Did the vet say something that gave you stronger suspicions?”

Matt nodded seriously. “He believes something triggered her seizure since she’s a healthy dog.” He clenched his fists. “If Elodie had kept a better eye on her... we might have been able to prevent all this.” He sighed softly then looked back at his two friends with a small smile. “I know you can’t undo the past, but please, find out why she had to suffer.”

“We’ll do our best,” Min promised, nudging Kip to agree half-heartedly.

This wasn’t exactly the sort of weekend Kip had in mind... looking into a dog’s possible murder attempt? He still felt that it was highly unlikely that someone would try to kill a dog. It sounded rather silly, but the whole seizure business did feel a little fishy. Only a little. Kip was not convinced that there was actual murder afoot. Min might be looking for a criminal, but Kip certainly wasn’t.

That Monday, Min gathered all the books on dogs from the bookstore. He took two copies of each book, one for him and one for Kip. To study. To *study*! Was the man mad? Studying? At this time of life? He had to be joking.

But alas, Min did not joke. He forced the books in Kip's hands, ordering him to study whenever he had breaks and promising to do the same himself. And without giving him a moment to protest, Min had returned to the café, his own books in hand.

"You owe me 100 bucks for those books!" Kip called out, huffing as he took his stack of books to the counter. Technically, Min didn't owe him anything... this was his parents' shop after all, but *he* was in charge of the books. So, Min should compensate.

To think he had to study about dogs! This whole case was getting more annoying the more that he thought about it. Why did *he* have to learn about dogs? Couldn't they just ask Matt and get it over with?

Nope, Min was stubborn. He believed that it was their responsibility to get things done. Something about you can't always depend on others to know everything for you. Right, as detectives they had to dig for knowledge on their own with zero guidance.

"I'm not a detective!" Kip groaned.

But groaning and complaining wasn't going to get him anywhere. He had a shop to run. Studying on dogs would have to wait until after the bookstore was closed. Surely Min could understand that!

CHAPTER FOUR

After several days of hard studying, Kip had hoped to take a break from the case. He was going to have visions of dogs in his sleep at this rate! However, Min had other plans for their weekend. That Saturday to be precise.

Coming to the park again wasn't exactly in Kip's plans, but Min had insisted. Something about this being the time for jogging? He hadn't quite caught what his friend had said. But here they were in the park at six o'clock on a Saturday morning.

Kip yawned, tugging at his hoody strings. "It's too cold for a jog at this hour! Besides, Matt's doggy park doesn't open until 10!"

"That's not why we're here," Min said as he stretched. "We already got enough information from Matt and the dog park. We're here to meet someone."

"Huh?" Kip gave his friend a confused look. "Meet someone? What do you mean by that? This isn't like those detective games we play where some NPC just appears and gives us a clue."

Min had the audacity to laugh at him. "You'll see. This is no random meeting."

Kip opened his mouth to argue more, but his friend was already going down the path at a light jog. He groaned inwardly then hurried after Min, grumbling under his breath.

"Less grumbling more jogging!" his friend called out cheerfully.

Kip could only groan. He'd really like to be back in bed, sleeping under his cozy blankets. He'd even welcome the sound of Min's cats whining for breakfast if it meant he could be back at the apartment instead of jogging in endless circles around the park. Min seemed to be leading them endlessly throughout the expansive park. Past the Shakespeare statue and then past

the volleyball courts. It felt like they had been jogging for hours... Why were they here again? To meet someone? Who in their right mind would want to be jogging at this hour?

“Hurry! We’ll miss her,” Min exclaimed, picking up the pace.

“Wait, what?!” Kip called out, panting as he tried to run after his friend. This ‘she’ must be the person Min wanted to meet.

And looking up ahead, he could spot a blonde jogger with a small black-and-white dog. The only other person who was as crazy as Min to be jogging this early.

“Ah! You must be Genevieve!” Min called out to the female jogger.

The jogger turned, tossing her hair over her shoulder. “And you are?”

Min gave a little bow. “I’m Min, and this,” he gestured towards Kip who was lagging behind him. “This slow jogger is Kip. We’re friends with your cousin Matt. He told us you enjoyed morning jogs.”

Genevieve brightened a little. “Oh yes. Mattie did mention you two. You two work at that little bookshop over in Koreatown?”

Min nodded. “That would be correct! We were hoping to catch you here and ask you a few questions.”

“Questions?”

“Yes,” Min answered, motioning for Kip to stand beside him. “We were hoping to get an accurate path of where you typically jogged with Maisy.”

The dog beside Genevieve let out a happy woof, hearing her name.

“What a smart dog,” Kip complimented awkwardly.

Genevieve chuckled as she patted her dog’s head. “You wanted to know where I usually go with her?”

“Yes!” Min chimed in before Kip could stop him. “We wanted to help Matt figure out the best walking routes for dogs. He’d have asked you himself, but he was busy this week with Curly Cuts. We’re just helping him out since we’re not busy.”

Kip had to admit even if Min lacked tact... at least he was an excellent liar. Kit wouldn’t have been able to fabricate such a believable story. Instead, he was pretty sure that he would have just told Genevieve the truth behind their questions. But Matt had been insistent that the two not mention that they were actually investigating Maisy’s incident until a little later. While Matt believed the incident was an attack, he didn’t want to worry his cousin about it.

“Please!” Matt had begged. “You’ll worry Genevieve if you mention that. She doesn’t exactly know everything, so I don’t want her to know until we have something solid to give her.”

So, that’s where Min’s lying came in handy. He just hoped that this wouldn’t come back to bite them later. Lying wasn’t really a good habit to develop.

“Well, I take this path and swing around the Shakespeare statue then stop by the Balto statue,” she explained “Maisy likes the statue. It’s like she wants to make Balto her hero.”

Maisy let out another happy woof, looking rather pleased with herself. Kip wondered if the dog could actually understand what they were saying about her, but dogs weren’t that smart. Were they? Maybe he should have studied up on dogs a little harder.

Min nodded, taking out a notebook from his pocket and scribbling down something. Kip couldn’t quite make it out, but he was glad Min had the insight to be prepared. Some detective he was being...

“So, do you find that path busy at this hour?” Min asked, glancing up from his notebook. “You think this time would be a good time for more people to try to walk their dogs?”

Genevieve tilted her head thoughtfully. “Well, it honestly depends on the dogs’ personalities and habits with their humans, but I found that morning walks are great since there aren’t a lot of people around. I often let Maisy off the leash without worrying about people saying things.” She shrugged. “But if more people walked their dogs at that time, I don’t know if I will be able to keep that up with Maisy.”

Min nodded, still scribbling away. “Ah, I see. Thank you very much for your time! I hope you have a nice rest of your jog!”

Genevieve smiled and gave the two a soft ‘goodbye’ then continued on her way with Maisy happily trotting at her heels. It seemed lonely, or maybe that was just Kip’s imagination thanks to this whole dog business.

“So... what exactly were those questions for?” Kip asked, taking the notebook away from Min’s hands. Now that they were back at the apartment, he could speak a little more freely. Min had been rather tight-lipped after they had left Genevieve... Now, he could get some answers!

“To gain information and avoid suspicion.”

“I understand the avoiding suspicion part, but not the gaining information.” Kip looked over Min’s messy handwriting with disdain. How was he supposed to read this... gibberish?

“Knowing her usual morning jogging route will help us understand Maisy’s habits,” Min explained as he set up their make-shift evidence board. “By mapping out her path, we can see where Maisy usually goes and what might have caused her to leave Matt. There might be something different in her mind that Matt and Genevieve’s friend didn’t realize. Maybe her friend took her a different route, and Maisy wanted to do it the right way.”

Kip sat down and watched as Min pinned a map of Central Park to the board. Well, that made sense. At least, it made sense now... but it might not make so much sense when he really thought this out. Min always sounded smart, but sometimes, he would just be pulling Kit's leg.

"I didn't know you were so well versed on dogs," he commented, draping his arms over the back of his chair.

"I'm not. I just did my research. Can you hand me a couple more pins and that piece of string on the table?"

Kip rolled his chair over and grabbed the items, lazily rolling back to his friend. "You're really going all out on this evidence board."

Once Kip had finally agreed to take on the case, Min had purchased a large corkboard and had it installed on their living room wall, replacing the ugly half-hearted tapestry painting Kip's distant aunt had made as a gift when they had first moved into the apartment. Here, they could always be reminded of the case and see the different clues and facts they had gathered. It made their apartment... more messy than ever.

"It pays to be professional."

"Right... all professional detectives create evidence boards for doggy murders." Kip glanced back down at Min's notebook. "You really think someone was trying to kill Maisy?"

Min looked over his shoulder and shrugged. "The vet confirmed that the seizures weren't normal for her," he reminded. "Matt said that he didn't remember hearing from Genevieve that Maisy was taking medication, so it's possible that something or someone triggered her seizure on purpose."

"But wouldn't all this research and questions be pointless?" He gestured at the notebook. "Those questions didn't really give us anything to go on."

Min raised an eyebrow. “We need all the clues we can get. Knowing the route they typically take could lead to us knowing how Maisy ended up where she did. I still think there’s a chance that this was deliberate. Think about it... What we need to figure out is *why* someone might dislike Maisy. An annoyed park guest? A disgruntled neighbor? That’s what this board is for.” He slammed his hand against the evidence board. “So, stop being so reluctant with this case, and lend a hand.”

Getting deeper into this case wasn’t exactly what Kip had in mind, but a promise was a promise. That’s what he had to keep reminding himself. It still seemed a bit silly to be looking into a dog’s death. Only Matt and Min could convince him to do such a thing. And both of them wouldn’t let him back out either.

“Don’t you think that we’ve done enough?” Kip pouted.

Min raised an eyebrow. “You call one day of questioning enough?”

Kip yawned. “Well, it’s just you keep having me wake up early on Saturdays to do this...”

“It’s not like we have time to do this during the week, Kip.”

Kip yawned again. “Mmmhmmm, so you said. But I still think there’s time after we close shop to investigate instead of waking up to go jogging again.”

“This is the only way we can meet Genevieve.”

“But doesn’t Matt live next door to Genevieve? Couldn’t we just ask him to have us meet or something?” asked Kip between yawns.

Min glanced at his friend as he pulled on his jogging shoes. “You know exactly why we can’t have Matt set us up. He doesn’t want her to know that we’re investigating until we have—”

“Solid proof. I know. I just think this whole thing is ridiculous.”

Min rolled his eyes as the two headed out for the park. While he understood why Kip felt so irritable (he had never been a morning person) and wasn't fond of this case, he wished his shorter friend would at least try to take things a little more seriously. This was for Matt after all.

Besides, life had been rather boring. Min loved their little shop, but sometimes, books and coffee could just get a bit dull. He wanted a little excitement every now and then, and Kip probably did too even if he didn't want to admit it. This was an opportunity to have some adventure spice up their life.

Kip was still yawning his head off as they entered the park. The shorter man simply followed his friend, trusting his guidance. After all, Kip wasn't exactly sure where they were headed. Just that Min wanted to meet up with Genevieve. Which could be anywhere really. Kip hated to admit he hadn't really been paying attention to the map of the park. Even if he knew her usual route as seen on their evidence board, there was no way he could translate that over to the actual park! He just had to trust that Min knew what he was doing.

“Ah! Over there. Miss Genevieve!” Min called out, waving excitedly at the jogger in the distance.

Kip couldn't help smiling a little as he watched the jogger approach them a soft smile. She seemed to be a nice sort of girl.

“Oh, hello again!” Genevieve greeted. “I didn't know you two were still jogging. Did Matt need more help?”

Min shook his head. “No, at least, not with the dog walks! We were hoping you could help us with a little poll Kip and I are doing. You see, I'm a cat person, so I have two of them back at home.” He smiled sweetly, not wanting to offend the dog lover. “So I'm biased towards

cats and feel like they are a better choice in pet since they don't cause a ruckus at the apartment. So, we were trying to see why some people might find dogs impossible to live with while others find it impossible with cats.”

Kip had been uncertain where this was leading at first, but as he listened, he realized that Min was a lot more prepared than he thought. His friend wasn't going into this blindly like he was. Min was actually taking the time and effort to research and *find* answers. It made him feel a little guilty for taking this case so flippantly...

Genevieve pursed her lips thoughtfully. “Well, I have heard one of the neighbors complain about Maisy. She had been barking at something, and they didn't like it. So, I suppose some people might find it easier to have cats since they don't really make a lot of noise. I think you have a point there, Min.”

Min nodded, notebook out as he scribbled away. “Very good. Is there anything else? Did all your neighbors or maybe anyone at the park feel this way about Maisy?”

The blonde shrugged. “Most of the neighbors were fond of her since she didn't really bark. The only other person who might have been a little annoyed is the landlord,” she admitted. “Maisy is a very good dog, but if I forgot to cut her nails, she'd scratch the floors up a bit. But I'm sure the same could be said of cats!”

Min did his best to smile. She wasn't trying to insult cats. And this was just a cover-up to get a list of possible suspects. “Yes, cats can scratch up the floor a bit as well,” he agreed, taking some more notes and humming thoughtfully to himself.

Kip was feeling... rather useless. Why was he even here? He stifled a yawn, glancing over and Genevieve. His eyes widened slightly as he noticed a familiar logo peeking out of her bag.

“Is that by any chance—?” Kip pointed to the logo.

Genevieve brightened. “Oh this?” She pulled out the flier and pointed proudly at the logo.

“You recognize it?”

Kip’s face flushed. “Well yes... I was looking at some website designers with Matt and that particular logo was done by—”

“Le Artiste Web,” Genevieve finished for him with a laugh.

“You are studying web design?” Kip asked curiously.

Genevieve gave him an amused look. “You could say that. You can’t just run a web design business without studying some web designing.”

“Wait...” Kip’s ears were burning now. “Does that mean you—?”

Genevieve merely smiled in response. “You can always get my business card from Matt if you need me. See you around soon!” She gave Kip a friendly wink before jogging off.

“She’s really something, isn’t she?” Min hummed.

“Huh?”

“Oh, nothing.” Min grinned, pocketing his notebook. “You should try talking to her more.”

“Huh?”

Min rolled his eyes. “A man of many words. That’s what you are.” He shook his head. “I think you should focus on Genevieve while I take a different angle.”

“Huh???”

Min just shook his head. There was no use in trying to explain anything with Kip in this state. He’d have to wait to make his request about Genevieve. He had a feeling that with Kip’s

interest in her hobbies, he might be able to get closer and find out a few more things about Maisy.

A little sneaky, but a detective had to do what a detective had to do. Once they found the truth, everything would come out and be known to her. Besides, it would be good to split the work evenly between the two.

CHAPTER FIVE

It wasn't like Min hadn't expected something like this to happen. The only thing was *why* did it happen now of all times? They were in the middle of a very important investigation, and Kip had to ask Genevieve on a date! Kip had said it was to help with the case... but Min really doubted that his friend would get anything done. Sure, he had been the one to think it was a good idea for Kip to be the one to investigate more into Genevieve, but so far, Kip had only been discussing web designs. Genevieve hadn't been able to give them much help since Kip had been slacking...

Though, in Kip's defense, even if Maisy was her dog, she hadn't been there when the crime happened. So, she was a little limited in information. However, that didn't mean Kip couldn't try to figure *something* out. There were ways to find out facts or gain some sort of information about Maisy. Maybe learn about the girl who had been taking care of Maisy while she was gone? That would be something.

"A date of all things!" Min grumbled to himself. So much for teamwork. It looked like Min would have to do all the sleuthing himself again. He had been trying to urge Kip to do things too. He knew his friend had a brilliant mind that would see things he didn't, but so far, Kip hadn't been able to use that side of himself.

Min huffed as he sat down in front of his computer. Well, at least one of them was going to get something done!

"Mreow?"

Min's expression softened as his calico cat hopped onto his lap, trilling for attention.

"Going to help me, Cali?" he asked, stroking the cat's head. "I'm afraid you're not going to like the topic very much."

“Meow?”

“Poor Min has to study dogs,” he explained, giving the cat a scratch behind the ears before gently pushing her off his lap. “So be a good kitty and take Stripes with you and shed your fur all over Kip’s bed!”

Min’s investigation wasn’t exactly going as smoothly as he would like. There wasn’t really anything solid to go on. He only had Matt’s suspicions, and following suspicions wasn’t an easy task. Still, he couldn’t sit around and do nothing. He had spent several hours staring at the evidence board he had built, trying to see where he could find something to go off of.

But he felt like he was going in circles. No one had witnessed exactly *when* Maisy had gotten her seizures. If they could know what caused the seizures, he and Kip could really figure out whether this incident was just an accident or not. He didn’t really want to go to the park, but staring at his board wasn’t going to get him anywhere. So he had given his two cats a farewell pat before heading for Central Park.

Min sighed as he entered the park. He really hadn’t planned on coming back after meeting up with Genevieve twice. The park seemed to have been cleared of all its clues, but looking back at his notes, he wondered if maybe they missed something. He and Kip hadn’t exactly taken the time to actually interview people around during the incident. They could only trust the information that Matt had been able to provide.

He shook his head. That had been foolish. They should have investigated themselves, but as Kip would probably point out, they weren’t professional detectives, so why should they? However, Min was going to try to correct that error. This was the only place that would give them answers or at a clue as to what really happened on that fateful Saturday.

Which was why he was staring at this random bench sitting on the edge of the path. It wasn't a completely random bench though. It was one of several benches that was located near where Matt's dog daycare was set up. And it was at such a bench that Genevieve's hat had been found alongside Maisy.

Min crouched beside the bench, inspecting the edges of the seat. Any physical evidence was probably long gone... but it was still worth the effort to check. It was still possible that something might show up.

"Excuse me, young man."

Min immediately got onto his feet, turning to face the stranger. "Oh, pardon me, miss!" He gave the elderly woman a sheepish smile and slight bow. "Did you want to take a seat?"

The woman sniffed a little but accepted Min's outstretched hand to take a seat on the bench. She made herself comfortable, taking her purse and placing it beside her with a soft sigh. "This park used to be so peaceful on the weekends you know."

"Oh?" Min looked at the woman curiously. It didn't seem important, but sometimes, the unimportant could prove useful. He didn't have anything to lose in this moment. "Has something changed?"

The old woman scowled as she pulled out a bag of birdseed from her purse. "I could feed the birds so peacefully on Saturday afternoon. Me and the other ladies like to feed the little birdies." She tsked. "Some of the others would feed the stray kitties, but it's all changed since that little dog daycare business started up."

Min perked up at this information. A possible lead. He might be able to find some suspects this way. "You don't like the dogs?"

“They scare away the birdies,” the woman huffed. “And it makes the whole park noisier than it ought. Nature should be peaceful.”

Min nodded slowly. The lady had a point. Many people went to the park to enjoy nature in peace and quiet. But dogs weren't exactly quiet creatures... Still, that didn't excuse the possibility of someone trying to harm the dogs just to get rid of them from this part of the park.

“Would you be happy if the daycare were to permanently close?” he asked hesitantly, wondering if this little old lady really would be that set against Matt's business. It was temporarily closed thanks to Maisy's incident. Matt didn't want to risk any other dogs' health if someone really was targeting the dog daycare.

“Many of us would be happy,” the old woman said sharply, turning away from Min and cooing at the birds that flew down to get the birdseed at her feet. “The sooner the better.”

That wasn't much to go on, but Min did feel like this information confirmed that Matt's worries weren't completely in vain. There were at least a few people who didn't like the daycare and would not be sorry to see it gone. So, he had a suspect list of sorts to set up. Mostly disgruntled old women. Apparently one of them had caused trouble before with another dog-related park. She had uprooted the signs and caused quite a stir. Her name was Francine Abbott. She was definitely someone to keep an eye on. He just hoped that Kip was also gaining some information that would help them sort out suspects.

CHAPTER SIX

Kip didn't know why he had done this to himself. He blamed Min! Okay, no, he couldn't blame Min, considering how much he had done to help Matt with this case while he didn't even do the bare minimum! This was his own fault. He was *supposed* to be investigating Maisy's incident, but instead, he was taking Genevieve to a performance of *Macbeth* at the university.

He had been initially planning on just hanging out with Genevieve then casually bringing up the topic of Maisy and such... but he had gotten sidetracked by a flier for the play and ended up asking the blonde for a date instead of asking important information.

"Ah Kip!"

Kip turned to see Genevieve waving him over with a bright smile. "I'm really glad you asked me to the play! I haven't seen a performance of *Macbeth* before, and getting tickets to the university's performance isn't easy.

Kip chuckled awkwardly. He had been lucky that Professor Lonki just happened to have sent him and Min tickets as several weeks ago... and here he thought the Russian professor hadn't liked him that much.

"Well, being a student still has its perks!"

Genevieve laughed softly. "I'm sure it does. I wish Matt would use his perks like you do," she teased as Kip offered his hand to take her to their seats. Professor Lonki spared no expense... VIP tickets. Made him sort of glad that Min wasn't here. Now *that* would be an awkward situation.

Once the audience had settled in, the lights dimmed... and the curtain rose, signaling the start of the performance. Kip couldn't help noticing how excited Genevieve looked. Seemed like Shakespeare (or plays in general) might be something she highly enjoyed. It was something to

tuck away for future thinking. A possible clue to understanding her character and maybe finding out more about Maisy? Okay, it was a little farfetched, but he had to prove to Min that this wasn't just a date!

The play was just as he expected. He wondered how much Professor Lonki invested in this year's performance... but at least Genevieve was enjoying herself. He had never been a huge fan of plays. When it came to world literature, he preferred novels to plays. He just had to endure this... how long was the play again? He snuck a peek at the program, paling slightly as he realized how long this was going to be. Were all plays almost two hours long?!

He felt a gentle nudge to his side.

"You okay?" Genevieve whispered. "There's an intermission in about 30 minutes."

"M'fine..." he murmured. Though, the word intermission was truly a blessing. He didn't think he could sit through two hours of *Macbeth*. He had heard quite enough Shakespeare thanks to his professor. Come to think of it, wasn't Professor Lonki quoting from this play when he was at the bookstore the other day? Some of the lines felt vaguely familiar now that he thought about it. He supposed the professor's head must have been filled with this play and caused him to be quoting it so much. Self-promotion for the performance maybe? He would never understand the world literature professor.

He suffered through several acts of the play until *finally* they broke for intermission. Plays could be very exhausting...

"New York University certainly has a talented drama team," Genevieve commented, glancing at the stage.

"Mmmm, they're pretty good," Kip answered, stifling a yawn. "Though, the actor playing Macbeth didn't recite lines on dogs in Act III as well as Professor Lonki did."

Genevieve gave the brunette a curious look. “Professor Lonki?”

Kip nodded. “One of the literature professors here. Takes a strong interest in all things Shakespeare. Helps with the drama team.” He gestured at the stage. “He puts a lot of funds into it, so he likes to stop by my shop and promote whatever plays they’re doing here. Was quoting that line about dogs the other day.”

“How funny,” Genevieve laughed. “I guess he really is passionate about Shakespeare.”

“You have no idea,” Kip chuckled. “And I quote, ‘All by the name of dogs: the valued file.’”

The two laughed then smiled at each other.

“Your professor really must have made an impression to make you remember such an obscure line,” Genevieve noted.

Kip shrugged. “I guess so, but lately my mind has been bombarded with dogs.” He shook his head with a slight smile. “Ever since Matt opened that dog park, all I hear about is dogs, dogs, dogs.”

“Well, Mattie has always been extremely into dogs,” she chuckled. “He really dotes on Maisy.”

Kip bit his lip. Maybe this was an opportunity to sleuth? But... it felt kind of wrong. She had no idea what he was up to regarding Maisy and Matt, and she was probably still sort of wary of the situation. However, he *promised* Min to do something about it while on this date.

“Was she a sick dog?”

Genevieve shook her head. “No, she is a really healthy dog. I mean... when she was little puppy, I was told she had some seizures, but I never had any health problems with her.” She shrugged. “It’s just one of those things that happen I guess.”

“Yeah...”

Kip wanted to console her, but it was hard. He never had a pet, so he couldn't really give her words of comfort. But... on the bright side, he did gain some information for Min regarding Maisy's past health that could prove useful. If she had seizures in the past, this incident really wasn't something to worry about. It was probably some sort of recurring illness. So, maybe they could just wrap up this case as just an accident and move on with their lives?

“The plays about to start back up,” Genevieve noted. “I'm going to the restroom real quick, before it starts.”

Kip nodded as she hurried out, still pondering on how he should continue things. He didn't want to upset Genevieve by bringing up Maisy again, but Min was depending on him to find more information! He was torn between what he should do and what he believed he should do. After all, he had promised Min that he would investigate and use this play as an opportunity. But... after seeing Genevieve's face when he complained about dogs, he had a guilty conscience.

Like, he understood Matt's position and worry, but hiding it just didn't seem right. Still, he had promised. He would just have to figure out a different way to approach Genevieve.

CHAPTER SEVEN

There was a distinct difference between cats and dogs. In Min's opinion, cats were more sweet and pleasant. Take his cats Cali and Stripes. They never bit or scratched him. Matt, however, would disagree and say that dogs are man's best friend. Cats would forever be superior in Min's mind, but sadly, he had to keep his focus on dogs for a little while longer. He had never looked at so many dog articles in all his life. So many dogs... he didn't want to be involved with dogs ever again after this case was closed if he could help it.

Still, there was some useful information he had gathered while Kip was off dating. He just hoped his friend hadn't gone completely off topic. Being friends with Genevieve wasn't a bad thing, but Kip did need to remember why he even met Genevieve to begin with. When he had gotten back from the play the previous week, Kip had forgotten to even try to gain any information. His thoughts had all been Genevieve this and Genevieve that. The poor guy had fallen hard for Matt's cousin, hadn't he? It wasn't wrong to fall in love, but this timing was horrible.

"Meow! Meow!"

Min glanced down at his cats. They looked up at him expectantly, desiring pats or food. He suspected the latter after glancing at the time. Dinner. And Kip was still out.

He sighed as he made his way to the kitchen, Cali and Stripes following him and constantly rubbing against his legs. They mewed in impatience as he seemed to be taking his precious time in pouring out their food.

"So dogs have certain things that can kill them just like cats," he murmured to himself, glancing at the evidence board. He could barely make it out from the kitchen. It was too far to the left...

He furrowed his brows and walked over to the board. The cats were fed, so he didn't need to worry about them for a while. He could turn his focus back to the case.

There still wasn't much to go on. They didn't even have a strong suspect list. They almost had a decent list... but it had proven a false lead. The neighbor that had complained about Maisy had moved to another state several months ago, and the landlord had changed to a friendlier pet policy since he got some discount on wood polishing? Min couldn't remember the details. The only thing that was clear was that neither the neighbor or landlord could have made an attempt on Maisy.

That led them back to square one more or less. They didn't have a suspect... not even one. So how could they figure out the cause of Maisy's death? It just didn't seem right for the dog to have just suddenly have a seizure for no reason. Especially a dog that did not have a previous history with seizures. There was something there... Min just couldn't find it.

He frowned hard at the evidence board. What was he missing? What angle was he not looking at? This was exactly why he wished Kip was here! He really believed that Kip would be able to find that angle... find the missing piece to their ever-growing puzzle.

But alas, Kip was once again on a date with the lovely Genevieve. If it weren't for the fact that she was Matt's cousin and the owner of Maisy, Min really would have liked to complain about her. She was a nice girl. Funny and polite. But—she was really becoming a distraction for his friend. Kip needed to get his head out of the clouds and remember what he was supposed to be doing for Matt. They needed information.

“Just because a girl smiles at you and has similar tastes and interests doesn't mean you need to ask them out *twice!*” Min complained, flopping onto the couch. “I just hope that *this* time you can get us some solid information. Please, Kip. We really need that missing piece.”

Genevieve had to admit she had been a little wary of the two men on their initial meeting. They knew her by name and had asked... a few sorts of strange questions. At least, they had been a little strange at first, but the pink-haired man (Min? she couldn't remember the Asian-looking man's name) had explained that they were friends with her cousin and were working on helping him out. That had put her mind somewhat at ease. The second time they met at the park, she was not as wary, but still a little concerned. They were asking questions about pets. It made her wonder... but Mattie wouldn't do that, would he? And again, Min had explained himself so well.

Then there was Kip. She blushed a little as she thought of the brown-haired man. He was a nice but awkward young man. He hadn't really asked any questions about dogs or pets. He was almost just a bystander now that Genevieve thought about it. But he had recognized her logo, and *that* had completely flattered her. He understood design. At least, to a certain extent, he understood. He had a good eye and an interest in understanding. That was more than enough for her to become interested. And then, he invited her to a play... and today, he was taking her to this new café he had heard about.

A second date. She could call it that, couldn't she? She had always wanted to go on a date. And lucky her, she was already getting a second dreamy date. A play, a café. This was all rather exciting, and Kip was quite the gentleman. She felt rather safe and comfortable around him which was strange considering Mattie was the only male she let close to her. Maybe she was finally opening up to new people? It had been a while since she had last been this open with strangers (even if they *did* know her Mattie).

“I hope I didn't keep you waiting?”

Genevieve let out a soft gasp of surprise. She had been lost in thought. “Not at all,” she assured, smiling at Kip. “I’m glad you didn’t get lost,” she teased.

Kip gave her a sheepish look. “I just took one wrong turn at the theatre. One!”

The blonde playfully jabbed him with her elbow. “And here I thought an alumni of the university would know the theatre’s layout like the back of his hand.”

Kip let out a tiny huff. “I’m bad at directions, what can I say in my defense?” He shrugged lightly. “My GPS is my saving grace.”

Genevieve laughed. “Okay, so your GPS kept you from getting lost and meeting me at the promised meeting place. Now, shall we head to that café?”

Kip held out his hand with a smile. “But of course! It’s not a far walk, and I won’t get lost.”

The blonde grinned. “Not with me beside you!”

Both flushed a little, feeling slightly embarrassed yet pleased by the words.

Kip cleared his throat as they entered the cafe. “This café has some great rosemary lemonade. You should give it a try,” he suggested as they stood in line.

“Oh, I can’t. I’m allergic.”

Kip looked at Genevieve in surprise. “To lemonade?”

The young lady laughed. “No, no.” She shook her head with a smile. “To the rosemary.”

That... was a strange allergy to have. Most of the allergies Kip had heard of were dairy or nut related. Rosemary was different. A very striking allergy to have.

“Soooooo, how’d it go? Spill the tea!” a happy voice chirped.

Genevieve shook her head as she smiled into her phone. “It went well. He’s very nice.”

“You’ve already said that!”

“Did I?” Genevieve teased. “I can’t remember what I have told you, Elodie.”

“That’s he’s cute. He’s nice. He’s clueless about directions. He had brown hair while his close friend has pink hair. And that’s about it,” Elodie complained. “You should text me a picture!”

“I can’t do that!” Genevieve gasped.

“Why not? Just sneak one when he’s not looking the next time you meet. Or better yet, get a picture from Mattie. I bet your cousin has several pictures of him.”

“You’re not wrong…” Genevieve murmured.

“So text me one!” her friend demanded. “I want to know what this guy looks like, so I can see if he’s worthy of you.”

“We’re just friends!” Genevieve protested.

Elodie scoffed. “Sure, and you only had two dates with a guy. So *just* friends.”

Genevieve could feel her cheeks burning. “Elodie! I’m being serious. Just because I went on two dates doesn’t mean he’s my boyfriend or anything.”

“Uh huh… still think he’s pretty close to being your boyfriend. Speaking of close, you remember that dog park you took Maisy to?”

Genevieve furrowed her brows. “Yeah? The one that’s open only on Saturdays?”

“Mhmmm,” Elodie hummed. “Yeah, I heard from Lucy. You remember Lucy? From high school? She hated your guts? Anyways, she has a feisty lab mix that she takes over to the park. And she told me that the owner of the place hired two amateur detectives to investigate Maisy’s accident. Can you believe that? It wasn’t like you were that close to the place.”

Genevieve pursed her lips. “Detectives, you say?”

“Yeah, weird, huh? But listen, Lucy was also telling me that...”

As soon as Kip arrived back from his little date, Min had pulled him to his room for an interrogation session. His friend was ready to drill him with a list full of questions.

“What did you learn? You still didn’t me really update me from when you went to the theatre.”

Kip chuckled awkwardly. “I came home late. I was too tired to update you then.”

“So update me now!” Min insisted.

Kip huffed, rolling his eyes some as he sat down on his friend’s bed. “Well, I honestly wasn’t able to gather much information,” he admitted reluctantly. “She didn’t seem to want to talk about Maisy’s incident. Her dog’s still recovering you know.”

“But you did find at least something out?”

Kip gave Min an annoyed look. “Well, Maisy had seizures when she was a puppy, so I think that cancels out the idea that someone purposefully tried to out her.” He crossed his arms in slight triumph. “Case closed.”

“Not necessarily,” Min pointed out. “There’s still a chance that someone knew about Maisy’s previous condition and tried to trigger it. Dog has seizure maybe dies, that could cause a stir and close up Matt’s business.”

Kip sighed. Again, Min had a point. There was still that possibility. He just didn’t want to admit it.

“It’s not like you can pinpoint what causes a seizure though,” Kip argued. “It’s not like an allergy where you have a reaction. Like today, the café’s special rosemary drinks are something Genevieve is allergic to. So if she drank it, she’d have a reaction and—”

“Wait, you said Genevieve is allergic to rosemary?”

Kip nodded. “Yeah, that’s what she was telling me. I was just saying how the café had this rosemary lemonade and—”

“That’s it!” Min interrupted triumphantly, getting onto his feet.

“What’s it?”

Min tugged the other over to his room and sat down at his computer. “I’ve been researching on dogs and found this article on dogs that suffer epilepsy.”

“I don’t see how this has anything to do with Genevieve. I mean, she did say that Maisy had seizures when she was a puppy, but that doesn’t have anything to do with Genevieve and rosemary.”

Min rolled his eyes. “Look at this article. It says here that certain spices and herbs can cause dogs that suffer epilepsy to have seizures!”

“I still don’t get this…”

“Don’t you see?! Maisy had a seizure in the park, and you just said she had a history with seizures in the past. Meaning she could have suffered from epilepsy,” Min rolled his chair over to their small safe. He pulled out the bit of evidence (the only evidence) that they had: a baseball cap carefully sealed in a Ziploc bag. “Remember this hat? This is what convinced Matt that someone was trying to get rid of Maisy.”

Kip took the evidence from Min, frowning. “Continue?”

Min sighed in exasperation. “Don’t you remember anything? First, this hat is Genevieve’s. Second, this hat’s brim was *soaked* in some sort of rosemary perfume or scented oil. Understand?”

His friend’s eyes widened. “Wait... you don’t mean?”

“Yes, I do mean.” Min set his lips in a thin line. “I think Genevieve was the intended target not Maisy.”

Matt stared at his two friends in shock. He had come over to their apartment as soon as he got their text. It had said that the finally had a solid lead on Maisy’s incident. However, this wasn’t exactly the sort of news he had been expecting to hear.

“You... can you repeat that? Please?”

Kip glanced at Min, pursing his lips. “Well, we think. We *think* that Maisy was accidentally targeted.”

“Meaning...?”

Min pursed his lips. “Meaning... they weren’t trying to hurt Maisy.” He let out a shaky sigh. “What we’re trying to say is that we think whoever did this to Maisy was actually trying to get Genevieve.”

“But how? Why?”

Kip took the initiative. “Do you know what Genevieve’s allergies are?”

“Allergies?” Matt furrowed his brow. “I know she had an odd one... but it wasn’t something common or anything she would really come to contact with.”

“Rosemary.”

Matt looked at Kip in surprise. “Yes, I think that was it, but how—”

Min interrupted, “If you remember, when you found Maisy, you also found Genevieve’s hat.”

Matt nodded slowly. He had a confused look on his face, but he trusted that his friends knew what they were doing. They were the detectives, not him.

“There was a strange residue on the brim. It had been soaked with rosemary oil,” Min continued. “And that is something that could fatally injure Genevieve but also trigger a seizure in a dog.”

Matt paled a little at this news. He had heard of such things, being a dog owner himself. To think that someone had purposefully planted something that would cause Maisy to get a seizure that could have possibly killed her... While he was sad that Maisy had to suffer, he was grateful that it had been Maisy and not Genevieve that had been the target. But... what could they do now? Whoever that was, would they try to murder Genevieve again?

He looked at his two friends for answers. “What do we do now?”

Kip bit his lip and glanced at Min. “Well, now that we know the cause, we have to find a motive. Who would want to get Genevieve out of the way?”

Min set his lips in a thin line. “So... what we are doing now is trying to answer that question. I think you might be able to help us gather a new suspect list of someone who might have been interested in harming your cousin. A grudge. A fight. Anything you can think of would help immensely.”

Matt nodded again. “I’m not sure if I can be of much help... but I think, I think I might know of a few people that she had issues within the past. From high school and college.”

Min and Kip glanced at each then nodded. “Anything you can provide would help.”

“Well...” Matt started slowly. “There was an incident of some sort a back in the fall semester. I don’t remember all the details.”

Min gave an encouraging nod. “Just tell us what you remember.”

CHAPTER EIGHT

“So... we have a suspect list again.”

Min and Kip frowned at the list before them. It had a few names scribbled down rather carelessly. But it was a start considering they never had such a solid list of suspects until now.

“We’ll need Matt for more help,” Min commented.

“No! We can handle this on our own.”

While he was thrilled to see Kip finally being more proactive about the case, Min disagreed. They weren’t familiar with these suspects. Sure, they all attended the same college, but the university was not a small campus. Not to mention they were different majors that would have little chance of interaction! They needed someone who knew of or might at least recognize the people on the list. Thus, Matt was needed! But for some reason, Kip didn’t want their friend’s help. Min suspected that a certain young woman was behind his rather sudden change in attitude towards the case along with Matt’s help... Oh well, he couldn’t be certain it was that. Though, he would have that suspicion until proven otherwise.

“I still think we should ask Matt for some details. He would at least know something of the people on our list,” Min pointed out firmly. “If we can at least get his knowledge, we would be able to see what sort of people they are without things getting too messy.”

Kip huffed. “But if we ask him, we’ll get a biased view!” he insisted. “It would be better for us to investigate on our own like I just said.”

“Meaning, we should just walk up to these people and ask if they attempted to murder a dog in Central Park?” Min countered, eyes narrowed at his friend.

“Oh come *on*, Min! That isn't at all what I mean.”

“Then what is it?” Min crossed his arms. “How are we supposed to get any information and make any progress if we don't ask help from an insider to these people?”

“We ask Genevieve.”

Ah... Min should have known. It looked like his suspicions were right after all. Kip had it bad for Matt's cousin. This could be a bad thing, considering what they now knew about Maisy's death. They needed to tread carefully. After all, Genevieve was completely unaware that they had been investigating the case this whole time.

“But you know her view would be considered biased.”

Despite Min's continual warnings, Kip went on with his idea to ask Genevieve. He had insisted that Genevieve's biasedness would actually be irrelevant. She probably had no suspicions of her friends and acquaintances. This would be in their favor. They would be able to clearly see her views and then pick out the truth for themselves.

“Matt is a protective older cousin,” Kip had argued. “He'd make weird comments and just say that one person didn't like dogs and obviously has to be the culprit. No, we need to see things from Genevieve's point of view.”

And that was Kip's final decision. There was no swaying the man, so Min left him to his own devices. If he wanted to dig a hole for himself, so be it, But Min? He was going to ask Matt's opinion regardless. One of the two detectives needed to have their head on straight.

He took his phone and dialed Matt's number, waiting until he heard the familiar *click* that signaled an answer. “Hey Matt?”

“Oh Min! How’s it going? I’m a little tied up at the moment—Sit!—but if you wait a moment.”

“I can wait,” Min assured, wincing as he heard some yips followed by a loud crashing sound at the other end of the phone. He must have caught Matt when he was feeding his dogs.

“I told you to *sit*, girl. I’m getting your food. Just wait!”

Min couldn’t help chuckling a little. Feeding time was never easy, even with cats. “You got it?”

“Huh? Oh right, yeah. I got it. What was it that you wanted to talk about?”

Min glanced over at the evidence board. “I was hoping to ask you about that list we made the other day.”

“The suspect list? Why? I already told you all that I know...”

“Descriptions. I need to know what they look like,” Min explained. “So I can see if they are around here or not. It is summer break after all. Some people may not be in town. It’ll help narrow things down if I can see them.”

There was a short pause with only an occasional scuffling sound of the dogs eating.

“I think I might have a couple of pictures that Genevieve sent me. If you swing by, I can show them.”

Min smiled. “Thanks! I’ll be there in five.”

Kip’s plan was to reveal everything to Genevieve. She deserved to know the truth after all. It wasn’t right to sneak around like this and keep her in the dark, especially since they knew the case was more serious. This wasn’t a little game anymore. It was serious business that Genevieve *needed* to know.

Kip just wasn't sure how he ought to confront her. He couldn't just come out and say "Hey, I've been investigating your dog's sudden seizure for your cousin and instead discovered you're the target for murder!" No, that would be ridiculous and completely unbelievable. He needed to find a way to gently break the news to her. And in a convincing manner. He almost wished Min was with him. His friend was good at coming up with things on the spot that just made sense. Kip wasn't so good... but he was on his own which left him no choice.

There wasn't much time now that he was at Genevieve's flat. They were meeting to discuss some web designs. It was Genevieve's greatest passion after all. She was good at it too. She kind of had to be good since graphic design was her major and she ranked highest in her class. It made Kip feel a little inadequate, but at least she never gave off that vibe when they were together. She was sweet. But he really needed to stop getting distracted with her looks and personality. As Min often reminded him, he needed to focus on what was important. And that was revealing the truth and warning her.

He knocked lightly on the apartment door. "Genevieve? It's me, Kip."

The door opened a few minutes to reveal Genevieve. She smiled at him, motioning for him to enter. "Glad you could make it! I just finished updating my site, so your timing is perfect."

Kip pursed his lips. If only he could be sure that the rest of his timing would be perfect...

Min pulled his feet onto the couch, trying to shoo the dogs away with a pillow. He had been too eager to visit Matt for information that he had momentarily forgotten it meant that he would actually have to be *with* Matt's rambunctious dogs.

"Shoo, shoo! I don't want you sniffing me like that."

The three dogs whined and pawed at the couch, interested in sniffing their pet's guest. He smelled of cats.

"Ah, I found it!" Matt called from his bedroom.

"Good! Now bring it here, please. Before your dogs attack me!"

Matt finally appeared with an album in hand, laughing as he nudged his dogs with his feet. "Come on, guys and gal. Leave poor Min alone. Go play elsewhere."

The dogs were reluctant to leave their pet, but soon, they were distracted by a sound outside and had rushed off to discover what it could be.

Matt shook his head and sat down beside Min with a smile as he opened the photobook. "Okay, this album should have everyone in it. She and her roommates made this during their sophomore year."

Min glanced over at the thick pages. It was more of a scrapbook than a photo album... but still, it was going to be important information.

"Okay okay..." Matt murmured as he flipped through the pages. "Aha! Here. This is Sandra." He pointed to a group photo.

Min recognized Genevieve, but the rest of the young ladies? He had never seen them before. Not surprising since these girls were probably the same major as Genevieve. As a writing major, he wouldn't have really seen art majors. The one Matt said was Sandra didn't look familiar at all. However, clues were clues. He might have run into her before and had just not known.

"May I take a picture of it?"

Matt blinked. "Uh sure?"

Min pulled out his phone to snap a quick photo. “So I can print it for the evidence board and remember what she looks like,” he explained, making a quick note that the first photo was Sandra.

“Right...” Matt flipped a couple more pages. “Over here is Lucy and right next to her is Chloe.”

Very convenient to have two on the same page. Min took a few more pictures on his phone, taking care to make sure he noted who was who. “Lucy has black hair... and Chloe has blonde.”

Matt flipped through a few more pages, allowing his friend to snap pictures and take notes on each of their suspects. This might not be a solid lead, but at least now Min and Kip would have faces to match with their suspects. And, if they really needed to, they could head to the campus for better pictures and possibly gain more clues about the girls’ characters.

“So, with this new program, I was able to make some adjustments to improve my overall website aesthetic. I wasn’t quite happy with the colors and the guidelines for making it user-friendly made it difficult,” Genevieve explained as she pulled up her website. “But now, it looks much better as you can see!”

Kip smiled as Genevieve showed her website.

“I finally got this new website working, and it’s really been able to help me promote my place. If you look at this layout, I think you can see how it could help Min’s parents’ bookshop.” She glanced over her shoulder with a smile. “I really don’t see why they don’t have a website. Online orders would really help out, you know.”

Kip chuckled a little and shrugged. “I suppose it would, but there’s just something about

the simplicity of just walking into a bookstore and ordering a cup of tea and coffee. I think there's that nostalgia of going back in time when you walk into the shop. No fancy website can recreate that."

Genevieve nodded thoughtfully. "I suppose not, but it still might not be a bad idea to consider for the future."

Kip bit his lip. Well, this was an opportunity to come straight to the point with her. "Ah Genevieve? Speaking of future... there's something I've been wanting to tell you."

Genevieve raised an eyebrow, scooting her chair back so she could get a better look at him. "Oh?"

She gnawed a little nervously at her lip, blushing ever so slightly. He mentioned the future... could it possibly mean that he might be a little more serious about their friendship? She did find herself thinking of Kip more often these days. Maybe he felt the same and was now going to officially ask her out?

"The truth is, we've been investigating the sudden seizure attack your dog had."

Genevieve blinked in surprise. So, this wasn't the future dealing with their friendship... She couldn't help being a little disappointed, but it made sense. Kip and Min had always been a little odd. To be honest, she had been suspecting this more recently. After all, their initial meeting at the park started with a question about Maisy. She had momentarily thought maybe they wanted a nice jogging route and brought up her Maisy because of Mattie. But, the more she got to know Kip and Min, her suspicions grew. Then, she heard from Elodie that Mattie had mentioned something about hiring private detectives. So, putting two and two together, she had come to the conclusion that the detectives Mattie had hired were Kip and his friend. Really...

She understood her cousin's concern and guilt over Maisy's health, but there really was no need to hire detectives! Maisy was doing just fine now. It had just been an accident.

"I know."

Kip's eyes widened in surprise. Sure, he was new to the whole detective business, but he had thought that he and Min had done a decent job of acting inconspicuous.

"I think it's sweet that your helping Mattie out, but you really should stop."

"But—"

Genevieve gave him a determined look. "No, I insist. I was upset that Maisy had to suffer, but I know that accidents happen. People don't just go hurting dogs. The police didn't think it was deliberate anyways. So, you and Min should really drop it."

"That's not why I was trying to tell you about this," Kip explained. "It's not what the police thought. I'm not, I mean *we're* not investigating your dog's incident anymore."

"That's good! I—"

"We're trying to prevent your murder."

Genevieve opened her mouth then quickly shut it. After all, what was the correct response in this situation? It was absolutely bizarre. Trying to prevent *her* murder? Why would anyone be trying to murder her. She had thought rather fondly of Kip... he had been a sweet guy and a close friend of her cousin, but this was taking it too far. He needed to stop playing silly detective games and get a hold of reality.

"Just because my dog unexpectedly get a seizure does not mean someone is trying to murder me," she said sharply.

"Of course not... but the evidence points to—"

“Kip,” Genevieve interrupted. “I appreciate that you wanted to ease Mattie’s mind about Maisy and his daycare, but enough is enough. Stop trying to play detective. Maisy’s seizure was just an accident and nothing more.”

“But Genevieve!” he protested.

The blonde glanced at her watch. “I have an appointment with a friend in half an hour and have to pick up Maisy from the vet. You should probably go.”

“Genevieve...”

“Please go,” she repeated, lips in a thin and disappointed line as she watched Kip reluctantly leave. While she did appreciate Kip finally admitting the truth about his and Min’s intentions... she couldn’t help feeling upset about the whole situation. She thought that Kip might have liked her. This whole business with Maisy was ridiculous. She’d have to give Mattie a piece of her mind. What was he thinking? Murder? And boys complained about girls having excessive imaginations. They should speak for themselves.

Genevieve sighed as she pulled out her phone.

“Hey Elodie? Can we move our meet-up to sooner?”

CHAPTER NINE

Min was surprised when he arrived back at the apartment. He had thought Kip would still be with Genevieve. But instead of being greeted by his two cats, he was greeted by a rather glum Kip sitting on the couch. Even more odd, his friend was holding Stripes in lap, stroking her absentmindedly.

“Hullo Kip,” he greeted, tilting his head to the side curiously. “Finished with Genevieve already?”

Kip grumbled as he shoved Stripes off his lap. The cat yowled and stalked off, glancing back at the human with a disdainful look. Min sighed, shaking his head. Kip shouldn’t have done that... Stripes held grudges while Cali was more sweet-tempered. Oh, well, that was something Kip would just have to put up with. Something was upsetting him, so that had a stronger priority than his cat’s grudge list.

“Something happen?” he asked, following his friend into the kitchen.

Kip was pouring himself a glass of water then glugged it down with an irritable look.

“She got mad,” he explained, “and kicked me out.”

Min blinked slowly. “Uh, that escalated quickly? Doesn’t sound like the Genevieve that Matt described.” He took a seat at the kitchen bar, giving Kip an expectant look. “What happened?”

Kip made a face. “I did what you told me not to do...” he admitted, sulkily. “I told her that we were investigating her dog’s death.”

Min shook his head, tsking softly. “So she kicked you out?”

“No... It wasn’t until after I told her that *she* was the intended victim not Maisy that she kicked me out.”

Min forced back a laugh. Now wasn't the time to be laughing at his friend's misfortune. But really, Kip should realize that telling Genevieve something like that would not go well. She had every right to be upset. This whole thing had been a secret from her and to spill it out to her like that? Kip was not really good with the ladies, now was he?

"She... say anything else?" he asked curiously.

"She did thank us for helping Mattie... I mean Matt." He blushed at his slip up. He had been spending too much time with Genevieve. "And then, she just told me to stop playing detective!" Kip fumed.

Min really struggled not to smile. "Well, she was upset, and you gave her some ah unwelcomed news."

"But she didn't have to say we were playing detectives!" his friend pouted.

Min shrugged lightly. "Give her some time. Maybe you two can work it out?" he offered.

Kip was still looking a bit sulky, but he nodded. Maybe she'd forget all about it tomorrow? And then, he could take a second chance at helping her stay safe.

CHAPTER TEN

It had been several days since Kip had last seen Genevieve. He had tried to talk with her. Reason with her. But she wouldn't hear any of it. She was now completely ignoring him. She didn't respond to his texts or calls. All contact with her had to be done through Matt now, and even that was sketchy. She was, after all, a little miffed with her cousin for starting this investigation behind her back. If he had been honest with her in the beginning, maybe she wouldn't be so upset with the three of them. Alas, hindsight was not a helpful thing.

This was her *life* in danger, and she was ignoring him. He was trying to save her life, and she just wasn't having it. Which made him wonder... were they really sure that Genevieve had been the intended target? They had no solid evidence after all. Maybe this whole thing really was just an accident? It wasn't like they could actually prove that the rosemary had been planted there on purpose. The police hadn't thought it strange, so why should they?

"The floor's been polished enough, Kip."

Kip blinked in surprise, staring at the mop in his hands. Oh right, he had been polishing the café floor. He had been so lost in thought about Genevieve and the whole case that he hadn't really paid attention to the fact that he had finished a bit ago. If he kept mopping at this rate, their customers would be slipping and sliding all across the café if they weren't blinded by the shine first.

"I think..." he started slowly. "Maybe we should drop the case."

Min frowned at his friend. "What makes you say that all the sudden?"

"Well, we don't really have any proof that this really was a murder attempt," Kip pointed out, gesturing with his mop. "This whole thing could just be an accident. Just like I said when we first took on this case."

“I still think we should keep on investigating. You say what if it isn’t but think about the opposite possibility. What if it *is* really a murder attempt?” Min countered. “I think that—”

Their conversation was interrupted by the merry little bell ringing as a customer entered the café.

“I would have the friends we miss were safe arriv’d!”²

Kip inwardly groaned, recognizing the voice of the one and only Professor Lonki. Why was he always quoting Shakespeare whenever he came?

“Good morning, Professor Lonki!” Min greeted, cheerful as ever. Obviously, he was not bothered by the professor’s strange habits.

“Some must go off, and yet, by these I see, so great a day as this is cheaply bought,” the professor quipped in return.

Min chuckled softly. “Yes, we are having a special on your favorite! So, it is rather cheap.”

Kip decided it was best to zone out of the rest of the conversation lest he go crazy. The banter or whatever it was between Min and Professor Lonki seriously made no sense to him. He never bothered to ask either if it was some code... It was a weird thing to ask despite the whole event being weird in and of itself. So, he had never bothered to ask or try to figure out the mystery that was his literature professor.

But as soon as their professor received his coffee, he bid them farewell, ending with one last quote from *Macbeth*. “We will perform in measure, time, and place. So thanks to all at once and to each one whom we invite to see us crown’d at Scone!”

Kip shook his head, leaning on his mop as he watched the professor stroll off.

² Direct quote from *Macbeth*, Act V, Scene IX, Line 1

“Bravo to Shakespeare,” he mocked as he finally put away his mop.

“It’s funny that you should mention Shakespeare. Didn’t Professor Lonki quote from *Macbeth* the last time he was here?” Min asked thoughtfully. “He was quoting from it again today.”

His friend only shrugged. “How am I supposed to know? I just know it’s Shakespeare.”

“‘All by the name of dogs: the valued file.’ I’m sure it’s *Macbeth*.”

Kip rolled his eyes. “So what? The professor has a thing for the play apparently. He quoted it last time he was here and then he did the play at the university.”

Min tapped his chin thoughtfully. “Maybe Professor Lonki knows something we don’t.”

Kip gave the other an annoyed look. “Sure, and pigs fly. There’s no way that Professor Lonki would know anything unless it’s anything between Shakespeare and Tolstoy.”

“Be nice, Kip. You really need to get over that poor grade because of your poorly done monologue from *Much Ado About Nothing*.”

“I am over that! Professor Lonki is just weird, and I don’t like Shakespeare.”

Min raised an eyebrow. He wasn’t convinced... but there was something about those quotes that bothered him.

“Didn’t you say that you saw the professor at the park when you went that one time?”

Kip shrugged. “Yeah, I think so. I heard from Matt that he likes to go there every Saturday to lecture by the Shakespeare statue.”

Min nodded slowly. The park... maybe they needed to take another look at Central Park to figure things out.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

If anything, Min was persistent. Kip could respect that. The guy did not know when to quit. And that, was exactly why he was where he was, standing in the middle of Central Park with a hand full of leashes attached to four rambunctious dogs.

“So... why am I doing this again?” Kip asked with gritted teeth, trying to keep the animals in line.

“Because Matt needed the help, and *you* can’t see Genevieve.”

Kip sighed, knowing all too well that Min was right. Matt’s cousin was still very determined to ignore him. Even though Min was technically his detective partner, she hadn’t really met him often enough and would probably be a little more open to talking to him (but only a little). Min was not fully labeled as a crazy detective fanatic like him. It was the pits.

“I still think there would be a better way to keep me occupied!” Kip grumbled but grateful that Min wasn’t forcing him to do any detective work. He understood that they really couldn’t just drop the case now. It was the fact that he and Genevieve had a sort of falling out that upset him. He just lacked a little motivation to pursue this case.

Min gave his friend a sympathetic pat on the shoulder. “I’m sure you’ll have a lovely time. Bond with the dogs and try not to get lost.”

“You jerk!” Kip called out as his friend trotted off. “Next time, I’m making sure Matt recruits you to walk his dogs!”

Min only waved as he continued on his way. Kip wondered if he even heard him... oh well, he had these dogs to watch.

“Sit? Stay?” He tried getting them to stay still as he worked on untangling the leashes as they walked through the park.

All four dogs were rather eager to get going, tugging Kip along. Who was walking who now? Kip wasn't sure but since the dogs seemed to know what they were doing better than he did, he let them take the lead. He was supposed to walk them for an hour anyways... so he didn't really have anywhere specific he needed or wanted to be. Let the dogs take control. He was pretty sure they had a better sense of direction than he did.

Elodie sipped her coffee with a happy sigh. It was nice to be able to kick back and relax. This was her last week in New York after all. She needed to enjoy herself during these last few days before she headed home to enjoy the rest of her summer break with her family.

“Hello? Are you Elodie by any chance?”

She looked up to see a red-headed lady, roughly her age, smiling down at her. “Yes? Um, do I know you?”

“Not directly. May I?” The redhead gestured to the empty seat.

Elodie nodded. “Of course.”

“I'm Mattie, Genevieve's cousin?”

Elodie immediately brightened. “Oh! Yes, Genevieve told me about you. I'm so very pleased to finally meet you.”

“The pleasure is all mine,” Mattie assured. “I'm lucky I bumped into you when I did!”

“Oh?” Elodie blinked. “Why's that?”

“You see Genevieve lost the keys to her apartment... and she remembered that she gave you the spare one?”

“Ah!” Elodie gasped, pulling her purse onto her lap and digging around inside. “I had forgotten to return them! It is really lucky you found me. I might not have returned them, and poor Genevieve would have to buy a new set.”

She triumphantly pulled out the keys and placed them in Mattie’s hand. “You’re really a sweet cousin to be doing that for her! No wonder she speaks so highly of you.”

Mattie smiled sweetly. “That’s so nice of you to say. I’m sure Genevieve exaggerates. She’s prone to do so.”

Elodie shook her head. “Oh no, not Genevieve!”

There was a strange look on Mattie’s face but soon smoothed away as if it was never there. “Ah well, we all have our little faults. Thanks again for the key!”

“No problem!”

Mattie gave her a wink as she got onto her feet. “I gotta rush. Need to give this key to Genevieve. Hope you enjoy the rest of your drink!”

Elodie waved as the red-head left. When she glanced down at her drink, she was surprised to find the receipt to her light lunch sitting there... paid by Mattie. She smiled to herself. Genevieve’s cousin was so sweet.

Kip was certain he had gone at least two laps around Central Park. Okay, maybe not two *full* laps around the entire park, but it certainly felt like it. And just how were these dogs not exhausted? It wasn’t like he was out of shape.

Kip dragged himself over to a nearby bench, tugging the dogs to stay with him. He hoped he was at the right spot to meet Matt and Min. He really did *not* want to be stuck with these dogs

for any longer. How did Matt keep up with having these dogs and three jobs? He would never make fun of Matt again...

“Ah Kip!” a cheerful voice called out, one that only served to annoy his already irritable state.

“Min.” Kip gave his friend a tight smile. “Glad to finally see you again.”

Min shrugged as Matt joined them a few moments later. Kip was more than ready to hand over the leashes to him.

“So? How’d it go? Min got to see Genevieve?”

Both his friends shook their heads.

“Sorry, she wasn’t home,” Matt explained. “I texted her and found out that she was seeing her friend Elodie off at the airport.”

Kip sighed. “So this whole walking the dogs was all for naught.”

Min gave his friend an apologetic look. Good. At least he knew what he did wrong, but Kip wasn’t 100% ready to forgive him. His arms ached from the dogs’ tugging, and his leg muscles were *screaming* from all the running he had done.

“We do have a plan for tomorrow though,” Matt explained.

The plan was for Min to head to the flat and meet with Genevieve while Matt and Kip watched over the café. Not the best idea considering neither of them really knew how to run the espresso machine, but there was no choice in the matter. From more texts, they found that Genevieve was still miffed with Kip. And Matt was out of the question too. She was being rather sharp with him. So in the end, Min was their only hope to get the information they needed. Meaning, Kip would have to suffer once more.

CHAPTER TWELVE

“You sure you can run the café while I’m gone?” Min asked, lingering in the doorway.

Honestly? Neither Matt or Kip were sure that they could... but for Genevieve’s safety, they had to buck up and just pretend they were capable.

“We’re positive! Just go, Min,” Kip insisted, forcing a bright smile. He jabbed Matt in the ribs to get him to do the same.

Min friend gave them both a doubtful look but finally relented. The café was now completely in their care.

“You do know how to run a register, right?”

Matt glared at Kip. “Yes, I do. I’m not someone who just works with animals you know! I’ve run a cash register before. I worked at Seven Eleven in high school.”

“My bad...” He grinned sheepishly. “Just don’t touch the coffee machine. I marked all the drinks except regular coffee as out of order, so just focus on coffee and the pastries. If you need me, just holler or text me.”

Matt sighed as Kip headed back to the bookstore to leave him to man the café. It wasn’t something he really knew how to do, but this was all for Genevieve. He had to just do his best and hope that customers didn’t ask him something that Min hadn’t told him about.

It was a rather long walk to Genevieve’s flat. Min probably could have borrowed Kip’s car or grabbed a taxi, but he felt like walking. It helped him think and plan out what he would say when he met Genevieve.

“Hi, Genevieve, it’s Min. Matt’s friend?” he tried then shook his head.

That didn't sound like it'd go off well. He'd have to just say hello and hope that she would let the conversation flow. It wasn't likely, but he could hope. Though, he should probably still rehearse a little. Think about what might be said and how he should respond. It was always a good idea to try to be one step ahead with these sorts of things.

When he finally made it to the apartment, Min was surprised to see a red-headed female at Genevieve's apartment. She was fiddling with the lock. It looked like the key might be stuck, something that happened to him and Kip on occasions. The apartment locks could be so stubborn at times.

"Do you need help?" Min offered.

The young lady started, obviously not expecting to have help offered. "Oh no, I can handle it. The key is just stuck."

"You're flatmates with Genevieve?" he asked curiously. She did look awfully familiar, but Min couldn't quite place a name with her face. Kip never mentioned Genevieve having a flatmate... oh well.

The lady gave him a rather shrewd look. "How did you know?"

Min brightened. "Well, I'm a sort of friend of hers. I was passing by and wanted to see if she'd like to hang out for a cup of coffee."

"That's too bad. Genevieve is out at the moment. I'm Nicole."

"A pleasure to meet you, Nicole! It's a pity that I'm missing Genevieve though," Min sighed sadly.

"A real pity indeed! Where you hoping to look at designs?"

Min shook his head. "No, that's what my friend is interested in. I actually was hoping to talk to her about her dog."

The girl gave him a sharp look. Oh right, he should be a little more tactful. Maisy had only just fully recovered after all.

“You see I’m thinking about getting a border collie myself,” Min explained hastily. “I was hoping to get her opinion.”

Nicole raised an eyebrow but nodded. “Oh, Genevieve would definitely suggest getting a border collie. She adores Maisy. That dog is spoiled rotten!” she laughed.

Min smiled, relieved that his lie worked. He didn’t know how much the flat mate knew about the things surrounding Maisy’s seizures. Also... the name Nicole didn’t ring a bell. She wasn’t on the suspect list that was for sure, but he still should be careful. Flatmates could share all sorts of things... Ack, Genevieve would suspect him now. He had already told her that he was a *cat* person, but if Nicole mentioned this conversation... he was totally screwed.

But he still had a role to play, so he’d worry about Genevieve a little later.

“What is Maisy like? Is she jumpy? Matt’s dogs like to jump, and I’m a little scared of them,” Min admitted.

Nicole shrugged lightly. “Oh, I couldn’t say. Maisy and I rarely interact. She is well-trained though, so I don’t think she’d be seen as jumpy. She’s really smart too.”

Min nodded, laughing some. “That’s what Matt was always saying. He insisted that she was the smartest dog in the world.”

“Ah well, not the smartest anymore. Poor dog.” She shook her head. “Genevieve was so upset when she came back. Maisy won’t be quite the same now.”

Min nodded slowly this time. That had to be rough, coming home to a sick and possibly dying pet. He would be so upset himself if he came home to find Cali or Stripes sick.

“Ah, do you know when Genevieve will be back?” he asked, not wanting to waste Nicole’s time.

The redhead looked like she was in a hurry. “She had to run some sort of errand, so she’ll probably be back soon.”

Min nodded. “Thank you. I’ll just wait for her then.”

Nicole gave him a small smile. “I hope you won’t have to wait around long! I gotta run. But please give her this key. I was using the spare instead of mine,” she explained. “I accidentally left mine at work, silly me!”

Min nodded. “Of course. I hope to see you again soon!”

Nicole gave him an odd look but smiled. “Goodbye, Min.”

That was odd. Min watched as the redhead left. He didn’t remember giving her his name... Maybe Genevieve had told her about him? Odd, he would have thought she wouldn’t have remembered him. Guess the upcoming conversation with her would be... more awkward than he had anticipated.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Things had been quiet around the shop. Business was still pretty much the same, yet, it still felt too quiet. All the initial excitement of the case seemed to have faded. Seemed. Min was still determined to finish it out.

Min sighed. Kip still was taking the rejection from Genevieve hard. But it wasn't like she was rejecting *him*. She was just not thrilled with this whole murder business, and who could blame her? They just had to keep a watchful eye on her and make sure they kept her safe. He and Kip couldn't do much since Genevieve didn't want them around detecting... so the two had thrust the responsibility on Matt. They, on the other hand, were supposed to be doing more investigating, sleuthing. But Kip...

"He's so stubborn!" Min grumbled, tapping his fingers against the counter. "If he really loves her, then—"

Wait. Min blinked a few times. Did Kip love Genevieve? Now there was something he hadn't really thought too deeply on. Kip had been sort of dating Matt's cousin. At first, it had been more to learn about her dog, but now... Min wondered. Two dates now and Kip was moping. It looked like he needed to really take over the case and let his friend sort his feelings out. Not like he hadn't done this alone before. This time, he wasn't going to be so sulky over it. Kip needed some time to recover or whatever it was. He'd take over the case for now, but he really needed his friend's help. While he had done several things on his own, he really couldn't do everything on his own.

Kip had made some important contributions after all. He had been the one who discovered Genevieve's allergy which had been a key point in cracking the case. They had

finally been able to come up with a motive. Sort of. They were able to realize that Maisy's seizures were no longer just an incident but an attempted murder.

Without Kip's help, they wouldn't have been able to get this far. His assistance had been crucial, and it still was. He just needed some time to sort out his feelings... but time was running out. They needed to find out who was trying to kill Genevieve before it was too late.

She needed to get a breath of fresh air, and not at Central Park. She wanted to avoid that place of all places. If she went there, it was highly likely she'd bump into Mattie. She really didn't want to see him. There was still that grudge she had. Technically, she had already forgiven him. He was her favorite cousin, even if he was only Matt. No one of extreme importance in the family and often overlooked... but he was sweet and always meant well.

Genevieve just wished he didn't look at her like a child. That was the real reason why she was so miffed at him for hiring detectives. Of course, Maisy's seizures had been upsetting... but she was an adult and could handle the changes the seizures might bring. There was no reason to drag his friends into a fruitless chase, even if one of his friends was rather good looking. It was just an accident. It didn't make sense that someone would be targeting one dog to get rid of his daycare much less try to murder her.

Ugh. This was exactly why she needed to get away from New York for a couple of days.

"Genevieveeeeeeeve!" A blur attacked her with a happy squeal. "I can't believe you're here!"

She gently pushed her friend off. "Good to see you too, Elodie. Long time no see."

Elodie grinned at her friend. "I was really surprised at your call. I thought you'd be too busy to stop by Jersey to see me."

“Never too busy for a friend!” Genevieve insisted.

Elodie rolled her eyes. “You really are too sweet. Reminds me of your cousin Mattie! She was a totally sweetheart like you said.”

Genevieve gave her friend a confused look. “She?”

“Yeah! Mattie, you cousin who lives next door? I met her at a café before I left,” Elodie explained with a slight frown. “I thought I mentioned it to you. Anyway, she’s really a sweet thing. I can’t wait to have a girls’ night with her sometime.”

Genevieve nodded a little as Elodie continued to ramble on. Who was this ‘Mattie’ that her friend had met? It wasn’t *her* Mattie because her cousin was a boy not a girl... it made her wonder if maybe, just maybe, Kip had been right about what he said.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

While Kip tired from all the past events, he couldn't really refuse Min's request to head to Central Park for a walk. Since there were no dogs involved, he didn't mind. They were just going for a walk by themselves. To clear their minds, or at least, that was what Min said. Kip wasn't sure if Min might have something else up his sleeve.

But a walk was nice. The weather was cooler in the evening, and the park looked rather nice too. He could appreciate the scenery since he wasn't yawning his head off. He could see the Shakespeare statue in the distance, and he was pretty sure he saw their eccentric professor standing nearby.

"Let's take a different path," Kip urged, leading Min away from the statue.

Thankfully, his friend didn't object, and they were able to avoid Professor Lonki and his endless quotes of Shakespeare. Kip was able to shift his attention back to the scenery as Min started up a conversation with a fellow jogger. A red-headed young woman. He didn't give her much attention since he was admiring the trees and foliage.

It wasn't until Min said 'goodbye,' that he realized the girl had left. Kip glanced at the retreating jogger. "Who was that?"

"Genevieve's flatmate."

Kip squinted at his friend. "Genevieve's... flatmate?"

Min nodded. "I told you, I bumped into her when I was trying to meet with Genevieve the other day, remember?"

"I could have sworn you just said friend!" Kip protested. "Because Genevieve doesn't have a flatmate!"

“What?” Min paled. “What do you mean she doesn’t have a flatmate? But I *saw* her unlocking the apartment door!”

“You must have seen wrong.”

“I did not! She had the key inside the lock. Apartment number 546! There is no mistake.”

Kip frowned. There was something off about this. He *knew* that Genevieve didn’t have a flat mate, but Min sounded positive that he had seen someone at the apartment.

“Let’s ask Matt. He’d know for sure.”

Min just shrugged. “All right, we’ll ask Matt, but I’m sure he’ll tell you what I just told you. There’s no way he wouldn’t know about her having a flatmate.”

There was something strange about the flatmate... why would Genevieve suddenly have a flatmate? Min had to be mistaken. Maybe it was just a friend? Watching the house? Checking in on Maisy?

Kip frowned as he dialed their friend’s number on his phone.

“Matt?”

“Yeah?” he yawned.

Their friend sounded a little groggy... perhaps they should have waited until they got back to the apartment to give him a call. It sounded like Matt had just woken up from a nap.

“We got a question for you. Can you tell us if Genevieve has a red-haired flat mate?”

“Huh? Flatmate? No, Genevieve lives alone.”

Kip gave Min a ‘I told you so!’ look. “Min was just telling me that she had a red-haired flatmate named Nicole?”

Matt was yawning again. “Mmm... no. Genevieve doesn’t know a Nicole. At least not to my knowledge.”

“Ah, I see. Okay, thanks.”

And before Matt could respond, Kip had hung up and was giving Min a pointed look.

“Nicole doesn’t exist.”

“But then who was it that I saw?? She had a key to Genevieve’s flat, honest!” Min insisted. “She gave the key to me, and I returned it to Genevieve!”

Kip raised an eyebrow. “You heard Matt. There is no such person. You must be mistaken.”

“I *saw* her at Genevieve’s flat. She was locking the door. I saw the key and everything! And then I saw her again today!”

Kip sighed. Perhaps he should humor Min a little. The poor guy had put up with a lot because of him. It was the least he could do.

“Okay, describe what she looked like. Maybe we can figure out who she is.”

Unlikely in Kip’s mind, but he didn’t think Min would let this go if he didn’t at least *try* to find something out. It was time he started pulling his weight in this case.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

“Well...” Min began slowly. “She was around Genevieve’s height and had red hair.”

Kip huffed as they entered their apartment and took their shoes off. “That doesn’t exactly give us a lot to go on. Think harder! Did she have freckles? What color were her eyes?”

There had to be something striking about her beside her height and hair. Because... how many redheads were there in New York City anyways? Dozens? Maybe even hundreds? They needed something more than what Min was giving him.

“Mreow?”

Cali hopped onto the couch, digging her claws into Kip’s lap just as he sat down.

“Ow! Cali, get off,” Kip complained, shoving the cat back onto the floor with a soft *thwump*. Cali made a soft hissing sound then hopped back onto the couch. She didn’t appreciate being removed from her rightful seat.

Min chuckled and picked her up, pressing a kiss to her head. “Silly Cali. You know Kip doesn’t like your claws.”

“Mrew!” the cat whined, wriggling in his arms then slipping out. She rubbed against the wall below their evidence board. A bit of string was dangling from it and attracted her attention. She batted at it then took a bite and *tugged* on it hard.

“Ah! Cali, no!” Min cried out, but it was too late.

The tug had loosened the string entirely and had let it unravel the careful loops and twists Min had done to connect all their evidence together. All that remained were the pins and images in a rather messy setup.

“Cali!” Min scolded, grabbing the yarn and trying to pull it away from his cat. However, Cali just clung to it tighter, finding this new game rather amusing. She kept her mouth tightly around the string and clawed at other dangling bits that hung off Min’s arms.

Min sighed in defeat letting her take the string to play with as she pleased. He glanced back at the evidence board that looked strangely empty without the red string.

“Aha!” He suddenly brightened and pointed at a photo pinned to the board. “That’s her! That’s Nicole!”

Kip sat up with a surprised look. “Oh? Let me see.”

He walked over to the evidence board, careful to avoid the tangled-up yarn Cali was playing with. He spotted Stripes in the corner, eyeing the string. Best to avoid the cat fight...

“Wait, but that’s not Nicole.” Kip frowned as he looked at the picture. “She’s Chloe.”

Min was frowning now. “Well, she’s not a redhead in this picture. Maybe it’s her sister?”

Kip raised an eyebrow. “What are the chances that she had a sister?” He shook his head. “We should call Matt over here. He might have answers for us. Not to mention, he can give us a better idea of who she is. We only know that Chloe had a fight with Genevieve. We need to dig into this more if she was pretending to be Genevieve’s flatmate.”

Min sighed as he picked up the yarn. His cats had gotten bored and had abandoned the red string. How could he have been so *stupid*? Every little fact or bit of information should have been shared. If he had taken that to heart, Min would have realized that the flatmate was a phony. He had just been so stuck inside of his head since Genevieve had rejected their help. But regrets weren’t really going to get them anywhere. He needed to focus on the case at hand.

“Okay, so we know that Genevieve doesn’t have a flatmate... and that Nicole was Chloe.” Min looked over at Kip. He was still staring hard at the fixed spread before them. They

had carefully remapped out a sort of evidence board just like in those detective shows and games they had seen and played. Though, it wasn't as easy to organize and sort through as those things had made out... Min had done such a good job the first time that redoing it was a real pain.

"We'll have Matt come over and we can sort out the rest from there," Kip decided.

Matt sadly hadn't been able to provide much information on Chloe, but he was able to confirm that she had no siblings *and* that she was a natural redhead. So, based on what they currently knew, Chloe was probably the same Nicole Min had met at the flat.

This definitely made her a prime suspect, but they had no solid proof... nor a clear motive. Matt only knew that they fought. He didn't know who might have instigated or what they fought over.

He did, however, know somebody who probably did know: Genevieve's older sister. They talked all the time and had gone to the same college. Genevieve's sister was just a year older than her, so it would be very easy for her to know quite a bit about Chloe.

But *why* did Kip have to be the one calling her? It was not fair to make *him* call. Genevieve probably blabbed everything to her and would make him a sitting target. He wanted to protest, to force Min to call. But the two traitors had already placed the phone in his hands.

"Hello? Who's this?"

Kip wanted to crawl into a hole... "Ah, this is Kip? A friend of Matt's?"

"Oh hello, Kip!"

He didn't know whether to be happy or worried at her seemingly happy and calm tone.

"Genevieve told me about you."

His heart skipped a beat. Yep, he should be worried. Very worried. “Ah ha ha... that’s nice.”

“So... why are you calling me?”

Kip gave Matt a sharp look. Well? How was he supposed to answer that?

His friend just shrugged. Some help.

“Ah, well, the truth is... Matt kinda hired me and my friend Min to look into the accident with Genevieve’s dog.”

“Mhmm,” the cousin hummed. It sounded like she already knew this information... which meant she probably heard everything from Genevieve.

“Well, uh, we believe that your sister is in—”

“In danger of being murdered,” she finished off for Kip. “I know.”

Was that supposed to be relieving?!

“I understand Genevieve’s frustration, but I also want to know Matt’s side of things. He’s not the type to make a fuss over nothing.”

Kip nodded before remembering he was on the phone. “Yes, uh well... it’s a long story and we don’t have a lot of time. We actually were hoping to ask you some questions about Chloe?”

It was suddenly rather silent at the other end... Kip was almost afraid that the cousin had hung up. If it weren’t for the soft breathing, he really would have thought she ended the call.

“Chloe... that would make sense,” she murmured. “Okay, but after I tell you, I want to talk to Matt.”

Kip swallowed harshly. “Yeah, will do.”

After Kip had finished talking with the cousin, he returned the phone to Matt as he promised. The two cousins probably had a lot to talk about... so he and Min left Matt in the living room to talk while they stayed in the kitchen.

“Well... that was unexpected,” Min commented softly as he made a pot of coffee.

Kip gave his friend a small nod as he frowned, still mulling over what they had just learned about Chloe. She was a ruthless girl... and to think, she had almost killed Genevieve. It was a relief that she hadn't, but there was still a chance she'd attempt it again.

After all, she had almost slipped into Genevieve's apartment. She had only been prevented thanks to Min's unexpected appearance. But what would happen if she attacked again? When they weren't around?

Clink!

Kip was stirred out of his thoughts as Min placed a glass of iced tea in front of him. The sound of the ice clinking against the glass had startled him.

“Don't worry so much,” Min said softly. “We'll figure out something. We got this far you know. We can make sure Genevieve stays safe.”

Kip took a sip of the tea. “I'm glad you sound so sure... because I can't feel so sure. She already tried twice you know.”

“And failed twice,” Min pointed out.

“Third times the charm?” Kip countered.

Min laughed, shaking his head. “No, we won't let that happen,” he assured, giving his friend's shoulder a gentle squeeze. “Just have some faith in us, okay? We know who we're up against and why we're against them. So we have the upper hand. Chloe has no clue how much we know.”

His friend had a point... but he still worried.

“Did Matt say if he knew when Genevieve was coming back?”

Min shrugged. “He didn’t. But it’s possible that her sister might know.”

Kip brightened at this suggestion. That made him feel just a little more prepared for what was to come.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Riiiiing ring. Riiiiing ring!

Kip groaned and covered his head with his pillow. It was Saturday morning for crying out loud. Why couldn't people wait until the afternoon to call?

He let the phone ring a few more times before he finally reached over and answered it.

“Hullo?”

“Kip?? Thank goodness you finally answered! I've been trying to call you all morning!”

Kip used his free hand to rub his eyes. “Matt?”

“Yes! It's me, Matt. This is important! Genevieve came home last night.”

Kip straightened, now fully alert. “She did? Did you tell Min?”

“Yes, I called him earlier so he could come and keep an eye on her.”

“Why didn't you call me first?!” Kip protested.

There was an exasperated sigh at the other end of the phone. “I *did* call you first, but as we all know, you sleep like a log! So I had to call Min before I headed to the park.”

Kip grumbled as he forced himself out of bed. “Okay okay... that's on me. What else do I need to know?”

“She's supposed to be meeting a friend for lunch, but she didn't say who the friend was or where it was at,” Matt explained. “So you and Min will have to keep an eye on her. I gave Min my watch so you should be able to ping her location if you lose her.”

“Wait do you mean be ‘ping’?” Kip asked as he worked on getting dressed which wasn't easy to do with one hand.

“Her parents wanted me to keep an eye on her so they gave me this watch that's connected to her phone.”

“Is that even legal?!”

Matt chuckled. “Well, she’s still on their phone plan, and she knows about it.”

“Oh.”

“Perfectly legal.”

Kip rolled his eyes. “Right, right. Min and I will keep a close eye on her.”

“You better!”

And with a *click*, the call ended. Kip finally had both his hands free and could finish washing up and just head out. No breakfast today. There was no time. As Sherlock would say, the game was afoot.

Min was standing across the street from Genevieve’s flat, keeping an eye on her place. She hadn’t come out just yet, but he couldn’t let his guard down. He couldn’t miss her leaving. Sure, they had the watch... but Min didn’t want to depend too heavily on the technology. One wrong move could be deadly, in more ways than one.

“You look too obvious, Min.”

Min turned on his heels to face Kip with a frown. “You’re late.”

Kip shrugged, yawning as he adjusted his cap and sunglasses. The perfect disguise in his opinion.

“And you say *I* look too obvious,” Min grumbled as he turned his attention back to the flat. Ack. He grabbed Kip’s hand and started walking. “She’s leaving!”

Kip turned his gaze to the flat as his friend tugged him along, barely spotting Genevieve as she disappeared down the stairwell.

Lucky for them, Genevieve did not take her car or call a taxi. Deep down, Min kind of wished she had. It would have been kind of fun to hire a taxi and follow after her just like in the books or in the movies. But he needed to force out such silly thoughts. This was more serious than fiction. He and Kip had to trail her and make sure that Chloe didn't make another murder attempt.

The streets of New York are almost always busy. It was a blessing and a curse. A blessing because it meant Genevieve wouldn't notice them following her but a curse because it would make it hard for them to follow her.

"Can you see her?!" Kip asked, straining to see over the crowd as they walked. He really hated being short.

"Barely," was Min's soft answer. "I think she's headed to that one new café you took her to that one time. At least, that's the direction she's headed in."

Kip brightened at that answer. "You're probably right. It's the only café in this area within walking distance. I'll go on ahead and grab a table for us. And you." He tossed his hat to his friend. "Wear this. Genevieve would be able to spot you a mile away if you just showed up like that."

Min couldn't really argue with that and let his friend go as he pulled the hat over his head, glancing at his reflection in the nearby shop windows to make sure his hair was mostly covered. A beanie would have given more coverage, but he had to make do with this baseball cap.

Genevieve hadn't expected a text from her of all people while she was away in Jersey. She had thought her number had been blocked... but reading the message, she couldn't help

feeling a twinge of compassion for her. So, despite knowing her older sister and even Elodie wouldn't approve, she agreed to meet with her old friend.

The messages had been so open and honest about the feelings of the past. She felt guilty and rather sorry for how she had treated Genevieve and just wanted a second chance. She understood if Genevieve didn't want to speak to her... but she had wanted to try asking all the same.

Genevieve couldn't be heartless to such a genuine apology and request. So, she cut her trip with Elodie short and arranged to meet with her friend that Saturday. They were going to meet at that café, the one that Kip had taken her to... She hadn't seen him in a while and felt a little guilty. She had been ignoring him because of the whole detective mess.

As she headed out to the café, she promised herself to contact him and apologize for ignoring him. She still felt that he had been in the wrong when it came to the whole detective business, but she could admit when she was also wrong. They'd make up somehow, but right now, she had a friend to reconcile with.

“Hello, Chloe!”

Kip almost wondered if he should have let Min go first as he got a table within earshot of Genevieve's table. He didn't recognize the blonde sitting opposite of her since her back was turned to him, so he assumed it was Elodie or another friend. After all, Chloe was a red-head.

The two girls were currently chatting about the weather, so there wasn't anything to be worried about. Still, he would keep an eye out for any red-heads that might pass by.

“What are you doing?!” a sharp voice hissed in his ear, nearly making him jump before he recognized his friend.

“Min! Don’t scare me like that!” he whispered harshly. “And what does it look like I’m doing? I’m on the lookout for Chloe.”

“Idiot!” Min smacked the Kip’s head and made him face the two girls. They were lucky the girls were too engrossed in their conversation to notice them. “You should be watching Chloe!”

“Chloe’s not here!”

Min scowled and pointed at the girl opposite of Genevieve. “That is Chloe.”

“But Chloe’s a redhead!”

“Not anymore. I saw her face. It’s her,” Min insisted. After all, he wasn’t going to make the same mistake twice with her.

“So what do we do?” Kip asked, lowering his voice.

“We watch and—” His eyes widened as he saw a waitress come over to Genevieve’s table and set down two drinks in clear to-go cups. That color...

“Don’t drink that!” Min called out, running over to Genevieve and snatching the drink out of the blonde’s hands just as she had reached out for it.

“What are you doing?” Genevieve gasped out as Kip came running up as well.

“Saving your life.” Kip took the to-go cup from Min’s hand and sniffed the drink. “This has rosemary in it.”

Genevieve looked at her friend in shock. “Chloe... you know I’m allergic.”

The blonde sitting across from her was shaking. “Y-yeah. I know.” She glared at Genevieve, gripping her chair tightly before standing onto her feet and pointing her finger at the other girl. “I wanted you to drink it and *die*! You were supposed to die!”

Chloe slammed her fist on the table, gaining the attention of the other customers as she raised her voice. “But your stupid dog got seizures instead! Then I missed my chance because of these two.” She shot an angry look at Kip and Min. “But today, I was going to get rid of you for good. You were going to finally get it for what you did to me. You goody two shoes. You ruined my life!” she shrieked, lunging at Genevieve and grasping onto her hair tightly.

Genevieve cried out and clawed at the other girl. Both girls were now screaming and tugging at each other’s hair. Leaving Min and Kip at a slight loss of what exactly to do. Should they intervene? It wasn’t like Chloe could actually kill Genevieve by pulling hair...

But it still wasn’t a good look for either girl. They needed to be separated, so Kip nodded to his friend and they each grabbed the two girls to pull them away from each other. Kip pulled Genevieve away as Min held back Chloe.

“That’s enough... the police will be here shortly,” Min said firmly, forcing the redhead to sit back down.

The café was strangely quiet... all the other customers were staring and whispering at the scene they had witnessed. The whole atmosphere had shifted by Chloe’s words and actions. And the arrival of the police only made the café quieter still.

“Didn’t know you had the police on speed dial,” Kip teased Min lightly as the police escorted Chloe out. A few policemen were still around, questioning some of the people and getting a testimony from Genevieve. They’d be questioned and interviewed later.

Min coughed. “It pays to be prepared.”

Once things had calmed down, Genevieve stopped by the bookstore to give a proper thanks to the two men who had saved her life. Maisy was left at the front, barking happily as she

peeked into the window after her mistress. Everything had happened so quickly... and suddenly. She didn't know what she ought to say to them, especially after she accused them of causing a fuss over nothing. Her face flushed at the mere thought of the angry words she had given Kip, but Matt assured her that his two friends understood and didn't hold it against her. But that didn't completely ease her mind as she entered the café..

“Hello?” she called out shyly.

“Oh, Genevieve, welcome!” Min greeted, popping out from the kitchen area. “Kip’s in the bookstore, but he should be over here shortly. Please take a seat!”

Genevieve nodded, taking a seat at the nearest table that looked towards the bookstore. She couldn't see Kip... but considering he was roughly her height, it wouldn't be easy to spot him over the shelves.

“Coffee? Or water? No rosemary is used here so you're safe,” Min assured with a soft smile as he placed two cups before her.

“Oh thank you! I—”

“Genevieve?”

She looked back up to see Kip smiling at her, and she couldn't help smiling back. “Hello Kip.”

He looked a little embarrassed as he took his seat. “I'm glad you stopped by. We were wanting to check on you, but Matt wouldn't let us.”

“More like *you* wanted to check,” Min mumbled as he poured some tea for Kip.

Genevieve glanced curiously at Min man, not quite catching what he had said, but he merely flashed a bright smile.

“So, I just ah... wanted to um...” Genevieve was mumbling now.

“You don’t need to thank us,” Min chimed in gently. “We’re just glad your safe.”

The blonde glanced between the two young men. She really could understand why her cousin was so fond of his friends. They were being so kind after she had been so determined to ignore them and brush them off.

“How did you realize that it was Chloe?” she asked softly. “I’m still a little surprised that it was her... even if I didn’t exactly get along with her back at college.”

Kip pursed his lips. “Well, we sort of realized it, er Min realized it,” he corrected himself. He could take all the credit. It had been a team effort, and most due to Min’s quick thinking and persistence. “You see he bumped into Chloe trying to break into your flat.”

“My flat?!”

“She told me was your flatmate Nicole, so I didn’t realize it at first,” Min explained. “It wasn’t until I saw Chloe’s picture on our evidence board that Kip and I realized something wasn’t right.”

Genevieve nodded a little. “I see... but how exactly did um... Maisy come into this whole thing? You both mentioned that Maisy’s seizures were sort of connected to this whole thing.”

Kip nodded. “From what we kind of figured on our own and based on her testimony from the police, Chloe had been watching you for a while and had been taking particular notice of your walks with Maisy. She was hoping to find a way to get Maisy to lure you to her trap.”

After observing Genevieve’s usual jogging route, Chloe had determined where she could plant the hat. It was simple. She would soak the brim of Genevieve’s hat with her rosemary essential oils and leave the rest to nature. What she hadn’t realized at the time was that Genevieve had an unexpected invitation to a friend’s wedding. So, instead of having Genevieve’s body

discovered that Saturday morning... she was shocked to find a convulsing dog in her place. Unsure what to do, Chloe had fled the scene, leaving the hat behind.

Annotated Bibliography

Agatha Christie Limited. "How Christie Wrote." agathachristie.com, Agatha Christie Limited, <https://www.agathachristie.com/about-christie/how-christie-wrote>.

The Agatha Christie website was created by Agatha Christie Limited, the company that is in charge of protecting and preserving the work of Agatha Christie. This article from the website provided information on Agatha Christie's writing process. Looking at Agatha Christie's writing process provided insight on how note-taking and careful planning can help with plotting out the book manuscript.

Bell, James Scott. *Plot and Structure: Techniques and Exercises for Crafting a Plot That Grips Readers from Start to Finish*. Writer's Digest Books, 2004.

James Scot Bell's book *Plot and Structure* explained the various ways writers can organize their plots for their stories. He provided several ways to outline the entire story and keep the plot clear as the writer works on the story. The organization tips helped lay down a foundation for where the main acts of the story should fall.

Christie, Agatha. *Agatha Christie: An Autobiography*. Dodd, Mead, and Company, 1977.

Agatha Christie's autobiography detailed her life from a young age to adulthood. In several sections of the autobiography, Christie mentioned her writing process and how she came up with some of her stories. The background on Christie's writing from a more personal perspective helped guide the writing process of the manuscript.

---. *And Then There Were None*. St. Martin's Griffin, 1939.

The work *And Then There Were None* was one of Agatha Christie's most defining works.

In this story, there were 10 deaths that Christie carefully planned. This work provided

inspiration and guidelines on how to carefully keep the manuscript woven together in a way that was feasible and made sense.

---. *Clues to Christie: The Definitive Guide to Miss Marple, Hercule Poirot, Tommy & Tuppence, and All of Agatha Christie's Mysteries*. E-book, William Morrow, 2011.

The work *Clues to Christie* covered some of Agatha Christie's best detectives. Looking at the different detectives Christie created provided background on how the detective character can be changed and evolved. While Poirot is known as a typical private detective figure, Miss Marple and Tommy and Tuppence act as more amateur detectives. This work provided a foundation for how the detective role would be approached in the manuscript.

---. *Curtain*. Dodd, Mead, and Company, 1975.

Agatha Christie's *Curtain* was her last story featuring her most famous detective Hercule Poirot. This last case takes place in the same town where the first Hercule Poirot story took place. The connections and ties to the first work were woven very well, giving inspiration to try to create possible ways for the manuscript to evolve into a series.

---. *Labors of Hercules*. HarperCollins, 1947.

The *Labors of Hercules* followed Hercule Poirot as he took on cases related to the legend of the Greek demigod Hercules. In a few of these short story cases, Hercule Poirot encountered dogs. These cases with dogs helped guide the approach to animals in the manuscript.

---. *Miss Marple: The Complete Short Stories*. William Morrow, 2011.

In *Miss Marple: The Complete Short Stories*, Miss Marple solves several cases through mere observation of what was being told to her. However, her answers at first were

strange because they seemed unrelated to the situation at hand. The seemingly out of place clues Miss Marple gave helped inspire the character of Professor Lonki in the manuscript.

---. *Murder Is Easy*. William Morrow, 1939.

In the work *Murder Is Easy* a retired policeman decided to take on a case after meeting an old woman. This old woman gave him a clue on the case but had been unable to give him anything solid. The policeman had only her one clue to go on. This one clue helped guide the manuscript on how to address a strange clue that did not seem like a very helpful one.

---. *The Pale Horse*. William Morrow, 1961.

The story of *The Pale Horse* follows a historian who stumbles upon a strange case that leads him to investigate. At first, the historian did not have a strong connection to the case, but as he got more involved, he realized how connected some the events were. This work helped the manuscript tie certain events together as well as making character connections.

---. *Poirot in the Orient*. Berkley Books, 2001.

The work *Poirot in the Orient* is a collection of several books that take place in the Middle East. The main location for each of the books is in Egypt. In each of these works, Agatha Christie provided subtle details that would remind her readers of the exact location the story was taking place in. These works provided background on how the manuscript should tie in the location through description and subtle hints.

---. *The Seven Dials Mystery*. St. Martin's Minotaur Mysteries, 2001.

Agatha Christie's *The Seven Dials Mystery* was written from the perspective of three main characters: Bill, Bundle, and Jimmy. The different point of views (POV) in this work helped provide the book manuscript with a guide on how to change POV from chapter to chapter and scene to scene. The initial paragraphs for each chapter clearly showed which character's POV was being used, providing a good approach for the manuscript to follow.

---. *Third Girl*. William Morrow, 1966.

The story of *Third Girl* told the story of three ladies who room together in an apartment flat. The third girl was a term used by the younger generation to find a third roommate to split living expenses. Since there were several characters living in apartments as well as some being roommates, this work provided some background as well as ideas on how to tie in the apartment with the mystery of the story.

Wu, Chia-ying. *The Importance of Being Cozy: Agatha Christie and Golden Age British*

Detective Fiction, State University of New York at Buffalo, Ann Arbor, 2007. ProQuest, <http://www.proquest.com/2Fdissertations-theses/2Fimportance-being-cosy-agatha-christie-golden-age/2Fdocview/2F304771228/2Fse-2/3Faccountid/3D12085>.

Chia-ying Wu's dissertation *The Importance of Being Cozy* covered the idea of Agatha Christie's works as being stories that connected readers to the detectives. Wu argued that the human qualities of the detectives are what draws a reader to loving the story and characters and not the violence or brilliant deductions. The homey feel Christie brings in her work brought her characters to life. This dissertation helped push the idea of creating a cozy sort of mystery that focused on the characters and storyline and not just the crime that had been committed.

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