

THE
SHERLOCK
SOCIETY

1

Biscayne Bay

MAYBE IF OUR LAST NAME WAS BAKER, WE would've sold cupcakes. Or if it was Walker, we might've taken care of people's dogs while they were on vacation. But it's Sherlock, so starting a detective agency just *seemed* like the thing to do. Especially compared to more traditional middle school moneymaking schemes like babysitting (boring), lawn mowing (sweaty), or cleaning out the attic (boring *and* sweaty).

My name is Alex Sherlock. I'm twelve years old, and my sister Zoe's thirteen. We'd had enough of bratty kids and weed-filled yards and wanted something new and exciting for summer. Tempted by the lure of adventure,

we jumped at the chance to become detectives.

Then, three weeks later, we had to jump into Biscayne Bay. That's because we were passengers on a yacht that exploded. (Okay, maybe we were more like "stowaways" than "passengers," but let's not focus on that part yet.) Just know that while *Sweet Caroline* was sinking to the ocean floor, we were clinging to floating debris and trying to figure out how to make it back to land. In every way imaginable, we were in over our heads. And as we treaded water with the acrid stench of burning fiberglass in the air, boring and sweaty suddenly didn't sound so bad.

"We should've mowed lawns," I said, looking up at the plume of black smoke spiraling into the sky.

"Ya think?" Zoe responded, giving me the stink eye as she tried to wrap her arms around a cooler that was bobbing up and down in the water. "What gave it away? The explosion? Or the sinking ship?"

"Technically, it's a 'boat,' not a 'ship,'" I replied, instantly regretting my words.

"Are you seriously correcting my vocabulary out here in the ocean?" she exclaimed. "Who are you trying to impress?"

Even in this stressful situation, I couldn't help myself. "Whom."

Her face scrunched up like she was trying to stop her head from exploding, and I thought she might drown me right then and there. “Do you know what your problem is? You don’t know when to—”

Plonk.

She was interrupted by a bright orange life vest that bopped her on the head. Another one landed right in front of me, splashing my face.

“Stop arguing and put these on,” our grandfather said as he dog-paddled toward us. “You’re wasting energy and we’ve got real problems to solve.”

“Problems, plural?” Zoe asked. “You mean there’s something more to worry about than making it to shore without becoming shark bait?”

“Sharks aren’t a concern. If you run into one, all you’ve got to do is punch it in the snout and gouge out its eyes,” he said, as if that was no big thing. “The apex predator that worries me here is your mother. She’s going to blame me for this.”

He had a point. Even though it had been our idea to sneak onto the yacht, as the responsible adult in the room where the plan was hatched, he probably should’ve at least tried to talk us out of it.

According to the business cards Zoe insisted we have

professionally printed, Grandpa was Director of Transportation and Logistics for the Sherlock Society. This was a fancy way of saying he drove us around in his old-school Cadillac convertible. But Grandpa being Grandpa, he did more than just drive. He was great at problem solving in the field (he figured out where to hide on the yacht) and often noticed things Zoe and I overlooked (hello, life preservers).

“What about you?” I asked, while trying to wriggle into mine. “There’re only two vests but three of us. Why don’t Zoe and I share one so you can have the other?”

“I don’t need a life preserver,” he scoffed, his pride wounded. “I’m like a fish. I’ve told you I swam the four-hundred individual medley in college. They called me the Barracuda.”

“We know,” I said, because he mentioned it at least once a month. “But it’s a lot farther than four hundred yards to the shore.”

“Besides,” Zoe added, “that was like nine presidents ago.”

He shot her an indignant look and was no doubt about to make his oft-repeated claim of being the healthiest seventy-three-year-old in Coconut Grove when we heard the shrill sound of an approaching siren.

“And the hits just keep on coming,” Grandpa moaned. “Now we’ve got cops.”

Zoe and I turned to see a Marine Patrol boat racing to the rescue. We were elated, but Grandpa seemed dismayed.

“You two get your vests buckled and wave them over,” he said, his voice quickening. “They’ll pluck you out of the water and get you back to safety.”

“Don’t you mean pluck *us* out and get *us* back?” I asked, confused.

“You’re minors, they’ll go easy on you,” he replied. “But I’ve got something of a checkered history with the Miami Police Department. I’m going to swim for it.”

“Swim for it?” Zoe asked incredulous. “You think you can outrace a Marine Patrol boat?”

“Four minutes, thirty-seven point two seconds,” Grandpa replied, proudly reciting his best time from college. “This stretch of water is the old boat racecourse. I’m going to speed through it just like those powerboats did when I was a kid.”

Before we could try to reason with him, he began swimming toward a hulking concrete grandstand known as Miami Marine Stadium. Long abandoned and covered with graffiti, it was where fans had once come out to watch boat races.

“Powerboat?” Zoe called out to him. “More like *pedal* boat!”

He gurgled back an unintelligible retort and kept on swimming.

As the police neared the wreckage, we got their attention by waving our arms and blowing on whistles attached to the life vests. There were two officers onboard, Sanchez and Del Castillo. (I know their names because our mother made us send each of them thank-you notes for saving our lives, as well as handwritten three-hundred-word essays titled “I Promise Not to Be Stupid Around the Water Again.”)

Sanchez was driving. As they got close, she put the engine on idle as Del Castillo leaned over the side and reached out to us with a long pole called a boat hook.

“Are either of you hurt?” he asked.

“No,” answered Zoe as we grabbed it and he pulled us in. “We’re fine. No injuries.”

Sanchez came over to help. “What about the others? Is anyone still onboard?”

“They escaped on Jet Skis right before the explosion,” I answered. “It’s just us.”

The officers shared a confused look, and Del Castillo asked, “Why’d they leave you?”

“Uh, they may not have realized we were onboard,” I admitted sheepishly, not wanting to delve too deeply into the Pandora’s box of our stowaway status. “It’s complicated.”

“What about him?” Sanchez motioned toward Grandpa, who was moving through the water at a very un-barracuda-like speed. “Is he complicated too?”

“More than you can possibly imagine,” Zoe replied.

Once we were onboard, they ran us through a quick battery of tests to make sure we weren’t in shock and didn’t have concussions. Then they began what was undoubtedly the slowest chase in the history of the Miami Police Department. We pattered alongside Grandpa until he finally gave up his swim for freedom and raised his hands in surrender. He’d only made it about 150 yards, not even half the distance he swam in college and nowhere close to reaching the stadium.

After receiving some emergency oxygen and chugging a bottle of Gatorade, he managed to catch his breath long enough to proclaim, “We answer no questions without our attorney present.” He started to say something else, but instead decided to lie down on a padded bench and stay quiet.

2

The Lawyer of Lost Causes

OFFICER SANCHEZ DROVE FAST ENOUGH that we had to hold on to a metal railing to keep our balance; and the sounds of the wind and engines were too loud for us to talk without raising our voices. Not that we needed to speak. As Zoe and I looked back at the smoldering wreckage, our anxious expressions said it all: *How did we get caught up in this mess?*

It took about fifteen minutes to reach the police marina. We zipped past the skyscrapers of downtown Miami and between semi-private islands with mansions belonging to movie stars and billionaires. Through it all, Grandpa lay on the bench with his eyes closed,

and Officer Del Castillo never took his eyes off us. I couldn't tell if it was because he was concerned for our well-being or if he was looking for any hint that we might be guilty of something.

Zoe and I exchanged nervous glances when we slowed down and approached the Sabal Palm Yacht Club. This was where we'd snuck onto *Sweet Caroline* a few hours earlier, and it seemed like we were returning to the scene of the crime to be confronted. I felt a wave of panic and was about to blurt out a full confession before I realized that Marine Patrol was headquartered right next door.

"Are we under arrest?" Grandpa asked as the officers led us into a two-story stucco building with dingy white paint and police-blue trim.

"*Not yet,*" Sanchez answered in a tone that managed to be humorous, threatening, and teasing all at once. "But you'll need to answer some questions so we can figure out what happened."

"You can call your lawyer from my desk," said Del Castillo. "Then a squad car will pick you up and take you downtown for the interview."

The inside of the building looked like a cross between a police station and a dive shop. The office was on the second floor, and we climbed a narrow

flight of stairs lined with life vests hanging from hooks and oxygen tanks neatly lined up, one per step. I gulped when we reached the top and I spied a pair of handcuffs dangling from the end of the railing. Instinctively, I rubbed my wrists, the words “not yet” fresh in my ears.

Grandpa handled the call to our attorney, who also happened to be our mother. Even standing a few feet away, we could hear her as she ran through all the emotions, from shocked to worried to furious to relieved that we weren't hurt. There was plenty of yelling, and Grandpa even flinched a few times. Fortunately, by the time it was our turn to talk, Mom had shifted into take-charge mode and was on her way to the police station for our interview.

“Are you both okay?” she asked as Zoe and I leaned together so we could share the phone.

“Yes,” we assured her. “We're fine.”

“Good.” She took a deep breath and transformed from concerned mother into all-business attorney. “Now listen closely. Don't say a word to the police until I get there. Understand?”

“Yes,” we replied.

“I mean it. Don't antagonize them. Don't be rude.

Just tell them that you can't answer any questions without me in the room. That's vitally important."

"We understand," Zoe assured her.

"Have they read you your rights?"

"No," I answered.

"Good. Let me know if that changes."

Since our clothes were still soaking wet, Sanchez offered us some used Police Athletic League sweats and T-shirts. There was no way of knowing what assortment of cops, criminals, and detainees might have worn them before us, so Zoe and I passed. Grandpa, however, jumped at the opportunity.

"Never turn down free," he advised. "Or dry, for that matter."

"They're free for a reason," Zoe said. "Besides, it doesn't matter if the clothes are dry if your underwear's still wet."

"Underwear?" he said with a raised eyebrow.

"Ew," we both replied, and quickly dropped the subject.

Since we weren't under arrest, they didn't put us in a holding cell. Instead, they had us wait in the break room with the door locked. There was a table, stackable plastic chairs, and a counter full of small appliances, includ-

ing a microwave that looked older than Grandpa. There was also a window air-conditioning unit, whining and straining but doing little to actually cool the air.

“How much trouble are we in?” I asked once we were alone and could talk openly.

“With *whom*?” Zoe replied, stressing the word so I wouldn’t correct her again. “The cops or Mom and Dad?”

“Both, I guess.”

“We should be fine with the police,” Grandpa said. “We haven’t broken any laws.”

Zoe gave him a disbelieving look and started counting off our transgressions on her fingers. “Breaking and entering, trespassing, unlawful recording of a private conversation—”

“Stop counting like that,” Grandpa said as he made a hushing motion with his hands. “There are eyes and ears everywhere. I’m just saying we haven’t done anything that a lawyer of your mother’s caliber shouldn’t be able to take care of.”

A profile in the *Miami Herald* once dubbed our mom the “Lawyer of Lost Causes,” because she regularly took on seemingly unwinnable cases, far more concerned with right and wrong than dollars and cents. She’d rep-

resented migrant workers who faced deportation, fought to save a senior center that was about to be demolished to make way for condominiums, and filed a lawsuit against a golf club that wouldn't admit women as members.

Each case seemed impossible to win, except that was exactly what she did. Oftentimes her clients couldn't afford to pay her, so they showed their gratitude by coming to our house with delicious homecooked meals ranging from country fried chicken to beef empanadas to oxtail soup.

This, however, was the first time she'd be representing stowaways in relation to the sinking of a luxury yacht. We hoped she could keep her winning streak alive.

"Okay, say Mom gets us out of here," I offered. "How much trouble do you think we're in when we get home?"

"That depends," Grandpa said. "When does your father get back from Honduras?"

"Late tomorrow night," Zoe answered.

"Then we're doomed," he said.

Our father was a marine biologist at the University of Miami. He'd taken a team of students to Central America to collect heat-tolerant corals to breed with ones from Florida to make them more resilient. As you might expect from someone who spent much of his time on a

beach, Dad had a “no shoes, no shirt, no problem” view of the world. He was a pushover when it came to discipline, but this time he wouldn’t be there to argue on our behalf.

“Your mother may be a compassionate attorney,” Grandpa continued. “But in this instance, she will be judge and jury, and her justice will be swift and unforgiving. We are going to be grounded for a very long time.”

“‘We’?” I asked. “She can’t ground you. You’re her father.”

“I live in her house. I live on a limited fixed income. And I nearly got her children blown up at sea. She can absolutely ground me.”

He looked out the window toward the yacht club parking lot.

“You know, Roberta’s right over there,” he said, referring to his car. “Maybe it’s not too late to make a run for it.”

“How do you propose we do that?” Zoe asked. “Crawl through the window and climb down the wall like Spider-Man? Let me guess, in addition to being on the swim team, you were also once a cat burglar?”

Grandpa gave her a stern look and said, “You know, if you weren’t so negative, you might have more friends.”

“I barely like the friends I’ve got,” Zoe said. “The last thing I want is more of them.”

We waited nearly two hours with no sign of the police officer who was supposed to pick us up. Twice we heard muffled voices in the hall, but both times the people walked away without coming in. When the door finally opened, we were surprised to see our mother.

“Mom?” Zoe exclaimed. “What are you doing here?”

“We thought you were meeting us at the police station,” I said.

“So did I,” she answered. “But when I got there, they told me to come here instead.”

We both stood up, and she enveloped us in a huge hug.

“You’re sure you’re okay?” she asked.

“Positive,” I answered, as I squeezed extra tight.

“Yeah,” Zoe said. “Just a little wet.”

“Well, now so am I.” Mom flashed a reassuring smile as she looked at the two kid-shaped water stains on her suit.

Even though she made a point of not looking at him, Grandpa chimed in, “I’m okay too, if you’re interested.”

Rather than answer, she just made a *hmm* noise.

We started to fill her in on the basics of what had

happened, but before we could provide many details, a bald man in a black suit came into the room. His cheeks were flushed, and there was a sweat stain forming below his collar. His wardrobe definitely wasn't Miami-friendly, which made me think he was from out of town. He had a New York accent, and I recognized his voice as belonging to one of the people who'd been speaking outside the door.

"Are you the mom-slash-attorney?" he asked in an unsuccessful attempt to sound hip.

"Yes, I am," she answered in an assertive professional tone. "Melinda Lassiter."

He smiled. "They tell me that you're the one who takes on all the unwinnable cases?"

"Then they tell you wrong," Grandpa interrupted. "She's the one who *wins* all the unwinnable cases." Cold shoulder or not, his daughter was his pride and joy.

"Nice to meet you," said the man. "Why don't we sit down and get started?"

"Actually, why don't you tell me who you are first," Mom replied.

"Of course," he said. "I'm Special Agent Dale Tyree."

"Special agent?" she asked surprised. "You're FBI?"

"Secret Service," he answered. "I'm down from

Washington.” He said this as if it would intimidate her. It didn’t.

“The Secret Service investigating a yacht sinking in Biscayne Bay seems unusual,” Mom said. “So does holding an interview in a break room at Marine Patrol instead of the police station. What’s going on here, Special Agent Tyree?”

“If we sit down, I’ll tell you what I can,” he said. “I’ve just got a few questions for your son and daughter about Morris Kane.”

Kane was a multi-millionaire, and *Sweet Caroline* was his yacht.

“We can sit down,” Mom said. “But my children aren’t answering anything unless you can guarantee them immunity.”

“That should be no problem,” he said without hesitation.

“‘Should be no problem’ and ‘guarantee’ aren’t quite the same thing now, are they?” Mom replied.

Tyree sighed. Despite his urgency, it was evident that she wasn’t going to budge. “Why don’t I step out and place a few calls so we can make it official?”

“Sounds like a plan,” Mom answered. “Blanket immunity for both of them.”

Grandpa cleared his throat, and Mom gave him a disapproving look.

“The senior citizen, too,” she said reluctantly.

“Thank you, darling,” said Grandpa.

Agent Tyree forced a smile and said, “This may take a while.”

“We’re in no hurry,” Mom answered.

Once he left the room, her demeanor changed from confident to confused. “None of this makes any sense,” she said as we sat down around the table.

“Yeah,” I replied. “I thought the Secret Service’s job was to protect the president.”

“Not to mention the fact that the boat just sank a couple hours ago,” Zoe added. “How could he get down here from Washington so quickly?”

“He couldn’t,” Mom answered. “Which means he was already in Miami investigating.” She shook her head as she considered this. “What have you gotten yourselves into?”

I started to answer, but Zoe put up her hand to stop me.

“We don’t talk without immunity,” she said.

“Exactly,” Mom replied. “That’s why he’s calling the US Attorney right now. He’s getting you immunity.”

“Not from the government,” Zoe said. “From you

and Dad. We'll tell you everything, but you have to promise not to punish us for it. We know we've made mistakes, but it was because we were trying to live up to what you're always telling us: 'Do what's right, not what's easy.'"

"Zoe, do you understand how serious this is?" Mom asked, perturbed. "We don't have time to play games."

"I'm not playing any games. I'm doing exactly what you'd do for your clients. What you just did with that agent." Zoe paused before adding, "I'm acting like you."

"Why does that not sound like a compliment?"

"I don't know," Zoe replied. "Because it is."

"Fine," Mom said. "I'll give you both immunity."

Zoe gave her a look and nodded toward Grandpa.

Mom rolled her eyes. "Okay. I'll give all three of you immunity."

Zoe smiled. "We'll take your word on that. No paperwork necessary." She turned to me and said, "Go ahead. Tell her."

In truth, I was excited to share the story, especially since I could do it without getting in trouble.

"Okay, it all started when I was locked in the school library."



The Sherlock Society

Three Weeks Earlier

ON THE SECOND-TO-LAST DAY OF SCHOOL, the final two hours were set aside so each club could have a year-end celebration. The student council held a yearbook-signing party in the gym. The band, chorus, and orchestra threw a dance in the music room. And the Spanish and French clubs turned the cafeteria into an international food fair.

Meanwhile, I was in the library with all the other members of the Sherlock Society. And by “all,” I mean Yadi and Lina. That’s it. There were only three of us. In fact, for the first half of the year there’d just been two; but Lina joined in January after moving here from Wyoming.

Yadi and I had been best friends since second grade, when we were the two worst players on our Little League baseball team. In a game when I struck out twice and committed three errors in the same inning, he sat next to me on the lonely end of the bench and called me his *mejor amigo*. We'd been inseparable ever since. So much so that people often confused us for each other even though we looked nothing alike.

Lina was the first girl to ever hang out with us. (Apparently, she had zero concern about her social standing.) She was an intriguing blend of quiet and bold. Although shy by nature, she dyed her hair electric blue. And even though she didn't talk much, she was laugh-out-loud funny. She was also supersmart and a huge reader. That love of reading is what led her to us.

She liked to help Ms. Campos after school in the library, which was where we held our meetings. We got together every other Thursday to discuss books, movies, puzzles, or anything else we deemed mysterious. We were, by far, the nerdiest club at Carver Middle, which was why we were so surprised to see Zoe come into the library.

"Finally," she said, exasperated. "I've been looking everywhere for you. No one I asked had even heard of

your club.” She shook her head. “By the way, I can’t believe you named a club after yourself.”

“It’s not named after me,” I said defensively. “It’s named after Sherlock Holmes. It’s a mystery club.”

Zoe laughed. “Well, it sure is a mystery to the rest of the student body. So, well done.”

“What are you doing here?” I asked. “Are you interested in joining?”

“Hardly. I just need your house key.”

“Why?”

“Because I forgot mine and I’m going home.”

“School’s not out for another two hours,” I replied.

“It’s early release if you’re not in a club, which means I’m done for the day.”

“But you’re in a ton of clubs,” Yadi said. “You’re vice president of student council.”

“Not today I’m not.”

That was when it dawned on me. “This is about summer camp, isn’t it?”

Recently there’d been trouble in popular girl paradise. Zoe and her two best friends were the cool kids of the seventh grade. Yadi and I called them the Cerberus, after the three-headed dog monster who guarded the gates of

the underworld. (Our frequent use of Greek mythology references was a solid indicator of our nerditude.)

The trouble was that Brooke and Chelsea were headed to a trendy summer camp in Maine, and my parents wouldn't let Zoe go. This had led to weeks of arguments and countless slamming doors at home. Things only got worse when another girl in their class signed up for camp and began angling for Zoe's spot in the squad.

"It doesn't matter what it's about," she replied. "I just want the key."

"I can give it to you, but you still can't go home," I said.

"I have no intention of spending two hours listening to them talk about color war."

"What's color war?" Yadi asked.

"I don't know," Zoe said. "But apparently, it's a big deal at camp."

"Well, you can't do that, either," I answered. "You're stuck in here with us."

"What do you mean?"

"For our year-end party, Ms. Campos turned the library into an escape room," I explained. "The doors are all locked."

Suddenly Zoe looked appalled. "Then unlock one."

“I can’t. The key’s hidden. That’s the whole point of the game. We have to find it.”

“She just locked you in?” she said, disbelieving. “What if there’s a fire or something?”

“Then we use the emergency door,” I said.

“I guess you can use that if you like,” Lina suggested. “Although it would set off alarms and interrupt all the parties. Not sure you want to be *that* person.”

Zoe considered this. “Fine,” she said. “Let’s just solve the puzzle. Where is it?”

“First we have to bring things to order,” I explained.

“Whatever.”

We gathered around a table and everyone (except Zoe) recited the phrase we said at the start of every meeting. “We are the Sherlock Society. It is our business to know what others do not.”

“What’s with that?” Zoe asked.

“It’s from a Holmes mystery called ‘The Adventure of the Blue Carbuncle,’” I explained. “It’s our official society motto.”

“Don’t you think it’s a bit of an overreach for a club with only three members to call itself a ‘society?’”

“It’s . . . *aspirational*,” I replied.

“I think the word you’re looking for is ‘delusional.’”

“Do you want to find the key? Or do you want to keep making fun of us?”

“Can’t I do both?”

I ignored her and turned to the others. “Ms. Campos left us two envelopes.” I handed one each to Lina and Yadi.

Lina opened the one marked *WELCOME* and read it to us. “Greetings from Professor Moriarty! You’ve been locked inside the royal library and have only sixty minutes to escape. In order to do that, you’ll have to solve a series of clues and riddles to find the key. When you’re ready to play, start the stopwatch and open the first clue.”

I held up a stopwatch that Ms. Campos had left us and dramatically pressed the button. “The game is afoot!”

Zoe rolled her eyes, but I didn’t care.

“Here we go!” Yadi tore open his envelope and read clue number one.

Dear Sherlock,

I’ve hidden clues for you to find

So take off the jacket and loosen the spine

The very first place that you need to look
Is inside my all-time favorite book:

In Lime Water Ink by Anna Graham

“*That’s* her favorite book?” Lina said. “I’ve never even heard of it.”

“Me neither,” added Yadi.

“Is lime water some kind of invisible ink that disappears until you put it over heat or something?” I asked.

“Don’t overthink things,” Zoe said as she walked across the room. “All we’ve got to do is find it and get the next clue. It should be in fiction under Graham.”

Although the rest of us were trying to enjoy the nuances of the game, Lina just wanted to get through it and find the key so she could leave. She reached the Gs and started listing off the authors. “Gerber, Gibbs, Glaser, Gonzalez, Grabenstein, Graff, Gratz.” She looked up, annoyed. “There’s no Graham.”

“Maybe it’s in nonfiction,” I suggested.

“I’ll look it up in Destiny.” Yadi headed toward a computer terminal.

“You won’t find it there,” Lina said.

It was only then that I noticed she hadn't followed the rest of us over to the fiction section. Instead, she'd gone to the game cabinet next to Ms. Campos's desk.

"Why not?" Yadi asked. "All the books are listed in Destiny."

"*In Lime Water Ink* is not a book," Lina answered. "*Listen* to the name of the author."

"Anna Graham?" I said, and this time when I heard it, I knew what she meant. "How did I miss that? It's an *anagram*. The letters are out of order."

"That's right," she said as she took the Scrabble game from the cabinet. She opened it and dumped the tiles onto a table and pulled out the ones that spelled *In Lime Water Ink*.

We huddled together and tried rearranging them to find a title. We came up with *Kim Went Airline*, *Liam Kiwi Intern*, and (my personal favorite) *Am I Erin Tinkle?* Surprisingly, Zoe was the one who solved it.

"*A Wrinkle in Time*," she blurted out without even touching the tiles.

Lina excitedly double-checked it by arranging the letters and said, "That's it!"

"Who's the author?" Yadi asked.

Lina gave him a disappointed look. "You don't know?"

“No, Ms. Readathon, I don’t,” he replied. “But I can list every third baseman to ever play for the Marlins. We all have things we know and things we don’t.”

“Madeleine L’Engle,” Lina answered as we headed back to the fiction section.

I pulled the book from the shelf and started flipping through the pages but didn’t find any clues. “Maybe this isn’t it,” I said, disappointed.

“It has to be it,” Zoe replied. “It fits too perfectly.”

“What else does the clue say?” Zoe asked.

Yadi read it to us again. “I’ve hidden the clues for you to find, so take off the jacket and loosen the spine.”

“*The*,” Lina said, as though that were a revelation.

“What do you mean?” I asked.

“The clue says *the* jacket and *the* spine, not *your* jacket and *your* spine,” she answered. “It’s not referring to Holmes, it’s talking about the book.”

“Clever.” I took off the jacket and then opened the book all the way to loosen the spine. A folded piece of paper slipped out from within it.

“Nice one,” Yadi said as he gave Lina a fist bump.

I handed the clue to Zoe to read.

“Clue number two,” she said, getting into it despite herself. “Dear Sherlock. I admit you are the greatest fic-

tional detective of all time, but your next answer depends on how well these young literary sleuths stack up.” She held up the list for us to see.

Petra Andalee

Harriet Welsch

Aven Green

Leroy Brown

Claudia Kincaid

“These must all be characters in kids’ mystery books,” I said. “Do you recognize them?”

“Harriet Welsch is *Harriet the Spy*,” Lina said. “And I think Claudia’s the main character in *From the Mixed-Up Files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler*.”

“Get those and I’ll look up the others on my phone,” Zoe said.

The library was genrefied, so all the mystery books were together in one section, which made it quick work. We pulled them from the shelves and brought them back to the table.

“So, now what?” I asked. “We’re supposed to see how they stack up. Does that mean we compare the mysteries? The detectives?”

“No,” Yadi said with a grin. “I bet we’re literally supposed to stack the books.”

We put them on top of each other in the same order the detectives’ names were listed.

Chasing Vermeer

Harriet the Spy

Insignificant Events in the Life of a Cactus

Encyclopedia Brown, Boy Detective

From the Mixed-Up Files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler

We were stumped. We stared at them for a while, with no idea how this helped us. Then Zoe spoke up.

“It’s the first letters,” she said.

“What do you mean?” I asked.

Lina couldn’t believe she hadn’t seen it first. “Of course, like an acrostic.”

“I don’t know what that is,” Zoe replied. “But the first letters are C-H-I-E-F. The clue is ‘chief.’”

This one wasn’t hard to solve at all. One wall was decorated with pictures of famous Floridians. Right in the middle was a portrait of Chief Osceola of the Seminole tribe.

“It’s behind the picture,” Zoe said.

She started to get up, but I put a hand on her shoulder to stop her. “Wait a second. We need to pause the game.”

“Why?” Zoe asked.

I took a deep breath. “Because I lied to you. The doors aren’t really locked.”

“What?” she exclaimed angrily. “Are you serious?”

“We asked Ms. Campos to lock them, but she said it wasn’t safe.”

“So *you all* lied to me,” she replied, looking at the others.

“I was the only one who lied,” I insisted. “They just didn’t rat me out.”

“Why would you do that?”

“Because you came in here and insulted my friends and me,” I answered. “I was annoyed. Besides, I thought if you played along, you might like it. It might be something we could do together. Anyway, here’s the key to the house.”

There was a time when Zoe and I used to do a lot together. I missed those days, but she obviously did not. She didn’t reply. She just shoved the key into her pocket and stormed out of the library.

“You better sleep with your door locked,” Yadi

warned me once she was gone. “She’s going to want revenge.”

“I don’t care,” I said. “Let’s go check behind Osceola.”

We found an envelope taped to the back of the picture, and Lina was about to open it when Zoe came back into the library and beelined straight for us. I thought she was going to explode at me, but instead of yelling, she asked, “What does it say?”

I was confused for a moment before I realized she was talking about the clue. She wanted to keep playing. I smiled and was about to say something, but she signaled me to stop.

“Don’t speak and make me regret this. Let’s just solve this thing.”