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**Penny Pepper - All Under Control
(vol. I)**

160 Pages

Rights Sold: Spain (cast., cat.),
Turkey, Greece, Czech Republic,
Hungary, Poland, Ukraine, Dutch
ISBN 978-3-423-76100-0

Penny Pepper

A Piece of Cake

Sunday Afternoon

4:00 (Party music, screaming, and noise all around me)

They are suspicious of me.

They think I'm a CRIMINAL

I, Penny Pepper - an "innocent" ten-year-old and the youngest member in an embarrassing, though non-criminal! family - have been accused of kidnapping the cutest dog in the world. But I like dogs more than anything and could never ever hurt one. I even love Rosie, that

MARGIN: Suspect #1

Caution: Dangerous!

little roly-poly wiener dog that's always sprawled on Grandma's couch, watching TV. I adore her despite the silly bows on her head (Rosie's, not Grandma's) and the fact that she's why my parents refuse to get me a dog, since they claim I already have one. HAHAHA, very funny! Rosie doesn't belong to me. She belongs to Grandma, and they've got to be about the same age. I think Grandma got Rosie when she was a little girl.

ANYWAY, BACK TO THE SCENE OF THE CRIME

Crime Scene: the yard at snobby Sydney Snider's house. There were banners with "Happy Birthday, Sydney!" hanging all over the place, even in the pool. And then there were the mountains of wrapping paper everywhere. Sydney tore open all her presents like a greedy maniac.

MARGIN: Rosie, the roly-poly wiener

Grandma & Rosie, 100 years ago or so (She had it good!)

Sydney is stupid

All drenched now

Except for mine. She unwrapped my gift with her arms stretched way out, as if there might be something disgusting in it. All it was was one of those free toothbrushes Mom gets from the sales reps.

My mom is a dentist

The toothbrush had only been used once, so it was still perfectly fine.

Time: Like I said, Sunday afternoon. One hour after Sydney's snob party had started. I had just begun to wonder if it was possible to die of starvation and boredom at a party, and had asked my best friend Ally when she thought we were going to get something to eat at this lame party, when Sydney let out an ear-piercing scream:

MARGIN: Still in tip-top condition!



HE'S GONE! STOLEN!!!

VICTIM: Sydney

Alright, she's still alive, but she's screeching and howling and stomping on all the wrapping paper.

SUSPECT: Me!

Why me?

Well, because all this actually started yesterday evening.

Yesterday evening: 6:00

When life was still sweet.

I was lying on my bed and had just written down what all the people in my apartment building had been up to this week. The truth is that I live in a building full of VERY strange people.

Honestly! They always behave really weird, and I need to find out why that is. I want to become a detective, which is why I keep watching them. Secretly, of course. If they don't suspect they're being watched, they'll drop their guard, and I'll be able to discover their secrets. So there I was jotting down my notes:

The Mysterious People in My Building

Mrs. Webber

From downstairs

She spent the entire week sitting at her window, acting all innocent. But she kept looking up and down the street, and got terribly upset if anyone came too close to the rosebush by the sidewalk.

Why? What has she buried under it?

Plan: Distract Mrs. Webber and check out the rosebush

MARGIN: Get away from my roses!

What is hiding under the rosebush?

The Hacksaw Family

From upstairs

Someone in their apartment kept screaming bloody murder all week long. You could have heard it on the next block. My brother Tim said it was just the Hacksaw daughter, who sings all the time because she wants to be a rockstar. I don't think that's true. Besides, what about their last name?!

Plan: Keep watching them!!!

Mr. Mulligan

From next door



He got a package almost every day this week. Some of them were gigantic! He refused to say what was in them. Okay, technically speaking, I haven't asked him yet, but he definitely looked like he didn't want to tell anyone. I think he's smuggled something into the country. Maybe baby elephants? He hauled two of the packages back to the post office. Why? Why would he want to get rid of elephants when he has friendly neighbors (me!) who would be delighted to take a couple of small elephants off his hands? Because he has a secret to hide!

Plan: Dress up like Mr. Mulligan and sign for one of his packages.

Suuuur-priiiiise!

My door suddenly swung open, as Mom cried out, all giggly and silly: "What a wonderful surprise!"

It never bodes well when she laughs like that. I immediately said:

"No thanks. I don't need any surprises."

But Mom wouldn't give up as she waved a piece of paper at me. I kept my head down, focusing on my important LIST. Mom waved the paper around a few more seconds before giving up and slamming it down on my nightstand.

MARGIN: Sydney is stupid

Invitation

You are cordially invited to Sydney's MEGA birthday party!

We will party hard in Sydney's giant yard
We will go swimming in Sydney's giant pool

There will be a MEGA-AMAZING surprise

Be there when Sydney gets the ultimate best present from her cool parents!!!

Don't forget your swimsuit

* Please leave other gifts at the door

PS: Penny: I had to invite you because my mother made me. I HAD to invite our whole class. Don't assume this means anything at all!!!

PPS: Could you possibly wear a nicer swimsuit than the gross brown one you wore last time? After all, this is supposed to be my cool party!

It was an invitation! From Sydney the queen snob in my class. Sydney with her stupid glittery barrettes and her in-ground pool and her pink phone and other junk.

This was BAD news. Where was the wonderful surprise?! My mother really has no idea what counts as

wonderful.

Things that count as wonderful:

1. Getting a dog. A real tracking dog!
2. Catching a criminal with the dog. (Webber, Hacksaw, Mulligan, and accomplices)
3. Having a news article written about me as the youngest detective in the world and becoming famous
4. Earning tons of money for my detective services.

At least, ten fifteen twenty dollars an hour!

Of course, I didn't actually want to go to the dumb party. But Mom insisted, something about it being rude if I didn't go.

She gave me a pretty barrette as a bribe. It was blue with a little dolphin on it.

She told me that nobody else had one like it. My convictions aren't for sale, but the barrette was just too cute. Who could resist a clip like that? After that, Ally called to say that she was also being forced to go to the party. She said that she really didn't care what Sydney got as an ultimate best present. Honestly. I quickly agreed that it didn't matter to me, either.

Ally suggested that we dress up like martians, just to make Sydney mad. Dressing up is Ally's favorite thing to do. She offered to lend me her blue wig, and I told her I'd think about it. My mood perked up a little bit.

MARGIN: But what is it?!?!?

Hurray! Dad also gave me something great this evening: his old dictaphone

Now I can OBSERVE - that means "to watch" - criminals and record them. And if they try to deny everything in court, I "Penny Pepper" can come and play back to them what they actually said.

This thing was really cool.

I tried it out right away.

Sydney, you stupid snob

Kidney, you limpid blob

Hmmm. Something seemed a little off, but I was still so happy.

MARGIN: ancient, but cool

Back to Sunday Afternoon

4:00

Sunday afternoon, I packed up my new dictaphone, my notebook (you should always be prepared), my present, and my brown swimsuit. I then snapped my dolphin barrette into my hair and went with Ally to Sydney's party.

Ally didn't dress up like a martian after all. Her mom wouldn't let her since Sydney's mom is her boss. That's why Ally's mom said she needed to act like she was completely normal.

Most of the others were already there, even Marie. She's another one of my friends (though not as much of a BFF as Ally). Marie is up for anything, and most of the time, she has fabulous ideas. Anyway, they were all standing around Sydney and shouting: "Awww! So sweet! He's adorable!"

Even a few of the boys were saying things like, "Oh, let me touch him!" Oliver was the one who flailed around the most, whining "Me, too! I want to hold him!" like a baby. Oliver, who otherwise NEVER says anything and NEVER understands anything and who is ALWAYS digging around in his nose!!!

"What do they have?" I murmured.

"Sydney's stinky old socks?" Ally guessed, as we both giggled.

But then Marie called out: "It's the ultimate best gift in the world!"

MARGIN: Booger Oliver - He doesn't think anyone notices, but everyone notices!

Somebody moved aside and then we could actually see what everyone was looking at. As that happened, my heart grew all warm and fuzzy, and my hands began to tremble.

I almost dropped my valuable present on the ground.

Sydney was holding the sweetest, cutest puppy in the world.

Sydney said his name was Charlie, then made a pathetic kissy face.

Bella shrieked, "That's the cutest name in the world!"

I thought it was totally sick that Bella was also at the party. Bella and Sydney had recently had a fight, although they're almost best friends. Even their moms are best friends.

That's why Sydney had to invite Bella, just as she had Ally and me.

Bella tried to kiss Charlie, but he didn't want her to touch him and snapped at her new barrette.

Ella Kate also had one. She's Sydney's BFF. Even Sydney was wearing an identical clip. This was what I'd sold my soul for!! Thanks a lot, Mom!

MARGIN: My brother says "totally sick" all the time. (Mom can't stand it...)
With dolphins!!! Just like mine!

I gulped and couldn't say anything.

It was just the kind of dog I'd always wanted, with pudgy paws and soft fur and big brown eyes.

“Ohhhh...” I finally croaked. My voice suddenly felt all scratchy. “Sydney’s opened her present.”

“PresentS!” Sydney corrected me. Her pile of gifts was a tall as Dad’s car.

MARGIN: The Sweetest Dog in the World

The other things Sydney got:

- 4 pairs of new shoes (pink, glitter, white, and pink stripes)
- 1 makeup kit (with sparkly pink lip gloss)
- 14 new shirts (mostly in ballet pink with sequins)
- 1 bike (two shades of pink)
- 2 phones (silver and red)
- 1 pair of pajamas (blue - she’ll definitely be exchanging these)
- 7 board games (couldn’t tell which color)
- 1 hammock with sparkly ties
- 1 karaoke machine (bubblegum pink)
- Sheets (pink with some strange boy’s face all over them. Sydney says it’s Charlie Puth) Yikes!

Everyone started yelling again: “He’s so cute!” Ally joined in. I heard her.

“I have a dog just like him,” Bella exclaimed, at which point I felt my blood start to boil.

IT’S SO UNFAIR!!

Everyone has a sweet dog except me! Sydney even has a second, bigger dog! Why does she need a little one, too?

The dog isn’t really all that sweet.

This somehow managed to slip past my lips.

With a rattling giggle, Sydney shot back:

“Geez, aren’t you jealous!”

Everyone laughed meanly.

I was so mad.

Still Sunday evening

With each passing second, Sydney’s party is growing louder. And dumber.

It was now time for the MEGA-AMAZING SURPRISE

The surprise was wearing green bloomers, a lame wig, and a painted smile. It’s name was: Bombo the Clown.

I have no idea where Sydney's parents found him, but he's definitely an escaped convict. This explains his costume! And he was about as funny as a dead fly. For some reason, Sydney acted like he was mega-amazing funny and clapped loudly. Most of the kids just kept talking, while Bombo jumped around up in front. He tried to get everyone's attention by shaking his curls and yelling:

BOMBO SAYS LISTEN UP!!!

BOMBO PLAYS IN A CUP! someone shouted back. Everybody looked at me even though I wasn't the one who said it. It was my dictaphone!

I hadn't turned it on, though. They all started howling with laughter.

Bombo was furious, and he stumbled and fell down. **FOR REAL!** The kids just laughed harder because this was finally something funny! Bombo glared at us angrily and then drove away fast.

MARGIN: maybe to hold up a bank?!

Unfortunately, the **MEGA-AMAZING SURPRISE** wasn't over yet. The second part of the surprise was about 134 years old, wore a blue hat covered with stars, and went by Marvin the Magician.

At this point, Sydney's applause lost a bit of its enthusiasm. She also looked a little annoyed. Ally, Marie, and I almost fell asleep. I finally got up and went to look for something to eat, but I didn't find anything except Bella, who was frantically searching for something in her hair.

Whatever she was looking for, I didn't want to eat it. Yikes!

I went back and told Ally and Marie that they should help me hunt because I had to get something to eat **RIGHT NOW**. Ally said it looked like Marvin was about to perform some magic, but he just kept pulling paper flowers out of his hat. He looked astonished each time he did so. He was really old. He probably kept forgetting that he had already done that trick for us and was wondering why he had so many flowers in his hat. We stood up carefully so we could slip away, but at that moment, Sydney began to shriek! My first thought was that she'd found a spider in her hair or that someone had given her a present that wasn't pink, but then she screamed:

HE'S GONE! MY CHARLIE IS GONE! DOGNAPPED!!!

Everybody started running around to look for him, calling **CHARLIE!** But there was no trace of him. Marie wondered if perhaps Marvin the Magician could wave his wand and bring him back, but Ally reminded her that this wouldn't work since all Marvin could do was conjure up paper flowers, not cute puppies.

MARGIN: yum! yum!

When we gave up searching the yard and gathered back together to console Sydney, she shot me an ugly look. A murderously ugly look. She pointed at me and cried: She did it!

Penny stole my dog! Because she's so jealous!!!



I started to laugh because that was such a pathetic, false suggestion, but nobody else laughed with me. NO. They all began to nod and whisper among themselves.

Penny is a thief! Thief! Thief!

Everyone except Ally. She hollered:

“Penny isn’t a thief, you dingdongs! She’s never stolen anything. I’m sure of that!”

“Exactly! I haven’t stolen anybody’s dog!” I said, though not as loudly as Ally. My voice still felt scratchy, kind of like an old bike bell.

Besides, he wasn’t all that cute.

“Ha! I still think you’re jealous.”

Luckily, I remembered right then that Grandma said she was going to start paying me five dollars a week to take roly-poly Rosie for walks every day. And so I said: “I don’t need your dog, since I’m about to make lots of money and can buy my own cute puppy!”

Ella Kate leaned down and picked up something from the empty puppy bed. She showed it to Sydney, and they both cried: “Aha!”

Sydney looked right at me: “You mean this money here?”

She dangled a piece of paper in front of my face:

Sydney:

If you want to see your dog (Charlie) alive again, you must pay:

\$100 \$1,000 \$10,000!!! IN CASH.

Don’t do anything stupid. If you tell the police, you’ll never see your dog (Charlie) again. Never ever.

The Dognapper

I was too shocked to say anything.

At least, at first. Then I said:

“Stupid is as stupid does.”

Sydney stared at me, a confused look on her face.

I bet she’d never of that!

“I’m not stupid,” I continued. “I wouldn’t write such stupid notes.”

MARGIN: Mom’s constantly saying that to my brother.

“She’s just trying to distract us,” Bella said accusingly. The others all nodded, except for Oliver who was picking his nose like there was no tomorrow.

Ally pointed out that maybe CHARLIE had run away. Exactly!

If I were a small dog, I wouldn’t want to live with Sydney.

NOT AT ALL!

Why I wouldn’t want to live with Sydney if I were a dog:

1. Because I would get headaches from all her pink stuff.
2. Because I would have to constantly listen to Sydney’s squeaky voice.
Sit! Stay! No! Kiss!
3. Because I’d have to see Bombo the Clown again when he breaks into Sydney’s house some night to steal money. He’s an escaped convict, after all.
4. Because I’d have to watch Sydney spend hours gazing at herself in the mirror and giggling.
5. Because Sydney would carry me around and KISS me. Yikes!

Sydney didn’t listen, but continued to send murderous glances my way while waving around the ransom note. I almost started to sob. Embarrassing!

Then I remembered: I’m a detective!

“Without my attorney present, I can’t say anything,” I declared. I added more quietly: “It wasn’t me. I’ll prove it!” Nobody heard me, though. However, the dictaphone piped up:

“It wasn’t me. I’ll move out!”

The others looked surprised. In his astonishment, Oliver flicked his booger at Bella.

It’s finally 4:43!

This Sunday afternoon will never end!

“Haha! How are you going to prove that?” Bella asked, her voice sounding a little sneaky. I studied her through my clever, narrowed detective eyes. All I said was:

CLUES

I glanced down at the empty dog bed and saw something else lying next to it.



“Look!” I cried. “A clue!”

Everybody looked down. It was something chewed and flat. More importantly, it was pink.

MARGIN: This was the dumbest party ever!

The booger landed right here - and she didn't even notice. Hilarious!!!

“AN EAR?!” Ally asked, as she poked at the thing with a stick.

“Did Charlie bite off his dognapper's ear?”

Sydney started to sob again, since this was a real possibility. Maybe Charlie wasn't nearly as sweet as he had pretended to be? Was he actually a wolfhound?

Marie cut in: “Nope, it's gum.”

Marie knows stuff like this. Marie knows everything, and she chews a ton of gum. She picked up the gum, examined it closely, and then sniffed at it. Marie is amazingly brave. She can be my assistant. “Strawberry,” she concluded.

That was absolutely thrilling!

So thrilling that I almost missed Clue Nr. 2: the footprint!

Sydney's parents had dumped sand all over the pool area to make it look like a beach. They said this made everything feel exotic.

The sand was perfect for footprints, especially the ones leading away from the dog bed. They had been left behind by sneakers with four ridges and a big V on them.

I continued my search. Any dognapper dumb enough to leave behind footprints and chewed-up gum was bound to have dropped other clues.

You know, like...

ID

USB stick

wooden leg

hat

candy

swim trunks

library card

mouse

triangle ruler

cigarettes

glasses

mug
etcetera

MARGIN: Ally said it looked like a giant sandbox in which Baby Sydney was supposed to play. Heehee. She also said she saw the cat pee in it. Twice. I've seen this somewhere before...

The others agreed that someone had definitely stolen the dog and that the donapper was motivated by one of the following goals:

- 1) They want to keep the dog for themselves because all they have at home is a dumb, boring goldfish. Lamé!
- 2) They want to sell the dog because they desperately need money and might not be able to get the \$10,000 out of Sydney.
- 3) They want to teach the dog neat tricks so he can get on some Animal Planet show and make a lot of money.
- 4) They want the dog to shake things up a little for their indoor cats. Meow!

I thought their ideas were good and was a little annoyed with myself for not coming up with them first.

A few kids headed out to find some cake. My stomach gurgled loudly. Ally's growled even louder, almost like a real dog. We still hadn't been given anything to eat at this unbelievably cheap party!

I suddenly thought of something:

Hey, guys, can any of you hear a dog barking?

Everyone stopped talking. It was nice and quiet until Sydney broke into another sobbing scream:

Charlie! Where are you, my snooky wookums?

Ally hissed: "Shut up!"

She's a real first-class assistant. I then noticed something, sitting in the dog bed. It was blue and had slipped to the side, so it was almost hidden.

MARGIN: I don't want to make a big deal out of it, but this was a super idea. Why didn't I think of it earlier?!

"Aha!" I cried. "There's something else in there!"

Everyone gave a shocked "Ohhhhhhh!"

Marie was just about to bravely pick it up when I shouted: "STOP! Fingerprints!"

A few nights ago, I had woken up and found Dad asleep in front of the TV. He was snoring like a freight train, so I was able to watch a little of his crime show: Deadly Passions. The show had just gotten to the part where a fat policeman yelled: "STOP! Fingerprints!"



Fingerprints are those funny little ridges on your fingers. They're a bit like a stamp. Each person's fingerprints are different, which is why the police can catch CRIMINALS with them. Well, only if they've grabbed something with their hands. If they touch something with their feet or nose, then this doesn't work. Fingerprints are ALMOST invisible. But only ALMOST. You can make them visible, and I know how to do that!!!

I carefully picked up the THING with my hankie and stuck it in my pocket. It was a blue dolphin barrette!

Can you believe that?! Just like mine. How strange. Mine seemed to be missing, all of a sudden.

I jotted all the CLUES down in my notebook, so I wouldn't forget anything. Including the clip.

BOX: Detectives have to take all clues seriously.

MARGIN: Mom always makes me carry a clean hankie with me. Because of germs and stuff.

Important Clues:

1. The dognapper had chewed strawberry gum!!! STRAWBERRY! Not apple or peppermint or disgusting cinnamon!
 - Strawberry is my favorite flavor, too.
2. The dognapper was wearing sneakers with four ridges and a "V" on them.
 - Where have I seen that before?
3. The dognapper wants to have a dog more than anything!! To annoy cats, get money, become famous on TV, etc.
 - For riches, reputation and revenge!!
4. The dognapper lost a blue barrette.
 - With a dolphin on it. There was allegedly only one in the world, but that doesn't seem to be true. There are at least a thousand. Ten thousand? A million. Thanks a lot, Mom.
5. The dognapper is a girl, as indicated by the barrette. OR it could be a boy who loves to wear clips. Why not? Our school janitor Mr. Jennings wears a ponytail.
 - Does he wear barrettes? Must check into it!

This was my list of important CLUES. That mean dognapper would get what was coming to him/her now that I was on the trail. Most of all, I would prove my innocence! I am, after all, a MASTER DETECTIVE.

However, most of the class wasn't paying any attention to me since they were busy stuffing their faces full of cake. I was pretty annoyed with them. There I was, hunting a criminal MASTERMIND, while they inhaled everything in sight! Literally everything. The cake wasn't big enough. CHEAP, just like I said.

And then someone said that Marie had handed out four pieces of strawberry gum.

To herself, Sydney, Ally, and... Penny

Uh, okay, me. I had somehow completely forgotten about that, what with the excitement and all that. I had spit my gum out somewhere. Marie and Ally were still chewing theirs. Sydney's was also gone.



Aha! Sydney's was missing. Because she had lost hers at the scene of the crime!

It dawned on me that Sydney wouldn't have stolen her own dog and demanded a ransom of \$10,000!!! from herself. Sydney isn't quite that dumb. In this case, I was the ONLY one without her gum. I quickly said: "Forget about the gum. What about the sneakers?"

Seven kids were wearing sneakers. Ella Kate and Bella were wearing sparkly pink ones with very smooth soles. This explains why they kept sliding across the grass and falling down.

Four boys were also wearing sneakers. Leo's were the size of ocean liners, so they didn't count. The twins' shoes smelled horrible when they pulled them off, just like my brother's. Like rotten potatoes. Marie - she's so brave!! - held her nose and examined the soles, but they were completely worn down and didn't have any ridges.

Oliver was also wearing sneakers, and his had four ridges and a "V"!!!

Oliver! Hand over the dog right now!!!

MARGIN: This was pretty hysterical. (Ally thought so, too.)

But Oliver claimed he had never stolen a dog, especially not Charlie, and that I was a stupidhead because I was wearing the same shoes he was!

I thought that was pretty brazen for a serial nose picker like him.

"That's not true. Besides, you're the stupidhead."

Ally leaned closer and whispered: "You ARE wearing the same shoes."

Crud.

I have the same sneakers as nose picker Oliver, only his are blue and mine are yellow. With four ridges and a "V." I knew I recognized that pattern from somewhere.

I rushed to continue: "Forget about the gum. Uh, I mean, the sneakers. What about the clip?"

It was funny that early on in this cheap party I'm about to starve to death!], so many girls were wearing the same barrette. Now the only ones were Ella Kate and Sydney. Ally - she's such an amazing assistant - remarked: "Bella's dolphin clip is gone."

Bella's lips curled down until she looked like an insulted fish:

"So what? Penny's is missing, too."

My barrette actually did seem to be gone. Where was that stupid thing? How could this have happened?

Marie suggested that perhaps Sydney and Ella Kate had lost their clips (as they were stealing Charlie), and

had secretly stolen Bella's and mine as a diversion.

MARGIN: well... hmm... um...

EXACTLY. That makes total sense! Once you've stolen something, you're more likely to do it again. Dogs, barrettes, basically anything you can get your thieving fingers on! Ally and I agreed, but Sydney shot us ugly looks and said that she didn't need to steal anything, especially her own dog! Her parents bought her everything she wanted, and if anyone was a suspect here, it was me!

"And Bella and Ella Kate," Ally added.

"NONSENSE!

First of all, that's Penny's footprint, not Bella's," Sydney shot back, pompously holding up one finger.

Secondly, that is guaranteed to be Penny's gum." She was now holding up two fingers and jabbing them in the air.

"Thirdly, Penny is missing her barrette, but Ella Kate isn't." There were now three fingers waving around.

MARGIN: Ally catches everything!

Boy, I thought that was pretty devious of her. Sydney was now acting as if she were the detective!

That's my job!!

Then Ella Kate got all sorts of excited. "Penny's crazy," she said. "Sydney's my best friend. Why would I steal from her? What would I do with Charlie? I have a Burmese cat at home. Her name's Hello Kitty, and she was super expensive!"

Ally giggled and whispered that Ella Kate shouldn't act so high and mighty since all she had was a burn-fleas cat.

Marie reminded us that we shouldn't forget that Bella's barrette was also missing.

MARGIN: Marie is a genius!

"But I don't need to steal Charlie. I have my own dog," Bella retorted.

"His name is Snuffles, and he's adorable. Penny's the one who doesn't have a dog!"

That was the lowest of low blows.

I showed Sydney and the other kids my list and told them that the dognapper had chewed strawberry gum, had worn sneakers with ridges, and had worn - and then lost - a dolphin barrette. I also pointed out that the dognapper wanted to have a dog more than anything because he didn't have any pets.

HA! That could be anyone! [*almost anyone]

For example, Ally isn't allowed to have any pets because her mother is allergic to anything with fur. This doesn't seem to apply to Ally's dad, though, which is odd. He has lots of fur on his back and chest, as I noticed once when he took Ally to the pool.

At first, I thought Ally was bringing her bear to go swimming, since he was wearing striped swim trunks. I was pretty jealous for those few minutes I thought was the only kid who couldn't have a pet.

"Ally doesn't have any pets, either!" I exclaimed.

But then Ally corrected me: "Well, I do have a pet now. Don't you remember? Dorothy the chicken. Since last week. Mom wants to start raising free-range hens."

I tried to pet Dorothy last week, but she gave me the evil eye and tried to peck my hand.

Crud, I had forgotten all about that.

I began to feel uneasy, since Ally now belonged to the pet owners' group. I was very, very, very much alone as the one non-pet owner. I was also the only real suspect left.

"There is only one person left of the list. And that person is PENNY."

Boy, did I feel down. We - Ally, Marie and I - left at that point, even though Sydney's parents were finally hauling out hot dogs and lemonade. Too late! They should have brought the food out sooner, then I might have taken some.

I told Ally and Marie that we would find Charlie.

To save my honor. And so on.

We held each other's hands and said:

On this patch of sacred ground,
We swear that Charlie will be found.

I heard that on TV once. Without the Charlie part, that is. I can't remember what they wanted to find or if they found it. I just thought it sounded nice.

Ally asked if we could dress up as detectives. She had enough hats and sunglasses and fake mustaches for all of us. Marie was ready to get started right away, but we still didn't have a plan.

Besides, it was time for us to go home.

Sunday evening
[at home] 6:02

Someone is being murdered singing at the Hacksaws again.

Back at home, I remembered that I still had the barrette wrapped in my clean hankie. I also remembered what the fat policeman had said on TV: FINGERPRINTS

I KNOW HOW TO take them!

How to take fingerprints:

To catch a criminal

You need:

1) A glass

Clean!

You can only take fingerprints from smooth surfaces!

2) Powder

The white kind.

Like for babies.

3) A brush

4) Transparent tape

5) Black paper

(very black)

(as black as the night)

I pressed my finger onto the glass, sprinkled a little powder onto it, and blew away the loose powder.

That's what the fat policeman's friend did on *Deadly Passions*.

He was also wearing rubber gloves, but I didn't have any. All I had were the purple wool ones with little pom-poms and bells that Grandma had knitted for me. They did the trick, but the tinkling of the bells was really annoying.

I then ran the brush lightly over my fingerprint until I could actually see it.

It was a little oily, like the fingerprints on the class fishbowl.

This is where Oswald, our class goldfish, lives. He's supposed to teach us how to be responsible, but he doesn't like doing that. He never looks at us.

MARGIN: I won't make eye contact. EVER!

After that, I pressed a piece of tape over the fingerprint, and there it was: my fingerprint! You could make it out really nicely against the (very) black paper! It was just a little small. So I slipped into Dad's office and made an ENLARGED copy of my fingerprint on his copier.

I did the same thing with the barrette. Luckily, the dolphin was smooth and big and not made of velvet.



I should point out that I would never wear a barrette made of velvet. I'm not Red Riding Hood, after all!!

I once again used the tinkling gloves, the powder, the brush, and the tape.

Surprise, surprise! - It wasn't the same fingerprint! My fingerprint looked like a whorl, while the one on the clip resembled an arch. It wasn't my barrette! I was INNOCENT! I was so happy to be innocent that I danced around my room. My brother Tim looked in and muttered:

"Hey, what's going on! Folk dance with gloves? Totally lame!"

But I didn't care. I was so relieved that I was INNOCENT! But then it occurred to me that I had known all along that I was innocent.

This made it doubly better!

How we will find the DOGNAPPER:

First: We will take fingerprints from all the party guests and compare them to the one on the clip!

What about the ones from Marvin the Magician?

To find him, we'll have to crash all the birthday parties around town and watch him pull thousands of dumb paper flowers out of his hat, and we'll die of boredom. Hmmm. And what about Bombo the Clown?

What if he stole Charlie and has hidden the two of them in a circus?

Second: There's also the question of motiv motieve moteive motive*

*A motive is the reason why a criminal does something.

Example: a criminal steals Mr. Meyer's money because he doesn't have any of his own.

Motive = Greed

He steals Mr. Meyer's wife because he is in love with Mrs. Meyer.

Motive = Love for Mrs. Meyer

He slugs Mr. Meyer because he can't stand him.

Motive = Hatred for Mr. Meyer, because he has such a pretty wife and tons of money.

The Dognapper's Motive:

1) Does Sydney have any enemies?

- Yes! A stunning number of them! For example... uh... me. We are enemies. Definitely.

- Booger Oliver is also her enemy. I saw him write "Sydney is stupid" on a bench once.

2) Does Sydney have much allowance money?

- Yes - but not \$10,000. Or does she? Maybe she gets \$10,000 a week for cleaning her room.

- Have Spy #1 (Ally) check into it.

3) Does Sydney have a criminal past?

- Unknown, but completely plausible. Maybe she and Bombo are working together? Maybe the two of them have robbed a bank together? How else could Sydney's family have so much money?
- Have Spy #2 (Marie) check into it.

Monday morning

At school

Recess: surrounded by shoving idiots

The next day at school, Ally said that she thought Booger Oliver was bound to be the DOGNAPPER. Although he hadn't been chewing gum or wearing a barrette, maybe he had swallowed it! She meant the gum. Ally is a really great, well-disguised assistant. Marie was, too. She was the one who remembered that Oliver hadn't been chewing any gum. Oh well. Hmm. But what about the footprints?

I promised the two of them that I would take their FINGERPRINTS, which they thought was so exciting. Marie also knew that Oliver didn't have any pets.

It's crazy what all Marie knows.

He had lice once, but they don't count.

A new clue! And his footprint was at the scene of the crime!

We discussed how we could possibly follow him. Ally thought that we should simply go visit him at home. Then we could see if he was hiding Charlie in his room. What a great idea! At that moment, our janitor Mr. Jennings walked by, and I wanted to see if he happened to be wearing a barrette. He suddenly stopped and said:

Are you little rascals have fun during your nice recess? Have a good time!

We were completely stunned. Normally, he says bellows things like: "Holy smokes, who broke this again?!" or "Just wait until I get my hands on you, then you'll be sorry!"

MARGIN: Take us for a walk!

There's a cat! Get it!

I'm hungry!

Mr. Jennings also looked completely different. His long hair was gone, and he now had a shorter, more stylish haircut. He was also no longer wearing blue, dusty overalls, but a casual American Eagle shirt and cotton slacks in safari green. And he smelled AMAZINGLY good, like some fancy men's cologne and not like a bologna sandwich.

It was really STRANGE. Especially when he quickly glanced all around like a criminal before slipping into his workshop!

"What's up with Mr. Jennings?" I wondered.

We discussed whether we should follow Mr. Jennings and OBSERVE him, but we agreed we couldn't manage that, since we needed to find Charlie first.

MARGIN: The old Mr. Jennings: Stuff it.

The new Mr. Jennings: Hey! How's it going! No problem! Great! Bye-bye!

Ally didn't want to serve Mr. Jennings anything, but Marie told her that OBSERVE was another word for WATCH. Ally didn't want to do that, either. More precisely, she wouldn't unless she got to pick what we wore while observing.

Schedule

1. Find Charlie's dognapper and rescue Charlie.
2. Save Penny's honor.
3. Observe Mr. Jennings - in other words, watch.

Has he maybe lost his mind? Perhaps this isn't even Mr. Jennings, but a cheerful, clean-cut twin brother? Don't let the trail grow cold!! Later. After we rescue Charlie.

After school, we walked over to Oliver's house. Ally and I wanted to dress up so Oliver couldn't recognize us, but Marie said that wouldn't work because if he didn't, he wouldn't let us in. Too bad. My disguise was REALLY! great. And Ally's was, too. She looked a little like a mini version of her dad. Unfortunately, nobody got to see us.

Oliver's mother answered the door and was overjoyed to see us.

Oliver dear! There are three sweet girls out here who want to play with you!

"We just want to ask him something," I quickly explained, since we had no desire to play with Oliver.

But his mother dragged us in the house, though we had to take our shoes off at the door.

Ally asked immediately if she could use the bathroom. This was part of the plan, so that she could secretly search for Charlie. I was jealous about this, because Ally was the one getting to be the DETECTIVE, while I had to sit in the kitchen with Marie, Oliver and his mother, and eat some kind of strange cookies. They were as hard as bricks, tasted a little like grit, and somehow expanded once they were in your mouth.

"Allergen-free cookies. Yummy, aren't they?" Oliver's mother crowed.

"Chummy, aren't we?" answered my dictaphone. Rats, I kept forgetting that it was in my pocket.

Oliver's mother gave a start, but she continued to bravely munch her cookie.

"Made without sugar, flour, eggs, or butter. Feel free to eat as many as you like. Do you have ALLERGIES, too? Oliver dear has lots."

From where he was sitting at the table, Oliver looked as if he had just developed a violent allergy to his own

mother.

“Are you allergic to animal fur?” Marie asked. “Then you can’t pet your new dog Charlie, can you? Too bad!”

HAHAHA, so CLEVER!

Marie is a REALLY! good assistant.
Almost as good as Ally.

Oliver’s mother blinked rapidly in confusion and declared that unfortunately Oliver dear didn’t have a dog named Charlie. He actually didn’t have any pets. NOT EVEN ONE. Because he was allergic to everything and broke out in hives easily.

The things that Oliver cannot have:

Anything with feathers -
Anything with fur -
Anything with scales -
Decent cookies -

When Ally returned from the bathroom, she shook her head slightly. No Charlie.

Of course not. Poor Oliver can’t have anything. I felt a little sorry for him.

I bet he enjoyed having the lice. At least for a while, he had a few tiny animals.

As we left, Oliver whispered:

I hope you find Charlie.

He’s actually quite nice. However, he can keep all the brick cookies for himself!!

3:32 Monday AFTERNOON [at home]

- Finally, no more annoying parents, teachers, janitors, idiots, or snobs

We were really depressed that we hadn’t found any trace of Charlie. Except... of course: the fingerprint on the barrette!!

We just needed to get a few more FINGERPRINTS. For comparison. I only had TWO at this point. I took Ally’s and Marie’s [at my house] and made enlarged copies of them in Dad’s office. They were a little smudgy and resembled spiral lollipops, but they didn’t look like the one on the clip.

MARGIN: Me [Penny]

The dognapper

Marie

Ally



Ally and Marie were also innocent. Boy, was I relieved! I wasn't sure if I wanted to be friends with anyone capable of dognapping.

My list of definite non-dognappers:

Oliver

He's not allowed to have a dog. He couldn't even kidnap a fly. Wing allergy.

Me - Penny

I knew this all along, but it can't hurt to keep a written record for other people's sake. I didn't do it!

Ally & Marie

Their fingerprints didn't match the one on the barrette. Besides, they are valuable, helpful, ideal assistants. Top-rate disguises, too.

MARGIN: Booger Oliver

Me

Marie

Ally

My list of potential dognappers:

1. Sydney the snob. I have no idea why she would want to kidnap her own dog, but you never can tell.
- Grandma's always saying that.
2. Bella. Although she has her own dog. Does she maybe want two of them? Some people can never get enough!
- Especially Bella.
3. Ella Kate. She only has a burning fleas cat. It would make sense that she'd be jealous of such a sweet dog.
4. All the other kids who were at the party. I just can't figure out why they would want to steal Charlie. But you never can tell.
- See #1.
5. Bombo and Marvin. Why else would they wear such disguises and slip into a kids' party?

I had to get the fingerprints from all of these people. Secretly, of course. If the dognapper grew suspicious, he might make a run for Mexico with Charlie!!

We needed to practice taking fingerprints first, which is why we wanted to get my brother Tim's. However, Tim refused and said we were totally crazy.

Well, what he actually said was:



YOU'RE SHOSHALLY SHRAZY

Tim got braces today.

- Mom is so proud of them, since she screwed them into his mouth herself in her office.

She tried to convince me that I needed them, too. She said they are cool.

NO!!! They aren't!

MARGIN: Braces are amazing!

When you have them, you end up talking like you have a sponge stuffed in your mouth. Spit sprays everywhere, sometimes even onto the people you're talking to. Also, if you forget yourself and try to laugh, everyone yells: "Metal mouth, metal mouth!"

"What's that?" I said to Tim. "I can't understand you. Did you stick a cantaloupe in your mouth?"

Tim looked so angry, and he squinted his eyes like a gangster. He also dribbled a little foam out of his mouth, but that was probably because of his braces. Or because he might have been hungry since he can't eat any of his favorite foods, thanks to his braces.

What Tim likes to eat:

- 1) Licorice. Licorice wheels that look like balls of yarn and that you can unroll in your mouth, all warm and sticky.
- 2) Gummy bears that you can shove from one cheek to the other until their arms and legs are all gone.
- 3) Hard candy with soft centers that you can bite down on and squish out the sweet filling.
- 4) Candy apples whose delicious coating ends up sticking all over your teeth and which you can still taste two days later in school.
- 5) Crunchy sour drops that crack so wonderfully loud that you wonder if you've broken a tooth.

What Tim is allowed to eat:

Plain yogurt (unsweetened)

I couldn't think of anyone else whose fingerprints we could take. Ally suggested we ask Oliver, but Marie thought he'd probably be allergic to the powder.

My goodness, Marie always thinks of everything!

In any case, it was time for me to take Rosie out for a walk. Ally had to go home, unfortunately, but Marie came along.

5:30 Monday Afternoon [at Grandma's]

Rosie didn't want to go out, but Grandma said she needed to get a little exercise. As for Grandma herself, she settled in in front of the TV with a box of caramels, explaining that she wouldn't be joining us since she couldn't miss an episode of Rehab Addict.

MARGIN: Grandma's TV is always turned up so LOUD!!! She can't hear anything, otherwise.

Rosie looked like she would have preferred to watch Rehab Addict 10,000 times more than go out. And like she would have loved to have one of the caramels Grandma had just popped in her mouth. Grandma can't really chew stuff anymore, so she sucks on things. As I watched her, it occurred to me that there was one other person whose FINGERPRINTS we could take as practice: Grandma's.

Grandma keeps her dentures in a glass, and it was guaranteed to have lots of her fingerprints all over it. PERFECT! All I needed to do now was find the glass and quickly get the fingerprints from it. What a super easy way to get a few more fingerprints!

"Grandma," I asked cheerfully, "where is the glass for your DENTURES?"

"Inzha shmaffroom."

MARGIN: Grandma's dentures. Gross!

I think Grandma meant, "in the bathroom." And she did. There was the glass, but Grandma's dentures were still IN it! That's why Grandma was mumbling so badly. It looked pretty gross, but then I suddenly had another BRILLIANT IDEA:

I had only wanted to take the fingerprints from the glass, but I could achieve more than just that with the dentures in the glass. Tomorrow at school. To help with the fingerprints and finding Charlie's dognapper and so on.

Would Grandma need her DENTURES for anything serious anytime soon?

"Grandma, do you need your dentures?"

"No, zhay always hurt. I don't need zhem to watch TV."

Perfect. I would simply take Grandma's dentures glass with me. Grandma wouldn't need them until at least the day after tomorrow, when she usually gets her hair done or meets friends for coffee.

- How exciting! I keep getting more and more detective-like! Marie secretly packed up the glass and Grandma's dentures, since I was too grossed out to do it. Yikes! [Marie is REALLY brave!!] Grandma didn't even notice.

MARGIN: Caramels



“Zhook at zhat. Her housh looksh like zhe undershide of the Millers’ zhofa.”*

* I think that Grandma meant that the house on TV looked messy, like the underside of the Millers’ sofa. I don’t know the Millers, so I don’t have any point of reference. I guess housecleaning isn’t really their thing.

I was ready to head right home, but Rosie still needed to be walked. We carried her downstairs since she refused to walk. Rosie weighs a ton, at least as much as a baby elephant.

As soon as we reached the sidewalk, Rosie waddled over to a street post and peed. And then she just stretched out on the pavement and closed her eyes. We stood there for a few minutes, watching her. Some other people joined us.

“Is that dog dead?!” a man asked sternly. “If it is, you can’t just leave it lying around here!”
He glanced into his black bag

- something jangled inside it

and took something out. I was freaking out because I thought he was going to pull out handcuffs, but it was only a phone. The man started talking into it: “Edward, I’m bringing the delivery over right now!”

To us, he barked: “This isn’t a dog cemetery, you know.”

A woman told him off him for acting like a monster around young children, and then the man told her off for butting in on something that wasn’t any of her business. He told Edward, who was still on the phone, that the delivery would be delayed because he was surrounded by horrible brats and nagging women. The woman shot back with some comment but we didn’t catch it, because that was the moment Rosie decided to stand up and waddle on, as slow as Christmas, like Grandma always says. Suddenly, the Hacksaw daughter turned a corner and walked past us - this time she wasn’t singing!! Marie tried to get Rosie to pick up her scent.

MARGIN: AARGH!

She smelled strongly of flowery body spray, but Rosie just kept snuffling in the other direction until she finally left behind a “mound” for us to pick up. She really is hopeless as a tracking dog, which brings us back to the main point.

I was anxious to get back home to prepare for taking FINGERPRINTS the next day.

By 24 hours from now, I might have already caught Charlie’s dognapper!!!

Tuesday Morning

In school

Last night, somebody sprayed “If you’re reading this, you’re stuuupid!” at the entrance.

- Unfortunately, I can’t solve every mystery.



I carried my mysterious bag to school. I had to be very careful with it since it contained the glass holding Grandma's dentures. Of course, everyone wanted to know what was in the bag, but I told them that I wouldn't reveal the SECRET until recess. This just made EVERYBODY all the more curious.

MARGIN: Clack Clack

But as I was heading out for recess, Ms. Webster, our teacher, asked me to take something to the janitor. Rats! It was a dumb, broken board. Yet another shelf in our classroom bookcase had broken, snapping like a firecracker. All the BOOKS had crashed to the floor, and the girls had shrieked. The boys had cheered, "Super cool, yo," but Ms. Webster was really annoyed. "Piece of junk," she muttered to the bookcase.

Ally walked with me to Mr. Jennings' workshop. We could smell his cologne all the way out in the hallway, and as we knocked on the door, we heard a loud banging. Mr. Jennings opened the door a little crack. All we could see was his nose.

"Aha, the charming students from Ms. Webster's class! What do you have there, a broken board? I'll fix it in a jiffy!"

He slid the board through the crack and slammed the door quickly. We stared at the door.

"What's up with him?" I asked.

MARGIN: Detective's case

Let me have it!

No running in the hall

Parents are responsible for their children

"He's gone bonkers," Ally said, crossing her eyes.

We decided to listen at the door for a few moments. Mr. Jennings was sawing away at something, as he muttered: "No one can know about this. I have to get them!" and "Guess what, you little miscreants? You'll never escape from here!"

I peered through the keyhole. He was building something out of boards.

A GIANT CAGE!

He then laughed and started making a terrible noise. He was singing!

Mr. JENNINGS was singing!

Despacito

This is how we do it down in Puerto Rico

Ally and I took off for the playground like our lives depended on it. I will NEVER EVER take something to Mr. Jennings again! Not for \$10,0000!!!

What could be wrong with Mr. Jennings:

1. He's gone crazy. (= bonkers)
2. He's decided to take all the kids who break things in the school and lock them in that thing he's building.
- CLUE: "Guess what, you little miscreants? You'll never escape from here!!"
3. He wants to become a pop star. (= bonkers)
4. He's spying for the CIA.
- CLUE: "No one can know about this. I have to get them!"
5. Somebody swapped the real Mr. Jennings out for his TWIN.
- Either aliens or the government? Maybe the President? But why?
6. Mr. Jennings is a member of a criminal GANG whose members go around in casual shirts and only wear a certain cologne.
- But what is its goal?

My head was really whirring now. Nothing had happened in my life for years, but now crimes were piling up all over the place in the span of a single week.

Ally, Marie and I had to hurry and start taking FINGERPRINTS before our dumb recess ended. We quickly hid behind the elderberry bush. I called out loudly: "Please line up if you want to see the surprise. Don't come unless you have nerves OF STEEL!"

MARGIN: One at a time!

Of course, EVERYONE got in line! Except for Sydney, who was just standing around and moping. Because of Charlie.

- Marie told us that Sydney's parents think he ran away. MARIE KNOWS EVERYTHING!!! Also, Sydney's other dog doesn't belong to her at all, but to her brother. And he's already about 53 years old.

- The dog, that is, not her brother! In any case, he's older, fatter, slower, and duller than Rosie.

Who would have thought that was even possible? I almost felt sorry for Sydney. Honestly, I felt really sorry for her.

What could be worse than to not own a sweet, cuddly, fluffy little dog? Well?

EXACTLY!

First, you own one, and then it's stolen!

On top of that, Sydney wasn't wearing anything pink today, only something in gross brown.

Ally suggested that maybe Sydney had purposely worn a disguise.

As for me, I suspect that grief has driven Sydney crazy!!



Marie announced to everyone: “One at a time, behind the bush.”

They all lined up nicely and trotted behind the bush to see the glass holding Grandma’s dentures.

MARGIN: “Eek!” “Totally sick!”

Most of the girls screamed, “Eek!,” while most of the boys said, “Cool, yo!” Finn wanted to buy the glass and dentures from me on the spot for \$2, so he could frighten his sister with them. He explained that she was a cry-baby and shrieks like a banshee. I thought that was just MEAN and said that Grandma’s dentures weren’t for sale. He whispered that he’d give me even more money for them. Five dollars! That offer was worth considering.

MARGIN: Cool, yo!

But Marie chimed in to say that I shouldn’t do it because the DENTURES had to be valuable. After all, they were old, which is another word for antique, which is another word for expensive!

It would be better for me to sell them somewhere else.

What no one noticed was that after they each walked off, we took our classmates’ fingerprints off the glass!!

HA! Please hold right here!

We then sent them on their way, and I took the fingerprints.

“Fast! Powder, brush, tape, and black paper, my assistants!”

Marie jotted down each kid’s name. She even thought to take Grandma’s fingerprints from the glass before we got started.

That way we could eli-mi-nate Grandma. Marie is almost as good of an assistant as Ally!

* eli-mi-nate - to cross off the suspect list

We were just wrapping up when recess ended. We had the fingerprints from Bella, Ella Kate, and all the other kids. The only ones missing were Sydney’s, who was sitting all gross brown and alone on a bench.

Marie walked over to her and simply pressed Grandma’s denture glass into her hand. Sydney didn’t make a sound. I don’t think she even saw Grandma’s dentures. She just kept stroking a little collar. I’m just about convinced we can also eli-mi-nate Sydney from our suspect list.

- I have no idea how I’m going to get Bombo’s and Marvin’s fingerprints...

But at least, we have all the other fingerprints. Ally and Marie came home with me right after school.

Our next step was to compare the fingerprints we had to the ones on the barrette!



But Dad was at home. Crud. I couldn't use the copier in his office! Besides that, he was really grouchy because he had forgotten his PASSWORD. Again. He couldn't access his computer and was really annoyed about it. Why does he constantly change his PASSWORD?

He kept bothering us, but heaven forbid I do the same thing. He just says: "Not now, Penny. I have to work!"

Fortunately, Spy Ally and Spy Marie had acquired some important new information.

- 1) Sydney doesn't get an allowance, but she still has to keep her room picked up.
- 2) Sydney's family hasn't robbed any banks. They have so much money, because Sydney's dad operates on fat, old women to make them thinner and younger. They give him EVERYTHING they have to do that.

MARGIN: PASSWORD

Wrong! Wrong! Wrong! Hahaha

? Aargh

Hmmm. So, Sydney didn't even have \$10,000. Did the dognapper know that?

No one can do any detecting around here, not even for a second, thanks to annoying parents being so needy and stuff.

HEY, PENNY?

Does Mom know my password??

Not now, Dad!

I have to work!!!

Grumbling, he headed to the kitchen to make a cup of coffee, which meant that we could FINALLY enlarge our fingerprints and examine them. It was so EXCITING! For some reason, they all looked the same, which was just dumb, of course. We first weeded out the whorls. Some of them looked like loops, and we tossed those out as well. We only wanted the ones that looked like arches. And we finally found one fingerprint that looked EXACTLY like the one on the barrette!

WHO IS IT?!

With trembling fingers, I reached for the piece of paper with the name on it. And was COMPLETELY shocked. The DOGNAPPER was

Grandma

Suspect Nr. 1

A shiver ran down my back.

My grandma was a DOGNAPPER?!

But then I remembered that Grandma thinks that having one dog (Rosie) is already too much. What would she want with Charlie? Also, my grandma would never ever ever take something from a little girl.

She is also the sweetest person in the world, and will bake you the yummiest pancakes and let you watch TV in peace without nagging you about doing something sensible instead.

No, my grandma was no dognapper. NO WAY.

“That can’t be right,” I said. “We must have mixed up the labels somehow.”

Ally suddenly looked kinda funny. Like she’d been caught. “Uh, well, two of the labels fell off by accident.”

Ally had just taped them back on the pages, which is how the names got switched.

You can’t trust anyone these days!

“What was the other name?” I asked, fixing Ally with a stern glare. Just like Ms. Webster when she growls, “Piece of junk!”

Ally flipped through the fingerprints. The labels were solidly stuck down on all of them, except one. That one was half-detached, and the name was:

BELLA!

MARGIN: The dognapper!

Bella - Dog Thief

Suspect Nr. 2

BELLA WAS THE DOGNAPPER!

But why? Bella already had a dog, like she’d pointed out at the party!

“Why would Bella want to steal Charlie, when she already has Snuffles?” Ally asked.

We were baffled. But then Marie said *she is a really great assistant detective: “I’ve never seen Snuffles, not even in a photo. Have you?”

No, Ally and I hadn’t seen Snuffles, either. Not even in a photo. That was weird. Really weird, since Bella takes pictures of anything she can boast about, including one of her new Justice jackets. And her phone and her pink polished toenails with flowers painted on them.

BUT NOT A SINGLE ONE OF SNUFFLES!!!

I then said to my two detectives: “Tomorrow, we’ll go to Bella’s and figure out the TRUTH!”

MARGIN: MARIE is brilliant!!

Click

Wednesday Afternoon

3:00

At Bella's house

Which looks really, really fancy, and seems to be radiating the scent of
Desonfec disconfektent desinfektant
Cleaners Yikes!

Two palm trees were standing in pots in front of Bella's house, and Bella's mom was hobbling around them in high heels, spraying them with water. A terrible tinkling sound was coming out of the house.

Bella can't play. She's practicing for her piano lesson.
Bella can't spray. She's canvassing for her canine Jason.

Good grief, the DICTAPHONE is driving me crazy. I turned it off, I know I did! It cuts on all by itself. Dad even worked on it yesterday.

"Aha!" Marie cried so loudly that Bella's mother almost tumbled off her heels.

"Her canine! We got her!"

"I have no idea what you're talking about, you strange child. Bella's practicing The Jolly Farmer!"

Ally whispered to me that the farmer didn't sound all that jolly. It sounded more like he was being beaten. With pitchforks. The three of us giggled, while Bella's mom looked very stern. She then turned her back on us and continued with her spraying.

"We just wanted to see Snuffles, Bella's dog."

The tinkling broke off abruptly, and Bella peeked out at us from behind the upstairs curtains. She looked really annoyed.

"What?" Bella's mom gasped, as she accidentally sprayed a little water on us. "A DOG with filthy paws? Here? Oh God, where?"

That seemed like a rather odd reaction.

WHY would Bella's mom be afraid of Snuffles?! He was adorable. SUPPOSEDLY.

"Yes, Bella's dog." I said. "Snuffles."

"Bella doesn't have a dog," Bella's mom replied, wrinkling her nose as if she could smell my brother Tim's disgusting socks. "I don't allow any creatures like that inside the house. They get everything dirty."

Marie asked if we could maybe go up to Bella's room, but her mom said NO. She had just cleaned the foyer, and we would mess everything up again, which would be dreadful since tomorrow was the garden party for



the ladies from the tennis club.

ABSOLUTELY NOT!

Your body's not so hot!!

“WHAT?” Bella's mom snarled. “What did you say to me?”

That stupid dictaphone!

Bella held a sign up against the upstairs window.

GET LOST!!!

We three detectives beat a retreat, as Bella's mom slammed the door.

“You know what?” Marie whispered. “ I think there's something off with Snuffles. I bet Bella doesn't even have a dog!”

We all stopped breathing, since it was all just too THRILLING. We started breathing again when Ally started to turn a little blue in the face.

AND IF BELLA DOESN'T HAVE A DOG, THEN

THAT MEANS SHE LIED AND

MARGIN: The dognapper's note

MIGHT BE CHARLIE'S DOGNAPPER.

THERE WAS ONLY ONE PROBLEM.

“How can we PROVE that?! They won't let us in the house.”

That's when we heard it. All three of us. It was rather muffled, but it was coming from Bella's backyard.

BARKING!

CHARLIE

We spent a REALLY long time considering what to do next. It was already almost dark outside. I felt pretty desperate because my two great assistants detectives and I had no idea what to do next. But then Ally suddenly exclaimed:

“Garden party with the ladies from the tennis club!”

“So what? It'll be as dull as dirt.”

But Ally got all excited, as did Marie, and both of them started shouting on top of each other. I couldn't



understand a single thing they were saying, at least not at first. But then.

MARGIN: The sweetest dog in the world

Secret Plan:

To crash the garden party for the tennis ladies. Obviously, not as Penny. But

UNDERCOVER

Undercover = to sneak around in a disguise, so that no one notices who you really are. FANTASTIC!

But which disguise?

As a lady? As a cake? Hmm... As a tennis racket?

Ally was bouncing up and down in excitement at the idea that we were actually going to dress up. That is, I would be. She wanted me to try on all her disguises. As compensation for this stunningly good idea, she got to have supper at my house later, but then we received a huge shock.

Mom suddenly remarked: "Grandma's been tearing up her house, looking for her DENTURES. They're missing somehow. I can't understand it. They couldn't have just walked away! What did she do with them?"

Ally and I exchanged HORRIFIED glances.

MARGIN: yum yum

Oh no! Grandma's dentures. I had totally forgotten about them. They were still in their glass, tucked in my bag!

Dad said he couldn't understand why Grandma kept forgetting where she put her dentures. And asked if we had any idea what his Facebook PASSWORD was. There was no way he could remember stuff like this himself.

"Yesterday it was LAWNMOWER_5947, but I decided to change it. But to what? I'M LOSING MY MIND!"

MARGIN: Grandma's dentures. Yucky!

My brother answered, but nobody could make out what he said. It sounded like

ZSCHURCHURCHURLCHLONZ

"Quite right, my dear," Mom said, patting him on the arm.

Somehow she could decipher his secret braces language.

She said to dad:



“Your PASSWORD is
YELLOWSTONEFIREFALL_2387

She then turned to Ally and me: “Guess who came by my practice today? Your very nice janitor, Mr. JENNINGS.”

I knocked my juice over in shock.

- Onto my brother.

“SCHLRCH!!!” my brother hollered angrily.

Ally made a little frightened squeal and looked at me. I also made a little frightened squeal and looked back.

MARGIN: Bwahahaha! SPY

IS MR. JENNINGS SPYING ON MY MOM?

“What did he want?” I asked. My voice sounded kinda scratchy.

“He wanted me to whiten his teeth,” Mama explained. “Such a nice man. So spiffy in his stylish casual shirt. And he smelled good, too.”

“Old fuddy-duddy Jennings?” Dad asked astonished. “The one with the greasy hair and overalls?”

Mom declared that Mr. JENNINGS was really, really, really nice, and that he had even asked about the sweet kids in Ms. Webster’s class. He said he had a marvelous

SURPRISE

for us.

The weird cage that Mr. Jennings was building! I grew COLD all over, and Ally started trembling so much that she dumped her juice on my brother, as well.

SCHLRCH!!!

Dad mumbled that he’d rather have a sensible PASSWORD than white teeth and that he was going to head out to the yard now to trim the bushes.

MARGIN: What is the cage for?!

Since they were getting overgrown and would soon be taking over the garden.

Ally and I looked at each other and shouted at the same time:

THE BUSHES!



OF COURSE!!!

Great minds think alike!

- That was the solution!

PLAN:

I'll dress up as a BUSH tomorrow and slip UNDERCOVER into the garden party for the tennis club ladies. Nobody'll recognize me!!

Ally almost lost it, she was so thrilled. It NEVER would have occurred to her dress up as a BUSH. She thought it was incredibly EXCITING!

Thursday Afternoon

The garden party is starting in a few minutes

Unfortunately, dressing up like a bush wasn't as easy as we'd thought it would be. How dumb. Ally thought that I should go as a lilac bush. She tied lots of lilac branches around my neck and stuck them in my hair. The branches were easy to get since Dad had piles of them after doing the trimming. But I didn't look anything like a lilac bush. I looked PATHETIC, like an exploded Christmas tree with purple lights.

As I walked down the street disguised as a lilac bush, everyone I saw stopped and stared at me.

One old man said: "Oh! Is today the maypole dance?"

And one little boy started to sob.

MARGIN: MAMA, A MONSTER!

Aargh!

The worst part was when Leo and the twins from my class walked past and started to howl with laughter.

HAAHAA!

PENNY looks crazy!

HAHA! HoHo!

They recognized me!

Obviously, this wasn't going to work.

But I had to somehow sneak undercover into the tennis club garden party!

Ally suggested that I should first slip into Bella's backyard and then disguise myself as a bush. Swell. And what would Ally and Marie be doing the whole time I'd be doing EVERYTHING on my own?

- Sneak in



- Chop branches from somewhere
- Get into my disguise
- Spy around
- Find Charlie
- Rescue Charlie
- Etc.

Marie said they would stand by the fence and OBSERVE the neighborhood. After all, they were only assistants! But then Marie pulled something out of her bag: a walkie-talkie.

MARGIN: As far as I'm concerned, Marie can stay a detective. She has the right stuff for it!

Ally and Marie explained that we could communicate with each other over the walkie-talkies, even when we couldn't see each other. - This made me feel a little better.

Things were starting to heat up now. We strolled veeeeery casually up to Bella's house. We could see lots of women in little white dresses, standing around in the backyard and chatting. Something about backhands and smashes.

They didn't notice us. Great! A car drove up, and a man in an apron got out. He picked up a tray full of delicious sandwiches and yelled: "Honeycakes Catering is here, please open the gate!"

This was MY chance! I ran up behind the man and opened the gate for him, before slipping inside behind him. He just walked into the backyard without even glancing at me.

You'd have thought he'd at least say thanks, if he wasn't going to offer me a sandwich!

IN ANY CASE, I was now IN!

I was at the garden party for the ladies from the tennis club! But I wasn't undercover yet. This wasn't too tragic, since luckily the tennis ladies hadn't noticed me yet. They tore the tray out of Mr. Honeycakes' hands and tossed it with a practiced backhand swing onto the buffet table, before grabbing for the sandwiches.

As for me, I looked around for a suitable bush. I was in luck! There was a super bushy bush with red flowers close by. Several garden tools were lying around it, including a large shovel.

- PERFECT

Have you found the dog?

Ally suddenly asked through the walkie-talkie. Boy did that scare me!

I was even more startled when my dictaphone responded very loudly:

Have you drowned the frog?

Two of the tennis ladies had just bitten into their sandwiches, and they turned toward me, horrified.



What did you just say?!

Crud. I wasn't UNDERCOVER yet!

MARGIN: Meow

Luckily, Mr. Honeycakes chose that moment to return to the garden, this time with trays full of cupcakes. The tennis ladies started screeching in delight, and I made a quick grab for a few branches from the bush. However, the entire bush came free in my hands, roots and all. For some reason, it wasn't firmly planted in the ground, which was very practical as far as I was concerned. I simply climbed into the bush and dashed off.

No one noticed.

Except for one old tennis lady.

"That bush is moving all by itself! I swear!"

"Get real, Heidi. You can't see past your nose."

"Fat seal, Heidi. You can't pee past your toes."

Heidi started shouting that the bush was now being impertinent as well and that it wasn't normal for bushes to run around, saying rude things to people. What in the world had Bella's mother been thinking to plant such strange bushes in her yard? I used this uproar to make a run for another part of the garden, where I hid behind a tree.

Puh, that was close!

"All clear," I whispered into the walkie-talkie. "I'm now a bush."

I tacked a "Roger" to the end of my update. For some reason, that's what you're supposed to say when you're talking into a walkie-talkie. I've seen it on TV, though I'm not sure why they do that.

"The tennis ladies are still snacking," Ally replied through the walkie-talkie.

I told her that she was supposed to say Roger when she was done talking, but she declared that Roger is a stupid name. Besides, why should she call me Roger when my name is Penny?!

I gave up at this point. Maybe it's okay if only one person says Roger...

MARGIN: I'm going to look for Charlie now. Roger.

I glanced all around, but there was no CHARLIE, just perfectly ordinary grass and flowers. And bushes being cut into the shape of balls. Then, I suddenly heard something! It sounded like a baby at first!

But there were no babies at the tennis ladies' garden party!!

It took a moment for me to realize that this wasn't really the sound of crying.

It was howling!

- Like the way a dog howls! Like the way a puppy howls!

"Can you hear that?" I hissed into the walkie-talkie.

"Can we hear what?" Marie bellowed back. "There's so much static, I can't hear anything!"

Good grief, they were making such a racket!

This was why I couldn't tell from which direction the howling was coming. Besides that, two gardeners started moving toward me. An old one and a young one.

"Okay, why dontcha get started on da bush buck dere, th'un with the red flawrs. The roddedendron. Bu' make it snappy. Dere's alot to do today!"

"Okay, why don't you start on that bush back there, the one with the red flowers. The rhododendron. But make it snappy. There's a lot to do today!"

"Yo, boss."

He suddenly started walking straight toward me, carrying a giant pair of hedge clippers!! I was frozen to the spot, but then I RAN. Straight across the yard! I think this rather surprised the gardener.

"Um, boss? The bush is... uh... leaving."

"Whatcha babblin' on about? Getta movin' n' trim!"

"What in the world are you talking about? Get on with the trimming!"

I stood perfectly still where I came to a stop, hoping the gardener would find something else to clip, but instead, he came closer and closer. And closer and closer! Until he was standing right in front of ME.

MARGIN: Uh oh.

At that moment, Marie whispered out of the walkie-talkie:

...up to right now... BATTERY... You... haven't... much longer.

And the dictaphone whispered in the gardener's direction:

Unhand that flower!! Lousy flea, your hours are numbered!

The gardener turned very PALE.



“Boss, now the bush is talking! It wants to kill me!”

“Heavies t’Betsy, man! Are you snockered or sumfin’? Stop fiddlin’ around and get crackin’.”

“Heavens to Betsy, man! Are you drunk or something? Stop messing around and cut that bush!”

But the young gardener was no longer interested in cutting my bush. He was terrified of me. Heehee!

He took off like a shot. This was the first time I was REALLY happy to have the dictaphone on me! That’s when I heard the howling again.

- IT WAS COMING FROM THE SHED!!!

I rushed out of the dumb bush, in case the gardener decided to come back for it.

Everything was dark inside as I opened the door. There was only one tiny window in the building, which smelled a little like... pee. But also exactly like a small, sweet, cuddly dog. I knelt down and whispered: “CHARLIE? Is that you?”

Something hurtled toward me, something small, sweet and fluffy. It was CHARLIE! He was overjoyed to see me, and he licked me all over my face. I usually find that a little gross, but not this time. I was too thrilled at finding Charlie!

I called Ally and Marie over the walkie-talkie right away:

Found the puppy beside the house! Roger

Downed the guppy beside the mouse! Roger

“What?” Ally cried.

I called very loudly:

I HAVE FOUND CHARLIE!

I once again heard howling from somewhere. Were there more dogs?

- This time it wasn’t howling...

It was crying. HUMAN CRYING!! I turned around, and who was standing there in the door, sobbing?!

BELLA!!

“Please don’t take him! Please don’t tell on me!”

But there’s no way I could do that.

Theft is theft!



“Charlie belongs to Sydney,” I said. “You still have Snuffles! Don’t you?”

This just made Bella sob all the louder. She finally confessed that there was no Snuffles.

Her mom wouldn’t let her have a pet, because animals get everything dirty and her mom’s nerves couldn’t survive that. I almost felt a little sorry for Bella. Actually, I felt really sorry for her. She claimed that she’d only wanted to keep CHARLIE for a little while, but he was just too sweet and she’d quickly decided she wanted to keep him for good. That’s why she’d demanded \$10,000 *in cash*. She knew there was no way Sydney could come up with that much money.

Why Bella’s cunning plan didn’t work:

- 1) Because I’m a fabulous DETECTIVE!!!
- 2) Because Marie is so brave, and she got us the walkie-talkies. And because she’s a fabulous DETECTIVE, too!!!
- 3) Because Ally can come up with the best disguises in the world and is a fabulous DETECTIVE, as well!!!

MARGIN: Cunning!

Bella kept sobbing harder and louder. A few of the ladies from the tennis club peeked through the shed door. Charlie couldn’t stay here. He was miserable in this dark shed. I explained that to Bella, and she finally said that she understood. A little. But when we reached the sidewalk with Charlie to join Ally and Marie, she started bawling again, because we found Sydney waiting with the others.

Sydney didn’t look like she felt even the slightest bit sorry for Bella!!!!

MARGIN: They had fetched Sydney.

Hey, Bella, you thief. Are you crazy?

Bella was crying so hard she started hiccuping.

I just want to pet a dog with soooft... hic... cuddly fur. ANY DOG. And go... hic... for walks with it... hic!!

This gave me a TOTALLY GREAT IDEA. I knew of a dog that needed to be taken for walks and liked to be petted. A dog that didn’t bite, that did like to watch TV, and that had nice, antique fur.

Rosie

Nom nom nom

I promised Bella that she could come to my Grandma’s and go for a walk with Rosie. I had to take back Grandma’s dentures anyway!

- Bella finally stopped sobbing.

And Sydney, the mega-lame snob, said a brand-new word (for her) to me.



It was Thanks.

- Sydney was so impressed.

And insisted on being told how we had figured it all out. My two assistants detectives and I.

We showed her the walkie-talkies and my cool dictaphone. We also told her about how we'd taken the fingerprints and disguised ourselves and stuff.

She thought that was totally cool.

Much cooler than her makeup kit, which is actually quite heavy. And her karaoke machine, which she was only allowed to use between 3:00 and 3:30 pm. Even cooler than the hammock, which was already torn because Sydney's mom had tried it out.

- Sydney is really very nice.

And she wanted to know if we were going to do anymore detecting, because it was just so exciting and she wanted to help.

She even said that we could use CHARLIE as our tracking dog. Boy, talk about being on Cloud 9!

Even despite the fact that Charlie is kind of a lame name for a super-smart tracking dog.

Just between you and me.

Charlie licked my face again. He loves me now, since I was the one that freed him from his prison!!

Unfortunately though, there wasn't any more detecting to do. Talk about dumb. So we stood around, chewing gum (strawberry) and petting Charlie. Until Ally suddenly cried out, her voice trembling: "Mr. JENNINGS!"

Oh man, of course. There was still Mr. Jennings in his stylish casual shirt and his bizarre CAGE! Even just the thought of it sent ice cubes through my veins.

Sydney agreed this was TOTALLY spooky.

So we agreed to form a detective club. And tomorrow we're going to OBSERVE Mr. Jennings. FOR REAL!!!

MARGIN: Bwahahaha

What's the cage for?

Friday Lunchtime

At school

In the spookiest place in the world

- Outside Mr. Jenning's workshop

dtv

The next day, the four of us met during our lunch break. We were SOOOO excited! We nonchalantly strolled back and forth outside of Mr. Jennings' workshop. Well, not all that nonchalantly since our PE teacher came by and asked if we were looking for something, since we were all just staring at the floor. We quickly said, "No!," and decided we needed to communicate with each other through our own secret sign language.

We needed to know when Mr. JENNINGS left his room, so that we could secretly slip inside and look for the cage!!!

"What will we do with the cage?"

"We could sell it on Ebay. My mom sells all sorts of stuff on Ebay."

As if that was actually important right now!! We first had to get into the room, and I was TRULY SCARED at this point!

Because strange singing was once again coming out of Mr. Jennings' workshop. It sounded even more horrible than the last time.

"Summer loving,
Had me a blast.
Summer loving,
Happened so fast."

We couldn't let our fear get the better of us, since we needed to practice our secret sign language.

1 wink =
The coast is clear.
We could go in!

2 winks =
STOP!
The enemy is close by!

Sydney got it right away and started winking like a professional. We'd managed to bring a really good detective on board. Sadly, Charlie wasn't allowed in the school, otherwise we could have yelled "Get him!," and he could have caught Mr. JENNINGS!

Ally got the winks mixed up and winked way too much while practicing. Our PE teacher came back by and asked if Ally had something in her eye. Ally quickly started staring at the floor again, which caused our PE teacher to once again ask if she could help her look for whatever was missing.

- Good grief, that woman is a real PEST.

As she finally walked off, Mr. Jennings' doorknob began to turn. We hurried to our hiding places. He walked out - in elegant bottle-green linen pants and a raspberry-colored pullover - and glanced quickly up and down



the hall.

TOTALLY SUSPICIOUS. But then our teacher appeared at the end of the hall. Mr. Jennings called out: “Ms. Webster! Hello!”

He strode toward her, trailing his cologne behind him. He COMPLETELY forgot to shut his door.

This was our CHANCE!!!

I quickly winked once at Ally, who had hidden under the staircase. She winked back twice. Marie, who was pretending to casually lean against the wall, winked at me once. Sydney had taken up a position on the staircase, where she was acting like a handrail. She winked twice.

MARGIN: Detective case

WHAT WAS GOING ON?

I slipped into Mr. Jennings’ workshop, my heart pounding SO LOUDLY in my ears. But someone behind me was breathing even louder. It was Marie, who had also had no idea why the other two had winked twice. Ally joined us, and explained that she had found the secret sign language confusing and didn’t think anybody could ever learn it. At that moment, we finally saw what Mr. JENNINGS was building. It wasn’t a cage. It was a bookcase.

And his workshop looked incredibly tidy, with flowers and pictures all over the place.

MARGIN: Huh? Do you get this?

NOPE.

NOPE.

Suddenly, the door swung open.

- I thought my heart stopped working!

But it was just Sydney, who seemed to be in a panic!

“Why didn’t you pay attention to me? I winked twice like you said! Mr. Jennings is coming back. Hide!”

Crud!! How could this happen?

We quickly crammed ourselves into Mr. Jennings’ wall cabinet. All his tools were in here, and we were pinched and poked everywhere since the space was much too TIGHT.

The workshop door opened, and Mr. Jennings stepped inside. We could see through the narrow crack in the cabinet door, which couldn’t quite shut properly. His cologne cloud wafted in first, followed by Mr. Jennings. And Ms. Webster, our teacher! Her cheeks were quite flushed.

“Please tell me what your surprise is, Mr. Jennings. I’m so curious!”



He pointed at the bookcase and declared that he had built this for her. In secret. Because it was supposed to be a SURPRISE.

MARGIN: Ouch!

And because the bookcase in her classroom was a piece of junk. And because it would make her so happy that he had especially built the shelves such that the BOOKS wouldn't fall off them anymore. He rapped on the bookcase, as he laughed and said: "The little miscreants won't escape from here!"

We were stunned. Especially when Ms. Webster also started laughing and said: "Aren't you full of tricks!"

Mr. Jennings shook his stylishly trimmed and coiffed hair, and replied: "Ms. Webster, there's another reason why I built the bookcase."

He knelt down on the floor and stared at it as if he were looking for something, just like we'd been doing earlier.

In a very hoarse voice, Mr. Jennings continued:

MARGIN: What's he looking for?

Shhh!

Don't know!!

Psssst.

I love your laugh, Ms. Webster. You are marvelous. And so nice.

But before Ms. Webster could say anything, the dictaphone in my pocket interrupted VERY LOUDLY:

I wove you a raft, Ms. Webster. You are made of lice. And some mice.

- Good grief, this dumb dictaphone!!!!

On top of that, the door on the stupid, tight cabinet suddenly popped open, and we tumbled out. But Mr. Jennings didn't even fuss at us. He just kept gazing at Ms. Webster as he gripped her hand. "And I even love these amusing, little rascals here, because you're their teacher, Ms. Webster."

He then pressed his lips against Ms. Webster's hand and kissed it loudly.

- That was so embarrassing...

Friday Afternoon

After school

- We're trying to suppress the memory of Mr. Jennings' hand kiss by chewing gum

- Strawberry



After school, Ally, Sydney, Marie, and I took CHARLIE for a walk and tried to recover from the shock of witnessing Mr. Jennings and Ms. Webster together. At least, Mr. Jennings wasn't a criminal, which was a good thing. Though a little disappointing, too, since we didn't have anything else to investigate.

I told the others about Mr. Mulligan and the Hacksaws in my building, and pointed out that we could OBSERVE - in other words, watch - them. But the others weren't all that interested in doing that. Sydney said that we could observe her brother, since she really wanted to know if he had a girlfriend. - However, for some reason, we didn't really want to deal with any more lovebirds. That's why we decided to take Charlie for a walk. As we rounded a corner, Sydney suddenly murmured, "Oh no!"

She swiftly hid behind a trash can. To our confused questions, she silently pointed, and there, next to a grocery store, stood a colorful car - And who was getting out of it? Bombo the Clown! He laughed like a billy goat and waved up at a window, where a group of unsuspecting kids were standing and staring with huge eyes. The poor kids! It had to be a party, and Bombo was here as the

MEGA-AMAZING
SURPRISE

"We should warn them," Sydney whispered.

"Bombo is the most embarrassing thing that can happen to your birthday!"

I was REALLY! happy that Sydney had also secretly thought Bombo was dumb! But we couldn't warn anyone because, with a loud, chortling "Bombo's coming, you little munchkins!," he had already dashed into the building.

Regardless, the walk with CHARLIE was great. He walks much, much faster than Rosie! He actually ran and jumped! But he got tired all of a sudden and dozed off in the middle of the sidewalk.

And then out of the blue, the weird man showed up again!!!

"Is that dog dead?!"

he asked us sternly. "If it is, you can't just leave it lying around here! This isn't a dog cemetery, you know."

It was the same man from before! And once again, he pulled out his phone and said, "Edward, I'm on my way with the delivery." He was still carrying his black bag in which something was jangling! That was suspicious, alright!!!

The others agreed.

Which is why I added another suspicious person to my list at home

SUSPECT:

The gripe from the street



Name: unknown

Appearance: Bald with a few scraggly hairs across the top of his head. [Why? What are they hiding?] Dark suit [Ally thinks it's a disguise], a black bag in which something is jangling mysteriously. The bag probably contains "the delivery." [Handcuffs? Gold coins? Stolen jewels?]

The gripe's accomplice: A certain "Edward." Who is Edward? Maybe an alias? Or does Edward work UNDERCOVER?

And above all: Why can't the man stand sleeping dogs?

Plan: Must OBSERVE more

We'll figure out what's going on with the gripe. And this time we have a real TRACKING DOG to help us!!

I have a feeling this might be our NEXT CASE!!

SUPER TRACKING DOG, CHARLIE