

THE SCIENCE INSPECTORS

BOOK TWO

The Case of the Broken Watch



The Science Inspectors

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Daniel Kenney

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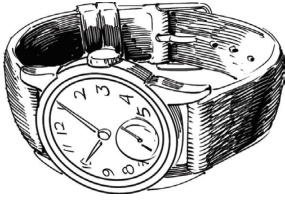
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CHAPTER 1

ALL IN THE NAME

Angela Moretti slammed her tray down so hard that some applesauce flew into the air and hit Howey Dooohan smack-dab in the face. He licked his lips and smiled. “Thanks, Angela. Now I can skip seconds.”

She shot him an apologetic look. “Sorry about that. I’m just annoyed.”

“You don’t say,” Norah Sloan said sarcastically. “Jamie, could you tell that Angela was annoyed?”

Jamie McDermott took a bite of his soggy chicken sandwich and shook his head. “No way. Moretti here is a rock. The way she keeps things inside, you can’t ever tell what she’s thinking or how she’s feeling. Our girl’s a real mystery.”

Howey wiped off his face. “Nope. A mystery wrapped up in a puzzle and decorated with an enigma.”

Angela gave each of her friends a withering look. “You

all about done now, or does this comedy routine need more time?”

Jamie shrugged. “I think we made our point. So, why are you annoyed?”

“Correction,” Norah said. “Why are you annoyed *today?*”

“First of all, in my defense, I was born this way. My mom and dad always said so. One time when I was four, I was so mad at a fly in our house that I decided to get rid of it with a baseball bat. I got that fly all right, but I also got a painful lesson in how to patch drywall. And secondly, and even more to the point, I basically live in an Italian restaurant. Being annoyed and getting angry is as natural to us as breathing.”

“And because you get so agitated so quickly, you are awfully fun to tease,” Norah said. “So, what’s annoying you so much today?”

“Not what,” Angela said. “Who. And the answer is Nina Marcus, the single worst person in the world.”

Norah, Howey, and Jamie exchanged glances and then, as if on cue, they each rolled their eyes.

That fired Angela up even more. “Oh, no—you did not just roll your eyes at me.”

Howey made a sympathetic face. “Listen, Angela. The thing is, we warned you. We told you Nina was the worst.”

“And yet, you’re still surprised,” Jamie said.

“I am,” Angela admitted. “It’s like she’s a virus. And you’ve all had the last several years to build up an immunity to her, but I haven’t. Or rather, I’m not numb to it like the three of you. I just hate to see people who are objectively terrible get away with it over and over again.”

“Trust me,” Norah said, “we all do. But in case you forgot, there’s a reason why Nina gets away with it.”

“You’re talking about her father?”

“Yes, Angela, I am. You may think Nina is the worst person in the world, but she’s not. That accolade belongs to her doting dad.”

“Gregori Marcus,” Jamie said with a low growl.

“Just what exactly makes this guy so bad?” Angela asked.

“Exactly?” Howie said with a bit of a tremble. “I’m not sure anyone knows.”

Jamie nodded. “Which is one of the reasons why he isn’t behind bars. That guy is as slippery as a snake, and smart in that Chicago street-smart sort of way.”

“Plus, he’s ruthless,” Norah said. “Intimidation and cruelty have a way of keeping lips shut, if you know what I mean. Nina is bad, but at least for now, it’s the kind of bad we can all tolerate. Hurt pride. Humiliation. Not

fun, but much better than a pair of broken legs.”

“And you’re saying that trying to teach Nina a lesson is a bad idea because of the—”

“Aforementioned broken legs,” Norah said, cutting Angela off. “That’s precisely what I’m saying.”

Angela threw up her hands. “I just can’t believe we have to let a girl like Nina Marcus act this way.”

“Well, Moretti,” Norah said, “until Gregori Marcus is behind bars and no longer a threat to people like you and me, that’s just the way it has to be.”

“I hate that.”

“I know you do, Angela,” Howie said. “We all hate it, but do you mind if we talked about something else? Talking about Gregori Marcus upsets my tummy, and I really want to go back and get more tater tots.”

“I thought you weren’t going to get seconds,” Angela observed.

“On applesauce, silly. But I still plan on getting more tots, another yogurt, and two more cartons of chocolate milk.”

“Howie Doohan, you are a human garbage dump.”

Norah smiled. “He’s more like an anaerobic digester.”

Jamie and Angela exchanged blank stares. Which was all Norah needed to be... well, Norah.

“You see, an anaerobic digester is a tank or a pit

where you combine organic material and moisture and heat. And if you keep those conditions just right, over time, special bugs consume the waste and other bugs come along and consume those bugs until eventually you are left with a lot less organic material and a whole lot of something else.”

“What?” Angela asked.

Norah slapped Howie on the back. “Gas. Methane gas, to be precise. Just like our Howie.”

Howie smiled proudly while Jamie and Angela laughed.

“Fine,” Angela finally said when the laughter died down. “No more talk about the Marcuses. What do you guys want to talk about?”

“How about the weather?” Howie said.

“The weather? What are we, a group of old folks down at the donut shop?” Jamie asked.

“I’m serious. Norah mentioned how an anaerobic digester like me needs heat. Well, trust me, I’ve got plenty of heat right now. Did you know that yesterday was one of the hottest October days on record here in Chicago?”

“It *was* pretty awful,” Angela agreed. “The restaurant kitchen was so hot yesterday, I thought I would melt.”

“Don’t encourage him, Angela,” Norah said. “This is

the part where Howie goes into his long diatribe about the evils of global warming. So, before he gets started, I will just say this. Yes, yesterday was hot. But last winter was one of the coldest in Chicago's history."

"Exactly," Jamie said. "And did you see that there was a huge snowstorm out east yesterday? I can't remember where exactly, but it was the earliest snowfall in that city's history. October ninth! Beating the old record by two days. I'm sure those people would love a little global warming right about now."

"Fine," Howie said. "Don't call it 'global warming.' Call it 'climate change,' for all I care. All I know is that to have the hottest October day in Chicago's history and for some city out east to have the earliest snowfall on the same day? That seems pretty crazy to me."

"It's weather," Angela said. "Isn't it always crazy and unpredictable? My mom used to say, 'If you don't like the weather, just wait a minute.'"

Norah raised her hand. "All in favor of agreeing with Howie that the weather is crazy so we can talk about something else, say aye."

Norah, Jamie, and Angela all said "aye" in unison.

Howie frowned. "Fine. What do *you* want to talk about, best friend?"

"How about the school nickname?"

Angela frowned. “The nickname? What are you talking about? I thought we were the Eagles. I finally just learned the fight song. And newsflash—it’s a *terrible* fight song.”

“We’re the Eagles for now,” Jamie explained. “But apparently some other Chicago middle school I’d never even heard of complained because they’re also the Eagles, and they demanded that we change.”

“Fun fact,” Howie said. “Eagles’ is the most popular school nickname in America. Second fun fact—‘Wildcats’ is number two and ‘Panthers’ is number three which is funny to me because, hello, a wildcat and a panther are just about the same thing. I mean, really.”

“Thank you, Howie, for that daily dose of nearly useless trivia,” Norah said.

“You’re most welcome.”

Jamie continued. “And the school district caved, and guess what? Since Beveridge is the newer school, we are the ones who have to come up with the new nickname.”

“How did I miss this drama?”

Norah smirked. “Probably the same adorable cluelessness that led you to stepping on a toilet paper bomb your first day of school.”

Jamie laughed hard at that one, seeing as he was the one who had built the ingenious device. But as soon as

Angela drilled her eyes into him, he stopped.

Then, turning to the others, she added, “It’s probably the fact that I’m doing everything I can to get used to a new city, a new school, and working in an Italian restaurant in all my free time. So, what’s the new nickname going to be?”

“The students will vote at a school assembly on Friday.”

“But I’ve heard about three contenders,” Jamie said. “The Jackrabbits, the Bison, and... the Rubies.”

“Rubies?” Angela said. “That’s terrible. Who would ever want a nickname like ‘Rubies’?”

Jamie, Norah, and Howie exchanged uncomfortable looks.

“What?” Angela asked. “What am I missing?”

“Word on the street is that ‘Rubies’ is the odds-on favorite to win,” Norah said.

“How is that possible?” Angela asked.

“It’s a terrible name, I’ll give you that,” Jamie said. “So, you’ve got to ask yourself—what student at this school would have the ability to convince an entire student body to vote for a terrible name?”

Angela didn’t have to think long before the answer hit her like a city bus-sized migraine headache. “Oh, no.”

The three of them nodded. “Oh, yes,” Howie said.

“Nina Marcus wants us to be called the Rubies?”

“Apparently rubies are Nina’s birthstone, she decided that’s what she wanted, and so poof! It’s happening,” Howie explained.

Angela slumped in her chair. “She really is the worst.”

“Yes, Angela, like we said before. She is. So, get used to it,” Norah said.

But Angela didn’t want to get used to it. As her friends continued to talk, she zoned out, nibbling on her sandwich and thinking about the unfairness in the world. A world in which people like the Marcuses were thriving and getting to do whatever they wanted. Suddenly and quite instinctively, Angela slammed her fist on the table. Luckily, there was no more applesauce to spray on Howie’s face.

“No,” she said defiantly.

“No, what?” Howie asked.

“No, I’m not going to get used to it. I don’t believe we should just sit around and let the Nina Marcuses of the world do whatever they want, whenever they want.”

“But you remember the thing we said about her father?” Jamie said.

“I do. Which means, we can’t do it the Chicago street-thug way. If we’re going to stop Nina, we have to be smarter. We all love science, and that means we’re

smart. Smarter than she is. There has to be a way for us to use our brains to stop her. Do you really want to be the Beveridge Rubies? Cuz I sure don't. So, let's find a way to stop Nina from getting what she wants. And let's be so smart about it that she doesn't even know what we did. Are you in?"

She looked around at her friends and could tell that Jamie especially was skeptical. That gave Angela a simple but brilliant idea. She leaned back in her chair. "It's kind of what I figured. You probably aren't smart enough to pull it off anyway."

Jamie narrowed his eyes. "Did you just say I wasn't smart enough?"

"To pull off something like this? Probably not."

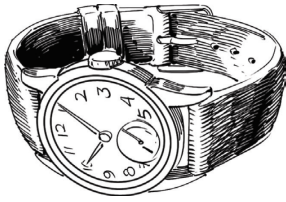
Jamie crossed his arms and set his jaw. "I'm in. I'm just curious about what your plan is."

The bell rang, marking the end of lunch.

"Simple, really. But if we do it right, also incredibly effective. I'll explain more tonight over a slice of deep dish at Big Lou's."

"Tonight? What if I'm busy tonight?" Jamie asked.

"You won't be busy because if we're going to pull it off this week, we have no time to waste. See you tonight."



CHAPTER 2

PIZZA PLANS

Big Lou, his ample belly, and his wide smile brought over the large deep-dish pepperoni pizza just as Howie sat down.

“To my favorite kids. Enjoy!”

Big Lou walked away as Norah took out a bag with her own utensils specially sterilized for times like this. Angela took her gaze off the pizza and set it on Howie. He wasn’t in his usual gray coveralls. Instead, he was wearing jeans and a green flannel shirt. The outfit looked every bit as hot and stuffy as the coveralls would on such an unusually steamy day, and Angela was curious about the change.

“What gives, Howie? I thought it was in the second-best friend contract that you had to notify me of any alterations to your regular wardrobe.”

Howie grabbed his slice of pizza and took a sip of the root beer that was waiting for him. “You’re right—the

contract should probably have that clause in it. Trust me, I'm not happy about it. My dad insisted I wash my coveralls because he said they were starting to stink."

Norah arched an eyebrow. "Starting to?"

"Fine, he said they were starting to stink more than normal. Well, that caught me off guard because I had to find something else to wear."

"And on the hottest day we've had in a month, you decided to wear jeans and flannel?" Jamie asked. "Why didn't you just wear shorts and a T-shirt?"

"I have a rule. I only wear shorts during gym class and at the pool. So, I chose my second favorite article of clothing. My green flannel." He took a big bite of his pizza and decided that was the perfect time to keep talking. "So, what did I miss?"

"Angela is about to unveil her scheme for getting back at Nina without her knowing we're getting back at her, and if I'm right, her plan relies on a scientific principle."

"Right as usual, Norah." Angela turned to Jamie. "You were especially skeptical when I introduced the idea at lunch today. But then, I suddenly convinced you to want to try anyway. Why is that?"

Jamie scratched his chin as he thought it over. "I guess because you said I probably wasn't smart enough to pull it off."

“And that made you eager to show me that you are in fact smart enough, correct?”

“Yeah, I guess that’s right.”

“That’s the same sort of thing we’re going to do with Norah. It’s a form of what’s called reverse psychology.”

Howie’s eyes widened. “I’ve heard of that.”

Norah held up a finger. “And it’s based on a principle called psychological reactance.”

Angela smiled. “Right again. I was doing some research on this after school when I was supposed to be helping out in the restaurant. Psychological reactance is the idea that something will be wanted more if people are told they can’t have it. Parents use this all the time when their kids are young. At least, my dad would. ‘Hey, Angela. I bet you’re not strong enough to work the vacuum.’ And I’d get mad about it and say I sure was. And he would doubt me and then I would go vacuum the living room just to show him. And boom—my dad got me to do a chore using reverse psychology. That’s exactly what I did to you.”

Jamie frowned. “I knew that.”

“At the time, I’m not so sure. I think you were so busy being offended that you didn’t realize I was trying to manipulate you.”

“And you’re saying we can do this to Nina?” Jamie asked.

“Maybe, if we’re subtle and clever enough. But here’s our big problem.”

“Her dad?”

“No. It’s Nina. You see, Jamie, she’s much smarter than you are.”

The four friends laughed, then ate their pizza and drank their sodas while Angela explained the basics of the plan.

“Right now, Norah wants our school to be the Beveridge Rubies, which makes me want to punch myself. I thought, as long as she wants us to have a ridiculous nickname, let’s go even bigger. Let’s think of something way worse and then convince her to support it using nothing other than reverse psychology.”

“How exactly would we do that?” Norah asked.

Angela took a big bite and smiled a gross pizza-filled smile. “That’s where you all come in. I can’t do everything around here. Remember, Norah, I’m just one of your misfits. But first things first. I say we choose a nickname even more terrible than ‘Rubies.’”

They brainstormed for the next ten minutes with Norah taking notes on her phone. Then they settled on a top three.

“So, our top three worst school nicknames are the Pink Ponies, the Broken Feathers, and the Strong Fighters. Do we want to vote so we can spend some time

on how we're actually going to pull this off by Friday?"

"What's happening Friday?" a big booming voice asked from Angela's right. She turned to see Big Lou back at their table.

"Our school is voting on a new nickname."

Big Lou looked incredulous. "A new nickname? Beveridge Middle School has been the Eagles forever."

"I know, Big Lou," Jamie said. "But now we have to change. Don't ask us why because we don't really understand it. But if you were to come up with a new nickname, what would you choose?"

"If it were up to me? Hmm. I suppose..." He broke out into another big smile. "If it were up to me, I would call us the 'Beveridge Big Lou's Pizza.' Because that means more business for me."

That got a laugh out of the table, then Big Lou noticed Howie and looked at him curiously. "Hey, nice green flannel. Where's your usual outfit?"

Howie smiled. "I thought I'd wear something extra breathable on account of the hot weather."

Big Lou didn't catch the sarcasm, but waved his hand in front of his face. "Hot is right. Too hot for October, if you ask me."

"And if you ask me," another voice bellowed, "it's refreshing."

Big Lou turned around, as did the kids, to see a tall man amble toward them carrying a to-go box of pizza. Big Lou clapped his hands together. “Sid Granger, as I live and breathe. I didn’t know you were in town.”

Sid was wearing blue jeans and a bright blue Buffalo Bills T-shirt. Big Lou scowled. “You gotta lotta nerve wearing a Bills shirt in this establishment, you know that? This is Bears country.”

“You seem to forget I grew up here, Big Lou. Of course it’s Bears country, and of course I root for the Bears every week. I even bet on them occasionally—that is, unless they’re playing my beloved Bills.”

“So, just in town for a visit?”

Sid shook his head. “Had to check on a couple big clients. The furniture business never sleeps.”

“Unless you’re selling beds,” Howie offered.

Sid glanced at Howie with what Angela thought was a look of annoyance. Then suddenly, he burst out laughing. “That’s a good one, kid. By the way, nice flannel.” He turned back to Big Lou. “But of course, I can’t be in Chicago without getting some of your deep dish.”

“And will you see Karla Kopeki while you’re here?”

“Are you kidding? Mom would roast me alive if I failed to visit her best friend in the world. In fact, I’m

going over there right now to share some of this delicious pie with her.”

“Well, give Karla my best. And Sid, don’t be a stranger. You may be a Bills fan, but your money spends just the same.”

Sid’s phone buzzed, and he stepped away to answer it. Big Lou turned back to the booth. “Well, kids. Enjoy your pizza, and best of luck with the whole nickname thing. And if the winner’s not Big Lou’s Pizza, I’m sure you’ll come up with something that’s just as good.” He walked back toward Sid, who was still on the phone. Angela noticed Sid was agitated by something.

“I think I’ve got it,” Howie said.

Angela turned back to her friend. “Got what?”

“The perfectly ridiculous school nickname. A name that’s so bad, it just might be good.”

Howie waited while Jamie, Norah, and Angela all looked at him, then finally when the anticipation was just right, he motioned with his hands as if he was unveiling a big surprise. “I give you Beveridge Middle School, home of the... Green Flannel.”

As soon as the words came out of his mouth, Angela knew it was the perfect name. Beyond ridiculous. Not offensive at all. And utterly unique.

“So, we go from being the Beveridge Eagles to the

Beveridge Green Flannel?” Jamie asked. “I think it’s sort of genius. What do you think, Angela?”

“It’s perfect. Norah?”

“What can I say? My best friend’s not completely useless. I like it too.”

Angela turned back toward Sid Granger, who was now hustling out of the pizza shop while Big Lou walked their way with a concerned look on his face.

“Something wrong, Big Lou?”

He nodded. “Sid just got a call from Karla Kopeki. Someone broke into her apartment today.”

“That’s terrible.”

“It’s worse than terrible. Something was stolen. Something very dear to her. The whole thing makes me just sick.” Big Lou walked away sadly.

“That’s awful,” Jamie said. “Mrs. Kopeki is really nice.”

“Mrs. Kopeki?” Angela said, trying to retrieve a memory. “Isn’t that the woman who bakes chocolate chip cookies on Wednesdays and leaves her window open for all of us to smell them?”

“That’s her all right,” Howie said. “And not only are her cookies great, but Big Lou and Jamie are right. She’s super nice. I’m so sorry this happened to her.”

“Well,” Angela said, “maybe we don’t have to just feel

bad for her. Maybe we can do something about it.”

“Like what?” Norah asked.

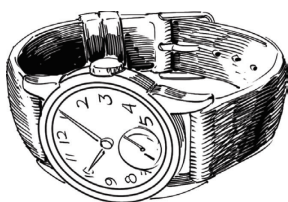
“Like, we’re the Science Inspectors. We already helped Mr. Bannister out a few weeks ago. Maybe we could help Mrs. Kopecki too.”

Norah frowned. “Didn’t you just convince us to join you in your grand scheme to get one over on Nina Marcus? A plan you still haven’t fully explained, and one that we have to do this week? And now you want to add an investigation on top of that?”

Angela shrugged. “What can I say? I’m special that way. Come on. Let’s just stop over at Mrs. Kopecki’s and take a look. Maybe we can figure something out. Unless, Norah, you think you’re not smart enough to solve another case?”

Norah narrowed her eyes at Angela. “Your feeble attempt at reverse psychology will not work on me, Moretti.”

Angela stood up and left money on the table for her share of the pizza. “I think it just did. Come on, guys. We’ve got a new case to solve.”



CHAPTER 3

NOT ON MY WATCH

By the time they entered Mrs. Kopecki's building ten minutes later, a small crowd had formed on the second floor. The man they had seen at Big Lou's, Sid Granger, was there next to a lovely pear-shaped woman who was clearly shaken up. A small mousy woman with thick red eyeglasses stood next to her. A young couple with a baby stood behind them. They all stared at a door with the number 23 on it, which was slightly ajar. Angela heard movement inside. The small woman with the red glasses turned to them.

"Captain Healy's going through her apartment as we speak." She patted the pear-shaped woman on the shoulder. "Thankfully, Karla called him right away. The two of them go way back. We all do, really." She leaned over to Karla. "And who'd you call after that?"

"I called you, of course."

"That's right. You called me, which makes sense. It's

not like I'm in charge around here, but I keep my eye on things, that's for certain. Edna Henson reporting for duty, sir. And Karla says to me, 'Oh, Edna, someone stole Bobby's watch. They broke in and stole his watch.'"

Edna looked at the family, at Sid, and at Angela and her friends and waited. Finally, Angela took the bait.

"Who's Bobby?"

Edna patted Karla on the back again. "Who's Bobby? Only the single greatest husband who ever lived and the love of Karla's life. Bobby Kopecki's been gone... oh, what has it been, Karla? A dozen years now?"

"Fifteen," Karla said in a whisper as she continued to stare at the door.

"Fifteen years?" Edna said with surprise. Then she shook her head somberly and made the sign of the cross. "Where does the time go? So, after you called me, who'd you call then, Karla?"

Karla finally stopped staring at her apartment and turned toward the small crowd. "I called Sid because I knew he was coming over. I had gone to bridge club like I always do on Tuesdays. Sid was coming over with some pizza for dinner, and I was anxious to spend a few minutes putting myself together before he arrived. But when I got to my door, I noticed it was open, which was odd. I never leave my door open. I always double-check.

I'm quite fastidious that way."

"Of that I can attest." Edna nodded. "Like I said, I keep an eye on things around here. And one thing I'll tell you is that Karla Kopecki always locks her door."

"My heart started beating fast. Like, really thumping out of my chest. I knew someone had been in my apartment. Maybe they were *still* in my apartment. I thought about going up to Edna's apartment first."

"Which I would have understood. Like I said, Edna Henson, reporting for duty."

"But I didn't."

Edna shook her head. "No, she didn't."

"I grabbed a little bottle of pepper spray I keep in my purse. Bobby bought me some a long time ago. I never used it on a person. I did use it on a dog one time. A vicious little poodle that came at me. Grabbed my grocery bag and tore it from my hands. That pepper spray worked just like Bobby said it would, so I always keep some with me. I grabbed it and went into my apartment, but... nobody was there."

"That's when Karla noticed something," Edna said.

"That's right. I looked over at the buffet cabinet in my dining room like I always do when I enter my apartment, but it was gone. The watch was gone. The watch I'd given to Bobby so many years ago."

“And that’s when you called Captain Healy, right?”
Edna prodded.

“That’s right. I called Captain Healy, who said he’d be over right away. Then I called Edna. Then I called Sid, and finally, I called Sid’s mom, Alma.”

Sid nodded. “My mom and Karla go way back too.”

Karla nodded. “Alma and I became best friends on the first day of first grade.”

“And remain so to this day,” Sid said.

“Even though Alma moved to Buffalo twenty years ago. Whenever Sid’s in town, he brings me some Big Lou’s. Sid’s good to me that way.”

The door to Apartment 23 swung open, and Captain Healy walked out. He looked around at the small crowd, and when his eyes settled on Angela and her friends, he got a slightly perturbed look on his face. Then he turned his focus to Mrs. Kopecki.

“I looked at the lock. No sign of forced entry. Meaning, whoever did this either had a key or is very good at picking locks. Are you sure the watch is the only thing that was stolen?”

“No, I’m not sure. I do keep a hundred dollars in an envelope under my mattress. That’s my emergency fund. But I didn’t check that.”

“Be sure you do, then let me know. Your television’s still

there. So is your iPad. I noticed a couple pieces of crystal that are probably worth something, but those were left alone as well. My guess? One of these street thieves broke in, saw the watch, thought it looked valuable, then got spooked and left in a hurry. That's probably why he left the door open. I'll be honest with you, Karla—these types of cases are very difficult to solve. I'll file a report, then I'll have some of my people check with the local pawn shops to see if anyone comes in looking to unload a watch.”

Karla shook her head. “I can't believe a pawn shop would be interested in a broken watch.”

Captain Healy frowned. “Excuse me. Are you saying the watch is broken?”

“It hasn't worked since the day I bought it for Bobby.”

Captain Healy closed his eyes and massaged the temples of his head with his fingers and thumbs.

“You called me because someone stole a watch that's never worked, not ever?”

“That doesn't give someone a right to steal it.”

Captain Healy let out an exasperated sigh. “I'll file the report and we'll check into local pawn shops. But if, as you say, the watch is broken, I'm afraid there's just not much we can do.”

Then Captain Healy left, but not before he shot Angela a look of clear annoyance.

The young family went back into their apartment while Edna Henson folded her arms disapprovingly. “You’d think Captain Healy would be more helpful than that.”

Karla sighed. “He does have a point. I can’t really expect the criminal justice system to care that much about a watch that doesn’t even work.”

“Well, Karla,” Sid said, “would you like me to come in and stay with you for a bit?”

“That’s kind of you, Sid. But no. I just don’t feel like it now.”

He tried to hand the pizza box to her, but she shook her head.

“And I’m sorry to say I don’t much have an appetite anymore. I think... I think I just want to be by myself. Thank you for coming over, and give your dear mother a hug from me.”

“I will. For sure. And I’ll be in town until the end of the week checking in with clients, so if you need something from me, don’t hesitate to call.”

Sid left while Edna and Karla spoke a little while longer. Angela and her friends circled up.

“I think that’s our cue to leave as well,” Jamie said.

“Agreed,” Norah said. “Moretti needs to explain the rest of this reverse psychology plan to us.”

“We can’t leave,” Angela said.

“Why can’t we?” Norah asked.

“Because you heard Captain Healy. He barely did anything in there. And once he found out the watch didn’t even work? Well, you saw his face. He’s not about to lift a finger to help her.”

“Then, and I hate to sound uncharitable here,” Norah said, “why should we care so much about it? The watch is broken. Meaning, it’s worthless.”

“That’s not exactly true,” Howie said.

Norah gave Howie a look similar to the one Captain Healy had given Angela.

“Sorry to disagree with you, best friend, but the watch is clearly very valuable to Mrs. Kopecki because it reminds her of her husband.”

Angela nodded. “And if the police aren’t going to do anything about it, the Science Inspectors should do what we can to help. What do we have to lose?”

Norah and Jamie looked at each other, and Jamie’s face was the first to relax. Finally, Norah said, “Okay. But I just want to go on the record as saying that I think this is a waste of our resources.”

“So noted,” Angela said. “And if you end up being right—”

“Which I usually am.”

“Then you will have the satisfaction of saying I told you so.”

Edna Henson walked up the stairs to her apartment, and Karla Kopecki went back into hers. But before she could close the door, Angela said, “Pardon me, Mrs. Kopecki.”

Mrs. Kopecki turned around. “Yes, dear? What is it?”

“You don’t know me, but I’m Angela Moretti, Tony Moretti’s daughter and Nonna’s granddaughter.”

Mrs. Kopecki looked at Angela, then placed a gentle hand against her cheek and patted it. “Of course you are. Has anyone ever told you how much you look like...?” Her voice trailed off.

“My mother?” Angela said. “Yes, I get that a lot. Anyway, I’m so sorry for what you’re going through, and I’ll just cut to the chase. I got the distinct impression that Captain Healy isn’t going to put much effort into helping you.”

“I got that impression as well.”

“That’s where we come in.” Angela turned and gestured to her friends. “We’re the Science Inspectors, and we like to use our science and detective skills to help solve problems just like this, the ones the police don’t care much about.”

“What are you saying exactly?”

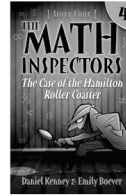
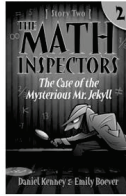
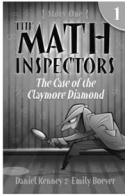
“If you’ll go through your story one more time and let us take a look at your apartment, we’ll do whatever we can to help solve your case.”

“My case?”

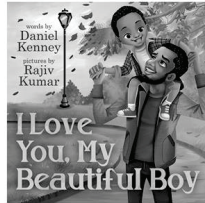
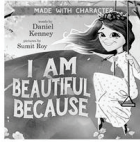
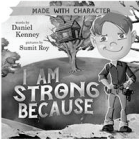
“Yes, Mrs. Kopecki. The case of the broken watch.”

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