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Zoe can either choose to stay on her current path toward popularity, perfect SAT scores, and Princeton, or she can take a major detour with Digby, and maybe find out what that kiss he stole from her really meant. Digby and his over-the-top schemes always lead somewhere unexpected and Zoe's beginning to learn she might just like jumping into the unknown. When it comes to Digby, for Zoe at least, the choice might already be made.

From the Hardcover edition.

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Editorial Review

Review

"The author bounces her characters off one another in spectacular ways, crafting drama, suspense, love, and exasperation with ease. . . . Readers will surely want to join Digby and Zoe for another round."—*Kirkus*

"Tromly excels at oddball character chemistry as well as crackling dialogue. . . . This zany sequel has everything to make fans of the first outing swoon."—*Booklist Online*

Praise for *Trouble Is a Friend of Mine*:

- *Publishers Weekly* Best Book of the Year

"In what reads like a combination of *Veronica Mars* and *The Breakfast Club*, debut author Tromly creates a screwball mystery with powerful crossover appeal."—*Publishers Weekly*, **starred review**

"This is one of those rare books that promises something unique and actually delivers beyond expectation. At least one copy belongs in every young adult collection—maybe even two or three. Once the word gets out, this book will fly off the shelves."—*VOYA*, **starred review**

"Fast-talking, suit-wearing Digby is an exasperating teenage Sherlock—sharply observant, impatient with social niceties, and unafraid of authority figures. . . . Fans of *Veronica Mars* and *Elementary* will find much to like here . . . Zoe's sarcastic first-person narration is fresh and funny . . . an offbeat and entertaining caper."—*Kirkus*

"An engrossing and satisfying read . . . Hand this one out along with a Chandler or Hammett classic and the first season of *Veronica Mars*."—*BCCB*, **starred review**

"A fast-paced story. . . . Readers will find a sharply drawn character in the irrepressible Zoe, who's as dubious about Digby's methods as she is curious about whether or not she can live up to his daredevilry."—*SLJ*

"With acerbic banter and a healthy dose of high-school high jinks, screenwriter Tromly weaves together traditional elements of teen stories to create a *Breakfast Club* for a new century."—*Booklist*

About the Author

Stephanie Tromly was born in Manila, grew up in Hong Kong, graduated from the University of Pennsylvania, and worked as a screenwriter in Los Angeles. She is currently on leave from her PhD program in English Literature at the University of Toronto and lives in Winnipeg with her husband and young son. Stephanie is the author of the *Trouble Is a Friend of Mine* trilogy.

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I don't believe in Happily Ever After. Nobody over the age of thirteen with an Internet connection has any business believing in that noise. But the kind of junior year I'm having is seriously challenging the life-saving cynicism I've cultivated for years.

Actually, to be precise, I'm having an epic second semester. My first semester was a series of fiascos, all courtesy of my friendship with Philip Digby. Though, honestly, I'm not even sure Digby ever considered me his friend. Accomplice, sure. But then he kissed me, which made us what? More than friends? Something other than friends? I hate semantics.

Normally, I wouldn't have fallen for Digby's stray-puppy-in-the-rain act in the first place. But I was new in town, I had no friends, and I was still reeling from my parents' brutal divorce. And then I found out that Digby's four-year-old sister, Sally, was abducted from her bed in the middle of the night when he was only seven years old and, to add to the tragedy of losing Sally, the authorities thought either his parents or Digby himself was guilty. Even worse, all of River Heights was convinced they'd done it and had turned against Digby and his parents. The pressure tore that family apart. The stray puppy, it turned out, was also the underdog. I was powerless to resist.

By Thanksgiving, he'd gotten me arrested, then kidnapped, and then blown up in an explosion. On the upside, we'd also dismantled a meth operation and found a missing girl. We didn't find Digby's sister, though, so he left town to keep looking for her.

But not before he scrambled my brains with that kiss. And then—nothing. Not a peep from the jerk for the last five months.

Meanwhile, everyone had heard I'd been hanging out with him and that we'd somehow busted up a major drug operation. People in school were curious and I had to act fast if I wanted to convert my infamy into friendships beyond whatever weird crisis-based camaraderie I'd experienced while I was capering around with Digby. I knew I was the flavor of a very short month, so I forced myself past the Digby-sized hole in my soul and Made an Effort.

My first attempts at getting to know new people were disasters. But then I realized that I was boring people with details, and once I basically stopped talking so much and mostly asked leading questions instead, things improved. And then, finally, after a locker room conversation—about the injustice of school going all the way until December 23—with Allie and Charlotte, two of the nicer girls from my PE class, I was in. An invitation to lunch turned into eyeliner tutorials in the good bathrooms and weekends trawling the mall with them. Eventually, I realized that I was enjoying more than just the fact that I was finally feeling included. I was actually having a good time with Charlotte and Allie. They'd been friends since grade school, but I could tell they were trying their best not to make me feel left out. And it worked. Things were looking up.

My luck kept right on improving, in fact, until after winter break, when I got my first official boyfriend: Austin Shaeffer. It happened at the mall. I was with Allie and Charlotte when I saw some guy hauling ass out of the Foot Locker. I didn't have the time—or maybe I didn't take the time—to think. Before I knew it, I'd kicked a wheeled holiday sale sign into the guy's path.

The guy hit the sign with a (surprisingly) satisfying *splat*. Digby would've loved watching the Foot Locker employees swarm the thief and pull all the fitness trackers still in boxes from his pockets. For the first time in a while, I let myself feel how much I missed life with Digby. I was so distracted, I didn't notice that a Foot Locker employee had started talking to me.

"Sorry, what?" I said. That's when I realized it was Austin Shaeffer. I didn't have classes with him, but I'd noticed him around school. It was hard not to notice Austin. He was handsome and athletic and one of the few guys who could be funny without being mean. He reminded me a little of Digby's friend Henry, although that might be because Austin was Henry's QB backup on our football team.

"You pushed the sign, right?" Austin said.

By this time, people were clapping. Charlotte pointed at me, yelling, “She’s our friend. Our friend did that.” Allie stooped for a selfie with the injured thief.

“How’d you know he shoplifted?” Austin said.

I almost said something about the weird bulge in the guy’s coat and how his run’s head-down urgency seemed more than a late-for-my-movie hustle, but I looked into Austin’s big blue eyes and checked myself. *Be normal, Zoe.* Austin Shaeffer doesn’t care what you know about body language.

“Actually . . .” I said. “The truth?”

Austin leaned in, forcing me to notice his aftershave. “Yeah?”

“I tripped. The sign kinda . . . rolled?” I tried not to judge myself for the giggle I burped out to sell my lie.

“Zoe Webster, right?” Austin said.

“Yeah . . . and you’re Austin—” Then suddenly Austin Shaeffer was holding my right hand. I’d forgotten about my latte and in the course of affecting coolness, I’d let my hand relax so much that coffee was pouring out the spout.

“Careful,” Austin said. “So, Zoe Webster, you saved my ass. They would’ve fired me if my section got jacked again.” He pointed at my cup. “You’ve probably had enough coffee today, but how about this weekend?”

Allie and Charlotte cackled while Austin entered my number in his phone.

“So cute . . . Austin Schaeffer’s blushing,” Allie said.

“Watch out, Zoe, Austin is trouble,” Charlotte said.

“I’m not trouble . . . don’t listen to them,” Austin said.

After Austin left, Allie, Charlotte, and I talked about him for hours. They liked him, I liked them, I wanted them to like me, Austin Shaeffer apparently liked me, and by the end of the afternoon, I liked him *a lot*. After Austin and I had our first coffee date, Allie, Charlotte, and I parsed every moment I’d spent with him. Being inside that giddy echo chamber was at least as much fun as the date itself.

So now I have a boyfriend and I have friends. I got flowers on Valentine’s Day, I’m invited to sleepovers, and I’m doing decently on social media. Sure, there are moments when I feel alien in my own life but mostly, it feels good to fit in. Finally, finally, I’m a normal.

But that’s all falling apart. Digby sauntered back into River Heights nine days ago, and now my happy ending is toast. Right this second, I’m about to make my entrance at the biggest party of the year. My boyfriend’s waiting inside. He’ll likely be the starting quarterback this fall, which means I’m dating the official Prince Charming of River Heights High. I’m wearing clothes way above my pay grade and riding in a fancy car with Sloane Bloom, my former nemesis who’s somehow turned into my perverse version of a fairy godmother. But here, at the brink of my Cinderella moment, all that matters to me is whether Digby will be at the party. See what I mean? Happy Ending ruined.

But as usual, I’m getting ahead of the story. I need to tell you about the last nine days.

ONE

“April is the cruelest month,” Mom said. “Just say it, Zoe. You told me so.”

Because my mother worked from home on Friday afternoons, I’d thought I’d save time and get her to drive me to my job at the mall. Mistake.

Mom stood on the gas pedal, but our car was officially beached. The left-side wheels were on the asphalt, but our right-side wheels were up in the air because of the huge snow boulder Mom had driven over and gotten stuck under the car. I felt queasy from sitting tilted as the engine ground away uselessly beneath me. Plus, the car stank of the cigarettes Mom didn’t think anyone knew she smoked during her solo commute to the community college where she taught English lit.

“Zoe told me not to park on this snowbank,” Mom said to Austin, who was sitting in the backseat. “But it didn’t seem so big last night.”

“I’ll go get your shovel,” Austin said.

“Zoe, put those ridiculous things away,” Mom said. She took a handful of my vocabulary cards and snorted. “What does this have to do with being a competent reader or writer?”

“Yeah, yeah, Mom. I know. Nothing. But it has everything to do with my doing well on the SATs next weekend,” I said. “I am extremely stressed about it . . .”

Austin came back with our shovel and said, “I’m going to start digging, okay, Miss Finn?”

Austin was still in the “Miss Finn” stage with Mom. In turn, Mom still got shy and combed her hair before Austin came over. Actually, even *I* still did. Sitting in Mom’s car, watching Austin, all muscles and sheer will, digging us out of the snow, I reflected on how it was probably a *good* thing that I still got nervous before Austin came over.

Austin flung a shovelful of snow over his shoulder, yelled *WHOA*, fell, and disappeared under the hood of the car. Mom and I jumped out.

It was a total movie shot: Austin on his back, his pretty face inches from the spinning tire. We pulled him out, so horrified we didn’t even remember we’d shut the car doors until we heard the auto locks engage. There was our car, hiked up on a snowbank, doors locked, keys in the ignition, stuck in drive with the wheels spinning.

“No!” Mom belatedly threw herself on the car’s hood. The car rocked under her weight.

“Careful, Miss Finn,” Austin said.

“Get away from the front of the car, Mom.” To Austin, I said, “Quick, put the snow back. But not under the tire!”

“I think there are spare keys in the house,” Mom said.

“Go. But if you don’t find them fast, call 911,” I said. “Or a tow truck.”

“Oh, God, my life’s a farce!” Mom ran into the house.

Austin resumed shoveling in the opposite direction while I kicked snow back under the car. Then a tall figure in black flitted across the field of my peripheral vision and disappeared behind an SUV. Something about his syncopated gait reminded me of something that made me super-happy, and then angry, and then confused.

Suddenly, there he was. Digby. Standing beside me. He seemed taller and broader than when he’d left, but that could’ve been because of his thick parka. He looked road-weary and his jaw was stubbled. He dropped his backpack in the snow. Clearly, it was the end of a long journey.

“Hey, Princeton,” Digby said. “Need help?”

Digby held a screwdriver and a long antenna he’d removed from the SUV he’d passed. He pried a gap along the rubber seam between our passenger’s-side door and the roof, fed the antenna through, and pushed the driver’s-side doors open button. He climbed in and killed the engine.

I got in too, realizing only when we were alone in the car that in the five months since he’d disappeared, I’d collected a ton of confrontational things to say without actually deciding on which to say first.

“Are you back?” I said.

Digby made a ta-da gesture. “Guess where I’ve been. Wait, don’t bother. You’ll never guess. Federal prison.” He laughed when my eyebrows shot up. “I went to Fort Dix to talk to Ezekiel.”

Ezekiel. Just hearing that drug dealer’s name made me relive the horror of his stuffing Digby and me in the trunk of his car and our almost getting blown up in his failed attempt to double-cross his boss.

Digby leaned in. “We’ve been looking at this all wrong, Princeton. Sally wasn’t taken by some pervert . . . it’s a whole other thing. When I finally got Ezekiel to put me on his visitors list, he told me about his friend—let’s call him Joe—who ran a crack squat downtown. Apparently, some guys rented Joe’s whole place for a week—exactly when Sally disappeared. Joe saw them carry in a little girl in the middle of the night. But when they left . . . there was a whole lot of stuff like *boys’* clothes and video games in the place.” Digby paused dramatically. “Remember Ezekiel said they were supposed to take me?”

“Who’s ‘they’?” I said.

“Exactly,” he said.

“Exactly what?” I said. “Who’s ‘they’?”

“Well, *that* I haven’t figured out yet,” Digby said.

“Did Ezekiel tell you anything real? Like, what these guys looked like? Or where the crack house *is*?” I said.

“His friend Joe said the guys were in nice suits and drove brand-new black SUVs. Ezekiel never got the address. Nice suits and black cars sounds like government types, and you know what that probably means . . . my dad,” Digby said. “I bet it had something to do with his old job at Perses Analytics.”

“Where Felix’s dad works?” I said. “I thought you said your dad’s an alcoholic.”

“Being an alcoholic was more Joel Digby’s hobby. Alcoholics have to cover their nut too, Princeton.”

“He was a scientist?”

“Propulsion engineer,” Digby said. “I wonder what he was working on.”

“But maybe you’re just being paranoid. Or maybe your father gambled, and his bookie took Sally to collect on a gambling debt? Or maybe Ezekiel’s evil and he’s screwing with your head because you put him in prison?” I said.

“But those are such boring explanations,” Digby said. “And, you know, Ezekiel and I got to talking and he’s not such a bad guy—”

“He sold meth to kids and pretended to be in a weird cult to do it,” I said.

Digby slapped the wheel. “Ah . . . the ol’ Princeton reality check. I forgot how much fun it is.”

“You forgot? Is that why I haven’t heard jack from you in five months?” I said.

Digby looked genuinely surprised. “I was busy . . .” He pointed out the windshield at Austin, who was still shoveling. “You’ve been busy too. I assume he’s . . . ?”

“Yeah. We’re dating . . . we’re together . . . he’s my boyfriend—”

“Got it,” Digby said. “Austin Shaeffer, huh? You teach him the difference between left and right yet?”

Months ago, he’d caught Austin writing an *R* on his right hand and an *L* on his left hand before scrimmage.

“That’s a good luck thing he started doing in peewee football,” I said.

“Well, I hate to call him stupid, but he’s still shoveling and the car’s been off . . . what? Two minutes?” Digby tooted the horn, threw up his hands, and yelled, “What’s up, buddy? Yeah. Engine’s off.”

Austin got in the backseat. “Hey . . . you’re Digby, right?”

“Hey, Austin.” Digby pointed at Austin’s gym bag and football helmet on the backseat. “Got a game later or something?”

“That’s my workout stuff,” Austin said. “Uh . . . we don’t play football in the spring, dude.”

I cringed at Austin’s patronizing tone.

“Way I hear it, you don’t play football in the fall either, *dude*. Still riding the bench praying Henry gets injured?” Digby said.

“Okay, Digby,” I said, “that’s—”

“I’m the backup QB. I play plenty. You’d know that if you knew anything about football,” Austin said.

“Got me there, sporto,” Digby said. “I’m up nights worrying about everything I don’t know about football.”

“Should I get the hose?” I said. “Digby, can we talk later? Austin and I were about to go to the mall.”

“Afternoon mall date?” Digby said.

“No, we’re going to work,” I said. “I’m going to Spring Fling afterward.”

“Spring Fling? Is that on today? Wait—work?” Digby said. “You mean that stuffed shirt of a father really did cut you off?”

“Dad’s a man of his word,” I said.

“You didn’t use the secret I told you about him?” Digby said. “That information’s good.”

“You mean that stuff you got on him hiding money from Mom? No,” I said. “I’m not a natural-born extortionist like you. I can’t suddenly start blackmailing people.”

“It’s light blackmail,” Digby said.

“I’d rather just work,” I said.

“What’s wrong with working?” Austin said.

“Wait a minute . . . this isn’t your mom’s car.” Digby hooked his fingers on the gunlock bolted onto the dashboard. He found a removable police siren under his seat. “Is this . . . Officer Cooper’s take-home car?” He worked it out. “They’re still together? Your mom and the cop who arrested you are in a serious relationship? Princeton, your life is *interesting*.”

“He moved in three months ago,” I said.

“Wow . . . monotone. That happy, huh? Liza works fast.” Digby dove across me and fished around under my seat.

“Hey, man. Not a fan of your face in my girlfriend’s lap,” Austin said.

There was a loud rip of Velcro and Digby’s hand came up holding a mag of ammunition Cooper had stashed under the seat. “Whoa, I wonder if the gun’s in here somewhere too.”

“Maybe you should put that back,” I said.

“Babe, I’m going to be late,” Austin said. “We should take the bus.”

“Come to think of it, I have mall stuff to do myself,” Digby said. “I’ll come with.”

“Good,” Austin said.

“Good,” Digby said.

“Great,” Austin said.

“Great,” Digby said. He had that lethal bored expression I wished Austin knew to fear as much as I did.

“Wonderful,” I said. “I better tell Mom we’re not waiting for the tow truck with her.”

TWO

Longest bus ride of my life. Austin is an old-timey *Lady and the Tramp* sweet kind of guy and he was being his usual affectionate self, sharing headphones with me and holding my hand. I'd seen Digby actively lash out at this kind of sentimental display before, but this time Digby just smirked at me. I was amazed we made it to the mall without incident.

"See you later, Austin. I'll walk Zoe to work." Digby's tone reminded me of the obnoxious message shirt a friend of ours used to wear: your girlfriend is in good hands.

Austin flinched but said, "That's cool, dude. I know how it is."

"Oh?" Digby said.

"Sure," Austin said. "Zoe told me everything."

"Really? What did she tell you?" Digby said. "Just so we're on the same page."

I'd been dreading this moment. Austin had gotten into the car before I'd had a chance to tell Digby there were things I hadn't told Austin. Our kiss, for example.

"About what happened last year with the explosion . . . I know you guys were tight," Austin said. "Like the brother she never had."

What a great thing to say to a guy with a missing sister.

"That's right. Brother she never had . . . that's me," Digby said. "Exact same page."

Austin gave me an extra-assertive kiss and left for work.

"Maybe if I hug you later, he won't have any choice but to whip it out and mark you with his pee," Digby said. "Better spend some time reassuring him tonight . . . sis."

"I didn't know what to tell him. You were gone—"

"Of course. What's to tell?" But his tone was all accusation.

"It's so annoying that you make me feel like somehow *I've* done something wrong." I walked away. He let me get pretty far before running after me.

"Hey, wait up," he said. "Where are you going?"

"I told you. Work."

I stopped for coffee. When he added two cookies to my tab, I said, "You still eat like a wolverine?"

Digby gave me his lazy sad-eyed smile. I wondered if, as he'd done before, he was planning on sleeping in his mom's garage, living on soup crackers and to-go packets of ketchup again.

“Work, huh?” Digby looked me up and down.

“What? You’re freaking me out,” I said.

“Give me a sec, I’m a little rusty. Okay, no makeup, so not any kind of cosmetics gig. Vintage dress, frumpy, dowdy housewife-y flavor . . .”

The barista helping me frowned at Digby. “Excuse *you*. Rude or anything?” she said.

“. . . so not any kind of trendy retail. The food court’s out. The face you pull whenever I eat . . . you don’t have a future in food service,” Digby said. “Those heels are surprisingly high for you, so you’re not walking across a big department store . . .”

“Come on, let’s speed this up,” I said.

“Okay, fine. I’ll go with either intern at the bank or the Hallmark store,” he said.

Watching him flounder was comical.

“The florist? The crystals place? Not the Lotto shack?” he said.

“Uh-oh, you’re more than rusty, my friend,” I said.

We walked into The Last Bookstand, the used books place where I worked.

“Wait, this is new. It wasn’t here when I left,” Digby said.

“Excuses, excuses. Old Digby would’ve memorized the new mall map at the entrance,” I said.

“Dammit,” he said. “Old Digby *would* have memorized the map.”

The store was empty, but I heard my manager working in the back. “Fisher! I’m here . . . sorry I’m late. Car trouble.”

Digby sniffed. “Is that patchouli? Incense?”

“Patchouli incense,” I said. “Listen, my manager, Fisher, had a hemp farm in Vermont. When you meet him, you’re going to want to make fun, but you’re not allowed. He’s the nicest man I’ve ever met and he’s had a tough year.”

“Okay. No jokes. Hippie jokes are too easy anyway,” Digby said. “Hey, uh . . . Princeton? I think I missed a birthday somewhere. I got you something.”

The box’s shade of blue was guaranteed to generate excitement from twenty feet away.

“Tiffany?” I said.

“Well, Tiffany dot com,” he said. “Open it.”

“You got me a locket?” I was surprised enough when I saw that he’d cut out and mounted photos in the little oval frames, but when I saw he’d chosen decent selfies of us at the winter ball, I was speechless.

“But maybe don’t shower with it on . . .” he said.

“Right. The silver will tarnish . . .” I said.

“Also I hid two micro SD cards in there,” he said.

“Of course you did,” I said, passing the box back to him. “What’s on them?”

“When I got home to Texas, I backed up my dad’s computer onto those SD cards,” he said.

“Backed up? You mean stole his files.”

Digby popped out the pictures and showed me the SD cards walled in behind a clear coating.

“I potted them in resin so they wouldn’t rattle around,” he said.

“So, in sum, you stole top secret government information from Perses Analytics that you think people are kidnapping children to get, you put it in this necklace, and you now want me to hang it around my neck,” I said.

“It’s my backup . . . in case they find the copy I’m working on,” Digby said.

“Why can’t we bury it or something? Or put it behind an air-conditioning vent?” I said.

“You mean with my clove cigarettes and Victoria’s Secret catalogs? Don’t be ridiculous, Princeton,” he said. “This is serious.”

“No.”

“Come on . . . the answer to who took my sister could be in one of those things,” Digby said, pushing the box back across the counter.

“Then *you* wear it,” I said.

“Are you kidding? They’ll search me first thing,” he said.

“And they’ll search me second. I’m always with you,” I said.

“Always with me?” Digby raised his eyebrows. “And how will Austin like that?”

Austin. Right.

“Hey, Zoe . . .” Fisher walked out of the back holding a vase of hydrangeas Austin had given me a week ago. “Check it out, these are still looking good . . . even though I absolutely loathe hydrangeas.” I slid the box off the counter and into my jacket pocket. I just didn’t feel like Fisher needed to see Digby giving me something in a Tiffany box.

“*You’re* the hippie hemp-head from Vermont?” Digby said.

“I guess so,” Fisher said. “Are you a friend of Zoe’s?”

Kudos to Fisher for not flinching when Digby leaned into him and took a deep sniff.

“I’m so sorry, Fisher,” I said.

“You must be Digby,” Fisher said. “Recognize you from Zoe’s stories, man. I like the suit.”

Digby paced around Fisher. “And you’re Fisher. Allegedly.”

“Allegedly? Yeah, I am. No ‘allegedly,’” Fisher said.

“I’m so sorry, Fisher, he’s . . .”

“Your beard’s new and still itches . . . I smell the alcohol in the anti-itch stuff you put on. Half your hair’s glued-on hairpieces . . . like you had to grow it really fast . . . looks like six months’ worth. Right when you showed up in town, I bet,” Digby said.

“Digby. Hair? Really?” I said.

“But what’s really interesting is the layout of this place.” Digby was excited now. “See how the aisles are arranged so customers have to pass by the front desk to get in or out of the store? It looks like a crazy hippie hoarder maze but really, it’s an Army Ranger ambush . . . the thieves are canalized past this choke point. How d’you know how to do that?”

“How do *you* know how to do that?” Fisher asked Digby. “*Canalized?* Wow . . . *that’s* some word.”

“So sorry, Fisher. Although, now that I’m thinking about the shelves . . . is this a fire hazard?” I said.

“Fire hazard. Wait.” Digby ran out of the store and came back holding a fire extinguisher. “Princeton, did you have to rearrange the shelves? Around . . . December 20?”

“Uh, actually, yeah . . . we put in a rack of fancy booklights before Christmas—”

“But then he had you put the shelves back into this maze shape a couple of days later?” Digby said.

“Well, yeah, the booklights weren’t selling,” I said.

Digby showed me the fire extinguisher’s tag. “The fire inspector checked this mall on the twenty-first of December.” Digby pointed at Fisher. “You made her move the shelves on the twentieth for the fire marshal’s visit and then after you passed inspection, you had her rebuild the ambush.” Digby pumped his fist. “Old Digby. What are you? Cop? Military?” Digby said. “Or . . . worse?”

Fisher looked mostly sad for Digby. “The smell of alcohol’s probably from the mouthwash I used after my breakfast burrito. The store’s laid out like this because the collectibles are in the back and this ain’t my first time at the rodeo,” Fisher said. “And I put in hairpieces because my hair grew out patchy after my chemo last year. Lion needs his mane, man.”

Digby kept going. “Chemo, huh?”

“Digby, if you’re ever going to draw a line . . . ever? Cancer’s got to be over that line,” I said.

“Chemo. That’s a good explanation. Solid.” Digby walked toward Fisher, not stopping even when he got so close that Fisher had to start backing up. “But explain *this*.”

Digby swatted my coffee cup off the counter. My scream turned into a swallowed gurgle when Fisher caught the cup without spilling a drop.

“Those are great reflexes,” Digby said.

Keeping the rest of his body perfectly still, Fisher swept my vase of hydrangeas off the desk. Digby similarly caught it.

“I could say the same thing about you,” Fisher said.

“Would you two idiots have this stupid argument with someone else’s stuff?” I snatched the coffee and vase from them. “Digby, stop picking fights. Are you tired or something? Hungry?”

“So hungry,” he said.

“God, you’re a toddler. Why don’t you go eat something?”

“Yeah . . .” Digby said. “See you after you get out of work? We should talk.”

The way he suddenly got intense when he said that made my heart thump. I didn’t know if I was ready to *talk*.

Just when my awkward unresponsiveness started to get painful, Fisher said, “If you like, it’s pretty slow right now . . . you could go hang out. I can text you if things pick up.”

“That’s the weirdest, most un-manager thing I’ve ever heard,” Digby said.

“Happy workers work happily, man,” Fisher said.

“More like employee turnover makes it hard to maintain a cover identity.” Digby grabbed a book. “How much is this?”

“On the house, kid,” Fisher said. “I’d *pay* money to get young people to read Pynchon.”

“See what I mean? Weird.” On his way out, Digby said, “Watch him.”

“That’s dark, man,” Fisher said.

“That’s nothing. He carries around a notebook where he keeps a list of suspects and motives so the police will have leads if he ever turns up murdered,” I said.

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