

THE MISSING DOG IS SPOTTED

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Jessica Scott Kerrin



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To my sister, Leslie, the veterinarian

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One

Club Photo

TREVOR HATED high shelves more than anything. So he sighed deeply when he discovered that the book he wanted — *The Case of the Waylaid Water Gun* — was sandwiched between other mystery novels on the tallest bookshelf at his school's library.

Out of reach.

He searched for the rolling footstool that the librarian used from time to time. He discovered it in the next aisle and pushed it back to his spot where he wedged it against the stack so it wouldn't move. Trevor climbed up and reached.

No luck.

He stood on his tippy-toes and reached again.

Still no luck.

He stepped down and began to pile books from the lower shelf onto the stool to give himself more height.

Big thick books.

“Need some help?”

Trevor recognized the voice, a classmate.

He looked up. Way up. It was Loyola Louden.

Loyola Louden, the school giant.

For the past year, ever since Trevor had arrived at Queensview Elementary to enroll in grade six, the two of them had had a secret, unspoken pact. Under absolutely no circumstances were they to appear together side by side.

Ever.

It wasn't because they didn't like each other. They actually didn't know each other all that well. As far as Trevor could tell, Loyola was a perfectly normal grade-six girl. She hung out with a typical group of chatties, they talked nonstop about clothes, they whispered to each other by holding their hand to the other person's ear rather than just speaking under their breath like the boys did, and when they giggled, which was all the time, it was typically over nothing. To Loyola and her circle of friends, everything was a Very Big Deal.

Trevor hardly paid them any attention. But he couldn't help noticing how Loyola struggled to blend in despite her height.

Once, when the class was handing in assignments by passing their work to the person who sat in front of them and so on all the way up to the first row, Trevor spotted Loyola's handwriting. It was tiny and cramped,

as if her words wanted to take up as little space as possible on the white page.

In recent months, she had also started slouching. Just a bit. Especially when she was sitting with the chatties outside of class, like during lunch. When the giggling became too much and a teacher called out to them to pipe down, she would hunch like a Galapagos tortoise pulling into its giant shell.

Also, Trevor had noticed a change in her color choice for clothes. She had moved away from the brilliant pinks and oranges that the chatties favored on the days that they didn't have to wear their school uniforms. Now she wore browns and grays and dark greens, turning herself into an invisible backdrop for the merry parade of shorter girls surrounding her.

Then there was her voice. She had started speaking in softer tones, maybe thinking that doing so somehow made her appear smaller. It didn't. Besides, her booming laughter gave her away. It filled the corners of the room and turned every head within earshot.

Trevor knew one more thing about Loyola. Whenever she met someone for the first time, it was the same routine. She was asked if she was a basketball player.

Loyola, who despised basketball, always had a great comeback.

"No," she would say. "Equestrian's my thing. I'm actually training to be a jockey."

Trevor enjoyed the next part — the confused look on the face of whoever had suggested that Loyola was a basketball player. Either they didn't get her sense of humor, or they didn't know what a jockey was.

Trevor knew all too well that jockeys were elite race-horse riders.

He also knew that the ideal jockey was small.

Unusually small.

Like Trevor.

Trevor was the shortest boy in his class. In fact, he was shorter than the boys below him in grade five.

And the boys in grade four.

And even a few in grade three.

Trevor understood exactly why Loyola didn't like standing next to him. It was because she'd look like the giant in "Jack and the Beanstalk."

Or the beanstalk.

So they stayed clear of each other, their secret pact standing between them.

"What are you doing here?" he asked.

"Borrowing books," she replied curtly, a stack of them on her hip.

Awkward silence. Then the library's telephone rang.

"Queensview Elementary Library," Ms. Wentzell, the librarian, said from behind her desk. "How can I help you?"

A short pause and then, "Oh dear. How sad," Ms. Wentzell said, her voice stricken.

Both Trevor and Loyola drifted out of the aisle and toward her desk.

“No, I haven’t seen it. But I will keep a lookout. What’s your telephone number, just in case?”

She jotted it down.

“And you’ve checked with the animal shelter? Of course. Of course. I’ll ask around and I’ll let you know. Bye for now.”

Ms. Wentzell sadly shook her head as she hung up.

“What’s wrong?” Loyola asked.

“Someone’s lost a dog,” she explained. She got up from her desk and went to the library’s window. She looked across the school’s soccer field and scanned the fence line.

“What does it look like?” Trevor asked.

“White with brown spots. Short ears. Medium-sized.”

All three studied the landscape, but there were no dogs with spots mingling with the recess crowd.

“If not here, then maybe the cemetery,” Ms. Wentzell suggested.

“The cemetery?!” Trevor and Loyola exclaimed together.

“The owner says it loves to run in wide-open spaces.”

“Yes, but the *cemetery*?” Trevor repeated.

Trevor knew a bit about the old Twillingate Cemetery. He passed by its ugly iron gate every day on his way to and from school.

The signs posted next to the gate were bleak:

Beware of Falling Gravestones

Enter at Your Own Risk

Closed at Sunset

No Dogs Allowed

Inside, the cemetery was even more ominous. It was jammed with ancient gravestones toppling this way and that. There were some benches and a hedgerow, and beyond that there was the newer part of the cemetery with much plainer markers arranged in straighter lines. There were never any visitors, or dogs for that matter, which added to the forlorn look of the place.

“The cemetery’s no place for lost dogs,” he said to Ms. Wentzell. “Mr. Creelman would never allow it.”

Mr. Creelman was the cemetery’s elderly grounds-keeper. He was in charge of a small group of equally elderly men called the Twillingate Cemetery Brigade. They cared for the grounds and made repairs to the gravestones in need of cleaning. When they took breaks from their work, they hung out at Sacred Grounds Cafe nearby, which was famous for its excellent lasagna. Trevor knew all this because Mr. Creelman had once been a guest speaker at the Queensview Mystery Book Club.

Trevor joined the Queensview Mystery Book Club as soon as it was formed, back at the beginning of grade six, because he had always loved solving riddles. The club was one of the reasons that Queensview was better than any other school he’d been to, which was four so far.

When Mr. Creelman visited the club, he talked about how to uncover buried family secrets by studying grave markers. He also told them about the history of the stone carvers at Twillingate Cemetery and what the symbols meant. Then he hauled out a book called *Famous Last Words* and grimly recited one gravestone poem after another in his gravelly monotone voice.

Trevor shook his head at the memory.

The school bell rang.

Ms. Wentzell returned to her desk but Trevor lingered, pretending to study the large map of the world on the wall near the window. He was waiting for Loyola to leave so that he could retrieve his book without her help. But she took forever to sign out her tall stack of books.

Trevor studied the map some more, trying to remember which countries his parents, both pilots, were flying to that week. His bedroom was filled with things from around the world that they had brought back from their trips — various globes, a plush monkey who bicycled across a tightrope strung between two walls, curious action figures that looked like astronauts, puzzle books, spinning tops, exotic model cars, dancing marionettes and musical instruments that made strange sounds.

Because Trevor's parents were working their way up to becoming captains by gaining experience flying different types of airplanes under different types of conditions, they had to jump at job openings when

they had the chance. In fact, they were moving again for their next assignment right after Trevor graduated from grade six, which was in three months.

“Don’t you both have your photo session now?” Ms. Wentzell asked.

All the club photographs for the yearbook were being taken that morning.

“I almost forgot!” Loyola exclaimed as she stacked her last book under her arm, then bolted.

Trevor immediately made a beeline for the rolling footstool, heaped some more books on it, climbed up, and, teetering like mad, snatched *The Case of the Way-laid Water Gun* from the loathsome top shelf.

By the time he finished signing his book out, the school’s hallways were empty.

Trevor checked the wall clock. He could still make the photo shoot for the Queensview Mystery Book Club if he hurried. He dashed to the gym, knowing exactly what he would see. There would be a spot at the end of the front row saved for him. And, in the very middle of the back row, Loyola would be lordling over everyone, surveying the tops of the heads before her. It would be just like their grade-six class picture taken at the beginning of the year all over again.

Trevor pushed through the gym door but stopped in his tracks. The gym was empty. Had he missed the photo session?

“Trevor!”

He turned at the sound of his name. It was Ms. Albright, the school’s secretary, hustling down the hallway toward him.

“I thought I saw you rush by. I just told Loyola there’s been a change of plans. The Queensview Mystery Book Club photo is being taken outside on the soccer field. If you hurry, you can still make it.”

“Thanks,” Trevor said, and he charged past her through the back door to the schoolyard, where it was unusually warm for April.

“Wait!” Trevor yelled as soon as he spotted his club on the field. The photographer had arranged the members sitting in a semi-circle, and they were reading mystery novels, including Loyola.

Mr. Easton, Trevor’s grade-six teacher who was also new to the school and who had founded the club, stood and waved him over. The photographer stepped back from his tripod.

“Have a seat between Noah and Jennifer,” Mr. Easton instructed as he returned to his own spot.

Trevor plopped down with relief — relief that they would be sitting for the photo and not arranged according to height like all the other school shots he had ever been in. He opened the book he had just signed out and turned to chapter one.

“Ready?” the photographer directed.

On cue, everyone turned to their books once again, except Miller, another member of the club, who was secretly giving Noah rabbit ears.

Click, click, click.

“All done,” the photographer announced.

Mr. Easton stood to chat with the photographer as he packed up his equipment.

“Where were you?” Noah asked.

“At the library,” Trevor said. “Why?”

“Mr. Easton posted the assignments for community service duty.”

“Where?”

“On the wall just outside the classroom.”

Trevor knew that all grade-six students had to volunteer for three months of community service in order to graduate from Queensview.

Noah stood up.

“What’d you get?” Trevor asked, standing, too.

“I’m helping out at the veterans’ hospital.”

“That’s what I wanted!” Trevor said.

“Oh, that’s too bad. It’s full now.”

“That’s okay. Maybe I got the soup kitchen,” Trevor said. It was his second choice.

“That’s full, too,” Jennifer said, eavesdropping. “I got that, along with Bertram.”

“Really? Then what did I get?” Trevor asked.

“Don’t know,” Noah said. “Go find out.”

Trevor didn’t hesitate. He trucked past the playground

equipment where a few of the birdhouses his class had made from outdated textbooks were still hanging.

Mr. Easton was always getting them to do fun projects like that. Another time he had his students write poems about the sky on kites that they had made. Then they flew the kites in the schoolyard. Trevor had written about the vapor trail that airplanes leave behind. His parents got all weepy when he read that poem to them, and they had it framed.

Trevor pushed those memories aside as he re-entered the school. His classroom was upstairs, across from the music room. It felt like an eternity to reach it, but there on the wall, next to the door, was a large sheet of paper titled *Community Service Assignments*.

Trevor scanned the sheet as fast as he could. As he read the penned-in names of his classmates, his concern grew. Gone were his first, second and third choices. Then, at the very bottom, Mr. Easton had written Trevor's name in his left-handed, loopy, backward-slanted penmanship.

Trevor read the name of the organization to which he had been assigned.

The Twillingate Cemetery Brigade.

Trevor heard a gulp behind him.

He turned around and looked up.

Way up.

And then he spun back to the list on the wall just to be sure.

It was true.

Her name had been written right beside Trevor's in that same loopy, backward-slanted handwriting, filling the only other spot for the Twillingate Cemetery Brigade.

Loyola Loudon.