

My Imaginary Friend, Book 1: The Red Thread Murders

The Beginning

7:33 PM

It all starts with a phone call.

Yeah, I know, right? How original. But I'm not making this stuff up, so there you go.

[[Pick up the phone.]]

[[Ignore it.]]

Pick up the phone.

Before you can reach it, Susan's dad is on the case. It's _his_ phone, after all.

(display: "The Detective")

Ignore it.

Never try, never fail. That's my motto, anyway.

It's all right, though, because Susan's dad is on the case. It's _his_ phone, after all.

(display: "The Detective")

Eavesdrop

That proves to be surprisingly difficult because the conversation is rather one-sided: the senior detective's brow is wrinkled, and his responses are more like confirmatory grunts than anything else.

After a minute or so of this, he covers the receiver with one hand and mouths "Do you have a--"

Before he can finish, Susan's already holding out a small notepad and a purple pen embellished with pink sparkles. She grins, sweetly.

He quickly jots something down and rips a page from the pad. (display: "Departure")

[["Looks like he forgot something!" Susan exclaims, far too cheerfully. ->The Forgetful Detective]]

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Try to figure out what has captured Susan's interest.

There's a manila folder balanced precariously on the edge of the kitchen table.

You asked Susan what "manila" meant once, and, with all the confidence of an internet-raised Millennial, she told you that the paper used to be made from Manila hemp fibers derived from inedible bananas. Knowledge is power, and all that.

This folder in particular looks like a case file of some kind, probably Mr. Gable's latest project, and Susan is eyeing it covetously.

[[Knock it over the edge when the perceptive detective isn't looking.]]
[[Try to listen to the phone conversation instead. ->Eavesdrop]]

.....

The Detective

Mr. Gable is in his mid-forties, prematurely balding, and as he brings the Blackberry to his ear, his "muscles" wobble slightly more than you might expect from a typical police detective, unless you buy into that whole donut cliché. I certainly don't.

Susan throws you the surreptitious Look that you've come to dread in your many years as her imaginary friend.

[[Try to listen to the phone conversation. ->Eavesdrop]]

[[Try to figure out what has captured Susan's interest.]]

Knock it over the edge when the perceptive detective isn't looking.

While interacting with the physical world isn't exactly your strong suit, this is child's play. The folder slips from the table with barely a sound and conveniently falls open, revealing a set of grisly photos secured by a paperclip.

Before you can take a closer look, though, you can hear Mr. Gabel get up. (display: "Departure")

The folder is still on the ground where it fell.

[[I guess he forgot something. Oops...->Induced Forgetfulness]]

The Forgetful Detective

Amidst the dirty dishes on the kitchen table, you can see that the forgetful detective left several items behind in his haste: his manila folder and Blackberry. There's also Susan's notepad and pen, but I'm guessing those were left intentionally.

"So, my young apprentice," Susan says theatrically, eyes gleaming with excitement, "how shall we uncover _The Detective's_ whereabouts?"

You point to...

[[the manila folder, presumed repository for classified case information->manila folder]]

[[the Blackberry, a clunky communications device from a former decade->Blackberry]]

[[the writing implements, tools of the trade for any intrepid young detective->writing implements]]

[[nothing. Susan needs to start taking things more seriously.->serious]]

manila folder

Death greets you from between the manila flaps. This definitely isn't age-appropriate reading material -- for either of you.

(live: 1s)[...eleven murders so far...]

(live: 2s)[...no commonality between victims...]

(live: 3s)[...young, old...]

(live: 4s)[...male, female...]

(live: 5s)[...different ethnicities...]

(live: 6s)[...red string found at crime scenes...]

(live: 7s)[The pictures are the worst part.]

(live: 8s)[So many corpses.]

(live: 9s)[All of them dead from different causes: strangulation, drowning, beheading, crushing, evisceration, blood loss, the list goes on.]

(live: 11s)[All different except for the blood red thread adorning the bodies: binding, cutting, or threaded through natural or artificial orifices.]

(live: 12s)[Susan's face is ghostly white as she examines an image of a nude man carved into patterned sections by an intricate red mesh.]

[[Close your eyes.]]

Blackberry

It's clearly a work-issued device; under ordinary circumstances, Susan's father would never carry around such a "high-tech doohickey" (his words, not mine).

Unlocking the phone is a cinch; most people, when mandated to choose a four-digit password that isn't all the same number, doesn't contain personally identifiable information, and needs to be changed every month, will choose something with a

pattern they can easily remember.

Susan gets in on her third try: 1-1-1-4.

Fortunately for the sake of her father's digital security, but less fortunately for the two of you, nothing is actually stored on the phone except a list of recent contact numbers. I'm sure Mr. Gabel knows exactly how to use more than `0.01%` of his handheld computer's capabilities and has merely elected not to use them.

[["You could call the person he just spoke to."->Call]]

[["I guess the notepad he was using would be a better bet."->writing implements]]

writing implements

"An astute deduction, my dear Watson."

Susan produces a pencil from up her sleeve and tumbles it between her fingers. She's been studying Houdini lately.

"With this Detective's Implement, I shall uncover the depressions... left in the parchment... forthwith." At this last, she gives the pencil a dramatic flourish and almost drops it -- she could probably use a bit more practice.

But no matter. A few rapid scribbles with the side of the pencil later, and an address is revealed on the pad:

=><=

143 Glensdale Ave

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[["Let's go!"->Following]]

Departure

"I'm on my way."

"Sorry, kiddo," he says, kissing Susan's forehead and ruffling her hair. "Duty calls. Bed by midnight and I'll see you in the morning."

A moment later, you can hear his car leaving the driveway.

Induced Forgetfulness

"Maybe that wasn't such a good idea..." Susan says. "But nothing's stopping us from looking in the folder now."

[["Nope!"->manila folder]]

[["Except for a sense of propriety..."->serious]]

serious

"Don't be such a spoilsport!" she says, chidingly.

It's times like this when you remember that Susan is barely fifteen.

"I want to know what my dad's hiding."

[[No power on earth can withstand the intensity of Susan's pouting expression.->manila folder]]

Following

Glensdale Avenue is about 15 minutes away by bike, and you make good time, riding on Sarah's shoulders.

You can tell something is wrong from half a block away. The perimeter to the mansion at 143 is unguarded, and the three empty cop cars parked in a vague semicircle on the gravel driveway are loosely spidered by a fine red thread.

The massive front doors stand ominously ajar, and there is a single fibrous line winding through the entranceway.

"Come on!" Susan says, pulling you along.

[["I have a bad feeling about this."->To be continued...]]

Close your eyes.

You stay like that for a long time, trying to push the images from your mind.

"We should get this back to dad." Susan's tone is resolute, although you can see her hands shaking slightly.

[["Let's call him."]]

[["Let's figure out where he's going."]]

"Let's call him."

"You're not very observant, are you?" Susan asks, indicating [[the abandoned Blackberry on the table->Blackberry]].

"Let's figure out where he's going."

"Obviously," Susan declares, dark thoughts momentarily pushed aside. "What resources do we have to determine my father's location?" She indicates the kitchen table, resplendent with Mr. Gable's forgotten Blackberry and the notepad and pen you vaguely remember him using before he left.

You point to...

[[the Blackberry->Blackberry]]

[[the writing implements->writing implements]]

Call

Susan twists her mouth. "I guess I don't really want my dad getting in trouble for being forgetful."

(live: 1s)[She thinks for a moment, and then her eyes light up. "Ah, what the hell."]

(live: 2s)[Susan pulls out her own phone and dials the number.

"Kin oi speak to 'tective Gable, please? I 'ave some 'portant information 'bout the case he's workin'"

I think Susan might have been watching a wee bit too much Veronica Mars lately.

"I'm sorry, but he isn't in right now. I could pass on a message..."

"Chip? That you?"

"Sorry, who is this?"

Susan drops the accent. "Sorry about that, it's Susan -- remember me?"

"Gable's kid, right? Neat accent. Yeah, hey, what's up?"

"I think my dad's phone is dead and he dropped some case files he might need as he rushed out the door. Could you tell me where he went, please? I could bring them to him."

"I... guess that might be ok. He's at a crime scene down on Glensdale, 143, I think. You can probably hand them to one of the people at the perimeter. You can't go in, though, obviously."

"Thanks so much, Chip. Really appreciate it."

"No problemo."

[["Alright," Susan says, ending the call. "Let's go!"->Following]]

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To be continued...

To be continued...

Title

<h2>My Imaginary Friend, Book 1: The Red Thread Murders</h2>

An interactive story by Julian Ceipek.

[[Begin->The Beginning]]