

The Case of the Broken Tumbler



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Well Enough Alone

As with most things in my life, I should have known better at the time and kept my nose out of other peoples business, but what can I say, I'm nosy. The whole affair started during the waning hours of my previous greatest investigation, The Case of the Missing Xylophone Mallet.

Alan Greenbelt, the best percussionist in the schools marching band, had come to me almost in tears the previous day. He was a nerdy kid, even by band standards, but we'd been on good terms since last year when he helped me find Alicia Fairbanks missing hamster. As he approached I couldn't help noticing he was working hard to hold back panic, but I could tell it was welling up like a dam ready to burst.

"Sarah, you've got to help me! I've been looking for it everywhere and the homecoming game is this weekend, there's no way I can play without it!"

He had the most annoying way of starting sentences half way through, like I already knew what he was talking about. "Hold on Alan, calm down and start from the beginning, what's going on?"

He takes a breath, taking a moment to compose himself before saying, "ok, so yesterday morning when I showed up at marching band practice before school, I got my whole uniform on and got everything ready, only when I went to get my mallets out of my bag, they were missing! I always put them in exactly the same place, and in the last two days I've looked absolutely everywhere, someone is trying to ruin me!" I could tell he was starting to get worked up again, so I tried a different tact.

This really isn't worth my time, he can find his own damn mallets

Missing Xylophone mallets just before the big game? Sounds like foul play

Although Alan was in the same marching band as my best friend Macy, I really didn't want to get involved in his drama. It was obvious to me that someone in the band was trying to pull one over on him, a jealous rival percussionist looking to steal his spot, or perhaps a spurned girl just trying to get back at him for some perceived slight, but more than anything I knew this wasn't my problem. However, as the best known detective at Lake Wood High, it wouldn't do to have the word going around that I rejected a case. I saw an easy way out that would fix both these problems.

"Listen Alan, I'll see what I can do. What I need from you is a description of the mallets, and a \$20 retainer to get started and another \$20 when I deliver the goods."

"Ah come on, you're going to change me?"

I force a laugh, "hey, if they're not worth the money then they're not worth my time." I knew asking for the 20 would make him think, silently hoping he would back out.

"Relax, I can pay, I really need those mallets back, they're my lucky set and I can't perform without them." He rummaged through his bag, eventually coming out with a ball of crumpled 1s and 5s. "They're about 10 inches long, wooden with blue felt tips. I've had them since I was a freshman, and I've used them in every show since."

I took the wad of loose bills, pushing them into the pocket of my hoodie, "I'll start asking around, and text you this after lunch if I can dig anything up." Of course I had no intention of doing any such thing, since I already knew exactly where I would find what he was looking for. Just then, the first bell rang and the mass of bodies filling the

hallways started to disperse into the rooms. Alan looked like he was about to say something, but I waved him off and started walking down towards Mr. Brackwords study hall in room 204.

It was a slog getting through the first few periods, and as soon as the bell rang for lunch I launched myself out the doors to the quad. I knew exactly how long it would take to get through my secret route off campus, and down to the music store downtown. I would have just enough time to grab a new set of mallets, swing by my favorite coffee spot for a muffin, and sneak back onto campus before the start of my next class.

I rounded the corner to the quad just in time to see the crowd assembling for the lunch time cheer squad display I had completely forgotten about. The crowd would make my planned departure route impossible, no way no one would notice me hop the fence behind the science building with all these jocks in attendance. I could see once of the vice principals gearing up to take the stage, and had to back peddle hard before drowning in the excess of palpable school spirit. I'd have to swing around the back of the grand stands, but I could still make it if I hurried.

I juke to the right, cutting through the current of lunch traffic, nearly running head first into a giant stuffed squirrel coming the other way, the school mascot headed to the rally. By grabbing a handful of fake fur and doing a full spin, I kept my momentum up and launched myself sideways through the human traffic towards the alley leading between the football bleachers and the science building. Unknown to the student body at large there's a padlocked side gate behind the

bleachers used only by the maintenance staff when they need to track fertilizer onto the field, well, and you're intrepid teenaged private investigator when she's in a hurry that is. I'd first picked the lock freshman year so Macy and I could sneak into the 4th of July fireworks without paying, and it's been yielding dividends ever since.

I skidded to a stop in front of the gate, and slipping my tension wrench into the lock started the familiar process of massaging the tumblers into position. I had popped this lock so many times I could do it by feel at this point, and couldn't help but nervously glance to my left and right as I wiggled the wrench deeper into the lock's mechanism. Normally I would only use this route at night, it was a bit brazen even for me to try and pop an administration padlock in broad daylight, but I was hoping that all the commotion in the quad would draw away any prying eyes. It was as I nervously glanced behind me that I spotted something odd, under the bleachers was what looked like a student's notebook. I felt the last tumbler give, and the immensely satisfying pop of the lock springing open, but before I opened the gate and escaped I couldn't help myself and dashed back to grab the notebook for perusal later.

The rest of the caper went off without a hitch, I grabbed my bicycle from the off-campus rack I habitually locked it too (it wouldn't do to be seen leaving the parking lot) and rode at full speed downtown towards the music shop. As I guessed, the 'unique, irreplaceable' mallets Alan was so worked up about were a cheap set of generic

mallets. I thanked the clerk behind the counter before racing back to campus.

Time to give that notebook a closer look



back to the start



back to the start



FIN

