

A Mystery Solved

“Can I ask you something?” Brian Bennett, rock-star real estate agent and future defendant for fraud, asks before they lead him away.

You nod politely. Might as well give him this, after all, he almost had you.

“I thought I had you,” he flicks his eyes towards the house, “was it my handwriting?”

You had noticed the similar script, but only after Brian gave himself away. In response, you point down to the lawn. “You pace when you’re anxious.”

Brian tracks your finger until he sees the bent grass forming a path where he was walking back and forth the night before. Almost imperceptible, but they don’t bring you in for nothing. The agent laughs, shaking his head and turning toward the patrol car.

As Officer Jenkins loads him into the backseat. Brian gives him a wink and says, “I never stood a chance.” Jenkins closes the door and tosses you a wink as if to say it was meant for you all along. Normally, you’d prefer to never be winked at, but you know Brian Bennett is too proud to bow.

You turn back to the house. Two stories with a triangle shaped roof. You don’t know what the different styles are called, so you name this architecture “typical tv house”. The kind of place families always own in shows that has plenty of windows and maybe two staircases for no reason.

It’s nearly impossible to sneak up on you, so you greet Detective Hutter when she’s still a dozen paces away. Her eyebrows raise in brief surprise before settling in a friendly smile. You may have had your differences, but like athletes competing in a championship game, you’ve developed a sincere respect for one another.

“Think you’ll be invited to the housewarming party?” She nods towards our vindicated inheritor of the typical tv house as they swagger in the front door, not bothering to close it behind themselves.

“I’d say we have a rapport.” You watch the owner’s tail drift into the shadows of the home.

When Daisy Bouchard passed away last week, so ended a lifetime of benevolent real estate business. Daisy wanted to share the good fortune of her parent’s wealth by purchasing homes all around the state and selling them to families that could really use them. She was careful in what she sold to who, taking her time to ensure that each family was matched with the perfect house they could afford and grow in. In the last few years, she did her business with Brian Bennett.

This may be a typical tv house because it was the one Daisy herself lived in. Adorable but still plenty big. She had intended to leave it to her companion and best friend, until Brian tried to bribe his way into the will.

It was this morning over a cup of tea that you had thought to walk around the house itself, remembering how Daisy’s friend had always looked out the windows when you were there talking to the detectives. What would a scheming real estate agent be doing outside the typical tv house at night if not trying to work himself up to letting Rose out and hoping she’d get lost? Finding Brian’s beaten path in the lawn led you notice Rose’s hair on the front stoop and follow the trail to where she had gotten herself stuck in a tree two streets over.

Detective Hutter had said goodbye and returned to her car while you allowed yourself this quick flashback of your success. She’d come to understand and even appreciate the way you could get lost in thought. You liked to think this deep daytime rumination helped empty your mind enough sleep with little weight to carry.

Waving after the Detective’s white car, you aren’t good with models either but that never stopped you from taking down a license plate, you head towards the house. Perhaps Rose left it open with the intent for you to join her?

The wood flooring is scuffed just enough to make you feel welcome to decide whether you keep your shoes on. You opt for off, leaving them tucked behind

the door and out of the way. Now you'll finally be able to see if that carpet in the front room is as soft as it looks. But first, you'll need to greet your ambivalent host.

You pull out your phone. Jesse has called twice, probably to see how things were going, maybe to give you a new assignment. You silence it, he'll call again but won't be bothered. You've always had a professional relationship flush with understanding boundaries.

The front hall of Daisy's home is delightfully lived in. There are other immaculately decorated houses. Nothing on the countertops and complementary paint colors meeting at every corner and door jam. Those places seek to be a typical tv house but come off with a stark museum quality. You won't find scuffed floors in those homes because a professional will be paid to cover any errant scratch.

Daisy spent her time here with the same ease in which she hoped for those she sold to. You can picture indulgent days of nothing where Daisy and Rose never looked at a clock nor mailed out a bill. Of course, that doesn't mean it's dirty, both occupants took time to clean when cleaning was necessary. While Daisy swept the floors, Rose maintained her coat.

You proceed directly to the kitchen. Light splashes down the hall, casting a midafternoon glimmer over the breakfast nook. You wouldn't be the investigator you are if you couldn't find a happy cat at nap time. Rose lifts her head from the walnut floor, flicks an ear in your direction, and returns to her optimal lounging position.

Her long body, rife with muscle that defies her lackadaisical manner, coils beneath fur a shade of living fog. Seeing her shoulder twitch, you can imagine that her strength as a mysterious creature moving behind a curtain of mist straight out of a thriller. Rose poses no threat, but she certainly wouldn't mind the comparison.

Her angular head is tipped just so to catch the best of the sun. Knifed ears still but switched on. You employ your keen perception to focus on her mouth, discovering a smile that speaks volumes on the subject of relief. She's had a

long week, is surely still in mourning, but rests in the comfort of her love for Daisy.

“I closed the door.” You offer, grabbing a bit of empty floor next to her. Stretching your legs out and letting your weight rest on your splayed palms, you immediately agree this is an excellent spot. The light is as understated as the back garden, offering the true depth of its beauty when you pause long enough. You close your eyes, letting the nothing take over the moment.

You can feel each ray of the sun. They overlap and puzzle piece their way into weaving a quilt of warmth over your skin. Melting away the stress of the case. Turning all those leads and questions and moments of nervous intrigue into a satisfying memory.

The last few days have been a near endless parade of police officers, lawyers, insurance agents, Brian’s bevy of assistants and neighborhood cats Rose knows. Now, it’s just the two of you, feeling like old college buddies even if you’ve only known each other for a long weekend.

As soon as you met Rose, you knew in your heart that she was the true owner. All of the paperwork listed, “my faithful agent and confidant Brian Bennett” but Brian never seemed to stop talking long enough to listen. Rose was always listening.

She may be watching a particle of dust or inspecting her paws, but she was listening. Whenever her or Daisy’s name was spoken, she’d take a moment to evaluate the speaker. When you were that person, you felt the weight of her gaze. This was a cat that had spent hours listening to Daisy’s good and bad days. She didn’t have to look at your nose or your forehead to maintain eye contact. Her eyes didn’t flick back and forth trying to pick which of your eyes to settle on. She simply looked at you. Into you. Animals have a calm quiet way of looking that shows full focus without all the noise people have in their minds.

Your sigh breaks the silence, but her purr affirms that she agrees. There is truly nothing like knowing your problems are behind you. You may get a call tomorrow that has you trudging through the woods or overturning trash bins,

but for now, nothing. Rose's gift for your work in retrieving her inheritance is this moment of pure void.

"Thank you." You lean forward. "Tea?"

Rose flops her tail towards the cupboard, that's where Daisy kept the good stuff. You amble over the stove and flip it to ten, letting the teapot that lives on the top left burner begin its boil. A strong cup of black tea may be nice to celebrate, but you are sure Rose would prefer herbal with berries. Now that you mentally mention it, that sounds perfect right about now.

Your eyes drift up from the amber glow of the burner to the sheen a teapot takes on as it begins to heat. The air surrounding it quivers with heated anticipation. Steam begins to trickle out in a stream thinner than the chimney of a flea. You allow yourself to be drawn into that steam as it gains density. Dusty gray roils out into the kitchen air, merging with the room's temperature.

You read once how opening a refrigerator may cool the kitchen with a quick burst of cold air, but leaving the doors open will actually cause the room to get warmer. Something to do with thermal dynamics. You wonder if the opposite is true and that the kitchen gets cooler when you heat a teapot. Maybe not, it feels warmer near the teapot than in the center of the kitchen. What's more, you've cooked plenty of times and never once thought to throw on an extra layer when the oven was on full blast.

Your experiments with heat stop when you see Rose sitting on the counter. She's watching you with those focused eyes. You don't feel sheepish, being curious is not only part of your job, but also your purpose. Wanting to know more has driven you away from failures and opened doors you never knew were closed. If you weren't curious, you never would have gotten as close to Rose as you have.

And it seems she agrees, her fur moves like campfire smoke with each step until she's at the edge closest to you. Her nails lightly hooked over the Formica countertop. You bring your nose down to hers, making contact with the delicacy of a flea's fireplace flume. Closing your eyes again, this time you bask in the warmth of her friendship.

The long moments that pass are a blink, punctuated by insistent whistle of the teapot.

Pouring the tea is always your favorite part of the ritual. At first the tea bag resists the splash, then embraces it and soon rises to the top. What a wonderful little analogy for meeting a challenge.

Philosophizing aside, seeing the hot water become infused with the snakes of burgundy that escape the tea bag on all sides is simply satisfying. The color is stark, then diluted until the entire cup takes on the life of the tea. You take your time to enjoy the pouring of both cups, setting the teapot on the cool burner next to its home without turning away.

The steeping of herbal tea is almost complete by the time you bring both cups over to the table. Rose lands like a ghost in that it doesn't make a sound and has to be seen to be believed. She settles in front of her cup, tail wrapped around the base to test if it's ready to drink.

You take it back, drinking the tea is your favorite part. Good thing you aren't this indecisive about your job. The best thing about drinking a cup of tea is that you can give yourself over to it entirely. The cup in your hands, the steam on your cheeks, the careful way it must be sipped at first. You adore the way this tea fills you with the beauty of the earth, sliding down to your belly in a form of communion.

Rose licks at hers. Drinking with a bit more speed for a cup so hot but perhaps a cat's tongue doesn't mind as much. Together, you enjoy. This moment of sharing offers a closure to that first cup you had when they brought you in a couple days back. You sat right in this very spot and Rose sat where she is now. You thought out loud that perhaps she would like a cup of tea and all the detectives scoffed. Some of them were probably not in their right minds as they were drinking black coffee in the afternoon with reckless abandon. You knew then what you know now, Rose is a part of this home and everything that takes place in it. She doesn't discriminate from activities that are oft considered human so why should anyone else exclude her. A moot point,

because from now on nothing will happen in this typical tv house without Rose's say.

And now she says that you should both adjourn to the couch. Afterall, the level of her tea has sunk to the point that she'd have to put her entire head in the cup and she's not about to do that. Daisy taught her better. Instead, Rose ghosts to the floor and make her way into the sitting room. Leaving your cup, you follow.

The sitting room is offers a variety of the advertised activity. One long couch is positioned directly across from the bay window and bookended with armchairs. A small loveseat is nestled beneath the windowsill. A tall chair, stoic yet welcoming, has backed into the corner to survey the comings and goings. You would sit but must take a moment to finally embrace the décor of this room.

The walls are lined with spoons. Daisy loved a spoon. Long spoons, small spoons, silver and stainless. Wooden spoons gather on the north wall while ladles look down on the long couch. Of course, teaspoons intermingle with all of these groups. It's not over-crowded or busy, it's consistent. Seeing spoons in this way brings on memories of bright breakfasting and comforting bowls of soup. Moreso, they remind you of all the wonderful times you've shared with others over spoons.

At last, you sit. Rose has been waiting, not impatiently, for your arrival. She doesn't sprawl into the couch like some do, but rests. Her back makes enough contact with the nap of the pillows to bear her slight weight without creation an impression in the fabric. You muse that this couch is the only one Rose has not made an impression on. Even Brian would admit he had a special place for this feline. That's probably why he had to pace so much to work up the nerve.

You don't consciously mimic the way Rose sits, but imitation is the finest form of flattery. Despite the ease of this visit, you've still been active. You sat in the sun and then made tea, which you drank. Now you are existing. Here on this couch, you just remain next to a being of great sincerity. Rose's tail unfurls over your leg, her version of a side hug.

“Thank you.” You say again. You’ll never get tired of being grateful for this. A career dealing with crime, like almost any career, can dim your light. The push and pull of obligation mixed with emotional investment can make even a work you love the dull quality of work you don’t. It’s the moments between responsibility when you have a chance to see yourself for who you are, check in and check out. This is one of those moments. Now, you should probably step out of the serenity of your peaceful mind because you’re missing quite the show.

The oak trees milling about in the front yard are a haven for local birds. Robins, chickadees, cardinals, doves, and finches have gathered for some very important meeting but with a respectful tone. They take turns speaking, making exception for the occasional harmony. The symmetry in which they converse alludes to a familiarity of the proceedings. Maybe this is a weekly gathering, even daily.

From the side of your eye, you watch Rose watch them. Her gaze is passive, not the laser focus of a predator or wanting of an outsider. She takes in the scene with an understanding of the bird’s world and gratitude to be included. You wonder if Daisy brought this entertainment to Rose’s attention or the other way around.

A cardinal takes to the air, looping low only to arch up in a reverse dive. His, you know from his bright red, flight is joined by two finches. Their smaller build shows off in agility as they spiral around the cardinal. The three increase their speed until they become a feathered vortex of aerial elegance. The movement is not frantic but rather an organic swell. It culminates without grandeur, all three simply alighting on the branches from which they came in perfect stillness. Birds must don’t believe in a climatic finale. You allow yourself a single clap before wondering if that’s the appropriate response.

A few more performances follow. The pair of you watch a starling orbit a kestrel and a family of wrens dance with a red-tailed hawk guest star. The event would make a fine spectacle for a half-time show of squirrels versus chipmunks. You’re tempted to check for a popcorn salesman.

As things settle, the birds begin to leave in twos and threes. The transition reminds you that this too must end. Rose's tail has returned to her side of the cushion, not dismissively but permissively for you to leave when you're ready. Part of you isn't sure you'd ever be ready. To know such peace only to return to the rush is a difficult decision. Then again, you wouldn't have recognized this as an oasis if not for the rest of your life. Such lovely balance in everything.

You stand, feet gorging themselves on the carpet you so long wondered about. Rose sits erect, her kitty smile projecting out to fill the room. You return it, transforming this moment into a smile itself.

"Call me anytime."

You're sure she won't need you again. It took everything Brian had to do what he did, no one else would stoop so low as to cross this cat. Still, you'd be honored to have a chance to help her once more, even to pick up a carton of milk.

Rose walks you to the door, brushing your calf in farewell. Stepping onto the porch, you notice the sun has gone behind the clouds, leaving the world outside as uncomplicated as inside. Daisy's rocking chair offers a tilt, and you nod.

Being a curious person, you could write a thousand questions about what you experienced here today. From the microscopic intrigue around the collection of spoons to how some sort of grand design made it so your entire schedule just so happened to clear itself right before you got the call to come here. Any other day, you may have created a cork board map, connecting the clues with pieces of yarn, but today you're happy to let Rose and Daisy keep their secrets.

Sometimes the most satisfying answer is knowing that there will always be too many questions. It's staying open to those questions that keep our hearts alight and our minds marinating the beauty of this life.

As you step down onto the walk, you hear the front door close.