

Chapter Nine

The Case Turns

The next three days were some of the most miserable of my life. I had never been suspended from school until now and these last three days all I could do was think about poor Mr. Mills, my friends, and the case. Mr. Mills, who had always been a friend of my mom and dad, was now having personal trouble. Was this trouble he was having connected with the burglary at school or was it connected with the school being audited?

I continued to lie on my bed almost falling asleep as I continued to ponder about the case. The more I thought about it the more I became troubled by this question. Why was the school being audited? I was no expert and knew I had many things to learn in life still but I remembered my dad telling me one time that audits helped make sure that all financial records or as I call them bookkeeping records were in order and that the money was being used for what it was intended.

These questions continued to race through my mind. Being suspended was no fun I can tell you and being restricted to my room was even less fun. Punching George was wrong, but I admit I sure did enjoy it. Seeing him get mad after being punched pleased me somewhat especially after all the times he bullied me, Lexi and Adrienne but still it was wrong. No matter how good it made feel at the moment, which I admit it made me feel really well, my dad told me that being in the wrong was never the right solution. Two wrongs don't make one right. George was wrong for the bullying just like Adrienne and I were wrong making threats and punching him. We should not have done so and while I saddened to be grounded, I understood the reason for it.

Still, this extra time of mine did have some benefits. It gave me time to think about the facts of the case and what we knew. I had no doubt that once the suspension was over that the three of us would go back to solving this case just as we had been doing. My only hope was the police and the school did not solve the case before we got back. I know that sounds awful. You always want cases to be solved but I confess a part of me wanted the mystery to continue. I, along with my friends Adrienne and Lexi, wanted to solve the case. I was intrigued. What started out as a simple open and shut burglary case was turning out to be anything but. More questions were being asked than were being answered and my dad as an investigator always told me that was never a good thing.

“Abby,” my mom shouted.

“Coming,” I said, as I quickly got up and ran to the kitchen. “What is it mom?”

“Lunch time,” my mom.

“What’s for lunch?” I asked.

“Peanut butter and jelly sandwich,” my mom said.

I sighed. I hated peanut butter and jelly sandwiches but alas I had no choice. I was grounded and I was doing everything I could not to get in more trouble. I wanted to see my friends Adrienne and Lexi again, which meant I needed to stay out of trouble and that meant not to complain or gripe about anything. I started to sit down at the kitchen table when I turned and saw my dad enter.

“Ellen,” my dad said as he walked into the kitchen.

“Dad,” I shouted.

“Hey munchkin,” my dad said.

“Michael, what are you doing home,” my mom said.

“We need to talk. It is about Mr. Mills,” my dad began.

“What is-,” my mom began as she and my dad walked into the den. I did what I could to hear what they were talking about. I was intrigued. *What was happening to Mr. Mills?* I asked myself. Normally my mom and my dad would talk and not be so secretive but the fact they went to the den and left me in the kitchen suggested to me that something big was happening. They began to talk and after a few moments I heard my mom cry.

“Nooooo,” my mom cried.

I had no doubt something big had happened. It was only after I again could hear my dad speak did I realize what was happening.

“Ellen, we will help George all that we can but we must let this play out,” my dad said.

I knew it. Mr. Mills was in trouble. But how? Why? What changed? The other day when my mom, dad and I talked I was assured Mr. Mills was under no investigation and that he would not be in trouble. In a matter of a few days all that changed. Did I miss something important? I was beginning to think to myself that perhaps I was not cut out to be a detective. Perhaps Mr. Mock, Mr. Macy, or heaven forbid Mr. Weller was right in that I would never cut it to be a detective.

I cried silently. All my life I wanted to be a detective and now it appears that Mr. Mock, Mr. Macy and Mr. Weller was right. I was not cut out to be a detective. Solving crimes was an adult business that children should stay out of. I continued to cry as my mom and dad walked into the kitchen.

“Sweetheart, what is wrong?” my dad asked in his usual gentle voice.

“Daddy,” I cried.

“Abby,” my dad said as he pulled me close to him and hugged me.

“What’s wrong?” my dad again asked.

“I will never be a detective,” I cried.

“Abby, Abby,” my dad calmly said. “And where in the world did you get that idea?”

“Everyone at school. They say I can’t do it. I wanted to solve this case but now it seems that I can’t-,” I began.

“Wait. Were you listening to what we were talking about?” my mom asked.

“I did not hear much,” I said.

“Abby,” my dad began. My mom frowned at him but he did not care at the moment as he continued. “Yes, Mr. Mills is having a difficult time. His wife is sick and it looks like based on information the police got yesterday he is now in legal trouble too.”

“You mean he is going to jail,” I said.

“It looks like it. From what I was told today he is being charged with burglary as well as embezzlement,” my dad calmly said.

“Embezzlement,” I asked.

“Abby, embezzlement is a different type of theft crime. It occurs when someone who is entrusted with funds or other assets and uses those funds of assets for other uses than what was intended. This crime takes time to plan and is usually undetected for long periods of time,” my dad said.

“So you are saying if you gave me 100 dollars to buy groceries and I use 90 of it to do and use the other 10 for my personal things without your permission I just embezzled the 10 dollars,” I said.

“Very good Abby. You catch on. That is a simple example but yes essentially that is correct. Embezzlement usually involves a high amount of money,” my dad said.

“How much money are we talking about?” I asked.

“According to the audit report I saw a half a million dollars is what is suspected of being embezzled,” my dad said.

“Half a million,” I said, with shock in my voice.

“I am in shock too Abby,” my dad said.

“Dad, Mr. Mills is innocent,” I protested.

“I know sweetheart. Your mom and I have known Mr. Mills a long time. I am also aware of the struggles that he has been going through lately. Personally, I believe he is innocent but the evidence at the moment, including a call we got yesterday informing of his activities, indicates he is the guilty party,” my dad said.

“That evidence is wrong dad,” I again protested.

“Unless Abby you can prove all that evidence, including the audit report, is plants I am having a hard time seeing how you can prove Mr. Mill’s innocence,” my dad said.

“Dad, you once told me as an investigator that you do go where the evidence leads you but that sometimes you have to go with your gut instinct. Especially when your instinct is telling you something is out of place,” I argued.

“Smart girl. You do sometimes have to go with your instinct,” my dad said calmly.

“Some cases Abby I have had to rely on intuition to help me solve them and other cases it is just so open and close that it seems like it takes very little effort. You are a wise girl Abby, and I can see you doing better than I have. My question for you is what does your heart tell you?”

“That something is out of place and that Mr. Mills is innocent,” I replied.

My dad smiled and laughed. My mon stood there giving me her usual stone glare stern look that she usually did. I did not care. My gut was telling Mr. Mills was innocent and that my

dad was challenging me to prove it. My dad knew I loved challenges and there was nothing bigger of a challenge to disprove what everyone else thought to be true. I wanted nothing more than to become a detective like my dad, my hero. He is one of the few people I truly looked up to and inspired to be like. I wanted nothing more now than to solve the case, prove Mr. Mills innocence, and make my dad proud. That would make things better and make these last three days like they never happened and for the first time since being suspended I was again happy.