

DAPHNE

“HONESTLY, VELMA, IS THIS really necessary?”

Crouching next to me, Velma Dinkley practically hissed, “Shh!”

I hated to point out the obvious, but I did so anyway. “He’s not here yet. We don’t have to whisper.”

“But he *could* be here any second!” Velma countered.

I rolled my eyes but only a half roll. Because Velma was, as usual, kind of right. Even if she did look ridiculous.

As she nestled even farther down into the narrow space between the back of a bench and the brick wall of the dilapidated Crystal Cove movie theater (now playing: a six-month-old movie that everyone had already seen!), I resisted the urge to take a picture. Velma was dressed in head-to-toe black, including her ever-present combat

boots. Even her hair was covered in a black knit beanie cap, and her new glasses—which were, you guessed it, black-rimmed—were slightly too big and covered half her face. She was definitely aiming for incognito but had landed more in the “Wow, is that girl trying to be invisible?” vicinity. Which, knowing Velma the way I do, was an equally plausible possibility.

“What do you think is going on with him?” Velma whispered.

I sighed. We’d had this conversation countless times since the day a few weeks ago that my best friend, Marcy Heller—well, my *other* best friend, since Velma Dinkley had inched her way back into the top tier—had warned me that Shaggy Rogers, one of Crystal Cove High’s most popular students, needed our help. What *kind* of help? Well, that was a mystery.

Luckily, Velma and I were pretty good at solving those.

“I honestly can’t even imagine what he could need our help with,” I confessed. I slunk down next to Velma and rolled my ankles until I heard a satisfying *pop*. Maybe my heeled boots weren’t the best choice for today’s stakeout. “Shaggy’s always been so . . . independent.”

Velma chuckled. “Independent. That’s a good word for it.”

“You would know.” I elbowed her. “You’re just like him.”

“What!” Velma winced when she realized how loudly

she'd gasped. Her voice dropped to a whisper again. "You take that back, Daphne Blake!"

I shrugged. "Hear me out. Shaggy keeps to himself most of the time. He knows everyone, of course, but who really knows him?" Shaggy was easy to be friends with—if you brought him food and petted his Great Dane, Scooby-Doo, he was loyal to you for life—but there was only so much digging under the surface he allowed. He threw parties all the time, which helped cement his popularity at school, but he often disappeared during them, escaping to his bedroom to hang out with Scooby and listen to music. His mother was the chief of police, and his dad—he of the famous Rogers family that helped settle Crystal Cove—had a piece of every business in town. And even though we'd both known him forever, I couldn't think of a single secret of Shaggy's he'd ever revealed to me—not a single worry, or dream, or desire. "Even when we were kids, did you ever feel close to him like you did to me?"

Velma pushed her glasses up the bridge of her nose as she considered this. Years ago, the four of us—me, Velma, Shaggy, and Fred Jones, now a hot member of our school's in-crowd—were super tight. (I guess there were five of us, if you counted Scooby. Which Shaggy definitely did.) We even formed a mystery-solving agency, Mystery Inc., and spent a whole summer finding—and solving—mysteries.

We were ten years old and that was the best summer of our lives . . . until it wasn't. It all fell apart thanks to me . . . but, I reminded myself, things were better now. Much better. Not only had Velma and I made up, but along the way I'd managed to mend my relationship with my mom, and Velma's parents had rightfully regained ownership of their old house and property. Things were looking up for both of us.

"Shaggy *is* hard to get to know," Velma admitted. She trained her serious brown eyes on me, large and intense through her prescription lenses. "And so am I. But don't forget . . . you are, too."

I scoffed. "Everyone in Crystal Cove knows me. And you can thank my mom for that!" Crystal Cove had already had a reputation, thanks to its mysterious history: Three hundred years ago, every resident of Crystal Cove disappeared, save for one. *Poof*. The Vanishing was enough for a town to make its name on, but then Crystal Cove had to go and do something else equally wild: A hundred years later, the entire town burned down. *Poof*, again. Shaggy's great-great-great-whatever-grandfather, Samuel Rogers III, had rebuilt it from scratch. And now here we were: a quiet community on the California coast, surrounded by a sparkling sea on one side and snowcapped mountains on the other, with a history that hung in the air like an impending rainstorm.