

Award-Winning Author of the
Kimberley West Gemstone Mysteries

LYNN FRANKLIN

The Poodle Who Sang Undercover



Top Dog Detective Cozy Mystery

The Poodle Who Sang Undercover

**Top Dog Detective
Cozy Mystery**

By Lynn Franklin



Also by Lynn Franklin

Kimberley West Gemstone Mystery Series

The Blue Diamond

The Pirate's Ruby

The Carolina Emerald

The Turquoise Treasure

Top Dog Detective Cozy Mysteries

The Poodle Who Sang Undercover

Free!

The Antique Diamond:

Kimberley West Gemstone Mystery

Prequel

To get your free copy, visit Lynn at

LynnFranklin.com

A Note from Lynn:

I've never been the greatest speller, so all of my books and stories are extensively reviewed by professional editors and proofreaders. If, however, you find an error, please email me at

Lynn@LynnFranklin.com so I can fix it.

Actually, you can email me even if you don't find problems. I love to hear from my readers. You are the reason that I write.

LynnFranklin.com

Copyright

The Poodle Who Sang Undercover: Top
Dog Detective Cozy Mystery
by Lynn Franklin
© 2023 by Lynn Franklin

All rights reserved. This book or any portion thereof may not be reproduced or used in any manner whatsoever without the express written permission of the publisher except for the use of brief quotations in a book review.

eBook: ISBN 978-1-7353084-8-7

Print: ISBN 978-1-7353084-9-4

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, businesses, places, events and incidents are either the products of the author's imagination or used in a fictitious manner. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, or actual events is purely coincidental.

Dedication

*To Shirley Williams and Barbara Woods
Two of the best poodle aunties ever!*

Contents

Part 1: The Poodle Who Picked Pockets

Chapter 1:	
A Most Unusual Detective Agency.....	2
Chapter 2:	
Unleashed.....	11
Chapter 3:	
SHE Walked In.....	20
Chapter 4:	
You Want Me to do What?.....	32
Chapter 5:	
I Smell Hotdogs.....	49
Chapter 6:	
Look at All the People!.....	64
Chapter 7:	
Escape!.....	77
Chapter 8:	
Fly Like the Wind.....	92

Part 2: The Poodle Who Ran Away From Home

Chapter 9:	
Is She Dead?.....	107

Chapter 10:	
Beware the Dogcatcher.....	124
Chapter 11:	
Follow that Scent!.....	139
Chapter 12:	
Follow that Bus.....	151
Chapter 13:	
My Dog's Faster Than Your Dog.....	160
Chapter 14:	
He Went That Away.....	182
Chapter 15:	
A Squeaky Clue.....	188
Chapter 16:	
Where's the Dip?.....	199
Chapter 17:	
Eddie Come Home.....	213

Part 3: The Poodle Who Sang Undercover

Chapter 18:	
Can I Bite Her?.....	227
Chapter 19:	
Nothin' But a Hound Dog.....	243
Chapter 20:	
Fig Cookies? Blech!.....	261
Chapter 21:	
Jailhouse Rock.....	268
Chapter 22:	
Coffee, Tea or Mystery?.....	298

Chapter 23:	
Midnight Excursion.....	319
Chapter 24:	
Miss Money Penny I Presume?.....	340
Chapter 25:	
Do You Smell What I Smell?.....	358
Chapter 26:	
NOW Can I Bite Her?.....	372
Chapter 27:	
I'm Not Wearing a Hat.....	381
Excerpt from The Blue Diamond.....	389
Free eBook	392
About Lynn Franklin.....	394

Part 1

The Poodle Who Picked Pockets



Chapter 1

A Most Unusual Detective Agency



Kimberley West slid her bike to a stop and gazed up at the squat brick building. This was it: Her last hope.

It didn't look promising.

Set well away from the fashionable shops lining the Chesapeake Bay, the three-story structure anchored a run-down shopping plaza. To her left, a woman wearing ankle-twisting spike heels entered a nail salon. Several mom types wandered into the dollar store. A single customer perched on a stool inside a sandwich shop.

Heat from the June sun radiated from the sidewalk. Maybe everyone was at the beach.

Kim secured her bike to an empty rack and slung a backpack over one shoulder. Trudging up the walk, she paused in front of an outdoor marquee.

The business she sought – Top Dog Detective Agency – was located on the first floor.

Dusting off her only pair of real trousers, she pulled open the door.

A dimly lit, narrow hallway stretched before her. Every door was closed. Kim paused, suddenly aware of her beating heart. Didn't every scary movie she'd ever seen feature just such a dark corridor?

Turn around. Just turn around and go home.

But. She really needed this job.

Biting her lip, she crept down the hallway, her footsteps echoing on the tiled floor.

She found the Top Dog Detective Agency all the way in the back.

Straightening her shoulders, Kim knocked. A voice bade her to enter.

She opened the door and quickly scanned the room.

Unlike the other detective agencies she'd visited this week, this office appeared bright and cheery. In front of her, a reasonably new laptop perched on top of a battered wooden desk. Behind it, a rolling leather chair sat empty. A private investigator's license, framed, hung on the wall above the chair.

A small bookcase shared the right wall with a hanging Mickey Mouse clock and a door.

To the left, a dirty window looked out over the parking lot. A trench coat hung from a freestanding coat rack.

A black Standard Poodle stood beside the coat, his attention focused on one of the large pockets. He appeared to have something clenched between his front teeth. As Kim watched, he teased the – the wallet? – from the pocket without causing any movement in the coat.

If someone had been wearing that coat, he would never have known his wallet was now missing.

"Can I help you?"

Kim turned toward the male voice. But no one was there.

"Down here," the voice said.

Kim looked down into the face of a black and tan, Longhaired Dachshund.

She felt her mouth drop open.

"Hey, Tucker, did you see?" This voice came from the poodle. "The coat didn't move at all this time—Oh, we have a guest."

The poodle trotted to Kim's side, sat and extended a paw. "I'm Archie Goodwin, but you can call me Sam."

Numbly, Kim shook the poodle's paw.

He gestured to the dachshund. "And this is Nero Wolfe, also known as Tucker."

Talking dogs!

Oh, no. No, no, no, no. This was not good.

She used to think she could talk with animals. But that was when she was a kid. She was 15 now and, while she still crooned to bluebirds as she set out food, she no longer expected them to talk back.

Fifteen-year-olds did not believe in talking dogs.

The poodle's tail drooped. He looked down at the dachshund.

"She doesn't understand, either," he said.

"I . . . I think I do understand," Kim said. "You're Sam and this is Tucker."

Both dogs instantly perked.

"You do? You really do!" Sam stood and put his front paws on Kim's shoulders. "Thank you, oh thank you for hearing us."

Kim grinned and scratched Sam's sides. The curly fur was cottony. As she knew it would be.

She'd been six years old when she met her first Standard Poodle and had fallen instantly in love. Sitting, he could gaze

directly into her eyes, his expression a mix of intelligence and elegance. He'd performed tricks at her command and washed her face when she asked for kisses. She'd gone home and begun a years-long campaign to get her own standard poodle.

So far, her parents hadn't succumbed to her pleas.

But now, right in front of her, was a living poodle who could actually form words.

Sam dropped back to the floor.

"Please excuse my buddy's enthusiasm," Tucker said. "We were starting to worry that Detective Bill was the only human who understood us."

"Where is Detective Bill?" Kim said.

The dogs' ears drooped.

"He's home, recovering from a heart attack," Sam said. "But don't worry. We're running the agency while he recovers. He's trained us to be great detectives."

"Our superior sense of smell allows us to trail suspects from a great distance," Tucker said.

"And see through people's disguises," Sam added. "Bill also taught us to remove items from suspects' pockets, purses, drawers and things and put them in plain sight."

"No need for a warrant," Tucker explained.

Sam's eyes brightened. "The best was when we directed Bill while he was chasing another car."

"Oh, yeah, that was great. We hung our heads out the window and followed the villain's scent," Tucker said.

"So, you see, we can do whatever detecting that you need," Sam said.

Kim's shoulders slumped.

"There's just one problem," she said. "I don't need to hire a detective. I need to find a summer job."

Technically, she already had a summer job. Ever since she was a kid, she spent much of the summer helping her grandfather in his jewelry store. She loved spending time with Grandpa and helping his customers find just the right necklace, earrings or ring.

But she'd never ask Grandpa for money. And, with college only a few years away, she needed to start saving for tuition.

Sure, she could flip hamburgers at a fast-food joint or try out for one of the few lifeguard jobs. But, as an avid mystery reader, what she really wanted to do was assist a real-life detective.

She explained her dilemma to the dogs.

Tucker snorted. "Ironic, isn't it? You can talk, but can't find work. We're getting plenty of inquiries through Detective Bill's advertisements. But no one can understand us, so we can't land the jobs."

Kim straightened. "Maybe, if we work together, we can convince people to hire us."

"We don't have money to pay you," Sam said.

"Yeah, we barely have enough money to buy cookies," Tucker grumbled.

"I'll work on commission." Seeing the confusion in the dogs' faces, she added, "That's where I make a percentage of whatever payment we receive. The rest belongs to you."

"How much of a commission?" Tucker said.

Kim hesitated. Most jewelry stores paid a salary plus a small – maybe 1 percent – commission on sales. However, she'd heard about a store that dispensed with the salaries completely and, instead, paid employees 10 percent commissions.

She named the amount and watched, fascinated, as the two dogs looked at each other. Somehow, without exchanging a

word, they communicated. How the heck did they do that?

When the two dogs turned back to her, she knew they'd made a decision.

In unison, they said, "It's a deal."

"Thank you!" Kim said. "I promise you won't regret this."

Once again, she shook hands with the dogs. Though what she really wanted to do was pick them up and hug them. Somehow, she knew they wouldn't appreciate that.

A glance at the clock showed her that she was running late.

"I promised Grandpa I'd help in his jewelry store this afternoon," she said. "But I'll come back tomorrow morning and we can work on finding new clients."

"Er . . ." Kim looked around the office, noting the dog beds – one big, one small – two bowls of water and a small refrigerator with a knotted rope hanging from the handle.

"Before I go, do you need anything? Like something to eat?"

"What do you have in mind?" Tucker said.

Sam tapped his buddy's shoulder.

"Don't mind Tucker; he's always hungry."

He gestured toward the refrigerator.
"Sheila, the lady who owns the grooming salon, brings us freshly cooked meals."

"We could use a microwave," Tucker grumbled. "I hate cold food."

"Let me talk to my parents," Kim said. "I'm sure they'd be happy to invite you over for dinner some night."

With a wave, she pulled open the door. The hallway no longer resembled a horror movie. Now she could hear the occasional bark from Sheila's Grooming Salon. Light filtered through the dirty window of the outside door. She resisted the urge to skip.

She had a job! A real paying job!
She couldn't wait to get started.

Chapter 2

Unleashed



"Do you think we did the right thing?" Tucker said, watching the door close behind their new partner.

"Our only other choice is give up detecting and do regular dog things."

They stared at each other, then sighed.

They'd already considered and rejected what humans considered normal dog activities.

In fact, from the moment they met, Sam and Tucker knew they were destined for greater things than lolling on the sofa, barking at the mailman or annoying the family cat.

Sure, they could have gotten traditional dog jobs. But who wants to herd smelly sheep or retrieve dead ducks or chase a fake rabbit around a race track?

As for those doggie beauty pageants . . . There was no way Sam would allow someone to brush his neck hair into a lion's mane or carve pom-poms onto his hips. Tucker's size disqualified him from the so-called confirmation competitions; he was too heavy to be classified as a "miniature dachshund" and too light to compete as a "standard dachshund."

As they considered employment options, they'd decided that the only job that would utilize their specialized skills and also be fun was detecting.

Tucker envisioned himself as the Nero Wolfe member of the team. When not consulting with the chef about breakfast, lunch and dinner, he would sit behind a large desk and instruct his assistant – that would be Sam – on how to conduct the investigation. Eventually, while puffing on a good cigar, Tucker would call everyone together and reveal the villain.

As the Archie part of the pair, Sam in no way considered himself Tucker's employee. They were, by golly, partners. Nor did he begrudge Tucker's desire to sit behind a desk – his buddy's short legs wouldn't allow him to run fast, anyway.

In Sam's view, he got the better part of the deal. He would chase suspects by day

and woo females on the dance floor by night. He didn't particularly care who solved the mystery. As the saying goes, poodles just wanna have fun.

They quickly realized that the fastest way to achieve their dream would be to convince a private investigator to hire them. That required learning to speak the language.

Using the Nero Wolfe mysteries as textbooks, they practiced forming words like "perp," "lock 'em up," "dame," "fedora" and "pfui."

Children seemed the most receptive to a pair of talking dogs. They readily corrected pronunciations and added modern slang to the dogs' vocabulary.

Once the dogs could communicate clearly with the local children, they began answering Want Ads for private detectives.

That's when they discovered that not all humans are willing to recognize dogs as good orators. Time after time, they presented themselves at private investigating offices. Time after time, they were chased out with the words "I don't need no dang barking dogs!"

Barking. The human detectives only heard barking.

Tucker and Sam returned to the streets. They talked to children in the local playground. The children talked back.

Emboldened, they talked to the children's mothers. Many responded by pulling their children close and shrieking "get away!" A few, however, leaned forward and exclaimed, "You can talk!"

After a few days, the two friends realized that the problem wasn't in the way they enunciated their words. The problem lay in the human ability to listen. Most humans heard only what they wanted to hear. They weren't receptive to new ideas and thoughts.

Talking dogs was a concept most people couldn't – or wouldn't – accept.

Dachshunds, however, are known for their persistence. Poodles are eternally optimistic. The pair decided to soldier on until they found a private investigator willing to listen to what they had to say.

Leaving the "help wanted" ads behind, they pulled out the Yellow Pages, looked up "private investigators" and, starting at the top of the alphabet, began visiting offices.

One sunny day, they marched down the hallway of a seedy office building and found the door for O'Brian Detective

Agency. By this time – having exhausted the A thru N part of the alphabet – the dogs knew that polite knocking would not gain them entrance. It was far too easy for someone to slam the door in their face before they had a chance to say a word.

Sam stood on his hind legs and used his front paws to turn the door knob. Tucker pushed the door open. They entered in time to see a tall, bearded man lob a balled paper towel toward a metal trash can.

The towel hit the rim of the can and fell to the floor.

The man scowled.

Sam trotted over to the paper, picked it up and – resisting the urge to shred it (most poodles have what's fondly called the "paper shredding gene") – deposited it into the can.

By the time he returned to Tucker's side, Detective Bill O'Brian was gawking at them.

"How'd you get in here?" O'Brian's voice was three-pack-a-day rough.

"We're here about a job," Sam said.

"We come as a set."

"You... you talk!"

"Finally!" Tucker sat down. "A detective who listens!"

"Yeah, well, you listen." The detective leaned forward. "Dogs don't work in this business. Believe me, I've tried.

"Criminals can spot German Shepherds, Doberman Pinschers and Rottweilers a mile away. Terriers want to be in charge. Golden Retrievers want to be everyone's friend. Bulldogs don't have the physical stamina, Beagles can't chase a perp without baying and Labrador Retrievers are easily distracted."

"We're not like any of those breeds," the dachshund said. "I'm Tucker and the big guy here is Sam."

Detective Bill eyes narrowed.

Before he could throw them out, Sam said, "Just give us a moment to tell you why you need us. Please."

Bill leaned back in his chair, plunked his boots onto his desk and crossed his arms.

"Okay, explain to me why I should hire not one, but two frou-frou dogs."

A low rumble rose from Tucker's chest. Sam gently touched his buddy's shoulders, urging restraint. The grumbling subsided.

"Our skills would increase your success rate," Sam said. "Tucker here can infiltrate even the smallest spaces. He can

sneak around undetected, open zippers and track at ground level. He's even capable of rearranging the furniture to build a bridge to, er, items above his head."

Sam grinned. "With me around, of course, he seldom has to resort to such measures.

"I, on the other hand, can identify scents on the breeze, run faster than any criminal, pick pockets and, of course, also open zippers. You couldn't ask for a better team."

The detective studied the two dogs. Shaking his head, he turned to his computer and began typing in a search engine.

"It says here that dachshunds are always hunting for food," Bill said.

"I know the difference between the smell of a steak and a person," Tucker grumbled.

Bill typed in another search. "And here it says that poodles can be clowns and without provocation will start running in large circles."

"The technical term is 'zoomies,'" Sam said. "As Tucker said, we know the difference between work and play."

Bill frowned at them. They waited patiently. After a minute or two, the

detective dragged fingers through his thinning hair.

"Well, I suppose if nothing else, you two will attract women. Let's try it for a week.

"But you let me do the talking. If you're as good as you say, you've got a job."

The arrangement worked better than any of them could have imagined. Bill's closure rates increased and word quickly spread. Soon they had more clients than they could manage and had to turn away jobs. Bill changed the name of the business to Top Dog Detective Agency.

And, as Bill had predicted, the dogs did attract interest of the female persuasion. The groomer who owned the business down the hall donated dog beds for Bill's office. Homemade dog food appeared next to the beer in the office refrigerator. Sam's head, ears and tail were fluffed and his scruffy curls were trimmed close to his body, leaving boot-like poofs on his legs. Tucker's coat shone.

The life wasn't exactly as the dogs had envisioned. While Sam did get to cuddle up to female clients, Tucker didn't get to sit at the desk and order people around. Even so, the arrangement satisfied all involved.

There was just one problem: Bill.

While the detective was good at helping other people, he wasn't so good at taking care of himself. He smoked cigarettes and cigars, dined on French-fries and hamburgers and, aside from following someone on foot, seldom exercised.

By and by, the detective had a heart attack and landed in the hospital. The doctors told him he couldn't go back to work for a long, long time.

After being assured that Bill would survive, the dogs discussed their own futures. Advertisements continued to bring in customers, as did word of mouth.

Most people, however, couldn't understand what the dogs were saying and made a hasty retreat. The few who did understand stuck their noses into the air and stomped away.

After several weeks, the dogs remained unemployed.

Then Kimberley West walked through their door.

Did they dare hope that she might be the solution to their problem?

Chapter 3

SHE Walked In



Kim wouldn't return until the next morning. Given their lack of success trying to make clients understand them, they decided to take the rest of the day off. Tomorrow, they'd start over with their new human partner.

In the meantime, there was food to eat and a backyard to romp.

Well, at least Sam would romp. Tucker would walk the fence perimeter searching for wayward squirrels.

Sam hopped onto Detective Bill's desk chair to shut down the laptop for the day. Tucker trotted toward the refrigerator door, aiming for the convenient rope hanging from the handle.

The office door opened, startling them.

Both dogs turned as SHE walked in.

Tall, blond, legs up to there, wearing a dead animal. She was class, real class, the kind that made males of all species stand up and pay attention.

Sam straightened. Tucker froze midstep.

The blond surveyed the office, her blue eyes moving from the coat stand, to the window, to the Mickey Mouse clock and finally, to the dachshund beside the refrigerator.

Her face broke into a broad smile.

"Oh, you're so cute!"

Knowing how much Tucker hated being called "cute," Sam tossed him a warning glance before leaping off the chair, sidling over and leaning against the blonde's leg.

"Well, hello handsome." She stroked Sam's head, then glanced around.

"Ah, hello?" she called. "Is anyone here?"

Tucker cleared his throat. Would she understand? And if not, how did they keep her here until Kim returned?

"Detective Bill isn't here right now," he said. "Sam and I are handling the agency while Bill recovers from an, er, injury."

The woman's eyes widened.

"You talk!"

For a moment, the two dogs were so startled they could only stare. Sam cleared his throat.

"Yes, ma'am," he said. "I'm Sam and he's Tucker. We've actually solved most of Bill's cases."

"Talking dogs," the woman murmured. "Maybe that's just what I need."

Both dogs stiffened to attention.

"I assume you can talk to other dogs?" the woman said.

"Of course." Sam glanced at Tucker, then met the woman's eyes. "Not all humans understand us. If your job requires interviewing those kinds of humans, we need to wait for Kim, our new human partner."

The woman smiled. "Actually, I'd prefer that certain humans not understand you."

"In that case," Sam said. "Won't you please have a seat?"

While Sam led the new client to the guest chair, Tucker hopped from the floor to a chair to the desktop. He crossed the desk and plunked his butt down in front of the woman.

She held out her hand. "I'm Angie Murgatroid."

After Tucker shook her hand, she extended it to Sam.

"So how can we help you, Ms Murgatroid?" Sam said.

"Please, call me Angie." She breathed deeply and tears formed in her blue eyes. "I need help finding my Afghan."

"You lost a blanket?" Tucker said.

"I believe our client is talking about an Afghan Hound," Sam said. "Tall, elegant, scored lowest on the dog IQ chart."

"Oh, but Benji is smart," Angie said. "I mean, for an Afghan. He knows his name and everything."

Sam and Tucker exchanged glances. They'd heard people often selected dogs that looked like them. Did Angie choose a dog who wouldn't be smarter than her?

Tucker reminded himself that Angie's neuron capacity wasn't the issue. She was a paying customer. If they handled this case correctly, no one would ever again hesitate to hire them.

"So," Tucker said, "when did, er, Benji go missing?"

"Two days ago." Angie pulled a monogrammed handkerchief from her purse and dabbed at her eyes. "We were at a local dog show. Benji was the favorite to win Best in Show. He easily won the Best of Breed."

She sniffed. "But when Charles – that's Benji's new handler -- went to get him for the Group judging, he wasn't there. His crate was wide open and Benji was gone."

"Please excuse my ignorance," Sam said, "but where was Benji's crate?"

"In the handler's area, along with the other dogs Charles was showing. If you're thinking Charles did something irresponsible by not constantly watching Benji, you're wrong. All of the handlers keep their dogs crated in their grooming space."

"So who had access to Benji's area?" Tucker said.

Angie shrugged. "Charles, of course. And his assistant. And, I suppose, anyone walking by the grooming area. It's nothing more than one big room. The groomers use their tables, hairdryers, dog crates and other things to section off their space. People can easily wander in and out."

"Isn't someone always with the dogs?" Sam said.

"Charles' assistant is usually around. Sometimes, though, they get behind schedule and the assistant needs to bring the next dog to Charles.

"But even if no one was working in Charles' area, there are others nearby getting

their dogs ready for the ring. You'd have to be pretty bold to waltz in and steal a dog."

"Not if you were someone people expected to be there," Sam said.

"You mean Charles' assistant?"

"Or another handler or a judge or a ring steward."

"But why?" Tucker said. "Why would someone steal Benji? Have you received a ransom note?"

Angie shook her head. "No note."

"Revenge is always a good motive," Tucker said. "Does anyone hold a grudge against you?"

"Absolutely not. Everyone loves me. And Benji." She leaned forward. "I'm afraid that someone intends to show Benji this weekend as their own dog."

"How could someone do that?" Sam said. "Don't all show dogs have microchips? Even Tucker and I have them."

Tucker thought microchips were one of the greatest things invented. The tiny, computer-like chips allowed humans to easily locate their "lost dogs."

Dogs, of course, are never really "lost." They know exactly where they are.

But in Tucker's experience, humans want to control everything. This desire led to the invention of the microchip.

If a dog decided to visit his neighbors and was dumb enough to get caught by Animal Control, someone at the animal shelter would scan between the dog's shoulder blades for a microchip. The chip would identify the dog's human, a call would be made and the dog returned home.

Microchips were essentially a dog's get-out-of-jail-free card.

"Benji has a microchip," Angie said, "and I assume the other dogs do, too. But no one stands at the ring entry and scans the microchips of every dog who enters."

"So you're thinking someone intends to show Benji, win the competition... And then what?"

"Sell him." Once again Angie dabbed at her eyes. "Sell him for thousands and thousands of dollars. And I'll never see my Benji again!"

Sam, who wilted at the sight of tears, laid his head on Angie's lap, trying to offer comfort.

Tucker, however, had no tolerance for tears.

"If you've already given up," he said, "why hire us?"

Sam lifted his head and glared at Tucker. But Tucker was unrepentant;

sometimes the only way to stop female hysterics was to shock them.

Sure enough, Angie's tears dried and she straightened her shoulders.

"I'm told that dogs can smell things that humans can't," she said. "That you can smell cancer on someone's breath, find a cadaver in sixty feet of water and track a week-old trail left by a specific human. Is this true?"

Tucker was so astounded by the depth of Angie's knowledge – and that she knew the word cadaver – that he couldn't speak. So it was Sam who answered.

"All of that is true," Sam said. "Our noses are tens of thousands times more sensitive than human noses."

He lifted his face. "We even have wing-like extensions on our noses. Can you see them?"

"Oh!" Angie studied Sam's nose. "I never noticed. Does Benji's nose also have wings?"

"Er, yes. Now watch what I can do." Sam twitched his nose.

"That's so cute! It's almost like that old television show, *Bewitched*, you know the one where the wife – she's a witch – twitches her nose to make rooms clean themselves or make a stain disappear or—"

Tucker couldn't take any more.

"There's nothing cute about it," he interrupted. "Our noses are serious tools. Rotating the sides of my nose helps me locate a specific scent."

"Then I've come to the right place." Angie looked from one dog to the other. "I want you to find Benji by going undercover at this weekend's dog show."

Sam's tail drooped. Tucker ground his teeth in frustration.

Dog shows. Why did it have to be a dog show?

A few weeks before his heart attack, Detective Bill decided to treat his two partners to a fun day at a dog show. They'd planned to stroll the grounds, inhaling all the wonderful smells. They'd watch a few competitions, giggle at the poodle haircuts and the skinny dachshunds, buy hotdogs and soft-serve ice cream for lunch.

But when they'd arrived at the fairgrounds, the attendant wouldn't let them in.

He told Bill that only dogs who were entered in the competition were allowed. Sam wasn't wearing a show coat. Tucker was larger than the weight limit. Not entered, no admittance.

Bill had taken them to a park, instead, and later produced the promised hot dogs and ice cream. But they'd never had the opportunity to enjoy the aroma of hundreds of different dog breeds gathered in a single place.

"We would love to search for Benji at the show," Sam said. "But the organizers bar dogs who aren't entered in the competition."

Angie clapped her hands together. "I've already solved that problem. In addition to conformation, this show also includes an agility fun match!"

Sam's eyes lit up. Tucker resisted the urge to crawl under the desk.

Agility, a canine obstacle course, required dogs to run through tunnels, weave through vertical poles, race across narrow planks and climb towering A-frames. The fastest dog wins.

Tucker did not do fast. Nor did Nero Wolfe.

Tucker cast about for a way to refuse this case. Or at least avoid the agility course.

People tend to underestimate dachshunds' intelligence. This is because, compared, say to poodles or Labradors or golden retrievers, dachshunds aren't as concerned about pleasing their humans.

Dachshunds, like terriers and other hounds, would rather please themselves.

In this instance, pleasing himself meant not running. When Tucker focused on a problem involving self-interest, he usually found a solution. It only took him a few seconds to find the perfect dodge.

"This all sounds lovely," he said. "But agility competitions require a human to run with the dog. And since the kidnapper will be suspicious if YOU suddenly entered agility. . ."

He let the sentence drift off, giving Angie the opportunity to find another way for them to go undercover.

Angie grinned.

"But didn't you just say that you have a human partner? She can enter with you."

Angie explained that the agility fun match was a fundraiser for the sponsoring club. A friend in the club could ensure their late entry.

Pulling out a checkbook, she said, "I assume you need a retainer for your services."

The dogs named the amount that Detective Bill always charged. Angie wrote the check and set it on the desk.

"I'll contact my friend and make arrangements to enter you both in agility." She stood and collected her things.

Casting them a bright smile, she added, "I guess I'll see you this weekend."

And with that, they had their first client.

Chapter 4

You Want Me to do *What?*



After Angie left, Sam picked up a pencil and, with the pointed end gripped between his teeth, used the eraser to punch in the numbers to Kim's telephone. She answered on the second ring.

"We got a case!" the two dogs said at once.

Quickly, they told her about Angie and the plan to enter the show grounds by signing up for the agility competition.

"Good thing we have a few days to get ready," Kim said. "My friend Mary loves agility and set up a practice course in her backyard.

"She and her family are away on vacation. But she's told me I can use her equipment whenever I can convince my parents to let me have a dog. So tomorrow,

why don't we go there to practice? It's not far from your office."

"Why do we have to practice?" Tucker said. "We're just entering as an excuse to look for Benji."

"We'll blow our cover if we aren't around when they call our name," Kim said. "Don't worry; I've helped Mary train her dog so I know what to do."

"Give us the address and we'll meet you there tomorrow morning," Sam said.

"I'd rather we went together," Kim said. "I know you've probably roamed the streets by yourself, but that's not safe. You could get hit by a car or snatched by animal control."

"On the way to Grandpa's, I stopped at a pet supply store and, well, you'll see tomorrow. Have a good night."

Before the dogs could protest, their new partner hung up the phone.

"Bill never worried about us going outside by ourselves," Tucker grumbled.

"That's because we arrived at his office without a human in tow," Sam said. "We haven't had a chance to train Kim."

"Hope she's not a slow learner," Tucker said. "You remember Gracie, the woman who owns the florist shop? She never did figure out that when I sit up and

wave my paws, I'm telling her to get me a cookie."

Sam snickered. "You have to admit that she looked pretty ridiculous waving back at you."

The next morning, Kim arrived promptly at 9 a.m. A marvelous scent drifted from the backpack that she wore.

"Do I smell liver?" Tucker stood on his hind legs, trying to get closer to Kim's pack.

"Liver treats," Kim said. "And plenty of water for all three of us. You guys ready to go?"

Kim locked the door for them and tucked the key into her pack. She led the way outside to a red bicycle featuring a front basket.

"I wanted a black one with racing stripes," Kim said. "But I couldn't find any in my price range. There used to be silly streamers hanging from the handlebars, but I cut those off."

"What's that?" Sam pointed to a stick-like thing jutting to the side of the bike.

"That's what I bought on the way home earlier. It's supposed to make it safe to go bike riding with your dog. The stick keeps you from running too close to me and getting clipped by the bike."

Leaning over, she attached Sam's harness to the stick.

"There's only one seat." Tucker pointed to the padded, triangle-shaped bicycle saddle. "Where's mine?"

"You're riding in the basket."

Tucker backed away from Kim's reaching hands.

"Aww, no, I'm not riding in that sissy thing. Why can't I run beside Sam?"

"You'd be exhausted by the time we got to Mary's house."

Kim scooped Tucker into her arms. "If I can tolerate a red bike, you can survive a ride in the basket."

She plunked him in. "Okay, are you both ready? Let's go."

Kim steered the bike to position Sam near the sidewalk, away from cars. Sam quickly established a pace to keep abreast of the bike.

After a few minutes, Sam grinned. He loved to race full out. The bike clipped along rapidly, allowing him to stretch his long legs.

This was fun!

He glanced up at Tucker and was pleased to see his buddy had gotten over his snit. Tucker stood with his front legs perched on the basket top. Wind blew

through his hair, his ears flapped, and his mouth curved into a grin.

They turned a couple of corners and arrived at a white cottage. Kim dismounted, unclipped Sam and removed Tucker from the basket.

"The agility stuff is in the backyard," she said.

She pushed her bike down a flagstone path, around the house and up to a short, chain-linked fence. She opened the gate and gestured for the dogs to enter ahead of her.

After leaning her bike against an inside corner, Kim turned to the dogs.

"We have a couple of days before the show, so today I'd like to show you the best ways to get on and off of the various obstacles without injuring yourselves."

She pointed to a variety of stand-alone fences. "Those are jumps. The height will be raised for tall dogs, lowered for shorter dogs.

"Over there—" She pointed to a series of vertical poles spaced evenly apart—"are the weave poles. Obviously, you weave through them. The trick will be to not miss a pole or you lose points."

"What about the treats?" Tucker asked

Kim grinned. "Those are to reward you when you do something right."

Tucker turned to Sam to share a paw bump. Sam, however, was staring wide-eyed at a contraption that looked a little like a bridge made of narrow planks.

Sam pointed at it. "What's that?"

"It's called a dog walk," Kim said.

"You get on it here, walk up and across the top and down the other side."

Sam's eyes widened. "How tall is that thing?"

"It's only four feet high."

"They use wider boards for the big dogs, right?"

"No. The width is the same for everyone."

Sam plunked his butt onto the round. "That's not fair. To cross that thing, the little dogs won't have to change the way they move their legs, but we big guys are going to have to step with one foot in front of the other."

Kim nodded. "I hear ya. But you big dogs will have the advantage when it comes to the A-frame."

She pointed to an A-shaped wooden mountain. Tucker's mouth went dry. "What are we supposed to do with that?"

"Climb."

"Climb? You mean with ropes and spikes and things?"

Kim laughed. "No, you'll just run up it. Let's just walk around while I show you a few things, okay?"

She pointed to the bottom of the mountain. "Notice that part of the A-Frame is painted yellow? The rules require that at least one paw touch the yellow paint both going on to and off of an obstacle. This will slow you down a bit, but it's also intended to make the obstacles safer."

The dogs looked around the yard. Sure enough, yellow paint adorned many of the so-called obstacles.

"The jumps and tunnels are just what they appear." She walked to a contraption that looked like a child's see-saw.

"This is called a Teeter." She pushed on the raised end and demonstrated how the board swung up and down.

"I've seen children playing on these," Sam said. "But there's always been two kids, one on each end."

Kim nodded. "In agility, a single dog is supposed to operate the Teeter. You enter from the lower end and walk up the board. When you get to the middle, you need to adjust your weight to make the upper board

drop down. Then you walk down that board to the end.

"Let's try it."

She reached into her pocket and pulled out several liver treats.

Seeing the food, Tucker hopped onto the lower end of the Teeter and raced up it. When he reached the middle, the balance shifted under his feet.

"Lean forward," Kim said. "That will drop the higher end."

Sure enough, when Tucker shifted his weight, the Teeter dropped so he could run to the bottom – and collect the liver treats!

Kim turned to Sam. "Your longer legs will make your center of gravity different from Tucker's. So start slowly until you're comfortable."

It took two tries before Sam identified the best position to make the Teeter go down.

"Why don't we just walk through a course so you can get the feel for it? I set the jumps for shorter dogs, so Tucker, you go first."

While Sam found a place in the shade, Kim led Tucker to what she called the "start line."

"One purpose of agility is for us to work together," she said. "So don't try an obstacle until I point to it. Ready?"

She pointed to a tire suspended between two poles.

"Jump!"

Tucker hopped through the tire and turned to follow Kim. That's when he spotted the vinyl tunnel.

Now tunnels he understood. After all, Tucker's ancestors used to follow badgers into their tunnels and pull them back out by their tails. He ran into the tunnel.

"Well, you're a pro at tunnels," Kim said. "But you're not supposed to do that until I tell you. Remember to wait until I indicate the next obstacle."

"Does this mean I don't get a treat?"

Kim grinned and gave him a single treat. "That's for effort. You'll get more if you listen."

She led him back to the starting line.

This time, Tucker jumped the tire and waited for Kim to point to the next obstacle, the weave poles. They moved on, through the tunnel and over the Teeter. The dog walk, which had worried Sam, seemed wide enough. But Tucker made sure that he didn't look down.

The very best obstacle was the pause table. It took some effort to climb onto it, but once there, Tucker was allowed to sit while Kim counted down ten seconds.

Oh, the joy of sitting! The sun beat down, warming the rubbery surface. What a perfect place to lay down and snooze...

"Tucker! We're not finished yet. You're only supposed to wait here for ten seconds."

Tucker opened an eye. Kim waved a liver treat.

With a sigh, Tucker accepted the treat and hopped off the table.

Kim led him to the mountain.

Tucker stood at the base of the man-made cliff, wondering what numbskull designed it. Who could expect a nine-inch-tall dog to climb this thing?

"It's okay, Tucker, I'll help you," Kim said.

He rolled his eyes toward Kim.

"Er, sometimes it's easier to take a run at it," she said. "Just make sure one of your paws touches the yellow part here at the bottom."

The "yellow part" was a painted area that crawled maybe two feet up the side of the mountain. How could a dachshund

possibly climb this thing without touching the yellow paint?

He backed away from the cliff, took a few deep breaths, then ran toward it. His feet hit the bottom of the frame and he scrambled upwards. Up, up...

Halfway to the top he lost momentum and began sliding backwards.

Kim reached out to grab him and hold him in position.

"If I support you, can you move one of your front paws?" she said.

Tucker gritted his teeth and reached forward with his right paw. Planting it on the cliff, he tried to drag a back foot after.

"That's good," Kim cooed. "Try pushing with your back legs."

"You have noticed that there's not much leg back there, right?"

"C'mon, Tucker, you can do it. Here, try to reach this."

She held a treat three inches beyond the dachshund's nose. Tucker's eyes brightened. He stretched forward and snagged the treat.

"How did you do that without moving your feet?"

Somewhere nearby, Sam snickered.

"How about I give him a push?" Sam said.

Kim shook her head. "No, the judges won't allow that."

Tucker's leg muscles, unused to all the activity, started trembling. Kim scooped him off the A-frame.

"It's okay," she crooned as she found his favorite spot to scratch. "You've worked hard today. We'll try again tomorrow."

She set him onto the ground and held out an entire handful of treats. Maybe agility wasn't so bad after all.

As Tucker chewed, Kim turned to Sam.

"Let me reset the jumps and then it's your turn."

Naturally, Sam sailed over all of the jumps, his floppy ears flying. He had to crouch to run through the tunnel, but he managed without slowing much. Kim pointed toward the A-frame. Sam charged up, flew over the top and raced down the other side, somehow remembering to "put one paw on the yellow part."

Kim was grinning from ear to ear. She pointed to the pause table.

Sam jumped over it.

"No, no, no! Weren't you watching Tucker? You're supposed to jump onto this and sit for ten seconds."

"Why?"

"Because that's the rules."

Sighing, Sam hopped onto the table, plunked his butt down and waited while Kim counted down.

She'd barely reached the "go" mark before Sam leaped from the table and over the next jump.

And then they came to the dog-walk.

Sam screeched to a halt.

"Are you sure big dogs use this thing?"

"Absolutely. Just put one foot in front of the other and you'll be fine."

Sam frowned, but started up the angled plank. Okay, this wasn't so bad. He could do this.

Then he reached the top.

"Whoa, that's a long way down," he said.

"Don't be silly," Kim said. "You've jumped higher than this."

"Yeah, but that was jumping. This is walking the plank. Like on a pirate ship."

"Don't look down," Tucker said.

"Just look at the board and put one foot in front of the other."

Sam nodded and reached forward with his right paw. A back paw followed and, slowly, step by step, he started across

the plank. When he reached the middle, however, he felt the plank bounce.

He froze. "What was that?"

"Did you feel a bounce? Don't worry, that's normal."

"Normal? Normal??? You expect me to keep my balance on a narrow, moving plank?"

"It was only a small bounce."

"I never felt it bounce," Tucker said.

Sam glared in his direction.

"It's not going to fall apart or anything," Kim said. "Keep going. You're almost there."

"I can't move," Sam said.

"Just one foot. See if you can move one foot."

But Sam remained a poodle statue.

Kim moved so she was standing right beside him.

"Okay, I'm going to support you while you take your steps," she said. "See? I won't let you fall."

The feel of Kim's hands on his body comforted Sam. Slowly, he moved his feet until he reached the ramp going down.

"Keep going," Kim crooned. "You're almost there."

Sam moved quickly down the ramp to the safety of the ground.

Tucker trotted over.

"Hey," he said, raising a paw.

"Hey, yourself," Sam replied, lifting his own paw.

They paw-bumped, then turned to Kim. She emptied her pockets and rewarded them with treats.

"Let's take a break and get a drink," she said. "I brought a picnic lunch for us."

As they ate, Kim couldn't stop grinning. Imagine working with not just one, but two intelligent dogs! And they hadn't even started their investigation. That would surely be fun. Well, maybe not for the poor missing Afghan. But once they found him and returned him to Angie, everyone would be happy.

And if they didn't find him? She frowned. What if the thief didn't bring Benji to the show?

No, she wouldn't think about that. Angie knew the dog world and she assumed the thief would try to show Benji this weekend. If Angie was wrong, well, they'd figure out another way to find Benji.

They needed to solve this case, not just for Benji's sake but also for the future of Top Dog Detective Agency.

To read more, click one of the links below:

Amazon:

<https://www.amazon.com/dp/B0C9RTW6>

WF

Apple:

<https://books.apple.com/us/book/the-poodle-who-sang-undercover/id6450792804>

Kobo:

<https://www.kobo.com/us/en/ebook/the-poodle-who-sang-undercover>

Google Play:

<https://play.google.com/store/books/details?id=27HIEAAAQBAJ&pli=1>