

# A Good Judge of Character

“Please tell me what happened when Grace disappeared,” Emma Hanson said to literary agent Jane Stuart and her assistant, Daniel.

Emma looked nothing like Grace, whose blond hair was always pulled into a ponytail. Emma hid behind curtains of brown hair. And whereas Grace’s voice was loud and strident, Emma’s was hushed and whispery.

“It was two days ago,” Daniel said. “Grace spent the morning filing. The mail arrived, and there were checks for several writers we represent. I gave the checks to Grace to take to the bank.

“Then I noticed she looked ill. She went into the storage room. When she came out, she fell into her chair and slumped on her desk. I ran over to her. She had passed out.”

Jane nodded. “We called an ambulance. They came and took her to the hospital. I found out they discharged her a short time later. We haven’t heard from her since.”

At that moment Jane’s tortoiseshell cat, Winky, ambled into the office. She leapt onto Jane’s desk, looked at Emma, and hissed. Emma recoiled, then sneezed. “I—don’t like cats.”

“I see you’re allergic, like Grace,” Jane observed.

“How did you know Grace was allergic?” Emma asked.

“One day I took her to lunch, and on the way we stopped at my house for some papers. Winky was there. Grace started sneezing. Winky hissed at her. Cats know when someone doesn’t like them.”

“Anyway,” Daniel interjected impatiently, “what also disappeared were the checks. We’re about to have the publishers put stops on them.”

Emma sniffled. “May I please use your bathroom?”

“Of course,” Jane said. She and Daniel watched her as she left the office and quietly closed the door



behind her.

Ten minutes passed and Emma did not return. Daniel said, “Do you think she’s all right?”

“Oh, she’s fine,” Jane replied. “She’s also gone. I expect the bank to call any minute.”

The phone rang. Jane picked it up. “Hello, Selma.... Yes, it’s shocking. May I please speak to Stanley?” Stanley Greenberg, Jane’s boyfriend, was a police detective. Jane listened for a moment, said, “Thank you, Stanley,” and hung up.

Daniel stared at her. “What’s going on?”

“That woman,” Jane said, pointing to the office door, “was Grace!”

“What?”

Jane nodded. “She’s pregnant, you see. The day she disappeared, she realized she was about to faint. So she quickly hid the checks in the storage room. She knew if she were taken to the hospital they would be found on her.”

Daniel frowned. “Why couldn’t they be found on her? She was taking them to the bank.”

“Because then the checks would have been returned to us. She couldn’t let that happen, because she intended to cash one of them. So she hid them in the storage room, intending to return for them. Today she returned for them...as her sister, ‘Emma.’ She couldn’t come back as Grace—how would she explain her disappearance?”

“When ‘Emma’ called yesterday and asked to meet with us about Grace’s disappearance, I decided to take Winky to work to see if she would react to this woman as she had to Grace, and vice versa. You saw the results.

“When ‘Emma’ excused herself to use the bathroom, she retrieved the hidden checks from the storage room and hurried to the bank to cash one as originally planned.”

“Did you alert the bank?”

“Of course—first thing this morning. I also alerted Stanley. He arrested her five minutes ago after she tried to cash a check for ten thousand dollars. Grace knew the bank often cashes checks for me. Her boyfriend was waiting for her in his car outside. Stanley has arrested him, too. In the glove compartment were two tickets to Brazil.

“Thanks, Wink,” Jane said, petting her smooth tortoiseshell coat. “You always were a good judge of character.”



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