



Mercury's Missing Mutt



An
IPPI
Mystery
Story

YOUR SOLAR SYSTEM needs you.”

Chloe Minn and Miranda Knox looked up from their lunch boxes. A dark-haired boy stood at the end of the table, holding out a business card:

*I.P.P.I.: Inter-Planetary Private Investigator
Jonathon Jones*

We solve every crime under the sun!

“I don’t get it,” Chloe said. “Each planet has its own police force. Why would anyone hire you?”

“Hire *us*,” Jonathon said, dusting a chair with a napkin and sitting down. “Because startroopers don’t like to get the dust of other planets on their hands. It’s outside their territory. That’s where *we* come in.”

I was getting up the nerve to come in and tell you I’m sorry. But I froze instead.



I should be the one apologizing, sis. I’m sorry I picked on you.

by Kristin O’Donnell Tubb
Art by Michael McCabe

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“We?” Miranda asked. She looked excitedly from Jonathon to Chloe, her curly hair springing from side to side.

“Oo! I wanna join!” Tommy Lutsinger said, leaning over his spaghetti.

Jonathon eyed him. “Miranda’s the school computer whiz, and nobody beats Chloe at math. How can *you* help?”

Tommy shifted, then sat upright. “I have the coolest dog in the universe, Comet!”

Jonathon scratched his chin. “Consider this your tryout, Lutsinger. We might need that pooch of yours.” He tapped some notes in his personal organizer. “Our first case is a missing mongrel on Mercury. One of its germly drool-hounds went missing from a dog kennel.”

Miranda knotted her fingers together. “A lost dog? Oh, poor whittle fuzzy wuppie!”



After school, Miranda used the supercomputer to teleport the crew,



plus Comet, to Mercury’s Dog Star Kennel.

“Thank heavens!” A woman in a fluffy fur coat greeted them. “My little Sirius is out there in the hot, hot world”—she pointed out the portal to a thermometer that read 800 degrees Fahrenheit—“without his filet mignon or sparkling water!”

Welp, we had it tough growing up. Mom always expected us to do our best, and Dad had a temper.



We’re just a couple of mongrels—dogs with parents of different breeds.



Voila! I’ve made us a fresh snack. Buttered toast rounds with zee char-grilled filet mignon—a fancy, tender steak.



“Oh, no!” Miranda clutched Comet’s leash tighter.

“You must be Mrs. Cash?” Jonathon asked. The woman nodded.

“The dog’s name is Sirius?” Tommy asked. “Are you serious?”

Chloe rolled her eyes. “Sirius is the name of the Dog Star, Tommy.”

“And the name of Mercury’s winningest canine.” The voice behind

them made them jump. “Sirius is a prize show dog. He wins every blue ribbon in sight or scent. And I am J. Preston Willingford, Sirius’s trainer. Dear Mrs. Cash and I will do whatever it takes to ensure his safe return.”

J. Preston stepped forth and patted Mrs. Cash’s hand. He was tall and thin, and from where the crew stood, they could see straight up his nose.

“You’re a trainer? You gotta meet my dog—he’s a champ!” Tommy whistled and patted his knee.

“Comet! Come here, boy!” Miranda released Comet’s leash, and Comet bounded over and laid a sloppy kiss right on J. Preston’s lips.

“Get this mutt *offa* me!” J. Preston swiped his face with a polka-dotted silk handkerchief.

Jonathon shuddered in sympathy, then asked, “Sirius disappeared yesterday, correct?”

“No, earlier today,” J. Preston said. “About thirty-six hours ago.”

“Uh, hello?” Tommy said, tapping his huge black wristwatch. “Thirty-six hours ago is yesterday. I mean, *was*.”



“Not here, Tommy,” Chloe said. “One day on Mercury is equal to 58 days on Earth.”

“It takes 58 Earth days for Mercury to spin around once?” Tommy asked.

“Yes,” Chloe said. “One day on Mercury is 1,392 hours long.”

“Yes, yes,” Mrs. Cash said.

“But enough chitchat. I know who dognapped my baby.”

“You do?” Jonathon said. “Who?”

“Her!” Mrs. Cash pointed toward the kennel doors, where a woman had just walked in with a fluffy poodle. “Joy *Flipple*. She and her hair ball *Josie* are jealous of my Sirius.”

J. Preston whispered, “Josie—the poodle—is also a client of mine. Poor pooch keeps winning red ribbons. Always second place. She’ll never win a blue if she keeps going up against Sirius.”

The crew eyed Joy Flipple.

“I got nothing to do with Sirius disappearing!” Joy shouted across the room, smacking her gum. “I’m a dog lover.” Joy pointed a long, glittery fingernail at Mrs. Cash. “But that



hideous coat of hers? *That* I’d take. I’d take it and give it back to the animal she stole it from.” She blew a huge bubble and strode away.

J. Preston straightened his bow tie. “I apologize for her behavior. Anyway, my bedroom is just over there. I awoke when I heard a bump in the kennel. I flipped on the lights but saw nothing. Poor Sirius must’ve

You were never an ice queen, Sonya. I’m sorry I called you that.



I’m sorry I was mean. And I promise to be more positive and not nitpick.

Ah, sisters...



Oh, brother.





been terrified, being whisked away in the middle of the night.”

Miranda whimpered at the thought.

Jonathon snapped his organizer shut. “Gang, can I have a word?” The group huddled together. “Whodunit? I feel like it’s Joy Flipple. She admitted she *could* be a criminal. And she has a motive.”

“I think it’s Mrs. Cash,” said Miranda. “What kind of dog lover wears *fur*? Not to mention the fact we’re on *Mercury*, the planet closest to the sun.”

“You’re getting warmer—no pun intended,” said Chloe. The crew turned to her.

Tommy nodded. “It’s the trainer, J. Blah-blah-blah. And thanks to Chloe I can even tell you why.”

Jonathon smiled. “Welcome to the I.P.P.I.’s, Lutsinger.”

How did Tommy and Jonathon know whodunit? Turn to page 34 for the answer!



So you’re not mad at me anymore?



When I saw you frozen, my anger was whisked away—taken suddenly and quickly—forever.



Let it go... Let it go...



Boy, did I let it go.