

CHAPTER 3

Maxine wanted to dive headfirst into the investigation, but knew she could really use some sleep. Up until now, she hadn't been sleeping in Ruby's apartment; she held out hope that she could return at any moment and didn't want to invade her space. But now...it was time. Maxine headed home and planned to grab a few things for her stay in the apartment.

When she opened the door again only a few hours later, Leo had a slightly delayed reaction to her arrival. She'd never been back again so soon. Although she was running on only a few hours of sleep, she was too eager to get back to the investigation to stay away long. "Investigation? Is that the word she was going with?" She thought to herself as she sat down on the couch. Leo jumped up next to her and began purring for attention. Maxine scanned the room as she thought about where possible clues could be hiding. Perhaps she'd start with the large pile of unopened mail that had been delivered since Ruby had

been gone. Today marked one month of her disappearance. She felt bad going through her personal things, but she felt she had no other choice; if invading Ruby's privacy was what it took to find her, it was worth it. One by one, Maxine picked up each envelope, ripping it open and frantically reading the contents. Handwritten letters from friends, bills, catalogues, newspapers, but nothing that seemed to help. Maxine was happy to see that Ruby had friends who were worried about her and reaching out, wondering where she had been.

Maxine's eyes felt heavy as she picked up the last unopened envelope. A flyer for the grand opening of a local restaurant. A month's worth of mail, and she was no closer to finding Ruby. Disappointment washed over her as she suddenly realized how tired she was. Maybe a short nap would help give her the motivation to continue her search. She dragged her feet as she made her way to the bedroom, flopping down on Ruby's big bed. Despite her extended absence, it still held her comforting smell. Maxine closed her eyes and placed her head on the pillow as she heard a small crinkling sound under her head. She shifted as she heard the sound again. She furrowed her brows as she reached under the

pillow, feeling a piece of paper. Pulling it out, she blinked her eyes to bring it into focus. A crinkled, handwritten note. It was a series of dots and lines; a code of some sort. Finally, another clue.