

Excerpt from *A Jewel of a Crime: A Venus Bixby Mystery*
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“Where do you think Margo is?”

Rather than barge uninvited into the classroom looking for her, Gabby and I bided our time and hung out in the lobby. I shifted from one foot to the other while Gabby perused the business cards pinned to a brand-new combination whiteboard and corkboard.

“When I come back with that vase, I’ll bring a few business cards to tack up here.”

“Great idea!” I rifled through my purse until I found a couple of cards promoting Oldies & Goodies and Cats & Their Cradle. I affixed them to the cork and smiled. Part of me wondered whether Sam would take them down before anyone ever saw them.

Still no Margo. Did she not hear the bell when we entered a few minutes ago? Maybe not over Ol’ Blue Eyes. I considered writing a message on the whiteboard. I picked through the pens in the Tremont Regency Hotel mug on the desk, but there didn’t appear to be any of those dry-erase markers.

“Where could she be?” Gabby asked.

“Probably in the back. Should we check?”

I gently opened the glass door to the main classroom. A rush of crisp air reminded me how we’d kept the temperature in the low sixties so the students wouldn’t get overheated. The smell of fresh-cut grass suddenly wafted over me. My nose recognized dance floor wax, forcing me to stifle a sneeze.

The same song we heard when we walked into the lobby still played. Must be on a continuous loop. I listened closely. Ah, Frank was singing “Witchcraft.” An appropriate theme for the day.

The walls were painted a creamy shade of white. Floor-to-ceiling mirrors lined one wall and a row of barres ran parallel to the floor. The mirrors reflected framed images on the opposite wall. I turned to examine them up close. I walked along the wall, studying and touching each gently. Definitely Sam and Margo in their younger years.

This egotistical display was so unlike the studio Paul, and then I, owned. Our walls were proudly adorned with photographs of the young dancers who graced our ballroom.

Where are those pictures? Why didn't they ask if I wanted them? What else did they keep from me?

"Margo?" I called.

Silence.

At the far end of the room, there was a royal purple floor-to-ceiling drape pulled closed across the width of the ballroom. As I walked toward it, I waved toward Gabby. "I'm gonna check back here."

I noticed a universal restroom to my right. I motioned to Gabby. "You check in there."

Then I drew back the curtain. "Never mind. Found her!" I cried out.