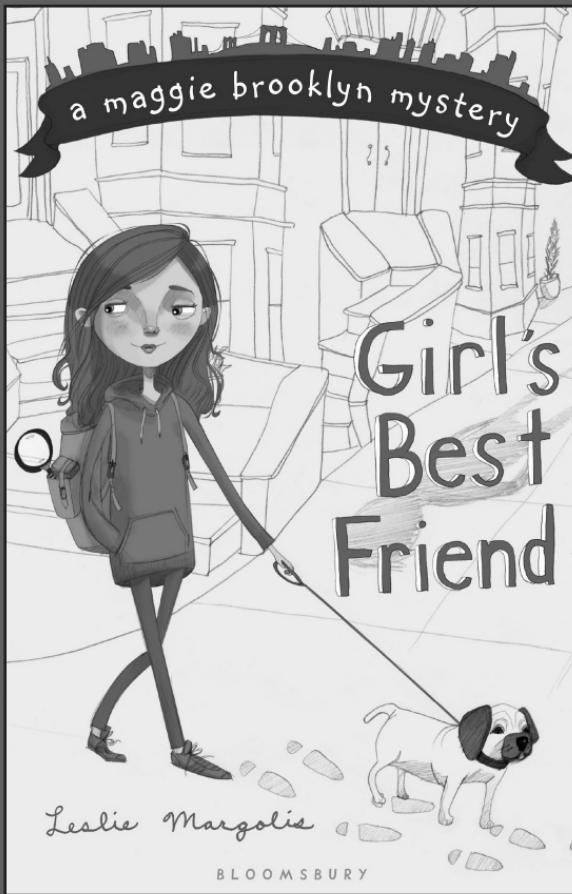


Don't miss Leslie Margolis's
brand-new mystery series!



Maggie Brooklyn Sinclair has a twin brother, a secret dog-walking business, and an eye for mystery. Read on for a sneak peek at her first adventure.

Ivy and I used to do everything together: music and ballet when we were little. Fencing and T-ball when we got older. Scrapbook making, modern dance, quilting, origami. . . . All these activities our parents signed us up for. Some fun. Some dumb.

I even helped her pick out Kermit, her first pet—the most adorable black and white Labrador/Dalmatian mutt you've ever seen. We were nine then and Ivy said he could be my dog, too.

We walked him every day after school, taking turns holding his leash.

I helped her give Kermit his first bath—a wet, soapy disaster.

Helped her carry home his first big bag of dog food from Acme Pet Food (before we found out they delivered for free).

He really felt like my dog.

Just like Ivy felt almost like a sister.

Then Eve O'Sullivan's parents had twin boys. They all moved to Brooklyn and everything changed.

At first it was small stuff: Eve and Ivy giggled over stuff that wasn't even funny. They had matching retro rainbow flip-flops and thought it proved they were destined to be friends. More likely, it meant that Urban Outfitters had a sale on flip-flops, but when I pointed this out, they accused me of being jealous.

One day the two of them set up a lemonade stand outside Ivy's building.

I asked if I could help out. They said there wasn't room. And that was the beginning of the end.

The Ivy I knew disappeared—morphed into a different person: a girl who had perfect hair and actually thought that made her better than everyone else.

A girl who wore eye shadow in the sixth grade and real lipstick, not just tinted gloss.

A girl whose socks always matched her shirts, which coordinated with her belts. A girl who made fun of those who didn't get their ears pierced because maybe they were afraid of needles.

A girl who doled out dirty looks the way she used to pass out sticks of gum.

In short, Ivy turned into someone I didn't even know. Someone I no longer even liked. And yet, I still missed her.

But how can you miss someone who doesn't even exist anymore? Two years should have been enough time for me to get over it and move on. And I had, for the most part.

I already knew that Ivy was a lot of things—backstabbing; gossipy; and okay, even pretty mean. But I never knew she was a thief, too.

Yet here she was, taking my stuff.

“Steal from me much?”

Ivy screamed and jumped what seemed like a mile.

“You scared me,” she yelled, all accusing—like I was supposed to feel bad.

“Am I supposed to apologize for getting in the way of your robbery?”

“It’s not like that,” Ivy cried. And that’s when I noticed her glassy red eyes. She swiped her shiny tears from her face with the back of her hand.

But were they real? I couldn’t tell. There was a time when I’d have given her the benefit of the doubt. Those days were long gone.

“I can explain,” she said, staring down at the cash in her hand like she didn’t know how it got there.

I walked across the room and grabbed my box out of her hand.

“I can’t believe you still have that,” said Ivy.

It’s not that I’m so sentimental. I swear I didn’t keep the cigar box because I was pining over our lost

friendship. Rather, the box was one of the coolest gifts anyone had ever given me. It's faded red with a map of the world inside. Musty smelling like it had an exciting history. We used to hide stuff in it when we played Pirates—an elaborate treasure-hunting game we made up. But that was a long time ago.

"It's just a stupid box," I said, opening the lid and checking to see that the keys and all my other dog-walking things were still there.

"I don't need any of that junk," Ivy said. "And I wasn't going to take all of your cash."

"Oh, sorry for the confusion. I should've known you were only going to steal *a little* from me. You know, since it's my birthday and all." I held out my hand and she gave up the stack of bills. I counted it in front of her—figuring it was all there, but knowing it would annoy her.

"I only need some of it and I can explain."

I was so angry I was shaking. "It looks pretty obvious to me, Ivy. First you crash my party and then you try and steal from me? Like it isn't enough to torture me at school every day? You have to come to my house and ruin my weekends, too?"

"I don't torture you," she said. "And the money is for Kermit."

"You're stealing money for your dog?" I asked. "Well, that certainly clears things up. What is it, credit

card debt? Poor guy. I didn't realize he was such a big spender."

"Don't be like this, Maggie. I'm serious. Kermit's in trouble."

Ivy pulled a small blue note card from her back pocket and handed it to me. "I wanted to tell you, but I figured this would be easier. And for the record, I was going to pay you back."

I grabbed the note. The printing was so neat it almost looked typed.

Want to see Kermit again? Bring \$100 in an unmarked envelope to the dog beach in Prospect Park tomorrow at noon. Tape it to the nearest park bench and walk away. Make sure you come alone.

"I don't get it," I said.

"Someone stole Kermit and they're holding him for ransom," she said. "And no one else knows—not even Katie or Eve and especially not my parents, so you have to promise me you'll keep quiet."

I glanced at her skeptically. "Is this a joke?"

"No, it's serious." The way her voice broke, the way her whole posture seemed off—anxious, really—made me believe her. "And you can't tell anyone."

“I’m not promising a thing,” I said. “But you’d still better explain.”

“Fine.” Ivy huffed out a small breath in angry defeat. “My parents are in England for two weeks, visiting my grandma because she’s sick, and they left me with my other grandma and she was out with her bridge club, so I took Kermit to a stoop sale where I found this very cool top and then I saw a bunch of Diane Von Furstenberg wrap dresses in the window at Beacon’s Closet and—” Ivy paused and looked me up and down. “Beacon’s Closet is on Fifth Avenue. They sell—”

“I know what Beacon’s Closet is.”

“Just checking.” She held up her hands, all fake innocent.

Ivy’s always been way into old clothes and she’s got this whole reverse-snobbery attitude about it. She prides herself on finding cool vintage stuff at used-clothing stores and stoop sales and even online. And it is a skill. It’s just, I don’t know why she thinks this makes her better than other people. Everyone has something they’re good at. And for me, it’s not fashion. But so what? “I’m not stupid.”

“I know. I’m just telling you. It was an emergency. The dress display was adorable, but I had Kermit, so—”

I cut her off. “Did you wash your hands really well after you cleaned up after him?”

“Maggie!”

“I’m just saying. Dogs carry all types of icky diseases.” I did my best imitation of her. I couldn’t help myself.

“Okay, fine.” She rolled her eyes. “I’m sorry, okay? It was just a joke.”

“Well, you forgot to make it funny.”

“Oh, who cares? No one heard.”

“Everyone heard!”

“Everyone?” She raised her eyebrows, all condescending. “I seriously doubt that.”

“Everyone in the Pizza Den. Milo, for instance.” I didn’t want to harp on this, but I couldn’t help it. His name just slipped out.

“Well, at least no one good heard.”

“What’s that supposed to mean?”

“Milo’s a dork. He doesn’t count.”

I started to object but stopped myself. Milo was so much more than a dork, but maybe it was better if Ivy thought of him that way. There’d be less competition. Plus, I didn’t want her knowing I liked him.

“Wait a second.” Ivy smiled like she could read my mind. “You like him.”

“Who?”

“Milo. It’s obvious.” She clapped and said, “Ha! That’s so typical.”

“I don’t like him,” I said, but I couldn’t meet her gaze. “And what do you mean by typical?”

“Just that he’s totally your type—tall, skinny, floppy-haired. All quiet so you never know what he’s thinking. I guess he’s not hideous, but he definitely needs a wardrobe update. Have you noticed that sweater he always wears? The one with the big hole?”

“Tell me more about Kermit. What time did you lose him?”

“What?” she asked. “Oh yeah. I tied him up at around three-thirty and he was gone by a quarter to four.”

“How did you do it?”

“What do you mean?”

“What kind of knot?”

“I don’t know. Square? You know I was always bad at knots in Girl Scouts.” Ivy grinned and I had to smile back. We’d both dropped out of Girl Scouts in the third grade—right before we got our rope-tying badges—because Ivy claimed it was a fascist organization. I didn’t know what that meant at the time, but it sounded cool, so I kept saying it, too, and eventually our parents got sick of hearing us complain and signed us up for a pottery class instead.

“Anyway, it was only a few minutes,” Ivy said.

“Before you said fifteen.”

Ivy cringed guiltily. "Okay, I don't know *exactly* how long it was. I guess I sort of lost track."

I shook my head. "I can't believe you left him on the street."

"Do you know how bad I feel? And I already told you it was an emergency . . ."

"A shopping emergency?"

"Yes!" Ivy screamed. "I abandoned my dog so I could shop. I'm a horrible person! I can't even walk by Beacon's Closet without feeling sick."

"Did you see anything suspicious? Or anyone? Do you think someone followed you, maybe? Can you think of anyone who might do this?"

"Like does Kermit have any enemies?" she asked.
"He's a dog!"

"I know. I'm just asking. Tell me what happened again. From the beginning this time."

Ivy took a deep breath and huffed. "Fine. So I tied Kermit to a parking meter directly in front of the store, where I'd be able to see him through the window the whole time. Then I went inside and—"

"If you could see him the whole time, then how did he get dognapped?"

Ivy frowned. "I could see him when I was looking at dresses, but the sunglasses display case is in the back."

I groaned.

“It’s not my fault,” said Ivy. “I made one tiny mistake. In one moment, I had the perfect dress for the fall dance. And in the next, my dog vanished.”

“That’s horrible,” I said. I meant it, too. And in the back of my mind, I also marveled at how she already had an outfit for the dance, which was a whole month away. I had no idea if I was even going. And she’d already figured out what to wear?

I wondered if she had a date. Then I got annoyed with myself for caring.

Meanwhile, Ivy sat cross-legged on my floor, in tears. She seemed so upset I had to believe her.

I handed her a tissue. She blew her nose, loudly, and went on. “I found this cop a block over, and I tried to tell him, but he didn’t believe me. I think he thought it was a joke. The way he looked at me—like I was wasting his time. It was awful. And I tried calling the police later on, but they said that dognapping is not a nine-one-one type of emergency and could they please speak to my parents. So I said no and hung up fast. And now Kermit’s gone and my parents will be home in ten days and they’ll never forgive me.”

“You didn’t tell your grandma?” I asked.

“No, she’s kind of forgetful and she doesn’t like dogs. I’m supposed to keep Kermit away from her whenever she’s at the house, so I don’t even think she’s noticed that he’s missing.”

I hadn't seen Ivy this upset since we got grounded for throwing water balloons out of her window when we were in the third grade. (And to be fair, that had been my idea.)

"But it's not your fault," I said.

"It kind of is. My parents warned me not to tie up Kermit. And they think I buy too many clothes. So this is the ultimate. I didn't know what to do until I remembered what you said about dog walking yesterday. My cousin used to walk dogs when he was in law school and he said it was the best job he ever had. Well paid, too. So I figured you had the cash. I mean, obviously you're not spending money on clothes." She looked me up and down.

"It's amazing how you can ask me for help *and* be insulting at the very same time."

"It's a gift." Ivy shrugged. "But whatever. I'm only stating a fact and you know I'll pay you back. I'm supposed to babysit next Friday and for three Saturday nights in a row. You'll have the money in no time."

Ivy stared at me, desperate. And as much as I wanted to say forget it, I thought of Kermit. One of my favorite dogs in the world, and the one with the saddest puppyhood I'd ever known.

He'd been found in an abandoned building when he was days old. His mom was gone and his whole litter was alone. Two had died by the time the shelter

found them. And once we finally convinced Ivy's parents that they must—absolutely had to—adopt one of the puppies, Kermit was the only one left. He had black and white shaggy fur and spots. The skinniest little body you've ever seen—we could see his ribs, even. Huge, fat paws that told us he'd grow up to be enormous. And he did. One time, this kid on the street mistook him for a donkey.

I couldn't believe he was gone.

Despite what Ivy did and despite the girl she'd become, I had to help Kermit. A hundred dollars was a lot of money, but I had it. No way could I refuse.

Still, reading the note gave me the chills. What kind of person would do something like this? No one I wanted to meet.

"I don't think you should go alone," I found myself saying.

Ivy's eyebrows shot up. "But I have to. The note says—"

"I know what the note says, but think about it. It could be dangerous. What if he or she tries to kidnap you? Are you sure you can't tell your parents?"

She shook her head. "There's no way."

"Well, what about my parents? They'd help, I bet."

"No, they'll just invoke the parent code and call my parents. You can't say a word." Ivy's cold blue eyes bore into me, letting me know she meant business. She

spoke carefully, urgently. "I need to get Kermit back and I need to listen to this person's instructions. So are you going to help me or what?"

I looked down at the note and then back up at Ivy.

I didn't answer right away, but I knew not to argue.

Once Ivy made up her mind there was no going back.