

Laurel Hill: Snow Days

By: Erin Mackey

Chapter 1 – Mystery Solved

Maggie Anderson stands motionless, barely breathing as she waits for the mystery to finally be over. In the months since Maggie and her mom moved to Laurel Hill, there's been one thing that Maggie has wanted to know, why Mrs. Everett, the town's librarian, is so sad all the time.

Every time she goes to Laurel Hill's library, Mrs. Everett either appears sad or she's snapping at the smallest things. Her new friends, Katie and Morgan Johnson, Nikki Taylor, Amy Madison, and Jennifer Bloom didn't know why either, but all the six girls were waiting to finally find out.

They just asked Sergeant Mackey, their school's resource officer, to tell them about Mrs. Everett and after some pleading, he finally agreed. As the cafeteria buzzes with activity, all six girls lean in so they can hear Sergeant Mackey as he begins to tell them the story of Mrs. Everett. "This goes back more than twenty years," he explains before continuing, "Mrs. Everett was still the town's librarian, but she was quite different; light-hearted, funny, and even up for pulling the occasional prank or two."

The girls can't believe Sergeant Mackey is talking about the same person; pulling pranks? The Mrs. Everett they know would banish someone from the library forever for trying to pull a prank.

He goes on to say, "She also had a family; a husband named Tom and a daughter named Gabrielle. It was a cold, rainy evening in December when the accident happened."

"Accident?" Nikki asked. She was hearing all this for the first time, even though she had grown up in Laurel Hill her entire life.

"Yes, one of the worst accidents we've had in our town," Sergeant Mackey responds. "Tom and Gabrielle were driving into town to pick Mrs. Everett up after she closed the library for the day. No one knows what happened for sure, because there were no witnesses, but it's thought that he may have hit a patch of ice that caused him to lose control of the car. They hit the big tree at Mulligan's Pond and the car careened into the pond itself."

The girls were horrified. They've always wondered what happened to the gnarled tree down by Mulligan's Pond and now they have their answer. They never guessed such tragedy would be the cause of the disfigured tree.

Sergeant Mackey continues, "When Tom and Gabrielle didn't show up to pick Mrs. Everett up, she called the police, but it took some time to find them because the car was dark in color and was almost completely submerged. By then, it was too late, and they had both passed away."

A tear slips out and slides down Maggie's cheek as she listens. She can't imagine losing her entire family in the blink of an eye!

“Mrs. Everett was devastated, of course, and I don’t think she’s ever gotten over the loss,” Sergeant Mackey tells them.

Amy quietly asks, “How old was Gabrielle, Sergeant Mackey?”

He explains, “She was twelve, Amy, right around your age.”

Nikki adds, “That may be why she seems to pay more attention to us.”

Maggie nods her head in agreement and says, “Thank you for telling us about Mrs. Everett, Sergeant Mackey.”

He smiles at the girls and replies, “Of course. I’ve always had a soft spot for Mrs. Everett, I was the patrol officer who responded to the library to pick her up that evening and she insisted that I take her to Mulligan’s Pond. On approaching the scene of the accident, I saw how she broke down at the sight of the car being pulled from the water. After a while, I took her home and stayed with her until her sister arrived.”

“That was really nice of you,” Jennifer responds. “I’m sure she appreciated all you did for her.”

Sergeant Mackey smiles at Jennifer’s remark. He grows serious as he looks up at the clock on the wall of the cafeteria. “It’s just about time for the bell to ring girls, so you’d better head off to class now.”

All six girls thank Sergeant Mackey again before walking off to meet up with their classes. They’re quiet as they enter the classroom and take their seats, and for the rest of the afternoon, they feel like they’re moving in slow motion as they try to process the story that Sergeant Mackey told them.

After their classes, the girls meet back at their lockers, still processing the news they just heard.

Jennifer breaks the silence, “I just can’t believe Mrs. Everett went through that.”

As the girls gather their things, put on their jackets and ready to walk home, Katie adds, “I can’t believe she continued to work at the library all these years. You would think it would be too painful to go back to work after that happened.”

Katie’s sister, Morgan, turns to her and explains, “Maybe she keeps working there because it keeps her close to the thoughts of her family.”

They all remain quiet on their walk home as the frigid wind whips up around them. After walking in silence for a distance, Maggie finally speaks up, “Christmas is in a few weeks, and I think we should do something for her.”

Amy adds, “We could get her a present - something that commemorates her family.”

“Whatdaya have in mind, Amy?” Nikki asks as they approach the place where they each split to head to their respective homes.

"I don't know yet," Amy replies before adding, "but we can all think about it tonight and see what we come up with by tomorrow."

Morgan responds, "That's a good idea, Amy, we'll each give our best ideas tomorrow and can decide what to get her."

The girls all agree on the plan before heading home to get out of the cold. When Maggie arrives home, she tells her mom the story of Mrs. Everett before asking for help with ideas on the type of gift to give to her.

"I think it is a lovely idea to get her something, Maggie," Mrs. Anderson tells her. "I'll think about it and let you know later this evening."

The following morning, as the girls meet up on their usual spot from where they all walk to school together, they start to discuss the different gift ideas they came up with for Mrs. Everett.

Amy begins, "There are these figurines called Angel Heart statues, and I thought we could get her one of those that has a mother, a father, and a young girl hugging them to represent her family."

"That's a great idea, Amy," Katie agrees, "better than our idea, actually."

"What was your idea, Katie?" Amy asks.

Katie explains, "Well, Morgan and I thought we could get a nice glass wall hanging from the gift shop downtown that says something about family."

"I think that's a good idea, too," Nikki declares. "My idea was a personalized frame that she could put a picture of her family in it."

Jennifer pipes up, "These are all great ideas! My suggestion was a garden stone with their names engraved on it."

"I like that idea too, Jennifer," Maggie exclaims.

"What was your idea, Maggie?" Nikki asks.

Maggie explains, "Well, my idea was a Christmas ornament with her family's names on it, with Mary, Joseph, and baby Jesus in the manger. But thinking about it now, she would only see my gift idea at Christmas time, and all of your ideas she would see all year round."

"That's true," Jennifer asserts, "but I love your gift idea the best, Maggie, and I think it would be even more special if she just have it out at Christmas time."

The other girls agree with Jennifer that Maggie's gift idea is the best, so they decide to choose that as their gift for Mrs. Everett.

"Does anyone know where we can get a personalized ornament like that?" Amy asks the group.

Nikki exclaims, "I do! Mrs. Babcock, at the church, makes them."

"That's right!" Amy agrees, "I remember seeing some of the ornaments she made, and they're beautiful."

Jennifer asks, "Amy, do you think your mom could get her number for us, since she works at the church?"

"Sure," Amy replies, "But I think her number might be in the church directory, too."

"Who wants to call and place the order?" Jennifer asks the group.

Maggie responds, "Well, since it was my idea, I guess I could call. I'll call tonight and text you the amount we'll need for the ornament and how long it'll take to make."

"That's perfect, Maggie, thanks," Morgan declares as the girls walk up to the entrance of the school.

Later that evening, Maggie pulls up the church directory app and looks for Mrs. Babcock's information. She calls Mrs. Babcock and talks with her about the ornament they would like to order. Mrs. Babcock says it should be ready in a week and will cost \$15, so Maggie places the order with her.

In a group chat, Maggie texts the other girls to fill them in on the cost and timeframe for the gift. The girls each reply how excited they are about the gift being ordered and how the cost is so reasonable. Now, they just have to be patient as they wait a week for the gift to be ready!