



SAMMY THE SLEUTH

by Linda Reilly

My 7-year old brother, Sammy, got a detective kit for his birthday. For a kid who's a natural snoop, it was the perfect gift.

"Hey, Sammy," I told him, "for Halloween, I think I'll get you a Sherlock Holmes costume."

"Who's Sherlock Homes?"

"*Holmes*. He's a famous detective. He wears this awesome-looking hat and an old-fashioned cape."

Sammy's eyes widened. "Cool!"

By trick-or-treat night, Sammy was bursting with excitement.

"Stay still, will you?" I told him. The hat fit okay, but the sleeves of the tweed cape hung past Sammy's fingertips. I tried to roll them up while he inspected my freckles with the magnifying glass from his detective kit.

"Where we going first, Jason?"

"We'll start at the Reids' house. Then we'll work our way around the block. We're only going to people we know, but that should give you plenty of candy." Enough to keep him on a sugar high till the next millennium, I figured.

By dark, trick-or-treaters began prowling the sidewalks. A bumblebee and a princess flitted past us, waving their eerie green light sticks. A chunky, bearded pirate with an eye patch darted across the street. His candy sack was a giant pillowcase.

I pressed the Reids' doorbell. Mr. Reid grinned when he saw the mini-detective.

"Trick or treat!" Sammy held out his pumpkin-shaped bucket. As Mr. Reid gathered candy from a bowl, Sammy peered intently around him. Mr. Reid plunked candy bars into Sammy's plastic pumpkin. Sammy and I thanked him.

"Boy, that was suspicious," Sammy said seriously, as we traipsed toward the next house. "When Mr. Reid was getting my candy, I could see into the kitchen. Bobby Reid and his mom were eating, and Bobby snuck something to the dog under the table. I bet it was a secret message, and the dog's gonna deliver it to the SBI!"

I choked back a laugh. More likely Bobby Reid was slipping the pooch his veggies. I once tried feeding my lima beans to our dog Patches. Patches spit them out on Mom's new rug, and I wasn't allowed to watch TV for a week.

"It's *FBI*. And let's forget about spying for tonight, okay kiddo?"

Sammy's been known to carry his spying a little too far. One time he spotted Mr. Wiggs slouched in the front seat of his car. Positive the man was in dire trouble, Sammy ran screaming for help. Turned out Mr. Wiggs was on a low-fat diet. He was only trying to scarf down a few doughnuts before Mrs. Wiggs caught him.

"But I'm a *detective*," Sammy complained. "I'm supposed to spy."

"For tonight, you're just supposed to collect candy. Come on, Mrs. Moore's house is next." Mrs. Moore's a really nice elderly woman whose husband died earlier this year. "Remember her, Sammy? She always gives kids tons of candy on Halloween."

Sammy's hand flew to the doorbell. "Trick or treat!"

Mrs. Moore opened the door. With a smile that looked forced, she tossed a lollipop into Sammy's candy bucket. Then she quickly closed the door.

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Sammy gave me a puzzled look. I knew he was wondering why Mrs. Moore had given him only a lollipop. Maybe she's still sad about her husband, I thought. Or maybe she's having money troubles.

Sammy frowned thoughtfully. “I guess Mrs. Moore was busy playing hide and seek. That’s prob’ly why she didn’t give me more candy.”

“Yeah, I suppose. Come on, Sherlock,” I said cheerfully. “Mrs. Gregory’s house is next. She always gives out popcorn balls, remember?”

Sammy brightened.

“Well, if it isn’t the famous Mr. Holmes,” Mrs. Gregory chuckled when she opened the door. She reached into a basket and pulled out a cellophane-wrapped popcorn ball. “And what do you deduce from this popcorn ball, young Sherlock?”

Deduce...?

Suddenly, I turned to Sammy. “Sammy, what did you say before? About Mrs. Moore?”

Sammy looked mystified. Then he said, “Oh yeah. She must’ve been playing hide and seek, ’cause someone was hiding behind a chair in the den. I saw part of a hat and part of a boot sticking out.”

“You couldn’t have, Sammy. You can’t see into the den from the doorway.”

“I know. But I could see the big mirror in the front hall. And the mirror can see into the den.”

My stomach buckled. “Mrs. Gregory, can you watch Sammy for a few minutes?”

“Certainly Jason, but—”

I didn’t hear the rest. I was already racing back to Mrs. Moore’s.

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I tried to see into one window, but the shade was pulled too low. At the next window, I hit pay dirt. The shade was almost an inch above the windowsill.

Right away, I spotted him—the bearded pirate. And he wasn’t a kid. He was an adult. Laughing, he was shoving stuff into his pillowcase. A silver tray. A fancy clock. Mrs. Moore’s purse. Poor Mrs. Moore was huddled in a chair. She looked terrified.

I ran back to Mrs. Gregory’s, and she called the police. She told them to hurry, and not to use the sirens.

Minutes later, two officers hauled the snarling, handcuffed pirate out of Mrs. Moore’s house. By then, a small crowd of goblins had gathered. Everyone cheered as the officers pushed the robber into the squad car.

Mrs. Moore was shaken, but okay. “I thought the robber was a trick-or-treater, until he forced his way inside,” she related with a shudder. “He told me, ‘if someone rings the bell, just throw a lollipop at them and get rid of them fast.’ Then he’d hide until the trick-or-treaters left.” She beamed at Sammy and me. “You two did some fine detective work.”

“Well, just call me Dr. Watson,” I joked.

Sammy tore open a candy wrapper. “Who’s Dr. Watson?”

“He’s Sherlock’s sidekick,” I explained. “The one who gets to eat half of Sherlock’s Halloween candy.”

Sammy narrowed his eyes at me. “Now that sounds suspicious,” he said. “Very suspicious.”

