

BONUS SCENE by TONYA KAPPES

ICE COFFEE CORRUPTION

Aunt Maxi

Well, butter my biscuits and call me a cobbler, I knew something was brewing the moment that door swung open and in came a gust of fall leaves, carrying with it a scream that would curl your toenails. Before I could even mutter a “Bless their heart,” that doggone Deputy jerked free from Louise’s grip like he was shot out of a cannon and high-tailed it down the boardwalk like his tail was on fire.

“Deputy, no!” Louise hollered, but that pup was already a blur of fur and determination, weaving through people faster than a hog on a hot griddle. Pepper, bless his well-behaved little heart, looked like he was about to join the doggy stampede, but one word from Roxy had him freezing like a statue. That dog’s got more sense than some folks I know.

Now, I’m not one to be left in the dust, so I hitched up my skirt and took off after them, Loretta hot on my heels. You’d think we were trying out for the Olympic sprint, the way we were dodging strollers, leaping over picnic baskets, and nearly sending a poor fella’s coffee flying. If it weren’t for the sheer panic of the moment, I’d have laughed myself silly at the sight of Loretta, her scarf flapping in the wind like she was a one-woman parade, bracelets jingling like a country band.

“Outta the way, folks!” I hollered, waving my arms like a madwoman. “Deputy on the loose!”

“Coming through, y’all!” Loretta added, looking like she’d just stepped off a merry-

go-round, her hair swirling around her head like a halo gone haywire.

We were a sight, let me tell you. The leaves were swirling all around us like we were in some kind of autumn-themed snow globe, and the smell of the lake mixed with that delicious scent of baked goods from the Bean Hive. But there was no time to stop for a pumpkin scone—Deputy was on a mission, and we were trailing behind like a couple of winded geese.

By the time we reached the bait and tackle shop, where that scream had come from, Deputy was already at the docks, nose to the ground like he was a bloodhound on a scent. And wouldn’t you know it, just as we got there, a boat shot out from the no-wake zone faster than a gator with a firecracker up its tail. Gone before I could even blink twice.

Deputy was at the edge of the dock, howling his fool head off, and it sent chills right down to my bones. It was the kind of howl that made you think of all the spooky stories you’d ever heard, and I tell you, it had me more spooked than a black cat in a room full of rocking chairs.

“Deputy!” Roxy called, and she got to him before I did, wrapping him up like a mama bear with her cub. “Good boy, it’s okay,” she murmured, but I knew that look in her eye. She was piecing something together, sure as shootin’.

Loretta and I finally caught up, both of us wheezing like a couple of old kettles. My hat was halfway to Timbuktu, and Loretta’s hair looked like it had been through a tornado and back.

“What in the sweet sarsaparilla was that all about?” I managed to puff out, straightening

my hat with as much dignity as I could muster.

“I reckon Deputy’s got himself a nose for trouble,” Loretta said, trying to tame the wild mane her hair had become.

The woman from the bait and tackle shop came running up, looking like she’d seen a ghost. “Did you see that? Someone took off in that boat like a bat outta hell!”

“I saw,” Roxy said, holding onto Deputy like he was the last piece of pie at Thanksgiving. “Did you get a look at who it was?”

“No, it all happened so fast,” the woman replied, voice trembling like a leaf in the wind. “One minute everything was quiet, and the next, that boat was gone.”

I looked out over the lake, trying to catch my breath and my thoughts at the same time. Whoever it was that hightailed it out of here, they were up to no good, and Deputy knew it before the rest of us did. This Friendsgiving Harvest Fest was shaping up to be more than just pumpkins and hayrides, that’s for sure. And if there’s one thing I know, it’s that things are about to get as tangled as a catfish in a fisherman’s net.