CASE FILE #2017-12

Adventures in ODYSSEY®

Jones & Parker Detective Agency

GNOME FOR THE HOLIDAYS

by Bob Hoose

An Emily Jones Solve-It-Yourself Mystery

When Wooton encounters a package puzzle, can Emily deliver the solution?

A good detective listens to the whole story, even in the most outlandish cases.

Matthew and I were warming up with a cup of hot cocoa at Whit's End when Wooton rushed into the shop. He stomped the snow off his boots and settled onto a stool.

"Gregor's on the move again," Wooton announced. Mr. Whittaker laughed and handed him a mug full of marshmallows.

"Who's Gregor?" Matthew asked.

"A garden gnome who walks around when no one's looking," Wooton said.

"Now that sounds like a mystery," I said with a laugh. "Where did you first see Gregor?"



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"On Dr. Hightower's porch," Wooton said. "That place has enough security cameras and lights to give you a tan on a snowy day."

Matthew beamed. Dr. Hightower was a reclusive scientist who lived at the edge of town. Supposedly, he had rigged his house with all kinds of inventions.

"Doc has been on vacation for a few weeks," Wooton said. "Before he left, he told me to keep delivering his mail like normal. 'Leave any packages under the gnome,' Dr. Hightower said. 'Gregor will take care of them.' "

Matthew started scribbling in his notepad.

"At first, nothing happened," Wooton continued. "The letters piled up in his mailbox. One Friday, I left a package under the gnome. When I came back the next day, the letters and the package were gone—and Gregor had moved."

"Where?" I asked, feeling a little tense.

"To the other side of the door," Wooton said. "He was staring right at me!"

"I think you're imagining things," Mr. Whittaker said.

"Yeah, Penny thought so, too," Wooton said. "Until Gregor moved again."

Matthew shivered with excitement.

"I left Doc another package, and the next day I caught Gregor lying on his side," Wooton said. "He had a skinny aluminum pole next to him. It looked like a ski pole, only with a rubber tip instead of a pointy metal one."

"So the gnome likes to ski?" I said, trying not to giggle.

"Don't be silly, Emily," Wooton replied. "He uses the pole to push the buttons on the keypad lock on Doc's door. That's how he gets inside."

"But you found him outside," Matthew noted.

"Maybe I caught him off guard," Wooton said. "He must have panicked, fallen over sideways and dropped the pole to throw me off."

"You don't seriously believe that, do you?" I asked.

Wooton laughed. "Well, not too seriously. But you see a lot of strange things on a postal route. If Mrs. Harris can subscribe to three different 'cheese of the month' clubs, why couldn't Dr. Hightower invent a robot gnome?"

I turned to Matthew, but he was already lost in tinker mode, sketching complicated diagrams in his head.

"I just wish I could figure out the hair," Wooton said.

"What hair?" Mr. Whittaker asked.

"When I went to Doc's house this afternoon, Gregor was standing in a bowl with a little frozen water at the bottom. He looked like an ice skater," Wooton said. "Next to the porch, I found a tuft of white hair snagged in the bushes—the exact same color as the gnome's porcelain hair."

Wooton pulled a small clump of hair out of his jacket pocket. It was thick, and white as snow.

"I've seen robots online with synthetic hair, but nothing so lifelike," Matthew said.

"What happened next?" Mr. Whittaker asked.

"I left today's delivery on the porch, gently set Gregor on top and took a picture with my phone," Wooton said. "If he tries to move again, I'll have proof."

"You could have taken the gnome," I suggested.

"No way!" Wooton said. "If I've learned anything from comic books, it's that you never kidnap 8-inch mechanized garden ornaments. They always get revenge."



Mr. Whittaker rubbed his chin thoughtfully. "Oh, I don't know about that, Wooton. I've seen Gregor around town, and he's always helping people."

"Wait, Gregor goes other places?" Matthew asked.

"Does he drive a tiny car?" Wooton asked.

"No, it's safer if he walks," Mr. Whittaker said.

I recognized the gleam in his eye. "You know something we don't," I said, leaning closer.

"Perhaps," Mr. Whittaker replied, sipping his cocoa. Whipped cream clung to his mustache.

I turned to Wooton. "Did you ever see the gnome move when Dr. Hightower was home?"

"No," he said.

"Then I think I know why that gnome is suddenly so active," I said.

Do you know what's really going on?

What were the clues?

Keep scrolling to read the solution!

Solution to

GNOME FOR THE HOLIDAYS:

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"First of all," I said, "Gregor is not a robot."

"Are you sure?" Wooton said nervously. "Because my other theory involves tiny space aliens disguised as gnomes."

I laughed. "You got confused. Gregor isn't the gnome. It's the name of Dr. Hightower's neighbor, or maybe a relative."

"Then why does the gnome keep moving?" Wooton said.

Mr. Whittaker chimed in. "Dr. Hightower must track his package deliveries online through his security cameras. When one arrives, he asks Gregor to pick it up."

"After Gregor collects the mail, he can't see where to put the gnome because he's blind," I said.

"What?!" Wooton gasped.

"That long, rubber-tipped pole you described sounds like a folding cane," Matthew explained. "Gregor probably also has a guide dog with white fur. That would explain the bowl of water and the hair you found."

Biblical evidence:

"Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not rely on your own understanding."

—Proverbs 3:5

"Excellent deductions!" Mr. Whittaker said with a smile. "I actually met Dr. Hightower's nephew, Gregor, when he first came to town. You two are spot on."

"I guess there's only one mystery left," Wooton said. "What kind of dog treats should we leave for Gregor's helpful pooch?"