

The Book Nook

BRIGTON, TEXAS

Dear Friend,

If you had told me five years ago that I'd trade boardrooms and budgets for lemon bars and book jackets, I would've laughed—probably politely, possibly wistfully. But here I am, running a bookshop in Brigton, Texas—a town so peaceful our entire police department just retired.

That's not hyperbole. Brigton had exactly one police officer: Chief Harlan. Shortly after I arrived, he left a note on his door and ran off to Alaska to “finally catch that salmon,” and no one's seen him since. Brigton loved him and misses him, but the town council has done little to replace him. I'm not sure if it's because the crime rate is so low that they feel the sheriff is all they need, or what. But it's sure a big change from a much bigger city!

Brigton may not have much in the way of crime, but it has heart. The kind you feel when the waitress at the cafe remembers your order and your dog's birthday. The kind that sends cookies and casseroles to anyone in need.

I came here accidentally. My medical leave was about to expire when I found the listing for the Book Nook. Just a few blurry photos and the phrase like “quaint but lovely” used with suspicious enthusiasm. I came to see it on a whim. Fell in love within an hour. Bought it two weeks later without bothering to negotiate.

And I don't regret it. Not even a little.

Millie Johnson, who owns the bakery across the street, showed up the day I moved in with coffee, scones, and sandwiches. She's lived here all her life and is married to a rancher, who is everything you hope for when you hear the word “cowboy”. She introduced me around and helped me settle in. The bakery closes before the bookstore on Saturdays, so we still meet here for lunch every week.

Daisy Mae came with the bookstore, nearly. I hadn't been here more than a couple of weeks when she walked in with a customer and never left. No one knows where she came from. She's a great dog and loves our long walks. Brigtonites love her as well. She even goes trick-or-treating at some businesses, and not just in October! She scratches on their door, and someone comes out with a dog treat! Clearly she adopted the entire town and just chooses to live with me...

So now my life is peaceful with books, tea, dog walks, and routines. I thought that would be the end of the story. Wouldn't you?

But lately... it feels like something is shifting. The air has a quiet tension you feel right before something begins. A whisper of trouble. I can't put my finger on anything in particular, but I'm getting the same feeling I had in my business analyst career when I found something in their books that didn't add up and often led to more rabbit holes.

Tonight, I'm going to this fundraiser. Millie's been baking up a storm for it, so the snacks will be wonderful if nothing else. A prominent family's sole surviving heir is showing off the Brigton Sapphire. Apparently no one's seen it, but everyone's heard all

kinds of stories about it. So, I'll go and see what all the fuss is about. It's supposed to be huge, very dark blue, and in the family's private collection for ages. At least all the rumors agree on those facts, so they're likely true. I'll see shortly!

Probably nothing. But just in case... I'll keep you posted.

Warmly,

Emma

PS - The evening didn't go quite as planned.

The sapphire was supposed to be the star of the night. There was bunting, champagne, a buffet, and the whispered anticipation usually reserved for theater curtains and scandalous reunions. Nearly everyone in town showed up—dressed to the nines and eager to see whether their favorite story about the Brighton Sapphire was true.

I thought I was going to nibble on pecan bars, make polite conversation, and admire a very large gemstone before heading home for a quiet evening with Daisy Mae and a cup of tea.

Instead, the lights went out just as they were about to reveal the sapphire in all its glory. When they came on, the sapphire was gone. It stunned everyone. I walked away from tonight with more questions than answers—and the knowledge that at least one person in Brighton is hiding something.

I didn't move here to investigate anything. I came for a quiet life. But sometimes, the past taps you on the shoulder... and asks if you're still paying attention.

If you'd like to follow along, I'll keep you updated.

Letter 1 Starts Here