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opening extract from

Grk and the Hot Dog Trail

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Chapter 1

The flight left in an hour. In a few minutes, they would be called to the gate. If he was going to do it, he had to do it now.

Tim stood up. He tugged the lead. Grk struggled to his feet and looked around the departure lounge of JFK International Airport, sniffing the air and wagging his tail.

Tim looked at his mother. 'Mum? I'm going for a pee.'

'Leave Grk here,' said Mrs Malt. 'I'll look after him.'

'Actually, it's not me who needs a pee. It's Grk.'

Mrs Malt nodded. 'Don't be too long. We have to get on the plane in fifteen minutes.'

'I'll be quick,' said Tim.

Together, he and Grk hurried across the departure lounge. At the exit, he glanced back. Through the crowds, he could see his mother sitting on a bench, reading a newspaper. Tim whispered, 'Sorry, Mum.' Of course, she couldn't hear him. But he would have felt even worse if he hadn't said anything.

He showed his passport to the guard, who waved him past. Tim hurried through the airport, following the signs to the taxi rank. Grk trotted alongside him.

There was a short queue for taxis. Tim stood at the back of the queue and waited impatiently, worried that

his mother would come searching for him. How long would she wait before she started worrying? Five minutes? Ten? And then what would she do? Would she run round the airport, searching for him? Or would she call the police immediately?

But neither Mrs Malt nor the police had arrived by the time that Tim reached the front of the queue. He opened the door. Grk jumped onto the back seat. Tim clambered after him and slammed the door. 'Good morning,' said the driver. 'Welcome to New York. What's your destination?'

'The Bramley Building, please.'

'Coming right up.'

The taxi accelerated down the sliproad and joined the highway.

The traffic was terrible. It took almost an hour to cross Brooklyn, plunge through the tunnel under the Hudson River and reach Manhattan. The streets of the Upper West Side were even more clogged. Finally, the taxi pulled up outside the Bramley Building. The driver said, 'This is it, kid.'

'Okay,' said Tim.

The driver said, 'You wanna give me a tip, give me a tip. Whatever you can afford. You don't want to give me a tip, you don't have to. It's a free country, right?'

'Thanks,' said Tim. 'I'd like to give you a tip. There's just one problem. I don't have any money.'

The taxi driver laughed. 'You British! You have a great sense of humour.'

'I'm not joking,' said Tim. 'I really don't have any money. Can I take your address? I'll get my mum to send the money tomorrow.'

The taxi driver laughed even louder. 'Irony, right? I love it. You are so ironic.'

'I'm not being ironic,' said Tim. 'I really don't have any money.'

Immediately, the taxi driver stopped laughing. He whirled round and poked his head through the sliding glass windows that divided the front seats from the back seats. 'Forget the tip. You don't wanna pay me a tip, don't pay me no tip. But just pay the fare, okay? Pay the fare.'

'I don't have any money.'

'Enough with your irony already,' said the taxi driver.

'Just give me the money.' Tim shook his head and spoke very slowly. 'I do not have any money.'

'Right! We're going to the police!' The driver thrust his foot down on the accelerator, revving the engine.

'No, no,' said Tim. If they went to the police, he would be sent back to his parents. Then he couldn't do anything. He wouldn't be able to help anyone. 'We don't have to go anywhere near the police.'

'That's fine by me,' said the driver. 'But where's my money?'

Tim thought quickly. He pointed at the Bramley Building. 'My parents are in there. I'll go inside, get some money and come back down.'

The taxi driver shook his head. 'Kid, do you think I was born yesterday?'

'No,' said Tim. 'I think you were probably born about forty years ago.'

'Forty-three,' said the taxi driver. 'I've driven cabs for seven. And I've learnt one thing. If a guy says he'll go inside and bring back the fare, he never comes back.'

Tim thrust his hands into his pockets. He found a piece of chewing gum, two doggie treats, some string, lots of fluff and his passport. 'You could keep this.' He offered the passport to the taxi driver. 'Till I come back with the money.'

'What's that?'

'My passport.'

The taxi driver shook his head. 'Worth nothing to me, kid. I'm not touching that.'

Tim frantically tried to think. What could he do? He had no money, and no way of getting money. Then he had an idea. 'I'll leave Grk,' he said.

'Grk? What's Grk?'

'This is Grk,' said Tim. He pointed at the small dog lying on the seat beside him. 'I'll leave him with you. If I leave my dog, I'll definitely come back, won't I?'

The taxi driver stared at Grk.

Grk stared back.

Finally, the taxi driver sighed and nodded. 'Go on, then.'

'Thanks,' said Tim. He jumped out of the taxi before the driver could change his mind.

As Tim walked from the taxi to the Bramley Building, Grk stood up on the seat and stared through the taxi's window, watching Tim with an expression of disbelief.

This cannot be happening, Grk's expression seemed to be saying. This cannot be happening!

But it was.

'Hello, little doggy,' said the taxi driver.

Grk turned his head and stared at the taxi driver.

'Shall we be friends?' The taxi driver smiled. He stretched out his right hand to pat Grk's head.

Grk growled and showed his sharp, pointy teeth.

'Okay, okay,' said the taxi driver, withdrawing his hand as fast as he could. 'Let's not be friends.'

As Tim approached the entrance of the Bramley Building, the door was opened by a doorman wearing a long black coat with bright silver buttons.

'Good morning,' said the doorman in a deep voice. 'Welcome to the Bramley Building.'

'Thanks,' said Tim, and walked through the door.

'My name is Roderick,' said the doorman. 'How can I help you today?'

'I've come to see someone,'said Tim, not stopping, not even slowing down, just heading straight for the lifts.

'Hey! Who have you come to see?'

Tim didn't reply or stop. He just kept walking towards the lifts.

'Come back!' The doorman was furious. 'You can't just walk in here! I'm the doorman, right? Y'understand? You have to tell me who you've come to see!'

Beside the lifts, Tim pressed the button marked with an arrow pointing upwards. The door slid open. Tim stepped inside.

For a moment, the doorman considered running after him, or pulling the switch that halted the lifts, or even calling the police. Then he decided that there wasn't much point. That kid looked about ten. Twelve at the most. How much damage could be done by a twelve-year-old kid?

The doorman retreated behind his desk, picked up his copy of the *National Enquirer*, and continued reading about the pink-haired aliens who had recently landed in Tennessee.

Inside the lift, Tim pressed the button marked 15.

The door slid shut. The lift shuddered upwards.

Tim wondered what he would find in the King and Queen's apartment. And, even more importantly, he tried to imagine what he should be looking for. If he saw a clue, would he even know it was a clue?

He thought about Grk, sitting in the back of the taxi. If Tim couldn't find enough money to pay the fare, what would happen? Would Grk belong to the driver? Or would they both be taken to the police station?

He thought about Max and Natascha Raffifi, who were currently awaiting further questions from the New York Police Department. He thought about his father, who would be pacing up and down the hotel room, anxious and impatient. He thought about his mother, who would be running round JFK International Airport, searching for him. Finally, he thought about himself.

Twenty-four hours ago, he had been a normal twelve-year-old boy, visiting New York for the first time, taking

a holiday with his parents, his best friends and his dog.

Now, he was a fugitive, a runaway, a liar and, most importantly, a detective.

The lift eased to a standstill. The door slid open.

This is it, thought Tim. There is only one person in the world who is going to discover who really stole the Golden Dachshund. And that person is me.

Tim stepped out onto the fifteenth floor and walked slowly towards apartment 153.