

RECAP
An Unlikely Heist
Book #6: The Unlikely Murder Club Series

SPOILERS! SPOILERS! SPOILERS!

The peace Agatha Shadewell has found in the small town of Unlikely, alongside her boyfriend, retired FBI agent Martin Kopp, is abruptly shattered by a headline in the local newspaper. The Belfair Bijou is set to host a high-profile fundraising gala featuring the auction of a rare pair of companion portraits by the late artist Maxine Vale: *Nick's Desire* and *Norah's Kisses*.

While the town celebrates the cultural event, Agatha recognizes a looming disaster: the painting of *Norah's Kisses* set for auction is a forgery she painted forty years earlier. During the creation of the fake, she used her own lips to create the "lipstick kisses" on the canvas and then preserved them with spray lacquer, a process that perfectly locked her DNA into the fibers.

Because her DNA is now on file following her arrest, a professional appraisal of the painting would lead law enforcement directly to her, resulting in a return to prison.

As Agatha processes the threat, she finds herself pulled back to 1983 and her time at the Madame La Faux Académie des Beaux-Arts. Under the thumb of her mentor and lover, Robert DuBois, a young Agatha was a star student of the manipulative Professor Felix Pinch.

Pinch taught his students that being "the best" made one a "tall poppy" and a target for resentment, a lesson Agatha learned painfully when a jealous classmate tried to dump paint thinner on her.

For her final project, Agatha was assigned to recreate *Norah's Kisses*. She excelled, even casing a private home to study the male companion piece, *Nick's Desire*, to ensure her forgery was perfect. At the time, she was flattered when Pinch asked to keep her "exceptional" work as a memento, not realizing until decades later that the professor was running a grift, using student forgeries to replace originals in private collections for profit.

Determined to save Agatha from her past, a "crew" forms, comprising Martin, his tech-savvy granddaughter Echo, and Echo's boyfriend Ambrose, the manager of the Bijou.

Echo's digital detective work reveals that the current owner of the original *Norah's Kisses* is Wolfgang "Wolfie" Stark, a retired gangster living in a nearby mansion. Martin recognizes the name immediately, sparking a memory of his own from 1996.

While working undercover as "Chris Crawford," Martin met Stark in Central Park to negotiate an illegal art deal. Their meeting was interrupted when they witnessed a man throw a puppy into the freezing duck pond. In a rare moment of shared humanity, both the FBI agent and the gangster abandoned their meeting to save the dog; Stark dived into the water while Martin

chased down the perpetrator. Though Stark escaped that day, he kept the dog, and the encounter left both men with a strange, unspoken respect for one another.

Returning to present day Unlikely, the newly formed heist crew devises a high-stakes plan to swap the forgery for the original before the appraiser arrives. Martin's role is to distract Stark at a local pool hall, engaging him in snooker and long stories to keep him away from home.

Meanwhile, Echo uses her hacking skills to "loop" Stark's security-camera footage, creating a digital lie that shows the grounds as empty while Agatha scales a turret to break into the mansion. The mission grows more complicated when the organizers add a last-minute cocktail party at the Bijou, meaning the paintings will be under guard earlier than expected. On the night of the heist, Agatha's truck breaks down, forcing a panicked Echo to run through town with the stolen painting clutched to her chest.

As the cocktail party at the Bijou reaches its peak, a "B-Team" — consisting of local residents Ernie Augustus, Clara Simpson, and Samantha Park — stages a theatrical "murder" in the nearby parkette to distract the guests and the police. During the ensuing chaos, Ambrose and Echo successfully swap the forgery at the Bijou for the original Agatha just retrieved from Stark's home.

In a final, grueling effort, Agatha, now nursing a sprained ankle, returns to Stark's mansion a second time to hang the forgery in the original's place, finishing just minutes before Stark returns from his evening shooting pool with Martin.

The resolution at the auction is as "unlikely" as the town itself. Wolfgang Stark attends the gala and wins the bidding for the Vale diptych for \$200,000. In a shocking final move, Stark reveals he has long possessed a "copy" of the painting, the very forgery Agatha has just returned to his wall, and offers it for auction as an "Agatha Shadewell original," with the proceeds going to charity. Stumpy McRoberts, the local pot dealer turned legitimate businessman, purchases the piece to hang in his new dispensary.

With her past finally secure and her DNA no longer a threat, Agatha remains in Unlikely, surrounded by a crew that has become her family, while Stark finds a new hobby as a member of the seniors' center's snooker club.