

MRS. MURPHY'S MOCCASIN, middle grade contemporary, approx. 34,000 words

### Chapter One: Agent Double-Oh-Twelve

I put my key in our door, 404F, and a shudder runs through me. Happens every afternoon after school, and I hate it. This apartment is my home now—why can't I get used to that? When I go in, I won't smell Grandma's fresh gingerbread. Or hear Gramps playing blues on his harmonica.

After everything went bad last spring, Mom sold our house—she said she had to. We moved in here, and I should be letting myself in. She won't be home from work yet. Only the cat will be there to greet me.

I have found one distraction from the hollowness inside me. Wannabe rock stars play air guitars. I'm a wannabe spy, and I look for missions. If I find one, with an air mic I make notes about it to a tape recorder in my mind. Out loud if I'm alone. Whisper, or even silent in my head if anyone else is around. This helps to keep me thinking about right now, which is mostly okay, instead of this past year, which was not the least bit okay. Only trouble is, sometimes my thoughts get mixed up with mission notes, and the air mic registers more than I want to share.

To the left of me is apartment 404E, vacant now after the Paderewskis moved out last week. Can I, should I check it out? It isn't much of a mission, but an apartment that's empty of furniture might be a better distraction than one that's empty of family.

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*Click. (A tongue click is my RECORD button.) Secret Agent Jackson Thomas, Double-Oh-Twelve, September 24, Friday afternoon, 3:30 p.m.—oops, use military time—1530 hours.*  
*Location: Hillside Commons, vacated apartment 404E.*