

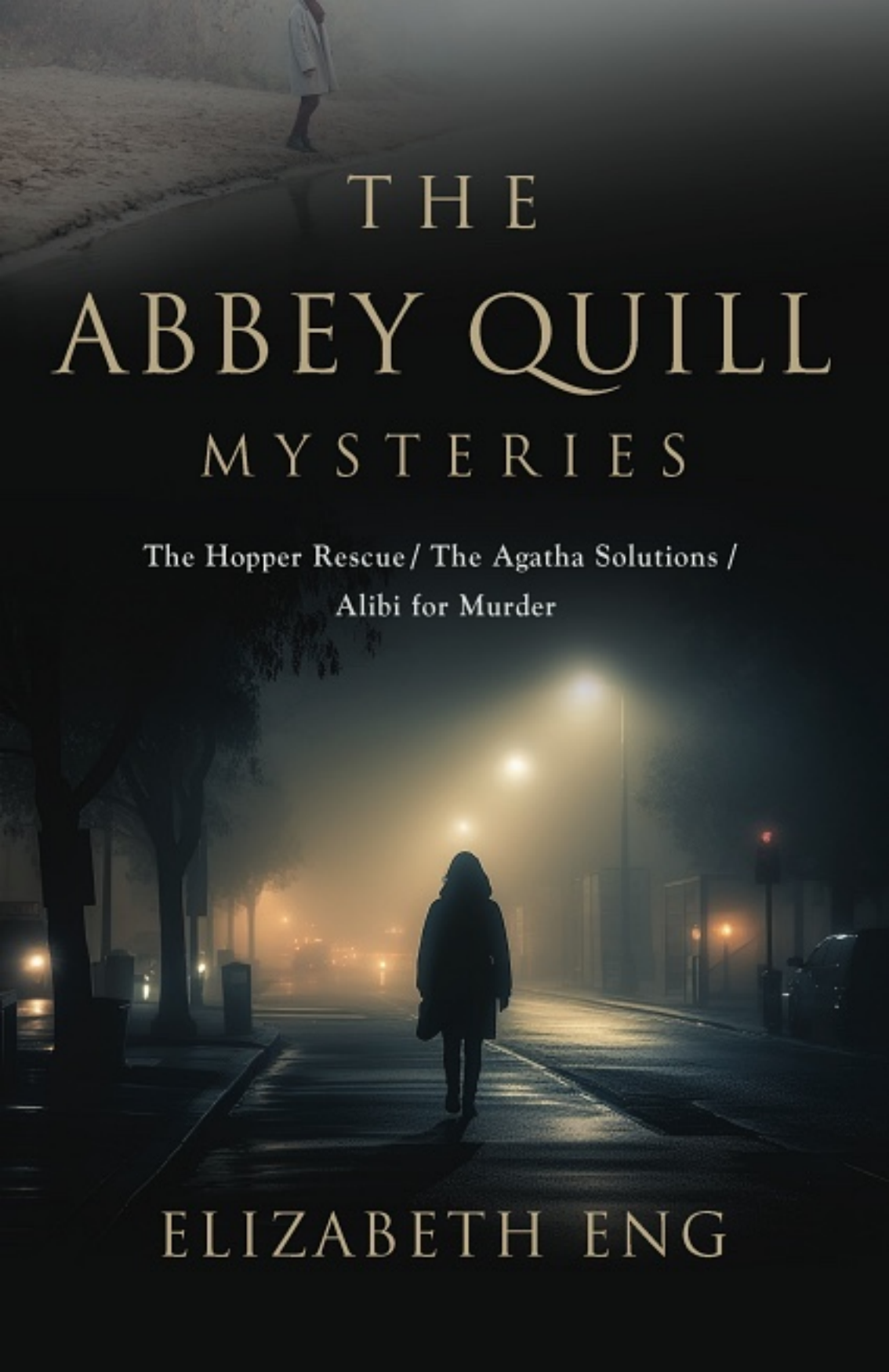
*Church secretary Abbey Quill finds herself thrust into the world of art theft, animal adoption, and murder. Follow her adventures in this collection of two novellas and a bonus short story.*

**The Abbey Quill Mysteries:  
The Hopper Rescue The Agatha Solutions Alibi for Murder  
By Elizabeth Eng**

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The background of the cover is a dark, atmospheric photograph of a street at night. A person in a dark coat is walking away from the camera down the center of the road. The street is illuminated by several streetlights, creating a hazy, foggy atmosphere. The overall color palette is dark with some warm yellow light from the streetlights.

THE  
ABBEY QUILL  
MYSTERIES

The Hopper Rescue / The Agatha Solutions /  
Alibi for Murder

ELIZABETH ENG

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# **The Hopper Rescue**

## **Chapter 1**

I had a feeling today would be different. My days at work begin quietly enough. I am always the first to arrive, usually the only person in the building all day. And I love that part of the job. Most people who call me, email me, or ring the bell on the old brick building are pleasant. I do what I can to help them with whatever they need, whether it's something as simple as an address or phone number, or more involved like the date of a baptism. I am Abbey Quill, secretary of the Highland Baptist Church.

My house is on the shore of Lake Ontario, so Monday, Wednesday, and Friday I take the Lake Avenue bus straight south to Genesee Street. I hop off at the corner, stopping at the neighborhood bakery to grab something for breakfast. In the ancient brick, two story building, the Brooks Bakery has been around for decades and is a local favorite. Today, I opened the door, causing the bell hanging from a leather strap to do its thing with a jingle and alert the employee behind the food case to look up.

“Good morning, Abbey! How are you?” Jane’s round, freckled face looked delighted to see me. As usual, I had to stop in my tracks and inhale deeply. It was a bakery, after all.

“Great, thanks, and you?” I replied after I had come out of my yeast- and sugar-induced coma.

Jane responded with her usual reply, “I’m here, that’s what counts.” She finished placing muffins in the case and said, “What can I get for you this morning?”

I was a regular customer, but I didn’t have a regular order. Far from it. I never knew what would strike my fancy day to day. Stepping up to the case, I eyed the muffins Jane had just finished arranging. This morning could be a muffin day, but... those croissants looked delicious. “I’ll have an almond croissant, please. And how about one of those half-moon cookies?” I set a five-dollar bill on the counter.

“Coming up!” Jane whipped open a white bakery bag and grabbed a tissue with which to pick up my selections. Reaching into the case, she chose a big, flaky croissant and then one of the large, half chocolate, half vanilla frosted round cookies. As I was being waited on, I looked around the shop, making note of the other familiar customers at a couple tables. My eyes rested on the bulletin board. I decided to check it out before leaving.

“Thanks, Jane,” I said, as she handed me the bag of pastries. “Make it a great day.”

“You, too,” she replied, and turned to the person waiting behind her, her face smiling, greeting the next customer.

I made my way over to the wall to read the notices. This was a community board with posts of all kinds, such as announcing upcoming concerts (rock and folk bands and pipe organ) and peaceful

demonstrations, yard sales, and Girl Scout cookies being sold in the community center parking lot. The one that caught my attention this morning was an appeal for volunteers at the local animal shelter. The notice was in color and showed a smiling man holding two adorable golden retriever puppies. Okay, so the man was adorable looking, too. It was the one being tacked to the board by a tall man in a navy sport whom I didn't recall seeing before in the store. Wow. The fellow in the picture had bright blue eyes the color of...

"Do you like dogs, cats, bunnies? We could really use some help downtown with the animals," the man next to me said.

"Oh, I don't know if—" I looked up into the two bluest eyes I'd ever seen. Wait. I looked back at the poster. Yup. Same guy. I licked my lips before answering (yes, I really did that). "You know, I'll bet I could smuggle with a puppy or two. I, mean snuggle!" *Geez, was I blithering?* I gazed up at him.

He finished placing the last thumbtack on the flyer and reached out his hand to introduce himself. "Sean. I'm Director of Community Events at the downtown shelter."

I felt a slight charge when our hands met. "Abbey. So nice to meet you," I said. Reluctantly, I let go of the firm handshake. "Uh, I will check my calendar and see when I have free time." I automatically ran a hand through my long dark hair to smooth any stray strands.

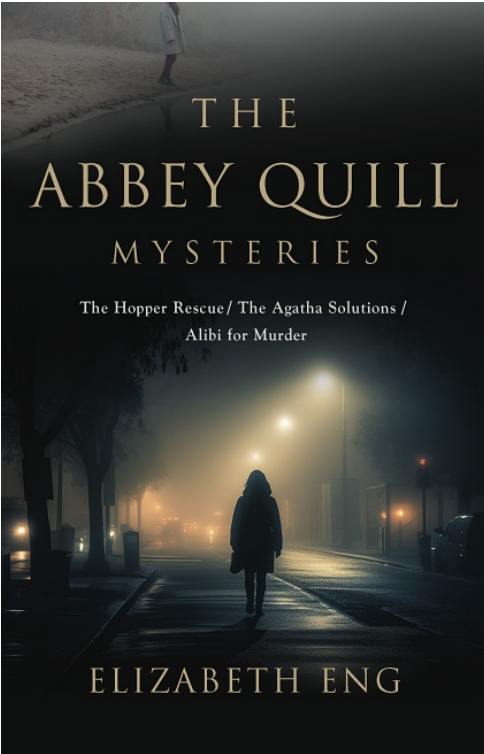
"Perfect. Whatever time you can fit in will help." He sighed. "So much to do, and not enough people to do it. Walking the dogs, supplying tech support, you name it, we need it." He stepped toward the door. "Thanks, and hope to see you soon." With a wave he was out of the bakery.

*I hope to see you soon, too.* Standing there, I allowed my eyes to follow him until he was out of sight. I left the bakery with pastries and a feeling that my life was about to be enhanced in several ways.

As I walked the block to the church, I reflected on meeting Sean. Sure, he was good looking and polite, but did I really want to volunteer at the animal shelter? Even I knew volunteering meant more than cuddling the puppies and kittens. I'd be expected to clean kennels and cages in addition to other duties. On the other hand, I'd really been stuck in a rut since Colin, my last boyfriend, left me. Well, I kicked him out. He thought he could sit at home and do nothing all day. And nothing was just that, nothing, No cooking, no cleaning, no laundry, no yardwork, no maintenance. He was good at keeping the recliner warm, though, and enjoying my cable television and my "housekeeping" tasks. We're both in our late twenties and after being able to purchase my home a few years ago, I became very possessive of it. Colin would call it selfish. Anyway, after a few months, I decided I was not about to be taken advantage of by a slacker of a boyfriend, so goodbye, Colin. No idea where he is now; don't know, don't care.

After climbing the building's cement steps, I took my keys out of my pocket. I loved the fact that they still used the old door locks from decades ago, but it's sad they had to install a security system. The church was broken into a few years back, and the powers that be decided better late than never. The crime in Roc City is ever on the increase. Fortunately, they didn't suffer too much damage to the inside of the church, but the emotional scars are still there. After 100 years they thought they were safe. Shows what can happen when one is complacent. Once I had locked the door behind me, I quickly punched in the four-digit code. The sharp "beep" reassured me all was secure.





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