



LET'S GET COZY

Plotting Your Cozy Mystery

WHO AM I?

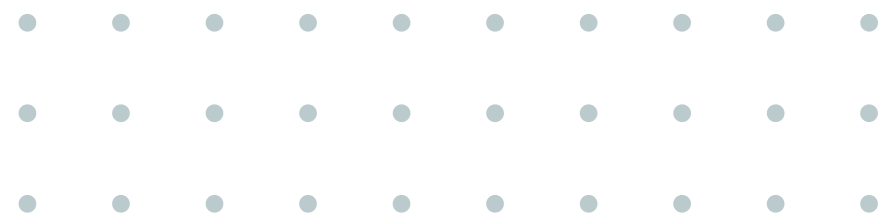


- Author of nine witchy cozy mysteries in two series with more to come.
- Avid cozy mystery fan in both books and television.
- Likely to become a victim or suspect if I ever lived in a small town.
- Very interested in poisons.
- Probably on an FBI watchlist somewhere.
- A writer, just like you!



WHAT MAKES A COZY?

- Sex and violence occur offstage and there are no graphic depictions.
- The detective is an amateur sleuth. Usually there's a theme.
- The crime and detection take place in a small, socially-intimate community. Small towns are most popular
- They have a hopeful view of human nature
- Nothing really terrible happens to any character you really care about



COMMON TROPES

- **Amateur Sleuth:** The protagonist is often an amateur detective, someone who stumbles upon a crime and decides to investigate. They are usually relatable and likable, with a personal connection to the case.
- **Small-Town Setting:** These stories often take place in small towns or villages where everyone knows each other. This close-knit community setting allows the sleuth to easily interact with suspects and gather information.
- **Quirky Characters:** A cast of eccentric and memorable characters is a staple. These can include the sleuth's friends, local townsfolk, and suspects, adding humor and charm to the story.
- **Cozy Atmosphere:** The setting is often warm and inviting, with descriptions of comfort food, homey decor, and a strong sense of community. This contrasts with the crime being investigated.
- **Nosy Neighbor:** There's often a nosy neighbor or busybody who provides the sleuth with valuable information and gossip, sometimes being both a help and a hindrance.
- **Love Interest:** Many cozy mysteries include a romantic subplot, with the sleuth having a love interest who may be a suspect or an ally in the investigation.
- **Red Herrings:** These stories are known for their plot twists and false leads, keeping both the sleuth and the reader guessing until the end.
- **Pet Sidekick:** The amateur sleuth often has a loyal pet companion who adds humor and helps solve the case. These pets are usually quirky and endearing.
- **Pun-Based Titles:** Cozy mysteries often have clever, pun-based titles that add to the lighthearted feel of the genre.
- **Overheard Conversations:** Key clues are often discovered through overheard conversations, adding to the mystery and helping the sleuth piece together the mystery.

**Annoyed
Police Detective**

**Continued Theme
or Hobby
Through Series**

**Murder Weapon
often close at
hand**

CHARACTER AND SETTING

Who is your Main Character? Why do they take it upon themselves to solve the crime?

What is their career or hobby and how does that give them unique access to information to solve the crime?

What is the small town like and how can that contribute to the crime or story?

Who are the supporting characters and how do they help or hinder in solving the crime?

Is there a love interest?

Who is the antagonist and what is their motivation?

Who dies? Where, when, why, and how? Or, if no one dies, what is the mystery?

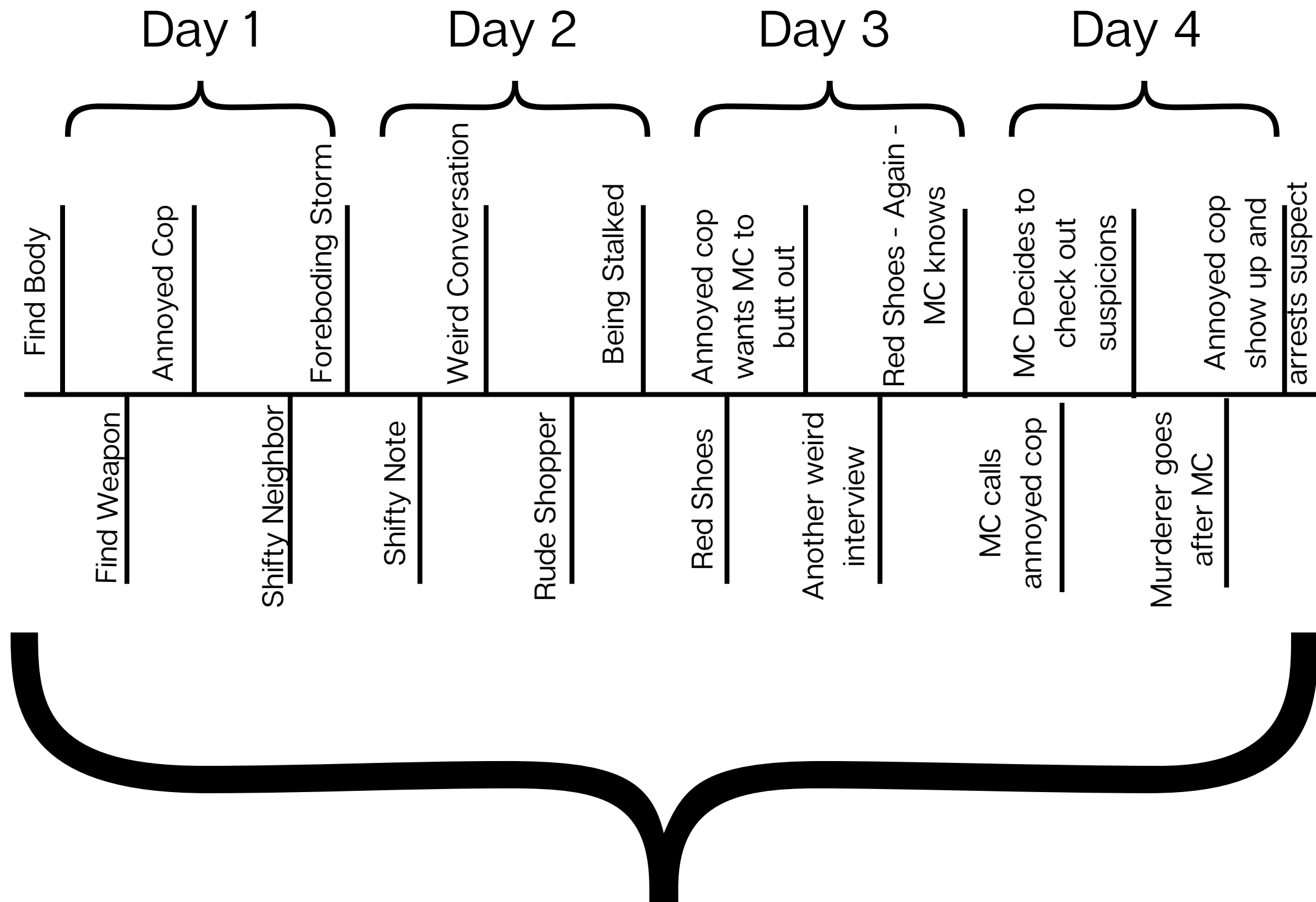
FORSHADOWING

- **Red Herrings:** Plan your clues to mislead readers early on. Make a list of possible suspects and WHY they may seem to be suspects.
- **Character Behavior:** Throw in subtle behavioral changes in your murderer that might implicate them, but that maybe people mistake for something else. (Know whodunnit before you start writing, or at least have a list of suspects.)
- **Drop Hints:** In dialogue, maybe someone says something they shouldn't have, or there was more to what they said than your sleuth first realized.
- **Symbolism:** Use objects or setting to foreshadow events.
- **Subtle Clues:** Scatter unimportant details through the story that on reflection, make complete sense and make the reader go – Oh!!!!
- **Recurring Themes:** Use recurring themes throughout the story that may hint at the murderer's identity.
- **Minor Characters:** Through gossip or passing conversation might drop clues or hints at who the murderer is, even if they don't know who it is themselves. "Oh, he was a nice boy. Always spent a lot of time in the basement..."

BUILDING SUSPENSE, CLIMAX, AND RESOLUTION

- **Build Suspense:**
 - Use pacing, cliffhangers, and unexpected twists to keep readers on edge. End chapters with questions unanswered.
 - Gradually reveal information that complicates the mystery.
- **Develop Subplots:**
 - Introduce secondary storylines that intersect with the main mystery.
 - Use these subplots to develop characters and add depth to the story.
- **Reveal the Climax:**
 - Bring all the clues and suspects together for a dramatic confrontation. The main character in a bad situation.
 - Ensure the detective pieces together the mystery in a logical and satisfying way.
- **Unmask the Culprit:**
 - Reveal the true culprit in a surprising yet believable manner. Maybe someone else saves the character or they somehow save themselves.
 - Explain how the clues led to this conclusion.
- **Resolve Loose Ends:**
 - Tie up any remaining subplots and questions.
 - Show the aftermath of the mystery's resolution for the characters involved.
- **Reflect on the Theme:**
 - Highlight any underlying themes or messages in the story.
 - Reflect on how the mystery has impacted the characters and setting.

Make a Timeline



Character Arc - pepper story with tidbits of characters personal life to add flavor and larger character arcs or mysteries.

A really brief example of a timeline



PLANNING SERIES'

Overall Character Arc

Character starts out

Character is flawed and struggles with work, life, relationships.

Book One

Character is struggling and flawed. Maybe tragically single. Maybe unsure of their life path. Add murder and/or mystery to the mix.

Book Two

Character has a love interest or two (or three) and starts to find their feet, but all these dang murders and/or mysteries keep happening and (s)he just can't stay out of it.

Character grows

Character finds it easier to navigate life as things go, has setbacks, but starts growing into a stronger or better person

Book Three

Character may have some setbacks and struggle to find feet again and starts to find a good balance to life, even if things aren't perfect and dead bodies keep cropping up.

Book Four

Character is more confident. Things may not be perfect, maybe (s)he keeps coming close to death, but things start improving in love and life despite all the murder or mayhem.



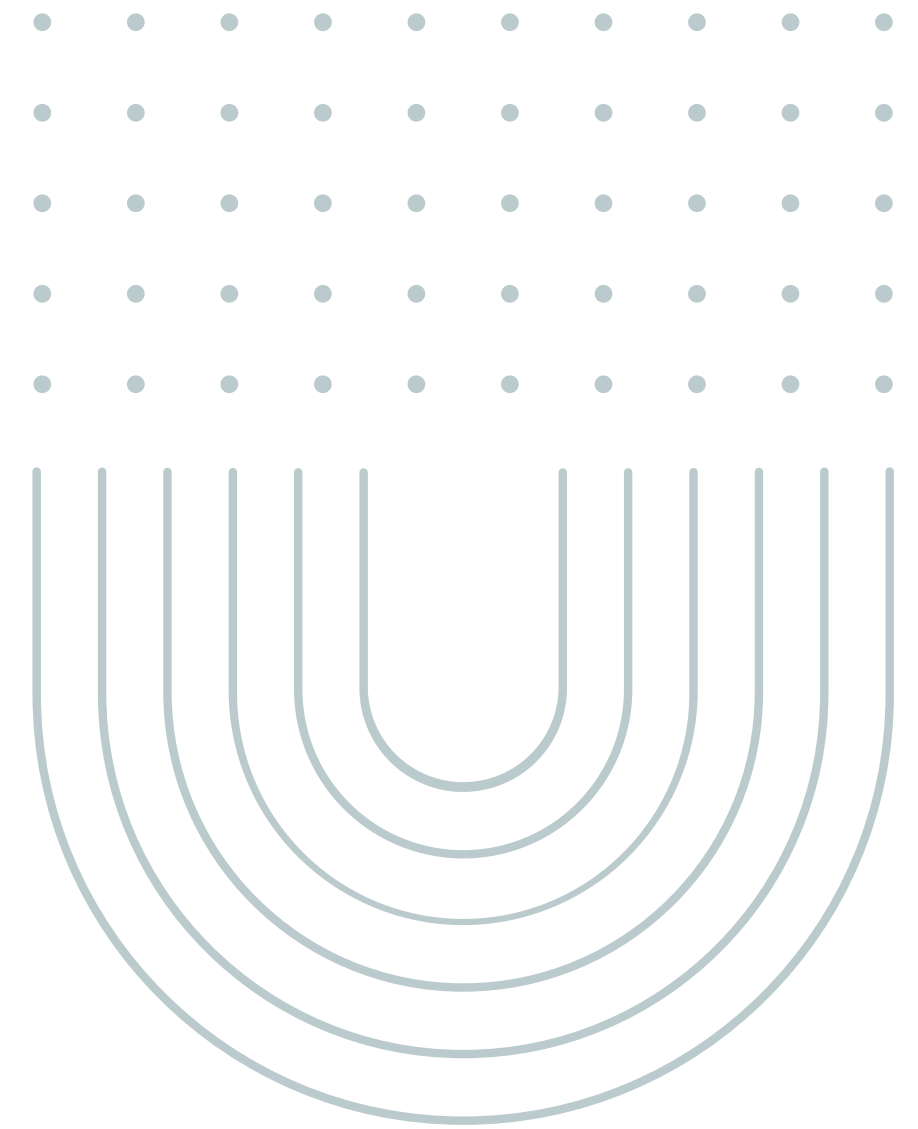
Even with Character Arc

Small reminders give new readers a clue what may have happened before in the story, but the reader can still read any book in the series without feeling totally lost.

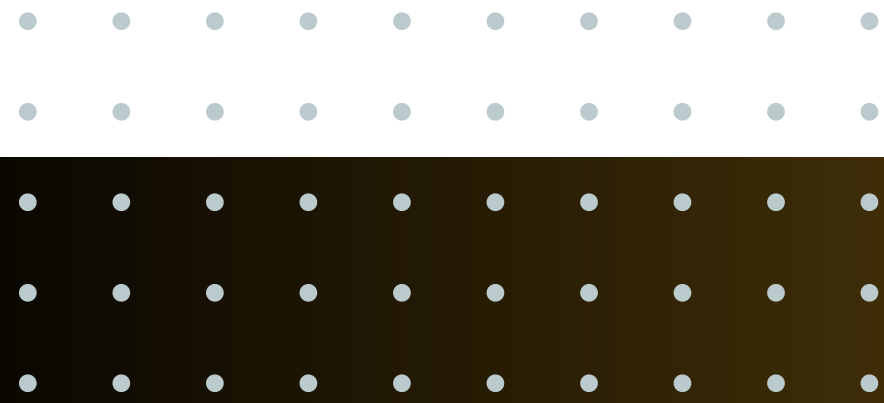


Complete Stories

Each mystery is contained in one book (unless you have a whole series mystery, like – what happened to a parent), and has a beginning, middle, and satisfying end.



**EACH BOOK
STANDS
ALONE**



Q & A

Do you have any questions?

www.sjreisner.com