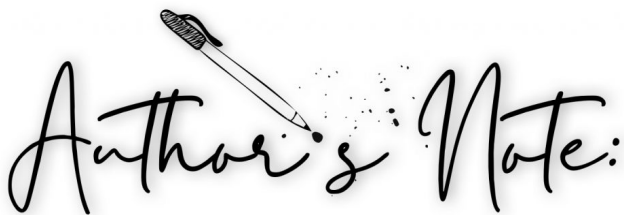


Max growled with frustration. He'd wasted hours trying to solve the stupid, cryptic letter because he couldn't find any of his friends. *Worst birthday ever.* About to crumble the paper, he grinned, realizing each line started with an R or an L. A smile tugged at his lips as he plunged headfirst into the labyrinth. At each corner, he turned with unwavering resolve, his pace increasing as his heart raced. The scenery became a blur around him. He rounded the last corner to a chorus of "Happy Birthday" from his friends, and after a moment of surprise, broke into laughter.



This week's story was a hard one to pull together. It wasn't the genre as much as the distractions all around me. It's bitterly cold here today, and I had windows open all the same. Weird, I know, but I like to open my windows in the writing nook for a short time every day. But, when someone pointed out it was snowing, I raced to close windows and accept that it really was time to turn the heat on.

Somehow writing a micro mystery involving the deciphering of a note and using the word labyrinth became more of a frustration with everything else unfolding around me. It happens some days, and that's when writing becomes burdensome rather than something fun I get to indulge in. The easiest way through it, for me, is to set a timer and continue working until it goes off. Then I'll move on to a project that is pure joy. Or, you know, go watch the snow fall while I drink some cocoa.

The Reluctant Author:

