

**The First Two Pages of “Good Morning, Green Leaf Class” by Sarah Cotter**

From: *Invitation to Murder: Chesapeake Crimes*

Edited by Donna Andrews, Barb Goffman and Marcia Talley (Wildside Press)

An Essay by Sarah Cotter

I’m a huge fan of short mysteries. I say this even though, as a nascent writer, attempting to pack a narrative punch into a short amount of words can be frustrating. It wasn’t until the Sisters in Crime Chesapeake Chapter’s call for submissions for their most recent anthology, *Invitation to Murder*, that I realized that I had an ideal work-around in telling my first murderous short story. By only using email messages to tell my story “Good Morning, Green Leaf Class,” I couldn’t allow myself to wax on or try to expand every detail. Opinions were hastily stated. Grievances demanded immediate answers. What better place for a pile up of opinions and grievances than a never ending email chain? Even better--- an email chain from a preschool class where it quickly becomes clear that some children may be excluded?

To: Green Leaf Class at Happy Tree Pre-School

Subject: Quilting party this Saturday!

Good Morning Green Leaf Class!

Quilting party time is almost here! I managed to find some beautiful samples and scraps, thanks to a fabulous friend of mine, and the ouchless needles just came in today. Perfect for little hands!

Just a reminder that if you’re having trouble with the silk screen app for your child’s picture, let me know. I have ties to the company and can push it on ahead if it’s too difficult.

Please remember we want a picture of both your child and Ms. Murphy. We all love our kids, but I’m sure each of you have some

special memory pictures of your child's time at Happy Tree Pre-School. Let's share that with Ms. Murphy's family!

The quilting party will start at around two o'clock this Saturday at my house (directions attached). Snacks (quinoa cakes courtesy of Clean Nummies, apples, and strawberry water) will be provided, as well as a few treats for the grown-ups. Can't wait to see you all this Saturday!

For obvious reasons, I ask that you hold back on any pictures from the Sunrise Petting Zoo prior to the incident.

Blessings,

Anabeth Johnson/Clean Nummies Inc.

Leaving aside the question "Why no pictures of the petting zoo?" (that will be answered later), I hoped that what the reader would take away from the opening is what a lovely afternoon that sounds like for some lucky children and their families. It makes sense. The preschool years are supposed to be a loving introduction to the world of learning for the smallest of children. It can, however, just as easily be an unsettling time for parents. A present day preschool expects parents to be part of the team—a volunteer, a donor, a resource—and above all work peacefully with the other dozen or so classroom families to make a happy experience. Easier said than done; an invitation to a child's party is about to go off the rails.

To: Green Leaf Class at Happy Tree Pre-School

Subject: Quilting party this Saturday!

Hello,

What party?

Did the invitation go home in the buddy bags? My daughter lost her buddy bag last week.

Maria

To: Green Leaf Class at Happy Tree Pre-School

Subject: Quilting party this Saturday!

Anabeth! I loved the handprint invitation last week. Thanks for the follow-up!

Unfortunately, my daughter Jacinda will have her AAU b-ball tournament that day (proud parents!). Would anyone be able to give Jameson a ride? I could do pick-up if it's after six o'clock.

Leslie

To: Green Leaf Class at Happy Tree Pre-School

Subject: Quilting party this Saturday!

Good Morning,

I've been out of town and I can't find an invite in the buddy bag. Did I miss something?

Alexandra Cunningham

To: Green Leaf Class at Happy Tree Pre-School

Subject: Quilting party this Saturday!

Hi All!

Thank you so much for setting this up Anabeth! Tristan has been looking forward to this all week!

Christine

To: Green Leaf Class at Happy Tree Pre-School

Subject: Quilting party this Saturday!

Hello,

I'm sorry, but I'm a little confused. Is this a school project or a party?

Also, my child is new this year. Who is Ms. Murphy?

Maria

To: Green Leaf Class at Happy Tree Pre-School

Subject: Quilting party this Saturday!

Good Morning,

I'm so glad that I'm not the only one who didn't know about this.

Anabeth—you are the room parent, right? Is this a school sanctioned event?

We really need to speak as a group to The Happy Tree office. First no update on the lice incident, and now this.

Alexandra Cunningham

To: Green Leaf Class at Happy Tree Pre-School

Subject: Quilting party this Saturday!

Hi Alexandra!

Did you read the email last week? Maybe you missed it!

Christine

To: Green Leaf Class at Happy Tree Pre-School

Subject: Quilting party this Saturday!

Hi Leslie!

I'd be happy to give Jameson a ride. Tristan adores him!

Christine

To: Green Leaf Class at Happy Tree Pre-School

Subject: Quilting party this Saturday!

I just checked my archives and there was no quilting party invite. No email at all from Anabeth since the silly dress up day celebration.

Alexandra Cunningham

To: Green Leaf Class at Happy Tree Pre-School

Subject: Quilting party this Saturday!

Good Morning Green Leaf Class!

My apologies. I accidentally used the wrong address list when sending that last post. I've got it sorted out now. Thanks for your understanding.

Blessings,

Anabeth Johnson/Clean Nummies Inc.

To: Green Leaf Class at Happy Tree Pre-School

Subject: Quilting party this Saturday!

Hello,

Sorry, I'm full of newbie questions.

Wasn't the email addressed to the Green Leaf class? Our children all go to the same class, correct?

Maria

To: Green Leaf Class at Happy Tree Pre-School

Subject: Quilting party this Saturday!

Hi All!

Did everyone remember to check your class emails? Anabeth has been planning this for weeks, and I know she has gotten the word out on numerous occasions.

I'm so excited! Now Tristan will always remember his time memorializing his very first teacher, thanks to the lovely silk screened quilt for Ms. Murphy's family. WTG Anabeth!

Christine

To: Green Leaf Class at Happy Tree Pre-School

Subject: Quilting party this Saturday!

Hi Christine,

It's clear that not everyone has received an invitation for this quilt party, or whatever it is.

Alexandra Cunningham

More voices will be added to the chain as it becomes clear that Anabeth's "mistake" may not have been so accidental. Alexandra will not be the only one who gets upset that her child wasn't invited.

Parenthood might allow former schoolyard offenders—the bosses, the bullies, the henchmen—to mellow with age, but how much really changes? Not every grown-up was a kid who played nice and shared. My hope is that the first two pages are enough to convince the reader that a tale full of anger, deception, and, ultimately, murder could come from such a lovely invitation and in so short of a story.

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Sarah Cotter is delighted to have her work published for the first time. She would like to thank the Chessie Chapter of Sisters in Crime for the opportunity! An avid lover of all things mystery, Sarah has written for the online blogs Smart Bitches, Trashy Books, Rants From Mommyland, and numerous theater guides. When not working on her first full length novel or volunteering, Sarah works as a substitute teacher in a school that bears absolutely no resemblance to Happy Tree.