Web Designer

by Hannah Melotto · Language: EN

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Overview

Web Designer by Hannah Melotto is a mystery novel that follows the story of a freelance web designer named Claire who stumbles upon a hidden message embedded in the code of a client's website. The message appears to be a cry for help, leading Claire into a dangerous investigation that uncovers a network of secrets and lies in the small town of Havenbrook. As she digs deeper, she finds that the website's owner, a reclusive tech entrepreneur, has vanished under suspicious circumstances, and the local police are not taking the case seriously.

Claire's unique skills as a web designer become her primary tool for unraveling the mystery, as she deciphers clues hidden in HTML, CSS, and JavaScript. Her journey takes her through the dark underbelly of the tech industry, revealing a web of corporate espionage, personal vendettas, and a shocking connection to her own past. The novel blends the procedural elements of a detective story with the modern world of coding and digital forensics, offering a fresh take on the genre.

The book matters because it highlights the growing importance of digital literacy in solving real-world problems, and it presents a compelling female protagonist who uses her technical expertise to challenge authority and seek justice. Melotto's narrative keeps readers on edge, balancing suspense with moments of introspection about identity, trust, and the hidden layers of the internet. The story ultimately underscores that the most dangerous secrets are often buried not in the ground, but in the lines of code that shape our digital lives.

Key Takeaways

- Pay attention to the details in code and metadata, as they can reveal hidden messages and clues.
- Trust your instincts when something feels off, even if others dismiss your concerns.
- Digital footprints are hard to erase; they can be used to trace a person's actions and whereabouts.
- Collaboration with others, even those you initially distrust, can be key to solving complex problems.
- Your professional skills can be repurposed for personal investigations and justice.
- Secrets from the past have a way of resurfacing and affecting the present.
- The line between victim and perpetrator is often blurred; keep an open mind.
- Never underestimate the power of a well-placed line of code to change everything.

Chapter Summaries

Chapter 1: The Client

Claire, a freelance web designer, takes on a new project for a client named Marcus Webb, a tech entrepreneur who wants a simple website for his startup. While reviewing the existing code, Claire notices an unusual comment in the HTML that reads 'HELP' in binary. She dismisses it initially but can't shake the feeling that something is wrong. The chapter establishes Claire's character, her meticulous work ethic, and her life in the quiet town of Havenbrook.

Chapter 2: The Vanishing

Claire tries to contact Marcus to ask about the binary message, but he doesn't respond. She visits his office, only to find it closed and abandoned. Concerned, she reports her findings to the local police, but they are dismissive, suggesting Marcus may have simply left town. Claire decides to investigate on her own, starting by digging into Marcus's online presence and his company's history.

Chapter 3: The Hidden Code

Claire spends hours analyzing the website's source code, discovering a series of hidden files and encrypted messages. She decodes them to reveal a map pointing to a location in the nearby woods. The chapter showcases Claire's technical skills and her growing obsession with the case. She also meets a local librarian, Sarah, who becomes an unlikely ally in her search.

Chapter 4: The Forest Discovery

Following the map, Claire and Sarah venture into the woods and find an old, abandoned cabin. Inside, they discover evidence that Marcus had been living there in hiding, along with documents suggesting he was involved in a corporate dispute with his former business partner, David. The chapter ends with a cliffhanger as they hear footsteps approaching the cabin.

Chapter 5: The Confrontation

The person approaching the cabin turns out to be David, Marcus's former partner. He claims he was also looking for Marcus and warns Claire to stay out of it. Claire is suspicious of David's motives and begins to investigate his background. She uncovers a history of financial fraud and a lawsuit that Marcus had filed against David, which could be a motive for foul play.

Chapter 6: The Digital Trail

Claire uses her skills to trace Marcus's digital footprint, finding a series of encrypted emails and a bank account with large withdrawals. She realizes that Marcus was planning to disappear, but something went wrong. She also discovers a connection between Marcus and a local tech company that had been shut down years ago, which ties to her own past.

Chapter 7: The Revelation

Claire uncovers that Marcus was actually her biological father, who had given her up for adoption as a child. He had been trying to contact her through the website, using the hidden messages as a way to reach out. The revelation shakes Claire to her core, but it also gives her a new determination to find him and uncover the truth about his disappearance.

Chapter 8: The Trap

Claire sets a trap for David, using a fake meeting to lure him out. With the help of Sarah and a sympathetic police officer, she records a confession from David, who admits to confronting Marcus but claims he left him alive. The chapter ends with a frantic search for Marcus, who may be injured or worse.

Chapter 9: The Rescue

Following David's clues, Claire and the police find Marcus in a hidden basement of the abandoned tech company. He is alive but weak, having been held captive by David. Marcus explains that he had discovered David's fraud and was planning to expose him, leading to the kidnapping. The chapter resolves the main conflict, with David arrested and Marcus reunited with Claire.

Chapter 10: The Aftermath

In the aftermath, Claire and Marcus begin to build a relationship, slowly getting to know each other as father and daughter. Claire decides to expand her freelance business into a digital forensics consultancy, using her skills to help others. The novel ends with Claire reflecting on the journey and the importance of facing the past to move forward.

Themes

- Digital forensics
- Family secrets
- Identity and belonging
- Trust and betrayal
- Justice and redemption
- The hidden internet

Notable Quotes

- "The code is a language, and every language has its secrets." — Claire reflects on her work as a web designer and the hidden messages she found.
- "I didn't choose this mystery; it chose me." — Claire explains to Sarah why she feels compelled to investigate Marcus's disappearance.

- "Sometimes the truth is buried in the lines you least expect." — Claire talks about the hidden code in the website.
- "You can't outrun your past, but you can learn to read its footprints." — Claire's internal monologue after discovering Marcus is her father.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is Web Designer about?

Web Designer is a mystery novel about a freelance web designer named Claire who discovers a hidden cry for help in a client's website code. She investigates the disappearance of the client, Marcus Webb, and uncovers a web of corporate fraud, family secrets, and a personal connection to her own past. The story blends digital forensics with a classic whodunit.

Is Web Designer worth reading?

Yes, if you enjoy mysteries with a modern tech twist. The protagonist is relatable and uses her unique skills in a realistic way. The plot has enough twists to keep you guessing, and the resolution is satisfying. It's a quick, engaging read for fans of cozy mysteries or tech-themed thrillers.

How does Web Designer end?

Spoiler: Claire rescues Marcus from a hidden basement, and David is arrested for kidnapping and fraud. Claire learns that Marcus is her biological father, and they begin to build a relationship. She also turns her web design business into a digital forensics consultancy, using her skills to help others.

Who should read Web Designer?

Readers who enjoy mysteries with a contemporary setting, especially those interested in technology and coding. It's also a good pick for anyone who likes strong female protagonists and stories about uncovering family secrets. If you're a fan of authors like Sue Grafton or Janet Evanovich, you might enjoy this.

How long does it take to read Web Designer?

At an average reading speed of 250 words per minute, the book takes about 4 hours to read. Since it's a relatively short novel, you could finish it in a weekend or a few evenings.