

WHIZ TANNER
and the

Secret Tunnel

A Tanner-Dent Mystery

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To
Sierra
For all the support I need

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"We solve crimes, mysteries, problems..."

Wilson "Whiz" Tanner
Chief Investigator

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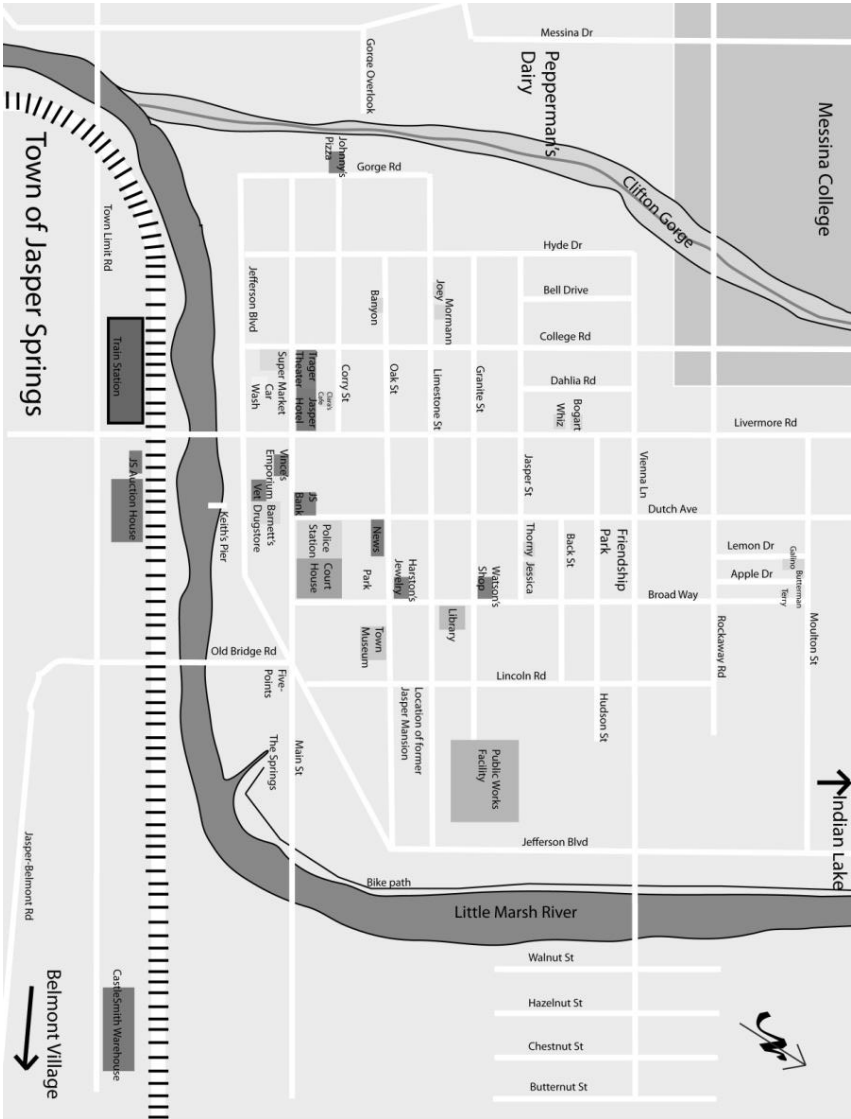
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CHAPTER 1

What's a DeLorean?

Have you ever been so afraid that your body couldn't move? Struck with so much fear that your muscles just didn't work—like they were frozen? Well, that's kinda what happened to me that night Agent M and I investigated the old Zimmer barn. My muscles weren't really frozen, but the effect was the same. Everything was in slow motion. Actually, my brain was working super-fast, kinda like Whiz's does all the time, I guess.

Whiz, that's Agent M, was near our only escape route, but being chased in the wrong direction. I'm Joey Dent, also known as Agent K, but I'd appreciate it if you would keep that little fact between you and me. I was being chased by a second guy on the other side of a deep hole.

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Now, I've been afraid before during investigations, but not like this time. I definitely didn't think this case was worth my life, and the Agency should have better procedures to safeguard its employees.

My best friend, Whiz Tanner, and I run the Tanner-Dent Detective Agency, and we were on a job. This particular job—which may be the last for Tanner-Dent—started with Chuck Boyles and an old sporty car. It was Tuesday, right after school. Oh, did I mention that the Tanner-Dent Detective Agency was run by two twelve-year-olds? Anyway....

Whiz and I usually meet at the bike rack after school. We don't have our final subject of the day together. While the rest of the class is doing math, Whiz, due to his super-duper brainpower, is in a pullout program where he gets the pleasure of doing harder math and extra stuff. So, at the end of the day, he comes from the counseling center, while I come from Mrs. Truman's classroom, and we converge by our bikes.

When I got to the racks, Parvaneh Shirazi was quickly walking away, and Chuck and Thorny Rose were deep in a heated argument. Chuck and Thorny are usually pretty close friends, but something got them going. I walked toward them and stopped next to Tommy Whittacker, one of the only kids in school faster than me in the hundred-meter dash. He was leaning against his bike as we both watched.

"I think a fight's gonna start," said Tommy.

"I swear I saw it!" cried Chuck, as the two of them pulled their bikes out of the rack. "It looked just like the one in the movie."

"Yeah, right," said Thorny with his lip curled in a sneer. He turned to me and Tommy. "I mentioned to

Parvaneh that *Back to the Future* was coming on TV tomorrow... she had never seen it. And, Chucky had to one-up me, in front of her, and say he saw the car. She wouldn't know."

I could see that this might get out of hand, quickly. Thorny has been secretly hot on Parvaneh since the beginning of the year. She moved to town this summer and is one of the cutest girls in our class—but don't tell Thorny I said that. Anything that made Thorny look bad in her eyes was not going to go over well with him.

"What's so hard to believe about that?" Chuck replied. "There are lots of those cars around."

"No way," Thorny shouted over him. "They haven't made them since before we were born, and there aren't any around here. You only said you saw it 'cause I said the movie was going to be on."

"Ask Whiz if it's possible. Hey Whiz!" Chuck called out, as he spotted Whiz walking our way.

"Yeah, Whiz," Thorny retorted. "Chuck needs some professional help here, but for his head, not from a detective."

"Knock it off, Thorny, and just ask him. You'll see," answered Chuck.

"Okay," Thorny replied with a smirk. "Chucky here's been seeing things. He says he saw someone pushing a DeLorean into Farmer Zimmer's barn... the old one out in his cow pasture. Tell him there's no way. There's not a DeLorean within a thousand miles of Jasper Springs."

"I did see a DeLorean," Chuck yelled back. "Just like the one in the movie *Back to the Future*... my dad has a poster of it in our garage so I know what one looks like. Except, it didn't have that flux thingy on the back."

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“Ah... the flux capacitor,” said Whiz. “The device that turned the car into a time machine. I saw that trilogy of movies last summer... it was quite a fascinating concept.”

Whiz was about to go on when Thorny broke him off. “But are there any of them in Jasper Springs?”

“An interesting question,” Whiz said, with a slight squinting of his eyes as if he was thinking deeply about it. “There were not many made, as I recall... only a couple of model years.”

“See, even Whiz says you couldn’t have seen one.” Thorny gave Chuck a push on the shoulder.

“Now, that is not what I said,” responded Whiz. “I said there were not many made. That is a long way from definitively stating there is not one in Jasper Springs.”

“Dad says they’re still making new ones somewhere in Texas,” Chuck said, directly in Thorny’s face. “There could easily be one around here.”

“No way! Those were made in Ireland, and they stopped making them a long time ago. Probably before your dad was even born. My uncle, in California, drove one once and told me all about them. They had doors that opened up like wings, and they were made out of special metal that didn’t rust so they didn’t need paint.” Thorny’s face grew red and his voice got louder.

“You can look it up on the internet if you don’t believe me,” replied Chuck, as the sound of his voice also increased.

Chuck let his bike fall and raised his hand to poke a finger in Thorny’s chest. Thorny moved a half a step back, dropped his own bike, and raised his fists.

“Whoa, whoa...” said Tommy. He rolled his bike between the two, but was careful not to get directly between

them himself. "Okay, guys... we can solve this. We have the great Tanner-Dent Detective Agency right here." He smiled, and looked over at me and Whiz.

By this time a group of kids had descended on the bike rack and were now hanging around waiting for a fight to start.

"He started it by dissing me in front of Parvaneh, and he poked me!" Thorny yelled. "You all saw that."

"I don't care if you're hot on Parvaneh, you called me a liar!" Chuck responded. "I did see one, and they do make new ones in Texas. My dad said so."

"As you stated," said Whiz. "That can be easily verified with a simple internet search. You have no need of a detective for that."

I turned to the crowd. "Does anybody have a smartphone?"

Nobody pulled one out. I don't think they wanted to stop a fight—we hadn't had a good one yet this year. Or, they knew that here on the north side of town there was no cell coverage, anyway.

"Yeah, but that's not the point. He said he saw one and that can't be proved since he was the only one there," Thorny responded. "Very convenient for a made-up story, if you ask me."

"I did see one and not because you mentioned the movie, and definitely not because of Parvaneh. It was being pushed into Zimmer's barn. And, it can be proved... just go look in his barn." Chuck began talking to the crowd. "Mr. Zimmer has a DeLorean in his barn, and Thorny is too stupid to believe me."

"What's a DeLorean?" shouted one of the kids.

"It's an old car," yelled another. "Like the time traveling one in the movie."

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“Why’s it in his barn? How do you know? Can we see it? What kind of old car?” The calls from the crowd kept coming.

“Tell ‘em what you told me,” Thorny taunted. “See if they believe you.”

So, Chuck began. “Last Saturday, I was riding my bike on Jamestown Road out past Fulmer’s Quarry. It was getting dark, and I was near where the road turns from dirt to asphalt.”

“I know the place,” called one of the kids. “That’s where the abandoned secret Air Force antenna station is.”

“That’s not secret,” replied another kid. “You can see it from the road.”

“It used to be secret, back when atomic bombs were secret. The Air Force had them all over the country to catch enemy planes coming to bomb us,” replied the first kid.

“Well it’s abandoned now,” called someone else.

“Or it looks that way because it’s so secret. Have you seen all those keep out signs on the tallest chain link fence around?”

“What about the time traveling car in Farmer Zimmer’s barn?” The questions—and answers—kept coming.

“Yeah, Mr. Zimmer’s old barn is abandoned, too,” someone else let out. “He hasn’t used that barn in years. Nothin’ but cows out there.”

“They’re bulls!” Thorny corrected.

“Well the barn is being used now,” Chuck insisted. “There’s a car in it... the famous car from the movies.”

“No there’s not,” Thorny retorted.

“Well, not *the* famous one, but one just like it. I’ve seen those movies a hundred times, so I know what it looks

like. And, I told you, my dad has the poster which I looked at as soon as I got home. The car in Farmer's Zimmer's field looked just like it."

"That's simple to check out. Someone has to go to the barn and look," said a kid in the crowd.

"I'm not going up to that barn," Chuck replied. "Thorny may not know much, but he's right about the bulls. Besides, I already saw what's in it."

"Well, I'm not going," responded Thorny with a distinct frown. "Those bulls are mean."

"Hey, I know," called another kid from the crowd. "This is a mystery, so Tanner-Dent can handle it. Mysteries is on their business card, you've seen it. We all have."

Everybody looked at me and Whiz as Tommy said, "Didn't I just say that?"

"Wait a minute," I replied. Bulls? I didn't want any part of this. "If you think me and Whiz are going..."

"Perhaps the firm of Tanner-Dent could look into this mystery," said Whiz, cutting me off. "However, our services do cost money, and since none of you are currently on retainer, we must decline until such time as funding has been raised."

With that strange, but typical, response from Whiz, the eagerness seemed to die down a bit, and some of the kids left. Well, that was the end of that—no bull fighting for me. What a relief. Then, I looked over at Whiz. He had that 'staring into space' kinda look he got when he was deep in thought. Uh, oh.

"It *would* be interesting to see if Chuck is correct about the DeLorean," Whiz finally said to me, as the crowd thinned out. "I would like to see one up close."

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Little did I know, not only did that thoughtful look mean I was going to be investigating Mr. Zimmer's barn, but fighting bulls would be the preferred activity!

End of Chapter ONE

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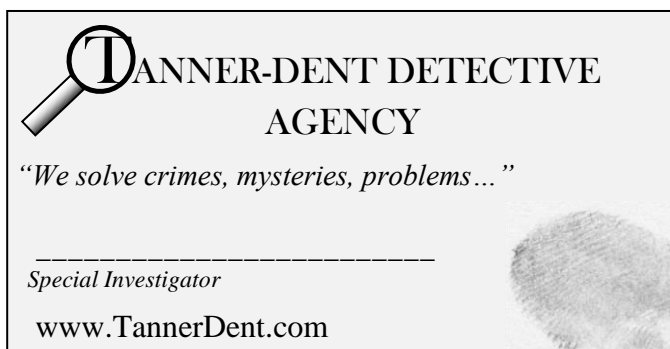
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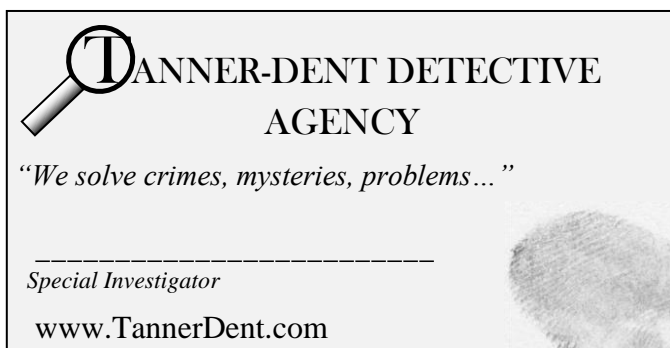




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