

WHIZ TANNER AND THE TANNER-DENT DETECTIVE AGENCY

Tanner-Dent short

What do two rising sixth-grade magicians, a secret underground shelter, and a missing dog have in common? Believe it or not, they all helped create a detective agency—the Tanner-Dent Detective Agency. Let me jump right in and tell you a few details about myself to set the stage. My name is Joey Dent and I'm a sixth-grader at Jasper Springs Elementary School. I'm normal height and weight for my age with brown hair and brown eyes—very average. Also of concern to this tale is Whiz Tanner, so I guess I should tell you about him, too.

Whiz—his real name is Wilson Tanner—and I have been best friends since second grade. We call him Whiz because of how smart he is. Description-wise, Whiz and I are pretty much alike. The big differences are his blue eyes, which are hidden behind a pair of glasses and the slight hint of red in his brown shaggy hair.

Now, the story I'm about to tell you was the turning point in our professional careers. You see... up until then, Whiz and I were magicians, which was why we were able to jump right into a real mystery when it came our way.

As I mentioned, we were magicians and throughout fifth grade we were heavily into practicing and performing magic. This was quite helpful in many ways. We studied all the

famous magicians and their tricks. We also began putting on small shows for our friends, even winning first place in the school talent show. But two things made that year quite different from previous ones.

First, we began researching and inventing magic tricks. Now, Whiz was always smart and knew it. This was the one area where we were kinda different. Sure, I get my share of A's but I also get a good sprinkling of other grades too. With magic, however, I found that I could do things that adults couldn't figure out. Boy was that powerful! Between the two of us, we were creating some pretty incredible magic tricks. That gave us both a real boost of confidence.

The second thing was, we needed someplace to do all this creating—a space to practice performing and a place to build and store our illusions. We needed privacy to work on our magic in secret. We started to do that in Whiz's garage by turning it into a stage and workshop, but his mother, who liked to park her car there, put a stop to that. Mr. Tanner, however, came to the rescue. He gave us permission to use the shelter in their backyard—actually, it's under their backyard which is pretty cool, but I'll get into that some other time.

We didn't know it at the time but working together to solve problems and having a place, all our own, to work in secret, were the right seeds needed, for a detective agency to form. All we needed was a mystery to complete the mix when Jessica Carlton's dog went missing.

It was the first week of sixth grade. The weather was warm and the days were still long. I was riding my bike home from a pick-up football game that started right after school. As I passed the Carlton's house, I saw Jessica walking around the house calling for her dog.

"Fluff Puff, here Puffy."

To be fair, she was in the fourth grade when she named him.

She looked a bit frantic so I quickly deduced something was wrong. Since it was still too early for supper and I had nothing going on and Jessica was kinda cute with all the makings of a damsel-in-distress—I got off my bike to help her look. Jessica, who had long, straight and very black hair, was only a few months older than me but it was just enough to put her a grade ahead. She was a middle-schooler. Having her move out of Jasper Springs Elementary helped promote me to the third fastest kid in school.

"Jessica, do you want some help?" I asked, hoping, for some unknown reason, that she would say yes.

"Oh, sure Joey. Thanks. I let Fluff Puff out for her afternoon walk and she disappeared. She was here a few minutes ago and now she's not."

Jessica and I looked up and down the street a couple of times and even searched her backyard. Nothing. Fluff Puff was a show dog with many ribbons and very friendly—one of

the few dogs in town who could run around without a leash and nobody minded. However, she rarely left the yard and never missed a meal. As I helped search, I realized that I had walked into a Class A mystery.

"You know who could probably be of some great help?" I asked a bit hesitantly.

"Who?"

"Whiz. I'll bet he could think like a dog and tell us where Fluff Puff went. I can call him if you'd like."

For some strange reason, I didn't really want Whiz to be around while I helped Jessica, but I really thought he could help and we were getting nowhere.

"Oh, sure. Please do." She brightened up and smiled at me for the first time. I blushed slightly but I sure hope she didn't notice.

So, I called him using the Carlton's phone and he high-tailed it right over. Whiz was probably the smartest kid in school and if anybody would be thrilled at solving a mystery it would be him. Six minutes later, he skidded to a halt in the front yard and jumped from his bike into a full run right toward us.

"Time is wasting, Joey. Follow me." He took charge and we moved.

"We've already looked everywhere," I said as he ran toward the flower bed surrounding the house. "She's not there."

"Yes but, we are not looking for the dog. We are looking for clues."

So we looked for clues—or rather, Whiz looked for clues while Jessica and I watched. And sure enough, within minutes we found shoeprints in the side flowerbed and

crisscross marks, from the wire mesh of a cage.

“These are clues, Joey. I deduce that whoever left the sole marks in the dirt, placed a wire frame cage down right here and trapped Jessica’s dog.”

We wasted no time in getting pictures of the evidence, drawing diagrams, and taking measurements. We gathered up all the crime scene clues we could find and then spent the next two days in our magic studio—actually the shelter under Whiz’s backyard that I mentioned—with Dr. Tanner’s laptop searching the Internet for sole patterns of shoes and designs of animal cages. We also scoured the Jasper Springs library for books on detective techniques. Wow! We learned a lot.

Every day after school, we spent our free time making phone calls and visits to the Jasper Springs Animal Clinic, Richardson’s Pet Shop, The Johnson Shoe Store and other ‘information sources’, as Whiz called them. I made sure to touch base with Jessica everyday to let her know we were still on the case. On Friday evening, we met in the Magic Studio to go over what we found.

“To summarize what we know...” Whiz began speaking. “From the sole prints, we know the shoes are approximately size eleven men’s Reebok Classic Leather Ultralite. Mr. Johnson provided a list of seventeen individuals who purchased those particular shoes in sizes nine to twelve over the last year.”

“So we have seventeen suspects? That’s a lot of people to investigate.”

“That is precisely why we have to eliminate the obvious ones. Our visits to Richardson’s come into play here—the cage connection.”

“Man, you’re starting to sound like a detective!”

“You must think like a detective to solve a crime, Joey. Today we are detectives.”

“But when I asked the clerk at Richardson’s, she said they haven’t sold any cages in over six months,” I added. “Could our dog-knapper have planned this six months ago?”

“I think not. While it is true that Richardson’s Pet Shop sells cages, they also rent cages—mostly for trapping unwanted animals such as raccoons and skunks. Remember, I said ‘our visits’... plural. I followed up with them yesterday, and they did rent four cages earlier this week. I have the names of all four customers, right there.”

He pointed to a slip of paper taped to the wall—next to our list of shoe buyers.

“Two of those names match the list of Reebok shoe buyers.”

“Alright! Two suspects. That’s more like it, Whiz.”

“Yes indeed. We will spend this weekend tailing these two and I bet we will find Jessica’s dog.”

Over the weekend we took turns tailing each suspect. Mr. Honeywell turned out to be a bust. He used the cage to capture a small fox that had been tormenting his dog, and turned it over to the county animal shelter. But following Mr. Blake was much more productive. We spotted him buying dog food at the local supermarket. But our search revealed that he did not have any pets, especially a dog. We reported this to Jessica who told her father. He went straight over to Mr. Blake’s house, two doors down, and knocked heavily on his front door. Busted!

When confronted, Mr. Blake came clean and returned the dog without any fuss. I guess it didn't hurt that Fluff Puff began barking. He couldn't very well deny that the dog was in his back room after that.

The back-story, as Jerry Mormann, my neighbor and the best news reporter at the Jasper Springs News, would put it, was that Mr. Carlton had complained to Mr. Blake about a junk car he had parked on the street in front of his house. When he refused to move it, Jessica's dad went to the city council. Mr. Blake was in violation of a junk car ordinance and the city made him move it. Obviously, he was angry with Mr. Carlton. To get back at him, he stole the dog.

Jessica was so grateful she gave me a big kiss on the cheek—another bigger blush—and Mr. Carlton gave us each a brand new \$20 bill. But the real payoff was the excitement Whiz and I got from solving the case. Almost immediately we packed away all our magic stuff so we could concentrate on solving crimes.

That week, The Tanner-Dent Detective Agency was born. Whiz became Agent M—some reference to James Bond, he told me—and I became Agent K, because K has such a tough sound to it and I always liked that character from Men in Black. And we haven't looked back.

We spent all of sixth grade solving all sorts of mysteries and even got our names in the paper. However, Police Chief Reid is peeved at us because we solved the Great Gasoline Station Drive-away crime before he did. Actually we were at the gas station on Jefferson when two high school guys filled up their car and drove off without paying. Mr. Dumas, the owner, was in the restroom the whole time, so he didn't see who they were. But Whiz and I recognized the car and

followed it. We convinced the two to turn themselves in.

The problem for the Chief was that he had just finished convincing Mr. Dumas that since he never actually saw the guys or their car, it was very unlikely that they would be found when Whiz and I came racing up on our bikes with the culprits following in their car. Mr. Dumas gave the Chief some very stern looks as they confessed. The Chief then turned around and gave us a very angry look.

We now try to stay out of the Chief's way, but that hasn't stopped us from getting involved in the solving of some really adult-sized crimes around Jasper Springs! Like the time we discovered a missing painting from the Town Museum, or when we found a secret message tied to the leg of a bird. Or, that time we...

The End