

GREYSTONE SECRETS
THE DECEIVERS



**MARGARET
PETERSON HADDIX**

ART BY ANNE LAMBELET



KATHERINE TEGEN BOOKS
An Imprint of HarperCollins Publishers

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Greystone Secrets #2: The Deceivers

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www.harpercollinschildrens.com

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Haddix, Margaret Peterson, author.

Title: The deceivers / Margaret Peterson Haddix.

Description: First edition. | New York: Katherine Tegen Books, an imprint of HarperCollins Publishers, [2020] | Series: Greystone secrets ; #2 | Audience: Ages 8–12. | Audience: Grades 4–6. | Summary: Told from separate viewpoints, as Finn, Emma, and Chess Greystone and Natalie Mayhew, ages eight to thirteen, continue their quest to rescue their mothers they must return to the alternate dimension where truth is illegal.

Identifiers: LCCN 2019026615 | ISBN 9780062838407 (hardcover)

Subjects: CYAC: Missing persons—Fiction. | Brothers and sisters—Fiction. | Family life—Fiction. | Honesty—Fiction. | Supernatural—Fiction.

Classification: LCCPZ7.H1164 Dec 2020 | DDC [Fic]—dc23

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2019026615>

Typography by Aurora Parlagreco

20 21 22 23 24 PC/LSCH 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1



First Edition

PART ONE

ONE



FINN

Every day after school now, Finn Greystone played pitch-and-catch with another kid's dad.

Ever since he'd been old enough to pick up a baseball, Finn had loved the game. He loved the arc of the white ball against the blue sky and the thud of the ball in his glove. Now he also loved the way Natalie Mayhew's father called out, "What an arm for an eight-year-old!" even when the ball wobbled overhead and dropped down in the wrong place, out of reach.

The truth was, Finn loved most games.

But ever since his mother had disappeared two weeks

ago, everything had a double meaning. Pitch-and-catch wasn't just a game anymore.

It was Finn's job.

Finn was supposed to keep Mr. Mayhew busy. Or "distracted and unsuspecting," as Finn's sister, Emma, put it when they were divvying up assignments.

"You're the only one who can still act happy," Finn's brother, Chess, had said. Chess had a knack for making Finn feel better about what he could and couldn't do. Emma, at ten, was probably a genius, and she was the best at solving codes. Chess, at twelve, remembered the most about what had happened when they were all really little and their father was still alive—it was like Chess had a brain full of clues. And then there was thirteen-year-old Natalie, Mr. Mayhew's daughter, who wasn't related to Finn but had forced her father to take in the three Greystone kids when they had nowhere else to go. She was really good with computers and cell phones and, well, secrets. She was the best at keeping secrets.

But Chess made it sound like Finn being happy was the best skill of all.

The funny thing was, Mr. Mayhew probably thought *he* was distracting *Finn*. Mr. Mayhew didn't want any of the Greystone kids thinking too much about the fact that their mother was still missing, or that their backyard had blown

up, or that the police couldn't find Natalie's mother, either.

And Mr. Mayhew didn't even know the half of what had really happened. He didn't know anything about the secret code the kids still needed to solve to get their mothers back. He didn't know that every afternoon while Finn played pitch-and-catch with Mr. Mayhew, the other kids were scrambling to find a way back into another world, a place of both known and unknown dangers.

At least Finn had gotten the big kids to promise that they wouldn't go back without him.

"Don't tell Natalie," Mr. Mayhew said as he released another pitch into the air, aimed for Finn's glove. "But this is exactly how I pictured being a dad before she was born. Playing games, carrying her around on my shoulders . . . All the stuff she's too old for now—or *says* she's too old for. I didn't even think about how being a dad also meant changing diapers and cleaning up vomit and wiping up pureed spinach, which, I'll tell you, I always thought was the nastiest of all the baby foods . . ."

Natalie was the prettiest girl Finn had ever seen. She had long dark hair that rippled down her back, and when Finn's class had read a story in school about an elegant queen, and Finn's friend Tyrell had poked him in the side and whispered, "What's 'elegant' mean?" Finn had whispered back, "You know. Like Natalie."

And Natalie was strong and tough and fierce, and she could type out a whole text message with her thumbs without even looking at her phone once, and she could do it faster than Finn could think. And when she wanted something, all she had to do was tilt her head to the side and raise one eyebrow, and her dad would say, “Oh, you’re right! We *should* order pizza for dinner tonight!” Or whatever she was asking for.

Natalie was *powerful*. That was an even better word for her than “elegant.”

So, yeah, Natalie probably would not want to hear that her dad was talking about changing her diapers and cleaning up her vomit when she was little.

The ball hit Finn’s glove a little too high and rolled off the top. Finn had to dart over and scoop it up before it rolled down into the pond that lay in the middle of the park.

“You’d think it’d be a good thing, being the fun dad,” Mr. Mayhew said while Finn jogged back into position. “You’d think that’s what people would want.”

A shadow crossed Mr. Mayhew’s face, which was really tan from all the time he spent out on the golf course, selling people fancy sports cars. Finn had known Mr. Mayhew for only two weeks, and he still didn’t understand what playing golf had to do with selling cars. But it seemed to work for Mr. Mayhew.

Finn did understand the shadow on Mr. Mayhew’s

face, and the way Mr. Mayhew's shoulders slumped when he thought Finn wasn't looking. It meant Mr. Mayhew was going to start talking about Natalie's mother, Ms. Morales. Mr. Mayhew and Ms. Morales weren't married anymore, but it still seemed like he missed her a lot.

Or maybe he just missed arguing with her.

"Don't you think kids and parents should have fun together?" Mr. Mayhew asked. He clapped his hand over his mouth, as if he'd just remembered he was talking to Finn, whose mother was missing and whose father was dead. "I mean, kids and *grown-ups* should have fun together. Like we are now. You and me. Life should be fun."

Sometimes Finn wanted to hold up a scorecard for Mr. Mayhew, as if Mr. Mayhew were an Olympic athlete, and Finn could grade him on his recovery from saying the wrong thing. This was one of his better efforts.

It really wasn't Mr. Mayhew's fault that there were so many wrong things people could say to Finn, Emma, Chess, and Natalie right now.

"This is fun," Finn said, tossing the ball back to Mr. Mayhew. He felt the little twang of his arm muscles; he watched the ball soar through the sky. He forced himself to smile, and it almost felt real. For just that moment, he let himself forget that Emma, Chess, and Natalie hadn't made any progress at all figuring out how to rescue their mothers. For all the

closer they'd gotten to finding a way back to the dangerous world—and finding their mothers—they might as well have spent every afternoon of the past two weeks doing nothing but playing pitch-and-catch alongside Finn and Mr. Mayhew.

“Now, that’s what I’m talking about!” Mr. Mayhew said, which was an expression Mr. Mayhew used a lot. He smiled back at Finn, and with his light brown hair and his tan skin and his white teeth, he looked like someone in a toothpaste commercial.

Maybe Mr. Mayhew’s smile was just as fake as Finn’s. Finn glanced past Mr. Mayhew, and past the fence that separated the trees and grass and paved trails of the park from the trees and grass and paved trails of Mr. Mayhew’s huge backyard. Finn gazed straight up, to the blinds covering the windows of Natalie’s second-story bedroom in Mr. Mayhew’s house. Finn had a deal with the other kids: They left the blinds down when they wanted to tell Finn, *Keep playing. We need Mr. Mayhew to stay away longer.* When they were ready to give up for the afternoon, they pulled the blinds all the way up.

Finn had to shade his eyes with his hand, because staring back at Mr. Mayhew’s house also meant staring toward the sun. So for a moment, Finn couldn’t quite believe what he was seeing.

The blinds were still down, but they weren't flat and motionless like they'd been most of the afternoon, and most of every afternoon, every day for the past two weeks. Instead, the blinds were flashing back and forth—open, shut, open, shut—in a way that made Finn think of butterflies flapping their wings. Or dozens of butterflies flapping their wings all at once, in unison.

This was a third code, one that Finn had seen only once before, when they were practicing.

This code meant, *Come back immediately! We found something!*

TWO



EMMA, MOMENTS EARLIER

The cop had rung the doorbell, stepped back, and then stood perfectly still, like a statue dropped from the sky onto Mr. Mayhew’s doorstep. Emma let out a deep sigh as she watched through Mr. Mayhew’s security system—which she’d called up on her laptop the instant she heard a car outside.

“Police, but . . . just one,” she reported to Chess and Natalie beside her. “And he’s so young I’m not even sure he shaves yet. His uniform looks like this is the first time he’s wearing it. So . . . this is an Officer Nice Guy. Not anyone with actual news about Mom and Ms. Morales.”

Emma could have gone on with the details that made her

sure this was just a rookie checking in, not a top detective who'd found an important clue. The cop kept his eyes trained directly ahead, not darting around watching for potential danger. His police car was neatly parked in the driveway, as if the cop had taken the time to aim for an invisible box with exact, ninety-degree angles. (Emma really would have preferred to see a cop car driven hastily over a curb, and abandoned in a rush.)

But most of all, she knew this cop didn't know anything because . . . he *couldn't*. All the cops thought the kids' missing mothers were somewhere on planet Earth, in the same dimension as the cops themselves. So that was the only place the cops knew to look.

If she'd been in a more playful mood, Emma might have enjoyed imagining the cops' reaction to the news that they needed to extend their missing persons search to an entirely different dimension.

But Emma hadn't been in a playful mood in two weeks. Not since she'd turned around in her own basement and seen a wall of broken shelves and dirt in place of the tunnel that, as far as Emma knew, might have been the only route between the two worlds.

What if the kids themselves had destroyed the only route for getting back into the other world to rescue their mothers?

Or, if another route existed, what if they never found it?

“It’s . . . nice that the police want to make us feel better,” Emma’s older brother, Chess, said faintly, from his spot curled up with a different laptop in Mr. Mayhew’s La-Z-Boy recliner. Chess had spent so much time lately cooped up inside staring at computers and codes that his skin had taken on the same pallor as a mushroom. Even his voice sounded slightly mushy.

At the other end of Emma’s couch, Natalie only snorted.

“Finn’s not here, you know?” Emma said. Usually Finn was the one they dispatched to speak to the cops, or grown-ups in general. As Mr. Mayhew put it, Finn “could charm paint from a wall.”

“Fine,” Natalie huffed. “I’ll send the cop away.”

Natalie unfurled herself from the couch. She’d been lying upside down, her neck bent back over the edge of the couch, her dark hair streaming down like a flag behind her, her own laptop held downside up at eye level.

“Um, Natalie?” Emma said, pantomiming smoothing down her hair, because Natalie’s was flipped around so wildly.

“Yeah, yeah, whatever,” Natalie muttered, though she did comb her fingers through her hair as she headed for the front door.

The day Emma first met Natalie, Chess had said she was a Lip Gloss Girl—one of those older girls who cared a lot

about how she looked. The world really had gone crazy if *Emma* had to remind *Natalie* to pay attention to her appearance.

But as soon as Natalie pulled open the door, she transformed into Natalie the Imposing, Natalie in Charge. In spite of herself, Emma listened and watched carefully, as if she were observing a science experiment. Once they got their mothers back, Emma fully expected to go back to her original lifetime goal of making as many mathematical and scientific discoveries as possible, just for the fun of it. She didn't envy Natalie's very different talents. But Emma *was* curious—how exactly did Natalie do it?

“Oh, Officer . . . Dutton!” Natalie exclaimed, adding the name so quickly that the poor cop probably thought she remembered him, not that she'd looked at the name badge pinned to his uniform. “Do you have news for us? Did you find my mother? Or Mrs. Greystone?”

“N-N-No,” the cop stammered, as if Natalie were his boss and he was terrified of being scolded. “We're trying, though. I promise, we're trying.”

Emma felt kind of sorry for the cop. She knew what it was like to try your hardest and still fail.

“Oh,” Natalie said, visibly deflating. Emma knew Natalie well enough now to see: This was Natalie being kind. What Natalie really wanted to do was stomp her feet and scream at

the top of her lungs and demand her mother's return.

Emma knew, because that's what she wanted to do every time she talked to a cop about her own mother's disappearance.

The cops can't do anything, Emma reminded herself. It's all up to Chess, Finn, Natalie, and me.

"I'm sorry," the cop said. "I just came to bring you these." He held up two large white garbage bags, both full to the point of bulging. "I know you and your dad said to donate all the flowers to charity, but people keep leaving stuffed animals and toys at the explosion site, too. And, well, the guys down at the station thought the little kids might want to pick out a few things for themselves before we give the rest away . . . I can come back tomorrow for anything they don't want . . ."

He thinks I'm a little kid, Emma thought. When he talks about "little kids," he means me and Finn.

That made Emma want to stomp and scream, too.

She was not used to being angry all the time. Before her mother disappeared, Emma could have counted on one hand the number of times she'd been really mad. Now the fury popped up at the weirdest times.

Sometimes Emma even got mad at numbers. Twelve—that was how many days had passed since the last time Emma had seen her mother. Three hundred and seventy-two—that

was the number of attempts Emma had made at solving the secret code her mother had left behind.

And . . . one. That, Emma was convinced, was the number of right answers waiting out there. One, out of an infinity of possibilities.

No wonder she was furious.

No wonder she was having trouble eating and sleeping and . . . even doing math.

Emma heard the front door shut, and she realized she'd zoned out and missed the rest of the conversation between Natalie and the cop.

"Okay," Natalie said, dropping the garbage bags to the foyer floor and starting to dig through them. "Humor break. One for you—" She tossed something yellow and orange toward Chess. "And one for you." Emma saw a blur of purple and pink headed her way.

Emma held up her hands to fend off whatever it was. Something bounced from her fingertips just as she saw Chess snatch a little toy tiger cub from the air.

"Oh, er, thanks," Chess said, blushing. He tucked the stuffed toy into the chair beside him as if he intended to treasure it forever.

Seriously? Emma thought. *Ohhh . . . because Natalie picked it out for him?*

Sometimes Chess could get a little weird around Natalie.

Sometimes Emma wanted to shake him by the shoulders and shout, *Snap out of it!*

And sometimes Emma wanted to shake Natalie, and boss her around: *Whatever you do, don't hurt my brother! Even if you don't have a crush on him like he does on you, be nice to him!*

Which was crazy, because Natalie was nice to all three of the Greystone kids. Now, anyway. She hadn't been like that when they first met.

"Emma, you haven't even looked at yours," Natalie complained, pretending to pout. "It's *so* sparkly—I know you'll love it!"

This was a joke. Emma looked down, ready to act disgusted. The object she'd knocked to the floor was a pink pillow covered in sequins. But . . . it was actually an *interesting* sequined pink pillow. The sequins were two-sided, and they were sewn on in a way that made them reversible. Emma had seen this kind of thing before: If she ran her hand across the pillow in one direction, the sequins would show an iridescent white heart. Running her hand in the other direction would flip the sequins to purple.

But when Emma knocked the pillow to the floor, it had landed oddly. Half the heart was white; half was purple.

And in the middle, on the jagged line that divided the white from the purple, one row of sequins stood straight up, as if they couldn't make up their minds which way to

go. One or two of the sequins were even broken—bent or warped in a way that made it seem like they would never lay right again, in either direction. Emma squinted thoughtfully at the narrow, jagged line that was neither white nor purple, but clear, see-through.

And then Emma leaped up, snatched the pink pillow from the ground, and screamed, “That’s it! This is the clue we needed! Now I know how to find Mom!”