

THE MATH INSPECTORS

BOOK ONE

The Case of the
Claymore Diamond



Daniel Kenney & Emily Boever

 BAKKEN
BOOKS





HISTORIC
RAVENSBURG

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Gertie **Felix** **Stanley** **Charlotte**
Hirschenbach Dervish Carusoe Miller



CHAPTER ONE

SEPTEMBER 9, 4:06 A.M.

A phone rang in a dark room, but the figure sitting nearby did not answer.

After a minute of silence, it rang again.

Same number.

A minute later, it rang yet again.

They would never stop calling.

The figure finally reached a trembling hand for the phone.

“Who is this?”

“Not the Boss, so this must be your lucky day,” came the answer. “The Boss does not like to be kept waiting.”

“I—I don’t have the money.”

A sigh crackled through the phone.

“I mean... I don’t have it right now. I just need more time.”

“Maybe you did not hear me,” hissed the voice. “The Boss is not the waiting type.”

“Just hear me out. I’ve got a plan, and I’ll—I’ll even pay an extra 5% on top of what I owe you!”

Cold silence filled the line.

The figure’s heartbeat raced. This wasn’t working. “Look, I used to know people who can move valuables on the black market, and—”

“The Boss knows all about your criminal past,” said the voice. “As a matter of fact, I am looking at a file of rather impressive incriminating evidence against you right now. You need more time?”

“Yes.”

“Well, this really must be your lucky day—you

have one week to pull off your plan.”

“You won’t regret this!”

“We shall see,” the voice said curtly. “But if you fail to deliver the money in one week, this file of evidence goes to the police, and I promise you, the only phone calls you’ll be taking after that will be on the prison phone.”

A trembling hand ended the call and turned on the light.

There was work to be done.



CHAPTER TWO

ALL UNITS RESPOND

This was Stanley Carusoe's New York. Not the steel-and-concrete jungle of Manhattan with its high-rises and low sewers and yellow taxis and dirty black streets. This was a spot two hours north of the city nestled between the Hudson River and the Catskill Mountains. A place filled with weird and wonderful people who ran businesses and raised families and hardly ever left. A place where girls and boys played and roamed and discovered and grew up.

And a place where one particular 12-year-old boy with a great love for math and an even

greater love for mystery was sitting in a tree house plotting his next adventure.

The place was called Ravensburg, and on this Saturday in September, the sticky heat of summer had momentarily stepped aside to make way for the slow, steady breezes of crystal-clear Canadian air. Stanley Carusoe sat up on the couch, peered out the window of the tree house, and smiled. A monarch butterfly danced in the wind on its long journey south. Change was in the air, Stanley thought.

Change was definitely in the air.

A noise pulled Stanley's attention away from the window. Gertie's round face popped up through the trapdoor.

"I hate her," she said.

"Hate who?" Felix asked, kneeling at the other tree house window and peering through a tiny pair of yellow binoculars.

Gertie stretched her neck. “Miss Perfect Polly Partridge. That’s who.”

“I know.” Felix adjusted his binoculars slightly. “I just think it’s funny to hear you say it. What’d she do to you this time?”

“You didn’t see it? Well, she didn’t just do it to *me*—she did it to *all* of us.” Gertie climbed up, unzipped her backpack in the middle of the floor, and grumbling all the while, pulled something out.

Stanley knew she hadn’t noticed him sitting on the couch. “What is that?”

Gertie jumped six inches and wheeled around. “Stanley Robinson Carusoe! Don’t sneak up on me like that!” She blew dark bangs out of her eyes. “Here. Read for yourself.”

Stanley grabbed the newspaper from Gertie, glanced at the headline, and frowned. “Um, Felix, you might want to take a look at this.”

Felix shook his head. “Later, guys. I’m involved in a very important stakeout right now. Kinda life and death.” Felix’s tall, lanky frame was folded at odd angles, his elbows perched on the windowsill.

Gertie’s eyes darted from the binoculars to the pile of candy wrappers on the floor, then back to Felix’s usually freckled face. “Is that camouflage paint?” she asked Stanley. “What exactly is he doing?”

Stanley shrugged and handed the paper back.

“I’ll tell you what I’m doing,” Felix replied, still spying. “I left the last piece of my birthday cake on the kitchen counter so it can reach room temperature. Everybody knows it’s mine, and everybody knows I’m waiting to have it tonight. Problem is, lately someone’s been swiping my food, and nobody’s fessed up to it. Well, not this time. I’ve got a perfect view of the kitchen from

here, and this time,” he shook his fist in the air, “I’m going to catch the thief red-handed.”

Gertie put her hands on her hips and cocked her head a little to the left. “Life and death? That’s not life and death, Felix. *This* is life and death.” Her short stride kept pace with her temper as she crossed the tree house and poked the newspaper at his red head. He ignored it. She looked down into the kitchen. “How long is your dumb stakeout going to take?”

“For your information, this isn’t dumb, and it’s not just any stakeout. It’s a cake stakeout.” He looked up and snapped his fingers. “Wait a second. That makes it a *cakeout!* Whoa. Anyway, I’ve been here for three hours, and I’m willing to wait thirty more to catch the culprit. In the past week, I’ve lost half a Twinkie, a piece of cinnamon toast, and leftover lasagna.” After a pause, he turned to her for the first time. “Do

you have any idea how good my mom's lasagna is on the second day?"

Stanley chuckled. If Felix was looking for sympathy, he wasn't going to find it with Gertie.

Felix returned to his binoculars.

"Have you even read yesterday's school newspaper?" Gertie practically screamed. "Polly wrote an editorial on 'Why English is the finest educational pursuit, followed by the arts, dance, science, and then,' get this, 'cleaning the bathroom and *then* math.' She cites studies that say people who like math are, quote: 'more likely to dress their pets up in sweaters, wet their beds, and take stuffed animals out on dates.' End quote."

Felix jerked forward. "Why, that low-down—I can't believe it!"

"I know," Gertie said. "She's really gone too far this time."

“No, look. Something’s happening in the house.”

Stanley darted to the window. Even Gertie pushed onto her tiptoes to get a better view.

There was a blur of movement in the kitchen. Then something small and white jumped onto the counter. It was Buckets, the Dervish family’s fluffy white cat. The fancy feline sniffed the edges of the birthday cake, licked the blue number 12 off the top, finished the entire piece in four bites, jumped down to the floor, and sauntered away.

The binoculars tipped from Felix’s face. “That mangy, good-for-nothing cat burglar. See if I ever fill his milk bowl full again. And after everything I’ve done for him, everything we’ve meant to each other...”

Stanley patted him on the shoulder. “Sorry, buddy. I know how much that cake meant to you.”

Gertie threw her hands in the air. “Cake? Who cares about cake? Look at this last sentence. ‘The only people more pathetic than people who like math are the people in this school who act like math is their best friend.’ *That* is a direct shot at *us*.”

“I suppose it is.” Felix sighed and started unwrapping another candy bar. “So, what do we do about it?”

He and Gertie both turned to Stanley.

But before Stanley could reply, the trapdoor flew open, and Charlotte came halfway up the ladder smiling at them. Her curly blond hair was drawn back in a ponytail, and her blue eyes sparkled with excitement.

Stanley looked down at her. “Did you get it?”

Charlotte heaved a cardboard box onto her shoulder. “Got it.”

“Yeah, well, we’ve got something too,” Gertie

said, flailing her arm so violently that pieces of newspaper floated to the tree house floor. “A gigantic Polly Partridge problem. Why am I the only one upset by this whole thing?”

“Trust me, Gertie,” Stanley said. “You’re not.” He reached down to lift the box up the ladder. “Polly will get what’s coming to her.” He took something out of the box—an electronic device with lots of knobs—and set it on the small table near the middle of the clubhouse. “But not today. Today, we have better things to do.” He held up a black power cord coming off the end of the device. “Today, we discover our destiny.”

Gertie eyed the outlet at the other end of the tree house. “It looks like our destiny needs an extension cord. What is that thing, anyway?”

Stanley nodded toward the trunk. “Get the extension cord and I’ll show you.”

Gertie bowed. “Whatever you say, dear

leader. But don't think I've forgotten about Polly."

Charlotte pulled herself into the tree house, leaned over the gadget, and tapped on it. "I haven't tried this thing yet. Not even sure if it still works." She looked up at Felix. "Nice camo, by the way."

"Not much good it did me," Felix mumbled, his mouth full of Snickers.

"Take it you don't need these after all?" Charlotte unslung a pair of high-powered hunting binoculars from around her neck.

"Nah, Operation Cake Bait couldn't wait. Thanks for bringing them, but my little Happy Meal Spynoculars worked just as well."

"Culprit?" Charlotte asked.

"Buckets," Felix answered.

"Bummer," Charlotte replied. She looked over at Gertie. "Cats eat cake?"

Gertie smirked. “Cats? No. Buckets? Anything.”

“It’s always been a source of bonding.” Felix sighed. “Until now.”

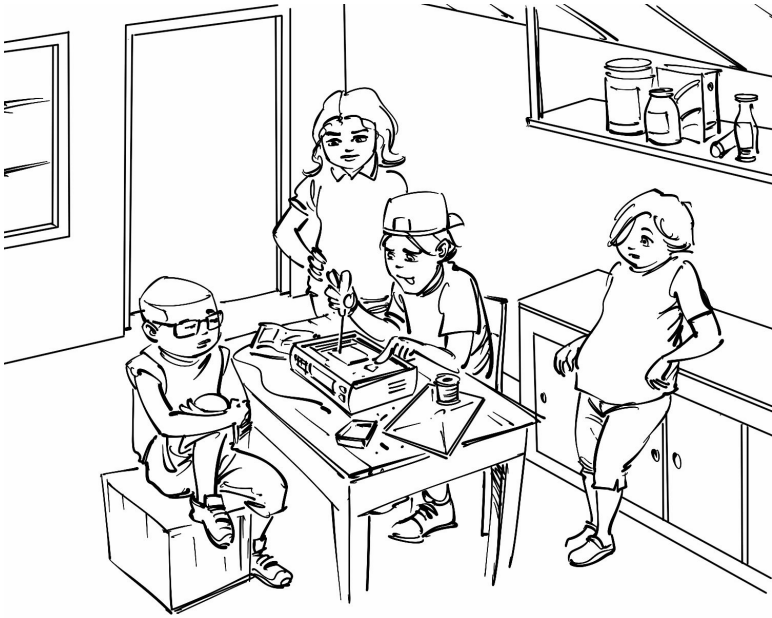
Stanley plugged the device into the extension cord. “Felix, see if you can get this thing to work.”

“If it’s electronic, I’ll get it to work,” Felix said. He ran his fingers over the strange device.

“This had better be some sort of getting-even machine, Stanley,” Gertie said.

Felix switched the power to the *on* position and adjusted a lever. He shook his head, then pulled a screwdriver out of his pocket and stuck it into the machine next to the lever. He leaned forward, then smiled. “It’s alive.”

They all held their breath and leaned in. Voices started crackling to life.



“A radio?” Gertie asked.

“It’s an old police scanner,” Charlotte replied. “We found it up in my attic, and Mr. Big Ideas here thought we needed it in the tree house. I once saw the guys on *MythBusters* try to toast bread with one. You know, in case of an emergency.”

“In case you need to toast bread while fighting crime?” Felix scratched his chin. “I like it.”

Charlotte shrugged. “Yeah, well, don’t get your hopes up. It didn’t work.”

“And how *exactly* is this our destiny, Stanley?” Gertie asked.

“Well, I *do* love toast,” Felix suggested.

“No toast,” Stanley said. “Forget the toast. We’re going to listen in on police chatter. When a crime has been committed, they talk about it on the radio. We listen, then go to the scene to watch the police in action. And I thought maybe we could... you know, even help solve a crime... or two.”

There was a long moment of silence.

“You want to start a detective agency?” Gertie asked.

“Well, I don’t know.” Stanley stuffed his hands in his pockets. “I just thought we would have fun.”

“Are you kidding?” Felix said. “We’d be just

like those meddlesome kids on *Scooby-Doo!* Solving mysteries, foiling plots, catching bad guys, and all while wearing groovy scarves. When do we start, gang?”

Charlotte punched Felix in the shoulder. “Thought I told you the cartoon thing was weird.”

“Zoinks!” Felix said, rubbing his arm.

Gertie leaned down for a closer look at the police scanner. “Okay, it is a cool idea. Except for the scarf thing.” She looked up at Stanley. “But you promise we’ll get Polly back?”

Stanley drew his right forefinger across his chest twice. “Cross my heart.”

The friends crowded around, and Stanley turned up the volume. For the next two hours, they planned their new club (very exciting) and listened to police chatter (not terribly exciting).

The radio reported on someone with too

many unpaid parking tickets.

“Let’s call ourselves the Math Bandits.”

“Yes, that would be a great name. If we were criminals!”

Somebody was driving with a broken taillight.

“I’ve got it—the Anti-English Club.”

“Well, it’s better than the Anti-Criminal Mathter Minds!”

A cat (not Buckets—though Felix was hopeful) was reportedly stuck up a tree.

“A slushie fund?”

“All I’m saying is, we’ll need a lot of snacks. And probably matching uniforms.”

They were just discussing meeting up again after dinner when something new buzzed through the scanner. The voice was surprisingly calm for such big news.

“Armed robbery at 429 Main Street, Franklin’s Jewelry. Suspect has fled the scene

and may be armed. Proceed with caution. All units respond. All units respond.”

The four friends stared at each other for a moment. Then all at once, they scrambled for the trapdoor, bolted down the ladder, untangled their bikes, and sped off.



CHAPTER THREE

A STRANGE FEELING

The Historic District of Ravensburg was exactly three blocks long. The oldest part of town, it was made up of brick streets, picturesque buildings, old trees, and colorful flowers. Normally, the mile ride from Felix's house would have taken only a few minutes. But on this day, news traveled faster than bikes, and the onlookers heading to Franklin's Jewelry Store delayed the four friends.

Police cruisers were parked at odd angles along Main Street, and an officer was already stringing yellow tape in a semicircle around

Franklin's in an effort to keep the steadily growing crowd at a distance. Behind him, an older man sat on the edge of a stretcher holding an ice pack to his bandaged, bloody head.

At the center of the commotion, Police Chief Abrams bent over a map laid out on the hood of a police car. Several officers were crowded around him. "If Franklin's is here," Abrams was saying, jabbing at the map, "then we need roadblocks set up at a 30-mile radius on all major routes."

"Chief," a young officer interrupted, "do we have the manpower for that?"

"No, I want the state patrol in on this. In fact, I'll bring in the park rangers if I have to. We just had a felony assault on a respected citizen, plus the theft of the Claymore Diamond. I was brought in as chief to clean up this town, and that's just what I'm going to do. One crime at a

time. We need to find whoever did this, and fast—or heads are going to roll.”

Stanley turned to the others. “Did you hear that?”

“I know,” Gertie snorted. “Could he have squeezed one more cliché into that little speech?”

“I mean about the Claymore Diamond. That’s gotta be worth like—”

Felix held up his phone and showed them the results of his internet search. “Like \$100,000, according to insurance value.”

Charlotte whistled. “That’s a lot of dough.”

“No joke,” Felix said. “And look what they did to Old Man Franklin.”

Gertie shook her head at Felix. “*Old Man Franklin?*”

“Have you guys never seen a single *Scooby-Doo* episode? There’s always an Old Man

Somebody who gets robbed.”

“Shall we just pull off the culprit’s mask now and be done with the mystery, Shaggy?” Gertie said.

“If only it were that easy in real life,” Felix said.

“Come on,” Stanley said. “Let’s find out what’s going on.”

The kids dropped their bikes next to a light pole and snaked their way through the crowd. On the far side of the crime scene, they spotted an officer writing notes on a pad. Officer Bobby Evans—the kids knew him well from his prior assignment as a school resource officer. They skirted along the edge of the police tape to get closer to him.

Evans looked up as the kids approached. “Hey, kids. What are you guys up to? Staying out of trouble?”

“No,” Gertie said. “We’re here to confess to stealing the Claymore Diamond.”

Evans stared at them.

Stanley chuckled. He knew that Gertie and Evans sometimes butted heads. “We overheard the chief talking. Too bad about Mr. Franklin. Is he going to be all right?”

“Should be,” Evans said, “though he took a nasty blow to the head.”

“Can you tell us what happened?” Felix asked. “We’ve started a detective agency. You know, ‘The Mathkateers—You Can Count on Us, and We Can... um... Count.’”

Charlotte jabbed an elbow at Felix. “We haven’t settled on an official name yet, or a motto. But give us a try. Maybe we could help.”

Felix moved closer to Evans. “Name or not, we’re colleagues now. So, what’s the inside scoop?”

“Colleagues, huh?” The corner of Evans’s mouth angled slightly. “Then why don’t you tell me what *you* think happened here?”

“It might help if I could see the crime scene up close,” Stanley said.

Officer Evans waved his hand once. Stanley grabbed Gertie’s notepad, stepped under the tape, and crossed through the police barrier.

“The things I do for you kids,” the young officer said. He pointed at the store’s front step. “Sit right there and don’t touch anything.”

Stanley surveyed the scene. Mr. Franklin being loaded into the ambulance. Glass on the sidewalk outside the broken storefront window. Thick tire marks lining the street in front of them. Stanley opened Gertie’s notebook. “I need to see it all on paper. Helps me think.”



“It’s clear as day what happened here,” Felix said. “Aliens. Old Man Franklin’s just lucky they were after the Claymore Diamond and not him.”

Officer Evans rolled his eyes. “Obviously.”

“Okay,” Stanley said. “I’ll take a stab at it. From what I can tell, Mr. Franklin was in the store when it was robbed, and he put up a fight. He lost. The glass on the ground outside means the window was broken from the inside. And by

the looks of the skid marks, the robber jumped into his car and sped out of here in a hurry.”

Evans’s mouth curled into a half grin. “Not bad. Well, I suppose there’s no harm in filling you in on a few things. It’ll all be public news in about ten minutes anyway, judging by the media van that just pulled up.”

He looked down at his notes. “According to Mr. Franklin, a white male in his mid-twenties by the name of Christopher Anderson came into the store just a little before closing. Mr. Anderson and Mr. Franklin got into an argument.” He flipped a page on his notepad. “Then Mr. Anderson grabbed a paperweight and cracked Mr. Franklin on the head. The 911 call came in from Mrs. Sheila Blump—she owns the store next to Franklin’s—and when Mr. Franklin woke up in a pool of his own blood a few minutes later, he noticed that his display case had been

smashed and two diamond rings had been taken. Then he saw that his Lock Pro 2000 was open—um, that’s the model of Franklin’s safe—and his most prized possession, the Claymore Diamond, was gone.”

At that moment, Evans’s radio crackled. “Suspect Christopher Anderson is in custody. Repeat, suspect in custody. Got him at the junction of Highways 50 and 6.”

Chief Abrams’s voice bellowed through the radio. “Good work. Did he give you any problems?”

“No, Chief,” came the answer. “No problems at all. We got him at the roadblock. Routine stop.”

Stanley saw Charlotte look at her watch. She was a stickler for detail.

“They *got* him,” Evans said. “Thankfully, that didn’t take too long. Maybe I can still catch the game tonight.”

The voice came through the radio again. “Hey, Chief, turns out we do have a problem. No Claymore Diamond, no diamonds of any kind, and Anderson isn’t talking. He must’ve stashed them someplace.”

Chief Abrams’s voice rumbled. “Start a search of the area now! Nobody goes home until we find that diamond.”

Evans sighed. “Looks like that game will have to wait.”

“I bet we could help,” Stanley suggested. “We *are* pretty smart.”

Evans laughed. “Nice seeing you kids, but it’s time to let the pros handle this.”

Stanley had a thought. “Hey—when you’re done, do you think we could get a copy of the official police report? It would be helpful for us to see how real police officers do their jobs.”

Evans shook his head. “No can do, Stanley.

That file is official police business. Like I said, you kids run along home.” He returned his attention to his notebook and walked away. “And be good,” he said over his shoulder, looking right at Gertie.

She curtsied and flashed a fake smile.

“Stanley, what’s on your mind?” Charlotte said. “I know that look. They got the guy, so why do you want the police report?”

“You heard him. Until they find the diamond, the case isn’t closed. What if Anderson had an accomplice? Let’s snoop around and see what we come up with.”

“How exactly does one snoop?” Felix asked.

“A real *Scooby-Doo* fan would never have to ask that question,” Stanley said. “Just do what you’re good at.”

And that’s what they did. Gertie took out her pen and paper and wrote down everything she

saw and heard. Charlotte climbed a tree and snapped mental pictures of the scene. Felix took out his camouflage handkerchief, hung it around his neck, leaned up against a tree, and said, “Groovy.”

And Stanley looked around for Sheila Blump, the owner of the store next door. But before he could find her, a familiar voice rose above the noise of the crowd.

“This is Stella Burger reporting live from Franklin’s Jewelry Store, where Ravensburg’s most respected precious metals establishment has been robbed. That’s right, Dan. I said robbed!”

She’s talking to Dan Flounder back in the studio, Stanley thought.

The reporter was clutching Mrs. Blump by the arm just out of camera shot. Now Stella yanked the heavysset woman into view.

“As usual, we are breaking news here at Channel 12. I have with me Mrs. Sheila Blump, owner of Blump’s Blooms and Bonbons, who has been Mr. Franklin’s closest neighbor on Main Street for years. Mrs. Blump, tell us what you know.” Stella thrust the microphone in Mrs. Blump’s face.

Mrs. Blump, it turned out, didn’t need further prompting. “Well, I’ll tell you all about my experience, Stella. I was minding my own business, literally. I mean I was just putting the finishing touches on some chocolate truffles—” She grabbed the microphone and leaned forward. “Which are all buy-one-get-one-half-off the rest of the day in solidarity with poor Mr. Franklin— when I saw Christopher Anderson walk into Mr. Franklin’s store at exactly 5:55 p.m. All of a sudden, I heard this terrific commotion. Now, I’m not one for meddling in

other people's affairs—just ask anyone—but I couldn't help but overhear.”

“And what is it that you heard?” Stella asked, grabbing the microphone back.

“Shouting. Yes, indeed. I heard shouting, though at first, I couldn't make out what they were saying. Then someone screamed, ‘You're a liar and a thief, and you'll never get away with this!’ Then it sounded like they were wrestling or something. Next thing I knew, there was this big crash, and that Anderson guy went running out of the store, jumped into his car, and sped off. Well, I have several years of parks-and-recreation judo training under my belt, so I knew my duty. I ran right over there, and when I saw dear old Mr. Franklin on the floor, I made the call to the police and stood guard until they came to relieve me. The whole thing has been so upsetting.”

Stella angled the microphone back. “I can’t imagine, Mrs. Blump. You’re so brave. And we’ll all sleep better tonight knowing an alleged felon is off the streets. Incidentally, how do you know it was Christopher Anderson you saw?”

“Well,” Mrs. Blump said, “I didn’t know his name until today when the police said they were hunting him, but I recognized his face. He’s been coming to Franklin’s on the 15th of every month for a while now. And when he’s done, he always comes into my place and buys a dozen chocolate truffles—which are all buy-one-get-one-half-off this whole week. To think, all these months, I’ve been gift-wrapping bonbons for a hooligan.”

Stella Burger looked directly into the camera with an enormous toothy smile. “The police have confirmed for us that Christopher Anderson is in custody, although the Claymore Diamond is still

missing. I repeat, the diamond is still missing. But I'm on this story for you, Ravensburg, so keep it tuned here for more news as it happens. Reporting live from Franklin's Jewelry Store, I'm Stella Burger from Action 12 News. Remember, '12 is Swell.' Back to you, Dan."

Gertie opened her mouth so wide, Stanley thought she might swallow her own face. Then she did a spot-on impersonation of Stella Burger. "Remember, '12 is Swell!' Seriously, it doesn't even rhyme!"

The crowd began to break up, and a young policewoman escorted Mrs. Blump away. *Probably wasn't supposed to be talking to the media*, Stanley thought. Now he wouldn't be able to ask her any questions either.

He and Gertie headed back to their bikes, where Felix and Charlotte were waiting.

"Anything to report?" Stanley asked.

“Not sure what’s important,” Charlotte said, “but I looked at everything I could.”

“And I’ve got half a notepad full,” Gertie said. They all turned to Felix.

“Oh, yeah,” he said. “I’ve got plenty. Where do I even begin to explain what’s in here right now?” He tapped the side of his head. “Lots. Maybe too much.”

Gertie rolled her eyes.

“What about you, Stanley?” Charlotte asked.

“I don’t know, guys,” Stanley said. “I’ve got a strange feeling about this.”

Charlotte shot Gertie a look, and they both giggled. “You mean you’ve got a Stanley?”

Stanley scrunched his face up. “Huh?”

“We decided to call a funny feeling a *Stanley*,” Charlotte explained.

“On account of you having funny feelings so much,” Gertie said.

“Yeah, dude,” Felix said. “We’re basically making fun of you.”

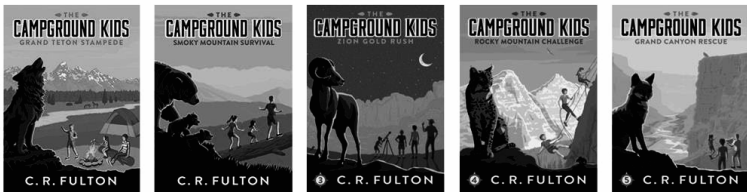
“Thank you, Felix. I gathered that. And I can’t help it, but I do get funny feelings.”

“You mean *Stanleys*,” Felix reminded him.

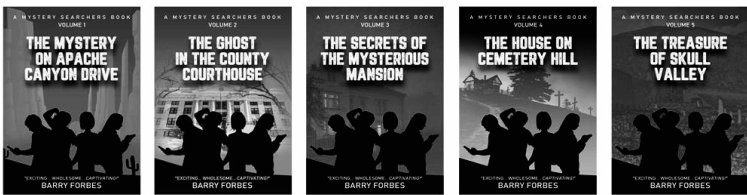
“And I say we meet at the tree house tomorrow morning and review everything we know. I think the police may be missing something.”

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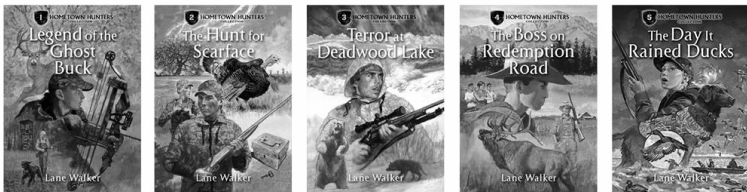
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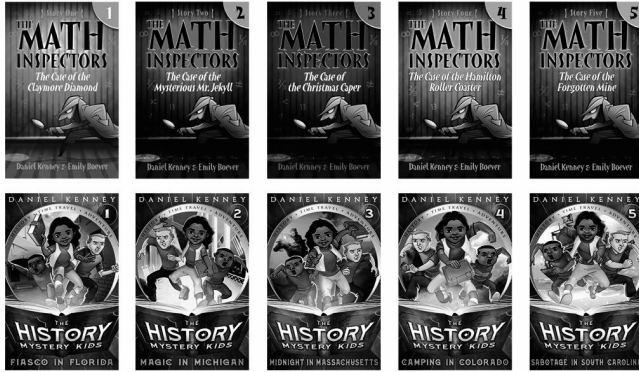


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