

The
Mystery

Mystery
Ryders #4

of the
Missing
Mystery



by
Criswell & Carli
Freeman

Sample Chapters

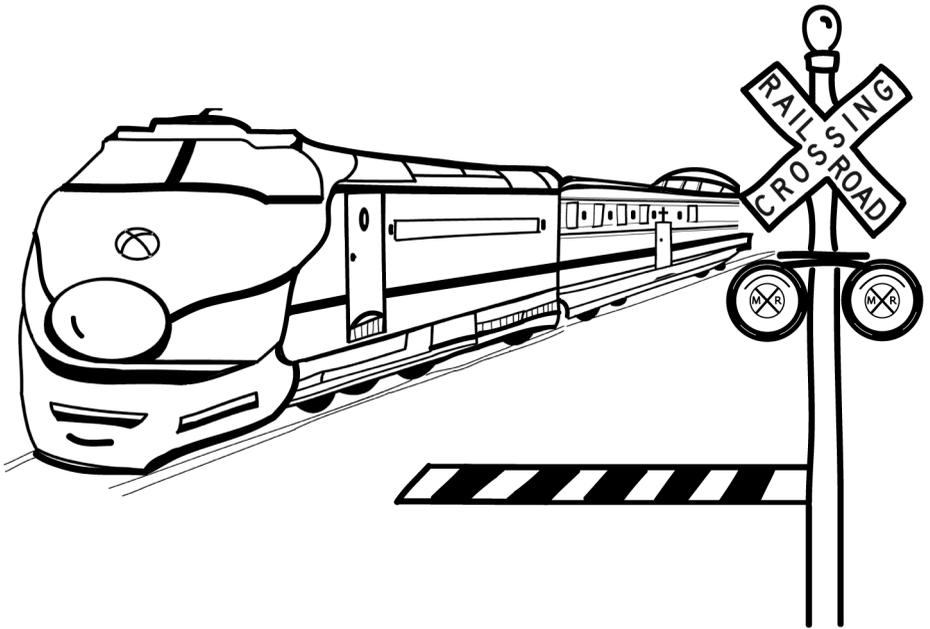
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Table of Contents

<i>A Mystery Goes Missing</i>	9
<i>Welcome to a Strange Sleepover!</i>	16
<i>A Surprising Price</i>	20
<i>Billionaire on Board</i>	23
<i>Back to Spring Valley</i>	29
<i>Dinner at Aunt Edna's</i>	34
<i>Off to the Scene of the Crime</i>	41
<i>Library Re-Search</i>	47
<i>Mystery in a Backpack</i>	57
<i>Calling the Author and the Expert</i>	62
<i>Let's Go on a Clue Hunt!</i>	69
<i>May Ryder, Ten-Minute Detective</i>	74
<i>The Expert Arrives</i>	79
<i>The Verdict</i>	87
<i>A Billionaire's Plea for Mercy</i>	91
<i>Keep Searching!</i>	94
<i>Library Lockdown</i>	98
<i>The Rest of the Story</i>	102
<i>Who's Who?</i>	106
<i>Hut Explains</i>	112
<i>Dinner (Again) at Aunt Edna's</i>	117
<i>Back to Omaha</i>	122



CHAPTER ONE



A Mystery Goes Missing

“Again! Let’s play hide-and-seek again!” begged my little brother.

“But, Quinn,” I said, “there really aren’t very many places to hide on a train.”

I was trying to be as kind as possible.

“Besides,” I said, “Dorothy and I want to look out the windows before it gets too dark. We can’t see the scenery if we spend all afternoon searching for you.”

THE MYSTERY RYDERS

My friend Dorothy Dash smiled at Quinn and said, “We’ve already played five games of hide-and-seek. Don’t you think that’s enough for now?”

“Oh, I never get tired of hide-and-seek,” said Quinn.

Then my brother paused for a moment and had a brainstorm.

“Maybe I can get Fudge to play with me!” he said. “I bet Fudge can find places you two never could.”

With that, Quinn turned and ran off in search of our little cocker spaniel.

Dorothy and I breathed two sighs of relief. We were now free to take a break, make our way to the observation deck, and experience the sights and sounds of train travel.

We could hear the train click and rumble as we walked past the kitchen, where my mother was hard at work.

Mom looked up from her cutting board and said, “Looks like we won’t be having dinner for a couple of hours. Would you two like a snack?”

A MYSTERY GOES MISSING

“Sounds great,” I said.

“What would you like?” Mom asked.

I turned to Dorothy for guidance, but she shrugged her shoulders.

“We don’t care,” I said. “Surprise us.”

“Thanks, Mrs. Ryder,” said Dorothy.

As we climbed the stairs to the observation deck, Dorothy looked at me.

“What kind of surprise do you think your mother is going to make for us?” she asked.

“Oh, that’s not really a surprise at all,” I said. “It’ll be fruit. That’s the only ‘surprise’ snack Mom ever serves.”

After a few moments, my mother arrived with a plate of neatly arranged apple slices and peeled tangerines. “Surprise!” said Mom, as she held out the plate.

“The fruit looks great,” I said.

“I agree,” said Dad, who grabbed an apple slice then took a seat beside Dorothy and me.

“Dad, when will we get to Omaha?” I asked.

“Tomorrow before lunch,” he said.

THE MYSTERY RYDERS

“Who’s the man you’re having lunch with?”
I asked.

“His name is Walton J. Walters,” said my father. “I met him years ago at a bookstore in Omaha. Walt is the founder of *N-Vest Industries*, one of the biggest companies in the world. In fact, his company owns the railroad tracks we’re riding on right now.”

“I thought railroads were for everybody to use,” said Dorothy. “I didn’t know anybody actually *owned* them.”

“Well, Walt owns this one,” said Dad. “He invited me to meet him in Omaha because he wants to buy the first book I ever wrote.”

“Since he has so much money, why doesn’t he just buy his own copy from a bookstore?” asked Dorothy. “Does he want you to deliver it, like a pizza?”

“Walt wants to buy something called a manuscript,” said my dad. “It’s not just any old book. It’s the actual pages I typed, put in a notebook, and sent to the publisher.”

A MYSTERY GOES MISSING

“Are you talking about those scribbled-on pages you gave to the library?” I asked.

“That’s right,” said Dad. “My manuscript is now officially the property of the Spring Valley Public Library. When I gave it to them last year, I really didn’t think it was worth very much.”

Dad paused for a moment and then chuckled.

“Actually, I was more interested in cleaning out the garage than making a donation,” he said. “But now Walt seems to think it’s more valuable than I thought.”

“How much is Mr. Walters going to pay for it?” I asked.

“I’m not sure,” said Dad, “but I’ll find out soon. Walt has hired an expert who’ll tell us what it’s worth—I expect to get *at least* a thousand dollars.”

“A thousand dollars is a lot of money for a few sheets of paper in an old notebook!” said Dorothy.

“It *is* a lot of money,” said Dad, “and I’ve told Mrs. Higgins that she can spend every penny to buy more books for the library. When she heard that news, she was a very happy librarian.”

THE MYSTERY RYDERS

I was pleased for Mrs. Higgins, but I was even more pleased to think that I might be introduced to a man who owned a real railroad.

“Do you think Dorothy and I could meet Mr. Walters?” I asked.

“Of course,” said Dad. “Walt plans to be at the train station when we arrive in Omaha.”

“Do you mean we get to meet a millionaire who actually owns his own trains and tracks?” asked Dorothy.

“That’s right,” said my dad. “We’ll be having lunch with him tomorrow. He’s a very nice man. Walt is so normal you’d never guess he’s a billionaire.”

“Did you say *billionaire*?” I asked.

“Yes,” said my father. “He’s one of the wealthiest men in the world. But, you’d never know it. Walt still lives in the same house he moved into forty years ago. And he still drives around Omaha in an old pickup truck.”

Just then, Dad’s phone beeped. He pulled it out of his pocket and looked at the screen.

A MYSTERY GOES MISSING

“It’s Mrs. Higgins,” he said. “She’s probably calling to find out when I’m meeting Walt.”

Dad answered the call with a smile on his face, but the smile quickly turned into a frown.

After several minutes, my father hung up.

“Bad news from Spring Valley,” he said. “The manuscript Walt Walters wants to buy has been stolen from its display case.”

I looked at Dorothy and she looked at me. Our carefree, spend-the-night-on-the-train sleepover had suddenly gone off the rails.

CHAPTER TWO



Welcome to a Strange Sleepover!

My name is Mary Catharine Ryder, but you can call me May. Everybody else does. I'm twelve and I live on a train, at least some of the time. The rest of the time I live at 4722 Bluefield Court in Spring Valley, Missouri, along with my two parents, my two brothers, and my dog.

My older brother, Hutson, is fourteen and very tall for his age. My little brother, Quinn, is six and sort of short. Fudge, my dog, is only two, but he's very smart for his age.

WELCOME TO A STRANGE SLEEPOVER!

My mother's name is Catharine, and she still calls my father John. But most people know my dad as Jonathan Ryder, the famous mystery writer who travels with his family in a private train car.

Speaking of the train, that's precisely where I was supposed to be having a fun weekend sleepover with my friend Dorothy Dash. In fact, we'd been planning this adventure for weeks.

The trip was going to be an exciting ride from Spring Valley to Omaha. We planned to spend the night on our train eating popcorn and watching old movies. But everything changed when my dad got the news about the stolen manuscript.

My normally easy-going father seemed worried. I knew my dad wanted the library to earn as much money as possible from the sale of his manuscript. And he didn't want to disappoint the nice billionaire who wanted to buy it. Plus, I was certain Dad really loved that dirty, old notebook with its smudgy pages.

So, in an effort to improve my father's mood, I tried to be optimistic.

THE MYSTERY RYDERS

“Don’t worry, Dad. Maybe somebody at the library simply misplaced your manuscript,” I said. “Besides, you’ve still got the file; you can just print another one.”

“I wish it were that simple,” said my dad. “Mrs. Higgins has already looked everywhere, and the notebook is nowhere to be found. It’s been stolen for sure.”

“Well, even if somebody did swipe your old notebook, you can still print another one,” said Dorothy, who seemed almost as interested in cheering up my father as I was.

“I’m afraid Walt isn’t interested in collecting copies,” said Dad. “He wants the original manuscript, the one with the editor’s notes scribbled all over it.”

Then, a slight smile crossed my father’s face.

“You know, the editor told me that my first mystery would never sell more than a few thousand books...but it sold millions. I guess that proves it pays to stay positive, because sometimes things turn out better than expected.”

WELCOME TO A STRANGE SLEEPOVER!

I hoped Dad was right. But, before I could tell him so, the phone rang again.

My father looked down and said, “It’s Walt calling from Omaha.”

When he answered the phone, my dad learned something that was either very good news or very bad news, depending on how you looked at it.



CHAPTER THREE



A Surprising Price

“Two hundred and fifty thousand dollars?” my father gasped into his phone. “Did I hear you right, Walt? Did you say the manuscript is worth a quarter of a million dollars?”

My father shook his head as he waited for the answer. Then Dad said, “Well, if your expert says it’s worth that much, I guess it is.”

Dorothy turned to me and whispered, “Is your father talking to that billionaire?”

A SURPRISING PRICE

“He is,” I whispered back. “And in a minute, Dad’s going to have to tell the billionaire that the manuscript is missing.”

Sure enough, my father quickly broke the bad news to Mr. Walters. Then he hung up.

“Walt was really sorry to hear about the theft,” said Dad, “because he wanted to buy my manuscript, whatever the price. But, Walt’s still going to meet us at the station tomorrow morning. He’s bringing lunch, and we’re all going to eat on board our train.”

“Sounds like fun!” I said.

“It will be fun,” said Dad. “Maybe by then Mrs. Higgins will have found that missing manuscript. Two hundred and fifty thousand dollars could buy a lot of new books.”

Hut walked upstairs and joined us on the observation deck, though he didn’t sit down.

“Did I hear you say two hundred and fifty thousand dollars?” asked Hut.

“That’s right,” said Dad. “The old three-ring binder I gave the library last year turns out to be worth a lot of money.”

THE MYSTERY RYDERS

“Are you sorry you gave it away?” Hut asked.

“Of course not,” said Dad. “I’ve loved that library since I was Quinn’s age. Besides, Mrs. Higgins could really fix the place up if she had that kind of money.”

“What do you mean *if* she had that kind of money?” asked Hut.

“The manuscript is gone,” said Dorothy. “Somebody stole it!”

“Gone?” asked Hut. “Are you sure?”

“Gone,” said Dad. “And, yes, I’m sure.”

Hut gave me a knowing glance. My brother and I love a good mystery, especially if it’s one we might have a chance to solve.

“I think I’ll call this one *The Mystery of the Missing Mystery*,” I said.

“Sounds like an interesting story,” said Hut. “I just hope it has a happy ending.”

CHAPTER FOUR



Billionaire on Board

That night after we had eaten supper, while our train was rumbling steadily toward Omaha, Dorothy and I went to my room to watch one of my favorite movies: *The Wizard of Oz*.

Dorothy climbed into the top bunk. Then, we settled in for an evening of yellow-brick roads, ruby slippers, and flying monkeys.

THE MYSTERY RYDERS

But, before the monkeys had a chance to scamper down the runway and take flight, Dorothy and I decided we'd had enough drama for one day. So we turned off the movie, switched off the lights, and tried to get some sleep.

In the darkness, I could hear and feel the train's clattering over the tracks. And, in a moment, I could also hear Dorothy's quiet voice.

"Do you think we'll really get to have lunch with that billionaire?" she asked.

"I think so," I said.

"Do you think we can have our picture taken with him?" asked Dorothy.

"Mr. Walters is supposed to be a very friendly man," I said, "so he probably won't mind if we take a few pictures."

"It's a shame somebody swiped your father's book," said Dorothy.

"You're right," I said. "But you know how Hut and I love solving mysteries. Maybe we can look for Dad's manuscript when we get back home."

BILLIONAIRE ON BOARD

“What if you and Hut really *could* find it? That would be *so* amazing...” said Dorothy, as she drifted off to sleep.

As for me, I didn’t fall asleep for a long time. I simply couldn’t stop thinking about the missing manuscript.

Next morning, when Dorothy and I walked into the kitchen, we were pleased to find Mom preparing a special breakfast of chocolate-chip pancakes...and fruit.

While we were eating, the city of Omaha came into view. Soon, the train began to slow, and finally it rolled to a stop at a small, neat station.

Waiting on the platform was a short, slightly chubby, white-haired man in a rumpled suit. As we stepped off the train, the man walked over to my dad.

“Welcome to Omaha, Jonathan,” he said.

My father hurried over to shake the man’s hand.

“It’s great to see you, Walt,” said Dad. “Sorry about the missing manuscript.”

THE MYSTERY RYDERS

“Oh, it’s not your fault,” said Walt. “Don’t let it spoil our lunch. Besides, I’m sending someone to Spring Valley to help. His name is Joshua Pennyweather, and he’ll know exactly what to look for.”

Dad seemed relieved to hear that Walt was on the case.

After my father introduced Walt to our whole family, to Dorothy, and to Mr. Owens (the trusty engineer of our train), Quinn tugged on the billionaire’s sleeve.

“When do we get to have lunch?” asked Quinn. “I’m hungry!”

My mother looked like a woman who wished she could turn back the hands of time just long enough to shush her youngest child, but Mr. Walters was not the least bit upset.

“I’m ready to eat whenever you are, Quinn,” said Walt. “I’ve got a picnic basket in the truck.”

“I’ll be happy to go get it,” offered Hut.

“Thanks, Hut,” said Mr. Walters, as he handed my brother the keys. “I’m in the red pickup near the

front door of the station—it's the only truck in the parking lot.”

In a jiffy, Hut returned with a big, wicker basket filled with sandwiches and cookies.

Then, as fast as you could say “all aboard,” we were back on the train, enjoying a rolling picnic while riding the rails around Omaha.

As we sat in the train's observation deck eating our sandwiches, it became clear that Mr. Walters was even more excited than we were.

“I love your train, Jonathan,” said Walt. “I wish my railroads could offer passenger service, but we can't seem to figure out a way to make the numbers work. Our trains haul tons of freight but no people.”

“If you like this train so much, you should ride back with us to Spring Valley,” said my father.

“I'd love to, but I'd hate to impose,” said Walt.

Then, Mom extended an official invitation.

“It wouldn't be an imposition, Walt,” said my mother. “We'd would love to have you as our guest.”

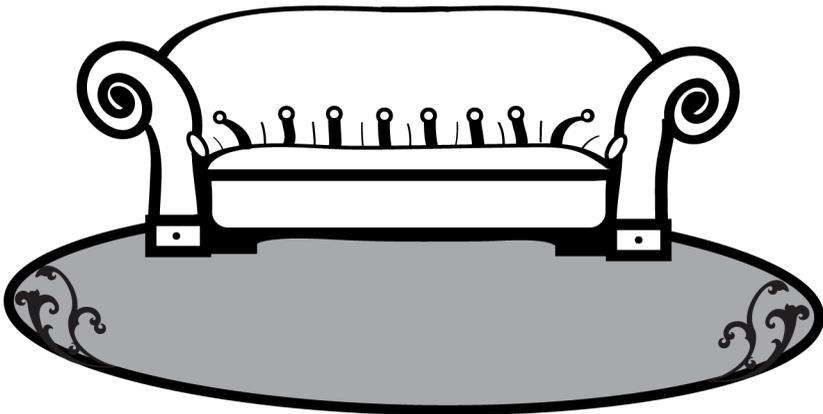
THE MYSTERY RYDERS

“Well,” said Mr. Walters, “it would take me a few minutes to go home and pack a bag. But actually, I’d love to go!”

“Then it’s settled,” said my father. “When we finish our tour around Omaha, we’ll wait at the station for you to go home and grab some clothes. Then we’ll all ride back to Spring Valley. You can spend the night with us.”

Dorothy looked at me. “Sounds like you’re going to have a billionaire stay at your house tonight!” she whispered.

“Well, I hope he doesn’t mind sleeping on the couch,” I said, “because we don’t have an extra bedroom.”



CHAPTER FIVE



Back to Spring Valley

When our train pulled to a stop at the Omaha station, Mr. Walters hurried to his truck and drove home. He came back with a small suitcase, and soon we were rolling down the tracks toward Spring Valley.

As the train clattered through the countryside, Dorothy and I made our way up to the observation deck where Dad and Mr. Walters were watching the scenery.

“Have a seat, young ladies,” said Mr. Walters. “Nebraska is beautiful, don’t you think?”

THE MYSTERY RYDERS

“It’s very pretty,” said Dorothy as she sat down.

I could tell Dorothy was excited about talking to Mr. Walters. And, I must admit, I was feeling the same way.

“Jonathan and I were just talking about the missing mystery,” said Mr. Walters.

“I told Walt that I’m better at writing my own mysteries than solving real ones,” said Dad.

Then, Mr. Walters turned to me.

“Your father tells me that you and Hut have solved several *real* mysteries on your own,” he said. “I’m impressed.”

I didn’t say anything, but I may have blushed.

Dorothy, who’s never shy, spoke up: “That’s right, Mr. Walters. May and Hut can figure out things when nobody else can. They’re like Sherlock Holmes times two.”

I smiled but still said nothing.

“I’m determined to find that manuscript,” said Mr. Walters. “I’ve read every one of Jonathan’s mysteries, and I want to add his very first pages to my rare-book collection. Besides, my book expert

tells me it's a wise investment.”

“Who decides how much something like that is worth?” asked Dorothy.

By now, Dorothy was also starting to gather valuable information on her own. I was pleased to have the help.

“I use the services of a company called Pennyweather International,” said Mr. Walters. “I work directly with the owner, Joshua Pennyweather. I’ve used him for years. He’s very reliable.”

“So how’d Mr. Pennyweather decide what price to put on my manuscript?” asked Dad. “After all, he’s never seen the real thing. It’s been in a display case at the Spring Valley Library.”

“Oh, Joshua *has* seen it,” said Mr. Walters.

Dad looked surprised.

“Several days ago,” said Mr. Walters, “Joshua flew to St. Louis, rented a car at the airport, and drove to Spring Valley. You must live in a charming area, because Joshua didn’t mind flying back to your nice town when he heard that the manuscript had gone missing.”

THE MYSTERY RYDERS

I decided that if my father and Dorothy could speak up, I could, too.

“Mr. Walters, why would you want an old, messy manuscript like Dad’s?” I asked.

“Well, I like to collect things,” said Mr. Walters, “and I’ve always loved books.”

Just then, my father’s phone rang.

Dad looked down at his phone and said, “It’s Aunt Edna. I’d better take this. She’s making supper tonight, and I want to let her know she’ll need to put a couple of extra plates on the dinner table.”

While Dad was talking to Aunt Edna, I explained to Mr. Walters that Edna isn’t actually our aunt. We just call her that because she’s like family. You see, Aunt Edna and her husband, Floyd, have been our next-door neighbors since before I was born.

Edna treats Mom and Dad like they were her own children, and she treats me like her granddaughter. So, it’s not unusual for Edna to have a home-cooked meal ready for us when we return from a trip.

BACK TO SPRING VALLEY

“Sounds great, Edna,” said Dad. “Dorothy Dash will be eating with us, and I’m bringing a friend of mine named Walt Walters.”

Dad talked to Aunt Edna for a few more minutes and hung up.

“Good news—we’re having fried chicken,” said Dad. “Edna also informed me that the whole town is talking about the missing manuscript. It was on the front-page of the *Spring Valley View*.”

“Have they found it yet?” asked Mr. Walters.

“No, they haven’t,” said Dad. “There’s still no trace.”

“Well, if the police can’t find it,” said Mr. Walters, “I’ll bet your kids can.”

Dorothy looked at me and smiled. She knew her sales pitch had worked.

Walton J. Walters had just asked Hut and me for help—or at least he’d sort of asked for it.

That's The End of This Sample

Congratulations! You've made it to the end of this Mystery Ryders sample. If you liked the first few chapters, you can purchase the entire book at:

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