

THE NOWHERE BEAR

“A Jimmy Finder Mystery”

by John DeBellis

I'd just washed down my last oatmeal cookie with four fingers of my favorite juice box when my door flew open and she glided in smoother than my best paper airplane. She was the most beautiful third grader I'd ever seen with hair yellower than anything I could ever find in a crayon box and two blue eyes the color of an unpolluted ocean, which made my heart skip more beats than my grandfather's old record player.

I'm Jimmy Finder, Private Eye, but right now I wish I had one more eye, then maybe she wouldn't notice the two I had staring at her. Before I could say something silly, she started speaking. "My name's Thalia," she said, fighting back her tears. "I need your help. I need you to find something for me," she pleaded.

At that point I would have done anything for her. I'd have split a candy bar with her and given her the biggest piece, but I wasn't going to tell her that. I'm a professional, the best kid detective in the neighborhood and I get paid top dollar for my work. "My fee is fifty cents a day, plus snacks."

"I have got plenty of money, I just got my allowance."

"Okay, what do you need found?" I said.

"Yesterday, before my sister went to spend the night at her friend Ginger's house, I borrowed Teddy, her teddy bear. I took it to school and when I went to put it in my knapsack it was gone. You have to find it before she comes home tonight, please!"

I like a girl who says please. When this case is over I'm looking forward to hearing her say, *thank you*. "Does your sister know you borrowed it?" I asked.

"No, she wasn't home. She's let me use it before. I didn't think she'd mind. I'm sorry, I know I should have asked her."

She was right. Rule of Thumb Number One: If you want to use something that belongs to someone else, ask first. Otherwise everybody would be using everybody else's stuff and we'd never know where anything was. "Where did you see Teddy last?" I asked, and offered her a Wheat Thin.

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Porkchin Park was a scary place! A lot of rough kids and even gangs played in Porkchin Park, so I had to stand tall. I couldn't show them I was afraid. Thalia held on to my right arm which I would have gladly given away just for that opportunity. As we made our way past the swings, slides, and sandboxes, I could feel dozens of eyes on us. I bet most of them were jealous.

Before we could cross the sandbox five big kids from Hopmoon street jumped out and blocked our way. Most kids were afraid to walk into Hopmoon street even if its just to retrieve a baseball. I never was never afraid because my mom and dad told me never to judge a book by it's cover. In grown up talk that means don't judge people by what you see on the outside. It's what they are like as a person that's important. Kid's from Hopmoon street are usually much friendly than they look, but these guys were scarier.

They were a gang of school bullies and would be bullies no matter what street they lived on.

Mack was the moniker of the biggest Hopmoon kid. Moniker in detective talk mean it's his name. He stood right in front of me and shouted, "Who said you can walk through our park?" His voice was loud and hard to understand like a gorilla with mouth full of cocoa puffs.

Thalia was afraid, so I held her hand tighter and then looked at the head Hopmoon kid right in his big hazel eyes and fibbed, "You told me I could walk through the park yesterday."

I hated to fib but right now it was better than fighting. I had a teddy bear to find. And besides, I'd heard through the detective grapevine that Mack was the worse hide-and-seek player in town, he'd always forget who he was looking for. So I said, "Don't you remember, the other day, I told you next time I'm in the park I'd bring the dime I owed you." And I forked it over. Which in detective talk means I put in the middle of his big dirty hand.

I didn't owe him one red cent. I never borrow money. If I can't pay for something, I save up until I can. I'd just added the dime bit so he'd look good in front of his friends and he'd find himself ten cents richer. He took the bait, which in detective talk means he believed my white lie. He turned to his pals, who shrugged, and then turned back to me. "Yeah, sure, you can go." And they left as fast as they came. We crossed the sandbox and made our way to the other play area.