

# The Big Puzzle

“A Jimmy Finder Mystery”

by

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It was one of those days. My basketball needed air. The batteries in my remote control car were dead. My juice box spilled and my nap wasn't coming easily. So when the knock on my play house door woke me up, I was one cranky detective. Oh, yeah, I'm a gumshoe, a sleuth, a P.I., a real live kid detective. My name is Jimmy Finder. Like my last name, I specialize in finding things that seem to disappear into thin air like a sock. “Hold your horses. I'll be right there,” I screamed. In detective talk, “hold your horses” means “please wait”. I tossed my World Series Championship blanket aside and hopped off the couch. My sneakers were where I always left them right next to the door. I put them on quickly. When you're a detective, you have to be ready to move fast so I was real good at tying bows.

When I opened the door, I thought my eyes were going to pop out. She was the most beautiful girl I'd ever seen, and I was lucky. She looked like she was my age. Veronica had light brown hair with dozens of ringlets that fell below her shoulders; but it was her face that I was drawn to like peanut butter to jelly. To say her eyes were blue was like saying Resident Evil was just a game.

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“Well, this morning I was having a birthday party for my doll, Kara. My dog, Ellie thinks Kara’s a real girl. She’s very cute,” she said while brushing a few strands of hair off her face.

“I bet she’s not as cute as you.” The words come out of my yapper before I knew I was saying them. In detective talk, “yapper” means mouth.

Veronica blushed. She looked good in pink. I bet she’d look good even in black and white like my grandpa’s old television. “All my closest friends were there: Little Frankie, Jamie, Carol Ann, and Jessica. After we finished our apple juice and imaginary cake, we put a puzzle together. It was so beautiful. It was a big puzzle of an underwater scene with dolphins, whales, and hundreds of pretty, colorful fish,” Veronica said sadly.

“I love a good puzzle. We detectives solve puzzles everyday. Well, everyday, except Sunday. We spend that with our family and sometimes our grandparents,” I blurted out. “Go on. Tell me the rest of it.”

“Well, the puzzle was finished so we played with my other toys until my Mom said it was time for lunch. My friends had to leave because I was going to lunch with my Mom, just her and me. I had the tuna fish special; it came with French fries.” As Veronica told me about her lunch, my stomach churned. I usually have a snack after my nap; but this case caught me by surprise like a geography quiz. “When I came home, I went into my playroom and a piece of the puzzle was missing. I looked everywhere but I couldn’t find it,” she said while holding back a tear. She actually put her little hand under her eye to keep the tear from rolling down her pretty face.

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The mall was usually a place where older kids hung out, so my detecting antenna was up. I kept thinking, “Why was Little Frankie at the mall and why wasn’t there an adult watching him?” Then I thought, “Hey, maybe he has an older brother, sister, cousin, or uncle there or maybe his Dad works at the arcade. There could be hundreds of reasons, so I couldn’t judge someone without getting to know him first. I learned a long time ago when I was just a rosy-cheeked kid in first grade, that just because someone looks and acts differently, that doesn’t mean he’s not nice.

Veronica snapped me out of my daydream. “There’s Little Frankie over there.” There he was alright. Only, much to my surprise, little Frankie wasn’t so little. He must have been nearly four and half feet tall, with muscles that came from training hard on the monkey bars. And he had a large, round head that had lots of room for a big smile. And when he saw Veronica, his smile was a whopper.

Like she did with Carol Ann, Veronica introduced us. “Frankie, this is Jimmy Finder. He’s a detective.”

Jimmy stuck out his hand that was the size of a catcher’s mitt. “Nice to meet you.” When I shook Little Frankie’s hand, it was like a small fish being swallowed up by whale. Or maybe it was like a hotdog being dropped into a loaf of Italian bread. Or maybe it was... Oh, who cares? Whatever it was, Little Frankie’s handshake was strong and firm, like someone who enjoys meeting new people. I liked Little Frankie right off the bat. I really wanted the big kid to be innocent. I hoped that someday we could be

pals. “So, you’re a real live detective. I never met a detective before,” Frankie said with so much excitement his voice almost squeaked.

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We were halfway up her walk when Jessica called us from the side of her house, where she was practicing Karate poses that looked more like trees that had been climbed on by too many big kids. Jessica was almost as tall as I am, which is almost as tall as Veronica who is almost as tall as me. I think. She was a cutie with a red pony tail, blue eyes, and more freckles than lights on a flying saucer. Yeah, she was a looker, alright but not my type, which at the moment was only Veronica. As usual, Veronica introduced us and gave Jessica “the company line”. In detective talk, that means she “told the same, old story”.

Jessica admitted to playing near the puzzle right away. “Sure. I was playing with Ellie right next to the puzzle. But when I left, the puzzle was still together. I think.” Maybe she was the one who took the piece of the puzzle, or maybe she just didn’t remember. I decided to let that idea bounce around in my head for awhile.

“How close were you to the puzzle when you were playing?” I asked her firmly. I wanted to show her I meant business.

“I don’t know -- maybe a few feet away,” she answered like she wasn’t sure.

I threw another question at her before she had time to think. “Was it a few feet or was it closer? Close enough for you to pick up the piece?” I was being tough, hoping

she would “spill the beans”. Oh, “spill the beans” in detective lingo means “confess” which means admitting you did something bad.

Veronica chimed in. “Jimmy, give her a chance. She’s trying.” Veronica was right. I wasn’t being fair. Even a detective should give a person a chance to answer a question.

“I don’t remember if a piece was missing or not but I know I didn’t take anything. I was just playing with your dog, Ellie, that’s all,” she pleaded. I was falling for her pitch, her rap, her routine, her explanation. In other words, I was believing her.