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Snipped in the Bud

A Tale from the Garden of Mysteries



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Books by Donna Alice Patton

MAGGIE AND EM MYSTERIES

The Secret of the Madonna

A Maze of Secrets

Secrets in the Cellar

Shh! It's a Secret!

TALES FROM THE GARDEN OF MYSTERIES

Snipped in the Bud

Squashed at the Fair

Spies Among the Lilies

TALES OF THE WEST

Jenny and the Hooky Playing Fiasco

Jenny and the Cattle Rustling Catastrophe

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Chapter One

SNATCHED!

Another Summer Snow is missing!” Ten-year-old Becky McGuffey burst into the kitchen and slumped in a chair. “What am I going to do?”

Across the table, her teenaged sister, Yvonne, didn’t even look up from her book.

Becky studied the book’s cover: *The Mystery of the Haunted Orchard*. The picture showed a sinister house with spindly apple trees, the branches reaching out like bony arms. Even with her troubles, she shivered. Becky loved a good mystery. In books—not in real life.

Having a mystery happen to me is no fun at all. “What am I going to do?”

This time, Yvonne looked up and rolled her eyes. “It’s just a rose. Plenty more will bloom before the fair.”

“Just a *rose!*”

That showed how much her sister knew. Becky sat up and pushed a yellow sun visor decorated with purple flowers back from her sweaty forehead.

“Summer Snow is my *best* white rose. It’s won first prize two years in a row at the junior garden show. It *has* to win the grand prize this year. The winner gets a gold plaque and a one-hundred-dollar gift card from Sam’s Garden Center.”

Not that she wanted to tell Yvonne, but Becky had secret plans for that contest prize.

I’ve been saving my birthday and Christmas money for two whole years now. If I win, the prize money will make exactly enough.

Yvonne popped a bubble of purple gum.

The grape scent tickled Becky’s nose. Even though she liked the color purple, she didn’t like grape anything.

“Why the worry?” Yvonne asked. “You couldn’t enter that rose anyway. The fair is still weeks away.”

“I know that.”

Becky had the dates—September 4th to 9th—marked in red on her puppy-dog calendar. “I don’t care if someone takes a rose now and then, if they ask.”

Sitting up straight, she tried to explain the problem to Yvonne. “Someone is taking my roses. Every day for the past two weeks I’ve found another rose gone. I have to stop the person taking them. What if they pick the rose that I’m going to enter in the fair?”

As a Junior Rose Grower, Becky had learned the hard way not to count on any single rose when entering a competition.

As the time drew near for the contest, she kept her eyes on her eight rose bushes. Only the most perfect blooms were picked for competition.

“You aren’t going to put umbrellas over your bushes this year, are you?” Yvonne asked with suspicion in her dark eyes. “It looks weird. All my friends laughed and called us the Family Who Didn’t Want Wet Flowers.”

“Roses can be beaten down by the rain,” Becky said, dodging the question.

Last summer, Yvonne had squawked plenty about the polka-dotted umbrellas sheltering Summer Snow and Candy Apple Red. This year, Becky could add a Princess Pink Nose umbrella and one with a clown. Yvonne would not be happy about those and right now Becky needed her sister’s advice.

“What am I going to do? I have to find out who’s taking my roses before it’s too late.”

“Who knows?” Yvonne said as she shrugged and went back to her book.

Another grape bubble popped, to Becky’s irritation.

Suddenly, Becky had an idea.

I love mysteries too. Why can’t I be like the girl detectives in books and solve this? Someone is taking my roses and I have to find out who. I’ll solve the mystery myself. But how?

“When someone in one of your books wants to solve a mystery, what do they do?” she asked her sister.

This was a topic Yvonne loved. A sparkle came into her eyes. She actually put down the book and looked interested. “The first thing to do is to look for clues or anyone suspicious.”

“Clues! That’s right.” Becky had read enough Nancy Drew mysteries to know that. “Where would I look?”

“That’s easy. You go to the scene of the crime.”

“Huh?”

“Your roses were taken from the garden, right?”

“Yes, but—”

“Then that’s the place you start. See if any suspicious characters are hanging around. Then search to see if they left any clues.”

“I’ll start in my rose garden, at the scene of the crime.” Becky jumped off the chair and squared her shoulders.

The first thing she needed before she could look for clues was a magnifying glass, just like Nancy Drew. Becky wasn’t too sure what a detective did with the magnifying glass, but it always helped the girls in books.

She tiptoed into the study where Mom worked and pantomimed borrowing from the supply box.

Mom nodded, her dark curls bobbing.

Rummaging around in a box of pencils, scissors, and paper clips, Becky pulled out the magnifying glass. With a quick wave, she mouthed “thank you”— although Mom didn’t notice.

Becky closed the study door without a squeak.

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Then she made a fast stop in her bedroom for a pink notebook with roses on the cover and a pencil.

I'll find a clue and stop that rose thief. Today.



Chapter Two

CLUES IN THE ROSE GARDEN

Magnifying glass in hand, Becky headed outside. She went out the front door, careful to close it softly. Standing on the porch, she peered through the blue morning glory vines climbing up the railing.

A good detective looked over the scene of the crime and searched for someone or something suspicious.

The only trouble was . . . everything seemed normal.

A lawnmower started up in the neighbor's yard, the mailman waved as he drove by, and a little boy on a tricycle pedaled past making racecar noises.

Becky sighed.

Her family lived in a nice neighborhood called Robin Hood Meadow. When they first moved into the brick ranch house, shutters trimmed in blue, Becky asked the realtor, "Where are Maid Marian and Friar Tuck? Does Robin Hood play here every day?"

Well, she dismissed herself, I was only six then. Four whole years ago.

Her family was glad to leave the cramped apartment on B Street for the roomy house with a yard. The best thing as far as Becky was concerned was being able to have a real garden of her own.

Finally, a dream come true.

For those first years in the new house her garden stayed small. Dad said there were too many other things to do first, like planting grass seed and putting in a new driveway.

Most of her plants still lived at Grandma's farm, which was okay with her.

Ever since Becky had been old enough, Grandma Bauer let her help plant seeds in the spacious farm garden. Grandma even set aside a little plot just for her.

"My grandma helped me begin my first garden when I was six," Grandma said as they set out Becky's first flat of marigold plants. "Grannie Joseph told me marigolds were named after Jesus' Mother. Then we studied all the other plants that were named after Mary."

Becky grinned and sank her hands deep into the soft loamy dirt. Did anything feel as good as rich, chocolate-colored soil?

"I'll be a gardener just like you someday."

"You'll be a better gardener than I am," Grandma had predicted. "One day you'll be winning prizes."

Since Grandma had been a member of the Green Thumb Ladies Garden Club for almost fifty years, she

loved having Becky follow in her footsteps. They shared their love of gardening over plenty of weekends at the Rose of Sharon Farm.

At home, the apartment's windowsills were wide and deep. Mom had given Becky permission to grow flowers and even some herbs in pots. If only she had been able to grow her favorite flower inside, she might not have minded container gardening.

As long as Becky could remember, roses had been special because of her favorite saint, Saint Theresa. Becky loved Grandma's stories about the girl saint and her garden nickname, The Little Flower. A person would have to be beautiful inside and out for someone to give them such a pretty name.

The more Becky learned about St. Theresa, the more she knew this was true. She especially loved stories about the saint's "shower of roses." Her favorite prayer began, *St. Theresa, send me a rose from the heavenly garden . . .*

Becky's roses might not be as pretty as a rose from Heaven, but she loved everything about them—their sweet scent, silky petals, and even the pokey thorns, once she learned to avoid them.

For her sixth birthday, Grandma gave Becky a Peace Rose that had to stay on the farm. A bloom from that rose became Becky's first entry in the Fulcomb County Fair. It won an Honorable Mention and a Junior Gardener plaque.

That first taste of victory hooked Becky for life. Like Grandma, she had topsoil in her blood and Miracle Grow in her heart.

The following summer, Becky entered more flowers in the fair. The year after that, when she was eight, the fair board changed the rules. Grandchildren could no longer enter unless they grew gardens at their own home.

“It’s because of that Alma Snyder,” Grandma said when she had read the rules. “She only did it because her granddaughter Meredith lives with her. It knocks out every other competitor.”

Grandma protested about how unfair it was, but it didn’t matter. Mrs. Snyder had her way.

So, Becky had missed one summer of entering the fair because of the stacked rules. But this year, as with the two previous years, it didn’t matter. Becky had her own garden at last and nothing could ruin that.

Skipping down the porch steps, she walked to her roses. Mom called it an apron-sized yard with a pocket garden. They had a nice green lawn and in one corner, Dad had built a white fence in a V to set apart Becky’s rainbow of roses.

Besides the white Summer Snow and Candy Apple Red, there was another Peace bush and five other colors of heavenly scented flowers. It had always been a peaceful corner before. Now, the bare stub of Summer Snow’s stalk mocked Becky.

Ha, ha, someone took me!

Sitting down on the warm grass, Becky sketched a picture of her garden in the notebook. She turned a page and wrote **SUSPICIOUS CHARACTERS**.

Then she looked around.

Next door, the Claxtons were in their front yard trying to teach their four-year-old son, Rodney, to golf. Mr. and Mrs. Claxton always wore sporty golf outfits, with visor caps on their dark hair. They dressed Rodney in tiny golf pants, white sneakers, and a miniature golf cap that had **FUTURE GOLF PRO** stitched on the front.

Becky smiled and waved. “Hi Mr. and Mrs. Claxton. Hi Rodney.”

“Hi, Becky,” Mr. Claxton shouted back. “He picked his own club today!”

Rodney swung a red plastic putter and hit the new maple tree in the yard. “Me don’t like golf,” he said just like always. Becky wrote down:

CLAXTON FAMILY—not suspicious.

Next, she studied the neighbor to her left, Mrs. Montgomery. Becky couldn’t see her, but Mrs. M, as all the kids called her, would be in the backyard.

Mrs. M. was what Mom called a kindred spirit. She loved to garden too. Only, Mrs. M grew just one plant—gourds. She could make a million magical things out of them, from bird feeders to gnome houses.

Maybe she had seen someone suspicious.

Becky went to the back gate and knocked.

A cheery voice called out, "Come in."

"Hi, Mrs. M. Have you been back here all morning?"

Becky asked as she walked into the backyard.

"No, I watered the front lawn earlier."

"You did?" Excited, Becky's fingers tightened around the pencil. "Did you happen to see anyone around my roses?"

"I sure did."

"Really? Who?" Could the mystery be solved already?

Mrs. M. squinted from under a broad-brimmed straw hat. "I saw your mother. She stopped to smell them."

"Oh." Becky's hopes dropped to the toes of her pink gym shoes. Mom always began the day that way. She said it lifted her spirits. "Did you see anyone else?"

Brushing paint over a gourd shaped like a pear, Mrs. M thought. "Hmm, well, I did see Mr. Claxton. He jumped the fence to pick—"

"My Summer Snow!"

Mrs. M. chuckled, "Oh my, no. Rodney finally hit a golf ball and it flew into your garden. Why all the questions, dearie?"

Becky told the story about her missing roses. "I'm going to find the clues and solve who did it."

"Oh my." Mrs. M's broad, sunburned face beamed, all her wrinkles curving into smiles. "I always loved a good whodunit myself."

“A whowhatzit?”

“A who-done-it. It’s not proper grammar.” Mrs. M had been a second-grade teacher, so she’d know. “But a cute nickname for a mystery. Tell me, have you discovered any clues yet?”

Becky had to admit she hadn’t. “Yvonne told me to look around for anyone who seems suspicious. But nobody does.”

“That could be a problem. Let’s see, have you searched the area for footprints or anything strange like candy wrappers or such?”

“Not yet. Should I? Is that the most important step?”

“Oh, yes, dearie,” Mrs. M. gave an emphatic nod of her head. “In all the mystery books I’ve read, the detective always goes over the scene with a fine-toothed comb. Or a magnifying glass like the one you have sticking out of your pocket. If I were you, I’d begin where the crime took place.”

“I will. Thank you, Mrs. M.” Becky hollered over her shoulder and skipped out of the gate.

Clues. I need clues.

Yvonne and Mrs. M. both said to search the scene of the crime.