

The Three Investigators

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The Case of the Ruined Roses



Mark Zahn

The Three Investigators in

THE CASE OF THE

RUINED

ROSES

by Mark Zahn

Based on characters created by Robert Arthur

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“She’s madly in love with you!”

Bob Andrews gave a mischievous laugh and slapped our partner, Pete Crenshaw, on the back.

“Positively enraptured,” I added.

Pete’s face turned as scarlet as the oversized valentine he held in his hand. He glanced back at the fluffy white teddy-bear and the bundle of red, pink, and white balloons strapped to the back of his bicycle and frowned.

“Very funny,” he muttered, peddling faster as if he could outrun our good-natured teasing.

It was Valentine’s Day and school had just let out. The three of us: Pete Crenshaw, Bob Andrews, and myself – Jupiter Jones – were riding over to Pete’s house so he could unload his embarrassing cargo.

Earlier in the day a girl at our school by the name of Kelly had let Pete know in a big way how she felt about him. Pete had sulked the rest of the day, swearing that he would never let a girl come between him and The Three Investigators.

Who are The Three Investigators, you ask? Well, to most of Rocky Beach, California, Pete, Bob, and I are known as that very junior detective firm. We take on cases of all shapes and sizes – no matter how peculiar. But on this particular day the last thing we were looking for was a case. In fact, the case found us!

We had just turned the corner onto Pete’s block when we saw poor Ms. Landry standing before her ruined rose bushes, sniffing quietly into a tissue. Ms. Landry is a kind old lady that lives on the end of Pete’s block. She is a gentle soul who would never hurt a fly, and she always pays Pete extra whenever he mows her lawn.

“Is everything okay, Ms. Landry?” Pete asked.

As we pulled our bicycles up onto the sidewalk, we could see that three rose bushes had been uprooted from their spots in front of her porch. The flower bed had been trampled and clods of dirt

scattered about when the bushes had been forcefully yanked from the ground.

Ms. Landry sniffled again and smiled kindly at Pete. “Oh, hello, Peter.” She gestured toward the mangled bushes and shook her head. “I just can’t understand it. Who would do such a thing?”

She looked at Bob and me and dabbed her eyes. “I’m a widow, you see. I don’t have much – my roses are my pride and joy. I take such care with them. And to have them treated so...”

Pete had a look on his face that I recognized instantly. He was ready for action. The Second Investigator smacked a fist into the palm of his hand and seethed.

“We’ll catch whoever did this, Ms. Landry!”

“Oh, that won’t be necessary, Peter,” Ms. Landry replied. “You see, I’ve already..”

Before she could finish, a familiar face came marching around the corner of the house.

“Frankie Bender!” Pete cried, pointing at the ruined flower bed. “Did you have anything to do with this?”

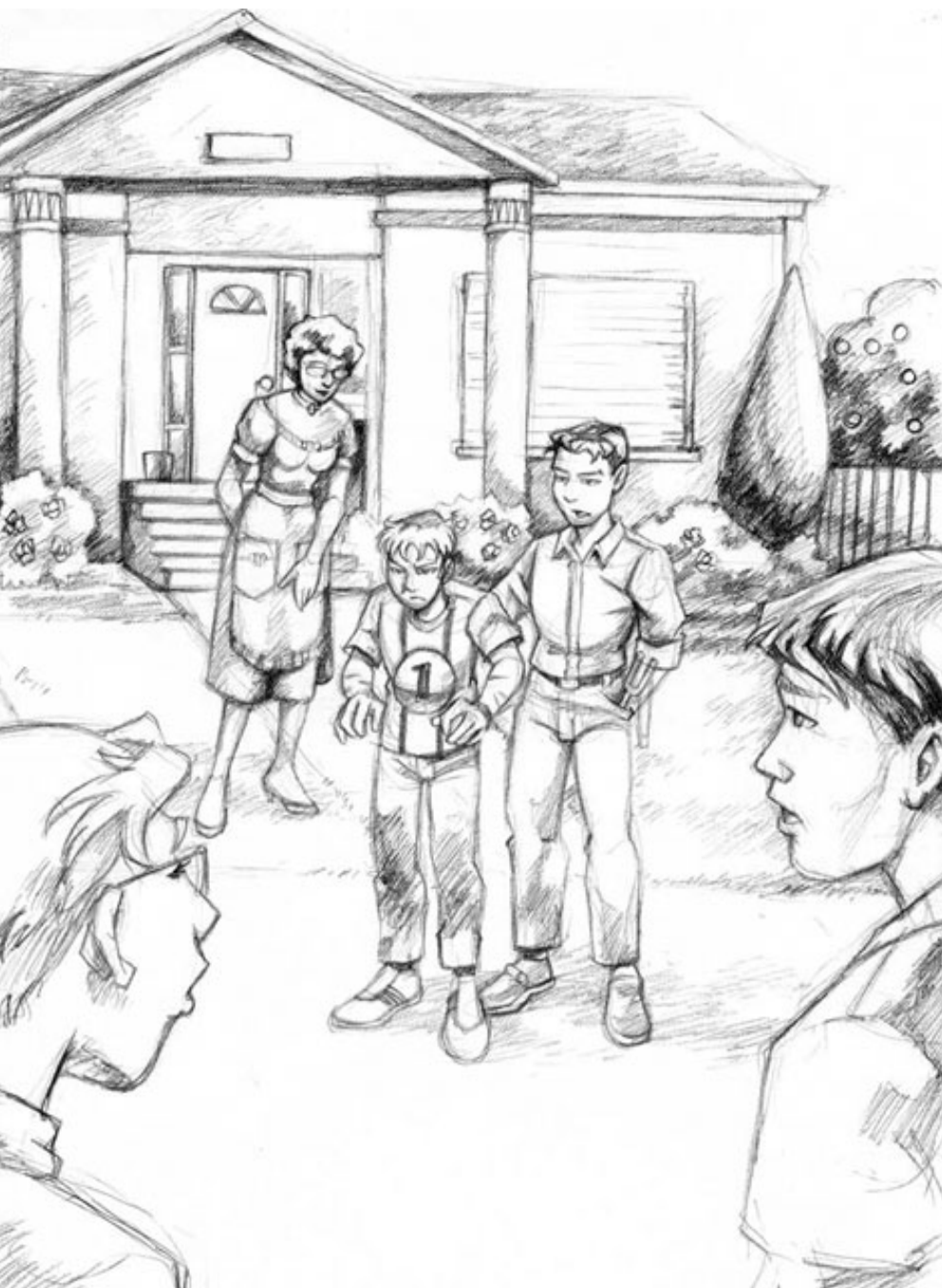
Bender, a short, barrel-chested boy, was not alone. He held a smaller, wiry boy by the scruff of the neck. The smaller boy’s knees were muddy, and I observed his dirty hands were nicked and cut with minor abrasions – most likely inflicted by the thorns on the rose bush.

Bender held a slingshot in his free hand. He stuffed the weapon into his back pocket and pushed the small boy forward, then stuffed his hands into his pockets and gloated.

“Of course I didn’t have anything to do with it, Crenshaw. I’m a real detective. I caught this guy trying to get away. Winged him in the head with my slingshot as he made a break for it!”

The smaller boy glared at Bender and rubbed the back of his head, as if remembering the pain.

“A detective?” Bob laughed. “You’ve got to be kidding!”



Frankie Bender nodded at Pete's bicycle and sneered. "While you three are off playing romeo with your balloons and teddy-bears, I've started my own detective business. My old man printed me up business cards and everything."

The ox-like boy started to pull something out of his pocket, and then smiled suddenly at Ms. Landry.

"Go ahead and show 'em my card, ma'am."

Ms. Landry fished a small card out of her apron and handed it to Pete. It read:

BENDER DETECTIVE AGENCY

"Spying, Eavesdropping, etc."

\$ \$ \$

Franklin Bender, jr.....President
 Rocko Tournabane..... Enforcement
 Jimmy 'Snitch' Inks.....Enforcement

"Young Franklin saw me fretting over my dear roses and offered to help. For a twenty dollar retainer fee, he promised to track down the culprit." The old woman frowned at the small, grimy boy that Frankie had apprehended. "You ought to be ashamed of yourself, young man. Vandalizing a poor old lady's house! I'm going to call your parents and let them know the mischief you've been up to!"

She dug in her apron again and produced a twenty dollar bill. Frankie quickly accepted the money and stuffed it into the front pocket of his jeans.

"Calling won't be necessary, ma'am. I've already contacted his folks and am taking him home just as soon as he fixes up your flower bed and puts these roses back where they belong. I'd help, but I'm allergic to roses."

"We'd be glad to help as well Ms. Landry," said Pete.

“Wouldn’t we, fellows?”

“Of course,” I said, turning to Bender. “Well, Frankie, it seems you’ve cracked the case.”

Frankie Bender rocked back on his heels and gave a superior smile. “That’s right, smart-guy. You’re not the only one who can figure things out. From now on, your club has some competition from me and my gang. We’re in business to stay, so you better hope you find your cases before we do. And if you get in our way, my slingshot just might find *you!*”

Pinching my lip, I nodded, and then held out my hand. “Agreed. In fact – let’s shake on it.”

Frankie ignored my gesture of goodwill. Instead, he cleared his throat and smiled at Ms. Landry.

“Ma’am? Would you mind if I used your restroom?”

Ms. Landry smiled graciously and led Frankie Bender up the steps of the porch. “Of course not, dear. It’s right inside and down the hall.” She looked at the smaller boy with the dirty face and scratched hands. “Peter – would you be keep an eye on that rascal, see to it that he puts my rose bushes back in order.”

I had seen enough. It was time to reveal the true criminal.

“Ms. Landry? Before you let that confidence man into your home, I think you should know that Frank Bender had a hand in spoliating your rose bushes. In fact – he had two hands in it!”

How did Jupiter know that Frankie Bender was involved in destroying Ms. Landry’s roses? Turn to page 8 to find out!

SOLUTION

Jupiter was quick to note Frankie Bender's reluctance to take his hands out of the pockets of his jeans. When he saw the scratches on the hands of the smaller boy, Jupe deduced Frankie might have the same scratches on his own hands – implicating him in the crime!

To prove his theory correct, Jupiter offered to shake Frankie's hand. When the bully refused, Jupe was positive that Bender was up to no good.

Pete finally wrestled Frankie's hands out of his pockets, exposing the abrasions made from pulling on the thorny rose bushes. Frankie eventually confessed – admitting that his 'detective agency' was really a scam to con people out of money. Ms. Landry immediately called Chief Reynolds of the Rocky Beach Police Department. Frankie and his partners were ordered to return all the money they had made from their various cons and sentenced to community service – planting rose bushes throughout Rocky Beach!

