

WHIZ TANNER  
and the  
Olympic Snow  
Caper

*A Tanner-Dent Mystery*

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Awesome Quest Mysteries

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## CHAPTER 1

### The Lodge

**O**n our first vacation since starting the Tanner-Dent Detective Agency, Whiz Tanner and I—Joey Dent, the second part of the agency name—found ourselves in the backseat of Whiz’s car heading toward Marsh River Mountain. People from the Appalachians or Rockies might call it a hill, but it was big for this part of the country. Dr. Tanner was driving with my dad riding shotgun. Mom was driving the girls—Mrs. Tanner, my big sister Patty, and Whiz’s little sister Tammy.

A little over an hour into the trip, Dr. Tanner exited the interstate onto a very small road which wound its way up the mountain. This road crossed the

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Marsh River at the only covered bridge in the county. It was the only way to get to the Marsh River Mountain Ski Resort.

“Half a mile to the lodge,” I said.

No super detective work there. I just read the road sign after the bridge.

“Hey boys, we’re unloading the car before you run off to the slopes,” Dad said.

“Both cars,” chimed in Dr. Tanner. “We have adjoining suites at the back of the lodge ... if you two will each get a luggage cart, we should be able to do it all in one trip.”

“Right, Dad. Joey and I are on it.” Whiz began looking for unused luggage carts as soon as we entered the parking lot. “Joey, I spot one just outside the main door. Grab that while I check inside.”

It was unusual to get a command from Whiz without him using my Code Name, Agent K. I guess Agent M, that’s Whiz, really was on vacation.

“Roger that,” I replied.

As soon as Dr. Tanner put the gear shift in park, Whiz and I unsnapped our seatbelts and bolted from the car. I grabbed the luggage cart outside the main door as Whiz ran inside. By the time I arrived at the car, Mom had pulled up and everybody got out—stretching, it was a long drive. Whiz arrived with the second cart as Dad and Dr. Tanner headed to the front desk to check in. Whiz, Patty, and I loaded all the bags onto the carts. Tammy helped a little with the moms directing everything to make sure the luggage went on the right carts. Then we headed inside.

I always got a big kick out of the lodge. Whiz and I had been here before—we've been coming once or twice a year since I was eight years old—but those were always day trips. This was the first time we would spend the night, several nights. The lobby was huge with giant beams of wood holding everything up—Dad called it rustic. Near the door, they had the second biggest fireplace I'd ever seen. And the fire was blazing.

The rest of the lobby had ski equipment hung everywhere—skis of all types, poles, jackets, goggles, gloves, flags, even some medals, from some competition, I supposed, in a display case over the fireplace mantle. It really looked like a ski lodge from a movie.

Near the check-in desk, the dads were waiting for us—keys in hand.

“The desk clerk said a big storm is heading over the mountain tonight,” said Dad. “They expect it to dump several inches of fine new powder on the slopes.”

“That, on top of an already deep base,” Dr. Tanner added.

“I guess that will make for some great skiing,” I said—talking as if I was an expert.

“Let's unpack before we start talking about skiing,” Mom said. “Work before play.”

“Third floor,” said Dr. Tanner. “Rooms 303 and 305.”

With that, Whiz and I took off for the elevators. It was tight, especially with the luggage carts, but we all got on. On the way up, Dad and Dr. Tanner handed out room keys. Everybody, except Tammy, got one. These

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weren't really keys, though. They were like credit cards. All you had to do was hold one against the lock and it opened—of course it had to be the right lock. Whiz and I tried—it only worked on the lock it was programmed for.

In no time, we had all the luggage off the carts and reasonably in the right rooms. Each suite had a small kitchen with a table, a large living room with a big-screen TV, and two couches that pulled out into beds, a bathroom, and a separate bedroom with its own bath. What was most impressive was the entire back wall was glass with a balcony looking out at the mountain.

“Wow!” I let out as I stared out the wall of windows.

“This is amazing,” Patty added.

“Joey, if you hurry, you and Whiz should have time to get fitted for skis and take a run or two on the slopes before supper,” Dad called.

Wasting no time, I headed out of the room with the empty luggage cart. As I passed room 303, Whiz was just coming out with his cart. We both put a little pep in our steps and headed toward the elevator.

“No investigations to stop our skiing,” said Whiz, as we ran down the hallway toward the elevator. I don't know if he was happy or sad about that. I, for one, thought we earned a quiet vacation after all the crimes we'd solved in the past few months.

We dropped off the luggage carts in the lobby and ran back to the rooms—taking the big curving staircase. This seemed to be carved out of one giant piece of wood like something in a museum—not the

Jasper Springs Museum, but one of those in a big city, or a movie. There was no time to wait for the elevator. When we arrived back at the rooms, the connecting doorway was open and Tammy was running from one room to the other. Patty was encouraging her.

In short order, Whiz and I had our snow pants on and were ready for the slopes. I grabbed my ski jacket and helmet as Whiz came in with all his gear.

“To the slopes!” I yelled.

“Onward,” Whiz replied.

“I wanna go, too,” Tammy called, as she followed Whiz into our room. “I wanna ski.”

But my wonderful sister came to the rescue—someday, I’ll tell her how much I like her.

“No, Tammy, you come with me to the spa. We’ll get our nails done—fingers and toes.”

Tammy turned to her with a big smile. “And have some hot chocolate.”

“Sure. Nails and chocolate.”

“Oh boy!”

Whiz’s mom mouthed ‘thank you’ to Patty.

“No problem,” Patty replied. “You guys do your own thing and we’ll all meet in the restaurant for supper. Around six o’clock?”

“Six sounds good,” Mom said.

I didn’t hear anything after that, since Whiz and I ran for the stairs without looking back. But we weren’t looking ahead either—apparently. We barged through the huge double doors to the ski area where a huge snowball hit me square on the chest. And more snowballs followed! The two main operatives of the

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Tanner-Dent Detective Agency should have seen that ambush coming. But I didn't feel so bad since Whiz was surprised as well.

There were two gangs of kids facing off against each other across the open area where all the ski slopes ended. They were hurtling snowballs at each other from various hiding places. Every time a new kid came out, both sides took aim at the newcomers. It took Whiz and me only a few seconds to respond—we were highly-trained detectives, after all.

I scooped up a huge handful of snow and formed it into a nearly perfect ball. While Whiz was doing the same thing, I tossed a hard throw that hit one kid smack on her shoulder—she turned just in time to protect her face. By this time, Whiz had his picture-perfect pitcher's windup going and let loose with a fast one that hit its mark right on the chest of the biggest kid. Coach Buzek would've been proud of his starting pitcher. We had to throw several more to keep the crossfire under control as we made our way to the pro shop. These kids were good.

We got to the pro shop without too much damage. There were two kids in line ahead of us being measured for skis and poles. They had to measure us to make sure the equipment was the right size. Those kids looked lost—I also noticed the remains of a snowball in the middle of the back of the smaller one.

“First time?” I asked.

“Yes,” replied the girl just ahead of me. “We're here for a couple of days with our parents, and our baby

sister, Elliott. Dad sent us down to get skis while he and Mom finished unpacking.”

“And we almost lost our lives getting here,” the younger one said. “I heard skiing could be dangerous, but I didn’t think they meant walking across the hotel yard.”

“Ah, come on,” replied his sister. “You would’ve been in the middle of the fight if we weren’t gonna ski.”

“Maybe ... but the skiing is dangerous ... right?” asked her brother. “If you have the wrong skis, I mean?”

“There is nothing to be afraid of,” offered Whiz. “These guys are pros and will fix you up with the right skis for your height and weight. Proper equipment makes skiing easier, though not necessarily less dangerous.”

“So, it is dangerous.”

“Relax, Wyatt,” said his sister. “Stay off the big slopes and you won’t get hurt. Mom and Dad wouldn’t let us do this if it were dangerous.” She turned to us. “I’m Madilynn, by the way—call me Madi. This is my little brother, Wyatt.”

“I’m not so little,” responded Wyatt. “I’m big enough to ski.”

“I’m Joey. This is Whiz.”

“Whiz?” asked Madi. “What kind of a name is that?”

“A nickname. One that has evolved over the years. I prefer it to my real name.”

“What’s your real name?” asked Wyatt.

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“Everyone calls me Whiz,” he replied.

Just then, the pros called Madi and Wyatt over to begin their fitting.

“It’s Wilson,” I whispered to Wyatt, as they walked toward the stack of skis.

As soon as Madi and Wyatt finished, Whiz and I walked up to pro-shop guys. Since we’ve done this before, the pros didn’t have to explain much and we were out in no time. Next stop—the ski lift!

Marsh River Mountain had several ski slopes, marked by colors and symbols—the pro guy suggested we stay off the black diamond, even though we’ve been here before. All the ski trails, except the bunny slope, end at a big flat area where the snowball gang ambushed us. Surrounding it were all the ski lifts to take you up the mountain. Each trail had its own lift.

Outside the pro shop, we strapped on our newly fitted skis and scooted off. The snowball gang was still at it but they didn’t lob anything our way. I supposed anyone on skis was off limits—we got a few smiles and handwaves, though. Madi and Wyatt were leaning against one of the lodge’s snowmobiles as we passed, trying to hook their boots to the skis, but with a little trouble. It was obvious, they were newbies at this.

“You guys need some help?” I asked.

“We got it,” responded Wyatt, as he shoved his boot harder against the ski. “The guys inside told us what to do.”

Madi looked at him with a little frown and then looked at me and Whiz. The look on her face softened into a smile. “It really is our first time,” she said.

“We’ve all been there,” I replied. “Whiz and I have been doing this for a couple of years now.”

“Put your toe in first,” Whiz instructed. “Shove it all the way forward and then step down hard on the heel.”

Madi did this as Wyatt watched. Instantly, her right ski locked tightly onto her boot. She repeated the moves with her left ski.

“I guess it’s simple, once you know the secret,” said Wyatt.

He followed and soon his skis were also firmly attached.

“Now what?” Wyatt asked. “I can’t stand up.”

“The rest isn’t so easy,” I answered.

“Maintain balance,” said Whiz. “Your center of gravity must be above the center-line of your boots. Imagine a line from just behind the ball of your feet to your zenith. Keep that line perpendicular to the ground and lift straight up.”

Madi and Wyatt both looked at him with a wrinkled forehead and a squint to their eyes, waiting for him to say something useful—or at least understandable.

“Keep your feet directly under you—your weight needs to be centered over your boots,” I clarified. “Use the poles for balance.”

They both proceeded to stand—wobbly, but upright.

“I suggest you head to the beginner slope.” I pointed to the bunny slope. “The top is right there.

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Once you go down, they have a rope you can hold that pulls you back up here.”

“Thank you,” said Madi. “But we have to wait for Mom and Dad. They said not to go anywhere until they get here.”

“Yeah. But thanks,” her brother replied.

“There’s an instructor at the top who’ll give you some pointers. He’s the guy in the orange blazer ... over there.” I pointed at him.

Madi nodded and then she and her brother practiced pushing off with their poles. Whiz and I turned our attention in the other direction and looked at each of the main ski lifts.

“Which slope first?” I asked.

“Based on the line in front of each lift and the time it takes to get to the top, I would say we have enough time for at least two runs on either of the two easy green circle slopes or one run on the blue square slope,” said Whiz.

“What about the black diamond?” Even with all the warnings, I wanted to do the black diamond someday.

“By my calculations, based on the length of the line and how far it goes up the mountain, we do not have sufficient time for that tonight. We have also never attempted the black diamond slope.”

“We *are* a year older. And ... nobody told us not to. I mean, like a parent—the pro shop guys don’t count.”

We considered each slope carefully and made our choice—shuffling over to the chosen lift. That was

when my adrenaline began pumping. This was the right way to start a great vacation. Nothing to get in our way of fun.

End of Chapter One

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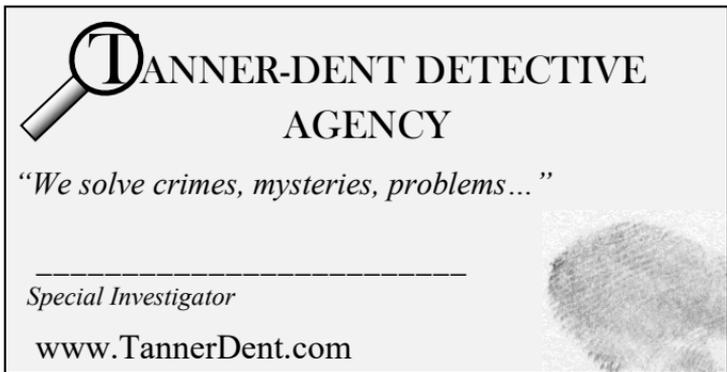
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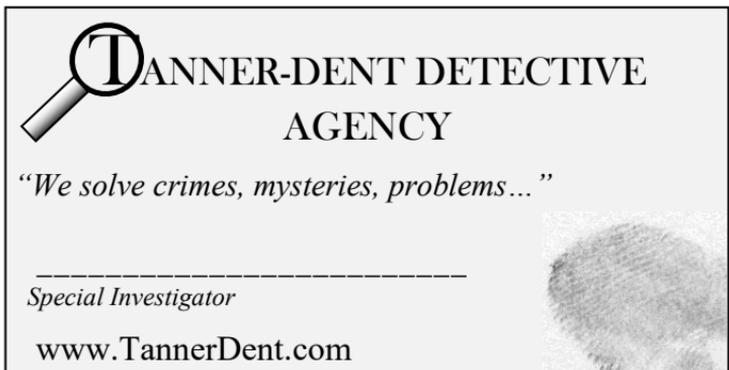
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