

THE MYSTERY AT JAMESTOWN

By Carole Marsh

Chapter 1 – All Wet!

Christina, Grant, Mimi, and Papa had just landed at the airport in Norfolk, Virginia. It was the first day of summer; school was over.

“Let VACATION begin!” Grant, age 7, squealed.

Papa revved the Mystery Girl’s engines a little and pulled into a hangar. “Let the screaming stop,” he pleaded with his grandson.

“Vacation, smaymation,” Mimi grumbled. “It’s always work, work, work, for me.”

Christina, her 10-year-old granddaughter, giggled. “Mimi, your work is your play! You write kid’s mystery books. Everywhere we go, you have a good time researching and writing and taking pictures. You know that’s true.”

Mimi smiled. “Yes, I’m just teasing.”

“Well, I’m not,” said Papa. “Let’s unload gear first, talk second.”

“Let’s eat first, unload second,” Grant suggested, rubbing his tummy.

“Let’s all go in the air-conditioned terminal and let someone else unload,” begged Christina, wiping her sweaty forehead.

“Let’s shop first, second, and third!” suggested Mimi.

Suddenly, the entire family began to laugh. “Nothing silly about us!” said Mimi.

Papa cleared his throat. “Nothing busy, either. I’ve unloaded everything while all you guys did was yak, yak, yak.”

“Aw, Papa, you figured out our scam,” teased Christina.

Grant looked around. “I don’t have a scam,” he disagreed. “I only have a backpack.”

The others laughed. Grant frowned. Just because he was the youngest and didn’t always catch on to everything over his head right away was no reason for them to laugh at him, he thought. “There’s no reason...” he began.

“We know! We know!” the others interrupted.

“We’re not laughing at you, Grant,” Mimi promised, giving her grandson a big hug. “We’re laughing with you.”

“Well HA HA!” Grant said as he jumped back. “I’m laughing AT you!”

When the others looked puzzled, Grant pointed behind them. Suddenly a big spray of water hit them! A wash truck was hosing down a nearby plane and the glistening spray arched right over onto Mimi’s, Papa’s, and Christina’s heads. They squealed.

“Feels good and cool,” Christina insisted, but her brother did not believe her.

“Messed up my hat!” Mimi complained. She always wore a hat.

“Maybe they could hose down the Mystery Girl while they’re at it,” Papa said hopefully. He hated for his little red and white airplane to get dirty. But the water stopped just as suddenly as it had begun. A young man in khaki pants and vest came running up to them.

“I’m so sorry!” he insisted. “Really! I didn’t mean to get you all wet. Are you ok?”

“I am,” said Grant, hands on his hips, swaying back and forth smugly.

Christina warned him, “He who laughs last laughs... well, I forget how that saying goes, little brother, but it means beware!”

“These grouchy little varmints are my grandchildren,” Papa said. “Don’t worry about the water, well, except for the hat maybe?” He gave Mimi a hopeful look.

Mimi grinned and stuck out her hand. “I remember you. You’re Joe. I met you on Roanoke Island. I’m Carole Marsh, and if the only bad thing that happens to me on this trip is that my hat gets wet, well, I can handle that.”

Joe looked relieved. “Of course, I remember you, too, Carole.” He shook hands all around. “Whew!” he said. “I’m so glad I’m not in trouble with you guys. I was just helping a friend hose down his plane. You can tell I’m not an expert at it! Can I buy you some iced tea or something to make up for the uh, unexpected shower?”

“Sounds like a winner!” said Papa, who never met a stranger, and they all headed for the terminal.

Lugging their rolling backpacks behind them, Grant and Christina followed the adults.

“Hey, Christina,” Grant said, pointing up ahead. “What’s all that stuff that guy has hanging from his pants? Is he a mechanic or something?”

Christina walked faster and looked at the gear dangling from the man’s belt and cargo shorts’ pockets. At first she thought it looked like gardening stuff—a trowel, a measuring tape, a magnifying loupe, and a cloth bag with a drawstring. She looked at the man’s long knee socks and chunky shoes. He also wore a pith helmet like people wear in the jungle. For a moment, she was totally confused. Then suddenly she snapped her fingers.

“Grant,” she said. “I think he’s an archaeologist!”

Chapter 2 – Skeletons and a Change of Plans

In the terminal, Christina was wise enough to wait patiently before interrupting the adults who had already settled at a table by the windows and were talking rapidly as if they had known each other forever.

However, Grant just couldn't wait for an answer. "Are you a real archaeologist?" he blurted. The man set down his coffee cup and gave Grant a big grin. With his spiky blond hair, twinkling blue eyes, deep tan, and rosy cheeks, the man really looked like a grown-up Grant to Christina.

"Yes, I am!" he said proudly. "Can you dig it?" That made everyone laugh, although Christina was not really sure Grant got the pun.

"What do you dig?" Grant asked, still curious. He loved anything about dirt. After all, in the dirt was where you found arrowheads, fossils, and dinosaur bones!

The man wagged his head back and forth. "Oh, artifacts like potsherds. And ancient tools. And bricks and bones..."

Grant got all excited. "You mean like skeletons?"

Now the man scrunched his shoulders down tight. He leaned forward on his elbows and put his face close to Grant's. "Yes!" he said. "Skeletons!"

"What a cool job!" Grant said, and satisfied with the answer, headed off to the fast food counter to order lemonade.

Christina hung around; she didn't like the sound of this. If Mimi got excited about something like this, it often changed their travel plans. And Mimi could really "dig" skeletons. After all, she wrote mystery books for kids, so ghouls and ghosts and skeletons and mummies and such were right up her writing alley.

"It's really good to see you again, Joe!" Mimi said. "When I saw you on Roanoke Island you were in charge of a dig. Where are you working now?" she asked.

Joe waved his arm toward the windows. "The greatest archaeological dig ever!" he said. "Up at Jamestown. It's like a crime scene up there," he added merrily. "Interesting, fascinating, actually. And we have a new Archaearium...and the 400th anniversary's underway...and so much is going on, I mean wow!"

"Whoa! Whoa!" cried Papa, and Christina giggled. Her grandfather was a pilot and a cowboy and claimed to be Mimi's "trail boss" to keep her on track with her writing projects. "Crime scene? Archaearium?"

Now Christina was so curious that she spoke up. "Are you talking about the Jamestown we study in school in history? The first English settlement in America?" All this had been on a test recently.

"The first permanent English settlement," Joe corrected her. "As you may know, there was an earlier attempt to establish a colony in the New World...south at Roanoke Island, North Carolina."

"Oh, I know that one," Christina said proudly. "The Lost Colony! We went to the outdoor drama about it when Mimi was working on a mystery about Blackbeard the Pirate. That's where Virginia Dare was born, but all the colonists vanished—right?—leaving no trace but a sign that said something like CROATAN."

“Good job!” said Joe, and Mimi and Papa beamed proudly at their granddaughter. “And we still aren’t sure what happened to those men, women and children. It’s a mystery!”

“And what about the Nina, Pinta, and Santa Maria, and Plymouth Rock, up in Massachusetts?” Mimi asked. Christina knew Mimi was just trying to get a history lesson given here; she didn’t fool her!

“That colony was established more for religious freedom reasons,” Joe explained.

“So what about JAMESTOWN?” Papa asked impatiently.

Joe cleared his throat. “The Jamestown colony was different. It was established to be a permanent base in the New World. The men and boys who came were given the goal to set up a real town and figure out ways to make money and discover crops or other things of value that could be exported back to England.”

“Only men and boys?” Christina asked, disappointed.

“That’s all that came over on the Godspeed, Discovery, and Susan Constant,” said Joe. “But don’t forget about Pocahontas!”

“That’s right!” said Mimi. “What a tale that is!”

“And CRIME SCENE?” Papa asked, still trying to get his original questions answered.

Joe shook his head seriously. “Oh my goodness,” he said. “It wasn’t a pretty picture. Can you just imagine landing in an unknown place, meeting people you believed were savages, and not having much of a clue as to how you were going to keep from starving to death, much less get along with one another...well, it’s a long story, but yes, it leads to some very suspicious skeletal remains.”

“Wow!” said Grant, who had walked up with two lemonades in time to hear the story. “I want to know more.”

“Me too!” Mimi squealed with an eager look at Papa.

Christina groaned. “We were going to Busch Gardens,” she reminded them. In her imagination, she saw the fun water rides and roller coasters vanishing like a dream.

Sure enough, Mimi said, “Joe, are you headed to Jamestown now?”

“You bet!” said Joe. “Why don’t you guys follow me and I’ll give you an A-plus tour you won’t forget! Besides, you need to see the new Archaearium.”

“Ok, ok?” Mimi asked her family. “And then we’ll go to the theme park; promise!”

“IT’S A DEAL!” Papa shouted, eager to be off to somewhere. He didn’t like to stay in one place too long.

As the adults headed to get luggage and cars, Christina and Grant sat hopelessly at the table, sipping on their lemonade.

“You and your big mouth,” Christina grumbled to her brother.

“Sorry,” he said. Then he smiled. “But Christina, there are skeletons!”

“Skeletons schmeletons!” she moaned. “I feel a mystery coming on—not a vacation!”

Chapter 3 – Who is James? Where is His Town?

In just a few minutes, Papa had their rental car loaded with luggage. Joe drove up in a rugged-looking jeep with mud plastered all over it.

Grant couldn't resist: "Can I ride with Joe? PLEASE!" Mimi looked at Papa and Papa looked at Mimi and they nodded "ok" to Grant.

Joe led the way out of the parking lot and Mimi, Papa, and Christina followed in the little red convertible (Mimi's favorite car) Papa had rented. It was not far to Jamestown. Of course, Grant—who had not studied this part of American history yet—had asked, "Who is James? Where is his town?"

Everyone had laughed at him good-naturedly. But, really, in the car, Christina, who thought she knew the story of Jamestown, was surprised at the difference in what Joe had described versus what she had learned in school.

"You have to understand," Mimi explained, "that the story of the founding of the colony at Jamestown is a very dramatic story. No one knew exactly what they were getting into. It was a serious journey and needed to be successful if the English were going to gain a strong base in what would one day become America."

"So it wasn't America yet?" Christina asked.

"Oh, no," said Mimi. "It was untamed wilderness! The Indians had learned how to live here successfully. But there were many tribes and they sometimes fought with one another. They were not especially happy to see funny-looking newcomers make an appearance and act like they owned everything."

Christina thought about that. "I can see their point of view," she admitted. "But why did you say they were funny-looking?"

Mimi laughed. "Well, just picture it! Here are native peoples accustomed to living in a land that is hot in the summer, filled with mosquitoes and other biting bugs, and so they dress in very few clothes and cake mud on themselves to keep those bugs from biting. And then here come men and boys from across the sea in boats, and they wear thick, heavy clothes. And they don't seem to know about fishing or farming. In fact, all they seem to be interested in is finding gold or other riches or some secret passage to the Orient."

"They didn't know their geography very well," marveled Christina.

"No, they didn't," said Mimi. "After all, it was the so-called New World, and little of it had been explored and mapped."

"And so what happened next?" asked Christina.

"Murder and violence! Starvation and tragedy! Deadly diseases! And so much more!" Mimi said dramatically.

Christina sat in the back seat and thought about all this. She had just thought the story of the founding of Jamestown was a sweet little story of the Indian princess girl, Pocahontas, saving the life of Captain John Smith, and everyone living happily-ever-after.

In the meantime, in Joe's Jeep, Grant was learning a thing or two himself. But it wasn't because Joe was talking to Grant. It was because Joe was on his cell phone talking to other archaeologists in Jamestown. This is what Grant overheard:

“Stolen?! They stole artifacts? Skeletal remains? I don’t believe it!” Joe was screaming into the phone as he drove down the highway. Mimi and Papa didn’t believe in talking on a cell phone while you were driving, so this all made Grant a little nervous.

“Who? Why?!” Joe squealed into his phone. “And where’s my assistant? I haven’t been able to reach him all day!” Joe was very upset. Finally, he slammed the cell phone down and looked around at Grant. “Grant,” he said, “when we get to Jamestown, you’re going to see that we have a real mystery on our hands!”

Grant nodded seriously, but inside he smiled a secret smile. “A mystery,” he told Joe the archaeologist, “is right up Mimi’s alley!” And to himself, Grant thought, **AND WE ALWAYS HELP HER SOLVE THEM!**