

The Mystery of the
**HAUNTED
GHOST TOWN**



by
Carole Marsh

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First Edition

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Published by Gallopade International/Carole Marsh Books. Printed in the United States of America.

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Cover Photo Credits: Eric Hood, istockphoto, ©Jupiterimages Corporation
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30 YEARS AGO . . .

As a mother and an author, one of the fondest periods of my life was when I decided to write mystery books for children. At this time (1979) kids were pretty much glued to the TV, something parents and teachers complained about the same way they do about web surfing and video games today.

I decided to set each mystery in a real place—a place kids could go and visit for themselves after reading the book. And I also used real children as characters. Usually a couple of my own children served as characters, and I had no trouble recruiting kids from the book's location to also be characters.

Also, I wanted all the kids—boys and girls of all ages—to participate in solving the mystery. And, I wanted kids to learn something as they read. Something about the history of the location. And, I wanted the stories to be funny. That formula of real+scary+smart+fun served me well.

I love getting letters from teachers and parents who say they read the book with their class or child, then visited the historic site and saw all the places in the mystery for themselves. What's so great about that? What's great is that you and your children have an experience that bonds you together forever. Something you shared. Something you both cared about at the time. Something that crossed all age levels—a good story, a good scare, a good laugh!

30 years later,

Carole Marsh



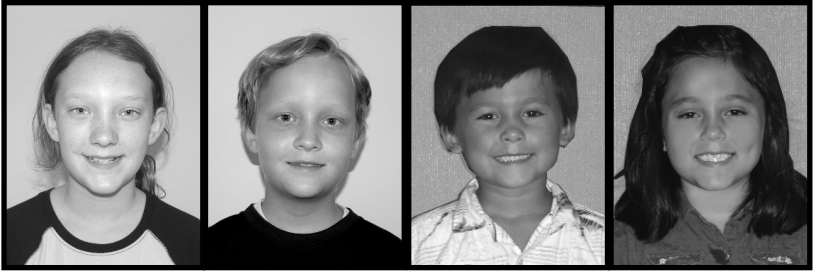
Hey, kids! As you see—here we are ready to embark on another of our exciting Carole Marsh Mystery adventures! You know, in “real life,” I keep very close tabs on Christina, Grant, and their friends when we travel. However, in the mystery books, they always seem to slip away from Papa and me so they can try to solve the mystery on their own!

I hope you will go to www.carolemarshmysteries.com and apply to be a character in a future mystery book! Well, *The Mystery Girl* is all tuned up and ready for “take-off!”

Gotta go...Papa says so! Wonder what I've forgotten this time?

Happy “Armchair Travel” Reading,

Mimi



**Christina
Yother**

**Grant
Yother**

**Elijah
Joiner**

**Erin
Joiner**

A BOUT THE C H A R A C T E R S

Christina Yother, 10, from Peachtree City, Georgia

Grant Yother, 7, from Peachtree City, Georgia,
Christina's brother

Elijah Joiner, 6, from Peachtree City, Georgia, as Jorge

Erin Joiner, 8, from Peachtree City, Georgia, as Rosita

The many places featured in the book actually exist and are worth a visit! Perhaps you could read the book and follow the trail these kids went on during their mysterious adventure!

TITLES IN THE CAROLE MARSH MYSTERIES SERIES

- #1 The Mystery of Biltmore House
- #2 The Mystery on the Freedom Trail
- #3 The Mystery of Blackbeard the Pirate
- #4 The Mystery of the Alamo Ghost
- #5 The Mystery on the California Mission Trail
- #6 The Mystery of the Missing Dinosaurs
- #7 The White House Christmas Mystery
- #8 The Mystery on Alaska's Iditarod Trail
- #9 The Mystery at Kill Devil Hills
- #10 The Mystery in New York City
- #11 The Mystery at Disney World
- #12 The Mystery on the Underground Railroad
- #13 The Mystery in the Rocky Mountains
- #14 The Mystery on the Mighty Mississippi
- #15 The Mystery at the Kentucky Derby
- #16 The Ghost of the Grand Canyon
- #17 The Mystery at Jamestown
- #18 The Mystery in Chocolate Town
- #19 The Mystery of the Haunted Ghost Town
- #20 The Counterfeit Constitution Mystery
- #21 The Mystery of the Haunted Ghost Town
- #22 The Mystery in Las Vegas
- #23 The Mystery at the Graveyard of the Atlantic
- #24 The Ghost of the Golden Gate Bridge

*Books and Teacher's Guides are available at
booksellers, libraries, school supply stores, museums,
and many other locations!*

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1 Biting the Dust

“Ghost towns! Are we going to see real ghost towns?” Grant asked his grandfather, Papa. “And REAL ghosts in the ghost towns?”

“Could be,” replied Papa, as he checked the gauges of his little red and white airplane, the *Mystery Girl*, preparing the plane for landing.

“Grant, there ARE no ghosts in ghost towns!” his sister, Christina, claimed in an older-sister, bossy way, as she tugged one of his blond curls. “I told you that! Papa, you’re just leading Grant on!”

“Don’t be too sure about that, Christina,” Papa answered, with a twinkle in his eye. “I’ve been in ghost towns, and I’d swear I came across a ghost or two! Those towns just might be haunted.” He laughed and added, “You’ll see for yourself!”

“You’ll have to make a believer out of me!” Christina declared, her arms thrust across her chest. She thought visiting ghost towns would be exciting, but certainly not scary. Sitting silently, her finger twirling a lock of her brown hair and her tongue toying with the

braces on her teeth, Christina wondered if Papa was right. She suspected he would tease her in some ghost town, probably acting like a ghost to scare her, just to prove his point. I'll have to keep an eye on him, Christina thought.

Christina and Grant often traveled with their grandparents. Their grandmother, Mimi, wrote mysteries for children, and often needed to do research in fascinating locations around the world. This trip, however, was a vacation. "There are no mysteries on my agenda, thank you very much!" Mimi had said when she invited the kids to come along.

Papa knew a lot about the Old West, and was something of a cowboy, always wearing jeans, a cowboy hat, and cowboy boots. With his stories of the Old West, Papa had no trouble convincing the kids to take this vacation in southern Arizona. They had looked forward to this trip for a long time, and now the day had finally come!

Mimi was not as thrilled. There was all that heat! And sun! And dust! She loved wearing hats and sparkly red sunglasses, and now had a good reason to wear them both—to protect her blond hair and fair skin from the blazing sun!

What Mimi did love was the scenery of the West. The stark desert, with its prickly cacti and multi-colored sunsets, stole her heart every time she saw it. Plus, she couldn't wait to get her hands on the stunning pieces of jewelry handcrafted by the Native Americans!

The *Mystery Girl* slowly descended to land at a local airport near Tombstone, Arizona. The plane was now low enough so the kids could see details on the ground below.

Christina gazed out the window on her side of the plane. Immediately below, there was nothing but dry and dusty yellow land, covered in spots by some low, drab shrub brush. Here and there, tumbleweeds lazily drifted in the sandy soil.

Grant's blue eyes popped open wide. "Is that Boot Hill Cemetery over there?" he yelled, jabbing his finger against the window on his side of the plane.

"Sure is," Papa said. "That's the real thing!"

"Wow—that's where the gunslingers are buried! Can we go there, Papa?" Grant asked, jumping up and down in his seat despite being **constrained** by his seat belt.

"It's just a bunch of tombstones," Christina remarked. She thought her little brother was silly to get so excited over an old cemetery. "You can see tombstones anywhere."

"Not like these," Papa said, with another of those twinkles in his eye. "You'll see!"

"OK, Papa...I suppose ghosts pop out from behind the tombstones and talk to you," Christina said. "Can't wait to see that!" She glanced out the window again to see a cloud of dust envelop the plane. Pebbles from the dirt runway rocketed everywhere, pelting the plane as it touched down.



Against the backdrop of the coffee-colored soil, Christina spotted a dark brown steer struggling to stand. Each time it got up, the bull collapsed again in a cloud of dust. The animal's legs were too weak for it to stand. A flock of buzzards slowly circled overhead.

Christina couldn't imagine a more **desolate** scene. She felt goose bumps on her neck. Maybe it wasn't just the ghost towns that were haunted, she thought. Maybe the whole place was haunted!

Little did she know how scary things could get in a ghost town—and a cemetery! This steer in distress was just the beginning of an Old West mystery!

2 Food for Thought

Soon after landing, Papa rented a red SUV (Mimi chose the color, of course!) for their vacation transportation.

“What should we do first?” Papa asked.

“Let’s eat!” Grant cried. “My tummy is emptier than Mimi’s swimming pool in January!”

“That’s pretty empty,” Papa replied. “Let’s head this way.”

Papa wheeled the SUV to a town outside Tombstone called Sunshine Gap. It was a small, dusty town with a few stores, a bank, a post office, a pizza parlor, and a restaurant. A big red and white sign advertised the eatery as the Lazy H Diner, a family restaurant with Western-style cooking.

Mimi leaned out of the SUV window and asked a local cowboy ambling along the sidewalk if the Lazy H Diner served good food.

“Yes, it does,” he said, picking his teeth with a weed. “China Betty sets out the best vittles anywhere in these parts. All the locals like to chow down at China Betty’s.”

“China Betty’s?” Mimi asked.

“Betty’s Chinese place,” the cowboy replied. “Her folks have been here from way back. They came to these parts to work on the railroad. She’s had the Lazy H Diner most of forty years. ’Cept we don’t call it the Lazy H. We call it China Betty’s.”

Mimi and Papa thanked the cowboy. Everyone decided that the Lazy H Diner, or China Betty’s, would be a great place to eat. They stepped inside the cool, sunny diner to find it filled, not with tourists, but with local folks from Sunshine Gap.

“The food’s got to be good,” Papa said, eyeing a sizzling ribeye steak on someone’s plate, “if the local people like to eat here.”

A plump, young waitress, with a pencil thrust behind her ear and “Sally” on her nametag, seated the group at a booth near a window. Grant, curious to see a Chinese person in the Wild West, asked the waitress, “Is there REALLY a China Betty?”

“Sure is!” Sally replied. Then she yelled, “Hey, Betty! A little feller, no taller than knee-high to a grasshopper, wants to see you!”

The door to the kitchen swung open and a tiny, elderly Chinese lady stuck her head out and waved.

Capped gold teeth gleamed from a smile as wide as Texas. Grant waved back with a spoon in his hand.

The waitress looked back at her guests. Taking the pencil from behind her ear, she asked, “Now, what can I get you folks?”

Grant looked puzzled. “What are ‘vittles’? If they’re good, I’d like some.”

The waitress laughed and said, “I can tell you’re not from around here. Vittles is food. We got plenty of good vittles, thanks to China Betty.”

“No wonder the local people like to eat here,” Mimi said. “The food looks tasty and China Betty sure looks friendly. What looks good to everyone?”

“Ribs!” Grant yelled as he pointed to the top of the menu. “Mimi, they have barbequed ribs.”

“The ribs are today’s special,” Sally said, jotting Grant’s order on her pad.

Everyone else thought the ribs, along with fresh corn, coleslaw, and fries sounded good too. Before long, all table conversation ceased as Christina, Grant, Papa, and Mimi concentrated on eating their mouthwatering Western meal.

Christina was stuffing her last crispy french fry into her mouth when she overheard a loud, angry voice in the booth behind her.

“Two more of my cattle are sick,” a man with scraggly red hair complained to his companion.

“That’s a real shame, Big Jim,” the friend answered.
“A real shame.”

Christina suddenly remembered the steer she saw from the airplane. Was that steer sick just like this man’s cattle? What was happening?

3 Cattle Skedaddle!

Because everyone else in the restaurant also heard Big Jim, all conversation stopped with the mention of sick cattle. Even China Betty came out from the kitchen to hear what was happening. A Mexican man, sitting at a nearby table with his wife and kids, looked up. “You too, Big Jim?” he said. “Counting my sick cow, that makes three animals this week.”

A wrinkled old man across the aisle said, “It ain’t natural for so many livestock to get sick.”

“I wonder if it’s the water,” Big Jim observed. “Maybe somethin’s wrong with the water. It’s not the food. I feed my cattle only the best.”

“*Si*,” the Mexican man said. “I think it’s the water too. I had a health inspector check my well water. He said it didn’t look right. He took some samples to test in his lab. He also said that if the water is polluted, it will require a major cleanup.”

“Manuel,” Big Jim remarked, “if you have bad water, and I do, many more probably do too. That’s a problem for the whole town! Not only could our cattle get sick and die, but nobody will want to live here. Who wants to live in a polluted town?”

Manuel replied, “*Si*, and none of us can afford to pay for a major cleanup!”

A bearded man wearing a yellow bandana lifted up a glass of water and called out, “China Betty, what’re you serving us to drink? Not bad water, I hope!”

“No such thing, Andy,” China Betty said. “I buy my water! You all best buy yours in a store—or right here,” she said, pointing to a refrigerator full of bottled water at the back of the restaurant.

Everyone let out a huge sigh of relief, glad to know the water they just drank for lunch didn’t come from the old well behind the restaurant.

Big Jim said, “I was thinkin’ of selling 40 acres. But with cattle dying, I don’t know who’d buy the land. In fact, it would make any thinkin’ man want to skedaddle!”

Grant leaned over to his grandfather. “Papa, what does a ski paddle have to do with cattle?” he asked. “Actually, what is a ski paddle?”

Papa smiled and said, “He didn’t say, ‘ski paddle.’ The word is ‘skedaddle.’ It means to get out, or pick up and leave.”

Grant said loudly, so everyone could hear, “It sounds like the cattle better skedaddle!”

Everyone laughed. Then Manuel said, “We can’t leave and neither can our cattle, young man. We live here. This is our home. China Betty’s family has lived here for 100 years or more.” Manuel glanced at the frightened faces of his wife and kids. Sighing, he said, “We must find out what’s happening and fix it.”

China Betty nodded in agreement. “This town is so small,” she said, “if just a few families leave, Sunshine Gap could become one more ghost town like so many others in Arizona—a pile of rubble and some cattle bones!”