

The Starlight Kids
Mystery of the Feather Burglar

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The Starlight Kids: Mystery of the Feather Burglar

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Praise for The Starlight Kids: Mystery of the Feather Burglar

Divorce, friendship and empowerment are all addressed in this very readable kid-friendly book. The kids do eventually bring the adults in to help but only after it's nearly too late.

-Judge's comment. 2015 Benjamin Franklin Young Reader award

This is a nice mystery story for kids, with enough real danger involved that they don't feel like the story has been written in such a way this it's talking down to them. There are some real issues that kids deal with thrown in too, making the narrative believable and real.

-Judge's comment. 2015 Benjamin Franklin Young Reader award

Books by Olive Peart

Linked

They were so similar and they lived in the same imperfect world with overwhelming family problems. Each boy, in his own way, was begging for help. One was black and the other was white and they had switched!

The Intruders

What does a black, a Chinese, an Italian and a Puerto Rican have in common? A thirst for excitement! The Bronx teens get this and more when they time-travel into the future and an adventure of a lifetime. All goes well until they are forced to take sides in a tribal battle. This was no longer fun. This was war!

Chapter 1

"Shari," her mother's voice echoed from some other room in the house, "Why not go outside?"

Shari reluctantly made her way to the window and saw a group of kids throwing a ball to one another. They seemed to be having fun, but she just wasn't in the mood; not while she was trying to forget her current situation. Besides, what did her mother know? Making new friends was the hardest thing in the world to do.

"I don't want to go outside. I don't know any of the kids out there."

Her mother came into the living room and began unpacking a box that said in bold, black lettering, **KNICKKNACKS—HANDLE WITH CARE.** "If you don't want to go outside, you may as well help me unpack." She had a frazzled look

on her face as she pushed a strand of hair from her forehead.

Shari scowled and wondered when her mother would handle "her" with care. Her mother was probably feeling guilty since she had no friends here. "But, Mom! That's not fair. I already unpacked some of the things for my room yesterday."

"Well, I have the entire house to sort out, and I don't need to watch you roaming about the house like a lost soul."

"If we didn't move, we wouldn't have to do any unpacking."

"Don't start this argument again, Shari." Her mother's voice began to rise. It was a sure sign that she was beginning to get angry.

Shari turned away. "I'll go outside," she muttered. Maybe those kids could explain what she had seen last night. It was so weird. Why would someone keep so much money in a house? Maybe she and her mom had moved in right next to a bunch of crooks. It would serve her mother right she thought indignantly!

If only she could wake up and find that the last few months hadn't happened. She had been so looking forward to the summer holidays. Beach trips with her friends, picnics, camp.... Now everything was changing. She was in a strange city with no friends and no family.

As soon as she stepped outside, Shari realized her mistake. She had nothing to play with, but she didn't want to go back in. She didn't want the kids to think she was afraid of them or something. Already, they were all staring at her. The kids had been playing a game she had never seen before. Four of the kids were standing inside a big square that was chalk drawn on the driveway. Inside the big square were four smaller squares. Each kid stood in his or hers own box and seemed to be hitting the ball to each other. Two of the children were standing to the side waiting for, she guessed, their turn. Shari noticed that there were six children in all, three boys and three girls. One boy had a deep tan and curly dark blond hair with brown eyes. Two of the girls

wore skirts and blouses. What's wrong with them, she wondered? Imagine playing this game in a skirt! All the other children wore what Shari considered standard summer wear – shorts and T-shirts. She sat on the last step of her stoop and watched them. They continued playing, occasionally glancing in her direction. At the end of the game, one of the older girls called out to her.

"Want to play? The game's called Four Square," said the girl in the skirt. She was a bit chubby for her height, but she had pretty brown eyes and short black hair combed into a dozen separate braids. Like Shari, her complexion was coffee brown.

Shari nodded and thought ... this game shouldn't be too hard to follow, and it wasn't like she was doing anything anyway. She walked over to where they were playing.

"We live next to you," another one of the girls said. "Our mother told us you just moved in yesterday." She noticed the girl was about her height, and she had a light complexion. Her hair

was about the same length as Shari's—reaching just below her shoulders. But while Shari's hair was relaxed—a rubber clasp held it in a ponytail—this girl's hair was combed into three thick braids.

The girl seemed friendly enough, she hoped. "Oh. You are Indy Parens then, right?" Shari said tentatively. Mr. and Mrs. Parens were Shari's new neighbors. The Parens had introduced themselves to Shari and her mother the day before as the moving men were unloading the boxes. Shari remembered Mrs. Parens talking about her three children.

"Uh-huh," the girl nodded. "And there's Shawn...and Rosad, my other brother," She pointed to the two boys; both had the same dark eyes as their sister.

"Shawn and Indy are twins," said the third girl. Like the first speaker, she too was a bit stocky, and her hair was braided in little short rows. Her skirt bobbed a little as she hopped around inside her square.

Shari looked at the twins. They looked

decent enough, but Rosad looked as if he had been playing in a pile of dirt; his clothes were rumpled and soiled.

"You don't look alike," She said as she continued looking at Shawn and Indy.

That's 'cause we're fraternal twins," Shawn explained. "Fraternal means...."

"I know what fraternal means," Shari interrupted, more annoyed than grateful for the explanation.

Shawn ignored her interruption. "...It just means that two eggs came out instead of one. So we're really just like a normal brother and sister."

"Are you twins too?" Shari asked, turning to the other girls.

"No. I'm Melissa. Melody and I are just sisters," the girl answered. "But we're only a year apart. I'm twelve years old." She pointed to her sister, "and she's eleven."

"Al is eleven too," Indy explained. "Shawn and I are almost twelve and Rosad is almost nine."

"I am twelve too," Shari announced. In California she was the leader of her group of

friends and she wondered if the same would be true here. She felt a pang of longing as she scanned the kids. She so missed her friends back home!

"Are we going to play, or what?" Al demanded.

"Al is an only child," Shawn gave his friend a high-five, "That's why he never learned to wait."

Everyone looked at Al. His T-shirt advertised a vacation in Puerto Rico. It was a deep purple, and it read: 'Relax, It's Puerto Rico.' He grinned, "Yes.... *Si*.... *Si*.... I don't have any brothers or sisters to bother me." He quickly glanced at Shawn and made a sad face. "I'm the one and only Al Ruiz." Next, he gave a small bow then flicked his head back, causing his jumbled blond curls to appear even more ruffled. "And I still say, let's play," he continued.

They all laughed.

"It's my turn," Rosad shouted.

"You were the last one to play," Shawn protested.

"We can give him another chance since he's the youngest," Al suggested.

"He is not a baby. He should wait his turn," Shawn insisted. "Everybody babies him. That's why he's so spoiled."

"Awwww.... Come on Shawn," Indy reasoned. "It won't hurt just this once."

Shawn mouthed the word, 'Baby' at Rosad.

"I'm not a baby!" Rosad yelled.

Seeing that the quarrel was about to escalate, Shari gave Rosad a gentle nudge. "Go ahead, Rosad, take your turn."

Rosad stuck his tongue out at Shawn. To Shari's surprise, Shawn ignored him.

Even though Shari had noted how to play Four Square, she soon found herself confused about the rules. Within a short time, she and Melissa were arguing. "You can't jump on that square," she objected as Melissa started hopping into Melody's square.

"We always play it like this." Melissa said. "Right, Shawn?" she turned for confirmation.

Shawn shrugged, "We agreed Melissa would set the rules. She's the oldest."

"Well that's not how you're supposed to play it." Shari repeated. "And I'm twelve too."

"It doesn't matter. This isn't the Olympics," Indy said. "Let's just play and quit arguing."

"But that's not how you were playing before," Shari protested.

"I don't care about that. We're just having fun, see?" Al was starting to become impatient. "Stop arguing and play. Mami is going to call me in soon."

Shari gave in. She knew there was no way the others would listen to her; the new girl on the street. Despite her misgivings about making friends with this group, she was beginning to enjoy herself until Al asked.....

"You're an only child too, right?"

"No," Shari said curtly.

There was silence as the others looked at her, but she made no effort to fill in the uncomfortable gap. She abruptly backed away and said, "I gotta go." With that, Shari turned and

ran back inside her house.

Her mother met her at the door. "Well, how did it go?"

"Awful!" Shari burst into tears. "I hate these kids and I hate this place." She ran up to her new room, flopped down on the bed and cried and cried ... for her brothers ... her dad ... her friends ... all left behind in California. She was acutely aware of her mother sitting on the edge of the bed patting her head.

"Leave me alone," she shouted burying her face in her pillow. "It's all your fault."

"Shari...", her mother tried.

Shari covered her ears. "I don't want to hear anything from you. I don't want to hear anything. I just want everything to go back to how it was Mom! Can't you see?" She heard her mother sigh then felt a final pat on her head.

"I love you, Shari," Ms. Wellington said before walking out.

Shari shouted that she wasn't hungry

when her mother called her for lunch. She was just too upset with her mother right now. She spent the rest of the evening looking out her bedroom window—watching the kids play—wondering what they said when she walked off. They really weren't as awful as she had led her mother to believe. In fact, she now wished that she hadn't rushed off. She wondered if they would still want her as a friend. When the other kids finally went inside, she carefully noted where they lived.

This was the northern section of the Bronx, New York and the area was mostly residential. All the houses on the block were detached single family homes, but there were two types. The bigger ones had a detached garage at the back of the house, and bigger lots. The smaller ones, like her mother's, had an attached garage at the side of the house. Her mother's house was in the middle of the block. Shari already knew that Shawn, Indy and Rosad lived next door to the right. Their house was one of the bigger houses. She now watched Al go to his house. He lived in one of the

smaller houses, across the street opposite Shawn's house. Melissa and Melody lived to Al's left. Their home was also small, similar to Al's.

The house just across from her house was where she had seen the man and woman counting money the night before. Shari wondered if they were the owners. The house looked neglected on the outside. It was one of the smaller houses just like her mother's, but it was the only house on the block that looked in need of a paint job.

Because the block was not very long and on a dead-end, the street was quiet. It really was a lovely block, with the tree-lined sidewalk giving residents a degree of privacy and providing a shady covering for the street. Leaves blocked her view of a good portion of the upper level of the houses across the street. However, she could sometimes see through a break in the leaves or when a breeze shifted the branches. The only windows Shari could see belonged to the house directly across from hers. The blinds on the lower level of the house were drawn, but a faint light shone through the windows. That light was the

only indication that the house was occupied.

She soon lost interest in observing her street. She didn't know what to do but stubbornly refused to go downstairs. Her computer wasn't set up yet and she didn't even have a TV to watch. Her mother had brought only two television sets with them; one she had placed in the living room and the other in the master bedroom. Shari finally unpacked her cards and began playing Solitaire, then a few other card games just to pass the time. It was going to be a long day she lamented.

"Shari! Are you coming down for dinner?" Her mother was calling.

Dinnertime! Finally! Shari didn't want to go, but she was starving. Slowly, she made her way down the stairs. Her mother had prepared a huge meal and Shari felt guilty about not helping her in the preparation ... but it was not her fault. Her mother should have called her to help. She sat silently at the table.

Throughout dinner Shari spoke only when asked a question, and even then her answers were

in monosyllables or mutters. Halfway through the meal, her mother gave up. At first Shari was pleased with her performance—she had forced her mother to give up trying to keep a conversation going. But as the uncomfortable silence wore on, she fidgeted in her seat, glancing occasionally at her mother, hoping she would say something ... anything. Her mother did not. Shari hurriedly finished eating, and since her mother hadn't suggested that she wash the dishes, she excused herself and ran upstairs.

Shari spent a boring evening in her room but soon grew tired of moping around and went to bed. It wasn't until early morning that the noise of a car driving up the block jolted her out of her light sleep. Shari ran to the window and saw a blue car pulling into the driveway across from her. Shari felt a thrill of excitement as an automatic garage door slowly opened. Maybe now she would find out more about the couple she had seen. But the windows of the car were darkly tinted, and as the car drove into the garage, she was unable to see the driver.

Disappointed, Shari watched the house. No one came out; nothing happened. She was about to turn away from her window to go back to sleep, when a light came on upstairs. The windows had no blinds on them, and Shari watched with mounting excitement as the same man and woman from the night before appeared. This time they were not counting money.

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