



The Library Thief

by Christa Upton

Mysteries with the Willow Street Kids, Book 1

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by Christa (Ittzes) Upton

cover photo by Nick Ittzes

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www.blackhillspicturebooks.com

To Dad and Mom

Special thanks *also* to hubby Steve, sis Cathy & family, bro Brian & family, parents-in-law Doug & Julie, g.k., good friend Sarah S. for her wonderful editing and beautiful photos, Aunt Eve, Aunt Suzi, our three wonderful children—Sarah, Alyssa, and Nathan, and especially the Lord Jesus Christ.

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The Intruder

"Hi, Christopher!" thirteen-year-old Amanda called to her cousin. Christopher, also thirteen years old, looked up and smiled. Amanda walked slowly up the sidewalk toward him.

"Hey, Amanda!" he called.

"Is Grandma home?" Amanda reached the driveway and stood there next to Christopher.

"No. Grandma just left, but she should be back pretty soon. Went to the Farmers' Market." Christopher finished adjusting his bike helmet and threw his leg over his blue 10-speed.

"Oh, no, not more vegetables from the Farmers' Market!" They both grinned. They liked to tease their Grandma about trying to entice them with all kinds of produce and new recipes, but often they had to admit the dishes were actually quite good. "Got any homework tonight?" Amanda asked.

"Not much. How about you?"

"Just history. Ugh."

"You're not excited about dates, battles, and bad guys, eh?" Christopher teased. Amanda rolled her eyes. Christopher laughed and said, "See ya later; I'm going to Mark's."

"Okay. 'Bye!" Christopher waved and rode off toward his friend Mark's house. Amanda headed up Grandma's front porch steps.

Christopher and Amanda both enjoyed living in their small Missouri town so close to their grandma that they could visit often. Along with Christopher's brothers Nolan and Matt, and Amanda's sister Sierra, they loved the encouragement and love (and cookies) Grandma always gave them.

Amanda opened the screen door, which gave a loud squeak, and stepped inside. She stopped for a minute and took a deep breath. She loved the smell of old wood and soap in Grandma's house. She also detected the scent of fresh cantaloupe—one of Grandma's favorite fruits. She turned to look at the comfortable green flowered couch and sheer white curtains. She loved everything about Grandma's house, even the creaky floor boards under the 1970's green

sculptured carpet.

She walked through the open adjoining living and dining room and into the little 1950's kitchen. She smiled as she looked at an “ancient” piece of artwork hanging on the wall—“Autumn Scene,” by Amanda Denny.

She vaguely remembered being very proud of it when she had given it to Grandma. She wondered if Grandma would keep it forever.

Soon she heard the screen door creak open again. She opened her mouth to call out, but suddenly she heard a very deep voice give a loud cough. There’s no way that person could be Grandma! She jerked back, startled, and her eyes widened as she heard the man stride forward further into the living room.

Amanda looked frantically for a place to hide. There was no hiding place in the kitchen, so she just backed up quietly toward the sink and leaned against the counter, shaking a little.

To Amanda’s relief, the man turned just before the kitchen into the small hall filled with books—Grandma’s little library. Amanda could hear the intruder thumping books as if making stacks of them. Finally whoever it was tramped out of the house, letting the screen door bang behind him. Amanda heard footsteps descending the stairs, a car door slam, and a vehicle drive off.

Amanda slowly tiptoed through the kitchen and peeked around the corner. No one was there, so she came into the living room and peered out the window. Right at that moment, she saw her grandmother’s van coming down the street. She felt very relieved to see it.

As soon as Grandma pulled into the driveway and turned the engine off, Amanda flew out the door and down the stairs to the driveway. Grandma opened the van door and looked up.

“Oh, Grandma, Grandma, someone was here!”

"My goodness, dear, what do you mean?" Amanda told her the whole episode, and Grandma shook her head.

"I can't imagine why anyone would do that!" Grandma exclaimed. "How strange. Let me get inside, and we will see what is what." Amanda helped Grandma out of the van. Then Amanda climbed into the van and grabbed several bags of fresh produce. She nudged the van door shut, and they both headed inside.

Amanda put the bags in the kitchen. Then she followed Grandma into the little hall, where they found stacks of books scattered on the desk and on the floor. As they put books back on the shelves, the two talked.

"Grandma, do you have anything valuable in here? Something like really old books that someone would pay a lot of money for?"

"Well, I really don't think I have any valuable books. But this does remind me of something interesting I can show you. It's a secret older than I am." Grandma's eyes twinkled.