

Seasons of the Sleuth Winter Holidays

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Seasons of the Sleuth

Winter Holidays

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CHAPTER 1

The little township of Richmond was always full of tourists on the weekends and during the school holidays. Zoe and Jordy went to the local school together and their mothers were best friends. The girls' mothers owned a pancake parlour and because it was always full of tourist in the holidays the two girls were left to their own devices.

They would spend their holidays either down by Richmond Bridge feeding the ducks, taking long walks across the paddocks or making up games. When they got hungry they'd hang around the pancake parlour waiting for their mothers to take a short break and make them some lunch.

The winter school holidays would have the two girls sitting by the Richmond Bridge talking about Cleaver House, a big old house beyond the wall. Cleaver House was said to be haunted and no one went in or out of it. All the windows and doors had been boarded up years ago and the only sign of life was an albino possum that was often spotted in the darkness sitting in a tree just beyond the high brick wall.

The local children played dares on each other which included climbing over into the back yard of Cleaver House. They pushed themselves through the metal on the gate posts or climbed over the high wall, only to run from the house crying about the screaming coming from within.

It didn't seem to matter what the children heard about the house, nothing put them off. The school holidays would draw in and the children would be back staring through the gate at the huge stone house daring each other to go inside.

One winter's morning Zoe and Jordy met outside the pancake parlour hoping to get a breakfast pancake. They weren't in luck. A bus load of Japanese tourists had arrived and every table was soon taken. "Oh I was so hoping for a bacon pancake stack," Jordy whined to Zoe.

Zoe shrugged her shoulders, "I had toast and cereal before we left home, and I'm not even hungry."

Jordy rolled her eyes. "But I am"

"Well if you are that hungry" she unzipped her bag. "Here eat this." She handed her friend a brownish banana.

"Yuck it's soft and gross," Jordy said pushing it back to her friend.

Zoe laughed and peeled it. "It's just the way I like them." She bit into it as Jordy looked on shaking her head.

"Come on we will go past the back of the bakery they will have something in their seconds bin."

The local bakery always put their not quite perfect pies and rolls into a basket behind the bakery. All the locals knew about it and were allowed to help themselves if they left a coin for charity.

"I only have a ten cent piece," Jordy said pulling out the single coin from her jacket pocket.

"So ten cents is something isn't it?" Zoe said.

The two girls headed straight for the bakery and went through the back gateway to the gravelled area where the bakery got their deliveries. There were two outside tables for the staff to sit at when they were on their breaks and a counter next to the back wall. A man of about fifty was sitting at the table drinking a coffee.

"Morning girls."

"Good Morning Mr. Adams, I hope you broke a tray of pies this morning," Jordy said walking straight over to the counter.

"Oh you are in luck I think. Toby that new apprentice broke a whole tray of party pies." "Oh goody," Jordy said making a bee line straight for the slightly dented party pies."

She dropped her ten cent coin into the charity box and took a pie in each hand. "Aren't you getting one?" he asked staring at Zoe.

"No, I just had a banana."

"So, how can you pass up those delicious pies, have two, they will go to waste otherwise,"

Zoe didn't argue but picked up the two that looked the least dented.

"So what trouble are you two going to get up to today?" he asked staring at the backpacks the two

girls were never seen without.

"Nothing much," Jordy said, licking the sauce from her lips.

"I've heard that before," he said standing up. "Go on Jordan take another couple. We are going to have another tray of something out here before the day is done." He shook his shock of white hair and disappeared inside.

"Can you believe it, these are so good, I don't know why they aren't good enough to sell." Jordy said picking up another two pies.

"I don't know either, I'm getting another two." Zoe said loading herself up.

The girls were then on their way down to the Richmond Bridge eating the pies as they went. "So what will we do today?" Zoe asked Jordy.

"I think we should go and have another look at Cleaver House?" she suggested.

Jordy shuddered. "After last time?"

"Oh boo you. Nothing happened last time, the possum just scared you that's all. Come on I thought you were braver than that."

"I am brave, alright but we aren't going to just look over the wall today we are going to climb over into the back yard."

Zoe's face reddened. "Oh sure, alright."

CHAPTER 2

Everyone knew Cleaver House had been built by the convicts that were sent to Tasmania by the British back when it was called Van Diemen's Land. It was a huge house built out of stone the convicts cut out of the local sandstone. The girls walked down next to the Richmond River passing the ducks and the families out with their stale bread. Then they walked along a narrow path, mostly overgrown with blackberries and other weeds. They didn't pass another soul. For at least five minutes neither girl spoke. "Do you think we can get back up that wall?" Zoe said nodded towards the high stone wall that ran around the whole house.

"Sure we can, if I give you a leg up and then you help me up."

"Okay then, but how we will get down the other side?"

"If there are no foot holes in the stone we can jump."

The girls got to the brick wall at the back of the house. They were surrounded by large trees and lots of wild blackberry bushes, which neither girl wanted to fall into. Jordy bent down and clasped her fingers together so Zoe could step onto her hands and together they would push her up to the first hole in the stonework.

"I'm right."

"Got a good hold?" "Yep now you reach up and I will help you up"

Jordy reached her long arms up to Zoe and jumped at the same time as Zoe pulled her. They had done the same thing loads of times and soon the two girls were climbing the wall. Zoe was leading the way and Jordy following her. It took almost ten minutes for the girls to climb onto the top of the wall and stare into the back yard of Cleaver House.

With a leg either side of the wall the girls balanced and stared at the back of the house. There were several stone buildings in the backyard, loads of old fruit trees, leafless and looking like long dead fingers reaching for them.

"It's so quiet." Zoe commented.

Jordy nodded. "It's a bit spooky even in the day."

"Do you still want to jump down?"

"I don't know?" Jordy bent forward and looked down the wall looking for a way they would be able to get out later.

"I think soooo." She screamed as she bent too far over the wall and tumbled forward straight to the ground below. She landed with a thud on a pile of rotting garden compost.

"Are you alright?" Zoe cried out.

It took Jordy a moment to think, she looked up and nodded. "Yep it was a soft landing." She stood up and readjusted her backpack.

"How will I get down?" Zoe asked.

"Just jump, it won't hurt."

Zoe stared her face now white, but she didn't have a choice she swung her other leg over and then jumped down to her friend.

She hit with a louder thump than Jordy as she rolled down onto the backpack.

"You all right?"

"Yep I think so." Jordy helped Zoe to her feet and the two girls stared at the back of the house. Every window and door was boarded up. "Why doesn't anyone live here?" Jordy asked.

"Mum says it's because it's haunted."

"But ghosts aren't real."

"Who said it was a ghost? Mum said it was an old witch Philomena the dream stealer."

"I haven't heard that one before." Jordy shook her head. "I don't think a real witch lived here."

"Well that's what my mum told me." Zoe had her hands on her hips.

"Whatever. Come on let's have a look around." They headed straight for the stone out building nearest to them. It was not only small but it had a chimney poking through the roof. They pushed the old door but it didn't budge. Big pieces of timber had been nailed across the front of the door frame and the door stopping it from opening. *

A valuable necklace has been missing for fifty years. Zoe and Jordy report strangers hiding in Cleaver House in Richmond Tasmania to the local Police. As always the police don't want to listen to them, so they have to investigate themselves. What are the strangers up to? Will Zoe and Jordy get out alive?

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