

© Belinda Murrell 2011

the *Ivory*
ROSE

Pippa's Island

Book 1: The Beach Shack Cafe

Book 2: Cub Reporters

The Locket of Dreams

The Ruby Talisman

The Ivory Rose

The Forgotten Pearl

The River Charm

The Sequin Star

The Lost Sapphire

The Sun Sword Trilogy

Book 1: The Quest for the Sun Gem

Book 2: The Voyage of the Owl

Book 3: The Snowy Tower

Lulu Bell

Lulu Bell and the Birthday Unicorn

Lulu Bell and the Fairy Penguin

Lulu Bell and the Cubby Fort

Lulu Bell and the Moon Dragon

Lulu Bell and the Circus Pup

Lulu Bell and the Sea Turtle

Lulu Bell and the Tiger Cub

Lulu Bell and the Pyjama Party

Lulu Bell and the Christmas Elf

Lulu Bell and the Koala Joey

Lulu Bell and the Arabian Nights

Lulu Bell and the Magical Garden

Lulu Bell and the Pirate Fun

© Belinda Murrell 2011

the
Ivory
ROSE

BELINDA
MURRELL



RANDOM HOUSE AUSTRALIA

© Belinda Murrell 2011

This project has been assisted by the Australian Government through the Australia Council, its arts funding and advisory body.



Australian Government



A Random House book

Published by Random House Australia Pty Ltd
Level 3, 100 Pacific Highway, North Sydney NSW 2060
www.randomhouse.com.au

First published by Random House Australia in 2011
This edition first published 2015

Copyright © Belinda Murrell 2011

The moral right of the author has been asserted.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted by any person or entity, including internet search engines or retailers, in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying (except under the statutory exceptions provisions of the Australian *Copyright Act 1968*), recording, scanning or by any information storage and retrieval system without the prior written permission of Random House Australia.

Addresses for companies within the Random House Group can be found at global.penguinrandomhouse.com

National Library of Australia
Cataloguing-in-Publication Entry

Author: Murrell, Belinda

Title: The ivory rose / Belinda Murrell

ISBN: 978 0 85798 698 6 (pbk)

Target Audience: For primary school age

Subjects: Ghost stories – Juvenile fiction

Adventure – Juvenile fiction

Time travel – Juvenile fiction

Sydney (NSW) – Juvenile fiction

Dewey Number: A823.4

‘In a Southern Garden’ by Dorothea Mackellar used by kind permission of the Estate of Dorothea Mackellar and Curtis Brown Australia.

Cover design by book design by saso

Internal design and typesetting by Midland Typesetters, Australia

Printed in Australia by Griffin Press, an accredited ISO AS/NZS 14001:2004

Environmental Management System printer

Random House Australia uses papers that are natural, renewable and recyclable products and made from wood grown in sustainable forests. The logging and manufacturing processes are expected to conform to the environmental regulations of the country of origin.

For my sister, Kate Forsyth, who introduced me to Shadow the cat and the mystery of the Gothic Witches' Houses, and whose love and support has been truly inspirational

'In a Southern Garden' by Dorothea Mackellar, 1918

WHEN the tall bamboos are clicking to the restless
little breeze,
And bats begin their jerky skimming flight,
And the creamy scented blossoms of the dark
pittosporum trees,
Grow sweeter with the coming of the night.

And the harbour in the distance lies beneath a
purple pall,
And nearer, at the garden's lowest fringe,
Loud the water soughs and gurgles 'mid the rocks
below the wall,
Dark-heaving, with a dim uncanny tinge

Of a green as pale as beryls, like the strange
faint-coloured flame
That burns around the Women of the Sea:
And the strip of sky to westward which the
camphorlaurels frame,
Has turned to ash-of-rose and ivory —

And a chorus rises valiantly from where the
crickets hide,
Close-shaded by the balsams drooping down —
It is evening in a garden by the kindly water-side,
A garden near the lights of Sydney town!

1

Rosethorne



Jemma pushed the ornate front doorbell nervously. It was the first day of her first job. The bell jangled somewhere deep in the house. Jemma glanced up. The house towered over her, covered in a mass of purple, flowering wisteria, its tall turreted roof spotted with lichen. Once it had been a grand house, a mansion really. But now the sandstone was cracked, the paint on the windows and doors a dull, flaking grey.

Rosethorne was one of the famous Witches' Houses of Annandale – a row of creepy old mansions on Johnston Street, built with towers and gargoyles, turrets and crenellations, gables and conical spires. Many of them had been renovated over the years to reflect their former glory, but not Rosethorne. People said Rosethorne was haunted.

Jemma shivered with nerves. She pushed the bell again more urgently.

What was the story? Jemma struggled to remember. A little girl? Murdered over a hundred years ago? Her ghost

still haunts the house, begging for help and retribution . . .

Jemma glanced over her shoulder, feeling cold despite the warm spring sunshine. A black cat wound around her feet and miaowed, its tail tickling her bare legs. Jemma stooped to pat the sleek fur. She loved animals but wasn't allowed any pets at home.

Too much fur, too much mess, too much trouble, Jemma thought, her mother's words echoing in her mind.

A sound of approaching footsteps thundered from inside, and the old grey door was flung open by a young girl wearing a maroon-and-white checked school uniform. Her hair was tied up in messy pigtails, and her button nose was sprinkled with freckles.

'Hi, Jemma,' whispered Sammy shyly, glancing up through her long fringe. 'That's my cat, Shadow. Mum's in the studio. She said to bring you in.'

Sammy was seven years old, with pale-blond hair, chocolate-brown eyes, a dimple in each cheek and two missing front teeth. She was so cute, Jemma wanted to tickle her.

'Hey, Sammy. Did you have a good day at school?'

Sammy trotted off down the long hall, her shyness quickly forgotten, and chatted animatedly about her day. Jemma followed, glancing around, Shadow the cat at her heels. Inside seemed just as derelict as outside: the paint peeling from the walls, the timber floors scuffed, unstable piles of packing boxes cluttering the grand reception rooms on her left.

At the very back of the house was an old kitchen and a shamble of little rooms that must have once been a scullery, pantry and laundry but were now jammed to the ceiling

with boxes. Outside, the garden was overgrown with weeds and magnificent old trees; a mound of rubbish was strewn against the remains of a ramshackle fence.

Sammy led the way into a two-storey timber outbuilding in the far corner of the block. A rickety door opened into a huge dusty room stacked to the ceiling with shelves. Each shelf held bowls, vases, cups, platters, jugs and pots, painted in a rainbow of flowers and figures.

In the middle of the room sat a woman, Sammy's mother, hunched over a potter's wheel, her hands grey and sticky with clay. She frowned in concentration, a large daub of clay across her cheek, her caramel hair piled in a tumble-down bun and a shapeless smock covering her clothes.

'Mama, Mama. Jemma's here,' cried Sammy, jiggling up and down with excitement, her pigtails flying and cheeks dimpling.

'Thanks, Sammy darling,' replied her mother, not taking her eyes off the clay on the wheel. 'I'll just be a moment, Jemma. I'm at a crucial stage.'

Jemma watched, fascinated as the blob of grey clay spun around, rapidly changing shape under those long, slim fingers. In a few moments the sticky blob had transformed into a tall, elegant vase, perfectly proportioned. The woman took her fingers away, nodding in satisfaction. The wheel slowly stopped spinning.

She stood up and wiped her hands on her clay-smearred smock, smiling in welcome. 'Sorry, Jemma. Thanks so much for coming'

'That's a pleasure, Mrs O'Donnell.'

'Please call me Maggie. Mrs O'Donnell sounds like a decrepit old grandmother!'

Maggie led Jemma around the studio, with its cobbled stone floor and rough timber walls, packing crates, kiln and splattered workbenches. 'This was once the old stables but it makes a perfect studio now.'

Maggie pointed to the benchtop cluttered with pots of paint, brushes and glaze. In the centre was a huge platter. 'This is my latest piece. What do you think?'

The platter was a deep, inky blue with a mermaid floating across the centre. Clouds of green hair billowed around her radiant face, and her silvery tail flickered with life.

'It's wonderful!' said Jemma, stroking the platter with her forefinger. 'The mermaid almost looks alive.'

'She's mine,' Sammy announced proudly. 'We're going to hang her in my room. I've called her Clorinda.'

Maggie smiled indulgently, stroking Sammy's hair off her forehead.

'Come and I'll show you around. I'm sorry everything is such a mess,' apologised Maggie. 'I'm trying to renovate, but I have a big exhibition coming up and there's never enough time to get everything done, which is why I'm so thrilled you can look after Sammy for a few weeks after school.'

Jemma smiled warmly. The job was like a dream come true for her too, although she had to use all her powers of persuasion to convince her mother that she could still get her homework done, practise the flute and fit in three ballet classes a week.

Maggie led the way back into the kitchen, chatting about Jemma's duties.

'If you could stay for a couple of hours it would be wonderful,' Maggie gushed. 'You can make yourselves some

afternoon tea – just help yourself to anything you find in the pantry. Do some reading with Sammy – she loves her reading – and make sure she does her homework. She doesn't have much. Then just play or draw or go for a walk, whatever you both feel like. The only important thing is to keep Sammy away from the studio while I'm working.'

Jemma nodded, taking it all in. The kitchen was old, with an ancient range hood crammed into the original fireplace. Piles of crockery were stacked on the open shelves; pans and pots hung from hooks on the mottled walls.

'It will take forever to renovate,' sighed Maggie, gesturing around at the stains and grime. 'But we bought it for a bargain price. The old house had been divided into tiny flatettes for years and allowed to deteriorate terribly. It had been on the market for months, standing empty. Sammy and I have spent every weekend pulling out rubbish and scrubbing and painting.'

Sammy pulled a hideous face, rolling her eyes at Jemma in disgust. Jemma giggled.

'The place was a rabbit warren of makeshift walls as thin as paper,' Maggie continued. 'We made an exciting discovery last week – two stunning marble fireplaces hidden behind a false wall in the reception room. It must have been a gorgeous house a hundred years ago.'

Maggie rubbed her forehead gingerly, overwhelmed by everything that needed to be done.

'Anyway, you two have some afternoon tea and I'd better get back to work. Come and let me know when it's six o'clock and you have to go. I forget the time completely when I'm working, and if you don't remind me I'll keep you here till midnight.'

Maggie bustled off back to the studio, leaving Jemma and Sammy alone to crunch on cheese and crackers with orange juice. Sammy read a chapter of *Adventures of the Wishing-Chair* aloud to Jemma, then she did her sheets of maths and spelling while Jemma tidied up.

‘Finished,’ announced Sammy, triumphantly waving her spelling sheet in the air. ‘I’m the best speller in my class. I can spell anything, even really hard words like “poltergeist” and “spectre”. I memorised them from the dictionary.’

‘Good work, Sammy,’ replied Jemma, taking the sheet. ‘Let me check that it’s all right, then we can go and play.’ She scanned the columns before handing the sheet back. ‘Fantastic – you got it! Every single word perfect. What would you like to do now?’

‘I can show you my room, and you can meet my friend Georgie. We can play up there.’

‘Sure,’ Jemma agreed, wondering who Georgie was. ‘Guide the way, fearless leader. Just be careful of any poltergeists or spectres on the way.’

Sammy galloped out the door and up the wide cedar stairs, with Jemma hurrying to catch up. A threadbare Persian carpet, splotted with the stains of many careless tenants, partially covered the dark timber steps.

Upstairs was a wide landing with numerous panelled cedar doors leading off the hallway. Sammy disappeared into one. This bedroom was the prettiest of all the rooms Jemma had seen so far with crowded bookshelves, a fireplace, a rocking chair packed with soft toys and a wide pink bed. Portraits of fairies and mermaids were hung on the

pale pink walls. Jemma recognised Maggie's style, while others were obviously drawn by Sammy.

The black cat was curled up asleep in the middle of a patchwork quilt, breathing deeply. Sammy stroked Shadow, who stretched and purred. Jemma perched on the side of the bed, patting the cat.

Sammy introduced Jemma to all the toys on her bed, one by one.

'And this is Purple Lambie,' explained Sammy, holding up a shabby, grubby, well-loved lamb of indeterminate colour, which might have been purple once. 'I've had her since I was a tiny baby and I sleep with her every night.'

Shadow suddenly started and spat, arching her back. The fur stood up along her spine in warning. Shadow hissed and jumped, darting off the bed and out the open door, which banged shut behind her.

'Georgie's here,' Sammy explained glumly. 'Shadow doesn't like Georgie.'

Jemma shivered, suddenly cold.

'What do you mean?' asked Jemma. 'Where's your friend Georgie?'

'In the rocking chair,' explained Sammy. 'She likes my toys.'

Jemma glanced in disbelief at the rocking chair full of teddies, lambs, bunnies and dolls. A lop-eared rabbit fell off the chair and onto the floor. The chair creaked on its rockers.

'There's no-one there,' Jemma contradicted, her voice a trifle shaky. She remembered back to her own childhood. As an only child, like Sammy, she had spent many hours playing on her own and had invented a whole family of

sisters to keep her company, each one with her own name, personality and dislikes. 'Do you mean Georgie is your imaginary friend?'

'No,' replied Sammy, adamantly. 'She's not imaginary. Georgie comes to see me all the time. Georgie's sad. She wants me to help her. Mama can't ever see Georgie, but I can. She has beautiful, long, dark curly hair and wears the prettiest dresses. Can't you see her, Jemma? She's right there. Maybe you could help Georgie?'

A frisson of fear rippled up Jemma's back, making the hairs on her arms stand on end. She gulped, then laughed nervously.

'Well, Sammy. I'd help Georgie if I could. But I can't see her. Why don't we go downstairs and do some drawing in the kitchen?'

Sammy nodded in agreement, pulling out her pencil case and a sketchbook. Jemma glanced at the fluffy rabbit on the floor but couldn't bring herself to go near the slowly creaking rocking chair to pick it up. Sammy did the job, tucking the rabbit gently back into place.



The two drew pictures and played games, chatting happily.

At six o'clock there was no sign of Maggie. Jemma waited for a few moments, then headed for the studio and softly knocked.

'Come in, come in,' Maggie called. 'Oh goodness me, it can't be after six already? Sorry, Jemma. I told you I lose track of the time in here.'

On the table beside Maggie was a tray of wet, grey objects ready to be fired. Shadow lay serenely curled up on a cushion under the table.

‘Did you have fun, Sammy?’ asked Maggie, unconsciously smearing another daub of clay on her nose.

‘I did my homework and we did some drawings of horses and we played pick-up-sticks and Jemma met Georgie.’ Sammy ticked off the list of activities on her fingers.

‘That does sound like fun,’ agreed Maggie. ‘Thanks so much, Jemma. Here’s some money and we’ll see you at four o’clock on Wednesday? Will you be all right walking home by yourself?’

‘S-s-sure,’ Jemma stammered, disconcerted by Maggie’s calm acceptance of the invisible ‘Georgie’. ‘That’s great. I’ll see you both then.’

Jemma clutched the notes. Despite her misgivings, she felt a rush of pride – this was the first money she had truly earned all by herself. On the walk home she entertained herself by adding up the money she could earn in the next few weeks and thinking of all the things she could do with it: save up for something special, buy some new clothes or music, buy her mum a nice birthday present . . .



The next street back from the imposing Witches’ Houses was Annandale Street, with its genteel middle-class villas. Behind that, like chicks clustered around their mothers, were the tiny, cramped, working-class cottages and semis. These had been gentrified and renovated over the

years, and now extended out, up and down, but humble workers' cottages they remained.

It was here that Jemma lived with her parents, in a narrow sandstone terrace with a neat box hedge across the tiny front garden and an antique urn overflowing with mini agapanthus.

Jemma used her key to open the black front door and called out hopefully, 'Mum? Dad? Is anyone home?'

She was answered by deafening silence. Jemma paused a moment, listening to the stillness of the house. *I should go and do my homework*, thought Jemma. *I should practise my flute.*

She glanced over the fence to the cottage next door. The jaunty strain of a violin sounded on the breeze. She could hear squealing and shrieking and giggling, doors banging. She could imagine the smell of something delicious wafting from the kitchen.

Just a few minutes, thought Jemma.

She locked her own front door carefully and crept next door, the gate creaking on its rusty hinges. This garden was overgrown with roses and lavender and geraniums. Jemma ignored the rarely used main entrance and took the side path, which led to the back of the house. Jemma knocked tentatively at the open kitchen door. A sharp barking sounded from inside.

'Come in. Is that you, Jemma? Ruby — Jemma's here.'

Dropping her bag at the back door, Jemma stepped into the kitchen, a wide smile on her face. Latte, the chocolate labrador, bounded over, wagging her whole body with her tail and licking any part of Jemma that she could reach.

Then Latte rolled over, offering her tummy for a scratch, her golden eyes glowing.

Jemma obediently scratched Latte's tummy and rubbed the dog's favourite spot, right between her eyes. Latte wuffed with pleasure and closed her eyes, tail sweeping the floor.

The warmth and chaos of the kitchen enveloped Jemma like a snug quilt. Ruby's mum sat on a chair in the centre of the room, a violin tucked under her chin, the music book on a stand in front of her. Ruby was her best friend and neighbour – one of four children. Ruby's sister Brenna sat on a chair beside her mother, her own violin tucked under her chin. The twins, Liam and Daisy, raced around the room, waving swords, shrieking and laughing.

'Hello, Milla. Is it okay if I come in for a while? Mum and Dad aren't home from work yet.'

'Of course, darling,' replied Milla, waving her violin bow in welcome. 'Are you hungry? There's freshly baked banana bread on the bench. Help yourself. Take some upstairs to Ruby. She's doing her homework. How did you go looking after little Sammy? She's a sweetie, isn't she? And Maggie's gorgeous too. I'm so glad you can help her out.'

Jemma nodded and concurred in the right places as she carved two hunks of warm, moist banana bread and laid them on a plate. Her mouth salivated as she smelt the delicious aroma.

'Thanks, Milla. This smells delicious.'

Jemma had a mock sword fight with Liam and Daisy as they tore past her. She pretended to be mortally wounded, swooning to the ground, the plate of banana bread carefully cradled on her chest.

‘You’re dead,’ screeched Daisy. ‘We killed Jemma!’

‘Give Jemma a kiss and she’ll come back to life again,’ suggested Milla as she resumed playing her violin, Brenna following her lead.

Daisy obediently hugged Jemma and kissed her cheek.

‘Thanks, Daisy,’ Jemma whispered, kissing her back. ‘I think you saved my life.’

Upstairs, Ruby was in the room she shared with Brenna, working at her desk. When Jemma came in she slammed her books shut with a beaming smile. ‘Reprieve!’ she exclaimed, reaching for a slab of banana bread. ‘How was it? Was Sammy good?’

Jemma sat on Ruby’s bed, nibbling at her own portion. ‘It was great. Sammy is so cute. Maggie was lovely. But the house . . . Well, it gives me the creeps.’

‘Why?’ begged Ruby, her eyes sparkling with curiosity. ‘Did something happen? Do you really think it’s haunted?’

Jemma frowned, thinking over the odd happenings of the afternoon. *Were they strange enough to mean Rosethorne was haunted?*

‘Noooo, well, yes – in a way,’ Jemma began. ‘Sammy says a girl called Georgie comes to visit her. A girl no-one else can see.’

‘Well, lots of kids her age have imaginary friends,’ Ruby replied dismissively.

‘Yes, but the cat hissed and spat at nothing when Sammy said her “friend” came in, and I felt suddenly cold, then the door slammed with no breeze, and the rocking chair started moving all by itself. It was really spooky.’

Ruby wrinkled her brow, then shook her head decisively, tossing her long red ponytail. 'There must have been just a slight breeze, Jem, and you didn't notice it. There is always a logical explanation for these things. Kids that age have such amazing imaginations, just like Liam and Daisy. I bet if you'd taken a closer look, the window was open a fraction or there was a draught from another room.'

Jemma thought back over the scene in Sammy's bedroom. *Was it just my imagination? Was it a fluky breeze? It must have been.* Jemma felt a little silly.

'Have you finished your English essay?' asked Jemma, changing the subject. 'I should go home and get mine done or Mum will be freaking.'

The girls chatted easily about homework and teachers and school friends, then Milla called up the stairs.

'Jemma, your dad just called. He's home now and wants you to get onto your homework.'

Jemma and Ruby thundered down the stairs, dodging the two armed knights and Latte the chocolate warhorse, and into the kitchen. Milla was now cooking dinner, the room filling with the smell of chorizo and bacon pasta. Jemma sniffed surreptitiously.

'Stay for dinner tomorrow night if you like, Jemma,' Milla offered, her eyes sympathetic.

'That would be great, thanks Milla. Mum and Dad have a fundraiser for the children's hospital, so they'll both be late.'

'Bring over your homework and do it here with Ruby.'

Jemma grinned and nodded as she loped out the back door, scooping up her bag.

2

Domestic Perfection



The lights were on at home now. Jemma used her key to open the door and headed down the long hallway.

‘Dad, I’m home,’ Jemma called.

‘I’m in the kitchen, Poss,’ her dad replied.

Jemma’s eyes skimmed over the familiar objects of her home. It could not be more different to the colourful chaos of Ruby’s home or the dingy dereliction of Sammy’s old mansion. At Jemma’s house *everything* was perfect.

From the oversized vase of pure white lilies on the elegant hall table to the carefully placed artwork on the taupe walls and the matching chocolate and cream cushions, meticulously selected by some famous interior designer – there was never an object out of place.

Jemma stowed her bag away in the hidden cupboard under the stairs, in the special cubicle designed for that purpose.

In the kitchen she hugged her dad and received a kiss on top of her head. ‘How was your day, Poss?’

‘Great, thanks Dad,’ Jemma replied, lost in her own thoughts of Sammy and Georgie.

She pulled up a stool and perched at the vast cultured stone bench. The kitchen was stunning – the latest in European design with an impressive stainless steel oven and cooktop, gleaming dishwasher and polished glass splash-back. Her dad, Dan, was opening a number of takeaway containers and warming the contents in the microwave.

Dan was tall with brown hair that had once been fair like Jemma’s and a kind face that crinkled easily into smiles. He was a paediatric physiotherapist at the children’s hospital.

‘Mum will be home in a minute.’ Dan juggled a hot container in his broad hands. ‘She was caught up in a meeting.’

‘Mmmmm,’ Jemma muttered.

‘Do you have much homework? Maybe you should hop into it while I warm up dinner.’

Jemma fetched her homework obediently and began planning out her English essay on *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*.

The front door opened and closed, and Jemma heard the tippy-tap of her mother’s heels pattering down the hallway.

Elizabeth Morgan was beautiful. Tall, graceful and impeccably dressed – her dark hair was cut fashionably short, flicked back to reveal diamond stud earrings. She wore a black fitted designer suit with pointy high heels. Elizabeth leant over to kiss Jemma, stroking Jemma’s fringe back from her forehead, and smiled. ‘Hi, darling.’

Jemma felt a surge of pride. Her mum was a senior partner in a major international law firm. She was astute, extremely intelligent and had a well-earned reputation for integrity and toughness.

‘Sorry I’m late,’ she apologised, placing her briefcase on the sideboard and kicking off her shoes. ‘There was a major flaw in the BHPR contract and none of the juniors noticed. It’s lucky I found it tonight or it would have been a total disaster at the client meeting tomorrow.’

Dan leant over and massaged her shoulders. ‘Sounds like a tough day – how’re you feeling?’

Elizabeth smiled back, arching her shoulders under his strong hands. ‘Stressed. Exhausted – glad to be home. Thanks for picking up dinner, Dan.’

‘No problem,’ Dan replied. ‘I thought about cooking my famous “Dan pad thai”, but I couldn’t face the late-night supermarket crowd, so it’s takeaway Japanese tonight. Why don’t you get changed and I’ll start serving.’

A few minutes later, Elizabeth returned in jeans and a T-shirt, and the family sat around the kitchen bench eating miso soup and ramen noodles.

‘How was your day, Dan?’ asked Elizabeth, ladling soup into three bowls.

‘Great. Lily Montgomery is making terrific progress – she walked about ten steps today without the frame. Her parents were over the moon. You should have seen her face! She was beaming from ear to ear.’

‘That’s fantastic – you must be so thrilled.’ Elizabeth turned to Jemma with a tired smile. ‘And what about you, Jemma? Did you get much homework today?’

‘Fine, thanks Mum,’ replied Jemma, toying with her tofu. ‘I have to finish my English essay.’

‘Aren’t you hungry, Jemma?’ asked her mother. ‘Or did you eat something at Ruby’s?’

Jemma loaded up her chopsticks with noodles.

‘I had afternoon tea at Sammy’s house,’ Jemma explained. ‘You know, today was my first day looking after Sammy. Maggie has a huge exhibition coming up, so she wants me to mind Sammy for three afternoons after school for the next few weeks.’

Elizabeth put her spoon down and looked at Jemma seriously. Jemma thought of it as her mother’s secret weapon – ‘the lethal lawyer glare’.

‘Just as long as it doesn’t interfere with your homework or music practise,’ Elizabeth insisted. ‘If I feel it is disrupting your schoolwork, I will have to ring Maggie and discontinue it.’

Jemma’s heart sank. *Give up my job already? I can’t. I’ve only just started – and Maggie needs me.*

Jemma glanced at her dad pleadingly. He smiled. ‘Jemma finishes at six, so she should have plenty of time to catch up. It will just mean she won’t have quite so much time hanging around at Ruby’s having fun.’

Jemma flashed a grateful smile at her dad.

‘Well, I do think it will be beneficial for you to earn your own money,’ Elizabeth continued, nodding her head slowly. ‘It’s the only way to learn the true value of money. Plus you can save up for a good investment, like some mining shares.’

Mining shares? Yikes! Jemma immediately changed the subject.

‘Maggie’s house is a bit spooky,’ Jemma confided. ‘They say it’s haunted.’

A shiver ran down Jemma’s spine at the thought of the peculiarities of the old house and the rocking chair.

‘Haunted?’ asked Dan with a grin. ‘Did you meet any wee ghaisties while you were there?’ He fluttered his fingers, eyebrows cocked and *ooooohed* in a deep, dramatic tone.

‘What nonsense, Dan,’ retorted Elizabeth, batting his fingers down. ‘Don’t encourage her. The only haunting around here is the neighbourhood kids playing pranks. There’s a perfectly rational explanation for all that superstitious rubbish.’

Dan tweaked Jemma’s hair, winking at her.

‘I’ll clear the table,’ offered Jemma quickly. ‘Then I’d better finish my homework.’

‘Why don’t you do your homework upstairs at your desk, Jemma?’ suggested Elizabeth. ‘It’s too distracting for you down here.’

Jemma thought ruefully of her favourite place to study – at Ruby’s kitchen table, with Latte barking, Liam and Daisy rumbling and fighting, Milla and Brenna practising their music and the delicious aromas of baking muffins or fragrant herbs.

‘Sure, Mum,’ answered Jemma, collecting the dishes.

‘I’ll do that, Poss,’ offered Dan. ‘You’d better get stuck into that work. Give me a yell if you have trouble, although you know I’m not much help with Shakespeare.’



On Wednesday, Maggie opened the door promptly on Jemma's ring. She threw a hurried greeting over her shoulder as she raced to the studio. Sammy had no homework so they read a chapter of *Adventures of the Wishing-Chair*, and then Sammy decided she wanted to play jungle explorers.

This game comprised wearing straw hats, carrying a broomstick as a weapon and creeping around the house. Sammy 'Livingstone' led them into the spacious reception rooms, piled high with cardboard packing boxes.

These two rooms, opening into each other, would have been magnificent once, with ornate plaster ceilings, grey marble fireplaces, large bay windows and a built-in window seat. Like everywhere at Rosethorne, the rooms were now shabby and decayed. Sammy was able to wriggle her way between the boxes, calling out what she could 'see', with Shadow, her faithful companion, leading the way.

'Just through this rugged mountain pass is a secret valley, with a magnificent waterfall tumbling hundreds of metres to the river below,' described Sammy, pointing with her broomstick.

'Can you see any animals down there?' asked Jemma, the lowly Sherpa.

'Lions, tigers, elephants, monkeys, giraffes and Georgie, although Georgie isn't an animal of course,' explained Sammy.

Jemma stiffened. She heard a spitting, hissing sound and Shadow shot from between the boxes, fur standing on end and tail in the air as she fled the room.

'Silly Shadow is frightened of the lions, although I wouldn't let any lions get her,' Sammy scoffed, her hand on her hip.

Jemma felt a waft of air on the back of her neck, almost as though someone was breathing on her. She whirled around, the fine hairs on her neck as stiff as Shadow's. There was nothing there.

'Come on, Sammy,' suggested Jemma with false cheer. 'Let's go and explore in the kitchen. I could discover some hot chocolate in there, I'm sure.'

'No, I want to explore the valley, Jemma, pleeease,' begged Sammy. 'I'm sure there're unicorns down there, plus Georgie wants to play too.'

An icy sensation gripped Jemma's bare arm like freezing hands. Jemma squealed and jumped, then shook her arm violently to ward off the chill.

What was that? wondered Jemma, her heart hammering in her chest. *That was not my imagination playing tricks. Someone or something just clutched at me with icicle hands.* Jemma took a few deep, steady breaths.

'Come on now, Sammy,' cajoled Jemma, holding out her hand to Sammy. 'I'll give you a piggyback ride to the kitchen. It's too dangerous here . . . The boxes might fall over and squash you.'

Sammy reluctantly agreed, and Jemma hoisted her up on her back and galloped all the way to the kitchen, where Shadow was skulking in her basket. For some reason this room felt safe and warm. Jemma made hot chocolate and had just sat down to sip on the creamy froth when there was a loud crash from the front of the house.

Jemma and Sammy raced to the reception rooms. A tower of three boxes had toppled over, spilling clothes, shoes, papers and saucepans. The top box had held pottery,

which smashed over the floor, scattering shards of ceramics everywhere.

A few moments later Maggie ran in.

‘Argh,’ Maggie cried, her brow furrowed. ‘I heard the crash. Did you knock something over? I knew I should have unpacked those boxes by now.’

‘We w-w-were in the kitchen,’ stuttered Jemma.

‘Well, never mind,’ Maggie soothed. ‘Lucky it was just some old pottery of mine.’

‘I’ll clean it up,’ Jemma offered reluctantly, glancing around for signs of whatever had knocked over the boxes.

Maggie smiled at Jemma. ‘Thank you. That would be great. I’m right in the middle of a firing.’

When Jemma left to go home that evening, Sammy gave her a great big cuddle.

‘I like you coming to look after me, Jemma,’ Sammy confided. ‘Georgie likes you too. Georgie’s not sad when you’re here.’

Jemma cuddled Sammy right back. ‘I’m glad Georgie’s not sad when I’m here. I like coming too.’

The lights were on when Jemma arrived home, but she couldn’t resist popping in next door to tell Ruby about the strange happenings at Rosethorne.

Ruby was practising her guitar on the sofa, while Brenna, Liam and Daisy sprawled in front of the fire with Latte, playing LEGO. Latte jumped up to greet Jemma, her tail wagging furiously, sending LEGO flying all over the floor and making the children shriek in annoyance.

Jemma laughed, rubbing Latte between the eyes. She helped Brenna scoop up the smashed space base and then

plonked on the sofa next to Ruby, her legs curled up underneath her. She told Ruby everything.

‘Are you sure you didn’t just imagine all this, Jem?’ asked Ruby skeptically, cradling the guitar on her lap. ‘Sammy or the cat must have knocked the boxes when they were exploring, causing them to topple over later.’

‘Maybe,’ agreed Jemma. ‘But that doesn’t explain the freezing grip on my arm. There is something very odd about that house.’

‘Let’s google it,’ suggested Ruby, putting her guitar down. ‘We might find out something interesting. Mum, can we use the computer to research Sammy’s house?’

‘Sure,’ replied Milla, looking up from where she was sorting socks at the kitchen table.

The two girls switched on the computer in the corner of the kitchen and typed in ‘Witches’ Houses of Annandale’ and ‘Rosethorne’. A number of results popped up, including entries from the local historical society and old newspaper articles:

Heritage Mansion for Sale

Rosethorne, a heritage-listed Victorian-Gothic mansion in Johnston Street, Annandale, is to be auctioned today. Rosethorne is one of several nineteenth-century mansions on Johnston Street, which are collectively known as the Witches’ Houses because of their turrets, which resemble witches’ hats.

The row of mansions was built during the 1880s by renowned builder and Mayor of Sydney John Young and are known for their

striking architectural features, including gargoyles, lions, turrets and towers ... Young planned to establish Annandale as a model suburb for the gentry, but the depression and resultant property slump of the 1890s meant the area evolved into a working-class suburb.

Rosethorne is reputed to be haunted by a shocking tragedy that occurred over one hundred years ago. A young girl, Georgiana Rose Thornton, was murdered in the house. The house was named after her mother, Rose Thornton. The murder of the twelve-year-old girl has never been solved, but the ghost of the child is said to haunt the house, begging for justice.

The house has been subdivided into flats for many years. Developers proposed to bulldoze Rosethorne and build an apartment block, however local residents formed an action group to oppose the demolition of this heritage home. Two other houses in the row, Rozelle and Claremont, were demolished late last century.

The most famous inhabitant of the row was Sir Henry Parkes, Premier of New South Wales and Father of Federation, who lived at Kenilworth for the last years of his life until his death in 1896. Due to its dilapidated state, Rosethorne is the ultimate Renovator's Dream.

The girls found lots more information about the other Witches' Houses and the history of the area, but nothing more about the murder of Georgiana Rose Thornton.

Ruby clicked the mouse to close down the internet.

'Wow,' sighed Ruby. 'Who would want to kill a twelve-year-old girl?'

'That's awful,' agreed Jemma and paused for a moment. 'You know, Ruby? Has it occurred to you that the murdered girl's name was Georgiana, and Sammy's invisible friend is Georgie?'

The two girls sat there side by side, both with their hair swept back into ponytails, Jemma's a short honey-blonde and Ruby's a deep auburn. Ruby was the practical one, the eldest of four in a chaotic family, while Jemma was dreamier and creative.

Ruby whistled and wrinkled her nose. 'It must be a coincidence, Jem. How could Sammy know the girls' name was Georgiana? Unless she heard one of the neighbours talking about it?'

Jemma thought of the freezing touch on her arm. *I didn't imagine it. I didn't.*

'What did you find out, girls?' asked Milla, coming over and laying one hand gently on each of the girl's shoulders.

Jemma glanced at Ruby, unsure of how much to tell Ruby's mum. Ruby shrugged.

'We're searching for information on Rosethorne because Sammy says she can see an invisible little girl called Georgie,' Jemma began tentatively. 'And it turns out a little girl called Georgiana was killed in the house over a hundred years ago. A couple of things have happened

in the house that are very strange – doors closing by themselves, untouched things falling, freezing cold sensations and Shadow, the cat, goes crazy just before these things happen . . .’

Milla patted Jemma on the back.

‘Well, animals do seem to sense strange things we humans can’t,’ mused Milla. ‘So do children, for that matter. A child being murdered is a very tragic event, which could well upset the equilibrium of any house. I don’t think we should scoff at things we don’t understand. We live in a truly astonishing world.’

Jemma smiled at Milla gratefully. It was nice to have someone take her concerns seriously. Milla wandered back into the kitchen to continue preparations for dinner.

‘I’d better get home or Mum will be in a miff,’ explained Jemma, pushing back her chair and jumping up. ‘She’s already terrified I’m going to fail my end-of-year exams because I’m working for Maggie.’

‘Ha,’ scoffed Ruby. ‘As if you’d ever fail! You mean she’s worried you won’t get straight As.’

Jemma nodded glumly. ‘You need straight As in everything to be a lawyer.’ Latte pushed her nose into Jemma’s hand and licked her palm, begging for a pat. Jemma obligingly stroked the dog’s nose. Latte’s tail went wild, her golden eyes liquid with adoration.

‘Do you even *want* to be a lawyer?’ asked Ruby. ‘I thought you wanted to be a vet?’

‘What does it matter?’ retorted Jemma. ‘You still need straight As!’

Ruby gave Jemma a hug as she walked her to the back door.

‘See you at the bus stop!’ called Ruby.

3

Sunny Saturday



‘Wake up, sleepyhead,’ called Dan, sticking his head around Jemma’s door. ‘Mum’s already back from the gym, and I’m starving. It’s time to eat.’

Saturday mornings followed a regular ritual in Jemma’s family. Elizabeth hit the gym early, before anyone else was awake. Jemma slept in, or read a book curled up in bed. When Elizabeth returned, they all strolled up to their favourite café for breakfast.

‘I’ll have the usual, please, Dimitri,’ said Elizabeth, taking a stool at the bench overlooking the street.

‘Eggwhite omelette, spinach and tomato, and a skim milk decaf?’ checked the waiter.

‘A “why bother”?’ added Dan with a grin at Jemma, as he did every week. ‘Make mine a double flat white and a Big Bruno Breakfast. Same for you, Poss?’

‘Yes, please, and a hot chocolate,’ confirmed Jemma, taking a seat beside Elizabeth.

Elizabeth tutted as she always did about Bruno's Big Breakfast, but it was a reflex action. She had flicked on her iPhone and was scanning emails.

Dan picked up the paper and skimmed the headlines, reading out snippets to Jemma.

'Global warming debate . . . Political scandal – "jobs-for-the-boys" accusations . . . Opposition Leader calls PM a useless, fat cow . . . blah, blah, blah.'

Elizabeth looked up sharply. Dan laughed.

'No, only joking,' Dan assured her. 'He called her something much worse than that.'

Jemma sighed, staring out at the cars whizzing past. A girl her own age walked by with her parents and older, blond-haired brother. Jemma recognised him from the school bus – his name was Tom.

Jemma wondered what the girl thought when she glanced in the open café window and saw her family, sitting side by side at the bench. Elizabeth, as always, was fully made-up, hair blow-dried and scrupulously dressed in crisp, beige trousers, white linen shirt, large dark sunglasses and ballet flats. Dan was more casual with chino shorts, blue polo shirt and brogues.

Then Jemma herself – medium height, slight, freckled nose, short blonde hair in a neat ponytail, a floral sundress and white leather sandals. *Is she looking at me with envy?* thought Jemma. *Or does she think we look like stuck-up snobs?* The girl's eyes slid over Jemma and back to her brother, who was flicking her with a rubber band.

The waiter brought the drinks and then the three huge white plates, balanced precariously on his palms. Bruno's Big Breakfast smelt delicious – crispy bacon, scrambled

eggs, sauteed mushrooms and sourdough toast. Jemma's mouth watered.

'What would you like to do today, Jemma?' asked Elizabeth, putting her iPhone away in her handbag. Elizabeth was meticulous about the 'no mobile phone rule' during meals. Meals were 'quality family time'.

Jemma thought carefully. Elizabeth liked to do special things on the weekend – visit a museum or the art gallery, take Jemma to her Saturday morning activities, ride bikes in Centennial Park, go to a concert or the opera.

'Ruby's mum is taking all the kids to Glebe Markets this afternoon and asked if I'd like to go with them after ballet, then hang around at Ruby's for a while,' explained Jemma, crossing her fingers under the bench.

'Oh?' asked Elizabeth, sipping her 'why bother'. She paused for a moment, cutting into her eggwhite omelette. Jemma held her breath hopefully.

'Well, I had thought we could go to Paddington this afternoon and buy you a new outfit, but I suppose that can wait,' conceded Elizabeth. 'If you go to the markets I could get some extra work done. But remember: don't be home late because we have three of the partners coming over for dinner, with their wives.'

'Can't wait, can we, Poss?'

Dan rolled his eyes at Jemma, which made her laugh.

'Thanks, Mum,' cried Jemma. 'That would be great.'

The three tucked into breakfast, chitchatting about what to cook for the dreaded partner dinner – tandoori lamb or Thai grilled chicken?

'I've been thinking about your birthday party, Jemma,' Elizabeth suddenly remembered. 'I thought we could

either invite some of the girls to high tea at the Grosvenor, or perhaps you would prefer to go out for dinner to Karlo's?

Jemma's face fell and she put down her toast.

'Well, I was hoping maybe I could just have a couple of girls over for a sleepover, cook some spaghetti bolognese, watch a DVD, paint our nails . . . You know, hang out.' Jemma suggested hesitantly.

'A sleepover?' Elizabeth frowned. 'I don't really like sleepovers – no-one sleeps. You girls will stay up all night, giggling and talking. If you want to paint your nails, maybe we could organise a party at my favourite nail salon. I'm sure Luella wouldn't mind if we booked out the whole salon one evening. We could have noodles delivered in those cute little cardboard boxes.'

Jemma looked down at her half-eaten bacon and eggs. She didn't really feel hungry anymore.

'Hmmm,' she murmured, stirring the egg yolk with her fork tip.

Elizabeth finished her coffee and pushed back on the stool. 'I'll ring Luella this afternoon,' she finished. 'Now we should get going, or you'll be late for ballet, and you should practise your flute before you go out with Ruby.'



The markets were crowded – families buying their weekly vegetables, pale-faced tourists toting cameras, and lots of edgy inner-city types dressed as emos, punks, rockers and fashionistas. Tattoos and piercings abounded, as did wildly dyed hair, ripped jeans, unisex outfits and big black boots.

Stalls sold everything from delicate glass jewellery, abstract paintings, pottery, exotic trinkets, vintage clothing to household junk.

Milla wandered off with the younger children in tow, giving Ruby and Jemma strict instructions where to meet her at two o'clock, along with some money to buy lunch.

'Look, Jem,' whispered Ruby in awe. Two teenagers strutted past dressed in ripped black leggings, basketball boots, denim shorts, and layers of black and sparkly silver – black singlets, black lace, silver vests, studded belts, loads of jewellery, oversized sunglasses and perky trilby hats. The girls looked cool, and they knew it.

Jemma glanced down at the floral dress she had worn to breakfast and suddenly felt very conservative.

'Come on, Jem,' shouted Ruby, dragging her by the hand into the maelstrom of people. 'Let's have some fun.'

Ruby led Jemma through the markets, searching for stalls that sold vintage and second-hand clothing. They tried a few things on, giggling as they attempted to change in the tiny tent cubicles and struggled to see themselves in the spotted old mirrors.

Jemma riffled through a box of scarves, scraps of lace and netting. Around her people jostled and pushed, grabbing for bargains from the heavily laden trestle tables.

'What do you think, Rubes?' she asked, draping a length of black lace across her chest.

'Hmmm,' mused Ruby, narrowing her eyes. 'We could make you a gorgeous crop top from that. There would be enough left over to sew some fingerless gloves too.'

The woman sitting behind the trestle table twinkled with amusement.

‘How much is it?’ Jemma asked, stroking the delicate lace with her finger.

‘It *was* ten dollars for the metre. But I can give it to you for five? There’s a little hole in the corner. I’ve got a lovely remnant of blue French velvet you might like as well?’

Jemma thought of the money she had already earned babysitting Sammy, and the more she would earn in the coming weeks. She nodded and pulled out a five-dollar note from her wallet.

‘Just the lace, thanks.’

Ruby had inherited her mother’s eye for a bargain, along with her fashion sense, and had the patience to sift through piles of junk to find a hidden treasure.

‘Look at this leather bomber jacket, Jem,’ Ruby said. ‘Don’t you think it’s cute? This would look awesome on you.’

Jemma’s eyes lit up and she tried it on over her dress. It was far too big, with a price tag to match, so Jemma reluctantly left it. Ruby was already onto the next treasure, discovering a black cotton vest with engraved silver buttons – a find that Ruby grabbed at once.

Jemma found a T-shirt stall, with dozens of colours, slogans and patterns. Her favourites were the ones emblazoned with simple French words: *Oui*, *Non* and *Je Suis*. Jemma bought a black T-shirt that said *Fantastique* in hot pink with silver swirls. Ruby bought one with a ferocious lion on it.

At lunchtime the two girls stopped to rest their legs, sit under a tree and drink a mango-and-banana smoothie, with a lemon-and-sugar crepe. They opened their paper shopping bags, oohing and aaahing over silver trinkets,

studded belts, colourful bracelets and silk scarves. Jemma piled the new bracelets over her wrist, enjoying the tinkle as she moved her arm.

The two girls had a pile of bags when they finally rushed to meet Milla at the front gate, only ten minutes late. Milla smiled at them knowingly.

‘Did you have fun, girls?’ she asked, herding everyone out the gate. ‘What did you buy?’

Ruby and Jemma chattered over the top of each other, talking excitedly about everything they had seen and loved and bought.

‘Mum, Mum, could we stop by Stella’s Warehouse on the way home?’ begged Ruby. ‘Jemma doesn’t have any leggings, and she really needs some. And we bought some lace to make crop tops; could you help us this afternoon, pleeeaaase, Mum?’

‘How could I refuse?’ said Milla, rolling her eyes at Jemma. ‘You two *are* on a shopping mission today.’

Stella’s Warehouse was a treasure trove of bargain clothes. Liam and Daisy complained loudly, but Milla gently chided them to be patient while Jemma tried on her leggings.

‘Look, Jem, at these hotpants – they are *so* cute!’ Ruby exclaimed, waving a tiny pair of denim shorts in the air.

‘They are *so* short!’ Jemma retorted. ‘I couldn’t wear that!’

‘Wear them over leggings, goose,’ teased Ruby. ‘Try them on. Can I have some too, Mum? Pleeeaaase?’

‘Can you afford them?’ asked Milla with mock severity. ‘You know the new rule – you earn pocket money helping

me with the chores, and you can buy yourself any extra treats you want.'

Ruby looked crestfallen. She had spent all her pocket money at the markets, and she didn't earn as much as Jemma did.

A thought occurred to her and she smiled winningly at Milla.

'Pleeeeeease, Mum? I'll do the vacuuming this afternoon . . .'

Milla laughed out loud, giving Ruby a bear hug.

'Now that's the kind of promise I can't turn down,' agreed Milla. 'All right, my darling, but you'd better get into all those dusty corners. And don't tell Dad!'

Daisy and Liam started playing hide-and-seek among the clothes racks, shrieking with laughter, while Ruby and Jemma tried on their hotpants. Brenna sat on the floor, reading her book quietly.

Jemma checked her wallet warily and saw the big hole she'd made in her savings. She checked her image in the dusty mirror. It was the first time she had earned her own money that she could spend on her own clothes. The mirror won.

'I'll take them,' Jemma announced to the sales assistant, with a grin at Ruby.

Back at Ruby's house, Milla ordered them to give her a fashion show of their purchases. Before Ruby was born, Milla had been the editor of a glossy women's fashion magazine, travelling the world, styling photo shoots, meeting famous models, attending cocktail parties and being given amazing clothes and accessories by the world's top designers. Milla still wrote regular freelance articles

for various publications and enjoyed styling mock fashion shows and photo shoots with her kids.

The girls changed into black leggings, denim hotpants, French slogan T-shirts and jewellery, then strutted down the stairs to show Milla. Brenna, Liam, Daisy and Latte the labrador all sat on the floor to watch the fun.

Milla narrowed her eyes at each girl, then set to work. Ruby was wearing purple basketball boots and the black vest over her T-shirt, while Jemma still wore her sensible white sandals.

‘Those shoes don’t quite work, Jemma,’ Milla decided. ‘Ruby, go and find Jem some ballet flats. Show me that belt. I think it would look better slung low on your hips . . . That’s better. Now, let me see that lace. Ruby’s right – we can whip you up a very cute little crop top with that. Brenna, go and find my jewellery box and my make-up kit, please darling.’

In no time flat, Milla had measured Jemma, snipped out a rough shape from the lace, and zipped around it with the sewing machine, creating a cute crop top for Jemma to wear over her T-shirt. Ruby used the remnants to fashion some sheer, fingerless, elbow-length gloves for them both.

When the girls were both dressed to Milla’s satisfaction, she started on their hair and make-up. With Ruby, she piled her thick, red hair into a messy bun at the back of her head, with one plaited lock of hair draped over her right shoulder. Jemma’s usually neat hair was too short to put up, so Milla mussed it up with mousse and tied it back with a turquoise bandana, the knot sitting perkily on top of her head.

‘I think, just for fun, we might try a little make-up today,’ suggested Milla. ‘I don’t normally think girls your age need make-up, but it would complete the new you!’

Milla patted pale matte eye shadow over their lids expertly, highlighting them with a smear of silver gloss in the centre. She blended the colours with her little fingertip, and then curled their eyelashes with black mascara. Lastly, she slicked their lips with a pale pink lip gloss.

‘What colour nails?’ asked Ruby, holding out a handful of different bottles.

‘Pink?’

‘No – something a bit more outrageous,’ decided Ruby. ‘How about turquoise or lilac?’

‘Turquoise,’ Jemma decided, holding out her fingernails for Ruby to paint.

The girls were having so much fun that they completely lost track of time. Milla took some photos of the two girls with their arms around each other, posing in different positions, pretending to be supermodels and rock chicks with Ruby’s guitar. Ruby put on their favourite CD and they danced and sang, strumming the guitar wildly.

‘You girls look gorgeous,’ cried Milla. ‘I would have employed you on the magazine any day!’

Ruby and Jemma grinned at each other, admiring their new looks.

It was after seven o’clock when the phone rang. Ruby’s dad, Michael, answered it, stepping over children, dog and toys to reach it.

‘Jemma, it’s your dad. He said to come home *immediately*.’

Jemma started up guiltily. She had promised her mum she would be home by six to help set the table for the

dreaded partner dinner. Jemma raced around Ruby's room, gathering up her purchases and her old clothes, stuffing them into a shopping bag.

'Bye, Rubes. Bye, everyone. Thanks so much, Milla. I had the most awesome day.'

Jemma tickled Latte on the tummy on her way out the door and gave Daisy a cuddle. She raced up the side path, out the flaking, creaky gate and into her own perfectly painted one. She huffed onto the verandah, only to realise that there were four strange adults waiting at her front door.

'Oh, hello,' Jemma gasped.

'Good evening, young lady,' said one of the men, holding out his hand. 'You must be Elizabeth's daughter, Jemima. I've heard so much about you. I'm John Morris – I work with your mum. This is my wife, Lesley, and my partner Steve Bowe and his wife, Susan.'

Jemma blushed as she shook hands with everyone.

The front door opened to reveal Elizabeth in a sleek black dress, chunky silver 'pearl' beads and high heels.

'Hello, everyone, welcome. Come in. Come in.' Elizabeth ushered her guests through the front door, smiling, kissing, hugging, chatting. Then she caught sight of Jemma at the back of the group.

'Oh!' she gasped. 'Jemima. Whatever are you *wearing*?'

Jemma smiled bravely. 'I went to the markets with Milla and Ruby, remember? We bought some new clothes and Milla did a fashion shoot with us.'

Elizabeth compressed her lips into a very thin line. The guests had turned to examine Jemma in the light of the hallway. Elizabeth smiled her very brittle smile.

‘Hello, Poss,’ called Dan, coming down the stairs with a wide, welcoming grin. ‘Looks like you’ve been having fun! Hello everyone, can I get you all a drink?’

‘Hello, Dan. Thanks, that would be lovely,’ John said.

The guests followed Dan down the hall towards the kitchen. Elizabeth turned to Jemma.

‘Go upstairs and get changed into something suitable for our dinner guests,’ she hissed. ‘And for goodness sake, scrub your face and brush your hair.’



Upstairs in the bathroom mirror, Jemma stared forlornly at her reflection. The fun of the afternoon had completely evaporated. Jemma sighed. She tried to recreate her super-model pose in the mirror. It just looked silly.

She wet a face washer and rubbed off the eyeshadow, the mascara, the lip gloss – the joy.

It took her a very long time to change into a dinner dress, put on her sandals, brush her hair, paste on a false smile and wander downstairs.

‘Ah, there you are, Jemma,’ called Elizabeth brightly. ‘That’s better. Here’s my beautiful girl. Come and sit at the table next to Daddy.’

Dan pulled out her chair and bowed as though she were a princess and he the humble butler.

It was a long evening with much talk of contracts, cases, clients, stocks, shares and settlements. Jemma wanted to crawl upstairs and cry.

Dan squeezed her hand and kissed it. ‘You look beautiful, Poss.’