



# GHOSTS IN THE GARDEN

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*For Georgie and Cavimhe*

## CHAPTER ONE



J.J. AND HER FRIEND, Sam, ran down the hall in the basement of Government House. Their teacher had given them permission to get a drink at the water fountain.

After the girls each had a drink, J.J. stood with her hands on her hips, watching Sam continue down the wide hall.

“Hurry up, Sam. We’re going to get in trouble again if we don’t get right back.”

A woman in a blue flowered dress passed J.J. with a smile. Momentarily distracted, J.J. watched the woman glide gracefully up the stairs that led back up to the main floor. She almost seemed to float.

J.J. turned her attention back to Sam, who was heading in the opposite direction from the activity room filled with their classmates. They were supposed to be returning to work on their posters, not exploring the premises.

“I just want to see what’s down here. You don’t have to come,” Sam said, and disappeared around a corner.

J.J. groaned. Sam knew that her curiosity always won out.



THEIR GRADE FIVE class was on a school trip to learn more about the former residence of Lieutenant Governors in Saskatchewan. Some said the impressive mansion was haunted. From previous experience, J.J. knew this to be true.

“I hope we don’t find any more ghosts right now,” she said. Even though they had formed the J.J. and Sam Ghost Detective Agency, she didn’t want to run into any ghosts when they were supposed to be with the other students. Besides, they didn’t have any of their ghost-detecting gear with them.

“We’ll just take a quick peek to see where this leads,” said Sam. Once J.J. joined her, Sam opened a heavy metal door into a narrower, shorter hallway. The door wheezed shut behind them. Overhead, the fluorescent lights flickered.

“I don’t like this.” J.J. eyed Sam nervously. “Let’s go back.”

“We won’t be long,” Sam said, as the lights flickered again. “Just don’t think about ghosts. Besides, the only ghost we’re likely to see down here is the harmless old gardener, George Watt.”

Suddenly, they were plunged into darkness.

J.J. gave a little gasp. Sam opened the door again to the main hallway. Lights still gleamed, showing the way they’d come.

“The power hasn’t gone out everywhere, so why is there no light here?” J.J. asked. She shivered. She knew the lighting in Government House seemed to be faulty, and it usually meant something mysterious was going on in the house.

“Let’s wait until our eyes adjust to find out.” Sam let

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the door wheeze shut once more. “I figure we’re probably underneath the ballroom.”

J.J. stalled. “I really don’t like this at all. It’s too dark down here.” She moved close to Sam.

Their breathing was the only sound.

After a few moments, J.J. could see a faint glow of daylight coming from a small window at the end of the hall. Strangely, the hallway seemed much longer than it had been moments before.

“This is still too dark.” J.J. clutched Sam’s arm. She really, really didn’t want to come across a ghost right now. Most of the ghosts they’d seen on previous visits had been in daylight.

“How about we come back another time with our flashlights and ghost detecting equipment?” She felt her pulse quicken, and she tried to pull Sam back the way they’d come.

Sam didn’t budge.

“We’ll come sometime when we’re not with the class.” J.J. grimaced at the thought of their classmates laughing at them.

Sam pulled J.J. forward. “We’ll just take a quick look and be back before anything happens or anyone misses us.”

“I don’t want to trip and fall.” J.J. already had bandages on her scraped knees from learning to skateboard.



“WE’LL BE FINE.” Sam took J.J.’s icy hand and they inched their way down the almost dark hallway.

Sam swept her hand along the rough cement wall.

“There must be a light switch somewhere.”

“Overhead, but don’t grab *that* string.” A gravelly Scottish voice came out of nowhere.

Sam and J.J. screamed. Sam felt J.J.’s hand grip harder. Her eyes had adjusted, and she saw that bare, low-watt light bulbs with pull strings had replaced the fluorescents.

“Who’s there?” Sam croaked.

A tall, slim man with a dark, curvy moustache emerged from the shadows. He held an odd-looking flashlight in one hand, though it was turned off. “Mr. Watt. At your service.”

Sam’s eyes widened. The hallway had definitely changed from where they’d started. Now, it was long and narrow, with a low ceiling.

J.J. jumped as a strange hissing sound came from behind Mr. Watt. She mumbled out of the side of her mouth to Sam. “What’s going on? Where are we?”

Sam shrugged and sidled closer to J.J. She whispered, “Did you hear his name? I think he might be the old gardener.”

J.J. gasped. “Oh, no. Then he *is* a ghost.”

“Something else is really weird about where we are.” Sam swallowed hard.

The man’s voice had a Scottish lilt, like their neighbour who lived down the street. Although he was dressed in a crisp, pale-blue-and-white striped shirt, with a tie and a black vest, the knees of his dark pants were smudged with dirt. The chain of a watch glinted from his vest pocket.

“You little...ah, lasses...” A look of confusion fell across his face as he looked down at their jeans and brightly-coloured sneakers. “You must have come to see

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my special fungi crop.”

Mr. Watt nodded to the open doorway nearby. A strange, earthy smell wafted over them. He stepped into the room and said, “Follow me.”

J.J. held back and whispered to Sam, “The gardener grew mushrooms here years ago. How come everything is so real now?”

Sam squeezed her arm. “I don’t know.”

“You lasses will have to step inside if you want to see properly,” called Mr. Watt.

“What are we going to do?” J.J. whispered.

“Let’s go along with him and see if we can figure something out,” Sam suggested.

J.J. clung to Sam as they stepped into the almost dark room. Only a tiny red light glowed from one corner of the ceiling.

“Smells like a barn in here,” J.J. whispered. “It reminds me of my great Aunt Marsha’s potato bin in the spring – mouldy, with rotting spuds.”

Sam wrinkled her nose at the damp, musty smell. She could see three levels of wide, shallow, wooden boxes stretching from one wall to another. The air was misty and the hissing sounded again.

She and J.J. gave each other wide-eyed looks.

“Steam heat,” Mr. Watt said, as he smoothed his moustache to either side of his face. His mouth held a hint of a smile. He gazed at the boxes filled with moist dirt and flecked with white, like a black sweater with bits of fluff on it. “The top berth of mushrooms will be ready for harvesting soon,” he said.

Sam nodded, trying to remember what they’d learned on one of their previous trips to Government House.

“If you’re still here in two or three days, you’ll get to see the mushrooms pop through the ground.” He frowned slightly. “Though this is not the place where most of His Honour Amédée Forget’s guests like to dally.”

“Oh no...” J.J. whispered. “Amédée Forget hasn’t lived at Government House since 1910.”

Sam started to respond. “Ah, we were, ah, that is we aren’t, uh...” Her voice trailed off. Where *were* they?

Mr. Watt raised his eyebrows at them.

J.J. recovered first. “We aren’t actually, well, we really aren’t His Honour Amédée Forget’s guests,” she said in a low voice.

“You’ll have to speak up if you want me to hear,” Mr. Watt rubbed his left ear. “Sounded like you said you weren’t His Honour’s guests.” He stared hard at them.

“We *are* visitors to Government House,” Sam said. What if Mr. Watt asked them to leave? Would they be able to find their way back to their own time?

He nodded. “That’s all right then.”

“Wh-what was your name again?” J.J. asked.

“Mr. George Watt, head gardener here since 1894.” He gave a slight bow of his head.

Sam’s fingers grasped J.J.’s arm. No doubt about it. George Watt *was* a ghost. Mushrooms hadn’t been grown in the stately home for decades. How could their surroundings seem so real? It was nothing like the ghost encounters they’d had before.

“Have we gone back in time?” Sam hissed at J.J.

“We’d better get back...uh, upstairs,” J.J. said. Sam bobbed her head in agreement.

George Watt pulled out his pocket watch and checked the time. “A little early for noon break,” he said. He stood

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polishing the cover. “But I expect you have other things to do.”

“What a nice watch,” said Sam, when she caught a glint of silver.

He held up the watch. She and J.J. leaned closer to look at the intricate design etched onto the silver.

“It was a parting gift from the duchess, who I worked for before coming to Canada,” he said, as he tucked the watch carefully back into his vest pocket.

“Where did you come from?” asked Sam.

“Scotland.” He stowed the handkerchief in a pocket in his pants. “Now mind yourselves a few moments while I turn on the hall light so you can see your way.” He glanced back at them. “Make sure to close the door tight. Don’t want to have any light leaking into the room. Mushrooms need darkness.”

Sam and J.J. stood inside the doorway, their heads poking out as George Watt switched on his flashlight. He started down the dark hall.

“Wonder what year it is?” Sam kept her voice low.

“1903, though why you wouldn’t know this begs a serious question.” Mr. Watt had an odd sound to his voice as he turned to face them.

“We’re just, uh, being silly,” said Sam with an embarrassed-looking grin. His hearing seemed to have suddenly improved.

J.J. broke in. “How long have you been growing mushrooms?”

“This is the fifth year now.” As if doubting their math skills, he added, “That would be since 1898.”

“That’s a very long time,” said Sam. She stepped into the hallway, with J.J. right behind her. “You are obviously

very good at it.”

Mr. Watt smiled at her praise, and then continued down the hall.

“How are we going to get back to the others?” J.J. turned a worried face to Sam.

“Just go through the door that brought you here,” George Watt pointed.

At the same time as he yanked on the light string, Sam whispered, “No one will ever believe we’ve been back in time with George Watt.”

Instantly, Mr. Watt disappeared. And so did the hallway.

Sam and J.J. found themselves in a totally different room. In the dark. Silence. No hissing. No smell of dirt.

“What happened?” J.J. gasped.

“I think we flipped in time again!” Sam shivered. “How did we do that? And where are we now?” Sam spun around, and then moved closer to J.J.

“I have no idea.” J.J. cowered tight to Sam.

They stared towards a streak of light that seeped around the cracks of a door. Their eyes adjusted to find a clutter of old, discarded furniture. From far away, they heard the sounds of their schoolmates’ chattering.

“At least we seem to be in our own time.” J.J. shuddered.

“Let’s get out of here,” Sam said, as she and J.J. grabbed hands and made for the outline of the door.

They tripped and clattered around stacks of chairs, small tables and other bits of furniture, swiping at cobwebs and sneezing at dust. Sam tugged on the doorknob, but it was stuck. J.J. gave it another yank.

Yes! It opened. By the time they ran down the hallway

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to the bottom of the main staircase, they were breathing hard. They were just in time to see the last of their classmates disappear around the corner at the top of the stairs.

J.J. clung to the banister, trying to catch her breath.

Beside her, Sam gasped. "Not only did we see a ghost, but we actually went back into his time!"

J.J. shook her head. "I'm not sure I like this ghost-detecting business anymore."

"It was a little strange." Sam started laughing. "But can you imagine the look on Mr. Watt's face when we disappeared?"

J.J. giggled. "He was probably more surprised than we were."

They laughed harder, clinging to one another until they were weak. They sat on the bottom step and wiped the tears from their eyes.

Suddenly, the lights went out around them.

"No!" said Sam. "This can't be happening again."

Sam bolted up the carpeted staircase, with J.J. on her heels.