

← PART TWO →

WE BEGIN OUR
INVESTIGATION 



1

The thought kept on worrying me, all the way through Prep. I wanted to slip a note to Daisy about it, but King Henry was glaring at me too hard. What if the murderer had seen me? After all, it must have been a close-run thing to make Miss Bell vanish between the first time I had gone into the Gym and the second.

After we had lined up in the washroom for toothbrushes, three to each porcelain sink, we got into bed. I took advantage of a pillow fight between Kitty and Lavinia to creep over to Daisy's narrow bed and climb in beside her.

'Daisy,' I whispered. 'What if the murderer *saw* me?'

'Saw you do what?' Daisy asked, rolling over. 'Ow, Hazel, your feet are blocks of ice.'

'Saw me in the Gym. After the murder!'

Daisy sighed. 'How on earth would they have seen you? They weren't there when you came in the first time, were they?'

'No,' I said. 'But what if they were hiding? In the Cupboard perhaps?'

'You're a chump,' said Daisy. 'If they were in the Cupboard, they couldn't have *seen* you through the closed door, could they? And you didn't say anything, did you, so even if they *were* hiding they couldn't have known it was you.'

'But we came back! What about then? How do you know for certain that they won't be after us both now that we know?'

'VO didn't say our names,' said Daisy wearily. 'I'm sure she didn't. Therefore the murderer will have no idea who either of us is. I promise you, Hazel, on my word as an excellent detective. Say it. I am an excellent detective.'

'You are an excellent detective,' I said, because she was digging her fingers into my arm.

'You see? It's quite all right. There's nothing to be worried about.'

I tried to make myself believe her.

'Unless, of course,' said Daisy casually, 'the murderer is just biding their time; waiting to find out exactly who we are and how much we saw before they come after us both. But that's not particularly likely. Now go back to your own bed, Watson, you're squashing me. We've got important work to do tomorrow.'

I went back to my bed, but it was a very long time before I got to sleep. I could hear Daisy breathing peacefully next to me, and thumping from Lavinia's bed as she rolled to and fro in her sleep. But then there were other noises I was not so sure about. The House pipes squealed and groaned louder than I had ever heard them before, and then there was a squeak below me, rattles and rustles in the walls; a soft sigh just outside the door. A floorboard, I told myself – mice ... Matron on her rounds – but I was most shamefully afraid. I squeezed my eyes tight shut,

to stop myself looking at the curtain floating in the breeze from our open window (Matron believes that fresh air is good for children), and tried to be brave. But I kept seeing Miss Bell's head lolling away from me, and when I did get to sleep my dreams were awful.



We began our detective work the next day.

We filed into Prayers, The One blaring away at the organ, to find that Miss Bell was not in her usual seat. This was just as Daisy and I expected, of course, but shocking for the rest of the school. You see, Miss Bell had never been late for anything before. She had always been perfectly punctual, so her absence from Prayers seemed as impossible as the Hall simply falling down around our heads. The wooden pews filled, and although the rule in Prayers is dead silence, punishable by detention, a whisper rose up like a shell pressed against your ear, making all the mistresses

and prefects frown and glare about them.

'Where's Miss Bell?' breathed Beanie. 'She's *never* ill!'

'Perhaps this is the day Miss Griffin is going to announce that she's the new Deputy,' Kitty whispered back, louder than she meant to. 'I'll bet anything they're about to come onto the stage together.'

'Girls!' snarled Mamzelle, whipping round from the row in front to glare at the third form. Her sharp face was looking particularly sour, and we quietened down at once. '*Silence*. Contemplate 'eaven, eef you please.'

The third form was quiet. But then Miss Griffin walked onto the stage, making us all rise to our feet, and she was alone. Kitty nudged Beanie in amazement, but then Miss Griffin began to speak and it was impossible not to pay attention to what she was saying.

I have not yet said much about Miss Griffin, other than that she is our Headmistress. That is because it is quite difficult to remember that Miss Griffin might need describing. Miss Griffin is a presence. I cannot imagine Deepdean without Miss Griffin, or

Miss Griffin without Deepdean. If the school was a person, it would wear Miss Griffin's neat swooped-back grey hair and immaculate Harris tweed.

Every day she glides along the corridors in sensible shoes that are just high enough to click. When I heard her during lessons I used to vaguely connect her with an automaton from the future. Even though I know it is shrimp-like foolishness, I still rather think that if you peeled away Miss Griffin's tidy outside you would find rows of gleaming clockwork wheels, busily ticking over to keep Deepdean going. It is very difficult to have an emotion about her, the way I like Mamzelle (despite her incomprehensible accent) and despise hockey-playing Miss Hopkins. Miss Griffin is simply *there*, as much a part of Deepdean School as the building itself. You only ever get to know her if you are one of the particularly promising Big Girls, whom she tutors for university entrance exams, or a prefect – who are not at all like the rest of us.

Miss Griffin gave her sermon, all about honour and striving which are the themes most Tuesdays. As soon as she began to run through the daily

messages, you could feel the whole school waiting to hear news about Miss Bell, but there was only a reminder about the fourth form's visit to a museum next Wednesday and then a scolding little notice about mess in The One's art room.

It may seem a bit odd, since Miss Griffin did not say anything at all about Miss Bell, but that was how I *knew* that she had been murdered. If even Miss Griffin did not know what had happened to Miss Bell, then the murderer really had managed to hide what they had done. Just as Daisy had said, it was up to us to detect it. The Detective Society's first real case! My stomach jumped like one of Lavinia's Mexican beans, and I couldn't tell whether I was terrified or wildly excited.

Miss Griffin, of course, had no idea about the state of my insides. 'And now, the hymn,' she said.

It was 'Lift Up Your Hearts'. The One pounded away with gusto, and under cover of the organ's enormous trumpeting blares Daisy leaned over to me.

'*E'en so, with one accord* – so, nothing about the Bell, then,' she sang.

'I know – *we lift them to the Lord,*' I replied. 'What shall we do?'

'Detect, of course,' warbled Daisy. 'We'll talk about our first lines of enquiry later – *The mire of sin, the weight of guilty fears* – isn't this song apt, though!'

Miss Griffin glared out from her podium, as though she had heard us, and I gulped and went back to singing the proper words.



It seemed that the masters and mistresses were determined to carry on as though nothing had changed. I wondered who would be waiting for us when we arrived for Science in second hour, but even I was amazed when we found Mamzelle waiting in Miss Bell's usual place, with a white lab coat on over her silky blouse. The rest of the form were simply gobsmacked.

'Bonjour, girls,' Mamzelle said. 'Mees Bell eez not 'ere *aujourd'hui*, *et alors* I will be taking you for ze lesson.'

'Will we have to speak in French?' asked Beanie in consternation.

'Not unless you want to, Rebecca,' said Mamzelle, shaking her hair and pursing her lips in amusement. 'Fear not, in *la France* I was ze mistress for Science, and so I know about what I will be teaching.'

'What's happened to Miss Bell?' asked Kitty.

'I cannot tell you Mees Bell's business, Kitty. I can only say that she eez not in school today and so I must take her lessons for her. Now sit down, all of you, and we will discuss ze cells of plants, which I gather eez what Mees Bell had planned for you.'

'Curiouser and curiouser,' whispered Daisy to me as we sat down. I could see everyone else around the room making surprised faces at each other behind their textbooks.

I really did feel as though I had fallen down Alice's rabbit hole. Even if I had not seen Miss Bell lying there on the Gym floor, I would have known that something terrible had happened to her. Miss Bell, after all, had never been even a minute late for a single lesson, and now here she was, missing an entire morning of school. If I had been a master or

mistress, I would have been ringing for the police directly, but it seemed none of them had. It was infuriating.

I was itching to speak to Daisy about it, and I could see, from the way that she was bouncing about on her chair, that she was dying to talk to me as well.

The bell for bunbreak rang, and Daisy spun round to face me. 'All right, Watson, this is it! Mental case-book at the ready! Our first mission is to dig up all the idle gossip we can. Before we begin our investigation properly, I want to know what everyone *else* thinks is going on.'

I would have preferred to proceed straight to the investigation, but there is no use arguing with Daisy when she has a Detective Society mission in mind. So I summoned all my Watson-y thoughts, nodded, and followed her outside.



4

On the lawn, the whole school was buzzing with made-up news about Miss Bell. Unfortunately, none of it suggested that she might be dead. On the contrary, most people seemed to think she had decided to run away – generally because she had been jilted by The One, although there were odder theories. One of the shrimps was telling us that Miss Bell was on the run because the government was after her, (although the shrimp could not say why the government might be interested in a schoolmistress), and another shrimp insisted that it was not the government at all, but a secret organization that

had something to do with *the East*. She looked at me rather fearfully as she said that, as though being from Hong Kong made me the East in human form and therefore untrustworthy. I hate all that. Usually, once they know me, English people simply pretend that I am not Oriental, and I simply do not remind them about it. But sometimes they slip, and little bits of nastiness that are usually hidden come sliding out of their mouths, which can be quite difficult to politely ignore.

That particular bunbreak I was doomed to have my difference noticed. I had several people hurriedly stop talking when we wandered past their groups, presumably in case I was a hostile agent of the East. Then a fifth former whom I had never spoken to before came up to ask me if it was really true that my father ran the opium trade. My father is a banker in Hong Kong, and I told her so. It was plain that she did not believe me.

‘She needn’t be snobbish about it,’ said Daisy to me when the fifth former had run off to join her friends. ‘Her father’s a dastardly smuggler. Everyone knows that.’

I was comforted by this, although I never quite know where Daisy gets this sort of information from. She is always coming out with things like that, but when I asked her once she only said, 'Oh, you know, my uncle,' and looked vague.

After that Daisy vanished into the crowd of people eating their buns on the North Lawn. She was gone some time. I craned my head around looking for her, but then someone seized the back of my pullover and I turned round to see Daisy again, looking very cheerful.

'Listen to this!' she hissed. 'The rumour is that Miss Bell's resigned. I just spoke to King Henry, and she told me.'

It might sound odd – that a third former like Daisy should be able to speak to the lofty Head Girl – but it is merely another absolutely English thing. The English have a habit of being related to nearly anyone you can mention, and King Henry turns out to be the fifth cousin of Daisy's mother. She and Daisy go riding together in the hols and have tea visits and so on, which makes it all right for Daisy to talk to King Henry sometimes when they are at Deepdean.

'There was a letter on the Headmistress's desk this morning; King Henry read it because Miss Griffin showed her. Miss Griffin is still trying to decide the right time to break it to the girls. King Henry must have liked Miss Bell more than I thought: she was looking awfully distressed when she told me.'

'But Miss Bell can't have resigned!' I exclaimed.

'I know *that*,' said Daisy irritably. 'Miss Bell's stone dead and therefore incapable of writing anything, let alone a resignation letter. But don't you see what this means? It absolutely proves, once and for all, that what you discovered was a murder; and that the murderer is someone who knows Miss Bell's handwriting well enough to forge it. It's also got to be someone high up enough in the school to be able to march into Miss Griffin's office and plant the letter on her desk.'

'A master or mistress!' I gasped, horrified. '*That's* why they're all pretending that nothing's wrong!'

'Well, not all of them did it,' Daisy pointed out. 'But the one who did – whoever it was – has managed to bamboozle the others with that note. That's what Mamzelle meant about not "prying into Miss Bell's

affairs". This is really it, Hazel. This means that it's up to us! If the Detective Society doesn't do something, nobody will!

I had a momentary un-detective-like pang. 'Are you sure we shouldn't just go to the police?' I asked.

'Don't be stupid,' said Daisy severely. 'We don't have any evidence yet. We don't even have a body. They'd simply laugh at us. No, we're on our own. And anyway, this is *our* murder case.'

I was not sure I liked the sound of that. Daisy was talking as though the case was just another tuck theft, but I knew it wasn't. What I had seen in the Gym had become, in my mind, my own personal ghost story in which bodies appeared and then vanished into thin air. Except that it wasn't a story at all, but very real. I was still terrified at the thought that the murderer might know that I had seen Miss Bell's body. What if I ended up a corpse myself? In a few years it might be *my* bloody ghost that all the Big Girls frightened the shrimps with, instead of Verity Abraham's. The thought made me shudder.

'But I thought you didn't even *like* Miss Bell,' I said, to make myself stop thinking about it.

'It's not about liking,' said Daisy sternly. 'It's the principle of the thing. People can't be allowed to get away with murder at Deepdean. Oh Hazel, it'll be so exciting! The Detective Society will be real at last!'

At this point, the bell rang for the end of bunbreak.

'Right,' said Daisy. 'I move for our first official meeting to be held after Prep this evening. In the meantime, since the murder of Miss Bell is now a proper Wells and Wong Detective Society case, you can keep on writing up notes, and I'll start planning our course of action. And we can both keep our eyes and ears open. Detective Society handshake?'

We shook hands, clicked our fingers, shook again, made the Mystery Gesture, and then rushed off for Art with The One.



I gave up on the rest of Tuesday's lessons. I spent all my lunch break scribbling case notes, and then tucked this casebook into my French textbook and carried on writing. Daisy, sitting next to me, covered for me beautifully (and only nudged me when she didn't agree with what I was writing). She was stewing away at the problem too.

Usually Daisy takes care to dawdle over her prep, and sigh, and look puzzled, and pass notes to people about the second part of question four. That evening, though, she flew through it and then sat gazing raptly at a chip of paint on the wall until Vir-

ginia Overton who, unluckily for us, was taking Prep that evening, snapped, 'Wells! Nose back in your book.'

After that, Daisy bent her head over her exercise book and spent the next fifteen minutes pretending to write. On my other side, Beanie was stuck in the tortures of her French assignment, her face screwed up and the end of her plait jammed into her mouth. Beyond her, Lavinia was plodding angrily through a Latin exercise. From behind us, Kitty kicked Beanie's chair and passed up a note. Beanie looked at it and squeaked with laughter, and the noise made Virginia look up – just in time to see Daisy slip a folded up piece of paper onto my desk.

'Wells!' said Virginia. '*No passing notes, you know the rules. If it's so important, you can jolly well come up here and read it out to all of us.*'

Daisy did not look alarmed by this at all. She stood up, took the paper back from me and walked to the front of the prep room. At Virginia's desk she turned to face us all, opened up the piece of paper and, in a solemn voice, read out, '*I wish Cook would give us something other than sprouts for dinner; they disagree*

with me awfully.'

'Wells, you little beast!' cried Virginia as we all squealed with laughter. 'Give that to me!'

She snatched the page from Daisy's hand and read it through, her face flushing with annoyance. 'Oh, go and sit down, and if I hear anything more from you this evening I shall report you to Matron. And be quiet, the rest of you little horrors! Shush! *Shush!*'

Daisy, triumphant, gave her audience the slightest of curtseys and then took her seat again amidst general delighted chaos and furious shushings from Virginia. As she sank down next to me, though, she leaned her head against mine for a moment and whispered, 'Meeting in the airing cupboard tonight after toothbrushes to talk about you-know-what.'

I went back to pretending to write an essay on the failings of George III. Classic Daisy, I thought. It was just like her. Then my stomach squished as I thought about what she had just said. Were we really ready for our first murder case?



6

Later, when all the prefects on duty were running about chasing shrimps who should have already been in bed (there were a great deal more of them than usual that evening, and I suspect that Daisy may have been behind it), I slipped out – with my casebook stuffed up my pyjama jacket and clutching my toothbrush for cover – and tiptoed down to the airing cupboard on the second-floor corridor. A moment later Daisy padded into view, in her slippers and regulation pyjamas, looking extremely casual. She peered up and down the dim corridor, then, satisfied that there was no one else in sight, seized

my arm, more or less dragged me into the airing cupboard and pulled the door shut behind her.

The air inside was thick and damp and very dark – I stumbled against Daisy and she said, ‘Ow, Hazel, you clod.’

There was a ripping noise and a snap, which made me jump. I said, ‘What’s that?’ and Daisy said, ‘Our cover. Oh, do stop flailing about ... Here—’

With a *pop* the electric light came on.

Rows and rows of wooden racks piled with grey school clothes came into view, as did Daisy, who was leaning back against the racks and glaring at me. I saw that one of the buttons on her pyjama jacket had been ripped off, leaving the fabric poking through.

‘Well,’ said Daisy, ‘sit down.’

I perched myself on a grey pile of games knickers. This made the wooden slats of the shelf creak dangerously, and I jumped off again.

‘All right,’ said Daisy, leaping up onto a rack with a cheerful bounce, and swinging her slippered feet as she spoke. ‘This meeting of the Detective Society is hereby called into session at ten minutes past eight on this, Tuesday the thirtieth of October. Present are

Daisy Wells, President, and Hazel Wong, Secretary. Tonight we will be discussing the Case of the Murder of Miss Bell. Any objections?’

‘No,’ I said, writing busily.

‘Excellent, Watson,’ said Daisy. ‘All right, the order of the meeting is as follows: first, the facts of the case. Second, the suspect list. Third, the current location of the body. And fourth, our plan of action.’

‘Do we *have* any facts of the case?’ I asked, pausing and looking up at Daisy. It seemed to me that we were starting off without any of the things that detectives usually take for granted. The body had vanished (and even though I had seen it, I had been too busy behaving like a frightened little shrimp to pay proper attention to it), and what was left of the crime scene must by now have been tidied away by Jones the handyman on his rounds. We had no photographic snaps to look at, no police interviews to read and no coroner’s report to look at either. To me, the situation seemed rather bleak.

‘Of course we do!’ said Daisy. ‘Come on, Hazel, don’t give up before we’ve even started. We know there was a murder because you found the body. We

know *who* was murdered – Miss Bell – and how she was murdered too.’

‘By being pushed off the Gym balcony!’ I agreed.

‘We can also make a jolly good stab at *when* it happened. Look – the last lesson of the day ends at four fifteen p.m. – which on Mondays happens to be second-form Dance. You went to the Gym—?’

‘At five forty-five,’ I said.

‘That means that Miss Bell must have been killed some time between four fifteen – after all, one of those second formers would have noticed the body if it was there during Dance – and five forty-five. There, you see? That’s *what, who, where, how* and *when*. That wasn’t so difficult.’

I realized she was right.

‘So, we do have some facts after all,’ Daisy went on. ‘And that brings us rather neatly to our second point: the suspects. Who might want to do away with Miss Bell – or rather, considering what’s happened this term, who wouldn’t?’

‘Do you really think it has to be a master or mistress?’ I asked.

'I think what we've worked out already practically proves it,' said Daisy. 'The resignation note, left on Miss Griffin's desk, in handwriting that looked like Miss Bell's – only a master or mistress could have done that, after all. And we've worked out that Miss Bell was killed after school hours, by someone strong enough to shove her over the side of the Gym balcony. I'd say that was all quite conclusive. So, which of them could have done it?'

'Well, Miss Parker,' I said. 'Because of what happened with Miss Bell and The One.'

'The jealousy angle,' said Daisy. 'I like it. Think of all those rows they've been having!'

I thought about Miss Parker in one of her legendary rages, dragging her fingers through her short black hair and shrieking, and decided that she was a very good suspect indeed.

'Who else?' Daisy asked.

'What about Miss Hopkins? She might have been afraid The One would jilt her for Miss Bell.'

'Now, that's a silly suggestion,' said Daisy. 'For one thing, it's a terribly weak motive. For another, I happen to know that Miss Hopkins was up in the

Pavilion talking tactics with the hockey lot on Monday after school. They've got that match against St Chator's this weekend, you know – they're terrified about it, so the Hop was helping them prepare. She couldn't have killed Miss Bell. And for a third – well, Miss Hopkins simply wouldn't do a thing like murder. She couldn't. She's – she's *pukka*.'

It was my turn to sigh. Daisy is quite obsessed with Miss Hopkins, and I felt that she was ruling her out unfairly. But I couldn't argue with such an alibi.

'All right, then,' I said. 'Miss Lappet and Miss Tennyson. They both want the Deputy Head job, don't they, but we all know that Miss Bell was about to be given it. What if one of them thought they'd get it by clearing Miss Bell out of the way?'

'*Much* better,' said Daisy, pleased. 'Neither of them have alibis that I can think of – and we know that Miss Tennyson was around school at the right time, don't we? After all, she took us for Lit. Soc yesterday, and societies all finish at five twenty. And then we saw her outside Mr MacLean's study shortly after you discovered the body, not far from the Gym at all. So ... who else? I suppose Mamzelle and Mr MacLean,

because we saw them near the scene of the crime at the right time too. Though I can't think of a motive for either of them, can you?'

I shook my head. 'Shouldn't we add The One, for the same reason?' I asked. 'He was there – I saw him stick his head out of his cubby as we were going past.'

'Very true,' agreed Daisy, nodding. 'Though, again, why ever would he kill Miss Bell? It's not as though he's even interested in her any more. Really, it ought to have been *her* killing *him*, and of course that didn't happen.'

'Rage?' I suggested. 'Blackmail? Remorse?'

'Hmm,' said Daisy. 'Not yet proven. But lovely work otherwise. Just look, we've got six suspects for our list! Write them down, do. Then we can cross them off later as we discover their alibis.'

I wrote them down.

SUSPECT LIST

1. *Miss Parker.* MOTIVE: Jealous rage.
ALIBI: None yet.
2. *Miss Hopkins.* MOTIVE: ~~getting rid of a love rival.~~ ALIBI: ~~Good. Up in Pavilion at time of murder.~~ RULED OUT.
3. *Miss Lappet.* MOTIVE: Wants the Deputy Headmistress job. ALIBI: None yet.
4. *Miss Tennyson.* MOTIVE: Wants the Deputy Headmistress job. ALIBI: None yet.
NOTES: Was observed near Gym just after murder, by Daisy Wells and Hazel Wong.
5. *Mamzelle.* MOTIVE: None yet.
ALIBI: None yet. NOTES: Was observed near Gym just after murder, by Daisy Wells and Hazel Wong.
6. *Mr MacLean.* MOTIVE: None yet.
ALIBI: None yet. NOTES: Was observed near Gym just after murder, by Daisy Wells and Hazel Wong.
7. *The One.* MOTIVE: ~~Anger & Blackmail~~
None yet. ALIBI: None yet. NOTES: Was observed near Gym just after murder, by Daisy Wells and Hazel Wong.

'All right, excellent work,' said Daisy. 'Now we must consider the matter of the body.'

I did not like the sound of that at all. In fact, it gave me the shudders. There we were, back again to the horrible idea that the murderer might still have been in the Gym when I arrived.

'Where did it go?' asked Daisy, not noticing the look on my face. 'How did the murderer move it? They wouldn't have had long, after all. If you left the Gym at five forty-five and came back with me and Virginia at, well, let's say five fifty-two – that seems about right – then they wouldn't have been able to get far. Bodies are extraordinarily heavy, my uncle says.'

I wished Daisy hadn't said that. It might have been a joke, but it made my chills worse than ever.

'I'd say that it was more than possible that your suggestion about the murderer hiding in the Cupboard is correct,' said Daisy excitedly, sounding more and more like something from one of her detective novels. 'And he or she could have dragged the body in there too! Imagine – you, me and Virginia, just a few steps away from the killer and the victim. But

if it *was* there at that moment, where was it moved to afterwards? Since no one using the Gym today noticed a body, it must have been moved somewhere else after we left yesterday evening. Perhaps the murderer used the trolley that Jones stores in the Cupboard, to move it more easily. Anyway, that's another of our tasks, to discover the current location of Miss Bell's body.'

'Ugh,' I said, shivering. I didn't want to see Miss Bell's corpse ever again, and I couldn't bear the thought that both it and the murderer might have been nearby when I returned to the Gym with Virginia and Daisy. Daisy, however, rolled her eyes at me. Things like that do not bother her at all. I don't think she sees them in her imagination in quite the same way I do.

'I think investigating the body's whereabouts will involve more careful planning than we can manage right now. We can't just go nosing about the school looking for a corpse, after all. I'll have to think about that. But – Hazel, write this down – the plan for tomorrow is as follows: we must establish alibis for the masters and mistresses on our suspect list. We

can try asking them directly, of course, but it may be easier simply to ask other girls. However, remember that this mission requires constant vigilance! Any answer may lead to the truth.'

'Yes,' I said, fighting down my nerves. 'I know. But – I still can't believe that one of *our* masters or mistresses could have committed a *murder*.'

'Oh, don't be silly, Hazel. My uncle says anyone's capable of murder, deep down. Only remember—'

But at that moment, the door to the airing cupboard was wrenched open and Virginia Overton appeared before us, looking grim. As quickly as I could, I dropped my casebook onto the floor and sat on it. Luckily, Virginia is sometimes less than observant.

'Whatever are you doing?' she asked us furiously. 'Come out of there at once.'

Daisy was unperturbed. 'The button just popped off my pyjama jacket. Hazel was helping me find a new one.'

'I *don't* think so,' said Virginia. 'It's nearly ten o'clock – you ought to have been in bed half an hour ago. Get back to your dorm immediately, and I shall be telling Matron about this later.'

Under her baleful eye we scurried out of the cupboard towards our dorm, Daisy clutching a new pyjama jacket. 'Beast,' she said, as soon as we were round the corner. 'She only wants us out of it so she and Belinda Vance can canoodle in there. Betsy North says she caught them at it last week.'

'Oh,' I said.

'The problem with this place,' said Daisy, pausing in the stairwell to wriggle out of her old pyjama jacket and into her new one, 'is that there are far too many secrets wherever you turn. And most of them are so *pointless*. It doesn't make it easy for two detectives to do their jobs.'

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It might seem strange that someone as popular as Daisy should have a secret like the Detective Society. Certainly, when I first met her I never suspected the sort of person she really is. The first time I met Daisy would be hard to forget. It was the first time I'd ever stepped onto a games field – and incidentally, also the first time I truly thought I might die.

I had been at Deepdean for less than a day. My boat from Hong Kong had only docked in England a week before, and I still couldn't understand how anywhere in the world could be so cold. I watched the English girls happily running out onto the field

wearing skimpy games skirts, and decided that I would have nothing to do with such madness. But I found myself ordered outside anyway, my lumpy legs sticking out underneath my itchy grey games skirt and games knickers (according to the English, the only place you can get cold is your behind, so they make you put on extra underwear over your real underwear to keep warm), and my frozen pink hands clutching my shiny new hockey stick.

Then Miss Hopkins blew her whistle, and suddenly all the other girls began to pound up and down in front of me, screaming and waving their sticks about as though they wanted to murder each other. It began to rain – not at all like the warm rain I was used to at home, but as though someone was shooting flakes of ice into my face and all up my bare, goose-pimpley legs.

That was the moment when I realized that England might not be exactly how it had seemed in my jolly school-story books.

I had been hearing about England – and the boarding schools real English children went to – all my life. My father had studied at one when he was a little

boy, and he never stops talking about it. He made me learn to read and write in English – and not only me but all our servants, even the *mui jai* – and then he gave me heaps and heaps of English books to read.

All the same, I never thought I would go to an English school myself. All the boys from families like mine did, of course, but girls generally stayed on Hong Kong Island. I would have too, if two things had not happened: first, my father's concubine had another daughter. This meant that my father's dream of sending a son of his to school in England was ruined again. Secondly, a girl my family knows, Victoria Cheng, was sent away to Hampden School for Ladies, in Cairo. Her father showed mine a picture of Victoria standing stiffly next to lots of other pale little girls in pinafores, and my father decided on the spot that if the Chengs could do it, we could do it too, and better.

The next thing I knew, my father was telling me that even though it was the middle of the year, I was going away to school myself – and not to Cairo, but to the real thing in England. 'If Cheng thinks that he can get the better of me like that,' said my father,

'he's wrong. Besides, no school in the world could change the fact that his daughter is stupid. My clever Hazel is worth ten Victoria Chengs, and now she's going to prove it.'

My mother was furious. She hates my father's obsession with England. 'Western school never did any Chinese person good,' she said.

'Oh, come now, darling,' said my father, laughing. 'What about me?'

'Exactly,' snapped my mother, and for the next week she refused to speak anything but Cantonese in protest.

Of course, I was wild with excitement. Like my father, I was obsessed with the real, original England. Our big white cake of a house, and the whole compound it sits in, is filled with Western things. We have a tidy green lawn bordered with pink roses (my mother is always complaining about all the watering they need), the Folio Society sends us heavy, beautiful-smelling parcels of books each month to fill up my father's library, and in every room the patterned wallpaper is nearly hidden by paintings – of grand English mansions surrounded by large

fields and very small farmers, of people riding beautiful brown horses or taking tea on green lawns. In the dining room we have a great big picture of the King wearing his moustache and medals, next to the Queen with her pearls and white dress. 'It's my little corner of England,' says my father – and when I looked out over the top of our compound wall, at the rickshaw drivers in the loud, dusty streets below, and beyond to Victoria Harbour, jam-packed with its junks and steamers, our house seemed part of a different world entirely.

The day I found out I was going to England I sat in our drawing room – its mahogany furniture a little warped and fuzzy from the heat, its wallpaper peeling – and imagined myself at school, arm-in-arm with a golden-haired girl, a friend who would turn me into a perfect English Miss, like her.

But standing on the cold games field that morning, it seemed to me that all the English Misses were actually horrible and mad. I clutched my hockey stick harder than ever – and then someone ran into me, extremely hard. I wobbled and gasped (I am so solid that it is not easy to knock me over) and the

someone said, 'Oh, I say, I'm so very sorry.'

And that, of course, was Daisy. Her hair was falling out of its plaits chaotically and her eyes were extremely blue, and although the rest of England was not exactly turning out as I had expected, here, at least, was one English ideal – my golden-haired friend come to life; a person absolutely made from the England of my books and paintings.

When I think back to that moment, I realize how silly I was.