Spooky House

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Chapter One

It's lunchtime and the weather is hot. Billie B Brown and her friends sit under the peppercorn tree at the edge of the playground.

Billie pulls a banana sandwich out of her lunchbox. Then she pulls out something wrapped in tissue paper.

‘What’s that?’ Mika asks.

‘Guess,’ says Billie, smiling secretively. She hands Mika the bundle of tissue paper. ‘Don’t open it, though!’

Mika closes her eyes and feels through the tissues. ‘Hmmm. It has a long thin bit,’ she says slowly. ‘And a round bit. And it’s hard.’

‘I know what it is,’ says Jack. He has already seen Billie’s new present because he lives next door. Billie showed it to him yesterday.

‘Don’t tell!’ says Billie.

‘Can I see?’ says Alex.

Mika hands him the package.

‘Give us a clue?’ asks Mika.

Billie grins. ‘It makes things bigger.’

‘A magnifying glass!’ Mika says.

‘You’re right!’ says Billie. She takes the package back from Alex and carefully unwraps it. There, glinting in the sunlight, is a brand-new magnifying glass. ‘My grandma gave it to me,’ she says proudly.

‘Cool,’ Alex and Mika say together. They touch the glass with their fingertips.

‘You can burn stuff with a magnifying glass,’ Alex says. ‘If we hold it over some dry leaves we could start a fire. I saw it on TV once.’

‘No way,’ says Jack. ‘That’s dangerous! Mr Benetto would be pretty angry if you burned the whole school down.’

Billie beckons for her friends to listen closely and lowers her voice.

‘Actually, I was thinking we could start a secret mystery club. We can use the magnifying glass to be spies and look for clues.’

‘It’s detectives who use magnifying glasses, not spies,’ Alex says.

Billie rolls her eyes. Sometimes Alex acts like he knows **everything**. ‘That’s what I meant,’ she says, shrugging. ‘Detectives.’

‘Aren’t they the same thing?’ Mika says.

‘No,’ says Alex. ‘Detectives are like Sherlock Holmes. Spies are like James Bond.’

‘Can I be James Bond?’ says Mika.

‘Bags being Sherlock Holmes!’ says Jack.

‘That’s not what I meant!’ says Billie, feeling frustrated that her friends are being silly. ‘We’ll be more like the Famous Five. Or the Secret Seven.’

‘But there’s only four of us!’ Jack grins. ‘Unless you want to invite Scraps?’

Alex woofs and Mika laughs.

Billie can't help grinning a little. But she wants her friends to listen. 'Come on, I'm serious,' she says.

'Where are we going to find a mystery around here, Billie?' Jack says. He swings his arms out wide.

'Unless you want to find out the mystery of the stinky lunchbox?' Alex jokes.

'Or the missing pencil case?' Mika giggles.

Billie sighs. *Jack's right,* she thinks. *School isn't a very exciting place to explore. Neither are our homes. Even the park isn't very exciting anymore, now that we are big.*

Billie tries to think of a place where they might find a mystery to solve. She has to be **quick**. Already her friends have started talking about other things. If she doesn't think of something soon, they won't want to start a secret club with her at all!

Just then, Billie has an idea. A super-dooper idea! She knows the perfect place. It's **mysterious** and **spooky** and she is sure her friends will be impressed. 'I know somewhere,' she says loudly. 'A really scary place. But only super-brave kids would dare to go there.'

'Where?' ask the others. They turn to face her, suddenly interested again.

Billie leans back against the trunk of the tree and smiles.

She knows her friends are paying attention now. ‘The spooky house at the end of our street,’ she says.

Jack gasps. ‘The haunted house?’

Billie nods.

‘There’s no such thing as a haunted house,’ Alex scoffs. He crosses his arms against his chest.

Billie feels annoyed with Alex. Even though she is pretty sure there’s no such thing as well, she still wants to make absolutely super sure.

Besides, she really wants to start a secret mystery club and Alex is ruining everything. So she ignores him and turns to Mika and Jack, putting on her spookiest voice.

'Sometimes when you walk past the house, you can hear **sawing** or **grinding** noises,' she says. 'That's the witch in there – grinding up bones!'

'Witches don't live in haunted houses,' Alex laughs. 'That's ghosts.'

‘There are ghosts, too,’ Billie adds. ‘They wait until a kid walks past on their own and then catch them. Then the witch grinds up their bones and eats them!’

Jack and Mika **shiver**.

‘No-one has ever seen anyone go in,’ Billie says in her spooky voice. ‘Or come out.’ She is having fun making up the story.

Then she announces, ‘The first mystery of the Secret Mystery Club is to find out who is living in that old house at the end of our street.

Who is brave enough to come with me?' She holds up her magnifying glass to her eye.

Mika shoots up her hand. Alex puts up his hand, too, but he rolls his eyes like he still doesn't believe Billie's story.

Last of all, Jack puts up his hand, very slowly. He looks worried. Billie knows he is only putting up his hand because he doesn't want to be left behind.

Billie feels a teensy bit bad.

She didn't mean to scare Jack.
But she really, **really** wants to find an exciting mystery for the Secret Mystery Club to solve.

Jack will be okay, she thinks.

She hopes she is right.