

# THE NOT SO SECRET GARDEN



BY THE WOODIES



THE NOT SO  
SECRET  
GARDEN

# Parameters Form

## Team Details

STATE:	WA
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SCHOOL/GROUP:	The Woodies
TEAM NAME:	The Woodies
TEAM ID:	485

## Parameters and random words

Parameters		Random words
Primary character 1	Gardener	ruby
Primary character 2	Canoeist	melts
Non-human character	Diamond ring	shiver
Setting	Abandoned factory	tasty
Issue	Helping your neighbour	sponge

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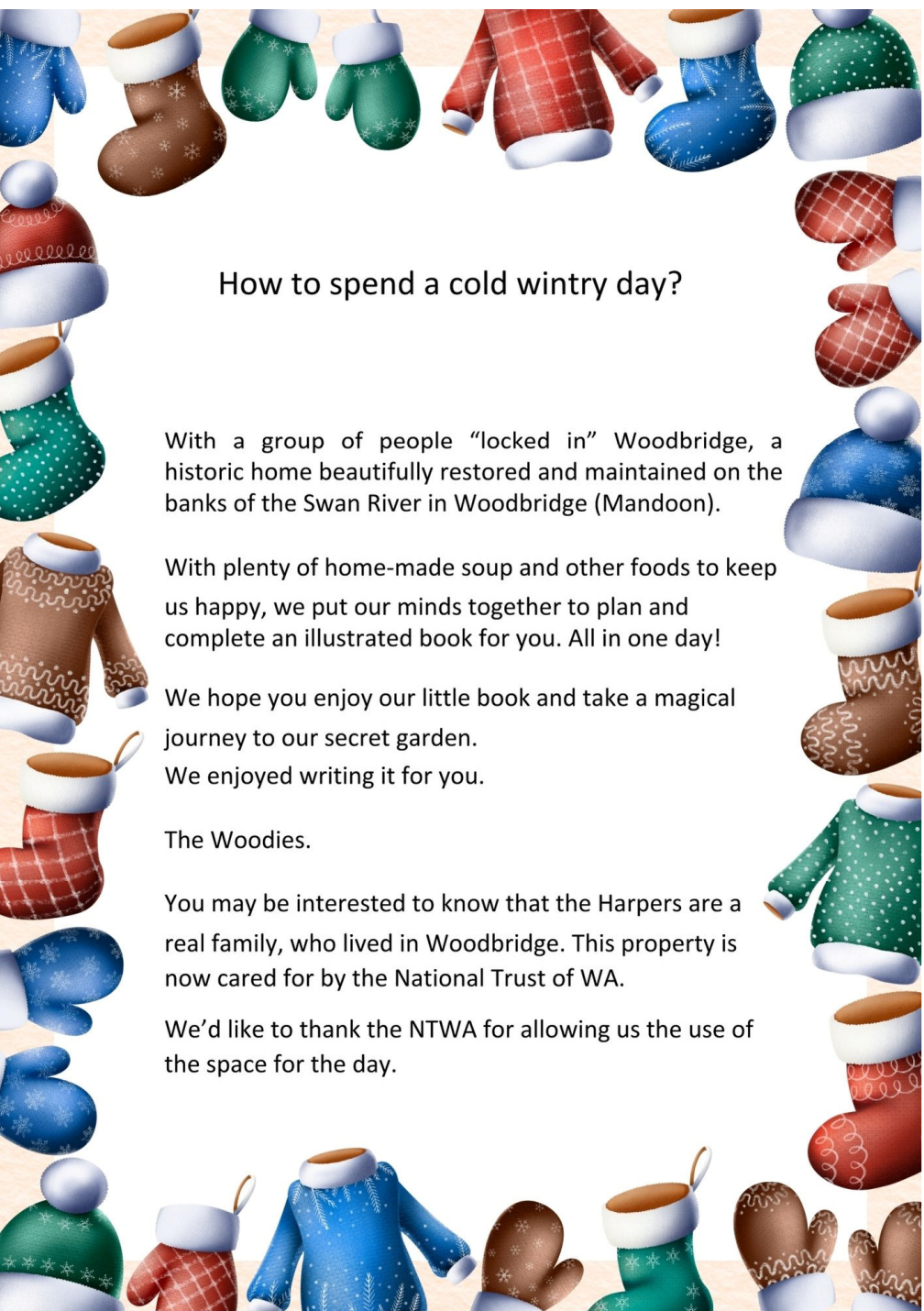
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## How to spend a cold wintry day?

With a group of people “locked in” Woodbridge, a historic home beautifully restored and maintained on the banks of the Swan River in Woodbridge (Mandoon).

With plenty of home-made soup and other foods to keep us happy, we put our minds together to plan and complete an illustrated book for you. All in one day!

We hope you enjoy our little book and take a magical journey to our secret garden.  
We enjoyed writing it for you.

The Woodies.

You may be interested to know that the Harpers are a real family, who lived in Woodbridge. This property is now cared for by the National Trust of WA.

We’d like to thank the NTWA for allowing us the use of the space for the day.

## Chapter 1

Ruby sighed as she gazed out from her secret place in the old factory garden. No ripples disturbed the surface of the river which appeared like glass in the crisp morning air. *This place is so cool*, she thought. *I just love the peace and quiet.*

She picked up a brown paper bag and peered in to find some shiny brown seeds. *Hmm, no label ... I wonder what these are, oh well I'll plant them anyway.* Ruby took her trowel and dug a shallow trench in the rich, alluvial earth. She sowed the seeds and covered them with soil, gently patting the surface, before watering.

‘Watch your blades.’

The sudden shout surprised Ruby. She stood and saw two long boats moving swiftly across the water.

‘Oh no,’ she groaned.

‘It’s just a log, Cox,’ one of the boys called.

‘Look ahead,’ called the Cox. ‘You boys, pay attention, you almost ran into the other boat.’

The boys laughed and called to each other.

‘Oh, go away pleeeeeease,’ Ruby muttered.

‘That’s enough boys. Settle down. Now row.’

Within minutes the boats travelled out of sight, and tranquillity returned. Ruby was relieved but she knew it would only be a matter of time before they arrived at the spot where they turned the boats to paddle back to school.

Ruby returned to her gardening and decided to see if any of the vegetables were ready to harvest. She regularly took vegetables to her homeless neighbours

who were squatting in the old house nearby. She enjoyed their company, sharing an evening meal and chatting into the night. They were good friends but ostracised by many.

‘It’s not their fault they’re homeless. Yeah! It’s capitalism’s fault, that’s whose fault it is.’

‘Hello there, who are you shouting at?’ Ruby hadn’t heard the man arrive.

‘No one. I wasn’t shouting either.’

He chuckled. ‘Okay, keep your wig on. That is a wig, isn’t it?’

‘What?’

‘Those rat’s tails, or whatever you call them,’ he said pointing to her long black dreadlocks.

‘None of your business,’ Ruby retorted. ‘Who are you anyway?’

‘Allow me to introduce myself, Goodman’s the name, Developments the game,’ he said handing her a business card. GOODMAN DEVELOPMENTS PTY LTD.

‘What a great spot this is,’ Goodman said, gazing at the tree-lined river and grapevines beyond. ‘Not surprising those early settlers thought it was good arable land with the meandering waterways and lush vegetation.’

*He’s read that somewhere,* Ruby thought. She detected a sinister look in the man’s eyes as he squinted at the remains of the old factory walls.

‘So, Miss ... uh ... what do you do here?’

‘I beg your pardon?’ Ruby said, not wanting to tell him anything about her secret garden.





Goodman pushed past her and saw the healthy vegetables waiting to be harvested. He laughed. 'Ah, I know what you're up to. You're one of those Guerilla Gardeners, aren't you?'

'So, what's it got to do with you?'

Just then Goodman's mobile phone rang. He answered saying: 'Goodman... Larry old friend ...' His voice was sardonic, he walked to the other side of the wall.

Ruby took the opportunity to escape. She quickly pulled up a couple of bunches of rainbow chard. She picked up her garden tools and ran.

Later that evening, Ruby visited the old house where her friends were squatting. They were grateful to receive the chard and now sat around a small fire, cooking. The aroma of vegetable curry drifted in the air.

'Wow, that smells good,' said Ruby, her stomach rumbling.

'Yeah, we dug up some potatoes from the back garden and Sarah found some carrots and onions in the wastebin outside the supermarket. A bit wrinkly, but okay.'

'It's disgusting what people throw out. There should be a law against it,' Ruby said.

'Hahaha, just imagine being arrested in possession of a slimy onion.'

'Or cruelty to wrinkly carrots,' they all laughed.

'So, how's that cool garden of yours going, Rube?' asked Sarah.

'It's looking good. It's such a lovely old place. I try to imagine what it was like when it was first built. You know, like who owned it? Who worked there? All that stuff.'

'I'll bet the people in this old house owned it,' said Trevor.

'What makes you think that?' Sarah asked.

Ruby retorted. 'Well, they must have had money. Look at all the rooms in here. You don't get to build fancy houses like this unless you are capitalising on the poor.'

'Maybe,' said Sarah. 'I don't think they were all bad though. You know, the early settlers didn't all go around ripping people off and stuff. They had to work hard to make a living and from what I've read, they had to be innovative too. Like they didn't have a lot of machinery and so on. Anyway, I reckon this curry is about ready. Let's eat.'

After the meal, Trevor stretched out on his mattress and folded his hands behind his head.

'Hey, Rube, I meant to tell you that I saw a flash car parked at the back of the old factory this morning. I wondered who it could be, I mean, like it's pretty much out of sight from the road.'

'It was probably Goodman,' Ruby replied.

'Who's that?'

She fished around in the back pocket of her jeans for the card the man had given her earlier that morning. 'Here,' she said, handing the card to Trevor.

'Oh, man!' Trevor sat up and stared at the card. 'A developer. W o a h!'

'What is he creeping around looking at?' asked Sarah.

'He's a rude man. Creepy is right too. I heard him talking on his phone, he gave me the creeps.'

'What's this?' Trevor flattened out a page from the local newspaper he had used to light the fire. He read.

“Protesters rally to contest the new proposed bridge over the river, they want a narrower crossing loosely following the footprint of the old Hendricks Road bridge that was demolished in 1982. The proposed bridge would be less imposing on local registered Aboriginal heritage sites, native vegetation, nearby wetlands and on the river flood plain.”

‘Oh yeah, I saw them protesting outside the Town Hall.’

‘Let me see that,’ said Ruby, taking the paper from Trevor’s hands. ‘Oh no! Look at this diagram here ... the road to that bridge goes straight through here.’

## Chapter 2

Young 17-year-old Harper had been out in his canoe practising for his school's big race against Scotch College in a week's time. As he paddled down the river his thoughts went back to his coach's words that were drummed into him at his weekly training session.

"For all your strokes: Think of yourself as a tree where the trunk gives the tree its strength. Not just your arms."

Harper pushed himself as was his nature, and the sweat from his brow rolled down his face and matted his hair. His long, sinewy arms were ideally suited to his chosen sport. But there were other reasons for his choice. He was a loner, and this was part of his experience which he enjoyed immensely. Alone with nature he could think of nothing better than to take in the sights and sounds of the Swan River.

The plentiful array of waterfowl along the banks gave for some interesting viewing, and it took his mind off his lonely life as a boarder at the grammar school.

This was a particularly sad time for him as it was coming up to Easter and the school holidays. He would not see his parents during this school break, unlike most of the other kids, as they were working as diplomats in Zimbabwe. His parents named him Harper as he bore a striking resemblance to his grandfather, Charles Harper Woodbridge. He possessed the same sharp chin, nose, and steel blue eyes. This, coupled with a dry sarcasm, rounded off his personality.

Harper had an intense sense of community and was admired for his sporting ability by his schoolmates. He was fiercely competitive, although he seemed to never

do enough to impress his father. In turn, his father never showed enough love for Harper, at least in Harper's eyes. When his father turned up to a footy game final that he was playing in, despite Harper scoring the winning goal, his father did not congratulate him.

As Harper rounded the bend of the river, he disturbed a couple of Mallard ducks, nesting underneath some majestic, flooded gums. In the distance, he saw an old red brick structure. Beside this lay a partly burned building with a mangled tin roof. This represented a cultural significance for young Harper, as it had been the old factory that his ancestors had worked in. He usually slowed down as he passed by this spot on his journey down the river, wondering what life would have been like for his forbears.

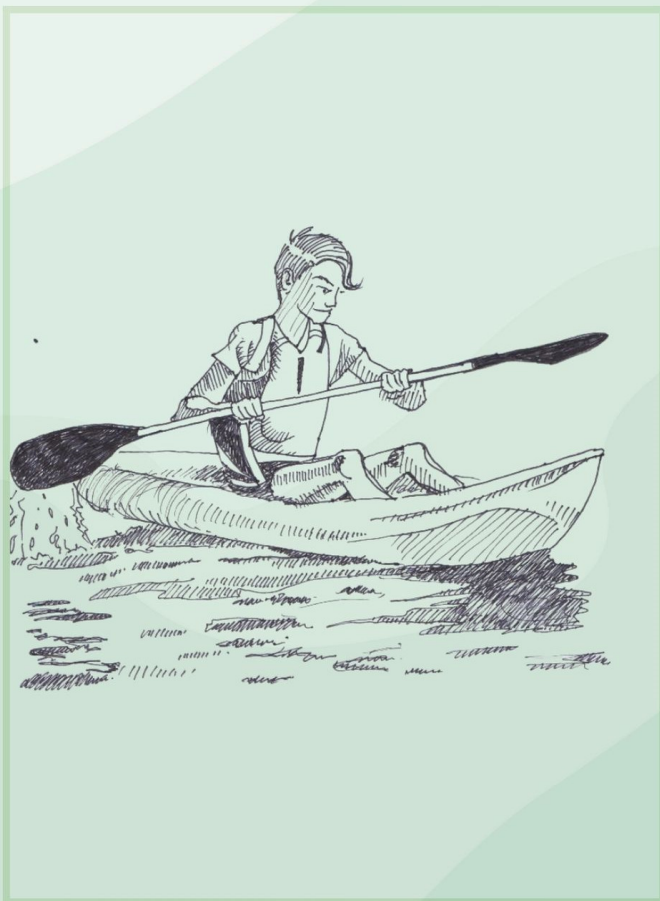
On this occasion he didn't slow down, on the contrary, he built up even more speed to test himself for the big race. He was now at full pace and although focused on his training he couldn't help but take one last look at the old factory as he whizzed by.

He had walked around the back of the building previously and discovered a secret garden of sorts. It was quite overgrown on the outside, so he had not walked through or taken much stock of it. He even thought, on that occasion, that he had witnessed a form ... a glimmering girl but just as quickly he had dismissed this thought saying to himself, *what would a girl be doing all the way out here, all alone?* Perhaps that was the reason that he took a second glance towards the garden.

To his total amazement, through the long grass stood a beautiful young girl, or was it an apparition? He had to be sure. Without thinking he lifted himself higher

in the canoe to have a better look. He pulled his paddle sharply down to his right to slow himself, and in doing so flipped his canoe over. He felt a sharp pain in his right-hand side as he sank below to the depths.

He shivered when he felt the chilly water envelop his body and he struggled to keep breathing. His innate wisdom told him not to panic but he knew that he was in serious trouble.





## Chapter 3

Harper lifted his knee onto the top of the riverbank, pushed himself up with his left arm and then to his feet, still hanging on to the side of his canoe, glad of the help from this wild girl. *Must be one of the squatters* he thought.

‘Nice day for a swim,’ she said.

Harper’s eyes followed the twists of a snake tattoo up her arm to her shoulders to her tangle of dreadlocks.

‘Thanks,’ he said. ‘Lucky you were here.’

‘You might have been making an unscheduled visit to Fremantle with your canoe!’ she laughed.

She turned round and started walking briskly up the path to the old factory.

‘No way! Hey. Wait a minute. I must make my canoe safe.’

He grabbed the bow and slid the boat towards him, twisted it sideways to let the water out and then pulled it onto the top of the bank. Seeing the canoe could not fall back into the river, he turned and ran after her.

‘What’s your name and what are you doing here?’ he asked.

She turned her head for a moment without stopping. ‘Name’s Ruby. I’m doing what the Council should be doing: making our land beautiful again and fruitful. Would you like a carrot? I’m harvesting them right now.’

Harper stripped off his shirt and rolled it into a sausage. The squeeze of river water made a dark line in the sand as he followed her. *A good looking one too*, he thought. He caught up with her beside the old mill. He could see where she had been planting trees and where there was a small garden bed that was thick with green leaves and fronds, undoubtably vegetables of

some kind.

‘Hi. I’m Harper.’

‘Unusual name.’

‘They called me after the man who built that colonial house back there.’

He pulled his shirt over his head, glad of the sun which would soon dry him, and stood next to Ruby who was kneeling and digging out a row of carrots and placing them in a bucket. Black knees showed through holes in her jeans.

‘Help yourself to a carrot, Harper. Guerilla Gardener and Community Restorer at your service,’ she said.

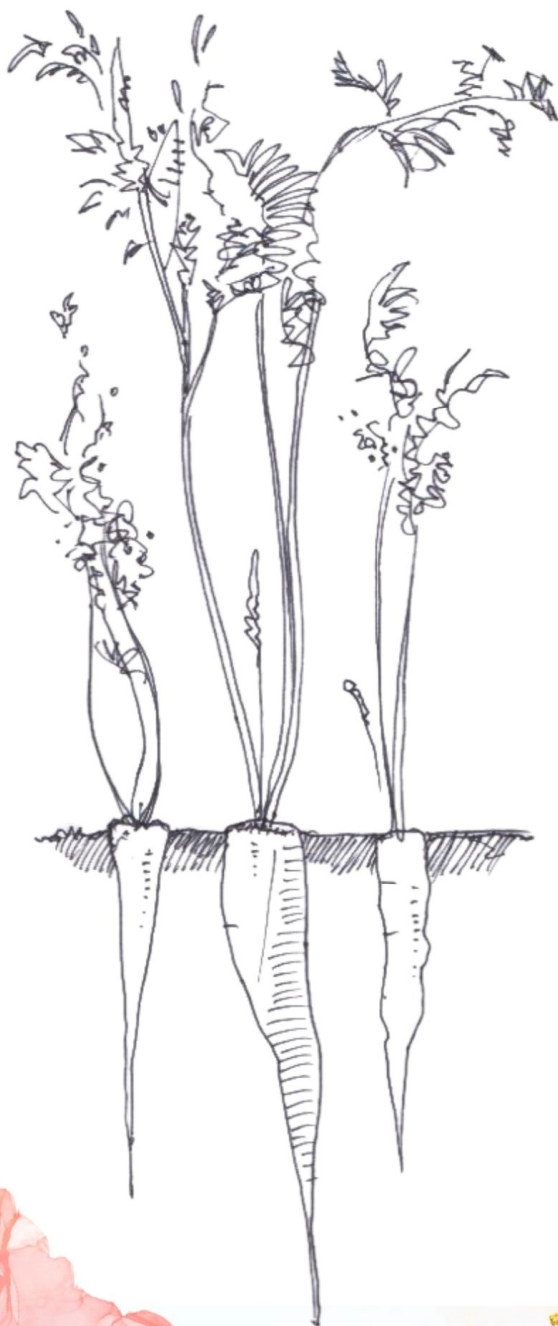
Harper felt he should help with the digging rather than helping himself from the bucket, bent down and, using his fingers, dug into the soil at the other end of her row.

‘There’s water in that can, wash your carrot, and splash the water over the plants. Don’t waste it.’

Harper hesitated. There was something else; something hard beside the carrot in the black earth that was not a stone. He put the carrot down and, holding the object in his thumb and index finger he poured water on it. What he held was a ring, an old-fashioned ring, like the ones his grandmother wore, one that looked as if it was made of gold, mounted with a diamond and precious stones.

‘Look what I’ve found,’ he said.

‘What?’ said Ruby. ‘They’re all carrots in this bed.’



‘No. A ring. Someone must have lost it. It was next to this big carrot.’

‘A ring? Let me see.’

He passed it over to her. She wiped her fingers on her trousers and held it up to the light.

‘Wow! It must be unbelievably valuable. That’s a diamond, and those must be seed-pearls and rubies. I suppose finders keepers means it’s yours. You are going to be rich!’

She handed the ring back to Harper.

Harper thought what good luck this was, how he could sell it and would be able to buy another canoe, a better one, one designed for racing. Then he thought of his grandfather, the respected pioneer after whom he was named and his father who was away on diplomatic service in Africa. *What would they think?*

‘No,’ replied Harper. ‘It’s yours. It was in your vegetable bed. I only dug it up. You would have found it if I had not dug at this end of the row before you reached here. Anyway, it is a girl’s ring. And more, you rescued me from the river, so you’ve earned it.’

‘Nonsense,’ she said. ‘Definitely finders keepers.’

‘I know how to settle this,’ replied Harper. ‘This ring is too small to fit on any of my fingers, so let’s see if it fits on yours. If it does, you keep it. If it doesn’t, we will sell it and split the proceeds between seeds and gardening tools for you and a racing canoe for me.’

He was unsure whether this was ethical and whether they should first try to find the owner, but it sounded like a good alternative to fighting over it.

‘Here. Give me your hand.’

He reached out and took it, gave her hand a quick brush with his palm and slipped the ring onto her little finger. He was surprised. He was not expecting a hand

that did so much gardening to be so slender. *Oh, oh. No canoe for me*, he thought.

The world spun. He felt dizzy. Ruby trembled and grasped his hand as she tried to balance.



## Chapter 4

Still firmly holding hands Ruby and Harper were in the exact same spot on the riverbank but it didn't seem to be the same as five minutes before. The air was different, clearer, and smelled cleaner somehow. Ruby heard birds calling; magpies and a smaller bird, darting through the reeds making a chirping sound Ruby had never seen or heard before. She quickly dropped Harper's hand, and he put his in his pocket.

They looked at each other, wondering what had just happened. They walked up the slope towards the house. It was not an ordinary house, it was magnificent, a grand house with two stories and a veranda around both upstairs and downstairs. Next door was a brand-new factory. Between both the factory and the house, was a magnificent garden. Roses, camellias, and all sorts of greenery and flowers filled the space and the air with perfume.

Harper's eyes were drawn straight away to a group, obviously a family, having afternoon tea on the veranda. They were dressed in old-fashioned clothes, full-length dresses with long lacy sleeves, and high lacy collars. All the women wore strings of pearls, like his grandmother had sometimes worn when she went to her fancy dinners.

The table in front of them was laden with elaborate cups and saucers and shiny silver tea pots, like his grandmother had when her posh friends came for tea and which he was never allowed to use. All the ladies were eating tiny sandwiches and cake. He was sure his grandmother called it a Victoria Sponge Cake and he remembered it being so soft it seemed to melt in his mouth when he ate it. The strawberries looked so red

and big and tasty he almost reached out to take one.

Ruby looked at Harper, at the group and then back again in disbelief to Harper.

‘You look just like that boy over there,’ she said.

‘Who?’ he asked.

‘That one there,’ Ruby said, pointing to the teenager, sitting on the edge of the veranda, eating a piece of sponge cake.

He looked to be the same age as Harper, knees scuffed with mud and hair askew, he had obviously just been called for tea from an adventure in the garden.

‘Gresley, after you’ve finished that, get washed up and ready for your lesson, please,’ said the woman in the middle of the group.

Ruby couldn’t believe her eyes. There on her hand was the diamond ring! The exact same one she was wearing! Not just one that looked similar but the exact same one! How could that be? Pearls, rubies, and sapphires encompassed a central diamond. There couldn’t be another ring like that, could there?

‘Who are these people, Harper?’ Ruby asked.

Harper gaped at the group. He hadn’t heard her.

Ruby nudged him.

He turned to her, his face deathly white.

‘Ruby. What happened? Are these people my relatives? Is that lady my great, great grandma? Have we travelled to the past? Is this what my family’s house looked like? So grand, so beautiful – look at the garden!’

Ruby looked around. The factory was next door, it looked like it had just been built, and the garden was young and beautiful.

Just then, the boy Gresley got up.

Ruby and Harper crawled closer to the veranda as







quietly as they could. They were not sure if they could be seen or heard. But to discover more about the history of this place, they needed to hear the conversation.

‘Mother why can’t Wilfred and I go on the train to school in the city anymore like the other boys?’

‘Gresley, I will not discuss this again, your father was mortally embarrassed when it was reported to him how unruly and loud you boys were on the train. You will be schooled at home by your father and tutor, now please go and wash up and get ready.’

Ruby thought to herself, *nothing changes*, remembering the train rides she took occasionally to the city jostling with the rowdy, boisterous school kids.

Harper looked at Ruby, tears in his eyes.

‘Ruby I can’t believe this is my family, and my family’s house, how could it all be a ruin now? How come the factory is so run down and falling apart?’

Ruby understood how Harper felt. She was sad too. Every day she worked in the factory garden; she imagined how it once was, she wondered what secrets might be hidden in the garden beds.

Harper continued. ‘And my family don’t seem to care, they spend their time overseas leaving me in boarding school and don’t mention the house or family at all.’

Ruby noticed Harper’s shoulders slump. She knew it was time to head back to their real time. She wondered why she had been given this ring; why she had been led to bring Harper here to discover his ancestors, and whether the pain he was feeling now would have a purpose she couldn’t presently see.

She led them back to the river, took Harper’s hand and gave it a squeeze before she put her hand in her pocket and slipped the ring off her finger.

## Chapter 5

*Why do I have to be here? I hate this school. I hate that my parents are always away. I wish I could stay with my grandmother.* Harper paddled his canoe down the river, these thoughts running through his mind. *Maybe I can just run away. That would teach them.*

As Harper paddled around the bend, he saw Ruby. She was working in her garden at the old factory, tending her plants, shrubs, and trees.

Harper decided to take a break and see how she was doing. Unfortunately, as he glided into the bank and jumped out of his canoe, he caught his foot on a tree root and fell into the water.

Ruby shook her head and pulled him onto the shore. 'You're not usually such a clutz, Harper.'

He coughed and spluttered and shook the water from his clothes, embarrassed and wishing he was anywhere else but in front of Ruby.

The river was rank with mud and weed and full of leeches! Harper knew he smelt revolting.

Ruby smiled. 'Let's find those leeches and pick them off. Now, what's bothering you?' she asked.

'I was just thinking how much I hate my life here at the grammar school and how much I'd like to live somewhere else ... anywhere else. Then I fell out of the canoe, and, well, you saw the rest. What are you doing here anyway? I thought you had got into trouble for trespassing!'

'I'm bringing the old place back to life,' said Ruby. 'And I'm never going to leave. Look at what I'm growing. Those incredible old seeds I found are starting to poke their heads through. They could be corn, or lettuce, tomatoes, or turnips. People used to eat turnips in the

olden days.'

'Harper, why do you hate it here so much? I guess I wouldn't want to be living with all those other rich boys up in that school. And why aren't there girls up there? It's so old fashioned.'

'My parents are overseas on diplomatic postings. I get dumped in boarding school and it's no fun. I see my Gran every other weekend and wish I could just live with her. It's not fair and I hate it.'

Ruby had an idea to cheer Harper up.

'Let's go back into the portal and see if your old family is still visible. Maybe we can find out more about them. You look like that boy in the vision. Gresley was his name, wasn't it?'

'Hold my hand,' said Ruby as she pulled the ring out of her pocket and placed it on her finger.

Suddenly there was a great shimmer in the atmosphere. A burst of light with a hole in the middle ... a portal, just like in sci fi stories.

'I'll never get sick of this,' said Harper. 'So exciting. Do you reckon if we tried, we could jump through again, into the past?'

'Let's just look for now,' said Ruby. 'I quite like it here in current time, regardless of how mad people make me feel.'

There was the house, just like the last time; the family on the veranda. And the sponge cake! It looked so delicious.

'If I'd been Gresley I wouldn't have been late for afternoon tea,' said Harper. 'Mind you, the orchards look like fun to climb about in, and think how much fun you could have hiding in the factory back then. I wonder if there were mice and the river rats we hate so much!'

'Speak for yourself,' said Ruby. 'I'm quite fond of

river rats you know, and they're not real rats either.'

'They're still disgusting,' said Harper. 'Anyway, we need to find out more about my family. I've got an idea. What are you doing tomorrow? It's Saturday and you could come with me to visit Gran. I told her all about you.'

'I've got better things to do,' said Ruby. 'You know I don't like people. It's bad enough you are hanging around here, annoying me.'

'Please, please, please,' begged Harper.

'If you'll stop being annoying, I might think about it,' said Ruby.

The following day, Saturday, they met at the train station and went off to visit Harper's Gran. And what do you think she'd made for them? A Victoria Sponge! Just like the one in the vision through the portal.

'Can we sit on the veranda and pretend we're at the old house?' said Harper, really getting into the spirit of things. 'Gran, can you please tell us stories of our family, you know, the ones that built that old house. And why we don't still live in it?'

'That was so long ago,' said Gran. 'The house was made into a school you know; in fact, it was the beginning of the grammar school you now go to. Then there was a war, and it was taken over to house elderly women. Then it was given back to another school and later it was pretty much abandoned.'

'But Mum and Dad are filthy rich,' said Harper. 'Why can't they buy it back and fix it up and stay in Australia and we could all live there, together? There's plenty of room for you too Gran.'

'You know your parents are doing incredibly important work Harper,' said Gran. 'They have to travel

most of the year.'

'But what about me?' said Harper. 'My whole life I've only had you, Gran. Why did they bother having me in the first place? When you think of our ancestors in the old house, so many kids to play with, a mother and father that looked after their children and loved them. Well, it looks like they loved them. Why can't my Mum and Dad love me?'

*Oh dear, this isn't how I thought this would go,* thought Ruby. Harper's getting even more agitated than he was before. *I wish I'd never thought of exploring Harper's past.*

On the train journey home Ruby said to Harper. 'I think perhaps we should just leave the past behind us for now, what do you think?'



## Chapter 6

Flexing her long arms Ruby walked out of her garden. She felt restless. The sun was shining down on an early September morning. It had been weeks since she and Harper had found the old lady's fantastic ring in the carrots, and weeks since their vision of a journey back in time. She waved the ring in the sun. 'Abracadabra!'

Ruby remembered the excitement of finding out about Harper's ancestors. Her quiet world of plants had been upended. She and Harper had looked in at one of time's dusty windows.

She thought about the Woodbridge children running by the veranda. *Had their lives been happy or sad? Fast or slow? How did they connect to Harper?* She shrugged, took the single long dread she kept loose and beaded and had a contemplative chew. Bad habit she knew, up there on the list of things she'd like to change about herself.

Ruby reflected deeply about the people she had glimpsed in the house that she and her new friend had seen wearing gorgeous frocks, back when the house was all so fresh and pretty.

The noisy grammar boys splashing and shouting up and down the river did not, for some reason, irritate her this morning as it once had. They sounded so light-hearted. The tiny fifth boy at the end of the passing boat roared out his instructions.

'Pick up your oars Crippen, stop slacking off Lyttleton-Chubb!'

Since Harper last visited her garden Ruby had battled enormous weeds, but of more interest to her now, the warm weather brought the first blossoms out on a pear tree. This could be a tree that no one but her

tended any more. The delicate white flowers looked like they belonged to another time. And maybe they did.

The old-style veggies in the garden were different from anything she could find in a supermarket, but not as much as she hoped. She loved her flower beds of stocks and delphiniums, pink and blue. But nothing happens quickly when you garden, except weeds that is. So sometimes you just must take yourself off for a long walk.

Ruby picked her way out of the wreck of the old factory, stepping over blocks of masonry that were too big for her and her friends, Trevor and Sarah, to move.

Trev and Sass were her besties and neighbours. They lived in the old house that Ruby now knew once belonged to Harper's ancestors.

'Hey what's up Ruby girl?' they'd call when she dropped in. 'Not more healthy vegetables? How about growing some cake baby doll?'

She had laughed.

In the three years since Ruby had wandered into the burnt-out factory, she and her friends had cleaned away the old bottles and tyres, the Hungry Jacks boxes, the old bed springs, the rotten bits of fabric. She had cut back the weedy lantana and pulled out wild oats and henbane.

What began as a little plot to grow some food for herself and her friends, expanded into the body of the old works as well, and along the perimeter.

For years, the council had fenced off the grounds and erected signs: 'Private property' 'No trespassing' ... that Ruby diligently failed to notice when expanding the little cut in the chain wire of the fence out back.

Ruby had been a skinny kid with mad hair and a wild idea that she wanted to make a space of her own. No



money, but all the energy of a tiger. It's not that she had run away from home. Rather she had drifted away, a day at a time.

Earlier, she had found a job as a checkout chick at the IGA down the road. But then discovered the old factory and found her feet.

But there was a snake loose in her garden ... a low feeling of dread crept into her heart, and that dread wore a grey suit, and its name was Pinkerton.

She crushed the white card in her pocket. 'We build them Better'. *We build them better not! How dare he even think about destroying all that she had made!*

Now she knew the name of the old house that her friends lived in. Woodbridge House. She knew it had once belonged to Harper's family. She knew Harper's parents didn't care much about what happened to it.

*Where, where are you Harper boy?* She thought. And then there he was walking along the riverbank and smiling at her. They slapped palms.

'I've got the afternoon off. I'm meant to be getting stuck into my physics homework, but stuff it.'

'Come and meet Trev and Sass. They think I've been hiding you. Come on if you don't mind a bit of scruff, you'll like them. They know your gran from the shop. They're really worried about Pinkerton and his cronies.'

'I know, right? What a piece of work. I can't bear the idea that your garden will get smashed and how can they think about flattening the house and the old factory? I called Dad and Mum and told them what was happening here.'

'Harper. We must become the resistance. We can't just lie down and let the bulldozers roll over us.'



## Chapter 7

As soon as the bell rang to signal the end of school, Harper packed his backpack and headed to the boat shed. He needed to see Ruby and tell her the news. It was Monday and there was little time before the Council would take action. His mind was racing as fast as his paddling. What could he do to help her?

The old factory came into view as he rounded the bend in the river, and he could see Ruby making her way through the hole in the fence.

‘Ruby!’ he called.

She didn’t look up and kept walking. When he reached her, he could see she was angry.

‘Why do people have to spoil everything?’ she said. ‘No-one has cared about this place for years and now because your school makes a complaint, the Council knows I’m here and says I have to go! You should have seen the guy who came here today to tell me. All official with his suit and papers. Got his nice shiny leather shoes all muddy and then I accidentally spilt some worm poo on them.’

‘I’m so sorry,’ said Harper. ‘I can’t believe this is going to be ruined. It’s not like we don’t have enough buildings around here that could be used for housing if they wanted to. What are we going to do? We only have until Friday.’

Ruby looked sad and Harper’s mind was still racing. ‘Let’s think this through. Just because the Council says they are going to demolish this place doesn’t mean we have to let them. We can still have a go at saving it. We just need to let them see how important it is to us and our friends.’

Ruby and Harper sat beneath a loquat tree while the

Ringneck parrots fed above them. Every now and then a shiny brown seed dropped to the ground just missing their heads. The parrots loved the juicy, orange covered fruit. The sound of the water lapping at the river's edge was comforting and they began to relax and breathe in the sweet air. After a while, Harper said he had an idea.

'Let's get everyone together to show the Council we care about this place and what they want to do is a bad idea. I know not everyone at the school agrees with the plan and I think some people are just seeing this as an opportunity to make more money.'

The complaint to the Council came from the school, but it was one person who brought it to the attention of the school Board: Mr Larry Pinkerton. He wasn't well liked in the community; not sure if it was the way he sneered at people or his annoying habit of cracking his knuckles at inappropriate times. He did have influence though, and when he spoke, people listened.

This time he told them of the trouble brewing down at the old factory. He had heard, although not seen for himself, that a homeless person was camped there, and she was a bad influence on the young people at the school, using the place to throw wild parties and encourage bad behaviour. He had heard that students were spending time there after school and the boarders were there on weekends. What sort of shenanigans were going on. Didn't we have a responsibility to protect our children? Mr Pinkerton had presented a very convincing case to the Board but perhaps not everyone was taken in by his talk.

What a lot of people didn't know was that Mr Pinkerton was also an employee of 'We Build Them Better Enterprises', a company with a vested interest in

developing the old factory.

Harper had a friend whose father knew about Mr Pinkerton, and he didn't like him or his company's tactics. Mr Pinkerton had attended Harper's school and had not been nice to some of the teachers ... they had long memories.

'There are some teachers who I know will help us. We could make some placards in the Art room and screen print some T-shirts. How does 'Keep Your Hands Off Our Garden' sound or maybe, 'Only Helping Hands in Our Garden' with a big finger pointing out at them.'

'Yes,' said Ruby. 'We could put it out on social media. Wow, I can see us being interviewed on TV ... local school kids and community rally to save garden. I have heard that this land was always meant to be a place for the people. One of the neighbours that checks in on me said that many years ago the owner left it to the community with the proviso it could not be developed. It seems that has been lost and forgotten to suit the developers. I know we need places for people to live. Look at me, I like where I am, but I would like somewhere I could feel a bit safer and warm in winter. A place that would be my home.'

'Don't worry Ruby,' said Harper. 'I won't let you down.'





## Chapter 8

Hair slicked wet around her face; Ruby frantically packed a rainbow of flowers into her rusty trolley. She had cut every bright bloom early that morning and put them into the containers salvaged from the bins the night before. Jam jars, coffee tins, yoghurt tubs. They wouldn't last long, but it was better than them being ploughed into the soil by the dozers. Maybe she could sell a few, find Trevor and Sarah and other homeless, use the money to help them all for a few nights. She knew where they had gone, she'd find them.

The roar of engines shattered the silence. The council workers had arrived. 'Barp, Barp, Barp,' the lead truck's horn screeched. The driver leaned out of the window shaking the yellow eviction notice at her.

'C'mon darling, we got the papers. Get them gates open, hurry up.'

Mr Goodman smirked as he sipped coffee in his strategically parked Bentley.

Furious at the man Ruby raced to the gate and yelled. 'You can wait. You are early.'

A large burly man opened the passenger door of the truck and clambered down armed with bolt cutters. 'Sorry kid. Orders are orders.'

She grasped the gate with both hands and planted her feet firmly on the ground about a pace in front of the truck.

'Well, you'll have to move me too.' She rattled the gate. 'And I'll scream blue murder.' It was a ruse, a bluff. She couldn't do this alone. Harper had let her down. Biting her lip to stop the tears she glanced over towards the school. Her heart skipped a beat, and she gasped as a line of placard-holding boarders came into sight.

'HANDS OFF OUR GROUND.'

'NOT TODAY.'

'HANDS OFF OUR LAND.'

The words shouted out from between the painted flowers.





Ruby spun around and saw her neighbours had joined the mob chanting, 'Not today, no way. Hands off the garden.'

The council worker climbed back into the truck.

Harper stood beside Ruby.

'Harper, I thought you'd let me down, sorry! Do you think it's going to be enough?'

'Wouldn't let a lady down,' he winked at her. She winced at the comment, Lady?

'Chill. No way was I going to let them destroy this place. It's complicated; crooked councillors, family law, estates... Dad came through, Gran called him. I didn't think he cared. But he does. He was really impressed that I knew so much about the history of the old place and wanted to preserve it, so he came home. He's done it.'

'Done what?' she asked.

'Saved it. Watch.'

Harper pointed to the gate where a tall, blue suited businessman was deep in conversation with the truckies.

The driver was on the phone. 'Call it off Bert,' he yelled through the window. 'It's legit.'

'You might as well go home.' Mr Woodbridge grinned at Mr Goodman. 'The land is mine by law and the school has plans for it, no demolition today,' he announced with a flourish. The crowd cheered as Mr Goodman drove off behind the low rumble of the trucks.

Harper's dad walked over to them. 'So, you are Ruby?'

She nodded.

'Well Ruby, the school have just acquired a garden and a new urban re-greening extracurricular program.'

'Oh,' she said quietly. She'd saved the land, only for

the school to muscle in. She felt she was still the loser.

'You don't get it, do you?' Harper nudged her. 'Dad, tell her.'

'Oh, yes. Ruby, we'd like you to stay on here as a custodial caretaker gardener for the family estate and help with the grounds.'

Ruby grinned,

'Make this motley crew work so hard they're too tired to nip out for burgers at night.'

She flung her arms around him and shouted, 'Thank you.' Then she stepped away sheepishly and added. 'Sorry sir.'

Mr Woodbridge laughed. 'You are most welcome. No apologies needed. Now everyone, you're all invited to the school hall for tea today where I will hand over the keys for the New Woodbridge Gardens to this lovely young woman.'

A cheer went through the throng and the neighbours filed away to tunes of 'see ya later,' 'tea sounds good,' 'is there footie today?' 'I'd quite like tea.'

'Why did you pick the flowers?' Harper asked.

Ruby shoved her hands in her pockets and grimaced as she explained it to him. 'I kinda wish I hadn't.' She sighed wistfully. 'Such a waste of good pollen! Poor pollinators.'

'Well,' he replied. 'I can't do anything about the butterflies, but I think we can put the flowers to good use. Come on chaps, let's get those flowers up to the school hall for the tea.'

Ruby had never been to such a beautiful tea. It wasn't quite as grand as the one Lady Fanny had hosted in that first vision, but for Ruby it was even better. Her flowers were the star attraction, they brightened the austere

white settings and reflected gem-like off the silverware. The homemade plum jam on the scones was delicious, and the chocolate cake was superb.

Her knees shook as she climbed up to the little platform to receive the key for the not-so-secret garden. She couldn't remember a time when she'd been this happy. She smiled a thank you at Harper over the brim of her cup as she chatted to a neighbour about the prospect of selling vegetables in his store. Having friends felt good. Having a job, and one she really wanted, was so cool. The best part though was saving the garden. The future was looking bright.

## Chapter 9

Ruby grinned as she looked up from staking the heritage Woodbridge tomatoes. The warm sunshine reflected off the old red brick walls of the factory and the air was full of the heady scent of spring blooms. Previously quiet and abandoned, the old factory was once again a hive of activity.

‘Daydreaming again, Rubes?’

‘Just thinking about how close we came to losing all this, Harper. Never dreamed my secret garden would come to this!’

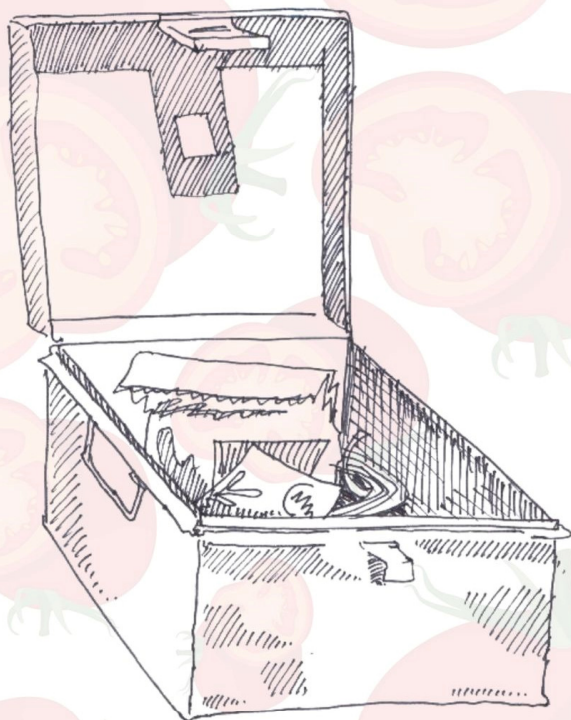
‘Yeah, I think the old boy would be proud of us, and of his tomatoes!’

The fight to save the house and factory had been tough, but neighbours working together had triumphed. The turning point had been those old tomato seeds.

Ruby had been fascinated by the stories of the Harper family nursery and how they had worked to develop seeds which would thrive in the hot, dry condition of Western Australia.

It had taken long hours of research in the Battye Library, and so many conversations with local seed savers, trying to track down old varieties of tomatoes in the hope that someone, somewhere might just still be growing the Woodbridge Tomatoes.

So many tasty, juicy tomatoes! Big, small, orange, green, red and yellow. Tart, sweet, and tangy. But no-one seemed to have the Woodbridge Tomato described in the old 1901 seed catalogue.



Then Harper decided to explore the cellars of the old house.

‘Why do you want to go down there, Harper? It’s dark and dusty, and I want to make the most of this warm weather to plant out some more delphiniums.’

‘Come on Ruby, it’ll be fun, and who knows what we might find down there!’

‘Spiders and rat droppings.’ muttered Ruby with a shiver. ‘Anything worth finding would likely have been discovered long since.’

‘Might be some old gardening tools?’ he said enticingly, knowing exactly how to bait his hook.

*There might be at that,* thought Ruby. *One man’s trash was exactly the kind of thing she treasured.* ‘Alright,’ she sighed. ‘Let’s get this over with. Do you have a torch on that technological marvel you call a phone?’

The cellars were indeed dark, dank, and dusty. With spiders galore, and useless bits of broken rubbish. But high on a stone shelf in a dark corner they found a rusted metal box. It rattled when shaken.

‘Treasure for sure!’ Harper chortled.

‘Probably just plant ties or markers,’ Ruby replied disparagingly. ‘Let’s get it out into the light.’

But it was indeed treasure, as Ruby saw it. Old packets of Harper Seeds, including one lone packet of the elusive Woodbridge tomato!

After so long the chances of the seeds still being viable were extremely low but Ruby knew she had to try. Carefully she planted them out and waited anxiously to see if any would germinate. She was delighted when three tiny tomato plants emerged tentatively from the seed raising mix. She nurtured them carefully, impatient to see if they would thrive.

Maybe Harper's old Grandfather was watching over them because they flourished in the warm walled garden of the old factory. Growing tall and strong and in time developing very tasty, large red fruit.

One of the prep school parents involved in the campaign to save the factory was a botanist and became very excited when he discovered the Woodbridge tomato plants in the garden and learned that they were one of the first varieties developed specifically for WA conditions. As the only examples of this locally developed heritage plant in existence, this provided the extra weight needed to save the factory. With the school agreeing to take on the conservation of the factory and to maintain the garden as part of the curriculum as well as establishing a community garden, the future of the garden that Ruby had poured her heart and soul into was finally secured.

Busy school children now grubbed in the dirt and harvested the produce which they would learn to cook in nutrition classes. And over by the far wall, where once dusty factory workers had toiled, local volunteers now worked amicably in the community garden. Science classes studied heritage seeds and worked with local seed savers to cultivate older varieties of vegetables. The school was looking at planting grape vines and introducing a beekeeping course for senior students. Everything in the garden was flourishing. Ruby no longer gardened alone but was part of a busy community.

She looked at the old ring on her finger and thought back over all that had happened since she and Harper had chanced upon it. How it had led to her friendship with Harper, drawn them to the past and the vision of his ancestors. Maybe his old grandfather had helped

them to find the seeds? Maybe he had left them there for them to find so that the garden and the factory could be saved? The ring had been central to everything.

The ring glinted and glistened in the sunshine. Ruby stared at it, mesmerised. As she watched, it slowly melted and faded away. Its work was done, at least for now.



WRITE-A-BOOK-IN-A-DAY  
21<sup>ST</sup> ANNIVERSARY  
2002-2023



JANE DEWING, GERRY CROWLEY, JO FLYNN, CAROL ASTBURY,  
LOIS CROWLEY, CHRIS OAKELEY, DEBORAH COOPER,  
BRONWEN CHANNON, , SHIRLEY BENTON, [RICKY ARNOLD]





A ROLICKING GOOD TALE ABOUT A MARVELLOUSLY MAGIC RING. QUITE PUTS MY LITTLE STORY TO SHAME. I NEEDED THREE SLICES OF CAKE" **BILBO BAGGINS, LORD OF THE RINGS**

Every single girl should get a ring like this. Don't wait for someone to give you one." **Beyonce, singer.**

Who knew vegetables could be so exciting?" **Colonel Saunders**

The only thing missing in this story was a gnome, otherwise it's great. I'd give my eye teeth to work in that garden. Pure magic"  
**Costas Georgiadis. gardening Australia**

Yeah. It was ok, not sure about vegetables though, or school, or magic or anything actually, but it's okay" **Greg Heffley, Diary of a Wimpy Kid.**

