

*THE MOSQUITO CREEK DETECTIVE CLUB...**BOOK I***

# MOSQUITO CREEK INN

by

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*You can't escape it –  
No concealment is possible –  
You are what you are  
On account of what you have done.*

Elbert Hubbard

## CHAPTER ONE

### *Something Very Dusty*

Dear Patrick, June 11...1997

It all started when part of the wall gave way and Sonia fell, face first across the threshold of a hidden doorway...

That night Sonia wasn't supposed to be trying on her mother's new shoes. After her mother left to show some houses and her grandpa went to Dr. Howes' for his weekly game of chess, she was supposed to put her younger sister and two younger brothers to bed, then she was supposed to finish a Girl Scout badge assignment, and then she was supposed to finish some ironing. But after the younger ones were in bed, checking out both pairs of her mom's fancy new shoes became Sonia's biggest priority.

When she stood in front of the closet mirror with one green, high heel shoe on her right foot and one red, wedge heel sandal on her left Sonia was instantly taller. She fussed with her hair and twisted it into a knot high on her head. Suddenly taller and with her hair high up on her head she felt stylish, almost elegant... That is until she tried to walk.

Watching her mother and her aunt walk in high heel shoes, it had looked easy enough. But looking at high heels and walking in them was like being on tippy toes held up by a nail. When she wobbled, she over corrected.

Scrambling, in a panic to regain her balance she grabbed for several of her mother's hanging dresses with one hand, and then stretched out for the back of the closet wall with the other. But the dresses came off the hangers and the wall opened up as if it was air.

After she hit the floor a whole lot of dust came up that made her sneeze. Her eyes watered and she blinked several times trying to see. Sonia wasn't hurt but the front of her bathrobe was a mess and she had to brush off the dust along with a lot of sticky cobwebs. That just made her sneeze again, and she still couldn't see very well.

There was only a single bulb in her mother's closet that cast more shadows than light. Squinting seemed to help her eyes adjust. In the dim light Sonia counted nine file boxes stacked on the far left of the small space she had discovered, with two very tall narrow boxes pushed to the right.

There were two suit cases wedged side by side between the two tall boxes. The suitcases were the same size, but one was a dust covered blue and the other suitcase was grey.

At first she could hardly believe what she had discovered.

Kids always think there must be a secret room, they even dream of a secret room but they rarely find one. This was where her mother hid the birthday gifts and Christmas presents, and the false wall was the reason Sonia had never found anything before.

All the boxes and suitcases were connected by major cobwebs and covered by a layer of dust, so she wasn't sure where to look first. Since the suitcases were the easiest to reach without actually needing to walk into the space behind her mother's closet, Sonia decided to start with them.

On the blue suitcase she blew off the surface dust that covered just the top edge and the handle then wiped the rest with her bathrobe

sleeve. The two clasps stuck a little, but when she laid it down on its side she got the catches to release.

The lid flew open and a framed photo of her parents wedding was right on top. She didn't want to cry, but tears stung her eyes when she lifted the picture. This photo disappeared after her father left when she was almost four.

More family snapshots and mementos, just made her feel worse because their lives had gone on without him and she barely remembered her dad. Abruptly she reclosed the suitcase and pushed it back into place.

For a few seconds Sonia just stared at the grey suitcase, then on an impulse she pulled it out, wiped off the dust with her other sleeve and opened it too.

On the very top was a large brown envelope with no address or any markings. But inside was the high school diploma of her mother's younger sister, Monica.

Below the diploma was a photo album with snapshots of her Aunt Monica as a baby, and then as a small child, and then a young teen. In nearly all of the photos with Sonia's aunt, beginning at the age of four, was a childhood playmate. The second name, hand printed on the back of each picture with the date, was...*Zara*.

Sonia got lost in the album and the snapshots and the funny comments written by her aunt of the shared experiences with her best friend as they grew up together. Then without any explanation the pictures, train and theater tickets, bowling scores, post cards and report cards just stopped. After Aunt Monica's fourteenth birthday the rest of the album pages were empty.

She thought that was odd and searched for another album. But what she found was the front page of a newspaper that gave Sonia a real blunt explanation for the blank pages after her aunt's 14<sup>th</sup> birthday.

**...LOCAL GIRL GOES MISSING IN SEVERE STORM...**

*Sometime in the late evening of August 16, my fourteen-year-old granddaughter Zara Grant, vanished.*

*Zara Grant was heiress to a vast, and historic, family fortune. Her paternal grandfather Kohrs Grant reported her missing to local authorities. Mr. Grant became concerned when about an hour after Zara left her home at Grant Ranch to go riding, her horse returned to the ranch alone.*

*An immediate search for the teenager was hampered by a severe rainstorm that moved into the area with over 100 recorded lighting strikes throughout the night.*

*Sheriff, Jeff Howard, was interviewed by The Review. The sheriff stated that he did not suspect foul play as they expected to find Zara with the help of local tracking dogs. "That storm rolled in pretty fast." The Sheriff stated. "Her horse likely threw her and she is just hurt, maybe has a broken leg."*

*As the search for Zara progresses the Review will keep Powell County residents informed.*

The face of the missing girl in the photograph published with the newspaper story, haunted Sonia. She hadn't known Zara Grant, but she felt sad that her Aunt Monica had lost a dear friend so young.

The sound of her grandpa's old truck coming up the driveway startled her back to the present - and her mother's closet - and it almost stopped her heart.

Shaking, she fumbled to close the suitcase and close the small hidden door, and re-hang her mother's three dresses and fit the stupid shoes back in their boxes.

When Grandpa Molosky came upstairs to check in and say goodnight, Sonia was at the ironing board. She faked interest in some kind of game show blaring from the small television on her mother's tall dresser, while she pretended to iron.

She was so sure that her grandpa would hear the loud drumming of her heart that she was grateful for the noise of the television show. When he hugged her goodnight – she was even more relieved that he hadn't noticed the iron wasn't even hot.

