

HIDDEN DEEPER

Franky Grace knew exactly what she was doing. The police needed to know. This was something heroic. Franky was giving the world the key to solve a problem, they just had to work a little to find it. But, it was there, and that was all that mattered. Of course, someone else could put two and two together.

Franky was putting her own life in danger, but that was a risk she was willing to take. She needed to do this. She took a deep breath as she emailed the last and final draft of her novel to the publisher. *Hidden Deeper*. What a perfect title for her book.

This is the end, she told herself, *finally*. She was wrong. It was just the beginning.

“Franky Grace,” the announcer on the television said, “Was reported missing last Sunday morning, after the release of her novel, *Hidden Deeper*. She is 5’5 with long blonde hair and was last seen wearing a pink and orange sundress. If you have any information about Mrs. Grace’s whereabouts, please contact the police immediately so she can be reunited with her family.”

Erin turned the television off. Mrs. Grace, her sunny, young Grade ten English teacher had been missing for almost four days. The supply, Mrs. Jacobs, was at least seventy-five years old and was an inadequate replacement. Erin swore she had a severe case of dementia. It was a good thing it was already June.

Erin pulled out her phone and texted her best friend, Hannah, *u hear the news? yeah. poor bethany*, Hannah texted back.

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Bethany was Mrs. Grace's seven-year-old daughter. She was even sweeter than her mother. Mrs. Grace's disappearance had been very difficult for Bethany and her father; it was difficult for almost everyone who knew her.

Erin left the house to walk to the bookstore. Carlsville was a small town and she passed Mrs. Grace's house along the way. She looked up and all the windows were dark, even though it was a Saturday afternoon. Miss Rose's bungalow was almost as dark.

Miss Rose was Mrs. Grace's next door neighbour and sister, though no one would have guessed that they were related. Miss Rose barely ever smiled. It was probably due to the fact that three years ago her fiancé, Kevin Jones, disappeared only a day before their wedding. She hadn't dated since.

Erin turned at the end of the street and walked until she reached the bookstore. She stepped inside and darted right towards the new books shelf. She scanned it and found what she was looking for. The last copy of "*Hidden Deeper*". She grabbed it, paid, and left to go read in the park nearby. She sat under a large maple tree. The cool summer breeze felt nice on her back. It lightened the heat of the blazing sun.

Erin opened the book and began to read. She never knew Mrs. Grace was such a good writer. But, there was something sinister and unsettling about the story. Erin couldn't describe why. Mrs. Grace was such a kind person and her book was ominous. Still, she couldn't put it down.

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Tuesday morning at breakfast, Erin was listening to the radio when a police officer began talking about the Franky Grace case.

“We found her this morning,” he began.

Erin turned up the volume.

“The body was found washed up by the lake,” the policeman said. “Mrs. Franky Grace’s death has been ruled a homicide. Other details are being kept confidential,” the policeman continued.

Erin shut off the television. *Mrs. Grace is DEAD?* She couldn’t comprehend this horrible event. She felt sick to her stomach and stayed home from school. During the day Erin finished her extra homework and pulled out Mrs. Grace’s novel.

“What happened?” she asked. The book wasn’t going to answer anything. It was just words on a page. She continued to read. The main character Jacqueline Casey was like Mrs. Grace. She had the same personality. She even owned the same car. Actually, there were a lot of similarities between Jacqueline Casey and Franky Grace. There were even a lot of similarities between Jacqueline’s sister, Michelle Casey, and Miss Rose. They both were forlorn people. In fact, Michelle’s fiancé went missing too. Except in the story he was murdered.

Erin thought about that. Maybe Mrs. Grace was trying to reveal something. No one knew exactly what happened to Kevin Jones. One day he was there and the next day he wasn’t.

Erin continued to read. She finished the book, then she made herself a snack.

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In the story, Michelle Casey had been the one to murder her own husband and Jacqueline found out. To protect her sister, she helped Michelle bury the body in a forest almost like the one in Carlsville. It even had a similar name: Harold Davis Park, while the one in Carlsville was called Howard Dean Park.

Erin thought more about it and the pieces seemed to fit together. Miss Rose was surprisingly not mournful after her husband went missing and it was rumoured that Mrs. Grace went through a small depression during that time.

Finally Erin realized it, the story wasn't just some made-up fictional world, it was the truth. Erin pulled out her phone and texted Hannah, *meet me at howard dean park at midnight. bring a shovel. will explain later.*

It was midnight. Erin had a shovel, flashlight, gardening boots and gloves. As well as the book.

"Hey!"

Erin turned and saw Hannah running over, "Did you bring the shovel?"

"Yeah... I have no idea what you want me to do with it, though. I snuck out, so we better be quick," Hannah said.

Erin explained her theory about the weird book similarities and how she wanted to see if it was all true.

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“So you want me to help you dig up a body because you read some stupid novel?” Hannah said. Then she laughed, “You’re crazy.”

“Please,” Erin begged.

“Whatever.”

Erin followed the book’s description of the burial spot and came to a place covered in bushes and moss. She placed the flashlight on the ground and began to dig.

“C’mon,” she urged Hannah.

“Ok. But this is crazy,” Hannah said.

They dug for a while before they hit something. Erin got on her knees to brush the extra dirt away.

“Holy shit!” Hannah cried.

“What the-” Erin covered her mouth with her hand.

“Oh my God, Erin. What are we going to do?” Hannah said.

“Go to the police?”

“What the hell, Erin. We can’t do that. Damn it! I would never have agreed to this if I actually thought it was real. If we tell them they’re just gonna ask us how we know and why, and they’re going to think we did it!” Hannah was freaking out.

Erin started to feel dizzy.

“Erin,” Hannah said calmer, “what are we going to do?”

“Cover him back up,” Erin said, “I have an idea.”

The girls dumped the dirt back over Kevin Jones’ body and brought their stuff back home. They were done for the day.

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It was the afternoon of the next day. They had waited for Miss Rose to leave. The door clicked. The girls were breaking into the back door of Miss Rose's bungalow. Erin had watched a YouTube video on how to open a lock with a hairpin. They were trying to see if there was anything that could tie Miss Rose and Mrs. Grace to the murder of Kevin Jones.

The girls stepped into the house quietly. They were still scared someone might see them.

"I'll keep searching downstairs. You go look upstairs in her bedroom. Be careful, we don't want anyone knowing we were here," Erin commanded. Hannah nodded and left. Erin looked through cupboards and underneath couch cushions but she couldn't find anything. Maybe Miss Rose wasn't the person in the story?

"Erin!" Hannah called. Erin tiptoed up the house's creaky steps. Hannah was in Miss. Rose's closet and boxes of letters were all around her on the floor.

"They're blackmail notes," Hannah said. "Someone knew Miss Rose and Mrs. Grace were responsible for Kevin Jones' death."

"Oh God," Erin said, "they really did do it."

The girls tidied up Miss Rose's house as if they had never set foot in the old place. They took a few notes with them. Erin wrote another blackmail note, copying the handwriting of the original blackmailer.

Meet me at Howard Dean Park tonight at 10:00 pm by the blue bench. Don't come and I'll reveal everything to the police.

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It was definitely a risk. They could get charged for the withholding of evidence and extortion but it was what needed to be done.

Erin checked her phone, it was 9:53 pm.

“Why do you think they did it?” Hannah asked.

“I don’t know,” Erin replied.

Just minutes later, Hannah whispered, “Look. Someone’s coming our way.”

Erin saw Miss Rose slowly approaching them.

“What are you doing here?” Miss Rose asked in her hoarse, mournful voice.

“We wrote the note. We know what happened to Kevin Jones,” Erin said.

“I don’t have time for this nonsense,” Miss Rose said, turning to leave.

“We have proof,” Hannah said, handing Miss Rose one of the blackmail notes they had taken.

“Where did you get this?” Miss Rose demanded.

“That doesn’t matter,” Erin replied.

“What do you want?”

“We want to know the truth,” Hannah said.

“You don’t understand the circumstances,” Miss Rose said and sat down on the bench, “Kevin was cheating on me, he had been for a year. I only found out a week before the wedding. I caught him with another woman in our bed. He thought I was out that evening, but I had come home early. I never told him. The next morning I went over

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to Franky's and she tried to help, but it didn't work. Kevin didn't even love me and I was going to marry him .

"Two nights before the wedding I heard him on the phone with that slut. They were talking about their plan: Kevin was going to marry me, take all the money I saved, then run off with her out of the country. It was too much. The next night I called him into the backyard. I didn't plan to kill him. I just wanted him to tell the truth. But, the shovel was there and I grabbed it, and then it was over.

"Franky saw it from her window and started screaming, 'Brittany what have you done? Brittany Rose what were you thinking?' We put the body in the car and drove to the park to bury it. I never found out who the cheating bitch was.

"A week later my sister and I started getting threatening letters asking for money or we would be turned in for murder. We went along, but I'm still worried," Miss Rose finished.

"Who do you think sent the notes?" Hannah asked.

"I don't know. Maybe Kevin's lover?" Miss Rose said, "Now give me my notes back."

Erin handed Miss Rose the blackmailer's letters and then Miss Rose left.

"What are we going to do?" Hannah asked Erin.

"We need to get into Mrs. Grace's house."

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The girls met up at Franky Grace's house at 9:00 am. Her husband and daughter had left for the day.

"Look," Erin said, "it's the winning photograph Kevin Jones took for the art festival three years ago." Erin pointed to a slightly faded photograph on Mrs. Grace's desk.

"I wonder why she has that?" Erin said.

Hannah walked over and pulled the photograph out of its metal frame.

"What are you doing?" Erin asked, "What about finger prints?"

"Read the back," Hannah passed Erin the photo.

"It's blank," Erin said.

"Look down."

Erin's eyes fell to the bottom left corner. In tiny delicate print were the words, so *you will always remember us, xo KJ.*

"How did you know to pull out the photo?" Erin began.

"I read it in some mystery novel," Hannah replied. "Anyways, it's signed KJ, Kevin Jones."

"Does this mean...?" Erin asked.

"Yeah. Franky Grace was the one having the affair with Kevin," Hannah said.

"Then who killed her?"

"Probably Miss Rose. She must have found out and gone insane. Her sister was cheating on her."

"Miss. Rose said she didn't know who did it though."

"She lied, she needed time... Oh my God she's gonna run away!"

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"You're a genius!"

"Thanks, but we have a criminal to catch," Hannah said.

The girls quickly tidied up and then left. They ran over to Miss Rose's bungalow. Hannah knocked on the door and Miss Rose appeared. The girls burst into the front entrance. Erin shut and guarded the door. There were a few suitcases sitting in the living room.

"Going somewhere?" Hannah asked.

"None of your business," Miss Rose mumbled.

"We know you killed your sister," Hannah said.

Miss Rose sat down and put her head in her hands.

"How could you? Affair or not," Hannah said, yanking the photograph out of her pocket and displaying it to Miss Rose.

"Tell the full truth this time," Erin demanded.

"It was never supposed to end this way," Miss Rose began. "One month ago I was in Franky's desk looking for a pen, when I came across the cheque I had just written to the blackmailer for five thousand dollars. In the drawer was also a leather journal with an old letter tucked inside. It was signed: *lots of love, KJ*. I realized that she was the person blackmailing me, trying to get the money Kevin had promised. I was heartbroken. And then she wrote everything into that damned book. I couldn't stand it..."

Miss Rose was crying now. It was terrible to watch.

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“My own sister,” Miss Rose continued through tears, “...had betrayed me. So, I killed her and dropped her body into the lake, thinking I would never see it again. But that bitch came back.”

Miss Rose sobbed. The girls pitied her.

Erin dialed 9-1-1.

After the call, Erin put down her phone, “It's over.”

“I know,” Miss Rose said.

“I can't believe Mrs. Grace did that,” Hannah said the next morning when the girls were walking to school.

“You can never fully know someone, can you?” Erin said.

“Yeah. Most people keep to themselves. They think it's better to have it all hidden deeper.”