



Prologue

I guess by now you're pretty familiar with the Legends — or as it's called this year, the Anniversary Legends. You're probably already aware that two of this year's events have been decided. I did well in both of them, but I've got really strong vibes that the next event — netball — will be a whole different ball game. In fact, it could be my toughest Legends event ever.

When I think about the competition I'm up against, there's one person who stands out. *Karla*. Karla Harris. There was a real buzz when she first joined Sandhurst. Rumour



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had it that she was a strong contender for the Anniversary Legends gold trophy. But Karla is one strange cookie. As the new girl at school, she's kept fairly much in the background during the first few events. Occasionally she's thrown her weight around but then just as suddenly she's dropped out of sight again.

For the Anniversary Legend of Netball, players are actually going to stay at an old mansion for a couple of weeks. This time there'll be no avoiding Karla



It was the traditional end-of-Legends party at Bryce's house — with a twist. This time Bryce and his dad had organised a games night to go with the food.

We'd already played table tennis (won by Mitchell); darts (won by Bryce); a sock-shooting game involving an assortment of socks and the open washing machine (won by Rat); and balloon volleyball (abandoned after Bubba accidentally popped a balloon and

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nearly fainted with fright). I looked around the table at my friends — Mitchell, Becky, Bryce, Bubba and Rat — as they dived into some nachos. They were all so different and fantastic in their own ways.

Mitchell was a sporting legend and a great guy. Bryce was as brainy as anything — really quiet, yet he loved sport too. Becky was sincere and totally reliable. She didn't have a jealous thought about anyone, especially me, which was amazing since I'd narrowly beaten her in a few Legends events. Bubba was a funny guy who didn't care what anyone thought about him. Rat was a new friend, who'd left Wetherhood school to join Sandhurst. He was an amazing basketballer but a bit private, though he obviously enjoyed being with us. I think maybe we were his first real friends.

'How will you cope?' someone was saying.

'Luci's in La-la Land,' Mitch sniggered, giving me a nudge.



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‘What?’ I asked, snapping back to reality.

‘Earth to Luci. Bubba asked you a question,’ Mitch said, rolling his eyes.

I looked over at Bubba. He had obviously made a full recovery from the balloon incident as he was now licking out what was left in the nachos bowl.

‘Cope with what?’ I asked him.

‘With being away from us. All of us. *Especially* Mitchell,’ he giggled.

‘How are those nachos?’ Mitchell asked Bubba. Mitchell’s face had turned red with embarrassment.

‘Bubba, I’ll be a nervous wreck,’ I said, jokingly. ‘But Mitchell has promised he’ll come and visit me one night after lights-out.’

‘Y—you did?’ Bubba asked, turning to Mitchell, wide-eyed.

Mitchell stifled a grin and nodded.

‘Yeah, of course,’ Rat piped up. ‘Karla asked me to pass on a message to you. She

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wants you to visit her.’

‘Sh—she does?’ Bubba had stopped chewing.

‘We’re pairing up, Bubba. It’s all arranged,’ Becky said, joining in the fun. ‘Mitchell and Luci, me and Rat, Bryce and um—’

‘Corinne,’ I said, nodding.

‘Yeah, that’s right,’ Becky continued. ‘And you and Karla. It’s the happiest I’ve seen her — ever.’

The colour drained from Bubba’s face. His hand, holding a scrap of nacho chip, had frozen halfway between the bowl and his mouth.

‘You’re not going to disappoint her are you, Bubba?’

Bubba’s chip fell to the table.

‘I’ve lost my appetite,’ he whispered, looking at each of us in turn.

There was silence, then Rat broke into laughter and the rest of us joined in.

‘Bubba, we were only joking,’ I said, slapping him on the back.



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Bubba picked up his chip.

‘I knew that,’ he said.

‘Oh, were you, Luci? Bummer,’ Mitch said, grinning.

I caught Becky looking at me and she gave me a quick wink.

‘Anyway, this netball thing should be fantastic,’ I said, changing the subject.

‘Should be,’ said Bryce. ‘Though I’ve heard some pretty weird things about that mansion you’re staying in.’

The room fell silent as we looked at Bryce. He sounded serious.

‘What do you mean?’ I asked.

‘Some strange old woman used to live there. Miss Shiverham. She was really into cats. I mean *really*.’

‘Yeah?’ Rat asked.

Bryce nodded. ‘That’s what I heard. Just Miss Shiverham, her housemaid and dozens of cats. Then she died.’

We were silent for a moment.

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‘Anyway, that all happened ages ago,’ he said quickly.

‘How long?’ I asked.

‘Ummm a couple of months — maybe not that far back. Anyway, she left her mansion to some leading community people. It’s their job to use it for the benefit of everyone: school groups, local businesses, for concerts and other stuff,’ he said.

‘How do you know all this?’ Bubba asked, looking wide-eyed.

‘My dad’s involved with the legal stuff,’ Bryce smiled.

‘Anyone for popcorn,’ shouted Bryce’s dad from the kitchen. Everyone except Bryce and I raced out of the room.

When Bryce has a secret, he has a strange little look on his face. He was trying to hide that look from me now.

‘Okay, Bryce. There’s something else, isn’t there? Something you haven’t told us.’

‘Dad also mentioned that there’s a



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mystery attached to the place, but he wouldn't tell me what it was.'

'Bad luck,' I said.

'So I snuck into his study and checked out Miss Shiverham's will.'

'You didn't!'

Bryce nodded sheepishly.

'Dad had told me that Miss Shiverham's housemaid — Miss Lister — had been with her for years. They were like sisters and would play practical jokes on each other. He said there was a rumour about an incredibly valuable treasure somewhere in the house. I read in the will that Miss Shiverham set up some sort of treasure hunt for Miss Lister.'

'One last joke,' I said.

'Miss Shiverham sounds eccentric.'

'Crazy more like it,' I said.

'As far as I could work out, it's something about ten tags for ten cats. The number on each tag is part of a code. The code opens a safe that holds a treasure,' Bryce finished.

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‘So what’s the treasure?’ I asked.

Bryce shook his head.

‘Dad didn’t say. The will just mentioned a treasure hunt.’ Bryce was suddenly looking anxious.

‘Are you okay, Bryce?’ I asked.

‘I shouldn’t have looked in Dad’s study. Or read that will. And I *shouldn’t* have told anyone else about it.’

Bryce wasn’t the kind of person to be looking for sympathy and I didn’t offer it.

‘How come the will was at your place?’

‘Dad was Miss Shiverham’s solicitor.’

‘Oh, right,’ I said. I sat quietly for a moment. ‘Bryce, I won’t tell anyone.’

There were cries from next door.

‘C’mon. There’ll be no popcorn left,’ I said, standing up.

‘Maybe you should check out the mansion while you’re there,’ Bryce said, grinning.

I gave him a shove through the door.

‘Don’t hold your breath,’ I told him.



Chapter 1

A Mystery at Feline Hall



Unlike the rugby competition organisers, the teacher in charge of netball had everything under control. Miss Connelly had created a fabulous section for netball on the Legends noticeboard. There was even a drawing of the old mansion where we would be staying.

‘Wow, it’s huge,’ Becky said, pointing at the garden at the front of the house and the drive that curved through it.

‘Feline Hall,’ I read aloud. ‘You’ve got to be joking. Becky, I’d like to check out the place

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before the tournament.’ I was thinking of the hidden treasure.

‘Good idea, count me in,’ a voice whispered in my ear. It was Karla.

‘You might need someone smart to get you out of a tricky situation,’ she added as she walked away with a netball trials notice.

Karla was always saying weird things that made no sense. I figured she was just looking for attention.

‘Hey, Karla?’ I called out.

‘What?’

‘Are you really going to sue the school because girls are banned from the Legend of Rugby?’ I asked.

‘Of course I am. It’s discrimination. And I’m going to tell them so.’ She strode away.

I nearly felt sorry for the Sandhurst teachers. Karla could be a real handful.



The next morning, Becky and I were delivering the newspapers to the staff room



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when a voice boomed out from behind us. It was Karla.

‘So, when are we going to check out spooky cat mansion, girls?’

I looked at Becky, and shrugged.

‘Dunno,’ I said.

‘Are you busy Thursday? After school?’

Becky asked her.

I held my breath.

‘Unless I get a detention in the next 24 hours, I’ll meet you there,’ she said, smiling broadly.

‘The map’s on the board— ’

‘I know where it is. I’ve been there before,’ she added, smugly.

‘Then why do you want to check it out?’

Becky muttered under her breath.

‘What did you say, *Becky?*’ growled Karla.

‘You’ve already been there. So why do you need to check it out again?’ I asked.

She took a step towards me then gave a mean little smile.

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‘You girls will need someone to hold your hand,’ she said finally.

Karla wasn’t making any sense at all.

‘It’s not like the safe little homes *you* belong to. Believe me,’ she insisted.

‘What do you mean?’ I asked.

‘Meet me Thursday. After school. And none of your boyfriends, either.’ She veered off down another corridor, almost knocking Miss Connelly into a wall.

‘Sorry, Miss Connelly,’ she blurted out.

Miss Connelly seemed as shocked as we were with Karla’s politeness. But before she could say anything, Karla had moved on.



After school on Thursday, Karla was waiting for us at the bottom school gate. She led the way, staying a few metres ahead for the short journey to Feline Hall — our home for ten days, starting next Monday.

‘Wait here,’ Karla said as she opened the gate. ‘I just need to clear the way.’



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‘Clear the way—’

At that moment a cat screeched loudly and jumped at us from nowhere. Becky and I screamed. The cat had launched itself through the air and landed on Becky’s shoulder. She swiped it away but not before it had torn her shirt.

‘Didn’t ya hear me? I said *wait!*’ Karla yelled, waving her arms at the black cat that had now disappeared into the bushes.

‘Are you okay?’ I asked Becky, turning my back on Karla. Becky nodded. She looked more surprised than hurt as she shoved her hand inside her shirt and felt her shoulder.

‘I warned you to wait.’

Becky looked at the blood on her hand. ‘You knew about that cat?’ she gasped. But Karla had either not heard her or was pretending not to hear.

‘Must be Karla’s little secret,’ I whispered to Becky. ‘Are you sure you’re okay? Do you want to just go home?’

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‘No, we’ve got this far,’ Becky said, wiping her hand on a patch of grass.

‘She loves being in charge, doesn’t she?’ I said.

We caught up with Karla at the top of the stairs. Karla was calmly pulling off the head of the stone cat sitting on a pillar. Reaching into its hollow ‘neck’, Karla pulled out a key and tossed it over to me.

‘Front door,’ she said.

After opening the door, I threw the key back to her. Karla replaced the key and slotted the cat’s head back onto its body. The fit was amazing.

‘How do you know about the key?’ demanded Becky.

‘I know about a lot of things,’ snapped Karla. ‘While you girls are tucked up nice and snug in your beds at night, there are some of us who aren’t so lucky.’

‘Meaning?’ I asked her.

Karla shrugged.



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‘No one in my home really notices if I’m in bed or not, so sometimes I head out with my sister to see what’s happening,’ said Karla.

‘Head out where?’ asked Becky. I was wondering the same thing.

‘Nowhere,’ Karla shrugged. She noticed our baffled looks. ‘Anywhere!’ she added. ‘Doesn’t really matter. We just get out. C’mon.’

We followed her into the house.

After the excitement of getting inside, the house itself was disappointing. It was dark and smelt musty.

Miss Shiverham had seriously had a thing for cats. Every second painting was of a cat, and there were little statues and cat-related objects everywhere you looked. There was a stained-glass window beside the front door that showed cats walking around a wishing well, and a rug bordered with cats lying at the base of the stairs.

‘Bryce was right about this woman being stuck on cats,’ I whispered to Becky.

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‘Feline Hall. It figures,’ she replied. She was holding an Egyptian-looking cat with a gold earring in one of its ears.

There were more locked doors, but Karla had lost interest in finding keys. We wandered around the big entrance hallway, walked up a huge flight of stairs and found nothing of interest in any of the bedrooms that we could actually get into.

‘Yeah, well, I know it all seems pretty darn quiet now,’ said Karla, ‘but I’m telling you, there’s something real weird about this place. The last time I was here there were strange noises, like someone whispering, but I was the only one here. Well, I thought I was. Then I heard this woman shouting. Something about finding cats. But I couldn’t hang around.’

Becky nudged me. She was probably thinking what I was. That Karla got scared and headed off quick. Probably what I would have done too.



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We walked out of the back door and into the garden. The netball courts were visible through some trees to one side.

‘I think they used to be tennis courts,’ Karla said, pointing to the netball courts.

‘Why did you bring us here?’ Becky asked, picking up a piece of paper from a garden bench. It looked like an envelope.

‘Why did you *come*?’ Karla snapped back quickly.

Becky didn’t answer. She was staring at the paper in her hand.

‘What is it, Becky?’ I asked, looking over her shoulder. The spidery writing on the envelope looked old-fashioned.

‘You think a couple of dead cats are really going to bother a bunch of smart kids here to play netball? You better come up with something a little stronger than that if you don’t want kids messing about where they don’t belong. And you’d better hurry up about it, too,’ Becky read aloud.

‘What does it mean?’ I asked.

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‘Give me that,’ snapped Karla, snatching the letter out of Becky’s hand.

Somewhere close by a cat screeched. It was answered by another cat’s hiss.

‘Come on, Becky, let’s get out of here. This place gives me the creeps.’ I walked towards a gap in the trees and through a small gate that led out onto the netball courts.

‘Are you thinking about that letter?’ Becky asked me.

‘Nup. I’m thinking about those supposedly ‘unbelievable’ netball players that everyone’s been talking about. The ones we’ll be playing against.’

‘The kids from Ascot College?’

I nodded. ‘I’m also thinking about Karla. I heard someone say Karla is twice as good as any of them,’ I added.

Overhead, a gust of wind blew through the branches of some trees overhanging the courts and a few leaves fell to the ground.

‘Let’s go home,’ I said.

