

Wisplurkers

Episode 11. Something behind him...

He tapped gently on the door and waited. Then he knocked louder. Still no one answered the door. Toby quickly glanced around to make sure he wasn't being watched, and this time he turned the handle on the front door. The lock was rusted, as were the hinges, and it refused to open. When he pushed and put his full weight behind it, the door wouldn't budge. "Stupid door."

He stood back and looked around. If he was a real private eye, what would he do now?

To his left was a narrow alleyway leading to the back of the house. There had to be a way in. Maybe an open window. The narrow alley was so overgrown with weeds Toby had to pick his way carefully. It opened out onto a paved yard and beyond was a patch of tall grass. Toby stood for a moment on the edge of the yard getting his bearings. At the end of the garden was a tumble-down shed almost dwarfed by bushes and trees. The garden was absolutely silent. Fancifully Toby thought it must be as silent as *death*. Not even a single bird chirped in the old gnarled branches of a birch tree growing at the bottom of the garden. He almost lost his nerve and ran when the sun suddenly went behind a bank of clouds and a strange, dark, stillness covered everything. The clouds moved on and the sun reappeared, bathing the boy in its comforting warmth. It made the house and garden friendlier, less menacing somehow. Toby grinned to himself. Clues! There had to be clues. If he could just get inside.

Cautiously he tried the back door. It was an old door, half timbered at the bottom with four small panes of glass at the top. He pushed hard, putting his shoulder against the frame. There was a crack as some of the rotted wood broke away in splinters, but the door stubbornly held fast to the frame.

Toby Dodd hated to be beaten.

To the left of the kitchen door was a small window not big enough for him to climb through and to the right he saw a large sash window. The glass in the window was grimy but Toby stepped up close and, by shading his eyes with his hands, attempted to see inside. The heavy curtains had been drawn across, but there was a narrow gap where the curtains didn't quite meet. It was dark and gloomy inside. Toby could just see the outlines of furniture and very little else. He tried the window but just like the doors, it was locked. It would take brute force to get it open or at least need something to smash the glass. That was an idea. Smash a window. What with?

Toby searched through the tall grass and amongst the overgrown bushes. There was quite a lot of rubbish dumped in black plastic bags, one or two

broken flower pots almost lost amongst the weeds and even a rusty bike frame with a tatty old basket still attached to the front. In the long grass he found a small rock. Actually there were a few dotted about.

Toby picked up the rock and weighed it in his hand, then taking aim he threw it at the window. His aim was for the pane of glass close to the door's catch. It was a good aim. The sudden noise, after the unusual quiet, seemed to fill the air like the sudden backfire of a car's engine. It made Toby jump. The glass shattered into three big pieces and then two fell away from the frame smashing onto the paved area, into much smaller fragments. With more rocks he smashed the glass in the smaller pantry window, and the four panes in the back door. He wasn't worried. He was sure any private eye would have done the same. Still he paused just in case the noise had attracted any attention, but no one came to see what the noise was all about. Toby was having such a great time. Yoh flappin'! He considered smashing the glass in the rest of the windows, but then again if no one came to shout at him and chase him away, there wasn't any point.

Toby tried the back door handle just once more, then he reached in through a hole in the one of the small bare windows searching for the key. By angling his head and pressing his forehead against the wood, he could just make out the key still in the lock, but it was just out of reach of his fingers. A piece of jagged glass, still held fast by the old dried-out putty, caught at his blazer and ripped a hole in the sleeve. Toby withdrew his arm and looked with alarm at the tear. There was no hope of patching it up, not with Sellotape, and it was on the outside of the sleeve, for all to see. Now his mother would have something to say about that, especially if she had to go and buy him a new blazer. And so close to the end of the term. He sighed. Never mind, he'd face that problem later, and instantly forgot all about it.

With his heart pounding and his mouth dry with anticipation he went back to the big window. Through the broken pane maybe, just maybe he could reach inside and push back the latch. The hole was certainly big enough for him to get his arm through, and without more mishaps to his blazer.

It seemed to take ages. Toby struggled at first with the latch, and when he finally got the window to open it creaked and groaned with disuse. But it opened fully and he jumped up and sat on the sill while he then struggled and tugged the heavy curtains out of his way. The light revealed the room, and for the first time Toby peered inside.

The room held heavy, solid old-fashioned furniture. At either side of the empty, ash covered grate stood two faded fireside chairs. Draped on both these chairs were the remnants of clothing. Empty lifeless clothes, as if the owners had carefully slid out of them, leaving them in exactly the same way they must have been wearing them while watching the television that was standing in the corner. Weird!

The dusty rug in the centre of the floor, the large, ugly sideboard against the far wall and the bird cage in the corner, were flooded with the sunlight and atoms of dust danced in a beam of light.

Carefully he lowered himself into the room. He stood for a second to check there was no sound inside the house before he moved towards the chairs and the empty clothes. He picked up a pair of faded trousers from the chair on the right. There was nothing in the pockets except an old bus ticket.

“Pooh. These stink,” Toby told the room, and wrinkled his nose in disgust, before dropping them back on the chair seat.

The chair to the left of the fire held the clothes of an old woman. The dress with a daisy print was almost hidden beneath a thick hand knitted cardigan and a plain blue apron.

He stooped to pick up one of the old woman’s pompom slippers and dropped it again in alarm. It still held one thick, crumpled stocking.

“Gross,” was Toby’s reaction. He shuddered and couldn’t prevent the sudden thought that flittered through his brain. “I wonder what happened to them?”

He stared at the floor as if expecting it to reveal bodies hidden beneath the floorboards, then shrugged his shoulders and went over to the sideboard. Clues! There had to be something here to help him solve this terrible crime. He opened the two drawers. They were empty. So was the cupboard underneath. Absolutely nothing. It was very disheartening. At the very least he’d expected to find blood splattered all over the walls and ceilings.

Toby went through the door into the kitchen. Maybe in here he’d find a clue. An evil looking butcher’s knife with dried blood on the blade would be something.

There was more light in this room owing to the broken glass in the door. He peered with little enthusiasm inside the cupboards and finally opened the fridge door to one side of the sink. It had nothing inside except a half empty bottle of milk. This was thick and sour. Toby picked it up and smelt it. “Phew.” He returned it to the shelf in the fridge.

He thought he heard something behind him. A sound. A scuffling. He spun round expecting to see — what?

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Wisplurkers. By Maggie C.

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