

# Mystery of the Hidden Face



**Elizabeth Honness**



# **Mystery of the Hidden Face**

by Elizabeth Honness

Illustrated by Jacqueline Tomes

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*For my cousins*  
CYNTHIA LEIGH FORSYTHE and MARIAN LEIGH OLEJER

*who share in happy childhood memories of  
Clinton, New Jersey—the “Riverbend” of  
this story; and for their children: Jeffrey and  
Scott Forsythe—Kathie, Cynthia, Victoria,  
and Suzanne Leigh Olejer*

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# Contents

<u>1. “A Dangerous Character”</u>	1
<u>2. The Forgotten Fortune</u>	6
<u>3. The Ancestor in the Attic</u>	10
<u>4. Vain Hope</u>	17
<u>5. A Big Catch</u>	22
<u>6. Karl Hoffman</u>	26
<u>7. “Tidings of Joy”</u>	31
<u>8. The Quarry</u>	35
<u>9. Another Rescue</u>	40
<u>10. A Letter from Philadelphia</u>	47
<u>11. Something “Funny-Peculiar”</u>	52
<u>12. “Against My Will”</u>	59
<u>13. The Art Thieves</u>	63
<u>14. Karl Hoffman’s Plan</u>	67
<u>15. Great-Grandmother’s Secret</u>	73
<u>16. Spilled Beans</u>	78
<u>About the Author</u>	82

## 1. “A Dangerous Character”

THE LONG JUNE twilight was fading into dusk when the Lane family came home from their picnic on the river. A wash of gold still lingered on the horizon. Above, the sky deepened into night-time blue and the evening star shone bright.

Debby, not quite three, yawned widely and sat down on the first porch step. “Debby sleepy,” she said, rubbing two chubby fists at her eyes.

“Poor baby! It’s way past your bedtime,” said Jennifer, feeling grown-up and superior because she was eleven and was allowed to stay up until nine o’clock as a matter of course. Her short fair hair, tied into tassels on each side of her head, bounced up and down as she took the steep porch steps two at a time. She unlatched the screen door and snapped on the hall light.

Debby held up her arms to Jeremy, who was twelve. “Ride Debby up steps,” she commanded. Jerry bent willingly to his little sister and helped her clamber on, then piggy-backed her into the house. Mr. and Mrs. Lane followed with the picnic basket and thermos jugs.

“Jenny, you take Deb upstairs and start her bath. I’ll be up as soon as I put these things in the kitchen,” Mrs. Lane said. “Lend a hand, Jerry, will you? Your father wants to have a peaceful time with the evening paper.”

Jenny and Debby started upstairs, but stopped short at a startled shout from the living room. “What the dickens has been going on here?” asked Mr. Lane. “Who turned over these chairs?”

Almost at once there was a sound of alarm from the kitchen, a low moan of distress from Mrs. Lane and an incredulous whistle from Jerry. “Jeepers, what a mess!” he shouted. “Hey, Dad, come quick!”

Jennifer grabbed Debby by the hand and raced for the kitchen. There she saw her mother, with Mr. Lane towering beside her, and Jeremy standing openmouthed, gazing at the wreckage of the once tidy room. Pots and pans were scattered about, canned goods spilled over the floor. The vegetable bin was lying on its side, potatoes and carrots and onions strewn every which way. Torn fragments of newspaper, which had once

lined the shelves storing canned foods, littered the linoleum. Coffee, flour, and sugar were poured on the kitchen counter from overturned canisters.

Debby began to cry. "Debby didn't do it, Debby didn't do it," she wailed.

Mr. Lane scooped her up in his arms. "Of course you didn't, darling. Don't cry." His lean, usually pleasant face became grim. "I'd like to catch the vandal who did, though."

Mrs. Lane looked as though she might cry too. "How will we ever get this mess cleaned up?"

Mr. Lane patted her shoulder. "It won't be so hard if we all pitch in and help."

"Do you s'pose it was a burglar?" asked Jennifer, feeling little creepy fingers of fear on her spine. "Maybe he's still in the house."

"A queer kind of burglar, if you ask me," said Jeremy. "Why should he want to make hash of our kitchen?"

"It's not only the kitchen," said Mr. Lane, putting down Debby who had now stopped crying. "The living room hasn't been spared either, though it's nothing as bad as this. We'd better look over the rest of the house. Mother and I'll go first. Here, Dorothy," he said, handing Mrs. Lane a broom. "I'll get a poker from the fireplace and we'll be armed at least."

Jenny and Jerry took their places on either side of Debby and she slipped her soft little hand into theirs. Each felt safer with this warm contact as they followed their parents on a tour of the house.

The dining room seemed untouched except for a pair of candlesticks knocked over on the sideboard. In the living room, as their father had said, several straight chairs had been upset, sofa pillows were on the floor, and a standing lamp had fallen across a big wing chair.

Mr. Lane picked up the fireplace poker and led the way into the hall. They saw that the double doors into the parlor were closed. Maybe the burglar was hiding in there! Jennifer's heart thumped as her dad pressed the light switch and slid open the doors. No one was there. The polished rosewood of the baby grand piano shone serenely in the light, the Victorian chairs and sofas and marble-top tables were in their usual places, just as they had been arranged in great-grandmother's day. Nothing had been touched.

Mr. Lane closed the double doors. He headed for the stairs. Mrs. Lane followed close behind, her broom gripped so hard her knuckles showed white.

*We do look funny*, Jennifer thought, eying her father's tall figure, poker in hand, with small, dainty mother at his heels, carrying the broom. She suppressed a giggle.

Debby hung back. "No want to go," she whispered.

"Don't be afraid, Deb. Dad won't let anything happen to us," Jerry told her. "Come on now, let's catch up to them."

They moved quietly up the stairs, along the upper hall, and into the doorway of their parents' room. Light flooded the room as Mr. Lane touched the switch. "Well!" he said. "Well! Will you look what we have here!"

"I'll be dog-goned!" said Jeremy. "A raccoon!"



Sitting in the middle of the bedroom rug was a gray furry animal about three feet long, with a bushy tail ringed round and round with stripes of black. He was holding a cantaloupe in his little black hands, chewing it busily, not in the least concerned at having been exposed as the intruder.

Jennifer began to laugh. "Oh me, oh my!" she sputtered. "What a funny burglar!"

Mother set down her broom and leaned beside it against the wall. She began to laugh too. Jeremy and Debby joined in, and