

A mystery grows at Chimney Bluffs

Chapter 4: “Trespassers in the conservatory”

by Jonathan Everitt

Illustration by Steve Smock

High-school seniors Sean and Brett were cutting class for a good cause. They had a history paper due.

This freezing February morning, Brett pulled up to a coffeehouse on Monroe where his partner in crime was waiting. The pair slipped out of Rochester in Brett’s Honda, and flew down the expressway toward Canandaigua. The expedition would lead them to a castle built by a banker long ago—now a sprawling museum and grounds.

“So. Why this place?” Sean asked, peering out the passenger window as they pulled into the snow-covered estate.

Brett turned off the car, grabbed his backpack, and stared back at Sean through his black shades.

“Old story I heard from my aunt,” Brett said. “At least two papers’ worth of material. Seriously.”

“I’m supposed to write about Great Lakes sailors,” Sean objected.

“That’s why we’re here,” Brett teased, popping open his car door.

The two stepped out into the empty parking lot. Sean tightened his wool scarf, blinked in the morning light and studied their destination. He’d expected a mansion of stone.

But this was a palace of glass.

“Last of its kind,” Brett said with a curator’s air.

The vast conservatory gleamed in the glaring sun, a colorless cathedral worthy of Oz.

“C’mon,” Brett said, gesturing toward the structure. “I know a way in.”

Inside, hazy sunlight filtered in through the ceiling. Tall palm trees and lacy ferns nodded quietly in the moist climate. Lost in awe, Sean fell behind as Brett went deeper into the labyrinth. He soon heard Brett’s voice bounce off glass somewhere ahead.

“Think I heard a car,” came the warning in a stage whisper. “Gotta make it quick.”

Sean followed the sound and found Brett stopped in his tracks in another wing. The space glowed, paint-thick with golden daffodils. Everywhere, yellow trumpets burst up through terra cotta pots.

“Whoa—” Sean gasped as he began to wade into the sea of color.

Brett grabbed his arm.

“The Chimney Bluffs,” he said as Sean turned to him. Then, looking back, murmured, “So it’s true.”

A distant, creaking door broke the room’s spell.

“Hello?” A woman’s voice called timidly.

By the time she reached the wing where the boys had stood in wonder, they were gone. Now her own eyes widened at the out-of-season spectacle. A day ago, the room had been bare.

Outside, a Honda sped out, kicking up gravel and ice. The woman shook her head. Reached for her phone. Glanced downward. At her feet, a battered leather journal rested, freshly dropped. Embossed on it: “1926.”

Brett would soon reach for it in his backpack—and discover it gone.

To be continued

