

The Dead Lady

by Susan McMillan



I was born on December 8, 1946 and resided at the junction of two streets, with a Mum, Dad and sister. This neighbourhood housed many children as we were all born around the same time and grew up together until we left our homes for individual adventures.

Cathy is one of my best buddies and her street runs straight out of our living room window, which I am delighted with, as I can see all that happens or what is about to happen. Her house is located on a big hill and we all seem to congregate there. Cathy yells, "We're all meeting here after dinner. There's a new game. See ya!"

I can hardly wait to get through supper as I keep wondering what this new game is all about. "Gotta go, gotta go," I mutter. Mum asks, "What's up?" "I don't know. Cathy said we're learning a new game or something." Having no need to keep me at the dining room table any longer Mum said, "See you at 9:00! No later! OKAY!" This is deliciously wonderful as it is the first summer I can stay out until after dark. "Yahoo," I yell as I fly down the street on wings of anticipation. Most of the gang is here.

We played blindfold last night. Robbie had the blindfold on and we all ran around him and when he yelled "STOP" we froze in the position we were caught in. Robbie walked right into Carol. He put his hands all over her face and by accident his finger went up her nose and he yelled, "It's Carol, it's Carol. I know its Carol because she got big nostrils." Carol cried and ran home, but here she is and I am glad because she is one of my best friends. I run up the hill and put my arm around her "We're learning a new game. It's called Jailer!" "What's that?" "I dunno!"

Oh well, I don't really care as this game seems just "Oh so-o-o-o-o-c-o-o-o-o-I!" Apparently we are to find a special hiding place and if we get caught we have to run up the hill and if we get tagged we have to stay there, in jail, until everyone is with us. Carol and I eventually take off but we are tagged early and we wonder where Cathy and Roy are. It's late and I will have to go home soon and I don't want to.

At that very moment Cathy comes rushing up the hill. She is white and can hardly breathe. Roy

is huffing and puffing just behind her. He stammers, "We found a dead lady! We found a dead lady!" Cathy chimes in. "We did! We did!" There's a skeleton down there!" "Where?" "Down the riverbank!" "The riverbank?" Carol and I are sitting together when the announcement was made. We sit there in silence, on the hill and I look into her huge eyes. It is very quiet for a long time. Then Martha yells out, "YA SURE!" and she starts to laugh. Everyone starts laughing so I laugh because I don't really know what else to do. And then Carol starts laughing. We laughed all the way home thinking this was hysterically funny.

The news travelled swiftly and we all congregate at Cathy's the next morning, but then start walking back towards my house. I run up to her as she is leading the group. "Where are we going?" Cathy replies, "Behind your house. The dead lady is behind your house!" I am stunned. We march with purpose through the back yard, which seemed to go on forever, down the path that is etched in riverbank of the Assiniboine River, through the trees and there she was just at the water's edge, mired into a mud hill mixed in with some small trees.

We stood still. Eventually the silence was broken. "Well, there's Polygrip for ya!" someone yelled. It was then I realized I was looking at dentures with a skeleton attached to it. The bones were shiny and very white. As I stood there, not knowing what to do, I noticed she had an open toed-blue shoe on her left foot and it looked like a pair of my grandmother's shoes.

Judy, who had joined us this morning, screamed, "There *is* a dead lady and I'm going home to tell my Mother," but the rest of us stood there wondering when and how she got there. We made a group decision and decided it was best to go home and tell our Mum's so off we went to our individual homes. I told my sister, who was standing in the back door of the house and she said was, "Oh sure."

Ha! She thought she was always right because she was older. Ha! Ha! I'll get her, I thought to myself, but she got to Mum first. Mum said, "Hey I just heard you found a dead lady down the river bank." "Mum-mmm-m-mmm we did, honest, we did! Come and see for yourself. "Com-m-m-m-m-m on-n-n-n-n-n-n!" "Listen Honey, I'd really like to but we can't right now. I want to take you downtown and we'll get you some new clothes for school. Run upstairs and change and hurry up. We've got to go. Now! Run!" Run I did, as this was terribly exciting for me. Better than Christmas and New Years, I think. I was getting new clothes for school, which starts in a few weeks. Yahoo!"

We came home from Eaton's and Mum told me to go upstairs and have my quiet-time. Everyone had a quiet-time on this street. "Sleep, read or clean up your room. It's up to you. "See you later."

“Dinner time, Mum yelled up the stairs.” I slowly came downstairs as I was half asleep and sat on my chair at the dining room table. Dad started the conversation with, “Oh, I hear you guys found a dead lady down the riverbank?” I perked up immediately. “Yes, we did, I said proudly, “Wanna see her after we eat?” “Want to?” My English was immediately corrected and they all started to laugh. “Why are you laughing?” I innocently asked in a run-on-sentence. “It’s not funny. She has false teeth and everything!” This seemed to make them laugh harder.

Mum was smiling as she explained she had called Mrs. Elliott and yes, Nancy too had told her the same thing and yes, Cathy’s Mum, Mrs. Fillmore knew about it as well. Mum’s eyes were dancing and she appeared to be enjoying herself. I must have looked at her really funny because Mum said, “You kids can’t fool all of us. We know you’re playing a joke.” I was flabbergasted. I couldn’t wait to talk to Cathy and Carol. No one believed us. Well, what nerve!

Judy had her bicycle so we decided to take her bike down the riverbank. Down we went to the dead lady. Cathy, Carol, Judy and I groaned and grunted making comments like, “Whoops! Careful, BE CAREFUL, DON’T, ok, ok, OKAY, careful, careful,” as we lifted the head on the count of One, Two, and Three. We dropped it into the carrier on Judy’s bicycle. Relieved that everything was in tack, we walked up the riverbank, through the backyard and past my house. Judy threw her leg over the seat of her bike and took off heading towards her home.

Our parents finally believed us.

The RCMP came from Toronto and identified the woman as a missing person from the late 1940s. I don’t really know the details but we kids thought she committed suicide and jumped off the bridge and was washed into our land during the Winnipeg flood in 1950. We all got it in our minds that she had fallen in love and her new husband had been killed in the war.

We kids thought it was romantic.