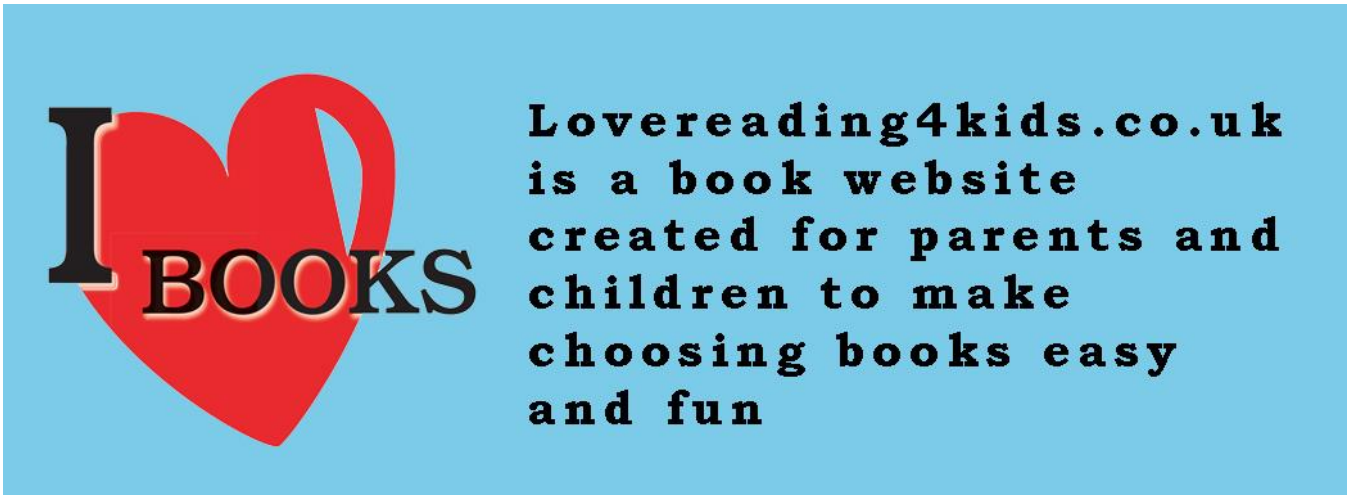


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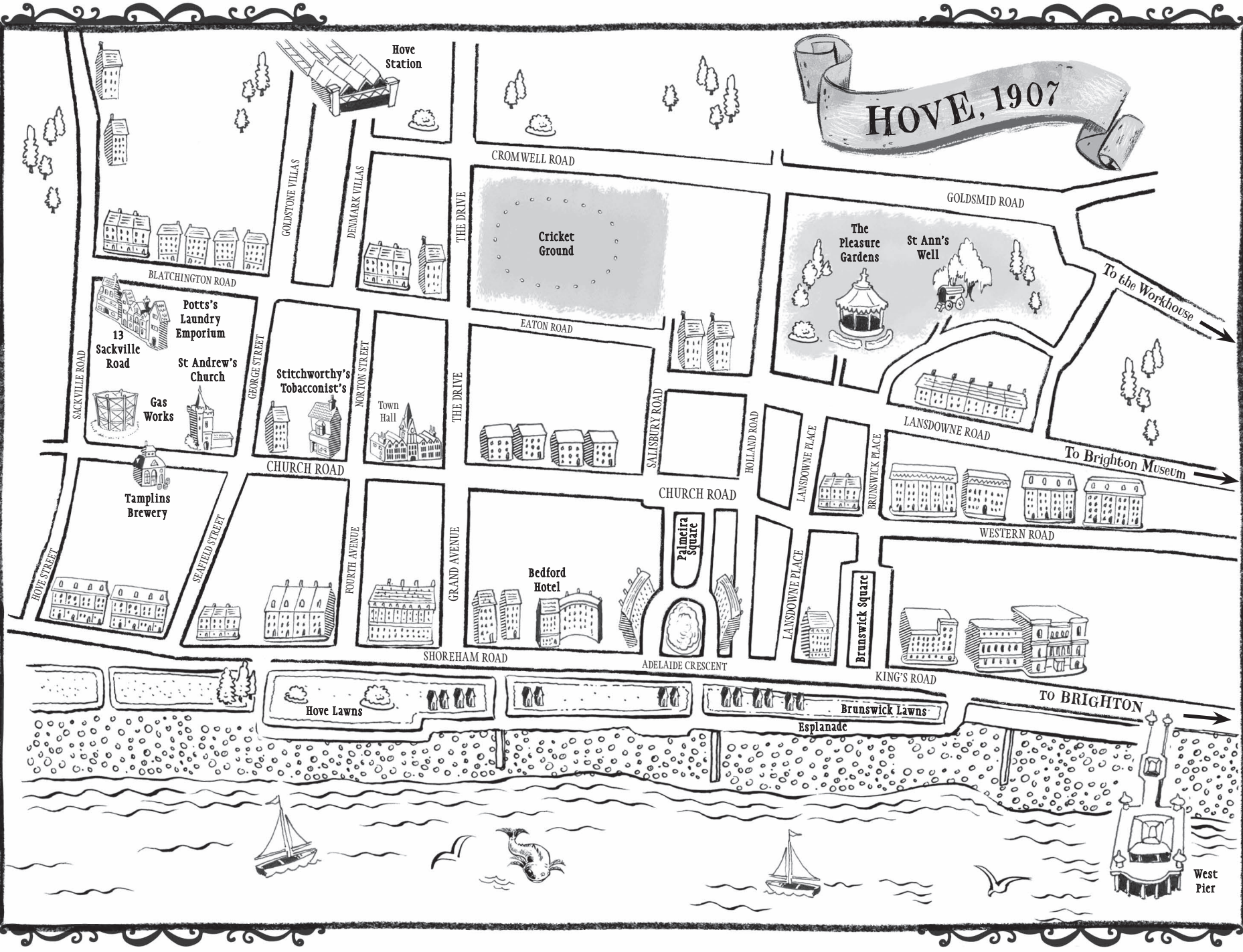
THE ROSE MUDDLE MYSTERIES



THE AMBER PENDANT

IMOGEN WHITE

USBORNE


HOVE, 1907
Hove Station
CROMWELL ROAD
GOLDSMID ROAD
GOLDSTONE VILLAS
DENMARK VILLAS
THE DRIVE
Cricket Ground
The Pleasure Gardens
St Ann's Well
To the Workhouse
BLATCHINGTON ROAD
Potts's Laundry Emporium
13 Sackville Road
St Andrew's Church
Gas Works
SACKVILLE ROAD
GEORGE STREET
Stitchworthy's Tobacconist's
NORTON STREET
Town Hall
EATON ROAD
SALISBURY ROAD
HOLLAND ROAD
LANSDOWNE ROAD
To Brighton Museum
LANSDOWNE PLACE
BRUNSWICK PLACE
CHURCH ROAD
Tamplins Brewery
HOVE STREET
SEAFIELD STREET
FOURTH AVENUE
GRAND AVENUE
Bedford Hotel
Palmeira Square
WESTERN ROAD
SHOREHAM ROAD
ADELAIDE CRESCENT
Brunswick Square
KING'S ROAD
TO BRIGHTON
Hove Lawns
Brunswick Lawns
Esplanade
West Pier

For Bobbie, 1928 - 2015

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Thirteen Sackville Road

Hove, 1907

"ROSE MUDDLE! Miss Templeforth has requested your company in the library."

Rose fell off her stool, sending it clattering across the kitchen. Drawing a sharp breath, she scrambled to her feet. Mr Crank, the butler, snarled at her from the doorway.

"M-me?" she stammered. "In the library?" She felt the colour leaving her cheeks. "But I ain't supposed to go in the library."

"Stop your braying, and get over here!"

Adjusting her frilled headpiece, she rushed over to the butler. Straight-backed in her maid's uniform, she tried to stand every one of her twelve years to a regimented attention.

The butler gripped her arm, and pulled her close. "As you know, Miss Templeforth has been interviewing a number of young girls this afternoon and she is extremely tired. Once this last girl leaves, it will be your turn. I suggest you go in quietly and listen to her very carefully," he smirked. "One may hope that she's reconsidering her act of charity in having you here, and is shipping you back to the workhouse where you belong. Imagine being replaced after just one week. Ha! I never understood why they brought you here in the first place."

Rose scrunched up her face against his hot cabbage breath. She decided his liver-spotted bald head looked like a quail's egg under the glare of the lamp.

Egghead! Rose thought, her slate-coloured eyes flashing at him.

The butler winced as if he'd detected her unspoken insult. Squeezing her arm even harder he opened his mouth to speak, but was cut short by a bell from the library upstairs.

With a sigh, he let go of Rose and set off up the creaky servants' staircase that led to the lobby above.

"Stay put. I'll be back to get you, Rose Muddle."

Shuffling from one foot to the other, Rose waited until the sound of the butler's footsteps had faded. Then she squeezed her eyes shut and wished really hard that she

could vanish into thin air. But it didn't work – it never did. She slumped onto her lumpy bed in the corner of the kitchen.

Rose hadn't met her mysterious mistress yet; she'd only heard the strange, haunting moans coming from the library. Miss Templeforth was ill – tuberculosis, so Rose had been told. She lived in the library, which remained out of bounds to everyone but the butler, the physician and the family lawyer. Until today that is, when a stream of girls had arrived to see her. They'd been sent in there, one by one, but had all come away screaming, or so struck down with fear they'd had to be carried out.

Rose did not want to visit the library – what if she *was* to be sent back to the workhouse? Thoughts of barred windows, turning the rotten mangle, Miss Gritt's punishments and the icy cold of the dormitory filled her mind. She shivered. This place was a piece of cake compared to there. In fact, working as a scullery maid at Sackville Road was more than Rose Muddle had ever dreamed of.

From her bed, Rose looked over the heavy table to where the stockpot bubbled merrily on the stove. Above it copper pans, arranged according to size, lined the wall. Everything here felt toasty warm.

And a shilling and threepence a week. Rose smiled. This

was a proper job. All her board and lodgings included, and she even had every other Sunday off – free as a bird to do whatever she fancied. Her smile faltered, as the words of the housemistress at the workhouse came to her. "They'll never keep you, Rose Muddle. Mark my words. You'll be back," Miss Gritt had said. And now the butler wanted shot of her too. A thread of alarm stitched itself inside Rose's heart. She wiped her sweaty palms on her apron. *I won't go back there, not ever.*

Voices carried from the servant's staircase, as the day maids headed back down to the kitchen.

Rose panicked, her tummy in ribbons; she needed some fresh air, and somewhere alone to think. Heading to the door, she freed the latch softly and slipped into the basement yard.

The October chill gnawed through her black floor-length dress and apron. She sniffed, wiping her nose on her sleeve and clapping her arms with her hands as the basement yard pressed in around her.

At four thirty it was already getting dark. The evening light made the yard, which had a grey stone floor, feel even smaller, just a few feet across. Rose looked at the tall brick wall that stretched up to the roadway above. She could hear the carriages rattling past on Sackville Road.

Scared stiff, she paced back and forth, still hoping she

could wish the situation away. She spotted the coal-hole and stopped, chewing her nail.

Maybe if she hid for a while she wouldn't have to see the mistress after all. *And what with the mistress so tired from all them interviews, and being as ill as she is…she could have a little nap instead. Yes,* Rose convinced herself. *I'd be doing her a blessed favour.* She jumped down in front of the hole.

"Oi, Rose! Is that you?" A scruffy head peered over the wall from the neighbouring yard, eyes hidden beneath a heavy fringe. "What's been happening to all them girls leaving your place looking like they seen a ghost or summin'."

"Shh, Jack Billings," Rose said, tugging with all her might at the barred door to the coal-hole. "I ain't got time to talk to you now."

"So, how's life treating you in the big house?" he pressed on, though it was taking all his effort to hold himself up.

"Bloomin' marvellous," she muttered, forcing the stiff bolt.

"Rose, what you up to?" he giggled.

"Miss Templeforth" – Rose looked up – "wants to see me in the library." She fell back to rest on her hands as the door groaned open. "But I fancy stopping inside there." She pointed into the sooty cavern of the coal-hole.

"Them girls," Jack said, clawing at the wall to get a better grip, "the ones leaving with the collywobbles. Them's the ones what answered to the advert in yesterday's local rag."

"Advert?" Rose got to her feet, dusting herself off. "What advert?"

She climbed onto an upturned pail and stared at Jack's dirt-smudged face as it hovered over the wall, his feet still dangling over Potts' Laundry Emporium next door. The Templeforth premises was the last of the smart townhouses on this side of the street; next to it crouched a line of shops and businesses.

Jack Billings beamed down at Rose amid the sweet-scented steam drifting up from the basement washroom behind him.

"What you on about, Jack Billings?" she asked, throwing him a sharp look. She'd known Jack from the workhouse – he collected the surplus laundry that Nanna Potts paid the workhouse to wash. He was always full of mischief and a rumour-mongerer to boot. But this particular snippet of information had well and truly sparked Rose's interest. "Well?" she asked.

"Look, I got it here." Jack's tongue balled in his cheek, pleased to have gained her attention. He fished something out of his pocket. "You workhouse lot can all read, can't ya?

So take a look for yourself, Rose." He thrust forward a crumpled piece of paper.

Rose flattened the newspaper cutting against the wall.

> ### Search for a Templeforth Heir
>
> The esteemed Miss Lucile Templeforth, being of ill health and in fear of death, is without an heir for the Templeforth family estate. She is compelled to undertake…

Rose shot a nervous glance at the house. She could hear the two day maids bashing about in the kitchen. She squinted back at the small print that trailed into a long article.

"Jack Billings, I ain't got time to read all that." She passed it back. "Do you know what it says or not?" she asked, knowing he would. He seemed to know everyone's business before it even happened.

"Yep." He winked, scrunching the paper back into his pocket. "Nanna Potts told me. Everyone's talking about it."

"Well? Spit it out then."

"Nanna Potts says of all the funny goings-on in that house, this is the oddest of all. Your mistress is dying, right? And coz she ain't got no family she knows of, she's asked in the *Evening Argus* for girls – girls what are not older

than thirteen – what might be related to her, to come today to be interviewed."

"Why only girls?" Rose asked. "And why just that old? What is it they'll get?"

"Well that's just it. Everything! When she snuffs it, they'll get the lot: the spooky house, all her dosh, and some old pendant what's been in the family for ever. Can you imagine getting all that? Some days I just wish I was a girl…" He eyed the grand townhouse and shook his head. "Nanna Potts thinks the old lady's batty. She must have had half the girls from town in and out of there today trying their luck."

"Well, I never!" Rose exclaimed. "But that don't explain why all them girls have been leaving in such a state…"

A thud, followed by a scream, cut her short. Rose looked up, but the projection of a bay window obscured her view. The noise came from the main doorway on the street above.

Rose turned to Jack, a finger pressed to her lips. Leaving him behind, she crept up the steps that led to the pavement gate.

High above, the front door crashed open, sending the fist-shaped knocker into convulsions. The outline of a feeble young girl hovered outside.

Rose ducked out of sight as the girl zigzagged down

the steps and swayed between the stone lions flanking the entrance. She wore a starched white frock, tied in the middle with a blue sash, and her hair was set in tight blonde ringlets. Like the others leaving that day, she looked delirious and wretched with fear. The girl staggered towards a waiting carriage. Its door swung open, allowing her to crawl inside.

Rose jolted as the carriage door slammed. The driver, high up on his bench – collar up and hat low – cracked his whip hard. The two black mares whinnied before jerking forward. They turned sharply in the street and headed back towards the junction at Church Road.

An emblem on the luggage hold flickered into view under the street lamp, a black sun with a face at its centre. In matt relief against the sheen of the carriage, it glared back at her before vanishing into darkness.

Rose gulped. *It's my turn next.* Awful memories of the workhouse stacked one on top of the other. The penance cupboard. The hunger. Ten of the best from Miss Gritt's rod. She swallowed. *If I'm discharged from here Gritt will have it in for me… I can't go back, I won't!* Rose fumbled with the latch on the gate to the street but it was no use; it was locked. She stared longingly up into the darkness outside.

"ROSE MUDDLE. It is time!" The butler's voice boomed from the kitchen doorway below.

Rose's heart tripped over itself. She snatched back her hand from the gate as icy dread flooded her body. *No good can come of this. I don't want to be sent back.*

"Sir, I were just…urm…I heard another scream and I…" she spluttered, rushing down the steps.

"Move it!" he spat, as she dashed past.

Inside, Rose felt the maids' eyes pinned to her back like daggers, but she ran on.

She climbed up the wooden staircase from the kitchen and hurried along the corridor into the imposing lobby, stopping outside the closed library door to catch her breath. Mounted animal heads and stuffed birds in glass domes leered from the walls, and the grandfather clock ticked away her final seconds before her fate would be sealed.

Rose yelped as the butler appeared behind her. Pushing her to one side, he opened the library door wide.

"Rose Muddle, as you requested, Ma'am."

Rose blinked up at him. "For pity's sake, don't send me in there. I can do better…work harder," she whispered. "I'll scrub the floors all night if you want." She willed him to change his mind. But the butler's thin lips crept into a twitching smirk as he nudged her inside.



The heavy library door closed behind Rose, plunging the room into silence. Her heart jiggered like a bee trapped in a pill pot as she stared across the vast, brooding room. Exotic skulls hung between the bookcases. Their shadows danced in the firelight, making phantoms which seemed to reach out for her.

"Do come and sit with us a while, Rose." The lady's voice echoed across the dim room. Rose traced it to a winged armchair positioned by the fire. The fifteen paces separating them seemed to swell and extend.

"Yes, Ma'am," Rose heard her own quivering voice reply.

She edged across the library, while the woman in the