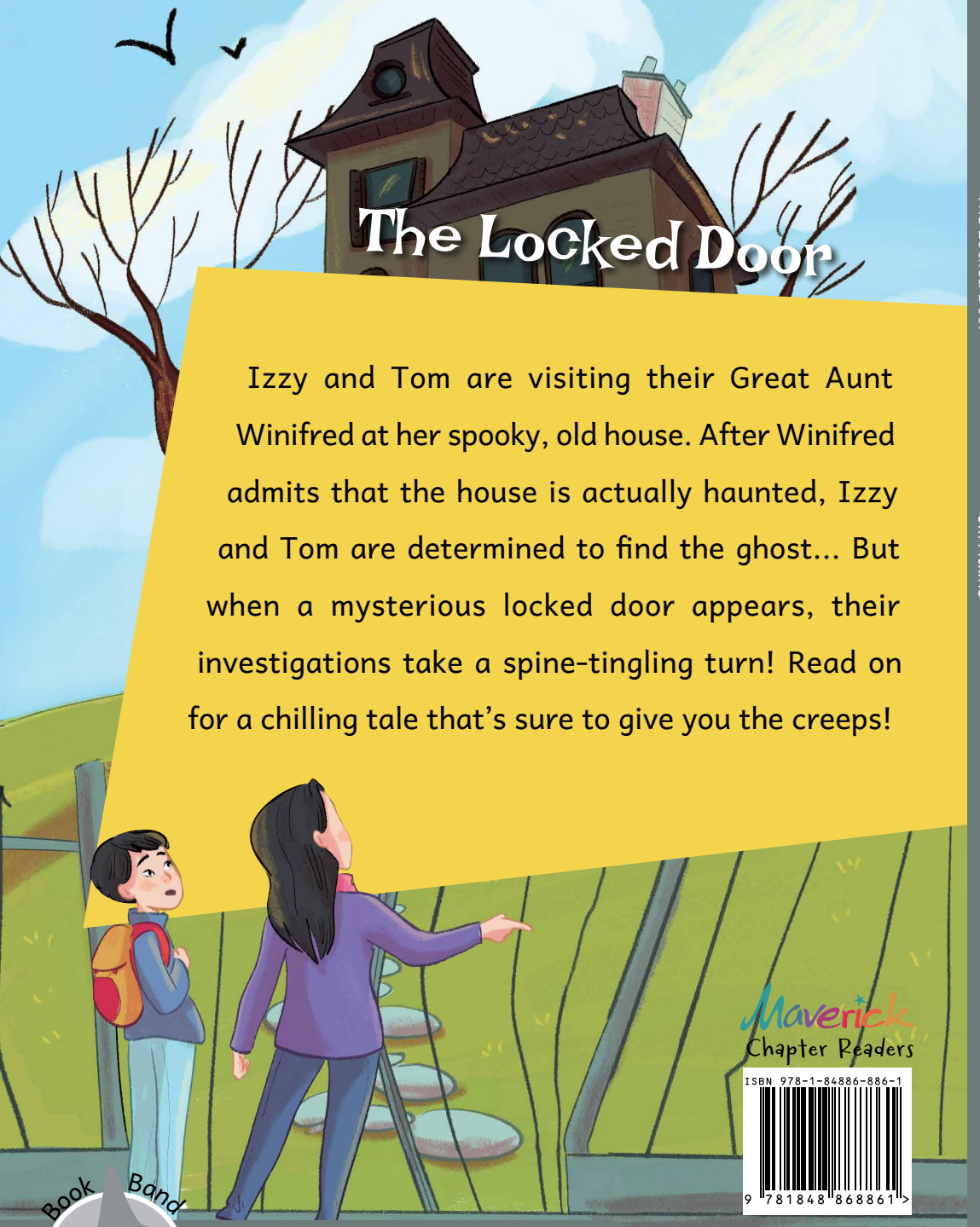


The Locked Door

Izzy and Tom are visiting their Great Aunt Winifred at her spooky, old house. After Winifred admits that the house is actually haunted, Izzy and Tom are determined to find the ghost... But when a mysterious locked door appears, their investigations take a spine-tingling turn! Read on for a chilling tale that's sure to give you the creeps!

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The Locked Door

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Maverick

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Written by
Jill Atkins

Illustrated by
Miriam Serafin

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'The Locked Door'
An original concept by Jill Atkins
© Jill Atkins 2022

Illustrated by Miriam Serafin

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For Review Only

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Chapter 1

Izzy stood at the rickety, old gate and looked up at the house. It was odd how narrow it was, with the wide expanse of rough ground to one side. The tall, dark windows seemed to be watching her. She shivered, then began to walk along the uneven stone path towards the oak front door.

"Wait for me!" shouted Tom, racing to catch her up.

Izzy stopped and turned.

"Do you remember coming here before?" she asked.

"Yes, just about," said Tom. "A long time ago."

Izzy nodded then shivered again. There was something about the house that she couldn't quite explain.

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"We were quite small," she said. "But I remember the stairs—very dark and narrow."

"Yes, and cobwebs!" laughed Tom.

Dad caught them up and they walked to the door. Dad lifted the large lion's head knocker. **Thud! Thud!** The sound echoed inside the house.

"Do you think Great Aunt Winifred is at home?" Izzy asked, feeling rather jittery about going inside now they were here.

"I hope so," Dad replied. "She said she would have tea ready when we arrived."

After a moment, Izzy heard shuffling footsteps and the door creaked open. She took a big breath and tried to relax.

"Come in, come in," came a high-pitched voice from the gloomy hallway. "The kettle is boiling and I've got cakes from the baker and..."

"Thank you, Aunt," said Dad as he stepped inside.

Izzy and Tom followed.

The little, grey-haired woman who came out of the shadows was just as Izzy remembered, except she seemed smaller than before.

Immediately, the slightly damp, musty smell of the house brought back vivid memories of the last time they had come. They had been allowed to explore the house; downstairs were the front room, kitchen, and a tiny old-fashioned bathroom and toilet out in the backyard. Then they had climbed the rickety stairs to the two bedrooms: one of which was Great Aunt Winifred's, and the other, smaller one she called the spare room.

"Do you remember?" whispered Tom.

Izzy smiled and nodded.

"It's lovely to see you," said Great Aunt Winifred. "You've both grown so much. Izzy, quite the young lady with that lovely long, dark hair! Ten, are you?"

Izzy nodded shyly.

"Sit down. Let's have some tea."

They were herded into the front room and sat at a

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round table that was covered in a dark red velvet cloth. Izzy looked at Tom. He looked nervous but, as soon as they had eaten a delicious chocolate cake and drunk a cup of tea, he was grinning and Izzy felt herself relax.

"I like to have visitors," said Great Aunt Winifred with cake crumbs spilling out all over her chin. "I'm all alone here, you know... well, except for the ghost."

"Ghost?" Izzy and Tom exclaimed together.

"Oh yes. The house is haunted. Has been ever since I've lived here and that's over fifty years."

Izzy almost choked on her tea. She knew there was something mysterious about the place.

"Oh, I almost forgot," said Great Aunt Winifred before Izzy could ask anything. "I wanted to show you an interesting book. It's upstairs in the spare room. Would you mind fetching it for me?"

Izzy and Tom stayed close together as they climbed the stairs.

"A ghost!" whispered Tom. "I wonder if we'll meet it."

Izzy glanced around her.

"I wonder where it is now," she whispered.

"Do you think it's a friendly ghost?" asked Tom.

"Well, it hasn't done Great Aunt Winifred any harm."

But Izzy jumped at every creak of the stairs and stood outside the spare room door for a while before she dared open it. The room was empty except for some old boxes, a rolled-up carpet, and a little table in front of the fireplace.

"No ghost here!" laughed Tom.

"That's a relief!" said Izzy. "Let's find that book and take it downstairs."

Suddenly, she froze. "Did you hear that?"

"What?"

There it was again, slightly louder this time. She held up her finger.

"Listen."

Tom gasped. "I can hear it now... a low, moaning sound."

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