

'We could go to the park,' Charrie suggested.

'Okay.'

The park was a large tract of land that Chelsea recognised as Parramatta Park. It was just down the road from the currently expanding Westfield shopping centre, which, if rumour could be believed, was going to be the biggest shopping centre under one roof in the Southern Hemisphere.

They wandered aimlessly. 'Let's play Pooh sticks,' Charrie suggested, when they came to the wooden bridge over water, mud-brown after the recent rains.

'What's that?'

Charrie stared at her in amazement. 'You mean you never played it? I'll show you.' She explained.

They each picked up a wooden stick.

'I win,' Charity said as her stick sailed further downstream.

Chelsea thought it was a dumb game but didn't say so.

'That's where the boys like to play Tarzan,' Charrie said pointing out a thick twine of rope that dangled from a tree. 'They swing out and jump into the river.'

'Yuk! I wouldn't like to swim in there.'

They walked on. Charrie stopped in front of a large building that Chelsea recognised as Government House. 'What I wouldn't give,' Charrie said, 'to have a fine house like that. And servants and all. Do you have servants?'

'Hardly,' Chelsea laughed. 'We're battling just like you. Well, maybe not quite like you,' she added. 'But we don't have a computer or a video or a CD player or a dishwasher or anything. My friend Jamila's got them all. And an in-ground pool.'

'Of her own, you mean?'

Chelsea nodded. 'In summer we spend a lot of time in it. Jam swims like a fish. Usually takes out prizes at the school swimming carnivals.'

'Your friend Jam, is she sweet?' Charity said, laughing.

'Not exactly! Especially if you get on the wrong side of her. But she's a good friend. At school we're known as Jam and Bun.'

'Bun?'

'As in chelsea bun.'

'Oh, I see,' Charity said, though Chelsea suspected, she didn't really. 'Well, one of these days,' Charrie said looking at the house with longing, 'I'm going to marry a rich man and have a place like that.'

Thinking of the woman Charity had become and knowing her dreams had never been realised, Chelsea felt sad. They stared at the building in silence.

'Come on. Race you to the bridge,' Charrie said, breaking the spell and tearing down the path.

Proud of being the fastest runner in the junior school, it didn't take her long to catch up with Charrie, then pass her. Laughing, she clattered onto the bridge and was soon running on the spongy grass. 'Hurry up, slow coach,' she called over her shoulder.

Out of breath, Charrie stopped on the bridge, and leant against the rail. There was a creaking groan.

'Charrie! Look out,' Chelsea screamed.

Too late.

There was a whine, then a crack. Charrie plunged into the water as the rail gave way. 'Help!' she shrieked before the water closed over her head.

Chelsea ran back towards the river and dived in.

Charrie's head appeared briefly, then disappeared again. 'Help!'

'Hang on. I'm coming,' she shouted. 'Hold your head up, and keep your mouth shut.' She grabbed Charrie under the armpits, attempting to heave her up, while struggling to keep both their heads above water. After the recent rain the river was running fast. 'Help me!' she spluttered, after they had both been pulled under. 'Flap

your arms and legs like this, like you're treading water. Otherwise we're both going to drown.'

'I can't.'

Brown water swirled over their heads. They surfaced.

'I won't let you drown,' Chelsea promised, hoping she was speaking the truth.

Charrie thrashed around.

'Charrie, listen to me. I've got to let you go for a moment.'

'No!' She clung tighter.

'We'll both drown if you don't let me go.' She disentangled herself from the grasping hands. 'I won't be long. Don't drown. Please don't drown,' she said, striking out for the shore.

'Chelsea! Don't leave me,' Charrie cried and choked on another mouthful of water.

'I'll be as quick as I can,' she promised.

'Don't leave me.'

'I've got to,' she said as Charrie disappeared under the water again.

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