
The Bell Sisters'
Discovery

By Abby Richmond

Other Books by Abby Richmond

Very Berry
Starring Eliza
Beatrice's Fortune

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Chapter One

When Lulu started crying, Rory was done.

“Shut *up*,” she bellowed at her bawling seven-year-old sister.

Mrowww! hissed their plump cat, Nigel. He jumped up from Olive’s knobby knees and plunked his twenty-pound self right in Rory’s lap, looking up at her reproachfully. “Get off me, you dumb cat,” Rory hissed right back. She was already feeling claustrophobic, and Nigel’s mounds of thick white fur weren’t helping her pit stains.

“It smells terrible in here,” eleven-year-old Olive commented dreamily, staring into space.

Eva, the oldest of the four, sighed from the front of the car and rolled down her window to let some air in. The wind was surprisingly cold, and it felt like a sharp, pine-scented slap in the face as it unexpectedly washed over her. She quickly rolled up the window.

“I am not a happy camper right now,” Lulu declared, using an expression she had heard Rory use some weeks back to describe a failed science quiz.

“What a coincidence,” Rory snapped back, “neither am I.”

Mrowwww! Nigel practically yelped, and dug his claws into Rory’s legs.

“OW, NIGEL!” Rory roared, and pushed the fluffy criminal onto Olive’s lap.

“Poor cat, has Rory been mean to you?” Olive stroked the chubby little monster, and Rory could have sworn that evil creature gave her a swift, vengeful little glance out of the corner of his green eye.

Eva let out another sigh, and grimly suggested to her father in the driver’s seat next to her to pull over the car as her youngest sister’s wails swelled.

“All right,” Mr. Bell said, and nearly swerved the car into a massive green tree as he attempted to pull over on the side of the road near a large house.

Rory hastily stumbled out of the car, and picked three long white cat hairs out of her t-shirt. Gross. She hated that cat anyway. And she was especially sick of her sisters. Younger sisters, in

particular. Seven-year-old sisters named Lulu, in fact, if you wanted to narrow it down.

What with Lulu on her plate, and the whole matter of the elections to figure out, it looked like it was going to be a long summer. “I’m going on a walk,” she muttered to Eva.

By the elections, Rory meant her school elections. The idea of possibly running had played in her mind for some time now. It wasn’t going to be easy, though, and there were plenty of things holding Rory back—for one, her opponents.

Brian Mallory, Tommy Peterson, and Noah White weren’t exactly Rory’s favorite people. Snide, snobby, and always surrounded by their separate little groups, they were intimidating in their own individual ways. Even Rory, always the boldest and most adventurous wherever she went, couldn’t help her sinking feeling that she wouldn’t stand a chance against any of those three boys in the election.

Applications were due at the end of August in order for her to run for seventh grade student president. Rory had brought the forms along, but she had no plans whatsoever to do anything with them. For Rory, a born competitor, winning was essential. A

humiliating defeat would not be acceptable under any circumstance.

So why even bother if all the odds were against her? Rory certainly didn't want to be the loser, and wasn't going to take that chance.

With that final, firm thought, Rory huffed out a short breath, and walked slowly back to the car, dreading the sound of Lulu's whining and fits all the way there.

Olive had a naturally creative mind. Despite the fact that she was only eleven, and Rory was twelve and a half, she always prided herself on having deeper thoughts and a more artistic sensibility than her older sister. Rory was always scornful of daydreaming, but Olive loved it. She especially thrived on her daydreams ever since she had decided to quit playing the cello.

Olive knew she had a look of disgust on her face as she rifled through the trunk of the car to find her book and had to push past the monstrous, black-clad instrument to dig it out of her suitcase. Aha! There was her book. She whipped the paperback out of her bag and hastily shut the trunk. No need to look at that ugly thing anymore.

As Olive criss-crossed her pale legs and sat beside her dad on the grass next to the car, she found it hard to ignore the slight scene that was going on between her father, Lulu, and her oldest sister, Eva. It was difficult for Olive to settle into the novel's thrilling plot amidst the soundtrack of Lulu's screeches. How un-romantic, un-daydreamlike could you get?

Hopefully Violet Wendell's house would fit her daydream-esque ideals. Olive had seen pictures of the author's mansion many times. The Edwardian estate was where the Bells would be staying over the summer. Mr. Bell worked at Cornell as an American literature professor, and he was taking the summer off to rent this house and then write a detailed research paper on Violet Wendell afterwards. Olive wasn't quite sure what to expect. This summer could be the dreamy adventure that would serve as a perfect distraction from this cello business, or just plain boring. Olive hoped it was the former.

This, clearly, was *not* Violet's house. In fact, it seemed a stark contrast to the photos Olive had seen—this stranger's house was a giant, ultra-modern mansion that clashed with the picturesque New England scenery.

Olive observed an older, distinguished looking couple come out of the modern mansion with sour expressions wrinkling their faces. Olive's dad cheerfully approached them, shaking both their hands and then pointing to his map. After a few minutes of talking to the irritated-looking couple, Mr. Bell shook their hands again and walked back to the car.

"Who were they?" Lulu asked, her curiosity overcoming her tears.

"I didn't realize this when I started talking to them, but it turned out to be Doris and Melvin Xavier," their father said, shutting the car door and turning the car back on. "Although Violet's land is a historical site that's registered with the state, they technically own the land on which the estate sits. The board back at Cornell and I had to negotiate with them on the phone to convince them to let us rent the house for the summer. They're not exactly the friendliest people—but oh well. Let's get to Violet's house now, huh?"

With Lulu's tears dried and Rory's temper squelched, it seemed that Eva and Olive could now get some peace in the car while their father figured out the rest of the way there.

Lulu was sick and tired of Rory's attitude. Just because Rory was the second oldest and was five years older than Lulu, she thought she was the boss of everybody. This infuriating thought was almost enough to cause her to whack the top of Rory's head. Lulu was stuck in the middle of the car, after all, and smelly Rory was just an inch away. Because Lulu was the smallest, and therefore took up the least room, Rory and Olive—the middle children themselves—had stuck Lulu in the middle seat of the car. Well, luckily Lulu wasn't a permanent middle child, and reportedly they only had five more minutes in the car to endure until they arrived at their long-awaited destination.

“What is a destination, anyway?” she wondered aloud.

“It's the place you're going to,” Olive explained.

“It's commonly said that the journey is more worthwhile than the destination,” their father commented, coming to a jerky halt at a red light.

Rory gave a loud snort.

Eva glared at Rory reproachfully, and then turned around from the front seat. “You know where our destination is, don’t you, Lu?”

Lulu rolled her eyes. Honestly. Didn’t her sisters know she was *seven*, not three? “Of course I do,” she replied. “It’s the big old house that...that person lived in.”

“The author, Violet Wendell,” Eva filled in, nodding.

Hmm. An author. Authors wrote books. Lulu had learned that in kindergarten. She had loved kindergarten. Her teacher was so nice, and always said Lulu was “vivacious.” Kindergarten was better than first grade. Her first grade teacher just called her “talkative” and “disruptive.”

Come to think of it, what DID “vivacious” even mean? What if her teacher had been insulting her that whole time, and Lulu just *thought* she was being complimentary?

“What does ‘vivacious’ mean?!” Lulu asked, a little freaked out.

“It kind of means energetic, and friendly,” Eva said patiently.

Oh.

Good.

“Anyway, here we are!” said Mr. Bell gleefully.

Their car turned a long, rounded corner and had to enter a tall black gate, with a sort of curly pattern on it. They drove for a few minutes on a pebbly lane, and finally a massive, proud house—if you could even call it a house—came into view. It was a tan color, and three stately chimneys rose up out of it.

Lulu didn’t know how to explain it, okay?

“Oh, wow,” breathed Rory.

Oh, wow, was right, Lulu thought. If even Rory was impressed, this mansion must be something really special. Lulu had grown out of her princess phase long ago, but it seemed like something or someone magical could have once lived here.