

BY EVAN JACOBS



THE OLD PHOTO BOOTH

A decorative title box with a hand-drawn, ornate border featuring floral and scrollwork motifs. The box is set against a background of faint spider webs. The text inside the box is centered and reads "THE HISTORY OF THE VINTAGE ROSE ANTIQUE SHOP".

THE HISTORY OF THE VINTAGE ROSE ANTIQUE SHOP

The story begins with a sorcerer named Ervin Legend. He had a talent for making money. While traveling, Ervin bought items all over the world. He would have called himself a collector. Others might say hoarder. Once he grew tired of things, he sold them for a profit. "One man's junk is another man's treasure," he used to say.

Eventually, Ervin wanted to settle down. His home was in Scarecrow, California. But he needed somewhere to put all of his things. Ervin opened the Vintage Rose Antique Shop in 1912. It was a place to keep his collections. His wife, Visalia, inspired the shop's name. She loved roses and kept them in vases all over the shop. "Roses mask the smell of old things," she would say.

After the shop opened, Ervin kept traveling. He collected pieces to sell from all over. In 1949, Ervin and Visalia went to Cairo, Egypt. While there, the couple disappeared. Nobody knows what happened to them. Some say Ervin's love of sorcery might have been to blame. He may have looked into something he shouldn't have.

Family members took over the shop. None were quite like Ervin, though. Without his passion, the business began to fail. His sister believed it was cursed.



In 1979, the Legends put the shop up for sale. Rose Myers bought it. She was odd, like Ervin. Her passion for old things was like his. "Everything has a story," she would say, with a twinkle in her eye. From a young age, Rose had looked for bargains. She would resell things for a profit. Buying the Vintage Rose was her dream come true. The place was old. It was filled with odd treasures. Plus, Rose was part of the name of the store. It seemed like this was meant to be.

Rose ran the shop for 40 years. When she passed away, it closed. The business had been left to her nephew, Evan Stewart. He was Rose's closest living relative. The Stewart family moved to Scarecrow. They reopened the shop in 2019.

Today, the shop still holds many treasures. Collectors come from all over. Some have purchased these mysterious relics. Are they magical? Do they watch over the store? We may never find out. Or will we?

CHAPTER 1

THE BOOTH

There's nothing to do today." Vonna doesn't look up from her phone. She, my other friends, and I walk on a lazy Saturday.

Eventually, Vonna glances in my direction. "Sarah, didn't you say there was a festival at the park?"

"Oh, sorry about that." My eyes don't move from my phone. "It's actually not until next month."

Vonna, Miranda, Christo, and I always hang out. We usually find something to do. But we haven't had any luck with that today. All of us just walk around town together and play on our phones to pass the time. Christo and Miranda are engrossed in games. Vonna and I are scrolling through social media posts.

We live in Scarecrow, California. It's a pretty small town. I think only about 25,000 people live here. Scarecrow was founded in the early 1900s. Back then, it was mainly strawberry fields and swamps. Most farmers had trouble growing crops. Birds were always

eating the seeds. Farmers got tired of that and started putting up scarecrows to keep the birds away. That's how the town got its name.

Some think Scarecrow is boring. Overall, I like it. This is the only town I know that is always overcast. It makes me feel like I live in a creepy movie. I love that about this place.

“Why don't we get ready for the school carnival?” Christo asks. “It's coming up soon.” He points to a weather-beaten flyer for the Scarecrow Middle School Carnival.

Miranda shrugs. “What's there to get ready for? We didn't do anything for it last year.”

I think for a moment. “It's not a bad idea. We're in seventh grade now. Last year we were new to middle school. All of us were just trying to survive our first year. We were too overwhelmed.”

Vonna chimes in. “Sarah is right. We can come up with something great to do now. I love how the school carnival is so much like the one for our town. But the school's is even better because students get to run the booths and games.”

Christo nods. “It's also a cool way to make money. We get to do whatever we want with our earnings. I heard that some students donate theirs to charity. Others

just divide it among themselves. Principal Legend said that ‘the goal is to encourage young entrepreneurship.’” He smiles proudly after recalling the principal’s exact words.

Miranda points at something. “Is Vintage Rose giving that away?”

We pause in front of Vintage Rose Antique Shop. Of the many small stores in downtown Scarecrow, it’s my favorite. The shop is dimly lit and filled with all kinds of old items. There’s even a pass-along section. It’s where the shop gives away used items for free. Customers who take from that area are supposed to donate something in return. Not everyone does, but I do.

All of us except for Vonna enjoy visiting the shop. Vonna thinks it stinks inside. She says the place smells like dead roses. I agree, but I don’t mind.

Looking around, I try to figure out what Miranda is pointing at. “Is Vintage Rose giving *what* away?”

Vonna grimaces. “Do you mean that old photo booth? Miranda, you can’t be seriously interested.”

Miranda eyes her. “So what if I am? It’s just sitting out front. I can’t help but wonder if it’s free.”

“Let’s find out,” Christo says.

Miranda and I follow him toward the store. Vonna reluctantly trails us.

We pause at the photo booth. The four of us take a closer look at it. I see the entire booth is made out of dark brown wood. A burgundy velvet curtain hangs over the top half of the booth's entrance. There is a small opening on the outside wall of the booth. The photos probably come out of that hole. It looks like a tray catches them there. Painted above the opening is a bright yellow question mark.

I remember reading about photo booths. People would pull the curtain back to enter. Then they would close it and keep it closed as their photos were snapped. Others would always know when a booth was in use. Below the curtain, people's legs and feet would show.

Christo grabs the curtain and pulls it open. He, Miranda, and I look inside the booth. The back wall has a bench attached to it. A tiny camera is mounted on the opposite wall. People would sit on the bench to get their picture taken.

The booth has a slot that accepts coins. A sign that reads "25 Cents" is right above the slot.

An older boy opens the door to the shop and sticks his head out. "The booth costs 100 bucks! Take it or leave it!"

I've seen him before. My guess is that he's the son of the shop's owners. That seems to be the only

good reason for why he's usually at Vintage Rose. He's always mean to the customers.

"Jay!" a woman shouts from inside the shop. "It's free! Stop being rude."

The boy rolls his eyes.

"You mean we can just take the booth?" I ask.

"Why would anyone want to?" Vonna mumbles.

Miranda looks at her. "Because it's awesome." She turns to Jay. "Is it like the items in the pass-along section? Should we donate something in return?"

The woman from inside the shop comes out. She must be Jay's mom. "No, not at all. There's no need to donate. You can just take it. We're not sure if it works. Our shop is so packed with items. We don't have room for something this big." She points to the bottom of the booth. "There are little wheels underneath so you can move it easier. They also lock in place."

Christo smiles. "Sounds like a deal. Thanks!"

Jay's mom nods. "Sure. Thank *you* for taking it off our hands."

Christo, Miranda, and I get behind the booth. We start pushing it away from the shop. Vonna just shakes her head and follows us.

CHAPTER 2

HOME

This isn't too hard to push," Christo says. He's obviously struggling like Miranda and me. "See, Vonna. We don't even need your help."

Vonna shrugs. "That works for me."

I'm breathing heavily. "Let's take it to my house. Of the four of us, I live closest to Vintage Rose."

"You mean the three of you," Vonna says. "There's no way I would take that to *my* house."

Ignoring Vonna, Miranda glances at me. "Maybe you should ask your dad first."

"Hmm. I guess you're right. Let's stop pushing for a sec." I take out my phone. "My plan was to just get the booth into the garage. I was thinking Dad might be more likely to accept it if it's already there. Asking first basically gives him a chance to say no."

"Who could blame him if he did?" Vonna asks. "Your dad may not want this big, clunky thing taking up space in his garage."

“That’s not helpful, Vonna,” Miranda says.

Christo leans against the booth. “I think you should ask him first, Sarah. He could say yes because you’re respectful enough to ask for his permission.”

Miranda nods. “That’s what I was thinking.”

“Okay, okay.” I call my dad on speakerphone so everyone can hear what he says.

He picks up after the second ring. “Hey, Sarah. Is everything all right?” My dad knows I never call him while he’s at work.

“Yeah.” I nervously bite the inside of my lip. “Um, my friends and I found this old photo booth. Vintage Rose is giving it away. It’s so cool. I think you’d like it too. Can I bring it home and keep it in our garage?”

“Does it work?” my dad asks.

I look at my friends. Miranda shrugs. Christo looks like he’s trying to think of something to say. Vonna rolls her eyes. Part of me wants to lie. But I know that’s not the right thing to do.

“We don’t know,” I say. “If it doesn’t, I promise we’ll try to fix it.”

“Ahh,” he says. I can almost hear the smile in his voice. “It could be like a do-it-yourself project.”

“Right!” I grin.

Miranda and Christo do too. Vonna looks bored.

“Okay,” my dad says. “Are you still at Vintage Rose?”

“Close.” I start fidgeting. “We were so excited it was free. This booth has wheels. So we already started pushing it, hoping we’d find somewhere to take it. We’re less than a block away from the shop.”

“I see. Well, I was going to leave work early anyway. Just stay where you are. I’ll be there with the truck shortly.”

It doesn’t take long for my dad to arrive. Two men who work with him also come in their cars. Everyone helps load the booth into the back of my dad’s truck. My friends and I pile inside the truck and head to my house. The two men follow us and help unload the booth into the garage. We thank them before they leave.

My dad stares at the photo booth. “You were right, Sarah. This thing *is* really cool. I hope all of you have fun with it.” He smiles as he opens the door to the house.

I love how my dad helps out and then doesn’t linger around. “Thanks, Dad.”

“Yeah, thanks, Mr. Fang!” Christo calls.

Miranda waves at my dad. “Thank you!”

“Mr. Fang, you’re awesome.” Vonna gestures at Miranda, Christo, and me. “I hope these three have fun.” She gives a sly smile.

My dad chuckles and waves. He closes the door behind him.

I go up to the booth’s entrance. “Let’s try it out!”

Christo, Miranda, and I pack into the photo booth. We sit on its bench. Vonna just watches us.

“Come on, Vonna,” Christo pleads. “Give it a try.”

She sighs. “Okay, whatever.” Vonna squeezes in next to me.

“Does anybody have a quarter?” Miranda asks.

“I do.” Vonna takes out a quarter and puts it in the slot.

She makes me smile. At first, Vonna clearly will not want to do something that interests the rest of us. But eventually, she joins in.

We pose and wait for the camera to snap our pictures.

“I didn’t hear anything. Did it work?” I ask.

“Maybe it just doesn’t make a noise,” Miranda says.

“Let me see.” Vonna peeks outside of the curtain. She peers at the slot where the pictures come out. “Nope. The slot’s tray is empty.”

All of us remain seated on the bench.

Christo frowns. “I guess it doesn’t work.”

No one knows what to do at first. Then we decide to think about it over the weekend. We’ll figure out our next steps on Monday. I tell everyone that I’ll share the news with my dad to see if he has any ideas.

Later that evening, he and I are eating dinner. I tell him about the booth not working.

“Hmm.” My dad finishes chewing. “Well, it *is* pretty old. This isn’t a surprise at all. I know I said it could be a do-it-yourself project. But you and your friends will probably need some help. How about I take a look at it tomorrow?”

I smile. “Thanks, Dad. I know the booth is not working yet. But isn’t it such a great find? It’s so classic and just . . . unmodern. I love that.”

He laughs as he checks emails from work on his phone. “Yes. It’s a very amazing find. But is ‘unmodern’ even a word?”

I shrug and laugh too. “We should look it up.”

My dad is the best. He’s always willing to help me, and he is one of the handiest people I know. I think he could fix just about anything. Whenever something breaks or stops working around the house, it usually doesn’t stay that way for long.

He also does plenty more at home than just make repairs. My mom passed away two years ago. Now it's just my dad and me in our large two-story home. He tries to do everything for me that my mom once did. That makes me love him even more.

When my mom died, I had hoped my dad and I would move away. Our house has too many memories. I wanted to forget this place forever. But he thought it would be best for us to stay. With time, I became okay with that.

My mom had cancer. Most of my bad memories at this house came from that time. I was glad that she could receive treatment at home. But my mom was surrounded by medical equipment. It made noises that I never want to hear again. Caregivers were always coming in and out of our house too.

I've only visited my mom's grave once. It was on the day of her funeral. Thinking of her in that cemetery upsets me. I don't ever want to go back.

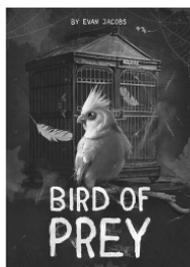
My dad took me to a counselor. She told me I was most likely afraid. If I visited my mom's grave, then I would feel like I was letting go of my mom forever. I could be terrified of that.

"Do you really think you can help fix that old photo booth?" I ask my dad.

“Maybe.” He winks. “It just depends on how *unmodern* it is.”

I burst into giggles.

VINTAGE ROSE MYSTERIES



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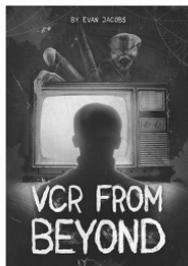
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VINTAGE ROSE MYSTERIES

THE OLD PHOTO BOOTH

Sarah thinks she has stumbled upon a treasure when she takes home an antique photo booth from Vintage Rose. The booth seems to provide the perfect way for her and her friends to be part of their school carnival this year. But when the photo booth starts working strangely, Sarah wonders if it is really a gift or a curse.

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