

THE HAUNTED HOTEL



A Haunted Mysteries Short Story

by

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Zack Jennings did not come to Canada looking for ghosts.

But they were definitely looking for him.

Zack, who was eleven, had traveled to Toronto with his stepmother, Judy Magruder Jennings. She was a world famous children's author whose Curiosity Cat books had been turned into a musical that was about to be given a pre-Broadway tryout at the Royal Alexandra Theatre in downtown Toronto.

Zack's dad (who had to work) and his dog Zipper (who hated even thinking about cargo crates) stayed home in North Chester, Connecticut. Zack's school was on its spring break so he was totally psyched to make the trip north with his famous step mom.

Canada became the first stamp in Zack's brand new passport because Judy requested it when they passed through customs at the airport.

"It'll be his first souvenir!" she told the obliging Canadian Borders Services Agent.

"Be sure to get some maple syrup, too, eh?" the agent said to Zack with a wink.

"Yes, sir," replied Zack.

"And maybe a loonie and a toonie."

"Oh-kay."

"Those are coins," explained Judy.

"Gotcha."

Once they'd cleared customs, Zack and Judy hailed a cab and headed to their hotel, which was practically right next door to the theatre.

"I can walk to rehearsals," said Judy. She still had to do some "minor rewrites and tweaks" on the script, even though the musical had already been staged at the Hanging Hill Summer Stock theater in Connecticut – a production that almost ended in disaster when the wackaloon director opened a doorway for demons down in the basement.

"I just hope no ghosts want to see the show this time," said Zack.

Judy nodded. "It's been rough, huh? Your 'gift?'"

Zack shrugged. He'd sort of gotten used to the fact that he could see ghosts and, more importantly, they could see him. That meant, if they had left behind any unfinished business on earth, they sometimes asked Zack to finish it for them.

"With great power comes great responsibility," Zack joked, quoting Uncle Ben Parker from his favorite Spider Man movie.

Judy laughed. "Well, if any ghosts show up, tell them you're taking the week off from being responsible. You're here on vacation to have fun."

"And to eat maple stuff."

"Exactly."

The taxi dropped them off at the Twittleham Plaza, a very grand, old school hotel. A bellman helped them drag their rolling suitcases into the lobby.

"May I be of assistance?" asked a ramrod stiff man behind the check-in desk.

Judy and Zack stepped up to the counter.

"Yes. We're checking in. Judy Magruder Jennings?"

"Of course." The man behind the counter clacked a couple keys on his computer.

Then he frowned. His pencil thin mustache drooped on his upper lip.

"Do you have a reservation?" he asked.

"Yes. We're with the Curiosity Cat company..."

"Curiosity Cat?" said the man, who's name, according to the brass tag pinned to his dark suit, was Jacques.

"Are you here for a pet food convention?"

"No," said Judy with a nervous chuckle. "It's a show. We're at the Royal Alexandra Theatre. Just across the square."

"Indeed," sniffed the man behind the counter. He clacked a few more keys. Squinted at his screen.

"I have a confirmation number," said Judy, digging through a jumble of papers in her shoulder bag.

"I'm certain you do," said the man, sounding super snooty and semi-French. "However, it seems your reservation doesn't start until Tuesday. Today, as you must be aware, is Sunday."

"No," said Judy.

"Yes, it is. I have a calendar if you care to consult it."

"I meant to say, 'No. The reservation is for today.' This is when the production company told me to be here. Today. Sunday. They made the reservation."

"I'm very sorry if this causes you any inconvenience, Madame. However, there is nothing further I can do. We are fully committed, until, of course, Tuesday. You have a very nice suite on Tuesday. One of our best."

"Can you give us a not-so-nice suite for today?" Judy asked sweetly.

"Please?" said Zack, eagerly. "This is my first trip to Canada."

"Is it?" said the man, sounding not in the least bit interested in any of Zack's trips – first, last or in-

between. "Well, I'm sorry it's off to such an inauspicious start."

Judy found her cell phone. "Maybe you can talk to Ian Trembley. He's with the producers..."

"I'm sorry," said the man, looking down his nose at Zack and Judy. "Unless this Mr. Trembley also produces magic shows and can, somehow, magically make an empty room appear, there is nothing more he or I can do. Perhaps you'd like to discuss making alternate lodging arrangements with Mr. Trembley? Until Tuesday, of course."

The man name-tagged Jacques smiled. It looked like his lips were pinching his face.

"I'll do that," said Judy, sounding a lot less cheery than usual. "By the way, I didn't catch your name."

"Jacques," said the man behind the counter, tapping his nametag. He bowed slightly. "Sorry I could not be of further assistance." He signaled to whoever was waiting behind Zack and Judy. "Next?"

"Can I speak to your manager?" Now Judy sounded sort of mad.

"You already have."

Frère Jacques flicked a thin business card out of his vest pocket. Zack and Judy read what was printed there:

"Jacques Boulanger, Manager."

"Next?" He signaled, once again, to the guest waiting behind Zack and Judy.

The man stepped forward. They moved out of the way.

"Don't worry, hon," Judy told Zack. "We'll find another hotel."

They trundled their suitcases over to a cluster of sofas and chairs so Judy could call the Curiosity Cat production company. Zack sat down in a fancy chair with all sorts of lumpy padding and flipped through an "Official Toronto Tourism Guide" he found on top of a glass table.

Judy said "uh-huh" and "I see" a lot into her phone.

Zack read about the Hockey Hall of Fame. And the CN tower. And the Royal Ontario Museum.

After about a dozen more "uh-huh's," Judy ended her call.

"There's some kind of convention in Toronto this week," she said with a sigh. "All of the downtown hotels are booked up. Except..."

"Except what?"

"Well, Mr. Trembly was able to find us a room at the Royal Duke. It's a few blocks west of here. It'd only be for two nights. Today, tomorrow..."

"Great!" said Zack. "Let's go."

"There's one slight problem."

"What?"

"Well, Mr. Trembly says there are rumors...stories..."

"About what?"

"The Royal Duke." Judy scrunched up her face the way she always did before she had to tell Zack bad news. "They say it might be haunted."

Of course they do, thought Zack. Because what would a Zack Jennings vacation be without a few ghosts, ghouls, or goblins?

"I could ask him to keep looking," said Judy. "But rehearsal starts in two hours..."

"With great power comes great responsibility," muttered Zack, grabbing the handle on his rolling suitcase. "Let's go see some Canadian ghosts. Maybe one will be a hockey player or a Mountie. Maybe they'll bring me maple candy..."

Zack and Judy rolled their suitcases down the sidewalk to the creepy old hotel. The bottom right corner of the "D" in the Royal Duke neon had burned out so the sign looked like it was for the Royal Puke.

There weren't any uniformed doormen out front under the dimly lit portico. Zack and Judy had to wrestle their bags through a narrow revolving door into the lobby, which was lined with dark wooden panels soaked with cigar smoke.

Murky oil paintings of old-timey guys in white curly wigs hung on the walls. There was ratty red carpet stretching from wall to wall. Musty carpet. It smelled like a wet cat. One that smoked cigars.

"Welcome to the Royal Duke," said the ancient man behind the front desk. He looked like a cadaver wearing an ill-fitting striped suit he'd stolen from a funeral director. "We have you in room 1313." When he said that, thunder clapped and chandeliers flickered.

Seriously. Of course, thunderstorms had been in the forecast. But still...

"Is that one of the haunted rooms?" asked Zack, casually.

The ancient man bristled. "None of our rooms are haunted, young man."

"Sorry," said Judy, resting a gentle hand on Zack's shoulder. "We just heard some stories."

"Well, madam, rest assured, there are no ghosts in any of our rooms." Thunder cracked again. "They're in the hallways."

Zack and Judy rode a rattletrap cage of an elevator up to the thirteenth floor and unpacked their suitcases in 1313 as quickly as they could. They took turns freshening up in the bathroom. Fast. They didn't bother adjusting

the thermostat or opening the window shades or checking out the minibar.

"Ready?" asked Judy.

"Ready!" said Zack.

They dashed off to rehearsal at the theatre.

They spent several hours watching the cast sing and dance their way through the slightly revised tale of the world's most curious cat. Then they went out to dinner with Tomasino Carrozza, the hysterically funny clown who played the title character, Curiosity Cat.

Finally, when they absolutely had to, they went back to the Royal Duke Hotel and creaked their way up to the thirteenth floor again in that old-fashioned elevator with the accordion cage door. They stayed up and watched Canadian TV until they both fell asleep – Judy on the bed, Zack, fully clothed, on the couch, with an empty Pringles tube rising up and down on his chest.

Zack's eyes popped open when the very loud, old-fashioned digital alarm clock in the room flicked over from 3:12 to 3:13 A.M. He heard voices out in the hallway. These weren't guests checking into their rooms after a maple syrup soaked night on the town. These were ghosts.

Zack was sure of it.

Because they were moaning. And wailing.

"Mom?" Zack whispered.

Judy snored.

Zack went over to the bed to jostle her leg a little.

"Mom?"

She snored louder.

She was completely conked out. Zack would have to investigate the wailing spooks in the hallway alone. Not that Judy would've been all that much help. She couldn't see ghosts. That was Zack's special "gift," one he sometimes wished had come with a receipt so he could take it back for something a little more useful like the ability to sink jump shots from the half-court line.

Zack put on a bathrobe, which, unfortunately, smelled as musty as the carpet.

He creaked open the heavy wooden door hanging on squeaky hinges.

And saw an apparition marching down the corridor.

A young woman. Maybe in her late twenties. She was dressed like people used to dress back in the olden days, the 1990s. She was wearing a brightly colored tracksuit. Her hair had been crimped into tight corkscrew curls. Zack could smell bitter chemicals wafting in her wake.

He could not, however, see her face. Only the back of her head.

"Business or pleasure?" she wailed as she walked.

"Business or pleasure?"

"Are you okay?" Zack asked.

The woman slowly, very slowly, turned around.

Her mouth was a weeping red gash. Bubbly pink blood burbled out from between her lips and trickled down the front of her tracksuit jacket. In her hands, she held a blue passport book. It looked like Zack's. Only hers was drizzled with blood splatters.

"I am dead," she announced, coldly. "He killed me." She held up the slim blue book with the American eagle seal on front. "This was my passport...*to murder!*"

Now two children, a boy and a girl, entered the hallway on either side of the woman. They each had a plush stuffed animal dangling from their hands: a moose in a Mountie hat wearing a knit sweater with a bright red Canadian maple leaf embroidered on its chest.

"He killed us, too!" they howled in unison, swinging their stuffed toys like pendulums. "Ret-tub tuna-ep! Ananab!"

Zack wondered if the kids were chanting Canadian First Nations people words. It sure sounded like a foreign language to him.

"Avenge our murders!" cried the woman, who might've been the boy and girl's mother. They were both definitely clinging to the legs of her track pants like she was.

"Avenge us, demon slayer! Avenge our deaths!"

Oh-kay, thought Zack. Demon slayer was what some of the ghosts back home in Connecticut called him. He figured word had spread up to the great white north.

"Ret-tub tuna-ep!" said the boy.

"Ananab! Ananab!" said the girl.

"What are you trying to say?" Zack asked the two blank-eyed kids. As he moved closer, he noticed their mouths were thin lines of burbling pink blood, too.

"Ret-tub tuna-ep!" said the boy.

"Ananab!" said the girl.

"Peanut butter and banana?" said Zack, flipping the nonsense words around. He learned about backward talking kid ghosts by watching an old Stephen King movie called The Shining with his dad. He figured it was a rule. Kids haunting hotel hallways had to speak backwards.

The three ghosts pointed to the floor in front of Room 1313. All of a sudden, there was a room service tray sitting there that hadn't been sitting there when Zack stepped out into the hall, otherwise he would've tripped over it.

There was a silver domed plate on the tray.

Zack bent down. The dome rattled, shook, and then hovered over the plate to reveal a glass of ice water, a bowl of tomato soup, and a peanut butter and banana sandwich cut in half. Two large chomps had been bitten into the soft bread on each side. A spoon leaned against the edge of the soup bowl. A butter knife smeared with brown peanut butter lay alongside the plate, which had a frilly R and D inscribed in gold on its curved border.

"Poison!" wheezed the woman.

"Poison!" wailed her children.

"Poison!" they all shrieked together.

The Royal Duke room service tray vanished. So did the women and her two children.

Zack understood his new responsibility.

It was up to him to, somehow, find the poisoner and avenge their murders.

The next morning, Zack and Judy had breakfast at a nearby restaurant called Eggspectation because even the thought of ordering room service kind of creeped Zack out after seeing the disappearing tray act in the hallway.

"You sure you won't be bored at the theatre all day?" asked Judy.

"Probably," said Zack. (There were only so many times he could listen to the same Curiosity Cat lyrics about how "There will never another cat like that" over and over and over again.)

"Do you want to hang at the hotel? Maybe rent an in-room movie or three?"

Zack smiled. "Sounds like a plan."

When they finished their breakfast burgers (eggs and meat on a bun), Judy headed off to the theater. Zack went back to the hotel.

Not to rent in-room movies; to investigate a murder.

When he pushed his way through the revolving door, he saw that the cadaver was still on duty behind the desk.

"Uh, hi," Zack said, shooting out his hand, the way he'd seen his dad do at backyard barbecues when meeting a stranger. "I'm Zack Jennings. We're in room thirteen-thirteen."

The elderly man smiled. He had very few teeth. And the ones he did have were either pointy or gold. "Yes." He came around the counter to shake Zack's hand. "We met yesterday. When you checked in. I'm Liam Cavendish."

"Pleased to meet you."

They exchanged a few more pleasantries. Mostly about baseball and hockey and why, in Canada, a knitted winter hat was called a "tuque."

"Probably from the French," said Mr. Cavendish.

Zack nodded like he was super interested.

"Soooo," he said, since the ice was broken with the tuque talk, "I think I met your ghosts last night."

The old man nodded. "Woman with two children?"

"Yep. They told me they were poisoned."

"Did they?"

"Yep."

"Strange."

"Why?"

"Belinda Baker and her twins, Billy and Bonnie, don't usually talk to guests."

Wow, thought Zack. Guess I really am special. Whatta gift.

"So, uh, do you know anything about it?" Zack asked.

Mr. Cavendish's eyes narrowed. "June fourteen. Nineteen ninety-two. I was on desk duty that night. Police asked me all sorts of questions. I told them what I will now tell you: The cook did it!"

"Huh?"

"Travis McAllister! He was our chef, back in the day. Ran our restaurant."

The old man flapped his hand toward an empty room on the far side of the lobby. It was filled with dusty round tables and moth-eaten chairs. There was one waitress with a paper hat and doily apron standing guard but nobody eating anything.

"I saw Travis flirting with Mrs. Baker when she and the twins came down for breakfast early that morning. Cheeky little monkey. She rebuffed his entreaties. Rebuffed them most soundly!"

Mr. Cavendish sounded like a British major general with bushy sideburns and a pith helmet that Zack had seen in a movie on TV.

"Did the police arrest the cook?" he asked.

"Not for long. Oh, they hauled him away to the old Bailey in handcuffs, mind you. Locked him up in the hoosegow. Nary a week later, they let him go."

"Was he the one who made them their room service food? The tomato soup? The peanut butter and banana sandwich?"

"Indeed so. He was also, if you ask me, the one who laced the food with arsenic!"

"So why did the police let him go?"

"I'm not certain. Why don't you go ask him?"

"Who?"

"Travis McAllister. He's still a cook, right here in downtown Toronto. You can find him at the Bloor House, a greasy spoon not but two blocks away, for, as they say the criminal always returns to the scene of the crime. This one never left!"

"What does he look like?" asked Zack, already checking a tourist map for the Bloor House.

"Easy," said Mr. Cavendish. "McAllister will be the chuffed man with the bald dome working the manky grill and flirting with all the chicky birds seated at the counter!"

Since it was the middle of the morning and Toronto seemed more polite than dangerous, Zack decided to dig a little deeper. He'd go to the Bloor House and talk to the cheeky chef, Travis McAllister.

When Zack stepped into the cafe', the scent of hot corned beef walloped his nose. It was a good smell. Like a greasy mountain of sizzling hot dogs on a grill. A bald man in a soiled apron who had to be Travis McAllister was flirting with two ladies, office workers half his age, who were getting up off their stools.

"Come back this afternoon for high tea, lassies," said McAllister. "We'll be servin' jambusters. Because I am a Manitoba man!"

When the giggling women were gone, Zack sat at the counter. Travis McAllister came over with a green order pad and stubby pencil.

"What can I get you, squirt?"

"Um, what's a jambuster?"

"A jelly doughnut – if we were back home in Manitoba, which we ain't, eh?"

"Right."

"So, what'll it be, squirt?"

"How about some information?" Zack said, because he'd heard a movie detective say that in a shady diner scene just like the one Zack was suddenly in. (Yes. Zack and his dad watched a lot movies.)

"'bout what?"

"The death of Belinda, Bonnie, and Billy Baker."

"What? That's ancient history."

"I know. I have to write a paper about their poisoning for school."

Mr. McAllister gave him a look. It wasn't a nice one, either.

Zack took a deep breath. "I talked to Mr. Cavendish at the Royal Duke Hotel..."

Mr. McAllister laughed and shook his head. "That old fart is still alive then, is he?"

"Yes, sir," said Zack. He didn't add "barely."

"He tell you I poisoned them people, eh?"

"Sort of."

Mr. McAllister shook his head. "Wait here, squirt."

He disappeared into the kitchen and came back with yellowed newspaper clipping sealed inside plastic.

"Had this thing laminated. Mr. Cavendish has been spreading the same ridiculous rumors about me since nineteen ninety-two. It wasn't me, kid. The police never found no evidence suggesting it might be. Newspaper said it was the rats."

"Huh?"

"There was arsenic in the water on account of the rat poison they spread all over the hotel. My only crime? Putting a glass of tap water on that tray with the sandwich and soup."

He slid the laminated article across the sticky, stain splattered counter.

Zack read about the rats found in the hotel's water tank. They'd eaten arsenic tainted bait that an exterminator had tucked into all the hotel's many nooks and crannies. Rat poison "made the vermin extremely thirsty." To slake their thirst, the rats leapt into the water tower

and drowned. As they decomposed, the arsenic in their bodies polluted the water in the hotel's cistern.

"So what do you want to eat, squirt?" asked Mr. McAllister.

Zack could taste a hint of vomit in the back of his mouth. Reading about poisoned rats drowning in a hotel water tank will do that to a guy.

"Um, nothing...right now...maybe in a second..."

Mr. McAllister snatched the laminated newspaper story from under Zack's nose.

"Pretty lady, that Belinda Baker," he said. "Hated to see her go before, you know, we could get to know each other a wee bit better." He gave Zack a skeezy wink. "Of course our bell hop felt even worse."

"How come?"

"Because the pretty lady was his ex-wife. Came up from Buffalo to win him back. But Jack moved up here to start a new life. One without a wife or two bawling brats."

Feeling like he had to order something, Zack had a bacon cheeseburger, which had normal bacon on it, even though they were in Canada. He'd been expecting Canadian bacon.

That afternoon, he hung out with Judy at the theatre.

That night, they went out to a nice dinner with the cast, came back to the spooky hotel, watched some TV, munched some more Pringles, and, once again fell asleep. Judy on the bed. Zack on the couch.

At exactly 3:13 a.m. Zack, who was sort of half-snoozing with one eye on the digital alarm clock, heard wailing out in the hall. This time, he didn't even bother trying to wake Judy.

He stepped out into the hallway in his robe.

Belinda, Bonnie, and Billy Baker were there again. The kids were holding their souvenir moose dolls. The mom was holding her passport booklet. They waited expectantly for Zack to say something.

He could tell: they were counting on him, big time.

"It was the rats," he told them. "They ate poison, hopped into the hotel's water tank and poisoned the drinking water."

The instant he said it out loud, Zack heard how stupid it sounded.

If the dying rats poisoned the water tank why were the three Bakers the only victims? Why didn't everybody else in the hotel die?

The two children turned their backs on Zack.

"Sorry," he said. "My theory might be a little off..."

Mrs. Baker motioned for Zack to follow her.

He did. Mostly because he was feeling bad for jumping to such a stupid conclusion. Plus, in his experience, ghosts couldn't really harm people. They could just scare you into hurting yourself.

Mrs. Baker and her twins led Zack to an exit door.

He opened it. They were in a stairwell. There were steps going up and steps going down. Pipes and conduits carrying steam and water and electricity were bolted to the naked cinderblock walls.

Mrs. Baker pointed at a bend where one of the pipes curved to duck beneath the staircase riser.

Zack looked to where she was pointing.

If he squinted, he could make out something gray and lumpy tucked between the top of the pipe elbow and the staircase. He climbed up the stairs, knelt down, reached around, and, after a couple grunts, tugged the cloth wad out from its hiding place.

It was a bundled-up, soiled napkin, gray with dust and lint. A frilly R and D were stitched near the hem. Zack unrolled the cloth. Inside were a butter knife and soup spoon.

The murder weapons?

Had someone stirred arsenic into the tomato soup and spread it across the peanut butter on the sandwich! Had they then wrapped up the evidence and hidden it here in the stairwell?

"Who did this?" Zack asked, turning around to face the three ghosts.

But they had vanished.

They couldn't give him any more clues. Crimes in the mortal realm could only be solved by mortals. It was another ghost rule.

Solving this particular murder was up to Zack.

The next morning, he walked with Judy to the theatre. He had the antique napkin wrapped around the spoon and knife safely secured in a plastic bag – the liner from the hotel room's ice bucket.

"You're awfully quiet," said Judy.

"Thinking," Zack mumbled.

"About what?"

So Zack told her everything about his two encounters with Belinda, Bonnie, and Billy Baker.

"Why didn't you wake me up?"

"Because you were snoring. Plus, you can't see ghosts. And they weren't very scary. I just wish I could figure out who poisoned them."

"Well, maybe it was that creepy cook," said Judy. "The one who fed you the rat story."

"Maybe. But, the more I think about it, the more I think it might've been the ex-husband. Jack. Jack Baker. He was a bellhop at the hotel. That means he would've carried the tray up to the room. He would've had a passkey. So he could've gone in and switched out the knife and spoon. I think his fingerprints will be all over the stuff I found in the stairwell."

"We should take them to the police," suggested Judy. "There's no statute of limitations on murder cases."

"Definitely," said Zack. "But, um, can we eat first? I'm sort of starving."

"Sure. How about a chocolate croissant?" Judy gestured toward a window pane with "Boulangier" painted in black and gold letters.

"They have pastries?"

"Sure," said Judy. "'Boulangier' is French for baker." And that's when Jack figured everything out.

They went to the nearest Toronto Police Service station. Zack told them his theory. They took his evidence and examined it.

Judy and Zack went to the Curiosity Cat rehearsals and dinner. They watched TV, ate Pringles, and slept through the night.

Zack had no ghostly visitors at 3:13 a.m.

The next morning, Tuesday, they went back to the Twittleham Plaza Hotel to check into their suite.

"Ah, Madame Magruder-Jennings," said the snooty man behind the front desk. "Bienvenue. Welcome."

"Thank you, Mr. Baker," said Zack.

"Pardon moi?"

"You can cut the French act, Jack. Everybody knows you're really Jack Baker not 'Jacques Boulanger!' You poisoned your ex-wife and your own kids."

"Ha! That is the most preposterous..."

That's when the two police detectives, who had been pretending to read newspapers, the way they always do in the movies, folded up their papers and marched to the front desk.

"Jack Baker?" said the lead detective, flashing his badge. "You are under arrest for the murders of Belinda,

Bonnie, and William Baker. Do you understand? You have the right to retain and instruct counsel without delay..."

Zack and Judy stepped aside while the police read Mr. Baker his Canadian rights.

Then they told him about the lab results they'd received that morning and the fingerprints they'd found all over the knife and spoon. They mentioned they might need a DNA sample, too.

"I had to kill them!" they heard Mr. Baker protest. "For my career. I came to Toronto to start a new life. But Belinda had to come up here, looking for me. Dragging along those two sniveling little brats from Buffalo..."

As he confessed, he didn't sound so French.

And Zack realized why the ghost of Belinda Baker had called her slim blue book her "passport to murder." It got her into Canada. It also got her dead.

After the police hauled Mr. Baker/Boulanger away, a very helpful (and slightly embarrassed) concierge checked Zack and Judy into the Twittleham Plaza Hotel.

"Says here you were supposed to check in on Sunday," he said consulting his computer screen.

"That's what I told Mr. Boulanger!" said Judy.

"Must've been a computer glitch," said Zack. "You know — a ghost in the machine?"

Judy smiled. "Riiight."

She understood what Zack meant.

Somehow – maybe by messing with their own electro-magnetic auras or manipulating the ether or doing something similarly mysterious – the Baker ghosts had changed Judy and Zack's reservations inside the Twittleham Plaza' computer system.

Because they needed Zack Jennings, the American "demon slayer" to stay at the Royal Duke until he solved their murder mystery.

And maybe that's also why, when the nice concierge showed Zack and Judy their rooms, there was a "Thank You" gift waiting on each twin bed: A stuffed animal tucked up against.

A moose, of course.

Wearing a Mountie hat and a knit sweater with a bright red maple leaf embroidered on the chest.

THE END

