Helping your children choose books they will love

I reading

Lovereading4kids.co.uk is a book website created for parents and children to make choosing books easy and fun

Opening extract from

Knightley and Son: K-9

Written by

Rohan Gavin

Published by

Bloomsbury Children's an imprint of Bloomsbury Publishing PLC

All Text is Copyright © of the Author and/or Illustrator

Please print off and read at your leisure.

Lovereading4kids.co.uk

Bloomsbury Publishing, London, New Delhi, New York and Sydney

First published in Great Britain in August 2014 by Bloomsbury Publishing Plc
50 Bedford Square, London WC1B 3DP

www.bloomsbury.com
www.knightleyandson.com

Bloomsbury is a registered trademark of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc

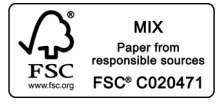
Text copyright © Rohan Gavin 2014
Illustrations copyright © Leo Hartas 2014

The moral rights of the author and illustrator have been asserted

All rights reserved
No part of this publication may be reproduced or
transmitted by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying
or otherwise, without the prior permission of the publisher

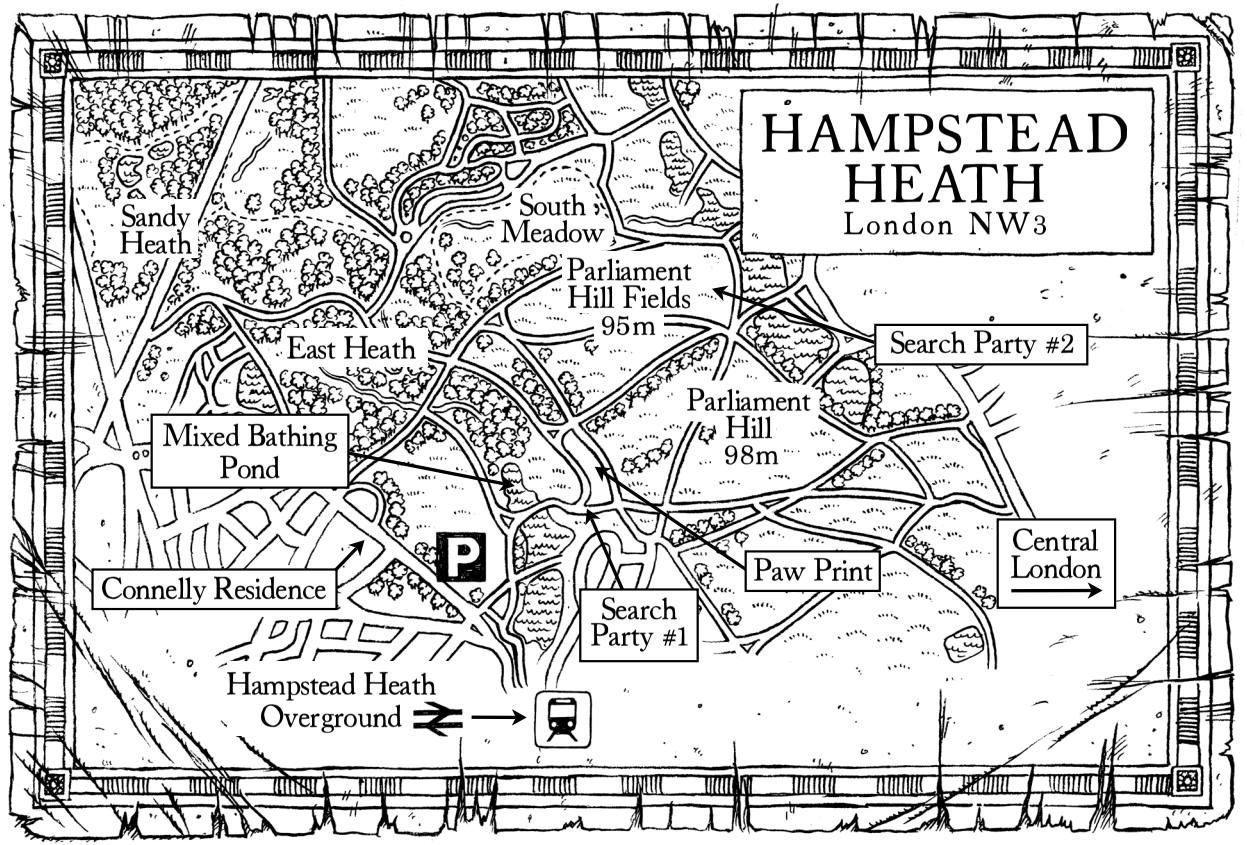
A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN 978 1 4088 5143 2



Typeset by Hewer Text UK Ltd, Edinburgh
Printed and bound in Great Britain by CPI Group (UK) Ltd, Croydon CR0 4YY

1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2


HAMPSTEAD HEATH
London NW3
Sandy Heath
South Meadow
Parliament Hill Fields 95m
East Heath
Search Party #2
Parliament Hill 98m
Mixed Bathing Pond
P
Central London
Paw Print
Connelly Residence
Search Party #1
Hampstead Heath Overground

Prologue
NO EXIT

It was a two packet of digestives problem. Possibly even three. And tonight of course he'd only brought a single Club biscuit, which he'd consumed over fifteen minutes ago. The new diet was doing little for his generous waistline and even less for his powers of concentration.

Uncle Bill (also known as Montague Billoch from the Department of the Unexplained) rummaged around in the depths of his coat pockets for any morsel that might have eluded him, finding only one woollen glove, coated in breadcrumbs and lacking a significant other. He gave up, rubbed his hands together against the cold, blew a plume of smoke from the cigar between his teeth and continued his lumbering stride along the brightly lit Victoria Embankment, with the River Thames glittering darkly below.

And still his search had produced nothing: no evidence of the rumoured subterranean tunnels that led from the

villains' secret bunker under Down Street Tube station, delivering would-be escapees to the river. No mysterious arches, no doorways in walls. Bill leaned over the stone balustrade, looking down towards the water, finding no footprints in the silty mudflats and no secret moorings where speedboats might have lain in wait. There were no clues whatsoever. He'd begun to think this routine was exactly that: routine. He was also starting to question the wisdom of his long-time colleague and pal, private eye Alan Knightley, who had suggested this fool's errand in the first place. *If* Alan's college-chum-turned-mortal-enemy, Morton Underwood, had somehow escaped from the Tube tracks three months ago, it was anyone's guess where he was now. Also missing were Underwood's colleagues from the sinister crime organisation known as the Combination: an awesome foe that had cast a long shadow over London with its almost supernatural feats of evil and corruption.

The one consolation was that if Alan's thirteen-year-old son, Darkus Knightley, was half as capable a detective as he'd proved on his first case, he would no doubt be following his own lines of inquiry. With the help of that unusual stepsister, Tilly, of course, who wanted to find the Combination for her own reasons: to avenge her mother's death.

Uncle Bill set aside these thoughts and ambled on

past the Houses of Parliament, which were wrapped in a treacly mist, their facets tinted orange by the floodlights. As he walked under the street lamps of Parliament Square, his massive form – with the homburg hat at its apex – cast its own near-planetary shadow over the surroundings. As if on cue, Big Ben began striking midnight, reverberating into the heavens and beyond.

Bill proceeded through the square, navigated two pedestrian crossings and found himself back on the river walk, which was by now deserted. A few passing lorries and minicabs were the only signs of life. Those, and the enormous London Eye watching silently and ominously from the other side of the restless waters.

Bill raised his collar and pressed on, feeling a twinge in his knee from the nasty spill he'd suffered on the Knightleys' last investigation. Hopefully any future cases would be less physically taxing. And less taxing on the already stretched finances of his little-known and little-thought-of department of Scotland Yard. Bill reminded himself that by the time he reached the Millennium Bridge he could, in good conscience, hail a cab, return to his modest but comfortable apartment in Putney and gain access to his secret refreshment cupboard.

As Bill relished this idea he heard a loud click on the pavement behind him. It sounded metallic, like a steel nail falling on to the paving stones with a single strike.

But when he turned around, there was nothing there. Just the dim globes of the street lights, and the trunks of the trees extending evenly into the distance.

Uncle Bill hesitantly removed the cigar from his teeth, examined the scene once more, then continued along the river walk with a slightly more urgent stride. His waddling shadow would have been shambolic were it not for its surprising speed. Bill glanced at the road running alongside him, but of course at this moment, there were no vehicles in sight. Before he could open his mouth to curse, the click returned again – clear as day – like a heavy pin dropping.

This time, Bill spun round with incredible stealth, hoping to catch the culprit in the act.

'Aye mah auntie. Ye ol' bampot,' he blurted in his almost unbelievably thick Scottish accent.

There was still nothing there. Except for . . . a small pair of twinkling eyes approximately fifty metres in his wake. The eyes hovered about a metre off the ground, then they darted back behind a tree.

'Whit? Ya mad dafty . . .'

Bill turned back, trying to act casual, and ambled faster, puffing smoke into the sky. And as the mists parted for a moment, he could make out a perfectly *full moon*.

'Just mah luck –'

At that moment, he was interrupted by a howl so loud that he initially mistook it for a boating horn somewhere on the Thames. But instead of a flat monotone, this sound rose into a feral wail that sent the hair on Bill's back (and there was a generous amount of it) standing on end. And from the guttural rattle of the beast, it sounded even hungrier than Bill was.

Bill took to his heels – which in this case were a pair of orthopaedic loafers that were designed for comfort and support, not for running – and he hurtled headlong down the centre of the river walk, under the light of the moon.

Behind him, the metallic click on the pavement became a clatter as the sharp claws of the beast accelerated to a gallop, its eyes unblinking, focused on its prey.

Bill waved his arms at a passing car but the driver failed to notice him through the row of tree trunks – or failed to care. The London Eye continued to watch indifferently from across the river.

The metallic clatter raced up behind Bill, and knowing he had no chance of outrunning it, he turned to face the enemy, his arms spread wide as if he intended to hug it to death.

'Whit da –?'

There was nothing there. Just the dim arc of the street lamp capturing an empty stretch of river walk. Bill blew

out his cheeks with relief and took a hefty tug on his cigar. Then, as he turned back around he discovered a low, muscular shape blocking his way, vapour trails rising from its nostrils. Its formidable torso was draped in shadow.

It was a *dog* of some kind. Or a wolf.

The animal's jaws opened as if in slow motion, with half a dozen glistening strings of saliva stretching between the lower mandible and the upper maxilla bone. Like a slippery and lethal musical instrument. Its body was pitch black but its coat shone with youth and vitality, even through the darkness. Its anatomy was ripped with long muscles that Bill couldn't even identify.

Its jaws opened wider, and its thin black lips rolled back to reveal two long rows of perfectly symmetrical and impossibly sharp teeth.

Instead of a howl, the animal emitted a series of rhythmic grunts as if it was delivering some sort of funeral eulogy.

Bill puffed up his chest in a primitive fight-or-flight response. Plumes of smoke escaped his cheeks as he tore the cigar from his mouth and waved its dim ember in the direction of the beast to ward it off. Needless to say, it had profoundly little effect.

'Hing aff us!' he warned, before tossing the cigar over his shoulder, sensing that it would be of no further use.

Bill desperately searched his deep coat pockets for any weapon or talisman to save him. Incredibly, his fingers detected the corner of what felt like a torn chocolate wrapper: a rogue Penguin biscuit if he was not mistaken.

Maintaining a poker face, Bill eased the half-eaten biscuit into his grasp – and for a fleeting millisecond he did in fact consider eating it, but then he thought better of it – and quickly yanked it out of his pocket and threw it in the opposite direction. The canine's instincts were confused for a split second as its eyes followed the treat, and Bill darted around the beast, using a tree trunk for cover.

'Ha!' Bill managed as he cantered further down the river walk. He may be a goner, but at least he wasn't going down without a fight.

The metallic clattering of the creature's claws started up with a vengeance, accompanied by an amused growl, indicating the prize would be all the more sweet for this minor setback.

Bill's hat blew off as he ran his version of an Olympic sprint. The slingshot shape of the Millennium Bridge loomed ahead of him, stretching over the water. It was always the end goal, and now Bill sensed it was a matter of life or death. As his orthopaedic loafers covered the distance, the sudden aerobic exercise had the odd side effect of clearing his mind.

Who could have set this beast on him? No idea. Bill had enemies, but he was more bureaucrat than field agent. How could it have tracked him? By smell of course. Something Bill had in plentiful supply. *Smell*. Smell was what he had to rid himself of. And fast.

Bill reached the entrance to the bridge and ran up the walkway, his chest heaving and his overcoat flapping in the wind. The curved railings and lateral suspension beams extended on either side of him with the water bubbling menacingly below.

He managed to get fifty metres across the bridge when he felt the warm breath of the beast on the back of his meaty calves. He turned to face the enemy once more.

The dog was almost smiling, its slick coat glowing in the mist. Playtime was over, it was dinner time now – and Bill presented a buffet spread of possibilities.

'A'right, beastie,' he wheezed.

The dog hissed through its bared teeth.

'Cheerio for nou –' Bill grabbed hold of the railing and hoisted himself over, teetering on the edge for a few seconds, like a side of beef on a butcher's scale.

The dog leaped up at him and bit, tearing away a piece of calf flesh and corduroy. But gravity was on Bill's side, and with another small budge, his full bulk toppled over the edge of the railings.

Somehow, Bill had the forethought to tuck his knees against his belly (as close as his physique would permit) then wrapped his arms around them, forming a human cannonball as he hit the freezing surface of the Thames, ejecting a tower of water into the air in his wake. A bystander on dry land described the scene as similar to a small car being dropped into a lake.

Bill instantly vanished underwater, his entire form being swallowed up by the river. Within moments, the tower of water evaporated and the Thames returned to its restless flow, leaving no trace of him.

The dog watched from the bridge, whined with abject disappointment, then trotted back across the walkway and into the night.

Chapter 1
HEALTHY COMPETITION

Darkus Knightley knelt down in the grass, planting his fingers along the chalk line. Six other runners were positioned alongside him, with the Cranston School sports field extending ahead of them. Although Darkus was physically fit, his frame was slighter than many of his classmates. He considered his physical form a vessel for his brain rather than a tool in itself – although he had, on occasion, needed to rely on it for self-defence. But even then, his brain was the real weapon; his body merely followed orders. He was also far more comfortable in a nicely cut tweed suit than in his own skin – which was currently exposed to the elements with only a running vest, shorts and a clunky pair of trainers for protection. And no hat.

The benefit of exercise, in his mind, was that it dulled the noise of the 'catastrophiser' – that trusty tool of his, which continually digested potential clues from his

immediate surroundings and churned out the worst-case scenario. Of course the worst-case scenario was often *not* the case, but when it *was*, the device would quickly unearth the dark, unpalatable truth.

He also found that physical exercise provided a fresh burst of oxygen to help him solve any outstanding cases or logic problems; but, if he was honest, he had precious few of those to solve at the moment, due to the fact that his father, Alan Knightley, had once again disappeared into his work, leaving Darkus behind to deal with the trivial pursuits of school life.

Burke, the sports master, fired the starting pistol, which snapped Darkus's mind into sharp focus. His fingers left the chalk line and balled into fists as his legs projected him down the track. The fifteen hundred metres was a chess game as much as a race and he would need to time it perfectly if he had any hope of finishing in a reasonable position. There was no audience in attendance, and no possibility he could win, but Darkus took a certain pride in everything he did. Strangely, the last time he'd run with such determination was when he was being pursued by Burke the sports master himself. Darkus had assisted his stepsister Tilly with her great escape from the school grounds only three months earlier. Fortunately, Burke had never made a positive identification. Of course back then the stakes had been

infinitely higher: saving his father's life; and protecting the world from his one-time godfather Morton Underwood and the evil Combination. Today was a far simpler game.

Matt Wilson, the school champion and an honest competitor, was already moving towards the inside lane, leading the pack. Brendan Doyle, who was built like an outhouse and wasn't exactly charitable by nature – due to an unhappy home life, Darkus deduced – jostled for position, still wearing the hoodie that he routinely used to intimidate fellow classmates. The teachers had put Doyle down a couple of years, which only added to his physical superiority. Darkus allowed Doyle to move in front of him and watched as the bully elbowed other runners out of the way.

Darkus turned the first corner, near the back of the pack – then saw something in the undergrowth at the edge of the track: it was the glint of a single lens. By the diameter of the reflection Darkus estimated it was a telephoto lens, with a focal length of between two hundred and three hundred millimetres. Darkus's catastrophiser started whirring feverishly, stealing oxygen from the rest of his body and raising his heart rate. It was unlikely to be a sniper. There were more discreet ways to dispose of a detective than on a school playing field. But if not, then who was it? As his arms and legs kept moving,

his breathing sped up and he experienced a burning sensation in his lungs from gulping down the cold air. As usual, he didn't want to listen to the catastrophiser, but his rational brain provided no reasonable explanation.

Darkus took evasive action by moving forward through the pack to obscure himself from whoever was watching. He saw Doyle in front of him, his hoodie visibly lagging from the exertion. Darkus moved to overtake him.

'What are you doing, *Dorkus*?' the boy demanded.

'Nothing special,' Darkus answered in between breaths.

'Think you're going to beat me or something?'

'Highly unlikely. You have a clear, physical advantage.'

'Then why are you all up in my stuff?'

'Just avoiding someone,' Darkus answered, glancing back to see the glint at six o' clock relative to his current position.

Doyle cocked his hoodie, baffled. 'By the way, it's Friday. What happened to that homework you owe me?'

'I'm afraid I had to go back on our agreement,' Darkus began. 'My hope was that a few good marks would boost your morale and improve your overall performance. But I can see my intervention has had the opposite effect,'

he said, catching his breath. 'Might I suggest focusing on sport? Perhaps of the full contact variety?'

Darkus stopped talking, steadied his breathing and continued to move through the pack until he felt a sharp pain in his right thigh. At the same time his right leg buckled and collapsed. He silently tumbled to the grass at the side of the track, feeling a numb, wet sensation on the upper part of his leg. The three other runners in close proximity collided painfully with him and fell nearby. Wilson the school champion slowed down, looking over his shoulder to check that none of his classmates were injured. Doyle accelerated past the leader triumphantly.

Darkus investigated the pain, reaching down to discover a small puncture wound in his thigh, which was oozing blood. The wound was too small for a sniper's bullet, too messy for a knife blade, but perfectly corresponded to a homemade 'shiv' – or improvised blade. Darkus looked up to see Doyle toss just such a weapon – a sharpened plastic comb whose teeth had been removed – into the undergrowth at the edge of the track. Doyle, who was now leading the pack, turned and shot Darkus a sinister smile from under his hoodie.

Darkus ignored this petty assault, and searched instead for the glinting lens, which had now vanished altogether. As Darkus scanned the surroundings, Burke jogged over to him, to inspect the wound.

'You're bleeding, Knightley.' Burke peered over his handlebar moustache.

'Must've caught it on a spike, sir. No harm done.'

Darkus got to his feet, took out a monogrammed handkerchief, bound up his leg, and completed the race.

He came last.

Darkus's mum, Jackie, was waiting at the school gates with Wilburforce sitting obediently beside her, his bat-ears twitching at every small sound. When Darkus approached in his usual tweed jacket and waistcoat ensemble, Wilbur wagged his tail once, which was normally the extent of the greeting. Darkus wasn't offended by this, because he knew the German shepherd was still recovering from the deafeningly loud noises he'd encountered during his long career in the K-9 unit of the bomb disposal squad. Darkus didn't know all the case histories because they were classified, but he could see by the greying temples and the tired eyes that Wilbur had seen more than most dogs (or people) would ever wish to.

Wilbur had been a gift from Darkus's father, Alan, after their first assignment. It was fair to say that this recent addition to the family hadn't gone down brilliantly with Darkus's stepdad, Clive. It had only been a matter of months since Clive suffered under the hypnotic

powers of the villain Morton Underwood and had an embarrassing on-air meltdown while filming his TV series, *Wheel Spin* – which was then taken off the air. And now an emotionally fragile police dog had moved into his house, leaving unexplained puddles (or worse) in the garage and sitting in his favourite La-Z-Boy chair. For some reason, Wilbur's post-traumatic stress disorder only ever seemed to affect Clive's belongings. Darkus, Jackie, and Clive's daughter, Tilly, were all immune. Their clothes never went missing and their things were never chewed or found their way to the bottom of the garden. Clive, however, was fair game for all of Wilbur's less sociable habits and there was no end to the missing gloves, hats, boxer shorts and DVDs that he would complain to Jackie about.

Darkus and Jackie talked in private about the fact that Clive's mind hadn't been the same since his own trauma – and he seemed to routinely forget where he'd put things. So perhaps the objects that were going missing weren't *all* Wilbur's fault. Naturally, Clive was convinced that the *Schweinhund* (German for pig-dog) was responsible for everything that was wrong in the house. Jackie had relented and tried a local dog trainer, with no success. After that she hired a 'dog whisperer', but the words fell on deaf ears. Next, Jackie tried an even more alternative therapy and visited a friend of a

friend who specialised in natural remedies, including herbal extracts and flower essences. Wilbur tried taking what was known as a 'rescue remedy' with his morning meal, but the only discernible effect was that he trotted around the house for the rest of the day with his tail between his legs, peeing uncontrollably.

'How was school?' enquired Jackie, bringing Darkus back to the present.

'The usual,' Darkus replied, then put on his tweed walking hat and patted Wilbur on the head. 'Attaboy,' he whispered.

Wilbur wrinkled his jowls and lifted his whiskers in a half-smile.

Doyle appeared through the school gates, tightening the strings of his hoodie and flashing a gang sign of some kind at Darkus, who smiled and waved by way of reply. Wilbur growled protectively, straining on the lead.

'Easy . . .' Darkus reassured the mutt. 'Nothing I can't handle.'

Tilly appeared through the gates next, in a leather jacket with her hair in purple dip-dyed pigtails. 'What up, fam?'

'We're fine, thank you, Tilly,' said Jackie, and led the motley-looking group towards their waiting estate car.

Darkus tapped his stepsister on the shoulder, leaving Jackie to put Wilbur in the back of the car. 'Don't take

this the wrong way, but were you watching me on the playing field?' he asked.

'Me?' Tilly snipped. 'No. Why would I be doing that?'

Despite the easing of relations on their first case, Darkus was reminded that Tilly's default setting would always be defensive since losing her mother, Carol – who'd been Darkus's father's assistant.

'Never mind,' he said, puzzled.

At that moment, a blonde female classmate darted out of the school gates and approached them. Tilly instinctively moved to block her: 'Can I help you?'

'My name's Alexis,' the blonde introduced herself. 'Friends call me Lex.'

'I know who you are,' said Tilly disdainfully, giving her the once-over. 'Editor-in-chief of *The Cranston Star*.'

'And chief photographer,' added Darkus, who couldn't help observing Alexis's slender legs, against which a long-lensed camera dangled from a strap over her shoulder. She was a year older than him, but at this age, it felt like an aeon.

'Guilty as charged,' replied Alexis, her lips curling into a cockeyed smile. She plucked a small twig from her blonde tresses, then flicked it away.

'You were watching me on the playing field,' deduced Darkus.

'Sorry if I distracted you,' she answered.

Tilly looked from Alexis to Darkus, unsure if she was detecting chemistry.

'If you wanted a photo, you only needed to ask,' said Darkus and shrugged on his herringbone overcoat.

'I wasn't after a glamour shot, Darkus. Or should I say . . . "Doc". The truth is, I'm breaking a story.'

'Really?' Tilly interjected. 'And what's the subject matter?'

'It's autobiographical, really. You see, I was on the Piccadilly Line last October, over half-term. Dad was taking me to a matinee . . .' she said coyly. 'I don't remember what film to be honest.'

'So?' demanded Tilly. 'For a journalist you certainly take a long time getting to the point.'

'I witnessed a unique air pressure phenomenon while we were underground,' said Alexis flatly. 'A freak tornado. You may've heard about it?'

Tilly and Darkus glanced at each other, realising that what she had actually witnessed was their climactic battle with the Combination.

'You must have been seeing things,' Darkus answered.

'Well, that's the funny thing,' said Alexis. 'What I was seeing was *you*, Darkus.'

'A reflection of one of the other passengers perhaps,' he countered. 'A trick of the light.'

Tilly remained quiet.

Alexis continued: 'The person I saw was around thirteen years old, standing on a disused Tube platform, wearing a tweed hat, and a herringbone overcoat. He was accompanied by a scrawny-looking female around the same age.'

'What d'you mean, "scrawny"?' snapped Tilly, then fell silent, before trying for a save. 'I mean . . . Tube lines run at over fifty miles per hour so it must've been hard to tell.'

'Oh, she was scrawny, all right,' Alexis confirmed, as Tilly's heavily mascaraed eyes went wide. Alexis turned to Darkus. 'Is it true your father was the renowned London detective . . . Alan Knightley?'

'Not was. *Is*,' Darkus responded, even though he hadn't heard from his dad in almost a month, and had no idea what he was currently working on. His father had clearly forgotten the success of their first investigation and was now operating on his own – although Darkus wasn't convinced his dad's reasoning powers were up to the job. His dad had recovered from the four-year-long coma inflicted on him by Underwood, but had proved he was still liable to return to that unconscious state at the drop of a tweed hat. In the absence of any clues as to what Knightley was *really* doing, Darkus could only speculate.

Alexis continued her line of questioning: 'Then I suppose it's not too big a stretch to assume your father might have been investigating something on the tracks?'

'Kids?' Jackie called over from the car. Wilbur whimpered as the boot was closed.

'I don't comment on my father's work,' said Darkus. Tilly grabbed him by the coat sleeve and dragged him towards the car. 'Now, if you'll excuse us, Lex,' Darkus said over his shoulder, 'we're late for tea. Have a pleasant weekend.'

Tilly muttered to herself as she slung her rucksack in the back seat and got in. '*Lex* . . . I mean, who can take someone with a name like that seriously?'

'She certainly has a very analytical mind,' Darkus commented as he got in the front.

'Analytical my –' Tilly slammed the door and Jackie accelerated away.