The Lost Island

Laura Powell

A Silver Service Mystery

Illustrated by Sarah Gibb

MACMILLAN CHILDREN'S BOOKS



First published 2018 by Macmillan Children's Books
an imprint of Pan Macmillan
20 New Wharf Road, London N1 9RR
Associated companies throughout the world
www.panmacmillan.com

ISBN 978-1-5098-0892-2

Text copyright © Laura Powell 2018
Illustrations copyright © Sarah Gibb 2018

The right of Laura Powell and Sarah Gibb to be identified as the author and illustrator of this work has been asserted by them in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means (electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise), without the prior written permission of the publisher.

Pan Macmillan does not have any control over, or any responsibility for, any author or third-party websites referred to in or on this book.

1 3 5 7 9 8 6 4 2

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

Printed and bound by CPI Group (UK) Ltd, Croydon CR0 4YY

This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, resold, hired out, or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in any form of binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

Chapter One



In commencing a new service, determine to do your duty in it.

S. & S. Adams, *The Complete Servant* (1825)

The crescent of houses was unrelentingly regular and forbiddingly handsome. It seemed more like a wall of battlements than a fashionable terrace.

London itself had the air of a city under siege. A thick, damp fog had invaded its streets, and at seven o'clock on a chilly February evening even the warmth of lit windows failed to pierce the gloom. Anyone who



had the means or opportunity to stay indoors was doing so.

A wraith appeared from within the fog; something insubstantial and pale, which seemed to float along the shrouded street. Close to, it was only a girl – a mere slip of a thing: plainly dressed, light-footed and carrying a shabby carpet bag. She paused to appraise number twenty with a briskness different to her otherwise mousy appearance.

Her name was Pattern, and she was presenting herself for service as housemaid at the residence of Lady Cecily Hawk, London's most celebrated society hostess. In her real identity, as Pattern Pendragon, Countess of Annwn, her arrival should have been met with bowing and scraping footmen and the best reception room in the house. As her reward for saving the life of the Grand Duchess of Elffinberg, she had been promoted from lady's maid to aristocrat. She was now not only one of the noblest personages in Elffinberg – she was also the dearest friend of its young ruler.

Yet here was a curious thing: although Pattern had been exceedingly happy to escape the lot of a domestic drudge, she had not found a life of ease to be entirely to her satisfaction either. Without purpose or challenge, she felt her wits grow dull, and her spirit restless. And so, after unravelling a mystery that had threatened the Grand Duchess (involving a dragon among many other perils!), she had acquired a new employer. It was an investigative agency known as the Silver Service, who numbered her among their most promising recruits, and it was under their direction that, in the guise of plain Penny Pattern, an orphan servant girl, she was now taking the narrow steps down to the tradesman's entrance to number twenty.

She had not been sent here merely to sweep floors and set fires. Evil deeds were rumoured to take place in this household, and it was Pattern's task to uncover them, reporting back to the man who had knocked on the door of the Silver Service because, for all his wealth and power, he had nowhere else to turn.

*



Sir William Whitby was as fine a gentleman as one could wish, with a pink well-fed face and a hearty manner. He was a Member of Parliament and had a large estate in Wiltshire. He also had a ward, Henry: his late cousin's child.

Henry was the cause of his present trouble. Since coming of age, the young man had acquired a taste for drinking and gambling. Last summer, Sir Whitby had dispatched him on a Grand Tour of Europe in the hope that time spent in the appreciation of classical antiquities and Renaissance art would be as morally improving as it was educational. At first, his plan seemed to have succeeded. Henry's letters home were full of the joys of archaeological explorations. He was making connections, furthermore, with the cream of European society. In his last communication, he had mentioned that he was on his way to visit an island near Capri, as the guest of the Contessa Cecelia di Falco and her daughter Cassiphone, one of the most eligible heiresses in Rome. But that was the last anyone had heard of him. Henry had vanished.

Sir Whitby engaged a private investigator to try to discover the fate of his ward. The man tracked down both the servants and the other guests at the Contessa di Falco's house party, all of whom claimed to have no knowledge of Henry. However, their recollections of their island stay were curiously vague. The investigator reported that their accounts of what little they *did* remember were so similar it was almost as if they were reciting lines from a play. Taking matters into his own hands, Sir Whitby travelled to Rome to meet with the Contessa himself. Yet after a whole morning spent in the Contessa's palazzo, Sir Whitby failed to remember what, exactly, had transpired. Although he was sure the Contessa had been entirely charming, he struggled to recall her appearance and dress, let alone their conversation. His only abiding memory of the encounter was of the Contessa's little pug dog, which had lifted its leg against his boot as he'd made his farewell. Sir Whitby felt himself – there was no other word for it – *entranced*.

Sir Whitby returned home very downcast. He was



now certain that Henry had met with an unhappy end, but discovering the true circumstances of his disappearance seemed a hopeless task. For several months, he lost himself in grief. Then that autumn, just over a year after Henry's disappearance, word spread of a glamorous new arrival on the London scene. Lady Cecily Hawk was a wealthy foreign-born widow with a beautiful daughter, Cassandra. An invitation to one of Lady Hawk's salons or soirées quickly became the most sought-after prize in town. Her daughter was besieged by a host of suitors. Furthermore, Lady Hawk was known to have acquired a private island off the Cornish coast. A favoured few were invited there for a house party in March.

Having no clear memory of his encounter with the Contessa, Sir Whitby would never have made a connection between her and Lady Hawk had he not bumped into the lady herself at the opera. Even then, he admitted it was unlikely that he would have recognized her, were it not for the little pug dog that her daughter carried in her arms. *That* piddlesome

creature was unmistakable! At once, Sir Whitby was seized by the strange conviction that Lady Hawk and the Contessa di Falco were one and the same. In which case, how had she managed to befuddle him so completely in Rome? How was she involved in Henry's disappearance, and to what end? Was it possible there was something profoundly amiss with the fascination she and her daughter exerted?

Sir Whitby was very uncomfortable in relating this narrative to the Silver Service agency. A man of his rank was not in the habit of consulting servants, unless it was to enquire of his butler which claret was to be brought up from the cellar, or to quiz his valet on the knotting of cravats. Yet here he was, confiding the most painful secrets of his household to people who, in the normal order of things, should barely be seen or heard!

Mr Crichton, director of the Silver Service, had served as butler to some of the highest families in the land, and his colleague Mrs Jervis had been housekeeper to the same. As such, they were entirely sympathetic to the delicate sensibilities of their clients. The Silver



Service was a place of last resort. People found their way to it when mysteries could not be solved by rational means, or when dark magic was hinted at with hushed tones and grave looks. But few knew what to expect when they visited the quiet office by Bedford Square. Only the emblem on the door – a feather duster crossed with a toasting fork – gave any hint as to what kind of business was undertaken within.

Once inside, there was a pleasing scent of clean linen and beeswax, and the atmosphere of orderly calm that is found in all the best-run households. In such a setting, it was hard to imagine the terrors of black magic and creatures of the night. Yet these were the Service's speciality. If you suspected your steward was embezzling funds or that your beloved was not constant with her affections, there was – as Sir Whitby could attest – no shortage of private investigators to take up your case. The Silver Service, however, dealt exclusively with the uncanny. Their business was the stuff of nightmares and bloodthirsty legends; shadowy forces that still lingered from ancient days.

'For who,' Mr Crichton liked to say, 'is better placed than a servant? The perfect servant is the invisible one. Invisible, incorruptible. A trusted servant has access to their employer's most intimate areas of life and work. A clever servant can turn this access to great advantage.'

Mr Crichton was upright and silver-haired, a man who knew how to soften his natural authority with the sheen of deference. Mrs Jervis had the air of everyone's favourite grandmother. These two were the public faces of the Service. The agents working on the ground were generally kept out of sight, their identities hidden to avoid detection. Thus while Pattern was privy to Sir Whitby's visit to the office, watching and listening from a concealed antechamber, the peer would never meet her in person, or even know her name. Perhaps this was just as well – his confidence in the Service would have been sorely tested had he known the fate of his ward was in the hands of a thirteen-year-old housemaid.

'One of our most impressive recruits,' Mrs Jervis told him. 'Whilst in service to foreign royalty, she foiled an attempt to usurp the throne, uncovering



an exceptionally devilish plot.'

At her spy-hole, Pattern frowned. It was true that her time as lady's maid to Her Royal Highness Arianwen Eleri Charlotte Louise, Grand Duchess of Elffinberg, had been of a peculiarly eventful nature. But she always felt a little uncomfortable having attention drawn to her exploits.

Sir Whitby, however, looked decidedly more cheerful at the mention of royalty. If the crowned heads of Europe sought the Service's assistance, then perhaps employing their expertise could be seen as a mark of distinction, rather than something to be kept quiet at all costs.

'Rest assured,' Mr Crichton told him, 'the matter will have our first attention. Lady Hawk or the Contessa di Falco, or whoever she may be, will not be able to hide her true designs for long.'

And so it was settled that Pattern should be placed as a maid in Lady Hawk's establishment. The original third housemaid was persuaded to give sudden notice in return for a generous pay-out, and Pattern was furnished

with references by a grateful client of the Service (whose home had been exorcised of a poltergeist). An interview was arranged with the housekeeper a mere three days before the entire servantry was due to depart for Lady Hawk's Cornish estate, where she would be hosting a large party.

As Pattern descended the steps to the tradesman's entrance of Lady Hawk's town house, she felt a tingle in her blood she had not felt since she had crept up a stony Elffish mountainside, poker in hand, as the sky swarmed with stars, and a dragon's breath tarred the air.

She would never have thought that any position could be more daunting than her sudden promotion to lady's maid, when she had been packed off at a moment's notice to serve royalty in a foreign land. This time, she had an even greater weight of expectation on her shoulders.

Since leaving Elffinberg and joining the Service, she had spent most of her time in training, both practical



and theoretical. She had studied previous assignments taken on by the Service, and learned everything she could from them concerning black magic and monsters, not to mention the more practical arts of sabotage, subterfuge and skulduggery. Her poker-fencing skills were now as advanced as her bonnet-trimming, and she could concoct a drug to temporarily paralyse all ten fingers and thumbs as easily as she could mix a common sleeping draught. Pattern's hopes of putting these new talents to the test were accordingly high.

She was determined to be worthy of the Silver Service's confidence in her. A niggling voice liked to whisper that her success in Elffinberg had mostly been a matter of luck. If her investigation of Lady Hawk was successful, then surely the voice of doubt would be silenced once and for all.

In truth, Pattern was almost more wary of her fellow servants than the villainy of their employer. She might be Pattern Pendragon, the girl who had slain a monster and befriended a princess, but she was still young, and shy, and nervous of making her

way in an unfamiliar household.

For the moment, however, no surprises or alarms lay in wait for her behind the back door. Pattern was shown through very civilly to the housekeeper's room, where she was asked about her former positions and training, and watched carefully as she recited the dates and names. Mrs Robinson had clearly taken the previous housemaid's desertion hard.

'To leave to nurse a sick aunt, of all people! If it were a parent, one might understand – but only an *aunt* . . .' She examined Pattern through her spectacles. 'Pardon me, but you are very small for fifteen. I would never have taken you for being such a grown girl.'

Pattern was fairly small for thirteen too. It was something she tried not to let bother her. 'Please, ma'am, I may be small, but I am strong.'

Mrs Robinson sighed. 'Well, we cannot afford to be choosy so late in the day.'

She explained that Lady Hawk and her daughter were presently staying with friends while their servants shut up the house. The island property in Cornwall was



stocked with all the provisions the party would require, so there was little to pack except the ladies' wardrobes, and their own personal effects. But the town house must still be cleaned from top to bottom, its valuables secured and its rooms shrouded in dust sheets.

'In your letter of recommendation, it says that you are a quick learner – and so shall we all need to be. The Cornish property is new to us servants, and I fear we are rather a small staff to host such a large gathering, and in such a place . . .' She caught herself. 'But I am assured everything there is in excellent order. Our mistress is a very gracious and kindly lady, and generous to a fault.'

Whatever evil schemes Lady Hawk might be concocting, Pattern thought it was to her credit that she did not exploit her staff. In fact, so far the only unusual thing that had been discovered about the lady was that both she and her daughter were vegetarians, which, although eccentric, was hardly criminal.

The second housemaid showed Pattern to their shared attic room. Elsie was a pink-cheeked girl of about eighteen, and as chatty and unquestioning as

Pattern could have hoped. Elsie confided that the butler, Mr Perks, was a stickler for the dusting, but wasn't a bad sort on the whole; that Alfred, the first footman, fancied himself a ladies' man; and that when she was in a good humour, Mrs Palfrey, the cook, would give them the off-cuts from her pastry-making. She also assured Pattern that, despite the Hawk ladies' unusual diet, meat was served to their servants as well as their guests.

Pattern nodded and smiled. At this stage, all information was useful. She had already studied the list of her fellow servants and so knew their names if not their character. The upper servants were Mr Perks, the butler; Mrs Robinson, the housekeeper; and Mrs Palfrey, the cook. Then there were the first and second footmen, Alfred and William; James, the coachman; Jacob, the groom; and Nathaniel, the hall boy. The female domestics were the kitchen maids, Ellen and Mabel; Tilly, the scullery maid; Anne, the laundry maid; and then the housemaids, Jane, Elsie and herself. Miss Jenks, Lady Hawk's maid, was currently



accompanying her mistress on her visit.

'When I started, I was afeared we'd all be worn ragged,' Elsie confided. 'There may only be two ladies to look after, but the missus is a great one for entertaining, make no mistake, and hardly a day goes by without a crowd of gentlemen calling for the young miss, or a whist party or supper or a dance. So you'd expect there to be a deal of work, but, truth be told, somehow it doesn't add up to all that much. Jane was saying just this morning there's times she fancies the house almost cleans itself!'

Pattern knew that gossip was her first and best resource, but encouraging it did not come easily. People assumed she must be a very serious person, partly because she had more schooling than most girls of her kind, but also because of her natural reserve. She tried to match Elsie's prattling manner.

'Is the young lady, Miss Hawk, as lovely as they say?'

'Wait till you see her! Like a little doll, she is. Peaches and cream and curls of gold. I should think half the gentlemen in the country are in love with her.'

'Perhaps they find her foreign ways refreshing.'

'Oh no,' said Elsie, looking somewhat shocked by the notion. 'Miss Hawk is as fine and proper an English lady as ever there was.'

'But I heard the mistress has been living overseas?'

'I s'pose she *does* have something a touch "continental" about her,' Elsie admitted. 'They've done a deal of travelling, anyhow. Paris, I think, and that city where they make the pastries, and somewhere with mountains, and someplace else with lakes . . . And now we're to journey to distant parts ourselves! I'm not sure what to think of it, myself. People say Cornwall is full of the queerest things: pirates and mermaids and the like.'

In normal circumstances, Pattern might have laughed. Pirates and mermaids, indeed! But after her own adventures, who knew what strange encounters might be awaiting them?

