THE LIGHTNING CATCHER

CLARE WEZE



BLOOMSBURY
CHILDREN'S BOOKS
LONDON OXFORD NEW YORK NEW DELHI SYDNEY

BLOOMSBURY CHILDREN'S BOOKS
Bloomsbury Publishing Plc
50 Bedford Square, London WC1B 3DP, UK
29 Earlsfort Terrace, Dublin 2, Ireland

BLOOMSBURY, BLOOMSBURY CHILDREN'S BOOKS and the Diana logo are trademarks of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc

First published in Great Britain in 2021 by Bloomsbury Publishing Plc

Text copyright © Clare Weze, 2021

Clare Weze has asserted her right under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act, 1988, to be identified as Author of this work

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or any information storage or retrieval system, without prior permission in writing from the publishers

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

ISBN: PB: 978-1-5266-2217-4; eBook: 978-1-5266-2218-1

Typeset by RefineCatch Limited, Bungay, Suffolk

To find out more about our authors and books visit www.bloomsbury.com and sign up for our newsletters

For Rufus Weze and Orianu Weze



Contents

1. Moth Man 1
2. Fight! Fight! 4
3. The Cloaked Strider 12
4. Trespass 16
5. Weird Goes with Weird 21
6. The Prisoner 23
7. Lightning Streak 27
8. The Stupid Puffer Coat 31
9. Stampede in the Mist 42
10. Malfunction 54
11. Frustrated Energy 58
12. Indoor Lightning 67
13. Cosmic Background Radiators 71
14. The Wasteland 76
15. Netted 83

16. Electrification 94
17. Don't Run 101
18. Escalation 105
19. Moonlight 107
20. Tombard 110
21. Grandad 120
22. Lilac Farm 123
23. Tilted 127
24. Stay Away 133
25. The Giant's House 146
26. Tunnels from the Sun 154
27. How to Ruin Your Life 165
28. Zero In 180
29. Beep 186
30. House of Ash 192
31. Spiralling 199
32. Departure 205
33. Always Watching 207
34. Questions 213
35. Not at Home 218
36. Lenny 222
37. Scraping Through 227
38. Visitors 229
39. A Letter 233
40. Cold Touch 236

41. Splinters 242
42. Rising 251
43. Mission 253
44. Deliverance 262

Acknowledgements 266



1

Moth Man

17th July

I'm not sure how you're meant to start journals, but here goes: We moved to Folding Ford in April and now it's July, and maybe it's because we're new here, but to me it's completely obvious that this village is cracked. Today the weirdness got major, which is why I'm going to start writing it all down. If something happens to me, everyone will know the facts, because of this journal.

Here's what happened today:

Only little kids believe in giants, but that's exactly what pounded down the hill, right at me. I was standing on the bridge at the edge of the village. It was dusk and I should have been home already.

He closed in fast, crazy white hair flying out, long string

of a body, big coat swinging with every step, like a cloak. And, OK, so up close I could see he wasn't a giant, but he *was* a ginormously tall man with a creepy face from a nightmare … and butterflies flapping around his shoulders.

The road was empty, the houses quiet and still.

Tried not to stare, but he was too tall, the butterflies were just too strange, and his snarly mouth and angry, darting eyes made him look ready to spring at anyone for any reason. I pretended something had got stuck in the front tyre of my bike, but my eyes were glued.

He scanned my face, a split-second glare that sent chills pulsing down my spine, chills that didn't stop, not even when he marched past me and away. And those weren't butterflies. They were brown, thick-bodied moths. And each one was tied to the man's wrists by a tiny thread.

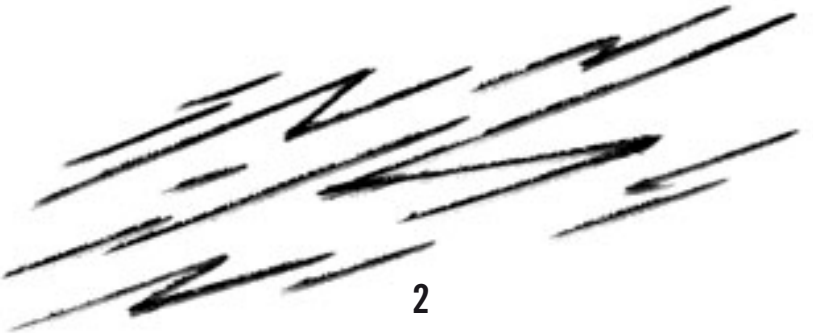
He was taking them for a walk.

The giant with the moths is just the latest in a whole load of very strange things. Just in case anyone finds this notebook when I'm dead, here's a list of all the weird stuff that's happened since we moved here:

1. *A frozen puddle all by itself on a hot day in June. (Mum thought someone had emptied out their ice box on the pavement, but that was partly my fault. I shouldn't have prodded it before showing her.)*

2. *Thick frost on* one *branch of* one *tree near the primary school. Brilliant white, totally arctic and completely impressive (especially for June).*
3. *A whirlwind in one of Dad's beaten-up buckets, bubbling the water into demented spirals, and no wind anywhere else. (A salty smell came off it.)*
4. *A type of cloud I haven't seen in any other place. It's like a stack of pancakes with gaps in between.*
5. *My new best friend Sam's trainers iced up right in front of his eyes. He's been helping me look for clues ever since.*

All those weather freak-outs have *got* to be connected, so Sam and I are on high alert for clues about this weird overload. My new Moth Man discovery is completely different, but he's linked – I'm sure of it. Sam and I will figure it all out and maybe get famous from it, and then this journal will be the official record of how we solve the mystery of Folding Ford.



2

Fight! Fight!

22nd July

A massive day for the investigation! Discovered a HUGE amount of stunning new knowledge. Mum dragged us to a pointless jumble sale in the stupid village hall, and that's how it started, because guess what? The Moth Man was there.

As soon as he walked in, the entire room went quiet. Everyone turned to stare. The same mad hair streamed down his back. The same coat flapped behind like a giant bat had got loose. But no moths.

I grabbed my sister. 'Hey, Lily,' I whispered. 'Who *is* that?'

'How should I know? But whoa – he is so completely gigantic. Imagine how long his innards must be.'

'Remember the man with the moths I told you about?' I pointed at the Moth Man. '*Him!*'

Lily rolled her eyes. 'Give it a rest, Alfie.'

'For real. I swear.'

The hall was so quiet you could hear rain pouring off the roof.

I leaned closer to Lily. 'Look at their faces. Nobody likes him.'

'That lady does,' Lily said.

The Moth Man was rummaging through a stall full of electrical junk run by an old black lady – the only black person other than Dad that I've seen since we moved here – with silver beads threaded through her hair and a walking stick. He poked about impatiently, picking up an electrical extension cable without looking at her, even though she was talking nicely to him and smiling her head off.

The jumblers started to murmur again, softly, an up-and-down tune full of questions. Loads of eyes watched him hand money over, and he was every type of awkward a human can be. Kind of cross, but embarrassed, and also maybe in a massive sulk, like he hated the whole world. And he still gave me shivers.

'Ugh – looks like he's getting ready for something deadly. Someone so creepy shouldn't be buying that much cabling,' Lily said, like she was an expert.

'Look at his coat,' I said. 'Looks like it's made of skin.'

The Moth Man was on the move. This time, I had to

follow. He's the best clue I've seen since we moved here: a man who takes moths for a walk on a lead and turns a whole room silent. He *must* be something to do with the weirdness of this village.

'What are you doing?' Lily said, but I ignored her.

The Moth Man's coat still dripped. His hair looked like a dog's fur just before it shakes off the rain, and people made a big gap to let him pass.

I was brave. I got *sooo* close. Could have reached out and touched. The coat wasn't skin after all, but some oily fabric I've never seen before, and it smelt of horsey sawdust. He reminded me of a whopping, untrustworthy spider, and I got all jumpy again. I quite like spiders, but that feeling doesn't seem right for a human.

Mum blocked me. 'Where do you think you're going?'

'Just—'

'Oh no you don't. Mind your own business.' She gave me the stare of destruction.

The Moth Man was stomping off on heavy boots that would probably have liked to kick a few legs on the way out. Slipping away. Soon there was no sign of anyone towering and battishly cloaked.

'Can we just go, then? Home? This is for old people.'

'Nope. We're here to stay, and it won't kill you. We're still the new ones round here. We have to show our faces.'

'As if anyone's even noticed us—'

'Don't argue with me, Alfie Bradley. Stay where I can see you. Don't break anything – in fact, don't *touch* anything. And don't forget to say "please" and "thank you".'

Lily popped up behind her. 'Yeah, Alfie, zero touching. Got it?'

What was I supposed to do? I toured the hall, but there was nothing cool in the entire room, just stinky clothes piled on tables like junk mountains. Bo*ring* – until Lily came up to me, giggling behind her hand.

'There's a full-on shouty-crackers fight in the kitchen,' she said, signalling me to follow. It didn't look like a Lily wind-up, and Mum was bending over a stall.

'They're arguing about your giant,' Lily said. 'He rescues weird animals from abroad and they keep escaping and Mr Fuming says it's dangerous and Mrs Cranky says it isn't.'

'Who? *Who?*'

She took me to a tiny corridor between the main hall and the kitchen. The kitchen door wasn't completely closed, and through the gap we could see the old lady from the electrical-junk stall leaning against the counter. She was the one rowing, and she was doing it with an old man I hadn't seen before, and because the noise from the main hall was like a million murmuring penguins, we were the only ones listening.

This new old man was red in the face and bulgy in the neck, with bristly white side-hair sticking up round the edges of his bald head like a brush. Lily was right – they were having a fantastic blow-up, shouting over each other like we're not supposed to at school. All I understood was, *Don't ever invite him to a parish event again!* (The old man spat that.) And, *Don't you dare tell me who I can and can't invite!* (The old lady yelled this.) And then they stopped and glared at each other.

'You missed the best bits,' Lily said. 'She kept telling him to get knotted.' She put her earbuds back in and skipped away.

I got into perfect secret-listening position, like a detective: body hidden in a corner, head angled round. See without being seen.

The old man started up again. 'This village hasn't been the same since that miscreant came back.'

The lady rapped her fingers along the counter and gave him an impressively fatal scowly look.

'As head of the parish council, I have a duty to police his mess and botching.' His voice was croaky, and deep, like a walrus. 'We've had enough of his marauding animals – they're always escaping. That monstrous bird on the allotments last summer – the damage it did! Spiteful-looking creature. Vermin! Folding Ford is no place for zoo rejects.'

Then he aced it. 'All the children are afraid of him

and it's not the sort of thing we want in this village. Experimental animal breeding, warped hybrids – it's not right. Hellish goings-on at that house.'

The lady made a superb lip-puckered face at him and said, 'Ash House is an animal *sanctuary*, not a—'

'Don't play the innocent,' he snapped. 'We've both seen what's escaped from there. A stampede of giant mutant guinea pigs last spring! Ash House is a charnel house!'

The lady looked at the ceiling and groaned. Whatever a charnel house is, she doesn't like them.

Ash House. The last house in the village. I knew it straight away – we drove past when we were still exploring new places to live, just before we moved here. It's big, white, and stands on its own with huge fir trees in the garden. Those trees are the best ever. They sway in the wind, leaning together like they're whispering.

More shouting. More muddle. I couldn't see what was so bad about bringing things into the country from abroad and making wind traps and messing about with stuff and inventing junk – sounded cool to me – but the old man thought it was bad, bad, *baaad*.

'… you name it, he's dragged it back with him like a bagful of Beelzebub's beetles.' He stopped to snigger at his own cleverness, then went on even more spittingly than before. 'Greasy, poisonous things – all those spitting frogs.

And now he's tampering with the electricity supply! All those contraptions of his should be smashed and stopped. Every last one of them.'

'Don't be ridiculous!' the lady said. 'Nathaniel Clemm is harmless. You're the one who needs stopping.'

So the Moth Man was called Nathaniel Clemm.

'Harmless? Spinal cords lying around the place, and you call that harmless?'

Spinal cords!

'Well,' the lady said, 'vultures have to eat.'

'Vultures!'

'Just one vulture,' she said, drumming her fingers again. Her nails flashed silver, like Christmas decorations. 'And she didn't stay long – he was just sheltering her between zoos. He's a conservationist, not a butcher. You want to round up anyone who's not the same as you, don't you? You can't stand people who are different.'

With a ridiculous walrus-like '*Harrumph!*' the old man turned his back on the lady and stomped out of a side door. The lady looked like she might come my way, so I sneaked back into the main hall and blended in like a total spy. The investigation was going better than I could possibly have hoped, but what was the next step?

Suddenly it was obvious: I'd go and look at this spooky old charnel house myself.

Thought I'd got past Mum easy. She was trying to make Lily eat a cupcake, which is just about impossible because Lily hardly eats anything since she got bullied super badly when she moved up into Year Eight last year. (That's why we had to move here, to get Lily a brand-new life.) Anyway, Lily and Mum were in a cupcake standoff, but Mum must have clocked me, and just as I reached the door, she struck.

'Where do you think you're off to now?'

Never even knew she *could* creep up on people.

'Need fresh air,' I said. Then a brainwave happened. 'And can I meet up with Sam? I've done nearly an hour here.' Sam would freak when I told him about Nathaniel Clemm and Ash House. We could recce the place together.

She looked at me suspiciously.

'It'll give me more exercise …'

Her mouth stretched into a straight line with dimples at each end, which meant I'd won but she still disapproved. 'Go on then. But you're going nowhere without this.' She pulled out my blue padded monstrosity of a coat from nowhere that made any sense.

'Not that puffy thing! It's hardly even raining now.'

'No coat, no go. You *will* need it, and you *will* take it.'

I grabbed the evil thing and cleared out.