THE LOST BEAR CUB

For Caroline
HW

For Mum and Dad
DD

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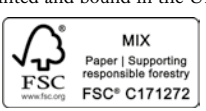
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Holly Webb
Illustrated by David Dean

LITTLE TIGER
LONDON





1

"Lucy…Wake up, sweetheart. We're nearly there. Hey… Lucy…"

Lucy blinked and snuggled further into the fleecy blanket Mum had wrapped around her. She'd spent ages trying to get to sleep on the plane but it had all been too different and strange. She'd even enjoyed the aeroplane food. It might not have tasted very nice but it had been fun, opening all the little boxes and packets.

"I've only been asleep a minute," she murmured, blinking around at the bright

cabin. There was an energy in the air now – people were folding their blankets away and searching through the seat pockets. A garbled announcement came over the speaker.

"We'll be landing soon," her mum explained. "You need to put your seat belt on. Can you feel the plane going down?"

Lucy frowned as she fiddled with the fastening of her seat belt, wondering how she would know. She'd never been on a plane before – but actually, her ears felt strange. Was that it? "I think my ears are popping."

"I've got some mints you can suck, that'll help."

Dad leaned over, smiling at her. He looked so excited, Lucy thought. He'd been like that for months. Ever since they'd started to plan their trip to Canada. Dad's only brother, Lucy's

uncle Pete, had gone to live in Canada years before. Lucy had never met him, and though they all said hello to each other on video calls – Lucy and her big brother Jack and their uncle's children too – it wasn't the same as really knowing someone.

Now they were going to stay for a whole month of the summer holidays at Uncle Pete and Auntie Cass's house. There were two older boy cousins, Reuben and Sam, and Kitty who was about six months older than Lucy. Lucy was as excited as Dad but she was nervous too. What if they didn't get on with their cousins? Just because they were family didn't mean they were actually going to *like* each other. Lucy loved spending time with her friends at school but she didn't think she was very good at meeting new people. She never knew what

to say. Mum, Dad and Lucy's friends from school who'd known her for ages said she was really funny but someone she'd just met wouldn't know it.

Lucy had two other cousins back in England, Georgie and Marcus, but they were younger than she was. They loved her and Jack because they were big and grown up. Now Lucy was going to be the youngest and the quietest… What if she spent the summer holidays hardly talking at all?

Lucy unwrapped the mint her dad had given her and slipped it into her mouth. She wasn't going to worry about all that now. Dad had kept saying it was going to be an adventure – they were going to camp out, and there would be all this amazing wildlife to see. Uncle Pete had sent them photos of moose walking down

the street near where he lived, and even a bear sunbathing in a neighbour's garden.

"Look!" Jack nudged her and pointed out of the window, and Lucy leaned over to see past her brother.

"Wow," she whispered, peering down through the clouds. "Mountains! They look so big. Is that snow on the top?" It had been really sunny and hot back at home, so it felt odd to see patches of snow snaking down the rocky crags.



"They're very tall, so they probably have a bit of snow all year round," Dad said, craning over from his seat on the other side of the aisle. "Not long now!"

Lucy threaded her hand with Mum's as they both stared out of the window. Her ears felt very odd, as though someone was pressing their hands around the sides of her head, but the view outside was so amazing that she could almost ignore it.

"Look at that lake!" Jack pointed again. Lucy leaned as far as she could and spotted the jewel-bright blue water against the dark mountains.

"It's beautiful," she murmured. It all looked so different too, wild and strange and magical. Lucy's nervousness was still there a little but the excitement was taking over. There was a city of skyscrapers below them now, with

the mountains rising up behind and the sea stretching round. Lucy had never seen anything like it before – she couldn't wait to land.



An hour later, all the sleep Lucy hadn't had on the plane was catching up with her. She tried to swallow a yawn and the airport official checking their passports smiled. "You can't be tired now. I bet you've got a full day ahead of you."

Lucy nodded shyly, loving the Canadian accent.

"You're all done. Welcome to Vancouver!"

"Thank you!" Mum put her arm round Lucy and scooted them forwards. "We need to head for baggage reclaim and get our suitcases," she explained to Jack and Lucy.

"And I can send a message to Pete, telling

him we're nearly ready for him to pick us up," Dad said. "Their house is about a forty-five-minute drive away." He looked round at the bustling airport and shook his head. "Hard to believe, isn't it – there's the busy city and then the wild mountains, and they're practically next to each other!"

It took longer than Lucy could have believed to get their luggage – they seemed to be watching the same suitcases that weren't theirs go round the carousel for ages – but at last they appeared and they grabbed them then headed through the airport to meet Uncle Pete.

Lucy hadn't realized how much he'd look like Dad when they saw him for real, standing by the barrier and waving. In photos and on video calls he and Dad didn't seem alike at all but it was something about the way they stood.

It made her like Uncle Pete at once.

"I wish I could have brought everybody," he said, taking one of the big suitcases after he'd given them a hug. "The whole family wanted to come to greet you. But we wouldn't have all been able to fit in the car. I've sorted out hiring one for you while you're here."

Lucy trotted along after them, wheeling her bag and trying not to bump into people. She stifled another yawn, wishing she'd slept more on the plane. She didn't want to miss any of their first view of Canada.

Mum sat in the middle of the back seat so Lucy and Jack could be by the windows. The airport was on an island but once they'd got over the bridges to the mainland, the first part of the journey looked a lot like their drive to the airport back home. Lots of shops and houses – and cars.

Until they came out of the edges of the city and started to see flashes of startlingly blue water between the dark pine trees, and mountains on the other side of the water. It all looked wild and exciting, even from inside a car.



"Those are more islands over there," Uncle Pete called from the front seat. "You're seeing it on a good day, it's beautiful with the sun on the water."



"Oh…" Lucy whispered, as a break in the trees showed them the ruffled surface of the water, its ripples glinting in the sun.

Uncle Pete laughed. "That's how I felt when I first saw it, Lucy. It's the most beautiful place to live. Here." He rustled about in the pocket of the car door and passed back a handful of leaflets. "Here, you two, take a look at these – some of the amazing places we're going to take you to."

Lucy and Jack flicked through them, looking at hiking trails, a kayaking centre and camping grounds. "Mum, look…" Lucy whispered, holding up a leaflet about a campsite. Across the top, in big black capitals, it said:

THIS IS
BEAR COUNTRY

"Same here," Jack said, pointing at another one.

"What's that?" Dad said, turning round in his seat. "Wow, bears, they don't want you to miss that, do they?"

Uncle Pete snorted. "No, they do not. We have to be so careful round here. Often people get themselves into trouble because they don't take it seriously; they think the bears are cute. Mind you, I think moose are more dangerous than bears." He slowed the car, shaking his head. "Uh-oh, I shouldn't have said anything. Hey, you two, look out the front."

"Is that a moose?" Jack yelped.

"Two. A mother and a calf." Uncle Pete sounded quite proud, as though he'd laid on the moose specially. "You see them quite often along here. We have to watch out when

we're driving. Mostly it's deer on the roads but you get moose too, and sometimes a bear…"



The moose were just strolling across the road, as though they hadn't a care in the world. They didn't seem bothered about the cars – perhaps they knew that everyone would stop for them. The mother was huge, definitely taller than Dad, Lucy thought.

She had a long, blunt nose, a bit like a camel, and such spindly legs. Her baby padded behind her, looking tiny next to its huge mother.

"Such big ears," Mum said, watching as the two moose disappeared into the trees. "But no horns?"

"Only the bull moose have those," Uncle Pete explained. "They're usually a lot bigger as well."

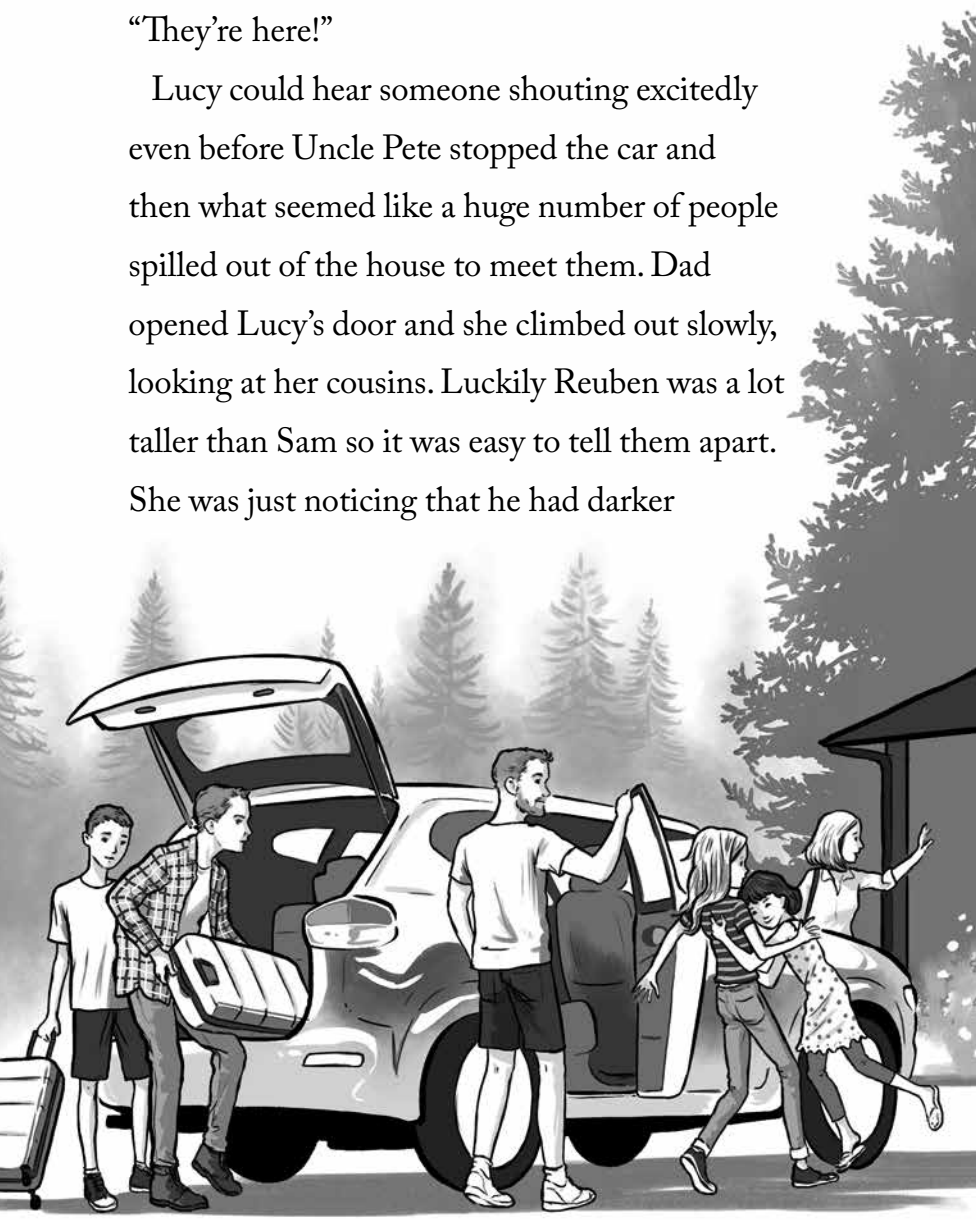
"Even bigger than that…" Lucy murmured. "How old was that baby one, Uncle Pete?"

"I think they're usually born at the beginning of summer," her uncle said thoughtfully. "Around June? So maybe a couple of months old. Definitely a lucky spot on your first day. We'll have to see what else we can find to top that!"

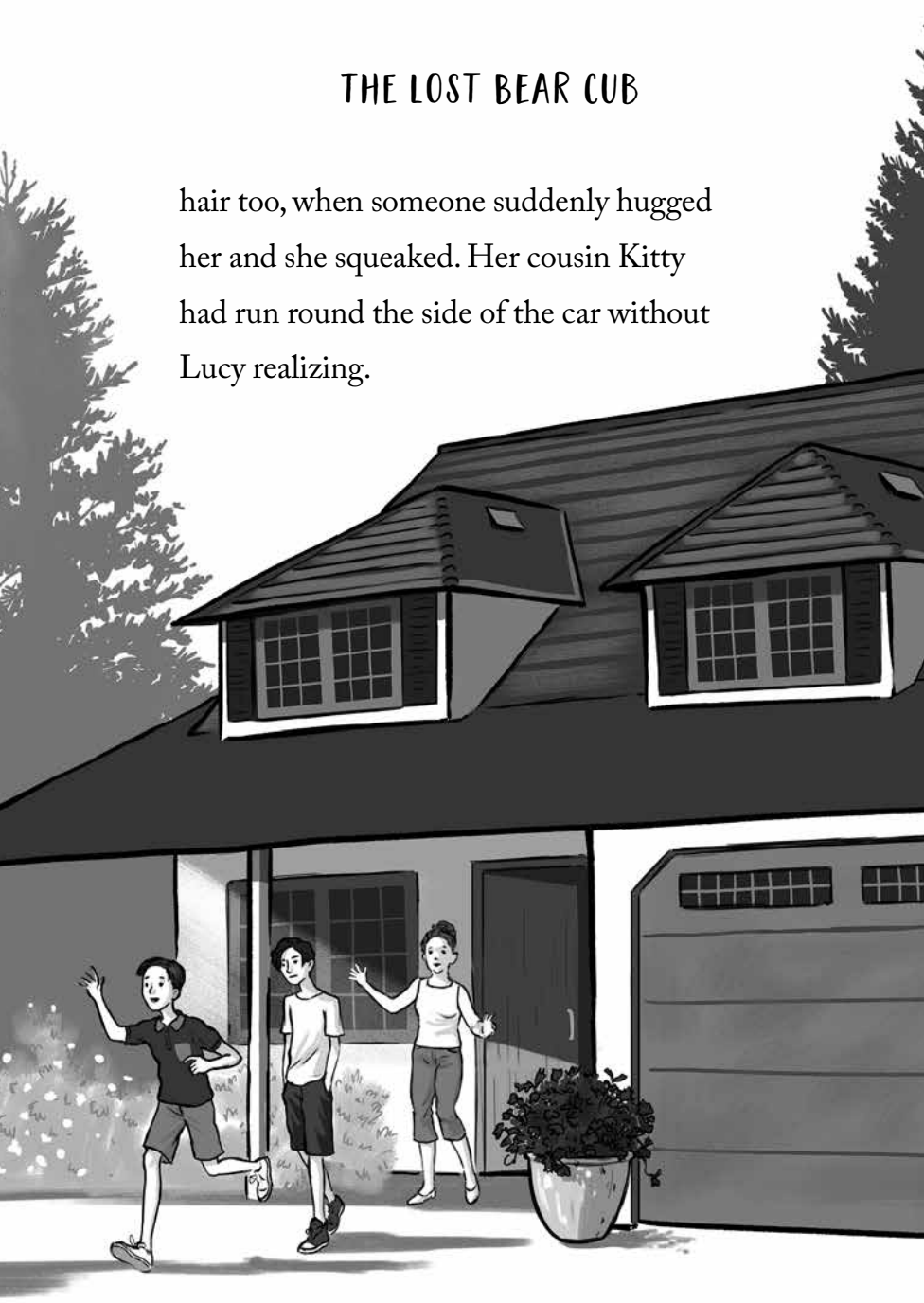


"They're here!"

Lucy could hear someone shouting excitedly even before Uncle Pete stopped the car and then what seemed like a huge number of people spilled out of the house to meet them. Dad opened Lucy's door and she climbed out slowly, looking at her cousins. Luckily Reuben was a lot taller than Sam so it was easy to tell them apart. She was just noticing that he had darker



hair too, when someone suddenly hugged her and she squeaked. Her cousin Kitty had run round the side of the car without Lucy realizing.



"Hey, Lucy! I'm Kitty, your cousin. Did you have a good journey? Did you like the plane? Were you airsick? I get sick whenever I'm in a plane. And cars sometimes."

"Hi…" Lucy gazed at her, a bit daunted by the flood of words – but at least her cousin seemed friendly. Kitty was smaller than she was, Lucy realized, feeling a bit pleased. She was the youngest child there but at least she wasn't the smallest.

"Wow, you're really tall." Kitty stepped back and eyed her, looking a bit surprised. "I thought I'd be taller than you since I'm older. I'm ten."

"I'm ten in September," Lucy told her. It wasn't that long.

"You're staying in my room – I've got a bed that pulls out from underneath mine. Want me to help carry your stuff?"

"Um, thanks." Lucy handed Kitty her little backpack and walked round to the back of the car to grab her suitcase. Her cousin seemed really friendly, which was good. And it would be fun sharing a room – she'd never done that before, except on a few sleepovers with friends from school.

"Everyone got all their stuff?" Uncle Pete asked, peering into the back of the car. "No one left any snacks or anything in the seat pockets?" He grinned at Kitty as he said it but it sounded like he was serious. Lucy shook her head uncertainly. Was he worried about things getting left in the car and going off? Mum had got really annoyed with Jack once for leaving an apple core in the car door where it started to grow horrible grey furry mildew.

"I don't think Jack or Lucy had any snacks…"

Mum said – she sounded uncertain too.

"It's not that I'm fussy about the car," Uncle Pete explained. "You know I said we have to be careful about bears. I really meant it. If you leave food in the car they can break in looking for it. It's not a problem if it's in the trunk and well covered up, but wrappers and stuff in the back, that's just asking for trouble."

Jack and Kitty exchanged a glance. Was Uncle Pete having them on?

"Hang on, how would bears know about the food?" Dad asked, looking puzzled.

"They've got the most amazing sense of smell," Uncle Pete said. "And believe it or not, they can open car doors, even if they're locked. Car doors don't stand up to five centimetres of claws, not when a bear wants in. It's absolutely true, Martin, I promise. It actually happened

to me not long after I moved out here. I parked up the car close to a trail and went hiking, and I'd left some supplies on the back seat. I locked the car, but it was an old model and the bear didn't have much trouble getting in. It ate all the food and ripped the seats to shreds in case I was hiding anything else." Uncle Pete shrugged. "Now I always check. A bear might have more of a problem with a newer car, but it's not worth the risk."

"Dad! You never told us that!" Reuben shook his head, laughing.

"It's not just food either," Auntie Cass put in. "Anything with a strong, sweet sort of smell, like a packet of wet wipes."

Mum looked worriedly at their bags, and Lucy knew she was thinking that she usually had wet wipes in her handbag, just in case.

"I don't think you got them out in the car," she whispered, and Mum smiled.

"I think we've got a lot to learn while we're here," she whispered back. "You definitely didn't have any biscuits or anything from the flight that you left in there? It would be awful if a bear ruined Uncle Pete's car…"

Lucy shuddered. Mum was right – that would *not* be a good start to the holiday.