

A Lockett & Wilde Mystery

The
GHOSTS of the
LIBRARY

"All hail Lockett & Wilde!"
LEMONY SNICKET



LUCY STRANGE & PAM SMY

PRAISE FOR LOCKETT & WILDE

“Comic, cosy and just eerie enough for a satisfying frisson.” *Guardian*

“Richly atmospheric and brilliantly entertaining.”
Scope for Imagination

“Ghost story morphed into humour and mystery.”
The Sunday Times

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The Week Junior

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“Spooky, haunting, shadowy.”
Armadillo Magazine

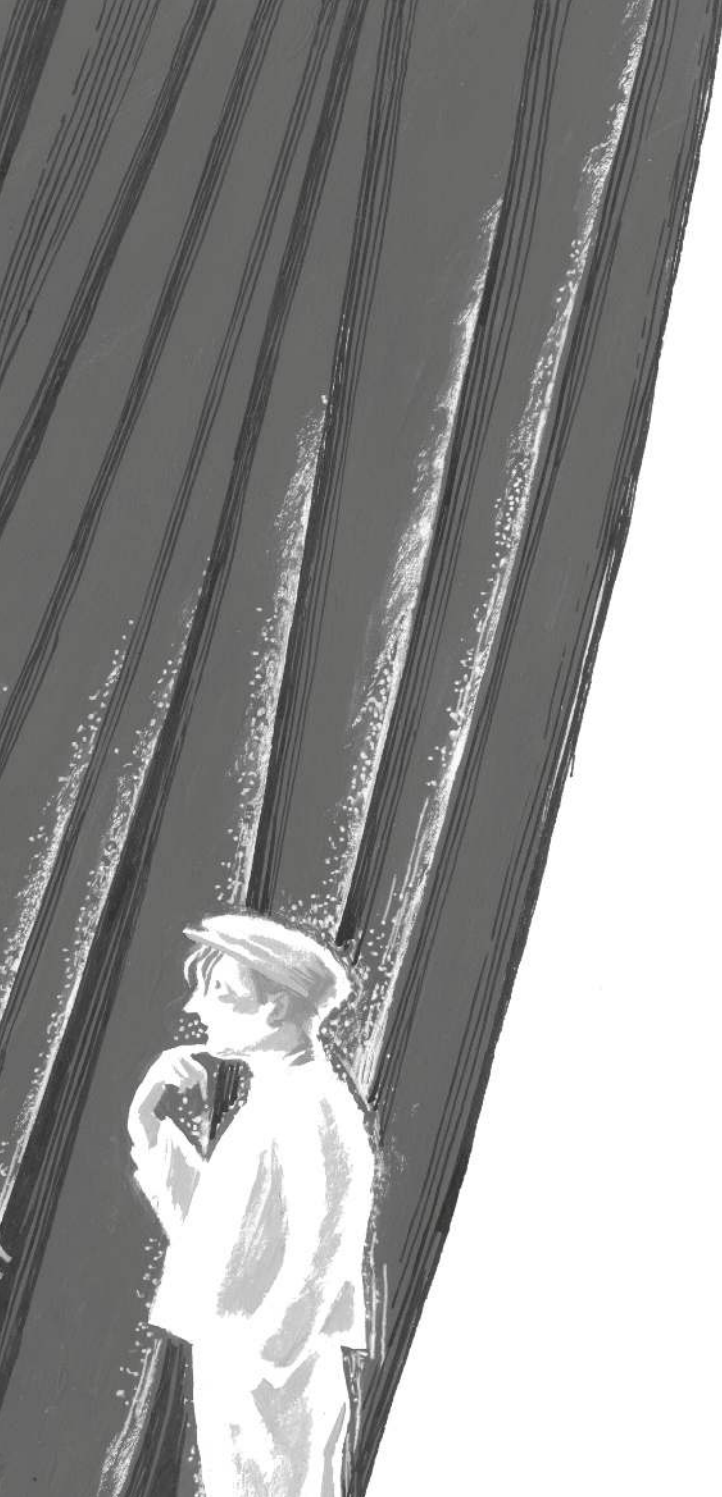
“Illustrations that’ll get your spine tingling just as much as the plot will.” *First News*





Lockett & Wilde's
DREADFULLY
HAUNTING
MYSTERIES





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EU Authorized Representative: HackettFlynn Ltd
36 Cloch Choirneal, Balrothery, Co. Dublin, K12 C942
Ireland. EU@walkerpublishinggroup.com

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LOCKETT AND WILDE'S DREADFULLY HAUNTING MYSTERIES

The Ghosts of the Library

BY **LUCY STRANGE** AND
ILLUSTRATED BY **PAM SMY**



WALKER
BOOKS

CHAPTER ONE

In Which All Is A-Bustle And A-Glow

It was with an immense feeling of relief that Matilda Lockett stepped through the front doors of St Euthalia's School that frosty autumn afternoon. She was surrounded by her fellow students, all chatting loudly and rushing for the gates, keen to get home and start their half-term holidays. But Matilda lingered on the stone steps for a moment and took a long, deep breath of the peppermint-cold air.

She had done it! Her first half-term at a proper, normal school for proper, normal people, and no one had *any* idea that she was far from being a proper, normal very-nearly-twelve-year-old.

It hadn't been easy for Matilda to keep her supernatural skills a secret, particularly when that ghost cat jumped onto her lap during lessons or when it lay down



across her exercise book and batted at her pencil. The cat had appeared that very afternoon in fact – stalking silently beneath the desks of the Maths classroom and then suddenly scrabbling up onto Matilda’s knees, making her yelp out “Yikes!” Matilda couldn’t *possibly* let on that she could see ghosts, of course, so she had been forced to pretend she was suffering from a rather unusual case of hiccups, and had spent the rest of the lesson going, “Yikes! Pardon me.”

Matilda took another deep breath and tried to put all memories of the mortifying Maths lesson behind her. She gazed at the red-brick, ivy-clad buildings that stood facing each other across the leafy quad. It was beginning to get dark now, and every window of the school was a square of golden light, shining out onto the old oak trees, which scattered their autumn leaves in the grass below.

“It really *is* a lovely school,” she said quietly.

A gaggle of first years went past Matilda, staring at her as she stood there muttering to herself. Matilda smiled and waved in an eager, friendly sort of way, but the other first years didn’t smile or wave back; they just watched her with wary eyes and went on their merry way.

Matilda sighed and plodded down the steps.

“Matilda – wait!” a voice called out from just behind her. It was Florence François – a girl who sat beside Matilda in class, someone Matilda *hoped* might become a friend at some point, if only she could keep Florence from discovering just how weird she really was. “Are you feeling better?” Florence asked.

“Better?”

“Yes. You know – the hiccups.”

“Oh, yes. Much better, thank you.” Matilda added a small “Yikes!” just for good measure, and Florence laughed. The two of them fell into step, heading across the quad. They passed the main school buildings and the Old Tower too – an imposing silhouette that loomed over them like a shadowy giant. Just one lonely light flickered behind the Old Tower’s high windows. Matilda looked up at the window and shivered





a little, then she realized she had stopped walking and trotted to catch up with Florence. Through the school gates they went, and out onto the main road.

“Are you doing anything over the holiday?” Florence asked.

Matilda did her best not to panic. “Oh, you know ... just, um, the normal things.” What on earth *were* the “normal things”? Matilda wracked her brain. “What about you?” she asked, flipping the question around in a move of dastardly agility.

“Oh, nothing much,” Florence said. “Just normal stuff too, I suppose...”

There was a slightly awkward pause, during which Matilda wondered if Florence was perhaps waiting for an invitation to meet up or come over to her house. *But I can't possibly let her meet Aunt Evelyn and Uncle Barnabus*, Matilda thought, shuddering at the very idea of it.

“Well, see you after half-term then,” Florence said, turning off down a tree-lined avenue.

“See you after half-term!” Matilda called over her shoulder, staying on the road that led into town.

Florence looked back, frowning. “I thought you lived somewhere near Regent's Park,” she said.

“Oh, I do – but I’m going to the theatre—” Matilda began, and then stopped herself. The theatre was something *else* she didn’t want people to find out about.

“The theatre!” Florence said with a big smile. “What are you going to see?”

“Nothing. Um, I mean – I don’t know,” Matilda mumbled.

Florence laughed again. “Well, enjoy the surprise,” she said. “Bye then!” And she gave Matilda a cheery wave as she headed homeward.

Matilda hoisted up her satchel, tucked her hands into the pockets of her sturdy school trousers and set off once more. “Phew – that was a close one,” she muttered to herself.



■ ■ ■

Matilda made her way along the crowded London streets, past lamplit shops and cafés glowing with candlelight. All was a-bustle and a-glow in the depths of the Bloomsbury Square Theatre too and, as Matilda unlooped her woolly scarf and dumped her school bags in a heap near the EXIT door of the auditorium, she was enveloped in a cacophony of noise from the stage. An enormous camel costume (with at least two people inside) was wobbling about, shouting at itself and tripping over its own feet, and a cluster of young actresses were singing in impossibly high-pitched voices about wishes and stars.

“This makes a change, doesn’t it?” Matilda murmured,



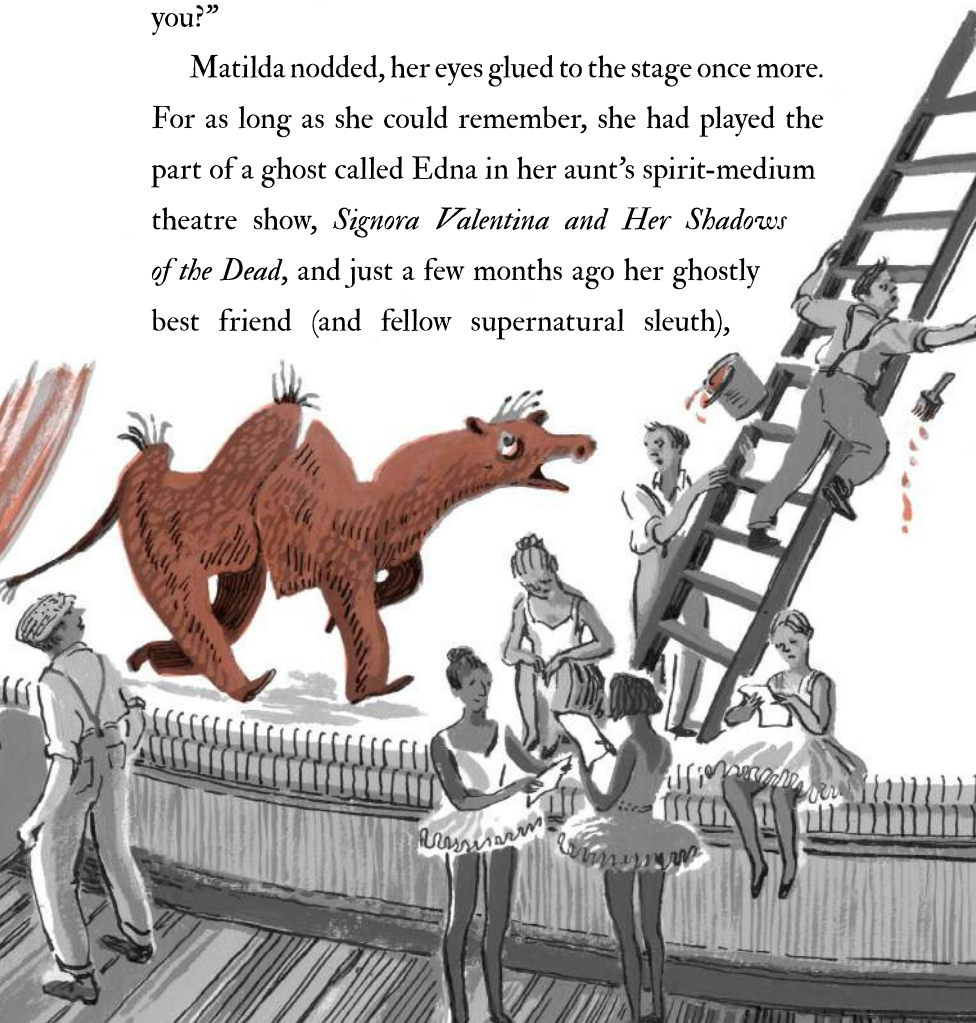
mesmerized by the colourful chaos of the pantomime's rehearsal.

“Doesn’t it just!” said a friendly voice close by.

Matilda turned to the ghost boy with a grin. “You won’t miss *our* show too much, Edgar?”

“Oh, it’ll be nice to have a breather, I think. Don’t you?”

Matilda nodded, her eyes glued to the stage once more. For as long as she could remember, she had played the part of a ghost called Edna in her aunt's spirit-medium theatre show, *Signora Valentina and Her Shadows of the Dead*, and just a few months ago her ghostly best friend (and fellow supernatural sleuth),



Edgar Wilde, had joined the cast too, dazzling audiences with his extraordinary poltergeist skills. But now the spirit-medium show had closed for the season, and Aunt Evelyn had rented the theatre out to a professional company who were rehearsing a Christmas pantomime.

The auditorium that was usually filled with spooky whispers and flickering shadows was now alive with whimsical music and boisterous nonsense, and Matilda was, quite frankly, delighted. Going to school and doing her lessons and remembering to do (most of) her homework and running around a hockey pitch and being kept in detention for forgetting to do (some of) her homework was more than enough for a very-nearly-twelve-year-old to manage. But once all THAT palaver had finished each day, Matilda had then had to rush through the dark, wet London streets, school satchel and muddy PE bag swinging about her person, all the way to the theatre to play the role of wretched Edna. And there had been that one occasion when she hadn't washed off all of her stage make-up after the show, and she'd had a hint of dead Edna about her all the next day at school; she'd had to tell everyone she was recovering from a rare tropical illness.

Matilda cringed just thinking about it, but then she

shook herself free from the torment of such memories. The show was OVER. She could spend half-term lounging about reading murder mysteries, and then there were only six weeks of school left until the Christmas holidays. Oh, how Matilda would enjoy them! She would throw herself wholeheartedly into all her lessons. She would impress her teachers and make some friends at last. She would be *proper and normal*!

“C’mon, Lockett,” Edgar said cheerfully. “Your aunt and uncle are sorting through a load of old costumes and props under the stage, having a big clear-out. You won’t *believe* some of the things they’ve found...”

But at that very moment, Aunt Evelyn swooped upon Matilda and engulfed her in an enormous, jasmine-scented hug. “There you are, darling!” she said. “Another wonderful day at school?”

“Yup. Wonderful,” Matilda said with a tight smile.

“Is young Edgar here too?” Aunt Evelyn squinted into the velvety gloom all around her niece as if that would help her see the little ghost (unfortunately for the so-called spirit medium, she was totally incapable of seeing or hearing the dratted things).

“Evening, Aunt Evelyn,” Edgar chirped.

“He is. He says good evening,” Matilda translated.

“Good evening to you too, young man,” Aunt Evelyn said graciously, wrapping an ermine cape around her shoulders. “Now get your things together, children – we’re going home for dinner. Barnabus is doing his famous sausage hotpot.”

“Ooh, yum.”

“BARNABUS BACON!” Aunt Evelyn bellowed over the noise of the pantomime rehearsal, and then, like an obedient and considerably oversized puppy, dear old Uncle Barnabus appeared from the door beside the stage and trotted towards them. He was clutching a bagful of dusty theatre souvenirs, and Colin, Aunt Evelyn’s pet parakeet, was perched upon his shoulder.



CHAPTER TWO

In Which Five Brothers Would Be Absolutely Awful

“Oh, won’t it be wonderful, Evie darling?” Uncle Barnabus exclaimed as they all walked home together through the dark, frosty streets. He took his beloved’s arm and hooked it through his. “Having a bit of a break from the show, eh? You can relax, oh love of my life. You can RELAX!”

“Aunt Evelyn? *Relax?*” Matilda murmured to Edgar as he drifted along beside her.

“We can do all the things the theatre routine never lets us do!” Barnabus continued blithely. “I’ll take you out for some posh evening dinners. We can have early morning walks along the river! And we’ll be able to get all that junk under the stage sorted out. There’s a century-load of stuff down there, you know – some of it is probably worth a bob or two. Just this afternoon, I found

a very convincing glass eyeball and a *terrific* ballet tutu.”

“I’m sure you’ll have a lovely time,” Aunt Evelyn enthused, patting his arm with an elegantly gloved hand. “Sounds like the job is right up your street.”

“*My* street?” Barnabus stopped. “You gave me the impression this would very much be a street we’d be walking together.”

“Oh no, dearest. I shall be far too busy to help, I’m afraid.”

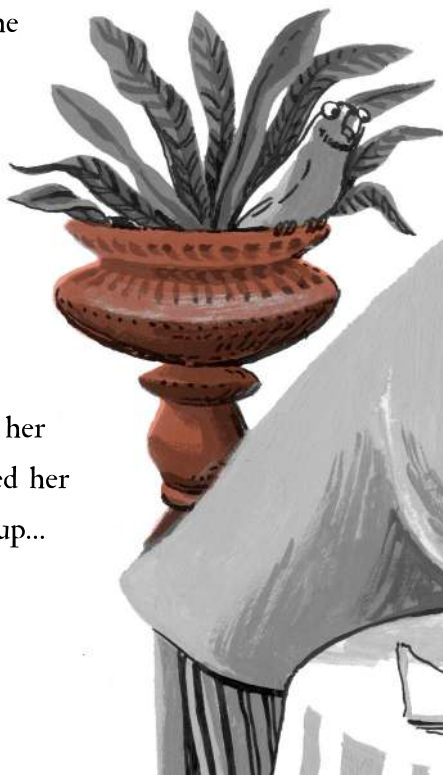
Busy? Matilda’s narrowed eyes met Edgar’s.

“B-busy?” Barnabus blustered. “But my dearest darling, I thought the whole point of renting out the theatre for the panto was so that you could have a *rest*?”

“Well, ye-es... That was the original idea, I admit,” Aunt Evelyn said slowly.

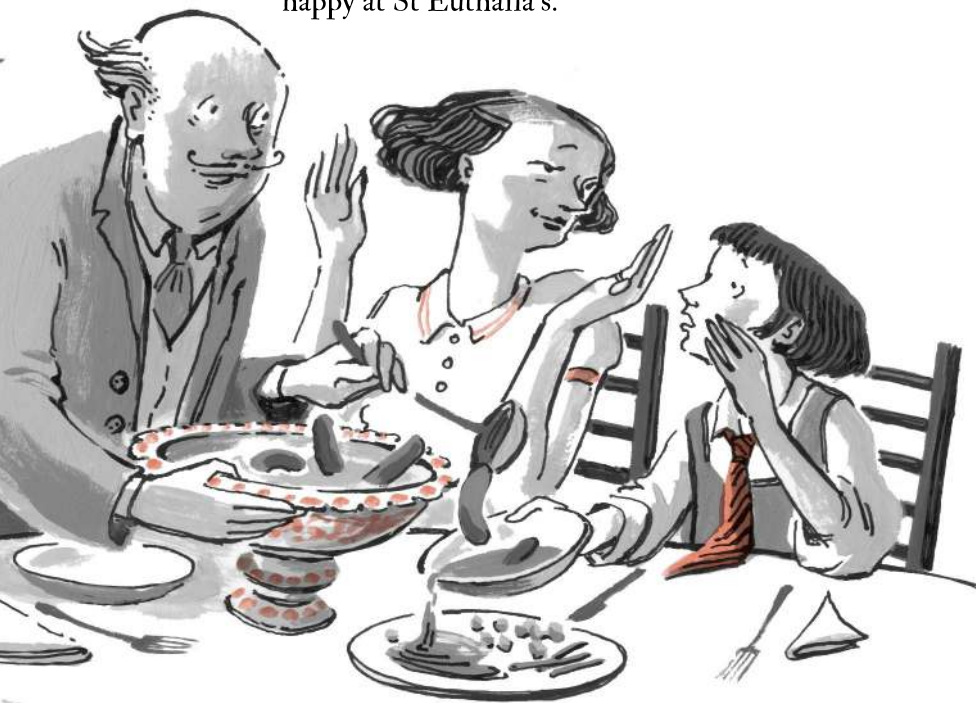
Matilda braced herself. There was something about her aunt’s tone of voice that warned her An Announcement was coming up...

■ ■ ■



“What do you *mean*, you’re going to be teaching at St Euthalia’s?” Matilda Lockett could not believe her ears. “I’m pretty sure Spirit-Mediumship is not on the school curriculum, Aunt Evelyn. We don’t do Séance lessons or Practical Necromancy or anything.”

“Now, now,” Uncle Barnabus said calmly, ladling another dollop of sausage hotpot onto Matilda’s plate. “There’s no need for that tone, Matilda, my little turnip. Your aunt is a woman of many talents. And what a thing – eh? The two of you together at my old school!” The hotpot ladle dripped on the tablecloth as Barnabus enjoyed a nostalgic moment. “I was always very happy at St Euthalia’s.”



"I shall be teaching Italian," Aunt Evelyn said in a matter-of-fact sort of voice, dabbing at the tablecloth with her napkin.

"I didn't know you spoke Italian," Matilda said, a trifle rudely.

"Well, I do. All those years travelling with Signora Valentina's Fair, you know. Italian, French, some useful bits of Dutch and a smattering of Japanese. I'll have you know I can order a martini in seventeen different languages, sweetie. It's my party piece."

Matilda was speechless.

"My mother," Aunt Evelyn went on, "the *original* Signora Valentina – she spoke Italian at home of course. It's the language of our family."

"Well, *I* don't speak it."

"All the more reason why I should come to your school and teach it then," Evelyn said, a pleased smile on her face. "Don't worry, darling," Aunt Evelyn said, winking at her niece. "I promise I won't embarrass you in front of all your friends."

■ ■ ■

"The thing *is*," Matilda grumbled to Edgar later on that night, "I don't really have any friends to be embarrassed

in front of. And the *other* thing is, I'm definitely not going to make any blimming friends once everyone realizes that the crazy new teacher sweeping about in a sequinned cloak is *my aunt*."

The little ghost boy stopped bouncing his rubber ball against the wall of Matilda's bedroom for a moment. "You mean, you haven't made any friends at school at all?" he said. "I thought it was all going swimmingly – I thought you loved it at school. Oh, Lockett..."

His genuine sympathy made Matilda feel a bit embarrassed. "I *do* love it. At least, I know I'm *going to* love it. I just haven't quite settled in yet." It was actually something of a relief for Matilda to be honest about it all. "And I think I've got a sort-of-almost-friend," she said a bit more brightly.

"Hang on, Lockett – is it a ghost or is it an actual living person, because if you're just hanging around with dead people, you can't possibly hope to—"

"Oh, no – she's an actual living person. She's called Florence and she's in my class. She seems to find me quite funny, which I think is definitely a good sign."

There was a pause.

"Isn't it?"



Edgar made a possibly-yes-possibly-no face and went back to bouncing his ball.

“She’s *proper and normal*,” Matilda said. “And she has *five* older brothers.”

Edgar sat up straight, forgetting all about the rubber ball, which bounced off the wall and boinged Matilda right on the bonce. “Five brothers!” he exclaimed. “Imagine that!”

“I know,” Matilda groaned, rubbing her forehead. “Five brothers would be absolutely awful.”

“It would be BRILLIANT. I’ve always wanted a big brother! Don’t you think it would be SO nice to have someone looking out for you, someone to help you make fortresses and catapults and identify wild animal poos and teach you all the obscure rules of cricket?”

Matilda tucked her chin in and looked at him.

“Nope? Oh, well.” Edgar looked a bit wistful. “I did have a big brother once, actually.”

“Did you? You’ve never told me that!”

“Well, a half-brother, from my father’s first marriage. But I never got to meet him.” Edgar sniffed.

Matilda looked at the sad little chap. “You’ve got a big sister,” she said, kindly.

Edgar wiped away a ghostly tear and smiled. “Not so hot on catapults and cricket, but you’ll do,” he said. “Hey – why don’t I come into school with you after half-term and see what I think of this almost-friend of yours?”

Matilda shook her head. “Not on your nelly, Edgar Wilde. It’s hard enough ignoring the ghost cat. There’s no way I could keep up the pretence of being normal if you were larking about beside me all day.”

“Fine. I’m going to help Barnabus sort through the old props at the theatre anyway. I want to find some glass eyeballs of my own and play marbles with them.”

Matilda laughed.

“And I wouldn’t want people to think you were weird,” Edgar added. “I mean, any weirder than they *already* think you are.”

Matilda threw the rubber ball right at him. She was still laughing, but part of her was genuinely worried. What on earth were Matilda’s fellow first years going to make of her once they realized she was the new Italian teacher’s niece?

CHAPTER THREE

In Which Mr Nutt Is Dead. Actually Dead.

The half-term holiday whizzed by in a whirl of prop-sorting, costume-clearing and camel-dodging, with very little time left over for lounging about or murder-mystery-reading, and before Matilda knew it, she was back in her cosy form room, sitting beside her almost-friend, Florence François, and writing down her timetable for the weeks ahead. Matilda scanned the subjects and teachers listed on the blackboard, and had to stop herself from whooping with joy: *No Italian lessons and no Signora Valentina – oh, the relief!*

Matilda was to have Maths with Miss Milsted; Geography with their form tutor, Mr Hubble; History with Professor Gorgon; and Astronomy with the school's headmistress, Dr Edwina Webber. There would also be Library lessons with someone called

Miss Quail, and Contemporary Dance classes as well.

“Sir?” asked Florence. “Why is there no teacher written down for Contemporary Dance?”

“Unfortunately,” Mr Hubble replied, tugging at his beard, “our Dance teacher, Miss Golightly, will not be able to teach you this term, on account of her going off to teach in another school.”

“Oh, what a shame,” Matilda said in a voice that was just a little bit too sad to be entirely believable. “We should probably just forget about Dance then...”

Florence François looked stricken.

“Not to worry,” Mr Hubble said. “Dr Webber is confident she has a new dance teacher lined up. And anyway – there’ll be no wriggling out of it, I’m afraid.” Mr Hubble held up a poster that said:
MIDWINTER MAGIC
– AN EVENING OF



FESTIVE MUSIC, DANCE & STARGAZING. “See that?” his finger stabbed at the word “DANCE”. “That’s you lot. There’s going to be a big midwinter’s night show, and you will all be prancing about as stars and planets, I believe. A super-stellar spectacle. A galactic gig, if you will.”

There was an excited burble of noise in the class, and Florence was beaming, but poor Matilda sighed inwardly. She had only just been freed from the shackles of rotten old Dead Edna; now it seemed she was to go straight into rehearsals for a *different* show in which she’d be twinkling like a little star, or something equally mortifying.

Florence noticed Matilda’s facial expression. “It’ll be fun!” she said.

Matilda tried to look like she thought it would be *fun* too.

Florence laughed.

The two of them continued copying down their time-tables in their very best handwriting.

Matilda frowned and put her hand up. “Who is Miss Quail, please, sir? I thought Mr Nutt was the school librarian.”

“Ah. Yes,” Mr Hubble said, suddenly a good deal

more serious. "I'm very sorry to tell you all that, unfortunately, our wonderful librarian, Mr Nutt, will not be able to take your library lessons this term, on account of his being ... dead."

"What do you mean, *dead*?" asked a boy called Nigel Norris. "Actually dead?"

"Yes," Mr Hubble replied gravely. "I'm afraid to say Mr Nutt is dead. Actually dead."

Matilda and Florence looked at each other, eyes wide. There was a stunned silence in the classroom.

Nigel Norris's hand shot up again. "How did he die?" he asked.

Mr Hubble shook his head at him. "Always with the questions, Nigel." He tugged at his beard. "Never you mind how he died."

At once, the first years began whispering and muttering.

"Quiet please!" Mr Hubble said, raising his voice a little. "Oi – you lot, PIPE DOWN." The muttering stopped. "All you need to know is that our new librarian is called Miss Quail. And you'll be meeting her in just a few minutes, as your first lesson of the day is a Library lesson – in the Old Tower."

CHAPTER FOUR

In Which There Are Oohs And Aahs

Quite a few of Matilda's lessons were to be in the Old Tower that term: the magnificent school library was housed within the tower's curved stone walls, and Astronomy lessons took place there too – in the observatory at the top. This would be the first time Matilda had set foot inside the Old Tower, and she couldn't wait. Funnily enough, this was the very building that Matilda had admired from beyond the school gates when she had dreamt of being a St Euthalia's student all those months ago.

Matilda followed Florence and the other children in her class across the frosty quad, past the headmistress's ivy-clad cottage, and lined up outside the big wooden door that led into the Old Tower. It was huge – like a fairy-tale castle. Matilda shivered with excitement.

She had only ever seen it from the outside and dreamt about what it might be like to step inside. Now – at last – the moment had come.

Just then, the ghost cat who haunted the school trotted up to Matilda with a friendly “Briiiaoww?” and wound itself around her ankles. Matilda felt like she was being tickled with a frozen feather duster. She checked quickly to make sure no one was watching, then she bent down to give the cat a bit of fuss. The ghost cat butted its transparent head against the back of Matilda’s hand and rubbed its cheek against Matilda’s knuckles. She was a handsome beast, Matilda thought. Her misty shadow was slender and elegant, creamy white in colour with large, dark ears, a dark nose, and piercing eyes. Her purr was as loud as a motorcycle, and Matilda wondered that her classmates couldn’t hear it. She glanced up then, only to see Florence looking at her quizzically. “You all right, Matilda?” she asked. “Having a bit of bother down there?”

“Bother? Oh no – just...” Matilda looked at her outstretched, wiggling fingers, and wondered what on earth it must look like to someone who couldn’t see the cat beneath them. “Just, um – testing to see how much colder

the air is close to the ground.” She stood up. “Yup,” she said, nodding wisely and wiggling her fingers about at shoulder height. “About two degrees colder down there, I reckon.”

Florence laughed. “Come on,” she said heading through the large, open doorway. “Everyone else has gone in.”

Matilda scurried after her.

Inside, the Old Tower was just as magical as Matilda had imagined. The round room was full of worn-out leather armchairs and sofas, lit with a hundred small table lamps, and there was a slightly terrifying stuffed brown bear standing on its hind legs as if poised to attack any unsuspecting first year foolish enough to turn their back. The high, curved walls were crammed with hundreds of thousands of books that could be reached by sliding ladders on smooth metal runners. The bookshelves stretched right up to the observatory platform in the dome at the top, which was accessed by a wrought-iron spiral staircase in the centre of the tower.

“Good morning, first years,” said Miss Quail. The new librarian was essentially a big, bright smile in an even bigger, brighter jumper. “Welcome to the library!”





Over the next few weeks, you'll be spending most of your mornings here exploring our wonderful collection of books, learning your way around the library and, of course ... reading."

Matilda was distracted then by a tiny movement, out of the corner of her eye – something on one of the tall library ladders. She turned quickly, but whatever it was had gone. A lamp flickered somewhere up there – on the observatory platform beneath the tower's high domed ceiling. It flickered again, and an icy feeling shivered up Matilda's spine; her skin prickled.

"Reading whatever we like?" Nigel Norris was asking, his hand waving in the air as usual.

"Hmm?" Miss Quail seemed to have been distracted by something too.

"I said, can we read whatever we like?"

"Yes!" Miss Quail said, beaming at Nigel. "Read whatever you like. I'm here to offer guidance, advice and recommendations wherever needed. There's a treasure hunt if you'd like to discover the library that way. And I'll be putting together different taster tables each day so you can try out a variety of genres. First up, we've got the ever-popular series Bunty and Bobby's Big Adventures."

There were *oobs* and *aabs* from some of Matilda's classmates as they surrounded the table to find their favourites.

Nigel Norris shot his hand into the air once more. "Can we go up the ladders?" he asked.

Florence grinned at Matilda, rolling her eyes at Nigel and his questions.

"Ah. Yes," Miss Quail said, and her lovely smile faltered for a moment. "Please be *very* careful on the ladders – no messing around. And only one person up a ladder at a time. I don't want another awful accident, thank you very much."

"What does she mean, *another awful accident*?" Matilda murmured to Florence once everyone had dispersed to browse the books. "Do you think that's what happened to Mr Nutt?"

Florence nodded slowly. "Maybe. Gosh, poor Mr Nutt. I know he was very old – about ninety-nine, I think. My biggest brother, Jim, said old Nutt was a real character. All my brothers talked about him."

At that moment, Miss Quail came over to the two girls. Matilda noticed that the ghost cat was slinking along by her side. It took extraordinary willpower for Matilda to ignore the cat. It rubbed its face against Miss Quail's leg