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opening extract from

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WILMA TENDERFOOT
AND THE CASE OF THE FROZEN HEARTS

By Emma Kennedy

Chapter One

Wilma Tenderfoot wasn't quite sure how she'd managed it but somehow, she was hanging upside down from a meat hook in the pantry. In her hand was an empty toilet roll which, although not quite as effective as a proper telescope, still concentrated the mind whenever peered through with one eye. As she hung, gently swaying, Wilma was forced to conclude that maybe she didn't have this detective lark pinned down quite yet and made a mental note to remember not to try and climb up a rack of hams in order to investigate a theft of sausages without first taking the appropriate precautions.

Her hero, Theodore P Goodman, the island's greatest living detective, wouldn't have got himself into this predicament, thought Wilma, taking a bite out of a particularly delicious joint of beef as she swayed towards it. No. He would have done things properly and wouldn't have slipped on a slab of greasy bacon, flown through the air and ended up suspended on a hook by the back of his pants.

One day, dreamed Wilma, as she rocked from side to side, she would be a great detective too and get to solve all manner of mysteries and conundrums but for now, she just had one problem to solve: how to get down from the rack of hams without being caught by Madam Skratch. Being an orphan at the Cooper Island Lowside Institute for Woeful Children was bad enough without being found upside down in the middle of some cold meats by the meanest Matron who had ever lived.

Wilma could hear Madam Skratch's voice barking orders beyond the door. She didn't have a moment to lose. Straightening her dress and unbuttoning her pinafore pocket, Wilma pulled out a tatty heap of squashed and torn bits of paper attached by their corners to a large metal ring. Frantically thumbing through the scraps, Wilma found what she was looking for: an old newspaper cutting that had the words 'Theodore P Goodman's Escape from Giant Clock' scrawled on its folded exterior. Opening it out as fast as she could, she examined the diagram that showed her favourite detective tied to the bottom of a massive pendulum. 'That's it!' she whispered, tapping at the picture. 'He used the pendulum to swing himself onto a ledge! If I can swing a bit harder on this ham hook then maybe I can reach that tin of peaches in syrup and then use the syrup to loosen up the hook and then….' But before Wilma had reached the end of her brilliant plan, events had taken a turn. Her pinafore had given way

and with one, ripping tear she landed head first in a basket of onions. The door to the pantry swung open.

'Wilma Tenderfoot!' yelled Madam Skratch, who looked like a vulture and smelled like cabbage. 'My office! Now!'

Wilma looked up and spat a shallot out of her mouth. She was in trouble. Again.

*

Somewhere between England and France is an island with only one small hill that no one has ever bothered to discover. If you go and look at a map right now, you'll be able to see it. It's just there, above that bit. It should come as no surprise that the small and ordinary looking Cooper Island has never been discovered. Exploring is, after all, no longer taught in schools and curiosity, the mainstay of any discoverer, has been discouraged since the unfortunate news that it can kill cats.

Hundreds of years ago, the Island was almost discovered by an explorer called Marco Polo. You may have heard of him. He had a beard and discovered impressive things like China and First Class Post so an island with one small hill somewhere between England and France was not at the top of his To Do list. It was a Tuesday and Marco Polo had been hard at it: 'I've been discovering non stop for sixteen years,' he said, standing on the poop of his deck. 'And in all that time I haven't had one day off. Not one.'

It was at this point that a small man called Angelo Pizza, whose daughter would invent the snack of the same name, shouted down from the ship's crow's nest. 'Ahoy!' he shouted. 'I can see an island with one small hill on it!'

Marco Polo had sighed at this news and thought about how his job as a discoverer of new lands and efficient postal systems was interfering with his enjoyment of life. If you know many adults I expect you've heard them moaning about their jobs. Well, Marco Polo was just the same. Marco Polo didn't want to go to work that day. He wanted to lie in a hammock, eat a fresh, crispy apple and have his face painted to look like a tiger. 'I can't be bothered!' he shouted up to Angelo Pizza. 'Do me a favour and just pretend you didn't see it.'

'Alright!' shouted down Angelo Pizza, who carried on looking out, though he was careful not to look out again in the direction of the island with the one small hill.

It might seem strange that no one has tried to discover Cooper Island since. But most discoverers are only interested in impressive things like the tallest mountain or the longest river. So Cooper Island, which didn't have anything that was tallest or longest or deepest, was overlooked and forgotten about and the people who lived there were left to get on with things and mind their own business. You would think that a place ignored by the world would be a haven of calm and happiness but you'd be wrong. Even small, insignificant islands can be hot

beds of trouble and bother and this story is about one trouble so terrible that if you're of a nervous disposition I would advise you to put this book down immediately.

*

Wilma had been packing for five minutes. She had been ordered to do so by Madam Skratch after being dragged from the pantry by one ear and then yelled at for 37 minutes at the end of which, the screaming matron had pulled a crumpled letter from her pocket, waved it under Wilma's nose and spluttered 'That's it! I give up! Your tomfoolery and nonsense has tested me for the last time! You're leaving! Today!' Wilma had been surprised but quietly thrilled, an emotion that was to prove woefully misplaced. The letter was from a dried up, misery of a woman called Mrs Waldock who had written in requesting a 'skivvy, one not too hungry nor too quarrel-some'. The unlucky wretch would go and live on the Farside of the island where he or she would be expected to do chores like grating the dead skin off the bottom of Mrs Waldock's feet and climbing down drains to clear blockages. It would not only be Wilma's first job but it would be the first time she had stepped outside the Lowside Institute for Woeful Children's front gates in ten years to go anywhere other than the obligatory Tuesday afternoon school classes where, as well as the usual reading and writing, Wilma and the other unfortunates had learned essential woeful life skills like Scraping and Scrubbing.

Wilma, who was the smallest and scrawniest of the Institute's ten year olds had lived at the orphanage all of her life. She didn't know much about where she had come from, only that she had been left in a tatty cardboard box at the Institute's gates during a storm so fierce that the orphanage's only tree had split clean in two. She had been wrapped in butcher's muslin and abandoned with no further clues as to her background other than one small luggage tag tied around her neck that had three words written on it: 'Because they gone'. She didn't know who had left her there or who the luggage tag referred to. It was a mystery as deep as the seas. But one day, Wilma had decided long ago, she would find out. She may have been small, but she was very determined.

In the ten years that Wilma had lived at the Institute for Woeful Children, she had made few if any friends. She had had a best friend once, when she was four, but it had all ended rather badly when the poor unfortunate had fallen into a furnace and been accidentally melted down and turned into a batch of spanners. Wilma quickly realised that if she was to avoid any further pain or anguish then it was probably best not to get to like anyone. Instead, she found her comfort in books, secreted out of the Institute's meagre library, and magazines, stolen from Madam Skratch's waste paper basket, both filled with the to-ings and fro-ings of life on the Farside and in particular, the adventures and triumphs of the island's greatest detective,

Theodore P Goodman. When she was young, it was the pictures of his great adventures that caught her imagination but as soon as she could read and piece together his methods and advice, Wilma was well and truly hooked. How she longed to be a detective like him!

Every Wednesday at 4 when Madam Skratch was eating cake in the turret room, Wilma would creep down to the Matron's office and quietly pick out that week's discarded copy of Boom!, Cooper island's weekly magazine for ladies of a certain age. Taking great care, Wilma would tear out the pages filled with tales of Theodore's solved cases and read them over and over so that they were practically committed to memory. By learning how Theodore P Goodman solved the island's crimes, Wilma could learn the theories of detective work and one day, find the answers to her past. If she was going to be a detective, she decided, she would have to start practising and she grabbed every opportunity to do so.

Once, when she was six, a large gristle pie had gone missing from the Institute's kitchen and Madam Skratch had demanded that the culprit be caught. Wilma, leaping at her first chance to have a crack at detecting, quietly decided that the pie thief had been none other than an unpredictable young lad named Thomas. His guilt, she concluded, was confirmed by the presence of flaky pastry trembling on his upper lip. But it turned out that Thomas wasn't eating flaky pastry at all, he was experiencing a rather unpleasant attack of eczema and as she stood, having this oversight pointed out to her by a sneering Madam Skratch, Wilma discovered that hasty predictions can lead to severe embarrassments. Detection, it would appear, was a subtler art than Wilma was quite ready for.

When she was seven, Wilma, not deterred by her earlier set back, had taken it upon herself to solve another baffling mystery. Socks were vanishing. Not pairs of socks, just the left ones and Wilma was convinced that a one legged child called Melody Tremble was the only possible suspect. But it turned out (yet again) that Wilma's suspicions were ill-conceived. Melody Tremble, as Madam Skratch exasperatedly revealed, could not have been the culprit because she may have only had one foot but it was a right foot, not a left. And besides, the sock thief, who had already been caught, turned out to be a hand puppeteer who had fallen on hard times. He had run out of socks. Case closed. It was another setback for the would-be detective, and one that wasn't making her terribly popular. All the same, Wilma was still determined.

Then there was the time, at the age of nine, when she had tried to get to the bottom of why she, of all the Woeful Institute's children, never seemed to get sent to a new home. Children from the Lowside Institute for Woeful children were, as a rule, farmed out to customers on the Farside of the island from the age of 8. But never Wilma. Being a curious creature, with detective-ish aspirations, she had decided to conduct a small investigation. However, because she was still not fully trained in the proper art of investigating, her methods were quite basic. So basic in fact that all she did was tug on Madam Skratch's sleeve and ask

‘Why am I still here please?’ But Madam Skratch had provided her with nothing more illuminating than a sharp pinch of the ear and a truck load of onions to peel so Wilma, despite her best efforts, was none the wiser. The mystery remained just that.

But now here she was being sent out into the wider world of the island at last. She might even get a chance to do some proper detecting. The thought of it made Wilma as excited as a bottle of bees. But all that would have to wait for now: she was a Lowsider from the Institute for Woeful Children who had a battleaxe with cracked and crusty feet to meet.

In order to leave the Institute, Wilma had been handed papers by the horrible Head Matron allowing her to pass from the Island’s Lowside to the more desirable Farside and given a letter from her new employer outlining her instructions. Because Wilma was finally being sent from the Institute she was allowed to take a bath, even if it was in cold water, and given a fresh pinafore and top shirt so that she would not ‘offend the eye’ of anyone with the misfortune to catch sight of her. ‘Lowsiders are not welcome on the Farside of the island and you will do well to remember it!’ Madam Skratch told Wilma repeatedly, with a firm wag of her bony finger. But Wilma didn’t need reminding. Every Lowsider knew that most Farsiders despised them. No one knew why. It was just the way things were.

Some children might have felt nervous and jelly legged at the prospect of leaving the only place they had ever known, but not Wilma. She had spent too many hours staring out through the bars of the orphanage gates, wondering what the rest of Cooper island was like and longing to visit all the places she had seen in Madam Skratch’s magazines. At the age of four, as she was tied to a rope and lowered down the orphanage well to catch frogs for supper, she daydreamed about the Sugarcane Swizzle trees that lined the Avenue of the Cooperans. At the age of five, when she was given a large spoon and told to make a statue of Madam Skratch out of chicken fat she was so busy imagining herself posing in front of the magnificent Poulet Palace that she inadvertently gave the matron three eyes and a wonky nose and at the age of six and three quarters, as she was shoved up the Institute’s chimneys strapped to the end of a broom to shoo away the bats, her mind only flitted away to the extravagant shows put on at the Valiant Vaudeville Theatre. But most of all, she thought about Theodore P Goodman and how one day, if she was *very* determined, he would help her find out where she had come from. In short, Wilma really couldn’t wait to leave.

Given that Wilma didn’t have anything much to call her own, she was ready, hat on and good to go, in a matter of moments. ‘Tenderfoot!’ yelled Madam Skratch, standing in the doorway to the dormitory. ‘Have you packed your things?’

‘Yes Madam Skratch, I have,’ replied Wilma, with a twinkle.

‘Well hurry yourself! Mrs Waldock will be waiting. Come here and let me look at you.’ Wilma trotted towards the doorway and stiffened her back, ready to be inspected. Madam Skratch towered over her and stared, tutting as her eyes darted over her grubby charge. ‘You will never amount to anything,’ she said, lifting Wilma’s chin with a sharp finger. ‘Your eyes are too green. Your nose is too small. Your hair is too light. And you have a mouth that is nothing but mischief. You have very little to commend you. Do as you are told Wilma Tenderfoot and you might have a passable life. Do not do what you are told and your life will be a fraught and thorny misery. Do you understand?’

‘Yes Madam Skratch,’ replied Wilma, tucking a small wayward lock of hair back under her hat.

‘And don’t fidget!’ snapped the Head Matron, pursing her lipless mouth. ‘I can’t bear a child that wriggles. Just like a maggot! Now pick up your things and go down to the courtyard. The cart will take you to Mrs Waldock.’

Wilma ran back to the thin and tiny bed where she had slept every night for the past ten years and picked up her small bundle of clothes. Taking care to keep her back to Madam Skratch, Wilma reached under her mattress and pulled out her two most precious possessions: the luggage label of her birthright and a folded up, tatty piece of paper that was now so faded it was almost wasted away. Quickly and quietly, Wilma tied the label to her wrist and pressed the paper, an article about Theodore’s top tips for detecting inside her bundle. She had no real need of it, of course, as she knew it off by heart but she whispered it to herself all the same.

Theodore P Goodman’s Ten Top Tips For Detecting

1. Contemplate the clues
2. Make deductions based on those clues
3. Keep a sharp look out for suspects and sometimes creep around after them
4. Keep suspects in the dark
5. Eavesdropping, whilst not encouraged in polite society, will often produce results
6. Be circuitous
7. Keep a sharp eye out for unusual behaviour. And always write things down.
8. Sometimes, using a disguise can be cunning
9. Behave seriously at all times
10. Never go detecting on an empty stomach

Wilma gave a small but determined sigh. She didn’t quite know what all those words meant but one day, she too would become a great and serious detective and nothing and nobody would stop her. She took one last look around the dormitory, turned and ran towards the next chapter of her life.

Chapter Two

Most grown ups are never happier than when they have someone to look down on and the Cooper Island Farsiders couldn't have been more delighted that they had the Cooper Lowsiders to despise. As long as the Farsiders had their immediate neighbours to oppress they were saved the exacting inconvenience of recognising their own shortcomings. Wilma had never been to the Farside of the island before, and as her cart pulled into the border station that separated the smaller side of Cooper from its more dominant part, she was thrilled and frightened at the same time.

'Papers,' drawled a large, lazy looking man in a booth. The border station was an imposing booth set between two towers. Behind it and a vast wall with a huge gate in it stretched for as far as Wilma could see. Everything on the Lowside seemed grey and depressed but through the windows in the border gate, Wilma could see green fields filled with poppies and beyond that, in the distance, she could just make out the island's one, small hill and the spires and peaks of Cooper's finest buildings. A trill of excitement fizzed through her.

As Wilma peered at the border control buildings, she had an unnerving sense of being stared at but by whom she couldn't quite tell. Jumping down from the back of the cart, she handed over the envelope from the Institute to the border guard. 'Work permit's in order,' muttered the guard, who Wilma noted from his name badge, was called Trevor. 'Stand on the red cross.'

Wilma looked down and saw a large, red cross on the floor. As she stepped onto it a sudden scrape of metal sounded from the covered part of the booth in front of her. Startled, she looked up and was even more surprised to see four sets of eyes peering back at her. Wilma didn't quite know what to do, so she just waved. On seeing this small, friendly gesture, one set of eyes blinked very hard, made a quick, sideways glance and the metal grate slammed shut again. There then followed some intense muttering which Wilma couldn't quite make out and Trevor was handed a note by a mystery arm that poked itself suddenly from the wall to Trevor's left. What a peculiar place this was, thought Wilma.

'No waving,' said Trevor, reading the note. 'No waving on the cross allowed.'

But Wilma had more important things on her mind. 'Why is it,' she began, giving Trevor an inquisitive stare, 'that a person is not allowed to go from one place to another? Why does everyone need papers?'

Trevor sat back in his chair and looked a bit panicked. Another note was thrust up with some urgency. 'Humph,' coughed Trevor, clearing his throat. 'Because this is the Farside. And you're from the Lowside. And there it is.'

‘Hmm,’ said Wilma, thinking. ‘But the only difference between the two is that one side is there and the other side is here. Wouldn’t it be easier just to let people wander about as they pleased?’

Trevor let out a small explosive splutter. ‘No, no, no!’ he insisted. ‘People must never be allowed to wander about. That would never do. Wander about! Goodness gracious! This is here and that is there. And that is how it is!’ Another piece of paper shot up and was waved in a frantic manner. Trevor took it and read it.

‘Permission to enter Farside granted but you are being issued with an Impertinence Order.’

Wilma just stared. She didn’t know what an Impertinence Order was.

‘Waving AND questioning…’ mumbled Trevor, stamping an official looking document. ‘Dear me. Dear, dear me.’

Trevor then handed Wilma back her envelope of papers and passed down the stamped Impertinence Order. It was very official looking and was in small, scrawling handwriting making it *very hard to read.* Wilma held it close to her face so as to get a better look at it. ‘Issued by the Grand Council of Border Controls,’ read Wilma. ‘For suggesting that here is the same as there (which it isn’t) and for gesticulating in a wild manner during government business (and putting us off) you are hereby issued with an Order forbidding you from further acts of the same hereonin and forthwith and also etcetera. Signed Kevin and Malcolm and Susan and Ian (official border control peepers)’

Wilma looked up. ‘I see,’ she said, tucking the Order into her pinafore pocket. ‘Well that’s that. Can I go now?’

‘No. Now you have to wait for an appropriately long and unnecessary length of time. Read the sign,’ said Trevor, pointing towards a poster. Wilma turned and looked at it. There it was. Item number 4 on the list of Border Control Procedures ‘Lowsiders will be required to wait for a lengthy and unnecessary time until such time as Border Control decides it has been long and unnecessary enough.’

Wilma shook her head. This place was mad. Still, she didn’t want to get herself another Impertinence Order so she went and sat in the back of the cart and hoped for the best.

Two hours and 32 minutes later, Trevor decided that Wilma’s wait had been sufficiently lengthy and sufficiently unnecessary. ‘You can go through now,’ he said, with an official nod. Wilma was quite tempted to do something rude, like stick her tongue out at him but given that she seemed to be in enough trouble already she thought the better of it and just stuck her tongue behind her front teeth instead.