

read the first
chapter!

LIBBY
AND THE
PARISIAN PUZZLE

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ILLUSTRATED BY BECKA MOOR





First published in 2022
by Firefly Press
25 Gabalfa Road, Llandaff North, Cardiff, CF14 2JJ
www.fireflypress.co.uk

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

Print ISBN 9781913102708
ebook ISBN 9781913102715

This book has been published with the support of the Books Council of Wales.

Typeset and design by Becka Moor

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





JC

For my parents, whose endless support and encouragement made this book possible. Thank you for always believing in me, even when I didn't believe in myself.



BM

For Jo Clarke, who has been an endless support, not just to me, but to the children's book community as a whole. We appreciate you.





CHAPTER 1

All Aboard

Libby couldn't believe her luck. The train was half empty and she'd managed to bag a whole table to herself. She shoved her case into the space behind her seat. Her mum waved frantically at the window. Checking no one was watching, Libby kneeled on her seat, opened the window and shouted, 'Are you really sure I can't come to Ecuador with you?'

'I've told you, Libby, it's too difficult this time. You'll be fine with Aunt Agatha.'

Her mum looked loaded down with her huge

rucksack and was wearing her sunglasses despite the dull weather.

‘But you’ve always taken me before.’ Libby thought about all the different places they’d travelled together. They’d sailed down rivers in rickety old boats, flown in seaplanes, sled across frozen lands.

‘I know and if I could take you with me, I would. I’ll miss you, Libby ... but you’ll be having far too much fun in Paris to miss me.’ Her mum smiled just a little too brightly.

Libby sighed. If only her dad was still here, maybe she wouldn’t have to go away. Although she was actually looking forward to Paris, it was one of her absolute favourite places – but she knew it wouldn’t be the same without Mum.

When her mum had first suggested the school, Libby was horrified. She’d never been to school before; they’d never stayed in one place long enough. But at the same time, she had always wondered what it would be like to go, and she was fascinated by the idea of the school her aunt ran. She really hoped it wasn’t like she imagined it, though – children all lined up

in rows wearing stiff uniforms. That would be awful!

Aunt Agatha was no ordinary head teacher. She ran Mousedale's Travelling School. Each term they moved to a different place: one term they might be sleeping in a treehouse on a remote island; another in an apartment in New York overlooking Central Park! She was joining the school for a term in Paris.

'Mum, did you pack my camera?'

Libby's mum took pictures for travel magazines and Libby had inherited her talent and love for photography.

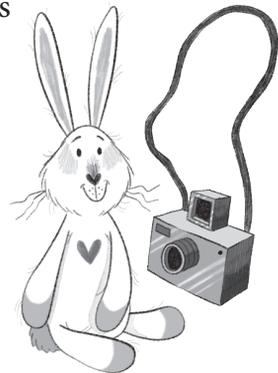
'It's in your rucksack with Bonnie.'

Libby felt her neck redden. 'Mum!' As much as she loved her tatty bunny, Bonnie, she didn't want the whole world knowing she still took her everywhere.

Mum laughed. 'Call me if you have any problems.'

Libby nodded. Her mum had given her an old mobile. All she could do on it was call and text, but Libby had never had a phone before, so it was still a treat.

Her mum looked at her watch.



‘I really need to go if I’m going to catch my flight.’

She was smiling but Libby could tell she was reluctant to leave her. Her mum always twisted her hair when she was stressed.

‘Have a fabulous time, Libby. And try not to get in any trouble. Remember, not everything is a mystery waiting for you to solve it.’

Her mum wiped away a tear. Libby would normally be embarrassed, but her own stomach felt twisty – this was the first time in her life they’d be apart for longer than a single night. Butterflies danced inside her the more she thought about it, but she didn’t want to upset her mum.

‘I promise,’ she said.

But, if a mystery just happened to find her, well, she couldn’t help that...

Her mum rushed off, with a last worried look over her shoulder. Libby sat back and took a deep breath. She was alone. It was really happening.

A woman entered her carriage. Libby was glad of the distraction. The lady was clinging to a battered red suitcase. A guard came down the aisle, saw her



struggling with her case and tried to help her. There were raised voices. Libby couldn't quite make out what was being said, but it was clear the lady didn't want to let go of it. The guard gave up, turned swiftly on his heel and headed to Libby.

He leaned over and smiled. 'Ticket?'

Libby handed it to him. The railway company's special hologram sparkled in the sunlight. Her mum had bought her a special ticket so the guards would look out for her. The guard said, in a French accent, 'Let me know if you need anything, during the journey or when we arrive.'



Libby didn't want to be treated like a baby. 'My aunt is meeting me at the station in Paris.'

'Well, that is good.' He smiled and off he went to the next carriage.

The woman with the red case had found a seat now. She kept looking behind her, as if she was expecting someone else. She fiddled with the buttons on her cardigan and Libby couldn't help noticing a large green ring on her finger.

Libby looked out of the window, hoping for one





last glimpse of her mum, even though she knew she was long gone. A tall lady came hurtling down the platform, her black-and-white coat flying behind her like a cape. She was waving, trying to get the attention of the guard, who was about to blow his whistle. Just as the doors were closing, she leaped on to the train, holding on to her blue hat.

Libby felt the pull of the train and the screech of the brakes releasing. They were off.



Before long, they were whizzing along at an amazing speed. Libby snuggled into her thick fleece and got comfy. The tall lady who had just managed to get on the train in time peered into the carriage. Libby wondered if she was looking for an empty seat. She must have changed her mind, because she disappeared in the other direction. Libby glimpsed a bright peacock feather swish at the back of her hat as she turned.



Libby checked her watch. It was still *ages* till they arrived in Paris. With no one to stop her, she could start on her lunch, even if it wasn't strictly lunchtime. She moved her watch forward an hour ready for her







arrival in Paris – now she could eat! Her lunch box was crammed with slices of cheese and breadsticks and nestling at the bottom was a slab of chocolate cake. She scooped up a big blob of hummus, then the train rocked, making her drop a splodge on her dungarees. She wiped at it – she didn't want to meet everyone at the school looking a mess.



Wiping the last crumb of cake off her lips, she looked around again. The lady was still holding her suitcase tightly and she seemed very stressed. Maybe she got travel sick – or maybe she had a secret to hide. The lady glanced up and spotted Libby. Embarrassed to be caught staring, Libby quickly turned to look at a man at the table opposite. He was reading a newspaper. She could just make out an article about a missing ring before he turned the page.



Libby remembered her mum's warning about poking her nose into things. So she rummaged around in her rucksack and found her new *Isobel Investigates* book. Libby had been so busy packing what she really needed – her entire collection of animal-rubber-topped pencils; puzzle books; a secret





stash of jellybeans – that she hadn't had the chance to read it yet. Isobel was her favourite sleuth, who managed to solve even the most tricky of cases.

Libby had just got to a part where Isobel found a coded letter when a shadow fell across her page. She looked up. The window had gone dark. They were finally entering the Channel Tunnel. She was on the way to Paris all by herself.

