

Try the 1st
chapter



LIBBY
AND THE
HIGHLAND
HEIST

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First published in 2023
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 9781915444011

ebook ISBN 9781915444028

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



JC

For Graeme, Freya and Evie, the best partners
in crime anyone could ever ask for x



BM

For Halle, Logan, Rudy and Sunny, for making
me a very proud Aunty!



MEET THE CHARACTERS







CHAPTER 1

A Highland View

‘Connie, we’re nearly here!’ shouted Libby. She swung down from the top bunk, landed on the floor and shook Connie to wake her up.

Annoyingly, last night Connie had dropped off straightaway, but Libby had hardly slept. Connie had been right – the top bunk of a sleeper train *was* like trying to sleep on a rollercoaster.

Connie rubbed her eyes and stretched. ‘What’s that awful rattling noise?’

‘Ssshhh,’ said Libby, throwing her pillow at her. ‘It’s my aunt. She snores terribly. I don’t think she’d like us to tell anyone though.’

Connie giggled. ‘My lips are sealed.’ She snuggled back down.

‘Hurry up.’ Libby checked her watch. ‘We might have time for some breakfast before we arrive.’

‘Good plan. Or my mum will insist we have a big bowl of porridge as soon as we step through the door.’

‘Bleugh,’ they said in unison.

They quickly got dressed and dashed down to the club car. Connie tried to persuade the attendant to make them something to eat, while Libby gazed out of the window. Everything seemed so empty compared to the streets of Paris. Although it was dark, she could just about see the mountains and rivers glistening in the distance where the moonlight shone on them. She felt a long way from home.

‘Here you go.’ Connie handed her a roll, distracting her.

Libby munched on her bacon roll while Connie chattered away. ‘I can’t wait for you to meet Bertie and James.’

‘I thought you only had one brother?’

‘Very funny,’ laughed Connie. ‘They’re my dogs, silly. I’ve missed them so much. Unlike my brother, who is so annoying!’

Libby wondered what it was like to have a brother. Being an only child, she was used to having her mum all to herself.

‘Oh, I think we’re coming into the station now!’ said Connie. ‘Let’s grab our bags. I know Dad will be waiting for us. He’s always early.’

Connie clambered off the train and dashed along the platform with Libby’s aunt, Miss Mousedale, in close pursuit.

Following behind, Libby couldn’t help noticing her aunt wasn’t her usual tidy self. Her hair was escaping from her bun and her cardigan was fastened up the wrong way. It looked like she had got ready in a hurry!

The station was completely deserted. Libby checked her watch, it had just turned six. Most sensible people would be fast asleep; she knew where she’d rather be. Connie was scanning up and

down, clearly trying to spot her dad. All around them were mountains covered in trees.



'I don't know where he's got to,' Connie sighed. She sat down on her case and searched for her phone in her rucksack.

Just then Miss Mousedale's phone rang. Libby wondered if it was Connie's mum ringing to tell them they were delayed. But the look on her aunt's face suggested it wasn't someone she wanted to speak to. Her aunt's voice got louder. She was clearly upset about something. The only word Libby heard clearly was 'forgery'. Before she could find out more, she spotted the headlights of a car in the distance.

'Is that your dad?' she asked.

Connie's face lit up. She jumped to her feet and started waving. The car swung into the station and a tall young man jumped out. He had the same wild hair as Connie. *It had to be Connie's brother*, Libby thought.

'Fergus, what are you doing here? Where's Dad?'

'Well, that's a fine welcome.' Fergus laughed, scooping up Connie and spinning her around.

'Put me down!' Connie's face was so red her freckles had almost disappeared.

'Dad's too busy. I hear you've been busy as well! Getting yourself into trouble, according to Mum.'

'Don't be so rude,' laughed Connie. 'You know I'm always on my best behaviour!'

Fergus stuck his tongue out at her. 'Of course, you're Miss Perfect!'



'Oh, do shut up,' Connie shoved him playfully. 'Anyway, let me introduce my very best friend in the whole world, Libby, and her aunt, Miss Mousedale.'

'Hello,' said Fergus. 'So, you must be the famous Libby. I've heard all about you and your mystery solving.'

Libby blushed. She hoped Connie's family didn't think she was some kind of troublemaker.

Last term, in Paris, Libby and Connie had discovered that their former teacher, Miss Browne, had framed Libby's aunt for stealing a valuable brooch. They had uncovered her true identity, found the missing brooch and made sure she'd been captured by the *gendarmes*. But that was weeks ago, and there had only been *one* mystery.

Miss Mousedale shivered and wrapped her cloak around herself tightly. 'We're looking forward to some peace and quiet. We've had enough excitement for one lifetime.'

'You'll be fine at our house, Miss Mousedale,' said

Connie. '*Nothing* ever happens there.'

Libby silently groaned. She wasn't convinced that the countryside would be much fun, but with her mum still away in Peru she didn't have much choice. It had been so kind of Connie's family to invite her and her aunt to stay for the Christmas holidays. It was funny to think of her aunt and Connie's mum having been friends at school. Maybe, once they were back at the travelling school next term, there would be more excitement in store for them.

Libby looked up. 'It looks like it's going to rain.'

The clouds were gathering overhead and she was longing to get inside the car.

'More likely to be snow,' said Miss Mousedale. 'I remember those skies from my childhood and all those times we got snowed in at school.'

'Ooh, maybe we'll have a white Christmas!' Libby smiled.

'If you knew what it was like round here when it snowed, you wouldn't say that,' Connie laughed. 'Let's get inside. I'm freezing.'

Libby and Connie clambered onto the backseat of the ancient, muddy Land Rover.

‘I’m exhausted,’ Miss Mousedale said, getting into the front seat. ‘I barely slept a wink last night!’

Libby and Connie looked at each other and smirked. They knew for a fact that she had snored for most of the night.

‘It won’t be long now,’ said Fergus after a few minutes. ‘It’s just down the track.’

Libby wiped the dirty window with her sleeve. She could see that the long road was lined with towering trees and in the distance she could just make out something large emerging through the mist. *Surely that can’t be Connie’s house? It’s huge,* thought Libby.

Four towers sheltered the house from the bitter wind. Behind was a forest of firs. As they approached, there was no sign of anyone or anything. Libby shivered as she looked up. Now she was nearer, she could see the crumbling brickwork and the patched-up windows, but it still would be the biggest house she’d ever stayed in in her life.

‘Home at last.’ Connie rushed to the door, pushed it open and ran inside. ‘Mum! Dad!’ she shouted. ‘Where are you?’

Libby was hit by a blast of heat from the open fire roaring away in the entrance hall. On either side of it were piles of logs and next to them were wellies in a mix of sizes and colours. She warmed her hands in front of the flames.

‘Connie,’ came a voice from the landing.

Libby looked up at the sweeping staircase. The dark red walls were covered with huge paintings. An older woman was coming down the stairs. She smiled but Libby noticed there were dark circles under her eyes.

‘Mum!’ Connie ran into her arms. ‘Where’s Dad? I thought he was coming to pick us up?’

‘He’s in his study working, I’m afraid. We mustn’t disturb him. He has some important business to attend to.’

Libby could see Connie was upset that her dad hadn’t come out to say hello.

‘It’s so lovely to see you again, Elspeth,’ said Miss Mousedale, hugging Connie’s mum. ‘Thank you for having us both. Especially when things are so...’

Before she could finish her sentence, Connie’s

mum interrupted. 'You must all be starving. How about I get Mrs MacCallum to rustle you up some bacon and eggs?'

Libby wondered what her aunt had been about to say. But the thought of food quickly distracted her.

'Sounds perfect. We haven't eaten a thing in ages, Mrs Montgomery,' she said, winking at Connie.

Despite what they'd eaten on the train, the girls still managed to devour a whole plateful of cooked breakfast. Her aunt and Connie's mum were soon deep in conversation and Libby tried to listen, but Connie and Fergus were drowning them out, shouting about something.

'And do you know where she is now?' asked Connie's mum.

Aunt Agatha looked up. Libby turned away. She didn't want her aunt to realise she'd been eavesdropping. Instead, she tried to join in with Connie and Fergus's conversation. 'What are you two rowing about?'

'This is us being nice,' laughed Connie. 'You should see when we're properly fighting.'

'Connie's a wild one,' said Fergus.

'Am not!' said Connie. And they started arguing again.

Libby looked over at her aunt and Connie's mum, but their conversation had come to an end. She couldn't believe she'd missed it.

'I think I'll have a rest. The journey took it out of me, I'm afraid,' said Miss Mousedale.

'Come on, Libby,' said Connie. 'Let's unpack. I'll show you where you're sleeping, Miss Mousedale. Mum, have you put her in the blue guest room?' She headed up the stairs without waiting.

Connie's mum blushed. 'Agatha, I have put you in the room next to the girls. I'm hoping that's suitable? It seems a waste to open up the east wing for one person. Not that I mean...'. She stopped.

Connie's mum fiddled with her necklace. Her face was turning blotchy. Libby hoped she didn't regret inviting them to stay.

'It's fine, I understand,' Miss Mousedale smiled. 'Best that I'm near these two. You never know what mischief they'll get up to.'

'Indeed. All that trouble in Paris wasn't at all what I expected when I sent Connie to your school. Donal isn't convinced about her going to New York with you next term.'

'That would be a shame,' said Miss Mousedale.

‘But I understand why it might not be appropriate given the circumstances.’

Libby couldn’t believe what she’d just heard. Surely Connie’s mum didn’t really mean she wouldn’t be returning to school? What ‘circumstances’ was her aunt talking about? She couldn’t imagine school without her friend.

‘Libby, let’s go and get changed. Then I can show you around,’ shouted Connie from the top of the stairs. Libby could see she was eager to get away. Bertie and James, Connie’s golden retrievers, came rushing out from the kitchen, galloped down the corridor and ran towards her, barking excitedly around Connie’s feet.

‘Connie, how many times have I told you not to encourage them to go upstairs? They’ll get mud everywhere.’

‘Sorry, Mum. I promise I won’t let them stay long. I’ve missed them.’ Connie dashed across the landing. Libby hurried to catch her up.



Libby stopped at the top of the stairs and took a closer look at the large paintings. It was like being in a museum. There was even a suit of armour stood menacingly in the corner. Her home was tiny in comparison. You could have fitted all of their things into just the landing.

‘Weird to think all the people in these portraits lived here,’ said Connie. ‘But don’t worry, I know that the house *definitely* isn’t haunted!’

Libby hesitated as Connie disappeared down the dark corridor. Despite Connie’s reassurances, she couldn’t help feel as if their ghosts were watching her. If she was going to be staying here, she mustn’t let her imagination get carried away.

She was just about to move again, when she felt a hand on her shoulder and froze.