

THE LUCY WILSON MYSTERIES

THE TWELVE DAYS OF CHRISTMAS



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TEN LORDS ARE LEAPING

*Hark the Herold angels sings, fa-la-la-la-la-la, la-la, la-la.
The old songs really did embody the season, didn't they?
In fact, why don't you head back with me, Lucy, and
Hobo? We can travel back to the long-gone days of
Victorian London.*

Snow and frost firmly settled on the rooftops, as small chimneys filled the air with a thick grey smoke.

The morning streets were beginning to come alive. Bakers, factory workers and all manners of people started about their day.

A policeman left his small, terraced house. His wife kissed him on the cheek and gave him a hand full of money for lunch.

'Be back at home in time for tea. The butcher has kept some lamb by for my sister. She has promised some leftovers so I can do a nice lamb pie.'

'With potatoes?'

'With potatoes!'

He rubbed his cold nose with his hand. His moustache kept his top lip warm but his nose was left to battle the elements. He started to walk down the cobbled street to the cotton mill at the far end. The air was brisk and the wind blew against his face. He clung to his coat to keep warm. Thick material was hard to come by and it was expensive, but having a police uniform meant he was given the thick coat for free. It was one of the perks of the job.

The cobbles underfoot were slippery. He longed for his hot drink at Flora's but that was hours away. He turned down Wickerman Alley, which was dark. Trapped between two tall factories, the only people usually down there were homeless or those doing what they could to make ends meet.

From the light of the factory, a shadow formed against the wall. It scurried forward. The policeman turned but missed it by seconds. Something moved behind him.

'Come on then, who's there!' the policeman ordered. No one replied.

He took a closer look. Some sacks had been left in the alley. They were damp and stunk. He made his way over, not knowing what he might find, or who, or what, was watching him.

He flipped over a bit of burlap, and when he saw

what lurked underneath, it took the life from his soul. A dead woman lay in front of him, covered in blood and teeth marks. He tapped his chest to find his whistle, his hands shaking. Finally finding it, he blew as hard as he could. Over and over again, he blew. Then suddenly all went quiet.

When the other policemen arrived, not only did they find the body of the woman, but of their colleague too.

Lucy and Hobo arrived in the area later that day by a hansom cab. The air hit them as they exited the warm cabin. Lucy wore a long black dress with white and grey fur stole and muffler. Hobo looked dapper in his black suit, although he also wore a tartan cape that made him look like a Scottish superhero.

They paid their fare and were guided by a peeler to the alleyway. By this time, both bodies had been removed and the area was cornered off.

‘Ah, Professor Wilson!’ A portly man with a huge moustache held his hand out to Hobo. ‘I am so glad you have agreed to look at this case, terrible situation. But, if the stories are to be believed, then you are the one to crack it.’

‘Thank you,’ Lucy responded. The man did a double take.

‘Surely not, by Jove, a female detective!’ he exclaimed. ‘Then again it is the 1880s. I suppose we

should all move with the times. Plus, if this job has taught me anything, it's that a woman can get all the gossip she needs.'

'Those are the words of an unmarried gentleman,' Lucy said.

'Ah, now let me guess how you know that. Ha, I have no wedding ring.'

'Oh yes, I hadn't noticed,' Lucy raised an eyebrow.

'Well, anyway. I'm Captain Ireton-Haines. I have a young ward somewhere.' He held out his hand to the correct Professor Wilson.

'Good Morning, Captain, this is my assistant George Kostinen, but you may call him Hobo.' Lucy introduced her friend.

After the pleasantries, Lucy and Hobo were escorted further into the alleyway. The winter sun may have been shining, but the tall buildings around them kept the alley in darkness.

Hobo held his hand to his nose.

'This place smells of ...'

'Shh!' Lucy interrupted.

The captain explained what had happened earlier that day. 'It isn't an isolated incident either, far from it. The young lady was indeed the first female victim. We have ruled out the Ripper as none of the wounds match. No, this lady has been bitten. We assumed it was after the attack, but our surgeon states that these were the cause of death.'

‘The death of PC Bennett was what you normally expect. His body was not covered and his face had the look of sheer terror.’

‘How many incidents have there been?’ Lucy asked.

‘Well, you see there is a slight discrepancy there. Officially there have been two, both paupers such as the lady.’ The captain looked slightly sheepish. His bushy moustache wriggled ashamedly. ‘However, the reason why you have been called here is the background of the unknown victims. Bennett, although an officer of the law, is also an anomaly here. You see the other victims were all lords.’

‘Ah, now we get down to it. The poor can be killed in their hundreds and it’s just an unfortunate unsolved case. But, once a lord is attacked, all of the stops are pulled out,’ Hobo protested. ‘For us to solve the case, we must have the details of all the victims. It’s clear whoever is behind this is not fussed about how much money someone has.’

The captain was just about to retaliate when his ward came to interrupt him.

‘Excuse me, sir, but we’ve found something,’ he said. Lucy recognised him instantly. It was her brother, Nick.

Lucy, Hobo, and the captain followed him further down the alleyway. A small gold button was pressed into the muddy road.

The captain picked it up and rubbed off some of the dirt with his handkerchief.

'Goodness, the pattern is a coat of arms!' he declared. 'Nicholas, get this to the station and make sure it is identified. Professor Wilson?'

While the captain's attention was on the gold button, Lucy had noticed a small stack of newspapers in the corner.

She crouched down, getting the bottom of her dress dirty in the mud. Some of the paper had been chewed in the corner.

'What do you think?' she asked Hobo.

'I think recycling hasn't been invented yet!'

'The bodies were found with bite marks on them. Could it be rats or mice?' Lucy asked.

'Why would they do that? Hordes of rodents don't just attack humans for no reason,' Hobo replied. 'Hang on, that date!'

Hobo picked up the top newspaper. It was dated with the day before yesterday.

'If these were only put here yesterday, then whoever nibbled them must have been here in the last twenty-four hours,' he said. 'Besides, why would they nibble paper if not to make a nest?'

'You mean, they're still around here?'

'Excuse me,' the captain popped his head in between Lucy and Hobo. 'Can we make our way out of the cold? The boy knows where to join us when he

has news. Until then, I would like you to come to the Great Western Royal Hotel. There are some people there that you may find useful in your investigation.'

I'm sorry, this is rather amiss of me. It must be age or too much mulled wine. I must tell you at this point that Lucy has no idea she doesn't belong in Victorian London, far from it. So, although the way she speaks might seem a bit more 'Charles Dickens' than normal, she isn't putting on an act. For her, this is all real.

The journey across the city was perilous. Not only were the streets full of other carriages, horses, and people, but the roads were unkempt. In some parts, the rough roads were so unbalanced that Lucy and Hobo almost bumped heads. Victorian London may have been part of the Industrial Revolution, but that didn't mean the streets were clean, well-made or quiet. Instead of the London buses and cars honking, the sound of horses, shouting and wooden wheels over cobbled roads filled the air. It was daytime, many of the workers were in their factories and yet traders, urchins and shoppers still packed the streets.

The Royal Hotel was located quite close to Paddington Station. Hobo commented on the architecture as they disembarked the hansom. He enjoyed the craftsmanship of new London. The buildings they replaced were drab and had little

beauty. The replacements, including the hotel, had grandeur and fit the new era of Britain. The three of them were escorted up to the main entrance, where the doorman tipped his hat and opened the glass and gold door.

Inside, the décor was rich and fine with gorgeous oil paintings and sculptures. They were escorted to the bar where other gentlemen were sitting talking and drinking. All elegantly dressed with similar physiques to the captain.

‘Ah, I’m sorry but this will be rather awkward.’ The captain looked red-faced. ‘I am afraid that the bar does not permit ladies, perhaps your assistant could join me and report back?’

‘You sent for my help, Captain Ireton-Haines. If you have not found suitable premises to conduct my interviews then I’m afraid I will have to retire back to my home and leave the mystery in your hands.’ Lucy cocked her head to one side and raised the Lethbridge-Stewart eyebrow.

After a brief talk with the hotel manager, Lucy set up a temporary office in one of the larger vacant suites. The captain had arranged it all, and with Hobo’s help, interviews were conducted one by one.

A butler had brought up some tea. For the time of day, it shouldn’t have been Earl Grey but Professor Wilson insisted on something softer. With each

interview, Lucy poured a cup and discussed the incidents of the last few weeks.

‘The first was Lord Daniels. He loved to drink and gamble,’ a thin, tall man with ginger hair explained. ‘At first, people thought it was a gambling debt being resolved, but with no organisations taking responsibility, questions were beginning to be raised.’

‘Old Georgie W was a bit of a theatre nut. He enjoyed the company of the West End actresses and was found dead in a room at Covent Garden. He had just watched a reading of Dicken’s *A Christmas Carol*,’ Sir Reginald explained. ‘Of course, his brother, Albert, met a sticky end just a few days later. A lovely fellow, enjoyed theatrics himself.’

Professor Wilson continued to make notes, her handwriting looked handsome with a quill and ink. She slid the paper to one side as she jotted down all of the details. It didn’t take long before she had questioned all of the gentry from the bar.

Hobo joined her, a little disappointed that the tea had been drunk.

‘So then, Prof, what’s the deal?’ he asked.

‘Apart from all the victims being bitten, they have nothing else in common. They were all attacked in different places. They didn’t have one common interest, and they have no mutual friends of any significance,’ Lucy explained.

'So, it was worthwhile then?'

'Undoubtedly, if anything it helps narrow down the mystery,' Lucy replied.

'How did you work that one out?'

'In good time, in good time...'

Elementary... She should have said elementary!

The two left the hotel moments later when the hansom cab arrived, the fresh snow crushed under the wheels. Hobo jumped into the carriage but Lucy closed the door behind him.

'What are you doing?' Hobo asked.

'I need to see someone to confirm something. You head back to the lodgings and I will see you before dinner,' she replied.

As the short winter day passed into dusk, Lucy had still not arrived back at the house. In fact, it was getting on for nearly 9pm when she eventually returned.

As she entered the hallway, the warmth of the fire hit her frozen cheeks. She rested her stole and muffler on the side table near the front door. The maid instantly took these.

Lucy followed the smell of wassail punch; the aroma of apples and spices flowed through the living room and tempted her to partake.

The small townhouse was lightly decorated for Christmas, with sprigs of holly, mistletoe and paper

decorations hanging from every picture and across the mantelpiece.

Hobo sat next to the fire. In his hand, he was twisting green-dyed goose feathers around small wooden sticks.

‘Where have you been?’ he asked.

‘All will be explained in due course, but for now, we need to retire to our rooms.’ Lucy poured a glass of wassail punch. ‘We have much work to do tomorrow and if my hunch is correct, which I have no reason to doubt, then the case shall be cracked and Christmas can resume.’

She collected a copy of *The Times* and, with glass still in hand, ascended the stairs.

The next morning was reminiscent of the previous. The cold air nipped at the residents of London. Jack Frost had been busy recreating his artwork of the day prior, even painting the cobwebs with dabs of ice.

Professor Wilson woke first, although Hobo was not far behind. Their breakfast was simple but gave them a fair start to the day.

The post arrived, although there was not much in the way of letters. Lucy and Hobo had been in London for a short time and had not yet managed to change their forwarding address.

It was not just the post that arrived with a tapping at the door, Nick joined them for a cup of tea and

some hearty porridge, before hailing all three of them a ride to the Royal Hotel.

The bar was again off limits to Lucy, but the room from the day before was still vacant and she once more set up office there.

Hobo went down to the foyer to greet Captain Ireton-Haines when he arrived.

Professor Wilson took the opportunity to ask Nick to send a few urgent telegrams. He was used to the request from the captain and did so promptly.

The captain took his time to arrive, so much was his delay that other lords and guests had already made their way to the suite, and had nearly enjoyed a whole urn of hot tea and devoured a tray of freshly baked minced pies.

Hobo instantly picked up a fresh china cup and warm pie. The foyer was warm with heat from the fire, but the constant opening of the door gave him a chill that he struggled to remove.

'These are really nice,' he said, forgetting the manners of the gentry and speaking with his mouth full.

'You will not find better pies this side of the Thames.' The captain picked up one too. 'The finest ox tongue is used, but then that is the true spirit of Christmas. We all come together and be thankful for the finer things in life.'

Hobo looked at his minced pie. He knew it had

meat in it but didn't expect it to be tongue. He placed it back down on the plate and made do with his tea.

Of the invited guests, many were from the day before, but there was a small ginger-haired man who was a stranger to all. His hair was scruffy and hidden under a patched-up cap. His coat, although thick, was torn in parts.

'I was asked here to solve a series of crimes that have taken place over the last few weeks,' Lucy explained. 'There are two sides to this case, one side is the accidental murders, while the other is the planned killing of nine lords.'

A small commotion filled the room. Lucy took no notice and continued her report.

'Two of the victims were paupers from the streets and a further victim was a policeman on his rounds,' Lucy continued. 'These are the unfortunate cases. I believe that they were simply in the wrong place at the wrong time. These, I feel, are the ones that the basis of a conviction should concentrate on.'

'I found it hard to conduct any research of my own, but I was inspired by an article I saw a few months ago regarding the training of rats and mice. It's possible to have used the rodents to conduct the attacks and I am quite sure that this is the case.' Lucy poured another cup. 'The question of how the attacks were committed is not the main question here, although I did seek the advice of a specialist

yesterday. All have been confirmed and, Captain Ireton-Haines, you will find that your ward has further evidence in the file given to him earlier.

‘Our concentration should therefore be on the reasons these attacks were carried out.’ Lucy stopped briefly to nibble on a biscuit. ‘This is the reason I have brought you all here today. Your telegrams explained this, although what they didn’t explain is one of you will not leave the hotel a free man. I checked the various links between the victims and there were next to none. It wasn’t until the early hours of the morning that something occurred to me. The nine victims with titles all owned land on the banks of the Thames. This didn’t strike me as odd at first, for many of those here own land or buildings in the capital.’

‘Some of you may be sceptical and may also position my reasonings as mere fanciful works of fiction, but I assure you they are all based on fact.’ Lucy placed down the cup. ‘Nearly six weeks ago, a scatter of explosions were seen in the London sky. Local newspapers reported on it. It was so unusual that the nibbled papers found in the alleyway yesterday were still reporting it. These explosions were actually the debris of an alien craft. Aboard that craft, a savage race of aliens was heading to this planet, but unfortunately, our atmosphere was too great and the ship disintegrated.

'Remains of the ship were scattered across the embankment of the Thames. More importantly, ten pieces were scattered across ten buildings. Each of the lords refused to return the items, assuming they held great value. Thus, it was at very last resort that the surviving creature put together a plan.

'Mr Dorney, I think you have some explaining to do,' Lucy said to the ginger-haired man at the back. As she called him out, his form morphed into a rodent physique. Some of the lords gasped as the man scurried around the floor. His hands grew into long-nailed claws, and a tail burst from his coattails and lay like a snake across the floor.

The lords jumped up onto their chairs, scared of being attacked or killed.

Dorney pounced at Lucy.

'All I wanted was to get off this smog-ridden planet, but those selfish men saw nothing but profit from the wreckage of my ship. It was the only way to steal it back,' he spat.

Lucy's long dress made it difficult to move, but she managed to leap up onto the bed.

Hobo, as part of a predetermined plan, threw a large net over to Nick.

The two of them ran towards the creature and captured it. Dorney tried his best to escape, he clawed at the net, tried to nibble through its wire ropes. He even tried to scratch Nick.

Lucy joined in and between the three of them, they managed to get the creature under control.

It was some days later, on the 23rd of December that Lucy next met Nick. He had been awarded for his help in the capture of the Rodent Man of London.

He brought a farewell gift to Lucy, a locket. Inside the small gold button with the coat of arms was set into one half.

‘Thank you,’ she said. ‘It’s weird, but London almost feels like my home, or at least somewhere I once lived. Maybe in a past life? But you also look familiar, I cannot say how the universe works, but I know that we are destined to be more than mere acquaintances. I see you as a brother for some strange reason, but I cannot say why.’

Nick gave her a confused glance.

She said her goodbyes and headed back to her true home, Ogmores-by-Sea. As the cab began its lengthy journey, it started to warp into various shapes.

Lucy could feel herself being pulled into her seat, sinking through the leather cushions into the unknown.

To be continued in Nine Ladies Dancing...

Available from Candy Jar

**The Mystery of Lucy Wilson: Apocalypse Tomorrow
by Steven Walton and Shaun Russell**

Lucy Wilson's adventures in time have taken her to some strange places. Dangerous places, faraway places... But none so strange and alien as where she finds herself now... The 1990s.

Pokémon battle in the schoolyards. Tamagotchi roam the streets. And a giant spider from a ruined future looks to spark an apocalypse that, technically, has already happened.

Timelines converge and realities shattered as Lucy's exile in time reaches its epic climax. And in the end, it all comes down to one question: who's better, 2Unlimited or Adamski?



Available from Candy Jar

**The Lucy Wilson Mysteries:
The Best Christmas Ever by Chris Lynch**

Christmas is the busiest time of the year, but this never seems to be a problem for the monsters and aliens that visit Lucy Wilson over the festive period!

Alongside her best friend Hobo, Lucy discovers one of her grandad's old secrets, investigates a creepy haunted mansion, and gets a visit from a mysterious goatman called Krampus, who takes bad children away.

This is a collection of three stories set over the Christmases of 2018, 2019 and 2020. Defending Earth doesn't stop for anything, not even Christmas! But which Christmas is the best one ever?





Listen to the Spotify Christmas list. Updated daily.

