

THE LUCY WILSON MYSTERIES

THE LLANFAIRFACH REBELLION



SUE HAMPTON

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The Lucy Wilson Mysteries

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2019.

It was the start of the Easter holidays and Lucy and Hobo were staying at her brother's house in London. That first morning Lucy overslept and didn't want to open her eyes because Grandad's face was there in her mind. His lips moved as if there was something he needed to tell her, but all she heard was silence. Was it a dream or a warning? She told herself to wake up fast.

Making her way into the kitchen, she found little Hannah's mouth full of toast and Conall pouring coffee. Hobo had his smooth head down, studying the crossword in Conall's paper.

He looked up and grinned. 'We were beginning to think you'd been abducted by aliens.' Then, triumphantly filling in the final clue, he flicked to the front page.

'Don't tell me what's happening in the world,' said Lucy, who had a feeling that the day might turn out to be the kind no one could have seen coming, not even an Earth protector with her CV. 'I don't think I want to know.'

Conall hugged her. She knew he dreamed about Grandad too.

'What's the plan?' Lucy asked, ruffling Hannah's hair. 'Well, we'll need to avoid the protest for sure.'

‘Protest?’ repeated Lucy. There always seemed to be a march about something these days, and she totally understood why.

Hobo looked up at her with his surely-everyone-knows-that face.

‘Climate activists have occupied five key sites,’ Conall explained, ‘including Oxford Circus and Waterloo Bridge.’

‘They call it a rebellion,’ commented Hobo, ‘or uprising.’

‘It’s meant to last through Easter weekend – or until the police arrest them all,’ said Conall. ‘I thought we’d be safe in Kew Gardens.’

Hobo began listing the Latin names of plants that should be flowering at Easter, but Lucy wasn’t listening.

‘I’d rather go to Waterloo Bridge,’ she said.

She knew Mum was worried about climate change. She said the media should call it an emergency. So Lucy didn’t think Mum would mind too much.

‘Just me and Hobo,’ she persisted. ‘Hobo’s seriously responsible. He’s almost old enough to get married!’

‘Luce,’ Hobo said, ‘you do remember what my mother does for a living?’

‘I bet loads of the cops are on the protestors’ side. And we’ll just check it out. Stand up and be

counted. It's our future. We can be back in time for Hannah's tea.'

'I've never been to a protest,' said Hobo. 'But I do think this one is overdue. I read the science; it's undeniable.'

'See,' Lucy said to Conall, 'I'll be in the hands of a virtual professor! Con, come on – we've seen off psychotic clowns, Bandrils, demons from the fifty-first century, and outwitted the Great Intelligence. Aliens decompose at the sight of us! We'll be totally fine...'

On the tube, Lucy felt triumphant and just a bit excited. She was careful not to clonk anyone with her home-made placard cut from the side of a cardboard box. SAVE OUR PLANET, it said – because none of the various aliens she'd encountered, from any of the darkest corners of the unknown universe, had a home as beautiful as Earth. There was no viable alternative. Conall didn't think sitting in the road was the right way to make your voice heard, but when she'd put him on the spot he had no better ideas. Hobo was quiet. She supposed he was thinking deep thoughts. It was always good having him on side.

Emerging at Waterloo Station, Lucy was surprised by a burst of sudden sun and a young blonde woman in a pink jumpsuit who thrust a

bottle of 'Free sunblock!' at her.

Then, out of nowhere, a boy wearing a backpack and riding a skateboard came crashing around the corner and knocked her to the ground. Slightly winded, Lucy pulled herself back up and chased after Hobo.

'Wait for me.'

Hobo was waiting for her further down the road. He pulled his hood up against the sharp wind. 'You okay?' he asked.

'Yeah, no bones broken.'

Soon they arrived at the bridge, which was closed to traffic. Beside the police sign, a line of protestors held a long banner, singing, *'Never doubt that a small group of people can change the world. Indeed it is the only thing that ever has.'*

The tune was more churchy than shouty, but Lucy told Hobo she liked the words.

'A quote from Margaret Mead,' said Hobo. 'American anthropologist. I like it too.'

Then the song changed to something more upbeat. *'People gonna rise like water...'* Lucy's head nodded to the rhythm and her feet started shuffling. She ignored Hobo's what-are-you-doing face and smoothed the fluorescent green sunblock on her bare arms, feeling it soak straight in. There were plenty of police around, but they mostly just

seemed to be watching the protest. Lucy noticed a few vans ready and waiting. She glimpsed a swirl of black behind one of them. It wasn't a uniform. Someone dressed as the Grim Reaper held a scythe in the air and seemed to be waving it at her, someone with a hidden face... Or no face at all? It was a great costume!

Suddenly she felt a strong urge to kick over the yellow police sign that said the road was closed. Her leg twitched forward as if someone had tested her reflex, but somehow she kept it under control, clenching her muscles and focusing hard on walking past the sign without flattening it. Breathing out, she realised she'd come close to being the first arrest of the day.

'What's with the silly walk?' Hobo asked.

'Cramp,' Lucy said, frowning. 'You might have to keep me under control.'

'So what's new?'

Walking on, she realised the boring, grey bridge was now a garden. Among the fluttering banners and flags, plants of all sizes had been positioned. Down the middle of what used to be the road was an avenue of trees. On both sides were tents for food and rest and families, but the cycle lanes were clear. A lorry powered by solar panels made a stage. Lucy had never been anywhere so colourful.

'Great vibe,' she remarked to Hobo.

‘Said the hippie.’ He grinned.

Just cos you haven’t got the hair for it, baldy. The words were trying so hard to tumble out that she had to bite her lip and swallow at the same time. Where did they come from?

Hobo accepted the offer of a mug of tea from an elderly woman who introduced herself as Josephine. She wanted to know where they were from.

Mind your own business. Lucy’s face had reshaped itself to match the words without her even thinking, and however hard she tried to pull it into a smile, she was afraid it looked sour. Leaving Hobo chatting and drinking, she walked away fast, stopping where she could lean over and look down on the Thames. She remembered *what a wuss* Hobo had been once, climbing down a fire escape at a TV studio. She wondered why she hung around with a *weird lump* like him.

The river below had the dull sheen of old metal. She could imagine how much fun it would be to jump down, down, deep... It couldn’t be too hard to climb over the railing. She was brave enough; she had no fear. But as soon as she began she felt a hand on her arm.

‘Not a good idea,’ said a police officer.

She shrugged him off. *Fatty. Who ate all the pies?*

‘Steady on,’ said the officer. ‘We’ve got enough

trouble here without fishing people out of the Thames.'

Lucy was thinking *how stupid* he was when she heard her name. Hobo was there to *stick his oar in*.

'What's going on?' Hobo asked, once the police officer had moved on.

'Leave me alone, Hobo, all right?'

Hobo was staring at her as if she was an anagram he couldn't solve. Lucy didn't like it much. Realising she needed more sunblock, she began to rub it in.

'Lucy, let me see...' Hobo reached for the tube, but she snatched it away and zipped it up in her backpack.

'Get your own.'

'I have my own, and I'll use it if the temperature reaches double figures.'

Lucy spun around. Behind them something was happening, and Lucy didn't want to miss it. The crowd knew. The drums spelt it out. Lucy wove her way through and saw at least a dozen police officers advancing. Behind what she might call the front garden, protestors sat on the ground. They didn't seem afraid.

'Lucy!' cried Hobo, back at her side again.

Who made you my minder? Lucy thought.

Lucy sat down with a couple of student types Nick's age. They smiled and asked if she was all

right, and was she really... something she didn't hear. Arrestable? Lucy looked straight ahead as protestors were picked off and carried away. The police boots looked bigger and heavier as they approached. If the nearest came any closer his ankles would be close enough to bite. But she needed more sunblock first.

'Let me see that.' Hobo reached for the tube again.

'No...'

But he'd grabbed it, taken it. 'No!' she yelled, her cry swallowed by the drums. She had to get it back.

'You're obstructing the road...' began the police officer, crouching down.

Not anymore! Lucy sprang up and chased after Hobo, who was running now, making her miss the fun. *I hate you, Hobo! I hate you!*

He had longer legs but they both knew she was faster. So why was he pulling away, heading towards the big old church with food stalls outside? Why were her legs so weak? Dimly she saw a young protestor carried away by four officers, his arms spread and his body limp. And a grandma with white hair and a small, serious smile deposited beside one of the vans.

'WE-LOVE-YOU!' called the crowd.

Lucy's world wavered. Rippling black silk filled her mind. She knew she was going to faint, but

Hobo was there to catch her.

At the church, the protestors were allowed to use the facilities. Lucy washed her face and arms in the sink. She had to admit it helped wake her up a bit.

‘I’m in the loo!’ Hobo shouted as she emerged. She could hear the fan dryer. But she wasn’t expecting him to open the door to the cubicle and point to the washbasin, where a thick, treacly liquid bubbled and spat.

‘Ew, that’s disgusting...’

‘It’s your sunblock. I heated it and squeezed it out – quite a job. Look closer, Lucy. But don’t touch.’

The way the liquid was squirming made her stomach heave. She didn’t want to look too closely, but there were little maggots with tiny gnashing teeth.

‘It’s alive.’ Her voice sounded flat.

‘Dead right. And it got inside you.’ Hobo ran water on it and poked it with a loo brush until it glugged away down the drain.

Lucy wished he wouldn’t overreact like this.

Hobo held her shoulders and looked right into her eyes; his were very blue. ‘Lucy, look at me. Remember who you are.’

Lucy lurched past him and vomited into the wash basin. It was rather explosive.

‘Good!’ he cried. ‘Excellent. That’ll help...’

‘Thanks for your sympathy.’ Lucy looked at herself in the mirror and realised she didn’t know who she’d been. It was as if she’d been occupied, like the bridge. ‘I’m back.’

Hobo nodded. ‘So who are you? Say it loud and clear, Lucy. Whoever, whatever is attacking you needs reminding who they’re dealing with.’

‘I’m Lucy Wilson.’

‘And she’s a Lethbridge-Stewart too!’ roared Hobo. ‘So give it up now! You’ve got NO chance!’

Not for the first time, Lucy wondered how she’d cope with any of this without Hobo. Her life was so serious now; days like this were her new normal. She hugged him, just for a second, and remembered him saying once that if he ever had a girlfriend she’d have to be as ‘incredible’ as her.

‘Is it the...?’ She didn’t like to name it, but she couldn’t remember any of the anagrams it had used to fool them before. ‘The Great Intelligence?’

Hobo shrugged. ‘Luce, we’ve met loads of aliens since the Great Intelligence. It could be any one of them. Or something worse.’

‘Worse?’ asked Lucy.

‘Yes, somebody using alien tech to hijack the protest to make sure it fails.’

‘That’s terrible. These people are trying to save the planet.’

‘But, Luce, some people don’t want to save the

planet. There's no profit in it.'

Hobo pulled out his phone and flicked through a few pages on the internet. 'This sunblock is made in Wales by Llanfairfach Pharmaceuticals. It's been banned in Europe.'

'What can we do?'

'Well, you've had a wash and you're okay. I'll put something on Twitter to warn people.'

Lucy quickly fished in her pocket for her phone and sent a text.

Anne, evil maggots in Llanfairfach
Pharmaceuticals sunblock.
Customer recall advised. Lucy x

'You realise you put a kiss at the end?' said Hobo.

Oops, thought Lucy, feeling quite embarrassed.
'I don't have a maggot emoji.'

They both laughed.

'Come on, Lucy. I'm sure Anne will sort it. Let's get out of here before more trouble kicks off.'

Back out on the street, Lucy looked back at the bridge and saw a couple of police vans filled with arrested protestors. Lucy's legs felt stronger now, but as they stood at the crossing, she realised something else was wrong. The ring she wore on a string around her neck had gone. She panicked. *No*

more time travel. She had only started getting used to it.

‘I’ve lost my ring!’ said Lucy. ‘Someone must have snatched it.’

‘Let’s retrace your steps,’ said Hobo.

For the next half hour they searched everywhere. And found nothing!

Soon they headed back to the bridge, past the vans, towards the banner and the flowers. People were still sitting on the ground, but the police numbers had dropped and the singing was wistful. Perhaps the arrests were over for now.

Lucy stopped suddenly, turned to Hobo and pointed over his shoulder. ‘Skateboard boy!’

On the other side of the bridge, a boy on a skateboard zipped past. It was the same boy that had knocked her over earlier. He was wearing Lucy’s ring around his neck.

‘Hey! Stop thief!’ shouted Lucy. She watched as the boy was grabbed by his backpack, thrown to the floor, and unceremoniously marched away by police officers. ‘He’s got my ring!’ she hollered.

A policeman walked towards her with something in the palm of his hand.

‘That’s my ring, officer,’ she cried.

The police man tightened her ring in his fist and held it like a punch he was about to throw. Lucy

hoped Hobo was memorising the number on his uniform.

‘Something tells me you couldn’t resist that free sunblock, officer.’

‘Something tells me you’re under arrest, girly. Room for a pipsqueak in the van.’

‘Under what power?’ demanded Hobo.

‘A power beyond anything you could guess, slaphead.’

Lucy winced. ‘I bet you’re really a decent guy.’

‘Is that right, missie?’ He was snarling now.

Where would he have applied the sunblock? His big body was thickly layered apart from his head.

Lucy pulled out her aluminium water bottle and threw the contents over his head. Water dripped down the back of his neck where the skin was pink.

‘To keep you cool!’

Hobo smiled his rather nervous approval. But would it be enough? For a moment the sergeant seemed possessed by a kind of quivering rage that made his eyes bulge. As he shook off the water, like a dog after a swim, something hit the ground and spun, glinting. Lucy picked it up and slipped it back around her neck.

Hobo grabbed her arm. ‘Come on, Lucy!’

Lucy began her briskest walk but couldn’t help turning her head – to see the police officer looking dazed and wiping his beard. His eyes no longer

burned, and when a child offered him a flower, he stooped down and took it with a smile.

Closer to the station, they stopped and looked back. She could tell Hobo would like to have stayed. Part of her wanted to be carried away to a police cell if it would help. But not today.

‘Why is it always me they’re after?’ she murmured, as they mounted the steps and found their tickets.

They both knew why.

‘Do you think everything will be all right now? Will the protest work?’

‘I don’t know,’ Hobo said and sighed.

They boarded the train and as the door shut behind them they watched as the Grim Reaper rolled back his black sleeve and rubbed sunblock into his arm.

THE LUCY WILSON MYSTERIES

CURSE OF THE MIRROR CLOWNS

