

## CHAPTER 1

It doesn't take an hour to build a snowman. That's how long Hattie Lock had been out.

When she first suggested she wanted to build a snowman, her mother had been reticent. Hattie was prone to getting a cold. When she did get one, it lasted weeks; her mother knew that. Hattie was insistent however, saying that it hardly ever snowed, and explaining how unfair it was. She started to stamp her feet, reaching up to strike the table, and in the end her mother capitulated.

Fifteen minutes she said. Hattie protested. No one could build a snowman in fifteen minutes. Hattie's mother looked at her.

Hattie was hardly large, only three feet tall. She had a point; it would take her more than fifteen minutes to build a snowman.

Her mother looked through the window. Some of Hattie's friends were playing outside – small figures running in the snow, throwing projectiles at one another, squealing with delight as they hit their friends, and then ducking, narrowly missing the snowballs thrown in reply.

“OK, half an hour then, but no longer.”

Hattie smiled and ran to get her coat.

“Make sure you wrap up warm,” her mother continued. “And take your gloves and your hat.”

“But I don't like the hat,” a voice said, from the hall. “It makes me feel itchy. It's not good.”

“How do you know what's good for you?” her mother replied.

She walked into the hall to see her daughter putting on her shoes, stamping them into place. Hattie put on her gloves and was about to head to the door, without her hat.

“Hat I said. Put on your hat.”

Hattie stopped by the door but did not look back. She knew what was coming. Her mother went to the cloakroom, picked up a hat and put it firmly on to Hattie’s head, pulling it down over her ears.

Hattie immediately reached for it, adjusting it, and stretched for the front door lock.



That had all been an hour ago, and now Mrs Lock was going to retrieve her daughter – the snowman-builder.

She put on her shoes and went to the front door. The walkway outside was cold. The whole council block was cold – a coldness that somehow matched the grey of the surrounding buildings. One could turn 360 degrees and all one would see was grey. Grey was the colour of this part of London.

She was hit by a gust of cold air. It made her shiver, and she wondered how her daughter could possibly have survived out here for an hour.

The snow in front of her had been disturbed, revealing the path her daughter had taken. Mrs Lock followed it around the building. There it joined the paths of other small feet – Hattie’s friends, Mrs Lock assumed.

She could no longer see the children who had been playing earlier. Funny that. When had they gone inside? She could see evidence of their presence though – deep

tracks, dug into the snow – attempts at making snowmen, one of which was only half-complete.

Moira Lock called out to her daughter.

There was no reply.

Another gust of wind blew through the grey courtyard, forcing her to cover her face. She should have come out with a coat, she realized that now. Never mind. She would only be out here a few minutes, then she and her daughter would be back in doors.

She would tell Hattie off, she knew that for sure. She'd said half-an-hour, and her daughter had disobeyed her.

Mrs Lock picked up her pace. She thought about the scolding she would soon be giving out. "Hattie!" she called out. "Hattie! Where are you?"

No reply.

In the distance a car drove past, cautiously making its way along, before turning off on to the main road.

"Hattie! We said half an hour. It's time to come in." Moira Lock stopped, waiting for the reply.

She rounded another corner and found she was near the lockups. "Hattie! Are you down there?"

Her daughter wasn't allowed down there by herself as she was well aware. Moira Lock could see some tracks in the snow, small tracks, steady tracks. She knew, somehow she instinctively knew, that they were those of her daughter.

She picked up her pace, annoyed with herself for having let her daughter out. The wind blew strongly again. She shivered, pulling her arms around her.

The snow in the lockups was crisp and clean; no one had taken their cars out. She looked about for signs of the snowman her daughter was supposed to be building. Nothing.

Even the kids who had been throwing snowballs hadn't come this way. They had probably obeyed their parents, Mrs Lock thought – not going where they shouldn't go – unlike her daughter. She scowled. Called out her daughter's name again. That was when she heard something.

At first she thought it was a rattling sound. When she heard it again, she listened carefully. There was a scrabbling ... a scratching. For a second, she thought it sounded familiar.

She turned around, listening for the sound again. It was harder to hear this time. The wind had picked up; she waited for it to subside and called out. The scrabbling sound repeated itself and Mrs Lock remembered what it reminded her of: a bird trapped in a chimney.

It had happened that autumn, at her mother's house. A bird had flown into the chimney and had been unable to get out. The noises it had made had attracted everyone's attention. Hattie had been scared at first but then fascinated, when her mother and her grandmother had explained what it was. It was her grandfather who had gained access to the chimney and freed the trapped creature.

Mrs Lock was now slightly anxious. She called out for her daughter and listened as the scrabbling sound repeated itself. She knew where it was: it was coming from in between the lockups.

She walked along the row of garages, looking to see if any were open. They were all shut and for the most part covered over with snow that had drifted.

The lockups were built as one complete unit, each one sectioned off from the next by a dividing wall. Halfway along the road the unit stopped. A second unit began, again partitioned by small internal walls. Mrs Lock reached the beginning of the second unit and stopped. She turned to face the lockups and was shocked by what she saw.

There was her daughter, looking away from her. She was compressed into the small gap between the first and second units.

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The gap couldn't have been more than four inches wide, but Hattie had managed to squeeze herself into it, and was now trapped. This terrified her mother, but what terrified her more was the fact that her daughter had managed to squeeze herself into such an impossibly small space.

She could make out her daughter's coat and her hat, but she couldn't see her face. Hattie's head was turned, facing the opposite way, and the gap was not wide enough for her to turn it back.

Mrs Lock stepped up to the gap and called out anxiously. "Hattie. Hattie. Are you OK?"

There was a small mumbling sound.

"Mummy," said a voice, eventually. "Mummy. I'm stuck. I can't get out."

"Hattie. Oh, Hattie; what are you doing in there?"

"I was trying to get through – a short cut. We were playing hide and seek. It was only a short cut, Mummy."

"Oh, Hattie." Mrs Lock looked up and down the road. Back at her daughter.

“It’s cold, Mummy, it’s cold. Get me out.”

Mrs Lock put her hand into the gap. She reached all the way down, as far as she possibly could, until her shoulder met the wall, stopping her from reaching any further. It still wasn’t far enough. Her daughter had managed to wedge herself several feet in.

“Mummy,” said the small voice, again. “I’m cold. I want to get out, Mummy.”

“Hattie, try and reach me. Hold out your arm.”

Hattie was unable to see her mother. She raised her hand, pointing it in the direction the voice was coming from. It still wasn’t enough. Her mother couldn’t reach her.

Mrs Lock stretched more, her shoulder pushing against the concrete side of the lockups. “I’m trying, Hattie. I’m trying to reach you. Stretch a bit more.”

Hattie extended her arm as far as she could reach.

“It’s cold, Mummy. I can’t feel my feet.”

“I know, Hattie. I know,” said a desperate voice.

Mrs Lock realized she wasn’t going to be able to reach her daughter. She had to get help. Perhaps if she got something from the flat – something she could extend into the gap, so that her daughter could grab hold of it.

“Stay there, Hattie. I’ll be back soon. Mummy will be back in a moment.”

“Where are you going?”

“I’m going to get some help. I’ll be back soon. Stay there.”

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Moira Lock ran back to the flat, ignoring the snow that slowed her down. She called 999 and ten minutes later, a fire crew arrived, along with an ambulance.

The officer in charge introduced himself as Greg Lutenzing. As his fellow officers prepared themselves, he leaned into the gap, just as Moira Lock had done.

“Hattie,” he called. “Hattie, can you hear me?”

A hesitant voice replied, “Yes.”

“It’s OK, Hattie. My name is Greg. Your mum called us. We’re here to help you – to get you out.

“OK, Hattie. The first thing I need to know is, can you move at all?”

“I can move my arms,” replied the quiet voice.

“OK. Now I’m reaching my hand in. Stretch out your hand. See if you can touch my fingers.” Hattie did as she was told. The fireman leant all the way in, and waved his fingers, trying to touch those of the small girl.

After several minutes he sighed and pulled himself back.

“OK, Hattie. Stay put. We’re going to try and do this another way. – Just stay calm.”

Lutenzing turned to Mrs Lock. “We’re going to try and reach in there with something. See if we can pull her out. She may not be able to move herself, but we might be able to pull her out.”

“Do be careful,” said Mrs Lock. “She’s only small.”

“I know,” said Lutenzing. “We understand.... Do you know how long she’s been in there?”

“Over an hour now, possibly an hour and a half.”

From the reaction on the fireman’s face, Mrs Lock knew this wasn’t the answer he wanted to hear.

“Here you go,” said another fireman, handing Lutenzing something.

“Thanks, Roy.” He had been handed a pole with which he reached into the gap, pointing it towards Hattie. “OK, Hattie,” he said, “I’m extending a pole towards you. See if you can grab it.”

Hattie reached out her arm and felt the pole. She was wearing gloves and her grip on it wasn’t strong. The moment Lutenzing pulled the pole, it came away from Hattie’s grasp.

“This isn’t going to work, Roy,” said Lutenzing, turning back to the fireman. The fireman looked at the next lockup.

“Greg, we could just break into this thing and go through the wall.” His voice dipped. “That kid isn’t going to have much longer. In this cold, we’ve got to think about hypothermia.”

Lutenzing looked at the lockup. It had wooden doors secured by a solid bolt. He looked at Mrs Lock. “Do you know who this one belongs to?”

“That’s Mr Tranmore’s. He lives in the same block as me.” She pointed to the block of flats. “I don’t think he’s in though.”

“That doesn’t matter.” Lutenzing looked at the block of flats. He wasn’t going to trudge to the top and knock on a door, just to see if the guy was in. “Roy, bring the bolt-cutters and two hammers.”

The second fireman went to the engine and returned with a pair of bolt-cutters. He used them to cut through the lock. The fireman then opened the wooden doors of the lockup and looked in.

There was no car inside, just boxes covered in tarpaulin. “OK,” said Lutenzing. “Measure the gap, to see how far down she is, and mark it off on the inside wall.” A third fireman got to work doing this. When he had finished, there was a mark on the



inside wall of the lockup. This was the spot they were going to break through, in order to reach Hattie.

“I suggest you talk to her, Mrs Lock,” said Lutenzing. “Reassure her that everything will be fine, and that we’ll get to her soon.”

Moira Lock did as she had been instructed and then stood back, while two firemen began to strike the wall with sledgehammers. The first blow went straight through and the second expanded the gap. By the time they had struck the wall half a dozen times, a hole had been made that was large enough to look through.

Hattie realized what was going on and remained still. The firemen continued to strike the wall and it broke away quicker, the hole becoming larger with every blow. “That’ll do,” said Lutenzing, after another minute.

He leant through the hole and looked up to see Hattie. “OK, I’m just going to reach out and grab you. We’ll have you out of there soon.”

Hattie remained quiet and felt something tugging at her coat. An arm went round her legs and she found herself being pulled towards the hole in the wall. The hole was so large they were able to bring her through almost standing up. The moment they had her, two paramedics rushed forward and put a blanket around her. They took her towards their ambulance and Moira Lock followed, stroking her daughter’s hair.

Lutenzing turned to his colleague and looked at the hole in the wall. “One of us has got to go up, and tell the guy who owns this what we’ve done.”

His colleague grinned. “Flip you for it.” He reached into a pocket, produced a coin and flipped it. As it came down, he failed to catch it. It hit the floor of the lockup. He bent down to pick it up, and that was when he noticed something. Another presence.

“Greg. There’s something down here.”

Greg looked at his friend. He was peering under a section of the tarpaulin. Greg Lutenzing grabbed the edge of the tarpaulin and pulled it back.

What was revealed made the second fireman pull his head back quickly.

“Jesus Christ!”

Lutenzing stared. He was older, and the more experienced of the two. He had seen a lot more in twenty years’ service – a lot more filth and degradation, sheer horror and misery. The sight he saw didn’t put him off; rather, it surprised him.

He wasn’t sure he had seen anything quite like this. For what lay before him looked like a body. But it was an old body – dried out and desiccated. What was most apparent, however, was that it had been cocooned.

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