



WELBECK
FLAME

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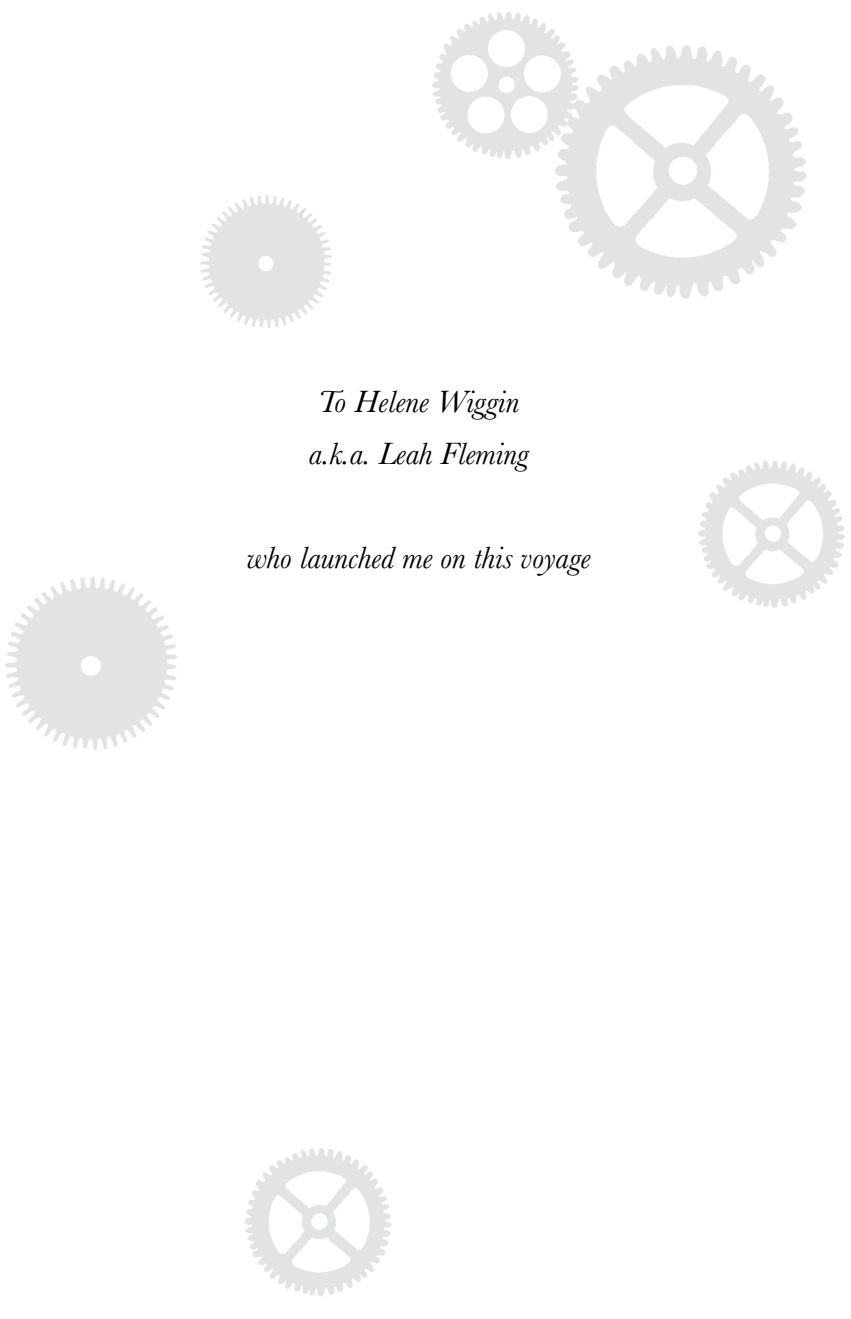
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The page is decorated with several light gray gear icons of various sizes and designs. In the top right, there is a large gear with four spokes and a smaller gear with four circular cutouts. In the middle left, there is a small gear with a central dot. In the middle right, there is a gear with four spokes. In the bottom left, there is a large gear with a central dot. In the bottom center, there is a gear with four spokes. In the bottom right, there is a gear with four spokes.

*To Helene Wiggin
a.k.a. Leah Fleming*

who launched me on this voyage

Dear Reader,

Thank you very much for taking the Time to read this book about Time. And because you are smart enough to read books, you will be smart enough to know that Time works backwards as well as forwards...

*2021, England, London
Bennett.A.M*

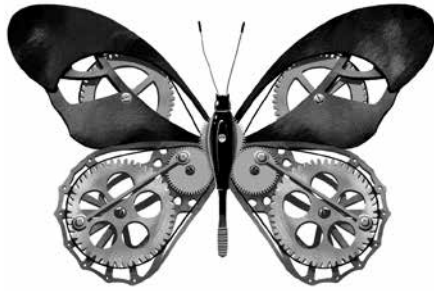
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LONDON

15 JANUARY 1894





15 JANUARY 1894

10 a.m.

Luna thought that an afternoon at her aunt's butterfly club would be the most deathly boring thing in the world.

She had only been living with her aunt for a month and was already sick of butterflies. Aunt Grace collected them, and they were all over the house, skewered with little pins to little cards, their bright wings spread, never to fly again. Colourful, pathetic and very, very dead.

Sometimes she would look at their names, written underneath in neat calligraphy – Rajah Brooke's Birdwing, the Duke of Burgundy, the Great Purple Emperor. They seemed such romantic titles to end in such a sad fate. They should be fluttering around in a meadow somewhere, not imprisoned in this tall, dark house.

Luna sometimes thought of herself as one of them. She had everything she wanted: enough to eat and drink, a nice room of her own and all the pretty gowns she wanted, in bright colours just like the butterflies. But she was pinned up in the tall, dark house too. The house, in a very smart part of Kensington (which was a very smart part of London), somehow seemed taller and skinnier than any in the row. In fact, it looked as stretched as she did.

The smart and skinny house did have a good-sized garden, but Luna was discouraged from playing in it, in case she was 'seen'. It was never explained to her whose gaze she was supposed to be avoiding. She was encouraged to stay indoors and read, but Aunt Grace's books weren't the sort of books with pictures or conversations. They were all books with titles like: *On the Applications of Non-Euclidean Geometry to the Theory of Quadratic Forms*. And who wants to read a book called *that*?

The truth was that Luna Goodhart would have read all the books in the library, however boring they were, if one of them could have told her what had happened to Papa. He'd disappeared very suddenly, with no explanation. Aunt Grace, looking enough like Papa for Luna to trust her at once, had not exactly explained when she'd turned up that Thursday at Luna's house to take her niece home

to live with her. ‘Your father’s on another plane,’ she’d said briskly, holding out her gloved hand, and would not say more, no matter how many times Luna asked. Soon, Luna stopped asking, in case she was told what she feared to be the truth.

That ‘on another plane’ was what grown-ups said when somebody was dead.

It had always been just Luna and Papa, in the little house in Greenwich Park, in the shadow of the Royal Observatory. Papa had given Luna everything, including her strange name, and now he was gone. Luna would spend many moments each day trying to remember the details of his face, the trick of his speech, so terrified was she of forgetting him even a little bit. Sometimes, Luna would sing her father’s favourite song in an attempt to feel closer to him. It was called *Yesterday* and he used to sing it all the time. Sang it, hummed it, whistled it. Luna didn’t know where her father had heard the song – probably at the music hall – but she had never heard anyone else sing it, so it seemed peculiarly his. Now Papa had disappeared, she certainly longed for yesterday. He’d gone without notice, gone without even a note. In the past, even when he’d had to go to his tailor or his attorney, he’d left little notes for her, always signed in the same way.

Yours until the end of time, Papa x

So Luna didn't want to be rude to Aunt Grace when she called that it was time to leave for an afternoon at the Butterfly Club, because Papa's sister was all the family Luna had left. But she *definitely* didn't want to go. Luna's one day of freedom was every Thursday, regular as clockwork, when her aunt was out all afternoon and evening at her butterfly club.

Luna went into the hallway. Aunt Grace was putting on her gloves, and, in doing so, covering up one of the most interesting things about her.

For Aunt Grace had a tattoo on her left wrist. The mark was so small and discreet that at first Luna had thought it a birthmark or a bruise. But it was neither. Luna had had the opportunity to see the thing properly at dinner, when Aunt Grace had passed the salt. It was a beautifully inked tattoo of a butterfly, but not a butterfly like the ones that hung on the walls of the house. It was a clockwork butterfly made up of little cogs and spindles and wheels, like the things that you'd find in the belly of a timepiece.

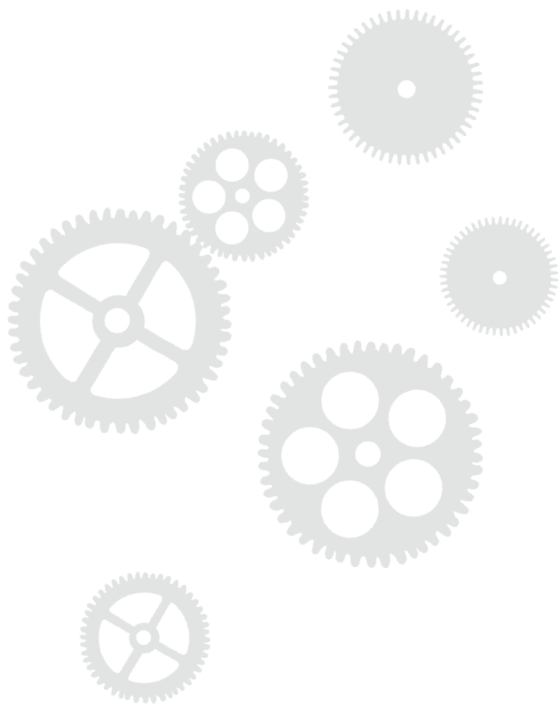
Aunt Grace turned to adjust her hat in the looking-glass, tucking in a stray lock of auburn hair. Auburn was that kind of red that you couldn't really call ginger but

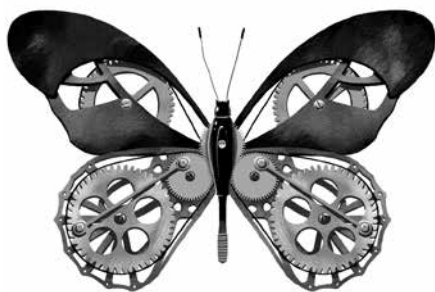
was much darker, the colour of port wine. Aunt Grace was beautiful, what with the auburn hair and everything, but she had jade-green eyes of the same shade as one of the butterflies on the wall, the one called the Green Hairstreak, and they made her look slightly scary. Because of the eyes it was much easier to talk to her when she wasn't looking directly at you. So while her aunt was looking in the looking-glass Luna took her chance and said, '*Must* I come to the Butterfly Club, Aunt? I'm sure I will be fine with Cook and Mabel.'

Aunt Grace turned and fixed the Green-Hairstreak eyes on Luna. 'Luna Goodhart, I promised your father I would help you pass the time, and that is a promise I intend to keep. Now, come along.'

And she held out a gloved hand. The hand reminded Luna of the day she'd collected Luna from the Greenwich Park house, the day that Father hadn't come home. Then, as now, the leather of her aunt's glove was cold, and the bones inside hard as pistons, almost as if Aunt Grace was part-machine. For the first time, Luna had a dark fantasy that the marking on her aunt's left wrist, which she could see at that moment peeping from the glove, was not a tattoo at all but a butterfly-shaped tear in the skin to reveal the machinery beneath.

The thought was nonsensical, but at the same time so frightening that Luna bit her tongue, and came along at once.





15 JANUARY 1894

11.50 a.m.

When Luna saw the Greenwich Observatory high on its green hill, she felt like she was seeing an old friend. The house she'd shared with Papa had not been far from here, and as Aunt Grace briskly helped her out of the hansom cab right by the entrance, she suddenly missed her father very badly.

Of course, Luna had never been inside the observatory, because such an honour was reserved for the most eminent scientists of the age. Aunt Grace, however, crossed the threshold as if it was her own, leading Luna by the hand through the iron gates and across the paved courtyard. A great brass line, like a single railway track, divided the pavings. She was so curious that she forgot to be frightened of her aunt.

‘What’s that?’

Aunt Grace actually stopped. ‘That,’ she said, ‘is the Prime Meridian. A geographical reference line that passes through this very spot, which gives us Greenwich Mean Time. This is the place from which all of our clocks are set. You are at the very home of time.’

A doorman let them through the entrance with no more than a touch of his hat. Clearly Aunt Grace was known here. She led Luna along passageways and down stairs and through doorways to the secret heart of the observatory, all the time following the brass line of the Meridian. Eventually the line stopped dead at a blank wall, at the foot of a grandfather clock, tall as Aunt Grace with a pendulum swinging in its belly. Luna looked up at Aunt Grace – it was, quite literally, the end of the line. But Aunt Grace reached up to open the casement, and she altered the gilded hands of the clock until they read 4.45 exactly.

As soon as she did so, the whole body of the clock swung outwards.

It was a door.

Aunt Grace stepped through the clock door into the dark, and Luna found herself in a room that was so dimly lit that at first it was hard to make out what was in it. But as the clock, which had closed behind them, chimed

noon with a silvery song, Aunt Grace said, ‘Welcome to the Butterfly Room.’

Gradually Luna’s eyes adjusted and she could see that the room was twelve-sided in shape, and each wall had a floor-to-ceiling shutter that was tightly closed. And around the walls, just like at the house in Kensington, there were hundreds and thousands of butterflies in a myriad of colours and shapes and sizes, all pinned to cards and carefully captioned. Luna looked at the nearest ones to her head, with their velvety wings and splayed antennae. In Aunt Grace’s house she didn’t really like them, but here they made her feel strangely at home. She even recognised an old acquaintance, a Blue Morpho butterfly, as big as a handspan, just like the one in Aunt Grace’s study, with wings the exact azure-blue as the dress Luna was wearing.

Then she noticed that around the lamplit edges of the room stood many distinguished-looking figures, perhaps forty or fifty in all. There was a mixture of ladies and gentlemen, all in smart evening dress like Aunt Grace, the men in top hats which looked like black stovepipes, the women in bonnets. They were all having hushed but important-sounding conversations, and didn’t bother to stop when Luna and Aunt Grace came in. But Luna did notice one or two of them looking at her in an interested

way – all kindly but curious, as if she was some sort of new species. Perhaps that could be explained by the fact that there was only one other child in the room, a handsome blonde boy, about the same height as Luna, standing with a handsome blonde man.

Aunt Grace nodded at the company, but headed straight to greet the blonde man, who clicked his heels smartly together, bowed his head sharply and kissed her butterfly wrist. From that moment, they forgot Luna and the boy, and just talked over their heads. Luna didn't understand a word, as they were speaking in a foreign language, but she did learn one thing from the conversation. The blonde man waved his hands about as he talked, and she could see, on his left wrist, a butterfly tattoo.

'Is that your mother?'

Luna could understand why the blonde boy had asked that. She and Aunt Grace shared the Goodhart auburn hair and green eyes.

'My aunt. She's a scientist. Is that your father?'

'Yes.' The boy's golden hair fell in his eyes, and he had a habit of raking it back with a pale hand.

'Is he a scientist too?'

'A doctor.'

'A physician?' asked Luna.

‘Yes. But also a great inventor. Dr Tanius Kass.’ The boy said his father’s name with a touching pride, as if Luna should have heard of him. ‘He’s from Prussia. That is, we both are.’ That explained the boy’s slight accent. Luna wasn’t too sure exactly where Prussia was – she knew it was an empire somewhere in eastern Europe, and vaguely thought it was perhaps made up of bits of Germany and bits of Russia. What she did know from the front of Papa’s newspaper was that they always seemed to be fighting, either for themselves or for others.

‘My name’s Konstantin,’ said the Prussian boy.

‘I’m Luna.’ Luna studied her new acquaintance. He looked ... she searched for the word ... expensive, in his well-cut silver-grey suit of clothes and his starched white Eton collars and silken cravat. But he seemed very down to earth, and not superior at all, and he smiled a crooked half-smile. Encouraged by his friendliness she said, ‘Did you know that your father has a clockwork butterfly tattooed on his wrist?’

‘Yes,’ said Konstantin. ‘I have been asking about it for years.’

‘What did he say?’

‘That he would explain it to me on my thirteenth birthday.’

‘When’s that?’

‘Today.’

‘Happy birthday.’

‘Thank you.’

Luna looked at the boy with the respect due from someone who was only twelve to someone who was thirteen. ‘Did you get anything nice?’

His answer was a strange one. ‘This is the first birthday I have had standing up on my own two feet,’ he said in his precise English. ‘I have never travelled. I have never even been to school. I have spent most of my life on my sick-bed, with only books for company. My brothers call me “Konstantly-ill”.’

‘What was wrong with you?’

‘My heart. Some disease with a long name. A long word of the heart.’

Luna studied the boy. Because she was so tall, he was almost exactly her height. ‘You look well now,’ she said comfortingly.

‘I had an operation. A very clever surgeon. My father says I have a clockwork heart now.’

Luna smiled at what was clearly a joke. ‘So what *did* you get for your birthday? Besides the clockwork heart, I mean?’

He smiled his half-smile again. ‘Now I am well, I asked for an adventure.’

‘And did you get one?’

He looked about him. ‘I think this might be it.’

Luna felt a thrill travel up her spine. ‘You may be right,’ she said. ‘How about this as a starting point? My aunt has the same tattoo as your father.’

Konstantin turned wide grey eyes on her. ‘*Really?*’ He thought for a moment. ‘Then I would be willing to wager that everyone else in this room has one too.’

Luna leant forward and looked left and right around the room. Sure enough, every left wrist that was exposed showed the same mark of the clockwork butterfly.

Aunt Grace turned to her. ‘Stop fidgeting, child.’

‘Who are these people, Aunt? Are they all scientists?’

‘Some, not all. Some are authors, like Mr H.G. Wells over there. Explorers, like Miss Mary Kingsley beyond him. Artists, like Mr Burne-Jones to your left. They are the finest minds of our age. A league of extraordinary ladies and gentlemen.’ Somehow, when Aunt Grace said this, she managed not to sound big-headed, just matter-of-fact.

‘Like the Royal Society?’ Luna thought this was an intelligent thing to say. The Royal Society, she knew, was a collection of the cleverest minds in the country.

‘Not at *all* like the Royal Society,’ sniffed Aunt Grace disapprovingly. ‘They do not admit women, much to their detriment.’

Luna was not entirely sure what detriment meant, but *was* sure it was a bad thing just from the way Aunt Grace said it. Slightly crushed, she asked, ‘So are all these ladies and gentlemen interested in butterflies?’

Aunt Grace turned and gave her a very direct look with those green eyes. ‘No. None of them are. Not even me.’

Luna thought of all the butterflies at home, and looked around the room at all the winged creatures flattened against the walls. ‘Then why...?’

‘It’s a cover,’ Aunt Grace said, ‘a blind. A respectable pursuit for ladies and gentlemen in order to mask our true business.’

‘And what is your true business?’

‘Progress,’ she said grandly. ‘You’ve heard of the Kodak box camera? The gramophone? The electric lightbulb? We brought them all to the world’s attention, and many other wonders besides.’

‘So you – the Butterfly Club – invented all these things?’

‘No. We borrowed them.’

‘Where from?’

‘From the future.’

Luna frowned a little, thinking for a moment that she had misheard. ‘I’m sorry, Aunt, but I simply don’t know what you mean.’

‘Those things would not be in our day-to-day lives, in eighteen hundred and ninety four, were it not for the Butterfly Club,’ Aunt Grace explained. ‘They belonged in the future; we found them, and brought them back.’

‘But ... but that’s impossible!’

‘As Mr Conan Doyle over there will tell you,’ said Aunt Grace, pointing to a serious gentleman with an impressive moustache, ‘when you have eliminated the impossible, whatever remains, however improbable, must be the truth.’

Luna goggled at the gentleman. If the inventor of the great detective Sherlock Holmes could believe in all of this, it couldn’t be an elaborate joke, could it?

Aunt Grace’s face was deadly serious. ‘I must tell you that time travel is perfectly possible.’

‘But how?’

‘All in good time.’

Luna looked at Aunt Grace sharply. She didn’t *seem* like she was making a joke – she wasn’t that type. ‘So you are stealing from the future?’

Aunt Grace turned on her. ‘Luna! What an ugly word. We are merely *borrowing* – bringing these treasures back in

time to bring progress forward. They would have come anyway. We just make them come sooner.’

‘So why are you called the Butterfly Club? And why do you all have butterfly tattoos on your wrists?’

She gave a rare smile. ‘Ah, you noticed that, did you? It is because of the Butterfly Effect, a scientific phenomenon discovered by our founder. His research is the reason this club exists.’

‘What’s the Butterfly Effect?’

Aunt Grace shot a look towards the grandfather-clock-which-was-also-a-door. It obviously had two faces, because it looked just the same on this side of the wall as it did on the other. Except for one thing. On this side, its hands showed what was presumably the true time, which was one minute to noon. ‘I think,’ said Aunt Grace, ‘we will let our founder speak for himself.’ She turned to Konstantin’s father. ‘Doctor Kass?’ she said sweetly. ‘It is time.’

The doctor picked up a little table from the shadows and placed it in the centre of the floor. Luna noticed that the table had twelve sides, just like the room, and that there was something on it covered in a dark cloth. The doctor removed the cloth with a flourish to reveal a little clockwork contraption, which seemed to be in the shape of a bird. A hush settled over the edges of the room as the

members seated themselves and fell quiet. ‘I now call this meeting of the Butterfly Club to order,’ said Aunt Grace into the silence.

The doctor wound a brass key at the contraption’s back. There was a whirring noise and the bird began to animate. As it cocked its little head to one side, bright ruby red eyes shining, clockwork wings fluttering and resettling, for all the world as if it lived, Aunt Grace addressed the bird in a commanding voice. ‘Chronos,’ she said. ‘Show us the professor.’

Even more remarkably, the clockwork bird opened its little brass beak and spoke. ‘Initiating primary communication,’ it said in a tiny, tinny metallic voice. Then it opened its beak wider and a broad beam of light shone forth, as tall as a lamp-post. Luna watched with her mouth open, something young Victorian ladies weren’t really supposed to do. But she couldn’t be blamed for this, as the beam of light resolved itself into arms and legs and a head, and a ghost appeared in the middle of the room.

