

MONTGOMERY
BONBON

MURDER
AT THE
MUSEUM



ALASDAIR BECKETT-KING

©2023 Copy **ILLUSTRATED BY CLAIRE POWELL** (Not final)

*To Mum, For continuously
helping me to solve life's mysteries.
Love always, Claire x*

*To Claire's mum, who I haven't
met but sounds very nice.
Alasdair*

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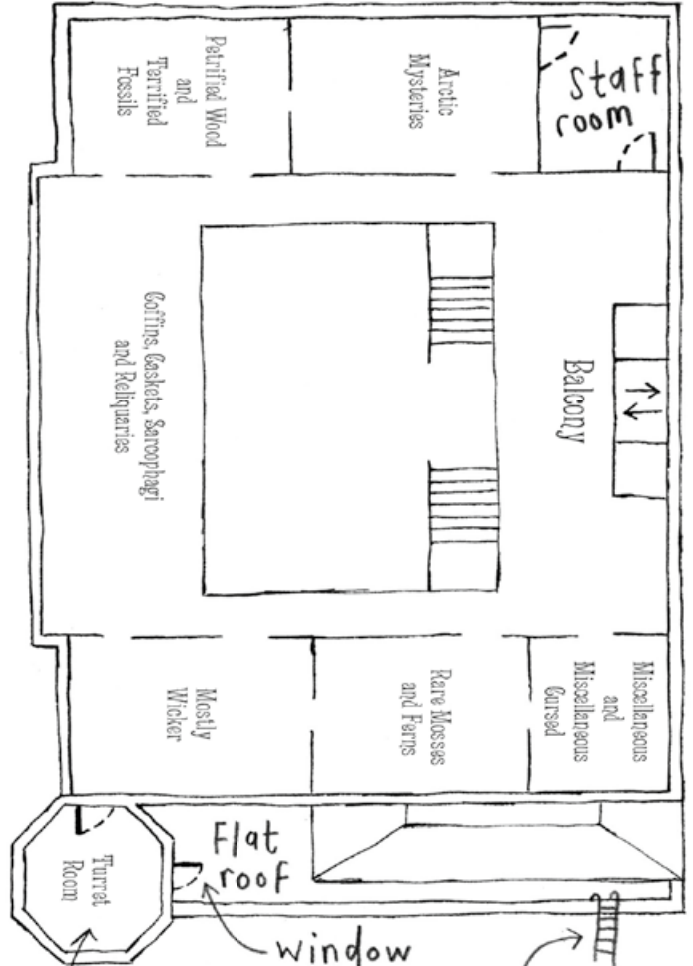
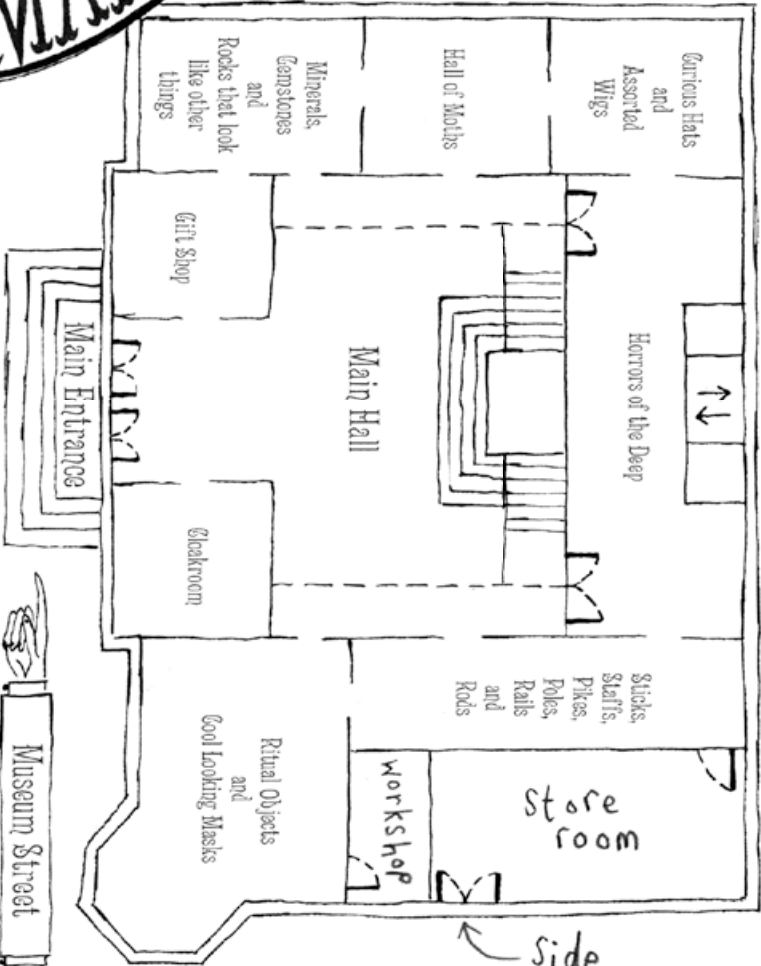
ALASDAIR BECKETT-KING

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MAP OF THE MUSEUM

Ground Floor

First Floor



Side entrance

Widdlington Eagle

Fire escape

Museum Street

HORNVILLE



BONNIE MONTGOMERY



GRAMPA BANKS



RASHIDA ZAKI



ABELARD HORNVILLE



LIZ MONTGOMERY



HARRIET SPRUCE



INSPECTOR SANDS



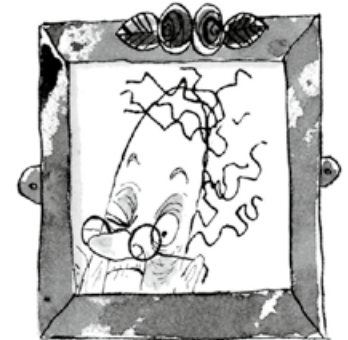
DANA HORNVILLE



HERMAN HORNVILLE



WARBOYS



ANTON PRICE



Chapter One Bonnie

It always seemed to be dusk inside the Hornville Museum. Even in the bright days of summer, it remained chilly and dark – like a fridge dropped down a mineshaft. The narrow windows were blackened with soot, dating back to the years when Widdlington was a town of coal fires and steam locomotives. Hundreds of glass cabinets looked like they had been cleaned only slightly more recently than the windows. Everywhere, signs read: **STRICTLY NO FLASH PHOTOGRAPHY**, a warning that the museum exhibits had got used to never-ending twilight, and that was the way they liked it.

Bonnie Montgomery was the youngest person the Hornville had seen in a long time. The museum reminded Bonnie of the discount aisle in the local supermarket, piled high with bizarre bargains that nobody really wanted: cruel weapons, whalebone carvings, strange grinning masks, and some suspiciously cheap lawn furniture. She had been begging Grampa Banks to bring her here for ages, and she was not disappointed.

The museum's full name was the Hornville Museum of Natural History and Suchlike, and it was supposed to be the oldest building in Widdlington. Bonnie thought this was a pretty funny way to go about things: putting a museum in the middle of nowhere and hoping a town would come along later. But everything about the Hornville was pretty funny, especially the bizarre creatures that loomed over its visitors. She pressed her nose against a glass case in front of her, staring up at a terrible, snarling creature, frozen in the moment of death.

“Did you know they call them Hornville’s Monsters?” she asked Grampa Banks in a hushed museum voice.

Grampa Banks was reading a brochure and noisily eating a lemon sherbet. He always brought lemon sherbets when he took Bonnie on a day out, and he always pretended he was not going to let her have one, which they both found hilarious. Grampa Banks was the sort of person who enjoyed museums by plodding methodically from exhibit to exhibit, reading every brass plaque and muttering, “Mmm.”

Bonnie preferred to follow her instincts, darting from case to case whenever something shiny caught her eye. She was never looking for “Mmm”; she was looking for “Aha!” This was what made them such an excellent team.

Summer holidays with Grampa Banks were always fun, even when they did not involve murder. (Today *was* going to involve murder, but Bonnie did not know that yet.)

Hornville’s Monsters were like no animals you would ever see at the zoo. Reading from his brochure, Grampa Banks explained to Bonnie that someone named Abelard Hornville, a man with a huge fortune and an even bigger beard, had bought Widdlington

Museum in 1931 and stuck his name on it. Old Hornville was a self-taught archaeologist, an amateur palaeontologist and an enthusiastic naturalist. He was also the kind of person who never bothered reading instructions. So, when explorers sent him the bones, skins and tusks of exotic and extinct animals, he assembled them in whatever way took his fancy. A trunk here, a fin there, a couple of beaks... He stitched them together, stuffed the poor beasts full of sawdust, and put them on display.

Tourists flocked to see the sabre-toothed bat, the diplodingo and the mighty flamingopotamus. Meanwhile, Hornville became a laughing stock in the scientific community – until everyone remembered how rich he was, and shut up about it.

Bonnie stared into the cold, hard eyes of a chimpanzebra. She could not escape the creeping sensation that the creature was staring back at her.

“Can I have a lemon sherbet now?” she asked.

Grampa Banks grinned. “Nope, they’re all for me.”

“Aw!”

That was when the lights went out.

With a *poomf!* the museum was plunged into pitch-darkness. Bonnie felt Grampa Banks grip her hand as startled shrieks and cries of alarm echoed around the Hornville’s vaulted halls. The grimy windows let in so little light, they might as well have been auditioning to be walls.

“Did you hear that?”

“What’s happening?”

“Someone spat a lemon sherbet at me!”

Then came the scream.

And what a scream it was. A rattling, terrible, bone-chilling scream from somewhere on the floor above.

The anxious museum visitors fell instantly silent, and Bonnie felt Grampa Banks squeeze her hand even tighter. The only light was a sickly green glow from a single fire exit sign, and it cast crooked, dancing shadows all around Bonnie; shadows that seemed to have claws and teeth.

FIRE EXIT

Something, thought Bonnie, is afoot.

Many people go their whole lives without noticing anything that is afoot, amiss or even untoward: without ever experiencing that toe-tingling, tummy-twisting sensation that a mystery is about to unfold. Bonnie Montgomery noticed things that were afoot all the time because, unlike most ten-year-old girls, she was the world's finest detective. This fact was known only to Bonnie herself – and Grampa Banks. Even Bonnie's mum did not know. This fact was a secret because ten-year-old girls are not allowed to be detectives. And they are certainly not allowed to solve murders, because murder is frowned upon.

Bonnie was a great detective, even though she had never *officially* solved a case. A mysterious gentleman known as Montgomery Bonbon, however, had assisted the authorities on numerous occasions. Montgomery Bonbon could not be reached by telephone, and nobody knew where he lived. All they knew was that he was an unusually short man with a shabby old raincoat, a big, bristly moustache, and an accent that was very hard to place.



While Bonnie was on a school exchange trip to Switzerland, it was Bonbon who unmasked cheese billionaire Mandrake Lesuisse as the Emmental Bandit. When the Rusakova Ballet came to Bonnie's home town, it was Bonbon who restored the Rusakova diamonds to the person Countess Rusakova had stolen them from. And when Bonnie visited the Widdlington Wildfowl Park, it was Bonbon who busted an international owl-smuggling ring, resulting in the arrests of over twelve owls.

Bonnie felt Grampa Banks gently loosen his grip on her hand. Both of them knew that Montgomery Bonbon was needed in the Hornville Museum today. The darkness was like a black velvet curtain drawn around her as she transformed into the renowned detective. She did not need a mirror; she had done this many times before.

First, she unzipped her backpack and pulled on his old raincoat.

Second, she tugged her beret down at a jaunty angle that implied a keen and inquisitive mind. She was already wearing the beret, of course. Whether



you are a ten-year-old girl or a mysterious foreign gentleman, you still look good in a beret.

Finally, she produced a sticky false moustache and pressed it into place on her upper lip – giving it a few wiggles to make sure it was secure.

Then she threw back her shoulders and took a deep breath.

Bonnie Montgomery had become Montgomery Bonbon.

