

THE LUCY WILSON MYSTERIES

THE TWELVE DAYS OF CHRISTMAS



STEVEN WALTON

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NINE LADIES DANCING

*Rocking around the Christmas tree,
When will her journey stop,
Everyone dances, with no end,
A party 'till they drop!*

Oh, Miss Wilson, or should I say Professor Wilson, or just plain Lucy? At this time of the year, we all deserve time off. Why don't you get a Christmas temp job for some extra pennies? In fact, no need to interview... the job is yours!

The sound of jingle bells filled the room. Shakin' Stevens was being played by the DJ. Just hearing the first notes of the song made Lucy and Hobo feel Christmassy. Of all the Christmas songs, this was one of Lucy's favourites. She once called it an old song, but the reaction from her mum prevented her from saying that again.

As the beat continued, the guests to the Christmas party started to arrive.

Hobo looked like a penguin in his black waistcoat and white shirt, although Lucy didn't want to say anything as her uniform was no better. Hobo had lucked out really. At least he looked smart! With a red furry headband, white trousers and a bright red pinny, Lucy felt like Mrs Claus. It wasn't a boy/girl thing either. She'd had the option of either outfit, but had laughed at Hobo's choice when she had seen that one first.

She picked up her tray of small mince pies and made her way to the small scatterings of people. Hobo, being slightly older, was given a tray of prosecco.

As Lucy passed Hobo, he snatched one of the pies from her tray and hid it under the cloth he carried over his arm. He then returned to the kitchen and enjoyed the buttery pastry before his tray was refilled and, again, he went out into the ever-increasing crowd.

Lucy watched him as he got his fill of mini quiches, sausage rolls, nuts, crisps, mini pizzas, gingerbread, Christmas cake and breadsticks.

Lucy had to admit the small cheese and onion roll she had tried was nice and she was tempted to have another. She felt annoyed when her next tray was a selection of fruit. Hobo, after being caught

with a scotch egg, was given a spray bottle and was told to clean tables.

Shakin' Stevens faded into Elton John, who then faded into Wham!. It was during 'Last Christmas' that Lucy's dad arrived.

'Ah, I see you've been hard at work,' he said, helping himself to the small red grapes on Lucy's tray. 'I told you that you'd have fun with a little Christmas job. Now, where do I get a little glass of something?'

Lucy frowned.

'Somebody will be right with you, sir.' She curtsied and left.

She could feel her dad laughing at her as she walked away.

'Right, you...'. She banged down the tray in front of Hobo. 'We need to swap uniforms, now!'

'Oh no, you made your choice,' said Hobo, laughing.

The head waitress, Nerys, just happened to walk past. This gave Lucy the perfect opportunity to take revenge.

'Nerys?' She tapped her shoulder. 'Shouldn't he be wearing a Christmas hat?'

And with that, Lucy walked away with a tray of pecan pie slices.

The next time she saw Hobo, he was wearing a sparkly green elf hat, complete with jingling bells.

The DJ continued to play all the Christmas favourites from Mariah Carey to John Lennon.

Lucy decided that she would offer the DJ something to eat since he was doing such a good job. The people on the dancefloor all swayed. They were slightly out of sync with the beat, but Lucy knew what adults were like at parties. She had once witnessed her dad do the YMCA – *although he seemed to have been under the impression it was spelt YMA, YA, YCM, and MCA.*

As she approached the DJ box, she could hear a low buzzing.

‘Are your speakers okay?’ she asked.

The DJ continued playing music and ignored her.

‘Excuse me? Can you hear me?’ Lucy tried again. The DJ turned to face her, covered from head to foot in a dark navy plastic. He was adorned with fairy lights, a Santa hat, and an ugly sweater, but looked more like a mannequin. Lucy remembered Grandad telling her the story about shop dummies. As she reached forward, the DJ opened a small hatch where his mouth should have been.

‘I... can... hear... you.’ His voice was robotic and sounded identical to an iPad that helped people to speak. ‘I... do... not... re... quire... food.’

His voice pattern, splitting syllables, made him sound monotonous. She was just about to alert someone when a small man tapped her shoulder.

‘Excuse me, love,’ the man said in a strong Birmingham accent. ‘What are you doing here?’

‘Sorry, I didn’t know he wasn’t real. I brought him some nibbles.’

‘Oh, yeah, the DJ Mark 40 is a wonder of modern technology. It uses AI to predict the songs the audience want to hear.’ He helped himself to the plate of food in Lucy’s hand. ‘It’s going to revolutionise the whole DJ scene. Plus, as each one needs a human back up, it means I won’t lose my job.’

‘Oh, okay. Thanks, I’ll head off now.’ Lucy turned to walk away. ‘By the way, can you hear that buzzing?’

‘Don’t go worrying about that. It’s just the Mark 40.’ The man returned an empty plate to Lucy who was beginning to feel tired. ‘By the way, me name’s Pete and I *do* eat food. You got any more of those little quiches?’

Lucy nodded and left for the kitchen.

The bright fluorescent lights must have woken her up as her tiredness disappeared as soon as she arrived.

Thankfully, the thick double doors blocked out much of the music, which was now Boney M.

Though she could still hear Hobo approach, the bells on his hat gave him away.

‘All right, Jingles?’ she quipped.

‘Don’t you worry, Luce. I’ll get you back.’

‘Have you seen the DJ?’

‘Not yet, why?’

‘Apparently he’s an AI robot. He plays the music you want to hear.’

‘It’s a shame he can’t help everybody with their dancing,’ Hobo said, taking a small bite from his next tray of food to serve.

‘I thought that. It’s like they all go through a giant chamber at eighteen—’

‘Yeah, it’s like they go in as reasonable teenagers and come out the other side as unstable adults,’ said Hobo, interrupting.

By now, to the music of Slade, everyone was up on the dance floor. It gave Lucy the short break she needed, but she shrugged when Nerys handed her a cloth to clean the tables. Lucy tried her best, but her heart wasn’t really in it.

Instead, she decided to look for her dad. But she couldn’t find him anywhere. Not at the table where she’d last seen him, or on the dance floor.

As Noddy Holder declared it was indeed Christmas, Wizard started to wish it could be Christmas every day. Nearly all of the adults lingered on the dancefloor, swaying from side to side. Lucy watched them for a moment, almost hypnotised, and jumped when Pete tapped her on the shoulder.

‘Hey, love, you got any more of them salmon things?’ Pete said. ‘Just bring a large tray. It will save you the energy of walking back and forth.’

‘I’ll go and check. Everybody seems to be having a good time,’ she said, nodding towards the dancefloor.

‘Oh, yes. Well, it *is* the season to be jolly. Why don’t you take a little break and join them? That’s what your boss is doing,’ he said, pointing to Nerys, who was now swaying along with the others.

‘Not really my thing,’ said Lucy, lying. If truth be told, she just wanted to find Hobo. ‘Let me get those salmon bites for you.’

With that, she dashed back to the kitchen.

Hobo was taking the opportunity to clear through the remaining food. He was particularly miffed that he had missed the plate of Jammy Dodgers.

‘Hobo, I think something weird is going on,’ Lucy said.

‘Yeah, I know. Those Ritz biscuits were definitely stale, but Nerys still made me hand them out,’ Hobo responded.

‘Not that,’ Lucy said. ‘No, I think something’s wrong with the adults.’

‘You don’t think it’s the food, do you?’ Hobo asked, cautiously considering dropping the half-eaten mini doughnut.

'Not sure, but wouldn't you have been affected as well?'

'What's wrong with them?' Hobo asked.

'Look for yourself.' Lucy opened the kitchen door. By now, they were the only two not on the dancefloor swaying.

'Luce, they're not blinking,' Hobo declared.

They both watched as the adults just moved enough to prove they were still alive.

'I need to find my dad,' Lucy said.

Lucy rushed around the venue, checking in every side room. She even checked the men's toilets. This actually meant opening the door a few centimetres and shouting 'Dad' with her eyes closed.

The uniform was making Lucy warm. She decided to pop outside for a few moments; she was near the doors anyway. As soon as she opened the first exit, her dad was standing there.

'We don't really have much option then,' Dad said, speaking into his phone. Lucy wasn't sure what he was talking about, but it sounded like work. So it was quite surprising when he ended the call with, 'I love you too.'

'Dad!'

Lucy made him jump.

'Oh, Lucy, your mum says hi,' Dad said. 'How you getting on? I've not seen you for a while. Don't

tell me you've been hiding in the kitchen stuffing your face.'

'No, well... yes, I was stuffing my face but not hiding. Dad, I'm glad you're okay,' Lucy said. Her relationship with her dad wasn't always the best. He didn't approve of Lucy's obsession with aliens. But when it came down to it, she loved him and didn't want him to be turned into a mindless zombie as well. She continued to explain.

'Lucy, you know I have no interest in any of this,' Albert said, rolling his eyes.

'Please, just come and see.'

With reluctance, he followed her inside.

Lucy looked around for Hobo but couldn't see him anywhere. It was useless trying to call out to him. The music had increased to deafening levels.

From behind the DJ box, she could see Pete. He was scrolling through his phone. Lucy decided to ask him to turn the music off for a few minutes. As much as she liked the song from *Home Alone*, it was rather distracting.

She mounted the first few steps and Pete frowned.

'Why aren't you dancing?' he asked.

'I think something's wrong.'

'Go and dance, little lady.'

'No, please can you turn the music off for just a moment?'

Lucy saw the expression on Pete's face change. He pushed her down the step. She managed to catch herself before she fell.

'I said, go and dance.'

Lucy looked up at Pete. His eyes were glossed over like marbles. She was just about to walk away when a familiar voice came from behind her.

'Don't push my daughter!' Dad said loudly.

'Go and dance. I don't want any trouble. Just go and dance!' Pete ordered.

'Say sorry!' Dad demanded.

'Get away from my DJ booth.'

'Say sorry!'

'Dad, it's fine.' Lucy didn't want to see her dad like this. He was normally a gentle man – grumpy, but gentle.

Pete pressed something on his phone. The DJ turned towards them. There was a slight sound of hydraulics as it approached Lucy and her dad menacingly.

'You will leave,' the DJ said.

Lucy took her dad's hand and pulled him away. The DJ was huge, and even if her dad were a boxer, he still wouldn't stand much of a chance.

As they made their way back to the kitchen, Lucy saw someone that made her heart sink. In the centre of the dancefloor, swaying mindlessly, was Hobo.

Lucy ran up to shake him awake, but it was no good. Not only was he too far gone, but Lucy started to feel tired herself. She felt the large hands of her dad pull her away.

Back in the kitchen, Lucy awoke almost instantly.

‘I don’t get it,’ Dad said.

‘We need to turn the music off.’

‘Really? Nobody can hate East 17 that much.’

‘Dad, it must be the music. That’s why Pete is being so obstructive. The robot DJ has to be playing something else,’ Lucy surmised.

‘So what should we do?’ Dad asked.

‘What? You mean you want to help?’

‘Don’t make a thing of it, Lucy. Just tell me what to do.’

After a brief explanation, Lucy and her dad returned to the dance hall. The DJ was now playing Band Aid’s ‘Do they know it’s Christmas’.

‘Does it ever snow in Africa?’

Lucy headed through the crowd of dancers, straight up to the steps where she had been pushed a few moments ago. Pete clocked her and again, rose from his seat. Lucy turned to her dad for support, but he wasn’t there.

Dad was now dancing with the others.

‘Looks like you are on your own,’ Pete said. Lucy watched her dad sway from side to side.

'You don't scare me,' Lucy said, crossing her fingers.

Pete grabbed her and tied her hands together with some cables.

'You won't get away with this!' she exclaimed.

'Oh, Lucy, I already have. Up and down the country my DJ robots are hypnotising all the Christmas revellers.'

'Why?'

'The world's gone mad and I'm going to put things back on track.'

'And you want to rule the world?'

'No.'

'What?' Lucy was surprised.

'I am not a suitable candidate, but my master is.'

'Master?'

Pete stepped back and pulled open his shirt, snapping all the buttons. A door in his chest opened up. Lucy winced, expecting to see blood and arteries and stuff like that. Instead, wires and circuitry were pulsating through the neon blue lights. In the centre, on a comfy seat, sat a small creature the size of a Guinea pig.

'Who are you?' Lucy asked, her voice barely heard over the music.

'I'm QuarleSha.'

'Carl Shaw?'

'Quarle, with a Q.'

‘Still sounds like Carl,’ Lucy joked.

The little creature stepped down from its seat. He looked like a small elf but without the outfit.

‘I’ve been sent here to reduce the human race to simple puppets.’

Lucy rolled her eyes.

‘Why do villains always tell their enemies their plans? Is that what they teach you at evil school?’

The little creature ignored Lucy. ‘For some reason you failed to fall under control of the “Wavelength Haunter Alter of Mind” device.’

‘Hang on, W-h-a-m!’ Lucy giggled. ‘You called your device WHAM?’

‘Yes, why?’

‘And you planned to use the device at Christmas?’

‘Well, if it wasn’t for the worldwide pandemic, it would have been in 2020.’

‘So, you would have used Wham!’s Last Christmas?’ Lucy laughed, confusing the little elf. ‘Whamaggedon, for real!’

‘Enough! I’m not sure why your puny mind finds my predicament so hilarious – but resistance is futile!’ Quarle shouted.

‘Oh, my dear little alien friend. You have no idea.’

Quarle looked at her, not understanding what she meant.

‘I have been defending this planet for a few

years now, and if there's one thing I've learned from my dancing little friend over there...' Lucy nodded her head over to Hobo, who was currently swaying to The Darkness, '...is that talking absolute nonsense is a good way to buy some time. NOW!'

As Lucy shouted, Dad pushed the giant DJ booth backwards. It sparked furiously and started to catch fire.

'What are you doing?' Quarle screamed in panic.

'You failed to overlook one key detail. Dad Dancing.' Lucy laughed. 'My dad isn't really under your control. He's just a rubbish dancer!'

'Oi!'

'Sorry, Dad.'

As the music fizzled out, the dancers all came to a halt. Nerys was fuming that half of her staff had found their way onto the dancefloor.

The main lights came on, signalling the end of the party. Dad pulled off the ugly sweater Lucy's Mum had forced him to wear. He caught Quarle with it like a sack. Meanwhile, Hobo untied Lucy.

Using more cables, Quarle was bound and ready to be taken away.

Lucy pulled out her phone and headed to the foyer to make the call to Dame Anne. When she walked through the doors, she found herself in a large room decorated with gingerbread, candy canes and holly.

Above the fireplace, a large portrait hung depicting the jolly old Saint Nick himself. Or was it? 'Grandad...?' Lucy said, confused.

To be continued in Eight Maids A Milking...

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**The Mystery of Lucy Wilson: Apocalypse Tomorrow
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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.

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**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.

