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Opening extract from
**The Mysterious Misadventures of
Clemency Wigglesworth**

Written by
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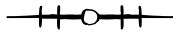
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Chapter 1

'Such a quiet little thing'



Clemency Wrigglesworth stood at the foot of the gangway and stared up at the big white ship. England—it was taking her to England. At least she hoped it was, if they would let her on board. She had never been to England before. She had never been on a ship before.

‘Hurry up, missie! You can’t stand there all day!’ The man behind her was puffing and blowing, trying to get past.

Clemency stepped onto the gangway.

At the top, a line of sailors all in white uniforms stood in the blazing mid-morning sun, greeting the passengers as they came on board. The captain, in his peaked cap, waited at the end of the line.

‘Good morning, good morning,’ he smiled at everyone. He wasn’t very tall, but when Clemency reached

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him he bent his head down to her level. 'Good morning! And who might you be?'

'Clemency Wrigglesworth.'

'You'll have to speak up, young lady. Your voice is very quiet.'

'Clemency Wrigglesworth. I've got a ticket.' In case he didn't believe her, she waved it under his sunburned nose. 'And luggage.' She pointed down at the dock, where three tin boxes and a cabin trunk formed a teetering pile. The name Wrigglesworth was stencilled on the sides in square black letters.

'I'm sure you have,' the captain said. 'And where is your family? Or your friends?'

Clemency bit her lip. 'I'm on my own.'

The captain frowned. 'Are you sure?'

He turned to the purser, who stood beside him with the passenger list, and asked, 'Are we expecting another unaccompanied child?'

The purser ran his finger down the list, shaking his head slowly. It took an agonizingly long time before he came to the Ws. 'Mrs Lucie Wrigglesworth, Miss Clemency Wrigglesworth,' he read out.

'Mrs Lucie Wrigglesworth? Would that be your mother?'

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Clemency nodded.

'And is she with you?'

Clemency shook her head.

'I *see*,' said the captain, and rubbed his jaw.

The man directly behind Clemency in the queue began puffing and blowing again. 'How long is this going to take?' he complained.

The captain said something to the purser in a voice too low for anyone to hear, and then took Clemency to one side and leaned down towards her again.

'You are very young to be travelling alone.'

'I'm eleven,' Clemency said, drawing her small frame up as tall and as wide as she could.

'Alone,' the captain went on, 'with no arrangements made for someone to look after you during the voyage. Where is your mother? According to my list, she's expected on board ship.'

'She couldn't come.'

'Is she unwell?'

'She *was* unwell,' Clemency said.

'Then she's better?'

'No. She got worse.'

The captain's tone became very serious, and he furrowed his brow. 'She's too ill to travel?'

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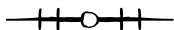
‘So ill that she died.’

The captain stood up straight again. His face registered shock. ‘And have you no other relatives, or friends?’

‘No,’ said Clemency, in a whisper. ‘At least, only in England. That’s where we were going when my mother fell ill, so that’s where I’m going now. I *must*. I haven’t got a home in India any longer. And I *have* got a ticket.’ She waved it again, just to prove her point.

He signalled to one of the officers waiting in line. ‘Take this young lady to my cabin, and find Mrs Potchard.’

At least I’m on board ship, thought Clemency. At least I’ve got this far. But she could feel her knees shaking beneath her.



The captain’s cabin was dark and stuffy. Clemency sat on a chair and swung her legs. This reminded her of the hotel where, for the past three weeks, she had sat on overstuffed chairs and swung her legs and waited for the ship to arrive in Bombay. One after another, different people had tried to take charge of her. Old ladies with whiskery faces had snapped

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orders at her. Young ladies with sharp noses asked her endless questions. And gentlemen with big moustaches stared at her and said, 'Well, well!' and never said anything more at all. They were all very interested in her *situation*, but none of them seemed very interested in *her*.

A steward put his head around the cabin door. 'You must be the young lady. Would you like anything to drink while you're waiting?'

Clemency nodded. When he came back with a glass of ice-cold lemonade, she asked, 'Please—what is it that I'm waiting for?'

'They've sent to find Mrs Potchard for you.'

'Mrs Potchard?'

Clemency wondered if she was the person who dealt with problematical children, with would-be stowaways, the person who was in charge of throwing them off the ship or handing them over to the Bombay police.

'Mrs Potchard looks after unaccompanied children on the voyage. If they're going home to England to start school, or when they sail out to India to join their families again, she takes care of them.'

'Oh.'

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‘She’s a very pleasant sort of lady.’ And the steward winked.

Usually when grown-ups said someone or something was pleasant, it turned out to be the opposite. Clemency could just imagine what Mrs Potchard would be like. Parents and guardians the length and breadth of the British Empire trusted her to ferry their children about the world. She would be like the strictest governess, and the fussiest nursemaid, and the bossiest old aunt, all rolled into one. Clemency pictured her as very tall and thin, with sharp eyes and a stern expression, and wearing a mud-coloured dress that she never changed.

Suddenly she heard a noise outside in the corridor. She recognized the captain’s voice, saying, ‘She’s a peaky little thing. I damn well hope she isn’t ill herself.’

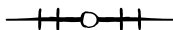
Then a woman’s voice replied, ‘Half the passengers could be carrying something infectious, you know, Captain. And you’re not intending to turn *them* off the ship!’

Clemency stopped swinging her legs and kept perfectly still.

The captain went on, ‘If I may speak plainly, she doesn’t seem terribly upset by it all.’

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'Probably still reeling from the shock,' replied the woman. And suddenly they were both in the room.



The captain made a bow, the sort of half-bow that a short person makes in a narrow space, and said, with a flourish, 'I beg to present—Mrs Potchard!'

Clemency opened her mouth, but nothing came out.

Mrs Potchard was hardly taller than Clemency herself. Her face was plump and cheerful, her cheeks and nose scattered with freckles. Untidy red-gold curls sprang out from under a lace cap. Her round little body, wrapped in a bright Paisley shawl, was shaped just like a barrel.

'I'm so pleased to meet you!' she said, and held out her hand to Clemency. 'I'm on this ship to take the Chope twins off to school in England. I do this all the time, you see. Everyone from the Viceroy down has seen fit to use my services. My terms are most reasonable. Captain Christmas has explained to me about your little—er—predicament.'

She glanced towards the captain, who bowed again, and nodded at her to go on.

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‘I would be very happy to oversee *your* journey as well, my dear. But only if you would be happy with my company.’

Well, that’s new, Clemency thought. Nobody had ever consulted her before, about anything. She ate the food that was dished up, wore the clothes the servants put out for her, read the books her governess told her to, attended other children’s parties because she was invited. But no one ever asked her what *she* thought about it all, or what *she* wanted.

Mrs Potchard sat down in the chair opposite. She lowered her voice and leaned across the small gap between them. ‘And Captain Christmas is quite anxious that *someone* should look after you. You can share my cabin, rather than be on your own.’

‘Will he throw me off the ship if I say no?’

Mrs Potchard’s eyes grew very round and wide. ‘Oh no! I’m sure he wouldn’t do that. Where would you go?’

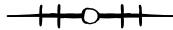
‘Exactly,’ said Clemency in a low voice. She leaned even nearer to Mrs Potchard. ‘I’d be glad to have your company. Thank you for asking me. But I haven’t any money to pay you. Not even on the most *reasonable terms* in the world.’

Mrs Potchard shook her head. ‘Never mind. We won’t worry about that until we get to England. I’m sure

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your relatives will be extremely relieved to have you safe home with them. They'll be more than happy to meet my expenses.'

'Yes,' said Clemency, but there was a shiver of doubt in her voice. For she had absolutely no idea who her relatives in England were . . .



'This is the first ship I've ever been on,' Clemency said. They were walking on the deck. Bombay slid away behind them in the hazy distance. 'I was born in India, and I've never left it. Before today.'

'And I've been to sea hundreds of times,' said Mrs Potchard. 'But my charges often haven't. The Chope twins—' and she nodded ahead to where two boys of eight or nine years old scuttled about, 'have never been away before now. They're off to boarding school. I expect at present they're missing their mama and papa.'

'I expect so,' Clemency agreed, stiffly. The twins, as alike as a duck and its reflection, looked incapable of missing anything but their tea.

Mrs Potchard gazed out over the wrinkling blue sea and said slowly, 'I expect you . . .?'

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Clemency knew what she was going to say. She felt disappointed. After such a promising start, Mrs Potchard was going to turn out just like all the people at the hotel. They pretended to be kind, but all they wanted to do was *find out* about her, so that they could go away and gossip to their friends. *‘That poor little orphan, do you know what she just told me about her dear sweet mother? Well—’*

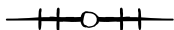
‘. . . could do with your tea?’ Mrs Potchard finished.

‘My tea?’

‘You must be hungry, child. When did you last eat?’

Clemency tried to think. Lunchtime had passed while she waited to board, and she had been so nervous at breakfast that she hadn’t been able to swallow a single mouthful. As she thought about her stomach, a sudden angry growl came out of it.

‘I think that speaks for itself,’ said Mrs Potchard, and she called out, ‘Twins! Come here at once!’ And they did.



Over tea, Clemency told Mrs Potchard, quite of her own accord, ‘I don’t really miss Mama because I hardly ever saw her. I saw my father even less. The thing I loved best about India was Treasure. I miss him. Treasure was a horse,’ she explained.

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'Your horse?'

'Oh, no! He belonged to Colonel Hibbert. But I saw him nearly every day and always took him a sugar lump. He was very big and gentle, and bright shiny chestnut, like a new coin.'

'Did your parents give you a horse of your own?'

'Never.'

'Or a little pony?'

'No. Nothing like that.'

Mrs Potchard gave her a thoughtful look, as if she were taking in a piece of information and storing it up for future use.

'Do you mind if I ask, had you any brothers or sisters?'

Clemency found that she didn't mind—too much—if Mrs Potchard asked.

'No, I was the only one. I had to share my governess with a girl called Phoebe Glover-Smith.'

'Glover-Smith? With brothers called Tom and Arthur?' Mrs Potchard's eyes shone and she laughed as if she was remembering something delicious. 'Naughtiest boys I ever met!'

'Were they?' said Clemency, delighted. 'Mrs Glover-Smith always told me that they were *such* well-mannered

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children, and *so* devoted to their studies, quite the opposite of Phoebe and me.'

So then they were off on a long conversation about Mrs Potchard's past charges.

'I don't think I've ever talked so much, all at one time,' Clemency told Mrs Potchard. 'Mama always said that I was such a quiet little thing. Timid, too.'

Mrs Potchard fixed her with a sharp look, but there was a distinct gleam in her eye. 'Is that so? In my experience, there is no such thing as a *really* quiet child. As for timid—no, I'm sure you'll discover you are hardly that. If you were timid you would never have got yourself as far as this ship.'

Clemency thought about this. She was quiet because at home that was what it was best to be. When Mama wasn't out at a dance or a party she was lying down, tired out, or complaining of a headache. And she was timid around her father. He was a fierce man with a loud voice and a sudden temper. He didn't want a child under his feet. She shook her head quickly, and tried not to think any more about that.

'You have *inner resources*, my dear,' said Mrs Potchard.

Clemency blushed. She was not accustomed to receiving compliments and didn't know what to do. So she changed the subject.

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'Do you enjoy life on the high seas?' she asked.

'I adore travelling. And this ship is the very best in the P&O line, and Captain Christmas is the very best captain. So you've struck lucky here.'

'I've never heard of anyone whose name was *really* Christmas,' Clemency told her.

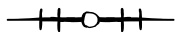
'Yes, Captain Francis Drake Christmas. He comes from a long line of sailors. But, unlike his namesake, he is very law-abiding. Not one bit piratical.'

Clemency frowned. 'Sir Francis Drake wasn't a *pirate*.'

'Of course he was!' said Mrs Potchard. 'All seafaring folk in those days were pirates first, and patriots after. Where did you learn your history?'

Clemency folded her hands primly and said, 'From Palmer's *History of The World for Children (In Three Parts)*, of course.'

'Of course,' echoed Mrs Potchard. 'Mr Palmer clearly left out the most interesting parts.'



Mrs Potchard's cabin was modest, but shipshape and very tidy. Clemency's luggage had been delivered and took up rather a lot of the room between the narrow

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beds. Clemency had just put on her nightgown and was brushing her hair when Mrs Potchard came in and sat down on the edge of her own bunk.

‘We really need to find out who your relatives are in England,’ she announced. ‘Are you sure you know nothing about them?’

Clemency shook her head. ‘No. Nothing at all.’

‘If you don’t mind, I’ll go through your belongings. There must be a clue of some sort. After all, if there isn’t, what will I do with you once we reach Southampton?’ Mrs Potchard sounded cheerful enough, but Clemency felt bleak. ‘I’m sure we can find out. The sooner we start, the sooner we’ll have something.’

Mrs Potchard opened the smallest tin box. It contained only Clemency’s clothes, her meagre store of toys and books. Next they worked through the bigger boxes, which were filled with her mother’s belongings: dresses, shoes, underwear. At last Mrs Potchard sat back on her heels and exclaimed, ‘This looks promising!’

She held up a small packet of letters, tied with a black ribbon.

‘Do you mind if I take a look?’

Clemency shook her head.

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Mrs Potchard unfolded the letters and quickly glanced through them. She scarcely seemed to have time to read one before she went on to the next.

'These appear to be letters from your father to your mother when he was away with the regiment,' she said, 'And these are from friends on hearing of his death.' She paused. 'Aha! What have we here?'

At the bottom of the pile were two very old and creased letters. Clemency could see how dirty and yellowed the paper had become.

'Hmm,' said Mrs Potchard. 'These are addressed from the Great Hall, Caredeew, near Frome, Somerset.' She frowned and peered more closely. 'One is signed with the initials H.T.L. And the other—in humbler writing, to my mind, it has many crossings-out and misspelt words—is signed simply from "Molly".'

Mrs Potchard read the contents of the letters to herself, with a certain amount of gentle head-shaking. But all she said to Clemency was, 'Good. Now we have an address in England, if not a name. We can put an advertisement in *The Times*, asking for someone to come and fetch you. I'm sure it will be quite straightforward.'

She gave Clemency a bright, confident smile. But Clemency didn't smile back.