

# LIPPY LIME JUICE



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by

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## **Chapter 1**

### **Katherine**

Katherine Capper trudged up the long road in the summer heat. Everyone had been complaining about the weather but Katherine had barely noticed it. She was oblivious to anything as mundane as the vagaries of the climate. Summer or winter she wore the same clothes, her only concession to the cold was a warm jacket and socks on her feet. Now, as it was summer, she was wearing a thin cotton dress over worn and patched underclothes. On her feet she wore a pair of sandals that had been passed down three times and were barely serviceable.

“Only the baked mud and dirt are holding them together,” her grandfather had remarked only two months before. ‘Two months,’ thought Katherine, ‘was it only two months ago...?’

She remembered that the first two weeks after Grandad died had been a whirl of visitors. Aunts and uncles, cousins and second cousins, friends, so called friends and even outright enemies had appeared on the doorstep with their miserable condolences. Katherine spat venomously. They didn’t come to see him when he was well. They didn’t want to know an old man with no legs.

As young as she was, she knew that most of the mourners wanted to be seen rather than to see her grieving family. As usual she had been totally ignored. Well that suited her, she didn’t want to be a part of their hypocritical charade. Every time a ‘wailing willie’ arrived she hid herself in the cupboard under the stairs, or in the cellar.

Katherine looked back down the road. The terraced houses were Edwardian style, much grander than her own modest street, with long front gardens, impressive porches and grand front doors. Some of the front paths were tiled with interesting mosaics and Katherine had her favourites. If the gate of number 22 was open, she would walk grandly up the path as if she lived there, marvelling at the colours and shapes of the design. One day she would get caught out, but not today! She had a quick look around and skipped up the path as she had done so many times before. No-one saw her. Her mood improved. She was nearly there!

The street seemed deserted. Most people were away for the day taking advantage of the splendid summer weather. Some were in their back garden enjoying the roses and lupins. It was a strange street. If streets had character then this would be a snooty, aloof, impersonal one that kept itself to itself.

Although Katherine's street was only twenty minutes walk away it was so different from Montague Gardens. Steeley Street was full of life. Grandmas would bring their little wooden stools out on to the pavement and sit there shelling peas or dicing carrots as they chatted to their next-door neighbours and passers by. There were always children playing in the street, kicking balls, swinging on lamp posts or playing marbles. If you walked up Steeley Street it would take you half an hour to get from one end to the other because there were so many people to talk to, even though the street was such a short one!

Montague Gardens was different. What Katherine didn't know was that many of the houses in Montague Gardens were empty, their owners having fled when the bombing started. These were people with connections in the country, with money and position. They could afford to load up their motor cars and move out to safety. No-one in Steeley Street even owned a motor car! No, they had stayed put, bombs or no bombs.

There had been some talk of sending the children away, evacuation it was called. The residents of Steeley Street were suspicious of the country, 'all that grass and cows' as Mrs Morgan would say. So no-one had moved out.

'It's strange,' thought Katherine as she contemplated Montague Gardens, 'six houses had been bombed here, but not one house in Steeley Street, why?' The unanswered question hung in the air...and then she was there!

The ruined building lay as a sad heap of rubble. It had been the first house in Montague Gardens to feel the swift vengeance of the night-time prowling aeroplanes. Months later nature had softened the gap between number 30 and number 34. Tall graceful Willowherb flowers had gathered together in a glorious profusion of colour. Lavender, purple, maroon and pink shades interspersed with cheerful white convolvuli. Grass had seeded in every available nook and cranny hiding the broken bricks and broken window frames.

Katherine picked her way carefully through the debris. She knew every inch of the derelict site. What had been left standing after the bombing had been pulled down in the interest of public safety, so on the surface there was nothing standing, but below - yes below - below there was a cellar, miraculously untouched, and full of treasures.

Months before Katherine had found the small staircase by accident and as soon as she entered the cellar she realised that she had found her hideaway, her secret special place.

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