

HOW TO
MAKE A
GOLEM
and
TERRIFY
PEOPLE

HOW TO
MAKE A
GOLEM
and
TERRIFY
PEOPLE

Alette J. Willis

Floris Books



FOR LAURA



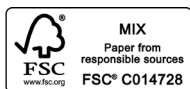
Kelpies is an imprint of Floris Books

First published in 2011 by Floris Books
© 2011 Alette J. Willis

Alette J. Willis has asserted her right under the
Copyright, Designs and Patent Act 1988 to be
identified as the Author of this work.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be
reproduced without the prior permission of
Floris Books, 15 Harrison Gardens, Edinburgh
www.florisbooks.co.uk

The publisher acknowledges subsidy from
Creative Scotland towards the publication
of this volume.



British Library CIP data available
ISBN 978-086315-840-7
Printed in the UK
by CPI Group (UK) Ltd, Croydon

HOW IT ALL BEGAN

Mum led the policeman into our house but I wasn't ready to go back in yet. I stayed in the front yard, watching as my whole world pulsed blue from the lights on the police car.

A gust of wind blew through the woods behind the house, rustling through the dry leaves. It sounded as though the trees were whispering to each other. I shivered, wrapping my warm coat more tightly around me.

As the wind died down again, I heard a new noise: a faint *squeak, squeak, squeak*, growing louder as someone or something came up the road towards me. I peered into the night. All I could see were the lines of houses on either side of the road, their windows curtained and dark, and the empty pools of light cast by the streetlamps.

The noise grew louder, crawling up my back like the sound of fingernails on a blackboard. I clamped my hands over my ears. Just when I thought I might scream to drown out the noise, a boy appeared out of the gloom. He was riding an old-fashioned bicycle, one

of the ones with big springy seats and high handlebars, a Mary Poppins bike. Every time his feet went round, the wheels protested: *squeak, squeak, squeak*.

The boy stopped behind the police car and stared at me, his owl eyes unblinking behind his round glasses. He was about my age, tall and skinny. His thick black hair stood up from his head, like he had a really bad case of static electricity, and none of his clothes fit right. The trousers were too short for his long legs and his jumper hung around him like a tent. He looked like someone who would get picked on at school. I would have felt sorry for him, except he was staring at the police car, my house and me with such greedy curiosity, I decided he probably deserved whatever he got. I hate it when people act like someone else's problems are entertaining.

I scowled at him. He blinked, put his feet on the pedals and cycled away, disappearing into the shadows without a sound.

"Edda, aren't you coming?" Mum called from the front door.

I walked slowly across the yard, dreading going back inside and having to face the wreck the burglars had made of my birthday presents.

"What were you staring at?" Mum asked as I stepped through the doorway.

"The boy on the bike," I said.

Mum looked confused. "What boy?"

"The one who stopped in front of our house," I said, equally puzzled. "You must have heard him. His wheels were making a horrible noise."

Mum shook her head and gave me a small, sad smile.
“My mind must have been somewhere else.”

I left my coat in the hall and followed her into the living room where Dad and the police officer were waiting.





1. COMING HOME

The day everything began to go wrong started off well. It was my thirteenth birthday and Mum made my favourite breakfast: pancakes with maple syrup. At school, Mrs Doak got the class to sing Happy Birthday to me, which none of the teachers at my previous schools had ever done. It made me feel like grinning with pleasure and crawling under my desk in embarrassment all at the same time. But what made that day better than any other birthday was that for the first time I had a best friend to celebrate with.

Some people keep diaries. Me, I keep a sketchbook. So as I walked home from school with Lucy Chu, I was thinking about the picture I would draw later when I was alone.

First, I'd sketch Lucy and me striding down the leaf-covered pavement in our matching navy skirts and jumpers, strands of mousey brown hair blowing about my freckled face, Lucy's black hair staying in its tidy bun despite the wind. Then I'd add the sun shining down on us, bright yellow in a blue sky, and Corstorphine Hill in front of us, gold and green trees

at the top, rows of houses snuggled against its slopes. My house stood up there. Since it was near the top, all I could see from the main road was a corner of its red roof. But in the picture in my head, having a house I could call home was just as important as having a best friend. I was so happy I felt like skipping, but instead I just smiled to myself and kicked my feet through the pile of leaves.

Lucy stopped at her garden gate. She stayed in one of a row of identical brick houses that lined the main road. She'd lived there her entire life; something I could only imagine. My parents and I had been in Edinburgh for just over a year, which was a couple of months longer than we'd lived anywhere else.

Lucy pulled a square package, wrapped in silver tissue paper, out of her bag. "Happy birthday, Edda," she said, handing it to me.

"Thanks," I said, smiling so wide my cheeks hurt.

"Aren't you going to open it?" she asked.

I didn't need to be asked twice. I tore off the paper. Inside was a small blank book with a picture of a lion on the cover. The painting looked familiar.

"I got it at the National Gallery," Lucy said. "It's from that painting you liked so much when we went there with school."

"*Una and the Lion!*" I exclaimed, finally recognising it. "It's the best painting in the whole building." Not only did I wish I could paint that beautifully, I also wished I could have a lion for company like Una. Then I wouldn't be afraid of anything.

"Is it a good size?" Lucy asked. "I wanted to get

something small enough to fit in your pocket so you can do your art wherever you go.”

I told her it was perfect, not wanting to admit I was too shy to even think about drawing in front of other people.

I gave Lucy a quick hug and continued on my way home, daydreaming about the presents waiting for me and the chocolate mousse cake I'd spied at the back of the fridge, even though Mum had sworn she wasn't making one this year.

I'd almost reached the top of Hillside Drive when a cloud passed in front of the sun and the street darkened. Some sound made me look behind. Huffing and puffing, Euan Morrison was pedalling up the road on an expensive new mountain bike. I had to hide. Euan's favourite hobby was picking on me, and no one was here to stop him. Luckily, he hadn't seen me yet. He was too busy watching his feet go round and round. I slipped behind a stubby rosebush and crouched down. Most of the time it stinks to be the smallest kid in class, but when you need to hide it can be useful.

Euan drew nearer. I held my breath. If he caught me skulking like this, he'd never let me live it down. He'd moved to Edinburgh last September just like I had. Kids had ignored him, just like they'd ignored me. We could have banded together, become friends even, but he decided the fast route to popularity was finding someone to make fun of: me.

I watched through a gap in the leaves as he rode past, still wearing his uniform. He stayed somewhere on the other side of school in a neighbourhood full of

big fancy houses, so what was he doing here? At the crossroads, he turned up the hill, towards my house. I gulped. Did he know where I lived?

I told myself I was being silly. Euan was lazy. He could humiliate me all he wanted at school. He was probably just going mountain biking. An iron gate at the top of my street led to Corstorphine Hill Nature Reserve. Lots of kids like Euan, with more muscle than brains, spent their afternoons on bicycles, hurtling down the park's steep, winding paths at break-neck speeds – literally. I hoped Euan would fall, not so badly he'd be hurt, just enough to scare him.

I counted to fifty, then left my hiding spot and walked slowly to the crossroads feeling angry with Euan for invading my neighbourhood and spoiling my perfect afternoon. I looked up the empty street. The gate was swinging back and forth in the wind.

It was only when I turned into my yard and Henry, my neighbour's golden retriever, came bounding over to the fence, that I noticed the sun had come back out.

My house, a snug little bungalow, looked even smaller than it was because the trees in the park behind it grew so tall. All that separated my back garden from that park was a stone wall and a green wooden door. When we first moved in, Mum said the door reminded her of *The Secret Garden*, that it made all of Corstorphine Hill Nature Reserve feel like our own magic place.

Dad's a woodworker and he loves having the woods close by. He says it makes it easier to live in the city, having nature just the other side of the wall. We moved to Edinburgh when Mum got a job teaching botanical

illustration – that’s painting pictures of plants for scientists – at the Royal Botanic Garden.

The house was empty but the whine of a band saw and the comforting smell of sawdust told me Dad was in his shed in the back garden. I went into the living room to investigate my presents.

There was a big squishy parcel from Granny and Grandpa Ritchie in Canada: probably a jumper. Granny Ritchie always knits me jumpers and they’re always at least two sizes too big. I only see her every few years and she never believes Mum when she sends my measurements – both my parents are normal sized. Nana Macdonald had sent something small in a hard box, jewellery maybe. She has very particular ideas about girls being ladylike.

The presents from my parents were more difficult to guess. They know how much I like to poke and prod my gifts, so they always disguise them, hiding them in extra-big boxes or using wads of bubble wrap to give them strange shapes. I’d asked for a set of professional oil pastels and an iPod. None of the packages looked right for either, but a couple were big enough to hide them inside. I’d have to wait until after dinner to find out.

I left my homework in my bag and went into my bedroom to get my sketchbook. The pictures I drew in it were just for me: things I found interesting, places I visited, stuff from my dreams, portraits of friends and caricatures of people who bugged me. No one, not even my parents, was allowed to open it. When I wasn’t using it, I kept it safely hidden under my mattress.

As I pulled it out of its hiding place, a small piece of paper fluttered to the floor: a leaflet for a contest at the National Gallery. Lucy had made me pick it up. The contest was called "Put Yourself in the Picture". To enter, you had to "interpret" one of the gallery's paintings by copying it and adding an image of yourself. The deadline was the first of October, which was only two weeks away, but I still hadn't gone back to the gallery. The idea of anybody seeing something I'd drawn was frightening enough; displaying a picture I'd made of myself was completely petrifying.

I folded up the leaflet and tucked it inside my sketchbook. I turned to a blank page and took out the box of broken, grotty pastels I'd had since I was six. Some of them were smudged so badly it was hard to tell what colour they were meant to be.

I closed my eyes and tried to remember the way everything had looked as I walked home. As soon as the image started to form in my head, I began to draw. I had no problem sketching Lucy and me, but when it came to adding the hill and houses I kept thinking about Euan being there and the picture went all wonky. The trees came out dark and menacing and the houses were crooked, not cosy at all. I pulled the page out, crumpled it up and started again. I'd just got the sun the way I wanted it when the front door banged open. I looked at the clock beside my bed. It was six thirty already!

"Sorry I'm late," called Mum. "Where is everybody? Aren't we picking up Lucy in ten minutes?"

"Coming," I said, shoving my sketchbook into its hiding place.

There was a knock on my bedroom door and Mum entered. "You're still in your school uniform!" she exclaimed. "And your hands are covered in pastel!" I looked down at them; they were a mess.

"Where's your father?" she asked. His band saw started whining again, so I didn't bother answering. "Hurry and get cleaned up," she said. "I'll pry your father out of his shed."

I wiped my hands quickly on a tissue and rummaged through my clothes until I found what I was looking for: a brightly coloured dress, because I'd picked a Mexican place for dinner; and red shoes with heels, because going to a restaurant for my birthday seemed like an adult thing to do.

"Oh, Mouse, you look so grown-up," said Mum, as I came into the hall. Edda the Mouse, that's me. My parents have been calling me that for as long as I can remember. It might have been cute when I was six, but I've hated the nickname for a while now. It's hard to be anything but small, quiet and timid when you hear "Mouse" more often than your real name. I'd kind of hoped they would stop doing it when I turned thirteen.

"Mum—" I began, but just at that moment Dad burst out of my parents' bedroom in his one, very out-dated suit, pleading for someone to sort out his tie. Mum got it knotted and herded us both out the door and into the car.

Dad slipped behind the steering wheel. He still had large flakes of sawdust in his hair. I looked down at the traces of pastel that were still on my hands and smiled.

*

I'd never tried proper Mexican food before, but the gooey cheese enchilada I ordered was delicious and I cleaned my plate – well, except for the fiery green hoops of sliced jalapeno pepper. After accidentally biting into one of those, I picked out the rest and piled them safely to the side.

After dinner, we dropped Lucy off at her house and Dad turned the car up Hillside Drive. I hugged my knees to my chest, feeling warm inside from dinner and the anticipation of presents.

Mum nattered on about work. Dad nodded every once in a while to show he was listening. We were out late. All that was left of the day was a faint blue glow in the sky behind the black hulk of the hill. As we turned onto our street, I sat up extra tall, waiting for the exact moment our house would appear out of the darkness.

Mr Campbell's house swung into view, windows glowing, but in the space before it, the space where our house should have been, all was shadowy blackness. For one crazy, awful second I thought our house was gone. Panic fluttered in my stomach, but then the headlights swept over its beige stone walls and curtained windows. I leaned back, feeling foolish for imagining a building could just disappear.

Dad pulled the car into the driveway. He and Mum got out. I lagged behind, unable to shake the feeling of uneasiness, like an itch that was everywhere and nowhere at the same time. The house was still here, but something was wrong; I knew it in the hollow of my stomach. This house was the first place we'd stayed in that really felt like home; if anything happened to it,

I didn't know what I'd do.

I opened the car door. I could hear Henry barking. Was it my imagination or did he sound anxious? I got out and looked over. He was at Mr Campbell's front window. He saw me. The barking stopped and was replaced by the thumping of his tail hitting the glass. He wasn't worried about anything. I was just being silly. If I wanted my parents to stop calling me Mouse, maybe it was time to stop acting like one.

"Edda, are you coming?" Mum called from the front door. "There's chocolate cake." The mention of chocolate chased away the last tingle of uneasiness. I skipped up the stairs and followed Mum inside.

"I thought you weren't baking a cake this year," I shouted, hanging up my jacket.

"It wouldn't be a birthday without your favourite cake," Mum said, poking her head out of the kitchen. "I was only teasing before."

"You shouldn't joke about chocolate," I said. She gave me a mischievous grin and vanished back into the kitchen.

A minute later she called, "Edda, can you please get Great-Granny Macdonald's plates out?"

I could hear someone rooting through drawers, probably trying to find the candles.

I turned the lights on in the living room. The china cabinet was empty.

"Where'd you put the plates?" I asked.

"What?" Mum shouted back.

As I stepped into the room, my foot kicked something. It rolled under the sofa. I bent down to see what it was:

a wadded-up ball of gold and purple wrapping paper. I looked over at the coffee table. Where the neat stack of presents had been, there was a mess of torn tissue paper, cut ribbons and ripped-up cardboard. The mammoth set of pastels I'd asked for had been dumped onto the floor, the magenta ground into the carpet by someone's shoe. Next to it sat an empty, watch-sized box with the crest of a Kirkcaldy jeweller on it.

My brain struggled to make sense of it.

"Mum, Dad," I said uncertainly. Panic danced in my stomach.

"Just a minute, honey," Mum called. "Nathan's finally found the candles. Why don't you put on the birthday CD?"

There was a gaping hole on the side table where the stereo should be. Someone had been in the house while we were gone. They might still be here now. My brain screamed "run" but my feet were glued to the floor. I opened my mouth to shout for help, but no sound came out.

"Okay, you can hit play now," said Dad, carrying a cake into the room, thirteen candles blazing on top.

"What's wrong, Mouse?" he asked, catching sight of my face.

My voice still wouldn't work. With a shaking hand, I pointed at the table, the cabinet, the place where the stereo should have been. Dad dumped the cake on the table and strode over to the phone, bellowing, "Helen, get in here, now!" as he picked up the receiver and dialled 999.

2. SLEEPING WITH THE LIGHTS ON

“They’ll send a police officer as soon as possible, but since it’s not an emergency it might take a while,” said Dad, hanging up the phone.

“Not an emergency?” I said. “But someone broke into our house. They stole my presents.” It felt like they’d also stolen the invisible warm bit that had made the house feel like home. I shivered.

“We’ll buy you new presents,” said Mum. I wondered if it was possible to buy back that warm, safe feeling too.

“What if they’re still here?” I continued. My stomach churned as I imagined a man in a balaclava lurking in my bedroom, listening to us talk, waiting for his moment to leap out.

“I wouldn’t worry, Mouse,” Dad said gently. “They got what they wanted. They’re long gone now.”

“Let’s wait outside anyway, just in case,” I said, desperate to escape the house that still looked like ours, but felt like it belonged to strangers.

“Mouse...” Mum began. I bolted out the front door before she could finish her sentence.

I waited for my parents to follow, but the door remained shut. The night began to close in around me and I shuddered.

A door slammed. It sounded like the back door to our house. I felt sick. Was it a burglar running away? Was he creeping towards me around the side of the house?

Where were my parents? Weren't they worried about me out here all alone surrounded by robbers?

I had a sudden sickening thought. What if they had surprised the burglar and he'd knocked them unconscious before running out the back door? What if they were lying on the floor bleeding, needing my help?

Once I had the thought, I couldn't get it out of my head. I had to go back inside and make sure they were okay. I was thirteen now, it was time to stop being Edda the Mouse and start being someone else, someone braver.

Mustering all the courage I could find, I took a step towards the house. The handle on the front door rattled and began to turn. I froze. The door swung open and Mum emerged in her winter jacket, carrying my big warm coat in her arms. Relief swept over me, making my knees wobble.

"I thought you might want this," she said. She wrapped the coat around my shoulders and I snuggled gratefully into its warmth.

"Where's Dad?" I asked, my voice still shaky.

"He went to check the shed," she said. Her hand reached into her pocket. Seconds later it came back

out, empty. I recognised that gesture. She'd made it a lot after she quit smoking. Watching her do it again, I knew she was upset too. The lump in my throat grew bigger.

"I should never have dragged us to the city," Mum said quietly, gazing at the house. "Maybe we should think about moving."

I thought about having to change schools again, about leaving Lucy behind. I thought about Henry. Who would take him for long walks if we left? I hated that our house had been broken into, but I didn't want to move away.

The sound of a car winding up Hillside Drive broke the silence. A police car appeared at the crossroads, turned up our street, and came to a halt in front of our house. A light came on inside it. I could see the police officer leafing through a notebook. The longer he sat reading, the more Mum stiffened and bristled beside me. Finally, he got out and came over to us, trampling straight through Mum's flower border without even noticing.

"Is this the B and E?" he asked her.

"If you're asking if we're the ones who called about a burglary, then the answer is yes," said Mum coldly.

The police officer looked like he'd be more comfortable in a uniform one size bigger. He brought a hand up to his mouth, stifling a yawn. I could actually hear Mum's jaw clench.

"Sorry," he said, "long day." Mum stared at him as though she'd have more sympathy for a midge.

"Well, show me the damage," he said.

Mum pursed her lips but said nothing, just turned and walked to the front door, the policeman in tow.

I lingered behind, which was when I heard the squeaking and saw the boy on the old-fashioned bicycle for the very first time.

When Mum, Dad and I were all gathered in the living room, the policeman asked us loads of questions. Did we usually leave the house on Tuesday nights? Who knew we were going out? Had there been work done to the house? My parents answered, no, nobody, and no.

“I wouldn’t worry too much,” he said, smiling jovially. “Looks like a professional job. If they didn’t have inside information, they must have had your place staked out.”

It sounded like a lot to worry about: someone watching our house. The thought made my skin crawl.

“Do you know how they got in?” the policeman asked. “Any broken windows? Broken doors?”

“I checked the back door. It was unlocked,” said Dad.

“Was it locked when you left?” asked the policeman.

“Yes... at least I think so, but I keep a spare key under the mat,” said Dad, looking guiltily at Mum. “The key’s gone,” he added.

“Then it wasn’t really a *break* and enter,” said the policeman, chortling at his own joke. Mum looked at him as if he were a midge she wanted to squash. “It’s better if they get in easily,” the policeman continued, “that way you don’t have to repair anything. Replacing a window or a door can be costly. Better get the locks changed though. These professionals know that once

you get the insurance money, you'll replace what they took. They could come back."

My stomach flip-flopped. What if they came back one afternoon when I was here by myself?

"Speaking of insurance claims..." The policeman handed Mum and Dad a stack of papers, explaining they had to write down each missing item, its brand, age, the room it had been taken from and what it had cost. One copy was for the police, one for the insurance company and one theirs to keep. He said not to bother rushing to fill them in, since they had a backlog of forms to deal with anyway. Mum's jaw ticked.

"Well, that's it for me," he said cheerfully. "I'll not keep you from your celebrations any longer." He waved a hand in the direction of the cake and the mess of torn wrapping paper.

"Aren't you going to look around?" Mum asked.

"Nah," he replied. "I see this sort of thing all the time."

"Well then, thank you for all your help," Mum said through clenched teeth.

"My pleasure," he replied, oblivious to the sarcasm in her voice.

While my parents walked him to the door – "to make sure he leaves," Mum muttered – I started tidying up. I gathered the shreds of wrapping paper and dumped them in the recycling bin. Then I collected all the pastels. Some were broken, while others had been smudged together. The only pastel that still looked brand new was the gold one, which was useless. When would I ever need to use a gold-coloured pastel?

I succeeded at holding my tears back until I saw the fuzzy pink jumper Granny Ritchie had sent me lying on the floor. Someone with muddy shoes had stepped on it and torn the shoulder. As I picked it up, the stitches started to unravel. The jumper was two sizes too big and I never wear pink, but watching it fall apart made my eyes fill up and overflow. I wiped my cheeks, folded up the jumper and laid it carefully on the table.

Mum came back in and grabbed one of the forms, announcing she was too wound up to go to bed just yet. I peeked over her shoulder as she noted the missing presents: an iPod and a Swiss watch.

Catching me looking, she tried to give me a smile, but it came out more like a grimace. "It's okay," she said. "We'll buy new ones."

I trailed after her and Dad as they went from room to room writing things down. They left my bedroom until last. I paused at the door, afraid of what I'd find on the other side.

I will be brave, I told myself. I gritted my teeth and followed them in.

The burglars had dumped my dresser drawers out onto the bed and my jewellery box gaped open. Necklaces and earrings were strewn across the desk. My stereo and even my crummy old clock radio were gone.

Mum flicked through my jewellery. "Her amber necklace is missing," she told Dad. He wrote it down.

That's when I noticed my mattress was hanging off the bed frame. Feeling like I might throw up, I walked slowly around to the far side of my bed. My sketchbook lay open on the carpet, the flyer for the contest ripped

in two beside it. My eyes threatened to overflow again. Someone had come in here, put his hands under my mattress, pulled out my most private thoughts and looked at all the stuff I wanted to keep secret.

I felt just as exposed as I had on my first day at Hillside High School when Euan stole the doodle I'd made of me as a mouse and showed it to the whole class, crowing, "Eddie the Wee Mousie", and making a stupid face. I'd wanted to say something clever, but my mind went blank. The other kids started laughing and calling me Wee Mousie too. I'd wanted to crawl under my desk and hide, but I couldn't move.

Lucy had rescued me. She strode up to Euan, who's at least a foot taller, pulled the notebook out of his hands and gave it back to me. Since that day, Lucy and I have been friends and making fun of me has been Euan's favourite pastime.

I suddenly remembered that Euan had been in my neighbourhood just a few, short hours before the burglary. He knew it was my birthday, thanks to Mrs Doak. He might even have overheard Lucy and me making plans to go out for dinner. Maybe he hadn't been going mountain biking after all. Maybe he'd come up here to spy on my house.

I told myself I was being silly. Euan was certainly mean enough, but the police officer had said it looked like a professional burglary and there was no way Euan had the brains to pull off something like that.

Mum stayed and helped me clean up. While we folded clothes and untangled necklaces, she kept telling me I

didn't have to sleep in my bedroom. She could get out the air mattress and put it on the floor by their bed.

I wanted to say yes. The idea of being alone in the dark in a room someone had broken into terrified me. But abandoning it felt too much like giving in to the burglars, so I said I was fine.

Mum stayed until I was safely tucked into bed. "Goodnight, Mouse," she said, kissing me on the forehead. For once I didn't mind the nickname; it made me feel safe and warm and sleepy. My eyelids sagged shut, but as soon as the door clicked closed behind her, they snapped back open again. The room was pitch black. Mum had turned off the lights on her way out. Heart pounding, I pulled the duvet up to my chin.

Had anybody checked under the bed? What if one of the burglars was hiding under there, waiting for me to go to sleep?

I lunged off the bed, and felt along the wall for the switch.

As soon as the light was back on, my fears dimmed, but I still needed to check that the room was empty.

I grabbed my hockey stick from the wardrobe and jumped back onto my bed. Holding it in front of me, I carefully leaned over and looked underneath. The only things lurking there were a couple of dust bunnies.

No one in the wardrobe, no one under the bed, and nowhere else large enough for someone to hide in. I leaned back onto my pillow with a sigh of relief, telling myself I was completely safe. I sat up straight again – unless someone broke in through my window.

I left the light on. Clutching my hockey stick, I

crawled back under the duvet, determined to stay awake the whole night. But without the dark to fill my imagination, my mind began to settle and I started to feel sleepy. I tried to keep my eyelids open, but they grew heavier and heavier. As I drifted off to sleep, I heard the faint *squeak, squeak, squeak* of a bicycle wheel that needs greasing.

