

A SLIGHTLY  
JONES MYSTERY

THE  
CASE

of the

HIDDEN  
CITY

Also by Joan Lennon and published by Catnip:

*The Case of the London Dragonfish*

*The Case of the Glasgow Ghoul*

*The Case of the Cambridge Mummy*

And for younger readers:

*Tales from the Turrets*

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JOAN LENNON



CATNIP BOOKS

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Everybody's heard of Florence Nightingale  
and David Livingstone. These books are dedicated  
to the nineteenth-century heroes and heroines who  
aren't so famous!

This one's for Gustave Eiffel, who built the Eiffel  
Tower, the inner skeleton of the Statue of Liberty,  
and more bridges, train stations, churches, gas  
works, theatres, fountains and viaducts – all over the  
world – than you could shake a stick at.



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CHAPTER ONE:  
**What the Moon  
Saw**

**T**he moon was full, hanging gloriously in a clear sky. Two great cities sparkled in the night below. Cats prowled on the roofs of London and Paris, their eyes like tiny twin moons between their pricked-up ears.

In London, home of Slightly Jones, detective-in-training, there was no candle burning in her attic bedroom, no sign that she was eagerly reading the latest Sherlock Holmes story late into the night. Slightly Jones wasn't there.

In Paris, one ray of moonlight shone down, past all the attic bedrooms, down between the buildings to the streets where it found a metal grill in the ground, then down, further down, into the dark places under the ground . . . A figure could be dimly seen, its face upturned, pale in the moonshine. For a moment, an eye gleamed. A hand lifted, as if to touch the light, and then the figure withdrew slowly back into the black, and it was as if it had never been.



CHAPTER TWO:  
**Moans in the  
Steamer**

**A**t exactly the same moment, Slightly Jones burst into the cabin of the Dover to Calais steamer with her red hair flying and her eyes sparking with excitement.

‘Granny, you *have* to come up on deck – it’s amazing! The moon and the wind and the waves –’

‘Slightly ...’

‘– and the boat’s just *ploughing* through it and throwing up the water at the front –’

‘SLIGHTLY ...’

‘– sploosh! Sploosh! And back and forth and up and down –’

‘SLIGHTLY!’

It was at this point that Slightly realised Granny’s face was a rather odd colour. A sort of greeny-grey. And she was lying down on her bunk, which wasn’t like Granny at all.

‘Oh, Granny. You should have eaten that ginger biscuit, like the captain said. He *said* it would help you not to get seasick.’

‘Hate ginger,’ muttered Granny. ‘Hate boats.’

‘Maybe if you came up on deck . . .’

‘BE QUIET, SLIGHTLY!’

‘I’ll just sit down then, shall I? Until you’re feeling better?’

If it had been anybody but Granny, Slightly would have sworn she *growled*. She decided that the smart thing was to do as she was told, so she curled up on her own bunk and started to read Sherlock Holmes’ latest adventure. But then, after a little while, she stopped. And listened.

There it was again. A strange, muffled, moaning, wailing sort of sound. Like a ghost.

‘Oooooo . . .’

‘Granny? Is that you?’ But Granny seemed to have dropped off to sleep.

Slightly looked under the bed. *This is ridiculous! Who ever heard of ghosts on a modern steamboat?*

‘OoooooOOOO!’ It was getting worse.

She moved around the small room, listening hard . . . *Is it coming from this side?* Closer, closer until she had her ear to the wall and . . . *Yes, the moaning is louder here . . .*

The knocking from the hall outside was so sudden it made Slightly bang her head on the gas fixture. Rubbing the sore spot, she scuttled over to open the door.

Mr Westerly stood in the doorway, stroking his moustache nervously. He was a big man and an accomplished artist, but at that moment he looked like a scolded schoolboy.

‘Slightly, thank goodness! I don’t know what to do . . . The lady in the next cabin . . . I’m afraid she is in need of assistance but when I tried to enter she – she threw her shoe at me!’ He pointed at his forehead on which, indeed, a very small mark could just be seen. ‘She insisted I send in her maid, but when I went to look for *her* I found she is ill with seasickness and I thought perhaps, if another female person – if Granny or you might . . .’

‘Slightly, go and see what you can do,’ said Granny in a hoarse whisper. ‘If I even try to stand up I cannot answer for the consequences . . .’

Slightly slipped into the corridor.

‘I’ll wait out here,’ whispered Mr Westerly, ‘in case she gets violent again.’

Slightly nodded. She could easily imagine what this formidable lady would look like – very English, very proper, with an impressive whalebone corset under a bombazine dress and her hair all scraped back in an iron-grey bun. She took a deep breath, knocked on the door and opened it . . . to be met by a flood of French from an extremely pretty young woman draped gracefully across the bed, all silk and fluttery scarves and flowing flaxen hair.

Slightly stared. *SHE scared Mr Westerly?!*

The lady was still talking a mile a minute in French and it looked as if tears were not far behind.

‘I’m sorry,’ said Slightly. ‘I don’t speak French – could you tell me what’s wrong in English?’

With barely a pause, the lady switched languages. ‘Oh, yes, I can indeed speak to you in English and so I can thank you for your kindness in coming to me in my great sorrow. *What is wrong?* you ask and I can tell you in a word – Death! *That* is what is wrong! I am dying! There is no fairness in this – I am young, I am beautiful, I am 0000000 . . .!’

*Ah-HA*, thought Slightly. *My ghost*. ‘I wonder if, just maybe, you might *not* be dying.’

‘Of course I am dying – do you think I do

not know the cold hand of Death when I feel it?' Nevertheless she looked at Slightly with a little hope. 'And if I am not dying, what is wrong with me?'

'Seasickness,' said Slightly firmly.

'What?! *Le mal de mer*? The sickness of the sea?' She looked for a moment as if she were about to be mightily offended – but then she stopped suddenly and whispered. 'Is it possible? Might I live to see another day? My beloved Paris? My equally beloved husband?'

'Yes,' said Slightly. 'Here, nibble on this.' And she handed the lady a ginger biscuit. The lady nibbled obediently. 'Now, I'm going to take you up on deck ...'

But she was not so obedient about this.

'I couldn't possibly go out in public – look at the state of my hair! It is in a mess!'

Slightly shrugged. 'My hair is always in a mess. Here, shove this hat on and we'll pull the veil down so nobody will know it's you.'

The lady giggled and suddenly didn't seem quite so grown up any more. 'A disguise! You are so clever . . . but I don't know your name. I am Madame Araminta du Perche – but you must call me Madame Mini because that is what my friends call me.'

'I'm Slightly Jones.'

‘No. No, you are a heroine! An angel. You are Florence Nightingshade!’

‘Er, Florence Nightingale.’

‘It is my English – you must forgive me!’

It was easy to do. Getting Madame Mini along the slanting corridors and safely up on deck with the way the ship was rolling *wasn't*, but Slightly managed and at last they were both giggling and clutching the railing.

Behind them, Dover’s white cliffs had disappeared into the distance. Ahead, the lights of Calais were a sparkle on the horizon. The steam engine throbbed powerfully and the smoke from the funnel streamed away across the night sky. It was exhilarating.

‘And now,’ said Madame Mini, ‘you must tell me *everything!*’

For one moment, Slightly hesitated. *I don't know this lady*, she thought. *She could be anything. She could be a thief or a con woman or a spy . . .*

Then Madame Mini looked at her and smiled her beautiful smile and said, ‘I’m so glad I met you, Mademoiselle Slightly. To say the truth, I have been quite lonely of late.’

And Slightly’s doubts dissolved. ‘I wish you could meet my family. It’s impossible to be lonely at Limpopo House!’

‘Limpopo? That is a strange name for a house! Why is it called that?’ Madame Mini asked, but Slightly couldn’t tell her why.

‘Nobody knows,’ she said, ‘except Granny. And she won’t tell. It’s a mystery.’

‘I love mysteries!’ said Madame Mini. ‘And you and your Granny live alone in this house of mystery?’

‘Not at all. And she’s not really my Granny. She’s my Great Aunt.’ Slightly explained how Granny Tonic had taken her in as a baby when Slightly’s parents died, but since everybody called her Granny, Slightly did too.

‘Who is “everybody”?’

So Slightly told her about the Limpopo lodgers. ‘Mr Gentler is a musician from Glasgow, and Miss Forth is a translator. She wears bloomers and rides a bicycle and she has a black cat called Cleopatra. And Mr Westerly is an artist. You’ve met him – remember? You threw a shoe at him. And of course, there’s Mr Thurgood. He’s a night watchman at the Natural History Museum and an amazing writer – it was through him that I got my first case.’

‘Please explain to me what is “a case”?’

So Slightly told Madame Mini about her adventures as a detective-in-training: the intriguing case of the London Dragonfish – the surprising case

of the Glasgow Ghoul – the terrifying case of the Cambridge Mummy. And Madame Mini seemed enthralled, her *mal de mer* completely forgotten. She asked a thousand questions, until the sun was coming up and the boat was about to enter the port of Calais.

As Slightly scurried off to find Granny and Mr Westerly, she found she couldn't stop grinning. She'd made a new friend, she'd crossed the Channel for the first time, it was her first visit to France and the beginning of a new case . . . (a sad and terrible case, of course, involving kidnapping – a very serious business.) But she couldn't help herself.

It was just so exciting!