



KATE WILKINSON

Kate studied English and drama and went to work at BBC Radio 4 in her twenties. Her first job was to write stories for preschool children who tuned into Listening Corner.

She then became a radio producer for many years, recording everything from boiling spaghetti to a poet in a broom cupboard. It was a joy for the most part, but she wanted to get back to writing stories rather than recording them.

The idea for *Edie Winter and the Box of Flits* came to her because in London, where she lives, she spends so much time hanging about on station platforms that she passes the time imagining a parallel world of small people who inhabit the underground.

About Edie Winter and the Box of Flits

Eleven-year-old Edie Winter is lonely. Dumped by her friends as she makes the tricky transition to secondary school, she decides to spend half term helping her dad at the Transport for London Lost Property Office.

Edie is intrigued by a wooden box that was found abandoned on the Bakerloo line. Inside she discovers Impy, a tiny, thumb-sized person with wings.

Impy needs a home for her family and someone to help her find her rebellious brother, Jot, who has gone missing in the underground. Set in contemporary London, *Edie Winter and the Box of Flits* is about being lost and found.

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EDIE WINTER AND THE BOX OF FLITS

Chapter One

*12 September. Kensal Green to Elephant and Castle (map of the Bakerloo line).
Three umbrellas, one scarf and one wooden box (locked).*

Edie noticed the boy first because he had red hair like her own, only his was gelled up into tufted spikes and hers hung down her back in two thick plaits.

A school tie was stuffed into the boy's jacket pocket and his legs were criss-crossed in front of him like oversized scissors. His thumb was skating back and forth across the screen of his phone as the stations on the London underground rattled past the windows behind him.

Edie could tell he had been in secondary school for a couple of years just by the easy way he'd stuffed his tie in his pocket. She looked down at her own school uniform. The jacket was still so big that only the tips of her fingers peeped out of the sleeves.

I might as well have 'Newbie Year Seven' plastered on my forehead, she thought.

The corners of her shirt dug into her neck, and Dad had insisted on looping her school tie into a tight V at the collar.

'Even a storm couldn't dislodge that knot,' he'd said, patting her on the head. 'I looked up how to do it in the Dictionary of Knots.'

If Dad hadn't been sitting there beside her on the train, she would have tugged at that knot until she could pull the tie from her neck and squash it right down to the bottom of her bag.

In another three months she would be twelve. It seemed a long time to wait.

The brakes whistled and screeched as the train arrived at Marylebone station. The carriage doors opened, letting out a breath of warm, fuggy air, and the boy snatched up his rucksack and bounced off, pushing past the passengers who were clustered around the exit.

Eddie could tell that he did this all the time. The London underground didn't faze him. He knew his way around the maze of stations and tracks that snaked right across the city.

So did she.

Years of living with Dad had taught her the names of every line and every station on the whole network. His job at the Transport for London Lost Property Office meant that the tube trains were almost a second home to her. She could even spell Piccadilly without pausing for breath. She wondered if the boy could do that.

PICC-A-DILLY. Two c's, one d and two l's. The doors snapped shut and the train gathered speed as it left the platform.

That was when she saw the box.

It was placed squarely on the seat opposite her, next to where the boy had been sitting. A wooden box about the size of a large shoebox with a lock at the front. Had it belonged to the boy? Eddie couldn't be sure. The boy *had* been sitting beside it, but if it was his, wouldn't he have suddenly remembered it as he stepped on to the platform, and scrambled his way back on to the train to grab it before the tube doors slid shut?

The train rattled on past five more stations.

The box sat there ignored by all the other passengers who were bent over their phones or reading the free newspapers that were left in piles by every station entrance.

Eddie stared at it. If it was a shoebox, why would there be a lock on the front? Maybe there were magic jumping boots inside or a pair of glass slippers?

A woman in a large woollen overcoat sat down beside it and a small dog nosed its way out of the folds of her coat. It sniffed at the box curiously and put its paw out to scratch the lid. Perhaps there were biscuits in there? Shortbread biscuits in different shapes and sizes like you get at Christmas. The dog began to sniff again more energetically.

'Wilfy!'

The woman pulled the dog back into the folds of her coat and moved down the carriage.

Eventually, as the train passed Lambeth North, Edie nudged her dad in the ribs.

‘I think someone’s left that box on the seat.’

Dad looked up from his paper and stared at the seat opposite. The train slowed down and pulled into Elephant and Castle. The carriage began to empty. Elephant and Castle was the end of the line.

‘How long has it been sitting there?’

‘Nine stations,’ said Edie. ‘I counted them.’

‘We’d better take it with us then,’ said Dad. ‘We’ll drop it into the Lost Property Office with these other things.’

He stood up, tucking two forgotten umbrellas under his arm and a red scarf he had found draped on a bench at Kensal Green

‘Can I carry it?’ asked Edie.

‘I suppose so,’ said Dad.

Edie picked up the box and wrapped her arms around it. It was lighter than she had expected. Too light for boots or biscuits. Perhaps it had a hamster inside with a little wheel for exercise, or a gold sovereign wrapped in a velvet bag?

‘Hurry up,’ said Dad.

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Benedict was waiting at the reception desk. He was nineteen and new to the Lost Property Office team. His hair flopped over his eyes and he wore skinny black jeans and T-shirts with slogans on. Today his T-shirt read: *Always Be Yourself Unless You Can Be A Unicorn.*

He jumped up as Edie and Mr Winter came through the door.

‘Ta-dah!’ he said, as if giving them a welcome fanfare.

‘Just a few more things to register, Benedict,’ said Dad, handing over his trawl of missing things.

Edie clung to the box. ‘Dad, can I look inside?’

She rattled the lid, but it was stuck fast.

‘No time, Edie. Benedict will sort it out.’

'I can catalogue it,' said Edie, 'I know what to do.'

'No, Edie. It's late and you have homework to do,' said Dad. 'Locked or not, the box doesn't belong to us. Someone will remember that they've left it on the train and probably pick it up tomorrow.'

She lifted it up to hand it over to Benedict. He had already begun to write out a label in big loopy writing: *One wooden box. Locked (no key). Found abandoned on carriage seat. Bakerloo line.*

'Come on, Edie. Rush hour, remember,' said Dad, walking towards the door.

Edie wasn't listening.

As she handed the box over to Benedict, she could have sworn that she felt something fluttering inside.

Chapter Two

25 October. Finsbury Park to Baker Street (map of Circle and Victoria lines).

It was the first day of the autumn half term and Mr Winter had agreed to let Edie help out in the office for the week. She was restless, and her feet were itchy from sitting at a table all morning. She drummed them up and down on the floor and jabbed another sticky barcode label on a damp umbrella.

Edie wanted to know what had happened to the box.

She hadn't been back to the Lost Property Office for six weeks and she was waiting for Benedict to come in for his shift. Rain dripped from the gutters outside the window, and the lights of the railway signals on the tracks below glistened like jelly sweets as they turned from red to green.

'Ughh!' Edie said. She rubbed at the glue on her fingers.

Benedict was very late, and as she waited for him, thoughts about secondary school crowded into her head.

She hated school.

A bluebottle buzzed furiously at the window, zigzagging back and forth as it tried to find its way out. Edie watched it for while as it whirred and fizzed. A small scribble of bad temper.

Edie had the same buzzing feeling inside, as if she, too, wanted to escape.

She stood up to open the window, gently flapping her hand at the fly until it caught a gust of air and zoomed away.

The phone rang and Mr Winter answered it.

‘Yup ... right ... oh dear ... that’s nasty.’

He put the phone down.

‘Poor Benedict. Tripped up and hurt his wrist. He won’t be in until later.’

Eddie felt cross and impatient. Why today of all days was Benedict going to be late?

Mr Winter was busy sorting through mobile phones. The day’s haul of lost property sacks had already slipped down the blue post chutes that ran from the ground floor down to the basement like a helter-skelter. The sacks were now lined up on the trolley beside him. Eddie had an idea.

‘Dad? Can I go and look in the room down the end?’

She loved the storeroom at the end of the corridor. It was where all the oddball, one-off things were stored, and it smelt of barley sugar and old biscuits. If the box hadn’t been claimed by anyone, it was sure to be there.

‘All right, but don’t spend hours,’ said Mr Winter. ‘Look for all the items marked ‘unclaimed’ and stack ’em in a pile ready for the charity shop. Load of old tat, most of it.’

As Eddie walked down the corridor she tried again not to think about school. In the week before half term, her two best friends from primary school had laughed at her new uniform with her baggy jumper and oversized shoes and talked in horrible, scratchy whispers. They’d never made fun of her before. Now they were all in Year Seven, it seemed to matter what you looked like.

‘Why are you still SO small?’ Ness had asked one lunchtime. She was already almost a head taller than Eddie.

‘Did you think getting big shoes would make you grow?’ asked Linny in a strange, sing-song voice. She leant over to Ness to show her a Snapchat picture of a ring of girls laughing and making faces.

Eddie opened her mouth to speak but nothing came out. She felt as if someone had pushed her hard and she was falling backwards off a wall that she had sat on for years. She fiddled with the end of one of her plaits.

‘I can still run the fastest,’ she said.

Ness and Linny looked at her as if she was their annoying younger sister.

‘Not in those shoes you can’t!’ Linny said.

And then they ignored her. They didn't even ask her what she was going to do over half term.

The corridor narrowed and Edie stopped in front of the last door.

She turned the key in the lock and pushed it open, breathing in the familiar, biscuity smell. The florescent strip lights buzzed into life, picking up specks of dust. There were no windows in the storeroom as the walls were covered with shelves that reached from floor to ceiling.

Edie walked along the first shelf, looking for the box, and pulling out any items that were marked with the large red 'unclaimed' labels. The pile grew – first a child's Pokémon rucksack, then a Mickey Mouse moneybox, an Arsenal football flag and an egg whisk.

She quickly scanned the other shelves, hoping to see a corner of wood, but there was nothing.

Edie became distracted by new arrivals. She pressed the alarm button on a penguin-shaped clock to make its wings flap, and plucked at the strings of a purple electric guitar. She was just about to pick up a strange medieval-looking sword, when she heard a tapping sound – sharp and insistent. It was an annoying tap, like a twig against a windowpane on a gusty night.

Edie stopped to listen.

There it was again – tap, tap, tap.

It was coming from somewhere high up.

She dragged a chair across the floor and levered herself up until the top of her head was level with the top shelf. She ran her hands along the surface, feeling her way. Her right hand rested on the soft brown felt of a cowboy hat. She pulled it towards her and spun it to the floor like a Frisbee.

Moving further along, her fingers caught in the oily feathers of a large bird.

'Agh!' she yelled, snatching her hand away as if she had burnt it.

The bird didn't move. Gingerly she felt for the bird's feet. They were firmly glued to a wooden plinth. The bird was stuffed.

She stopped again to listen. The tapping was just up to her right.

Climbing down, she moved the chair along and tried again. Just along from the stuffed bird, her fingers rested on the corners of a wooden box.

She felt certain it was *the* box. Her box. The one she had found on the Bakerloo line. The boy's spiked red hair fluttered across her memory.

Edie scabbled at it and dragged it towards her. She felt sweat prickling on her forehead as she slid it off the shelf and into her arms.

It felt the same. She could see Benedict's wobbly handwriting on the brown label that was tied to its handle.

She was right. Benedict *had* put it here for safekeeping.

She saw that there was a small pane of glass on each side that she hadn't noticed before. The tapping noise was coming from one of the panes.

Edie felt scared and excited at the same time. She hadn't been mistaken about that fluttering feeling when she handed over the box to Benedict. There *was* something alive in there. Perhaps it *was* a hamster gnawing and scraping at the wooden sides?

If it was something alive, it would be very hungry.

Gripping the box by the handle to keep it steady, she stepped back down from her chair and sat on it.

The tapping became louder and more frantic.

Edie held the box up until the pane of glass was level with her face. At first all she could see was a faint yellow glow. It was blurry, as if someone had smeared the glass with grease, but her eyes slowly adjusted.

A tiny creature was beating its fists against the glass. It was about the size of Edie's thumb. Its hair looked like the fluff on a dandelion and it had wings that were whirring furiously. The creature stopped banging and started to wave wildly at Edie.

Then, clear as a tiny bell, words began to form.

'I want to come out RIGHT THIS MINUTE!'