



Mad Lady at the Station

*An excerpt from DOTTY AND THE CALENDAR
HOUSE KEY, Chapter 1: 'New Beginnings'.*

Dotty awoke at Leeds with a gentle squeeze on the shoulder from a friendly train guard: a lady with thick blond hair cut just short of her shoulders, and a kind smile.

“You’re in Leeds now, love. Time to get off the train.”

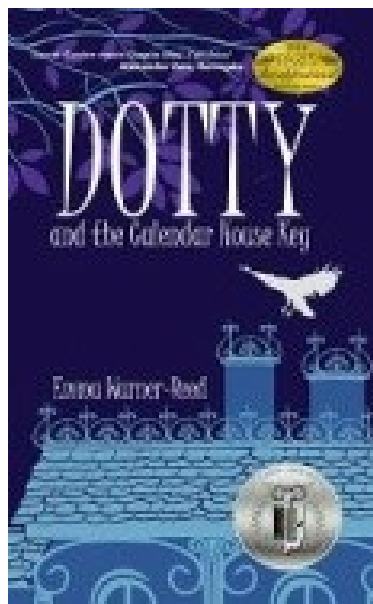
Dotty glanced out of the train window, her eyes quickly scanning the platform for anyone who might be Great Uncle Winchester. Instead, her gaze alighted upon a strange looking female figure on the concourse. Dotty blinked hard and then looked again. The woman, who was in the latter part of middle age, was making what could only be described

as a complete spectacle of herself. She beamed from ear to ear like an over-excited schoolgirl and waved manically in Dotty's direction. Dotty eyed her suspiciously.

The woman was short in stature – no more than five feet tall – and matronly, with a mass of wiry curls that tumbled out at all angles from her white cloth mop-cap: the type you see maids wearing in the mid-afternoon Victorian melodramas Dotty's mum had liked to watch on TV. The woman's face was round (as was the rest of her) and rather red around the nose and cheeks – too many hours standing over a steaming stock pot, she reckoned, for this person was clearly a cook.

It was not just the cap that gave Dotty this impression. Over her plain brown dress the woman was wearing a large white cooking apron covered in flour (as was much of the rest of her), protruding from the front pocket of which was a rolling pin – also much floured. Dotty stared at the vision in flour again. Perhaps she was still dreaming. Clearly this person didn't belong in any sensible scene from modern life. The cook continued to wave. Dotty had just concluded that she must be an over-zealous National Trust volunteer escaped from one of their annual Heritage Days, when she noticed something hanging around the woman's neck. It was a makeshift cardboard sign, with 'DOROTHEA

PARSONS' scrawled on it in blue marker pen. *Well that blew the 'mad lady waiting for somebody else' theory out of the water then,* thought Dotty, miserably.



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