

CROW  
MORW

Mountain

lucy inglis



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# For Charlie, Ruth, and Jack Tweddle. With love.

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# Prologue

“Hope! The taxi’s here!” Meredith shouted.

Hope rammed the last of her stuff into her black nylon duffel bag. “Coming!”

She clumped down the stairs, lugging her heavy bags, as her mother stood in the hall, looking at the clock.

“He’s cutting it fine.”

“We’ve got hours, Mum.” *And hours of hanging around in airports for the next day.*

“Do you have everything you need? Where we’re going is very remote.”

“Where we go is always very remote. And yes, I have everything. I think.”

The black-cab driver beeped his horn. Meredith threw open the door, letting in London’s pale spring sunshine. “Then let’s go.”

The driver rolled his window down. “Taxi for West?”

“That’s us.”

When they were loaded into the cab, he checked their destination. “Heathrow, Terminal Five, ladies?”

“Yes, please,” Meredith said curtly, clearly annoyed with his familiar tone.

As they left the end of their road, he began to make conversation. “Going on holiday?”

“No, work.”

“What’s your work, then?” he asked, with the typical bluntness of a London cabbie.

“I’m an environmental and forest ecosystem scientist specializing in subalpine microclimates.”

Hope squashed a sigh. Meredith was more than usually on edge when they had to make a flight.

“A sub . . . righto.” The driver continued undeterred. “Where are you working, then?”

“Montana. On the edge of the Glacier National Park. For a month.”

He whistled, pulling into the traffic heading for the North Circular. “Had a man from Montana in my cab once. Know what they say about it?”

“No,” Meredith said.

“They call it the Last Best Place.”

“Because of its remarkable ecology?”

“No. Because of how it’s one of the least populated places in America. You can lose yourself in the wilderness there and never be found. The Unabomber, outlaws, people like that. Go off grid in Montana and you’re never seen again.” He glanced at Hope in the rearview mirror. “The real Wild West.”