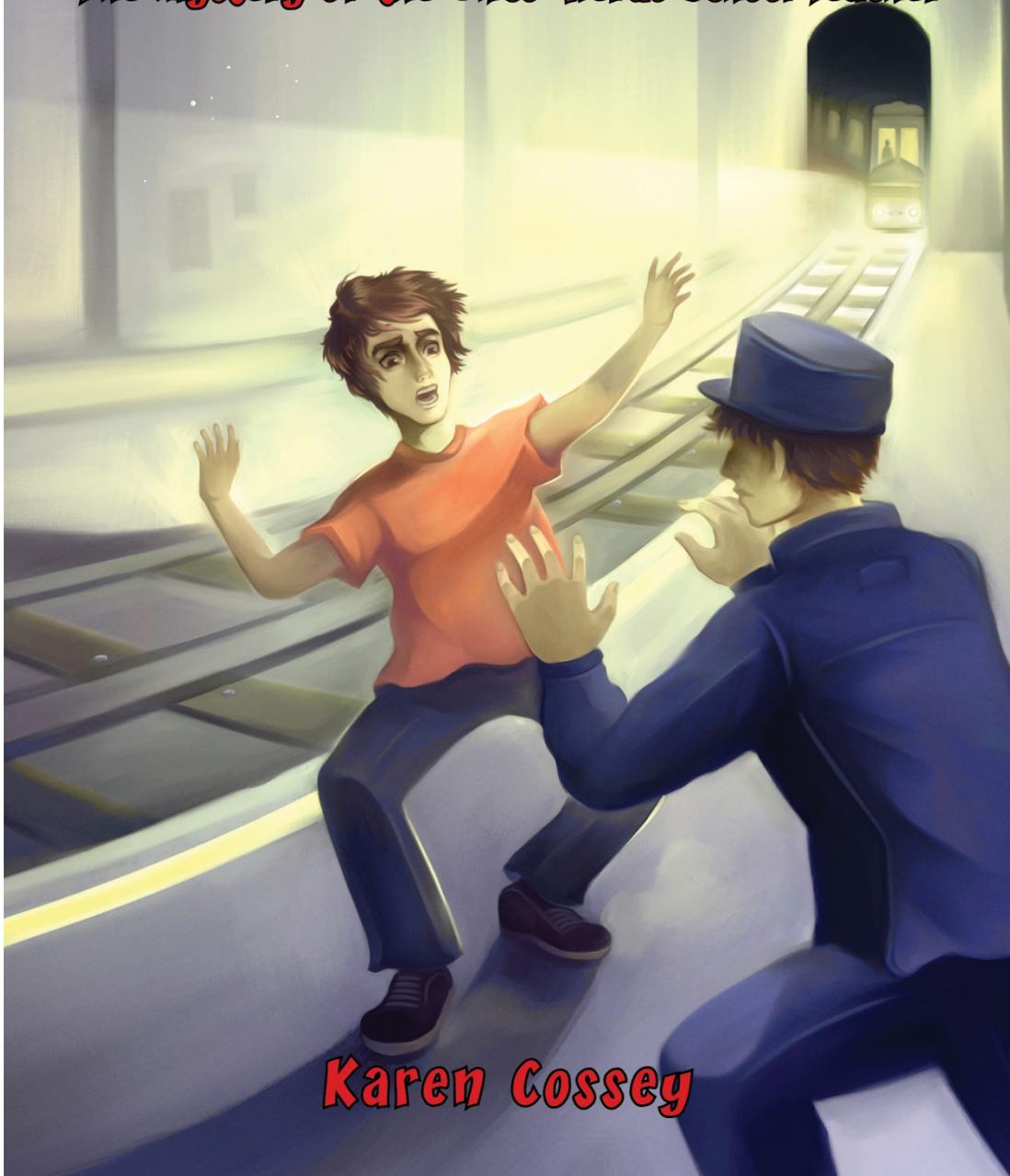




THE CON ARTIST'S TAKEOVER

The Mystery of the Unco-Nerdo School Teacher



Karen Cossey

Chapter One: The Jump

*Midday Friday, last week of June,
Spain.*

The scream of police sirens kept coming as Andrew raced across the bridge in the Bugatti Veyron. The police car was getting closer.

Up ahead was the dead-end drop into the river. The police car slammed on its brakes, but Andrew changed gears and sped up.

The sirens stopped. The only noise was the sound of the Bugatti's revving engine.

Would he make it? Andrew pushed the booster button as he hit the hidden ramp. Perfect timing. The Bugatti flew off the road, arched through the sky, then headed down towards the ramp on the other side of the river.

Great landing!

Andrew pulled the car to a stop.

Cheers erupted from the film crew as Andrew climbed out of the car and took his helmet off. Jason ran up to him.

"Wow! What a buzz. Did you see that?" Andrew waved his arm towards the river.

"We did. Got it all on film too. You sure know how to drive."

"Thanks, Jason. That was a blast. I never imagined a Bugatti could jump like that! Thanks for letting me have a go. I've been missing the Bug back home. Hey, maybe we should have it fitted out with a roll cage."

Jason rubbed his thumb across his fingers. "You want to pay for that? And all the repairs after the jump?"

Andrew looked at the car. The mechanics were shaking their heads.

"You're right." He smiled and tapped the car's bonnet. "I'll leave the stunt driving to the movie-makers."

Jason's assistant came up and passed Jason his mobile.

"Did she film it for you? Let's see," Andrew said.

Jason showed the video clip to Andrew.

Nice jump. That was going to be great on the big screen.

“You should send that to Lia,” Andrew said. “Ask her if she wants to go for a drive.”

Jason grinned at him and sent the message.

A minute later, his mobile beeped with Lia's reply. They looked at it together:

First time I've been glad the Bug's out of action. Love to go for a drive with you though. But let's take the BMW. A little more sedate for my liking. As long as Andrew's not driving.”

Chapter Two: Painful Ugly Education

9.30am Saturday morning, Cawsand, England.

Logan threw his helmet on his bed and headed downstairs to the kitchen. Saturday morning and he was starving. He'd been at the track since 5.30 practicing for next month's big race. The track was closing for the next two weeks so it had been his last chance.

Man, he was going to miss it. But he'd survive.

That thought made him stop at the kitchen door and scratch his head.

He wasn't as gloomy as he used to be, not since catching those shipwreck pirates. Thank goodness for Meeka, Nate and Poet. He had friends who were like family. Or was it family who were friends? Didn't matter. He was glad for it, both ways round.

"Have you seen Poet?" Abby asked as she pushed past him.

"I saw her lying on her bed," he said.

Nate came in from outside, sweating from a run.

"She was supposed to do her housework," Abby said.

"Mum, she's trying to break her record," Nate said.

"What record?" Abby asked and looked at them both.

Logan's heart skipped a beat.

"What record, boys?" Abby asked again, slower and louder this time.

Nate cringed.

Uh-oh.

"Popping bubbles. You know, on a bubble wrap popping app," Nate said.

"What! Whose pointless idea was that?" Abby asked.

Logan smirked as Nate's mouth dropped open. "I am currently the record holder for most pops. It's not pointless. It takes skill."

Logan snorted. Was Nate for real? Abby was not going to buy that.

"Well, it takes perseverance, a fine quality for anyone to develop. Plus it's on the tablet, so it's environmentally friendly. No wasted bubble wrap going out to sea," Nate said.

Abby groaned and shook her head. “Why did I ever let you guys have a tablet? So much for educational.” She stomped out of the kitchen.

Logan looked at Nate and winked.

“This ought to be good,” Nate said, grinning.

“Let’s go see.” Logan followed Abby upstairs. She was standing outside Poet’s bedroom door, peering in. She turned to them as they came up to her. “How long has she been lying there?”

Nate checked his phone. “About two hours.”

Abby sighed, then tiptoed into the room, sat on the edge of the bed and started rubbing Poet’s lower back and bottom.

“Mum!” Poet turned around and sat up. “What are you doing?”

“Massaging your behind. Like they do to old people in hospital who can’t move. If you lie on one side for too long, you need help to keep your circulation going.”

“That’s weird!” Poet jumped up and stomped out the room. The tablet dropped onto the floor.

Abby picked up the tablet. “I don’t think she needs this any more.” She headed off to her bedroom and came out empty-handed a minute later, before shutting the door behind her, and going downstairs after Poet.

Logan leaned against the wall next to Poet’s door and looked at Nate who was laughing.

Another minute, and there should be some screaming from Poet.

“That’s not funny!” Poet shouted from the bottom of the stairs.

Nate stopped laughing and turned to Logan.

“I found that funny. Did you find that funny?” Nate raised his eyebrow at Logan.

Logan wiped the grin off his face with his hand and frowned. “I found it hilari-arse.”

Nate laughed again for a few seconds. “You know, you’re getting a lot funnier since you met Meeka.”

The smile dropped from Logan’s face and he glanced up to the ceiling. “Can you keep a secret?” he asked.

Nate stared at him, both eyebrows raised.

“Okay, okay. Don’t look at me like me that. The thing is, I am a lot more relaxed since we met Meeka. She’s ridiculous. But it’s not only her.” He shrugged and looked around before

staring at Nate again. “I guess I feel more at home. I think I’m starting to like having my own mum and dad.”

Nate beamed like it was Christmas morning.

“Don’t get carried away, Nate,” Logan said. “I haven’t promised to marry you guys or anything.”

“Thank goodness. But don’t let on too much.”

“Why?”

“Because as soon as Mum figures out you’re settling down, she’ll start giving you more jobs around here.”

So true. Sometimes she was so crazy about housework.

“Good point. I’ll keep up some moody moments then. That always makes her look worried.”

“Yeah, you do those well. You’re a real glum-bum.”

“That’s not funny,” Logan said. “Take it back.”

“Or what?” Nate stepped closer, puffed out his chest, and stood on tiptoes.

Logan frowned. If anyone else did that, he’d freak out. Sucked that he was such a scaredy-cat after all his Dad had done to him. Good it was only Nate being stupid. Even when he helped Nate with his self-defence, Nate never hurt him.

“I’ll keep your birthday present for myself,” Logan said. “I can do with some new socks.”

Nate rocked back on his heels and let out his breath. “Socks! Please tell me you’ve done better than that for me, Mr-I-got-a-dirt-bike-for-my-birthday.”

“They’ve got ninjas on them,” Logan said.

The doorbell rang.

“Jason! Andrew!” Poet screamed.

They raced down the stairs, Nate pushing in front. He was such a cheat.

“Nate! Logan!” Jason said and hugged them both. Abby came into the room, and Jason hugged her too.

“Let go of my wife, you scoundrel.” Steve came in from the kitchen, smiling as he dropped his workbag on the ground. He shook Jason’s hand. “What are you doing here?”

“Andrew and I are on our way home from Spain in the jet, and we wondered if we could take you all back with us. You said you were both taking a week off to get some things done around here, but wouldn’t you rather come have some fun with us?”

Nate and Poet both yelled.

The jet! That would be wicked!

Steve and Abby looked at each other.

“What about painting the second floor?” Steve asked, eyebrows raised.

“The scaffolding guys can’t come until Wednesday. What about building a wood shed?”

“I am kind of tired.” Steve looked at Jason. “It’s been a crazy month since Lia Castaneda was reported staying at Hideaway Lodge. You wouldn’t believe how many sightseers get stuck by the tide when they’re walking around the cliffs to the lodge. Maybe we could all take a few days off and come back by Wednesday for Nate and Poet’s birthdays. The kids would only miss a couple days of school. I’m sure they can catch up.”

Poet frowned.

Oh, yeah. She had her science project due next Friday—on her birthday. She complained about it a lot. But she wouldn’t mention it now, would she?

“It would make Meeka happy,” Jason said.

“Yeah, she needs cheering up. Her teacher’s giving her a hard time,” Poet said.

Phew. She wasn’t going to say anything about her homework.

“You know about that?” Jason asked, eyebrows raised.

“Sure—iMessage,” Logan said. “We all know about it. We have a group chat. We talk to each other every day.”

“I know about the group. It’s cool. Keeps her sane. But I didn’t realise she’d talked about her teacher. Maybe it’s worse than I think. I could do with your guys help to work out how horrible this new teacher really is. Meeka’s imagination is inclined to get away from her sometimes. I can’t go firing teachers every time they give her more homework than she likes.”

“So it’s a visit with a mission,” Nate said.

“A critical mission,” Poet said.

“One of the world’s most important people’s happiness hangs in the balance,” Logan said.

“That’s nice you think so highly of Meeka, and she’s definitely the most important person in the world to me and Lia, but I wouldn’t say she was one of the world’s most important people,” Jason said.

“I wasn’t talking about Meeka,” Logan said. “I was talking about her teacher. Miss Cowan.”

Jason rubbed his chin. “What?”

“Mum is always saying teachers are some of the most important people in the world. Them and motorbike mechanics.”

Jason laughed.

“And if you fire her, she won’t be very happy,” Nate said. “Plus it’s not so easy to find a good teacher. We still haven’t got a replacement for Mr Gomander. Learning history from a history teacher is a drag, but it’s even worse trying to learn it from a PE teacher.”

“So, can we go on this perilous mission into the jaws of painful ugly education?” Logan asked Abby.

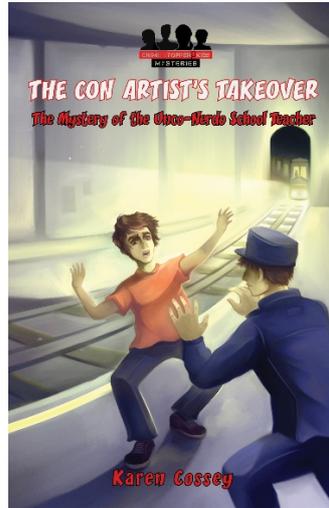
“Ugly is the right word.” Andrew cringed. “I don’t know how Miss Cowan makes herself look so bad. She reminds me of a mean old principal who made my life miserable when I was at school.”

“Don’t judge a book by the cover,” Nate said. “Don’t worry. We can give an accurate opinion based on her teaching abilities. Some of my best teachers have looked hideous. Anyway, we’re all used to having to look at Cole every day, yet we allow him to stay. Maybe because he’s good at the dishes.”

“I notice you say that while he’s not here.” Abby smiled, then turned to Jason. “We’d love to come, Jason. But you need to know I’m on Miss Cowan’s side.”

“That’s good,” Steve said. “Cole will get back from the gym in a minute. Then we’ll have four kids in the house opposed to any form of education.”

“That’s not fair, Dad,” Nate said. “Poet’s been doing education on her tablet all morning.”
Abby groaned.



Crime Stopper Kids Mysteries
The Con Artists Takeover

Find out what happens at Meeka's house when the Crime Stopper Kids meet her teacher.

Read it in book two, The Con Artist's Takeover at:

www.karencossey.com