

Florence Corbaci (or Flossie) is 12 years old, from the UAE. She loves music and is trying to learn bass guitar - although the only instrument she can really play is the triangle. Florence loves reading, preferably with her cat (Cleopawtra) curled up in her lap. She wrote *Gamemaster* because she loves mystery books - especially if they have a plot twist!

Gamemaster
by Florence Corbaci

The only sound in the building was the scratching of pen on paper as Libbie Elton signed out for the day. It had been a long shift at the escape room, and she was eager to be in the congenial comfort of her small apartment. The dark illuminated halls of the facility were the only ones who heard her whistle to herself as she left.

The sharp ring of the telephone greeted Libby at home. “Mum?” Libby dumped her backpack in the hallway and flung herself onto the sofa.

“Mum, can you get that?” Silence. She was probably working late. Reluctantly, Libby answered the phone.

“Hello?”

“Elizabeth Elton.” The words were muffled, garbled. Her brows furrowed. “You have one hour to play a little game. I am the gamemaster. Find out who this is or else. Have fun in your escape room.”

“Wait wha—”

“Goodbye.”

Too late.

Four blindfolded figures were flung through her front door. Libby screamed. All the doors and windows suddenly clamped shut, locking her inside with the others.

“M-mrs. Lindsey? Mr. Pope?” Her neighbour and the landlord. The other two were strangers, a young boy and someone who looked like his older sister.

Libby shoved past them and pulled at the doorknob, clawing at the door.

“Emma, what’s happening?” The boy ripped off his blindfold, asking his sister. He couldn’t’ve been more than 12.

“I have no idea, Leo,” Emma responded.

“How did you all get here?” Libby was bewildered.

“I felt a prick in my arm and then I was blindfolded and here!” Mrs. Lindsey exclaimed. A murmur of agreement rippled through the group.

“Which one of you is it!”

“What do you mean, dearie?” It was Mr. Pope.

“One of you did this!”

The boy opened his mouth, but Mrs. Lindsey glared at him. Strange.

50:03

Libby looked around the room. Then she noticed it. The pictures on the wall had an abnormal formation. She touched one, and it fell, revealing a letter. She repeated this process until all of the pictures were down.

MLOFHETLA

“Bonkers.” She muttered, walking away. It was nonsense.

“It’s ok, Libby dear,” Mrs. Lindsey placed a tentative hand on her shoulder.

She looked at all of the people in the room.

It had to be one of them. The boy was too young, and so was his sister. Mrs. Lindsey had known Libby for years; she couldn’t be capable of something like this. Mr. Pope however...it was the only logical explanation.

“It’s you, Mr. Pope!”

“Libby—”

Mr. Pope clutched at his chest and fell to the ground.

“Mr. Pope!”

The phone rang.

Mrs. Lindsey and Emma ran to Mr. Pope.

“This is a prerecorded message. One incorrect guess. Forty-seven minutes left.”

Mr. Pope was unconscious.

The others looked at Libby in fear.

She searched their faces. And then she searched the walls. A keyhole she had never noticed before was there in the corner. It had to be a part of this twisted game. From working in an escape room, Libby knew that every lock had a key. A key...

Like the one that was dangling around young Emma's neck.

"Hey, what's that key?"

"What key?" The girl looked down, eyes widening in shock. "That's not mine? They must have put it on me?"

"Can I borrow it?"

Emma shrugged. "Sure."

40:56

Minutes later, Libby shoved the key into the keyhole. "Open sesame!"

It clicked, and opened to reveal a small hole with a telescope inside. No- a kaleidoscope.

Libby lifted it to her eye, and looked inside to see a bright pattern. Flowers and leaves. Emma took it from her hands.

"Can I see?" Emma angled her head around until she found something odd. "Look!"

She pointed at the flowers on the windowsill—flowers and leaves.

Libby reached inside the soil and rooted around, latching her hands onto a square piece of cardstock. It was a picture of the wall where all the photos had hung. Libby grimaced and stared at the letters again, contemplating. She was right back where she had started. What if she looked at it a different way?

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She couldn't make one word, but... one...two...three!

All... of.. them? Libby gasped. They were all in on it. She backed away from them. Mrs. Lindsey, the unconscious Mr. Pope, the boy, and his sister.

27:26

"All of you," she whispered incredulously.

They were all in on it, but why?

Someone made them do this.

She questioned them, but they merely shook their heads.

They couldn't tell her.

Libby had to find out.

Still reeling from the betrayal, Libby assessed the room once more. The kaleidoscope stood out the most to her. *Emma saw with a kaleidoscope—wait*. Sight. The blindfolds the four had been wearing when they entered the room.

Libby ran to the place where the blindfolds were and picked them up. Inside one was a name, stitched into the midnight fabric.

10:00

As Libby spoke the name, there was a satisfactory click as the doors and windows unlocked.

She turned to the other three still conscious “victims” in the room. Mrs. Lindsey spoke first.

“Every few years, the gamemaster picks someone who they think is worthy of running the escape room company and creating new puzzles. This is a test of sorts.”

Libby’s brow furrowed. She loved puzzles, but was she next in line to take over the escape room company? She then remembered where she had seen the name on the blindfold before.

On a plaque in the building where she worked. “But what would’ve happened if I failed? And why did you all play along?”

“Nothing would’ve happened.” Emma affirmed.

“We were offered money to play along.” Mrs. Lindsey shrugged.

Libby looked at Mr. Pope pointedly, incidentally just as he opened one eye and winked. He had been faking it. Libby rolled her eyes as he apologised.

A while later, Libby sighed and ushered the four accomplices out of her house as they offered more sheepish apologies. It had been a good puzzle; she had to admit. But none of it had been real.

As she closed the door, she noticed a small box behind it. Curious, she opened it. Inside was a small badge, engraved with an eight-letter word.

Gamemaster

Maybe part of the game was real after all.