

## CHAPTER ONE:

"DAD'S GONE DOWN THE SIDE!"

It was the end of August and the Sun was shining the last of its summer rays over the Welsh countryside. At the bottom of a long and winding road just outside Wrexham, set back amongst the trees and bushes, was number 2 Cefn Road.

It was a large semi-detached house with a big garden at the front and an even bigger one at the back. The front garden was slightly overgrown and framed by Hawthorn and Elder bushes. Brambles poked their branches from in between them and their thick black juicy berries cascaded down onto the hull of an upturned dinghy that sat alongside the hedge. In the back, the garden was just as overgrown, with a large lawn that desperately needed trimming. A swing-set and climbing frame sat neglected on the grass, while situated against the wall of the house was a wooden playhouse that was neatly decorated inside with yellow curtains and blue carpet tiles.

On the roof of a nearby shed, a black and white cat sat and watched with interest as a mouse ran along the bottom of the wall and into the field at the bottom of the garden. The cat yawned, stretched and then jumped down off the roof. He wandered languorously over to the climbing frame and ran up the slide to the top. He looked around casually then jumped nimbly over to the top of the swing before leaping down on to the roof of the playhouse. Lying down and poking his head over the edge of the roof, the cat peered into the window of the playhouse to see if anyone was inside. One of his favourite games was to curl up in the dolls pram that the playhouse's owner kept in there and then let her chauffeur him around the garden.

Finding nobody inside, the cat jumped down onto the patio and wandered around the side of the house to the back door. With a final disparaging sniff at the air, he disappeared through the cat-flap and strolled casually through the kitchen. He paused by the living room

door. The door was closed over, so the cat stood on his hind legs and leaned against it until it swung open a crack. He then pushed his head through the small opening and wriggled it about until the door opened enough for him to get through and into the living room. He stopped by the side of the sofa to catch his breath before jumping nimbly up onto the arm where he beheld a curious sight.

Mum was standing over the sofa looking down at Dad. She was very pretty, with long strawberry-blonde hair. Her husband was large with very short dark hair.

Mum leaned in closer to her husband. "Is it there?" she asked.

"Just a second," said Dad. "I think I've got something."

He was in an awkward position, half sitting, half standing with his right hand shoved down the side of the sofa. The cat leaned over and butted him gently on the arm.

"Not now, Charlie." Dad muttered. He had a determined expression on his face which changed to one of triumph as he pulled his arm out from down the side.

"Hang on, hang on. I think I've got it!" He pulled his hand free and with an absent minded tickle behind the cat's ear, stood up.

"Well?" asked Mum, expectantly.

Dad held out his hand. Nestled in his palm was a nine volt battery.

Mum frowned. "That isn't my ring."

Dad looked at the cat sadly. The cat returned his gaze inscrutably. Dad looked at his wife.

"No?" He prodded the battery gently, as if he was worried that it might suddenly grow fangs and bite him.

Mum shook her head. "No."

Dad shrugged and tossed the battery to Mum. She caught it deftly and smiled as her husband grinned back at her.

"Okay," he said cheerfully. "I'll try again."

He plunged his hand back down and rummaged about a bit more.

After a few minutes, he pulled his hand out and held out its contents with a flourish.

"Ta daaa!"

Mum raised her eyebrows. "That's a CD of Christmas songs. I wondered where that had gone."

Bored, the cat yawned and jumped down off the arm. With a last accusing look up at Dad, he padded softly over to his basket, lay down and went to sleep.

Dad pushed his arm down again. Suddenly he gave a shout.

"Ha!"

Mum leaned forward. "Have you found it?" she asked.

Dad shook his head as he removed his arm from the sofa.

"No, but I've found the remote for the telly. I'll be able to change the channel at last." He shoved his hand back down. "Okay, I'll give it one last try."

The living room door opened wide and Ashley came in followed closely by his younger brother Regan. Ashley was sixteen and had light brown hair and grey eyes, whilst his brother was thirteen and had fair hair and blue eyes.

Ashley took one look at his father and giggled. "What's Dad doing?"

Mum sighed. "He's looking for my ring. I dropped it down the side of the sofa this morning. At least, I think I dropped it down there."

Dad looked up. "You think you dropped it?"

"Well, I'm not sure now."

Dad growled and continued his search. Regan laughed and turned on the television.

"Hey, great! The remote. Now I can change the channel."

Suddenly, the door flew open and banged against the wall. A small, very pretty, fair-haired girl ran in and jumped onto the sofa. Dad grunted as she landed.

It was Katy. She was eight 'going on eighteen' as her Nanna always said.

"Hello Daddy," she smiled, looking up at him with her big brown eyes.

"What're you doing?"

Dad grinned. "I'm looking for the lost people of Loopy Land."

Katy peered down the side of the sofa. "I can't see any loopy people."

"That's because they're lost," said Dad.

Katy frowned. "You're silly."

Dad laughed and glanced up at Mum who shrugged. "She's your daughter," she said with a smile.

Dad shoved his other hand after the first. He twisted around and pushed his head in the gap he made. Katy watched him intently.

Mum sighed. "I'll put the kettle on."

There was a muffled grunt of assent from Dad and with a final roll of her eyes towards her husband she went out to the kitchen.

Dad wriggled further down. Slowly, his top half disappeared from view.

Katy tapped him on the back. "Have you found them yet Daddy?" she asked.

"Found who, Dumplin'?" came the muffled reply.

"The lost loopy people."

There was a faint chuckle. "No, not yet Darling," said Dad. "But I'll keep looking."

He wriggled down further until all that Katy could see of him was a pair of legs sticking up in the air. Then suddenly, with a final wriggle, he disappeared from view.

Katy peered down the side of the sofa. "Daddy?" she asked nervously.

There was no answer.

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Katy ran into the kitchen followed by her brothers. Mum was up to her elbows in soapy water. She ran a cloth over a plate and looked up as Katy ran in. Mum placed the plate on the drainer and dried her hands on the tea towel that was tucked into the top of her jeans. Katy ran up

to Mum and grabbed her legs.

"Mummy," she sobbed. "Daddy's gone!"

Mum picked her up and looked at the boys in puzzlement.

"What's happened?"

Ashley looked terrified. "Mum, Dad's fallen down the side of the sofa"

Regan nodded. "He's gone Mum."

Mum shook her head. "Don't be silly. Dad can't have fallen down the side of the sofa. He's way too big for that."

Katy buried her head in Mum's shoulder. "It's true," she cried. "He wriggled and jiggled and wriggled some more, then plop. He vanished."

Mum pushed past the boys and went into the living room. There was no sign of Dad anywhere.

"Paul?" she called. There was no answer. She went over to the sofa and peered down the side. "Paul? Are you there?" There was still no answer. Katy wriggled so Mum put her down.

Katy climbed onto the sofa and put her hand down the side. "I can't feel him Mummy."

Mum grabbed Katy's arm. "Be careful."

Katy reached down further.

Mum pulled her back. "I said be careful. I don't want you falling down there too."

"But we must do something to help Daddy!" Katy cried.

Mum sat down and put her head in her hands. "What can we do?"

"We could call the Police," suggested Regan.

Ashley shook his head. "Don't be silly, they'll never believe us."

Katy got down off the sofa, sat down on the floor and began pulling on her Wellington boots. She looked grimly up at Mum. "I'm going down there," she said firmly. "And I'm not coming back until I've found him."

Mum was shocked. "Oh, no you're not young lady," she said, shaking her head. "No chance. You're far too young."

Katy was determined. "I am going," she said as she put on her coat.

Mum cursed her daughter's stubbornness - she definitely got that from her father.

She went into the kitchen. Mum followed and found Katy standing on a stool. She had taken some bread out of the bread bin and was buttering it lightly. She reached up to a cupboard above her head and took out a jar of strawberry jam. Scooping out some of the contents, she spread it thickly over the bread. She plonked another slice of bread on the top and cut it into quarters. Then she made another.

Katy then reached into the cupboard again and took out a couple of bags of crisps, and a carton of orange juice. She wrapped the sandwiches in foil and stuffed the lot into a carrier bag. She jumped down from the stool and looked up at Mum with a smile. "Don't worry Mummy, I'll be careful."

Mum crouched down beside her and took Katy's hand in hers. She smiled back at her daughter. "You really want to do this don't you?"

Katy nodded. "I have to find my Daddy," she said simply.

Mum hugged her. When Katy looked up, she saw that Mum had tears in her eyes. "Don't cry Mummy."

"I'm not really crying darling," smiled Mum. "I'm just so proud of you, that's all."

Katy hugged her Mum hard. Then she pulled away, picked up her bag and went into the living room. Mum wiped away a tear and then followed.

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In the living room, Katy was saying goodbye to her brothers. Ashley hugged her and gave her a bag.

"It's a bag of sweets," he explained. "There are toffees and strawberry laces and some softmints 'cos I know they're your favourites."

Katy turned to Regan, who hugged her and handed her a torch. "It might be dark down there," he mumbled.

Katy thanked her brothers and looked at Mum. Mum grabbed her and hugged her tightly. "Be careful, won't you? And bring Daddy home safely to us?"

Katy nodded. "I will," she promised.

Katy climbed onto the sofa and shone the torch down the side. It was very dark down there. She drew herself up to her full height - which wasn't very tall, took a deep breath, blew a kiss to mum and jumped down the side of the sofa.

Ashley and Regan ran over and peered down after her. There was no sign of their sister.

Ashley looked at Mum. "Will she be okay?"

Mum smiled and nodded. "Yes," she said firmly. "She'll be superb."

## CHAPTER TWO:

"DON'T BE SILLY, 'THINGY' ISN'T A NAME."

Katy found herself sliding down a narrow smooth-sided tunnel. Katy reached out to the sides but couldn't find a hand hold or anything to slow her descent.

She slid further and further and Katy began to think that the tunnel would never end. She opened her bag and took out a sandwich.

Munching on it, she wondered if her Daddy had fallen down the same hole.

After what felt like an age, Katy realised that she was beginning to slow down. The tunnel was starting to curve slightly and begin to straighten out. She found herself falling over to one side until she began to slide down the side. With a whoosh, she flew out of the mouth of the tunnel and landed with a gentle bump on some conveniently placed moss.

She got to her feet and shone her torch around. She was in a large damp cavern and she realised that the moss she had landed on seemed to carpet the entire floor of the cave.

Strange stalagmites and stalactites twisted up from the floor and down from the roof of the cave, meeting in the middle to form a thick spiral that bisected the cavern. They were in a regular pattern, one after the other in several straight lines as far as the eye could see and Katy found that she had to walk carefully to avoid being caught on the spring-like structures.

A steady drip-dripping sound came from a far corner indicating that there was a constant source of water there. Katy drew a deep breath and set off in the direction of the sound in the hope that it would lead her out.

The cavern was huge and full of dark corners and mysterious places, so Katy began to sing out loud to keep her spirits up. "Twinkle, twinkle, little star," she sang. "How I wonder what you are."

Her voice bounced off the walls and came back to her as echoes until it



seemed like there was a whole choir of Katy's singing at the top of their voices.

"That's a nice song."

Katy stopped singing and spun around. The voice seemed to come out of nowhere and Katy looked around, wide-eyed with fear. "Wh-who's there?" she stammered. "Come out where I can see you."

The voice came again. "Do you promise to be nice to me if I do?" it asked.

Katy nodded. "Yes. I promise."

She shone her torch in the direction of the voice. Slowly, from behind a rock, came a curious figure. It was about her height, round with two scrawny arms and two spindly legs. Its body seemed to be made of a kind of woolly/fluffy material and was a myriad of colours all vying for attention. The creature had no head to speak of, but possessed two large blue eyes in the centre of its body above a wide mouth filled with rows of sharp needle like teeth. With a start, Katy realised what it was. "You're a ball of fluff!" she exclaimed in delight. Katy's torch played across the small figure before her and she looked closely at it. The ball of fluff drew itself up to its full height and glared at Katy.

"Steady on darlin'," it grumbled. "You're not exactly 'all that' yourself!"

"No," she tried to explain as she walked around the creature, looking him up and down. "I mean... well...what it is..." She broke off in exasperation and shrugged. "You're a ball of fluff! I've seen Mummy pull stuff like you from the tumble dryer."

The creature grinned. "Yeah? Well I've been called worse I suppose."

Katy shone her torch around. "I'm down the side of the sofa," she breathed; realising for the first time where she was. She grinned back at the creature. "And you're a ball of fluff!"

"Will you please stop saying that?" the creature asked.

"Sorry," said Katy shamefacedly. "This is all new to me." She took a deep breath. "My name is Katy," she said. "What's yours?"

The creature frowned "Don't know," it said. "I don't think I have one."

Katy stared at him. "But you must have one. Everybody has a name"

The creature folded his arms and turned away huffily. "Well, I don't."

Katy realised she had upset the funny little thing. She sighed, put her arm around it and gave it a hug. "I'm sorry. I didn't mean to hurt your feelings. It's just that everyone has a name where I come from."

The creature looked up at her. "Really?"

Katy nodded.

The creature cocked his head to one side and narrowed its eyes.

"Where do you come from?"

Katy pointed upwards and the creature gave a little gasp. "You mean, from Outside?"

Katy shrugged. "I suppose so. If that's what you call the other side of the sofa."

They looked at each other in silence for a few minutes.

"What do other people call you?" asked Katy.

The creature shrugged. "Not a lot," he said sadly. "Most of the time they just call me Thingy."

Katy chuckled. "Thingy isn't a name."

"'s better than Katy."

She shot him a sideways glance, and then she clapped her hands together and gave a shout. The creature jumped in surprise.

Katy laughed. "I know," she cried. "I'll give you a name! Now, what name should I give you?"

She sat down on the damp floor and scratched her head in concentration.

Suddenly, she jumped to her feet. "I've got it! I'll call you Daffodil!"

The creature looked at her. "You have got to be joking."

Kay was surprised. "You don't like Daffodil?" The creature rolled his eyes and sighed. Katy tried again.

"Okay," she said slowly. "How about Ploppy? I've got a toy doggie

called Ploppy."

"Yeah, like that is so not gonna happen." Growled the creature.

"Bruno?" she asked. The creature shook his head.

This went on for a good half hour, with Katy suggesting names and the creature either shaking his head or laughing out loud at the names she came up with. Finally, Katy threw her arms up in exasperation. "Okay, how about Sebastian? That's the name of our neighbour's dog. That's quite a nice name."

"Yeah, if you're a cartoon lobster!"

Katy sighed. "Well, why don't you think of something instead of putting down all of my suggestions?"

The creature scratched its armpit. "Okay, er..." it was his turn to sit down on the mossy ground and he screwed his eyes up in concentration. Finally, he opened them with a sigh and looked up at Katy.

"What kind of dog was it?" he asked meekly. Katy blinked.

"What?"

The creature got to his feet. "Your neighbour's dog. Was it a good one or was it one of those tiny little funny lookin' things that celebrities carry around in handbags?"

"Erm..." she shrugged, "I think it's called a Saint Bernard."

The creature jumped up and down in excitement. "Yes! Oh, yes! That's it! That's a wonderful name." He stopped. "But I think I'll drop the saint bit 'cos," he leaned in close to Katy with a wicked grin, "I ain't no saint, baby!" He broke off into raucous laughter.

Katy smiled back at him. "You look like a Bernard. It suits you."

Bernard grinned at Katy, who grinned back at Bernard. Then, she reached into her bag and pulled out a sandwich.

"Are you hungry Bernard?" She offered him the sandwich. Bernard took it and ate it hungrily. Katy took one for herself and they munched in silence for a while.

When they had both finished their sandwiches, Katy stood up. "Well, it was nice to have met you Bernard. But I must be going now."

Bernard looked up in alarm. "But you can't go now. We were just getting to know each other."

Katy looked sadly down at him. "I have to go Bernard. You see, I came here to find my Daddy. He fell down the side of the sofa and I have to rescue him."

Bernard stood up. "Then I'm coming with you," he said firmly.

Katy put her hand on his arm. "Are you sure? You don't have to. I mean he's my Daddy after all."

Bernard nodded. "Yes, I'm sure. I know all the caves around here.

You'll need a guide if you want to find your Dad. Besides, I can't leave you alone now. We're friends aren't we?"

Katy gave Bernard a big hug. "Yes, Bernard. We're the best of friends."

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They had walked for some time with Bernard leading the way. They had climbed over rocks as big as Dad's car and had squeezed through narrow gaps not much wider than Katy herself. Katy shared some of the sweets her brother had given her and they walked happily along sucking on a couple of strawberry laces.

"So, what do you do here Bernard?" asked Katy, chewing on the last bit of her lace. Bernard shrugged.

"Oh, this and that," he replied with his mouth full. "Mostly I find things and try to sell them at the market in Daven Port. That's why I was in the cavern. It's surprising what you find in here."

"What sort of things?" Katy asked. Bernard stopped and looked around.

"Well," he jumped across to a rock and looked behind it. "Here we are, see?" He held out his hand and showed Katy what he had found. Katy took the object from him and turned it over in her hands as she looked at it. It was about the size of a dinner plate, round with a spike sticking

out of the back. It had a clip on the spike shaped like a butterfly and it seemed to Katy to be made out of solid gold. With a gasp, she realised what it was.

"This is Mummy's earring!" She exclaimed. "She lost it ages ago."

Bernard took back the earring. "We're lucky. Most jewellery ends up at the bottom of the Golden Sea."

"But why is it so big? It'll never fit in her ear now."

Bernard grinned at her. "It must've slipped down between the springs," he explained. "When you came down here, did you slide down a long tunnel?" Katy nodded. Bernard smiled sagely. "Well, that explains it dunnit? The tunnel makes things smaller so they'll fit better down here.

This earring is full sized, so therefore it didn't fall down the tunnel."

"How many tunnels are there?" Katy asked curiously.

"There's only the one in this cavern, which is quite odd in itself. Most caverns have thousands of tunnels all leading to different sofas. Your sofa must be something special to be given a cavern of its own. You must lose a lot of stuff down its side."

Katy thought of all the things her father had pulled out before he disappeared, and nodded vigorously.

"How many caverns are there?"

Bernard shrugged. "Ooh, thousands and thousands. The Flint Mountains are riddled with 'em."

They carried on walking past more of the strange spring-like structures. As Katy gingerly edged her way around a particularly knobbly one, she felt her feet slip out from under her and she fell down on her bottom with a thud. Bernard ran over to her.

"Are you okay? That was a nasty fall."

Katy got carefully to her feet. "Yes, I'm fine," she said dusting herself off. "That moss is quite soft really."

She looked around to see what she had slipped on. There were several small round objects scattered by her feet. She bent down and picked

one up.

"Marbles," she breathed. "They're probably Regan's."

She picked up the rest and put them in her bag and then turned to Bernard. He pointed in front of them.

"'Ere we go, the mouth of the cavern is just up ahead."

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They emerged into a clearing surrounded by a vast forest. Katy looked around her at the tall trees, their branches reaching into the sky. "It's beautiful," she breathed.

Bernard looked up too. "Yuk. Horrible green things," he scoffed.

"They never talk to you. Always got their noses stuck up in the air."

Katy smiled. "Don't be silly Bernard. Trees can't talk. They're just made of wood. See?"

She walked over to the nearest tree and tapped it sharply on its trunk.

She then stepped back in alarm as a pair of dark brown eyes snapped open in the bark, roughly five feet from the ground.

"Don't do that!" the tree said huffily.

"Sorry," said Katy apologetically. "I didn't mean to hurt you"

The tree shook its branches and laughed. "Oh, don't be silly. You didn't hurt me. How could you? I am made of wood after all. No, you woke me up. And I was having such a lovely dream too."

Bernard came over. "See," he said. "I told you they were horrible."

The tree looked down at him. "Oh, it's you Thingy. I wondered what the smell was."

Katy was shocked. "Don't speak to him like that! Anyway, his name is Bernard not Thingy."

"Ooooh," said the tree. "Bernard is it? Very posh, I don't think."

Bernard stuck out his tongue at the tree and stalked off to the cave mouth to sulk. Katy watched him go before turning back to the tree.

"Well, that wasn't very nice."

The tree snorted. "Ha! He's not very nice. He's always scratching things

on our bark and snapping off our twigs and never taking the time to actually talk to us."

"Well," said Katy patiently. "Have you ever taken the time to talk to him?"

The tree admitted that it hadn't, so Katy suggested that both the tree and Bernard should talk to each other for a while.

"Just so you can get to know one another," she said cheerily.

The tree agreed and so Katy walked over to where Bernard was sitting gouging holes in the forest floor with a sharp stone he had found.

After a little gentle persuasion, Bernard reluctantly went over to talk to the tree.

Katy smiled. "There. Now we're getting along like a house on fire."

The tree screamed and covered its eyes with a couple of branches. Katy and Bernard stepped back in alarm.

"Are you alright?" asked Katy nervously, as the whole tree started to shake in fear.

The tree peeped out through its leaves. "You said fire. Oh, please don't mention fire around here," it sobbed.

Katy patted its trunk reassuringly. "Shhh. I'm sorry. I didn't mean it.

It's just a figure of speech where I come from."

"Where does she come from?" the tree whispered to Bernard.

"From Outside." Bernard whispered back. "She's looking for her Daddy. He's from Outside too."

The tree was shocked. "What? You mean Outside Outside?"

Bernard nodded.

The tree cleared its throat. "Erm, perhaps I can help? What does your Daddy look like?"

Katy sighed. "Well, he's bigger than me with dark hair and glasses. He's got a big belly and a big heart and I love him very much."

The tree smiled. "Then I shall help you find him"

Katy was puzzled. "I don't mean to be rude, but how can you help

me?"

The tree fluttered its leaves. "I shall speak to my brothers and sisters. We see and hear everything that happens in the forests, from here to the Golden Sea."

Bernard harrumphed loudly.

The tree glanced sideways at him. "Yes, well. We don't count the Forest of Sorrows for obvious reasons."

"What's the Forest of Sorrows?" asked Katy.

The tree's eyes widened. "Believe me. You're better off not knowing."

"He's right," said Bernard darkly. "You really don't want to know."

Katy gulped and decided that she would take their word for it. After all the Forest of Sorrows didn't exactly sound like a place she'd like to visit anytime soon.

She looked around the clearing. Many of the trees had opened their eyes and were watching intently.

Katy gave a gasp. "Are these all your brothers and sisters?"

The tree smiled. "Oh yes. We're all one big happy family. In fact, you might even say we have branches everywhere!" He chuckled to himself.

Katy laughed too. Bernard rolled his eyes. The tree waved its branches and closed its eyes. The other trees followed suit. There was a low murmur amongst them. The murmur grew louder and louder. Katy and Bernard put their hands over their ears. After several minutes, the sound stopped and the tree opened its eyes.

It looked sadly at Katy. "I have some terrible news for you."

Katy looked worried.

The tree went on. "It seems that your Daddy got as far as the Jade Bridge before he was ambushed and taken prisoner by Zizom."

Katy was puzzled. "Who is Zizom?"

Bernard drew a sharp breath and threw a sidelong glance at the tree.

The tree spoke in a sombre tone. "Zizom is the ruler of our world. He lives in the Dark Tower on the Plain of Stones, very far from here."



Bernard gently took Katy's arm. "It's a dangerous road to the Plain of Stones. But I'll come with you to look after you."

Katy hugged him. "Thank you Bernard," she whispered.

The tree spoke again. "You must follow the path to the Jade Bridge. My brothers and sisters will show you the way. There you will meet a Grey Troll. Beware of this miserable creature, as it will try to trick you. If it succeeds, then you will be forever in his power and you will become a part of the bridge and remain there forever."

Katy was scared. "Magic?" she whispered.

"No!" the tree snorted. "Don't be silly. There's no such thing as magic!" he laughed. "No, apparently he just ties you to the foundations and you stay there until you die. Eventually your bones calcify and become part of the bridge."

"Really?" she asked.

The tree shrugged its branches. "Well, that's what they say. Not having actually seen it for myself, I can't guarantee it. But the troll's a nasty piece of work, that's for sure."

Katy relaxed and hugged the tree. "I'll be careful."

The tree closed its eyes. "Now you must be on your way. Listen to the trees; they will whisper words to guide you."

Bernard picked up Katy's bag. "Come on, it's this way."

He set off along a path that had mysteriously appeared in the forest.

Katy gave the tree one last hug and followed him. As they left the clearing, the tree opened its eyes.

"Goodbye my friends," it whispered. "And good luck."

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Katy and Bernard had been walking along the path for about an hour.

The trees had whispered advice to them all the way. The trees had also told Katy about the Grey Troll.

Apparently, he had been taken from his village by Zizom when he was still a baby. Zizom had raised him to adulthood and then placed him in

charge of the Jade Bridge.

It was the troll's job to ensure that no-one without the express permission of Zizom could cross. The troll would ask the unwary traveller a question from a mysterious book. If the luckless traveller couldn't answer correctly, then they were captured and placed to work below the bridge to strengthen its foundations.

Over the years, the Jade Bridge had grown from a simple footbridge into a huge, glittering structure that stretched majestically across the river. Too wide and too deep to wade across, the river wound from the mountains in the east, to the Golden Sea in the west.

As Katy and Bernard walked, the trees outlined a plan to enable them to cross the bridge safely. They explained that the Grey Troll had one weakness. It was a weakness that they would need to exploit.

The Grey Troll's weakness, the trees told them, was that he had a very, very, sweet tooth.

Katy remembered the bag of sweets that Ashley had given her before she had set off down the side of the sofa. She patted the pocket she had put them in. suddenly, she stopped. The pocket was empty.

Katy searched frantically through her other pockets. There was no sign of the sweets. She grabbed the bag from Bernard and searched through that. They weren't there either. She looked at Bernard, who was chewing; a guilty look on his face.

"Bernard," said Katy slowly. "Have you seen my bag of sweets? You know, the ones we need to bribe the Grey Troll with?"

Bernard swallowed. "No," he said, shaking his head.

Katy frowned. "Are you sure?"

He blushed. "Well, I May have had one or two."

"One or two?" Katy said incredulously. "You've eaten the lot."

Bernard coughed in embarrassment. "You know how it is," he said defensively. "You can't just have one. They were too tasty."

Katy sighed. "Great! How are we supposed to get across the Jade

Bridge now?"

Bernard shrugged. "Well, we could try to trick the troll. Or we could fight him."

Katy glared at him. Bernard looked around. Then his eyes lit up and he grinned a huge grin.

"Or," he said pointing to a tree. "Or we could go and ask those bees over there for some of their honey."

Katy looked to where he was pointing. There hanging from a low branch was the biggest beehive Katy had ever seen. Bees the size of footballs flew in and out of the hive, buzzing happily to themselves.

Katy took a deep breath. "Oh, great. Giant bees," she sighed and walked over to the hive. One of the bees stopped buzzing around and flew over to meet her.

"Hello," she said with a cheerfulness that belied the terror she was feeling inside at the sight of the huge insects. "My name is Katy. What's yours?"

The bee flew closer. "Zzzz, Zander, zzzz," it buzzed.

Katy smiled nervously. "Hello Zander," she said. "Can you help us?"

The bee buzzed up and down. "Zzzz, depends on what you want, zzzz."

A couple of other bees had noticed Katy and Bernard and they too flew over. The bees buzzed excitedly around the pair.

Katy flinched slightly and coughed to attract their attention. "Look, can you help us?"

Zander buzzed to a halt. "Zzzz, like I said. Depends on what you want, zzz."

Katy sighed. "It's a long story."

The bees buzzed around. "Zzzzz, oh we love stories, zzz," they chorused. "Zzz, tell us, zzz"

Katy told them.

The bees stopped buzzing and flew forward. Katy shrank back in

alarm.

The bees stopped and buzzed more gently.

Zander bobbed up and down. "Zzz, oh you poor thing, zz. Zzz, it's okay, we won't hurt you, zz."

One of the other bees flew up. "Zzz, we'll help you, zzz."

"Zzzz, yes we'll help, zzz."

The other bees buzzed around Katy's head. Katy ducked as one swooped a little too close to her head for comfort.

She held up a hand. "Erm, excuse me?" she cried. "Hello?"

The bees buzzed a little more quietly.

Katy pointed in the direction of the Jade Bridge. "Look, we have to get across that thing. Do you think that you could spare us a little of your honey please? We need it to bribe the Grey Troll with."

The bees buzzed louder. Zander buzzed down. "Zzz, oh that troll. He's always trying to get our honey. He's a right nuisance, he really is, zzz."

Zander zoomed off back to the hive. A few minutes later, he zoomed back, a small jar held between his front legs. He swooped down to where Katy stood and dropped the jar into her hands. It was full to the brim with honey. Katy looked up to where Zander buzzed happily around with his fellow bees.

"Thank you, Zander," she grinned. "Thank you, bees."

The bees buzzed back to their hive. Zander stayed behind and flew close to Katy's ear.

"Zzz, good luck Katy, zzz," he buzzed. "Zzz, be careful won't you?

Watch out for that troll. He's a tricky one, zzz."

Katy told him that she would take care and he flew off back to his hive.

Katy turned to Bernard. "Here," she said, handing him the jar. "Don't eat it."

Bernard placed the jar carefully in the bag. Katy patted him on the back and they set off for the Jade Bridge.

CHAPTER THREE:

"WE'LL DODGE THE GREY TROLL AND NIP OVER THE BRIDGE."

The Grey Troll was having a very, very bad day. And he was loving every minute! He hummed a little tune as he finished tying the last knot in a series of extremely difficult knots in a piece of coarse rope. The rope itself was tied around the supine form of a portly, middle-aged man who was bawling uncontrollably. The Troll hauled the man to his feet and propped him up against a barnacle encrusted pillar.

They were in a long dank tunnel festooned with lichen and barnacles. There were large pillars spaced at regular intervals that stretched high into the tunnel roof, each as encrusted as the other. On first viewing, the pillars appeared to be made of a course stone; but on closer inspection, they were - horrifically - revealed to be composed of calcified human remains.

The man sniffed and the Troll pulled a grubby hanky from his pocket and shoved it under the man's nose. The man blew his nose noisily. "Finished?" asked the Troll. The man nodded sadly. "Good." The Troll removed the hanky and looked curiously at its contents. "Lovely!" He smiled happily to himself and tucked the hanky back into his pocket. He turned back to the man and with a flourish, took a long scroll from another pocket. He unfurled it and cleared his throat.

"By the order of his most high Excellency the Lord Zizom; ruler of the five lands, protector of the people and all round good egg. You have failed to answer the question put to you by his ever loyal servant the Grey Troll." He lowered the scroll slightly and grinned at the man.

"That's me by the way." He raised the scroll and continued reading.

"And have therefore forfeited the right to cross the Jade Bridge. The penalty for this act of unforgivable ignorance is to be tied to the foundations of the bridge, there to spend the rest of your natural existence in the hope that your miserable bones will provide support for all others who venture across it."

The Troll rolled up his scroll and put it away. "There we go then. Have a nice day!" And with a cheery wave he turned and scuttled back along the tunnel. From behind him came a long mournful wail as the man resumed his sobbing.

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It wasn't long before Katy and Bernard reached the Jade Bridge and found their way barred by an enormous pair of ornate golden gates. They were at least the size of a house and were encrusted with jewels and precious stones. Bernard pointed through one of the gates at a small ramshackle hut sitting right in the middle of the bridge. To either side of the hut was a barrier, like the kind Katy had seen in the car park in town.

"There you go," said Bernard. "That's where the Grey Troll lives."

Katy took the jar of honey from the bag. Then she opened the gates and began the long walk to the middle of the bridge. Bernard closed the gates and followed on behind.

As they reached the hut, the door flew open and a short ugly grey figure ran out. It was a little taller than Katy was and wore a short grey jacket and trousers. It had a wrinkled face with a cruel mouth and bug eyes that bulged out of their sockets. It had a small grey cap jammed onto the back of his head.

It ran up and blocked their way, glaring angrily at Katy.

"You can't cross! You can't cross!" it screamed at her in a thin reedy voice.

"Why?" Katy was not going to be put off.

The troll jumped up and down. "Because, because, because! You have to have permission from Zizom himself to cross the Jade Bridge!"

It paused and leaned closer. "You haven't got permission have you? I hate it when they have permission."

Katy shook her head. "No, we don't have permission. But we would like to cross."

"No, no, no!" the troll screamed at her. "Not unless you can answer my question! And even then, there's no guarantee that I'll let you cross," he added slyly.

Katy folded her arms and narrowed her eyes. "Go on then," she said coldly. "Ask your question."

The troll stepped back in surprise. "Oh, okay then. Wait here."

He ran back into the hut. Katy looked at Bernard, who shrugged his shoulders and shook his head. The hut door flew open and the troll emerged carrying a heavy book. He fumbled with the book's ornate clasp, which sprang open and the troll flicked through the pages until he reached one he liked. He gave an evil grin and rolled his eyes.

Katy sighed impatiently. "Look," she said. "Can you hurry it up a bit? We've got things we really have to be getting on with."

"Really?" said the troll. "What things?"

Katy told him.

The troll shook his head. "Well, if your Daddy is a prisoner of Zizom, then you've got no chance of rescuing him. Zizom's a nasty piece of work, I can tell you. I don't envy you at all."

Katy frowned and pointed at the book. "Fine. Will you just ask your question?"

The troll glared at her. "Okay, okay. Keep your hair on." He cleared his throat. "Right. The question I have for you is this." He paused for effect.

"What - is the name - of Doctor Who's time machine?"

The troll slammed the book shut triumphantly.

Katy looked at him unbelievably for a second, then she laughed out loud. "That's a silly question. Everybody knows the answer to that one. It's the TARDIS!"

The troll was surprised. "But, but, that's impossible!" he spluttered.

"How do you know that?"

He opened the book again, muttering to himself.

"Right, I'll ask you another one."

Bernard held up his hand. "Oh, no you don't mate!" he gasped. "You only get to ask one question. That's the rules."

The troll sneered at him. "It's my bridge. I can ask as many questions as I like." He pointed to a page. "Here's a good one. You'll never get this." He cleared his throat again. "What - is the name - of Doctor Who's robot dog?"

Katy giggled. "Easy, it's K9!"

The troll looked crestfallen. "I don't believe it. No-one's ever answered a question correctly before. How did you know the answers?"

Katy grinned. "My Daddy's a Doctor Who fan"

The troll took a step backwards. "A Doctor Who fan?" he breathed. "So that's how."

He stood dejectedly in front of them. Katy suddenly felt sorry for the wretched creature. She took the book from him and looked through it. She laughed gently and closing it, read the title on the cover. It said 'The Gigantic Doctor Who Quiz Book'.

She shook her head. "My Daddy lost this, ages ago. It must have fallen down the side of the sofa."

She gave the book back to the troll. He took it and looked sadly at the cover. "Zizom is going to be very angry with me."

Katy patted the troll's arm. She nudged Bernard and then held out the jar of honey. "Here. Perhaps this will make you feel better."

The troll took the jar and gazed at it in awe. "Is this enchanted honey from the bees in the forest?"

Katy nodded.

The troll stared at her in amazement. "But this is very, very valuable. Are you sure that you want to give it to me?"

Katy nodded again. "It's all for you," she said gently. "Provided that you let us cross the Jade Bridge."

The Grey Troll's face twitched. Then slowly, and painfully, his mouth



twisted upwards at the corners. Katy looked shocked at first, but then realised that the troll was actually smiling at her. It must have been a difficult thing for him to do, she thought, as it looked like he was out of practice.

The troll danced around happily. "Of course you can cross," he sang. "Anything for the daughter of a Doctor Who fan!"

He jumped on the end of the barrier. It swung upwards and the troll waved them through.

Katy and Bernard set off across the bridge. As they reached the far side, Katy could hear the Grey Troll shouting after them. She turned and saw him waving from the doorway of his hut.

"Good luck!"

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The sun burned down hotly on Katy and Bernard as they walked along a rocky path that led upwards through high mountains, honeycombed with caves. Huge rock faces stood either side of the road and Katy was starting to feel a little claustrophobic.

Bernard was very nervous. He was looking this way and that and keeping a tight grip on Katy's bag.

They stopped by a rocky outcrop.

"I'm tired," Katy sighed. "Let's stop and rest for a while."

Bernard nodded his agreement and sat down on a large flat rock.

He looked in the bag. "We've eaten all the sandwiches," he complained.

Katy looked in the bag. "You mean you've eaten all the sandwiches," she sighed. She handed him the bag. "There's a packet of crisps there if you want them."

She took out the juice. "I'm thirsty."

She removed the straw and pushed it into the carton. She took a long swig and sighed contentedly. "Ahhh, that's better."

She offered the carton to Bernard who took it and slurped the juice down noisily.

Katy took a look around. "Where are we now, Bernard?"

Bernard swallowed the last of the juice. "This is the Flint Mountains.

We should be safe from Zizom's Dark Seers here."

Katy was puzzled. "Dark Seers? What are they?"

Bernard looked at her, his eyes wide. "The Dark Seers are Zizom's eyes and ears. They sense living things through their auras and keep Zizom informed as to anyone who would dare to cross the Jade Bridge. He would have known about us the moment we crossed."

Bernard brushed crumbs from his fur. He chuckled to himself.

"Fortunately for us, the flint in these mountains interferes with their powers. As long as we're here, we're safe."

Katy relaxed a little. "Good. Which way do we go now?"

"We follow the path upwards and then down towards the Golden Sea."

They stood up and trudged on. As they reached the summit of the mountain, they passed a large crack in the rock face.

Katy stopped. "Did you hear that?"

Bernard shook his head.

Katy pressed her ear to the rock. "I'm sure I heard a voice just now."

Bernard cocked his head to one side and listened intently.

"<Help me.>"

"I heard that!" Bernard exclaimed. "Whatever could it be?"

Katy shrugged. "I've no idea."

The voice came again. "<Help me!>"

Katy pressed her lips to the rock and shouted. "Where are you?"

"<I'm in the rock.>"

"How did you get in the rock?"

Katy looked at Bernard who raised an eyebrow. She turned back to the rock.

"<Never mind how I got in,>" said the voice. "<Help me get out!>"

"Well if you tell me how you got in," said Katy. "It might give me an idea how to get you out."

"<Oh, sorry. Can you see a small stone sticking out about halfway up the rock face?>"

Katy looked. Sure enough, about halfway up the rock she was leaning on, was a small round stone. Katy banged her hand on the rock in excitement. "I've found it!"

"<Good,>" said the voice. "<Now press it!>"

Katy pressed it. A small panel slid back in the rock face revealing a rusty metal wheel. Katy turned the wheel and it moved slowly with an ear splitting creak of grinding gears. There was a low rumbling sound and she jumped back in alarm as the noise grew louder. Then suddenly, the rock face split in two, right down the middle. The two halves slid slowly apart until there was a large gap between them. There trapped in the centre was a man. He looked up and with a wiggle, he jumped out. As soon as he was free, the two halves of rock slammed shut with a resounding crash.

The man dusted himself off. He was tall, with closely cropped dark brown hair. He was dressed in a camouflage outfit and wore a heavy pack on his back. Katy noticed a livid scar running down his right cheek and felt a tiny frisson of fear run down her spine. The man smiled at Katy and it was such a genuine smile that lit up his face that the fear she felt on seeing his scar melted away. Instinctively she knew that this was a good man, so she returned his smile. "You're a soldier!" The soldier stood to attention and saluted. "Yes Ma'am. Thank you for freeing me Ma'am."

Katy giggled. "You can put your hand down."

The soldier looked puzzled but stayed at attention. Katy thought hard and tried to remember what she had seen in those old army films her brothers' liked to watch.

"Erm, stand at ease soldier!" she said carefully.

The soldier lowered his hand and relaxed.

"Now, what on Earth were you doing in that rock?"

The soldier remained silent and looked pleadingly at her.

Katy coughed and said in a gruff voice. "Report, soldier!" she commanded.

The soldier grinned and told an extraordinary tale. He had been on manoeuvres with his platoon when he had fallen down a crevasse. He had fallen for a long time before hitting the ground. He had then blacked out for a while and when he had woken, he had found himself in a cave. He had made his way out and had managed to reach a river. In the far distance, he had spied a bridge, but had decided that it was too dangerous to make a crossing there because it appeared to be guarded.

So, he had constructed a raft from some nearby fallen trees and had crossed the river on that. He had managed to get as far as the mountains before he was captured by some dark hooded figures on horseback. They had carried him up the mountain, where they had imprisoned him in the rock.

Katy and Bernard listened with baited breath as the soldier told them of his battle with the hooded figures. When he had finished, Katy tapped Bernard on the arm. "Those hooded figures. What do you suppose they were?"

Bernard looked gravely at her. "The Dark Seers I told you about. They probably thought our friend here was too dangerous to take back to Zizom's Tower and decided that it would be safer to imprison him here. He was lucky. I've heard that they can do far, far worse."

Katy turned back to the soldier. "Look, we're going to Zizom's Dark Tower to rescue my Daddy. We could really use your help. Will you come with us?"

The soldier jumped to attention again. "Yes Ma'am. It will be my pleasure Ma'am."

Katy smiled. "Great! But could you do something for me first?"

The soldier saluted again. "Yes Ma'am."

Katy giggled. "Do you think you could stop saluting me all the time? It can be quite tiring watching you jump to attention every time I speak to you."

The soldier smiled sheepishly. "Sorry Ma'am."

"And stop calling me Ma'am. My name is Katy. This is Bernard."

"Yes, Ma - erm, Katy."

Katy nodded. "That's better," she said. "What's your name?"

The soldier went to salute again but then stopped and gave a huge grin.

"Corporal Joe Perkins Ma - I mean, Katy."

"Good. Now we're all friends."

Corporal Perkins relaxed, limped over to a flat rock and then sat down.

Katy sat next to him. "Are you alright? You're limping."

Perkins smiled and rubbed his legs. "Just a bit of cramp, that's all. I've been stuck in there for so long."

Katy nodded and then peered closely at the soldier's legs. Oddly, they looked like they were made of plastic. In fact now that she had a close look at him, his face and his arms seemed to be made of the stuff too. In fact, Katy was willing to bet that his entire body was made of plastic and that he'd have a tattoo on one shoulder that said AM. She clicked her fingers. "You're one of Regan's Action Men!"

Perkins nodded. "Yes Ma'am, my Commanding Officer is General Regan Ma'am."

Katy was astonished. "You must have fallen down the side of the sofa too!"

Bernard scratched his fluff. "I wonder what else fell down the side of your sofa."

Katy shrugged. "I wonder... Perhaps we'll find out. Come on you two, we have a long walk ahead of us and it's getting dark. We'll have to find some shelter soon."

Bernard pointed down the mountain. On the horizon, they could make out a huge shimmering ocean.

"We must try to get as far as the Golden Sea. We'll be able to find accommodation in Daven Port."

"Golden Sea?" asked Katy.

"Yeah," said Bernard. "Well, actually it's really a lake, but its fifty miles wide. We have to cross the Sea to get to the Plain of Stones. Now, there are two ways to get to Daven Port..."

"Don't tell me," interrupted Katy. "There's a long way and a short way."

Bernard shook his head. "Sort of. The long way is the safe way..." he began.

"We get the picture," said Perkins. "What's the safe way?"

"Well, there's a highway to the north. It runs between Chester Fields and Daven Port. But it's only a safe way if we get there before nightfall. Otherwise we're in danger of being caught by the Dark Seers. It's a busy road of a night."

"And the other way?" asked Katy

"The shorter route takes us through the Forest of Sorrows. We have a better chance of making Daven Port before nightfall if we go that way, but -"

"But it's through the Forest of Sorrows and you told me that I didn't want to know about that," finished Katy.

"Well," said Perkins. "It doesn't look like we have much of a choice does it? We'll have to go through the Forest of Sorrows."

Katy nodded and took both their arms. She hugged them both and they set off down the mountain path.