

Magical Crab Apple Orchard

Sally Codyre

Local Legend Publishing UK

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Chapter 1

Whack! Bang! Slash! Another monster fell twitching to the ground. Stepping nimbly over its quivering form, the boy swung around to meet the huge purple tower of jelly that was bearing down on him. Aiming his sword carefully, he stepped forward with a cry of triumph. There was a flash of metal, followed by a loud howling as the purple mass flopped to the ground, clutching the arm that had just been stabbed.

Dropping his weapon the boy kneeled down beside the monster which, now his game had been interrupted, had turned into a loudly crying little sister. “Come on Dee. Suck it up, it’s not that bad...Oh, and please stop crying. Abbey’s coming!” he frantically hushed her, and cowered down into the grass as his irritable older sister stormed over, angry at the interruption in her book.

“Oscar! What have you done you stupid head!” she demanded, picking up the now sulky Dee and kicking Oscar in the shins as he stood up and brushed the dirt off his hands. Wincing, he muttered something about “telling Mummy” and picked up the sword, which had now been transformed back into a piece of hose pipe. “What was that?” demanded Abbey, advancing on him with a look so ferocious it stopped him from repeating the comment. “Mummy is busy with the cleaning. She told you to look after Dee for just one morning and look what happens!” Dee clucked her agreement from her spot on Abbey’s hip, looking menacingly at Oscar for a moment then, abruptly

bored, she stuck her thumb in her mouth and buried her face in Abbey's mane of long red hair.

"Mummy told you to look after her." Oscar muttered defiantly, scuffing the toe of his shoe in the dirt.

"No, well I was busy reading my book! You were just playing a stupid game!" Abbey replied defiantly, her face flooding with colour as she swung Dee further up her hip. Dee giggled with glee at the tension and poked a chubby finger into Abbey's mouth. As his sister flounced away Oscar returned half heartedly to his monster slaying, but somehow it just didn't seem so real any more.

The Princess was beautiful, with long blonde hair threaded with wild flowers. She wore a long flowing gown that swished quietly with every movement. Then a knight, dressed all in black, charged in with his sword held aloft, threatening the Princess who screamed loudly.

Abbey awoke with a start, breathing heavily as she felt a drop of sweat run down her face. Sitting up quickly, she tried to shake off the bad dream. There was another loud scream from the next room. Jumping out of bed, she threw on her dressing gown and hurried into the next room.

Dee was standing in her cot, crying loudly. Rubbing her eyes, Abbey closed the door quietly behind her and was about to switch on the light when something caught her eye. Turning slowly back around she saw the small blue light bobbing around next to Dee's face. The floor creaked quietly as Abbey took a step forward. She froze, holding her breath for a second to see if she had been noticed, but

Dee was crying loudly enough to cover her so she took another cautious step forward. As she got closer to the cot, Abbey heard a voice, a man's voice, coming from the darkness near her. Swallowing the scream that had almost escaped her, she took another small step forward and examined the light that was bobbing around Dee's head.

The voice seemed to be coming from the light! Listening carefully Abbey could just catch the words.

“- now please don't, I didn't mean it, I'm not really here to steal teeth I promise! Don't cry now...Oh dear! Oh deary, deary me, now look what you've done!”

The voice stopped abruptly as another small light appeared at the window. This one was electric green with red flecks shooting out of it like little fireworks, bouncing off the walls. The light began to float down towards the cot. “Oh Pansies, she's mad!” muttered the blue light, shrinking a little as the other landed neatly next to it.

“You fool, Bill! Now look at this mess! Trying to wake the whole house up are you?” The shrill female voice was like bells, even though it was undoubtedly very angry. There was a quiet slapping noise and the blue light howled with pain. “Be quiet Bill! You've done enough damage!”

“Ouch, you old bat! There was no need to go clipping me round the ear. I was just being friendly,” objected Bill.

Ignoring him, the green light turned towards Dee who was still crying quietly in her cot. The red flecks stopped bouncing around the room as the light lowered her voice to a soothing gurgle, and almost instantly Dee stopped crying and lay back down in bed.

“Right. I’ll deal with you when we get home, you half witted fool,” she said to Bill, floating up towards the window.

“Thanks a lot, you,” muttered Bill towards the silent cot, as he followed the other light towards the window.

“I’m telling you they were real! If they were real that is, if it wasn’t a dream, which I don’t think it was ’cause I’d just woken up from a dream!” Sighing deeply, Abbey lay back in the grass and watched the clouds.

Oscar sat next to her, absorbed in poking with a stick at the ants scurrying past. For a few moments the only sound was Dee, gurgling softly to herself as she sucked happily on a leaf and chased the butterflies with her eyes, watching with envy as they fluttered around; small dashes of colour dancing just beyond her reach.

It was a most baffling situation. Abbey was at a complete loss as to whether the lights and voices had been a dream or real, and Oscar was not being a sympathetic audience. As usual he had nothing to add; no helpful advice or opinions. Just a boy, she concluded in disgust, shaking her head and sighing, and Dee wasn’t exactly being helpful, all she did was cry and suck things; she was too young to appreciate the seriousness of the matter.

She lay back in the grass and watched the clouds, making shapes out of them like she used to when she was younger. There was an elephant with a big top hat, a couple of mushrooms, and small girl with long flowing hair. She frowned at the sky. Something wasn’t right about the picture. The girl had two big lumps of cloud behind

her which spoiled the shape. With a gasp she shot upright, grabbing Oscar's arm as a huge smile spread across her face.

Grumbling loudly Oscar abandoned his stick and turned to face his sister, his look of annoyance changing swiftly to one of curiosity when he saw her expression.

"Fairies," breathed Abbey, turning her radiant face to him.

"What?" asked Oscar blankly, raising an eyebrow like Mummy did when she didn't understand something.

"They were fairies. That's how they flew. And they glowed! Why didn't I realise it before?"

Oscar shook his head stupidly, and Dee clapped her hands and squealed her agreement. "You're going potty, Abbey-Abbey." Oscar said through a yawn, patting his sister on the arm patronizingly, "There's no such thing as fairies."

As the words came out of his mouth something very strange happened. The sounds turned into real live letters! They looked as if they had been cut out of some shiny paper or material, and they flashed in the sun, floating lazily above the children's heads. Transfixed, the children sat, frozen in their spots, watching the letters spiralling out of order so they no longer read as Oscar's words, but drifted around, some floating up into the sky and out of sight.

"What the..." began Oscar, but before he could get any more out, more letters spilled out of his mouth. He looked around, confused and scared. Abbey had a frown on her face as she watched the letters, and Dee started crying when she couldn't catch a bright pink W that floated past her.



“Ha ha ha! Oh boy, was that funny! You should have seen the looks on your faces...priceless!” chortled a voice from among the bushes.

“Who’s there?” demanded Abbey, looking around apprehensively. “Show yourself!”

“All right. Chill out now, but just, PLEASE, don’t scream...” and a little man, about the size of a thumb strolled out from behind a leaf, and jumped neatly on to Oscar’s knee. He was still laughing, wiping tears off his face with fingers that were so small they were almost transparent. He was dressed in a tiny pair of worn out jeans, a blue and red flannelette shirt, and little cowboy boots, with a cowboy hat tucked under his arm. Oscar let loose another bundle of colourful letters into the sky, and the little man on his knee doubled over with laughter, slapping his knee and gasping for breath.

“Bill! What are you doing now?” came a shrill voice which Abbey had no trouble recognizing. Bill stopped

laughing immediately, and stood up straight, a sombre look on his small face.

Onto the scene strolled another being, about the same size as Bill. She had short spiky black hair and was wearing a bright orange overall which had green stains on the knees. She had a menacing looking broom in one hand which she brandished as she marched across the garden and rapped Bill soundly over the head with it, and then promptly started screeching at him. “You moron, what are you doing, scaring the poor children out of their minds and putting spells on them! Who do you think you are you little...?” She was interrupted by a fresh round of screaming from Dee who had watched the scene quietly enough and now had had too much. “She always does that,” muttered Bill, shooting a reproachful look at the howling baby.

“...and making them cry too! What is this?” finished the little woman, rapping him over the head again and turning back to the children. She shot a critical look at Dee, who was still crying, then pointed her finger and muttered a few words, and a dummy appeared in Dee’s mouth. The baby was stunned into immediate silence. “That’s better. Now I can hear myself think,” said Bill’s friend, smiling up at the astonished look on Abbey’s face, and jumping on to Oscar’s knee to take a seat beside Bill.

“Right, now. Sorry about that... let’s start again. My name is Fay and this is my brother Bill. I know you’re Dee,” she smiled at the baby, and then turned to look up at Oscar. “Your name dear?” she asked kindly, ignoring the puzzled look on his face.

“I’m Oscar,” he said, letting out another stream of letters. Fay clicked her tongue and flicked her fingers at

him. “And you dear? I don’t know you either.” She waited as Abbey tried to gather her thoughts.

“A–Abbey. I’m Abbey,” she stuttered, smiling apprehensively as Fay nodded her approval. “Are you flower fairies?”

Bill made a noise somewhere between a snort and a choke and jumped up, his face turning the same shade of red as Abbey’s hair. “Flower fairies?” he shouted, his tiny voice hardly louder than normal to the children. “Flower fairies! What, do you think I look like a flower, eh? Is that it? Should I just put on a tutu and dance around with daisies in my hair?”

“Shh dear, calm down before you hurt yourself,” said Fay in a soothing voice.

“Calm down? No I will not...” but the rest of Bill’s sentence was interrupted as his face turned purple and his head began to swell up, then with a small ‘pop’, he was gone and in his place was a little miniature red apple. Fay sighed and patted the apple gently.

She turned to Abbey. “No dear. As you might have gathered, we are not flower fairies. We’re crab apple fairies! We live in the crab apple orchard, see?” She pointed her broom behind her, through the bushes towards the vegetable patches.

“I don’t see any apple trees,” objected Oscar, “and what’s a clampapple?”

“Crab apple, dear. They used to be called fairy apples, but since fairies became an endangered species, crab became a more suitable name. That’s one just there.” She pointed at the small one sitting on Oscar’s leg.

“Bill,” gurgled Dee, blowing a happy bubble of saliva and waving her dummy energetically at Oscar’s leg, “Where Bill?”

“Hmm. I was hoping we wouldn’t have to turn him back for a while. Oh well,” sighed Fay, clicking her fingers at the little apple.

Bill was still ranting and raving as he reappeared, waving his arms around like a windmill, “... and another thing, I don’t think...” Thud. With a slight slurping noise the dummy hit Bill fair in the chest, knocking the wind out of him as he looked for the source of the attack.

“Bill!” squealed Dee happily, holding out her hands to him. Bill looked hopefully at Fay, who shook her head firmly.

“Go on Bill; be nice, she’s only young!”

Muttering something about babies being made into pies, Bill jumped cautiously onto Dee’s outstretched finger. Gurgling her delight the baby took a firm grip on Bill’s torso and shook him firmly, giving a delighted squeal when he protested.

“Well, I’m sorry Bill. I really got out of the wrong side of bed today,” apologized Fay, shooting a regretful glance at her brother, who was now yelling ferociously, without effect, as his words were drowned out by Dee’s laughter. “Anyway, where was I? Oh please shut him up, dear, I can’t hear myself think.”

Bill’s cries were abruptly cut off and Abbey and Oscar turned around, just in time to see him vanish into Dee’s mouth. All that was left were his tiny feet, kicking frantically at the baby’s fingers.

“Oh dear! Dee, spit him out now! That’s terribly rude,” scolded Abbey, crawling over and retrieving the

sticky fairy as Fay and Oscar howled with laughter in the background.

“Oh the day you were taught a lesson by a two year old,” panted Fay, wiping her eyes as the sodden Bill wrung out his hat, and shook out his hair like a dog, sending tiny droplets all over the others.

“She had banana for lunch,” he grunted, wiping his hands on his sodden trousers. “G’day!!” And with that he vanished, head held high and hat aloft, into the bushes.

“Oh deary me, he’ll be sulking for weeks,” giggled Fay, stretching her arms and picking up her broom. “It was lovely to meet you all. I daresay I’ll see you soon.” She smiled at them and with one last snort of laughter she vanished in a puff of green smoke.

Chapter 2

“We haven’t seen the fairies in ages!” grumbled Oscar, throwing down his piece of puzzle and lying back on the carpet.

“It’s only been three days!” said Abbey, placing a bright pink parrot’s head on a dolls body, frowning at it for a moment, and then taking it off again. Dee smiled in agreement and put her piece of puzzle back into her mouth.

“Our fairies don’t have wings! Do you think they can fly?” pondered Oscar, examining another piece of parrot jigsaw.

“Yes, of course they can! I saw them fly that night when they were in Dee’s room!” Abbey gently tugged the piece out of Dee’s mouth and placed it onto the picture.

“We should ask Fay next time we see her anyway,” said Oscar, turning his piece of cardboard over and looking at it from a different angle.

“Ask me what, dear?” asked Fay as she sidled through the gap underneath the door. “My, my, that cat of yours is a nasty piece of work! Nearly ripped my head off!”

“Bad kitty,” crooned Dee, picking a new piece of puzzle and sliding it into her mouth as the small fairy seated herself comfortably on the floor next to Abbey.

“We were just wondering, can you fly?” asked Oscar, sitting up and looking at the little woman next to him.

Fay sat in silence for a moment, figuring out how best to answer the question. The silence was broken only by the light pattering of rain on the roof.

Finally, she said slowly, “Well it’s not so much a question of if we can, or if we do. You see, all fairies are given wings, but not all of them can or want to use them. Just because you have something doesn’t necessarily mean you use it. I mean, what if you have a swimming pool but you’re afraid of fish?”

“Hang on, so what you’re trying to say is that you’re scared of heights?” asked Oscar with a snigger.

“Me? No, of course not! But some others...”

“Are you serious? Bill? That’s the funniest...” but Oscar was too overcome with giggles to finish the sentence and had to lie down again, clutching his side and gasping for breath.

Fay shot him a disapproving look and continued. “He’s not so much scared as apprehensive. He worries a lot. But please don’t mention this to him; he’s rather sensitive about it.”

Abbey nodded sombrely over Oscar's dying squeals of amusement and even Dee spat out her piece of puzzle and nodded her head so that her blonde curls bounced merrily.

“So how does he travel over long distances?” asked Abbey, returning to her jigsaw.

“I usually put a hover on him, so that it looks like he’s flying but it tricks his brain into thinking he’s still standing on the ground.”

“What if we tried to teach him?” asked Oscar excitedly. “Mummy has a book about curing irrational fears! We could use it and teach him to fly!”

Fay almost laughed at the idea but stopped herself so as not to hurt Oscar’s feelings. “He would never agree

to it unless you forced him to, and that's a very rare chance."

"Abbey, dear? Where are you? I need you to give Dee her bath. And if you see Oscar can you get him to come and help me peel the potatoes?" Oscar sighed heavily as Mummy's voice echoed down the hallway.

"Why do weekends always go so fast?" he said regretfully, looking at the half finished puzzle on the floor in front of him.

"I'd better scoot, but come by and visit us later if you can," asked Fay, getting up and stretching. Flicking her fingers, she said, "I'll show you my wings now, I've got to fly home anyway." As she spoke, two big green wings grew out of her shoulders, about twice the size of her actual body each. They were not smooth and beautiful like butterflies wings, they looked like they had been made from slices of chunky apple. "Everyone's wings are different, just like people's faces," smiled Fay at the shocked looks on the children's faces. "Bill's wings look like leaves, on the rare occasions they come out." Then, with a last grin at them all, Fay leapt off the floor and vanished out of the window, just as Mummy appeared through the door.

"So where actually is this crab apple orchard?" asked Oscar as he hugged the big book he was carrying closer to him and looked cautiously around the dark bushes.

"I'm not sure. This was the direction Fay pointed in, but I don't see any apple trees..." said Abbey uncertainly,

hoisting Dee further up her hip and gently removing a lock of her own hair from the baby's mouth.

It was twilight. The rainclouds had cleared and the long shadows of the veggie garden were making the children edgy as they crept towards the dark mountain of waving branches and rustling leaves that was the forest.

“Ok, if the worst comes to the worst, Abbey, you take Dee and the book and run. I'll fight off the monsters. Tell Mummy I love her and don't let kitty sleep on my bed.”

Abbey snorted with a lot more confidence than she really felt. “What kind of monsters are you worried about?” she asked, just for the sake of talking.

“Well the big green jelly bogs are quite scary. They have red eyes and are about the size of a... of a... holy popsicles; that's one just there! Quick Abbey! Run! I'll fight him off!” His voice rose to a squeak and he clutched Abbey's arm so tightly it hurt.

Crouching in the shadows, not three meters away from them sat the monster, quivering in the breeze as it stared at them out of bright red eyes. The children stooped frozen, unable to move. Then a loud laugh broke the silence, and with a ‘pop’ the jelly bog vanished and all that remained in its place was a small blue light, rolling around in the dead leaves quaking with mirth. Abbey let out a deep breath that she hadn't noticed she'd been holding and stepped towards the light, frowning disapprovingly as Bill finally stopped laughing and stood up straight, grinning around at them.

“Bill! You scared us half to death!” scolded Abbey, picking up the little man and holding him close to her face.

“I wasn’t scared,” muttered Oscar from behind his book, glaring at the fairy.

“Oh boy, the looks on your faces! Priceless!” chortled Bill, covering his giggles with a hand and trying to look serious.

“What on earth are you wearing?” asked Oscar, eyeing Bill’s clothes uncertainly.

“It’s my shape shifter’s outfit!” replied Bill defiantly. Hoisting up his long straw skirt and wrapping the pink feather boa more securely around his neck. “I need it to change shapes. That jelly bog was quite comfy actually. Thanks Oscar, I might use it again – oh, not on you, of course,” he added quickly, seeing the look of horror on Oscar’s face and smirking. “Oh, and if you don’t mind, how about we don’t mention this to Fay? She has a nasty habit of turning me into a turnip, sometimes she leaves me in the veggie patch for days and I can tell you, it smells awful!”

“Ok, we promise not to tell Fay if you promise never to use it on us again,” said Oscar quickly.

Bill gave an unwilling nod of agreement before Abbey added quickly, “And you will have to let us help you with something, otherwise we’ll tell.”

Bill looked surprised. “My goodness! You do strike a hard bargain! What could you possibly want to help me with?”

“Fly, fly!” piped up Dee with a giggle, wriggling her little toes with glee as she looked down at the fairy who had frozen; all the colour draining out of his face as he stared at the baby, who yawned widely and put her thumb in her mouth, eyeing Bill with curiosity.

“I-I-what? What does she mean? I can fly perfectly well!”

“Let us help you, please? Or - ”

“...or we will tell Fay about the jelly bog,” finished Oscar with a smug smile.

As Bill mouthed wordlessly, trying to find a name bad enough for Oscar, there was a small ‘pop’ and Fay’s bright green light appeared on Abbey’s shoulder.

“Bill, you’re a terrible host! Leaving our poor guests standing out here in the cold! Come on dears, follow me, we’ll get you warmed right up in no time.”

She leapt into the air and hovered for a second, waiting for the others to follow her.

“No Fay, hold your horses, these little brats are going to help me fly,” said Bill begrudgingly, ruffling up Oscar’s hair from his perch on Abbey’s other shoulder.

“Great! How did you persuade him to agree to this?” asked Fay, looking as surprised as if a cow had just told her it was going to fly an aeroplane.

“Ah, I guess I’m just in a good mood,” said Bill quickly, before anyone else could get a word in. “Now let’s get this out of the way. What do I need to do?”

“Are you kidding me? You want me to throw myself off this thing? You must be crazy! Or murderers...” Bill trailed off, hopeful that someone would step in and say it was a ridiculous idea and they should all just go home.

When no one did he continued, “No way. I’m not doing this, you can’t make me!”

Oscar turned to Fay, “Have you ever heard of a jelly ...”

“No no, I’m doing it! I’m doing it!” cut in Bill hurriedly, throwing Oscar a dirty look and turning back to face the drop.

The three of them were crouched on the edge of the veranda roof, looking down at Abbey and Dee who had stayed on the ground to keep a look out.

“Just remember; pretend you’re jumping into a big swimming pool!” called Abbey, her voice magnified in the silent night.

“All right! Here I go!” Bill took a deep breath, fluttered his wings and jumped off the roof. For an awful second he fell towards the ground like a tumbleweed abandoned by the wind. Then he flapped his wings and soared up into the air, whooping with delight.

As he flipped and twisted, laughing with glee, Fay smiled at Oscar and said, “I don’t know what kind of blackmail you had to use, but thank you. You’ve made my job a lot easier now I don’t have to haul him everywhere.”

Before Oscar could reply there was a shout in the sky above them and they turned just in time to see the tiny shadow that was Bill, heading full speed towards the trunk of a tree, with no means of slowing down.

“Oh dear! We didn’t tell him how to turn!” moaned Fay as, with a low thud, Bill collided with the tree. She was the first to reach him, followed by a breathless Abbey and an anxious Dee. He was lying in the grass, shouting unintelligible sentences and clutching his left arm.

“What happened? Is he ok?” asked Oscar anxiously, as he climbed off the roof and ran over.

“Broken arm. Don’t worry, it will do him good not to be able to put spells on everything that moves for a few days. It’s his spell hand see?” she pointed at the arm and bandages flew from her fingertips, making a sling around Bill’s neck and elbow.

“Rotten turkey pies! Fairy bells! Slobbery holladong monsters!” yelled Bill, apparently quite unaware of what was going on around him. Frowning slightly, Fay muttered an incantation and Bill’s mouth snapped shut as if it had been glued.

“That’s better. Now I can think,” said Fay, waving her arm and sending Bill’s body into the air and hung there, limp as a rag doll while Fay said goodnight to the children. Then, pulling Bill alongside her, like an uncooperative dog, she flew off towards the garden.

“Come on, let’s go to bed,” said Abbey, as Oscar smothered a huge yawn and swayed where he stood. Carrying a sleeping Dee in one arm, Abbey staggered into the house, leaving Oscar to lock the door.

“We should go and visit Bill,” said Abbey, as she and Oscar got off the school bus and began walking down the driveway towards the house.

“Yes but we still don’t know where they live!” protested Oscar, kicking a stone along in front of him.

“It can’t be too far away, and anyway, Mummy wants us out of the house today so she can clean up for her party. We’ll take Dee and go exploring!”

“Ok, but I’ll bring my sword, just in case we bump into any monsters.”

“Oscar, you’re seven now! You have to stop playing this monster game soon!”

“You thought fairies were a game too! Until we met Fay and Bill! How do you know monsters aren’t true as well?” Abbey shivered, even though it was a warm afternoon.

“Oh, I hope not. That would be awful. Suppose they eat children?”

“Don’t worry, they won’t come near us if I bring my sword,” said Oscar confidently. “Well, this is as far as we came yesterday but now what? I don’t see any apple trees!” He stopped and looked around, frowning at the thick shrubbery and big gum trees surrounding them.

“What if we tried to call them?” suggested Abbey, then, turning away from the others she softly called, “Fay? Are you there?”

There was a loud ‘pop’ and Fay appeared in mid-air, holding a saucepan in one hand, a big wooden spoon in the other and wearing an apron. “Hello, dears! You need to warn me when you’re about to do that! Nearly gave me a heart attack!” she smiled at them all; her short spiky hair bristling in the breeze. “Well, what are you waiting for? Let’s go!” she beckoned them to follow her as she flew off through the bushes towards the forest.



They walked in silence for a while, pausing only to lift Dee over a log, or pick up Oscar when he tripped over a stick lying across the path. Then, suddenly and without warning, Oscar vanished. With a shriek he was hoisted about three meters into the air by his ankle.

“What the...! Oh, how annoying, it’s one of Bill’s silly monster traps - don’t worry, we haven’t seen a monster around here in years! He’s just paranoid. What a nuisance. Don’t worry dear, we’ll get you down in just a flash.” Fay added to Oscar, who was now swinging around their heads making quite a lot of noise. “Keep it down a bit! I can’t concentrate,” complained Fay, holding her saucepan askew and clicking her fingers as she muttered a few incantations. There was a loud crack as the rope holding Oscar vanished and he floated gently back to the ground. “Sorry about that,” said Fay to the red-faced boy as he got up and brushed himself off. “Thought I’d gotten rid of them all! Shall we continue?”

They walked on in silence, carefully watching the ground for more monster traps.

“Here we are. Now, stand back.”

They had stopped beside a huge old oak tree in the middle of a small clearing. Fay knocked on the door three times and a little door appeared in the side, just big enough to allow the children to climb in without bumping their heads.

“Right. Oscar, you go first and we’ll follow behind,” instructed Fay, ushering him forward. He stepped into the tree willingly enough and for the second time that day, vanished from sight. “It’s ok, he was meant to do that,” Fay smiled at the alarmed look on Abbey’s face. “Your turn, Dee.”

The baby toddled forward and vanished into the tree. Taking a deep breath, Abbey stepped forward... into nothing! She couldn't suppress a little scream of terror as she plunged down the black hole. After just a moment of falling she landed with a soft thud. Opening her eyes, she saw that she was in a paddock of long soft grass with lots of small thin trees scattered haphazardly around.

The trees were covered in blossom; each one a different colour. Above her was a soft layer of vines and flowers which, although they blocked out the sky, didn't stop the light. In fact, it was as if another sun shone in this magical orchard. It was filled with a bright light and Abbey could hear birds singing from amongst the vines.

"This is pretty cool isn't it?" Oscar's voice came from behind her. A few meters behind him sat Dee, examining a crab apple that had fallen off its branch before popping it into her mouth.

"Wow!" breathed Abbey, noticing for the first time the little cottage standing ahead of them. It was too far away to see what it was made of, but it was brightly coloured, blending in perfectly with the trees around it.

"Nice isn't it?" came Fay's voice, right behind them. The children gasped in surprise as they turned to see a full-sized Fay, brushing flowers and leaves out of her hair and picking up her frying pan.

"We're normal size here," she explained unnecessarily, smiling at their shocked faces. "We only shrink up there because there is not enough belief in us. The less people believe in fairies the smaller we get. Would you like a cup of tea?" She started off in the direction of the cottage, adding over her shoulder, "Oh and eat what

you like, I've been cooking all morning so there's plenty of repair material."

As they approached the house, all three children noticed at once that it was made entirely of sweets! With squeals of delight they flung themselves on the house, watched by an amused Fay who opened the little gingerbread door and vanished inside to put the kettle on. The children entered a minute later, clutching handfuls of chocolate, biscuits, sherbet bombs, caramel, lollipops and every other type of sweet you could imagine.

Fay was setting out cups of hot chocolate and Bill was sitting in a corner, chewing a piece of grass and muttering to himself. His arm was still in its sling, which was now dark blue. He looked very sorry for himself but cheered up straight away when he saw his guests. "You brought that for me? How sweet!" he said to Dee who was sucking a piece of gingerbread.

"You can get your own!" the baby said indignantly, backing up a step as Bill reached out with his good arm.

"Ah, you're right, I can!" he said, reaching behind him and pulling off half the windowsill.

"All right! Enough! Please stop demolishing the house!" Fay flung her hands up in alarm.

"Oh, what's this?" asked Abbey eagerly, sipping her drink and shivering with delight.

"Ah, that's my crab apple jelly. I put a spoon in each," smiled Fay, sipping her own drink.

There was a spluttering noise from the corner as Bill swallowed his piece of grass. Everyone watched in silence for a minute while he coughed it back up and said, "Your jelly? *Your* jelly, is it now? Tell me, what exactly did you do except pick the apples and stew them?"

“Me? Tell me, what exactly did YOU do except stir the pot and put the lids on?” retorted Fay, banging down her cup and standing up, glaring at her brother. “I think you’ll find ...” she stopped as Oscar cleared his throat loudly.

“Um, maybe we should go, it’s getting late and Mummy will be getting worried.”

“Now look what you’ve done, you old bat! You’ve scared away our visitors!” said Bill, stamping his foot and glaring at Fay.

Ignoring him, Fay turned back to the children. “I’m so sorry; maybe you could come and visit again when Bill’s stopped sulking?”

“Of course!” said Abbey, smiling as she stood up.

Oscar finished his drink in one and got up too. “How do we get back?” he asked, looking around as if to find a couple of flying broomsticks.

“I’ll send you back. Ready?” Fay reached out and tapped them all gently on the head. One by one, in a puff of purple smoke, the children vanished.