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Chapter one: Jeb and JoJo set sail

It was summer and Jeb and JoJo Barnesfather were looking forward to holidaying on Lickspittle Island, so named because of an exotic fruit found only on its shores. They had heard many wonderful stories (and some not so wonderful) about the Island. It was a place cloaked in mystery in their imagination. Many of the stories were, of course, not true. That witches and dragons still inhabited the place, if indeed they had ever done, was surely too fanciful to be believed.

For Mainlanders, like Jeb and JoJo, opportunities to visit the place were few and far between. It had long been the rule that the Islanders could come to the Mainland but only in exceptional circumstances was the reverse ever allowed. This had been the case for centuries. It was accepted custom. And, it must be said, the Islanders were quite happy with their self-imposed remoteness. They seemed quite proud of it in fact. Of course, such secrecy only made the Mainlanders more curious.

Jeb and JoJo had only ever dreamed of visiting the place but as luck would have it this particular summer would be different. Their father, an auditor by profession, had won a contract to conduct an annual examination of the Island's monetary affairs. This was a rare opportunity and Mrs Barnesfather had squealed with delight when her husband had broken the news. The children, though sharing the initial excitement, were cautious in their reaction.

“What had happened to the other auditor?” Jeb had asked. She had heard that the Islanders had eaten the hapless fellow and fed his bones to the sharks. Mr. Barnesfather had heard the story too. A quizzical look had clouded his brow as he looked down his thin bespectacled nose and patted Jeb on the head.

“Oh I suspect he just wanted a change. Don’t worry we will be quite safe.” he had assured them with a kindly smile. The children, seeing the doubt in his face, were not quite sure.

And so it was that the Barnesfather’s sojourn began. Mr. and Mrs B had gone on ahead to arrange accommodation and left the children in the care of their Aunt Mimi, an indomitable and unconquerable spirit of goodness and light. They were late and Aunt Mimi was ushering them down and along Pier number four ‘O’ where the Islanders docked their boats when visiting the Mainland, a task they undertook daily when bringing their wares or catches of fish to sell.

Jeb and JoJo were laughing as they clattered along behind Aunt Mimi. The little wheels on their pull-a-long suit cases click clacked over the gaps in the rough planks as they did their best to keep stride with Aunt Mimi’s beetling pace. They giggled as the cases jumped at sharp angles and bounced sideways, occasionally clipping their hurrying heels. A few of the anglers hunched at the end of the pier turned cursorily, their frowning looks sending a warning shush. “You’ll scare the fish” they seemed to whisper.

“Ahhhh. Here it is.” announced Aunt Mimi stopping abruptly. Jeb, who was looking at the various boats moored alongside the pier, crashed into her Aunt’s ample bottom and JoJo could do nothing other than crash into his sister and fall back over his suitcase onto some upturned crayfish pots. He lay sprawled among the pots on the salted wooden timbers and began to cry.

“Jeb pushed me.” he wailed.

“I did not.” retorted Jeb indignantly with her hands on her hips glaring at her considerably younger brother. “You little pain.” she huffed.

“Am not” wailed JoJo louder still.

Suddenly JoJo felt himself lifted to his feet and set straight by a mountain of a man.

“There thee go young master,” said the stranger kindly.

Jeb and JoJo stared at the giant frame before them while Aunt Mimi clucked and fussed about JoJo.

“Oh thank you.” gushed Aunt Mimi. “You are most kind.” Her face was a little flushed and the man continued to smile kindly.

“Thee must be the Barnesfather children I take it?” he said looking at Jeb and JoJo.

“Yes. Indeed they are.” replied Aunt Mimi. “Jeb and JoJo” she added pointing the children out to the man. “And you are Mr. O’Hara, I suppose?”

“Yes Ma’am.”

“Well then...very good. Children this is Mr. O’Hara. He is taking you over to the Island. Come along...and do stop gawking, girl” she chided, pushing Jeb who had been staring open mouthed at Mr. O’Hara.

Mr. O’Hara was a thick set man with arms as big as most men’s legs. He had wild woolly red hair and an equally wild and woolly red beard with wiry strands of grey mixed in. JoJo thought he looked like he had swallowed a bear.

Mr. O’Hara stepped down into his boat and lifted the children aboard. First JoJo and then Jeb.

“There thee go young uns set ye selves down and the ol’ *Sea Lion* will have thee at the Island in a jiffy.” The children sat on a bench seat along the rear starboard side. The floor was a little slippery and a fishing net lay bunched against the back of the boat.

“Now be careful children. And don’t go leaning over the edge.” warned Aunt Mimi from the pier. “Kisses and hugs to your parents children, remember.”

“Yes Aunt Mimi” giggled Jeb and JoJo as the *Sea Lion*’s engine groaned. Neither Jeb nor JoJo had been on a boat before and both were very excited if not a little apprehensive. They sat silently not daring to move as Mr. O’Hara stood crammed into the boat’s little cabin scratching his considerably large head. The engine groaned again, chug, chugging a few throaty belches before spluttering into silence. Mr. O’Hara scratched his head again and the children looked at each other a little concerned.

“Is there anything wrong?” called Aunt Mimi.

Mr. O’Hara looked up, though no longer smiling, and declared bluntly “No Ma’am. Just a temperamental old cow.” Aunt Mimi recoiled in mute horror. Such language! And in front of the children too! “Tis nothing that *Matilda* can’t fix.”

The children watched as Mr. O’Hara took a large gnarled piece of timber, like a twisted baseball bat, that was propped up in the corner of the cabin. Jeb saw the name of *Matilda* carved into its side and giggled. Mr. O’Hara raised *Matilda* high in the air and delivered a purposeful and well aimed blow upon the engine housing by the cabin. JoJo, who didn’t like loud noises – he was, after all, only six – covered his ears.

Mr. O’Hara clamped a massive hand upon JoJo’s cringing head and said cheerfully “Don’t worry young Master. Tis only noise.” He turned back to the cabin and, cocking an ear to the side, turned the ignition key. The engine coughed and suddenly spluttered into life. Jeb and JoJo listened to its deep drone and the slapping of the ocean upon the boat’s side as they pulled away from the pier. They both felt a

little odd as the vibrations of the motor and the motion of the boat upon the sea turned their legs to jelly.

“Byeeeeeeee...” they called waving at Aunt Mimi who was trotting alongside until the *Sea Lion* cleared the pier and set her course to the Island. The children looked back watching the wake of the boat churning froth and bubbles behind them, continuing to stare at the pier until Aunt Mimi was no longer recognizable.

JoJo began to worry awfully as he looked about and saw that they were alone surrounded by an expansive mass of grey green sea. Alone except for a few gulls and terns wheeling aimlessly above them. Just as his bottom lip began to quiver and the first inkling of a tear worked its way upward, Mr. O’Hara looked back and beamed a friendly smile, his white teeth flashing through his red beard.

“Now young master. Would thee like to drive the boat?”

JoJo looked at Jeb, his eyes wide, with a grin almost as large as Mr. O’Hara’s.

“Can I?” he asked looking at his sister.

“Yeah. It’s okay JoJo. You can.” assured Jeb.

Mr. O’Hara reached down and picked JoJo up and stood him behind the steering wheel. “There lad.” he laughed, “She’s all yours Captain Barnesfather.” JoJo beamed at his sudden elevation to ship’s captain. The trouble was, being only six years old and five years younger than his sister; he had never driven a boat before. Actually, naturally, and of course, he had never driven anything before. And being only six, even standing tiptoed, he could not see a thing except a slice of sky below the wheelhouse roof. But Mr. O’Hara seemed not to care.

“Steer away young un. Thee won’t hit anything out here.” This was just as well because JoJo’s steering was not the best. The boat slewed starboard then back to port then starboard again. Jeb grabbed the side of her seat tightly as the boat rocked

and changed direction suddenly. She felt quite unwell too. A sickly churning in her stomach and a slight light-headedness made her swoon as the boat careered along under young Captain Barnesfather's control or, rather, his lack of it.

After what seemed an interminably long time, Mr. O'Hara took over again and the boat settled into a smoother passage.

"Are we there yet" whispered Jeb meekly, still feeling a bit off colour though slowly regaining her composure.

"Oh no," chortled Mr. O'Hara, "about forty minutes yet...Not long lassie".

Not long whined Jeb to herself. But he had said 'in a jiffy' and forty minutes was not 'a jiffy'. Five...maybe, she argued to herself.

"Look yonder and thee can just see the Island." called Mr. O'Hara. The children followed his pointing finger to the horizon. There in the hazy distance was a smidgen of land. "That be the crown o' the volcano, the Island's highest point" Mr. O'Hara informed them.

"A volcano. Wow." responded JoJo with some wonderment. "Are there any squods there?"

"Squods!" uttered Mr. O'Hara scratching his beard thoughtfully not ever having heard of a squod before. Jeb rolled her eyes upward. She knew all about squods. They were a JoJo invention. The trouble was, depending on the time or place or circumstance, her brother could choose to change whatever it was a squod was.

"I thought squods only lived in water JoJo" queried Jeb.

"Yeah well they do but not always" her brother replied defensively "It could live in the water that comes up into the volcano from the ocean" he reasoned.

Mr. O'Hara nodded sagely. "Aye that could be so young un. Are thee sure thee don't mean a squid?"

JoJo shook his head, “No. It’s a bit like a squid only bigger.” He stretched his arms out by way of explanation, “And its got like a thousand legs hasn’t it Jeb?”

Jeb rolled her eyes again “If you say so” she replied with a hint of resignation.

Mr. O’Hara thought for a moment “Well I can’t say I’ve ever seen one but I’ll keep a look out young master. Though it sounds a nasty customer.”

“No it’s not nasty, not to people. It only eats sharks.” replied JoJo the squid expert.

In the distance the Island was growing before the children’s eyes. The volcano dominated the skyline as the *Sea Lion* sliced through the ocean toward it. The green of the forests below and the outline of a town along the Island’s edge were also taking shape. As the picturesque landscape loomed closer the children’s eyes widened as their anticipation grew.

Chapter two: The legend of the silver seal

As the shape of the Island became ever clearer a strange silence enveloped Jeb and JoJo. They began to wonder exactly what the Island was really like and what might lie in store for them once they reached their destination. Jeb, not being one used to long periods of quiet, began to fidget. She looked at Mr. O'Hara who was gazing fixedly ahead and then glanced at her brother who was imitating Mr. O'Hara with almost equal rigidity. Jeb could not stand it. She just had to say something.

“Mr. O'Hara, why is the *Sea Lion* called the *Sea Lion*? Did you name her?”

“Aye I did lassie” he replied “Thought it appropriate. A lot o' seals in these parts. Keep an eye out young uns, particularly close to shore. They'll be resting on the rocks if thee are lucky.”

JoJo was scanning the ocean intently. “Yeah and we might see a squid too” he declared rather hopefully.

Mr. O'Hara laughed loudly. “Well thee might too, young master but I'll tell thee about something thee might see and that if thee ever do, ye life will never be the same again.” The children looked at Mr. O'Hara with eyes as wide as saucers. He looked at them and lowered his voice. Jeb and JoJo listened intently as he began to speak, his voice barely able to be heard above the waves bumping against the *Sea Lion*'s hull and bows.

“A silver seal,” he began in a whisper “is said to live in these parts. Some say tis a myth, a legend or an old wives tale o' years gone by. Pure silver, the most beautiful creature in these seas, the princess or queen o' seals as she is sometimes called. Five hundred years ago a Spanish galleon laden with treasures was said to have

sunk in these waters. Try as they might nobody has ever discovered its whereabouts. Tis o' no account though. As the story goes, the Spanish King's son was on board with his bride to be. His fiancé was a true beauty, the prettiest wee lass the prince had ever laid eyes upon. She was the daughter o' a powerful Indian shaman from the Americas. The two were very much in love but the girl's father opposed the marriage. She fled under the protection o' the prince. Her father was outraged and cursed the boat and swore that a fearful vengeance was near at hand. Whether it was the curse no one can rightly say but a dreadful storm fell upon the boat as it entered its final homeward leg. A violent freak storm the likes o' which had never been seen before or since in these parts. The ship was swallowed by the sea and vanished completely. All on board were lost. All bar one that is."

"The princess." answered Jeb, awestruck by the story.

"It might have been a squod that swallowed it." suggested JoJo.

Mr. O'Hara smiled and shook his head. "No young master 'twas no squod.

'Twas forces o' nature beyond the understanding o' mortal men."

"And the princess?" inquired Jeb.

"Aye the princess" continued Mr. O'Hara, "was washed upon the rocks, where she waited in vain and unseen, sustained only by the fish that the seals brought to her as she pined, hoping her love would soon come for her. Alas he was another lost soul claimed by the sea. Eventually, though none can say after how long, she herself slipped into the ocean only to be carried away by the seals with which she had formed a special bond. Where she was taken nobody knows but since that fateful time a silver seal has watched these waterways. It is said it is the princess transformed, waiting still."

Jeb pondered the unlikely story while scanning the sea about them hoping to spy the silver seal. “Have you ever seen the silver seal Mr. O’Hara?”

Mr. O’Hara shook his head. “No lass. Others on the Island claim they have. Fishermen like myself, mostly, who have been in trouble and rescued they say by the seal though none are ever able to say exactly that they did see her.”

After more silence and much seal and squid searching the Island quickly assumed greater detail. Jeb thought the colourful houses dotting the foreshore were wonderfully pretty. The volcano rose majestically, dwarfing everything. Jeb and JoJo gasped as they took in its grandeur. The volcano sat, more or less, slap-bang in the middle of the Island. Truth was it actually was the Island. The children were increasingly excited by the thought of finally stepping ashore and investigating the place.

The *Sea Lion* was approaching the Island from its south side. Mr. O’Hara pointed the bows toward the eastern end where a large stony tongue and numerous rocky outcrops dotted the shoreline and water. Numbers of glistening seals could be seen singly and in groups lounging upon the rocks bathing in the sun, scratching themselves and sliding back into the water where they lolled about languidly. A few of the more inquisitive floated effortlessly in the swell watching unperturbed as the boat ploughed toward them.

Mr. O’Hara slowed the boat and turned it to the west and the children thrilled as it shuddered and the stern glided into line with the chosen direction. JoJo was looking into the water watching for squods and observing the giant bending strands of kelp that swayed below.

“Look JoJo.” called Jeb excitedly pointing to the rocky strand, “A lighthouse.”

“Cool.” cooed JoJo “Can we go there?”

Jeb ignored him, as did Mr. O'Hara who was guiding the boat through the bobbing buoys that marked the safest channel to the Island. On the rocks among the seals stood a boy. He appeared to be bigger and older than Jeb, maybe thirteen she thought as she studied him. She raised her hand and waved. The boy stood statue-like and stared blankly at them as the *Sea Lion* passed by. Jeb was a little disappointed and a bit embarrassed at having waved at the ignorant boy. She stared back all the same until the views recaptured her attention. Ahead was a jetty along which several fishing boats were moored. They passed by a long curving beach. Not a pebbly one but one with clear white sand with low bluffs and a forest beyond. And the town was now in full view. Shops and houses were squeezed together, old houses with wonderfully coloured doors and walls.

Mr. O'Hara cut the *Sea Lion's* motor and the boat surged toward the jetty slowing its pace as it drew nearer. Mr. O'Hara was standing on the bow deck and hurled a rope to a man on the jetty who coiled it expertly about the mooring post.

"Morning Mr. O'Meara." called Mr. O'Hara. The man looked up and nodded in gruff acknowledgment. Jeb thought he did not look a particularly friendly type as he appeared to scowl at her as she watched him. He reached out with a long hooked pole and dragged the stern of the boat to the wharf. Jeb noticed the man's thumbs upon the pole. They were mere stumps, no more than a knob above the first thumb joint. Jeb stared. The man glared at her as he held the boat steady while Mr. O'Hara lifted the children and their cases to the ground.

"There thee go young uns. Welcome to Lickspittle Island."

Jeb and JoJo looked about for their parents but they were nowhere to be seen. All the children could see was a man wheeling a broad wooden barrow down the

cobbled road toward them. The road sloped gently down from the town to the wharf or gently upward depending on your point of view.

“Ahoy Mr. O’Mara.” called Mr. O’Hara waving to the approaching man with the barrow.” The man waved back and the barrow, which was one of those large wooden market types used by green grocers, wobbled to one side as he did so. “This is Mr. O’Mara without the ‘e’, not to be confused with Mr. O’Meara with the ‘e’.” explained Mr. O’Hara pointing at the man whom Jeb considered was a decidedly unfriendly type.

“Mr. O’Mara is going to take thee young uns up to the cottage where ye parents are staying.”

Mr. O’Mara set the barrow down and mopped his brow with a large red and white polka dotted handkerchief. He was a little puffed and gazed up at the sun. “A warm one today to be sure. Do thee agree Mr. O’Meara?”

Mr. O’Meara, with the ‘e’, merely grunted confirming in Jeb’s mind that he was not very friendly at all. In fact she thought him rather rude.

“These are the Barnesfather children.” said Mr. O’Hara to Mr. O’Mara.

The barrow man looked at them kindly. “Mr. Barnesfather’s children. Thee don’t say. Ye father’s an interesting man to be sure.” he said with a half smile and a wink at the children.

Now Jeb knew her father as many things. In fact she had heard him called many things in her eleven year long lifetime but none of them equated with interesting. No, interesting was certainly not a word that came to mind when she thought of her father. He was an accountant or more correctly an auditor, which explained some of the many names she had heard him called. She had sat in his study and watched him work on occasions. It was not the most flamboyant job in the world

she had thought. He would look down his pencil thin nose with his round spectacles set on the end and tap away on a calculator. Sometimes he shook his head sadly and other times he nodded, even allowing himself a private smile. Sometimes he would click his tongue, tisk tisking in admonishing tones, and scribble in the margins of the ledger books with his purple pen that always sat poised in his left hand. In fact watching her father work was as boring as watching grass grow or so Jeb remembered her mother saying once. The most interesting thing about her father that Jeb could think of was that he was left handed and wrote in a strange backward slant. Perhaps that was what Mr. O'Mara, without the 'e' had meant, though Jeb didn't really think so.

“Well come along children.” announced Mr. O'Mara, “We best be off. I'm sure ye mother will be getting anxious. Hop in then.”

Jeb and JoJo looked at each other. Hop in the barrow they thought to one another. This could be fun.

“Come along. We haven't got all day.”

Jeb clambered in and Mr. O'Hara lifted JoJo into the barrow beside his sister and placed their cases behind them as back rests. “Now thee young uns be sure to take care and be sure to come and see me if thee need any help. Understood?”

“We will.” chorused Jeb and JoJo rocking back against their cases as Mr. O'Mara lifted the barrow and lurched forward up the hill.

Chapter three: Lickspittle Island

The town had looked quaint from a distance. Up close it was even prettier. The houses in the main part of the town were double storey affairs, with little windows and plant boxes adorning the upper floors. At street level they served as shop fronts with large display windows and wonderfully coloured doorways.

The barrow in which the children were being ferried bounced over the cobblestones as Mr. O'Mara trundled up the street at a slow but steady gait. Jeb felt a bit sorry for him as his breathlessness was made worse by having to say hello to the people they passed, each of whom called out friendly greetings. There was Mr. O'Flaherty, Mr. and Mrs O'Rourke, old Mrs O'Sullivan and the cheeky O'Leary children who skipped past dancing close to the barrow as Mr. O'Mara puffed along.

Jeb could not help but notice how similar all the Islanders looked. The men were strong robust types, quite tall, with jet-black hair generally cut short with occasional scruffy bits hanging over the ears and neck. They had dark eyes, coal black almost and swarthy skin. They wore loose fitting collarless shirts under waistcoats and baggy breeches held up by leather buttoned braces; Quite plain and dull really. They looked exactly how Jeb imagined her great grandfathers might have dressed. The women were much brighter, wearing coloured shawls and frocks. They struck Jeb as being Spanish. They looked all the world as she imagined gypsies might look but spoke with an odd mixture of Celtic accents.

Between gasps, Mr. O'Mara explained that nobody on the Island bothered with house numbers and that all houses and shops were recognizable by the colour coding of the doors. No two were the same. "It isn't so much a code, rather a random

selection o' colours. Well not random because someone obviously picked them but well...thee know what I mean." he explained before giving up.

And so it was. Jeb and JoJo gazed at the colourful shops as they passed and Jeb, who could read, called out the names for her brother to hear. There was the red and green of O'Mellon's fruit shop, the blue and yellow of O'Keogh the locksmith, the purple and pink of O'Melody's music store, the orange and lilac of O'Coffey's cafe, the green and white of O'Quill's stationary (Mr. Barnesfather's favourite shop), the red and black of O'Brogan the cobbler, the yellow, orange and green of O'Curry's delicatessen, the gold and brown of O'Brick's hardware shop, and the red and white of O'Corcoran's bottle shop. There was the sombre black of O'Cosgrave the undertaker contrasted with the brighter pink and light blue of Mrs O'Brolly's umbrella shop. There was also the aqua and dark blue of O'Finnegan's, the fishmonger, and the yellow and orange of O'Bree's cheese shop. And so it went up the street on both sides.

JoJo laughed continuously as the 'O' names rolled from his sister and Mr. O'Mara's tongues. It was odd thought Jeb, all those names beginning with 'O'.

"Does everybody's name start with 'O' on this Island?" asked Jeb.

Mr. O'Mara set the barrow down outside the red and blue door of O'Scanlon's confectionary to catch his breath while the children gaped at the array of sweets in the windows. Jeb's question was a good enough excuse as any for a rest. "Hmmm, let me think." He cocked his head to one side and thought on it. "Far as I know, beside the occasional visitor, that would be right."

Mr. O'Mara disappeared into O'Scanlon's and returned with two toffee apples that he handed to his grateful charges. "There are o' course the Magillikuddy sisters." he announced solemnly "Their name doesn't start with 'O'." He dropped his voice to

a whisper and warned, "But thee would be best advised to steer clear o' them." Why, Mr. O'Mara did not say and before Jeb could ask she lurched back against her case as they pushed off again.

The road began to bend to the right and at its end, on opposite sides, were two hotels. On the left was a dark Tudor styled tavern that seemed to frown down upon the street. It was called the 'Witches and Warlocks' tavern. On the right stood a single storey whitewashed stone tavern called the 'Pig and Sow'. Neither seemed open. As Mr. O'Mara wheeled past them the most magnificent view presented itself to the children.

"Wow." exclaimed JoJo enthusiastically "Look at that Jeb." Behind the hotels a small market square opened up. Standing in its centre was an old timber bell tower. A number of streets peeled off to the right along which white thatch roofed cottages were crowded together. To the left lay O'Dell's dairy. Above all the full face of the volcano was visible. Its grass-tinged slope gave way to a greyer and rockier face as it rose to the lip of its ragged crater. Forest or what were, in fact, two woods fringed its base. That on the left was known as the north wood and that on the right as the south wood. The north wood was darker than the south wood. Both gave off an odd shimmer that Jeb had never seen before. She blinked her eyes in case it was some optical illusion but no matter what she did the hazy shimmer remained. A low stone fence divided the last row of houses from the fields that led up to the woods. It was in this street at the very end where the Barnesfather's cottage was situated shaded in the morning by the shadow of the volcano or mountain, as the Islanders preferred to call it.

The children marveled at the thatched roof of the cottage. Its bright white walls shone radiantly in the warm sun that bathed the Island. As the afternoon wore

on the volcano's shadow shrank back onto the woods before receding along its western face and crawling over the crater to darken the eastern side of the Island leaving the cottage bathed in sunshine. At the end of the street, where the road below converged with a track leading up from the beach, was the village green upon which a few sheep grazed contentedly. The front yard was small and mostly consisted of bright flowers and bushes from which the warm buzz of insects could be heard. The slate roofs of the fisherman's cottages that lined the beach were visible as were the seaweed farmers gathering kelp along the foreshore. It was just like a postcard thought Jeb.

Mrs Barnesfather was overjoyed to see her children, even though they had been separated only a few days. She thanked Mr. O'Mara and showed the children inside. They competed excitedly to tell their mother what they had seen and tell her about Mr. O'Hara's story of the silver seal. After a snack and a drink the children settled in their room for a rest.

Jeb tried to read a book while JoJo unpacked his suitcase. He was thrilled at its contents. All his friends were there, squashed tightly into the case but none the worse for wear. JoJo propped them in a line along the wall. There was Corduroy, a large brown bear; Sebastian, a slightly smaller fawn coloured bear; Chocolate Bear, a small light brown fellow; Flower Bear, smaller still and a faded straw colour with a Band-Aid stuck diagonally across his threadbare shoulder; and finally, Bunna, who was not a bear at all but a small grey rabbit, though a very good friend of the bears.

After playing and reading a short time, Jeb and JoJo began wondering how they might fill their time. The bunk beds were a novelty, it was true, but what had seemed such an exciting place was looking less interesting as they realized there was no television or play-station.

“I’ll be bored,” exclaimed JoJo miserably.

“Me too” agreed his sister.

“Nonsense.” chided their mother who then lapsed into one of her ‘In my day’ lectures to which neither Jeb nor JoJo paid much attention. “Go out the back and play.” concluded their mother. The children obediently complied and wandered outside.

The backyard was by far the largest in the street. The low stone wall the children had seen from the barrow marked its furthest boundary. Along the wall or rather just before it was a row of fruit trees. Jeb counted seven. Being summer they were all in fruit and the branches drooped from the weight. The bright purple fruit was a kind Jeb or JoJo had never seen. It was like a pear only with a hard skin with a texture something like a pomegranate. Jeb reached up and pulled one from a low hanging branch and inspected it before handing it to JoJo and picking another.

JoJo looked at the fruit sniffed it and bit into the skin tentatively. He recoiled in spluttering horror spitting the bitter skin from his mouth and throwing the strange fruit upon the ground.

“Yuk! That’s disgusting. I’m not eating that.”

Jeb, who had been examining the fruit closely, laughed. “JoJo, it’s like a passion fruit. You have to cut it open.”

JoJo eyed his sister doubtfully. As it happened Jeb was right. Their mother, who had been watching from the window, brought a plate, a knife and two teaspoons and let the children carve some of the fruit open. “They are called lickspittles” she explained as she set the plates and cutlery down on the lawn.

It was, as Jeb had thought, much like a passion fruit only tangier and sweeter. JoJo ate several before flopping on his back and announcing emphatically. "I'm full. I think I'm going to be sick."

"You guts." declared his sister. JoJo rolled onto his side and began retching in Jeb's direction, "I'm gonna vomit on you."

Jeb screamed and scrambled to her feet. "Muuuuuummmmmmm" she bellowed as JoJo chased after her delighting in her panicked response.

And so their first afternoon passed quickly with similar silly games such as hide and seek behind the hedges that bordered the yard. Best of all was the large and twisted golden elm that grew outside their bedroom window in which they could spend hours climbing should they wish to.

Another bonus was the cat. Mrs O'Shaunnessy, who owned the cottage and who was residing with her sister Mrs O'Bryan while the Barnesfathers were on the Island, had left her cat in the visitors' care. He was an old fellow, nearly seventeen, black with a white nose, chest, and socks and with a face sporting a small black goatee of sorts. Most of the time he lay curled up benignly on the back step occasionally watching the children through a sleepy half-opened eye. Sometimes he would pad quietly along the hedgerows sniffing at what seemed nothing in particular, batting a tired paw at the insects that buzzed distractingly in the greenery.

Mr. Barnesfather arrived home for dinner and presented Jeb and JoJo with a small gift to welcome them to the Island and show his pleasure at having his family reunited.

"There you go. A special treat for you both." he beamed handing the children a toffee apple each. The children looked at each other and laughed. Mr. Barnesfather looked a little confused. "I thought you'd like them." he said a bit hurt.

Jeb stepped forward and gave him a hug, “We do Daddy, we do. Don’t we JoJo?” JoJo nodded his head solemnly in complete agreement while wondering whether he could fit another toffee apple in his bloated stomach.

After dinner the children were put to bed. JoJo was quite excited, as he had never slept in a bunk bed before. He demanded to have the top bunk. Jeb, despite her efforts to convince him of the dangers of falling from a great height, conceded and took the bottom.

“No farting.” she called to her brother above her. JoJo laughed.

The bunks lay across the bedroom window so the children were able to sit up and look through the curtains and out into the backyard. In the shadows of night the mountaintop was visible, forming a stark defining line upon the horizon in the moonlight. The golden elm cast spooky spindly shapes upon the windows that danced eerily through the curtains. JoJo pulled the covers over his head and announced that he was scared and wanted Jeb to sleep with him. So Jeb climbed into the top bunk with her brother and his five friends. It was crowded but cozy. They lay listening to the wind whistling under the eaves. They heard the ocean sigh and, from a distance, the crump of waves exploding against the rocks carried to them.

“What was that?” JoJo suddenly declared sitting bolt upright.

“Its just the wind, JoJo.” soothed his sister. JoJo remained sitting, listening intently.

“There it is again. Listen.” Jeb listened too but could hear nothing other than the wind and the sea.

“What sort of noise, JoJo?”

JoJo paused giving his description some thought. “Its like a...umm...a...whistling singing noise.” Jeb glared at him in the half-light.

“Whistling and singing...” she sneered, “Like the wind, JoJo?”

Her brother shook his head. “Like the seven dwarfs.” he explained.

Jeb flopped her head back on the pillow in disbelief. The seven dwarfs. Yeah, right, she thought. And then Jeb heard it too. A faint yet unmistakable musical whistling, rising and falling somewhere outside. Jeb sat up and peeked through the curtains. The moon hung high in the sky bathing the backyard in an eerie blue light. There, among the lickspittles, a number of small lights bobbed about, particularly within the largest lickspittle tree. Jeb opened the curtain wider so that her brother could also observe the phenomenon.

“I wonder what it is?” whispered Jeb. Just as she uttered this the back porch light went on. Mr. Barnesfather appeared in his dressing gown and slippers and peered into the night while cleaning his spectacles with a handkerchief. In an instant the lights disappeared. Mr. B. placed his spectacles on his nose and stood motionless, staring into the darkness.

“Mmm. Very strange. Most odd indeed.” Jeb and JoJo heard him mutter before he eventually closed the door and went to bed.

Jeb lay awake trying to hear the noise again, occasionally stealing a peek through the curtains. Neither the whistling nor the lights could be heard or seen. Eventually she fell asleep, jammed against JoJo, who had promptly dozed off clutching Corduroy who had shown a decided disinterest in the whole affair.

Chapter four: A little person

In the morning after breakfast, Jeb and JoJo searched about the lickspittles. What they were looking for they could not tell. Jeb was certain something had been in the backyard the previous evening though what exactly she could only guess at. They looked in the branches and around the trunks hoping to find anything at all. After what seemed an age they had found nothing and Jeb was becoming dejected.

“Hey Jeb. Look what I found.” piped JoJo. Jeb jumped from the large lickspittle and crouched by his side. JoJo held up a small straight stick at the end of which was a charred, ever so small lump of coal or some such substance. Jeb inspected it closely.

“What could it be?” she said more to herself.

“I dunno” responded JoJo, “Looks like a used matchstick.” he observed.

“We should ask Mr. O’Hara.” suggested Jeb.

At that point in time Mrs Barnesfather appeared at the back door and announced she was going shopping and that the children could choose to stay home if they wanted. Following their exciting discovery they chose to stay.

Mrs O’Shaunnessy’s cat, which was snaking hungrily about Mrs Barnesfather’s ankles, looked somewhat put out as she closed the door. It sat down, licked its paws, washed its face and then suddenly craned forward in the direction of the side hedge. The children followed its gaze. They watched without a murmur as the cat crept low to the ground and began to slink in stops and starts along the hedge line. Try as they might they could see nothing that suggested a meal. Halfway along, the cat stopped. Its hindquarters wriggled and its tail twitched erratically as it crouched

peering into the hedge. The hackles on its shoulders raised as it readied to pounce. With a burst of speed surprising of old bones it leapt into the undergrowth. A rustle of dried leaves and a shrill cry echoed forth. Alarmed, the children scrambled quickly toward the cat, which appeared triumphantly with its catch.

Dangling from the cat's mouth was not a bird or a mouse. Dangling from the cat's mouth was the most astonishing and unimaginable thing the children had ever seen. A little person, with his feet kicking and arms waving was squealing in terrified defiance at his rude and sudden capture. His pants were stretched tight as he hung precariously from the cat's mouth.

Jeb rushed at the cat waving her arms frantically "Shoo puss, shoo!" she shouted.

The cat hissed in response and dropped its prey upon the ground. The little person landed on the grass upon his back and just as he tried to sit up was pushed back violently by the cat's paw. There he lay terror stricken as the cat swiped at the advancing children.

"Go on, get away." screamed Jeb fretfully. JoJo threw a moth eaten lickspittle at the cat that bounced off its old head. Much chagrined, it retreated discontentedly to the back step where it growled and scowled at the children from a distance. Thus relieved, the little person scrambled to his feet and scampered away in haste toward the stone wall. He did not get far as Jeb reached out quickly and collared him, raising him carefully from the ground and holding him up in both her hands.

"Hello." she said softly. The little person crossed his arms indignantly and with great affectation turned his head away, squeezing his eyes tightly shut.

"We're not going to hurt you. Are we JoJo?" JoJo did not respond. He just stared at the little person in his sister's hands, transfixed in disbelief.

“I promise we won’t hurt you.” continued Jeb, “Look...” She turned and placed him gently down in a fork of the lickspittle’s boughs. “See we don’t want to hurt you.”

The little person scampered up the branch, jumped onto a higher bough and was suddenly lost in the foliage out of Jeb’s reach.

“You’ve lost him.” cried JoJo.

“I have not.” retorted Jeb angrily while looking up into the tree. “Little person. Where are you? I promise we won’t hurt you.”

There was a rustling high up on one of the outer branches. Jeb and JoJo, who had now both clambered into the lower part of the lickspittle, peered upward.

“Oww!” yelled Jeb suddenly as a lickspittle conked her on the head. Another followed quickly and struck JoJo on his forehead.

“Hey!” shouted JoJo “Stop it.” The little person paid them no heed and continued the bombardment. As Jeb and JoJo fought to cover their heads they saw their assailant drop from the branches to the top of the stone wall. After a furtive look about he jumped from the wall into the field.

“Quick, he’s getting away.” shouted Jeb as she tumbled from the lickspittle. JoJo came tumbling after in hot pursuit. As the children reached the wall they could see the little person running with high pumping arms and legs across the field into the long grass that led up to the south wood. Try as they might the children could not keep sight of the fleeing figure whose head soon disappeared below the line of the tall grass and into the woods.

One of the first things Mrs O’Shaunnessy had told Mrs Barnesfather was to not let the children wander into the woods alone. In fact, she had added, “Tis best not to venture too far into the woods at all, especially the north woods.”

Mrs Barnesfather had, of course, told the children the very same. On this day, as you can imagine, the children forgot all about such instruction and clambered post haste over the wall in a frenzied chase. They spied a slight path that had been beaten through the grass and guessed that it was the little person's trail. Excitedly they ploughed into the south woods. They called and hollered but to no avail. All their searching proved in vain as they fossicked about the trees. Nowhere was the little person to be found. Worse, when Jeb and JoJo paused to finally take their bearings, they found themselves surrounded by trees and shrubs, mostly of light green varieties, and with no idea from which direction they had come.

“We're lost.” blubbered JoJo.

Jeb, who was equally concerned, tried to remain calm and took her brother's hand forcing a smile to her lips. In her happiest nonchalant voice she stated, “Come on JoJo, the cottage is this way.”

In this confident frame of mind, Jeb proceeded to lead her brother north in precisely the opposite direction they needed to go. Jeb thought that if she could get a clear sighting of the mountain then she might be able to work out exactly where they were. The trouble was that the trees in these woods were quite high and the foliage very thick. The net effect was to produce a dense canopy from under which little could be detected. After walking some time the woods began to thin. Excited by the prospect of a clearing the children hastened forward. They dashed with enthusiastic abandon into what they thought was a clear space.

As Jeb broke through the fringe of trees her heart leapt into her mouth. Before her the ground fell away to a sheer drop. Below was an expanse of water, still and crystal blue. Jeb stopped just in time but JoJo, who was doing his best to keep up, hustled past her blithely unaware. Jeb screamed and grabbed the back of his

windcheater, pulling him back and off balance as his front foot hovered over the edge. The two children collapsed in a heap perilously close to the edge from which they wriggled back as soon as they had caught their breath.

JoJo, who had been very brave up to this time, now began to sob in body racking convulsions.

“We’re going to die” he wailed. Jeb grabbed him and shook him roughly.

“Be quiet. We are *not* going to die.” Jeb insisted as she looked about for some recognizable landmark. Then, as if by miracle, she spied what she had not seen before, a bridge. It was a simple wooden affair that looked quite sturdy. It was not the rickety swaying rope type that stretched precariously across a deep canyon promising a certain fall through the rotten planks episode as Jeb had seen in so many adventure movies. It arched in an unspectacular manner from one side to the other promising safe passage. Of course, Jeb could have decided to turn back from whence she had come but JoJo was now in no mood to retrace his steps. Forward seemed the best option to his young mind.

“Come on. JoJo, this way.” urged Jeb. Her brother brushed the tears from his eyes and followed. His dirty grinding knuckles left grimy streaks upon his flushed cheeks.

The lake over which the bridge spanned was quite narrow and judging by the sheerness of the sides Jeb thought it an old crater from the volcano. There was hardly a ripple in the water. Clear as it was, the bottom was unfathomable. Though Jeb could swim a little, she knew if she or JoJo fell in there would be no getting back. Even if they made it to the side they would never have found anything to cling to and haul themselves out. Despite the green all about them, not a skerrick of plant life existed on the shiny grey walls that rimmed the lake.

As Jeb and JoJo crossed the bridge the mountaintop became visible jutting majestically above them as they stepped from beneath the leafy canopy of the woods and over the bridge. Jeb breathed a sigh of relief.

“Look JoJo, it’s the same view as when we arrived yesterday, only closer.” announced Jeb with certainty. “I know the way back now. It’s this way.” she said turning left as they stepped from the bridge.

Jeb was right this time and though the ground had been relatively flat where they had first entered the woods, now it began to slope gently downward. And Jeb knew that down on this Island could only lead to the sea and safety. With the lake lost to view the children walked assuredly down the slope. They were still in the woods and continued on, though not without some foreboding.

The trees in this part of the woods were darker, thicker and the bushes pricklier. Tangled vines hung down and assorted ivy covered the ground like trip wires causing the children to stumble in their tracks. The air was colder and damper. Both brother and sister were chilled to the bone. Their skin crawled as they picked their way forward. Jeb thought they must now be in the north woods and remembering Mrs O’Shaunnessy’s warning, transmitted through their mother, quickened her pace. Jeb saw what looked like flecks of ocean and pointed them out to JoJo whose face brightened considerably. His little legs were aching and he was hungry.

The dark woods began to thin and the children were relieved to spy the rooftops of the town far ahead. Perhaps it was this that caused them to pause and take a breather. In doing so they soon became aware of someone else close by. Where the trees thinned to a less menacing mass somebody was hunched over picking berries from a strange bush.

“Excuse me.” called Jeb in her most polite voice. The person stiffened and without straightening turned a hooded head to gaze at the siblings. It was an old woman, bent and haggard with craggy features and greying skin. Jeb saw all this as she tentatively advanced toward the stranger. JoJo lingered well behind, afraid to join his sister.

The woman slowly stood up in her own crooked way and Jeb could see her dark brown garb was much tattered, drawn in at her waist by a frayed rope belt. Perhaps she was a hermit thought Jeb.

The woman looked frightful and her eyes seemed to bulge as she stared at Jeb and JoJo.

“Ack. Children!” she spat disgustedly. Gathering her basket she began to hurry back into the cloying sanctuary of the woods.

Jeb started after her, “Excuse me Ma’am. We didn’t mean to scare you.”

The woman wheeled about on her heels and her cowl fell back revealing a shock of long grey hair. “Begone!” she screeched in a shrill piercing voice filled with venom. The woman raked her left arm in wide arc in the direction of the children as she turned. Her right hand was held in a claw from which long yellow fingernails curled and thrust pointedly at the children.

Jeb and JoJo froze their faces etched with unmitigated terror. A sudden ill wind gushed from nowhere and a tempest of leaves and twigs scattered wildly up from the forest floor forcing them to shield their eyes. They cowered low to the ground as the trees bent forward groaning in creaking twisted contortions as the large boughs flayed menacingly above them.

As quickly as the storm blew up it disappeared, and so did the old woman. Jeb and JoJo looked at each other and in one unified scream turned and fled down the

slope. They broke through the cover of the woods into the fields below where the comforting sight of the ocean and town lay as if in a picture frame. Jeb reached the stone wall with JoJo on her heels and they followed it all the way home, collapsing in an exhausted and nervous state in the cottage backyard just as their mother pushed through the front gate with a basket full of shopping.

“JoJo, we can’t tell anybody about today, okay?” demanded Jeb breathlessly.

JoJo nodded.

“Not even about the little person?” he inquired equally out of breath.

“Especially about the little person.” his sister replied, knowing full well that no big person would ever believe them.

Chapter five: The factory

Mr. O'Hara was sitting on an upturned half-barrel at the end of the wharf repairing a fish net with a large needle and thick rope yarn. Surprisingly, his large weather beaten hands picked deftly at the frayed and broken strands as he mended absent-mindedly.

"Hello Mr. O'Hara" called the children as they ran up to him. Mr. O'Hara turned and smiled clapping his hands joyously upon his trunk-like thighs.

"Morning young uns. I was wondering when I would see thee again." He lifted JoJo up under the armpits and swung him from side to side before depositing him on his feet again. "I tell thee young master. I've been looking out to sea all morning and nary a squod t' be seen." declared Mr. O'Hara with serious disappointment.

JoJo looked a little downcast too and shook his head sadly. In a comforting tone he explained, "Well, you never see them when you're looking. They only appear when you're *not* looking."

"Ahhhhhh. I see." replied Mr. O'Hara, now considerably enlightened "That would explain it then." He gave JoJo's head a playful rub tousling his freshly brushed hair. Mr. O'Hara stood up and took two wooden crates from a pile, arranging them by his side for the children to sit on.

Jeb sat down next to Mr. O'Hara. JoJo chose to sit upon the ground where he had found some empty mussel shells and where he could look between the cracks into the water lapping beneath them. The events of the previous night were still very much on Jeb's mind. How could they not be? She resolved to get some information from Mr. O'Hara, surreptitiously without letting on too much.

"Mr. O'Hara" she began tentatively, "Do you believe in fairies?"

Mr. O'Hara gave a big belly laugh. "Fairies. Do I believe in fairies? Would this be the winged variety, lass? Or the non-winged variety?"

Jeb hadn't thought about varieties of fairies but she supposed both were as equally valid. Mr. O'Hara continued.

"Now if thee be talking winged variety I could not rightly say. I've never seen any mind so I could not rightly say yay or nay. Now..." he raised his bushy eyebrow which hung like a massive cloud upon his forehead, "if thee being talking about the non-winged variety, then thee would be talking about the wee folk. And in these parts the wee folk are said to exist. That's a fact."

Jeb pondered a moment before continuing her enquiries. "So *you* have never seen the wee folk?"

Mr. O'Hara nodded and looked at Jeb gravely, "Aye. Never. But there be plenty o' signs about that say they do exist."

Jeb figured this was most certainly true. She had been on the Island only a few days and already seen a little person or rather, as Mr. O'Hara described them, one of the wee folk. She was still reluctant to admit to having seen anything to anyone.

"Has anyone here ever seen the wee folk?"

"Aye, o' course. How could we not? 'Tis only a small island, after all." said Mr. O'Hara with some surprise.

"And nobody has ever caught one?" asked Jeb incredulously.

Mr. O'Hara looked at her from under his knitted brow with some surprise, "Now why would thee want to do that? Why would thee want to catch somebody who was just going about minding their own business?"

Jeb felt a bit foolish. Why indeed? she asked herself. It made no sense at all when she thought about it.

“I mean, how would thee like to be snatched up by some giant for no good reason?” admonished Mr. O’Hara.

“I wouldn’t.” replied Jeb meekly.

“Aye, there thee go then.” Mr. O’Hara looked at Jeb seriously and added “Thee must promise not to bother any o’ the wee folk if thee should see them.”

Jeb nodded in agreement. “And thee young master.” added Mr. O’Hara leaning forward to where JoJo was playing. The stick he had found in the backyard protruded from his shirt pocket. Mr. O’Hara took the stick carefully between his thumb and forefinger and smiled as he examined it. He rolled the charcoal ball ever so lightly over his fingertip and sniffed. For a moment Jeb thought he was going to pick his nose.

“Paraffin.” he declared knowingly as he slipped the stick back into JoJo’s pocket and winked. “Like I said, there be signs. Thee haven’t seen any o’ these wee folk have thee?” queried Mr. O’Hara.

“Oh no.” replied Jeb earnestly and untruthfully. “But I did see an old lady in the woods.”

Mr. O’Hara sat up straight. A concerned look furrowed his already furrowed brow. “This old lady, was she ugly?” Mr. O’Hara felt a tad guilty using such judgmental language. The truth was, if it was who he thought it was, that ugly was just the word he was looking for.

“Ugly.” JoJo repeated and after some consideration stated emphatically, “She was ugly as.”

Mr. O’Hara considered this a moment “If I said choose from ugly, ugly as, and not so ugly. How would thee describe her?”

Jeb and JoJo looked at each other and grinned. “Ugly as.” they announced together.

Mr. O’Hara laughed loudly. “That would be Morgana Magillikuddy then. There be three Magillikuddy sisters. Morgana who is ugly as, Madge who is just plain ugly and Millie, the youngest, who is not so ugly. They own the factory yonder.” Mr. O’Hara pointed off to the north slightly west of the town. The children looked down the wharf along which a light railway ran and bent off to the left where it disappeared into the lush green ferns that covered that part of the Island. “The train goes straight to the factory gates. It will be along soon,” he said looking at a golden fob watch that he had drawn from his waistcoat pocket.

They sat for awhile as Mr. O’Hara continued his mending until the unmistakable chugging of a steam engine could be heard. The wheezing and thumping drum sound of the pistons and boilers drew closer. JoJo jumped to his feet.

“Cool” he exclaimed excitedly pointing to where a vintage Buddicom engine chuffed in reverse up the track, pushing its coal tender and a flatcar laden with goods. It was green with red trim and a tall black chimney. Its central horizontal tubular boiler gleamed glaringly bright in the sunshine. It had a firebox at the rear of the driver’s platform. The driver waved warmly as he approached.

“A 2-2-2.” enthused JoJo with Thomas the Tank authority.

“Hello Mr. O’Toole. Back already?” called Mr. O’Hara as he led the children alongside the siding into which the engine eased to halt with a hissing bump.

“Aye Mr. O’Hara thee know it.” laughed Mr. O’Toole, “Our ladies are not ones for chatting, to be sure.” Spying the children Mr. O’Toole said, “Thee be the Barnesfather children then. Interesting man ye father.”

There it was again. Jeb promised herself she would find out exactly what it was that was so interesting about her father. Whatever it was, it had eluded her so far.

“Would thee like a ride to the factory and back?” asked Mr. O’Toole. “I’ve got one more load to go.”

“Yes please.” thrilled JoJo. A boat ride, a barrow ride and a train ride all in the same week. It was too good a chance to miss.

Jeb hesitated “We better not. Mum said not to go too far and to meet her at the beauty salon.”

“Mrs O’Hare’s.” chortled Mr. O’Toole, “Thee will have plenty o’ time to spare, believe me.” Both he and Mr. O’Hara guffawed loudly. Although the Magillikuddys were spare in conversation, Mrs O’Hare, quite to the contrary, was known to have it down to a perfectly and abjectly inescapable art form.

After a few minutes all the boxes stamped MAGILLIKUDDYS had been steadily off loaded by Mr. O’Meara and a few other men on to trolleys. These would eventually be loaded onto a boat that carried Island produce to the Mainland twice a week.

“All set.” called Mr. O’Toole as the men pushed the trolleys clear. “You coming then?”

Mr. O’Hara winked at the children, “Go on.” He passed Jeb and JoJo up to the driver’s platform next to Mr. O’Toole “I’ll let ye mother know.”

“Hold on.” cautioned Mr. O’Toole as he pulled the peak of his striped engine driver’s hat over his dark eyes. The children squeezed up against Mr. O’Toole’s legs and held on tight to the thin brass rail that framed the platform upon which they stood. The Buddicom engine number 33, or ‘tirty tree’ as Mr. O’Toole was apt to say, heaved and with a loud clump rolled forward. Clump, Clump, CLUMP, CLUMP,

CLUMPETY CLUMP. The engine beat out its mesmerizing tattoo, louder and faster as it gathered speed. The children swayed as the engine left the wharf and entered the first turn, chuffing away from the town. Past the cows chewing grass in the fields of O'Dell's dairy and past the bog fields beyond them. Jeb, on the right side of Mr. O'Toole, looked down and watched the steam gushing from the front cylinders, the hot air forcing the ferns back. The ground was smothered in ferns and the fronds shimmied, dancing with the rippling breeze, stretching over the fields all the way into the north wood.

On Mr. O'Toole's left, JoJo looked down and gripped the engine driver's pants tightly. The ferns stopped upon the edge of the bluff upon which the train ran. Waves boiled in a white swirling wash upon the rocks below.

The track climbed a slight incline to a saddle overlooking the town and ocean before bending back to the right where the fringe of the north woods closed in and squeezed the track against a sharp bend around which the Buddicom clattered and clanked. The bend curved back following a low grade toward the Island's most northern point. It was on this point that the Magillikuddy factory was situated tucked awkwardly in the folds of a steep razor backed ridge that ran from the mountaintop.

Mr. O'Toole closed down the throttle on the engine and the Buddicom slowed to a clunking crawl and then stopped short of the tall rusting wrought iron gates. An equally high perimeter fence with sharpened spikes bent back at odd angles to the line of the woods on one side and to the cliff's edge on the other. Signs affixed to the fence warned trespassers to KEEP OUT.

The factory was a dilapidated place. Constructed of weathered timbers of streaky greys, its sides actually leant outwards giving an impression of instability. A small office and large warehouse marked its front facade behind which the factory

proper stretched with its high windows fogged with grime. The tip of a large pile of coal could be seen from which a bucket conveying apparatus rattled slowly by a platform tower to the factory rear and back. On the seaward side of the factory an old tower or keep, with battlements, rose overlooking the property. It was all that was left of an old mansion that had once occupied the land, explained Mr. O'Toole.

“Come on children, we get off here.” said Mr. O'Toole jumping from the engine to the ground. He held his hands up to assist Jeb and JoJo who were both wondering what was happening. They sat down on a verge of grass by the track.

Watching the factory, the children saw the large warehouse door slide open. From its cavernous mouth the three Magillikuddy sisters appeared hurrying along the railway that continued up from the front gate. The children could see that Madge and Millie were dressed exactly as Morgana Magillikuddy had been when they had seen her in the woods. The only thing that distinguished them was the pattern of tights each wore. In contrast to their drab outer garments, these were very bright. Morgana wore pink and white polka dotted tights, Madge wore red and white striped tights and Millie wore a multi rainbow flower patterned pair. This, along with their different degrees of ugliness, was all that differentiated the three sisters who were all more or less the same height and girth with the same long crooked pointed noses. They hurried forward toward the front gate cackling in unmelodious voices to one another.

Jeb could not help but think of them as witches for that was exactly what they looked like. Perhaps she was being unfair she thought. After all her Grandma had a long pointy nose and she wasn't a witch, despite what her father said. And there was her aunty too. Not Mimi, another one who had a wart on her nose but was not a witch. At least as far as Jeb knew.

Morgana Magillikuddy unchained the gates and then Madge and Millie hauled them open. Morgana clambered onto the driver's platform of the Buddicom. She saw the children and grimaced, her frail shoulders hunching further and shuddering at the sight of them. The engine hissed and groaned and began chugging forward toward the factory where it was swallowed by the dark of the warehouse. Madge and Millie hung absently upon the gates ignoring Mr. O'Toole and the children. Jeb was watching Millie, the younger not so ugly sister, swinging upon the hinges. As Jeb watched she saw Millie begin to hover. Her heels were touching with her toes pointed outward and her feet flittering like a sparrow's wings.

"Look!" shouted Jeb pointing. Mr. O'Toole looked up but Millie, on hearing Jeb's voice, floated back to the ground.

"Did you see?" said Jeb. "She was floating." Mr. O'Toole and JoJo looked but saw only a disinterested Millie looking back toward the factory.

Mr. O'Toole shrugged. "Was not." retorted JoJo.

"But she was. Honest." declared Jeb.

Before Jeb could protest further, Morgana Magillikuddy came cruising back from the warehouse with the flat top laden with neatly packed boxes. She brought the train to a halt exactly where Mr. O'Toole had stopped. Morgana jumped down, giving the children a withering look.

"Ack. Children!" she muttered with palpable disapproval. The gates banged shut and the Magillikuddy sisters retreated cackling and bickering to the factory. Mr. O'Toole and the children climbed aboard and soon the Buddicom was in motion toward the town.

"Mr. O'Toole," asked Jeb, "How did Morgana Magillikuddy load the train so quickly?"

“I don’t rightly know lass.” he mused “I often used to wonder. One of them things I suppose. Don’t know and I don’t ask. But thee would be best advised to steer clear o’ them ...umm...ladies.”

“I see.” said Jeb while not really seeing at all. Jeb was unable to comprehend how on an Island, where so many curious things seemed to happen, that Islander’s such as Mr. O’Toole and Mr. O’Hara seemed not the least bit curious.

Mrs Barnesfather was exceptionally pleased to see the children wander into Mrs O’Hare’s salon on their return. Not because she was worried, Mr. O’Hara had after all told her where the children had gone. Rather she was pleased to be able to escape the salon. Jeb noticed her mother appeared a little flushed and agitated. Her smile looked a bit forced. In fact Mrs B’s smile muscles were wilting.

“Oh dear,” she gasped with relief as she ushered the children up the street, “You wouldn’t believe how much that woman can talk.”

Chapter six: King Doodledork

Sitting on the stone fence at the back of the yard, Jeb could see beyond the treetops of the woods to the middle and upper slopes of the mountain. The slopes began to steepen halfway up and broke into a number of rocky outcrops and ledges. It was all together too difficult for an eleven and six year old to climb. The grassy slopes beyond the woods were another matter. Jeb thought it might be nice to have a picnic there. JoJo was less attracted to the idea. He had had enough of the woods for a while. Getting lost and zapped by some crazy old lady and swished by a few maniacal trees was not his idea of fun. On that score, Jeb too was a little hesitant. Still, as she explained to their mother, if they skirted the edge of the woods she could see them as they walked and could keep an eye out as they sat upon the hillside.

And so it was arranged. Though dubious, JoJo soon fell into step. With some food and drinks and with Sebastian and Flower Bear as company he was ready for adventure. Jeb carried a light blanket and, with zinc cream plastered noses, the children set off. Mrs Barnesfather waved, watching from the kitchen as they trekked over the village green and on up the slopes. The western face of the volcano was the only side that offered such a leisurely stroll. The southern, eastern and northern approaches were all quite sheer and fell away to steep cliffs where the ocean pummeled the rocks that lay predatorily below.

It took some time for Jeb and JoJo to reach the grassy knoll above the woods. As they walked Jeb had the uncanny feeling that they were being watched. At intermittent intervals she would grab her brother's shoulder and stop him while she

scanned the woods for signs of anyone following. All she ever saw was the constant peculiar shimmering haze.

Finally they reached the knoll and fell to the ground exhausted. Jeb placed the blanket upon the ground and with JoJo dumped the contents of their bags in a jumbled mess in the centre. They drank and ate a little while gazing down upon the vista below. The ocean sparkled, boats bobbed about in the channel, seals lounged and Mrs Barnesfather waved from the kitchen. The colourful houses added to the perfect picture.

“I bet you could see heaps of squods from here.” said JoJo as he gazed at the expanse of ocean surrounding the Island.

With Flower Bear in his hand JoJo waved back at his mother who smiled before heading off to mop the floors. He sat down and leaned upon the edge of the blanket. It was with great surprise that he suddenly pitched backward as his hand and arm collapsed into the ground. The earth had given way and JoJo lay on his side with his arm buried up to his armpit.

“Whoa.” he yelled in astonishment and some delight. He withdrew his arm and knelt by the hole. Then, looking at his empty hand screamed in distress, “I’ve lost Flower Bear.”

Jeb, who was still suspiciously looking for prying eyes in the woods, turned to see what the commotion was all about. “Careful JoJo.” she warned as her brother lay on his belly reaching into the hole, his fingers wiggling as he desperately searched for Flower Bear.

“I think I touched him.” he declared hopefully. JoJo’s clutching fingers grasped at what he thought was Flower Bear. With a triumphant yell he pulled his arm from the hole.

Staring at JoJo was not Flower Bear at all. Instead, a rather rotund little person was fighting furiously trying to escape JoJo's grasp.

JoJo was as startled as his struggling accidental prisoner. He screamed in surprise, letting go of the little person who fell with flailing arms and legs straight back down the hole. Fortunately, the wee person landed on the still unrecovered Flower Bear and bounced once, twice and then rolled off onto the ground. He did not wait to look up and bolted fearful of being gathered up again.

"Did you see that?" shouted JoJo. Jeb had, indeed, seen 'that' and was slightly agog at the discovery of another little person. In his excited state, JoJo pushed his head into the hole for a better look.

"Careful, you'll get stuck." warned Jeb a tad too late.

JoJo did not hear. He was too consumed by the amazing sight before his upside down eyes. Looking up at him were three little people. They looked greatly surprised if not a little terrified. Turning his head left to right he could see a wide ledge and on it just detected a number of the wee folk scurrying away around a corner from where a brighter light emanated. But as JoJo turned, his shoulders slipped further into the hole, causing dirt to fall about the ledge. The three little people ducked for cover from the light avalanche and disappeared around the corner as JoJo's head and shoulders screwed tighter into the hole. Flower Bear lay motionless staring fixedly at his stuck master.

"Jeb. I can see three little people." called JoJo. The three wee folk, hazarding a cautious peep around the corner, covered their ears as JoJo's deafening voice echoed about the chamber. Being so much larger than them it was only natural that his voice would seem much louder, especially in such a confined space. To Jeb though, JoJo's

voice was hardly distinguishable at all. It floated back in a muffled mumble as if he had his head stuck in a pillow.

“Okay. I’ll try and pull you out.” replied Jeb without having the faintest idea what JoJo had said. She tugged at his legs but could not pull him free. Although his pants began to be pulled down from his hips, JoJo did not seem to notice or care as he squinted into the cavern below.

The little people had all disappeared and JoJo was trying to swivel his neck to get a better look. He slipped a little further into the hole and his head came to rest on the soft furry belly of Flower Bear. Above him Jeb sat back scratching her head with concern, trying to figure how she might pull her brother up.

Meanwhile down below, JoJo could hear the babble of excited voices. He turned his head slightly, for that was all he was able to do, and there marching around the corner and down the ledge was a procession of little people. At their head was a rather regal looking chap with a white beard, hoisted high on the shoulders of some pole-bearers who carried a rickety looking throne upon which he sat. Flanking him were two lines of soldiers. At least that is what JoJo thought them to be. They wore helmets made from lickspittle shells and carried gold shields. They were armed with sharpened wooden spears that, if they were ten times larger, might have proved quite fearsome. Numerous little people crowded behind in all manner of dress. Their clothes seemed to be made of old bits of rag and seaweed as far as JoJo could make out.

The procession stopped in front of JoJo’s nose and the white-bearded little person leaned forward and prodded the end of JoJo’s nose with a staff. It tickled and JoJo wiggled his nose in response. He noticed the little person was wearing an

aluminum ring pull bit upon his head, the type found upon cans of soft drink.

Interesting, he thought.

The white-bearded fellow pressed his staff into JoJo's nose again. "What are thee?" he asked JoJo in a small but demanding voice that JoJo could hardly hear.

"What?" replied JoJo trying to make out the words. There was a collective mumble from the crowd and JoJo noticed them all cowering and covering their ears.

"Not so loud." yelled the white-bearded one in his loudest voice. This time JoJo understood. "What are thee?" asked the one with the white beard again.

"I'm JoJo." replied JoJo earnestly and remembering his father's grammar lessons, lowered his voice to a whisper so as not to deafen his hosts and added, "And I'm a who not a what."

The white-bearded one turned to all those behind him and with a commanding and authoritative voice solemnly announced obliviously, "It is a JoJo." He turned back and looked at JoJo, who was quite helpless and unable to prevent the white-bearded one's constant prodding of his nose. "What do thee want?"

What did I want? thought JoJo. He didn't want anything really, only one thing.

"I want Flower Bear." he said rather matter-of-factly. The white-bearded one looked confused and whispered to some of those about him. They shrugged their tiny shoulders.

The bearded one prodded JoJo on the nose again. "I am Doodledork, King of Glissendorf, ruler of the Arkadians." he announced gravely while pointing to his royal ring pull crown. "Thee must leave at once. Thee are not welcome here."

"I can't. I'm stuck." said JoJo. His predicament suddenly dawned upon him and he began to cry.

Meanwhile Jeb had decided on another approach to free her brother. She stood over him with a foot planted firmly on each side of him and gripped the middle of his shirt. Jeb began to heave him upward. As she pulled, dirt began to fall away around his shoulders, showering the ledge below.

“Back. Get back.” yelled King Doodledork. Little people ran in all directions. King Doodledork swayed uncertainly on his throne as the pole-bearers took off. A stream of panicked little people babbled with shrill alarm as they flooded down the ledge away from JoJo. JoJo was quite scared himself as could see large cracks tearing open the ground above him. Being quite stuck, he was totally helpless. Jeb, too, was frightened as she felt the ground shift beneath her feet. And then, without further warning, the ground about Jeb collapsed and her legs gave way as she fell upon her bottom. JoJo felt himself suddenly free and crashed onto his back and shoulders on the ledge with thick clods of dirt and grass all over him. He was stunned by the impact and squeezed his eyes shut as he felt the falling sensation grip him. When he opened his eyes he saw Jeb sitting at his feet shaking the dirt from her hair.

“Are you all right, JoJo?” she asked.

JoJo nodded and gushed excitedly, “Jeb, you should have seen them. There were hundreds of them. And they’ve got a King. He spoke to me. King Doodlehead or something.”

Jeb sat in the freshly formed crater looking at her brother listening intently and, for once, believing every word he said. He told her everything he saw but try as he might he could not remember the King’s name or the name of the little people’s place.

“Never mind.” said Jeb, “You’ll probably remember later. She looked at the sky and then at the dirt about them. “We better go back JoJo.”

The children climbed out of the crater and brushed the dirt from their clothes as best as they could. Jeb pulled the blanket free and inspected it. It was filthy.

“Flower Bear!” cried JoJo with delight as he saw a worn yellow head protruding from the dirt. He shook the bear and gave it a cuddle.

“Oh look JoJo what’s this?” Jeb bent down and lifted a small gold disc from the ground. She rubbed the dirt from it with her thumb and held it up to the light. It looked quite old and had a picture of a King imprinted on it with what looked like a foreign language etched around it. A tiny brace of metal was fixed to its back.

“It’s one of their shields.” answered JoJo knowledgeably.

“Looks like an old coin.” said Jeb, slipping it carefully into her jeans pocket, “Let’s show it to Mr. O’Hara tomorrow.”

The children took one last look around before they left. There was no sign of the little people and, in fact, the fallen earth had left no obvious gaps to their world. JoJo hoped that no one had been squashed. What a terrible thing it would be if they had killed a little person. They trudged home disconsolately, dragging the blanket and bags behind them, quite concerned over what might have happened to King Doodlehead or whatever his name was and the wee folk.

All the way home Jeb was gripped with the same feeling she had felt before, a feeling that they were being followed. She looked into the woods hoping to catch a glimpse of something or somebody. All she ever saw was the trees though.

When Mrs Barnesfather saw her children appear at the back door she laughed and directed them straight to the bath.

“My word. You do look like you had fun.” she chortled.

That night, as the children lay in their bunks dozing off to a dreamy sleep, JoJo sat up suddenly.

“Doodledork. It was King Doodledork. Doodledork of Glissendorf.” he declared in a trancelike state before falling promptly back upon his pillow.

Jeb propped herself upon her elbow as she caught his words. “King Doodledork of Glissendorf.” she repeated quietly as she took the golden shield from underneath her pillow. She turned it slowly in her fingers wondering whether Mr. O’Hara might cast some light upon these matters.

Chapter seven: A Spanish doubloon

The wharf was a hive of activity when Jeb and JoJo next saw Mr O'Hara. The Buddicom lay puffing restlessly in its siding, as the Magillikuddy merchandise was off-loaded, while the fishermen and crews washed down the decks of their vessels. The morning catches had long been transported to the Mainland and the crews and workers chatted and laughed as if they had not a care in the world. The children could not help but feel an exciting vibe in the air. In the main street the shopkeepers scrubbed and polished their shopfronts and wares. Hanging above the doorways of all the shops and houses were flags bearing the clan crests and depictions of the various families, the red and white hand of the O'Brannigans, the daggers and red lions of the O'Riordans, the white boar of the O'Farrell clan and so forth. The town was a veritable sea of colour.

The faces of all the townsfolk beamed with warmth and exuberance. All except Mr O'Meara who Jeb noticed was looking particularly surly on this particular day. Mr O'Hara, by contrast, wore a grin bigger than a Cheshire cat and his sizeable beard and whiskers seemed to bristle with excitement.

"Hello young uns." he called happily as the children approached. Jeb and JoJo skipped delightedly into his outstretched arms. "Bear hug." he roared as he wrapped his arms around the laughing children.

"Everybody looks very busy today, Mr O'Hara." observed Jeb.

"Yes lass, indeed they are; a very special day tomorrow." Mr O'Hara paused momentarily for effect before intoning in an almost religious whisper, "Tis Mac Liberation Day."

“Mac Liberation Day.” repeated Jeb. “I’ve never heard that word before. I’ve heard of liberation but never Mac Liberation.”

“Well ‘tis a long story,” laughed Mr O’Hara. “But I’ll try and keep it short. If thee want to hear it that is, o’ course.”

Jeb and JoJo nodded eagerly, “Yes please.” JoJo, in particular, loved a good story.

“Many years ago,” began Mr O’Hara “there were two types of Island folk. The O’s whom thee see today and the Macs who no longer live here. The O people had lived here for centuries before the Macs arrived from the Mainland after the great storm. The Island, thee see, had been wrecked and needed rebuilding. The O people were destitute and in need of a helping hand, which the Macs gave them. At first the two got on well. The O clans were happy to share what little they had with the Macs. But soon the goodwill began to evaporate. The Macs wanted more and they quickly set themselves up in opposition to the O folk in everything and everyway. Ill feeling ran deep and the O people felt cheated and robbed of their old way of life. Worst among the Macs was a fellow who simply became known as Big Mac. He was a ruthless fellow and soon owned many of the shops and boats. But rather than share with all, as had been the longstanding Island tradition, he chose to horde all that he declared was his. Great hardship visited the Island and many O clans experienced poverty and hunger for the first time. Worse was the fate of the wee folk.”

“The wee folk?” Jeb and JoJo looked at each other with surprise. Mr O’Hara smiled.

“Aye, the wee folk. They had lived on the neighbouring Island of Arkadia alongside the O people since as long as anyone could remember. Arkadia existed in a region known as the Never World. It and this Island formed something of a nexus

between this and the Old World. It is a magical realm where witches, warlocks, dragons, wee folk and the like thrive. A realm accessible only to true believers that has shrunk since the old ways have been replaced by the new. Anyway the Great Storm washed Arkadia clear away and the Arkadians sort refuge on our Island. The Macs, however, forced the wee folk to work for them. They became slaves locked in cages and used to make goods and wares that the Macs sold on the Mainland. Profit and money, thee see, had become the measure of success. This had never been the way of the Island.” sighed Mr O’Hara, as if he remembered those dark days personally. “But then, when things had reached the lowest point, the O people rose up. They marched on the Big Mac mansion, where the Magillikuddy factory stands today. The land had previously been home to a witch’s coven. Big Mac took one of the witches as his wife and begot two daughters. Outraged by all that had happened our ancestors tore down the mansion and carried Big Mac away. What exactly happened to him no one can say...or will say. The Macs became terrified. If the O clans could get rid of Big Mac so easily, what fate might befall ordinary Macs, they thought? They began to leave the Island in droves as the O people hounded them night and day. They were dark days indeed. Eventually peace and quiet was restored and the old ways resumed. Some of the Macs remained, including Big Mac’s wife who vowed to build the mansion back up again, stubborn to the end she was. She never did, mind. But most chose to leave. The saddest part of all was the plight o’ the wee folk. Their trust in the Islanders was broken forever and they retreated from sight, existing as fringe-dwellers in a place that was always rightfully theirs.”

It was a sad but exciting story thought Jeb. As she listened she had taken the gold coin, if that was what it was, from her pocket and was turning it absently over

and over in her hand. When Mr O'Hara finished she looked up and saw him staring with some bewilderment at her.

“Where did thee get that?” he asked seriously, taking the coin from Jeb's fingers.

“We found it up on the hill.” trilled JoJo “It's a shield of the...” He was cut short as Jeb clamped her hand over his mouth. Mr O'Hara looked at Jeb suspiciously and held the coin up to the light. He examined it closely and then placed it in his mouth biting down upon it.

“Mmmm. Better come with me lass.” he suggested, looking about nervously as if someone might be watching. As he handed the coin back, it fell from Jeb's fingers and bounced off the ground and rolled precariously over the cracks in the wharf's planks before coming to rest against the boot of Mr O'Meara who happened to be stacking boxes nearby. He looked down. Jeb thought she saw the flicker of a smile and a certain glint in his eye as he picked up the coin pincer-like with two fingers, a method well practised on account of his stumpy thumbs. Mr O'Hara stepped up to him.

“There's a good fellow, Mr O'Meara.” he said holding out his hand. Mr O'Meara turned the coin in his fingers and with an odd crooked smile placed the coin into Mr O'Hara's palm. He looked at Mr O'Hara and then the children, his dark eyes sparkling, and turned back to his business.

Mr O'Meara was not the only one who had seen the coin. Standing on the deck of a battered ketch by the *Sea Lion* was the boy whom Jeb had seen on the rocks when she had first arrived. As then, he was staring at her. Or so she thought. Jeb stared back as impassively as she could and then looked away as he stared her out.

Her cheeks burned with embarrassment as she turned away angry at herself for breaking.

“Come along young uns” urged Mr O’Hara as he steered Jeb and JoJo away and up to the main street.

“Mr O’Meara scares me.” said Jeb bluntly.

“Don’t mind him, lass. He’s harmless. A lone wolf to be sure; carries the world upon his shoulders that one.” replied Mr O’Hara, and then dropping his voice added, “Mind thee, perhaps with good reason. His mother was the last of the Macs. Married ol’ Seamus O’Meara. Poor ol’ Seamus came to grief though and left her a widow. Try as she might Mr O’Meara’s mother never did recover. She kept to herself and as a young un Mr O’Meara was pretty much left to his own means. Then, o’ course, there was the accident with his thumbs. A metal crate fell flush on his hands as he was stacking some boxes, severed both in an instant. Still, he gets by well enough.”

The Island was beginning to sound a great deal more fascinating than Jeb had already found it. “And who is that boy who was staring at us?” she asked.

“That be Rory O’Keeffe, not to be confused with young Billy O’Keefe. He lives with his father at the lighthouse on t’other side of the Island. Very important job has our Mr O’Keeffe. Mad as a Hatter, though. Still, the boy’s a good enough lad.” mused Mr O’Hara. “Here we are.”

Jeb looked at the sign on the shop window at which they had stopped. It read: MR O’DIEM: ANTIQUARIAN BOOKS AND COINS. Just leaving the shop was the local policeman, the Island’s solitary and generally profoundly relaxed and unbusy policeman. Today, however, Mr O’Mulligan was looking very grave indeed.

“Hello Mr O’Mulligan” greeted Mr O’Hara, “Why the serious face?”

Mr O'Mulligan looked at Mr O'Hara with a troubled frown.

“A robbery, I'm afraid Mr O'Hara. A robbery. The first since...” he paused and shook his head. “Well the first since I don't know when...since a very long time ago I should think.” He wandered away muttering to himself and shaking his head in continued bewilderment. Mr O'Hara raised his eyebrows in surprise and then nodded toward the door.

“Come on then.”

A small bell tinkled as Mr O'Hara pushed the door open. Behind a glass counter, Mr O'Diem stood with his head bowed low over a sheet of stamps with a magnifying glass to his eye. “Uhum. Mmm. Very interesting” he was saying to himself. He looked up and a giant eye stared out at the children through the glass.

“Morning Mr O'Diem.” greeted Mr O'Hara warmly.

“Morning Mr O'Hara.” returned Mr O'Diem laying the magnifying glass upon the bench top. JoJo was looking all about at the different stamps and bank notes in the various display cabinets. The colours, shapes and patterns were fascinating to his roving eye. Jeb was staring at the rows of old books, her nose twitching a little from the musty smell and the dusty covers.

“What's all this about a robbery then Mr O'Diem?” asked Mr O'Hara immediately.

Mr O'Diem tapped the glass top of the counter. “It would seem that the Book of Cordozza, an ancient book o' spells, has been taken from the shop. Twas a book compiled by Cordozza, the great evil wizard of the Never World. He was defeated and banished in the Wizard War of 44. The book was found after the Great Storm. Blown to the Island I suspect. I kept it hidden in the back for fear o' it falling into the wrong hands not that there has ever been much need for such a worry on this Island...but one

can never be too careful. Anyway, this morning I noticed the chest in which it was stored had been opened and the book was missing. I can't imagine who would do such a thing or how they could know."

Both men looked perplexed by the incident, though Mr O'Hara, who knew Mr O'Diem was particularly fond of a chat and a tipple, thought he had a pretty good idea about the how. Mr O'Diem was first to draw away from the unhappy event.

"Never mind though. No use crying over spilt milk as they say. What might I be able to do for thee this fine day Mr O'Hara?"

"Well Mr O'Diem, the young lass has this coin or something. We thought thee might be able to tell us more about it."

Mr O'Hara looked at Jeb and gave a crooked nod of the head toward Mr O'Diem.

"Oh yes, that's right" said Jeb, forgetting for a moment that it was she who had the coin. She took it from her pocket and gave it to Mr O'Diem, who as Mr O'Hara had done, held it to the light and examined it with a wrinkled brow.

"Mmmmm. Interesting." he said. Jeb thought the coin, or whatever, was probably the most interesting thing on the Island next to her father, judged by the reaction of Messrs O'Diem and O'Hara.

"Very interesting indeed." said Mr O'Diem. He now had a telescopic eyeglass wedged in his eye-socket and looked rather odd. A bit cyber and robotic thought Jeb. "Where did thee get this, lass?"

Jeb looked at Mr O'Hara warily. Mr O'Hara laid a friendly and comforting hand upon her small shoulders and nodded with pursed lips and his eyes closed as if in deep meditation.

“Up on the hill” replied Jeb pointing vaguely over her shoulder in the direction of the street. Mr O’Diem turned and scanned a bookshelf of dusty Moroccan bound tomes behind him. He drew one from the shelf and blew the dust from its faded jacket, coughing slightly as he did so. He laid it carefully open upon the bench-top. Mr O’Hara and the children leaned forward and all four heads formed an umbrella blocking out the light. Mr O’Diem huffed impatiently and waved his customers back. “A little room please.” he said testily.

Mr O’Diem began to flip through the pages, umming and ahing at this and that, nodding and musing with the occasional utterance, “Interesting, very interesting.” Mr O’Hara began to drum his fingers impatiently on the glass until a steely look from Mr Diem stopped him. At last Mr O’Diem looked up, jabbing his finger at a picture on the page.

“Just as I thought, a specially pressed large gold doubloon circa 1492 made in honour of the Spanish King from gold taken from the Incas. How it got to this Island...” he paused and looked at Mr O’Hara who stood silently with his brow knitted heavily in thought “is anybody’s guess.” Mr O’Diem handed the coin back to Jeb.

“Is it really gold?” asked JoJo incredulously.

“Aye,” nodded Mr O’Diem “but the least said about it the better. Do thee agree Mr O’Hara?”

“Aye Mr O’Diem, I do.” He looked sternly at the children and tapped his nose several times as he did so. “Not a word young uns. And be sure to keep that hidden well beneath ye pillow lass.”

Mr O’Hara and the children left the shop. The bell tinkled as the door closed behind them and they squinted their eyes as they adjusted to the light of the street.

Leaning against a lamppost on the other side of the road was Mr O'Meara. He smiled as they passed. A very odd thing for him to do thought Jeb. Mr O'Hara uttered a deep growl of acknowledgment as they passed.

“Not good. Not good”, Jeb thought she heard him mumble. They walked back to the cottage where Mr O'Hara bid them goodbye.

“Remember. Not a word to anyone.” commanded Mr O'Hara as he turned to leave.

“Why not?” ventured Jeb.

Mr O'Hara turned back as if surprised. “Greed lass. Greed almost ruined this Island once. The prospect of untold wealth does strange things to men's minds. Strange things” he sighed “If there be more coins up there, best that it stays where 'tis, where it can do no-one any harm.” Again he tapped the side of his nose. “Not a word young uns. Not a word.”

Jeb and JoJo laughed and looking at one another tapped the sides of their own noses.

“Not a word” they promised, shaking their young giggling heads, “Not a word.”

Chapter eight: Mac Liberation Day

It was a strange sight indeed that greeted the children when they awoke on Mac Liberation Day. A wheezing and puffing emanated from the backyard of the cottage. What sounded like Mr Barnesfather's voice floated back to Jeb and JoJo's bedroom. They pressed their curious faces to the window. There was their father, in baggy white shorts and a freshly starched white t-shirt, squatting up and down in a series of jerky callisthenic exercises.

One, two, wheeze, three, puff-puff.

The children watched amazed. Jeb began to think that perhaps her father was interesting after all. What he was doing she could tell well enough, exercising, though not very well she surmised. Why? To that she had no answer.

"You be careful." Mrs Barnesfather was telling him. "You're not as young as you used to be you know"

Mr Barnesfather snorted contemptuously "You forget dear, I was the school sprint champion."

One, two, wheeze, three, puff puff.

"And a dab hand at cricket and football too, you know." he added for good measure.

"Maybe so," continued their mother unfazed "but that was twenty-five years ago and some of these Islanders are awfully big."

One, two, wheeze, three, puff-puff.

Mr Barnesfather persisted.

Between breaths he explained his philosophy. “Once one has ridden a bicycle one never forgets. Age shall not weary me. If the mind is willing dear, the body will follow. Believe me.”

His wife shook her head forlornly and sighed “I wish I could dear. But bigger is bigger and younger is younger. Just be careful.”

One, two, wheeze, three, puff-puff.

Mr Barnesfather continued as his wife withdrew indoors.

“Mum. What’s Dad doing?” asked JoJo as he and his sister sat down to breakfast.

Mrs Barnesfather laughed as she answered. “The Islanders have invited him to play in their annual Mac Liberation mobbing match.”

“Mobbing?” queried Jeb.

Mrs Barnesfather shrugged. “Some type of football game I think.” she responded vaguely. “They play it once a year. Apparently some sort of celebration for when a chap by the name of Big Mac was expelled from the Island. Anyway your dad has agreed to play...silly bugger. Thinks he’s sixteen again”

“He’ll get killed.” declared JoJo excitedly.

His mother patted his head lovingly and laughed. “Let’s hope not JoJo.”

The town-square was a blaze of colour as the families congregated with their clan flags. The women, as usual, looked stunning in their myriad coloured dresses and shawls. The men were more sober in appearance though their dark heads gleamed in the sunshine from the oil that plastered their hair in place.

Presently the crowd began to assume some sense of order. A lone bass drummer flanked by two pipers assembled at the head of the square where the road

led off to the village green. Behind them a couple of the Island children carried the Island's official banner. A golden O set upon a dark green field crowned by a castle with a dragon curled about the base. Within the O were four embroidered depictions of life within the town set around a smoking volcano which stood in the middle. There was a picture of the fishermen and boats, of the kelp farmers, the railway, and of a thatch roofed cottage.

The participating mobbing players (they being almost the entire male population of the Island plus Mr Barnesfather, of course) assembled behind the advance guard. All were dressed in white shorts and an array of sporting tops. All wore hob-nailed boots with thick woollen socks except Mr Barnesfather who had rescued an old pair of tennis shoes from somewhere. Jeb and JoJo could not help but laugh at their father, whose muscle challenged frame clad in starched white shorts and t-shirt, looked ridiculously conspicuous among the robust and swarthy locals.

Falling in behind the players were their families and the rest of the Islanders. Here the various clan colours fluttered and danced high above the crowd. With an inharmonious clamour the band, if it could be called such, started up. The pipes wailed into life with a screeching cat-o-wailing over the boom of the drum and the excited mass lurched into motion. Up the street they marched, chatting and laughing. Mrs Barnesfather and the children waved as Mr B passed them. He waved back nervously and Jeb thought he looked a little pale. They then fell in behind the marching crowd and followed them up the street, past their cottage and on to the village green.

Once at the green the various families planted their clan colours alongside the upper boundary and settled down to watch. The sheep were shooed from the green and the players gathered in the centre. Jeb thought the whole scene looked splendid.

The flags fluttering on straining poles in the warm breeze gave the whole affair the flavour of a medieval tournament.

At each end of the green an upturned packing crate had been staked into a fixed position. The game's purpose, Mr Barnesfather had explained to his family, was for one side to place the ball in one of the crates. First to score was the winner and if no side scored then play was concluded at dusk. This made for a terribly long day if neither side scored. This was the likely outcome for apparently no one had succeeded in the quest for as long as anyone could remember. The ball was not a ball but rather a reinforced hessian bag stuffed with seaweed and then tightly bound by strands of dried kelp. It was called a boondle.

Mr O'Diem had been given the job as match referee, though all that required was for him to toss the boondle in the air to start proceedings. The captains, selected by ballot each year, were Mr Lenny O'Henery the poultryman and Mr O'Loughlin, another large fisherman though not of the gigantic size of Mr O'Hara. Sides were selected by alternative picks as occurred in most schoolyards. Lenny O'Henery selected his brother Kenny with his first pick and Mr O'Loughlin, in turn, selected Mr O'Hara.

Mr Barnesfather was the last picked. Jeb and JoJo felt sorry for him as he shuffled and kicked at the ground as the pool of players dwindled until he, with drooping shoulders, was left standing alone. But at least it meant he was on Mr O'Hara's side, a point Jeb figured could only be in his favour.

The two teams gathered in a massive pack in the centre of the green. Mr O'Diem picked up the boondle and showed it to the crowd who roared their approval. He glanced at the two captains who indicated their readiness with a nervous nod of their heads. Satisfied, Mr O'Diem stepped back and threw the boondle high into the

air. The game had begun. One of O'Henery's men reached up and knocked the boondle down toward a waiting teammate. The boondle was quickly gathered up and the dull crashing thump of body upon body became the constant for the afternoon as the two teams launched themselves against the wall of players opposite. There were no rules as far as Jeb could tell, just a tangled mass of kicking feet and flailing arms of men and boys. It was easy to see why no one had ever scored. Occasionally the boondle would spill or be wrested free only for the unfortunate soul who happened to seize it to be mangled in turn.

Mr Barnesfather was thinking that the game was nothing as he had imagined it would be. Mrs Barnesfather, too, was alarmed and was quite happy to see her husband loitering about the outer fringe. And so the afternoon wore on with neither side making much headway. JoJo became quite disillusioned and bored. He began scanning the horizon for any signs of squods at sea. Unfortunately, none were to be seen.

As the sun moved low in the western sky, casting long shadows across the green, the tactics adapted themselves to the exhaustion of the players. The fitter players occupied the front line and the less fit a series of lines behind. Any breakaway from the front line had to negotiate four or five defensive lines, all of which made scoring even less likely. And then one of those happenstances of sport occurred. A magical moment conjured from thin air that ran totally at odds with the flow of the game.

O'Loughlin's men had grasped the boondle and were making a dash upon the O'Henery men's front line. The supporting lines closed in quickly, fighting off their fatigue. Mr Barnesfather, who as he had claimed was surprisingly fit and whom age, indeed, did not appear to have wearied found himself uncomfortably close to the

action as he was borne forward with his team-mates. The boondle runner, Mr O'Ratigan, the Island's pest control man, dashed heroically into the midst of O'Henery's charging horde. There was a sickening crash. Mr O'Ratigan reeled back, flinging his arms high as he fell heavily to the ground. The boondle flew in a tumbling arc straight into Mr Barnesfather's outstretched arms.

"Sweet mother of Jesus" gasped a horrified Mrs Barnesfather.

Jeb mutely followed her mother's reaction while JoJo suddenly began yelling encouragement. "Go Dad!"

"Run!" roared Mr O'Hara as he fended off a lunging O'Henery man. Mr Barnesfather had needed no such prompting. He was an intelligent man. He understood that if he had the boondle and a pack of hardy and seemingly blood thirsty O'Henery men wished to loosen his grip then running seemed a most excellent and expedient measure. He took off. His speed surprised the O'Henery men and thrilled JoJo who yelled excitedly "Look at him go, Mum" Mrs Barnesfather's hands covered her eyes.

Mr Barnesfather was galloping furiously to his left. He had a plan. If he could go left he might just get around the O'Henery men's right if his own team could drive them back. His teammates sensed an opportunity and suddenly the complexion of the game was changed. Try as they might the O'Henery men were now struggling as they wheeled and scampered to head off the rabbit-like Mr Barnesfather. Each time they closed a protective wall of charging players would crash into them shepherding Mr B past their clutching and grasping hands. On ran Mr B and the crowd was on its feet shouting loudly. Mr B's chest swelled as he caught the cheering on the breeze.

But as Mrs Barnesfather had said, twenty-five years was a long time and suddenly Mr B's legs tired. His heart was pounding and his throat burning. Just as he

spied the cherished upturned packing crate his race was up. Mr O'Hara valiantly pushed two O'Henery men away in a mighty last effort to make space but alas the dam had burst. One swept by, then a second, followed by a third and a fourth. When next Mr O'Hara looked Mr Barnesfather had disappeared in a scrimmage of wriggling bodies. Play continued and when the tangled mess of limbs and torsos was cleared Mr B was revealed, lying crumpled on the ground like a crushed praying mantis.

With the fading light and with this final crippling, Mr O'Diem blew his whistle and ended the game. The players slumped to the ground and the crowd surged on to the green in jubilant celebration.

“Another draw.” said one.

“But what a fine game it was.” another declared in rapturous tones.

By degrees the crowd began to drift back to the town where festivities were to continue well into the night. Drinks at the Pig and Sow, a roast spit in the square and a fiddle band to dance to.

Mr Barnesfather lay moaning upon the ground, his hands twitching, not really knowing which part of his aching body to clutch. His wife had hurried to his side with Jeb and JoJo running behind.

“I don't want to say I told you so.” began Mrs Barnesfather although Jeb knew that was exactly what her mother was about to do. Mr Barnesfather looked up like a scolded dog as his wife listed his foolishness. Mr O'Hara who was standing nearby guffawed loudly and clapped the children and Mrs Barnesfather upon the back. Mrs B scowled a little not quite enamoured of Mr O'Hara's good heartedness at that particular moment.

“He'll be fine. Mark my words, Mrs Barnesfather. An ale or two and a good sleep is all he needs.”

Mr Barnesfather groaned loudly. Whether in agreement or disagreement nobody really knew. He slowly got to his feet and tottered gingerly from the ground not at all sure that the evening's festivities would be to his liking.

Mr O'Hara, however, was right. A few ales soon washed Jeb and JoJo's father's practised reserve away. The children drank red lemonade and giggled as their father at some late hour began a silly jig with one of the O'Henery brothers. Mr O'Hara and Mr O'Mara beamed and winked at the children.

"Interesting man that Mr Barnesfather" they chuckled. Mrs Barnesfather blushed with embarrassment. The children laughed and danced with some of the Islander children. When the night ended in the early hours they skipped gaily home while their mother chided her husband who lay sprawled in Mr O'Mara's barrow. Mr O'Hara having kindly offered to wheel him home.

Everyone (though perhaps not Mrs Barnesfather) had had a good time, everyone except four shadowy figures who stared out of the grimy windows of the Witches and Warlocks tavern, watching and waiting with what looked like malevolent intent, according to Mr O'Mulligan.

For reasons long since lost to the collective memory of the Islanders, Mr O'Meara and the Magillikuddy sisters were not inclined to enjoy Mac Liberation Day. And, had anyone peeped inside the Witches and Warlocks tavern that night they may have seen an interesting exchange take place. They might also have seen a sight never seen before as the Magillikuddy sisters smiled (though it was more like a grimace) as a stumpy thumbed pair of hands handed them a plain wrapped parcel.

Chapter nine: A midnight adventure

The day after Mac Liberation Day was a quiet one, a day of recovery so to speak. Jeb and JoJo slept till lunchtime and Mr Barnesfather did not surface until mid-afternoon and then only to grumble and moan about various aches and pains that ailed him, of which there were many, from his bruised shin-bones to the pounding headache that multiplied the slightest sound tenfold. JoJo roaring about with arms outstretched in aeroplane mode was not what the doctor had ordered.

“Serves you right.” was the only solace Mrs Barnesfather was prepared to offer.

Mrs Barnesfather was, in fact, secretly happy for the quiet as she took the opportunity to spend the afternoon by the beach sketching the beautiful surrounds. The kelp farmers were absent and the children accompanied her and paddled in the shallows. Their father, however, remained at the cottage nursing his various ailments. And so the day passed. The odd seal glided close by, rolling lazily on its back giving the children only the most cursory attention despite Jeb and JoJo’s uninhibited glee. In the sky above a plethora of sea birds circled with equal disinterest.

That evening both Mr Barnesfather and the children were early to bed. As night enveloped the household the only sounds to be heard, should one have been present, were those emanating from the snoring sleepers mixed with the loud purring of Mrs O’Shaunnessy’s cat. Then another sound chimed in.

Tink, tink, tink.

Jeb opened her sleepy eyes.

Tink, tink, tink.

There it was again. Jeb crawled to the bottom of her bunk and peeped through the curtain. Her heart and mind raced as she thought of the prospects. Perhaps the little people were back. What she saw though was totally unexpected. It was not the little people but rather the boy who stared.

Crouched low behind the trunk of the golden elm a short distance from the back porch was Rory O’Keeffe. He had been throwing small pebbles softly against the window. When he saw Jeb’s face appear at the window he stepped boldly from behind the tree and beckoned for her to join him outside.

A quizzical look inscribed Jeb’s face. What to do? She was curious but it *was* the middle of the night. JoJo was snoring contentedly and similar twisted sounds curled down the hallway from her parents’ room. Everyone was soundly asleep.

Jeb carefully prised the window open. It was a little stiff but eventually slid open. She lowered her head to the gap and whispered to her visitor.

“What do you want?”

“I need to speak to thee. I’ve something to show thee. Can thee come?” he replied.

“It’s very late. Don’t you have school or work in the morning?” queried Jeb.

“Nobody goes to school on the Island.” he snorted defensively “And I work when I want to. Please can thee come? ‘Tis important.”

Jeb wondered what it was that could be so important in the middle of the night. And being so curious she decided to go with the boy. He appeared to be more polite than his rude staring suggested. She grabbed her coat and slipped it over her pyjamas and tiptoed quietly down the hall.

When Jeb went into the backyard, the boy was standing behind the stonewall beckoning her.

“Hurry we have to hurry before the tide comes back in.” he called.

Jeb hurried up to him and climbed over the wall.

“Where are we going? And why?” demanded Jeb impatiently.

The boy placed his finger over his lip. “Sssssshh. Not here. I’ll tell thee soon. Follow me.”

Jeb noticed he carried a torch though he had not turned it on. The boy crouched low and ran toward the south wood with Jeb following. He seemed conscious of being followed and kept looking about to make sure they were alone. Once in the woods they began walking normally though quickly along its edge remaining hidden from prying eyes. At the corner of the woods, near where Jeb and JoJo had turned to climb to their picnic spot, the boy took Jeb’s hand.

“Quick.” he said without further explanation. They broke from the wood and ran diagonally down the slope to where the sandy beach dissipated into a jumble of rocks and where the mountain slope became steeper. Here the boy turned on the torch. Its yellow light flashed over the grey rocks clad with a mixture of dried and wet clumps of seaweed.

For the first time Jeb became a bit apprehensive. In the still night air she could hear the ocean sucking in deep gasping breaths below them. A mournful sigh seemed to well up from its depths. As the noise surged through Jeb’s receptive ear it suddenly exploded to nothingness as waves crashed upon the rocks. Then the sighing resumed. Jeb could only see an expansive black hole below. The torch occasionally illuminated the white foaming suds that frothed and bubbled below. To fall was to face certain destruction. Jeb found herself grasping the boy’s hand for security.

“Here we are.” announced the boy breathlessly as they disappeared behind a large rock. He dropped to his hands and knees and shone the torch underneath a

protruding ledge. A wave crashed against the blowhole and a shower of water whipped high over them and spattered them with heavy drops.

“Tis okay.” said the boy as he spied the increasing level of doubt on Jeb’s face, “Follow me”. He belly crawled underneath the ledge and Jeb followed. She flattened herself to the ground like a lizard and wriggled after him.

The boy shone the torch around a large cave. Jeb gasped. The cave was damp and musky and the ocean echoed in its vacuous chamber. The boy shone the torch ahead of them and Jeb could see the floor rising and narrowing toward the roof some distance ahead.

“My name’s Rory.” the boy said introducing himself belatedly and abruptly.

“I know. Mr O’Hara told me. I’m Jeb.”

Rory looked at her, “I’ve never heard that name before?”

“Well it’s not my real name. A nickname really. My real name is Jane Emma Barnesfather. My parents call me by my initials...and so does everyone else.”

Rory smiled “Jane. ‘Tis a pretty name.” Suddenly Jane, who had always been called Jeb, thought so too as it rolled from her companion’s lilting tongue. “I shall call thee Jane.” stated Rory emphatically. Jeb smiled. Rory was proving much nicer than she had first thought.

“I saw the gold coin thee found.” he said.

Jeb was not surprised, he had after all been watching when she showed it to Mr O’Hara. “You must not tell anybody.” she warned. “Mr O’Hara said it must stay a secret. So you must promise.”

Rory nodded. “Aye. I promise.” he said solemnly “And thee must promise not to tell anyone o’ what I am about to show thee.” A sudden rush of excitement gripped Jeb as she wondered what Rory’s big secret might be.

“I promise” said Jeb as equally solemnly as Rory had done.

“No. I mean thee must really promise.” Rory implored.

Jeb shrugged, “Okay I promise. Cross my heart and hope to die.” she said although she kept her fingers crossed behind her back as she did so.

“Because if anyone ever finds out. Everything will be ruined.”

Jeb wondered what potentially catastrophic thing it was that she was about to witness. Again she became a little nervous. They walked for what seemed an eternity up the ever narrowing tunnel that branched off from the cavern until they were almost doubled over and the sound of the ocean a distant rumble. At the end of the tunnel was another hole. Again Jeb had to belly crawl along the ground. She followed close behind Rory whose scabbling feet kept knocking her head. Jeb wished she had placed her hair in a bun or worn a hat as her long hair was becoming tangled. She winced as her hands or Rory’s feet caught her dangling matted locks.

A stunning sight overwhelmed Jeb when they at last emerged from the tunnel. She was standing on a ledge that overlooked a palatial cavern. Giant stalactites protruded from the ceiling of the vast underground chamber while stalagmites ranged up from its floor. A burnished orange and red glow illuminated the place. Small craters dotted the ground from which steaming vapours hissed and curled slowly upward before disappearing in chaotic shivering wisps.

“Lava pools.” said Rory noting the amazed look on Jeb’s face. “They’re quite safe. As long as thee don’t get too close.”

Rory and Jeb walked down a natural causeway along the side of the cavern. It was quite steep and they constantly had to slow their gathering speed by gripping the rock walls. Presently they reached flatter ground. They came to a slit-like opening in a wall through which they were able to squeeze. Thankfully, thought Jeb, without

having to crawl. The rocks were cold and damp. When finally they squeezed through, Rory motioned for Jeb to bob down. They crouched together behind some rocks and Jeb was aware of the pleasant feel of sand beneath her feet. High above them shafts of bluish moonlight airbrushed a body of gently lapping water.

As Jeb's eyes adjusted to the light she could see that before them was a sandy strip of an underground beach. A large dark shape protruded from the water some distance away, the exact nature of which Jeb could not quite make out.

"Where are we?" she whispered.

Rory did not answer. Instead he carefully shone his torch in a slow arc over the little beach and water. The dark shape revealed itself as the remains of a wreck. Its broken form, rotted decks and shattered masts from which hung strips of bleached canvas gave the appearance of a ghost ship in the half light.

"Tis a Spanish galleon." whispered Rory. "Tis some kind of underground lagoon. I found it a few months ago. I've been busting to tell someone. Come on."

They crept forward with Rory shining the torch to lead the way. Once on the beach Jeb could scarcely believe her eyes. Strewn over the sand were all manner of riches. Doubloons like the one Jeb and JoJo had found, as well as jewellery, gems and gold and silver statuettes lay everywhere. Several broken wooden chests with their splintered and weathered lids tilted open had clearly been dragged ashore at some point in time. Jeb reached into one and drew out a handful of fine sand and sparkling diamonds. She watched spellbound as the sand streamed through the gaps in her fingers leaving a palm full of glittering wealth.

Jeb said flabbergasted. "There must be an absolute fortune here." she whispered hoarsely.

Rory nodded in agreement and continued to sweep the beach and water with the torch. The light danced over an old rowboat upon the sand. Jeb grabbed Rory's wrist.

"Look" she gasped in amazement.

Inside the row boat bathed in the soft filtered glow of the moonlight was a young naked woman with beautiful long black hair that fell over her back past her buttocks. She lay curled upon a bed of seaweed. Jeb had never seen hair so long. Rory was equally stunned. He had never seen a naked woman before. The two stood transfixed by the unexpected sight.

It was Jeb who regained some composure first. She tugged at Rory's sleeve, "Come on. Let's get a bit closer for a proper look." Rory stood bolted to the ground not sure in his young mind whether it was altogether appropriate for him to have a closer look. Jeb pulled impatiently at his sleeve. "Come on."

As Jeb stepped forward she trod upon a piece of driftwood that snapped with a piercing crack that ricocheted around the lagoon. The young woman awoke. She sat up, not startled but with quiet confidence and unhurried poise. With an elegant toss of her head, her long silken mane fell into surprisingly groomed order upon her back. Her skin was a glorious light bronze that glistened as the torch and moonlight spotlighted her beauty.

The woman rose slowly, stepping gracefully from her makeshift bed, and without a second glance at the gawking children, walked slowly and assuredly into the water. Her hair fanned out behind her as she descended into the depths of the lagoon.

"Wait!" cried Rory and Jeb.

Too late, the beautiful woman had disappeared. The only hint of her presence was the rippling circles that spread outward from her point of submersion. Rory shone the torch in jerking sweeps over the water trying to find her again.

“Look!” shouted Jeb. “There!” she pointed to something that broke the surface. Rory followed her direction and the torch beam caught the form of a sleek silver body as it arched and dived downward below the shattered hull of the wreck.

“The silver seal!” blurted Jeb in utter disbelief.

‘Aye.’ said Rory seemingly unfazed by what he had just seen “So, tis true. The princess lives.”

The two looked at each other with broad grins. “We better get back. Tide will be in again soon.” hastened Rory.

The journey back did not seem to take anywhere near as long, though the main pathway back was quite steep. It was with some alarm that Jeb arrived at the final gap through which they had to crawl. Little foaming bubbles were breaking into the cavern from the outside. The tide was evidently rising.

“Tis okay.” said Rory in a calm voice. “We still have time.” Jeb was awfully glad of that. The idea of being stuck within the mountain somewhere did not appeal to her. As it was it was scary enough having to crawl through the hole as water flowed in and out. She was saturated by the time she emerged and had no idea how she would explain her clothes to her mother. The edge of the blowhole was now uncomfortably close as Jeb followed Rory back toward the beach. It was still dark though the first hints of dawn were clawing away at the night sky.

Just as they approached the bottom of the rocks they ran slap-bang into Mr O’Meara. He was just climbing up as they were scuttling down. All three were surprised and stood staring awkwardly at one another. Rory grabbed Jeb’s hand and

pulled her past Mr O'Meara who allowed himself a sly grin as the boy and girl scampered away.

Rory and Jeb ran frantically back to the cottage. Rory extracted a further promise from Jeb not to tell anybody of their adventure before he retreated back into the woods. Of course Jeb promised. This time with her fingers uncrossed. Once inside, she dumped her sodden clothes into the washing machine, thinking perhaps her mother would not notice. Finally Jeb collapsed exhausted on the bed as a rooster crowed somewhere close to town.

Chapter ten: Captured

“Jeb. Wake up. Wake up Jeb.” repeated JoJo as he tried to arouse his sister.

“Mum. Jeb won’t wake up.”

Mrs Barnesfather hustled into the bedroom. “Come on Jeb. You’d think you hadn’t had any sleep at all. Hurry up. Come and say goodbye to your father.”

Mr Barnesfather was in a much chirpier frame of mind this morning. He rubbed JoJo on the head. “You be good for your mother.”

JoJo smiled. Jeb had still not awoken by the time her father was ready to leave.

“I don’t know what’s wrong with that girl.” huffed Mrs Barnesfather. “I suppose she must need the sleep, though the Lord only knows why?”

Mr Barnesfather smiled. “Yes I suspect you are right. Leave her be dear. I’ll see her when I come home.”

JoJo was less accommodating. He returned to the bedroom and shook his sister until he forced her eyes open. “Come on Jeb. Wake up. You can’t stay here all day you know.”

“My name is Jane not Jeb.” she hissed glaring at her little brother through the puffy slits of her eyes.

“Oh Sor-ree!” declared JoJo before he stalked back into the kitchen.

Mrs Barnesfather returned some time later and sat on the bunk and shook Jeb gently awake. “Sweetie I have to go down to town. I need you to get up and look after JoJo.”

Jeb got reluctantly out of bed. She glared at JoJo as he poked his tongue out as she passed.

“And could you please put the washing on for me Jeb.” added her mother before leaving. “I won’t be long.”

“Yes Mum.” Jeb smiled, suddenly relieved of the worry that her wet clothes would remain undiscovered and that a lie of explanation would not be warranted.

With Mrs Barnesfather out of the house JoJo began pestering his sister (as Jeb saw it) for a play. Jeb, though, was in a tired and grumble bum frame of mind. “Go away you little pain. Why can’t you go and play by yourself?”

“Like how?” demanded JoJo.

“Oh I don’t know JoJo. Make up an adventure or something. Just leave me alone.” replied Jeb irritably.

“Yeah. Well I will then.” yelled JoJo angrily.

“Good.” Jeb felt rather pleased with herself having got rid of her brother so easily. She busied herself with the washing and then, stifling a yawn or two, lay down on the couch to think about her adventure during the night. Excited, as she was, Jeb could not keep her eyes open and was soon asleep.

“I’m going on a squod hunt.” announced JoJo as he opened a tin of biscuits in the kitchen and stuffed his pockets full with supplies for his expedition. Jeb, who was fast asleep, did not answer and so JoJo fetched Corduroy from the bedroom before wandering into the backyard. He found himself a long stick that he could use alternatively as a staff or squod gun if need be. Thus equipped he marched on toward the south wood. Mrs O’Shaunnessy’s cat followed behind with its tail stiff and erect in a most military fashion.

He began his journey by following the clear route he had taken with Jeb on the day of their picnic. At the end of the village green the purpose of his expedition changed. A scan of the ocean revealed no squods. This was disappointing in the

extreme and JoJo was beginning to think he might never see a squod. Then JoJo got to thinking about King Doodledork and the little people. Wouldn't it be fun to see them again? Better still, he thought, if he could find some more gold. He looked up the mountain and over the trees of the south wood to the spot where he and Jeb had made their discovery. His little mind reasoned that it was a much shorter route to cut through the woods. The early encounter with Morgana Magillikuddy appeared long forgotten. So decided, JoJo set off with Corduroy and Mrs O'Shaunnessy's cat.

JoJo was a fair way into the woods when all of a sudden he stepped on some loose branches upon the ground and fell into a freshly dug hole. The hole was just large enough for a little boy to fall into and just deep enough for a little boy to be unable to climb out of. After several failed attempts to escape JoJo sat down most perplexed and wondered how he would ever get out. He clung tightly to Corduroy while Mrs O'Shaunnessy's cat prowled about the edge sniffing and mewing in low guttural tones.

Suddenly the cat hissed and retreated rapidly back toward the cottage. Three ugly faces appeared over the edge of the hole and peered into it. JoJo looked up and began to tremble at the sheer ugliness of them all. They were undoubtedly the Magillikuddy sisters... close up. Nobody else could possibly achieve such a span of ugliness. Crooked noses, jutting jaws and wart dotted chins aside, the Magillikuddy's were just plain ugly.

"Ack. A boy child." spat Morgana Magillikuddy somewhat disappointedly.
"What can we possibly do with him?"

The three sisters thought awhile. "Let's take him home and use him like the rest of them." Madge suggested.

“Yes, let’s do” agreed Millie “He’s ten times bigger and can do ten times as much work.”

“Alright then.” grumbled Morgana. She stood up and pointed a wagging finger at JoJo, “Come along boy”

JoJo noticed Morgana Magillikudy’s pointing finger beginning to glow. First a soft light blue, then brighter and darker from blue to purple. JoJo watched fascinated, forgetting his fear momentarily, as the light orb glowed brighter and brighter until it had grown to the size of a large beach ball on her crooked finger. Then with an indecipherable incantation Morgana zapped the growing sphere in JoJo’s direction.

JoJo dropped Corduroy in fright as the dazzling purple ball consumed him. He pushed against it and as he struggled to free himself from it he began to float upward. The sphere felt like water as JoJo felt all around him. It was a malleable substance but one that simply resisted all his attempts to push his small hands through. He was now floating upside down and could see Corduroy lying alone staring up at him. The Magillikuddy sisters seemed to be having fun, pointing and laughing at him. JoJo was now extremely fearful about what was going to happen to him. The sisters were playing with him, zapping him from side to side from sister to sister as if playing catch. Of course they never caught JoJo at all preferring to just kept him hovering helplessly above them.

After they had tired of their game Morgana Magillikuddy announced abruptly, “Come girls...It is time.”

JoJo noticed three natty birch branch broomsticks propped against a tree nearby. The sisters snapped their fingers. With that the broomsticks flew from the tree into the open hands of their respective owners. JoJo, now half upright, was truly

amazed. They really are witches he thought as his throat went desperately dry with dread.

The sisters vaulted onto their broomsticks much like a cowboy did a horse when in a hurry. They then roared off at great speed. Morgana kept a finger wagging over her shoulder dragging JoJo along as they sped off.

JoJo was terrified. The sisters were hunched down low on their brooms as they sped rocket like above the floor of the woods and below the canopy of the trees. They weaved between trunks and low lying branches as if they had not a care in the world. Dry leaves upon the ground were gathered up in swirling spiralling columns as the sisters swept over it. JoJo simply bobbed along in their wake, spinning and turning in the purple sphere.

Helpless and afraid, all JoJo could do was let events unfold. The sisters burst from the dark woods and flew over the perimeter fence of the factory, up over the warehouse roof and through the open window of the remaining tower of the old mansion. They propped their brooms against the wall and deposited JoJo, still embalmed in purple fuzz, in the centre of the room.

Morgana snapped her fingers and the fuzz disappeared. JoJo fell unceremoniously to the ground. He felt all over his body and satisfied that the fuzz was all gone, ventured to stand up. The sisters looked at him and then at one another. Overcome by their ugliness and consumed with fear JoJo burst into tears.

“Are you going to eat me?” he stammered between sobs.

Morgana laughed evilly, “What? Boil you down into child soup. There’s a thought.” she cackled. A dreamy salivating look softened the features of the Magillikuddys as they considered such a culinary delight.

“I wish.” sighed Morgana contemplatively, “ It’s not like the old days.”

“Damn witches’ union.” reflected Madge sadly. “Ever since those bleeding heart leftie goody two shoe white witches took over its never been the same. No eating children they say. Pah!”

The sisters heaved a collective sigh of disappointment.

“Perhaps we should take him back.” ventured Millie, the youngest of the three.

Morgana and Madge looked at her with alarm. “Take him back.” they chorused indignantly.

“Bad enough that we can’t eat him.” moaned Morgana. “No he stays. He’s ours. We can lock him up with the rest of them. He can start work in the morning.”

With that Madge grabbed JoJo by the ear, twisting it for good measure as she marched him down the spiral staircase to the dungeon below. The heavy oak door of the dungeon creaked as Madge opened it and shoved JoJo into the darkness.

“I’ll be back.” she sneered before closing the door.

JoJo sat on the cold earthen floor and began to cry. Whatever was he going to do? And what on earth was going to happen to him?

Chapter eleven: Looking for JoJo

When Jeb finally awoke it was a few hours after JoJo had set off. She looked for her brother but he was nowhere to be found. Oh well, she reasoned, perhaps her mother had come home and taken him somewhere. When Mrs Barnesfather returned home she fell into a tearful state of upset when she discovered that JoJo was missing. Naturally and not surprisingly, of course, she blamed Jeb for losing him. In turn, Jeb felt awfully guilty at having lost her brother though in the back of her mind she thought he had really lost himself and didn't see why it was her fault at all.

Mrs Barnesfather phoned Mr Barnesfather, who phoned Mr O'Mulligan, the policeman, who phoned Mr O'Duffy, the very occasional town mayor. Both appeared soon after at the Barnesfather's cottage.

"Now, now, Mrs Barnesfather" said Mr O'Mulligan in his most solemn and soothing voice to Mrs Barnesfather who was quite distraught by now. "I'm sure the lad will be alright."

"Aye. The boy won't have strayed too far away to be sure." reasoned Mr O'Duffy.

"We've still a few hours of light so we can organise a search party. What say Mr O'Duffy?"

"Aye Mr O'Mulligan. A search party would be a fine idea." agreed Mr O'Duffy "I'll go and ring the bells."

The mayor hurried down the street, patting Jeb on the head as he left. "Don't worry lassie. We'll have him found soon enough."

Nobody could remember when the town bells had last been rung. Not for centuries most guessed. They were only to be rung when an emergency occurred on the Island and no one could remember such a thing. The odd emergency at sea transpired, of course, but that was a different procedure altogether featuring klaxon-horns and what not.

Mr O'Duffy pulled lustily on the ropes and the bells began to peel out their resounding melodious tune. As the bells rang the doors of the various shops and houses began to be flung hurriedly open. The townsfolk began to stream into the town-square. Soon most of the Islanders were gathered in the square wondering what the emergency could possibly be.

Mr O'Mulligan raised his hands and an expectant hush descended over the crowd.

"Now listen up" he began "The young Barnesfather lad is missing so we need to search the Island. Mr O'Hara shall take the *Sea Lion* and young O'Keeffe and check the coast, south around Dragon's Spit and home by the north side. Mr O'Toole, take the engine with the O'Henery brothers and do a run up to the Magillikuddy factory. The rest o' thee will need to form a line from O'Dell's dairy to the village green. We'll pass through the north and south woods to the Magillikuddys and the lower slopes. Mr Barnesfather will come with us. Mrs Barnesfather please wait with Mrs O'Brien and the ladies from the salon. We'll find him, I promise." He smiled kindly and Mrs Barnesfather began to cry as her husband steered her into the care of the salon ladies.

With the plan laid down a general hubbub of activity overtook the place. Islanders, men, women and children all, began to clamber over the stone wall and extend in a long line stretching from O'Dell's dairy to beyond the village green.

Torches were brought from the houses and distributed along the line. It would be dusk soon and every precaution was taken to increase the searchers' chances.

Mr O'Mulligan, with Mr Barnesfather by his side, stood to the front and centre much like a general commanding his troops and motioned the line forward. The Islanders set off in determined fashion. Trepidation gripped them as they approached the woods. Entry into the north woods had been largely taboo. Few Islanders had ever bothered to find out if the tales of mystery and dread associated with the woods had any foundation. The odd brush with strange phenomena, trees that seemed alive and the screaming of banshees in the wind, was enough to deter most. Now the Islanders began to cautiously probe the woods, the flame from their torches held aloft added a theatrical touch of foreboding to the scene.

Mr O'Mulligan had not wanted to alarm Mrs Barnesfather so had quietly arranged for Mr O'Finn, the abalone diver, to bring his suit to the woods. The worst scenario had to be considered. The lake would need to be searched. Mr Barnesfather was much relieved when Mr O'Finn's search revealed nothing though he had noted the water to be uncommonly warm.

The first major clue was discovered when Mr Barnesfather found Corduroy in the hole in the woods.

"Some sort o' trap by the look of it." concluded Mr O'Mulligan. "At least we know he was here."

Back at the wharf Mr O'Hara, Rory O'Keeffe and Jeb, who had insisted that she accompany them, boarded the *Sea Lion* as Mr O'Mara and the O'Henery brothers worked up a head of steam in the Buddicom. The engine chugged off with Lenny O'Henery hanging from the left of the driver's platform scanning the track and countryside while his brother Kenny did likewise on the right. Mr O'Hara kept the

Buddicom at a slow easy pace as it wound searchingly on its track toward the Magillikuddy factory.

Mr O'Hara steered the *Sea Lion* along at an equally sedate pace. Jeb and Rory scanned the shore with binoculars. The beach, the blowhole and then the rocky outcrops that dotted the waters around Dragonhead Spit revealed nothing. As dusk began to fall Jeb marvelled at the luminous torches inching in a ragged burning line through the woods.

The ocean became considerably choppy as the *Sea Lion* nosed its way around the Spit under the guardianship of the lighthouse that rose up like a red and white checked sentinel marking the geographical eye of the dragon. The cove to the west of the lighthouse was a graveyard of old ships. The masts and rotting bulkheads of some remained visible as a sober reminder to passing traffic of past perils.

Bobbing about in a small rowboat was a lone fisherman. It was Mr O'Keeffe, Rory's father, and he cut an odd sight in an old army coat, fingerless gloves and tattered beanie.

"Ahoy, Mr O'Keeffe." called Mr O'Hara, "Have thee seen a young lad in ye travels by any chance?"

"No time." shouted Mr O'Keeffe.

Mr O'Hara and Jeb looked at Rory for an explanation. Rory looked as equally bamboozled and simply shrugged his shoulders.

"No time for what?" asked Mr O'Hara.

"Travel, o' course. I'm a busy man. Keep the light house don't thee know?"

"Aye, I know. We're looking for a boy. About six." said Mr O'Hara rephrasing the question.

“Is it?” said Mr O’Keeffe with surprise, taking out his watch. “I make it half past the hour, sir. And if I don’t get a bite soon there’ll be no supper tonight.”

Mr O’Hara was clearly not going to get through to Mr O’Keeffe, who as well as being a tad crazy was a bit deaf, too. The *Sea Lion* pulled away and made its way up toward the Magillikuddy factory.

Boom. Boom. Boom.

Three loud explosions in quick succession caused Jeb to swivel around in surprise. “What was that?” she yelled as she saw three fissures of water rising and collapsing around Mr O’Keeffe’s rowboat, which was rocking precariously with Rory’s dad standing stooped with his hands gripping the gun whales for balance.

Rory and Mr O’Hara grinned at each other knowingly.

“Gelignite.” they answered.

“It’s me Da’s preferred method of fishing.” explained Rory.

“I see.” said Jeb as she peered at Mr O’Keeffe through Mr O’Hara’s binoculars. Rory’s father was joyfully fetching the stunned and dead flappers as they floated to the top, whooping deliriously as he fetched each lifeless fish from the water. Jeb was beginning to comprehend the extent of Mr O’Keeffe’s craziness.

The Magillikuddy sisters were used to explosions. They had watched Mr O’Keeffe fishing for years and actually, in fact, quite admired his style. What they were not used to was snooping Islanders, as they saw it, wandering through *their* woods. Nor was there a scheduled delivery or pick up to explain the Buddicom’s sudden appearance at the factory gates.

From their vantage point at the top of the old mansion’s keep they could see the north and south woods. They observed the crowded fusion of light as Mr O’Mulligan’s south wood searchers crossed the bridge and joined their comrades who

had been steadily and more confidently ranging through the north woods toward the factory. No misfortune had befallen anybody and the Islanders were very much relieved when they concluded their search and assembled along the perimeter of the factory. Perhaps the stories about the strange occurrences had been untrue after all they reasoned.

JoJo, however, remained unfound. He had, as far as anyone could tell, simply vanished. He could not have possibly climbed the volcano and so the only logical place left to look concluded Mr O'Mulligan, was the Magillikuddy factory.

"They'll wreck everything." cursed Morgana Magillikuddy from the top of the tower as she observed Mr O'Mulligan impatiently pressing the entrance gate bell. "Of all days, those O'Buffoons pick this one day of the century to come calling."

The 'everything' that Morgana referred to was the lunar solar equinox of the orbiting Black Star of Asimov, a mysterious stellar phenomenon known only to expert dabblers in the black arts. When the Black Star achieved perfect synchronicity along the axis of the sun, earth and moon, those whom had access to the ancient Book of Cordozza could summon, through a special incantation, the energy of the Black Star from which extraordinary supernatural powers could be extracted. With that power it was anyone's guess as to what dastardly deeds might be proscribed by those imbued with its dark energy.

And it had just so happened that the Book of Cordozza had recently come into the possession of the Magillikuddys. Stolen by Mr O'Meara in the early hours of the previous morning and secreted in plain brown wrapping in a crate behind the Witches and Warlock tavern. Needless to say the Magillikuddys were ecstatic when it was handed to them.

That equinox occurred only once every five hundred years and was due to fall at precisely midnight. A special concoction needed to be prepared and then at the given time the potion's visceral powers would be conjured up by the incantation and transmitted and refracted back via the energy pulsating within the Black Star thus imbuing the conjurers with the special power. Thus endowed the possibilities were endless.

Having locked JoJo securely away, the sisters had hurried to the rooftop where a large cauldron was on the boil. The book with its jewel studded leather cover etched with a snake wrapped about a seething dragon lay open upon a gold lectern by the cauldron. Placed carefully about the battlements were all the necessary ingredients required to assist the summoning of the power of Asimov. Curried bat-wings, a dead cat, scraped warts, sun-dried toad and all types of cured manures, herbs, berries, fruits and animal innards and gizzards imaginable. In fact quite a pong reeked within and around the old mansion's keep.

But now the meddling Islanders had poked their unwanted noses into the mix and the sisters were not happy. Morgana stormed furiously down the stairs with Millie stalking crossly after her. Madge remained to stir the pot. The crowd of Islanders, including Mr Barnesfather, stepped back warily from the gates as the two sisters stomped up to it.

“What do you want?” demanded Morgana.

“We are looking for a young lad. Lost he is. About yea big.” replied Mr O'Mulligan stoutly while indicating JoJo's height as being about up to his hip.

Millie whispered in Morgana's ear. “We could give him back. Perhaps then they might nick off.”

Morgana glared at her. “Give him back? You stupid girl. No, no, no.”

She turned back to face Mr O'Mulligan. "He's not here." Morgana snapped tersely.

"All the same Ma'am I'd appreciate it if thee would let us search the grounds and buildings. He may be hiding or lost somewhere unbeknownst to thee".

"Well he's not. Go away. All of you." Morgana glared at everybody through the closed gate. Her look was savage enough to elicit a grumble of disquiet from the Islanders.

Mr O'Mulligan stood his ground resolutely as the Islander's shifted back in the face of Morgana's mounting fury, "Ma'am I really must insist."

"Insist." spat Morgana. "Insist. Do you know *who* you're dealing with? Insist." she repeated contemptuously.

Now, as Morgana's rage began to simmer, she lost control of her bodily functions so to speak. Behaviour she had suppressed for years began to manifest itself. As her temper flared she began to pace up and down, only she was treading on thin air. Hovering and rising as her anger took hold.

"Well you can't have him." she roared. "He's ours."

With that declaration of guilt she mumbled a curse beneath her breath and swept her arm in an arc before her. A shower of sparks erupted along the fence. An array of brilliant colours that made the Islanders gasp while simultaneously ducking for cover. They began to run back to the protection of the woods that proved no sanctuary at all. Another sweep of her arm and the trees came alive with a bellowing and swishing and swooshing of wind, branches and leaves. Islanders began running in all directions, colliding with one another in their endeavours to get away.

Mr O'Toole threw the Buddicom into reverse. The O'Henery brothers fell head over heels from the platform with the sudden jolt. They ran desperately after the

engine as it backed away fast up the hill and out of sight with frightened people clutching desperately to the rails of the driver's platform.

“Go on. Run you cowards, run. I always knew I would have my day. And tomorrow you'll get yours.” laughed Morgana with maniacal glee. “Mark my word you scummy Os the bride of Big Mac lives and I and my daughters will destroy you just as you tried to ruin us all those years ago.”

Those who had not yet retreated and who heard Morgana's diatribe were stunned by the revelation. The Magillikuddys were not sisters at all. They were the wife and daughters of the historically evil Big Mac. It was so obvious really. They were MacKillicuddys not Magillikuddys! They had been living a centuries long deception which the sands of time had hidden from the Islander's modern memory. Now the ill winds of change had rudely swept all aside revealing the true state of things.

Morgana's crooked fingers tingled and she threw a multi-pronged zap attack indiscriminately toward the woods. Ten jagged streams of fizzing light speared into the border of the woods striking at random.

“Owwwwww” roared Mr Barnesfather clutching Corduroy to his chest as he was toppled by an orange curler to the head.

“Aaaaaagh” screamed Mr O'Mulligan jumping high, holding his behind as a searing yellow off-cutter roused him from his hiding place. Other cries of pain and indignation rose from among the trees and bushes as Islanders variously fell victim to the jabbing light attacks. Within minutes a mad panic had gripped all and sundry. Everyone was running hell for leather to the safety of the town.

“Well that settles it.” gasped Mr O'Mulligan to Mr Barnesfather as they matched stride for stride, “They have ye boy.”

Chapter twelve: Escape

While the commotion and pandemonium was unfolding above him, JoJo was left to adjust to his new surroundings. After a fitful outpouring of grief he finally began to investigate his situation. It was quite dark where he had landed after being bundled through the dungeon door. Behind him though, he noticed a soft glow of light through an open doorway. He tentatively moved away from the dungeon door to the opening. Peering around the corner he found himself looking down a corridor. At one end to his left was a dull light coming from what looked like another doorway. To his right the corridor disappeared into claustrophobic blackness from which a strange growling rumble with an asthmatic rattle was audible. JoJo chose to go left.

Quietly creeping down the corridor, hugging the tightly compacted earthen walls as he crept, JoJo peeked around the doorway. He was astonished with what he saw. More little people. Rows and rows of them in crude wooden and wire cages. Some were asleep, their little knees tucked under their chins, on musty straw beds. Some sat with their backs against the bars of the cages. They were like kittens in a pet shop, thought JoJo, only nowhere near as playful. In fact, the wee folk looked utterly miserable.

So racked with misery were they that they didn't even bother to react to JoJo when he stepped into the room. He walked up and down the rows, looking at the doleful eyes that stared blankly back at him. A few of the bolder little people came to the front of their cages to look at him including a stooped old bald one with a crooked walking stick.

“My name is Baldylocks.” said the old man, pointing to his bald as a badger head with a wry smile.

“Hello. I’m JoJo.” responded JoJo remembering to lower his voice while offering his finger to the outstretched hand on offer, “Pleased to meet you. Why are you all locked up?”

“We are prisoners and slaves of the MacKillicuddys.” replied Baldylocks.

“MacKillicuddys! You mean the Magillikuddy’s?” corrected JoJo

“No. The Magillikuddys *are* the MacKillicuddys.” explained Baldylocks.

“Oh. I see” replied JoJo thoughtfully though not really understanding the historical implications of the difference at all. “Why did they catch you?”

“They make us work in the factory. Night and day. Making all their wares. Soap, biscuits, perfumes, creams, oils.”

“Does King Doodledork know you are here? I know him, you know.” said JoJo proudly.

“Doodledork is King!” cried Baldylocks incredulously. “I have been here that long? Doodledork, King! Surely it cannot be. He was but a babe in Queen Bessibelle’s arms when last I saw Glissendorf.” He clasped his bald head in anguish.

“Why don’t you escape?” asked JoJo simply. “And why doesn’t the King come and rescue you?”

The old one shook his head sorrowfully. “Because the MacKillicuddys are too powerful. Neither we nor the King could overpower them. I fear we are about to become even more powerless judging by the pong out there today. They are up to no good, to be sure, up in that tower.” There was a general muttering of consent.

JoJo began to unhook the latches on the cages.

“What are thee doing?” gasped Baldylocks pulling his cage door shut. “Are thee crazy. The MacKillicuddys will kill us for sure if they find us gone.”

“Nonsense. It’s against the law. The police will arrest them if they do.” announced JoJo plainly as he opened the cage again.

A titter of excitement ran through the cages. Wee folk began to climb from their open cages. Perhaps this fearless Islander of unknown origins might be their saviour they thought. JoJo helped many of them down to the floor. It was a long way for a little person to jump after all. At least four feet, which was equivalent to about jumping off the roof of a cottage in real person height JoJo figured.

JoJo was feeling quite excited and important as the wee folk crowded about his feet. “Follow me!” he declared confidently though with no real plan in mind. They followed him to the dungeon door. He tried to open it but with no success. JoJo looked perplexed. He looked down at Baldylocks who was tugging at his trouser legs.

“There’s another door.” said the old one pointing to the darker end of the corridor. “It leads to the factory but...” He hesitated as if fearful of awakening some sleeping giant. “Tis always guarded.”

“Guarded. By who?” asked JoJo.

Baldylocks gulped. “The evil steam monster.”

Now JoJo had heard of many monsters. He knew of squods, dinosaurs, aliens and many other such things. He had never heard of a steam monster.

“Is that like a squod?”

“A squod?” Baldylocks looked confused. “Maybe. Tis huge. Absolutely ginormous. And steam comes out of its mouth, nose and ears.” he added with dramatic *vibrato*.

JoJo was impressed. It didn't sound much like a squid though. Perhaps a cousin, he thought. And a distant one at that. He peered cautiously into the dark. He could hear a rattling rumble of heavy breathing rolling out of the shadows. JoJo gulped and crept a little further forward. The wee folk shuffled nervously behind him. Closer and closer crept JoJo. Louder and louder came the breathing. As the cautious group inched nearer the form of the steam monster took discernible shape.

It was large, sure enough. Little streams of steam and smoke leaked from all its orifices. Yes, all its orifices, which helped explain the putrid sulphurous gassy smell that turned all their noses. A cloud of blue smoke shrouded the doorway in front of which the steam monster lay. It opened a sleepy eye and lifted its jaw from its crossed paws on which its chin was resting. It sniffed and the smoke sucked back down its flared nostrils and out again as it lay its head down. Its skin had a reddish hue to it, as far as JoJo could tell, and was quite scaly. It had little ears and clawed wings that folded in upon its back. A long pointed tail curled about its powerful hind legs and along its resting body.

"It's a dragon." whispered JoJo incredulously. "Wow. That is *so* way cooler than a steam monster."

"Careful. Don't upset it." cautioned someone from the crowd of wee folk.

To tell the truth, the dragon looked entirely incapable of getting upset or of taking any active interest in JoJo or the little people.

"Morgana says it will roast anyone alive if they try to get past it." called another shaking voice.

JoJo thought the dragon looked quite friendly and hardly fearsome at all. Remembering his pocketful of provisions he thrust his hands in his pockets and pulled out a handful of crushed biscuits.

“I wonder if it’s hungry?”

He threw the crumbs toward the dragon. It eyed the offering with caution and then its long forked blue tongue flicked forward, tasting the biscuits and once satisfied it licked them up ravenously. It made a strange whining noise and shifted its considerably large frame toward JoJo. JoJo took out some more crumbs and threw them on the ground. The dragon licked them up and raised its head giving a satisfied shake. Steam and smoke hissed from its long head. It began to butt its snout against JoJo’s pocket. JoJo withdrew some more biscuits and this time let them lie on the palm of his hand. The dragon licked the crumbs clean and JoJo giggled at the sensation of its tongue upon his hand. It felt rough as he imagined a giant cat’s tongue might do.

The fear of the freed Arkadians began to evaporate. This steam monster was nothing to be afraid of. “Just like a big puppy.” JoJo assured them. They began to wander forward for a closer look. As they did the echo of footsteps on the stairs outside resounded through the dungeon.

“Its Madge.” cried somebody. “Quick hide.”

Hide. But where? JoJo looked about in panic. There was nowhere but the shadows. He ran past the dragon and crouched against the wall behind it. There with scores of wee folk he waited hardly daring to breathe. The dungeon door flew open, letting in a burst of light. There framed in the doorway looking particularly frightful was Madge.

Madge turned left and headed for the now empty room. JoJo and the Arkadians cringed as they heard a screech of rage echo back. Madge stalked up the corridor ranting and raving, glaring all about and stopped in front of the dragon.

“You useless lump of scales.” she railed and whacked the dragon over the head with her broomstick. It winced and steam and smoke puffed all around like dust rising from a beaten rug. “You are the most useless guard-dragon I’ve ever had the misfortune to know. Where are they? I can almost smell them.” She again whacked the dragon over the head. It cringed and let out a smoky whimper as it backed away from the door. Its big wriggling behind almost squashed some of the wee folk pressed against the wall as it edged away from Madge.

Madge, whose rage was now building, might have easily found JoJo and the wee folk had she taken a deep breath and calmed down. But no, she preferred anger. These witches were prime examples of subjects lacking emotional intelligence, a concept JoJo’s mother preached but of which he had no idea of what she was talking about. Madge bounced her broom off the dragon’s head one more time for good measure.

“All puff and no fire” she shouted contemptuously. “You’ve never been any good.” The dragon whined. With her broomstick in hand, Madge wildly swung the door open and stomped up the steps flinging open a trapdoor that led onto the factory floor.

In the factory the conveyer belt rattled along where little people dotted the dusty bench-tops packing goods into boxes. At the sight of Madge’s quite ugly head appearing through the trapdoor everyone cast their eyes down and redoubled their efforts. Madge glared at all and sundry but no one was game to look at her. She jumped upon her broom and with a kick-start off the floor lurched into the air. She circled the factory floor drifted through to the warehouse and then dipped low, close to the floor, searching everywhere.

“Come out you little varmits!” she hissed. “You think you can hide from me. Think again.” After a few unsuccessful sweeps of the premises her anger began to swell again. In a fit of white-hot pique she began to roar in circles around the factory.

“You rotten little twerps. I’ll find you.” she was shaking her fists at the workers below who were sweating profusely. “And if I don’t there’s plenty more where you came from...not that it really matters. Soon the power of the Dark Star will be ours.” She began to cackle and shriek defiantly at nobody in particular. Her gnarled fingers were choking the broomstick, which was bending under the pressure. Madge hoicked the broomstick back and shot upward at a sharp angle. Bent low over the stick she zoomed rocket-like straight through the roof into the night. Splinters of wooden tiles showered the amazed Arkadians below. They watched the sparkling fiery wake of her flight path twist off into the night.

JoJo, Baldylocks and the others had followed cautiously up the steps. When Madge finally streaked off into the night they gamely stepped onto the factory floor. And there, waddling behind them, much to the amazement of the on-lookers was the dragon. The toiling Arkadians continued working not sure what to do. Frightened and confused they watched as JoJo and the others wandered along.

“This way” called JoJo as he spied the railway line leading to the main warehouse doors.

“Come on.” called Baldylocks to the workers who were watching incredulously and terrified by the thought that Madge might return any minute. “We’re going home. The JoJo is taking us home.” There was a cheer and suddenly the workers downed their tools and began scrambling down the specially installed miniature ladders to the floor. For the first time that any Arkadian could remember the

Magillikuddy assembly line ground to a halt (really MacKillicuddy, as you know, but for simplicity's sake we shall stick with the former).

It was now quite a crowd, even by big people's standards. Word had spread like wildfire and soon streams of wee folk poured from the various workplaces and thronged about JoJo as he followed the railway tracks to the doors. He contemplated the red and green buttons by the door.

"The green." suggested Baldylocks wisely. JoJo pressed the button. With an electric hum and a rattle and a shake the doors began to slide open automatically. There was a sight to behold. JoJo stood surrounded by the wee folk with the dragon by his side. Stars twinkled and the lights of the town marked the shoreline. He sucked in the cool night air. He would be home soon he thought happily.

Chapter thirteen: A decision

As the hullabaloo at the factory reached its climax, Mr O'Hara and his young crew aboard the *Sea Lion* were diligently chugging along the northern coast searching for JoJo with no luck at all. The light was by then fading fast and so Mr O'Hara decided to pick up speed and hasten home.

As the *Sea Lion* passed by the factory, Jeb, Rory and Mr O'Hara's attention was drawn to an eerie slime green glow rising from the battlements of the old mansion tower.

"Odd." murmured Mr O'Hara, "I've never seen anything like that afore." Even odder was the magical orange, red and yellow streak that suddenly burst into the sky from above the factory like a comet.

"Look." yelled Rory pointing to the sky.

"Is it a bird? Is it a plane?" wondered Jeb.

"No. It's Madge Magillikuddy." stated Mr O'Hara in amazement. "On a broomstick!"

Indeed it was the ugly one so stated and she was powering upward at an increasing rate of knots. Then suddenly she plateaued out and circled wide around the factory and over the ocean. Her ragged outfit flapped in the breeze and cut a classic silhouette against the moon. Madge dipped and swerved in easy movements. The ease with which she rode the night breeze reminded Jeb of the gentle grace of the seals in the water.

The three mariners watched as Madge dived low over the railway track and steered a course toward the town.

“I don’t like the look o’ that.” said Mr O’Hara as he urged the *Sea Lion* forward. Jeb and Rory had given up scanning the coast. It was far too dark to see. They stood close behind Mr O’Hara watching as the water washed back off the ship’s bows. Mr O’Hara had the engine opened to full throttle and it growled in protest.

The Islander’s who had fled before Morgana Magillikuddy’s wrath were now just beginning to emerge in dribs and drabs from the woods and were congregating in a panicked and excited mass in the town square. Mr O’Toole with his passengers had been first back but Morgana’s attack had put extra speed in the Islander’s legs and all were soon united jabbering and shouting as Mr O’Mulligan tried to calm them down. It was no easy task as he himself had the wind right up.

The sight of Madge sweeping in fast and low over the town was not a recipe for calm and considered thought. Seeing the pathetic crowd milling about, Madge dived down among them scattering the screaming mob in all directions. She swerved sharply around the bell tower and scooted over the rooftops and between the narrow gaps of the houses as the Islander’s sought refuge in the safety of their homes. Chasing down any hapless individual or group in her zigzagging flight path Madge let fly with a relentless barrage of zap attacks. People tumbled over one another in a wild and sometimes hilarious scrambling panic as they strived to get away from the variety of sparkling energy balls that fizzed and ricocheted everywhere, deflecting off walls and windows.

“Go on. Run, O’Morons. Run.” she cackled above them.

The *Sea Lion* was plying its uninterrupted way home as Madge wreaked havoc on the terrified Islanders below. She flitted upwards and wheeled about. As she did so, she caught sight of Mr O’Hara, Rory and Jeb looking up at her as their boat nosed

toward the wharf. With a squawk she wrenched her stick sideways and rocketed down toward them.

“Duck.” roared Mr O’Hara. Jeb and Rory obediently dived to the deck and Mr O’Hara threw his burly body over them as a shield. Jeb heard him grunt in pain as a series of star spangled zaps zipped across his shoulders.

Madge whistled close by shaking her fist and shot away in a long turning movement. Mr O’Hara and the children were just getting to their feet when they were violently thrown down again as the *Sea Lion* crashed out of control into the side of the wharf. A loud boom rent the air and Mr O’Hara grimaced as the prow splintered and cracked. Worse still, Madge was hovering threateningly above them. As the boat bounced back off the wharf she accelerated downward and with a sweeping motion of her hand the sea was raised up all around the *Sea Lion*. Like a giant hand a large wave rose from the ocean bed, its thick foaming fingers clawing over the boat and falling upon it with a loud and mighty thump.

“Look out!” yelled Mr O’Hara as he gathered Jeb and Rory in his powerful arms. Madge whooshed by as the wave dumped its weight upon the injured boat. Water and spray washed the deck as Mr O’Hara clung to his young charges. They gripped him tightly in fear of their young lives. Madge flew away into the distance satisfied with her handiwork.

The *Sea Lion* lurched to starboard and back to port. Bubbles rose all around followed by some loud belches and burps. Mr O’Hara now standing in water up to his knees looked ruefully at the children. “Hang on.” he called.

Hang on they did. The water rose as the *Sea Lion* began to sink. Past Mr O’Hara’s knees, past his waist, past his stomach and just as Jeb was beginning to

think she might have to swim, a hollow bump sounded as the hull settled on the sand below and the waterline settled at Mr O'Hara's heaving chest.

Mr O'Hara waded to the side of the boat and hoisted Jeb and Rory onto the wharf.

"There thee go." he said as if nothing untoward had happened. He clambered out and looked at his sunken boat and sighed. "Well who would have thunk it?" He looked at Jeb and Rory who were both dripping wet and shivering half with cold and half with terror. With cold terror one might say.

"We best get thee home and into some dry clothes." said Mr O'Hara as cheerfully as he was able. The three squelched off up the hill, through the town square still crowded with dazed people and on to the cottage. Mr O'Diem's shop door flew open and he hurried after them with a large old dusty leather-bound book tucked under his arm.

"I must see Mr O'Mulligan and Mr O'Duffy immediately. I have terrible news." he gulped as he passed the still squelching threesome.

Jeb, Rory and Mr O'Hara each looked at the other in alarm. Terrible news they thought. What could possibly be more terrible than what had already happened? They hastened after Mr O'Diem as fast as their soggy feet allowed. On up to the cottage they went. *Squelch, squelch, squelch.*

At the cottage Mrs Barnesfather had recovered some of her equilibrium. A herbal draught of crushed lickspittle and kelp prepared by Dr O'Flynn, the Island's physician, had revived her spirits markedly. Her husband and Mr O'Mulligan had explained the recent altercation at the Magillikuddys along with Morgana's admission that JoJo was, indeed, in their witchly clutches.

Mrs Barnesfather was just in the midst of a distressed and agitated motherly tirade as Jeb and the others entered.

“If those evil witches have my JoJo then I’m going right over there to get him back.” she declared defiantly. Jeb thought her mother had never looked so determined in her life. By the look on her face Jeb thought she might be capable of causing some grief too.

“Now, now, Mrs Barnesfather.” cautioned Mr O’Mulligan, “The whole town has just tried to do that and well...errr...has failed.” he added sheepishly remembering his own recent inglorious retreat.

“I don’t care. I am going up there.” countered Mrs Barnesfather refusing to alter her position.

“Perhaps in the morning, when everybody is rested, we can return.” suggested Mr O’Duffy.

“I am afraid that will be too late.” interrupted Mr O’Diem laying the old book open upon the table at a sketch of a diamond star. “I have been studying the stars of late and tonight marks the equinox of Asimov or the Black Star as our ancestors knew it. For those who practise the black arts, it marks a night on which unearthly powers can be summoned when the star passes between the moon and the earth. The power is not eternal and only lasts twenty-four hours but in that time great harm can be done by those who wield it. The great storm and flood that consumed the Island five centuries ago were believed to have been caused by power divined from Asimov. It would seem that the Magillikuddys have designs in that direction. And if they are committed to avenging the disappearance of Big Mac all those years ago, then we, my friends, must stare doom in the face. For as sure as my name is Francis Michael Thomas Mitchell Patrick O’Diem, tomorrow will mark our Doomsday unless we stop them now.”

Horror gripped everybody around the table. What could they do?

“Right then. Who’s coming with me?” said Mrs Barnesfather as she rolled up her sleeves. Mrs O’Brien and the salon ladies looked at Mrs Barnesfather, inspired by her resolve.

“Right on sister.” they shouted as they joined Mrs B at the door. The menfolk looked a little flabbergasted. “Yeah right on Mum.” chimed Jeb, still dripping wet but not caring for the moment as she joined her mother who now bristled and glowered with courageous determination.

“Yes dear. We are right behind you.” smiled Mr Barnesfather putting an arm around both his wife and daughter.

“Aye! That’s the spirit.” roared Mr O’Hara clapping his hands with a squelchy clump. “Thee all hurry on. I’ll meet thee there. I have a plan if I can just find Mr O’Toole.”

Mr Barnesfather nodded and looking at his wife, said with quiet resolve.

“Let’s go get our boy.”

Chapter fourteen: Return to Glissendorf

It was fortunate for JoJo and the Arkadians that other things distracted the Magillikuddys. Ordinarily the trek from the factory to the Magillikuddy's rusting perimeter fence would have been fraught with danger. But not tonight. Now, as things had transpired, Madge was off on a witchly bender terrorising the town while high in the old mansion's keep Morgana and Millie were focussed on stirring in the necessary ghastly ingredients of their potion, muttering incantations under their breath as they did so.

The wee folk flooded down to the fence and easily passed through the gaps and began to run toward the north woods. Glissendorf beckoned. All were free except for JoJo and the dragon.

Try as he might JoJo was simply too big to slip through the fence. And the dragon...well...it had no hope, none at all. JoJo sat down glumly as he watched the wee folk disappearing into the darkness. Baldylocks though, keen as he was to put the Magillikuddy place behind him, was troubled by the sight of JoJo and the dragon stuck behind the fence. He ran back.

JoJo was looking quite anxious. The dragon sat disconsolately by his side, its head bowed with steam and smoke issuing forth in troubled billows.

"We can't get out." wailed JoJo.

"Make it fly." yelled Baldylocks.

“How?” replied JoJo in a bewildered tone. JoJo looked at the pathetic cowed creature by his side. It was like a big dopey puppy he thought. It seemed to have no idea at all about being a dragon.

Baldylocks thought a moment. “We’ll ride it over the fence.” JoJo looked doubtful. This dragon did not look like the flying type. And then there was the small and troubling fact that JoJo had never ridden a dragon before. He could not even ride a bicycle. But then, he thought, perhaps riding a dragon was easier than riding a bike.

Baldylocks tried several times unsuccessfully to climb onto the dragon’s neck before JoJo finally grabbed him by the collar and placed him high upon the dragon’s neck. Baldylocks clung to two little knobby giraffe like horns that protruded from the dragon’s scaly cranium.

“Come on. Hop on.” shouted Baldylocks. JoJo climbed onto the dragon’s shoulders settling awkwardly between its wings and gripping its neck tightly. The dragon was very bumpy and not at all pleasant to sit on. JoJo couldn’t seem to get his bottom comfortable.

“How do we start it?” asked JoJo.

“Hit it.” responded Baldylocks.

JoJo did not particularly like that plan. He thought the dragon had probably been hit enough by the Magillikuddys. As he was contemplating how to move the listless griffin, Madge cruised in over the fence returning from her short tempest of terror. She did not bother to look down, instead gliding to the keep where her mother and sister were busy concocting their special potion.

At that moment the dragon looked up and at the sight of Madge took fright. It began to snort and stamp making low guttural whining noises. JoJo and Baldylocks battled to stay aboard as its back rose and fell. Steam and smoke billowed everywhere

and both would be riders began to cough trying to wave the vapours from their stinging eyes. The dragon lifted its head and looked at the fence. It began a ponderous rolling gallop, if it could really be called such, gradually picking up speed a little beyond walking pace. Its wings suddenly extended and they began to beat in a furious uncoordinated up and down motion. JoJo swayed from side to side his bottom raked painfully by the dragon's leathery scales. Baldylocks shut his eyes.

Closer and closer loomed the fence. Each pounding step of the dragon's massive hindquarter legs reverberated through JoJo's bottom. So ungainly was the creature that observers might have likened its take-off attempt to that of an albatross. Just as JoJo despaired at the prospect of crashing into the fence the dragon rose up. Air gushed all around its giant frame and it cleared the fence by inches. But that was it. It was more a jump than a fly and as quickly as it rose, it fell. Its nose ploughed into the ground and its body bunched up behind like a concertina as it belly slid toward the woods pitching JoJo and Baldylocks over its head. They tumbled heavily to the ground as the dragon stopped. A dark furrow of freshly ploughed dirt marked its landing path.

"We did it. We did it." cried Baldylocks delightedly, "We flew." JoJo was relieved and the dragon looked rather pleased with itself. JoJo patted it affectionately on the head.

"Good dragon. We knew you could do it."

With that, the three unlikely companions set forth into the woods. It was quite dark and JoJo was most apprehensive. The woods had not provided him with many happy experiences thus far.

"I wish we had a torch." he said.

Now came a point where wishes seemed to come true. It wasn't that the dragon was a wish dragon but something within it was beginning to stir. Whether it was the excitement of the moment, whether it was the thought of being freed from the Magillikuddy's or whether it was just a matter of self-confidence neither JoJo nor Baldylocks could tell. The dragon's belly was beginning to glow. Like a huge red and orange lantern it began to illuminate the forest around them. Wisps of fire began to lick outward amidst the steam and smoke. The dragon seemed to be walking taller and with a swagger in its step. It was as if it had found its dragoness at last.

By the light of the dragon JoJo could see numbers of the wee folk searching about, individually and in small groups in the underbrush, peering under leaves, prodding at the ground and looking behind trees.

"What are they doing?" asked JoJo.

"Looking for the way home." answered Baldylocks. "They are trying to find the old paths and burrows."

"Ohh. I know how they can get home." said JoJo.

"Thee do!" Baldylocks was both astounded and excited by JoJo's revelation.

"Yes. In the hole in the ground where I met King Doodledork."

"Thee must show us, at once." urged his bald little companion. Baldylocks stopped and halloed to all the Arkadians nearby. "The JoJo will show us the way home." There was a cheer and soon JoJo was surrounded again by excited little people.

Of course, JoJo being only six and a very tired six at that was not necessarily at his directional best. He tried to think of what Jeb had told him. If the volcano was up then the cottage was down or some such thing. It seemed easy enough. The

procession wound aimlessly through the north woods and over the bridge to the south woods.

“Are we close?” asked Baldylocks.

“Um. I think so.” said JoJo uncertainly. He remembered the bridge but that was before the picnic. So exactly which way he really couldn’t tell. The more he thought about it the more he became confused.

“Where is the hole?” asked Baldylocks impatiently. “Is it in the woods?”

“Oh no. It was on the side of the hill. Not in the woods.”

“Then it is up. This way.” called Baldylocks to his compatriots. He turned left off the bridge and the procession of little people, JoJo and dragon followed. Soon the whole crowd was clear of the south woods and the lip of the volcano appeared as a dark line in the night above them.

“Is it here? Is it there? Or over there?” asked Baldylocks pointing all around. JoJo scratched his head.

“It’s somewhere here.” he declared without shedding any light on the matter at all. If JoJo was operating in a metaphorical darkness, at least the dragon was casting some real light on proceedings. As it ambled along the hillside it lit up the surrounding landscape and suddenly for all to see there appeared a relatively fresh looking crater in the hill.

“That’s it!” cried JoJo triumphantly. Baldylocks and a number of other Arkadians dropped into the hole searching for an entry point. They began to dig with their little hands but made little headway.

“Are you sure this is it?” shouted Baldylocks from the hole. JoJo nodded. “Its no use we need tools.” said Baldylocks wistfully.

Having watched the little people at work the dragon thought it might be fun to join them. It crawled into the crater. The little people scrambled out mindful of being crushed or roasted alive. With a lot of hissing and puffing the dragon began scrabbling with its front claws at the side of the hole. Dirt, smoke and steam rose up from the crater. Then the dragon's head disappeared from sight only to rise up again, its snout covered in soil. Baldylocks looked into the hole where a dragon's head size hole had been bored into the cavern below. A dull light shone from within.

Baldylocks and the others tentatively crowded through the hole. They found themselves on the ledge that JoJo had looked at upside down a few days beforehand.

"This way." called Baldylocks motioning for the others to follow. The intrepid first bunch of Arkadians swelled to a horde as they crept along the ledge with hearts in mouth. Baldylocks came to the end of the ledge where it ran down into a larger cavern. His eyes filled with tears as emotion overwhelmed him. There below lay Glissendorf. The walls were honeycombed with the cave dwellings of its citizens and the majestic rock palace of the royal family was set high among them.

Baldylocks and his fellow Arkadians whooped and cheered as they ran joyously toward their old homes. The Arkadian guard stirred alarmed at the sudden rush. The Arkadian citizenry, too, rushed to see what the commotion was about. Soon friends and long lost relatives recognised their missing kith and kin and joined in a tumultuous and rapturous reunion. An excitement as had never been known before overtook the place.

King Doodledork demanded to know what all the noise was and finally Baldylocks was ushered before the King to explain. After a long and excited recounting of events Baldylocks finally concluded.

"And ye most majestic majesty we owe our escape all to the JoJo."

King Doodledork stroked his beard thoughtfully. “This JoJo. It is the same JoJo that I have met?”

“Yes.” confirmed Baldylocks. “It told us of its meeting with ye royal highness.”

“Then we must award it with the *Croix de Arkadia* in honour of its heroism. Where is this JoJo now?”

Baldylocks looked back over the throng of Arkadians from whence they had come. JoJo and the dragon were nowhere to be seen.

“I do not know Sire. I do not know.”

As the last of the wee folk had disappeared into the hole the dragon had tried to follow. Of course being so big it had made little headway. In fact after sticking its head and neck through the cavity, the dragon had become hopelessly stuck. No matter how much it wiggled and waggled, its head simply refused to budge. It became quite frustrated and its wings beat in heavy fed-up flaps. JoJo tried to assist by climbing onto its back and wrapping his muscle less arms around the creature’s neck.

“Come on. You can do it.” he urged.

Eventually the dragon did do it. The frustrated creature pulled its head free with such force that it tumbled backwards and JoJo nearly fell from its shoulders. Snorting and huffing the dragon climbed from the crater covered in dirt. It began to stomp about in erratic circles flapping its wings trying to shake the dirt from itself. It looked much like an overgrown strutting rooster and JoJo clung to it firmly so that he did not fall from his precarious perch.

Then JoJo felt the strangest sensation. He suddenly felt as if he was floating. He looked down and much to his surprise saw the dragon’s taloned feet dangling below its glowing belly rising higher and higher. With all its huffing, puffing,

stomping and flapping, the dragon had found its wings. It floated higher and higher and, in truth, it was as surprised as its young passenger.

Soon the mouth of the crater passed them by as they rose higher still. JoJo looked over the woods and could see the torchlights of his mother's search party wending their way toward the Magillikuddy factory. Far off he heard the whistle of the Buddicom and its solitary yellow headlight cutting through the dark. At the Magillikuddy's a bright slime green translucent light was issuing upward from the tower. In the sky above the Black Star shone brightly seeming to pulse with rippling energy. The importance of none of these things did JoJo understand. It was just what he saw.

As the dragon rose higher it began to test its ability. Extending and folding its wings at various angles it found it could turn and dive. It began to glide in circles over the volcano and then swooped down around the lighthouse. The blue beam of the lighthouse gave a ghostly look to the creature as it passed through.

"Begorrah!" uttered Mr O'Keeffe as the dragon and boy sailed by his window. He took out his fob watch and tapped it to loosen the stuck second hand.

"Tis way past that lad's bedtime." he muttered.

Mr O'Keeffe was quite correct too. JoJo was up way past his bedtime and his eyelids were sagging in a telltale sign. The dragon was tired as well. It wheeled back toward the mountain and landed on the lower lid of the Eye of Cyclops. There looking down upon the lighthouse and the wrecks in Shipwreck Cove it settled down to sleep. Unable to keep his own eyes open JoJo slid off the dragon's back and snuggled in next to its warm belly, oblivious to the dramatic scenes unfolding on the other side of the mountain.

Chapter fifteen: To the rescue

As the Barnesfathers, Mr O'Mulligan, Mr O'Duffy, Mr O'Diem, Mrs O'Brien and the salon ladies set off into the woods toward the Magillikuddy factory, Mr O'Hara set off in search of Mr O'Toole. Jeb and Rory had wanted to accompany either expedition but were told in no uncertain terms to remain behind.

"It will be too dangerous for children." they were told. Both protested that this was unfair but Jeb's parents were insistent and so Jeb and Rory remained behind. They changed out of their wet clothes. Rory borrowed a pair of jeans and t-shirt from Jeb which though nice and dry were rather too small. Jeb laughed and Rory glared at her. He was not impressed with having to wear girls' clothes let alone clothes a size or two too small.

Mr O'Hara jogged down the hill to the wharf where he salvaged *Matilda* from his beloved *Sea Lion*. He found Mr O'Toole sitting disconsolately by the Buddicom quite overcome by events.

"Quick Mr O'Toole. We must fire up the engine and get back to the Magillikuddy's factory."

"Back!" said Mr O'Toole disbelievingly. "Back! Thee must be crazy."

"I'll explain on the way." shouted Mr O'Hara as he jumped upon the driver's platform. He grabbed an armful of wood and tossed it into the Buddicom's furnace.

"How fast can she go, Mr O'Toole?"

"Oh they say up to fifty miles per hour but there has never been a call for such high speed on this short run." replied Mr O'Toole as he climbed aboard to assist his friend.

“Then tonight’s the night.” said Mr O’Hara grimly.

While Mr O’Hara and Mr O’Toole worked up a head of steam to start the engine forward the Barnesfather’s and others were hurrying through the woods. It was with great apprehension that they left the cover of the woods and approached the factory gates. They were locked as usual. The intrepid party began to scout the perimeter looking for a way in. They attempted to climb the razor sharp pronged fence but it proved beyond them.

“It’s no use.” despaired Mr Barnesfather as all regrouped at the gates after a fruitless search. “We will have to wait for Mr O’Hara.”

“Well he better hurry because that can’t be a good sign.” said Mr O’Diem pointing to the tower.

The tower offered a truly amazing and terrifying sight. Morgana and Millie having been joined by Madge had completed their stirring and the last of the special ingredients had been placed in the cauldron. They formed a triangulation of witchery around the boiling pot.

“The time is nigh.” announced Morgana. “Are you ready girls?”

Madge and Millie nodded and the three raised their broomsticks high above the cauldron joining in a tepee-like cross section over the bubbling concoction. They and the entire keep were now bathed in the eerie green light. As the broomsticks connected a laser of white light shot from the heavens where hung the Black Star. The band of light coiled like an electric serpent around the sticks and began to entwine the arms of the three witches. Their horrid bodies began to shake and their eyes rolled into the back of their heads as they chanted an ancient rhyme in unison, over and over.

Wah Roon Gah

Bor Num Birr

Guli Bun Jay

The tower was engulfed in a swirl of greenish yellow and pinkish purple mist. The Magillikuddys seemed to enter into a unified violent epileptic fit as the white light coursed through their bodies.

“We must stop them!” yelled Mr O’Diem fearfully. At that moment the yellow beam of the Buddicom’s lantern flashed over the slope behind them. The engine with Mr O’Hara and Mr O’Toole toiling manfully upon the driver’s platform was rattling along at a pace it had never known. At times its wheels seemed to lift from the rails. It rumbled over the hill and began to gather more speed down the slope. Mr O’Toole waved everyone off the tracks and away from the gates as the engine bore down in a mad rush.

“Hold on!” shouted Mr O’Hara as they rattled on. The rails literally bent beneath them but now there was no question of stopping. The engine crashed into the factory gates, which burst open with a loud snap and clang of metal on metal. The gates were smashed and torn from the hinges as the engine crashed through. Mr O’Hara and Mr O’Toole crouched low upon the driver’s platform and were lucky not to be decapitated. Nor were they finished. On surged the engine. Through the open warehouse door it hurtled where it plunged off the tracks into the machinery and stacked goods within. The two men jumped clear. On went the engine tipping to one side as it cleaved through two of the factory’s main supporting pillars.

A sickening slow creaking split began to tear the air. Mr O’Hara and Mr O’Toole looked at one other.

“Are you thinking what I’m thinking.” asked Mr O’Hara. Mr O’Toole nodded.

“Run!” each shouted to the other. They scrambled to their feet and bolted at high speed from the warehouse.

Those watching at the wrecked gate saw two figures running madly from the warehouse. An explosion and ball of flame mixed with black and grey smoke erupted out of the doorway as Mr O'Hara and Mr O'Toole dived forward in a seemingly perfectly staged Hollywood dive and tumble to safety. The only thing missing was the slow motion. Behind them the factory collapsed in an ear splitting crash of old timbers and bricks. The Buddicom and *Matilda* were lost. As the dust and smoke settled the Magillikuddy factory, which had stood for hundreds of years, appeared now as a mess of debris. Everything tumbled to the ground, everything except the tower that remained stout and untouched rising defiantly above the chaos.

“Quick.” urged Mr O'Diem as he hurried to assist his recumbent friends. “We must hurry. There is not a minute to spare.”

So saying he rushed past Mr O'Hara and Mr O'Toole and clambered over the debris to where the tower's stairwell door was blocked by the rubble. He began clawing away at the collapsed remains trying to clear a path so that they might reach the Magillikuddys and stop whatever evil they were conspiring to unleash. The others quickly joined them with Mr O'Hara tossing aside the broken beams as if they were matchsticks. As they worked the greenish yellow and pinkish purple mist mixed with the smoke and dust enveloped them and wound around the tower. It was as if they were working in a freakishly coloured London fog. Their skins tingled as if warmed and charged by a special electricity in the air.

As they worked the trilogy of terror chanted oblivious to all that had fallen about them, in a swaying reverie drinking in the power that flowed into them.

In little time the party below had cleared the doorway. Mr O'Hara seized a long broken rafter and tested its weight with his powerful hands.

“Tis not bad.” he said quietly. “Tis no *Matilda* but tis not bad just the same.”

He drew his shoulders back and slammed the club against the heavy oak door. It burst open releasing the foulest of smells and a brilliantly bright green light. None knew whether to cover their eyes or noses. Mr O’Hara peered up the narrow winding stone staircase.

“Come on.” he called.

The others drew a deep breath and began to follow. What appeared an easier enough climb proved exceedingly difficult. As the anxious group pushed up the steps they felt as if a huge weight was pressing down upon them. It was as if some massive gravitational force was resisting them. A high wind howled and shrieked racing in mad gushes about the tower whistling up and down the stairway. The mists continued to swirl and bad odours wafted all around.

Mr O’Hara was sweating profusely such was the pressure. Eventually he, the Island’s modern Goliath was sapped of strength and he slumped exhausted half way up by the tower’s only window. There he could look out upon the ocean where the outline of Witches Hat Rock jutting pointedly from the sea caught his eye. He did a quick double take. There upon the rock a young woman with a slender body stood proud and erect with her arms stretched high above her head as if beckoning to the heavens. Her head was tilted back and her long hair flowed loosely behind her in the ocean breeze.

“Who is that?” queried Mr O’Mulligan who had managed to battle on up the steps ahead of the others.

“I don’t know.” said Mr O’Hara “But let’s hope she be on our side.”

Stuck in the tower as they were Mr O’Hara and his companions could not see what was transpiring above them. There, atop of the keep, the Magillikuddys were

glowing with the power of the Black Star as they gorged upon its energy. Suddenly the intensity of the light began to dim. The whites of Morgana's eyes rolled back down revealing her beady sinister black eyeballs. She glowered out to sea. Not daring to loosen her grip on her broomstick she caught sight of the youthful figure upon the rock.

The band of light entwining the Maglikuddy's broomsticks began to bend and wobble in a distended bow. Morgana closed her eyes and redoubled her chanting as she saw the beam inching toward the young woman. It was the Princess, drawing on the inherited powers of her shaman father, defiantly acting as a counterpoint to the Maglikuddy's evil intent. Chanting louder the three witches tried to resist the hijacking interloper's efforts. Try as they did the witches had to own defeat. The critical moment had come and gone. The beam suddenly unravelled and was pulled from their crossed broomsticks. The mists about the tower gushed skyward into nothingness. Mrs Barnesfather rushed past Mr O'Hara on the stairs and led her companions clattering up to the top of the keep.

Morgana was appalled. Madge and Millie were equally astounded as they observed the precious light beam shift over the Princess. Her body glistened and shone as the Black Star's power wrapped itself around her. The ocean drew up around Witches Hat Rock like a curtain as she was drawn up into the beam. Then with her arms straight and outstretched, hovering over the ocean, her head stiffened and she stared at the tower with blazing green eyes. Her body was a dazzling supernatural white. Slowly she brought her hands together pointing them at the tower.

"Hell and damnation." cursed Morgana as she watched the building orb of power forming around the woman's hands.

“Meddlers.” screeched Madge as Mrs Barnesfather burst on to the keep with the others jam-packed behind her, freed by the easing of the gravitational force within the stairwell.

“Where’s my boy?” shrieked Mrs Barnesfather with equal hostility.

“Hooley Dooley.” uttered Mr O’Diem pointing out to the shimmering form hovering above the ocean.

A meteor-like fireball streaked toward the tower straight and true as a guided missile. It pierced the thick stone walls passing like a hot knife through butter out the other side. From there it shot upward and curled around high above the gaping occupants. Down it spiralled in a screaming whoosh toward the gathered mass on top of the keep.

“Let’s get out of here.” commanded Morgana to her offspring. The broomsticks flew into their hands and they swung aboard as the fireball rocketed down.

“Not so fast.” yelled Mr Barnesfather as he grabbed Morgana’s broomstick low down by the brush end.

“Down the stairs.” roared Mr O’Hara as he spread his arms and bulldozed his friends toward the stairway. They tumbled and fell all the way down in a scrambling tight mass as the fireball exploded into the cauldron. A hissing fissure of boiling slime shot upwards and cascaded a myriad of bits ‘n’ pieces of gizzards and such like over the battlements. Chunks of the shattered blackened pot whizzed all around in a dangerous hail of ricocheting shrapnel.

The shock wave of the explosion blasted the Magillikuddys in an uncontrollable cart wheeling tumble clear of the tower. Mr Barnesfather was barely able to maintain his grip as his weight dragged Morgana downward.

“Let go.” she hissed beating at his hands as she tried to gain height. Each time she rapped Mr Barnesfather’s knuckles he would let go and hold on with the other hand. So doing he swayed precariously from one side to the other. At times his feet scraped the ground below and then the water as Morgana jolted her stick this way and that trying to rid herself of her encumbrance. To make things even more uncomfortable, Madge and Millie ducked and dived behind their mother kicking at her dangling cargo as they buffeted into Mr Barnesfather’s sides. Still he refused to let go.

Mrs Barnesfather, now safe on the ground by the damaged keep with the rescuing party, watched her husband disappear to the east toward Dragonhead Spit boldly carried away as no man had been before.

“No doubt about it. Ye husband is an interesting and remarkable man.” uttered Mr O’Hara solemnly to a further shocked Mrs Barnesfather.

Chapter sixteen: Kidnapped

Although initially upset at not being allowed to accompany the adults, Jeb and Rory were soon quite content that they had not. Both were exhausted by the night's travails and their stomachs groaned with hunger. Jeb prepared a drink of hot chocolate and grumbled about JoJo having taken the last of the biscuits.

"You can sleep in the top bunk." Jeb told Rory. He smiled as he sipped his chocolate.

"You're quite nice for a girl." he said.

"Oh really," huffed Jeb not quite knowing how to take the comment. It was nice that Rory thought she was quite nice but she was a little chagrined at the 'for a girl' aspect. What was wrong with girls? Just typical of a boy, she thought, though she did think Rory was quite nice for a boy. She was about to ask him just what he meant when a loud banging issued forth from the back door.

"They must have forgotten something." said Rory getting to his feet. He ran to the door and opened it. Jeb, watching from the kitchen table, gave a start. Mr O'Meara, dark and imposing, grabbed Rory with a claw like grip upon his shoulder and pushed him roughly back into the kitchen as he stepped into the house. He carried an old fashioned blunderbuss in his other hand.

"Well isn't this nice." he snarled. "Two pipsqueaks home alone." He raised the gun with its gleaming brass barrel, cradling it in his fingers and stumpy thumbs, pointing it threateningly at the children. Rory stood protectively in front of Jeb.

“Tis okay Jane.” he said bravely confronting Mr O’Meara, “What do thee want?”

“I do want.” laughed Mr O’Meara. “I want the gold.” he said in a slow, cold deliberate voice, “And thee little urchins are going to show me exactly where ‘tis.”

Rory crossed his arms. “And what makes thee so sure we know where ‘tis.” he said a little imperiously.

“Call it a hunch.” sneered Mr O’Meara.

“We shan’t tell you a thing.” interjected Jeb.

“No and thee can’t make us.” added Rory.

“Really.” replied Mr O’Meara as a sly and evil grin curled his top lip and made his black eyes shine. “We’ll see about that.”

KA-BOOM!

Smoke and flame erupted from the antique weapon. Cups and saucers on the shelf behind exploded into splinters of enamel and wood from the cabinet that held them. Jeb and Rory clutched each other in an embrace of terror.

“Now,” reasoned Mr O’Meara “the next one is reserved for little Missy so let’s not be silly.” He tilted his head toward the door and poked Jeb and Rory into motion with the still smoking barrel.

Mr O’Meara had taken his opportunity. While Mr O’Hara and Mr O’Toole were stoking the Buddicom and while the others with Jeb’s parents had set off in search of JoJo and with the rest of the town still hiding after Madge’s attack, Mr O’Meara had moved on the unprotected children.

Jeb and Rory trudged miserably along with their scurrilous kidnapper prodding them forward, past the village green, down to the beach, over the rocks and up past the blowhole. It was a particularly scary passage as no one had brought a torch

and Rory groped cautiously in front of them. Jeb could feel the water washing over the rocks and dampening the floor of the entrance. She was no expert of the tides but knew enough to realise the tide was rising. They could belly crawl in but once in they would soon be trapped; and trapped with a madman at that.

Mr O'Meara forced Jeb to go first and then he followed grunting as his larger frame struggled with the paucity of space. A limbo dancer he most certainly was not. Rory, of course, had to follow.

On they ventured with Rory in the lead. Mr O'Meara was only barely able to negotiate the tunnel through which they had to pass. When they emerged into the cavern with the stalactites, stalagmites and lava pools, the grandeur of the place seemed lost on Mr O'Meara. He was wet and his clothes torn. He was not in the most pleasant of moods as he pushed Rory roughly ahead of him.

“Hurry up boy.”

Jeb was struggling to keep up as they hastened down the causeway of the cavern. Presently they came to the rock face with the slit entrance through which Rory and Jeb had squeezed previously.

“Tis through here.” announced Rory somewhat triumphantly knowing that Mr O'Meara would never be able to get through. Mr O'Meara tried once but the gap was simply not man-size.

“Alright boy, thee go in and get me the gold. The girl stays here. Insurance, if thee know what I mean.” he said coldly narrowing his eyes as he looked at Rory.

“Understand me boy?”

Rory understood all right and cursed silently to himself that he could not help Jeb. But when the moment came, he promised, he would make Mr O'Meara pay. Jeb sat quietly as Rory slipped out of sight. Some minutes later, perhaps five, perhaps ten,

he reappeared and opened his hand. It contained a sample of the riches that lay beyond. Mr O'Meara took the doubloons his black eyes wide and shining and a smirk of evil triumph and delight spread over his face.

“There is more of this boy?”

Rory nodded.

“How much more?”

“Box loads.” replied Rory.

Mr O'Meara thought on it a few moments trying to think how he could best secure the treasure. “Go on boy. Get back in there. And fill all ye pockets too.” he snapped as he tried to find a solution.

Rory slid out of sight. It was a slow process and Mr O'Meara was becoming savagely impatient. He turned to Jeb and pointing with the blunderbuss at the opening directed her toward it.

“Go and help him. And no funny business.” he wagged the gun menacingly, “Or else.”

Jeb's legs were trembling as she edged her way into the hidden cove. She wondered what on earth was going to happen to them. Rory had just finished stuffing his pockets or rather Jeb's jean pockets with precious stones when he saw Jeb picking her way over the rocks toward him.

“What are thee doing here?” he asked.

“He said I had to help you and no funny business or else.” replied Jeb barely able to hide the nervousness in her voice.

“Aye. No funny business. Well we'll see about that.” said Rory defiantly.

“Jane as long as he is on that side and we are on this he can't touch us. All we need to do is find a way out.”

Jeb looked around. No obvious avenues suggested themselves. Rory, too, was mulling over possibilities.

“Remember the silver seal, Jane?”

Jeb smiled, “Of course.” How could she not? It was one of the most wondrous things she had ever seen.

“Well there must be a cave or tunnel or something below the lagoon. The silver seal must get to the ocean somehow. If we can find it then maybe we could swim out.”

Rory’s logic made sense but the possibility of finding such a place in the dark and then not knowing how far they would need to swim or hold their breath made it an unlikely one. Jeb figured she would most certainly drown attempting such a breathtaking escape. As the two stood pondering their options the blue beam of the lighthouse passed by the Eye of Cyclops briefly illuminating the lagoon.

“What about there?” exclaimed Jeb pointing high above the lagoon to where the gap of the eye opened onto the mountainside.

“Aye, o’ course.” responded Rory with equal enthusiasm. “If we can get up there then me Da is sure to see us...eventually.” Rory’s confidence wilted a tad as he reflected on his father’s not so sane mind.

The two escapees scanned the high walls looking for a way up. Between the intermittent strobe-like passes of the lighthouse beam they were able to make out the existence of a narrow ledge that finished high in the corner of the wall separating the lagoon from the cavern. The reddish orange glow of the lava pools radiated through a sizeable gap where the ledge ended. Where the rock face fell away to the ground was very steep though not so steep to prevent a careful climber making his or her way to it by the prudent selection of foot and hand holds. Rory and Jeb agreed to make the

effort using the light of the passing lighthouse beam to discover appropriate footholds as they climbed. It was a slow and risky process but it seemed to be the only way.

As they began to climb they could hear Mr O'Meara's voice raging through the slit.

"I said no funny business thee rotten little scoundrels. Get back here or else!"

At the sound of his voice Jeb and Rory moved quickly to begin their ascent. Pained by his stupidity and enraged by the children's trickery, Mr O'Meara began to look for an alternative route. He too spied the gap in the top corner of the rock face that petitioned the lagoon from the cavern in which he stood. And he too began to climb, the light from the lava pools being far more generous than the strobing lighthouse beam.

Jeb and Rory, of course, were not to know of Mr O'Meara's ascent or he of theirs. It was with mutual surprise that the two parties came face to face through the gap as they clambered onto their respective ledges. Jeb balked with fright and loose stones fell from the edge of the ledge as Rory steadied her.

"Quick this way." urged Rory. He gripped Jeb's arm tightly as they inched toward the Eye of Cyclops. Mr O'Meara swore unintelligibly as he scraped his head ducking through the gap.

It happened that sometime before, unbeknown to Jeb or Rory who were unable to see from below, the dragon with JoJo aboard had alighted in the Eye of Cyclops. They were snuggled down in a fitful slumber when Jeb and Rory edged onto the ledge.

"JoJo." squealed Jeb with unrestrained delight.

JoJo opened a sleepy eye. Seeing his sister, he thought, *Great. I'm having a nightmare.*

Jeb was no nightmare and she hugged her brother who reciprocated half in kind, not being a particularly huggy sort of fellow. The dragon opened its eyes and with a tired snort hissed steam and smoke all about.

The dragon's belly began to heave and brighten. Jeb and Rory gasped, first at the sight of the dragon and then at the sight of its fiery pulsating stomach.

"Its okay he's quite friendly." JoJo assured them.

Jeb and Rory sighed with relief. And then Mr O'Meara appeared.

"Well, well, well...what have we here then." he sneered. The dragon shifted and snarled as the children backed away from their unwelcome guest toward the outer ledge. On one side was the lagoon with the remains of the Spanish galleon and on the other the littered hulks of Shipwreck Cove and the rocks beneath it. Both promised a skewering or splattering of sorts for the children should they fall. There was no question about it. This time, thought Jeb, they were well and truly trapped.

Chapter seventeen: Redemption

Jeb, JoJo and Rory's days looked numbered. They backed slowly away from Mr O'Meara and pressed up against the dragon, which was only half-awake, and of little help.

"Scared?" asked Mr O'Meara though not really expecting a response. "Well thee ought to be. I'm thinking I might throw thee over one by one. Aye, but who to begin with." he mused with malevolent menace. A cold wave of fear swept over the children, the sort that begins at the top of the skull, as if a cold clammy hand has injected a fear serum that washes through the body right down to the toes. All three shuddered as their short lives flashed before them.

"O'Meara!" called Rory dropping the civil politeness so practised on the Island. Mr O'Meara had forfeited the right to be called mister. He was no gentleman. "Look down behind thee. There's ye treasure."

Rory's desperate ploy worked. O'Meara stopped and turned away to look down to the lagoon. As the lighthouse beam passed again he caught a glimpse of the marvellous treasures strewn over the beach below. His eyes widened and he clapped his hands upon his knees with glee and laughed heartily.

"Mine. Tis all mine." he gloated.

The children, though thankful of this short respite, were still at a loss as to what might happen next. The answer to that question soon came sweeping round the mountain. Jeb and JoJo could barely believe their eyes as they saw their father pass in a jumbled mass of arms, legs and broomsticks under the lighthouse. Mr Barnesfather

was hanging on determinedly to Morgana Magillikuddy's broomstick while battling gamely to ward off the flailing punches and kicks of the pursuing Madge and Millie.

"Begorra. Folks are up late these days." stated Mr O'Keeffe with a miffed shake of his head as he sipped a late night early morning cup of tea while watching the Magillikuddy's and Mr Barnesfather pass by his window.

Morgana, still weighed down by her unwanted passenger, was struggling to get the height and momentum she desired. A sudden gust of wind lifted her skirt and broomstick and she accelerated around the lighthouse toward the mountain. Her evil mind had decided to try and dash her cargo against the mountain's rocky face. With the aid of the wind she was able to gain some elevation and speed. By now, nearly blind with rage, Morgana took the Eye of Cyclops as her point of aim. As Morgana hurtled toward the mountain she wrenched her stick sharply to the right. Mr Barnesfather, still swinging with the forward momentum, crashed into the rock-face above the Eye. He slid like a flattened cartoon character down the rocks and onto the ledge where he lay motionless. Jeb and JoJo looked down at their father, who although breathing, had the distinct look of a stunned mullet about him. He gradually came to his senses and sat up.

"Where am I?" he murmured looking around with surprise at the dragon. On a night of broomstick rides and witch attacks he was not as surprised by the sight of a fire breathing behemoth as he might otherwise have been.

The appearance of the Magillikuddys had a number of unforeseen effects. The first was that it stymied, momentarily at least, Mr O'Meara's attention on the children as he too watched the witches struggle to rid themselves of Mr Barnesfather's presence.

The dragon was also transfixed. Its eyes narrowed and somewhere deep within its pea-sized brain the shrieking of the Magillikuddys stirred a deep resentment. It rose suddenly letting out an angry snort as if remembering the years of abuse it had suffered at their hands. Flames licked out from its flared nostrils and mouth. It stretched its wings and with its powerful hind-legs launched itself from the ledge into the air, its belly a burning fiery furnace of red. Its tail uncoiled and swept the feet of all upon the ledge from under them. All plummeted screaming from the ledge toward an unknown fate below. As Jeb and JoJo fell their father grabbed them and drew them tightly to him.

“I’ve got you.” he declared protectively without any idea what he might do beyond hang on. In those precious moments it was all Jeb and JoJo needed to hear. They clung tightly to their father. They struck the water with a stinging thump. The Barnesfather’s emerged coughing and spluttering from the cold water. Mr Barnesfather gasped breathlessly as he struggled to keep Jeb’s and JoJo’s head above water.

Rory, who was a strong swimmer, had struck out for the shore immediately. Mr O’Meara had gashed his head upon some submerged rocks and resurfaced disoriented and bleeding. He managed to grasp the protruding yardarm of a sunken wreck to stay afloat.

Mr Barnesfather, who was not a strong swimmer, was floundering. Jeb and JoJo were coughing up salt water from their mouths as they tried to gulp down the night air. Their father was sinking as he struggled to keep his children afloat. Air bubbles streamed from his mouth as a last gasp issued from his exploding lungs.

Just as Mr Barnesfather was making his peace he felt his body rise up and break the surface. Then down he began to sink again. Yet, lo and behold, up he surged

once more. He held Jeb and JoJo tightly in his aching arms wondering at the force behind this timely rescue. He looked over his shoulder and there rising from the water was a silver seal. Sleek and elegant it rose and fell dipping its head and shoulders below the surface as it nudged Mr B and the children forward. It continued this process until safe in the shallows where Mr B, Jeb and JoJo were able to drag themselves to the safety of the rocks. Rory flopped down beside them. All were wet and exhausted. They looked a sorry bedraggled lot. But all were too tired to care.

Having freed herself of Mr Barnesfather, Morgana Magillikuddy punched the air triumphantly. She barrel rolled her broomstick several times in celebration of her victory. Madge and Millie followed suit. Down, up and upside down. Around and around they zoomed chattering with exhilaration. They were ripe with over confidence. It was not surprising, as they darted between the lighthouse and the lighthouse keeper's quarters that they failed to see Mr O'Keeffe's clothes line. Morgana flew straight into it. A wet sheet wrapped itself about her crooked nose. Madge and Millie became equally entangled in a pair of dungarees and a shirt.

All three witches cursed and climbed upward, uprooting the washing line posts as they did so. They swerved and veered erratically with the washing clinging and flapping about their bodies. The washing line and posts bounced along off the rocks beneath them like a loose anchor. One of the posts hooked under the seat of Mr O'Keeffe's rowboat that was drawn up upon the rocks with all his fishing gear. It too was hoisted into the air. The Magillikuddy's surged in fits and starts over the water trying to free themselves.

Mr Barnesfather, Jeb, JoJo and Rory watched the chaos passing overhead. The dragon also watched as it soared high above with wings outstretched. As the witches moved further out to sea fighting every inch of the way to maintain their altitude the

dragon followed. They were easily caught and with a massive exhalation of hot air the dragon sent a billowing ball of flame into their midst.

“Ack.” squealed the witches as the flames ignited the brush of their broomsticks and singed their clothes. The posts of the clothesline and the rowboat caught fire. The dragon drew another breath and belched an even larger ball of flame in their direction.

This time the effects were even greater. Mr O’Keeffe’s box of gelignite was wedged beneath the rowboat’s back seat. The increased heat intensity of the dragon’s second fiery attack caused it to explode with a fearful cracking detonation. Burning planks and shredded cloth mixed with an innumerable shower of sparks. It was a spectacular display. Morgana was cast high into the night sky. Madge was tossed in a whirling tumbling arc to the left while Millie cannoned away similarly to the right. The Magillikuddy’s with their smoking witches rags disappeared over the horizon like faltering sky rockets leaving a wavering tail of light in their wakes. The dragon, too, disappeared, huffing and puffing plumes of red, orange and yellow into the black.

“I think we are safe now kids.” said Mr Barnesfather still a little shocked and unsure of himself or his whereabouts.

Mr O’Keeffe wandered from the lighthouse looking bemused. “Tis a strange time to be having a picnic.” he said quite earnestly. Then looking at the vacant spot where his boat had been he scratched his head in puzzlement. “I could have sworn I left it over there.” he said looking straight at Rory, “Son, I think me boat’s been stolen.”

No one dared laugh but Mr Barnesfather suggested Mr O’Keeffe telephone the harbourmaster so that they might be taken back to the town.

“I most certainly have.” declared Mr O’Keeffe emphatically. “Yes sticking plaster. Sticking plaster, I’m sure I have some inside the house.”

Rory watched his befuddled father wander away on his confused and irrelevant mission. “Never mind. I’ll do it.” he said to Mr Barnesfather.

Mr O’Davey the harbourmaster could hardly believe the tale that Rory blurted out over the phone. Nevertheless, in light of the strange goings on of the past twenty-four hours, he promised to come straight over.

When Mr O’Davey finally arrived the children were thankful that their ordeal was over at last. Mr Barnesfather and the children explained to Mr O’Davey as best as they could the sequence of events of the past evening. At least, as best as they understood them. It was clear to Mr O’Davey that Mr O’Meara was a central villain in the drama. He was dragged from the water cold and shivering and tied up by the wrists and ankles before being deposited in the harbourmaster’s boat.

Jeb and JoJo went to sleep against their father's shoulders as Mr O’Davey drove the exhausted adventurers back to the town. Rory waved them good-bye and with his father still looking for the sticking plaster crawled into his bed.

Mrs Barnesfather and all and sundry at the Magillikuddy’s had witnessed the final climactic curtain come down in the northern sky. Mrs B was escorted in a distressed state back to the cottage not knowing whether her husband or children were dead or alive. One can imagine the sheer joy that gripped her when they all eventually walked through the front door. The description of such motherly soppiness though is best left alone.

Mr O’Davey handed Mr O’Meara over to Mr O’Mulligan who marched his unscrupulous prisoner away to the Island’s solitary prison cell. With that done

everybody went home to bed for a much needed rest. That night Jeb and JoJo slept fitfully in their parents' big bed.

Chapter eighteen: Honouring the JoJo

A bird (or a dragon for that matter) flying over the Island in the days following the mayhem could not help but notice, had it the powers of cognitive comparison, the scars of that evening. Many of the neat houses and shops that had first caught Jeb and JoJo's eye bore holes and charcoaled stains from Madge's zap attacks. Garden beds, flower boxes and pots had been overturned in the mad scramble for safety on that now infamous night. Fences and gates, too, had been damaged. Of course such things were relatively superficial and the Islanders were soon at work with plaster mix and hammers and nails patching the damage. Mr O'Brick's hardware store did a lively trade.

More serious was the sight of the *Sea Lion* lying half-submerged next to the Island's pier. And if the bird or dragon should follow the railway track to where the Magillikuddy factory had stood for all those years it might have spied the green side of the Buddicom just visible amongst the still smouldering rubble.

When Jeb and JoJo next visited Mr O'Hara he was sitting with Mr O'Toole by the pier ruminating with his chin braced upon one fist staring at his still submerged *Sea Lion*.

"Hello young uns." he called cheerfully as Jeb and JoJo skipped up to him.

Jeb looked at the *Sea Lion* and asked, "What are you going to do?"

"Oh we'll think o' something won't we Mr O'Toole."

"Yes Mr O'Hara. Where there's a will there be a way." replied Mr O'Toole thinking much the same thoughts about his engine as his friend was about his boat.

“Probably go into the salvage business I reckon,” continued Mr O’Hara, “O’Hara and O’Toole scrap metal merchants has a nice ring to it.”

“O’Toole and O’Hara.” corrected Mr O’Toole. The two men laughed.

Jeb had a thousand questions she wanted to ask about *that* night. The two most pressing concerned the Magillikuddys and Mr O’Meara.

“What will happen to Mr O’Meara?” asked Jeb. He had scared her fearfully she hoped the full force of the law would be used against him.

Mr O’Hara shifted his gaze from the boat to the children. “Never thee mind about him young uns. He’ll be taken care of. Nothing a good talking to won’t set right. A man is entitled to one mistake in his life though some might make many more. Our Mr O’Meara will redeem himself, o’ that I’m sure. I’m certain some good will be found in his tortured soul. Am I right Mr O’Toole?”

“Aye.” nodded Mr O’Toole in agreement, “I expect thee are Mr O’Hara. A man is entitled to another chance to be sure.”

Jeb was not entirely convinced that much good would be found in Mr O’Meara. He had struck her as a rather bad sort right from the start. She thought he deserved much worse than a good talking to.

“And what about the Magillikuddys? What do you think happened to them?”

Mr O’Hara paused and smiled as he pictured their wild and fiery exit from the Island.

“Squods.” stated JoJo “The squods would have eaten them. They love witches.” Jeb rolled her eyes. Here we go again, she thought.

“Squods?” Mr O’Toole looked confused.

“Never mind Mr O’Toole. I’ll tell thee later.” said Mr O’Hara, “No young master I don’t think squods would have eaten them. I may be wrong, o’ course but I

do not think so. Out past the horizon lies the Never World. They will find sanctuary there. And I am glad o' that"

"Glad." exclaimed Jeb in astonishment. "After all the bad things they did. Shouldn't they be in gaol?"

"Bad things." Mr O'Hara considered Jeb's proposition. "Misguided perhaps. But who can blame them. Were they not victims o' our ancestors' revenge? Can we blame them for wanting their revenge too? Big Mac may have wronged our ancestors but Morgana was a loyal wife and a protective mother. We cannot condemn her for that. The Never World will accommodate them well enough."

"And what about the treasure and the little people." asked JoJo.

Mr O'Hara patted JoJo upon the head and winked. "The treasure and the wee folk will take care o' themselves young master. But remember," added Mr O'Hara tapping the side of his nose, "the less said about those things the better."

"Cool." JoJo grinned.

"Well thee young uns must have a lot to do seeing as ye are leaving on the morrow. And Mr O'Toole and I still have some figuring to do yet so thee best make tracks."

Jeb and JoJo agreed although Jeb still had heaps of questions she could have asked.

"By the way." called Mr O'Hara as the children turned to leave, "How is ye father?"

"Oh he's fine." replied Jeb.

"Interesting man ye father." added Mr O'Toole in a thoughtful and considered tone.

Jeb and JoJo looked at one another and smiled broadly in Mr O'Toole's direction.

"We know." they giggled proudly.

With Mr Barnesfather's work now complete and with their adventures behind them, Jeb and JoJo settled down for their last night on the Island. They sat for a time on the end of the bottom bunk looking through the window into the yard.

"I'm going to miss this place." said Jeb.

"I won't." declared JoJo who was anxious to return to his toys and friends on the Mainland. He was a little bit annoyed at not having seen any squods too. Gradually their conversation dwindled into silence and they went to sleep. Outside the lickspittle trees and the golden elm swayed in a cool evening breeze. Some considerable time later, in the wee small hours of the morning, a tap tap tapping at the window was heard.

Tap, tap, tappity tap.

It was ever so faint though not so faint that Jeb did not hear it. She sat up and drew the curtain back expecting to see Rory again.

"Excuse me." said a small squeaky voice at the already half-open window.

"Would the JoJo be here?"

"Yes of course." replied Jeb looking at the small bald person. She was not startled. It would take a lot to surprise her from now on after all the happenings of the past week. "I'll just get him for you."

Jeb shook JoJo vigorously. "JoJo. Wake up. There's somebody here to see you."

JoJo sat up and rubbed his eyes. He climbed down onto the bottom bunk.

“Baldylocks!” he exclaimed in happy surprise.

Baldylocks smiled. “Hello the JoJo. King Doodledork would be honoured if thee would meet with him. He has something for thee.”

“Oh cool.” said JoJo thinking immediately of gold coins and diamonds.

Jeb and JoJo crept quietly from the bedroom down the hall through the kitchen and out the backdoor. As they stood on the back porch they were presented with a spectacular sight. The lickspittle trees were alive with lights. Full of fairy lights it seemed. Hundreds upon hundreds of wee folk were gathered at various points among the branches. Their paraffin charcoal stick lamps twinkled against the black of night.

Standing before the base of the largest lickspittle was King Doodledork. Well standing is something of an inexactness. He was hoisted high upon his rickety throne on the shoulders of his Arkadian guard. Another set of guardsmen carried a flat silver cross above their heads. A string of ordinary Arkadians stood behind holding the metal chain that was fastened to the cross.

The King turned to his followers as Baldylocks led JoJo, with Jeb close behind, to greet His Royal Highness.

“Fellow Arkadians,” began King Doodledork regally as JoJo kneeled before him. “It is my great pleasure to acknowledge the JoJo before me. As thee know it was with the help of the JoJo that the lost generations of Arkadia were recently united with their friends and loved ones. We owe the JoJo a debt far beyond our capacity to pay. By way of recognition, the royal artisans of Arkadia have worked day and night to make a special *Croix de Arkadia* from the royal treasure. The cross is, as thee all know, awarded for exceptional services rendered to the Realm. Never before has the *Croix de Arkadia* been awarded to one from the other side. It is now with the greatest honour that I bestow this Ancient Order of Arkadia upon the JoJo.”

The Arkadian Guard marched forward and hoisted the cross above their heads. Baldylocks motioned JoJo to take it. JoJo lifted the cross from the bearers who were thankful to be relieved of its weight. Not that it was that heavy in actual normal sized human terms.

JoJo inspected it closely. It was made from aluminium soft drink cans. It had been beaten flat and into shape of a cross by little mallets. The pinprick indentations of the strikes formed a slightly corrugated texture upon its surface. In fact some of the brand names of the soft drink companies were still visible giving it quite a colourful aspect too. The chain was made of ring pull links just like the one that served as King Doodledork's crown.

JoJo accepted the gift graciously and bowed his head at the King. The Arkadians hanging and sitting in the lickspittle trees cheered lustily. The King shushed them all motioning for them to be quiet.

“Do thee want to wake everybody up?” he admonished his royal subjects.

The King ordered himself to be carried before the JoJo. He extended his royal hand. JoJo extended his index finger, which the King shook warmly. “I thank thee for ye heroic endeavours. Thee must visit when thee come again.”

“I will.” replied JoJo. “And thankyou.” he said fondling the cross that hung proudly from his neck.

King Doodledork and the Arkadians waved farewell and faded back into the night. Jeb and JoJo watched the procession of winking lanterns disappear through the fields and into the cover of the south woods.

The children examined the cross closely after they had all disappeared. It was a simple affair. Both thought the King had a very strange concept of treasure.

Especially with all that which lay within the volcano. They simply didn't understand it.

The last day of the Barnesfather's stay was a glorious one. The sun shone and a beautiful heat warmed the Island. A crowd of well-wishers led by the mayor, Mr O'Duffy, crowded about the wharf to see them off. The Islanders had adorned their homes and shops once again with their clan flags. It was quite an honour that they had bestowed upon a Mainland family. Mr O'Mara barrowed the children down the street to where Mr O'Hara waited on the harbourmaster's boat. Mr and Mrs Barnesfather walked arm in arm behind them. JoJo wore his *Croix de Arkadia* with bursting pride even though no one else had the faintest idea of what it was. That was JoJo's secret

Jeb looked all about and her heart sunk a little. She had hoped to see Rory but he was nowhere to be seen. The family boarded Mr O'Davey's boat. Mr O'Hara started it up. The short journey home had begun.

Mrs O'Shaunnessey waved from the cottage with the cat in her arms. The kelp farmers paused and looked up from their work along the beach. They waved and the Barnesfathers returned the salute. Mr O'Hara steered the boat through the buoys and turned south to the mainland.

There standing on the rocks scattered around Dragonhead Spit stood Rory. Jeb waved enthusiastically. Rory did not move. Instead, as he had done when they first arrived, he stared after them impassively. Close inspection would have revealed the hint of smile upon his cheeky lips.

"Ohhh." huffed Jeb angrily while feeling extra foolish. "That boy."

Her anger soon gave way to elation. As the boat put the Island behind it a seal cut across the beam.

“Will thee look at that.” roared Mr O’Hara ecstatically “Tis the silver seal. Luck’s a fortune is it not young uns?”

Jeb and JoJo smiled and watched as the seal majestically cut back and forth through the wash of the boat. Then it pulled away and lolled in the water as the boat continued on. When Jeb last looked she saw the head of the Princess sink beneath the water.

Aunt Mimi was of course waiting to greet them. After several suffocating hugs from her Mr O’Hara was able to intervene and bid the family farewell. He knelt by the children and drew them into his massive arms and gave them a huge hug. “I’ll miss thee.” he said with a hint of tearful emotion. He looked up at Mr and Mrs Barnesfather. “Take care, Sir. And thee, Ma’am.”

Mrs Barnesfather stepped forward and gave Mr O’Hara a kiss on his bristly cheek. “Thankyou.” she whispered. He blushed profusely his red face blending as one with his bushy red hair. Mr Barnesfather, in turn, shook Mr O’Hara’s hand and immediately wished he hadn’t as he tried to regain feeling in his crushed fingers.

“Y’all come back now.” called Mr O’Hara as he started the boat for home.

“We will.” chorused Jeb and JoJo. They lingered until Mr O’Hara disappeared from view over the horizon. Then the Barnesfather family turned for home.