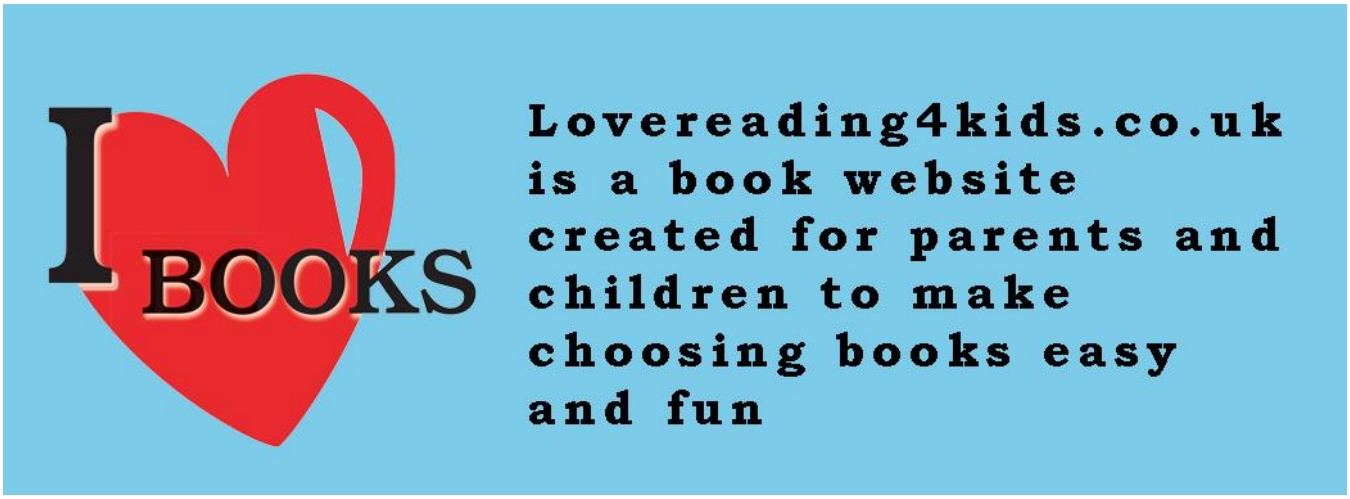


Opening extract from

The Great Troll Rescue

Written & Illustrated by

Tom Percival

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This book is dedicated to my brother, Hugh, for all our childhood adventures



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Red, Anansi, Rapunzel, Jack and his magical talking hen, Betsy, were sitting beneath the leafy branches of the Story Tree in the middle of Tale Town.

The afternoon sun beat down upon them and the air was thick and heavy. Out to sea storm clouds were gathering – the weather wouldn't hold for long.

'What do you think Hansel and

Gretel are up to?' asked Red.

'They said they were going camping with their dad,' said Rapunzel.

'Whaaaat?' squawked Betsy, rolling her eyes. Although she was a talking hen, Betsy could only say the word 'What' – but somehow her friends always knew what she meant.

Jack frowned. 'It is *weird*, isn't it?' he said. 'They go off on these trips to the woods with their dad, and then we don't see them for weeks! But I saw their dad in town just this morning with *another* new wife – and she's even worse than the last one. He was buying her a diamond-covered toilet-roll holder and looked *really* miserable.'

They fell silent. Life in Tale Town



was always *slightly* unusual, but what else would you expect in a place where stories literally grew on trees?

The Story Tree was the reason that Tale Town got its name. On its branches grew every story that had ever been told near it. To 'read' the stories, all you had to do was run your finger along any branch or leaf and the tale would spring to life in your head. All the children had at least one or two stories growing on the Story Tree – even Anansi, who hadn't been living there very long.

‘So Anansi, how’s your uncle Rufaro doing?’ asked Rapunzel. ‘Any news?’

‘Well, he still looks like a troll,’ replied Anansi. ‘So he’s still living in that stinking cave in the woods, away from all his friends and family, surviving on scraps of food, and water from that smelly pond.’

‘Hmm,’ replied Rapunzel. ‘So not



that great, then?'

'Not really,' said Anansi with a sigh.

It had been well over a year since almost all of Anansi's family had been cursed to look, sound and smell like trolls. Only Anansi and his father still looked human. Nobody knew how it had happened, or why. More worryingly, nobody had the slightest clue how to



turn them back. Even *more* worryingly, the people of Tale Town and the trolls had been at war for as long as anyone could remember. Without a cure, his family would never be able to come home.

'And what about your mum?' asked Jack. 'Is she still on her way here?'

Anansi brightened. 'Yeah, she should arrive any day now! Dad sorted out a ticket on a boat from Far Far Away.' He paused. 'Well, I say a "ticket" . . . Let's just say she's on a boat.'

'Don't worry, Anansi,' said Red, patting him on the arm, 'I just know that Rufaro will be able to find a cure.'

'I guess so,' replied Anansi, but he didn't sound hopeful.

A large raindrop landed with a puff of dust on the dry ground and Jack glanced up.

'Looks like it's about to—'

He was interrupted by a crash of thunder as huge, fat raindrops fell all around them. Everybody sprang to their feet and ran for cover.

The captain had already given the order to abandon ship. The boat had been thrown on to a series of jagged



rocks a mile or so from Tale Town and was taking on water. As the last of the lifeboats were lowered, a deep voice boomed from a huge box in the hold.

'Hello? Is there anybody there? I don't want to alarm you, but my feet are getting wet, and I just wondered if everything was OK? The boat's not sinking, is it?'

There was no response. By now water was halfway up the side of the crate which was printed with the words:



'*Yiiikes!*' squealed the voice as the water rose higher.

It was hard to imagine such a deep and gravelly voice squealing, but *somehow* it managed it.

'I'm going to come out now,' the voice continued. 'But just to warn you . . . I look a *teeny* bit like a troll. But I'm not *really* a troll! So, no spears or swords, right? Agreed?'

Again there was no answer.

The voice in the box muttered, 'Here we go then . . .' and with a crash the crate exploded outward, revealing a very large, very trolly-looking *troll*.

The troll glanced around and realized that the ship definitely *was* sinking. It searched through its pockets until

it found what it was looking for – a bright yellow bottle – then it scrambled up the steps towards the deck and leaped up the mast, climbing as fast as it could until it reached the crow's nest. Shutting its eyes in concentration, the troll whispered a spell into the yellow bottle – then sealed it with a cork and flung it far out into the towering waves.

Seconds later, the troll fell into the churning water, leaving a splash of white spray that was immediately swallowed up in the darkness of the storm.