
THE DUNDOODLE MYSTERIES
THE CHOCOLATE FACTORY GHOST
DAVID O'CONNELL
BLOOMSBURY
ILLUSTRATED BY CLAIRE POWELL

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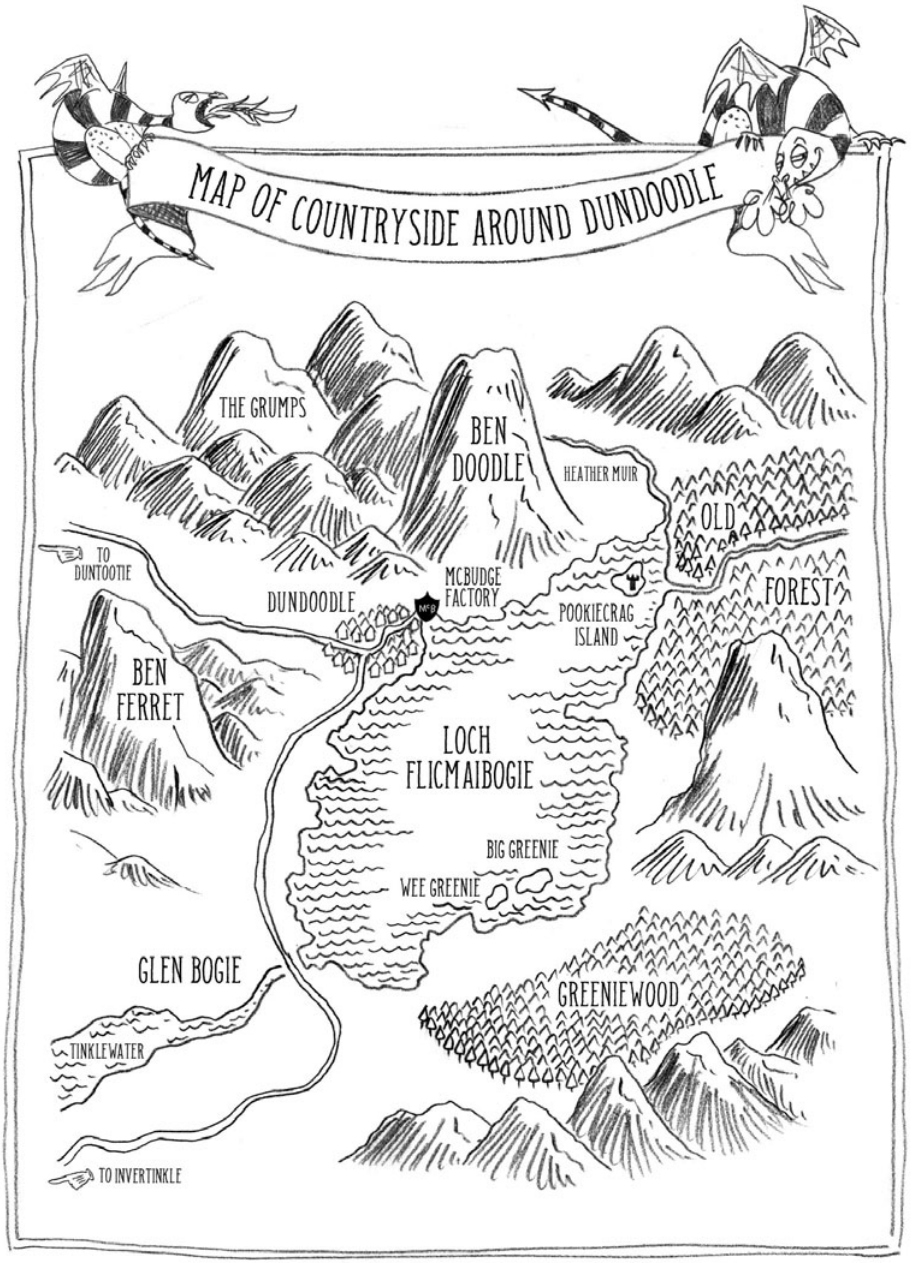


DAVID O'CONNELL

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BLOOMSBURY

LONDON OXFORD NEW YORK NEW DELHI SYDNEY


MAP OF COUNTRYSIDE AROUND DUNDOODLE
THE GRUMPS
BEN DOODLE
HEATHER MUIR
OLD FOREST
TO DUNTOOTIE
DUNDOODLE
MCBUDGE FACTORY
POOKIECRAG ISLAND
BEN FERRET
LOCH FLICMAIBOGIE
BIG GREENIE
WEE GREENIE
GLEN BOGIE
GREENIEWOOD
TINKLEWATER
TO INVERTINKLE





Archie stared up at the portrait of the old man. It had winked at him, hadn't it? He was sure of it. No, he must be imagining things. This spooky old house was playing tricks with his mind.

He was sitting in the very grand library of the very grand Honeystone Hall, surrounded by books – how could anyone own so *many* books? – and ancient, rickety and *very* dusty furniture. Were all the cobwebs real or were they specially delivered by the We'll-Make-Your-Home-Look-Creepy Company? Mum sat in the chair next to him, fidgeting like she had spiders dancing in her underwear and too preoccupied to pay any attention to misbehaving artwork. Had the portrait winked at him again? It hadn't. Had it? It HAD! It even grinned a little. This place was seriously WEIRD.

He dragged his eyes away from the painting which hung above the very grand fireplace.

'What are we *doing* here?' he whispered for the hundredth time.

'I don't *know*,' Mum whispered back. She gave the sparrow-like man shuffling papers, who sat in front of them, a sharp look.

'Can we get on with … *things*, Mr Tatters?' she said. 'We've come all the way from Invertinkle.'

'Of course, of course, dear lady,' said the lawyer amiably. 'Some of the details of this … *situation* are unusual. I was just checking a few particulars, but now we can proceed.' He cleared his throat dramatically.

'Archie McBudge,' said Mr Tatters, peering at the boy through a pair of grubby spectacles. 'You are a very fortunate young man. Very fortunate *indeed*. Great things lie in store for you.'

Archie had never thought he was destined for Great Things. A few Medium-Sized Things perhaps. 'Medium-sized' always sounded manageable. Great Things sounded like a *lot* of responsibility and he wasn't the ambitious type.

'Really?' was all he could say. *What was going on?*

'Whilst we mourn the recent *tragic* loss of your

great-uncle, Archibald McBudge …' said Mr Tatters, pointing a bony finger towards the painting – *the* painting! He had a *Great-Uncle Archibald*? '… owner of McBudge's Fudge and Confectionery Company, and a dear, personal friend of mine …' Archie's jaw dropped. McBudge's Fudge! He'd never even known Great-Uncle Archibald existed, but everyone knew McBudge's Fudge. It was the softest, sweetest-tasting, melt-in-the-mouthiest, fudgiest fudge you could buy. The best in the world. Archie had always been pleased he shared his name with a company that made something so famously tasty, but he'd never thought there might be an actual family connection! And from the look on Mum's face, she hadn't either. She started to say something but was interrupted by Mr Tatters giving his beaky nose a good blow.

'Whilst we mourn his loss,' the lawyer repeated, dabbing his eyes, 'I am very pleased to tell you that your great-uncle remembered you in his will.' He picked up a leather-bound folder. Archie and Mum looked nervously at each other. Nobody had ever left them anything in a will before. They'd never known anyone with any money! All they knew was that Mr Tatters had sent them a letter asking them to drive all the way to the little town of Dundoodle, tucked between a mountain and a

forest-edged loch, to meet him at Honeystone Hall to talk about some 'family business'. The lawyer was reading from a piece of paper in the folder.

'Your great-uncle writes: *As my nephew is no longer alive, I hereby leave all my earthly possessions to his son, my namesake, Archie McBudge. My fortune, my business holdings and associated properties I leave to him and his heirs.*' Mr Tatters took off his spectacles and looked at Archie expectantly.

'Oh, Archie!' said Mum with a deep intake of breath.

'What?' said Archie. He didn't understand. What were 'earthly possessions'? 'Has he left me his gardening tools or something?'

'No!' hissed Mum. 'Archie, he's left you *everything*.'

'Everything?' said Archie.

'*Everything*,' said Mr Tatters.

'Does that mean I *own* the fudge factory?' said Archie in disbelief. 'Where they make the fudge and the chocolates and all the other sweets?'

'Yes, Archie. You own the fudge factory,' confirmed Mr Tatters.

'And all the McBudge Fudge shops?' put in Mum, wide-eyed. 'There's one in almost every town.'

'And all the McBudge Fudge shops,' said Mr Tatters.

'And Honeystone Hall?' said Archie, looking around him. 'Can we come and live here? There must be over a hundred rooms in this place!' And a very odd painting, though he didn't mention that.

'*And* Honeystone Hall,' said Mr Tatters. He snapped the folder shut. 'Fudge fortune. Fudge factory. Fudge shops. Fudge … urm, *Honey*stone Hall. The whole lot. Even the gardening tools.'

I must have put my lucky underpants on today, thought Archie. He looked up at the portrait of Great-Uncle Archibald. The old man in the painting winked at him again. And this time, Archie winked back.



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'There's one more thing,' said Mr Tatters, reaching into his jacket pocket. 'Your great-uncle left you this letter.' He handed Archie a crumpled envelope. A surprisingly steady hand (Great-Uncle Archibald looked *ancient* in the portrait) had written on it in thick caramel-brown ink:

To the heir of the Chief of the Clan McBudge.

'The heir,' said Mr Tatters, catching Archie's puzzled look. 'That would be you. Old Mr McBudge intended for you to read this in private. Why don't you go and explore whilst your mother and I discuss the legal paperwork and whatnot? I'm sure you'll find plenty of quiet spots in the house to read.'

He was being dismissed. The grown-ups had grown-up things to talk about. With a nod from Mum, Archie ran out of the library, clutching the mysterious letter. His head was spinning. He was … he was *rich*! And Honeystone Hall belonged to *him*. Him and nobody else. Except maybe the ghost of his great-uncle. What had been going on with that painting? He pushed it out of his mind. There were plenty of other things to think about. Great Things. It would take him a week just to explore the house, never mind the gardens and the factory.

Archie wandered along a passageway, pondering which of the doors to try first. Everything – furniture, pictures, wallpaper – looked *very* old and was covered in a ghostly layer of dust. The stillness was deathly. *Plenty of quiet spots*, Mr Tatters had said. Spots? This was practically measles.

He tried one door. It was a cupboard, filled with moth-speckled coats. Another door revealed an old-fashioned laundry room, with sinks and mangles and drying rails. So far, so disappointing. Yet there was something else. In each room Archie could feel a presence, like someone – some*thing* – had left just moments before. He shivered.

Finally, he chose a large green door with a dark metal handle. With a satisfying clunk, it opened and

light poured into the shadowy passage. He took a step backwards as he was struck by the heat and smell of earth. Ferns, palm trees, vines and orchids lay before him, bathed in a balmy mist and occupied with the business of growing and flowering and generally being alive and leafy. Had he stumbled into a different world? Transported to a desert island? He half expected a dinosaur to lumber into view.

'It's a giant greenhouse,' he said aloud. The glass roof was as high as the Hall itself. The warmth, light and life were a marked contrast to the rest of the house and the dreary wintry world outside it. But it had the same watchfulness about it. Something hidden had its eye on him.

Archie followed a path amongst the plants and perched on a twisted tree root that had pushed its way up through the tiled floor. He opened the envelope and pulled out a crisp piece of paper covered with the same caramel-coloured writing.

Dear Archie (the letter began),

Mr Tatters must have told you by now that you are my heir as Chief of the Clan Mc Budge, as well as heir to the Mc Budge Fudge fortune. I have no doubt this will have come as a surprise to you. Knowing you would inherit one



day, but wanting you to have a normal life for as long as possible, your father kept his family connections a secret.

So Dad knew all along! Archie smiled. Dad loved secrets. He wished Dad was here now.

Your father was a clever man. Having lots of money can do strange things to people. And the desire for money can make people go bad. Very bad. You must always remember this!

But who better to run a chocolate factory than a child? Children understand fudge and sweets and chocolate far better than grown-ups. However, it is a great responsibility.

You must prove you are worthy of your inheritance, worthy of the name Mc Budge! So I have set you a test, in the form of a treasure hunt, to see just how canny you are ...

There are six items you must collect, and six clues to find them. Once you have them all, a greater seventh treasure awaits you! But keep it secret! Others will go to any length to get it first!

Others? What did that mean?

The first clue will appear very soon. Keep your eyes open and your taste buds ready! You may find help in the strangest ways. Dundoodle is an odd place – expect the unexpected ...

Good luck!
Your great-uncle, Archibald Mc Budge.

Archie realised he was holding his breath. His heart was beating fast. A test? A treasure hunt?

P.S. Look behind you.

'If you ask me,' said a voice just by his ear, 'you're in a whole lot of trouble, Archie McBudge.'

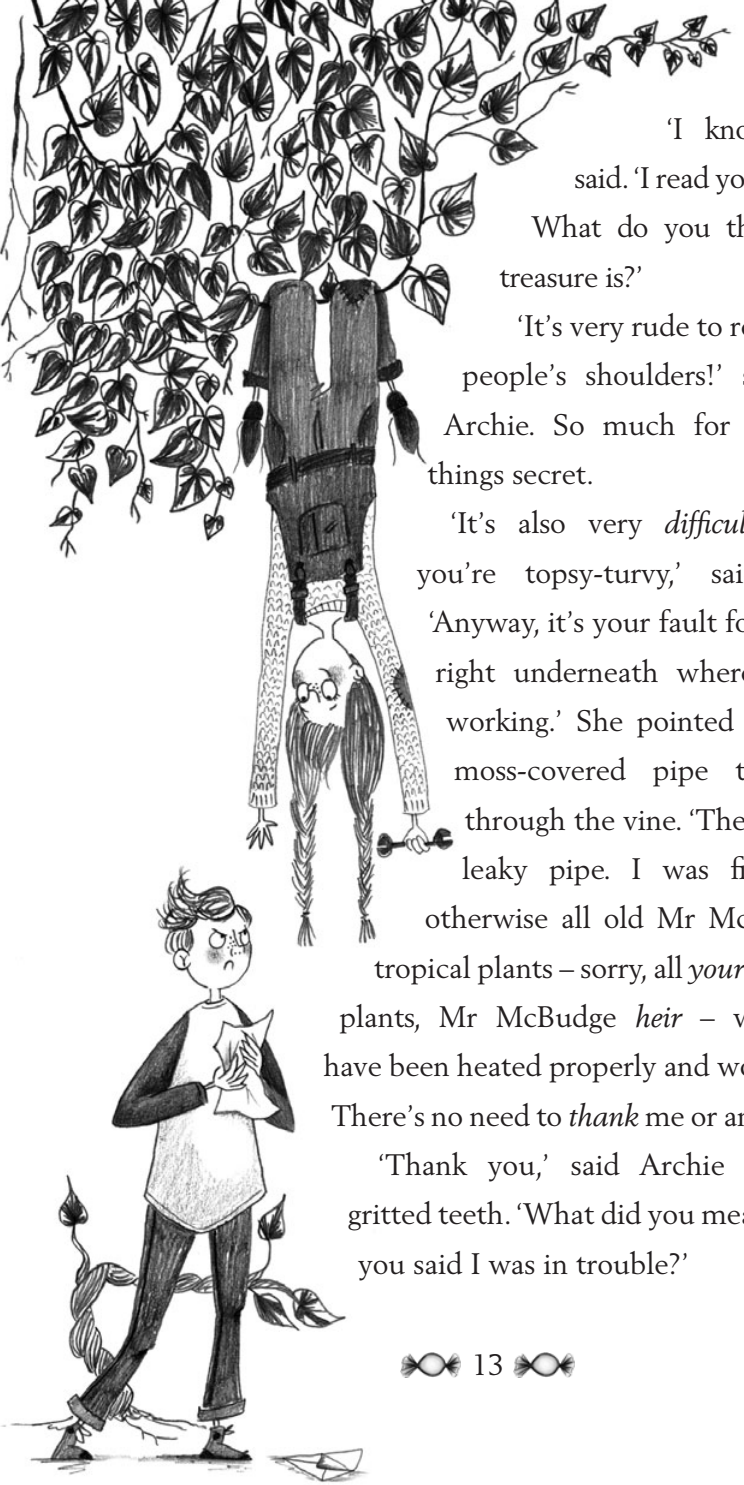


Archie jumped up from his perch and spun round. There was a girl, hanging upside down from a thick vine that clung to the wall. Her grubby face glistened in the heat and gave him a cheeky upside-down smile. A spanner twirled confidently between her fingers.

'Who are you?' said Archie, annoyed. The girl unhooked her feet from the vine and let herself gently down to the ground.

'I'm Felicity Fairbairn,' said the girl, still smiling. 'Fliss for short.'

'I'm the McBudge heir,' said Archie. 'I own this place.' He liked the sound of that. But Fliss did not seem to be impressed.



'I know,' she said. 'I read your letter. What do you think the treasure is?'

'It's very rude to read over people's shoulders!' snapped Archie. So much for keeping things secret.

'It's also very *difficult* when you're topsy-turvy,' said Fliss. 'Anyway, it's your fault for sitting right underneath where I was working.' She pointed up to a moss-covered pipe threaded through the vine. 'There was a leaky pipe. I was fixing it, otherwise all old Mr McBudge's tropical plants – sorry, all *your* tropical plants, Mr McBudge *heir* – wouldn't have been heated properly and would die. There's no need to *thank* me or anything.'

'Thank you,' said Archie through gritted teeth. 'What did you mean when you said I was in trouble?'

'You'll never pass this test, this treasure-hunt-task-quest-thing or whatever it is,' said Fliss scornfully. 'You don't deserve to! How is it right that you get to have all *this* –' she waved her spanner around at the plants, the greenhouse and the Hall – 'when you don't know anything about this place? I've lived in Dundoodle my *whole* life, and my family have always worked in the McBudge factory. I know it like the back of my hand. But you're just a stranger here and don't even care about any of that. You've just turned up out of the blue and now it's all yours. It's *not fair*.'

She folded her arms emphatically and gave a sniff. Archie didn't have an answer. It wasn't fair really.

'I can't help it,' he said finally. 'Great-Uncle Archibald left it all to me. He didn't have to, I suppose. He could have left it to a home for bald, toothless donkeys called Clive if he'd wanted to. It's probably complicated.'

'That's why I like machines,' said Fliss, slapping the spanner into her palm. 'I'm going to be an engineer when I'm older. I know all about the machines in the factory. They're nice and simple. If they're broken, you can fix them. Or just smash them with a hammer.'

'And I'm going to fix this,' said Archie. 'I want to pass this test – and I will! I'll prove I'm a proper McBudge and

show everyone that I *do* care.' For some reason the idea of Great Things had grown on him. What was Archie McBudge really capable of?

Fliss's frown softened.

'You sounded a bit like your great-uncle then,' she said, rubbing her dirty nose on her sleeve. 'Completely bonkers. You're *so* obviously going to need my help. Where shall we start?'

Archie sighed. This girl was not going to leave him alone.

'Can I trust you to keep this a secret?' he said.

'Of course!' said Fliss. 'But you should probably eat that letter if you want to be really sure.'

'What?' said Archie, looking at the wrinkled paper.

'Old Mr McBudge used to write on rice paper with chocolate ink. You can eat it! You could eat all his letters. I told you, *bonkers*.'

Archie sniffed the paper. It did smell good. He cautiously went to take a bite. The letter scrunched up in recoil and flew out of his hand and on to the floor.

'D-did you see that?' he said. 'The letter's *alive*!'



'*Expect the unexpected*,' said Fliss, wide-eyed. 'That was certainly unexpected.' She reached to touch the piece of paper. It jumped off the floor, jerkily flapping its folds like wings and rising into the air. They watched with open mouths as the letter flew once around Archie's head then up into a tree covered in purple, bell-shaped flowers, coming to rest on a branch.

At that moment a little white dog burst through the foliage, circling the tree and barking excitedly at the letter, which hopped and fluttered nervously like a bird.

'Sherbet!' a voice called from amongst the plants. 'Where are you? Heel, boy!' The dog completely ignored the command and ran up to Archie, wagging his tail. Then

a very small and very, *very* old man appeared. He wheezed and coughed, leaning on the tree for support.

'Are you all right?' said Archie, forgetting the letter in the commotion.

'Oh, I'm just a tad out of breath,' croaked the man. 'You must be young Master Archie.' He stood straight and performed a wobbling bow. 'I'm Tablet, your butler. And you seem to have met Sherbet, your late great-uncle's dog. He recognises a McBudge, as do I. But I'm afraid I'm not up to walkies these days.'



Tablet looked like he had stepped out from inside a vacuum cleaner: grey dust knitted together with bits of hair and nail clippings. Every time he moved, flakes of skin gently drifted to the ground. He let out a scratchy cough to clear his throat and Archie half expected him to disintegrate on the spot.



'It's nice to meet you,' said Archie, cuddling the dog. A butler! Whatever next?

'I had the pleasure of serving your great-uncle,' Tablet said, his smile revealing a mixed selection of teeth. 'And his father too. I'm

practically part of the furniture, you might say.' He gave a little laugh that turned quickly into a hacking cough, sending more bits of skin floating away in small clouds. *If he isn't part of the furniture, he's certainly all over it*, thought Archie, remembering the dust that covered everything in the library.

'I see you've fixed that pipe like I asked, Miss Fairbairn,' said Tablet, recovering himself. 'I'm much obliged. It's so nice to have some young people around the place. Or any *living* people, for that matter. I hope you'll be very happy here, Master Archie. I shall make sure I have the best room ready for you.'

'Completely bonkers,' hissed Fliss, as Tablet wobbled his way out of the greenhouse. 'He must be at least six-hundred years old.'

'I wonder if he knows about the treasure hunt,' said Archie, remembering the letter. It still sat on the tree branch.

And it wasn't alone.

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