# The Shop on Peculiar Hill

Vale of Strange Book One

by

Grimly Darkwood

# Chapter One – Peculiar Hill

Peter came to live at Aunt Maggie's shop after his parents were kidnapped by pirates and eaten by tigers, and the Overseers of Children decided the lad was too young to live in the hut on Evil Island without them. Peculiar Hill was not exactly safe – not by the standards of Manchester or Basingstoke, for instance – but the Overseers ruled that it had the edge over Evil Island, being very impressed with the absence of any crocodiles.

So Peter moved in with his aunt and uncle, arriving one day with a trunk full of all his belongings, except for his hat which was stuffed in a hole in the wall of the hut on Evil Island, to keep out the rain and the pirates.

"We'd better get you a new hat," said Uncle Bob as he lifted the trunk onto the back of the cart at Strange Station, with a bit of help from the Station Master, who didn't have much else to do as this was summer and there weren't many tourists around. Uncle Bob was a big man with a

friendly face and a bulging belly. His skin was tanned and leathery, like a well-worn pair of shoes. “You’ll need a hat here when the weather turns cold,” he explained.

“That’s right,” said the Station Master. “You’ll need a hat here when the bogeys start flying around. Otherwise your head’ll get covered in fizz.”

“What are bogeys and fizz?” asked Peter, who had never heard of such things.

Uncle Bob glared at the Station Master, then took the reins to encourage the mules up the hill.

“You’ll find out soon enough, Peter,” he muttered.

Aunt Maggie was standing at the door of the shop when the cart drew up, next to a large sign saying “Mules for hire.” She had a welcoming smile on her face and a long pole in her hand. She was thin and wiry with pale skin and bulging eyes like a fish. She kept twitching and peering about her anxiously.

“You must be Peter,” she called out, as the lad climbed down from the cart, and she gave him a sloppy kiss on the cheek and pointed at the sky.

“You see up there?” she asked.

“Yes,” said Peter.

“That’s the sky,” said Aunt Maggie. “That’s where bogeys come from and don’t you forget it.”

“Don’t you go and worry the lad,” said Uncle Bob. “It’s not as dangerous round here as you seem to think.” And he took down the trunk and it slipped and fell on top of him.

“Let that be a lesson to you,” said Aunt Maggie, when they had called out the next door neighbours and got the trunk off Uncle Bob with a system of ropes and pulleys. “Don’t you go and tell the lad that it’s safe round here, ’cos it’s not. Not unless you take the proper precautions.” She turned her bulging eyes upon Peter. “You see that pole?” she said. “I always keep that pole handy in case I need it for fending off great big bogeys.”

“But the bogeys don’t fly till November,” Uncle Bob protested, “and it’s not even July till a week on Tuesday,”

“You can’t be too careful,” Aunt Maggie said sternly, rolling out a large bandage to put on Uncle Bob. “Now where does it hurt most?”

When Uncle Bob was bandaged up, they pulled the trunk into the shop. Inside, it was quite

dark, but Peter could see that the walls were covered with row upon row of shelves, crammed full with tins and cans and packets of stuff. Some of these he knew well enough, like baked beans and corn flakes, but others had small, hand-written labels which Peter could hardly read. One tin had a picture of a creature with large wings, cruel little eyes, and great big, sharp teeth, and Peter wondered if this was one of the flying 'bogeys' that everybody was talking about. He rather hoped it wasn't. He stooped closer to try to read the label: "Aunt Maggie's Home-Made Glop," it read. "Regular use keeps bogeys at bay. Always read the instructions."

Uncle Bob was opening Peter's trunk.

"Let's see what you got in here," he said, and he and Aunt Maggie started taking out Peter's things.

"He's got no pole for the bogeys," cried Aunt Maggie.

"He's got no hat for their fizz either," said Uncle Bob.

Aunt Maggie muttered something under her breath and it seemed to Peter that she might have been saying a prayer.

“You won’t survive round here very long,” said Aunt Maggie, “not without a pole for the bogeys and a hat for their fizz and a pair of boots to guard against the heeble-greebs. Didn’t you have any things like that on Evil Island?”

Peter had never heard of bogeys or fizz or heeble-greebs, let alone come across them himself, so he shook his head.

“Then I’m not surprised your parents got eaten,” said Aunt Maggie, in a tone which suggested it served them right. “Your Uncle Bob and I would be eaten as well if we didn’t take proper precautions.”

“Now don’t you go and worry the lad,” said Uncle Bob. “It’s not as dangerous round here as you seem to think.” And the door to the shop swung suddenly open and hit Uncle Bob on the part they had bandaged first because it hurt the most.

“I was just saying,” said Aunt Maggie, handing Uncle Bob a piece of cloth to stick in his mouth to stifle his cries so they didn’t disturb the canary, “we wouldn’t survive very long without proper precautions.”

“Very true, Mrs Arkenthrobb,” said a thin, wizened man who had entered the shop. “That’s a nasty old sneeze you got there,” he told Uncle Bob. “Stuck half way up your nose, is it?”

“He’s not sneezing, he’s crying out in pain,” Aunt Maggie explained, “and he keeps on saying it isn’t dangerous round here.”

“That’s a mistaken belief is that,” said the wizened man, stepping forward and standing on Uncle Bob’s big toe, which was the bit they had bandaged second because it hurt the second most. “I’ll have a bottle of unge please, Mrs Arkenthrobb,” he continued, “and a can of glop and a packet of liquorice all-sorts.”

“There you are,” said Aunt Maggie. “Mr Grimble needs unge and glop. If it wasn’t dangerous, he wouldn’t need stuff like that to protect him, now would he?”

“Just getting set for the winter,” said the man she had called Mr Grimble. “After all, it’s July a week on Tuesday.”

“What are unge and glop?” asked Peter.

“Well…” began Aunt Maggie.

“Don’t tell him, Maggie!” said Uncle Bob, removing the rag from his mouth at last, the

worst being over for now. “It’s too much for one day, what with the travelling and all. I’ll tell him tomorrow when he’s had chance to get used to his new home. He’s not going to die overnight, now is he?”

Aunt Maggie said nothing, but she and Mr Grimble exchanged glances and shook their heads in a worried sort of way.

“Well,” said Mr Grimble, turning to Peter. “It was very nice to meet you – I hope we shall meet again.”

But he looked as though he feared this might never happen.