PROLOGUE

THERE ARE THINGS TO KNOW ABOUT THE WORLD.

Surely you realise that what *you* know is not everything there is to know. In spite of humankind's ingenuity, there are shadows too dark for your species to fully illuminate. The very mantle of our planet is one example; the ocean floor is another. And in these shadows we live. The Hidden Ones. The magical creatures who have removed ourselves from the destructive human orbit. Once, we fairies ruled the surface as humans do currently, as bacteria will in the future, but for now we are content for the most part to exist in our underground civilisation. For ten thousand years, fairies have used our magic and technology to shield ourselves from prying eyes, and to heal the beleaguered Earth mother, Danu. We fairies have a saying that is writ large in golden tiles on the altar mosaic of the Hey Hey Temple, and the saying is this: WE DIG DEEP AND WE ENDURE.

But there is always one maverick who does not care

a fig for fairy mosaics and is hell-bent on reaching the surface. Usually this maverick is a troll. And, specifically in this case, the maverick is a troll who will shortly and for a ridiculous reason be named Whistle Blower.

For here begins the second documented cycle of Fowl Adventures.

1
MEET THE ANTAGONISTS

The Baddie: Lord Teddy Bleedham-Drye, The Duke of Scilly

If a person wants to murder the head of a family, then it is very important that the entire family also be done away with, or the distraught survivors might very well decide to take bloody revenge, or at least make a detailed report at the local police station. There is, in fact, an entire chapter on this exact subject in *The Criminal Mastermind's Almanac,* an infamous guidebook for aspiring ruthless criminals by Professor Wulf Bane, which was turned down by every reputable publisher but is available on demand from the author. The actual chapter name is 'Kill Them All. Even the Pets'. A gruesome title that would put most normal people off reading it, but Lord Teddy Bleedham-Drye, Duke of Scilly, was not a normal person, and the juiciest phrases in his copy of *The Criminal Mastermind's Almanac* were marked

in pink highlighter, and the book itself was dedicated as follows:

To Teddy
From one criminal mastermind to another
Don't be a stranger
Wulfy

Lord Bleedham-Drye had dedicated most of his one hundred and fifty plus years on this green earth to staying *on* this green earth as long as possible, as opposed to being buried beneath it. In television interviews he credited his youthful appearance to yoga and fish oil, but, in actual fact, Lord Teddy had spent much of his inherited fortune travelling the globe in search of any potions and pills, legal or not, that would extend his life span. As a roving ambassador for the Crown, Lord Teddy could easily find an excuse to visit the most far-flung corners of the planet in the name of culture, when in fact he was keeping his eyes open for anything that grew, swam, waddled or crawled that would help him stay alive for even a minute longer than his allotted three score and ten.

So far in his quest, Lord Teddy had tried every

so-called *eternal-youth therapy* for which there was even the flimsiest of supporting evidence. He had, among other things, ingested tons of willow-bark extract, swallowed millions of antioxidant tablets, slurped gallons of therapeutic arsenic, injected the cerebrospinal fluid of the endangered Madagascan lemur, devoured countless helpings of South-east Asian liver-fluke spaghetti, and spent almost a month suspended over an active volcanic rift in Iceland, funnelling the restorative volcanic gas up the leg holes of his linen shorts. These and other extreme practices – never ever to be tried at home – had indeed kept Bleedham-Drye breathing and vital thus far, but there had been side-effects. The lemur fluid had caused his forearms to elongate so that his hands dangled below his knees. The arsenic had paralysed the left corner of his mouth so that it was forever curled in a sardonic sneer, and the volcanic embers had scalded his bottom, forcing Teddy to walk in a slightly bowlegged manner as though trying to keep his balance in rough seas. Bleedham-Drye considered these secondary effects a small price to pay for his wrinkle-free complexion, luxuriant mane of hair and spade of black beard, and of course the vigour that helped him endure lengthy treks and safaris in the hunt for any rumoured life-extenders.

But Lord Teddy was all too aware that he had yet to hit the jackpot, therapeutically speaking, in regards to his quest for an unreasonably extended life. It was true that he had eked out a few extra decades, but what was that in the face of eternity? There were jellyfish that, as a matter of course, lived longer than he had. Jellyfish! They didn't even have brains, for heaven's sake.

Teddy found himself frustrated, which he hated, because stress gave a fellow wrinkles.

A new direction was called for.

No more small-stakes half measures, cribbing a year here and a season there.

I must find the fountain of youth, he resolved one evening while lying in his brass tub of electric eels, which he had heard did wonders for a chap's circulation.

As it turned out, Lord Bleedham-Drye *did* find the fountain of youth, but it was not a fountain in the traditional sense of the word, as the life-giving liquid was contained in the venom of a mythological creature. And the family he would possibly have to murder to access it was none other than the Fowls of Dublin, Ireland, who were not overly fond of being murdered.

* * *