Beware! Swamp Goblins!

My name is Harvey Small. You can call me a human. But not a bogeyman or a goblin or a vampire … and certainly not a giant.

Mum's job makes us move a lot. I've lived in Small Town, Small City, Small-on-the-Hill, Small-over-the-Hill, Small-round-the-Hill, Small-under-the-Hill, Smallshire, Smallford, Smallington and Small-on-Sea. And I've only ever seen humans there.

But I've got a secret.

If you drive night and day, and day and night and night and day again, you'll come to a deep, dark, stinky swamp. You won't see a single office block or any shops or cinemas or football grounds … only

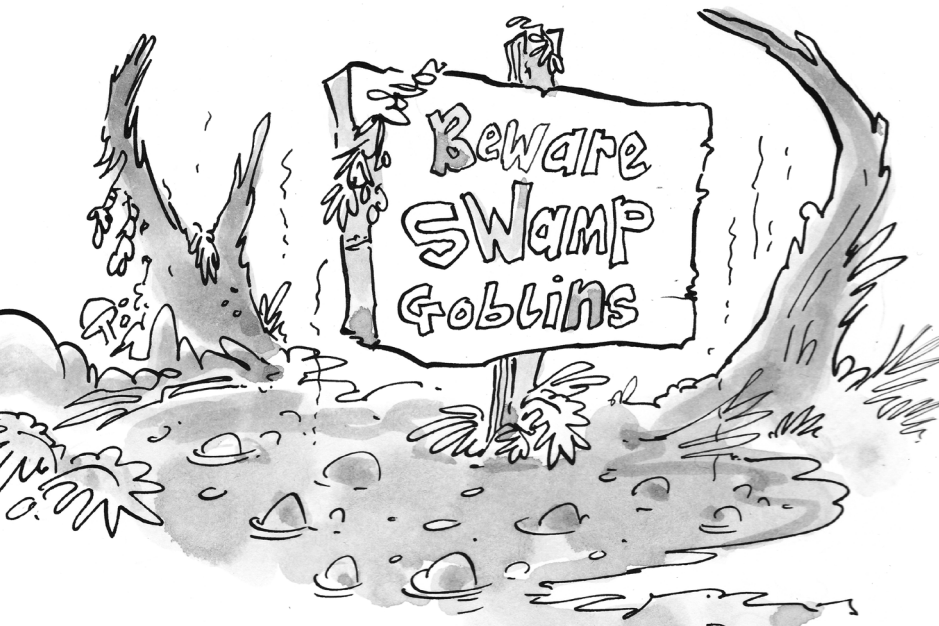
thick green weeds, boggy ground and faded signs that say, '*Beware! Swamp Goblins!*'

And all those creatures you thought lived in stories? You'll find them there. Some of them, anyway.

The world is far bigger than grown-ups say.

I know.

I've seen it.



Chapter one

Bang!

On my 10th birthday, I opened:

- one pair of stilts
- one pair of sludge-brown dungarees that were ten times too long for me
- one green velvet top hat that was almost half a metre high and fell over my nose
- absolutely NO football boots.

"Thanks Mum," I said, struggling to hide my disappointment. Mum's presents were even worse than that shower cap Aunty Hilda gave me last year.

"Go on, try them on," said Mum. She picked up

the stilts and put them on the kitchen floor. She had an eager look in her eyes.

I shook my head. I didn't feel like fancy dress.

"Come on, spoil sport. Look, you stand on these flat bits here," said Mum. She pointed at two shoe-sized platforms halfway up each stilt. They had straps dangling off them. "I'll strap in your trainers. Then you can walk around and pretend to be really tall. You'll love it." Mum beamed at me like this was a brilliant idea.

It wasn't.

I'm Harvey Small, not Harvey Tall. Being short didn't bother me. Short kids could still play football. If they had new football boots. Which I didn't.

Mum lifted me onto the stilts anyway, and my head almost hit the ceiling.

I looked down and frowned.

Each stilt had a flipper-sized

fake foot sticking out the bottom. "What are the feet for?" I asked. This was definitely the weirdest present I'd ever had.

"Oh," said Mum, laughing a little too loudly. "I think rubber feet make stilts *even more fun*, don't you? Go on, try walking around."

Mum's idea of fun wasn't the same as mine.

I took one step forwards, went "Woaahhhhhh!" and fell flat on the kitchen floor.

"Ow!" I said.

"Oops," said Mum, unstrapping me from the stilts. She looked at her watch and frowned like she was late for something. But we couldn't be late. Mum promised she wouldn't go to work on my birthday. And I didn't have school because Mum hadn't found a new one for me yet.

Not after what happened in the last one.

Or the one before that.

Was that why Mum got me such awful presents? I was still trying to work it out, when there was a knock on the door.

BANG.

It wasn't a normal knock.

BANG!

Sawdust came down from the ceiling.

BANG!

The whole house shook.

"That must be the new neighbours, coming to wish you a happy birthday!" said Mum in the pretend cheery voice she uses when she doesn't want me to worry. (It *always* makes me worry more.)

"But no one lives anywhere near here!" I blurted as all our plates fell off the kitchen shelf and smashed on the floor. Unlike our boring old houses on boring streets next to boring offices, *this* house was on the edge of a swamp. It smelled like damp raincoats and looked ready to fall down. I loved it.

"Let's surprise them!" said Mum, acting like I hadn't said anything at all. She shoved the top hat on my head, lifted me back onto the stilts and pulled the extra-long dungarees up over them.

"Mum, what are you doing?" I said. If our new neighbours really were outside, this wasn't what I wanted to wear when I met them.

Mum ignored me again and pushed me into the hall. I wobbled all the way.

BANG!

BANG!

CRASH!

A big hairy fist burst through the middle of the front door and pulled it off its hinges.

"Arghhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!" I cried.

The hairy fist was attached to a hairy arm that was attached to a body that was even bigger than mine (and I was on STILTS!). This body was so tall its face could have peered into our upstairs windows. But right now, the face and the arms and the fists and the body were bent over and squeezing through the space where our front door had been.

There was only one sensible thing to do.

"HELP! IT'S A GIANT! HE'S GOING TO EAT US!" I yelled at the top of my voice. I stumbled backwards so fast I almost fell off my stilts.

But the strangest thing of all was Mum. She didn't scream, or cry, or call the police. She said, "Oh, you must be Mr Ogg. Thank you *so* much for coming."

Then she pointed at me.

"This is my son, Harvey. I think he'll fit in perfectly at your school."

School? What kind of school would want stilt-walking students? Or have giants for teachers?

"I'm sure Madame Bogbrush's School for Gifted Giants will be the *perfect* place for my gifted boy," Mum added.

So that's what she was up to.

Nice try, Mum. But even when I was wobbling on stilts, there was NO WAY Mr Ogg would think I was a giant.

Not a chance.

Uh uh.

Absolutely not.