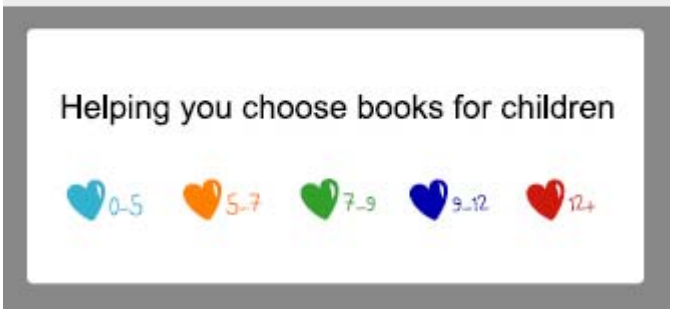
Lovereading4kids.co.uk



opening extract from

Thomas Trew and the Hidden People

written by

Sophie Masson

published by

Hodder Children's Books

All text is copyright of the author and illustrator

please print off and read at your leisure.

ONE

'There's a dwarf in the hall,' said Thomas Trew to his father, one grey London afternoon.

His father Gareth didn't even look up from his desk. Ever since he'd lost his job, he was always doing sums, trying to make two and two equal twenty-two, not four.

'There's a dwarf in the hall, Dad,' Thomas repeated. 'And he's with a lady who's dressed like a rainbow.'

'Mmm,' murmured Gareth, vaguely. He was used to Thomas's stories about people only he could see. Everyone thought Thomas was a bit weird, even his dad. The only person who hadn't was Thomas's mother, Mab; but she was dead.

Thomas didn't mind what people thought. That was their problem, not his. Ever since he could remember, he'd seen people who weren't there, and heard things that no one else heard. And he *knew* they were real.

'Dad! They say I've got to go to Owlchurch. They say you promised Mum!'

His father jumped up, scattering scribbled papers everywhere. 'They do, do they?' He rushed to the hall. And there he saw that Thomas wasn't making it up.

The dwarf had black whiskers and black eyes, and wore a very old suit, much too big for him. The lady was a bit taller. She had wild grey hair and narrow green eyes. She wore a rainbow mix of colours: red, orange, yellow, green, blue, purple.

'I'm Angelica Eyebright of the Hidden People, Middler Country, Owlchurch branch,' she said, briskly, before Gareth could say a word. 'And this is Adverse Camber, also of the Hidden People, etcetera.'

37

Thomas beamed. 'I've seen people like you, lots of times, out of the corner of my eye. I wondered when you'd talk to me.'

'Sorry to dodge about like that,' smiled Angelica Eyebright. 'Had to, you know. Couldn't speak to you till you were ready.'

Gareth found his voice. 'Wait on! You're not supposed to contact him till he's ten! That's not till August!'

Angelica Eyebright looked shifty. 'Things have changed. He has to come *now*.'

Gareth folded his arms. 'What's the big hurry?'

Thomas stared at his father. 'Dad! Do you know these people?'

It was Gareth's turn to look shifty. 'Not exactly . . . but your mother . . . she did say that . . . well—'

Angelica Eyebright interrupted. 'You still haven't told him, Gareth Trew! Well, *really*!' She turned to Thomas. Her eyes flashed. 'He was supposed to tell you. Ages ago. You are a

Rymer, Thomas. A Rymer, like your dear mother Mab was before you. And it's time you came and lived with us.'

Thomas's heart beat fast. 'A Rymer? What's a Rymer?'

Then Adverse Camber spoke for the first time. His voice was very deep, like the rumble of distant thunder. 'A Rymer sees and hears things other people can't. A Rymer can travel easily between the worlds.'

'Between the worlds?' breathed Thomas. 'What worlds?'

'Our world – the Hidden World, and the world of humans, which we call the Obvious World,' said the dwarf, gravely.

'The Hidden World is the source of dreams and magic,' added Angelica. 'There are two kinds of humans who can go there. Magicians – witches, wizards, enchanters and so on. And Rymers. With a few trusted exceptions, magicians can only come for short, supervised visits. We hold conventions and conferences

and workshops for them. But they're not allowed just to come and go as they please.'

'Have to keep an eye on magicians. They're ambitious. Out for what they can get. They snoop. They often try to trick us and pinch magic,' said Adverse.

Angelica said, 'Magicians are our customers. But Rymers – they're our *friends*. They come into our world not to learn about magic, but to learn about *us*. You see, they're our ambassadors back to the Obvious World, the strongest link between the two worlds. So they can live with us for as long as they want.'

'When they leave us,' said Adverse, 'we give them a precious gift to take back to the Obvious World. A gift they can use for the rest of their lives. The gift of poetry. Of story. Of art. Of prophecy. Of music . . .'

Thomas only half remembered his mother. She'd died when he was four years old. But he did remember one thing very clearly. She'd played the flute, beautifully. He heard

it sometimes, in his dreams. Music was what she'd brought back from the Hidden World, he thought.

'We've been friends with the Rymers for a long time,' went on Angelica. 'You see, centuries ago, a Rymer helped us when we were in great danger. We've never forgotten. After that, we vowed eternal friendship with all Rymers.'

'And I'm one of them?'

'You are indeed. So was your mother. So was her uncle. Not everyone in your mother's family has been a Rymer, though; it skips whole generations sometimes. And there are Rymers to be found all over the world. But you have one thing in common. You're all descended from that first Rymer, centuries ago.' She smiled. 'He even had the same first name as you – Thomas the Rymer. We called him True Tom.'

'Now just hang on a minute,' said Gareth, finally getting a word in. 'This is all very well,

but you still haven't explained what the big hurry is. We have a right to know!'

Adverse and Angelica shot a glance at each other. 'Thing is,' said Angelica, slowly, 'we think the Uncouthers may be on the move again.'

'Uncouthers?' Thomas repeated, uneasily.

'You see, Thomas, there are different peoples living in the Hidden World,' said Adverse Camber. 'The Middlers – that's us. We live on the lowlands. The Ariels – they come from the sky-country. The Seafolk – they live in the oceans and seas. The Montaynards – they live in the rocks and the mountains. And then there's the Uncouthers. They live deep underground, in the dark city of Pandemonium. They make nightmares, and sell evil magic to sorcerers, and they don't get on with the rest of us.'

Angelica said, 'That's what the Rymer helped us with, long ago. Back then the Uncouthers declared war on the rest of the Hidden People, and tried to take over our world. True Tom

could have simply gone back to the Obvious World. But he didn't. He helped us fight.'

'We defeated the Uncouthers,' added the dwarf. 'Since then, they've been bound by a strict peace treaty. They've tried to get around it once or twice. In the last century or so, it's been OK, because their Queen isn't interested in war. But we've heard she is about to give up her throne to her son. And we think he's got big plans to try and take over the worlds again.'

'What will happen if he does?'

'He'll stop good dreams,' said Adverse, quietly. 'Nightmares will flood the Obvious World. Everyone will be scared to go to sleep. People will go mad. Governments will fall. Even magicians and Rymers will be helpless. The world will go dark. The Uncouthers will rule everything.'

Thomas shivered.

'Now hang on,' cried Gareth, before Thomas could speak. 'Are you expecting him to fight the Uncouthers? Are you crazy? He might be

a Rymer, but he's also my son and I don't want him put in danger.'

'Do you think *we* do?' snapped Angelica Eyebright. 'Of course we don't want him to fight the Uncouthers. He's not ready for that, not yet. But we think he's more at risk if he stays here. We've heard that the Uncouthers are looking for him. They don't know who he is, not yet. But they've always hated the Rymers, since that first one. They've always felt that his part in the war turned the tide against them. If we leave it much longer, they might actually find Thomas. And then . . . well, let's say they'll try their hardest to stop him coming.'

The dwarf said, quietly, 'It's hard for us to protect him here. The effect of nightmares is much stronger here than in our world. Believe me, Mr Trew, Thomas will be much safer in Owlchurch. The Uncouthers won't dare to harm him there. They'll know they have us to reckon with.'

'I still don't know if—' began Gareth, but Thomas interrupted him.

'Dad, I want to go. I *really* want to go. I really *have* to go!'

'Oh, for goodness' sake, Thomas! You can't go on your own . . . you just can't. I would be worried to death.' He rounded on Angelica and the dwarf. 'You're crazy, putting such ideas in his head! He's still young! He needs his father!'

'Of course he does,' said Angelica, calmly. 'That's why you're coming too, Gareth Trew.'

Gareth spluttered. 'Me?'

'The very same. I have a job for you. Managing my business, the Apple Tree Café. You need a job, don't you?'

'Yes, but . . .'

'And don't worry about the house. We'll send a squad of house-pixies to keep it in tiptop shape till you come back. Now then, go and pack, both of you. We need to leave as soon as possible. And don't bother taking

too much. There's all you need in Owlchurch.'

Gareth started protesting again. But Thomas took no notice. He raced up the stairs to pack his bag, more excited than he'd ever been in his life. And if he was a little scared too, well, he could cope with that for the moment. Things were really happening, at long last!