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Impossible and Incredible

Ed landed with a *FLUMP* onto something pliable and soft. It felt like a slightly deflated bouncy castle. He rolled over a few times before catching himself. Then he lay there, eyes squeezed shut, heart hammering, fist still tight around the piece of sea-glass.

Slowly, he opened his eyes, but quickly closed them again. What he was looking at couldn't possibly be real.

The sky above him was the bright blue of a September morning, but it was streaked with coils and swirls of pink, yellow, white and purple clouds. There were birds as large as cars flapping steadily through them, being chased by butterflies so big you could have ridden them. Their wingbeats blew a cookie-dough smell right into Ed's face.

Ed got carefully his feet. The ground beneath his socks wasn't stable, and it certainly wasn't the laundry-covered carpet he had been standing on a moment ago. It was creamy-coloured and squishy. Ed poked a toe into it to see if it had any give, and the whole ground began to shake. A rumbling noise filled Ed's ears – a loud roar that seemed to be coming from . . .

Ed turned around to see a face – a head – complete with antennae and eyes on stalks and a gaping mouth big enough to swallow a bus . . . and realised he wasn't standing on ground at all. He was standing on a soft neck part of a gigantic SNAIL.

And it was LAUGHING.

Ed gawped in horror as the snail laughed *HO HO HO*! It actually seemed to be . . . smiling? 'THAT TICKLES!' the snail boomed. One of its eyes on stalks peered down at Ed. 'DO IT AGAIN?'

Ed screamed. There was no way he could ever have held it in. The scream unbalanced him and he slipped down the soft (though not at all slimy) body of the giant snail to the ground. He landed on luminous green grass with a thud, skidding on all fours before scrambling upright and running for his life.

Where in the name of Bel *was* he?

He tried to make sense of it all as he ran. He'd

been sat on his bed at home, Elodie had passed him the sea-glass, and then . . . he was here. Wherever *here* was. Ed's socks slipped on the grass and he looked around himself in a panic.

This place was . . . *weird*.

He had been too busy running away from the snail to notice at first, but as he slowed down, he realised he wasn't alone. There was a slow procession of teddy-bears walking lopsidedly down a path that seemed to be made out of squares of chocolate. That was definitely a river of strawberry milkshake not too far away, and why did that tree seem to be growing bunches of money instead of apples?

Ed stopped running, and stared. A party of brightly coloured robots to his right randomly started break-dancing, as a team of mice dressed like ninjas rolled a huge wheel of cheese away in the opposite direction. Ed could see multicoloured inflatable rings floating down the lazy milkshake river, each one carrying a bunny rabbit, one of which was reading a newspaper. There was a fairy painting a rainbow in the sky using a drippy tin of paint, as a space-rocket with gleaming white and red paintwork shot past it, the crew waving out of the port-holes.

This . . . was impossible.

He realised his mouth was open and he could taste

Irn Bru, his favourite pop. He accepted this last oddness with a vague nod. Things couldn't get any weirder.

Or, maybe they could.

'Are you alright?'

Ed spun around and found himself face to face with a red-haired girl about his own age wearing waders, a yellow raincoat and what looked like a sealskin scarf wrapped around her neck. 'Who are you?' he blurted.

'I'm Estha,' she said. She took a step back, as if to look at him properly. Her blue eyes started to widen. 'Who . . . who are you?'

'I'm . . . Ed,' he said, cautiously. He felt like a bug in a glass case.

Estha was staring at him now, mouth open, eyes popping. 'Are – are you an Artezan?' She asked, her Scottish accent the most comforting thing Ed had experienced in the last ten minutes. 'How did you get here?' Her eyes were flitting about all over Ed from his socks to the top of his head as if she couldn't quite believe he was real.

'I am an Artezan, and – and I don't know, I just held this and . . .' Ed held the sea-glass out in his hand. 'Where is *here*?' he asked helplessly.

Estha looked carefully at the bead of glass in his hand but didn't answer his question. Her freckly face

was scrunched up in the same expression Ed wore in maths lessons. 'Are you . . .' She reached out, and prodded Ed in the chest. 'Oh, wow.' Her eyes went wide as she walked around him, as if checking he was three-dimensional. 'Oh *wow*.'

Ed swayed a bit from the poke and the inspection, feeling light-headed. 'What is all this?' he asked. 'Where am I? What's going on?'

Estha's frown softened a bit, but her eyes were still wide. 'But you're *real*. You're a real Artezan, right here. We thought . . . we'd given up hope of there ever being . . .' Her eyes suddenly shone as if she wanted to cry.

'We?' Ed was too worried to ask what the girl had been hoping for. Nothing here was making any sense at all. He touched at his own chest. He felt real to himself. And her poke had felt real too. 'Where *am* I?' he asked again.

'You're in Tìr Aislingean,' Esther said. She cast a hand around as if to indicate everything from the bunnies to the space-rockets. 'We live here, me and all the others.'

Ed's mind stretched back through time to try and remember the games he and his dad played about words. Scottish Gaelic was one language they played in, and the word sounded so familiar . . .

'*Tìr* is "country",' he remembered. 'Or "land"? The land of—'

'Of dreams,' Esther finished.

Ed blinked. 'The land . . . of dreams.'

'Aye.' Estha cocked her head to one side. The sealskin scarf dropped to one side, the tail flapping down. 'Did you *really* not mean to come here?' She sounded as amazed and bewildered as he felt.

'No, I just . . . I only got my Reveal yesterday, so . . .' Ed looked at the pearl of glass he held, and realisation ignited inside him. 'Oh, wait, I get it – this must be my tuil! I don't just *create threads* of dreams like Nyx, I can come here, to the land of them!'

He suddenly felt so filled up with excitement he could have floated off into the strange multicoloured sky. He had a power! And not just any power – he had travelled to a whole different *world*. That was the greatest power he had ever heard of! He was going to be celebrated, congratulated, as much as Elodie was, maybe even more! He laughed out loud, and punched the air, whooping for joy.

'I knew it couldn't be something ordinary!' he shouted. 'I *knew* it!' He thought of that deep, dark purple aura and felt utterly vindicated. He *was* powerful, just like his twin.