LET SLEEPING GODS LIE

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For Tom and Billie, my travel companions
across the lands of our imagination.



A great shadow spread over the ground; at its edge the traveller stopped. The plague of the long road, that great beast, blocked his path. Above a mighty lion's body, twice as high at the shoulder as a man, was the face of a woman, lips parted into a question.

The Wolff-Rämmer World Mythology Collection, volume 2



CHAPTER 1

LOST

Saving the world is not all it's cracked up to be. It's pretty rubbish, actually.

That's what Trixie dos Santos told herself as she walked to school, squinting against the low autumn sun as it passed slowly behind the hill that led from her house to the centre of town. A year ago, the pale light would've only cast shadows from the rows of terraced houses that lined the street, but this morning the neat silhouettes of pointed roofs and small chimneys were joined by the huge curling shapes of dragons, who floated lazily across the sky, struggling to warm their scales in the cold morning air.

A year ago the Big Blackout had happened. All electricity had disappeared from the world and chaos ensued – cold, hunger, looting and violence spread in the dark and desperation that followed. As scientists and politicians failed to find answers, Trixie had thought

she knew what was going on. Obsessed with ancient myths since she was a toddler, when her grandmother had told her her first legend, Trixie had been certain that ancient gods had stolen the power from humankind in an attempt to be worshipped again. No one had believed Trixie, of course, but that didn't stop her. She fled home, enlisted the help of a band of infuriating trickster gods and tried to get the electricity back. Before leaving she had thought the whole thing would be great fun, but the journey was full of terror, danger and pain. Although they *did* bring the electricity back into the world, Trixie had been badly injured and her pet ferret Iorgi had been killed.

Surely all the kudos from having *actually* saved the *actual* world would make up for some of it, right? Wrong. There was no kudos. Zilch. Zero. Nada. Although Trixie's parents believed her, no one else thought that a young girl could've been capable of doing something that whole governments hadn't. To make everything worse, when Trixie brought electricity back she also, inadvertently, released magic into the world. When trolls, unicorns and all manner of fantastic creatures began appearing everywhere, most people just assumed that the end of the blackout and the sudden appearance of magic were natural, or, up to that point, supernatural phenomena, events that had happened outside any human control.

In a universe that had been suddenly filled with inexplicable magic, the disappearance of the power had become just another baffling moment that couldn't really be understood, just accepted.

Trixie found that hard to take. She couldn't even convince her closest friends at school about what she had done, and it drove her mad. Now everyone accepted fairies, banshees and yetis were real, but they still thought her adventure was just a story. It was *so* unfair.

She stopped before crossing the road, noticing some movement between the bushes and trees in the middle of a roundabout. A group of tiny men wearing pointy felt hats were digging the soil, humming a tune together as they worked. One of them looked up and waved hello to Trixie, beaming. She made an effort to smile, barely moving the ends of her mouth up, and waved back limply.

Anyone else would've cheered up at the sight of the jolly gnomes, but Trixie became even gloomier. Getting back from her quest, she had thought that life would go back to normal, but it hadn't. It *couldn't*. There was no normal any more, at least not how it had been until a year ago. Everyone was still trying to find their place in this new reality, filled with all the wonder and terror that magic had brought back when it returned. For every gentle dryad or elegant winged horse that grazed in a

meadow, there were sly yokai or ravenous vampires prowling in the dark. All the safety people living in towns and cities were used to had disappeared, a mixture of worry and wonder left in its place.

A few friendly gnomes doing some gardening were lovely to have around, Trixie thought, but she couldn't forget the extra food she now had to carry in her backpack to distract the huge troll who lived under the bridge that went over the railway track between her house and school.

A bump on her shoulder made Trixie look up, worried. A short girl had stopped next to her, her face nearly hidden by a fringe that swept out of her hoodie. 'Are you going to cross or is the plan to spend the rest of the day staring at your trainers?' she asked.

'My trainers are very interesting, I'll have you know,' Trixie replied, managing a smile.

'Er . . . not more interesting than those little gardening men, or that weird bird cat thing perched on top of that tree,' the other girl said, pointing up.

'That's a sphinx, Laura,' said Trixie, rolling her eyes.

'No, it's not,' the girl replied. 'Sphinxes are huge, have heads like Egyptian pharaohs and will gobble you up if you don't answer their riddles.'

'That's just that statue, there are loads of different types of sphinx,' said Trixie. 'They come in all shapes and

sizes, like people, dogs or my mum's homemade nuggets.'

'Fair enough,' said Laura, 'but it's still not asking us anything. Maybe it's just a really weird pigeon or something . . .'

'Let's see what happens when we try to cross the road,' said Trixie.

The girls waited for a few cars to pass and stepped onto the crossing. When they were halfway across, the sphinx flew down from the tree where it had been perching and landed in front of them. It was as high as Trixie's knee: two large grey wings framed a long cat's body, on top of which stood the head of a slightly bored middle-aged woman.

'Answer me or I'll devour you!' it spat.

'Er, excuse me?' said Trixie.

'Answer me or I'll devour you,' the sphinx repeated, with a little less conviction this time.

'Well, that's not a very nice way to start a conversation, is it?' Trixie said. 'All *we* are trying to do is get to school, and I'm sure *you* have things to be getting on with as well, so let's all be on our way. Good day.'

'Wait! That's not how it works,' hissed the sphinx, baring a row of sharp fangs at the girls. 'You have to solve my riddle. If you can't, I get to eat you.'

'Do you want to?' asked Trixie.

'Want to what?' said the sphinx, baffled.

'Eat us,' Trixie replied.

The sphinx blinked at Trixie very slowly. 'Hm . . . not really,' she said. 'It's easy to find food around here, and neither of you looks like you'd taste too nice, no offence intended.'

'None taken,' said Laura.

'It's just . . .' the sphinx continued '. . . that's the way it works. I guard the path and eat unwary travellers.'

'Well, no one is making you do it,' said Trixie. 'You can go stand somewhere else and even *not* eat anyone, if that's what you fancy.'

The sphinx cocked her head to one side and stared at the two girls.

'Mind, blown . . .' whispered Laura to Trixie.

After a while the sphinx straightened her head, narrowing her eyes. 'Are you sure about that?' she asked.

'One hundred per cent,' replied Trixie.

'Oh . . . well . . . in that case, good day to both of you. I should probably go and find something else to do with my time,' said the sphinx.

'See if they have any traffic warden jobs going,' Trixie shouted as the sphinx flew away. 'You get to give people tickets, it annoys them a lot more than just being eaten.'

Laura laughed and wrapped her arms around Trixie as they walked on. 'That was brilliant!' She said. 'How come you were not scared of that weird thing?!? It was



almost as big as a fox.'

'It was just a really small sphinx,' said Trixie. 'Nothing to write home about.'

'Only you!' said Laura. 'Sometimes I almost believe your crazy story about tricking all sorts of gods and getting the power back . . .'

'Yeah, that's much harder to believe than being harassed by a sphinx on the road to school, Laura,' said Trixie, all the cheer she had felt after getting rid of the sphinx emptying away.

'Don't be like that,' her friend said, shoving Trixie gently. 'We're late for registration anyway, so you'll have a real reason to be grumpy soon. Mr Porter and his clipboard of doom will most definitely be waiting for us at the front gate.'

'That'd be another good job for that sphinx,' said Trixie.

'Anyone else doing Mr Porter's job would be an improvement,' said Laura 'even a stubby-winged cat-lady with sharp teeth.'

'I heard that!' came a voice from around the gate, sending Trixie and her friend sprinting into the school yard.

