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Opening extract from

# Mr Gum and the Power Crystals

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# Some of the crazy old townsfolk from Lamonic Bibber



Mrs Lovely



Friday O'Leary



Billy William the Third



Old Granny



Mr Gum




Martin Launderette



Alan Taylor



Polly

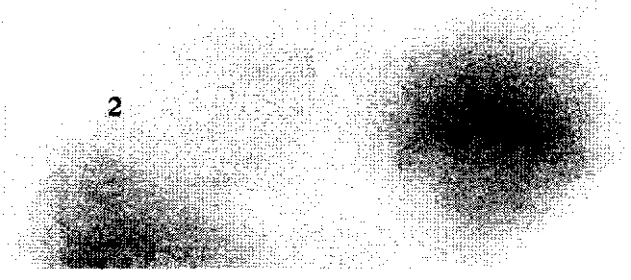
# INTRODUCTION: Why do things happen?

'Why do things happen?' That's the question on everyone's lips these days.

'Why do things happen, Science?' everyone's lips ask Science. And luckily, Science usually has the answer. For example, if you ask Science why your little sister is crying,

the answer is plain – because you called her 'Stinky' and broke all her dolls with a hammer. Or if you ask Science why rain falls from the sky, the answer is simple – because it just does and stuff.

But every so often something happens which is so extraordinary that even Science does not hold the answers. For instance, take the horrifying events of last summer in the little town of Lamonic Bibber. 'Why did they happen, Science?' you may ask. But you will get no answer.



For some things are so strange that they cannot be explained away with Science. Or Maths. Or even P.E. But like Old Granny said as she rocked back and forth in her chair by the fireside:

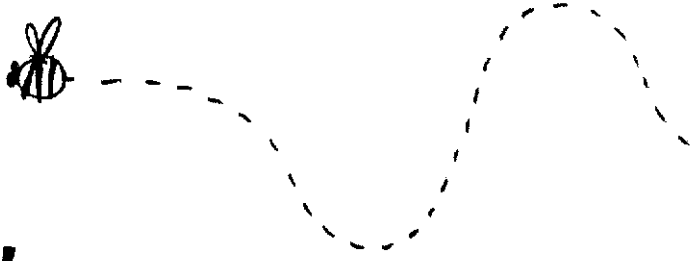
'The past has a way of repeating itself. The past has a way of repeating itself. The past has a way of repeating itself.'

And perhaps that is all that anyone can say of such things.

# Chapter 1

# The Strange Stones

It all started one hot afternoon, down by the Lamonic River where the water rushes grow. A nine-year-old girl called Polly was skipping along by the water's edge and oh, what a happy little nibblehead she was! It was the height of summer and the world was her playground, sparkling with colour and excitement at every twist and turn.



**FLINK!** A trout leapt from the clear water in a flash of silver scales.

**BZZZZ!** A bumblebee did that thing where it goes really near your ear and makes you jump in astonishment.

**WHOOOOOSH-THUMP-SQUISH!** A kingfisher soared gracefully into the side of a sycamore tree, plummeted to the ground and was stepped on by an otter.

The warblers warbled and the dragonflies dragonflew and the frogs texted 'RIBBET' to each other on their mobiles. And the sun shone down upon them all as if to say, 'Here, have loads of heat off me for a laugh.' It was the height of summer all right.

'Oranges an' mermaids, says the bells of Saint Dickens!' sang Polly as she skip-skap-skappled along. 'I owe you five matchsticks, says the bells of –'

BARK!

Suddenly there came a sound from the Old Meadow yonder, a sound so happy that for one amazing moment all the soldiers in the world put down their guns and did a bit of hopscotch instead.

BAAARK!

There it was again, even happier than before and with a couple of extra 'A's in the middle free of charge.



'SPARKLERS!' shouted Polly joyously. 'It's Jake, the Number One Best Woofdog on the Woofdog Charts, an' that's a official Polly Fact!'

Crashing through the undergrowth she followed the barking to the Old Meadow yonder, and yes! There was big Jake himself, doing what he loved best – digging an enormous hole with his legendary paws. Dirt was flyin', flies were buzzin', cows were mooin', letter 'g's' were missin' – it was chaos.



'Hey, Jakey, let me play too!' laughed Polly, running over. But even as she spoke Jake was emerging from the hole, a small brown object clutched between his doggy-go-lucky teeth.

'What you found, what you found?' said Polly, petting the energetic beast until he gobbed the thing proudly into the long grass. It was a little bag made of rough cloth and tied with red ribbon. Here and there it had been nibbled away by insects and pumpkins, but the material was

thick and had withstood even the greediest attacks.

'What's that?' said Polly, squinting at something written on the bag, scratched into the cloth in rusty red ink:

1559

'Ooh,' she marvelled. 'This bag must be

from them long-ago Olden Days what's written in the history books. An' it's probbly a-burstin' with buried treasures what no one's never seen for thousands of years!'

With trembling fingers Polly untied the ribbon. Then, hardly daring to breathe, she tipped the contents of the bag into her sweaty palm.

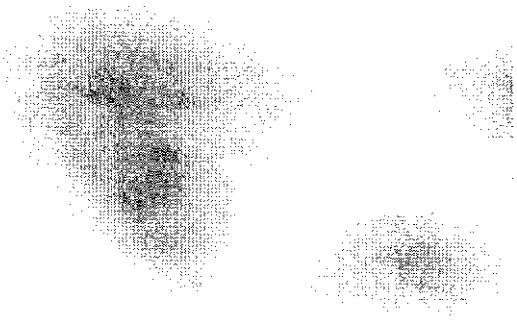
'Smooky palooki!' she sighed. 'These things is well beautiful!'

For she was holding two strangely shaped stones, one pink and one white, glinting in the bright sunshine, glinting more brightly than anything Polly had ever seen before. They were beautiful indeed – and yet, Polly thought, there was something strange about their beauty. It was a cold, evil kind of beauty that would destroy you if you got too close, like a beautiful goose standing on a hillside.

*You walk towards the goose, transfixed by its beauty. You want to touch the goose! You want to feel its soft feathery back and maybe have a cheeky stroke of its neck. But it is only when you are up close that you realise it is not a goose at all, but a cruel wolf with hunger in his eyes and a plastic beak strapped to his face.*

Yet try as she might, Polly could not tear her eyes away. The stones were so beautiful. She wanted





to look at them forever, or slightly longer if possible. They made her feel strong, as if she could achieve anything . . .

By her side Jake gave a little whimper, and Polly looked up, startled from her daydreams.

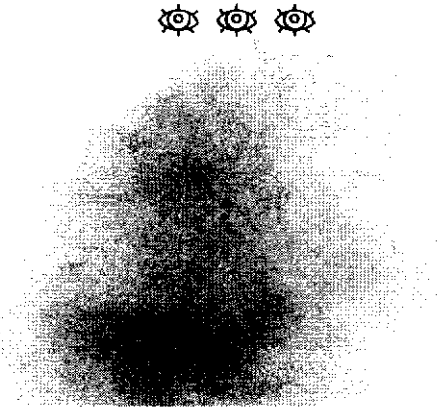
'Oh,' she laughed uneasily. 'Look how dark it's got while I been a-starin' at these stones! I done lost track of the times!'

And so, putting the stones in her pocket, Polly headed for home. The sun was setting and

the shadows were creeping out to play and she found herself walking slightly faster than normal.

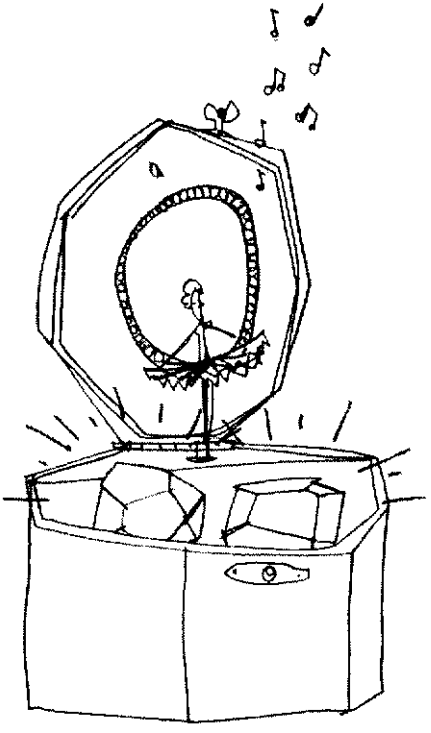
'Not cos I'm scared or nothin',' she told Jake. 'Jus' cos I wanna see what it's like walkin' fast, that's all.'

But as they walked, Polly had the feeling that unfriendly eyes were upon her. And she was very glad indeed when they were finally away from the riverside and heading back into town.



'These stones are brilliant,' she told herself later that evening. But all the same, she locked them safely away in her jewellery box before she went to bed.

'Not cos I'm frightened of them or nothin',' she told herself. 'Jus' cos I wanna see what it's like putting things in my jewellery box, that's all.'



# Chapter 2

## Polly's Bad Dream

That very same night Polly had a strange dream. In her dream the stones had somehow escaped from her jewellery box. There they were, sitting in her hand, turning and moving as if they were alive.

*Take us to the windmill, Polly*, the stones seemed

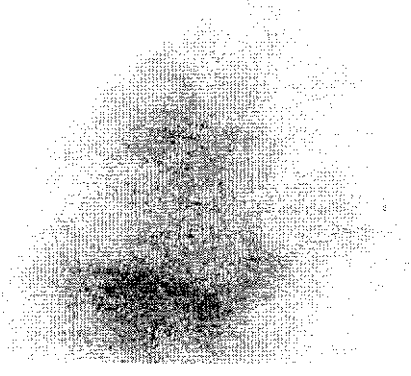
to whisper inside her head. *Take us to the windmill!*

'But there aren't no windmills in Lamonic Bibber,' Polly frowned sleepily. 'You only gets windmills in foreign countries like Indostralia an' the United States of Wales, don't you?'

*Take us to the windmill*, the stones seemed to whisper again. *It is our Destiny.*

'NO,' said Polly, more firmly this time. 'It's jus' my imaginations an' I'm not a-listenin'!'

*Awwww, go on, take us*, said the pink one.



*It'll be a laugh.*

*We'd take YOU to the windmill if YOU wanted to go,* said the white one.

'For the last time, NO!' cried Polly in her dream. But unable to help herself, she was getting up anyway. She was getting up and opening her bedroom door. Now she was standing in the bathroom brushing her teeth . . .

*No time for dental hygiene*, whispered the stones.

*Take us to the windmill!*

'Honestly,' said Polly crossly. 'Don't you two ever think 'bout nothin' but a-goin' to windmills?'

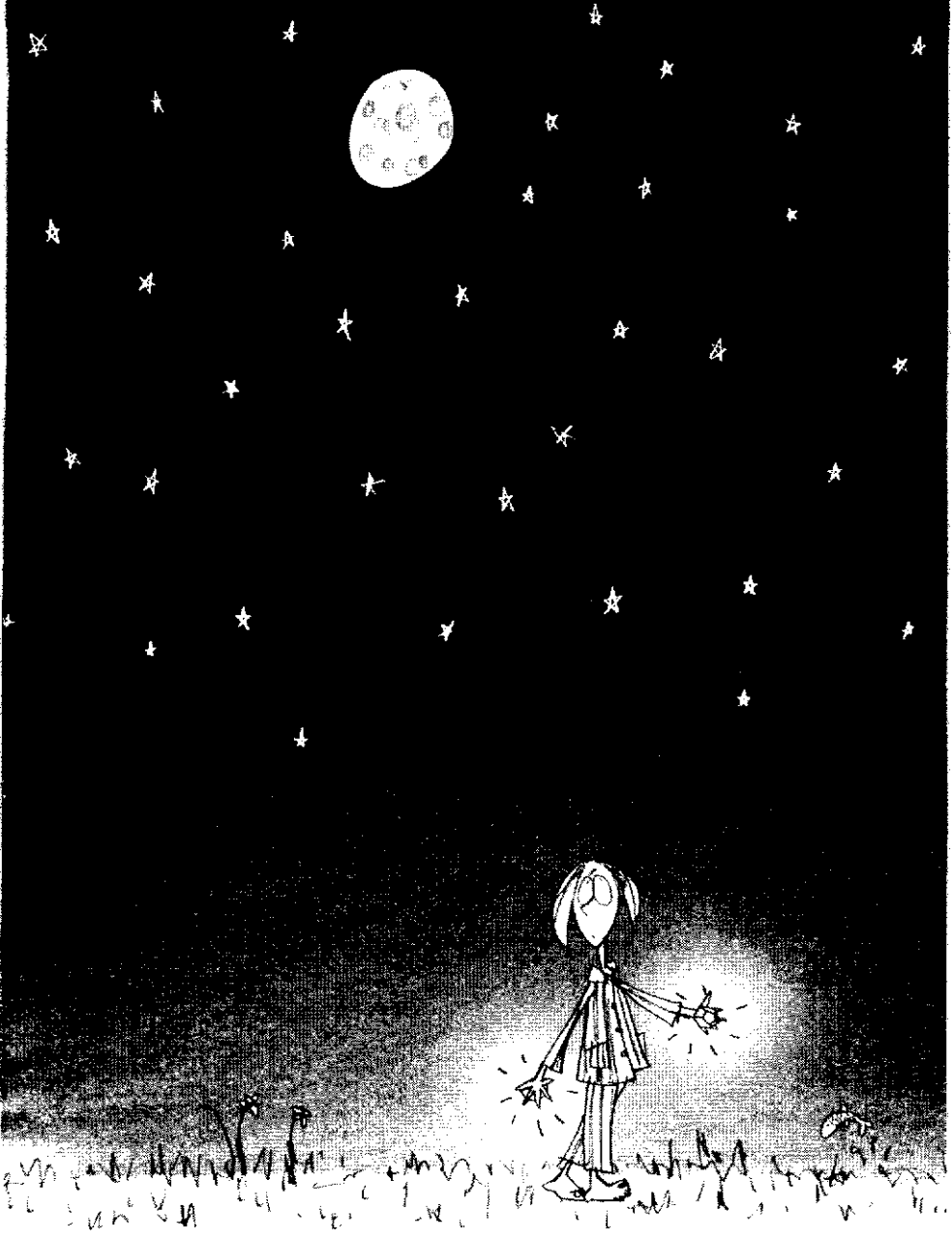
*Not really*, whispered the stones. *It is our Destiny.*

'Well, it's my Destiny to go back to bed right now an' dream of friendly ponies instead,' replied Polly. But even as she said this she was gazing at the stones as if entranced, thinking how pretty they looked . . .

And before she knew it she was out the front door and underneath the stars. It was very late.

Not a soul saw her as she made her way down to the river, gliding along soundlessly in her bare feet. High above the moon shone like a silver coin from the Olden Days, and glancing up, Polly saw a dreadful thing – for the moon was changing, changing before her very eyes.

Round and round whizzed the moon's silvery disc . . . Now it seemed like the sails of a great windmill, turning and turning in the sky above . . . And now it changed to become a huge loaf of



freshly baked bread . . . But then the bread was burning, burning, until it was nothing more than cinders and ashes . . . And then it changed once more to become a face that Polly knew only too well. A horrifying face with a big red beard, a face with two angry bloodshot eyes . . .

'Mr Gum!' Polly cried out. 'What's that beardy old criminal doin' here? Even in dreams, he is the worst!'

But then the awful vision was gone and the

moon was just the moon again. Except it still had a bit of Mr Gum's beard on by accident. And part of his nose.



'I don't like this dream,' said Polly as she walked along. The warm wind ruffled her pyjamas and the grass swished secretly at her feet. 'I wants to wake up,' she whimpered. 'I really truly does.'