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Opening extract from

Bug Brother

Written by

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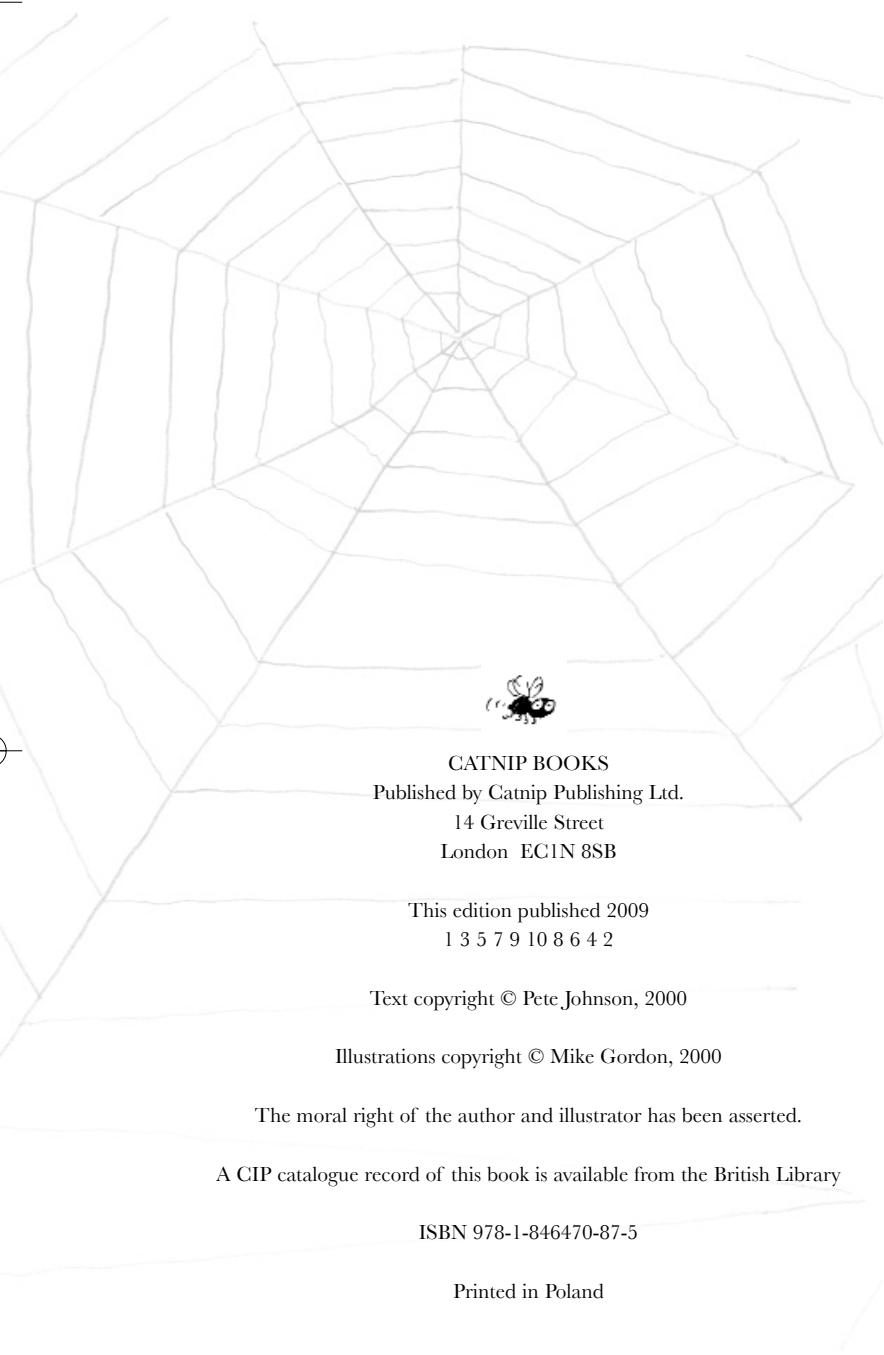
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BUG BROTHER



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ILLUSTRATED BY
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1. All About *Harry*

Harry is the most annoying younger brother in the entire universe.

For a start, he's always going into my bedroom, especially when I'm not there.

I'll come home and find he's left all my computer games out everywhere. Or he's taken something out of my bedroom without even asking – the other day, he took my beanbag

away and chucked it downstairs. Then Mum tripped over it and started having a go at me. He thought that was SO funny.

He's also really noisy and he wakes me up at night. His bedroom is right next to mine. So in the middle of the night, I'll hear him playing his story tapes or searching through his drawers for one of his games. Sometimes he'll even call my name out. 'Jamie, Jamie,' he shouts. If he's awake, I've got to be awake too.

But the worst thing of all – and this is a bit embarrassing – is that I'm two years and three months older than Harry, but he's taller than me. Half a head taller. I come up to the middle of his ear.

Of course Harry just loves being taller than me. And when someone mistakes

him for the older one of us – well, he'll smile about that for days afterwards. It isn't fair, is it? I shouldn't have to look up to my little brother.

I don't tell anyone how bad I feel about this – except Reema. She lives in the road next to mine and she's my best friend. One time when I was complaining, Reema suggested I just ignore Harry, act as if he wasn't really there. I tried this. Whenever Harry came near me, I just closed my eyes and hummed to myself. But then he punched me, so I had to punch him back in self-defence, didn't I? Then we started having this massive fight until Mum came in and stopped us.

Guess whose fault it was? I'm the older one, so I should set an example.

Anyway, just when I thought my brother couldn't get any worse, there came a bombshell. I'd gone round to Reema's house after school. When I got back, Mum, Dad and Harry were looking so happy I thought we must have won the lottery at least.

Mum said, 'Good news, Jamie. We've just heard Harry is going to be in the borough sports. He's passed the trials for the school's sports day. He will be their youngest competitor.'

Mum and Dad were dead proud, I could see that.

But I just thought, why wasn't it me?



I'd entered the trials too. Dad must have realized what I was thinking because he said, 'It'll be your turn next, Jamie.'

I didn't answer. My eyes were burning and my throat had gone very dry.

Then Mum said, very quietly, 'You should say well done to your brother.'

I glanced up. There was Harry waiting for me to say it, looking all smug and pleased with himself. He knew he could run faster than me and jump higher. He had it all.

It wasn't fair.

And I couldn't say well done to him. Instead I bolted out of the house.

I heard Dad calling me.

'I'm going back round Reema's,' I cried, and didn't wait for him to reply.

When I got to Reema's house, Mrs Patel said, 'Oh, you've just missed her. She's gone to tea with her nan. Can I give her a message?'

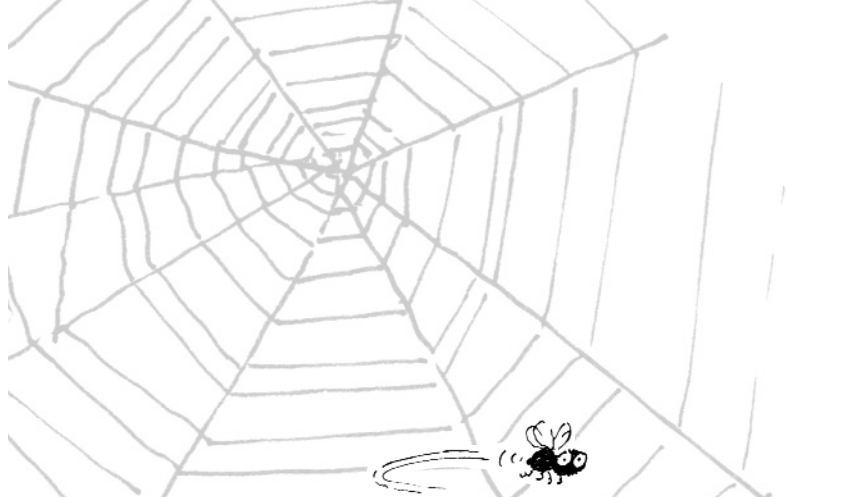
'It's all right, thanks,' I mumbled.

I didn't want to go home. So instead I wandered into the wood opposite my house. I wasn't supposed to go in there without telling Mum or Dad first.

I walked along with my head down, muttering, 'Why do all the good things happen to my brother? I wish something really exciting would happen to me for a change.'

Then I looked up and started in amazement.

You won't believe what I saw . . .



2. An Amazing Discovery

High in the branches of a tree hung a dark blue cape. It seemed to have just landed there. I wanted to get a closer look, so I jumped on to the lowest branch and started pulling myself up. Now I could see there were bright gold stars all around the sides of the cape. And just inside the collar was the number seven. This was gold too and shone as if it had just been polished.

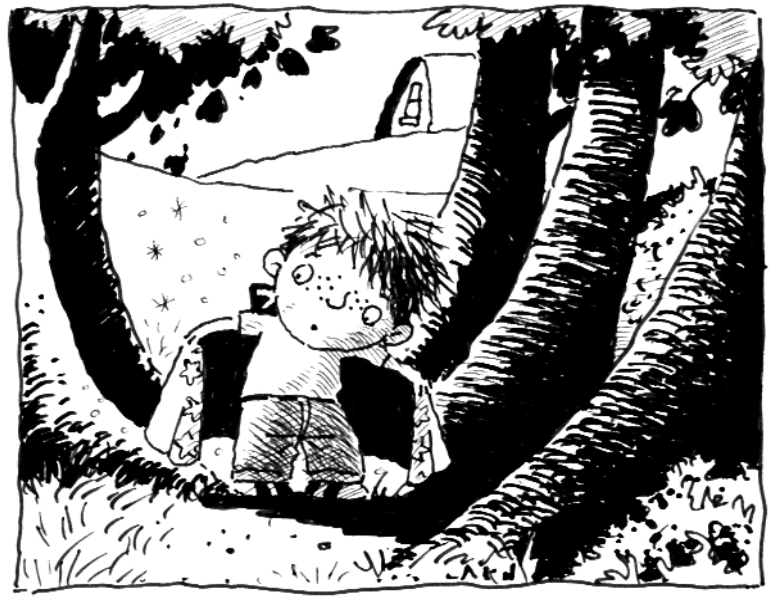
But where had it come from? A parachute might suddenly appear on the top of a tree, but not a cape. Unless – unless a magician had been flying through the air in such a hurry the cape had slipped off his shoulders.

The wind tugged gently at it. I wouldn't have been surprised if the cape had soared off into the sky again. I climbed nearer. All at once, I could reach out and touch it. My hands began to tingle. Maybe a magician was searching for his missing cape at this very moment.

Should I leave it where it was? But I couldn't do that. So instead, I tugged the cape off the branches and very carefully carried it back down to the ground. I felt as if I'd found treasure.

I searched for a name or a label. There was none. The inside of the cape was black velvet. It felt soft and silky. It also looked brand new, as if it had come straight out of the shops. But right then, I knew my cape hadn't come from any shop. I put it around my shoulders.

Immediately, a shiver ran through me,



and I suddenly felt lighter too, as if I could fly all the way home.

I didn't.But my feet hardly seemed to touch the ground.

I raced into the kitchen, grinning all over my face. Mum, Dad and Harry were sitting round the table.

'We've already finished eating,' said Mum, 'So next time you go round to Reema's . . .' she stopped. 'Wherever did you get that from?'

'I found it hanging from a tree,' I replied.

'You've been to the woods without telling us,' said Dad.

He looked across at Mum, but she was still gazing at my cape. 'It's beautiful,' she murmured.

Then Harry touched it.

'Hands off,' I muttered.

'It's too big for you,' he said.

'No it's not. It fits me perfectly . . . and it's nothing to do with you,' I added.

'I want one,' cried Harry. 'It's not fair, Jamie's got a cape and I haven't.'

'Sorry,' I said, smiling. 'There's only one cape like this in the whole world, and it belongs to me.'

'Are you sure you found it hanging in a tree?' asked Dad.

'Yes,' I said indignantly.

'Well I don't know if you can keep it, love. Someone must be missing that,' said Mum.

'But if no one is missing it, then it's mine?' I asked.

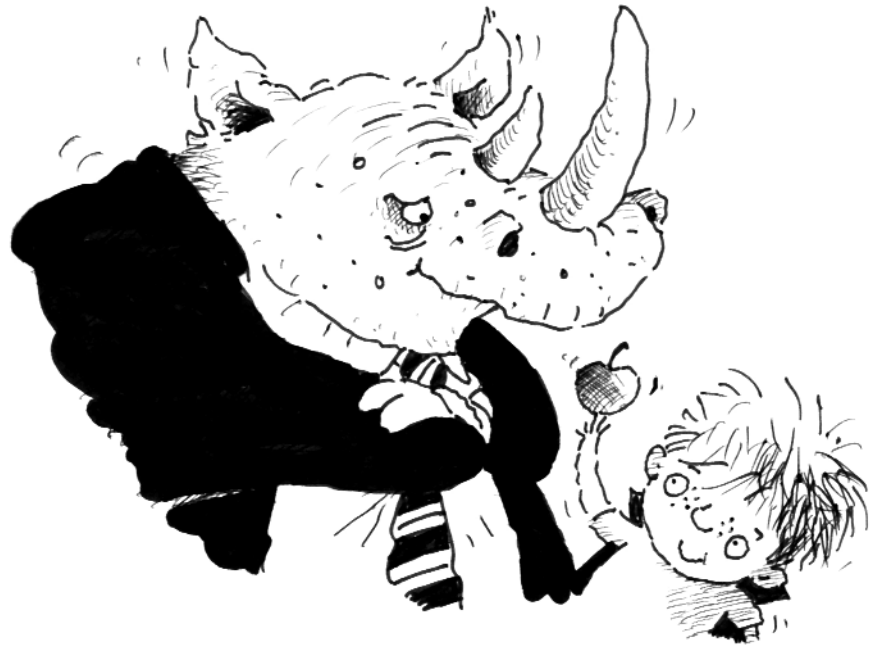
'We'll see,' said Mum.

Mum put up a notice in the post office. For a while, I lived in dread of someone knocking on the door and claiming my cape, but no one ever did. Mum said it was all a bit of a mystery, but in the end she agreed that I could keep it.

I wore the cape everywhere, even sometimes to school. My magician's cape, as I called it. I let Reema try it on. She thought it was brilliant. She was fascinated by the number seven on the collar.

'Seven's supposed to be a magic number,' she said, 'so that's a little sign your cape is very special.'

She and I pretended the cape could do magic. So if a teacher told us off for talking, I'd put my left thumb (I am



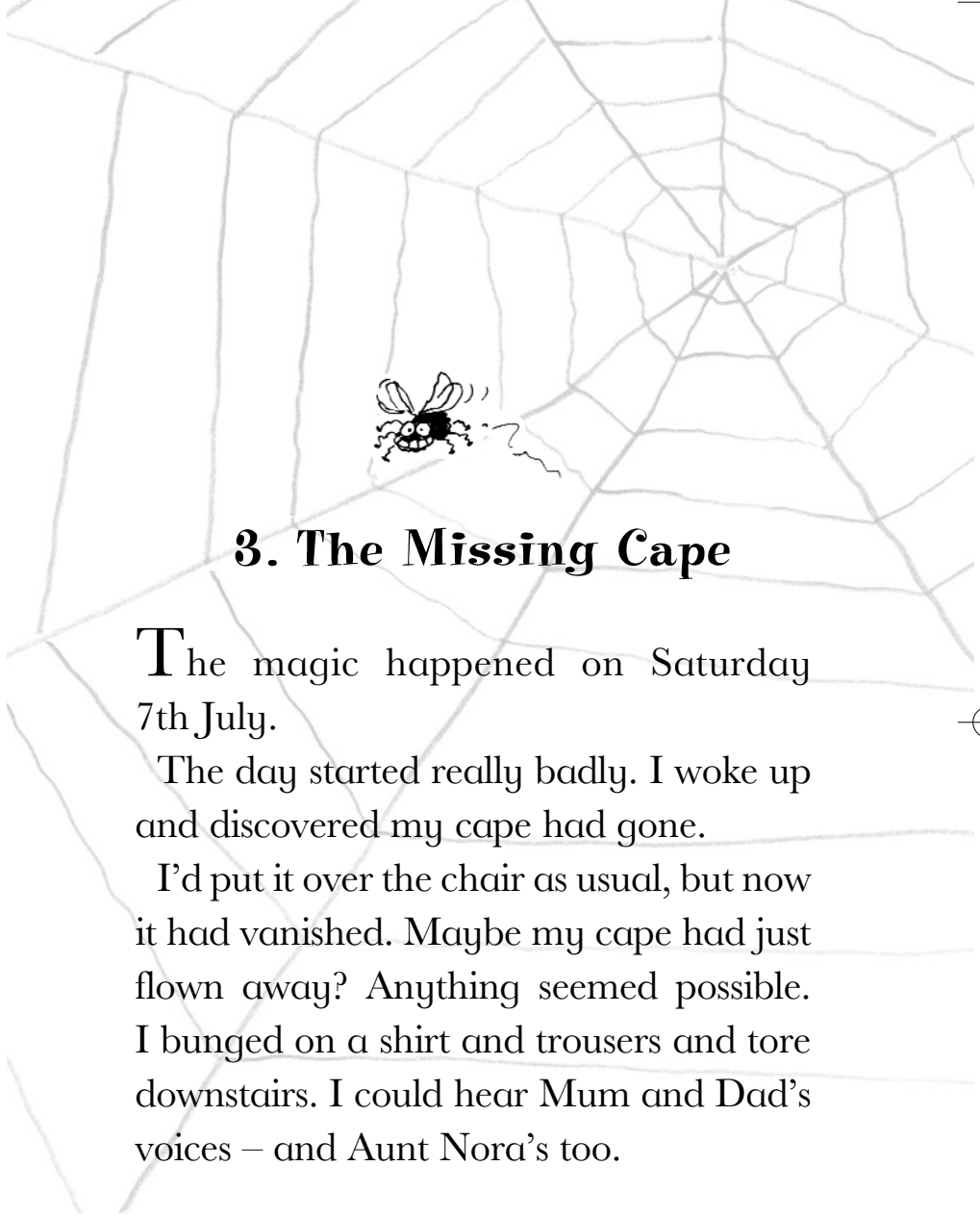
left-handed) on the seven and whisper, 'I want you to turn that horrible teacher into a rhinoceros right now.'

Nothing ever happened, but the idea still made Reema and me burst out laughing.

Of course, I put spells on Harry. I'd

get my cape to turn him into all sorts of animals – and I'd often make him invisible too. My spells might not have worked, but I enjoyed making them. And I felt different when I was wearing that cape: bigger, stronger, more powerful.

I was certain that one day my cape would do something magical. And one day it did.



3. The Missing Cape

The magic happened on Saturday 7th July.

The day started really badly. I woke up and discovered my cape had gone.

I'd put it over the chair as usual, but now it had vanished. Maybe my cape had just flown away? Anything seemed possible. I bunged on a shirt and trousers and tore downstairs. I could hear Mum and Dad's voices – and Aunt Nora's too.