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Chapter 1

I've-no-han-ky-in-my-hand-so-I'm-a-bo-gey-won-derland . . .

Wo! Bogey wonderland—wo—oh—

Wo! No hanky in my hand . . . Oh no!

I split my pants when I start to dance in bogey wonderland . . .

It was only when Kayleigh and Chanelle stopped boogieing and put their hands on their hips that Eddie realized he'd been singing out loud. He stopped. He shuffled uneasily, and pushed his hands deep into his fleece pockets as they all stared at him. Auntie Kath pursed her lips and raised one eyebrow. Damon, though, paid no attention. He was listening to his iPod and ignoring all of them as they stood in the queue to the caves.

'Sorry,' muttered Eddie, feeling his ears get hot. 'I didn't realize that was out loud.'

‘Don’t worry, girls—go on.’ Auntie Kath turned her back on Eddie and smiled at her daughters. ‘Some people just don’t appreciate talent. And look . . . other people think you’re wonderful!’

The twins smirked and then went on with their dance routine and yes, people *were* watching, and smiling indulgently. Kayleigh and Chanelle were nine-year-old disco dance champions, after all. Three times a week they put on shiny dance outfits and scraped their brown hair up into very tight knots on their heads and went to what they called Modern Jazz classes. Then Disco classes followed on afterwards. Sometimes Tap classes followed Disco. But Disco was their best. And they had loads of silver cups in the sitting room cabinet to prove it. The house was forever pulsing with ‘Boogie Wonderland’ or ‘D.I.S.C.O’ or ‘I Will Survive’, and if you walked into the dining room without checking first you were likely to get a smack in the face from a twirling spangly stick, which was part of some of their routines.

They *were* good dancers, Eddie had to admit, but their singing was dreadful and nobody in their family seemed to have noticed. Auntie Kath was convinced that her twins were going to be hugely famous.

The other problem was that none of them seemed to have an embarrassment chip. For Eddie, practising

a song-and-dance routine in a queue outside a tourist attraction was as appealing as doing naked handstands in the middle of school assembly. But the self-consciousness component in this family was missing. They just didn't think that constantly showing off to complete strangers, without ever being asked, was in any way odd. Being twelve, Eddie was an expert in embarrassment, which was why he was so surprised to find he'd been quietly singing his 'Bogey Wonderland' lyrics out loud. Oh no . . . it must be catching. He'd only been with them a week and already he was performing in public.

'Queue's moving!' said Auntie Kath and Kayleigh and Chanelle broke off from their gyrating and shimmied along the path instead. Eddie was hugely relieved that the queue was quite short. It had been a bad summer for tourism so far, with foot and mouth disease striking the country once more. Although the Wookey Hole caves, unlike attractions with animals, were open to the public, not many people were travelling far from home. Most of the people in this queue were likely to be locals, from Bristol or Bath maybe. Somerset wasn't an afflicted area, so people in the county could still travel through the countryside. Auntie Kath, Damon, Kayleigh, and Chanelle had been here at least twice before and were really more excited by the indoor play

area, slot machines, and gift shop at the end of the tour than the caves themselves.

Eddie, though, was excited about the caves. He'd never been into real caves before. He lived in East Sussex, where the land was green and pretty and flat. No caves in East Sussex. This outing was the best thing that had happened since he had arrived this summer in the Mendip Hills to stay with his aunt and cousins. His mother had been very ill and now needed time alone with just his dad, so she could recover. Dad had asked his sister if she would take Eddie and she had said he could stay for the whole summer if need be. She hadn't wanted him to come, Eddie had since decided. He could tell this by the number of times she said the words 'Christian duty' to her various friends when they dropped by the house. It was her Christian duty to look after her nephew while poor Ellen was getting better. Her Christian duty to put up a camp bed for him in Damon's room. Her Christian duty to feed him and take him out with her own children. Auntie Kath was not unkind to him, but she made sure he was well aware of the cost of all the kindness he did get. All he had to do in return was be constantly grateful. It was exhausting.

'Thanks ever so much for taking me here today,' he said, as they walked into the opening of the caves

where the guide was waiting for them in the cool underground air.

'That's quite all right, Edward,' said Auntie Kath. 'What kind of an aunt would I be if I didn't bring you along too?' Eddie smiled gratefully.

'Are we all in?' said the guide, a young man in a Wookey Hole fleece, carrying a torch. There was a murmur from the small group of about a dozen people standing in the wide cave opening. There was nobody else in the queue behind them.

'Good,' said the guide. 'Now—welcome to Wookey Hole, where a river flows from the underworld and pagan and Christian legends abound! Follow me into a world of witches and saints, of cave people and explorers, of divers and danger!'

Eddie looked around him and grinned. The air smelled of earth and metal and water and the roof of the cave seemed to reach down to him with its stubby stone stalactite fingers. *Or was that stalagmite?* he wondered, as they trooped down a dimly lit passageway after the guide. *How did you remember? Ummm . . . Stalactite . . . the c was for ceiling. And stalagmite, the g was for ground.* He thought . . . Anyway, they were stone icicles going up and down and it was really properly spooky.

After a bit more talk about the history of the

caves, the guide led them down some steps, hewn into the rock, and they arrived at the 'Witch's Kitchen'; a larger chamber opening out around a subterranean river, its clear, glassy water lit from beneath the surface and glowing gold and green. The guide showed them a huge stalagmite which seemed to rear up out of the rock floor. He shone his torch on it to show them how much it looked like a witch. Eddie wasn't convinced. It looked more like a deformed potato to him.

'She was cooking a child in her cauldron when she was sprinkled with holy water by a monk,' whispered the guide, who was obviously an out of work actor, thought Eddie. Chanelle and Kayleigh were fascinated by him and stood, gaping, hanging on his every dramatic word. Damon hadn't taken his earphones out and simply bopped along to a song only he could hear, his eyes idly roving the walls and ceiling and his mouth working tirelessly on a lump of bubblegum. He'd seen it before and wasn't impressed. He shoved Eddie back behind him, though, as they made their way on through another narrow passage.

'Oi!' complained Eddie, rubbing his chest where Damon's hard elbow had struck. Damon made an 'aww, poor baby' kind of face and then went on ahead.

'Nice chap, your cousin.' Eddie looked round, surprised. He had thought he was the last person in the

queue of visitors, but there was a man behind him. An old man. His hair was silvery white and his eyes, behind his spectacles, were grey and rather pink in the corners.

'Well . . . he's always like that,' said Eddie, as if it was an excuse. Which, of course, it wasn't. Damon was a thug. He was top in sports at school and liked to use his cousin's head as target practice for rugby, basketball, or football. Eddie had been woken up three times already this week with some kind of sports equipment bashing into his face. He was hoping his cousin would stop short of the ice hockey stick which stood in the corner of his bedroom. He *would* complain about the bruises to his aunt, but feared this would be seen as less than grateful. She was doing her Christian duty, after all. He complained to Damon, at the time, of course, and obviously badly wanted to get up and smack his cousin's face in, but this wasn't really a sensible option. Damon was a year older and several times harder than Eddie. He'd already broken the nose of a boy at school. Auntie Kath insisted it was only 'playing around', but you only had to look at Damon's block-like face to realize that 'playing around' with him was a very bad idea. Mostly, Eddie just stayed out of his way.

'You're not anything like him, are you?' said the strange man. 'Or the rest of them.'

'I hope not,' muttered Eddie, moving away after the tour party.

'You go your own way, don't you?' said the man, standing still as Eddie looked back at him. He realized the man was wearing a Wookey Hole staff fleece.

'Um . . . yeah,' said Eddie. He glanced back to the tour party which had nearly disappeared now around a bend in the cave passage. Without them the Witch's Kitchen looked better. More serious. Real.

'Well,' said the man. Eddie squinted at him, confused.

'Well what?' he asked.

The man smiled and pointed to his left. 'Your own way,' he said, smiling broadly and somehow *expectantly* at Eddie. Eddie followed the line of the man's finger and saw what looked like a small dark seam in the rock face of the cave. 'Move left a little and see,' said the man.

Eddie looked around him uneasily. Was this guy the staff weirdo? The one they had to employ on some government Employ This Weirdo initiative. The one who was never allowed a tour party of his own, for safety reasons. But still, he moved slightly to his left and then gasped as he saw that the line in the rock was not just a darker streak of limestone, but actually a gap. A gap that led somewhere.

'It's fine, you know. You will be safe,' smiled the man. 'They don't take people down here because some are too fat to get through. You're small and thin. You'll be fine. There are better chambers beyond. Here—you'll need this.' He handed Eddie a torch. Eddie took it and stepped towards the narrow, slanting gap. He was nervous. Unsure.

'I will wait for you here,' said the man. His smile was very calm, very steady. He looked at Eddie as if he had known him for a very long time. 'Mind your head and keep turning to your right. You should come back to the passageway of your own accord. Then we can catch up with the others.'

Eddie opened his mouth to ask why he was being given this special treatment. Then he closed it again. He should be very, very suspicious. An old guy offers you a secret passageway outing in a cave and you just shrug and *go*? Yeah, right! And yet . . . it was that smile. A smile that seemed to hold ages and ages of knowledge. Further up the passageway the voices of the main party were echoing back. He heard Kayleigh and Chanelle singing. They were obviously amused by the echo and thrilled to be going back into their act for the assembled party. Eddie shuddered, switched on the torch, and stepped into the gap in the rock.