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Opening extract from

# Muddle Earth Too

Written by

## Paul Stewart

Published by

## Macmillan Children's Books

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**Paul Stewart** is a well-established and award-winning author of children's books – everything from picture books to fantasy, sci-fi and horror.

**Chris Riddell** is an accomplished artist and political cartoonist for the *Observer*. His books have won many awards, including the Kate Greenaway Medal, the Nestlé Children's Book Prize and the Red House Children's Book Award.

**Paul** and **Chris** first met at their sons' nursery school and decided to work together (they can't remember why!). Since then their books have included the Blobheads series, The Edge Chronicles, the Far-Flung Adventures and the Muddle Earth books.

'Paul Stewart and Chris Riddell's The Edge Chronicles series has built a seriously solid fan base of children and young-at-heart fantasy-fevered adults. *Muddle Earth* will delight them all' amazon.co.uk

'I laughed from cover to cover . . . an excellent book' Donald Carrick, 12, *Herald*

*Also by Paul Stewart and Chris Riddell*

## Muddle Earth

Blobheads
Blobheads Go Boing!

The Rabbit and Hedgehog books

The Edge Chronicles

The Far-Flung Adventures

*And by Chris Riddell*

Ottoline and the Yellow Cat
Ottoline Goes to School
Ottoline at Sea

www.panmacmillan.com/chrisriddell




Paul Stewart & Chris Riddell

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*For Julie*
*PS*

*For Jo*
*CR*





NAME: Joe Jefferson

OCCUPATION: Schoolboy

HOBBIES: Football, TV, arguing with his sister

FAVOURITE FOOD: Anything not cooked by Norbert

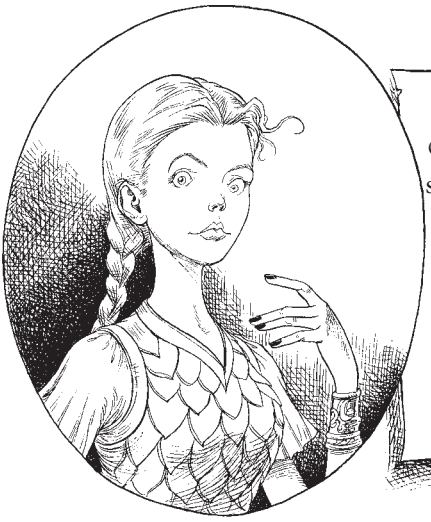


NAME: Randalf the Wise, Muddle Earth's . . . er, leading wizard?

OCCUPATION: Wizard Headmaster of Stinkyhogs School of Wizardry

HOBBIES: Performing spells (I think you'll find that's spell! – Veronica)

FAVOURITE FOOD: Norbert's squashed tadpole fritters



NAME: Ella Jefferson

OCCUPATION: Moody big sister to her brother, Joe – and a barbarian princess

HOBBIES: See 'Occupation', plus painting her nails black

FAVOURITE FOOD: Cheeseburger and fries



NAME: Norbert the Not-Very-Big

OCCUPATION: School cook

HOBBIES: Thumb-sucking, cooking – especially cake-decorating

FAVOURITE FOOD: Everything

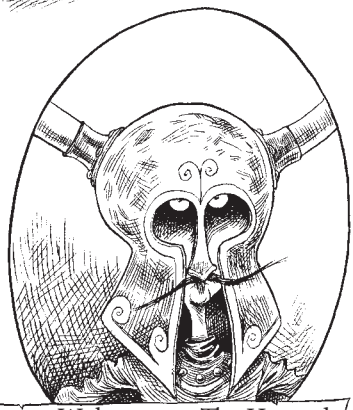


NAME: Veronica

OCCUPATION: Familiar to the great wizard, Randalf the Wise

HOBBIES: Being sarcastic

FAVOURITE FOOD: Anything not cooked by Norbert



NAME: Walter, once The Horned Baron, now retired

OCCUPATION: Retired Ruler of Muddle Earth

HOBBIES: Wooing Fifi the Fair in their love nest in Trollbridge

FAVOURITE FOOD: Bad-breath porridge

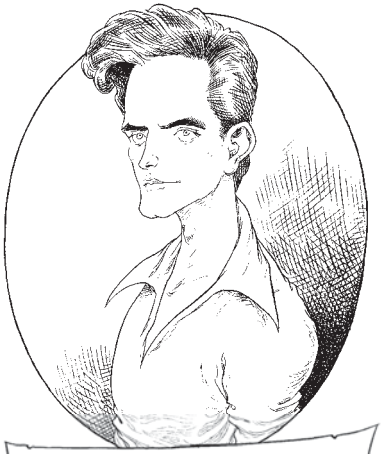


NAME: Lord Asbow

OCCUPATION: Dean of University of Whatever

HOBBIES: Repelling invaders, discussing the meaning of life with his pet Labrador

FAVOURITE FOOD: Sunrise dust, dog food

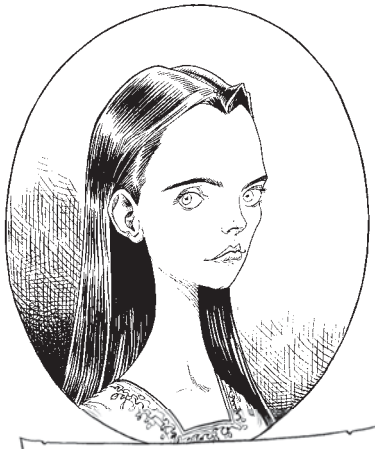


NAME: Edward Gorgeous

OCCUPATION: Student and barbarian

HOBBIES: Broomball, brooding, looking gorgeous

FAVOURITE FOOD: Tomatoes (sort of)



NAME: Edwina Lovely

OCCUPATION: Queen Susan's lady-in-waiting (sometimes)

HOBBIES: Looking lovely, obsessing over Edward Gorgeous

FAVOURITE FOOD: Royal blood



NAME: Eraguff the Eager-to-Please

OCCUPATION: Dragon

HOBBIES: Nest decorating, flower picking, knitting

FAVOURITE FOOD: Definitely NOT wizard

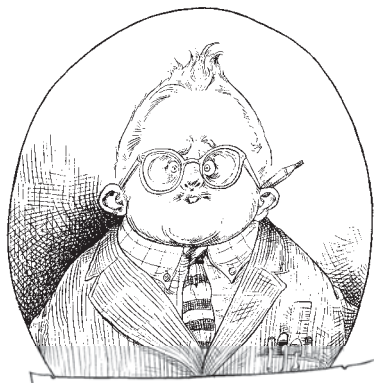


NAME: Eudora Pinkwhistle, one of Muddle Earth's leading witches

OCCUPATION: Potions teacher, Stinkyhogs

HOBBIES: Spells, and crushing on a certain wizard headmaster

FAVOURITE FOOD: Tea and fairy-cake

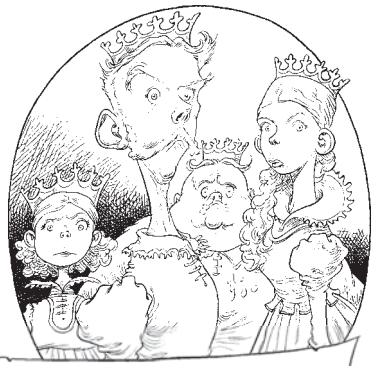


NAME: Mr Fluffy

OCCUPATION: Woodwork teacher, Stinkyhogs

HOBBIES: Storing food in his chubby cheeks, howling at Muddle Earth's three moons

FAVOURITE FOOD: Nuts

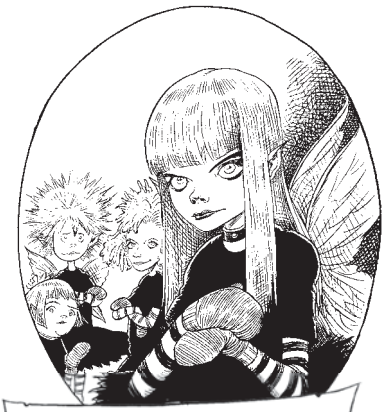


NAME: Kings Peter and Edmund and Queens Susan and Lucy

OCCUPATION: Er . . . Kings and Queens

HOBBIES: Bossing people about

FAVOURITE FOOD: As long as it's expensive, anything!



NAME: Pesticide and Nettle, Thistle and Briar Rose

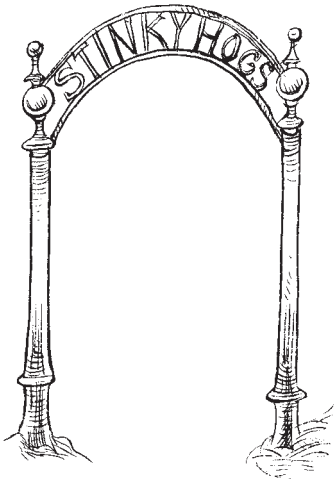
OCCUPATION: Flower fairies

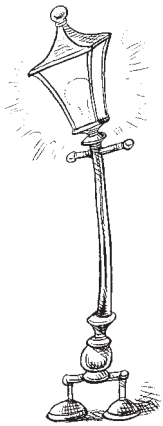
HOBBIES: Jeer-leading, causing trouble

FAVOURITE FOOD: Pollen pizza

Book One

# Down with Stinkyhogs!





# Prologue

Day was dawning over Muddle Earth and, as usual, things were getting in a muddle. Two of the three moons had forgotten to set. They shone down – one purple, one yellow – on the Ogre Hills, which rumbled with the snores of sleeping ogres, and the rattle and clink of the milk-elf delivering bottles of stiltmouse milk to the steps of every cave.

Meanwhile, the sun was rising over the Musty Mountains, sending flocks of tatty batbirds flapping off to roost. High above the Perfumed Bog they collided with sleepy lazybirds that were just waking up and taking to the air like overstuffed pillowcases looking for a pillow-fight.

The noise roused a wallowing pink stinky hog that looked up wearily, and an exploding gas frog that inflated in alarm, and blew up. After a good deal of honking and hooting, flapping and plumping, the birds settled their differences and all headed for Elfwood, where it still seemed to be the middle of the afternoon.

'Here they come, Sandra, bold as you please,' a spreading chestnut tree grumbled, 'perching in our branches without so much as a by-your-leave.'



'Oh, the batbirds and lazybirds are nothing, Trevor,' his neighbour, a dumpy sycamore, replied with a shudder. 'It's the woodpeckers you've got to watch out for . . .'

In Goblintown, the city that never sleeps, the goblins were going about their business as usual. Sausage makers were sausage making, bakers were baking

and bankers were going out for enormous lunches on expenses.

Meanwhile in nearby Trollbridge, the city that never sweeps, the trolls were knee-deep in rotten cabbage leaves and mouldy turnip tops, but didn't seem to mind. Below their bridge, the Enchanted River flowed past.

'Toffee trousers, watering cans, *tinkle-tinkle*, April showers . . .' it babbled enchantedly as it meandered through fields and orchards, before rising up into the air like a big wet mushroom to form the Enchanted Lake.

Bobbing upon its magical waters were the seven houseboats belonging to the seven wizards of Muddle Earth. Six were in darkness, their owners still fast asleep, while the seventh was aglow with lamplight. This, the largest and grandest of them all, was the residence of Roger the Wrinkled, who was pacing up and down the deck in a purple chiffon dressing gown and pink fluffy mules, dictating a letter to his enchanted quill.

He was working late, or working early. He wasn't sure which.

'With our ruler the Horned Baron having stepped down from the throne *comma* and the wizards in charge of Muddle Earth *comma* . . .' Roger intoned in his thin, reedy voice, 'it is more important than ever that the highest standards of . . .'

He paused to allow the quill to dip itself in the ink pot that hovered beside the floating parchment.

'. . . the highest standards of . . .'



'You've said that already,' wheezed the quill in a scratchy-sounding whisper.

'. . . the highest standards of wizardry,' Roger continued, ignoring it, 'should be maintained at all costs. *Full stop*. It is therefore my duty to inform you that unless Stinkyhogs School of Wizardry triumphs in the forthcoming tournament . . .'

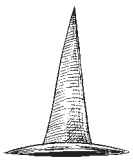
He paused to clear his throat importantly.

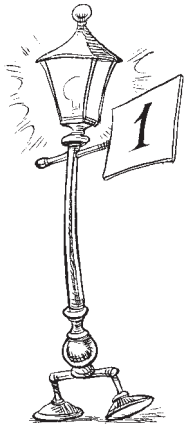
*Ahem!* wrote the quill.

'. . . then you will leave me no alternative but to close the school. *Full stop*. In that unfortunate event you'll have let not only me down *comma* my fellow wizards down *comma* but worst of all you will have let yourself down – *double exclamation mark*.'

Roger the Wrinkled waved an immaculately varnished fingernail at the parchment, which immediately folded itself into a neat envelope.

'And,' whispered the quill, as it fluttered up and lodged itself behind its master's wrinkled ear, 'Muddle Earth too!'






The hulking cave trog shuffled down the corridor, his horny bare feet sending dust flying up from the varnished floorboards.

*Ting-a-ling-a-ling . . .*

Attached to his cap was a tiny brass bell which bounced about on the end of a spring.

*Ting-a-ling-a-ling . . . Ting-a-ling-a-ling . . .*

The wooden panels strapped to his front and back had various bits of tattered parchment pinned to them that flapped as he went.

*SIGN UP FOR GLUM CLUB*, read one; *Weeping and Wailing Experience Not Essential.*

*Elf Computer Class – After School in the Dungeon*, read another.

Why not try FANTASY ROLE PLAY? Join our Accountants and Bank Managers Group. (See Mr Mild for details.)

The cave trog paused.

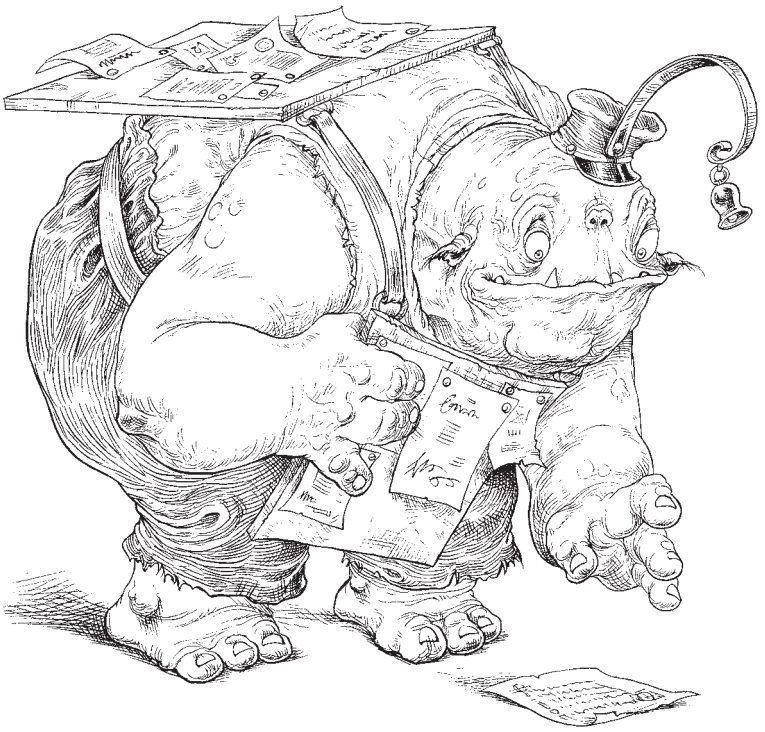
*Ting-a-ling-a-ling . . .*

A loosely attached piece of parchment fluttered to the floor and, tutting loudly, the cave trog bent to pick it up.

*Ting-a-ling-a-CLUNK.*

Straightening up, he adjusted his cap and scrutinized the parchment. He ran the filthy nail of a fat finger along the words, his lips moving as he read.

*Stinkyhogs School of Wizardry Broomball Team*
*for the Goblet of Porridge Match.*



Under this was a list of names.

~~Coach: Thragar Warspanner~~
~~Centre Spoon: Thrasher~~
~~Mid-Broom: Charlie Battlepants~~
~~Graters: Olga Onionbreath & Rufus Hairyear~~
Chimney Sweeper: Edward Gorgeous.
GO, PERFUMED PORKERS!

With the exception of Edward Gorgeous, all the names had been crossed out.

The cave trog unwrinkled the parchment. Going cross-eyed as he squinted down at his front, he carefully pinned the notice back on his board.

*Ting-a-ling-a-ling.*

The cave trog got to the end of the corridor and turned. The doors that lined it remained resolutely closed and the corridor was so silent you could hear a pin drop – which it did, and another notice fluttered to the floor. It was pink and covered in poorly applied glitter.

Jeer-leading Practice Today at . . . You call those pom-poms? . . . Oh, shut up!

The cave trog ignored it. *Ting-a-ling-a-ling* went his tiny bell. He sighed forlornly. Then, raising his two great hams of hands and cupping them round his mouth, he bellowed so loudly the door frames rattled and the oak panelling shook.

'*TING – ER – LING – ER – **LING!***'

There was a brief pause. Then, with a *bang-bang-bang-bang*, the doors on both sides of the corridor flew

open and the pupils of Stinkyhogs School of Wizardry came pouring out.

Young trolls and goblins, ogres and barbarians, each one wearing ill-fitting blazers of pink and even pinker stripes, and pointy hats that were either too big or too small, pushed past each other in a swirling scrum of elbows and shoulder barges as they made their way from classrooms on one side of the corridor to classrooms on the other. The air throbbed with feverish noise. There was shouting. Laughter. Hustle-bustle and harum-scarum.

The pupils kicked the cave trog's shins as they shoved past. 'Ouch! Ouch! Ouch!' he exclaimed.

Frowning, he reached behind his back and pulled a notice from the board.

*Kick me*, it read.

'Yeah, yeah, very funny,' he murmured mournfully to no one in particular. 'You should try being a noticeboard and the school bell, all at the same time.'

'Not to mention janitor,' came an exasperated voice from just behind the trog. 'The toilets are blocked in the East Tower, Tinklebell.'

*Bang! Bang! Bang! Bang! Bang!* The doors slammed shut.

Silence fell as swiftly and suddenly as it had been shattered. Another drawing pin clattered to the wooden floor.

'Remind me to have a word with Norbert about serving prune curry for breakfast.'

Tinklebell the cave trog, school bell, noticeboard and janitor turned to see a short, portly figure with thick white hair and a bushy white beard staring up at him. He wore a voluminous black cape around his shoulders and a tall pointy wizard's hat on his head. A budgie was perched upon its brim.



'Remind him yourself. I'm not your secretary!' the budgie exclaimed. 'She's the one upstairs, remember? Got you wrapped around her little finger, at her constant beck and call. "No, Mrs Horned Baron. Yes, Mrs Horned Baron. Three bags full, Mrs Horned Baron . . ."'

'Shut up, Veronica,' headmaster Randalfus Rumblebore hissed through gritted teeth as he tried to swat the budgie away.

'Randalf! Randalf!' came a loud and piercing voice from the top of the stairs. 'What *is* that awful smell? Do something, Randalf! *Do* something!'

'All under control, Mrs Horned Baron,' the headmaster called back meekly. 'I'm taking care of it.'

'Well, just make sure you do!' Ingrid bellowed back.

'And have my afternoon tea sent up. I'm absolutely parched!'

Looking down, an exasperated Randalf noticed a piece of parchment lying on the floor. He picked it up, turned it over and found himself looking at the broomball notice with the names crossed off.

'Oh, for crying out loud,' he muttered woefully.

'So he's left,' Veronica commented disdainfully, 'and taken the team with him.' She tutted. 'Well, you can't say I didn't warn you. Turning down his request for a pay rise was just asking for trouble. That's barbarians for you – never trust anyone with wings on their helmet. I mean, it's just not natural . . .'

'Shut *up*, Veronica,' Randalf snapped.

Just then, Norbert the Not-Very-Big appeared at the far end of the corridor. He minced carefully over the creaking floorboards on great stocky ogre legs, his three eyes blinking with concentration as he balanced a tray of afternoon tea and half a dozen snugglemuffins on an upraised hand.

'Wish they'd make their minds up,' he was grumbling. 'Moons rising. Sun setting. I don't know whether I'm coming or going. What time of day is it, anyway?'

He had just reached the stairs that led up to Ingrid's chambers when a lazybird came flopping through the open window opposite and perched on the tea tray – slopping the tea and squashing one of the snugglemuffins as it landed – and promptly fell asleep. There was a

crumpled letter clamped in its beak.

'Clear off,' Norbert said, brushing the bird aside with his free arm.

The lazybird squawked, dropped the letter and flapped off. Norbert righted the crockery, daubed at the spilt milk and tea, pushed the crumbs of the damaged snugglemuffin into his mouth and, tray held high, continued up the stairs.

'Take me for granted, they do,' the cave trog was muttering to himself as he turned on his calloused heels and blundered back along the corridor to deal with the blocked toilet.

Randalf stared down at the folded letter that lay at his feet, a sinking feeling in his stomach. It was from Roger the Wrinkled. He could tell that from the blob of red sealing wax with its oh-so-familiar imprint of a stiletto-heeled shoe.

'What now?' he groaned.

'Only one way to find out,' said Veronica.

Randalf sighed, then grunted as he stooped down and picked up the letter. He broke the seal, opened the letter and started reading – then sighed again, long and loud and heartfelt.

'Oh, Veronica,' he said. 'That's all I need. Roger is threatening to close the school if we don't win the Goblet of Porridge, which is in three days' time – and now we don't even have a broomball team!'

Before Veronica could answer, there came the most

extraordinary sound from somewhere outside, in the school grounds. It was low-pitched and mournful, rising to a spine-tingling but chewy wail, like a wolf howling at the moon with its mouth full. At the window, a green moon had risen, round and full, and was hanging in the air like a giant glowing cabbage.

'What on Muddle Earth was that?' exclaimed Randalf.

'No idea,' said Veronica, with a shrug. 'But whatever it was, it didn't sound very happy.'



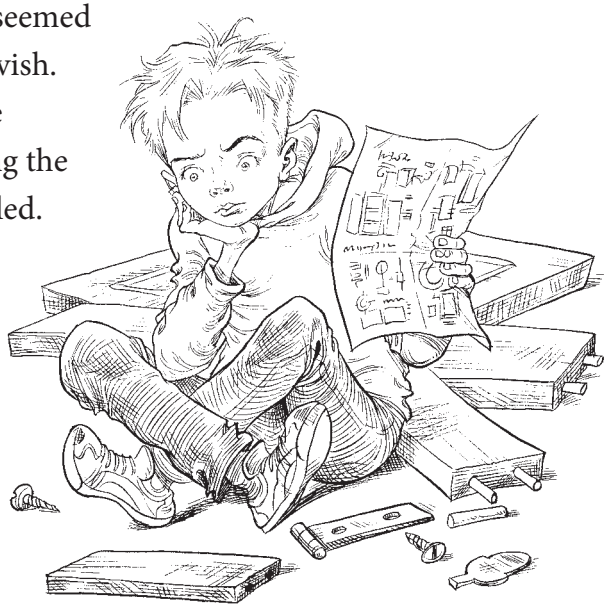
It was an odd day in the Jefferson household. For a start it was quiet. There was no vacuum cleaner whirring or noisy dusting because Mrs Jefferson was at work. There was no hammering or buzzing of power tools because Mr Jefferson was at the DIY store buying more materials for the extension he was building on to the back of the house. And there were no wild shrieks and cries of 'Mum! Mum! Where are my trainers?' because the twins were playing football over at the park.

Odder still was where Joe was. He couldn't remember the last time he'd set foot inside his sister Ella's bedroom. Normally Joe, like everyone else in the family, was forbidden to enter. A sign in threatening black letters – *KEEP OUT . . . OR ELSE!* – written beneath a sinister skull and crossbones emphasized the point.

Yet that was where Joe was now. In Ella's bedroom. He was kneeling on the floor beside a heap of wooden

boards, pieces of dowelling, screws and hinges. Before him were instructions on how to assemble a wardrobe.

The *Tumnus* claimed to be 'a stylish, easy-to-assemble bedroom unit' from somewhere unpronounceable in 'Binland' – or was that 'Fimland'? Joe couldn't be sure. The instructions seemed to be written in Elvish.



'I can't find the thing for tightening the screws,' he grumbled.

Ella, who was sitting on her bed, flicking through a magazine called *Goth Idol* while painting her toenails black, reached up and pulled a headphone from her ear.

'Did you say something?' she asked.

'Call this a wardrobe?' Joe shook his head. 'Where on earth does Dad find this stuff?'

'The internet, probably. Dead cheap, but who knows where it's from? And who cares? Just follow the instructions.'

Joe smoothed them out, then turned them upside down.

'Perhaps this is it,' he said, picking up an odd-looking bit of flat metal shaped like an acorn. With a shrug, he took a plank of wood and tried slotting it into place with another. 'Do you think these go together?' he asked tentatively.

Ella shrugged. 'Whatever,' she said, without taking her eyes off the magazine.

Joe glared at his big sister. Oh yes, it was a change being allowed into her precious bedroom, but there was no change in Ella herself. She was still as moody and temperamental as ever – or 'artistic and sensitive' as she called it. Here he was, trying to be helpful, and this was all the thanks he got.

Joe fitted the two bits of wood together and picked up another. He squinted at the smudgy printed diagram. He would not give up. He would not be beaten.

'If this goes in there . . . then this must go there . . .' he muttered.

Slowly, as Joe persevered, the wardrobe started to take shape. Sides. Back. Bottom, with pedestal feet. Shelves, side drawers, hanger rail. Top. Finally all that needed to be done was the front. He had the door. He had the hinges. But where were the screws?

He upended the cardboard box with the word *Tumnus* and a drawing of an impressive-looking wardrobe on the side, and shook it. It was empty. He looked beneath the unfinished wardrobe. He rummaged under Ella's bed, through her waste-paper basket; he checked his own pockets. But the screws were nowhere to be found.

'They're not here!' he complained loudly.

Ella removed her headphones. 'Pardon?' she said.

'The screws,' he said. 'I can't find the hinge screws anywhere, and I need them to . . .'

And then he saw them. They were in the small clear plastic envelope that Ella was idly fiddling with as she pored over a two-page spread about how black was the new black.

'There!' Joe said, outraged.

'Where?' said Ella.

'You're holding them.'

Ella looked down at her hand and frowned, as if seeing the screws for the first time. 'Oh, are these what you were looking for?'

'Yes,' said Joe as calmly as he could manage. 'But you're going to have to give me a hand.'

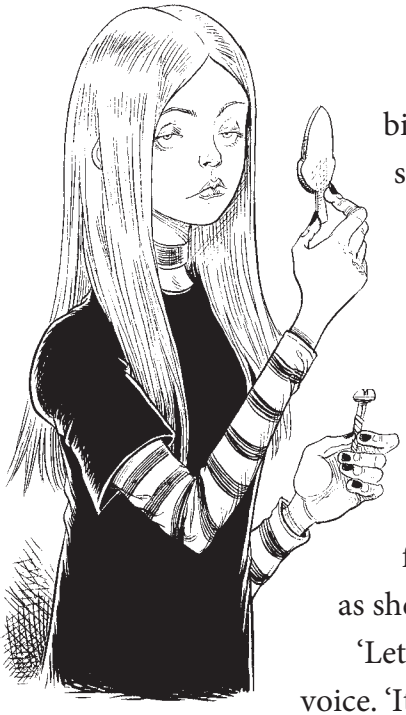
'But *you're* meant to be doing *me* a favour . . .'

'I can't fix the door on my own,' he said. 'What do you want to do, hold the door or screw the hinges into place?'

Ella climbed from the bed. 'I'll do the hinges,' she said. 'Some favour this is. You're the one who claims to be good at fixing things. I'm artistic, sensitive . . .'

Joe bit his tongue and handed Ella the flat metal acorn-shaped tool.

While he held the door in place, Ella climbed inside the wardrobe and, one by one, attached the hinges, tightening the screws, first at the top and then at the bottom . . .



'Last one,' Ella said. 'Just a bit tighter. There we are . . .' She slipped the screw-tightening tool into the pocket of her black cut-off jeans. 'All done!'

Joe giggled. 'Artistic', 'sensitive' . . . He pushed the door shut and leaned against it. There was a scrabbling noise as Ella climbed to her feet and a *thump thump thump* as she pounded on the door.

'Let me out, Joe!' came her muffled voice. 'It's not funny. Open the door and stop mucking around . . .'

'Whatever!' said Joe, laughing as he leaned against the rattling door.

It went silent. Joe smiled. He knew what she was up to. She was pretending to be calm, then when he did open the door, she'd leap out at him.

'So you're artistic and sensitive?' he said.

Nothing.

'Is that why you paint your toenails black?'

Still nothing.

'Ella?

He straightened up and pulled the door open. He peered inside.

'Ella?' The wardrobe was empty. 'Ella, where are you?'

Joe frowned, baffled. The *Tumnus* was a flat-pack wardrobe, not a magic trick.

So where was she?

Joe climbed warily inside. The door closed behind him, plunging the inside of the wardrobe into darkness. He reached out with his hands – and felt something there. Clothes, on hangers, smelling of old ladies and banana skins. Fur coats, dozens of them.

He took a step forward. The soft fur rubbed against his face. He took another step, and another. The *Tumnus* was huge inside, so much larger than it had looked in the drawing on the cardboard box. He took another step . . .

His feet crunched on something underfoot. Twigs and fir cones. The fur coats prickled against his face as they turned into the branches of trees – Christmas trees. Up ahead was a faint yellow light. And as Joe made his way towards it, the trees thinned out and the air was filled with white flakes that swirled around him and settled on the ground.

Like snow – except it wasn't snow at all. It was ash.

*Boom* came a soft, half-hearted sound, and the air grew thick with a musty smell like unwashed socks.

Joe stopped. In front of him was a lamp-post. It was short – barely taller than Joe himself – and black and made of cast iron, with a fluted column and a hexagonal glass lantern at the top which gave out a soft yellow light.

Just then there was a loud scream. Joe froze, his stomach churning.

'Ella!' he called out. 'Ella, is that you?'

