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Opening extract from

# Wildly Weird

Written by

**Kate Umansky**

Published by

**Barrington Stoke Ltd**

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# Wildly Weird

by

Kaye Umansky

Illustrated by Chris Mould

For Dawn, who has a curly plant

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# Chapter 1
# A Meeting in the Road

One breezy Saturday morning, Pinchton Primm came staggering back from the library with two huge carrier bags full of books about jungles.

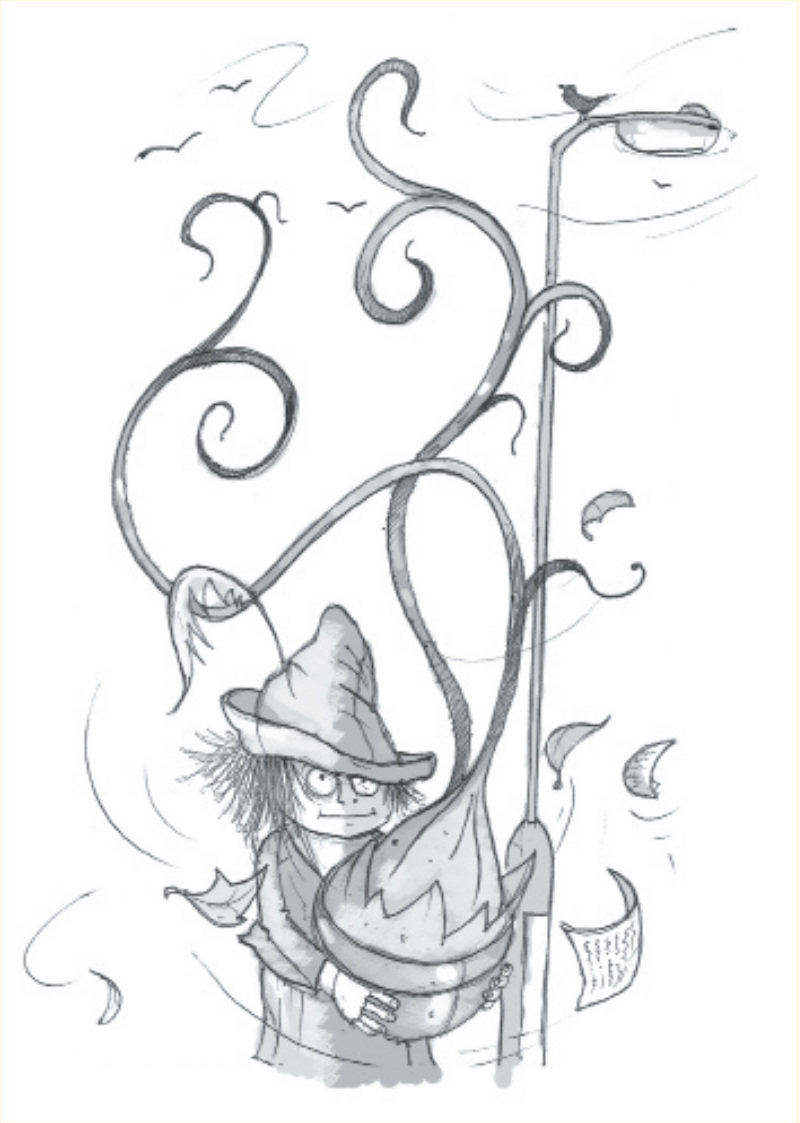
*My Thoughts About The Rainforest*. That was the title of his homework essay. But Pinchton had no thoughts. His brain was a blank because he had nodded off when they had talked about it in class.

The handles of the bags were slicing his fingers in half, but he hoped it would be worth it. If he copied from the books, he wouldn't have to come up with a single *word* of his own, let alone a whole load of thoughts. Pinchton was fed-up. He didn't like having to do any thinking on Saturday mornings. All he wanted was to play on his Xbox without having to think at all. He wanted to lie on his bed with the curtains shut. Sadly, his parents had other plans for him.

He had nearly reached his house (Number 15, Tidy Street, with the smart front garden) when he saw a bush walking towards him.

Startled, he put his bags down and cleaned his glasses on his blazer. He looked again.

It wasn't a bush after all. It was Otterly Weird, dressed in green and carrying the House Plant.



The Weird family had moved in to Number 17, next door (with the awful front garden) just a few months ago. There were eight of them. Maybe nine. There was:



Gran Weird
(Dwarf)



Mrs Weird
(Stunt Woman)



Mr Weird
(Inventor)



Oliver Weird
(Big Brother)



Otterly Weird
(Ott)



Frankly Weird
(The Baby)





Ginger
(The Black Cat)

and



The House
Plant(!)

There was also a strange Thudding Thing that lived somewhere deep in the house and acted up whenever anyone came to the door. Pinchton still hadn't found out what *that* was. But he kept trying.

Unlike Pinchton, who had to dress in a tidy, proper way, Ott liked fancy clothes. Pinchton could see that today was a green day. She wore green wellingtons, a green dress and a green cardigan with frog buttons. Over one arm was a green plastic handbag. On her head was a Robin Hood hat which had come free with the cornflakes. (Pinchton knew. He'd had one before

his mother had thrown it away, saying it was silly.)

The House Plant Ott was carrying was also green. It stood up tall in its pot. Its tangled stalks and long thin tendrils twisted about wildly in the wind.

There was something very strange about the House Plant. Not only did it look odd, it was almost as if it – *knew* things. It seemed to listen to what people were saying. It *swayed* at you. It was more like a pet than a plant. Pinchton had once asked Ott if it had a name. She had said, "Don't be daft. It's a Plant."

Yes, the Plant was Weird all right. But then, so was the entire Weird family. Pinchton knew all about them. If his parents knew what Pinchton knew, they would have a fit. Pinchton's parents liked a tidy life. A life without surprises. No sudden shocks or dramas or dressing up in odd clothes.



"Hello, Ott," said Pinchton, "you're looking green."

"I am, aren't I?" said Ott, cheerfully. "That's because I'm a Greenie." She stopped and rested the House Plant on the wall. "Phew. You're heavy, you are."

That last remark was for the Plant, who continued to swish. Although the wind had dropped.

"You're a *what*?" said Pinchton.

"A Greenie. It's a girl's club. Like the Brownies, but green. I'm going to make some new friends. We wear green uniforms. I haven't got one. But I thought I'd get into the mood of the thing."

"What do you do there?" asked Pinchton.

"Grow stuff, mostly. It's about taking care of the Environment."

"Oh, that," said Pinchton, in a gloomy voice. "We did that last term. They made us clean up a bus shelter. This term we're doing the Rainforest."

"At least it's far away so they can't make you clean it," Ott said helpfully.

"I've got it for homework, though," moaned Pinchton.

"Ask Oliver," said Ott. "He loves doing homework. You'll make his weekend."

"Well, if you put it like *that*," said Pinchton. What a good idea! Suddenly, his Saturday looked a whole lot brighter. Oliver would do a great job. He had written an essay for Pinchton once before. Pinchton had got an A and his teacher had looked at him in a surprised way.



"So you like being a Greenie, do you?" he went on.

"I don't know. I've only just joined. It's run by Green Lizard and Green Turtle. We're into wildlife, ponds and window boxes. We're against litter, dumping and pollution."

"Really?" said Pinchton. "Is that so?"

He stared over her shoulder into the Weirds' front garden, which was a riot of soggy boxes and overflowing bins. A shopping trolley lay on one side. A Harley-Davidson motorbike dripped oil into the stinging nettles.

Ott saw what he was looking at. "I see what you mean," she said. "Oh, well."

"You'll have to clear it up," said Pinchton. "Now you're a *Greenie*."

He hadn't really meant this to sound sarcastic, but that was the way it came out. A bit mean. It was just that he hadn't liked all the *we's*. *We* do this, *we* do that. It made him feel grumpy and left out.

"I will," said Ott, with a shrug. "But first I'm going to the cricket field. There's a Fun Day. The Greenies are running a Potted Plant Show." Ott beamed at the House Plant. "And you're going to win, right?"

The House Plant thrashed about as if it agreed – one hundred per cent. Of course, it could have been the wind.

Except that there wasn't any wind.

"It's quite excited," said Ott. "It doesn't get out much."

"Does your gran know it's out?" asked Pinchton. He looked at the Plant and felt rather



uneasy. The House Plant always lived in the kitchen, with Gran and Ginger.

"Of course," said Ott. "It was her idea. It's been a bit droopy lately. She says winning a competition will be good for its self-confidence."

"What do you *mean* by that, exactly?" Pinchton asked, carefully.

"Winning the competition will cheer it up. Make it feel good about itself."

"Look," said Pinchton, "I'm no expert, but even I know plants don't ..." He broke off. The House Plant had gone very still indeed. It was standing bolt upright with a sharp, alert air, almost as if it was listening to what Pinchton was saying. Pinchton decided not to finish that sentence.

"Plants don't what?" said Ott.

"Never mind."

"Anyway," Ott went on, "we made it a Good Luck card. I've got it in my bag. Everyone's signed it. Frankly poured on the glitter. Want to see?"

For a second, Pinchton thought about a family who made Good Luck cards for plants. Then he decided not to think about it any more. He also decided to ignore the fact that the Plant's leaves were now hung all over Ott in a happy, thanks-for-the-lovely-card sort of way. He said, "Maybe later."

"Everyone's coming to see the competition. Dad's invented a camera he wants to try out. Mum was meant to be riding the bike over a canyon today but she's put it off until Monday so that she can come too."

"What about Ginger? Is he coming?"



"He's a cat. Depends on his mood."

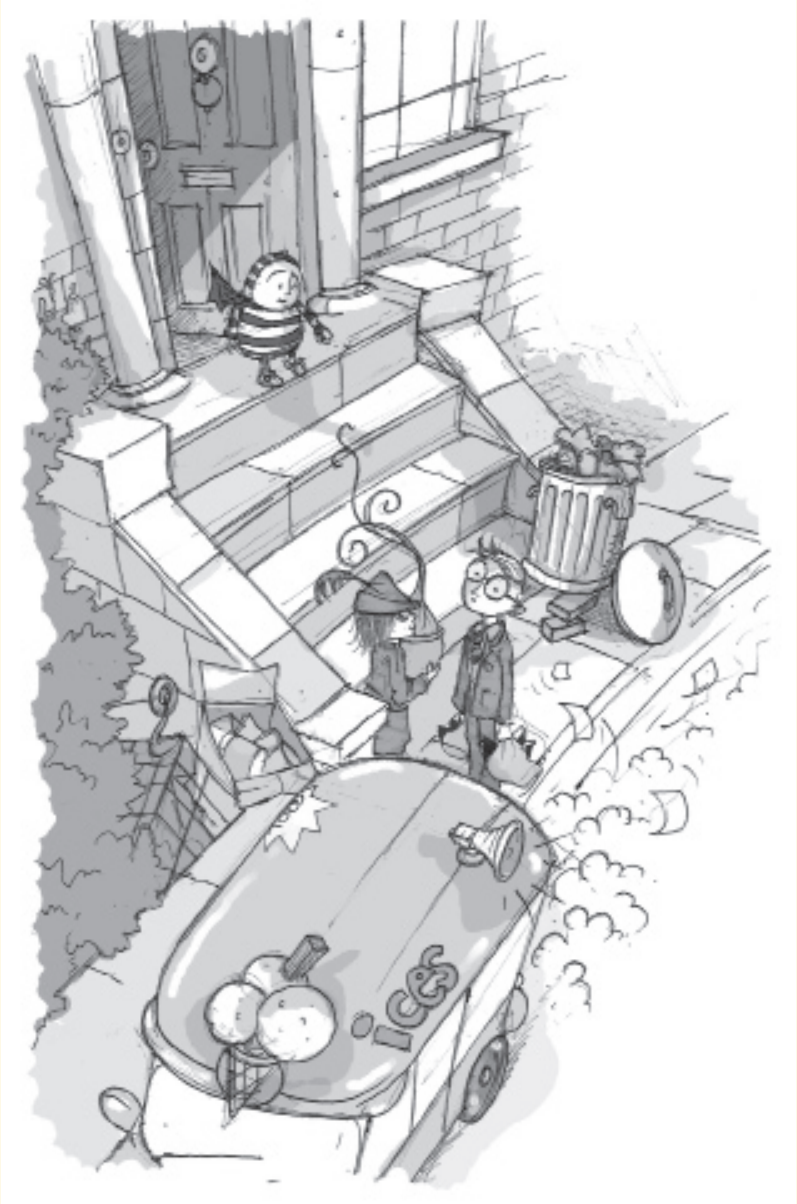
Suddenly, Pinchton saw his chance to ask about what really puzzled him. Now was the perfect time.

"What about the Thudding Thing you keep in the house?" he said. "The Thing that makes a fuss every time anyone comes calling? Is *that* coming?"

"Ah. I'm glad you asked me about that. You see …"

Just then, an ice-cream van went past, playing its tune at top volume. Pinchton couldn't hear a word Ott said. He could see her mouth moving, but all he could hear were the noisy bells of the van.

"… so that's why," ended Ott, as the van vanished around the corner.




The front door of Number 17 opened and Frankly Weird toddled out. He wore a yellow and black stripy jump suit. A broken umbrella was tied to his back with string. On his feet were hamster slippers. He stood on the top step, mouth open, eyes huge. He was pointing and making a buzzing noise.

"ZZZZZZZZ," buzzed Frankly.

Pinchton gave a little sigh. The perfect moment was over and he still hadn't solved the mystery of the Thudding Thing.

"Do you want an ice-cream, Frankly?" asked Ott. "All right, in a minute."

"Hello, Frankly," said Pinchton, in a jolly voice. "Are you a bee?"

Frankly looked at him as though he was mad.

"He's a wasp," said Ott. "Different buzz. Anyway, I think the Plant stands a good chance of winning, don't you?"

Pinchton looked at the Plant. It stood proud and tall in its pot, with an air of quiet confidence.

"Well," he said, "er … I'm sure there won't be many plants quite like this one."

"Want to come?" invited Ott. "You can help carry it."

Pinchton thought about this. He wouldn't be allowed, not until he had done his homework. Besides, weren't Plant Shows very boring? His mother was mad about gardening. She had won lots of prizes and gave talks with slide shows. Sometimes she asked Pinchton to help her. Made him download pictures of flowers from the computer or look up Latin names in a big,



boring book. It wasn't something he looked forward to.

"There's other stuff going on," said Ott. "A bouncy castle and stalls and things."

Still, Pinchton wasn't sure if he should say "yes".

"What?" said Ott. "Aren't you allowed?"

"Of course I'm *allowed*," said Pinchton, a bit stiffly. "I'm *allowed* all right. Why wouldn't I be?"

"What, then?" Ott asked. "Is it one of your Meals or something?"

Meals were not messed about with in the Primm household. Meals meant healthy food eaten at the table, with clean hands. Unlike the Weirds, who helped themselves to chips from newspapers spread on the floor. Except that …

"No," said Pinchton. "My parents are going somewhere. They're going to leave me a watercress salad for my lunch."

"Great! We can eat something at the Fun Day," Ott said. "My treat. Popcorn, ice-cream! Hot dogs!"

"Really?" said Pinchton, hopefully. He wasn't allowed any of those things.

"Of course. Unless watercress salad is what you really *want* ..."

"No," said Pinchton. "I'll come. I'll just drop these books off home first. Er – do you want to come in?"

He hoped she wouldn't. There were cream carpets in Number 15. Wellington boots, mad toddlers and strange, potted life forms were not welcome.



"It's all right," said Ott, kindly. "We'll wait out here."