

A TWINKL ORIGINAL

# THE DUAL WORLD OF ANDERS ARNFIELD







First published 2018 by Twinkl Ltd.  
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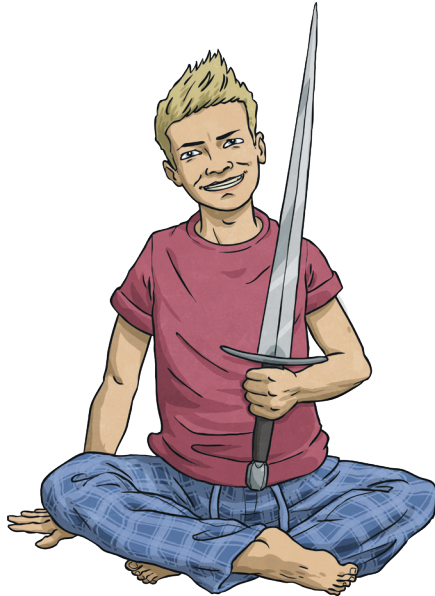
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Twinkl Educational Publishing

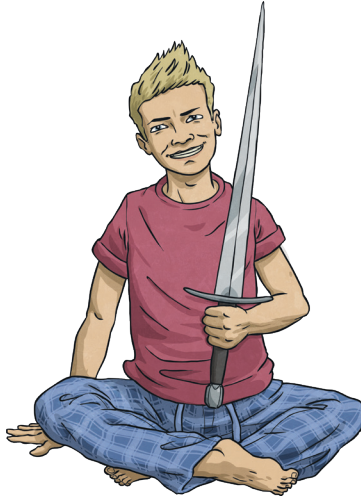


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## Chapter 1

### Danger of a Klingenot

Fuelled by rage and revenge, Anders Arnfield stood in front of the giant gates of Pengreg Hall and raised his sword to face the snarling creature ahead. In front of him, and for miles beyond, lay the ruins of the ancient Gunders Wood, which were now just smouldering ashes as the once tall trees lay forlorn on the forest floor. Behind the great house over his shoulder, he could sense the path to freedom but he was determined not to take the easy way out.

There was no doubt in Anders' mind that the creature bearing down on him was the same klingenot he had encountered in his previous dreams - a creature the

klingenot was close enough for Anders to smell its stale breath. He told himself that the creature must represent something or someone in the real world – that’s how everything had been so far in all of Anders’ adventures around Gunders Wood. Although he was furious to see the destruction of the once beautiful woodland that he had grown to love, Anders could see that the creature in front of him was angry too.

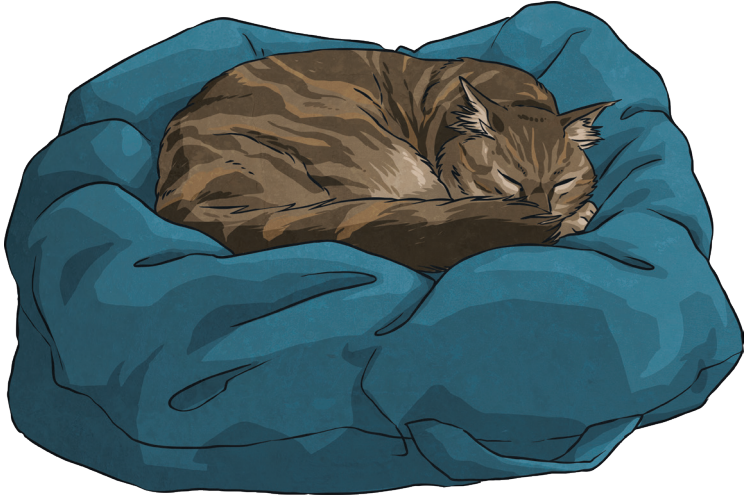
Glowing brightly like a neon sign, the word ‘angry’ burned into his mind, his consciousness, but it did not feel complete. The word was missing something. The creature was not just angry; it was hangry. As always, the word didn’t make any sense to Anders. Holding the gaze of the bulging eyes and writhing head, he desperately tried to make time for himself to think, as he simultaneously tossed the words around in his mind. Angry. Hangry. Hungry. Finally, the realisation began to dawn on him. Anders’ mind felt as foggy as the thick air that hung over the rough, open landscape around him, and he was almost certain that the two were linked – but he felt a certainty that he was on the verge of solving something. Like a clearing of the mist, he could see the swirls of an explanation forming through his muddled mind. Hangry: the creature’s anger was driven by hunger.

Visions from the past flashed into his brain, featuring contented klingenots roaming peacefully in pairs through the surrounding Gunders Wood. In every image, they were eating the leaves and foliage from the branches. Creatures of other varied shapes and sizes wandered amongst them, unharmed and in no anticipation of any danger. Anders had felt these images before – not necessarily been there, but felt them. Only snapshots and sections of this wonderful world had been revealed to him, but he recognised some of the unusual beings that lurked around both then and now. There were the squibs, which reminded him of jellyfish but shuffled around awkwardly on land, and the belchers, easily identified by their burping, gurgling sound. As wonderful as these creatures were and as privileged as Anders felt to frequent their world, right now, they didn't absorb his focus. The important part of the images flickering past him were definitely the klingenots and most importantly of all, he was drawn to the way they lifted their old-looking heads and plucked their food purposefully from the trees.

It is hard enough for a normal person to try to make sense of a dream after they had woken up, let alone trying to figure out disguised meanings and messages while still immersed in them. Yet thoughts and reasoning seemed to be falling into place. Anger

would only fuel more anger. Instinctively, the boy knew that he had to put down his sword. As he did so, the roar of the creature distorted in pitch and volume, changing into a groan. Anders still felt vulnerable. Overwhelmingly aware that he was not yet safe, if he could just distract the beast momentarily then he might get a chance in the waking world to influence what happened next.

Turning tentatively to the right, Anders focused all his energy onto the misty window at the far end of the hall's front. Once before, he had been able to pull off something like this but the effort and concentration was so great right now that he felt a knot forming in his forehead. Could he do it? Through the strain came a single quiet tap. It was working. *Tap, tap* – louder. Squeezing his eyes tightly shut, he willed his thoughts all into the single direction. *Tap, tap, tap*. The noise he was creating on the window was enough to gain the attention of the klingenot. In an instant, the beast's large, pointed ears twitched and rotated. It swung its head to the left and narrowed its eyes to focus on the far window. Anders knew that this was his chance and he seized it.



## **Chapter 2**

### Dreaming Reality

Anders squeezed his eyes tightly closed again, then inhaled deeply through his nose whilst pushing out his chest. Summoning all his willpower and clenching his fists, he burst open his eyelids. Instantly gasping for breath and draped in his sweat-soaked duvet, he sat bolt upright on the floor of his bedroom, which was peppered with scattered pillows. His breath was still coming in sharp bursts as he began to register his Dad tapping on the bedroom door.

*Tap, tap, tap!*

Was that the noise he had heard in his dream? Or was

it just a coincidence?

“Anders,” Dad called, “Are you alright?”

“Just another dream, Dad,” he replied. “I’m OK.”

But if he was really being honest, Anders didn’t feel particularly ‘OK’. He knew, without a doubt, that it was not ‘just another dream’; that he would be back in the now-familiar surroundings of Gunders Wood by nightfall, if not sooner, and most likely back at the mercy of the klingenot. He hoped, however, that he had bought himself some time. His father pushed open the door and poked his head round anxiously.

“You know you can talk to me if you need to, buddy.”

“I know, Dad.”

“There’s some breakfast on the table downstairs, if you fancy it,” he said.

“I’ll be down in a bit,” Anders smiled. It wasn’t unusual for him to go to sleep in his bed and wake up in some strange position or place around the room. It was no surprise to his father any longer either, and although Anders knew that he worried, it had also become

something that felt almost normal.

Anders didn't have any brothers or sisters, and his mum and dad had separated years ago. They got along pretty well now – at least they tried to, for his benefit – and Anders spent most of his time living with his father.

With a weary stretch, he rolled over to look across towards the beanbag in the corner of the room. Behind it were his two tall bookcases, meeting at a right angle with their backs against perpendicular walls. In the opposite corner stood his old oak desk, which was adorned with two generations of dents, marks and engravings, and cluttered with an array of stationery, plastic models and unusual objects that he had gathered from many holidays. This furniture filled the far side of the room, opposite to the bunk beds that Anders slept on despite being an only child. Sometimes he preferred the top bunk and sometimes the bottom; other times he had fallen asleep in one, only to wake up in the other without quite knowing how. His eyes finally focused upon the creature on the beanbag that he was hoping may be the solution to his perilous predicament with the klingenot.

A memory floated into his mind of their first encounter

together in the wood. It was one of the times when all had been quiet, with just Anders exploring the wonderful forest which bloomed around him. Not too far away, on this particular occasion, a rustling noise had stopped him in his tracks, swiftly followed by some movement from deep within the tall grasses ahead. He had watched the spot until he convinced himself that he was only imagining something there. Then, as soon as he had started to relax - a pounce. A flash of fur, in shades of brown - huge eyes upon him - four lunging paws, controlled by agile limbs. The creature had landed squarely on top of Anders, knocking him backwards, fortunately causing him only a light scratch to his hand and inflicting a bang to the back of his head as he hit the ground. Despite being the size of a tiger, luckily the creature had been harmless. It had nuzzled and rubbed its head in between Anders' arm and body, which had made him giggle with relief. Affectionately, it had licked his hand while he lay amongst the grass and stroked its head. Instinctively, Anders had felt that he knew that the name of this creature: a tracator. He didn't know how; it didn't exist in his normal life and he had never come across one before, but he knew that the friendly, familiar being that was playfully bounding around him was a type of tracator.

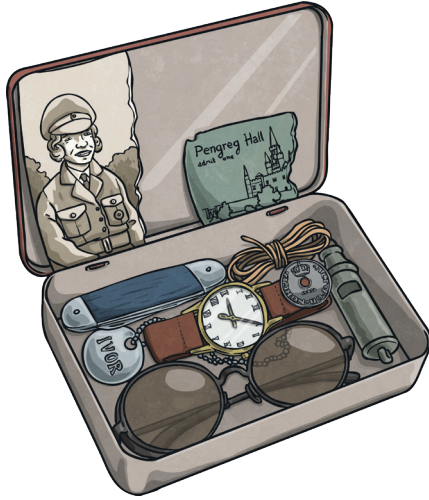


When he had woken contentedly after that episode and felt his cat snuggled on the bed beside him, the connection had been clear. His own cat, Cheshire, had jumped onto his bed as he slept. He had reasoned that his subconscious had obviously interpreted it in his dream and he had imagined the real cat as something much bigger in his dream-world. Something had still troubled him straight away, though. First, there was the scratch. Feeling a throbbing pain along the back of his hand, he had looked to see a single raised, red line breaking the skin - not quite bleeding, but threatening to do so. There was an explanation, of course. Cheshire must have really scratched him during the night - the mark was real. But then there was the other throbbing pain at the back of his head. Anders had sat up and rubbed the spot where it hurt, and felt an undoubtedly egg-shaped bump forming. In the dream, the tractor had knocked him off balance and he had hit his head on the dusty ground. How could that have caused a real bump, while he lay sleeping on his pillow in the bottom bunk of his bed? Wincing a little as he rubbed and felt the bruise blossoming, it seemed like a few dusty grains of dirt transferred to his fingers and sprinkled the pillow underneath. Yet, he knew he had been as clean as a whistle from his bath before bedtime. He had reached up and touched the underside of the top bunk, feeling nothing there to

explain the dirt. Thinking back to it now, the memory made him smile.

Not long afterwards, there had been another occasion when he had been paddling in the warm, flowing river that ran along the edge of the forest. He had woken up with a patch of water in his bed, underneath his feet.

These had been some of the first realisations that there was something different about him, about his 'dreams'. That first encounter with the tracator was almost two years ago now. Back then, he had puzzled over the evidence as much as he was still puzzling over his experiences now. One thing was for sure though: that tracator was as real as the bump on his head. And as he looked at Cheshire curled up lazily on the beanbag in his bedroom, he knew that he needed the help of a trusty tracator if he was to fend off the klingenot from last night.



## Chapter 3

### Inside the Box

Taking out his notepad from the side of the bed, Anders scribbled down the word that had appeared to him the night before: 'hangry'. The book contained various previous notes, along with sketches, words, descriptions and ideas – anything that had seemed significant from the wood. He flicked through the pages, remembering more of those first few times that he had found himself in his second world. From the beginning, it had never felt like an ordinary dream.

It was natural that his parents had blamed the sudden night-time episodes on the recent news confirming the death of Anders' grandma. Anders had known

his grandma for a relatively short time but they had developed a special bond. She had lived in England for about a year, before leaving to go back to Norway, the country in which she was born, just after his 10th birthday. Within weeks of being home, she had died. Several weeks later, Anders had received a mysterious-looking parcel in the post, wrapped in tatty brown paper and stamped with international postmarks. Inside, there had been a note written in his grandma's beautiful, old-fashioned handwriting. The tin box that he first set eyes on that day was tucked safely under his bed now, and he took it out once more to examine the items inside for probably the hundredth time. Sitting cross-legged on the floor, he laid out the contents of the box side by side in a row on his carpet, including the notebook that he had been writing in. On its leather cover, it had a symbol which he had since matched with the one on the flag of Russia. The remaining items in the box included: an old-fashioned wrist-watch that had never worked; a fairly short piece of brown twine; a foreign silver coin; a penknife; a whistle; a shabby dog-eared admission ticket featuring the name 'Pengreg Hall' and a faded picture of the grand building; a black and white photograph – or at least half of one, torn down one side – showing a young lady in some kind of uniform; a small, round, silver nametag on a chain with the name 'Ivor' engraved; a

pair of thin-framed metal sunglasses.

Over time, Anders had tried to piece together the significance of some of these items. Mostly, he remained unsure why they were there but some he'd tried to guess, based on things that had happened or he had seen. One item that he felt sure was there for his protection in Gunders Wood and the bordering heathland was the penknife. It was not as a penknife that the object presented itself in the world of his dreams, but usually as something much bigger, yet he confidently connected the two. Proud of the folding knife, he had once been carrying it downstairs through the house with the relatively innocent intention of taking it out with him as he headed to the nearby fields and the canal bank beyond. Noticing before he reached the door, his father had scolded him for playing with the dangerous object and warned that he would only be allowed to keep it in the tin box if he promised not to mess around with it on his own - and certainly never to take it outside without permission.

That same night, after he had been prevented from taking the knife out with him, Anders had been exploring the area of Hancamill Heath in his other world: a rock-filled shadowy expanse beyond the greenery of Gunders Wood. Moss and heather grew

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around boulders and inside crevices, with barren branches reaching out from twisting tree trunks as if searching for something to grasp. In contrast to his waking world, Anders felt much more confident there, far less afraid, despite the odd occurrences and unusual beasts. Occasionally, he would still feel vulnerable and had wished before that he had something to protect himself should he need it.

Amongst the rocks of the heath on this night, he had made a discovery that seemed to connect the tin box to the environment that he was inhabiting. Firstly, he had been drawn to an area of ground where the earth had been disturbed. As he had cleared away the moss and lichen that had begun to grow again, he had uncovered a flat sheet of rusty metal, which was about the size of a manhole cover. Despite the rust and dirt, the faded emblem on the metal was evident and it matched the symbol on the tin box under his bed. Anders had lifted the metal and found that it had been used to cover a shallow hole that had been dug into the hard ground. Other than a few dirty dry leaves, there was just one thing visible inside, sticking out of the ground. It was dark green with silver writing and looked like an elaborate handle of a lever. Pulling it free from the earth below, he had found that it was indeed an ornate handle, which was decoratively carved

with twisting leaf shapes, but was in fact attached to a long silver sword. Astonished at the discovery, he had examined it and recognised the silver writing on the dark green background of the handle. It said 'agderkniv'- the same Norwegian writing in the same style with the same colours as the penknife under his bed.

The sword had since been a comforting companion, though rarely required. Thinking about it now, Anders recalled throwing down the weapon in front of the klingenot and remembered that he was yet to return to the situation. He had successfully bought himself some time and was able to consider his options. Briefly, he wondered about finding an offering of food for the creature but then he turned his attention to acquiring a little useful backup to defend himself. With his mind firmly made up, and his head still weary from lack of sleep, Anders lifted the dozing Cheshire up onto his bed. As the boy curled up onto his side and closed his eyes, the cat circled and made itself comfortable in the crook of his body. Anders rested a hand on the back of Cheshire's neck and braced himself for the scene that would arrest him as soon as his brain began to transcend from one world to the other.





## Chapter 4

### Return to Gunders Wood

What was his plan anyway? Anders knew that he wanted the tracator by his side but what was he expecting it to do? This was the thought that seemed to pass with him from the comfort of his scrunched-up duvet to the spot in front of Pengreg Hall that he last remembered standing in. Before he could organise anything more in the fog of his mind, he was suddenly overcome by his own sharp intake of breath. His eyes widened in time to see the klingenot turning its head back from the former distraction of the window noise and staring directly down at him. Frantically, Anders looked around and held out his left hand. From the distance, shades of brown fur came bounding towards

him, emitting the low rumbling noise that he instantly recognised. The klingenot now turned towards it too, dipping its neck towards the ground and letting out a howling roar. In response, the tracator sidled slowly to face it head on and arched its back. The klingenot was by far the bigger of the two creatures but both were strong, powerful beasts. The tracator changed the pitch of its noise, pinned back its ears and narrowed its glinting eyes. Hostile tension filled the air as a stand-off ensued; some kind of skirmish was about to descend. Smoke blew from the nostrils of the klingenot, as it lifted a thick-set front hoof and focused on its new prey.

No one noticed until the very last moment the half-leaping, half-gliding mass of muscle and fur that appeared from the edge of their vision. A second tracator, mostly black on top with a hint of white on its underbelly, was suddenly visible as it soared through the air. It had similar pointed ears to the first, but it bore the scars of a previous battle with a nasty nick evident on one side. In a flash, the thought hit Anders that his own tracator had managed to summon some kind of support – two against one, and the added element of surprise. However, it was soon evident that the object of the newcomer's aggression was its fellow tracator. Not friends of the same species; rivals

more like. Clouds of dust erupted into the air, wails came from somewhere in the ruckus and great tufts of torn fur shot out in various directions. Rather than being at Anders' side, the tracator he had hoped to rely on wriggled for its freedom, then fled back in the direction from which it had come. His help replaced by the second arrival of the same species, Anders was left frozen, at the mercy of no longer one, but two unpredictable beasts. With his attempted effort of a plan in shreds before it even had time to properly form, he stepped back, terrified.

The black tracator hissed, then lifted its head in a sign of triumph before gazing at Anders. In all of the melee, the klingenot had barely moved but now two pairs of glowering eyes became concentrated on the boy. He gulped. He opened his mouth to force out a scream but could generate no sound. The tracator circled round the back of the klingenot and the pair began to seem more and more like they were very much on the same side. Anders felt for his sword but remembered that he had cast it aside. He was out of options. His shoulders slumped. He exhaled slowly as he felt his energy leaving him in resignation. But at the same time, he saw the same signs in his opponents. The more Anders let go of the aggression that he was trying to muster, the calmer the creatures in front of him seemed to

become. And then, the klingenot dropped to the knees of its front limbs and collapsed, its strength seemingly exhausted. Responding likewise, the tracator lay down beside its collaborator.

At that moment, Anders realised that the klingenot had not destroyed the forest. It was calling out for help because the forest had been destroyed. Its source of food was gone. Whereas Anders had thought that the creature had devastated the forest in anger, it was actually angry because the forest was gone. Thinking back to the word that had formed earlier - hangry - he made the connection again that the creature was angry because it was hungry. It had no food. He had made a terrible misjudgement. The klingenot needed his help and now he was starting to piece together the reasons why.



## Chapter 5

### Counting Sheep

Have you ever wondered how your dreams are created? How your night-time thoughts are connected to your daylight life? Anders had heard many theories and interpretations of dreams but none that really explained the mysteries of any mind. He had never heard of anyone whose dreams had been proven to be genuine messages that guided their waking life; neither for that matter had he found anyone whose dreams seemed so linked that actual physical evidence remained behind from them.

One undeciphered dream kept replaying to him. Wherever he turned, there were whispers echoing from the scuffling squibs. Sometimes they would clearly be

saying, "Follow me." Where the words came from was not clear as there were no mouths – or any other features – on these little creatures. They possessed a very jelly-like body, about the size of a slightly deflated football, that wiggled and wobbled as they were unable to keep any kind of permanent shape. Below this were a set of what appeared to be tentacles, like an octopus', which were enough to hold their quivering bodies off the ground. By stretching and contracting the tentacles, the squibs moved rather gracefully along. There was definitely something about the way they tilted their bodies upwards as if looking at Anders through non-existent eyes, that meant he knew the words were coming from them. He was never sure whether to follow the little critters but something told him that they were trying to tempt him towards somewhere he shouldn't be going. Enough doubt in his mind prevented him from succumbing to their temptation.

Other times, words rose into the air but it was less clear whether the words came from the squibs or if they always just seemed to be there at the same time as these weird, whispering messages.

*Go in your...*

He wasn't sure if those were the words he had heard

and what – if anything – followed them. They were just whispers being repeated over and over, carried by the wind. He'd tried to figure out if they were coming from anywhere in particular. Go in your what? he wondered. What did it mean? Tipping his head to one side, he had tried to listen more carefully. Following where he thought the sound could be coming from, he had lifted rocks, peered between tree branches and parted long grass. As the same scene occurred frequently, he analysed and toyed with the words. At one point he changed his mind:

*Down in your...*

Perhaps this was the beginning of the phrase. Whichever it was, he still couldn't make it out properly and it played on his mind because it seemed vital. At the very least, it could be some kind of clue or instruction that would be helpful.

It wasn't the only recurring dream either. Anders cast his mind back to a repeating scene that occurred regularly to him:

*Two almost identical rhino-like creatures are present, which he finds himself referring to as batterams. They are the largest creatures in Gunders Wood and all*

*its surroundings. One of them charges along a well-trodden path through the trees. Anders is sitting eating large berries in the v-shaped bough of a thick, old tree. He picks more of its fruit as his attention is caught by the thunderous charging of the horned beast. As he looks on, it is rushing, head down, from right to left of his view but before it comes into the centre of his sight, his focus is snatched away. First, he feels a low rumbling beneath him, then instantly hears the beating of heavy hooves on the hard ground. From his high vantage point, Anders can see just seconds before it happens that the two great, grey brutes are about to collide with tremendous force. It takes a moment for the realisation to register; another moment for his mouth to drop open almost as quickly as the round, red fruit drops from his hand. He closes his eyes, anticipating the impact of a battering ram and after a moment more, the sound hits him in the chest. Gasping, he winces and grips the branch at his side. Clouds of dust are mixed with the deep, pained shriek of both animals. A guttural roar rips through the forest. Through plumes of dust and debris, Anders sees the upturned side of one majestic beast unnaturally twisted and being flung, despite its bulk, off balance. The head of the other batteram has rebounded off its opposite number and digs forcefully into the ground as the rear end crumples forward and lifts into the air.*



This dream had jolted him, screaming and breathless, from sleep many times and had his mum or dad rush into his bedroom, whichever house he was in, to check that he was OK. On more than one occasion, the persistence of this dream had prompted action, such as a visit to the doctors, a change of bedtime routine or a new remedy to be suggested. Nothing worked. Anders just knew that the best way to deal with his 'issues' was to embrace them.

Has anyone ever told you to try counting sheep if you can't get to sleep? He tried it once - in the early days. He closed his eyes and pictured fluffy white sheep hopping happily over a gate into a field, counting each one as it passed. You could argue that it worked because at some point, he fell asleep and transcended into his other world. The next thing he remembered was being trampled by a stampede of horned beasts, racing each other across the wilderness, jumping obstacles as they bounded past. Each one was branded on the side with a number and strange symbol. After suffering a kick to the head from a flying hoof, Anders scrambled around in clouds of dust, trying to regain his footing and dodging the last of the dashing bodies and legs. He woke up in a filthy bed, with a tender bruise above his right eye and scratches down both arms.



## Chapter 6

### Caterwaul

As a gang of black clouds gathered in the sky above the Arnfields' house, Cheshire the cat strolled the length of the driveway then sat and paused at the end to look around. Watched by Anders from the bedroom window, he was briefly distracted by an insect of some kind flying around in the air. His eyes flicked upwards as his head darted from side to side, then up and around as if it were being controlled by a powerful magnet. As quickly as the insect had gained his attention, it appeared to be gone again and Cheshire's gaze returned to the view directly ahead. Anders was waiting for his best friend Charlie, who had had to go out shopping with his mum before being allowed to

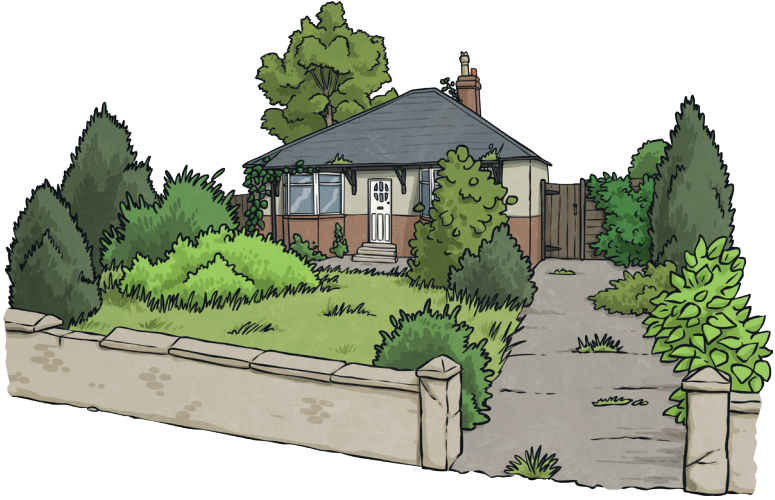
come round. Charlie only lived round the corner and the boys spent a lot of their weekends and evenings hanging out together. Whilst watching and waiting, Anders noticed one of the few neighbours who also lived in the cul-de-sac: Mr Collins at Number 2. There were only five houses in the little part of the street and the way that they were angled meant that it was just possible to see through Mr Collins' window. It was a running joke that the unusual man was often to be spotted as he peered out from behind his curtain, yet he rarely acknowledged anyone. In fact, the boys had started referring to him as 'Creepy Collins'. On one occasion, when their tennis ball had accidentally landed on his garden, Charlie had gone to retrieve it as Anders daren't. Just as he was picking it up from the man's front lawn, after being careful not to tread on any flowers or shrubs, Creepy Collins had made him jump out of his skin by banging loudly on the upstairs window. Ever since, the boys always knew he was likely to be watching them like a hawk but they just avoided going near the front of his garden if at all possible.

Now, he smiled as he watched his Cheshire, his little buddy and sidekick, surveying his territory. Looking confident that the coast was clear, the cat sauntered into the road towards the hedgerow opposite. Before

he reached his destination, he would be ambushed. In the quiet cul-de-sac, Anders noticed that his own cat was not the only territorial feline in the vicinity. Lurking underneath a bush was a fat black and white cat that belonged to Mrs Beaumont, who was the old lady that lived in the corner bungalow with the large garden. It seemed that this cat was not content with the rather wide open space of its own back garden as it eyed the progress of Cheshire crossing the empty road. Crouching low on four paws, even from Anders' distant view up high, he knew that it was narrowing its eyes, ready to pounce. Whether Cheshire sensed he was being watched or heard a noise that gave away his adversary, it was not clear. Either way, he stopped again halfway to the hedgerow and spun his head towards the bushes at the front of Mrs Beaumont's garden. With a flash of black fur, one cat pounced from its stalking position as the other fled for safety in a mixture of surprise and fear. A sharp, shrieking caterwaul echoed like a warning alarm. Cheshire was not hanging around to put up a fight. It was clear who was the boss, and was probably not the first time that a similar exchange had taken place. Anders could see that his own cat had scarpered and circled back on himself before taking to an acceptable spot near the edge of their garden. His immediate concern was not for his pet, though. Standing, staring from his

vantage point, he shook his head at the memory that had been jogged: the two cats, the black and white fur, the predatory pounce of the second cat. The scene was very strongly reminding him of that moment in front of the klingnot with the tracators of Gunders Wood.

After dashing downstairs and out of the front door as quickly as he could, Anders slowed purposefully so as not to startle the cat that he was heading towards. Regally, it stretched out, lying boldly in the middle of the quiet road. Thick black fur all over, with a splodge of white here and there including its underside. It had just the same style markings as the tracator that had burst from nowhere to appear by the side of the klingnot. Already, Anders was sure that the two were one and the same creature, transcending between worlds before he noticed the final clinching evidence. When the black cat turned its head and looked brazenly up at him, it revealed a slight nick in its ear – exactly as Anders had noticed on the tracator in Gunders Wood.



## Chapter 7

### Investigating

“We have to go over to Mrs Beaumont’s house,” Anders said to Charlie when his friend finally arrived later that afternoon.

“You’re crazy!” retorted Charlie. “What are we going to say? Excuse me, my friend had a dream that your cat was a huge creature in another world, trying to protect some other huge creature and so we thought you might know something about it?”

“I know how it sounds, Charlie, but please, let’s try? Remember the string and the broken rope?”

Anders was now referring to a previous strange coincidence when he had been fiddling around with the piece of brown twine from his box. Somehow, it had ended up still in his hand when he was in the dual world, exploring Hancamill Heath – only it wasn't just brown twine, it was a length of thick rope. He had linked the two things because they appeared to have a knot tied in them in exactly the same way at one end. Using the rope, he had hooked one end around a tree branch to swing across a flowing river. Only, the rope had broken, Anders had fallen into the river and had woken up in his bed soaking wet with a glass of water from his bedside table spilled all over him. That very same day, he and Charlie had come across a rope tied to a tree at the back of the park where they sometimes rode their bikes. Charlie had wanted to swing on it but Anders had convinced him not to because of the dream. They had watched as some other kids from their school tried it out and ended up falling in a muddy ditch when the rope snapped just as Anders had predicted.

“Yeah but that never proved anything,” said Charlie in response now, still not quite persuaded by the power of his friend's experiences in this so-called other world.

“It saved you from a muddy fall or a broken arm!” Anders bickered.

“But that rope was obviously going to break at some point anyway. Doesn’t mean you knew just because it happened to you in your dream-world or whatever. Anyway, it’s fine, let’s just go over to the old woman’s house if you’re so adamant. I just hope she’s friendlier than Creepy Collins.”

Cautiously, the two boys crossed the cul-de-sac from Anders’ house, past the front border of the next-door neighbour’s garden and over the road to the edge of the driveway in front of the old lady’s bungalow. The garden was full of plants and large, overgrown bushes that were beginning to look in need of attention. Overhanging the long driveway, they made the house quite private and obscured the view of anyone from the road trying to look towards the house itself. As the pair walked gingerly round the curving driveway, the front of the house began to emerge, still partially hidden behind a mixture of climbing honeysuckle and ivy. Wooden window frames were in a state of disrepair and paint flaked from numerous places. None of this was noticeable without being this side of the foliage at the front but Anders felt a pang of guilt that he’d never really taken the time to even know what lurked here, behind the edge of the old woman’s garden, so close to his own home. It wasn’t that he – or his father, as far as he knew – had deliberately avoided Mrs Beaumont’s



house or ever fallen out with her. Occasionally they had seen her and exchanged a wave, as her son collected her to take her out for the day. She just generally kept a fairly private life and everyone in the cul-de-sac was too busy with their own lives to really think anything of her at all.

Thoughts flashed through his head as he stepped in front of Charlie to raise the ornate bronze knocker on the front door: would she mind them coming to her house like this? Would she be annoyed at the interference of two kids with overactive imaginations? With an ominous echo, the heavy knocker thudded against the door once, then twice. Instinctively, Anders stepped back as soon as he let go, treading on Charlie's foot.

"Ouch! Watch it, will you!" came the shriek from behind, but no sound or movement was evident from the other side of the door. "Come on, this place is creeping me out," whispered Charlie.

"Hang on. One more try," suggested Anders, as he stepped forward again. Three loud knocks this time. Then a pause. Silence.

"That's it," Charlie reaffirmed. "We've tried. Let's go." Turning to lead the way back down the drive, he took

no more than three or four paces then suddenly yelped in surprise. "Woah!"

"What is it?" Anders spun around to look.

There, standing in front of them on the path and staring intently towards them was the black cat that had led them here, head cocked to one side and a nick in its right ear. It meowed pleadingly.

"Scared the living daylights out of me," Charlie sighed in relief.

Anders turned back to the front door, not brave enough to knock again but placing his ear to the surface of it.

"I think I can hear someone in there," he said as he beckoned Charlie back towards him.

"Great. Well, we've knocked twice, so they clearly don't want to answer. I'm telling you, I'm out of here - as long as this crazy cat lets me past."

"Don't want to answer or can't answer?" Anders deliberated aloud. Crouching slightly, he pushed open the rusty letterbox and peered inside. He blinked, so that his eyes might adjust to the darkness being

revealed beyond the letterbox. After trying to look from left to right, he then refocused directly forward into the blackness just as another pair of eyes appeared inches from his own, staring wide open, right back at him from the other side of the rectangular opening. "Aargh!" he staggered backwards in horror, kicking over a plant pot and breaking his sideways fall on a prickly bush. Charlie ran back from halfway back down the driveway where he had been half-heartedly carrying out his threat to leave.

"What is it? What's wrong?" he asked.

Anders was not certain. Did he just imagine what he had seen? The image certainly startled him but as he shook his head, trying to shake the doubt from his mind, he felt the memory merging with that of another moment. He heard the words replay in his head again:

*Down in your...*

No;

*Don't ignore...*

The words from that repeating scene in the other world were swirling in his head again now but he realised

no more than three or four paces then suddenly yelped in surprise. "Woah!"

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*Down in your...*

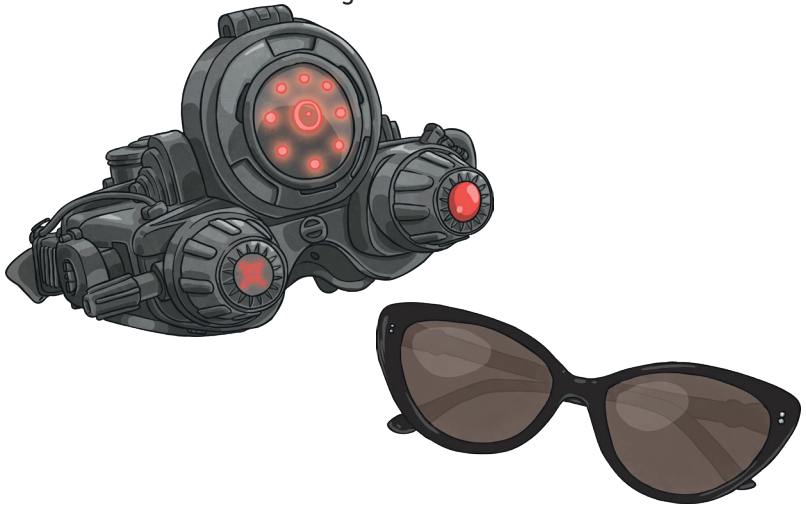
No;

*Don't ignore...*

The words from that repeating scene in the other world were swirling in his head again now but he realised

the link. On one of those occasions, searching for the source of the words in the wood, he had peered into a hole in a thick tree trunk only to find a pair of eyes staring back at him. He shuddered.

Back on his feet, Anders summoned the courage to push open the letterbox once more. This time keeping it at arm's length, he craned his head backwards a little to keep it further away from the door. He squinted into the darkness; there was no sign of anything this time. All that he could make out as he edged closer was an old-fashioned hallway with a small wooden table against one wall, supporting a telephone, a notepad and a vase of dried out, drooping brown flowers. Two doors led from the hallway. One, directly ahead, was completely closed, while the other to the opposite side of the table was very slightly ajar. He must have just imagined the pair of eyes - maybe they were just a scene from his second world instead. But if that was the case, maybe he was being reminded of that scene for a reason. Gently allowing the letterbox to close, he motioned to Charlie and as the two boys retreated along the driveway, Anders tried to explain about seeing the eyes, remembering the dream scene and hearing the repeating words. He had the overwhelming feeling that something was not right and was beginning to convince Charlie of the same idea.



## Chapter 8

### Night Vision

“Look, if the old lady is out with her son or whoever, then we’ll just have to keep an eye out for when she gets back. Then you can say whatever it is you think you’re going to say to her and get it over with,” Charlie had said after they left the old woman’s garden. But after sitting at Anders’ dining room table in the front room for over an hour so that they could see through the window into the street, boredom had begun to set in. “I’m gonna have to go home soon,” he mumbled without really looking up from the magazine he was flicking through.

“Well you’re not much of a look-out anyway,” replied

Anders with a friendly punch.

“Yeah, yeah. I’m here aren’t I?” retorted Charlie.

“Not for much longer, by the sound of it.”

“Well, I’ll head back over later, after tea if you like. As long as we’re not sitting here in the window the whole time,” Charlie half-joked as he returned the punch to Anders’ arm. With that, he made off for the door shouting, “See ya later!”

Alone, Anders sat at the table, flicking through his notebook with the Russian symbol on it and spreading out the other items from the box again. It had been a tiring couple of days and he felt like he had not slept well. The thin, black-rimmed sunglasses that he played with had turned out to be surprisingly useful in the other world. Once, he had fallen asleep wearing them. When he woke on the edge of Hancamill Heath, looking across to Gunders Wood, he couldn’t understand at first why everything looked so strange. It was clearly night-time there, but he could see light and movement in the darkness that he wouldn’t normally be able to see. Not even realising that there was something on his eyes, it was only when he put his hand to his face to scratch an itch that he hit against the goggles.



Sliding them up onto his forehead, he blinked and found his vision reduced by the limitations of the dark; sliding them back into place again showed him that it was the goggles that were the difference. He took them off and examined them, certainly not making any connection at the time between these and the fragile old sunglasses he had taken from his box. In contrast, the night-vision goggles were sleek, modern and very cool. When he looked through them, he could sharply make out tiny movements and heat spots within the forest.

Only upon waking in his bedroom did he realise that he had fallen asleep wearing the glasses and wondered whether there was a connection. Several further occasions proved his theory. Now, toying with them as he thought about the incident at Mrs Beaumont's front door, he didn't have any particular use in mind for night-vision goggles but held them in his hand anyway as he put his head down on the table and felt himself drifting away, his eyelids becoming heavy.

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The sky was black - not just dark and cloudy, but pure black with not a hint of light polluting it from below. Scattered liberally were the twinkling lights

of faraway stars, doing nothing to illuminate but providing a pretty display above Anders' head. He could see barely a few yards ahead of him and even that was made up of distorted, shadowy shapes. Next to him was the rough, wide stump of a tree trunk that was now missing anything that used to be above head-height. As he leaned against it with one hand, he realised that in his other hand was the pair of night-vision goggles. He slid the arms snugly onto the sides of his head and when the lenses covered his eyes, the darkness ahead of him was transformed.

Anders stood barely a few feet away from where he had last found himself standing in Gunders Wood, but now the previously fearsome klingenot lay almost motionless to his right. He could tell it was alive from the sporadic intakes of breath that made its body rise up and fall down. He also knew that the outline and shape of its form was only evident to him because it was giving off heat that was then being picked up by his goggles. The heat also meant the creature was alive. Amongst the strange colours and shapes that made up the contours of its body, it seemed now that one of its rear legs was injured. Nearby, the black and white tracator also lay, less awkwardly and in an apparently more comfortable position, with steadier breathing. Scanning the scene, Anders cast his gaze

right across the landscape. There were other creatures active in the forest at night. Small squibs shuffled in groups of threes and fours; large batterams stalked around in silence – strange, considering their size; overhead were the occasional swoops and lunges of the flying corradukes. These long-beaked, wide-winged bipeds generally kept themselves to themselves but had come to Anders' rescue on previous occasions when he needed it. Somewhere out there were the yhoudies – skulking, weasely creatures with hunched backs and cloaked heads.

From some faraway place, there was that sound again – the wailing, howling warning of a caterwauling sound. He remembered hearing it previously so distinctly, but not here. And yet right now, nothing or no one seemed to have heard it but Anders, as though a cautionary alarm had been triggered and was echoing only in his mind. Suddenly, he sensed some movement much closer to him than the distance he had been focusing upon. Instinctively, he crouched. Squashing himself up against the side of the broken trunk, he held his breath to avoid making any sound or movement of his own. It was unclear exactly what kind of brute was suddenly sneaking around but it didn't seem like anything he'd encountered before. Its attention was so focused on the immobile klingenot

that it certainly hadn't seemed to notice Anders merely a short distance away. Circling and stalking around the back of the area, it had an evil, menacing aura that signalled unspoken malicious intentions.

It was clear that the slumbering klingenot was not predator but prey; not only that but right now it was hurt. It was sleeping and it seemed to be virtually helpless. Not long ago, Anders had felt intimidated by the stricken creature. Now, once again, he saw the power of kindness. He was here to help. Yet, he knew he was powerless against the strength of whatever other creatures strode or flew around him. In the heavy darkness, he racked his brain as the figure lurked and leaned over the klingenot. Wait – that was it! The beasts that flew around him; the corradukes had shown their allegiance before, and he knew how to summon them. In the waking world, he had never mastered the art of whistling. Sure, he could purse his lips and blow a short, quiet toot but it came out as feeble as a kitten's whimper. In this world, he had discovered that his talent for whistling was much more impressive. He assumed that was the reason that the silver, metal whistle was amongst the items in his 'tin of clues'.

Purposefully, he looked to the skies. Parting one finger

and a thumb sideways into his mouth, he inhaled and filled his chest with air then gave one almighty ear-splitting whistle. As the unknown figure was startled by the shrill noise, the flying fiends above arced towards the source of the noise. One of them swooped down, first heading directly at Anders, then lunging knowingly in front of him, turning in mid-flight and charging headlong at the thing in the shadows. Through his night-vision goggles, he saw it swipe its clawed talons threateningly at the head of its target, which knocked it off balance. Immediately, a second corraduke flew in from another angle, making contact with the same target from the other side. Within moments, a third and then a fourth, by which time the first attacker had circled back in with a follow-up blow. Flailing its arms wildly, the brute abandoned whatever its original intentions were, succumbing to the repeated swipes and squawks of the corradukes. Skulking away, it ambled back into the remains of the forest as Anders twirled his sword in the air triumphantly, while the corradukes responded by circling in tight little curves, flapping and diving. He watched the coloured glow of the evil brute's body heat becoming smaller and smaller as it disappeared into the distance.



## Chapter 9

### Convincing Dad

“Dad, we have to go and check on Mrs Beaumont across the road,” yelled Anders as he ran down the path to the shed at the bottom of their back garden. He had woken with his head on the table, with the sunglasses pushing into the bridge of his nose and rubbing the back of his ears, even though he was sure he had not been actually wearing them when he fell asleep. After wiping a little dribble from the corner of his mouth, he had shot up from his seat feeling the thoughts in his head forming through the haze, then charged out of the back door in the direction he was now heading.

“Hey, kiddo, slow down,” replied Anders’ father as

he turned from his workbench just as the boy was barging through the door of the outbuilding. Dad was frequently in the shed, where he would tinker with things. The shelves were stocked from floor to ceiling with all sorts, from old car radios and broken bits of electrical components to miscellaneous blocks of wood and half-empty tins of paint.

“Charlie and I went to her door earlier,” gasped Anders in between breaths. “I heard something... the cat was protecting her... it was a message in the dream... she’s in some kind of danger... think about it - we haven’t seen any sight of her for days.”

Everything came out garbled but somehow, he managed to explain to his father enough to convince the man that it was at least worth a visit to put his mind at rest.

“I’m pretty sure she actually gave me a spare key in case of emergencies, but let’s not get ahead of ourselves,” Dad said reassuringly as he got up from his stool. “It’ll be in one of the drawers somewhere, I imagine. I don’t think we need to worry too much yet, though. I’ll come over there with you and we’ll knock on the door again.”

Together, Anders and his Dad walked up the side of their own house and across the road towards Mrs Beaumont's. Charlie was just dawdling around the corner with his earphones in and MP3 player in his hand when he noticed the pair of them marching purposefully in the direction of the corner bungalow.

"Hey guys," he shouted. "Wait for me!"

From the window of Number 2, the three of them were being watched, as usual, from behind twitching curtains until they disappeared around the other side of the bushes that shielded Mrs Beaumont's garden. Dad rapped gently on the door and stepped back as he cleared his throat. After glancing at Anders and Charlie both silently urging him on, he stepped forward again and knocked harder. Without much of a wait this time, Dad pushed open the letterbox and peered inside. Anders held his breath momentarily, remembering what happened when he had done the same.

"Hello!" shouted Dad into the house with his mouth to the letterbox now. Again, he looked through and then put his ear to the gap. "Hello," he said again with more purpose. "Is there anyone there?"



“Can you see anything?” asked Charlie.

“No, but I thought I heard something,” Dad replied. “Hello... Mrs Beaumont?” he yelled again into the house. “Are you okay?” Both boys stood waiting expectantly. “Maybe we should go back for that spare key,” said Dad. “I think you’re right, kiddo. There might be something wrong here. I’m not sure if I could hear something ever so faintly.”

Dashing back into their own house with renewed urgency, they began to rummage through the drawers of the sideboard. Digging through pens, string, scraps of paper, half-empty boxes of matches, chargers for unknown electrical items and all manner of objects that rarely saw the light of day, eventually Dad triumphantly raised his right hand. In it, he clutched a single silver key attached to a blue plastic fob. A phone number was written on a bit of paper that was inserted into the fob, along with the name ‘Glen’.

“I’ve got a phone number for Mrs Beaumont’s son here too,” said Dad as he took out his phone from his back pocket and immediately tapping in the numbers from the fob. “He gave me this not long after we first moved in. Don’t think I’ve ever rung him.”

As soon as he was done pressing the keypad with his thumb, he put the phone to his ear but within a few seconds of listening, he took it away again and shook his head. "Number not recognised," he said with a shrug of his shoulders. And so, followed hastily by Charlie, they made their way back out of the door and across the road again.

Knocking and shouting the old lady's name again, but without waiting, Dad wriggled the key into the lock and twisted it. With a gentle shove, the door opened. A musty smell escaped to mix with the fresh evening air as the two boys closely followed Anders' father tentatively into the hallway. "Stay back behind me for a minute, boys," Dad suggested as he edged forward and called out again.

This time they all heard the weak reply.

"Through there," pointed out Anders as all three of them quickly followed the direction of the timid voice into the kitchen at the back of the house. As they hurried into the room, they all knew they had been absolutely right to have returned – but the time for relief and satisfaction would have to wait.



## Chapter 10

### Feeding the Cat

Late in the evening, Anders and Charlie were able to reflect on the unexpected events of a long day. They had found Mrs Beaumont lying on the floor in her kitchen in desperate need of help. She had fallen and cut her head as well as hurting her shoulder, hip and knee. She had not been able to get up or get help and couldn't remember how long she had been lying there. Thankfully, Dad had known exactly what to do. An ambulance was called, which arrived quickly with paramedics who treated Mrs Beaumont and eventually took her to hospital. Before that, with the little strength that she had, the old lady had thanked the boys so many times that they had lost count. She had

been terribly hungry as she had been without food for several days. As well as being very weak, but extremely relieved to have been found, she said how angry she was because her son should have been visiting and was supposed to look after her – but he had turned up less and less. He had not visited at all this week when she had needed him the most. The only thing that had kept her going, she had told them all, was her cat, Ivor. It kept coming into the house through the cat-flap in the back door, probably wanting food of its own. Each time, it meowed or licked her face or rubbed against her, which at least kept her alert or awake in the hope that someone would soon find her.

While they had been there waiting for the paramedics to arrive, the cat had strolled in through the cat-flap and stretched out near to its owner. Mrs Beaumont had pointed out the cupboard where its food was kept and asked Anders and Charlie to feed it. Ivor certainly ate his food like he hadn't eaten for days. When the old lady was on a stretcher, about to be taken into the ambulance, she thanked Mr. Arnfield once again, then asked if he would feed Ivor while she was in the hospital – with a little help from the boys, if they wanted. She gave a little smile as they agreed while wincing at the pain she was obviously feeling at the same time. "I can't believe she was in there that whole

time,” Anders said to Charlie as they ate takeaway pizza together for supper at Anders’ house.

“Well, I can’t believe your dream led us there to help her,” replied Charlie as he took a piece of chicken to go with his slice of stuffed-crust pepperoni.

“Do you know what else is a bit of a strange coincidence?” asked Anders, not waiting for an answer before continuing. “What did she say was the name of her cat?”

“Ivor, wasn’t it? Strange name for a cat, if you ask me.”

“Maybe so,” Anders went on excitedly, “But, what’s the name engraved on this tag that was in my grandma’s box?”

He pushed the round, silver nametag across the table to show Charlie, after he had been to retrieve it from the box when they got home earlier.

“Ivor!” said Charlie again, but with a bit more animation this time.

“Exactly!” said Anders through another mouthful of pizza. “Coincidence again?”



Taking time out the following day from their busy school-holiday schedule of playing football at the field or gaming all day in front of a screen at home, the boys visited Mrs Beaumont's house to feed Ivor. Anders' dad had insisted on walking over with them and letting them in, before trusting them to fill up one bowl with biscuits, another with fresh water and empty half a tin of cat food into the third. With Dad having gone back to his latest project in the shed at the bottom of the garden, the boys finished their duty and were ready to head out and lock the door behind them.

"Let's just have a look in here," said Charlie, with one hand already on the handle of a closed door from the hallway.

"No," Anders responded. "That would be snooping. It's not right."

"Oh, come on! Just a little look – haven't you wondered what it's like in here? No one is going to know if we just take a quick peek. Just follow me."

Blinking, Anders processed the instruction – *follow me* – and felt its meaning in another scenario, not

just here. He thought back to the squibs of Gunders Wood, but before he could protest further, Charlie was disappearing into the room. Light green, flower-patterned carpet was matched with dark green curtains. With a sofa and single armchair at one end, the long room turned from lounge at one end to dining room at the other. At the side of the wooden table, draped in a tablecloth and surrounded by six covered chairs, was an old-looking piece of furniture that was as wide as it was tall. Dark tinted glass doors protected some old-fashioned items behind, displayed proudly whilst the shelves were adorned with photo frames and vases, all sitting atop a row of cupboards with wooden doors concealing their contents. Most of it looked like it could have been there for years, untouched. While Charlie had glided around to the other side of the table poking his nose into the books on a different shelf, Anders was drawn to a photo frame tucked in amongst the many others. As he leaned over to get a closer look, his eyes widened. He couldn't believe what he was seeing. It had been the black and silver edging of the frame that had looked familiar at first, but now suddenly he had noticed the photograph inside the frame. The faded colour, the background, and of course the uniform of the person in the image were all recognisable. But it was the closer inspection that formed a knot in Anders' throat and a tightening

of his chest. He steadied himself with a hand on the side of the unit to stop himself falling over right there and then.

“Charlie,” he murmured.

“What is it?” came the half-interested reply.

“I’ve just found the other half of the photo from my box,” gulped Anders.





## Chapter 11

### A Torn Photo

Down the left-hand edge of the photograph in the frame was a torn edge. There was clearly a person missing from off the side of the picture and Anders had the person in that half of the photo under his bed. Both halves of the picture showed a woman in military uniform smiling. He had never recognised the photo of his own but the woman in this picture had a glint in her eye that pierced his soul. Surely it couldn't be though? Anders was overcome with a desperate desire to ask Mrs Beaumont about the photo. Who was it in the picture? Why did she have it? Why was it torn in half? Why was the matching half in his own box, sent to him on behalf of his grandmother after

she had died?

“I need to ask her, Charlie!” he said to his friend after explaining the significance and mystery of his discovery.

“But you can’t,” said Charlie pulling Anders towards the door. “If you do, then it will be obvious we’ve been snooping in her room. We’re not supposed to be in here, remember? The door was closed – we were just meant to be in the kitchen feeding the cat.”

Charlie was right, of course. By asking about the picture, it would give away that they had been where they shouldn’t. Part of Anders wished he had never followed his friend into the room but the other part knew that following him had led to the discovery. Then again, what use was finding the other half of the photo if he had to pretend he hadn’t seen it?

For the rest of the day, he brooded over the discovery. He lay in bed later with his own half of the photo, wondering how it could be possible that the two pictures had once been part of the same whole, which had somehow been torn in half. Why would one half belong to Mrs Beaumont? Why was one half in his tin?



Anders stood and stared up at Pengreg Hall, feeling almost overwhelmed by its splendour. Towering three stories high, there were turrets that were more suited to a fairytale castle. Thick, green vines twisted and curled up and around, intertwining with each other. To the left, cascading down into the river below was the frothing waterfall that always lured his eyes. Mesmerized, Anders felt such strong emotions as he watched the powerful water crash over huge rocks, unstoppable in its pursuit downstream. Tumbling over the edge of the crevice, the water seemed to create visions of places, faces, reflections of light that morphed into new images - images which danced and swirled, as the torrents poured down into a murky abyss. He was almost hypnotised as he stared into the water, and watched the colours of the scene beyond flicker and fade in and out.

A bridge stretched from the right of the hall, over the river and valley below, connecting the grounds with the meandering path from Gunders Wood. Reflections of Pengreg Hall's mullioned windows danced on the surface of the water, with their ornate black and silver edging morphing from straight rectangular shapes into wavy versions of themselves.

Further in the distance, as he turned and surveyed the scene, he spotted a lone klingenot meandering its way amongst upturned tree roots and fallen branches. He couldn't be sure it was the same one that he had encountered; it walked with a limp, yet seemed calmer and more content. Even though it was light now, small groups of yhoudies gathered together, facing inwards, rarely looking up and always filling Anders with dread.

Grandma had often talked about dreams when she had been with him.

“Let your dreams be your guide,” she would say with a grin and a glint in her eye.

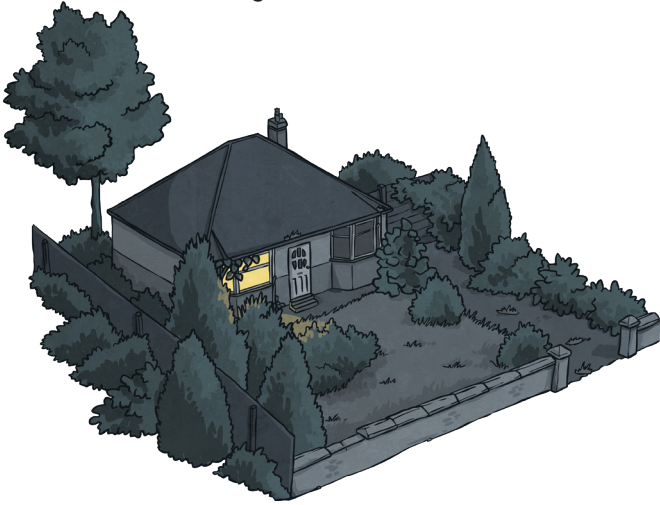
Never did Anders realise the significance until it was too late to question her. Instead, he thought they were just kind words of encouragement. “Embrace your dreams,” she once said. “Close your eyes and open your mind.” Sometimes he wondered whether she knew about or sensed his gift even before he did. Did she just somehow realise the ability that would fall upon him? Did she have it too? Was she somehow guiding him now? The knowing twinkle in her expression and the conviction in her words - these things now persuaded him that she must surely have experienced some form of what he was experiencing. In turn, this made him

wonder: did she once walk in the same places as him? Did she inhabit a different world when she slept but find messages in the same way? Or did she enjoy exactly the same mysteries here in Gunders Wood? Moreover, could she still be here now? If you died in the real world, did you also die in the dream world?

Anders had more than once looked up again at the black windows of Pengreg Hall, convinced that he could see a silhouetted figure looking out from the top floor. And if he trusted the feeling in the pit of his stomach, if he was right, he'd bet anything that the figure was his grandma. He had considered the thought that the grand building may be some kind of heaven. Maybe it simply represented death itself. In the box, there was a ticket to enter the hall but the door was always locked and there was never any way in. Perhaps the point was that he shouldn't want to go in. Perhaps the real challenge was to stay out? Or perhaps he had to protect it in some way?

Darkness was descending again – it seemed to change from day to night-time much more often in this world. It was becoming difficult to see off into the distance, where he had watched the klingenot wandering with its limp. A feeling of unease was creeping over him and he wondered whether he was able to feel safe or not.

Now and again, he thought he heard rustling noises in the gloom surrounding him. The yhoudies were more active at night, and the evil brute that he had frightened away with help from the corradukes must still be out there somewhere. Sitting with his back against one of the pillars around the gated entrance of the hall, he laid his sword by his side and breathed slowly. Just as it often had done, a light in the window of the hall flickered a little, becoming brighter like a beacon and then dimmer again.



## Chapter 12

### Light in the Dark

Anders sat up with a jolt. Darkness was all around him and he scrambled around for the night-vision goggles. Confusion toyed with him as he felt soft, almost silky, ground beneath him. A gradual understanding took hold as he realised he was not in Gunders Wood but the comfort of his bedroom. Still breathing quickly, he swung his legs out of bed and narrowed his eyes to find the general direction of his desk, where a glass of water waited. After swallowing several gulps to quench his thirst, he found his vision adjusting to the dark. On the bedside table was his penknife but he knew he had put it away in the box with everything else. Absentmindedly, he wandered groggily to the

window.

He peered through a narrow gap in the curtains; all was still outside. A streetlamp lit the corner of the cul-de-sac to his right but across to the left, there was another light that was not so normal. It came from behind the bushes in front of Mrs Beaumont's house. Though it was hard to see clearly due to all the leaves and branches, Anders realised there was definitely a light on inside the house. Did he leave it on earlier when feeding Ivor? No, he was sure that neither him nor Charlie even put on a light as it had been the middle of the afternoon.

Mrs Beaumont was still in hospital - wasn't she? She couldn't have been released so soon. When Dad had phoned the hospital during the day, they had said she would be staying in for at least another night for them to make sure she was OK. Just then, a figure passed by the window inside the house. Moving far too quickly to be the old lady, it went by one way then came back into view again going back in the opposite direction. Whoever it was appeared to be hurrying around and the silhouetted shape looked very much like a man. A burglar! Mrs Beaumont's house had been broken into while she wasn't there!



Within moments, Anders had woken his father. After shouting and then shaking him, he had brought him to the window whilst explaining quickly what was happening. Acting without hesitation despite the fogginess of sleep, Dad had grabbed his phone and dialled for the police. Reassured that they were on their way, Dad had then taken his dressing gown to throw over his pyjamas and headed out of the front door, instructing Anders to stay in the house. The boy did roughly as he was told, keeping a foot on the doorstep as he craned his body in the direction of the corner bungalow. His father had walked warily to the edge of the lady's driveway to peer around the bushes for a better look.

Soon afterwards, the anticipated police car came racing round the corner into the small section of road that was shared between the four houses. Two uniformed police officers leapt out of the car. One of them spoke briefly to Anders' father before directing him back towards his own house, then joined his partner heading out of sight towards Mrs Beaumont's front door. Meanwhile, Creepy Collins at Number 2 had opened his front door just slightly and stood for a moment in his dressing gown while looking suspiciously out of the narrow gap.

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It seemed a long time before the two policemen emerged from the house. Yet, instead of dragging anyone out in handcuffs, as Anders had expected, they walked out chatting casually with another man who was dressed in dark jeans and a brown leather jacket with a hood poking out from underneath. The boy watched from the doorstep as his father walked over to meet them. After a short time standing in discussion, his Dad even shook hands with the man in the leather jacket before heading back to the house. He explained to Anders everything that he had just been informed of: that the man was Mrs Beaumont's son, Glen, who had been there sorting out some of her belongings and collecting things that she needed. He was there so late because he had been busy working away all day. Satisfied, the policemen climbed back into their car and drove away; Glen went back into his mother's house to continue his sorting out; Anders and his dad went back to bed feeling slightly embarrassed, and quietly, without anyone noticing, Mr Collins disappeared back from behind the edge of his living room curtain.



## **Chapter 13**

### The Fountain

Tired from having been up in the middle of the night, Anders found himself bored and with nothing much to do the following day. Charlie was out with his family again and Dad said he would be busy all day with his projects in the shed. Since his last birthday, Anders had been allowed to catch the bus by himself for the short ride into town. Deciding to take advantage of the time alone with his thoughts, he took the short journey from the stop at the end of the main road and jumped off the bus in the town centre. Walking towards the market square that he had occasionally been to with his grandma, he listened to some music and picked through the recent events in his mind from

both his waking and dream worlds. He loved to sit and watch people go by, now just as much as he did then – ‘people-watching’, grandma would call it. It was a handy distraction from his thoughts but also a moment of quiet solitude amongst the bustling crowds of people. Aimlessly, he kicked around a small stone. Shining down was a brilliant, bright sun that bounced light from the windows of the huge buildings along one side of the square. Department stores, offices and popular cafés stood side by side.

In the middle of the square was a fountain. Anders circled its perimeter, trailing the finger of his left hand along the wet surface of the stone edging. After a full circle, he sat down and dipped his fingers into the cool water, making ripples. Some people had thrown money into the fountain, many of the glistening coins at the bottom of the water representing the absent-minded wish of a passer-by. Within the reflecting sunlight and rippling surface, one coin unexpectedly caught his eye. He blinked, thinking he had seen it incorrectly. The ripples from his own swirling hand still disturbed the appearance of the shiny metal below. In the beat of a second as Anders squinted and leaned his body over the side to try to confirm what he had seen. A coin with a hole. A Norwegian krone, matching the one in his box at home. Focusing frantically, he located

it again with his eyes and plunged his arm into the water to his elbow and further, until he could grasp the small silver coin between his fingers and thumb. Bringing it out into the air, he studied it and flipped it over in his hand. A shiver vibrated through his body – not from the cold water trickling down his arm, but from the sight of the year marked on the coin: 1977, also exactly the same year as the coin he knew was at home in his bedroom. Why here? A town in England so far from its origin. A coincidence, perhaps? Grandma, maybe? Surely it couldn't have been nestled there since Grandma had last visited. He couldn't even remember her tossing a coin into the fountain. Why notice it now? Some overwhelming urge that he couldn't explain was filling inside him. There was some connection, he knew it. The coin was a sign; it had to be.

Anders felt strangely dizzy. His heart thumped. Thoughts raced through his mind – connections firing, but not quite creating enough of a spark to launch a cohesive understanding – Grandma, the box, the coins, Gunders Wood - so many images held loosely together with fragments of thread. Flashbacks. Water running and cascading, which was adding a serene sound effect to the blur of his thoughts. Water fell from the fountain as Anders stared into it, more water always shooting upwards into the air from the centre

and splashing down all around. His mind was fuzzy. He felt torn between places, like he was in two places at once.

*Don't ignore her...*

Trying to focus, he glanced to his right, expecting to see the rope bridge from Pengreg Hall, but instead, a lady in a smart suit, carrying a briefcase, wandered past close to him and he remembered where he actually was.

The feeling was so strong; it was like déjà vu – not for the first time. Staring into the fountain with the coin in his wet hand, the jumble of thoughts had sent him spinning back to the tranquil edge of the river in his other world. Again, he felt a compelling connection. There was a link to be found, he knew it. Looking up into the tumbling water again, he suddenly saw what he was looking for, without previously having realised what it was. Through the hazy vision, his eyes were drawn to a shop window, and in that window was something that he knew instantly. Recognisable despite the shimmering water, it was the same photo frame that he had seen in Mrs Beaumont's front room. It was as if the fountain and the coin had drawn his attention to it. Anders skipped maniacally around

the fountain and hurtled towards the shop window. Almost bouncing off the glass as he bounded into it, he placed his palms flat against the pane. It took no time at all to convince himself that it was the same frame, sadly deprived of its photograph. He had held it in his hands less than two days ago. He looked up at the shop sign. It was an antique and second-hand shop, selling all kinds of items from furniture to jewellery. Intrigued, he stepped inside and asked an assistant about the frame.

“I’ve just put that in the window, not five minutes ago,” the assistant replied. Anders’ jaw could well have hit the ground as he was told about the frame being brought in that very morning and sold to the shop along with a few other items. When pointed out, there were at least two or three he recognised too: a vase, a china ornament, a second larger gold photo frame. They had all been in Mrs Beaumont’s bungalow on that same unit of furniture. Yet it was the smallest frame that still held his gaze – that one he knew had contained the half a photograph to match his own half. He certainly couldn’t afford to buy it, but he could sure check out where he thought it must have come from.



## Chapter 14

### Sneaking In

The cul-de-sac appeared deserted that evening by the time Charlie came over. All afternoon, the boys had been exchanging text messages and Charlie had insisted that Anders was to wait for him before going back into Mrs Beaumont's house again. They had the responsibility of feeding Ivor but, of course, that was not their primary reason for being desperate to get back inside. Anders had already filled his friend in that morning about calling out the police in the middle of the night only to find that the light on inside the house was because her son was there. Everyone had gone back to bed during the early hours feeling reassured, but Anders' suspicion level had now gone through the roof again with the



sighting of the photo frame. Convinced that it was from inside the house – along with the other items that he recognised in the shop – Anders had updated Charlie again in the afternoon. This time, the pair speculated about theories and possibilities as to how and why those items had got into the shop window.

An element of doubt had again begun to creep into Anders' mind since getting home, and he had almost convinced himself that what he saw was just a coincidence. Without them still in his hands, he could no longer be sure. Yet at the time, he had been so certain that they were the same items he had seen on the larger dresser in Mrs Beaumont's living room.

Itching to find out, he had honoured the promise to wait as Charlie was still busy with his family. Not wanting to reveal that the boys had been snooping, Anders had also resisted the temptation to say anything to his father. Eventually, upon seeing Charlie arrive, Anders had grabbed the keys and met his friend out front, deliberately not even shouting to tell his father in the shed that they were going to feed the cat.

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Letting themselves into the house, the boys carefully

closed the front door behind them and walked through the hallway directly to the living room. Anders made a beeline straight for where he had picked up the photo frame on his last visit, but it was gone. Eyes darting hurriedly, he looked around amongst the other frames. He couldn't be sure, but they seemed fewer than before – maybe two or three missing – but one of the gaps was definitely left by the frame he had in his mind. Now, once again, he was convinced: it definitely had been Mrs Beaumont's frame in the antique shop. It wasn't just a coincidence. And more than ever, he needed to know the connection now to his own photo. With Charlie at his side, Anders stepped back and scanned the rest of the tall unit. Most items were still there; it certainly wasn't bare but things were missing. He hadn't really taken everything else in when he was last here the previous day but a couple of china ornaments and the vase that was also in the shop were definitely absent. The whole unit had been crammed full of objects; now there was a telling gap here and there.

Charlie had already begun wandering around the room. "Wasn't there an old record player over here?" he asked, bending down and inspecting a strange line on the wall where the bottom of the wallpaper was less faded in colour than the top.

"I think so!" Anders replied in alarm, joining his friend, then looking over at the corner of the room with the television. "And there, on the mantelpiece, there was a clock - I'm sure of it. In fact, the key to wind it up is still here at the side." Anders pocketed the key and ran his finger along a line of dust which outlined a clean rectangular portion of the mantelpiece. Something had been there very recently but had now been moved.

"There's something really odd happening," Charlie chipped in, sharing the same thoughts and observation, "and it seems pretty strange that the only other person we know has been here since us is that son of the old lady. What did he say he was doing again?"

"Apparently, he told the police he was just collecting some of her things for her."

"In the middle of the night?" asked Charlie incredulously.

"Exactly!" said Anders as he raised his eyebrows. "But I doubt she'd be needing a clock or a record player in hospital. Now, next thing we know, this stuff has gone missing and I'm pretty sure that same stuff has already turned up in the antique shop in town. We have to tell someone."

“Yeah, but if we tell your Dad, isn’t he going to wonder why we were looking in her front room in the first place? How are we supposed to let on that we know things have gone missing unless we confess that we were in here before and now we’ve come back in here again? We’re only supposed to be feeding the cat!”

“That’s it!” exclaimed Anders. “The cat! We’ll say that we came to feed Ivor and couldn’t find him. The door to the living room was slightly open, so we came inside to look for him. While we were here, we just happened to notice the photo and recognised it from the photo I already have in Grandma’s box.”

“You know what? That might just work!” said Charlie with a smile as he was obviously impressed by the idea. “Right then, we’d better actually feed the cat, seeing as that’s what we’re supposed to be doing!”

Although there was in fact no sign of Ivor, the boys knew he could come and go through the cat flap at the back door so they went into the kitchen to get the biscuits and pouch of meat to put into his bowl. Before they had chance to replenish either food or water, they were startled by a noise outside the front door. Voices were accompanied by muffled footsteps. Keys jangled in the lock. Someone was letting themselves into the house.

“Quick, in here!” whispered Charlie.

The boys bundled themselves tightly into the pantry in the kitchen, but left the door slightly ajar as they could barely fit amongst the shelves and piles of boxes on the floor. Packed in closely together, they could now hear a pair of voices travelling through the thinly opened door of the kitchen and around into the equally marginal opening of the pantry door. Shoulders squashed against each other, the boys tried to breathe both slowly and silently as they listened. Their eyes widened as the conversation became clearer and they realised exactly who and what they were witnessing.



## Chapter 15

### Evidence

Immediately, it had become apparent that one of the voices belonged to Mrs Beaumont's son, Glen. He had quite quickly referred to his mother being 'out of the way' in hospital and had claimed that he had already managed to 'raise some quick cash' with a few bits and bobs that wouldn't be missed. Walking around the house, the voices rising and falling in volume depending on their whereabouts, it had appeared that he was trying to sell or get a value for other items in the house. The second voice had been deep and commanding, belonging to a man who didn't seem to say much but had a hint of intimidation about him.

At one point while listening to the conversation, Charlie had pointed animatedly towards Anders' pocket, jabbing his finger and nodding his head in the same direction. Then he had put his hand to his ear with his thumb and little finger pointing out in opposite directions to make a gesture like a phone. Anders had responded by taking out his phone but his instinct was not to try making a call. He had not dared to speak, for fear of being heard and discovered. Whilst hoping and praying that the two men had no reason to look in the pantry for anything, Anders had instead used his phone to activate the voice recording feature. As he held it up towards the crack in the door, he had hoped that the voices were loud enough and clear enough to be recorded.

If so, he had the evidence that Mrs Beaumont's son had admitted to owing huge amounts of money to some pretty bad people, stealing some of his mother's things to sell and making arrangements for other larger things to be taken in order to pay off a loan. He had even said that it was not the first time that he'd managed to get away with something similar and that he could make it look like a robbery without appearing to be involved himself. He just had to be a little more careful, he'd admitted, because one of the neighbours' kids had seen him in the house and called

the police the previous night. With all this recorded, all the boys needed to do now was get out safely, without being discovered. That was a task easier said than done, whilst the pair of crooks were barely a few metres away from them and sounded like they were heading closer and closer to the kitchen. Quickly, Anders tapped out a text message to his Dad. Tap, tap, tap – in the silence of the pantry, the tiny noise of striking his thumb on the keypad seemed much louder than it actually was.

*Trapped at Mrs B's house. Call police now! Help!*

Pressing the send button, Anders could only hope that his father had his own phone with him and that he picked up the message down at the bottom of the garden. There was little else he could do right at that moment, especially as the door to the kitchen was being pushed open and the two men were walking right into the room.





## Chapter 16

### Trapped

Anders and Charlie virtually held their breath now and looked directly at each other as they heard the men barely a couple of metres away from them. They were trapped. Shielded only by the thickness of the partly-closed pantry door, they held themselves as if they were frozen, all except their eyeballs which darted around anxiously. At least one of the men was so close to the other side of the door, Anders could smell his stale breath and the rotten stench stirred a memory in his mind from Gunders Wood. Both men walked a few paces in the direction away from the pantry, coming partially in and out of view through the crack. Slightly taller than Glen Beaumont, the second man was stocky

with wide, hunched shoulders and not much of a neck. They seemed to be agreeing that there was nothing in the kitchen worth bothering with and the boys urgently hoped that this meant that they would soon be leaving. Then came a sudden vibration in Anders' hand. Thankfully, his phone was switched to silent but the vibrating alert of an incoming call was still enough to shock him and he fumbled desperately to press the button which would silence it. As soon as he did so, he froze once more and looked crestfallen at Charlie.

“Well what do we have here then?” they heard the deep, foreboding voice of the bigger man say.

Anders' heart was like a ticking time-bomb and he closed his eyes, waiting for reality to explode with the opening of the pantry door. The moment never came. Instead there was the clap of another tiny door snapping shut.

“Oh, that's just Ivor. Don't mind him,” said Glen. It seemed that at the same moment that Anders' phone had vibrated with a call, Mrs Beaumont's cat had poked its head through the cat-flap and diverted their attention. The boys exchanged looks of relief, but they knew they remained completely vulnerable. Still the men didn't leave the kitchen.

Gradually, during their conversation, the hunched man with the deep voice had started to sound more agitated with Glen, and in turn Glen had become more defensive and pleading. Both boys were beginning to feel hot, flustered and more scared than ever of being discovered. Then, the phone again: this time a message flashed up. It was from Dad.

*Is this a joke?*

Anders noticed with this alert that the previous call had also been from his father. At least he had picked up the message but was he taking them seriously? There was no way now that Anders could call and explain, or even dare to tap out another message. He just needed the men to leave the room, or preferably the whole house.

Through the crack in the open door, there was an unexpected movement down low in their line of vision. Anders and Charlie immediately noticed it together and looked towards the floor. Through the tiny gap, they could see one furry ear and one shiny, black eye. The ear had a little nick in the side of it, while the eye was round, focused and staring directly at them. The boys stared down at the cat. The cat looked directly back at them, no doubt bemused at the presence of two people inside the pantry.

“Meowwww.”

Of course - he wanted his food. But the last thing they needed was the cat looking directly at the pantry, drawing attention to where they were hiding. Silently, Anders mimed an expression to shoo away the cat, involving a flick of his head and slight wave of his hand without actually moving his body too much. It probably conveyed nothing to the confused cat.

“Meeowwwwwww.”

Louder, longer and more insistent this time. Anders gulped as he felt his throat tighten with anxiety. Charlie’s shoulders sagged, fearing the worst.

“Sounds like the moggie wants feeding,” came the deep voice of the stocky visitor. Inside the pantry, the boys looked at each other, eyes widening again as Anders watched a bead of sweat form on his friend’s forehead, pausing momentarily at his temple before descending down the side of his face.

“Nah, ignore it. I never liked that dumb animal anyway,” said Glen as his voice trailed away behind disappearing footsteps. It sounded clearly like he had walked out of the room as he was speaking, but the

other man still loomed menacingly close in the kitchen. Neither of the boys could physically see him, meaning that he was probably directly on the other side of the pantry door. Anders craned his head to peer through the crack without being seen, still being watched by Ivor. Suddenly into view came a large hand, ruffling the top of the cat's head.

"Sorry kitty. We're a bit busy right now," breathed the voice as the boys froze once more. With that, heavy footsteps turned and also disappeared from the room, leaving behind a quiet relief, punctuated one last time with the whimper of the cat.

"Meow."

Looking at each other in the tiny confined space, the boys signalled their mutual feelings almost telepathically. They had survived a monumentally close shave and now knew they had to take their chance to try to get away.

"Can we make a run for it?" Anders asked, barely whispering the words.

"With your phone and then that cat nearly dropping us right in it, I think we've used up all our good luck

in here. I say let's get out," replied Charlie with a hand almost on the door.

"But they're still in the house," motioned Anders. "They'll hear us."

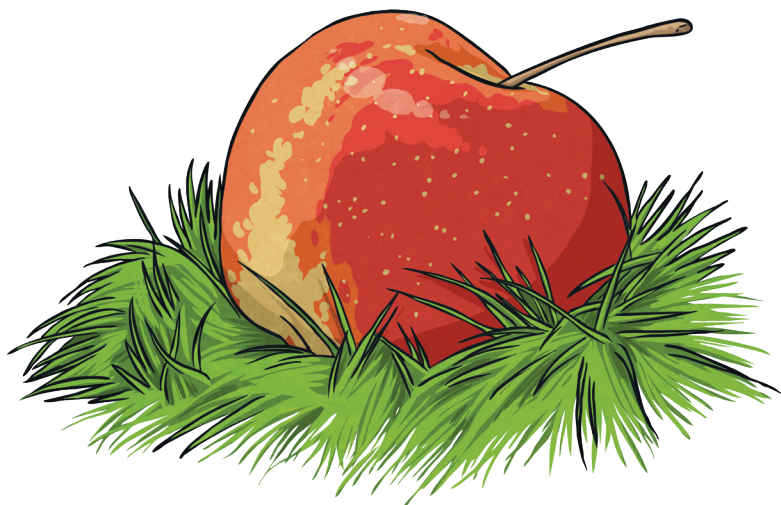
"We can get out of this pantry and across the kitchen to the back door," murmured Charlie. "If we can get through there, we're outside in the back garden and can run for it – over the fence, out the back gate, anything rather than staying in here waiting for them to come back and find us again."

"OK," Anders agreed with a nod after he had peered through the crack in the door again. "They must be in one of the other rooms so the coast should be clear. From here, we make a dash on the count of three. It's only a few metres to the back door. Then we just have to turn the key and we'll hopefully be through it and outside before they realise."

"Ready then?" asked Charlie. Anders gave another nod and held up his finger. He mouthed the numbers: "One, two..." and then at the same time as saying "three", he pushed open the door.

Charlie leapt over the surprised cat as he led the way.

Anders was immediately behind as they rounded the small kitchen table, deflected off the edge of a worktop and charged headlong at the back door. With a thud, Charlie hit the door first with his palms facing out ahead of him, using it as a barrier to halt his speed, while reaching his hand simultaneously to grab at the key in the lock. Barely a heartbeat later, Anders ploughed into him from behind at the same speed. And then, in unison, they stopped and screamed.



## **Chapter 17**

### After the Scream

In such haste to reach the door, neither had even noticed what was on the other side. Now, they were suddenly face to face with someone staring back at them from the other side of the glass: Creepy Collins.

It was like time had frozen for a moment. Charlie had turned the key before even registering the face right in front of him; he had his other palm pressed against the window in the top half of the door. Anders had one hand on his friend's shoulder and the other on the handle of the door. It seemed for that moment that Mr Collins was motionless. However, the frozen moment was shattered with the sound of Glen Beaumont and



his accomplice bounding back through the house from wherever they had been when hearing the boys' scream. Faced with an impossible choice, Anders and Charlie had Creepy Collins ahead of them and the two crooks rapidly approaching behind. Now they really were trapped. The choice was made for them as Mr Collins pulled down the handle to open the back door from the outside, pushing it inwards. As the boys were forced backwards by the opening door, the man on the outside was grabbing at them and pulling them out.

Enticed by the slightly better of two unattractive options, neither of them resisted, and they bundled through the door and out into the back garden. Mr Collins held onto them but ushered them straight past him protectively and pushed them off towards the open side gate that led round to the front of the house. After initially appearing to follow them, he instead turned to face the pursuing men from inside the house.

“Quick, kids - get yourselves away,” Creepy Collins shouted as the boys reached the gate and realised that he had indeed been there to help them after all.

“Who the hell is this guy?” bellowed the deep voice of the hunched, stocky man who stood behind Mrs Beaumont's red-faced son.

“That’s a damn good question!” added Glen angrily, speaking the words in the direction of Mr Collins. “Don’t you live across the road?”

“Indeed I do,” replied Mr Collins. “And I’ve been watching all your crooked visits, before and after your poor mother was hurt.”

“Why, you...” Glen’s words tailed off as he hurtled himself furiously at the neighbour.

At the side gate, Anders had paused and watched the exchange. He gasped. Glen Beaumont took a few paces, then threw his entire body into Mr Collins, arms outstretched, knocking the standing man clean off his feet. Both men fell to the floor, wrapped together in an aggressive, wrestling heap with a cloud of dust being kicked up from the dry grass. In the corner of the garden, an apple fell and bounced onto the lawn.

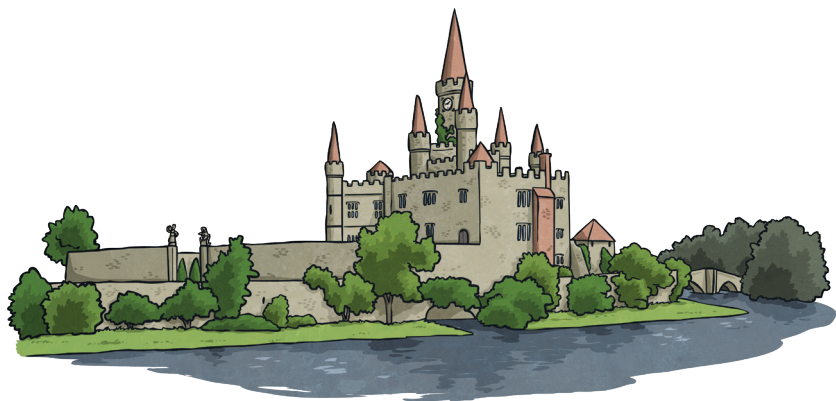
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A moment after witnessing the scuffle of the two men on the back lawn, Anders had caught up with Charlie around the front of the house. He knew that the apple falling from the tree linked the impact of the collision with the recurring event of the batterams, which he

had seen so often in Gunders Wood. It was like that moment had been written and predicted for a while. Confronting him around the other side of the house was the panicked arrival of his father, followed by the screeching halt of a police car. The hunched man had made a run for it out the front door but he was grabbed by one policeman reacting quickly as he alighted from his car.

“Round there!” shouted Charlie as he pointed towards the back garden. The second policeman headed off around the back, while hollering into his radio. It was not long afterwards that another police car had arrived and between everyone, stories began to be sorted through. It turned out that Mr Collins had been not only observing all the events of the cul-de-sac, but had paid special attention to Glen Beaumont after becoming suspicious of the man’s actions and motives. From his post at the window, he had seen Anders and Charlie enter the house, followed soon after by Glen and his accomplice. Knowing that the kids could be in trouble, he had made his way around the back of the house where he had been able to help them escape. Furthermore, he also had video recordings of Glen on several occasions, which would help to incriminate him for stealing his mother’s belongings. Fortunately, Anders’ voice recording was also clear enough to pass on to the police.

The other man involved was quickly identified as being well-known to the police and both were taken away in the back of the two police cars. Charlie and Anders then had to explain everything from the beginning to a lady police officer. Charlie's mum came over and sat with Anders' dad as they listened to it all and made an occasional gasp. When it was all over, Anders was exhausted. Charlie left with his mum; the cul-de-sac seemed quiet again. Dad promised they could visit Mrs Beaumont the next day but first, he said, Anders needed a very good night's sleep. Anders wasn't sure he could remember what that even felt like but as his head hit the pillow, his eyelids were heavy and a great slumber took hold of his body and mind.



## Chapter 18

### Looking Down

It felt like he was floating in the air. Steadily, the sensation crept over him and when he opened his eyes to look down he could see all of Gunders Wood below him. For the first time, he sensed he had the whole perspective of the place. Moreover, as he looked closer, he could detect the green shoots of new plants and growth where the recently destroyed trees had been. Colour and vitality seemed to be running through the forest, breathing new life everywhere. Relaxed, Anders found himself descending slowly to the ground. His feet gently touched the soft forest floor and he felt in control of himself again.

Across the river was the majestic front of Pengreg Hall. Its front gates interrupted the middle of a grand wall that ran the length of the grounds. On either side of the gates were large pillars and he took a moment to admire the beautiful and suddenly familiar figurine statues standing on each pillar on either side of the gate. Looking past them, he saw a magnificent old clock face protruding from the top of the building that he had never noticed before. The hands of the clock were not moving and it gave him an intriguing thought. His hand felt into his pocket and found a key. Just as he was expecting. It was not exactly the key he thought he would find, however; this one was significantly bigger and slightly rusty. But he still sensed what it would be for. He began walking purposefully in the direction of the building but as he did so, he felt his feet becoming lighter and then despite his forward paces, he wasn't making contact with the ground at all. Looking down, he saw himself still walking but just a few inches off the ground on thin air – and he was rising. His legs were still making a walking movement but he was now moving forwards, higher and higher into the air until he was over the grounds of Pengreg Hall. Below him, he could hear the muffled crackling sound of some old-fashioned music drifting up from within the building.

Slowing steadily, Anders came to a stop on the roof of the building. He reached out and grabbed hold of the back of a structure which was raised up to about his own height and he knew that he was clutching the back of the clock mechanism. Directly in front of him was a door panel, which he opened. Inside, the workings of the clock were laid bare and he could see right through the gaps in them to the hands which were on the front of the translucent clock face. Most significantly of all was a slot which was the perfect size for the key from Anders' pocket. Carefully, he inserted it and turned it to the right. After the first turn, the clock hands stirred into motion with the grinding of cogs and wheels. Two more turns of the key and Anders stepped back in satisfaction. Admiring his sudden, surprise achievement, he folded his arms and smiled as the clock began to tick. But before he had chance to enjoy the moment for too long, he felt the roof tile below him give way a little. Before he even had chance to alter his footing, he slipped as the tile cracked and Anders fell, tumbling off the edge of the roof.



## Chapter 19

### Confessions and Questions

With a thud, Anders crumpled into a ball as he hit the carpeted floor. Pain shot through his arm and shoulder but he rolled onto his back and knew that he had not hurt himself too much. Rubbing his forearm at the point of the impact, he lay there for a moment, blinked his eyes and looked up at the bunkbed which towered above him. He had definitely climbed into bed on the bottom bunk last night but he could see the ruffled, messy duvet of the top bunk hanging over the edge of the frame, halfway down the side of the ladder. He was pretty sure that was where he had just fallen from. Climbing back up to straighten the duvet, he pushed the pillows back into place and spotted a little sparkle



of metal. On the top mattress was the watch from Grandma's box. Anders pulled it towards him, unable to remember taking it out of its usual place with the other items. For the first time, it was working.

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Later that afternoon, Anders accompanied his father to the hospital to visit Mrs Beaumont. As they arrived, two police officers were just leaving her bedside and for a moment, Anders' father paused. The old lady was sat up in bed and she smiled to encourage them over to her. Despite having just had the news broken to her of everything that had happened in the short time that she'd been in hospital, Mrs Beaumont seemed to be in good spirits. She explained that she was very sad about what her son had done but that there had been some other incidents in the past and she hadn't been too surprised to find out. Although she didn't think he was still 'up to his old tricks', she had said that he would have to get what was coming to him and she hoped now he had been caught that whatever punishment was doled out would be a harsh lesson for him to learn from. She also said that she was being allowed out of hospital by the doctors, who were really pleased with how quickly she had recovered.

“The first thing that I’ll be doing is getting some new locks and only giving a spare key to someone I can trust – like you two!” she said as she placed her hand on the back of Anders’ hand.

“Before you say anything else, I need to tell you something,” Anders responded with a little hint of worry in his voice.

“Yes, dear?” asked the lady.

Anders found the words tumbling out of his mouth. “Well, maybe you shouldn’t trust me. I’m really so sorry but when my friend Charlie and I went in to feed Ivor, we didn’t just go into the kitchen. You see, we also went into your living room and we were going to pretend that we were looking for Ivor but I don’t want to lie to you so I’m telling you the truth. And the truth is we were just being a bit nosy and I’m really sorry now.”

“Don’t worry, child,” said Mrs Beaumont reassuringly. “You’ve done a good thing. Perhaps something had guided you there and if it wasn’t for you, it sounds to me like this unsavoury business wouldn’t have ended quite so happily.”

“But, there’s something else,” Anders went on. “One of

the photograph frames that was taken. I recognised it. It had just half a photo inside, torn down one edge. And I have the other half.” Reaching into his pocket, Anders took out his own part of the photograph and unfolded it to pass it into the hand of Mrs Beaumont. Instantly, there was a change in her expression; she was lighting up in wonder. Clearly, she knew the photograph of her own that Anders was talking about and she also knew this was the matching, missing half. Her mouth opened, lips mumbling but with no words coming out straight away. Her head shook a little from side to side and a tear welled in the corner of her eye.

“How did you get this?” she eventually asked.

“It was in a box that was sent to me from my grandmother after she died, with lots of other things. I don’t know who sent the box but there was a note inside from my grandmother so I know she wanted it to come to me. Do you know who this is in the photo? And why the other half was in your house?” Anders probed.

“This photograph is of me,” said Mrs Beaumont. Anders and his father looked at each other, then back at the old lady.

“It was taken when I was much younger, as I was

standing next to a lady that was my best friend, who once saved my life and who I never saw again after that moment. We had torn this photograph in half not long before that day. I kept the half with her pictured. She kept this half. I think that lady must have been your grandmother.”

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By the time the rest of the story was unravelled, Anders thought he must have picked his jaw up from the floor several times over. His father had stood up at one point and walked around, rubbing the top of his head saying things like, “This is incredible,” and, “This actually makes sense now,” and “I can’t believe she never told me this.” Mrs Beaumont had explained how she had been some kind of spy when she was much younger, along with Anders’ grandmother. They had worked for the authorities in Norway, where they both originally came from, but then had been sent to Russia. Upon being almost discovered during a secret operation that was immediately abandoned, they had needed to split up from each other and had never seen each other again. Many years later, she had moved to England to start a new life and was never able to track down her old friend.

“It seems that somehow she was watching over me all this time,” Mrs Beaumont said with a sense of wonder. “She always did talk mysteriously about her ‘gift’. I didn’t take much notice of it, but sometimes she just seemed to know where to look or what to do, like it was a sixth sense. I think it sounds like you may have the gift too, young man.”

Anders raised an eyebrow and smiled from one side of his mouth.

*A gift. Perhaps that’s what you might call it.*



## Chapter 20

### Connections

Two days later, Anders sat at the kitchen table in Mrs Beaumont's house as she gingerly moved around, getting used to the new walking stick she had been given, boiling the kettle and making tea. Ivor lay sleeping on a cushion on the chair next to him.

"Look at that creature," said Mrs Beaumont as she ruffled the top of the cat's head, between his ears. "Don't you just love that loud purring sound they make when they're so happy and content? Sounds to me just like a tractor sometimes!"

"What?" Anders jerked his head around in surprise at

the comparison.

“The cat,” said the old lady. “Often reminds me of a tractor engine, he purrs so loud!”

“Tractor. Tracator! Tra – cat – or,” Anders muttered under his breath. Another connection unpicked.

He recalled the moment less than a week earlier when they had discovered their neighbour lying on the floor where his feet were now, and a couple of days after that when he found himself trapped with Charlie inside her pantry over to his right. Noticing an unopened envelope bearing a handwritten address with a name he had seen before, he wondered who it could be for. “Mrs Beaumont, can I ask you something?”

“Yes, dear?”

“Why do you have letters here addressed to Ms N. Pegger? Is it someone else who used to live here?”

“Ah, no dear. That’s me. My maiden name was Pegger before I moved to England and married my husband, Jack. I was Nora Pegger. Some people still know me by that name.”

“Your name is Nora?” asked Anders, as another little light bulb began to flicker inside his mind.

“Yes, Nora Beaumont now, but when I knew your grandmother I was Nora Pegger.”

“Don’t ignore her...” said Anders as he thought out loud to himself.

“Pardon, dear?”

“Maybe it wasn’t ‘Don’t ignore her’ – it’s clearer now at last, the words that were echoing: it was ‘Go in, Nora’.”

“Well, how strange you should say that,” said the old lady. “That’s the last thing I remember your grandmother saying to me. We thought we were being followed on that last day I ever saw her. We were looking for somewhere to hide quickly and we found this place, which was like a back entrance to a little alleyway. ‘Go in, Nora,’ she had said to me, pushing me inside, but she never had chance to follow. They caught her, these youths wearing hoods, while I got away because I’d gone in first. And I never knew what happened to her after that. We abandoned it all and left the country. But whatever just made you say those words?”



Anders smiled and muttered, "I guess I just heard it somewhere."

Together, they sat and talked for a while about his grandmother. Mrs Beaumont told him stories about when the two ladies were younger and tales about what they did when working as spies. Anders told her about not really knowing his grandmother much until she was quite old, because she had lived back in Norway for most of his life, then came to spend some time with him and his father in England before she died. During that time, they had been really close and she had been very kind to him, but she had never really talked about her past. At his own home later, after they had talked and laughed for hours, Anders was drawn back to thinking of the envelope he had seen and asked about. He was enticed by it so much, he felt sure there was something important about it. On a notepad, in his bedroom he wrote out the name in capital letters:

*N. PEGGER*

He looked and then swapped around the letters and he couldn't quite believe what it read...

*PENEGREG!*

The grand old building that he had pondered about, wondering what it represented. In his box, he had a ticket with its name, Pengreg Hall. The name of the hall, it appeared, was an anagram of Mrs Beaumont's original name. Maybe the whole place – the wood, the hall – maybe all those events were there to lead him to this one mission: saving Mrs Beaumont, his grandmother's old friend. And by doing so, he was also saving the Hall and the Wood. Whatever or wherever that was. Furthermore, behind all of this, somehow, was his grandmother. She had known Mrs Beaumont – or Nora – and she had somehow had the box of clues sent to Anders. Somehow, she had known – maybe even influenced – what Anders was able to do in his dream world.

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Climbing into a fresh, clean bottom bunk bed, Anders felt an enormous sense of pride and relief. He smiled to himself at the thought of the good that he had done and all the mysteries that he had finally unravelled. Not in such a long time had he felt so relaxed about going to sleep. Across the room, Cheshire was already purring away – like a tractor! With the wide grin still on his face, Anders let his eyes fall shut and gave a long, contented sigh as he drifted away.

It felt like hours before he wearily opened one eye again, feeling the prodding of feline paws and the familiar sound now so obviously like a rumbling engine. He looked up to see the huge, friendly figure of a tracator padding its large feet gently against his chest. A long, knobbly twig poked into his back as he rolled over on the forest floor. Rising to his feet, he unfolded himself and patted the tracator on the back of the head, then wandered along the river to the bridge where he would have a better view of Pengreg Hall. Fruit was appearing on the trees again all around him. There was now an evident, miraculous rejuvenation of the forest. Nearby, a klingenot walked gingerly from tree to tree before stopping and turning. It lifted in its head and bowed it again gracefully in acknowledgement of Anders.

Despite dusk descending, the hall looked resplendent, as if it were showing off a new coat of paint. Where once the light had morphed and flashed slowly from bright to dim, it was now shining more brightly than ever. The silhouetted figure at the top floor was also clearer than ever, standing tall and proud. But now there was most definitely another figure on the same floor, a little way along – the pair separated by three of the magnificent windows. Anders watched as they turned and walked towards each other, meeting in the middle of the three windows in a long embrace,

then they looked down and seemed to watch, as the boy waved and lingered briefly before heading to the edge of the water. He stretched out by the side of the river. Once again he found himself joined by a trusty tracator – not just one this time, but two. One laid down while the other sat, first watching some of the flying creatures in the sky, then turning their attention to those swimming beneath the surface of the water. Pouncing near the muddy bank of the river, one of them took a swipe at the flowing water, but didn't appreciate getting a wet paw and turned around, disappointed. Eventually they both lost interest in any prey; the black and white creature rubbed itself against Anders as it plodded away out of sight while the other, more familiar, one curled up at his side.

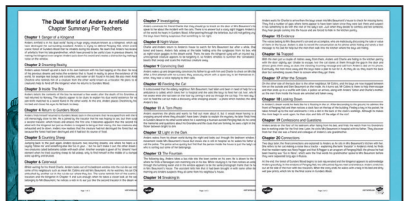
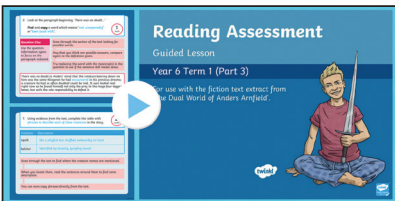
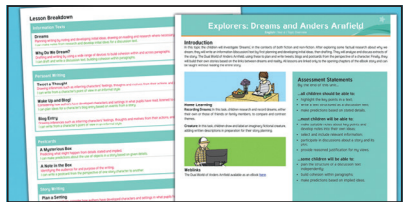
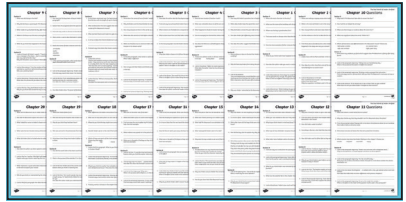
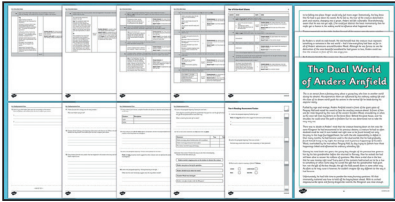
Together they slept, dreamily wondering what may await them next. They were only woken by the sound of an alarm clock. Anders rolled over, reached out his arm and turned it off. He threw a long, knobbly twig into the bin from underneath him and tried to dust off the dirty, wet, tiger-sized paw print from his duvet. Then he climbed out of bed, ready for the adventures of a new day ahead.





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