





CHAPTER 20

We don't just get to jump over rocks, we also have to climb a small cliff, inch our way along a rock so narrow it's like walking a tightrope (a tightrope covered in seaweed) and scramble through a tunnel dripping with seawater. But still the Crow's Nest doesn't seem to be getting any closer.

Once, when Rose and I were staying with Grandad, we swam out to a diving platform in the sea. From the beach it looked easy, but I soon got tired and only managed to reach the platform

because Rose kept me calm. There's no Rose to keep me calm now. Just Win, a wizard-ninja who keeps shouting, 'MAGIC!' at the top of his voice and laughing like a maniac whenever a big wave hits us.

Win also does a lot of reminiscing, and seems keen to focus on all the terrible things we've done to Crowky. 'Do you remember when Rose stole his head?' he calls as he walks along a rock, his arms out for balance. 'She put it on a unicorn's horn and the unicorn ran into the forest and Crowky went dashing after it, bumping into trees and falling over. Oh, and then there was that time we nicked the *Raven* because Crowky had been terrorising the mermaids. You must remember that!'

'Kind of,' I say weakly.

Now the mist is so thick I can only see the rock that's directly in front of me. The Crow's Nest is completely hidden from view. This doesn't slow Win down. If anything, he starts to jump between the rocks even faster. 'We tied Crowky to the mast,' he shouts. 'Remember? It was so funny. A

bird stole some of his straw to make a nest and the mermaids came to jeer!'

Win cackles, but I don't. We pause on a rock high above the sea. 'Win, don't you think Crowky will have a serious grudge against us?'

'Definitely!'

'But when we get to the Crow's Nest you're sure we can, you know, beat him, like we used to? Even without Rose?'

'Yeah . . . probably!'

'*Probably?* Win, all we've got to help us fight Crowky – a scarecrow who can drain our energy just by placing his twiggy fingers on us and squeezing – is a wooden sword and some apples!'

'Don't forget my lethal wakizashi and my even more lethal magic!'

I shake my head. 'We've not thought this through properly. Rose used to come up with our best ideas. Maybe we should . . . I don't know . . . come up with a better plan?'

'A better plan than going along the Magic Road, getting into the Crow's Nest, whacking Crowky and saving your grandad?' Win slaps me

on the shoulder and the mist twists around us. 'It's an AMAZING plan, Arthur, and don't forget I'm half wizard. Since you've been gone, I've learned some wicked new spells.'

'Really?' This sounds promising.

'Yes, I can even make fruit change colour. In fact, I'll get into wizard mode right now so that I'm ready.' With one hand, he pulls his hood up so that it makes a pointed hat.

Suddenly the reality of what we're about to do sinks in. 'Win, this thing my grandad has, asthma, it makes it hard for him to breathe. If Crowky's stuffed him, what will that do to his breathing?'

'Well, I've never been stuffed, not properly, but when Crowky drained me I felt everything sort of, slow down, my breathing, my heartbeat –'

I shake my head. 'Win, we can't risk mucking this up. Let's go back and find someone who can help us get in the castle, because if Crowky catches us too, there will be no one to save Grandad, or us!'

'Umm . . . Arthur?' Win is staring ahead. 'I

think it's too late for that.'

'What do you mean?' I peer into the thinning mist. At first I can't see anything, but then I make out a black shape. It's a figure standing dead still on a rock, arms outstretched, stick fingers spread wide. It's wearing a black leather coat, ragged and torn, which swirls in the mist. Its head hangs forward and a pair of wings tremble in the wind. A solitary crow sits on its shoulder.

'Is that . . . *Crowky*?' I whisper.

'Yep,' says Win, and automatically we shuffle closer together.

'He's like those scarecrows we saw earlier, right?' I stare at the top of Crowky's head. 'Right now he's asleep, not *at home*.'

'Crowky's *always* at home,' says Win. 'Maybe he's having a rest? Or doing it to freak us out?'

In a flash, Crowky's head snaps up and a pair of round button eyes lock on to mine. Win and I grab hold of each other as Crowky's stuffed arms flop down and his wings spring open on his back. The crow takes off with a shrill *caw*, then Crowky's twig fingers curl into fists and a grin

spreads across his pale sack-like face.

‘Definitely doing it to freak us out,’ whispers Win.

In one swift movement, Crowky crouches then springs forward and starts to jump effortlessly from rock to rock, moving closer towards us.

‘Crowky’s just a boy like us,’ I say, gripping Win’s arm.

Win laughs weakly. ‘Not really a boy. More a scarecrow with wings.’

I force myself to smile. ‘You’re right. He’s just a big straw bird!’

‘With powerful legs and life-sapping hands and a deranged mind and –’

‘Not helping, Win.’ I squeeze his arm tighter to stop my hands from shaking.

Crowky pauses in a crouch, then bounds forward again.

Win nudges me. ‘Don’t worry, mate. He’s outnumbered!’

‘But I’m no good at fighting,’ I say, my voice a whisper, even though Crowky is still a few rocks away. ‘In fact, I’ve never properly thumped

anyone in my life!’

Win snorts. ‘You’ve thumped Crowky a hundred times.’

‘I mean, I haven’t thumped anyone outside Roar.’ *In real life*, I add in my head. ‘And I don’t want to thump anyone, not even Crowky.’ My voice rises in panic. ‘At school I was a playground mediator!’

Win’s eyes flick back to me. ‘What are you on about, Arthur?’

‘I’m trained to sort situations out using –’

‘A bag of rocks? Your fists? Nunchucks?’

‘No! *Words*.’

Crowky takes a flying leap and lands on the rock immediately opposite ours. His shoulders are hunched and his head is angled down again. Mist wraps around him.

‘*Words*, Arthur?’ says Win. ‘*Words*? Crowky will eat your *words*, before stuffing them back into your mouth and dumping you – and your *words* – into the sea!’

‘Words are actually very powerful.’

Crowky’s head lifts.



‘But are words as powerful as *him*?’ Win hisses. Crowky’s stuffed body ripples in anticipation and his wings pull back. He stares at me and his grin spreads even wider across his moon-like face.

I’m so scared I have to remind myself to breathe.

‘*Arthur Trout!*’ he rasps.

I blink and try to swallow away my fear.

Underneath his leather coat Crowky’s wearing ripped black jeans with straw poking out of the holes and black hi-tops. His dirty yellow hair sticks out as wildly as his feathers.

‘When did he get so muscly?’ I whisper to Win. Crowky’s arms look over-stuffed, bulging with straw.

‘When he started eating mermaids.’

‘*What?!*’

He smiles weakly. ‘Joke.’

I feel faint. ‘Win, do me a favour? Don’t do any jokes, just for a bit.’

‘OK, but you need to say something. This is getting weird . . .’

He’s right. It is. Crowky is grinning at me in silence. I clear my throat and force myself to look into his hard eyes.

‘Hello,’ I say in a small voice.

Win thumps me. ‘*Hello?* Say something tougher than that!’

‘Um . . . Crowky, we’ve not come to cause you any trouble –’

‘We have!’ shouts Win. ‘Massive trouble!’

Now it's my turn to thump him. 'We just want my grandad back. I don't want to blame you for something you haven't done, but all the evidence seems to point towards you having stolen him . . .' Crowky still doesn't speak. He just watches me, his button eyes glittering. 'Maybe "stolen" isn't quite the right word. I mean, maybe you were trying to *help* him? Was that it? If so, thank you for helping my grandad, but I'd like to take him home now . . . please. Perhaps we could all go back to the Crow's Nest and collect him?'

Crowky raises a hand and points a knobbly twig finger at me. 'I am going to get you, Arthur Trout.' His voice is a rusty-nail snarl. 'I am going to get you and your sister just like I got your pathetic, snivelling Grandad!'

Something hot, like fire, stirs inside me, a flicker of something that I haven't felt for a long time. I let go of Win and step forward. 'My grandad has never snivelled in his life!'

The wind whips my words away and Crowky's eyes widen in delight. 'Oh yes he has. He snivelled when I found him in that tunnel and

pulled him into Roar, he snivelled when I chained him up in my dungeon, and he snivelled when I ripped this off his back!' He flings open his jacket to reveal that he's wearing Grandad's 'NO PROB-LLAMA!' T-shirt.

I shake my head in horror. 'What sort of . . . weirdo steals an old man's T-shirt?'

Crowky laughs and points at himself with both twig thumbs. 'This sort of weirdo! But he still didn't shut up, Arthur, so today I was forced to drain all the moaning and snivelling out of him.' As he says these words his hands press together in front of him, like he's reliving the moment he crushed the life out of Grandad.

'You stuffed my grandad?' My voice is weak.

'Oh yes, Arthur!' he says with delight. 'He's a scarecrow now.'

Horror crashes through me as hard as the waves hitting the rocks by my feet. Win puts his hand on my shoulder, keeping me steady on my feet.

'Where's Rose by the way?' says Crowky, his eyes flicking behind us. 'I thought I'd be catching

two little Trouts today. Don't you two come as a pair?'

I lift my chin up. 'Rose isn't here,' I say, and I'm actually glad she didn't crawl with me into the camp bed. No matter what Rose has done, I never want her to feel this scared.

Crowky smiles. 'Then I'll have to make do with what I've got. Do you think your grandad would enjoy a dip in the Bottomless Ocean?' He peers down at the crashing waves. 'It's difficult to swim when you can't move a muscle.'

I lunge forward, but Win pulls me back, shouting, 'Weapons, Arthur, weapons!'

I stick my hand into my rucksack and pull out a wooden sword. Win holds his wakizashi in one hand, and his wand in the other.

'Wait!' he whispers. 'I'll hit him with a snaring spell. He won't be able to move and you can go up there and thump him.' Before I can say anything Win has leaped forward, raised his wand high above his head and cried, 'Pigeon fudge!'

There's a bang, and stars and smoke burst

from his wand. When the smoke clears we see that the wakizashi is now tightly gripped in Crowky's hand. With a cackle he swishes it through the air.

'I think I did the *sharing* spell by mistake,' cries Win. 'Did I say "*pigeon* fudge" or "*smidgen* fudge"?''

But we don't have time to discuss Win's spectacularly rubbish magic, because Crowky has raised the wakizashi high above his head and is already leaping through the air towards our rock.

'RUN!' I yell.

Chapter 20 -

Questions

Chapter 20 questions

1. Win and Arthur didn't just get to jump over rocks on their way to find Grandad, what else did they do? page 105 **3 mark**
2. Why could Arthur only see the rock in front of him? page 106 **1 mark**
3. Which word in the sentence means the same as laugh? Win cackles, but I don't. **1 mark**
4. On pages 107&108, how has the author described the figure in the mist? **2 marks**
5. Why were Arthur's hands shaking? page 109 **1 mark**
6. The author has written "Crowky's stuffed body ripples with anticipation". What does this mean? **3 marks**

