

The Amazing Adventures of Jimmy Crikey

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Chapter One

RUNNING AWAY

Jimmy Crikey was not a happy boy. His big blue eyes were so sad. None of the children at Hill Crest Junior School would play with Jimmy. They only ever made fun of him. He tried ever so hard to study during lessons but the other children's sly giggles and rude remarks always managed to make him feel uncomfortable. When the school bell rang for playtime and everyone dashed outside to continue their games of tug, tag, hopscotch or skip, there always remained one lonely figure in some quiet corner of the schoolyard. Jimmy had long since given up his attempts to join in their games. He just didn't seem to be able to fit in and it's not nice to always be laughed at.

Why did they laugh at Jimmy? Well, he was certainly quite different from the other children and he did have rather an odd appearance. His head was crowned with a bright red shock of unruly hair. Between his big blue eyes snuggled a small, snub nose. His ears were rather longer and more pointed than usual, but his feet, well they were simply ee-normous! They certainly looked out of place on such a small boy. Whenever he met someone for the first time they would stop and stare and then say, 'Crikey! Just look at him.' That was how he came to be known as Jimmy Crikey. His

real name was Jimmy McGellan but the boys and girls at Hill Crest school always called him Jimmy Crikey.

It started off that one boy began to bully Jimmy, always making fun of his odd appearance. That boy persuaded one of his friends to join in the fun of taunting the odd one out and soon they were all ganging up on Jimmy. In team games, no one would choose Jimmy to be on their side because he had a habit of stumbling over his enormous feet. Whichever team he was on always lost that game.

As a result, no one chose Jimmy to be their friend. He was totally excluded from their playgroups and gangs, just because he looked different. Despite their cruel jokes, Jimmy was a very bright boy. He seemed to learn faster than anyone else, but he never raised his hand during class to answer a teacher's question, although he almost always knew the answer. He just wanted to stay quietly in the background without drawing any further attention to himself.

Only when school was over for the day did Jimmy begin to relax and smile. Then he dashed back to his home on the very edge of Esh Village, where he lived with his very special Aunt Ethel. Lemonade and cake, or milk and biscuits, were always ready on the kitchen table when he rushed in from school to Aunt Ethel's warm welcome of a smile, a hug and a great big sloppy kiss.

Aunt Ethel Harper was kind, a little overweight, slightly rotund, but in a cuddly, warm way. She almost always wore a gingham pinafore over her flowery dresses. Her hair was as white as snow and she had looked after Jimmy for as long as he could remember. Jimmy's parents had died when he was very young and Aunt Ethel promised them she would look after their baby until he was old enough to care for himself. Each night Aunt Ethel would tuck him up in bed and tell exciting, bedtime

adventure stories. Some were about faraway places among the stars; others were about exploring strange worlds, and yet more were about sailing expeditions on distant seas. Then, after saying prayers, she would plant a kiss on his cheek and bid him, "Sleep tight!"

One night, after saying his prayers, as usual, Jimmy finally made up his mind. He was tired of everyone making fun of his strange appearance. It seemed to him that he just could not make any friends. No one had time to spare for the boy who was different. So, he wrote a note for Aunt Ethel and left it on his pillow. He had decided to run away.

"Please don't worry about me Aunt Ethel," he wrote. "I'm going off on a search to see if I can find a place where people will not laugh and make fun of me. Somehow I feel that I don't belong in this world. I just don't fit in. Thank you for caring for me. When I am settled I'll write to let you know where I am. Goodbye. Love from Jimmy."

He crept quietly down the stairs to the kitchen and packed into his satchel a few shortbread biscuits, two chocolate covered crisp bars and a bottle of lemonade. Carefully and quietly, he opened the kitchen door and walked out into the dark night. With a last look over his shoulder, he set off on his journey into the wide world.

He turned left after leaving the house and began walking away from the village. Initially hesitant, until his eyes adjusted to the darkness of the night, he walked down the country lane, lit only by a silvery, full moon. And Jimmy started to wish he had waited until morning. He could hear the animals and owls making their night-time noises, calling to each other, the owl telling the fox, "Look out! Someone's about!" By the time Jimmy reached the edge of the forest, the lane had narrowed to a pathway

and the moon was hiding behind a cloud. He stumbled along the narrow track between the trees, whistling a happy tune to try to keep the fear at bay.

The noises of the night grew louder as if they were following him, so he walked a little faster. Then, like a pistol shot, there came the sharp sound of cracking wood and, without waiting to discover what it was, Jimmy ran. He didn't know that the sound had been created by an old, rotted branch snapping and falling from a tree. He just ran, and ran, and ran, bumping into tree trunks and tripping over long tree roots in his mad dash to escape. He was so blinded by fear that he didn't notice the hole in the ground opening up in front of him and suddenly he was falling, down and down and down.

He tumbled head over heels and bumped from side to side, in the shaft. His fall was slowed by the tangle of tree roots that grew across the vertical shaft, but he still received a painful bump when he landed on the dried leaves and twigs, which had collected at the bottom of the hole.

It should have been pitch black down there, but from one corner there came the faintest glow of light. Moving the twigs and dried leaves to one side, he looked out and rubbed his eyes in amazement. He couldn't believe what he saw. There, outside the hole, was a whole new world. Jimmy emerged into green fields swathed in wildflowers stretching away for miles. The gently sloping hills were carpeted with colours of every hue and, in the distance, there were mountains topped with glistening snow. The entry to this world was at the base of a towering cliffside. The tops of the cliffs were shrouded in mist where they met the sky. From the strangely luminous sky, a warm, shining glow of soft light bathed the whole scene.

Jimmy was astonished and, as he looked around, his wide eyes picked out traces of a faint pathway that only animals had trod. It led off into the distant green hills. He

tossed his satchel over his shoulder and made up his mind to follow wherever the path led. Fear disappeared as Jimmy set off to explore this strange new world he had found at the bottom of a hole.

Chapter Two

UNDERGROUND WORLD

Jimmy followed the trampled grass track through the underground world for many hours. The path led through meadows, over surrounding hills, crossing many streams. Black and yellow, fuzzy-coated bees buzzed and colourful butterflies flitted among the flowers that were scattered in random patterns across the slopes.

After several hours of walking, tired, he stopped to rest awhile and sat on a rock at the top of a hill. All that exercise had made Jimmy feel quite hungry and thirsty. So, while he rested he ate the biscuits and one of the cakes that were packed in his satchel. He finished his picnic snack with a long thirst-quenching drink of lemonade.

Feeling refreshed, Jimmy started to follow the track again, winding slowly down the hill into the valley. Then the path appeared to widen into a definite track and then a road which led towards what appeared to be a village or a town. Yes! There, in the distance, was - a small town. His pace quickened and he strode confidently down the path to the bottom of the hill, along the road towards the town. He hoped and wished that the children in this town would not laugh at his bright red shock of hair, his small snub nose, his pointed ears and his eenor-mous feet.

Jimmy's footsteps clattered on the cobblestones when he walked between the houses into the town's central market square. No one laughed at him. No one laughed because there was no one there to laugh. Not a single person was to be seen, anywhere. The market square was deserted except for a well standing in the centre, with a low, red brick wall built around it with a small, green-tiled canopy over the roller bar.

There was not a sound to be heard other than the sighing of the breeze.

Jimmy stretched up on his toes and peered through the windows of the shops and houses that surrounded the square.

There were certainly people there but they were all fast asleep. He said a quiet, "Hello!" to the butcher, who was slouched in a chair inside his shop doorway, but the butcher just went on sleeping, eyes closed tight beneath his yellow straw hat. He said, "Hello!" again, louder this time, but the butcher still didn't hear him. At last, Jimmy shouted at the top of his voice, "Hello! Can anyone hear me?"

Then, very faintly, there came a reply. "Help! Help!" It wasn't the butcher's voice, he hadn't moved, not even his moustache had twitched.

Jimmy could not tell where the voice had come from and he tried again. "Hello! Where are you?"

Again the faint voice answered. "I'm down here."

Jimmy could hardly believe it - the sound seemed to be coming from the well in the middle of the town square. He walked across to it, stood on tiptoe and peered over the low surrounding wall, down the dark green shaft. When his eyes became

accustomed to the dimness he saw a strange sight. There, at the bottom of the well, was a small lady - sitting in a small boat.

"Well, don't just stand there looking at me," yelled the lady.

"Get me out of here."

"How can I do that?" Jimmy asked.

"Lower the bucket on the end of the rope," the echoing voice shouted back.

Jimmy tried to turn the handle that was attached to the well's wooden roller to lower the bucket into the well, but the handle was jammed solid. He leaned over the wall and shouted down, "I can't turn the handle, it's stuck."

"Well! Give it a kick then," bellowed the little lady. So Jimmy did just that. He kicked the handle as hard as he could.

The shock of the kick freed the rusted roller. The bucket fell down the well, but the roller turned so fast that Jimmy couldn't catch hold of the spinning handle to slow it down. He heard the bucket bouncing madly, from side to side, against the walls of the well. Then there was a big bump, a loud splash and a surprised shout. "Aghhhh!"

Worried, he shouted down, "Are you all right?"

After a brief pause there came the rather cross answer, "No! I'm not all right. The bucket hit me on the head and knocked me into the water. Now there's a bump on my head and I'm all wet through." There was a short silence and then, "Aren't you going to wind me up?"

"Sorry! I'll wind you up now,"

He was quite out of breath by the time the little lady in the green garb popped her head over the side of the well. Jimmy helped her out of the bucket and they sat together on the brick wall that surrounded the well. The elf-like figure replaced her green hat, swung up her green hosed legs and emptied the water out of her brown, ankle-high boots.

Jimmy looked at the bump on the little lady's head and said, "I'm sorry about that."

"Oh, that's all right," she responded, now smiling. "I'm just happy that you came along and pulled me out. I've been down there for what seems like a year or more, with no one to talk to except the fish and the frogs, and they don't say very much. Anyway, now that I'm free, how do you do, I'm Gemma. Who are you?"

"I'm Jimmy." It was only then that Jimmy realised that he had made a new friend. A friend who did not laugh or point at his red shock of hair, his small snub nose, or his pointed ears and Gemma didn't even seem to notice his enormous feet. The very first person he had met in this new subterranean world and Gemma was actually thanking him for pulling him out of the well.

But then Gemma herself was more than a little unusual. The top of her head hardly reached as high as Jimmy's shoulder and her long, dark brown hair curled down to her shoulders.

Jimmy asked Gemma how she had been marooned at the bottom of the well. He asked why everyone was sleeping. He had so many questions to ask.

Gemma sat on the edge of the well in the warm sunshine, drying her green tunic, hose and pointed hat, and told Jimmy what had happened: "It seems I've always lived at the bottom of the well, and it's my job to make sure that the bucket's full of water

when the townsfolk come to the well. Whenever I want to come up to see my friends, all I have to do is sit in the bucket and someone will wind me up to the surface.

“The town had been a happy place to live; happy, that is until the witch who lived in the house on the hill forgot how to laugh. She had always been such a friendly, happy witch and never used her magic spells for evil purposes - that is, until the day she forgot how to laugh. Yes! She forgot how to laugh. Her very best friend Ira, a sister witch, tried many different spells to try and make Matilda happy again but a heavy sadness had eaten into her heart. She had lost a special companion who had been with her for many, many years: Beatrix, a jet black cat with dark blue eyes. She was a very old cat and one day she just curled up on the bottom of the witch’s bed, as usual, went to sleep, and, well, never woke up again.”

“How sad”, said Jimmy.

Gemma continued her tale. “Matilda cried for days and none of her friends could comfort her. This went on for many weeks and eventually, the sadness took away all her happiness and she didn’t even want to laugh. Then another of Matilda’s friends, Floella, had a bright idea. Her cat had just had kittens and one was the spitting image of Beatrix. Floella gave Matilda the kitten and over the next few weeks, Matilda began to take an interest in things again. But she had been so sad for so long that she had forgotten how to laugh.

“She came down to the town and asked the town’s folk to show her how to laugh again, and they certainly tried. They told her funny stories, they acted the fool, did lots of silly things, and even tried tickling her with feathers, but nothing they did could make the witch laugh. Then Matilda became angry. She became so angry that she waved

her magic wand and cast a spell that put everyone into a deep sleep. And they would stay asleep until the day came when the witch could laugh again.”

Gemma had been lucky. Sort of. She had been at the bottom of the well when the witch waved her wand, and the spell missed her. But what could Jimmy do now to help his new friend? Gemma was too frightened to go anywhere near the witch's house, which was at the top of the hill on the south side of town. She was afraid to ask the witch if she would lift the magic spell of sleep, in case Matilda put her to sleep too, just like everyone else in the town.

Jimmy quickly made up his mind. Now that he had a new friend, he would show her how brave he could be. Jimmy was determined; he would go to the house on the hill to see the witch who couldn't laugh and ask her to remove the magic spell.

Chapter Three

THE WITCH

That very same morning Gemma waved goodbye and Jimmy set off up the hill to the witch's house. He took long, bold paces as he marched off toward the old rambling house, but he didn't feel quite as brave as Gemma thought he was. The nearer he got to the big, forbidding house, the slower he walked. He saw a window at the side of the house and quietly crept closer, one step at a time. Very, very slowly, he stood up and peeped in through the grime coated window.

A black cauldron, bubbling and frothing, hung on a hook over an enormous log fire set in an arched stone hearth. Cooking implements, carving knives, spoons and forked prongs, hung from a long bar beneath the mantle shelf. Sitting on a three-legged stool, stirring the mixture with a big wooden spoon, was the witch. She wore a traditional black pointed hat decorated in gold, with signs of the zodiac. A black shawl covered her shoulders and her dark green, plain and shapeless gown hung long to the floor. Only the toes of her black boots were visible beneath the hem. Long, straight black hair hung down from under her hat to reach the middle of her back. Curled around her feet was a green-eyed, jet black cat.

The witch's red-rimmed eyes were focused on the cauldron, and from what Jimmy could see, there were tears rolling down her cheeks as she rocked backwards and forwards over the boiling pot. She was chanting a sad, tuneless lament as she tried to mix yet another brew that might help to make her laugh again. Every concoction she tried had failed: bat's wings, frog's spawn, spider's hairs, snake-skin oil, even toadstool stalks - but nothing in her book of spells would work.

Jimmy was no longer afraid. He could only feel sorry for the witch who couldn't laugh. He walked around to the front of the house and boldly raised the devil's head knocker that hung on the large wooden door. Knock! Knock! The witch didn't even get up off her stool. "Who's there?" she croaked. She knew it couldn't be anyone from the town because they were all under her sleeping spell.

Jimmy shouted through the letterbox. "My name is Jimmy. Please let me in. I know you're sad because you've forgotten how to laugh, and I've come to try to make you happy again so that you will remove the sleeping spell."

The witch lifted her head and looked quizzically towards the door. "Do you think you can make me laugh?" she asked.

"I don't know, but I would like to try," answered Jimmy. He heard her shuffling toward the door.

"If you can succeed," she said, "and show me how to laugh, I will gladly lift the sleeping spell. Everyone will wake up and the town will become alive again."

She slowly opened the door which creaked on its hinges.

Her long nose preceded her chin as she thrust out her head and looked straight at Jimmy. She stopped, looked and looked again. Then, with the faintest of twinkles in her black-as-coal eyes, a small smile tugged lightly at the corners of her mouth and spread slowly over her face. Then she chuckled, and finally, she burst into laughter. She laughed and laughed until the tears flowed in rivers down her cheeks.

Jimmy didn't quite know what to do, but soon he was laughing just as hard as the witch. When she recovered some of her breath, she took hold of Jimmy and hugged him. "Why, you're the strangest boy I have ever seen. That red mop of hair and small snub nose, those pointed ears and enormous feet, I have never seen anyone quite like you. Wherever have you come from?" Jimmy was ushered into the witch's house and sitting on a wooden chair, at a table covered with a red velvet tablecloth, he explained how he had left Aunt Ethel and then stumbled down a hole in the forest floor and discovered the underground world and how he came to the town where everyone except Gemma was under the sleeping spell.

"I'm sorry if I was rude to you, Jimmy, but you have helped me to remember how to laugh, and now I shall keep my promise. Come with me, down to the town."

Holding tightly onto Jimmy's hand, she led him down the hill into the market square. Then Matilda took out a slim, silver wand from a fold in her green gown and waved it once over her head. The wand rose from her hand into the air and circled over the town, shedding beams of magic each time it turned in the air. Slowly the sleeping bodies stirred. Yawning and stretching, the townsfolk were soon wide awake and gathered around Matilda and Jimmy and Gemma.

The witch held up her hand to collect the returning wand and also to quieten the crowd. Then she told them how this strange boy had been brave enough to come to her house on the hill to try and make her laugh. How he had looked so funny when she opened the door that she quickly remembered how to laugh, and Jimmy had laughed with her. "But," she said, "never let anyone in Roombelow dare to laugh at Jimmy again. His bravery has saved you all from the spell of sleep."

Mr McDonald, the bald-headed, rather rotund Mayor, replied. "On behalf of the people of Roombelow, may I offer our thanks for what you have done for us today. Your bravery has earned our warmest praise. You're welcome to stay in Roombelow for as long as you wish. My house is your house Jimmy, and my wife, Amanda, and I would consider it an honour if you would stay with us as our guest."

Jimmy was overjoyed. He was hailed as a hero and had found a new home. Roombelow was a happy town again and he had found many new friends - Mr McDonald, the Mayor, his wife Amanda, Matilda the Witch, Gemma, the little lady who lived at the bottom of the well, and many, many more of the townsfolk folk. He decided that this was just the sort of place where he could happily live, with no more taunts about his strange appearance.

Now, running away is not usually a very sensible thing to do, but, just this once things seem to have worked out well.

Chapter Four

THE FLOOD

The weeks passed by so quickly in the underground world. Jimmy Crikey stayed in the town of Roombelow with Mr McDonald, the Mayor, and his loving wife Amanda. She was almost like a carbon copy of Jimmy's Aunt Ethel and they hit it off from the start. Almost every day, after school classes, he and Gemma would walk up to the house on the hill to visit Matilda the witch. She allowed the two friends to explore the old house, which was filled with many strange and wonderful things. Sometimes Matilda would tell stories about the magical powers of the things they found, like the solid silver bowl, always full of fresh milk. No matter how often the milk was poured out, the bowl always filled up again with more milk, and it never turned sour. There was a crystal ball, which stood in the centre of the table, into which Matilda would stare when she wanted to talk to any of her many witch sisters. There was Sister Witch Ira who had the power to search the skies. There was Sister Ellwin, a water spirit, who wafted over every form of water. Sister Floella was the spirit of the earth.

Among the treasures, there was also a special pair of spectacles to help Matilda see things in the dark. They even found a magic ring which, when worn on the little finger of the left hand, allowed whoever was wearing it to talk with the

animals. Jimmy and Gemma spent many happy hours rediscovering the host of magical treasures which Matilda had long forgotten and discarded.

Life for Jimmy had become idyllic. Yes, he still had to attend school every weekday but lessons were no longer full of trials and tribulations. He was no longer singled out as being special and clumsy. Jimmy was just accepted as one of the children of Roombelow. No one made fun of him anymore.

Everything was rolling along, just fine until the morning Jimmy was awakened, by the angry sound of heavy raindrops hammering against the windowpane.

Oh! Well! he thought, *it will soon stop. It hardly ever rains during the day in Roombelow.*

But the rain lashed down harder as the morning slowly passed. By mid-day, when Jimmy looked out of the classroom window again, large pools were beginning to cover the cobblestones in the town square. He could hardly see the well. The well! He had forgotten about Gemma at the bottom of the well. He dashed out of school, into the pouring rain, threw the bucket over the side of the well and quickly pulled up his friend. Together they dashed back into Mr McDonald's house and the two friends stood in front of the fire to dry their wet clothes.

Mrs McDonald, Amanda, was by now very worried. "If it doesn't stop raining soon, the town will flood," she said.

Other townsfolk were worried too and they came to see the Mayor to ask him what to do, but Mr McDonald didn't know what to do. "I've never known it to rain so heavily for as long as this before," he said. "Perhaps you had all better move your children and furniture upstairs just in case the town gets flooded."

The pools in the town square grew bigger and deeper. By the middle of the afternoon, the square was covered with a lake of water which began to trickle over thresholds and under doors into the houses.

"Whatever can we do?" asked Amanda.

What can anyone do? Jimmy thought for a while and then announced. "I'm going to see Witch Matilda. Perhaps she can suggest something." He persuaded Gemma to stay with Mr McDonald, pulled a cape over his shoulders and set off up the hill to Matilda's house.

Jimmy shook the water off his cape and entered the witch's house. He was such a welcomed visitor that he didn't even have to knock. Matilda had told him, "Just come straight on in and, if I'm not around, help yourself to a drink until I get back." She looked up from her book of spells. "Ah! Jimmy!" she said. "I've been searching for a spell to stop the rain but I can't find one."

"If you can't, perhaps one of your witch friends can help," Jimmy suggested.

Matilda reached into a cupboard and took out the crystal ball, placed it in the centre of the table and darkened the room by drawing the curtains. She sat next to Jimmy at the table and moved her hands over the ball. The crystal clouded over and then began to shine brightly at its very centre. Soon the light became less intense and there appeared an image of one of her witch sisters. She talked to all of her witch friends, but no one knew of a spell that would stop the rain. The very last witch Matilda talked to was Ira, and Ira thought it might help if someone would go to see the great White Owl of the mountains because he was a very wise, old owl and would surely know how to stop the rain. But Ira did not know on which mountain the White Owl lived.

Jimmy had an idea. "If you could loan me your magic ring, Matilda, I'll go up into the mountains and talk with the animals. Perhaps they have seen the great White Owl, and they may be able to give me directions."

Matilda agreed, so Jimmy put the ring on the little finger of his left hand, threw his cape around his shoulders again, and set off on the track to the mountains, through the pouring rain.

Chapter Five

THE WEATHERMAN

Jimmy was quickly on his way, steadily and carefully climbing up the first mountain in his search for the wise old owl. The rain was still falling furiously and he was by now soaking wet and uncomfortable. The cold rain had seeped through his cape and ran down his neck. He passed a rabbit who was looking out of its burrow.

“Excuse me, but I’m looking for the Great White Owl. Have you seen him?” Jimmy asked.

“No!” the rabbit replied. “But you could try asking the sheep, they live further up the mountain.”

Finding the sheep wasn’t easy. They were sheltering behind rocks, under overhanging ledges, and even in gullies, trying to keep themselves and their young lambs dry. Near the top of the mountain, Jimmy found them and asked, “Please can you help me? Do you know where the Great White Owl lives?”

“Baa!” said one of the oldest sheep, a ram with great curling horns. “White Owl certainly does not live on this mountain. You could try asking Charlie Raven. He does a lot of flying around, so he might know.”

“Thank you,” said Jimmy, “but where will I find Charlie Raven?”

The sheep told Jimmy he would find Raven sheltering in a hole in the old, gnarled beech tree, at the bottom of the tallest mountain.

“But which mountain is the tallest?” asked Jimmy. “They’re all covered with clouds and it’s impossible to see through the rain.”

“It’s the third mountain on the left,” the ram answered, pulling his head back under the shelter of the rock, out of the rain.

Jimmy ran down the mountainside and along the shingle track towards the third mountain on the left. Just as the ram had told him, there was the old beech tree. He walked up to it and shouted, “Hello! Are you there, Mr Raven!”

Charlie Raven reluctantly stuck his beak out of a hole halfway up the trunk. “Whatever is a boy like you doing out in weather like this?”

“I have to find the Great White Owl, and the sheep told me that you would know where to find him.”

“Oh! That’s easy,” said Charlie. “You will find him at the top of this very mountain. He is a very wise, old, mountain owl and when it rains he flies higher, up through the clouds, to where the sky will still be clear and bright.”

“Thank you very much,” said Jimmy. “I have to get up there quickly. Thanks again, Mr Raven.”

Jimmy continued the climb up the mountain as fast as he could go, through the rain and the clouds, he emerged into the bright sunshine at the very tip of the mountain top. There, on a rock, sat the Great White Owl, dozing in the warmth of the sun.

“Hrm! Hrm!” coughed Jimmy politely, because he didn’t quite know what to say to the owl.

Owl opened one eye and blinked at him. “What can I do for you, my boy?”

“Well, er, you see, sir,” stuttered Jimmy. “Ira the witch, who is a friend of Matilda the witch, said that if anyone knew how to stop the rain, it would be you.”

“Stop the rain? But we *need* the rain,” said Owl, now wide awake.

“Yes, sir, but it’s been raining so hard for so long that Roombelow will be flooded if it doesn’t stop soon. The water level has already risen up to the thresholds of the doorways. Soon it will flood into the houses.”

“Ah!” said wise old owl. “There is only one person who can stop the rain. The Weather Man.”

“Where will I find him?” asked Jimmy.

“In his cloud, of course,” said Owl.

“But how do I find him among all these rain clouds?”

“You need my help,” said Owl. “Come here, boy, and I will sprinkle your feet with stardust.” Owl reached deeply into his downy feathers and withdrew a small, oval, glass vial. He took out the stopper and shook the vial vigorously. Jimmy’s feet were enveloped in a cloud of sparkling crystals. “There! Now you can walk across the tops of the clouds. Look for a round white cloud. It should be easy to find it amongst all these black clouds. That’s where the Weather Man lives.”

“Thank you, sir,” said Jimmy, stepping off the mountain onto the tops of the clouds. “I hope we meet again.” But the Great White Owl did not hear - he had already tucked his head under a wing and was fast asleep.

Running and skipping over the clouds, Jimmy soon spotted the solitary, round, white cloud contrasted against the dark of the storm clouds and, in no time at all, was standing on its fluffy white top.

There was a hole through the top of the cloud and a ladder led down, inside, to a room full of knobs, dials, and levers. Jimmy climbed down and had a look around. There was no sign of the Weather Man in the control room. Then he heard the sound of someone snoring. He moved aside a red, velvet curtain, and behind it, stretched out on a low bed, fast asleep, was the Weatherman.

The Weatherman wore a red, Noddy style cap, which fell forward over his brow. The golden tassels at the end rose and fell with every snore. Perched above his nose was a pair of half framed spectacles. Beneath his nose grew a long white moustache and an equally long beard. His green robe glowed and shimmered, silk-like, and his matching shoes ended with curled over toes.

Jimmy gently shook the Weather Man, who woke up, rubbed his eyes, scratched his long white beard and then sat up. "Why! Hello there! Goodness me, what are you doing here boy and, more to the point, how did you get here?"

Jimmy told him the long story and then said, "Please, Mr Weatherman, can you stop the rain before Roombelow is flooded?"

"Yes! Yes!" said the Weatherman. "I must have forgotten to turn off the rain before I went to sleep." He moved over to the controls and turned the knobs and pulled the levers - and the rain immediately stopped. He pressed a switch and a gentle breeze started to blow the clouds away. He turned the big wheel and the sky shone brighter and warmer. "That will soon dry the water up," he said. "Now I'd better take you back home."

Mr McDonald and Amanda, Matilda the witch and Gemma, as well as many of the townsfolk, were gathered in the square. The rain had stopped, the clouds had disappeared, the sun was beating down and the puddles were drying up.

Gemma was the first one to notice a white cloud, getting closer and closer. "Look!" she said in a high-pitched voice. "That cloud. It's falling out of the sky." Everyone looked up and, as the cloud came nearer, they moved back in fear. The cloud floated gently down to the ground, stopped for a moment and then started to rise again. When every wisp of the cloud had gone, who was left standing there but Jimmy. The Weatherman had carried him home in his cloud. Jimmy gave a last wave to the cloud before his friends surrounded him. The crowd wanted to add their congratulations and to hear how Jimmy had met the Weather Man.

So, the next time you see a single, round, white cloud in a clear blue sky, remember Jimmy's adventure and give a thought to the Weatherman. Give him a wave. He may be watching you.

Chapter Six

THE EMPTY WELL

Jimmy's best friend, Gemma, lived in a small, comfortably furnished cave at the bottom of the well in the centre of Roombelow's town square. Every morning, whenever the bucket was lowered for water, Gemma's task was to make sure that the battered, old, wooden bucket was filled to the brim with fresh water from the stream. Then she would shout up the shaft, "Haul away!" and the bucket would be wound slowly back to the surface. Every day the town's people would send down food and drink in the empty bucket and each afternoon, when work was over for the day, they would wind her to the surface. Then, when Jimmy and the other children returned home from school, they were free to spend time together.

No one in Roombelow made fun of Jimmy's bright red mop of hair, nor his pointed ears and they never referred to his enormous feet. To them, Jimmy was the hero who rescued them from Matilda's sleeping spell and the one who found the Weatherman and stopped the rain before the town was flooded.

When Matilda cast her sleeping spell over the town, Gemma had been marooned in the cave at the bottom of the well. Gemma was obviously different from the rest of

the people in Roombelow. She was much smaller than everyone else but no one knew where she came from. Around her neck, hanging on a thin gold necklace was a single, precious, sparkling stone. A gemstone as beautiful as the diamond in Aunt Ethel's wedding ring, but much, much bigger. Gemma had lived at the bottom of the well for such a long time that she had learned to talk the language of the fish. She made lots of fish friends, with whom she whiled away many an hour until Jimmy arrived in Roombelow and unexpectedly rescued her. Gemma and Jimmy's friendship flourished.

Sometimes they would venture off on their own, away from Roombelow, to explore the vast underground world, discovering many an enchanted valley and grottoes of great beauty. On other occasions, they spent the whole day in the house on the hill, home of Matilda the witch. Matilda's home was a gold mine of glorious secrets, forgotten trinkets, mystical trappings and magical wonders which were a constant source of fascination.

A very close and happy friendship grew between the diminutive lady from the bottom of the well, under Roombelow, and the strange-looking boy from the world above. Jimmy was happy in his new surroundings, in his new "almost" family, not that his Aunt Ethel was ever very far from his thoughts. He hoped she would understand why he had left her love and care. Jimmy was determined to return to Esh Village as soon as he could so that he could explain everything to his aunt.

Early one fine morning, as they usually did, Mr McDonald and Jimmy came to the well for water. Jimmy lowered the bucket and waited for Gemma to give her usual shout of, "Haul away!" Then Mr McDonald would wind the bucket back up to the

surface. But today there was no shout. They waited a moment more, and then Jimmy leaned over the brick wall and shouted down. "Are you there, Gemma?"

"Yes!" shouted back Gemma.

Mr McDonald looked surprised and in his very deep gravelly voice asked, "Are you all right down there?"

Back came another high pitched, "Yes!"

"Is the bucket full yet?" Mr McDonald's voice rumbled down the well.

"No! It's not!" was Gemma's reply.

Jimmy was concerned as he shouted down, "Whatever is wrong, Gemma?"

Gemma's answer was quite a shock. "The water isn't deep enough to fill the bucket."

Mr McDonald had had enough of this shouting up and down, and he told Gemma to climb into the bucket so that he could wind her up to the surface.

Only when the small figure of Gemma was sitting safely alongside Jimmy on the wall of the well did Mr McDonald speak again. "There has always been plenty of water in the well and now you tell me there isn't enough to fill the bucket! What has happened down there, Gemma?"

"The well is fed by an underground stream," Gemma replied, "but for some reason, the stream is not as deep as it usually is. I don't know what is happening."

Nor did Jimmy, but he was determined to find out why the stream was drying up. "Please, can we borrow your boat, Mr McDonald?" Jimmy asked. "Gemma's boat is too small for me."

"Certainly," said Mr McDonald, "provided that there's plenty of water left to float a boat in. Is there, Gemma?"

"There is at the moment," said Gemma, "but the water level is falling all the time."

"Then we'd better hurry," said Jimmy. "Will you come with me?" he asked Gemma.

"Of course!" piped his little friend. "We will have to follow the stream through the many tunnels and caves and, if you take me along to talk to the fish, they may be able to help us."

Mr McDonald, Mr Porker, the butcher, and Mr Trimit, the Tailor, carefully lowered the flat-bottomed boat down the well shaft. Then Jimmy and Gemma were lowered to the bottom of the well. They loaded all the supplies they needed for their journey. Food, clothing, oars, and poles were securely packed before they waved farewell to their friends.

Jimmy rowed and Gemma held up the oil lamp to light their way through the cold dark tunnels. The damp walls reflected the light of the lamp and cast creeping shadows about them, as slowly they made their way along, following the twisting course of the stream.

It took an age before they met one of Gemma's fish friends and, when they did, Gemma leaned over the prow of the boat and asked where all the other fish and frogs had disappeared to. Jimmy, of course, could not understand the strange gurgling

sounds the fish made, and he wished he had remembered to bring Matilda's magic ring, the one which allowed the wearer to talk with animals. But then, he wasn't sure if a fish was the same as an animal.

He waited patiently until the gurgling and burbling stopped and then asked, "What was all that about?"

Gemma explained. "Most of my fish friends swam further upstream to try and find deeper pools where they may be safe for a while longer, even if the stream dries up completely. A few may even have gone to where they believe there is an enormous lake which will never dry up. Fiona, that's the name of the fish I'm talking to, has told me where she thinks the lake is. We must turn left at the next tunnel and then take the second tunnel on the right. Fiona will guide us part of the way, but she is afraid to swim all the way into the lake. Some friends of hers went exploring that way some months ago and have never been seen again."

Both Jimmy and Gemma were a little apprehensive now, but they had to continue their journey. They had to find out why the stream was drying up.

Fiona led them slowly, deeper and deeper into the honeycombs of caves and tunnels, following the twists and turns as the stream trickled past the boat.

After a long while, Fiona stopped, raised her head into the glow of Gemma's lamp and gurgled gently to her. This was as far as she dared to go. She splashed her tail onto the water, as if to say goodbye, and then swam back down the stream towards the deep pool where her family was waiting.

Now Jimmy and Gemma were left on their own. Somewhere ahead lay the lake that Fiona was so afraid of.

Chapter Seven

THE GREEN CAVERN

Jimmy and Gemma continued their journey through the maze of tunnels but soon the tunnel they were travelling through became so narrow that Jimmy could no longer use the oars. Instead, he used the pole to push the boat forward. Gemma sat at the front, showing the way with the fading light of the lamp.

“Steady, Jimmy,” piped Gemma, and Jimmy could see that the roof of the tunnel was getting lower and lower. Finally, the rocky roof hung so low that he couldn’t use the pole, so, while Gemma crouched in the bow, he lay down on the bottom of the boat and tried to pull the boat along with his hands grasping at the roof. Further progress was slow as Jimmy struggled to get a grip on the slippery, slimy stone.

Then everything went black. “Light the lamp again,” said Jimmy.

“I can’t,” said Gemma. “The oil must have run out.” Silence. “What do we do now, Jimmy?”

“Why, we go on, of course,” said Jimmy, not feeling quite as brave as he sounded. And on they went. Hand over hand, pulling and pushing the boat through the blackness.

At long last, the roof began to rise higher over their heads. Soon they were able to sit up and use the pole again. Gemma noticed first. “I think it’s getting lighter.” The roof was higher and the tunnel was wider, wide enough for Jimmy to use the oars again. “Where is the light coming from?” asked Gemma.

“Shhh!” replied Jimmy. The eerie glow was brighter now and the tunnel continued to get wider. “Where has the roof gone?” asked Gemma trembling from head to toe.

“Shhh!” repeated Jimmy. The roof was now so high they could hardly see it.

Then they rounded a bend and before them lay a lake - an enormous green lake, lit by an emerald glow that seemed to come from the walls of the vast cavern. The whole scene was breathtaking. The lake was beautiful. The panorama was vast and frightening.

Their whispers echoed quietly as they wondered what they should do next.

“We’ve come this far,” whispered Jimmy. “We can’t turn back now.”

The oars swished through the still, deep, green waters and Jimmy rowed strongly on. Gemma’s mouth was dry and she took a sip of her drink to quench her thirst and quell her fear.

“What’s that noise?” quavered Gemma, but Jimmy had already stopped rowing and the boat drifted silently on. He too could hear the whisper of sound that was rapidly

increasing. As they progressed further into the cavern the sound grew louder and at last, they could see what was causing the noise.

A brilliant blue waterfall, dropped all the way from the roof of the cavern down to the deep green waters of the lake. The waterfall that tumbled over the shelf up in the roof wasn't very wide, but it was absolutely the most beautiful sight that either Jimmy or Gemma had ever seen.

They were so spellbound that they didn't realise their boat had drifted toward the shingle covered shore. The hull of the boat grated over the shingles and came to a gentle halt among the pebbles, but they could hardly tear their eyes away from the spectacle.

Some seconds passed before Jimmy could see that the lake was teeming with fish - some red, some gold, some silver, blue and oh! every colour of the rainbow, mixed up in that clear, green water. Suddenly the spell was broken by a cry from Gemma. "Oh gosh! Jimmy! Help!" Jimmy turned around quickly.

"What's wrong, Gemma?"

"A hand! I saw a hand! I saw a hand in the water," gasped Gemma.

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Jimmy. "There are only fish in the water and fish don't have hands. Do they?"

"Oh, but some of us have," answered a strange voice. It wasn't Gemma's high pitched voice that had answered. The new voice had a strange burbling, gurgling tone

that reminded Jimmy very much of Fiona's fish talk. "Why it's a talking fish," said a very surprised Jimmy.

Gemma told him, "That's not a fish. Fish don't have hands."

"But it *is* a fish," said Jimmy. "See there! Look! It has a scaly tail."

Then the warbling came again. "Of course I have a tail. I also have a body, two arms, two hands, two eyes and a head." And then the fish, or was it a man, pulled itself onto the pebbly shore and sat on a rock. "See!" it said. "I'm half a fish and half a man. There are lots of us here, but we hid when we heard you coming. Now that I know you mean us no harm, I will call my friends."

He began to beat the water with his tail, and the ripples spread out over the lake. More ripples appeared and soon there were ten or fifteen or more heads bobbing alongside the boat, warbling their "Hello's" to the two friends.

Once Gemma, at last, found the courage to uncover her eyes, she sat agog. Jimmy asked the half-fish, half-man, "Who are you?"

"I am Milton," answered the creature, "and these are my friends, the Aquamites. This is the land of Aquarius where we have lived for thousands of years. We never grow old, you see. But just at the moment, we are a little overcrowded. So many fish have travelled to our lake, seeking safety, because their rivers and streams are drying up and ..."

"But that is why we're here," interrupted Jimmy. "The stream from your lake fills our well, in the town of Roombelow. But soon there will be no water left for our friends to drink."

“And no water for the fish to swim in,” added Gemma.

“We are trying to find out what has happened to the water,” went on Jimmy.

“We too would like to know what has happened,” said

Milton. “Look at our waterfall.”

“It really is beautiful,” said Jimmy.

Milton waved his arm “But that is just a trickle. The whole side of the cave should be covered with a blue curtain of cascading water.”

“What a wonderful sight that must be. But why isn’t it like that now? What has happened to the water?”

“We don’t know,” answered Milton sadly, “and we cannot find out. Being an Aquamite is all very well and good for living in water, but we can’t climb up there,” he said, pointing up to the rocky shelf in the roof of the cavern.

“I don’t think anyone can climb up there,” chimed in Gemma.

“Someone must,” said Jimmy, “and, as you are too small, it will have to be me.”

Chapter Eight

THE RED CAVE

Jimmy set off on the almost vertical climb, up to the roof of the cavern. Gemma told him to be very, very careful, and the Aquamites wished him luck.

Jimmy had climbed plenty of trees before and even a mountain or two, but this was the first time he had tried to climb a sheer wall of rock. His hands kept slipping on the damp surfaces and there were times when the only thing that saved him from falling was the firm foothold his enormous feet gave him. He remembered how the children in the upper world had laughed at his strange appearance and his enormous feet. They would not laugh if they could see him now, clinging and climbing, up and up and up.

Only when Jimmy had reached the safety of the rocky shelf did he dare to look down. He unfastened the rope, which had been around his waist, and tied it off around a large rock. He waved to the tiny figure standing far, far below, then turned to face the unknown and took his first steps into the tunnel, through which the stream trickled toward him.

At first, there was just the slightest glow of light, now of a blue hue, and gradually it became bright enough to light the shadows and show the way. Jimmy had walked a mile or two along the tunnel by the edge of the trickling stream. He was feeling rather tired and was about to sit down for a rest when he noticed that the tunnel had become wider and higher. Perhaps there was another cavern just ahead. So on he went, and soon he stepped out of the tunnel into a cave, a cave that glowed red. The red cave was not as high as the green cave but was still very large, with a deep pool in the centre. In a large basin sunk deep into the stone floor, there was a dark pool. Water trickled over the edge of the basin, ran through the blue tunnel and eventually plummeted down over the rocky shelf to make the blue waterfall that filled the lake in the green cavern.

Jimmy had found the underground pool, filled by an underground spring, that supplied the stream which fed the well in the town of Roombelow. But why was there insufficient water for the Aquamites, the fish, the frogs and the people of Roombelow?

He moved closer to the dark pool which reflected the red walls of the cave. Then he saw the hideous smile on the enormous mouth of a gigantic eel. The eel's long black body was coiled around and filled the rocky basin of the pool. Jimmy could now see why the underground streams had almost dried up. The giant eel's body tapered to a tail that almost filled the hole from where the underground spring bubbled up.

Jimmy pondered. The eel stared. Jimmy could see what the problem was, but what could he do about it? He needed Gemma's help. Jimmy couldn't talk to an eel, but Gemma might be able to. There was only one thing to do. He must go back for Gemma. Slowly he backed away from the giant eel, which watched him but didn't try to stop him. When he reached the tunnel he ran as fast as he could, splashing through

the shallow stream, and didn't stop until he reached the rocky shelf in the roof of the green cavern.

Several moments passed before he recovered sufficient breath and was able to shout down to Gemma. "Tie yourself to the end of the rope." His voice echoed. "I need your help."

Gemma was a little afraid, but if her best friend needed her help, then she would do as Jimmy asked. She tied the end of the rope around her tiny waist, knotted it tightly, and closed her eyes. She kept them closed all the way up the vertical rock wall until she felt Jimmy's hand taking hers. Gemma had safely reached the rocky shelf and gasped with relief, glad to be safe, alongside her friend.

While she sat, recovering from her frightening hoist up the cliff face, Jimmy told her what he had found in the red cave.

"You have to talk to the giant eel," he told Gemma. "We must find out where it has come from." "But the eel may not understand fish talk," said Gemma.

"We won't know that until you try. Come on, Gemma. We must hurry."

And off they went, back to the red cave and the giant eel.

Chapter Nine

FIND THE SEA

The giant eel was still curled up in the pool when Gemma and Jimmy reached the red cave. It watched them approach.

“Go on, Gemma,” said Jimmy. “Speak to it. It looks friendly.”

Gemma cautiously approached and started to make gurgling fishy sounds and then quickly stepped back, startled as the giant eel slowly raised its massive head. It moved to the side of the pool. Then it started to make the same gurgling noises that Gemma had made.

Gemma was delighted. “He likes me. He really likes me, Jimmy. And he understands me. His name is Larson and he wants to know where he is and how we found him.”

Then followed a long fishy conversation between the little lady and the giant eel. Jimmy waited patiently until Gemma had finished talking to the eel. Then it was the

eel's turn to wait while Gemma recounted the story to Jimmy. She told Jimmy of how the giant eel had started life as a tiny elver in a small stream, but then the time came when all eels must meet together in an enormous far away sea. Larson, for that was his name, had lost his way when the river he was swimming in carried him underground. Eventually, he was swept into this deep pool in the red cave. And here he had stayed, growing bigger and bigger, until eventually, his body blocked off the flow of water. He wanted to get back to the sea but couldn't find a route through the maze of tunnels. Larson was sorry. He didn't know that other fish, animals and people needed the water, but what could he do? He couldn't find a way out.

Larson was no longer smiling. There were large tears rolling from his big sad eyes, splashing into red rippled reflections in the pool.

"Tell him to stop crying," said Jimmy. "We'll find a way to get him back to the sea. That will solve his problem and ours. Once he's out of the pool and in the sea, the stream will start to flow faster and it will soon fill our well again."

Gemma bubbled Jimmy's message and Larson stopped crying. The smile returned to his face and he told Gemma he would wait there until they found a way to get him back to the sea.

Off went the two pals searching through the tunnels and caves. Jimmy was pleased that Gemma was with him to ask the way of the fish and frogs they might meet on their search. But only a few of them had even heard of the sea and none knew where it was.

They came to yet another large cave, with a small rocky pool and lots of further passages leading off into the darkness. Jimmy did not know which of the passages to

take, and he decided they should sit down and have a snack while they rested. When they had eaten the bread, cheese and buttered scones, they moved to the pool to take a drink of its clear water. They bent their heads and Jimmy was sure he saw one or two fish eyes peeping from behind the rocks. Gemma finished drinking and stood up ready to leave.

“Don’t go yet,” said Jimmy. “You haven’t asked these fish if they know where the sea is.”

“But I can’t see any fish,” said Gemma.

“That’s because they are hiding,” replied Jimmy. “Perhaps they are afraid of us.”

“I’ll let them know we mean no harm,” trilled Gemma. Gently Gemma gurgled greetings to the fish hiding among the rocks. Slowly and one by one they came into the edge of the pool in answer to her request for help. Gemma could hardly contain her excitement. “Yes! They have heard of the sea. It’s quite close by. Along that passage there. Sometimes the crabs call in for a chat and tell them stories of the great deep sea. A little further along and the floor of the tunnel rises steeply, turns and then drops sharply, right into the bottom of the sea.

The bend in the tunnel stops the sea from coming into here.” “That’s wonderful news,” said Jimmy. “Come on Gemma. We’ll have to get back and tell Larson.”

Gemma thanked the fish and joined hands with Jimmy as they skipped their way back through the tunnels and passages to the red cave.

Chapter Ten

ESCAPE

Larson was delighted to hear Gemma gurgle the good news, and his face filled with the happiest of eel smiles you've ever seen.

"It's all very well knowing the way, but how will we get Larson out of the pool, through the passages and into the sea?" asked Jimmy.

Gemma had no answer to that and sat dejected on a rock with her head between her tiny hands. Larson could see something was wrong and he wriggled over and nudged Gemma. He wanted to know why the pals were now so sad after bringing the good news.

Gemma slowly explained what the problem was but Larson was not at all unhappy. He raised his huge head and laughed and laughed. Jimmy sat there with his eyes wide and his mouth gaping. The red cave rocked with the roar of Larson's laughter. Then he uncoiled his long body and slithered out of the pool, alongside Gemma and Jimmy. He told Gemma, who in turn told Jimmy, that eels can travel on land even though they live in water. Didn't everyone know that?

The problem was no longer a problem and, with Jimmy and Gemma leading the way, Larson the giant eel slithered his way along behind them, through the twisting tunnels and passages to the cave with the rocky pool. The shy fish hid when they saw the giant eel wriggling past into the passage that led to the bottom of the sea.

Larson said his thanks to the friends, and his massive head was in the sea before his tail flicked a last wave of goodbye and he disappeared forever around the bend in the tunnel.

Now the time had come for the happy adventurers to return to Roombelow with the marvellous news.

They quickly retraced their steps to the red cave where the underground spring was now bubbling and frothing. It had filled the rock basin to overflowing now that Larson was no longer stopping its flow. The pair hurried back to the rocky shelf in the roof of the green cavern.

Jimmy quickly tied the rope around Gemma's waist and lowered her down to the shingle shore where the Aquamites were waiting. Then he started his hazardous downward climb. It was faster going down with the rope to hold onto, but before he reached the bottom he was thoroughly soaked through. The stream was flowing faster, flooding over the rocky shelf, spreading out to cover the whole width of the cavern with its cold, blue curtain.

At last, Jimmy emerged from the water that cascaded over him. Milton greeted him at the edge of the green lake.

"There is no time to thank you properly for saving the fish and restoring our wonderful waterfall. You must be quick.

Join Gemma in the boat. The water will flow quickly through the tunnels. It will flood some of them to the roof level. You have saved our lake and the lives of the fish, now you must hurry to save your own lives.”

Jimmy rowed as he had never rowed before, heading for the tunnel that had brought them to Aqualand. They had to get past the point where the roof came down very low, otherwise, they would be trapped. They were almost there, but the stream was flowing faster now, like a river in flood. He lost the oars in the darkness as the tunnel walls narrowed. The current carried them along even faster.

“Down!” shouted Gemma from the front of the boat and, just in time, they threw themselves onto the floor as the tunnel roof began scraping along right over their heads.

Then they were clear, but the danger was not over. The stream had become a torrent of water carrying their small craft through the blackness with alarming speed, crashing it from side to side against the walls of the tunnels.

“Keep down,” yelled Jimmy, “and hold on for your life.”

Their frightening ride seemed to last a lifetime. But finally, it ended. There came a deafening crash and the boat was thrown against a solid wall of rock. It broke up into a thousand pieces and Jimmy just had time to grab Gemma’s tiny hand before the current swept them on. He struggled to keep their heads above the rising, surging water, but he was tired and weary. He wouldn’t be able to hold on much longer. Gemma was slipping from his grasp.

Just as it seemed they both must perish, the foaming water carried them up. Yes, up! They had reached the well and were carried up between its steep walls. Pop!!

They shot out of the shaft like a cork from a bottle and landed in a tangled heap by the side of the well - tired out, soaking wet, but safe and unhurt, back with the people of Roombelow.

Mr McDonald gently lifted Jimmy in his big arms. Mr

Trimitt picked Gemma up. Amanda and Matilda the friendly witch were waiting too.

“We don’t know how you did it,” she said, “but you’ve saved the town again. We’re all anxious to hear your story, but first, you are going to get out of those wet clothes, into a warm bath, have a bowl of hot soup and off to bed for both of you.”

“All right,” said a tired Jimmy. “We’ll tell you all about it tomorrow.” And the pair were carried lovingly into the warmth of the Mayor’s house where Amanda was already heating the water for the bath.

The route back to the underworld’s emerald lake was now completely flooded. It is doubtful that Gemma or Jimmy will ever again see the friends they met during that adventure, but I’m sure they will never forget: Fiona, the fish who first led the way; Milton and the Aquamites, and Larson the friendly giant eel. How strange it was that Jimmy and Gemma were separated from their homes, just as Larson had been from his. But at least Larson was now on his way home. Gemma did not know where her home was and although Jimmy had lived most his life with Aunt Ethel he knew in his heart that Esh was not his true home either.