



JASON'S MAGIC LEGS



A fairytale for all ages by

Michael Snell

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Chapter 1

Life hadn't been good to Jason Taylor. In fact, many would say it had been cruel. Staring out of the window that Saturday afternoon, watching the kids playing football in the street, the ten year old was debating the very subject in his mind. He wanted so much to be friends with the boys outside having fun, to join in with all the games they played, but wiping a tear from his eye, he knew it could never be.

"Come away from that window, Jason," shouted his mother from the kitchen where she was washing up after their lunch. "You'll have those ruffians teasing and calling you names. I don't want that window broken again if they start throwing things."

Melissa was a single mother and at twenty-five still quite young and pretty, not that she could find any time to capitalise on those assets. She was paying the price for being a little too carefree as a young teenager. Her vibrant lifestyle of drinking with her friends, playing up to the boys and the bright lights of town, had given her a child at fifteen, his father unknown.

All she could remember about the guy called Jay from that heavily drink-laden night was how incredibly handsome he was and how fortunate she'd felt at the time for pulling such a gorgeous young lad. A stranger passing through town, all she had left to remind her of him now was Jason. She'd given the child that name quite simply because he was Jay's son. It was abundantly obvious the boy came with all of his father's handsome genes. He had his unblemished golden-

tanned skin, beautiful black eyes, black silky hair, and dimples on his cheeks that produced the cutest of smiles. The pity was, he hadn't inherited Jay's strong working legs too.

An unmarried mother and still a schoolgirl, Melissa's life was made hell at home. Nevertheless, her mother did the right thing, or duty according to her righteous mind, looking after the baby while Melissa finished her schooling. Returning to school was perhaps a waste of time, though. The girl's final exam results were abysmal.

Melissa left home as soon as she could after finishing school, mainly just to get away from her mother's persistent nagging. She acquired a ground-floor council flat, however it was unfortunate the only one available at the time was on the Forest Estate and that was a notoriously poor and rough area on the outskirts of East Ploddon. It needed to be a ground floor residence because, although the doctors and specialists had failed to find a reason for it, Jason couldn't walk.

The experts said he had a conversion disorder, a wide-ranging term that meant he should be walking, everything was physically able to work okay, but something psychological was preventing it. His legs were perfectly formed, and because of the long hours she spent exercising them for him, they were quite strong and muscular too. Occasionally they would involuntarily kick out and prove that strength, while still refusing to walk.

Jason sighed, a long and sad sigh, wheeling himself back to his computer. There were only the boring games since his mother could no longer afford the broadband connection and he'd played them all countless times. He missed the social networks. On them, where he could be anybody he wanted to be and not a cripple whose legs didn't work, he'd amassed hundreds of friends. He felt lonely without them, for now he didn't have any friends at all.

"Why don't you read one of your library books?" Melissa asked. She had finished doing the dishes and noticed how

downhearted her son looked. “You haven’t read any of the last three I got you.”

Jason attended a special school, not because of any learning difficulties but simply because the local school couldn’t cope with his old-fashioned wheelchair. It was too large. Every Monday, after the minibus with a lift on the back for wheelchairs called to take him to school, his mother would walk into town and change his library books. Trouble was, she rarely picked any he liked. They were usually too young for him. Where he wanted exciting adventure stories, she brought back tales of pixies, goblins, elves and fairies. They were embarrassing.

“I didn’t really like the ones you brought me the last time, but I suppose I could try one of them again,” Jason conceded.

He always read on his bed. Reading for long periods in his wheelchair invariably gave him a crick in his neck, while on his bed he could pull himself around into many different positions.

“Don’t go falling asleep, then,” his mother warned. “Otherwise you won’t be able to sleep tonight.”

“I won’t,” Jason promised, wheeling his way to his bedroom. He was a strong lad, easily able to pull himself on and off his bed.

The three library books were on his bedside cabinet. He surveyed the titles, finally plumping for ‘Tommy’s Big Adventure’ to try again. Yes, it was an adventure story of sorts, but on the very first page he’d discovered it took place in an unreal world, a fairyland, where all kinds of weird things lived. Jason had long since stopped believing in fairies. He’d never known the tooth fairy, and even Santa Claus hadn’t risked venturing on to his part of the estate every year.

Propping himself up on a pillow and yawning, Jason began to read:

Chapter One

There exists a strange land. It is strange because there is only one way into it for humans and that way is a

secret. Tommy Barnes was just ten when he discovered the way in. He was the only son of Robert and Mary Barnes who owned the village stores in Denton Village. They worked long hours to make the shop pay, and when not at school Tommy was often left to amuse himself for many of those hours. The village was short on children. There were none of his age with whom he could play. It was on one such unamusing day that he found the way into Tarebia. Now he spends a lot of his spare time there playing with the inhabitants and having many great adventures.

One Saturday Tommy woke up early, and with nothing to do, he decided to pay the magic kingdom a visit. Entering Tarebia and magically diminishing in size to cope with its scale, he found it unusually quiet. There were no dragons in the sky and they were always up early. Even the sky itself didn't look right, it was only blue. Where had all the other colours gone? His best friend didn't appear to be around either so he ran to call on another close friend, Tiffin, who lived on the edge of Bluebell Wood.

Tommy knocked on the giant oak tree. "It's for you, Tiffin!" a voice shouted.

The cheeky pixie boy came out of the tree hollow, only this morning he didn't look cheeky, he looked sad.

"What's wrong?" Tommy asked him. "Everything looks different today, sort of dull. There aren't even any dragons playing in the sky. Is that why you are sad?"

"The goblins have taken over the magic kingdom since your last visit," said Tiffin wiping away a tear. "Massena, the queen of Tarebia's fairies, and all the fairy royals are their prisoners but we don't know where they are holding them. While the queen's wings are tied

no fairy can fly, and without the morning fairy dust to colour the sky, few of the dragons wake up these days. If you listen carefully, you can sometimes hear them snoring in the mountains.”

“Crikey! What can we do?” Tommy asked.

Jason couldn't believe he was actually reading the book. Pixies? Fairies? It was stuff for toddlers! He shifted to a more comfortable position, yawned again, and turned to the next page.

“Goblins can be ruthless. They're evil beings and they show no mercy in battle,” warned Tiffin. “We are hoping the elves will turn up soon. Partoon set off yesterday to find them but you know how hard the elves are to find sometimes. They are always looking for work and once it's done they move on searching for more. I hope the goblins don't discover what Partoon's doing, they will put him to death if they find out.”

“No!” Tommy shouted. “They mustn't kill him!” Partoon, the young pixie prince, was Tommy's best friend. “Which way was he heading?” he asked desperately.

“South, taking the risky shortcut through the bewitched forest and troll country. Partoon reckons the elves will probably be somewhere near the cornfields at this time of the year and the shortcut will save him at least half a day of travelling,” said Tiffin. “You are not going to follow him, are you?”

“I have to,” Tommy said. “He's my mate!”

“But the trolls like human boys. There was another boy who used to visit us many moons ago and they ate him.”

Tommy forced down a swallow that didn't want to happen. *“Can I borrow a hare?” he asked.*

“You can take Sarano as far as the bewitched forest, he’s the fastest. I’ll get him harnessed,” said Tiffin.

The pixie boy disappeared back inside the tree momentarily, to pick up the saddlery, before leading the way to the clearing. He whistled a tune and the hare bounded up to him, waiting patiently while he fitted the tack. The animal surveyed Tommy with its suspicious eyes, because that’s what hares do, but it wasn’t worried. Tommy was a familiar face.

“You will need to find a friendly unicorn in the forest; it’s your only hope of catching up with Partoon. It’s a clockwise corkscrew for the friendly ones, don’t forget. You do remember the routine for humans riding our animals, don’t you?” the pixie lad asked.

“Yes, of course I do,” said Tommy.

He went over and whispered his name into Sarano’s ear, told the beast where he wanted to be taken and pledged his allegiance to Queen Massena. The hare crouched down agreeably, as low as it could, allowing him to mount its back with ease.

“Thanks, Tiffin! I’ll see you soon, I hope!” Tommy said, gently kneeling the animal. Sarano rose up and bounded away, heading for the bewitched forest. Tommy hung on for all he was worth.

The bewitched forest was to the south. It was always due south and that was from anywhere. Tommy had not been there before. No one had ever taken him. Few ever went there because it was not a good place to go. According to fairy legend, every type of strange tree that ever existed could be found in the bewitched forest. As some of them were able to move around, and others once lived off of eating dinosaurs, it was a dangerous place. Gloomily dark inside under the dense foliage, with just a

few clearings of light where the unicorns grazed, it was a huge place too, though exactly how huge nobody could hazard a guess. Its size and shape continuously changed along with the locations of the clearings. They were not fixed and would appear wherever a unicorn decided to graze. Size didn't mean a lot to anything in the magical kingdom. Everything adapted automatically to cope. Normal pixie size now, the size to live in tree hollows as he clung on tightly to the racing hare, Tommy knew he would magically enlarge to fit on to a unicorn should he be lucky enough to find a friendly one.

Sarano slowed and then stopped at the boundary of the forest for Tommy to alight. Hares didn't enter anywhere that was bewitched. Tommy thanked him for the ride, patted him a few times on the shoulder, and sent him on his way home. The animal bounded off, happy to leave the area. Tommy grew back to his normal size as he watched it go, and then turning to enter the trees, he experienced a cold shudder rushing through his body. He suddenly felt extremely vulnerable and wished he'd thought to ask Tiffin for some kind of a weapon for protection. Not too far ahead of him by the sound of it, there were noises coming out of the gloomily dark forest interior, like munching.

Jason looked up from the page and glanced around the room. Through the window, he could see dark storm clouds gathering and he laughed at himself. They undoubtedly explained the gloominess overtaking the room. It was nothing at all to do with the story, as a sneaky thought had crept into his head and dared to suggest. He switched on his bedside lamp. It wasn't that it was becoming too dark for him to read, he had excellent eyesight and could still see the words easily, it was more that he suspected he was coming to a creepy part of the story. That forest sounded positively evil. He looked

around the room again. So, he *was* enjoying the book after all, but nobody needed to know that. He quickly puffed up the sagging pillow and turned the page eager to learn more.

“Yeeoow!” Tommy screamed, feeling something reaching out of the trees and grabbing hold of his leg, trying to pull him into the darkness.

“Time for your physio, Jason,” Melissa called out from the living room to annoyingly tear his eyes away from the page.

“Oh, mu-um! Not now!” he pleaded, excited and wanting to read more.

“Yes, now,” she said quite firmly.

“Can you do it in here today?” he asked.

“No, I can’t see the telly in there, can I?”

Jason’s physiotherapy involved electronic pads being stuck to his legs. An electric current pulsed between them, causing the muscles in his legs to jerk rapidly and retract. Each time, between the pulses, his mother would pull his legs back to their full extent to help strengthen them. Not the most pleasant of experiences, it embarrassingly necessitated him lying on the settee almost half naked — the important half at that! — and it lasted for a full hour.

Annoyed, Jason slid into his wheelchair and made his way back to the living room. Though the jerking pulses would be a big distraction and might somewhat mar his enjoyment, he’d reckoned he could read the book during the treatment, but in the end had decided against taking it with him. He realised if his mother saw him engrossed in a fairytale, she might never get him anything else.

Jason survived the hourlong treatment, and suffered his mother’s pleas that followed on afterwards every day to try and move his legs. He tried, but it didn’t happen. While lying there the television programme had attracted his interest and he continued to watch it. Teatime came and went, and there more good things to watch on the box, so it wasn’t until bedtime that Jason remembered his book.

With all the grab bars and other fitted aids throughout the flat, Jason was very independent and could do most things for himself. He kissed his mother goodnight, poured a glass of milk to take with him, wheeled himself into his bedroom, closed the door and took off his upper clothes. After pulling himself onto the bed, he removed the rest of his clothes except his underpants which he slept in and would change in the morning after his shower.

Sliding under the covers, Jason began to wonder what had grabbed Tommy in the story he'd been reading. It was bugging him and he knew he wouldn't sleep until he'd found out, so he made himself comfortable with pillows propping him up and returned to the book.

The Octobush grew only a few roots. Eight strong ones it could use to move around on and grab its prey and two static ones to anchor itself in the ground. While Tommy watched the hare galloping off into the distance, the inquisitive bush had dug a new hole for its static roots. It pulled itself up out of the ground and along to the new position, replanting itself. Closer now, the bush had easily reached Tommy. Stealthily extending one of its long tentacle-like roots, it had wound it around the boy's left leg and was pulling him in towards the thorns of its branches.

Tommy didn't know that the sharp thorns were poisonous, or hollow so they could suck the blood out of stunned victims, but he'd a pretty good idea he wasn't in for anything pleasant. He grabbed handfuls of the long grass, clumps of it, holding on as he tried to stop the tugging limb from pulling him any further, but the grass simply tore away under the force until he was clawing at the dry earth with his fingernails in desperation.

"Yeeoow!" he screamed out again, louder this time. "Heeeelp meeeeeeeee!"

The bush seemed to tug even harder. Tommy was very nearly there within its branches.

“Blimey!” Jason gasped. He discovered his throat had dried so he took a sip of his milk before continuing.

Now, if there was one thing an Octobush didn't like it was the Rotorbird. Not because the bird was immune to the poisonous thorns, but more that its tail feathers were lethally sharp and its beak obnoxiously blunt. The bush had no defence against the big bird should it extend its tail and perform the notorious circular dance. The razor-sharp blade-like tail could easily sever any of its muscular roots within seconds, and once they were lost, there was no way of escaping should it then choose to set up home in a nearby tree. It would have to listen to the bird's constant nagging.

“Are you two idiots playing a game?” the bird sitting in the adjacent *Paparia* tree asked. “You shouldn't be playing games in the forest, you know? This is home to lots of creatures. They don't want the likes of you . . .”

“Nooooooooo! I'm not plaaaaayiiiiing!” yelled Tommy, desperately looking up at the bird.

The bird hopped down to the ground and cocked its head to one side, inquisitively summing up the situation. With wings closed, it was about the same size as Tommy, dingily brown all over with piercing red eyes. “What are you doing if you're not playing, then?” the Rotorbird asked.

“If you must know, I was trying to find my friend Partoon, the pixie prince, so we could alert the elves that the goblins have taken over. We need to search for the fairy queen together,” gasped Tommy almost breathless. He felt so weak now, he knew within seconds he would be closing his eyes, giving in and succumbing to whatever the bush held in store for him.

“Well, why didn’t you say so before?” The bird fanned its huge tail. Angling it slightly downwards, it began hopping on the spot in a circle. Slicing through the restraining root, it threw back its head, loudly crowing out, “Yayayayayayaya!”

The Octobush quickly uprooted and replanted itself back in its earlier position, further away.

“Thanks, bird!” Tommy exclaimed, sitting up and unwinding the severed root from his leg. “I thought I was a goner!”

“Phew!” Jason looked up from the page and wiped his brow, relieved. It was a good point in the story to put the book down for the night, he decided. At least Tommy was safe. If he read any more tonight, the story might easily become exciting again. Then, staying up for hours just to see what happened, he’d hardly get any sleep.

Placing the book on his bedside cabinet, Jason turned over and closed his eyes. He giggled to himself, knowing he’d probably spend at least half of the night dreaming of walking bushes and nagging birds.

Chapter 2

Jason woke up early on Sunday morning. Reaching down beside the bed, he retrieved the pole and expertly opened the curtains to the window above his head. Sunlight spilled into the room. Fluffing his pillows into a pile and sitting up against them, he grabbed the book off the bedside cabinet. There had been many dreams in the night about walking bushes and nagging birds, but what more was there? Excited, about to open it at the page where he'd left it, the realisation that perhaps first a bathroom visit was called for annoyed him. He replaced the book and heaved himself into his chair, hurriedly wheeling himself out of the room.

Returning minutes later, Jason stopped to think about his annoyance. To be annoyed at something as simple as having to put down a book to visit the bathroom could only mean one thing. He'd woken up extra happy that morning. Yesterday morning he was feeling low when he awoke, sad even, like most mornings, but since starting to read the book all that had changed. He wasn't moping around this morning, wanting to go back to sleep because there would be nothing to do, he was wide-awake and alive.

Resetting his pillows, he pulled himself onto the bed, up against them, and reached for the book. It was then that he realised something else too. Tommy was like a friend, a good mate, and he cared about him. Last night he couldn't stop reading until he knew the boy was safe. What perils awaited Tommy today, he wondered, opening the book.

“What you need is a friendly unicorn,” the bird said. “It’s not safe to walk in the bewitched forest, not unless you have a tail like mine.”

“But how will I find one without exploring the forest?” Tommy asked, accepting what the bird said was probably very true. It wasn’t safe.

“You won’t be able to find one without exploring the forest,” said the bird, “not around here. But I can fly up high and see the clearings where they roam. If you whisper your message for the unicorn into my ear, I will pass it on. One will soon appear then.”

Tommy rapidly scrambled to his feet and ran over to the bird. “Er, where do birds keep their ears?” he asked, feeling foolish.

“Yayayayayayayaya!” Finding the question funny, the bird chuckled and did a little dance, thankfully without extending its tail feathers this time. “Try for the same place as yours, it’ll get there.”

“I’m Tommy Barnes and I need a unicorn to help me find my friend Partoon, the pixie prince. He’s searching for the elves to tell them the goblins have taken over the magic kingdom and imprisoned the royal fairies. I want to help him rescue the fairy queen,” Tommy whispered.

“I’ll see you later,” the bird said, strangely looking skywards. “You know, you haven’t heard the last of me! Yayayayayayayaya!” Still happily chuckling away, the bird took flight, disappearing over the tops of the trees.

In case the nasty bush should attack him again, Tommy walked a few yards away from the forest and sat on the grass to wait. Worrying about Partoon, and hoping nothing terrible had happened to him, he began to feel impatient.

“Modipius at your service, Tommy Barnes. You did ask for a unicorn, didn’t you?” the voice behind Tommy said, making him jump.

He leapt to his feet and checked the unicorn’s horn. It was a clockwise corkscrew, so he knew the animal to be a friendly one.

“Will you help me find Partoon, please?” Tommy asked. “He’s looking for the elves, but I don’t know where.”

“Jump up on my back. Don’t worry, we’ll find him!”

Tommy jumped up. “Um, what do I hold on to?” he asked.

Modipius laughed. “You don’t know much about unicorns, do you? If a unicorn is happy with you, it’s impossible to fall off. Even if I fly upside down, you won’t fall off, I promise.”

“Fly?” Tommy asked, his eyes opening wide, aghast. “Unicorns fly?”

Modipius answered him by leaping into the air, and soaring high over the forest.

“Wow!” Tommy felt an immediate bonding. He leaned forward confidently, resting his hands on the animal’s neck and looking over his head, between his ears, as if he’d been riding unicorns all his life.

“Wow!” Jason exclaimed. “I wish I had a unicorn! If I had a unicorn he could take me everywhere, and I wouldn’t need a wheelchair.”

“Is that you getting up, Jason? Who are you talking to? Are you alright?” his mother called out from her bedroom.

“Fine, mum! Not getting up yet, too busy talking to myself,” Jason giggled. This book is sure getting to me, he thought, straightaway returning to it.

They were very high up, and positively zooming along, but Tommy wasn’t frightened. He could see for

miles. To his right were the snowy mountains, and he thought of the sleeping dragons. Left was Bluebell Woods, where the pixies lived. Below him the forest appeared to be oozing as it continuously changed shape, and ahead of him lie the river and lakes. Big hunched over beings, almost naked with very long hair, were lumbering around by the bridges and he guessed they were the trolls. He'd never seen one for real before.

There were well-worn tracks to the foot of the mountains where, squinting, he thought he could just make out their caves. Further on, ahead and way past the trolls, fields of golden corn were basking in the sun. There was something going on in the corner of one of the fields. Tommy did a double take. Modipius had spotted it too and they slightly changed direction, heading straight for it.

“Are they reindeer down there?” Tommy shouted disbelievingly in his unicorn’s ear.

Modipius turned his head to answer. “Yes, they’ll be picking up their supplies. Elves don’t only work for Santa at Christmastime, you know? The Claus family have to eat, and so too do the elves and goblins. They can’t survive the winter without stores of food like fairies and pixies can.”

“Oh, look! There’s Partoon!” Tommy shouted.

The unicorn went into a steep dive, picking up even more speed. The wind whistled past Tommy, ringing in his ears and blowing his hair straight out behind him. Just as he started to question in his mind whether they were going to impale themselves into the ground by the unicorn’s horn, the beast levelled out, slowed unbelievably, and descended to land gently next to Partoon.

“Show off!” Partoon joked, fondly patting the unicorn’s neck.

Tommy patted it too, hugging and thanking him, and then he slid off the animal into his friend’s arms.

“Great to see you again, Tommy,” the young prince said, embracing him. “I knew you’d turn up.”

“You did?”

“You couldn’t miss an adventure, could you?”

“But I didn’t know anything was wrong until I arrived here,” said Tommy. “It wasn’t the reason why I came, though I’m glad now I did!”

“Shh!” Partoon put his arm around Tommy, pulling him closer, and whispered, “But it is the reason why you came. Haven’t you worked it out? We only have these adventures when someone’s watching us, and you are always here then.”

“I am? But who is watching us?” Tommy asked, looking all about him, screwing up his face and not understanding.

Partoon cast his eyes upwards, deliberately so Tommy would notice and his eyes follow. “Him. The boy,” he whispered softly. “I bet you didn’t know he doesn’t walk!”

“Wha . . . ?” Jason spluttered, immediately dropping the book. Coming to rest on the bedcovers, just about where his lap was, the book folded shut. Jason, frozen to the spot in his not understanding, just stared down at it, frightened. A million questions were racing through his mind, and they were all the same: how did Partoon know about him?

Chapter 3

A whole ten minutes passed before Jason felt brave enough to pick up the book. He'd spent the time trying to answer the question bugging him. Partoon couldn't possibly know anything about him. He was just a character in a book. Whoever wrote the story couldn't know about him either. His eyes checked the author's name on the cover. He was sure neither he nor his mother would know the writer; they knew very few people anyway. Besides, there was the small fact that not every boy who read the book wouldn't be able to walk, wasn't there? It was all so totally inexplicable, and frighteningly so.

Deciding the only way he might learn more was by carrying on reading, Jason finally found the courage to open up the book again. He swallowed hard, took a deep breath, and flicked through the pages to find his place. He read through the same words where he'd left it so suddenly. They hadn't changed, or he'd read them incorrectly, they were exactly the same. Slowly, he turned the page.

Chapter Two

A few of the goblins were celebrating, and when their kind celebrate it sometimes lasts for days. Today was the third day for the group of gold miners sprawling around in one of the mountain caves. The naughty nectar they drank on these occasions had run out; the jubilation would end soon unless they could steal some more from the human world.

The trolls didn't bother the goblins. The stupid lumbering giants had learned long ago how awful goblins tasted, and as they were basically evil beings a bit like themselves only smaller, they happily shared the caves with them, though never the same cave because the trolls stank rotten. More than a few of the caves were now the entrances to the mines where the goblins searched for gold. Goblins stored gold, and they had amassed huge quantities of the precious metal. One day, if the legends were correct, they would use it to bring ruination to the human world.

"I need some zeds," Bafario stated, hardly able to keep his eyes moist.

The chief of the goblin miners had been the life and soul of the party. Tired now, too tired to keep on wetting his lidless eyes, he yearned to sleep. Sleeping was what made goblins so ugly, but there was little they could do about it. With no eyelids, they needed to screw up their faces to close their eyes.

"Fat chance of sleep," said Golt, another goblin miner. "If you thought life was hard under the fairies, wait until you see what King Efelro wants out of us!"

"I've heard he wants a solid gold throne," Pento, the youngest of the goblins, stated. "We'll need an awful lot of gold if it's going to take his big butt!"

Pento's remark made them laugh, and soon they were all rolling around hysterically again. They were taking advantage of King Efelro and the Goblin Guards being away on a mission, and really should not have been celebrating at all.

Overcoming the royal fairies and laying claim to the throne, the king had set off with the cruellest of his goblins to capture as many elves as they could find, to

enslave them. If they could make slaves of enough elves, then Santa would have to employ goblins to help him, he would have no choice. That would give the goblins an easy way into the human world, a wonderful place to make mischief, and where seemingly there was an unlimited supply of that naughty nectar.

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Tommy helped the elves load the sleigh, it was important it got away soon, but he hadn't realised just how much they could pack inside it. Sheaf after sheaf was pushed in, yet there was always room for more. He was becoming tired when the elf in charge of the sleigh finally said they had enough for a long winter. Relieved, he walked to the front so he could talk to the reindeer.

"I bet you don't know their names!" Partoon said, putting his arm around Tommy. Pixies frequently embrace their friends; they are a very touchy-feely people.

"I only know Rudolph, but I can't see one with a red nose," said Tommy.

Partoon laughed and squeezed him. "Rudolph isn't here today. Left to right, from the front, it is Dasher, Dancer, Prancer, Vixen, Comet, Cupid, Donner, and Blitzen. They change order every time they go out; the front two go to the back. I bet you didn't know that!"

"No, I didn't, but how do the elves make the sleigh fly? Elves aren't magical, are they?" Tommy asked.

"The reindeer make it fly, they're magical. It was the very first spell the fairies ever made. Fairies are born out of children's happiness, so they decided to make them happier. Clever stuff, eh?" Partoon winked.

“So is Father Christmas . . . ?”

“Yep! He is descended from the first child to ever chuckle when given a toy, because that made the first fairy.”

“Where do pixies come from, then? You are like fairies, aren’t you?”

“Ouch! We’re only like them in human eyes. Yes, we’re sprites, but that’s the only similarity. We are the babies that don’t make it, that’s why, though sometimes impish, we are invariably good. Babies don’t know of evil things. They come later in your world.”

“Sorry, I didn’t realise,” said Tommy.

“Ah, it doesn’t matter!” Partoon winked and hugged him.

They both waved as the sleigh started its run to take off. Everybody stopped what they were doing to watch it depart. It circled once, high overhead, and then headed due north.

“Have you learned of any news about the fairy queen?” Tommy asked, looking concerned. “Do the goblins still have her?”

“No, there’s no news. All the fairy royals are still missing. Fairies and pixies have been searching everywhere, but there’s no sign of them,” Partoon said sadly. “Some of us believe the goblins may have hidden them outside the magic kingdom, where it’s impossible for us to survive for long. It is still very dangerous for them, but coming from earthly creatures, elves and goblins fare better than we do in your world. I bet you didn’t know that!

“Many of the elves have volunteered to form a search party, but we can’t spare them. The losses would be enormous, and there is so much work they need to do

here before the winter sets in. I bet you didn't know no one can work anything like as hard as the elves."

"I didn't, but do you mean the royal fairies might be hidden in my world?" Tommy asked fearfully.

"It's all we can think of now," said Partoon.

"But my world is absolutely ginormous! You'd never find them!"

"I know, it doesn't bear thinking about."

"But how long will the fairies survive in my world, if you're right?" Tommy asked, trying to stop his eyes from welling up. He knew Massena, the queen of Tarebia's fairies, and all the fairy royals, he'd met them several times. They were lovely people.

"Who knows? It'll depend on where they are and how the goblins imprisoned them. The goblins are bad. They may be gone already."

"Gone?" Tommy was really fighting now to hold those tears back.

"When sprites do what you call die, they fade away with no trace within minutes," said Partoon. "I bet you didn't know that!"

"No!" The battle was lost, and Tommy bawled, the tears were streaming down his face.

"Stop it! I'll have to tickle you! I bet you don't know what will happen if you cry sad tears in the magic kingdom," Partoon said.

"Blimey! How can you not cry?" Jason asked himself, sniffing hard and wiping his wet eyes. A couple of tears had fallen on to the page, and he ignored them. Before daring to find out what crying in the magic kingdom did, he tried drying his eyes on his duvet cover.

"No, I don't. What will happen?" Tommy asked, rubbing his eyes and managing to stem the flow.

Partoon looked up into the sky. The rain pelted down. "Too late, it's started. I bet we're in for a storm."

"Sorry," said Tommy. "I couldn't help it."

Jason stopped reading. Horrified, he looked down at his tears slowly sinking into the page. "No! That's impossible!" he shouted, but still grabbing the duvet cover back and trying to mop up his tears.

"Are you still talking to yourself in there?" his mother called.

"I dropped something, that's all!" Jason called back, which wasn't that far from the truth.

"I hope you weren't swearing."

"I wasn't!" Jason said, looking down at the page.

"Ah, it doesn't matter," Partoon said, smiling at Tommy and squeezing him again. "It's stopped raining already. Seems like it was only a shower."

Jason looked up again, and banged his fist against the side of his head a couple of times. He needed reassurance he wasn't asleep and dreaming. He wasn't, so what was happening to him? How could his tears interact with the story? It was impossible; it wasn't a computer game. Gulping, trying to explain the rain coming and going along with his tears as being nothing more than a coincidence, but playing safe and making sure his eyes were perfectly dry first, he continued reading.

Tommy frowned. He was watching Modipius, his unicorn, and the one Partoon had ridden there. They were behaving strangely. Uneasy, they looked as if they might fly off at any minute.

Partoon's eyes followed Tommy's gaze. Noticing the peculiar behaviour, the pixie prince began looking all around. His hand flew to the knife he carried in his belt. It was normally only used to cut vines, but he thought it might offer them some protection if he needed it.

“I bet you don’t know we have company,” Partoon said, not sounding happy.

Before Tommy could ask who, the goblins began to appear. They were closing in from all four sides of the field. The elves froze. There were only thirty of them, and it seemed they were outnumbered by about four to one. Partoon rushed over to the unicorns. Tommy couldn’t believe his friend was going to make a run for it, but he still followed him. He wasn’t running, he was only pacifying the beasts with a charm. They quietened down immediately.

“You must go,” one of the leading elves shouted. “Both of you must leave here now, while you can. The goblins are in full battledress, they mean business.”

“We shall be alright, Thesus, but you must blow the Horn of Juba,” Partoon said.

“I cannot. It is not allowed. Elves are peaceful. We cannot declare war before one of our number is attacked,” Thesus replied.

“Then I wish you well,” Partoon said, leaping onto his unicorn and nodding for Tommy to do likewise. “We shall still be here, fighting with you.”

“I never doubted it,” the elf leader said.

Tommy scrambled up on to Modipius. “What are we doing?” he asked Partoon, frightened.

“Losing our first battle, I think. But we shall have to try,” said Partoon. “You just let your unicorn do whatever it wants, and watch out for any swords swinging about. I bet you don’t know you’re invisible now!”

“I am?”

“Who said that?” Partoon joked, winking at him.

The goblins closed right in, forming a circle around the elves. One of them, dressed in more elaborate armour and with a golden crown perched on his head, stepped forward a few paces.

“I Efelro, leader of goblins, have claimed the crown of Tarebia. Massena and her family are in exile. Henceforth all elves will bow to me!” he said.

“We shall not!” declared Thesus, taking a step forward. “Elf does not bow unto elf, so no elf will ever pay homage to a goblin!”

“You paid homage to Massena,” Efelro argued, almost spitting the words out.

“We did not. We gave Queen Massena the due respect she earned and was entitled. We still do. She has earned our support.”

Efelro grinned snidely. “You disappoint me, Thesus. I was going to give you rank over the elf slaves.” He walked slowly up and down in front of the elves, surveying them. “Any of you fancy an easy life?” he asked. “Step forward if you do.”

Like soldiers drilling on a parade ground, at precisely the same instant, thirty elves all took one step backwards. Thesus chuckled. Efelro coloured up, looking angrier than ever.

Invisible, Partoon flew over the top of Efelro, and so close that one of his unicorn’s hoofs knocked the golden crown from off the goblin’s head. “I bet you don’t know who did that!” he shouted.

Tommy watched his friend as he made the unicorn land close behind Efelro. He had an idea what was coming next, and waited. It wasn’t exactly as Tommy imagined. The king didn’t bend down to retrieve his crown. Instead, another goblin stepped forward to pick it

up, so it was he who felt the full force of the unicorn's hind legs on his butt. Tommy giggled as the goblin was kicked forward and fell on to his face. The crown rolled along the ground, further away from the self-proclaimed king.

Efelro hurried after the crown, but not wishing to bend over and receive a kick, he picked it up on the end of his sword. Raising the sword into the air, the crown slid down the blade into his hand. He sneered as he placed it back on his head, and patted it repeatedly to stress the point that he was the king.

The patting was just too much for Partoon to resist. He jumped down off his unicorn and invisibly danced all around the goblin.

"Pat as pat will, cowpat on his head shall spill!" he sang out.

The goblin's hand came down to pat the runniest of cowpats, squelching it all over his head so it dripped down on to his face. It was a very smelly one too. The elves showed their appreciation and jeered. Tommy was nearly wetting himself giggling.

Efelro was fuming. "Pixie magic! Show yourself, you coward! Fight fair!" he roared.

Partoon made himself visible and stood in front of the goblin.

"Yes, it's pixie magic, Efelro. Stronger than goblin tricks, and don't you forget it! But I am no coward. Give me a sword and I will fight you for the kingdom," he said, beaming.

"You!" Efelro exclaimed. He appeared shocked.

"Yes, it is me," Partoon laughed. He was only a young pixie prince, but his expertise with a sword at the annual tournaments was already legendary.

“But pixies have never wanted the kingdom before,” Efelro spluttered nervously. “You could have taken it off the fairies anytime.”

“No, we haven’t wanted it, but I bet you didn’t know pixies have never wanted goblins either. If I win, I shall give the kingdom back to the fairies, and I may just spare you some agony in exchange for returning the fairy royals,” Partoon said, grinning confidently.

A rousing cheer went up from the elves.

“Fight! Fight! Fight! Fight!” they chanted, jumping up and down.

Efelro knew he dare not risk a duel with the young prince. Pixies were nimble creatures. Where goblins were a little slow and cumbersome, pixies could flit about with ease. Partoon was already renowned for his swordsmanship; he would slash him to pieces.

“No, I will not fight you for the kingdom,” Efelro said, staring coldly at the pixie. “Why should I? I already have the kingdom! You will never see the fairy royals again! They are trash!”

A gasp went up from the elves.

Efelro turned his head to look at his goblin troops. Raising his sword high in the air, he shouted, “Put down the uprising!”

The goblins charged forward.

Modipius flew up, taking Tommy to safety above the battle. The unicorn kicked out continuously at goblin heads, but with so many of them, it wasn’t making much of an impact. Partoon was doing well. Several goblins had fallen, badly wounded by the sword he’d wrestled from one of them. And then it happened. The elves were defenceless; they had no weapons with them and couldn’t fight back. They only had their fists against the swords as

they tried to run away. With such little resistance, a goblin raised his sword and sliced off a fleeing elf's head.

It was so unnecessary. Given time, both elves and goblins can recover from the most flagitious wounds, ones that without a doubt would kill a human, but not from a severed head. There had been battles before in the magic kingdom, horrendous ones eons ago, nevertheless they were always won and lost on the numbers wounded and unable to carry on with the fight. Though accidents had occurred in the past, never before had such finality been deliberately inflicted.

A hush fell over the battlefield. Everyone paused to watch the head rolling along the ground. Thesus untied the horn from his rope belt and blew it as hard as he could manage, turning in every direction.

“Strewth!” Jason exclaimed. “Goblins are horrible!” He glanced at the clock and decided, as much as he didn’t want to because the story was gripping him, he really needed to get up. If he stayed there much longer, his mother would be moaning at him. Closing the book, and remembering the page number, he put it on his bedside cabinet and heaved himself into his wheelchair. He chuckled entering the shower, wondering if pixies and elves suffered the same routine every morning.

Chapter 4

Jason took a long shower, thinking about the story and wondering what might happen next. He guessed that horn would bring hundreds of elves running into battle, and he couldn't wait to see if he was right, but he knew he'd have to eat breakfast before he could get back to the book. He dried himself and dressed in his clean clothes, and by that time his food was waiting on the table.

"Are you enjoying that book?" his mother asked, putting a cup of tea down next to him.

"It's okay, I suppose," Jason said, not wanting to admit the truth.

"Well, if you want it changed this week, you'll need to finish it today."

"I will."

Jason hurried through breakfast so he could get back to it as fast as he could.

Chapter Three

Partoon became invisible again, and finding his unicorn, he galloped across to join Tommy. "I bet you don't know what happens now!" he said.

"Lots of elves turn up for battle? How many elves are there?" Tommy asked.

Partoon frowned. "Why would anyone keep records? No one knows how many elves there are, but they'll all be here soon. There's going to be at least two funerals before the battle."

“Two? I only saw one elf killed.”

“Pato had a wife. She will die of grief, it is the elf way,” Partoon said glumly.

“Oh, no! Really?”

“Elves are strange creatures. The first hundred years or so, while they’re young, they are bit like pixies, fun loving, though they work and we don’t. Then they enter a second stage, pick a wife, settle down and work even harder. They only ever have one wife, never splitting up like humans sometimes do, and there’s never been an exception. I bet you didn’t know that!”

“No, I didn’t. Is there a third stage?”

“When they are old, aged over seven or eight hundred years, they seem to know when, they move to beyond the waterfall and join the wise old ones. They tell the stories, passing them on. They are the only records there are, the stories.”

“You mean that’s where they retire to in old age? Beyond the waterfall?”

*“Retire? Elves don’t retire. The couples work until one of them gets the weakness, and then their relatives are sent for. About a fortnight later, both will die within days of each other; one of the weakness and the other of grief. Trouble with Pato is his parents are still alive. Elves **expect** their parents to die first, so that grief doesn’t kill them, but when a son or daughter dies first, the parents can go too. There might be more funerals yet; I bet you didn’t know that!”*

“Oh, that’s so sad! But will the goblins wait while the funerals happen? Won’t they take advantage of that time?” Tommy asked.

“I don’t know. These things don’t happen very often. Maybe the one who watches us, the boy who doesn’t

walk, will do something to stop them.” Partoon craned his neck, looking skywards.

“Wha . . . ? No, it can’t be! Not again! How on earth could *I* ever stop them?” Jason looked up from the page dumbfounded. He thought for a minute, looking blankly all around the room, unable to believe the story, and then he carried on reading.

“But what can the boy do to help the elves if he cannot walk?” Tommy asked.

*Partoon replied, “He **can** walk, though. Pixies know these things. He doesn’t walk now, but he will. He has to! He is the only one who can find the fairy royals and save them.”*

“No! No, no, no! Don’t be so stupid! Stupid, stupid, stupid pixie! I *can’t* walk!” Jason cried out, throwing the book down. He turned over, burying his head in his pillow, sobbing. The book tumbled down the bed, rolling off and hitting the floor hard.

Ten minutes passed before, wiping his eyes, Jason leaned out of the bed and with quite some difficulty retrieved the book. He took a big sniff, a long one, found his page and began reading again.

“Wow! What was that?” Tommy asked, his eyes wide open in alarm.

Partoon urged his unicorn with his knees, and they flew high up, circling a couple of times before returning.

“I think it was a quake, a big one,” he said. “The goblins are rushing to the mines. Huge clouds of dust are rising up at the bottom of the mountains. I bet some of the mines have caved-in!”

Tommy asked, “Do you think the boy is responsible for the quake?”

“Sure to be!” Partoon replied, giving a wink.

Jason looked up. “Eh? Don’t be stupid! What did I do? I didn’t do anything!” Then he noticed the dent on the spine of

the book. "Oh, crikey! I did! I dropped the book! Oh, no! I hope I haven't killed anybody!" He rushed his eyes back to the page, to check.

"Come on, follow me," Partoon said. He urged his unicorn again, and this time it flew up heading for Bluebell Woods.

Modipius quickly followed Partoon, with Tommy calling out, "Where are we going? Shouldn't we be helping the goblins? They are beings after all!"

Partoon shouted, "I bet you don't know how strong fairies are!"

"Eh?" Tommy didn't understand what his friend was getting at.

"Fairies are quite strong and they are very bright lights. They'll be needed, but they can't fly while the queen's wings are tied. We shall have to take the fairies to the mines ourselves," explained Partoon.

"Oh!"

They arrived at the fairy glen on the far side of the woods.

Partoon jumped off his unicorn and began to dance on the grass, singing, "Fairies, fairies, come to us. The unicorns shall be your bus. The mountains have fallen, the goblins are trapped. We need you to help, or they'll all be zapped."

Little lights, sun bright, began to appear everywhere, and in their thousands they scrambled up the unicorns' legs, and then on up as far the animals' necks, knotting themselves in their manes.

When there were no more, Partoon said, "Don't be frightened, Tommy. This time we shall be going very high, to the top of the mountains, and I bet you didn't know we shall be flying upside down!"

“What!” Tommy dearly hoped his unicorn was correct in saying he couldn’t fall off, it was impossible. Upside down? Whatever for?

They didn’t fly upside down, not until they reached the mountains.

Circling high above them, Partoon called out, “Hey-up!” and the unicorns flipped over, violently shaking their heads.

Tommy didn’t fall off, and he was happy about that. Clouds of bright silver particles began to spread out, enveloping the air all around for as far as Tommy could see, and the sky turned colourful in the fairy dust, like one huge bright rainbow.

Partoon called, “Hey-up!” again, and the unicorns flipped the right way up before diving at a tremendous speed down towards the caves at the bottom of the mountains. There were caves at the top too, just beneath the snowline, and as they whizzed past them, he sang out loudly, “Dragons, dragons, wake up now. I need your help, I’ll show you how!”

Roars, billowing smoke, and flames came from the cave entrances, and then the beasts appeared, shook themselves a couple of times, and took to the air, following the unicorns down. At the bottom, Partoon could see all the sadness of the goblins. Because of their peculiar eyes, they couldn’t cry, but their ears drooping over almost double told him just how devastated they felt.

Fortunately, only one of the caves was blocked, the biggest one, but unfortunately it led to the biggest mine. Partoon soon learned that fifty goblins were trapped inside. He ran into the mouth of the cave, followed by Tommy, until they reached the rockfall blocking the way.

“Fairies, fairies, weave me hair. Make it strong for rocks to bear. I need it long just like a rope. It is the goblins’ only hope,” Partoon sang out.

The unicorns fidgeted uncomfortably as the fairies robbed them of their mane and tail hairs, spinning them into a rope. It wasn’t that they minded giving it, just that being plucked wasn’t the best experience they’d ever known, and they had an awful lot of hair to give.

Partoon fetched a few of the fairies and took them into the cave. Their lights scrambled over the fallen rocks, moving little chunks here and there, until they’d burrowed a tiny way through. After a few minutes, they came back. One changed from a speck of light, turning into a recognisable fairy. She whispered into Partoon’s ear and then became a light again.

Partoon ran out and shouted loudly from the cave entrance, “Bet you didn’t know they’re all still alive in there!”

“Oh, thank goodness!” Jason sighed. He didn’t particularly like the goblins, but he would have felt really awful if, by some strangeness of the book, he’d been responsible for killing any of them. Feeling relief that they were all okay, he read on.

The ropes were soon ready, and the fairies struggled putting them around the rocks, one by one. Once they were safely clear each time, the other end of the rope was looped around a dragon’s tooth, and backing up, the beast pulled the rock out of the cave. It was a long slow process, and sometimes more rocks would fall, but they kept on going until there was a large enough gap for the goblins to escape.

Satisfied the hole was large enough, Partoon shouted for the goblins to go deeper into the cave for a few minutes. Two dragons took it in turns to breathe fire

around the gap, melting and sealing the rocks so no more could fall during the escape. It took quite a while for the rockface to cool down, and then the fifty goblin miners scrambled out to safety. A huge cheer went up.

There were several hundred goblins out there by now, and they stood around in large groups, talking. Partoon and Tommy were just about to leave, to take the fairies home, when one of the goblins rushed up to them.

“We thank you for your help, pixie prince. The goblins have voted. Efelro is no longer our leader because he killed Pato. I, Bafario, leader of the mining goblins, have been elected overall leader. I shall deal with Efelro, and while I am the goblin leader, no goblin will lay claim to the kingdom.”

“Thank you, Bafario. That is good news, and I am happy, but do you know what Efelro has done with the fairy royals?” Partoon asked.

“No, Partoon, I do not. Only Efelro knows where they are and I think he will hold on to that information. It is all he has to bargain with for his life. I have already offered him exile in exchange for the information and he has refused. He demands complete freedom, and not all the goblins would go along with that.”

“Thank you for trying, Bafario. Pixies and goblins are friends once again, and I shall spread the good news to the elves so that we may prevent an unnecessary war. Hey-up!” Partoon said, and the unicorns flew up into the air, heading for Bluebell Wood.

Tommy spent the flight time deep in thought. Once the fairies were back home safely, and thanked for their help, he asked Partoon how anybody from the magic kingdom managed to enter his world.

“Why? Bet you want me to move in with you!”

Tommy chuckled. "I wish! It would be great to have a friend at home, But no, I was only wondering whether it could give us any clues where Efelro went with the royal fairies."

"Fairies and pixies can come and go as they like, they just make a wish. It's harder for goblins and elves, and things like trolls and dragons aren't allowed to leave anymore," said Partoon. "There are many communities in your world, in safe countryside places like woods and moors, sometimes at the bottom of large gardens, and any elf or goblin from the magical kingdom may visit them, but for anywhere else it can only be in response to a watcher who doesn't believe. We have to go then, and take a risk, in the hope of saving our lives."

*"You mean, every time someone says they don't believe in fairies or pixies, one **really** dies?" Tommy asked, horrified.*

"Not if they go to the place where it happened and convince somebody there the fairies, pixies, or whatever, really do exist. Then they are spared," said Partoon.

"Oh, crikey!" Jason exclaimed. Shocked, he closed the book. He remembered pooh-poohing when he first saw what the story was about, disbelievingly laughing at fairies and goblins in particular. Realising his actions might just have been what allowed Efelro and the fairies into his world, he felt sick. He thought about it for a long time.

Over lunch, trying to be casual about it, Jason asked his mother, "Do you believe in things like fairies and goblins, mum?"

She laughed, ruffling his hair. "I did the other day when it seemed nothing was where I'd left it, son. I thought then that we had a goblin in the flat."

Jason realised that was how Efelro had managed to live on and return to the kingdom. By moving things around and hiding them, he'd convinced his mother that he existed. But

what about the fairies? Remembering a film he'd loved, even though he hadn't believed it, to cover all four of the missing royal fairies, four times he quickly repeated, "I do believe in fairies, I do, I do!"

"Are you taking the Mickey out of me, Jason?" His mother laughed again.

"Would I?" Jason joked. "So did you find everything in the end?"

"Almost. I still haven't found where I hid the Christmas drink, though. There are three bottles of expensive sherry hiding somewhere."

Jason remembered the goblins in the cave were drinking naughty nectar from the human world. That could be it, he thought, Efelro might have given them some, or perhaps they'd stolen it off him. That meant the royal fairies had to be hidden in the flat, or somewhere close by. But where? Hadn't his mother just said she'd searched the place for various things, so why hadn't she found the fairies if they were there? He went back to his bedroom to give it more thought.

Chapter 5

All day, Jason thought about where the fairies might be, even through his physiotherapy, and when his mother wasn't looking, he searched in as many places he could reach. There was no sign of them anywhere.

He didn't read any more of the book that day, not even when he went to bed that night, so upset was he. Moping around while getting ready for school the next morning, he told his mother not to change that particular library book, only the other two, and he hid it under his pillow in case she should forget. He knew he would have to finish reading the story sometime., but not right now. He didn't want it to have an unhappy ending, and it seemed that only he could put that to right.

The minibus pulled up outside and the driver tooted the horn. Jason kissed his mother goodbye, reminding her about the books. He wheeled himself outside, waiting at the back of the vehicle while the driver operated the tail lift. Inside, while watching his mother through the window leaving for town, he pulled the securing strap tightly around himself, fastening it, and then they were off, his mother going in one direction and he in the other.

Before the minibus could reach the end of the road, the enormous dustcart entered the narrow street. With it being impossible to get past, the driver pulled the minibus over so that one set of wheels were on the pavement, and they waited as the refuse collectors slowly made their way down the street, house by house, emptying the wheelie-bins.

“Blooming heck!” Jason screamed out. He had just suddenly remembered something, and there were tears in his eyes.

Everybody in the vehicle turned to look at him. Before anybody could stop him, Jason unfastened his strap and slid open the side door.

“Oh, Partoon, you’d better be blinking right!” Jason cried out, leaping through the door. “Come on legs, run! You can do it! You’ve *gotta* do it!”

And they did! Jason was wobbling all over the place, but he was running, and he was getting there. Gasping on reaching it, he pulled open the lid of their wheelie-bin and began frantically rummaging around inside, chucking plastic bottles and cans out willy-nilly. He had to be right! Efelro had said the royal fairies were trash! The trashcan was the only place he hadn’t looked!

“Got it!” he screamed, seeing the dim lights flickering in his mother’s empty nail varnish bottle. He grabbed it, threw everything else back inside quickly, just in time for the man collecting it, and after fumbling for his key, he rushed indoors.

Placing the bottle on the kitchen table, he unscrewed the top. It still had the brush attached, and inside that must have restricted the fairies even more.

“I do believe in fairies, I do, I do!” he desperately shouted out four times.

One by one, the four lights grew brighter and flew out of the bottle, coming to rest on the table. When they were all out, they changed into recognisable fairies, sitting on the side of the table swinging their legs.

“Don’t go anywhere!” Jason said, rushing into his bedroom and retrieving the book. He found his page. The fairies watched, smiling, as he read on.

“Wow, look! Partoon, look! The fairies are flying again!” Tommy exclaimed excitedly.

“The boy has walked! He has rescued them! The royal fairies are free! Yippee!” Partoon shouted. “He’ll be able to come here and visit us now, and I bet he didn’t know that!”

“Yayayayayayaya!” laughed the Rotorbird as it flew past. “I told him he hadn’t seen the last of me!”

THE END

“Wow! A happy ending! I did it!” Jason said, grinning.

“Thank you for being so brave and rescuing us,” the fairy with the crown said sweetly. “For that you have earned the Freedom of Tarebia. Anytime you are alone, you only need close your eyes and say, “Yayayayayayaya!” and you will enter our magical kingdom. We must go now, but don’t forget to look us up sometime, will you?” She winked.

“No, your majesty,” said Jason. “I hope to visit soon, but first I’ve got to surprise my mum!”

“Why don’t you take her into J’s Bestest Burger Bar? That’ll surprise her!” Queen Massena said, and then all four fairies seemed to burst into a fit of uncontrollable giggling before disappearing.

The minibus driver was stood scratching his head by the garden gate when Jason rushed outside.

“I won’t need you anymore, thanks,” he told the man, as he tore up the street heading for town.

Jason found his mother in the library. He was giggling as he walked up to her and tugged her arm. She looked round, and shocked to see him walking, came over faint. She had to sit on a nearby chair. He picked his own books that day and then suggested, to celebrate him walking, they should pay a visit to J’s Bestest Burger Bar, almost next door, saying she looked like she needed a drink anyway.

His mother would have bought him anything he wanted for being able to walk. She could still hardly believe it as she made her way up to the counter of the burger joint. The guy serving turned round to ask what she wanted. She took one look at him, gasped, and passed out, collapsing to the floor.

“Mum!” Jason screamed.

“Melissa!” the guy screamed even louder, running round to pick her up. Putting her on a chair, he began fanning her face with a cardboard tray.

“You know my mum?” Jason asked, as Melissa began to come round a little bit.

“It was a long time ago,” the guy said, “but we lost touch. I guess she must have settled down with someone and got married. I asked her to marry *me* once, but I don’t think she believed me. So what’s *your* name?”

“I’m Jason, her son, and she never married anyone. Your name’s not Jay, is it? You look like me; you’re not my dad, are you?”

“Jay’s son? Jason? I really, really hope so!”

“Where have you been for the last ten years?” Melissa asked, still looking frail.

“Searching for you, of course! Why do you think I moved here? I tried all the places I thought you might go for years, but you were never in any of them. If only you’d told me your surname, I might have found you.”

“Phew! I’m feeling okay now. You can stop fanning me. It was just a bit of a shock seeing you again after all this time. So, tell me, do you happen to have any children?” Melissa asked, standing up.

“Only the one,” he replied.

Melissa sounded disappointed, saying, “Oh, that’s nice! You found someone then, and settled down.”

“This one,” Jay said, putting his arm around Jason.

“You’re not married, then?” Melissa asked hesitantly.

“No, I’m still waiting for your answer, aren’t I? You never gave it to me that night.”

“Really?”

“Yes, really. So what is it? You’re not going to make me wait any longer, are you?”

“I guess it has to be yes, doesn’t it?” Melissa laughed.

Jay picked Melissa up and spun her around madly, hugging her. “Guys, meet your new managing director!” he called out to the blokes working behind the counter and in the kitchen.

“You own this?” Melissa asked giving a little frown.

“And another twenty-seven just like it,” he replied, winking at Jason. “There is a bit of a clue in the name, isn’t there? J’s Bestest Burger Bar?”

“Wow! I do believe in fairies, I really do, I really, really do!” Jason exclaimed, as his father hugged him too.

THE END.