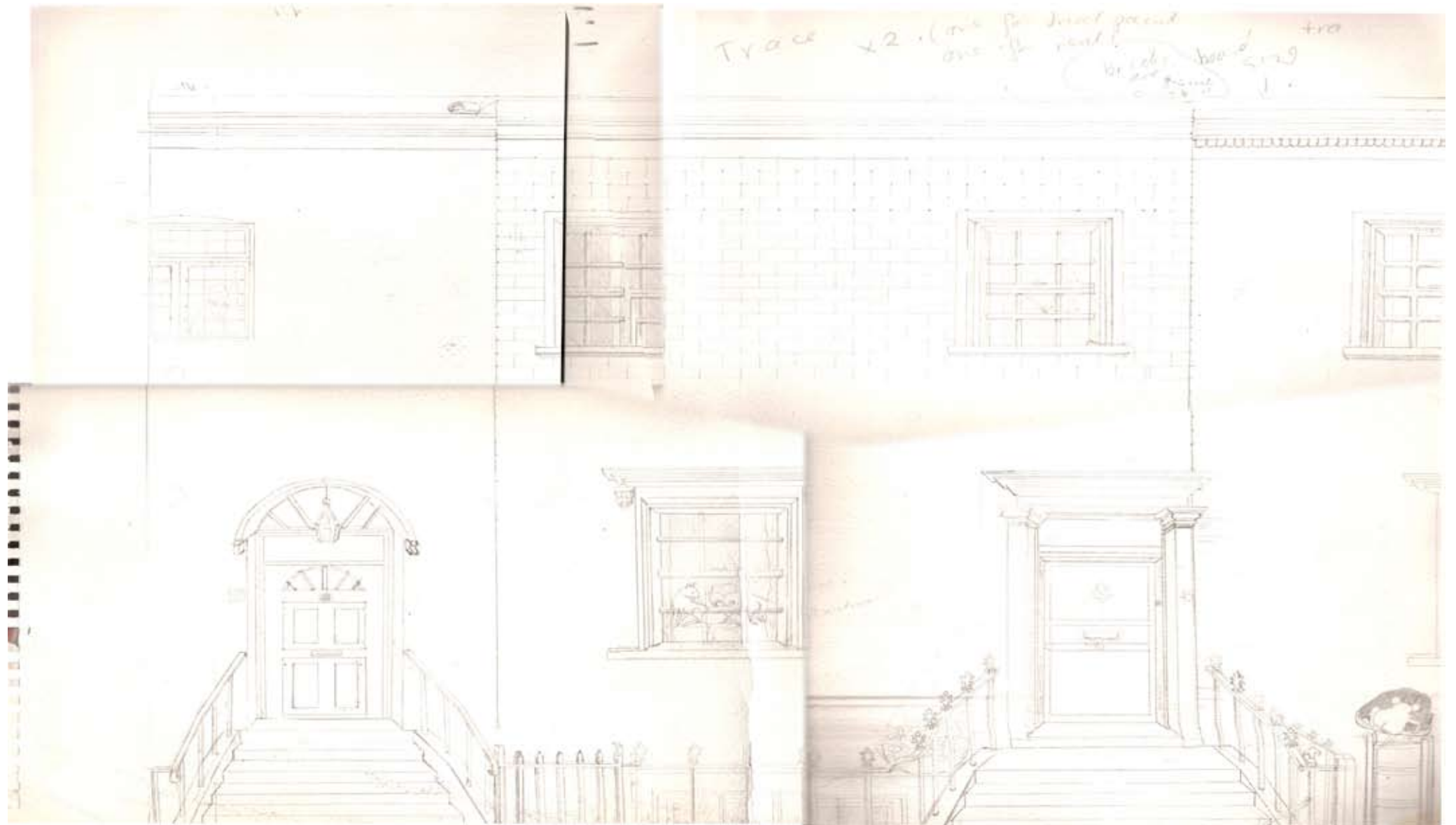


Thomas's Adventure





Thomas was feeling rather cross.

Mummy and Daddy were at work; Brianne had taken Matthew upstairs; Garibaldi, Kutching and Kit-Kat were busy too. There was NO-ONE to play with and when Thomas looked out of the window he felt even crosser.....

"Oh botheration!" he said to himself, as he crawled under the kitchen table, clutching a bag of prunes. "I can't even run away, because it's raining!" He folded his arms and sang a song:

"Rain, rain, go away,
Come again another day,
Thomas wants to go and play."

He popped a prune into his mouth and looked out of the window again. There was a flash of lightning and a roll of thunder and the rain came down harder than ever. Glumly, Thomas watched the trickles of water running down the kitchen window. "Bother, BOTHER, BOTHER!" he muttered to himself, "what a boring, BORING day!"

"Psst!" What was that? "Psssssst!"

This time something tickled the lobe of his ear and Thomas gave it a scratch. "Ow! Stop it, you careless boy!" scolded a tiny voice. "You almost knocked me over!" There, perched on his shoulder was a tiny, odd-looking man.

"Hi, I'm Jimmy," announced the stranger. "Good morning, Jimmy", replied Thomas politely. "I'm Thomas Dougherty!" "Shh.... Not so loud!" whispered Jimmy. "Nobody must know I'm here. It's a secret." He tapped his nose and gave a wink. "I thought", he continued, "that we could have an adventure together!" Thomas beamed. He felt better already.

"I'll take a deep breath while you count to ten. Then, when I shout JUMP, we'll both jump together" explained Jimmy. "Right?" Thomas's heart beat faster with excitement and he clutched his bag of prunes tightly. He nodded solemnly. Jimmy took a deep breath. Thomas began to count: "one...two...three...four...five...six, seven, eight nine TEN!"

"JUMP!" shouted Jimmy.....but, OH DEAR, when they landed and opened their eyes they were still in the kitchen. "I'm afraid", said Jimmy, "without my magic wand, which I lost recently, things don't always work out as I expect." Seeing Thomas's disappointed face, he added kindly: "Let's try again!" So they did.

Once again Jimmy took a deep breath while Thomas counted to ten. "Jump!" squeaked Jimmy, and this time they went whizzing through the air.....

Now, it just so happened, quite by chance, that at the very moment Jimmy shouted JUMP for the second time, Kutching, Thomas's favourite cat, was jumping down from the sink, and she got mixed up with the magic..... So she came too....

They landed on the shore of a lake in a land to which Thomas had never been before.

"Into the boat you get!" ordered Jimmy. "Boat? Where?" asked a puzzled Thomas. Jimmy pointed at something small and green on the water. "Over THERE, of course. Can't you see?"

Thomas looked. Then he stared. "That's just an old leaf!" he exclaimed in surprise. Surely Jimmy didn't mean that!

Jimmy chuckled at his little joke. "Now watch this!" he said. First he crossed two fingers of his right hand and then two of his left. He held them in the air and murmured into the wind:

"Abricadabra! gazEE-gazum, Hee, Hee! Ha, Ha! Ho, Ho! Hum, Hum!"

Thomas's eyes grew round with amazement as the leaf got bigger and bigger and changed into a beautiful boat. As for Jimmy, he was quite delighted with himself, because, without the help of his wand, his magic often went completely wrong.

Clutching Kutching firmly around her middle, Thomas climbed into the gently rocking boat. "MEEOW!" wailed Kutching, who didn't like THIS idea at all! "Don't you worry, Kutch", whispered Thomas. "I'll look after you, so don't be afraid", and he picked up an oar.

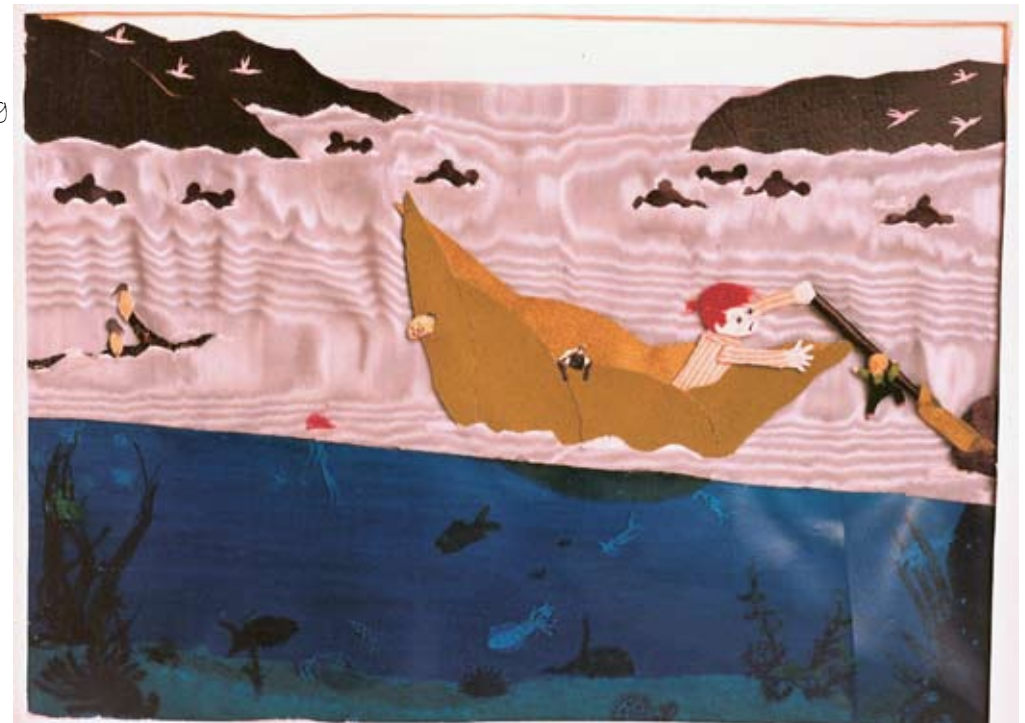
"Hey! Wait for me!" shouted Jimmy. "I'm too small to climb up on my own!"

Quickly Thomas held out a wet oar and fearfully Jimmy stepped and slithered along it.

At last he tumbled willy-nilly into the boat. "Phew! Made it!" he gasped.

With a gentle breeze blowing over them, they sailed across the lake, singing cheerfully:

"Row, row, row the boat,
Gently 'cross the sea,
Merrily, merrily, merrily, merrily,
Life is but a dream....."





With a "bump", the boat landed on the other side. Kutching was very relieved and jumped onto the sandy shore, while Thomas helped Jimmy out. He wriggled his toes in the sand and as he did so a bad-tempered crab waved its claws at him.

"Get off my hole!" it grumbled in a scratchy voice. "How can I go inside when you've got your foot over the entrance? Get off, I say!"

Startled, Thomas jumped out of the way.

"ALL the animals living in this land can talk", explained Jimmy. "Come along and I'll introduce you to some of them."

They wandered up the beach and on the way met Terry Turtle plodding determinedly along the shore.

"Hi there!" called Jimmy.

Terry spat some bothersome sand out of his mouth.

"Beware of the Monster... BEWARE!" he mumbled in reply; then with one last heave and a bubbling sigh he slipped into the water and was gone.

"Yes, yes!" chattered another voice nervously. "You and your friends must take care! The Monster is out and about today - BEWARE!"

Looking up, they saw cheeky Chestnut, the monkey, swinging from a nearby tree.

"Oh Dear! Oh DEAR!" wailed Jimmy in distress. "We must go and warn Mrs Muddleduck to hide her ducklings. She's such a foolish bird, she'll never think of it herself."

"Now, you just listen to me", rasped an aged voice. "Stay with us and you'll be safe, but, if you go beyond the trees, you'll soon get into trouble!" Turning around, they saw old Grimble, the wisest creature in the land. He peered sternly at them through his spectacles.

"I'm sorry to disobey you, Mr Grimble", said Jimmy in his most respectful voice, "but Mrs Muddleduck is my friend and I must be nearby to help her if she needs me."

"No! No! Don't go!" shouted Mr Grimble in distress. "There is nothing you can do when the Monster is about. Come back..... Oh! COME BACK!"

It was too late. They had gone.

Gone beyond the trees.

Mrs Muddleduck's nest was tucked in amongst some tall reeds. In it there were three young muddleducklings, calling loudly for their mother. However, Mrs Muddleduck was nowhere to be seen. Jimmy wrung his hands in distress.

"Tut, tut! That silly old bird! We must find her immediately. You stand guard Thomas, while I look for her."

Before Thomas could blink an eye, Jimmy had vanished. Thomas began to feel frightened and rather alone, but just then Kutching meowed softly and rubbed herself against his leg. "Don't worry", she seemed to be saying, "I'm here. I'll look after you....." Thomas stroked her gently and began to feel much better. It was comforting to have her there.....

Just then, they heard a fearful, thunderous, roaring sound, in the distance. They listened carefully. It seemed to be getting closer. Soon they could hear heavy footsteps plodding along the earth. Thomas was sure the footsteps were coming straight towards them... Nearer and nearer.....

"I think the Monster is coming, Kutch", he whispered. Kutch tried to look fierce by opening her mouth and showing her sharp teeth. She stretched her claws and hissed loudly.

Thomas looked around. He needed something to fight the monster with..... He noticed a loose stick poking out of the duckling's nest. He gave one sharp tug, then another, and out it popped. He was only just in time!

"Aha!!" boomed a mighty voice. "I think I've found some lunch!" A puff of smoke curled its way towards Thomas. Thomas's heart began to beat faster, but he called out as loudly as he could:

"WHO GOES THERE?"

"ME", answered a gruff voice, "the MONSTER." Sure enough, there he was, standing over them. "Go away you horrid thing!" cried Thomas in a trembling voice. Kutching spat as ferociously as she could. "Shan't!" replied the Monster rudely - and he moved a bit closer.

Thomas was a brave, brave boy, so he didn't run away. Kutching was a brave, brave cat and she didn't run away either!

"Keep away from us, or I'll fight you with my stick!" shouted Thomas.

The Monster looked at Thomas's small stick in surprise. Then he grinned wickedly and moved closer still. Kutching meowed in warning and Thomas shouted:

"I'll chase you into the lake!"

The Monster rolled his eyes and laughed and laughed at the very idea of being chased into the lake by such a small boy, holding a very small stick. Then he sent a burst of flames straight towards Thomas and Kutching.

"I am going to EAT you!" he roared.

"I won't let you", replied Thomas in a rather squeaky voice "because I'll put a spell on you and change you into a different kind of Monster. So there!"

The Monster suddenly went very quiet and still. There was a pause.....

"Really?" he asked at last.

Actually, Thomas didn't know how to change the monster with the magic spell, but he shut his eyes and pretended that he did. Now what were Jimmy's magic words? Thomas wasn't quite sure, but he took a deep breath and did his very best. He waved his stick and cried:

"Abricadabra, (he was sure of that bit) Er... Let me see now... Hee... Zum... Pum... Pum... Ha... Ho... Hum, Hum!"

"Meow!" added Kutching who wanted to help.

To everyone's amazement something happened that had never, EVER happened before.....

The great, big, fierce Monster burst into tears!

"Waaah!" he wailed. "Whaaaaaa! NObody loves ME. I'm not a bad Monster really. I only PRETEND to be fierce... It's only a game, but nobody seems to understand. They all run away and hide when they hear me coming... Oh, if only someone would understand and just be my friend! Boo... Hoo... Hoooooo!"

Thomas felt sorry for the Monster. Now what could he do to help? Then he had one of his GOOD IDEAS!

"I'll be your friend if you promise never, EVER to frighten anyone again", fixing Kutching with a warning look, he added: "So will my cat, Kutching. Won't you, Kutch?"

Luckily, Kutch began to purr.....



"Will you? Honestly?" asked the Monster, sniffing loudly.

"Course we will!" replied Thomas stoutly and to seal the bargain he offered the monster a prune from his bag. He wasn't afraid now. Who could be afraid of a Monster who cried?

"I promise NEVER, EVER, EVER, NEVER to do it again!" declared the Monster. He swallowed the prune hastily in case Thomas should change his mind.

"My name is Cyril, by the way" he said, as he smiled mistily through his tears. Just then there was a great commotion.

"HELP! HEEEEELP! Save my babies!" and Mrs Muddleduck burst into view, flapping her wings and making a great deal of noise.

"Be quiet!" hissed Jimmy who was riding on her back. "The Monster will EAT us!"

"Aitch... EE. EL. PEE!" screamed Mrs Muddleduck, covering her eyes and stopping so suddenly that Jimmy fell onto the ground in a tangle of arms and legs.

"Don't be afraid!" cried Thomas, "Cyril has promised to be a well-behaved Monster from now on, and he would really like to have some friends to play with. He never meant to be bad". He gave Cyril a hug.

"It's a trick, Thomas! Get away from there!" gasped Jimmy, who was beginning to look rather green.

"Help!" quacked Mrs Muddleduck again, in a faint voice.

"Please", begged Cyril. "Try to like me, just a little. I'll do my best to be the gentlest, kindest and friendliness Monster from now on, and to show my good intentions, I would be very happy to babysit for you Mrs Muddleduck, whenever you like.... that is ... if ... if you WANT me to....."

Mrs Muddleduck was so flustered that she said, "yes, please", instead of "NO THANK YOU!"

The Monster looked happy. He turned to Jimmy. "Perhaps you would like to have rides on my head, and see the world from higher up, instead of from down on the ground."

"Well", muttered Jimmy, who was beginning to think that a Monster with a silly name like Cyril couldn't be THAT bad, "well if you PROMISE not to hurt me, I mi...."

"Promise, PROMISE, PROMISE!" interrupted Cyril hastily.

"Hmmm", murmured Jimmy thoughtfully. "I can't understand why there's such a SUDDEN change in you. It's all very odd indeed!"



"I can explain!" shouted Thomas eagerly, "you see, Jimmy, I said you magic words - although they didn't sound exactly right - and I waved this stick just as if it were a REAL wand and..."

"Stick! STICK! That is a wand, my magic wand! You've found my wand!" Jimmy was so happy that he danced an excited little jig.

Mrs Muddleduck, who was peeping through her feathers by now, cleared her throat politely. "Ahem!" she said, "I think that THAT is part of my nest actually".

"You silly old duck" scolded Jimmy. "You used my wand as part of your nest. No wonder I couldn't find it!"

Mrs Muddleduck fluffed up her feathers and said in a rather troubled kind of voice:

"What was my wand doing in your nest?" She always got muddled over the simplest things! Everyone burst out laughing.

"No, No!" chortled Jimmy, "You've used MY wand in YOUR nest!"

Mrs Muddleduck didn't understand why they were all laughing, but she was pleased to think she'd made them all so happy. She stopped puzzling over the problem - it only made her dizzy. Instead, she bustled over to her nest, where she quacked softly and contentedly to her family.

Jimmy suddenly noticed that the sun was slowly sinking behind the hills. Owls were beginning to yawn and stretch their wings, and crickets chirruped in the distance. Before long, soft evening light would be settling over them.

"Thomas, Kutching! Quick!" Jimmy gasped. "You must go home before you are missed. You can visit us again, so long as you never tell ANYONE about your adventure today. It's a secret that should NEVER BE TOLD." With a wink of his eye and a wave of his wand, Jimmy sent Thomas and Kutching tumbling gently through that air. Kutching didn't like this at all so she was glad to find that Thomas had tucked her firmly and safely under his arm.

With his bag of prunes clutched in his other hand, Thomas waved and waved goodbye to his new friends until he couldn't see them and more. He and Kutching seemed to tumble on and on and Thomas was just beginning to wonder if Jimmy's magic had gone wrong again - when PLONK they landed on something soft and red.

They were only JUST IN TIME....

