

Chapter One

Today is December 27th. It's cold and trying its hardest to snow. It's still Christmas time and we have special plans because today is my younger sister Tabitha's 10th Birthday and we are on our way to Auntie Ruthy's house.

My auntie's road is always a bit chillier than the others round here because the big forest on one side shades it from the sun, making it lovely and cool in summer and Christmassy in the winter. The road we live in is full of tarmac and houses that heat right up and send out warmth like radiators. Another thing about Ruthy's road is that it's protected by law to keep it looking old and pretty, so it has old fashioned lamp-posts that give off a soft yellowy glow, unlike our street lights that blind you to death and could probably give you a sun tan!

I love this road. In fact every time we visit I say to myself, "I do love this road!" (In my head of course, not out loud; I'm not a lunatic). In the spring the forest is full of new leaves and shoots, with bluebells popping their heads up and squirrels running around all over the place. In the summer it's green and lush, with squirrels still running around all over the place. In autumn it's brown and yellow with big fat leaves floating everywhere and squirrels *still* running round the place like nutcases in a last-ditch effort to collect all the nuts. Now, though, it's winter: it feels very quiet, very still, and there's not a nutcase squirrel in sight.

So, now I've set the scene for you I had better get on with my story! We always try and guess Auntie Ruthy's presents in advance because she is the Present Goddess! We never manage to do it though; she surprises us every time. She has some kind of special brain cell that tells her to buy us things we didn't even know we wanted.

Well, on this particular day my mum pulls the car up right outside Ruthy's house in a space you could park a bus in. You may think this is normal, but down a narrow, wobbly little road it's not a bit normal; it's usually a

job to find anywhere at all. Today, though, there were loads of empty spaces - too *many*. Something strange must be going on!

“Well, this is very odd, but great all the same!” and Mum had a smile on her face. Small things make my mum smile (like cake and parking spaces!) We have one of those big ‘people carrier’ cars because there are six people in our family. Auntie Ruthy has a cool black sports car with two seats, and that’s what I can see myself in when I grow up, maybe in silver. Haven’t made my mind up yet, though. I’m eleven and a half, so I’ve got time to think about it.

As Mum applied the hand break the usual argument broke out of ‘who’s going to ring the doorbell?’ an argument we didn’t even need this time because Ruthy was already at the door calling out, “Happy Birthday, Tabitha!” We couldn’t actually hear what she was saying, because of the music, the closed windows and the ongoing argument about the door bell, but Tabby knew because she was smiling.

“Hi, Everyone!”

“Hello, Ruthy!”

“Hi, Auntie!”

“Feel any older, Tabs?” asked Auntie Ruthy. I can never understand why grown-ups ask you that - of course you don’t feel any different to the way you felt yesterday! Maybe it’s an over twenty-one thing and when I’m twenty one I’ll be able to let you know.

“Yes, I do actually. I’m double digits now!”

We all hurried inside while Ruthy went to the car to help Mum with some bags and stuff.

Mum started moaning about still finding wrapping paper all over the place at home, while we were busy inspecting Ruthy’s Christmas decorations. One perfect tree placed in a perfect pot, with expensive looking perfect decorations! One candle (white) on the hearth with three perfect sprigs of holly! Christmas cards lined up like soldiers in order of size - perfect! All very perfect! Our house is like a Santa’s Grotto, with bits sticking out of everywhere, things hanging from everywhere and

Christmas stuff anywhere we can get it. The tree decorations all stop about half way up because we can't reach any higher, though after a couple of days Mum moves bits around to even it up and make it look good. Ruthy's tree has chocolate baubles hanging from it with the chocolate *still* in! Ours were gone on the day they were put there, but Mum hasn't realised yet because clever Tabitha had the bright idea to save the wrappers, fill them with tissue and hang them back up!

After taking our shoes off like lightning we rushed downstairs to the kitchen to find a birthday card and a very beautifully wrapped present (with a magnificent bow!) sitting on the table. With a face as happy as a Hawaiian happy-face spider, (Google this, it will make you laugh), Tabitha turned into a lunatic and started dancing around the place like a twit.

"Oh, my God! Oh, my God! Look!"

"What is it?" we all shouted.

"It's a chemistry set - it's a grown-up one! It's got 333 experiments. Oh, thank you so much! It's brilliant! Can we use it now?"

"No, Tabs, wait till we get home. It's probably a bit messy," said Mummy.

"Oh, yeah, ok! Good thinking, Mum! Come over to ours and we can do some experiments together." Ruthy's house is always perfect, while ours is... well, ours is not. Our house has a cosy, cluttered and messed up feel - the sort of place where you lose things as soon as you put them down. I even nearly lost my sister once. (Joke!)

"Sounds great, Tabs!" Tabs sat there with this big box, turning it over and over and round and round, reading every single word on every single side - twice!

"Ok then!" Looking at the clock, Mum got up from her chair. "I'll have to go. My appointment's at eleven-thirty."

"Don't you want a cup of tea?"

"No, it's ok. I need to pop to the Post Office too - before they get busy."

Ruthy raised an eyebrow. (You never know with Mum and time!) “How long do you think you’ll be?”

“Oh, not very long. Be back about half-past one. Shall I bring us some lunch?”

“Yes, super!”

“Right, then! Now Girls, be good!”

“Yes, Mum!”

Kisses all round, which takes at least ten minutes. I don’t know why we have to do this every time Mum leaves us somewhere, it would be much quicker just to call out goodbye. It’s even worse when we’re in France and we have to do two kisses both sides. I’ve even heard that in Belgium you have to do it three times!

“Donc, les Enfants! Voulez-vous un chocolat chaud?” asked Ruthy.

‘Donc’ (it’s pronounced ‘donk’) makes us laugh every time we hear it. It means ‘so’ in French, but it’s SO funny! ‘So Children, do you want hot chocolate?’ is what she was asking.

“Oui!”

“Oui, what?”

“Oui, *s’il vous plait!*” (Yes please!) Auntie is so strict on manners, even in French!

“That’s better - come on then!”

Did I mention already that we are having French lessons? Anyway, we are - and practice makes perfect! Ruthy always makes the most *perfect* hot chocolate as well, not too hot and not too cold, with two sugars and stirred just right, and while we were drinking it we talked about our news and we found ourselves on the subject of our Christmas presents and other Christmas stuff.

Martha had the most to say here. She told us all about Father Christmas visiting her classroom, and how they’d found his foot prints in the snow that magically appeared on the inside window ledge. It’s funny how the

same thing happened when I was in that class but doesn't happen any more now I'm eleven - odd that! But Martha told the story in such detail and with so much enthusiasm that even I started to think it was true!

"That sounds amazing, Martha!"

"It was, Rachael!" answered Martha, with a lovely glowing smile on her face.

"Actually," announced Ruthy all matter-of-factly, "changing the subject slightly, I'm glad you girls are here today. There's a little job you can help me with."

"Cool! What is it?"

"Not shopping? I *hate* shopping!" Tabs hates everything at the moment; Mum says she's 'at that age', whatever that means!

"No, it's not shopping, Tabitha. I need to go into the loft."

Mmm, that sounds interesting, I thought: I might just offer to do that! We had never been in Ruthy's loft before, and we weren't allowed in our loft at home. Well, we weren't really allowed in anyone's loft! What was all that about? I sat and stared out of the window for a while, to give myself a little time to wonder about family lofts and lofts in general.

Yes, on thinking about it further, in every Disney film we'd seen every single person had a massive loft! Sometimes they were fitted out with pool tables, sofas, and really cool stuff; sometimes they were dusty old places full of the very interesting stuff that grannies leave behind. And one more thing - they were always called 'attics,' so why did we call them lofts? This was starting to sound like it could be an interesting job!

Our empty mugs were put in the sink to wash later, and Ruthy led us out to the shed to get the ladder. Yes, and another thing, in films they always had fancy pull-down steps to their attics! Auntie Ruthy, Nan and Granddad and us all had wonky old ladders that were a nightmare to get out and always needed someone to hold on at the bottom!

"I've been waiting to use this!" Ruthy was becoming quite excited. "Take a look, Girls! A magic ladder!"

We didn't know what she was on about, so we just stood there watching her bring out a shining new silver ladder with only three steps!

We all laughed. "Ruthy, do you have a magic wand or something? That's definitely not going to reach the loft!"

"Yes, well, in fact I do! Abracadabra!" She pulled the top step upwards and out came another step; she kept pulling up, and *more* steps appeared.

"Telescopic! Oh yeah, I knew that!" I announced.

"No you didn't, Lilly." Martha gave me a suspicious look.

"Cool!" Rachael was obviously rather impressed.

"I know. Great, aren't they! And you'll be the first to use them. They were a surprise gift from Father Christmas - I didn't even know I wanted them."

"That would make sense. Father Christmas probably uses them too, to get up to the top of the chimney, so he can get down it."

"Yeah, good thinking!" Martha without question was in total agreement.

"Duh!" My sisters are so immature.

"Well, you never see him with long ladders sticking out of his sleigh, do you Lilly!"

"True, Martha, true!" says Ruthy, winking at me, and I do my best to wink back. Ruthy and I have a mature bond thing going on that my sisters don't have at their age, and I don't think they can even wink yet either. It's quite tricky - like raising one eyebrow: now that's very tricky indeed.

Suddenly the doorbell rang and we looked at one another; we weren't expecting anyone else!

"Oh? Wonder who that can be!"

"Stay down here, Girls. I'll only be a minute."

While Ruthy was gone for a 'minute', we investigated what else was in the shed. First we noticed a bag of 'Miracle-Gro', which personally I don't

understand. Plants just grow anyway - there's no miracle. Now if it was called 'magic' grow, that *would* be interesting! There were the usual gardening tools as well, and an *electric* mower. It must take all of ten seconds to cut the grass! The garden is so tiny you can't even run in it. Outside, there were lots of big plants in big pots dotted about the place, pansies in square pots, an old white wooden table and chairs, and a very old metal watering can. There was also a pear tree so wonky it looked as if it was about to fall over. In fact everything looked old, worn out and about to fall over, which was strange considering that everything inside the house was the complete opposite: perfect!

Ruthy came back into the garden carrying a small child, whose face we couldn't see. "Look who I found on the door step!" she exclaimed. "It's Paige!"

"Hi, Paige!"

Paige didn't respond; she never does. It takes her about half an hour to show her face, then another half an hour to start speaking: she is very, very shy; also pretty and very little. I think she's about three years old and she weighs about as much as a single feather. Paige is a very fussy eater; in fact she's a very fussy everything - practically perfect in every way, just like Mary Poppins! She is always neat and tidy, keeps her toys in order and is very, very polite. Oh, and of course she's always very, very clean too. Paige doesn't much care for dirt of any kind.

Our other auntie followed Ruthy into the garden. She's not my mum's sister kind of auntie, she's my uncle's wife; her name is Kissie and she was carrying Paige's sister Maye, who is still a baby. I can't really describe Maye, as she doesn't do much yet. She just laughs a lot, and has blonde hair.

"We saw your mum down the road and she said you were all here, so we thought we'd pop in and say hello. We can't stay - we're off to go food shopping," Kissie explained.

SHOPPING! We all hate shopping, it's so boring! Unless it's your turn to push the trolley, which as there are four of us is only once a month.

"Can Paige stay with us?"

I thought I could save her from the ordeal! Maye doesn't really know what's going on anyway, and she always gets to sit *IN* the trolley! Something I can't even remember now!

"Yes, of course!" said Auntie Ruthy. "The more the merrier!"

"Yayyy!" Paige was smiling, and seemed to have forgotten her shyness all of a sudden! She wiggled her way out of Ruthy's arms and ran over to us in excitement. After a quick cup of tea and the ten minute kissing goodbye routine, Auntie Kissie and Maye went on their way and we were ready to continue our loft adventure. Yesss!

"Put your shoes back on, it's not safe to climb the ladder in socks."

The ladder was placed with its feet against the opposite bit of wall, leaning diagonally up to the loft hatch. Looked a bit scary, but hey! Where there's fear there's adventure! Auntie went up first, pushed back the hatch and laid it down flat on the other side, then reached up into the darkness, and swung her arms about.

"Lilly, shoot back downstairs please, and get the big yellow torch from under the sink in the kitchen."

I didn't need to be asked twice, and off I shot. A torch! This was going to be good - I had a really good feeling about this. Within seconds I was back, to find Ruthy had got down from the ladder.

"I can't find the stupid light-pully thing."

"I'll go up if you want. I'll be able to find it for sure!"

"Ok, I'll hold the ladder. Now, when you get to the top the pully should be up above your head somewhere."

One second later the torch was on: I was up the ladder, the light-pully thing found and pulled, I was in the loft, and the light was on! Splendid!

"Well done, Bones!" She calls me Bones sometimes because when I was little I used to sit on her lap and apparently my bum was bony! Nice! We all have nick-names, and I can't even remember where some of them came from. I'll have a think and tell you about them later.

"What's up there, Lilly?" enquired Rachael.

“Are we all going up?” Paige was looking a bit solemn!

“Is there a pool table?” Tabs asked. There were a lot of questions going on!

(Ha! So I’m not the only one who thinks that about pool tables. Interesting!)

“There’s nothing, absolutely nothing! It’s completely empty!” I walked around a couple of steps; I couldn’t really go any further - it wasn’t that big a place!

“Why are we going up there, if it’s empty?”

“Did you just want to check out your new ladders, Auntie Ruth?” I shouted out wittily, practising the art of sarcasm as I stuck my head back down the hole.

Ruthy smiled at me. “Maybe I did, Lilly, or maybe I didn’t. Come on, Girls - one at a time! Hold on, and be careful!”

“Don’t think I’m allowed up there.” Miss Paige Poppins taking care of her own safety at the ripe old age of three!

“It’s ok, Paige, I’m going to be right behind you.”

Once we were safely up, Ruthy closed the loft hatch in case anyone accidentally fell back down the hole, and we all stood there.

“Now, Lilly, pull the cord again and turn the light off!”

“No, Lilly-a!” Martha shouted out. Martha is not the biggest fan of the dark.

“It’s ok, Marf - hold on to me! We only need to do it for a couple of seconds.”

I held onto the pull cord ready to pull, and then looked down at the torch to find the on/off button. By the time I looked back up, Tabs, Rach, Marf and Paige were stuck to Ruthy like baby opossums. (You simply must google: opossum carrying babies. Look at ‘images’ - you won’t believe it!)

“OK, I think we’re ready. Turn it off!”

I held the pully thing and had my other hand ready on the switch for the torch. I wasn't taking any chances of being in the dark for too long, so with perfect timing one was pulled and the other pushed. It was still quite dark; all we could see were two faint little streams of light coming through the roof in the very far corner. We all stayed silent, wondering what on earth we were doing, or supposed to be doing, and no one moved a muscle. I even held my breath - don't know why really, seems a bit stupid now, but it was a tense situation. Anything could happen! This was a very long couple of seconds, too long. What was going on and what were we waiting for? I was looking everywhere - up, down, left, right, up again, down again - but I couldn't see anything. I couldn't even sense anything, and I started to wait for a spooky chill or something. Nothing happened! I'd stopped holding my breath by now, as I'd run out of air and was taking short sharp breaths instead. My eyes didn't seem to be adjusting; I was obviously going blind with fright!

"Ru - u...thy?" I said in a very small voice.

"Sssh!!"

Oh my God! 'Sssh' what? What could she hear? I couldn't hear anything. Oh no, there was something up here with us! That must be why she'd wanted us to help - she didn't want go into the loft on her own, in case something terrible was up there. This was not good, and I was starting not to like it at all. It seemed like another ten minutes before Ruthy whispered, "Oh no! Thought so!"

Thought what? Oh no, what? What was it? What could she see? Getting more and more frightened, I put my hand out in front of me to feel my way a little closer to where I knew the others were; then a little closer, so close I could feel Paige shaking with fear, and I had accidentally poked Martha in the nose - or I thought it was her nose! I had to say something; I had to know what was going on. So softly that I couldn't even hear my own words, I whispered, "What is it?" The tension was so massive I could feel sweat on my top lip, and it was winter for goodness sake! What could it be? What? What?! Why was it taking so long to find out?

"Going to need a roofer!"

“Ruthy! That’s not even funny!”

“Ha -ha! Turn the torch on, Lilly!”

“NOT funny!” The torch was on and the pully thing pulled.

“Ruu - tthh - yyy!”

“It was a *little* bit funny! What did you think was happening?”

“I don’t know, but I was getting a bit worried about it!”

“Honestly! You girls!”

“Ruthy that really *wasn’t* funny.” Martha’s eyes had welled up with big pools of tears, probably not helped by my earlier eye poking!

“Sorry, Honey, come here! It was only a little joke. I’ll make up for it - I have ice cream!”

“Ok!” we all said together with our scared faces slowly turning to smiles.

“Come on then, let’s get back down!”

Opening up the loft hatch let a bright light flood in from the hallway below as Ruthy began to reverse down the ladder, cradling Paige.

“It’s actually ok up here when the lights are on,” said Martha.

“Yes, it’s cool. I’ve found a bird’s nest,” Rachael announced. “Paige, are you sure you don’t want to stay up?”

“No thank you, Rachael,” and that was that!

“Where’s the bird’s nest?”

“Over here - look! Right up in the corner.”

“Girls, come on down!” Ruthy was now at the bottom of the ladder calling back up.

“Can we stay a bit longer? We’ve found an old bird’s nest.”

“Five minutes, then. Close the hatch, Lilly! I will lock it from down here, we don’t want any accidents. When I’ve got the ice cream ready I’ll come

and get you. And remember you can't open the hatch from up there, so knock on it if you need me."

"Ok!" we all shouted.

"FIVE minutes, ok!"

We could hear Ruthy and Paige's footsteps thumping down the stairs as we all sat studying the bird's nest. Looking around, we saw quite a few spiders' webs but no spiders. Tabitha carefully placed the bird's nest by the loft hatch ready to take home, and went off wandering around. Peeking behind the big chunk of brickwork that formed a chimney breast, she quickly spun back round to us.

"It's not *totally* empty, Lilly!"

We all walked over to take a look. Leaning up against the other side of the fire breast, hidden from view, was a very large mirror indeed. After glancing round to see if there was anything else lying about, we lined up in front of it and looked at ourselves. I adjusted my hair and straightened my top, (a new one I got for Christmas), admiring it and myself - I was looking good!

"Wonder why Ruthy left this up here and didn't put it in her lounge?"

"Would look nice in my bedroom, actually!"

Martha isn't really interested in what she looks like, so she was staring down at the floor and spotted a blue wooden bead probably left from someone's old broken necklace.

"Look what I've found!"

Just as she stood up to pass the bead to Rachel I froze, pointing with a very straight arm directly at the mirror. I tried to speak but couldn't make the words come out of my mouth. While the others were examining the bead I was still pointing silently at the mirror, like a frozen idiot.

Tabitha turned to pass me the bead. "LillyWhat are you doing, Lilly?" From the corner of my eye I could see her looking at me strangely, but my face didn't meet hers; it stayed frozen, fixed on the mirror, my arm

still pointing very straight. She followed my arm with her eyes, followed my finger, and then - she looked at what I was pointing at.

Now Tabitha was frozen! Rachael turned to us, turned to the mirror and she froze too. Now all three of us were frozen - frozen in shock at the sight of Martha picking her nose! But it wasn't the nose picking that shocked us: it was the fact that *my* reflection was normal, *Tabby's* reflection was normal, as was Rachael's, but Martha's reflection was a *boy*! A boy picking his nose!

Chapter Two

“Marf!” All our eyes were fixed on Martha’s reflection.

“Yep?” Martha’s eyes were fixed on the floor.

“Look in the mirror!”

She looked up, jumped in fright and let out a shriek. Her arms shot up into the air as she spun round to see the boy who was so obviously standing behind her. But there was no boy! She spun back again and just stood there like a statue, staring at the mirror.

While she was performing all these manoeuvres, so was the boy in the mirror!

“Martha?”

“Uh-uh?”

“What you doing?”

The boy in the mirror was once again picking his nose.

“It’s not me doing that!”

“What?”

“I’m not moving my arms, they’re moving themselves. And I’m definitely not picking my nose!”

I turned from looking at the mirror to look at Martha, and she was Martha - still a little girl, still my little sister - but when I looked at the reflection in the mirror she was a boy, a little boy: the same age and everything, but a boy!

“What the...?”

“It’s the bead! Lilly, it must be the bead! I was the one that found the bead! It’s a magic bead, Lilly!”

“It can’t be the bead,” said Rachel. “I’ve got it in my hand and I’m not a boy!”

“It must be - I didn’t do anything else!”

“Pass me the bead, Rach.” I held the bead tight in my hand. I rubbed it for some magic, blew on it like a magician, looked into the mirror, and nothing! Nothing had changed.

I said all the magic words I knew: the old fashioned abracadabra, bippity-boppity-boo, hocus-pocus, hey presto, shazzam and izzy-wizzy. Then we tried some made up words: tralar - bookar, rama-lama, ding-dong, and whoosha-blaloosha. Martha even threw in ishi-macka-rama-dong-balls. Goodness knows where her head goes sometimes, obviously that wasn’t going to work - it didn’t even sound magic! Actually nothing worked.

“Tell us exactly what you did, Marf, when you found the bead.”

“I looked down, I saw it, and I got it!” she explained.

“Did you put it in your mouth?” I asked.

“No, I’m not a baby, Lilly!”

“Up your nose? I’m not touching it if it’s got snot on it!”

“Shut up, Tabs, you idiot!”

“Which hand did you use?”

“This one.” She held out her left hand.

“Ah-hah - that’s it! She’s left-handed. Use your left hand, Lilly.” Tabitha’s extra-large brain shining through yet again!

“Oh, you’re so clever, Tabs!”

A very cocky expression took over Tabby’s face as she lifted her head high and nodded in total agreement.

I now had it in my left hand and - nothing! “You must’ve done something else, Marf!”

“NO – I – DIDN’T!”

“She must’ve done! Think, Marf, think!” Tabs was being a bit forceful.

“Don’t pick on me Tabith-a! I DIDN’T DO ANYTHING!”

I went through the process in my mind. One - we had been busy admiring ourselves while Martha had been off staring at the floor. Two - she must have looked down, seen the bead and picked it up. Three - she passed it to Rachael.

“Ha! Got it! She passed it to Rachael! What hand did you use Rachael?”

“My right.”

“That’s it - you used your *right!* Now, I’ll hold it in my *left* hand and pass it to you, Tabs. Then you take it off me with your *right* hand, ok?”

“Ok!”

“Ready?”

“Yep!”

Andnothing!

“Think, Marf-a, think!”

“I’m going down to Ruthy if you keep on at me. I DID NOTHING, I JUST PICKED IT UP.”

“Leave her alone, you two!” Rachael went over to Marf to give her a little cuddle, but in the reflection Rachael was cuddling a boy.

“Oooh, Rachael! You love boys! Have you got a boyfriend?”

“This is not the time Tabs, you wally!”

“Alright, it was a *little* bit funny!”

We all went quiet as we looked back at the mirror. Everyone had their thinking heads on; you could clearly see the concentration on everyone’s face - except Martha’s, and she was still nose picking.

“Well, I don’t know... it’s all very, very weird.”

“Give me back the bead, Lilly, I don’t want to be a boy any more!” protested Martha.

I passed the bead over, and Martha dropped it but quickly bent down to pick it up. When she stood up she was back! Her reflection was back! Marf was herself, and she was smiling!

“I’m glad I’m not a boy if all they do is pick their stupid noses all day!”

“That’s it! She bent down! Marth, drop the bead!”

She promptly did; she’d had enough of it anyway. The bead rolled a little way, but I stopped it just in time before it disappeared down a crack in the boarding. I bent down slowly! I stood up slowly! I had the bead in my left hand (for extra magic) and I looked in the mirror. My reflection had changed! I was a.....

“Ha-ha, Lilly! Ha-ha!” Tabs and Rachael were laughing so much they were holding their jaws to stop them from aching!

“It worked, Lilly, it worked!” Martha shouted, jumping around.

Oh, yay! It worked alright: I was a cucumber! (Nice!) Tabitha snatched the bead from my hand dropped it, bent down and then stood up and checked her own look in the mirror.

“Oh, yes! That’ll do nicely!”

“Give it to me, Tabs!” Rachael went through the same routine.

“Well! Not what I would have chosen, but it’ll do for me!”

So there we were. Tabitha’s reflection was a princess, Rachael’s reflection was a prima ballerina, and I was a cucumber!

“I’m not changing again.” Martha had her arms crossed in front of her, all defiant.

“Well, I definitely am!”

I dropped to the floor and stood up, forgetting all about the magic bead, but it worked anyway. We didn’t even need the bead; it was just a stupid old bead from a stupid old necklace after all. Down, up, down, up, down up I went like a yo-yo, my reflection changing with each move: monkey, firefighter, rabbit and mermaid all came and went. Caveman, penguin, banana, supermodel, elf... and then I stopped, not because I was happy

to be an elf, I was just exhausted! I took a little rest for a few seconds, and then went down and up again.... elf. And again elf, and *again* elf.

“What the...? It’s run out, darn it! I should’ve stopped at supermodel!”

“Elf is ok, Lilly! You look nice as an elf, and the green outfit goes with your eyes!”

“True! Green *is* my colour.”

Martha held my hand and asked. “Can I be an elf?”

“I guess! Just do what I did.”

“Will you do it with me?”

“Of course - hold my hand!”

We went down and up together, and would you believe it – up as an elf first time! None of the up and down nonsense I had to go through.

“If we’re going to be stuck as elves, I think it’s only fair you two should be elves as well!”

“You would think that, Lilly, wouldn’t you! This is the best I’ve ever looked!”

Tabitha was admiring her princess tiara and long flowing pink dress. Rachel was up on her ballerina toes, prancing around like a ... well, like a stupid prima ballerina.

“You’re just jealous, Lilly!”

She was right of course, I was totally jealous. But I was the oldest, so obviously always in charge and always correct.

“Yes come on, let’s all be elves!” Martha is so cute that no one can resist what she wants, ever. So with that we held hands, we did the old down and up routine, and ‘Voila!’ (French for ‘there you are!’) We were four little elves! Marvellous!

“Now what?”

“Oh for goodness sake, Rachael, what do you think?”

“I don’t know!”

“We step into the magic mirror! You’re so dumb, don’t you ever read?”

“What?”

“Like Alice in ‘Through the Looking Glass’, Dopey! You step into another land!”

“Yes, that *is* true, Rachael. They always do that in films, and I’ve seen loads of them,” Martha advised.

“Yes, yes, that’s right!” added Tabitha.

“So, are we ready for the adventure of a lifetime?”

“I was born ready!”

We were in fits of laughter; it’s not the sort of comment you expect from a five year old! Martha was obviously very keen. For the next couple of minutes we made fun of her for the time we watched the film ‘Bedknobs and Broomsticks’. (It’s a brilliant film - check it out). Martha went to bed with her shoes on just in case there was an adventure to be had in the night! The mocking didn’t seem to affect her much, though; she was extremely focused and very born ready!

“Let’s go all together, Girls, right foot first! Let’s do it! Step over the frame and in... ok?”

“Ok!”

“One, two, three - GO!”

Our right feet hit the mirror and stopped immediately. Four heads bashed against the glass with full force. Instantly I felt the pain on my forehead, but more than that I felt shock!

“What the...! That isn’t meant to happen!”

“You’re telling me!” We were all rubbing our heads in pain.

“Lilly-a!”

“What! That’s what all magic mirrors *do*. I’ve seen it a thousand times!”

“This mirror is stupid! Let’s go down to Ruthy.”

“Calm down! Maybe we just have to work it out.”

“Oh, for goodness sake!”

“Look, we know it’s magic don’t we! We know that much - so let’s try again.” I was hoping to encourage everyone.

“Easy, this one! We forgot to hold hands!”

“Tabs, may I say, I know you’re younger than me, but you truly were put on this planet to be a genius!”

“It’s nothing, Lilly. You’re welcome!”

We form our line, hold hands and go for it again.

“One, two, three - GO!”

“Oh, for crying out loud!”

“Think again, Tabs!” The already sore foreheads now had another bash right in the exact same spot.

“Hold our breath and close our eyes?”

“Good, Rachael, good!”

“One, two, three...”

“This isn’t funny any more; let’s just forget it!”

“No! Come on, we can do it! Can’t we, Lilly!” said Martha, obviously still super keen.

“Yes, Marf! Positive thinking, Girls, come on!”

The same old usual suspects: magic words; turning once to the left, turning once to the right; putting our hands up, then down - all it did was make our heads redder and more painful and our patience thinner.

“I’ve got one more idea in the bag. If it doesn’t work, it’s obviously not magic and we forget it. Agreed?”

“Agreed! My head can’t take much more,” Tabby moaned.

“Ok, let’s do it!”

So we bent down - as it had seemed to work before - and we crawled forward. I must say, though, I did have one eye shut and was gritting my teeth ready for another knock on my head. But this time there was no knock on the head. After another few seconds I felt a cool sensation hit my face, like the feeling you get when you open the fridge. I opened my other eye and my mouth began to relax and morph into a sort of smile! I looked to my left to see three heads poking through the mirror - but no bodies as yet, just heads. Feeling quietly confident, we slowly carried on crawling through to the other side of the mirror without a word being said.