

Phoenix House

Carenza Hayhoe

Monkey Business

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Acknowledgements

The story of Phoenix House began life as I built my first dolls' house watched by my then seven year old granddaughter. It was to replace the one that had been made for my grandmother when she was the same age and was to be for ourselves; the problem was to find a way that we could make ourselves small enough to get into the house. Three items are real, the doll Hannah who belonged to my great grandmother, the crystal ball and the spyglass which we bought on ebay. Dolls entered the house on the day we found a granny doll who soon began to spin stories and the book was born. I owe a huge debt of gratitude to my long suffering family who have encouraged me; to all those children and adults who have read the drafts and asked for more; to Tiffany Scull for her wonderful illustrations; and most of all to Graeme Talboys who has encouraged and guided me from start to finish.

Carenza Hayhoe
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The Illustrator

I really began my career as a slipware potter when I met Carenza Hayhoe during 2001 at her gallery The Wellbeloved on Portland in Dorset. I had always loved drawing and after showing Carenza some of my sketches she convinced me to move away from glazing and use my drawing ability with my pottery. I was hooked and threw myself into experimenting with different coloured slips under the same clear glaze. During this time I began to look at the technique of sgraffito and this really excited me, as it still does today. Here I found I could combine both my throwing, slip colours and the love and need to draw. Over time I have worked hard to develop and to produce pieces which are thrown to a high standard and well decorated. My slips are applied with a brush rather than dipping, this allows me to build up the colours in graduation from light to dark over the piece. Over time my designs have become more detailed and I have many sketch books containing drawings which I often revisit to develop further. Every thing I make starts life on paper and then moves onto my pots. I love the natural world and spend a lot of time drawing animals, birds and plants. I have found the Arts and Crafts movement and the Art Nouveau style influences.

Tiffany Scull

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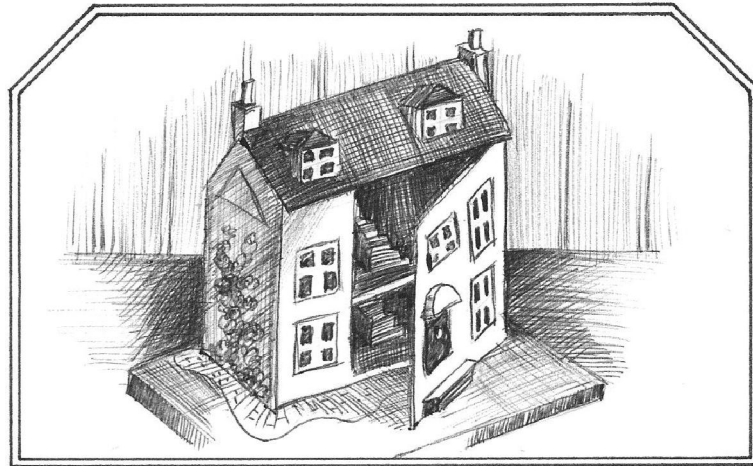
for

Kezia

who knows how to use a spyglass and shared the dream.

BITTER DAY

Ginny



Ginny slammed the front door. Another minute in that room and she would have screamed.

It was all wrong to have a party on a day like this. On any other day she would have been happy to listen to her grandmother's friends and answer their questions about school and all the other things that they thought she would be interested in, like boyfriends and stuff, but not today. She just wanted to be alone, to think about the last week and try to understand what had happened.

Connie was Connie to everyone; she'd never been anything else, even to her grandchildren. She had seemed ageless and unchanging, good at listening and safe to be with. Then, Connie in that hospital; there and yet not there. The coffin with her name on it being lowered into the ground. Now the only grown-ups in the family were Pa and Aunt Flo.

At least Connie hadn't been burned. Part of her was still on the island; she was still part of Innistone just like Ginny's mum, Hetty.

Thirteen was a horrible age; too old to cry and too young to be treated like a grown-up. Not that Ginny really wanted to be a grown-up. In fact she really didn't know what she wanted to be, she just knew that she was different.

The light was going fast and the path between Forty-Four and the house next door was almost dark. Ginny felt in her pocket for her pencil torch. It only had a narrow beam but it was sufficient. At the end of the path she climbed the gate. There was still enough light to see across the field to where the old house was standing, a tall shadowy shape with six steps up to the front door.

As she crossed the field, the grass scrunched under her feet where the snow had frozen again since starting to thaw. After the overheated room filled with grown-up gossip, the cold on her cheeks was oddly comforting. She looked up and saw one star in the darkening sky. "Twilight, and the evening star," she said to herself and tried to hum the tune Connie used to sing to her when she was little, but her voice wobbled. The darkening field, usually comfortably familiar, felt full of an unknown threat.

There were no lights in the house, but peering through the kitchen window she could see by the light of her torch saucepans and smashed plates lying all over the floor, chairs lying on their sides and the cat lying on top of everything. The sitting room was even worse, the place had been wrecked. The portrait over the fireplace was hanging at a drunken angle, a violin broken in half was only held together by the strings, music books were scattered everywhere, the delicate Chinese vases crushed under the weight of the piano which was lying on its face in the middle of the chaos.

A bulky, shapeless figure was coming out of the back gate of Forty-Four into the field, struggling with a heavy can and muttering as it approached the house. Switching off her torch, Ginny moved quietly into the shadow of the big sycamore tree and waited. She watched as the front door was wrenched open,

the can was swung towards the hall and a stream of petrol poured into the house soaking the carpet and curtains.

“Stop it!” shouted Ginny as she ran forward. “You can’t do that.”

Her Aunt Flo turned abruptly, slipped, and recovered herself.

“Oh but I can,” she snarled as she flung a match into the door of the dolls’ house. A huge orange and gold flame shot into the night sky. Glass cracked and shattered and clouds of black, oily smoke poured from the windows.

“We’ve had enough of childish nonsense in this family – this stuff is all silly, sentimental rubbish. Just toys and a dolls’ house riddled with woodworm and full of Victorian tat. I’m going to have enough trouble sorting out the old woman’s bits and pieces without hanging onto nursery junk like that.”

The whole house was blazing, ash rising into the air as the furniture, so small and delicate, disappeared into nothing in the heat generated by the can of petrol.

“That won’t take long and as soon as the old biddies back there have gone, I can begin sorting through all Connie’s stuff before getting back to London in the morning.”

Around the base of the bonfire were a few scattered pieces that the flames had not yet reached. Ginny darted forward, snatching at what she could rescue without getting caught by the fire. She grabbed a doll with leather hands and a wax face not yet destroyed by the heat as well as a small spyglass of mahogany and brass.

“You stupid fool,” shouted Aunt Flo, dragging her back. “You’ll fry and I’ll be blamed.”

“Fat lot you’d care,” screamed Ginny. “The house was for Lou.”

“Don’t be wet – sentimental rubbish. Get the child a Barbie and she’ll soon forget all about it.” Aunt Flo turned away.

She was not alone. Clutching the back of her skirt and trying desperately to keep up was the shadowy figure of a small child.

Ginny could see right through her to the folds of Aunt Flo's skirt.

It was only in recent months that Ginny had begun to see these shadows, and not everyone had them. Some were quite like the people they were attached to and some, like the child clinging onto Aunt Flo were very different. This little one turned and stared wide-eyed at Ginny. She was sucking her thumb and looked so very sad. It was obvious that Aunt Flo had no idea that she was there, for she nearly caught the child in the garden door as she slammed it behind her.

Clutching her two treasures tightly, Ginny turned from the blaze and ran back the way she had come, stumbling blindly up the dark path as all the unshed tears of the past week poured down her face. Sobbing took over her whole body, choking her. She gasped for breath and clung onto the ivy on the wall which hung over the path so thickly that a slim person could bury themselves in it and not be seen.

Time seemed to stand still as she struggled with her misery. "If only I could remember Hetty properly," she thought. "And Lou was so tiny when she died she doesn't remember her at all." She scrubbed her face angrily with her sodden hankie. "Aunt Flo is horrible and useless."

Something moved in the ivy above Ginny's head and an owl hooted in the distance. She leant back against the wall and thought about her family. How could Connie's son and daughter be so different? Why couldn't Flo be like Pa? Pa, bony, bearded, and tall but so gentle, always ready to put down his tools and listen, always kindly if a bit absent-minded. What if his jeans did need a patch from time to time or his sweater needed darning? He still managed to wear his clothes with a dignity that defied criticism.

Most men would have found their daughters a stepmother, but Pa had managed with Connie in the background ever since Hetty had died. "Better happy than rich," he would say. "We've

got our own home, enough to eat, good friends and we live in a wonderful place – what more could a man want when he has two lovely daughters?”

Aunt Flo was fifteen years older than Pa and as long as Ginny could remember she had never been happy. Connie said that Aunt Flo’s father had been very young and handsome, but it had been one of those hurried wartime marriages and he had never come back. Eventually, Connie had received a telegram from the War Office saying: ‘Missing, presumed dead.’

“Disappeared somewhere in the back streets of Hong Kong I shouldn’t be surprised,” Ginny had heard someone in the village say, but what that meant she couldn’t work out. No one seemed to know anything about him.

Connie had waited a long time before marrying again; to Will Pullen, a fisherman much older than herself. “He was drowned in an October gale when your Pa was only four,” Connie had said. “Grandpa Will was a boat builder like your Pa. He was a great one for reading and his family knew all about healing plants. Before there were any doctors on the island people would go to the Pullens for healing. Will wrote songs and hymns for the Wesleyan Chapel too. He was a special man and your Pa is very like him.”

After Will Pullen was drowned, Connie had managed on her own, making a living by her typewriter until she became quite a well-known author. Ginny remembered how, when she was very little, she would sit curled up on Connie’s lap in front of a driftwood fire, listening to tales of merfolk and wonderful happenings under the sea.

Connie’s house had been full of books and toys that had belonged to people from long ago, and furniture that shone with the polish of love and smelt deliciously of lavender wax. There were old fashioned oil lamps and a pair of black flat irons and a cabinet with secret drawers full of tiny treasures. Ginny loved

the ivory humming top and a brass bound glass case with a shiny Australian Christmas Beetle in it.

Best of all was the dolls' house. It had been built by the village carpenter for Connie's mother, Daisy, when she was only seven. Now it was all gone because Aunt Flo thought it was 'sentimental rubbish'.

The tears and sobbing came to an end to be replaced by a dull, cold ache which seemed to fill every part of her being. Ginny realised that not only was she miserable but she was also shivering and bitterly cold. It was time to go home. The last thing she wanted was to worry Pa, tonight of all nights. She wondered if he and Lou had gone home by now or if they were still at Forty-Four.

"Knowing Pa," she thought, "he'll stay and help Aunt Flo with all the clearing up. Thank goodness she's going out for supper with an old school friend and not coming home. If I hurry I might get there first. I'll light the fire and put the soup on before Pa and Lou get back."

Clutching her two treasures she began to run.

HOT SOUP

Ginny



It was downhill all the way from Forty-Four to Cliff House. Lights were on in most of the cottage windows as Ginny went past and she could see people sitting round the television or eating supper as if it was the end of an ordinary day. Only Nun's Cottage was dark. It had been for sale as long as anyone could remember. The place was really only big enough for one person and was so old that no one wanted to live there. A stone bowl had been carved into the side of the open front porch and it was said that hundreds of years ago it was used for holy water. The roof tiles were cut from thin slabs of stone which made the roof so heavy that it sagged in a gentle curve. Having been empty for so long, it was beginning to look more like a ruin than a home for someone to live in.

As she turned the corner into the lane Ginny could see Pa's workshop, a small one-up one-down building. Like Nun's Cottage it was built from great blocks of stone with stone slates for the roof. The windows were carved out of single slabs taken from the ruined church four hundred years before when the cliff

began to collapse and the islanders built a new church in the centre of Innistone.

The path to the house ran round the workshop to an iron gate and on into the garden. There was no other garden like it on the island for it was surrounded by trees and sheltered from all but the easterly wind. Like his father, Peter Pullen grew herbs as well as most of the vegetables the family needed and from early spring the garden was always full of flowers. Already there were snow drops and crocuses as well as a few early daffodils. Ginny could see the light over the front door and another in the kitchen welcoming her home. She realised that she must have spent a long time hidden under the ivy and hoped that Pa wasn't worried.

The gate complained noisily as she pushed it open. Pa refused to oil it. He said it was as good as a door bell; they could never be taken by surprise as long as the gate hinges sang their rusty song. As she walked up the path the door was flung open and Pa was standing there with a welcoming smile on his face, the first smile she had seen for days.

"Thank goodness you're home. I was beginning to wonder what had happened to you. You're frozen! Where have you been?"

Ginny held out her two treasures. "I went out into the field and Aunt Flo set fire to..." She found she couldn't go on, the sobs were trying to start again and she wasn't going to let that happen.

"I know all about that," said her father. "At least you managed to rescue Will's spyglass as well as Hannah. We'll talk about what happened later. Just come into the kitchen and get warm. Hot soup will make things feel a bit better." Pulling out a red spotted hanky he gave it to her. Then, putting an arm round her, he pushed the front door with his other hand and shut out the night.

The kitchen was the heart of the house where everyone gathered round the table to talk, eat, and do all the sitting down jobs like shelling peas and writing letters. Two greyhounds, one coffee coloured, the other white with golden patches, got up from their basket by the range to press themselves against her in greeting and a Siamese cat took a flying leap, hanging onto her shoulders with his claws before wrapping himself round her neck.

“Ouch! Tishoo, that hurt,” complained Ginny. “OK, I know you love me, but that’s no way to show it.”

The light above the table cast a warm glow over the whole room, illuminating the grandfather clock and the paintings by the children’s mother. The soup that Ginny had made that morning was steaming on the cooker and a big bowl of polished apples sat in the middle of the table. As usual, Lou was sitting at the far end with her drawing book open and a jar of coloured pencils beside her. Four places were already laid.

“Els said she would drop in with an apple cake so I asked her to supper,” explained Pa. “She’s the only person I would have allowed through the door tonight.”

Els was an artist who lived on the other side of the lane, a wonderful friend who had been part of their lives as long as Ginny could remember. She was an understanding sort of listener who never leapt in with answers, but was good at explaining without talking down and making you feel silly. At that moment the gate whined and seconds later Els walked into the kitchen carrying a newly baked apple cake, smelling of spices and topped with crunchy brown sugar. Ginny put the doll and the spyglass carefully on the sideboard and sat down next to Lou who pushed her drawing book to one side. Pa poured soup into generous sized brown pottery bowls and soon the strange atmosphere of the past week began to change and soften until life seemed almost normal.

“I wondered what Flo had been doing,” said Pa when the bowls were empty and nothing remained but a pile of crumbs. “I met her coming back from the field. She said something about you being upset Ginny, and told me that she had just set fire to some rubbish. I couldn’t believe it when she said she had got rid of the doll’s house.” He paused for a moment.

“I don’t think she has ever seen me angry before. Don’t worry girls; there won’t be any more bonfires. Flo has agreed that the three of us can sort through all the things she thinks of as rubbish and she will look after the paper work. I am really sorry about the house; I know how much it meant to you both. We will find something really special for your birthday Lou – won’t we Ginny?”

“But Pa,” said Ginny, “it only had a little woodworm in it, and you always said that nothing is going to fall apart so long as the woodworms go on holding hands. Aunt Flo must have known you could fix it.” She looked hopefully at her father.

Meanwhile Lou had been sitting absolutely still while her eyes got rounder and rounder. Tears were glistening ready to fall, but instead of starting to cry she suddenly sat up straight and said, “I don’t like Aunt Flo; she is absolutely horrid but she isn’t going to make me cry. That house was made for Great Granny Daisy when she was the same age as me because her mummy and daddy loved her. She loved it and made it real. You can kill people but you can’t kill love so she hasn’t killed our house. Aunt Flo can say magic is nonsense but I’ll draw the house and make it real again; and we’ve still got Hannah and the little ’scope and they’re really truly magic!”

“Poor Flo, she’s really a very unhappy person and unhappy people sometimes do and say silly unkind things,” said Els. “We’ve known each other for ever. At school she was always top in science and got teased and called clever clogs.”

“Wise folk have always known that there is magic in the world, whatever scientists may say,” said Peter. “I used to tease

Flo and ask her why scientists couldn't explain things like dark energy and chaos theory. She didn't want to believe there might be things that scientists would never be able to understand or control."

"Flo used to get so cross with you," laughed Els, "and all you did was smile at her. You were lucky she didn't thump you!"

"Magic is everywhere for those who are young at heart and wise enough to recognise it. We'll never be able to explain everything tidily away," said Peter. "Now come on little one – bed!"

Ginny looked round the table. Lou's little face under her cap of tight, dark chestnut coloured curls so fierce and determined, Pa with his thinning iron grey hair and beard suddenly looking very tired and hollow cheeked, while white haired Els looked on with gentle concern. Best give Pa a break, she thought. Els will know the right thing to do, whether he needs to talk or just be silent for a while. Like Pa, she had no shadow attached to her. She was all of a piece, unchanging, kindly and absolutely dependable. As a painter she could see past the front people choose to show the world to the real person inside.

"Come on Lou, I'll give you a lift." Pushing her chair back, Ginny bent down and Lou, blowing kisses to the two grown-ups, climbed on her back. Taking the two treasures from the side board and with Lou's arms wrapped round her neck, Ginny set off up the stairs.

Lou's bedroom was small and narrow with a window at either end. One looked west into the garden, the other showed the rocky, broken ground of a filled in quarry and beyond it, the sea. On foggy nights the lightship just off shore could be heard warning fishermen to keep away from danger, but tonight its friendly beam swept across a calm sea to the house on the cliff showing that all was well. Lou climbed up onto the windowsill, as she did every night, to look out over the cliffs hoping to see a

boat in the bay or some of the night creatures going about their business under her window.

“No, Ginny, don’t draw the curtains, I want to see the sun come up out of the sea in the morning.” Within minutes she was in bed and snuggled under her duvet. The quiet reassuring murmur of grown-up voices could be heard through the floor.

“Tell me a story Ginny – tell me about Hannah and why she is magic.”

“Well,” said Ginny, “Hannah is very, very old. She was given to Connie’s granny when she was seven and that is over a hundred and fifty years ago. In those days children were very good at inventing games because there wasn’t any television. They didn’t have very many toys, maybe some picture building blocks, a ball and perhaps, if they were very lucky, a rocking horse. The little girl, whose name was Mary, loved her doll. She carried her everywhere and imagined all kinds of adventures with her. One awful day they had been playing in a hay field and Mary had just put Hannah in the shade of a haycock so her pretty wax face shouldn’t melt in the sun, when she was called by her nursery maid for a picnic tea.”

“What’s a haycock?” asked Lou. “It sounds like a funny sort of bird.”

“Long ago, before they had machines that made hay bales,” said Ginny, “farmers piled the hay into little heaps all over the field and called them haycocks. When it was dry enough, the hay was taken by horse and cart and made into a haystack. Connie told me she used to help make hay like that when she was little. It was hard work and everyone helped.” Both girls were quiet for a moment and Lou snuggled closer to her sister.

“When tea was finished,” Ginny went on, “Mary looked for Hannah, but she couldn’t remember where she had put her. The haycocks all looked the same and there were simply dozens of them. She searched and searched and in the end had to go home to bed without her precious doll. Hannah was alone in the field

all night with no one but field mice for company. The next morning, just after sun up, she was found by one of the farmhands, soaking wet with dew but otherwise all right. Mary was thrilled to have her back and promised her that she would never, ever be parted from her again. That is why she kept her so carefully. Great-granny Daisy loved her and looked after her; Connie had her when she was little. Even though he was a boy, Pa knew she was special although he didn't really play with her and now we have her to look after."

"Connie and all the others loved her and looked after and that's what makes her magic?"

"That's right Lou – I'll leave her here to watch over you tonight."

"And I can love her for Daisy and Connie too," murmured Lou, rolled over and within seconds was fast asleep.

Ginny paused outside the door, wondering if she should go downstairs again. It had been a very long day and school had to be faced in the morning. During the week since Connie died she had been allowed to stay at home. "Would there be lots of questions," Ginny wondered, "or would people just avoid her, afraid that she would cry if they were sympathetic?" Either way, the thought of school was daunting, but she couldn't run away from it. Clutching the spyglass for comfort she climbed the narrow stairs to her own room under the eaves.