

Dean Wood is a HGV driver by trade, and can often be found chugging around the Derbyshire countryside. He lives with his wife Julie, step daughter Chloe and Charlie their collie dog. His sister Sharon Wood does the wonderful illustrations that go with his story.

To sis, whose pictures give my story life.

Dean Wood

MICHAEL MOON
AND THE CAULDRON
OF WISHES

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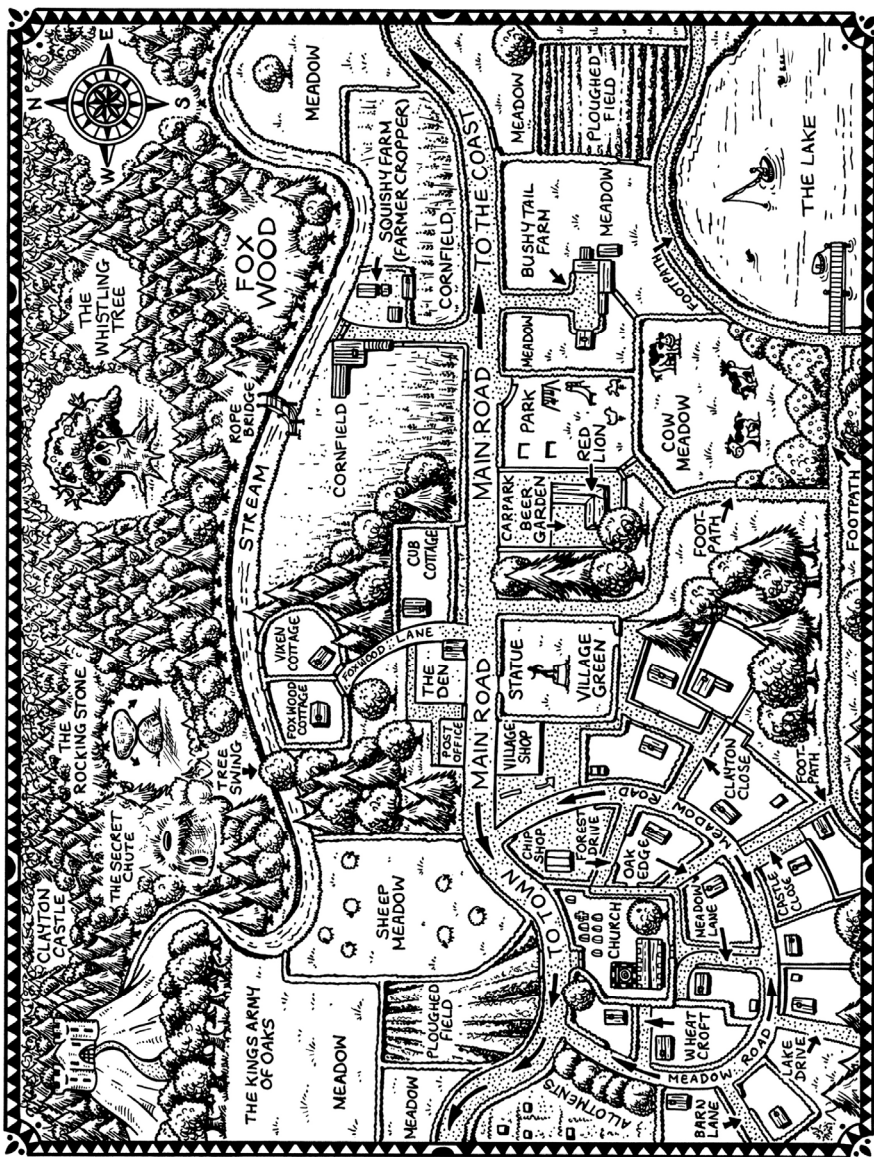
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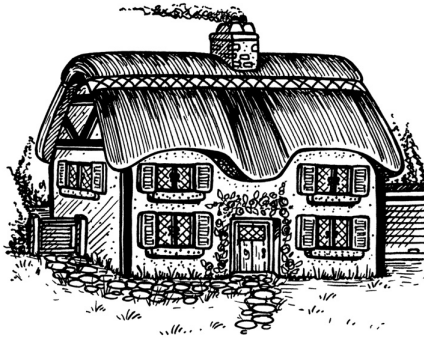
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Chapter One

Uncle Ed's Cottage

Michael sat miserably looking down at his new shoes. Great big ugly clomping things they were, but no matter how much he protested to his mother about wearing them, the answer she gave him was always the same.

“Look, stop moaning about them Mickey, I know you like your old trainers better but where we’re going they just won’t be good enough, you’ll need good sturdy shoes like these.”

‘They’re not sturdy, they’re clompy,’ thought Michael sulkily. He looked across to his baby sister Kizzy who was bolted snugly in her child seat next to him. Her real name was Katherine but everyone had taken to calling her Kizzy. She just sat there, eyes closed as she sucked and chewed merrily on her dummy. She didn’t seem upset at all that they were moving to the country. Unlike Michael, he was very upset about having to move home, away from his friends and his school and the city, where there were loads of shops and things to do. Now they were having to move just because Dad had got a stupid new job. Michael sighed, he was going to be stuck in a cottage

in the middle of nowhere, with no friends and nothing to do and, worse still, the countryside smells funny too.

Michael felt very bitter and angry, particularly toward his Uncle Ed it was all his stupid fault. It was him that had given Dad the job as manager at his factory that made tractors. Michael couldn't understand why Uncle Ed had given Dad his job, because he had always lived for his tractor factory. It was all he ever talked about, even to the children. So when all of a sudden Michael's dad received a phone call from him saying that he had won the lottery, met a nice young girlfriend and was moving to Monte Carlo, wherever that was, they were all shocked. They were even more surprised when he told them that they could have his country cottage and that Dad would be taking over his precious factory.

Michael sighed deeply, he'd tried to talk Dad out of moving to Uncle Ed's house, but all he said was, "Look Michael, I know you don't want to move, but this is the chance of a life time for us, it's not every day you get to own a factory and a lovely country cottage for nothing."

So that was that, he was just going to have to get used to it.

"Dad, are we nearly there yet?"

"Nearly," replied Dad.

"We'll be there in about twenty minutes Mickey," said Mum.

Just then, upon hearing her favourite name, Kizzy woke up, giggled and roared at the top of her voice, "MEEKY MOOOO!"

Mum and Dad burst out with laughter. Michael on the other hand wasn't amused.

"How many times have I got to tell you, you stupid little girl, my name is Mickey Moon!"

Kizzy just stared at him for a few moments, her big brown eyes twinkling. Then she removed her dummy from her mouth, pointed it straight at Michael and boomed, "MEEKY MOOOO!"

By now Mum was laughing so much she had tears rolling down her face.

“Right that’s it, I’m not talking to any of you anymore!” said Michael angrily, and with that, he folded his arms, turned to look out of the window and sulked for the rest of the journey.

The weather was lovely and sunny as they approached the tiny village of Clayton on the Meadows. Dad drove down the main street that consisted of a village store, a post office, a village green with a statue in the middle and a pub. Just after the post office, dad turned left on to Foxwood Lane. It was a bumpy little track at the bottom of which lay their new home, Foxwood Cottage.

Dad pulled the car on to the gravel drive and parked outside the garage door.

“What do you think of it then?” said Dad as they all climbed out of the car.

Michael looked at the stone cottage. It was the first time he had been to Uncle Ed’s house. It was much bigger than he had expected, much bigger than their squashed up little house in the city. This one had a front garden with a small lawn and a hedge that went all around it. The hedge was covered in lots of different coloured flowers. The garage was big too, big enough for two cars thought Michael.

“It’s quite nice Dad, I like the garden.”

“Yes, well just wait till you see the one around the back,” said Mum.

She led them through a little gate which took them on to a path that went down the side of the cottage and on to the back garden.

“Wow, it’s massive!” said Michael.

The back garden was the biggest he’d ever seen; its lawn was nearly as big as a football pitch. A little stepping stone path led from the back door of the cottage right down the centre of the lawn and stopped half way, where it met a wishing well.

“Is that a real one Dad, with water at the bottom?”

“Yes it is, and it’s very deep, so I don’t want you to go too near to it. If you fall down we may not be able to get you back up, and besides, people around here say there is a troll that

lives at the bottom of it,” said Dad trying to hide the smirk on his face.

“Yeah, whatever Dad,” said Michael.

He didn’t believe him for one minute, but all the same he thought he’d better not go too near to it just in case.

The lawn continued to spread out beyond the well until it reached a little fence with an archway that led into an area full of apple trees.

“Wow! Are they real apple trees?”

“Yes, that’s our orchard,” said Mum.

“Can I climb up and get some please?”

“Yes, but be careful, I don’t want you hurting yourself, and don’t eat them either, they’re for cooking. You’ll get an upset tummy if you try to eat them.”

At this, Kizzy started giggling again. “Mek Meeky trump trump.”

Michael was too interested in what he could get up to in the orchard to be annoyed with Kizzy. He sprinted down the lawn leaving Mum, Dad and Kizzy to go inside and explore their new home. He ran past the well and through the little gate into the orchard. There were loads of apples on the floor, and some were really big.

‘Bigger than cricket balls,’ thought Michael. He searched for a moment or two to find a tree with a branch low enough for him to climb on to. Eventually he spotted one near the back of the orchard and clambered up it. He didn’t stop climbing until he reached the top where he popped his head out of the branches and looked around. What he saw nearly made him drop out of the tree.

“This is amazing,” Michael said to himself; he could see for miles around.

At the back of the orchard there was another small fence with a gate. Just beyond that there was a wide stream, and best of all, it had a proper rope bridge crossing it. Over to his left where the stream was a little narrower, there was a large tree with a rope swing hanging from it. Michael’s heart began to race when he thought of all the fun he was going to have exploring his new home. He looked over to his right and could

see into next door's garden. Its back lawn looked equally as big as their own and, better still, it had a couple of goalposts set up on it. There was a football left on the lawn. Michael guessed that a little boy must live there; he hoped he could meet him soon and perhaps they could become friends too.

Beyond their neighbour's garden was a large field full of golden barley corn which swayed and shimmered gently in the breeze. 'That would be a great place to play hide and seek,' Michael thought to himself. There were no neighbours to Michael's left, just several gentle rolling meadows, at the far end of which lay a large grassy hill. On top of the hill stood what looked like an ancient castle with turrets and battlements just like the ones he'd seen in the history books at school.

Michael scrambled down the tree as fast as he could, he couldn't wait to tell his parents about the swing, the rope bridge and best of all the medieval castle.

As soon as his feet touched the ground he was sprinting through the orchard. Maybe if there was time his dad could take him to see the castle today. Suddenly Michael's foot struck something in the long grass, it went with a loud bong!! that sent him tumbling head over heels.

"Ouch!" said Michael as he landed amongst the fallen apples with a thump. He sat up and massaged his throbbing big toe as he looked all around him to see what he had tripped on. There in the long grass, just a couple of feet in front of him, lay a large dirty old copper pot, the type you might use for cooking with.

"Grr, stupid thing, where did that come from?"

He couldn't remember seeing it when he ran through the orchard the first time, but then again he'd probably been too interested in finding a tree to climb to notice anything else.

Michael picked himself back up and ran back to the house, this time being a little more careful where he put his feet.

Michael burst through the back door into the kitchen and excitedly told his parents everything he had seen.

His Dad smiled to himself and said, "So you might get to like it here after all then?"

“Yeah, I think it looks really cool around here and I think there may be a little boy living next door too.”

“There is, his name’s Tony and he’s nine years old, the same as you. In fact you will probably be in the same class at school,” replied Dad.

“Can we go and visit the castle please Dad?”

“No I’m afraid not. We’ve got loads of unpacking to do, you included Mickey.”

Kizzy opened her mouth ready to roar out her favourite name, but Mum just took the opportunity to shovel in the fork full of baby food that she’d been trying to persuade her to take for the last ten minutes.

“Please Dad,” begged Mickey.

“I said no, get off upstairs to your new room and unpack your things, we’ve taken your case up for you already.”

Michael just stood there looking a little disappointed. His Dad noticed and said, “I’ll tell you what, when you have done your unpacking and your room is tidy I’ll go and get us some fish and chips for supper, deal?”

“Ok Dad, deal.”

Michael would have liked to have gone to the castle today, but it was only Friday and he’d have the rest of the weekend to explore. Besides, the thought of fish and chips was making him hungry. So he did as he was told, went upstairs and unpacked his things, all the while dreaming of all the fun and mischief he could get up to tomorrow.



Chapter Two

A New Best Friend

“Mickey... Mickey, are you getting up? It’s nine o’clock, I’ve got breakfast ready for you and your favourite cartoons are on TV.”

“Wha, um, er, yeah Mum, I’m coming,” said Michael groggily.

He threw the bed sheets off of himself and swung his legs to the left to get out of bed, but as soon as he had done so, his knees made contact with something very hard.

“Ouch! What’s going on?” squeaked Michael suddenly much more awake.

Something was wrong; the wall was on the wrong side of the bed. Then suddenly he remembered he was in his new bedroom. He looked over to his right where the sun was pouring in like laser beams through the slits in the blinds. He watched as thousands of tiny dust motes danced and swirled like golden fireflies in the sun’s peaceful rays. Michael could hear birds singing too. Hundreds of shrill warbling voices all singing their own song. It sounded so peaceful; he’d never heard birds singing like this before. Living in the city, it was

difficult to hear anything above the traffic noise and the constant din of human activity.

Michael wandered over to the window and rolled up the blinds, he had to shield his eyes from the piercing light that suddenly flooded his dim room. Once his eyes had adjusted he looked out of the window at the view. It was lovely, but he couldn't see as much from here as he had from the higher vantage point at the top of the apple tree. He could still see the well, the orchard and the castle on top of the hill, he hadn't dreamt it; it was all real. Just then, he saw a football shoot high in the air over the next door's garden. He couldn't see over the edge from here, but he didn't need to. All that mattered was that the little boy next door was out and he was playing football.

Michael got dressed quickly and thundered down the cottage's steep staircase to the smell of bacon and sausages. He bounded into the kitchen and plonked himself down behind a huge stack of bacon sandwiches.

"Morning Mickey," said Mum, who was stood by the stove holding a frying pan full of fried eggs.

"Morny wum," spluttered Michael through a mouthful of orange juice and soggy sandwiches.

"How many times have I told you not to talk with your mouth full?"

"Sorry. Can I go and call for the boy next door, Mum?"

"Yes, but only when you have finished your breakfast and combed your hair, it looks like a bird's nest."

Dad heaved a great sigh from the corner of the room; he was stood between Kizzy and the portable TV and was trying desperately to get her to eat a spoonful of mushy Weetabix, but was having no joy as she was more interested in cartoons than breakfast.

Michael gobbled his breakfast as quickly as he could, then ran out of the room, pretending not to hear the words "Michael you haven't combed you hair!" as he sprinted down the hall and out through the front door into the early morning sunshine.

Michael made his way over to the house next door. The plaque on their gate read 'Vixen Cottage'. He toddled up the

short cobbled stone path and knocked on the front door. After a short while he knocked again and pressed the doorbell.

Bing Bong! Bing Bong! Went the door chime very loudly, so loud it made Michael jump and he began to wonder if the person who answered the door would be angry with him. He need not have feared though, for when the door finally opened, he was greeted by an old man with the friendliest face he had ever seen.

“Hello there, young sir, what can I do for you?” said the old man, staring at Michael.

He seemed to be examining his face very closely as if checking something out.

“Hello, my name is Michael, and I’ve come to live next door. I was wondering if Tony would like to play football with me, sir?”

“Yes, of course, come through to the back garden and we’ll go and ask shall we?”

Michael followed the old man through the house which was very similar in size and the way that the rooms were laid out to their own. But the house’s contents and furnishings were very different. Everything looked very old and mysterious. The front room had a large roaring log fire and the floor was made up of ancient-looking flag stones. On the walls, there were many portrait paintings. The people in them wore clothes that ranged from the present time back to the outfits of long ago. Just like the ones he’d seen in his Medieval History lessons. The shelves were full of old leather-bound books and the table was piled high with maps and drawings of strange old contraptions.

The old man led him through the kitchen and into the back garden.

“Toni!... Toni, I’ve got a young gentleman here that would like to play football with you.”

“Ok, coming,” replied a rather squeaky voice.

“I’ll leave you to it then, have fun both of you,” said the old man. Then he turned and shuffled slowly back inside.

Just then, a young girl appeared from around the back of the greenhouse, and came running towards him with a football tucked under her arm.

“Hello,” said Michael. “I’ve come to play football with Tony; you haven’t seen him anywhere have you?”

“I’m Toni, nice to meet you,” said the little girl holding out a rather grubby looking hand for him to shake.

Michael just stood there, his mouth gaping open with surprise.

“B... B... B... But you’re a girl, girls don’t play football!”

“Yes they do, well this one does anyway, and I’m as good as any boy!”

“But, I thought you were a boy.”

“Yuk! No way, I can’t think of anything more gross.”

Michael sulkily looked down at his feet. This wasn’t fair he thought. He wanted to play football and racing cars, he wanted to play pirates on the river and make rafts and have sword fights. Girls didn’t like those sorts of games, they liked dolls and ponies and make-up.

Toni dropped the ball at her feet and looked at Michael with a beaming smile on her face.

“Come on then, let’s see if you can get the ball off me!”

“No problem, I’m a really good footballer, so good Dad says that I’ll play for England one day,” said Michael pointing proudly at the three lions on his new England shirt.

“Ok, prove it Michael Moon,” said Toni glancing at the name on the back of his shirt.

“Right, you asked for it!” And, with that, Michael charged at her. But she simply flicked the ball away and side-stepped him.

“Grrr! I’ll show you!” said Michael trying again and once more having no luck. In fact, after half an hour of playing he still hadn’t managed to get the ball.

“Thought you said you were good,” giggled Toni.

“I am. I’m just letting you off because you’re a girl and we’re playing on your garden that’s all.”

“Oh really? I believe you, NOT!” said Toni and then started laughing at the sight of Michael standing there sweating, red faced and very angry.

“Well I’m going home now. I don’t want to play anymore, besides, my dad said he’s going to take me to the castle today, and that’s lots more fun than stupid football!”

With that Michael turned to leave.

“No wait, please don’t go,” said Toni suddenly sounding panicky. “We can play something else, anything you want. I didn’t mean to laugh; I think you’re a really good footballer. Please stop a bit longer. I haven’t got anyone to play with around here.”

When Michael saw the miserable expression on Toni’s face, his anger with her immediately disappeared. She looked like she was close to tears.

“Ok, I’ll stay. What shall we play?”

“We could play hide and seek in Farmer Cropper’s corn field if you like, but whatever you do, don’t let him see you. He once caught me in there and lectured me for ages; then he grabbed hold of my ear and dragged me all the way home. It didn’t half hurt, and I’m sure that one of my ears has ended up bigger than the other.”

Michael burst into a fit of giggles.

“No it hasn’t,” he said.

“Thank you,” replied Toni, looking pleased.

“They’re both really big,” he said jokingly, and then started laughing again. Toni just blew a raspberry at him.

“Well, I don’t think we should play hide and seek then. I don’t want to get into trouble on my first day. What about having a go on that tree swing, that looks fun.”

“Yes ok, let’s go then.”

With that, Toni turned to make her way to the gate at the bottom of the garden.

“Hold on, I’ll have to let Mum and Dad know where I’m going. Aren’t you going to let your granddad know what we’re up to before we go?”

“No, he’s ok as long as I don’t go any further than the tree swing, and besides, he’s not my granddad, he’s my dad.”

“Oh!” said Michael surprised. “But he looks really old.”

“Yes, so what? That doesn’t stop him being my dad, he adopted me actually, which I think is a very nice thing to do.”

“Yes it was, he seems very nice,” said Michael backtracking quickly, as he could see that he’d offended her.

“Yes, well, anyway, are we going to play on that swing or what?”

“Ok, I’ll race you! Last one to the gate is pants at football,” said Michael, and took off down the lawn as fast as he could, with Toni chasing after him.

The two children played happily on the tree swing for hours and when they were tired of that, they climbed the trees in the orchard. Then, finally, they went up stream to the rope bridge where they had races with the sticks that they threw in the water.

Michael didn’t even bother going to the castle when his dad offered to take him. He was having way too much fun with his new friend.

At six o’ clock, Toni’s’ dad shouted her in for her tea.

“Are you coming out to play again tomorrow?”

“Yeah, you bet, today has been brill. You know you’re really good fun, for a girl!”

“Thanks, you’re not so bad yourself, for a boy!”

Then Toni blew another raspberry at him and ran off home.

Michael smiled to himself, he’d had the most fun he could ever remember having, and who would have thought that his new best friend would have been a girl.