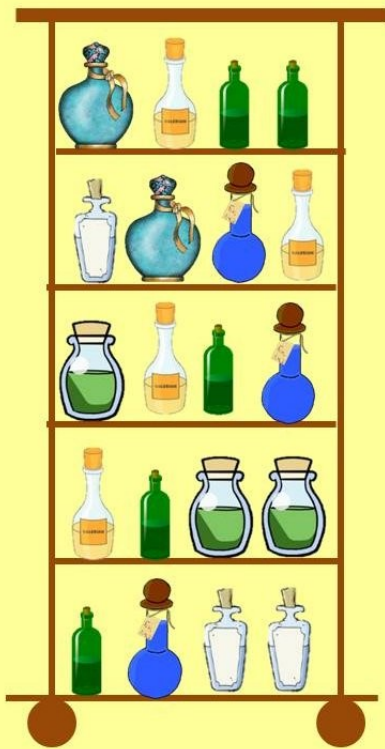


# The Dream Guardian



# Ben Bennetts

## **Summary**

Grandpa is a storyteller. He's also The Dream Guardian, charged with looking after hundreds of bottles of dreams, both happiness dreams and nightmares. His grandchildren, Tommy and Nikki, often visit him to listen to a story and, in Tommy's case, learn how to become the new Dream Guardian when the time comes. Listen to stories about hidden temples, a runaway dog, four-winged fairies, stag beetles, witches, Arthur (the original Dream Guardian), adventurous train journeys, ... and much more, plus secret rooms, secret books, and how to re-dream a bottled dream.

## **Foreword to parents, grandparents and other readers**

This book is designed to be read to listeners aged 8-years-old and upwards. The intention is not only to captivate the child but also educate in various ways. There is a lookup section at the back for words that might be unfamiliar to younger listeners or readers. If you are reading the book on your own, enjoy!

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### Dedication



This book, and the stories herein, is dedicated to my older granddaughters Ella and Georgia who, as small children, allowed me to hone my skills as an impromptu storyteller in the days when they stayed overnight; and to my younger granddaughters, Emilie and Lottie who, I hope, will enjoy both listening to and reading the stories.

(^\_^)

## Frontispiece



Der Grossvater erzählt eine Geschichte (The Grandfather Tells A Story),  
Albert Anker (1831-1910)

(^\_^)



## Chapter 1

### **In which we meet Tommy, his sister Nikki, his mum Maggie, his story-telling Grandpa, and learn some interesting things about stag beetles.**

"Tommy! Tommy! Are you up? Are you dressed? The school bus will be here shortly. Come on. Your breakfast is ready."

Tommy listened to his mother shouting from downstairs. He was awake and half dressed. He reached down and found the other sock where he had dropped it last night.

"Coming Mum," he shouted. "I'm just putting my socks on."

Another day at school, he thought. Still, we get to go to the gym this morning and that nice Miss Faversham has arranged a nature ramble this afternoon looking for birds, identifying trees and lifting up dead branches to see what creepy-crawlies lived underneath. Maybe he would find a beetle or a spider he can capture to frighten the girls in his class. I must remember to take my empty matchbox, he thought.

Tommy finished dressing, waved the flannel at his face, combed his hair with his fingers, and went downstairs.

"Morning son," said his mum. "Sleep well?"

"Yeah, fine," Tommy replied. "I had a dream but I can't remember it. What's for breakfast?"

"Bread and spit on it!" shrieked Nikki, his younger sister.

"Nikki, I've told you not to say that. It's scrambled eggs, Tommy. Here. Sit down."

Tommy's mum pulled a chair away from the table and placed a plate of scrambled eggs in front of him as he sat down.

"And what's happening at school today, young man?" she enquired.

"Gym this morning and a nature ramble this afternoon," replied Tommy. "Is my gym kit in my bag?"

"Yes. I had a job to clean it after you'd sat on the dirty floor in the gym. You need to tell Mr Jenkins the caretaker to wash that floor more often."

"Mum, I can't do that. Mr Jenkins will just laugh at me and then chase me with his mop."

"You'll get a better wash than the one you had this morning then," laughed Nikki.

Tommy glared at his sister. Even from a very young age she'd taken care of her appearance and this morning was neatly dressed in her school uniform, her auburn hair plaited and tied up in a bundle, and her face well-scrubbed.

"Watch it," he said with a growl but Nikki just laughed again. Secretly, Tommy was very fond of his sister but he tried to maintain an air of authority when he could. It never worked, however. Nikki would just laugh when he tried to tell her off.

"Now Tommy, here's your bag. Make sure you see your sister into her playground before you go on to yours. I've packed your lunch, checked your gym kit, made sure your homework is in the bag, and closed the zip."

"Don't fuss Mum. I'm ready. Come on Squirt," he said, turning to Nikki and taking her hand. "It's time to go." Tommy had nicknamed his sister Squirt when she was born because she was so tiny. He still called her that even though she was no longer tiny. She didn't mind.

Tommy's mum went with them to the door. "I'll be there at 3 o'clock to pick you up, Nikki. I need to go shopping. You can come with me. What will you do Tommy?"

"I'll go round to see Grandpa after the bus has dropped me off," replied Tommy. "I'll walk back before it gets dark."

Grandpa's house was just five minutes away in the road off to the right at the end of Tommy's road. His mum could see him down the road until he turned into Grandpa's road and Grandpa could see him as he approached the house. He was allowed to walk on his own as long as he told his mum and granddad he was going.

"Okay, but don't let Grandpa get you into trouble," Tommy's mum said. "He can be a bit of a rascal when he wants to be."

"I won't Mum," said Tommy and with Nikki in tow ran out of the door and down the path to catch the school bus which was just turning into their road.

"Bye," shouted Maggie.  
"Bye Mum," shouted the two children.  
And they were gone.

Later that day, after Tommy had successfully caused mayhem with two small spiders and one very large fearsome-looking stag beetle, Tommy walked the short distance to Grandpa's house. The house was tucked away slightly from the main road and was quite old with many funny roof shapes and odd-shaped windows. Grandpa was not keen on gardening and the front garden was overgrown with trees, shrubs, bushes and weeds, so much so that it was quite difficult to see the path that led up to the front door. But, Tommy knew the way and he walked boldly up the path and knocked loudly on the door.

"Grandpa, it's me, Tommy," he shouted.

Grandpa always kept the door locked when he was in the house and he said that Tommy wasn't old enough to have a key yet. You might lose it, he told Tommy. When you're a bit older...

"Grandpa!" Tommy shouted impatiently. "Where are you?"

"I'm coming. I'm coming," came a muffled reply from inside the house. "Hold your horses. We haven't got a train to catch!"

Grandpa opened the door and stood there looking down at the small lad on his doorstep.

"Well, well, well," he said. "What have we here? Why, it's young Tommy, fresh from school, brimming with new knowledge, and just bursting to have a piece of cake and a glass of milk, I bet."

"Hi Grandpa," said Tommy pushing past his granddad and walking into the kitchen where, sure enough, he spied a glass of milk besides a piece of cake on a plate.

"Thanks, Grandpa," he said, throwing his school bag down in a corner and picking up the cake.

"So, what have you been up to today?" asked Grandpa.

"Oh, nothing much. We had gym practice and then I found some spiders and a beetle on a nature ramble. I tried to put the beetle down the neck of Lizzie Turner's dress but she got all scared and ran away and reported me to Miss Faversham. I have to do extra homework now about the life of a stag beetle."

"Hmm. That's hard luck but I can help you with the extra homework and if you do it here your mum doesn't need to know about it."

"Thanks, Grandpa," said Tommy looking at his granddad. Grandpa was dressed in an old sweater and baggy trousers. He'd put on a bit of weight and he bought what he called 'easies' from a big supermarket that sold cheap clothes. He looked a bit scruffy but as he said to his daughter, Tommy's mum, when she complained, "It's the inner man what counts Maggie; not the outer appearance." "Yeah, yeah, yeah," Tommy's mum would reply. "It would help if you shaved more often and for goodness sake stop walking around in your bare feet! And buy a comb," she added.

Tommy's grandad would just laugh and go off and make a cup of tea.

Tommy thought the world of his granddad. Ever since he'd been born, Grandpa had made a fuss of him. He was the firstborn grandchild and Grandpa had doted on him, taking him out in his pram when he was a baby, pushing him on the swings down in the park, buying him ice cream and other forbidden goodies, helping him with his homework when he started school, and telling him made-up stories. And oh, what stories! They just seemed to pour out of him. Grandpa would sit down with Tommy, inside by the glowing fire in winter, outside in the warm sun in the back garden in the summer, and just start telling him stories. Sometimes they were about small children the same sort of age as Tommy and Nikki. Sometimes they were adventure stories of daring explorers and adventurous daredevils. Sometimes they were about mythical beasts and magical beings. And sometimes, the stories went on and on over many days. But they were always interesting and Tommy would sit listening for hours even begging his granddad not to stop when the time came for him to go home.

"Can I have a story today, Grandpa?" Tommy asked.

"Maybe," replied Grandpa. "But first finish your cake and let's sort out your extra homework on stag beetles. I'm sure Lizzie what's-her-name would love to know more about stag beetles when she gets older. When we've done the homework, maybe there'll be time for one short story before you run off home."

"Okay," replied Tommy picking up his glass of milk and polishing off what was left of the cake.

"Where do the stories come from, Grandpa?" asked Tommy, his mouth full of cake.

"Oh, out of my head I guess but I also know of a secret place where I can find more stories if I ever run out."

"Can I visit this place, Grandpa? Where is it? Can anybody go in? How many stories are there? How did the stories get there? ..."

"Whoa, whoa, whoa. Hold on young Tommy. That's way too many questions all at once. One day I'll tell you about the secret place, I promise. Now, tell me about your day at school. What did you learn? Can you do a somersault over the big wooden box in the gym yet? Did you do any reading, writing or arithmetic?"

Dutifully, Tommy recounted his day's experience at school and then they set to discovering what stag beetles do and how they do it. Tommy found out they can live up to seven years but mostly they live underground as larvae, that only female stag beetles bite people, and they feed on decaying wood.

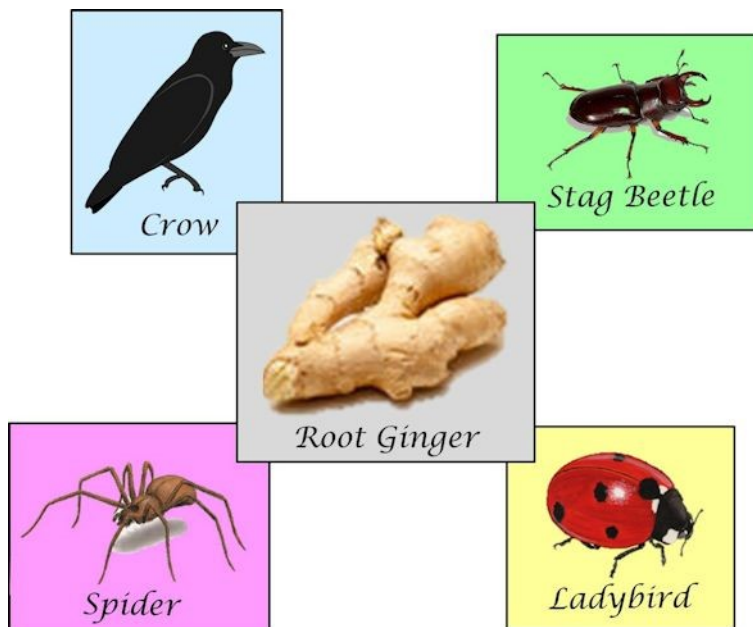
"Tell me a story about a stag beetle, Grandpa," requested Tommy when they had finished the extra homework.

"Okay, but just a short one as it's nearly time for you to go home," replied Grandpa. "And promise me you will retell it to Nikki when you get home."

"I will Grandpa," replied Tommy. "Now tell me the story, please."

### ***Bert the Stag Beetle***

***In which Bert learns not to eat root ginger.***



*Bert was a stag beetle. He'd been a stag beetle all his life and had no desire to be anything else. He especially did not want to be a ladybird which is another type of beetle. He didn't like ladybirds. He thought they were nasty little beetles always going on about their bright red wings covered in black spots.*



*Bert lived at the bottom of a big garden with his mum and dad and brothers and sisters. He was a happy stag beetle and wandered around the garden during the day looking for old bits of wood to chew on and a sunny patch of earth where he could sit down and rest for a while.*



*One day, he came across a piece of root ginger, the sort you use in cooking. Someone in the house must have put it out for the birds. Now, there are two things you must know about root ginger and stag beetles. The first is that stag beetles find root ginger irresistible. It looks like old wood and they are attracted by the smell and cannot resist having a chew on the fibrous root. The second thing is that if a stag beetle eats root ginger, it instantly turns into a ladybird!*

*Bert being an adventurous stag beetle decided to have a chew at the root ginger and - pouf, just like that - turned into a ladybird.*

*"Oh no," exclaimed Bert in dismay looking down at his new red wings with small black spots. "What happened? I'll never be able to go home now. What will Mum and Dad say?"*

*"Got a problem there, lad?" asked a gruff voice.*

*Bert turned around to see a rather large spider looking at him, a big smile spread all over his face.*

*"I watched you eat the ginger and knew what would happen," said the spider. "I've seen it happen before."*

*"What'll I do?" wailed Bert. "My mum and dad won't be at all happy and my brothers and sisters will all laugh at me."*

*"Well, you could go and find a ladybird family to live with, or you could ..." the spider's voice trailed off.*

*"Could what?" said Bert the new ladybird, or should that be manbird? "What could I do?"*

*"There is a cure but it's rather dangerous," said the spider. "You need to find a crow's nest and walk around the edge in a clockwise direction three times saying:*

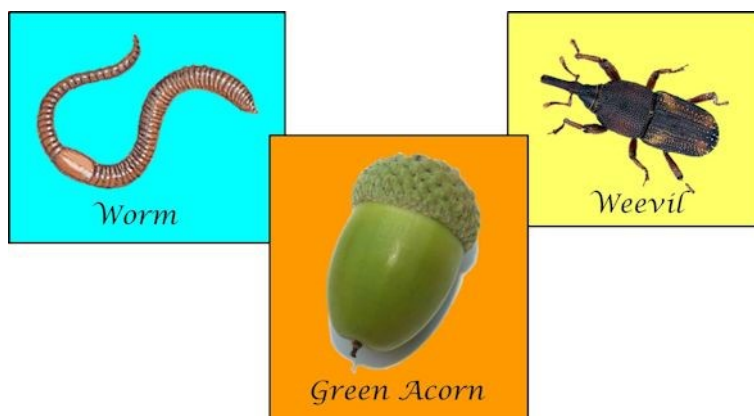
*Ladybird, ladybird, please wave your flag.  
Turn me back to a nice black stag.*

*... but be careful; crows eat ladybirds," concluded the spider.*

*"Will that work?" asked Bert.*

*"Oh yes. It's magic. I've seen it work before, once when a worm ate a green acorn and turned into a weevil but his rhyme was different:*

*Weevil, weevil, don't make me squirm.  
Turn me back to a wriggly worm.*



*Bert thought about this for a while. He knew where there was a crow's nest in the big old oak tree at the edge of the garden but the crow who lived there was bad-tempered and Bert had no intention of providing him with a late lunch or early dinner.*

*"There's a crow's nest ..." started the spider.*

*"I know, I know," interrupted Bert. "Let me think a while. Okay, I'll do it. Do you know when the crow will not be there?"*

*"Yes, he goes for a fly-around at 4 o'clock every afternoon. Talks to his friends. Gets back at 4:15."*

*"What's the time now? I've left my watch back in the nest."*

*The spider looked at his watch. "Just gone 3 o'clock," he replied. "You've plenty of time to get down to the tree and hide in the roots until the crow flies off at 4 o'clock. But wait a minute."*

*And so saying, the spider jumped onto Bert the ladybird and, in one gulp, swallowed him up for spiders also eat ladybirds, you see.*

*The moral of this story is never trust a spider, especially if you're a ladybird; and never eat ginger, especially if you're a stag beetle.*

*"Grandpa!" protested Tommy. "That's not a happy ending."*

*"Well, not all stories have a happy ending, Tommy. Tomorrow, I'll see if I can find a happy-ending story but, for now, it's time for you to go home before your mum starts to worry and shout at me for keeping you up late."*

*"Okay Grandpa," said Tommy gathering up his school bag. "Will you show me the secret place tomorrow?"*

*"I might," replied Grandpa putting on his socks and shoes. "Let's go. I'll walk you to the end of the road."*

When he reached home, Tommy decided to tell his mum about the stag beetle in case she found out about it from Lizzie Turner's mum and then he offered to tell Nikki the story about the stag beetle as a bedtime story. But he changed the ending. He said that Bert the ladybird did indeed wait until 4 o'clock and when the crow flew off to see his friends, Bert flew up to the nest and duly walked around it three times in a clockwise direction reciting the little poem the spider had told him. At the end of the third lap, Bert turned back into a stag beetle and he was able to fly back to his home where he lived happily ever after, vowing never to eat root ginger again even if it was served up on toast with a little bit of his favourite brown sauce on the side.

Nikki was happy with the story and went sound asleep dreaming of friendly stag beetles and ladybirds and Tommy's mum forgave him for scaring Lizzie Turner and said she would cook him his favourite chicken and broccoli pie tomorrow night for when he returned from school. Tommy was pleased about that.

(^\_^)

### **Questions**

1. What did Tommy do to Lizzie Turner? Was she happy about it? If not, why not?
2. Where does Grandpa get his stories from? Can you tell a story?
3. What happens if a stag beetle eats root ginger?

## Chapter 2

### **In which Tommy learns about Grandpa's past and hears the first of many secrets.**

Tommy didn't get to see his granddad again for six days. Sometimes, he had too much homework. Sometimes, he went out to play with his friends. Sometimes he had to go shopping with Mum. And sometimes he had to *do stuff* around the house. Tommy's dad was a bigwig in a large international company—something to do with a 'farm' and something called 'suiticals'; Tommy didn't know quite how to say it and certainly couldn't spell the word—but whatever it was meant that Tommy's dad had to travel to foreign countries and was often away for a week or more. As a result, Tommy's mum insisted that Tommy helped her keep the house clean, look after Nikki, do the washing up, and even sweep the floor now and again. When she wanted Tommy to do these things, she would call him and tell him it was time to *do stuff* and these days and evenings became known as *do stuff* days and evenings.

Tommy didn't mind too much. He was happy to help his mum. She worked hard during the day helping out at a local charity shop and sometimes she just wanted to come home, put her feet up on a footstool, and watch television while Tommy made her a cup of tea and kept Nikki occupied.

Consequently, it was six days before Tommy next visited his granddad.

"Hello Grandpa," he shouted through the letterbox. "It's me, Tommy. Open the door please."

"Where have you been?" asked Grandpa, somewhat grumpily. "It's been quiet here on my own."

Tommy's grandmother had passed away seven years ago, gone to that big rest home in the sky, Grandpa said. Tommy had some vague memories of her but he knew Grandpa still missed her and the house was full of framed photographs of when they were young—the wedding, pictures of his mum when she was a young girl, pictures of people who Tommy didn't recognise and even Grandpa had difficulty naming these days, and pictures of him and Nikki when they were babies.

"Sorry, Grandpa. I had a couple of *do stuff* days and Mum's been busy repairing a dress for old Mrs Watson next door so I had to look after Nikki."

"How is that little poppet, Nikki? I haven't seen her for over a week now."

"Mum said she'll pop in tomorrow morning and bring Nikki," replied Tommy. "It's Saturday and Mum wants to go shopping so she asked if it's okay if she drops us both off tomorrow morning for a couple of hours."

"Yes, that's okay. You're better off here than being dragged around a supermarket full of crazy people buying food they'll never eat and spending money they haven't got," said Grandpa. Grandpa was not fond of shopping at the best of times and certainly didn't like supermarkets except when he needed some new easies. He still bought most of his food at the corner shop run by Ranjit Singh, an Indian gentleman who had settled there a few years back and kept the shop open from dawn to dusk. You should open the shop from *dusk* to *dawn* Ranjit, his granddad used to say. Yes sir, very good sir, Ranjit would reply very seriously wobbling his head side to side, and then burst out laughing at Grandpa's little joke.

Tommy walked through to the kitchen.

"Is your dad home, Tommy?" asked Grandpa.

"No. He's away on one of his trips. I think he's back next Friday. Did you used to travel, Grandpa?"

"Oh yes. I travelled all over the world when I was working for a living. I went to America, to India, to Japan, and all over Europe. I even went to South Africa once—nice place, full of wild animals and fantastic scenery. I took your grandmother. She wanted to stay there forever."

"What did you do when you were working, Grandpa? Were you an aircraft pilot?"

"Oh no, Tommy lad. I was an architect. I..."

"What's an architect, Grandpa?" Tommy interrupted.

"An architect is someone who designs buildings—houses, office blocks, factories— all sorts of things. I worked for a famous company of architects and I designed houses mostly. In fact, I designed this house, many years ago, when I first got started."

"Wow," said Tommy. "Is that why it has funny bits of roof and windows in strange places?"

"Now hang on lad. This house has secrets."

"What do you mean?" asked Tommy. "What sort of secrets?"

"A secret room," replied Grandpa, dropping his voice almost to a whisper. "A room so well hidden that no-one would ever find it unless they pulled the house down."

Tommy stared at his granddad, his eyes and mouth wide open.

"Where is it, Grandpa?" he whispered back. Tommy had explored the house many times but he had never found a secret room and he could not imagine where it was. Upstairs on the floor with the bedrooms? Downstairs on the floor where the kitchen and lounge were located? Down in the basement where the lighting was low and it sometimes smelt damp? It had to be there, he thought.

"Show me Grandpa, show me. It must be down in the basement. What's inside the secret room?" he asked breathlessly.

"That's for me to know and you to find out," replied Grandpa. "In any case, it wouldn't be a secret if I told you, now would it?"

"Aw Grandpa, please please tell me. I won't sleep tonight unless you do."

"Oh yes you will," said Grandpa. "I'll tell you a short story about a secret room and you will sleep like a log. Okay?"

"I guess so but will you show me your secret room sometime? What's in it? Can you at least tell me that?"

"No," replied Grandpa. "I will show you the secret room one day and tell you what's in it but for now you'll have to make do with my story. Make yourself comfortable. I'll go and put my socks on and then I'll begin."

Tommy settled back into the cushions in his chair and waited for Grandpa to begin the story but his mind was racing all over the house wondering where the secret room was and speculating on what was inside.

### ***The Secret Room in the Vicarage***

***In which Edith and Jean go to school, uncover a secret, and rescue a cat.***



*Way back before motor cars were invented and when people travelled around on horseback or in a horse-drawn carriage, there lived a young girl called Edith. Edith's dad*



was a watchmaker and her mum worked as a maid in a big grand house down by the river. Edith was still at school, or at least at what passed for a school in her village. It was a big old corner room in the local vicarage and the vicar's wife taught all the village children to read and to write and, in some cases, how to add up and subtract numbers.

One day, while Edith and the other children were waiting for the vicar's wife to arrive and start teaching, Edith and her friend Jean heard a sound behind the wall at the back of the room.

"That sounds like a cat," Edith said to Jean.

"Sure does," replied her friend, "but where's it coming from?"

"Behind the wall," said Edith, approaching the wall, her head to one side listening for the mewing sound.

"There it is again," said Jean as they both reached the wall. "Listen."

The sound seemed to be coming from low down and was definitely behind the wall.

"But this is an outside wall," said Edith, "so how did the cat get behind it?"

"I don't know," said Jean. "Let's go out into the garden and take a look."

The two girls went through the door leading to the garden and stared at the outside wall with the windows and where it joined the wall at the end of the house.

"That's odd," said Edith. "Inside the classroom, that window there is right at the end of the room but outside, the window finishes well before it reaches the end wall. There must be a small room between the back wall in the classroom and the end wall of the house. Let's take a look."

With that, the two girls ran back into the classroom and began tapping on the end wall. Sure enough, the taps sounded hollow.

"Yes, there is a space behind here," cried Edith.

Just then the vicar's wife came in and the two girls told her all about their discovery. The vicar's wife listened patiently and then said:

"You are correct. There is a small room there but it was boarded up a long time ago. In the days of Good Queen Bess, Queen Elizabeth the First, many women were hunted down and accused of being witches. Terrible things happened to them. This place has always been a vicarage and at the time of the witch hunts, the vicar who lived here was not convinced that witches really existed and he built this secret room to hide women from the village who were accused of being witches. There is a small door outside, well hidden behind a large bush, where the women could enter and hide in the room and he would pass them food and water until the witchfinders had moved away to another village. Then he would let them out and normal life would return to the village."

"Did anybody ever find the women?" asked Edith.

"No. No woman in this village was ever hurt because she was suspected of being a witch," replied the vicar's wife. "If you go inside the room, you will find the original straw mattresses the women slept on and a small table and some chairs where they ate their bread and drank their water. There's even a bucket up one end behind a curtain where they... well, you know what I mean."

"That's amazing," said Jean. "Fancy that. A secret room and all this time we didn't know about it. Are there any ghosts in the room?"

"Well now, that would be telling, wouldn't it?" replied the vicar's wife with a smile. "But, we'd best rescue the cat. There is a gap underneath the small door to the room and my guess is that's how the cat found its way into the room. I'll go fetch the key and let it out."

Edith, Jean, and the rest of the class who, by now, had been listening to the vicar's wife tell her story, all trooped out and around the back to watch the vicar's wife stoop down behind a large bushy shrub and open the door whereupon the cat ran out mewing loudly.

"That's odd," remarked the vicar's wife looking at the name tag on the cat's collar. "That cat belongs next door and used to be a tabby cat—brown, orange and white in colour. Look at it now. It's jet black!"

*Edith felt a cold shiver run up and down her spine as she looked at the cat. It was looking directly at her, eyes unblinking and very green. Edith screamed as she looked down and saw that she was slowly but very surely changing into a witch!*



"Grandpa, I thought that was going to be a happy-ending story! I'm feeling all shivery now."

Grandpa laughed. "Don't worry Tommy. There are no witches these days but just be careful if you see a black cat. Cross over the road if necessary and don't, whatever you do, let a black cat walk across your path."

"Grandpa! Stop it."

Grandpa laughed again and gestured toward the cake and milk on the table.

"Eat up. It's time to go home," he said, still smiling.

(^\_^)

### Questions

1. Where do you think Grandpa's secret room is inside his house? What's inside the room?
2. A few hundred years ago, some old women were suspected of being a witch. Do you think witches still exist?
3. Are you frightened of black cats?

### Chapter 3

#### **In which Tommy and Nikki feed the ducks and play on the swings and Nikki discovers a strange fact about dragonflies.**

Early next morning, Tommy's mum Maggie dropped the two children off at Grandpa's. She had her own key and unlocking the door, walked straight in and entered the kitchen. Grandpa was sitting at the table finishing off a bit of toast and marmalade and doing a crossword in the newspaper. Nikki ran to him, threw her small arms around him, and almost knocked his cup of tea over.

"Grandpa, Grandpa, how are you?" she cried.

"Fine luvvie, fine. Let me look at you," he said disconnecting her arms and holding her in front of him. "My, you have grown this much since last I saw you," he said opening her arms out as wide as he could.

"Grandpa, you saw me last week. I haven't hardly not grown at all," replied the little girl in a serious tone.

"I'm only kidding Nikki," said Grandpa with a grin. "And it's 'I have hardly grown', not 'I haven't hardly not grown'. Don't they teach you anything at that school of yours?"

Maggie had been standing in the doorway watching the exchange between her dad and her daughter with a slight smile on her face.

"Morning Dad," she said. "Is everything okay?"

"Hi Mags; yeah, everything's tickety-boo. Young Tommy here pops around occasionally to check up on me and keep me company," he said ruffling Tommy's hair.

"Good. Well, I'll away to the supermarket. Is there anything you want?" asked Maggie.

"A packet of dark-chocolate digestive biscuits will be good. Ranjit Singh only keeps the milk-chocolate ones in his shop, silly old man. He says if he gets them in, I'll be the only person who'll buy them."



"Well, I'll think about that," his daughter replied. "You eat too many of those biscuits and you could do with losing a bit of weight. You're still wearing those old easies, I see. I suspect you go to bed in those, don't you?"

"Maggie, of course not!" he protested. "Now, away with you. The children and I have lots to do. It's a lovely morning. I think we'll wander down to the park, feed the ducks, go on the swings and see-saw, and maybe have an ice cream. What do you say, you two?"

"Yes!" shouted Nikki.

"Sounds good to me, Grandpa," replied Tommy.

"Okay. I'll be back around eleven," Maggie said. "Be good," she added as she went back out to her car.

"They'll be fine," Grandpa shouted back to her and then turning to the children, "Do you want some toast or a drink before we go?"

"No. We've had breakfast Grandpa. Let's go, let's go!"

The park was only five minutes' walk away and along the way they chatted about school, news of their dad, and a cartoon film they had recently seen at the cinema. Grandpa carried a bag of old bread he'd saved for the ducks and Nikki insisted they make straight for the small pond and feed the ducks. The ducks saw them coming and swam rapidly towards the edge, ready for their feast. Grandpa sat down on a nearby bench and watched the children throw the bread to the squawking birds. He knew that bread was not the best food for ducks but there was plenty of underwater weed in the pond and the ducks were forever upending themselves to feed off the good stuff at the bottom when there was no bread on offer. Their diet is not too bad, he thought.

When all the bread had gone, the children came back and sat down with Grandpa on the bench.

"Let's go to the playground," said Tommy.

"Yes. I'll show you how high I can go on the swings," added Nikki, and off they rushed to the playground where, for fifteen minutes or so, they swung, see-sawed, climbed, slid, and hung upside down while Grandpa kept a watchful eye on them.

After a while, Grandpa took them over to the ice cream van and armed with Mr Whippy 99 cones, they wandered back to the bench by the pond.

"Oh look, there's a dragonfly," said Nikki pointing to a large dragonfly with beautiful sky-blue wings hovering over the water.

"Do you know that some dragonflies used to be fairies?" said Grandpa.

Nikki turned her head towards Grandpa. "Really?" she said. "How did that happen?"

"Have I never told you the story about how fairies become dragonflies?" asked Grandpa.

"No," said Tommy and Nikki in unison. Now Tommy, being older than Nikki, wasn't sure he believed in fairies anymore but Nikki was convinced they existed and was curious to hear more.

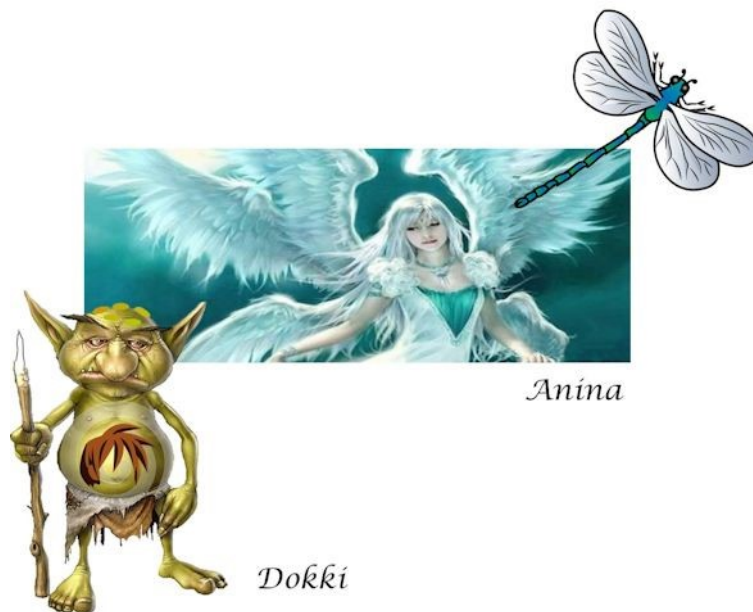
"Tell us the story, Grandpa," she said.

"Let me see; what's the time? It's quite a long story," he said, glancing at his watch.

"Okay. We don't have to go back yet so let me tell you how and when fairies became dragonflies.

### ***Anina and Dokki***

***In which Anina the fairy has an unfortunate encounter with Dokki the Go-Badly goblin and learns about dragonflies.***



Anina came into existence on the ninth day of the ninth week of the ninth month of the ninth year in the ninth century of Fairy Time. Fairies aren't born like human babies. They suddenly exist. They suddenly,... well,... just become fairies. Nobody knows how this happens, except maybe the Chief Fairy, but that's how Anina was born, if 'born' is the right word. When the other fairies asked her name, she instantly said 'Anina'. Anina is the fairy word for nine and it has a very unusual and remarkable property. It spells the same word forwards and backwards, just like Anna, Elle and Otto.

Anina was also remarkable for another reason. She had four wings, not two. She had two wings on each shoulder. Again, nobody knew how this happened and for these reasons the other fairies looked upon Anina with awe and respect and Anina knew then that she was a very special fairy and she set about doing extra good things everywhere she went. Her four wings could carry her much further and faster than ordinary two-winged fairies and whenever someone was in trouble and needed a bit of magic to help them out Anina was there, waving her wand and fluttering her wings.

Now, you may not know this but fairies are indestructible. They are immortal. Nothing can hurt them: fire, big rocks, water, even centipedes and scorpions. If a cow accidentally steps on a fairy while it's resting under a mushroom, the fairy just picks itself up, shakes the dust from its wings, and goes off to find another mushroom. If a bird accidentally picks up a fairy in its beak thinking it's a tasty bit of food to feed to the young birds back in the nest, the fairy sprinkles a special form of stardust that tastes nasty and makes the bird cough whereby the fairy drops free and flies away laughing. If a fairy goes to sleep at night on a branch in a very high tree and falls off while still sleep, it immediately wakes up, opens its wings and flies off safely to another branch.

Fairies last forever, or so Anina was told but one day a terrible thing happened. Anina had just finished doing her good deeds for the day and was looking for a place to rest her wings when she came across a Go-Badly goblin called Dokki. Go-Badly goblins are bad news to a fairy. A Go-Badly goblin is resistant to the nasty-tasting stardust and will eat a fairy to increase its magic powers. Everyone in the fairy kingdom thought that Go-Badly goblins were safely locked away. In the great Fairies versus Goblins war in the second century of Fairy Time, all the goblins were finally trapped in a big cave high up in the mountains and the entrance was sealed with as many big rocks as the fairies could find. Not even a small mouse or a humble bumblebee could find its way through the rocks and the fairies were finally free of their enemy.

Not so with Dokki however. On the day all the goblins were trapped, Dokki was away in a foreign land, terrorising the people who lived in the villages and generally having a good time. He was incredibly ugly with big warts all over his head and a very hairy body. His eyes were bloodshot and his big pointy ears were always in need of a jolly good clean. But Dokki didn't worry about these things. He was a Go-Badly goblin, he would say to himself, and Go-Badly goblins can do what they want when they want and to whomever they want. That's what Go-Badly goblins do.

At the end of the great Fairies versus Goblins war, Dokki returned home not knowing what had happened and, to his surprise, discovered that he was the only Go-Badly goblin still left out in the open. All the other Go-Badly goblins and the Snarkles, the Goblots and even the fearsome Pukwudgies, were all locked up in a big cave high up in the mountains and Dokki could neither get in nor let them out. He appointed himself the Eternal Keeper of the Goblins. He would guard the cave, he thought, and see if one day he could gain enough strength to move the rocks away from the entrance. Every day, he used to sit on the biggest rock in the entrance and try to talk through the cracks to his friends inside the cave. But they never heard him and it was a lonely life for Dokki. He vowed to take revenge on the fairies who had done this.

And so it was that he came across Anina when she flew onto one of the rocks after her hard day's work.

Anina did not know that this rock in front of this cave high up on this mountain was the place where all the goblins were trapped. Seven centuries of Fairy Time had passed and very few fairies could remember the terrible battles they had fought with the goblins. But,



the cave was high up and fairies usually didn't like to fly this high so Dokki's presence had not been discovered until that fateful day when Anina settled on the rock.

"Ho, ho, what have we here?" said Dokki placing one dirty-finger-nailed hand on Anina's head, pinning her down on the rock. "A tasty morsel, I think, to increase my strength so that I can move these rocks and let all my brethren out."

Anina struggled but the goblin was too powerful. She let out a cry, a very special cry that could travel far and wide and which would be heard by other fairies who would come to help.

"That won't help you," said Dokki. "After I've eaten you, I will eat the others and my magic powers will become so great I will be able to move all these rocks."

As Anina struggled to get free, Dokki adjusted his grip on her, pinching her four wings tightly together so that she could not use them to fly away. Just as he was about to pop her into his mouth, he heard a noise, a loud shushing noise accompanied by what seemed to be a light breeze. He looked up. Above him, fluttering their wings furiously and making the air move was a great group of fairies led by the Fairy King.

"Ha! You can't hurt me," shouted Dokki.

"Oh yes we can," shouted the fairies and one at a time, they dived down on Dokki pricking their tiny wands into the great big warts all over his head.

"Ouch! Ouch! Get off!" shouted Dokki raising both his hands to ward off the attack thereby letting go of Anina. She scampered off and hid beneath a rock in a space too small for Dokki to follow. She lay there, panting and hurting. Her wings didn't feel right. Dokki had pinched them very hard when he held her prisoner.

In the meantime, Dokki became fed up with the constant pricking of his warts and decided he'd had enough. He picked up his knapsack and a spare pair of boots and ran away further up the mountain where he felt sure the fairies wouldn't follow.

Once he had gone, the fairies turned their attention to Anina.

"Anina, you can come out now. The goblin has gone."

Anina crawled out from beneath the rock. "Thank you my brothers. Thank you my sisters. Thank you Fairy King. But I fear I am seriously wounded. My wings do not seem to work anymore."

A fairy with broken wings is not a happy fairy. A fairy must have good working wings to go about its business and Anina sensed that she was seriously wounded.

"Let me see," said the Fairy King, bending down and examining Anina's wings. "Oh gosh," he said. "This one is badly torn and that one is broken. I'm afraid I cannot mend your wings, Anina."

"What am I to do?" cried Anina. "If I cannot fly, I cannot do good deeds. I will just have to sit here forever and forever."

"Well, there is one thing I can do," said the Fairy King, "but it will make you mortal which means you will eventually die like all mortals."

"What's that?" asked Anina.

"I can turn you into a dragonfly. Dragonflies have four wings, just like you, and you will become a beautiful flying insect, darting over ponds and delighting small children and not-so-small children with your beautiful colours and dazzling flying skills. Would you like that?"

"Yes, yes please Fairy King. I will fly again and make people happy, so yes. Please do it."

The Fairy King raised his magic wand and said the magic words...

*Abracadabra, please do not cry  
I'll turn you into a dragonfly!*

... and then and there, Anina changed into a beautiful dragonfly and flew away in search of a pond.

"It is done," said the Fairy King. "Come fairies. We must away from this terrible place."

*Up high, Dokki watched the fairies depart. Now I'll never become strong enough to move the rocks, he thought. I wonder if the Fairy King can turn me into anything.*

*Far away, the Fairy King heard the thoughts of the goblin but chose to ignore them. He could have waved his magic wand a second time and turned the goblin into a scaly warty toad but he thought he'd save that for another day.*

"Oh, that was a lovely story, Grandpa," said Nikki. "Do all dragonflies come from fairies?"

"Some do, some don't," replied Grandpa. "After Anina became a dragonfly, a lot more fairies started to have four wings and many chose to become dragonflies rather than live forever. So, many of the dragonflies you see here and in other places used to be fairies."

"How can you tell?" asked Nikki.

"The dragonflies with sky-blue wings come from fairies. Those with violet, brown or salmon-pink wings are ordinary dragonflies," replied Grandpa.

Nikki sat quietly looking and waiting for another dragonfly to appear and, sure enough, one with sky-blue wings came over from the other side of the pond and settled on a reed right in front of her.

"Hello fairy," she whispered quietly. "You are looking very lovely today."

The dragonfly seemed to lift its head and look straight at her for a while and then it opened its four wings, dipped its head as if in farewell and flew off back to the other side of the pond.

"Time to go," said Grandpa. "Your mother will be coming to fetch you shortly."

"Goodbye fairy," said Nikki as they left. "I'll be back just as soon as I can."

"Where's the secret room and what's inside?" asked Tommy.

"Oh yes. I haven't told you about that, have I? I must remember to do so very soon."

"Yes, Grandpa. Very soon," replied Tommy sternly.

(^\_^)

### Questions

1. Have you ever seen a dragonfly? Where was it?
2. Do you think the Fairy King should have changed Dokki into a toad? Toads aren't so bad, are they?
3. Grandpa likes dark-chocolate digestive biscuits. What sort of biscuits do you like?

## Chapter 4

### **In which Grandpa reveals how to construct a secret room in a house and Tommy learns about the Dream Trappers**

"Grandpa, tell me about the secret room," said Tommy. He had left school as soon as the bell went, caught the school bus home, changed out of his school uniform, and ran as fast as he could to Grandpa's house. He was now out the back perched on a small bench placed against the wall. Grandpa was seated opposite in an old deck chair that looked as if it was about to collapse under his weight.

"Ah, so that's why you came early today, is it?" said Grandpa. "You want to know about the secret room, eh? Well, let me tell you about building a secret room inside a house. First, you *don't* build a secret room inside a house. You build a house around a secret room. At least, that's what I did when I designed and built this house. If the room is to remain a secret, it must blend in with everything else in the house—the other rooms, the stairs, the floors, the ceilings, the windows, and the doors. So, let us think about this house. Do you think the secret room is on the ground floor where the kitchen and the lounge are located, Tommy?"

"No," replied Tommy.

"Why not?" asked Grandpa.

"Because every room including the hallway has an outside wall with at least one window and every room can be entered through a door. There's no space for a secret room."

"That's correct," said Grandpa. "How about the upstairs?"

Tommy thought for a moment. "I don't think so," he said, "for the same reason. Every bedroom, and the bathroom, also has a window and there are no secret places between any of the bedrooms. It must be either in the loft or the basement," he concluded.

"I can tell you it's in neither of those places," said Grandpa. "The loft is full of rafters, beams, joists, struts and what we call web braces that help to keep the whole structure rigid. There is no room in my loft to build a secret room and in any case, you've been up there through the trap door when you were looking for my old photographs once. Don't you remember? You didn't see a secret room, did you?"

"No," said Tommy ruefully. "It's got to be in the basement then."

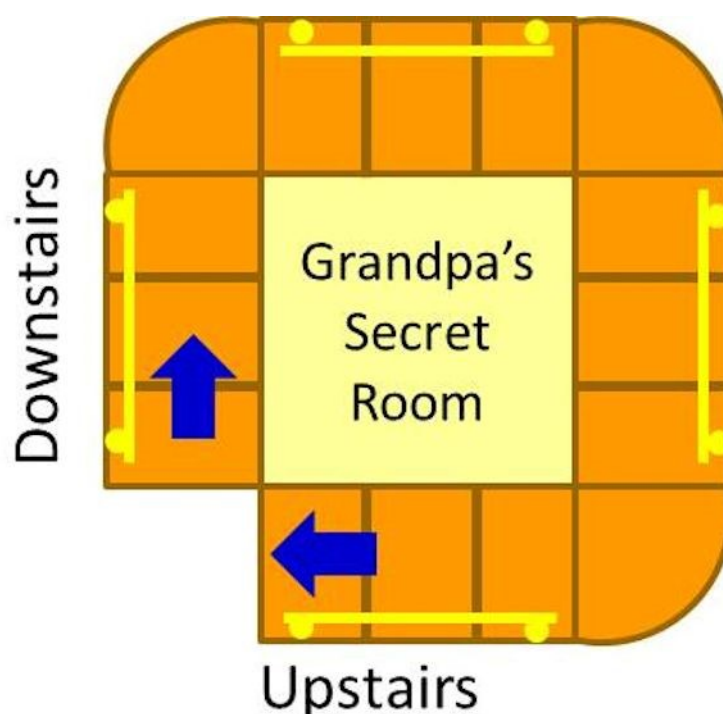
"Nope. Wrong again Tommy. My basement is hardly a basement at all. I dug it out when the footings of the house were laid but I never built a secret room down there. It's too damp and dingy; definitely not the place to hide a secret room. Try again."

"Well, I give up," said Tommy. "There's no other place you can build a secret room unless it's outside here in the garden."

"No. It's in the house. Think carefully. What did I say about building a house around a secret room, not the other way round? Think about when you go up the stairs. How many times do you turn a corner before you reach the top?"

"Three," replied Tommy, "and always a right turn." And then it dawned on him. "I think I've got it, Grandpa. When I go up the stairs, there's a railing on the outside but just a smooth wall on the inside and I turn a corner every three steps. The secret room must be inside that smooth wall. It's a small box-like room. Am I right?"

"Yes," said Grandpa. "You are correct. Every time you turn a corner, you always turn right as you said. The room is in the space between the ground floor and the first floor and you are walking around it as you climb the stairs. It's not very big but it's big enough to stand up in once you're inside."



"How do you get inside, Grandpa?"

"One of those smooth walls you mentioned is actually on hidden hinges. If you know where to push on the wall, the door will open inwards and you can enter the room."

Tommy was quite excited now and anxious to go inside the house and open the door and he leapt up, grabbed his granddad's hand and tried to pull him up out of the deck chair.

"Let's go, let's go, Grandpa. Show me the room."

"Wait a minute," said Grandpa, resisting the insistent tug on his arm. "There's another secret you must know about. Sit down, and I'll tell you a story, this time about your great-great-great-great grandfather."

"That's five greats," said Tommy.

"Yes. Let me call him by his proper name which was Arthur. I'll get fed up saying great-great-great-great grandfather all the time! His full name was Arthur Higginbottom. He was named Arthur after Arthur Wellesley, the First Duke of Wellington, who defeated Napoleon at Waterloo, and Higginbottom because that was his dad's name!"

"That's the same as your surname, Grandpa," said Tommy.

"Yes, but not your name, Tommy. Your mother took your dad's surname when she got married. His name, and your name, is Postlewhite. Your mum thought about adding her maiden surname to your dad's surname but Maggie Higginbottom-Postlewhite would have been a bit of a mouthful, don't you think?"

"So would Tommy Higginbottom-Postlewhite, Grandpa," said Tommy with a laugh.

"Tommy Postlewhite is bad enough! The boys at school are forever asking to see my *white postle*!"

Grandpa roared with laughter at the thought of Tommy being asked about his white postle. "That's not as bad as being asked about your *higgin bottom*," he said with another great laugh. "The word *postle* is short for *apostle*, someone who is a keen supporter of a new idea or cause," he said, "so the boys who ask you this question have got the wrong idea about a postle, white or otherwise."

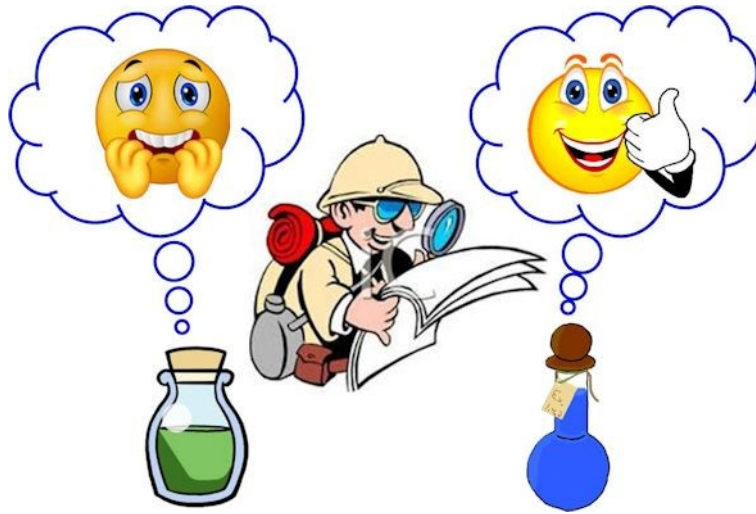
"I'll let them know," said Tommy seriously. "Can I have the story now?"

"Ah yes. Sit down while I collect my thoughts."

Tommy sat down and waited for Grandpa to start the story.

***Arthur, the original Dream Guardian***

***In which Arthur meets the Dream Trappers, learns how to bottle a dream, and becomes the first Dream Guardian.***



Arthur Higginbottom lived many years ago and was an explorer. He explored mountains, valleys, deserts, forests, oceans, and old towns and cities belonging to ancient civilisations. He enjoyed exploring and he wrote a great many books about what he found but there was one book he never wrote. He just carried it in his head. The book he never wrote was called *How To Save and Recall Dreams*. Now, of course, it is silly to name a book that was never written because how can a book that was never written have a name? But Arthur didn't worry about that. He named the book, never wrote it, carried it about in his head, and always knew what page to turn to if he needed information about dreams.

There was another reason why Arthur never wrote his book. What he had discovered was so important that he didn't want anyone else to know about it except his son, and his son's son, and his son's son's son, and so on. When the time came, he would pass the knowledge down to his son and instruct him also never to write the book.

What Arthur discovered was how to capture a dream and put it away safely in a corked bottle ready to be opened and re-dreamed if necessary. This was a very important discovery. He learnt it from an ancient tribe of mystical people called the Dream Trappers living in the middle of a vast tropical rainforest, a jungle, somewhere very close to Africa. Arthur even kept the name and location of this tribe secret so that no-one else could discover its whereabouts.

Basically, the Dream Trappers had worked out how to trap a dream as it left a person who had finished dreaming. At the time, and even now, when a person dreams, the dream feels very real and often involves other people, some known to the dreamer, some not. Sometimes, the dreams can become quite frightening and may cause the dreamer to wake up. When this happens they are called nightmares and the Dream Trappers were anxious to catch these nightmarish dreams and banish them from the minds of the dreamers forever. The tribe also wanted to catch good dreams (Arthur called them happiness dreams) so that the dreamers could remember them and, if they wanted, re-enter the dream and continue the story when next they slept. The elders of the tribe worked hard and diligently and, eventually, learnt how to capture the dream at the point when it left the dreamer and store it inside a dream bottle. To do this, they used a cloth made from the finest silk collected from specially-bred silkworms fed only on milk and honey. The silk threads were so fine that even a dream could not escape through the fabric. A silk cloth was spread lightly over the sleeping person and at the end of the dream as it broke away from inside the dreamer's head it became trapped under the cloth. The elders would then draw the ends of the cloth together, tie them with a fine silk rope, turn the cloth upside



*down, place an open dream bottle over the tied-up ends, untie the rope, and squeeze the cloth to force the dream into the bottle. When the cloth was empty, the bottle entrance was secured with a special cork and the now-awake dreamer asked what sort of dream it was. This all had to be done quickly for it is well known that the last bits of a dream still left in the dreamer's mind fade very quickly and all memory of the dream is then lost. If the dream was a happiness dream, the bottle would be labelled with a title that summarised the dream, such as Climbing up a Rainbow. If the dream was a nightmare, such as Chased by a Big Hairy Monster, the special cork would be sealed for all time with a red sealing wax and the dream bottle put away never to be reopened.*

*All this Arthur found out from the ancient tribe and all this he carried in his head and, when the time came, passed down to his son. He learnt to capture his own dreams and the dreams of others and over time he built up a collection of dreams which he stored, first in a small wooden chest he carried with him everywhere he went and, eventually, in a secret room he built in his house back home. In this way he became the Guardian of the Dreams, responsible for making sure the secret of how to capture and store dreams was kept always in the family and responsible for making sure nobody ever entered the secret room to tamper with the dreams. His title was The Dream Guardian and this title was passed down from father to son, father to son, until we reach the present day.*

Grandpa paused and looked at Tommy. "I am the Dream Guardian," he said solemnly, "and you will be the next Dream Guardian. I had no son, only Maggie my daughter, your mother, and the ancient tribe of Dream Trappers ruled that the Dream Guardian should always be a male. I don't know why they did this but, in those days, the females in the family were not considered strong enough to carry the responsibility of looking after the dreams inside the dream bottles. I think these days we would not agree with such a rule but I talked with your mother about this and she agreed the title should pass to you when the time comes. I don't plan on joining Grandma in that big rest home in the sky anytime soon but I do need to show you how to open the secret room, how to capture and store new dreams, and how to open a dream and relive it."

Tommy looked at his granddad. It was a lot to take in and he was a little bit overwhelmed by all the things Grandpa had told him.

"Does this mean I won't be getting any more stories?" he asked.

"Oh no no no. I will still tell you and Nikki stories and, in fact, if necessary we can open some of the happiness dreams and re-dream them. They date back many years and it'll be interesting to experience a dream made a few hundred years ago. With what's in that secret room, you will have enough stories to last you a lifetime. I mean, when you think about it, the stories in my head are just like dreams but I am awake when I tell them."

"Yes, I understand Grandpa. Can we go and look inside the secret room now?"

"No. I think you've had enough secrets for one day. Next time you come around, I'll show you how to open the door and we'll take a peek inside. Okay?"

"Okay Grandpa," said Tommy. "I suppose I'd better get off home now."

Grandpa walked with Tommy to the door and stood and watched him walk down the road until he turned the corner into his road. Tommy seemed to be walking slower than usual. Today's been a big day for him, thought Grandpa. It'll get even bigger when I open the room for him.

(^\_^)

### Questions

1. Are there any secret places in your house? Where are they?
2. When you dream, do you remember the dream when you wake up?
3. Would you like to be a Dream Guardian?

## Acknowledgements

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- Lottie Brandon (granddaughter) for her rendition of the Dream Guardian (front cover), based on an original artwork called the Dream Guardian by 1313cookie at <http://1313cookie.deviantart.com/art/Digital-Art-Practice-Dream-Guardian-Again-535630500>
- Layla, our collective and lovable Mal-Shi, for inspiring the story Grandpa told in chapter 18. One evening, early 2017, she was frightened by a nearby gunshot and did a runner. She was found in a garden over a mile away and reported to the local council who collected her and returned her to us. Never was £20, the collection fee, more willingly spent.

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### About the Author

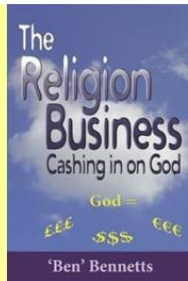
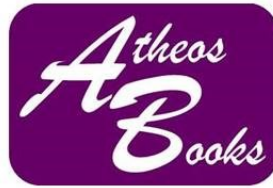


With *Fat Betty* on the Coast-to-Coast, 2010

I'm a retired electronics engineer in my 70s. I write blogs and books and before my knees wore out, walked long-distance trails with my wife Carol. During my professional career, I authored two technical books and just under one hundred technical papers. Since retiring in 2007, I've written various books under my own name and two under the pseudonym of J C Pascoe. You can read more about the books on my website, [ben-bennetts.com/books](http://ben-bennetts.com/books). The books are available as e-books on [www.smashwords.com](http://www.smashwords.com) and in Amazon's Kindle Store.

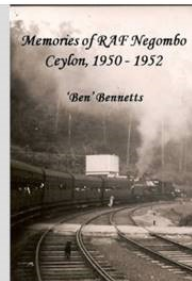
Contact me at [ben@ben-bennetts.com](mailto:ben@ben-bennetts.com)

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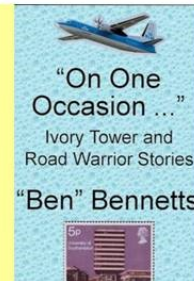
[The Religion Business:](#)  
[Cashing in on God](#)  
2012, e-book and p-book

An atheist's view of religion



[Memories of RAF Negombo](#)  
[Ceylon, 1950 - 52](#)  
(Assisted by Maureen Wyatt  
(née Bennetts))  
2012, e-book.

My life as a small boy living  
on an RAF camp in Ceylon,  
now Sri Lanka.



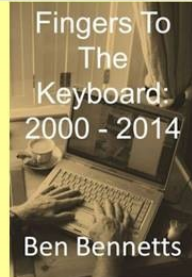
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[Tower and Road Warrior](#)  
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2013, e-book

Stories from my professional  
career as a university  
lecturer (Ivory Tower) and, a  
world-travelling consultant  
in electronics (Road  
Warrior).



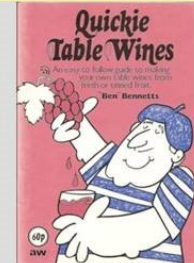
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Stories from multi-day hikes  
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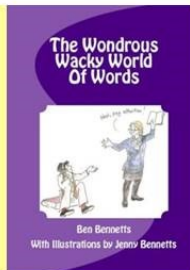
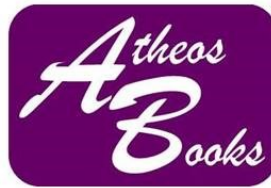
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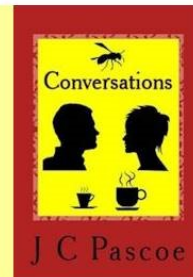
Tales From The Trails  
Part 2: non-UK Trails



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[Tales from the Trails Part 2: non-UK Trails](#)  
2015, e-book

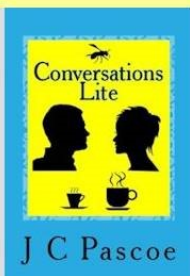
More stories from long-distance hikes, this time further afield (Nepal, India, Madeira, Spain and Switzerland)



[Conversations \(J C Pascoe\)](#)  
2016, e-book and p-book

A novel about a young university student (Abi) and an older divorcé (Gerry), the lives of honey bees, and lots of sex.

**Note: sexually explicit and not suitable for minors.**



[Conversation Lite \(J C Pascoe\)](#)  
2016, e-book and p-book

As per *Conversations* but without the sex.

Fingers To The Keyboard:  
2015 - 2016



Ben Bennetts

[Fingers to the Keyboard: 2015 – 2016](#)  
2017, e-book

A collection of all my blogs published in 2015 and 2016

The Dream Guardian



Ben Bennetts

The Dream Guardian  
2017, in preparation

Stories told to Tommy and Nikki by Grandpa, the Dream Guardian.

(^\_^)