

Chapter Two

Spills and Thrills

“I found these bottles in the darkest corner of a very old shop in a small Welsh village, at the foot of a mountain upon which stands a medieval castle,” said Aunt Thea. “The man who sold them to me said that the lord who lived in the castle, many centuries ago, once asked every wise woman in the village to create the perfect drink to fill his prized goblet, which was made of Welsh gold and set with rubies. The drink had to be perfectly sweet and perfectly wet, perfectly cool on the tongue and perfectly hot in the throat. Only one wise woman could do this, and rumour has it that this woman was a witch – because not only was the drink the most delectable flavour and most fabulous feeling in the world – it also had the power to bring the stuff of dreams . . . *alive!*”

Aunt Thea stared at them both, her brown eyes sparkling like her beads.



“Is that true?” asked Jack. He really *wanted* it to be true – but he was nine now, and felt he should check.

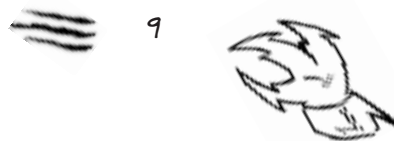
“The drink,” went on Aunt Thea, “was called Merrion’s Mead – after Lord Merrion, who had asked for it. Sadly, the lord forgot that as well as good dreams, we all have *bad* dreams too. He’d had night after night of dancing with princesses, flying with unicorns and turning his trees into barley sugar and eating them – but after drinking three cups of mead late one evening, he had a nightmare and was chased into his own moat by a giant pillow, and sadly drowned.”

There was a moment’s silence. Lewis looked horrified but Jack was pursing his lips.

“How did anyone ever *know* that he’d been dreaming about being chased by a giant pillow?” demanded Jack, and Aunt Thea threw back her head, clapped her hands and laughed.

“That’s just what I said!” she beamed. “Now – get on with your Tauris, boys. Your mum and I have grown-up stuff to talk about.”

Jack and Lewis examined their gifts for a few minutes, then they put the corks back in and placed the bottles on the table next to their drawings. Jack went back to drawing



ELECTROTAUR and Lewis screwed up the last picture (he had a habit of going off his creations) and started a fresh one of SLASHERMITE.

Electrotaur was a tall, golden scaly creature, standing up like a man, but with a spiky tail, the



head of a dragon and claws like bits of lightning. Jack frowned at the criss-cross yellow and red pattern he'd just drawn on Electrotaur's legs. It was meant to look like fire, but was more like the trousers his grandad wore on the golf course. He wasn't sure that this really *worked* on a terrifying electrical monster.

Lewis was doing better with Slashermitte. His Taur's little purple head had spiky ears and a horn in the middle, like a rhinoceros. The rest of his body was covered in purple crayon zigzags. His claws were sharp; used for slashing – but actually, Slashermitte was only a baby, said Lewis, and though he looked scary, was really a goodie.

"Electrotaur's not really bad either," said Jack, putting an electrical glow and a few sparks at the



end of his creation's tail.
"Well – sometimes he is.
He *can* be really mean.
But not if you give him
doughnuts. Doughnuts
always turn him good."

Jack went on about
Electrotaur a bit more
while he tried to improve
the trousers, but Lewis
was engrossed with
Slashermite, who was

coming along nicely. Scrag the cat pushed the
kitchen door open, and Mum and Aunt Thea's
voices could be heard from the dining room. Aunt
Thea sounded serious now. "He's managed to get
everyone else to sell," she sighed, "and to be honest
I probably would have too by now. But he won't
protect the standing stone, I know it. So I can't
move."

"Oh, Thea," sighed their mum, "it's only a
chunk of rock! You can't let a chunk of rock rule
your life."

"Cara, that standing stone is important to the
world," said Aunt Thea. "You never did
understand about these things." Jack bit his lip.

