

## 6: The Horrible People.

Next week Dad and Mum were friends again, the carpet cleaned, the hearthrug patched, the glass door mended and Fierce Bag had a bell round his neck – so the little birdies could hear him and fly away.

But there was a problem –

Up the street –

The most terrible sounds of hammers where a new family had moved in.

Dad leaned against the kitchen table with his arm round Mum. “It’s as though Thor has moved in,” he said.

“Ah,” said Mum, “like the Voice moved in with us.”

Dad didn’t answer. He was already thinking of a poem about Thor and his hammer.

“Bert and Thor  
Were fixing up a door  
Two little taps  
And the outer walls collapse.  
More of what they’re doin’  
And the inside is a ruin.  
Oops, says Bert,  
Heck, says Thor,  
There’s nowhere left  
For fixing up this door.”

Meanwhile Vega was sitting on the step outside the back gate with Fierce Bag plus her Silly and Barmy dolls. Along came a girl from the noisy house. She looked a bit odd, because she had jeans on under her skirt, a sandshoe on one foot, a welly on the other, pigtails that looked like they came from real pigs, a pair of sunglasses over her mouth, and violet lipstick round her eyes.

Vega wasn’t sure whether to say hello or not, but the girl stopped a few paces away, put hands on hips, and stared right at her.

Fierce Bag raised his hackles and backed away.

The girl raised a finger and pointed at Vega’s dolls. “Point point!” she said. “Point at your dolls! Make fun! Laugh laugh! Hur!”

Vega had never been spoken to like this before, so she forgot to say polite things like, “How do you do?” or “What lovely lipstick you have on your eyes!” or “I think you would look better with a dustbin over your head!”

Then the girl produced a Barmy doll of her own – which was very odd because she didn't seem to have one – and she lifted it to her mouth, bit off the head and spat it out, saying, “Threaten, threaten! Talk to you and say I'll bite the heads off your dolls! Sneer sneer! Laugh! Hur!”

Fierce Bag hissed and ran inside the house.

“Chortle!” said the girl. “Turn to go!” and she did indeed turn. “Walk away laughing! Plodge plodge! Hur! Plodge! Hur Hur! Plodge plodge!”

Vega watched her go up the street, then gathered her dolls and rushed inside to tell her parents.

Meanwhile Arcturus had been playing out at the front on his new BMX Super-Whizz-Prang bike. He was just practising wheelies and managing nothing better than the odd crash into a parked car – when along came a strange boy on another bike and rammed him. Right on the front wheel.

Arcturus fell off and his bike tumbled over him. As he lay there he looked up at the strange boy – who wore tartan trousers, a leather dressing gown, shoe boxes on his feet, an eye patch, and a woolly hat with a red flag on top.

The boy opened his mouth, said “Spit!” and sucked in violently. Then he stopped, said “Try again! Spit!” and this time he did manage something – although what came out looked rather like a tongue. “Wait!” he ordered. “I need that!” and he bent down, picked up the tongue-thing and popped it back in his mouth. “There!” he said, nodding triumphantly.

Arcturus looked down at the boy's bike and was puzzled to notice its two wheels looked more like three, or maybe four. He tried sorting this out in his mind, but his eyes went blurry, and the boy spoke again.

“A lot of swear words!” he called. “Bad, vicious words! Really terrible filthy ones!” Then he laughed, “Hur hur! Laugh!” He pointed a finger at Arcturus and said “Point point! Threaten!” He then reached into his mouth, pulled out the tongue-thing, gave it a shake and put it back. “Doesn't fit!” he grumbled. “Grumble grumble! Ride off! Laugh! Hur!”

And he rode away backwards till a wheel fell off. So he picked up the bike, said “Carry!” and plodged home. “Plodge plodge!”

Arcturus watched him go. Then he got out from under his own bike and rushed in to tell his parents.

The two children arrived roughly at the same time.

“Well,” said Dad after listening patiently to their stories, “it sounds like they’re aliens from another planet who aren’t very good at pretending to be humans.”

“Aliens from another planet?” sing-songed Mum. “Are you sure they’re not Thor from another dimension? Or maybe angels from who knows where?”

“Huh,” sneered Dad, “you might mock now, but wait till it gets dark. Then we’ll see what you really believe.” He grinned triumphantly. He reckoned that had got her.

Mum tossed her head. “Well I think the simple solution, children, is they’re just plain barmy. Or to put it another way,” she added, “compared to your father they’re quite sane.”

Just then there was a knock at the front door. (Dad still hadn’t fixed the bell.) Mum went with a sigh.

She opened the door to a man who wore a greasy fawn raincoat which only reached his waist. The rest was stuffed into tight blue jeans over which he wore red leg warmers. He had clogs on his feet, a green cloth cap on his head, and a beard on the left of his face while the right side was clean shaven.

“Hello,” said Mum.

“Are you in!?!?” he shouted at her neck.

Mum turned to look into the house. “Archibald?” she called.

“Why are you calling me Archibald?” asked Dad from back in the living room.

“Not sure,” she replied. “Are we in?”

“All except Archibald,” called Dad. “He nipped into the garden but couldn’t find one, so he’s not back yet.”

Mum nodded as if satisfied. “We’re in,” she said.

“Oh!!” shouted the strange man. “No point in robbing you just yet, then!!!”

Mum smiled sympathetically. “No, probably not.”

“Righto!!” bawled the man, turning to go. “I’ll just pop back when you’re out!!!”

“Okay,” replied Mum, her face full of serious attention. “We’re always in apart from then.”

“Thank you!!” bellowed the man as he limped up the road, clattering away on his clogs.

Mum had just come back – and the children were just asking her who Archibald was – and Dad was just saying the man in the garden – and the children were just replying we don’t have a garden – and Mum was just explaining that’s why you can’t see him when... there

came another knock.

Dad answered it this time.

It was a woman. "Want to buy any clothes pegs?" she slobbered.

Dad looked at her. She wore the biggest pinny in the world, which was gungy white and had "Love isn't" written all over the edges. When she turned sideways, Dad saw she had nothing on underneath apart from woolly tights and a large brown swimsuit. There were broken high heels on her shoes, and yellow ribbons in her hair.

"Clothes pegs?" replied Dad. "Why? Have you got any?"

The woman turned nervously to her three, four or seven small children. "Any of you got clothes pegs?" she asked squelchily. "No Mister," she replied before the brats could answer. And her reply was so wet Dad had to duck under the spray.

As he straightened up, he tried to count the straggly children with her – but his eyes blurred and he could never get the number right.

Suddenly the woman turned, pushed her brood out of the gate, and shouted, "I'll get even for that! Just you wait, you big toilet roll!"

As she waddled away Dad noticed some strips of elastoplast stuck on her back. "Your sellotape's coming undone," he called. "Careful your shoulder doesn't drop off!"

Quick!" she panicked to her three, four or seven children. "Hold me up! I'm coming apart!"

Dad strolled back to the family. "Told you they were aliens," he nodded. "She's only held together with Blu-tack."...

Things got more and more weird as the days went by.

The horrible boy punched Arcturus. "Laugh laugh!" he said and jumped away up the street as if on a pogo stick.

The nasty girl seized one of Vega's Silly dolls and bit its head off. "Snigger snigger," she laughed, then clutched her throat. "Choke choke!" she gasped with bulging eyeballs. Then with a glop! she swallowed the head. "Better!" she smiled. "Burp burp!"

The strange man was seen one night wearing a mask and a hooped jumper. He carried a bag marked "Swag" into which he was carefully emptying the contents of the family's dustbin. Mum opened the back door, handed him a carrier bag full of ash, tin cans, banana skins, old cat food – and said, "Here have this as well."

"Thank you very much you rotten pig!!" shouted the man politely. Then as Mum shut

the door again, he added in a stiff roar, “Very grateful, you horrible donkey!!!”

Next the slobbery woman started posting dirty nappies through the front door. On one particularly evil smelling batch she pinned a notice which read, “Roses are red, violets are blue. Rub this on your head, and jump in the loo.”

Dad spotted her from an upstairs window and shouted, “Your left leg’s dropped off!” Immediately the woman grabbed the leg with both hands and hopped all the way home. She fell over seventeen times.

Things got worse and worse.

There seemed to be dozens of brats falling out of the house every time the door opened.

The man rode up and down on a bike bawling, “Make a racket!! Lots of din!!! Nuisance nuisance!!!”

Smoke and doom hung over the neighbourhood.

Yet whenever Mum and Dad mentioned this to the other neighbours they replied, “Oh the new people. They’re a bit funny aren’t they? Still, they’re not so bad I suppose.”

Dad and Mum couldn’t believe it. “What about all the smoke?” they asked, “and the feeling of doom?”

“You’re imagining things,” the neighbours would reply. “It’s been a bit foggy recently, dull weather, that’s all.”

Meanwhile the situation became even worse.

Plant pots began falling off tables and windowsills. Oozy stains appeared on the wallpaper. The children felt unseen fingers pinching them. The cat would be asleep then leap up as if kicked.

Then the sounds started. Very faint voices calling, “Laugh laugh. Snigger. Plodge plodge.”

And finally, there came a hollow whisper from all around them – pronouncing the name, “KRARG.”

“Humphrey!” the children called. “We need you Humphrey! Where are you?”