



A HUGH DUNNIT MYSTERY

TEETHING TROUBLE

SUSPECT #1



SUSPECT #2



SUSPECT #3



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ILLUSTRATIONS BY
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1.

Feeling a Bit Wobbly

This case . . . this *crime*. Like a lucky dip, it was full of surprises.

Let me take you back to when it started.

But before that, let me take you back another week.

It was Monday. The day that spends itself reminding you that you couldn't be further away from the weekend. There was nothing much to say about it, right up until it spoke for itself. In the morning, I got dressed for school and came down for breakfast. Little did I know my life was going to change for ever. For a few days. One minute, I was having cereal (big bowl, baked flakes, semi-skimmed, sort of soggy) and

the next, I felt something I hadn't felt since the last time I'd felt it.

I had a wobbly tooth.



It was my right canine. It ended up dogging me all week. I couldn't bite into anything hard, which made it hard to eat anything that wasn't soft. I couldn't even eat a biscuit.

That really takes the biscuit, I thought. My leftover birthday cake was just about spongy enough, but Dad had eaten the last slice. *That really takes the cake*, I thought.

As anyone who has bought a house on a cliff can tell you, it's not easy living on the edge. When you know something's going to happen, but you don't know *when* it's going to happen, time moves slowly. This week went so slowly, it felt like it was going backwards. But, sure enough, just like clockwork (if the clock was running out of batteries) Friday finally turned up just to relieve Thursday of its duties. By now, my tooth was wobblier than my gran after her third sherry. Dad said losing your milk teeth was all part of growing up . . . he said maybe I was worried about it because I didn't *want* to grow up, and then he went back to playing with his train set.

Friday meant half-term, and that meant going to stay with Aunt Dahlia. She's great, but she's

still my least-favourite aunt because a) she's a dentist, so the first thing she does when she sees me is pull my lips back like she's drawing curtains, and b) she lives at the seaside, where everything's damp for ten months a year. She also has the world's most terrifying cat, which is saying something, because seventy per cent of cats are scientifically scary. Empress may look like a fluffy grey cloud, but even the stormiest clouds don't want to claw your eyes out. She's a moggy of monumental menace, and best avoided.



On the plus side, staying at Aunt Dahlia's meant I got to spend a few days with my cousin Buddy. Buddy's nothing like me, and I like that he's like that. You know exactly what you're going to get with Buddy – he's like an open book, and most of the pages are just weird doodles. Buddy wouldn't say boo to a goose, even if the goose was ready for it and had specifically asked him to. He's literally the most nervous human being I've ever met. The point is, Buddy never, ever gets into trouble. In fact, he'll go to a lot of trouble to *avoid* getting into trouble. Sure, that troubles me, cos the trouble is, trouble is *everywhere*. But I don't think I've ever seen him get told off, and definitely nothing like my five-times-a-day average.

That's not to say I go *looking* for trouble. But if I don't find it, it usually comes looking for me. You see, everything can be fine one minute, and the next, 'fine' decides to go on holiday. Sometimes it feels like 'fine' retired and left

‘trouble’ in charge.

When you have to deal with trouble as much as I do, you’ve got to stay on your toes. I may as well be a ballerina.

Speaking of trouble, it was about to meet me head on. Oh, sure, I was about to lose my tooth in a dramatic and unexpected way, but that’s the least dramatic and unexpected thing about this story. No, it’s what happened *after* my tooth came out that put me right in the middle of a mystery . . . and that mystery had a name.

You know her as the Tooth Fairy.

And she was about to go missing.



2.

The Tooth Will Out

Like a big fart in a small lift, my loose tooth was going nowhere. By the time we arrived at the seaside it was wobblier than ever, but still refused to leave my mouth.



‘Hugh, stop fiddling, you,’ said my dad as we got out of the car. ‘Like your uncle Silas, that tooth will come out when it’s good and ready.’

I unwrapped my fingers from around the tooth. I’d been messing with it for the whole journey, stopping occasionally to check whether my little brother Ivor had filled his nappy.

‘Give it a sniff,’ my mum would say.

‘I have,’ I’d say. ‘He smells of poo.’

‘Are you sure? Really lean in,’ said Mum.

‘I don’t need to lean in,’ I replied. ‘The poo smell is why I’m leaning away.’

Many nappy changes in many petrol stations later, we’d arrived. As I got out of the car and looked around, I remember thinking that everything looked just as I remembered. On one side of the road was a long row of big houses with brightly coloured doors. The roofs, walls and front gardens were covered in so much seagull poo that it looked like they’d used it as paint. On the other side I could see sea.



I turned back to the house to see Aunt Dahlia racing out of her front door like she was running a marathon and I was the finish line. Aunt Dahlia was tiny. Either I'd grown since I last saw her or she'd shrunk. And I hadn't grown, because Dad had measured me. As she skipped down the front steps, I spotted Buddy, hovering timidly in the open doorway. He looked exactly as nervous as ever (although not quite as nervous as that time he hid in a cupboard cos he thought the seagulls were coming to get

him). Then I saw Aunt Dahlia's cat, Empress, glowering at us from the front window, sitting on her sequinned cushion. It was her favourite spot from which to dislike everything she saw.

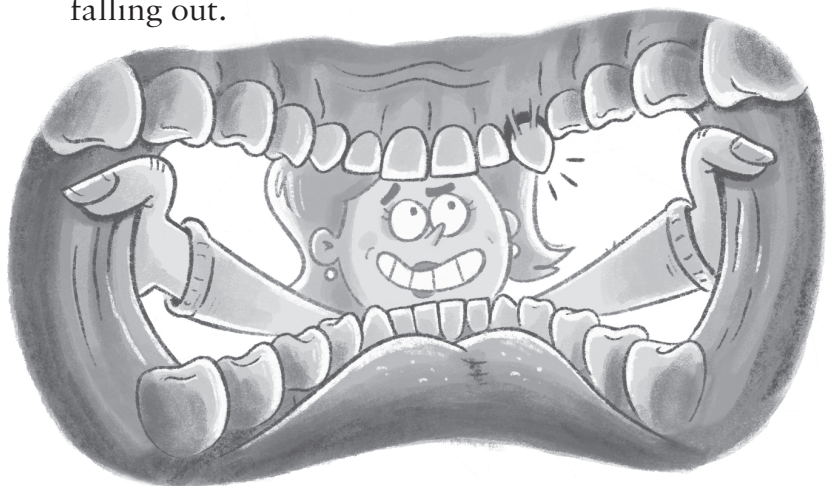
I was busy wondering how to avoid Empress entirely, when I realised Aunt Dahlia was hugging me so hard I thought the pressure might pop my loose tooth out.

It didn't.

'Either you've grown, or I've shrunk!' Aunt Dahlia said loudly in my ear.

'Dad measured me,' I said. 'I haven't grow—'

Aunt Dahlia interrupted me, grabbing my lips and pulling them apart like they'd had a falling out.



‘That tooth’s ready to go,’ she said, peering inside my mouth. ‘Twelve to fourteen hours and you’ll be free of it.’

Aunt Dahlia released me from her vice-like lip grab and turned her attention to my little brother, cos Mum was waving him around like a farting flag. Aunt Dahlia was already cooing over him when I saw Buddy coming down the steps. Buddy always looked like he was trying to avoid some future catastrophe. But he didn’t need to worry about the future, cos the present was giving him enough trouble – he’d just reached the pavement, when he caught his foot. He fell forward and went flying, fast. Before I could move, he’d headbutted me square in the jaw. I stumbled back with my hand over my mouth.

‘Hugh!’ shouted my mum and dad and Aunt Dahlia.

Buddy screamed ‘OwOWWow!’

Ivor said ‘Gwah’, but I don’t think he was

paying attention.

Like that time I got stuck on a teacups ride at the fair, everything was spinning, but I already realised that something about my head felt different. My tongue confirmed my suspicions.

My wobbly tooth was gone.

‘You all right, Hugh?’ asked Dad, as Aunt Dahlia checked on Buddy.

‘Nobody move!’ I said, glancing down. ‘Wait . . . there!’

It couldn’t have been more ‘there’ if I’d put it there myself. There, there on the pavement, accompanied by a single drop of blood (mine) was my tooth.



‘Hugh, you’re in the money!’ cried my dad, pointing down at the tooth. ‘Tooth Fairy cash bonus!’

As my brain rattled, my dad’s words rattled around my brain. *You’re in the money*. I can’t pretend I hadn’t already thought about it. You lose a tooth, you gain a pound – that’s how it’s always been. Like an umpire at a tennis match, I knew the score:

- Put tooth under pillow
- Go to sleep
- Wake up to find tooth gone and pound coin in its place

Normally, I’m suspicious of magical beings, but if the Tooth Fairy wants to pay for the privilege of milk-tooth disposal, I’m not complaining. So, every time I’ve lost a tooth, I’ve put it under my pillow and gone to sleep safe in the knowledge that the Tooth Fairy would do her thing. Sure enough, I’d wake up the next morning to find the tooth had vanished

and, in its a place, a one pound coin. And once, two fifty pence pieces. There's no doubt about it, the Tooth Fairy is *rich*. Rumour has it, she pays out every time she collects a lost tooth. That's a whole lot of money. One thousand . . . maybe one *quintillion* pounds. Yep, the Tooth Fairy's got money and she's not afraid to spend it, but just on children's teeth.

But then:

'Oh, no, that's not happening,' said Aunt Dahlia. 'The Tooth Fairy doesn't come to our house.'

'What?' I said, gently jabbing the gummy gap in my gum with my thumb.

'What do you mean?' asked Dad.

Aunt Dahlia's eyes darted from left to right, like she was watching a very small game of tennis.

'I'm afraid the Tooth Fairy doesn't come to Twenty-two Seaview View,' Aunt Dahlia continued. 'Simple as that.'

‘Since when?’ Mum asked.

‘Since ever – it’s just one of those things,’ Aunt Dahlia replied with a shrug. ‘Right, who’s for tea?’

As everyone headed into the house, I stared at my tooth, finally free of my head and resting in my palm. A moment ago, it had meant the promise of a pound. Now, it was just a bit of bone. I’d never heard of the Tooth Fairy skipping houses. It didn’t make sense.



‘Buddy, have you *never* been given money by the Tooth Fairy?’ I asked my cousin as we headed inside the house. Empress hissed at me from the front room, and I felt everything clenchable clench at once.

‘Nah, not a penny,’ said Buddy, with quite a big shrug. ‘It’s a mystery.’

Isn’t it just, I thought, and then also said it. ‘Isn’t it just? I don’t get why the Tooth Fairy would ignore this one house – what’s she got against Twenty-two Seaview View?’

‘Dunno,’ replied Buddy. ‘I’ve never really thought about it.’



‘Well, lucky for you, I’m about to think about nothing else,’ I said. ‘Thinking about things that need to be thought about is what I think about the most.’

I had a think. *Maybe there’s a reasonable reason*, I thought. Then again, I reasoned, it stands to reason that there might be an *unreasonable* reason. Either way, I knew I couldn’t leave until I’d found out why the Tooth Fairy didn’t visit Buddy’s house. And I wasn’t going to stop finding out until I’d found out everything there was to find.

There was a mystery to solve. Fortunately, mystery’s my middle name, even though it’s not on my birth certificate.

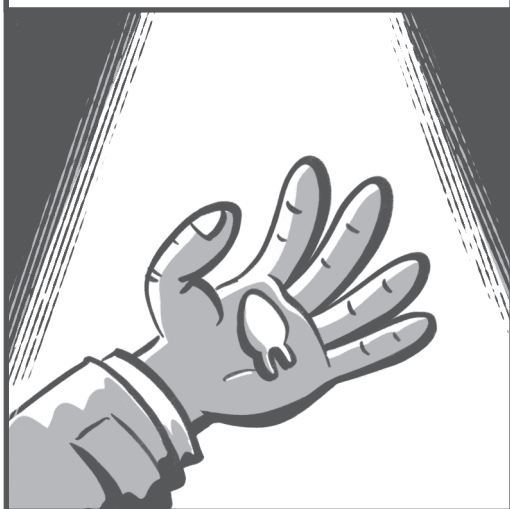
I was on the case.



3.

The Buddy System

EVERYTHING HAS A PRICE.



ONE POUND.




LIKE AN
UNFLUSHED
TOILET, IT'S
NOT TO BE
SNIFFED AT.


WHO AM I TO TURN
MY NOSE UP AT COLD,
HARD CASH? AFTER
ALL, SLEUTHING CAN
BE EXPENSIVE . . .









I PUT THE TOOTH
WHERE IT BELONGED,
AND COVERED IT WITH
THE FEATHER-FILLED
COTTON CONTAINER.



IF THE TOOTH FAIRY DID
MAKE AN APPEARANCE,
I HAD TO MAKE SURE
EVERYTHING WAS
ABOVE BOARD AND
UNDER PILLOW.



I MADE MYSELF
COMFORTABLE
ON A CHAIR AND
PREPARED FOR
A LONG NIGHT.



I'M USED TO WORKING THE
NIGHT-SHIFT - IT COMES WITH
THE TERRITORY.



PLUS, THIS WASN'T
MY FIRST STAKE OUT.

AND I'D HAD A NAP
IN THE CAR.

It's only when I woke up that I realised I'd fallen asleep.

I heard the sound of seagulls and saw fuzzy dawn light trying to get in through closed curtains.

It was more-or-less morning.

I shuffled off the chair but my brain had forgotten to tell my legs I was awake, and I ended up falling flat on my face. I was lucky not to knock my front teeth out, and, if what Aunt Dahlia says is true, twice as lucky, cos I wouldn't have made a penny out of them.

By the time the feeling started to come back into my legs, Buddy was poking his head around the door in his pink-and-purple polka-dot pyjamas. My fall must have woken him – his nerves make him a light sleeper. Not to mention the fact that he's kept up by the sound of the sea, which he plays on a CD called *Soothing Sea Sounds* to drown out the sounds of the actual sea outside.

‘You awake?’ he asked.

‘Everything except my legs,’ I replied, wobblier on my feet than my tooth had been in my mouth. My bleary eyes turned to the bed. It looked undisturbed, which was disturbing.

My tooth.

In the second before I lifted up the pillow, I wondered if maybe, just maybe, the Tooth Fairy had done her thing after all. By the time I had the pillow in my hand, I’d already decided what I was going to spend my pound on.

But the truth hurts. And the truth was, my tooth, which hadn’t hurt since it left my head, was still on the bed.

‘Told you,’ said Buddy. ‘She doesn’t come here. Never has, never will.’

‘But why? What’s stopping her?’ I asked.

Buddy shrugged again. He reached into his pyjama pocket and took out a small matchbox. He gave it a rattling shake before pushing it open with a finger. ‘Want to put yours with mine?’

I glanced inside, to find a fairy's small fortune's worth of baby teeth.

'Gross,' I said. Buddy grinned.

'Do you want to see my toenail clippings?'



'One hundred per cent not,' I replied, peering into the matchbox again. 'How many are in there?'

'Fourteen,' Buddy replied. I added my tooth to the matchbox.

‘So that’s *fifteen* pounds the Tooth Fairy owes us,’ I said. ‘We need to find out what’s stopping her coming to this house.’

‘We?’ Buddy repeated, getting that nervous look he gets when he gets nervous.

To be honest, when I’m on a case, I usually prefer to work alone. But, if you ignore the earlier headbutt, I couldn’t help but think it would be a good idea for me and Buddy to put our heads together. After all, my cousin was the biggest victim in all of this, which meant he was involved whether he liked it or not, and by the look on his face, he did not.

‘Trust me,’ I said. ‘We’re going to find out who or what is stopping the Tooth Fairy coming here, and put a stop to it. And nothing’s going to stop us.’