



CHAPTER ONE

JEZ LLOYD

From the bathroom window, Jez heard crunching on the driveway outside. He hurled himself down the stairs and threw the front door open. He was sprayed with gravel as Charlie skidded his Beemo to a halt.

‘Ebo, Sharli,’ said Jez. He sounded funny because he had a toothbrush sticking out of his mouth.

Charlie smiled. ‘Hiya.’

‘Coo skig,’ added Jez admiringly. With his new birthday Beemo he’d be able to wreck the driveway too. He could hardly wait.



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They were going to ride into town so that Jez could spend his £20.23 birthday money (the 23p was from his grandma, who'd never liked him). That was easily enough to buy things for the Beemo. Cool things like stickers and lights and mirrors and peggies and spoki-dokies.

Jez rinsed his toothbrush under the kitchen tap, hid it behind some broccoli to save going back upstairs and shouted, 'See ya, Mum!' Then he bolted out the door and leaped on to his brand-new bright blue Beemo Super X.

'Yee-hah!' he yelled, and they were off.

At the centre of Oakwood town there was a row of shops. If you weren't really paying attention, you might think it was just one long street. But actually it was two short ones.



Sheek Street ran in from the east, and Bleak Street ran in from the west. They met slap, bang, shamboozle in the middle of town. Jez and Charlie hung out in Sheek Street all the time, but they'd never dared go down Bleak Street. Not even once.

In Sheek Street the boys looked in Faberelli's Deli, Jameson's Fine Sausages, Trim's Barber's Shop, Portia's Poodle Parlour, Hattie's Hats and the Clock House. So far, the trip had been a complete disaster. Now they sat in Mrs Cappuccino's Cafe, sipping blueberry-and-banana



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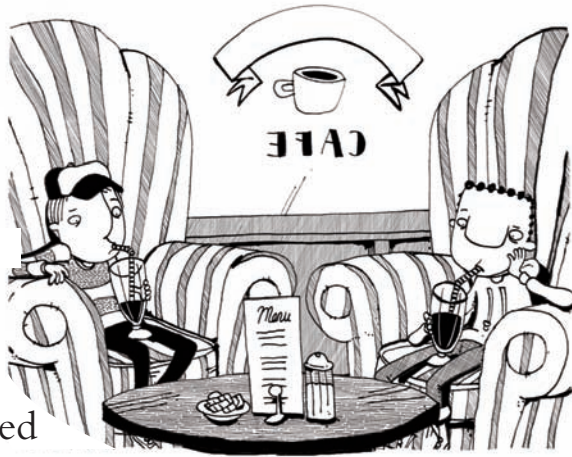
smoothies through green and gold stripy straws.

‘Well, we’ve looked everywhere,’ sighed Jez, ‘and found nothing. I don’t want socks or sausages or a lump of Brie or a haircut. And there isn’t a bike shop.’

‘These smoothies are good though,’ said Charlie, taking a long slurp.

‘Yeah, but I’ve still got fifteen pounds forty-seven left,’ moaned Jez. ‘What are we going to do with it?’

Charlie’s eyes slid to the rich brown gooey dessert behind the glass counter. ‘Five helpings of sticky toffee pudding?’ he suggested.



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‘Char, you know how that stuff sticks your teeth together. We’d be trying to prise our jaws apart all afternoon! But listen – I’ve got a better idea.’

Charlie leaned in close over the table and tried to look interested. This was difficult, because his eyeballs seemed to be magnetically attracted to the sticky toffee pudding behind the counter.

‘We’ll go and buy something in Bleak Street,’ Jez whispered.

Charlie was horrified. ‘No way, Jez. It’s *dangerous* down there.’

‘True. But that just makes it more exciting.’

Charlie gulped. Bleak Street was dead scary. It was somewhere you just didn’t go – not if you were sensible, anyway. And if Charlie was anything, he was sensible.

‘No way, Jez,’ he said firmly. ‘I am



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absolutely putting my foot down. I am *not* going down Bleak Street. Not now. Not ever. Not in a million years.'

Jez and Charlie coasted down Bleak Street. Charlie suddenly skidded to a halt and stared into the Greasy Spoon Cafe, pretending to be interested in the torn, stained notice in the window. Really he was trying not to go any further from the safety of Sheek Street. 'Breakfast menu,' he read. 'Soggy bacon, hard fried eggs, burnt sausages, rubbery toast, tea that tastes faintly of washing-up liquid. Three pounds fifty.'

'Yuck! No wonder the place is empty,' cried Jez. 'Maybe all the customers died of food poisoning and their bodies are—'

'Shut up!' hissed Charlie. 'You're giving

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me the creeps. I don't know how you talked me into this!'

'Oh, chill out,' called Jez, setting off down the hill again.

Charlie sighed and followed. He couldn't let Jez go alone. Together they freewheeled past a couple of betting shops, a second-hand record store, Tony's TV Repairs and loads of empty units plastered with old posters.

Suddenly Jez spotted something and braked hard.

Charlie smacked right into the back of him.

'Ow!' he yelled.

'Quirk's,' Jez whispered.





CHAPTER TWO QUIRK'S

Charlie stared up at the faded sign on the rundown little building in front of them. He didn't like the look of the place. Not one little bit. A gang of greasy bikers hung out by the graffiti-covered wall opposite. They made him nervous. 'Nice wheels,' said the greasiest one, and the others sniggered at the Beemos. 'Come on, Jez. Let's go back,' Charlie hissed. 'This street's really dodgy. Besides, we don't even know what's in there.'

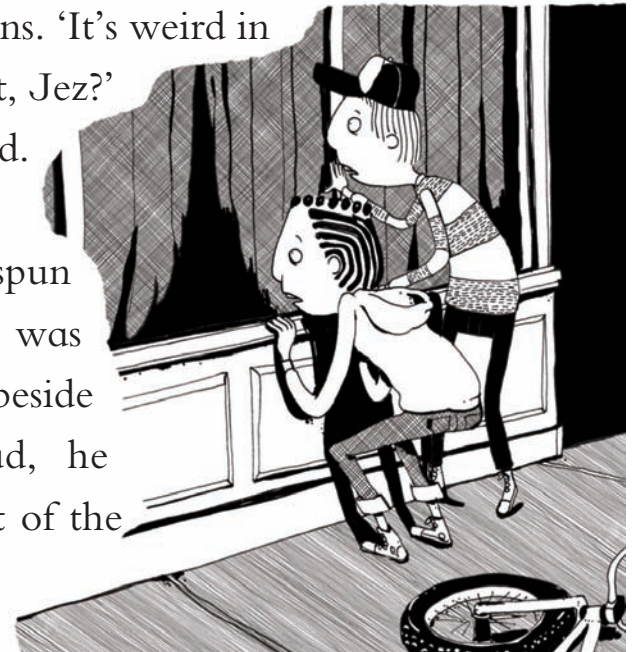
'It's just a shop,' said Jez, pressing his nose up against the window. A faded velvet curtain hung behind the glass, but there was

nothing on display. 'Come over here – just for a look. We don't have to go in or anything.'

'Well, all right,' muttered Charlie, laying down his Beemo, 'but just for a look, OK?' He squished his nose up against the grimy glass. Through a tear in the curtain he could see inside. Dusty shelves stretched from floor to ceiling. They held rows and rows of bottles, jars, packets, cans, boxes and tins. 'It's weird in there, isn't it, Jez?' he whispered.

No reply.

Charlie spun round. Jez was no longer beside him. Instead, he was in front of the



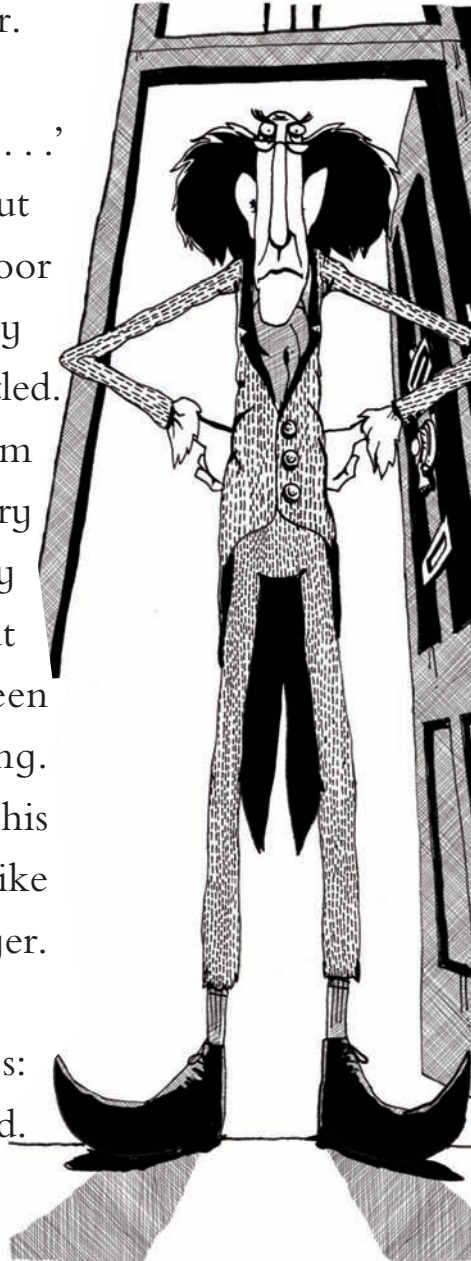


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crumbling oak door.
Knocking.

'Hey, you said just . . .'
Charlie protested, but
he fell silent as the door
creaked open. They
both looked up, startled.
Towering over them
was a very tall, very
thin man. His frizzy
black hair stood out
as if he'd just been
struck by lightning.
When he spoke, his
voice was crackly, like
an old record player.
'Closed. Goodbye.'

'But the sign says:
"Open",' Jez argued.



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The man extended a long, bony hand.
With the edge of a thick yellow fingernail
he tapped the sign. 'Not any more,' he
snarled. The word 'Open' shimmered silver,
then became the word 'Closed'. Jez and
Charlie gasped.

SLAM!

Wow, thought Jez. With the sign and
everything, could this actually be a shop
that sold *real* magic? 'Let us in!' he yelled,
hammering on the door.

The door swung open again, and the
shopkeeper glared down at the boys, eyes
flashing with fury. 'WHAT DO YOU
WANT?' he bellowed.

'We want to buy some magic,' said Jez.
The shopkeeper laughed, tossing his head
back. His thin neck creaked alarmingly.
'Ha ha ha! That's the funniest thing I've



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heard in a frightfully long time. *You* wish to purchase some magic?!

'What's so funny about that?' asked Jez crossly.

'The very idea that I would sell magic to children, of course! That I, Quentin Quirk, voted Most Likeable Shopkeeper of 1894 by the Society of Evil Overlords, would do such a thing! It would mean breaking one of the most important rules in the Magic Works Owners' Handbook, section five, paragraph three! Not to mention the fact that I cannot stand sticky little brats anyway! Children *all* smell of salt-and-vinegar crisps. Children *all* have dried glue on their fingers. Children *all* wipe their noses on their sleeves!'

'We do not!' cried Charlie, amazed that a grown-up could be so rude.

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But Mr Quirk didn't even hear him. 'Ha ha ha!' he laughed. 'Sell magic to *you*. The very thought!' He paused, pulled a black silk handkerchief from his jacket pocket and wiped the tears from his eyes. 'I'm sorry,' he said, in a not-sorry-at-all voice, 'but I don't serve children. Now, run along. GoodBYE.'

He began to swing the door shut. But Jez wouldn't give up. He just *had* to get into that shop. 'We've got money,' he shouted.

The door hovered ajar. Mr Quirk leaned into the street and sniffed the air. The tip of his long, pointed nose quivered.

'What are you doing?' asked Jez, puzzled.

'I'm checking whether you really do have money,' Mr Quirk explained. 'Money smells like a delicious ripe French cheese.' He sniffed the air again.



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Jez and Charlie looked at each other, mystified.

'Ah, yes, you stink to high heaven,' concluded Mr Quirk.

'Charming,' said Charlie huffily.

Mr Quirk smiled like the wolf dressed as granny. 'Enter,' he said, ushering Jez and a reluctant Charlie into the dark, cavernous shop. 'Now then, what about a tin of today's special?' He gestured at a rickety table with a few dusty tins stacked up on it.

Today's Special. The tins looked like they'd

been there for 150 years. At least.

The label on the top tin read: 'All-Seeing Shoe Polish'. Jez picked it up.



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'Do NOT touch the merchandise!' shrieked Mr Quirk.

Jez placed the tin down gingerly, as if it was an unexploded bomb. 'What's it do, anyway?' he asked.

'Shine your shoes with All-Seeing Shoe Polish and you'll never step into a puddle or a pile of canine filth again,' said Mr Quirk proudly.

Jez looked puzzled. 'What's canine filth?' he whispered to Charlie.

'Dog poo,' Charlie murmured back.

'Oh! Erm, no thanks. What else have you got?'

Mr Quirk raised his eyebrows. He did *not* look impressed. 'At Quirk's, we stock a wide range of magical goods for the discerning professional,' he said haughtily. 'Dreams, hauntings, funny feelings, tricks.'



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'Tricks?' Jez repeated. 'Oh good. We're looking for a trick to play on Francesca, my teenage sister. She's so moody and spiteful. Mum reckons it's just a phase but, personally, I think she's one of the demonic undead . . .'

'Don't speak ill of the undead,' snapped Mr Quirk. 'Some of my best customers are undead.'

'*Undead?*' spluttered Charlie.

'Sorry,' said Jez breezily. 'Anyway, what have you got to fix a wicked sister?'

'My tricks are far too good to be frittered away on *your sister*,' Mr Quirk hissed. 'Why don't you go to a children's joke shop? You could purchase some foaming sugar or fake blood or a whoopie cushion or some such item. This is a *serious* emporium full of *serious* magic.'

Jez could feel his temper rising. 'I'm

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easily old enough to use serious magic, ta very much, and I . . .'

Mr Quirk held his hands up. 'Very well, very well. Don't have a tantrum!' His eyes flicked over the rows of potions on the back wall. 'As it happens, I have got something in stock that would fix a fearsome sister for a while.'

Charlie looked horrified. 'Jez,' he gasped, 'I know Francesca is a nightmare, but you can't use *magic* on her. That could be highly dangerous—'

But Jez had already made up his mind. 'We'll take it,' he said.