

## CHAPTER ONE

# QUIRK'S

Jez and Charlie raced along Bleak Street then dropped their Beemos on to the pavement outside Quirk's. Jez took a deep breath, then knocked on the crumbling oak door.

A few seconds later, it opened a tiny crack and Mr Quirk's spindly nose stuck out. The thick yellow nails of his knobbly fingers curled around the wood. 'My drear boys,' he snarled. 'Horried to see you. Go away.'

'Mr Quirk, please let us in!' called Jez. 'We need your help!'

'Huh!' scoffed Mr Quirk. 'I think NOT!'



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I'm never letting you sticky revolting brats into my precious emporium again! Especially not after last time, when, if you recall, you ended up setting mini-sharks loose in the town's toilet system. Good. Bye.'

The door slammed shut. Mr Quirk was being his usual self, i.e. tall, bony and bad-tempered.

'Nothing'll go wrong this time, I promise,' called Jez through the keyhole. 'We just want to buy another trick.'

'No!'

'We've got money.'

Mr Quirk opened the door a fraction and sniffed the air. His long nose quivered. 'You stink,' he observed.



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'Charming!' huffed Jez. 'I had a bath just last . . .' he paused, 'week,' he admitted.

Mr Quirk frowned (even more). 'I mean, apart from the general stench of grubby child. You also smell like a very ripe mouldy cheese, which, to the trained nose, is the highly distinctive stink of money. Come in then,' he snapped. 'But don't you dare touch **ANYTHING** or I'll be treating you both to some Extra-Strength Fingernail Remover.'

'Erm, don't you mean fingernail *polish* remover?' asked Charlie.

Mr Quirk gave him a wicked look. 'No, I don't,' he muttered darkly.

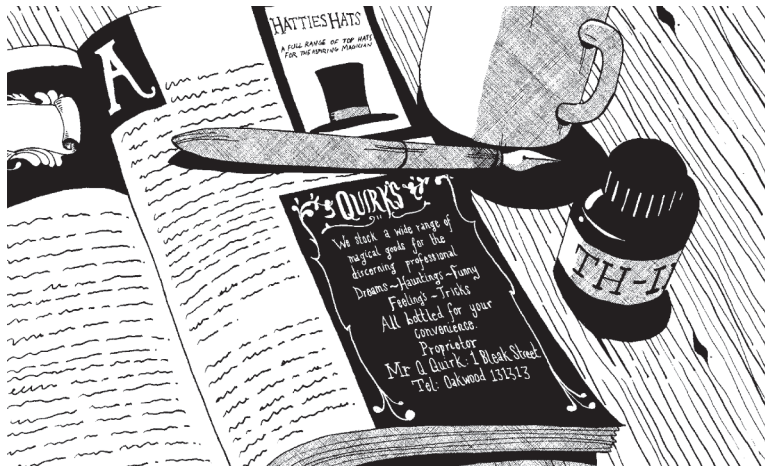
Jez gulped, and Charlie shoved his hands deep into his pockets.

Hearts pounding, Jez and Charlie stepped into the shop. The rows and rows of dusty



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old bottles and jars in all shapes and sizes were still the same. The green leather surface of Mr Quirk's wooden desk was still covered in bills and papers. The latest copy of *Magic Monthly* magazine was still open on the desk, showing an advertisement for the emporium.



The huge, dirty flagstones were also as cold as ever underfoot. Charlie shivered and scuffed his baseball boots nervously.

'Now, what exactly do you require?' asked Mr Quirk impatiently.

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'Oh, anything really,' said Jez. 'A trick to play on my sister, Francesca, would be fun. She's being even more vile than usual, if that's possible.' He peered at one of the thick glass bottles. "'Big Beard Elixir",' he read. 'Now that sounds promising. Or how about one of these Most Alarming Ghost Alarm Clocks? That would put the wind up her!'





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Mr Quirk looked outraged and snatched the clock. 'I am most certainly *not* selling you any more tricks after what happened last time!'

Charlie jumped, but Jez wasn't even listening. 'And, hey, wow, look at this!' he cried.

He had crossed the emporium and was heaving at the lid of a huge glass display case. Charlie gasped, remembering the threat of the Extra-Strength Fingernail Remover. He wondered why Jez didn't worry about things like that. You know, little things like *mortal danger*. There was one single item inside the case: a box. It was slightly bigger than a shoebox, and there

were red,  
green and  
purple stripes  
painted on it.  
Its label read:



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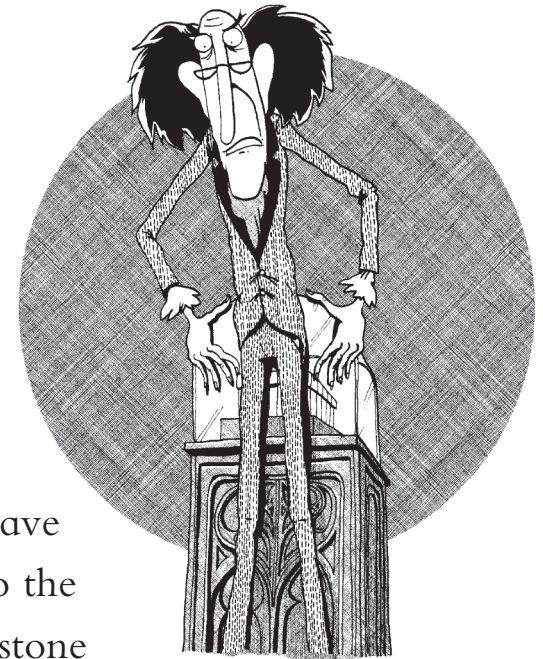


'I forbid you to open that case!' Mr Quirk screeched. His ancient knees creaked as he hurtled across the emporium and threw himself at the display case, knocking Jez out of the way. 'Get your snotty, greasy child-fingers away from there!

That box is my most prized possession!' He glared at Jez, his dark eyes spitting fire.

If looks could kill, Jez would have keeled over on to the cold stone floor, stone cold dead. Instead he asked, 'What's in it?'

'I am certainly not telling *you*!' snapped Mr Quirk.







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'It's probably things like fart powder and blue tongue sweets,' Jez guessed, 'but, you know, highly dangerous ones that blow your bum off or make your tongue stretch out and tie into a knot. Maybe there's even something as good as the bum-biting sharks in there, or a trick that makes you fly up in the air and stick to the ceiling by your little toe.' He sighed dreamily. 'A whole box of tricks, Charlie! *Highly dangerous* ones! Look out, Francesca – here we come!'

Charlie looked at the striped box in the display case. He used to have qualms about using magic on Francesca, but since she'd tipped him into a rotten slimy wheelie bin and sent him trundling down a steep hill towards a busy road . . . well, since then, the gloves were pretty much off. 'How much is it?' he asked.

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'It doesn't matter how much it is,' sneered Mr Quirk, 'because I would never sell it to the likes of you. Besides, I know you don't *have* twenty pounds. You don't smell anywhere near mouldy-cheesy enough.'

Jez and Charlie exchanged a disappointed glance. Mr Quirk was right. Even if they could convince him to sell the box to them, where on earth were they going to get twenty quid from?

Mr Quirk's crackly voice cut into their thoughts. 'Right, come on, buy something then,' he snapped.

'Erm, I don't think we will, th-thanks,' said Jez, his voice trembling as Mr Quirk strode towards him. There was a wicked glint in his eye, and his arms were outstretched in the strangling position

'Not buy anything!' he cried, fingers



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twitching. 'What do you mean, not *buy* anything? When you have taken up so much of my valuable time?'

Jez backed towards the door.

'OK, w-w-we'll buy something,' Charlie stammered. He rummaged in his pockets and Jez did the same. Among the sweet wrappers and bus tickets and Subbuteo men they found a few coins. Jez handed his to Charlie, who fumbled nervously as he

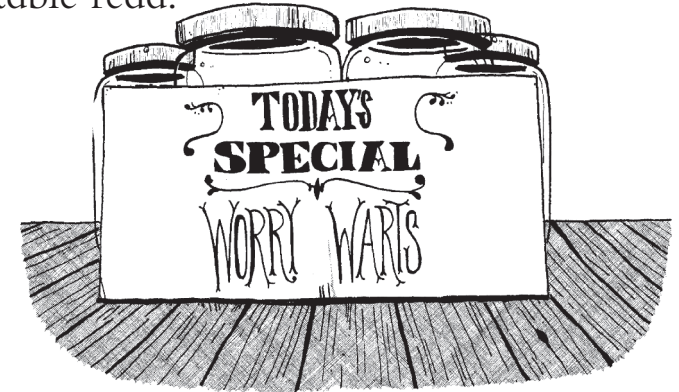


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counted up. 'We've got two pounds, forty-one pence,' he stammered, hoping it would be enough for something – anything.

Mr Quirk stalked over to a small table on which stood a number of glass jars. The sign on the table read:



'Char!' Jez hissed. 'That's our only money. We don't even know what Worry Warts are!'

'Jez, were you planning to leave this shop with *all* your fingernails?' asked Charlie flatly.

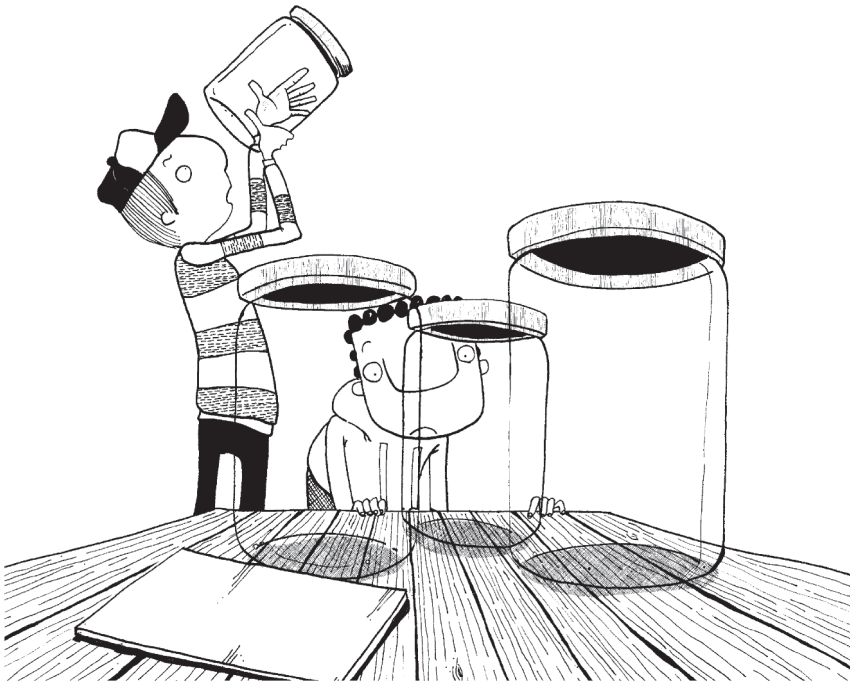
Jez gulped. 'I get your point. Worry Warts it is.'



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The boys hurried over to the table and peered into the jars.

'But they're empty,' murmured Jez. He wondered if it was a trick. Mr Quirk was quite capable of taking their money in exchange for a jar of thin air.



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'Well, of course they're empty, you nincompoop,' snapped Mr Quirk. 'Worry warts are no good unless they're harvested on the day of purchase. Follow me.'

Jez and Charlie stared at each other as Mr Quirk swept off across the shop. They were both thinking the same thing. *Harvested?* What on earth did that mean?

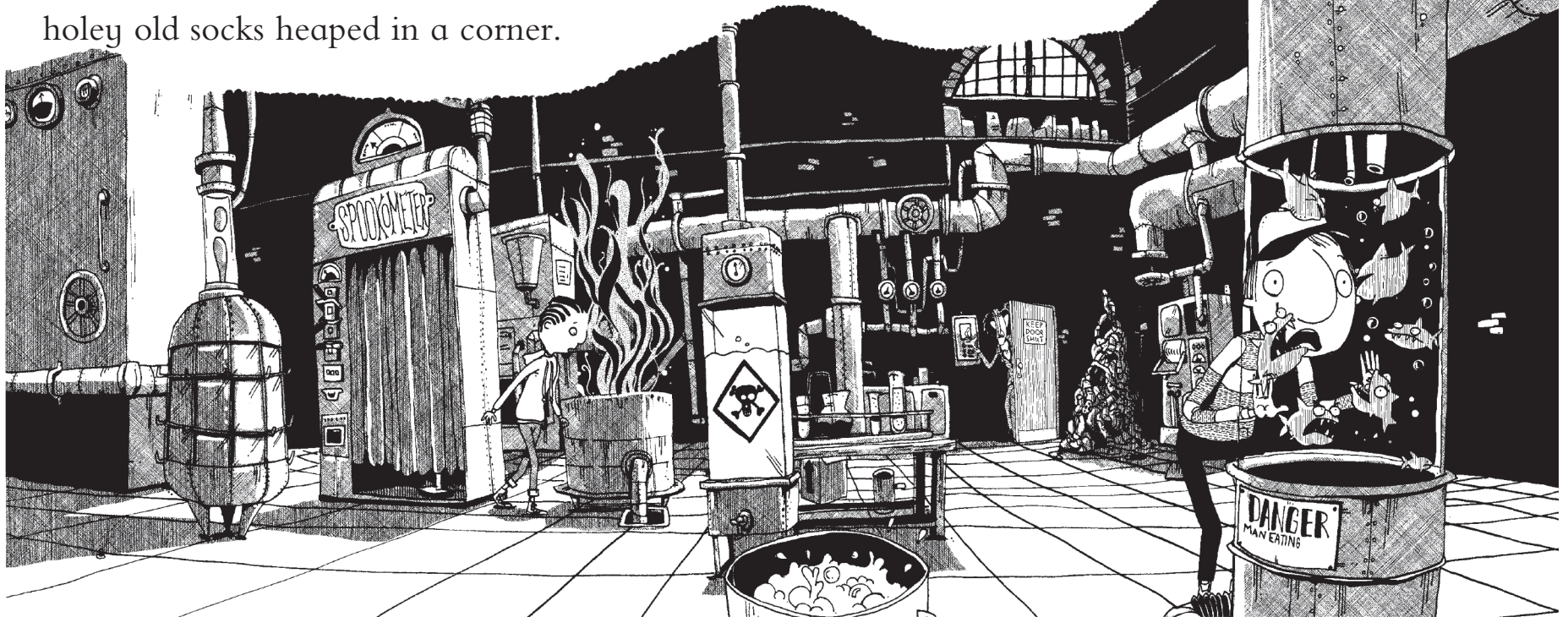
They followed Mr Quirk to a cabinet of glass bottles, where he counted three shelves down and six bottles to the right, until he reached the jar labelled Red Herrings. He gave it three sharp taps and the whole cabinet swung backwards. Jez and Charlie grinned at each other – they couldn't believe their luck. Once again, they were being let into the Magic Works – the secret back room where all Mr Quirk's magical inventions and potions were made.





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Inside the room strange machines whirred and clicked, foul-smelling liquids spluttered and bubbled in large pots, and rows of test tubes sat on a long wooden bench, streaming brightly coloured smoke and fizzing to themselves. There was a tank of mini man-eating sharks for making Liquid Frighteners, something called a Spook-o-meter and, for some reason, a pile of smelly, holey old socks heaped in a corner.



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Mr Quirk ushered them over to the far wall, opened a creaky cupboard door and stepped inside. ‘Hurry up!’ he hissed. ‘They can’t be exposed to light, you know, not while they’re still growing.’ He grabbed their arms, yanked them into the cupboard and shut the door.



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Then Mr Quirk flicked on an ultraviolet light. A purple glow filled the tiny space.

Charlie and Jez stared around them. 'Err! Yuck!' they cried. But they didn't say anything else after that. They were too busy trying to hold their breath because the humid air smelt like a pungent combination of sweaty trainer and dead rat. On every wall was some kind of slimy yellow substance, on which were growing the most revolting things they had ever seen in their lives. The moist, fleshy Worry Warts made a kind of low, grumbling sound. It was hard to tell but, when Jez looked really closely, yes, they were moving. Some of them were fat and bright purple and some of them were hairy. They had round boggly eyes in their sludge, and some of them had fat gooey lips. Some of them even had mini

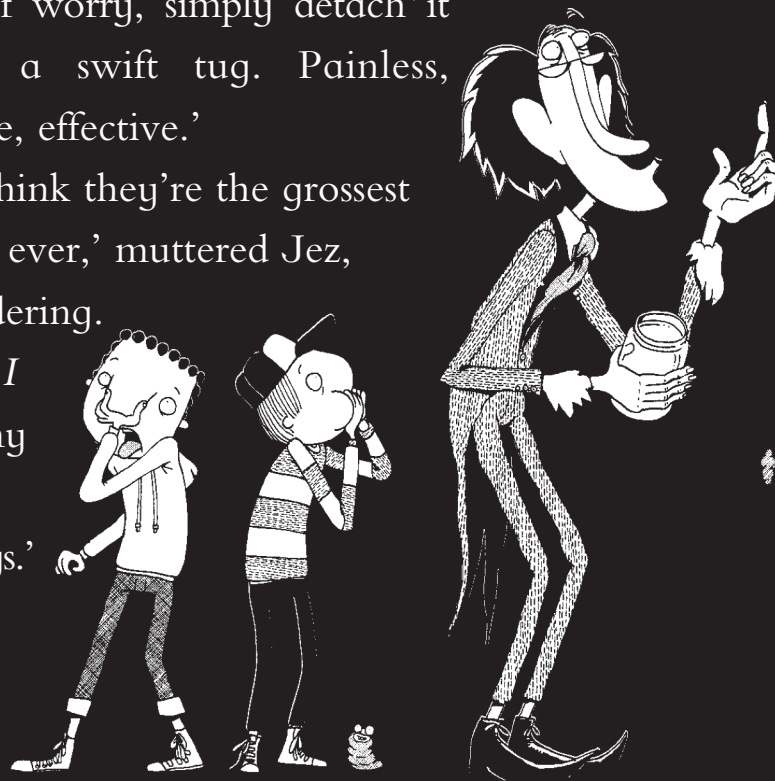
## THE PURPLE SLUGGY WORRY WARTS

Worry Warts growing on them. All of them were revolting.

Mr Quirk cooed at the warts as though they were kittens. Then he turned to the boys. 'If you're worrying, take a Worry Wart and apply it to your skin,' he said. 'In approximately ten seconds, it will have sucked all the worry out of you. When the Worry Wart is full of worry, simply detach it with a swift tug. Painless, simple, effective.'

'I think they're the grossest thing ever,' muttered Jez, shuddering.

'And I eat my own bogeys.'





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Mr Quirk took an empty glass jar from a pocket in his coat, unscrewed the lid and began flicking Worry Warts into it with a gnarled yellow fingernail. Charlie swallowed hard – he thought he might be sick. When he had about twenty of the things, Mr Quirk put the lid on the jar and shoved it into Jez's hands. Jez immediately checked that the lid was on as tight as it would go. Mr Quirk opened the cupboard door and the boys tumbled out, panting and gasping for air.

'Pay now,' he snapped.

Charlie tipped the pile of change into his outstretched hand. Like Jez, he couldn't take his eyes off the repulsive purple Worry Warts, which were now squelching up the sides of the glass jar like alien slugs from the planet Puke. The boys wrinkled their

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noses as one of the warts suddenly sprouted a long black hair.

Mr Quirk shoved them back through the secret doorway into the emporium, muttering to himself. 'Right then. Kindly shove off,' he snarled, frogmarching them out of the door. 'You are making my emporium look shabby with your snot-nosed, gluey-fingered child-ness. It is bad for business. Goodbye. And *don't* come again.'

Jez and Charlie didn't argue. They were still mesmerized by the revolting

purple  
sluggy  
Worry  
Warts.

