

## CHAPTER ONE



Precariously balanced on a branch, surrounded by dense tree foliage, with hands clamped tightly around her eyes, Josie widened her fingers ever so slightly to let in some light as she allowed herself to glance downwards, they had found her so quickly!

“Oh, that’s not fair, there are two of you!” said Josie, looking down at the squirrel and her dog.

“Two is just a number, one plus one equals two,” said a voice.

Josie looked down from her branch, but she couldn’t see anyone.

“Two feet, two hands, two eyes, two ears, two noses,” said the voice again.

“You can’t have two noses!” laughed Josie, still trying to see where the voice was coming from.

“Why not? I had two once, but I lost one.”

“No, you didn’t. That’s just silly,” she chuckled.

“I did too. Too plus too is.....no, hang on a minute, that’s not right.”

“That’s a different type of two. Too is not a number, it’s a word.”

“Well, it sounds like a number. Anyway, what are you doing in my tree?”

“This is not your tree, it’s just a tree, and it belongs to anyone.”

“No, it isn’t, it’s mine. I found it.”

Josie thought for a moment before replying.

“Well, I’ve lived in this village for all my life and this tree has always been here, so when did you find it?”

“Last week..., or was it the week before? Mmmm, I can never remember.”

Josie still couldn’t see where the voice was coming from, but thought she had better be polite and introduce herself.

“Well, my name is Josie and I’m eight years old.”

“I’m very pleased you meet you, Josie.”

There was a long silence.

“Well?” asked Josie, finally.

“Well, what?” replied the voice.

Josie gave a sigh.

“Most people think it’s polite to introduce themselves when they meet.”

“Well, we haven’t really met, so I can’t introduce myself.”

“Oh, I thought we had.”

“Ok, well, if we’ve met, tell me what colour is my hat?”

Josie peered through the leaves to the ground below, but couldn’t see anyone, much less a hat.

“Far-le-dar,” said the voice. “Come on, it’s not a troublesome question. It’s not like I asked you to tell me what colour the letter seven smells like.”

Josie wrinkled her face up and looked very, very confused.

“What?” she asked.

“I said it’s not like I asked you to tell me what colour the letter seven smells like. I just asked you what colour my hat is.”

Josie shook her head to get the thought of the Milliner’s riddle out of her head. She wanted to tell him that seven wasn’t a letter and numbers didn’t actually smell, but by now she was quite confused.

Once her mind had cleared, she closed her eyes and thought really hard of what colour the hat might be. She thought it might be black, but that was a boring colour, because a lot of people had a black hat. Then she thought of a bright yellow hat, but she wasn’t sure if anyone would wear a yellow hat. It would be far too bright.

“Blue!” she shouted.

“Nope.”

“What colour is it then?” she asked.

“I don’t know.”

“You must know,” said Josie, becoming impatient.

“I’m not wearing a hat, so I don’t know what colour it is.”

Josie folded her arms across her chest and gave a huff.

“So how was I supposed to guess what colour it was if you aren’t wearing one?”

“Well, a smart person would have asked me if I was really wearing a hat, before telling me what colour it was.”

“I am smart. I’m top of my class at school.”

“So, if you’re smart, why are you hiding in my tree?”

“It is NOT your tree!” repeated Josie, shuffling along the branch, hoping to see who was on the ground below.

“Josie are red, violets are blue, oh I feel a sneeze coming..., ahhhhhhchoo!” said the voice.

Josie gave another sigh.

“It’s roses! Roses are red.”

“But you said your name was Josie. Have you changed it to roses?”

“No silly. Oh, it doesn’t matter. I’m coming down the tree now. Wait there.”

“Ok, I’ll wait right where I am.”

When Josie reached the ground, she looked around, but couldn’t see anyone. She then slowly walked round the tree, but there was definitely no one there. If she was honest, she was a little disappointed, so she sat down on the grass and lent against the tree.

“Did you see anyone, Mr Spike?” she asked, but her dog just wagged his tail.

“Oh well. I suppose we had better find Morgan,” she said, getting to her feet.

“Who’s Morgan?” asked the voice.

Josie looked around, but again couldn’t see anyone.

“He’s my brother. Are you invisible?” she asked.

“I’m not sure. Not the last time I checked.”

“Well, why can’t I see you? Where are you?”

“I’m still in my tree, where you told me to stay. ‘Stay right there,’ you said. I remember you telling me quite strongly.”

Josie looked up into the tree and there, sitting on a branch, was a very strange man indeed. He wasn’t very big, not like adults look. But he must have been an adult because he had a big black beard and Josie knew that only adults have beards. His clothes looked strange, like he had found them in a rubbish bin somewhere. On his head was a tall hat, which was covered in all sorts of things. He was also wearing the strangest spectacles Josie had ever seen.

“You said you weren’t wearing a hat,” said Josie, with some consternation.

“I only just put it on,” replied the man quickly.

“Why didn’t you tell me you were in the tree?”

“You didn’t ask.”

“Well, I demand you come down from that tree right now, before I get jolly cross!” said Josie, tapping her foot.

“Stay in the tree, come down the tree. Are you always so bossy?”

“Only when I’m cross,” said Josie, crossly.

“Ok, I’ll come down. I’m bored in this tree, anyway.” And with that, the man took off his hat and tossed it to the ground.

“I should stand well back if I were you,” he instructed.

Soon the hat started to make all kinds of clanking sounds and then the top lifted like a hatch on a submarine.

The clanking got louder and louder until eventually a ladder slowly emerged from the hat and rose into the tree where the man was sitting. He then simply swung on to the ladder, which then retracted back down into the hat, leaving the man standing on the ground. He then picked up the hat and placed it back on his head.

“Good afternoon. My name is Hector. I’m very pleased to make your acquaintance,” he said, bowing and shaking Josie’s hand.

“And I am pleased to meet you. Are you a magician, Hector?”

“No, I am a Milliner.”

“I’ve never heard of one of those. What do they do?”

“They make hats.”

“I don’t have a hat, and even if I did, I don’t think it would have a ladder that comes out of the top like yours.”

The Milliner didn’t seem to be listening to her and was more interested in the dog that was sitting at Josie’s feet.

“Your dog is not very polite,” he said, looking at the Jack Russell.

“Hector, let me introduce you to Mr Spike. He is the best dog in the whole wide world.”

“Well, I’ve not been to the ‘wholewideworld’ before, but he

does look like a fine dog.” The man lent forward. “I am very pleased to meet you, Mr Spike. My name is Edward.”

“You said your name was Hector?” questioned Josie.

“It was, but I changed it,” said the Milliner, shaking the dog’s paw.

“But you only told me a few minutes ago it was Hector.”

“Yes, but then I got bored with it, so I changed it.”

“Well, it’s been very nice to meet you Edward or Hector, but my brother is at the other end of the field building a fort out of straw bales, so I’d better find him. Will you be in your tree tomorrow?”

“Tree? I don’t have a tree.”

Josie gave another deep sigh.

“You said this tree was yours.”

“No I didn’t.”

“Oh dear. Well, wherever you will be, I hope to see you again tomorrow.”

“You may, you may not. I haven’t decided yet,” said the Milliner, taking off his hat and bowing with a flourish.

“You are a strange man, Mr Milliner,” chuckled Josie.

“Why thank you, that’s very kind of you to say, but I must now get back to my tree, so if you will excuse me?” And in a puff of blue smoke, he vanished.

“If knees could sneeze, would your toes be your nose? I suppose the thing is, no one knows,” came the Milliner’s voice from high in the tree.

Josie laughed.

“Come on Spike. Let’s find Morgan.”



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