

Atticus Van Tasticus

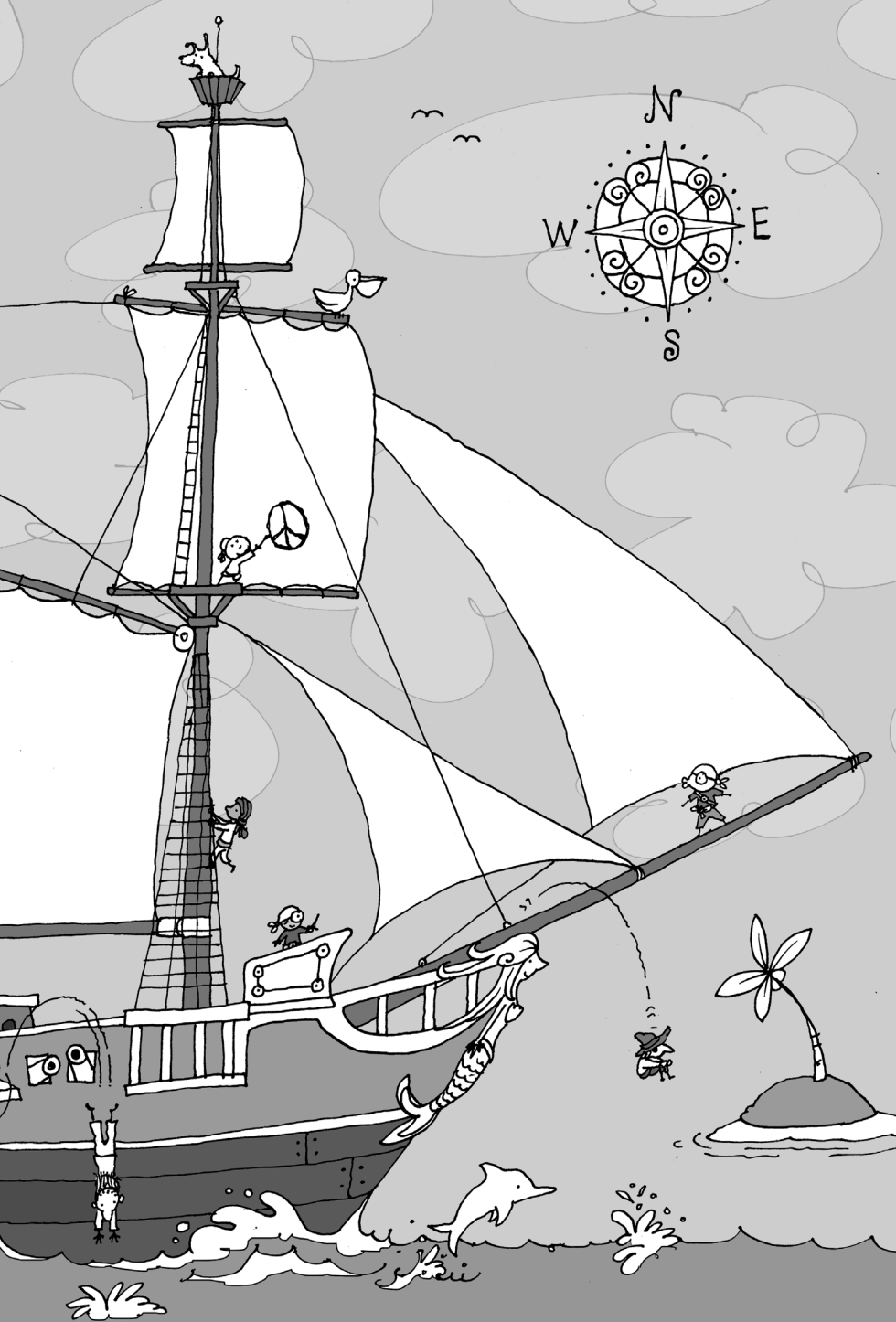


The Grandnan

For Pirate Stephen. AD

For my dad. Arrrrrr! SMK





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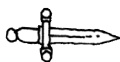
Atticus Van Tasticus



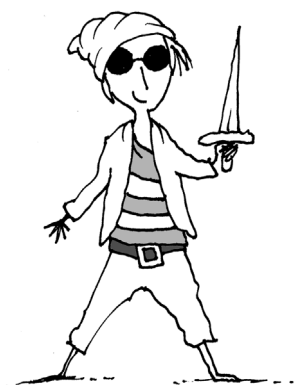
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Princess

THE CREW



Muscles



First Mate



Two Times

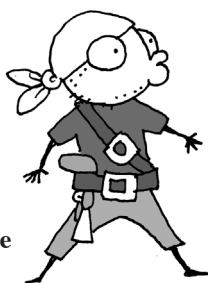


Wrong Way Warren!

Stinkeye



Fishface



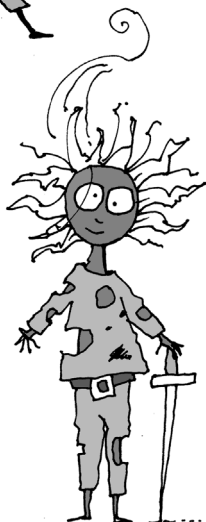
Buttface



Mullet



Rod (Lightning Rod)



Atticus



Slapfoot



Hogbreath





~~Every single part of this story
is historically correct,
unless it's not.~~



~~This work of non-fiction is
pretty much historically
and factually correct~~

~~Some of this true story
might be made up~~

~~None of this is true~~

~~This is rubbish~~

A story



Yay

Arrrrr



Prologue

All Legends Start Somewhere



Atticus Van Tasticus was a pretty normal boy, from a fairly normal family, who just happened to have an abnormally wealthy grandnan. As in, she was stuffed with the stuff. ‘More money than God,’ as the saying goes.



The way his family sucked up to Grandnan Van Tasticus drove Atticus completely bonkers, but he got it.

Whenever she was around, everyone was on their best manners. It was all, 'Yes, Grandnan. No, Grandnan. Can I've a fist full of gold, Grandnan?' She'd bat her eyes and pucker up, but never opened her purse.

Well, almost never. And the Van Tasticus family had tried everything.

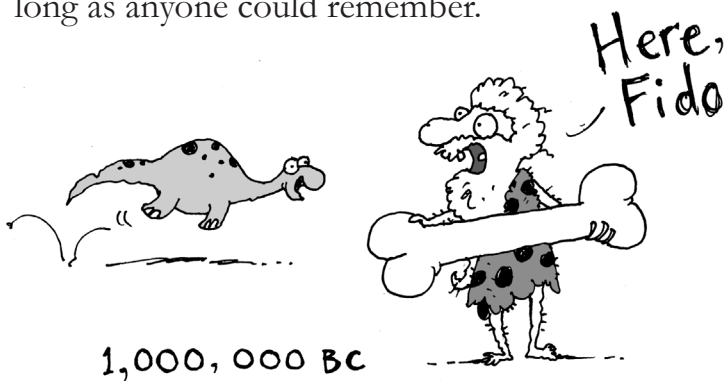


It's not as if she wasn't generous.

Every grandkid got one shot at her riches: it was a family thing, like a tradition. Great-Grandnan Van Tasticus had given her

grandkids the exact same shot, and so had Great-Great-Grandnan Van Tasticus.

And on it had gone for as long as anyone could remember.

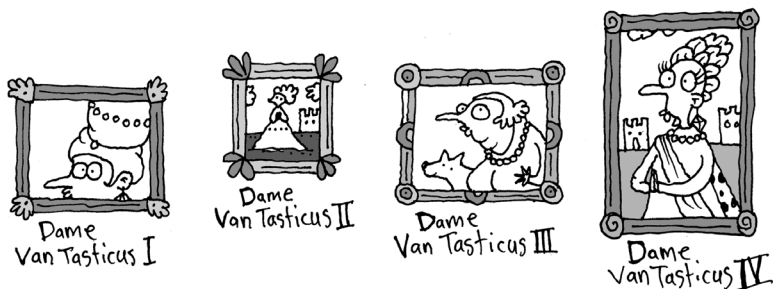


Atticus's dad said it was stupid. 'This is stupid,' he said. 'It's ridiculous. Most kids would rather have a dress-ups costume than some junky old painting that would be worth thousands of dollars after the old painter turned his toes up. Who would let a ten-year-old choose their own destiny?'

The really stupid thing was what he chose on his tenth birthday.



Atticus's mum said it was pathetic. 'This is pathetic,' she said. But only because her nan wasn't rich like Grandnan Van Tasticus and all the Grandnan Van Tasticuses before her.



Mum's nan was from a very different line of grandmas.



Atticus knew his turn to choose was coming, and he had to get it right. His mum and dad reminded him all the time, and he

couldn't stuff it up. The future lushness of his family depended on him, and him alone. He had one shot, and knew Grandnan would say something like, 'Use this to make something of yourself. To make the world a better place. Go forth and prosper. *Do what you wanna do, be what you wanna be — yeah!*'



His brother had blown it badly on his tenth birthday.

His sister hadn't done much better.

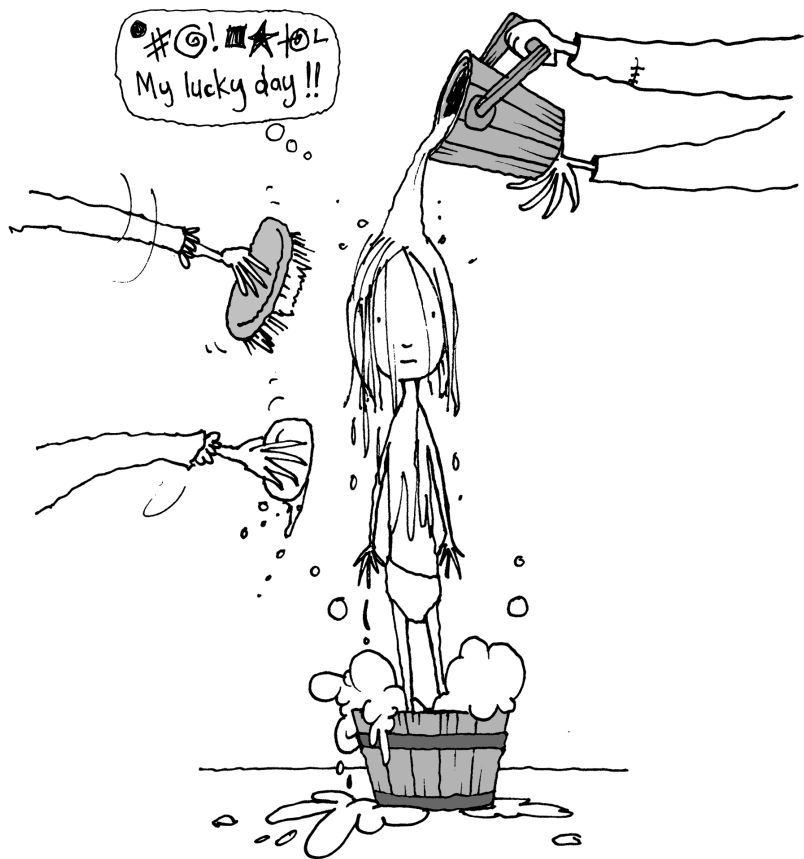
Aunty Agnes was a joke.

Uncle Edward was a fool.

And Dad, well. The less said about that the better.

Now it was up to Atticus.





Chapter 1

1750 or So



On the morning of the night before Atticus turned ten, his parents began the very big job of getting him ready.

‘You are a grub,’ said Mum, practically sanding him with soap.

‘And the smell,’ said Dad, tipping another bucket of cold water on him.

‘Eeewwww!’ they both shrieked.

Atticus couldn’t believe it. He smelt good. He could smell his richness without even trying. It was a good honest smell, like a horse in the rain, or a dog fresh out of a puddle. And the dirt made his skin match the colour of his hair. He thought he was pretty much perfect.



He just wished he was strong enough to wriggle free from the soap.



‘Stop wriggling,’ said his father.

‘You have to be clean and fresh and brilliant, so if you stuff up your choice, you’ll get another chance. Don’t you see? Stay still so we can help you.’

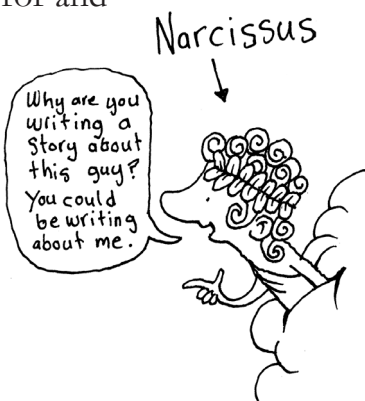
‘It doesn’t matter what I look like.’ Atticus squirmed. ‘As Grandnan says, “You get what you get and you don’t get upset!”.’

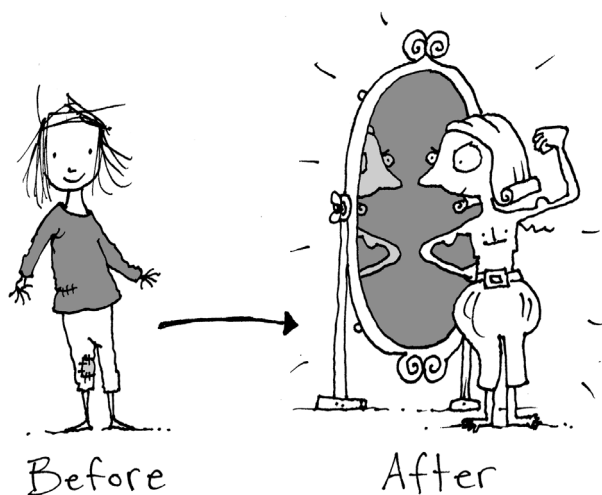
Atticus was scrubbed so clean he felt dirty. Then he was pushed into tights and pulled into a shirt. His hair was scraped across his head and glued down tight, his teeth polished, and his shoes were an ornament to Narcissus, the God of reflection.

He stood in front of the mirror and shuddered at the boy looking back at him.

‘Beautiful,’ said his mother.

‘Superb,’ said his father.





‘Oh, please,’ groaned Atticus.

He didn’t look like himself at all. Normally what he saw was a handsome young man with a jaw that jutted out like a boulder at the bottom of a granite cliff. Sharp, capable cheeks leading to a ferocious brow to shield his dark eyes and launch the thatch of hair on his head the way an island sprouts palm trees. With his shirt off and pants well hitched, he was on the definitely side of awesome. Best of all, there was a hair under his arm. Just the one. Mum always wanted to pluck it,

but Atticus would say, ‘No, Mother. It’s my hair. You never know when I might need it.’

That Atticus was exactly nothing like the one in the mirror. This Atticus looked like a kid – it was embarrassing.

‘Arrrrgh,’ he went. ‘If I have to stay like this a second longer than I have to, I’m going to lose my poop.’

‘You look gorgeous, Atty,’ said his mum, licking her hand and using the slobber to stick down some stray hairs. ‘Just how Grandnan would want. In fact, you look so good, I bet if you make a silly choice she’ll give you another go on this most special day of the Van Tasticus family tradition.’



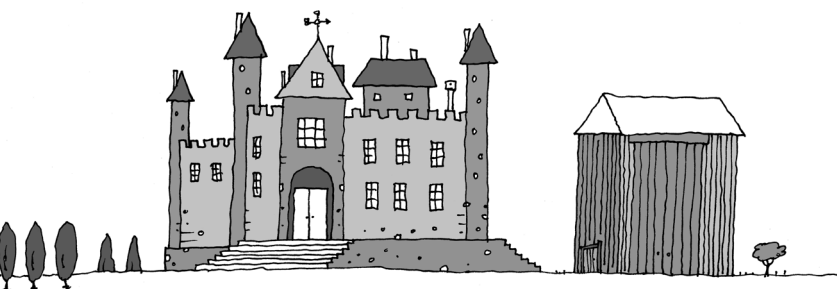
Chapter 2

The Tradition



The day you turn ten in the Van Tasticus house goes pretty much like this.

Grandnan's horse-drawn coach arrived and the freshly minted double-digiter begged to take the reins. The answer was always the same from the grumpy buffoon up front and every ten-year-old worth their salt grizzled and said, 'If I'm old enough to get to choose something – anything – from Grandnan Van Tasticus's giant shed, I'm old enough to whip your fat horse into a canter.'



No parents were allowed. Only the ten-year-old went to Grandnan's.

Through the gate, up the drive, past the giant woolly dogs and all the way to the steps in front of the house. The door creeeeeked open, and that's where you found Grandnan Van Tasticus.

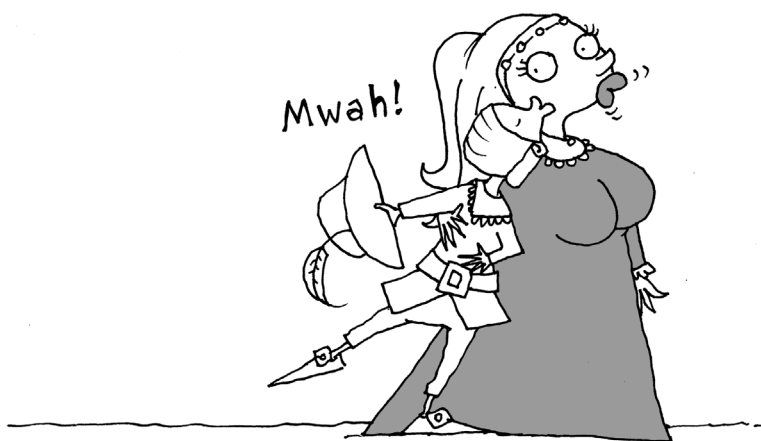
She probably wasn't as scary as she looked, but Atticus still felt a bit like a little kid in a big kids' boxing match.



'Hello, Grandnan,' he said, puckering up like he meant it.



'Aaaaaatticus, the last of my ten-year-olds.' She smiled, offering a cheek to his lips. 'You ready?'



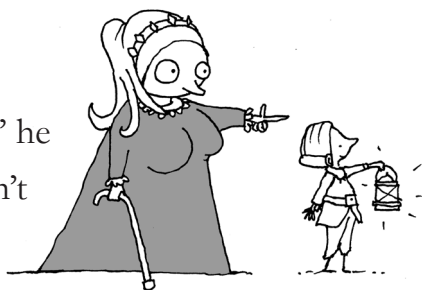
‘Mmm hmmm,’ he said, still pretty shaky.

‘You sure?’

‘Think so.’

‘You know the deal?’

‘Mmmmm hmmm,’ he said again. He really didn’t trust himself to speak.



‘Let me remind you,
just in case: You can go into my old shed
and choose anything you want. Anything.
It’s yours. Forever. To do with as you wish.
You can use it. Or sell it. Or burn it. Whatever.
There are things of great value and things
worth less than nothing. But be careful, don’t

look with your head, Atticus. You're a good boy. Look with your heart.'

It was the exact opposite of what his mother and father had told him. And his brother and his sister and his aunty and uncle, too.

They'd said, 'Choose with your head, you idiot. Your heart's got no brains.'

Grandnan Van Tasticus took him by the hand and walked him to the giant shed, where two men the size of elephants waited.

'Open it up,' she said to them.

They heaved and hauled and struggled with the giant doors.

'You should put these doors on wheels or rollers,' whispered Atticus. 'Then they'd be roller doors.'

Grandnan patted his head in the nicest possible way then pointed towards a massive

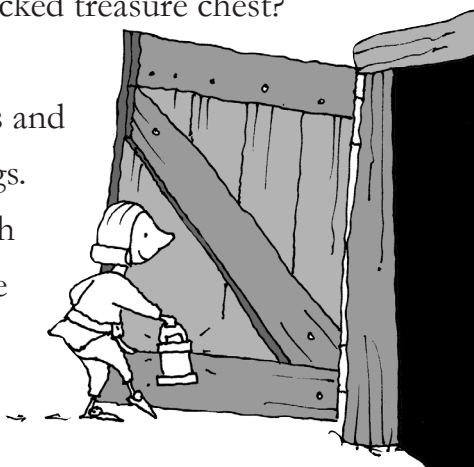
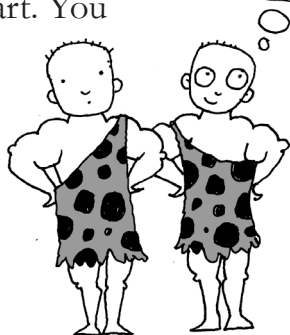


building. It was hardly a shed like he'd expected – more like a museum.

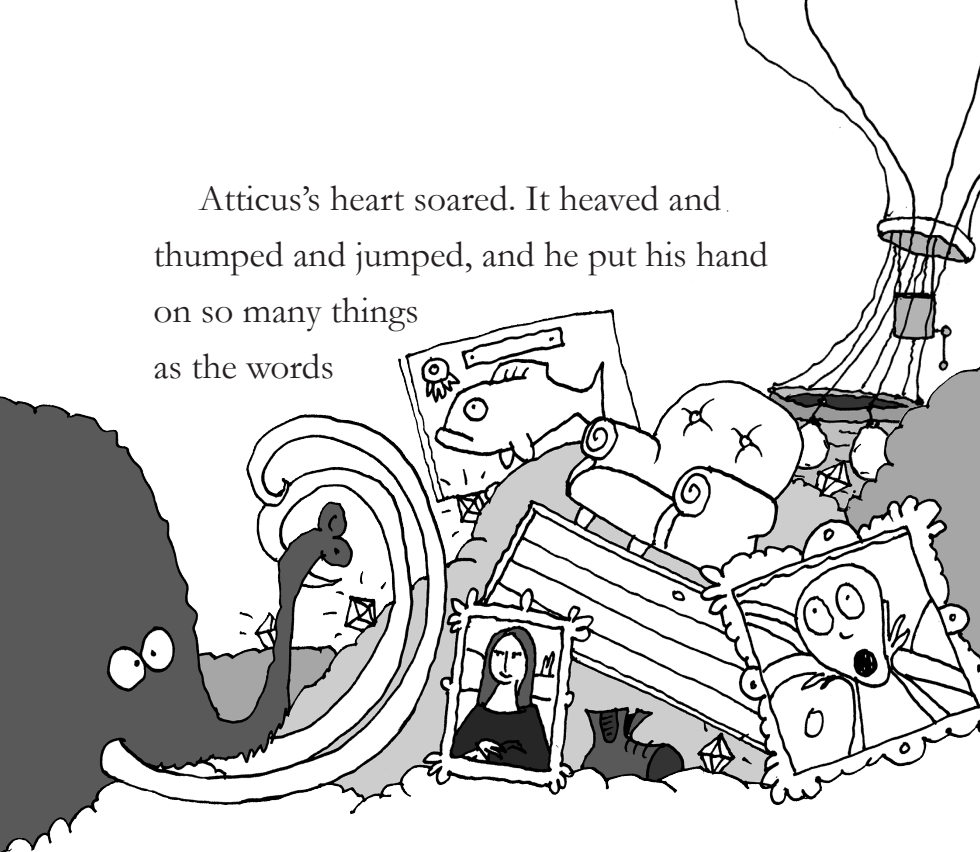
‘Your heart, Atticus Van Tasticus.

Choose one thing with your heart. You have all day, so there is no rush. But be certain – you only get one chance, it's a forever pick.’

His heart was practically beating out of his chest. If not for his puffy shirt, she'd have seen it for sure. With the doors all the way open, what Atticus saw looked like paradise. A bounty like you'd only ever imagined. There was hoards of stuff, it must have taken her ages to collect it all. Was that unicorn alive or stuffed? Was that a locked treasure chest? He could see cupboards overflowing with clothes and carpets and beautiful rugs. The walls were lined with paintings, and there were more on the floor.



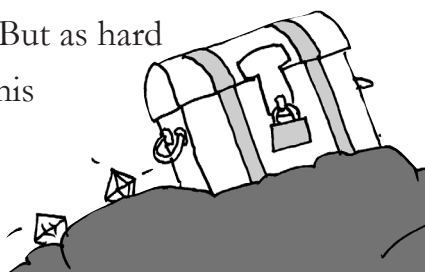
Atticus's heart soared. It heaved and thumped and jumped, and he put his hand on so many things as the words

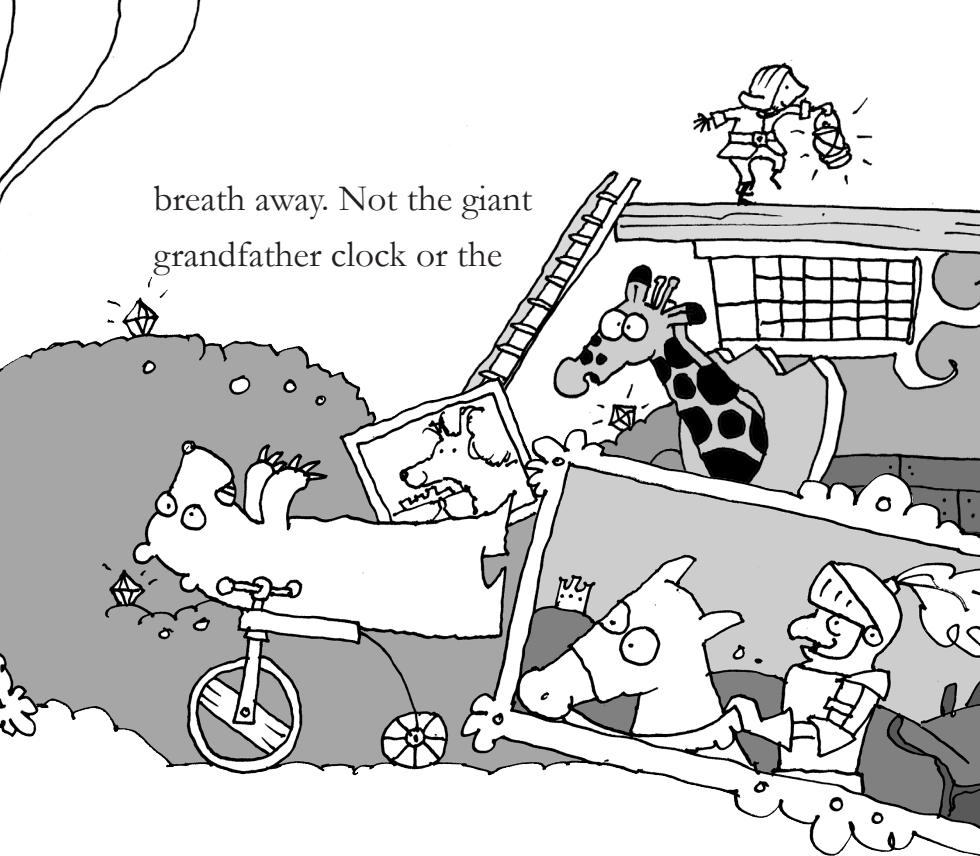


formed in his mouth. 'This is the one!' he wanted to say, over and over.

Grandnan followed along, but never said a word. And Atticus didn't utter more than a series of delighted grunts.

He ventured deeper, past the stuffed woolly mammoth, to where things got dusty. He could feel he was close. But as hard as he looked, nothing took his





breath away. Not the giant grandfather clock or the

heavy bag on the ground with 'gold' stamped on it. *Fake*, he thought. *Has to be fake*. Not the funny looking thing that might one day be called a bike. Not even the enormous man-sized basket attached to ropes which were attached to a giant balloon waiting to be blown up.

Atticus sighed when he hit the back wall of the shed.

He'd missed it, and he'd been in there for ages.

There was pretty much nothing else to see.

But then Atticus looked into the gloom and saw a crown full of jewels and remembered the words from his parents. 'Use your head, Atticus. Use your head.' *Could it be the crown?*

He looked at his grandnan, who was halfway to filthy, and she raised one eyebrow. It had to be the crown, didn't it? Out here where the dust was deep. *It was a trick of Grandnan to have the best stuff way out back*, Atticus thought. She knew he wouldn't be able to wait to pick something early on in the quest. She knew he'd grab something from the front like the others always did. He was ten and impatient. They all were. How would they be able to hold out for the good stuff hidden under a layer of filth out the back if she loaded the fun stuff at the front?

Atticus picked up the crown, took a huge gulp of air and blew as hard as he could. It was most definitely beautiful. He took a second breath, ready for a bigger blow but sneezed like he had a hurricane inside him.

Achoooooooooooooooooeeewww!

He sneezed so hard he sneezed himself into a somersault and rolled through a small wooden trapdoor into a dark, wooden room. His heart skipped a beat.

He'd found it, he was sure.

'I want this,' he said, fumbling for the crown. 'Grandnan, I CHOOSE THIS!'

'The crown?' she puffed once she'd arrived. Grandnan Van Tasticus might have sounded the tiniest bit disappointed. 'That old thing? Why? Do you think you're going to be a king?'



Atticus shook his head and passed the crown to Grandnan. 'Not that junky thing,' he said. With his arms wide, he smiled. 'This!'

His heart said it was right.

Grandnan took a step back, looking into the gloom, hoping to see what Atticus saw. She took another step back, then another and another until, finally, she could see the whole thing. It was huge, so big you couldn't see it from up close.

'Oh, I'd forgotten about that,' she said, the smile back in her voice. 'What are you going to do with that?'

'Well, der, Grandnan. I'm going to be a pirate!'

