


'An excellent book, good and original and, in all the best ways, strange'

NEIL GAIMAN

ATICA



GARRY KILWORTH

ATICA



江苏工业学院图书馆

藏书章

Garry Kilworth

atom

www.atombooks.co.uk

ATOM

First published in Great Britain 2006 by Atom
This paperback edition published in 2007 by Atom

Copyright © 2006 by Garry Kilworth

The moral right of the author has been asserted.

All characters and events in this publication, other than those clearly in the public domain, are fictitious and any resemblance to real persons, living or dead, is purely coincidental.

All rights reserved.

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, without the prior permission in writing of the publisher, nor be otherwise circulated in any form of binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition, including this condition, being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

A CIP catalogue record for this book
is available from the British Library.

ISBN 978-1-904-233-56-5

Typeset in Bembo by M Rules
Printed and bound in Great by
Mackays of Chatham plc

Atom
An imprint of
Little, Brown Book Group
Brettenham House
Lancaster Place
London WC2E 7EN

A Member of the Hachette Livre Group of Companies

www.atombooks.co.uk

Garry Kilworth was born in York in 1941 but has travelled widely around the globe ever since, being fascinated by the folklore, myths and legends of the places he has visited. He has been attracted by various forms of fantasy and supernatural writing but has more recently written a number of acclaimed and much-loved stories for children. Garry has been twice short-listed for the Carnegie medal.

You can find out more about Garry at www.garrykilworth.com and at the Atom website www.atombooks.co.uk

BY GARRY KILWORTH

The Knights of Liöfwende Trilogy

Spiggot's Quest

Mallmoc's Castle

Boggart and Fen

Attica

Jigsaw

*To the memory of Nelson,
a three-legged cat with a four-fold personality*

‘In the attics of my life
Full of cloudy dreams unreal
Full of tastes no tongue can know
And lights no eye can see
When there was no ear to hear
You sang to me’

Attics of My Life
THE GRATEFUL DEAD

ATICA

CONTENTS

1	Encounters in a Garden	1
2	Crossing the Threshold	16
3	Sky with a Thousand Windows	30
4	Board-combers into Bundles	44
5	Quest for the Golden Bureau	63
6	Pursued by Mad Mannequins	75
7	On the Mountain of Shadows	89
8	Scissor-birds that Blood Your Head	105
9	The Boy in the Wooden Mask	120
10	Punch and Judy, I Presume?	135
11	Dancing Rats in the Moonlight	151
12	Bortrekkers and Electric Dust Storms	166
13	The Collector of Souls	179
14	Visit to the Underworld	192
15	Cold Draught Then a Warm Reunion	209
16	Atticans in Khaki Coats	222
17	Swarming of the Ink Imps	236
18	Rafter Kings and Rafter Queens	252
19	Voyage over the Great Water Tank	271
20	Attack of the Music Makers!	287
21	Saviour of the Wooden World	305
22	The End of the Beginning	326



CHAPTER 1

Encounters in a Garden

The attic smelled of dust and ages. Jordy peered through a shaft of sunlight speckled with motes to a dim network of beams and rafters. He reminded himself he was a boy who wasn't afraid of eerie places. But the silence and the gloom of the attic, along with that atmosphere of dead air, were enough to disturb the most resolute of boys. A sound came from the depths. Were there birds up here, inside the roofing? Or worse still, rats? Who could tell? There could be rotted bodies in trunks, old festering secrets from bygone years, evidence of horrible crimes. Anything.

'Jordy, come on, this box is heavy – my arms are falling off!'

He jumped at the sound, which seemed very loud to him.

'Sorry, Clo,' he said, reaching back down the steps for the box of oddments. 'I – I was just . . .'

'I scared you, didn't I?' cried his step-sister. 'You jumped a mile then.'

'Not scared, exactly,' he replied through gritted teeth. 'It's just a bit spooky up here. Come and look.'

‘No, thanks. Too dirty. Just push the box in. You don’t need to go all the way up. Those places get filthy. My mum and your dad’ – none of the children had quite got used to the new arrangements yet, and were still awkward with what to call their parents – ‘will have to bring the heavy stuff up themselves.’

‘I’m quite strong.’

‘Me too, but not when it comes to lifting furniture . . .’

She continued talking, but Jordy wasn’t listening. He was staring into that half-lit world of the attic. You couldn’t see the walls: they were hidden in darkness. The pillar of light coming from a single window tile seemed to be the only substantial thing up there, and of course that wasn’t solid, it was just air, sunshine and swimming dust. He could see a pile of old clothes under a rafter, with what looked like a crumbling hymn book or Bible on top. The rags looked like the carcass of some grotesque animal, but he could see now that they were a soldier’s uniform, by the black buttons and the battered cap perched on top. Probably a long-dead soldier from a forgotten war.

Jordy shuddered and retreated down the steps.

Then, to rid himself of his dark mood, he put on a mock hoarse voice and said to Chloe, ‘Don’t go up there. It’s *horrible*.’

‘Oh, you—’ Chloe punched him on the shoulder.

They went downstairs together, to join the rest of the family.

They were in the front garden, staring at the furniture which was left over now that they had filled their new three-bedroomed flat. Not that it was much to look at, Dipa conceded. Most of it was junk. When two single parents set up home together, it resulted in the meeting of

two great furniture tidal waves. The contents of two separate homes rushed together and formed a huge pile of tables, chairs, sideboards, dressers and other household goods.

It was Dipa who took charge as usual.

'From what's left we'll keep our sideboard and your desk,' she said. 'The rest can go to a charity shop.'

'What about my old piano stool?' said Ben, sounding a little peeved. 'I made that myself. Look, Nelson needs it.'

'Nelson would sleep on a bed of glass if it was warm enough,' snorted Dipa, 'and you know it.'

Nelson, their three-legged ginger cat, was stretched out on the satin-covered seat in feline bliss, his warm furry body soaking up the sun. Nelson had lost a front leg in an uneven battle with a pickup truck. He now used his disability to attract sympathy when he wanted something, limping more than usual and letting out a pathetic *yowl* which soon turned to a rumbling growl if he didn't get what he wanted. He could also move like lightning still, chasing the sparrows in the yard.

Smiling, Dipa placed a hand on her new husband's shoulder. 'Your woodwork skills are astonishing, darling, but we don't have a piano.'

Ben sighed in resignation. 'All right, one of each. That's fair, I suppose.'

The three children, fed up and bored with moving difficulties, stood by and watched. Jordy was Ben's only child: a tall lean boy with a languid air of superiority about him. Next came Chloe, very pretty, her pitch-black hair inherited from Asian ancestors. There was a defiant look which made you wary of upsetting her. Finally, two years younger, there was Alex, with a squarer build than the other two and a quieter disposition. Alex had dark eyes that looked out at

you, but didn't let you look in. You rarely guessed what he was thinking.

'Can we go for a pizza now?' asked Jordy. 'You said we could have lunch out.'

'Well, I'm certainly not cooking anything,' Dipa said, 'so you'd better. I'll call the charity shop first, in case it rains and ruins all this lot. Ben, can you give the kids some money, then go and tip the removal men? They're sitting in the cab of their lorry, waiting.'

Dipa didn't stop for replies. She bounded through the front doorway and up to their first-floor flat. Their new home was in one of those big Victorian terraced houses which had been owned by a Mr Grantham before the conversion to two flats. Mr Grantham, a very elderly man, now lived on the ground floor, having sold the upstairs flat to the Wilsons.

Dipa telephoned a charity shop, told them where to find the furniture, then went to join Ben. The pair followed their children into the city and to a pizza place they had found earlier. Jordy, Chloe and Alex were in a much better mood now that they had fizzy drinks and food inside them.

'Hey, here they are,' cried Jordy, as Dipa and Ben entered, 'fresh from battles with sofa and sideboard.'

Right at that moment Ben's mobile phone rang: the theme tune from the TV programme *ER*. He answered it, then said, 'Sorry, folks, gotta go. Stuart's not turned up for his shift this afternoon. Sick or something.'

The children groaned, but they were used to this. Ben was a paramedic and Dipa was a doctor, so their parents were often called away. At least Dipa was not starting at the hospital until the day after tomorrow, so she was safe for forty-eight hours. She jammed a piece of Chloe's pizza in her husband's mouth and told him to get a takeaway

later. Then once he'd gone she settled down with the kids to enjoy their company.

Mr Grantham was a solitary and distant person. In truth he was not a happy man, though his life had not been a terrible one. He had fought in the Second World War, had been married for fifty years, and had for most of that time been reasonably content. But now there was nothing to do but sit and think, and for some reason he could not dwell on happy times, but rather on those occasions when he was treated badly.

'Noisy bunch,' he muttered, as he heard his new neighbours going up the stairs. 'No consideration.'

Then the television went on upstairs. Loud at first, but then turned down lower.

He had his own television of course, but he rarely switched it on these days. Half of it he didn't understand: these 'reality' shows as they called them. Youths and girls draped over chairs, yelling at one another. The other half was full of very young, gaudy and loud presenters too full of their own self-importance. Every programme seemed to be crammed with confrontations. Mr Grantham didn't much like his own company but he cared even less for the ghostly company of spiky-haired young men and bouncy, grinning young women. They didn't even speak the Queen's English, most of them. No, he preferred the radio these days.

Mr Grantham was not looking forward to sharing his house with these strangers, but financial difficulties had forced him into it.

Two weeks after the move a hot, bright day came to bless the Wilsons in their new home. It was the summer holidays. Jordy was playing a computer game in his

bedroom, Alex was making a huge and complex kite out of a kit, and Chloe had decided to take a book to read outside.

The back garden was communal. Mr Grantham had retained the right to use it, while at the same time conceding that the new occupants would also like to enjoy it. Not that there was much to it, in the way of flower beds and shrubs. There was a rough-looking lawn of sorts, and apple trees at the bottom, and what used to be a vegetable plot. Mr Grantham's back would no longer allow him to dig, though he still mowed the grass. He was out there sitting in a deckchair watching the butterflies and birds, when Chloe came with a canvas seat and plonked herself nearby.

'Hope I'm not disturbing you, Mr Grantham?' she said, flashing him one of her famous smiles. 'I won't make a sound, I promise.'

Nelson had followed Chloe out into the garden and sprawled himself on the grass next to Mr Grantham's deckchair.

'Suit yourself, young lady,' grunted Mr Grantham. 'It's your garden too.'

'Chloe,' she said. 'My name's Chloe.'

'And mine's Mr Grantham.'

They settled into silence, broken only by the sounds of nature and Chloe's pages being turned.

'What're you reading?' asked Mr Grantham at length. 'One of them Harry Potters?'

'Not this time,' said Chloe. She held it up. 'It's a book called *Holes*. It's about a boy in America . . .'

'Oh, don't tell me the plot,' said Mr Grantham quickly, waving skinny fingers at her. 'Nothing so boring as hearing the plot of a novel second-hand. Drives you potty.'

Chloe refused to be annoyed by this old man. She always considered herself good at charming reluctant people and this was a challenge.

‘Harry Potty?’ she said.

Mr Grantham, despite himself, chuckled.

‘Very good, very good.’

‘I always carry a list of my top twenty favourite books,’ said Chloe, taking a folded sheet of paper from her jeans pocket. ‘Do you want to hear it?’

‘Not especially. Do you want to hear my life story?’

He was being sarcastic and was startled when Chloe replied, ‘Yes. I expect it’s very interesting.’ She put the book down in a deliberate way. Nelson gave a great big yawn and rolled over onto his back, his remaining three legs sticking in the air. His eyes were looking up at Mr Grantham’s face as if in expectation.

‘Well,’ said Mr Grantham, flustered. He waved away a wasp that came too near. ‘I don’t expect it’s *that* interesting, to a young person like you.’ He changed the subject. ‘This your cat? What’s her name?’

‘Our cat, and *his* name’s Nelson.’

‘Likes water and sailing ships, does he?’

Chloe smiled. ‘No, of course not, but he’s lost a limb – in the same place as the admiral.’

‘Oh, very good.’ Mr Grantham made an attempt at tickling Nelson’s tummy and received an indignant glare in return. ‘Where are you from, Chloe? You from India? Were you born out there?’

‘No, I’m from here. I was born in Portsmouth,’ she replied, without any asperity. ‘My dad was half-English – he wanted us to have first names which sounded British – but my mum’s parents came from Bengal. My brother Alexander was born in Brighton. Jordy was born in the West Country, I think. Minehead. He’s not my real

brother, he's my step-brother, but we get on OK. Where were you born?'

'Funnily enough, India,' he said. 'My dad was in the army out there. So I first saw the world in the Far East and you're from England.' He turned awkwardly in his deckchair. 'That dark-haired one. The smaller boy. He passed me in the hall without a good-morning or a how-are-you.'

'That's Alex. He doesn't mean anything by it. He's just quiet. Lost in a world of his own. He wasn't being rude. Sometimes I get annoyed with him and yell at him to pay attention to me, and he simply looks startled – you know, like a rabbit with a fox or something. You can tell he's somewhere else, on another planet. Some boys are like that. Most girls are like me though, aren't they? Chatterboxes.'

She smiled, knowing by his amused look that she was charming the socks off Mr Grantham. He was a crusty old man, even Dipa and Ben had said that, but Chloe was good at getting under the armour of such people. When they had had their dog, the woman at the kennels had been regarded as a ferocious dragon, but Chloe had made her a friend.

Her new step-father had been an easy nut to crack at first, but she noted with some chagrin that now he was *family* he was not so swiftly charmed. Neither she nor Alex had liked him in the beginning, though that had not stopped her from being enchanting. Ben was not what they would have chosen for their mother as a second husband. He didn't seem ambitious enough. Ben seemed happy to remain just a paramedic, which was not much different from a nurse, while Dipa was way above him as a doctor.

Their own father had been a businessman, full of drive.