

# THE GHOSTS IN THE CLOCK WALK AGAIN

## CHAPTER SIX

### GHOSTS IN SPACE

It was half term and Grandad visited John's house for a day; he had repaired the book on the old house and brought it to show everyone. He had done a very good job on it and it looked excellent, all bound up in a green leather cover. They all had a very pleasant day and Grandad went home a little while before John went to bed. However, there was a telephone call from Grandad while John was getting washed and his Dad came into the bathroom to tell him about it.

"That was Grandad on the 'phone," he said. "He can't find the book anywhere and wonders if he left it here."

They all had a very good look round but couldn't find it and John went to bed feeling rather worried. The next day he visited his Grandad and told him that there was no sign of the book.

"Mum said you might have mislaid it when you got home," he said.

"Your mum thinks I'm a forgetful old man!" said Grandad. "All right, you help me look."

They looked very thoroughly but there was no sign of it.

"Oh well, I suppose it will turn up," said his Grandad but John wasn't so sure. They had a good day apart from that; Grandad took John to the park where they had an ice cream and when they went back to Grandad's house they had a big tea. John went home later, feeling happy but with the loss of the book nagging at the back of his mind.

That night he crept down to the clock again, with the photocopied book in his dressing-gown pocket. He heard a faint sound as he drew close to the clock. It wasn't the Abbot's little pipe, though. This sounded more like a lively jig played on a fiddle. He opened the door of the clock quietly and looked in. There was Sir Percy on one of the weights playing his violin and on the other was Lady Matilda, dancing. They looked up and stopped, and waved at John.

"Hello," whispered John. "I thought I could hear something."

He shrank rapidly and stood on the ledge, and the other two floated over to join him. Lady Matilda was rather out of breath.

"I do enjoy a dance," she said. "I don't get the chance very often."

“What were you playing,” asked John. “Is it an old tune?”

“Very,” nodded Sir Percy. “Old even when I was alive. It’s a dance that Lady Matilda knew from the days of Queen Elizabeth. She whistled it for me and I picked it up and played it.”

“I remember watching the Queen dance to that tune at court,” said Lady Matilda. “Should we join the others? I think that they are all in the bottom of the clock.”

They floated down and found the others sat around the big table. They all greeted John warmly.

“I’m not sure if it’s important,” he said, sitting down and sipping a glass of ginger beer that the Abbot had wished up for him. “But Grandad’s copy of the book has gone missing. He can’t find it anywhere.”

The ghosts looked worried.

“Oglai said to make sure that we didn’t lose the book,” said Leticia. “He said it could change everything.”

Lady Matilda looked thoughtful.

“If it’s been stolen by someone connected with the goings on in the pictures, then we may find the book in the house,” she said.

“There’s only one picture we haven’t visited yet,” said the Abbot. “Perhaps the answer is in there.”

“It’s the house that I knew,” said Bunsen. “The last house before it was all torn down to make that office block. I’m looking forward to seeing it again. I know the house backwards. If the book is in it I’m sure we’ll find it.”

“Well, it’s our last chance to find out what is going on,” said Jellicoe. “John, lad, open up the book please and let’s have a look at the picture.”

John did so and opened up the book to the last picture, the house that Bunsen knew when he was Butler. It was an odd looking place, very different to any of the houses that they had seen before. It was all turrets and towers, pointed pepperpot roofs and steep gables. All the windows were sharply pointed and there were battlements everywhere. The front entrance looked like some medieval gatehouse.

“Odd looking place,” said Sir Percy. “Not like any of the other houses. I remember it being built. The burned-out ruins of the last house were demolished and this was put up in its place.”

“Still a bit of Abbey about inside, as I recall,” said Abbot Baldwin.

“Plenty of passages under the house,” said Bunsen. “And the walls were very thick in places.”

“Right, everyone concentrate,” said Lady Matilda. “We’ll all have a close look at it with any luck.”

They all shut their eyes and thought hard, then they opened them again and floated up to the door of the clock and stepped out. They found themselves full size, standing in a very strange room indeed.

“Are we in the right place?” asked John. “It seems like something from Aladdin or Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves.”

He was remembering the pantomimes he had been to and the room really did resemble something out of the Arabian Nights. The ceiling was all gilded and plastered so that it was full of hanging stalagmite-like shapes rather like a picture Grandad had shown John of the Alhambra Palace that had been built by the Arabs in Spain. The walls were all very highly decorated with blue and white tiles with Arab writing on them and the woodwork everywhere round the doors and windows was carved into that peculiar onion-shaped opening that looks so Eastern. There was a lot of Indian brasswork all round the room on carved tables and chests that all looked as if they too had come from the East.

“No, this is the house all right,” said Bunsen. “This is called the Moorish Room. The Spanish called the Arabs Moors,” he explained to John.

“Must have been terrible to dust,” said Lady Matilda. “All these fiddly bits and pieces everywhere. So much for dust to settle on!”

“It was,” agreed Bunsen. “After the housekeeper left in hysterics one day because she saw some knight come out of the woodwork and his head fell off, it became my job to ensure that the maids had all done a thorough dust and it was quite a task, I can tell you.”

“I remember that,” said Sir Percy. “We were playing blind man’s buff and I had my eyes blindfolded. I blundered through one of the walls and hit my head on one of the gas brackets on the wall. My head fell off and all I could hear was someone screaming. I thought it was Lady Matilda practicing to keep her hand in. Turned out it was this house keeper. Last we saw of her, as I recall.”

“Hardly surprising,” said Lady Matilda.

John had caught sight of something on the floor and picked it up. It was a little box of matches, but rather strange ones. The box itself had a picture of a lamp on it, like one out of Aladdin and the matches were green. He showed it to Bunsen.

“On the floor!” said Bunsen. “How very untidy. I would have been very annoyed when I was alive. Must have been dropped by some workman come in to do a job. I should put them in your pocket.”

“Lovely rug,” said Leticia, admiring the red, black and green patterned carpet at their feet.

“Genuine Persian,” said Bunsen.

John thought it wonderful; the red and black patterns wove strange pictures all round the outer edge of the carpet and the green pattern in the middle seemed to writhe and twist into the oddest shapes.

“Should we have a look round the rest of the house?” asked Bunsen.

Jellicoe turned to check on the clock and make sure it was safe and then joined the others as they trooped out after Bunsen into a fine panelled hall that

reminded John of Lady Matilda's house and into a room filled from floor to ceiling by bookcases with glass doors.

"This is the library," said Bunsen. "My favourite room in the house. I wonder; if that book has somehow come into this house, it might well be here. Can you recall what it looked like, John?"

"Yes," nodded John, "It's quite thin but it's got a green and gold cover and stands out a bit."

Most of the books in the shelves - and there were hundreds of them - were covered in brown or red leather with gold letters so it was fairly easy to look along the shelves for a green spine. There was no sign of it.

"I like books," said Sir Percy. "I had lots of them in my house. A gentleman was expected to have a lot of books in his library. I remember that I read one once. It was brown."

"Just the one?" asked Abbot Baldwin.

"Oh yes, took me years. I can't remember what it was about," said Sir Percy. "But I loved the library. I used to find it very restful. I used to go in, sit down, take a look all round at those lovely leather bindings and fall asleep."

Exasperated, the Abbot raised his eyes to heaven.

"Let's have a look at the sitting room," said Bunsen. "It may be on the bookshelf in there."

They left the library and followed Bunsen into another amazing room. John looked up and gasped. The ceiling was domed and painted a very deep blue, spangled with gold and silver stars, like the night sky. The walls were all painted with scenes of castles and mountains but there was something there that made them all gasp with surprise. The clock had followed them! There it stood, against the wall, ticking away gently.

"It's followed us!" said the Abbot.

Jellicoe looked startled at first but then studied the clock more closely and chuckled.

"No it hasn't," he said. "Remember that last clock I made was sold to this house? Well, here it is. We've come back in time in the one in John's house - and that one is in the Moorish Room. This one hasn't come back in time yet!"

"You mean that there are two clocks in the house both exactly the same?" asked Sir Percy. "I'm confused." His head started to go round and he put up his hands to stop it.

"Not quite," said Jellicoe. "I can tell the difference. This one hasn't got quite so much wear; the face isn't so scratched."

"We'll have to make sure that we go back into the right clock," said Lady Matilda.

"Isn't there another ghost of you in that clock?" asked John. "You said that you decided to live in your last clock after you became a ghost."

“Quite right,” said Jellicoe. “There’s probably another me in there right now. I wonder what it’s like meeting yourself.”

“Complicated, I should think,” said Lady Matilda. “Let’s not bother. Any sign of the book?”

“There’s another lot of us somewhere around too,” mused Leticia. “I think we used to spend a lot of our time in the attics. We’re probably up there now.”

“There’s no trace of it here,” said Bunsen. “Let’s try upstairs.”

“Suppose we meet someone,” said John. “Like you for instance, before you became a ghost.”

“I’ve been thinking about that,” said Bunsen. “I think that everyone’s gone away for the yearly holiday in Scotland. The whole household used to go off there, all except the cook and the maid. They used to pop in occasionally to dust and make sure everything was all right. I don’t think we’ll be disturbed.”

“Suppose you meet yourselves as ghosts haunting this place?” asked John. It had often occurred to him that this was a possibility in the various houses that they had been in.

“As Leticia says, we used to spend a lot of time on the attics,” said Abbot Baldwin. “I expect we’re up there now, asleep - we sleep in the day, you see.”

“We used to go on holiday too,” said Lady Matilda. “Into the pictures hanging on the walls. That’s when we first found that we could do so. We’re probably in Scotland ourselves - we often used to go into the Monarch of the Glen.”

“Oh yes, that enormous stag standing on a hillside,” said Sir Percy. “It chased me once.”

“Well, I told you not to wave that red tablecloth at it,” said Lady Matilda.

There was the sound of a slamming door below them and a strange swishing noise.

“What’s that and where is it coming from?” asked Sir Percy.

“It’s coming from the cellars,” said Bunsen. “Quick, follow me!”

They ran after Bunsen into the hall and down some steps at the end of a passage.

“Good job the owner hasn’t had these removed yet,” said Bunsen. “This is where I had my, er, little accident.”

Bunsen had become a ghost after the owner took the cellar steps away and replaced them with a ladder, locking the ladder up to stop Bunsen from his regular visits to the cellar. Unfortunately he had forgotten to tell Bunsen who opened the door one night, fell head first into a barrel of brandy and died trying to drink his way out.

The steps were still there and they all found themselves in a vaulted cellar again, filled with barrels and racks of bottles.

“This is the wine cellar,” said Bunsen, happily. “My other favourite place in the house.”

He took a lantern from the wall and lit it with the last match from a box in his pocket. They began to explore carefully, keeping an eye out for any men in black with black beards. The cellar was quite large and behind some racks they came across a strange hole in the wall, just as if a big door had swung back.

“That’s odd,” said Bunsen. “I thought I knew every inch of this cellar. I didn’t know this was here.”

“It’s not that secret passage again, is it?” asked Sir Percy. “We never seem to get away from it.”

“I didn’t know the house had one,” said Bunsen. “Should we go in?”

They entered very carefully, Bunsen going first and holding the lantern high to see if there was anyone inside; the others followed. John noticed that they were actually going through a thick stone wall and the door seemed to be made of solid stone too.

Inside was a huge, dusty dim space. Bunsen held the lantern as high as he could and they looked around - it was a vaulted space, held up by pillars, the roof and walls had collapsed here and there and there were piles of rubble lying around.

“Same old secret passage,” said the Abbot. “It’s the old undercroft of the Abbey - you know, that cellar under the church. It’s lasted well!”

“Certainly has,” nodded Jellicoe, then he glanced back towards the door and cried, “Look out!”

They all turned and saw the big stone door swinging to. Before they could get to it, it had closed tight and there was no handle or any sign that it could open from that side. The ghosts threw themselves at the door but it was no good - it was firmly shut. They searched for hidden catches and secret locks to no avail.

“One or two of us will have to go through the wall and find the latch on the other side,” said Jellicoe. “I’ll stay with John. You go through the stone.”

Sir Percy nodded and walked up to the wall, and banged his nose against it badly. “Ow!” he said, and took off his head to rub his nose better.

“I’ll try,” said the Abbot and he walked into the wall as well and bumped himself.

“Oh no!” said Lady Matilda. “Try wishing something up!”

They did; it didn’t work.

“It’s those blasted charms,” said Leticia. “Someone’s got hold of them! We’re trapped!”

“Worse, whoever’s trapped us has got the clock!” said Lady Matilda. “That’s how they’ve got the charms!”

“How are we going to get out of here?” asked Abbot Baldwin desperately.

“I’ve an idea,” said Jellicoe, taking the lantern from Bunsen. He explored the other end of the cellar but shook his head as he saw the piles of rubble there. The ceiling had fallen in.

“No chance of getting through that. I hoped that there would still be steps up to that old stone trapdoor,” he said, “but it’s all collapsed. We’re trapped all right.”

Then Sir Percy tripped over a stone and his head fell off and crashed into the lantern that Jellicoe had put on the floor while he sat down and had a think. The lantern went out and they were in the pitch dark.

“You clumsy great oaf,” shouted Leticia. “Look what you’ve done.”

There was silence and then a groan from somewhere in the blackness.

“Percy, Percy!, Where are you?” shouted Lady Matilda, in a very worried tone.

The groaning continued.

“Oh dear, he’s hurt!” said Lady Matilda. “Quick, feel around on the floor. Try to find him!”

John was getting frightened by this time in the dark. Bunsen said, “I can’t light the lantern; that was my last match!” and then John remembered the matchbox in his pocket and pulled it out. With trembling fingers he struck a match. There was a flash of green light and Oglai appeared!

“Oh thank goodness,” said Lady Matilda. “Good thinking, John.”

“All I wanted to do was light the lantern,” said John in a shaky voice. “I’m frightened of the dark and I wanted some light.”

“No sooner said than done, Oh Master John,” said Oglai and he rubbed his fingers together. With a flash of green light a big chandelier appeared above them all set with glittering diamonds and lit by hundreds of candles. More candles appeared in silver brackets on the walls and four great carved marble stands rose up from the floor, each bearing another twenty candles in gold candlesticks. The cellar was a blaze of light.

“Overdoing it just a bit,” said the Abbot. “But at least we can find poor old Percy.”

They found the knight’s head behind a heap of rubble, it was all dusty and bruised. He opened his eyes as they carried him into the light.

“Oh dear, I really must stop all this falling about,” he said. “I’m doing my head no good at all.”

“Poor Percy,” said Lady Matilda tenderly. “We’ll brush you off and bathe your bruises.”

“Just put the clot’s head back on and tie it down with string!” said the Abbot impatiently. “We’ve got a clock to find!”

Lady Matilda ignored him and brushed the dust from Sir Percy's hair and Oglai provided a small bottle of something that smelled very nice and a silk hanky to bathe the head. The bruises disappeared as soon as Lady Matilda touched them with the lotion!

"Excellent stuff, that," said Sir Percy. "I feel marvellous."

"It certainly is," said Lady Matilda. "You must give me the recipe, Oglai - if you don't mind, that is."

"Not at all, oh lovely lady," said Oglai. "It will be a pleasure. I am so glad that Master John thought to strike a match, I have been trying to contact you for I knew that the Book had been captured, but I could not do so directly. Something was stopping me and I do not know what. I was able to conceal myself in that box and enter your noble house, Oh Master Butler, and I hoped that you would see me. I am pleased that you did."

"So am I," said Leticia. "We can't wish anything up. All our powers have gone."

"They've found some anti-ghost charms I had under lock and key," said Lady Matilda. "They've broken into our clock and stolen them. I really should have destroyed the charms but you know how it is."

"I do indeed," said Oglai. "Most difficult. Let us get you out of here and we will go in search of the Noble Clock and the Book of Houses."

He pointed at the door and green fire flew from his fingers; the door slowly opened and the ghosts trooped out, through the wine cellar and up the steps into the Moorish Room.

"Wonderful," said Oglai, looking around. "I feel so much at home."

"Yes, but where is the clock," gasped Jellicoe. "It's gone!"

"So has the carpet," said Lady Matilda, puzzled. "I can understand them taking the clock, but why on earth would they take the carpet?"

"Carpet?" said Oglai. "Black and red with a green sign in the middle?"

"Yes, how did you know?" asked Bunsen.

"It is a magic carpet!" said Oglai. "It flies!"

"It never did when I was standing on it," said Bunsen, "and I've even had it outside to beat the dust out of it. It never moved."

"Ah! You did not speak the magic word that starts it up," said Oglai. "Also they are most difficult to control. It is necessary to take a test for a carpet licence."

"You mean that one of those bearded fellows has a carpet licence?" asked Sir Percy. "Funny, they didn't seem the types to go in for that."

"True," nodded Oglai, "but we genies are all trained in the management of carpets."

"You mean that there is a genie helping them?" said Abbot Baldwin.

"Not Bulbul," gasped John.

"I fear so," said Oglai, looking grave.

“I thought he had been eaten by a dragon,” said Jellicoe.

“Not easy, digesting a genie, even for a dragon,” said Oglai. “He may have been able to escape, although his powers are reduced.”

“It’s worse than I thought, then,” said Jellicoe. “How are we going to find the clock, the book and the carpet? Where have they gone?”

“I will consult the Crystal Oracle,” said Oglai. “Come!”

He led them to small round table and took off his turban. From it he took out a crystal ball as big as his head.

“You wear that on your head?” asked John. “It must be awfully heavy.”

“Oh, but when it is in my turban it is the size and weight of a marble,” said Oglai. “But when I need it, it grows. So useful.”

“It certainly is!” said Lady Matilda. “How does it work?”

Oglai sat down and passed his hands over the crystal. It clouded over and then cleared and went black. Stars appeared, scattered all over it.

“It’s the night sky,” said Jellicoe.

“Yes, and look there,” said Leticia, pointing to a little speck flying across the surface of the crystal.

“I will adjust the magnification,” said Oglai and he waved his hand over the crystal again. The speck grew and they could clearly see it was the carpet with the dread figure of Bulbul the Red Genie sat on the front, but half his former size, and behind him were four black-bearded figures. Between them was the clock, laid down on the carpet. One of the figures had a book in his hand, in a green cover.

“That’s the book,” said John, excitedly. They saw the figure open up the door of the clock and put the book inside.

“What are they going to do with the clock?” asked John.

“They’re heading for the Moon,” said Oglai. “I fear the worst. I think they intend to drop the Clock on the Moon and smash it to pieces. No one will ever be able to go to the Moon and repair it and recover the Book. You will all be trapped here forever. They will rule the World of the Clock and the World of the Book. We must get after them, but how?”

Jellicoe had been thinking hard for a few minutes.

“Could we use the clock to go after them, if we had it?” he asked.

“Oh yes!” said Oglai. “But we do not have it.”

“Oh yes we do!” said Jellicoe. “Follow me!”

“Lead on, Oh Master Clockmaker,” said Oglai, replacing the crystal in his turban.

Jellicoe led them to the other room and showed Oglai the other clock.

“There it is,” he said. “The same clock but much younger!”

“Perfect!” said Oglai, excited. “And we have the heavens above us,” he said, pointing to the dome above them, all painted with stars. “I think that we can pursue them after all. Please to be entering the clock.”

“I hope that I can,” said John. “Do you think the magic will work for me in this clock?”

“Will it work for any of us?” asked Lady Matilda. “Well, here we go. Concentrate, all of you.”

They did and found themselves standing in front of the face, inside the glass door, all of them the right height and with Oglai standing beside John.

“Please to be sitting down,” he said. “Hang on tight! Five, four, three, two one! We have ignition! We have lift off!”

They did too; John felt the clock rising into the air and a great weight seemed to be pressing down on top of him. He craned over to look down towards the base of the clock, and saw that flames and smoke were shooting out from it!

“It’s become a rocket!” he said excitedly. “We’re going up in a rocket!”

They were indeed and as the clock shot upwards on a pillar of flame, John had a nasty feeling that they were going to crash into the ceiling, but he saw that the dome above them had disappeared and they were heading straight out into a blackness filled with stars.

“I must go and control this ship of the stars,” said Oglai. “We must head for the moon and overtake the Flying Carpet.”

He vanished and the others all looked out the glass door and into space. There were only a few stars in the sky now and the Moon appeared some distance away, full, round and gleaming silver.

“We need some of the constellations to help us,” said John, remembering how Orion, Sagittarius and the others had helped in stopping Bulbul before.

“It’s the wrong time for constellations,” said Jellicoe, turning round to look at the Moon and Stars part of the clock face behind them, where the moon was just about filling the sky. “It’s a full moon and the constellations we need are in a different part of the heavens.”

“I can see them!” shouted Leticia. “Look!”

She pointed and they looked in the direction of her finger. They saw the carpet in the far distance heading for the Moon. The clock was in pursuit but it was long way behind.

“We aren’t fast enough,” said Jellicoe. “Where’s Oglai?”

“He said he had to go off and control the rocket,” said John. “I wonder if he’s on top of it somewhere?”

“Good thinking,” said Jellicoe. “Let’s see if we can find him.”

They walked through the clock face and floated up inside the works. As they did, John noticed something, nudged Jellicoe and pointed. Jellicoe chuckled. There in a corner was a bed and in it, wearing his nightshirt and nightcap, was Jellicoe as John had first seen him, lying asleep in bed with his ear trumpet by his side.

“He won’t be able to hear us,” said Jellicoe. “His ears are still stuffed with cotton wool. I doubt he will wake up tonight.”

They floated on up to the very top of the clock and through the wooden roof, to find themselves in a glass bubble on top that looked for all the world like an upside-down goldfish bowl. In the middle was Oglai, seated in front of the oddest set of controls that John had ever seen.

There were some old radio dials like the ones Grandad had on his ancient radio, several brass light switches, a couple of gas taps, the controls from what seemed to be an antique washing machine and a screen from a television set that had come out of a museum and which was glowing green. Oglai was intently staring at the screen and manipulating his odd controls. He turned to see the ghosts behind him.

“It is no good,” he sighed. “They are too fast for us. The carpet they are using is a turbocharged racing model.”

John looked up at the stars around them. He caught sight of a great figure outlined in silver in the sky.

“Look,” he said. “There’s a constellation. Perhaps it will help us. What is it?”

“Pegasus the Winged Horse,” said Jellicoe. “And look there! There’s Aquarius the Water Carrier! Oglai, head over there.”

He pointed and Oglai swung the clock round and roared off in the direction of Aquarius, a huge silver-outlined figure of a lady in a robe with a water jug on her shoulder. She waved as they approached.

“Hello,” she said; her voice was quite clear although it seemed to come from a great distance away and now that they were close to her, she filled the sky. “Can I help? You seem to be in trouble.”

Quickly they explained the problem. She nodded, whistled and a huge dog came bounding up.

“This is Sirius, the Dog Star,” she said. “He will help us. We’ll need another bit of help too.” She whistled again and with a thunder of hoofs, Pegasus bounded across the sky, his wings making a hurricane amongst the stars.

Aquarius leapt on his back and galloped off after the carpet. The clock followed, with Sirius in front. By now the carpet and its occupants were very close to the Moon; they looked back and saw they were being pursued and the bearded men shook their fists. With a shout of triumph they threw the clock off the carpet and it fell towards the Moon, gathering speed.

“It’ll be smashed to bits,” said Jellicoe, aghast.

However, Sirius had seen the clock fall and he darted forward to grasp the clock in his jaws just before it hit the surface of the moon. He made a sharp turn and headed back to Oglai’s rocket-clock. Roaring with rage and shouting something about having dog for dinner, Bulbul turned the carpet in a tight turn

and shot after Sirius. Bulbul was crouched low on the front and began to wave a lasso round and round his head as he drew closer to the star-dog. Then he saw Pegasus heading straight for him, with Aquarius on his back, and he abruptly turned the carpet around again, but it was too late. As she drew alongside the carpet, Aquarius emptied her water jug over the occupants. Suddenly the carpet sputtered, jerked to a halt and began to fall towards the Moon like an autumn leaf falling from a tree, spiralling gently down. Bulbul seemed to have disappeared and the bearded men were all absolutely soaked through and clinging on to the carpet for dear life. The carpet fluttered down and landed gently on the silver surface.

Oglai landed the rocket-clock and its occupants safely by the side of the carpet; Pegasus and Aquarius joined them and Sirius set the other clock down gently. It was an odd sight that met their eyes; the carpet was soaked through and lay limp. A tiny Bulbul was lying on his back in a pool of water and blowing more water out of his mouth like a whale. All four black-bearded men were changing as the black ran out of their beards and hair and revealed - Sir Rufus the Red, the Red Miller, Hassan the Red Bearded and Red Sidney the Pirate, the villains of the World of the Clock! All were wet through and grumbling furiously.

“Carpets and genies don’t like water,” said Oglai as the ghosts and John left the clock and floated to the surface, growing in size. “It shrinks genies and stops magic carpets working. And what strange trickery is this, that the black-bearded ones become red?”

“Dye,” said Bunsen, “or ink. Whatever it is, it isn’t waterproof.”

“We’ll get even with you yet,” snarled Hassan and he shook his fist and pulled out his scimitar. Red Sidney pulled out a cutlass, Rufus took out his big sword and the Miller pulled out a couple of pistols. “Board them,” roared Red Sidney. “We’ve still got the charms. There’s nothing they can do! We’ll settle their hash once and for all!”

For a minute things looked nasty but Oglai snapped his fingers and the four red-bearded villains froze.

“My best spell,” he said. “Their charms are against ghosts, not genies and Bulbul has no power when he is wet! Perhaps you would collect the charms, please, Oh Master Butler,” he said to Bunsen, who did so and gave them to Oglai.

“Would you like me to deal with these?” he said to Lady Matilda.

“Please do,” she nodded. “Can you destroy them?”

“Oh, yes, I think so,” said Oglai. “A friend of mine lives on the slopes of Mount Etna. He has a pet left-footed elephant.”

Lady Matilda sighed. “How useful,” she said.

Aquarius picked up the soggy, immobile red-bearded villains and popped them into her water jug, along with Bulbul.

“I’ll deal with these,” she said. “I’ll put them on the Pole Star. Sirius will keep guard on them, won’t you, boy?”

Sirius wagged his tail. John reached out to pat him and found that despite Sirius seeming to be an enormous silver outline, he actually felt quite solid. The

huge dog bent his head down so the ghosts could pat him and scratch him behind the ears. They all made a big fuss of him and he wagged his tail like anything and raised quite a gale on the surface of the Moon.

“How is the clock?” asked Aquarius.

Jellicoe inspected it carefully and opened it up to find the lost book lying inside. He passed it to John.

“Any damage?” he asked. John had a good look.

“No, he said. “It’s fine.”

“So is the clock,” said Jellicoe.

“We’ll have to take the carpet back to the House,” said Bunsen. “And that other clock, too.”

“We better get it right, as well,” said Sir Percy. “If we get the wrong clock back to John’s house there’ll be two Jellicoes in it!”

“One’s quite enough,” said Jellicoe, chuckling.

They set off. Oglai piloted one clock and Sir Percy and Abbot Baldwin decided they would pilot the other, with a similar set of controls to the ones in Oglai’s clock. John, Lady Matilda, Bunsen and Leticia decided they would ride with Oglai, while Jellicoe rode with Sir Percy and the Abbot to keep an eye on them, and they took off. John watched as the other clock took off, on a great pillar of flame and smoke and then looped the loop all over the sky.

“Show-offs!” said Leticia.

“I don’t think that they actually intended to do that,” murmured Lady Matilda. “I’m not sure they’ve got the hang of it yet.”

Eventually the other clock straightened up and Oglai flew alongside it. John saw that Jellicoe had taken over the controls and the Abbot and Sir Percy were sat with their backs to each other, sulking furiously.

They swept across the sky, John looking out to see all the stars and planets in the blackness of space and thought how beautiful it was. He felt quite sleepy and seemed to fall into the star-spangled blackness of space. He woke up, in his own bed to find the photocopied book on his eiderdown, and he got up and went downstairs. He wondered if there would be an upside-down goldfish bowl on top of the clock in the hall - and indeed if there would be a clock in the hall at all, and if there was, would it have two Jellicoes in it, if the ghosts had got it a bit wrong?

He found his Dad standing by the clock, looking puzzled. Luckily there wasn’t an upside-down goldfish bowl on the top of the clock after all - but his

Dad was holding a book in his hand, a thin book with a green leather cover. It was Grandad's book about the old house!

"Look at this," he said. "I found it propped up by the side of the clock. Now, how on earth did it get there? Well, Grandad will be pleased."

Dad went to breakfast; John felt in his dressing-gown pocket - there was a box in there and he pulled it out to find the matchbox with the Aladdin's lamp picture on the front and the green matches inside. He stood smiling at the Clock; there was no sign of the ghosts but somehow John felt that it certainly wasn't the last of . . . .

The Ghosts in the Clock.

The End - for now