

## The Return o The Mingins by Elizabeth Cordiner

The evenin sun wis settin, turnin the sky pink an rid as Jamesey an Teenie shared a bag o chips thegither. Teeny perched on Jamesey's shooder, her fairy wings folded ahent her an her een dreamy as she remembered.

'Mind when ah stole a bit o yer roll?'

Jamesey laughed.

'Ah mind it fine. It wis when ah first got tae ken ye, an when ah met thae awfy Mingins.'

Teeny's purply-blue een shone.

'An ye saved me an ma pal Tattie fae them. Ye became ma pal, Jamesey, an ah became yours.'

Jamesey's een were shinin tae.

'Aye, we're pals.'

'Fur ever an ever?' asked Teeny.

'Fuer ever an ever.' said Jamesey.

Teeny flew onto his haund.

'Even if...' an she swallied hard, 'even if The Mingins cam back?'

Jamesey's face tightened.

'Whit dae ye mean, Teeny? Ah thocht they were in the jile.'

The fairy's colours paled.

'They're due tae get oot soon. Ye see, they've served their sentence.'

There wis a silence, then Jamesey straightened his shooders.

‘Dinnae worry, Teeny,’ an his voice wis strong, ‘They’ll no bother us again.’

But he wis wrang.

The Mingins sat grumblin in their cell in Her Majesty the Fairy Queen’s jile.

‘Ah hate this place,’ said Manky, ‘There’s nae dirt an there’s nae guid rubbish tae eat, jist breed an watter. Oh whit ah’d gie fur a rotten aipple or a juicy rat.’

He rubbed his belly.

‘Ah hate it mair than you,’ said Captain Glaur, an his voice shook wi rage, ‘They took ma collection awa, ma dug’s tail an ma rabbit’s fit, an they...’

‘Shut up!’ said Chief Mawkit.

He rose tae his feet.

‘Ah’m scunnered listenin tae ye a’. We’ll be gettin oot soon, an you, Captain Glaur, can get some new trophies fur yer belt.’

‘An can ah get a mouldy pie again?’ said Manky.

He began tae dribble at the thocht. Mawkit looked hard at him.

‘You? You? It’s me first, Manky. Me!’ He pinte tae his chest, ‘Remember that.’

‘Ah niver get tae keep the guid stuff,’ said Manky under his breath.

‘It’s no fair.’

'Ah heard that. Ye'll get the back o ma haund,' Chief Mawkit snarled.

Manky began tae cry. Rid tears ran doon his cheeks an dripped aff his chin. He wiped them awa wi his lang fingers but they kept comin.

'Naebody listens tae me,' he whimpered as he waddled awa, 'Naebody.'

'Shut yer mooth!' said Chief Mawkit, an he bared his teeth, 'Ah've got tae think.'

'Whit about, sur?' asked Chief Glaur.

Chief Mawkit spat oot his answer, an his een were rid an his een were cauld.

'Revenge,' he said, 'Revenge.'

Captain Glaur wis thinkin as weel. The Chief wis wearin his leader's chain o office an it bumped against his chest as he waddled around the cell. That shid be me, Glaur thocht, wearin that chain roond ma neck. Ah shid be Chief. If ah had been Chief, we widnae be in jile. Jamesey had made a richt fule o them under Mawkit's leadership. Mawkit shid be gone. Maybe wan day a big dug wid get him, or somebody wid come up ahent him an push him oot. Wha micht that somebody be? It micht be him. Then he wid tak his rightful place as leader. Till that day, though, they had tae hae revenge on Jamesey an revenge on thae twa fairies. He smacked his lips.

Revenge.

It wis early in the mornin when the Mingins were let oot o jile. They were led by Chief Mawkit wha wis followed by Captain Glaur an his men.

Manky wis last. But a few steps ahead o them a' wis Mucky, who'd been telt tae look oot fur ony danger. His job wis tae see if there wis ony danger.

Glaur rubbed his belly. He thocht o Jamesey pu'in on his chain an the wound that that had made, an his wee een got harder.

'Jist you wait,' he muttered. 'We'll get ye yet,' an the Mingins picked it up an began tae chant, 'Jist you wait, jist you wait,' an their thick broony-yellow bodies swayed, an their lang airms stretched oot as their fingers grasped at the air.

'Oh, Chief Mawkit,' Manky cried, 'See the roots, smell the worms an the dirt. We're nearly hame.'

'It's a' safe, sur,' shouted Mucky. 'Naebody tae see us. Naebody tae ken'.

They disappeared doon under, an as they did so, a bluebird that wis flyin overhead sped aff towards Boggy Wid. He flew as fast as he could. The Mingins were hame. Teeny had tae be telt.

When the bluebird arrived, Teeny an Tattie were dancing thegither jist fur the fun o it, but when they heard the news they stopped. Tattie went pale, rememberin the bottle, an Teeny took her wee haund an held it. They went at wance tae see the Queen.

She listened. She eyeweys listened an her beautiful face wis kind. Then she spoke, an the fairies listened.

‘The Mingins are oot. Aye, that’s right. They’ve served their sentence. Remember, they’ll never be like us. They’re Mingins. But if they keep tae themsels, they’ll no be breakin ony Fairy Laws. Jist wait an see.’

Teeny nodded, but she felt suddenly cauld. Wait an see. Why could she hear a voice inside sayin ‘Wait an see.’?

That nicht a silver moon shone doon as the Mingins cam oot o a drain an made straight fur the Midden. It had been a lang time since they’d been there an the foul smell o rubbish wis sweet tae their nebs. Manky sat by himsel on an auld tyre scoopin oot the black flees that had drooned in a puddle fur tae pit them on a sandwich.

He wis coontin them, wan, twa, fower. He sterted again, fower, six, seventeen. He broke aff, puzzled.

‘An awfy lot onywey. Ah’ll spread them on a roll.’

Twa o the Mingins were fightin ower a mouldy pizza, an Chief Glaur had fund a deid burd’s leg. He wis triumphantly tyin it on tae his belt when he saw whit he had been hopin tae fund - a gless bottle. It glinted in the moonlicht.

‘Ma new bottle,’ he said tae himself. ‘This wans fur Teeny or ma name’s no Glaur. Jist you wait. Naebody gets the better o Captain Glaur, an ye’ll sit in here jist fine, jist like yer pal Tattie did.’

It wis near mornin afore they left, an there wis nae bluebird watchin this time, because he wis asleep in his tree.

When Jamesey wis kickin a ba about waitin fur the chip van in the precinct tae open, he suddenly felt his airms pinned tae his side an he could smell the rotten breath o a Mingin. It wis on its ain, but wan wis enough.

‘Got ye.’

Mucky’s dirty fingers poked intae Jamesey’s side, ‘Captain Glaur’s gonnae want tae see you.’

Jamesey struggled but Mucky widnae let go. Whit could he dae tae get free? He thocht hard.

In his jaiket pooches he had a biscuit an a ball o string, but his airms were bein held too ticht tae reach them, onywey. In his trooser pocket he hud his torch. He micht be able tae reach that.

His fingers groped in the pooch.

Nearly there.

The Mingin wis squeezin him that hard that he thocht his banes micht crack. His fingers closed roond the torch. Twistin roond, he shone it richt intae the Mingin’s een.

Mingins dinnae like bricht licht. They prefer the dark, an this wan wis nae different. Mucky yelped an covered his een, takin his haunds aff Jamesey, an Jamesey wis free. He wis a guid runner, an he began tae

run, an he ran like the wind. He had tae get tae Boggy Wid, an he had tae see Teeny afore it wis too late.

Mucky wis nae runner, an he went slowly back tae Chief Mawkit.

His een were still sair, an he wisnae lookin furrin tae whit the Chief wid say. He wid get a slap or a kick fur his failure.

Chief Mawkit looked at him.

‘Ye let thon boy escape? Some Mingin you are.’

He raised his haund then he stopped. His een lit up.

‘Ye’ll get yer punishment, but richt noo we need tae move. The boy will be headin fur the Fairies. He’ll want tae see Tattie an Teeny,’ Princess Ah’ll go whaur ah please Teeny’, but she’ll no, no in oor territory, no whaur there are crisps tae be chewed or buns tae be sooked. We’re goin tae Boggy Wid, men, an the boy will lead us tae her.’

They marched alang in their tunnels under the grund amang the worms an beetles until they smelled the wid abune them. Oot o the roots they emerged. Glaur had the bottle he’d fund in the Midden ready tied tae the chain round his waist. If he didnae get Teeny he’d get Tattie. He’d caught her afore. It had been a great capture, better than a rat’s heid, cos she wis alive.

‘Stey ahent the bushes, men,’ said Glaur, ‘Ma brave boys.’

But he wisnae sae brave. Whaur micht Jamesey be? The wid wis a big place. There micht be hedgehogs wi prickles or even, an he shivered, a big slaverin dug.

‘Stey alert, men,’ he said, ‘Stey alert.

Oh, but the wid is big, thocht Manky, an ah’m feart. He wisnae happy. He wanted tae be at hame wi a juicy pie, no here whaur there wis danger, an he didnae want revenge on onybody. Maybe he wisnae a guid Mingin. His een filled wi tears. If he wisnae a proper Mingin, whit wis he, an whit wid he dae? He wid be lost.

A windhad sprung up an wis blawin the leaves a’ aboot on the path an Teeny an Tattie were busy when Jamesey fund them. They were sittin on a log makin a special banner fur a special occasion, the yearly Fairy Feast. The Fairy Queen wid be there, an it wid be a fantastic pairty. Teeny’s scissors were cuttin oot the bright blue cloth. They wid tie it up atween twa trees when it wis decorated an a’ready. The fairy pals looked up as Jamesey appeared.

‘Hiya,’ said Tattie.

It’s oor ‘Mingin Exterminator’,’ said Teeny, an they smiled.

Jamesey could see them clearly when no ither human bein could, an he saw their smiles an he saw whit they were daein. His hert wis heavy.

‘Listen, ma freends,’ he said, an he telt the story o his escape, ‘The Mingins havenae learned onythin.’ He shook his heid. ‘They’re jist the same. But so are we. We can stop them. You, Teeny, You, Tattie, an me. We’ll work thegither, or,’ an he stopped an shivered,’ there’ll be nae happy pairty fur the twa o ye. They tried tae get me. They’ll be comin fur you twa next. But ah’ve got an idea.’ He drew oot o his pooch his ball o string, and began tae cut it up intae lengths usin Teeny’s scissors.



‘Here’s whit we dae, ma freends. But we need nimble fingers, an we need tae work fast, an we need tae work thegither fur there’s a lot mair tae dae.’

The wind blew the leaves intae heaps an made a carpet. There were new boulders in the wid – or were they Mingins? They crouched fae time tae time fur cover an their broony- yellowy backs were roounded. Then they waited till they got the scent again, fur they were getting nearer, an could follow it. An it wis gettin stronger.

At last the Mingins saw them.

They had come up ahent them. They were sittin thegither, very still.

‘The hale three o them,’ breathed Glaur, ‘A’ thegither. Keep quiet, men.’

They waited fur the signal.

Chief Mawkit raised his haund an the Mingins advanced, steadily, quietly, across the saft leafy path towards the three pals.

‘You get the boy, Mucky, an ah’ll get the fairies,’ said Glaur, ‘Ah’ll pu their wings aff so they cannae flee awa.’

‘Aye, sur.’

The Mingin’s lang taes were makin the leaves rustle. But still the three didnae move.

‘They dinnae ken,’ whispered Mucky. But they did.

Suddenly Teeny an Tattie turned roond an opened their wings, flyin richt in front o the Mingins. Jamesey turned as weel an he made a face at them. Enraged, the Mingins roared an cam towards them. That was when the net that the pals had made, the net that they'd made o Jamesey's string, the net that wis fu o holes, the net that wis covered by the leaves, the net that they'd tied tae the trees, trapped them, an they fell, tangled up by their taes an their airms an their lang fingers, stuck firmly in its strings, fur the mair they struggled, the mair they were caught.

When the bluebird brought the Fairy Polis, the three breathed a sigh o relief.

'Attemptin tae fairynap,' Jamesey said, 'That's a crime. They'll be seein the inside o a cell fur a lang time. Badness will never prosper. An you twa hae a pairty tae go tae. Three cheers fur us three pals!'

As wan by wan, the Mingins were pit in the Polis van, a miserable Manky wis last. Trapped in the net, his hert wis fu.

'Ah wonder hoo ye gie up bein a Mingin?' he thocht, 'It's nae fun ony mair.' A tear ran doon his face, 'Maybe it never was.'