

The Usborne Young Writers' Award 2010 - The Winning Story



Kharmacaraculitus

by Steve Barlow, Steve Skidmore and Skye Humbert

Somebody was out to get me.

First there was the van that mounted the pavement as I was walking down the High Street. If I hadn't stepped into that shop doorway, I'd have been stuck to its radiator grill like a dustcart.

Then there was the gargoyle. It had been on the church tower for 700 years before it smashed on the pavement half a metre from where I was standing.

Then, less than an hour ago, on the station platform, someone yelled, "Look out!" and I felt a pair of hands shove me forward just as the train was coming in. How I stopped myself falling in front of it, I'll never know.

I went to a café, had a cup of tea and stopped shaking. Then I set off home. I'd hardly gone one hundred metres when a silver Bentley Continental stopped right beside me and the passenger door swung open.

A voice from inside said, "Get in."

I stumbled back and began to run. Before I could escape, a rough hand grabbed me and pulled me back. I fell into the car, twisted on the floor.

"What the—?"

"Quiet – or you may not survive," a hoarse voice croaked next to me.

I looked up, trying to make sense of the dark figures around me. The car screeched around a corner and sped on, pressing me into my neighbour. He pushed me back. That was when I saw his face – cold and expressionless. I shuddered and turned away. Through the car window, I saw strange hills and a creepy forest. I'm definitely not in Carlsville anymore, I thought. The darkness of the forest felt like being swallowed by a giant snake.

The car stopped. Then men pushed me out onto hard sticks and leaves. The rush of cold air on my face and crowding desolation made me realize how far away from any civilization I must be.

"Who are you and why are you kidnapping me?" I asked, turning to the men, "Are you trying to kill me?"

“Kharma and Curse Protection, also known as KACP Company & Co,” said one of the three men, thrusting a badge into my face. “Do you know what that means?”

“No.”

“Good.”

The man muttered something to the others. All I could catch was,

“Kill...disease...final...now!”

Gulp! Whatever the men wanted it must be related to everything else that happened today – the van, the gargoyle and the train. My situation was looking increasingly desperate.

“You!” said a stout man with dark hair and eyes.

I felt sick. At any moment I knew they’d bring out a gun and it’d all be over.

“You’ve been infected with a rare disease. We’re currently trying to contain it. This is why we’ve brought you where you’re less likely to get hurt – or hurt others.”

“A...a disease?” I stammered.

“It’s called KHARMACARACULITIS and it gives you terribly bad luck. You may think someone is out to get you, but it’s actually some *thing* that’s doing it.”

“Kharma...what? I don’t feel ill.”

“It’s not like a cold. Good luck, bad luck, it eats into the bones. It controls everything that happens to you.”

“I hardly think—”

“Look, do you want to end up blowing up half your town – because that’s the kind of thing we’ve seen in other cases like yours.”

He waved to one of the other men, who picked up a small, black box and brought out a gigantic needle, oozing with a disgusting green mixture. I started panicking. I’d had a fear of needles ever since I was a baby. All those measles jabs – any self-respecting child would have a phobia.

I started to run away, but I tripped and fell onto a pile of sawn logs, bruising my face.

Just my luck. Immediately, some of the higher logs started wobbling. One of the men jumped to my rescue. He pushed me out of the way just in time, but fell over himself.

Soon he was buried under the debris.

Oh no. How much bad luck could one person take? This was like waking up with only one leg. I saw that in a film once, and it terrified me. With a gasp, I fainted. I think the men must have taken me to the car because when I later woke up, I was on the back seat and it was moving again.

My head felt as if someone had punched it. My eyes were blurred and my arm was throbbing like a washing machine. Nevertheless, I was still in one piece.

When my eyes adjusted, I saw the man who’d jumped to save me leaning over me.

“How are you feeling?” he asked. I realized he was holding the needle, but all the repulsive liquid inside had disappeared.

“What have you done to me?”

“You’re fine. We’ve given you the serum. Just be careful, we’re not sure how this disease

occurred but, just to stay safe, keep away from ladders, mirrors, spilt salt etc for a few days.”

For some reason I could scarcely keep my eyes open. “Wait,” I said drowsily, “you’re okay, but you got buried in rubble?”

“That’s the serum. With the right amount, it can actually give you good luck. Believe me, we need it when we’re hanging around people like you all day.” He had a rugged voice that drowned out the rumbling of the car. “Here, if you need us again, you’ll know who to call,” he handed me his badge. “Now lie down and you’ll be back home in no time.”

The warm sun flooded into my bedroom and lit up the shadows. I hugged my scratchy sheets and soft pillows, opened my eyes and looked around. Phew! Everything was still just the way it always was.

I got up and raced outside, my arm was fine and the bruises were gone. I smelled the sweet air and the warm breeze. Had it all been a dream? Well, whatever had happened, I’d never felt so good before.

I skipped down the steps of my house and out onto the road. Something was lying on the pavement. It was the badge the man had given me.

So it had been all true. I’d had the best adventure of my life and I’d been cured of my bad luck! Feeling elated, I walked towards the café, anxious for another delicious cup of tea. But, before I stepped inside, something dark and furry jumped out in front of me...

A black cat crossed my path...

