

### Chapter 3

#### The Danger

A far-off bolt of lightning from an approaching thunderstorm rumbled through the air, and Susan felt a cool breeze blow over the top of her stockings, across her bare legs. Babu Bishka. It's name was Babu Bishka.

For a long moment she forgot just where she was, or who she was. Then her thoughts flowed all over the place, trying to understand what she had just seen and heard. Then for another moment she couldn't think at all.

"Are you a troll?" asked Susan.

Then, the thing that looked like a troll, the thing that looked like a troll sitting on a rock under a bridge next to the river, said something again, in a wavering, almost tearful voice. "I think so."

"What do you mean?" Susan piped out "either you're a troll or you're not a troll, aren't you?". She stopped short to think for a moment, and then in a gentler voice she asked "Have you ever seen a troll?"

"Not for a long time" it sighed in response.

Susan could tell her new acquaintance was really gloomy and sad, for a reason she didn't understand. Now that she had a better chance to look at him she was starting to think Babu was a boy, but she wasn't really sure why she thought that. He didn't seem as big as she first thought, and maybe not as old either. Maybe if she could get him to talk he might be happier, like she got happier when her parents would let her talk about whatever she wanted to talk about.

"Where are your parents?" asked Susan. Another rumble of far-off thunder was followed by a hush of wind. "Are they bigger than you?" she asked, but then felt sorry because she had a feeling that she shouldn't have asked that question, though she didn't know why.

"My parents are much bigger than me."

"How big?" asked Susan, with her eyes wide open with wonder, realizing she was really talking to something amazing.

"Big enough to hold me in their arms and carry me across the river. Big enough to spin me around in circles in the air. Big enough to always beat me at foot races if they really wanted to. I think they always let me win, but I didn't care. I felt safe sleeping between them when we were traveling, or sleeping in my corner when we were home."

"Where is your home?"

At that question, Babu shrank back under the bridge again, and seemed to withdraw into himself, as if thinking of somewhere far away. After a moment, he replied with a sigh about his home being somewhere far down the river.

"Can't you go home?"

"Ma and pa will come and get me. I know it." said Babu with determination. But with this, Susan could tell he was almost going to cry.

"Did they leave you here?"

"They didn't leave me. I lost them."

"You lost your parents?"

At this Babu did break into sobs, and Susan felt desperate to cheer up this little troll, if not little in size, at least little in years, as little as Susan herself.

"Why don't you come home with me, and I'll ask my parents how we can find your parents."

"Where do you live?"

"I live over there, in Plainview, just on the other side of this bridge. It only takes me ten minutes to walk down to the Park. We can make it before that thunderstorm gets here."

"I can't go over there."

"You have to. How else am I going to show you to my parents.?"

"Oh I can't do that."

"Why not? We could wait until it was just dark, and then sneak home just before they light the streetlights. No one would see you."

"But I'm not big enough."

"What do you mean you're not big enough? You're bigger than me. Why aren't you big enough?"

"I'm not as big as my parents, so they always had to hold me in their arms when they'd walk across the river."

"We'll go over the bridge, silly" said Susan in amused exasperation.

"But I'm a troll. I can't go over bridges."

"Why not? Why can't you walk over a bridge like anybody else?"

"I don't know. Ma and Pa said trolls never walk on bridges."

"Oh ok" said Susan, finally realizing that it wasn't very likely that Babu would budge from his hiding place beneath the bridge that day. "I'll go tell my parents and I'll get them to come back down here with me. And then they'll know how to find your parents."

Then Susan, inspired by her plan and her newfound friendship with Babu, went on to tell Babu of her mother and father, how curious and happy they would be to meet Babu, and how her brother might be a little jealous or gruff with him, and that her younger sister might not really understand how special Babu was. But she was very fond of her whole family right at that moment, and she tried to paint a very warm picture of them for Babu. Babu sighed as he sat listening to her.

The approaching storm had gained in intensity, and now rainy squalls were dancing down the river near the bend. Because of the storms and because she was going to be later than usual getting home, Susan was becoming increasingly anxious. She was so excited about talking with Babu, and telling him stories of her family, that she would stall again and again. This indecision made her anxiously hop up and down on the rocks and boulders at the edge of the river under the bridge, first on one foot, then the other.

Finally one big bolt of lightning followed in little more than a second by a huge thunderclap convinced Susan she should be off. She quickly said good-bye to Babu, promised to return tomorrow, and hurriedly turned to go. As she turned, her left foot slipped off one rock, got wedged between two smaller rocks, causing her to fall and sprain her ankle. The pain of her sprained ankle, on top of the pain caused by her earlier fall was too much for Susan. She collapsed at the edge of the river, and as the downpour began, cried out for help.

She did not know if Babu would help her, or even if he could help her. Maybe he could never get the courage to leave the bridge until his parents returned for him. At that moment she wished she hadn't had the courage that led to her meeting with Babu, because she would have been home, warm and dry, and have been enjoying this storm from her bedroom window, instead of lying in mud down by the river, with tears streaming down her already wet face.

Babu didn't know what to do when Susan fell and sprained her ankle. He thought her cries for help would be heard, and he worried about being discovered by other people in town. When the rain began, Babu finally rushed out from under the

bridge, picked Susan up as gently as he could in his massive thick arms, and carried her underneath the shelter of the bridge. But he found there was little he could do to comfort Susan, who was cold and in pain. He sat helplessly by as she quivered and shivered without saying anything, looking at Babu with a confused and scared look on her face.

The storm continued to rage, and the river started to rise, further swollen by rains that were soaking the valley. Babu stared at the menacing river, and then stared inside himself, wishing against all hope that his parents would come back right now and rescue both of them, or Susan's parents would come and find her. He would try not to be discovered by them, but he was more worried about his new friend than himself.

Knowing that to be true, and watching the river rise and rise, Babu finally came to the bravest decision of his young troll life. And at that very moment he felt some of the fear he had been living with since he was separated from his parents lift off. He didn't feel like such a little troll anymore. He went over to Susan, and with a shushing sound bent down, picked her up again, then stepped bravely out into the blowing storm.

Babu walked up the muddy and rocky slope to the road that crossed the bridge, and with a moment or two of hesitation, set foot on first the road, then the bridge. When he got near the Plainview side of the bridge, he walked faster. Using almost inaudible directions and nudges from Susan he hurried through the streets of her town. She grew more weary and confused as she bounced through town in Babu's arms. The pain of her ankle made her wince.

When Babu reached her house, which was brightly lit from inside, and had the front door wide open on the porch, Susan and Babu exchanged worried glances. Susan realized she was scared of what might happen if her parents saw Babu. Babu was relieved when she gestured to have him put her down on the porch. He reached over the railing and laid her on the porch swing. He pointed toward the open door, then ran off down the alleyway. He was quite worried if he would ever make it back to the safety of the bridge, but real happy inside for what he'd done. He had been able to help someone else, a feeling that made him feel much less helpless himself.

Susan waited long enough to make sure Babu had gotten away, then cried out to her parents. She collapsed completely in their arms when they rushed out, overjoyed and overworried to see her. Other than a few mumbled answers about the park and storm, both Susan and her parents were happy to wait until morning to talk any more about it.

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