**The Emerald Pool**

Roy and Ruby were ten year old twins, born and bred at Stratford in East London. Their grandmother Mable, to whom they were devoted, had recently retired and returned to Dominica, her Caribbean island home. When the summer holidays finally arrived and they were heading off on a plane to spend five glorious weeks with Grandma in Tranto village, Roy and Ruby could not believe their luck.

They were helped to settle in by some village youth who took them under their wings, teaching them all they needed to know about mango-picking, crab-hunting, bird-trapping, devil-daring after dark and all manner of pleasant pastimes. Thus it was that they found themselves relaxing on Tranto Beach, shaded by almond and coconut trees, in the company of The Artful Dodgers basketball club.

“We don't have a decent kit between us, not even a proper ball, so how we can call ourselves a basketball team?” grumbled Marcus whose nickname was “Moanie”- but this time, everyone agreed that he had a point.

“Yeah, man, how we ever going to lick those Midnight Groovers at the tournament? groaned Sonny.

“We just have to raise the funds then.” pronounced Darren, the fifteen year old whom they had bribed to be their coach.

There was no shortage of suggestions: - A bicycle race from Four Corners Bridge to the main Castle Bruce Road? - Much too dangerous on that bendy road and besides, they had no more than one and a half bikes between them, if you could call Paul and Danny’s dangerous contraptions bikes.

- “Maybe a swim to Lion’s Head?” offered Danny. He was referring to the big rock which loomed before them, a mile away in the ocean.

Trouble was, none of them were strong enough swimmers, nor brave enough to take on the might of the Atlantic.

“A sponsored walk, then.” suggested Ruby, to which everyone nodded. Now, that was more like it.

“A Sponsored walk sound like a good idea.” Darren said, smiling approval at Ruby. “How about you make it…, you know, like something…well, different. A kind of individual challenge?”

“Cool.” Ruby beamed back at Darren.

“I thought we were a team.” protested Roy.

“Yeah.” agreed Sonny, blowing a huge bubble through his chewing gum.

“Come on fellers”, said Darren, trying to sound wise and grown up. “With a name like Artful Dodgers, all you bound to think of something. Now get to work.”

On that commanding note, the group broke up and went home to think up ideas for their “special” fundraising walk. When they got home, Roy and Ruby discussed the team’s conversation casually with their grandma.

“I know, we could walk to the Emerald Pool” announced Ruby at dinner that evening.

“Why the Emerald Pool?” quizzed Grandma.

“Yeah, why the Emerald Pool?” parroted Roy.

“I hear that place is haunted, you know.” Said Grandma quietly.

“Haunted, Nanny?” Roy was suddenly all ears.

“Yes” continued Grandma. “By some strange woman.”

“What Woman, Nanny?” asked Ruby, now really warming up to the idea of the Emerald Pool walk.

“There been sightings of her by hunters, wood-cutters and suchlike.”

“Who is she, Nan?” asked Roy

“What does she look like? probed Ruby, bursting with curiosity.

“Well, am not too sure, you know” replied grandma. Some people say she could be Mama Glo, a mermaid who comes to bathe in the pool and comb her long black hair with a golden comb. Mostly at sunset.

The twins gasped, hanging on every word.

“ Then again, it could be La Diablesse.” She continued in her low mysterious voice.

“La Diablesse?” echoed Roy and Ruby together. The name rang an alarming bell.

“Yes, the one-foot lady who comes out for a stroll around sunset and always in a long, black dress.”

“Why a long, black dress ?” asked Ruby.

“To hide her deformed foot, of course; her heavy donkey hoof. I would stay away from the Emerald Pool if I were you. You hear me, you two?”

“Yes Nanny.” They both nodded vigorously.

Keeping their fingers crossed behind their backs, the twins promised their Nan that they would not to go off on their own to the Emerald Pool.

That evening, sitting on the moonlit verandah watching the fireflies do their crazy hypnotic dance, Ruby planned a secret visit to the pool, though Roy was not at all happy about disobeying their grandma. Ruby did her best to reassure him.

“This mysterious lady, whoever she is, comes out at sunset, right?”

“Yes, but...” Roy tried, but couldn’t get a word in edgeways.

“So it's already kind of dark when she's about, right?”

“I guess so.” Roy had no choice but to agree.

“Well then,” concluded Ruby, triumphantly: “we walk to the pool in broad daylight, so where's the harm in that?”

Their opportunity came the very next day. No sooner had their grandmother boarded the bus into town for her weekly shop , Ruby and Roy set off for the Emerald Pool. After a long, hot trek along the main road they arrived at a signposted roundabout from where they gained their bearings.

“Brilliant!” Ruby pointed to the arrow which read *Emerald Pool*. They followed the narrow track leading off the main road into the rain forest. Soon, they could hear the gurgling and hissing of water in the gorge below. A mountain whistler, an elusive, unremarkable little bird made them jump out of their skins, as it swooped down the mountainside, whistling at full throttle.

Cautiously, they zigzagged their way down a winding track through to a wooded underworld. They ended up in a clearing, a sort of ancient grotto where a shimmering crystal pool flaunted its splendour.

“Is that it?” said Roy, disappointed. “Tichty, man!”

“It's beautiful,” cooed Ruby

“Too spooky.” Roy said.

A skinny waterfall hissed petulantly down the high ridge into the circular pool strewn with large and small rocks, covered in a slimy green moss. Shafts of sunlight penetrated the branches of overhanging trees, while moving shadows danced eerily upon the translucent water. The place was definitely spooky.

“It's not even big enough to have a proper swim,” complained Roy. I don't see what all the fuss is about.”

“Stop your moaning.” His sister said.

“And you're forgetting something else.” said Roy.

What now?” Ruby asked, exasperated.

“We can't get any sponsor money for this walk, 'cause we shouldn't even be here.”

“Might as well at least have a paddle then,” said Ruby, pulling off her trainers and socks and placing them on a flat stone.

“The water's too cold, anyway. Let's go back Ruby” urged Roy.

“Relax, little brother, keep your hair on. Just let me cool my feet and take a few sips from this famous pool.” Ruby then rolled up her jeans and waded towards the middle of the pool, carefully avoiding the slippery stones. It was much deeper than it appeared and yes, it felt quite cold at first.

“Let's get out of here.” Urged Roy, looking nervously around him. “Remember what Nanny said?”

“Just one minute more” pleaded Ruby. This water is luv-ly.”

“Look what I found!” called Roy, examining something shiny which he had picked up off a log.

Ruby went over to take a look.

“What do you think it is?” he asked her.

“No idea,” she said.

“It looks like diamond or gold or something,” said Roy, peering at the small, glittery object in his palm.

“It looks like the tooth from a comb” observed Ruby.

“Yeah, Mama Glo's comb,” said Roy under his breath.

“MAMA GLO'S COMB! “ They exclaimed together.

Goose pimples were clearly visible on Roy's neck and arms while Ruby could feel her hair beginning to stand on end.

“I'm out of here!” said Roy, stumbling towards the foot of the hill.

“Wait for me!” cried Ruby, pulling on socks over wet feet, squeezing into damp, muddy trainers and limping towards her brother. They stayed close together as they panted, slipped and slid their way up the seemingly endless journey to the top. What they wouldn’t give for the reassurance of the sunlit main road and the welcome vibrations of a passing vehicle.

Breathless and sweaty, a mere whisker away from the summit, Roy and Ruby came to an abrupt halt. A looming shadow had blocked their path. With throats dry and hearts thumping, they slowly and fearfully looked up, to be confronted by… their grandmother’s most disapproving gaze.

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