Chaos at Custard

Castle Emma

Custard Castle had three hundred dusty rooms, and only seven people.

There was the King, the Queen, and Princess Fifi.

There was Bella the maid, Jack the servant boy, and the Cook.

There was Wizard Watchit, who lived in the tallest tower, and did magic spells for the others.

However, he didn’t always get them right…

Princess Fifi's Frog

Princess Fifi was in her purple rowing boat.

She was rowing across the moat of Custard Castle with Bella the maid. It was a warm summer's day. But Fifi was not happy.

"Bother," she said. "Why can't I find any frogs? Where are they all?"

"They hopped away when the moat got turned to custard," Bella told her. "Even when it turned back to water, the frogs never came back."

"But I need a frog!" wailed Fifi. "I need a frog to kiss and change into a handsome prince!"

"Hmm," said Bella. "I'm not sure if that's the best way to find a prince."

Fifi wasn't listening. She had spotted something in the reeds. "A frog! A frog!" she shouted. "I've found one at last. Look!"

Bella looked. It was a very ugly frog. It had nubbly, knobbly, greenish-brownish skin, and bulging orange eyes.

"Hand me the net!" cried Fifi.

WHOP! went the net over the frog.

It did not try to jump away. It sat inside the net and blinked its orange eyes.

Fifi grabbed the frog and picked it up to kiss it.

"Yuck!" she said. "It tastes horrid. Why isn't it turning into a prince?" "Maybe it's a lady frog," said Bella.

"Then it should turn into a princess!" said Fifi. "That would be better than nothing. I could play with another princess."

She screwed up her face and kissed the frog again.

Still nothing happened.

"Hold it for me," commanded Fifi. She began to row back to shore.

Bella held the frog at arm's length. It felt cold and slimy, and it smelt of mud.

When they reached the bank, Fifi said, "Let's go and find Wizard Watchit. He can turn this frog into a prince for me."

Wizard Watchit lived in the tallest tower of the Castle. Fifi marched towards the tower, and Bella followed with the frog.

"What do you want a handsome prince for, anyway?" she asked.

"To fetch and carry things, of course!" said Fifi. "And to fight dragons, and give me chocolates, and gallop to my rescue, and so on."

"Hmm," said Bella. "I'm not sure if that's the best way to treat a prince."

By now they were at the Wizard's tower. Fifi shouted up the stairs.

"Wizard Watchit! Come down here!" Nobody answered.

“Bother!” said Fifi, and she began to climb the stairs.

Bella followed, carrying the frog. It was very heavy. After a while she had to put it down.

“You can hop up the stairs,” she told it.

The frog did not hop up the stairs. It just sat and blinked at her.

With a sigh, Bella picked it up again. She had to carry it all the way to the top of the tower.

Fifi banged on Wizard Watchit’s door. When the Wizard opened it, he looked very cross.

“What do you want?” he snapped. “I’m in the middle of a spell.” “I

want you to turn this frog into a prince for me,” said Fifi.

The Wizard looked at the nubbly, knobbly, greenish-brownish frog. “It won’t be much of a prince,” he said.

Fifi stamped her foot. “I don’t care! Just do it!”

“All right,” said the Wizard. “I’ll try.” He began to gabble a spell.

“*Oh froggy frog, grow big and wide*

From up to down and side to side.

Turn into a prince so charming

And don’t look quite so alarming.”

“That’s not a very good rhyme,” said Bella.

“It’s not a very good frog,” sniffed Wizard Watchit. “And I’ve got better things to do.”

“Look! The spell’s working!” cried Fifi in excitement.

The frog was beginning to grow. Soon it was too big and heavy for Bella to hold. She put it down in a hurry.

The frog kept on growing bigger and bigger. It did not turn into a handsome prince. It turned into a giant, nubbly, knobbly, greenish-brownish frog.

The giant frog squatted at the top of the stairs and blinked at them with enormous orange eyes.

“What’s that meant to be?” squawked Fifi.

“That’s your prince,” said Wizard Watchit. “Take it away. I’m busy.” And he slammed the door.

Just then the giant frog began to hop.

It had not wanted to hop up the stairs. But it did not mind hopping down them.

However, hopping was not quite the right word. ***Thud thud thud*** went the giant frog, slithering and sliding and lolloping down the stairs.

Fifi and Bella chased after it.

“Catch it!” Fifi cried.

Bella tried to catch the frog, but it was too huge and slippery. When she grabbed one of its legs, it slid out of her grasp. It waddled out of the Wizard’s tower and headed for the castle door.

“Stop right there, you stupid prince!” cried Fifi.

The frog did not stop. It crawled up to the castle door and squeezed through, ripping the door off its hinges.

The frog lolloped into the castle. ***Slap slap slap*** went its huge body on the flagstones.

It stopped in the middle of the hall and looked around, as if it was wondering where to go next.

“Aha!” cried Fifi. “I’ve got you now, you great big green galumphing prince!”

“Hmm,” said Bella. “I’m not sure if that’s the best way to talk to a prince.”

“Stay right there, you ugly prince!” ordered Fifi. “It’s dragon-fighting time!”

She ran to the cupboard under the stairs, where they kept a small sleepy dragon for lighting the fires.

Fifi took the little dragon out of the cupboard. She put it down in front of the gigantic frog.

“Well, go on, then! Fight!” she said.

The frog and the dragon looked at each other. The frog blinked its enormous orange eyes.

The dragon yawned. A puff of smoke came from its mouth and drifted into the frog’s face.

The frog did not like the smoke. It blinked several times, quickly. Then it turned round and began to lollop away down the corridor.

“What a useless prince,” cried Fifi. “After it!”

The giant frog lolloped into the throne room. The King was in there, having an important nap.

Slap slap slap went the frog across the floor. The King woke up and fell off his throne in shock.

“Help!” he cried. “A monster! Save me!”

“It’s not a monster, it’s only a stupid prince,” said Fifi.

The frog stared at the King. Then it shot out a fat green tongue. It caught a beetle underneath the throne, and dropped it in front of Fifi.

“Stop that, you disgusting prince!” said Fifi. “You’re supposed to give me chocolates, not beetles!”

The giant frog just blinked at her. Then it lolloped away out of the throne room.

The next room was the royal bathroom. The frog slithered through the door.

The Queen was in there, putting up a shelf. She dropped all her screws in surprise when the giant frog waddled in.

It lolloped over to the bath and sat down in it with an enormous, heavy squelch.

The Queen stared at it in horror. “Help!” she cried. “It’s going to break the bath!”

No sooner had she spoken than the bath began to crack. A hundred little jagged lines appeared all over it.

Then it fell apart under the weight of the giant frog. Bits of bath rolled everywhere.

“Come here, you clumsy prince!” yelled Fifi.

But the frog picked itself up and lolloped out of the bathroom.

It waddled through the castle until it reached the kitchen.

The Cook was in there with Jack the servant-boy. The Cook was making royal doughnuts, and Jack was testing them.

“This one’s not round enough for the King,” said Jack. He had just put the doughnut in his mouth,when the giant frog squeezed through the door.

“Help!” cried the Cook, as the frog waddled towards them.

Its orange eyes bulged more than ever. Then it shot out its fat green tongue, and swept a doughnut off the plate into its mouth.

“Stop it, you greedy prince!” Princess Fifi shouted. “You just stop right there!”

The giant frog stopped and looked at her.

“Start behaving properly,” scolded Fifi. “You’re meant to ride like the wind to be at my side. You’re not supposed to lollop through the castle like a sack of cabbages!”

The giant frog just blinked at her. Then it shot out its fat green tongue and licked its own nose.

Fifi shrieked. “What revolting manners!”

“Whatever is it?” gasped the trembling Cook.

“It’s a very disappointing prince,” snapped Fifi.

“It doesn’t look much like a prince,” said Jack.

Bella explained. “It’s a frog that Wizard Watchit did a spell on.”

Jack stared at it. “A frog?” he said. “No, I don’t think so. That’s a

toad!” “A toad? No wonder the spell didn’t work properly,” said Bella.

“A toad? I can’t stand toads!” screamed Fifi, and she ran out of the kitchen.

The giant toad began to lollop after her with huge, squelchy lollops. It could lollop faster than Fifi could run. It caught her up and bowled her over.

Then it sat on her legs and blinked at her with its enormous orange eyes.

“Help!” cried Fifi. “Get this terrible toad prince off me!”

The toad shot out its fat green tongue and licked Princess Fifi’s nose.

“Aargh!” she squealed. “It wants to eat me!”

“No, it doesn’t. I think it likes you,” said Jack.

“It *likes* me?”

“Well, you did kiss it,” Bella pointed out. “Twice. And you’ve followed it all over the castle, and you keep calling it a prince. So it’s not surprising if it likes you.”

“I expect it’s trying to kiss you back,” said Jack.

“No!” screamed Fifi. “Never!” She managed to pull her legs free. Then she picked up her frilly skirts and raced away.

The giant toad lolloped after her. It chased Fifi all the way through Custard Castle, while Jack and Bella followed.

Fifi ran through room after room, until at last she reached the back door. She shot through it and ran down to the moat.

Her rowing-boat was pulled up on the bank. Fifi jumped into the boat and pushed off across the water.

“Haha!” she cried. “Toads can’t swim like frogs. You can’t reach me now, you stupid prince!”

“Actually,” said Jack, “toads can swim quite well. They just don’t do it as much as frogs.”

Before he finished speaking, the giant toad flopped into the water with an enormous SPLOSH.

It was such an enormous SPLOSH that a huge wave reared up and sped across the moat like a tsunami.

The huge wave caught Fifi’s rowing boat. It threw it up into the air and turned it over. Fifi tumbled out and disappeared into the water.

The toad blinked its enormous orange eyes. Then it dived beneath the surface.

“What can we do?” gasped Jack.

“We’ll have to rescue her!” cried Bella. She was pulling off her shoes ready to jump in, when the water rose up in another giant wave.

In the middle of the wave they saw the toad. It came up with something clinging to its back, covered in duck-weed.

“Fifi!” shouted Bella. “Are you all right?”

Fifi did not answer. She was trying to balance on the toad’s back as it swam.

The toad swam to the side of the moat and Fifi slid off. Bella helped her to her feet.

“Stupid prince!” cried Fifi, shaking off the duck-weed. “Now my frilly frock is ruined!”

“Hang on,” said Bella. “That toad just saved your life!”

“It came to your rescue,” added Jack. “Isn’t that what a prince is meant to do?”

Fifi frowned. “Well… I suppose so.”

“So what are you going to say to it?” said Bella.

“Thank you, stupid prince,” said Fifi sulkily.

“Ahem,” said Bella.

“Oh, all right. Thank you, kind and gallant prince, for swimming to my rescue.”

In answer, the toad shot out its fat green tongue and licked Princess Fifi’s nose.

“Aargh!” she screamed. The toad dived back into the moat in alarm. “You’ve frightened it away,” said Jack.

“No, there it is!” Bella pointed at the reed-bed. “It’s where you found it. It’s gone back home.”

The giant toad was squatting in the reeds. And there it stayed all week, until the Wizard’s spell wore off and it shrank back to its normal size.

That was a hot and sunny week. It was so hot that every evening Fifi and Bella and Jack came to the moat for a swim.

Whenever the giant toad saw them coming, it began to lollop up and down in the reeds with excitement. And every lollop made a huge and marvellous wave, perfect to practise surfing on.

When they got tired, the giant toad gave them a lift to dry land on its back.

“All in all,” said Fifi, as she threw the toad a doughnut, “I’ve met worse princes – and none that was as good at licking his own nose.”

The Surprising Storm

The King was very excited.

“I’ve got an invitation to King Ludo’s party!” he said. “All the top Kings will be there!”

“Can I go?” asked Princess Fifi.

“Certainly not! It’s Kings only.”

“What about queens?” the Queen asked.

“Didn’t you hear me? This is a kingly party,” said the King. “We play kingly games like Pass the Crown, and we talk about kingly things.”

“What sort of kingly things?”

“Like who has the biggest dragon, and the highest tower, and the most gold, and the newest clothes. I’d better wear my best red velvet gown. Where is my red velvet gown, Bella?”

“In your wardrobe,” said Bella the maid.

“No, it’s not!” said the King. “I’ve already looked in

there.” “In the Queen’s wardrobe?” suggested Bella.

The Queen looked shocked. She was wearing her overalls. “Me? A red velvet gown? Never!”

“Um,” said Princess Fifi. “I just, um, borrowed it for a day or two.”

“You borrowed my best velvet gown?” cried the King.

“To go skating in. It’s a bit long, but it’s nice and soft,” said Fifi. “It stops me getting bruises when I fall over.”

“You fell over?” shrieked the King.

“It’s all right,” said Fifi. “I didn’t hurt myself.”

“But what about my gown?” groaned the King.

Fifi shrugged. “It’s only a little bit muddy.”

Bella went to Fifi’s room to find the gown. It was under Fifi’s bed with her roller-skates wrapped up in it. It was covered in thick, black mud.

When the King saw it, he was furious.

“Get that gown clean by tomorrow!” he roared at Bella.

“It won’t be easy,” Bella said.

“Why not? It’s your job to clean things. Go and sort it out!”

So Bella went off to the kitchen to wash the red velvet gown.

It took her a long, long time. She had to wash it very carefully, so that the red dye would not come out.

She could not scrub it in case she spoilt the velvet. She could not use hot water in case she shrank it.

And she could not squeeze the water out in case she creased it. So after she had washed the gown, she hung it in the courtyard to dry.

The red velvet gown drooped and dripped. There was no wind. There was no sun.

“This gown will never get dry!” said Bella, feeling very worried.

“I know what to do,” said Jack, the servant-boy. “Let’s use the dragon! It can breathe hot air at the gown to dry it.”

He ran to fetch the sleepy dragon from the cupboard under the stairs. They kept it there for lighting the fires in the castle. Although it was only a small dragon, it was very good at breathing fire.

They aimed the dragon at the gown and prodded it until it puffed out yellow flames. The velvet gown began to steam. Then it began to smoke.

“Stop, stop!” cried Bella. “The dragon will burn the gown!”

“Bother,” said Jack. “I’ll go and find the wizard. Maybe he can do a spell.”

He took the dragon back to its cupboard. Then he ran to the tallest tower, where Wizard Watchit lived with the ghost.

“Wizard!” he shouted. “Magic needed!”

When the Wizard came down from his tower, Bella explained the problem.

“We need to dry the King’s red gown,” she said. “Please can you do a spell to make the sun shine and the wind blow?”

The Wizard scratched his head. “Tricky,” he said. “I can’t put a spell on the sun: it’s much too big and much too far away.”

“Well, what about the wind?” asked Jack.

“That’s almost as hard,” said Wizard Watchit. “Why does the King need his red gown for this party anyway? He could wear his purple one instead.”

“You can tell him that,” said Bella. “*I’m* not.”

“All right. I will!” declared the Wizard.

He marched into the palace. The King was in the parlour with a cup of tea.

“What do you want?” snapped the King. “I’m doing some very important work.”

“Drinking tea?”

“I’m planning! I’m deciding how to impress the other kings at the party.”

“Oh, yes, the party,” said the Wizard. “Why don’t you wear your nice purple gown to it?”

The King looked annoyed. “I wore my purple gown to the last party! They’ve all seen it! I want to wear my new red gown.”

“I’m afraid it won’t be dry in time,” said Wizard Watchit.

The King stamped his foot. “Then you’d better make it dry! Just do some magic!”

“But–”

“How hard can it be to dry a gown?” the King demanded. “What a big fuss about nothing! You’re making a storm in a teacup. Now go and sort it out!”

The Wizard left. He felt quite upset.

“The King knows nothing about magic,” he fumed. “He doesn’t know how hard it is to change the weather. A storm in a tea-cup indeed!”

That gave him an idea. He peered back into the room, where the King was finishing his cup of tea.

“I’ll give him a storm in a teacup,” said the Wizard to himself. “I’ll show him who’s making a big fuss about nothing!”

He muttered a spell under his breath, and stamped away.

In the parlour, the teacup began to shake in the King’s hand. He stared down at it in surprise.

Tea-leaves were swirling round and round inside the cup. It looked as if there was a little whirlwind in there.

“Aargh!” said the King. “What’s that?” Holding the teacup at arm’s length, he ran into the next room.

The next room was the royal bathroom. The Queen was lying under the basin with a bucket. She was mending a pipe.

“Help!” cried the King, and he threw the teacup into her bucket.

The teacup broke. Immediately the tiny whirlwind grew to fill the bucket.

The Queen jumped up. “My goodness!” she exclaimed. “What’s that?”

“I’ve no idea!” yelped the King. “Make it go away!”

So the Queen picked up the bucket and threw it into the bath.

The bucket tipped over. At once the bath was full of swirling, whirling wind. The tiny storm grew to fill the tub. It made a humming sound, like a bath-tub full of bees.

“Get rid of it!” howled the King.

“Don’t worry,” said the Queen. “I’ll send it down the plughole.”

She pulled out the plug. With a gurgle, the storm was sucked down the plughole and into the drain. They watched it spiral down until nothing was left.

“No problem!” said the Queen. “It’s gone.”

Then they both heard a strange noise outside. It was a humming, roaring, whirling sound, and it was getting louder and louder.

They peered out of the window. The storm was escaping from the bottom of the drainpipe. It began to whirl round and round in the open air. It was growing bigger every second.

“Help!” screamed the King. “We’ve got a hurricane!”

“I think it’s a tornado, actually,” said the Queen.

“I don’t care what it is,” the King wailed. “I don’t want it in my castle. Wizard!”

But the Wizard could not hear him call. The storm was too loud. The wind no longer sounded like a bunch of busy bees. It growled and howled like a pack of restless wolves.

The storm set out to explore Custard Castle. It whirled round every wall. It roared round every tower. It ripped the flags from the turrets and spun the weather-vane round so hard that it broke off.

When Jack and Bella heard the storm, they ran to shelter in the kitchen.

When Wizard Watchit heard the storm, he dived into the King’s treasure room. He sat there with the Thing, listening to the wind rage and roar outside.

When Princess Fifi heard the storm, she looked out of her window and saw flags whirling past.

“Good weather for kite-flying!” she said. She ran to her cupboard to get her kites.

But as soon as she took them outside, the storm decided to play with them. It grabbed the kites from Fifi’s hands and threw them high into the sky.

Fifi ran back inside and shut herself in her cupboard, before the wind could throw her high into the sky as well.

Up in the Wizard’s tower, the ghost heard the storm. It looked out of the door just as the storm came rushing in.

The storm snatched up the ghost and tried to make it play. The ghost went tumbling round the tower like a handkerchief in a washing machine. At last it managed to escape into the wizard's cauldron.

The storm was disappointed because the ghost would not play. Yowling and howling, it tugged at the roof of the Wizard's tower. It pulled the roof right off and flung it high into the sky.

Then it rushed off to find something else to play with.

It swept under arches and over walls, until it found the courtyard where the King's red gown was hanging. It began to play with the gown.

Bella and Jack watched through the kitchen window as the gown flapped on the washing line.

"This wind will dry the gown!" said Jack.

"If it doesn't blow it away first," groaned Bella.

By now, however, the storm was tired of whirling through the castle. It was ready for a change. The wind stopped roaring quite so loudly.

A moment later, it began to rain.

But this was no ordinary rain. The raindrops were as big as marbles, and they fell in thousands. Soon the courtyard was ankle-deep in water. The red gown was no longer dripping: it was streaming.

The rain stopped as suddenly as it had started. The next minute, it began to hail. Huge hailstones battered at the castle roofs and clattered on the cobbles.

At last the hail stopped. Then there was just time for a little snow, before the thunderstorm began.

“This has gone too far!” said Bella between booms of thunder and flashes of lightning. “Where’s the Wizard? Can’t he stop this dreadful storm?”

The Wizard was still in the treasure room with the Thing. They sat and listened to the thunder. After a while, it went quiet.

“**GRARRK**,” said the Thing.

“Do you think so?” said the Wizard.

“**BLOOGRURP**,” said the Thing.

“Maybe you’re right,” said the Wizard. Cautiously he opened the door.

By now the storm was very tired indeed. It had played all the games that it could think of. It whirled half-heartedly a few more times around the castle: then it stopped altogether.

It dropped all the kites and flags and weathervanes that it had thrown into the sky. The roof fell down from the clouds, and landed with a crash back on top of the Wizard’s tower. The exhausted storm blew itself away for a nice lie-down in a distant field.

The Wizard went to find the others. The King and Queen were in the courtyard, looking very glum.

“We need new drains,” the Queen said, gazing at the puddles.

“Never mind the drains. I need a new red gown!” wailed the King, staring at the washing line. He looked as if he might be going to cry.

“At least it’s clean,” said Wizard Watchit.

This was true. The King’s best red velvet gown had been washed, spun, scoured and dried by the surprising storm. It was now very clean indeed.

It was also full of little neat holes left by lightning bolts, and big ragged holes left by hailstones. The rain had shrunk it to half the size it had been; and the dye had run.

The gown was no longer grand and rich and red. It was small and tattered and a rather pretty shade of pink.

“I can’t wear that to King Ludo’s party!” howled the King.

“Hurrah!” cried Fifi. “That means I can have it as a roller-skating gown. It’s my favourite colour – and now it fits me perfectly!”

“But what about the party?” wailed the King.

“Just wear your purple gown,” said Bella.

“It’s all that dreadful storm’s fault!” groaned the King. “Where on earth did it come from?”

“Can’t imagine,” said the Wizard. “Never mind! Now you’ve got something to boast about that will really impress the other Kings.”

“What’s that?” the King whimpered.

The Wizard pointed to the tower roof. It was crooked where the storm had dropped it.

“You may not have the newest gown, or the most gold, or the biggest dragon,” he told the King, “but you had the highest tower by far – for at least ten minutes!”

Dragon Dilemma

Bella woke up in a panic.

“Oh, no! I’m late!” she thought. “I need to light all the fires before the King and Queen wake up!” She jumped out of bed.

Bella was the maid at Custard Castle. Every morning, she lit the fires in all the rooms. She used a small dragon to start the fires. It was small enough to carry around with her, under one arm.

The little dragon slept in the cupboard under the stairs. Bella hurried there as fast as she could, and flung open the door.

“Dragon!” she cried. “Wake up!”

But there was no dragon in the cupboard. She put her head inside to make sure. It was empty.

“Bother!” said Bella. “Where’s that dragon gone?”

She hurried off to find Jack the servant boy. He was busy polishing the King’s boots.

“Jack? Have you got the dragon?” she asked.

“No,” said Jack. “Why?”

“It’s run off! We’ve got to find it!” said Bella. “Where can it be?”

“I expect it’s gone looking for something to eat,” said Jack. “It’s a hungry little dragon. Let’s go and check in the kitchen.”

They ran to the kitchen. The Cook was in there, making dough.

“We’ve lost the dragon! Have you seen it?” asked Jack.

“Certainly not,” said the Cook. “You’d better find it quickly, though. I need it to light the oven before I can make the royal breakfast.”

“Oh, dear,” groaned Bella. “It could be anywhere in the castle!”

“I’ll help you hunt for it,” said Jack.

So together they began to hunt through the three hundred dusty rooms of Custard Castle.

Bella called out, “Dragon! Where are you?” Jack whistled, but the dragon did not appear.

They had searched seventeen rooms when suddenly Jack stopped.

“What’s that noise?” he said.

Bella listened. She could hear something flapping and thumping.

“It’s coming from upstairs,” she said. “But it sounds big – far too big to be our little dragon.”

As well as being the servant boy, Jack was also the guard. He sighed, and said, “I’d better go and investigate, and find out what it is. I wish I had my sword and helmet.”

“Where are they?” asked Bella.

“They’re in my room, on the top floor – and *that’s* in the way,” said Jack, pointing at the ceiling. There was another loud thump, and a crash.

“I’ll investigate with you,” said Bella.

They both crept up the stairs. The noise grew even louder. They tiptoed along the corridor, and put their heads around the corner.

They saw the doors of all the royal bedrooms, tightly closed. But something was thumping and flapping in the corridor. Something big and green and scaly, with wide, wide wings and a long, long tail.

“It can’t be!” gasped Bella.

“It is,” said Jack. “That’s our dragon.”

“But it’s *enormous*!” whispered Bella. “Whatever can have happened?”

The dragon began to rampage up and down the corridor, thumping its huge scaly feet and flapping its wings.

It was in a very bad temper. It whisked its tail, and shattered a vase. It had already broken a window and a mirror, and knocked four pictures off the wall.

Just then the King came charging out of his bedroom. He was wearing a nightshirt embroidered with little gold crowns. He looked almost as angry as the dragon.

“What’s all this noise? I’m trying to sleep!” he shouted.

Then he saw the dragon – and the dragon saw him. It opened its mouth and huffed red flames.

The King leapt backwards. “Help!” he screamed.

The Queen came dashing out of the bathroom. She was wearing pyjamas patterned with tiny hammers.

“What’s all–” she began, and then she saw the dragon.

She leapt backwards too. “Help!” she screamed.

Bella and Jack ran towards her. At the same time, Princess Fifi came rushing out of her bedroom. She was wearing a fluffy dressing-gown covered in ribbons and bows.

“What’s– help!” she screamed. “A dragon! Save me!”

The dragon swished its tail furiously. It opened its mouth wide, ready to huff more red flames.

The Queen and the King and Princess Fifi ran. So did Bella and Jack. They all jumped through the nearest door and slammed it shut.

They were in Princess Fifi’s room. The angry dragon was thumping and flapping and crashing just outside.

“That looked like our little dragon!” the Queen exclaimed. “But it’s enormous!”

“Someone must have put a spell on it to make it grow,” said Fifi. “Like my giant frog prince.”

“A spell? Then I know what’s happened. It’s that stupid Wizard!” snapped the King. “He’s always doing things like this.”

“What are we going to do?” asked Fifi.

“I don’t know,” said the Queen. “We need the Wizard, but we can’t reach him. It’s a dragon dilemma.”

But the King stamped over to the window. He put his head out and bellowed at the tallest tower. “Wizard Watchit! Are you awake?”

The Wizard appeared in the highest window of the tower.

“I am now,” he shouted back. “What is it?”

“I want a word with you!” the King shouted. “You come here this minute!” The Wizard disappeared from his window. A minute later, they heard footsteps running in the corridor outside.

Then they heard a frantic banging on the door.

“Help!” said the Wizard’s voice. “Let me in! There’s a dragon trying to burn me up!”

Jack opened the door and the Wizard shot inside. He was wearing a night-gown decorated with little cauldrons.

“Phew!” he said. “That was a near thing. Where did that big dragon come from?”

The King glared at him. “That’s our dragon! You must have put a spell on it to make it grow!” he snapped.

“No, I didn’t,” said the Wizard.

“It was the right size yesterday! I expect you magicked it by accident.”

“No, I–” Wizard Watchit stopped. He had just remembered that the night before, he had tried to make up a new spell to turn a pen into a sausage roll. His spell hadn’t worked on the pen, but maybe it had worked on the dragon...

“You’d better go out there and magic it right back!” the King roared at him.

Wizard Watchit gulped. He wished it was a giant sausage roll waiting outside the door, instead of an angry dragon. “I’m afraid I don’t know how,” he said. “But I expect the magic will wear off soon.”

“Do you mean we’re stuck here until then?” the Queen asked.

“But I’m cold,” said Fifi.

“And I’m hungry,” said the King.

“And I’ve got loads of jobs to do,” said Jack.

“And so have I,” said Bella.

Wizard Watchit looked at Bella. “Why don’t you just catch the dragon and light the fires?” he asked her.

“Me?” said Bella. “How?”

“The usual way,” said Wizard Watchit. “Tie a string around the dragon’s neck and lead it round the castle.”

“But it’s in a rage!” said Bella.

“It’s probably just surprised at being so big,” the Wizard said.

Bella thought about this. The little dragon was usually quite tame and sleepy. It only got bad-tempered when it was hungry.

“Perhaps it needs food,” she decided. “But we’ve got no food in here to give it.”

“I’ve got chocolates!” cried Fifi. “I’ve loads of peppermint creams. I don’t like them, but the dragon might.” She gave Bella a box.

“I’ll help you catch the dragon,” Jack told Bella. “I just need to borrow a belt.”

“Well, hurry up!” said the King. “I want my breakfast! You can tell us when it’s safe to come out. Hop to it! Off you go!”

Bella and Jack quietly opened the door and tiptoed out.

They weren’t quiet enough. The dragon turned round and saw them.

It opened its mouth wide – but before it could huff fire at them, Bella tossed a peppermint cream into its mouth.

Looking surprised, the dragon began to chew. While it was chewing, Jack slipped Fifi’s dressing-gown belt around its neck, and tied it. Then he gave the other end to Bella.

“Let’s get to work, dragon,” Bella told it. She pulled the dragon along the corridor to the Queen’s parlour. The dragon could only just squeeze through the door.

“Well, go on!” said Bella, pointing at the fireplace.

The dragon looked indignant. It huffed red flames at her. Bella skipped out of the way, and the flames went into the fireplace. The wood in the fireplace began to crackle and burn.

“Good dragon!” said Bella, and she threw it a peppermint cream. The dragon ate it up eagerly.

Then Bella and Jack led the dragon from room to room to light the fires. The dragon huffed at every fireplace, and then opened its mouth wide for a peppermint cream.

At last Bella said, “Oops! I’ve only got one peppermint cream left.”

“You’d better save that for the kitchen,” said Jack.

“Come on, dragon,” Bella told it. “Down we go!” She pulled it down the stairs to the kitchen with a thump thump thump. They squeezed it through the door.

“About time too!” said the Cook. “Hurry up and light my oven! Then we can all have breakfast.”

“All right,” said Jack. He went over to the oven, threw open its door – and there, curled up inside the cold oven, was a small green dragon, fast asleep.

He stared at it. “That’s our dragon!”

“So it is,” said Bella, peering at it. “What’s it doing in here?”

“It must have come in here at night, looking for something to eat.”

“But then what….?” Slowly Bella turned to look at the big dragon sitting up behind her. It opened its mouth for a peppermint cream.

“Just wait a minute,” Bella told it. She hurried to the back door of the kitchen and ran out into the yard.

The dragon bounded over to the back door and squeezed through after her.

“Watch out!” called Jack. “It’s looking annoyed. It wants that peppermint cream!”

Out in the yard, the dragon opened its mouth wide again. When Bella did not give it a peppermint cream, it drew a long, deep breath.

It was just about to huff red flames at Bella, when she threw the peppermint cream.

But she did not throw it into the dragon’s mouth. Instead she hurled it high into the air.

At once the dragon leapt up after it. Beating its huge wings, it flapped after the peppermint cream and caught it in mid-air.

But then the dragon did not come down again. It kept on flying. It flew higher and higher, while Jack and Bella watched. At last it was just a speck against the clouds.

“I hope it finds its way back home,” said Bella. “I wonder how it got into the castle?”

“It must have crashed into it in the dark,” said Jack. “Remember that broken window? I bet it came in there, and then didn’t know how to get out again. No wonder it was angry!”

They went into the kitchen. The Cook had already used the little dragon to light the oven and the stove. The little dragon was running around looking for food, while the Cook was stirring a pot.

“Porridge?” she said.

“I’d better go and tell the King it’s safe to come out now,” said Bella.

“Not just yet,” said Jack.

“Sit down and have some breakfast first,” the Cook suggested. “You’ve had a busy morning.”

So Bella and Jack sat down. The Cook filled four bowls with porridge, cream and honey. She put three bowls on the table, for herself and Jack and Bella.

And she put the fourth bowl on the floor, for the hungry little dragon.

Spring Clean

The King and Queen and Princess Fifi were sitting in the throne room, eating doughnuts.

Bella was there too, but she was not eating doughnuts. She was cleaning.

“Oops!” said the King. “I’ve spilt some more jam on the throne. Bella – clean it up!”

Bella threw her mop on the floor. She glared at the King, looking very cross.

“Why should I clean it up?” she said. “Nobody ever cleans this castle except me!” “It’s your job,” said Princess Fifi. “You’re the maid.”

“But Custard Castle is too big for just one maid to clean!” said Bella. “There are three hundred rooms! I can’t clean them all. You’ve got to help.”

“Me? I’m a King!” said the King, alarmed. “Kings don’t do cleaning.”

“If you don’t help,” said Bella, “I’ll go on strike and not clean anything, ever again.”

“What?” gasped the Queen.

“You can’t do that!” cried Fifi.

“Oh, yes, I can.”

“But what do you want us to do?” wailed the King.

“You have to help me do a big Spring Clean,” said Bella.

“A Spring Clean? What’s that?” asked Fifi.

“It means we clean the whole castle from top to bottom. Then we won’t need to do it again till next year. But everybody has to help!”

Bella looked so fierce that they agreed.

“I’ll clean the bathrooms,” said the Queen.

“I’ll clean the state rooms,” said the King.

“I’ll clean the bedrooms,” said Princess Fifi.

“All right!” said Bella. “Jack can clean the corridors, the Cook can clean the kitchen, and I can clean the rest.”

She got mops and buckets, dusters and brushes, and soap and sponges, and handed them round.

“I’ll wear my overalls,” said the Queen.

“I’ll wear my skateboarding dress,” said Fifi.

“I’d better wear my oldest royal robe,” the King said glumly. He was not looking forward to this.

Soon the castle was full of the sound of clanking buckets and scrubbing brushes.

The Queen was very happy cleaning bathrooms, because she could do some plumbing while she was there.

Fifi was quite happy cleaning bedrooms, because she could try on everybody’s clothes while she was there.

The Cook and Jack the servant boy were fairly happy cleaning the kitchen and the corridors, because they were used to it.

And Bella was happy because everyone was helping her.

The only person who was not happy was the King. He was not happy at all. The state rooms were huge and dusty and musty, and Bella kept on pointing out bits that he had missed.

“I shouldn’t have to do this,” grumbled the King. His face was red, his hands were black with dirt and his oldest royal robe with grey with dust. “What about the Wizard? Why isn’t he cleaning too?”

“You’re right! I forgot about Wizard Watchit!” exclaimed Bella. She ran off to his tower to find him.

“We’re doing a big Spring Clean,” she told him. “You can do the towers.”

The Wizard looked puzzled. “Do the towers? What with?”

“With soapy water and a brush,” said Bella, and she hurried away.

The Wizard scratched his head. He had never heard of a Spring Clean.

“A big sprinkling?” he said to the ghost. “What’s that all about?”

“*Woo woo woo,*” said the ghost.

The Wizard shrugged. “Oh, well. If that’s what Bella wants…”

So he did a spell to sprinkle soapy water and brushes all over the towers of Custard Castle. The brushes bounced off the towers, but the soapy water cleaned them quite well.

Meanwhile Bella was cleaning her way through the castle. After a while she reached the treasure room.

Cautiously she opened the door.

"**RRRARGH!!**" went the Thing that guarded the treasure room.

"Sorry, Thing," said Bella, "but I need to clean the treasure." She lit the lamps and began to dust the piles of coins.

The Thing jumped off the treasure pile and huddled in a corner. It was a small, blue, fluffy Thing, and it did not like its treasure room to be clean and bright. It liked it to be dark and dusty.

Bella began to sweep its corner.

"**EEEGH!**!" went the Thing, and it fled. It ran out of the treasure room and hid in the cupboard under the stairs, next to the sleepy little dragon they kept there for lighting the fires.

Five minutes later, the cupboard door was flung open. Bella began to polish the dozing dragon.

"**RRUURKK**!!" cried the Thing. It fled again.

This time it bounced down the steep stairs that led to the dungeon. It was nice and dark and dusty down there.

The dungeon was peaceful – for a while. But not for long.

Soon Bella came down the stairs, sweeping as she went. She had done so much sweeping that her broom was almost worn out.

“Last bit,” she said. She pushed open the dungeon door, and lit a lamp inside.

“**WHURGHH**!!” protested the Thing. It jumped into Bella’s bucket to hide from the light.

Bella did not notice it there. She was too busy cleaning the dungeon.

First she swept the floor. Next she polished the chains.

Then she noticed a rusty iron hook sticking out of the wall. It looked dirty, so she began to scrub it.

As she scrubbed, the wall behind it moved. There was a creak and a groan. Slowly a hidden door opened, and revealed a passage.

“I never knew that was there!” gasped Bella. “It’s dark and damp… and absolutely filthy!”

She picked up a torch and her bucket. Then she set off down the secret passage.

At the end of the passage was a tall, dark cupboard.

“What a dirty old cupboard!” said Bella, brushing cobwebs off it. She opened it and peered inside.

A dozen spiders crawled out. And then something fell out of the cupboard – something long and thin.

Bella jumped backwards, before she realised what it was.

“A broom!” she cried. “Just what I need! Mine’s worn out. This broom is very dirty, though.”

The broom was covered in grime and cobwebs. Bella reached into her bucket for a cloth to clean it.

But instead of a cloth, she pulled out the small, fluffy Thing.

Bella did not notice. She began to polish the broom with the Thing.

As soon as she rubbed the broom, it shot up into the air with the Thing clinging on to it by its tiny claws.

“**AAROOGGH!**!” howled the Thing.

“Oh, my goodness,” said Bella. “It’s a magic broom!” She jumped up to try and grab it, but the broom flew away. It swooped down the passage with the Thing hanging on to it.

“**EEYARGGH**!!” yowled the Thing.

“Come back!” cried Bella.

The broom flew out of the secret passage and into the dungeon. It flew through the dungeon and headed up the stairs.

Bella ran after it. Every time she nearly caught it up, the broom darted away again, with the terrified Thing yowling as it clung on.

The broom swooped and swirled along the corridors of Custard Castle. Bella ran after it, shouting, “Stop, broom! Stop!” She was terribly afraid that the Thing would fall off.

Everybody ran out of the rooms they were cleaning, to see what all the shouting was about.

“**YAEEEGH**!!” screamed the Thing as the broom did a loop-the-loop.

“Whatever is going on?” cried the King.

“It’s a magic broom,” said Bella, “and it won’t stop flying!”

“Magic? Wizard Watchit – sort it out!” ordered the King.

Wizard Watchit stared at the broom zooming up and down overhead.

“I know that broom!” he exclaimed. “It belongs to my Aunt Hogweed, the witch. She must have left it behind last time she came to visit me.”

“Why did she hide it in the dungeon?” asked Bella.

“I’ve no idea,” said Wizard Watchit.

“Well, do a spell to stop it!” said the Queen. She ducked as the broom shot over her and flew into the throne room.

“I don’t know any spells for runaway brooms,” the Wizard said.

“Then think of one – quickly!” yelled the King.

So the Wizard made up a spell and said it in a hurry.

“*Stop your swooping, start your sweeping,*

Before your passenger starts weeping!”

To his great relief, the broom slowed down. It drifted to the floor of the throne room, with the Thing still hanging on to it.

The broom landed. It stood upright and began to sweep the throne room.

“There we are! No problem!” said the Wizard smugly.

Jack tried to pick up the Thing. It bit his finger and clung on to the broom.

"Ouch! The Thing seems to be all right," he said.

"And now that magic broom will finish all the cleaning!" cried the King. "Well done, Wizard! Jolly good spell!"

The Wizard looked hard at the broom. It was busy sweeping behind the throne. Suddenly he realised why his Aunt Hogweed had hidden it away.

"Um…" he said. "Must go now! Bye!"

He ran off to his tower. As he ran he heard a shriek behind him.

Then everyone began to scream and shout, because they had all just noticed what the broom was doing.

"It's not brushing the dirt away at all!" cried Fifi. "It's bringing it back!"

For wherever the broom swept, piles of dust and cobwebs appeared.

"That's a magic broom all right," said Jack, watching the throne grow dirtier and dustier.

"Oh, no!" wailed Bella. "We've just cleaned everything! We've got to get this broom out of the castle!"

She grabbed hold of the broom and tried to drag it away. The Thing was still clinging on to it.

The broom was very hard to drag. It tried to keep sweeping. And wherever it swept, piles of dirt and dust appeared.

Bella dragged it slowly through the castle, leaving a dusty, dirty trail behind.

She stopped just outside the treasure room. "This is hard work!" she gasped. "I can't drag it all the way back to the dungeon!"

"**EEGURGLE**!!" squealed the Thing.

"Really? All right then," said Bella. She opened the door of the treasure room and dragged the broom inside.

At once it began to sweep. Piles of dirt began to appear around the treasure.

"**GARRAGH**!!" said the Thing happily. It jumped off the broom and sat on top of the heap of golden coins while the broom swept around it. Soon it was surrounded by dust and cobwebs.

Bella left them there and closed the door. She could hear the Thing singing and the broom sweeping. She went back upstairs to find the King.

"The broom's busy sweeping your treasure room," she said. "It's as good as an extra guard."

“My treasure will get all dirty!” protested the King.

“It doesn’t need to be clean,” said Bella.

“But what about my throne?” wailed the King. “It’s a terrible mess!

Bella looked at the throne. Now it was not just smeared with jam. It was covered in dirt and dust and cobwebs too.

“You’d better clean it up,” the King told her.

But Bella shook her head.

“You can if you want to,” she said. “But I’ve finished my Spring Clean. I’m not going to clean a single thing until next year!”

The End

Thank you for reading Chaos at Custard Castle.

Have you read the first two collections of Custard Castle stories?

They are The King of Custard Castle (which is free) and The Ghost of Custard Castle (which is not free, but is not expensive.) Both are available from most good ebook stores.

You can also find the Custard Castle tales, and many other free stories and ebooks, at Emma Laybourn’s website,

www.megamousebooks.com

Happy Reading!