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Slovenian Vocabulary

Babica pronounced *ba-bee-tsah* = Grandmother

Draga Moja (F) pronounced *dra-ga moya* = My Dear/
Sweetheart

Dragi Moj (M) pronounced *dra-gee moy* = My Dear/
Sweetheart

Ljubček moj (M) pronounced *lyoob-chek moy* = My
Sweetheart

Ljubica Moja (F) pronounced *lyoo-bee-tsa moya* = My
Sweetheart

Ljubim te pronounced *lyoo-bim tay* = I love you

Marija Character name, pronounced *Maria*

Moji Dragi pronounced *moyee dra-gee* = My Dears/
Sweetheart

Oprosti pronounced *o-pross-ee* = I'm Sorry

Sonček Moj pronounced *sonn-chek moy* = My Sunshine

Vrtača pronounced *vurr-tah-chah* = Sinkhole (a depres-
sion or hole in the ground caused by some form of
collapse of the surface layer)

Foreword

Here in this unique book is the inside story of a supreme storyteller. Here you can discover how the magic of storytelling is made, encouraging families everywhere to tell more stories.

I am myself a storyteller first and a writer second. But when I perform, I read the words I've written, which I love to do. But when you read you focus on the words, live the story as well as you can while reading, but always relating to the words in front of you, the turning of the pages, and that to a degree always distances you from an audience. You feel inhibited by the way you are telling it. You flow the story as best you can, but what you really want is not just to read it but to tell it as you are living it in your mind's eye, to lose yourself in the story, and take the audience by the hand and take them on the journey with you.

See Danyah in full flow on stage, and you never look away. And it's not just the staging and the lighting or the extraordinary inventiveness of puppets and props, it's the sheer intensity of her storytelling, how she moves with the story, telling it with her whole body. She invites her audience to join her in the story, and seven years of age or seventy, we go with her.

I must have read my story of *I Believe in Unicorns*, telling it as best I could, a hundred times. And until I saw Danyah performing it at festivals, in schools, in concert halls, in theatres, I thought I'd read it quite well. Never have I seen audiences more deeply engaged, tearful, joyful, rapt as when she performed it.

This book is telling us all, you can do this storytelling, you don't need the prop of a book. Tell a story as they were told of old, dance it, sing it, live it. Do it with total commitment and they'll go with you. Mean it, with your voice, your eyes, your whole being. Tell it true, eye to eye.

Do read the book, using the story and the story games to enjoy the magic of spontaneous storytelling in your own family, and, if you want a master class, go to see her, be transported.

Michael Morpurgo

Introduction

Everyone tells stories. Although most people would not consider themselves to be ‘storytellers’, we all are. Humans are storytelling-beings. You and I are storytellers, whether we recognise it or not. We share anecdotes and memories, tell jokes, describe experiences, spin yarns. Our lives are made up of stories. We listen to songs, are persuaded by adverts, read books, listen to the radio, understand our history through the stories of those who came before us, watch films and TV.

We make sense of the world through story. Stories feed us to our very core.

What I love so much about spontaneous storytelling is that anyone can do it, anywhere and with any number of people. You don’t need to be an expert storyteller, have a good memory, or even have time to prepare. All you need to do is to be present, then listen, let go and have fun. Stories told off-the-cuff offer us a door into infinite adventures, a special playground where we can be and do anything that our imagination can conjure – and as we take off into this world, we can carry our listeners with us.

I wrote this book to share the seven secrets of spontaneous storytelling, so that you can become a confident storyteller and have fun playing story games with your family and friends. There are few pleasures children love more than hearing their parents telling them stories.

The seeds of this book were sown many years ago when I was a young child. I played around a neglected, bricked up windmill close to my parents’ home in York

and around a tumbled down cottage in the Yorkshire Dales during the holidays. I spent days cloud watching, inventing stories in my imagination and collecting treasures – a stone, twig or piece of sheep’s wool – for my father to turn into a tale around the open fire. My dad kept these items in a beautiful, small oak box that he had made, and would ask me to choose one to use as a springboard into a tall tale. He always began his stories, ‘Once upon a time...’

I don’t remember the content of these made-up stories, but I remember how they made me feel. This time together with my father made me laugh, think, question, be curious and feel loved.

I forgot all about my father’s improvised tales until many years later when I was introduced to spontaneous storytelling in my work. I realised that this storytelling genre is akin to devising theatre, always my favourite form of theatre since college days. This ancient art, stretching back to Roman times, is used for television and radio programmes such as *Whose Line is it Anyway?*, *Would I Lie to You?* and *Just a Minute*, which all rely heavily on improvisation and spontaneity.

It seems to me that flexibility and adaptability are key skills for us to cultivate as we live through extraordinary changes in the world. Unlike during my childhood, there are far greater challenges and demands on parents today, not least that we are constantly bombarded with ways to entertain our children, to keep them busy and occupied.

As a step-parent and parent I often struggled to find creative and empowering solutions to the many trials we faced as a family. On reflection, it was stories

and storytelling which helped me most to navigate some of the stormiest of times.

When my young stepson came to stay, he would wake several times in the night, crying and miserable, until I came up with the idea of building him a den. Together we upturned the sofa and chairs and covered them with blankets before filling the space with pillows and a duvet. He loved it. From then on bedtime was an adventure. Each night I told him a story as he drifted into sleep, cocooned and safe.

My daughter was a feisty, challenging child. I often used stories, games, play and humour when she kicked and screamed, refusing to co-operate, or when she was frustrated, tired or hungry. On my best days, we lay on the trampoline sharing cloud stories when she needed quiet time and I told stories when she was feeling anxious. Her friends asked me to play story games when I drove them home. Jumping on a magical carpet of stories was the only way I could get her to walk up the very steep hill to school. I certainly didn't always get it right, but these storytelling games were immensely helpful to me, averting at least some of the crises! This book is an opportunity for you to share these family tested storytelling tools for yourself.

Many years later, in my solo, theatrical storytelling show *I Believe in Unicorns*, adapted from the story by Michael Morpurgo, we include a spontaneous story which I share with audiences at the point when eight-year-old Tomas, who hates reading and school, meets the librarian in his local library. At each performance I ask members of the audience to call out a Name, a Place and an Object. I then weave these into a

three-minute story, whilst being timed. It has been incredible, hilarious and at times terrifying, to open my heart to allow a spontaneous story to flow through me, using only these random words and my imagination.

My decision, therefore, to write this book in the form of a tale about a young family exploring storytelling was an easy one, not least because I have witnessed the incredible power of story. I know from experience how much fun story games are when we play together. I also know that stories considerably help us to digest and remember what we've learnt.

The purpose of this book is to share the secrets of storytelling that I have learnt from being a parent, from working with families, with children in schools, in theatres and from so many wise women in my life. I would like to pass these secrets on to you now. I hope they will inspire you and give you the confidence to become a storytelling family, so that you can benefit from the deep nourishment of stories for many years to come.

Here you will find ideas, story games and provocations to help you easily create tales 'out of the air' with and for your families and friends. The tools, tips and tricks in the book are simple and fun, designed for you to follow, adapt and add to, to fit your own particular circumstances. They can be shared with large and small groups of children in a school, library, outside or in your home.

Each Secret has its own chapter, which is explored through the lens of the troubled Dale family:

1. A Welcome Stranger: *The First Secret – Imagination*
2. Is She For Real?: *The Second Secret – Observation and Senses*

3. There was Silence: *The Third Secret – Memory*
 4. In Search of Treasure: *The Fourth Secret – Puppets and Props*
 5. Ah! Snow: *The Fifth Secret – Wonder*
 6. Less is More: *The Sixth Secret – Play*
 7. One Step at a Time: *The Seventh Secret – Confidence*
- Each chapter has a games section for easy reference.

The Dales, like many families, encounter difficulties as they navigate the day-to-day challenges of life with their three children. Darinka and Adam Dale are looking for help. This support comes to them in the form of a Wise Woman, Dorothy, who appears unexpectedly one day seemingly from nowhere.

I offer this book to you, with love...

Danyah Miller



CHAPTER 5

Ah, Snow!

The Fifth Secret – Wonder

‘The more I wonder, the more I love.’

Alice Walker, *The Color Purple*

When Tommy had opened his curtains he'd yelled, 'Wow! Mama, come, come... snow – it's snowing.'

Half an hour later, Tommy scrambled up onto his dad's knee at breakfast. 'It's a snowy day, Dada.'

The flurry of snow added to the blanket of brilliant white covering the trees, houses and cars. It was already over two feet deep in places, having fallen heavily overnight. Outside it was bitterly cold and unsurprisingly Darinka had received a text to confirm that there would be no school today.

The twins, picking up on Tommy's excitement, were jumping up and down on the sofa, holding hands, calling out, 'Snowy day, snowy day.'

Adam sat at the table, slowly drinking his coffee, remembering back to his own childhood snowy days, which felt like stolen treasure. He had hated school,

preferring to be outside. Adam breathed out deeply at the memory of running down the steep hill from his home to collect Si, before the two of them headed off to Buttock Hill to spend the day with their mates, sledging and snowball fighting.

Adam tickled Tommy, still sitting on his knee, and announced, 'No school, eh? Well, that settles it – no work either! Let's get the toboggans out, matey.'

Tommy let out an enormous squeal of delight and joined the twins on the sofa.

'Come off, you'll break it,' Darinka called, heading to the kitchen to clear away the breakfast things. 'Let's get ready to go then!'

Eventually, hand in hand, they set off on foot for Buttock Hill, which was already packed with families sledging down or pulling their sledges back up the steep hill.

As they reached the top the snow had stopped falling, and between the heavy cloud cover the sky was a pale blue and the sun cast shafts of light across the landscape. It was now possible for them to see breathtaking views of the white hills and valleys stretching endlessly towards the horizon. Adam squeezed Darinka's shoulders as they paused, staring at the vastness and beauty.

'Come on, Dada,' called Tommy, making his way towards the mound route.

There were several possible snow runs, but Adam liked this route best because of a small hump of earth halfway down the hill. 'If you catch it just right,' he'd told them, giggling like a kid, as they walked towards the meadow, 'your sledge will take off and when you

come back down, bam! You'll fly to the bottom of the hill so fast. It's epic!

Adam held Tommy tightly round his waist as they went down the first time on one toboggan. The two of them focused on perfecting their technique and their determination intensified when, an hour later, Si and Joe joined them.

Darinka had grown up skiing and when it was her turn she hit the mound with accuracy first time and made it to the bottom in record speed, much to the frustration of Si and Adam and the admiration of their kids.

'That was for Shubu,' Darinka called out, holding her arms out high to receive applause!

It was early afternoon before they headed home, exhilarated and rosy cheeked. Marija sat on Adam's shoulders and Luka clung to his mum's neck as she piggybacked him. Tommy ran alongside, chatting non-stop, all the way.

As Darinka helped the children into the dry, warm clothes she had left out over the radiators, Adam got lunch ready.

'This is the best lunch ever, Dada,' Tommy declared. He ate up all his vegetable soup and warm bread roll. Darinka laughed, knowing that he didn't usually like soup.

After lunch Darinka took the twins for a nap. Almost as soon as they lay down, they were both asleep. Darinka lay down on her bed too and closed her eyes.

Adam and Tommy washed up and Adam told his son they were going to his workshop, which he rented

in the village, to make a new toboggan together. Tommy's mouth dropped open, staring at his dad in disbelief before running on the spot and clapping his hands.

'Shh mate, don't wake the twinnies,' Adam laughed.

The snowfall continued and school remained closed for two more days, taking them into the weekend. Darinka was thrilled that Adam had come sledging with them each morning and taken Tommy off to the workshop every afternoon. It had felt like a real holiday, with gentle mornings, bumps and bruises, tears, lazy lunches, side-splitting belly laughs, snow fights and silliness.

'What'll we call her then, eh, mate?' Adam asked Tommy on Saturday afternoon, sanding down their toboggan, which was almost finished.

Tommy watched in awe as his dad painted a lightning bolt down one side and printed the word 'LIGHTENING' in capital letters along the other.

'This is the best! This is the best!' Tommy repeated over and over as he pulled the new sledge proudly back up the hill to their home, sharing his prize with his mum and the twins. 'You see this bit here,' he pointed earnestly as Marija and Luka looked at it, 'that's called a knot. This wood is Ash.'

Adam was standing by his son's side. Darinka slid up behind Adam, putting her arms round him. He took her hands in his, turned his head and kissed her.

'I hope this is for his birthday,' she whispered.

'Mmm, not really,' Adam said sheepishly, realising that he should have thought about that. Darinka laughed, gently pushing him sideways. 'It's only a

couple of weeks away. It would have been a perfect gift.’ She shook her head and squeezed his arm.

Tommy wanted his new toboggan to be hung on his wall. As Adam was putting it up, he thought about who and where his own father might be, if he even knew about Adam. Was he dead or living somewhere with another family? He felt a sharp pain shoot through his chest as it tightened and he swallowed down a boiling lump in his throat.

‘Supper’s ready.’ Darinka’s soothing voice cut through his thoughts but his fury and confusion were slow to dissipate, leaving him scratchy throughout the meal. He snapped when Luka pushed his sister.

‘Stop hitting now, otherwise I’ll hit you,’ he’d shouted harshly across the table, at which Luka burst into tears.

As he sat on the side of their bed that evening, he pulled Darinka towards him. ‘Sorry I snapped at tea. It makes me so angry when Luka hits Marija.’ Darinka kissed him. She hated it when he shouted at the children, but she’d seen that he was making a real effort to control his anger.

‘Snow’s melting fast now Dinks, that’s the last of it for a while I reckon,’ Adam continued as they lay together in the dark, his arm around her.

‘It’s been a great week, thanks sweetie.’

‘Yeah, it really has. You okay if I go to check out the new site in the morning? It’ll only take me ten minutes to cycle there.’ Adam had successfully quoted to be part of the team due to work on the redevelopment of one of the old warehouses along the canal.

Having remained empty for years, planning permission had recently been granted to convert it into swish apartments and work was due to start on Monday. The developer was reputed to pay well and on time and had bought the two adjoining warehouses. Adam hoped to have secure work for a good number of years.

Darinka and he had often talked about finding a plot of land on which to build their own place. This job could mean they would realise their dream sooner than he had hoped.

‘Yes, *ljubček moj*, yes.’

Darinka’s eyelids began to close. She was still wrapped in Adam’s arms and thought back to how different their relationship had been just a few months earlier. Was it Dorothy who had such an impact on their lives? How could stories make this much difference?

The kids slept longer than usual the next morning. Adam slipped out of the house before anyone was awake. As he crept through the sitting room, Nala the cat was curled up by the fire, its embers giving off a soothing warmth. He gave her a stroke and she purred loudly.

The warehouses butted up to the canal tow path, around three miles from the Dale’s home. Since the snow was rapidly turning to ice and slush it was safer to walk than cycle. The sun streaked the sky with pink and blue and deep grey as it rose above the horizon, a low mist clung to the water and Adam glimpsed the crescent moon.

He glanced down to check his phone and text Darinka, and as he looked up, shoving his phone in his pocket, he saw Dorothy walking towards him.

She called out, ‘Well, now, how are you?’

‘Diddlin’ okay, actually,’ laughed Adam, pleased to see her.

‘May I walk with you a while?’ she asked as he got closer.

‘Why not?!’ he laughed.

As they walked side by side, they could hear the muffled sound of birds, and their boots crunched in rhythm through the snow and ice.

Dorothy asked about Si, Tess and Joe. Adam’s step faltered, a shiver pulsed down his neck, his forehead furrowed momentarily. Although she could only see him through the corner of her eye, this didn’t escape her notice.

‘Ah pet, it’s difficult, isn’t it? You never mind me. Take no notice, it’s none of my business.’

But he wanted to tell her that he and Si had found a quiet, dimly lit corner of the pub and after he’d hesitantly mentioned a childhood memory, one story had led to another and others, events, pranks, sorrows and heartbreaks until, inevitably, Adam mentioned the first time they had met Shubu.

‘She was so cool, Si, bloody intelligent. I don’t know why she fancied you mate!’ They had laughed out loud.

Si had taken a moment to speak, breathing heavily, clearing his throat, palpably holding back tears, but then Adam found that Si couldn’t stop talking about her.

Adam looked round at Dorothy and said, ‘When Si broke down in tears, I thought I’d said too much. He was a mess. Next time I saw him, I was going to apologise but he launched straight into more

memories about Shubu. He told me that either people ignore him or clam up whenever her name's mentioned, and he hates it.'

'Ah, pet. You've helped him a great deal. As I said before, sharing memories will help him to process it better. Stories are rather clever beings, aren't they?'

Adam nodded. They walked slowly, the watery ice slushing beneath their feet, as he continued, 'Tess is really struggling. Apparently, she and Si have shouting matches all the time, ending in floods of tears. Si says Joe doesn't say anything but listens to it all and is on high alert.'

Dorothy nodded. 'Tough for them all. By Tess's age stories can seem babyish can't they, and reading's been replaced with phones. They hold much more allure.' Dorothy was perceptive, without being judgmental. 'Hanging out with friends, focusing on appearance and how many likes they've got on social media is important.

'At this age, with brains expanding and hormones flying about, young people are sensitive to criticism and orders. We certainly have our work cut out for us to guide them without breaking down what can often feel like a fragile relationship between us.' Dorothy shook her head gently, as she opened and closed her fists and rubbed her hands together to stimulate the blood flow.

A flock of birds screeched overhead, black against the sky which had changed from pinks to a dull, endless grey.

Adam's feet were cold, so he stamped as they walked, to warm them.

'As Tess is 14, she's moving into the thinking

realms,' continued Dorothy. 'I'd suggest that mental and physical quizzes, quests and puzzles will help her. Anything that tests her knowledge and observation skills and challenges her thinking. Could you encourage her to go climbing and camping if she likes being outside?'

Adam nodded. He really wanted to support Si and was about to ask a question when Dorothy changed the subject.

'I thought that, since it's Tommy's seventh birthday in two weeks – what a special age – it's about time I shared my fifth secret with you. My first four secrets focused on what tools we can use to invent stories, while the next three concentrate on how we bring these tools to life.'

Adam wondered what this one could be.

'Yes, you're wondering!' Dorothy laughed. 'That's exactly what it is! This secret is about wonder and its importance, particularly in storytelling. Wonder is magical, delicious and... well, infectious too.'

Adam's mind flashed back to last week when Tommy had opened his curtains to see a world turned white! His first word had been 'Wow!' And that's exactly what Adam had felt too – a bubbling, infectious excitement about the snow.

'That's it!' Dorothy repeated, beaming. 'That's it! It's this quality of wonder that sparks our curiosity. Wonder is such a vital ingredient in effective learning, not only in literacy and numeracy, but for our whole development. It's a vital ingredient in the way we share stories with young children too. We want to build on their natural sense of wonder through our stories.'

Dorothy reminded Adam that when the storyteller uses words to paint the picture of a story, these images are readily transmitted to the listener. As we begin, ‘*Once upon a time...*’ our listener, wide-eyed and open-mouthed, is transported to a far-away land.

‘It’s such a damp, grey morning,’ Adam chuckled. ‘I wish I could be carried away to an exotic land now!’

Dorothy readily agreed.

When Adam had first met Dorothy, he had stumbled and struggled to find words, been unable to think of ideas, but he realised that over the past few months he had practised and found it much easier to come up with stories, had built up a bigger bank of words. ‘Mind you,’ he said, ‘the kids are quick to jump in with suggestions when I falter.’

‘This is part of the fun of spontaneous storytelling isn’t it, pet? The more we practise and enjoy the words the more easily they come to us. Good storytellers have a huge reservoir of vocabulary to bring stories alive and using these to tell a tale is part of the skill.’ Dorothy urged Adam to find ways to evoke wonder in his storytelling. She explained that in doing so he would stimulate his kids’ curiosity – a vital building block for them to become motivated and engaged adults. Dorothy rubbed the tip of her nose, which was icy cold, and continued.

‘Then, as they inevitably go through more cynical stages of life, this inner light of wonder will continue to flicker. It will sustain them through their challenges and struggles.’

Adam thought about Tess and Joe. ‘But what is wonder in stories? How do I do that? Is it the same as

awe?’ asked Adam, trying to reach for words to ask the right question.

‘Good question,’ said Dorothy. ‘One to contemplate, for sure.’

Dorothy and Adam had a relaxed and playful way of being together, which had grown over time, allowing them to walk comfortably now in silence. The buildings on the side of the canal made way to open fields, exposing them to the bitter wind. Adam pulled his cap down as far as he could to stop the air biting at his ears.

Dorothy, oblivious to the cold, was considering Adam’s question. ‘Well, my sense is that awe is what we experience when we’re in the presence of something vast or extraordinary. For example, witnessing a fiery sunrise or looking up at a million stars on a clear night. It’s something outside of ourselves that we encounter. Whereas wonder is the feeling which lies inside us, often provoked by an awe-inspiring experience. For example holding your baby in your arms for the very first time. These two, awe and wonder, sit side by side.’

Dorothy could feel Adam’s rising frustration as he wrestled with how to practically apply this information. ‘OK, let’s take two examples, how you prepare your environment and how you use your voice,’ she continued as he sighed deeply, his irritation having been recognised by her. ‘Create an environment which is calm, quiet, beautiful. If you have space in your home, choose a special nook as your story corner. Clear this space of clutter, except for one or two special treasures, like a candle which you gently light at the beginning of your story and blow out at the end. You could play a melodic instrument at the start and end of the story session,

maybe collect flowers from the fields and arrange them in a tiny vase on a table or shelf which you drape with a silk cloth. Or place a few of the special stones, acorns or pinecones that the kids have collected next to the candle or vase.'

She drifted off for a moment, in her own thoughts, and then chuckled. 'Keep it natural and keep it simple. My wise grandmother used to say, "less is more". It's about keeping the space clean. Make sure there's no dust, put your attention into its beauty. Countless times I've seen the magic that this attention to detail brings, both to the teller and the listener.'

Adam thought about the Squidge Room. Perhaps Darinka and he could turn a corner of it into a storytelling space. He knew she would be up for it because she had become fascinated by stories and storytelling, learning and practising whenever possible.

'What about my voice? You mentioned using our voice?' asked Adam.

'Ah yes. What a good pupil you are this morning, Adam!' Dorothy joked.

'Well, you know Dinks, she'll be mad at me if I don't squeeze as much information from you as I can!' he bantered back. The two of them laughed out loud, sending birds scattering from a tree as they passed it. There was a dull roar of the traffic in the distance.

'Well, well, I better tell you then! How we use our voice is so important. You must be aware of the effect your voice has on the mood of your children. How they respond when your voice is angry, filled with joy or touched with sadness.'

Adam nodded.

‘This is no different in storytelling. When you use a bright, bold, strong voice, you’ll invoke energy, action and vitality,’ said Dorothy. ‘Dropping your voice and making it sinister will instil a touch of fear and dread. As Tommy gets older he’ll enjoy more jeopardy in his stories!’

Dorothy stopped walking for a moment and touched Adam’s arm.

‘But don’t overdo this with young ones, they don’t need it, save it for another phase of their life, it will come soon enough.’

She started to walk again. ‘When you use a quiet, gentle voice you’ll lull the kids into a dreamlike state and draw out their sense of wonder.’

Adam thought about how different Darinka’s story style was from his own. The kids seemed to like both.

‘Since we associate wonder with pleasure, whatever we discover as a result of wonder is satisfying and energising.’

They walked on, watching and listening as the world around them awoke.

‘Storytelling’s a brilliant way for us to learn about the awe and wonder of the world. When we grow up, we might not remember the stories we were told when we were small, but we’re likely to remember the sensory impression the story, and the teller, have left behind.’

Adam told Dorothy that he couldn’t remember what stories, if any, his nan told him, but he could remember her smell and her warmth. When he was in trouble, as a lad, he would hide behind the sofa until she persuaded him to sit with her. Lost in her folds and her ‘nan

smell' she was silent as he wrestled with himself. Then she'd listen, without interrupting, as he spoke it all out. When he was around 13, he'd overheard her saying to his mum, 'He needs our love most when he deserves it least.' Adam scratched his chin as he swallowed away the lump in his throat and cracked two of his knuckles.

'Ah, pet, what a wise woman your nan was. She knew that children don't learn from what we say, but from what we do or feel and behind that, what we think. As she held you in her embrace, she was showing you that you were safe with her.' Dorothy made it sound so obvious!

'Holding hands does the same thing, pet.'

The wind was stirring, blowing strands of Dorothy's hair in all directions. She swept it out of her eyes and face, pinning it back up, as they walked.

'I could talk for hours about how important it is to cultivate wonder, to make time and space for these wow moments. To share joy with each other.' Dorothy's voice seemed to drop low and she spoke slowly and deliberately. 'Adam, really take notice of these moments in your life, the big and the small. When you consciously notice them, you're then able to incorporate this quality into your stories...' Dorothy paused, 'and your life... your life, Adam will be much happier.'

Dorothy laughed at herself as she rubbed her hands together.

'I have so much to say, don't I! But, creating these moments of wonder for your kids will make them feel more satisfied, more grateful and more inclined to help others.'

Adam knew that they were getting close to the warehouses. He slowed his pace, wanting to hear more.

Dorothy was still chatting. ‘I know you want to hear something practical you can put into practice, don’t you, young fella?’

Adam nodded and laughed. ‘Yes! I do, to be fair!’

‘So, here’s a fun game to play with Tommy on his birthday. It’s also a great rainy-day game. I call it “Finders-Keepers Treasure Hunt”. It takes some preparation on your part but it’s not difficult!’

‘When Tommy comes down for breakfast on the morning of his birthday, place a small object, say a toy car, on the table. Attach a label with some words, like “Prepare for your Birthday Finders-Keepers Treasure Hunt”. You could get the twins to draw round the words.’

‘Then share a story with him to set up the game and send him off on his treasure hunt. The toy might lead him to the Squidge Room where all his toys are kept. In the Squidge Room there’s another object-clue, with another little label. Perhaps a spoon? Tommy will need to think where the spoon comes from, and thus he opens the cutlery drawer to find the next object-clue. And in the drawer, there’s another little note tied to, say, a bar of soap... and so to the bathroom...’

She stopped walking and looked directly at Adam. He paused too, taking in what she was describing.

‘You get the idea, pet? It can have as many or as few clues as you like until eventually he gets a clue which brings him back to the breakfast table or somewhere hidden where he finds his birthday finders keepers present. Take care to put each clue somewhere safe so he doesn’t inadvertently come across it ahead of time.’

‘Or so the twins don’t find them and tell him where they are!’ added Adam, knowingly.

‘Yes, indeed!’

As they started walking again Adam stamped his feet hard several times to keep them warm.

‘But what kind of story would I tell?’ asked Adam, whose brain had gone blank at the thought of this.

‘Oh well, let’s see. If it was Marija, it would definitely be a pirate story, wouldn’t it?!’

Adam laughed. ‘Oh yes, Marija’s left our house and has been replaced by Demelza the Pirate.’

‘Since Tommy was born in January you could use the time of year as a backdrop to the story. How about something like this...

‘One bitter cold January morning when Squirrel Munch woke, he was very hungry so he visited his underground hoard to collect nuts, seeds and berries that he’d stored for the winter. To his surprise he couldn’t find his hoard anywhere. He’d forgotten where he’d buried them. So he called for his friends, badger, rabbit and mouse to help.’ Dorothy stopped for a moment. Adam could see she was making the story up as they walked. Both were aware how close they were to the warehouses. A noise of a plane cut through the story.

‘They all agreed to help their friend,’ continued Dorothy, ‘but Squirrel Munch promised to share some of his food with whoever found it for him. “Finders keepers” said badger with a grin. They all set off to search. After a while Squirrel Munch was tired and headed back to his dray for a rest. Here he found an object with a note tied to it. It was a clue from rabbit.’

Adam now realised he could make something up, although he had secretly decided he would use this particular story for Tommy’s birthday.

Dorothy concluded, ‘This could be the toy that you’ve left out for Tommy, pet. So, you’d finish the story by saying that since Squirrel Munch didn’t understand the clue, would Tommy help him by following the trail to find the buried treasure? Hopefully whatever story you create will entice him to start the hunt.’

‘Tommy’ll love this!’

‘Perfect,’ smiled Dorothy. ‘Just perfect.’

They stopped again, this time outside the first of the three imposing warehouses where Adam would be working in the months ahead. Dorothy touched his shoulder gently. ‘Adam, you’re a good man, with a kind heart. Remember that.’

Adam’s breath caught at the back of his throat. He stared ahead of him, afraid to look round at Dorothy in case he cried. For a split second he felt as if he was enveloped in his nan’s arms.

Adam stayed motionless, unable to move, knowing that when he did eventually summon the courage to turn towards Dorothy, she would be gone.

STORY GAMES FROM CHAPTER 5

Finders Keepers Treasure Hunt – see page 147

For one or more players (to be set up by someone who isn't playing)

- Gather several small objects from different rooms in your house and attach a label to each one.
- Decide on the order you will hide each object, where you intend to hide them and what the clues will be to enable players to move from one clue to the next.
- Write each clue on the appropriate label before hiding the objects to create a treasure hunt.
- Choose as many or as few clues as you like, the final clue leads to the prize.
- When the treasure hunt is prepared and the players are gathered, make up a story to set the scene, and to set up the game, sharing the first clue with them as part of the tale. They are now ready to set off on their treasure hunt.
- Each object prompts the players to the location of the next object. For example, if the first clue is a toothbrush, this encourages them to go to the bathroom to find the next clue and so on.

Did you know?

- Stop for a moment...
- As well as sharing stories, another way to reawaken our sense of awe and wonder is to be still, to do nothing except watch the world go by for a while. Many of us suffer from the pressures and stresses associated with modern life. Giving ourselves permission to integrate quiet time into our daily rhythm will help us

to unclutter our minds, dream, be creative and open ourselves to wonder afresh at our wonderful world. If you can find a place to sit, in nature, under a tree in the park, close to a stream or the canal or in the woods, even better!

Further reading...

The Artist's Way, by Julia Cameron.

Imagination, storytelling and the importance of wonder, by Ollie Oakenshield (watch on YouTube)