

# **Jessica Sweetshop and the House of Trolls, Skeletons and Dragons!**

Do you believe in fairy tales? Do you believe that sometimes the things you wish for the most do come true? Against all the odds, against all hope and against all despair, when you are drowning in the darkest of days and bleakest of futures, a tiny speck of light can make you believe. Can make you breathe again and make you dare to dream again.

I believe.

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My name is Jessica Sweetshop (I come from a long line of Sweetshops and apparently I am distantly related to the great *Isambard Bartholomew Sweetshop the 1<sup>st</sup>*, who invented the technique of putting pictures and letters all the way through sticks of rock). I am 14 years old and I am an only child.

My story starts just over a year ago, mom, dad and I, living happily in our little house, on our long street, in our small town. I remember the sun always shining and laughing and there was lots of colour. Dad painted pictures of “important people” (I never knew who they were and they looked very scary and stern and serious when they arrived for their sittings and I had to be good and quiet until they were gone!). Dad had received a letter to paint the portrait of an important person in a foreign country, we were all invited and we had to leave that very same day. We were all so excited, but dad said that he felt very strongly that he should go alone. A few days later we received a telegram saying that the ship dad was sailing on had been attacked by pirates and dad had been killed.

‘Chin up, dear’

I looked up at my mom who was gently wiping a tear from my cheek.

‘Daddy would want us to be strong now, and look after each other’

I reached up my hand and touched her cheek which was wet with her own tears. ‘Can daddy see us in heaven mommy?’

She looked at me with soft, sad eyes and pulled me to her tightly.

‘Daddy is always with us my darling, he is in all the good things and he will be with you forever, for you are the best thing in the world’

We did our best to carry on as normal. Mom and I would start the day early, mom saying: ‘Brush your teeth well, my dear, for with a name like *Sweetshop* –’

‘Your teeth must gleam!’ I would always finish her sentence. Then (with gleaming teeth) we would clean the house until it too gleamed. As with all good practises, if you keep on top of things, it is easy to maintain them, and our house required little time to ensure everything was in its place and shining with freshly washed, wiped, polished, brushed and dusted perfection.

Then, it was time for my lessons. It wasn’t because the local schools were bad schools that I was taught at home, it was because mom and dad were just different.

They always said: ‘Why let others do what we could do for ourselves, at least as good and usually better?’

This was true about most things and not just my schooling. They called it “being independently civilised”

‘Think the same, just be different about it Jessica, for you are very special’

Dad would say: ‘There are many alternatives to reach a goal, as simple or as complicated as the world and you make them’

I missed my dad.

Our evenings would be spent by the fire where mom would read to me. My favourites were tales of knights and dragons and princesses trapped in towers, worlds of dreams and happy endings. And we would talk about dad. Mom would tell me about how he loved to paint and that he only painted 'important people' because they paid him money to keep us in comfort. How he used to tell her that painting those people was like lying to himself because if he painted what he really saw then they would never want to be painted again!

'They are vain, self-important people who see themselves as handsome noble figures and that is how I paint them, for that is how they pay me – not the wart ridden troll faces, twisted with corruption and power as they appear sitting before me' he used to say.

And we would go into his studio and draw back the covers from his *special paintings* which hid them from the cynical eyes of the "important people" and I would stand in silence as my senses filled with warmth and wonder.

'Didn't they want to buy daddies nice paintings mommy?'

'These painting aren't for the likes of them dear; they can't see the purpose of something so pure, to them they are worthless. Daddy painted them for us and perhaps one day he hoped others would see them for what they really are'

And my mom would hold me and we would cry.

Then, on my thirteenth birthday, everything changed.

'Brush your teeth well, my dear, for with a name like *Sweetshop* –'

‘Your teeth must gleam!’ I finished for her, and a sudden knock at the door made my mom stiffen.

‘I wonder who that could –‘KNOCK! KNOCK! KNOCK! The noise was loud and heavy and important and sent my mom hurrying downstairs to the front door.

From the bathroom I could hear muffled talking – a man, deep voiced, not friendly, talking loudly. I could just make out my moms voice, short and desperate. Then silence.

Mouth foamed with toothpaste, I meekly made my way down the stairs and peered along the hall, polished tiles reflecting the image of my mom in the open doorway, her head and shoulders slumped forward, the man was gone. She looked at me, her mouth moved but no words formed, and then she collapsed, her head bouncing hard on those gleaming tiles, I screamed and ran to her.

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‘Your mom received a nasty blow to the head; she will need to stay in hospital for a few days. You can see her now, but only for a moment.’

The doctor led me through to a room in the hospital where my mom lay. Her head was bandaged and a tube ran from her arm to a plastic bag hanging from a stand. Her eyes hung heavy as she slowly turned her head towards me.

‘It’s alright my darling’ she said quietly ‘Mommy had a nasty fall’ her words were slow, as if half asleep. Then her eyes closed.

‘Mom!’ I cried and tried to hug her but a nurse pulled me away.

‘Mommy needs to rest now dear, you come with me.’

Hand held tightly around my wrist she dragged me out of the room, I was scared.

'Mommy!' but the nurse kept a firm hold and we entered another room.

'Sit down please Jessica.'

The room was dark, lit only by a small lamp in the corner. The curtains were drawn against the light of the day. I stopped struggling and turned towards a man sitting on a large wooden chair, an ugly fat man that resembled a troll, face all covered in warts with cold small eyes that stared out from under the brim of a tall black hat. His fat hairy hands clasped the top of a black walking stick and short sharp yellow teeth flashed through thin wet lips.

'My name is Lord Piglington'

'My daddy painted your picture!'

'He did my dear, and a fine job he made of it too' His voice was deep and without warmth.

'Your fathers' death was a great loss'

Then it dawned on me 'It was you!' I said accusingly, 'You came to our house – you made mommy sick!'

I was scared and angry, I wanted to run from the room and find my mom but the nurse was standing at the door, arms folded staring hard at me.

'It was an unfortunate turn of events' the man continued through those sharp yellow teeth 'your father, killed on a ship in the middle of the ocean by pirates...', his black eyes narrowed slightly, 'how fortunate, for you and your mom, that you were not travelling with him.'

Those last words were said coldly and his eyes glazed as if thinking of other things.

'My associates and I have been funding your fathers work for some time and as I explained to your mother, we made several advanced payments

for work which can no longer be completed. Therefore, we are legally entitled to recoup our losses by taking possession of your house and all your father's paintings and materials'

He leaned forward, fat sweaty hands clasped tightly around his black stick.

'As you and your mother are now penniless, I have kindly offered servant positions at my house, which includes room and board. I fear that your mother was so overwhelmed with my generosity that she fainted at the news. A car is waiting outside, you will leave immediately. Your mother will join you when she is well.'

He gestured to the nurse and she moved towards me.

'No!' I could not believe what I was hearing, how could this happen? How could things get so bad so quickly?

'Mom!' I shouted after her all the way through the hospital, the nurse again dragging me.

'Mom!' please wake up! Please hear me and come and get me! 'Mom!'

SLAM! The car door shut and through tear stained eyes I watched the hospital drift away. I was being taken to the *Troll's* house.

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I was in a dream (nightmare), as we drove, houses and people flashed by, all going about their normal business, oblivious to my grief and the tragic unfairness that had suddenly fell upon my mom and me.

After some time the car slowed and paused in front of two enormous iron gates. Ornate letters which scrolled across the ironwork read: "*Piglington Estate*". We had arrived and my heart sank. The gates swung open with a

slow painful screech and the car moved through. They then closed behind us with an ominous clang which echoed across the open lawns that sprawled out either side of the road ahead.

The driver said nothing and never looked back towards me. A black cap sat on his large head which in turn sat on wide shoulders. I did not want to speak to him. We drove on. Eventually the wide lawns gave way to thick woodland, large tangled trees and twisting vines that soaked up the daylight, and then we were there.

The house appeared suddenly, as if the trees had been hiding it. A wide, dark house, with small windows and a huge front entrance of stone columns covered in carvings and statues.

A tall thin man was standing at the entrance. He was dressed in a black suit, a black shirt and black tie. His skin was ghostly white and drawn tight and thin across his face and his black eyes looked down at me through sunken holes.

‘Miss Sweetshop, I have been expecting your arrival’ his said.

Long thin hands gestured me from the car. His voice seemed to come from deep within his chest in a rasp. The columns rose up either side of him and I could see the carvings; hideous creatures with horns and grinning teeth twisting around the stone. Beneath each column sat a statue, large dogs, mouths turned up in silent frozen growls, crouched and ready to pounce. I looked about me, wanting to run.

‘I would not advise you to be out in the grounds on your own’ said the thin man, seeing my desperation.

‘The dogs roam freely and will kill you and eat you’ he said flatly.

‘My name is Mr Skelton; I am the butler and at all times you shall address me as either *Sir* or *Mr Skelton*’

And then I fainted.

I opened my eyes and for one tiny instant I thought I was at home, safe with my mom and all the recent horridness was just a bad dream, a nightmare retreating with the dark. But no, I sat upright with a start, fear gripping me, it was real. It was all real. I looked about me.

I was in a small room, no pictures hung on the plain colourless walls, and except for the small blanket upon which I was sitting, the floor was bare. A small chest was against the wall opposite me and a chamber pot sat under a small sink which had one tap. The small curtain-less window allowed barely a ray of light to enter and even though an un-shaded bulb glowed in the centre of the plain ceiling, the light it cast seemed to drown in the shadowy corners. Opposite the window was a dark wooden door with a large brass doorknob, a doorknob which was twisting and at the same time, a heavy bolt was being drawn back. I held my breath as the door suddenly lurched open, hinges groaning under the weight.

The open door shed no light from the other side and out of the darkness a white head and long thin white hands floated into the room. It was Mr Skelton.

‘Your first day has not gone well; you will not be treated so lightly next time.’ He spat the words out of his mouth.

‘While you are in this house, fainting, crying or any other girlish emotion will not be tolerated.’

He leaned into my face and I shrank against the wall, his breath smelt like rotten meat.

‘You are here to work, get out of bed and follow me.’

Bed? This blanket on the floor is my bed? I was too scared to argue and followed the *Skeleton* as he turned and headed for the darkness.

'I can't see where I am going' I said.

The thin shadow in front of me stopped and I could smell the *Skeleton's* breath as he turned and pressed his face against mine.

'DO NOT TALK UNLESS YOU ARE SPOKEN TOO!'

I was fighting back tears, he was breathing fast

'Ears are better than eyes in these corridors you little brat, follow my footsteps. If you get lost I will be *very angry*.'

And he marched off down the long corridor, feet clipping on the wooden floor. I followed, desperate not to get lost; this was a very bad man.

Suddenly, the footsteps stopped and a door opened. We entered a huge hall, dimly lit by a single flaming torch. At the centre of the gloomy hall was a long table surrounded by plain wooden chairs, all plain that is, except one, which sat at the top of the far end of the table and was taller than the others and had carvings, like a throne.

A large ornate fireplace stood on the wall behind and in the dim shadows above hung a large painting which I recognised instantly – it was a painting of Lord Piglington – a painting by my dad!

I could not help but stare at the painting. It looked like the Troll – but somehow, more human, less warts, a thinner, kinder face, larger eyes, whiter teeth – and then my head spun and my ear stung with a sharp pain.

'PAY ATTENTION! You wretched thing!'

The *Skeleton* had slapped my face, I bit my lips, I mustn't start to cry!

'Lord Piglington is having a meeting here shortly, you are to polish the floor and this table and all the chairs except the Masters.'

His long fingers indicating to the largest chair.

'I don't want your vile little hands near it, do you understand?'

I nodded. The white face suddenly flushed red as he grabbed my neck  
'YES SIR OR YES MR SKELTON!!' he screamed at me through gritted teeth.

Y-yes – M-Mr Skelton, I'm sorry'

'You will be' he growled, releasing his grip

'Here is the polish and cloths, get on with it, smartly mind, I will be back shortly and your work had better be sufficient, otherwise the master will be most upset, oh, and don't try to run away, there is only one way out of this room.'

He said those last words with a slight smile which made me tremble.

Left alone, I knelt down and started to polish the large wooden floor and as I worked, I cried. Tears fell to the floor and mixed with the polish and I continued this way all across the large dark room. I stopped behind the big chair. Wiping my eyes, I looked above the fireplace, at dad's painting of that horrid man and to my surprise, I felt comforted. Dad painted that picture. Dad's brush strokes. I felt the urge to touch them, to feel their texture, and it was irresistible! I looked around to see what I could use to stand on and reach the painting. The large chair was closest and tall enough for me to touch the painting with ease. I pulled it away from the table and it screeched across the floor, the noise echoing around the hall. I positioned it under the painting and climbed onto the seat and stood up, level with the painting. This close up, the painting looked totally different, the sweeps and lines seemed to vibrate and even in the dim light I could almost hear the colour! I reached out and gently touched the centre of the picture.

'Jessica' a voice whispered.

The Skeleton! He's back and I'm not working and I moved the chair! And...and I'm still alone! That wasn't the Skeletons voice, it was...Daddies? I looked up at the painting, it couldn't have been! I imagined it, and yet it sounded like dads voice! I nervously reached out again, fingers gently touching the canvas, between the eyes of Lord Piglington, the Troll. The eyes moved and stared at me, the head suddenly twisted and came out from the painting, pushing me backwards, its face distorted through the wildly stretched canvas, the image snarled and then the head snapped back like an elastic band and the canvas was flat again. A distant sound of thunder crackled around the room and then all was silent.

I hit the floor with a thud, my head bouncing off the freshly polished surface.

'With a name like *Sweetshop*, your teeth must gleam'

My moms' voice called softly through the darkness spinning in my head. The room also spun and I thought I was going to be sick.

What was happening? Was I going mad?

I was brought back to my senses sharply, as not too far away, the slam of a large heavy door echoed somewhere in the house, followed by the sound of footsteps, confidently walking their way through the shadowy corridors. It was the Skeleton – and he was coming back to the hall!

It was at this point that I decided enough was enough. I had been taken away from my sick mom, kidnapped by a *troll* and a *skeleton*, to do their bidding for reasons I did not know – I did know that I was scared and I had to get away!

I had to hide!

I quickly looked around; panic taking over me. Except for the table and chairs, the hall was quite empty, where was I going to hide? The Skeleton will

be entering the room any second; he will see the moved chair – the chair! It's in front of the fireplace! I rose unsteadily to my feet, lunged at the chair and pulled it back to the table. Turning swiftly, I ran to the fireplace and paused to look up into its dark depths. The door handle turned with a creak, I climbed into the blackness and held my breath.

Footsteps entered the room and suddenly stopped.

'Where are you girl...?' The rasping voice of the Skeleton muttered.

I could feel his words circling the room, seeking me out, he followed them, the stench of his breath being drawn towards me. I could smell it; he was right in front of the chimney!

'You can't hide, little girl...come on out, I won't hurt you – I '

He stopped abruptly.

'You moved the Masters chair... you *touched* the Masters chair?'

His voice had become higher, like a record played at the wrong speed.

'I think it's a bit chilly in here, I think I should make a fire, yes! A nice big warm fire, warm the room for Master and his guests, yes, yes – nice surprises, nice surprises'

He was ranting with rage – he was going to light the fire!

He knew where I was hiding and he was going to light a fire. I still didn't move, or make a sound, even when coal, wood and paper started to be piled below me, and then – a hand appeared. A long thin white hand, with long thin white fingers and at the end of those long thin white fingers flickered a long thin white match! I was about to scream when I heard the door at the far end of the hall burst open and the room suddenly fill with many footsteps.

'Skelton!'

A voice boomed out. It was Lord Piglington, the Troll!

'What in blazes are you doing man?'

I looked down at the match and blew gently against the flame, it went out!

‘My Lord!’ The Skeleton cried out in a panic. ‘I am lighting my Lord and his honoured guests a fire to keep out the chill of the day, the match has extinguished, I will light another’

‘You will do nothing of the sort!’

The Troll’s voice was so loud that soot fell on to my head from the chimney around me.

‘Our meeting is about to start, leave us immediately’

‘But, My Lord...’

‘IMMEDIATELY MAN! GET OUT!’

The long thin white hand hesitated and then suddenly disappeared and to my immense relief, the Skeleton was gone. I sat there in the dark, regretting that I had not just carried on with my cleaning and not moved the chair, not touched daddies’ picture or fell and banged my head. I wondered if I should just climb down from the chimney and hope that the Troll would be kinder than the Skeleton.

My thoughts were interrupted by the sounds of chairs being moved and sat upon, as Lord Piglington’s guests settled themselves around the large wooden table.

‘Gentlemen’ the Troll began to speak. ‘Welcome all to Piglington Manor’

‘Dispense with the pleasantries Piglington, have you got the girl?’

My ears strained at those words, were they talking about me? I had to look into the room! I braced myself against the inside of the chimney and bent down, lowering my head to peer out over the pile of coal, wood and paper the Skeleton had lain there moments before.

Around the table sat a group of large, fat wart-faced men, some slouching back in their chairs, some resting on their black walking sticks. Black hats rested on the table, some were grinning with short sharp yellow teeth. One was standing up and I had to peer lower over the coals. To my surprise, it was the Troll, Lord Piglington, he said: 'I have, your Highness, she has been assigned some domestic duties during her short stay'

Your Highness? I looked at the back of the large chair; the chair I thought had been reserved for Lord Piglington! Black robes fluttered and flowed out from where the man sat. He spoke in a guttural low tone.

'Good, good, bring her in, I want to look at the wretched thing'

A murmur went around the room.

The Troll raised one hairy hand; 'Ah, there is one other thing. I have the child as arranged, her thirteenth birthday has passed and the *Entring* will be growing within her'

The *Entring*? I did not know what he meant.

The Troll continued: 'The mother, on the other hand, took the news that we were taking possession of her house and her husbands paintings rather badly. However, I arranged that she be placed in my ah "recuperative" care. She is here and should survive long enough for our purpose.'

Mom is here! I nearly fell from my hiding place.

The black robes fluttered, 'She had better, Piglington, it is on your head if she fails to complete the Trinity'

The Troll pressed a bell near the door and almost immediately the Skeleton entered the room, his eyes looking directly towards the fireplace, directly at me!

'Fetch the girl, bring her here immediately' boomed the Troll, Skeleton raised a shaking, pointing finger towards me.

‘But, but My Lord she is here, hiding in the fireplace...’

It was too much; I lost my footing and fell head forwards out of the fireplace in a cloud of soot.

There was a shriek of commotion from the gathering as everyone sitting stood suddenly to stare with small black eyes at me, some knocking their chairs over in their haste. The man in the big chair was last to stand and I watched him rise slowly, a large bald head appearing from behind the backrest, his black robes lifting from the seat as he raised himself to his full height, taller, much taller than the Trolls, and his ears, he hadn’t any ears!

The man spun to face me and I froze. The black robes rippled and moved and I followed their movement upwards and my mouth let out a silent scream. The teeth seemed to have sliced their way out his mouth, which was stretched the full width of his face, his skin was potted, like scales and he had no eyes, although I knew he was staring at me. Staring into me.

‘Well, well, it seems, Piglington, we have a chimney sprite in our midst, a very tasty sprite at that!’ he grated, a thin forked tongue slipped out briefly between the rows of irregular teeth.

‘And wasn’t your manservant about to set fire to our little sprite earlier?’  
All eyes fell on the Skeleton.

‘SKELTON!’ The Troll raged.

‘But, My Lord, she had moved the Masters chair, she needed to be punished...’

He looked terrified, trembling he collapsed to his knees.

‘Forgive me Master, please!’

The man moved towards the Skeleton and opened his wide teeth filled mouth; he opened it so wide there was no room for eyes or ears, everyone in the room went silent, except for the whimpering of the Skeleton, who stared

with a mouth nearly as wide as the thing almost upon him. I wanted to look away, to run, but the horror of the moment wouldn't let me move. The man suddenly drew a deep breath and exhaled...the Skeleton burst into flames, so quickly that in a moment he was no more than a pile of ash on the floor. The *dragon* stopped exhaling.

He turned towards a cowering room, 'Take the girl, it is time'

'No! Wait! Please!' I was crying, screaming hysterically as I was dragged out of the hall and into the dark corridors.

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Down and down we went, through the depths of the old house, into the cellar, and down again. It seemed we must be going into hell itself.

And then, we stopped. I could just make out a large steel door in front of us, the Dragon opened it - and we entered what looked like a painter's studio! Paint tubes and brushes, knives and pencils, some stacked neatly, others poking out of jars, well used pallets awash with colour lay against canvas covered easels. The scene continued around what was a large circular room, the centre of which lay a table and I quickly realised my mom was laid out upon it!

'Mom!' I ran to her.

'Jessica? Is that you?'

She looked like she did in the hospital, sleepy, barely able to talk. I looked back at the Dragon and his trolls.

'Leave my mom alone you beasts!'

'SILENCE' crackled the Dragon 'it is time for you, Jessica to know *what* you really are. Do you like to paint, Jessica?'

I looked at him blankly.

‘You like to look at paintings don’t you?’

He continued without waiting for a reply, ‘You like to feel their energy, their movement? As if you could actually reach out and touch them, to be part of them?’

I rested my head on my moms, tears in my eyes, he still continued.

‘We’ve been searching for you Jessica; we have been searching for so long, so very long. Do you realise how many artists across the world we have sought, looking for the one that would connect us to you?’

He raised a misshapen clawed hand and began wiping his lips; a ring sparkled red upon his finger.

‘And quite by chance Lord Piglington here happened upon your father. You were right under our noses, all this time. The Entring is in your father and we have kept him in our employ as we waited for you to grow.’

I watched in surprise as he drew his hand away from his face, he grinned at me, through a normal, human mouth. He suddenly had the face of a normal human.

‘Thank you for that demonstration earlier’ he said, almost gently ‘I know it’s strong within you now and tonight we will release it and it shall be mine.’

I gave him a despairing gaze, but although he now had the face of a human, his eyes were cold and evil and without compassion.

You look puzzled my dear’ he grinned again.

‘I am the High Lord of the *Order of the Entring*, an ancient order that once rose in the times before history. The Entring is the creative force behind all invention and all destruction. Some have used it for the benefit of mankind; Galileo, Da Vinci, Einstein, and others with more vision have used it for evil:

Rasputin, Stalin, Hitler. But I have something that no one has possessed in millennia.'

He raised his hand to display the large diamond ring which shone with a deep red light.

'This ring contains the power to manipulate illusion and reality through the medium of art. The ring is useless to anyone without the gift, but it glows in the presence of those with the Entring within them. Your dad has the power, but you, Jessica, you are very special. You are a *first born girl*. This has not happened for generations and the *first born girl* of an Entring is the ultimate chosen one. Her thirteenth birthday is the *Year of Awakening*; when the power manifests itself into a physical form, which can be focused by the ring.

I looked at the other trolls to find they too were now completely normal looking – Lord Piglington actually looked like his painting.

'You see us now as the world sees us. They are blind to what lies beneath. But you, Jessica, like your father, are able to see us differently. You can see our darkness, our greed. Your dad painted us well, hiding our, ah *negative traits*. Your power grows and the ring can feel it, you are linked strongly to the ring and I can use it Jessica, like I did when I killed the manservant, I can take your fear and turn it into reality, I can feed off the creativeness of man and turn it into his destruction!'

He wasn't talking to me now but was looking up, arms raised to the heavens.

'And with the Trinity, that power will be transferred to me forever!'

I didn't understand. I didn't care! I wanted to go home with my mom!

*'Jessica!'*

It had happened again, that voice! Just like dad's!

‘Jessica, look!’

I turned in a daze, there was too much to take in, but I knew it was my dad’s voice!

‘Daddy?’

‘Daddy!’ He was being held by two of the trolls.

‘Jessica, think happy thoughts and it will all be alright!’

The Dragon was shouting now ‘Put them all in position, it’s time for The Trinity!’

And we were manhandled into three opposite sides of a triangle etched into the stone floor. Mom collapsed in a heap, dad and myself held by the trolls.

The Dragon was now standing in the centre of the triangle, arms raised. In his right hand was the gleaming ring, casting a red light around the room, an unnatural light that crackled with the same thunder I’d heard in the hall.

He started to speak: ‘Mother and father of the first born female Entring completes the unity of the ring, bring forth this Trinity to bestow the ring holder power of all three!’

He started to chant something, a strange language, and he had to raise his voice over the ever increasing noise of thunder. Lord Piglington was now uncovering the easels which circled the room, revealing pictures of grotesque shadowy beasts, evil many legged creatures with malice filled eyes. I could sense hatred in every brush stroke. They had been using dad’s paints to create those pictures!

The ring shone brighter and brighter, I had to close my eyes from the glare and then, with an almighty crash, the light exploded into three beams which shot out from the Dragon, into mom, dad and me. The trolls who were

holding us were thrown against the walls, paint pots spraying everywhere, yet we could not move, the light had us. My feet were lifted from the ground. All I could do was to stare at the Dragon, who had stopped chanting and was now screaming. His “normal” looking form had gone; he looked twice as tall and his large teeth-filled mouth was opening wider and wider. Blackness was growing from within him, a dark light which was reaching out to us through the beams. Then the canvas on the easels began to stretch, just like the one above the fire in the hall. The horrid shapes of black hearted shadow creatures began to force their way from the canvases.

I could feel my life being drained from within.

‘Think happy thoughts, Jessica, send them into the light’

It was dad’s voice again, this time in my head! I suddenly knew what he wanted me to do, but how?! I looked at mom, floating in the beam of light, she was awake, she looked like an angel – no! A fairy! That was it! I was a princess, kidnapped by trolls, chased by a skeleton and threatened by a dragon! Mom was my fairy godmom and my dad was the good king, and he was alive! I will imagine a fairytale and *my* fairytales ALWAYS have a HAPPY ENDING!

And then it happened, the light engulfed us all. There was nothing, I was nothing. I wasn’t scared. I wanted to stay there for ever.

And then darkness. I looked around, trying to see, I didn’t like this. Suddenly, a light flickered to life, small at first, but it grew around me and became bright enough for me to see the underground room.

‘Mom, dad!’

They were there, mom looked well again and she was hugging dad. They turned towards me and I ran to them and we stood there for a long time, together again.

Eventually we looked around. Paint had exploded everywhere.

‘Where did the bad people go daddy?’ I asked nervously, we all looked about.

‘I don’t know I – look! At the walls!’

Amongst the rainbow of colour now covering the walls were pictures!

‘Mommy, look, it’s my fairytale!’

We all stared at the walls. In various scenes of misery, were trolls, skeletons and dragons being sliced, burned, squashed, and generally defeated by noble looking knights on white horses! On my finger was now the ring, which glowed with a white light and when I looked at each pain-filled painted face, they moved and cried out to me.

We locked that room up and threw away the key. There they would stay, trapped forever in their very own paintings.

Dad told us that the trip to the foreign land had been a trap and the ship he had been on was attacked by pirates who kidnapped him for Lord Piglington. They were very angry when they found out that mom and I were not aboard! Dad had tried to warn me by using the Entring. He said he could sense when I was close to one of his paintings and tried to reach out and speak to me.

‘I could here you in my head!’ I said.

Mom held me in her arms ‘you have a wonderful gift, Jessica, and your dads’ family are very special. ‘

I looked up at her; she smiled warmly and said: ‘How do you think *Isambard Bartholomew Sweetshop the 1<sup>st</sup>* came up with the idea of putting colours and letters in rock?’

I grinned broadly ‘He used the Entring!’

Dad ruffled my hair with his hand 'That he did young lady, it has always been in our family, but you are the first to be a first born girl and that is very special indeed, you have a great gift now, and we shall teach you to use it wisely'

We went home, all three of us, back to our happy house. A few months later Piglington Estate fell into disrepair and was torn down. Nobody wanted to live there, and nobody cared, so the forest grew back, hiding any trace of the old house.

I am still learning about the Entring, but now and again, on special occasions, dad takes us into his studio, where we stand in silence, filling our senses with warmth and wonder, and I let the ring glow and cover us with light and take us into the special paintings and we laugh and play within them and within our imagination.

And that's about it! That is my story; so fairytales can come true, if you believe in them enough and, oh, don't forget to think "happy thoughts!" And BRUSH YOUR TEETH UNTIL THEY GLEAM!

THE END