

## Telephone Box and a Bus Stop

*Monday, 13 June 2005*

My name is Becky Blunt, and today has not been a good day. In fact, you could go as far as to say that it has been an awful day. The worst day ever. I kid you not! Taking into consideration last years Valentines fiasco, and not forgetting the farce of a family reunion, today has been the worst of the lot. At the moment, I am hiding in a grit-bin. Why, I hear you cry, is she hiding in a grit-bin? Well, to explain the whys and wherefores, I need to start from the beginning, since the beginning is usually where most stories begin.

It started as any other day would: Dad playing his Brotherhood of Man records at full blast, Mum crying over Lorraine Kelly, me lying in bed wishing I didn't have to go to school, dreading Maths 'cos I hadn't done the homework. Just another normal day for the Blunt family of Birmingham.

The trouble started when I finally dragged myself out of bed, made an attempt to get ready for school (Unsuccessful. The week's score stands at: Hairbrush 5, Becky 0), and went downstairs for breakfast. Dad was in the kitchen, making something disgusting on the stove (It looked like poo. Seriously.), and I went to the pantry to get my co-co pops.

Imagine my displeasure, my dissatisfaction and my disgruntlement when I discovered that they were all gone. Not one little *pop* remained. Not one. Suffice to say, I was thoroughly annoyed.

So I decided to ask Dad where they'd all gone. Yesterday when I'd eaten my co-co pops there had been at least a quarter of the packet left.

"Dad, who ate all the co-co pops?"

"Must've been Kenickie,"

"Oh righ- wait! Must've been Kenickie? Why would Kenickie have eaten all the co-co pops? He's not here! Oh Dad, please tell me he's not here!"

Kenickie is my five-year-old cousin. He's a right pain in the arse, and has a tendency to remove his clothes in public places. Anyway, Dad nodded his head, and I buried mine in my hands. Then the thought wheels started turning...If Kenickie was here...that meant my other cousin Rizzo was here...which meant Uncle Bob was here. I should have known there and then that the day wasn't going to turn out well. Any day that starts with the discovery that Uncle Bob is in the vicinity is a bad day.

Uncle Bob is my Dad's older and utterly barmy brother. Okay, so Uncle Bob's not quite as bonkers as Mad Uncle Tom, at least Uncle Bob doesn't prance around with a lightsabre pretending to be Prince Charming! (Bad Christmas experience. Never want to mention it again.)

But Uncle Bob is not one of my favourite family members, and when I found out he was in the house, I wanted to get away as fast as possible. Even if that meant facing the wrath of Mrs. Woodhouse, my scary Maths teacher. I grabbed my coat from the floor where I'd hung it up the night before, waved at my Dad, and was optimistic that I'd make it out of the front door without encountering the 'devil-child' (that's Kenickie), the 'tyrant-teen' (Rizzo) or the 'unhinged-uncle' (Bob, of course!)

As you may have guessed, luck was not on my side. I was just about to open the door, when I heard Uncle Bob call my name from the top of the stairs. I turned, ready to face my doom, plastering a fake smile on my face.

"Becky! My favourite niece!" he called down to me. Just for the record, I am his *only* niece. All my cousins are boys.

"Hi Uncle Bob," the fake-smile was strained, "what are you doing here? You weren't here last night."

"Just popped 'round to drop a few things off for your Mum from your Aunty Lynda. We're just about to get on our way."

"I see," the fake-smile was slipping, as I said brightly, "well, I'll see you then, got to get the bus, y'know to go to school and get educated!"

"Tosh! No need for the bus when your Uncle Bob's here to save the day! I'll give you a lift to school!" He sounded thoroughly pleased with this suggestion. I, on the other hand, was absolutely horrified. No way was Uncle Bob going to take me to school. Not a cat in hell's chance of it. You might think I'm mad, turning down a free ride, but when the choice is between a nice, normal bus and a seriously uncool vomit-coloured Robin Reliant, what would you choose?

So I nodded at Uncle Bob, told him I'd wait outside by the car, didn't wait for a reply, and stepped outside. As soon as my feet hit the garden path, I made a run for it. Just seeing the 'Vomit-Comet' parked in the driveway was enough to convince my legs the exercise was worth it.

By this time, it was nearing half past eight, and I was running late. Bloody Uncle Bob. No matter that it was probably my fault (I really should learn how to set my alarm clock); I decided to blame Uncle Bob anyway. And Dad, for letting Uncle Bob into the house. And Mum, for marrying Dad. Anyone but me, basically.

Anyway, I was late for the bus. It had gone by the time I got to the bus stop, and there wasn't one due for another hour. I *could* have swallowed my pride, returned home and given in to Uncle Bob, but I decided to find another bus. I vaguely remembered that the seventy-six ran near my school, and I *thought* that there was a stop for that a few roads away.

So I set off on my merry little way, my schoolbag on my back, trying to find the seventy-six bus stop. I went down a few roads, trying to hurry as it was now coming up to twenty to nine and school started at nine. Every time I let regret slip into my head that I hadn't accepted Uncle Bob's lift, I imagined myself in the back of his

vomit-coloured three-wheeler and sighed in relief that I *hadn't* got a lift with him.

Eventually, I found the seventy-six stop (or what at the time I *thought* was the seventy-six stop!), outside someone's house, up against their fence, half hidden by a randomly-placed monkey-puzzle tree, which I thought was a little odd.

By now, it was five to nine, and I'd resigned myself to the fact that I was going to be late. Mrs Woodhouse was probably going to kill me, the last time I was late she made me write lines: *I must get up at 6.00am every day so I can arrive at school on time.* I hate her so much.

I decided I had no choice but to wait for the seventy-six to arrive, so that is what I did. I waited. And waited. And waited a little bit more. But there was no bus. And there was no timetable attached to the bus stop. By then, I was really starting to panic. Despite what Kaz (my bezzie mate) likes to say, I *do* care about school. And I'd never been this late before. I was going to get in serious trouble when I finally arrived.

I was about to give up, and head home to blag a lift off Dad (Uncle Bob would surely have left by then), when I heard a strange noise coming from the bus stop. It was a sort of whirring noise, like an electric whisk.

At first, I thought that it must be someone mowing their lawn with some new-fangled machine that makes a different noise to normal, but no, the noise definitely came from the bus stop. And then, something even odder happened.

The bus stop (which was one of those old fashioned ones – a stick with a sign on the top) began to spin. Round and round and round, faster and faster, all by itself.

I didn't know what to do – there I was, standing between a monkey-puzzle tree and a spinning bus stop, late for school and waiting for a bus that was never going to arrive – I felt like crying.

And then, almost as soon as it had started, the bus stop stopped spinning and whirring. And this was the moment I began to doubt my sanity. A hole appeared at the base of the bus stop. It was round (as most holes are, of course), and when I looked down it, I could see nothing but swirling purple colours. It was very, very strange.

I looked around to see if anyone else could see what I could – but there was no one there at that time of the morning, everyone was either at work or school (except me!).

So once I'd got over the shock of seeing a spinning bus stop, and a hole randomly appearing from nowhere, I began to wonder if this was some sort of practical joke. Like, maybe Uncle Bob had set the whole thing up and Jeremy Beadle was about to jump out from the hole and congratulate me for being taken for a fool. Well. Someone did jump out of the hole, but it wasn't Jeremy Beadle.

It was an oddly-clothed man. He was dressed in these groovy hippy clothes – all long and floaty, and he had the hippy hair too – long with a beard.

“Woah,” I said, not thinking straight. After all, this man *had* just jumped out of a hole

that had appeared from nowhere in front of a spinning bus stop that was hidden by a monkey puzzle tree.

“Good Morning,” he said, quite pleasantly, as though appearing out of holes was quite a normal occurrence.

“Uh, hi,” I replied, not too sure what was going on, and still slightly convinced that Jeremy Beadle or Noel Edmonds or maybe even Mr. Blobby was going to spring out from behind a bush and yell ‘Gotcha!’

“Are you off to Hogsmeade then?” the man said, smiling at me, “lovely day for it.”

“Hogsmeade?” I said, wondering what on earth he was going on about.

“Yes. That *is* where you want to go isn’t it? One doesn’t usually come to a port-device without knowing a destination. And this is the port-device to take you to Hogsmeade.”

I was getting seriously cranky by now. I was over an hour late for school, Mrs. Woodhouse was almost definitely going to kill me, an odd man had just popped up out of the ground, and now he wanted to know if I was going to *Hogsmeade*, wherever *that* was.

“I just want to go to school,” I moaned, not caring if I sounded like a petulant child.

“Ah, well, you’ll be needing to go to London then. Hogwarts Express leaves from Kings Cross – platform nine and three-quarters. Though, I would have thought you’d know that by now – you certainly don’t look like a first-year to me!” I had no clue what he was on about, “The port-device to London is the telephone box around the corner, in between the bench and the lamp-post.”

“*Who* are you?” I asked the man, completely lost, “I am *so* confused!”

“My name is Dedalus Diggle, and my dear, if confusion is the first step to knowledge, then I’m a genius!”

By this point, I was less and less convinced I was on a hidden camera programme, and more and more convinced that this man had escaped from a mental hospital.

“Are you lost, Mr, er, Diggle?”

“Why no, dear, I’m in the area to visit my good friend, Doris Crockford. We go way back you know – we were friends before You-Know-Who’s first rise to power.”

“I see...” I didn’t see. I didn’t see at all. Hogsmeade? Hogwarts? Platform nine and three-quarters? You-Know-Who? What was this man going on about?

“So where is it exactly you’re off to? I know the area quite well, so I’ll be able to point you in the right direction of a port-device!” He winked at me. Urgh...dirty old man.

“I just want to go to school!” I said, feeling a bout of verbal-diarrhoea coming on. “Is that too much to ask? All I want to do is go to school, learn a bit of maths, a bit of French, do some P.E. Okay, so I’ll get yelled at by Mrs. Woodhouse for being late, and then for not doing my Maths homework! And I’ll probably pass out during P.E. cos’ we’re doing cross-country at the moment and I can’t run! And I *know* I’ll get my verb conjugations wrong in French! But who cares? I. Just. Want. To. Go. To. School!”

I think I’d scared this Mr. Diggle at this point, because he had backed away from me a bit. And his eyes had widened as though he was scared of me. Then he started talking to himself, which convinced me that he was in fact a mental hospital escapee.

“Muggle...school?” he said, slowly, “Learn French? Learn Maths? Oh dear, Dedalus, you’ve been very stupid...you’ll have to get to the Ministry quickly...she’ll need obliterating...yes...”

I was getting impatient by this point, and I really needed to get to school, not spend my day talking about nonsense with a crazy old man (I get enough of that when Mad Uncle Tom comes to stay!), so I mentally made a plan of action. Number one; find out which hospital he’d escaped from, number two; return him to said hospital, and number three; get the bus to school and receive multiple detentions for turning up late. When I had this sorted, I looked up, ready to implicate my fantastic plan, to find that Mr. Diggle had disappeared.

Well, I can tell you, I was utterly annoyed. I’d spent the last thirty seconds of my life coming up with a *brilliant* plan of action for him, and he’d gone and disappeared! How rude!

Anyway, I realised that with Mr. Diggle gone, I could still implement action number three of my plan: going to school. So, I set off down the road, determined to find a bus that would *actually* take me there.

I’d just turned the corner of the road, glad to be away from the strange bus stop that creates random holes in the ground, when suddenly, there was an odd popping noise, like the noise my Dad can make by putting his finger in his cheek and pulling it out again. Which, incidentally, he really likes doing for some reason – at the family reunion last year he thought it would be fun to have a cheek-popping competition with his band (who are bizarrely called ‘Bodlave’; because, apparently, this is a mixture of all the members’ names: My Uncle Bob, Uncle Rodney, Uncle Lesley and my Dad, Dave. Mad, I know, but that’s my family for you!). But that’s beside the point. There was this strange popping noise from behind me, and I, being a nosy-parker, turned to see what it was.

It was that Diggle man again, along with another mad-hippy-mental-hospital-escapee, who had balding red hair, and horn-rimmed glasses, and was pointing a long wooden stick at me.

Now, I was terrified. When two madmen appear out of nowhere, wearing crazy hippy clothes and pointing sticks at you – what other option do you have, other than to be

frightened to death?

“There she is Arthur!” Diggle said, pointing at me, “I tell you, I’m glad I ran into you in the atrium – I hadn’t been looking forward to telling the obliviators what I’d done!”

The red haired man didn’t stop pointing his stick at me, but answered Diggle anyway. I didn’t know what to do. Should I run? Should I stay put? Or should I karate-chop the red-haired man and knee Diggle in the goolies? So many possibilities, so little time to think.

“No harm done Dedalus, though you really shouldn’t go out without your wand you know, if you’d had it with you, you could have obliterated her yourself.”

I was panicking by that point. Not only was I not in school (where I should have been learning how to peel an apple in food tech), but there were two madmen pointing sticks at me, and no one around to whom I could call for help.

“Stop pointing your stick at me!” I yelled suddenly, scared that the stick was actually a gun or something in disguise. Okay, looking back, it couldn’t have been a gun because it was too thin, but I was flustered at the time.

The red-haired man looked at me oddly, then smiled a strange sort of smile.

“It’s all right, I won’t hurt you,” he said.

“Then why are you pointing a stick at me?” I moaned, sounding wimpy.

He didn’t answer straight away, but when he did, I wished he hadn’t.

“Before I oblivate you,” he said, and I didn’t like the sound of ‘oblivate you’, so I poised myself ready to run away, “I want to ask you something,” he paused, “how does an aeroplane stay up in the sky? I’m very interested. They look so heavy!”

As you can probably imagine, I was very, very bewildered. Then, a stroke of inspiration hit me! I could hear an aeroplane humming above us, and the man had said he liked aeroplanes – that was a plan I could work with!

“Look!” I suddenly exclaimed, “there’s an aeroplane right there!” and I pointed up into the sky. Predictably, both men looked up, and I took this as my chance.

I ran, ran like I’d never run before, ran as fast as my little legs would carry me. Heck, I could have given Mr Motivator a run for his money!

I didn’t stop to see if Diggle and Red-Head were following me, I just scarpered. Running down Boxwood Avenue, I could hear distant yells and pounding feet. They sounded quite far away, but I was getting tired, and wasn’t running as fast. In fact, it was more like jogging. Or maybe even walking.

So I decided I needed somewhere to hide. And wouldn’t you know it? Boxwood Avenue is one of those roads that has houses with no front gardens. So nowhere to

hide. There was no phone box, no bushes to hide behind, nothing at all.

Except a grit-bin.

A big, yellow, garish grit-bin was the only place to hide. Thank God that it's not winter, and there wasn't any grit in it! So, in I climbed, into the grit bin, and closed the lid on top of me.

And I've been here for two hours. I'm too scared to look out and see if Diggle and Red-Head are still there.

I'm not too sure what to do now actually... Oh My God! What if I have to live in here forever? What if I have to stay inside this grit-bin, only getting out in the dead of night, relying on leftover kebabs the footie-fans have dropped on their way home from the pub? People will call me Becky the Grit-Bin Lady, and I'll be feared by all the little kids in the neighbourhood. I'll never be able to return home; for fear of running into Diggle and Red-Head... I'll never see my parents again! Hold on, that's not a bad thought! Actually... living in the grit-bin and becoming Becky the Grit-Bin Lady's not looking like such a bad idea now. And hey! If I stay here, I'll never have to see Uncle Bob again! Never be ridiculed about my flat-chest by Rizzo! *Never have to witness one of Kenickie's streaking episodes again!*

Now that is an appealing proposal. In fact, I might be seriously considering it, if I didn't have cramp in my left arm. And if I could feel my feet. And if my school bag wasn't digging into my bum.

No... becoming Becky the Grit-Bin Lady might not be such a good idea. After all... who would Mrs. Woodhouse shout at for not doing the Maths homework if I stayed here? Who would listen to Kaz moan about how Fit Lad from Year 12 doesn't give her a second glance? Who, heaven forbid, would confiscate Dad's Dexy's Midnight Runners CD, if I were to eke out the rest of my days in the grit-bin?

No, it would be better for the world if I got out of the grit-bin. I'm going to take a peek now, to see if Diggle and Red-Head are still there. If they're not, I'm going to make a dash for home – I don't care about school now, it's almost half three anyway.

I just looked, there's no one out there. It's safe to go, the coast is clear and all that jazz. I'll go now then. I'm going to miss my grit-bin when I get out. It's been my sanctuary for the last two hours, the place of refuge I ran to when all hope was lost.

Thinking about it, maybe today hasn't been all that bad. Okay, when I first got into the grit-bin, Monday the thirteenth of June topped the list as the worst day ever, but now I've had time to contemplate, to pontificate and to ponder, maybe it's not all that bad.

Okay, so I didn't get my co-co pops this morning, and I had a run-in with Uncle Bob. Never mind that I missed the school bus, and came across a strange spinning bus-stop. Forget about the fact that I met a madman who completely befuddled me, and another one who pointed at me with a stick. I survived the ordeal and hid in a grit-bin, and if there's any other person who can say that, then I'll eat my (very stylish Topshop) hat.

Maybe I'll come back one day, with my children, and say 'That's where Mummy hid from the madmen who escaped from the mental hospital' and then my children will say 'wow Mummy, you were really brave to hide in a grit-bin'.

Yep. Today's been a good day.

**A/N: This fic was originally written in response to the 'Telephone Box and a Bus Stop' challenge from the HPFF forums, where a Muggle had to encounter an everyday item with magical properties.**