

Manky's Story by Elizabeth Cordiner

Manky hid ahent the bushes.

He tried tae mak himself sma, but he kent that his taes were stickin oot.

The big dug wis still barkin, an if it saw him or smelt him, weel, Manky kent whit wid happen. There'd be nae use runnin awa, fur Mingins dinnae run fast, an dugs dae. An he wis tired, sae tired. He'd been on his ain fur a lang time noo. It seemed like he wis eyeweys on his ain.

He thocht back tae whit had happened tae him, an he could hardly believe it.

It had a' sterted when the Mingins had got taken by the Fairy Polis. The Fairy Coort had been merciless. The Mingins had expected tae go tae jile again fur attempted fairynappin, but they had been sentenced tae banishment, banishment tae a country far far awa whaur they wid hae tae work a' day.

Manky had been bundled wi a' the ither Mingins intae the Polis van. Chief Mawkit wis bilin wi rage an spit wis comin oot o his mooth.

'Ah'll be comin back, an they'll a' get it. Ah'll see tae that.'

'Aye, sur.'

Captain Glaur's een glittered.

'An ah'll help ye. We'll be back.'

The Mingins a' began tae sway, an tae chant thegither,

'We'll be back wan day. We'll be back. We'll be back... We'll be back wan day. We'll be back.'

But Manky had been silent.

The ither Mingins had talked then aboot hoo they didnae deserve banishment an hoo important they were, an the wee fairies werenae, an hoo human beins werenae worth a snail's poo.

But Manky wis beginning tae think that they did deserve it, an that a'body deserved tae live withoot fear

Even he did.

An he had been eyeweys scared, scared o Captain Glaur, scared o Chief Mawakit, scared o Mucky an a' the rest. He wis tired o bein scared. Tired o bein laughed at. An tired o bein a Mingin.

Efter a while the rest o the Mingins had fallen asleep. They were goin through a wid, an the van had bumped ower a big stane an stopped. The driver got up tae check on the Mingins, but the back door had flown open an Manky saw the world outside, the green gress, the trees, an the blue sky.

Suddenly he knew whit tae dae. He slipped oot afore the driver got roond tae the door.

He wis free.

He couldnae believe it. He wis gettin a second chance. He wis free tae be himsel, an free fae the Mingins.

But he *wis* a Mingin. Hoo wid he ever be free fae bein a Mingin?

He didnae ken, but he kent that he wid try.

That had been days ago - an noo, as he shivered under the hedge, it felt like ages since he had escaped. He'd looked fur anither underground hame, but they were a' fu o rabbits or moles or badgers an scary animals wi big teeth. He'd been sleepin whaur he could, but keepin awa fae humans. They were trouble fur him an he didnae trust them.

An he wis hungry, lookin fur rotten auld food whaur he could find it. His belly rumbled.

At last the big dug padded awa, an Manky stood up. There wis a puddle on the grund, an Manky could see himself reflected in it. His heid wis bent, his body soaked an scratched, an there were leaves stuck tae his taenails.

He looked beaten. He looked as if naebody loved him, an naebody did. Maybe he shid jist curl up an dee.

'Hey! Look at that! Whit's that?' There were twa humans shoutin an pintin at him. Danger. He froze wi fear. Whit wid he dae? Nae Captain Glaur tae tell him.

'Look at its taes, Ellie.'

The boy speakin wis haudin the haund o a sma'er human bein, an he stretched oot his free haund tae Manky.

'Here, here. Come oan. Ah'll no hurt ye.'

Manky bolted fur the hedge again. But the boy an girl followed him. Manky peeped through.

The boy had black hair, black as a raven's wing, an the girl had yellae hair, yellae like a dandelion.

The boy wis showin him somethin on his palm, some wee broon things.

'Are ye hungry? Tak some.'

Manky wis hungry. Awfy hungry. But whit were thae things? They didnae smell hoo he liked food, rotten an dirty.

'A wee bit choclit?'said the boy.

Manky made a decision. He took a risk. This wis a new life. He stretched oot his lang fingers, an took wan oot o the boy's palm.

'Look, Romesh,' said the girl, 'He's eatin wan.'

It wis sae strange on his tongue, a' clean. He sooked it. He swallied it. He burped. Then he licked his fingers an stretched oot his fingers again.

Romesh bent doon an looked intae Manky's een.

'Whaur dae ye live? Ye dinnae look awfy weel. Dae ye ken there's a beetle livin atween yer taes?'

Manky looked at him wi dull een. He wis dun, nae energy left. If thae human beins were goin tae hurt him, too bad. He had nae fecht left in him. A big rid tear ran doon his face.

'Oh, Romesh,' said the girl, 'He's greetin. Tak him hame wi us. Tae the Hoose.'

Romesh took Manky's haund, an Ellie the ither, an the Mingin waddled awa wi them. Tae the Hoose.

When they got tae the Hoose, Manky's een grew large. It wis a big building, an the gairden wis fu o bairns. Wis this a schule? He kent whit a schule wis. There were boys an girls runnin, skippin, on swings, playin hide an seek. Sae mony human beins in wan place. An a lot o them the same size as him.

'Keep wi us,' said Romesh, 'We'll go roond the back tae the shed.'

But wan boy, a redheided boy, had seen them them. He stood fur a minute as if struck by lichtnin. Then he left the ithers an followed Romesh, Ellie an Manky as they went roond tae the shed.

Ellie saw him first. She pinte a wee fat finger.

'It's Charlie,' she said.

Romesh pit his finger tae his lips an his een were earnest.

'Ssh, Charlie. We'll no tell onybody aboot this. We fund him an we've tae look efter him whitever he is.'

He stopped then an looked at Manky.

'Whit are ye then?

Manky couldnae, widnae speak. Hoo could he tell him?

'It's ok. Romesh wis gentle, 'Ye dinnae need tae tell me. Jist tell us yer name.'

'Manky.'

'Manky? That's a great name. Right, Mankyboy, see if ye like the shed.'

The shed wis a widden hut set awa fae the building an next tae a plot o land wi vegetables an green plants. The three went intae the shed wi Manky an Manky looked roond. There were flooers in pots, spades covered in dirt, forks fur digging up neeps an tatties, an rakes fur smoothin doon the earth.

He liked this place. He liked the smell o it. There were sacks in the corner an Ramesh pinted tae them.

‘Ye can sleep there,’ he said, ‘an we’ll bring ye watter an food. Jist dinnae go oot.’

‘Ah’ll get ye watter,’ said Charlie eagerly, ‘Dae ye like it sparklin or still?’

Manky liked it fae a puddle. But this wis human bein land an it wis sae different.

‘Ah dinnae ken,’ he said, an a tear rolled oot.

A’ right,’ said Charlie, ‘It’s a’ right.’

He raised his haund.

‘Gie me five,’ an Manky shrank awa. Chief Mawkit an Captain Glaur had raised their haunds afore hittin him.

‘Ah’m no gaunt ae hit ye, said Charlie, distressed, ‘Ah widnae dae that. Ever.’ An his blue een flashed. ‘That happened tae me afore ah cam tae the Hoose, but ah’m ok here. An you will be anaw. Jist trust me.’

Trust him? Manky searched his hert an fund that he did. He trusted him.

Efter they left, he lay doon on the sacks an fur the first time since he’d escaped, he slept weel. When he awoke, the shed wis nice an dark an he wis cosy. A bottle o watter an a saucer o thae choclit things wis on

the flair. He drank an ate an then he licked his fingers. Tasted like squashed – up flees. No quite as guid though.

He explored the shed. There wis a big green thing wi teeth an a bucket an a cord that wis a' rolled up. There wis a widden thing wi steps a' the wey up tae the tap so ye could climb up. There were tins wi colours on the lids, rid an yellae an blue. There were big scissors – he'd seen them afore, a' rusty an thrown oot, in the midden. He liked the widden wa's an the earthy grund.

He felt –whit wis the word? Safe.

He felt safe.

Romesh, Ellie an Charlie had settled doon as weel, lookin efter Manky every day, keepin him safe.

'Dae ye think he'll stey wi us?' asked Charlie.

'We dinnae ken whit he is or whaur he's been. He wis awfy scared though.' Ramesh pursed his lips, 'Maybe scared o goin back.'

They were silent then, thinkin o whit Manky micht be scared.

Then Ellie, the youngest o them, said in her wee saft voice, 'He'll tell us some time. But till then we shid jist be his pals.

An they a' agreed.

Time passed, an Manky steyed in the shed maist days. Wance a week, if thegairdener wanted in, Ellie wid get Manky oot, an he wid stey in her wee pink room till the danger wis ower.

‘Ssh,’ she wid say, but he kent no tae mak a noise, ‘Dinnae go oot noo.’

He wid curl up in the corner o the room an coont his fingers. Ellie had telt him hoot ae dae it an he never got tired o daein it richt.

‘Wan twa three fower,’ he wid stert, an when he’d feenished, he’d go on tae his taes.

Sometimes Ellie wid leave him some sweeties or buttons tae coont.

He felt sae prood o himself. Noo he could coont, whit else could he dae?

There were books there wi picters in them, an Ellie wid tell him the stories. She ca’ed it readin. Maybe wan day he could learn that tae.

Still, he liked tae be back in the shed. It felt like his place, his ain place. He began tae enjoy a lot o’ whit the three pals brought him, even though it wis fresh an clean. He still liked a guid drink o puddle watter though, an sneaked oot at nicht tae get some, an tae look at the moon high abune the building. Maist days he wid watch whit the bairns were daein through the peephole in the shed. They played funny games an ran about a lot. They were sae fast.

Manky looked at his lang taes an roond body an kent he wid never keep up. But did he want tae? Did he want tae jine in? He wisnae shair.

But somethin inside him wis changin. An as he watched, questions rose in him. Wha wis Chief amang them? Wha wis Captain?

There wis naebody.

Naebody bossin the ithers aboot. Hoo could this be?

He asked Charlie. Charlie shrugged his shooders.

‘We jist try tae get on thegither. We’re no perfect,’ said Charlie, ‘We mak mistakes. Sometimes we fecht. But we mak up again, say “sorry”, an shake haunds.’

Sorry? Whit wis sorry? Wis sorry whit he hud been feelin aboot bein a Mingin?

Wan day Manky heard them a’ shoutin. He could see through the peephole whit it wis. There wis a fecht goin on. Twa boys were hittin wan anither, an wan sterted tae greet.

Manky leapt oot.

‘No! No! Ye’ve no tae dae that,’ he said, ‘It disnae work. Ah’ve been hit afore an ah ken. Ye’ve tae say “sorry” an shake haunds.’

They scattered at wance an stood, mooths open, starin at Manky. But Romesh, Ellie an Charlie were soon there, an stood beside him.

Ramesh’s gaze wis steady.

‘That’s it noo,’ he said, ‘The time fur hidin is ower. They’ll tell oor Hoosemither, Miss Valentine. It’s time fur you tae come oot.’

They took him intae the Hoose whaur Miss Valentine stood wi kids a’ roond her, pintin an haudin ontae her. Manky looked up at heran his body sterted tae shake. She seemed sae tall, an her look wis serious.

'Ah've heard whit you did,' said Miss Valentine, 'So we'll sit doon an ye'll tell me a' aboot yersel fur ah've never met onywan like you afore.'

So Manky did.

He telt her his hale lang story richt fae the beginnin'. An the children listened in silence.

At the end o it, Miss Valentine took his haund wi its lang fingers intae hers.

'This is yer hame noo,' she said softly, 'Sometimes when children come tae us they're hurt inside an sometimes they want tae fight. We have tae teach them a different wey. An you could help. Wid ye like that?'

Wid he like that? Tae stey wi his pals? An tae help the new wans?

Aye. He wid.

He wid like it awfy awfy much. Mankyboy. They ca'ed him Mankyboy. Maybe that wis whit he wis. Part Mingin an part boy.

He realised that that wis jist fine.