Chapter 56

TITCH STITCH

"NOOOO!" screamed Dotty from the stern of HMS *Victory*. "TITCH!"

"Titch! No! Have you been hit?" asked Elsie.

"No. I've just got a stitch," he replied. Then in his most heroic tone he announced, "I'm not going to make it. You go on without me. Leave me here on the ice to die."

"*Die?* Titch! You've only got a stitch!"

"It's a bad one. A really bad one. But promise me one thing, young Elsie?"

"What, Titch?"

"Tell Dotty that... **I LOVE HER**. Urgh!" He clutched himself again.

Elsie shook her head. She might be the child here, but so often she felt more grown up than the grown-ups.

"You tell her, Titch!" said the girl, hooking her arm under his.

"What's happened to my darling?" called out Dotty from the ship.

"Titch has a stitch!" replied Elsie. Then the girl turned her attention back to the private. "Now stop being silly, Titch. Stitch or no stitch, we're all getting on that ship."

"I'll do my best, young miss."

The wind billowed the sails, and the ship's hull began creaking in the ice.

CRUNCH!

A huge ramp was lowered from HMS *Victory*, landing on the ice with a BOSH!

"WOOLLY FIRST!" shouted Elsie as she gathered the handful of pensioners to get behind the animal and push her up the ramp by her bottom.

As the boat rocked in the breaking ice, the ramp wobbled from side to side.

"**HOOO!**" hooted the mammoth.

"Nearly there, my friend!" called out Elsie, as she used all her might to make the final push over into the ship.

THUMP!

The wooden deck buckled a little under the mammoth's weight.

"HOOO!"

"HURRAH!" cried all on board, overjoyed that their large, hairy friend had made it.

Above HMS *Victory*, the Zeppelin was flying low.

"NOW I'VE GOT YOU, **ICE MONSTER**!" came a cry from the gondola.

RAT! TAT! TAT! TAT! TAT! TAT!

All the old soldiers hit the deck as HMS *Victory* was riddled with bullets.

POW! POW! POW!

"I'VE BEEN HIT!" yelled the admiral.

Dotty rushed over to him.

"Where?"

"MY LEG!"

"Which one?"

"The wooden one."

Indeed, there was a bullet lodged in there.

"Is it bleeding?" asked Dotty.

"Yes. Very badly."

"I can't see any blood!"

"No, it's just sawdust."

"Are you feeling any pain?"

"None at all. But I'm not going to let that blasted woman get away with this!"

Chapter 57

REVENGE

With its sails in full bloom, HMS *Victory* began forcing its way through the ice.

A cold and wet Elsie looked over the stern of the ship to see who was still following. In the distance, she could see something shaped like a sail speeding along the ice, overtaking the policemen. As it came closer, she realised the sail was multicoloured. It was, in fact, the balloon they had made of handkerchiefs (and one pair of bloomers).

"What...?" she muttered to herself.

It was only when the balloon got closer that she spotted the professor underneath it! He had attached the sail to his wheelchair, and was using the power of the wind to drag himself along.

"YOU CAN'T PUT A GREAT MAN DOWN!"

he called out. With one hand, he was steering the sail. In the other, he was holding the dart gun.

"I HAVE COME TO TAKE MY MONSTER BACK!

THIS IS REVENGE!"

"Oh no!" said Dotty. "This never ends!" she called out to the admiral. "Faster! Faster!"

"It's the ice!" the man called back. "It's so thick we can't go any faster!"

"LOOK!" She pointed to the professor.

"Maybe we can kill two birds with one stone," replied the admiral, setting a course straight for the newly built Tower Bridge.

Looking across to the riverbanks, Elsie noticed that London had woken up, and crowds were beginning to line the banks of the Thames. Much to her surprise, Londoners began clapping and cheering. They were clearly delighted to see this magnificent beast, the mammoth, brought back to life. And aboard Nelson's old warship no less.

"HURRAH!"

But there was a big problem. HMS *Victory*'s masts were too tall to fit under the bridge.

"We're not going to make it, Admiral!" called out Titch from the bow of the ship.

"We need to get that bridge open!" the admiral called back.

Elsie spotted a group of a dozen children loitering on the bridge. The unmistakable figures of the **Sticky Fingers Gang**.

"ELSIE!" they shouted on seeing her.

"OPEN THE BRIDGE!" she shouted back. "UP! UP!"

Immediately, the gang began scaling the bridge to find the control room.

The Zeppelin was now just behind the ship, and gaining on them. Fast.

CLUNK! W H I R R !

Also gaining was the professor, who fired a poisoned dart.

PING!

It lodged into Buckshot's pith helmet.

"LOOK WHERE YOU'RE SHOOTING, YOU RUDDY FOOL, OR I'LL BLAST YOU TO SMITHEREENS!" she cried.

"THEN GET THAT PREPOSTEROUS CONTRAPTION OUT OF MY WAY!"

The professor fired again. This time the dart struck the Zeppelin's huge envelope of gas.

PPPFFFFFT!

There was a loud farting noise as air began escaping.

In a fury, Buckshot trained her machine gun on the professor.

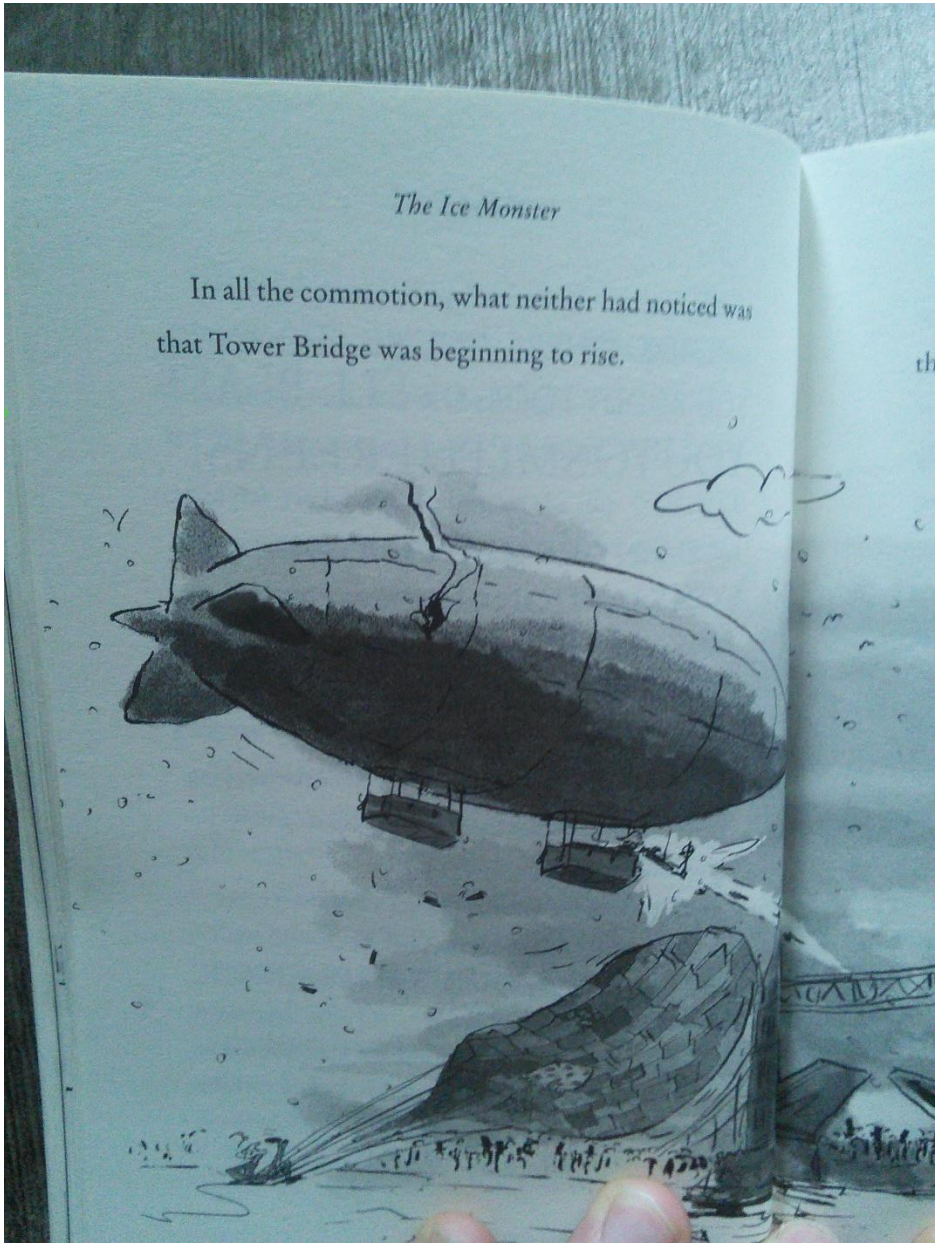
RAT! TAT! TAT! TAT! TAT! TAT!!

"MISSED!" called out the professor.

"CHECK YOUR WHEELCHAIR, YOU OLD FOOL!"

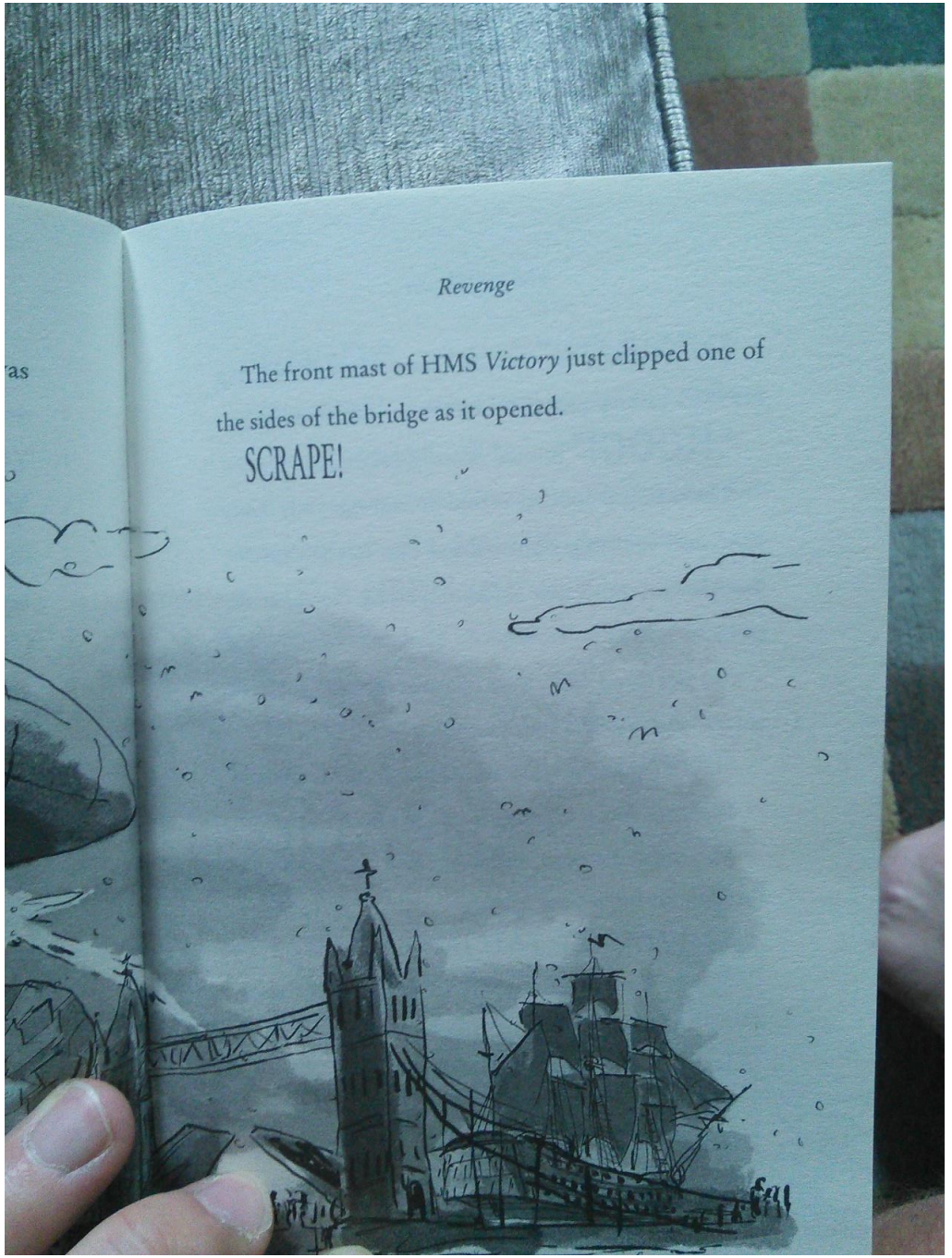
He looked down. Indeed, she had blasted it out of existence. The professor was now skidding across the ice on his bottom.

In all the commotion, what neither had noticed was that Tower Bridge was beginning to rise.



The front mast of HMS *Victory* just clipped one of the sides of the bridge as it opened.

SCRAPE!



"HURRAH!" shouted the soldiers on the ship as HMS *Victory* passed under the magnificent bridge.

"HOOO!" hooted Woolly, joining in.

The admiral looked round to see not only Lady Buckshot looming right behind him in the Zeppelin, but also the professor skimming along the ice at the stern.

"Order those scallywags to lower the bridge. Quick smart!" ordered the admiral.

"DOWN! DOWN!" shouted the girl to her friends.

Right on cue, the bridge began to lower.

The machine gun blasted, once again ripping through the hull of the *Victory*.

RAT! TAT! TAT! TAT! TAT! TAT!

At the bottom of the Zeppelin, Lady Buckshot hollered her instructions to the pilot. "UP! UP!"

"Darn!" said the admiral. "She's not going to fall for it!"

A tethering cable was dangling down from the airship. Using her trunk, Woolly grabbed hold of the end.

"HOOO!"

"WOOLLY?" exclaimed Elsie in delight. This was one smart mammoth.

As the engines of the Zeppelin roared, the mammoth used all her strength to pull the flying machine down.

"HELP HER!" called out Elsie, and the old soldiers rushed to hold on to Woolly to stop her being pulled into the air.

"NOOO!" screamed Lady Buckshot, as the Zeppelin crashed straight into the bridge.

SMASH!

The envelope full of gas exploded in the air.

KABOOM!

"ARGH!" she cried as her gondola plunged right on to the professor, sending them both down into the icy waters of the Thames.

GURGLE! GURGLE! GURGLE!

PLOP! PLOP! PLOP!

GLUG! GLUG! GLUG!

"HURRAH!" shouted everyone on board the *Victory*.

"HOOO!" hooted Woolly.

The **Sticky Fingers Gang** all waved goodbye to Flo.

"GOOD LUCK!" they shouted.

"THANK YOU!" she called back. "WE'LL NEED IT!"

The admiral addressed his crew. "Now, men, set sail for the North Pole!"