



TRISHA LEE

Trisha grew up in Dursley, Gloucestershire where she was constantly getting into trouble for fidgeting and making up stories. These attributes served her well and she ended up with a theatre degree from Dartington College of Arts. Spending several years on the cabaret circuit, she regularly supported John Cooper Clarke and Merseyside poet Adrian Henry. Passionate about creative education, Trisha wrote *Princesses, Dragons and Helicopter Stories*, about an approach to storytelling that she pioneered in the UK. The book is a bestseller and was shortlisted for the UKLA Academic Book of the Year 2016. She has worked with children all over the world, and their voices inspired her to write *The Story Tap*.

About The Story Tap

Amelia Appleby lives her life through fantasy, just like her storytelling dad. But he's dead, squashed by an enormous book of bedtime stories.

To keep her safe, Mum enrolls Amelia at the Shaw Academy of Hard Facts, a school where fiction is banned and facts make you dizzy. Amelia hasn't been there long when she discovers the dreadful Story Tap and begins to unravel the truth behind the immaculately behaved children in their grey uniforms.

Caught in a dangerous adventure, Amelia has only the power of story, but is that enough to save everyone when time is running out?

trishalee@me.com

@TrishaLeeWrites

THE STORY TAP

Chapter One

Squashed

It started with a book.

Bertie Braithwaite's Gargantuan Book of Bedtime Stories.

Probably the largest book in the whole wide world, which unfortunately for Abraham Appleby, hadn't been put away properly on the library shelf.

The following morning, the tragic accident was on the front page of every newspaper in the country.

STORYTELLER SQUASHED

There were other stories beneath it, including:

Triplee Triplets Still Missing

And

Chance Chocolate Announces New Brand

But all Amelia Appleby cared about was the headline.

Her dad was dead.

Chapter Two

The Grey Envelope

‘Die, Die, Die!’ yelled Amelia Appleby, balancing on the branch of a tree, and thrusting her broomstick sword into the heart of an imaginary goblin. She tried not to think about Dad. It had been four long weeks since the funeral, and everyone kept saying things would soon be back to normal.

They weren’t.

They’d never be normal again.

Pushing the thought from her mind, Amelia readied herself to launch into a daring jump through the air, followed by a blood-curdling scream that would protect the council estate from ogres, when the postman walked down the street. He stopped outside her front door and reached into his bag just as a cloud moved in front of the sun.

The sky darkened.

Amelia shivered. Supposing it was another sympathy card and Mum started crying again?

The postman took out a square grey envelope. It didn’t look like a sympathy card. But what was it?

‘I’ve never seen a grey envelope before,’ said Amelia plonking herself down on the branch and dangling her legs over the edge. ‘If brown envelopes contain bills and white envelopes contain sympathy cards, what do grey ones contain?’

‘Change,’ said the postman looking up at her. ‘Always change.’ Without saying another word, he popped the envelope through her letterbox and walked away.

Amelia scrambled up the tree, watching him until he disappeared and wondering what he meant.

She was the image of her father: a splatter of freckles and a tangle of wild red hair that even Mum couldn’t control, no matter how many hair ties she used. Higher and higher Amelia rose, no longer a girl climbing a tree but an explorer hiking into the unknown.

Later, she returned to the ground and flew on her broomstick across the small patch of grass in front of her house chased by a tribe of goblins.

Amelia was about to release a spell from her fingertips when Mum glanced out through the net curtains.

‘In,’ she shouted a few seconds later, holding the door open just wide enough for Amelia to squeeze through. ‘I said, No Stories.’

Mum was still in her dressing gown. Her hair hung limply around her face like faded brown string that had been left too long in the rain. Flecks of sadness flickered across her eyes and these days she was either angry or tearful.

Amelia slipped past her and into the front room without looking up. ‘There’s a letter for you,’ she said, grateful for the distraction.

The envelope lay on the mat, begging to be rescued. It was a perfect square of grey paper, with the address printed in white. Amelia pushed a stray clump of red hair behind her ear and reached down to pick it up.

‘Don’t touch it!’ yelled Mum, grabbing hold of Amelia’s hand and staring at the grey envelope as if it were a snake. ‘I’m not ready to open it.’

Amelia had no idea what she was talking about. How could you not be ready to open an envelope?

‘Is it from the bank?’ she asked.

‘No.’

‘Is it from the doctor?’

‘No.’

‘Is it from Dad’s sister, Mad Aunt Edith?’

‘No.’

‘That’s a shame, I like her. We make up stories together. Oops.’ Amelia bit her lip. The last thing she needed was to make Mum even crosser. ‘What I meant to say is, we used to make up stories together, but not any more. Anyway, she lives too far away. If it’s not from Mad Aunt Edith, then who sent it?’

‘Amelia, leave it. I don’t want to read it. Not yet. It’s for the best.’

Mum had been saying that a lot recently.

A few days after the funeral, she’d locked all Dad’s stories in a wooden chest and moved them to the attic. Then she’d locked the boxroom where he used to write. She put both keys on a chain around her neck and told Amelia that she must never them.

‘It’s for the best,’ she said.

Next, she’d made Amelia promise that she would stop making up stories.

Not in the house,

not in the garden,

not in the street.

NEVER.

Not even a miniature, one-sentence story that accidentally slipped out when Amelia didn't expect it. Certainly not. No way.

'Definitely for the best.'

And a little while after that, she took all of Amelia's storybooks and gave them to a charity shop.

'It really is for the best.'

Ever since Dad died, Mum had invented her own meaning for the word best.

The letter stayed on the mat.

It was still there the next morning, and the next evening and at breakfast the next day.

School time, home time, meal time, bedtime, every time Amelia walked past the front door, the letter was still there. Others came and went, but this one stayed where it fell.

'Are you ready to open it now?' Amelia asked on her way out the door each morning.

'Mum, it's still here,' she said on her way in.

The longer the letter lay on the mat, the more it played on Amelia's mind. Perhaps it was from a long-lost relative, inviting her and Mum to fly to America and audition for a part in a film. Or supposing it was from a zoo who couldn't look after their animals and needed to find them new homes. Or, maybe they'd won a million pounds, and they could spend it on whatever they liked.

After one week and two days, Amelia's imagination could bear it no longer. She'd already pictured herself agreeing to star in a Hollywood movie, and adopting a penguin and buying a castle by the sea.

She had to know who the letter was from.

Arriving home from school, Amelia lingered by the front door gathering

her courage. Taking a deep breath, she picked up the grey envelope, tore it open and thrust it into Mum's hand.

There was a long pause.

Gulp.

Amelia tried to make light of it.

'It might be good news. Maybe it's a map that will lead us to buried treasure, or a letter from the Queen inviting us to tea.'

Mum's face changed as quickly as the sky in spring.

'Stop. Making. Up. Stories. You promised.'

If only Amelia could magic herself back in time, place herself under a speaking curse and hand over the letter without saying a word. If only Mum hadn't made her promise. Amelia hated breaking promises, but it wasn't her fault. She never should have made that promise in the first place. How could the daughter of a storyteller ever stop making up stories?

And now Mum was unfolding the strange grey letter, the letter Amelia had been so curious about, but rather than feeling excited, she was standing in a cloud of dread. This was going to end badly.

Mum's left eye twitched.

Amelia crossed her fingers, just like Dad used to, and sucked on a strand of red hair that had escaped from one of her plaits.

Mum read. *Amelia waited.*

Reading. *Waiting.*

Reading. *Waiting.*

Finally, Mum folded the letter, pressed down on each seam and placed it back in the envelope.

'We need to talk,' she said. Amelia hated those words. 'I should have opened this sooner. I was hoping it would go away. The people who sent it approached me at the funeral. I knew your dad wouldn't approve, but I was upset. It seemed like a good idea. We have to go through with it. I signed a contract.'

'Contract?' What was Mum talking about? The dread swirled around Amelia, turning her mouth dry.

'You're starting a new school.'

'What?' Amelia spat the hair out of her mouth, wishing she'd left the envelope where she'd found it. 'I don't need a new school. I like the one I've got.'

Mum's cheeks turned red, and she avoided Amelia's eyes. 'A school without stories,' she mumbled.

'No! You wouldn't do that to me. You couldn't. What would Dad say?'

Dad wouldn't say anything.

Dad would never say anything again. The realisation rushed into Amelia and smashed around her skull making her dizzy.

'Since Abraham. Since your dad.' Mum hesitated, and the dark silence, the one that always arrived with any mention of Dad, tapped gently at the door. 'Since. Then. I have tried to stop you imitating him. But every day. Every made-up story. Every time you look at me out of those same forget-me-not eyes. Amelia, you're becoming more like him than ever. You even sound like him. I can't let that happen. I can't lose you as well. Your father was becoming fanatical.'

Mum stopped talking, and the silence crept closer.

She was right. Dad had been acting weird in the weeks before his death. Even Amelia had noticed it. He'd seemed distracted and was constantly searching his storybooks and muttering to himself.

'Stories are dangerous,' continued Mum. 'They killed him.'

'A book killed him.'

'A storybook. There's a meeting at the school on Friday. I'll take the day off work. It'll make everything better.'

'No, it won't,' said Amelia. 'How can a school make everything better? I wish Dad were here. He wouldn't let me go to a school where there were no stories. If I were upset, he would tell me a story, not run away from them like you're doing. You're jealous. You never liked how close we were. You never loved stories like we did. Just cos you can't tell them as well as him.'

As soon as the words flew out of her mouth, Amelia wished she could swallow them back.

Mum's eyes narrowed into tiny slits. Her neck went red and bumpy.

'You know how hard it's been,' she said. Her voice croaked with tears. It would have been easier if she'd shouted.

'Please don't do this,' said Amelia. 'I won't make up stories again. I promise.'

Mum shook her head.

'You're going to a new school, and that's the end of it. It's for the best.'

Chapter Three
In Times of Need

Amelia paced up and down the front room, arms crossed, teeth grinding. Mum had no right to send her to a new school. Not now, not with everything that had happened. It wasn't fair.

If only Dad were alive.

He'd know what to do.

All Amelia wanted was to sit in the boxroom where he used to write, curl up in his chair and pretend things were back to normal. She hadn't told Mum she had a key. *It was for the best.* Dad had given it to her when she was pretending to be a princess locked in a tower and he'd never asked for it back.

Maybe now was the time to use it.

Amelia waited for the sound of pans clattering in the kitchen before tiptoeing down the hall. She padded softly up the stairs stretching her legs to cover two steps at a time.

Racing across the corridor, she stepped over the creaky floorboard in front of her bedroom and stopped outside the boxroom. Without making a sound, Amelia eased up the hall carpet pulling it away from the wall. The key was still underneath, exactly where she'd left it.

Pushing the carpet back into place, she put the key in the lock, turned the handle, opened the door and froze.

Mum had been busy since Amelia had seen it last.

The heart of the room had been stolen.

The shelves were empty. Dad's writing desk had been cleared, his stories locked in the attic and the air was thick with the scent of furniture polish mixed with a hint of ancient books that even Mum couldn't scrub from the walls.

The curtains were shut as if they were hiding a secret and light fought its way through them sending grains of sunshine flickering across Dad's empty chair. Amelia stroked her hand across it. She slid herself down into the brown leather seat and let the arms enclose her.

Brushing against the surface of the desk, she felt for the occasional scratch

where Dad had pressed too hard when he was writing and traced her finger around the lonely circle that had been left by his coffee cup.

She'd been circling the stain for a while when something caught her eye. A white triangle of card trapped between the desk and the wall.

Once Amelia noticed it, she couldn't work out why she hadn't seen it before, why Mum hadn't seen it when she was cleaning.

Her hand shook. It was something of Dad's. Something that Mum hadn't cleared.

Glancing at the door, just to make sure Mum didn't burst in, Amelia turned her attention back to the card. Her fingers tightened around it.

GRADUALLY,

CAREFULLY,

SHE WRIGGLED IT FREE.

It was an oblong shape, the type Dad used when he wrote the bare bones of a story. His Thinking Pages. Amelia teased the last bit of it from behind the desk.

It was blank.

She crossed her fingers just like Dad did when he was acting brave, hoping there was something written on the other side.

Hardly able to breathe, she flipped it over.

The back was covered in writing. Amelia recognised it immediately. It was the handwritten sign that used to hang above Dad's desk. The one he kept to remind him; his motto.

She closed her eyes, and in her head, she could hear Dad's voice.

He was reading it out loud to her.

IN TIMES OF NEED:

***Choose the path where you least want to tread,
For a world of adventure exists within dread.***