

Billy

by David K Shute

“Hey look, over there!” exclaimed Billy, pointing in the direction of Egg Rock. At the same time he ducked down into the bushes. Peter and Bobbo looked and also ducked down into the bushes.

“Whoa,” said Peter, “what is that thing?” The boys were all looking at a four-foot high creature standing on two legs, holding fishing gear in his hands and wearing a funny green hat on his very hairy head.

“A troll,” said Billy, a sense of both amazement and triumph in his voice. “A real live troll.”

“No way,” replied Bobbo, “there is no such thing as trolls in real life. Besides, that thing is short and not very scary.”

“Yeah, well then, what is it? Have you ever seen pictures of Norwegian trolls?” answered Billy, slightly dismissively.

“It could be a leprechaun,” said Peter.

“Leprechauns aren’t real either, and besides, this thing isn’t wearing any shoes and it is really fat and hairy.” Bobbo was certain. “I think we’re all just dreaming.”

Billy laughed. “The same dream at the same time?”

The troll cast his line into the river and slowly reeled in his line, making his bait act like a worm. He didn’t catch anything. He looked up and down the river to see if there might be a better place to try. As his gaze turned around in the direction of the boys, they ducked still further down into the bushes. This caused the bushes to move and rattle. The troll saw this and stared at the clump of bushes downstream from him for an extra moment. This could be some kind of animal coming to drink. The bushes settled back into stillness and the troll returned his attention to his fishing gear.

“That was close,” whispered Peter. The boys remained completely still for a few minutes.

“Now what are we going to do,” asked Bobbo. “We can’t sit here all day.”

“Hmmm,” said Billy. Billy wanted to get something belonging to the troll. Nobody else had something like that. That would just be so cool. “We could chase it and see where it came from.”

“What makes you think it will run away?” asked Peter.

“What makes you think it will run home?” asked Bobbo. Neither boy wanted to go chasing after that troll.

“What would you do if three guys came running after you,” challenged Billy.

“If I had a knife and I was a troll I would just stab you,” answered Peter. While it was true that the troll was only four feet tall, none of the boys were much taller and Bobbo was in fact the same size. Only Billy was as stout as the troll.

“Well, I’m going to find out,” announced Billy. He turned and started moving in a low crouch through the brush along the riverbank toward the troll. He stopped and turned back when the other two boys didn’t follow him. “Come on, chickens.”

That got Peter and Bobbo moving behind Billy. Rather than crouching, Bobbo just stood up and started walking toward the troll.

The troll saw Bobbo and hurriedly pulled in his line, picked up his basket and ran toward Egg Rock. Billy shouted “Wait!” and the boys started running. The troll took something out of his pocket, put it in the rock and promptly disappeared.

The boys ran up to the rock and looked everywhere for the troll. There was absolutely no sign of it. They all agreed that the rock was some kind of door but none could see how to open it.

“I’m going to get through that door,” vowed Billy. As far as he was concerned, there had to be treasures on the other side.

“How are you going to do that?” challenged Peter. “It’s obviously magic.”

“Hey wait, what’s this,” asked Bobbo, picking something up from where the troll was fishing. He held it up for his friends to see. It looked like a fishing hook but not one they had ever seen before. Bobbo let the other two hold it. When Billy got it he put it in his pocket.

“Hey,” protested Bobbo, “that’s mine.”

“Yeah well this is really sharp,” said Billy, seeing that Peter was going to side with Bobbo. “I’ll carry it for you until we get back. Let’s go, I want to look up trolls.”

The boys left the river and went home. Billy did give the fishing hook back to Bobbo once he got home, but only after Peter reminded hm.

That evening, after dinner, Billy came over to Peter’s house. “Come on, I want to go back and see if the troll comes looking for his missing fish hook,” he said.

“I’m not running after it,” said Peter. “And I need to be home by dark.”

“OK OK we’ll just watch,” said Billy. The boys went back to the river.

This time they positioned themselves behind the rock, so that they could see but still

hide easily enough if they needed to hide. They waited a long time. Finally the sun went down and it started to get dark. Peter said he had to get home and was about to leave when suddenly the troll popped out in front of the rock. It started searching around the ground where it had been fishing.

The troll searched everywhere, but did not find the hook. Finally it gave up and went back to the rock. It took the strange key out of a pouch on its belt and slid it into a crack in the rock. Just as the magic door opened, Billy jumped out from behind the rock. Startled, the troll jumped through the open door, leaving the key behind. Billy quickly jumped through the door after the troll.

Peter jumped out from behind the rock to look for Billy. He couldn't believe Billy had disappeared into the magic door. Peter turned the magic key to see if the door would open again, which it did, but nothing happened. Peter pulled the key out of the rock and sat down to wait. Even though he was supposed to be home now, he could not leave, not while Billy was gone.

He waited for as long as he could and then he went home. His parents were very angry with him so he told them he had gone to the river with Billy and Billy had chased a rabbit into the woods and got lost. Peter's parents immediately called Billy's parents and told them what happened. Billy still wasn't home so Billy's parents called the police. Peter could not go to sleep.

Billy found himself standing alongside a river on the other side of the door. There were trees and bushes just like he always saw, but there were also trees and flowers he had never seen, even in pictures. It was dark, night time. Billy saw no sign of the troll, but he did see a path that led away from the river toward some hills. He turned around to see if he could see anything like a doorway that went back home. Behind him stood a massive tree with a hollow trunk. Billy guessed that was the way. Confident he knew how to get home, Billy headed down the path.

After walking for about fifteen minutes, he saw a small clearing ahead and the glow of a campfire. Billy thought this must be where the troll went. He crept very carefully up the path and as he got close to the camp, he moved into the trees.

Asleep on the ground lay a gigantic figure, three times bigger than the troll. His arms and legs were huge, like tree trunks. His head was bald. He had no facial hair. On the ground around him lay a pouch, a large spoon and two clay pots. Billy looked at this creature and decided this was a real troll, like in horror stories. He wondered if he could sneak up and steal either the pouch or the spoon. He really wanted that pouch.

Very very slowly and quietly, Billy crept up to within reach of the pouch. He reached out, grabbed it and started to pull it away. Just then the gargantuan woke up, turned his head, saw Billy stealing his pouch, pulled out his knife and slashed at Billy's arm.

The knife cut Billy's arm off between his elbow and his shoulder. Billy screamed in pain and ran for the hollow tree. The gargantuan stood up and stomped after him. Billy

ducked and weaved, slipping and falling and getting back up to run. Finally he could run no more and just fell down unconscious on the path.

The gargantuan found Billy, who was now covered in blood, his severed arm bleeding profusely. The creature picked Billy up and carried him to the hollowed out tree. When he got there, the little troll was there.

The little troll was clearly afraid of the gargantuan but nonetheless he pointed at the hollow in the tree and at the unconscious boy. The gargantuan understood and carried Billy through the hollow, laying his body down in front of the big rock on the other side. When he came back, he let the little troll know that he had caught the boy stealing and that the troll should seal off the door. Then the gargantuan walked away back to his camp.

The police found Billy laying on the riverbank in front of Egg Rock. His right arm was severed above the elbow; he did not appear to be alive but the police rushed him to the hospital anyway, where he died from loss of blood. The police told his parents that Billy had been moved to the location where his body was found. A search was conducted throughout the woods for the rest of his arm but it was never found.

After Billy's funeral, Peter found the courage to tell his Dad about the troll and the door. He gave his father the key. He told him about the fish hook that Bobbo had. Peter's dad had a hard time believing any of this story. It was true that the key Peter gave him was made out of something his Dad had never seen before. It was also quite clear that his son was very upset about what happened to Billy and that his son absolutely believed the story he told.

Peter's Dad took the key to Billy's father William Smith. Together the two men obtained the fish hook from Bobbo, who also told the same story about a troll who disappeared into the rock. Mr. Smith took the key and the hook to a university friend who analyzed the metals and said they were made out of steel and bronze but also contained compounds he had never seen before. The university wanted to keep these items but Billy's father said no.

Billy's father could not accept the idea that somebody could cut off his son's arm and then leave him to die with no trace of how any of it was done. This wild story of the two boys about trolls and magic at first made him very angry, but when the university said there was something unnatural about the key and the hook he was ready to believe the story.

Early one morning Mr. Smith took the key and went back to Egg Rock. He studied it carefully and found the narrow sliver of a crevice that fit the key. He inserted the key and the door opened. He took out the key and went through the door.

Mr. Smith found himself standing on a riverbank on the other side. He saw the path leading away toward the hills; he also looked back and saw the hollow tree through which he had come. He noticed that many of the trees and bushes looked familiar but there were some he'd never seen.

He walked for a few minutes down the path and froze. A gigantic bald-headed man-creature was coming fast up the path in his direction. Mr. Smith looked frantically around for somewhere to hide. A huge plant with large leaves looked like the best chance so he crawled under the leaves. Within seconds, a number of large six-legged bugs startled crawling on him. He couldn't move so he had to let them crawl on his shoes and pants.

The gargantuan went a few giant steps past where Mr. Smith was hiding and stopped. He appeared to be sniffing the air. He started looking around, moving bushes and tree limbs aside. Mr. Smith knew the gargantuan was going to find him. He waited until the creature turned his back and moved in the opposite direction, then Mr. Smith got up and ran as fast as he could toward the hollow tree.

The gargantuan saw him immediately and started to chase him. It only took a few seconds for Mr. Smith to realize the creature was going to catch him before he could get to the hollow tree. He was only twenty yards away from the tree when he stopped, grabbed a handful of dirt and turned to face the oncoming gargantuan.

The gargantuan stopped ten feet away from Mr. Smith. Mr. Smith was out of breath and the bugs that had crawled into his pant legs were starting to bite, which felt like little stings.

The gargantuan made some noises that sounded like it might be a language and then pointed at the hollow tree. Mr. Smith didn't understand so he waited. The gargantuan repeated the same noises and again pointed, more vigorously, in the direction of the tree. Mr. Smith didn't dare turn his back on the creature but he thought maybe the creature wanted him to go back through the magic door. He took a few slow steps backward toward the tree.

The gargantuan took two giant steps toward him and pulled out a knife from his belt and waved it in the direction of the tree. Mr. Smith panicked; he threw the rocks and dirt in the face of the gargantuan and turned and ran for the tree.

The gargantuan made angry noises and started to follow. Mr. Smith got to the tree, stepped into the hollow in the trunk and nothing happened. The gargantuan arrived, growling. Mr. Smith pulled out the key and poked it into every little crack in the tree. The gargantuan reached into the tree hollow. The door opened and Mr. Smith fell through to the other side.

As soon as he got rid of the human being from the other side, the gargantuan set about destroying the tree with the hollow. The little trolls heard the noise and came to stop the gargantuan but he would not stop. That door would never open again.

Mr. Smith landed in the dirt on the riverbank in front of Egg Rock. Immediately he waded into the river and pulled up his pant legs to get the bugs off of him. The bugs fled into the river.

Mr. Smith's legs were covered in red welts from the bugs. He waded back up onto shore and sat down on a fallen tree trunk.

Now he knew how his son died. The giant creature cut his arm off. Mr. Smith vowed to come back with a rifle and kill the creature. It was a long time before he could return. He had to go to the hospital to get the poison from the bug bites removed from his bloodstream. The doctors in the hospital said they had never seen any sort of insect venom like that and only a total blood transfusion would work.

Mrs. Smith had a very hard time believing the story her husband told her. She was still grieving the unexplained loss of her son. Now her husband was telling wild stories of giant monster trolls and showing up covered in bites from an insect no doctor had ever seen. He became obsessed with going back through this "magic door" to kill the creature. She begged and pleaded with him to give up on this crazy idea but he would not.

When Mr. Smith did finally return to Egg Rock with a rifle, the key did not work. The rock was just a rock and no more. Nonetheless, Mr. Smith never gave up trying to open the door.