

CHAPTER ONE

The girl in the picture

The girl in the picture said that her name was Kayleigh, but I knew she was lying. So, I called her Dilly Dilly after the song, *Lavender blue dilly dilly, Lavender green*. She didn't like that. Whenever she was getting on my nerves, I would just say, "Yes, Dilly Dilly," and she would stop getting on my nerves. She would stamp her feet, and stick out her tongue, and then frown like an old man thinking. She insisted that her hair was red, but it wasn't. It was bright like the sun, sparkled like the stars, and smelled of the ocean.

Mum bought her picture for me at a car boot sale. Paid fifty pence for it. She could have paid twenty five pence for it, but the smallest thing she had was a fifty pence piece, and she said that she felt guilty asking for change.

The man selling the picture said, "Thank you." And gave her a wink and a smile, and then he looked ever so stern, opened his eyes wide like the lights on the front of his car, stared mum right in the eyes, and said the darnedest thing.

He said, “Be careful with that ‘un, she’s trouble all right.”

He then turned to the woman looking at the egg timer next to me and said, “That’ll be a pound love.” Bright as a button as if nothing had happened.

I shivered despite it being the hottest day of the year.

Mum bought the picture because she said it would look good hung on the wall above my little yellow desk. And she was right, it did. The picture was of a girl, sat on a swing that hung from a large oak tree. The tree was in the middle of a field of Blue Lavender. Apparently it had been painted by some local celebrity artist. That’s what the man had said. But I figured that they couldn’t have been that good, because the picture was selling for twenty five pence at a car boot. I think the man would have told mum that it had been painted by Monet if he had thought he could have got away with it.

Much later in my life I did find out who the artist was, but that’s another story altogether. It wasn’t Monet by the way, just in case you were wondering.

It was many weeks later before Dilly spoke to me. I was sat at my desk doing some maths homework. Maths, I hate maths, all those numbers, give me the heebies. Anyway, all of a sudden I heard this voice, quiet, but smooth like the purr of a kitten. She said, “They are coming you know.”

She was always saying things like that. She didn’t use that voice of course, because that was not how she sounded. That had been for dramatic affect. Normally she just sounded like any other girl. At least like you’d expect any other girl to sound like.

Let’s do an experiment shall we. Stop what you are doing, and turn the telly on. Flick through the channels

until you can see some children's channel with a kids program on. Wait a while until a girl appears and starts talking. Can you hear her? Well, that's how Dilly sounds, exactly like that.

But hang on a moment, I'm getting ahead of myself. How rude of me. Just like me of course. Babbling away without thinking. Let me start again.

My name is Annabelle, Annabelle Cloud. I'm ten years old. And I have dreams. The other children call me the Daydream Believer, like the Monkees song. If you don't know who the Monkees are then ask your mum or dad, they probably know. If they don't then watch Shrek, they sang the song "I'm a believer", actually that won't help you either, because they didn't sing the version of the song in the film, so forget that then.

I have adventures. I have adventures in my dreams, and dreams in my adventures. And they all started the day my mum gave me the picture of Dilly.

I never fully understood the travelling. I tried to ask Dilly about it, and she told me that she was a conduit, or a portal, or a talisman, or something like that. Actually, she told me that the picture was the talisman, and that she was just trapped inside of it. That's an interesting story in it's own right, and I'll likely tell you that one later.

I just think about her as being the key. She unlocks doors that I can travel through. And when I can smell the ocean in her hair, I know it's time for a journey. Sometimes I start the journey before I smell the ocean. I think I'm having a normal dream, and then, all of a sudden, the ocean fills my nose, and I know that Dilly and I are going on a trip.

She told me about the children, and the twelve Dream Stones, and how they were usually the talisman of choice, and that she was an anomaly, and she wasn't really sure if the guardians knew anything about her.

I met the children once, well I met Grace. She was lovely. But their story is a much bigger story, and not mine to tell. So hopefully someone will tell you that story soon. But again, I'm getting ahead of myself.

I like telling stories, love writing. I try to write down everything that I can remember from my travels. I'm like a travel writer.

Mrs Popple my teacher says, "When writing a story, you must make sure that you show and not tell."

I think that is really odd statement, because I'm writing a story and not making a film, so I'm always going to tell you the story. Apparently, it's about how you tell the story that turns it into a show. You the reader, or the listener, needs to think they are in the story and not just being told about it, even though I am just telling you about it.

It doesn't make much sense to me really, but then few things do. So I am going to apologise before hand, and just tell you my stories anyway, and you can listen, that is if you have the audiobook version, oh I do hope they make an audiobook version, if they do I wonder who they would use to narrate it? Oh, that's so grand, they could have some really fabulous actress to be my voice. You will get lost in the lovely lilt of her, or should I say my voice. It sounds really nice by the way. It sounds like Raspberry Ripple on Vanilla ice cream, on a very hot day. All smooth and sugary.

Oh, but if you don't have the audiobook, and you are

reading this, what will my voice sound like in your head. That's a tricky one. I don't think Raspberry Ripple really helps you does it? You know what, just pick a voice, I don't mind which, just make it a fabulous one. Hmm, be careful though, because if they make a film of my stories, the actress might not sound like the voice in your head, and then you will be all of a quandary, because my voice will be so important to the telling of this story, that you won't be sure that you want to go and watch the film, because you might think that the actress will spoil in. You'll be like to your friends, "That actress, well she's nothing like Annabelle Cloud, I don't know why they cast her." But one of your friends, you know the one, the one that knows lots about films, they'd be like, "No, she's perfect". And you know what, that friend is right, because she is perfect. The film will be great, so make sure you go and watch it.

Oh, dear, I've done it again. I'm waffling. I have a habit of doing that. What I really wanted to say was, I'm going to tell you these stories, and there might be some showing in it, and there might be some telling in it, and for that I am sorry. But hopefully we can all get along majestically and have a good time.

So back to Dilly. Dilly has become my friend. Actually. She's probably my best friend. I know that she can be hard to live with sometimes, but most of the time she is ok. We have our arguments every now and then, but don't all friends do that?