

The House With Too Many Doors



A funny adventure with Bob, Mary and Floof
Eight chapters of unexpected doors

The House That Looked After You



Bob and Mary lived in a house that had far too many doors.

Nobody knew exactly how many.

Their dad said there were twenty-three. Their mum said there were twenty-seven. Bob had once counted thirty-one.

Mary claimed she had found forty-two, although Bob pointed out that Mary had counted the pantry door six times because she kept going back for biscuits.

The house was enormous, old and slightly crooked.

It had three floors, two staircases, four chimneys, one attic, a cellar nobody liked going into, and more corridors than any sensible house could possibly need.

There were doors at the ends of corridors. Doors underneath stairs. Doors inside cupboards.

There was even a little red door halfway up the main staircase.

Nobody knew where that one went.

Dad said it probably contained pipes. Mary thought it led to buried treasure.

Bob thought it contained spiders.

Bob usually thought things contained spiders.

The strangest thing about the house, though, was that sometimes there seemed to be more doors than there had been the day before.

Mum blamed the renovations that previous owners had made over the last hundred years. Dad blamed bad memory. Mary blamed magic.

Bob preferred not to blame anything at all.

Blaming things often led to investigating them. And investigating things was exactly the sort of thing Mary liked doing.

Bob preferred toast. Toast was predictable.

One night, after dinner, their father came upstairs to say goodnight.

Rain tapped softly against the windows and the wind moved through the trees outside. The old house creaked and sighed.

"Is the house going to fall down?" Bob asked.

Dad laughed.

"This house has been standing for nearly two hundred years."

"That doesn't answer the question," said Bob.

Dad tucked the blankets around him.

"The funny thing about old houses," he said, "is that after enough people have lived in them, they start to feel alive."

Mary sat up in her bed.

"Alive?"

"In a way," Dad said. "They remember footsteps. Voices. Laughter. Arguments. Birthdays. Christmas mornings."

Bob frowned.

"Do they remember people dropping jam on the carpet?"

"I expect they remember that very well."

"That was Mary."

"It was raspberry," Mary said proudly.

Dad smiled.

"My grandfather used to say this house looked after everyone who lived here."

Bob glanced at the ceiling.

"How?"

Dad shrugged.

"Maybe it keeps the rain out when you're cold. Maybe it creaks when someone is walking downstairs. Maybe sometimes it helps you find something you've lost."

Mary's eyes widened.

"Does it have secret passages?"

"I didn't say that."

"You didn't say it didn't."

Dad laughed.

"Goodnight, explorers."

"Goodnight, Dad."

He turned off the light and closed the door.

A few minutes later, everything became quiet.

Almost.

Because old houses are never completely quiet.

They click. They knock. They creak. They groan.

And occasionally they make a noise like—

WHOOMPH!

Mary sat upright. Bob disappeared underneath his blanket.

For several seconds neither of them moved.

Then Mary whispered, "Did you hear that?"

"No."

"You did."

"I've decided I didn't."

There came another sound.

Scrrrrrape.

Mary climbed out of bed.

Bob's head appeared above the blanket.

"Where are you going?"

"To investigate."

"Of course you are."

Mary pulled on her dressing gown.

Bob groaned.

"Dad said the house looks after us."

"Exactly."

"That doesn't mean we should wander around it in the middle of the night!"

Mary opened the bedroom door.

The corridor outside was dark. Moonlight came through a tall window at the far end.

"Come on," she whispered.

Bob did not move.

Mary smiled.

"I'll go by myself."

Bob immediately got out of bed.

This was one of Mary's most successful tricks.

"I am only coming," Bob whispered, "to stop you doing something ridiculous."

"Good."

"How are we going to know where we've been?"

Mary thought for a moment.

"We count the doors."

Bob stared at her.

"That is a terrible idea."

"Why?"

"Because this house has too many doors."

"Exactly."

And that was the start of the problems.

Door Number Thirteen



They began outside their bedroom.

"One," whispered Mary.

Their bedroom door.

"Two."

The bathroom.

"Three."

The linen cupboard.

"Four."

The little cupboard where Dad kept a vacuum cleaner that hadn't worked since Christmas.

They continued along the corridor.

Five. Six. Seven.

At door number eight, Bob stopped.

"Was that there yesterday?"

It was a narrow green door between two paintings.

Mary stared at it.

"I don't think so."

"Let's go back."

Mary reached for the handle.

"Absolutely not!"

Mary opened it.

Inside was a broom cupboard.

Bob sighed.

"See?"

Then one of the brooms sneezed.

Bob screamed. Mary slammed the door shut.

They stood silently.

"What," Bob whispered, "was that?"

Mary slowly opened the door again.

There were three brooms. A bucket. A mop. Nothing else.

Bob pointed.

"The blue broom sneezed."

"Brooms don't sneeze."

"That one does."

The broom remained perfectly still.

Mary closed the door.

"Door eight," she said.

"I don't like door eight."

They continued.

Nine. Ten. Eleven. Twelve.

Then they stopped.

At the end of the corridor stood a door neither of them had ever seen before.

It was enormous. Round at the top. Painted purple. And covered in tiny silver stars.

Mary grinned. Bob looked horrified.

"No."

"I haven't done anything."

"You're about to."

Mary stepped closer.

"Thirteen."

"That's unlucky."

"Only if something bad happens."

"That is what unlucky means."

From behind the purple door came a strange noise.

Brrrrooop.

Mary blinked. Bob blinked.

Brrrrooop.

"That sounds like someone blowing bubbles in soup," said Mary.

"We should get Dad."

Mary reached for the handle.

"MARY!"

She opened the door.

The Thing in the Library



The door led into the library.

Except the library was supposed to be downstairs.

Bob pointed this out immediately.

"The library is downstairs."

"Apparently not tonight."

"That is not how rooms work."

The library was dark except for moonlight spilling through the windows.

Tall shelves covered every wall. Books were piled on tables and stacked beside chairs.

In the middle of the room was something enormous. And hairy. And breathing.
Bob grabbed Mary's arm.
The creature was almost as tall as the ceiling.
Its fur was bright orange. It had enormous floppy ears, three fingers on each hand, two huge feet and a round belly.
It was curled up on the carpet.
Mary whispered, "It's an alien."
Bob whispered, "How do you know?"
"It looks like one."
"What are aliens supposed to look like?"
"I don't know."
"Then it could be anything!"
The creature opened one eye.
Bob froze.
The eye was the size of a tennis ball. It stared at them.
Then the creature's fur changed from orange to pale blue.
"Oh," said Mary.
The other eye opened. The creature sat up.
Bob squeaked.
The alien's fur changed to yellow. She raised one enormous hand.
"Hello?"
Mary waved.
"Hello."
Bob stared at her.
"You can't just say hello!"
"What should I say?"
"I don't know. Something alien."
Mary tried.
"Greetings, visitor from another world."
The creature frowned.
"That sounds silly."
Bob's mouth fell open.

"She speaks English."

"I speak forty-three thousand languages," said the creature.

She scratched her stomach.

"English is quite easy, except for the word 'through'. Why is there a G and an H in it?"

Bob thought about this.

"That is actually a good question."

The alien smiled. Then she sneezed.

BRRRROOOOP!

Her fur instantly turned bright green.

Mary laughed.

"That was you!"

The alien nodded.

"I have dust in my nose."

She sneezed again.

BRRRROOOOP!

Purple.

Bob took one step forward.

"You change colour when you sneeze?"

"No."

The alien looked embarrassed.

"I change colour when I feel things."

"What does green mean?"

"Embarrassed."

"And purple?"

"More embarrassed."

Mary came closer.

"My name's Mary. This is my brother Bob."

"Hello Bob."

Bob gave a nervous little wave.

"What are you?"

The creature thought about this.

"Lost."

Floof



The alien's name was extremely difficult to pronounce.

It sounded something like:

"Flrrr-bibble-wompf-zing-ploop."

Mary tried three times. Bob tried once and accidentally spat on a dictionary.

"Could we call you something else?" Mary asked.

The alien nodded.

"Most humans call me Floof."

"You've met humans before?" Bob asked.

"No."

"Then who calls you Floof?"

Floof thought carefully.

"No one."

Mary laughed.

"I like you."

Floof turned pink.

"What does pink mean?" she asked.

"Happy."

Floof explained that she came from a planet called Bloopa, which orbited two suns on the far side of the galaxy.

Bloopa had purple oceans. Trees that walked around looking for shade. Fish that lived in clouds. And sandwiches that occasionally escaped before lunch.

Bob had many questions about the sandwiches.

Mary had more important questions.

"How did you get here?"

Floof's fur turned grey.

"I fell through a black hole."

Bob stared.

"You fell through a black hole?"

"Yes."

"Aren't black holes supposed to crush you?"

Floof shrugged.

"Normally."

"Normally?"

"I was wearing my travelling socks."

Mary looked at Floof's enormous feet.

She was wearing one red sock and one sock with yellow ducks.

"Special space socks?" Mary asked.

"No. Just very comfortable."

Floof explained that she had been travelling home when her little spacecraft had been pulled toward a black hole.

She pressed the emergency button.

Unfortunately, she had pressed the sandwich button instead.

"Did a sandwich come out?" asked Bob.

"Yes."

"What kind?"

"Cheese."

"Good choice."

"The spacecraft fell into the black hole," Floof continued. "Everything went dark. There was a terrible noise. Then I landed here."

"In the library?" asked Mary.

"No."

Floof pointed across the room.

"At first I landed in your kitchen."

Bob frowned.

"When?"

"Three days ago."

Mary gasped.

"You've been here for three days?"

Floof nodded.

"I've been trying to find the way back."

"Through the black hole?"

"Yes."

"Where is it?"

Floof pointed towards the purple door.

"Somewhere in your house."

Bob immediately turned pale.

"There is a black hole in our house?"

"Possibly."

"Possibly?"

"It moves."

Bob sat down.

"I knew we should have stayed in bed."

The Door Problem



Mary wanted to wake Mum and Dad immediately.

Floof turned bright red.

"No!"

"What does red mean?" Bob asked.

"Scared."

Mary was surprised.

"You're scared of Mum and Dad?"

"I am three metres tall, covered in fur and hiding in their library."

"That is a fair point," said Bob.

Floof explained that there was another problem.

The house kept changing.

Every time she tried to find the black hole, new doors appeared.

She had opened one door and found the bathroom. Another had opened into the garden. A third had opened into a small room filled entirely with umbrellas.

One door had opened onto a beach.

"A beach?" Mary said.

Floof nodded.

"There was a crab."

"Inside our house?"

"It was very rude."

Bob stood up.

"Wait."

He looked back at the purple door.

"We've been counting doors."

Mary nodded.

"Thirteen."

Bob shook his head.

"No. Thirteen before we came in."

They turned around.

The purple door had disappeared.

There was only a bookshelf.

Mary stared at it.

"Oh."

Bob pointed.

"That is exactly the sort of 'oh' I was worried about."

Floof's fur turned blue.

"What does blue mean?" asked Mary.

"Worried."

"That's Bob's normal colour," she said.

"I heard that."

Then something clicked behind them.

A door appeared between two bookshelves. It hadn't been there a moment earlier.

Small. Yellow. With a brass handle.

Mary smiled.

"Door fourteen."

Bob groaned.

"Please stop counting."

Mary opened it.

The Corridor That Wasn't There



On the other side was a corridor.

A very long corridor.

Too long.

It stretched so far that they could not see the end.

Pictures hung along the walls. But they were strange pictures.

Bob stepped closer to one.

It showed their house. Except there was no garden.

Another showed the house surrounded by snow. Another showed the house floating on the ocean.

Mary looked at Floof.
"Has this always been here?"
Floof shook her head.
They began walking.
Door fifteen led to Mum and Dad's bedroom.
They closed it quickly.
Door sixteen opened into the pantry.
Floof ate three biscuits.
Door seventeen contained nothing except a chair.
"What is that for?" Mary asked.
Bob looked inside.
"Maybe it's for someone who opens too many doors and needs to sit down."
Door eighteen led into a forest.
Real trees. Real wind. A bird flew past.
Mary took one step through.
Bob grabbed her pyjamas.
"No!"
"But—"
"No!"
They closed it.
Door nineteen was locked.
Door twenty opened into the bathroom.
Again.
"This house has two bathrooms," said Bob.
"Yes," said Mary.
"That is the same bathroom."
Their toothbrushes were sitting beside the sink.
"How can the same bathroom be in two different places?"
Floof turned yellow.

"Your house bends."
Bob stared.
"Houses don't bend."
"This one does."
They kept walking.
Twenty-one. Twenty-two. Twenty-three.
At door twenty-four they heard a strange humming sound.
Floof stopped.
Her fur turned white.
"What does white mean?" asked Mary.
"Excited."
The humming grew louder.
Floof rushed forward.
"This is it!"
Mary opened the door.
Beyond it was darkness.
Not ordinary darkness.
Deep darkness.
It twisted and rolled like smoke. Tiny lights sparkled inside it.
Bob took several steps backwards.
"The black hole?"
Floof nodded.
"My way home."
Then the house shook.
The door slammed shut.
Everything went quiet.
Floof stared at it.
Then her fur slowly turned blue.
The handle had disappeared.

The House Has Other Ideas



"We found it!" Mary cried.
"And lost it again," said Bob.
Floof sat down heavily.
The floor creaked.
"I will never get home."
Mary sat beside her.
"We'll find another way."
Bob looked back along the corridor.
Except the corridor had gone.

Behind them was now a staircase.

"Mary."

"What?"

"We have another problem."

They stared.

The staircase went upward. And upward. And upward.

Far beyond the height of their house.

Mary smiled.

Bob pointed at her.

"Don't."

"What?"

"That smile."

"What smile?"

"The smile you do before something terrible happens."

Mary started climbing.

Floof followed.

Bob sighed.

"I preferred bedtime."

Up they went.

At the top was a single wooden door.

No handle. No lock. Just a sentence carved into the wood.

THE HOUSE LOOKS AFTER EVERYONE WHO LIVES HERE.

Mary read it aloud.

Bob stared.

"That is what Dad said."

Floof touched the words.

"But I don't live here."

Mary thought.

"Maybe that's the problem."

Bob suddenly understood.

"The house isn't keeping you prisoner."

"It might be trying to protect us."

Floof turned green.

"I am not dangerous."

"We know," Mary said.

"But the house doesn't."

They heard another creak.

A new line appeared underneath the first.

WHO IS FLOOF?

All three jumped.

"The house can write?" said Bob.

Mary stepped towards the door.

"She is our friend."

Nothing happened.

Bob added, "And she ate three biscuits."

The words changed.

THAT DOES NOT HELP.

Mary burst out laughing.

Even Bob smiled.

Floof turned pink.

Mary placed her hand on the door.

"She fell through a black hole. She is lost. She wants to go home."

The house groaned.

Somewhere far below them, doors slammed.

One. Two. Three.

Then dozens.

BANG! BANG! BANG! BANG!

Bob covered his ears.

Finally everything became quiet.

New words appeared.

THEN SHE SHOULD GO HOME.

A handle slowly grew out of the door.

Floof turned white.

Mary opened it.

Goodbye Floof



Beyond the door was a room none of them had seen before.
It was perfectly round.
Stars moved across the ceiling.
In the centre floated the black hole.
Except now it didn't look frightening.
It looked like a doorway filled with stars.
Floof stepped forward.
Her fur changed colours faster than Mary could name them.
Pink. Blue. Yellow. Green. Purple. Orange.

"What does that mean?" Bob asked.
Floof sniffed.
"All of them."
Mary hugged Floof.
It was like hugging an enormous warm teddy bear.
Bob joined in.
Floof wrapped both children in her arms.
"You would like Bloopa," she said.
"Even me?" Bob asked.
"Especially you."
"Why?"
"Everyone on Bloopa worries."
Bob smiled.
"Sounds sensible."
Floof walked towards the black hole.
Then stopped.
She turned around.
"Oh."
"What?" Mary asked.
"I almost forgot."
Floof reached into her fur and pulled out something small.
A silver door handle.
"For you."
Mary held it.

"What does it do?"

Floof smiled.

"I don't know."

Bob groaned.

"Of course you don't."

Floof stepped into the black hole.

For a moment she became nothing more than a shadow surrounded by stars.

Then—

BRRRROOOOP!

A giant purple paw appeared again.

"Sorry. Dust."

And then she vanished.

The black hole disappeared. The room faded.

The children suddenly found themselves standing outside their bedroom.

Mary looked around.

"Door twenty-five?"

Bob checked.

There was no mysterious door. No endless corridor. No staircase.

Everything looked normal.

Mary opened her hand.

The silver door handle was still there.

Bob stared.

"We are never doing that again."

Mary smiled.

“Definitely.”

They climbed into bed.

A few minutes passed.

Then—

CLICK.

Mary opened her eyes. Bob opened his eyes.

On the wall between their beds was a new door.

Very small. Bright blue.

And attached to it was a silver handle.

Mary grinned.

Bob pulled the blanket over his head.

“No.”

From behind the door came a tiny voice.

“Excuse me?”

Mary climbed out of bed.

“Mary.”

The voice continued.

“Has anyone seen a very large purple alien?”

Bob slowly lowered the blanket.

Mary reached for the handle.

And somewhere deep inside the house...

something laughed.

THE END

Or perhaps...

THE BEGINNING.