

Liberty Young and the Guardian of Balance

Written & illustrated by

Sophie Marshall

Published by Saronti Ltd

Facilitated by Nikki Young at Storymakers

Prologue:

Rain lashed down upon the window panes, blurring the dark night sky. The wind howled and the sky grumbled. Then everything went black and a deep, mysterious silence hung in the cool night air. But then there was a light, a glimmer of gold; a tiny fragment of hope, that disappeared in the blink of an eye. Strange figures began to engulf the darkness; faces that seemed familiar but didn't want to focus; a warning of some sort. A ferocious and dangerous curse had been awakened and nothing could stop it now...

Chapter 1:

I woke with a start and pushed back the covers, my clothes felt like they had been soaked in a barrel of sweat and my heart was beating so fast, it sounded like I had just run a marathon. It took me a second before I realised where I was. The crooked walls of my bedroom seemed to cave in on me, making me shiver once more. Slowly, I climbed out of bed and walked over to my thread-bare curtains, still shaking. I pulled them back and the face of the night looked back at me, I sighed; another restless night. Stopping to grab my nightdress, I clambered down the creaky, spiralled staircase to the kitchen. Then, checking that no one was looking, I pulled on my old wellington boots and stepped out into the night. The wind flicked dust into my eyes and the rain made my hair stick to my face, but it would be morning soon and I would have to be back in bed before my dad came to wake me up. I trudged onwards, focusing on putting one foot in front of the other. The mud was thick here and it tugged at my feet, trying to pull me under. My eyes ached, my head throbbed and my legs were limp. I could hardly control what I was doing. Then I heard a voice, it was faint yet distinct. I only just managed to catch the words that it uttered before I lost all consciousness.

"Liberty Young."

Chapter 2:

The early morning sun beat down upon my eyelids, my mouth was parched and my limbs were stiff. I saw my house in the distance, the door was wide open with two anxious faces peering out of it. Their eyes swivelled this way and that until they found my face amongst the undergrowth. A look of relief spread across their faces as they dashed toward me. I rubbed my eyes and sat up. My dad got to me first, he was panting and furious.

"LIBERTY YOUNG! What on earth did you think you were thinking, going outside in the middle of the night? You could have got lost, or worse, badly hurt!" he exclaimed.

Even though he was trying to be mad at me, I could see that he was actually really worried.

"Your father's right, Libby. If this happens again, we may have to lock you in your room at night!"

My mother lowered her voice to a whisper.

"And don't think I don't know about the other times you've done this. Your father may be slightly clueless, but I, however, am not! This is your last chance! Do you hear me?! We want you to be safe, sweetheart. Don't take it the wrong way."

She kissed my forehead and smiled at me. I couldn't help smiling back, even though I was cross at her.

My dad tried to act all cheery like nothing had happened. "Come on then, we've got to get you ready for school, or you'll be late!"

I groaned. I had forgotten that it was a school day. Now I wouldn't have any time to explore what was going on. As I trampled on the dying ivy that smothered the cracked ground beneath my feet, clouds of dust coughed up behind me. Out of the corner of my eye, I could see my parents exchanging anxious glances. Suddenly, without knowing why, a wave of fury and irritation rose inside me and I stormed off into the distance. Why did my parents have to be so overprotective?

I scuffed my feet along the ground thoughtfully; life here in the magical universe was so dull, nothing ever happened here and it seemed that no one really wanted anything to happen. Everything was so old-fashioned too; it was as if everything was just continuing like life before King Dade had captured everyone. My school was an old building with long, spindly sticks weaved together for the walls and a pile of hay smothered in manure for the roof, making the whole place reek. The uniform was a baggy, creased blouse that looked like a dusty sack on me, a scratchy, tartan kilt that reached my knees and a patchy maroon cardigan. The boys, however, had it easy. They wore charcoal-grey shorts, and pale white polo shirts, with a navy blazer to top it off.

I hated my school.

Chapter 3:

The sound of boisterous kids swarming onto the (withering) playing field interrupted my thoughts. A glance at my watch confirmed it was already 9.00 am! I ran back to my house as quickly as my feet would carry me and flung open the front door. I dashed up the stairs without a second look at my parents, who were standing in the kitchen, muttering to each other. Then at last, when I reached the top of the staircase, I pushed open my creaky bedroom door. I pulled on my school uniform, wincing as the kilt began to irritate my skin and shoved my feet into the tough leather school shoes that sat on the front door mat. Without another word, I hurried out of the house and made my way to school.

When I finally arrived at my classroom, all the good seats were taken, leaving only one space in the front row. I flung my bag down and slumped into the hard wooden chair next to Nasty Crude; the meanest kid in the whole school. Just then, the class teacher entered the room, her nose pointing up in the air as she glanced around. Her eyes stopped where I was sitting and she shook her head in disgust. "LIBERTY YOUNG! That is no way for a young lady to sit. Straighten up your spine immediately and take that ugly look off your face while you're at it!" she declared.

"Yes ma'am," I sighed. Beside me, Nasty giggled.

"Now children get out your exercise books and we shall begin!" she announced, rolling her Rs profusely.

"Yes, Mrs Vex," we chanted.

I stuck my hand into my bag and fished around for my pristine purple notebook. But I couldn't find it. Trying to keep a straight face, I hauled my bag onto my lap and peered into the dark abyss. Nothing! Slowly, I let my hand creep up my side until it was as high as it could go. I squinted and held my breath. The buzz of talking stopped, and everyone froze and stared at me. Mrs Vex turned her head so that I was face to face with her piercing blue eyes.

"Yes, Liberty," she frowned.

"Umm. ma'am, I appear to have misplaced my exercise book. Could I perhaps go and umm. retrieve it, please?" I babbled nervously.

I could sense that now I was not the only one holding their breath; everyone in the class seemed to be.

"Very well," she stated. Everyone let out a sigh of relief. "But I want to see you in my office, at lunch. Do I make myself clear?"

"Yes ma'am," I mumbled, keeping my head down.

I scurried out of the room before Nasty could utter a single word into my ear. When I was out of the school grounds, I ran as fast as I could towards the woods, without looking back.

Chapter 4:

I didn't want to go home; my parents would just scold me. I wished I could go to Matthew's house and talk to him; he would understand me, and would comfort me. But he had left almost a month ago now. His parents felt the same way about him as I did about myself; that there was no place for him here, no opportunities, no part to play in society life. They had enquired about a place at the best school in the country back on Earth, and a few months later their letter was accepted and Matthew had just left me here, all alone without another word. Just thinking about it made me sad. At the time, I had asked my parents if I could go back to Earth too and find a life of my own there. Here I felt like a puppet and my strings were being pulled by my parents. Sometimes, I felt that my parents didn't even know me, because they didn't! We'd been separated for all these years and now that we were back together, they weren't even trying to make an effort to get to know me.

"I'm tired of this stupid place!" I yelled at the top of my lungs.

There was a loud gasp, and then feet trampling on dead leaves. I spun around, anxiously.

"Who's there?" I cried out.

There was no reply, so I decided to keep trudging onwards. But something was not right. Everything seemed different somehow, the air seemed dense, like it was carrying a heavy burden; dark magic. The trees seemed to be reaching for me, speaking, yet hushing themselves as if they were afraid that I would know something was off. I heard that voice again, calling my name. It was so soothing; like a lullaby. I could feel its strong tug at my body, wanting me to follow its song. But there was a bright light hogging my vision, a barrier between me and the voice. My ears felt numb and I couldn't hear anything anymore. The bright light slowly began to fade to nothingness and I could see ahead. There in front of me was the ghost of time. I rubbed my eyes; this couldn't be real.

"Ghost of Time, is that really you?" I exclaimed.

"Yes dear, it is me and I have some bad news," she answered gravely.

"Yes..." I urged her on.

"The Guardian of Balance has been awakened, but she is very dangerous for she has been cursed by King Dade himself and she's coming for you. She needs to steal all the positive magic she can, to make sure that darkness reigns. She's already almost made everyone on Earth her zombies and stolen what little magic they have in them, but what she's really after is you. You need to save the world once again, this time without Matthew," she explained.

"What do you mean, without Matthew? I can't do it on my own!" I stammered.

"I'm afraid that Matthew has already fallen under her spell. But there's no time to waste, so you must hurry. You need to find the cursed object and free the guardian's true self. I would think that it would be hidden somewhere in the Forest of Darkness, so that is where I am sending you. Good luck, Liberty and be careful!" she said.

I peered through the portal that had opened. The trees wore gnarled branches and seemed to have faces that cackled wickedly. I shivered and tried not to think of what beastly things lurked in the corners or outskirts of the forest as I stepped through the opening. I turned around to check that the portal had closed, but it stayed there. I heard footsteps and I saw a shadowy shape look through the portal, then someone stepped through and banged into me.

Chapter 5:

As my vision began to focus, I realised who had bumped into me; Nasty Crude.

"Nasty!!" I cried, "You were following me?!"

I didn't know why I sounded so surprised; it was definitely the kind of thing that Nasty would do.

"Yes, but I didn't realise I would end up in some ancient, creepy forest," she replied haughtily.

"It serves you right!" I exclaimed.

She snorted and began to walk towards the trees, brushing herself off as she did so. I sighed. The last thing I wanted was Nasty tagging along on my mission.

"Wait up!" I called after her. "You don't know what you're doing, it's dangerous in there!"

"What do you know?!" she sniggered. "You're just trying to scare me away."

"I'm not, honestly! Ugh, why do you have to be so stubborn; I don't even know why I'm trying to help you!" I shouted.

"Whatever!" she retorted and strode away into the distance.

Ignoring her rude remark, I made my way into the forest, watching my back as I went.

The sky above the canopy of dying leaves was a patchwork of midnight black and miserable grey. There was a cold wind that engulfed the forest. The floor beneath my feet was smothered with dry, crispy leaves that curled up as if to try and stay warm, and the trees groaned and moaned in agony. My heart skipped a beat; this place was seriously creepy. I tried to pull myself together. If I didn't find the cursed

object soon, we'd all be doomed. Blocking out all thoughts from my mind, I grasped my way through the forest, only stopping when I spotted a strange shadowed shape; an opening of a cave. It was shaped like a shark's mouth; stalactites dripped from its stone lips, ready to crush anyone who dared to enter. A shiver rippled through my body and my head throbbed as a thousand thoughts rushed through my mind. I inched forward, squeezing my eyes tight. I scuffed my feet along the ground, desperately trying to drag my body along the floor. Soon I stood face to face with the glistening stalactites. Just then, a loud piercing scream echoed through the forest, shattering the curtain of silence that draped across the forest.

Nasty.

I ran faster than I ever had before, the trees cackled and seemed to be inching ever closer to me, but still, I kept running. It was as if the whole forest had been awakened. Their gnarled branches grabbed at my clothes and hair. Their faces sprung to life and seemed to mock me as I rushed past. The scream came again, making me run even faster. I could barely see ahead of me; tree branches whizzed by, rain that started from nowhere spattered on the ground, announcing the arrival of dark magic. After what felt like an age, I spotted Nasty, rooted to the spot, petrified.

14

"Nasty. There you are!" I cried. "I've been looking all over for you. What-"

I cut myself short. There standing right before my eyes was a ghostly towering figure. She had pale sunken cheeks, cold, piercing amber eyes and tufts of golden hair. I gulped loudly. It was the Guardian of Balance...

Chapter 6:

She turned to face me.

"It's you," she stated.

Without really knowing why, I nodded. She grinned wickedly. That was when I noticed that she was not alone. Behind her was a hoard of people, I spotted Matthew amongst the crowd.

"Matthew?" I whispered softly.

He couldn't hear me now; he was under her spell. They all looked so strange. Their eyes had been taken over by a dark turquoise, their skin was pale and their faces were blank and expressionless. She followed my gaze and smiled falsely at the look of fear and horror on my face.

"Liberty, join me. If you do, I can make you twice as powerful. Join the dark side," she whispered softly.

Her voice was so calm and soothing. I recognised it from somewhere but my brain wouldn't think. My eyelids were heavy, my head numb.

"Yes, Liberty, sleep and wake up forgetting all of this," she crooned. "Sleep child."

My eyes blinked and then there was blackness; a deep mysterious black.

Chapter 7:

My mind became fevered by the guardian's words. I knew I had to get back to the cave but why was I even here? Where was here?

Soon, I dreamt...

The guardian went into the cave along with her army of people and came out again a few minutes later carrying a rusty, golden goblet. She handed it to one of her many warriors.

"Here, take this and hide it somewhere where that meddling Liberty won't find it. I'm not strong enough to face her just yet, even my forgetting spell didn't really work on her, so we must keep it hidden and far away from her," she whispered.

He nodded like a puppet.

"Now, we must go to The Lake of Mystery, quickly before she wakes up. She'll never think to look for the goblet there. It's too obvious. Then we go..."

My eyes slowly began to flicker open. Nasty was crouching over me, her face panicstricken. When she saw me awakening, she scrambled backwards and acted like she didn't care. It was pitch-black. What time was it? How long had I been out? I looked at Nasty for answers but she just looked away. I got to my feet and went over to her.

"Nasty, what happened?" I asked.

"She cast a spell over you and you were unconscious for two whole hours. She's far away from here now. But who cares, I'm going back home," she declared snobbishly.

I looked at her pitifully. Clearly, she didn't know that there was no escaping this until the guardian had been defeated. I remembered my dream.

"There's no time and even if there was, you couldn't go. You're stuck here now until we break the curse. So come on, we've got to go to the Lake of Mystery and quickly!" I explained.

She made a sort of grunting sound and followed me out of the trees.

"And how are we supposed to get there?" she asked when we were safely out of the forest.

"You'll see!" I grinned. "Ghost of Time, are you there?"

There was a bright light and then the ghost of time appeared before my eyes.

"Yes Liberty, how may I assist you?" she replied.

"Could you take us to The Lake of Mystery please?" I questioned.

"Of course!"

A portal opened in front of us and rays of sunshine pierced through the darkness around us.

"Thank you," I said as we stepped through it.

She smiled at me, then vanished into thin air.

Chapter 8:

The Lake of Mystery sat peacefully in the middle of the dense population of trees. The sun's rays were reflected off it and it rippled gently in the slight gust of wind that enveloped the forest.

"Come on, we have to find the goblet," I said with a nagging urgency in my voice.

"Why should I help you?" she sniggered. "You can go and find the stupid goblet on your own, I'm staying here!"

I sighed, "But Nasty, I can't leave you here on your own. Don't you remember what happened last time?! I'm not going to let anything bad happen to you."

"How do you even remember what happened? Didn't that thing cast a spell on you making you forget what happened?" she remarked.

"Well, she tried to, but she's not strong enough yet. She doesn't have enough power, so it didn't really work. I only forgot where I was for a little bit, then it all started coming back," I replied grinning.

She didn't smile back. Her face stayed the same. "Whatever. Magic is pathetic anyway, just like you."

I shrugged and started walking into the distance, Nasty followed close behind me.

"Hmm... if the Guardian of Darkness was in power when evil magic ruled over The Lake of Mystery then perhaps the Guardian of Light is awake now that positive magic reigns," I said, voicing my thoughts.

"Guardian of Light?" I called out.

A swirl of smoke appeared before me.

"Yes, who's there?" she replied.

"It is I, Liberty Young. I have come to find the cursed object, a golden goblet, slightly rusty with age," I explained.

"And why would you, a mere child, come to seek such an item?" she mocked.

"The Ghost of Time entrusted me with the mission of breaking the curse of the Guardian of Balance," I answered humbly. "Have you seen such a thing?"

"I'm afraid not, brave Liberty," she said both sorrowfully and solemnly.

"So much for your great plan!" Nasty sneered.

"But I did see the Guardian of Balance headed that way," the guardian continued, pointing over to a large tangle of trees that wailed as they swayed to and fro. "Do be careful though as that part of the forest is dangerous!"

"Thank you for all your help," I said.

With that, she wafted back underground. I turned to face Nasty again and smiled. She groaned and followed me to the copse of trees, keeping her distance. As I approached the entrance, I span around to check that Nasty was still following me. She had her arms crossed and was pouting her lips. I giggled.

"Oh, come on! Cheer up, it isn't that bad. You know, if you actually helped me instead of just standing around, things would be a lot quicker." I raised an eyebrow and looked at her thoughtfully.

"Ugh, fine. Anything to get away from you," she retorted.

"As you wish," I shrugged.

I strode forwards and looked at the trees. Their cry echoed around my ears. I scanned the place for a way through but everything seemed to be covered in gnarled branches.

"There's no obvious way through, we're going to have to hope for the best," I told Nasty.

"Wow thanks, I hadn't realised. Can we just hurry this up already, I want to go back home in one piece!" she replied sarcastically.

I watched the branches carefully and they seemed to be moving backwards and forwards.

"I've got it!" I cried out, "We can jump over them."

I took another step forwards until I was inches away from the moving branch. It was night here, so it was hard to see. I closed my eyes and willed myself to jump over it. I felt my feet lift from the ground as I flew across the branch below; the feeling was exhilarating. I landed on the other side with a thud, face to face with another branch. Nasty grumbled and copied me reluctantly. We did this several times until we stood before the last branch. We both jumped across it confidently but instead of landing on the ground like before, we flew down a deep hole in the ground.

"NO!" I squealed. "This can't be happening."

"Oh, it can and it just did!" someone cackled from above.

I looked up to see the Guardian of Balance's ghostly face peering down the hole. Her voice sounded different than before; it was rough and hoarse. She grasped the goblet in one hand and with the other she held a small potion. I squinted to make out what it said. I gasped. It was an enchantment. She popped the cork that concealed it and took a sip, I could hear the change in her voice, instantly.

"Goodbye Liberty, sleep tight," she mocked.

"No, I won't let you get away this time," I yawned.

My eyes began to feel heavy again, my whole body felt like it weighed a tonne. I dragged myself across the ground and tried to heave myself up the side of the hole, but it was hopeless. The dust gave way beneath my hands and I slid to the ground. I felt like I was seeing double. My head was spinning and my vision wouldn't focus. All I could hear in my ears was the sound of the guardian's mocking voice.

"Sleep tight," she cackled.

Chapter 9:

"Wake up Liberty, you have to wake up!" Nasty screamed.

"Argh! What's going on?" I cried.

"No time to explain, but we have to find a way out of here," she babbled.

My eyes darted around, searching for something to use.

"Look, there's a vine stuck in the wall here, maybe we can use it to climb out!" I exclaimed.

Together we clutched it with both hands and began to ease it out of the dust. It was the perfect length. I squinted, trying to make out what we could tie the other end to. I spotted a tree not too far away and threw up the vine. It hooked itself around one of its branches. I tugged to make sure it was secure and began to haul

myself up. I concentrated on putting one hand in front of the other and wrapping my legs around the vine as I did so. When I reached the top of the ditch, I gave Nasty a thumbs up and she copied what I had done.

"I overheard them talking about going back to Earth, to get more recruits for their army of zombies," Nasty explained, brushing the mud and dust off her knees.

I grimaced. Earth was an easy target.

"Come on then, we need to get moving. They'll be there soon if they aren't already!" I replied. "The Lake of Mystery acts as a portal to all worlds and dimensions. We can get there quicker that way."

Nasty nodded and without any fuss, we both ran towards the lake. As I knelt at the edge of the water, I put a finger to my lips, motioning for her to be silent and stroked the top of the lake gently. I imagined a portal opening between this world and Earth, I pictured its empty streets, everyone shut away in their houses, trembling in terror. I searched for the Guardian of Balance and her army of zombies. They were strolling down a street in the centre of the city, all the doors had been

bolted shut and curtains had been drawn. This was definitely the right place. As I drew my hand away, the lake disappeared and in its place was a portal.

"Come on!" I cried, jumping through it.

I could feel the change in the atmosphere almost immediately. The sun began to fade into a dull misty fog that enveloped the town, the crisp, cool wind sent a shiver down my spine and the ground was hard and gritty beneath my feet. I didn't want to be here any longer than I had to. Nasty seemed to silently agree with me. We walked onwards past many abandoned houses. Everything was so still and silent that all that could be heard was the soft pitter patter of our feet. The sky rumbled and a ginormous angry rain cloud came into view. With that, we both sped up.

"Are you sure you know where you're going?" Nasty moaned. "We've been walking forever!"

"Ssh!" I whispered.

With my back flat against the side of a house, I peered around the corner. I could hear voices. A quick glance confirmed my suspicions; it was the Guardian of Balance.

"Stay here. I'll be back soon," I said to Nasty.

I tiptoed around the corner, holding my breath for fear that I would give myself away. As I crept closer, I spotted a glint of gold; it was coming from one of the guardian's pockets. I inched forwards and stretched out a hand. She spun around, sensing the change in the wind.

"You again," she growled. "Don't you ever give up? Seize her!"

I gasped as thousands of zombies came charging towards me. They clutched my wrists and pinned my arms behind my back. I tried to struggle free, but it was no use. Their grip was too strong.

"Help!" I cried. "Nasty help me!"

There was no response. Nasty crouched behind the house for cover, her body trembling in fear. She didn't know what to do.

"Nasty are you there? Help me, please I'm..." I called again. The rest of my words were muffled by a zombie's hand.

Nasty dashed towards me and tried to pull the zombies off of me. The guardian laughed, amused.

"Foolish girl, you think you can beat me?!" she cackled.

The goblet was in plain sight now; I could hear it calling me. I reached out and grabbed it, then clutching it tight I flung the zombies off of me and started to run.

"Give that back!" the guardian roared at the top of her lungs.

She started to conjure up a spell. Realising what she was doing, I grasped the goblet with both hands and held it up towards the sky. She hurled the spell at me and I

lifted the goblet in front of my face. I watched as the spell hit the goblet and it shattered into thousands of pieces. The curse; a glowing dark red orb, hovered out from inside the fragments and burst into a million specks of dust. I laughed. I had done it; I had freed the guardian from the evil curse.

Chapter 10:

The guardian awoke with a start. She surveyed the scene around her, bewildered. Behind her ghostly figure, an army of zombies groaned and mumbled as if they were sleep-walking and in front of her Nasty and I stood laughing and celebrating happily.

"Who-who are you?" she stammered. "And where am I?"

I felt tears of joy welling up in my eyes. "I'm Liberty Young and this is Nasty. We saved you from the curse that King Dade cast upon you. I'm so glad you're back to your true self!"

"Yes, so am I. But, are you really telling me that all of this is real? I feel like I have just awoken from a very bad dream," she remarked, thoughtfully.

I couldn't stop myself from beaming. "Yes, it is all real, but it's over now and what's important is that you're safe!"

Nasty being her typical self, interrupted the touching scene. "Yeah, yeah alright but can we go home now? The mission's over, isn't it?"

I shook my head and turned my gaze to the army of zombies that stood before me. A wave of sadness washed over my head.

I averted my eyes and looked at the guardian again. "Why are they still like this if the curse is broken?"

I realised that she looked different now, a thing of beauty. Her sunken cheeks were plump and rosy, her eyes had softened to a baby blue colour and her golden tufts of hair were now a waterfall of sunshine that flowed down her back.

"I'm not sure," she replied solemnly. "Maybe it's because what I did to them came from King Dade's magic, not my own."

"But-but King Dade's gone, isn't he?"

My heart was thudding in my chest. I desperately wanted her to agree with me, but instead, her face turned a ghostly pale colour.

"Unless, he's back!" she exclaimed, her voice quaking.

I turned once more to face the array of zombies that stared at us with glowing eyes. There didn't seem like there was anything we could do for them now.

What we didn't realise in our panic was that the curse had buried itself deep down underground and had planted itself ready to sprout very soon...

We hope that you, your family and friends enjoy the book you have created. This project was co-ordinated and facilitated by author Nikki Young for members of her Storymakers writing club.

Find out more at: <u>www.storymakersclub.com</u>. and register for your next exciting course.

The Storymakers Writing Club provides English and writing support to children aged 7+ in the form of weekly groups, 1:1 sessions and holiday workshops.

Publish your book at <u>www.saronti.com/storymakers</u>

Do you like to write stories? **Ever fancied publishing one of them?**

It's easy with Saronti.

Get in touch to find out more about our publishing packages for young authors.

www.saronti.com

Need another copy of this book? Go to www.saronti.com/storymakers Your book reference is Sar2730

sarenti



Liberty has defeated King Dade, the king of all darkness, but another challenge lies ahead. The Guardian of balance has awakened and bears a dangerous curse. The guardian is out to find Liberty and bring the darkness back again. Will Liberty be able to break the curse and bring the guardian back to her true self?