

THE PUZZLE OF THE PORTAL



BESS

The Puzzle of the Portal

Written & illustrated by

Bess Titchener

Chapter 1.

In London, it was cold, grey, dark, smoky smelling. Factories and identical miserable office blocks and flats were all that could be seen. Some of London is great – fields and blue skies and happiness, but not this part of London. Even the people had a grey expression at this part of London. However, the interior of Floor 37 of a specific flat did not match the rest of London. Perfume everywhere that made it smell of Spring and flowers, brightly coloured furniture and wallpaper. Plants were everywhere that a plant fitted, well-cared for and smelling nice. This was Zara and Hazel's flat.

Published by Saronti Ltd

Facilitated by Nikki Young at Storymakers

However, Zara and Hazel were not at home. They were in Hawaii.

Hawaii was beautiful. Warm and joyful, unlike London, where they lived. In Hawaii, they were walking towards their hotel, which was five stars. They were using a Sat Nav, and

the walk was lovely. Beautiful palm trees fell over paths made of broken seashells and the sea was a beautiful blue which complimented the white sand.

“Look at the white sand!” shouted Zara, the younger sister, who was 9.

“Zara, white sand is made out of parrotfish poo,” Hazel replied calmly, the older one-13.

“Oh.”

Arriving at the hotel, they were taken aback by the beauty of it. It was tall, pale in colour, two towering palm trees on either side. The windows were clean, some with Hawaii-themed stickers on them.

They entered the building, which had luxurious red carpeting and gold interior decorations. There was a breakfast hall on the left, which had beautiful tables and chairs with a white fancy tablecloth draped over all of them. It felt so fancy and excited, especially to a family who lived in the darkest corners of London.

Zara was running in circles out of boredom. Every time she ran a circle, she said an extra word of her sentence to Hazel, who was pretending to listen, actually listening to a podcast about animal in her earbuds.

“Hey, Hazel,” Zara said, “Whatcha doin’?”

“Nothing much,” she replied.

“Remember that woman on the plane who had a really deep voice and hated us? That was funny.”

“Yeah. Whatcha listening to?”

“Listening to a podcast about animals. I’m on my favourite bit.”

“Boring!” Zara exclaimed, “We’re in Hawaii! And that’s what you do?”

“Yes, that is what I do.”

“Oh, well, I guess that’s just boring. Hahaha! BORING!”

“You have too much energy.”

“No I don’t!”

Finally, Mum stepped in to stop them.

“Girls, stop fighting. It may be boring for you, Zara, but not for her, okay? Now, you too, go outside. Here’s your bug book, Hazel. Spot some bugs, okay?”

“Okay, curfew?” Hazel asked.

“Hmm, 12:30, Hawaiian time. Bye, girls.”

“BYE MUM!” Zara shouted.

Chapter 2.

Zara and Hazel walked off together into the small woodland area a bit behind the hotel. It was odd, with all the palm trees surrounding it, but it still looked fun. They began to run into the forest. Lots of trees gathered in the forest, but they were spread apart.

“Hmm, mango trees. Tasty,” Hazel murmured, plucking a ripe one off.

There were some bugs scurrying across the ground looking for a hiding spot. Some unusual big rocks were scattered throughout the place.

Zara was already bored, “There’s nothing to do!”

“Yes, there is, Zara. We can look under some rocks for bugs. I’m looking for some Hawaii-only bugs.”

“Okay, fine. I’ll look at your stupid bug stuff, but when I’m bored, we’re leaving.”

Suddenly, Hazel’s quick eye spotted something.

“It’s the Hawaiian Happy-Face Spider! Quick, under that rock!”

“Ew, spider.”

Hazel crawled over slowly. She had to tie her long brown hair back as it was falling down at her face. She also adjusted her large round glasses so they wouldn’t fall off. Finally, she sat down next to the rock.

“Zara, come help me lift this heavy rock.”

“Okay, fine,” Zara groaned.

The girls finally lifted it and chucked it to the side. Surprisingly, there were no bugs, just a large, deep hole. It looked like it dropped into the depths of the earth.

“Woah,” they both jumped back.

“That’s crazy,” Zara murmured, “Look!”

Zara was pointing at the rock they had tipped over. There was writing, that appeared to be in blue crayon!

Come down for an
amazing surprise

“Hazel! Let’s go!” Zara says, without thinking.

“No! Zara! We can’t! This is dangerous! Imagine what could happen if we slid into the depths of the Earth!”

“It says there is an amazing surprise! This is a test to see how brave people are.”

“You mean how stupid people are.”

“Okay, whatever,” Zara laughed. She gave a quick smile to Hazel and jumped down before Hazel could stop her.

Chapter 3.

Zara began screaming, her scream getting fainter and fainter as she continued falling.

I told her not to do it, I told her!

Hazel knew that she couldn’t just let her sister go by herself. She could be in serious danger. So, following her sister, she sat at the opening of the hole, took a breath, and dropped.

She found that it was some sort of slide, one that didn’t give you friction burn, but was still very fast. It was a drop at first and then just a slide. She hoped that the slide was the only reason Zara screamed.

She dropped down at the end of the slide and she almost screamed. Zara was standing up perfectly fine, not screaming, but in front of them was a tall, square portal.

“Oh my word, Zara!” Hazel groaned, dropping her notebook on the muddy wet stone floor, “What have you done? We’re trapped here in a tiny dark stone room, practically a death slide being the only way to get out. There’s a portal in front of us, and we’re stuck. Like what in the magic is this? Even I can’t explain it.”

“Then we’re really screwed.”

The portal was a swirly dark blue, yet it didn't light up the room at all, not even the stone barrier around it. It was very bright, but still, didn't light up anything – it was weird. The girls began to walk around looking for any sort of information on what to do.

All of a sudden, Zara shouted, "I found a torch!" at the same time as Hazel shouted, "I found a sign!"

Zara picked up the torch and clicked it on. It was dim but worked perfectly fine. The sign read, again, in blue crayon writing:

There is no other way out. If you climb the slide nothing can be done. Your only chance is the portal. Otherwise, be stuck in this rotten foul room for eternity.

"Woah, someone...or something has actually made this – that's pretty crazy," Hazel admired, "But still – scary and dangerous."

"Hazel, I think the sign's right. There's no way we're going back up that slide."

"Okay, okay, I agree. We have to do it."

They held hands and stepped into the portal.

Chapter 4.

It was so quick that Zara and Hazel couldn't even see what the portal was like. Just a flash of blue and they were dumped on the ground. Hazel rubbed her eyes, and stood up, bringing Zara up with her.

The scene was lovely, a Hawaiian forest, mango trees that were spread out, insects scurrying faster than usual, unusual rocks scattered throughout the place – unusually similar to the previous forest.

"Hazel, Hazel. It's the same. The exact same place. Just look: trees, unusual rocks, bugs. Hotel, even. That's so weird."

"No, a portal wouldn't just teleport us back here – otherwise, what's the point."

"Experiment?"

"It's clear that they wanted somebody – especially children, because of the slide – to come down there. They wouldn't just teleport us up for a bit of fun."

"True."

"Let's look under the rock we came into and see if we can go down there, then teleport back into the real world," Hazel suggested.

"Yes, good idea," Zara replied.

Hazel and Zara looked around – they found a rock that looked remotely similar to the one that they had come into at first. Hazel tipped it over to find...nothing.

"Ugh, let's go."

They walked around to see just how similar this place was. Suddenly, from behind a tree, a woman walked out. They recognised her – she was the woman with the deep voice who hated children whom they were unlucky to encounter on the plane, so it was a surprise when she said in a very high-pitched voice, "Hello, you two. Nice to meet you. Having a stroll? Me too. Bethany."

Bethany held out her hand for one of them to shake, mainly pointing at Hazel. Bethany's hand was small and wrinkly with disgusting fingernails, 3 bangles in need of a clean, and a ring that was on so tightly it looked like she was going to the grave with it. Bethany's hair was messy, grey and thin, tied up in a very loose bun. She had small glasses, a round face and dungarees on.

Hesitantly, Hazel shook her hand so she didn't seem rude. Bethany's grip was very tight, and Hazel thought her fingers were going to fall off from the pressure. Finally, Bethany walked off, with a "Bye girls, have fun."

Once she was gone, Hazel said, "There is something seriously off about her."

Zara nodded.

When they began to walk again, they heard some rustling behind them. They turned around, startled, and Bethany was behind them.

Zara screamed.

Chapter 5.

“Darlings, darlings, darlings,” Bethany said, placing a hand on each of their shoulders. Zara instantly shook it off, “Rude, I see. Well, would you like me to tell you something.”

“Okay, go on — anything.”

Out of nowhere, Bethany started singing. Not nice, angelic singing, deafening, screams of a witch being burnt.

If you two are smart enough you shall see-e-e

Under some rocks are some clues

I put them myself, yes me-e-e!

You can find these clues, then listen to the many cow’s moos.

You’re trapped; I trapped you right here!

If you want to get out, listen, with your ears!

The only way out is the hidden messages under rocks

And that is all that locks

You here!

“You put us here?” Zara shouted.

“Yes, darling, I did,” Bethany replied, placing her hand once again on Zara’s small shoulder, “And now, you have to find your very own way out.”

She said the last bit in a sing-songy voice, and then simply walked away, like she was the best person in the world.

“This is bad, Zara,” Hazel said, “But her song may help us. She told us to look under some rocks for clues. That’s probably why there are so many misplaced weird rocks. We should start looking. C’mon.”

Hazel led Zara around to the nearest rock and lifted it up. Underneath, in blue crayon, it said:

Well done. This is just your proof that there are actually clues.

“Well that’s helpful,” Zara sighed sarcastically.

“I know, it’s bad, Zara, but at least there are actually clues,” Hazel reasoned.

“Okay, next one.”

The next rock they found read:

They key to escaping this place, you shall find, is seeing the clues inside of these rocks. To find which one to look at first, look at how many small stones are next to it. Clue 1 – one stone, Clue 2- two stones. Have fun.

“This is not my idea of fun,” Zara grunted.

“Just think of it as a game.”

“But it’s not. If we lose the game, we’re not gonna make it out of the game,” Zara replied stubbornly.

“Well, we’re going to lose the game if we don’t start looking now!”

They searched for the rock with three small stones next to it and lifted it up to reveal its message.

There are six clues, so for your third, I’m telling you, eat a mango from the tree that rests by number four.

Next, they walked over to number four, with four stones, and plucked a mango each. They began to wonder if it was a trick, but so far all of the clues had been helpful. They both chomped into it, but something didn’t feel quite right...there was something inside. To their complete surprise, there was a slit of card in there, with some writing on it, this time, not in blue crayon, just regular, black pen.

You did it! Perfect. Now, a clue is, the place you went to originally to come to the marvellous portal is currently blocked. When finishing the trail, I will be coming. If I'm faster, you lose. If you're faster, I lose. Go.

Zara began to run off, but Hazel reminded her they hadn't looked under rock four. They lifted it and saw what it said.

You're so close now, but so am I. Keep going. Also, a clue, to keep you motivated – if you lose, you shall never escape.

Zara and Hazel began to run, desperately searching for the next rock. It was in between two mango trees, with two mangoes next to it. They lifted it.

I'm almost there.

That was all it said. The clues weren't really clues – just, information to make them faster. They went frantically searching for the last rock for 5 minutes as it was so well hidden. They finally saw a lump in a bundle of leaves and revealed the rock. No hidden message, nothing. A slide.

Chapter 6

Behind them, they noticed Bethany running towards them. As quickly as they could, they slid, tumbling over each other in the wide slide.

They were dumped on the ground before the portal, but...it wasn't there. Just the stone blocks that once surrounded it. This was confusing, and scary, as they were trapped eternally in a room with a woman who wanted to keep them trapped forever.

"I'm coming, I'm coming!" Bethany shrieked.

Zara and Hazel were terrified.

"What do we do, what do we do?" Zara kept repeating.

"I don't know, Zara, I'm sorry."

"No, I am. I should have never gone down the slide, because then this would have never happened. You're the best Hazel and I–"

"HAHAHAHAHHAH! You are trapped? No portal. Wait, I'm trapped too. HAHAHAHAHHAH, lies!"

Bethany whipped out the most incredible looking device Hazel and Zara had ever seen. It was dark blue, with a glass container inside, like a giant jar of bubbles. She opened the machine and created a massive bubble portal.

Suddenly, Hazel and Zara realised they had to take their chances. It was here and they needed to escape whilst Bethany was putting her device away. They took a breath and leapt into the portal, screaming in relief!

They plopped on the ground, and they could just about hear the faint voice of Bethany screaming, “NOOOOOOOOO!”

They were so happy but realised that they would have to tell their parents why they were so late – and they would not believe their story. Luckily, they saw their hotel, and it was still lit up. They wondered what time it was – Hazel’s clock had long stopped working.

Quickly, they ran into the hotel.

“Hello there,” Hazel said to the person at the front desk.

“Hi there, are you okay?”

“Yes, do you know which room Lilly Westhood and Dan Westhood are in? They’re our parents.”

“Oh yes, are you...Zara and Hazel?”

The girls nodded.

“Room 34, bottom floor, turn right, yeah?”

“Yes, thank you very much.”

Hazel and Zara ran off, looking for Room 34. It was a lot easier than looking for rocks with a certain amount of stones next to them.

They finally found it. Hazel knocked politely before Zara could burst in. Lilly, their mum, opened the door.

Immediately, Hazel shouted, “Oh my gosh, I am so sorry we were so late! I promise, there’s a reason.”

“Late?” Lilly asked, confused, “Darling, you were just short of ten minutes.

Hazel and Zara glanced at each other, then they smiled.

“Oh yes, Mum,” Hazel said, “Sorry about that. We had a great time.”

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: www.storymakersclub.com 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 www.saronti.com/storymakers

**Need another copy of this book?
Go to www.saronti.com/storymakers
Your book reference is Sar3103**

**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

Zara and Hazel were just on a normal holiday trip to Hawaii, when they decided to take a walk in the mango tree forest. Little did they know, they would encounter something that would make them question reality for the rest of the trip...