

## Jimmy's Secret Room

Young Jimmy used to like visiting his grandparents' house. It was an large, rambling one in a small village in the country. It was rumoured to have a secret room. Jimmy liked prowling around the house and especially liked browsing through the attics. There were all sorts of interesting things there – old books, old clothes and strange old-fashioned objects. But, try as he might, he had never discovered the secret room.

He was going to stay with them again this summer during the school holidays. This time, he thought, I must find that secret room.

"It's nonsense," said his grandfather when he raised the subject again after lunch one day. "Count all the windows on the outside, then check all the rooms in the house; you'll find they all match up. There's nowhere for any secret room."

"But, grandad," said Jimmy, "if you could work out where a hidden room was by matching up windows and rooms, it wouldn't be very secret, would it?"

"I wonder," said his grandmother, "if it's just a little cubby hole somewhere in those attics."

"Oh," grandad laughed, "young Jimmy's prowled around in those attics often enough; I reckon he'd have found any secret room up there, if there was one."

"I suppose I would have done," said Jimmy. Then brightening up, he said "Maybe it's a priest hole. They're meant to be difficult to find."

"No," grandad said, "the house isn't old enough for that. It was built by someone called Benjamin Reynolds in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century when priest holes were no longer needed. He wasn't a catholic either."

"No," grandma said, "he was something odd, a theosophist or something. We're the first catholics to live here as far as we know."

"A bit early to be a theosophist," said grandad. "The theosophist society, if I remember rightly, wasn't founded until 1875 in New York; but he was certainly that way inclined. It was his daughter who sold up after he died and went to America to join the theosophists."

"Ah, yes," grandma said, "so it was. But Old Benjamin was a bit odd, by all accounts. What happened to his wife after he died?"

"I don't think anyone is certain," grandad said. "Did she go with her daughter to America or back to her family in Northumbria? I seem to recall his daughter was a bit vague about that in her book."

"In her book!" exclaimed Jimmy. "You mean she wrote about her dad and you've got the book?"

"Yes, yes, Jimmy," grandad said. "One of the previous owners must have bought it. It's not that interesting. It'll be among those old books up there in the attic."

"Great," said Jimmy, "I must find it!" With that he got up and left the room quickly.

"I know where that young man is off to," laughed grandma.

"Yes," agreed grandad, who settled himself into his arm chair for his postprandial doze.

Jimmy had indeed gone off to the attics. There was spiral staircase at the end of the main

corridor on the first floor that led up into the attics. Jimmy was there in next to no time.

He began searching among the old books there. This took longer than it might have done because he kept being distracted by odd titles and things he found inside the books. He also realized that he didn't know the title of the book he was looking for nor the actual name of the author. Maybe he should have asked his grandparents for a bit more information. But he did not want to disturb them now; he knew his granddad liked to have a nap after lunch.

He remembered the surname was Reynolds and hoped the daughter had not married before she wrote about her father. He kept searching. Eventually, after a couple of hours, he discovered "My Father, Initiate of Isis" by Arsinoë Reynolds.

"What an odd name," thought Jimmy, "and what an odd title. I thought ISIS was a fairly recent Islamic group, certainly not 19<sup>th</sup> century. How odd."

When he saw that it had been published by the Theosophical Society of New York in 1886, he knew it was the book. As it was sunny outside, he decided to take the book out into the garden, find a seat and read it.

He soon discovered that the Isis in the title was an ancient Egyptian goddess, and gave a chuckle to think that a fanatical group of Islamists shared a name with a pagan goddess. But he found Arsinoë's style somewhat mundane and boring and, despite his wanting to see if it gave any clue to the secret room, he was soon dozing off in the warm, summer sun.

"Wakey, wakey!" he heard voices. It was his grandparents coming out into the garden with a pot of tea, some cups and saucers, a jug of milk and a few small cakes.

"I see you found the book," said granddad. "I'm not surprised you fell asleep. She's not the most interesting writer, is she?"

"No," groaned Jimmy with feeling. "She isn't."

"The only thing I found interesting in that book," granddad said, "was a plan of this house. It doesn't seem to have changed much over the years."

"Oh," said Jimmy, suddenly becoming interested. "I hadn't found that. I wonder if it gives any clue about a secret room."

"None that I recall," said granddad.

"Where is it?" said Jimmy, about to pick up the book.

"Leave it now, Jimmy," said grandma, "and have some tea. I sure you can manage a cake or two."

"Ooh, thanks, grandma," he said.

When at last they had finished their tea and grandma had taken the tray in, Jimmy picked up the book and looked for the plan of the house. He soon found it and, as his grandfather had said, it was not very different from what the house was now. There was certainly no indication of any secret room. Feeling rather disappointed, he took the book up his room and tried to read some more. There was one place where Arsinoë mentioned a stairway to the portal of Isis; but she was vague about where the stairway was.

"A portal is a sort of doorway," thought Jimmy. "I wonder."

There were only two staircases in the house: a normal one from ground to first floor, and the

spiral one from the first floor into the attics. Then he remembered seeing what looked like some steps in the attic, next to chimney stack on the side of the house. “But they can’t go anywhere”, he thought. “They’re up against the side wall of the house.”

At supper that evening, he mentioned these steps.

“Yes,” agreed grandad, “they are a bit odd. Maybe they were once used as shelves.”

Jimmy wondered. The next day he went up into the attic, found the steps and went up them and, to his surprise, through the wall. He found himself in a room; but it was an odd sort of room, with strange things in it. When he looked through a window in the room, the landscape looked very weird.

“Hello,” he heard a voice say. “Who are you and what are you?”

“I’m Jimmy,” he replied, adding as he turned round, “I’m a boy.”

But what was he looking at when he turned? It was not like any creature he had ever seen; yet, for some reason, he did not feel scared; he sensed the creature was friendly.

“A boy?” asked the creature, without speaking, which puzzled Jimmy. “Oh dear,” added the creature, “do try to control your thoughts. It’s making it very difficult to understand you.”

Jimmy realized that the creature was communicating by telepathy; that was why Jimmy ‘heard’ the creature’s thoughts as English. Jimmy tried to control his thoughts.

“That’s better,” said the creature. “I’m Zeevok. I guess you must have come through a tunnel in spacetime. It happens in this room from time to time.”

To cut a long story short. Jimmy and Zeevok got on well together and Jimmy found he could easily return to the attic. He decided not to tell his grandparents about this secret room and to admit there was not one after all.

He visited Zeevok several times that summer. When he got back home he Googled ‘spacetime tunnel’ and found such tunnels were called ‘wormholes’. He became fascinated by them and worked hard at school and university and eventually became a renowned physicist and mathematician whose main area of investigation was in General Relativity, Einstein–Rosen bridges and other such theoretical concepts.

There was, however, one sadness in his life. Not long after his grandparents had died, their house was bought by a developer; and since it was not particularly old it was not a listed building. It was demolished to make way for a new shopping mall in a village that grown over the years into a small town. So the secret room of Professor Jimmy’s youth remained thereafter secret.