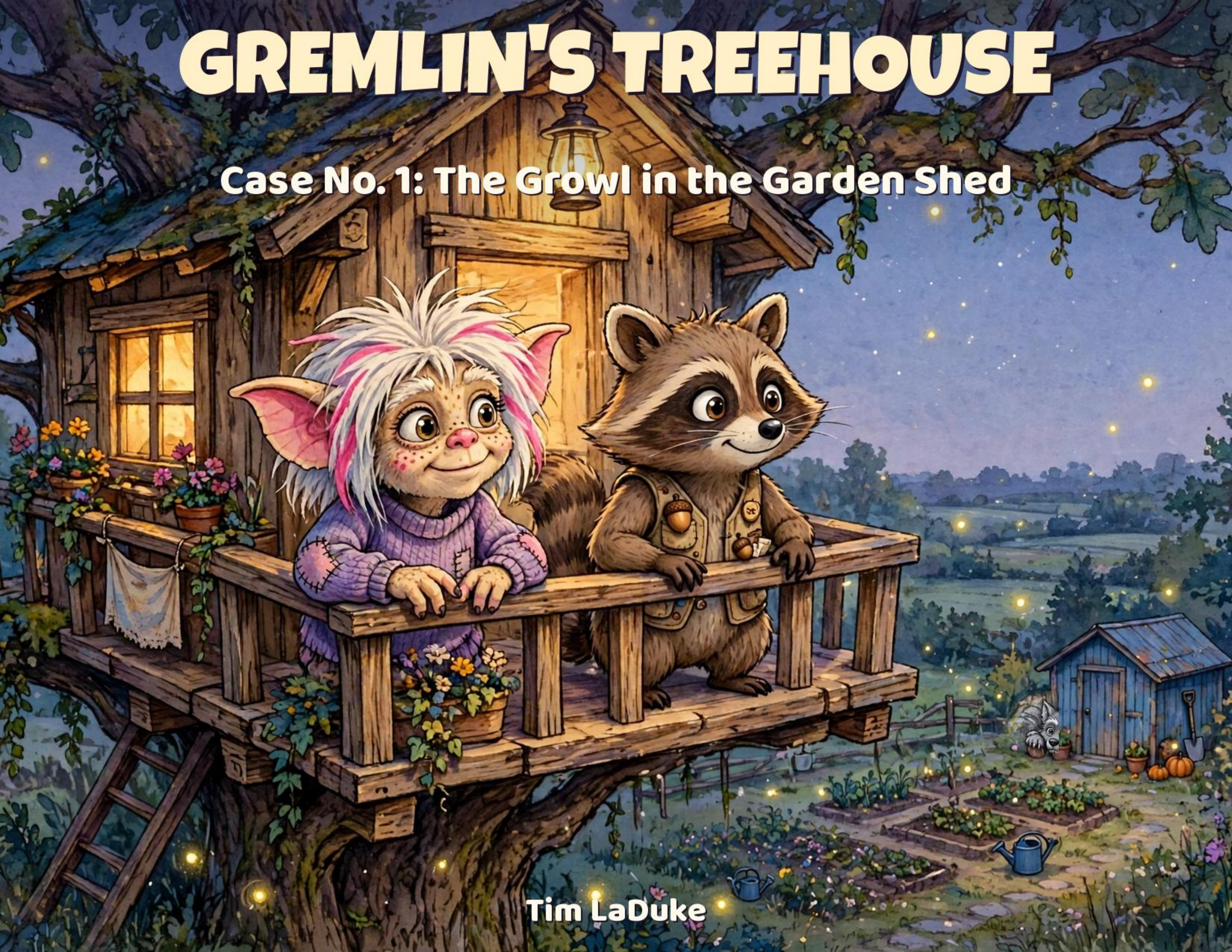
GREMLIN'S TREEHOUSE

Case No. 1: The Growl in the Garden Shed



Tim LaDuke

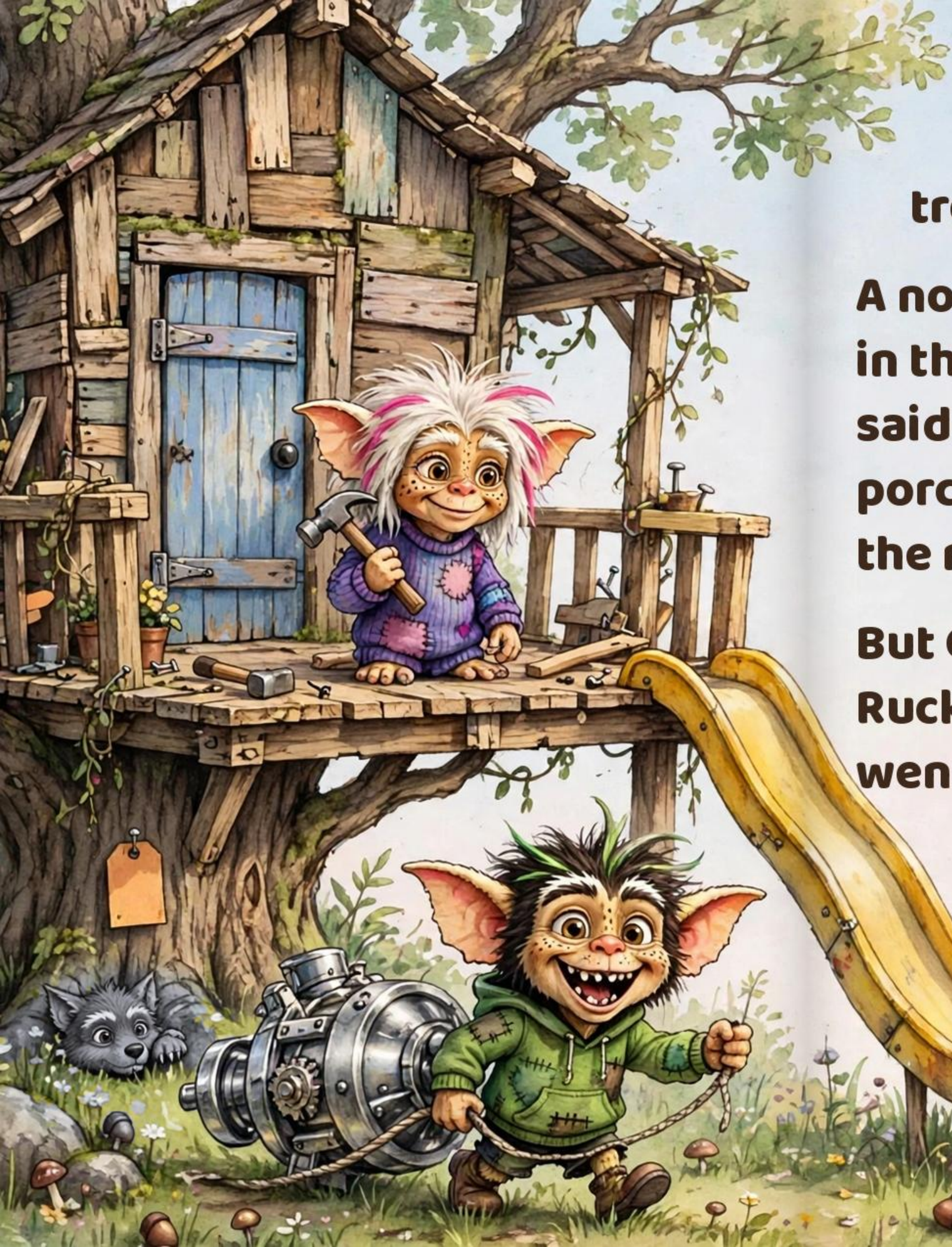
Gremlin's Treehouse

Case No. 1: The Growl in the Garden Shed

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High in the branches, up in the old oak, stands the treehouse, hidden and snug.

A note came Tuesday, flapping in the wind — TOO MUCH PORCH, said the note. Down came the porch — crash! — straight into the mud.

But Grimlin hammered, and Ruckus hauled wood, and up went a porch better than before — A BETTER PORCH!

Now the note hangs like a medal of honor.



Only kids can find the way up the tree.

Grown-ups pass below — whoosh! — and never see a thing.

That morning came June, climbing — up, up, up — in her yellow raincoat, quick as a squirrel.

"There is a growl in our garden shed," said June.

"Every evening, after supper — GRRRR — straight through the door!"



For six days, that shed door stayed shut. Her watering can was trapped inside. Her courage had gone quiet.

"Could be something big," said Grimlin. "Could be something small. So we go and we look at everything twice."

"I WILL HANDLE IT!" cried Ruckus, thumping his chest.

Ruckus is the bravest heart in the treehouse — he would march through a storm for a friend, or for a really excellent snack.

Down by the shed stood the Growl-Catcher, built by Ruckus with tremendous pride: one box, one stick, one string, and a pile of snacks shining in a golden heap.

"No one can resist a snack!" cried Ruckus. June nodded slowly. Like science.



SNAP!

"GOT IT!" yelled Ruckus, puffed with pride. But lift the box — no growl at all. Only the Baron, in a flourish of cape, flat on his back.

"RELEA—" he began, in his grandest voice. June heard only a hiss, small and thin. "He says he is very busy ruling," said Grimlin.

Then, from the shed —

GRRRR — came the growl, and the Baron fainted — flat as a pancake, out like a light.



TOOT-TOOT-TOOT! Down swept Miss Priss, all feathers and flair, and landed — plop! — on the very top of the shed roof.

"I SHALL SOLVE THIS AT ONCE!" she announced, with a bow fit for a queen.

GRRRR, said the shed.

"I shall delegate!" she called — from the fence. From the next yard over. June heard only: chirp, chirp, chirp.



Then dusk came down, soft and purple and slow, and there in the mud — prints. BIG ones. THE BIGGEST.

Deep prints. Heavy prints. Prints with claws. June held Grimlin by the sleeve, tight — and stayed.

"Okay," said Grimlin, soft and low. "Now we look closer. Nice and slow."

Ruckus got low. Ruckus got sniffy. Ruckus got to work.



Sniff, sniff. Shuffle, shuffle. Ruckus followed the trail. The big prints marched ahead, enormous and deep, but step by step, step by step, the prints began to change.

Not smaller. Just lighter. Lighter, and slower, and sad around the edges.

"Not a giant," whispered Grimlin. "Something little. Something small and lost."



GRRRR, said the door, in the dark by the shed. Then smaller — grr. Then only a whine.

Ruckus sat down in the mud, soft and slow, and he talked through the crack, soft as feathers.

Grimlin opened the door the way you open a book — an inch. A breath. One more inch. Look.

NOT a monster.
NOT a giant. NOT a growl. Inside was Pepper!

A small lost dog, covered in mud, growling with her whole chest — and scared, scared, scared underneath.

A round gold tag: PEPPER — and an address. Two streets away.

"Hi, Pepper," June whispered, sitting down in the straw. "I get scared too." She held out her hand.



Nobody grabbed. Nobody rushed. Pepper stayed tucked in the straw, trembling.

Then Ruckus — brave, brave Ruckus — did the bravest thing of all: out came his pocket snack — his best one — and he held it out. He did not take it back.

Pepper sniffed. Pepper shivered. Thump, thump, thump went her tail!

June walked her home, two streets over, to a porch light glowing gold, and the happiest door swung wide — Pepper was home!



Back at the treehouse — snack time at last! The Baron woke up. The Baron woke FAST.

On the ladder, warm under a cloth, sat a plate of warm cookies. No one saw who had left them there. Nobody ever does.

Grimlin smiled at the big, round moon.

"Case closed," she said. "And remember — Scared things act tough. Be gentle first."

CASE FILE NO. 1 — CLOSED

The clue was: paw prints, and a tag that said PEPPER.
Did you spot the prints changing? Good eyes, detective.

Now you try:

- How many paw prints can you find on this page?
- Pepper was scared — what do scared things sometimes do? (Act tough!)
- Who was brave AND gentle in this case? (Everybody. Even the Baron. Sort of.)

JUNIOR DETECTIVE BADGE EARNED:
KINDNESS

Badge of Kindness — for remembering that scared things act tough, and being gentle first.

DID YOU SPOT WALLY?

Next time, in Gremlin's Treehouse:

Case No. 2 — The Case of the Vanishing Lunches.