**Putting The Trolls Back Where They Belong**

They used to be ugly creatures that lived under bridges in fairy tales. In the 1990s, they were the florescent-haired toys that nobody could get enough of. In the 21st century, trolls are now lurking online, waiting to spoil your fun, and worse.

Since the rise of the internet, we’ve used the word ‘trolls’ to refer to people who deliberately try to annoy or upset people online. They often post insults, spam, deliberately argumentative comments or other material designed to get a negative reaction from the original poster. You’ll find trolls pretty much anywhere there’s a comments section. You might even have been a troll yourself at some point. You might be one still, priding yourself on your ability to upset people you’ve never met with a carefully-chosen nonsensical argument, off-topic post or pathetic personal insult.

But I hope you’re not.

You see, trolls are just another type of bully. They’re nothing new in themselves; as a species, we’ve been subjected to meanness, spite and ignorance since we figured out we could talk. It’s unfortunately part of the rich tapestry of human experience, along with other nicer things like kindness, empathy and understanding. But the problem with trolls is that, because they are often protected by the anonymity of a username, they feel that they can vent their bilious rants wherever they like and to whomever they like, without fear of actually having to be responsible for their words.

Thankfully, the law is changing to try and remedy the situation. The Crown Prosecution Service are now making it easier to prosecute trolls who abuse and harass people online. Comments which threaten violence, which are obscene or grossly offensive, could cause their author to be prosecuted.

‘Oh, but what about free speech?’ I hear you ask. ‘Isn’t it my right to deliberately be an idiot somewhere I’m not wanted?’. Well no, it isn’t, actually. But there is an important distinction to make between disagreeing with people and subjecting them to abuse. If your opinion differs from other people, fine. You might not be welcome to express it in certain contexts, but it’s your opinion and you are entitled to it. If you are deliberately using your words (or pictures) to offend and upset somebody, then you’re trolling, and that’s not okay. Take the example of female MPs online, who are exposed to rape and death threats on a depressingly frequent basis, merely for doing their jobs. Nobody deserves to be subjected to that kind of trolling.

Most trolls wouldn’t dream of saying the things they type online out loud in real life, to real-life people. If they did, they’d be kicked out of places faster than they could say ‘loser’. So be sure to steer clear of trolls, and don’t be afraid to use the ‘report’ button if you need to flag up some abusive comments. The internet has given us so many wonderful things; let’s put those trolls back under the bridge where they belong.