

Julie, Peter and the Google-Geezer

Julie and Peter were on holiday. They were spending a few days with Grandfather Jacob, who lived in a big old creaky country house—where nothing *ever* happened.

The children were in the middle of unpacking their clothes. It was a big boring job.

"I wish we could be finished," Peter complained. "I want to play out."

"Hey Peter," Julie said, taking no notice of her little brother. "What has eight legs, but no feet?"

"Ah?"

"I said, what has eight legs, but no feet?"

"I don't know. What?"

"Four pairs of trousers! Ha!" Julie laughed. "I just made that one up." Peter laughed too. His sister was the best making-up-jokes sister in the whole wide world.

When the unpacking was all finally done, the children hurried on downstairs and straight outside. In the back garden, they found Grandfather Jacob with Henry the dog. They were playing fetch the stick. Henry the dog threw, and Grandfather fetched. Julie and Peter rushed to join them.

"Ah, gere you rrrr," Grandfather Jacob said, looking up with the stick still in his mouth. "Want to play Hide and Peek?" He always called it "Hide and Peek," because he always peeked.

After the game Grandfather felt tired and decided to have fifty winks—he always took at least ten more winks than he was allowed. Peter decided to play skipping. Henry the dog read a book about cats. And so, when Julie disappeared, down to the bottom of the garden, along the river bank towards the garden shed, no one even noticed.

After supper, everyone went out to play on the swing Grandfather Jacob had made in the big oak tree.

Eight o'clock finally came, and it was time for bed.

"Can't we just play a little longer?" Peter grumbled, in a

grumbly sort of way.

"No," Grandfather said, "it's past eight o' clock. Tomorrow though," he added, with a twinkle in his eye, "is another day."

Grandfather tucked them in, gave a kiss to Julie, and a kiss to Peter. Grandfather liked to give kisses—and he never asked for them back.

It was a warm night and the bedroom window was slightly ajar. Outside, the sounds of summer filled the darkness. A frog down by the river: "Kneedeep," he said. "Kneedeep, kneedeep." (Frogs always know *how* deep). A spiky hedgehog kissing his spiky hedgehog girlfriend: "Ouch. Ouch." (Those spikes always seem to get in the way). A cricket playing cricket with a bat: "Clack-Swoosh. Clack-Swoosh." (Crickets are always good at cricket).

"Peter, are you asleep?" Julie whispered across from her bed under the window.

"Yes," Peter said.

"Well wake up then," she whispered.

"What do you want?" he groaned.

"It's time to go."

"Go? Go where? What do you mean?"

"You know what I mean," Julie teased, held out an old key to show him. It was the key to the *attic*. The attic was the only room in the creaky old country house that was always kept locked. Grandfather Jacob kept the key hidden in a biscuit tin, hidden in the garden shed.

"You got that key again," Peter moaned miserably. "We're not allowed in the attic. I don't want to go there. I'm scared."

In the attic, you see, there was a trunk, and in the trunk there was always magic. And it was the kind of magic that gave a small boy the creepy-jeepers. He hated magic. He hated the creepy-jeepers.

"*Don't be a baby,*" Julie said in her "don't be a baby" voice, and pulled him out of bed.

"Awww," Peter groaned. He hated magic. He hated the

creepy-jeepers.

Julie took his hand, led him silently from the bedroom, along the passage, and up the stairs. She unlocked the attic door with the rusty old key. Peter turned on the light. Julie closed the door behind them. The room was dead dusty quiet. Julie and Peter walked over the bare floor boards to the corner where the trunk stood.

Julie pushed open the lid.

"Look," Julie whispered. She reached in, and took out two balloons. One was red, the other blue.

"I bet they're magic," she said excitedly. "Let's blow them up." The red balloon and the blue balloon were just waiting to be blown up.

"Do we have to?" Peter said, in a "do we have to" kind of voice. He had suddenly caught the creepy-jeepers.

"Don't be a baby," she told him. "Take it and blow it up."

"I want the red one," Peter said. Julie gave him the red one, and they began to puff.

"Blow blow blow, puff puff puff, huff huff." Peter was so busy puffing away that he hardly noticed when, QUICK AS A FLASH, they both disappeared. They were completely not there. The attic was without them.

"Not again," Peter grumbled. "We've been disappeared. And look where we are this time." Peter was on the verge of tears.

The children were in someone's living-room. But it was the strangest weirdest and messiest living-room they had ever seen: strewn about, all over the place, were bottles and test tubes full of powders, chemicals, and funny looking stuff.

"We shouldn't be in here," Peter said. "Let's go back home."

"Not yet. There's no hurry." Julie tied a knot in the bottom of her magic balloon, and Peter copied.

"But this is *someone's house*," Peter said, in his goody-goody voice.

"I know *that*. But they're not in—are they."

"They must be out buying fish 'n' chips," Peter decided.

"Don't be silly," Julie said. She was wandering about the room, reading the labels on the strange bottles and test tubes.

"That's funny," Julie began, holding one up to show Peter. "It says here, 'Hair Tonic: Guaranteed to make you bald.'" And she made a face to show just *how* funny she thought it was.

"And look at this one: 'Cough Syrup: Guaranteed to make you cough.'" "

During all this, Peter was doing absolutely nothing. All he wanted was to burst the balloons and get back to Grandfather Jacob's house.

"Ha! This one says: 'Powdered Piano Music: Just add water, and hear your favourite piano music.'" "

"I don't like piano music," Peter said.

"Whoever lives here must be wacko," Julie decided.

Just then a wacko man came into the house. He had wacko hair and a wacko face. The first thing Peter noticed about the wacko man though, was that he carried a parcel of fish 'n' chips.

"Goodness gracious me," he began, in a "goodness gracious me" sort of voice. "Visitors."

"I'm Julie, and this is my brother, Peter."

"Of course you are," he agreed, "and I'm Professor Snodgrass." As he spoke, the door opened again and in came a little boy, crying away to himself.

"And this is my son, Little Snodgrass."

"Hello Little Snodgrass," Julie began. "What's wrong?"

"I'm crying," he sobbed, "because it's my birthday tomorrow!"

Julie looked at Little Snodgrass as if he was perfectly potty, and said, "It's your birthday tomorrow, so you're *crying*?"

"Yes."

"Why?" Julie was perplexed.

"Because," he wept, "tomorrow can never come."

"Never come?" Peter joined in. "Why not?"

"The Google Geezer has stolen it," he told them.

"Indubitably." Professor Snodgrass said. Professor Snodgrass liked big words, and, fortunately, big words liked Professor Snodgrass.

"Well I never," Julie well I nevered.

"Golly gosh," Peter golly goshed.

"Sob, sob," the boy sobbed.

"Well, why did this *Google Geezer* steal tomorrow? Do you know?" Julie asked.

"Yes, I do know. I know I do do know. He's always playing tricks on people. Bad tricks, and this is the baddest ever. He loves those bad tricks he does."

"Oh," Julie said.

"So he stole tomorrow and he keeps it in a special bottle. The only bottle that can keep tomorrow."

"Well wiggle my wogs and woggle my wigs!" Julie exclaimed.

"I wish," Little Snodgrass whimpered, "he would find another trick, and give us back tomorrow. *I want my birthday!*" And he really began to cry like mad.

"There there," said Professor Snodgrass, "if tomorrow can never come, we must endeavour to make the most of today." And he kissed his son upon the head. "Shlop," went the kiss. "Come, come help me finish the experiment."

Professor Snodgrass put the fish 'n' chips away in the oven to keep them warm. Then he found the two beakers of the funny looking stuff he needed, and handed one to his son. Little Snodgrass loved helping his father so much, he almost forgot it would never be his birthday.

"These chemicals," Professor Snodgrass explained, "are supremely super, extremely extraordinary—and a bit sloppy as well. You see, if I don't mix them in the appropriate order, something decidedly dreadful will happen. Now, do I put the blue stuff with the red stuff, or the red stuff with the blue stuff?"

Professor Snodgrass scratched his head. "Anyway! Now hold still Little Snodgrass." And he began to pour and mix.

"What will happen if you don't mix properly?" Peter asked, feeling a little worried.

"Sufficient to say, with these particular compounds," he began, still using big professor words that the children could hardly understand, "an error in mixing procedure could produce . . ."

And just then, Julie and Peter noticed a really rotten stink.

". . . could produce . . ." continued the professor, his nose beginning to twitch, ". . . could produce a most unpleasant smell." The smell was really bad by now.

"Pewy woowie noowie!" said Peter.

"Yaky baky daky!" agreed Julie.

"Ziky zaky zooooo!" admitted Little Snodgrass.

"Ugh," said the professor. "Let's get out of here before we are *smelled* to death. *Smelled* to death I say." And they all went running outside, holding their noses, eager to escape the odious odour.

"That was a horrible smell," Peter said, taking a deep breath of fresh air.

"That was a nasty smell," Julie decided.

"That was a stinkypoo smell," commented Little Snodgrass.

"That was . . ." began the professor, searching for the biggest words he knew, ". . . a putrescently perpendicular smell of a singularly stupendous and stagnant nature." Julie and Peter and Little Snodgrass had no clue what he was talking about, but they nodded their heads anyway.

"Now, where are my manners?" said the professor, searching his pockets. "Let's all sit down. Now tell me, Julie, to what do we owe the veritable pleasure of this visit?" They all sat themselves down on the garden bench.

"Well," Julie began, "we're just sort of exploring."

"Top-o," he congratulated them.

"But I was thinking," Julie continued, "maybe we can help with this Google Geezer business. Maybe we can get tomorrow back."

"But how?" Little Snodgrass looked up, suddenly very interested.

"Yes. Precisely. Precisely how?" Professor Snodgrass wondered.

"That," said Julie thoughtfully, "is a good question."

"And do you, pray tell, have a good answer?" Professor Snodgrass asked, raising one eyebrow and lowering the other.

Julie thought hard for a moment. What could they do to make the tricky Google Geezer give back tomorrow? He was obviously having a tricky time playing such a clever tricky trick on everyone. What could be done? And then, all of a sudden, Julie had an idea. All of a sudden she knew how to get tomorrow from the Google Geezer, once and for all.

"Yes I do! I know how to make the Google Geezer give back tomorrow!" she said.

"Are you sure?" Professor Snodgrass asked, dubiously. "He is, after all, exceedingly tricky."

"And lucky for us too. Now listen carefully Professor, because I'll need your help." And Julie explained her plan.

After hours and hours of work, everything was ready.

"I hope this is all right," Professor Snodgrass said, handing Julie a small jar of purple powder.

Julie looked at the small jar of purple powder. "I'm sure it is," she said, and put it in her pocket. "Now, if you can tell us where the Google Geezer lives, we can be off."

"Do we really have to visit the Google Geezer?" Peter grumbled. "I'm sure he's not even in. Yes, I'm really sure."

"*Don't be a baby,*" Julie said, and turned back to Professor Snodgrass.

"Listen carefully then," the professor began. "The route is really rather routine: simply take the high road to the low

road, clap your hands, stamp your feet, take a hop, skip, and jump, and then turn around three times."

"And?"

"And you'll be there—at the Google Geezer's home. Be careful though: there's nothing he likes more than playing tricks on people—especially *other* people!"

"We will," the children chimed together.

"Good. Now one last thing: to get back here, you must do exactly the same, but in reverse order—and with one finger stuck up your nose."

Julie and Peter said farewell to Professor Snodgrass and Little Snodgrass. And then they took the high road to the low road, clapped their hands, stamped their feet, took a hop, skip, and jump, and finally turned around three times.

And there they were, right in front of the infamous Google Geezer's home. The Google Geezer lived inside a hollow tree, and above the door a sign read: "PLEASE PULL ROPE." Dangling down from up in the tree was a rope.

"I wonder what's on the other end?" Julie wondered.

"I don't know, but we'd better do as the sign says." Peter pulled on the rope as hard as he could. Hidden in the branches, the rope was attached to a bucket full of wet water, and as Peter pulled, it tipped over and poured down on his head. "SPLASH SPLASH SPLASH!" it went. "SPLASHY SPLASHY SPLOO!"

"Ahhhh," Peter cried, soaked through to the skin! "I've been wetted!"

"Tee hee hee," they heard a voice laugh. It was the Google Geezer, peering out from his bedroom window, and enjoying every minute of his tricky trick.

"You rotter!" Peter called out to him.

"I know," said the Google Geezer, "and I love it!" His voice rasped in a hiss-hiss-hissing kind of way, and he wore a peculiar smile on his unsmiling face.

"Now what do you kids want?" he gargled.

"We want to talk with you."

"Talk with me? Wait a moment then, and I'll come on down." The Google Geezer disappeared from the window, and soon the door opened.

"Please, do come in. We'll have some tea," the Google Geezer offered. He was a tall, thin man. When he turned sideways, he looked like a piece of knotted string.

"I'm not sure . . ." began Julie, wondering if it was a good idea to go inside.

"Come now," the Google Geezer insisted, "there's nothing to be afraid of. It's only me."

"Well, all right." Julie took Peter by the hand, and in they went. They sat themselves down at the table and the Google-Geezer busied himself making the tea.

"Milk?"

"Yes please," the children answered.

"Sugar?"

"Yes please." And the Google Geezer brought the tea over, and sat at the table beside them.

"Now drink up, and tell me what you want to talk about."

"Actually, it's about tomorrow," Julie said, and took a sip of her drink. Then, suddenly, she cried out, "UGH!" and stood up spitting and spluttering. "Spit spit spit," she went. "Spit spat spoo."

"Tee hee hee," laughed the Google Geezer. Instead of *tea*, he had served the children cups of *mud*. *Mud!* Imagine it.

"Yuk," Julie slobbered. "You're a dirty rotten meany, you are!" she told him.

"I know," he answered. "And I love it."

"He's not nice, Julie. Let's go," Peter suggested.

"Just a minute Peter, we came here for a reason."

"Yes," agreed the Google Geezer, "you came here to give me some fun!" And he laughed some more, "Tee hee hee. Tee hee hee hee."

"We certainly didn't," Julie told him. "We're here because you've stolen tomorrow—and we intend to get it back."

"Get it back?" The Google Geezer laughed his snaky laugh. "And how do you propose to do that?"

"Listen carefully, you Google Geezer you," and she took out the jar containing the purple powder the professor had made. "I've got something here you might find interesting. *Very interesting.*"

"And what would that be?" he challenged.

"Look." Julie held the jar up, giving the Google Geezer a good view. "You like playing tricks on people, eh Google Geezer? Well I have here the *best* trick of all." And with that, she saw his eyes light up, his mouth begin to water, and his feet begin to throb!

"What is it? What is it? What is it?"

"This, my dear Google Geezer, is a jar of **MAGIC ITCHING POWDER**. It will last forever. You can play tricks forever and ever with this." And Julie held out the jar to entice him. "And best of all, it's all harmless fun." The Google Geezer, you see, wasn't a truly bad person, it's just that he loved playing tricks on people—especially *other* people. He was wobbling like crazy to get his hands on what seemed to be the best trick of all: one that could be played again and again, for ever and ever; and after all, it would be just harmless fun. But then his trickiness brought caution.

"How do I know it works?" asked the tricky Google Geezer, trickily.

"You can test it," Julie said.

"But how can we?" Peter began. Julie opened the bottle and gave her brother a strange look. And it was that strange look that made him realise what she intended to do; how she planned to test the **MAGIC ITCHING POWDER**.

"Oh no you don't!" he protested. "You're not trying that stuff on me. You're not putting it down *my* back." And finally, in a resigned sort of way, "Why should it be *me*?"

"Because you're the youngest, and because I said so, and because I'll kick your bum if you carry on. Now *don't be a*

baby!" She pulled on the collar of his shirt, and sprinkled a little of the **MAGIC ITCHING POWDER** down his back.

"It's not fair," Peter said. "And anyway, it doesn't even work!"

"Oh dear," Julie sighed. But then, after a few moments, Peter began to scratch his back like mad. It really did itch. Itchy itchy itch, it went. Skitchy skatchy skoo. Julie had to laugh!

"Tee hee hee," sniggered the Google Geezer, in his snaky way.

"Scratch my back for me, *please*," Peter pleaded.

"I want it! I want it! I want it!" the Google Geezer began to fizzle all over the place. All over the place. "I want it! I want it! I want it!" he fizzled.

"I thought you would."

"Give me it first, and then you can have tomorrow. I promise." And do you think the Google Geezer would keep his promise? Well, Julie didn't.

"No way." She refused. "You hand over tomorrow first."

The thought of playing tricks forever and ever was too much for the Google Geezer. And anyway, if he did keep tomorrow, he could only play tricks today. He stepped onto a banana skin, slipped upstairs, and came back holding a small pink bottle with a cork in the top.

"This is the only bottle that can keep tomorrow," he told them. "I'll be very sorry to see it go."

"But think what fun you can have with this," Julie said, thinking he might change his mind. "And best of all, it's all harmless fun." The Google Geezer gave the bottle of tomorrow to Julie in exchange for the **MAGIC ITCHING POWDER**.

With the Google Geezer chuckling away to himself, in tricky anticipation of the tricky tricks he could play, for ever and ever, Julie and Peter began the topsyturvy journey back to the village.

"Stick a finger up your nose, and follow me," Julie told

her brother, who was still busy trying to scratch his back. And so, with fingers in noses, they turned around three times, took a jump skip and hop, stamped their feet, clapped their hands, took the low road to the high, and arrived back at Professor Snodgrass's house. Lucky for Peter, the **MAGIC ITCHING POWDER** didn't work for too long, and by then it had just about worn off. Professor Snodgrass and Little Snodgrass were working away on something or other.

"Ah, hello Julie. Hello Peter. We'll be with you both in a moment." And he turned back to his chemicals. "Now, where was I? Oh yes, this is the tricky part. If I don't mix this brown stuff with that yellow stuff in just the right way, which is to say very slowly, very very slowly, something quite dreadful could happen." And then he scratched his head in a thoughtful way. "Or should it be very quickly? Very very quickly? Anyway! Hold the beaker still Little Snodgrass." And he began to mix. After a moment, something quite dreadful happened: The chemicals started to bubble, and the bubbles bubbled bubbles, until quite soon they were everywhere. The whole room began to fill, and the bubbles bubbled and bubbled and bubbled.

"Quick!" cried the professor, "let's get out of here, before we are all *bubbled* to death! *Bubbled* to death I say!"

At last they were all in the garden, but Professor Snodgrass didn't quite know what to say.

"I don't quite know what to say," he said.

"That's all right," Julie told him. "Accidents will happen."

"Yes," he agreed, "but they always seem to happen to *me*."

"Never mind."

"No, never mind," Peter added.

"No, no, never mind," said the sad looking Little Snodgrass.

"Are you still sad about tomorrow never coming?" Julie asked him.

"Yes." And his bottom lip stuck out to prove it was true.

"You're both back so soon," Professor Snodgrass noted.

"Yes, and we have good news."

"Bravo," Professor Snodgrass said. "Good news is always good news."

"We have something that will cheer you up, Little Snodgrass."

"Nothing can do that," he answered.

"Not even this?" Julie showed him the pink bottle.

"What's that?"

"Look inside." Little Snodgrass took the bottle.

"It's all funny looking." And it was. It was all mixed up and muddled. It had bits floating in it. Bits that would, bits that could, and bits that shouldn't—but did anyway. "What is it?" Little Snodgrass asked. Julie and Peter told him.

"It's tomorrow," they called together. The boy's face lit up.

"Really really?" It seemed too good to be true.

"Really," the children said.

"Really really really?"

"Really really!"

"Really really really really?"

"Really really really!" they said.

"Now," Julie began, "take off the cork, and let it come out." Little Snodgrass removed the stopper, and for a moment they all felt dazed and dizzy, as if time was trying to catch up with itself.

"I'm going to be six. I'm going to be six," the boy sang. Professor Snodgrass smashed the bottle and threw all the pices in the bin, so that no-one could steal tomorrow ever again. And they all began to celebrate with a party of fish 'n' chips and red pop.

The two children were alone now. Julie took a pin from her hair.

"It's time to go home. It's time to burst the balloons," she said.

"But they'll go bang," Peter complained.

"So?"

"I don't like things that go bang."

"*Don't be a baby,*" she told him and burst the two balloons. BANG! BANG! they went, and, QUICK AS A FLASH, Julie and Peter disappeared.

The children found themselves back in Grandfather Jacob's attic. Morning light was streaking in through the small window. Julie locked the attic door and they hurried to bed, where they pretended to be asleep until Grandfather Jacob came up.

"Wakey-wakey. Rise and shine," Grandfather said. "It's tomorrow."

"You mean it's today," Julie said.

"Well maybe I do, and maybe I don't," Grandfather Jacob said, with a twinkle in his eye.

And so, next time you have an itch on your back, and try to reach that unreachable spot to scratch—*but just can't quite do it*—you'll know it's just the Google Geezer up to his old tricks—

but don't tell anyone, will you?