

Bedtime Stories **for KIDS**

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This is the first of a number of Dexter stories

The puppies were warm and snuggled close to their Mother. One of them was much larger than the others and kicked his little legs about whilst trying to get comfy. "Ow" shouted one of the others. "Sorry" replied the big puppy. "I thought you were a cushion."

There were eight puppies altogether; four boys and four girls. It would soon be time for them to find new homes and already people were calling round to see them. One day a tall man with a nice face came to look at them. He picked up the very large puppy, held him close to his face and gazed into his eyes. The puppy looked back at the nice face and bit his nose. "Ow" shouted the man. "You just bit my nose." "So that's a nose," thought the puppy. "I like noses. They seem like fun." The man wasn't too upset. "You're a friendly puppy, but very cheeky," he said laughingly. "I think I will take you home with me." "I wonder what cheeky means?" thought the puppy. He wasn't to know that he would be called that name many more times during his life.

The man took the puppy home to his wife and son Jonathan. They lived in a large house with a huge garden and woodlands at the back. He put the puppy down on the lawn and the puppy walked straight over to a red flower and bit its head off. "Cheeky", said the man picking him up and taking him indoors. His wife, who was carrying a big slice of freshly made chocolate cake, and son came running to see the new arrival. The puppy was being held very tightly under the man's arm. There was a red flower head dangling out of his mouth. Jonathan put his face close to the puppy and said, "You're cheeky." "There's that word again," thought the puppy, and immediately dropped the flower and bit Jonathan's nose. The puppy was happy. That was two noses in one day. "Ow," cried Jonathan. "He just bit my nose." "I know," replied his Dad. "He bit mine earlier. I guess he likes noses."

Jonathan's Mum then walked over to the little puppy, leaned forward and stroked him gently with her free hand. The puppy also leaned forward and took a huge bite out of the chocolate cake. "Mmmm," he said to himself. "That was really really nice," and he licked the crumbs from his mouth. He then tried to take another bite, but Jonathan's Mum quickly backed away laughing. "I think I am going to be happy here," thought the puppy. "The people are friendly, the food is tasty and there are lots of noses to bite."

"What shall we call him Dad?" asked Jonathan. "Dexter," said his Mum. Jonathan, his Dad and the puppy all looked at her in surprise. "Why Dexter?" asked Jonathan. Jonathan's Mum went over to the puppy, smiled at him and said, "Do you like the name Dexter?" The puppy gazed back at her, bit her on the nose, and from that day on he was called Dexter.

GRANDAD'S MISSING TEETH

Children are made readers on the laps of their parents. Emilie Buchwald

Dexter a big and very smelly dog was best friends with Rufus, who was much smaller and not as smelly, thank goodness.

One warm sunny day Dexter, who had been asleep, woke and stretched lazily. He snapped at a little fly that had cheekily landed on his nose. The fly flew away smiling to herself. "It must be one of my very smelly days," thought Dexter, and with that happy thought he wandered off to find his little friend Rufus.

Rufus lived next door and Dexter wriggled under the fence, chewed at a blade of grass on his way through and spat it out again. "Ugh, that was awful," he shouted to no-one. He then ambled slowly to the back door, searching all the time for any bits of food lying around. Apart from being smelly, he was also a bit greedy. He spotted some bread, pounced on a crust and started to chew it quickly. "Hey," shouted a very angry blackbird. "That's been thrown out for us." Dexter stopped in mid chew and looked guiltily at the ground. "Sorry," he mumbled through the chewed bread and walked slowly away. He hoped the blackbird hadn't noticed that the crust was still in his mouth as it had some very nice butter on it, and it tasted a lot better than the grass.

To announce his arrival, he let out an enormous bark and frightened himself. It didn't sound a bit like him because of the bread in his mouth. After a short while a small head appeared out of the cat flap, glanced nervously around, and shot back in again. It was Rufus.

"Hey," shouted Dexter. "It's me." Rufus popped his head out again, saw his friend and jumped all the way out. He walked over to Dexter, glancing anxiously round the garden as if he were expecting a monster to leap out. "What's the matter?" asked Dexter who suddenly let out a huge hiccup as he had eaten the bread too quickly. Rufus jumped back in surprise. "Well," asked Dexter again, "What's the problem?" "I heard this very strange mumbley noise and it sounded like a big wild animal," answered

Rufus, his eyes wide with fear. "It was me," laughed Dexter. "I was chewing a crust." "HMMMMM," muttered Rufus, who didn't believe him. He still thought something strange was lurking in his garden. He wasn't too keen either on the big burp he had just heard.

"Right." barked Dexter, leaping about and hiccuping again. Apart from being smelly and greedy he was also very noisy. "What shall we do, frighten the cat next door or dig up Mr Green's garden? I think I have left an old bone in there." Rufus looked at his big, smelly friend and said quietly, "I said I would help Grandad."

"Grandad," snorted Dexter. "What's wrong with Grandad?"

"He's lost his teeth," replied Rufus even more quietly.

Dexter gave a loud doggy sigh. "Has he looked in his mouth? That's where teeth can usually be found."

"These are false teeth," said Rufus not quite sure what false teeth were, "and he's lost the top ones."

"Right," said Dexter, eager to start the search. "What do they look like?"

"Like teeth," replied Rufus a little unhelpfully.

"I have never seen teeth outside of a mouth," said Dexter. "Do they bite?"

Rufus hadn't thought of that and he began to wish he had not offered to help. He couldn't think of anything worse than finding some biting teeth. "If we do find them," said Rufus a little nervously, "and they look like they are going to bite us, we will run away."

"Ok," said Dexter who privately thought that if some teeth were going to bite him, then he would jolly well bite them back.

The two friends set off for the wood nearby. They scrambled under the fence both laughing because the grass tickled their tummies. Rufus found it much easier to crawl under as he was so much smaller. Sometimes it helped to be little. The dogs set off sniffing and barking and digging little holes as dogs do, when suddenly Dexter stopped. He stopped so suddenly that poor Rufus fell over him. Dexter then shot his nose in the air and gave a huge sniff. It was such a big sniff that a passing butterfly was sucked towards him. "Sorry," muttered Dexter and the butterfly pulled her tongue out at him and flew off.

"What is it?" asked Rufus hopefully. "Can you smell the teeth?" Dexter paused for a while and then said, "No. I think it's a sausage. Someone is having a barbecue."

"Can we please concentrate on teeth," snapped Rufus getting a little

annoyed. "Sorry," said Dexter disappointedly. The sausage did smell very very nice.

The friends carried on walking, and this time Rufus kept well back in case Dexter did another emergency stop. They came to a clearing and saw about ten squirrels all gathered round in a circle. "What are they up to?" asked Dexter. He wasn't too keen on the squirrels because he liked to chase them and as soon as he was about to pounce on one, it would run up a tree, sit on the high branches, and call him names. Squirrels could be very rude.

"Hello squirrels," said Rufus politely, "are you having a party?"

"No," replied the oldest squirrel. "We have found something strange and we brought it here to eat, but we don't like the look of it." Dexter and Rufus immediately ran over to the squirrel circle and peered in. There, lying on the ground, was something pink with what looked like teeth stuck on the outer edge. "I think that's what we are looking for," whispered Rufus. Dexter stared at the strange object and couldn't quite believe that someone would actually put that in their mouth. "You can have it if you want," said another squirrel. "We prefer nuts," and with that the squirrels all ran off and left the teeth on the ground.

Dexter peered a little closer and saw that the teeth were covered in bits of soil and dirt. "Wow, they look a mess, and they smell worse than me," said Dexter. "I think we had better clean them up before we give them back to Grandad. "Let's go and wash them in the pond."

"Ok," replied Rufus who was very pleased with their find. Dexter picked up the false teeth very carefully, just in case they tried to bite him, and Rufus started laughing. "What?" mumbled Dexter with a mouthful of teeth.

"You look as though you are smiling," said Rufus.

"Leth hurry," mumbled Dexter. "I don't like theeth teeth in my mouth." Dexter also thought he had seen an ant walking about on the teeth, and he hated the taste of ants.

The two dogs ran through the trees and headed for the pond. Dexter was sure the teeth were trying to talk to him and he couldn't wait to spit them out. At the water's edge Dexter leaned over and began to swish the teeth backwards and forwards in the water trying to get them clean. "Is the dirt coming off?" asked Rufus anxiously. "Yeth it ith," replied Dexter finding it very difficult to speak with two sets of teeth in his mouth. Unfortunately,

as he opened his mouth to answer he dropped the teeth in the pond. The two dogs watched in dismay as they sank down and rested on the bottom. Poor Dexter started to panic. "Are those the false teeth, or mine?" he said in horror. Rufus asked him to open his mouth so he could check and when Dexter opened his mouth wide, Rufus shot back in terror. There before him was the biggest set of white teeth he had ever seen.

"Quick shut your mouth Dexter. Your teeth are safely in there."

Rufus gazed into the pond and saw the false teeth smiling back at him.

"I can't reach them. The water's too deep," wailed Rufus. "It is for me too," said Dexter who was very relieved he still had his own teeth.

"What are we going to do," cried Rufus who was beginning to get upset. Both dogs sat down and tried to think of an answer. Dexter wasn't the best of thinkers. He was much better at eating and smelling. Rufus sat down, squeezed his eyes shut and concentrated hard. Immediately a picture of a big juicy sausage popped into his head. That didn't help at all.

Just as they were about to give up, a frog appeared and shouted a friendly hello. "I must say you two look very sad," said the frog cheerily.

"We have a problem," explained Dexter and he told the frog of their mishap. The frog looked down into the water and saw the teeth lying on the bottom still smiling. "I think I will be able to get those for you," he said happily and off he hopped into the pond. He then dived down using his strong legs to send him to the bottom. "I wish I had legs like that," sighed Rufus. "Somehow," said Dexter seriously, "I don't think they would look right on you. Frogs' legs only look good on frogs." Of course he was right.

A few seconds later the teeth started to move and it looked as though they were floating to the top. Behind them was the frog pushing them up with his head. Soon the teeth broke the surface and Dexter grabbed them. "Whatever you do, don't talk," warned Rufus. "Ok," said Dexter who promptly dropped the teeth again, but luckily they landed on the grass. The two dogs thanked the frog for all his help and promised to come and play with him the next day. The frog croaked happily and hopped away.

"Quick let's get them back to Grandad," said Rufus anxiously. Rufus and Dexter ran as fast as they could back to the garden, crawled under the fence and Dexter placed the teeth on a garden chair. "Do you think they will be all right?" Rufus asked Dexter a little concerned. "What if they are a bit smelly?" "Well," said Dexter knowingly, "I have always found my

bones to be at their very best when they are smelly." Rufus didn't think Grandad would like smelly teeth, but he decided not to say anything for fear of upsetting Dexter. Just then Grandad came out of the house and began walking towards the greenhouse.

Rufus went over to the teeth, and started to bark. He barked so much that Grandad asked him what was wrong. Rufus continued barking until Grandad came over and of course he saw the teeth. He shouted in a toothless voice to no-one in particular. "I have found my teeth. They were in the garden all the time." He inspected them carefully and then put them in his mouth. "Mmmmmm," he said to himself. "These are nice. They taste of nuts" Dexter and Rufus looked at each other and wondered if the squirrels had been chewing them and had left a nutty taste behind. They shared a little smile together.

Dexter was now very hungry and he told Rufus he was going in for his tea. "I've enjoyed helping Grandad today," he said, and because he was feeling in a very generous mood he added, "and if Grandad loses anything else, just give me a shout." "Well, as a matter of fact," replied Rufus, "he did say his cat had gone missing." Dexter stopped dead in his tracks. "Cat," he snorted. "Cat." He then gave one of his biggest and noisiest snorts ever. "Count me out. I do not do cat searches." There was no way he was going to search for a smelly old cat. Important dogs like Dexter just didn't do things like that. Not even for Grandad.

A little bit of inside information

Grandad's cat is nearly as big as Dexter and has very long claws. I think, despite all his snorting, that Dexter is just a little bit afraid of the smelly old cat, don't you? Please don't tell anyone., This is our secret.

THE VERY STRANGE BIRTHDAY PRESENT

There are no seven wonders of the world in the eyes of a child. There are seven million. Walt Streightiff

One of a selection of fun children's bedtime stories by gemma.

These delightful bedtime stories have a feel-good factor, are safe to read, and have a happy ending

Oliver was a kind little bear with big brown eyes who always had his nose in the honey pot. This meant that as well as being kind he was also very

sticky. Today was his birthday and he was so excited that he fell out of bed and landed in a heap of fur on the floor.

"Come and open your presents," his Mum shouted and he charged into the kitchen that smelled of warm pancakes and honey. He didn't know what to do first, open his gifts or eat a pancake so he did both. Honey dripped from his mouth as he eagerly tore open present after present. There was a toy mouse that sang 'Happy Birthday', coloured pencils that squeaked when squeezed and a pair of bright red boots with tassels. Oliver loved tassels.

At last he came to the final gift which was very small and felt hard. He noticed it was from his Mum and he tingled with excitement as she always got him just what he wanted. He tore at the pretty paper and suddenly a bright green stone fell out. Oliver stared at the stone which shone brightly back at him, but he couldn't help feeling a twinge of disappointment. He glanced up at his Mum who was watching him carefully. She smiled and explained, "It's a wishing stone Oliver. You hold it in your paws and make a wish, and if you are very lucky it will come true." "Wow!" exclaimed Oliver, looking at the stone in a new light. "I'll try it out straight away." He held the shiny green stone in his sticky paws and noticed how cool and smooth it felt. He held on tight, closed his eyes and wished with all his might that today would be the best day of his life.

"Did you make a wish Oliver?" asked his Mum. He explained and she said "And what do you think would make this the best day of your life?" Oliver gave a little frown as he thought for a while and then said, "Lots of chocolate and honey to eat, a picnic with all my friends and not having to make my bed." Oliver's Mum smiled at him and said, "Well I hope you get your wish."

Oliver's party was to take place later that day so he figured he had just enough time to fit in a game of hide and seek with his best friend Ross. Ross, who lived next door, was a friendly little bear but his fur was a very unusual colour. His owner had stuffed him into the washing machine one day and although he had come out very clean, the green socks that had shared the wash with him, had tinted the ends of his fur, and in the right light he looked a bit scary, even to himself. He had also been known to frighten the cat a few times. Ross was very forgetful, and the last time

they played hide and seek, he was supposed to be doing the seeking. Part way through the game he forgot what he was playing and went home for his tea, and poor Oliver fell asleep waiting to be found. It turned out to be a very long game.

Oliver rushed outside into the warm golden sunshine and was just about to leap over a small bush into Ross's garden when he heard sobbing. He spotted Mrs Bumble, a very kind elderly bear, sitting on her garden wall with shopping bags all around her, and her head in her paws. He ran over to her, put a friendly sticky paw on her shoulder, and asked what was wrong. She explained , in between huge sobs, that she had lost her keys and couldn't get into the house to feed her new puppy Max who was making a dreadful noise behind the front door.

It was getting late and Oliver knew that his party was about to start. He looked at poor Mrs Bumble who was becoming more agitated by the minute, and he could hear Max scratching frantically at the door. Although only a young bear, Oliver was always considerate of others, and he decided there and then that his party would have to wait. He would help.

The little bear set off towards the shops keeping his eyes to the ground in the hope of finding the keys, and it was half an hour later that he successfully located them at the Pharmacy. Mrs Bumble had gone in to buy some rosehip syrup and must have dropped her keys when she took the money out of her pocket. Oliver thanked the shop owner for keeping the keys safe, and in return Oliver was given a bag of humbugs for being so helpful.

Oliver rushed back to Mrs Bumble who hadn't moved an inch since he left her, and he could hear Max now whimpering sadly. Mrs Bumble looked up with a tear stained face as she heard him approach, and when she saw the keys she hugged Oliver so hard she crushed three of his humbugs. She quickly unlocked the door and the puppy charged out and ran round and round them both yapping excitedly. Mrs Bumble fed Max straight away and he gobbled up his meal so quickly he gave himself hiccups. Then, in between the hiccups, he started licking both Oliver and Mrs Bumble over and over again. He was very pleased to see them.

"Oliver, I have something to ask you," said Mrs Bumble anxiously. "Today has made me realise that I am a little too old and a little too forgetful to have a young puppy, and I was wondering if your Mum would let you

keep him?" Oliver's little face lit up with excitement as he said, "I'll ask her. Can I take Max now?" "Yes", replied Mrs Bumble and her eyes filled with tears for the second time that day. She stroked the little puppy and Max gave her an enormous lick. "I will miss him so much," she sobbed, "but I know he will be much happier with you. Thank you so much for your help today Oliver. I hope I haven't kept you from anything important?" and the polite little bear with the sticky paws simply said "No, nothing important."

Oliver ran home with the little puppy wriggling under his arm. He burst into the house and found his Mum playing games with all of his friends. "Oliver," she cried, "where have you been? We had to start the party without you." Oliver explained everything and put the puppy down on the floor. "Can I keep him Mum? Can I? Can I? Can I? "I'm not sure Oliver," replied his Mum. "You already have a hamster and three pink mice." The little puppy walked over to Oliver's Mum and began to pull at her slippers. He pulled so hard a bow came off and the puppy fell over backwards. Oliver and his Mum laughed and the puppy wagged his tail and gave a little bark. "I do believe," said his Mum smiling, "he will fit in very well in this house. Yes, you can keep him," and Oliver gave her a kiss and a big hug and crushed another humbug. The party was a huge success and the food was delicious. Max of course joined in all the games and even won one, which made everyone laugh.

Later that night when Oliver was tucked up in bed and Max was snuggled next to him, his Mum said, "Well, Oliver did you get your wish?. Oliver had completely forgotten about the wishing stone and he thought for a while and then said, "No, I don't think I did. I wished for honey and chocolate and a picnic and I didn't get any of those things, but it doesn't matter." "No, Oliver," replied his Mum, "that's not what you wished for. If you remember, you wished that today would be the best day of your life." Oliver looked thoughtfully at his Mum and then remembered Mrs Bumble and how he had missed the beginning of his party so that he could help her. He had got so much pleasure out of helping someone else. He looked at the little puppy now curled up and sleeping peacefully next to him, and he felt a warm glow of love for the little creature. "Do you know Mum, this has been the best day of my life and the stone did make my wish come true after all. Thank you for such a special present." "The stone is very special but it can't work on its own. You got your wish because you deserved it. Always remember when you do something helpful

and unselfish for someone else, then something very special will happen to you. Goodnight my little son and goodnight little Max." Max turned over and put a small paw on Oliver's arm and Oliver smiled down at the puppy, closed his eyes, and fell fast asleep

SARAH'S SECRET

You can learn many things from children. How much patience you have for instance. Franklin P Jones

One of a selection of fun children's bedtime stories by Gemma
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"It's so not fair," cried Sarah to herself. "Mum's going off for the day and I'm supposed to stay at a stranger's house. I'd rather stay on my own. I won't go!"

Sarah knew, however, that she had no choice because her Mum had been called away on some family emergency and Mrs Young, whose own children had long since left home, had agreed to take Sarah for the day. Sarah, who was nearly seven, was very shy and couldn't think of anything worse than spending a day with a stranger. The more she thought about it, the more she began to panic. What would they talk about? What if she were hungry and was too afraid to ask for something to eat, and she couldn't bear to think about needing the bathroom.

The day finally arrived and Sarah, with her shoulders hunched and her head hanging down, walked with her Mum up the gravel path towards Mrs Young's front door. Sarah hung on so tightly to her Mum's hand that her Mum cried out in pain. "Stop that. You're hurting me!" she said rather loudly. Sarah stared at her feet in silence. Her Mum just didn't understand how hard this was for her.

As they approached the door, it was flung open by a huge lady with a grin like the Cheshire cat. She was wearing a large pink and grey apron which Sarah thought made her look like a rather large elephant. "Come in. Come in!" she shrilled and stepped to one side as Sarah's Mum tried to squeeze past dragging a very reluctant Sarah behind her.

"Now", said Mrs Young, nodding at Sarah's Mum, "you get off and Sarah and I will just get to know each other." The huge lady beamed at Sarah and poor Sarah started to blush and began to feel very hot and sticky.

She looked at her Mum in the most pleading way she knew how, silently begging her not to leave her with this grey and pink woman. Sarah felt a tear begin to trickle slowly down her cheek but whether her Mum saw it or not Sarah didn't know. Her Mum quickly bent down, kissed her daughter briefly on the cheek and, in a cloud of perfume, left.

"This is it," thought Sarah miserably. "A whole day in this place and nowhere to hide." Mrs Young took Sarah's hand and led her into the lounge and almost pushed her down on to the settee. Mrs Young then settled herself next to her. "Oh! That's much too close," thought Sarah and moved away from the large woman who smelled of cooking.

"Now dear," said Mrs Young, bringing her face so close to Sarah's that Sarah could see a few little hairs sprouting from her chin. "Tell me about yourself." Sarah knew she should reply but was too embarrassed to speak. Mrs Young tried again. "What would you like to do today?" Again there was silence and Sarah was beginning to feel very uncomfortable. Mrs Young tried very hard to get Sarah to talk but Sarah knew she was becoming a little angry. "What are you doing at school?" came the clipped question as she was obviously losing patience. Sarah just wanted to run off home but she knew that was impossible. Mrs Young said in a somewhat sarcastic voice, "Do you have a tongue child?" Sarah thought she was going to die. Her heart was pounding, she was very very hot and the smell of cooking was making her feel sick.

After a few more questions, followed by a few more silences, Mrs Young tutted "My, my, we are a quiet little girl. Well I haven't time to waste here with you, so I'll put you in the play room and get on with my jobs." "Oh! Thank goodness," sighed Sarah to herself. "I'm going to be left alone." The large lady pushed herself up slowly out of the settee and a few springs groaned in relief. She grabbed Sarah's hand roughly, pulled her up and marched off towards a brown door which Sarah hadn't noticed before. Mrs Young opened the door and she and Sarah stepped into a very dark and untidy room which had been a children's play room many years ago. "You stay here and play with anything you want, and I will come back later with some lunch." She then turned quite quickly for such a big lady and left the room. Sarah stood there for a few minutes taking in the mess around her. She then walked over to the door, closed it quietly and shut herself off from Mrs Young and the rest of the world. Sarah didn't like the room. It was dark and had a musty smell. The floor

which was covered in threadbare carpet, was littered with books, toys and games. Sarah walked over to the boxes of games and carefully lifted a few lids. Not one of the games was complete. Bits were either missing or broken and the books were so old, Sarah didn't even want to open one in case a spider or something worse walked out. There was a faded red ball in the corner which at some time had been big and bouncy, but was now sadly flat, and the toys were very dirty. One poor teddy had an eye, an ear and one leg missing.

Sarah turned round slowly in a full circle trying to find something that was worth playing with. There was nothing, so she sat down in the middle of the mess and sighed deeply. She had been sitting there for a few minutes when she spotted a curtain pulled across one corner of the room. "I wonder what could be lurking behind there?" she thought. She didn't hold out much hope of it being something interesting because the rest of the room was such a mess. Should she take a peep or not? She was a little afraid of what she might find, but curiosity got the better of her and she tiptoed over to the corner and took a deep breath. She decided to count to three and then quickly pull back the curtain. "One, two, three," she counted and tugged at the curtain with great force. "Oh!" she exclaimed. "Oh!" She blinked her eyes several times to make sure she wasn't seeing things. She reached out and touched it gently. Yes it was real. Standing before her was the most beautiful rocking horse she had ever seen. It was pale gold in colour with a long gold mane and tail. The mane was plaited and each little plait was tied with a scarlet ribbon. On its back was a bright red saddle, and its scarlet bridle was studded with jewels. Sarah stared for a long long time and then stepped nearer to the beautiful horse. "I wonder if I dare get on its back?" she thought and then remembered Mrs Young saying she could play with anything she wanted. "I bet Mrs Young was trying to keep this horse a secret," thought Sarah. "That's why he is tucked behind the curtain."

She patted the horse gently on its neck, picked up the reins and slipped her foot into the stirrup. Then with a huge effort she swung herself up into the saddle. She sat quite still enjoying the feel of the smooth leather saddle and the bright red reins in her hands. Very slowly she began to rock backwards and forwards. It was the most wonderful feeling ever and she no longer felt afraid or shy. She began to go faster and faster and it was as though she were galloping along a sandy beach with the sun on her

back and the breeze blowing through her hair. She felt as free as a bird. After what seemed like a long time she very gently began to slow down until horse and rider came to a stop. "Oh! That was the most wonderful ride I have ever had," she sighed, patting the horse's neck. "Thank you," replied the horse. "I'm glad you enjoyed it." Sarah was stunned. It seemed as if the horse had spoken to her, but she knew she must have been mistaken. She waited to see if the horse spoke again, but all was quiet. She had imagined it. She smiled to herself, bent forward and patted the horse again and said, "You know something funny. I really thought you just spoke to me." "I did," replied the horse. "No! this can't be real. Rocking horses don't talk. I'm going mad." "No you're not," said the horse. "You are a very kind little girl called Sarah and you are afraid of grown ups." "Oh! that is so spooky," whispered Sarah. "How do you know about me?" "I know lots of things about lots of people. Why are you afraid of grown ups?" "Well," replied Sarah, "I never know what to say to them. I just go red and feel hot and uncomfortable." "I'll let you into a secret," said the horse. "Most adults really like to talk about themselves, so next time you meet one, just ask them how they are feeling or ask about their holiday and just stand back and listen. Sometimes you can't shut them up." Sarah smiled at this advice. It sounded so simple, but she promised to give it a try. "Do you honestly think I'll be able to talk to people?" she asked anxiously. "Well you are talking to me now," smiled the horse. "Yes I am," said Sarah, surprised at her own courage. She realised she wasn't shy at all talking to this beautiful animal, but then the horse wasn't an adult.

"Can I come back and see you again please?" asked Sarah. "Of course," replied the horse. "If you need me, you will find me." "What a strange thing to say," thought Sarah. "I know where you are. You are in this dark, musty room."

"I would like you to have something of mine to remind you about our little talk. Please take one of my ribbons from my mane and keep it safe." "Oh! Thank you," said Sarah gratefully, and she carefully untied one of the scarlet ribbons, slipped it in her pocket and flung her arms round the horse's neck and gave him a big hug.

"I think I hear someone coming," whispered the horse and Sarah looked at her watch and realised it was nearly time to go home. "I wonder what happened to my lunch?" she thought. She slipped off the horse's back, gave him a pat, kissed his soft nose and whispered, "I'll see you again."

She moved out from behind the curtain, pulled it back over the corner, and went and sat in the middle of the untidy room.

Sure enough after a few minutes Mrs Young burst into the room, still smelling of cooking with her apron now covered in flour and splodges of jam. She was followed by Sarah's Mum. Sarah got up and rushed over to her Mum and hugged her. "Had a good day?" asked her Mum smiling down at her. "One of the best," replied Sarah. "Mrs Young let me play in here and I have been riding the most beautiful rocking horse ever." "Well." said Mrs Young, looking at her curiously, "Sarah certainly has a good imagination, even though she doesn't talk much. I don't have a rocking horse." "Oh but you do," insisted Sarah. "It's just behind that curtain. Come on I will show you." Sarah, her Mum and Mrs Young all walked over to the curtain and with a great flourish Sarah pulled it back and stepped to one side so they could both have a good view.

"What am I supposed to be looking at?" asked her Mum puzzled. Sarah followed her Mum's gaze and saw nothing more than a pair of old step ladders and a stool. "Well", asked Mrs Young with a silly grin on her face, "where's this wonderful horse?" Sarah was dumbfounded. She couldn't quite believe what was going on. "But, but, but," she stammered. "It was here. I rode it." "Yes, of course you did dear," said Mrs Young winking at Sarah's Mum. "I did, I did." cried Sarah beginning to get very upset, "and the horse spoke to me." "Right," said Sarah's Mum a little sharply. "That will do Sarah. Say thank you to Mrs Young and we will get off home for tea." Sarah said a tearful goodbye and she and her Mum walked home in silence.

When they arrived her Mum said, "Go and get washed and ready for bed and then come down and have some tea." "It's too early for bed," sobbed Sarah. "Do as I say," replied her Mum crossly. "Little girls who tell lies should be taught a lesson." "But I didn't tell any lies." Sarah began, but her Mum interrupted her, "That will do, Sarah. I don't know what's come over you today and I don't want to hear another word about talking horses." Sarah went to her room in silence. She sat on the bed and the tears rolled down her cheeks. She knew she had seen and spoken to the horse. Why would no-one believe her. After a few minutes of deep sobbing, she pulled herself together, had a wash and got into her pyjamas. She threw her day clothes on the floor in a fit of despair. Tea wasn't a happy occasion and Sarah picked at a few chips, took a

bite out of a sausage and left the rest. It was one of her favourite meals, but she wasn't in the mood for eating. Her Mum was still mad at her and Sarah could sense her staring at her, but she didn't look up. After the meal her Mum spoke. "Sarah, I don't know what's wrong with you. You know you should not tell lies and I am very disappointed in you." Sarah tried to speak but her Mum held up her hand to quieten her. "Now get yourself to bed and perhaps in the morning you will feel different about things. You can then apologise for your behaviour."

Sarah left the table and began to walk up the stairs to bed. "Oh and by the way," called her Mum after her. "If you have thrown your clothes on the floor, please pick them up and put them away." Sarah always marvelled at the way her Mum knew what she had done. She must have a sixth sense.

She carried on up the stairs, went to the bathroom to clean her teeth, and then went to her room. She reluctantly picked up all the clothes that had been left lying on the floor and put them away. She got into bed and pulled the covers up high under her chin. She thought about her day and how she had met the wonderful horse. Then she remembered Mrs Young and her Mum who both thought she was lying. Was there a chance that she had imagined it all? Maybe she was so desperate for someone to talk to and understand her that she had made up the story. What if the horse was all in her mind? She felt a little disappointed that it could all have been make believe.

By now she was feeling a little sleepy and her eyes began to droop. Perhaps she should rehearse what she was going to say to her Mum by way of an apology. She snuggled down and turned on her side feeling a little flat at the possibility that it had all been a big mistake when something caught her eye. She glanced at it carefully. It was lying on the carpet. She crawled out of bed and went over to pick it up. There in all its glory was a small scarlet ribbon. It must have dropped out of her cardigan when she threw her clothes on the floor. She held on to it very tightly and her whole body began to tingle with excitement. It hadn't been make believe after all. The horse was real and here was proof. Sarah climbed back into bed clutching tightly to the little ribbon, a huge smile on her face. Now she knew what she was going to tell her Mum in the morning. She was going to apologise and say she must have been mistaken. This secret was far too big to share with anyone. In fact,

Sarah believed that the horse didn't want to be seen by anyone but her. She, and only she, knew the truth and she also knew that there would be lots of other times when she would meet her beloved horse. He would be there when she needed him, and she didn't have to go to Mrs Young's to find him. "That's what he must have meant," Sarah thought, " when he said If you need me, you will find me." He was now her secret and Sarah felt supremely happy and at peace. With that thought uppermost in her mind she fell fast asleep with a smile on her face and a little scarlet ribbon clutched tightly in her hand.

THE LONELY LITTLE DOG

If you carry your childhood with you, you never become older. Tom Stoppard

One of a selection of fun children's bedtime stories by gemma. These delightful bedtime stories have a feel-good factor, are safe to read, and have a happy ending

Tufty waited patiently on the toy shop shelf. He had been there for about three months. He was sad and lonely because no-one wanted to buy him, and he was getting a little dusty. Youngsters would skip into the shop, look eagerly round the shelves for a toy and choose a teddy. Tufty was a husky dog. He had a bright red collar with a shiny tag which proudly displayed his name. He had a fluffy coat and shiny eyes that looked longingly at the door whenever anyone entered.

This particular day was wet and cold and Tufty thought no-one would be out and about. He gave a little sigh, dropped his head and thought that maybe tomorrow would be better. Just then the door burst open and a gust of wind blew some leaves into the shop. A small boy with pink cheeks ran in and immediately went over to the teddies. "Here they are Mum," he shouted in excitement. "Which one shall I get?" "Why don't you have a change?" asked his Mum. "You already have five teddies at home and it would be nice to take something different." The little boy glanced round all the shelves and Tufty waited, hardly daring to breathe, hoping with all his might that this time it would be him. Then the unbelievable happened and the little boy lifted Tufty off the shelf and said, "He looks nice Mum. He's got a huge curly tail and he's called Tufty. May I have him?" It took all of Tufty's strength not to smother the little boy in licks, but he knew that he shouldn't do things like that because it scared people.

Tufty arrived at his new home and couldn't help smiling to himself. He had always wanted to be loved by someone, and now he was going to get his wish. All those lonely days in the toy shop were over and at last he had a friend. He gave a little shiver of excitement as he thought about all the happy times that lay ahead. He was taken into the little boy's bedroom and carefully placed on the windowsill next to the five bears he had heard about. The bears, who were all different colours, sat there in silence and glared at Tufty. "I will come back later," said the little boy as he ruffled Tufty's head and went downstairs for tea.

Tufty looked anxiously at the teddies and gave a little smile. "Hi," he said in his most friendly voice. "Who do you think you are talking to you silly looking animal?" growled the black bear nearest to him. Tufty was stunned at the rudeness and felt uncomfortable. "I was just trying to be friendly," he said in a quiet voice. "Well don't," replied the black bear. "We do not want to be friendly with animals that don't look like us." "That's right," butted in the white bear. "This is a windowsill for bears and you don't look a bit like a bear." "That's because I am a dog," whispered Tufty who was beginning to feel close to tears. "We hate dogs," said the golden bear who didn't really know much about them, but felt he had to join in. "Why don't you go home?" added the blue bear. "You look very silly with your funny tail and fluffy coat." "I don't have a home," sobbed Tufty. "and I am not silly, I am just different." Tufty could feel a tear begin to trickle very slowly down his face. "Oh! that's right. Start crying and see if anyone cares," said the green bear who snarled and showed a set of very strong white teeth. There wasn't one bear out of the five who was friendly, and Tufty felt more tears beginning to fill his eyes. He quickly turned away so the bears couldn't see how upset he was. He wanted to go back to the shop. He never ever thought he would think that way, but it was better to be lonely than to be sitting here with five angry bears, none of which liked him.

After his tea, the little boy, who was called Jack, returned to his bedroom and picked Tufty off the windowsill. "Ha," said one of the teddies. "It looks as though you are the favourite for now. We will make you pay for that." Tufty began to feel scared and tried to tell Jack not to make him the favourite, but Jack couldn't hear him.

Jack took Tufty round to show his friends, and although none of them had seen a dog quite like him before, they all thought he was very nice. For a short while Tufty began to enjoy himself, but a little niggle at the back of

his mind kept reminding him that the nasty bears back home were after him.

Eventually Jack returned home and went upstairs to put Tufty back on the windowsill. There wasn't a space for him as the bears had very rudely spread out. Jack moved the green bear closer to the blue bear and put Tufty in the space. He ruffled his head again and said, "I knew my friends would like you. You have a kind face." Although Tufty thought that was a nice thing to say, he knew the bears were listening and would do something nasty when Jack had gone.

Once the door was closed the bears all spread out again and knocked poor Tufty onto the floor. It hurt and Tufty tried not to cry out. "Oh dear," said the black bear. "You seem to have lost your balance. Silly dog." The other bears all started to laugh which made a very peculiar noise.

There was a clean pillowcase on the windowsill and the white bear grabbed it with his teeth and dropped it on the floor. It fell on top of Tufty and completely covered him. "Well that's an improvement," laughed the green bear. "We can't see him anymore." All the bears thought this was really funny and began laughing again in a bear like way.

Tufty began to cry and little sobs could be heard under the pillowcase. He could hear the bears plotting what to do next. "We don't want this dog living here. Let's keep biting him and knocking him to the floor," said one of the bears. "We could also pull bits of fur out of that silly tail," said another. The bears went on and on and Tufty became sadder and sadder. He began to think of a way he could escape, but once outside the door he wouldn't know where to go. But did that really matter? He knew he couldn't stand much more of this.

When Jack came to bed he kissed all the bears goodnight and then said, "Hey! Where's Tufty?" The bears all kept very quiet and just sat there with silly grins on their faces. Tufty spent the night alone under the pillowcase.

The next day Jack jumped out of bed and landed on the pillowcase. "Ow," he cried as he trod on Tufty, lost his footing and fell over. Jack looked under the pillowcase. saw Tufty and threw his arms around him. "I thought I had lost you," he said and to Tufty's horror he placed him back on the windowsill. "Oh please don't make me stay up here," Tufty said, but of course Jack was unable to understand dog talk and he kissed Tufty and left. Once Jack was out of the room the bears went into action, and

with a huge thump Tufty was back on the floor. "Right," he thought. "I can't go on like this. I know the bears don't want me, and although I love Jack, I don't think I can live with these rude creatures anymore. Tonight I will make my escape and I don't care if I do get lost. Anything would be better than this." The bears were laughing and talking amongst themselves about how very clever they all were at upsetting the strange little dog.

Later that afternoon Jack burst into the room and in his hand he had another toy. Tufty looked up from the floor and groaned. It was yet another bear and this time it was brown. Jack saw Tufty on the floor again, laughed and picked him up. "You really are a clumsy dog," he said. He moved the five bears along and placed the brown bear next to them, followed by Tufty. "This is Harvey," said Jack, "and I want you all to be nice to him, and with that he left the room.

There was a long drawn out silence while the five original bears looked closely at Harvey. He was bigger than all of them and he looked a little fierce. At last the green bear spoke. "Do you see that stupid dog sitting next to you? Well, we all hate him and we are trying to get rid of him." "Oh no," thought Tufty. "Here we go again and this time it's six against one." The brown bear turned his attention to Tufty and looked him up and down. Tufty sat in silence waiting for either a hurtful remark or a swift knock onto the floor. "Hi," said the bear in a pleasant voice. "I am very pleased to meet you." "Yyyou are?" stammered Tufty wondering why he was pretending to be friendly. "Yes I am. You remind me of home and all the friends I have left behind." "What on earth are you blabbering about?" snorted the green bear and Harvey growled loudly and fiercely at him. The green bear went very quiet and all the other bears began to look a little anxious.

"I can see what's going on here," said Harvey wisely. "You bears have all ganged up on this little dog and you should be ashamed of yourselves. You call yourselves bears, but bears are kind and you five are a disgrace. This so called stupid dog is a very intelligent husky and he comes from Alaska. I wonder how many of you clever bears even know where that is? He and his family, along with many other dogs, help to pull sledges across the snow. If the people of Alaska didn't have these dogs to help them, they would be trapped in their homes and would run out of food." The five bears looked at each other in surprise and back at Tufty. They began

to realise that their families had done nothing as important and helpful as that, and perhaps they had been a little cruel to the young dog. "Wait a minute," snapped the golden bear bravely. "How do we know that you are telling the truth?" Harvey gave a long sigh. "You don't even recognise me, do you? I am one of the brown grizzly bears that also lives in Alaska. I have seen these dogs working and we are all very proud of them."

Tufty's eyes filled with tears as he remembered those cold days and how he had helped families to get about in the deep snow. He remembered his Mum and Dad telling him to be a good dog and always be kind to others. He missed his family, but Tufty's legs had not been strong enough and he had been sent on a plane to another country where he ended up on a shelf in a toy shop.

He looked up at the brown bear and smiled. "Don't worry little dog," said Harvey, "I am going to protect you and I will be your friend if you will let me." "Oh yes please," said Tufty happily. "I would love you to be my friend forever." Harvey stood up and shook himself so hard that the five bears sitting near him began to bounce up and down and very slowly one by one they all fell off the windowsill and onto the floor.

There was an awful lot of noise as the bears fell in a big heap of fur. "Oh I am so sorry," said Harvey looking at Tufty and giving him a wink. "I sometimes forget how strong I am. I think I ought to tell you bears that I often stand up and shake myself. It just depends what mood I'm in." The bears all knew what Harvey meant and realised that they had better behave themselves if they didn't want to keep being knocked onto the floor.

"Tufty and I will get to know each other," said Harvey smiling, "and you five will have to wait until someone comes upstairs and returns you to the windowsill." The five bears began to realise that they had treated Tufty very badly and felt ashamed of themselves. They also realised that Harvey was much bigger and stronger than the rest of them and they had better behave themselves from now on. In a way it was good to have such an important dog as a friend, and they really hadn't given him a chance to become one of the family.

Tufty and Harvey were chattering away the best of friends, and Tufty put a grateful paw on Harvey's arm. "Thank you for saying those things," he said. "I was having a pretty bad time before you came." "I know," replied Harvey. "I could tell. From now on things will be different and you and I will be invincible." "What does that mean?" asked Tufty puzzled. "I don't

know," whispered Harvey, "but I thought it sounded good." Tufty smiled at him and glanced down at the group of sad bears waiting patiently for someone to help them. He looked back at Harvey, gave a little sigh and thought life isn't so bad after all.

A VERY FUNNY NOISE

What is a home without children? Quiet! Henny Youngman

One of a selection of fun children's bedtime stories by gemma.

These delightful bedtime stories have a feel-good factor, are safe to read, and have a happy ending (check out the froggy information at the end)

Steady crunching was coming from the corner of Dusty's hutch. She was enjoying a fresh carrot someone had kindly given her. She stopped eating and cocked her head on one side. There was the strangest of noises coming from the forest. She placed the carrot down and carefully turned her back against the door of her hutch, kicked backwards with her strong legs and the door flew open. She then popped her head out and looked around anxiously in case anyone had seen her. The grown ups all thought the door to her hutch was faulty and kept coming open, but Dusty knew different.

All was clear so she jumped out and tried to locate the source of the noise. She hopped into the forest which ran along her back garden, and sat for a while listening. A small squirrel came up and asked if she had heard the strange sound. "Yes," replied Dusty, who was a very helpful rabbit, "and I am going to find out what is causing it." The two creatures set off and it wasn't long before four more squirrels, a mouse and two rabbits joined the little party.

They all walked in a single line towards the noise which became louder and louder. It sounded like something popping. Every now and then it would stop and then it would start its pop pop pop again. Suddenly Dusty stopped and the rest of the animals all bumped into each other. "What was that for?" asked the squirrel nearest to her who had squashed her nose. "I've just seen a dandelion leaf and I wanted to take it home for tea," replied Dusty a little sheepishly. All the others told her off as they had all bumped their noses and some had sore bottoms. "Just keep going towards the noise," said the little mouse and they all set off again.

As they entered a dark part of the forest, the noise became quite loud. Dusty stopped and turned round to look at the others. "I don't think I want to go any further," she said looking quite scared. "Can someone else take the lead?" Everyone looked at everyone else and no-one wanted to go

first. "Shall we just go back?" said one of the rabbits who turned quickly ready to dash off home. The little mouse was the bravest of all and said, "As we have come so far I will go first. After all it can't be a monster, can it?" She looked at the others and it was clear from their faces that a monster was exactly what they all thought it might be, and what was worse, a popping one.

The mouse took a deep breath and set off leading the little group, which by now was walking very much slower. They reached a circle of trees and the noise was coming from the middle of the circle. They all stopped and the mouse said she would crawl on her own under a bush and see what she could see. She would report back to the others. The others breathed a sigh of relief as there was no way they wanted to go first.

There was a bit of rustling in the undergrowth as the little mouse edged her way towards the circle. Then it went quiet for a while, and then the little mouse returned. They all looked at her with big frightened eyes and some of them were not sure if they wanted to know what she had seen. The mouse then started to smile and the others began to relax a little. If whatever it was made the mouse smile, it couldn't be that bad.

"You have to come and see this," she said laughing. They all followed her, some still a little unsure, until they reached the clearing. There in the middle were about 50 frogs and they were having a party. Some children had been playing earlier and had left several bottles of lemonade which had been tipped out into a plastic bowl. The frogs must have thought it was water and they had all been drinking it. Unfortunately for them it kept making them do little burps, and the forest was alive with the sound of 50 burping frogs.

The little group of animals all started to laugh, some with relief that there was no monster to frighten them. The frogs, in between the burping, invited them to join the party and share the food and drink. The animals stayed quite late and had a wonderful day. Then it was time to leave, and as the little group sang and burped their way home, they all agreed it had been one of the best burping parties ever.

Some froggy facts

- Did you know that the tongues of frogs are very sticky and can flick out a very long way?
- Frogs like to eat things that are alive and if they see something moving, and it will fit in their mouth, they will stick their tongue out and try and catch it. Sometimes they make a mistake and catch something not very nice

- Frogs are super jumpers and can leap 20 times their own length.
- They take in water through their skins, so they don't need to drink.
- Frogs can change the colour of their skin to fit in with their surroundings.
- One of Dusty's best friends is a frog.

A SILLY LITTLE STORY

Dexter, a big bouncy dog, was walking round in little circles with very stiff back legs. That could only mean one thing. He was mad. Very mad. He snorted and puffed and puffed and snorted. He did so much puffing and snorting and going round in circles that he began to feel sick, so he stopped.

Mattie, a rather large black cat, suddenly appeared. "Dexter, what on earth is wrong with you?" she asked. "I'm mad," he snorted. "A very rude frog has just come up to me and called me names." "That's funny," said Mattie. "He did the same to me yesterday." "What did he call you?" asked Mattie in a caring way. She liked Dexter and didn't want anyone to hurt or annoy him. Dexter didn't really want to repeat the names and so he gazed down at the grass for a long time. "Go on," urged Mattie. "I will then be able to judge how bad the names are." "Well," replied Dexter, "he called me a Biggy, Diggy, Doggy, Woggy." Mattie tried very hard not to laugh because she thought the names were quite funny. Trying to be helpful she said, "Well you are big and you do dig." "Stop," cried Dexter. "I do not wish to be called biggy or diggy or doggy or woggy." "Sorry," said Mattie still trying not to smile.

"Anyway, Mattie, what did the frog call you?" asked Dexter with a cheeky look on his face. Now it was Mattie's turn to look away. "I'd rather not say," she replied shyly. "Oh go on. Tell me, tell me, tell me," said Dexter who was pleased that he wasn't the only one to be called names. "Well," Mattie said, "he called me Scratty, Fat, Mattie, Catty." Dexter laughed out loud. He just couldn't help himself. Then he quickly stopped laughing because he could see how upset Mattie was. Trying to be helpful he said, "Well you are a cat, and Mattie is your name and...." he stopped here and gave a little cough, "...you are a little fat." "But I am not scratty," Mattie cried. "What does that mean?" asked Dexter puzzled. "I don't know, but I don't like the sound of it," said Mattie still upset.

"I have an idea," said Dexter. "Let's go and find this frog and tell him off."

"OK," said Mattie, who wasn't sure if she wanted to see this rude frog again. The two of them set off into the forest and soon bumped into their friend Dusty the rabbit. Dusty had a clever way of getting out of her hutch, and none of the grown-ups knew how she did it, but that's another story.

Today Dusty was looking a little upset, so Dexter and Mattie asked her what was wrong. "I've just seen this very rude frog," began Dusty, and both Dexter and Mattie said at the same time, "and he called you names." "How did you know that?" asked Dusty. "Did you hear what he called me?" "No," said

Mattie, "but he has done the same to us." Dusty began to feel a little better, but she still wasn't happy.

Dexter, who always wanted to know everything about everybody, asked Dusty what she had been called. "Don't laugh," pleaded Dusty. She cleared her throat and said, "He called me a Dummy Bunny with a Funny Tummy." Both Mattie and Dexter burst out laughing and poor old Dusty just sat there in silence. "Don't worry," said Mattie gently, "he called me Scratty Fat Mattie Catty and Dexter a Biggy Diggy Doggy Woggy." This brought a smile to Dusty's face and she began to feel a little better. "We are trying to find the frog and tell him off," said Dexter. "Do you want to come with us?" "Yes please," said Dusty and the little party of three set off deeper into the forest.

It wasn't long before they came to the swampy part of the wood. Frogs like these kinds of places and sure enough after a few minutes the cheeky frog appeared and hopped up to them. "Hi," he said in a friendly croak. "Don't you try and be friendly with us," said Dexter. "You have upset us all with your silly names." The frog looked surprised. "Why have I upset you? I was only being friendly. Sometimes," said the frog, "when you have good friends, you call them names. Not nasty names, but friendly silly names. That's what I did with you," "Oh," said Mattie a little surprised. "Do you mean that those names were meant to be friendly?" "Yes," said the frog. "I only call people I like silly names. That means I would like them to be my friends and play with me some time."

Dexter, Mattie and Dusty thought about this for some time and decided the frog was probably telling the truth. After all the names did make them all laugh. "Ok," said Dexter. "We believe you, and we will come and play with you, but first we have to think up a name for you." "OK," said the frog happily. He liked names. Mattie, Dexter and Dusty put their heads

together and thought hard, and finally came up with a name. The frog waited by the swamp.

"We've got a name for you," said Dusty. The frog hopped eagerly back to the little group. "We are going to call you the Iggy Oggy Bog Frog." The frog hopped up and down in delight. He loved it and thanked the little group for such a fine name.

The four of them said they would all come back the next day and play games with each other. So Iggy Oggy Bog Frog, Dummy Bunny with the Funny Tummy, Scratty Fat Mattie Catty and Biggy Diggy Doggy Woggy all went home happy that it had all ended so well. Having silly names wasn't such a bad idea after all.

The forest went quiet for a while, and then the frog returned and sat by the side of the swamp. He'd never had so many different animal friends and he'd never been given a name before. He was so pleased that he began to sing to himself, "I'm the Iggy Oggy Bog Frog." All the trees whispered back, "He's the Iggy Oggy Bog Frog." Iggy Oggy sighed with pleasure. He was indeed a very happy boggy froggy.

KATIE, THE GHOST HUNTER

A characteristic of the normal child is that he doesn't act that way very often. Anon.

It was freezing cold and a thin layer of snow covered the ground. Katie and Ben were standing huddled together. Ben was in a very bad mood. Eight year old boys could be so annoying so, to try and get his interest, Katie whispered in his ear, "Guess what?" "I don't want to guess, and I don't want to know," replied Ben rudely, kicking a small stone which shot across the garden and hit his Dad's car. It left a small mark. That meant more trouble for Ben if he were found out. This made his mood even worse.

Ignoring him Katie continued, "Have you heard about a ghost who lives in the wood?" "Yes, yes, I've heard all about this ghost," replied Ben grumpily. "He's got a stupid name, something like Revilo, and he helps people. I don't believe in ghosts, and they are supposed to be spooky, not helpful." "If I can show you that he is real, will you change your mind?" asked Katie hopefully. "There's as much chance of that happening as my cat getting married," snorted Ben and wandered off. Just as he

was about to disappear round a corner he turned and shouted back at Katie, "If you can get me proof, I'll eat my smelly socks," and with a smirk on his face he disappeared.

This was now a challenge, and Katie stood for a few minutes wondering where she should start looking. The woods seemed like a good place so she pulled up her hood, tucked her hands in her pockets and set off. Once inside, the day suddenly became very much darker and colder, and Katie wondered whether this was such a good idea. Where do you look for a ghost? Do you find them, or do they find you? Katie gave a little shiver. She didn't like the thought of a ghost finding her. She wandered around going nowhere, with just some rabbits and a squirrel for company. This really wasn't nice. It was too dark and cold, and the wind kept making strange noises. She started to shout, "Hellooooo ghost. Where are you?" Her voice made a strange echoing sound that scared her, so she stopped shouting. All she could hear was the wind whining through the trees. Although she hated to admit it, Katie was scared, and began to drag her feet in the snow making little patterns. "I guess Ben was right," she thought. "This is a stupid idea and there's no one here but me and the animals."

It was getting so dark she could hardly see, so she decided to head back home when, to her horror, she realised she had walked much further than intended, and was lost. "Oh no!" she cried to no-one in particular. "It's going to get pitch black soon and it's freezing." She folded her arms across her body to keep warm, and began to look around anxiously for a sign of something familiar. She started to walk forward but her way was blocked by a large bush, so she turned round desperately trying to see where she was going and bumped into a tree. She tried another direction, but this time a large holly bush stopped her in her tracks and scratched Katie all over her hands. The wind was now howling and it had started to snow. She set off yet again, but this time the track came to a dead end. She was cold, hungry and lost. Even the animals had disappeared, and she was all alone and frightened, and her hands were very sore.

The thought of seeing a ghost now filled her with dread. She thought she heard some rustling in the bushes and her heart began to beat very loudly, but it must have been the wind as there was no-one there. Tears trickled down her cold cheeks, and she began to sob quietly. She buried her face in her hands, trying to block out everything about this place.

When at last she lifted her head and wiped away the tears she saw, to her amazement, a boy about the same age as she standing watching her. Katie jumped back startled. "Hi" he said in a friendly voice. "I'm Oliver in a roundabout sort of way. What's your name?" Katie stared for a few minutes blinking her eyes just to make sure she wasn't seeing things. She gave a few noisy sniffs, hoping he hadn't seen her crying, and replied through chattering teeth, "I'm Katie. Are you real?" Oliver laughed. "Oh yes, I am real. What are you doing out here on your own in the dark?" "I'm trying to find my way home, but I'm lost," replied Katie. "It happens," said Oliver kindly. "Would you like me to show you the way." "Oh yes please," said a very relieved Katie and the two of them set off.

They walked side by side chatting. Then Katie asked, "Oliver, what were you doing in the wood?" "Well I'm interested in ghosts," he said, "and this is a good place to find one." "That's funny," said Katie, "I too was ghost hunting." "I know," replied Oliver quietly.

Katie told Oliver about Ben and how he had been in a bad mood. "Well his Dad told him he had to stay in the house for the next five days, because he refused to do his homework," said Oliver. "Oh", I didn't know you knew him. No wonder he was in a bad mood," replied Katie.

They carried on along the woodland path and soon the trees began to thin out and Katie could see some lights from nearby houses. "Oh, we're nearly there," she said happily. "I can't thank you enough for what you have done," "It's nothing," replied Oliver modestly. "I'm always happy to help." "Would you like to come back to my house and have a warm drink?" asked Katie. "Thank you but I do have some place to go. Maybe another time" replied Oliver.

As they approached Katie's house she could see the outline of someone waiting for her. "That's Ben," she told Oliver. "Let's hope his mood has changed." She waved and Ben waved back. She wasn't looking forward to telling him he had been right and there were no ghosts. "I'm puzzled about something, Oliver," said Katie. "How did you know where I lived? I never told you." Katie turned towards Oliver for a reply, but there was no-one there. "Where's he gone? He could have waited to say goodbye." She ran up to Ben who was waiting for her, and he said crossly, "Where have you been? Don't tell me you have been ghost hunting all this time." "Yes I have," retorted Katie. She wasn't going to tell him how scared she had been. "You were right all along Ben. There are no ghosts. The only

person I met was Oliver, who you saw me with just now.” “I didn’t see you with anyone,” said Ben. Katie laughed. “He was with me when you waved.” Ben looked at Katie curiously. “Katie, when I waved to you, you were on your own.” “No I wasn’t,” shouted Katie. “I was with Oliver, and he helped me find my way home. He knows you, because he told me something about you, your Dad and your homework.” “Katie, I think the cold has affected your brain. You were on your own, and I don’t know anyone called Oliver.” Katie said in exasperation, “Come with me and I will show you the exact spot where Oliver left me. Perhaps from where you were standing you couldn’t see him.” Katie and Ben walked back to where Katie last saw Oliver. “It was just about here,” she said. “Well,” replied Ben, “I would certainly have been able to see him if he were standing here.” Katie began to get upset. “Ben why are you being so silly. You have been in a funny mood all day and now you are just being awkward.” Ben was getting fed up with this conversation, and was just about to leave when he noticed something. “Katie,” he said smiling to himself, “this so called friend of yours, where are his footprints?” Katie looked down at the ground and saw a single trail of footsteps. They were hers. “I just don’t understand,” blurted out Katie. “How can that be?” “Let’s put it this way,” grinned Ben. “Oliver was just someone you made up.” “No, no he wasn’t,” cried Katie getting frustrated.

Ben started to walk back to his house and Katie followed with her head hung down. She began to think about how she had first met Oliver. He had appeared from nowhere just when she needed help. He had known where she lived, knew about Ben, and had walked her home without leaving any footprints. Then he had disappeared. A little thought began to niggle at the back of her mind. Surely Oliver couldn’t be the ghost, could he? When Ben and Katie reached their homes Ben said, “See you tomorrow Katie and let’s forget about Oliver.” “Ben, just before you go in, is it true that your Dad has grounded you for five days because you didn’t do your homework?” “How did you know that?” said Ben sulkily. He had been trying to keep it a secret. “This Oliver that doesn’t exist told me,” said Katie a little smugly. It was Ben’s turn to look puzzled. “You know Ben, the more I think about it the more I think he may have been a ghost,” and she gave a little shiver. He helped me find my way home and told me about you. How did he know that? “I don’t know,” said Ben a little sheepishly.

Ben was now starting to believe Katie, when a thought struck him. "He can't have been the ghost, he hasn't got the right name. If you remember, the ghost is called Revilo, so you are wrong." Katie thought about this for a while. Perhaps there were two ghosts, but this seemed very unlikely. Maybe Revilo had two names. No, that didn't make sense either. She began to feel a little disappointed. She really wanted Oliver to be the ghost. Then she let out an enormous squeal. "Ben I've got it. Don't you see Oliver didn't want to frighten me by letting me know he was the ghost, so he turned his name back to front." Ben, who was a little slower than Katie at working things out, thought long and hard about this and then realised she was right. The name Oliver turned the other way round was Revilo. "Also," said Katie eagerly, "when he first told me his name he said he was called Oliver in a roundabout sort of way. I did think at the time it was an odd thing to say, but now I know what he meant." That did it for Ben, and he had to agree that Oliver was the ghost. He just wished he had seen him. Ben had the good manners to say he was sorry to Katie and admit he had been wrong. "I am sorry I didn't believe you Katie. How can I make it up to you?" Katie looked at him for a while, and started to smile. "You can eat your smelly socks, Ben," she laughed. "Eat your smelly socks," and still laughing she skipped off home.

WHY ARE YOU LOOKING AT ME, MR BULL?

If children grew up according to early indications, we should have nothing but geniuses. Goethe

One of a selection of fun children's bedtime stories by Gemma

These delightful stories have a feel-good factor, are safe to read, and have a happy ending.

Charlotte, the furry donkey, was standing in the corner of her field on her own. She wanted someone to play with, but there was no one, and she gave a sad little sigh.

Suddenly, to her delight, she spotted a hen pecking at some corn. She went over to the hen and said hopefully, "Would you like to come and play, and be my friend just for today?" The hen, who was very annoyed that someone had stopped her pecking, looked up from her corn and said rudely, "You're too big and hairy, and very, very scary," and she strutted away to find some more corn. Charlotte was alone once more.

Charlotte then spotted a pig snuffling in a trough. She walked over to the

pig and said hopefully, "Would you like to come and play, and be my friend just for today?" The pig looked up with a very grubby nose, sneezed loudly, and grunted rather rudely, "You're too big and hairy, and very, very scary," and he pushed his nose back in the trough, and carried on sneezing and snuffling. He was making a terrible mess, as pigs do. Poor Charlotte was alone once more.

She was just about to give up looking for a friend, when she saw a dog barking, and running round in circles chasing his tail. She walked over to the dog and said hopefully, "Would you like to come and play, and be my friend just for today?" The dog stopped barking and chasing. He wasn't very happy that this donkey had stopped him from playing his favourite game – chasing his tail. He still hadn't been able to catch it, but he kept on trying. He said to Charlotte rudely, "You're too big and hairy, and very, very scary," and he ran off to do some more barking and chasing of tail.

Poor Charlotte was alone once more, and a little tear trickled down her face. She was just about to make her way across her field, when she felt someone was watching her. It was a bull. This frightened Charlotte. It also frightened the hen, the pig and the dog, and all three of them ran over to stand with Charlotte. As Charlotte was so big, hairy, and scary, the little animals thought she might be able to help them.

The kind little donkey said, "Jump on my back, and I will try and take you all to safety." The dog leapt in the air, and was on Charlotte's back in a second. He looked very pleased with himself. The poor hen and pig looked up at Charlotte, and knew it was impossible for them to jump on her back.

The bull was still watching, and he started to walk towards them. The hen began to panic and said, "I must try my very best to get on the donkey's back. Stand back pig. I am going to take my biggest jump ever." The hen did a little run, frantically flapped her wings, and launched herself in the air. She flew straight into the donkey's chest, and fell exhausted to the floor. The pig had a little smile to himself.

It was the pig's turn next. He breathed deeply, took a running jump, which wasn't a jump at all, and ran straight under the donkey's tummy, and out the other side. The dog thought this was really funny, and started to laugh. He soon stopped, when he saw how upset the hen and the pig were.

Charlotte, seeing how difficult it was for them, kindly knelt down on her front legs, so that the hen and the pig could climb on. As she knelt down, the dog fell off, and the hen and the pig climbed on. The hen and the pig, who were now the only ones on her back, laughed at the dog. The dog, however, soon jumped back on, and with the little party safely on board, Charlotte made her way across the meadow to the far corner. The bull began to follow them.

This frightened the animals, and they clung on to the donkey's back. Once the little group had reached the far corner of the field, Charlotte realised they were trapped. There was no escape. The bull was getting nearer and nearer. As he reached the terrified animals, he stood in front of them and gave an enormous roar.

As the animals all waited for something terrible to happen, to their surprise the bull said in a big gruff voice, "Would you like to come and play, and be my friends just for today. I'm very lonely?" The animals were stunned. They were just about to tell the bull that he was too big and hairy and very, very scary, when they decided that sometimes it helps to have a big, hairy, scary friend. After a lot of discussion, all the animals told the delighted bull that they would be happy to be his friends.

And so it was that the donkey and the bull made some new small friends, and the hen, the pig and the dog made some big, hairy, scary friends. After all it really doesn't matter how big, hairy and scary you are on the outside, as long as you have a big kind heart on the inside.

DEXTER LENDS A PAW

Never underestimate a child's ability to get into more trouble. Martin Mull

Dexter woke early, stretched and had a really good scratch. Then he sneezed, had two more scratches and felt much better. He slowly walked out of the house and over to see his friend Rufus.

Rufus was hiding behind a shrub. "What are you doing?" asked Dexter puzzled. "Shhhhh, I'm hiding from next door's cat." "Hiding," snorted Dexter. "Hiding. Dogs do not hide from cats. I'll show you how to sort cats out. Where is she?"

"She is lying over there in the corner."

Dexter spotted the cat, and stalked over to her with very stiff legs. He walked like that when he was mad. "Watch carefully and learn from one

who knows," he shouted over to Rufus. "Hey cat," he growled. "If you don't get up and leave this garden, I'm going to do something horrible to you." The cat, who wasn't afraid of anyone, looked up, winked at Dexter, and put her head down again.

Dexter was furious. He began to bark, and he barked and barked and barked until the cat stood up, took a huge leap and landed on his back. This took Dexter by surprise and he started to run round the garden, trying to dislodge her. Rufus watched from behind his shrub in disbelief. The faster Dexter ran, the harder the cat clung on. He then stopped suddenly hoping the cat would fall off, but she stayed put. He set off again at high speed zig-zagging round the flower beds, then he galloped round the lawn jumping in the air and arching his back to get rid of her. Rufus thought it looked like something from a cowboy film where the horse tries to unseat its rider. Also, he was sure he had seen the cat smiling.

Dexter tried every trick he could think of to get rid of the cat, but her claws were deep in his fur. After several fast laps round the garden, poor Dexter began to tire and his laps became slower and slower until he came to a complete halt, puffing very hard. Once Dexter had stopped, the cat jumped off, pulled her tongue out at him, and slowly walked away with her tail in the air.

Rufus crawled out from behind the bush. "Well, that should certainly teach her a lesson," he laughed. "Oh, shut up," puffed Dexter rudely. He hated cats.

The two of them walked off in silence, but Rufus knew Dexter wouldn't stay mad for long. Sure enough after a few minutes Dexter said excitedly, "How about digging some holes and waiting to see if someone falls in one?" "Dexter, that's an awful thing to do," cried Rufus who was much more considerate of others. "Let's see if we can find someone to play with." "Ok," replied Dexter hoping they didn't meet any squirrels. He hated squirrels almost, but not quite, as much as cats. They always threw acorns at him.

They had only walked a few paces when they bumped into Pumpkin pig looking very upset. She was with Dusty the little fat rabbit, and Harrington hedgehog. "Oh, oh looks like trouble," whispered Dexter, and ran off to dig some holes. Rufus stayed to find out what was wrong.

"Pumpkin has lost her glasses and she can't see a thing," said Dusty. "She just tried to eat a sausage, and it turned out to be an old bicycle tyre. Now she feels sick." "We'll help," said Rufus kindly, and called Dexter.

Dexter, who had dug at least three holes and was very pleased with

himself, walked over covered in mud. "Pooh, you smell," said Pumpkin moving away from him. "Yes I do," smiled Dexter. The smellier he was, the better he liked it.

Dexter was told of the problem and of course he said he would help. Harrington hedgehog whispered in Dexter's ear that it might be a good idea for him to go for a quick swim in the pond to clean himself up. Actually, he whispered in Dexter's elbow because he couldn't reach his ear, but Dexter heard him anyway. "Ok," he said good naturedly, and ran off towards the pond. The others could hear him barking and thrashing about in the water (Dexter loved to swim) and two minutes later he was back and dripping wet. There were some dead reeds stuck in his fur and a small frog sitting on his head. He smiled at them as only dogs know how, and then gave the biggest shake of all times. The frog flew off, hit the ground with a thump and hopped angrily away. Everyone else got soaked with water, and Dexter with his special doggy smile said, "Well, now we all smell the same."

"Right," said Dexter, suddenly being serious, "we all need to concentrate on helping Pumpkin." He put a friendly paw on her shoulder and told her he had the best nose in the forest and could find anything just by sniffing. Rufus looked a little uneasy, as he knew Dexter's sniffings always led to food.

The little group set off with Dexter in the lead, his muddy nose in the air trying to sniff the glasses. Suddenly he stopped and the animals following ran into the back of him. "Can we have some warning before you stop dead?" cried Pumpkin picking herself up. Dexter ignored this and started to sniff very loudly. "I've found something," he whispered softly as though he were tracking a thief. "Why are you whispering?" asked Pumpkin. "Because I can smell better when I don't shout," replied Dexter. "You always smell smelly to me," muttered Harrington but no-one heard him. "It's this way," said Dexter and set off very slowly. He stopped again and this time only Harrington the hedgehog bumped into him. Dexter yelped with pain. "Ow, that hurt," he cried, but being a brave dog he carried on despite a pricked bottom.

Dexter left the woodland path and headed for a large flowering bush. The little group of animals followed a safe distance behind. When they reached the bush, Dexter circled it several times with very stiff legs. This made him feel important. Rufus started to laugh. All the other animals watched Dexter carefully. Perhaps Pumpkin's glasses were in the middle of the bush. Without warning, and to everyone's surprise, Dexter got down on his

tummy. He wriggled under the bush, got hold of something in his teeth and dragged it out. It looked like a big black bag tied up with string. The animals all gasped in amazement, and Pumpkin looked puzzled. Why would her glasses be in the bag?

"What's in there?" asked Harrington a little scared. "I don't know," replied Dexter and he poked it with his paw. A very strange noise was heard coming from the bag. All the animals, including Dexter, shot back, and Pumpkin even ran behind a tree. She didn't like noisy bags. "I think," said Harrington carefully, "we had better leave the bag alone. Glasses don't make noises."

The others nodded in agreement and moved off into the forest. No-one wanted to know why the black bag was making noises. They were all afraid of what was in there. Perhaps it was a black bag monster.

"What a load of cowards you are," snorted Dexter. "I am going to chew through this string and solve the mystery. Stand back everyone," he shouted importantly,

forgetting that the others had already left him, and he was on his own. They hadn't gone far, and they were all watching from behind trees. Rufus knew that Dexter couldn't resist opening the bag, because there was always a chance some food was inside. Dexter started to chew at the string, and in no time it broke. He had the most beautiful strong white teeth, and held the record for the fastest bone eater. He was pretty fast at eating anything else as well. Most of the animals watching from afar promised themselves to keep friendly with Dexter. With teeth like those, you needed him on your side.

The animals began to feel a bit disloyal leaving Dexter to do all the work himself, so one by one they came out from behind the trees and walked over to Dexter.

As they approached, the bag began to move, and everyone took a few steps back again. Sometimes you can find strange things in black bags. To everyone's amazement, however, once the bag fell open, there sitting in the middle were five of the tiniest kittens you have ever seen. They blinked a lot as their eyes tried to get used to the light. Not one of the other animals said a word as they were all so surprised. Slowly, one by one, the tiny kittens started mewling and tried to walk. They all staggered a little bit and then fell back onto the floor.

Dusty was good with babies and was the first to move. She went over to the kittens and had a long chat with them. She found out that they had been cruelly dumped, as the owner couldn't look after them. The little

rabbit promised the kittens they could stay with her, and all the other animals said they would help the kittens to look after themselves.

Dexter sat back and watched all that was happening. He didn't get too close for fear of frightening the little creatures, but one little black and white kitten carefully found her way over to Dexter and thanked him for saving their lives. "You're welcome," smiled Dexter. "I don't suppose you have a pair of glasses in there with you, or a sausage?" "No, I am sorry there was just us in the bag," was the reply.

The little group, larger now by five kittens, made its way to Dusty's house where the kittens would stay for a while. "Well, Dexter," said Harrington hedgehog a little cheekily, "you are supposed to be the champion sniffer. How can you get kittens mixed up with glasses?" "I know I made a mistake and I am sorry Pumpkin that I didn't find your glasses," said Dexter. "Don't apologise," replied Pumpkin. "You have saved the lives of these little kittens, and I'd rather you did that than find my glasses." All the other animals thought that was a nice thing to say because they knew how much Pumpkin needed her glasses. She couldn't see a thing without them.

The kittens settled down and loved their new home. The other animals promised to come and see them every day. Just as the little group was breaking up, Otis owl flew low over them. "Pumpkin," he shouted. "Your glasses will be ready tomorrow. I've mended them for you," and off he flew. There was a long silence and then all the animals slowly turned to look at Pumpkin. Poor old Pumpkin, who was pink anyway, went three shades deeper. "Oh no," she said embarrassingly. "I had quite forgotten that Otis was mending my glasses." There was another long silence and then Dexter started laughing. Then they all joined in, including the kittens. It made a very strange sound.

"Never mind, Pumpkin", said the kittens. "It is thanks to your forgetfulness that Dexter found us, and now we have all got extra friends." Pumpkin felt a little better and promised herself that once she got her glasses back, she would go and take a good look at the kittens just to see what they look like. She didn't like to admit to anyone that when Dexter first opened the black bag, she thought there were five fluffy balls of wool inside, and she was so looking forward to knitting a scarf with them!

Wake up little sheepdog

One of a selection of fun children's bedtime stories by gemma'

These delightful bedtime stories have a feel-good factor, are safe to read,

and have a happy ending

It is never too late to have a happy childhood – Tom Robbins

Sandy was a sheepdog with a very special job. She lived on a big farm with her owner, Farmer Jack, who looked after many different types of animals. The most important animals to Sandy, however, were the sheep.

Every afternoon, Farmer Jack would round up his sheep, and bring them to the farmyard. A few hours later, the sheep were moved back into their wonderful green meadow. This was where Sandy's special job began.

Sandy had to make sure that all forty sheep had returned safely to the field. Every afternoon she would count them as they trotted back through the gate, making sure none had got lost on the way. It was a very important job, and Sandy liked doing it, but it caused her a huge problem.

As you may know, counting sheep makes you very, very sleepy. Each day as Sandy started to count the sheep, her eyelids would quickly begin to close, and her head would get very heavy. Before she could count to twenty, she was fast asleep. The sheep used to smile, as they passed the sleeping Sandy.

This happened every single afternoon. It was unacceptable, Sandy told herself. Farmer Jack was relying on her to do a very important job, but every time she tried, she fell asleep! This was ridiculous. Sheepdogs don't fall asleep whilst working. She had to fix it.

Sitting beneath her favourite tree, Sandy tried to think of ways to count the forty sheep, and keep awake. Thirty minutes later, she still had no idea what to do, so she decided to ask the other farm animals.

The goats in the next field suggested that Sandy could try counting the sheep with her eyes closed, so she did not have to watch them. Sandy thanked the goats, but thought it was a very silly idea. How can you count sheep, when you can't see them?

The hens in the henhouse said Sandy could try counting in a different language, to keep her mind busy. That might have worked, but Sandy didn't know any other languages.

Finally, the cows with bells around their necks, suggested that, to stay awake, Sandy hopped up and down on one leg as she counted. The pigs next door thought this was really funny, and snorted with laughter. If anything, hopping up and down would probably make the sheep laugh, and make Sandy more tired.

This was proving to be a difficult problem, but Sandy would not give up. She knew she would find an answer if she just kept trying.

All of a sudden, an idea popped into her head. If all the sheep wore bells round their necks, like the cows, Sandy would not need to watch them at all. She could just listen. But sheep were sometimes silly, and they might run through the gate, turn round and go back out again. Then they would get counted twice.

That wouldn't work either, so instead of using bells, Sandy decided to simply talk to the sheep. She explained her problem, and politely asked if they would help. The sheep happily agreed.

And so from that day on, every afternoon when the forty sheep hurried back into their field, they each shouted out their name. All Sandy had to do was listen, and count the names as the sheep trotted by. She no longer had to worry about falling asleep, because she was not watching the sheep, only listening.

The little sheepdog had solved her problem because she never gave up. But not only had Sandy solved her problem, she was on first name terms with forty new friends.

SOME SILLY POEMS

A cheeky little dog

A very naughty boy, Was chasing a dog so small
"I'm going to pull your tail off, And I'm going to pop your ball"

They both ran round in circles, 'till they could no longer run
Then the boy fell on the ground, And the small dog bit his bum

The Evidence

There were ten cakes this morning, And now there are only three
Whose been in here and pinched them, I know it wasn't me

A tell-tale sign was spotted, And someone came to mind
It must have been our grandad, He's left his teeth behind!

Good Friends

The lonely little pony, Went searching for a friend
He looked up high he looked below, He looked around the bend

"Why does no one want to play?", The lonely pony cried
"Because you're big and scary", A tiny mouse replied

"Do I scare you?" the pony asked, The mouse said "Yes you do"
"Well isn't that the strangest thing, Because you scare me too"

"But I am kind and generous, And wouldn't hurt a fly"
The pony laughed and shook his head, And whispered "So am I"

"Jump on my back" the pony said, "We needn't be apart"
The mouse jumped on, a little scared, But with a happy heart

One big, one small, the friendly pair, Had such a lovely ride
Who bothers what their sizes are, What counts is what's inside

A Visit to the Zoo

Two little witches, Went down to the zoo
They packed a small picnic, And took their wands too

There was so much to see, Like monkeys and bears
And camels and rhinos, And tigers in pairs

It's time for some fun, The witches both said
As they brought out their wands, All shiny and red

They pointed the wands, At a monkey nearby
Shouted abracadabra, And hoped he would fly

But the two little witches, Were not very good
And their spells didn't work, As well as they should

They tried several times, To get the spell right
They used different words, And they squeezed their wands tight
The monkey just sat there, And pulled out his tongue
So the witches went home, Wondering what had gone wrong

That night in the Zoo, Things were not right
The snake had a hump, The camel a stripe

The zebra was pink, And the hippo was blue
Do you know what happened, That night in the Zoo?

KEVIN THE VERY OLD RABBIT by Gordon Dioxide

Kevin the Very Old Rabbit was very old.

Believe it or not, he was 146 years old and his name was Kevin.

He had always been old. In fact, when he was born he had glasses and a long white beard, which greatly surprised his mother because she had perfect eyesight and no facial hair whatsoever. His dad was called Kevin the Extremely Old Rabbit, but he's not in this story.

Now, every Tuesday morning Kevin would drive to the post office in Swindon to collect his pension money. But today was no ordinary Tuesday morning for two main reasons. Firstly it was his birthday and secondly it was in fact Wednesday. This meant that he was actually 147 years old. The only problem was, he didn't know it! You see, because he thought it was Tuesday he thought that his birthday was not until tomorrow!

Anyway, he parked the car in the usual place – on double yellow lines opposite the police station. He turned on the radio and got out of the car. He never had the radio on when he was driving because he hated pop music.

Suddenly, a very watery thing happened. It started to rain. Not just a few drops, but whole bucketfuls. He ran to the bus shelter, but the bus shelter didn't have a roof so this didn't help. He'd forgotten to bring his umbrella and his fur was getting soaked.

So he looked around and saw a big shop called Umbrella World, just next door to Woolworths. When he ran into the shop he couldn't believe how many umbrellas were in there. There were millions and billions of them, neatly lined up on shelves.

The first one he looked at was made of silk with a gold handle, but this was too expensive. The next one was full of holes to let the rain through, which Kevin thought was a very silly idea. Then he saw a lovely yellow umbrella, covered in pictures of monkeys and tennis rackets. It cost just

four pounds and ninety-nine pence so he took out his purse and bought it.

When he went outside he found that it had stopped raining, which was a good thing and a bad thing. After looking at his watch he decided that he was probably hungry, so he crossed over the road to McDonalds. He bought a Big Mac, but threw the burger and bread roll into the bin because, being a rabbit, he only liked the lettuce. Three and a half weeks later he got a letter from the boss of McDonalds. It said,

"Dear Mr. Very Old Rabbit

Congratulations! You have won a trip round the world on Concorde in our Ronald McDonald Spot the Difference competition. The plane leaves Heathrow airport at 8 o'clock tomorrow morning. Have a good time!

Love from Sir Malcolm Morris McDonald"

Unfortunately, Kevin couldn't read so he screwed up the letter and threw it into the dustbin. He thought it was probably a sappy love letter from Mildred Parker who used to fancy him at school.

A bit later that day, Kevin got a telephone call from Sir Malcolm Morris McDonald's secretary. She wanted to know if he was packed and ready to go on holiday. At first, Kevin thought it was Mildred Parker asking him if he was ready for a honeymoon. But after a while, the secretary, whose name was Gladys, explained all about the competition and how he had won a trip round the world on Concorde.

Kevin was very excited. He packed his suitcase with two jumpers, one pair of trousers, a clean pair of socks, a spare pair of shoelaces, nine pairs of pyjamas, a book, another book, some sunglasses, one more book and a cuddly toy.

Next day, he got up bright and early. He drove down the M4 motorway to Heathrow Airport and climbed on board Concorde. A nice lady called Air Stewardess gave him a cup of coffee and a chocolate biscuit. He didn't really like coffee, but drank it anyway because he didn't want to upset Air Stewardess.

At 8 o'clock the plane took off into the air and soared above the clouds. Concorde travels faster than the speed of sound, which is very fast indeed, so it took just three hours to reach the city of Washington. The first person that Kevin met was a man called Bill Clinton. He used to be the President of the United States of America, but not anymore. He took Kevin to lunch at the White House. They had fried lettuce with jam and

chatted about their favourite cartoons. Kevin's favourite was Bugs Bunny and Bill Clinton's favourite was Scooby Doo.

At half past six Kevin was back on Concorde flying to Hollywood, which is where actors and actresses make films to show in the cinema. He was introduced to a man named Steven Spielberg, who has made very popular films such as E.T. and Jurassic Park.

Steven Spielberg was amazed to meet an English rabbit that could talk. He had been looking for a talking rabbit to appear in his next film, called Attack of the Bunnies. But Kevin didn't want to be an actor. He was a plumber and preferred tinkering about with taps and water pipes.

Kevin spent the night in a very expensive 5-star hotel. His room had a television with 49 channels and he stayed awake all night switching from one programme to the next. When morning came he was so tired that he fell asleep. He missed breakfast, then he missed lunch, and then he missed tea. Worst of all, he missed his next flight on Concorde!

When he eventually woke up he caught a bus to the airport. But he was very disappointed when they told him that the plane had already gone. So he caught a bus to the harbour and got on board a very big passenger ship that was heading for Japan.

He was excited to find that he had his very own cabin with a bed and a porthole to look out of. There was a restaurant on the ship but there was a big problem with the food. The ship's crew had forgotten to load any food supplies onto the ship ... except for 600 sacks of broccoli. Now normal people don't like broccoli, but if you're a rabbit you'll find that broccoli is actually rather nice. So this was an ideal situation for Kevin – 600 sacks of broccoli and he was the only one on the ship who liked it. He ate 4 sacks straight away and decided to save the other 596 for later.

At ten past nine a big storm blew up and the ship sank. Luckily, Kevin had been sitting in one of the life-rafts at the time so he was quite safe. He steered the life-raft to the nearest desert island, which was small in size, round in shape, and had a palm tree sticking up in the middle. It also had one other thing – a lady that looked a bit like Mildred Parker. In fact, she looked so much like her that it was her. This was a very depressing development for Kevin. Stuck on a desert island with Mildred Parker.

Of course, Mildred was delighted to see Kevin and immediately wanted to kiss him. He quickly climbed up the palm tree to escape her clutches. But he didn't know that Mildred had once won an Olympic gold medal in gymnastics. Basically, this meant that she was very good at climbing trees, so she was quick to follow him.

Unfortunately, the palm tree was one of the weakest in the world, and it couldn't stand the combined weight of a 147-year old rabbit and a slightly chubby ex-gymnast. So the tree toppled over and both Kevin and Mildred landed with their heads in the sand and their legs sticking up in the air. They were stuck on the island for many years. Kevin spent his time playing with a Monopoly set that he kept in his waistcoat pocket. He didn't know many of the rules, but he enjoyed passing Go and collecting 200 pounds. Mildred spent her time trying to count the grains of sand on the island. She got up to four billion, nine hundred and forty two million, six thousand, four hundred and twenty three, when Kevin threw a couple of grains into the sea and she had to start again.

The day after Kevin's 200th birthday a really great thing happened. A ship came and rescued them and took them back to Swindon. They had been stranded on the desert island for more than 50 years and, do you know, something really nice happened during that time that I didn't tell you about. They fell in love! So, soon after they arrived back in England they got married. They had two children and told them all about their adventure. A bit later, they decided to live happily ever after.

Here are a few questions to see if you've been listening ...
How many sacks of broccoli were on the ship?
What is Kevin's favourite cartoon?
Why couldn't Mildred count the grains of sand on the island?
What does Kevin prefer – lettuce or pop music?
What do you think they ate when they were on the island?
Would you like to live on a desert island?
If you enjoyed this story, please ask your teacher to read it out to the class. If you didn't enjoy it, I'm sorry, so very very sorry.

I AM A MOLE

There was once a hole that had a mole living in it. He didn't have a name because moles don't usually bother with that sort of thing. He was very happy though, and used to go around singing a little rhyme:-

"I am a mole
And I live in a hole"

He had lots of friends who lived on the nearby farm.

One day, the local tiger heard him singing the rhyme and very much enjoyed it. So the tiger, whose name was Barry, made up his own version which went like this:-

"I am a tiger,
And I live in a liger"

When you think about it, this was a bit silly because there is no such thing as a liger and he certainly didn't live in one.

Anyway, Barry skipped off down the path proudly singing his new tune and keen to show it off to all the other animals.

He met Wayne the hamster who was trying to look cool by blowing bubbles with a pack of bubble gum that he'd found near the road. Unfortunately he was having a lot of trouble because he'd forgotten to take off the wrapper.

Barry sang his song:

"I am a tiger,
And I live in a liger"

and Wayne thought it was brilliant. It immediately set Wayne thinking, and within half an hour he'd come up with his own version:-

"I am a hamster
And I live in a camster"

Have you ever heard of a camster? I certainly haven't.

Wayne was so proud of himself that he soon forgot all about his bubble gum problems, and set off to look for Brian the Badger.

Brian was out tractor-spotting with a notepad and pencil, but Wayne found him in less than 12 minutes. Can you guess what happened next? Yes, Brian invented a song ...

"I am a badger

And I live in a quadger"

Soon there were hundreds of animals all singing their own songs. By midnight they were making such a din that the farmer's baby woke up. The baby was furious so he climbed out of his cot and went outside to see what was going on. When he saw all the animals singing such ridiculous songs he couldn't help laughing. In fact, he laughed so much that he fell over into a big bowl of gravy, which made him laugh even more. Soon he was singing ...

"I am a baby

And I live in some gravy"

Eventually Barry the Tiger, Wayne the Hamster, Brian the Badger, the mole that didn't have a name, the Farmer's Baby, and all the other animals got so tired that they all fell fast asleep in the middle of the field.

This was a great relief to all the people in the nearby village that had been kept awake by the terrible noise.

The mole that didn't have a name woke up early the next morning and drove to the shop to get some milk. Its quite unusual to see a mole that can drive because most of them fail their driving test due to poor eyesight. In the shop he met Kylie the Hedgehog who was buying some toothpaste to clean her spikes. Suddenly, there was a loud rumbling noise and the shop started to shake.

"Earthquake, Earthquake!" shouted the shopkeeper "We're all doomed! no, wait a minute, its just a plane flying overhead."

They all went outside and were amazed to see a big jumbo jet landing in the cow field opposite. A door opened on the side of the plane, so the mole that didn't have a name, Kylie the Hedgehog, the shopkeeper whose name I can't remember, and a couple of cows, climbed on board.

There were 17 cats inside and they told the mole that they were flying to Italy for a holiday and the plane had stopped for a rest.

"Great" said the mole "we'll come with you".

And they did. They flew to a place called Venice, which was very wet because of all the water in the streets.

"This is no place for a mole" said the mole "where am I going to dig a hole?" And as you can imagine, it was no place for a hedgehog either, or a couple of cows, or a shopkeeper that couldn't swim.

After walking around for a few seconds, they went into a pizza restaurant to get some steak and kidney pie. One of the cows had a cold and kept sneezing over the table, which was a bit horrid. They each had 4 puddings – a chocolate éclair, a jam doughnut, some ice cream, and a toffee cake. Kylie mixed all hers together, but then the cow sneezed on it and she didn't feel hungry anymore.

At ten past two they left the restaurant, but forgot to pay the waiter. The waiter chased them down the street but tripped over and cut his leg on one of Kylie's spikes. The mole bandaged it up and paid him the money. Then the waiter told them that he was fed up with working in the restaurant and asked if he could join the animals on their adventure. So there they were in the middle of Venice – a mole that didn't have a name, Kylie the hedgehog, a shopkeeper, a cow with a cold, a cow without a cold, and a waiter called Luigi.

And then the cow without a cold caught a cold from the cow with a cold. This meant that both cows now had colds and the sneezing was horrendously loud. It started to quieten down a bit when the cow that had the first cold started to feel better, but soon afterwards the cow that had the second cold got worse and his sneezing got louder. They went into a shop to get some medicine, but it was a toy shop so they bought a Power Rangers laser-sword instead. Luckily, this cheered up the cow and he forgot all about his cold.

Later that day they caught a train to Paris and climbed up the Eiffel Tower. There were more than 900 steps to the top and the cows kept stopping for a rest. When they got to the top, the mole decided that he didn't like heights because he was more used to being underground. So they all went back down again, only to find that Kylie had left the laser-sword back at the top. So the shopkeeper had to climb all the way back up again. When he got there, the laser-sword was nowhere to be seen! This was because Kylie had actually left it on the platform at Venice railway station.

They were all starting to get a bit tired, so they checked into a hotel and went straight to bed.

The next morning they found that a curious thing had happened during the night. Their hotel had been moved from the middle of Paris to a place called Pisa in Italy. This of course was completely untrue. Had they checked their train timetable properly they would have realised that the

train took them from Venice to Pisa, and they had never been anywhere near Paris. The tower that they climbed up wasn't the Eiffel one, but the Leaning Tower of Pisa.

However, they were sure that the hotel had been moved and were very angry with the hotel manager. He didn't know what they were talking about, but, in order to get a bit of peace and quiet, he agreed to move the hotel back to Paris. So a big lorry arrived and pulled the hotel all the way to Paris. Some of the hotel guests were slightly annoyed as they had been enjoying their holiday in Pisa.

The animals weren't very keen on Paris because the streets were too clean, so they decided to hire a car and drive back to Pisa. Unfortunately they didn't know the way and headed north instead of south. After a while they reached the Channel Tunnel, which is a big tunnel under the sea between France and England. They drove through the tunnel, which was a bit naughty because it's a train tunnel. Luckily there were no trains coming the other way so they soon arrived back on their farm in England.

That evening they told Barry the Tiger and Wayne the Hamster about all their adventures. While they'd been away, Wayne had learnt how to blow bubbles and he really did look quite cool. Luigi married Kylie in the village church, while the shopkeeper sold his shop and built a pizza restaurant next to the farmhouse. The mole went back to his hole and dreamt about going on another adventure.

SIX BEARS GET IN A PICKLE

Once upon a time there was a family of six bears. There was Daddy Bear, Mummy Bear, Blue Bear, Big Bear, Clever Bear and Completely Bear. They lived in a forest that didn't have any trees.

Now, as you might expect, Daddy Bear was the Daddy, Mummy Bear was the Mummy, Blue Bear was blue, Big Bear was big, Clever Bear was clever and Completely Bear didn't have any clothes.

One day, Daddy Bear decided that he wanted to do something really exciting, just for a change. So he stayed at home to watch football on the television. Mummy Bear said that she too would have to stay at home because there was a lot of housework to be done, so she stayed at home and watched an old movie on the upstairs television.

The four young bears all decided to go out looking for adventure, so off they went.

Blue Bear headed for the fun fair, but on the way he tripped and fell into a pot of yellow paint. This made him yellow from head to toe – not the sort of colour a Blue Bear wants to be painted.

Big Bear went to the Science Museum. Before he looked at all the interesting exhibits, he went to get a large hamburger and fizzy drink from the restaurant. But instead of drinking the fizzy drink, he accidentally drank some Incredible Shrinking Potion which made him about the size of ant. Not the sort of size a Big Bear wants to be.

Clever Bear went to the library. He was sitting down reading some history books, when suddenly his brain exploded and millions of tiny pieces shot out of his ears. A clever bear without a brain should just be called Bear.

Completely Bear went to the shops. When he was walking down the street he came across an Opposite Thief. Now, in case you haven't guessed, an Opposite Thief is the opposite of a thief – instead of stealing things, he gives things to complete strangers. Quite a good sort of chap really.

He saw a poor beggar man sitting in a doorway and gave him a million pounds. He saw an old lady at a bus stop, and, very carefully, slipped a gold necklace into her pocket. Then he saw Completely Bear, a bear without any clothes. You can guess what he did. He dressed him up in very fine clothes – a silk shirt, a designer suit from Italy, and a pair of leather boots. Completely Bear was furious but he couldn't take the clothes off because he didn't know how to undress because he had never worn any clothes before!

So there we have it – a blue bear that was yellow, a big bear that was small, a clever bear with no brain, and a bare bear that had clothes.

Big Bear went home, knocked on the door, and said "Its Big Bear. Please let me in" in a tiny voice. Mummy Bear said "You're not Big Bear. Big Bear is big. You are small. Go away."

Then Blue Bear went home, knocked on the door, and said "Its Blue Bear. Please let me in." in a yellowy sort of voice. Mummy Bear said "You're not Blue Bear. Blue Bear is blue. You are yellow. Go away."

Then Completely Bear went home, knocked on the door, and said "Its Completely Bear. Please let me in" in a voice that sounded as if it came from someone wearing clothes. Mummy Bear said "You're not Completely

Bear. Completely Bear is bare. You are clothed. Go away."

Then Clever Bear went home, knocked on the door, and said "Its Bear Clever. In please me let." in a voice that didn't make any sense at all. Mummy Bear said "You're not Clever Bear. Clever Bear is clever. You are silly. Go away."

So the four bears walked sadly away from their home. They had nowhere to live and they didn't know what to do.

"I know, lets go and see the Wise Old Owl" said Big Bear, but no-one heard him because his voice was so tiny.

"Old Wise go lets see Owl" said Clever Bear, but no-one understood what he meant.

"Lets go and see the Wise Old Owl" said Blue Bear, but his voice was so yellow they thought he was talking custard.

"I know, lets go and see the Wise Old Owl" said Completely Bear.

"That's what I said!" said the other three.

So off they went to find the Wise Old Owl. The Wise Old Owl was sitting in his tree, and he didn't recognise the four bears at first. But when they told him what had happened, he put his thinking cap on. He thought and he thought until he couldn't think any more. Then he thought a bit more. Then he thought so much that there weren't any more thoughts left to think. So he fell asleep.

When the Wise Old Owl woke up he found that the four bears had moved into his tree-house. Big Bear was resting in a thimble. Blue Bear was trying to find some blue ink to pour all over himself. Completely Bear was still trying to work out how to take his clothes off. And Clever Bear was in the kitchen trying to cook some toast in the fridge.

The Wise Old Owl didn't really want four bears living in his house, so he started to think again. He thought so hard that smoke started to come out of his ears.

All of a sudden he had an idea. A great idea. He would mix up some magic potions to sort out the bears' problems. So he went into the kitchen and started to mix up all his special secret ingredients.

After about an hour he was finished. There was some Incredible Growing Potion for Big Bear, some Turn-Anything Blue Potion for Blue Bear, some Clothes-Removal Potion for Completely Bear, and some Brain-Making

Potion for Clever Bear.

The Incredible Growing Potion was in a green bottle. The Turn-Anything Blue Potion was in a pink bottle. The Clothes-Removal Potion was in a yellow bottle. And the Brain-Making Potion was in a blue bottle.

He called Clever Bear into the kitchen, and said "Give the green bottle to Big Bear, the pink bottle to Blue Bear, the yellow bottle to Completely Bear and the blue bottle is yours."

Clever Bear took the bottles to the other bears and said "Ummm, errr, the black bottle is for ... no, there isn't a black bottle ... the blue bottle is yours Big Bear, the yellow bottle must be for Blue Bear because he is yellow ... the pink bottle is for Completely Bear, so the green bottle must be for me."

They all drunk their potions and waited for something to happen. After a few minutes, something did happen ... but not what they were expecting.

Big Bear suddenly became very brainy, and started shouting out some really difficult sums. Completely Bear turned blue. Clever Bear grew so big that he hit his head on the ceiling. And Blue Bear's clothes fell off!

What a disaster! What a mix-up! Big Bear was now small and clever. Completely Bear was blue and fully-clothed. Clever Bear was enormous but short on brains. And Blue Bear was bare and yellow! Its all very confusing.

The Wise Old Owl was shocked to see what a mess Clever Bear had made giving out the bottles. The four bears were even more shocked to see what the potions had done to them.

"What are we going to do now?" said Blue Bear.

"There's only one thing for it." said the Wise Old Owl "You must go and see the Wizard of Brick, who lives down the Yellow Oz Road. He has got some Put Everything Back to Normal Potion."

So off they went, down the Yellow Oz Road. They found the Wizard of Brick in his big golden castle. He laughed a great big wizardy laugh when he saw the four ridiculous-looking bears.

"No problem, no problem" he said "I will sort you out. Clever Bear, go into my Magic Room and bring me the bottle labelled Put Everything Back to Normal Potion."

So Clever Bear went into the Magic Room (he only just fitted through the

door because he was so enormous) and saw two bottles on the table. One bottle was labelled Put Everything Back to Normal Potion, and the other was labelled Make Everything Worse Potion. Unfortunately Clever Bear could no longer read, so which one do you think he got? Yes, the wrong one. All four bears drunk some of the Make Everything Worse Potion!

Big Bear was now small, clever, and bright orange. Completely Bear was blue, fully-clothed, and had elephant trunks growing out of his ears. Clever Bear was silly, huge and thought he was a rhinoceros fairy. And Blue Bear was bare, yellow, and his head had turned into an egg salad! Oh dear, oh dear! The potion had certainly made everything worse! But wait, there is an easy way to sort out this mess once and for all. Can you think what it might be? Go back in the Magic Room and get the Put Everything Back to Normal Potion!

Do you think they sent Clever Bear in to get it? No, they sent Blue Bear in. It was a bit difficult for him to see properly because his head was an egg salad. But he managed to find the potion and brought it out to the others. They all drank some and do you know what happened? Big Bear grew big. Blue Bear turned blue. Clever Bear got his brain back. And Completely Bear lost all his clothes! So everything was back to normal. They all went home and, this time, Mummy Bear let them in. "Did you all have a nice day?" she asked. "Errr ... yes, it was quite interesting!" they said.

A LOVELY SUNNY DAY

It was a lovely sunny day in Oak Tree Farm. An 8-year old boy called Tommy lay by the stream listening to the sounds of the countryside. The birds were singing, the cows were mooing, the lions were roaring, and the sheep were

Hang on, did I say lions? Yes I did, and they were heading straight for Tommy.

Tommy stood up and saw the three fierce lions coming across the field. He heard a noise behind him, and, looking round, saw a grizzly bear stomping towards him. On his right were a large number of tigers staring

at him, and on his left, in the stream, was a crocodile.

There was no escape. Tommy didn't know what to do. He thought for a moment and realised that the only way out was downwards, so he got a spade and started to dig. But he couldn't dig fast enough – the lions were rapidly approaching, the grizzly bear was just a few feet away, the tigers were starting to move, and the crocodile was snapping at his heels.

Suddenly, a spaceship flew down from the sky and picked him up.

"Phew, that was a close shave" thought Tommy.

Now he was flying through space at a hundred miles an hour. The spaceship was driven by two aliens, both called Dave. They were green with large red eyes and yellow horns. One of them was wearing a T-shirt with the words "I've been to Buckingham Palace and seen the queen" across the front. The other one wore an identical T-shirt.

Tommy was pleased to have been rescued from the animal attack, but was a bit unsure about where these two Daves were taking him.

It was quite warm in the spaceship, so Tommy asked if the heating could be turned down. Unfortunately, neither Dave was quite sure how the heating system worked so one of them opened a window instead. This was a big mistake because space is a vacuum and quite capable of sucking things out of spaceships. This is exactly what happened to the two Daves – they were sucked out of the window, never to be seen again.

Tommy shut the window and sat down at the controls. He'd never driven a spaceship before and was going to have to learn fast, otherwise he'd be in big trouble.

He saw a red button with the letter R on it, and pressed it. The radio came on playing Wannabe by the Spice Girls. Pressing a button marked W started the windscreen wipers, but it wasn't raining so he turned them off. Eventually he taught himself how to control the spaceship using the steering wheel and gear stick. He brought it down to Earth and landed in his back garden just in time for tea.

He told his mum about his little adventure, but she told him to stop telling lies and get on with his fish fingers.

Forty years later, Tommy was 48-years old and he went on holiday to Spain with his family. While relaxing on a beach he saw two objects falling

from the sky. They landed on his towel, and, on closer inspection, Tommy realised that it was the two Daves! After all this time they had finally fallen out of space and back to Earth.

The two Daves were delighted to see Tommy, and Tommy said he would look after them. Now, although the two Daves looked the same, they were in fact completely different. One was clever, and one wasn't. Let's call them Clever Dave and Not-so-Clever Dave.

Tommy said he would drive them to a shop to get some decent clothes. Tommy got in the driving seat, Clever Dave got in the passenger seat, and Not-so-Clever Dave got on the roof rack. When the car started to move, Not-so-Clever Dave fell off the back of the car. He had to chase after them, but as he wasn't very good at running he decided to catch a bus. He climbed on board the number 46 bus and sat on the driver's lap. The bus followed the car all the way to the clothes shop.

In the shop Clever Dave put on a nice black suit and tie. Not-so-Clever Dave put a shirt on his legs, some socks over his ears, a hat on his feet and some shoes on his shoulders. He thought he looked smart, but he actually looked quite ridiculous.

Then they went to a posh restaurant to have a meal. Clever Dave picked up his knife and fork and ate his food. Not-so-Clever Dave picked up his food and ate his knife and fork! He even said it tasted delicious. For pudding, he had the tablecloth and a lady's purse.

Not-so-Clever Dave had a lot of trouble adapting to life on Earth. He couldn't understand why people had to pay for things in shops, so he kept getting arrested for helping himself.

One day, the two Daves were making a cake for Tommy's birthday. Clever Dave was mixing some flour and sugar, while Not-so-Clever Dave was mixing some eggs and dynamite. When Not-so-Clever Dave put the mixture in the oven, there was a huge explosion and both Daves were blasted back to space, never to be seen again.

Tommy was sad to lose his friends, but tried to get on with life as best he could.

Another forty years went past and Tommy was now very old. One day, he was doing some gardening when he saw an aeroplane flying past. There seemed to be something hanging from one of the wings, so he got his binoculars to have a better look. Suddenly, whatever it was came free

from the plane and started to float down to the ground. It turned out to be two things, not one, and both of those things were Daves.

Tommy was delighted to see his old friends again, although it was a shame that Not-so-Clever Dave had landed on his flower bed. They went into the house and got something to eat, because both Daves were hungry after floating around space for 40 years.

Tommy mentioned that he wished he were young again, because being old can be a bit of a problem. Then an amazing thing happened. Clever Dave produced a pack of Magical Wishing Powder and sprinkled it over Tommy.

Suddenly, Tommy was 8 years old again! He was lying by a stream in Oak Tree Farm and it was a lovely sunny day. The birds were singing, the cows were mooing, the lions were roaring, and the sheep were

Yes, thanks to Clever Dave, Tommy was able to live his life all over again. This time though, he dug a bit faster and escaped from the animals through a tunnel. In his second life he never met the Daves, but he always had happy memories of them ...

ANOTHER MONDAY MORNING

Jeremy hated Monday mornings. Everything always seemed to go disastrously wrong, and this particular Monday was going to be even worse.

The first thing he did was climb out of bed, only to find that his bedroom floor had disappeared! So he went crashing down to the room below, which happened to be the kitchen. Luckily he landed on his chair, just as his mother was putting his Cinnamon Toast Crunch on the table. So he ate it up and set off for school. Unfortunately, he was still wearing his pyjamas.

Jeremy was 11 years old. He had no brothers, no sisters, no goldfish and no cats. He did have a very nice pair of socks though, which his mother knitted last Christmas. The good thing about socks is that you can take them anywhere, unlike pets. I mean, you couldn't take your goldfish to the cinema or your cat to the supermarket, could you? He called one of them Left Sock and the other one Right Sock, and kept them in his pocket because Left Sock didn't like the smell of his feet.

When he got to school he found that there wasn't a school, as it had been flattened by a wild bulldozer over the weekend. This was a typical Monday morning disaster for Jeremy, although it did mean that he wouldn't have to go to his French lesson today.

Just then, he saw Billy Muggins looking at where the school used to be. Billy Muggins was the only boy in his class with a moustache, and he was also still in his pyjamas. Before they had a chance to say hello to each other, they heard a quiet voice coming from somewhere.

"Help! Help!" said the voice.

The two boys found that it was an ant trapped under a pile of bricks, so they rescued him. The ant said his name was Anthony and he wanted to go home.

"Where is your home?" asked Jeremy.

"Australia." said Anthony.

"Australia! How did you get to England?" asked Jeremy.

"I walked of course. Ants can't drive you know." said Anthony rather sarcastically.

"I didn't know they could talk either." said Billy Muggins.

"Of course they can talk." said Anthony "Its just that humans are too stupid to hear them!"

Jeremy thought that Anthony was a liar. How could an ant walk from Australia to England? It would take a million years. And anyway, there's a lot of sea in the way.

"Are you a million years old?" asked Jeremy.

"Of course not, I'm four."

"Can you swim?" asked Jeremy.

"Errr ... yup"

"Swim in that puddle then." suggested Jeremy.

"Errr ... I can't ... I haven't got my swimming trunks."

Now Jeremy was sure that the ant was a liar.

All of a sudden, a thick fog came down from the sky. When it cleared, they found that they were in the Land of the Anteaters. Now if you are an ant, the Land of the Anteaters is one place you definitely don't want to be! Three anteaters walked up to them. They were looking at Anthony and licking their lips. They hadn't eaten for many days and were extremely hungry. The leader was called Nick Nasty, and he lunged at Anthony with his long sticky tongue. Jeremy quickly picked up the ant, and hid him in his Left Sock in his left pocket. Billy Muggins pushed Nick Nasty away and told him to clear off.

Nick Nasty was a bully, but, like all bullies, he was also a coward, so he ran off with the other two anteaters following him.

The two boys were getting hungry now, so they decided to go and find something to eat. There are no shops in the Land of the Anteaters so they picked some apples from a pear tree. Anthony had a toffee that he found on the ground.

After walking for a couple of miles, they came across a large building with a sign that said "Ants Disco – all ants welcome".

"Great," said Anthony "lets go in and have a look."

"Why would there be an ants disco in a land where anteaters live? I hope its not a trap." said Jeremy.

They crept inside very nervously, and found themselves in a large darkened room where spooky music was playing.

SUDDENLY ... nothing happened!

And then, just as suddenly, something did happen!

The lights came on and they saw that they were surrounded by hundreds of anteaters, all staring at them. Nick Nasty stepped forward and said,

"Good ... lunch has arrived everybody."

Thankfully, Jeremy had hidden Anthony in his Left Sock again, and this caused Nick Nasty to be a bit confused.

"Where is the ant?" he boomed, in a loud angry voice.

"We ate him for lunch." said Billy Muggins.

"I don't believe you. Humans don't eat ants!" said Nick Nasty.

"We do" said Jeremy "he was delicious."

"Empty your pockets" demanded the nasty one.

They emptied their pockets and Nick Nasty told Jeremy to pass him the socks. Jeremy threw the Right Sock at him and it landed on his face, causing him to faint from the smell.

The other anteaters gathered round their nasty leader to see if he was okay, and Jeremy and Billy Muggins quickly escaped out of the front door. Anthony was still safely wrapped up in the Left Sock.

While they were running away from the building, another thick fog came down.

This time, when the fog cleared they were back at the school.

They walked back home and Jeremy's mother said "Did you have a nice

day at school?"

"Ummm ... it was a bit different to usual" replied Jeremy.

"Oh that's nice" said mother, but she never found out what really happened.

Jeremy kept Anthony hidden in a matchbox by his bed, because his dad was scared of insects.

"It was quite an adventure," thought Jeremy "maybe Mondays aren't that bad after all."

BECKY AND GEORGE

Every Friday, Becky and her brother George would sit in the garden and have their evening meal.

And every Friday, Becky would eat all her meal up nicely while George would accidentally spill his all over the grass.

You see, George was a bit on the clumsy side. He was 6 years old and Becky was 9.

This particular Friday, Becky was carefully munching on her fish fingers, while George was spraying spaghetti all round the garden. It was all over his face, some was in his hair, the rose bushes were covered in it, and some had landed on the shed roof. He wasn't doing it on purpose; he just found it very difficult to move food from his plate and into his mouth without some great disaster happening on the way.

Then next door's cat appeared through a hole in the fence. He looked around the garden and couldn't believe how much mess there was. But luckily, spaghetti was his favourite food so he started eating it all up.

George was hungry. In fact, he was very hungry. All he'd eaten was half a lick of spaghetti juice. Monty (that was the cat's name) said he had some delicious food next door, and George could have some if he wanted.

Great said George I'm so starving I could eat anything.

So Monty took George and Becky next door, where they found a bowl of food. It was salmon flavoured Whiskas Supermeat.

Looks delicious said George, and he bent down and took a bite.

It is delicious, he said, as he tucked in. He was on his hands and knees, eating it straight from the bowl just like a cat.

Becky thought her brother was gross.

But, amazingly, he didn't spill any. All the cat food went directly from the

bowl into his mouth. There were no silly knives and forks to get in the way, and so nothing got spilt.

The next morning Becky was in the dining room eating her breakfast, in her usual perfect fashion. Then George appeared, still half asleep. Mum put a bowl of Corn Flakes and a spoon onto the table.

George put the bowl on the floor, got down on his hands and knees and started lapping up all the Corn Flakes.

Mum was horrified!

What are you doing? she screamed.

Becky told Mum all about her gross brother's new technique for eating food without spilling a drop.

Mum just thought that George was a twit, and he would have to learn how to use a knife and fork sometime.

Then Dad came down, tripped over George, and landed with his head in the Corn Flakes bowl.

I've just washed my hair! shouted Dad. Whats that stupid boy doing eating his breakfast on the floor?

Mum and Becky laughed. George hid in the cupboard under the stairs, and refused to come out until Dad calmed down.

But Dad didn't calm down. He had steam coming out of his nostrils and his face went bright red. He banged on the cupboard door, but George was too scared to open it.

A few minutes passed and Dad was late for work. Then a few hours passed and Dad was very late for work.

George was crouched in a corner of the darkened cupboard, with his back to the door. Dad was on the other side and his knuckles were turning blue from all the banging. His whole body was shaking with anger. The steam from his nostrils had caused a great fog to fill the dining room.

Mum went off to work and Becky went to school. When they got home, the whole house was full of steam. Dad and George were still in the same positions.

Mum told them to stop being so silly, but George still refused to come out because Dad was still in a rage.

The next morning the situation was unchanged. Mum fed George by sliding small scraps of food under the door. He was able to drink through a long straw that Becky pushed through the keyhole.

Life went on like this for quite a while. Dad lost his job because he never turned up for work. George got very lonely in his little cupboard world. The only thing he had to play with was an ironing board, so he made up a game in which he pretended to iron everybody in the world's clothes. He'd already done everybody in India and was just starting on Germany. Becky learnt to play games by herself because there was no brother to play with. Mum just got on with life as best she could.

Twenty three years later George was still hiding in the cupboard, and Dad was still raging at the door. George was now 29 years old and Dad was now a Grandad because Becky had got married and had four kids. George had finished doing everybody's pretend ironing a couple of years ago and now he was beginning to get a bit bored. So he decided to start the ironing game all over again, beginning with all the shirts in Australia. The dining room was filled with a terrible smell, caused by the fact that Dad hadn't changed his socks for 23 years.

Twenty years after that, Becky's kids had grown up and had kids of their own. So Dad was a Great Grandad and George was a Great Uncle. Becky's grandchildren were frightened of their Great Uncle George – the strange man they had never seen that lived in a dark cupboard. Two thousand years later the dinosaurs returned to take over the Earth. The only humans left alive were Dad and George. Dad was still in so much of a rage that he didn't even notice that there were no other people about.

George was now 2,049 years old. He had a long white beard that kept getting in the way when he was ironing. Dad was even older than that, and his feet were so stinky that he had to clip a peg onto his nose. The dinosaurs ruled the Earth for about a million years until they eventually died out and became extinct, just like Dad's socks. So Dad and George were the only two living creatures left on Earth. Now Dad had been banging on the door for so long that the door was starting to break up. Although his hands were very sore and bruised, he managed to punch a hole right through the door.

Some light shone into the cupboard for the first time in millions of years. It dazzled George at first but he soon got used to it. Dad kept banging until, eventually, he completely knocked the door down.

George was shocked to Dad, who looked very old indeed. Dad barged into the cupboard and pulled George out.

You made me trip up! shouted Dad, And now I'm late for work!

But Dad, where is everybody? Where's Mum and Becky? asked George.

Dad looked around and was amazed to find that the house was empty. He switched on the television but there was no sound or picture. He tried the radio – nothing. He went into the kitchen to get something to eat, but there was just one bit of mouldy cheese in the fridge. In fact, the fridge wasn't even working properly because there was no electricity.

The two of them went out into the street. No cars, no people, no cats, no dogs, no noise, no trees, no plants of any sort, and nothing moved at all. It seemed that the world was completely dead.

How long have I been in that cupboard? asked George.

About twenty minutes I think said Dad. Dad had been in such a rage that he hadn't noticed that a few million years had passed.

No Dad. I think its been a lot longer than that! Look at this old newspaper said George.

George picked up a crumpled newspaper off the ground. The headline was Dinosaurs Take Over the Earth! The newspaper was dated July 15th in the year 4037.

But there were no dinosaurs about.

They must have all died out after this newspaper was printed. I've probably been shut in that cupboard for millions of years! said George.

Lets get something to eat, said Dad.

They found some old badger legs and dipped them in a jar of mustard. Dad had a good feast, but George made a mess and got badger blood all over his beard. He still didn't know how to eat properly.

Suddenly they realised that they were not alone. Monty, the cat from next door, appeared through a hole in a fence.

Hi!, he said in a catty sort of way.

Monty told Dad and George all about what had been happening, and how the dinosaurs had taken over the Earth and then become extinct again.

Dad and George said they were sad because they would never see Mum and Becky again.

Yes you can, said Monty I've invented a Time Machine. It can take us back in time to when Mum and Becky were still alive.

Great!, said Dad and George.

Monty told them about how he had got bored being the only cat alive. So he had spent his time reading books about how to build time machines.

He took them to an old rubbish tip, and there right at the top of a pile of junk was a big black box.

They climbed inside, and Monty sat at the controls. He set the system date to March 5th 1997 – the day that George first hid in the cupboard.

The box started to shake and make strange noises. It went dark and then light and then dark and then light again. Now it was flashing and the noises were getting louder.

Suddenly it stopped. Monty opened the door. When they climbed out they found themselves in Monty's garden.

George looked over the fence.

Mum! he shouted. There was Mum hanging out the washing.

What are you doing next door? asked Mum I thought you were having your breakfast.

Dad laughed because Mum clearly didn't know that they had been away for millions of years.

George went inside and gave Becky a big hug. Becky thought her brother had gone bonkers.

Dad told George that he would never lose his temper again. But George decided to sit up at the table to have his breakfast, just in case ...

CHICKEN

One day the sky fell down and hit Chicken Licken on the head.

"I thought that was going to happen" said Chicken Licken.

He had a great big bump on his head, so he set off to tell the doctor.

On his way he met Monkey Grunkey, who said

"Chicken Licken, where are you going in such a hurry?"

"Mind your own business" said Chicken Licken, and he carried on to tell the doctor that he had a great big bump on his head.

On his way he met Elephant Belephant and his sister Melephant. They said

"Chicken Licken, where are you going in such a hurry?"

"I'm going to tell the doctor that I've got a great big bump on my head" said Chicken Licken.

"We'll come with you" said Elephant Belephant, but they couldn't because their trunks had been tied together in a knot.

So Chicken Licken carried on, and on his way he met Goldfishy Boldfishy,

who said

"Chicken Licken, where are you going in such a hurry?"

"I'm going to tell the doctor that I've got a great big bump on my head" said Chicken Licken.

"I'll come with you" said Goldfishy Boldfishy, but he couldn't because goldfish can't walk.

So Chicken Licken carried on, and on his way he met Sheepy Weepy, who cried

"Chicken Licken, where are you going in such a hurry?"

"I do wish people would stop bugging me" said Chicken Licken "I'm going to tell the doctor that I've got a great big bump on my head."

"I'll come with you" said Sheepy Weepy, but he couldn't because his mum said he had to tidy his room.

So Chicken Licken carried on, and on his way he met Hippopotomously Zippopotomously, who said

"Chicken Licken, where are you going in such a hurry?"

"I'm going to tell the doctor that I've got a great big bump on my head" said Chicken Licken.

"I'll come with you" said Hippopotomously Zippopotomously.

Now Hippopotomously Zippopotomously did have legs, and his room was tidy, and he didn't have a trunk that was tied in a knot. So he was just about to go with Chicken Licken when someone undid his tummy button and his bottom dropped off.

So Chicken Licken carried on, and on his way he met Fish Finger Mish Minger, who said

"Chicken Licken, where are you going in such a hurry?"

"I'm going to tell the doctor that I've got a great big bump on my head" said Chicken Licken.

"I'll come with you" said Fish Finger Mish Minger, but he couldn't because Chicken Licken ate him.

So Chicken Licken carried on, and on his way he met Felt Tip Pen Belt Bit Ben, who said

"Chicken Licken, where are you going in such a hurry?"

"I'm going to tell the doctor that I've got a great big bump on my head" said Chicken Licken.

"I am the doctor" said Felt Tip Pen Belt Bit Ben.

"No you're not" said Chicken Licken.

"Yes I am" said Felt Tip Pen Belt Bit Ben.

"No you're not"

"Yes I am"

"Not"

"Am"

"Not"

"Am"

"Not Not Not"

"Am Am Am Am Am Am Am Am"

And then Chicken Licken pulled the lid off Felt Tip Pen Belt Bit Ben, and threw it in the river.

So Chicken Licken carried on, and on his way he met Humpty Dumpty, who said

"Chicken Licken, where are you going in such a hurry?"

"I'm going to tell the doctor that I've got a great big bump on my head" said Chicken Licken.

"I'll come with you" said Humpty Dumpty, but then there was a great CRASH! as Humpty Dumpty fell off a wall.

Eventually Chicken Licken arrived at the door of the doctor's surgery, but he didn't have an appointment so the nurse told him to go away.

Then he saw the sign on the door.

It said "Doctor Felt Tip Pen Belt Bit Ben".

"Oh dear" thought Chicken Licken "I'll have to bandage it up myself".

Here are a few questions to see if you have been listening ...

Why couldn't Elephant Belephant and his sister Melephant come?

Why couldn't Goldfishy Boldfishy come?

Why couldn't Sheepy Weepy come?

Why couldn't Hippopotomousy Zippopotomousy come?

Why couldn't Fish Finger Mish Minger come?

What would you do if the sky fell down?

EMPTY CAVE

Once upon a time there was a cave. It was completely empty except for all the air. The air was everywhere as you would expect.

But you wouldn't expect to find a double-decker bus in a cave. And you'd be right, because there were no double-decker buses in this cave.

There were however two potato peelers in the cave. One potato peeler was lying on the ground, and the other potato peeler was lying on the ground.

Five minutes later a boy called Boy walked into the cave. Guess what he was looking for?

That's right, he was looking for his pet skunk called Stinky. Not much in here he thought, so he went away and never came back.

But then he changed his mind and did come back.

He saw one of the potato peelers and picked it up. He took a couple of potatoes from his pocket and started to peel them. Boy carried everything around in his pockets, just in case.

When he finished peeling the potatoes, he took a plate out of his pocket, sat down, squirted some ketchup on, and started to eat them. He wasn't able to cook them because he'd left the cooker at home in the kitchen.

For pudding he fancied a chocolate ice-cream gateaux, so he looked around the cave to see if he could find any.

No luck, all he could find was another potato peeler. Just what he didn't need.

Then a very mysterious thing happened. I can't tell you what it was, because it's a secret.

Boy left the cave and went home.

When he got home he found that his mum had made him raw potatoes and ketchup for tea. That was a stroke of bad luck. His mum wasn't very bright, which is why she had called her son Boy. But for pudding he had chocolate ice-cream gateaux, which was a stroke of good luck.

He told his mum about the mysterious thing that happened in the cave. I can't repeat what he said because it's a secret.

On Tuesday he went back to see if the cave was still there. And of course it was still there because caves can't move.

He sat down in the cave entrance and started to sing a song about a one-legged giraffe who couldn't stand up properly. Just when he got to the bit where the giraffe toppled over into a large vat of custard, the mysterious thing happened two more times.

Can you keep a secret?

You promise not to tell anyone?

Well, what happened is this.

His pet skunk Stinky appeared like a ghostly vision. He was wearing a long robe and had a crown on his head. Amazingly, he could actually talk.

He was talking in a deep spooky voice and this is what he was saying, Treasure! Treasure! Follow me to find the treasure!

So this time, Boy decided to follow him.

They went through a small tunnel at the back of the cave and eventually came out into another cave. This cave was larger than the first, and guess what it was filled with?

No, not treasure. Potato peelers. Hundreds and hundreds of potato peelers. It was a potato peeler factory, and they were being made by a team of about 20 skunks.

So this is where potato peelers are made, thought Boy. I've always wondered where the shops get them from.

But Stinky carried on to the back of the cave, and Boy followed him into another tunnel. This time they came out into an even bigger cave.

There was a sign at the entrance that said Even Bigger Cave.

But there was nothing in this cave except for a couple of toe nail clippings.

So they went through another tunnel and came to a sign that said. The Most Biggest Cave of All.

Boy couldn't believe his eyes when he looked around. The cave was brimming with treasure. It was truly bulging with treasure. Crammed full with treasure. Jam-packed. Choc-a-block. More treasure than the rest of the world put together.

This will make me rich beyond my wildest of dreams thought Boy.

Stinky said he could have all the treasure. The skunks didn't want it because they were only interested in potato peelers.

So Boy stuffed all the treasure into his pockets. He had very deep pockets, but there wasn't enough room for a diamond-covered crown, so he wore it on his head.

On the way home he saw a huge giraffe leaning against a tree. The giraffe was sad, partly because he'd lost three of his legs, and partly because his new shirt was covered in custard.

Please help me your Highness, said the giraffe. He thought that Boy was the king because of the crown on his head.

Boy felt sorry for the giraffe, and because he was the kindest boy in the

world he gave him all the treasure.

The giraffe was delighted. Now he could afford to buy three wooden legs and a new shirt.

Boy took giraffe home and built him a tall shed in the garden. Mum thought up a good name for their new pet – Giraffe!

And they all lived happily ever after.

But remember, if you ever find two potato peelers in a cave and then go through the tunnel to the next cave, and then go through to the Even Bigger Cave and then go through to the Most Biggest Cave of All, you won't find any treasure there because Giraffe has got it all.

THE LAND OF FANTASTIC NAMES

Tom was 9 years old and he wished he had a longer name.

"I'm 9 years old," he said "and I wish I had a longer name." Told you so.

"I wish I had ten letters in my name, or even fifteen, or even fifty or a hundred." But he was wasting his breath because no one was listening.

One day he was sitting in the middle of a field talking to himself as usual. He was muttering something about how short his name was, when suddenly he heard a voice behind him,

"Oh, do shut up!" said the voice "All you ever do is moan, moan, moan, about your silly name. Why don't you get a proper life?"

Tom looked round to see a tree coming towards him. The tree carried on talking "Every day you come up to my field. Every day you sit there going on and on about names. Well I'm sick of it. If its really that important, why don't you change your name?"

"Change it?" said Tom "But how? How would I think of a new name?"

"Go and get one from the Land of Fantastic Names of course" said the tree.

"The Land of Fantastic Names? Where's that?" asked Tom.

"Just north of Oxford on the A34. Don't you know anything?" said the tree. It was clear that the tree was starting to get a bit irritated, so Tom made a hasty exit and set off to find the Land of Fantastic Names.

He caught the 11.30 train from platform 4 at London Paddington and, after changing at Reading, arrived in Oxford just after lunchtime. He hadn't had lunch himself, but that didn't matter because he'd had some yesterday.

He caught a bus from Oxford station that took him directly to the Land of Fantastic Names, where he saw a man standing on a corner of the street counting all the people as they went past.

"Congratulations!" he said to Tom "You are the one millionth person to walk down this street this year."

"Have I won anything?" asked Tom.

"No I just thought you might like to know" said the man.

The man said his name was Raymond Snodgrass Junior, which Tom thought was a great name.

"How can I get a name like that?" asked Tom.

"You need to go to the Land of Fantastic Names" said Raymond Snodgrass Junior.

"But this is the Land of Fantastic Names" said Tom.

"You're in the right place then" said the man.

"Well, what do I do now then?" asked Tom.

"You need to go and see Gumbo Mulroney ChopFace. He's in charge of giving out fantastic names. He's over there selling newspapers."

Tom saw a short fat man with a bald head, and walked over.

"Do you want to buy a newspaper?" asked Gumbo Mulroney ChopFace.

"No" said Tom.

But the man gave him one anyway.

"This newspaper has got fish and chips in it" said Tom.

"Yes, I always think fish and chips taste better in newspaper" said Gumbo. Strange man, thought Tom.

"My name has only got three letters in it," said Tom, "can you get me a better one?"

"No I can't. You need to go and see Terry TickleFace the Third. He's over there counting the number of people that walk past."

"That can't be Terry Tickle-whatsit," said Tom "that's Raymond Snodgrass Junior."

"Oh yes, so it is" said Gumbo Mulroney ChopFace "it must be Terry's day off."

"Where does he live then?" asked Tom.

"In his house of course" said Gumbo Mulroney ChopFace.

"And where might that be?" asked Tom.

"In the same street as my house" said Gumbo Mulroney ChopFace.

"And where is your house?" asked Tom.

"In the same street as Terry TickleFace the Third's. I just told you that!"

Tom realised he was getting nowhere with this man so he looked up Terry's address in the phone book. He lived in PigPigPog Avenue, so Tom went round there straight away.

"What do you want?" asked the thin fat man who opened the door.

"New name please," said Tom.

"What new name would that be?" asked the man.

"Umm, I don't know. I thought you might be able to help me think of one," said Tom.

"I've got some new ones growing in the garden if you want to have a look," said the man.

So they went round to the back garden. Tom was amazed to see names everywhere. They were growing on trees, in bushes, and some were even growing on the lawn.

The first name he saw was Betty Beedlebum.

"Nice name," said Tom "but its a girl's name. I'm not having that."

"Of course its a girl's name," said the man "that's a female bush you're looking at."

"Oh!" said Tom "where's the boys bush then?"

The man went to the boys bush and started to read the names.

"Barry Bighead the Boring Beekeeper"

"No, I'm not keen on that one" said Tom.

"Grunt Gimblethorpe"

"No, that's even worse."

"Jason Jeremiah Jellytooth"

"No"

"Clumbo Clipper Clop Clap Clop"

"Definitely Not"

"Tom"

"No, I've already got a name like that, its boring."

All of a sudden, a name fell down from a tree and landed on Tom's shoulder. Tom read it, and was very impressed. It was a brilliant name, just the sort of thing he was looking for.

"I'll have this one" he said.

"What is it?" asked Terry TickleFace the Third.

"Sargeant Skeleton Stink Squirter"

"Excellent" said Terry TickleFace the Third "it suits you. You can have it, but you must leave your existing name here."

So Tom put his Tom name on a bush and went away with his new name. When he got back home it was nearly time for supper.

"What would you like for supper Tom?" asked his Mum.

He didn't answer, so she asked him again. Still no reply.

"Why aren't you talking to me Tom?" asked Mum.

"Tom's not my name anymore. I changed it in the Land of Fantastic Names."

"Oh yes" said Mum "and what might your new name be?"

"Sargeant Skeleton Stink Squirter"

His Mum fainted on the kitchen floor.

Dad came home and went upstairs to get changed. He saw a new sign on Tom's door that said "SARGEANT SKELETON STINK SQUIRTER'S ROOM".

There must be some mistake thought Dad, that's Tom's room. When the Sargeant told him about his new name, Dad was so amazed at what he was hearing that his ears fell off.

The next day, Stink Squirter went back to school. All the other kids laughed at his new name. Even the teacher sniggered. But Stinky didn't care. He was proud of himself. He was different to all the other kids and he didn't intend to be upset by their comments.

After a few weeks, everybody got used to his new name and they all stopped laughing at him. In fact, some of the kids were getting quite jealous. They started to wish that they had interesting names as well.

So one day they asked Sargeant Squirter if he would take them to the Land of Fantastic Names, just north of Oxford. This he did, and while the other kids were all changing their sensible names into ridiculous ones, Stinky picked his old name, Tom, off the bush.

"Mmmm," he thought "I think perhaps my old name wasn't so bad after all."

So he took his old name back. Now he was Tom again, and everybody else had silly names.

The next day at school, the teacher had great trouble reading the register without laughing. It went something like this ...

"Billy Bathwater" – "Yes Miss"

"Harry Head-Bandage" – "Yes Miss"

"Kylie Kangaroo Kettle Keeper" – "Yes Miss"

"Larry Lipstick" – "Yes Miss"

"Toooooooooo TigTigTig TunkyTunkTunk" – "Yes Miss"

"Tom" – "Yes Miss"

After that, Tom never went back to the Land of Fantastic Names. He was happy with his proper name and thought that his parents were very kind to give it to him.

MIKE MOUNTAIN

Mike was bored. Nothing ever seemed to happen in his life. Every day he would get up, do nothing for twelve hours and then go back to bed.

Then the following day he would get up, do nothing for twelve hours and then go back to bed.

And the day after that he would get up, do nothing for twelve hours and then go back to bed.

This happened every day, and every following day. Yesterday, today and tomorrow in that order.

"Get up, do nothing, go to bed" he said.

Then he said it again, twice.

"Get up, do nothing, go to bed"

"Get up, do nothing, go to bed"

This routine went on for a long long long long long time. Well quite long anyway.

Mike was a mountain. In fact he still is. His Dad was a Scotsman called Ben Nevis and his Mum was an Asian lady called Eva Rest.

Most mountains lead very quiet lives. Every day is the same. Nothing ever seems to happen in their lives. They get up, do nothing for twelve hours and then go back to bed.

But one day something did happen. Something amazing. And it happened to our friend Mike. And I'm going to write a book to tell you about it.

This is that book. I've finished it already.

So here goes ...

Chapter 1.

Once upon a time, there was a mountain called Mike. He was bored. Nothing ever seemed to happen in his blah blah blah etc etc, you know

all this so I won't repeat it.

Let's get straight to the amazing thing.

Mike was sitting in his garden when he found a piece of paper and a pen. That's not the amazing thing. Be patient.

He decided he would use the pen to write a story on the piece of paper. Then he would have three things – a pen, a piece of paper and a story. Neat idea, but not the amazing thing.

The amazing thing happened when he decided what his story would be about. He decided he would write about a story about someone who writes stories. Yes, he decided he would write a story about me, Gordon Dioxide.

So he was writing a story about me, while I was writing a story about him. And my story about him was about him writing a story about me. Amazing isn't it? Well I think it is.

Chapter 2.

Not much happened in Chapter 2 so please go straight to Chapter 3.

Chapter 3.

Chapter 3 is all about the weather, which isn't very interesting so I won't bore you with all the details. All you need to know is that it was a cloudy day.

Chapter 4.

On this particular cloudy day, as Mike sat in his garden writing a book called Gordon Dioxide and the Dancing Cat, a gentle noise came floating down from the sky. The noise settled on Mike's shoulder and stayed very still and very quiet.

So still that Mike didn't notice, and so quiet that you wouldn't really call it a noise anymore.

Just then, Mike's Mum Eva came out into the garden. She immediately noticed the silent noise, and told Mike. Mike stood up slowly, taking care not to disturb the noise. But he failed miserably. The noise was badly disturbed, and was silent no more.

Shouting and screaming, the noise started demanding equal rights for this, more money for that and straighter bananas.

Eva and Mike were having none of this.

"No, no, no!" they replied, "You can have your equal rights, you can take more money but bananas must always be bent. A straight banana would look

wrong, it would taste wrong and it would almost certainly smell of garlic!"
"Well that's just typical." said the noise "Nobody ever does what I say. Fine. Let's just forget the whole thing."
Now Eva and Mike were starting to feel a bit guilty.
"Mmmm" said Mike "I suppose we could ask the government to straighten some bananas".
"Yes we could ask them to straighten some" said Eva.
"Don't bother" said the noise "They won't take any notice. They never do."
"Okay" said Mike.
And that pretty much wraps up Chapter 4.

Chapter 5.

The next day the noise came back and did exactly the same thing, so please read Chapter 4 again.

Chapter 6.

In the weeks that followed, there were seven days.
The noise never came back and boredom returned to the world of Mike Mountain.
Mike's big wish was to become a footballer, but he was just too lazy to do anything about it. Too lazy to buy a football kit, too lazy to buy a ball and too lazy to practice.
He would get up every morning, do nothing for twelve hours and then go back to bed.
Then one day he got a phone call from the England football manager, who was trying to get a team together for the World Cup. Unfortunately, Mike was asleep at the time and didn't hear the phone ring. He was dreaming about playing for England in the World Cup.
So that was a particularly bad day. A day when something brilliant nearly happened but didn't, making it even worse than an average day when nothing even nearly happens.

Chapter 7.

Mike suddenly remembered about the book he was writing – Gordon Dioxide and the Dancing Cat. He found it by the seat in the garden. There were still no words in it, so there was little chance of getting it published yet. But the title was excellent, especially if he could work out a way of combining a dancing cat with an author.
After mulling it over for a second or two he lost all interest in writing

stories, and went back to bed.

Chapter 8.

Chapter 8 is the chapter immediately before chapter 9, which is actually a much better chapter so lets skip forward to that.

Chapter 9.

One day Clive the Plumber came into Mike's life and fixed his leaking sink. But this was no ordinary plumber, although the sink was very ordinary. Clive had a talent, a wonderful talent, because when he starts to sing the world starts to sing. And when Clive's fixing a leaky pipe he always starts to sing.

Mike was trying to read a book about a rare species of South American dancing cat to get some ideas for his story, which he'd forgotten he'd lost interest in.

But he could no longer concentrate as everybody on the planet was singing "Zippedy Doo Daa Zippedy Day My Oh My What a Wonderful Day".

"Shut up!" he shouted "You're all very irritating!"

The world went quiet. They all looked at Mike.

"Ooooooh, moody!" they said.

But Mike ignored that remark, and continued his research.

He discovered that dancing cats were once common in Europe, but had been hunted to the point of extinction by an even rarer species of gardening cat. In 1742 the gardening cats had gathered all their forks and spades and used them to hurl mushroom compost at the retreating armies of dancing cat.

This episode of history had ended with the last of the dancing cats seeking protection on the great prairies of Argentina.

"An interesting piece of information" thought Mike "But not interesting enough. I need to find out exactly what these dancing cats are like."

So the very next day, armed with a piece of paper and a pen, he set sail for Argentina.

Chapter 10.

Now Argentina is a very long way away, unless you're in Brazil. Which is exactly where Mike was. He'd caught the wrong ship and ended up in the wrong place at the wrong time.

"This is all wrong" he said to himself "This is Brazil and my watch is 20 minutes fast".

But after a few days the problem had been solved. He was now in Argentina, exactly the country he wanted to be in, and his watch had been adjusted to American Atomic Time. There is no more accurate measure of time than AAT.

He soon found a colony of dancing cats, playing violins and skipping round a camp fire. At first the cats were afraid that Mike was a spy working for an evil gang of European gardening cats, but after a while they started to trust him.

Mike learnt that dancing cats are kind, generous, intelligent, cute and reliable. He stayed at their camp for two weeks.

He would remember those cats for the rest of his life, which wasn't very long because the ship sank on the way home.

MUFTY THE SQUIRREL

* this story may be unsuitable for some very young children *

Muffy the squirrel was a sweet little thing. He was cuddly and snuggly and buggly and sometimes he was even a bit scruggly. He was as kind as Father Christmas and softer than a very soft thing.

One day (I think it was Tuesday) he got a letter from the post-squirrel.

He thought it would be a good idea to open it, because that would be the best way to find out who it was from. So he did. And it was from someone called Giant Claws the Gruesome Grizzly Bear.

This is what it said ...

Dear Muffy

I am very very hungry. In fact I am starving. Can I come to your house for supper on Saturday?

Yours sincerely

Giant Claws the Gruesome Grizzly Bear

Muffy had never heard of this bear before, but he felt very sorry for him. A tear started to appear in his eye, so he decided to write back straight away.

This is what he wrote ...

Dear Giant Claws the Gruesome Grizzly Bear

I would be delighted if you come to my house for supper on Saturday. I will prepare some delicious acorn soup using my special secret recipe which involves opening a can of tomato soup and pouring some acorns in.

Lots of love and cuddles
from Mufty
XXX

Mufty read the letter back to himself to check for spelling mistakes, and then noticed that he'd given away the secret recipe.

Never mind, he thought, and he set off to town to post the letter.

On the way he saw an elephant with its trunk tangled up in some bushes. Being a kind and sweet little thing, Mufty helped free the elephant.

Then he helped an old lady across the road. She didn't really want to cross the road, so Mufty had to help her back again.

Then he found a spider caught up in a web, so he carefully pulled it out and placed it on the ground. The spider was a bit irritated because it had been building the web for hours. It was even more irritated when a bicycle came along and squashed it.

As you can see, some of Mufty's good deeds didn't work too well.

He went into the Post Office to buy a stamp for the letter. There was a newspaper on the shelf, and the headline was. Seven Squirrels Eaten by Grizzly Bear!

The good news is that Mufty hadn't yet posted the letter inviting the Grizzly to his house. So there was still time for him to throw the letter away. The bad news is that Mufty didn't look at the newspaper. Instead, he bought a stamp, stuck it on the letter and dropped it into the letter box.

He headed back home, humming a happy little tune as he went.

Wednesday came and went.

Thursday came and went.

Friday came and went.

And then Saturday arrived. The big day. The day that he been looking forward to.

He spent all day getting things ready. There were napkins, party hats, flowers, candles, and everything you normally see when you go round to a squirrel's house for supper.

At six o'clock there was a loud banging at the door. Mufty opened it and found a huge fearsome bear with big teeth and giant claws.

Please come in, said Mufty.

Giant Claws barged in shouting and yelling about how hungry he was.

Would you like some of my delicious acorn soup, asked Mufty.

NO! shouted the bear, I hate soup.

Oh! said Mufty, what would you like then?

Squirrel pie! yelled the bear.

I don't think they sell that at our supermarket, said Mufty.

That's okay, said the bear with a grin I like to make it myself!

And how exactly do you make squirrel pie? asked Mufty.

Well, its quite simple really said the bear. First, you get a squirrel. Then you add a touch of salt, not too much and not too little. Then, you stuff it in your mouth!

I don't think I like the sound of that, said Mufty, can't we have chocolate cakes instead?

Then the bear went mad. He grabbed Mufty. Then he grabbed the salt and sprinkled some in his bushy tail. Then he opened his mouth really wide and pulled Mufty towards his giant teeth. Then he sneezed. Then he sneezed again. Then he sneezed again, and again and again. He couldn't stop sneezing. He sneezed so much that he dropped Mufty, who ran off and hid in the kitchen.

Eventually, the bear sneezed so hard that his head blew off and landed in the butter dish.

Mufty was safe at last. He came out of his hiding place and mopped up all the bear blood. He put the bear's head in his glass trophy cabinet, which had been empty for years because he'd never won anything before. He decided never to invite grizzly bears into his house again. In fact, he needed a good holiday after this ordeal, so he flew off to Majorca to get a sun tan.

So that was a happy ending, but there is one very important thing you must learn from this story ...

When you're making squirrel pie, make sure you use salt instead of pepper!

MY BROTHER

Fourteen times! That's how many times I've told him. Fourteen times!

By the way, my name's Emily Jones. Hi! I'm writing this so that future generations will know all about the problems I'm having with my brother. I'm going to bury it in the garden and one day it will be found and they will be shocked to read about what a pest he is.

His name is Daniel. He's only seven, but I'm eleven and a half.

Anyway, as I was saying, fourteen times I've told him to knock before he comes into my bedroom. There's a big sign on the door that says "If your name is Daniel, knock!" But he just barges straight in.

He's such a numskull. He thinks that Queen are a better group than the Spice Girls. In case you don't know, the Spice Girls have sold more than 15 million records and been number 1 in 15 countries. They were voted the best group ever. I'd be surprised if Queen have sold a hundred records. Dad says that Queen are very popular, but I think he's just saying that to cheer Daniel up.

Last Tuesday he spilt blackcurrant all over my library book about the Romans. Mum just told me to stop hitting him. She always takes his side. And he's always copying me. If I get my drawing book out, he gets his drawing book out. If I get my Spice Girls sticker book out, he gets his football sticker book out. If I want to buy a dinosaur key-ring from the Natural History Museum, he wants to buy a dinosaur key-ring from the Natural History Museum. If I want chocolate chip ice-cream, he wants chocolate chip ice-cream. If I want vanilla ice-cream, he wants vanilla ice-cream.

He's such a copy-cat. He can't think for himself.

And he's got no idea about fashion. He wears the same old blue jumper every day and his trainers only cost four pounds (they were actually 3-99 but I always forget about the penny because its quicker). He walks around with his hands completely in his pockets, but I just put my thumbs in my pockets and leave the fingers sticking out because its far more fashionable. And his hair is always sticking up in the mornings - I don't think he knows what a comb is!

Last Tuesday, about 25 minutes before he spilt the blackcurrant, he climbed up to the first branch of the apple tree. He called Mum and Dad

out to see and they said "Well Done", but he was only on the first branch. A baby could climb higher than that. I would have probably climbed to the top branch, but I had my new shoes on which cost 10 pounds (9-99). They've got 2-inch platforms and red laces. Daniel's trainers have got velcro because he can't even do up laces.

Last Tuesday, about one hour and fifteen minutes after he spilt the blackcurrant, he was doing his homework sums. They were really simple. We get long multiplication and long division to do, but he was doing things like $3+3$ and $5+2$. He thought that nine plus three was 13. See what I mean? He's completely useless. I've always known that nine plus three equals 12.

I've got a CD player in my room now, so I can listen to my music in peace and quiet at last. It was made in China and Dad says this means it's good quality. If you shut your eyes you would think that the Spice Girls were actually in your room. Mum says she wouldn't want the Spice Girls in her room.

Daniel thinks he's so grown-up, but he's not. I'm allowed to walk up to the shop on my own to get some milk, and when I'm twelve I'll be able to cycle to Emma's house. That reminds me, Daniel's bike is so small and it's not even a mountain bike. He's put some Flapper Zappers in the spokes because he thinks it makes the bike go faster, but it doesn't.

And he's always getting me into trouble when I haven't done anything. Once I saw him licking some chocolate off one of Mum's new cakes, and when I told her she just told me off for telling tales. That's not fair is it? Also, he hogs the computer for hours. When I need to do some important work with my Barbie game, he keeps playing Monster Bash over and over and over again.

Daniel's just so annoying. Life was much better before he came along. I wish I had an older sister instead of a younger brother, because Emma's got an older sister and she's really nice.

My favourite colour is dark yellow and my favourite shop is Bangles because its got all sorts of priceless jewellery such as hair-bands, necklaces, and ear-rings. I was one of the first people in my class to have their ears pierced. Emma hasn't had hers pierced yet, but I still like her. She says she can't have them pierced because they are infected. I pretend to believe her, but really I think her Mum won't let her.

When I was young I thought I'd never be allowed to have my ears pierced until I was 18. It doesn't hurt, but I definitely wouldn't have other parts of my body pierced like the man I saw at the bus stop. He had 5 rings in his right ear, 3 in his left ear, one in the corner of his eye, and a big ring through his nose. I didn't stare because I didn't want to embarrass him.

Apart from my brother, my family includes other people such as me, my Mum and my Dad. My Mum complains a lot because she does all the work around here. My Dad is always watching football on TV. He says the government pay him to do it, but they don't.

We also have a ginger cat called Ginger. Well that's what I tell my friends. They have all got pets so I pretend we've got one too. When they come to visit our house I tell them that Ginger has gone to the vet's for a check-up. Dad says he hasn't got time to watch football AND look after a cat. I have lots of friends as you would expect. My first best friend is Emma Thomas, my second best is Jessica Barnes, and my third best is Natalie Wilson. Julie Banks used to be my third, but now she is seventh because she broke the lid off my pencil case.

There is a boy in my class that I want to marry when I'm 22. I'm not going to tell you his name because its a secret and only Emma knows. He spoke to me in September but I ignored him because I didn't want him to know that I love him.

If you are reading this in the future, you may wish to know about the sort of civilisation that I live in. Well, it is a very advanced one with many well-designed gadgets to make everyday living easier. For example, our televisions are now linked into the BBC by a cable, which means there are many more channels to choose from. These extra channels provide important information on earthquakes, shopping and sharks. Previous civilisations did not have this luxury.

We are doing a school project on the Romans. They were also a very advanced civilisation, but all their gadgets were lost underground when they became extinct. Their main interest was mosaic floors, which were very comfortable to walk on. They were also very advanced at making fine Roman pottery, which made it easier to store good wine.

You are probably wondering why I have stopped talking about my brother. Well, I have decided not to mention him again because of his bad attitude. He's such a dork. Last Monday or Wednesday he wanted me to

pretend to be an acorn growing into a big oak tree, because he'd learnt how to do it at Drama. But I refused because Geri from the Spice Girls says that Girl Power is all about doing the things in life that you want to do.

Anyway, I hope you have enjoyed reading all about my life, and I'm sorry about my brother. To make sure you have been reading carefully, I have invented some questions for you:-

1. Is my brother a) kind and generous b) intelligent c) a complete dork
2. What is our cat called, even though we haven't got one?
3. How old will I be on my wedding day?
4. What is the capital of France? (The answer is F. This was a joke question to help keep your spirits up, and to show you that I have a good sense of humour)
5. What important information can I learn about on our new TV channels?
6. How much did Daniel's trainers cost?
7. What is my favourite colour?

MY LIFE STORY

This is a bicycle about my life. I'm sorry, did I say bicycle? I meant to say "story", but sometimes I get my words mixed up. Anyway, as I was saying, this is story about my life. It's called "My Life Bicycle".

I am now 104 years old, but when I was born I was zero. I was just a baby in those days, and I couldn't walk, talk or fold maps. Now I can walk and talk, but I'm still learning how to fold maps.

I'm old now, but when I was young I wasn't old at all.

During my first year, I did a lot of crying and a lot of unpleasant things in my nappies. By the way, nappies are called diapers in America and something else in Norway, Belgium, Italy and Bolivia.

Exactly 12 months after birth, I had my first birthday. And 52 weeks after that, I had my second. My third came 365 days later, my fourth 8,760 hours later, my fifth 525,600 minutes later and my sixth 31.536 million seconds later.

By the way again, if you are 5 you have been alive for more than 157 million seconds. This handy cut-out-and-keep chart shows how long you have been alive:

5 years = 157,000,000 seconds

6 years = 189,000,000 seconds
7 years = 220,000,000 seconds
8 years = 252,000,000 seconds
9 years = 283,000,000 seconds
10 years = 315,000,000 seconds

If you are more than 10, you can either work it out for yourself or go and do something more interesting.

Anyway, back to the story of my life. After I was 6, I became 7. Then I became 8, then 9, then 10, then 11, then 12, then 13, then 14, then 15, then 16, then 17, then 18, then 19, then 20. I missed out 21 because I forgot my birthday, so, after two years at 20, I became 22.

I used to have an imaginary friend. He was imaginary because only I knew about him. Nobody else could see him, hear him, smell him or stamp on his foot. He used to go everywhere with me, but one morning I woke up to find that he had disappeared. I haven't seen him since.

After 22, I was 23, then 24, then 25, then 26, then 27, then 28, then 29, then 30.

Every birthday I had to go out and buy one extra candle for my cake, except on my 22nd birthday when I had to buy two.

I got married when I was 31. My wife was two years younger than me and still is. She always uses my candles on her birthday cake, as we share everything except her lipstick.

Did you know that lipstick is called "rossetto" in Italy, "lippenstift" in Holland, "batom" in Portugal and "lipstick" in Scotland? No? Well, you do now. When I was 32 I got a job at a fire extinguisher factory, but it burnt down. When I was 33 I got a job at a map factory, but soon got the sack.

Then I got the sack at a sack factory.

Then I got fired at a gun factory.

When I was 34 I joined the Navy because I like flying. This was a terrible experience because they put me on a plane that sailed on water. I hate everything to do with the sea: I hate waves, I hate salt water, I hate fish and I hate all three letters "s", "e" and "a".

When I was 35 I became a doctor, but had to give that up when I got a mystery illness.

At 36 I got a job at an alarm clock factory, but kept being late for work after oversleeping at home.

Then I got a job at a bed factory, but kept being late to go home after oversleeping at work.

On September 15th 1937, my wife and I decided to move to Alaska to start a new life. The following day we moved back as it was too cold.

We also tried moving to Nigeria, but that was too hot. Eventually, we found a nice place just down the road, where the temperature was perfect. We were very happy, but my career was going nowhere. I needed to find a job that I was good at.

I tried bricklaying, dentistry and professional tennis but it was difficult trying to hold down three jobs at the same time.

I became an astronaut, but once you've seen one planet you've seen them all.

Working in a bank was more interesting. That went well until the day I put all the money in the safe and accidentally dropped the key down an old well shaft.

I applied to become a check-out girl at the local supermarket but they said I had filled in the wrong form.

My next job was a complete disaster and I don't want to talk about it.

It would soon be time to retire and I hadn't even started work yet!

I tried to get someone to sponsor me to see how many cakes I could eat in 4 days. I was sure that this would bring me fame and fortune, as well as a mention in the Book of World Records. Nobody sponsored me but I went ahead with the record attempt anyway. I ate 79 cakes on the first day, but then spent the next three days in hospital.

Soon after that, I decided to go to University. For three years I studied books and wrote essays. When I went to hand all my work in I found out that I was supposed to have sent in an application form before starting university.

We weren't short of money as my wife had quite a good career. She had worked her way up from being a tea lady to become the Prime Minister. This meant there was a vacancy in the government for a new tea lady. So I went to the interview wearing a dress and lipstick, but didn't get the job as I have no idea how to make tea.

I also went for an interview at a door factory, but couldn't find the way in. I joined a pop group and they asked me to be the singer as I can't play

any instruments. They kicked me out when they realised that I can't sing either. After two days as a helicopter pilot and six days swimming back to shore, I finally found my dream job. It involved counting the number of books in our local library. I completed the task in less than a week, but they refused to pay me as they said that nobody had asked me to do it. This made me quite angry, so I decided to use my library ticket to borrow all 740,000 books. Cycling home with all these books wasn't easy, and I had to make three trips.

I spent the next ten years reading all the books, and thus became the cleverest person in the whole wide world. This really was my big break. I worked out how to solve world hunger, discovered a cure for all known diseases and won some great prizes on TV quiz shows.

I wrote a book that included all the information that I'd read about. The book was bigger than a small city (but smaller than a big city). Sherwood Forest had to be cut down to provide enough paper for the book. Unfortunately there were no book shops large enough to stock the book, so it was a bit of a waste of time really.

As this is the story of my life, I suppose I should tell you my name. It's Jonathan Dolphin, not ideal for someone who doesn't like the s-e-a. My middle name is Grmbhhyfrw, a word with no vowels and completely impossible to pronounce.

My motto in life always used to be "You will find that everybody is good if you take time to get to know them". To test this theory, I invited the Devil to our wedding. I'm sorry to say that he yawned during the Best Man's speech, so now my motto is "You will find that everybody is good, except for the Devil who can be very rude at weddings."

My wife is still the Prime Minister, I am still the cleverest man in the whole wide world and we still have plenty of money left over from my success on "Who Wants to be a Zillionaire". But when I was younger, so much younger than today, I never needed anybody's help in any way. Now I need a butler, a gardener, a cook and somebody to put the toothpaste on my brush.

There are three things that irritate me: empty staplers, umbrellas on a windy day and smug-looking cats that think they know everything. If these cats were really that clever, they wouldn't spend all their time chasing mice while being chased by dogs. They would get out of the way and let the dogs chase the mice.

Anyway, I'd better stop writing this story now as I've got another job interview in a minute.

Now you know all about my life, you will be able to go on "Mastermind" with the specialist subject of "The Life and Times of Jonathan Dolphin".

NORMAL RAT SETS A NEW WORLD COUNTING RECORD

Once upon a time there was a normal-looking rat called Normal Rat. He had a sister called Basketball Rat, who was good at basketball. Basketball Rat had a brother called Normal Rat, and they both had a brother called Spelling Rat. He was good at spelling. Normal Rat, Basketball Rat and Spelling Rat had two sisters called Gardening Rat and Weather Forecasting Rat, and they all had a brother called Running Backwards Rat.

Their mother was called Cuddly Rat and she was married to a Welsh rabbit called Scott. Cuddly and Scott had five children called Normal Rat, Basketball Rat, Spelling Rat, Gardening Rat and Weather Forecasting Rat, plus a sixth child called Running Backwards Rat.

They all lived in a large house in the middle of a small town called London.

Next door lived a family of fifteen frogs, including Freddie Frog, Flora Frog and their children Felicity, Fergus, Felix, Ferdinand, Fernando, Fern, Fifi, Fiona, Fitz, Florence, Frank, Fraser and Colin. Next door to the frogs lived Cuddly Rat, Scott Rabbit, Normal Rat, Basketball Rat, Spelling Rat, Gardening Rat and Weather Forecasting Rat. Also living in the same house as Cuddly Rat, Scott Rabbit, Normal Rat, Basketball Rat, Spelling Rat, Gardening Rat and Weather Forecasting Rat was Running Backwards Rat. Running Backwards Rat was the son of Cuddly Rat and Scott Rabbit and the brother of Normal Rat, Basketball Rat, Spelling Rat, Gardening Rat and Weather Forecasting Rat.

Once a year, people would come from miles around to watch the Annual Counting Competition. This was the most exciting day of the year for all Londoners, but this year was especially exciting for the Rat and Frog families as four of them were taking part in the competition.

Now the highest that anybody in the world could count up to was 109. Nobody, but nobody, could work out what comes after 109.

So when Fiona Frog went onto the stage, she counted all the way up to 109, smiled, bowed to the audience and left the stage while everybody

clapped politely. Then Spelling Rat did the same thing and then Fraser Frog did the same thing again.

Finally, Normal Rat walked onto the stage. He counted to 100 in very quick time and then continued "101, 102, 103, 104, 105, 106, 107, 108, 109 ..." Everybody expected him to bow and leave the stage. But he didn't. He coughed and took a step forward. He looked down at all the faces, cleared his throat once more and then said in a very confident voice "200".

A hush fell over the audience. Nobody knew what to do. They all looked at each other nervously. Then, from the back of the crowd, Professor Rat called "Yes! Yes! I think he's right! Yes! I'm sure he's right! He's right! He's right! He's done it! A new world counting record!"

Everybody went wild. They clapped and cheered and carried Normal Rat around the room on their shoulders. This was the biggest thing to happen in London since Great Grandfather Rat broke through the 100 barrier in 1937.

Just then, a small voice from the crowd called "I don't believe it. That can't be right. There must be at least 90 numbers between 109 and 200". But nobody heard the voice as it belonged to Extremely Quiet Rat.

Instead, Professor Rat went onto the stage and announced that Normal Rat would now be called Counting Rat. And that made Normal Rat very proud.

The new counting system was introduced immediately into schools all over London, and soon everybody could do it.

It wasn't until ten years later that a young rat called Young Rat discovered that there were indeed another 90 numbers between 109 and 200. He was renamed Missing Numbers Discovery Rat and went on to become rich, famous and quite good looking.

This all goes to show that you shouldn't always believe everything that people tell you. Everybody believed that 200 came after 109, but they were wrong. You should always ask questions if you are not sure about anything. That is the only way to become as clever as Missing Numbers Discovery Rat.

There is no such thing as a stupid question. Asking a question shows that you are thinking.

A TREE-MENDOUS RACE

"I'm faster than you" said the oak tree.

"No you're not" said the elm tree "and you're at least 600 years old so you must be the slowest tree in the forest!"

"You've got Dutch Elm Disease" said the oak.

"No I haven't. It's just a cold. And I'll race you to the end of that field" said the elm, pointing to a fence in the distance.

They agreed to run the race at 4 o'clock on Wednesday afternoon, just before tea.

But when the time came, it turned out to be a great disappointment. Nobody had told the trees about their roots. All trees have roots that fix them to the ground, preventing them from taking part in any of the more active sports. Running across the field turned out to be completely impossible with those crazy twisted roots growing deep into the earth.

So they decided to have an argument instead.

Elmy the Elm said that caterpillars turn into worms and Oaky the Oak said that caterpillars turn into squirrels. They argued about this for half an hour, until eventually they decided to ask a caterpillar. They asked Pilly the Caterpillar, but Pilly said he didn't know what he would turn into as he hadn't turned into it yet.

The following morning Elmy saw a worm and said "Look! Pilly has turned into a worm. I was right!"

But then Pilly appeared, so he was wrong.

The following morning Oaky saw a squirrel and said "Look! Pilly has turned into a squirrel. I was right!"

But then Pilly appeared, so he was wrong.

The following morning, there was no worm, no squirrel and no Pilly.

The two trees were wondering where Pilly had gone.

Then they saw a butterfly.

"Excuse me Mr Butterfly" said Elmy "have you seen a caterpillar called Pilly?"

"No" said the butterfly "but my name is Pilly"

"You're not Pilly" said Oaky "Pilly is a caterpillar and one day he will turn into a squirrel".

"Or a worm" said Elmy.

"Or maybe a butterfly" said Pilly, with a grin on his face.

Then a cute little bunny rabbit called Fluffy appeared and ate Pilly the

Butterfly, completely wiping the smile off his face.

Oaky and Elmy soon gave up looking for Pilly the caterpillar, and started to think about more important things. Like who could eat the most toast without being sick.

They agreed to have the eating competition at 11 o'clock on Thursday morning, just before lunch.

But when the time came, it turned out to be a great disappointment. Neither of them had hands, so they couldn't push the lever down on the toaster. Instead of hands, they had twigs, which were completely useless when it came to operating basic kitchen equipment.

So they decided to write a poem instead. It went like this ...

Elmy and Oaky were a pair of trees
That didn't eat ham but did like cheese
On Wednesday afternoon they planned a race
Only to find they were stuck in one place

They had no need of running boots
As they were stopped from moving by pesky roots
So they argued about a caterpillar
That was swallowed up by Fluffy the Killer
Their argument was very silly
And led to the end of poor old Pilly
So they turned their attention to eating toast
To see which tree could take the most

But that was the worst of their crazy plans
As neither tree had any hands
So take my advice and beware
If ever you meet this crazy pair!
Most of the poem was written by Elmy, but Oaky wrote the words.

DON'T PANIC!

"My house! My house! My house has been stolen!" cried Igglebert.

Igglebert was a 67-year-old man called Igglebert. He was always having bad dreams and thinking they were real.

He woke up and realised that it was just a dream, so he got up to clean his teeth.

Then he noticed that his house really had been stolen in the middle of the night, so he had nowhere to clean his teeth.

"My teeth! My teeth! My teeth will rot and fall out and I'll have to eat soup for the rest of my life!"

He was always in a panic about something or other.

Now he was standing all alone in an empty field. All the other houses in the street had also been stolen. So had the road, the cars, the signs, the trees and the gardens. There was nothing left.

Suddenly he remembered that he went to a party last night and he'd fallen asleep in a field while walking home. This wasn't his street at all!

What a relief!

So he carried on walking home. When he got home he was pleased to see that his house was still standing and so was everything else in the street.

He went into his house and saw three strangers in the kitchen having a cup of tea. He looked around and saw that all his furniture had been stolen and replaced with new chairs, tables, wallpaper, carpets and pictures. Even the books on the shelf were different.

"My furniture! My furniture! My furniture has been stolen and replaced with all this new stuff!" he cried.

The three people in the kitchen looked puzzled.

"Who are you?" they asked.

"I'm Igglebert, a 67-year-old man called Igglebert. I live here. This is my house. Number 22 Granby Street."

"This is Number 44 Willow Street. You're in the wrong house" they said.

"Oh!" said Igglebert "that explains it. But where is my furniture?"

"It's probably in your house" they said.

"Yes of course" said Igglebert "that's where it would be!"

So off he went to find Granby Street.

When he arrived back home at Number 22 Granby Street he noticed that somebody had changed the sign on the door to Number 27. He also noticed that house Number 27 now had his Number 22 sign on the door.

"How annoying" he thought, so he switched the two signs back again.

Then he went into his house, only to find a strange old lady sweeping the television with a broom.

"Who are you?" she asked.

"I'm Igglebert, a 67-year-old man called Igglebert. I live here. This is my

house. Number 22 Granby Street."

"This is Number 27 Granby Street. You're in the wrong house" she said.

"Oh!" said Igglebert "that explains it. But why does it say Number 22 on the door?"

"It doesn't" she said.

"Yes it does" said Igglebert. And he showed her.

"Oh sorry" she said "I must be in the wrong house!", and off she went to find the house with 27 on the door.

Igglebert went back inside, but was still puzzled about how different everything looked. The sofa was pink instead of blue. The picture on the wall was a fluffy cat stretched out in the sun, instead of a group of pigs playing darts. The books on the shelf were all about cookery, needlework and local history, instead of monster trucks, soldiers, pigs and darts.

Then suddenly he remembered that he had swapped the numbers on the doors and this house really did belong to the strange old lady.

So he went over the road to his real house and was delighted to find that the strange old lady had cleaned all the floors, tidied the bedroom and swept the television.

After they had swapped houses and changed the door numbers back, everything had returned to normal.

Igglebert had a mug of warm milk with two slices of toast, and then went to bed.

Two hours later he woke up shouting "My toast! My toast! I forgot to put butter on my toast!"

This wasn't just a bad dream. He really had forgotten to put butter on his toast. But it was too late. The toast had been eaten and washed down with warm milk.

What could he do?

Should he panic?

Should he have some more toast, but this time with butter, even though he wasn't hungry?

I know what I would do. I'd just forget all about it and go back to sleep!

THE ANIMAL RACE

There once lived a dog and there once lived a cat in the same town in the same street in the same year. The town was London, the street was Regent Street and the year was 1984.

The dog was called Fido and the cat was called Bradley. They had an odd relationship. How can I put this? Well, they weren't exactly best of friends. In fact, they hated each other. Every day they would have an argument. Then they would fight. Then they would ignore each other. Then another argument would start up and it would keep going round in circles – argue, fight, ignore, argue, fight, ignore.

Most of the arguments were about who was best. Fido thought he was best and Bradley thought he was best.

One day, they decided to settle the argument once and for all and find out who really was the best.

So they decided to have a race. A race from one end of London to the other. From West London to East London. They would start at Paddington Station in the West and finish at Tower Bridge in the East.

The winner would be crowned "Animal King of Regent Street" and the loser would have to be his slave for ever.

The day of the race was Saturday July 7th, and they were both ready to go at 9 o'clock.

When the big station clock struck 9 they were off, with both trying desperately to beat the other to Tower Bridge.

But within five seconds, disaster struck. Fido wasn't looking where he was going and ran straight into a brick wall. Bradley wasn't having much luck either, as he was heading North instead of East.

Fido soon recovered, and, after a quick hospital detour to get a nose bandage, he was now galloping through Hyde Park. He hired a boat to take him across the lake, but the boat sank and he had to swim to safety. The Queen saw him and felt sorry for him with his soaking wet coat and sore nose. She took him in to Buckingham Palace to get him dry and give him something to eat. He got so cosy in the Palace that he forgot all about the race.

Meanwhile, Bradley had just arrived in Scotland. He'd gone 300 miles in the wrong direction. He stopped at a cafe to get a burger, but all they had was haggis. He asked the cafe owner, Jock MacDundee, if he was close to Tower Bridge, but couldn't understand the reply. So he carried on heading North, still hungry and with no idea where he was.

The next morning, a Buckingham Palace servant was serving Fido with a huge luxurious breakfast of sausages, bacon, eggs and custard, when he suddenly remembered about the race. So he grabbed a slice of toast and

ran out of the Palace.

He sprinted down Pall Mall and then sprinted back again because he'd forgotten to thank the Queen for looking after him. When he got back to the Palace, he again forgot to thank the Queen. After racing up and down Pall Mall three more times he eventually remembered to thank her, and she said that he was welcome to stay at the Palace at any time.

Meanwhile, Bradley was no longer in Scotland. He'd gone past Scotland and was now at the North Pole. He was running so fast that he didn't feel the cold. And he was running so fast that a polar bear that was chasing him couldn't catch up. But then he stopped for a rest and the polar bear could catch up. Bradley saw the polar bear just in time and started running again. But now he was running even faster. He was running faster than a speeding car, faster than a train, faster than a rocket and nearly as fast a polar bear. But not quite. The polar bear caught up and grabbed the poor little cat. Bradley squealed and wriggled and squirmed in the polar bear's enormous paws. The polar bear was hungry. The polar bear was hungry for a big plate of cat.

Then Bradley had a good idea. An idea that was to save his life. Instead of letting the polar bear eat him, he decided to eat the polar bear. And he did. And he enjoyed every mouthful. It was the biggest meal he'd ever eaten, but it gave him the energy to carry on with the race.

He headed on through Canada, America, Mexico, Colombia, Brazil, Argentina, the South Pole, Africa, Spain, France and back to England. He'd gone all the way round the world and ended up back at Paddington Station, where he'd started the race.

Meanwhile, Fido was nearly at the finish line at Tower Bridge. He jumped on a red bus to take him the last half mile. He was excited. He knew he was going to win and he had a big smile on his face.

But then the bus turned left, instead of right towards the bridge. Then it turned left again, then right, then left, then straight on for a bit, then four more lefts and three more rights. When it eventually stopped, he jumped off to find himself back at Paddington Station. And there was Bradley, covered in icicles and eating a burger.

The two of them immediately started to argue about who had won the race. But of course neither of them had really won it, because they were

both still at the starting line. The argument turned into a fight and then they started ignoring each other. Can you guess what happened next? Yes, another argument started, and then a fight and so on and so on for ever more.

TWO BIRTHDAY CARDS AND A NEWSPAPER

Once upon a time there was a 12-year-old girl called Jenny Wellington. She was on her way to the shop to buy two newspapers and a birthday card, not two birthday cards and a newspaper like it mistakenly says in the title of this story.

Suddenly she heard a voice behind her shouting "Wait! Wait!"

She turned to see her brother Boz running along the street.

"The goldfish! The goldfish!" he shouted.

"What about the goldfish?" she replied.

"The goldfish! The goldfish!" he shouted again.

"Calm down Boz. Calm down. What's happened?"

Boz took a deep breath.

"The goldfish bowl has fallen off the shelf and smashed into many small pieces. They're all dead! They're all dead!" he cried.

"I've told you before" she said "they are not goldfish, they are carrots. It's part of a school science experiment to see what happens when you keep a bunch of carrots in a bowl of water."

"Oh" said Boz "what does happen?"

"Nothing" she said "well, not until your brother comes and knocks them off the shelf."

"I didn't! I didn't!"

Boz repeats nearly everything he says.

Meanwhile, back at the house, the carrots were not dead. They were very much alive. There were five of them and they all had similar names: Orange 1, Orange 2, Orange 3, Orange 4 and Orange 856.

Orange 3 was the leader, and he was leading them out of the kitchen and into the garden. They were looking for Mr Wellington's vegetable patch. After a couple of minutes they found it, and spent the next two hours freeing all the carrots from the soil. They now had a Carrot Army with 600 soldiers and their mission was to take over the world. They wanted carrots to be in charge and humans to be their slaves!

Orange 3 changed his name to General Orange and ordered his army to spread out and attack any humans they came across.

The first human to appear was Mrs Mabel Wellington, the mother of Jenny and Boz and wife of Mister. She was hanging out the washing.

The carrots surrounded her and started to close in, leaving her with no escape route. Just as they were about to pounce, Mrs Mabel looked down and said "Who's left all these carrots on the ground?" She picked them up, put them in a big saucepan and boiled them up for dinner.

That was the end of the Carrot Army and 599 of the nasty orange root vegetables.

But their leader General Orange had managed to escape and he was now hiding in the garden shed.

The garden shed had been built fifty years earlier by a man called Jim Shed. Jim is short for Jimmy, which is long for James.

Jim was a really nice man. Every day he would build a new shed and give it to someone, even if they didn't want it. Once he built four sheds in one day, which is still a record for the Northern Hemisphere. The record for the Southern Hemisphere is held by Betty Springer of Auckland, New Zealand, who built six timber sheds in 23 hours and 12 minutes on July 7th 1974. But Jim hated carrots. He had hated them ever since his Mother had tried to force feed him raw vegetables for breakfast on his seventh birthday. He took a vow to destroy every carrot in the land, every carrot in every other land and every carrot in the sea.

For 49 years he built sheds in the morning and destroyed carrots in the afternoon. The evenings were spent on other activities.

When he eventually retired from his shed and carrot work, he took a part-time job at a village shop. And that's where he was working when Jenny Wellington walked in and asked for two birthday cards and a newspaper. She was meant to ask for one birthday card and two newspapers but she was all confused because of Boz and his goldfish problem.

"How's your shed?" asked Jim. "Fine" said Jenny.

"Good. I built that shed fifty years ago."

"I know. You tell me that every day."

"Can I come and check it over this afternoon?" he asked.

"Yes if you think you must, but please don't go attacking Dad's vegetable patch like you did last week" she replied.

So later that day, Jim Shed arrived at the Wellington house. He was

pleased to see that the carrots had all disappeared from the garden.

Now he was heading for the shed. The shed that was now the hiding place of the evil General Orange. General Orange the carrot. How would he react when he saw it? Would he go mad with anger? Would he collapse in tears? Let's find out ...

Jim opened the shed door. He stepped inside. He looked around. He moved slowly towards a large box in the corner. He reached out a hand to lift the lid from the box ...

Suddenly there was a loud bang. He looked around to see Superman flying through the window. Except it wasn't the real Superman. It was Boz. And Boz was wearing the new Superman cape that he'd got for his birthday.

This distracted Jim, and General Orange took his chance to leap out of the box and attack. A great battle followed until Boz managed to overpower the evil carrot and bury it deep under ground. Jim said that Boz was a hero.

Boz went inside for his birthday tea and told everyone that he was a hero. But they just laughed when he said he had won a battle against a carrot. "Carrots aren't dangerous" they said.

But we know that some are dangerous, don't we? Especially General Orange. Let's just hope that nobody ever digs him up and puts him on your dinner plate!

INTERESTING BROCCOLI

The interesting thing about broccoli is that there are four interesting things about broccoli.

Number One. Nobody knows how to spell it. Not even the people who write the Oxford English Dictionary know how many c's and how many l's there are. Number Two. Nobody really likes it. Not even the Man Who Eats Everything, including garbage, trash, rubbish and street litter.

Number Three. No matter how long you boil it, it's always cold by the time it reaches your plate. Number Four. It's green.

Okay, the last one wasn't very interesting, but I could only think of three good ones. Anyway, this story isn't about broccoli. It's about a boy with four heads. I'm only joking; it is actually about broccoli.

The interesting thing about broccoli is that there are four interesting things about broccoli. Sorry, I've already done that bit ...

Let me start again.

Once upon a time there was a boy with four heads. He grew up to become the Man With Four Heads. He became very keen on all sorts of food, and soon became known as the Man With Four Heads Who Eats Everything. Or MWFHWEE for short.

Having four heads meant that he could look north, south, east and west all at the same time. Unfortunately this meant that the sun was always in his eyes. However, he could always see if a cat was trying to creep up on him from behind or from the side. He wasn't keen on cats playing practical jokes, but he was keen on food.

One day he was eating an egg carton with his north-facing head, a tin can with his south-facing head, an old magazine with his east-facing head and a bacon sandwich with his west-facing head, when he turned round and his north-facing head became his south-facing head, his south-facing head became his north, his west became his east and his east became his west. Then he turned back again.

After his meals, he sat down on a park bench and dozed off. Then Felix and Fluffy crept up behind him and covered him in broccoli pudding. Don't worry if you don't know what broccoli pudding is, because neither do I. About two hours later, MWFHWEE woke up and was surprised to find himself covered in broccoli pudding.

You might remember that the second most interesting thing about broccoli is that nobody likes it, not even the Man Who Eats Everything, including garbage, trash, rubbish and street litter.

So he was not too pleased that he was going to have to eat himself out of the mess.

Luckily, with four mouths he was able to eat all the broccoli pudding in a quarter of the time it would have taken anyone with the usual number of heads. He then set off to find the two naughty little kittens that were responsible.

He found Felix and Fluffy outside the pet shop. Felix had shreds of broccoli on his paws and Fluffy had pudding mixture on his whiskers.

"Have you seen any cats messing about with broccoli pudding?" he asked.

"No" they said "we're good cats".

The two cats then went into the pet shop and opened all the cages. The

shopkeeper was furious as he watched all his animals run out into the street, including six rabbits, half a dozen puppies, five hamsters, another hamster and about six white mice.

Three of the mice were blind and the other three wore contact lenses. They ran and they ran until they escaped the dangerous traffic and the busy streets and reached the safety of the countryside.

They came to an old farmhouse and went into the kitchen. Standing by the cooker was a large woman with a large knife. She was looking around for more ingredients to put into her mouse-tail soup.

Just then Farmer Venison walked into the room and his tummy was rumbling. He had eaten nothing since breakfast and was looking forward to his dinner.

The Farmer's Wife was just about to cut the tails off three of the mice when the Farmer announced that he wanted to be a vegetarian, and he would never eat meat again. So the mice ran off, and the Farmer had broccoli toast instead. Don't worry if you don't know what broccoli toast is, because neither do I.

Farmer Venison was a keen gardener, and whenever he wasn't in his fields looking after plants you'd find him in his garden looking after plants. His favourite plant was the stinging nettle, because he liked to put some in his wife's hat every morning. She had got used to this silly practical joke and always remembered to check her clothes before putting them on.

One morning the Farmer decided to think up a new joke. So he sat at the kitchen table with a pen and paper, thinking hard and scribbling away. Eventually he came up with the brilliant idea of filling his wife's best hat with chocolate milk shake.

His timing couldn't have been worse however, as today was the day that the Queen of Bulgaria was due to visit their farm. So the Farmer's Wife put on her best frock, which was made of fine silk, gold buttons, diamond chains and various bits of plastic. She then checked that her hat was clear of stinging nettles and put it on her head. This caused two pints of chocolate milk shake to fall over her dress. This caused her to scream in horror. This caused the Farmer to laugh. This caused the Farmer's Wife to throw a chair at the Farmer.

Just then, the door bell made a ringing noise.

"The queen! The queen!" screamed the Farmer's Wife "She's here and

look at the state of me!"

It wasn't the queen. It was the postman. He had a letter from the queen that said she wouldn't be coming to the farm.

In fact, the queen was still back home in Bulgaria. She was unable to travel as her clothes were ruined when the King of Bulgaria played a practical joke with her crown and a vat of flavoured yoghurt.

So now we are coming to end of the story, and I hope you have learnt an important lesson: Jokes aren't funny. They ruin people's clothes.

MWFHWEE never did find who was responsible for the broccoli pudding incident.

The two cats carried on being naughty until one day they tried breaking into a bank. It turned out to be a prison, not a bank, and they couldn't escape.

The six mice lived happily ever after in a broccoli field.

After six attempts, Farmer Venison eventually succeeded in giving up being a vegetarian. He was unable to give up practical jokes though.

Mrs Venison went shopping for a new dress, some milk shake and a chair. She never did meet the Queen of Bulgaria.

ALL ABOUT AMERICA AND AMERICANS

America was the largest country in North America, and still is. It's incredibly big, with a population of about one million people and pets.

The capital city is New York, which has exactly two million people and pets.

The American people are called the inhabitants, and their pets are called dogs, cats and other things.

So this is the story of America.

America was discovered by accident in the year 1452.

He was trying to sail from Oxford to Paris, but his wife, Mrs Accident, was navigating, and they landed in San Francisco seven weeks later.

They liked the vibe of the place so decided to stay.

Their first child, Chuck H Accident Junior, was the first European to be born in America, and their second child was the second.

So all Americans alive today have descended from Mr Accident, his wife Ann, Chuck H Junior and the other one.

The most famous American of all-time was Peter, a baker from Chicago. He invented a way to make bread without using any ingredients, and

became so famous that the inhabitants could think of nothing else. Sadly, however, he died of starvation and not even his own children could remember him.

The national dish of America is Halibut Nogg, a fish custard eaten by all inhabitants before breakfast. Other popular foods are squid, artificial rhubarb, parsley and meat. There are no drinks.

America has a cousin called Canada, which is both the sister of Alaska and the brother of Norway. Another cousin is called Mexico and another one isn't.

It is said that there are more cars in America than there are planets in the solar system. Inhabitants are allowed to drive inside supermarkets and churches, but speed limits are imposed at busy times.

The fastest squirrel was Bissy, who ran 100 metres in 8.2 seconds in Ohio in 1961. The slowest squirrel was Sir John Gendelton, who ran one metre in one hour in Ohio in 1962. Squirrel racing has since been banned in all states, except Ohio.

The American alphabet has just 24 letters. They don't use F or G, so have to revert to the English alphabet when pronouncing words like giraffe or goffee. In case you don't know, goffee is a coffee-flavoured toffee that's been popular in Texas since the nationwide ban on liquid drinks.

American shops are open seven days a week, except Sundays. They sell clothing, kitchen equipment, garden swing chairs, guitar bags, guitar strings, guitar accessories, Halibut Nogg and guitars. They don't sell orange-coloured or orange-flavoured products, or any item that can be broken by an angry child.

American air is made up of nitrogen, oxygen, birds and flies. The land is quite solid, but the rivers are much softer.

American clothing is designed to stay dry in good weather, but does have a tendency to get wet during rain. Some inhabitants try to get around this by pre-soaking their unmentionable under-garments in a strong solution of Halibut Nogg, but it never works.

According to the Guinness Book of Records, the youngest person in America is Dwightsy Benk, a zero-year old baby from Detroit, but this record was broken soon after printing. The smallest person in America has not yet been found, but scientists predict it will also be a young baby.

Laughing in public is legal in most states, but sad faces are frowned

upon. Toothpaste is now made with mint, milk, eggs and sugar, and has been renamed ice cream. Most American schools were built without any doors, but this practical joke backfired when they realised that new children couldn't get in and old children couldn't get out.

Every evening, American families gather around a large cactus bush and sing Japanese love songs to each other. The last one still awake has to sleep in the bush. Christmas is special, a time of year when everybody replaces their shoe laces with spaghetti. However, the fun can come to a sudden end if the spaghetti is overcooked and not strong enough to prevent the shoes from falling off. When this happens, the person is banned from making any unkind comments to animals until January 12th. American firemen are the best in the world at putting out fires, but this can get really annoying at barbecues.

Many Americans pretend to forget their own birthdays, in order to get a nice surprise when they wake up one morning and receive lots of unexpected presents. There are thought to be at least 25 states in America, with some estimates putting the figure as high as 40. Albert Einstein calculated that there were exactly 246, but this has since been disproved, along with his famous theory that blue squirrels are invisible because they run faster than the speed of light.

Cars drive on the right side of the road, while buses and trucks drive on the left. They switch over on weekends, national holidays and after 4pm on cold days in April and foggy days in October. This simple system ensures that everybody gets a fair chance to drive on both sides.

Everybody has two friends, a good friend and a bad friend, making four friends altogether, or five if you include yourself. The bad friend is useful when you need someone to criticise or insult you. The good friend will always say you are brilliant, even when you can't find your left ear.

The most powerful man in America is actually a woman. Her name is Betty and she controls what people think by sending out telepathic signals through internet wi-fi networks. The only way to resist is to take a fatal dose of warm avocado thrice daily.

There are three types of music in America: rock music, classical music and tuffington, which is a military rap performed by marching ballerinas. In March and April all three musics are combined to create the Easter

Cacophony. America's greatest explorer was Chintzy Adams, who literally got very cold when discovering the Arctic ice motel in the winter of 1894.

Everything came to a standstill in July 1974, when amateur golfers across the country went on strike. For ten long weeks they refused to play even a single hole, as President Cakes ignored their demands for pay. Eventually the army was brought in to calm the situation and provide a replacement service.

The most popular sport is Big Chessel Beating, in which contestants jump seven times in a northerly direction, then hop twice to the east and pirouette four times to the south. The winner is the first to arrive back at base square while shouting "I've won, I've won, I've won".