

A Month of Bedtime Stories

THE
FIRST
FIVE
STORIES!

Neil Roy McFarlane

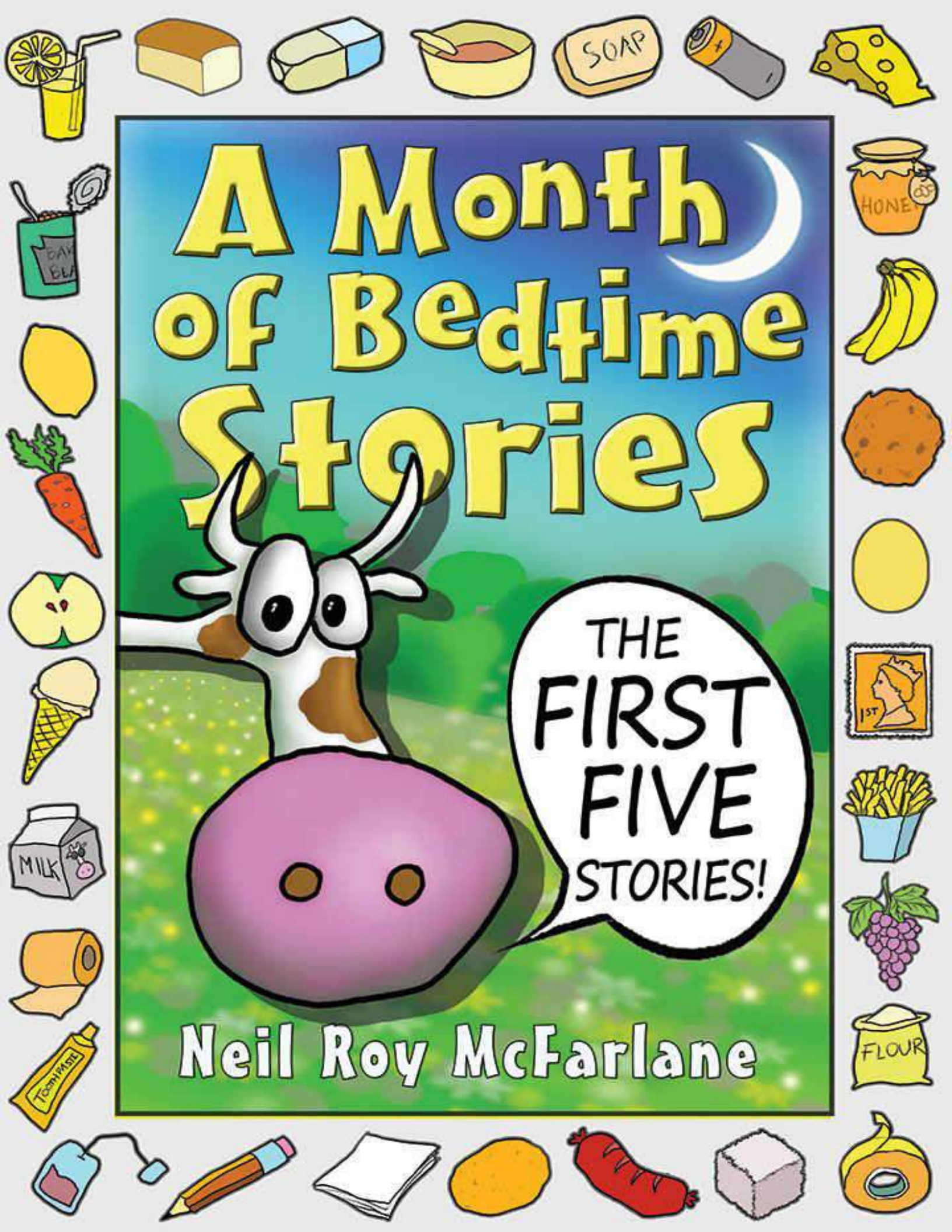


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**A Month of Bedtime Stories:
The First Five Stories**

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And off you went to the woods . . .



1. Nanoodle Snagglebottom

THIS STORY IS a little bit different from other stories. Usually stories are about other people but this story is about you. And usually stories are made up but this story is all true. It's about all the amazing things you did today, all that climbing and jumping and meeting an alien!

I know what you're thinking: you're thinking: *I didn't meet an alien today!*

Oh yes you did! You just can't remember because you got a bonk on the head which made you forget all about it.

Let me tell you what happened.

We were going to cook dinner but we'd run out of potatoes.

"Don't worry," you said. "I know where to get potatoes."

And off you went to the woods.

When you got to the woods, you climbed that really big tree because you thought it was a potato tree.

Sometimes you can be a little bit silly, but that's OK – we still love you.

So you climbed that tree, the biggest tree in the woods. You know the one I mean. Up and up you went, higher and higher and upper and upper, until you'd climbed right up above the clouds. Then you looked out from the top branches and all you could see were clouds in every direction, like a big ocean of clouds and not a potato in sight.

It was then that you started to think, *Hmmm, maybe potatoes don't grow on trees after all.*

And then for some reason you started to laugh.

"Ha!" you said.

Then you said, "Ha ha!"

Then you said, "Ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha! I don't know why ... ha ha ... I'm laughing. There's nothing ... ha ha ... funny up here."

"It's the oxygen," said a voice.

"What oxygen?" you asked.

"Trees make oxygen," said the voice. "You're right at the top of this tree, the biggest in the woods, so there's a lot of oxygen up here. Breathing in oxygen makes you feel happy and that's why you're laughing."

"Oh," you said. And then you thought, *Where is that voice coming from?*

"You're probably wondering where this voice is coming from, aren't you?" said the voice.

"Well, yes I am, actually," you replied.

"Look up," said the voice.

So you looked up and there, hovering silently just above your head, was a flying saucer!

And inside the cockpit was a dog!

"Blinkin' Nora!" you said. "It's a dog in a flying saucer!"

"I'm not a dog," said the dog that wasn't a dog. "I'm an alien. Grrrr."

"You look like a dog," you said, "and you growl like one."

"You look like a globbleplop," said the alien.

"A globbleplop?" you said. "What's a globbleplop?"

"It's something we have on my planet. We throw sticks and globbleplops fetch them."

"You mean to say on your planet you keep children as pets?" you asked.

"They're not children," said the alien. "They're globbleplops."

"Whatever," you said. "What are you doing here, anyway?"

"I'm observing your planet," the alien replied.

"Observing it? Why?"

“That information is top secret. What are *you* doing here?”

“That information is also top secret,” you said, “and I ain’t gonna tell ya.”

Well, that alien didn’t look very happy at all. Maybe it was because he was a nosy sort of alien and he really wanted to know why you had climbed that great big tree. Or maybe he just didn’t like children who said things like “I ain’t gonna tell ya.” Whatever the reason, after a bit of the old silent treatment, he eventually said, “Oh, very well. I’ll give you a ride in my flying saucer if you agree to tell me why you climbed that big tree.”

“Wow!” you said. “A ride in a flying saucer! It’s a deal!”

So you climbed into the passenger seat and the flying saucer flew up into the sky. Higher and higher it went, so high that all the people on the Earth below looked like little ants and the ants didn’t look like anything because you couldn’t see them at all. And still you went higher and higher and upper and upper until you were so high you were in space.

“Jiminy Cricket!” you said. “We’re in space!”

“Space is nothing,” said the alien. “I go into space all the time. Why, I go into space every morning just to buy a newspaper. My name is Nanoodle Snagglebottom by the way, but you can call me Nanoo for short. What’s your name?”

“That’s top secret information,” you said, “and I ain’t gonna tell ya.”

“Geez Louise,” said Nanoo. “What an annoying kid.”

Then Nanoo pointed the flying saucer at the Moon and in no time at all you’d landed on the Moon’s dusty surface.

“Wow. I’m actually on the Moon.”

“That’s right, kid,” Nanoo said. “Why don’t you go and explore? But don’t forget to wear a space suit. There’s no air here. No atmosphere at all. There’s a bar over on the dark side where they have live music on the weekend. That place has plenty of atmosphere. But here there’s none at all.”

You didn't really know what Nanoo was talking about but you put on a space suit anyway and went off to explore.

The first thing you noticed was you could jump really high on the Moon. That's because the Moon is smaller than the Earth so there's less gravity. Gravity is the stuff that pulls you down to the ground and stops you from floating away. With less gravity, you could jump really high.

"Wheeeee!" you shouted as you leaped over a hill. "This is fun."

After a while you got tired of all that leaping about so you headed back to the flying saucer. When you got back, Nanoo couldn't see you because he was looking the other way and you heard him speaking on his communicator.

"No, sir, I didn't see any mungles. That is correct, sir. As far as I can see, there are no horrible, dangerous, nasty mungles on Planet Earth and it is perfectly safe to invade. Over and out."

Invade! These aliens were going to invade our planet! But what could you, a little child, do to stop them?

"Hi, Nanoo," you said. "I want to go home now. I'm late for dinner."

So Nanoo started up the flying saucer and off you flew back towards Earth.

On the way, Nanoo asked you, "So how did you like the Moon?"

"It was OK," you answered. "But it was dead."

"Yes, that's true," Nanoo said. "It's pretty dead all right. I should have taken you to the bar on the dark side. That place has plenty of life, especially on the weekend."

"Nanoo, what's a mungle?"

"Hey!" said Nanoo. "You've been listening to my private conversations. That's top secret information. Which reminds me, now that I've taken you for a ride in my flying saucer, don't forget you have to tell me why you were climbing that tree."

"Fair enough," you said. "A deal's a deal. I was climbing that tree to look for potatoes. You see, we were going to have dinner but we'd

run out of potatoes and I thought that maybe that big tree was a potato tree so I thought if I climbed it I might find some.”

“What’s a potato?” asked Nanoo.

“You don’t know what a potato is? Wow, you’re quite stupid for an alien.”

“Don’t call me stupid,” growled Nanoo. “Geez Louise, what an annoying kid. *You* don’t even know what a *mungle* is.”

“Fair enough,” you replied. “I’m sorry I called you stupid.”

Nanoo wagged his tail and smiled. “Apology accepted. Maybe you’re not such a bad kid after all.”

“Hey, Nanoo. Could you do me a favour? Before you take me home, could we stop at the shop so I can buy some potatoes? If I go home now without any potatoes, I think everyone will be really disappointed. Pleeeeeeeease?”

“OK,” said Nanoo. “As you’re being so polite, I’ll take you to the shop first.”

So you flew back down towards the Earth and the people still looked like ants because you were so far away, and the ants didn’t look like anything because you couldn’t see them at all. But then as you got closer and closer, the people looked like people and the ants looked like ants, which is how it should be, and Nanoo stopped the flying saucer outside the shop.

“I won’t be a moment,” you said, and you ran into the shop while Nanoo waited for you.

Two minutes later you came out with a shopping bag to find that Nanoo was having an argument with a traffic warden.

“Oi,” said the traffic warden. “You can’t park here. Those are double yellow lines.”

“But I’m not parked here, am I?” said Nanoo. “Look, I’m floating above the road, and if I’m not touching the road, then I’m not parked *on* the road, am I?”

The traffic warden looked under the flying saucer and could see that it really was floating a few inches above the road. He looked

puzzled and scratched his head. "Oh, er, let me see," said the traffic warden, and he got out a book of rules and regulations and started flicking through the pages.

"OK, Nanoo," you said. "I got the shopping. You can take me home now."

You jumped in the flying saucer and it flew away, leaving the traffic warden still scratching his head.

When the saucer stopped outside our house, you jumped out and turned to Nanoo.

"Before you go, Nanoo, I want to give you these," you said, pulling out a small packet from the shopping bag. "They're doggy treats. I bought them for you because you've been so nice to me, taking me to the Moon and all."

"Doggy treats?" said Nanoo. "I'm not a dog. I'm an alien. How many times do I have to tell you? Geez Louise, what an annoying kid you are."

But then when you opened the packet and offered him a treat, he said, "Oooh! An ickletick! I love ickleticks!" And he sat up, raised his paws, and wagged his tail. "Yum yum!" he said, eating one treat after another. "Delicious! Thanks kid. You're not so bad after all."

"Do you want to try a potato?" you asked. "Maybe you'll like it too."

"I don't know what a potato is," Nanoo said, "but sure, I'll try one."

You took out a potato and gave it to Nanoo, but instead of eating it, he just turned white and screamed, "Agh! Mungles! Horrible, nasty, dangerous mungles!"

And he started up the flying saucer and roared away as fast as he could go. As the saucer flew away, you could hear him screaming on his communicator: "Nanoo to base! Nanoo to base! The humans have mungles! Horrible, nasty, dangerous mungles! Cancel the invasion! I repeat, cancel the invasion!"

And with that, the saucer disappeared into the clouds and you never saw Nanoo again.

So, you thought, potatoes are mungles. And Earth is safe. All thanks to me!

And then you turned around to go into the house, thinking to yourself: *I don't know why they're so scared of potatoes. What's dangerous about a potato? They're pretty harmless things if you ask me.*

But just then a potato fell out of the sky (it was the one you'd given to Nanoo) and hit you on the head and it made you forget everything that happened, so now you can't remember anything about it, can you?

Whether you believe it or not, on behalf of everybody on Earth I would like to take this opportunity to say thank you, thank you very very much, for saving the human race.

Three cheers for you!

Hip hip ...



2. The Submarine Full of Bees

WHAT AN AMAZING day you had today, didn't you? You must be very tired after your adventure with those bees.

What? You don't remember?

It must have been that magic flower that made you forget.

Let me tell you about it.

We were going to have lunch and I asked you what kind of sandwich you wanted and you said a honey sandwich. But when we looked, we found we'd run out of honey.

You said, "Don't worry. I know where honey comes from."

And off you went to the woods.

When you got to the woods, you looked around for a bee hive because you knew that bees make honey, but you couldn't find one anywhere.

After you'd walked around for a while, you got tired and sat down on a log. You were just sitting there, minding your own business and wondering if you'd ever find any honey when suddenly you heard something crashing through the undergrowth and a voice crying, "Ow! Ow! Ow!"

Then a bear appeared, followed by a great cloud of angry bees.

"BUZZ!" went the bees.

"Ow!" went the bear.

"BUZZ BUZZ BUZZ!" went the bees.

"Ow! Ow! Ow!" went the bear.

And then that bear just ran straight past you without even so much as a "Good day" and disappeared into the woods closely followed by those angry, buzzing bees.

Hmmm, you thought. I wonder what that was all about.

You sat there for a while thinking about that bear and those bees. And then you had an idea.

I know, you thought. Maybe they're having a race. Maybe it's sports day in the woods and it's bees against bears.

Then you thought some more and then you had another idea.

I know, you thought. Maybe those bees were lost and they asked that bear for directions to the nearest Post Office and the bear is leading them there.

All of a sudden ...

Nothing happened!

So you just carried on sitting there on that log, thinking and thinking and thinking, until you had another idea. And this one was your best one yet.

I know, you thought. Those bees are angry and they're chasing that bear, and that bear is running away from those angry, buzzing bees.

After thinking some more, you had yet another brilliant idea.

I bet that bear was looking for honey just like I am, and he found a bee hive and he tried to steal that honey, so all those bees got angry and chased him away.

And then you had another brilliant idea, even more brilliant than the one before, the most brilliant idea of them all.

Why, that hive must be empty now because all the bees are out chasing that bear. If I follow the direction where that bear came from, I might find that hive and I can take as much honey as I want without getting stung.

After all that thinking, your brain was feeling quite sore, so then you thought, *That's enough thinking. Now it's time for action.*

And you jumped up and started off in the direction where that bear had come from. And sure enough, after you'd gone not very far at all, you saw a hole in a tree and there was some sticky yellow stuff dripping from it.

"Honey!" you shouted. "I've found the hive!"

You went up to the hole and you put in your hand, feeling around for the honey.

"I say!" said a posh voice. "You there. The human child with the funny nose. What are you up to?"

You looked up and there, hovering right in front of your funny nose, was the Queen Bee, complete with a crown and sceptre.

“Are you trying to steal my honey, what?” she asked.

“Oh, um, no, not at all,” you spluttered, quickly taking your hand out of the hole.

“I’m the Queen, don’t cha know, so please address me as ‘Your Highness’.”

“Sorry, Your Highness. I wasn’t trying to steal your honey, honest I wasn’t.”

“So what were you doing with your hand up my hive hole?” asked the Queen suspiciously.

“Oh. That ... I was, um, I was just, um ...” But you didn’t know what to say.

“Never mind,” said the Queen. “I’ve got a job for you, don’t cha know. Can you steer a submarine?”

“I, um, I think so,” you replied. “Why do you ask, Your Highness?”

“Because,” said the Queen, “I’m taking my royal submarine on an underwater expedition. Unfortunately most of my bees have gone to the Post Office to post a letter, so I only have Boris, Boris, Boris and Boris here to help me.” She pointed to four bees sitting on a branch nearby, and they waved at you in a friendly way. “It takes six crew members to operate a submarine as I’m sure you know, so we’re one short. If you can steer a submarine, you’re in.”

You thought about it for a moment and then you asked, “What’s the pay?”

“Ten squillion pounds or a jar of honey,” said the Queen. “The choice is entirely yours.”

Hmmm. Ten squillion pounds or a jar of honey ... Ten squillion pounds or a jar of honey ... It certainly was a difficult choice. After thinking for a moment, you said:

Ip dip thrupenny bit

You are not it

My words are true

It must be YOU!

"I'll take the money," you said.

"You'll take the honey?" said the Queen. "Oh, jolly good."

"No, I said I'll take the money."

"Yes, I heard you the first time," said the Queen. "You'll take the honey. Well then, that's settled. Let's begin."

"No no no no no!" you cried. "I said I'll take the money. The MON-ey. The ten squillion pounds."

"Oh," said the Queen, looking rather disappointed. "Very well. It's a deal. Now, we'll be exploring that puddle there. There's the submarine we'll be using." And she pointed to a tiny submarine at the edge of the puddle, about the size of a very small sausage.

"But that's too small," you said. "I'll never fit in there."

"Don't worry," said the Queen. "See that bramble bush there? See those blackberries on it? See that blackberry third from the left, near the top? Yes, that's the one. Eat that blackberry."

"But why?" you asked.

"It's a magic blackberry," said the Queen. "It will shrink you."

You peered at the blackberry curiously.

"But it looks just like all the others," you said. "How do you know this one is magic?"

"Because," said the Queen, "I knitted it myself. Now hurry up and eat it. Mission starts in T minus twenty seconds."

You didn't really know what "T minus twenty seconds" meant, but you ate the blackberry anyway and immediately you shrank down to bee size.

"Jiminy Cricket!" you said. "I'm shrunk. It was a magic blackberry after all."

The Queen and the four Boris's flew down to join you at the edge of the puddle and you all boarded the submarine.

"All right, close the hatch!" ordered the Queen.

"Aye aye, Your Highness," you said, closing the hatch.

“Now that we’re in the submarine, you should address me as ‘Captain’,” said the Queen.

“Aye aye, Your Highn ... er ... I mean Captain,” you said.

After the submarine had dived down into the puddle, you looked through a porthole and you saw lots of strange creatures swimming about out there. The water was quite murky but it seemed to be very deep. You couldn’t see the bottom at all.

“How deep are we, Captain?” you asked.

“Deeper than we’ve ever been before,” replied the Queen. “Two inches at least.”

“And how deep is this puddle?”

“At least six inches,” said the Queen. “But we will dive right down to the bottom and boldly go where no bee has gone before, don’t cha know.”

So you took hold of the steering wheel and you pushed forward and the submarine’s nose lurched downwards and down down down you all went.

“Three inches,” said the Queen. “Four inches ...”

“Captain!” said Boris. “It’s too deep!”

“Captain!” said another Boris. “The pressure’s too much!”

“Captain!” said another Boris. “She canna take any more!”

“Five inches ...” said the Queen. “Just one more inch, Mr Boris. Don’t give up now.”

“Captain!” said another Boris. “I’ve given her all she’s got, an’ I canna give her no more!”

“Six inches!” announced the Queen. “We’ve jolly well done it.”

And with that, the submarine came to rest on the bottom of the puddle.

“Right then,” said the Queen. “Let’s put on our scuba gear and go out for a swim. It’s very dark here at the bottom of the puddle and the pressure will be enormous, so expect to find some very strange creatures swimming about. Our mission is to seek out new life forms, creatures that nobody has ever seen before.”

So you, the Queen and the four Boris's put on your scuba gear. You thought the bees looked very funny wearing masks and flippers.

"Ha," said a Boris.

"Ha ha," said another Boris.

"Ha ha ha," said a third Boris, and soon all four Boris's were laughing uncontrollably. "Ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha!"

"What are you all laughing at?" you asked them.

"You," said a Boris. "We've never – ha ha ha – seen a human – ha ha ha – wearing scuba gear before. Oh my – ha ha ha – you do look funny."

"Enough of that," said the Queen. "This is a serious mission, don't cha know. Now, let's get going."

So you all went out and swam around looking for new life forms, creatures you'd never seen before.

You saw an earthworm. That wasn't new.

Then you saw a snail. That wasn't new.

Then you saw a tadpole. That wasn't new either.

Suddenly you saw a strange creature with see-through skin and seven legs and bright blue lights flashing in its belly.

"Here, Your Majesty! Over here! I've found a new life form!" you said. "Something no one has ever seen before." But you didn't have communicators, so in the water your voice just sounded like this: "Glug glug glug glug glug."

"I can't hear anything you're saying," said the Queen. "It just sounded like 'Glug glug glug glug glug'."

"Yes, I know," you said. "It's because we don't have communicators." (Glug glug glug glug glug.)

"Oh blast it. I knew we'd forgotten something," replied the Queen. (Glug glug glug glug.)

The Queen and the Boris's swam over to you and they saw the new creature too.

“Wow!” said the Queen. “That’s amazing. A creature never before seen by anyone. I hereby name this creature a quantum techno poppadum. Boris, take a photo.” (Glug glug, glug glug glug glug.)

“Aye aye, Captain,” said a Boris. (Glug glug, glug glug.) And he took a photo of the quantum techno poppadum.

FLASH went the camera bulb, and it seemed to startle the creature because all of a sudden that quantum techno poppadum went crazy and started attacking you all.

“Quick! Back to the submarine!” ordered the Queen. (Glug! Glug glug glug glug glug glug!)

You all swam as quick as you could back to the submarine, chased all the way by that angry quantum techno poppadum.

“Close the hatch!” said the Queen. “Let’s get out of here. Take her away, pilot.”

And you grabbed the controls and you steered that submarine back up to the surface as quick as you could. The submarine shot out of the puddle and landed on some moss and you all got out.

“I declare this mission a success,” announced the Queen. “We discovered a new creature and have photographic evidence to prove it. Well done everybody. Let’s all go home.”

“Wait a minute,” you said. “You haven’t paid me yet.”

“Oh yes. That’s right,” said the Queen. “Here you are then. One jar of honey, as promised.”

You looked at that jar of honey and you thought there were two problems with it. Number one: you were still tiny and that jar was enormous, so you couldn’t possibly lift it. And number two: it wasn’t a squillion pounds.

You turned to the Queen and said, “Hang on a minute. You promised to pay me a squillion pounds, not a jar of honey.”

“Are you *quite* sure?” asked the Queen.

“Absolutely one hundred percent stonking sure,” you replied. “And besides, I’m still shrunk. I need to get back to my normal size.”

“Oh. Well, in that case, do you see that daisy there? Yes, that’s the one. And do you see that petal? The third one along. Yes, that’s right. Rub that petal under your chin and it will change you back to normal, as you were before.”

“And then you’ll pay me a squillion pounds?” you asked.

“Oh yes,” said the Queen. “Yapsolutely. I am the Queen after all, don’t cha know. A squillion pounds is nothing to me. It’s simply peanuts. A drop in the puddle.”

You picked the petal from the daisy and looked at it suspiciously. “It just looks like a normal petal to me. Are you sure it’s magic?”

“Oh, yapsolutely,” replied the Queen. “I baked it myself.”

So you rubbed that petal under your chin and suddenly you grew back to normal size.

“Oh, what happened?” you said. “I feel a bit strange.”

You looked around and you saw five bees buzzing away into the woods, and then you looked down and saw that jar of honey.

“Oh, look! A jar of honey,” you said.

And you picked it up and brought it home.

I bet you can’t remember doing any of those things, can you? That’s because the Queen Bee tricked you. That daisy petal changed you back to normal size but it also made you lose your memory and forget everything that had happened. Even though I’ve told you all about it, I bet you still can’t remember, can you?

Well, in case you don’t believe me, you’ll find that jar of honey in the kitchen, the very same jar of honey that you brought back from the woods today, which just goes to show that everything I’ve told you is true.

Well, that’s the end of the story. The only thing left to do is to congratulate you on a mission well done and for discovering a new creature previously unknown to science: the quantum techno poppadum.

Congratulations.

Three cheers for you!

Hip hip ...



3. Underground Adventure With an Annoying Rabbit

YOU DON'T LOOK very muddy. I thought you would be very muddy after your underground adventure today.

What? You don't remember? You've forgotten all about it, have you? I suppose it must have been that poisonous gas that made you forget.

Let me tell you what happened.

I said I wanted a cup of tea, and you offered to make me one because you're such a nice, kind person. But then you looked in the fridge and you found there was no milk.

You sighed and looked at me and said, "Ah, we're always running out of things. But don't worry, I know where milk comes from."

And off you went to the woods.

The only problem was, when you got to the woods you realised you weren't sure where milk came from after all. You couldn't remember if it grew on trees or if it was spun by milk worms or if it was juice from some kind of special milk fruit.

After a while you saw a rabbit and decided to stop and ask it.

"Excuse me, Mr. Rabbit. Could you tell me where milk comes from please?"

The rabbit looked at you and said, "I'm sorry kid. I'm a rabbit. Rabbits can't talk." And with that, it hopped away.

It seemed to you that there was something strange about what that rabbit said, but you couldn't put your finger on it so you just carried on walking.

After a while you met that rabbit again and you suddenly realised what was strange.

"Excuse me, Mr. Rabbit. If you can't talk, how can you tell me that you can't talk?"

"OK, OK," said the rabbit. "You got me, kid. You caught me red-handed. I admit I can talk. The problem is, we rabbits are all French, so we don't understand English." And with that, the rabbit hopped away again.

Once more, it seemed to you that there was something strange about what that rabbit had said, but once again you couldn't put your finger on it so you just carried on walking.

After a while you came to a hill, and in the side of that hill there was a tunnel entrance, and next to the tunnel entrance there was a sign which read:

MILK MINE

DANGER

Hard hats to be worn at all times.

Next to the sign was the same rabbit you'd met before. It was wearing a hard hat and it was carrying a small bird cage and inside the cage was a canary and a cat.

You suddenly realised what was strange.

"Excuse me, Mr. Rabbit. If you can't speak English, how can you tell me in English that you can't speak English?"

"OK, kid," the rabbit said. "You got me. You caught me blue-handed this time. Now what was it you wanted to know? Oh yes, where does milk come from? I'll tell you the truth this time. Milk comes from cows."

"Thank you" you said, and with that you walked away to look for a cow, thinking to yourself, *What an annoying rabbit.*

After a while you saw a cow asleep in a tree and you called up to it, "Helloooo!"

"Huh? Whazzat? Wha'appened?" said the cow, startled from its sleep and almost falling from the branch.

"I'm sorry to wake you up," you called, "but I was making a cup of tea and we've run out of milk and I wonder if you could spare some."

“Milk?” said the cow. “What makes you think I can give you milk? You haven’t been talking to that annoying rabbit have you?”

“Well, yes, I have, actually.”

“I knew it,” said the cow. “You shouldn’t believe a word he says. He’s a stonking great liar. Next he’ll be telling you that cows don’t climb trees.”

And with that, the cow curled its tail tightly around the branch and went back to sleep.

That does it, you thought. I’m going back to give that rabbit a piece of my mind.

So you went back to see the rabbit.

“Excuse me, Mr. Rabbit. You told me that milk comes from cows and I went to see a cow and that cow ... Hang on a minute. This is a milk mine, isn’t it?”

“No, kid,” said the rabbit. “This is a gold mine.”

“It *is* a milk mine,” you replied. “It says so on that sign there, see? ‘Milk Mine’.”

“What sign? Oh, that sign. OK, OK. You got me, kid. You caught me yellow-handed this time. You’re right, this is a milk mine. In fact it’s my milk mine. Which means that this milk mine is mine. It’s a mine and it’s mine. A mine that’s mine. My mine. Now, what about it?”

“Well, can I please go into your milk mine and do some mining to get some milk?”

“What? Are you kidding? Mining is dangerous work. This isn’t the kind of work a cow can do.”

“But, um, I’m not a cow,” you said.

“You’re not?” said the rabbit, looking very surprised. “Well, why didn’t you tell me before? That changes everything. I wouldn’t have told you all those fibs before if I’d known you weren’t a cow.” The rabbit looked around and then leaned forward, speaking in a low voice. “Between you and me, I don’t like cows.” Then the rabbit picked up a hard hat and the cage with the canary and the cat. “Why, of course you can come into my mine to get some milk. Here’s a hard

hat. See, it's got a lamp at the front. Switch it on – it's dark down in that mine. OK, ready? Here we go.”

You followed that rabbit into the mine, and you both walked along the tunnel, which had round earth walls and sloped gently downwards, winding left and right as it went.

“What's the cage for?” you asked.

“Hmm. You've never done any mining before, I see. Well, let me tell you. The most dangerous thing about mining is poisonous gas. You see this cat?” The rabbit held up the cage for you to see. “This cat is very sensitive to poisonous gas. If there is any poisonous gas, the cat will detect it and give us the signal and then we have to evacuate the mine immediately.”

You thought for a moment and then you asked, “What does ‘evacuate’ mean?”

“Evacuate means ‘vacate’, ‘scram’, ‘skedaddle’, ‘scarper’, ‘scoot’, ‘skidoo’, ‘clear out’, ‘beat it’, ‘hightail’, ‘vamoose’, ‘make tracks’, ‘bail out’, ‘decamp’, ‘git’, ‘head for the hills’, ‘make like a banana and split’, ‘make like a tree and leave’, ‘make like a tap and run’, ‘make like a guillotine and head off’, etcetera, etcetera, etcetera.”

“Oh,” you said.

After a while the rabbit stopped. “You see this patch of tunnel wall? See how it's a little darker than the rest? Well, this might be a good place to try for milk. What you do is, you take this pick axe and you hit it against the wall to make a hole, and if you're lucky, milk will come out.”

So you took that pick axe and you swung it as hard as you could against the wall. The spike went in deep and when you pulled it out a spray of red liquid spurted out.

“What is it?” you asked.

The rabbit dipped in a paw and licked it. “Prune juice. Better luck next time.”

So you carried on walking. After a while the tunnel split into two and you took the left fork. Down down down you went, deeper and deeper underground.

“How about here?” you asked. “There’s another dark patch.”

The rabbit nodded so you swung the pick axe as hard as you could, and this time a brown liquid came out.

The rabbit tasted it. “Chocolate sauce. Better luck next time.”

You walked further on into the mine and again the tunnel split into two and this time you took the right fork.

“Hey,” you said. “The canary is lying down. Does that mean anything?”

“No, that’s fine,” said the rabbit, peering into the cage. “Nothing to worry about. It’s probably just taking a nap. It’s the cat you have to watch out for.”

After a while you came to another dark patch.

“How about here?” you asked.

The rabbit nodded so you swung the pick axe as hard as you could, and this time a white liquid came out.

“Is it milk?” you asked, excitedly.

The rabbit tasted it and shook its head. “Yoghurt. Close, but you can’t make tea with yoghurt. Trust me, I’ve tried. Better luck next time, kid.”

Suddenly you noticed something.

“Hey. The cat looks sad. I think it’s crying.”

You both peered into the cage, and you could see that the cat was holding the canary in its arms and crying loudly.

“Jeepers creepers!” cried the rabbit. “The cat’s crying. That’s the signal! It means there’s poisonous gas! Let’s get out of here!”

And you both started running back up the tunnel as fast as you could. But there was a rock, and the rabbit tripped over it and crashed to the ground.

“Agh!” it said, gripping its leg.

“Are you hurt?” you asked.

"I can't make it," said the rabbit. "I can't walk. Leave me here. Save yourself, kid. Run!"

"No way!" you shouted. "I'm not leaving you!"

And you picked up that rabbit and ran. In one arm you carried the cage with the canary and the cat; in the other arm you carried the rabbit, and you ran as fast as the wind. Up up up, back through the tunnel, past the forks, past the spoons, around all the bends and back out into the fresh air at the entrance to the mine, where you collapsed on the ground, gasping for breath.

The rabbit looked at you with wide eyes.

"You saved me, kid! You saved my life!"

"It was nothing," you gasped.

"Nothing shmething," said the rabbit. "You're a hero. A real hero. I wish I had something to give you."

Just then the cow appeared.

"Hello," said the cow. "I was looking for you. You did say you wanted some milk, didn't you? Here you are."

So saying, the cow handed you a carton of milk and then walked away into the woods.

The rabbit looked at the carton and looked at you, then back at the carton. "You see what I mean?" it said.

"What an annoying cow," you said.

"Exactly," said the rabbit.

You both got to your feet.

"How is your leg?" you asked.

The rabbit limped around a bit. "I'll be OK," it said. "Nothing broken. Just a sprain."

"I'm going home now," you said. "I want to tell everyone about my amazing adventure." You held out your hand. "Goodbye. It was nice meeting you."

"Goodbye," said the rabbit, shaking your hand. Then as you started to leave, it called to you: "I hope you didn't breathe in any

gas. But if you did, don't worry, you won't die. It will just make you feel a little dizzy and you may forget stuff."

You started off back towards home, but on the way you started to feel a little dizzy. You fell down onto the grass and fell asleep for a few minutes. When you woke up, you saw that carton of milk on the grass in front of you.

"Oh, look. A carton of milk."

And you picked it up, brought it home and made me a nice cup of tea.

I suppose you must have breathed in some of that poisonous gas in the milk mine, and that's what made you feel dizzy and forget all about your adventure. However, if you were to look in the fridge you'd find that very same carton of milk that you brought back from the woods, the milk that annoying cow gave you, which proves that it all definitely happened just like I said it did.

You were very brave in that tunnel today. It was wonderful the way you saved that rabbit. You really are a hero.

I'm very proud of you.

Three cheers for you.

Hip hip ...



4. Toothpaste at the Centre of the Earth

WOW, WHAT AN amazing day you had today! Do you remember that time machine and that clever slug you met?

What? You don't remember? It must be that journey through time that made you forget.

Let me tell you what happened.

When you woke up this morning, you went to brush your teeth and guess what? You found there wasn't any toothpaste.

But then you thought, *Not to worry – I know where toothpaste comes from.*

And off you went to the woods.

When you got to the woods, you went straight to the cave where the bear lives. The bear wasn't in, but that didn't matter. You went to the back of the cave and pushed the secret rock, and a secret door opened up, and you went through the secret entrance and down the secret steps. Then you came to the secret grotto with the secret elevator, and you got inside the secret elevator and pressed the button marked 'Centre of the Earth'.

And that elevator started going down, faster and faster and downer and downer, until suddenly it stopped and a bell went 'ding' and the door opened and you stepped out and turned left and there, in front of you, was ... the Toothpaste Shop at the Centre of the Earth!

And guess what?

It was closed!

"Oh no!" you said. "I've come all this way and it's closed. Now what am I going to do?"

"You just missed him," said a voice.

"Missed who?" you asked.

"The shopkeeper," said the voice. "He left just five minutes ago. He's gone on holiday. He won't be back until next week."

"Next week?" you exclaimed. "I can't wait until next week. I need to brush my teeth today."

“Run out of toothpaste, have you?” asked the voice.

“Yes, that’s right.”

“Well,” said the voice, “you could always use a time machine to travel back five minutes into the past just before the shopkeeper closed up shop. Then you could quickly nip in and buy some toothpaste before he leaves.”

“Hey! That’s a good idea,” you said. “But where can I find a time machine?”

“You can use mine,” said the voice.

You looked around and saw a slug, and next to that slug was something that looked like a dentist’s chair.

“This is my time machine,” said the slug. “I made it myself. My name is Doctor Sebastian Slug. What’s your name?”

“That information is top secret,” you said.

“Huh?” said the slug. “I told you my name, but your name’s top secret, is it? That’s not fair. Right then. My name’s top secret too. Don’t ask me what it is because I’m not going to tell you. So there!”

“Is it Doctor Sebastian Slug?” you asked.

“Grrr,” growled Doctor Slug. “You are an annoying child, do you know that?”

“Well, you’re an annoying slug,” you said, “trying to fool me into believing you made a time machine.”

“What? You think just because I’m small and slimy I can’t be clever and brilliant as well. Why, I’ll have you know I have a BA in Psychology, an MA in Cosmology, and a PhD in Timemachinology. *And I can count backwards from ten to zero with my eyes closed.*”

“Go on then,” you said.

So Doctor Slug closed his eyes and counted: “Ten, nine, eight, seven, five, six, four, three, one, zero.”

“What happened to two?” you asked.

“Two,” said Doctor Slug quickly.

“Hmmm. Not bad,” you said. “What is that thing, anyway? It looks like a dentist’s chair.”

“This,” said Doctor Slug, “is my time machine. I already told you that. Do you always forget things so easily?”

“Sometimes.” You looked more closely at the dentist’s chair. “Can we really go back in time in this thing?”

“Certainly,” said Doctor Slug, hopping onto the arm of the chair. “Climb aboard, child. Let’s go.”

So you climbed up onto the chair and Doctor Slug looked into your mouth.

“Open wide,” he said.

“What for?” you said.

“So I can check your teeth,” said Doctor Slug.

“Hey, I thought you said this was a time machine. I don’t want you to check my teeth.”

“Oh, very well,” said Doctor Slug. Then he hit a switch and suddenly the time machine started whirring and whizzing and humming and thrumming and suddenly time started going backwards. You saw the shopkeeper arrive backwards and open up his toothpaste shop. Then a customer went in and gave the shopkeeper a tube of toothpaste, and the shopkeeper gave the customer some money.

“Wow, this is amazing,” you said. “It really is a time machine. You’re like a slug version of Doctor Who.”

“Doctor *Who*?” asked Doctor Slug.

“Doctor Who,” you replied.

“Doctor *Who*?” asked Doctor Slug, looking puzzled.

“Doctor Who,” you replied.

“Doctor *Who*?” asked Doctor Slug, beginning to look annoyed.

“Doctor ... Oh, never mind,” you said. “Hey, can we stop now? The shop’s open and I want to buy some toothpaste.”

“All right,” said Doctor Slug, and he hit the ‘Stop’ switch. Nothing happened. “Uh oh,” said Doctor Slug. “It looks like the ‘Stop’ switch is broken again.” He shook his head and sighed. “It’s always doing this.”

As you watched, you saw the builders arrive and un-build the toothpaste shop!

“What’s happening?” you asked.

“We’ve gone back to the time before the shop was built,” said Doctor Slug.

Soon the elevator was un-built as well, and there was nothing left at the centre of the Earth except the time machine, surrounded by rock.

“What’s happening now?” you asked.

Doctor Slug looked at some dials at the front of the time machine. “It’s the Second World War,” he announced. “Now it’s the First World War. Isn’t it amazing?”

You looked at the rock walls surrounding you. They weren’t doing anything. “Oh yes, absolutely fascinating,” you agreed.

“Columbus has just lost America. Now Shakespeare is erasing Hamlet.”

There was a pause as the time machine continued to whirr and whizz and hum and thrum.

“What’s happening now?” you asked.

Doctor Slug glanced at the dials. “Humans have just un-discovered fire. Now it’s the ice age. Now there are dinosaurs! Just think, child, you’ve travelled back to the time when dinosaurs roamed the earth? Aren’t you excited?”

You looked at the rock walls. They continued to do nothing.

“Mmm. Yes. Very excited,” you said, trying to stifle a yawn.

The time machine continued whirring and whizzing and humming and thrumming, and the noise was quite relaxing. You wondered if it would be rude to take a little nap.

“Now fish are un-crawling out of the oceans,” said Doctor Slug. “Now the first life forms are un-appearing.”

“Ho hum,” you said.

Suddenly the rock walls exploded outwards and the time machine was floating in space. There were lots of asteroids floating about, whizzing this way and that.

“What happened?” you asked, suddenly wide awake.

“We’ve travelled back to a time before there was a Planet Earth,” said Doctor Slug. “And look – the sun is about to disappear.”

“But why?” you asked, as the sun really did disappear from view.

“Because we’ve gone back four billion years to a time before the sun’s birth,” said Doctor Slug.

Then suddenly the whole universe started shrinking and dragging the time machine with it. Everything shrank to the size of a football, and then to the size of a tennis ball, and then to the size of a ping pong ball, and then to the size of a peanut! And everything was very bright, and it kept on getting smaller and smaller and brighter and brighter until suddenly the time machine’s motor came to a halt and there was an eerie silence.

“What happened?” you asked the doctor. “Where are we?”

“We’ve gone back to the beginning of time, when the universe was born. We are ... good grief, this really is remarkable ... we are actually in the centre of the big bang!”

“The big what?” you asked.

“The big bang,” said the doctor. “It’s when the universe started. The time machine can’t go back any further into the past because there’s no more past to go back into. This is where time itself began.”

You looked around. It was all very bright, but after a while your eyes became adjusted to the brightness and you saw something.

“What’s that?” you asked.

You both went to take a closer look. It was a shop. There was a sign above the shop. It read: *The Toothpaste Shop at the Centre of the Big Bang.*

“Goodness me,” said Doctor Slug. “Fancy finding that here. What a stroke of luck.”

“I’ll say!” you replied. And you went into the shop.

“Customer!” shouted the shopkeeper’s wife.

“Don’t be silly, dear,” said the shopkeeper, who was a funny-looking man with big teeth. “We never have customers. I told you this was a bad place to open a toothpaste shop.” Then he saw you. “Well I’ll be!” he said. “It’s true. An actual real live customer if you please. What can I do for you?”

“I’d like chicken-fried rice, please,” you said.

“I’m sorry,” said the shopkeeper. “We don’t serve chicken-fried rice. This is the Toothpaste Shop at the Centre of the Big Bang. We only sell toothpaste here. If you want chicken-fried rice, you could try the Chinese Takeaway at the End of the Universe.”

“Oh that’s all right,” you said. “I was only joking. What I really want is a tube of toothpaste, and I’ve come a very long way to get it.”

You paid for the toothpaste and put it into your pocket and then you went back to the time machine. Doctor Slug hit the ‘forward’ switch and the time machine whizzed and whirred and hummed and thrummed and started on its long journey back to the future.

“It’s a shame that we won’t remember any of this,” said Doctor Slug.

“Why not?” you asked.

“Because we’re going back along the same time line we came from. Everything we remember from our journey here, we’re going to un-remember as we travel back. For example, we’ve already forgotten about the Toothpaste Shop at the Centre of the Big Bang, haven’t we?”

“Jiminy Cricket!” you said. “You’re right. I’ve completely forgotten all about that funny-looking shopkeeper.”

“You mean the one with the big teeth?” asked Doctor Slug.

“Yes,” you answered.

“Me too,” said Doctor Slug. “I’ve completely forgotten all about him.”

After a while, the sun formed, and the Earth formed, and life formed in the oceans, and as each event happened, the memories

you'd made as you'd travelled into the past were un-made as you travelled back into the future and you completely forgot you'd ever seen any of those things.

Eventually you arrived back at the centre of the Earth and you got out of the time machine and there was the Toothpaste Shop with a 'closed' sign on the door.

"Oh rats, it's closed," you said.

"Hey," said a voice. "Why don't we use my time machine to go back in time and buy some toothpaste?"

You looked round to see a slug sitting on what looked like some kind of dentist's chair.

"Don't be ridiculous," you said. "Time machines aren't real and slugs can't talk."

You went up in the elevator, through the secret grotto and out the bear's cave and headed for home.

You felt sad as you walked home, as if you'd lost something precious.

You thought to yourself: *I don't know why I feel so sad. Maybe it's because everyone will be disappointed when I get home without any toothpaste.*

But just then you put your hands into your pockets and felt something, and you pulled it out.

"Hooray!" you shouted. "I found a tube of toothpaste!"

And you ran all the way home feeling very happy.

And that's what happened. It's a shame that you can't remember any of it because of the time reversal dual polarity un-remembering quantumization effect, but never mind. At least you got the toothpaste so we can all brush our teeth and keep them nice and clean.

And if you don't believe me, you'll find that tube of toothpaste in the bathroom, the very same tube you brought back all the way from the centre of the big bang at the beginning of time.

What an adventure! And what a great, time-traveling, secret-elevator-operating, big-bang-visiting, toothpaste-finding kid you are.

Three cheers for you.

Hip hip ...



5. Captain Slinky and the Cockney Pirates

YOU MUST BE very tired after your adventure today, what with being lost in that storm and everything else that happened to you.

Oh, I forgot – you can't remember anything about it because of that banana.

Let me explain.

I made you an egg sandwich, but when I gave it to you, you said, "Hang on a doggone minute. This egg sandwich is a bit funny. In fact, it's more like a bread sandwich than an egg sandwich."

I said, "Yes, I'm very sorry about that, but you see ..."

And you said, "Don't tell me. We've run out of eggs."

"That's right! How did you know?" I asked.

"Just a wild guess," you said. "But don't worry – I know where eggs come from."

And before I could say anything, you'd disappeared out the door and ...

... off you went to the woods.

What you thought was that you'd find some eggplants and pick some eggs, then bring them back so you could have an egg sandwich. Problem solved.

But as you headed for the woods, you started thinking: *Hmm. To tell the truth, I've never actually ever seen an eggplant in the woods. They must be quite rare. I wonder where I can find one. Perhaps I can ask one of the animals. For some reason I think a chicken would be the best animal to ask. So I need to find a chicken.*

When you got to the woods, you started looking for a chicken, and luckily the first animal you saw, standing on a bit of grass, was a chicken.

"Excuse me, Mrs Chicken," you said, "I was going to have an egg sandwich but it didn't have any eggs in it because we've run out of eggs and it was more like a bread sandwich than an egg sandwich, in fact it wasn't really an egg sandwich at all. You could say it was a sandwich sandwich. So could you tell me where I can find an

eggplant so I can pick some eggs and have a proper egg sandwich with actual eggs in it please thank you very much?"

The chicken looked at you for a moment and then it said, "Mmmooooooooo."

"Oh. Thank you," you said, and you started to walk away. But then you stopped and said, "Hang on a doggone minute! That's not right! Chickens don't say 'moo'."

And you looked at that chicken closely and suddenly you realised it wasn't a chicken at all. It was some other animal wearing a chicken mask. That's right – it was pretending to be a chicken!

"Ha, you can't fool me," you said, and you reached forward and pulled off its mask and guess what it was really? It was a monkey!

"You're a monkey!" you gasped.

"That's right," said the monkey. "But it's OK. I'm not doing anything wrong. I'm just standing here on this bit of grass. I was just about to have my lunch."

"Oh," you said. "I thought you were a chicken. I'm looking for an eggplant."

"Well," said the monkey, "there's no point asking me. I'm not a chicken. I'm a monkey."

So you turned around and started to leave. But then you stopped and said, "Hang on a doggone minute! If you're a monkey, why did you say 'moo'?"

And you looked closely at that monkey, and you realised that its monkey face wasn't a real face at all – it was a monkey mask! So you reached forward and pulled off that monkey mask and underneath ... guess what it was really? It was a cow!

"You're a cow!" you said. "An annoying cow."

"OK, OK, you got me kid," said the cow. "You caught me purple-handed. So I'm going to tell you what you want to know. Listen to me. You're trying to find a chicken, right? That's your plan, right? Because you think a chicken can tell you where you can find an eggplant, right? But let me tell you, you don't pick eggs from an

eggplant, see? Because eggs don't grow on eggplants. No they don't. Eggs come from chickens. So you need to change your plan."

"So what should my new plan be?" you asked.

"Isn't it obvious?" replied the cow. "If eggs come from chickens, you need to find a chicken."

"Oh," you said. "Thank you very much. I'll leave you to carry on eating grass."

"Grass?" said the cow. "I'm not going to eat grass. I'm going to eat those bananas in that tree there." And with that, the cow swung up into the tree and disappeared.

So, you thought, I shouldn't be looking for a chicken. That was my old plan. My new plan is ... to look for a chicken.

And off you went to look for a chicken.

But before you got very far, you heard a great crashing through the undergrowth and suddenly a pirate ship appeared!

"Grab that landlubber!" you heard someone shout, and some pirates threw down a net and caught you and hauled you up onto the ship where a great big pirate captain with a wooden leg, a hook and an eye patch, looked you up and down.

"Cor blimey, what a funny little specimen!" said the pirate captain. "My name's Captain Slinky, and this is me ship, the Mudskipper. Someone stole me treasure, and we're on a mission to get it back. Want to join us, landlubber?"

"Well, actually, I was looking for ... "

Captain Slinky grabbed your hand and shook it. "Great," he said. "Welcome aboard. You can be me new cabin boy. Or girl. Or whatever you are."

"What happened to your old cabin boy?" you asked.

"A canon ball knocked orf 'is 'ead!" said a sailor.

"That's right - clean orf!" said another sailor.

"'e's takin' two weeks orf to recover," said Captain Slinky. "This 'ere's a cockney pirate ship, by the way, so you'll 'ave to speak cockney while yer on board. All wight?"

“Aye aye, Cap’n,” you said. “I’ll do me blinkin’ best, inn’it?”

“That’s the spirit!” said Captain Slinky. “Haul anchor men. Set the mainsail. Let’s go an’ find me missin’ treasure.”

So the ship set sail and moved off through the woods, crashing through the undergrowth, flattening nettles and brambles as it went.

Down below deck, the crew were playing cards and singing a song. The song went like this:

Yo ho ho and a bucket of cheese

Fifteen men on a monkey’s knees

The Captain’s treasure, give it back now please

Yo ho ho and a bucket of cheese

Suddenly the lanterns hanging from the beams started swinging to and fro.

“Storm’s coming!” shouted the captain. “All hands on deck! Trim the mainsail! Haul anchor! Heave ho! Hempen the halter! Jingle the jib!” Then Captain Slinky looked at you. “You! Cabin kid! Man the crow’s nest and tell us what you can see.”

“The crow’s nest?” you said.

“Up there!” said a sailor, pointing to the crow’s nest at the top of the main mast. “Quick as ye can, matey, or the captain’ll run ye through!”

So you climbed up the mast as quick as you could. Up and up you climbed, then upper and upper, until at last you reached the crow’s nest.

“Y’er good at climbin’, in’tcha?” called Captain Slinky. “What d’y’see, matey?”

The ship was rocking back and forth in the storm, and the crow’s nest was leaning and swinging and it made you feel dizzy to look down at the ground, lurching and reeling below you. You held on tight.

“I can only see some trees, sir,” you called down.

“You what?” cried Captain Slinky. “I can’t understand ye, matey. Speak cockney. We’re cockney pirates, remember?”

“I said, I can’t see nuffink but trees, Cap’n.”

“That’s better,” shouted the captain.

“Hang on a blinkin’ minute!” you called. “I can see sumfink now. Sumfink in the trees, inn’it. It’s a black fing, inn’it. It’s got some birds in it, inn’it. Black as the ace of spades, they are. They’re crows, I fink. Oh, I see what it is now. It’s a crow’s nest.”

“Well that ain’t no use, matey. Keep a look out and tell us if y’see anyfink else. All wight?”

“Aye aye, Cap’n,” you shouted.

The wind blew and the storm raged, and the ship went crashing through the woods, rabbits and squirrels scattering in its wake. Suddenly you saw some rocks ahead.

“Rocks ahead!” you shouted, but it was too late. The ship crashed against the rocks and they made a hole in the hull and the ship stuck fast.

“Abandon ship!” yelled the captain. “Man the lifeboat!”

You climbed down and got into the lifeboat with the rest of the crew. Captain Slinky stood at the front of the boat and issued orders.

“Row men. Row fer yer lives! What d’ye see, cabin kid?”

You looked out from the stern but you couldn’t see anything special.

“I can’t see nuffink special, sir. Only a puddle over there under that tree.”

“Head for that puddle, men!” shouted Captain Slinky.

The crew rowed hard and eventually reached the tree and everyone got out and stood in the puddle.

“We’re safe ’ere men,” said Captain Slinky. “We’ll stay ’ere until the storm ends, then we’ll row back to the ship an’ repair that ’ole in the ’ull.”

The sailors sat down in the puddle while all around them the rain fell and the wind blew. After a while they started playing cards and singing a song. The song went like this:

Yo ho ho and a cup of blue cream

Fifteen men on a trampoline

The captain's treasure is a broke-down dream

Yo ho ho and a cup of blue cream

Captain Slinky listened to the song and he looked very sad. After a while he started to cry big salty tears.

"There there, Cap'n," said a sailor. "Don't be sad. 'ere lads. Let's all give the Cap'n a cuddle."

And all the sailors gathered round Captain Slinky and gave him a big group hug.

"Thanks maties," said the captain. "It's me lost treasure, y'see. It breaks me 'eart to fink I might never find 'er again."

"You'll find 'er, Cap'n. Don't you worry," said a sailor.

"What is this treasure you're looking for, Captain?" you asked.

"Eh?" said the captain. "I can't unnerstan' a word yer sayin'. We're cockney pirates, remember?"

"Oh, er, sorry," you said. "I mean, this 'ere treasure wot you is lookin' fer, Cap'n. Wot is it, exac'ly?"

"Well," said Captain Slinky, "y'see this 'ere wooden leg, don't cha? And y'see this 'ere 'ook, don't cha? And you see this 'ere eye patch, don't cha? Well, of course I 'as to 'ave all these things to be a proper pirate captain, in'nit? But, y'see this 'ere shoulder, don't cha? Well, there's sumfink missing on it, in'nit? And d'you know what that sumfink is, matey?"

"Is it a parrot?" you guessed.

"That's right, matey. A parrot is precisely what is missin' on this 'ere shoulder. And a parrot is the most important thing of all fer a pirate captain's shoulder to 'ave on it, in'nit? An' my shoulder used to 'ave a parrot on it, an' not just any ol' parrot, mind. My parrot was special, better than all them other pirate captains' parrots put together. She was me pride an' joy, she was the apple of me eye, Polly was. And now I've gone an' lost 'er. Lost 'er forever, I 'ave."

And with that, Captain Slinky broke down again and cried more great, big, salty tears. The sailors all gathered round and gave him another group hug.

Just then you heard something up in the tree above you. It was a 'buk buk buk'.

"What's that, Cap'n?" you asked, pointing to a branch.

"Shiver me timbers!" cried Captain Slinky. "It's me treasure, me pride and joy, it's Polly, me missin' parrot! 'ere matey, y'er a good climber, in'tcha? Climb up and get 'er fer me, will ye?"

So you climbed up that tree and you crawled along that branch and you got the captain's parrot and you brought it back down and gave it to him.

"Oh thanks, matey. Thanks a bundle!" he said, giving the bird a big hug and then putting it on his shoulder.

All the other sailors gathered round and patted the captain on the back and shook his hand, congratulating him on his good fortune, but you knew there was something fishy about that parrot. You'd had some recent experience of this kind of thing, and while all the sailors were congratulating the captain, you leaned forward and whispered to that bird.

"Hey. I know you're not a parrot. I know you're just a chicken wearing a parrot mask."

"Buk buk!" squawked the chicken in surprise.

"It's all right. I promise not to tell. But only if you do me a favour."

"Buk buk," agreed the chicken.

"I want three eggs."

So the chicken went 'buk' and out came an egg, and you slipped it into your pocket. And the chicken went 'buk' again and out came another egg, and you slipped it into your other pocket. Then the chicken went 'buk' again and you caught the third egg in your hand.

"ello?" said Captain Slinky, seeing the egg. "I ain't never seen 'er do that before. She must 'a' taken a shine to yer, matey."

By this time the storm was over and the captain ordered everyone to get into the lifeboat to row back to the ship.

“It’s all right, Captain. I’ve got my eggs, so I’m going home now.” And you started walking away.

“Look at that!” yelled the sailors. “The kid can walk on grass!” They looked really shocked.

“Thanks for everything!” you called back. “Goodbye and good luck!”

“Shiver me timbers!” cried Captain Slinky. “The kid’s gone mad! Come back ’ere matey! Get in the lifeboat or you’ll drown!”

But you just carried on walking, heading for home.

After a while you stopped and took the eggs out of your pockets and counted them.

“One, two, three. Great. Now we can have egg sandwiches.”

But just as you started walking off again, you heard a ‘mooo’ from the tree above you. You looked up and you thought, *I bet it’s that annoying cow.*

Just then, a banana fell on your head and knocked you out cold.

After a few minutes, you woke up and there in front of you lying on the grass were three eggs.

“Oooh look! Eggs!” you said. “How lucky!” And you picked them up and brought them home, and we made egg sandwiches.

I suppose you don’t remember any of this do you? It was that banana that fell on your head and knocked you out. It made you lose your memory.

Never mind. If you look in the fridge you’ll find one of those eggs – we haven’t eaten it yet – so you can see that everything I’ve told you is true.

You did a great job today helping Captain Slinky find his lost chicken. I think I should congratulate you. Let me shake your hand.

Congratulations! Congratulations!

Three cheers for you.

Hip hip ...

MESSAGE FROM
THE AUTHOR

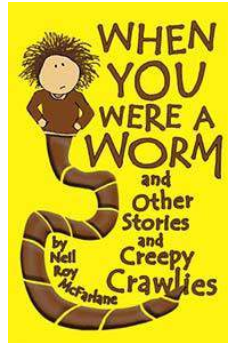
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There are 31 stories in *A Month of Bedtime Stories* and (at the time of writing) a whopping 52 stories in the complete "and off you went to the woods" series.

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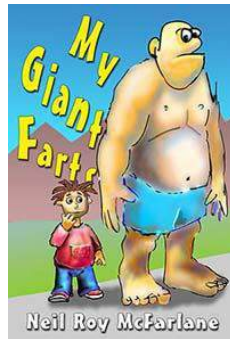
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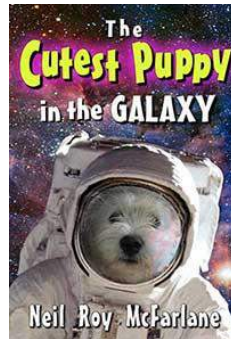
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