

Amazing Stories for James and Sam

This is a collection of stories that I made up for my two children, James and Sam, to stop them getting bored on long car journeys. They are mostly silly, inspired by whatever we were doing at the time.

All the stories are made up on the spur of the moment. There's no planning before and no changes after. They are just there to pass the time of the day.

I have forgotten some of the first ones I told because I did not write them down (so nobody will ever know the one about the giant or the one about the comet). That's why I decided to put them in a book – now I can easily tell them again, and maybe other children will enjoy hearing them too.

I have also included a few little illustrations. I'm afraid I'm not very good at drawing, but they should give you some idea of how I pictured the stories.

All text and illustrations:

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The Freshest Baker in the World

We thought this one up driving through Birmingham on a journey... can't remember why.

Once upon a time, in a big city not so very far from here, there was a small baker's shop. The rest of the city was full of giant superstores and hypermarkets, so it was very unusual to find small shops like this one.

However, this was a very unusual shop. The baker who owned the shop had magical powers that allowed him to bake the freshest bread in the world. He did not have cakes and loaves on display in the window like other bakers. Whatever his customers asked for, he would disappear out the back and return in just three seconds with whatever it was, freshly baked.

Bread rolls, muffins and chocolate cakes were easy, but the baker could also bake really unusual stuff. Once, a customer came in and asked for twelve pyramid-shaped bagels. "Just a moment!" said the baker, and disappeared out the back. Three seconds later, he returned with twelve fresh pyramid-shaped bagels.

Once a lady came in and asked for a baguette as long as a bus. "Certainly, madam!" said the baker. He disappeared out the back and after just three seconds, the end of a baguette appeared at the doorway. The lady grabbed that end while the baker held the other and together they carefully carried it out into the street.



Now just across the road from the bakers was a large supermarket, which was run by an evil supermarket witch. She hated small shops. She thought everyone should buy everything from huge supermarkets like hers.

One day, she was wondering why her supermarket never sold as much bread and cakes as the supermarkets that her friends worked at. She asked some of her customers where they got their bread from and they told her about the bakers. This made her very angry.

"I must stop people shopping there!" she screeched. So that night, she cast an evil spell on the baker.

The next morning, the baker was in his shop getting ready for the day's business. The first customer came in, a young lady in a red dress, and asked for a square doughnut.

"No problem!" the baker said, and disappeared out the back.

After three seconds, he *did not* come back. After three more seconds, he still had not come back. By this time, the young lady was getting worried. She was a regular customer and had never had to wait more than three seconds before.

Eventually, the baker came back, but looked very puzzled.

"I don't understand it," he said. "I tried making your doughnut, but it was made from wood. So I tried again, and it was still made from wood!". He sadly held up the two wooden square doughnuts.

"Harrumph!" said the young lady in the red dress, and went across to the supermarket to get some boring old round doughnuts.

The supermarket witch had been watching all this from a small window in her supermarket. She cackled and rubbed her hands together with glee.

The next customer came in, a man wearing a stripy hat, and asked for a banana-shaped loaf of banana bread. The baker looked worried, but went out the back. After three seconds, he came back, by now looking quite frightened.

"I don't understand it!" he said, holding a nicely varnished, wooden, banana-shaped loaf of banana bread. "You may as well have it," he said, giving it to the man in the stripy hat.

The man walked out and the baker followed him to the door.

"I don't understand it. I'll have to close the shop."

And he slowly started to turn the "open" sign round so that it showed "closed".

But outside, a passer-by noticed the man carrying the wooden banana bread.

"That's a nice ornament," he said, "Where's it from?"

"From this baker's shop. He's not much of a baker, but his woodworking is pretty good."

So the passer-by went into the shop. The shopkeeper said, "I'm afraid we're closed. I don't do baking any more."

But the passer-by said, "I don't want anything baked. I was wondering if you had a table in the shape of a camel."

The baker thought for a moment, then said, "Let me see what I can do!".

He disappeared out the back, and after just three seconds, he returned with a table shaped like a camel.

"Thank you very much!" said the passer-by. He went back home and told all his friends about the new woodwork shop.

Before long, word of the amazing woodwork shop had spread far and wide, and the baker had a constant stream of customers.

The supermarket witch, who had been very happy now that her bread and cake sales were up, started to notice that her furniture sales were falling. She asked a customer where people were buying their furniture these days.

"Why, from that new woodworker's shop across the road!".

Furious, the witch ran out of her supermarket and into the baker's shop.

"Right," she shouted, "I've had enough of you! I'm going to destroy your equipment once and for all!". She pushed passed the baker and went out the back.

Three seconds went by. Another three seconds went by. Then the baker went out the back to see what had happened to her. To his surprise, there was no sign of the witch. But there was a life-sized, nicely varnished *wooden carving* of a witch.

"Goodness me!" said the baker. "What on earth shall I do with this?"

He carried it outside and left it in front of his shop, and there it stands to this day, showing passers-by that he is the freshest woodworker in the world.



The Sausage Escape

Inspired by Sam's dinner at the soft play centre.

Once upon what can only be described as a time, two sausages were lying on a plate. There was also a jacket potato, a Yorkshire pudding and some peas lying next to them. They had only met each other five minutes ago when the chef put them onto the plate, but already they were good friends.

The peas were using the sausages as springboards to bounce into the Yorkshire pudding, and the jacket potato was telling them silly stories making them all laugh.

Suddenly, a knife and fork appeared from up above, came down and chopped one of the sausages into pieces and took them away.

The other foods on the plate were shocked. Jacket was the first to recover his voice.

"Quick everyone," he said, "we must make a plan to get out of here, otherwise we'll all be taken away, and who knows what will become of us?"

"But what can we do?" said the peas.

"Hmm..." said Jacket. "I know where we'll be safe – in a cave on the beach. We can have fun playing in the sand too."

"But how can we get there?" asked Yorkshire.

"Well," said Jacket, thoughtfully, "how about this: I'm round and so is Sausage, so why don't I be the back wheel, Sausage can be the front wheel, and Yorkshire can go on top of us. The peas can jump into Yorkshire and we'll all be able to roll away."

So, without further ado, they all took up their positions.

"Now ROOOLLLLL!" shouted Jacket, and off they went.

The rolled off the plate and onto the chair, then onto the floor, then over to the door. That's where they found the first obstacle – the door was closed.



"Now what?" asked Sausage.

"We know!" shouted the peas. "Sausage should jump up and down and waggle around, that will tempt the cat over here, because cats love sausages. Then he can hide behind Jacket so the cat can't find him. Then the cat will get bored, go out through the cat flap and we can jump through behind."

Sausage looked a little worried – it sounded dangerous – but he agreed to give it a try. Sure enough, the cat went over to gobble up the dancing sausage, but when he got there, the sausage was nowhere to be seen. The cat soon got bored of looking and wandered outside through the cat flap. The food quickly jumped through and hid behind a bush.

"Fantastic!" said the peas, "but now, how do we get to the beach?"

They all thought for a minute.

"I know," said Sausage, "I can hear some seagulls flying around, and they love Yorkshire puddings. Yorkshire can go and lie on the path over there and wait for a seagull to come down, snatch him up and take him away to the beach to feed her chicks."

Yorkshire didn't like this at all.

"But the seagull will eat me! And how will the rest of you get to the beach?"

"Don't worry, I've worked it all out", said Sausage, reassuringly. "While the seagull is busy trying to fit you in her beak, Jacket and I will jump on her back, and the peas can grab hold of her legs. Then, when she reaches the beach, the peas can tickle her legs and she'll laugh so much she'll drop you. Then the rest of us can jump down."

So Yorkshire agreed to give it a try. Everything went according to plan, and as they tumbled from the seagull and down onto the sandy beach, they thought their troubles were over. Then they noticed all the hungry seagulls and crabs looking for food.

"Quick, someone think of a plan!" shouted the peas.

"I know," said the Yorkshire. "We'll walk along in single file and the peas can climb on top of us as camouflage. Then we'll look like a piece of green seaweed being blown along the beach. Seagulls and crabs don't eat seaweed, so we'll be able to get to the cave in safety."

And that's just what they did. They reached the cave and lived there happily for the rest of the day, until the tide came in and they were all washed away.



The Comfiest Bed In The World

*I thought of this one when James jumped on our bed one morning to wake me up.
James and Sam like imagining how big the huge money bag is.*

Once upon a time, there was an old and uncomfortable bed. It didn't even have a proper mattress, just a hard concrete slab. But it did have a dream. It dreamt of being the comfiest bed in the world.

So one day, it decided the time had come to make its dream real. It went to the local dump, and asked a workman if it could have a look around for an old mattress.

"Be my guest!" said the workman, "it's better than burying them in the ground."

The bed spent all day trying to find a mattress that wasn't covered in broken egg shells or with springs bursting out of the side. Eventually it found one; it wasn't great, but it would do.

The next day, it went into the shopping centre in town. It had a sign saying "10 minutes sleep for 1 pound". Its plan was that people busy doing their shopping would love the chance to relax and have a quick nap instead of rushing round all the shops. It was a good plan - by the end of the day it had a nice little bag full of money.



It did this for the rest of the week, and then went to the mattress shop.

It said to the shopkeeper, "I've got this nice little bag full money, and I'd like to buy a new mattress, a really comfy one. This one I've got at the moment does the job, but it's not great, and I've got a dream: I want to be the comfiest bed in the world!"

The shopkeeper thought hard. "Well, I'm not sure I have the *comfiest* mattress in the world, but I can sell you this one, which is very very soft."

The bed bought it, and the next week it went round local offices and business with a new sign: "Power naps - 30 minutes for £5". It thought all the busy workers would work much better if they took a short break. It was such a tempting offer - especially when people saw the soft new mattress. By the end of the week, it had a *huge* bag of money.

It thought to itself, "This is fun! People love sleeping on me, so I must be very soft and comfy. But I don't think I'm the comfiest bed in the world."

So it went to the big city and sought out the finest mattress maker in the land.

"Listen, I have this *huge* bag of money, *and* I have a dream. I want to be the comfiest bed in the world."

The bedmaker said "No problem! I've been working on a top-secret ultra-comfy mattress for a while now. It's nearly ready, and I think you could be the perfect bed to try it out."

The bed was delighted. The new mattress fitted perfectly and was *extremely* comfy. It went back to the shopping centre and back to the offices and let people sleep on it for free. Soon it was famous - and it really was the comfiest bed in the world.

The Cloud Farmer

James and I were looking at interesting things out of the window on a long car journey. First we saw a strange farm machine on a trailer, then lots of clouds.

Once upon a time, a brother and sister were walking home from the summer fair with their mum. The children each had a balloon, the sort that floats up by itself. The balloons were a bit giddy and not being very careful – they were bouncing around all over the place. Suddenly, they bounced too hard and floated out of the children's hands and up into the sky.

The children were very upset as they watched their balloons float away until they were tiny dots, but their mum said, "Never mind, we can get some more at next year's fair. I'm sure the balloons will keep an eye on you from up in the sky and find other ways to make you happy."

Meanwhile, the balloons floated up and up. They floated a long way from the fair and it started to get cloudy. First they floated through rain clouds and got all wet. Then a strong wind blew them dry, and also blew them a long way away.

Then they floated through some thunder clouds, where they were very nearly struck by lightning. They were very frightened.

Then they floated through clouds full of hail stones, which pitter-pattered all over them like someone playing a drum. They were being hit so much they were afraid they would burst, but they kept on floating and before long came out of the hail clouds.

They found themselves in a warm sky with long white clouds raked in to neat rows. They were feeling relieved, when suddenly – pop! A big round sharp pronged thing came from nowhere and bashed into one of the balloons, bursting it. Its friend watched in shock as the bits of rubber fell down and down until they were too small to see.

It cried out in sadness, which sounded like a rubbery squeak, but someone, or something, heard it.

"What's all this then?" said a voice.

The balloon looked round to see who it was. The voice belonged to a very strange person who appeared to be made out of clouds. He had been pulling the big round sharp pronged thing along on a rope. The balloon was startled, but eventually managed to explain.



"It's that thing you're towing, it bashed into my friend and burst him!"

"Oh dear, I am *very* sorry," said the cloud person. "I'm a cloud farmer, and this is the plough I use to make all the clouds up here neat and tidy. I'm afraid there's nothing I can do to help your friend."

"Then what am I going to do?" asked the balloon, starting to cry again. "I've been blowing around for ages, I'll never be able to find the children I belong to again, and it's too dangerous for balloons up here anyway, and..."

But the cloud farmer interrupted him. "There, there, now, maybe there is something I can do to help you. I've been looking for a helper for a while now, but no one ever seems to come up here. I'm getting old, and there just doesn't seem to be time to get down to the villages and towns and look after the clouds down there. I hardly have time to grow all the snowflakes up at the North Pole for the snow clouds. Maybe you could lend me a hand."

"But how? I'm just a balloon!"

"Well, I know I'm getting old, but I think I still have a little bit of weather magic left."

He reached behind his ear and pulled off some of the cloudiness he was made from. He carefully wrapped it round the balloon and patted it down.

"Now, this may hurt a little bit, but don't worry!" He pulled out a pin from nowhere, stuck it through the cloudiness and popped the balloon.

"Ouch!" said the balloon, but to its surprise, it was still a balloon, but now it was made of the same cloudiness as the cloud farmer.

"Wow! I'm a cloudalloon!" it said, "But what do I do now?"

"Go down to the low levels and see what you can do about those clouds. You won't be able to tidy them all up, but see what you can do to help. Sometimes people need rain, to make their crops grow and keep the rivers and lakes full, sometimes people like it to be dry, so they can go out and play."

So the cloudalloon floated down. It did its best to make sure that the rain fell where it was most wanted, and not where it was not wanted. Sometimes it would make a special effort to clear the clouds away when there was a summer fair or school sports day.

Once, after it had been a cloudalloon for a year and a day, it happened to be working in the village where it had first floated away from the children. It was clearing away the clouds ready for the summer fair. To its surprise, down there were the same children. They were on the way to the fair with their mum. They both just happened to look up into the sky, and saw a funny balloon-shaped cloud, which seemed to shape itself into a face and then wink at them, before floating away. The children smiled, and this year they made sure they held onto their new balloons *very* tightly.

Superveg

Inspired by the salad that James didn't want with his sandwich at a café.

Once upon a time, there was a café that served a little salad with all its meals and sandwiches. This was no good for the children who went there because they all hated salad.

Every morning, the farmer who lived down the road would go into his field and round up the vegetables to send over to the café for the salads. First he would go to the tomato plant, where the tomatoes were usually fast a sleep, and give it a shake.

"Wake up! Wake up! You lazy tomatoes!" he would shout, until enough tomatoes had jumped down to the floor.

Then he would go to the lettuces, all snuggled up in their bed of soil, and tickle them until they jumped up out of the ground and went over to wait with the tomatoes.

Then he would go over to the red onions. They were very shy and usually lay hidden in the ground, but they were easy to spot because their leaves stuck up into the air. So the farmer would pull them out carefully.

Finally, he would go to the cucumbers. They were all very excited, jumping up and down like little dogs. The farmer would count out the number that the café would need, and choose one to be the leader of the group and lead them all safely to the café.

One morning, just as the vegetables were about to set off for the café, a little voice spoke up.

"What about me?"

The farmer looked down and saw a strange new vegetable he had never seen before. It was purple with leaves coming out of the top like tentacles.

"What about you?" he asked.



"Aren't you going to send me to the café too?" asked the new vegetable.

"I can't do that, they only want lettuce, tomatoes, cucumber and red onions. I don't even know what you are!"

"Please let me go! Please, please, please!"

So the farmer let it go.



When the vegetables reached the café, the chef opened the door and let in the lettuce, tomatoes, cucumbers and red onions. As the last one went in, he started to close the door.

Then he heard a little voice call up, "What about me?"

"What about you?" asked the chef, looking down at the strange purple thing.

"Aren't you going to put me into the salads?"

"I can't do that," answered the chef, "my customers only want lettuce, tomatoes, cucumber and red onions. I don't even know what you are!"

"Please put me in with the salad! Please, please, please!"

So the chef decided to give the new vegetable a try.

Not long after, the first customers in the café were waiting for their food. They were a mum, a dad and their son, who had been to the café before and was not looking forward to his salad. The food arrived, but the family were very puzzled by the strange purple vegetable.

"What's this purple thing?" they asked.

"I've no idea," said the waitress, "normally we only serve lettuce, tomatoes, cucumber and red onions."

"Well, we can't eat it, we don't even know what it is!" said the dad.

All this time, the boy had been looking closely at the new vegetable. It looked cool.

"Don't send it back!" he said, "I'll eat it."

He tried it and thought it was delicious. His parents were amazed and asked the waitress to thank the chef for finally finding a vegetable their son would eat. The waitress did so. The next time the chef saw the farmer, he also passed on the news that children seemed to like the new vegetable, and please could he send some more.

So the farmer went into his field to find some more of the strange new vegetable. There were lots.

"I'm going to have to think of a name for it. How about Superveg?"

All the little purple things jumped up and down with delight, shouting "We're superveg! We're superveg!"

Before long, the word spread and soon children all over the country were enjoying superveg with their salads. Next time you go to a café, see if you can find some in your salad.

The Fizzy Drinks

This was thought up by James and Sam's mum, but she let me write it down.

Once upon a time, in a kitchen just like yours, there were two bottles of fizzy drink. One was orangeade, the other was cherryade. They were sitting on the windowsill waiting to be drunk.



The cherryade was getting very excited. "They'll drink me first! It'll be me! I can't wait, it's going to be so bubbly and fun!"

The orangeade was more restrained. "It doesn't matter who gets drunk first, they'll still enjoy us both."

The cherryade thought of a fun game. "I know", it said, "let's have a competition to see who gets picked first!"

It started jumping up and down, wobbling from side to side, and making as much noise as it could. "Drink me! Drink me!" it shouted, in a small, bubbly voice.

The orangeade just stood there, watching the cherryade getting giddier and giddier.

Then the children came over.

"Which one shall we drink first?" they said to one another.

"The cherryade, it looks fun!"

So they took the cherryade off the windowsill, but as soon as they opened it, it was so shaken up that it all fizzed out and bubbled all over the floor.

"Oh dear!" they said, "looks like we'll be drinking the orangeade first after all."



The Football Who Hated Being Kicked

James just wanted a football story one bath time.

One upon a time, there was a football called Steven. He hated being kicked around.

During football practice one day, he thought about it. "I know I shouldn't really mind being kicked, after all I am a football, it's just that I seem to get kicked much more often and much harder than the other balls."

So Steven decided that he would hide. The next week at football practice, he made sure that he was lying right at the bottom of the big bag of footballs in which he lived. Sure enough, when the players took some balls out to practice with, he was left behind at the bottom with a few other spare balls.

"That's better!" he thought to himself, as he watched all the other balls being kicked around (sometime *very* hard, he noticed) through the netting on the side of bag.

The next week at practice, the same thing happened, and again he watched happily as the other balls got kicked around, while he just sat and watched.

The following week, though, he felt just a tiny bit sad. The players had taken out almost all the balls, leaving just Steven and a couple of old wrinkled balls, the sort with cracked leather and faded colours. They didn't talk much, so Steven felt lonely and left out. He gave a sigh, by letting some of the air inside him escape.

It was same the week after. Again, it was just Steven and the unwanted balls left behind in the bag. He let out an even bigger sigh. And so it went on until the end of the football season. Then, the coach had to sort through all the equipment before it was packed away until the next season.

As he was sorting through the balls, he saw Steven and noticed how small and wrinkled he was.

"This one must have a puncture," he said, because he did not know that footballs could sigh and lose their air.

He tossed it to the side where the dustbins were. Steven suddenly realised that when the dustbins were emptied, he would be taken to the landfill site and buried in the ground – never to be kicked again. He felt *terribly* sad.

Just then, some of the players came running up.

"Coach," they shouted, "we've lost our ball! Have you got a spare one we can borrow for the summer?"

"Well, not really, I can't give you one of the club balls, but there's that tatty old one by the rubbish you can have if you like. I was only going to throw it away."

So the players took the ball home, where they tried pumping it up. They were very pleased when it didn't go down again and they decided to keep it.

Steven was delighted. He now lived in a house, so the players always cleaned him up if they played with him in the mud, and he had lots of other interesting toys to talk to. The players did kick him around, but not too much and not too hard, and after all he was a football.

"Maybe," he thought to himself, "I don't hate being kicked quite so much as I did!" and took a big deep breath of contentment.

The Evil Woodcutter

Inspired by a woodcutter's shed at the side of the motorway which I've been driving past since I was a child.

Once upon a time, there was a kindly woodcutter, who lived in a village with lots of children who loved to go and play in his workshop. They would climb over the piles of wood, sometimes hurt themselves on his sharp tools as children do, and beg the woodcutter to carve animals for them (which he would do if he wasn't too busy).



At the edge of the village, there lived an evil witch, who loved eating children sandwiches, children curry and children ice cream. The problem was that she was so ugly and evil that the children never went near her cottage, so most of the time she had to make do with squirrel soup.

One night, she came up with a plan. She cast a spell that would make the children come to her cottage. Then she would be able to catch them and cook them.

The following day, all the children in the village went out to play, but instead of going to the woodcutter's workshop, they went to the witch's cottage. They were playing happily, and the witch watched hungrily from a window. But when she went out to catch them, she was so ugly and frightening that the spell broke, and all the children ran back home.

The witch was very angry, and came up with a new plan. That night, she cast two spells – one to bring the children to her house and one to make her appear beautiful and friendly.

The next morning, all the children again came to her house. But this time, when she came out, she looked so beautiful and friendly that the children did not run away. She started catching the children by throwing sacks over them, and hanging them from trees, where they could hang for a few days to become tender and juicy.

Suddenly the woodcutter appeared. He had been wondering why the children had stopped coming to his workshop and had followed them to the witch's cottage. Seeing what was happening, he chased the witch away with his axe. Once again, the spell was broken and the children ran home.

The witch was so furious that steam came whooshing out of her ears. So she thought long and hard, and came up with the perfect plan. She spent all that evening casting a spell which would turn the woodcutter evil and silence his tongue.

The next day, the children went to the woodcutter as before. But silently, as the children entered his workshop, he threw sacks over their heads and hung them up out the back to turn juicy and tender.

Later on that day, when the children did not return to their homes, their parents came looking for them. They searched everywhere, even the witch's cottage, but could not find them. Eventually, they went to ask the woodcutter if he had seen the children. He said nothing, but pointed out the back of his workshop. The parents went there and found all the children hanging up in sacks.

The woodcutter tried to explain what had happened but the witch's spell had silenced his tongue. The villagers were so angry that they chased him out of the village and told him never to return.

Over time, the woodcutter's good nature started to come back, but he was scared that if he ever saw any children again, he might try to take them to the witch. So he built a new workshop at the side of the motorway, as far from any children as he could. His workshop is still there to this very day. If you ever drive past, have a look round the back to see if you see any sacks hanging up.

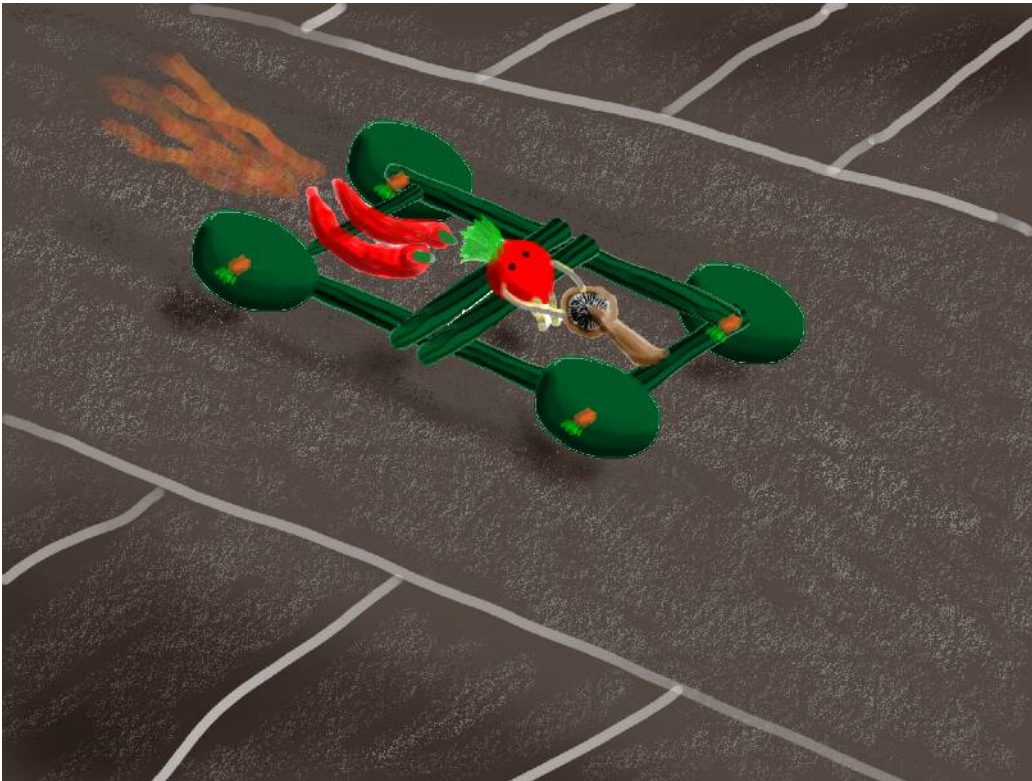
As for the witch, she decided that eating children was just too much trouble, so she became vegetarian. Her favourite food is now chocolate-coated cabbage.

The Chewing Gum Race

Inspired by Sam's love of chewing gum, which he is not allowed to have all the time.

Once upon a very time, there was a race at the supermarket. It happened at night, when all the customers and people who worked there had gone home. Each section of the supermarket created a vehicle and they all raced around the car park.

The fruit and veg section created a race car using water melons for wheels, cucumbers for the frame and carrots for screws to hold it all together. The steering wheel was a mushroom and it was driven by a radish. It was powered by red hot exploding chilli peppers.



The meat section creating a racing mannequin using chicken drumstick for legs, sausages for arms and a beefburger for a body.

The electricals section joined forces with frozen food by filling a vacuum cleaner with ice, so as the vacuum blew itself along, it showered the ground in front of it with a layer of ice and skated super fast.

All the different parts of the supermarket got involved, except for the chewing gum. The chewing gum lived in a little stand all by itself next to the tills. It didn't know how to make a car or a mannequin or even a bike, it only knew how to be squidgy and sticky. It was very sad.

The next day, when the supermarket was full of shoppers and people working as usual, there was a sudden screeching sound from outside. A real racing car skidded past the cash machines, nearly slid into the trolley shelter and came to noisy halt right by the entrance. The driver jumped out and ran into the store.

"Help, quick, my tyre has got a puncture! If I can't fix it, I'll lose the race!"

The chewing gum saw its chance. It jumped up and leapt into the driver's hands.

"Of course!" shouted the driver. "I know what to do!"

Quickly, he chewed some of the gum until it was nice and sticky and stuck it onto his wheel to stop the air leaking out. He got back into his car and sped off to rejoin the race.

The next day, the newspapers arrived. The supermarket manager saw the headlines and was amazed: "Super gum saves the day and wins the race".

Just then, there was another screech from the car park and the racing car driver came in again, this time carrying a gigantic shiny trophy.

"I want to give this trophy to you," he said to the chewing gum. "Without you, I couldn't have won the race."

The chewing gum was so pleased, and the next time the supermarket had a night time race, it had the special honour of giving the prizes out to the best racers. But it always kept its gigantic trophy for itself.

The Piglet And The Wizard

We thought this one up over a Sunday lunch.

Once upon a time, there was a piglet called Jaffa. He had a sister called Cake and a big brother called Hobnob (their mum had named them after her favourite foods). They all lived in a big pig sty full of mud and spent their days eating chocolate truffles.

One day, Jaffa noticed a man in a pointy hat floating past the sty. He trotted across to the wall and leant over on his front legs to see what was happening.

"That's strange", he thought, "people don't usually float around here."

He asked the man why he was floating.

"I'm a wizard, and this is how wizards get around on muddy farms. It saves having to clean my boots when I get home."



Jaffa was impressed, but before long he went back to eating the chocolate truffles.

The next week, Jaffa heard a strange scream - "miiiiiaaaaowwww!". He quickly trotted across to the pig sty wall and leant over on his front legs to see what was happening. He saw that the farmer had driven over the tail of a cat with his tractor. It was Tiddles, the farm cat, and she was screaming in pain because her tail had been squashed flat. But the farmer hadn't heard because the tractor was so noisy.

Just then, the wizard came by again and noticed poor Tiddles with her flattened tail.

"Poor little kitty cat!" he said, and waved his wand.

The cat's tail magically unflattened itself. Jaffa was very impressed by this, but before long, he went back to rolling around in the mud.

The week after, in the middle of the night, Jaffa was woken up by a scuffling noise near the pig sty. It was dark as there was no moon and no stars, but he managed to find his way to the wall of the sty and peered over the top. There was the wizard, lit up by a light coming from the end of his wand. He was searching the ground and muttering about where he'd dropped his car keys.

"Hmm," thought Jaffa, "it must be really useful to have a lighty-up wand," but soon he went back to bed.

Soon after, Jaffa and his brothers and sisters had eaten so many chocolate truffles that the farmer came to them and said, "You're not piglets any more, you're big enough to go out and get jobs. Let me see now! The Little Pigs Building Company is looking for a wolf prevention specialist..."

"That sounds fun!" squealed Hobnob. So the farmer sent him off to work with the Little Pigs.

"Now, I need someone to help repair my tractors and combined harvesters..."

"Wow, I'd love to do that, it'd be *so* cool fixing those huge machines!" squealed Cake, so off she went to the workshop.

"Now, there's a job going at the vegetarian sausage factory..."

Jaffa wrinkled his snout - that didn't sound like much fun. Just then, the wizard floated past again.

"I know!" squealed Jaffa, "I can be a wizard."

The farmer looked unsure, but the wizard said, "What a splendid idea!" and took Jaffa off to be his apprentice.

After a year and a day, all the pigs returned to the farm to see how they had all got on with their jobs.

"It's hard working for the Little Pigs, there are just so many wolves around these days," complained Hobnob.

"It's hard fixing the tractors. They're getting old now and keep breaking down," complained Cake.

"It's been hard learning how to be a wizard," said Jaffa, "but look!" He waved his magic wand, and the rusty old tractors and combined harvesters suddenly became shiny and new again.

"And watch this!" he said, and waved his wand again. This time, there was a frightful howling noise, then they saw the wolves who lived all across the fields and hills go running off into the distance as if their tails were on fire.

"And finally..." He waved his wand one more time and the pig sty became filled to overflowing with chocolate truffles. They all dived in and lived happily and chocolateily ever after.

Ash The Toilet

Inspired by the toilet in a little cottage we lived in in Bristol.

Once upon a time, there was a toilet called Ash. It was a very strange toilet, because it was made from very strange things. The water tank was actually a fish tank with a real fish swimming around in it. The pipes were made from old bicycle tyres. The basin was an old kitchen mixing bowl and the lid was a broken guitar.



The reason it was made from such strange parts was that it belonged to Professor S. Inventor (the "S" stood for "Super"). It was the first fully working toilet ever invented, and he had been very proud of it. "But I can't sell it like that, it's just made from bits of old rubbish", he said to himself So he had put it at the back of his shed and kept his goldfish in it.

Now Ash and the goldfish had become good friends, as they had only each other to talk to. But recently, the goldfish noticed that Ash was becoming very quiet.

"What's wrong?" the goldfish asked.

"I just don't like sitting here at the back of the shed with a goldfish in me. I mean, it's nice to have you here to talk to, but toilets should be being used!"

The goldfish wanted only the best for his friend, but was a little worried by this – if anyone did ever flush the toilet, he would be flushed down the drain, and who knows what would become of him?

The toilet started to cry, and when the professor came to feed his fish later that day,

he saw the tears and thought that the tank was leaking.

“Oh well,” he said, “I suppose I'd better take it to the rubbish dump.”

He felt a little sad, as it had been one of his first inventions. He pulled a pencil from behind his ear and wrote on the top of the guitar: “This is the first fully working toilet ever invented – signed Professor S. Inventor.” Then he took it to the dump, without even remembering to take the fish out.

The next day, the curator of the science museum happened to be taking her old toilet to the dump too, as she was having a new bathroom fitted. She noticed the strange cobbled-together toilet already there and read the writing on the guitar.

“Well I never!” she thought to herself. She was an expert on toilets, bath tubs, showers and plug holes, and knew all about the professor's works.

She asked the owner of the dump if it would be okay for her to take the toilet to display in the museum.

“It's just a bit of old junk,” he said, “but if you can find a use for it, that's one less piece of rubbish for us to bury in the ground.”

So she took Ash and the goldfish back to the science museum, where they were preparing a new display of toilets, bath tubs, showers and plug holes. She gave them to the engineer, who set to work adding them to the display.

After a few days, the exhibit was finished. It was all plumbed together and working, but the engineer had not connected it to the drain. Instead, when it was flushed, the water went all the way through and came back in to the tank at the top. The goldfish went with the water through the pipes, and he thought it was fantastic fun.

All the visitors to the museum thought it was wonderful, and the curator was pleased how people could see into the tank to see how it worked. One day, the Professor came to the museum with his children. They called him over to the toilet.

“How strange, it looks just like the one I threw away!” Then he saw the message he'd written on the lid and knew it was his, but to this day, he does not know how it had got there.

So next time you visit a science museum, look carefully and see if you can find Ash the toilet and the amazing flushing fish.

The Box and the Rat

Based on a trip to the parcel depot with James and Sam.

Once upon a time, there was a parcel called George. He was very sad, because he did not have an address label on him, he did not have any stamps on him, and he did not have anything inside him. These things are very important if you are a parcel.

He was walking sadly down the street one day, wondering what to do, when he saw a post lady.

"Please", he said to her, "could you post me to someone? I'm a parcel, and that's all I dream of."

The post lady looked down at him and said, "No, you don't have any stamps, so I can't post you."

So George carried on, feeling sadder than ever. Then he saw a delivery van drive past. The driver stopped and got out to deliver a parcel.

"Please", George shouted up, "could you deliver me to someone? I'm a parcel, and that's all I dream of."

The delivery driver looked down at him and said, "No, you don't have an address label, so I wouldn't know where to deliver you to."

So George carried on, wondering how he would ever achieve his dreams. Before long, he came across a friendly rat.



"Why are you so sad?" asked the rat.

"Well, I'm a parcel, but I don't have an address, I don't have any stamps and I don't have anything inside me. These things are very important to me. My only dream is to be posted somewhere."

"Maybe I can help," said the rat. "My name is George. I'll jump inside you, and we'll go and see what we can find."

So they carried on together.

Just then, the post lady went by on her bike. She was going very fast, and did not notice when some stamps fell out of her pocket. George picked them up and called after the post lady, but she was too far away to hear him.

"I'll just put these on your side for now," said George, "and we can give them back to her next time we see her."

They continued down the street. But then something happened that made George sad again. They could see a little boy with his mum. It looked like they were getting ready for a birthday party.

"That's what I should be doing - going to party with a present inside me, so someone can open me and be happy!"

Then they saw that the boy had dropped a piece of paper. It was a party invitation.

"I'll just put it on your side for now," said George, "until we find a dustbin."

Just then, the delivery van went past again. The driver spotted the parcel and stopped to take a look.

"Well, look at this," he said, "a parcel with stamps, an address and a pet rat inside. I'd best deliver it!" He closed the lid to keep the rat safe and put it in his van.

The next day, it was the little boy's birthday. He was happily playing with all his new toys, when the doorbell rang. It was the delivery man, with a parcel for the boy.

The boy opened it up and there was a rat inside. "Someone must have got you a pet rat as a present," said his mum.

"Can I keep it?" asked the boy.

"Yes," said his mum. "It can live in the box".

So George lived happily ever after, with his best friend George to keep him company and the little boy to play with.



The Volcano

Sam asked for this because there was a volcano on his t-shirt. There was also a lot of noise and banging coming from upstairs when the boys were getting dressed.

Once upon a time, there was a volcano called Levi. He lived by the edge of a village but, because he was a kind and friendly volcano, he tried his best not to cause trouble to the villagers. He did not erupt very often, just once every few years, and he made sure his ash fell on the fields behind him, not on the village in front.

Now, the villagers were frightened of the volcano, because they knew they were unpredictable and could be very dangerous. Yet the ash always seemed to fall on their fields and was a brilliant fertilizer that made the crops grow really well. This was why the villagers stayed in the village, despite the risk.

One day, the children were playing on the low hills at Levi's feet. Levi was a lonely volcano, because there were no other volcanoes for miles around. So he was really pleased to have some company.

The children were having so much fun running around and laughing that Levi started to laugh too. It was a low rumbling sound that made the ground shake. The children all knew about the dangers of volcanoes, so they quickly ran away, screaming and shouting. Levi was left alone again.

After a few weeks, there had been no further signs of activity from the volcano, so the children went back to play there again. This time, Levi was so pleased that not only did he laugh, making the ground shake, but he also tried to talk to the children, which made steam come out of cracks in the ground.

This time, the children were terrified and ran back to the village to tell their parents what had happened.

"We have made the volcano angry by disturbing its peace", said the village wise man. "The children are not allowed to play there again, and we must all avoid walking on the foothills."

Levi now felt lonelier than ever. He did not know about what the wise man had said, he just found that he never even saw the villagers any more. He was so sad he started to cry, and the water from his tears put out his fires so that he did not erupt any more.

Several years went by, without the volcano erupting. This made life hard for the villagers, who relied on the ash to make their crops grow well.

"The wise man was right," said the villagers. "We made the volcano so angry that he will never again help us."

Nearly ten years had gone by without ash, when a young girl, who had not been born when the volcano last erupted, was listening to the story of the rumbling ground and the steam. It had become a legend in the village.

The girl, who was as kind and friendly as the volcano, said, "That volcano wasn't angry, he was lonely. Look, there are no other volcanoes for miles around. We should go and play with him, then he'll help us again."

The wise man was not sure, but the villagers who looked after the crops in the fields said, "The volcano has not erupted for ten years, it is dead. There's no harm in playing on it now." Secretly, they hoped the girl was right.

So the next day, the children excitedly ran over the fields to the low hills at Levi's feet. They ran around laughing and joking until, suddenly, the ground started to shake.

They looked worried, but the girl said, "Listen, he's laughing!"

If they listened carefully, the noise did indeed sound a bit like laughter. So they carried on playing. Levi was overjoyed, and let out some steam, which blew through a hollow rock that made it sound like a flute.

This time none of the children were scared, because it sounded like the volcano was singing to them. So they carried on their games.

Levi was so pleased, he let himself erupt and sent ash all over the fields behind him.

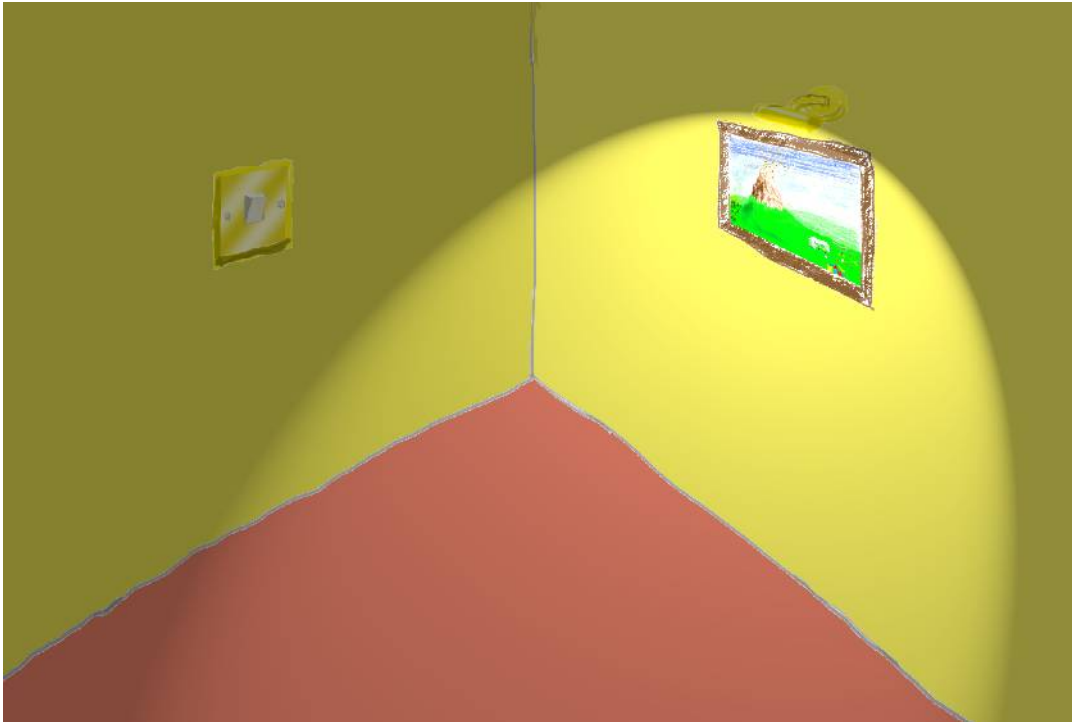


The villagers were delighted. They felt that they understood the volcano at last. They decided to hold a fair every spring in honour of the volcano. This was Levi's favourite day of the year, and at the end of the fair, he always erupted like fireworks, sending ash over the fields to make the crops grow well for the rest of the year.

The Light Switch and the Picture Frame

James wanted a story one tea time; when I asked him what about, these were the first things he saw looking round the kitchen.

Once upon a time, in a lounge, there was a light switch and a picture frame. The light switch was not for the main room lights, but for a little light above the picture frame.



Now it so happened that the light switch and the picture frame were not good friends. They always argued and bickered about which was the most important.

"I'm the most important!" said the light switch, "Without me, no one would even look at you."

"I'm clearly the most important," said the picture frame, "because if I wasn't here, they wouldn't even have bothered getting you!"

So it went on for years. When people entered the room and turned the switch on, the picture frame would call over to it and say, "See? I'm most important – they only turned you on so they could get a better look at *me!*"

When people left the room and turned the switch off, it would call across to the picture frame, "There you are, you see, without me, you're nothing!"

Then, one day, the light switch broke. An electrician came and took it away. The picture frame was suddenly very lonely and became sad.

"I didn't realise how much I liked the old switch, for all its bickering and moaning."

Meanwhile, the switch was stuck on the electrician's workbench, with just a few broken toasters and bits of wire to keep it company.

"I didn't realise how much I liked the old picture frame, for all its moaning and bickering." it thought sadly to itself.

Before too long, the electrician fixed the switch and took it back into the lounge. It worked fine again.

Do you think the light switch and picture frame would be friends, now they had realised how much they missed each other?

"See?" said the light switch, "I told you I was the most important, that's why they went to all that trouble to fix me!"

"Rubbish!" said the picture frame, "they only bothered fixing *you* so they could look at *me!*"

So it continued for many years more, but secretly, both the light switch and the picture frame were very pleased to be back together again.

Lionel

I thought of this while looking at all the long boring lines painted on the road driving up to our grandparents.

Once upon a very long and boring time, there was a very long and boring motorway. All the way along it, from the start to the finish, were boring white lines. They were all exactly the same size and all did exactly the same thing, which was nothing – they just sat there showing the cars where to drive.

All except one line, called Lionel. Lionel was fed up of being just another boring old line. He wanted to travel, to see the world, to be something.

"This is so boring!" he said to the lines next to him (who were too boring even to have names).

"What do you mean?" replied the next line.

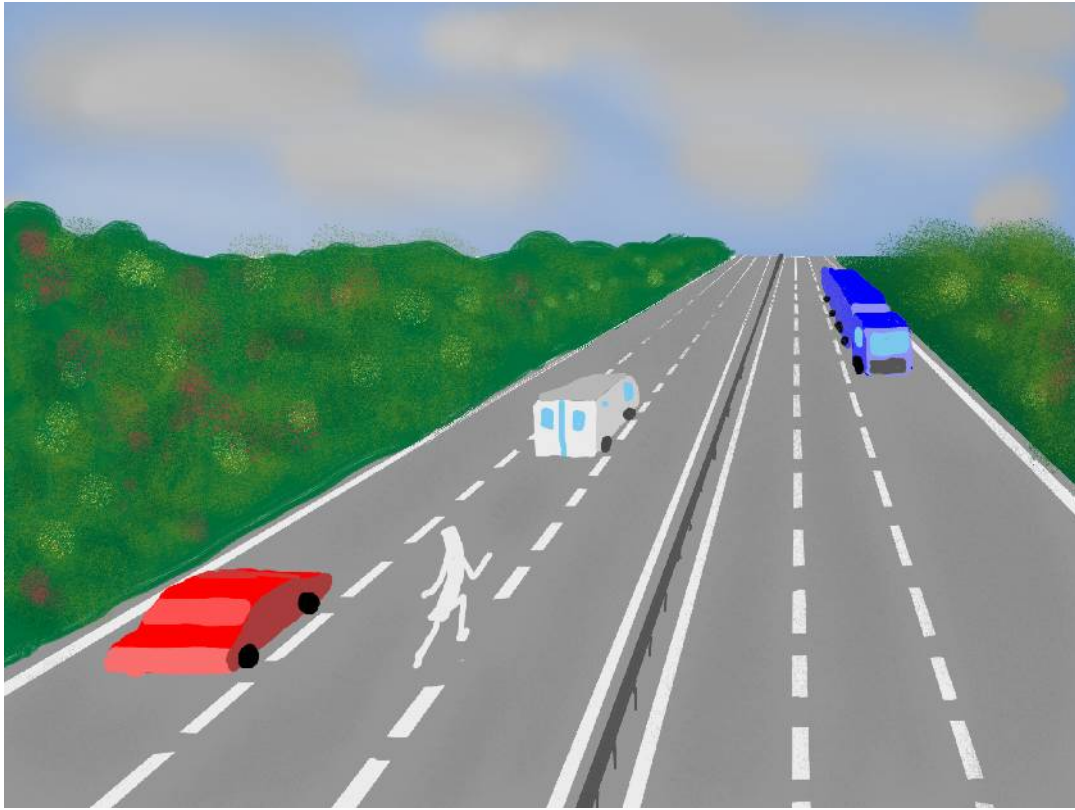
"Lying here all the time, being driven over by fast cars and fat lorries. There must be more to life than this!"

"But we're just white lines on the motorway. What else could there be?"

Just then, a truck drove past. On the side was a picture of a football pitch with nice neat white lines marking out the playing areas. The writing on the truck said "ACME Pitch Marking".

"There, you see!" shouted Lionel. "I could be a white line at a famous football pitch."

So he jumped up and ran after the truck. He caught up with it and stuck himself to the side. When the truck reached the football ground, Lionel jumped off and went and laid down on the pitch's halfway line.



"Wow!" he thought to himself. "This is going to be so exciting!"

He waited patiently until the time came for the next football match. It was exciting, but Lionel found that the studs on the player's boots kept treading through him, which really hurt. After the match, someone came and cut the grass with a big tractor with spinning blades. That really hurt too.

"This is no good. I won't last long out here." And sadly he made his way back to the motorway.

"How did it go?" the other lines asked him. He explained what had happened sadly.

"Never mind," his friends said, "we're glad to have you back."

Yet Lionel was still restless. The next day, a circus lorry went past. On the back were cages with animals in them. Lionel spotted a zebra.

"Look!" he said, "There's an animal completely covered in white lines! It would be great fun at the circus, watching all the exciting shows!"

Up he leapt and chased after the lorry. He clambered through the bars of the zebra's cage and stuck himself to the side of the zebra.

The problem was, though, that he was not the right sort of line and could not fit in with the zebra's pattern. The next time the circus did a show, the circus master looked at the zebra with the big fat stripe on its side and thought it did not look right, so the zebra (and Lionel) spent the entire time hidden away in a tent at the back.

"This is even more boring than being on the road," he moaned, and sadly made his way back to the motorway.

"How did it go?" the other lines asked him. He told them.

"Maybe you should just settle down here with us," they said.

"Okay then," he sighed, and settled back into his old position.

Just then, a van went past, painted with lots of interesting stripes. The writing on the van said "Super School Playground Patterns".

"That's it!" shouted Lionel. "There *is* somewhere I can be myself and have fun!"

He jumped up, ran after the van and found his way into the back. The van drove all the way to a school playground, where the driver started to paint lots of fun games and patterns on the ground. Lionel sneaked out and shaped himself into a snakes and ladders game.

The next time the school children came out to play, they were delighted, and started playing on Lionel straight away. Lionel was very excited; he thought the game was great fun and the children's little feet were light and gentle.

That night, he changed his shape into a hopscotch pattern. The following day, the children were amazed to find this new game. So Lionel kept changing, giving the children different games every day (the teachers did not notice this, they never bothered looking closely at the lines).

Lionel lived there happily ever after. Next time you go to a playground, look carefully at the lines – one of them could be Lionel.

The Paper Plane and the Moon

Sam asked for this one at breakfast when he was playing with a paper aeroplane.

Once upon a time, there was a paper aeroplane lying on a table. It was a good paper aeroplane, very well made and very patient, but it dreamed of flying to the moon.

"I've no idea how to get there," it thought to itself, "but I may as well make a start." So it launched itself off the table and landed on the floor half way across the room.

It lay there patiently until a little girl came in. "This looks like a good paper aeroplane," she thought to herself. "I bet it would like to fly to the moon."

She did not know how to get it to the moon, but she decided to make a start. She wrote "To the moon" on its wings with a pencil and went upstairs to the highest room in the house. She threw it out of the window as hard as she could and it disappeared off down the street.

It came to rest on the pavement. "I'm doing well," it thought to itself. "I must be getting quite close to the moon now." It was only a paper aeroplane, so it did not realise just how far away the moon is.

It lay there patiently until some time later when a postman came along and found it. He picked it up and peered closely at the writing on its wings.

"Hmm," thought the postman, "this looks like a good paper aeroplane, waiting patiently to get to the moon. Maybe I can help."

The postman knew that most moon rockets were launched from the Space Centre in America. So he wrote "Space Centre, USA" on the plane's wings and dropped it in the bag of post destined for America.

Soon, the paper aeroplane found itself in a real aeroplane with all the other post. Unfortunately, the cargo bay door was not properly closed. Half way across the Atlantic Ocean, the plane flew through some turbulence, which made the post bags tip over. The paper aeroplane fell out through the open gap at the edge of the cargo bay door.

"Oh dear!" it thought. "I'm never going to get to the moon now!" But it was a good aeroplane, well-made and patient, and it floated down through the sky all the way

to the space centre in America. There it landed on the car park, just next to where an astronaut was getting out of her car. She picked up the paper aeroplane and looked closely at the writing on its wings.

"I bet some kid has made this," she said to herself. "Well, we're not planning any moon missions at the moment, but I'll see if I can take it up to the space station. That'll get it a little bit closer."

Sure enough, a few weeks later when the astronaut was preparing to go up to the space station in a rocket, she remembered to put the paper plane in her luggage.

Now, when a rocket reaches the space station, the astronauts have to crawl through a short connecting tunnel. It is quite a tight squeeze, and this time the astronaut's luggage burst open as she struggled through. She picked most of it up, but somehow missed the paper aeroplane.

"Oh, dear!" it thought. "I won't reach the moon now, but at least I'm up in space!"

It lay there patiently until it was time for the rocket to leave. As it disconnected from the space station, the paper aeroplane tumbled out of the connecting tunnel and out into open space.

"Wow!" it thought. As it tumbled over and over, it could see the Earth in one direction and the Moon in the other. But each time it tumbled, it seemed that the Earth was a tiny bit smaller, and the Moon was a tiny bit bigger.

"I must be heading towards the moon after all!"

It still did not realise just how far away the moon was, but it was a *very* patient paper aeroplane and it will get there eventually. Maybe if you look into the sky one night, you'll be able to see how far it has got.



The Boy Who Ate Slowly

Inspired by Sam, who often eats very slowly.

Once upon a time, there was a little boy who ate his dinner *very* slowly. Sometimes it would take him an hour just to eat the peas on his plate (and there were not very many peas to begin with).

He would talk for a while, then choose a single pea, then carefully push it onto the prongs of his fork, then put it back because it was too wrinkled, then choose a better one, then eventually put it into his mouth, then chew it for a while, then maybe swallow it, maybe not.

His parents would say to him, "If you eat any more slowly, you'll turn to stone!"

But the boy did not listen. He began to eat more and more slowly. Soon it took nearly two hours to eat his peas because, on top of everything else, he had taken to polishing each pea carefully with a napkin and trying it on each prong of his fork to see where it fitted best.

His parents said to him, "We mean it, if you get any slower, the world will come to an end before you finish!"

But he still did not listen. Instead, he started to day dream while he was chewing each pea. As he was eating his third pea, a strange thing happened. His mum and dad started to move faster and faster. He thought this was a bit strange, but he carried on chewing his peas.

When he got to his fifth pea, he hardly seemed to be able to see his parents at all, just some strange blurry things whizzing around. He could see the clock clearly, but the hands were spinning round faster and faster.



He kept eating his peas, while stranger and stranger things happened around him. First the house started to disappear, crumbling away into dust. He did not mind, because he was still enjoying his peas.

Then a great thick forest began to grow around him. Eventually he finished his peas and looked at what had happened. He could not see any people around him, nor any buildings, nor any sign of his house or parents.

He wondered what had happened and thought about his parents' warnings. He did not seem to have turned to stone, nor had the world ended, but things were definitely not right.

"Maybe," he thought, "I should eat my peas faster next time."

He was starting to feel hungry by now, so he looked around. Some of the nearby trees were giant pea plants.

"They must have grown where I dropped peas on the floor and they rolled away," he said to himself.

He pulled off a few pods and picked out the peas. He ate one, chewing quickly. As he did so, the forest around him started to grow thinner and smaller.

He popped another pea into his mouth (without even bothering to check how wrinkled it was). He chewed quicker. The forest disappeared completely. He ate another, and his house started to reappear around him.

Then, without even stopping to polish them or fit them onto the prongs of his fork, he ate three peas at once. All at once, his house was completely back, and so were his parents. Even the clock seemed to be moving at the right speed.

His parents looked at him, with an empty plate and a mouthful of peas.

"Wow," they said, "you've finished those peas quickly!"

The Diamond Fields

I was explaining to James how most things are made from rocks, metals or oils dug out of the ground, which made me think about diamonds. I have heard that there really are diamond fields in some parts of the world.

Once upon a time, in a country so far away that you will probably never visit it, there was a little boy called Impy. His family was very poor and couldn't afford to send him or his brothers and sisters to school. In fact, they could hardly afford to buy enough food for them all to eat.

"I hear tell there's diamond fields up North," said his mum, "We should move there, then we'd be able to live like kings!"

"So why don't we move, Mum?" asked Impy.

"Ha, little one, they are only stories, made up to give people hope. There's no such thing as diamond fields."

So life went on, with poor Impy getting hungrier and hungrier.

One day, Impy decided that he had had enough. He decided to go out and find these diamond fields. "Farmers grow crops in fields easily enough, so I don't see why they can't grow diamonds!", he thought to himself, but he did not tell his mum where he was going, because he did not think she would understand.

So he filled his bag with as much food as he could fit in and set off. He walked all day, but there was no sign of the diamond fields.

"Well, it is a long way up to the North", he said to himself.

He walked all the next day too, and by the end he was very tired.

"Maybe it was just a story after all," he thought, but he carried on walking.

By the end of the next day, he was about to give up hope, when he felt something hard under his foot. He scabbled around in the soil and was amazed when he found that the hard thing was a fat, shiny diamond.

"So it *is* true!" he shouted out loud. All that week, he searched around in the soil, pulling out diamonds, both large and small. Eventually, he decided that he had

enough diamonds to make him very rich. He carried on North, looking for a town where he could sell his diamonds.

All that day, some wicked men had been watching him from a distance. They were too lazy to look for diamonds themselves, especially when they saw how quickly Impy's nimble fingers could find them. When they realised he had finished searching, they went over to him, stole all his diamonds and ran away.

Impy sat down on the soil and started to cry. What was he to do now? He was running out of food and could no longer remember the way home.

He cried and cried and cried, until a woman appeared from somewhere and came over and tried to comfort him.

"What's wrong, little one?" she asked.

Impy explained what had happened.

"Don't worry, little one," she said in a friendly voice, "If you're good at finding diamonds, you can come and help me and my friends. We have lots of food and we can help you find your way home."

So Impy went to help them. All week he worked hard, finding lots of diamonds, which he gave to the women to look after. The women did not seem to find many themselves – mostly they just sat and watched – but they sang cheerful songs and gave Impy plenty of food.

After a week, in the evening, he said to the women: "I've helped you find lots of diamonds; please can we go and sell them and then can you show me the way home?"

"Of course, little one!" they said. "We'll head to town first thing in the morning."

The next day, as the sun rose, Impy woke up and looked around. There was no sign of the women. He waited all day, and realised he had been tricked again.

This time, he did not cry. He thought instead. "Diamonds are no good," he said, "I can't eat them and they just cause trouble. What I need is a field of corn. Then I can eat, and my family can eat, and maybe I can sell some to pay for me to go to school."

He walked and walked until he left the diamond fields far behind, and eventually found a field full of tall wild corn. It took him a long time to harvest it by hand, but eventually he had enough to sell. He went back to a village he had passed earlier and sold it. He used the money to buy a scythe, which made it much easier to harvest the corn. Soon he had lots to sell.

So Impy became a farmer. No wicked people came to the corn fields, he had plenty to eat, and had money to buy tools to make his work faster and easier. Yet he was so busy that he had almost forgotten about his family.

Several years went by. One day, he was digging in his field when his spade hit a hard, shiny stone. Impy dug it out. It was the biggest diamond he had ever seen. He thought back to when he had left home all those years ago, and knew what he had to do.



He took the diamond to the big city, sold it and used the money to hire some builders. He went to the library, found a big map and worked out how to get back to his village, and off they all went.

His mum and brothers and sisters were so pleased that he was back and that he was doing well.

"But who are these friends of yours?" asked his mum, looking at the builders.

"They've come to build our very own school!" replied Impy.

All the children in the village were so excited about having their very own school, and some of the parents went to help Impy on his farm. Soon the village was prosperous.

One day, Impy's mum asked him, "How did you get all the money for the school and the farm? Did you find a diamond field?"

"Ah, there may indeed be diamond fields, but they're not worth visiting. Let's just leave them as stories, to give people hope."

The Mid Air Pizza

Sam wanted a story about mid-air, but James wanted one about pizza. So I combined the two.

Once upon a fine summer's day in Italy, there was a pizza shop. Sat at the back of the shop on the counter was a big blob of pizza dough called Giuseppe. As he lay there, waiting to be made into pizzas, he looked out of the window and saw all the birds flying through the air.

"Wow," he thought, "that looks amazing! I wish I could fly through mid-air like the birds!"

Later on, the pizza chef came and tore off a bit of Giuseppe to make a pizza (Giuseppe did not mind this; after all, he was a blob of pizza dough so that was his purpose in life).

The pizza chef spun and shaped the bit of dough round and round in his hands. Every now and then, he would toss the dough into the air.

"Wow!" thought Giuseppe, "I really am flying!" But he could still see the birds outside flying free, and realised that he would never get to fly free like them while he was stuck in the shop. So he made a wish.

"I wish, I wish, I wish that I could fly through mid air with the birds!"

Now, there must have been a fairy god pizza listening to Giuseppe, because later on that day, a lady came into the shop and talked to the pizza chef.

"I'm from the newspaper," she said, "and our readers have voted your pizzas as being some of the tastiest in the city. So we're having a competition in the main square, this very afternoon, to see who makes the best. Can you come along and join in?"

The pizza chef was delighted. He grabbed his best pizza sauce, some finest mozzarella, and looked at the blobs of pizza dough at the back. Giuseppe puffed himself up so that he looked extra soft and fluffy. The pizza chef grabbed Giuseppe and headed to the main square.

There was a big crowd of people watching the pizza making competition. The pizza chef tore off a bit of Giuseppe.

"This is my chance!" thought Giuseppe. "Now I'm in the open air with no roof above me, I really will be able to fly with the birds."

So when the pizza chef had spun and shaped the dough for a while and then threw it up into the air, Giuseppe gave a big extra push to make himself go even higher.

The crowd loved it and clapped and cheered. The pizza chef noticed this, and next time, he threw the pizza even higher. Again, Giuseppe gave an extra push and went even higher than before. The crowd laughed and cheered even more.

"Fantastic," thought Giuseppe, "I really am up in mid-air! If only I could fly..."

The pizza chef decided to put all his effort into his last throw. He threw Giuseppe up with all his might; Giuseppe gave his biggest extra push, and up he went, and then, snap! a bird grabbed him in its beak.

"Oooh!" said the crowd in dismay, as the bird flew away over the square with Giuseppe.

"I'm not giving up now," thought the pizza chef to himself. He grabbed some pizza sauce in a bendy plastic ladle and catapulted it towards the pizza.

"Splat!" went the sauce as it hit the pizza, covering it nicely.

The pizza chef grabbed a handful of mozzarella and threw it at the pizza.

"Splodge!" went the mozzarella as it settled into the sauce.



By this time, the pizza was getting too heavy for the bird. It flew low over a barbecue at the edge of the square. The flames roared up and cooked the pizza, but also burnt the ends of the bird's wings. With a squawk it dropped the pizza and flew off.

The pizza rolled along the floor of the square and came to rest in front of two little boys, who had come to watch the competition with their dad.

The crowd burst into the most tremendous applause. The pizza chef was awarded the star prize for the most impressive pizza cooking, and Giuseppe had achieved his dream of flying through mid-air with the birds.

The Worn Out Toothbrush

This is a bath-time story. James chews his toothbrushes so they get worn out quickly, whereas Sam makes his last forever.

Once upon a very clean and sparkly time (with a slightly minty smell), there was a wise old toothbrush. He lived in a cup in the bathroom and had been there for a long time, nearly as long as the last trip to the dentist. He was getting a little bit worn out, but there were still plenty of brushings left in him.

Then one day, a brand new toothbrush appeared in the cup. She was called Ginger. All her bristles were nice and straight (with an interesting pattern like lots of little pyramids).

Unfortunately, she was a bit rude. She looked at the old toothbrush and said, "Ugh, look how scruffy and worn out you are!"

The wise old toothbrush was not offended. He just smiled and said, "You'll be like me one day!"

"Nonsense!" laughed Ginger.

So the weeks went by, until eventually the wise old toothbrush became too old to use. The people were very sad to see him go, but he did not mind, because he had enjoyed a good life and kept lots of teeth sparkly clean.

Ginger was still rude though. "Glad he's gone," she thought, "he made the place look untidy." She did not realise it, but she too was starting to get worn out, with her beautiful bristles becoming untidy and scruffy.

Then, one day, a brand new toothbrush arrived. It was small and neat and tidy and very proud of its bristles (which had an interesting pattern like a crocodile's teeth). The new toothbrush was not rude like Ginger, but had never seen a worn-out toothbrush before. He kept staring at her.

"What?" she asked. "Why are you looking at me like that?"

"Sorry, you just look a bit different to the other toothbrushes in the shop. You're bristles are all curly and messy."

"Nonsense!" she said, "I'm not worn out." She went to look in the bathroom mirror

and was startled to see an old, worn out toothbrush.

"The wise old toothbrush was right," she sighed, "Now I'm just like him."

She explained it all to the new toothbrush. "This is what happens to us, you see. We come in nice and shiny, we put all our effort into keeping people's teeth shiny, then we end up worn out and they have to replace us. Now I feel really bad for being rude to the wise old toothbrush. I wish I could do something to make up for it!"

"Well maybe you can," said the new toothbrush. "Why not go and see if there's anything else we can do apart from clean teeth? That way, we'll have something to look forward to even when we're worn out."

So off Ginger went. She hopped down from the shelf in the bathroom and found her way into the kitchen. She looked around and saw the scrubbing brush up by the sink. She jumped up to ask if she could help.

"Well, you can try," said the scrubbing brush, "but some of the plates are very big, and I'm afraid that you're quite small."

Ginger did try, but after ten minutes she had only cleaned a small part of the plate.

"This is no good!" she sighed.

She carried on round the house, until she found the hall cupboard. Inside, there was a great big broom used to sweep the floors.

"Do you think I could help you?" she asked.

"By all means!" replied the broom, "But there's an awful lot of floor to sweep."

Ginger did try, but before long she was exhausted, and had only cleaned a small corner of the floor.

"This is no good either!" she moaned.

She had almost given up hope, when she saw the hamster cage in the bedroom.

"Maybe the hamster will have some ideas," she thought, and went over for a chat.

"You know," said the hamster, "the people here always struggle to clean between the bars of my cage and to get into the corners. They could do with a small brush like you."

Ginger decided to give it a try. She brushed around the bars for a few minutes. She was just the right size to fit in the gaps, and her curly bristles could reach right round the bars. So she sat there, wedged in between the shiny bars, and waited.

When the people came to look at the hamster, they noticed Ginger and the shiny bars, and realised she was just the brush they needed to help keep the cage clean.



Ginger was overjoyed. When the people had finished giving the cage a good clean, they took her to the bathroom and washed her in the sink.

"So?" said the new toothbrush, "How did it go?"

"Fantastic!" she said. "Us old brushes might not be any good at keeping teeth sparkly, but there'll always be something we can do to help people."

The new toothbrush was pleased. "What a wise old toothbrush!" he thought.

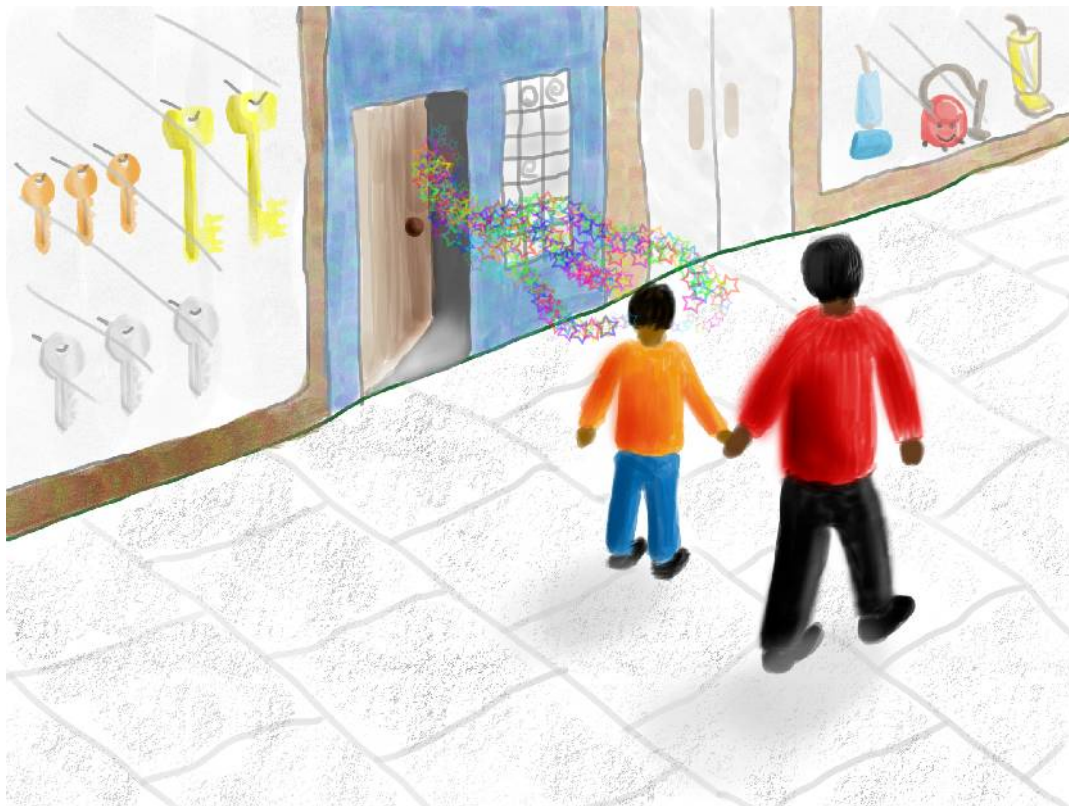
The Strangest Sound

We thought of this one after we'd been trying to talk while breathing in, which makes a very strange sound.

Once upon a particularly dull Saturday, a little boy called Ram was being dragged round the shops with his mum and dad. He hated this kind of shopping. His parents only went into really boring shops that sold socks, pans and make-up. As they wandered along, Ram became more and more bored, until everything around him seemed to fade away and become a blur of noise.

Suddenly, as they were walking past some shops that sold only keys and vacuum cleaners, he heard the strangest sound. It was like "Argly arble wubabley bloo", but there was more, like "bnnnnnnn bnnnnnnn". And there was also some "bluba looba bluba looba", and other sounds that he could not describe.

Ram turned and looked around to see where the noise had come from, but could not find it. So he carried on walking.



The shops became more and more boring – there was one that sold nothing but tea towels, one that sold chairs (and not even spinny-round ones) and one that sold wool (but only grey and brown wool).

Everything was so boring it started to blur again, when suddenly he heard the strange sound once more. It seemed to be a mixture of “oywi boywi soywi” and “warb warb warb.”

This time, his parents had stopped to look at a bookshelf shop, so Ram had time for a good look round. Across the street was a very small shop, just a door and a narrow window. That was where the sound was coming from!

He went over, pushed the door open carefully and peered inside. The sound was coming from the shopkeeper, who was a perfectly ordinary looking lady. She was on the phone to someone. As Ram listened, the noise stopped being strange and he found that he could understand it.

It sounded like, “Btoob btooby toob, ybbi bibby, anyway, jrjr jrjr, there's a customer here, so I'll call you back later.”

She smiled at Ram. “Sorry, I've been on the phone all morning. Not many customers at the moment. People don't normally notice my shop when there's so much noise and bustle in the street. Is there anything you'd like to buy?”

“I don't know,” said Ram, “I don't have any money. I was just wondering what the strange sound was.”

“Oh, that was just me! I always talk like that when there's no one around. Most people don't hear it anyway above the noise of the other shops. Anyway, you don't need any money here. In this shop, you pay for things with promises.”

“Promises?” asked Ram, puzzled. “I don't understand. What sort of things do you sell?”

“Well, we have a special offer on ideas at the moment, and the dreams are very good value. We could even do you a packet of imagination.”

Ram looked even more puzzled. Even though he could now understand the shopkeeper's words, what she was saying did not make any sense.

“Look, it's simple. I can give you a big bag of ideas, but you've got to promise to

use them to make other people happy. If you'd like the dreams, then you've got to promise to go to bed straight away when your parents ask you without messing around. If you want the packet of imagination, you've got to promise that you'll use it to stop being bored on long car journeys."

"Well, OK, I promise all those things!" said Ram.

"Good!" said the lady. She rummaged around under the counter and gave Ram a big carrier bag full of packages, wrapped up in paper so he could not quite see what was inside them.

"I'd better be getting back to my mum and dad, but thanks for the things!"

Ram went out of the shop and found his parents, still looking at the bookshelves.

"Look what I've got from that shop over there!" he shouted at them excitedly. But when they turned to look, his bag had disappeared. He looked at where the shop was, but he could not see it amongst all the coffee bean stores and chopping board shops.

So they all carried on shopping. But now Ram's head was full of ideas for pictures he could draw to brighten up the school noticeboard and new games he could play with the children at school – things that would make people happy.

That night, he did go to bed when his parents asked, without any fuss. While slept, he had wonderful dreams, full of adventures and excitement, that left him refreshed when he woke up the next day.

And thanks to all the imagination, he could always think of a song, a story or a joke to tell, so even on the longer car journeys, he never got bored again.

The Monsters

James just chose this one at bath time, after reading books about beasts all day.

Once upon a time, there was a village that had two monsters. Both were frighteningly ugly, with foul faces and hideous arms and legs. Both could talk only in growls and snarls. However, while one monster was nasty and evil, the other was nice and kind. Sadly, the villagers were so scared of the monsters that they had never bothered to figure this out, they were just terrified of both of them.

The bad monster did all sorts of bad things. It would go into the village and steal eggs and chickens. It would run through the fields of corn and trample the crops. It would let the sheep loose so they got lost on the hillsides. Whenever it saw the villagers, it would roar and growl and chase them.

The villagers lived in fear of all this. They hurried from house to house, always looking over their shoulders. The children did not play outside because they were too scared of the monsters.

The good monster was actually very friendly but did not have any friends, because the villagers would run away whenever they saw it, thinking it was the bad monster. This made the good monster feel sad.

Yet the good monster did many helpful things around the village, just out of the kindness of its heart. It would gather up any sheep it found wandering on the hills and bring them back. It chased away any rogues and ruffians who came to the village to cause trouble. It even kept the wild wolves away.

It *did* take some of the villagers' corn, because that is what it ate, but it made up for it by removing all the little stones from the soil after the farmers had ploughed the fields (the little stones were perfect for filling in the draughty cracks and gaps in the monster's cave).

One day, after the bad monster had trampled the corn, stolen a chicken *and* let the sheep loose all in one day, the villagers decided that they had had enough. They sent a letter to the queen demanding that she sort out the monster problem.



The queen (who was kind, generous and beautiful) agreed to help. She sent all her horses and all her men to capture the monsters and take them to prison.

The villagers were delighted. They no longer hurried from house to house and forgot about looking over their shoulders all the time. Best of all, the children could now spend most of their time playing happily in the streets and fields.

But their happiness did not last for long. Rogues and ruffians started coming to the village; they would steal sheep and damage the farm equipment. Wolves would come at night and eat the chickens. When the farmers ploughed their fields, they found that the soil was very stony, so the crops did not grow very well.

"This is worse than when the monsters were here!" the villagers complained.

One day, a wandering wise woman came to the village. She saw how unhappy everyone was and asked them why.

"Well, there's the rogues and ruffians, the wild wolves and even the soil is too stony. It's worse than when we had the monsters."

"You got rid of your monsters?" asked the wandering wise women in surprise.

"Yes," replied the villagers, "they used to trample the corn, steal the eggs and chickens and set the sheep loose."

"Hmm... that sounds like the bad monster. But what did the good monster do?"

"Good monster?" asked the villagers.

"Yes," said the wandering wise woman, "Normally monsters come in pairs – a good one and a bad one. By all means get rid of the bad one, but you should keep the good one."

The villagers decided to get their good monster back. The chief villager went to see visit the queen, explained the situation, and asked if she could see the two monsters.

"Of course," said the queen, "but how are you going to work out which is the good monster?"

"Easy," smiled the chief villager. "I'm just going to ask!"

So off they went to the first monster, which was locked safely away in the prison.

"Are you the good monster or the bad monster?" asked the chief villager.

The monster growled ferociously and tried to bite them.

"That's probably the bad one," said the queen.

They went to the second monster and asked, "Are you the good monster or the bad monster?"

The monster smiled and made a friendly growl.

"This must be the good one," said the chief villager, and took it back to the village.

At first, the villagers were still a bit scared of the monster (it was, after all, frighteningly ugly). So they decided to see how it would react to different situations.

First, they took it to the chickens. To their relief, the monster did not try to eat the chickens. Instead, it picked up some eggs that had rolled on the floor and gave them to the villagers.

Then they took it to where the sheep were kept. The monster did not try to let the sheep out, but ran off in to the hills. The villagers were puzzled, but very soon the monster returned with a sheep that had been missing for ages.

Finally, they took it to the corn fields. The monster started to cut down some of the corn.

"Quick, stop it!" shouted some of the villagers.

"No, wait," said the chief villager, "let's see what it does with the corn. It's not just trampling it."

The monster took the corn under one arm and went to the newly-ploughed fields. It collected as many little stones as it could carry and took them off to its cave. All the villagers followed, eager to see what it would do next. As before, the monster used the little stones to fill in the cracks in its cave. Then it found a comfy rock and sat down, chewing the corn and watching the villagers.

"See?" said the chief villager. "It just took the corn to eat, and in return, it's cleared some of the stones from the farmer's fields. That will let us grow more corn. And I expect that any rogues, ruffians or wolves that come by will soon be scared away when they see our ferocious monster."

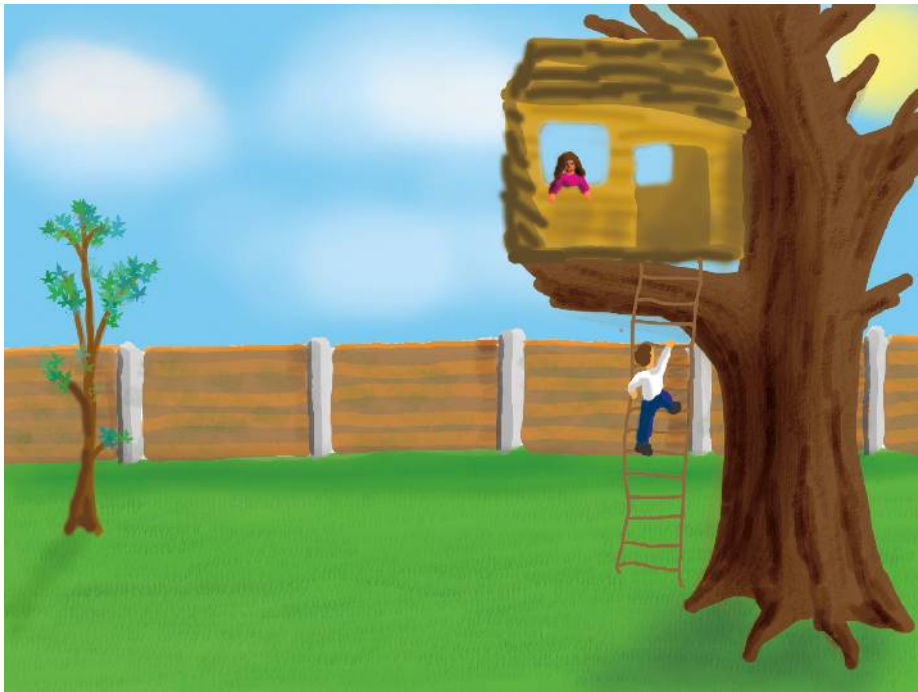
So at long last, the villagers realised that their monster was very good indeed. It carried on doing all its helpful jobs and was very happy to have so many friends in the village.

The Tree House

Sam doesn't always have a reason for things; he said he wanted this one just because he likes trees. But he had been climbing a tree in the garden to make a bird's nest a few days' earlier.

Once upon a bright warm spring day, a young sapling called Tabby was busy growing in a garden. Tabby was quite a happy little tree, apart from one problem. She really wanted to be big and strong enough to have a tree house built in her.

Across the other side of the garden was a great big strong tree called Tindel, who *did* have a tree house built in him. The children who lived at the house had lots of fun climbing up and playing in the tree house during the summer, and a squirrel lived there in the winter.



Tindel was a friendly tree and tried to comfort Tabby.

"Don't worry, every year you'll grow bigger and stronger, and eventually they'll be able to build a tree house in you."

"But they won't want two tree houses," complained Tabby.

"Don't worry, I said! As I get older, my branches will become dry or rotten and it won't be safe to have a tree house in me. They'll move it across to you."

So year after year, Tabby tried her best to grow big and strong. Eventually, she was strong enough to support a tree house. Tabby looked forward excitedly to when the grown-ups in the house would move the tree house across from Tindel to her.

But the time never came. The children were no longer children. They had grown up into grown ups and had left home – to work, to university, to their own houses. Their parents came out one day to look at the tree house.

"We may as well take it down and put it on the bonfire," they said. They too were sad, because they could remember all the fun the children had had playing in it. But it was starting to get old and rotten, so they took it down.

Tabby was very upset. "Now I'll never get a tree house!"

"Don't give up hope," said Tindel, "You never know what the future will hold. Just keep trying your best to grow up big and strong."

The years went by. Tabby grew into a fine, strong tree, with big, sturdy branches. Tindel was still healthy, but some of his branches were starting to become weak.

Then, one bright warm spring day, a little girl came running into the garden. It was the daughter of one of the children who had grown up in the house and had played in the old tree house.

The little girl pointed at Tabby.

"Please mummy, can we have a tree house?"

"We'll ask granddad. It should be OK. We used to have one in that old tree over there when we were young."

The little girl's granddad thought it was a splendid idea. Soon Tabby had her very own tree house, and over the years, more and more grand children came and played in it.

"You were right," said Tabby to Tindel, "all I had to do was to keep doing what I do best – growing up into a big and strong tree."

The Coal Mine

Inspired by a trip to the coal mining museum.

One upon a deep, dark time, at the bottom of a coal mine, there was a little truck on wheels that was used to move coal around the mine. He travelled along a pair of rails, like a small train track. He was called Rhodri.

Rhodri had two good friends – a miner's head lamp called Catrin and a lump of coal called Boris.

Now the three had been friends for many years, but were becoming fed up with life down the mine. Rhodri was bored with running up and down the same old tracks day after day and his wheels were starting to ache. He longed for a change of scenery and a quiet life.

Catrin the lamp was fed up with being switched on and off by the miners. She wished she had a job where she got to decide for herself when to light up and when to stay dark.

As for Boris, he was scared of the dark. He just wanted to live somewhere it wasn't dark all the time. "I've spent millions years buried in the dark," he said, "I deserve some light. And I don't want to be shoved on the fire like the other bits of coal!"

So one day, they decided it was time to leave the mine. Boris the coal jumped into Rhodri the truck, while Catrin the lamp held onto the front to act as look-out, and off they went.

They rolled along the track for a while.

"This is no good," said Rhodri, "these are the tracks I always go along. They don't lead out of the mine."

So they decided to go off the tracks and roll along the less used, more secret tunnels.

"This is more like it!" said Catrin, peering ahead into the gloom. But Rhodri was finding it hard going with his tired old wheels.

"I'm not sure this is a good idea," said Boris the coal. "We've been gone a long time now, what if Catrin's batteries go flat?"

Just then, they rounded a bend in the tunnel and saw a glimmer of light at the end.

"Look!" shouted Catrin. "I think I can see daylight up ahead!"

Sure enough, as they got closer, the light grew brighter and brighter, until they came to an opening in the side of the hill that the coal mine was dug into.

"What a fantastic view!" said Boris, who had never been outside the mine before.

"But what do we do now we're out?" asked Rhodri. "We can't just sit here in the mouth of a cave forever."

Suddenly, some loose stones underneath Rhodri's wheels slipped and gave way. The three friends started to roll down the hill. They went faster and faster.

"Help!" shouted Catrin, flashing her light on and off.

"Stop!" shouted Boris, who was finding this scarier than being in the dark.

"Whoa!" shouted Rhodri, whose wheels squealed and sparked on the rocks.

They went hurtling down until they reached the village, careered into Mrs Evans' garden, and crashed to a halt against her garden wall.

Mrs Evans came out to see what all the noise was.

"Bobol Bach!" she said (which probably means she was very surprised). "Where on earth have you come from?"

The friends did not reply (they never spoke when humans were around), but somehow managed to look friendly and helpful.

"Well," said Mrs Evans, "I could certainly find something useful to do with you."

She filled Rhodri up with soil and pretty flowers and put him at the edge of her garden overlooking the road. Rhodri was delighted – not only could he watch the world going by, but his poor wheels would never have to struggle along hard rails again.

She hung Catrin just outside the front door to be a night light.

“Make sure you only light up for me and my friends,” Mrs Evans told her.

Catrin was very pleased. Finally she could decide for herself when to turn on and off and still do a useful job.

As for Boris the coal, well, it so happened that Mrs Evans' husband used to be a coal miner but had died some time ago. Mrs Evans put Boris in a lovely position in the middle of her rockery.

“You can sit there and remind me of my husband, who loved working in the coal mine.”

So Boris was happy too, sitting there in the sunshine, and if ever he got scared of the dark at night time, he could always ask Catrin to switch on for a moment.

And so they all lived happily ever after.



The Pylon

We were driving on holiday when Sam saw a pylon in a field.

Once upon a time, there was a tall pylon that lived in a field. She was called Petra and she loved listening to things (being a pylon, there wasn't much else to do, standing there in the field all day holding up the wires). She loved listening to the birds in spring, to the children playing in the field in summer, to the wind in autumn and to the gentle fall of snowflakes in winter.

Unfortunately, the wires that Petra had to hold up were *very* annoying. They were noisy and badly behaved. They would chatter and talk when Petra was trying to listen. They would howl and flap about in the wind. In winter, when icicles grew on the wires, they would shake them off so that they fell to the ground with a great crash.

"Why, oh why, oh why," moaned Petra, "is my only companion in all these miles of countryside *so* annoying?"

Then one day, a giant came wandering through the field carrying a guitar.

"Hello there!" called Petra. "What's a giant like you doing in a field like this?"

"I'm trying to find some strings for my guitar. It's tricky – none of the guitar shops I've been to have big enough strings for a giant's guitar."

Petra thought for a moment. A naughty idea entered her mind.

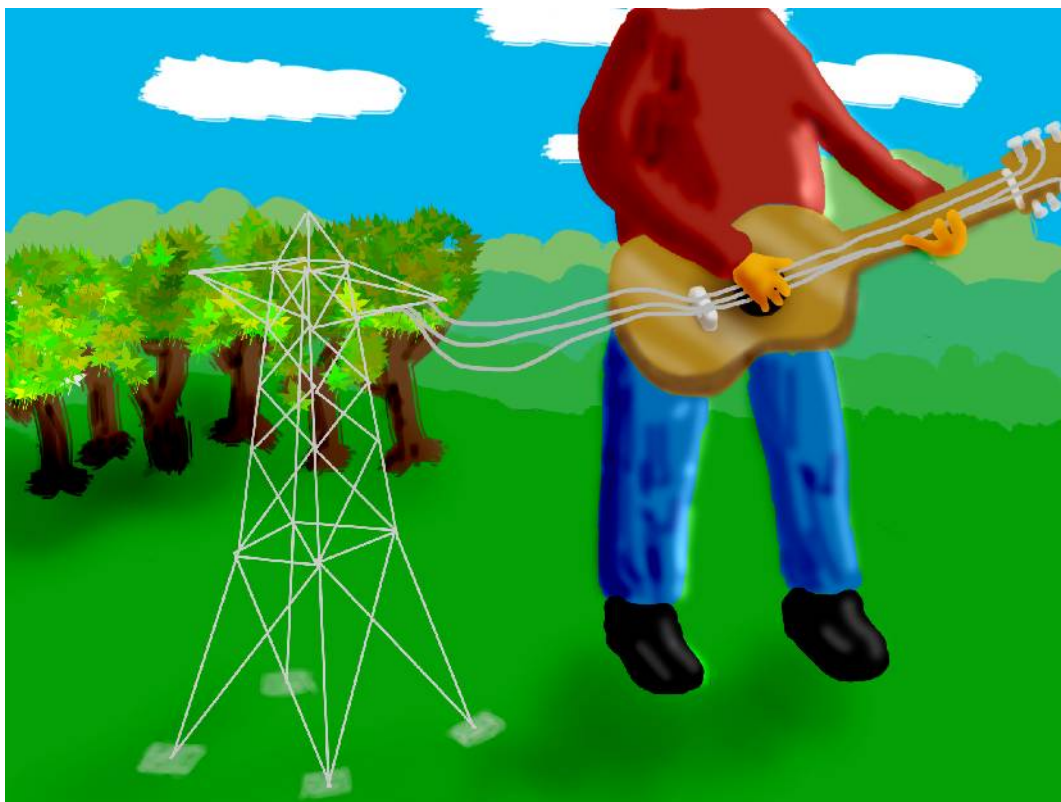
"Well, you could take these wires I'm holding up. They're probably the right size."

"What?" exclaimed the wires, startled. "No, you can't take me!"

"Hey, come on!" said the giant, "it'll be wild. We can do gigs, go to concerts. Adventure, excitement and really wild things!"

"Well, maybe," said the wires, thinking a bit more. "It might be better than sitting here in this field."

So the giant took the wires, fitted them to his guitar, and off he went.



Petra heaved a big sigh of relief. She settled back and listen to the quiet little sounds – the birds twittering in their nests, the butterflies fluttering around the flowers, the lambs bleating in the nearby fields.

Autumn came, and Petra listened to the wind rustling the trees. Winter came, and Petra could hear each and every snowflakes tumbling to the ground.

But then the next year rolled round and Petra noticed something strange. It was too quiet. Nice though the little sounds of nature were, she missed talking to the wires. She missed their silly noises and chatter. She felt a little bit lonely.

That summer, the farmer had organised a big music festival in the field. Lots of bands and musicians came to play their songs. To Petra's delight, the giant came to play his guitar. His music was fantastic, and after he had finished playing, Petra called over to the wires on his guitar.

“Hey, how's it going?” she asked.

The wires looked a little sad. “Well, you know, it's been great living the rock and roll

lifestyle, seeing the world, meeting great musicians and everything. But all the loud music and the noise gets to you after a while. I just wish I could come back to the field and enjoy the silence.”

Petra was delighted to hear this. She asked the giant if he would mind stringing the wires back onto her.

“Not at all,” he said. “Now we’re famous, lots of people have started making giant-sized guitar strings. I don’t have to go taking them down from pylons any more.”

Soon life returned to how it used to be. Except, there were a few changes. The wires had learned how to make beautiful music. They twanged tunefully in the spring in harmony with the bird song. They let the wind blow through them mournfully in the strong autumn gales. In winter, they would shake the icicles in a crisp, shimmering melody.

Petra and the wires became firm friends. The farmer continued having music festivals every year – lots of bands played wonderful music, but the highlight of the show was a quiet half hour, right at the end, when everyone would stop to listen to the beautiful sounds of nature.

Glossary of words that James and Sam did not know

Taken from "Chambers Children's Colour Dictionary", which we found at James and Sam's grandma's house. Their mum used this dictionary when she was little.

Apprentice:	<i>one who is learning a trade (a craft or job).</i>
Career:	<i>move or run rapidly and wildly.</i>
Cobbled:	<i>repaired, patched roughly or hurriedly.</i>
Contentment:	<i>happiness, satisfaction.</i>
Curator:	<i>a person who is in charge of a museum.</i>
Destined:	<i>bound (for a place); intended (as if by fate). Fate: what the future holds.</i>
Dismay:	<i>surprise and upset.</i>
Fertilizer:	<i>a substance (e.g. manure, chemicals) for making fields more fruitful, producing much.</i>
Hypermarket:	<i>a very large supermarket.</i>
Mannequin:	<i>a life-size dummy of the human body, used in the making or displaying of clothes (the meaning in the printed dictionary was out-of-date, so I had to look on-line for this one).</i>
Melody:	<i>a tune, sweet music.</i>
Mournful:	<i>sad.</i>
Reassuringly:	<i>taking away a person's doubts or fears.</i>
Rockery:	<i>a collection of stones amongst which small plants are grown.</i>
Rogue:	<i>a dishonest person; a mischievous person, a rascal.</i>
Ruffian:	<i>a rough, brutal person.</i>
Sapling:	<i>a young tree.</i>
Scuffling:	<i>a confused fight</i>
Shimmering:	<i>shining with a quivering or unsteady light.</i>
Snarl:	<i>to growl, showing the teeth.</i>
Springboard:	<i>a springy board from which swimmers may dive.</i>
Tender:	<i>soft, not hard or tough.</i>
Turbulence:	<i>in the atmosphere, movement of air currents, especially when affecting the flight of aircraft.</i>

Other people worked hard to make those dictionaries, so I need to mention them here to say thank you:

"Chambers Children's Colour Dictionary", © W & R Chambers Ltd, 1981.

"Chambers 21st Century Dictionary" (on-line), © Chambers Publishers Ltd 2010.

