

PETER AND THE  
PLASTIC  
SNOWMEN  
TWO

*Roger Hartopp*

*To the best boys in my life along with the best  
mother and wife*

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# PETER AND THE PLASTIC SNOWMEN TWO

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## 1. THE SECRET REVEALED

It was two nights ago that seven-year old Peter Peddington had had the most fantastic adventure of his life.

It was in the middle of a cold, snowy night, just after the New Year, that he got up and went outside to look again at the snowman that his dad had made the morning before, and then discovered, very much to his surprise, that it was now made of plastic. This particular surprise was nothing, however, when he also discovered that it was alive and it talked. It then took him on a small series of adventures, first to his very surprised Auntie Anne by making a big jump into the sky. It took him to a fantastic cloud where there was the biggest playground ever. There were also other plastic snowmen, some important plastic snowmen, and lots of other children.

Then the next thing he knew was waking up in his bed and back in just his pyjamas. His winter coat, gloves, scarf and boots had been put back in exactly the same place where he put them on. The snowman – that is, his Plastic Snowman – had also returned to the exact same place in the garden where he had originally been built.

Now all Peter could do was to go outside into the garden where it was still cold, where there was still plenty of snow on the ground, and where his snowman was still standing, still made of snow. It would only turn to plastic, so he was told by the snowman, if there was nobody else around.

But he really believed that what happened really happened. The problem was he could not prove it.

Mummy and Daddy, of course, just took his story as typical childish fantasy. Peter believed what he saw and yet the evidence told him the opposite. He had recently spoken to his Auntie Anne, but she did not say anything about that night

despite the fact that he was there at her house, and that he had even had a drink and a piece of chocolate cake while she was trying call his parents and his Auntie Jane. As far as she was concerned, her evening was spent just watching TV. He had spoken to Auntie Jane too, but she happily chatted to him without expressing any surprise or giving any kind of hint that she had received any kind of phone call from Auntie Anne when she had tried to contact her. He had even gone out the following night, convinced that there was absolutely nobody around, and at about the same time as the previous night of his adventure, to see if his snowman would turn to plastic and talk to him. It didn't, and it wouldn't.

But there had been *one* clue – just one – that perhaps he could bring his snowman back to life. It was something he'd heard on the fantastic cloud, something that the Most Important Plastic Snowman – a very official but not-so-friendly snowman - asked his Plastic Snowman. Peter had then asked him: "*And what does activated the standard way mean?*" to which the Plastic Snowman had answered, "*It means to start something working in the correct way.*" But what was that correct way?

The weather forecast had predicted the cold weather and snow would remain for some time, although a new forecast today said that warmer weather was expected by the Friday. It was now Sunday. Peter knew that if he was to be able to find a way of 'activating' his snowman, then it would have to be soon.

\*

"What are you looking so sad about, Peter?" asked Daddy, who had just joined him outside in the garden. He playfully threw a snowball at him, hitting his back, and expecting one to be thrown back at him, which didn't come.

Peter thought quickly. "Um, it's because... Christmas is over and you're going back to work tomorrow," he said sadly.

“Of course, but you’re not back at school until Wednesday,” smiled his father, “so at least you’ve still got plenty of time to have some fun. Look, tell you what, I’ll build another snowman. How about that?”

“Okay.”

Peter didn’t really care about another snowman. He just stared at the one that he knew had taken him into the sky.

As before, Daddy made the new snowman from a series of large snowballs that were piled on top of each other, and then filling in the gaps with snow and rounding out the body. To make it more interesting, he built it at the other side of the garden, and made it taller and thinner.

After an hour, the job was finished. “There! What do you think?”

Even Peter had to raise a smile at this snowman. “It’s great Daddy. It’s not as good as the first one, but better than everyone else’s. You are the best snowman-maker ever!”

“Thank you!” grinned Daddy. “At least you’ve cheered up a bit!”

“I’ll go in and ask Mummy for some more bits to make his face and body,” said Peter gleefully.

“Don’t know if she’ll be happy about using more buttons and another scarf and hat,” said Daddy, “but see what you can do, okay. It’ll help if you smile and show Mummy that you’re now in a good mood.”

\*

Ten minutes later Peter returned with some purple cardigan buttons and a large pink hat. He’d also brought a striped orange tie, one that Daddy often wore at work.

“I suppose Mummy thinks that’s funny,” he said, in a half-amused half-annoyed kind of way.

Peter arranged the buttons into a face similar to the Plastic Snowman's face, the result being that it had tiny eyes and a mouth shape limited to a simple grin. He placed the hat on top as Daddy tied the tie around the neck.

"Shall I get the camera out-" began Daddy, before stopping himself. "Oh, that reminds me Peter, I haven't shown you the pictures from the other day. I even took a little video outside. Want to come and look?"

"Okay," said Peter brightly, "but I didn't know you'd taken a video too."

"It's not much," said Daddy, "but it's quite nice. I only played it back on the camera last night. I'll put it onto the laptop so you can see them all."

\*

After they had removed their thick winter clothes, Mummy prepared them both a hot drink as Daddy retrieved both his camera and laptop and set it up on the kitchen table.

Peter sat at the table, and for some reason that he wasn't sure about, began to feel a sense of excitement. He felt certain he knew what to expect, but...

Daddy connected the camera to the laptop and set everything up ready for a presentation. "Okay, here we go."

First up were the photographs. There were ten in total, with different poses made by Peter next to the Plastic Snowman.

Then came the video. The picture wobbled at first as Daddy was still getting into a comfortable position, but then held the camera steady to show Peter setting himself up for photographs. Snow was falling quite heavily, as it had done so most of that day. Then the video showed Peter scratching his nose as some particularly large snowflakes landed there. After that the film stopped.



“There you go Peter,” said Daddy brightly. “We’ll go out again in a bit and I’ll take some more photos of the new snowman. Peter?”

“Oh, er, sorry, Daddy,” said Peter, who had suddenly become deep in thought.

He wondered. Had he just seen how to activate the Plastic Snowman?

“Can I see the video again Daddy?”

And Peter saw the video ten times. He was mentally taking as many notes as he could, such as to where he was standing, how he scratched his nose, how long for, and so on. For a small boy of seven years old, there was a surprising amount of wise thinking going through this young mind.

\*

For the third night in a row – around 11pm - Peter got up from his bed, crept downstairs and put on his winter clothes. He hadn’t slept at all as a deep sense of excitement had overwhelmed him. Mummy and Daddy had gone to bed early as they were both due back at work after the long Christmas and New Year holiday, and until Peter was due back at school, he would be staying with Grandma from tomorrow. She only lived a very short distance away so Mummy would be dropping him off and picking him up later.

Like that night his Plastic Snowman had come to life, the sky was cloudless and full of stars. The moon was large and bright, but a small part of it was now in shadow. On that fateful night it had been a full moon. It was now quite frosty and certainly the coldest night of the winter so far.

Peter slowly walked up to his Plastic Snowman. It was still dressed in its old brown cloth cap and green scarf. It still had two big black buttons for the eyes, a carrot for the nose, ten

little red buttons for the mouth, and three big red buttons that were stuck to the tummy for his coat.

He touched it. It was, as he expected, still made of snow.

He took a deep breath, shaking not through cold but with that strong sense of excitement. In the video he was standing in front of the snowman – he would now do the same. He was even wearing exactly the same winter clothes. The only differences were these: it was not daytime, it was not snowing, and he was aware of what he was about to do. If this didn't work, he thought, then he didn't know what else to do.

He stood in front of the snowman.

He rubbed his nose five times...

*"Hello again Peter."*

Peter quickly turned around to see the smiling face of his Plastic Snowman. "PLASTIC SNOWMAN! YOU'RE BACK!"

The Plastic Snowman grabbed him, picked him up from his feet and hugged him in his tight, warm, plastic arms. Peter felt the aura of warmth completely envelop his body and cut out the surrounding frosty air. He was so happy warm tears were now flowing down his cheeks.

"Well, I did not expect to be here or to see you again!" said the Plastic Snowman happily. "It's so wonderful to be given another go!"

"What about me?" said another low voice.

This particular voice was clearly filled with surprise and bewilderment.

The ten little red buttons that made up the Plastic Snowman's mouth had suddenly arranged themselves into an 'o' shape.

He then put Peter back on the ground.

Peter turned around.

The second snowman that Daddy had built earlier that day had also come to life.

## 2. THE SECOND PLASTIC SNOWMAN

“What about you?” said the Plastic Snowman. “Oh yes. This is Peter. He’s *my* friend.”

The six small purple buttons that made up the Tall Thin Plastic Snowman’s mouth moved up and down, creating a wavy line to show that he was talking. “*Your* friend? Hey now wait a moment! You’ve had your turn! He’s my friend now!”

“I’m sorry, but Peter activated *me*.”

“Hang on, he activated me too!” the Tall Thin Plastic Snowman shot back.

“But he didn’t mean to do that,” said the Plastic Snowman calmly. “You just happened to be there.”

Peter looked at the two snowmen in astonishment as both focused their attentions on each other and not on him.

“Um, can’t I be both your friends?” he asked timidly.

“Plastic snowmen are supposed to have only *one* friend,” said the Tall Thin Plastic Snowman gently. “They get one go and then they disappear.”

“What do you mean, they disappear?” Peter asked worryingly.

“It means,” said the Plastic Snowman, “that we only exist for the one night for one friend, after which... that’s it.”

*“What? You die?”* Peter was getting scared.

*“No no, you’ve just simply had your turn,”* said the Tall Thin Plastic Snowman in a reassuring voice to Peter. *“You then simply get sent to another area like marketing, maintenance, cleaning out, or at worst... Accounts. And I’m not waiting for such a long time to get my turn again. You’re now my friend. Aren’t you, Peter?”* he added meekly.

*“Er...”* said Peter. *“I... I don’t know. The Plastic Snowman is my friend... but... you can be my friend too!”*

*“That is not possible,”* said the Plastic Snowman solemnly. *“You can only have one of us as a friend. Even you were supposed to have only the one chance of being a friend to us snowmen. Which leads me to ask you, how did you know how to reactivate me?”*

*“I – I guessed after watching a video of myself, I saw that I rubbed my nose a few times,”* said Peter shakily.

Both snowmen sighed. *“Early twenty-first century modern technology strikes again. The Most Important Plastic Snowman needs to be informed about this,”* said the Tall Thin Plastic Snowman.

*“You mean the Official Very Important Plastic Snowman,”* corrected the Plastic Snowman.

The Tall Thin Plastic Snowman did not appear to hear what the Plastic Snowman had just said, or had chosen to ignore him, and continued speaking. *“Last time it was tablets. And we’re not talking about taking them for tummy upsets. Before that it was Blackberries and Apples. The devices, not fruit! And then there’s Wii, and we’re not talking about going to the toilet! These humans are useless when it comes to thinking up new names for their gadgets. Clearly the Bureaucratic Snowmen are not doing their jobs properly. I always tell them they should be sent to Atoz!”*

“Atoz?” said Peter suddenly. “That was mentioned when I was on the cloud! Where’s that? And what’s a Bureaucratic Snowman? What’s marketing? What’s Accounts? And what’s maintenance?”

“That’s not important at the moment, Peter,” said the Plastic Snowman quickly, and then adding, “I’d better inform the Official Very Important Plastic Snowman.”

“Now wait a minute!” said the Tall Thin Plastic Snowman, who sounded rather annoyed. “It’s *my* life today! *My* turn! You had your chance this winter! *I* should be going to see him!”

“But Peter chose to activate *me*, not you!” said the Plastic Snowman firmly. “He goes with *me* to the cloud.”

“*He shouldn’t have activated anyone!*” said the Tall Thin Plastic Snowman, now sounding very angry. “You said this yourself!”

“But he did. And it wasn’t meant to be you. I’m sorry.”

“NOOO!”

And suddenly the Tall Thin Plastic Snowman started to run. His legs were slightly shorter than the Plastic Snowman’s, but he was certainly no slower.

“You can’t do that!” shouted the Plastic Snowman.

“Can’t I? See me try!” the Tall Thin Plastic Snowman shouted back.

He hopped. And then skipped. And then he jumped high, high into the air, going upwards and onwards.

“I hope for his sake he doesn’t meet the Most Important Plastic Snowman,” said the Plastic Snowman darkly. “Overly bureaucratic lump of ice, that’s all he really is.”

And all through what was happening, Peter could only watch. He didn’t know what else to say.

But what he did notice was that where the Tall Thin Plastic Snowman had stood, there was a green circular patch.

This time, he knew he had not been dreaming.

### 3. RETURN TO THE CLOUD

“I suppose we had better go up to the cloud,” said the Plastic Snowman. “I’m obliged to report all this to the Official Very Important Plastic Snowman.”

Peter wanted to ask if they could jump too, but he knew that Plastic Snowmen were not allowed to do this except when taking the children home. His Plastic Snowman had problems with this before, particularly with the Most Important Plastic Snowman. This snowman had tried to get him into trouble before the boss, the head, or whatever you wanted to call him, or as Peter knew him, the Official Very Important Plastic Snowman. The correct way to travel was a far less exciting method: this involved clicking the fingers and suddenly re-appearing in another place.

“Hold my hand, Peter.”

The Plastic Snowman duly clicked his fingers, and the next thing Peter knew was suddenly falling several meters into what seemed like a great big fluffy white bath sponge which also acted like a trampoline, and he suddenly found himself going up again after landing. After landing and bouncing up and down two more times, he finally got to his feet. He knew where he was – the cloud was a fun place.

He looked around. To his surprise, there was no sign of the giant funfair, other children or other plastic snowmen of various shapes and sizes.

Even the Plastic Snowman seemed surprised. 'Somehow it looks like we've ended up on the wrong side of the cloud.'

Then Peter shouted, "Look over there!"

A black, bowler-hatted snowman was approaching them. It looked very similar to Peter's snowman, except that it was taller and had slightly longer legs. It was also wearing a large, black tie, and the eyes, nose and mouth were made up of several lumps of very black coal. Peter recognized it as the very official Most Important Plastic Snowman he met two nights ago, particularly as it was holding the very same black clipboard. Its expression was one of seriousness: not too different to the expression it had back then. It wasn't Peter's favorite snowman by a long way.

The Plastic Snowman spoke first. "Why have we appeared on this part of the cloud?" he asked politely, "and where's the Official Very Important Plastic Snowman?"

"Hello Petal," said the Most Important Plastic Snowman to Peter.

"My name's Peter, not Petal," said Peter sternly.

"My apologies. Anyway, you are going to the playground."

"With my Plastic Snowman?"

"No Petrol. Your Plastic Snowman has to appear before a disciplinary commission to ascertain –"

"What do you mean?" interrupted Peter. "You're using a lot of big words! I'm only a little boy! And I'm *Peter*!" Peter felt the Most Important Plastic Snowman was saying his name wrong deliberately.

The Plastic Snowman then spoke quietly to Peter. "It means that I am going to have to stand in front of a group of other snowmen. They're known as the Council of Cloudland Snowmen, and I have to explain why I did a certain thing, and if they decide that it is a very bad thing I've done, I'll get a punishment for it."

He then turned to the Most Important Plastic Snowman: "Who has told you to do this?" he said loudly and firmly. "Why hasn't the Official Very Important Plastic Snowman come to see me? Where's the official notice?"

"Here, attached to my clipboard," said the Most Important Plastic Snowman sniffily. He unclipped it and handed it to the Plastic Snowman.

He looked hard at it. "Well, it certainly looks like his signature."

"*But you haven't done anything!*" shouted Peter, "all you did was –"

"Peter, at this time please don't say anything that might be used against me while I try to argue about whatever it is. Anyway, the Official Very Important Plastic Snowman is a good snowman, so it must be serious if he has decided this. I'm sure he'll ask you about the things that happened and you can tell them him what happened. Assuming it *is* about something you saw. By the way, what have I supposed to have done?"

"Not for me to say," said the Most Important Plastic Snowman.

If Peter was scared, he wasn't showing it now. "Mr. Most Important Plastic Snowman," he said firmly. "If my Plastic Snowman is going to stand in front of this group of Very High - thingy Plastic Snowmen, I want to be with him. I was there, I know what he did!"



‘Only on the night you were with me,’ said the Plastic Snowman quietly. “We still don’t know for sure.”

Suddenly two more snowmen appeared from nothing to stand on either side of the Most Important Plastic Snowman. This time, these Plastic Snowmen were very broad with small heads, and had no feet. Their arms were very fat. They then started hopping to the Plastic Snowman to stand either side of him. Peter recognized them as the same snowmen that had stood either side of the Most Important Plastic Snowman when they first met. They looked to him like the snowman equivalent of bodyguards or security men.

“Petter, you will now go and join the other children. We will give you another Plastic Snowman to be with,” said the Most Important Plastic Snowman, his voice showing no sign of feeling any sympathy or pity for the little boy.

“I don’t want to be with another Plastic Snowman, and you know my name’s not Petter, IT’S PETER!” shouted Peter angrily. “Have you got that?”

“It is not up to you,” said the Most Important Plastic Snowman drily.

He suddenly clicked his fingers, and disappeared, along with the Plastic Snowman and his two snowman escorts.

All Peter could now see was the cloud he was standing on, going into the distance either side of where his feet were. He suddenly felt very alone as he looked around.

“*Plastic Snowman?*” he whimpered in hope.

“Yes?”

The voice came from just a few meters away. But it was not the familiar reassuring deep voice. It was a voice that was high-pitched and lacked authority.

A Plastic Snowman who, like the others, had simply just appeared, came bouncing up to Peter. It was half the size of his

snowman, had two small branches for arms, a face made up of small stones and a celeriac – the root vegetable of a celery stick – for a nose. And being a big round vegetable, the nose was massively out of proportion to the rest of its facial features.

“Shall we go and play?” it said simply. “Hold my branchy hand and I’ll take you to the playground.”

“No,” said Peter firmly. “I want to go to *my* Plastic Snowman.”

“But I am now your Plastic Snowman,” said the fat-nosed Plastic Snowman sadly. “Please, let me be your friend. It’s my turn up here and I’ve been waiting for a friend to play with and take to the playground.”

Peter suddenly felt a little sorry for this sad-looking snowman. “Who built you?” he asked sympathetically.

“I was built two days ago,” it said sadly, “and I only just made it to the cloud. I wasn’t allowed to take my friend Narinder back to India because I was told I was just too small and weak to do the jump back. They didn’t have much snow in that part of India but she lovingly built me from what snow she had.”

Then Peter had an idea. “Plastic Snowman... India. That’s a nice name. Can I call you India? Yes, you can be my friend India. Listen. I want you to take me to where my Plastic Snowman is now.”

“But you can’t have more than one snowman friend,” said India fearfully.

Peter thought quickly. “So... if you are my friend, then... he is not my friend anymore,” he said. “But... he was my friend and I still like him very much. India, I want to see him. Please. Can you help me?”

India stared at Peter. He was just a simply-made snowman, and he didn’t really have any thoughts in the ways of views

and opinions. But now this boy told him that he was *his* friend, and not that other snowman who is now going to a place where they decide what to do with naughty snowmen, so was he breaking any rules?

“OK,” he said meekly. “Now, listen to me carefully. I want you to –”

“Hold your hand?”

“Oooh. How did you know that?”

“I... did it before two days ago.”

“Oh... right, Okay. So, hold my hand, Patter.”

“It’s Peter. Please don’t be like that other stupid snowman.”

“Ah, well, the Most Important Plastic Snowman told me –”

“Yes, *that* stupid snowman. Can we go?”

The small pebbles that made up India’s mouth arranged themselves into a smile. He then put up the branch that made up his right arm. Peter held it and shut his eyes.

Next moment, they reappeared outside what looked like an extremely large, marquee-sized igloo.

#### 4. THE COURTROOM

“Is this where my snowman is?” asked Peter uncertainly.

“Yes Peter,” said India, who had dropped his ‘need-to-be-loved’ smile and composure, and now looked very uncomfortable in their new surroundings. “But you shouldn’t go inside. Children don’t go inside these places. Even we snowmen aren’t supposed to go in there.”

“Why not?”

“Because... we shouldn’t.”

Peter began to look a little annoyed. “I want to go in.”

“You can’t!” said India anxiously. “We can’t!”

“*Why not?*” said Peter once again, losing patience. “India. You are now... *my* snowman. So please tell me what is in that igloo!”

India was Peter’s snowman! That was good enough for him.

“Because there are some Council of Cloudland Snowmen inside who are deciding what to do about... your old Plastic Snowman.”

“Thank you,” said Peter firmly, and immediately walked into the igloo.

“Wait!” shouted India, and went after him.

\*

Peter walked down a small tunnel that was dazzling inside. The snow was bright and gleaming, providing as much light as a normal day on the ground would give.

After ten metres, the tunnel went left and he suddenly found himself behind a large group of snowmen.

Between those snowmen that were standing with their backs to him, Peter could see that those facing him at the other side of the igloo were all very well-made. They all had well-

proportioned heads, bodies, arms and feet, just like his Plastic Snowman. But they all had faces made up of pieces of black coal and all were wearing ties. He could also make out two of them that were wearing bowler hats, just like the Most Important Plastic Snowman.

And one of them was in the middle of speaking. *"...can not prove that there was another snowman in the same area where you were. You were warned the first time you did an unauthorized jump. Now you must face the consequences of your actions."*

"I will say this again. You know who to bring here. He will tell you what really happened," said a familiar deep voice.

Peter walked up until he was just about touching the snowmen that were in front of him.

He could now see more of what was happening. And he could now see his Plastic Snowman.

"And we will repeat what we've already told you," said the other voice. "He is a land child. He is not of our society. He is also too young to have such responsibility of deciding a snowman's fate. He has no authority here in our cloud."

Peter could now see where the other voice was coming from. He felt sure that, despite its similar appearance to many other snowmen in the igloo, it was the Very Important Plastic Snowman.

"Well, I find Peter a very intelligent little boy," said the Plastic Snowman. "Even more so when he worked out how to activate me."

"You must have told him!" said another Plastic Snowman. "You know this is forbidden and must be punished by our strongest laws!"

*Punished?* thought Peter. *What would they do to him?*

"I most certainly did not," said the Plastic Snowman firmly. "The world below is moving forward. We are not. Their

ability to find out more about the world, how it works, the technology they are developing and have now developed is putting us in increasing danger of being discovered. It will not be long before the world below finds out who we are and what we do!"

"*Poppycock!* Our secrecy defences are sound and impregnable, and always will be! We will always be one step ahead from those curiosities below!" said the Most Important Plastic Snowman angrily, again using vocabulary that Peter had difficulty understanding.

"And I will ask you again," said the Plastic Snowman calmly. "Where is the Official Very Important Plastic Snowman? Why is he not present at my trial?"

"He is not available at this time!" shouted the Most Important Plastic Snowman. "And in his absence, his authority has been passed onto me. That is all you need to know!"

"And I have heard enough," it added. "The decision has been made and you have been found guilty. You are to be sent to Atoz. There you will work for the Monsters in maintaining our cloudland until you melt away. Your ability to jump or simultaneously move between places will be taken away from you... not that it's easy to do so from there. But you will continue to have the ability of movement and speech, but your form will revert to snow."

"As *you* so wish," said the Plastic Snowman arrogantly.

"*Petee!*" whispered India, who was now standing right next to Peter. "*We have to go or I will be in serious trouble!*"

"Why? Will they send you to Atoz if they catch us here?" said Peter shakily.

If you could actually see a snowman freeze in fear, which when you think about it should be impossible, then India did it.

“May your snow soul help us all for now and in the future, when I trust you will be a better snowman. Goodbye.”

“NOOO!” Suddenly every snowman in the igloo turned around.

*“A child!”*

*“What is he doing here?”*

*“Send the snowman concerned to Atoz!”*

And then a gap emerged between the snowmen. Peter ran through it and headed straight for the Plastic Snowman.

Then at that moment, a bright light began to shine on the Plastic Snowman.

Peter jumped and grabbed him.

And the next thing he knew was that they were inside what looked like a cave.

\*

But back in the igloo, there was mass pandemonium. Snowmen were uncharacteristically shouting at each other, particularly at those who were in the bowler hats. But they were all quickly silenced by the sudden appearance of the Tall Thin Plastic Snowman, with its purple cardigan buttons, a large pink hat, and wearing a striped orange tie around its neck.

*“That’s not supposed to happen!”* it said in a high-pitched voice. *“I have sent a child down to Atoz!”*

“What do you mean?” said the Most Important Plastic Snowman, sounding uncharacteristically surprised.

*“Oh, Most Important Plastic Snowman, It was me who did the run and jump! It wasn’t that snowman!”*

The Most Important Plastic Snowman looked furious at this news. There were murmurings around the igloo and among the Council of Cloudland Snowmen, some of them shouting at the Most Important Plastic Snowman. The Tall Thin

Plastic Snowman was clearly distressed. *"I am responsible for Peter! I have broken a sacred law never to harm a child!"*

"You... may not have harmed him," said the Most Important Plastic Snowman, looking shaken at how the snowmen had reacted. "But I am going to hold you responsible for..." – he said this next bit with a sense of reluctance – "...bringing him back. Along with the snowman that the boy has christened... India."

And then India appeared, not because he wanted to, but the other snowmen he had hidden behind suddenly stepped to one side. He slowly traipsed towards the Tall Thin Plastic Snowman, looking completely and utterly distraught. *"Me?..."*

"The boy has told you that you were now his Plastic Snowman. He got into here under your responsibility. Now you will assist in bringing him back."

The Tall Thin Plastic Snowman stood and stared at India, who tried to cover his eyes with his branchy hands but without too much success. His fat nose was too big and in the way.

"You both have ten cloud minutes to get prepared. The Plastic Snowman has about two hours in Atoz before he melts away. That is, if the child is not with him, so you'd better hope he is."

The Most Important Plastic Snowman then turned to the snowmen that were standing either side of him, and said quietly: "This should not have happened. This was not what should have happened. Thanks to that stupid snowman a child has found its way into Atoz. If we are to remain in control of the Cloudland, they have to get that boy back. I dare not think of the consequences to us if we don't! If he were here, that would be just the very thing the Very Official Plastic Snowman needs to get rid of us, so be thankful that I managed to get rid



of him and have him and his ridiculously lenient attitudes sent to Accounts.”

He then turned to the two snowmen who, whether they liked it or not, were about to go on a mission where it was possible that they would not return. “And one other thing you two – you must not, under any circumstances, upset the Monsters of Atoz.”

## 5. THE MONSTERS OF ATOZ

Peter and the Plastic Snowman began walking around the cave to see what there is, and what there was.

He let go of the Plastic Snowman’s hand. To his surprise, he did not feel suddenly cold as he had expected.

“That’s not me this time,” said the Plastic Snowman grimly. “It really is warmer down here. But for the moment I won’t melt, because I’m still plastic, thanks to you. You have still retained the aura you have, and you being with me means I haven’t changed my form. You have, by accident, extended my life in this form. But when you disappear from my sight, I will turn back to snow and will melt away in a very short time.”

“You will *melt*?” said Peter urgently. “Oh Plastic Snowman, what are we going to do? I can’t leave you!”

“Hopefully, if that idiot of a snowman has got sense, and the Council of Cloudland Snowmen ensure he makes that decision, you’ll be rescued,” said the Plastic Snowman

reassuringly. "There's no way they'll leave you down here. This is against our sacred laws. In fact, it's in our nature that we don't let the children ever come to any harm. I'm sure by now even the other snowman you made now knows you're here and shouldn't be, and is now readying himself to come and get you."

"I don't like him. He got you into trouble."

"But it will now be his job to get *you* out of trouble, whether he likes it or not. The Most Important Plastic Snowman would have had to have given that order. He might not agree, but he'll have to."

"But what about you? Will he get you out?"

The Plastic Snowman did not answer.

Peter understood.

But as he began to cry, he suddenly jumped as a noise echoed around the cave.

"UURRRGGGGHHH!"

"What was that?" whimpered Peter.

"That," said the Plastic Snowman calmly, "was one of the Monsters of Atoz."

"UURRRGGGGHHH!"

Peter then started to hold the Plastic Snowman's hand tightly. "I'm scared..."

"You'll be okay. The monsters won't do anything to you. They are bound by certain rules that apply to both the cloudland and here, even if they don't know this. And that, should, not include harming children," said the Plastic Snowman reassuringly.

And then the monster that was making the noise appeared.

Peter froze in horror. It was as monstrous looking as it could be: it was large and round, had six arms, it had one leg

but a wide foot, and... well, it really wasn't that pleasant to look at.

But it did have two eyes.

Well, it did... it's just that they were where you would expect the ears to be.

"URGH!" it said. "I'm the Urgh monster. Hello snowman. We've been expecting you as you've been a bad snowman. But who's this?"

"This," said the Plastic Snowman, "is Peter."

"URGH! Plastic Peter?"

Peter was too scared to speak.

"No, just Peter," said the Plastic Snowman.

"URGH! Er... Hello Peter. Hey, you're interesting. The RARRGH monster likes to look after little creatures. She'll look after you."

"*The... Rarrgh monster?*" said Peter hoarsely.

"URGH! You can speak!" said the URGH monster. "Hey, Grrr's very chatty. She likes a bit of gossip."

Although terrified, the intensity of fear seemed to loosen its grip on Peter slightly. This was not exactly what he had expected from meeting such a horrible-looking creature, and he was now starting to get used to its appearance. "Don't monsters... usually eat people?" he said meekly.

"URGH! We're not going to eat you! You're too... *cute*. And you are a human child. A human child. You know, I've never met an actual human child before. I've seen them drawn in one of our picture books, you know, that great story, *Humans Love Underpants*. And that film Vargy likes, *Humans Inc*. You know, we don't usually get anything else down here apart from naughty, bad snowmen... and one or two other snowmen who aren't really naughty, but just bossy. So we will look after you."

“RARRGH!” said another monster’s voice. “Do I hear a little thing that needs my help?”

The Rarrgh monster was also hideous looking with big teeth, red eyes, and tufts of hair sticking out of a big round greasy purple body that appeared to be oozing yellow jelly. It had no legs and four tentacles, and generally slid about to move.

“RARRGH! Come along, my little dear. I think you should meet the rest of us. We’re really quite a nice bunch of monsters.”

\*

Peter and the Plastic Snowman were led out of the cave and into another chamber that was lit by fiery torches that lined the walls.

Peter then suddenly put his hand on his mouth to stifle a scream. The chamber was full of monsters of all shapes, sizes, numbers of eyes, ears, arms, legs, tentacles, blobs full of something, whatever. They had them.

“RARRGH! Hello everyone, I’d like you to meet this lovely little creature that brought a snowman down to us to serve his punishment from the Cloudland above. Little creature –”

“My name’s Peter,” said Peter.

“RARRGH! You’ve got a name?” said the Rarrgh monster excitedly. “That’ll make things easier here. Hey, we’ve all got names too. Urgy’ll introduce you to the gang!”

The Plastic Snowman and Peter looked at each other.

“URGH! First, let me introduce you to... the Arrgh Monster!”

“ARRGH!” said the Arrgh monster, jumping up and down, his eyes falling off his face as it did so. This did not seem to concern the monster, who casually picked them up and stuck them back on.

“URGH. This is the Bleurgh Monster.”

“BLEURGH! Hello Peter,” burred the Bleurgh Monster, whose smile expanded across and beyond the width of its face, showing massive green teeth inside. Like a centipede creeping along on its hundred legs, it did the same as it rejoined the others.

“URGH. And here’s the Creearrgh Monster.”

“CREEARRRGH!” the Creearrgh Monster screeched, with the scream coming from the back of its throat, wherever that was. Then it started coughing, and walked away into a corner. It got out a handkerchief with one of its hairy paws and placed it over its tummy. Apparently that was where its mouth was.

“URGH. The Doorgee Monster.”

“DOORRRRGEEE!” The Doorgee Monster appeared to smile, although it was difficult to tell whether the smile came from a mouth or from something else.

“URGH. Meet the Eeeek Monster.”

“EEEEK!” it squeaked. “It’s interesting to see you!” The Eeeek Monster then ran away, eeking away.

“URGH. The Froogy Froogy Monster!”

“What?” said Peter, who was slowly breaking into a smile.

The Froogy Froogy Monster stepped forward. “FROOGY FROOGY! I like to... er, froogy,” it said almost apologetically, and began a little dance. This was quite a sight for a creature with twenty legs and ten arms.

“URGH. The Grrr Monster!”

“GRRRRRRRRR!” It looked like a giant cup with legs. Its strange shaped body appeared to be holding several litres of liquid.

“The... Horrible Monster,” said the Urgh Monster uncertainly.

“HORRIBLE,” said the Horrible Monster, adding, “Yes, I know, it’s not very original. But I wanted to be called Hector, but the other monsters thought it wasn’t frightening enough.”

Peter thought the Horrible Monster was the least horrible looking of the creatures that had introduced themselves to him so far, looking rather like a hippopotamus with dog ears.

“URGH. The Ik Monster.”

“IK IK!”

Peter sniggered. “But shouldn’t you be called the IK IK Monster?”

“IK IK. No,” said the Ik Monster. “I just wanted to be different.”

“URGH. The Jovial Monster!”

Something that looked like a lumpy ball with one eye and a small hole rolled in front of Peter. “Hahaha, hello Peter, haha and welcome to this cave of fun and thrills and spills and lots of things to lots of fun and frolics!” the Jovial Monster said, not unsurprisingly, in a jovial manner.

“Thank you,” said Peter. “But you didn’t say jovial.”

“No, because I don’t. I’m just very... jolly and happy. I’m very jovial, hence my name.”

“URGH. The Killer Monster!”

“*What?*” Peter did not like the sound of this monster.

“*Killer...*” it said very quietly and timidly, despite its fierce appearance of looking like a giant spider. It had just two legs, and it was standing up. It had large fanged teeth. “Did that sound scary enough?” it added meekly.

“URGH. That was better,” said the Urgh Monster. “Now, where was I?”

“That was the Killer Monster,” said the Plastic Snowman sarcastically.

“URGH. Oh yes. And now... The Lovely monster!”

“LOVVVVEEEELLLLY!” It certainly didn’t look lovely with a face so flat it looked like the surface of an iron. It even had a line of eyes around it. This face also appeared to be stuck onto a lion’s head but with the body of a giant mole. It screamed at the top of its voice.

“URGH. The... Monster Monster!”

This time nothing appeared.

“URGH. Ah yes,” said the Urgh Monster. “The Monster Monster is so monstrous he has to sleep outside. He doesn’t sleep in the Chamber. He’s too big.

“URGH! The Nigel Monster!”

“NIGEL!”

Peter just burst out laughing when he heard the name, but calmed slightly when he saw this monster. Despite almost looking like an alien from space with its green slim body, large eyes and thin mouth, it was wearing glasses. And for some reason, these glasses just seemed to take the fierceness away from its appearance. “*Really?* The *Nigel* Monster? You’re really called the *Nigel Monster?*”

“NIGEL! And what’s wrong with that?” said the Nigel Monster, sounding rather offended. “I’m one of the best monsters in Atoz!”

“Really?” said Peter, still smirking. “Why is that?”

“NIGEL! I... *nigel* things!”

Peter had to turn around and force himself to stop sniggering. For a short time he had forgotten about the fact that he was still in a far worse situation than worrying about whether he was going to get niggled or not.

“URGH! Can we have order please?” said the Urgh Monster, as all the other monsters began talking among themselves. “We have a little thing here who we have to make comfortable!”

“URGH. The Ooooooh Monster!”

“OOOOOH!” said a creature that looked like a flatfish, but with eyestalks sticking out at the front. Its mouth was also on a stalk. The way it had said *oooooh* sounded as though it had just seen a delicious chocolate cream cake.

“URGH. The Pig Monster!”

“PIG!”

Peter couldn't help himself but make a grunting noise like a pig. The Pig Monster – which, surprisingly as the Monsters of Atoz went, actually looked like a pig, but with scales. It thought Peter's grunt was really amusing. “Haha! That sounds very funny! Never had anyone do that to me before!” It then proceeded to make a grunting sound like a real pig. “Very good. I must try that more often.” It then casually took off one of its arms to scratch its scaly back before putting it back on.

“URGH. Next, the Quarg Monster.”

“QUARG!” it quarged from somewhere. This monster didn't appear to have a nose and mouth, but its three eyes within the top half of its feathered body blinked all at once.

“URGH. You've already met her – the Rarrgh Monster.”

“RARRGH... Oh, he's really sweet you know. I'll make you a chocolate pie later.”

“URGH. The Ssshhhh Monster,” said the Urgh Monster quietly.

“HELLO!” bellowed the Ssshhhh Monster. “I'M THE NOISY ONE OUT OF US HERE!” Peter could only see an enormous mouth on two long hairy legs.

“URGH. The Tea Monster.”

“TEA!” shouted the Tea Monster enthusiastically. “Who wants tea?”

“OOOOOH! I'd like a cup please. Two sugars.”

“TEA! What about you, Grrr? You never say no!”



“GRRR! Yep, you can pour me a bucket after I’ve finished drinking this lot in my open tummy.”

The Tea Monster then proceeded to shake its big belly, open its mouth at the top of its head and appeared to regurgitate some tea, which duly landed into some cups and a bucket that suddenly and conveniently appeared on the floor.

“URGH. Now me of course. No introductions necessary.

“The Varg Monster.”

“VARG!” it varged. “VARG! VARG! VARG!” This one looked like a giant sea anemone, its eyes from time to time poking through on long stalks to look around before disappearing from sight and back into its body.

“URGH. The Wollawollawolla Monster!”

“WOLLA,” it said defiantly.

“URGH! WOLLAWOLLAWOLLA MONSTER!” shouted the Urgh monster, “say your name properly! We have a non-snowman non-monster guest here!”

“MONSTER!” boomed a voice from outside, which shook the cave and caused tiny little stones and dust to fall from the ceiling.

“URGH! Not you Monster Monster! Anyway, you’re late! I meant YOU, Wollawollawolla Monster!”

“WOLLA. I don’t want to!”

A creature that looked remarkably like a fridge with two little arms and legs added in disgust: “Being called Wollawollawolla is just an exaggeration. One Wolla is enough, thank you very much.”

“IK IK! Hail brother!”

“URGH. As you wish. And now...”

The Urgh Monster went silent.

Peter then uttered, “the... *Xylophone* Monster?”

The monster that had stood forward looked rather disappointed. "XYLOPHONE. Awww, how did you know my name?" It certainly didn't look like a xylophone – it looked more like a tuba with its head poking out of the bell, and had two thick blue-green arms, and on the end of each were ten-fingered hands.

"URGH. The Y Monster!"

"Y am I here? Y are we having this meeting? Y isn't dinner ready?" said a creature with an incredibly tiny head, a fat body covered in tentacles, and making slurping noises as well as saying 'Y' a lot.

"URGH. Don't be so grumpy Y Monster. Finally... the Zarg Monster!"

The Zarg Monster had the least fearsome appearance of all the creatures. In fact, it had the head of a cat with the body of a sausage dog, along with six legs and two arms. "ZARG. Hello Peter, how do you do," it said in a perfectly clipped British accent. "I say old bean, it's so wonderfully glorious to see a new face down here in these old caves..."

"URGH, yes, thank you Zarg Monster. So, there you have it. We are the Monsters of Atoz. A - TO - Z. Atoz! And we are the Carers of the Cloudland!"

And all the monsters started shouting out their names, making quite an echoey din inside the large chamber.

Peter turned to his Plastic Snowman, who shrugged his shoulders. He seemed just as bemused as Peter. Compared to their audience, they were both lost for words.

Once the noise had gone down, the Urgh Monster then stepped up to the Plastic Snowman. It was at least twice the size. "URGH. Okay Sunshine. You know why you're here. Well, no point in wasting time."

The Urgh Monster than took the Plastic Snowman's hand, and was surprised. "Hey, why aren't you snow?"

"FROOGY FROOGY. That's because of the child. In his presence the snowman is plastic. But once he's out of sight he goes back to snow," said the Froogy Froogy Monster.

"LOVVVVEEEELLLLY!" screamed the Lovely Monster.

"CREE- ahur – ahur – ahur - ARRGH!" coughed the Creearrgh Monster.

"SSSHHHH!" hissed the Ssshhhh Monster, before shouting at the top of its voice, "BE QUIET!!!!"

Peter looked at the Plastic Snowman alarmed, then turned to the Urgh Monster. "Where are you taking him?"

"URGH. To the place where all the bad snowmen go. To the generating room to provide extra monsterpower in keeping the generators going."

"Those are the generators that keep the Cloudland in the sky and provide us with our special powers," explained the Plastic Snowman.

"RARRGH. Don't worry Peter," said the Rarrgh Monster kindly. "We'll take very good care of you. You know, I just did some research on early 21<sup>st</sup> century human children. From where you come from you enjoy doing a lot of wees. We have plenty of toilets."

"IK IK. You haven't done your homework, Rarrgy!" said the Ik Monster. "It's not WEES, it's WIIs!"

"RARRGH! That's what I said!"

"IK IK! WIIS! It's something called a game boy computer thing!"

"And plenty of chocolate, chips, and something they call Quick food for this boy, who I'm sure is gameboy for all of this."

"OOOOOH! *Fast Food!*" corrected the Ooooh Monster.

“I’M GOING WITH THE PLASTIC SNOWMAN!” shouted Peter as the monster noises started to build up again.

“Peter, NO! You shouldn’t!” said the Plastic Snowman.

“Plastic Snowman, you’re going to melt if I’m not there next to you!” said Peter.

The Monsters of Atoz were still noisy enough to allow Peter to say something without being heard. “And besides, you said the rotten snowman’s coming. Maybe there’ll still be a chance to rescue you too!”

The Plastic Snowman’s face – made up of two big black buttons for the eyes, the carrot for the nose and the ten little red buttons for the mouth – was suddenly more serious than Peter had ever seen it before. “Peter – I cannot and must not be rescued. It would be breaking all the rules that we and the monsters follow. Should any of us do so, goodness knows what would happen to Atoz and the Cloudland! Besides, I don’t have the power, and even that snowman won’t have the power to get me back too. I’m just too big and bulky.”

“But it wasn’t your fault!” said Peter, his eyes welling up again. “The other snowman is coming! He can explain everything to the monsters!”

The Plastic Snowman looked up. “If he is following the Snowman code, he should. But he has already broken one of the lesser rules. It would have only got him a warning. Instead, what he did has sent me here.”

“And if he does, can’t he stay and you come back?”

“I don’t know,” said the Plastic Snowman. “Such an act has never happened before. But as I said, I have no powers to come back.”

“URRRRRGGGGHHHH! Quiet every *thing!*” shouted the URGH Monster. “Come on, let’s go!”

“I want to go with my snowman!” said Peter, almost in tears.

“RARRGH! Let him go Urgy. We need to keep him happy,” said the Rarrgh Monster kindly.

“URGH. Okay Rarrgy, he’s your responsibility.”

## 6. THE GENERATING ROOM

The generating room was down one of the twelve chamber corridors that led out of the main circular chamber where the monsters had introduced themselves. Indeed, if you could look down into the chamber, each passage entrance was spread out evenly, resembling the marks that would make up one to twelve on a clockface.

Peter, the Plastic Snowman, and the Urg and Raargh monsters emerged into another chamber – which was even bigger than the main chamber – and Peter could feel how much warmer it was there. There were not lots of flashing buttons and computers, as he had expected, but one, very large place where you put in a lot of coal and have a fire. This place is then used to boil water, just like a steam engine, and that boiling water generates pressure, and that pressure helps to generate energy. This space with the fire is called a furnace. There was already a fire raging away inside and the noise of heavy iron pumping away above that. Standing next to the furnace were

the Y, the Nigel, and the Quarg monsters. And two very big hairy legs.

Peter looked up to see a very large body, upon which was a head that must have been thirty metres above him.

“URGH. This is the Monster Monster.” said the Urgh monster proudly. “But she can’t speak now. Her voice is so loud that she would surely hurt your ears.”

It hadn’t occur to Peter until now that there could even be girl and boy monsters - even though all their voices sounded like males - although he did remember that the Rarrgh Monster, the one who liked him very much and wanted to feed him chocolate pie and other treats was referred to as a ‘she’, so for sure that had to be a girl monster.

“QUARG. This is where you’ll be working,” said the Quarg Monster. “There is a big choice of coal shovels to choose from.”

Peter could see a shovel that was big enough to shovel up an amount of coal that would easily fill the back of a van. This, he presumed, belonged to the Monster Monster.

But then the two big legs of the Monster Monster began to walk away towards a big open door, and left. “Y. She’s finished her shift for the day,” explained the Y Monster. “And that’s where you come in, snowman.”

“NIGEL! You don’t seem to be melting!” said the Nigel Monster.

“URGH. That’s because he’s plastic,” explained the Urgh Monster.

“Y. Why? The snowmen are usually making a puddle by now.”

“URGH. That’s because the little boy is here. Because of his presence, the Snowman is not melting. Not yet anyway,

which is good news for us because we get more work out of you.”

“QUARG. But it’s very hot. Surely the plastic will melt and we’ll end up getting a sticky mess on our lovely clean stone floor?”

“URGH. Good point Quargy. We’ll give him twenty minutes, maximize his time as a Plastic Snowman as much as possible before he starts to seriously melt, then we’ll get the boy out and he can work and melt more naturally.”

“NO!” shouted Peter.

“NIGEL. Do we have a NO Monster in here?”

“I’M NOT LEAVING HIM!” shouted Peter again.

“URGH. You’re not leaving him. Not for twenty minutes anyway.”

“I’M NOT LEAVING HIM AT ALL!”

But before Peter could grab the Plastic Snowman’s hand and not let go, the Rarrgh Monster stepped out and grabbed him with one of her tentacles. “RARRGH. No Peter, you can stand with me and then we’ll leave. I’ll give you some pie, a burgbeef, I think you call it, chip and larther sausages, and some desert. I scream I think you call this sweet white cold stuff, although I don’t know why you like these mobile phones called Blackberries added to it. Then you can play with some Androids.”

But tears were streaming down Peter’s cheeks. He could see the Plastic Snowman being led away by the other Monsters to the furnace and being directed to the countless shovels of different shapes and sizes.

The Raargh Monster’s tentacles were holding him tightly. The Plastic Snowman then chose a shovel that suited his height, and was then escorted to a pile of coal that was so high it

disappeared into the roof of the chamber, which itself was so high you couldn't see it.

Peter was helpless. There was nothing he could do.

## 7. THE RESCUE

The Plastic Snowman appeared to completely accept his fate.

He began to shovel up the coal and throw it into the fire. He seemed to be quite strong, being able to hurl the coal into the furnace at a distance. Also on the positive side he was avoiding the worst of the heat and did not appear to be melting.

The other monsters also collected their shovels and joined in, each performing their tasks in their own particular way depending on the number of limbs, shovels, how big their mouths were for holding coal, or however their bodies were designed. Meanwhile, the Rarrgh Monster had loosened her grip enough on Peter to make him feel more comfortable, but nevertheless there was still no way that he could escape.

For another ten minutes they continued with their duties. Then suddenly –

*“Okay, hold it there, everyone! We're here on behalf of the Cloudland Health and Safety Inspection Unit!”*

A tall, thin plastic snowman with purple cardigan buttons, a large pink hat, and wearing a striped orange tie around its



neck, had appeared from another passageway. He appeared to have an eye missing. There was some dampness on the floor where he had been standing, but a puddle was not forming. He had clearly been melting, but this process had stopped now he was in Peter's presence.

But then Peter was surprised to see a smaller snowman following him. It was a lot smaller, it had two small branches for arms, one of which was holding something flat, but its face was missing many of the stones that made up its features. But it still had that celeric that made up its disproportionately large nose –

*"INDIA!"*

The warmth of the chamber had affected India considerably. Peter was sure he had melted far more than the Tall Thin Plastic Snowman.

The shock of the sudden appearance of these new snowmen and Peter's cry made the Rarrgh Monster unintentionally lose her grip. Peter got free and ran straight to the Plastic Snowman.

The Tall Thin Plastic Snowman, however, tried to keep his calm. "Er, we're here just to check on the supplies needed to keep operations here running smoothly for Cloudland," he said. "Can you direct us to the storeroom?"

The Urgh Monster looked at them suspiciously. "URGH. This is highly... unusual. Do you have the necessary paperwork, bossy snowmen?"

India then held out what was a black clipboard in his right branchy hand with several sheets of paper attached to the front of it. Peter was sure it was the same clipboard owned by the Most Important Plastic Snowman.

The Urgh Monster hopped up to it suspiciously. He glared at it, and recognized the Most Important Plastic Snowman's signature.

He then noticed some extra writing underneath. He tried to read it aloud but found it difficult. Peter thought that it must have been written by the Most Important Plastic Snowman as he had a habit of using very big words. After two minutes, the message was understood as this:

*The Council of Cloudland Snowmen hereby request the handing over of the small human infant officially registered by birth as Peter Peddington to ourselves as the human has not received formal permission or possess the necessary formal documentation to enter the vicinity hereby known as Atoz. With the permission of the High Council of Atoz, we kindly request that you send the child back with the representatives of the Cloudland Health and Safety Inspection Unit.*

"It means," said the Plastic Snowman, "that Peter should not be here and he should be returned to Cloudland."

"RARRGGHH! WHAT?" shouted the Rarrgh Monster. "You can't take my child! I was going to feed him a chocolate pie!"

"He is a child that has his own mother and father, and he belongs to them," said the Tall Thin Plastic Snowman.

"NIGEL! Only one mother and father?" said the Nigel Monster. "Dear me, you must feel lonely. I've got three mothers, two fathers, six half –"

"URGH! Enough Nigelly, we know all about your family, it's nothing unusual!" said the Urgh Monster. "But this situation is not what I call normal."

"No, it isn't," said the Tall Thin Plastic Snowman. "That's why we're here. Peter shouldn't be here. We've come to collect him."

Peter could see that the Urgh Monster was trying to make sense of the very unusual situation that had now been presented to him.

After a minute's uncomfortable silence, he spoke. "URGH. Okay, but what about this business of the storeroom?"

"You can come with us and we'll all go up there to check your supplies. Then we'll leave. Quietly."

"RARRGH! I WANT MY CHILD BACK!" bawled the Rarrgh Monster. "They're going to take him away from me!"

"URGH. Y, Nigelly, go and get Xylophony and Piggy. Take Rarryg with you. Get Bleurgy, Eeeeky, and Froogy down here in the furnace."

"RARRGH! I don't want to go!"

"NIGEL. Come on Rarryg, we've got a job to do!" The Nigel Monster then grabbed two of the Rarrgh Monster's tentacles and dragged her away.

The snowmen, Peter, and the Quarg and Urgh Monsters then left the furnace and walked along a long stone passage. It was also going upwards, and it was quite a steep climb.

"Good job you're with us, Peter," said the Plastic Snowman. "At least your power of keeping us plastic and the heat down here not melting us has kept us going far longer than I'd have certainly hoped."

After five minutes, they entered another very large chamber where all manner of items were stored. There was another huge pile of coal along with several shelves that were lined with boxes of all shapes and sizes.

"URGH. Here we are, the storeroom. Quargy, I'd like you to stand by the entrance."

"QUARG. Why, Urgy?"

"URGH. I have a feeling about this. Quargy, you're my most trusted sidekick. Could you do this for me?"

“QUARG. Okay Urgy.”

As the Quarg Monster quarged across to the entrance, the Urgh Monster turned to the others. “URGH. Anyway, I know why we’re here. And I feel sure that you are not really representatives from the Cloudland Health and Safety Unit.”

“You’re right,” said the Tall Thin Plastic Snowman. “So why did you let us come here?”

“URGH. Rarrgy means well, but I fear for the human child’s well-being if she looks after him. She’s easily one of the best-looking monsters down here. Many of us wish we could ooze jelly from our skin. It’s a good trick. URGH. But I can see that your little child would have a lot of problems. And as I understand the laws between our states, anything that is not snowman or monster cannot and must not be harmed. I don’t think Rarrgy realizes this.”

Peter looked at the snowmen. “*Why* are we in here?”

“Because,” said the Tall Thin Plastic Snowman, “we cannot leave Atoz while we are so deep into the monster’s chambers. The storeroom is the closest and quietest place back to the Cloudland. Of course, it’s easy getting here, but not so easy to get back. That is, Urgh Monster, if you will let us go back, of course. You are the big boss. We request your permission to leave and take the child with us.”

“URGH. Permission granted.”

The Tall Thin Plastic Snowman and India looked at each other. They’d done it!

“Come on Peter,” said India kindly, “Hold our hands and we’ll take you home.”

“You can say my name right!” shouted Peter brightly. “But what about him?” He pointed to the Plastic Snowman.

“I can’t go,” the Plastic Snowman said sadly. “The ability for me to leave was taken away from me.”

“URGH. He can’t go,” said the Urgh Monster. “He was sent here to be punished. We cannot go against this decision.”

“Then I’m not going either!” said Peter angrily.

The Urgh Monster’s expression was now one of bewilderment. On the one hand, the agreement between the Atoz High Council and Cloudland was clear. When a snowman is sent to be punished, there was no going back. But the safety of a child...

“URGH. Why did they send you here, snowman?”

The Plastic Snowman looked at the Tall Thin Plastic Snowman. “Why don’t you tell him the story?”

## 8. INDIA’S SUPREME ACT

After the Urgh Monster had heard the whole sorry tale, he looked disgusted at the Tall, Thin, Plastic Snowman. “URRRRRGGGGHHH!! Because you were so selfish, and whether it was your fault or not, you put this child’s life at risk! *You should be down here!*”

“I should,” said the Tall Thin Plastic Snowman sadly. “And I’m sure I will be once this is done. But it needs the two of us to combine our finger-snapping powers to instantly get back to the Cloudland. This rock is very thick, you know!”

“URGH. Then send more snowmen to get enough power to bring this child and the snowman back up!”

“There’s a problem with that. Actually, there are *four* problems,” said the Plastic Snowman firmly. “First, that is illegal. I don’t think even you could convince your fellow monsters that it would not be seen as an invasion. Second, once Peter leaves, I will start to melt. I will be virtually gone when such help arrives. Three, I’m too big to go with the snowmen and leave Peter behind for rescue afterwards. Four, from what I can feel from my senses, a new day will be starting on the human earth in an hour. Peter must be returned to his family by then.”

“No, Plastic Snowman!” shouted Peter, “I want to be with you! You’re my best friend!”

The Plastic Snowman looked hard into Peter’s eyes. “Peter, not so long ago I saw you as a very wise, very mature little boy. You were acting much older than your age. Think like that again for me. Please... act this way now. You know there’s nothing else we can do.”

Peter knew the Plastic Snowman was right, but –

“If only we had a transmatic matter displacement nebuliser,” said India airily. “This would provide the same power and energy as one snowman’s click of the fingers.”

“You *what?*” said the Tall Thin Plastic Snowman, astonished.

“And where on Atoz are we going to get one of those things and how do you know they even exist?” said the Plastic Snowman derisively.

“I... just read about one of those in what humans call... a children’s comic... when I was doing some research into how to look after children.”

“URGH. I think we’ve got one.”

“WHAT?” all three snowmen shouted back together.

But Peter didn't seem so surprised. He had seen so much of the unexpected down in Atoz and up in the Cloudland. So why shouldn't these monsters have a transmatic... thingy?

"URGH. Quarg?" the Urgh monster shouted across the storeroom chamber. "Have we got a transmatic matter displacement nebuliser somewhere on the shelves?"

"QUARG. I believe there's one on shelf 3426C, but I think it's broken," shouted the Quarg Monster back.

"URGH! Come on, let's go and get it. That shelf's only two minutes away!"

"Well," sighed the Plastic Snowman to Peter. "It is a large storeroom."

In fact, it only took them a minute to get to shelf 3426C, which was situated five metres up. But this was not a problem for the Urgh Monster – he simply stood on his leg, and then his body started going upwards, his leg getting longer and longer. He then reached out with two of his arms and grabbed a large flat box, about the size of a small table surface.

They rushed back to the Quarg Monster, who began to put it together. This took just a minute. The monster then got out what Peter thought looked like the kind of unusual patterned curtain he would find in someone's living room, but was told by the Plastic Snowman that it was, in fact, the instruction manual.

"QUARG! Ah, I see what's the problem!" the Quarg Monster shouted excitedly after looking at a red stripy zig-zag line on the manual.

"RARRGH. Yes. The problem is... YOU!"

The Rarrgh Monster was back. She was not alone. Alongside her were the Arrgh, Creearrrgh, Doorgee, Ik, Lovely, Pig, Tea, Varg, Wollawollawolla, Y and Zarg Monsters.

“RARRGH! We know what you’re up to, and you are breaking several of our laws to do this!” screamed the Rarrgh Monster. The oozing jelly from her greasy purple body had turned into a disgusting shade of brown to indicate her anger.

“URGH! Not true! The child’s safety is more important than anything else! It is within our natural laws!”

“RARRRRGGGHHH! I TOLD YOU, I WILL LOOK AFTER THE LITTLE THING AND KEEP HIM HAPPY!” screamed the Rarrgh Monster. She then slid one of her tentacles behind her back and produced a white dish which contained something brown. “RARRGH. You’d like some of my lovely chocolate pie, wouldn’t you sweet thing?” she said in a very sickly sort of sweet way to Peter.

“No,” said Peter defiantly. “I want to go home.”

“RARRGH! *This is your home! This was your home the moment you came here! And I will see you stay here!*”

And just as one of her tentacles flashed out to make a grab for Peter, a thick blue-green arm with a ten-fingered hand grabbed it.

“XYLOPHONE! You will not harm the child!”

The other monsters had arrived. There was suddenly a lot of noise as the Arrgh, Creearrrgh, Doorgee, Ik, Lovely, Pig, Tea, Varg, Wollawollawolla, Y and Zarg Monsters that supported the Rarrgh Monster squared up to the Bleurgh, Eeeek, Froogy Froogy, Grrr, Horrible, Jovial, Killer, Nigel, Ooooooh, Ssshhhh and Xylophone Monsters, who were all clearly on the side of the Urgh Monster. Monster Monster, of course, was just simply too big to get involved, and remained in the generating room to keep stoking the furnace.

The Urgh Monster quickly took advantage of the covering noise. “Urgh,” it said to the Quarg Monster. “Quargy, can you fix that transmatic matter displacement nebuliser?”



“QUARG. I sure can, but there’s one thing I need, according to the instruction manual. Look!” He pointed to six green blobs under a red horizontal line.

“URGH. I don’t believe it!”

“RARRGH! LET – GO – OF – MY – TENTACLE!” screamed the Rarrgh Monster, and with a fierce tug and shuffle, she managed to free herself from the Xylophone Monster’s grip.

“RARRGH! Urgy, I’m taking over as Head of the High Council of Atoz. *You will surrender yourself to me!*”

“URGH! No chance! Things – stop them! This human child has to be returned!”

And then came the weirdest battle that Peter had ever seen, even when compared to those that he saw occasionally on the TV, when he shouldn’t have, of course, because he sneaked down the stairs to look through the door to have a peek at what his parents were watching when occasionally getting a drink.

Being monsters, the two sides were not kicking or punching each other as such, or using anything that looked like a weapon. In fact, Peter found the way that they were doing battle rather fascinating. Tentacles, extra heads, shouting (ZARG! NIGEL! OOOOOH! DORGEE!), enlarging eyes and ears to outstare or outhear the opposition, Monsters firing ooze, blobs of hair, green stuff that Peter thought looked like nose bogey, and limbs that appeared to detach themselves from bodies but returned themselves to their owners. Steam of different colours flew out – green, yellow, indigo – and some had their own smells: banana, diesel oil, milk, and many that Peter didn’t recognize or even want to know. Or smell.

Individual battles found monsters crashing into the shelves with many of those shelves toppling, spilling boxes and emptying their contents all over the floor. Monsters were falling in apparent pain after being varged, froogy froogied, jovialed

(HO! HO! HO!), and xylophoned. Some lost their voices for a short time after they were ssshhhed (very loudly, of course), and others leapt around saying their names followed by an exclamation of pain: “LOVELY! OUCH!” “IK! OOYAH!” “AARGH! Arrgh!” after they were tea-ed by the Tea Monster pouring hot tea over them. The Horrible Monster had a novel way of attack: he just hectored them and they leapt away, annoyed.

In fact, from what Peter could see, none of the monsters were doing any real harm to each other; if they were, then their powers of recovery were remarkably quick. It looked like it was going to be a battle that would only end as to which monsters were going to be left standing after they had tired each other out.

Peter looked to the snowmen, but then noticed that India wasn't there. Then –

“WATCH OUT PETER!”

The Plastic Snowman had grabbed his arm and pulled him to the side as a brown thing of some kind went whizzing past where he had stood a second ago.

Two of the monsters on the Urgh Monster's side – the Grrr and the Nigel – were standing close to Peter, the snowmen and the Quarg Monster, who was frantically setting up the transmatic matter displacement nebuliser into position.

“QUARG! URGY! IT'S READY! But I need those fuel cells!”

The Urgh Monster – after having urg-ed the Pig Monster onto a high shelf containing several small green boxes, upon which it sat motionless and carefully balanced on the edge for thirty seconds before it recovered, then fell, then bounced on the floor three times before standing up again: “PIG! I still wonder why I never thought of making that noise before!” and

grunted - then ran to the Rarrgh Monster, who coincidentally had successfully rarrghed the Oooooh Monster into a corner where it had been stuck to the wall by some particularly sticky green jelly she had oozed out.

“RARRGH! And now you, Urgy! I’m going to have you stuck to the wall by some particularly smelly jelly!”

Her face contorted as some deep purple jelly oozed out of her round body. It smelled awful.

“URGH! No way, Rarrgy! I’m going to urg you to the highest shelf in this storeroom and keep you there until you say sorry and accept the word of me – the Head of the High Council of Atoz!”

“RARRGH! You’ll never take me there!”

The two monsters were now circling each other. All the other monsters had stopped fighting to watch.

A tentacle zipped past the Urg Monster’s left eye. Quickly, he opened his mouth and fired a blob of something orange and gooey. It only just missed the Rarrgh Monster, but splatted onto the cave wall, leaving a large orange mess which seemed to attract some honey bees from somewhere.

Then the Rarrgh Monster scooped off a little of her jelly and threw it. It landed on the Urg Monster’s right eye (where you would expect an ear).

The Urg Monster roared with fury and leapt high in the air and landed almost right on top of the Rarrgh Monster, but the Rarrgh Monster saw it coming and jumped to one side as the Urg Monster landed – SPLAT – next to her. At first, the impact of the landing appeared to make the Monster spread out on the floor as if it were a blob of thick liquid, but the next moment the goo formed back into the Urg Monster’s regular shape.

The Rarrgh Monster then tried to fling some of her jelly again at the Urg Monster, but this time she missed, the mess

instead hitting the Ik Monster, who slopped to the ground. “IK IK! I’m stuck!” it screeched.

The Urgh Monster then looked up. Then he ran towards one of the shelves to get to a particular box.

He opened the box. There was nothing inside. No fuel cells. “URGH!”

“RARRGH!” said the Rarrgh Monster, approaching the Urgh Monster. “Whatever you thought was in that box isn’t there to help you! Now I’m going to goo you and make you stuck!”

“GRRR!” said the Grrr Monster in alarm to Peter and the snowmen, “If the Rarrgh Monster goes him with her jelly and he doesn’t recover in ten seconds, she will become Head of the Atoz High Council! And her jelly is gooey enough to make sure he will be stuck for more than ten seconds!”

The Urgh Monster suddenly looked resigned to his fate. Whatever was in that box, if it was something that could have won it the challenge – it was not there.

“RARRGH! Look forward to being a mere minion of a monster who reports to *me!*”

The Rarrgh Monster took a deep breath, and –  
SPLAT!

What looked like a large snowball had landed right on top of her, and the impact was such that the RARRGH Monster stayed down – for more than ten seconds.

There was suddenly all sorts of cheering – well, gurgling, grouching, screeching, all kinds of noises that were clearly in appreciation of the victor – and the URGH Monster lifted up its six arms in triumph.

But Peter, the Plastic Snowman, and the Tall Thin Plastic Snowman were not cheering. They realized where that snowball had come from. Or rather, who that snowball was.

*"But... I thought India was plastic? I thought as long as I'm with you, you're plastic!"* said Peter tearfully.

"He was," said the Plastic Snowman solemnly. "But we snowmen can also make the choice as to whether we are snow or plastic in front of the children, even down here. India must have chosen to go back to snow. Clearly he was right. Snow seems to have an effect on the Monsters. Slows them down, they're not used to the cold. Look, the Rarrgh Monster's only getting up now.

"India chose to climb up onto a high shelf to get the Rarrgh Monster. He jumped down to save you. Clearly he had a deep fondness for you."

*"He even believed he had become my new Snowman... and I told him that!"* said Peter crying. *"It's all my fault!"*

The Rarrgh Monster looked dazed and was shaking with cold. She unstuck a large branch from her sticky body – one of India's branchy arms.

"RARRGH... you have beaten me Urgy, and so I remain your servant," said the Rarrgh Monster quietly and she staggered to join the rest of the monsters.

"URGH. And you've used your challenge, Rarrgy," said the Urgh Monster commandingly. "You now have to wait your turn before you can challenge any of us again to become Head of the Atoz High Council. That may not be me, of course.

The Urgh monster then turned to the Quarg monster. "URGH. There weren't any power cells left for the transmatic matter displacement nebulizer. The box was empty," it said sadly.

"QUARG! I didn't need any fuel cells! Rarrgy's particularly potent chocolate pie mixture has more than done the trick. It's even better. We should have enough additional power to help send you *all* home."

“Including the Plastic Snowman?” shouted Peter excitedly.

“QUARG. Yes, including the Plastic Snowman!”

“HOORAY! Oh, fantastic! Plastic Snowman, you’re getting out of here! You’re going back!”

“I am indeed, and I am pleasantly surprised that we have to thank the Raargh monster for making it possible,” said the Plastic Snowman with a wry smile. “So hopefully I’ll be going back to settle some business.”

“URGH. And now, Peter, Snowmen, It’s time for you to get back to your Cloudland. What do you need to do?”

“We need to stand on the top of that shelf over there,” said the thin tall snowman. “We don’t have the ability to jump down here in Atoz. Can you monsters get us up there?”

“URGH! Monster Monster!”

“MONSTER!”

After a few boxes had been shaken off the shelves thanks to the vibrations of the Monster Monster’s voice, a giant furry hand at the end of a long, hairy arm was stretching into the storeroom and towards the snowmen. They all stepped onto it, and then the arm seemed to stretch even further and upwards, lifting them onto the shelf. “URGH. It would have taken me, Grrrgy and Nigelly a lot more time to have done that,” said the Urgh Monster happily.

“Thank you Urgh Monster for your help,” said the Plastic Snowman happily. “Say goodbye, Peter... Peter?”

But Peter just remembered India and was getting tearful again. He really hadn’t wanted him to go this way.

Along with all the different monster noises that they always gave before saying something, all the monsters – including the Rarrgh Monster – all cheerfully, in their own monsterish ways, said goodbye.

The Quarg Monster powered up the transmatic matter displacement nebuliser. "QUARG! Let's do a countdown. When I shout zero, I will push down the lever. At the same time, snowman, you click your fingers!"

"QUARG! FIVE... FOUR... THREE... TWO... ONE... CLICK!"

The lever on the transmatic matter displacement nebuliser was slammed down, and the Tall Thin Plastic Snowman clicked his fingers.

## 9. GOOD NEWS AND BAD NEWS

The next moment, the snowmen and Peter were back on the Cloudland, standing next to the large marquee-sized igloo where the Plastic Snowman had been judged guilty and then made his and Peter's journey down to Atoz.

"I have to say it's good to be back," said the Plastic Snowman cheerfully.

"I couldn't agree more," said the Tall Thin Plastic Snowman, "but I will still have to go in there for playing my part in getting Peter into the land of Atoz."

He said this as if it was a normal every day activity that anyone would do at work, although he then added tentatively: "And to face the Most Important Plastic Snowman and his cronies. It's thanks to them I got Peter in this situation. He told me to keep quiet during your trial. I was not even supposed to

be at the trial but I was curious. He wanted you out the way, but when I saw what happened to Peter, I had to do something."

"That's what I thought," said the Plastic Snowman coolly. "He clearly doesn't like me."

"Why?" asked Peter. "What did you do to upset him?"

"I have my theories."

"And I don't like him at all," Peter said sniffily. Although happy to be out, he could not understand why the snowmen didn't seem to care about what happened to India.

Then out came the Most Important Plastic Snowman, this time joined by a group of other, similar looking snowmen.

"We have two final tasks to complete before Peter returns home," he said in his usual official sort of voice. "First, Peto, there is someone to see you."

"It's Peter, not Peto!" sobbed Peter, "and I don't care – INDIA!"

From behind the snowmen hopped another, smaller snowman, with branches for arms. But it had a face made up of small stones and a large vegetable for a nose that was out of proportion with the rest of its face. It didn't look exactly like India, but Peter knew. He just knew it was him.

"Hello Peter," said India. "As you can see, I've been rebuilt. I'm not exactly the same – well, we can never be exactly the same, but I've been rewarded by getting another body straight away, for my part in helping to get you away from the monsters."

*"But I thought you were –"*

"You thought I was dead? Oh no, Peter, we don't die. They just take our souls, put them somewhere in one of the cabinets in the soul department that deals with us, until the... Most Important Plastic Snowman decides it is my turn again to be a



snowman and give me the chance to be with a child. They found me very quickly, which I'm so happy about, because they often have to do a bit of soul searching."

"But India," said Peter, "why have you almost got the same body as last time? Wouldn't he..." – he looked up at the Most Important Plastic Snowman – "wouldn't *they* give you a better body?"

"They could have given me a new body, slightly better than this one, but I've got used to this one with you around. Maybe when it's time for me to move into a new body perhaps I will be lucky enough to be just like your Plastic Snowman."

The Plastic Snowman looked at his complete arms and his legs. "You know, I really should be so lucky with my body," he said humbly.

He quickly glanced at the Most Important Plastic Snowman and his well-made colleagues. "India, you are a better snowman than many of us."

Peter looked at the Most Important Plastic Snowman, who appeared to be frowning at the Plastic Snowman.

India smiled. "As they say on the land below, don't be fooled by appearances."

Peter then looked at the other snowmen. They all had what he thought were the best snowman bodies. This did not make him feel good about them, and he felt that they were well-aware that other, less well-made snowmen would be made to feel inferior to them to keep some kind of control over them. He certainly did not think they were. India had proved that.

"So," he said coldly to the Most Important Plastic Snowman. "What will happen to the other snowman that my father made?"

Peter had begun to really dislike this snowman and his pompous attitude. There was no way, in his mind, that this

snowman could ever be the friendly type. After all, it had been unsmiling and overformal all the times he had been in his presence, but there was something else, something darker, that had now upset the Plastic Snowman.

“He should be sent to the land of Atoz,” said the Very Important Plastic Snowman stiffly. “But I think he should be sent to somewhere worse – to our Accounts area.”

“ACCOUNTS? Oh no, please, I want to go to Atoz!” said the Tall Thin Plastic Snowman, sounding very upset. “Not to Accounts!”

“How bad is the Accounts area?” asked Peter.

“Please, don’t ask,” said the Plastic Snowman grimly. “It is our worse punishment. But he should be free to return to the life of being a snowman by next winter.”

Peter was relieved to hear that his punishment was not going to mean the end for him.

“*Maybe I’ll see you next winter...*” said the Tall Thin Plastic Snowman as he was led away by the Very Important Plastic Snowman’s burly bodyguards.

“So, Most Important Plastic Snowman,” said the Plastic Snowman defiantly. “Can you tell me where is the Chief Very Important Plastic Snowman? You sent him down to the Accounts area too, out the way, so ensure nobody can hear what they want to say?”

The Most Important Plastic Snowman now looked angrier than at any time Peter had seen it. He suddenly snapped his fingers. Very quickly, Peter felt the sudden urge to sleep, and began to lay down on the soft cotton-wall floor of the cloud. “Plastic Snowman, get Peter home now!” he commanded. “The sun is beginning to come up! You must get him back home before you are seen! You know what will happen if you do not!”

“Yes, Most Important Plastic Snowman. Come on Peter.”

Peter was already fast asleep as the Plastic Snowman picked him up.

As before, the Plastic Snowman was allowed to hop, skip and jump off the cloud and into the air, back towards Peter’s house.

\*

As Peter opened his eyes, woken up by his father getting ready to go back to work after the long Christmas and New Year break, he felt as though he had just had the strangest dream...

...like the dream he’d had three nights ago.

But... different.

He looked out of the window. There were two snowmen out there, standing perfectly still on the snowy ground, just as they should be when they were made the day before and three days before. There was the one that he felt sure had taken him to Auntie Anne’s house and a cloud with a wonderful playground, and there was another one, the tall thin one that his daddy had built the day before, except one of its eyes were now missing.

He tried to think. There was something about that Tall Thin Plastic Snowman in his dream, but he couldn’t remember exactly what it was...

He went downstairs after Daddy had left, and there was Mummy sitting, still in her nightdress and dressing-gown, and drinking a cup of coffee. Her favorite radio station was playing music in the background.

“Morning, sweetheart,” she said cheerily. “I can see you slept well again last night.”

“Yes,” said Peter sleepily. “I –”

“We should now get dressed as I’ve got to take you over to Grandma’s. What would you like for breakfast? Oh wait a second,” said Mummy quickly, “I just want to hear the news.”

The presenter on the radio program read out the news headlines, and then added –

*“And the good news is that there’s been a sudden change in conditions and there is a thaw on the way across the country. Although it’ll still be cold today, with temperatures below freezing, they are expected to increase overnight and we can expect daytime temperatures tomorrow to reach around five or six degrees centigrade.”*

“Wow, they weren’t expecting that yesterday,” said Mummy happily. “That means the roads and pavements should be clear tomorrow.”

“They’re going up?” Peter said suddenly and without thinking. “But what about –”

He ran up to the window and glared at the snowmen.

There was something about that other snowman – but what?

He tried to think. The dream he had three nights ago was still fresh in his memory, but for some reason he could recall very little from last night.

There *was* something else... *but what was it?*

His mind was blank.

It was if he knew he had experienced something, but that something had taken that experience, the *memory* of that experience, away. But there was –

He just couldn’t get to it.

To get at that experience, he needed a spark, a signal, to get at those memories.

Even his day at Grandma’s did nothing to help, although by the afternoon he was beginning to worry less about last

night as the hours went by and it was just some strange dream that, for whatever reason, his mind chose not to remember in detail.

He was even beginning to think less about that night three nights ago, even doubting whether that experience was real.

\*

After being picked up by Mummy, he came home, and then the family had an evening meal. Both his parents were looking at him, smiling broadly.

“Why are you smiling so much?”

“Peter,” said Mummy, unable to keep her excitement to herself, “after I dropped you off at grandma’s, I went to the doctor, and – guess what –”

Peter looked at them while they paused for dramatic effect, readying for the big announcement.

“You’re going to have a baby brother or sister!”

“A baby brother – or sister?”

“Yes! Isn’t that great!”

He grinned broadly. Peter was not going to be the lone child in the family.

Suddenly the excitement of having a sibling put much of what had gone before even further into the recesses of his memory.