

Grandfather Jacob Loses His Voice

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

Julie and Peter were playing with Grandfather Jacob in the living room, when something strange happened. Grandfather, who had a slight cough, suddenly lost his voice. His lips lipped, his tongue tongued, but no sound came out. Poor old Grandfather. Finally, he took a pen and paper, wrote a message, and handed it to Julie.

“‘Oh dear me. I seem to have lost my voice,’” she read aloud.

“You’ve lost your voice?” Peter said. “Where? Where have you lost it, Grandfather?” Grandfather only shrugged his shoulders and wrote:

“Don’t worry children, everything will be all right.”

Grandfather Jacob really had lost his voice.

After lunch, Julie and Peter went into the back room to play Grandfather Jacob’s old piano. Peter played all the black notes and Julie played all the white notes. Henry the dog came in, sat beside them, and began to sing.

The rest of the day was quiet. The only way Grandfather could speak to the children was by writing messages on scraps of paper. His spelling was so bad though, he didn’t like to say too much. He had well and truly lost his voice. By night time it still hadn’t come back.

Grandfather tucked Julie and Peter into bed, and gave them a kiss night-night. Henry the dog kissed them night-night as well, and Henry the dog was the best slip-sloppy night-night kisser in the whole wide world.

After a few minutes, Julie whispered, “Peter, are you asleep?”

There was no answer. Julie climbed from her bed.

“Wake up,” she whispered, shaking him.

"What do you want?" Peter grumbled and yawned at the same time.

"We've got something important to do."

"Yes, sleep."

"No, not sleep. I'm worried about Grandfather Jacob. What if his voice never comes back?"

"I don't know."

"We have to look for it. We have to find it."

"What do you mean?" Peter sounded suspicious.

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

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

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

"Don't you want to find Grandfather Jacob's voice?"

"Yes, but . . . not with *magic*."

"We *need* magic. You can't find a lost voice without it."

"No," Peter said, as if that was an answer.

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

Making hardly a sound, out of the room they went, down the corridor, up the stairs. Julie unlocked the attic door. It creeeeeeeeaked open on its tired hinges. It creeeeeeeeaked closed again behind them. The attic was the kind of room that would like a "Do Not Disturb" sign on the door.

Peter turned on the light. Standing in the usual dusty corner was the old trunk.

"There it is," Julie whispered.

The children walked over to the trunk and pushed open the

lid. Inside was a large and brightly coloured umbrella.

"It must be magic," Julie said, lifting it out. "Now let's open it and see what happens."

"Oh dear," Peter groaned, his voice beginning to wobble with fear.

"Don't be a baby," Julie told him. It was then, by the way, that something very strange happened: QUICK AS A FLASH, Julie and Peter both disappeared.

The children were *somewhere else*. They were in a forest and the autumn leaves looked as if they had been coloured in by a crazy kid with a really big box of crazy crayons. It was pouring with rain, so Julie and Peter were happy to have the umbrella with them. And the rain went "Pitter patter pitter patter pitter patter pitter patter," as it fell through the branches to the ground. "Pitter patter pitter patter," it went.

"Ho ho ho ho! Why, hello," said a kind of lumpy, dumpy voice. The children turned around, and saw a huge brown bear coming towards them.

"Oh, oh," said Peter, looking almost as worried as he sounded.

"Come along, ho! Follow me, ho! Let's get in out of the rain and have some tea. Ho ho ho!" laughed the laughing bear.

"Have some tea?" Julie asked. "You mean you won't grab and grizzle us?" The bear was, after all, the largest bear they had ever seen. In fact, he was the *only* bear they had ever seen.

"Grab and grizzle you? Hardy hardy ho! No no no," laughed the laughing bear.

"You won't nobble and nibble us?" Peter wondered.

"Nobble and nibble you? Hardy hardy ho! No no no," laughed the laughing bear.

"You won't trap and tickle us," Julie wondered.

"Trap and tickle you? Hardy hardy ho! No no no," laughed the laughing bear.

"You won't make us do *sums*, will you? Like ninety-nine take

away forty-four."

"Ninety-nine take away forty-four? Ho ho ho ho. No no no no. It gives the head an ache just *hearing* it," laughed the laughing bear.

"Phew!" said Peter.

"Phew!" said Julie.

"Now, come along, ho, quickly. We're getting all wet with this rain. Ho ho ho ho. I've never seen rain quite so *wet* before. Ho ho!"

And so Julie and Peter followed the laughing bear all the way to his laughing house.

Inside, the laughing bear served Julie and Peter with laughing tea, and laughing biscuits. Of course, the laughing tea and laughing biscuits didn't actually laugh; it was just impossible to drink the laughing tea, or eat the laughing biscuits, without laughing.

"Haa haa haa. It certainly is raining fast," Julie laughed, taking a sip of her laughing tea.

"Hee hee heeee. It hee really heeeee is heeeeeee," Peter laughed, taking a bite of his laughing biscuit.

"Hardy hardy ho. I love the rain," laughed the laughing bear.

"Ha! Me too!" Julie laughed.

"Heeeeeee he. Me too!" Peter laughed.

And they all laughed some more, as if rain was the funniest thing in the world. Finally the laughing bear said, "Now, what brings you two children to these, ha, *private* parts?"

"Well," Julie answered, suddenly becoming serious, "we're looking for Grandfather's voice."

"Yes, he's lost it," Peter added.

"Lost it has he? That certainly isn't a laughing matter," the laughing bear said, laughing his head off. "Haa haa haa. No laughing matter."

"Have you seen it anywhere?" Julie asked hopefully.

"No, ho ho. No, ho sorry ho."

"Never mind," Julie sighed. "We'll look somewhere else."

The children finished their laughing tea and laughing biscuits, thanked the laughing bear, and said toodle-pip. Instead of saying good-bye, the laughing bear just laughed! He was that kind of laughing bear.

Out into the rain they went, huddled beneath the magic umbrella.

"Where are we going now?" Peter asked.

"I don't know now, do I?!" Julie said, shaking her head.

The children walked on through the forest, and finally came to a racing roaring river. In the middle of the river was a small island with a small house. A wisp of smoke coughed from a chimney.

"It looks like someone's home," Julie said. They walked closer, along the river bank, and stopped beside a rickety-rackety old wooden bridge, leading to the island.

"Let's go visit," Julie said, pulling Peter by the hand.

"I don't like it," Peter said. And when they reached the middle of the rickety-rackety old wooden bridge, Peter liked it even less. He was looking down at the splashing river far below. "It's scary," he said. And you know what Julie answered:

"Don't be a baby," she told him.

Finally across, they walked up the garden path and knocked on the door of the little house.

It was a beaver who answered. He looked very surprised, and sounded very musical. The beaver, you see, could not speak without singing.

"Toodle do!

Toodle dee!

Two small children

One small me," he sang, and I'm happy to say, it was all quite in tune.

"Er, hello Mr. Beaver," Julie said.

"Hello you," he sang, looking at Julie

"And hello you," he sang, looking at Peter.

"How do you do you do you do?"

"Fine thanks," Julie said.

"Grandfather has lost his voice," Peter announced, "and we're looking for it. Have you seen it anywhere?"

"To lose a friend is sad

To lose your way regretful

But to lose a voice is mad

Grandpa must be too forgetful! !"

"It wasn't his fault," Julie said. "He has a cold."

"Well goodness me

I do declare

If that's the case

It's just not fair.

To lose the only

Voice he had

Must make your granddad

Hopping mad.

But deary me

I'm sad to say

His voice has not

Passed by this way"

"Oh dear. Well, I'm sorry we troubled you Mr. Beaver," Julie said.

"It was no trouble

It was not truly.

Say 'trouble' quick—

It sounds like Julie.

Call me liar

Call me cheater

Say 'trouble' slow

It sounds like Peter," sang the beaver. Julie and Peter were not altogether sure what the beaver meant by this—but they both had a feeling he was being a bit cheeky.

And so the children went on their way, back over the

"Vlee vlee," went the lion.

"Pitter patter," went the rain. The sky was crying too.

"Boooo hooo, tell me, boo, Mr. Lion, hoo hoo."

"Yes? vlee vlee vlee," he cried.

"Grandfather, zeee, has lost, fooo, his voice. Noooo noooo. Have you seen it? Booooo hooooo hooooo."

"No," said the lion, still crying like crazy. "But if, chooooo choooo, you are looking, gloo gloo, for someone's voice, voo, there is only one place to search."

"Where? Zoo zooo," cried Julie, suddenly feeling even happier, and crying even harder. "Where hic should hic we hic look?" And the lion told them.

And so, just as before, huddled under the magic umbrella, on they went. Only now they knew where they were going and what they were looking for.

Suddenly, Peter said, "That must be it," and pointed with his pointing finger.

"Echo Cave. Thank seven we've arrived."

"Thank you, seven," Peter said. It was a little joke they liked to say, every now and then.

The entrance to Echo Cave was like a dark mouth on the face of the mountain, and seemed like the kind of place best left to bats, rats, and grown-ups.

"It's dark in there," Peter said in a scaredypoo kind of voice. "Do we *really* have to go in?"

"Do you want to find Grandfather's voice, Peter?"

"Yes, but . . ." he hesitated.

"Well, I'm going in. You stay here, if you wish."

"What?! By myself? No fear!" And he ran to catch up.

Into the cave they went, and boy was it dark.

"Hello!" Peter called out, scared there was someone inside.

"Hello!" someone answered.

Peter's eyes widened. "Who's that?" he called.

"Who's that?" someone answered.

"It's me. Peter," Peter called.

"It's me. Peter," someone answered.

"It's only your echo," Julie told him.

"It's only your echo," someone else answered.

"Now stop messing around, and come on."

"Now stop messing around, and come on."

Further into the cave they went, stepping cautiously, cautiously stepping, step by cautious step. Further into the inky blackness. Julie held on tightly to Peter's hand, because now they could see nothing. And all that nothing was black nothing. It was scary nothing. And then, just ahead, there seemed to be a green light coming from another chamber of the cave.

When they arrived, the children saw the entire room was lit by a strange kind of moss, which grew on the floor and rocky walls, and glowed like wet lightning. But there was something even odder than that: small golden boxes, about the size of small golden boxes, littered the ground. Lots and lots of them. They were all exactly the same.

"I wonder if there's treasure in them?" Peter wondered. Peter was mad about treasure.

"Let's look and see," Julie said, picking one up and opening its lid. It seemed empty—but just then a voice said:

"Hello dere." Julie was so surprised, she slammed the lid shut.

"Did you hear that?" she asked.

"Yes," Peter replied.

"It came from inside the box, didn't it?"

"Yep. Better put it down and we'll get out of here. It's spooky."

"Don't be a baby," Julie told him, and opened up the box again.

"Hello dere," said the voice. It was a silly kind of voice. Julie closed the lid again, and turned to Peter with a very

strange look on her face: her mouth curled down, her eyebrows went up, and her eyes opened wide. (See if you can do it). Her expression seemed to say, "Well wiggle my wogs and woggle my wigs!" Julie put the box down and said, "Let's try another." Once again, as soon as the lid was open, a voice spoke, but this voice was very different from the first. It was gruff and rough.

"And who might you be? And what might you want?" it asked. By now, even Julie thought it was spooky, and she slammed the lid shut.

"Well, what do you think of that?" Julie was dumbfounded. Meanwhile, Peter was too busy being scared to answer. Julie put the box down, picked up another, and opened the lid.

"Hello children," said a nice ladies voice. "How do you do?" Julie went from box to box, opening them one by one, and each time a different voice spoke out:

"'Tis a strrrange place. 'Tis a strrrange strrrange place."

"It's a wee bit chilly in 'ere lassie. Aye it is." And:

"What a gay day." Peter was scared. Julie was puzzled.

"What *is* this place?" she mumbled to herself. But herself was not listening to herself. She was too busy thinking.

"I want to go," Peter said.

"Hold your horses, Peter," Julie said, suddenly all excited. "I think I know where we are. I think I know what's happening."

"Good. We can go then."

"This must be the place," Julie explained, not even listening to her brother, "where all the lost voices go. Every time someone loses their voice, it comes here for safe-keeping."

"You mean," began Peter, half interested, "like last year when I had a cough for three days, and I lost my voice and, and I couldn't speak and—"

"Yes. This is where it must have been. Here in Echo Cave."

"That means Grandfather's voice must be here, doesn't it?"

"Yes." And they began opening the boxes, searching for Grandfather's voice.

"Oh deary, deary me," said one.

"What do you want?" said another. "I'm trying to rest." At last, they opened a box, and heard a voice just just like Grandfather Jacob's.

"This is it," Julie said excitedly. She closed the lid shut, and put the box underneath her arm.

"At last," said Peter. "Let's go home."

Julie closed the lovely magic umbrella, and suddenly, QUICK AS A FLASH, the two children disappeared.

Back in the attic, Julie and Peter put the magic umbrella back in the trunk, locked the door, and hurried down to their beds.

Downstairs, at breakfast, Julie said:

"Grandfather, close your eyes; we have a gift for you." He would have liked, I'm sure, to have said:

"Splendid." Or perhaps, "Lovely, what is it?" But poor old Grandfather, with no voice, could say nothing, and simply closed his eyes tightly shut. Julie placed the little golden box in his hand, and said:

"You can look now." And that's just what he did. He opened the lid, and peered inside.

"But it's empty," he said. **Out loud.** Julie and Peter began to giggle, and that, perhaps, was what made him realise.

"*I can speak!*" he said joyfully. "All of a sudden I have my voice back. *I can speak!*" And the children laughed their heads off. "But, but," began Grandfather, with a twinkle in his eye, "I wonder how it happened?" Julie and Peter laughed some more. Of course, they knew how it had happened, and now so do you—

but don't tell anyone, will you?