

"I know a great many secrets," she said, and suddenly she smiled. It was a thin icy smile, the kind a snake might make just before it bites you. "Come over here to Grandma and she'll whisper secrets to you."

George took a step backward, edging closer to the door.

"You mustn't be frightened of your old grandma," she said, smiling that icy smile.

George took another step backward.

"Some of us," she said, and all at once she was leaning forward in her chair and whispering in a throaty sort of voice George had never heard her use before. "Some of us," she said, "have magic powers that can twist the creatures of this earth into wondrous shapes. . . ."

A tingle of electricity flashed down the length of George's spine. He began to feel frightened.

"Some of us," the old woman went on, "have fire on our tongues and sparks in our bellies and wizardry in the tips of our fingers. . . ."



"Some of us know secrets that would make your hair stand straight up on end and your eyes pop out of their sockets. . . ."

George wanted to run away, but his feet seemed stuck to the floor.

"We know how to make your nails drop off and teeth grow out of your fingers instead."

George began to tremble. It was her face that frightened him most of all, the frosty smile, the brilliant unblinking eyes.

"We know how to have you wake up in the morning with a long tail coming out from behind you."

"Grandma!" he cried out. "Stop!"

"We know secrets, my dear, about dark places where dark things live and squirm and slither all over each other. . . ."

George made a dive for the door.

"It doesn't matter how far you run," he heard her saying, "you won't ever get away. . . ."

George ran into the kitchen, slamming the door behind him.



## The Marvelous Plan

George sat himself down at the table in the kitchen. He was shaking a little. Oh, how he hated Grandma! He really *bated* that horrid old witchy woman. And all of a sudden he had a tremendous urge to *do something* about her. Something *whopping*. Something *absolutely terrific*. A *real shocker*. A sort of explosion. He wanted to blow away the witchy smell that hung about her in the next room. He may have been only eight years old, but he was a brave little boy. He was ready to take this old woman on.

"I'm not going to be frightened by *her*," he said softly to himself. But he *was* frightened. And that's why he wanted suddenly to explode her away.

Well . . . not quite away. But he did want to shake the old woman up a bit.

Very well, then. What should it be, this whopping terrific exploding shocker for Grandma?

He would have liked to put a firecracker under her chair, but he didn't have one.

He would have liked to put a long green snake down the back of her dress, but he didn't have a long green snake.

He would have liked to put six big black rats in the room with her and lock the door, but he didn't have six big black rats.

As George sat there pondering this interesting problem, his eye fell upon the bottle of Grandma's brown



medicine standing on the sideboard. Rotten stuff it seemed to be. Four times a day a large spoonful of it was shoveled into her mouth, and it didn't do her the slightest bit of good. She was always just as horrid after she'd had it as she'd been before. The whole point of medicine, surely, was to make a person better. If it didn't do that, then it was quite useless.

*So-bo!* thought George suddenly. *Ab-ba! Ho-bum!* I know exactly what I'll do. I shall make her a *new* medicine, one that is so strong and so fierce and so fantastic it will either cure her completely or blow off the top of her head. I'll make her a *magic medicine*, a medicine no doctor in the world has ever made before.

George looked at the kitchen clock. It said five past ten. There was nearly an hour left before Grandma's next dose was due at eleven.

"Here we go, then!" cried George, jumping up from the table. "A magic medicine it shall be!"

“So give me a bug and a jumping flea,  
Give me two snails and lizards three,  
And a slimy squiggler from the sea,  
And the poisonous sting of a bumblebee,  
And the juice from the fruit of the jujube tree,  
And the powdered bone of a wombat’s knee.  
And one hundred other things as well  
Each with a rather nasty smell.  
I’ll stir them up, I’ll boil them long,  
A mixture tough, a mixture strong.  
And then, heigh-ho, and down it goes,

A nice big spoonful (hold your nose)  
Just gulp it down and have no fear.  
‘How do you like it, Granny dear?’  
Will she go pop? Will she explode?  
Will she go flying down the road?  
Will she go poof in a puff of smoke?  
Start fizzing like a can of Coke?  
Who knows? Not I. Let’s wait and see.  
(I’m glad it’s neither you nor me.)  
Oh Grandma, if you only knew  
What I have got in store for you!”

## Brown Paint

George turned off the heat under the stewing pot. He must leave plenty of time for it to cool down.

When all the steam and froth had gone away, he peered into the giant pot to see what color the great medicine now was. It was a deep and brilliant blue.

“It needs more brown in it,” George said. “It simply must be brown, or she’ll get suspicious.”

George ran outside and dashed into his father’s toolshed where all the paints were kept. There was a row of cans on the shelf, all colors, black, green, red, pink, white and brown. He reached for the can of brown. The label said simply DARK BROWN GLOSS PAINT ONE QUART. He took a screwdriver and prised off the lid. The can was three-quarters full. He rushed it back to the kitchen. He poured the whole lot into the pot. The pot was now full to the brim. Very gently, George stirred the paint into the mixture with the long wooden spoon. *Ab-ba!* It was all turning brown! A lovely rich creamy brown!

“Where’s that medicine of mine, boy?!” came the voice from the living room. “You’re forgetting me! You’re doing it on purpose! I shall tell your mother!”

“I’m not forgetting you, Grandma,” George called

back. “I’m thinking of you all the time. But there are still ten minutes to go.”

“You’re a nasty little maggot!” The voice screeched



back. "You're a lazy and disobedient little worm and you're growing too fast."

George fetched the bottle of Grandma's real medicine from the sideboard. He took out the cork and tipped it all down the sink. He then filled the bottle with his own magic mixture by dipping a small jug into the pot and using it as a pourer. He replaced the cork.

Had it cooled down enough yet? Not quite. He held the bottle under the cold tap for a couple of minutes. The label came off in the water, but that didn't matter. He dried the bottle with a dishcloth.

All was now ready!

This was it!

The great moment had arrived!

"Medicine time, Grandma!" he called out.

"I should hope so, too," came the grumpy reply.

The silver tablespoon in which the medicine was always given lay ready on the kitchen sideboard. George picked it up.

Holding the spoon in one hand and the bottle in the other, he advanced into the living room.

## Grandma Gets the Medicine

Grandma sat hunched in her chair by the window. The wicked little eyes followed George closely as he crossed the room toward her.

"You're late," she snapped.

"I don't think I am, Grandma."

"Don't interrupt me in the middle of a sentence!" she shouted.

"But you'd finished your sentence, Grandma."

"There you go again!" she cried. "Always interrupting and arguing. You really are a tiresome little boy. What's the time?"

"It's exactly eleven o'clock, Grandma."

"You're lying as usual. Stop talking so much and give me my medicine. Shake the bottle first. Then pour it onto the spoon and make sure it's a whole spoonful."

"Are you going to gulp it all down in one go?" George asked her. "Or will you sip it?"

"What I do is none of your business," the old woman said. "Fill the spoon."

As George removed the cork and began very slowly to pour the thick brown stuff into the spoon, he couldn't help thinking back on all the mad and marvelous things that had gone into the making of this crazy

stuff—the shaving soap, the hair remover, the dandruff cure, the automatic washing-machine powder, the flea powder for dogs, the shoe polish, the black pepper, the horseradish sauce and all the rest of them,

not to mention the powerful animal pills and powders and liquids . . . and the brown paint.

“Open your mouth wide, Grandma,” he said, “and I’ll pop it in.”

The old hag opened her small wrinkled mouth, showing disgusting pale brown teeth.

“Here we go!” George cried out. “Swallow it down!” He pushed the spoon well into her mouth and tipped the mixture down her throat. Then he stepped back to watch the result.

It was worth watching.

Grandma yelled “*Oweeee!*” and her whole body shot up *whoosh* into the air. It was exactly as though someone had pushed an electric wire through the underneath of her chair and switched on the current. Up she went like a jack-in-the-box . . . and she didn’t come down . . . she stayed there . . . suspended in midair . . . about two feet up . . . still in a sitting position . . . but rigid now . . . frozen . . . quivering . . . the eyes bulging . . . the hair standing straight up on end.

“Is something wrong, Grandma?” George asked her politely. “Are you all right?”

Suspended up there in space, the old girl was beyond speaking.

The shock that George’s marvelous mixture had given her must have been tremendous.

You’d have thought she’d swallowed a red-hot poker the way she took off from that chair.

Then down she came again with a *plop*, back into her seat.