



**PETER AND THE
PLASTIC SNOWMAN**

ROGER HARTOPP

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Roger Hartopp

Dedicated to Peter and Simon

AUTHOR'S NOTE

The book I mention in this story is 'The Snowman', the story that helped to give me this wonderful idea for an adventure.

If you have never heard of this book or seen the very popular video (well, it is possible, because I'm sure you are all very young!) then do ask Mummy and Daddy to find Raymond Briggs's delightful tale.

You may even find it better than this one!

Anyway.

I hope that you, the reader, and the children who listen to (or read) the story enjoy it very much. It is for the 6-10 age group, but adults can enjoy it very much too as there are many levels to the story.

This is not going to be the only book. The next Plastic Snowman book is going to be very, very different. You have been warned.

Roger Hartopp

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1. SNOWING!

It was the first Friday immediately after the Christmas and New Year holiday and the first snow of the winter had finally arrived. But it wasn't just a flurry or a few snowflakes; it was lots and lots of the stuff.

Seven-year old Peter Peddington was sitting quietly by the window in the kitchen of his house. All morning he had been watching the snow settling and covering the garden. Now it was snowing very hard and the depth of the settled snow was now, he reckoned, up to the level of the top of his shoes.

Mr. Peddington, or Daddy as we and Peter shall call him, was also sitting in the kitchen, reading a TV magazine and drinking his tea. He wasn't due back at work until the following Monday: his company gave its workers a long winter break over the Christmas and New Year period.

'Daddy?' asked Peter, turning to Daddy. 'Are we still going to see Auntie Anne?' Peter had three Aunties, but he only got to see Auntie Anne once a year as she lived so far away. They were due to make a three-hour drive to her house that afternoon to spend the weekend there before his parents went back to work. Peter wasn't due back at school until the following Wednesday.

'Sorry Peter,' said Daddy sadly, looking down from his magazine. 'There's a lot of snow out there now. But hopefully we'll go when the roads have been cleared. I hope the council get their gritting lorries and trucks and shovels down here fairly soon. I don't really fancy driving out in this snow.'

Peter turned and looked out of the window again. It was clearly snowing harder than ever. He felt sure they would not be going anywhere in these conditions. But there was still quite a bit of time yet.

'Daddy, can we go outside and make a snowman?' asked Peter hopefully, as Daddy went back to his magazine.

Usually Daddy would play with Peter when he was in the mood, which wasn't that often. This was not because he didn't enjoy it, but he often found himself doing other things at home such as using the computer or reading a book or magazine. But to Peter's surprise he quickly put the magazine down on the table and closed it. His eyes were very bright and he had a big smile. 'You know what, Peter?' he gleamed. 'That's an excellent idea. I used to enjoy making snowmen when I was a little boy, and you know what, I really fancy making one now! Let me just finish my cup of tea.'

Then Mrs. Peddington, who we and Peter will call Mummy, came into the kitchen, looking serious and purposeful. She was the kind of lady who always needed to have something to do and couldn't sit still. 'I'm glad it's a good idea too Daddy. You need to get a bit of exercise and play with your son a bit more! And before you two go out,' she added kindly but firmly to both of them, 'you both make sure you wrap up warm!'

'Okay Mummy!' shouted Peter gleefully.

'Okay Mummy!' added Daddy, smiling.

So Peter rushed into the hall to his clothes peg. He lifted off his thick winter coat, and put it on, making sure that all the buttons were fastened well. He then put on his thick woolly hat, his thick woolly scarf, his thick woolly gloves, and his thick winter boots. 'There! I'm ready!' he shouted.

'So am I!' added Daddy, zipping up his winter coat.

'Have fun!' called Mummy. 'And look after my little boy!'

'She always says that,' said Peter, smiling.

'She does, but she loves you very much,' said Daddy, opening the back door.

'Wow!' shouted Peter as he walked out of the house. Although he had seen the snow falling from where he had been sitting by the window, seeing it for real was something else. He had never seen so

much before, and as he walked off the doorstep, he found that it had now reached the top of his winter boots. It was still snowing heavily.

And then without warning, Daddy picked up some snow and rolled it into a ball within his hands. 'Snowball fight!' he laughed, as he gently threw it at Peter's coat.

Peter chuckled. Running out into the garden, he also gathered up some snow and threw a snowball back at Daddy. Very soon the pair were throwing lots of snowballs at each other.

2. THE SNOWMAN

After a few minutes of hurling lots of snowballs and getting well covered with snow, Daddy put up his arms in mock surrender. 'Okay chap!' he laughed, 'You win!'

'Can we make a snowman now?' grinned Peter.

'Of course we can!' said Daddy, smiling. 'You watch and learn!'

He then began to roll a snowball along the ground. It very quickly got bigger and bigger as it gathered up snow, leaving a green trail of uncovered grass in its wake.

'Wow!' said Peter excitedly, 'so what happens next?'

'This is just the first part of him,' said Daddy. 'Now I will make two more big snowballs, then plonk them on top of each other so I can make him big.'

Daddy made another two large snowballs. It took him a bit of effort to pick them up and put them on top of each other as they were quite heavy. He looked relieved when this was done. 'Gosh, not as young as I used to be,' he grinned, and began to add more snow around the snowman to fill the gaps that were between the snowballs so that he could make a nice round body, smoothing things out either by using his gloved hand or with a small shovel; it was almost like making a simple sculpture.

He then made one more snowball. This one was about half the size of the others. Daddy was relieved that this one was not as heavy as the others – there was no way he could have lifted another large snowball up to the height of his head. He then made two large, thick arms that lay down by the snowman's sides. He then made another two, but smaller snowballs. He positioned them close together at the base of the snowman so they clearly looked like snowmen feet.

When he finished, he stood back with Peter to look at the snowman.

He was quite pleased with his work. 'Do you like it?' he asked Peter.

Peter wasn't too sure. 'Well, er, yes,' he said doubtfully, 'but it hasn't got a face or a scarf.'

'I know what we'll do,' said Daddy smiling. 'You go inside and ask Mummy for things to make his face, and to give you a hat and a

scarf! Oh, and get my camera. We should take a picture of him!’

‘Okay Daddy!’

*

After a few minutes, Peter returned to the garden with Daddy’s camera. He also brought with him several buttons, a carrot, and an old brown cloth cap and green scarf. He handed them to Daddy.

‘These are perfect,’ Daddy said. He used the two big black buttons for the eyes, the carrot for the nose, ten little red buttons for the mouth, and three big red buttons that he stuck to the snowman’s tummy for his coat. Finally, he wrapped the scarf around the neck, and placed the hat on the head.

‘There! Finished!’ he announced, and stood back to admire this new piece of handiwork.

Peter joined him. ‘Wow!’ he shouted. ‘That really is the best snowman in the world! Thank you Daddy!’

‘Thank *you*, Peter,’ said Daddy proudly. ‘Let’s take a few pictures. Go and stand next to the snowman and give us a big smile.’

So Peter did so, grinning broadly. As Daddy pointed the camera at him, some large snowflakes landed on his nose. It made it itch, and he had to give it a little scratch. After that, he was happy. ‘Cheese!’ he said gleefully.

Daddy took about ten photos, each time with Peter standing in a different position around the snowman. When he finished taking all the photos he needed, Peter walked away from the snowman. He then turned to look at it again. It really did look like a perfectly well-built snowman.

‘Will he melt?’ he asked worryingly.

‘Not for a few days,’ replied Daddy in a voice that cheered Peter up again. ‘It’ll still be cold for some time, according to the weather forecast.’

‘Okay boys, you’ve been out there long enough!’ shouted Mummy from the kitchen window. ‘Come on in now, dinner’s

ready!’

*

As the snow continued to fall heavily, it was becoming very clear that they would not be going to Auntie Anne's house. There was now a lot of snow on the roads, and the men whose job it was to clear them were unable to clear them fast enough.

After dinner Peter went back outside. It was not snowing so hard now, so he spent a long time running around and playing with his new snowman. But the short winter day meant it soon got very dark and very cold, and Mummy had to call him home.

After some supper and a hot cup of tea it was bedtime. Peter brushed his teeth thoroughly and put on his pyjamas. Daddy then came up to his bedroom to read him a short bedtime story.

‘This one's called *The Snowman*,’ he began.

‘I remember this!’ said Peter excitedly. ‘It was a Christmas present from Auntie Anne! It's about this little boy who builds a snowman that comes alive, takes him to the North Pole, and they meet Father Christmas! But I remember it has a sad ending...’

‘Ah, that’s why you asked me earlier if the snowman would melt,’ smiled Daddy.

*

When Daddy finished the story, he kissed Peter on the cheek and said, ‘Goodnight Peter. Sleep well. See you in the morning.’

‘Goodnight Daddy,’ said Peter happily, and then looked at the window. ‘Goodnight snowman.’

‘Yes,’ said Daddy with a smile, also looking at the window. ‘Goodnight snowman. We'll see you in the morning.’

It had been a busy day. Very soon Peter was fast asleep.

3. THE PLASTIC SNOWMAN

A little later Peter suddenly woke up. He could just hear the TV downstairs. After a few minutes trying to get back to sleep, he got up and looked up at the window. He then quickly got out of bed and ran to it.

He wondered...

He crept quietly out of his bedroom, went downstairs, and tiptoed past the living room.

Mummy and Daddy had not yet gone to bed. Normally he would stop and peek through the door as they never shut it tight. But not tonight. They were watching a movie with lots of bangs and crashes, and so the television and the large speakers were quite noisy. There was little chance of him being heard opening the door.

Very quietly, Peter took his winter clothes from his clothes peg. He put them on and then, as quietly as he could, opened the back

door to the garden.

It was a very cold night, but it had stopped snowing.

As Peter stood just outside the door, he looked up and saw that all the stars were out. There was a bright full moon.

Quietly closing the door but careful not to close it tight for fear of being shut out, he went straight to the garden and up to the snowman.

He ran up and put his arms out and hugged it.

But to his surprise, the snowman was not cold and wet.

In fact, it was nice and warm!

Very puzzled, Peter then took off his glove and touched the snowman with his bare hand.

And then he had an even bigger surprise - the snowman was not soft!

He knocked on it.

'Hello?' said a low voice above him.

Peter looked up. The snowman was looking down at him. And it was smiling!

'How are you, Peter?' it said.

Peter suddenly gasped and stood away, aware of the fact that what he was seeing was real. But very quickly that initial fear turned to excitement. 'You're alive!'

He went back up to the snowman and touched it again. 'But you're not made of snow!'

'No, I'm not,' said the snowman happily, as the ten buttons that made up his mouth suddenly danced around. They were moving in time with his voice, and it really looked like he was talking. 'Good! I'm made of nice warm plastic! Just as I should be!'

'Wow!' said Peter, 'I've got a Plastic Snowman!'

And then, to Peter's surprise, the Plastic Snowman put out his arms and looked at each one. He then said excitedly, 'Brilliant! I've

got some nice arms... I'm been made with decent arms! Really good arms! A little short, but great, they're arms!

He then looked down at his feet. 'Hey! I've got feet! Fantastic! You've made me with feet! Hey, I really look like one of the Really Important Snowmen!'

He started dancing around. 'I've got feet!' he shouted, hardly able to contain the enthusiasm he felt in having a pair of feet. 'Did you know Peter that ninety-nine per cent of snowmen aren't even made with feet, and I've got feet! Only the best snowmen get feet! Okay, not too much in the way of legs, but I shouldn't complain! Thank you! Thank you so much! I feel really important now!'

Peter could only stand there, his mouth wide open in surprise. He didn't know what to say next.

'I'm so happy,' continued the Plastic Snowman, 'In fact, I'm so happy and feel so important that I want to go somewhere. I don't want to stand here all night. Hey, that's great! I can say, 'I don't want to stand', not 'I don't want to balance!' Dear me, I wonder... no I shouldn't, they don't really like it up in the Cloudland... but hey, I must have been made into an important plastic snowman for a reason...'

He shuffled about, clearly eager to go and do something. 'Well, I'm supposed to take you to... wait, I'm important looking! Peter! Can we go somewhere, Peter? Please! I feel like going somewhere! Anywhere! Give me some instructions! Give me a place to visit!'

Peter laughed. 'Okay!' he shouted.

'So where would you like to go?' asked the Plastic Snowman. 'To the mountains? The forest? A place where there's lots of animals?'

Peter already had the answer to this in his mind. 'Let's fly to the North Pole and see Father Christmas!' he said, jumping with excitement.

The stones that made up the eyes and mouth of the Plastic Snowman's face then re-arranged themselves into a face that clearly looked a little disappointed. 'The North Pole?' he said gloomily. 'Oh. Well, he's not up there now. He's probably sleeping it all off at the moment. And *fly*? Oh, we're always asked to do that. But Peter, I have to tell you that, well... you see, we plastic snowmen don't *really* fly, well, not as such. As you can see, we're not designed to do that. We don't have wings. Like you. I have arms, well not many snowmen even have arms, just twigs and branches, but can you fly with just your two arms?"

'Um...'

'You're not sure? Look, let me show you.'

The Plastic Snowman flapped his two arms to try and prove flying was not possible with two arms.

Peter just stared in silence as the Plastic Snowman ran round and round in circles, flapping his arms. Not surprisingly, he didn't fly.

'Well,' smiled the Plastic Snowman, now stopped. 'Look, I'll tell you what. We can go more or less anywhere we like, but not to Father Christmas. Think. Are you sure there isn't anywhere else you would like to go?'

Peter thought for a moment, and then said, 'Let's go and see my Auntie Anne!'

'*Really?*' said the Plastic Snowman, his button mouth curving from a smile to disappointment again, 'But... it's a bit late, isn't it? She might have gone to bed. Come on Peter, I hoped you would be asking to see places where there are hills and lakes and animals. Places where there wouldn't be—'

But Peter was beginning to get a little impatient. 'Come on, Plastic Snowman!' he shouted. 'Prove to me that you're a magic snowman. Let's go and see my Auntie Anne. *Please!*'

‘Okay then, but it’s definitely risky. It’s somewhere I shouldn’t really be going to,’ said the Plastic Snowman with a big sigh. ‘Now take my hand and hold it very tightly. And we’re only looking at the house, okay?’

Peter looked at the Plastic Snowman’s right arm. There was no hand on the end. ‘How am I going to hold on if you haven’t got a hand?’ he asked worryingly.

‘Ah, good point. Well, now then, watch this,’ said the Plastic Snowman confidently.

He put his right arm out, and then Peter saw three little stubby fingers, a thumb, and a palm slowly grow out of the end.

‘One hand from the end of my wonderful arm!’ said the Plastic Snowman proudly.

Peter smiled. He then reached out and grabbed the right hand. He was surprised to find this right hand was nice and warm. Even more strangely, the chilly air around him suddenly turned from cold to pleasantly warm.

‘When you hold me,’ the Plastic Snowman explained, ‘I generate additional heat around my body and the child I am holding. Brilliant really. Don’t know exactly how that works, but I suppose there’s perhaps some magic to it, I’m not quite sure, but-’

‘So how are we getting there if you can’t fly?’ cut in Peter.

The Plastic Snowman then raised his left arm where there was already a hand at the end of that. He was about to click the fingers, but then stopped. ‘Okay, I’m technically breaking a rule here, but I’m a brilliantly made snowman so I must be like this for a reason, so I think it should be okay. Fortunately, the Chief Most Important Plastic Snowman’s a very understanding snowman. As long as no harm’s done I should be fine, particularly as you’ve given me feet,’ he said confidently.

‘What do you mean?’ asked Peter curiously.

‘Listen to me carefully, Peter,’ said the Plastic Snowman. ‘When I start running, you start running. When I hop, you hop. When I skip, you skip. And then when I say *jump*, you jump as high as you can into the air!’

‘So we *are* going to fly!’ said Peter, getting very excited.

‘Actually Peter, we’re not exactly going to fly,’ said the Plastic Snowman. ‘We’re actually going to do one, big, *enormous* jump. Now hold my hand very tightly.’

As he did so, the chilly air that made Peter feel cold now suddenly felt warm again. It was just like holding hands with a hot water bottle.

‘Ready?’ asked the Plastic Snowman.

‘Ready!’ replied Peter.

So they started to run down the garden. Although the Plastic Snowman only had short, stumpy legs that were stuck at the bottom of his body, these legs were not only able to lift him, but they could run quite fast, too.

The Plastic Snowman hopped.

Peter hopped.

The Plastic Snowman skipped.

Peter skipped.

And then the Plastic Snowman yelled, ‘JUMP!’

And Peter jumped as high as he could.

And then they went up, up, UP into the air!

Peter could not contain himself any longer. ‘WHEEEE!’ he shouted.

He could see his house beginning to get smaller and smaller. The snow-covered town where he lived was also getting smaller and smaller.

And still they were going up, up, and up, and soon all Peter could see were lots of little lights of all the towns and villages below him, along with the moving headlights of those few cars that had

dared to go out into the snow that still covered a lot of the roads. He knew that the ground was a long way down, but even though he was only holding one hand, he felt as though his whole body was being held tightly, making sure that there was no way he would fall.

Then he looked up at the sky. The stars were so bright! The moon was so big!

'WOW!' he yelled. It was the biggest WOW he had ever said! Peter could see many towns, villages, rivers, lakes and forests that were below his feet and that were lit up by the full moon, but he could now feel that they had reached the top of their jump and that they were slowly heading downwards. The lights on the ground soon got bigger and bigger again. Peter now saw the moonlit houses that made up another small town. Those houses were getting bigger and bigger very quickly.

And then their feet touched, and then sank, into the snow-covered ground.

They were now standing outside the front door of a very familiar house.

4. AUNTIE ANNE'S HOUSE

'It's Auntie Anne's house!' Peter shouted excitedly.

'It certainly is,' said the Plastic Snowman warily, standing behind Peter.

Peter let go of the Plastic Snowman's hand. That warm feeling he had being next to the Plastic Snowman suddenly disappeared, and he could feel the cold night air once again.

He cautiously walked up to the door. The doorbell was too high to reach.

'Can you ring the bell for me?' he asked the Plastic Snowman.

But the Plastic Snowman started shaking his head. 'Peter, I told you that we're only meant to be looking at the house. It really isn't a very good idea to—'

But Peter took no notice and removed a glove. KNOCK KNOCK!

'NO, PETER—'

Again. KNOCK KNOCK.

A few seconds later, a familiar face to Peter opened the front door.

It was Auntie Anne. She was looking very surprised.

'Hello Auntie Anne!' shouted Peter happily.

'Oh my goodness me!' said Auntie Anne, putting her hand up to her mouth in mild shock. 'Hello Peter! I thought you weren't all coming because of all the snow! Your mummy even called me to say you weren't coming! You're all very late! I was about to go to bed!'

She then stepped forward and looked around outside. 'Where is your Mummy and Daddy?' she asked kindly.

'They're not here,' said Peter, unaware that Auntie Anne always expected them to be there with him.

'Where are they, Peter?'

'They're at home, watching television,' he said cheerily.

But Auntie Anne began to look very worried. 'Peter, if Mummy and Daddy aren't here, how did *you* get here?'

'The Plastic Snowman!' shouted Peter, pointing to the snowman that was standing right behind him.

Auntie Anne looked behind Peter. There certainly was a snowman standing there, which certainly wasn't there at least two hours earlier, the last time she had opened the front door. 'Oh, right, it's, er, I have to say, very good,' she said uncertainly as she looked at the Plastic Snowman. 'But it's a strange place for you to build him, right outside my door. It's, erm, excellent. Er, how did you make that all on your own?'

'I didn't build him here,' said Peter. 'Daddy built him at home, in the garden.'

'Really?' said Auntie Anne, her tone both puzzled and concerned.

'Yes!' Peter said. 'And he's made of plastic!'

'I see.'

Auntie Anne looked to her left and right, hoping that somehow the answer to this rather bewildering situation she now found herself in was clearly in view, but it wasn't. 'Did you... er, *fly* here?' she asked almost in desperation, thinking of the book she gave him the previous Christmas.

'No, don't be silly Auntie Anne!' said Peter with a big smile.

'Okay, well, at least I'm not going crackers, then,' she whispered to herself.

'We jumped a very big jump to get here,' said Peter brightly, 'and it was higher than the trees and the mountains, and we jumped all the way here! He doesn't usually jump, but he did it for me.'

'No. I'm all wrong. I'm definitely going crackers,' mumbled Auntie Anne to herself again.

She then spoke aloud. 'Okay Peter. Let me get this right. He's... plastic, right? Can I, erm, touch him?'

'Yes! Of course!'

So Auntie Anne touched the Plastic Snowman. He was cold and wet, just as she expected, much to her relief that at least *that* made sense.

'He's made of snow, Peter.'

'Oh.' Peter was very surprised. He turned and touched it, and it was.

Auntie Anne decided this was enough. 'Come on inside the house, Peter,' she said kindly. 'We don't want you to get cold!'

Peter looked back at the Plastic Snowman hopefully, but the Plastic Snowman did not move.

Auntie Anne then gently picked Peter up, brought him inside the house, and closed the door.

Inside, she made him a nice hot cup of tea and brought it to him in the living room, which he drank and which warmed him up considerably. He also munched on a piece of Auntie Anne's delicious home-made chocolate sponge cake that she had baked especially for Peter and his mummy and daddy's visit over the weekend, but of course it had not yet been touched.

But Peter could not take the Plastic Snowman off his mind and wondered why it was not made of plastic any more.

Auntie Anne's thoughts were, of course, somewhere else entirely. She was roaming between the kitchen and the living room with her telephone, checking if Peter was sitting there and being out the way so she could talk to his mummy and daddy quietly.

But they were not answering, a voice at the other end simply telling the caller to leave a message.

She called their cell phone numbers, but these were switched off. *'Should I call the police?'* she whispered quietly to herself, so Peter wouldn't hear her. *'No, wait...'*

She dialled another number and started wandering in circles in the living room as she waited for the phone at the other end to be picked up.

As Peter was finishing his cake, he was very surprised to hear what sounded like the Plastic Snowman's kind, low voice in his head, which was saying, *'Peter, come outside to me now. Do it now. This will be your only chance.'*

As Auntie Anne wandered back into the kitchen, Peter got up. He knew what he had to do.

He quickly put on his winter things, and hoped that Auntie Anne would not suddenly come out the kitchen to check on him again.

And she was just about to do so when a voice came on the telephone. She stayed in the kitchen so that, she thought, Peter would not hear her.

She spoke quickly and urgently, but her slightly panicky voice was now loud enough for Peter to suddenly pay attention. *'Hello? Hello? Jane? Jane? Yes, sorry to get you out of bed, but guess what, you won't believe who's here—'*

Peter didn't want to listen to the rest of the conversation. He went straight back to the front door and opened it.

The snowman was still there. And it winked at him!

'You're not snow any more!' shouted Peter as he hugged the snowman, and again felt the warmth that once more kept the cold night air away.

But before Peter could ask why the Plastic Snowman was not made of snow any more, or how he could speak to him from outside Auntie Anne's house, the Plastic Snowman said in a rather more serious voice. 'Peter, we have to go. And now. I tried to tell you that this was not a good idea, but you knocked on the door.'

'Why do we have to go?' asked Peter innocently.

'Because pretty soon your Auntie Anne is going to discover you're not in her house any more!'

'Okay!' Peter said cheerfully. 'Let's now go to my Auntie Jill and Auntie Jane!'

But the Plastic Snowman was shaking his head. 'Sorry, Peter, I'm afraid you won't be able to see them or any other people tonight,' he said in a quiet voice. 'Believe me when I say that's really the last thing we should do. There are now problems I have to sort out. Take my hand Peter. We're not jumping this time though.'

'We're *not*?' asked Peter, given no time at all to feel unhappy about not going to his other aunts. 'Then how are we going to travel?'

'By something a bit simpler. The way we should be travelling. The way *I* usually travel. Perhaps the way we should have been travelling. Oh dear, I wish I wasn't feeling so proud of myself now. I'm probably in a little bit of trouble.'

'Why?'

And then he heard Auntie Anne's voice from inside the house. '*Peter! Where are you? PETER!*' It was a voice that was both panicked and terrified.

Peter was scared. The Plastic Snowman raised his left arm. 'With a click of my fingers,' he said quickly. 'So hold my hand tightly now, Peter. Here we go!'

He clicked his fingers just before Auntie Anne opened the front door. There was a brief flash.

The next thing Peter knew was that he was standing on the edge of a snow-covered forest. Auntie Anne's house and town had completely disappeared.

5. THE SECRET

Peter was very surprised and a little alarmed at the suddenness that they had left Auntie Anne, and the fact that in the blink of an eye her house had been replaced by a snow-covered field and lots of trees.

'What's happened? Plastic Snowman, where's Auntie Anne's house?' said Peter worryingly.

'We've not there anymore,' said the Plastic Snowman seriously. 'We had to go or we'd be in serious trouble.'

'Where are we now?'

'Somewhere out of the way, somewhere where we can stop for a few minutes and then get around to what I really have been made for. I think we left your Auntie's house just in time, but she was opening the door when we left.'

The Plastic Snowman then looked at Peter, who was still shaking a little from the experience of running away from a very worried aunt and then suddenly appearing somewhere else.

'Instantly moving from one place to another does tend to scare you at first,' said the Plastic Snowman gently. 'But you soon get used to it. That's how we'll be travelling from now on as, well I've already told you, I'm not supposed to be jumping. Well, not yet, anyway.'

One part of his experience at Auntie Anne's house had Peter puzzled. 'Plastic Snowman, how did you speak to me from outside Auntie Anne's house?'

'Ah, well, it's my Plastic Snowman secret,' said the Plastic Snowman. 'Besides, it would be very difficult to explain how I did it.'

There was a pause before Peter then asked sadly, 'Plastic Snowman, why can't I see my other aunties?'

'Oh my dear Peter. Because it's late... and well, in truth I really shouldn't have done what I did, I just got too excited. Now your parents and your other Auntie will know that you were at Auntie Anne's house because she will have called them. If you hadn't got away with me, Auntie Anne would have kept you at her house until Mummy and Daddy came for you. Everybody would then ask you a lot of questions. That's why we had to leave as quickly as we did. We are in a little bit of a mess.'

'What kinds of questions?'

'Their questions need answers which they can believe. They will not believe you if you tell them how you got to Auntie Anne's house.'

'But I did tell Auntie Anne.'

'Did she believe you, Peter?'

Peter thought about this for a moment. Auntie Anne certainly did sound as though she didn't believe him. And she did sound very worried when she was on the telephone.

'As I tried to tell you,' continued the Plastic Snowman, 'we really should not be going to visit people for those reasons, even your aunts. But I clearly got a little over-excited about having this wonderful snowman body that you helped me, and I so wanted you to be happy too. But, well, I've clearly made a mistake. I hoped you just wanted to see something that didn't involve people!'

As Peter looked up at the snow-covered trees and the fields of snow that were lit up by the bright moonlight, he now understood what the Plastic Snowman was telling him. He went very quiet for a moment before finally asking, 'Plastic Snowman, why were you a normal snowman when Auntie Anne touched you?'

'I am only a plastic snowman to you. I'm a normal snowman to everyone else.'

'Why?'

'Plastic snowmen are for the eyes and ears of a small number of very special little girls and boys like you. It is, and has to remain, our secret. I now have a problem and it needs fixing.'

He went on. 'If mummies and daddies, aunties and uncles, foster parents and guardians knew that you and every other child were able to jump in the air or disappear suddenly with a plastic snowman, you would be locked up in your houses until you became big children!'

'Oh.'

Again Peter went quiet for a moment, which seemed to please the Plastic Snowman as he smiled. But no. There was going to be another question.

'Plastic Snowman, what are guardians and foster parents?'

'Foster parents are people who become mummies and daddies for children who, sadly, don't have a mummy or daddy. Guardians are people who look after children, but are not acting as mummies and daddies.'

'Okay.' Peter thought how lucky he was to have his own mummy and daddy.

'Was that your last question?' asked the Plastic Snowman hopefully.

'Erm, I think so...'

'So, Peter, there's not really many other places I can take you.'

Peter now looked and sounded disappointed. 'Does this mean I have to go home now?'

The Plastic Snowman looked down at him, looking worried. 'Do you really want to go home now, Peter?'

'No! Not yet!' Peter shouted back quickly. 'Oh, and I have one more question. What's the Cloudland?'

'Now that question I can answer easily for you!' said the Plastic Snowman. 'Because that's exactly where we're going next! Where we have to go next! Where we're supposed to be going all this time!'

Where we can sort things out! Peter, do you see that big white cloud up there, next to the full moon?’

Peter looked up. ‘Yes I can!’

‘That, is what we snowmen call, the Cloudland. And we’re going to it!’

‘Why?’ asked Peter excitedly. He could sense that something wonderful was about to happen.

‘You’ll see! Hold tight!’

‘Are we going to jump?’

‘No Peter, as I’ve told you. A click of my fingers will get us there instantly.’

‘Oh.’

The Plastic Snowman’s jump to Auntie Anne’s house was almost the same as flying, and Peter really wanted to jump again. But he had never been to, or inside the middle of a cloud before, even in an aeroplane.

But he was in for an even bigger surprise.

The Plastic Snowman clicked the fingers of his left hand.

And then Peter suddenly found himself about five metres above the cloud. Just for a moment he seemed to be suspended in the air – and then he fell straight down.

He screamed, but then he found himself landing on top of what felt like a very, very soft giant bath sponge. He then bounced up again as if he was on a giant trampoline. He bounced again another two times, and from being very scared he found he could not stop laughing.

After he stopped bouncing and stood up on the cloud, Peter stared in disbelief at what looked like the biggest children’s playground in the world that had embedded itself on top of the biggest piece of cotton-wool ever.

‘WOW!’ he shouted.

That WOW was even bigger than the one earlier.

And that was big.

6. THE CLOUD AND THE MOST IMPORTANT PLASTIC
SNOWMAN

Thanks to the bright light of the full moon, Peter could clearly make out lots of brilliantly-coloured swings, roundabouts, slides, climbing frames, ropes, little cars, aeroplanes, helicopters, and see-saws that rested on top of what looked like a giant cotton-wool ball. There were also lots of little boys and girls who were playing on all these wonderful things. There were also lots of other plastic snowmen, most of which were bouncing around (as they had no legs), much to his Plastic Snowman's amusement. Peter could see that all the snowmen had at least two eyes and a mouth – but not always a nose – and many had long sticks or tree branches that were used to make their arms. They came in all shapes and sizes: fat, thin, or just in strange shapes; some had apples or oranges for noses, and some with sticks used to make mouths. But none of them appeared to look at all as good as his snowman.

Even the Plastic Snowman looked thoughtful. 'You know Peter, I'm a very, very lucky plastic snowman,' he said. 'I want to thank you and your daddy for making me the way I am. This really makes me one of the privileged few, and may even allow me to do things an ordinary plastic snowman cannot.'

'What does privileged mean?' asked Peter.

'It means to have special rights and advantages over others.'

Peter wasn't too sure what point the Plastic Snowman was making: what was going on in front of him was far more interesting, and he couldn't wait to join the other children.

Many of the Plastic Snowmen were wearing all kinds of hats and scarves, and he even saw one who was wearing a large woman's dress! They and the children were all playing together, making lots of happy noises and having lots of fun.

With his Plastic Snowman in hand, Peter walked into the playground. It was like walking on a very soft carpet.

Then he noticed another Plastic Snowman that was the same shape as his, approaching them. On each side were two other

snowmen, slightly bigger and broader than the one in the middle, but all three were perfectly well-made, perhaps a little more so than his snowman.

The one in the middle also had arms, but had slightly longer legs, and was taller. He was wearing only a round black hat and a large, black tie, and his eyes, nose and mouth were made up not of buttons or a carrot, but of several lumps of very black coal. He had a black clipboard in his right hand with several sheets of paper attached to the front of it.

The other two were also dressed the same but without the tie.

'Ah, I didn't expect them...' said the Plastic Snowman, sounding slightly worried. 'He's known as the Most Important Plastic Snowman, second to the Official Very Important Plastic Snowman. I'm going to have to be very good.'

'Why's that?' said Peter enquiringly.

'He's the one who makes the decisions about when, where, and if snowmen go to children, to other departments, or... it's not so important Peter. He's coming to me for a reason. You just listen while I do the talking, okay?'

When he arrived, the Most Important Plastic Snowman looked down at Peter, and then turned to the Plastic Snowman who had brought him up to the cloud. The smaller lumps of black coal on its face moved slowly to form an 'o' shape. It was clearly getting ready to speak.

'I can see you're one of the lucky snowmen,' it said in a very official kind of voice. 'We usually have special... tasks for the well-made snowmen. Two arms and two legs. Well done. Name?'

'Peter,' replied the Plastic Snowman.

'Your name's Peter?' asked Peter, looking up at his Plastic Snowman surprisingly.

'No Peter, he's asking me about your name,' said the Plastic Snowman, trying to force a smile.

The Most Important Plastic Snowman looked at his clipboard from which he removed a black pen. He looked down at Peter.

'Hello Preeter,' he said, still sounding very serious.

'Hello Mr. The Most Important Plastic Snowman,' said Peter uncertainly. 'I think you've got my name wrong. My name's Peter, not Preeter. P-E-T-E-R.'

The Most Important Plastic Snowman proceeded to cross out something on his clipboard and then, correct his name, presumably to Peter.

'Plastic Snowman,' began the Most Important Plastic Snowman. 'As you perhaps know, by order of The Cloudland Council of Snowmen and as Second-in-command to the Chief Very Important Plastic Snowman, it's standard snowman procedure to ask you, particularly as you are such a well-made snowman, a few important questions. Did this little boy or any of his family build you?'

'What's standard snowman procedure?' asked Peter innocently.

'It's a set of rules that we have to follow when we arrive,' said the Plastic Snowman. 'Hush now Peter, so we can get this done quickly, okay?'

'Before I was interrupted,' said the Most Important Plastic Snowman curtly, 'did this little boy or any of his family build you?'

'Yes,' replied the Plastic Snowman quickly.

The Most Important Plastic Snowman then appeared to tick something off on his clipboard. 'Were you activated in the standard way?'

'Yes, I was.'

Peter looked puzzled. What did he mean by that? He wanted to ask, but thought better of it.

'Has anyone, at any time, seen you and Perter in conversation or disappear suddenly?' continued the Most Important Plastic Snowman.

Peter was beginning to dislike this snowman a lot.

'I think so,' said the Plastic Snowman. 'But there was one time when someone almost saw me.'

'I see,' said the Most Important Plastic Snowman, frowning at his clipboard. 'We'll need details later.' His pen was clearly writing many things down.

He continued. 'Has anyone, at any time, seen or touched you as a Plastic Snowman?'

'No,' said the Plastic Snowman confidently.

'Is there anything else I should know?' The Most Important Plastic Snowman was looking side to side at his two larger snowmen. They grinned.

The Plastic Snowman then explained that Peter told his Auntie Anne about him and how Peter's Auntie had tried to contact his Mummy and Daddy, and his other aunties.

'I see,' said the Most Important Plastic Snowman, his tone sounding more serious as he wrote this piece of information down on the clipboard. 'You know you should not have taken him to a situation where there was a chance of another human getting involved. Fortunately for us all, you made the right decision in coming here, so at least we—' he looked to his other snowmen either side, both of which were grinning '—can do something about it. I realise that all the Plastic Snowmen usually make some kind of error thanks to the children they're allocated to, but I really would have thought that a snowman of your quality would have had more sense.'

The Plastic Snowman's features arranged themselves into one of slight anger.

'Right,' continued the Very Important Plastic Snowman. 'Was there... anything else? Anything else that you should really be telling me?' he added in a voice that gave Peter the idea that he was telling off the Plastic Snowman.

The Plastic Snowman looked at all three of the other plastic snowmen, staring at him. Now all three were grinning. They knew something.

‘Could I inform the Chief Very Important Plastic Snowman about this? He is, perhaps, the snowman who should be really informed.’

‘You’re going to tell *me*, and *I’ll* pass this information on to the Chief Very Important Plastic Snowman,’ the Very Important Plastic Snowman said, now with a trace of anger in its voice. ‘Is that *clear*?’

‘We did a jump,’ added the Plastic Snowman nervously.

‘*No click of the fingers?*’

The Most Important Plastic Snowman looked furious. The lumps of coal on the faces of the other two larger snowmen had now arranged themselves to look a little menacing to Peter. ‘I thought you knew the rules!’

‘Yes,’ said the Plastic Snowman uncertainly, ‘but I thought I got this excellent snowman body for a reason.’

‘And what reason do you think that might be?’ said the Most Important Plastic Snowman dangerously. ‘We only jump at the end! This is your first and only warning,’ he added. ‘Break it again and you’ll be sent to Atoz.’

The Plastic Snowman looked stunned. ‘To *Atoz*? But I thought—’

‘You thought *nothing*. You have made a wrong assumption.’

The Plastic Snowman tried to sound brave. ‘I’d like to talk to the Chief Very Important Plastic Snowman, please.’

‘Are you questioning *me*?’

Then the big snowman standing to the Most Important Plastic Snowman’s left then appeared to whisper something to him where his ear would be expected. He had clearly been reminded that, for the past minute, he had been so focussed in telling off the Plastic Snowman that he had forgotten all about Peter, and suddenly realised he perhaps said a lot more than he should have done.

He then walked up to the Plastic Snowman and looked hard into his eyes. 'You shouldn't get pushed into these things by the children. You all know that,' he said quietly but sternly.

'Yes sir, Most Important Plastic Snowman sir,' said the Plastic Snowman uncomfortably.

'What's going on here?'

Another snowman was strolling towards them. This one, however, looked very different to the rest of them.

This snowman appeared to have been made a very long time ago, giving Peter the impression that it was, in fact, an old snowman. Its body was not so smooth, the carrot in its nose seemed very old and withered. Its black eyes seemed slightly out of position, and its mouth did not seem quite so complete, with one or two bits of coal missing.

'Are you being overzealous again, Most Important Plastic Snowman?' it said with a voice that seemed very old.

'What does overzealous mean?' whispered Peter to the Plastic Snowman.

'It means the Most Important Plastic Snowman is being too strict with our rule system,' the Plastic Snowman whispered back.

'Dear me, Most Important Plastic Snowman. You really have to relax, particularly in front of children. And... is it really necessary to have those other snowmen with you all the time?'

'I have to let the other snowman know that what we do is very serious and we don't want any breaches in our security that lets the adults know we even exist,' said the Most Important Plastic Snowman firmly. 'I feel... Official Very Important Plastic Snowman... that you are not carrying out your duties as meticulously as you used to.'

'Or rather, *you* are acting in a way that suggests to me you want to put fear into our snowmen to ensure they are following the rules

as *you* have interpreted them,' said the Official Very Important Plastic Snowman calmly.

The Most Important Plastic Snowman did not respond. Instead, it stepped back and looked down at Peter with a big, but forced, smile.

'I'm sure you would like to participate and interact with all the other children here,' he asked in a voice that tried its best to be friendly but still sounded official. 'They come from all over the world, you know.'

'Um—'

'He means would you like to go and play now, Peter,' said the Plastic Snowman quietly.

'Oh, right. Yes please!' shouted Peter.

'You wait for me for a moment, okay?' the Plastic Snowman quickly added.

Peter let go of the Plastic Snowman's warm hand. He expected to suddenly feel the cold air again, but surprisingly, it wasn't at all cold on the cloud. He still felt nice and warm.

Unable to contain his enthusiasm, he ran straight to a toy car. Looking very red and just like a sports car, it was nearly the same size as the real thing. But it just had a steering wheel and two pedals, one for going fast and another to stop. It was easy to drive. Peter drove it around in circles to get used to it, but he made sure that he could see his Plastic Snowman at all times.

The Plastic Snowman, the Official Very Important Plastic Snowman and the Most Important Plastic Snowman were continuing their conversation, but all were appearing extremely agitated. The other two snowmen looked like they were about to intervene at any time. The Most Important Plastic Snowman continued writing notes on his clipboard. If they were doing any shouting, Peter could not hear it. Finally, he appeared to make one more mark on his clipboard before gesturing to his fellow snowmen,

after which they walked away, leaving the Official Very Important Plastic Snowman and Peter's snowman together. They continued to converse, but far more calmly, before the older snowman then went to see another Plastic Snowman that had just arrived with a ginger-haired little girl. She was smiling from ear to ear after also bouncing on the cloud on her arrival. The Plastic Snowman then rejoined Peter, getting into the car's passenger seat.

'What were you all talking about?' asked Peter. 'Who was that older-looking snowman? Why did that other stupid snowman ask you those questions? Who are those other snowmen? What was he writing? Why was he so angry? What's Atoz?'

'The Older Snowman, or as we call him, the Official Very Important Plastic Snowman, the highest of us here, was asking me for all the details of our time together so he can then make some arrangements,' said the Plastic Snowman reassuringly.

'Arrangements?' said Peter, puzzled.

'To make sure you get back safely,'

Peter looked at his Plastic Snowman worryingly. 'And what did that other snowman mean when he said... what did he say... *activated... the... standard way* mean?'

'It means to start something working in the correct way.'

'So, Plastic Snowman, is everything okay? What's Atoz?'

'Everything's okay, Peter. And Atoz is not important. Really. Don't you worry!'

'Plastic Snowman, what started you working in the right way in our garden?'

'Gosh, lots of questions, Peter!' said the Plastic Snowman suddenly, looking at the playground. 'We only have a few hours left here. Enough talking now. Let's go and enjoy ourselves.'

'Okay,' said Peter quietly. 'But I've one more question. Do you like the Most Important Plastic Snowman? Because I don't.'

The Plastic Snowman quickly changed the subject. 'Look at that toy car over there!' he said enthusiastically. 'There's nobody in it. Come on, let's go!'

7. THE MOST FANTASTIC PLAYGROUND

It was the most fantastic time of seven-year old Peter Peddington's life.

He had lots of fun driving the car all around the cloud, weaving around all the rides, faster and faster, driving through long tunnels and going up and down many white, woolly and spongy hills. Then he went onto the swingiest swing ever, with his Plastic Snowman pushing him higher and higher.

'Wheee! Higher!' he shouted.

But then as the swing went very, very high, he fell off the seat!

But he did not fall straight down. Instead, he floated down, weaving from side to side like a leaf falling off a tree, and landing with a very soft plop onto the big fluffy ball of cotton wool.

That was so much fun!

'Again!' Peter shouted.

Later he went on a very big multi-coloured see-saw with another little boy, and then onto a slide which seemed to be as high as a very tall building in the city. Then there was a ride in a train decorated with hundreds of different-coloured flashing lights – a train that seemed to go on for ever and ever, up, down, through and even underneath the cloud. He also went on a very whizzy roundabout with other children that went not only round and round, but floated up in the air and turned onto its side! It went around so fast that everyone spun off and flew in all directions, but they always fell and landed gently and softly.

No child ever got hurt on the cloud. Clearly all the Plastic Snowmen were making sure of that.

This playground was so exciting!

*

For a long, long time everybody played happily on all the rides.

Then Peter could see the Official Very Important Plastic Snowman, standing alongside the Most Important Plastic Snowman and his other snowmen at the top of the highest ride on the cloud.

He put up his arm, and slowly waved it.

And then, as if by magic, all the children started yawning at the same time.

Peter also gave out a big yawn. 'I'm very sleepy,' he said to his Plastic Snowman. 'I want to go home now.' And as he wearily looked around at all the other boys and girls, some of them appeared to falling asleep on the spot.

The Plastic Snowman did not take Peter's hand. He gently picked up the tired little boy and let him rest in his arms.

All the other Plastic Snowmen were doing the same with their children. Those snowmen that did not have arms managed to bend down and ask their children to wrap their arms tight around their necks. Other snowmen then appeared, a mix of well-built and with

arms, to assist the others picking up the children. When the children's arms were successfully around the snowmen's necks, they were fixed like glue. They would not be falling off.

The Official Very Important Plastic Snowman then raised his right arm, his voice carrying across the whole cloud so every Plastic Snowman could hear him clearly. 'I shouldn't need to remind every snowman here that it's gentle returns for the children, please. Jumping or bouncing only,' he said, quietly and officially, but with a voice that seemed tired.

And so, all at the same time, the handful of Plastic Snowmen ran – and all the others bounced – across the cloud. They hopped – or boinged. And skipped – or sprang. And then they jumped – or bounded. All the children were now going home.

8. THE MORNING AFTER

Very quickly the cloud was a long way up and behind them. Although Peter could hardly keep his eyes open, he could still see the stars and the bright full moon. But he could also see there was a faint orange glow in the east.

'What's that?' he yawned.

'That's the sun, Peter,' said the Plastic Snowman gently. 'It'll be coming up very soon. That means it's almost morning.'

Soon they were going down towards the lights of a familiar town.

And then, a moment later, the Plastic Snowman's feet touched and sank into the snow-covered ground. They were back in Peter's garden.

'Am I home?' asked Peter very sleepily.

'Yes, you are,' said the Plastic Snowman. 'And now I'm going to take you to—'

But Peter did not hear what the Plastic Snowman said next.

He had now fallen fast asleep.

*

It was half past eight in the morning when Peter eventually woke up. And when he did, his eyes suddenly opened to the daylight that had now filled his room from between the closed curtains. He slowly sat up in his bed.

He blinked and stretched. He'd had a very interesting dream.

He got up and went to the window. Outside he could see the snowman Daddy had built yesterday. It had snowed again during the night, and there was a small pile of snow on the Plastic Snowman's hat–

'My Plastic Snowman!' he suddenly shouted.

He got up and ran out of the bedroom.

Mummy and Daddy, already out of their pyjamas and fully dressed, were having breakfast in the kitchen.

'Good morning Peter!' smiled Mummy, 'You've had a really good sleep. I didn't hear you at all last night! You must have been very tired from all that playing in the garden yesterday!'

'Mummy! Daddy!' shouted Peter very quickly, 'I went out with the snowman and he turned into plastic and we jumped to see Auntie Anne, and then we went to the biggest and best playground in the world! It was in the sky, on top of a big white fluffy cloud, and there were lots of other children and snowmen and a Most Important Plastic Snowman and an Official Very Important Plastic Snowman!'

'Wow, sounds like a great dream,' said Daddy, smiling.

'But I didn't dream it Daddy, it was real!' said Peter urgently. 'Can I see my snowman now, please? Please?'

'Not until you get out of your pyjamas and have breakfast!' said Mummy firmly.

*

Peter ate his breakfast very quickly. He then rushed to get his winter clothes which he found were all hanging up neatly on his peg, just as they were last night. He did not wait for Daddy to get his

coat on as he ran out into the garden. It was still cold and was snowing again, but very lightly.

He smiled. The Plastic Snowman was still there.

Daddy still had not come out.

Peter ran up to the snowman.

'Plastic Snowman?' he asked.

The Plastic Snowman said nothing.

'Plastic Snowman?' said Peter, now sounding a little worried.

He looked around. Still no Daddy, and there was nobody else in or near the garden.

He touched the snowman. It was cold and wet.

He was made of snow.

'PLASTIC SNOWMAN!' Peter said, almost crying.

But the Plastic Snowman would not move, speak, or turn into plastic.

Then Daddy came into the garden. He looked at Peter, who seemed as though he was about to cry.

'Peter! What's the matter?' he asked, looking concerned.

'Daddy...' Peter began sadly. But then, as if something had just put all this information into his head, he remembered the things the Plastic Snowman had told him.

Their questions need answers which they can believe.

They will not believe you if you tell them how you got to Auntie Anne's house.

If mummies and daddies, aunties and uncles, and foster parents and guardians knew that you and every other child were able to jump in the air or disappear suddenly with a Plastic Snowman, then you would be locked up in your houses until you became big children.

Plastic Snowmen are for the eyes and ears of little girls and boys only. It is our secret.

'I'm just very sad that my snowman will melt in the end.'

Daddy put a reassuring arm around him. 'You know, Peter,' he said kindly, 'I remember when I was a child, I had a wonderful dream.'

'You do?' Peter suddenly looked up at Daddy.

'Yes, I had a dream that I was taken to a big white cloud by a snowman too. I was taken because I and the other children there were very special to them.'

'Really Daddy?' said Peter.

'But,' said Daddy, winking. 'It was only a dream.'

'Yes,' said Peter, quietly and sadly. 'It was only a dream...'

But then he thought of something. What was it that made his snowman start working – what was the word that the Most Important Plastic Snowman used – *activated* him?

Peter smiled.

Maybe he and the Plastic Snowman would be together again soon.

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