There was no denying it was hot. No-one could remember a summer quite like it. Even the old people - fathers, mothers, impossibly old uncles - could not among them remember a summer so hot, nor a heat so relentless and unforgiving. How hot is hot? With heat, as with cold, or with pain, it is difficult to write down in words exactly how hot it was. Maybe pictures would better express the heaviness, the trickles of sweat, the thickness of the air. The entire atmosphere it seemed, had turned to hot glue, or to lava - liquid, molten, stifling. The dogs and cats sprawled in the patches of shadow they could find, their tongues hanging out of their mouths, limp, almost lifeless. It was a very hot summer.

Usually in the summer, when the weather turned hot and impossibly sticky, there were things one could do. The first was to leave the city for the cool lakes and quiet cottages, where only the droning of hungry mosquitoes disturbed your daydreams. To escape the mosquitoes it was a simple thing to walk to the wooden dock, untie the rowboat, and pole yourself with either oar to the bug-free zone some ten feet from the shore, where the rest of the day could be passed in relative contentment with one foot trailing in the water for fish to nibble at their convenience. This summer, the cottage was not an option. The highways north were black with overheated cars, the beaches littered with baking bodies, and the bugs daring
and mean. Even far from the shore the air was heavy and thick and hot and swarming with flies.

The second was to go to the basement - the lower in the house the better. There the air was cool and moist and dank, and the treasures of past childhoods poked out of the torn corners of cardboard boxes to be explored - glassy-eyed dolls, frayed teddy bears, yellowing books. This summer, the basement was out of the question. It was stuffy, it was stifling, it was sultry, it was just not suitable.

What then? No-one had ever known a summer so hot. What could be done to escape the dreadful summer heat? No-one could eat it was so hot. No-one could move, it was so hot. No-one could sleep it was so hot. No-one could think, the heat was just too ever present, too overpowering, too, well, in a word, hot.

Suddenly, someone, I can't remember who exactly (it was really too hot) remembered a friend of a brother of an uncle (or something like that) telling them about their friend's brother's uncle's family (whoever they might have been - it really was too hot) and the summer heat in Baghdad, long summers ago. When they (whoever they were) were still very young, and their parents (long forgotten, alas) were still young, and even their grandparents (you could look them up, perhaps) were almost young, they all went up to the rooftops to escape the heat. There, high above the city of Baghdad, they told stories to each other throughout the long hot summer night, while the stars blazed over the parched streets of the ancient stone city, the ancient Persian city of Baghdad.
ringed by jewelled minarets, where even the hot dry stones had stories to tell.

So this is what they did. First mother, then father, then the whole family escaped up the fire escape ladder to the flat rooftop overlooking the sweltering city. They brought sheets which they had stored in the refrigerator (blankets would have been too hot) lemonade (it was all they had that was cool) and cookies (anything else would have been too much to eat, it was so hot). Finally, after the rooftop picnic was laid out, and all the children quiet and gathered 'round, grandpa and nana climbed slowly to the roof, stopping every two or three steps, on account of the heat. When grandpa and nana had chosen a place by the picnic blanket, and grandpa had taken a long sip of lemonade, Father began to tell the first story, a story about the magic night gardens of ancient Persia...

"In Persia it seems" said Father quietly, "where my older brother was once the vice-consul and advisor to the Shah, gardens were not what we would imagine them to be here. What do we think of when we hear the word 'garden?' Here, and in England, and in France and Italy and Germany and just about anywhere you can imagine, gardens were planted so that the flowers would please the eye with their colours and shapes and sizes. In an English garden, like the one we have in our backyard, rhododendrons bloom silkily and irises bloom purple and perfumed and proud in the springtime. Roses take over towards midsummer, giving way to rock-hugging portulaca just before the onset of the chilly autumn weather. Here, the flowers are a feast for the eyes, as
soothing in the first days of spring as in the last days of fall. Gardening is painting in plants, and the picture changes with the passing of the seasons." Grandpa paused to take a breath, and sip at the lemonade that was quickly getting warm in the glass on the picnic blanket.

"In Persia, on the other hand, or so my brother tells me, the weather is very hot, and even the hardiest flowers wilt in the relentless sunshine. Flowers bloom for a single day, and then fall to the ground from heat exhaustion. Water is not to be found in the hot summer, and the thirsty plants do not waste their time on displays of form and colour.

But the Persians have their roots planted firmly in an old and romantic culture, and Persian poetry is among the most beautiful in the world. Anyone who has read the poems of Omar Khayyam (who was known in his own time and his own country not as a poet, but a mathematician) will believe me when I say that Persian poetry rivals that of our own Shakespeare. So it is unthinkable that the Persian soul could live without gardens, despite the hot and relentless summer sun. So instead of gardens for the eyes, made for the bright light of the daytime, the Persians cherished what they called their scented night gardens, to be savoured in the cool and dark of the long middle eastern twilight, to the sound of the prayer calls echoing through the winding streets of Baghdad. These gardens were not meant for the eyes. In the night, the reddest of reds or the subtlest of blues are much the same. 'At night, all cats are black' goes the saying. No, these gardens were gardens not for the eyes, but for the nose, gardens intricately designed to delight the
nose with the smells of lemon, of musk, of lilies and of lilacs. And there, high above the city, on the rooftops of Baghdad, lovers would walk hand in hand among the green plants with their eyes closed, following their noses from one end of the scented garden to the next, swept along by the heavy perfumed air of the hot Persian night. There, with their eyes closed, the scented garden was the very definition of love...

The purple summer sunset had given way to a deep blue twilight. The lights of the city twinkled below them in the haze like thousands of earthbound stars, and the air outside was heavy and thick with the smell of the pavement that rose from the streets like musk. Uncle James asked to tell the next story, a story he had heard many years ago, when he was wandering in the hilly green countryside of Japan. He had never told anyone the real reason he went to Japan, a magical country where the children tie paper ribbons in trees to bring them good luck - he was in search of the tiniest kite ever made, a kite that flew on the end of a single strand of human hair, in the dancing air above a single candle's flame. Even though he never found this tiny kite, he followed rumours of it from the cold mountains in the north to the volcanic islands in the south, and from the deep swells of the Pacific on the east to the inland sea and the fishing villages on the west. No, he never found the kite, but he heard many stories, of which this was only one...

It was the story of the Baku, a very strange animal that only came out at night, whose existence was only guessed at, because he had never been seen in waking life. No-one
knew how big the Baku was, or what colour, although some very old people said he was large and blue, and had a long nose like an anteater, and a long, raspy tongue like a kitten. But in truth, no-one really knew much about the Baku at all. The reason for this became obvious when you considered the Baku's diet. The Baku did not eat the leaves of trees (like giraffes), nor the turnips in the garden (like rabbits), nor even field mice (like wild wolves). The Baku did not eat Cheerios or yoghurt or bananas or bagels or bacon and eggs (like you). The Baku ate dreams. This meant that the Baku was often a very hungry Baku. Some nights, people didn't seem to dream at all, or, if the sky was stormy, they woke up when the lightning flashed or the thunder clapped, just as the Baku was getting ready to take a nibble out of a tasty dream. Other nights, everyone would have nightmares, which as you can imagine are not very tasty at all, and if they are terrifically scary can they can cause indigestion if eaten accidentally. The best dreams, of course, were children's dreams, because if they listened to their parents (as children sometimes do) their parents would say 'sweet dreams' just before the children went to bed, and if the Baku was very lucky, they would be.

The Baku liked children, so he would be very careful not to make a pig of himself (and what self-respecting Baku would want to be anything but a Baku?) and startle the young dreamer by gobbling the dream down with a great slurp, and then making noises, eating with his mouth full and smacking his lips. No, the Baku was a kind and considerate animal (nourished by sweet dreams, this is quite understandable), who would wait until the sweetest
of dreams was almost over, and then curl up beside the dreamer and ever so quietly nibble at the sweetest bits, starting at the outside and working his way in, chewing very quietly and wiping his mouth with a napkin whenever a delightful episode dribbled down his long chin. If he were to be very skillful, the Baku would finish just as the dreamer awoke, by which time the dream would have disappeared anyway, in a shimmering, shining happy moment just as the young eyes opened to greet another day of splashing through puddles or looking for tadpoles. For the Baku, however, the worst thing was to let a sweet dream go to waste... This is why dreams are often so hard to remember - they may have been nibbled a little by a hungry Baku...

It was still too hot to sleep, and the heat was still making the children squirm a little, even though there was plenty of lemonade to go 'round. In any case, it was very exciting to be staying up late, on the roof, listening to stories as the moon rose higher and higher in the sky above the city. It is so long ago that I have forgotten many of the stories the children told, but if you help me remember, maybe we can write them all down. All of you take a turn, and write down your favourite story, or tell it to your parents, or draw it, so we can all share in them as the evening cools...
Once upon a time, not so long ago as you might not remember, but not so recently as the day before yesterday, there lived a big alligator and a small jaguar. The alligator was grumbly and green and gregarious, and the jaguar was gentle, genteel, and generally shy. Jaguar had only just come to the banks of the river where Alligator lived, and he hadn't yet made many friends, except a little tousle-headed boy named Taylor. Taylor had been friends with Alligator for a long, long, time - or at least several months, but was sometimes very cross with him, as Alligator would get up very early in the morning and eat all of Taylor's right socks before he left for school. The wrong socks tasted dreadful, so he would always leave them lying there on the floor beside the bed, as if the other one was still just tucked away out of sight... Understandably, Taylor was delighted to have a new friend living by the riverbank, and he visited them both as often as he could. So as they were sitting together on the frozen edge of the river on one of the long winter afternoons at the end of a particularly long and cold January that Alligator suggested that to Jaguar that they should invite Taylor to dinner. "But what will we have for dinner?" asked Jaguar rather timidly. "Alligators eat big fat rabbits" said Alligator, more out of conviction than anything else, as in reality, Alligator had never eaten anything other than Taylor's socks. "Alright then, rabbit it is" said Jaguar, wondering
all the while what a rabbit looked like, and how on earth they would know if they had found one if by chance they did. So Alligator and Jaguar set off in search of a rabbit, Alligator out in front leading the way, his great green snout snuffling in the snow, and Jaguar scampering and skittering cautiously on the ice, and hopping back and forth over Alligator's great green tail. It wasn't very long before Alligator and Jaguar came across a rabbit foraging among the scrubby bushes sticking out of the hard white snow. The rabbit was hungry too, and the last snowfall had all but covered up the very last of the twigs on which he could nibble. So it was a very hungry bunny indeed who turned around to find himself face to face with a large green Alligator smiling broadly with a charming but rather toothy grin, followed by a self-effacing Jaguar looking rather shyly at his fluffy, snow-covered paws, and twitching his short, stubby, snow-covered tail. "We are looking for a rabbit" Alligator announced proudly "because we are inviting our friend Taylor to dinner". The rabbit was rather startled, but asked calmly "may I assume you have a particular sort of rabbit in mind?"

"Well actually..." said Alligator in a hoarse whisper, we're not entirely sure what a rabbit looks like..." "Aaah" said the rabbit, "then allow me to help. I happen to know exactly what rabbits look like, and will help you find one." Alligator looked relieved, and beamed benevolently at Jaguar, who was amusing himself making angels in the snow with the help of Alligator's long scaly tail, which
made the wings longer and more angel-like, if you know what I mean. "First of all" said the rabbit, "we must frequent the places rabbits like best, which are certainly not cold, snowy, icy patches beside clumps of scraggly bushes in the wilderness of Mississauga." "Rabbits" he said in a low, conspiratorial voice "like to live in dark, warm, low places - places where little boys can be seen to play, places where especially boys with little sisters are known to inhabit." "Why we know just the place!" squeaked Jaguar in a happy, squeaky growl. "We certainly do" agreed Alligator, as he wondered how he had spent so much time under Taylor's bed without noticing rabbits. Perhaps they only came out when he was asleep he thought. So the three of them made their way to Taylor's house - through the park, past the tennis courts, over the fence and past the frozen swimming pool, until at last there they were, all three of them huddled underneath Taylor's bed in the dark. "Do you think he will hear us" whispered Jaguar. "Not a chance" said Alligator" "Shhhhhhh" said rabbit, "I can see rabbits..." And there, just at the edge of the bed, just by the bit where the sheet hung down to the floor, were two red wool socks. "Rabbits" said Rabbit. "I thought they were socks" said Jaguar timidly. "Rabbits" said Rabbit. "I've always called them socks" said Alligator. "Rabbits, definitely" said Rabbit, "Let's catch them before they get away." So the three of them crept to the side of the bed, and without making so much as the noise a handkerchief makes falling to the floor, they pounced on the two red socks and
quickly made their escape. Back in the woods by the riverbank they spent the rest of the day cooking the socks in large iron pot, with a wonderful sauce made from wild mushrooms. That evening the three new friends invited Taylor to dinner. "What are we having?" asked Taylor, who had arrived wearing only his boots and a light blue jacket. "Rabbit" they all said at once, and Taylor said "sounds delicious". So they all sat down to dinner, and by the end of the evening, the entire pot had been licked clean, right to the bottom. "We must do this again" said Taylor "I never knew rabbit could be so delicious". "Neither did we" they all said at once, and waved goodbye to Taylor before all falling asleep in a satisfied heap together.

The End

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Leo was six and Leo was a Lion. He had been lion in his bed all day, or rather sitting, trying to alion all his trains, which meant putting them in long, straight lions. Leo loved trains (I’m not lion to you) and loved the different alionses he could make by joining one to the other. But enough reading between the lions and let’s get on with our story…

Leo loved trains more than almost anything else. He loved the clittery clattery freight trains that woke him up at night with their long sighs. He loved the long, sleek, cool ICE trains with their low-slung sniffly snuffly snouts as they sped into the night. He loved the hissing hiccoughing S-bahn trains that skittered and screeched by his window as he was getting ready for school. But most of all he loved his very own trains. Leo had many, many, trains. He had Tommy the Tank Engine, James, a special Rescue Train, and dozens of other trains of all sizes, shapes, and descriptions. Leo could never get enough of trains – in fact, he spent most of his waking moments looking at, or to be more precise for, trains.

For Leo had a brother (in fact, he had two). And unfortunately for Leo, his younger brother Sebastian (known to his friends as the notorious ‘Wriggle Monster’)
liked nothing more than to sow disorder in the neatly aligned life of Leo’s trains, and to hide them under pillows, beds, and tables – even throwing them occasionally out the window! This would predictably drive Leo into a blind rage, which is just what the Wriggle Monster intended. Predictably, Leo spent a lot of time looking for trains, and the rest of the time looking for his brother...

So one morning, while Leo was squirming and squiggling trying to reach a train that his brother had accidentally on purpose kicked under the bed, he was shocked to see a new train engine puffing slowly towards him along the wooden floor from somewhere in the kitchen. It wasn’t a train Leo knew at all. It was old-looking and bent at the corners, and from its smokestack trailed what looked to be a mane of long, white, hair.

The decrepit old engine wheezed closer, and Leo could see that behind was a line of oddly-shaped wagons – unlike any he had ever seen before. The first wagon was the colour of burnished gold, a flat, almost green colour that glinted and glowed without being the least bit shiny. In large letters the name ‘BING’ was inscribed along the length of the golden wagon. Behind the golden wagon were countless coloured wagons the shape of pudgy pillows, or clouds. On each was written the name ‘BONG’ followed by a number, 1, 2, 3, and so on as far as Leo could see, although oddly there seemed to be some
wagons missing. Finally the last wagon snaked its way out of the kitchen. It wasn’t very pretty at all, all bent and broken and lead-coloured. On its side were scrawled the letters ‘NON-BING’.

‘Good morning’, said Leo, as the old engine had now come as far as it could, and seemed to expire altogether, the mane of white smoke going limp and settling in a tangled heap beside him. ‘Good morning to you’ said the old engine, and began to cough violently. ‘My name is Timmy’, he said in a voice enfeebled by his coughing fit, ‘and this is my train of thought. Surely James or Tommy have mentioned me?’ ‘Not really’ said Leo, rather embarrassed ‘they’ve never spoken of a train named Timmy before – and as for a train of thought, only my Daddy has one of those, and he keeps losing it all the time.’ ‘Just as I suspected’ said Timmy ‘out of sight, out of mind – these thoughts I am dragging behind me nearly drive me out of my mind I can tell you!’ ‘Every single wagon – at least the ones called BONG – contains a thought, a perfectly rounded, well-formed thought. Have a look for yourself – but just make sure you don’t mix them up. Only the gods know what would happen then!’

Curious, Leo inspected the wagons more closely. They all looked more or less the same, except for their colour, which was different for every wagon. Leo decided to inspect the purple-coloured wagon with a large gold ‘6’ on its side. Carefully etched into the rounded contours of its
soft mauve pillow-like exterior was a tiny door, with a tiny gold latch, just big enough for Leo’s six-year old fingers to open. Leo peered inside. Through the tiny door, Leo could just make out a sort of funny-shaped ball, not a ball exactly, but a many-sided block. ‘A tetrahedron’ sighed Timmy. Look in another wagon. Leo’s gaze fixed on another wagon in what seemed to be an endless line. This wagon was a deep green colour. Leo carefully lifted the latch of the small door. Inside was another sort of ball, this time with twelve facets. ‘A dodecahedron, quite plainly’ explained Timmy. ‘And so on and so on down the line’ he muttered ‘each in their perfection and each in their place in the world of ideas’ he continued.

Leo was baffled, but before he could ask what on earth Timmy meant, another thought crossed Leo’s mind.

‘What about BING? asked Leo, ‘and NON-BING?’ Before Timmy could answer, the Wriggle Monster came thundering out of his bedroom his eyes wide with the exciting (albeit not entirely original) thought of wreaking havoc. His gaze fell on Timmy, who drew back in horror and began wheezing asthmatically. Leo shouted ‘No, leave him alone, he’s my friend!’ and the Wriggle Monster turned his attention to the wagon at the very end of the train labelled NON-BING, the very same wagon that Leo had just asked about. He scuttled to the end of the long line of wagons and snatched NON-BING from the track. Chortling mischievously he waved NON-BING
about, watching as Timmy’s eyes got bigger and his wheezing more pronounced. Leo exploded into action – ‘You let go of my train this minute’ he shouted, chasing his brother around the room.

Then it happened. Leo tried to snatch NON-BING from his brother’s hand, and tripped over BING, derailing Timmy and the entire train of thoughts. The wagons rolled over on their sides, and Timmy closed his eyes and cowered under the silvery mane of his own smokestack. But worst of all, BING rolled sideways and collided against NON-BING, which Leo had somehow knocked free from the Wriggle Monster’s grasp. BANG! There was a huge puff of smoke, and the sour smell of electricity filled the air. When the smoke cleared, BING and NON-BING were nowhere to be seen, nor, in fact, were any of the wagons. Only Timmy lay there on the floor, forlorn and wheezing, tangled up in his own mane of silver-white smoke.

Leo and his brother were speechless, too scared by the huge explosion to be interested in fighting each other any more, too scared, in fact, to do anything but slowly clean up the mess before their parents came home. So one by one, Leo and his brother, for the first time ever, quietly, slowly and carefully put Leo’s trains back in one long line, with Timmy at the front. What happened to all the other wagons they never found out, and after a time, they never even gave it a second thought.
THE END (or almost...)

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Leo and the Wriggle Monster

For the longest time, as long as he could remember, Leo lived at the centre of the world. Where Leo lived, the sun rose every morning to make the world bright enough for Leo to play in, and set every evening so he could go to sleep. Leo had a Father to take him for walks, a Mother to cook him dinner, and a Nanny to play with him all day long. Leo had two Grandmothers to buy him new clothes, two Grandfathers to buy him new toys, legions of aunts to kiss and cuddle him, and cohorts of uncles to read to him before going to bed. And all this just for Leo. It was a good and orderly world, thought Leo to himself, arranged just as it should be.

There was a place for everything in Leo's world, and in Leo's world, everything had its place. This made him very happy, because he knew that when everything was in its place, all was well in the world.

Leo had a pencil case with pencils that made all the colours in the rainbow. Leo loved drawing, and carefully coloured in-between the lines with the right colours - green for the grass, blue for the sky, yellow for the sun. When he was done, he put each pencil carefully back in the box - first the red pencil, then the orange one, then the
yellow, the green, the blue, and finally the purple one - all the colours in the rainbow in their proper place.
Leo had a collection of toy cars, which he placed in long orderly rows, starting with the large shiny Porsche, and ending with a small red firetruck. Leo had a collection of trains, which hooked one onto the other in a specific, immutable order. Leo liked order in his life, and was deeply offended if this order was disrupted. At suppertime, he arranged the food on his plate so that everything had its own place, with nothing touching - no broccoli jostling cabbage, no chicken nudging potato. At mealtimes, order reigned supreme.

Most of all, Leo loved his books. Every night just before bed he curled up with a favourite book and read it very slowly and carefully, starting at the beginning and ending at the end, his small finger following the story as it marched in an orderly row across the page, one letter following the next, letters assembled with military precision into words, platoons of words marshalled into squadrons of sentences, each sentence obeying the commands of the comma and the full stop.

Then one day, everything changed. A new creature appeared suddenly in Leo's well-ordered world. A small creature, a loud creature, a wiggly and disorderly creature - a Wriggle Monster! The foundations of Leo's world began to shake.

First the Wriggle Monster unhooked his carefully ordered trains. Then the Wriggle Monster scattered Leo's orderly
rows of cars and re-arranged them at random, instead of in neat rows. The Wriggle Monster mixed the coloured pencils in his pencil case and stirred together the vegetables on his dinner plate - and Leo knew that when one vegetable mingled with another, disaster was sure to follow. It did, of course. The Wriggle Monster tipped over Leo's milk and up-ended his plate, and Leo's whole dinner ended up in one disorderly mess on the floor. The Wriggle Monster seemed intent on creating chaos in Leo's ever-so-neatly ordered world!

But worst of all, the Wriggle Monster sowed disorder in Leo's books. The Wriggle Monster would grab a book - first by one side, then by another, then by the spine - and shake it and shake it and shake it, until all the letters were in different places! This was the last straw for Leo. How could he read his books if all the letters had been dislodged and scattered about the page? How could the Wriggle Monster be stopped? Leo complained to his parents, but his pleas that the Wriggle Monster be evicted fell on strangely unsympathetic ears. Leo was puzzled - for surely direct action was called for. That night, Leo tried the most straightforward approach - the counter-wriggle. Just as soon as the Wriggle Monster fell happily asleep, Leo crept into his room and wriggled him awake again. At first, the Wriggle Monster thought this was a delightful and delightfully disorderly game - but soon, enough was enough, and the Wriggle Monster began to signal his discontent with loud shrieks of displeasure.
Soon the Wriggle Monster's undisciplined cries brought Mother, then Father, then stern parental judgement. Leo was not, under any circumstances, to wriggle the Wriggle Monster - especially at bedtime.

Leo went to his room to think. He took his cars to his room and arranged in their proper order. He brought his trains to his room and hooked them up carefully one by one. He replaced each of his coloured pencils in their box in their correct order like a rainbow. He brought his cup of milk to his room, and, very carefully so as not to accidentally jiggle the vegetables together, he brought in his dinner plate. Finally he brought in his favourite book, an old book, and planned to set about putting the words back in order. Leo knew the book by heart, having read it every night for the last month. It began with the words:

"Once upon a time, there was a young boy, who lived in the middle of a forest..."

Leo hesitated. He feared the worst. The Wriggle Monster had shaken the book so fiercely that he expected to find the words as muddled and confused as the colours in his pencil case, something like:

"Ogbo nponatie, ayo ol ire wunyw hreth easve etc edinaf om imuh d dle ofst."
Leo gulped in horror at the thought, then opened up his book at the first page, but instead of the wild jumble of letters he feared, this is what he read:

'iiiie... Leo V rode mighty wooden whales to chase fortune, fame and ripe bounty.'

Leo paused for a moment. This wasn't such a bad story after all. Already he could see himself astride a wooden whale, brandishing his epee, in search of adventure. He continued reading, expecting to find the familiar words:

'... with his aged long-suffering Father, his beautiful sister, and his wicked Stepmother.'

Instead, in their place, the story continued:

'swiiiim... Sir Leo sighed, and going further in the buff, stuck fast. He splashed the water...'

This was getting interesting, thought Leo, and so it was. The further he read, the more exciting the story became - and he was the hero! The very same letters had been jiggled into quite another story! Noble Sir Leo the Fifth circled the globe, riding naked and proud on his team of glistening teak whales, seeking out evil-doers intent on making trains run late, discovering buried treasure under squeaky floorboards, rescuing forlorn maidens trapped in car showrooms, deciphering ancient manuscripts, and
making children eat their Brussels sprouts. All in all, thought Leo, the story had been much improved by a little shaking.

This revelation set Leo to thinking - what if the Wriggle Monster's undisciplined manner actually made things better? He went to his pencil case and spilled the pencils on the floor higgledy-piggledy. He took out a his colouring book and set at it with a vengeance - bilious green clouds, an effervescent blue sun, brassy yellow grass and an orange lake. Not bad at all, thought Sir Leo, and quite a lot of fun in the bargain. Tentatively he tried putting the silver Porsche in the middle of the line of cars, instead of at its head, as was his custom. Not unsuccessful, thought Leo the Fifth, with an air of 'noblesse oblige'. Nor did the trains suffer noticeably when re-arranged.

It was rather late by now, and even Mother and Father had retired to bed. Leo too was tired, but before he curled up underneath the covers, he slipped into his slippers and padded down the hall to where the Wriggle Monster lay sleeping quietly. Leo crept up to the side of the Wriggle Monster's bed, leaned over the sleeping figure, and kissed him goodnight.

Goodnight Wriggle Monster, he said, and padded quietly back to his room. Tomorrow, he thought, will be quite a
different day. He hoped his parents were ready for TWO Wriggle Monsters in the house...

FIN
Once upon a time, not so long ago as you would have forgotten, but not so recently as to be yesterday, there was a young boy named Zachary – Zack for short – who lived in a wonderful house in a wonderful city in a land trying to be the wonderful place it was fifty years ago.

This wonderful city was called London, in fact, and besides being wonderful, it was also hot – at least in the summer. London summer heat was not your ordinary, garden variety heat meant to be enjoyed at your ordinary garden party – London heat was something else. London heat in the summer was worse than awful, it was muggy, it was sweltering, it was suffocating. In short, it was just dreadful.

On one dreadfully hot summer’s day, Zack woke up sticky and hot (not entirely unusual after a long sleepless night in the awful London heat) and knew exactly what he wanted – ice cubes! Cold, slithery, slippery wonderful ice cubes that he could squiggle down his back to relieve the oppressive stickiness of a hot London morning (even the morning freshness quickly vanished under the beating sun). So Zack quietly clambered out of his bed, and crept
down the corridor past the door to his parent’s bedroom to
the kitchen where he knew the refrigerator stood waiting.

There it was, as he had expected, in the corner of the
kitchen, already bright with the hot morning sun. Zack
stopped to make sure that his parents had not heard him,
and slowly eased open the refrigerator door. The
refrigerator began to hum with the impatient noise a
refrigerator makes just when you are trying to be very,
very quiet, and the refrigerator light clicked on to reveal –
a funnily dressed creature with a toothy grin wearing a
lop-sided bear-skin hat! Zachary was so surprised he nearly
fell over backwards!

‘Who are you?’ he asked.

‘I am a Djinn’, said the curious-looking creature, ‘but you
can call me Gordon’ he sighed, ‘and I have been trapped
in this refrigerator since I accidentally mistook it for my
Mini-bar’ he said rather wistfully. ‘Now I must wait until I
am freed from my confinement by a wandering pilgrim.
Are you a pilgrim?’ he asked in a slightly pleading tone.
Now Zack didn’t exactly know what a pilgrim might be,
but he had once heard his father boast of being from
Pilgrim stock (or something about stocks), so he bravely
said ‘yes, I am’. The Djinn’s eyes beamed happily
‘Wonderful!’ he said ‘I can then grant you one wish, and I
will be free to return to my Mini-bar in the faraway
mountains’.
The Djinn clapped his hands and suddenly two of the oddest looking bellboys appeared from the depths of the refrigerator. ‘Allow me to introduce Nick and Nick’ said the Djinn cheerily ‘Ready to do your bidding’. The two bellboys were only slightly taller than Zachary, although the looked both to be teenagers, and their uniform was strangely familiar, thought Zachary. ‘So’ said the Djinn ‘what is your wish?’ Without thinking, Zack blurted out ‘I only really came to get some ice cubes’. ‘Ice cubes? Ice cubes?’ said the Djinn, astonished. ‘Why you could have had riches beyond measure – why ice cubes?’ ‘I actually don’t need riches beyond measure’ said Zack, a little stubbornly ‘but it is very hot, and I really do want some ice cubes’.

‘Well young man’ said the Djinn frowning a little ‘then ice cubes it shall be!’ ‘Away we go then Nicks!’ shouted the Djinn, and suddenly the whole kitchen was filled with a silvery frost and the Djinn, Zack and the two Nicks were sucked into the refrigerator.

It was really quite exciting. For what seemed to be ages, Zack felt he was trapped inside a swirling snowstorm, a refreshing treat after the London heat. Then, with a soft thump, Zack landed in a pile of snow. Thump, thump, thump landed the Djinn and the two Nicks beside him. Where were they? All around were mountain peaks, snow covering the dark green pine trees. ‘Look out!’ shouted the
Djinn, and Zack just had time to roll out of the way as a bespectacled figure hurtled by them at tremendous speed, face forwards on a small sled. Spectators were cheering on either side of them as another luge streaked by. Zack, the Djinn and the two Nicks scrambled up the icy edge of the snowy track. They were in St. Moritz! And it was winter! Apparently the Djinn’s magic could travel them in time and in space.

‘Perfect!’ said the Djinn, brushing the snow off his huge hat and squeezing his way through the line of people cheering on the next sled hurtling down the Cresta Run. ‘Just where I had hoped we’d land’. He sped of towards the Palace Hotel, followed by the two Nicks, with Zack doing his best to follow them as he stumbled and slid on the snow. When they got to the grand entrance, the two Nicks, dressed proudly in their Palace Hotel uniforms, ushered Zack and the Djinn into the lift to the suites on the second floor, the Djinn looking strangely out of place in his huge bear skin hat. At the end of the corridor one of the doors was slightly ajar. The two Nicks officiously held open the door, and Zack and the Djinn entered the room. There in the corner, just by the window, beside a bowl of fresh fruit, stood a small Mini-bar. ‘My Mini-bar! Home at last!’ shouted the Djinn, prancing up and down with delight. Proudly the Djinn pulled a small key out of his pocket and opened the Mini-bar. Smiling, he reached deep into the Mini-bar (just as Zack himself remembered doing so many times before) and with a deep bow, he presented
Zack with two ice cubes. ‘One for the road’ he cried, and he grabbed Zack around the tummy and pushed him into the Mini-bar. The two Nicks slammed the door shut and once again Zack found himself in a swirl of snowflakes and rushing wind.

Bang! Out tumbled Zack into his bed. The sun was just peeking up over the horizon – and it was dreadfully hot. ‘What a funny dream I just had’ thought Zack, rubbing the sleep out of his eyes, still wondering where he was. ‘Yikes!’ he shouted, suddenly wide awake – and what was that?

Two very cold ice cubes fell to the floor with a clatter from the back of his pyjamas, and slowly began to melt…

FIN

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ZACKED AGAIN!
ANOTHER STORY ABOUT A DJINN AND TWO NICKS

Ever since the hot summer night ever so long ago, Zachary could not forget the strange business of the ice cubes. Unable to sleep one sweltering London night, Zack had crept down to the refrigerator for a cool drink – only to be kidnapped by a furry-hatted Djinn and his two accomplices. The annoying thing was, Zack had nothing to show for it save for a puddle of cold water – all that remained of the two ice cubes that had somehow found their way into his bed. The next time, Zack promised himself to find out for sure whether his adventure had been real or only just imagined.

Now we often think ‘the next time’, hoping that there will be a next time in which the oversights of the first time can be remedied. ‘Next time, I will be more careful’ we think, looking at the butterflies scattered all over the hard tiles of the kitchen floor. ‘Next time, I will have a more clever answer’ we say to ourselves as the teacher scolds us for having thought that a very large goldfish bowl would look just perfect on top of the highest shelf. ‘Next time’ is often just a way of making us feel better for having done something clumsy, or silly, or plain embarrassing. And often, when the ‘next time’ does occur, we do exactly the
same thing again, because the most difficult part of ‘next time’ is that you don’t usually notice that it is the next time until it is much too late. In fact, everything seems very fresh and new and ever so clever when it happens that it is always for the first time. For Zachary, however, the next time was going to have to wait....

Many months later it was not sweltering any longer, it was wet. In London (at least where Zack lived) it always seemed to be raining. This might be because it was winter in London, or because the neighbourhood which Zack lived (Wet 8) was particularly drizzly, or just because it always rains in London, Zack didn’t know. And frankly, he didn’t really care. Rain was not a good thing in Zachary’s world. The grass was soggy, the trees were drippy, the streets slippery. When Zack went to the park with his nanny, he was enclosed in his pram by a stiff plastic windshield that quickly became foggy and dank. Worst of all, the weather was not cold, it was not hot, it was not bright, and it was not dark. It was just nothing – foggy and featureless, dreary and dreadful.

One rainy day at the end of a rainy week at the end of a month of rain, Zack was thrilled to hear his parents bustling about the house. Zack knew bustling usually meant travel. Nor was he wrong this time. “We’re off to St. Moritz” his Mother said cheerfully. “This year, you can learn about moguls,” said his Father, a banker who dreamed about a career in cinema. Zack didn’t know if
this meant meeting Steven Spielberg, but he did know what St. Moritz meant – sun, cold and lots of snow! Even by the age of two, Zachary was an old St. Moritz hand, and it was only a matter of time, thought Zachary, before he too would be hurtling headlong down the icy curves of the Cresta Run like his Father.

Several hours of bustle later (which included clambering in and out of cars, waiting in lines, and being bounced up and down in aeroplanes), Zack and his now exhausted parents finally arrived at the Palace Hotel, where their bags (and their cat, Moritz) were quickly whisked away by two red-suited bellmen.

After so many taxis, planes, and trains, not to mention the long drive through the mountains along a road that curved this way and that just when you least expected it, Zack’s parents were not in the mood for a late night. So almost as quickly as the bags had been taken from the car, Zack found himself bundled into bed in his parents’ room and kissed goodnight. Zack couldn’t complain about the room. The room was wonderful. There were fresh flowers in the vases, fresh fruit in the basket, fresh white linen on the beds, and best of all, a view of the dark mountains beyond. The cat had quickly found a warm corner to curl up in and was purring contentedly. But Zack had absolutely no intention of going to bed so early.
Zack pretended to fall asleep immediately, keeping his eyes tightly closed and snoring gently. Soon Zack’s parents were fast asleep (not at all pretending), and he could hear them breathing softly. Slowly and very quietly, Zack crept out of his bed, and tiptoed to the Mini-bar. A long time ago, when Zack was just a baby (after all, now Zack was nearly three years old), the Mini-bar was one of his favourite games, so he knew just how to work it. Very quietly he eased the door open.

This time, it was suddenly the next time, for as Zack eased open the door, he was greeted by the sight, not as he had expected, of the usual assortment of little bottles, yellow and green tins, and the occasional snack hidden inside of crackly silver foil, but instead, of a furry-hatted Djinn with a broad and toothy grin.

“Fancy meeting you again” said the Djinn, clambering through a forest of small bottles. “Looking for something cool and refreshing perhaps?”

“Care for an ice cube?” he laughed, as he leapt straight out of the refrigerator and deftly strapped two ice cubes to the soles of Zack’s feet. Zack could feel his feet slipping out from under him, but before he could fall, the two Nicks were at his side, each holding one of Zack’s flailing arms. “Easy does it young man” they said in unison, “now comes the fun part!” Faster than you could say “on the rocks” the two Nicks started wheeling Zachary around the
room, while the Djinn followed behind, tickling his sides and laughing. Zachary didn’t quite know what to think, everything was turning around far too quickly. “I hope my parents don’t wake up” he thought worriedly, although oddly despite all this slipping and sliding, he hadn’t yet crashed into anything. In fact, he didn’t seem to be making any noise at all.

Before he couldn’t figure out what in the world was going on, the two Nicks had opened the door to Zack’s room and wheeled him into the corridor. “Off you go!” chortled the Djinn. Now I say ‘wheeled’, which isn’t really accurate, as the ice cubes, although they felt like small and cold wheels on the soles of his feet, actually worked more like skates, skittering and sliding this way and that willy-nilly. Sometimes Zack’s legs seemed to be going in two directions at once!

The Palace Hotel was very different by moonlight that it was in the bright afternoon sunshine. The corridors were dark and mysterious, and the figures in the portraits seemed to move at the oddest moments. As the two Nicks skated Zack along the corridor an apple fell from a painted bowl of fruit and bounced off his head. “Lucky it wasn’t a still life with oysters” thought Zack, as he dodged an orange. Somehow the Djinn was no longer behind Zack and the two Nicks, but in front, bouncing cheerfully along in his big furry hat, which he was using as a canoe by paddling quickly with his hands. “He looks like he is
taking a bath in a furry teacup” thought Zack. But Zack had other things on his mind. After a few paces, Zack had overcome his initial shock at being whisked around a darkened hotel like a push broom, and shook himself free from the Nicks. A little unsteadily, Zack started to skate for himself on the ice cubes strapped to his feet, which somehow didn’t seem to melt. The Nicks were delighted “Bravo Zack!” they cheered, and jumped into the Djinns hat, which was still careening ahead of them.

Soon the corridor ended in a cascade of stairs. Now you might think that the furry teacup would just tumble headlong and end in a heap at the bottom of the stairs with Zack on top in a jumble of arms and legs. But no! The Djinn and the two Nicks, paddling wildly with their hands, just bumped along the Niagara of stairs and shot through the big front doors of the hotel and across the wide street, with Zack flailing and trailing a few steps behind. Bump! Bump! Bump! over they went, slithering down the steep slope of the icy Cresta Run.

The moonlight bathed the town of St. Moritz in a pale blue light, and Zack could see the silhouette of the steeple against the night sky. “Look out!” shouted the two Nicks as Zack narrowly avoided sliding into one of the steep walls of the run.

If the slide through the corridors of the Palace Hotel was fast – this was much faster! The Cresta Run snaked down
the mountain, twisting left and right, and no matter what Zack did to slow himself down it only seemed to make him slide even faster. Suddenly it was all over. With a bump and a crash Zack catapulted over the icy edge of the track and landed with a soft thud – on top of the Djinn’s hat! Everything went dark and Zack could hear a deep rumbling sound. He woke up with a start. He was surrounded in fur! He looked frantically around to see if the Djinn and the two Nicks were there to help him, but all he could see was his cat Moritz’s bushy tail, and all he could hear was Moritz’s deep purring. “Next time” thought Zack, as he too closed his eyes and fell back asleep.

FIN

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