

Opening extract from
Mr Majeika

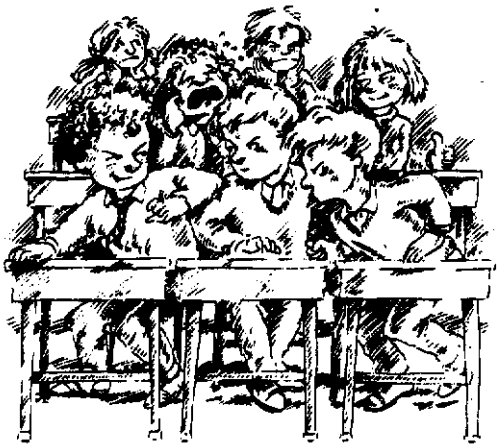
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1. *The Carpet-Bicycle*



It was Monday morning, it was pouring with rain, and it was everyone's first day back at St Barty's Primary School after the Christmas holidays. That's why Class Three were in a bad temper.

Pandora Green had been rude to Melanie, so Melanie was crying (though Melanie always found *something* to cry about). Hamish Bigmore was trying to pick a quarrel with Thomas and Pete, the twins. And Mr Potter the head teacher was very cross

because the new teacher for Class Three hadn't turned up.

'I can't think where he is,' he grumbled at Class Three. 'He should have been here at nine o'clock for the beginning of school. And now it's nearly ten, and I should be teaching Class Two. We'll have to open the folding doors and let you share the lesson with them.'

Class Three groaned. They thought themselves very important people, and didn't in the least want to share a lesson with Class Two, who were just babies.

'Bother this thing,' muttered Mr Potter, struggling with the folding doors that separated the classrooms.

'*I'll* help you, Mr Potter,' said Hamish Bigmore, who didn't really want to help at all, but just to be a nuisance as usual. And then everyone else began to shout: 'Don't let

Hamish Bigmore do it, he's no good, let *me* help,' so that in a moment there was uproar.

But suddenly silence fell. And there was a gasp.

Mr Potter was still fiddling with the folding doors, so he didn't see what was happening. But Class Three did.

One of the big windows in the classroom slid open all by itself, and *something* flew in.

It was a man on a magic carpet.



There could be no doubt about that. Class Three knew a magic carpet when they saw

one. After all, they'd read *Aladdin* and all that sort of stuff. There are magic carpets all over the place in *Aladdin*. But this wasn't *Aladdin*. This was St Barty's Primary School on a wet Monday morning. And magic carpets don't turn up in schools. Class Three knew that. So they stared.

The carpet hung in the air for a moment, as if it wasn't sure what to do. Then it came down on the floor with a bump. 'Ow!' said the man sitting on it.

He was quite old, and he had a pointed beard and very bright eyes, behind a pair of glasses. His hair and clothes were wet from the rain. On the whole he looked quite ordinary – except for the fact that he was sitting on a magic carpet.

'I just can't manage it,' said Mr Potter, still pushing at the folding doors. 'I'll have to go and get the caretaker.'

Then he saw the man on the carpet.

'What – how – eh?' said Mr Potter. Words usually deserted Mr Potter at difficult moments.

The man on the carpet scrambled to his feet. 'Majeika,' he said politely, offering his hand.

Mr Potter took the hand. 'Majeika?' he repeated, puzzled. Then a look of understanding dawned on his face. 'Ah,' he said, 'Mr Majeika!' He turned to Class Three. 'Boys and girls,' he said, 'I want you to meet Mr Majeika. He's your new teacher.'

For a moment there was silence. Then Melanie began to cry: 'Boo-hoo! I'm *frightened* of him! He came on a magic carpet!'

'What's the matter, Melanie?' snapped Mr Potter. 'I can't hear a word you're saying. It sounded like "magic carpet" or some such

nonsense.' He turned briskly to Mr Majeika. 'Now, you're rather late, Mr Majeika. You might have telephoned me.'

'I'm so sorry,' said Mr Majeika. 'You see, my magic carpet took a wrong turning. It's normally quite good at finding the way, but I think the rain must have got into it. I do beg your pardon.'

'Never mind,' said Mr Potter. 'And now ... Wait a minute, did I hear you say *magic carpet*?'

It was Mr Majeika's turn to look bothered. 'Oh, did I really say that? How very silly of me. A complete slip of the tongue. I meant – *bicycle*, of course. I came on a bicycle.'

'Quite so,' said Mr Potter. 'Bicycle, of course ...' His voice tailed off. He was staring at the magic carpet. 'What's that?' he said rather faintly.

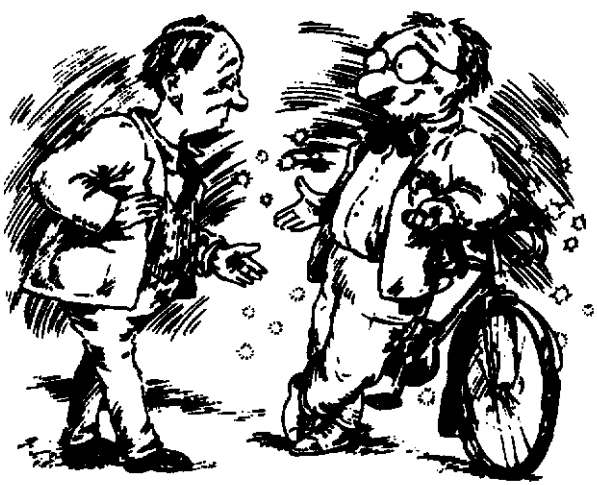
'That?' said Mr Majeika cheerily. 'That's

my magic – ' He cleared his throat. 'Oh dear, my mistake again. *That's my bicycle.*' And as he said these last words, he pointed a finger at the magic carpet.

There was a funny sort of humming noise, and the carpet rolled itself up and turned into a bicycle.

Mr Majeika leant cheerily against the handlebars and rang the bicycle bell. 'Nice bike, isn't it?' he said, smiling at Mr Potter.

You could have heard a pin drop.



Mr Potter turned rather white. 'I – I don't think I feel very well,' he said at last. 'I – I don't seem to be able to tell the difference between a carpet and a bicycle.'

Mr Majeika smiled even more cheerily. 'Never mind, a very easy mistake to make. And now I think it's time I began to teach our young friends here.'

Mr Potter wiped his forehead with his handkerchief. 'What? Oh – yes – of course,' he muttered faintly, backing to the door. 'Yes, yes, please do begin. Can't tell a bicycle from a carpet . . .' he mumbled to himself as he left the room.

'Now then,' said Mr Majeika to Class Three, 'to work!'

2. *Chips for Everyone*



Never had Class Three been so quiet as they were for the rest of that lesson. They sat in absolute silence as Mr Majeika told them what work he planned to give them for the rest of that term.

Not that any of them was really listening to what he was saying. It actually sounded very ordinary, with stuff about nature-study, and the kings and queens of England, and special projects, and that sort of thing, just like all the other teachers. But they couldn't take it in. Each of them was thinking about just one thing: the magic carpet.

When break came, and they were all having milk and biscuits, they whispered about it.



'I *saw* it,' whispered Pandora Green's best friend Jody.

'So did I,' said Thomas and Pete together. 'It *was* a magic carpet.'

'If you ask *me*,' said Hamish Bigmore, 'it was a mass hallucination.' Hamish Bigmore was always learning long words just so that he could show them off.