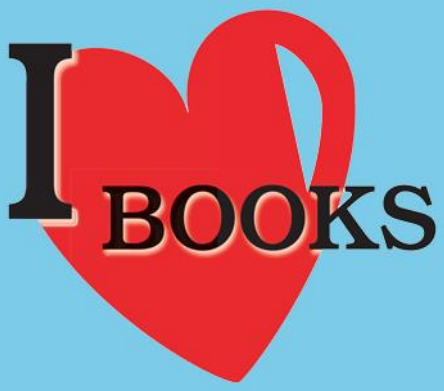


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The Goblin Aeroplane



The Goblin Aeroplane

'IT'S SUCH a lovely day you can take your lesson books on to the hillside, if you like,' said Mummy one morning to Jill and Robert.

So out they went.

'What have you got to do?' Robert asked Jill.

'I've got to learn how to spell six words,' said Jill. 'They're rather hard. Here they are: "mushroom", "toadstool", "honey", "dewdrop", "magic" and "enchantment". Don't you think they are hard, Robert?'

'Yes,' said Robert. 'I'm sure I don't know how to spell them. I've got to learn my seven times table.'

'I'm only up to five times,' said Jill. 'Ooh, isn't it lovely out on the hillside, Robert?'

The two children sat down and opened their books – but it was hard to work. First a lovely peacock butterfly flew by. Then a tiny copper beetle with a shining back ran over Jill's book. Then a robin came and sat so near to them that they hardly dared to move in case he was frightened away.

'I say, Jill!' said Robert at last. 'How much work have you done?'

'None!' said Jill. 'Have you learnt your times table, Robert?'

'Only as far as seven times two,' answered Robert. 'It's a pity to have to do homework when the sun is shining so brightly and we'd like to play.'

'Well, let's not do it,' said Jill. 'No one will know, because we can take our books to bed with us tonight, and after Mummy has gone we can get them out and learn our words and our times tables then!'

'Oh, no, Jill!' said Robert, shocked. 'Mummy

trusted us to do our lessons here, and we must. It would be mean to play when she sent us out here for a treat.'

'All right,' said Jill. 'It would be mean – so let's get on quickly and finish them, Robert.'

The two children turned their backs on one another, put their fingers in their ears and began to learn their spelling and times table. They didn't look up once even when the robin flew down at their feet. They meant to do their lessons really properly.

Soon Jill sat up.

'I've finished, Robert!' she said. 'Hear my spelling, will you?'

'Yes, if you'll hear my seven times table,' said Robert. They passed each other their books, and Jill was just beginning to spell 'mushroom' when a very strange thing happened.

They saw a tiny speck in the sky, which rapidly grew larger. It was bright red and yellow.

'It's an aeroplane, Jill!' said Robert. 'But what a

funny one!'

It certainly was odd, for instead of having flat wings like an ordinary aeroplane, it had curved wings like a bird, and it flapped these slowly up and down as it flew.

'It's coming down!' said Jill, in excitement. 'Ooh, look, Robert, it's coming down quite near us!'

Sure enough the strange aeroplane flew swiftly towards them, flapping its odd red and yellow wings. From the cockpit a funny little man peeped out. He waved his hand to them.

The aeroplane suddenly dipped downwards, and with a whirr of wings that sounded rather like a giant bee buzzing, it landed on the hillside near the excited children. They ran up to it in astonishment.

'What a tiny aeroplane!' cried Robert. 'I've never seen one like that before!'

'It's a goblin aeroplane!' said the pilot inside, peeping at them and grinning widely. 'It belongs to me.'

'Are you a goblin then?' asked Jill, in surprise.

'Of course,' said the strange pilot, and he jumped out of his plane. Then the children saw that he really was a goblin. His ears were pointed and stuck out above his cap. His body was round and fat, and his feet were as pointed as his ears.

'I've come to ask if you can tell me where Greenfield Farm is,' he said.

'Oh yes,' said Robert. 'It's over that field, then through a path in the wood, then over a stile, then down by the stream, then over the little hill, then—'

'Goodness!' cried the goblin, 'I shall never find it in my aeroplane! Can't you tell me how to get to it from the air?'

'I might, if I were in your aeroplane with you,' said Robert, doubtfully. 'I think I should know what the farm looks like, but I couldn't quite tell you now how to go. You see, I've never been in an aeroplane.'

'Well come for a ride in mine,' said the goblin, grinning. 'You and your sister can both come, and as soon as you show me Greenfield Farm and I land

there, you can hop out and run home again.'

'Ooh!' shouted both children in excitement, and they danced up and down in glee. 'Do you really mean it?'

'Of course,' said the goblin. 'Come on, hop in.'

So they climbed into the aeroplane, and the goblin climbed in too. Jill and Robert looked to see how he flew it. It was a very strange aeroplane, there was no doubt of that. In front of the goblin's seat were dozens of little buttons, each with something printed on. One had 'Down' on, one had 'Up', and another had 'Sideways'. Still another had 'Home' on, and a fifth had 'Fast', and a sixth one 'Slow'. There were many more besides.

The goblin pressed the button marked 'Up' and the aeroplane began to flap its strange wings. It rose from the ground, and the children clutched the sides in excitement, for it was a very odd feeling to be in something that flapped its wings and flew into the air.

'There's the farm!' cried Robert, and he pointed to a pretty farm house over to the east. At once the goblin

pressed a button marked 'East', and the aeroplane flapped its way to the right. Soon it was over the farm, but to the children's great surprise it didn't land, but flew straight on.

'Aren't you going to land?' asked Jill. 'You've passed right over the farm.'

'Ha ha!' laughed the goblin, and it was such a nasty laugh that the children looked at him in surprise.

'Why don't you land?' asked Robert. 'I don't want to go too far, you know, because of getting home again.'

'You're going to come with me!' said the goblin. 'You didn't suppose I really wanted to go to the farm, did you? Why that was only a trick to get you both into my aeroplane!'

The children sat silent for a minute, they were so surprised. Jill felt frightened.

'What do you want us for?' asked Robert at last.

'To sell to Big-One the giant,' said the goblin. 'He's lonely in his castle and he wants two children to talk to.'

'But, good gracious, you can't do a thing like that!' cried Robert, in a rage. 'Take us back home at once, or I'll make you very sorry for yourself!'

The goblin smiled a wide smile, and said nothing. Robert wondered what to do. He did not dare to hit the goblin, for he was afraid that the aeroplane might fall. So he just sat there frowning, holding Jill's hand tightly, for he saw that she was frightened.

After about twenty minutes Robert looked over the side of the aeroplane. Far below was a strange-looking country with palaces gleaming on hills, and castles towering high.

'It must be Fairyland,' whispered Jill when Robert pointed it out to her. 'Oh, Robert, this is a great adventure, even if that old goblin is taking us to a giant!'

Just then the aeroplane plunged downwards, for the goblin had pressed the button marked 'Down'. It flew to a great castle standing on a mountain top, and landed on one of the towers. The goblin leapt out

and ran to a staircase leading down from the roof.

'Hey, Big-One!' he called. 'Here are two children for you! Where's that sack of gold you promised me?'

Robert and Jill heard great footsteps coming up the stairs, and a giant's head peeped out on to the roof. He had a huge shock of hair, a turned-up nose, a wide mouth and very nice blue eyes as big as dinner plates. The children liked the look of him much better than they liked the goblin.

'So these are the children,' said the giant, in a loud booming voice. 'Well, they look all right, goblin. You can have your sack of gold tonight. I haven't any by me at the moment. Come for it at six o'clock.'

'All right,' said the goblin, and he went back to the aeroplane.

'Climb out,' he ordered, and Robert and Jill climbed down from the cockpit, feeling very strange. The goblin leapt into his seat, pressed the button marked 'Up' and disappeared into the sky, shouting that he would be back that night at six

o'clock for his sack of gold without fail.

The giant looked at the two children.

'Will you come down into my kitchen?' he said, in a kind voice. 'I am sure you want something to eat and drink after your ride.'

Robert and Jill felt glad to hear him speak so politely. He couldn't be very fierce, they thought. They followed him down the enormous stairs and came to a vast kitchen where a huge kettle boiled loudly on a great fire.

'Sit down,' said Big-One, and he pointed to two chairs. But neither Robert nor Jill could climb on to the seats, for they were so high up. So the giant gently lifted them up, and then took the boiling kettle from the stove.

He made some cocoa in three great china cups, and set out three enormous plates, on each of which he had placed a very large slice of currant cake.

'Please join me in a little lunch,' he said. 'It is really very kind of you to take pity on me and come to live

with me. I didn't think any children would be willing to come here, you know.'

'Why, we weren't willing!' said Robert, in astonishment. 'The goblin got us here by a trick. We didn't want to come here at all!'

'What!' cried the giant, upsetting his cocoa in his surprise. 'Do you mean to say that nasty little goblin brought you here against your will?'

'Yes,' said Robert, and he told Big-One all about the morning's happenings.

Jill listened and nodded her head, eating her currant cake, which was really most delicious.

The giant was terribly upset when he heard about the trick that the goblin had played on the children.

'I don't know what to do!' he said, and two big tears stood in his saucer-eyes. 'I wouldn't have had such a thing happen for the world! Now, however can I get you back again? And oh, dear me, that nasty goblin will be coming for his sack of gold too, and I haven't any. You see, I thought you'd be able to help me with

my spells, for children are very clever – much cleverer than stupid giants like me. I thought I'd get you to help me with a gold-spell, and make some gold before the evening.'

'Well, we don't mind helping you a bit,' said Robert, who liked the big giant very much. 'Don't cry. You've splashed a tear into your cocoa, and it will make it taste salty.'

'Will you really help me?' cried Big-One. 'Oh, you good, kind children! Well, I'll just clear away these things and then we'll set about making a gold-spell.'

He put the cups and plates into a huge sink and washed them up. Then he took the children into a big bare room with many chalk circles drawn on the floor. A big pot hung over a fire that burnt with strange green flames.

'Now first of all I've got to write six words in the biggest of these chalk circles,' he said. 'But, oh dear me, I don't know how to spell them! Still, children are very clever, so I do hope you'll be able

to help me. Can either of you spell "mushroom"?'

'I can!' cried Jill, excitedly. 'I learnt it this very morning! M-U-S-H-R-O-O-M!'

The giant carefully wrote it down in the circle as Jill spelt it. Then he looked up at her.

'Now could you spell "magic"?' he asked.

'Yes!' said Jill, 'M-A-G-I-C! That was one of the words I had to learn this morning, too!'

Well, would you believe it, all the words that the giant needed for his spells were the very ones Jill had to learn! Wasn't it a good thing she had done them so well? The last one the giant wanted was "enchantment".

'That's the hardest one,' said Jill, and she frowned. 'Oh, I do hope I remember it properly. Let me see – E-N–'

'Where's your spelling book, Jill?' asked Robert, terribly afraid that Jill might spell the word wrong after all. 'You could look it up before you spell it.'

'We left both our books on the hillside!' said Jill. 'No, I must try and spell it out of my head. Let me

think for a minute – yes, I think I've got it. E-N-C-H-A-N-T-M-E-N-T!'

Big-One wrote it carefully down. Then he drew a toadstool and a mushroom right in the very middle of the circle, put a spot of honey on each, and shook a dewdrop from a piece of grass on to the honey.

'That's all ready for the spell now!' he said. 'What a good thing you knew how to spell "mushroom", "toadstool", "honey", "dewdrop", "magic" and "enchantment", Jill. But oh, dear me – the next thing we have to do is very hard!'

'What's that?' asked Robert.

'Well, two of us have to dance round the circle holding hands,' said the giant, 'whilst one stands in the middle chanting the seven times table. But I don't know the seven times table. I only know twice times.'

'I don't know it either,' said Jill.

'But I do!' cried Robert. 'I learnt it this very morning. I can say it! I'll be the one to stand in the middle.'

'Oh, good!' said Big-One, and he rubbed his great hands together in delight. 'Now listen – Jill and I will dance round together, and you must stand still in the middle saying your seven times table at the top of your voice. At the end of it I have to say twelve very magic words, and then, if we've done the spell right, a sack of gold appears right in the middle of the circle!'

'Come on, let's do it!' cried Jill. 'Are you sure you know all your seven times perfectly, Robert? It might spoil the spell if you got something wrong.'

'I'm not quite sure of seven times twelve,' said Robert. 'I think it's eighty-four, but just wait a minute and I'll work it out to make sure.'

He took a piece of the giant's chalk and wrote the figure 12 seven times on the floor. Then he added them up, and sure enough, it made eighty-four, so he was quite right.

Then they started the spell. Jill and the giant danced round the circle, and Robert stood in the middle saying his seven times table at the top of his

voice. When he had finished the giant shouted out a string of curious magic words, and all the words he had written inside the ring suddenly vanished!

Then crash! A great sack suddenly appeared in the middle of the circle and knocked Robert down. He was up in a minute, and peeped into the mouth of the sack.

'Yes, the spell has worked!' he cried. 'It's full of gold! Ooh, what powerful magic! And what a mercy I knew my seven times table properly!'

The giant was so pleased. He could hardly thank Robert and Jill enough.

'You don't know how grateful I am to you,' he said. 'I can pay that horrid goblin now, though I don't think he deserves a penny, because he brought you here by a trick. But the next thing is – how am I going to get you home again?'

'I don't know,' said Robert. 'Could you use magic, do you think?'

'No,' said Big-One. 'I don't know any that would

take you home. Wait a minute – let me think.'

He sat down on a stool and frowned for five minutes. Then he jumped up and clapped his hands so loudly that it quite frightened Jill.

'I've a fine plan!' he said. 'The goblin will come in his aeroplane tonight at six o'clock. Now listen – I'll hide you behind a chimney pot on the roof of the castle. When the goblin arrives I'll call him downstairs to the cellar to fetch his gold. As soon as he's gone down the stairs you must pop out, jump into the aeroplane and fly home!'

'But we don't know how to fly a goblin aeroplane!' said Robert.

'Oh, it's quite easy,' said Big-One. 'Didn't you see all those buttons? Well, you just press the one that says "Up" and then the one that says "Home", and then the one that says "Down" when you see your home, and there you are!'

'Well, I think I could do that,' said Robert. 'Anyway, I'll try. But what shall we do till six o'clock?'

'Perhaps you'd like to come out with me in my yellow motor car and see the sights of Fairyland?' said the giant.

'Ooh, yes!' cried the children. So the giant took them out to his great motor car, and they climbed into it. What a time they had! They saw elves and fairies, brownies and gnomes, pixies and witches, and all kinds of strange little folk. They went into glittering palaces, they had dinner with a wizard and tea with a brownie, so you can guess what a glorious day they had. They were sorry when half-past five came, and the giant took them back to his castle.

He took them up to the roof and showed them a chimney to hide behind. Then he shook hands with both of them, and thanked them very much for all their help.

'Thank you for the lovely day you've given us,' said the children. 'We only wish we could stay longer, but our mother would be worried if we did.'

'Sh! Here comes the goblin!' said Big-One,

suddenly. He ran down the stairs, and the children were left alone behind their chimney. They heard a whirring sound, and saw the red and yellow aeroplane flying down, its strange wings flapping as it came.

The goblin landed neatly on the roof and ran to the stairs.

'Where's my sack of gold, Big-One?' he cried.

'Come down and fetch it!' came the giant's booming voice. 'It's in my cellar.'

The goblin raced down the stairs. As soon as he was gone Robert and Jill ran to the aeroplane and climbed into it. Robert pressed the button marked 'Up', and the aeroplane at once rose upwards. Then he pressed the button marked 'Home', and the machine turned round in the air and flew steadily towards the setting sun.

Jill looked back and saw the goblin standing on the roof of the castle, shouting wildly. The giant stood beside him, laughing. They could hear his great 'Ho-ho-ho' for a long way.

The aeroplane flew steadily onwards. Suddenly Jill gave a cry and pointed downwards.

'There's our house, Robert!' she cried. 'Press the "Down" button quickly!'

Robert pressed it. The aeroplane swooped down and landed on the hillside where the children had sat learning their lessons that morning. Robert and Jill jumped out, picked up their books which were still where they had left them, and raced home.

'Why, my dears, wherever have you been?' cried their mother. 'I have been so worried about you!'

'Oh Mummy, we've had such an adventure!' cried Robert. 'We've been up in a goblin aeroplane!' And he told her all that had happened. Their mother was so astonished that she simply couldn't say a word.

'Come and see the aeroplane,' said Robert. 'It's out on the hillside.'

They all three ran to the hill – but just as they got there they heard a whirring sound and Robert pointed up in the air.

'There it goes!' he cried. 'I expect it's gone back to the goblin. Oh, Mummy, I wish you'd seen all the buttons inside, and had come for a ride with us.'

'But that's not an aeroplane,' said their mother. 'It's only a very big bird. I can see its wings flapping.'

'No, really, it's the goblin aeroplane,' said Jill. But I don't think their mother believed it.

'Anyhow, my dears,' she said, as they all went home again. 'What a very good thing it was that you were good and learnt your lessons properly this morning – else you might have had to stay with that giant!'

And it was a good thing, wasn't it?