McTavish on the Move

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Conkers



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CONTENTS

1.	A Nice Day at Work	1
2.	A New Job	15
3.	Not a Small Problem	19
4.	Doom and Gloom	27
5.	The New House	36
6.	Getting Ready to Move	49
7.	Great Movers	55
8.	Fear and Trembling	67
9.	New School	80
10.	GOTCHA!	90
11.	The Most Well-Behaved Dog in the World	99

1

A Nice Day at Work

At 6 p.m. precisely, Pa Peachey stepped in through the front door singing a happy little tune.

"La la la," he sang. "Tra la, tra lee, oh happy me!"

Ollie and Ava sat at the kitchen table doing homework. They glanced at each other in alarm.

The Peachey family were used to Pa Peachey returning from work cranky and crabby and cross. They were used to him mumbling and grumbling and muttering. But singing and smiling? Humming a happy tune?

"La di da, la di dee, oh what joy it is to be!" Pa Peachey sang.

Betty stared at her father with concern.

"Are you feeling quite well, Pa?" she asked.

"Quite well?" Pa Peachey answered. "Why, I am more than quite well! I am full of the joys of spring!"

Ava's eyes widened with horror.

Pa Peachey began to sing once more. "If you're happy and you know it, clap your hands," he sang happily.

Nobody clapped. Ava and Ollie clutched each other in fear.

On his bed under the stairs, McTavish tilted his head, amazed. Never since he joined the Peachey family had Pa Peachey come home from work in a good mood.

"Hello, darling," Ma Peachey said cautiously. "Are you feeling quite well?"

"Quite well? Quite well? Why does everyone keep asking if I'm feeling quite well? As a

matter of fact, I am feeling superb. I am feeling devil-may-care and happy-go-lucky. I'm feeling joyous, optimistic and downright delighted. Why, I am in such high spirits, I might dance a merry little dance!"

Ava covered her face with her hands.

"Perhaps you should sit down, Pa," Betty said, her brow furrowed.

"Perhaps we should call a doctor," Ollie said. "Or the police."

McTavish stood up. He padded across the room and sat at Pa Peachey's feet. He looked up at Pa Peachey's face.

Pa Peachey certainly looked like the same person who had left for work this morning in his usual grumpy mood. But perhaps he had been hit by a bus. Perhaps a blow to the head had changed his personality or given him amnesia. Perhaps Pa Peachey had forgotten his reputation as the world's crankiest man.

"Did you have a nice day at work?" Ma Peachey asked in a worried voice.

"As a matter of fact, I did," said Pa Peachey, smiling broadly.

The Peachey children froze. They stared at each other in disbelief.



"You had a nice day at work?" Ollie gaped. "Are you sure?"

"Really?" said Ava. "You had a *nice day*" – she pronounced the words carefully – "*at work*?"

"Indeed I did," Pa Peachey said with a huge grin.

The Peachey children shuddered.

McTavish pricked his ears, alert to this strange turn of events.

For a long time, nobody said a word. The silence was so silent, you could hear a pin stand still.

After a few minutes, Pa Peachey became impatient.

"Doesn't anyone want to know *why* I had a nice day at work?"

The Peachey children did not want to know.

Pa Peachey had never had a nice day at work. Not ever. Pa Peachey hated work almost as much as he hated weekends and holidays. He was crabby on Mondays and irritable on Tuesdays. On Wednesdays he was glum. On Thursdays and Fridays he was just plain cross. Pa Peachey complained about beautiful summer days. He moaned about Christmas. He hated

weddings and birthdays. In short, Pa Peachey was not known for his cheerful disposition.

The Peachey children did not mind Pa Peachey's personality. They were used to it.

What they did not like was unexpected change.

"If you are going to be happy all of a sudden," said Ollie, "I wish you would give us time to prepare."

"If you are planning to be jolly," Ava said, "I'd appreciate at least a week's notice."

"Are you running a fever, Pa?" Betty asked with concern.

"What has it come to," moaned Pa Peachey, "when a man with a new job isn't allowed to be cheerful in his own home?"

"A new job!" exclaimed Betty.

"Tell us," said Ma Peachey.

"Well," said Pa Peachey, "if you must know—"

"We must!" shouted all the Peacheys at once.

"I have been offered a new job."

"A new job!" Betty leaped up and hugged her father. "That is wonderful news!"

Ma Peachey frowned. "What sort of new job?"

The Peacheys fell silent once more. They

tilted their heads. They squinted their eyes. They concentrated hard.

The fact was that not one of them understood what Pa Peachey did at work, despite his many attempts over the years to explain.

"It has to do with ..." Pa Peachey began.

The Peacheys leaned in, attentive.

Pa Peachey looked at the ceiling. "It's rather like ..."

The Peacheys all frowned with concentration.

Pa Peachey looked down at the floor. "It's very much concerned with ..."

Nobody even dared blink.

Pa Peachey closed his eyes for a long moment. At last he opened them and sighed.

"Never mind," he said. "The new job is rather like the old job – only more so."

All the Peacheys nodded wisely.

Pa Peachey hesitated for a moment and then went on. "Perhaps I should also mention – not that it is at all important, influential or significant in any way, not that any of you will even be terribly interested—"

"Yes?" Betty said with a slight narrowing of the eyes.

"That the new job will be ..."

"Yes?" Ava said with the beginnings of a frown.

"The new job will be?" said Ollie with a suspicious glare.

"The new job will be," Pa Peachey said, "in a different place."

"A different place?" Ollie gasped. "What does that even mean? Paris? Albania? Idaho? Shanghai?"

Ava frowned. "When you say 'a different place', what sort of different place do you have in mind?"

Betty looked puzzled. “Does ‘a different place’ mean ‘a place’ that is ‘different’?”

McTavish listened carefully. As a rescue dog, he knew it was his sworn duty to rescue the Peachey family from danger and harm. He had rescued them many times in the past. The challenge, he found, was to *keep* them rescued, for the Peacheys had a bad habit of descending into chaos the moment he turned his back.

McTavish did not remember turning his back lately, but he nonetheless had a feeling that chaos might be lurking just around the corner.