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Opening extract from

S.W.I.T.C.H. 3 Grasshopper Glitch

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Twitchy Travellers

Danny was jumpy.

'Stop making that *noise*!' snapped Josh as they waited at the gate. Danny was making a peculiar screechy-scrapey noise through his teeth. He was trying to learn to whistle but he only managed to sound like a rusty bike chain being repeatedly dragged against a tin tray.

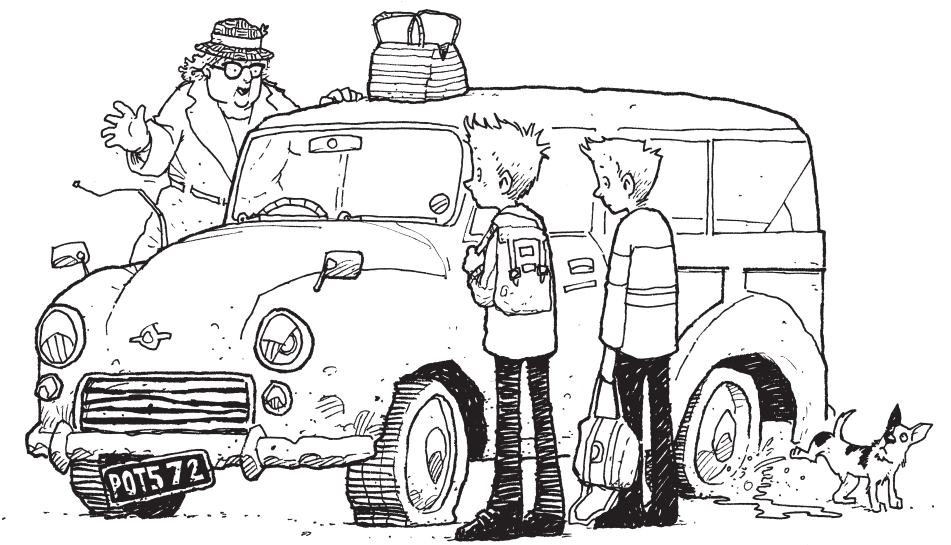
He didn't pay Josh any attention.

'Will you *stop* it!' Josh whacked his lunchbox against the back of Danny's head and his twin glared at him, rubbing his spiky blond hair.

'I can't help it. I'm nervous!' Danny muttered, eyeing the car at the roadside. The car which would take them to school this morning. Mum couldn't drive them in today and so their next-door neighbour, Petty Potts, was giving them a

lift. She was just getting her bag from the house and soon they would be away.

Josh stared at the car too, and felt that his brother had some cause to be jumpy. Petty's car was so old it was actually made of *wood*. The back half of it looked like a chunk of old boat and the dark-green leather seats inside were like furniture from a museum. Piddle, their terrier dog, was cocking his leg against one of the back wheels.



'It can't be legal to drive this around on proper roads!' hissed Danny, as Petty emerged from her gate with a large open-topped woven straw bag in

her hands. 'I mean—do you think she's even got a licence?'

'Come along, you two. Hop in,' said Petty, opening the door and tipping up the front passenger seat so they could get into the back. 'Oh, get away from my tyres, you nasty leaky creature!' She glared at Piddle and he grinned up at her doggily before shooting back into the garden and up the side passage where they heard Mum shutting the gate.

Petty tutted and went round to the driver's door. She was in her brown raincoat and wearing her usual tweedy hat, pulled down low over her spectacles. She looked exactly like someone should look, driving such an ancient wreck, thought Danny. 'Pooh.' He pulled a face at Josh as they clambered in across the bouncy cracked leather seat. It also smelt like a museum.

'Where are the seatbelts?' asked Josh looking left and right.

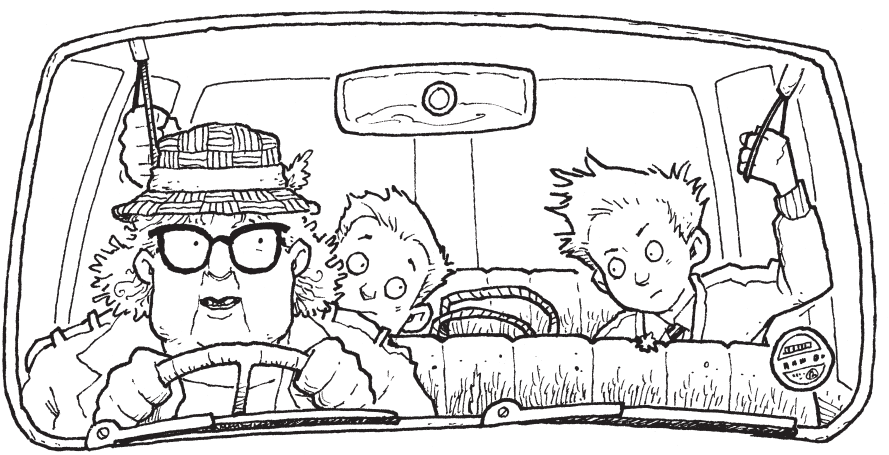
'It's a Morris Traveller, Josh,' said Petty, grinding the gears as the engine coughed into life. 'They didn't build them with seatbelts back in 1966. Just

hang on tight—I'm not going to crash.' She turned around, put her bag in between them on the seat, and creased her face into what she probably thought was a reassuring smile.

Petty Potts's reassuring smiles never really worked somehow. Danny grabbed on to a little leather strap above the window and narrowed his eyes at her.

Josh did the same.

'Oh, for heaven's sake, you two!' she huffed, as she turned back and started to drive up the road in a lurching fashion. 'You might have a little faith in me. I'm not going to kill you!'



Danny and Josh raised identical eyebrows at her in the rear-view mirror. Petty had never *tried* to kill them, true. But she had certainly brought them closer to a bizarre and grisly death than any other grown-up they knew. Since they'd stumbled into the secret underground laboratory hidden beneath her garden shed, they'd very nearly been crushed, drowned, splatted, pecked hollow, swatted, mummified and eaten—more times than they wanted to remember. Petty might *look* like a nice old biddy, but she was the genius inventor of SWITCH spray, which could change you into a creepy-crawly with just a few squirts. Josh and Danny had already been transformed into spiders and flies—and that was really quite enough.

Naming her *Serum Which Instigates Total Cellular Hijack* 'SWITCH' made it sound rather fun. And it was—if you didn't mind getting eaten, drowned, turned into soup or splattered with a giant sandal.

'Any more side effects from your house fly adventure?' Petty called back, cheerfully, over the rumble and clunk of the fifty-year-old engine.

'No. We've stopped sniffing around the bin now,' said Josh. 'And Danny hasn't spat on a doughnut or tried to walk up the kitchen window since last Tuesday.' He sighed and then grinned to himself. Being a bluebottle *was* very exciting. Even Danny had loved it—well, apart from the bit when he'd been on the lunch menu for a hungry spider.

'Good, good, good,' said Petty. 'You know, I thought it was a disaster when you two first accidentally ran into a jet of my Spider SWITCH spray . . . but actually it was the best thing that could have happened. If you hadn't found your way into my secret lab, I might never have moved on from trying to SWITCH rats and dogs!'

'Er . . . thanks,' muttered Josh, raising his eyebrows at Danny, who was shaking his head and looking annoyed. The dog Petty had been trying to spray was *their* dog, Piddle. It was when they were rescuing Piddle that they had first got caught in a jet of Petty's SWITCH spray.

'And, of course, rats could never tell me what the experience was like!' went on Petty. 'And you two are *so* helpful! I'm so delighted you've agreed

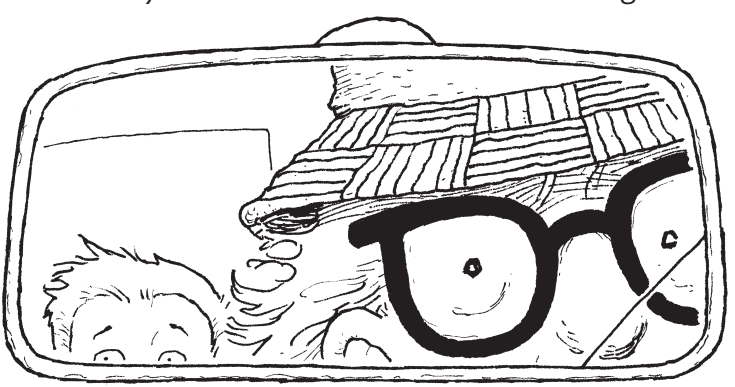
to be my assistants on the S.W.I.T.C.H. project.'

'Look—we just said we'd help you out by looking for your missing cube things,' said Josh as they reached the traffic lights near their school. 'We're *not* trying out any more SWITCH sprays!'

'I never asked you to!' protested Petty, looking all innocent and injured. 'And finding my missing cubes is absolutely the most important thing. Without them I will never be able to rediscover my formula and move on to turning things into reptiles—and you'll never get the chance to find out how it feels to be a giant python or an anaconda or a Komodo dragon!'

'We don't *want* to find out!' squawked Danny. 'Haven't you heard us? Being turned into other creatures is just too dangerous!'

'Yes, of course, of course . . . ' Petty smiled ferociously into her rear-view mirror. 'Although I



can't imagine how anyone could hurt you if you were a twenty-four foot python!'

Danny and Josh looked at each other—and there was just the faintest twinkle of excitement in Josh's eyes. He thought about Petty's promise. If they could find the last four missing cubes which held the secret of the REPTOSWITCH spray, she would be able to temporarily turn them into amazing reptiles. Josh loved wildlife—being a lizard or a snake would be incredible! The BUGSWITCH was amazing enough but a REPTOSWITCH? It would be hard to resist trying *that* spray out. And nice to be less easy to eat or squash! This was a definite downside to being a creepy-crawly.

'Josh!' hissed Danny, narrowing his eyes at his brother. 'Don't even *think* about it! You don't even know she's telling the truth! She's as fishy as fishfingers in fish sauce in a fish-shaped dish!'

Josh had to admit Danny was right. Petty claimed some pretty mad things. Although she had the BUGSWITCH sprays sorted, she insisted a man who had worked with her had stolen the rest of her research and even burnt out bits of her

memory. She'd forgotten where she'd hidden the special glass cubes which contained the secret REPTOSWITCH formula. That was why she needed their help—to find them. And they *had* found one.

'We have been looking for your cubes,' Danny was saying. 'And we will keep looking for them. But don't go thinking you'll *ever* change us into anything again—not unless we agree to it!'

'Well, of course not! What do you take me for? Some kind of monster?' huffed Petty. 'I would never dream of such a thing. But . . . I just wanted to tell you that I think I have perfected a SWITCH *potion* now. You can *drink* SWITCH instead of spray it on—and it'll have the same effect.'

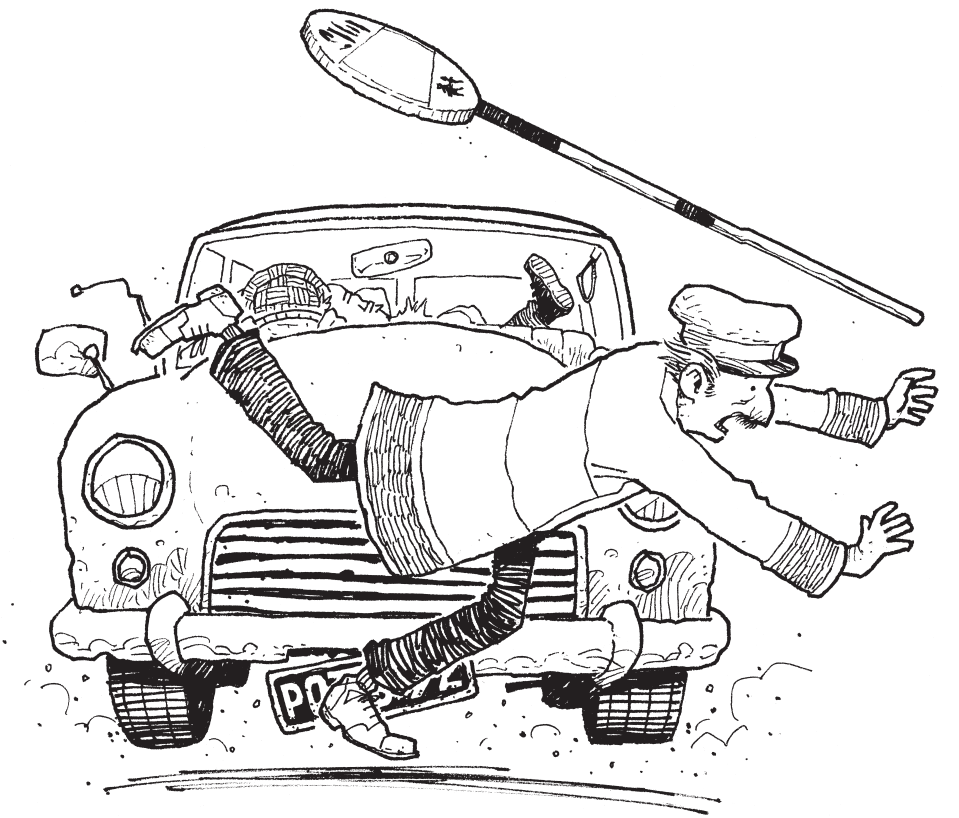
'We're not drinking *anything*!' declared Josh.

'Of course you're not—but if you ever *did*, it's all quite safe because, look, there's a SWITCH antidote potion too! I made it just in case drinking SWITCH makes the changes last longer than the spray. It gets right inside, of course, so it probably lasts longer—but the antidote can stop it all at any time like the gas back in my lab. Look—I've got

both the potion and the antidote in my bag.'

With one hand on the wheel, she turned around to rummage in the bag between them and was just hauling out a small plastic bottle when Josh shouted,

'LOOK OUT!'



There was a screech of elderly brakes and all three of them jerked violently forward as Petty's Morris Traveller nearly collided with the lollipop man. School bags, lunchboxes, and Petty's stuff went flying everywhere and it was just as well Josh and Danny had been hanging on to the little leather straps above their heads or they might well have shot through the windscreen.

Petty had bashed her nose on her steering wheel. 'Oh, all right! All right! Keep your stupid shiny hat on!' she was shouting at the lollipop man who was waving his yellow STOP sign around and looking very angry.

'Please—just drive around the corner, so we can get out,' wailed Josh keeping his head down behind the front seats in case anyone from their school was watching. He and Danny scrabbled about, picking up their bags and books and lunchboxes.

'My bun's all squashed!' moaned Danny, picking up a cake which now looked more like a biscuit.

'Well, mine had a pretty hard whack too, thanks for your concern!' sniffed Petty, as they pulled at last around the corner, away from the angry lollipop man.

'My buNNN! BuNNN—not BUM!' squawked Danny, with a horrified shudder.

'Thanks for the lift,' said Josh as they fumbled with the tipping front seat and the passenger door. He and Danny grabbed their school stuff and got out as fast as they could, slamming the door behind them.

Petty rubbed her nose, and called out, 'I'm off round the park to try the potion and the antidote out on the squirrels. I'll let you know how it goes!' and she did a violent U-turn, nearly knocking a passing postman off his bike.

'Come on,' said Danny, shoving his bottle of drink and flattened bun back into his lunchbox and slinging his bag over his shoulder. 'I never thought I'd say this, but I can't wait to get to school, where it's safe.'

And he went on through the school gates, having no idea that something very, very *un*safe was slurping about in his bag.

