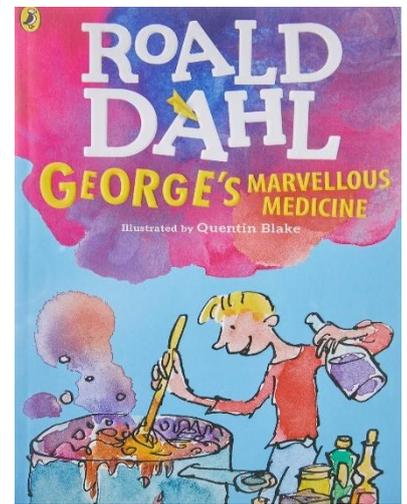


George's Marvellous Medicine

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Chapter 1

Grandma

'I'm going shopping in the village,' George's mother said to George on Saturday morning. 'So be a good boy and don't get up to mischief.'

This was a silly thing to say to a small boy at any time. It immediately made him wonder what sort of mischief he might get up to.

'And don't forget to give Grandma her medicine at eleven o'clock,' the mother said. Then out she went, closing the back door behind her.

Grandma, who was dozing in her chair by the window, opened one wicked little eye and said, 'Now you heard what your mother said, George. Don't forget my medicine.'

'No, Grandma,' George said.

'And just try to behave yourself for once while she's away.'

'Yes, Grandma,' George said.

George was bored to tears. He didn't have a brother or a sister. His father was a farmer and the farm they lived on was miles away from anywhere, so there were never any children to play with. He was tired of staring at pigs and hens and cows and sheep. He was especially tired of having to live in the same house as that grizzly old grunion of a Grandma. Looking after her all by himself was hardly the most exciting way to spend a Saturday morning.

'You can make me a nice cup of tea for a start,' Grandma said to George.

'That'll keep you out of mischief for a few minutes.'

'Yes, Grandma,' George said.

George couldn't help disliking Grandma. She was a selfish grumpy old woman. She had pale brown teeth and a small puckered up mouth like a dog's bottom.

'How much sugar in your tea today, Grandma?' George asked her.

'One spoon,' she said. 'And no milk.'

Most grandmothers are lovely, kind, helpful old ladies, but not this one. She spent all day and every day sitting in her chair by the window, and she was always complaining, grouching, grousing, grumbling, griping about something or other. Never once, even on her best days, had she smiled at George and said,

'Well, how are you this morning, George?' or 'Why don't you and I have a game of Snakes and Ladders?' or 'How was school today?' She didn't seem to care about other people, only about herself. She was a miserable old grouch.

George went into the kitchen and made Grandma a cup of tea with a teabag. He put one spoon of sugar in it and no milk. He stirred the sugar well and carried the cup into the living-room. Grandma sipped the tea. 'It's not sweet enough,' she said. 'Put more sugar in.'

George took the cup back to the kitchen and added another spoonful of sugar. He stirred it again and carried it carefully in to Grandma.

'Where's the saucer?' she said. 'I won't have a cup without a saucer.'

George fetched her a saucer.

'And what about a teaspoon, if you please?'

'I've stirred it for you, Grandma. I stirred it well.'

'I'll stir my own tea, thank you very much,' she said. 'Fetch me a teaspoon.'

George fetched her a teaspoon.

When George's mother or father were home, Grandma never ordered George about like this. It was only when she had him on her own that she began treating him badly.

'You know what's the matter with you?' the old woman said, staring at George over the rim of the teacup with those bright wicked little eyes. 'You're growing too fast. Boys who grow too fast become stupid and lazy.'

'But I can't help it if I'm growing fast, Grandma,' George said.

'Of course you can,' she snapped. 'Growing's a nasty childish habit.'

'But we have to grow, Grandma. If we didn't grow, we'd never be grown-ups.'

'Rubbish, boy, rubbish,' she said. 'Look at me. Am I growing? Certainly not.'

'But you did once, Grandma.'

'Only very little,' the old woman answered. 'I gave up growing when I was extremely small, along with all the other nasty childish habits like laziness and disobedience and greed and sloppiness and untidiness and stupidity. You haven't given up any of these things, have you?'

'I'm still only a little boy, Grandma.'

'You're eight years old,' she snorted. 'That's old enough to know better. If you don't stop growing soon, it'll be too late.'

'Too late for what, Grandma?'

'It's ridiculous,' she went on. 'You're nearly as tall as me already.'

George took a good look at Grandma. She certainly was a very tiny person. Her legs were so short she had to have a footstool to put her feet on, and her head only came half-way up the back of the armchair.

'Daddy says it's fine for a man to be tall,' George said.

'Don't listen to your daddy,' Grandma said. 'Listen to me.'

'But how do I stop myself growing?' George asked her.

'Eat less chocolate,' Grandma said.

'Does chocolate make you grow?'

'It makes you grow the wrong way,' she snapped. 'Up instead of down.'

Grandma sipped some tea but never took her eyes from the little boy who stood before her.

'Never grow up,' she said. 'Always down.'

'Yes, Grandma.'

'And stop eating chocolate. Eat cabbage instead.'

'Cabbage! Oh no, I don't like cabbage,' George said.

'It's not what you like or what you don't like,' Grandma snapped. 'It's what's good for you that counts. From now on, you must eat cabbage three times a day.

Mountains of cabbage! And if it's got caterpillars in it, so much the better!'

'Owch,' George said.

'Caterpillars give you brains,' the old woman said.

'Mummy washes them down the sink,' George said.

'Mummy's as stupid as you are,' Grandma said. 'Cabbage doesn't taste of anything without a few boiled caterpillars in it. Slugs, too.'

'Not slugs!' George cried out. 'I couldn't eat slugs!'

'Whenever I see a live slug on a piece of lettuce,' Grandma said, 'I gobble it up quick before it crawls away. Delicious.' She squeezed her lips together tight so that her mouth became a tiny wrinkled hole. 'Delicious,' she said again.

'Worms and slugs and beetley bugs. You don't know what's good for you.'

'You're joking, Grandma.'

'I never joke,' she said. 'Beetles are perhaps best of all. They go crunch!'

'Grandma! That's beastly!'

The old hag grinned, showing those pale brown teeth. 'Sometimes, if you're lucky,' she said, 'you get a beetle inside the stem of a stick of celery. That's what I like.'

'Grandma! How could you?'

'You find all sorts of nice things in sticks of raw celery,' the old woman went on. 'Sometimes it's earwigs.'

'I don't want to hear about it!' cried George.

'A big fat earwig is very tasty,' Grandma said, licking her lips. 'But you've got to be very quick, my dear, when you put one of those in your mouth. It has a pair of sharp nippers on its back end and if it grabs your tongue with those, it never lets go. So you've got to bite the earwig first, chop chop, before it bites you.'

George started edging towards the door. He wanted to get as far away as possible from this filthy old woman.

'You're trying to get away from me, aren't you,' she said, pointing a finger straight at George's face. 'You're trying to get away from Grandma.'

Little George stood by the door staring at the old hag in the chair. She stared back at him. Could it be, George wondered, that she was a witch? He had always thought witches were only in fairy tales, but now he was not so sure.

'Come closer to me, little boy,' she said, beckoning to him with a horny finger.

'Come closer to me and I will tell you secrets.'

George didn't move.

Grandma didn't move either.

'I know a great many secrets,' she said, and suddenly she smiled. It was a thin icy smile, the kind a snake might make just before it bites you. 'Come over here to Grandma and she'll whisper secrets to you.'

George took a step backwards, edging closer to the door.

'You mustn't be frightened of your old Grandma,' she said, smiling that icy smile.

George took another step backwards.

'Some of us,' she said, and all at once she was leaning forward in her chair and whispering in a throaty sort of voice George had never heard her use before.

'Some of us,' she said, 'have magic powers that can twist the creatures of this earth into wondrous shapes . . .'

A tingle of electricity flashed down the length of George's spine. He began to feel frightened.

'Some of us,' the old woman went on, 'have fire on our tongues and sparks in our bellies and wizardry in the tips of our fingers . . .'

'Some of us know secrets that would make your hair stand straight up on end and your eyes pop out of their sockets . . .'

George wanted to run away, but his feet seemed stuck to the floor.

'We know how to make your nails drop off and teeth grow out of your fingers instead.'

George began to tremble. It was her face that frightened him most of all, the frosty smile, the brilliant unblinking eyes.

'We know how to have you wake up in the morning with a long tail coming out from behind you.'

'Grandma!' he cried out. 'Stop!'

'We know secrets, my dear, about dark places where dark things live and squirm and slither all over each other . . .'

George made a dive for the door.

'It doesn't matter how far you run,' he heard her saying, 'you won't ever get away . . .'

George ran into the kitchen, slamming the door behind him.

Chapter 2

The Marvellous Plan

George sat himself down at the table in the kitchen. He was shaking a little.

Oh, how he hated Grandma! He really hated that horrid old witchy woman. And all of a sudden he had a tremendous urge to do something about her. Something whopping. Something absolutely terrific. A real shocker. A sort of explosion. He wanted to blow away the witchy smell that hung about her in the next room. He may have been only eight years old but he was a brave little boy. He was ready to take this old woman on.

'I'm not going to be frightened by her,' he said softly to himself. But he was frightened. And that's why he wanted suddenly to explode her away.

Well . . . not quite away. But he did want to shake the old woman up a bit.

Very well, then. What should it be, this whopping terrific exploding shocker for Grandma?

He would have liked to put a firework banger under her chair but he didn't have one.

He would have liked to put a long green snake down the back of her dress but he didn't have a long green snake.

He would have liked to put six big black rats in the room with her and lock the door but he didn't have six big black rats.

As George sat there pondering this interesting problem, his eye fell upon the bottle of Grandma's brown medicine standing on the sideboard. Rotten stuff it seemed to be. Four times a day a large spoonful of it was shovelled into her mouth and it didn't do her the slightest bit of good. She was always just as horrid after she'd had it as she'd been before. The whole point of medicine, surely, was to make a person better. If it didn't do that, then it was quite useless.

So-ho! thought George suddenly. Ah-ha! Ho-hum! I know exactly what I'll do. I shall make her a new medicine, one that is so strong and so fierce and so fantastic it will either cure her completely or blow off the top of her head.

I'll make her a magic medicine, a medicine no doctor in the world has ever made before.

George looked at the kitchen clock. It said five past ten. There was nearly an hour left before Grandma's next dose was due at eleven.

'Here we go, then!' cried George, jumping up from the table. 'A magic medicine it shall be!'

'So give me a bug and a jumping flea,
Give me two snails and lizards three,
And a slimy squiggler from the sea,
And the poisonous sting of a bumblebee,
And the juice from the fruit of the ju-jube tree,
And the powdered bone of a wombat's knee.
And one hundred other things as well
Each with a rather nasty smell.
I'll stir them up, I'll boil them long,
A mixture tough, a mixture strong.
And then, heigh-ho, and down it goes,
A nice big spoonful (hold your nose)
Just gulp it down and have no fear.'

"How do you like it, Granny dear?"
Will she go pop? Will she explode?
Will she go flying down the road?
Will she go poof in a puff of smoke?
Start fizzing like a can of Coke?
Who knows? Not I. Let's wait and see.
(I'm glad it's neither you nor me.)
Oh Grandma, if you only knew
What I have got in store for you!

Chapter 3

George Begins to Make the Medicine

George took an enormous saucepan out of the cupboard and placed it on the kitchen table.

'George!' came the shrill voice from the next room. 'What are you doing?'

'Nothing, Grandma,' he called out.

'You needn't think I can't hear you just because you closed the door! You're rattling the saucepans!'

'I'm just tidying the kitchen, Grandma.'

Then there was silence.

George had absolutely no doubts whatsoever about how he was going to make his famous medicine. He wasn't going to fool about wondering whether to put in a little bit of this or a little bit of that. Quite simply, he was going to put in

EVERYTHING he could find. There would be no messing about, no hesitating, no wondering whether a particular thing would knock the old girl sideways or not.

The rule would be this: whatever he saw, if it was runny or powdery or gooey, in it went.

Nobody had ever made a medicine like that before. If it didn't actually cure

Grandma, then it would anyway cause some exciting results. It would be worth watching.

George decided to work his way round the various rooms one at a time and see what they had to offer. He would go first to the bathroom. There are always lots of funny things in a bathroom. So upstairs he went, carrying the enormous two-handled saucepan before him.

In the bathroom, he gazed longingly at the famous and dreaded medicine cupboard.

But he didn't go near it. It was the only thing in the entire house he was forbidden to touch.

He had made solemn promises to his parents about this and he wasn't going to break them.

There were things in there, they had told him, that could actually kill a person, and although he was out to give Grandma a pretty fiery mouthful, he didn't really want a dead body on his hands. George put the saucepan on the floor and went to work.

Number one was a bottle labelled GOLDEN GLOSS HAIR SHAMPOO. He emptied it into the pan. 'That ought to wash her tummy nice and clean,' he said.

He took a full tube of TOOTHPASTE and squeezed out the whole lot of it in one long worm.

'Maybe that will brighten up those horrid brown teeth of hers,' he said.

There was an aerosol can of SUPERFOAM SHAVING SOAP belonging to his father. George loved playing with aerosols. He pressed the button and kept his finger on it until there was nothing left. A wonderful mountain of white foam built up in the giant saucepan. With his fingers, he scooped out the contents of a jar of VITAMIN ENRICHED FACE CREAM.

In went a small bottle of scarlet NAIL VARNISH. 'If the toothpaste doesn't clean her teeth,' George said, 'then this will paint them as red as roses.'

He found another jar of creamy stuff labelled HAIR REMOVER. SMEAR IT ON YOUR LEGS, it said, AND ALLOW TO REMAIN FOR FIVE MINUTES. George tipped it all into the saucepan.

There was a bottle with yellow stuff inside it called DISHWORTH'S FAMOUS DANDRUFF CURE. In it went.

There was something called BRILLIDENT FOR CLEANING FALSE TEETH. It was a white powder. In that went, too.

He found another aerosol can, NEVERMORE PONKING DEODORANT SPRAY,

GUARANTEED, it said, TO KEEP AWAY UNPLEASANT BODY SMELLS FOR A WHOLE DAY. 'She could use plenty of that,' George said as he sprayed the entire canful into the saucepan.

LIQUID PARAFFIN, the next one was called. It was a big bottle. He hadn't the faintest idea what it did to you, but he poured it in anyway.

That, he thought, looking around him, was about all from the bathroom.

On his mother's dressing-table in the bedroom, George found yet another lovely aerosol can. It was called HELGA'S HAIRSET. HOLD TWELVE INCHES AWAY FROM THE HAIR AND SPRAY LIGHTLY. He squirted the whole lot into the saucepan. He did enjoy squirting these aerosols.

There was a bottle of perfume called FLOWERS OF TURNIPS. It smelled of old cheese. In it went.

And in, too, went a large round box of POWDER. It was called PINK PLASTER. There was a powder-puff on top and he threw that in as well for luck.

He found a couple of LIPSTICKS. He pulled the greasy red things out of their little cases and added them to the mixture.

The bedroom had nothing more to offer, so George carried the enormous saucepan downstairs again and trotted into the laundry-room where the shelves were full of all kinds of household items.

The first one he took down was a large box of SUPERWHITE FOR AUTOMATIC WASHING-MACHINES. DIRT, it said, WILL DISAPPEAR LIKE MAGIC. George didn't know whether Grandma was automatic or not, but she was certainly a dirty old woman.

'So she'd better have it all,' he said, tipping in the whole boxful.

Then there was a big tin of WAXWELL FLOOR POLISH. IT REMOVES FILTH AND FOUL MESSSES FROM YOUR FLOOR AND LEAVES EVERYTHING SHINY BRIGHT, it said. George scooped the orange-coloured waxy stuff out of the tin and plonked it into the pan.

There was a round cardboard carton labelled FLEA POWDER FOR DOGS. KEEP WELL AWAY FROM THE DOG'S FOOD, it said, BECAUSE THIS POWDER, IF EATEN, WILL MAKE THE DOG EXPLODE. 'Good,' said George, pouring it all into the saucepan.

He found a box of CANARY SEED on the shelf. 'Perhaps it'll make the old bird sing,' he said, and in it went.

Next, George explored the box with shoe-cleaning materials — brushes and tins and dusters. Well now, he thought, Grandma's medicine is brown, so my medicine must also be brown or she'll smell a rat. The way to colour it, he decided, would be with BROWN SHOE-POLISH. The large tin he chose was labelled DARK TAN. Splendid. He scooped it all out with an old spoon and plopped it into the pan. He would stir it up later.

On his way back to the kitchen, George saw a bottle of GIN standing on the sideboard. Grandma was very fond of gin. She was allowed to have a small nip of it every evening. Now he would give her a treat. He would pour in the whole bottle. He did.

Back in the kitchen, George put the huge saucepan on the table and went over to the cupboard that served as a larder. The shelves were bulging with bottles and jars of every sort. He chose the following and emptied them one by one into the saucepan:

A TIN OF CURRY POWDER

A TIN OF MUSTARD POWDER

A BOTTLE OF 'EXTRA HOT' CHILLI SAUCE

A TIN OF BLACK PEPPERCORNS

A BOTTLE OF HORSERADISH SAUCE

'There!' he said aloud. 'That should do it!'

'George!' came the screechy voice from the next room. 'Who are you talking to in there? What are you up to?'

'Nothing, Grandma, absolutely nothing,' he called back.

'Is it time for my medicine yet?'

'No, Grandma, not for about half an hour.'

'Well, just see you don't forget it.'

'I won't, Grandma,' George answered. 'I promise I won't.'

Chapter 4

Animal Pills

At this point, George suddenly had an extra good wheeze. Although the medicine cupboard in the house was forbidden ground, what about the medicines his father kept on the shelf in the shed next to the henhouse? The animal medicines? What about those? Nobody had ever told him he mustn't touch them. Let's face it, George said to himself, hair-spray and shaving-cream and shoe-polish are all very well and they will no doubt cause some splendid explosions inside the old geezer, but what the magic mixture now needs is a touch of the real stuff, real pills and real tonics, to give it punch and muscle.

George picked up the heavy three-quarters full saucepan and carried it out of the back door. He crossed the farmyard and headed straight for the shed alongside the henhouse. He knew his father wouldn't be there. He was out haymaking in one of the meadows.

George entered the dusty old shed and put the saucepan on the bench. Then he looked up at the medicine shelf. There were five big bottles there. Two were full of pills, two were full of runny stuff and one was full of powder.

'I'll use them all,' George said. 'Grandma needs them. Boy, does she need them!'

The first bottle he took down contained an orange-coloured powder. The label said, FOR CHICKENS WITH FOUL PEST, HEN GRIPE, SORE BEAKS, GAMMY LEGS, COCKERELITIS, EGG TROUBLE, BROODINESS OR LOSS OF FEATHERS. MIX ONE SPOONFUL ONLY WITH EACH BUCKET OF FEED.

'Well,' George said aloud to himself as he tipped in the whole bottleful, 'the old bird won't be losing any feathers after she's had a dose of this.'

The next bottle he took down had about five hundred gigantic purple pills in it. FOR HORSES WITH HOARSE THROATS, it said on the label. THE HOARSE-THROATED HORSE SHOULD SUCK ONE PILL TWICE A DAY.

'Grandma may not have a hoarse throat,' George said, 'but she's certainly got a sharp tongue. Maybe they'll cure that instead.' Into the saucepan went the five hundred gigantic purple pills.

Then there was a bottle of thick yellowish liquid. FOR COWS, BULLS AND BULLOCKS, the label said. WILL CURE COW POX, COW MANGE, CRUMPLED HORNS, BAD BREATH IN BULLS, EARACHE, TOOTHACHE, HEADACHE, HOOFACE, TAILACHE AND SORE UDDERS.

'That grumpy old cow in the living-room has every one of those rotten illnesses,' George said. 'She'll need it all.' With a slop and a gurgle, the yellow liquid splashed into the now nearly full saucepan.

The next bottle contained a brilliant red liquid. SHEEPDIP, it said on the label. FOR SHEEP WITH SHEEPROT AND FOR GETTING RID OF TICKS AND FLEAS. MIX ONE SPOONFUL IN ONE GALLON OF WATER AND SLOSH IT OVER THE SHEEP. CAUTION, DO NOT MAKE THE MIXTURE ANY STRONGER OR THE WOOL WILL FALL OUT AND THE ANIMAL WILL BE NAKED.

'By gum,' said George, 'how I'd love to walk in and slosh it all over old Grandma and watch the ticks and fleas go jumping off her. But I can't. I mustn't. So she'll have to drink it instead.' He poured the bright red medicine into the saucepan.

The last bottle on the shelf was full of pale green pills. PIG PILLS, the label announced. FOR PIGS WITH PORK PRICKLES, TENDER TROTTERS, BRISTLE BLIGHT AND

SWINE SICKNESS. GIVE ONE PILL PER DAY. IN SEVERE CASES TWO PILLS MAY BE GIVEN,

BUT MORE THAN THAT WILL MAKE THE PIG ROCK AND ROLL.

'Just the stuff, said George, 'for that miserable old pig back there in the house. She'll need a very big dose.' He tipped all the green pills, hundreds and hundreds of them, into the saucepan.

There was an old stick lying on the bench that had been used for stirring paint. George picked it up and started to stir his marvellous concoction. The mixture was as thick as cream, and as he stirred and stirred, many wonderful colours rose up from the depths and blended together, pinks, blues, greens, yellows and browns.

George went on stirring until it was all well mixed, but even so there were still hundreds of pills lying on the bottom that hadn't melted. And there was his mother's splendid powder-puff floating on the surface. 'I shall have to boil it all up,' George said. 'One good quick boil on the stove is all it needs.' And with that he staggered back towards the house with the enormous heavy saucepan.

On the way, he passed the garage, so he went in to see if he could find any other interesting things. He added the following:

Half a pint of ENGINE OIL — to keep Grandma's engine going smoothly.

Some ANTI-FREEZE — to keep her radiator from freezing up in winter.

A handful of GREASE — to grease her creaking joints.

Then back to the kitchen.

Chapter 5

The Cook-Up

In the kitchen, George put the saucepan on the stove and turned up the gas flame underneath it as high as it would go.

'George!' came the awful voice from the next room. 'It's time for my medicine!'

'Not yet, Grandma,' George called back. 'There's still twenty minutes before eleven o'clock.'

'What mischief are you up to in there now?' Granny screeched. 'I hear noises.'

George thought it best not to answer this one. He found a long wooden spoon in a kitchen drawer and began stirring hard. The stuff in the pot got hotter and hotter.

Soon the marvellous mixture began to froth and foam. A rich blue smoke, the colour of peacocks, rose from the surface of the liquid, and a fiery fearsome smell filled the kitchen.

It made George choke and splutter. It was a smell unlike any he had smelled before. It was a brutal and bewitching smell, spicy and staggering, fierce and frenzied, full of wizardry and magic. Whenever he got a whiff of it up his nose, firecrackers went off in his skull and electric prickles ran along the backs of his legs. It was wonderful to stand there stirring this amazing mixture and to watch it smoking blue and bubbling and frothing and foaming as though it were alive. At one point, he could have sworn he saw bright sparks flashing in the swirling foam.

And suddenly, George found himself dancing around the steaming pot, chanting strange words that came into his head out of nowhere:

'Fiery broth and witch's brew

Foamy froth and riches blue

Fume and spume and spoondrift spray

Fizzle swizzle shout hooray

Watch it sloshing, swashing, splashing

Hear it hissing, squishing, spissing

Grandma better start to pray.'

Chapter 6

Brown Paint

George turned off the heat under the saucepan. He must leave plenty of time for it to cool down. When all the steam and froth had gone away, he peered into the giant pan to see what colour the great medicine now was. It was a deep and brilliant blue.

'It needs more brown in it,' George said. 'It simply must be brown or she'll get suspicious.'

George ran outside and dashed into his father's toolshed where all the paints were kept. There was a row of cans on the shelf, all colours, black, green, red, pink, white and brown. He reached for the can of brown. The label said simply DARK BROWN GLOSS PAINT ONE QUART. He took a screwdriver and prised off the lid. The can was three-quarters full. He rushed it back to the kitchen. He poured the whole lot into the saucepan. The saucepan was now full to the brim. Very gently, George stirred the paint into the mixture with the long wooden spoon. Ah-ha! It was all turning brown! A lovely rich creamy brown!

'Where's that medicine of mine, boy?!' came the voice from the living-room.

'You're forgetting me! You're doing it on purpose! I shall tell your mother!'

'I'm not forgetting you, Grandma,' George called back. 'I'm thinking of you all the time. But there are still ten minutes to go.'

'You're a nasty little maggot!' the voice screeched back. 'You're a lazy and disobedient little worm, and you're growing too fast.'

George fetched the bottle of Grandma's real medicine from the sideboard. He took out the cork and tipped it all down the sink. He then filled the bottle with his own magic mixture by dipping a small jug into the saucepan and using it as a pourer. He replaced the cork. Had it cooled down enough yet? Not quite. He held the bottle under the cold tap for a couple of minutes. The label came off in the wet but that didn't matter.

He dried the bottle with a dishcloth.

All was now ready!

This was it!

The great moment had arrived!

'Medicine time, Grandma!' he called out.

'I should hope so, too,' came the grumpy reply.

The silver tablespoon in which the medicine was always given lay ready on the kitchen sideboard. George picked it up.

Holding the spoon in one hand and the bottle in the other, he advanced into the living-room.

Chapter 7

Grandma Gets the Medicine

Grandma sat hunched in her chair by the window. The wicked little eyes followed George closely as he crossed the room towards her.

'You're late,' she snapped.

'I don't think I am, Grandma.'

'Don't interrupt me in the middle of a sentence!' she shouted.

'But you'd finished your sentence, Grandma.'

'There you go again!' she cried. 'Always interrupting and arguing. You really are a tiresome little boy. What's the time?'

'It's exactly eleven o'clock, Grandma.'

'You're lying as usual. Stop talking so much and give me my medicine. Shake the bottle first. Then pour it into the spoon and make sure it's a whole spoonful.'

'Are you going to gulp it all down in one go?' George asked her. 'Or will you sip it?'

'What I do is none of your business,' the old woman said. 'Fill the spoon.'

As George removed the cork and began very slowly to pour the thick brown stuff into the spoon, he couldn't help thinking back upon all the mad and marvellous things that had gone into the making of this crazy stuff — the shaving soap, the hair remover, the dandruff cure, the automatic washing-machine powder, the flea powder for dogs, the shoe polish, the black pepper, the horseradish sauce and all the rest of them, not to mention the powerful animal pills and powders and liquids . . . and the brown paint.

'Open your mouth wide, Grandma,' he said, 'and I'll pop it in.'

The old hag opened her small wrinkled mouth, showing disgusting pale brown teeth.

'Here we go!' George cried out. 'Swallow it down!' He pushed the spoon well into her mouth and tipped the mixture down her throat. Then he stepped back to watch the result. It was worth watching.

Grandma yelled 'Oweeeee!' and her whole body shot up whoosh into the air. It was exactly as though someone had pushed an electric wire through the underneath of her chair and switched on the current. Up she went like a jack-in-the-box . . . and she didn't come down . . . she stayed there . . . suspended in mid air . . . about two feet up . . . still in a sitting position . . . but rigid now . . . frozen . . . quivering . . . the eyes bulging . . . the hair standing straight up on end.

'Is something wrong, Grandma?' George asked her politely. 'Are you all right?'

Suspended up there in space, the old girl was beyond speaking.

The shock that George's marvellous mixture had given her must have been tremendous.

You'd have thought she'd swallowed a red-hot poker the way she took off from that chair.

Then down she came again with a plop, back into her seat.

'Call the fire brigade!' she shouted suddenly. 'My stomach's on fire!'

'It's just the medicine, Grandma,' George said. 'It's good strong stuff.'

'Fire!' the old woman yelled. 'Fire in the basement! Get a bucket! Man the hoses! Do something quick!'

'Cool it, Grandma,' George said. But he got a bit of a shock when he saw the smoke coming out of her mouth and out of her nostrils. Clouds of black smoke were coming out of her nose and blowing around the room.

'By golly, you really are on fire,' George said.

'Of course I'm on fire!' she yelled. 'I'll be burned to a crisp! I'll be fried to a frizzle! I'll be boiled like a beetroot!'

George ran into the kitchen and came back with a jug of water. 'Open your mouth, Grandma!' he cried. He could hardly see her for the smoke, but he managed to pour half a jugful down her throat. A sizzling sound, the kind you get if you hold a hot frying-pan under a cold tap, came up from deep down in Grandma's stomach. The old hag bucked and shied and snorted. She gasped and gurgled. Spouts of water came shooting out of her. And the smoke cleared away.

'The fire's out,' George announced proudly. 'You'll be all right now, Grandma.'

'All right?' she yelled. 'Who's all right? There's jacky-jumpers in my tummy!

There's squiggles in my belly! There's bangers in my bottom!' She began bouncing up and down in the chair. Quite obviously she was not very comfortable.

'You'll find it's doing you a lot of good, that medicine, Grandma,' George said.

'Good?' she screamed. 'Doing me good? It's killing me!'

Then she began to bulge.

She was swelling!

She was puffing up all over!

Someone was pumping her up, that's how it looked!

Was she going to explode?

Her face was turning from purple to green!

But wait! She had a puncture somewhere! George could hear the hiss of escaping air. She stopped swelling. She was going down. She was slowly getting thinner again, shrinking back and back slowly to her shrivelly old self.

'How's things, Grandma?' George said.

No answer.

Then a funny thing happened. Grandma's body gave a sudden sharp twist and a sudden sharp jerk and she flipped herself clear out of the chair and landed neatly on her two feet on the carpet.

'That's terrific, Grandma!' George cried. 'You haven't stood up like that for years! Look at you! You're standing up all on your own and you're not even using a stick!'

Grandma didn't even hear him. The frozen pop-eyed look was back with her again now. She was miles away in another world. Marvellous medicine, George told himself. He found it fascinating to stand there watching what it was doing to the old hag. What next? he wondered.

He soon found out.

Suddenly she began to grow.

It was quite slow at first . . . just a very gradual inching upwards . . . up, up, up . . . inch by inch . . . getting taller and taller . . . about an inch every few seconds . . . and in the beginning George didn't notice it.

But when she had passed the five foot six mark and was going on up towards being six feet tall, George gave a jump and shouted, 'Hey, Grandma! You're growing! You're going up! Hang on, Grandma! You'd better stop now or you'll be hitting the ceiling!'

But Grandma didn't stop.

It was a truly fantastic sight, this ancient scrawny old woman getting taller and taller, longer and longer, thinner and thinner, as though she were a piece of elastic being pulled upwards by invisible hands.

When the top of her head actually touched the ceiling, George thought she was bound to stop.

But she didn't.

There was a sort of scrunching noise, and bits of plaster and cement came raining down.

'Hadn't you better stop now, Grandma?' George said. 'Daddy's just had this whole room repainted.'

But there was no stopping her now.

Soon, her head and shoulders had completely disappeared through the ceiling and she was still going. George dashed upstairs to his own bedroom and there she was coming up through the floor like a mushroom.

'Whoopee!' she shouted, finding her voice at last. 'Hallelujah, here I come!'

'Steady on, Grandma,' George said.

'With a heigh-nonny-no and up we go!' she shouted. 'Just watch me grow!'

'This is my room,' George said. 'Look at the mess you're making.'

'Terrific medicine!' she cried. 'Give me some more!'

She's dotty as a doughnut, George thought.

'Come on, boy! Give me some more!' she yelled. 'Dish it out! I'm slowing down!'

George was still clutching the medicine bottle in one hand and the spoon in the other. Oh well, he thought, why not? He poured out a second dose and popped it into her mouth.

'Oweee!' she screamed and up she went again. Her feet were still on the floor downstairs in the living-room but her head was moving quickly towards the ceiling of the bedroom.

'I'm on my way now, boy!' she called down to George. 'Just watch me go!'

'That's the attic above you, Grandma!' George called out. 'I'd keep out of there! It's full of bugs and bogles!'

Crash! The old girl's head went through the ceiling as though it were butter.

George stood in his bedroom gazing at the shambles. There was a big hole in the floor and another in the ceiling, and sticking up like a post between the two was the middle part of Grandma. Her legs were in the room below, her head in the attic.

'I'm still going!' came the old screechy voice from up above. 'Give me another dose, my boy, and let's go through the roof!'

'No, Grandma, no!' George called back. 'You're busting up the whole house!'

'To heck with the house!' she shouted. 'I want some fresh air! I haven't been outside for twenty years!'

'By golly, she is going through the roof!' George told himself. He ran downstairs. He rushed out of the back door into the yard. It would be simply awful, he thought, if she bashed up the roof as well. His father would be furious. And he, George, would get the blame. He had made the medicine. He had given her too much. 'Don't come through the roof, Grandma,' he prayed. 'Please don't.'

Chapter 8

The Brown Hen

George stood in the farmyard looking up at the roof. The old farmhouse had a fine roof of pale red tiles and tall chimneys. There was no sign of Grandma. There was only a song-thrush sitting on one of the chimney-pots, singing a song. The old wurzel's got stuck in the attic, George thought. Thank goodness for that.

Suddenly a tile came clattering down from the roof and fell into the yard. The song-thrush took off fast and flew away.

Then another tile came down.

Then half a dozen more.

And then, very slowly, like some weird monster rising up from the deep, Grandma's head came through the roof . . .

Then her scrawny neck . . .

And the tops of her shoulders . . .

'How'm I doing, boy!' she shouted. 'How's that for a bash up?'

'Don't you think you'd better stop now, Grandma?' George called out . . .

'I have stopped!' she answered. 'I feel terrific! Didn't I tell you I had magic powers! Didn't I warn you I had wizardry in the tips of my fingers! But you wouldn't listen to me, would you? You wouldn't listen to your old Grandma!'

'You didn't do it, Grandma,' George shouted back to her. 'I did it! I made you a new medicine!'

'A new medicine? You? What rubbish!' she yelled.

'I did! I did!' George shouted.

'You're lying as usual!' Grandma yelled. 'You're always lying!'

'I'm not lying, Grandma. I swear I'm not.'

The wrinkled old face high up on the roof stared down suspiciously at George.

'Are you telling me you actually made a new medicine all by yourself?' she shouted.

'Yes, Grandma, all by myself.'

'I don't believe you,' she answered. 'But I'm very comfortable up here. Fetch me a cup of tea.'

A brown hen was pecking about in the yard close to where George was standing.

The hen gave him an idea. Quickly, he uncorked the medicine bottle and poured some of the brown stuff into the spoon. 'Watch this, Grandma!' he shouted. He crouched down, holding out the spoon to the hen.

'Chicken,' he said. 'Chick-chick-chicken. Come here. Have some of this.'

Chickens are stupid birds, and very greedy. They think everything is food. This one thought the spoon was full of corn. It hopped over. It put its head on one side and looked at the spoon. 'Come on, chicken,' George said. 'Good chicken. Chick-chick-chick.'

The brown hen stretched out its neck towards the spoon and went peck. It got a beakful of medicine.

The effect was electric.

'Oweee!' shrieked the hen and it shot straight up into the air like a rocket. It went as high as the house.

Then down it came again into the yard, splosh. And there it sat with its feathers all sticking straight out from its body. There was a look of amazement on its silly face. George stood watching it. Grandma up on the roof was watching it, too.

The hen got to its feet. It was rather shaky. It was making funny gurgling noises in its throat. Its beak was opening and shutting. It seemed like a pretty sick hen.

'You've done it in, you stupid boy!' Grandma shouted. 'That hen's going to die!

Your father'll be after you now! He'll give you socks and serve you right!'

All of a sudden, black smoke started pouring out of the hen's beak.

'It's on fire!' Grandma yelled. 'The hen's on fire!'

George ran to the water-trough to get a bucket of water.

'That hen'll be roasted and ready for eating any moment!' Grandma shouted.

George sloshed the bucket of water over the hen. There was a sizzling sound and the smoke went away.

'Old hen's laid its last egg!' Grandma shouted. 'Hens don't do any laying after they've been on fire!'

Now that the fire was out, the hen seemed better. It stood up properly. It flapped its wings.

Then it crouched down low to the ground, as though getting ready to jump. It did jump. It

jumped high in the air and turned a complete somersault, then landed back on its feet.

'It's a circus hen!' Grandma shouted from the rooftop. 'It's a flipping acrobat!'

Now the hen began to grow.

George had been waiting for this to happen. 'It's growing!' he yelled. 'It's growing, Grandma! Look, it's growing!'

Bigger and bigger . . . taller and taller it grew. Soon the hen was four or five times its normal size.

'Can you see it, Grandma?!' George shouted.

'I can see it, boy!' the old girl shouted back. 'I'm watching it!'

George was hopping about from one foot to the other with excitement, pointing at the enormous hen and shouting, 'It's had the magic medicine, Grandma, and it's growing just like you did!'

But there was a difference between the way the hen was growing and the way Grandma grew. When Grandma grew taller and taller, she got thinner and thinner.

The hen didn't. It stayed nice and plump all along.

Soon it was taller than George, but it didn't stop there. It went right on growing until it was about as big as a horse. Then it stopped.

'Doesn't it look marvellous, Grandma!' George shouted.

'It's not as tall as me!' Grandma sang out. 'Compared with me, that hen is titchy small! I am the tallest of them all!'

Chapter 9

The Pig, the Bullocks, the Sheep, the Pony and the Nanny-goat

At that moment, George's mother came back from shopping in the village. She drove her car into the yard and got out. She was carrying a bottle of milk in one hand and a bag of groceries in the other.

The first thing she saw was the gigantic brown hen towering over little George. She dropped the bottle of milk.

Then Grandma started shouting at her from the rooftop, and when she looked up and saw Grandma's head sticking up through the tiles, she dropped the bag of groceries.

'How about that then, eh Mary?' Grandma shouted. 'I'll bet you've never seen a hen as big as that! That's George's giant hen, that is!'

'But . . . but . . . but . . .' stammered George's mother.

'It's George's magic medicine!' Grandma shouted. 'We've both of us had it, the hen and I!'

'But how in the world did you get up on the roof?' cried the mother.

'I didn't!' cackled the old woman. 'My feet are still standing on the floor in the living-room!'

This was too much for George's mother to understand. She just goggled and gaped.

She looked as though she was going to faint.

A second later, George's father appeared. His name was Mr Killy Kranky. Mr Kranky was a small man with bandy legs and a huge head. He was a kind father to George, but he was not an easy person to live with because even the smallest things got him all worked up and excited.

The hen standing in the yard was certainly not a small thing, and when Mr Kranky saw it he started jumping about as though something was burning his feet. 'Great heavens!' he cried, waving his arms. 'What's this? What's happened? Where did it come from? It's a giant hen! Who did it?'

'I did,' George said.

'Look at me!' Grandma shouted from the rooftop. 'Never mind about the hen! What about me?'

Mr Kranky looked up and saw Grandma. 'Shut up, Grandma,' he said. It didn't seem to surprise him that the old girl was sticking up through the roof. It was the hen that excited him. He had never seen anything like it. But then who had?

'It's fantastic!' Mr Kranky shouted, dancing round and round. 'It's colossal!

It's gigantic! It's tremendous! It's a miracle! How did you do it, George?'

George started telling his father about the magic medicine. While he was doing this, the big brown hen sat down in the middle of the yard and went cluck-cluck-cluck . . . cluck-cluck-cluck-cluck-cluck.

Everyone stared at it.

When it stood up again, there was a brown egg lying there. The egg was the size of a football.

'That egg would make scrambled eggs for twenty people!' Mrs Kranky said.

'George!' Mr Kranky shouted. 'How much of this medicine have you got?'

'Lots,' George said. 'There's a big saucepanful in the kitchen, and this bottle here's nearly full.'

'Come with me!' Mr Kranky yelled, grabbing George by the arm. 'Bring the medicine! For years and years I've been trying to breed bigger and bigger animals. Bigger bulls for beef. Bigger pigs for pork. Bigger sheep for mutton . . .'

They went to the pigsty first.

George gave a spoonful of medicine to the pig. The pig blew smoke from its nose and jumped about all over the place. Then it grew and grew.

In the end, it looked like this . . .

They went to the herd of fine black bullocks that Mr Kranky was trying to fatten for the market.

George gave each of them some medicine, and this is what happened . . .

Then the sheep . . .

He gave some to his grey pony, Jack Frost . . .

And finally, just for fun, he gave some to Alma, the nanny-goat . . .

Chapter 10

A Crane for Grandma

Grandma, from high up on the rooftop, could see everything that was going on and she didn't like what she saw. She wanted to be the centre of attention and nobody was taking the slightest notice of her. George and Mr Kranky were running round and getting excited about the enormous animals. Mrs Kranky was washing up in the kitchen, and Grandma was all alone on the rooftop.

'Hey you!' she yelled. 'George! Get me a cup of tea this minute, you idle little beast!'

'Don't listen to the old goat,' Mr Kranky said. 'She's stuck where she is and a good thing, too.'

'But we can't leave her up there, dad,' George said. 'What if it rains?'

'George!' Grandma yelled. 'Oh, you horrible little boy! You disgusting little worm! Fetch me a cup of tea at once and a slice of currant cake!'

'We'll have to get her out, dad,' George said. 'She won't give us any peace if we don't.'

Mrs Kranky came outside and she agreed with George. 'She's my own mother,' she said.

'She's a pain in the neck,' Mr Kranky said.

'I don't care,' Mrs Kranky said. 'I'm not leaving my own mother sticking up through the roof for the rest of her life.'

So in the end, Mr Kranky telephoned the Crane Company and asked them to send their biggest crane out to the house at once.

The crane arrived one hour later. It was on wheels and there were two men inside it. The crane men climbed up on to the roof and put ropes under Grandma's arms.

Then she was lifted right up through the roof . . .

In a way, the medicine had done Grandma good. It had not made her any less grumpy or bad-tempered, but it seemed to have cured all her aches and pains, and she was suddenly as frisky as a ferret. As soon as the crane had lowered her to the ground, she ran over to George's huge pony, Jack Frost, and jumped on to his back. This ancient old hag, who was now as tall as a house, then galloped about the farm on the gigantic pony, jumping over trees and sheds and shouting, 'Out of my way! Clear the decks! Stand back all you miserable midgets or I'll trample you to death!' and other silly things like that.

But because Grandma was now much too tall to get back into the house, she had to sleep that night in the hay-barn with the mice and the rats.