

Roald
Dahl

*James and the
Giant Peach*

illustrated by Quentin Blake

PUFFIN BOOKS

Journey to the center of the peach.

“Good heavens!” he said. “I know what this is! I’ve come to the stone in the middle of the peach!”

Then he noticed that there was a small door cut into the face of the peach stone. He gave a push. It swung open. He crawled through it, and before he had time to glance up and see where he was, he heard a voice saying, “Look who’s here!” And another one said, “We’ve been waiting for you!”

James stopped and stared at the speakers, his face white with horror.

He started to stand up, but his knees were shaking so much he had to sit down again on the floor. He glanced behind him, thinking he could bolt back into the tunnel the way he had come, but the doorway had disappeared. There was now only a solid brown wall behind him.

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James and the Giant Peach

Roald
James Dahl
and the
Giant Peach

illustrated by Quentin Blake

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This book is for Olivia and Tessa

Contents

Chapter 1
Chapter 2
Chapter 3
Chapter 4
Chapter 5
Chapter 6
Chapter 7
Chapter 8
Chapter 9
Chapter 10
Chapter 11
Chapter 12
Chapter 13
Chapter 14
Chapter 15
Chapter 16
Chapter 17
Chapter 18
Chapter 19
Chapter 20
Chapter 21
Chapter 22
Chapter 23
Chapter 24
Chapter 25
Chapter 26
Chapter 27
Chapter 28
Chapter 29
Chapter 30

Chapter 31

Chapter 32

Chapter 33

Chapter 34

Chapter 35

Chapter 36

Chapter 37

Chapter 38

Chapter 39

UNTIL HE WAS FOUR years old, James Henry Trotter had had a happy life. He lived peacefully with his mother and father in a beautiful house beside the sea. There were always plenty of other children for him to play with, and there was the sandy beach for him to run about on, and the ocean to paddle in. It was the perfect life for a small boy.

Then, one day, James's mother and father went to London to do some shopping, and there a terrible thing happened. Both of them suddenly got eaten up (in full daylight, mind you, and on a crowded street) by an enormous angry rhinoceros which had escaped from the London Zoo.

Now this, as you can well imagine, was a rather nasty experience for two such gentle parents. But in the long run it was far nastier for James than it was for them. *Their* troubles were all over in a jiffy. They were dead and gone in thirty-five seconds flat. Poor James, on the other hand, was still very much alive, and all at once he found himself alone and frightened in a vast unfriendly world. The lovely house by the seaside had to be sold immediately, and the little boy, carrying nothing but a small suitcase containing a pair of pajamas and a toothbrush, was sent away to live with his two aunts.

Their names were Aunt Sponge and Aunt Spiker, and I am sorry to say that they were both really horrible people. They were selfish and lazy and cruel, and right from the beginning they started beating poor James for almost no reason at all. They never called him by his real name, but always referred to him as "you disgusting little beast" or "you filthy nuisance" or "you miserable creature," and they certainly never gave him any toys to play with or any picture books to look at. His room was as bare as a prison cell.

They lived—Aunt Sponge, Aunt Spiker, and now James as well—in a queer ramshackle house on the top of a high hill in the south of England. The hill was so high that from almost anywhere in the garden James could look down and see for miles and miles across a marvelous landscape of woods and fields; and on a very clear day, if he looked in the right direction, he could see a tiny gray dot far away on the horizon, which was the house that he used to live in with his beloved mother and father. And just beyond that, he could see the ocean itself—a long thin streak of blackish-blue, like a line of ink, beneath the rim of the sky.



But James was never allowed to go down off the top of that hill. Neither Aunt Sponge nor Aunt Spiker could ever be bothered to take him out herself, not even for a small walk or a picnic, and he certainly wasn't permitted to go alone. "The nasty little beast will only get into mischief if he goes out of the garden," Aunt Spiker had said. And terrible punishments were promised him, such as being locked up in the cellar with the rats for a week, if he even so much as dared to climb over the fence.



The garden, which covered the whole of the top of the hill, was large and desolate, and the only tree in the entire place (apart from a clump of dirty old laurel bushes at the far end) was an ancient peach tree that never gave any peaches. There was no swing, no seesaw, no sand pit, and no other children were ever invited to come up the hill to play with poor James. There wasn't so much as a dog or a cat around to keep him company. And as time went on, he became sadder and sadder, and more and more lonely, and he used to spend hours every day standing at the bottom of the garden, gazing wistfully at the lovely but forbidden world of woods and fields and ocean that was spread out below him like a

magic carpet.

AFTER JAMES HENRY TROTTER had been living with his aunts for three whole years there came a morning when something rather peculiar happened to him. And this thing, which as I say was only *rather* peculiar, soon caused a second thing to happen which was *very* peculiar. And then the *very* peculiar thing, in its own turn, caused a really *fantastically* peculiar thing to occur.

It all started on a blazing hot day in the middle of summer. Aunt Sponge, Aunt Spiker, and James were all out in the garden. James had been put to work, as usual. This time he was chopping wood for the kitchen stove. Aunt Sponge and Aunt Spiker were sitting comfortably in deckchairs nearby, sipping tall glasses of fizzy lemonade and watching him to see that he didn't stop work for one moment.

Aunt Sponge was enormously fat and very short. She had small piggy eyes, a sunken mouth, and one of those white flabby faces that looked exactly as though it had been boiled. She was like a great white soggy overboiled cabbage. Aunt Spiker, on the other hand, was lean and tall and bony, and she wore steel-rimmed spectacles that fixed onto the end of her nose with a clip. She had a screeching voice and long wet narrow lips, and whenever she got angry or excited, little flecks of spit would come shooting out of her mouth as she talked. And there they sat, these two ghastly hags, sipping their drinks, and every now and again screaming at James to chop faster and faster. They also talked about themselves, each one saying how beautiful she thought she was. Aunt Sponge had a long-handled mirror on her lap, and she kept picking it up and gazing at her own hideous face.



*“I look and smell,” Aunt Sponge declared, “as lovely as a rose!
Just feast your eyes upon my face, observe my shapely nose!
Behold my heavenly silky locks!*

*And if I take off both my socks
You'll see my dainty toes."*

"But don't forget," Aunt Spiker cried, "how much your tummy shows!"

*Aunt Sponge went red. Aunt Spiker said, "My sweet, you cannot win,
Behold MY gorgeous curvy shape, my teeth, my charming grin!
Oh, beauteous me! How I adore
My radiant looks! And please ignore
The pimple on my chin."*

"My dear old trout!" Aunt Sponge cried out, "You're only bones and skin!"

*"Such loveliness as I possess can only truly shine
In Hollywood!" Aunt Sponge declared. "Oh, wouldn't that be fine!
I'd capture all the nations' hearts!
They'd give me all the leading parts!
The stars would all resign!"*

"I think you'd make," Aunt Spiker said, "a lovely Frankenstein."

Poor James was still slaving away at the chopping-block. The heat was terrible. He was sweating all over. His arm was aching. The chopper was a large blunt thing far too heavy for a small boy to use. And as he worked, James began thinking about all the other children in the world and what they might be doing at this moment. Some would be riding tricycles in their gardens. Some would be walking in cool woods and picking bunches of wild flowers. And all the little friends whom he used to know would be down by the seaside, playing in the wet sand and splashing around in the water...

Great tears began oozing out of James's eyes and rolling down his cheeks. He stopped working and leaned against the chopping-block, overwhelmed by his own unhappiness.



"What's the matter with you?" Aunt Spiker screeched, glaring at him over the top of her steel

spectacles.

James began to cry.

“Stop that immediately and get on with your work, you nasty little beast!” Aunt Sponge ordered.

“Oh, Auntie Sponge!” James cried out. “And Auntie Spiker! Couldn’t we all—*please*—just for once—go down to the seaside on the bus? It isn’t very far—and I feel so hot and awful and lonely...”

“Why, you lazy good-for-nothing brute!” Aunt Spiker shouted.

“Beat him!” cried Aunt Sponge.

“I certainly will!” Aunt Spiker snapped. She glared at James, and James looked back at her with large frightened eyes. “I shall beat you later on in the day when I don’t feel so hot,” she said. “And now get out of my sight, you disgusting little worm, and give me some peace!”

James turned and ran. He ran off as fast as he could to the far end of the garden and hid himself behind that clump of dirty old laurel bushes that we mentioned earlier on. Then he covered his face with his hands and began to cry and cry.

IT WAS AT THIS POINT that the first thing of all, the *rather* peculiar thing that led to so many other *much* more peculiar things, happened to him.

For suddenly, just behind him, James heard a rustling of leaves, and he turned around and saw an old man in a crazy dark-green suit emerging from the bushes. He was a very small old man, but he had a huge bald head and a face that was covered all over with bristly black whiskers. He stopped when he was about three yards away, and he stood there leaning on his stick and staring hard at James.

When he spoke, his voice was very slow and creaky. "Come closer to me, little boy," he said, beckoning to James with a finger. "Come right up close to me and I will show you something *wonderful*."

James was too frightened to move.

The old man hobbled a step or two nearer, and then he put a hand into the pocket of his jacket and took out a small white paper bag.



"You see this?" he whispered, waving the bag gently to and fro in front of James's face. "You know what this is, my dear? You know what's inside this little bag?"

Then he came nearer still, leaning forward and pushing his face so close to James that James could feel breath blowing on his cheeks. The breath smelled musty and stale and slightly mildewed, like air in an old cellar.

"Take a look, my dear," he said, opening the bag and tilting it toward James. Inside it, James could see a mass of tiny green things that looked like little stones or crystals, each one about the size of a grain of rice. They were extraordinarily beautiful, and there was a strange brightness about them, a sort of luminous quality that made them glow and sparkle in the most wonderful way.

“Listen to them!” the old man whispered. “Listen to them move!”

James stared into the bag, and sure enough there was a faint rustling sound coming up from inside it, and then he noticed that all the thousands of little green things were slowly, very very slowly stirring about and moving over each other as though they were alive.

“There’s more power and magic in those things in there than in all the rest of the world put together,” the old man said softly.

“But—but—what *are* they?” James murmured, finding his voice at last. “Where do they come from?”

“Ah-ha,” the old man whispered. “You’d never guess that!” He was crouching a little now and pushing his face still closer and closer to James until the tip of his long nose was actually touching the skin on James’s forehead. Then suddenly he jumped back and began waving his stick madly in the air. “Crocodile tongues!” he cried. “One thousand long slimy crocodile tongues boiled up in the skull of a dead witch for twenty days and nights with the eyeballs of a lizard! Add the fingers of a young monkey, the gizzard of a pig, the beak of a green parrot, the juice of a porcupine, and three spoonfuls of sugar. Stew for another week, and then let the moon do the rest!”

All at once, he pushed the white paper bag into James’s hands, and said, “Here! You take it! It’s yours!”

JAMES HENRY TROTTER stood there clutching the bag and staring at the old man.

“And now,” the old man said, “all you’ve got to do is this. Take a large jug of water, and pour all the little green things into it. Then, very slowly, one by one, add ten hairs from your own head. That sets them off! It gets them going! In a couple of minutes the water will begin to froth and bubble furiously, and as soon as that happens you must quickly drink it all down, the whole jugful, in one gulp. And then, my dear, you will feel it churning and boiling in your stomach, and steam will start coming out of your mouth, and immediately after that, *marvelous* things will start happening to you, *fabulous, unbelievable* things—and you will never be miserable again in your life. Because you *are* miserable, aren’t you? You needn’t tell me! I know *all* about it! Now, off you go and do exactly as I say. And don’t whisper a word of this to those two horrible aunts of yours! Not a word! And don’t let those green things in there get away from you either! Because if they do escape, then they will be working their magic upon somebody else instead of upon *you*! And that isn’t what you want at all, is it, my dear? *Whoever they meet first, be it bug, insect, animal, or tree, that will be the one who gets the full power of their magic!* So hold the bag tight! Don’t tear the paper! Off you go! Hurry up! Don’t wait! Now’s the time! Hurry!”

With that, the old man turned away and disappeared into the bushes.

THE NEXT MOMENT, James was running back toward the house as fast as he could go. He would do it all in the kitchen, he told himself—if only he could get in there without Aunt Sponge and Aunt Spiker seeing him. He was terribly excited. He flew through the long grass and the stinging-nettles, not caring whether he got stung or not on his bare knees, and in the distance he could see Aunt Sponge and Aunt Spiker sitting in their chairs with their backs toward him. He swerved away from them so as to go around the other side of the house, but then suddenly just as he was passing underneath the old peach tree that stood in the middle of the garden, his foot slipped and he fell flat on his face in the grass. The paper bag burst open as it hit the ground and the thousands of tiny green things were scattered in all directions.



James immediately picked himself up onto his hands and knees and started searching around for his precious treasures. *But what was this?* They were all sinking into the soil! He could actually see them wriggling and twisting as they burrowed their way downward into the hard earth, and at once he reached out a hand to pick some of them up before it was too late, but they disappeared right under his fingers. He went after some others, and the same thing happened! He began scrabbling around frantically in an effort to catch hold of those that were left, but they were too quick for him. Each time

the tips of his fingers were just about to touch them, they vanished into the earth! And soon, in the space of only a few seconds, every single one of them had gone!

James felt like crying. He would never get them back now—they were lost, lost, lost forever.

But where had they gone to? And why in the world had they been so eager to push down into the earth like that? What were they after? There was nothing down *there*. Nothing except the roots of the old peach tree...and a whole lot of earthworms and centipedes and insects living in the soil.

But what was it that the old man had said? *Whoever they meet first, be it bug, insect, animal, or tree, that will be the one who gets the full power of their magic!*

Good heavens, thought James. What is going to happen in that case if they *do* meet an earthworm? Or a centipede? Or a spider? And what if they *do* go into the roots of the peach tree?

“Get up at once, you lazy little beast!” a voice was suddenly shouting in James’s ear. James glanced up and saw Aunt Spiker standing over him, grim and tall and bony, glaring at him through her steel-rimmed spectacles. “Get back over there immediately and finish chopping up those logs!” she ordered.

Aunt Sponge, fat and pulpy as a jellyfish, came waddling up behind her sister to see what was going on. “Why don’t we just lower the boy down the well in a bucket and leave him there for the night?” she suggested. “That ought to teach him not to laze around like this the whole day long.”

“That’s a very good wheeze, my dear Sponge. But let’s make him finish chopping up the wood first. Be off with you at once, you hideous brat, and do some work!”

Slowly, sadly, poor James got up off the ground and went back to the woodpile. Oh, if only he hadn’t slipped and fallen and dropped that precious bag. All hope of a happier life had gone completely now. Today and tomorrow and the next day and all the other days as well would be nothing but punishment and pain, unhappiness and despair.

He picked up the chopper and was just about to start chopping away again when he heard a shout behind him that made him stop and turn.

“SPONGE! SPONGE! Come here at once and look at this!”

“At what?”

“It’s a peach!” Aunt Spiker was shouting.

“A what?”



“A peach! Right up there on the highest branch! Can’t you see it?”

“I think you must be mistaken, my dear Spiker. That miserable tree *never* has any peaches on it.”

“There’s one on it now, Sponge! You look for yourself!”

“You’re teasing me, Spiker. You’re making my mouth water on purpose when there’s nothing to put into it. Why, that tree’s never even had a *blossom* on it, let alone a peach. Right up on the highest branch, you say? I can’t see a thing. Very funny...Ha, ha...*Good gracious* me! Well, *I’ll be blowed!* There really *is* a peach up there!”

“A nice big one, too!” Aunt Spiker said.

“A beauty, a beauty!” Aunt Sponge cried out.

At this point, James slowly put down his chopper and turned and looked across at the two women, who were standing underneath the peach tree.

Something is about to happen, he told himself. *Something peculiar is about to happen any moment.* He hadn’t the faintest idea what it might be, but he could feel it in his bones that something was going to happen soon. He could feel it in the air around him...in the sudden stillness that had fallen upon the

garden....

~~James tiptoed a little closer to the tree. The aunts were not talking now. They were just standing there, staring at the peach. There was not a sound anywhere, not even a breath of wind, and overhead the sun blazed down upon them out of a deep blue sky.~~

“It looks ripe to me,” Aunt Spiker said, breaking the silence.

“Then why don’t we eat it?” Aunt Sponge suggested, licking her thick lips. “We can have half each. Hey, you! James! Come over here at once and climb this tree!”

James came running over.

“I want you to pick that peach up there on the highest branch,” Aunt Sponge went on. “Can you see it?”

“Yes, Auntie Sponge, I can see it!”

“And don’t you dare to eat any of it yourself. Your Aunt Spiker and I are going to have it between us right here and now, half each. Get on with you! Up you go!”

James crossed over to the tree trunk.

“Stop!” Aunt Spiker said quickly. “Hold everything!” She was staring up into the branches with her mouth wide open and her eyes bulging as though she had seen a ghost. “*Look!*” she said. “*Look, Sponge, look!*”

“What’s the matter with you?” Aunt Sponge demanded.

“It’s *growing!*” Aunt Spiker cried. “It’s getting bigger and bigger!”

“What is?”

“The peach, of course!”

“You’re joking!”

“Well, look for yourself!”

“But my dear Spiker, that’s perfectly ridiculous. That’s impossible. That’s—that’s—that’s—Now, wait *just* a minute—No—No—that can’t be right—No—Yes—Great Scott! The thing really *is* growing!”

“It’s nearly twice as big already!” Aunt Spiker shouted.

“It can’t be true!”

“It *is* true!”

“It must be a miracle!”

“Watch it! Watch it!”

“I *am* watching it!”

“Great Heavens alive!” Aunt Spiker yelled. “I can actually see the thing bulging and swelling before my very eyes!”

THE TWO WOMEN and the small boy stood absolutely still on the grass underneath the tree, gazing up at this extraordinary fruit. James's little face was glowing with excitement, his eyes were as big and bright as two stars. He could see the peach swelling larger and larger as clearly as if it were a balloon being blown up.

In half a minute, it was the size of a melon!

In another half-minute, it was *twice* as big again!

"Just *look* at it growing!" Aunt Spiker cried.

"Will it ever stop!" Aunt Sponge shouted, waving her fat arms and starting to dance around in circles.

And now it was so big it looked like an enormous butter-colored pumpkin dangling from the top of the tree.

"Get away from that tree trunk, you stupid boy!" Aunt Spiker yelled. "The slightest shake and I'm sure it'll fall off! It must weigh twenty or thirty pounds at least!"

The branch that the peach was growing upon was beginning to bend over further and further because of the weight.

"Stand back!" Aunt Sponge shouted. "It's coming down! The branch is going to break!"

But the branch didn't break. It simply bent over more and more as the peach got heavier and heavier.

And still it went on growing.

In another minute, this mammoth fruit was as large and round and fat as Aunt Sponge herself, and probably just as heavy.

"It *has* to stop now!" Aunt Spiker yelled. "It can't go on forever!"

But it didn't stop.

Soon it was the size of a small car, and reached halfway to the ground.

Both aunts were now hopping around and around the tree, clapping their hands and shouting all sorts of silly things in their excitement.

"Hallelujah!" Aunt Spiker shouted. "What a peach! What a peach!"

"Terrifico!" Aunt Sponge cried out, "Magnifico! Splendifico! And what a meal!"

"It's still growing!"

"I know! I know!"

As for James, he was so spellbound by the whole thing that he could only stand and stare and murmur quietly to himself, "Oh, isn't it beautiful. It's the most beautiful thing I've ever seen."

"Shut up, you little twerp!" Aunt Spiker snapped, happening to overhear him. "It's none of your business!"

"That's right," Aunt Sponge declared. "It's got nothing to do with you whatsoever! Keep out of it!"

"Look!" Aunt Spiker shouted. "It's growing faster than ever now! It's speeding up!"

"I see it, Spiker! I do! I do!"

Bigger and bigger grew the peach, bigger and bigger and bigger.

Then at last, when it had become nearly as tall as the tree that it was growing on, as tall and wide, in fact, as a small house, the bottom part of it gently touched the ground—and there it rested.



“It can’t fall off now!” Aunt Sponge shouted.

“It’s stopped growing!” Aunt Spiker cried.

“No, it hasn’t!”

“Yes, it has!”

“It’s slowing down, Spiker, it’s slowing down! But it hasn’t stopped yet! You watch it!”

There was a pause.

“It has now!”

“I believe you’re right.”

“Do you think it’s safe to touch it?”

“I don’t know. We’d better be careful.”

Aunt Sponge and Aunt Spiker began walking slowly around the peach, inspecting it very cautiously from all sides. They were like a couple of hunters who had just shot an elephant and were not quite sure whether it was dead or alive. And the massive round fruit towered over them so high that they looked like midgets from another world beside it.

The skin of the peach was very beautiful—a rich buttery yellow with patches of brilliant pink and red. Aunt Sponge advanced cautiously and touched it with the tip of one finger. “It’s ripe!” she cried. “It’s just perfect! Now, see here, Spiker. Why don’t we go and get us a shovel right away and dig out a great big hunk of it for you and me to eat?”

“No,” Aunt Spiker said. “Not yet.”

“Whyever not?”

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