

# The Amazing Adventures

of Ouch



Paul Gordon Busby

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AMAZING  
ADVENTURES  
OF  
OUCH**

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*This book is dedicated to Nemo,  
who painted the picture  
on the cover.*

*This is an interactive story for young children  
to read or to be read to.*

*They will also need some blank paper  
and some coloured pencils or pens,  
and an adult.*

## RIDDLES

There was once a man who was very very tall. He was so tall that he had to bend down to get through doors. Whenever people visited his house and he was in another room, he would always forget to bend down, and he would hit his head on the door frame on his way to the front door. The first thing he said when he opened the door was “Ouch!” as he rubbed his head. That is why people called him Ouch, which of course wasn’t his real name. His real name was (*say a name*).

He was not young and he was not old, but somewhere in between. The only way I can describe him is to say he was very very tall and had a lot of bruises on his head. You will have to tell me whether he was fat or thin (*choose*), whether his hair was black, blond or brown or grey (*choose*), and what colour were his eyes (*blue, brown, green or yellow*). He may have worn glasses, I don’t remember. *Can you tell me?* I also cannot remember if he had a beard or a moustache or not. *Maybe you can tell me that too.*

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When he was a young man, he wanted to go to sea. But everyone told him that it was too dangerous for him as they don’t make beds that long in ships, and he would have to sleep with his feet sticking out of the porthole – the window on a ship. Besides, he would always be knocking his head on the overhead lights and breaking them, leaving everywhere in darkness.

The only way he could go to sea was to row a boat. Do you know how to row a boat? If the sea is smooth, it is fairly easy. But if it is rough, it can be very difficult. The waves can make you rock from side to side (*try rowing and rocking side to side*). Or the waves can make you rock forwards and back (*try doing it too*). Sometimes when it is really rough, the waves can make you rock in lots of different directions. (*Don’t do this if you have just eaten!*)

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So, Ouch went to sea in a rowing boat. Sometimes the sea was calm. At other times the sea was really rough when there was a storm. One day, it was so rough that Ouch had to stop rowing and hold on to the sides of the boat to make sure he was not swept overboard. It was very frightening.

He spotted a seagull flying above him. “Wark,” it cried. “Wark, wark.”

“I’m afraid I don’t speak seagull-ese,” said Ouch. “Do you speak English?”

“I am speaking English,” replied the seagull. “Wark, wark, I have to wark all day.”

“Don’t you mean ‘work’?” asked Ouch.

“No, I mean wark. I have to go wark so that people know I’m a seagull and give me some nice food – ice creams, chips, hot dogs - I eat them all.”

“I’m afraid I haven’t got any of those things.”

The seagull flew off, disgusted.

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The storm eventually calmed down. He saw a lot of fish in the sea. One of them came up to him and spoke. (*Do you know what a fish looks and sounds like when it is talking? What is it like?*)

“Hello,” said the fish. “You must be Ouch.”

“How do you know that?” he asked.

“Because of the bruises on your forehead.”

“What kind of a fish are you?” asked Ouch.

“I’m a sea-fish,” he replied. “Tell me. What are you doing here?”

“I always wanted to go to sea. But now I want to go to dry land. Do you know how much further I must go?”

“It’s not far. Look over there,” and the fish pointed to where Ouch could see land. “Just follow me and I’ll take you there,” and he sank down into the water again and was no longer visible.

“Thank you,” Ouch said, and he rowed quickly in that direction. “But how can I follow you if I can’t see you?”

There was no reply, just a lot of bubbles on the water.

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It was not long before he came to a beach with soft sand and he was able to get out of his boat and pull it up on to the beach. But as soon as he started to walk away from his boat, a couple of fierce men appeared and grabbed him. They made him walk up the beach and then along a long narrow road which ran between high hedges so he could not see what was on the other side of them. All he could see was the road in front of him.

“We’re taking you to the king,” one of the men said.

“And to the queen,” the other man said.

They walked for a long time and Ouch was getting very tired and hungry. All at once he spotted a building in front of him. It was a big castle. The biggest castle he had ever seen. It had a huge wooden door but no windows. On both sides of the castle were huge towers that looked like Christmas crackers. Very strange! (*Can you draw what it must have looked like?*)

The two men, still holding Ouch by an arm each side, marched him up to the castle, rang the doorbell and when the door opened, they took him inside. They climbed a lot of steep steps and came to a room with a small golden door. Of course, Ouch bumped his head when he went into the room and cried out, and the men knew for certain they had got the right man.

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“Hello,” said a voice. “I am the king. The king of crackers.”

He was a tiny man almost covered up in a purple robe and sitting on a golden throne in front of Ouch. Instead of a crown he wore a red paper hat.

“And I am the queen. He may be crackers, but I’m most certainly not,” she said.

She was a very tiny woman also hidden in a purple robe, sitting on a smaller golden throne beside the king.

The king clapped his hands and a young woman entered the room.

“This is Princess Urgh, my daughter,” said the queen.

She was the ugliest woman he had ever seen. Her clothes were tattered and torn, her hair was in a terrible mess, and she had long dirty fingernails. She was eating a huge jam doughnut and it was obvious that a lot of the jam had dripped onto her chin and from there onto her shirt.

“Hello, Princess Urgh,” said Ouch, politely, trying not to look too closely at her.

“What’s up with him?” snarled the Princess and belched loudly.

*(Can you draw the Princess and the King and the Queen? Do you know anyone who is like the Princess?)*

“I am told that you want to marry the Princess,” said the king. “Yes of course you can.”

“Please do,” added the queen. “Don’t delay.”

“I’ve never met her before and I have no intention of marrying her,” said Ouch.

“Oh, go on,” said the queen.

“No, I’m sorry,” said Ouch. “I really must be going now. I’ve a boat to catch to go back home.”

“We won’t allow you to go until you have solved three riddles,” said the king. “I am not the king of crackers for nothing. I spend all my time making up riddles and I’m fed up with waiting for Christmas for someone to read them.”

“If you must, I will solve them, your majesty,” said Ouch, impatiently.

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“Here is the first one. How do you do the washing up?” asked the king.

*(Can you answer that?)*

“Well, you put all the cutlery and crockery in a bowl, fill it with water and detergent and scrub them until they are clean and then rinse them.”

“No. The answer to how do you do the washing up is that you start washing your feet and end up with your head.”

Ouch realised he had not given the answer the king had wanted.

“Next puzzle,” said the king. “What’s in a cake, but not in lake; what’s in a man but not in men; what’s in fire but not in a file?”

*(Can you work out the answer?)*

“In a cake there is a ‘c’ which is not in lake; in man, there is an ‘a’ which is not in men; and in a fire there is an ‘r’ which is not in file. Put these together and you get CAR,” said Ouch.

“Car? What’s a car? Whatever it is, there are no cars around here. The correct answer is that in a cake, there are things like flour, eggs, butter, and so on, whereas in a lake, there is water. A man

is just one male person, whereas men means more than one of them. And in a fire, there is a flame and smoke, whereas in a file there is paper - unburned paper. You really are dim.”

Ouch had got two answers out of three wrong. If he did not get the next one right, he would have to marry Princess Urgh. The very thought of that made him go “urgh”.

“My final question is this. Which is the odd one out or these? A cat, a dog, a rabbit, a kangaroo, a horse, a chair, a monkey, a man or a mouse?”

*(Do you know what the answer is?)*

“That is obvious,” said Ouch. “It’s a chair. The others are all living creatures.”

“Ah hah! Got you there,” said the king. “The answer is a ‘man’ as all the others have four legs and a man only has two.”

Ouch was not happy. The king had told him he had got all three puzzles wrong, which meant he would have to marry Princess Urgh. He was not at all happy about that.

“Take him away and lock him up,” announced the king to the men who were guarding Ouch.

They led him to a small low room in one of the towers where he had to stoop over all the time. The chairs were only a foot high, and the bed was only three foot long. There were no windows, the floor was uneven and damp and there were cobwebs all over the ceiling. The men locked the door and left him there by himself. *(Can you draw what the room was like?)*

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What shall I do, thought Ouch? Maybe I should marry her and then I would be free? Or maybe I should try and escape? *(What would you do?)*

He definitely did not want to marry her, so escaping seemed to be a better idea. He wondered if he had enough strength to knock the door down, but when he tried doing that, it did not budge. He lay on the floor as the bed would break if he lay on it.

He suddenly had a brainwave. He took off his boots and put them in the bed and covered them over with the blanket to make a shape to look as if he was in bed. He put his hand in some cobwebs and found some big spiders to hold. Then he called out to the guards to come quickly.

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When the guards unlocked the door, they came inside the room and went up to the bed. As they did so, he put the spiders onto the heads of the guards. The guards felt the spiders in their hair and shrieked and jumped about, knocking their own heads on the walls as they tried to get rid of the spiders and leaving the door open for Ouch to escape.

He ran to the top of the tower and found a bit of cardboard poking out the top. He summoned up strength and pulled it and the tower went bang and collapsed. When other guards came to see what was going on, he managed to find a way to the tower on the other side without being seen. He did the same thing as he had done with the first tower, and that tower also went bang and collapsed.

The king and queen were running about hither and thither, not knowing what to do. But Princess Urgh was nowhere to be seen. Maybe she was eating another doughnut in the kitchen of the castle, thought Ouch.

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The castle lay in ruins, and Ouch was able to escape and run down the road to the beach. His boat was still where he had left it on the sand. But sitting inside it was the Princess. She had a fishing net in her hands which she threatened to throw over Ouch's head. (*Can you draw a picture of her in the boat with the fishing net?*)

Ouch ran around and around the boat while the Princess kept trying to throw the net over him. He thought that if he ran into the sea, she would follow him, and then he could quickly nip back to the boat and escape. But she did not leave the boat. He was totally at a loss as to what to do. (*What would you do?*)

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He was getting very tired and sat down on a rock to rest. At that moment the seagull he had seen earlier flew low overhead. It saw a jam doughnut in the hand of the princess and seized it with his beak and made off with it. Princess Urgh was overcome with grief. Doughnuts were the only things in her life that she truly loved, and to be without one was horrible for her. She contemplated what to do and decided to get out of the boat and go back to the castle to get another one. Ouch waited until she had gone and then ran up to his boat, pushed it into the water and jumped in. He picked up the oars and rowed as fast as he could. (*Do you remember how to row?*)

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On the way back, the sea was very rough again but he grabbed hold of the sides of the boat until it was calm again.

"Hello," said a watery voice nearby. It was the fish he had come across earlier. "Have you had a nice day?"

"It was horrible!" replied Ouch. "But at least I am now free and I am going home."

The fish looked pleased for him and smiled. (*Have you ever seen a fish smile?*)

"I'll show you the way home," said the fish. "Follow the bubbles." And it dived down and swam off in front of the boat.

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When Ouch got home, the first thing he did...was to bang his head on the front door. But for once it did not hurt him...much. He had had worse things than that to worry about. Never again would he want to go off to sea. He would be happy just to stay at home in the future.

## WHAT HAPPENED TO A TALL BOY

Ouch was not a big baby when he was born, but he grew very fast after that. His pram or baby carriage, if that's what you call it, had to have an extension with another couple of wheels added in front because of his long legs. By law, the front had to have a red flag on it to warn people he was coming and not to get runover. When he was sitting in his highchair at the table at mealtimes, his feet rested on the floor so that he was able to kick anything he dropped directly into the waste-bin.

He grew out of his clothes very quickly and his mother was constantly having to stitch more material to his sleeves and trousers to make them longer. He was constantly needing new shoes, so most of the time he had to wear home-made flip-flops which allowed his feet to grow. When it was necessary, they only needed a bigger bottom bit, instead of having a whole new pair of shoes. Sometimes when he got bored, he would just stare in the mirror and watch himself grow. That made him even more bored and it would usually make him fall asleep.

“Hasn't he grown,” his grandparents would always say when they visited.

“Either I've grown, or you've shrunk,” he used to think.

*(Did you know that people often shrink when they older? Be careful when you walk about that you don't stamp on great-grandma!)*

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When he was about one and a half years old and was learning to walk, he would use his grandfather's walking aid to get about. That meant that his grandfather had to stay put in the armchair for a long time until he got his walking aid back. He did not mind that.

At Christmas time one year, his family were not able to buy a Christmas tree. Guess who had to stand for hours in a corner of the room, covered in tinsel and holding some baubles in his hand? Have you guessed? ... Yes, it was Ouch. On his head they put a star that glittered and lit up when he pressed a switch with his foot. To make things more entertaining for the family, he occasionally moved his arms about, which seemed to be a big improvement on a normal Christmas tree, or so his family thought.

Another time, the pole holding up the washing-line broke. All the washing might have fallen onto the ground, if his mother had not called Ouch to come and prop up the line. He did as he was told. At that moment his mother's phone rang, and she went indoors to answer it. She then made a drink and sat down to have a nap. She slept longer than she meant to and awoke two hours later, wondering what had happened to her son. But we know what he was doing, don't we? Fortunately, it did not rain on him, but the wind was very strong and very cold and he ached for a week afterwards. *(Can you draw a picture of him holding up the washing-line?)*

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When he started school, he was a big help to the teachers. He could easily reach books on the top shelves of bookcases; he could change light-bulbs without needing a ladder;

and he could paint the ceiling when it needed it. Of course, he did not have to do these sorts of things very often, but only now and again.

For him, the biggest problem was sitting at his desk. The chairs were all much too small for him, and try as he might, he could not get his long legs under the desk. He had to have a much higher chair, and a tall desk was made just for him. Other boys in his class would have complained that he was getting more attention than them. But they didn't, because they were really afraid of him, as he was so big. *(Do you know any really tall children in your class? Are they able to do things you can't do?)*

In sports, he proved to be very useful to those who were in the same team as him. He could out-run anyone and jump higher and longer than anyone else. Netball, or you may call it basketball, was his favourite sport, and he had no difficulty in dropping the ball into the net without any need to throw it. Almost single-handedly, he won all the matches for the school team against other schools. Because of this, he became very popular amongst the rest of the pupils and the teachers.

There were disadvantages of being tall though. *(Can you think of any?)* He could not hide easily if his friends played hide and seek. And he sometimes found it hard to start walking or running like smaller people because it took longer for his brain to tell his feet what to do, because his head and his feet were much further apart.

Above all, he could not help hitting his head on door-frames when he went through them and would say "Ow" very loudly. He was teased by the other children for shouting out "Ow" *(which rhymes with cow and not bow – isn't that strange?)*. That is why Ow became his nickname while he was at school. When he was older, he changed it to "Ouch" as it sounded more grown-up. But it meant the same thing – he had hurt his head. *(In order that you won't get confused, I'll call him Ouch, so you know who I'm talking about.)*

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If there was one thing he really enjoyed, it was being a scout. One year, the scouts went camping in a field by a small river with tall trees on the other side. Climbing trees was much easier for him than for the shorter scouts as he could get from one branch to another without any difficulty, however far apart they were. But he also helped smaller boys to climb the trees by lifting them up to the higher branches and helping them down again...unless he forgot, which he only did a few times and left them up in the tree! *(Have you ever climbed a tree? Was it more difficult climbing up or down it?)*

The scouts put up their tents in the field which was not easy since it had been very dry weather and the ground was rock hard. Hammering the tent-pegs into the ground to keep the tents up was difficult. But the scouts did the best they could.

Ouch shared a tent with three other scouts. It was not a big tent, none of them were, and there was not much room inside. Ouch could not lie down straight or his legs and his head would pop out of the tent at both ends. The only thing he could do was to curl up into a tight little ball and try to get some sleep in that position. It was not easy.

On the first night it started to rain and it rained for hours on end. Then it got windy and the wind blew the tents so strongly that one of the sides came away from the ground. His

job was to hold the tent steady while the others went outside to hammer the pegs back into the ground again.

A sudden gust of wind sent everyone flying. The tent collapsed and when the scouts tried to put it up again, they found that one of the poles which held it up had broken. Poor Ouch had to hold the tent up for the rest of the night and did not get any sleep at all. He was the only one who was tall enough and strong enough to do that. The others all went to sleep and slept soundly until the morning. (*Can you draw a picture of him holding up the tent?*)

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When everyone got up, they found the ground was very wet and muddy, although the wind had died down and the rain had stopped. The scout-master told them to go into the woods to fetch some wood to make a fire with. But the river now was much wider after all the rain that had fallen, and it was difficult to cross it to get to the trees.

Someone suggested that Ouch might be able to step over the water, but he slipped in the mud on the river bank and fell over. He clutched onto a branch on the other side which prevented him from falling into the river. The other scouts saw he had suddenly become a bridge – a human bridge. They realised that they could get to the far side if they climbed over him, which all of them did. “Ow, ow, ow,” he said, but the others did not pay any attention to him. That wasn’t nice of them, was it? (*What would you have done?*)

When the last boy had walked over him, he managed to lift his legs and still holding on to the branch with his hands he managed to stand up and wade through the river to the other side. He was dripping wet and not very happy. The first thing he did was to find a big branch lying on the ground that the storm had broken off from a tree. The branch would now be called a log. To save himself from being walked over again, he picked it up and placed it over the river so the scouts could use it as a bridge on the way back. He also found a much thinner branch which could be used for a tent pole.

The other scouts gathered up a lot of twigs from the ground and then walked over the log to cross the river to get back to the tents. Ouch did not bother to go over the log as it might break, since he was heavier than the other boys. But he did not mind wading through the water as he was wet through anyway.

When they reached the tents, they lit a fire using the twigs they had collected, and the scout-master opened some tins of baked beans to heat over the fire for them to eat. The scouts did not like eating the tins and preferred the beans. (*Only joking!*) Ouch had something else to eat to go with his beans: he found a lot of tiny fishes which had swum into his trouser pockets in the stream.

“ow tasty,” he said to the others who looked enviously at him. Nevertheless, he did share some of the fish with them – the bones!

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For the rest of the days at camp, the others treated Ouch with a lot more respect. He enjoyed the walks, the sing-songs, and the games. They found the tracks of wild animals and learned which animals had made them. They practised tying knots in a piece of rope, and loved tying each other up, which is not what they should have done. And they foraged for food – wild berries and nuts – that they could eat.

There was one other activity, though, which turned out differently from expected. The scout-master had brought along some canoes and he took them down to the river for all the scouts to have a go at canoeing. Poor Ouch. They were all too small for him to get into, and if he had managed to sit in one, it would have sunk as he was too heavy for it.

Not to be left out of things, he found the log he had used as a bridge, and with his knife he carved out a seat for himself. To make it go faster, he also carved the front end into a V-shape and put it into the water. By this time, the rest of the scouts in their canoes had already gone off down the river. They had stopped for a while to give their arms a rest from paddling when Ouch's log came along and ploughed into the back of one canoe. This canoe turned over and rammed into the canoe in front, which in turn rammed into the one in front, and so on, until all of them were upside down in the water. No-one was hurt because the water was only shallow, and they could easily wade back to the shore. *(Can you draw a picture of this?)*

Ouch was blamed for this and had to leave the camp immediately. His parents were sent the bill for all the wrecked canoes, and the parents of the other scouts complained bitterly to the scout-master and to Ouch's own parents about what he had done. He told them that it was an accident, but they did not forgive him. Life can be unfair at times.

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This is when Ouch learned that if you are different from other people, you can feel like the odd one out and be teased or blamed if things go wrong.

His very small friend, Tiny Me, agreed with him. So did his Chinese friend and his African friend and his Arabian friend, as did his blind friend and his disabled friend - in fact all of his friends who in some way or other were different from other people,

But being different is not always a problem. Sometimes, other people appreciate you for what you can do that they can't do. That is how Ouch came to terms with being much taller than everyone else, and he no longer worried about it.

## OUCH GOES TO WORK

After he left school, Ouch went to work on a farm. There were some jobs that suited him, and some that did not because of his height. He was no good at driving a tractor, for instance, because it was too cramped for him in the driving seat. On the other hand, he had no difficulty in riding a horse. What good is a horse on a farm nowadays? Well, if the tractor breaks down, or you can't get fuel for it, it might be useful. But that is a bit unlikely. In the old days before tractors had been invented, though, many jobs on a farm were done by horses.

*(Do you think you could drive a tractor or would you prefer to drive a sports car? Most people would probably choose a sports car, but fortunately there are people who can drive tractors. If there were not, we would not have any breakfast cereals, or bread, or many other things we eat.)*

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He had a go at milking a cow but you have to squat down to do that and it was not easy for him. He thought that if he could get the cow to jump up and down, all he would have to do would be to hang on in the same position. He knew that sometimes farmers played music to cows as they believed it made them give more milk. If he put on some rock-and-roll music, the cows might dance to it, he thought. That did not work, as all the cows did was to shuffle their feet around in time to the music. He changed the music and played them some ballet music. This time, the cows raised themselves on the tips of their hooves and did all kinds of graceful leaps into the air which allowed him to milk them. The farmer put a stop to this when he bought a milking machine with tubes connecting each cow to a large milk-container. As the cows had to remain as still as possible for this to work, the music was stopped and Ouch had to be given a new job to do. *(If you were a cow, what kind of music, or should that be moo-sic, would you like to listen to?)*

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He tried his hand at shearing sheep – cutting off their wool, that is. As this was all new to him, he was given some shears, a bit like scissors, to do it with. He could not grab hold of a sheep on the ground - it was too low down for him to grasp. Instead, he got the sheep to climb onto a table in front of him. Lifting it up and putting it on the table was very tiring, and the sheep did not like being picked up and bleated angrily at him before jumping down again and running off. After that he installed a short ladder for them to walk up to get to the table, and one to get down again.

The next sheep made a dash for it as soon as he started cutting the wool on its side. The following sheep allowed him to cut off a strip of wool from its back before escaping. He tried to cut the wool from the leg of another sheep, but was put off when the sheep licked his face and he let go of it. After that, he tried to cut the wool off from around a sheep's face, only to be kicked by one of its hind legs. This was not going well for him. At the end of the day there were lots of sheep in the field with little bits of wool missing, but none of them sheared any more than that. The farmer had to get another shearer to take over from him, and he gave Ouch another job to do. *(Do you know how long it takes to shear a sheep with shears – 5 minutes, 20 minutes, 1 hours, or 3 hours? \* For the answer, go to the end of this story.)*

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The farmer had recently bought some free-range hens and gave Ouch the task of looking after them and collecting the eggs. The chickens had other ideas. The hens liked to run around the yard, but did not want to go into the coop – the hut where they could sleep safely at night. Ouch had to round them up and drive them inside, but as soon as his back was turned the ones inside would come outside again. It took a lot of time and effort to get them all inside the coop every evening.

But after a few days he succeeded in getting them all inside. Now the problem was that they wanted to stay there all the day long instead of coming outside. It took several more days before the hens understood where they should be and when.

All this time, though, no eggs were laid. The hens were too busy concentrating on other things, like knowing where they should be at what time. By accident one day, Ouch discovered a few eggs hidden in some long grass. But this was not a good place for them to be. He could have trodden on them. The eggs should have been laid in the nest boxes in the coop. If they really want to lay eggs outside, then I should put the nest boxes outside too, he concluded.

He knew that hens liked to lay their eggs somewhere up high, so he put the boxes high up in some trees. It is no surprise that the hens refused to co-operate - mainly because they can't climb trees. But they did lay some eggs inside the coop. At least, that was better. He replaced the nest boxes inside the coop again, and awaited the result. All of the hens now laid their eggs outside once again, although it took a time to find out where. Looking after chickens was something which he could not do, so the patient farmer wondered what next to get him to do. *(Do you know roughly how many eggs are laid by a hen in a week? One, four, ten, twenty-five, fifty, three hundred? \*\* For the answer go to the end of this story.)*

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Planting and harvesting root vegetables was no good as Ouch would have to stoop down all the way to the ground and it would hurt his back. Many tall people suffer from aches and pains in their backs. He could help out with harvesting peas and runner beans. He was very successful with this as the stalks grow up high. He was also able to harvest some of the fruit crops – apples, pears and grapes. In fact, he was excellent at picking apples since he did not need a ladder.

For fruit that was not so high up off the ground, he used a wheel-chair with a basket attached to the back. He never complained and went out in all weathers to do the harvesting. Sometimes his wheelchair did get stuck in the mud, but he was able to use some ski poles to push himself out of it. Other times he would tie a rope around a tree or a bush and pull himself out. *(Can you do a picture of him in his wheelchair under an apple-tree pushing on the poles or pulling on the rope?)*

The farmer was pleased with the way he solved this problem and let him work on his farm permanently.

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While he was working on the farm, he became interested in singing. He always used to sing when he worked and other people who heard him told him he ought to sing in public. There was a theatre in town, and what attracted him to it was the high roof. He learned a few songs and bought the music which he gave to the musicians in the band there.

The first concert went down very well. A lot of people came to it and they applauded loudly for him. But he did feel a bit self-conscious being the only singer on stage. He therefore asked the

farmer's daughter if she would like to sing with him. She said she would love that. They formed a duo to sing together.

I should point out that it was a bit unusual. The farmer's daughter had a very low voice, probably as a result of rounding up the cows. She used to have a high voice, but when the wind blew, the cows were unable to hear her calling them, so she trained herself to have a low-pitched voice which the cows could hear. This had affected her singing voice too and she had to sing the bass part in the local choir.

On the other hand, Ouch had a very high voice. It was not his fault and it was not deliberate. Unlike other boys he never went through puberty, so his voice did not break. If anything, his voice got higher and higher, which was a surprise to people who heard him speak or sing.

They were a unique duo, combining a very high and a very low voice. They were persuaded to make a recording, but on hearing it, no-one knew who was singing the soprano line, and who was singing the bass line. The recording sold well and they became quite famous. However, they did not want to leave the farm, so they turned down offers to do concerts elsewhere.

Their biggest fans were the cows who were missing their rock-and-roll and ballet music in the cattle shed. For a special treat, the duo would sometimes sing to the cattle in the fields in the evenings. The cows moored their appreciation and danced along with the music. Even the bulls joined in, in the neighbouring field. It is also rumoured that the chickens in their coop were so excited by the songs that they laid more eggs, some of them already cooked! Only the sheep turned a deaf ear to their singing, because if they showed their enthusiasm like the cows and the chickens did, they would be accused of acting like...sheep. *(Do you know anyone who sings to their animals? Perhaps you can draw a picture of the man and woman singing in the field, with the cows and bulls dancing?)*

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Although Ouch was kept busy with these activities most of the time, he wanted to do something else that would be useful to other people. That is why he became a fireman or rather a fire fighter, as women can also do this. Instead of the siren, he would sit on top of the fire-engine and make the same sound. He was good at doing impressions.

He could not find a uniform large enough. The solution was to get hold of two uniforms and stitch them together. That did not work for his helmet. For that, he had to take two of them to a blacksmith and get him to melt them down and make a bigger one. His helmet was useful to protect him from things falling on his head, especially things that were burning. It also prevented him banging his head on the door frame when entering a burning building. He found this helmet so useful that he liked to wear it at other times when not putting out fires. But as it was heavy, he took it off at home, which is where he would bang his head when he answered the door. *(Lots of people have to wear helmets, including builders, soldiers, motor-cyclists and cyclists. Do you have one? If so, why do you have to wear it?)*

The main advantage he had over other fire fighters was that there were times when he did not need to use a ladder. He could rescue cats who were stuck up trees, except cats who did not want to be rescued! And he could reach people who were on the second floor of a burning building. When a bit more height was needed, another fire fighter would climb on his shoulders, and then another one could climb on the shoulders of the other fire fighter, and so on. It was sometimes easier just to use a ladder in the first place, but he wanted to show that he could be useful.

You may think there was no point in doing this. But it had its uses. With their spare hands, all the fire fighters could pass a bucket of water up to the person above them, although putting out

fires usually needs lots more water. Standing on each other's shoulders was more useful in rescuing a person from high up and passing them down to the person below until they safely reached the ground.

Perhaps the most useful thing of all in standing on one another's shoulders, was that if some of the fire fighters had colds, they could blow their noses with their handkerchiefs. This was not so easy if they had to hold on to a ladder at the same time. There's no point in rescuing someone if you are only going to give them your germs, is it? Sudden sneezing, though, was a different matter, as if one person sneezed, all the others above would fall off.

How, you may wonder, did they all climb on to each other's shoulders, especially the ones higher up? The answer is simple – they used a ladder.

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Ouch tried not to enter burning buildings himself. He was likely to knock the ceiling down, and if a building was on fire, the whole place might collapse. On the other hand, he was sometimes asked to hold up the wooden beams in the ceiling if they were in danger of falling down. This led to a big problem for him – how was he to leave if he was stopping the building from collapsing? There was no solution to that and he did have a few narrow escapes when rushing to get out. (*What would you have done?*)

Holding the hoses and putting the water on the fire was his main job and he was really good at that. A hose full of water is heavy, but fortunately he was very strong. Sometimes, doing this took a long time and to help concentrate on what he was doing he would sing. This made other people smile, even those who were being rescued. Or they may have been pulling faces – it was hard to tell in the smoke.

He enjoyed being a fire fighter, just as he enjoyed singing and working on a farm. He was a happy person and made other people happy too. That is an important thing to do, isn't it?

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*\*The answer is about fifteen minutes. With electric shears, it can be done in about a minute.*

*\*\* The answer is about 3 to 5 eggs.*

## OUCH GOES ON HOLIDAY

Ouch wanted to have a holiday and was thinking about what he would like to do. There was a seaside town he had always fancied visiting. But how could he get there? He ruled out travelling by coach or by train as the seats would not be comfortable for such a tall man – there would not be enough room for his long legs. He did not own a car and did not know how to drive one. He did not want to walk there and back, carrying a heavy suitcase. (In his mind, you always had to have a suitcase if you are going on holiday, which is not necessarily true, but that is what he thought.)

The only other way would be to go there on horseback. He was very skilled at riding horses, and a horse would be good company for him, as he did not know anyone who would want to go with him. The farmer he worked for had a horse and said he would lend it to him.

“The horse could do with a holiday too,” the farmer told him. “It would make a change for her to get away from her field for a while. She knows every blade of grass in the field and it would do her good to ‘seek pastures new’, as long as you bring her back again. We need something that only she can provide.” (*Can you guess what?*)

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Ouch worked out what he wanted to take with him. He was not used to going on holiday and hadn't a clue what he might need. The first thing that came to his mind was his king-size bed. Then there was his favourite armchair, his own toilet seat and the cast-iron bucket which he used as a fire-extinguisher.

He had not yet fathomed out how to attach a suitcase to a horse. But when he discovered that none of the things that he wanted to take would fit into one anyway, he gave up on that idea and bought some saddle-bags instead. Since the town he wished to visit would take more than a day to get to, he would simply have to spend a night somewhere on the way there. So maybe he would not need some of these items. (*What would you like to take on holiday with you? A grand piano? You're not related to Ouch, are you? What else?*)

He went through all his clothes and wanted to take them all. He soon found that there was certainly not room for some things, so he threw out his fireman's uniform and his fancy outfit which he wore for his singing concerts. Next to go were the old clothes he wore on the farm which smelled to highest heaven. This lightened the load a lot...and the smell!

He then thought – ah! I shall have to also take some stuff for the horse too: a bundle of hay, a spare blanket and a tank of water. But again, he could not fit these things into just one saddle bag. (The other saddle bag was reserved for his own luggage.) It was a big puzzle for him and he spent months cutting down on the things that he could take. He ended up finally with a tooth brush and paste, a bar of soap, a towel, one clean shirt and a spare pair of underpants for himself, and a bottle of water for the horse. These conveniently fitted into the two saddle-bags.

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He visited the horse every day for a few weeks before leaving in order to get to know her. The horse was grateful for the company and they had long conversations. It turned out that they liked many of the same things, in particular Country-and-Western music. The horse had always wanted to star in Western movies, but never had the opportunity. Ouch told the horse (whose name, incidentally was

Radish, because the farmer was very fond of horse radish) that he loved dandelions, just like the horse did. Ouch thought they were pretty. The horse thought they were pretty good to eat. Both of them knew straight away that they would get along just fine.

Ouch took the opportunity to ride her around the field. It was fortunate that she was a very large horse as he was so tall. Why? Just big horse! (*Say it aloud.*)

Did you know that the height of a horse is measured in hands? To find out the height of a horse you measure from the ground up to the *withers*, that is the horse's shoulders. A hand is equal to 4 inches or 10.16cm. Three hands equal one foot (*12 inches or 30.48cm*). You may think that as you have two feet you should have six hands. This would be very handy, wouldn't it? Think of how many notes you could play on a piano with six hands! But no, a *hand* is the name of the measurement, just like a *foot* is. So, if you are four-foot tall, it does not mean that you have four feet, does it! Or perhaps YOU do. Count them again.

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To get back to the story...

The day finally dawned when Ouch left home for his holiday. He went to the farm and put the saddle and the saddle-bags on the horse and away they went.

The horse, Radish, was a bit scared about leaving her field, but Ouch was patient with her, and soon she was enjoying the new experience. Along the roadside there were grass verges which seemed greener than the grass in her own field. They did not make much progress at first because she kept stopping to have a snack. But the novelty wore off after a while, as the grass still tasted pretty much the same.

What worried Ouch and Radish was that many cars came too close when they overtook them and some were going very fast. It made both of them frightened. Ouch put a sign on his back asking drivers to take care, but not all of them did. They also kept to the very edge of the road, but that was also dangerous as there a lot of potholes there.

When they had a chance to do so, they took a much quieter side-road which was much more enjoyable. From high up on the horse's back, Ouch could look over the hedges. None of the other farms looked nearly as good as the one he worked on. The horse agreed whole-heartedly with him.

They stopped for lunch in the shade beside some water. Radish had a long drink and a bit of a thrash around in the water, while Ouch ate his sandwich, although large chunks of it fell into the water. He took off his shoes and socks and bathed his feet. That was so refreshing that he took all his clothes off and had a swim. It was very nice, almost like being on holiday, he thought. Hold on, it was a holiday, which made it even nicer. That is, until an angry man appeared and told them to get out of his swimming pool. They hurriedly left and Ouch had to get dressed again while sitting on top of the horse - not an easy thing to do. (*Have you ever got dressed sitting on a horse? Do you think it would be difficult?*)

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The afternoon was uneventful. For a long time, there was very little traffic and they did not have to stop for anything. It was all going so well until they passed what turned out to be a race-course. Radish paid a lot of attention to it and finally could not resist jumping over the hedge and joining in the race. Ouch could not believe that Radish could run so fast and had to hold on for dear life. The other jockeys, who were dwarfs compared to Ouch, were astonished to see such a tall man on a farm-horse.

They were not happy to be overtaken by them. Radish made a dash towards the finishing line and beat all the other horses. She was declared the winner, but then immediately she darted off towards the exit when a dog that was barking frightened her. They re-joined the road outside and carried on their way.

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At dinner-time they reached their overnight lodging. It was a pleasant enough place all on ground level with a stable next to it. Ouch paid the owner who showed them around and then left them. The room Ouch was given was not at all suitable for him. It had a terribly low ceiling. On the other hand, the stable had a much higher roof. He was not happy in the short bed either, and in the middle of the night he went out to the stable. There were many bales of hay lying around for the horse to eat. But they were more comfortable than the bed he had been given, and he lay down amongst them beside Radish and went fast asleep.

This did not please Radish. Not only had Ouch taken her food supply away from her, but his loud snoring was keeping her awake. Radish undid the door of the stable and went into the building. She entered the first door she came to, thinking it was Ouch's room. With a sigh of relief, she lay down on the bed and immediately heard a loud scream close-by. It was a woman's voice. It turned out that it was not Ouch's room at all, but that of a woman guest who was sleeping in the bed. She did not expect to share it with a big horse. (*Can you draw a picture of a horse in bed?*)

Radish quickly raised himself from the bed and knocking her head on the doorpost, she returned to the stable. The noise woke up the innkeeper who came to see what was going on. The woman told him that there was a horse in her room. By then, there was not. The innkeeper assumed she must have had a nightmare (which in a sense she did have) and went back to his own room.

Ouch knew nothing about what had happened. He had a good night's sleep and ate a hearty breakfast before they left the next morning.

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The road from here to the seaside resort was much busier than the previous one. Cars zoomed up behind them and there were times when Ouch had to get off the horse and lead it. The grass verges on both sides were gone, and now they were replaced by the gardens of houses. The flowers gave Radish the chance to vary her diet. But she came to the conclusion that grass was best after all. This was a happy coincidence, as the hotel which Ouch had booked had a large lawn around it. And the manager of the hotel welcomed having a horse to graze on it, rather than have to mow it. He also benefitted from the horse manure which he put on his bed of roses. Ouch was expecting a discount on his bill for this, but instead, the manager did not offer him one, but said he could have some free roses. As they were not blooming at the time, Ouch did not take him up on the offer. (*Would you?*)

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In the afternoon, they made their way to the beach. Ouch noticed the donkey-rides and thought that he could earn some money by providing horse-rides. The man who owned the donkey was not pleased with this, and they had to find a spot on the beach far away from the donkey.

Ouch helped to lift the children onto the back of Radish. As she was a big horse, it was possible to get two children on her back and make twice as much money. Then he led the horse around the beach, keeping well clear of the donkey. Radish looked down on the donkey and thought she was much

superior to it, and to prove it, she walked much faster than it could. The children were a bit scared by this, but kept quiet.

It was the first time the horse had seen the sea and the waves mesmerised her. As the waves swept up the beach, she tried to race them. It was a wonderful game for her, but not so wonderful for the children on her back. One particular wave came in fast, and Radish had to break into a gallop to keep ahead of it. The children both nearly fell off, but enjoyed it. The donkey rides were so tame, they said. But their parents did not approve and shouted at Ouch. The children had to get off and Ouch and Radish had to go to another part of the beach. (*Which would you prefer – a fast horse-ride or a slow donkey-ride?*)

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While Ouch had a swim on his own, he asked Radish to wait for him. He went down to the sea and had a lovely time splashing about. In the meantime, the horse was getting bored. There was no grass to munch here, and she did not enjoy walking in the deep sand. It was very tiring for her so she lay down on someone's towel. When the person came back from his swim, he tried to shoo her off. Getting up off the soft sand she found was impossible. To get some added strength, she ate the ice creams that she mistakenly thought people were offering to her. They were tasty, but did not help.

Some people suggested digging away at the soft sand around her in order to reach the harder sand beneath. They set to work with their tiny buckets and spades and were joined by a lot more people. Others suggested that what was needed was more towels for her hooves to get a grip on, and people from all over the beach came along and threw their towels into the hole around her. The result was that they got in each other's way and what progress was made by one group was instantly undone by what the other group did. Radish was enjoying the attention she was getting and enjoying the extra ice creams that came her way. Of course, if you dig a hole, you have to put what you have dug somewhere else, and therefore on the other side of the circular ditch was now a 'mountain' of soft sand. (*What would you have done to get her up?*)

Radish decided that now was the time to have a roll on her back, something which horses often do if they have an itch. She rolled over and then came across the huge pile of sand which had been dumped to the side of her. This sent her rolling back and straight into the deep ditch that had been dug. She was now surrounded by even higher sand and although the huge number of towels that had been thrown there did enable her to get a grip and stand up, she was well and truly now in a big hole which she could not get out of.

All this time, Ouch had been having a lovely time in the sea and had not noticed what had been going on. When finally he turned around, he noticed the huge crowd gathered around where he had left Radish, but the horse was not visible. He made his way back and saw what the problem was. He scratched his head and scratched and scratched until he had an idea. Making his way up to the man with the donkey, he asked if it could help out. At first, the man refused. But when Ouch gave him the money he had earned in giving children horse-rides, he agreed.

Together they tied all the remaining towels together to make a long long line. To one end of it, they attached the horse. To the other end, the donkey. In front of the donkey and attached to it by a couple of towels was Ouch.

All the people on the beach were instructed to dig a path out of the pit but being careful not to create another mound of sand anywhere nearby. When they had finished this, Ouch shouted "Heave" and he and the donkey strained to pull Radish out of the hole. Other strong men and women helped out by pulling on the towels too.

At the head of the long line of towels, Ouch noticed a little girl. He asked her if she would go and fetch a big handful of grass. She did as she was asked to do.

“Now go along to the horse and stand a few feet in front of her,” he told her, “And if she starts to move forward, you must move forward too.”

The little girl did this, and slowly but surely Radish came out of the ditch and was freed. Ouch bought the girl an ice cream for doing this, even though it was immediately eaten by Radish, who had developed quite a taste for them. To make up for that, he gave the girl a ride on the back of the horse up to the grassy area beside the road. She did not really want to go there, but was too polite to refuse.

Then he thanked her again and helped her down and he and Radish left the beach and returned to their hotel. It had been a long day and after dinner in the hotel, Ouch went to his room and fell asleep. Radish was glad to be back on the hotel lawn and ate and ate and ate. You could say that she was very ‘graze-ful’ to be back.

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The next day it was time to go home again. Ouch got up early and after knocking his head on the doorpost of his room and then the doorframe of the hotel entrance, he saddled up Radish and off they went.

Traffic was heavy on the road. The weather was not so nice as it had been and it was not long before it started to rain. Ouch had not thought of bringing a raincoat, but he did have an umbrella. This helped to keep him dry, but poor Radish got dripping wet. This made her very miserable and moody and she plodded on very slowly. At one point, Ouch got off and walked beside her with his umbrella over her head. She felt this was humiliating and insulting. Horses are used to the rain – it happens all the time in certain places. And no-one goes around putting up umbrellas for them in their fields. She felt very embarrassed. What if another horse came along and saw this? She would never live it down. If she could have turned bright red, she would have done.

“Neigh,” she protested. “Neigh, neigh.” But Ouch did not listen to her and kept holding up the umbrella. The only thing she could do was to walk faster and faster to get away from the umbrella. She went from a trot to a canter to a fast gallop. Ouch had a hard job keeping up with her. But the sight of a field just off the road with lovely green grass made her jump the gate and start munching at the grass.

Ouch took this opportunity to eat his packed lunch and to have a much-needed rest. After a few hours both of them were full-up. The rain had thankfully stopped and once they had left the field, Ouch got on the horse’s back again. They took the next side turning onto a much quieter road. This was much more pleasant. When it was evening, they thought about stopping for the night in a huge barn beside the road. It was nice and warm inside and there were many large bales of hay scattered around. Ouch chose his spot and Radish went to a far corner so his snoring would not disturb her. *(Do you or any of your family snore when you sleep? How can you stop it? Did you know that animals also snore? You should hear my cat!)*

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Early the next morning they were both awoken by the sound of a tractor. The bales of hay were being taken out of the barn. The tractor lifted up a bale high into the air and then dropped it on the ground outside. Unknown to the tractor driver, a very tall man was hidden inside it. Radish quickly left the barn and went up to the bale and ate a hole in the hay for Ouch to escape. He got on the horse

and they charged off as fast as they could. (*Can you draw what happened? You must be good at drawing horses by now!*)

The journey home from there was not far, and within a few hours they were back at Radish's own farm. Ouch thanked the farmer for loaning him the horse and gave him a souvenir from the seaside resort – a bucket of sand and a small spade. He then walked home. It was good to be back in his own bed once again. He had had a lovely holiday but was glad, in a way, that it was over. It was too much like hard work. Maybe he would take another holiday sometime else in his life. But for now, it was back to the life he was used to, and he was looking forward to that. (*Are you glad to get home after a holiday? That's probably why holidays were invented, so we can come home again. Isn't that strange? Really strange!*)

## OUCH GETS TO SLOUCH

Ouch worked on the farm until he retired. The farmer found plenty of useful jobs for him to do and he did them all very well. But as he got older, he found it more difficult to stand upright, because so much of the time he had to bend over and he developed a permanent slouch. This can happen to tall people. This meant that he could no longer reach the fruit on some trees. However, the stoop reduced his height and he no longer hit his head when going through a doorway.

He never married or had a partner. He simply could not imagine living with someone else the whole time. He liked his own company, which is fortunate.

He still sang with the farmer's daughter. She got married and had children who also liked to sing. They had the idea of forming a choir. It performed all over the place – in the cowshed, in the hen coop and in the fields of the farm. The animals all loved the singing, even the sheep – the offspring of the sheep that Ouch had tried to shear, many years ago. They had cultured tastes and wanted to hear anything classical, from Baa-ch to Baa-rtok, whereas Radish, the horse, wanted Roy Rogers' song "A Four-Legged Friend". Better still, any Country-and-Western song about horses, but definitely not Bluegrass music, which would make her feel sick. (*What songs do you think the cows and the chickens would have liked?*)

As he was no longer as fit as when he was younger, he left the fire brigade and they presented him with a medal for long (i.e. tall) service. He missed putting out fires and thought of starting some of his own so he could put them out again. But that seemed a very silly idea and very dangerous if he could not put them out and he would not know that beforehand. However, the fire-engine still needed to have a siren, so Ouch was hired to sit on top and to make the sound of a siren when it was called out to go to a fire.

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On the way to a fire one day, the fire-engine passed the vicar. He admired the sounds that Ouch was making and went to see Ouch as soon as the fire had been put out.

"Some of our bell-ringers at the church are not well," he said. "Could you help out, please?"

Ouch was very flattered to be asked. On the following Sunday he went along to church and climbed the tower to where they were pulling the ropes to make the bells ring. There were several bell-ringers absent, so he was given a few ropes to pull. He found this very difficult, almost impossible to do. Instead, he was told to sing the notes of the missing bells. This was much easier to do and the vicar was delighted by it. (*Could you make the sound of a church-bell?*)

He did this for a few weeks. Then, the vicar asked him if he could do something else as well. Several members of the choir were unwell. Could he join the choir too and become a chorister?

So straight after ringing the bells that day, he had to join in with the choir. The choir slowly walked down the aisle from the choir-vestry, where the choristers put on their robes, to the choir-stalls in front of the altar. The robes consisted of a long black cassock, like a woollen winter coat which stretched down to the floor, and a shorter white cotton surplice on top going down to the knees, a bit like a summer frock. This really made him confused about what season it was, as it was only spring at the time.

(I know about this because I was once a choirboy myself and had to dress like that. Apart from singing, I had to collect up all the sweet-wrappers the other choirboys had dropped in the choir-

stalls during the sermon! Eating sweets while the vicar preached was not actually forbidden as it kept the choirboys from chatting...so much. But sometimes the rustling noise of the sweet-papers disturbed the vicar and he forgot what he was saying.) (*Can you draw this?*)

Ouch was not a choirboy, though, and he took it all very seriously. He did his best at singing along with the rest of the choir, but was disappointed that there were no cows, chickens or sheep in church to hear him. He did hope, though, that they could hear him from the farm, which was unlikely as it was a couple of miles away.

Week by week, other members of the choir got sick and Ouch had to sing all the different parts himself. He started out being a soprano – the highest voice, but after a while he got used to singing the lower parts – the alto, tenor and bass parts. He once tried singing two different parts at the same time, but could not do it. (*There are some people who can, can you? Don't worry if you can't. Being able to do this is very rare.*)

At Easter time, the choir had to sing an anthem, that is a piece designed to entertain the congregation so they could have a sit-down for a short time without having to kneel down or stand up. Elderly people really appreciated this. Not only was he the only chorister that day – all the others were sick, but the organist was also too unwell to attend church. It was a lengthy piece to sing, at least ten minutes long, but he sang all the parts and imitated the organ at times too.

He enjoyed being in church. It was nice and peaceful and it had a high roof, although that did not matter quite so much now that he had a stoop. He soon got to know all the prayers by heart, and lucky for him, he did not have to pick up any sweet-wrappers being the only one in the choir, and he did not eat sweets anyway.

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Having to dress up in church made him want to take part in the plays that the dramatic society put on. He was given a lot of different parts. None of them had any lines he had to learn, but they were still important parts. In most of them, he had to play a giant, as in *Jack and the Beanstalk*. In others, he had to be a tall tree or a telegraph pole or a double-decker bus.

He was once cast as the front part of a pantomime horse, with another person, a much smaller person, playing the back part. It looked like a very strange horse, but Ouch thought that Radish would have been proud of him, although he hoped she would not have fallen in love with the pantomime horse. There's no accounting for taste!

The director of the play was so pleased with him that he gave him some lines to speak. When he was supposed to be an oak tree, he had to say:

“I'm a tree, I'm a tree, I'm a tall tall tree...”

But he forgot the next line. (*Can you think what it might have been? Make one up to end with something that rhymes with 'tree'.*)

When he was a giant, he had to say:

“Ho Ho! I'm a giant and I'm seven foot tall...”

But someone in the audience coughed and no-one heard the next line. (*Could you make one up to rhyme with 'tall'?*)

And when he was a bus, his line was:

“Honk honk! I’m a bus and I’m coming your way...”

At that moment it thundered and no-one heard the line after that. (*Could you think what it might have been?*)

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He loved acting and he loved making the costumes for the characters he played. When he was to play a giant, all he needed to do was wear his normal clothes. But for other parts he had to design and make special costumes. He made a bus out of bits of paper and cardboard which he had to sit in. Similarly, when he was a tree, he cut out bits of cardboard and old cloths which he wound tightly around him and held out some branches which had leaves on them.

However, he could not think what to do about the uniform when he was supposed to be a policeman. He knew a real policeman and found out when the policeman went to the swimming pool, leaving his uniform in the changing-room. Ouch sneaked into the changing-room, took the uniform and left a note telling the policeman that he was just borrowing the uniform for a short time while he was in the pool. Of course, he forgot to return it afterwards and the policeman had to walk home in his swimming costume. He was very annoyed and nearly put Ouch in prison. But decided not to, as Ouch had once put out a fire in his house. (*Can you draw what happened?*)

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Apart from these activities, Ouch tended his garden. He had always liked sun-flowers as they were also very tall. One year he planted nothing but sunflowers in his garden. He thought that they would make it warmer and he could sunbathe beneath them, even when it was raining. He found out they did not make the ground any warmer or drier and he got wet through. Nevertheless, he enjoyed the bright yellow colour of the flowers and had a lot of nice sunflower seeds to eat when the flowers had stopped blooming.

Another year, he chose to grow a wild garden. He dug up all the roses and colourful flowers and planted nothing but weeds: dandelions, daisies, buttercups, celandine, stinging nettles, thistles and many more. The bees appreciated them, but not the neighbours when the weeds started to take over their own gardens.

But he had the last laugh on them when there was a shortage of certain vegetables in the shops. Instead of lettuce, he ate dandelion leaves, and instead of spinach and other greens, he ate thistles and stinging nettles, being careful to pick them with his gloves and preparing them ready for eating. The other weeds could be used in place of certain medicines and ointments that you normally get from the pharmacy, and they helped soothe his aches and pains just as well.

*Do you know what a weed is? It is “a plant in the wrong place”. Once, the birds did a poo in my garden amongst the flowers. Next year where they had pooed, a raspberry cane grew up. That was strictly speaking a weed. If the birds had pooed in a raspberry patch in the garden and a flowering plant had grown up, that plant would be a weed. A note of caution – don’t eat any old weed – it may be one that is not good for you and may make you sick.*

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Ouch had other hobbies too. There were certain things he could not do alone – play tennis or other competitive sports, or play chess or card games (except for Solitaire) or ballroom dancing.

That left him with a lot of things he tried his hand at. He was used to cooking for himself, but now he had more time, he baked bread. He made wine. He went bird watching and flew a kite. He did some painting, pottery and sculpture. He took photographs and collected stamps. He did crossword puzzles and did jigsaws. He took up yoga, weaving, knitting, train-spotting, jogging, metal-detecting, and bowls. He learned another language and taught himself how to play a musical instrument – the double bass as it was just the right size for him. He was never bored. And he never had enough time. Some things he gave up after a short while. Others he stuck at for longer. For once in his life his tallness no longer mattered. (*Can you do any of these things? Would you like to try?*)

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He went to see Radish, the horse and told her what he was up to.

“You’re lucky,” she said. “I’ve always wanted to make model airplanes.”

“That’s interesting,” he said. “Anything else?”

“Yes, I would have liked to learn about Hinduism.”

“Why is that?” he asked.

“To find out why it is my destiny, call it my job if you like, to munch grass all day, every day,” she replied mournfully, “and I think I might find the answer in Hinduism.”

“And there’s something else I am expected to do,” she added.

“Yes, go on,” he urged her.

“Well, when I go to the toilet, I’m expected to announce it to the farmer so he can collect it in a bucket,” she said.

“Do you mean, Whinny the Poo?” he said.

(The sound a horse makes is called ‘whinnying’.)

“Right first time,” she said. “But you know I’m only horsing around. But to be serious, I always wanted to be a famous fashion model.”

“Would that make you a clothes horse?” he suggested.

“Or a deep-sea diver,” she said.

“A sea-horse, I presume.” He guessed that one too.

“But I’m just an old farm-horse,” she said sadly and tears flowed down her long face.

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To cheer her up, a few days later, he brought her some wood and some tools to make model airplanes, and a book on Hinduism, plus an ice cream which he knew she loved.

She was delighted to get them and set to work straight away. She ate the tools, studied how to eat an ice cream and made an airplane out of the book on Hinduism.

So there is a lesson in this for everyone: never listen to a talking-horse. Or perhaps he imagined it all? What do you think?

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*What would you like to do if you had more time? Maybe you could write a story for other people to read? I'm sure you could. Give it a try. Or try some of the other ideas. I hope you have enjoyed these stories. I look forward to reading yours. Good luck.*