

## The three children are naughty and learn a lesson

After returning from their Canberra excursion the children settled back into life at school, forgetting most of what they had seen, learned and or even thought. Except that everyone now thought it was time for the holidays.

But one of the children, Frederick, had not forgotten everything from the Canberra excursion. Oh no, for Frederick one thing remained quite clear, in fact quite clearer than it had been in Canberra.

Now if you remember one of the places the children visited was Mount Ainslee, the most famous lookout in Canberra. Perhaps you also remember how interested Frederick was in the aircraft guiding beacon, right on the very top, and how he wanted to come back at night to see the lights of Canberra, and of course the light of the beacon. But that didn't happen because the teachers had not put a night return into the program. And that had spoilt the excursion for him.

Now Frederick was old enough and smart enough to have a very naughty idea. He suddenly realised why the teachers had not put coming back at night into the program. The reason is that there are too many lady teachers at Holcombe Public School. You see, lady teachers always stop children from having fun. If they see children playing with a ball they screech: "Put that away!" If they see children having fun climbing something they scream: "Get down! Now!" So of course coming back at night to see the beacon would be just impossible.

Frederick then thought of a plan to fix the problem. And he thought it best to ask two of his friends, Sophie and Melissa, to help him. These girls also didn't like lady teachers either because the girls wanted to race about, climb things and get into mischief.

So the three children visited the library to find some magic spells to use on the lady teachers. "This is an interesting project you are working on, children. It's strange your teacher hasn't mentioned it to me," commented the lady librarian, gliding along as librarians always do, and causing trouble already.

"Well, it's our own choice," explained Sophie.

"And it's going to be a surprise," added Melissa, sneakily.

There were just so many spells to choose from but finally there were three clear choices: turning the lady teachers into frogs, shrinking them, or vapourising them with a puff of smoke. "What do you think?" asked Frederick.

"Well shrinking them or giving them the frog treatment would mean they would still be there—and who wants that?" said Melissa.

"Quite right!" Sophie said firmly. "We will vapourise them! And also, it's the easiest of the spells. We just have to learn the spell, point at the lady teacher, do it, and she will be gone."

That afternoon, in class, their teacher noticed that Sophie, Melissa and Frederick were not their usual selves—they seemed to have their minds on something else, even though the class was having an art lesson. The other children happily got on with their finger painting, smearing their clothes as always, little knowing that tomorrow a special lady teacher vapourising program would begin.

Lunchtime the next day was boringly hot, with most children standing under the trees. Some of the boys were playing cricket, which they did every lunchtime. If they were short of numbers

sometimes they asked Sophie to play, but it always seemed to be fielding. Secretly they knew that Sophie could easily beat most of them at cricket.

The three friends were also standing under a tree and of course so was the lady teacher. This was no good at all. How were the children going to put the spell on her?

Frederick came up with the answer: "Wait until the lunch bell goes and she will then have to leave the tree to go back inside."

"Of course," agreed Melissa, "but we'll have to go back inside also."

"We'll stand under that tree. It's on the way back and we'll have a few seconds—and that's all we need," added Sophie.

And so it happened—the bell rang, the playground gradually emptied, and the children had a clear shot at the target. They lined up and chanted the spell, and here it is:

*One potato, two potato, three potato, four;  
Easel, weasel, wombat, more;  
Lady teachers, such a bore,  
Nasty people—out the door!*

They had to point with the right arm and stand on left leg. This was reversed for the next line, and so on. Frederick, by far the least athletic of three, had been really practising. And he got the actions right. But he didn't get the words right. He chanted, "...three potato, four potato".

"Stop," whispered Sophie, giving Frederick a kick. Sophie was beginning to kick her friends a little too often. "Quick, start again, and don't muck it up this time."

This time it was perfect. It was done. The children stared, expecting to see it happen, but the lady teacher kept on walking, and then gazed at the three children with a creepy look that said, "You're late—get going or there'll be trouble". The children turned and ran to the toilets, then out to line up ready to go in.

Guess what? The lady teacher *wasn't* there to take her class in. Instead it was the school principal, Mr Bean. "Girls and boys," he began, with all the children falling instantly silent, especially Sophie, Melissa and Frederick. "Mrs Robinson has been called away so I will be taking her class this afternoon." And so the lady teacher's class walked in, one behind the other, with no talking, and sitting up straight when they got to their desks. No-one knew quite what to expect.

Actually Mr Bean's real name was Mr Beanbag, which was a very good name because he was the fattest school principal by far in all the high country. His car was a monster SUV with special handles for the passengers and driver to grab when the car was going over bumpy ground. But Mr Beanbag used the handle to lower himself into the driver's seat. Otherwise the driver's seat would be squashed by his hippopotamus sized body dropping onto it. Fat people have fat legs but this doesn't mean they have big leg muscles, so they can't sit down slowly like normal people. Of course Mr Beanbag had to use the handle to help him get out of the seat too.

Some of the younger children didn't like getting too close to Mr Beanbag because he might move and accidentally squash them. It's like being at the zoo—it's best to see the large animals from outside the cage. The older children weren't worried about

this though. In fact, surprisingly, they were glad their principal looked like an inflated pig. You see school principals, when they visit classrooms, usually want to sit next to someone and then have a look at his or her work. Well the children didn't want that, and with Mr Beanbag it would never happen because he was too fat to sit at the children's desks—indeed he could scarcely squeeze down the aisles.

But let's not be mean to Mr Beanbag. Actually he is a kind person, always ready to help a child in trouble. On one excursion day a student missed the bus. Mr Beanbag put the child into his car and caught up with the bus at the first McDonald's stop, making this little boy and his family very happy. So from now on we will use the name Mr Bean—and no more fat jokes!

The next day dawned cool and crisp, and the sky was blue from horizon to horizon—a perfect day not to be at school. But the three friends couldn't wait to get to school to see if Mrs Robinson was there. Did the magic spell finally work?

At 9.03, just three minutes after the bell, there was Mrs Robinson. Sophie now knew that life sometimes isn't fair. Mrs Robinson's turning up at school must be one of those unfair things which happen to make children suffer. More action was called for, and at recess the three children knew what to do. The spell had to be shouted louder, and the target had to be much closer. This was risky, but it seemed the only way.

"Here we go, on the count of three," said Sophie, as at lunchtime that very day the three children positioned themselves closer to the target. "One, two, *three*".

*One potato, two potato, three potato, four;  
Easel, weasel, wombat, more:  
Lady teachers, such a bore,  
Nasty people—out the door!*

If the spell didn't work this time, it never would. Mrs Robinson, turned—perhaps getting ready to vapourise?—and started walking towards them. It was too late to run. The three children knew there was some music to face.

"Aaaa," murmured Sophie.

"Eeee," whispered Melissa.

"Urrrr," groaned Frederick.

"What on earth are you three children doing?" asked Mrs Robinson, putting on her 'I expect a sensible answer face'. The children did have an answer, but it wasn't going to sound sensible at all. Absolutely, completely, totally and downright stupid was more like it. More stupid than the most stupid student in the whole school could possibly think of.

"We were trying to vapourise you," answered Melissa, trying to sound sensible, but failing utterly.

"Yes," added Sophie. "We got the spell out of the library," hoping that this somehow might make it right. Sophie remembered that teachers always want children to go to the library.

"Mrs Robinson," said Frederick, a brave and very honest boy, "it is my fault. I started it and convinced Sophie and Melissa to join me."

Now all children spend a great deal of time staring at their teachers' faces, and strangely, teachers always seem to like this, and indeed often shout and scream when children don't do it. So these three children knew their teacher's face very well—and it seemed that just possibly, their teacher was trying not to smile.

"I am pleased you are using the library, children. But why

are you trying to vapourise me?"

"Well, we—mainly me—decided that lady teachers should be vapourised, and we thought we would start with you," recounted Frederick, relaxing a little. And Mrs Robinson began to smile now as she listened to the whole story, and how it had started on that Canberra excursion, on the top of Mount Ainslee.

"And now children, I have a story to tell," said Mrs Robinson. "You will have to walk with me as I move around the playground." Children know that teachers never stay in one place while on 'playground duty' but they are so used to it, they don't know that they know this. Lots of things are like this at school, which is one reason why children find it hard to tell their parents what happens at school.

It was nearly the end of lunchtime now and some children were beginning to get naughty—that's another thing that always just happens. But Mrs Robinson put a stop to many things by walking nearby. She didn't want to interrupt her story.

"Well," she continued, "that's interesting, Frederick. The other teachers and I—and some of us *are* lady teachers—all wanted to bring you back to Mount Ainslee at night, and we had planned to. But a few weeks before we had to go we found out that the council would be closing the lookout at night because repairs had to be made to an electric cable under the road. It was too late to change anything then. We didn't tell you all this because we didn't want you to be disappointed."

"Oh," said Frederick. The other two were so shocked their mouths were positively glued shut. A big silence began but Frederick knew he had to break that silence.

"I didn't know—and I'm sorry about trying to vapourise you."

"Thank you for saying that—and I am sure you are including the other lady teachers in that," commented Mrs Robinson.

"And we're sorry too," chimed in the two girls.

The children were sorry but deep down, perhaps, lady teachers still had to prove themselves. Surely not *all* lady teachers could be like Mrs Robinson. Frederick was quite certain about not being certain.

That afternoon, Sophie got off the school bus, and opened the large steel gate. It squeaked its special squeak but Sophie's mind was still on what happened that day. For once she was glad to be away from her friends and glad to be home. Her mother asked, as she often did, "and what happened at school today?" expecting the usual reply of "nothing much".

"Oh today we tried to put a magic spell on Mrs Robinson and vapourise her, but it didn't work. Besides, Mrs Robinson is nice so she doesn't really need a magic spell."

"Oh, that's good," said Sophie's mother, expertly steering the car around the bumps and branches on the dirt road, "but Mrs Robinson tells me that you have to take more care with your homework..." And just for once Sophie was glad her mother was talking about homework. And that night Sophie's homework was the best it had been in quite a long while.