

Once Round the Sun

BY

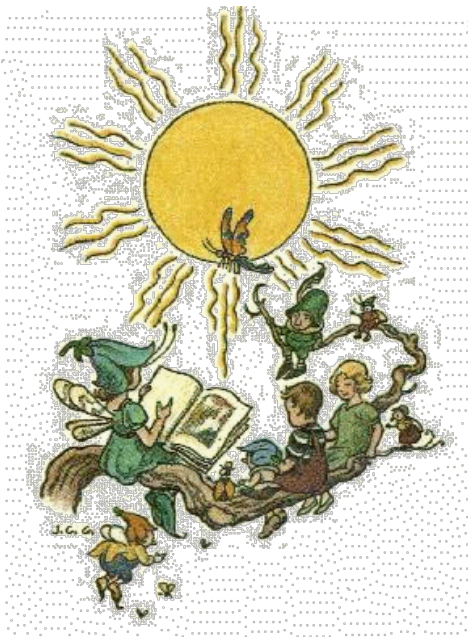
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You are about to read the story of Peter and his BIG YEAR.

When you have finished you will see that every year,
you, like Peter, go on a wonderful journey.

Every time your birthday comes round, you know
that since your last birthday you have gone all the way
around the Sun, and are starting to do it all over again.

I hope you'll like Peter, and make believe you and Peter
are just the same -- maybe you are.

Every boy and girl can get the Big Year, if they just know
how to ask, and their questions are good questions.

Because each of you has an Uncle Peppercorn too,
and though he is very small, he is very very important.

Uncle Peppercorn



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A copy of the first edition of *Once Round the Sun* was found accidentally in a used bookstore in the mid 1980's by a friend of the book's author. Inside the front cover were handpainted color illustrations by Justin Gruelle with an inscription to his friends John and Connie Hasbrook. The artist and the recipients are no longer living.

These additional illustrations together with the inscription are reproduced below.



Chapter One

You May Call Me Uncle Peppercorn

Peter put his brand-new roller-skates in the corner where he could see them first thing in the morning. Then he left his clothes on a chair and got into bed. His mind was buzzing with the questions he had forgotten to ask during the day.

"Oh, how I wish everybody would answer everything I ask them," he thought.

"Do you really wish that?" said a little voice at his elbow. Peter looked up quickly. There was a tiny little man with a funny big hat sitting on the side of his bed. "Because if you do, we might be able to arrange it." murmured the little man, and stroked his long beard. His hand was no bigger than Peter's little fingernail.

"Who are you?" asked Peter, surprised.

"It doesn't matter who I am," said the little man. "But you may call me Uncle Peppercorn. Come on," he said. "Hurry up. We've got a long way to go before morning."

Peter obediently got out of bed and dressed quickly. The little man jumped on Peter's shoulder.



"Hang on tight!" he shouted. "Here we go!"

Peter didn't know what he was supposed to hang on to, but he didn't have time to ask. Before he could say "what?" they were off, flying through the dark night, up, up, far above the houses.

Away they went among the stars in the big blue nothing until Peter couldn't tell which was the earth they had come from. All the stars were blinking and twinkling all around them and Peter wondered if HE were blinking and twinkling too.

Then they came to a star that looked bigger than the others. It grew and grew until they finally landed on a jutting mountain-top of this strange and beautiful star.

"Where are we?" wondered Peter. "Where's the earth?"

"We're about halfway to the North Pole of the sky," said Uncle Peppercorn. "Look, you can just see the earth down there," and he pointed out into space.

"Which one is it?" said Peter, growing quite dizzy looking at the millions of pin-points of light in the dark blue sky.

"See that sun over there?" asked the little man. "The one to the left of that big fellow?"

"Oh, yes," said Peter. "Is that the earth?"

Uncle Peppercorn gave a chuckle. "How conceited you fellows are!" he said. "No, the earth's the third little speck drifting round it. You can just see it if you screw your eyes up tight." He climbed up on the bridge of Peter's nose and shaded his eyes with both arms. "Now can you see it?"

"Ye-es," said Peter uncertainly. "It looks awfully small."

"It is," said Uncle Peppercorn. "The earth is just a little ball that rolls round and round the sun. It's spinning like a big top all the time, so that the people on one side of it see the sun half the time, and the people on the other side see the sun the other half of the time. Day and night, you know."

"I don't understand," said Peter.



"Haven't you noticed how the sun comes up on one side of the sky and goes down on the other?"

"Oh, yes," Peter said, proud to know this. "It rises in the East and sets in the West."

"Yes, only it doesn't really rise and set. You can see from here. The sun stays there and the earth spins round it. Every time it turns around, the sun shines on different sides of it."

Suddenly he jumped lightly to the ground. There were lots of bright shiny stones lying about on this strange star. Uncle Peppercorn picked up one of them and put it on a flat rock. Then he turned to Peter.

"Where's your top?" he asked.

"My top?" Peter was surprised. He felt in his pocket and pulled out a piece of string, some rusty nails, and finally his top.

"How did you know I had a top in my pocket?" asked Peter.

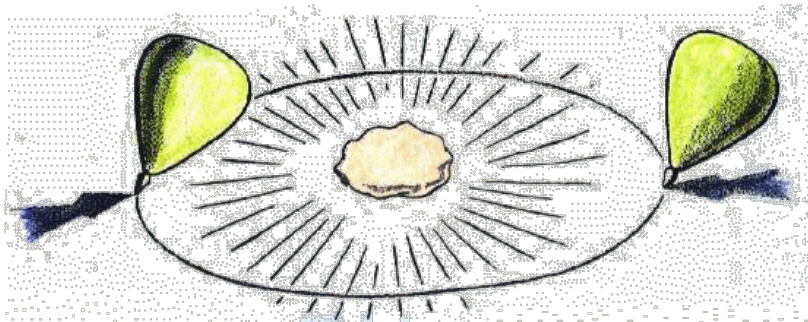
"It doesn't matter how I knew," said Uncle Peppercorn testily. "Put it down here."

When Peter had put the top on the rock, Uncle Peppercorn looked at it carefully and then stretched up on tip-toe to touch the smooth sides. "Does this thing work?" he asked.

"Sure it works!" Peter picked it up and wound the string round it. He set it spinning on the flat rock and it started to

spin in a wide circle round the bright stone that lay in the middle of the rock. Uncle Peppercorn jumped quickly out of the way.

"You don't have to let in run over me!" he cried.



"Why, look!" cried Peter. "It's going round the sun." For Peter was still thinking of the earth and the sun, and the top looked just like a little planet going round and round a shining sun.

"Is that how the earth moves?" he asked.

"That's right," said Uncle Peppercorn. "The earth is like a great big top and it turns around many many times, while it's going just once round the sun. It seems to go quite slowly because we're so small."

Peter looked at little Uncle Peppercorn and couldn't help smiling. Uncle Peppercorn was so very small. But Uncle

Peppercorn knew what Peter was thinking and he drew himself up to his full three inches.



"I'm just as big for me as you are big for you," he said, frowning at Peter. "and you're very small beside the earth, you know."

"I'm sorry!" said Peter. "I didn't mean to be rude."

"That's all right!" Uncle Peppercorn smiled again. "You see the earth is so much bigger than both of us that it only has to turn round once to make a whole day and night for us. And it takes a whole year to travel round the sun."

Just then the top ran down and Peter picked it up and set it spinning again. Once more it started its journey, spinning round and round itself and at the same time traveling slowly round the shining stone.

"I should think it would get dizzy," said Peter. "Is it fever that makes it hot in summer?"

Uncle Peppercorn chuckled. "No," he said. "Look carefully and see if you notice something about the way the top stands when it spins."

Peter bent down and looked carefully at the spinning top.

"I don't see anything," he said.

"Look again" said Uncle Peppercorn. "Is it quite straight?"

"Oh! said Peter. "No, of course it isn't. It wobbles a little."

"Of course a top wobbles more than the earth," said Uncle Peppercorn. "The earth wobbles so slowly that it takes thousands of years for one little wobble. That's why the earth stays a bit crooked for a very long time. It's a bit crooked now."

Peter caught the top just as it wobbled right off the rock. He laughed. "I hope the earth doesn't do that!" he said.

Uncle Peppercorn gave his deep chuckle. "Spin it again!" he said.

Peter spun it again, and the top traveled around as before.

"Now, look carefully," said Uncle Peppercorn. "You see how, when it's crooked, the top end, that is the north end, comes

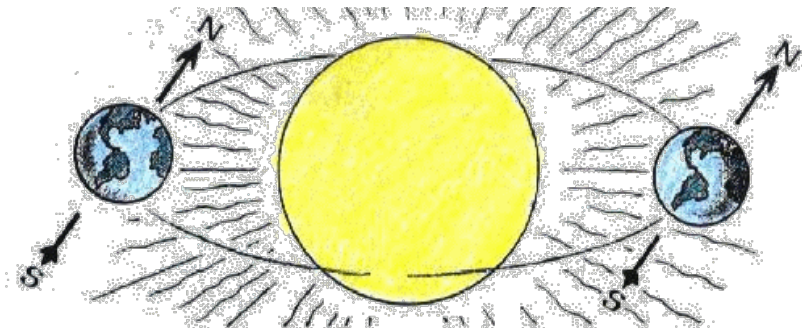
nearer the sun when the earth is on one side of the sun, and is farther away when the earth is on the other side of the sun?"

"Oh, yes!" cried peter. "When the north is nearer it gets



more sunlight than the other end, even while it's turning all the time."

"Right!" said Uncle Peppercorn. "Suppose you were living on the top end, north of the middle. What season would it be there?"



"What season?" Oh! I see." Peter thought a minute. "Oh, is that what makes the summer?"

Peter was thrilled. He had worked it out by himself.

"Then," he cried, quite excited, "it must be winter down below. And then when it gets to the other side of the sun, it's summer down below and winter on top. So that must be why there is one winter and one summer every year! And all the time there are lots of days and nights because it keeps spinning round by itself all the time too."

"My, my!" Uncle Peppercorn blinked at Peter under his funny big hat. "You're even quicker than I thought. Maybe we can give you the BIG YEAR."

"What's the Big Year?" Peter sensed something exciting. "Well," said Uncle Peppercorn, "it's something that only very few people can get. I don't quite know about you."

"Oh, please tell me," Peter begged. He was excited but he didn't know why.

"First you tell me," said Uncle Peppercorn, "what would you do if somebody asked you a question?"

"Why, I'd answer them, of course.

"Always?" Uncle Peppercorn's voice was suddenly very stern.

"Well," Peter stopped. "If I knew the answer," he added doubtfully.

"All right!" Uncle Peppercorn jumped on to Peter's shoulder. "You'll do," he said. "just remember that and you can ask anybody anything you want to know."

He pointed down again to where the little speck of earth rolled. The third speck from the little sun, to the left of the big fellow.

"Look carefully," Uncle Peppercorn said. "You see where the earth is now. It's going to go all round the sun and you're

going with it. Only now you'll KNOW you're going with it. Until it gets back to the same place again, you may ask all the questions you like of everything and everybody on it. And everything will answer you in its own special way. If you ask good questions you'll get good answers. If you ask silly questions you'll get silly answers. The earth and the trees and the grass and the sky, land and sea -- they'll all answer you, until you get back to the same place again."

Uncle Peppercorn climbed up on Peter's nose, so Peter



had to squint to see him. "Remember," he said sternly and waved his forefinger that was the size of one bristle of a toothbrush, "you must always answer all the questions of others, too."

Peter squinted at the little man perched on the end of his nose and Uncle Peppercorn looked so funny that he started to laugh. Uncle Peppercorn hurriedly grabbed hold of Peter's right eyebrow and said pettishly:

"Don't do that! It's rude . . . And I might fall down and break my neck," he added "Then how would you get back home?"

Peter apologized at once. "I'm sorry," he said. "I didn't

mean to frighten you. And I promise to answer everybody's questions if only I can find out the answers first."

"O.K." said Uncle Peppercorn, letting go of Peter's eyebrow. He chuckled to himself. "You look pretty funny yourself, you know, squinting down at the end of you nose." He climbed back to Peter's shoulder. Suddenly he shouted:

"Hang on, here we go!"

Peter gasped. It was so very sudden. They were off in the big blue sky again with all the twinkles around them everywhere. Peter lost track of where they were. For a moment he was afraid Uncle Peppercorn might not be able to find the earth among all the sparkling things. Then he saw it. It was the third speck from the sun that was coming nearer and nearer. Suddenly they were back home. They just missed the moon and landed quite softly on the earth.

"Here we are." said Uncle Peppercorn calmly. "Is there anything you want to ask me before I go away?"

"Don't' go away," said Peter. "I like you. Aren't you going to stay with me?"

"I'll be around if you need me," said Uncle Peppercorn.

With that he vanished, and Peter was alone in a big forest.

Chapter Two

Build a Snowman, Peter

The trees were bare and quiet. All the world seemed to be asleep. Peter felt very lonely after Uncle Peppercorn had left him and he didn't know which way to go. He wanted to cry, but then he remembered that he was seven years old, and boys don't cry when they're seven.

So he started to run through the woods to see if he couldn't find Uncle Peppercorn.

"Uncle Peppercorn!" he cried. "Uncle Peppercorn!" But there was only silence.

Peter stood there sadly and wondered what to do next. It was funny that Uncle Peppercorn, who was only as big as one of Peter's fingers, should make all that difference. Peter was very, very lonely.

He had just sat down on the root of a tree when he heard a small voice beside him.

"Excuse me!" said the voice.

Peter looked all around, but he didn't see anybody. Only a squirrel that was trying to get by him to climb up to its home in a hollow of the tree.

"Excuse me!" said the squirrel again.

"Oh!" said Peter and moved aside quickly. "I didn't know you were speaking to me. I never heard a squirrel speak before."

"That's all right," said Squirrel. "You haven't got used to the Big Year yet, I suppose. Uncle Peppercorn told me about you. You're Peter."

"Yes, said Peter. And there the conversation ended. Squirrel busied herself cleaning out her nest and was sweeping it with a straw, while Peter watched.

She swept a large dead beetle out of the nest and leaned on her straw.

"Uncle Peppercorn told me it's going to snow today, so



I'm getting my nest cozy, because we'll be staying indoors for a while. What are you going to do?"

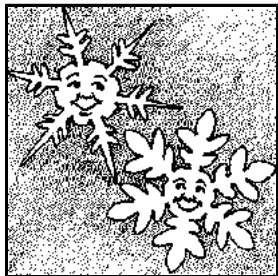
"I -- I don't know," said Peter.

"I'd like to invite you in," said Squirrel, "but you're rather big. Perhaps you'd better try somewhere else."

Just then a big snowflake drifted down and melted on Peter's nose.

He turned to Squirrel and laughed.

"Did you see that?" he asked. "I love snow, don't you?" Then he remembered his manners and said politely:



"Thank you very much for inviting me even if I can't get in."

Another big flake lighted on his sleeve, and soon the air was white with whirling specks of snow. There was a deep soft silence and the snowflakes danced their graceful way to the earth.

Soon every branch and twig was covered.

Peter caught hundreds of snowflakes in his hands and looked at their pretty little six-pointed stars. "You are beautiful, he murmured.

"Hullo, Peter tinkled a little voice. "Do you think we look nice?"

"I'm trying to find two of you that are alike," said Peter.
"Will you help me?"

The snowflakes all laughed together.

"Oh, Peter!" they laughed. "Don't you know that no two of us are alike? Try if you want to, but you'll never find a pair."

And they all laughed again.

Suddenly a gruff voice spoke:

"It isn't very nice of you to laugh at poor Peter. How was he to know that you're all different? He's no snowflake."

It was Uncle Peppercorn. He was standing on a twig and looking around him very sternly.

"Hullo, Uncle Peppercorn!" sang the snowflakes. "If he isn't a snowflake, he must be a snowman." And the impudent snowflakes laughed some more.

Peter looked at himself, and he laughed too.

"I look like one, don't I?"

"You certainly do," smiled Uncle Peppercorn. "How would you like to build one?"

All the snowflakes shouted together:

"Build a snowman, Peter! Build a snowman!"

"Sure," said Peter. He scraped up snowflakes in both hands, and they all snuggled as close together as they could.



Soon he had a lovely snowman. Uncle Peppercorn tried to help too, but he couldn't do very much because he was so small. So he just stood on the twig and told Peter what to do.

"Now you want two acorns," said Uncle Peppercorn, when the snowman was ready.

Peter picked up two acorns that had been lying under the snow and put them in the snowman's face.

"What about a pipe?" said Uncle Peppercorn. Peter looked

for a bent twig to put in the snowman's mouth. At last he chose the one Uncle Peppercorn was standing on. As he started to break it off, his little friend suddenly disappeared.

"Oh!" said Peter. "I hope he didn't think I was rude."

He was quite worried because he had begun to depend on having Uncle Peppercorn around to show him what to do.

He looked everywhere, but he couldn't find him.

The snowflakes wanted him to come and play some more, but Peter was too worried about losing Uncle Peppercorn.

At last he walked sadly away through the snow, wondering what was to become of him in the big white silence.



Chapter Three

Grrmph! Peter, Grrr!

Peter stopped by a little stream that was frozen solid except for a tiny trickle in the middle. Suddenly he heard a gruff voice, saying:

"Grrmph! Peter, Grrr!"

A big black bear was coming toward him with its funny clumsy walk. Peter was so frightened he couldn't even run away. He just stood there and expected that the bear would swallow him whole. "Grrmph!" said the bear again.

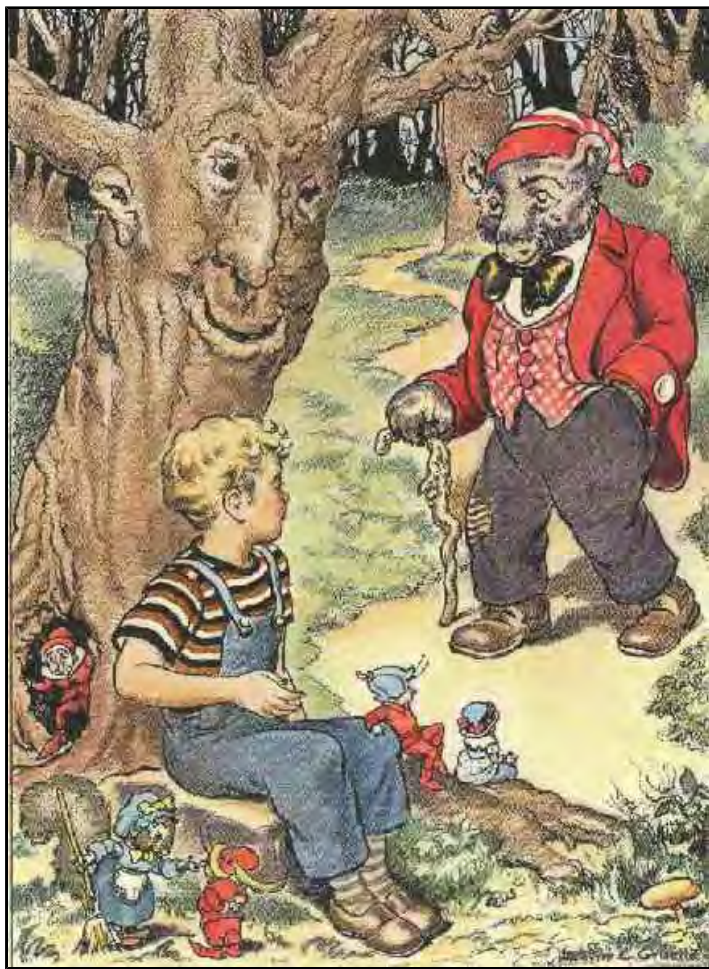
"How do you do," said Peter, trying not to tremble. Uncle Peppercorn had said that he could ask anybody anything, but he hadn't said anything about big black bears and what you were supposed to do with them.

"Fine, " said Bear, "but sleepy."

Then Peter understood that the bear wasn't angry at all. He only said "Grrmph!" as a sort of greeting.

Suddenly Bear gave a huge yawn. Peter jumped. Was the bear going to eat him after all?

"Just going to turn in," yawned Bear. "What are you going to do?"



"I don't know," said Peter.

"Room for one more," growled Bear. "You'd better come with me."

Peter wasn't quite sure that he wanted to. The bear was so very gruff. But it was cold outside, so he thought he would at, least go and see where the bear lived.

There was a nice big hole in a rock. Almost like a cave, thought Peter. It was dry and carefully furnished with twigs and dry leaves that were soft to lie on.

The bear curled up in the den and showed Peter where he could curl up beside him. Peter sat down carefully. With a last "Grrmph!" the bear was fast asleep.

It was cozy in the den. Peter curled up close to the rough woolly coat of the bear and soon he was fast asleep too.



Peter was asleep for a long time when a sharp voice awoke him saying, "Come on, Peter! You can't stay here all your life." It was Uncle Peppercorn.

"Oh!" said Peter, rubbing his eyes, "what time is it?"

"Time you got up," said Uncle Peppercorn. "You've been asleep nearly a week."

"A week!" shouted Peter. The bear stirred uneasily, and Peter lowered his voice. "A week!" he whispered. "But why is HE still asleep?" he asked.

"He sleeps for a couple of months," said Uncle Peppercorn. "Come on!"

Peter crawled out of the bear's den as quietly as he could. When they were outside he asked: "Why does he sleep so long?"

"He sleeps all winter. That's just like a night to him."

"Does he stay awake all summer then?" asked Peter.

"Not quite. He sleeps and wakes, nights and days, just like you do during one lifetime."

Peter thought for a while. Then he said:

"I suppose that's right-if he knows about the earth going round the sun. Does he, Uncle Peppercorn?"

"Well," said Uncle Peppercorn, "he knows in a way, but not like you do. He feels it. You UNDERSTAND it."

"Oh!" said Peter, not quite sure that he did.

"By the way," said Uncle Peppercorn, "you were afraid of the bear, weren't you?"

"Yes," Peter said, a little ashamed of himself.

"You needn't be," said Uncle Peppercorn. "As long as you have the Big Year, everything is friendly. Bear has a gruff voice, but he would never hurt anybody who has the Big Year."

"Oh!" said Peter. "Then I needn't ever be afraid."

"That's the point," said Uncle Peppercorn. "If you are afraid, you lose the Big Year. You nearly lost it then. If you had run away from the bear, he MIGHT have hurt you."

Peter remembered how he had wanted to run away.

"Never be afraid, Peter," said Uncle Peppercorn.



Chapter Five



I Have to be Somewhere Else Soon

It was very quiet under the big spruce trees where Peter wandered along and listened to the drip, drip of melting snow from the branches.

"Hullo, Peter, " said a small voice at his feet.

Peter looked down and there stood a tiny snowdrop, peeping up through the carpet of pine needles.

"Hi!" He bent down and looked at the pretty white flower. "Who are you?"

"I'm Snowdrop. Have you seen my cousin Violet yet?"

"No, I haven't noticed any."

"Oh, dear! That's too bad of her. Now I shall have to go away without seeing her again. She was late last year too."

"I'm sorry," said Peter. "Maybe I could give her a message

for you. She'll show up some time. Why do you have to go away? Can't you wait till she comes?"

"I can't very well," Snowdrop hesitated a little. "You see, I have to be somewhere else soon."

"But you can't move. How can you go away?" Peter looked carefully and saw that the snowdrop was firmly rooted to the Spot.

"Oh, that's easy. I just die here and bloom higher up the mountain, and farther up north."

"Oh, I see," said Peter doubtfully, but he wasn't at all sure that he did. "I'll have to ask Uncle Peppercorn about this," he thought to himself.

"Did you want me?" Peter knew Uncle Peppercorn's voice and looked all around, but he was nowhere in sight. Then he heard a familiar chuckle.

"Here, on your sleeve," said Uncle Peppercorn. "Don't look so startled."

"I'm not," mumbled Peter. "Not at all. But I wish you'd give me warning."

"Well, what did you want to ask me?"

Peter racked his brains. "I'm afraid I've forgotten."

"About me," said Snowdrop.

"Oh, yes! How did you know?"

"You were using my language," said Snowdrop. "You know . . . thought-language."

"Yes, Uncle Peppercorn, how can she move?"

"Remember about the earth going round the track?" asked Uncle Peppercorn.

"Oh, " said Peter. "You mean we're getting this end nearer the sun and that makes spring come here. Now I understand. But why must she go somewhere else?"

"Well, spring is moving northward, of course."

"Oh, dear!" said Peter. "It looked so easy from away out there, but it's very complicated from here, isn't it?"

"Well, look!" Uncle Peppercorn jumped to the ground and stood leaning against the snowdrop. He turned to apologize. "You don't mind, do you?"



"Not a bit," said Snowdrop. "Just don't push my petals. They're about ready to fall off." She paused. "Unless, of course, you'd rather I left you."

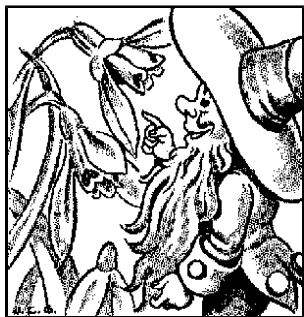
"No, no," said Uncle Peppercorn. "Do stay for a while."

"Now," he said, turning to Peter, "Snowdrop here He gave her stem a gentle pat.

"Ouch!" said Snowdrop. "There goes my first petal." And a creamy petal fluttered to the ground.

"I'm so sorry," said Uncle Peppercorn. "It must have been very loose."

"Go on, don't mind me, said Snowdrop bravely, but her head began to droop a little lower.



"Well, as I was saying

Uncle Peppercorn continued. "Oh, dear, there she goes again." And another petal fell softly at his feet.

"Never mind, I'll say goodbye now," said Snowdrop faintly. "I'll see you later. I'm just starting to bud up north."

"I think I understand, said Peter. "I think you do too," said Uncle Peppercorn, and vanished.

Chapter Five



But You Do Babble, Don't You?

Peter was feeling rather sad at leaving the little dead snowdrop and he started to walk up the mountain to see if he could find another.

After a while he came to a brook that was singing to itself, as it danced and sparkled over the pebbles.

"Hullo, Peter. Nice to see you."

"Hullo." Peter looked all around to see who was talking.

"Here," giggled Brook, "you should know my voice. It's louder than usual, because I'm full of melting snow from the mountains."

"Oh?" Peter looked toward the snowy crest where the brook had its spring, and he suddenly thought of something.

"Did you see a snowdrop up there?" he asked.

"A few, " said Brook. "They're just starting, but it's still rather early. It's much colder up there, you know."

"What about violets?"

"Not yet," said Brook, "but they'll come. Why, were you looking for some?"

"Well, yes. A snowdrop asked me to give her regards to a violet, and I haven't seen one yet."

"You will, chanted Brook. "Do you want to sing with me? I'm awfully busy, with so much snow-water to carry all the way to Ocean, and I. always sing when I work."

"Why do you have to work so hard?" asked Peter.



"I do it because I like to." Brook gave an extra little swirl between two big stones, and twisted and churned with delight.

"Ocean is always sending a lot of water up into the clouds, and the clouds drop their snow on the mountains. Then I have to carry it all back to Ocean, so it can start all over again."

"What a waste of time, 11 said Peter.

"Waste of time, indeed!" Brook bubbled indignantly. "What would you do if I didn't bring you nice fresh clean water to drink, I'd like to know? And how would anything grow? Things don't live without water, you know. EVERYTHING depends on the work I do."

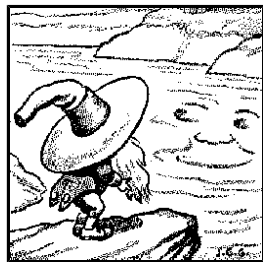


"Oh, I'm sorry," said Peter. "I didn't mean to hurt your feelings. I'm sure you're very important."

"Well, " said Brook, bubbling softly, "I'm not the only brook, you know. Let's get this straight. I don't want you to think we brooks are conceited or anything. Some brooks have made that mistake and tried to make out they were the only dribbles in the world. And what happened?" He paused. "They dried up! And that was the end of them. No, we brooks aren't important, but the work we do is very important. Like you. You aren't important. But you THINK! And that's very important. See what I mean?"

"You mean my thinking is more important than I am? I don't understand that," said Peter.

"Oh, dear!" said a familiar voice. Peter turned and saw Uncle Peppercorn perched on a small rock. "You're always getting puzzled about something," he grumbled. "I guess that's what I get for giving a small boy the Big Year. Well, what do you want to know?"



"Brook says I'm not important but my thinking is. How can a thought be more important than a thinker?"

"It isn't," said Uncle Peppercorn. "But if you didn't think you wouldn't be a thinker. See?"

"Oh, now I understand," said Peter.

"That's what Brook means, " said Uncle Peppercorn. "He talks so much, he doesn't say anything very clearly, but he means well."

"Means well, indeed!" Brook spluttered angrily. "What could be clearer than I am?" and he calmed his crystal water so that Peter could see every pebble in the cool deep.

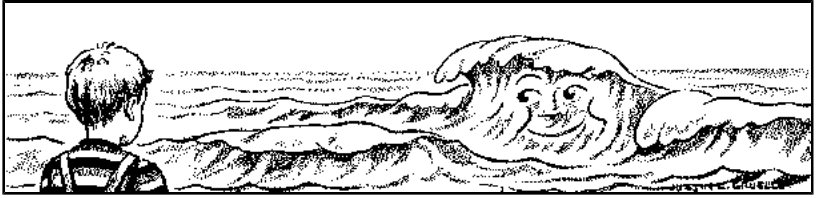
"You are very clear and beautiful, we all know that," said Uncle Peppercorn, "but you do babble, don't you?"

"Of course I do. That's my job," gurgled Brook happily and sent up a spray of foam that almost drowned poor Uncle Peppercorn, so that he had to vanish quickly.

"He's an old pepper-pot, isn't he?" chuckled Brook.



Chapter Six



It All Has to be Washed

For quite a long time Peter followed the brook. It wound through forests and plains and fields until it became a big river. On the way he met Violet and gave her Snowdrop's message.

Violet blew him a puff of perfume and thanked him.

"Give my love to Rose, when you see her," she said.

After a long time the big river came down to the ocean. Peter had never met Ocean before.

"It's awfully big," he whispered to himself. "How can there be that much water?"

"You don't see very much of it," roared Ocean, and splashed huge waves on the shore with a scatter of spray. "There's much more underneath."

"How far does it go?" Peter asked.

"Well, you see where the edge seems to be?" said Ocean. "That's just the beginning. It looks like an edge because that's where the earth turns over. Wherever you go on my surface, you'll still keep seeing the edge all around. Like an ant on a baseball."

Peter laughed. He could imagine an ant on a baseball thinking the edge of the world was where he couldn't see any farther. It would look just like a plate. Like the ocean, in fact.

Peter picked up a pebble and threw it at a big wave. Then he remembered that Ocean was alive too, and he hastened to apologize.

"Oh, that's all right," said Ocean. "People do that all the time. I don't mind at all. It saves me the trouble of inching the stones down one by one."

"Do you have to do that?"

"Oh, yes. Sooner or later every grain of sand comes down to the bottom, and all those that are on the bottom come up on the beach. It's a regular turning over all the time."

"Why?" asked Peter.

"It all has to be washed. You wouldn't wear the same clothes forever without washing them, would you?"

"There must be an awful lot of stones on the bottom, then."

"Sure there are. Some of them come down from high mountains and get smaller and smaller on the way."

"But how do they get down?" asked Peter.



Suddenly Uncle Peppercorn appeared, crawling out of Peter's pocket.

"Ouch!" said Peter. "That tickles."

"Nonsense!" said Uncle Peppercorn.

"I'm too little to tickle anybody."

He assumed his best schoolmaster manner and pointed his tiny finger at Peter, as he balanced on a button of Peter's shirt.

"You wanted to know how the pebbles get down. What do you think Brook was doing? Eh?"

"Carrying water," said Peter. "What else?"

"You'd be surprised how much else goes along with the water, said Uncle Peppercorn. "Stones and seeds and rubbish and weeds. All kinds of things."

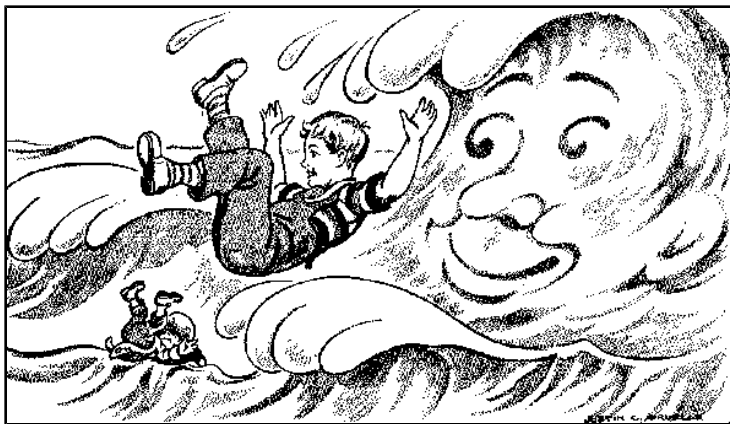
Suddenly he laughed. "You're a funny boy. 'Don't you want to play in the water?"

"Oh!" cried Peter. "May I? Won't Ocean mind?"

"Of course not!" Ocean burst into a broad laugh all along the edge, and all the little waves broke into a thousand ripples of laughter. "Come on in, the water's fine!"

Peter rushed down to the edge and began to play in the water. Big white horses came racing along the surface and broke into galloping foam that turned into smaller and smaller ripples. But they were all careful to soften down near Peter. They can be rather rough sometimes, and Peter was so small and helpless, when they tumbled all over him and rolled him round and round.

At last he sat down on the beach, quite tired, and he found



that Uncle Peppercorn was still clinging to his buttonhole, drenched and miserable.

"Why, Uncle Peppercorn!" he cried in dismay. "You're all wet! Why didn't you disappear and keep dry?"

"Well," grumbled Uncle Peppercorn, shaking the water out of his hat, a little water won't hurt me, but a lot of it might hurt you. Got to look after you, you know."

With that he vanished.



Chapter Seven



It All Comes from the Root, You Know

Ocean was sorry to see Peter go and brought up a beautiful shell for Peter to take with him. It was a cowrie that Peter could put to his ear and hear Ocean roaring far away, as if it were inside the shell. He walked for a long time, meeting many strange things, but quite often he would stop and take the shell out of his pocket and listen to the song of Ocean deep inside.

One day he was walking through a wood. There were many trees and they were all full of bright green leaves, and dull green leaves, light green leaves and dark green leaves, and most of them had flowers and smelled good.

Peter sniffed the air and listened to their whispering about him.

"That's Peter," he heard one tree say to another. "He's

been given the Big Year. Do you think we should talk to him or shall we wait until he asks us something?" Because trees are very well-bred and never upset your thoughts if you want to be quiet. But Peter had heard the soft murmur. He turned to the walnut-tree and smiled.

"I didn't mean to listen," he said, "but I couldn't help hearing what you said. Would you like to talk to me?"

"Of course, said Walnut. "Is there anything you want to talk about particularly?"

"I was just wondering," said Peter, "where you got your pretty clothes. You looked quite sad and bare when I passed this way before."

"We grow them ourselves," rustled Birch. She swayed gracefully in the breeze. "I'm glad you like them."

"I think they're beautiful," said Peter. "How do you do it?"

"Oh, it all comes from the root, you know," chimed in Maple. "The life starts underground and grows from inside, until we get big and grow more and more leaves and pretty things."

"I wish I could do that, 11 said Peter sadly. "My clothes are kind of ragged-looking next to yours."

"Oh, but you do grow yours," growled a big oak. "Never grumble, young man. You grow even more wonderful clothes than we do."



"What DO you mean?" exclaimed Peter, looking down at his faded jeans.

"I don't mean your outside clothes. I mean your body," said Oak.

"What about it?" Peter was really puzzled now.

"Uh-huh! I knew you wouldn't get far without calling on me, came the voice of Uncle Peppercorn from Peter's shoulder. "NOW what's puzzling you?"

"Oak there says I grow my body. How can I?"

"Well, look at yourself," said Uncle Peppercorn. "You've got a different body from everybody else, haven't you?"

"Oh, sure," said Peter.

"Well, it's a Peter-body. See? Oak has an Oak-body. I

have an Uncle Peppercorn-body - more or less. Rather less, really, because mine is kind of special."

"I see that, said Peter. "You keep vanishing, so it isn't a very solid one. But how do I grow mine?"

"From inside, of course. You're you, so you grow one to fit you. You wouldn't fit in any other."

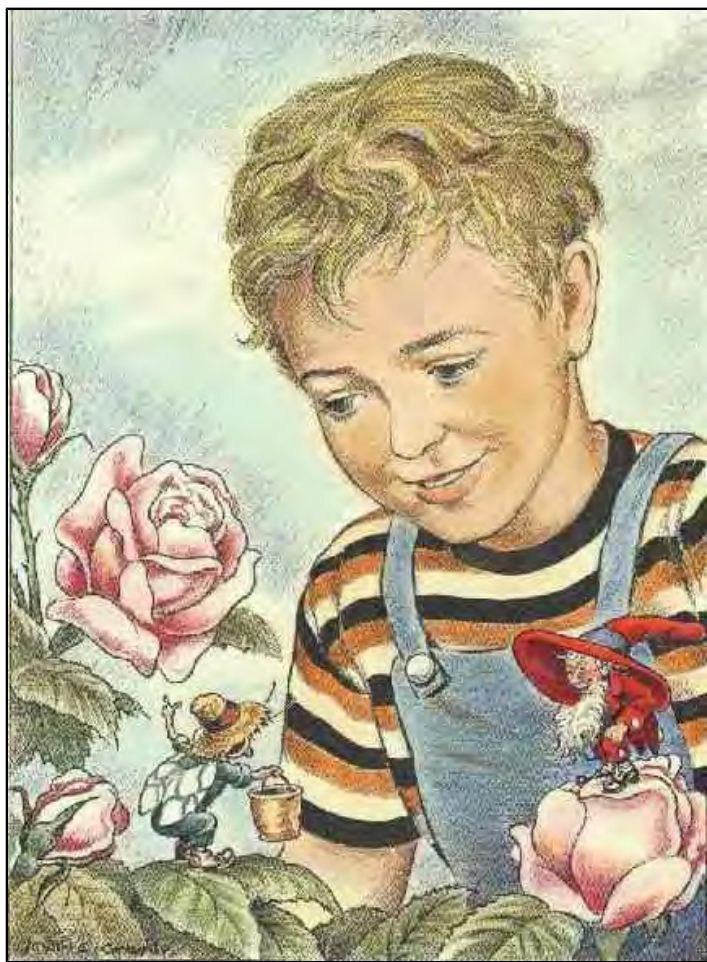
Peter thought for a long time. Then he said: "Of course. That explains why everybody looks different. Because they ARE different."

"Hm!" said Uncle Peppercorn. "It's time you met some other flowers. Have you delivered that message to the rose yet?"

"I haven't seen a rose yet," said Peter.

"O.K., come along." Uncle Peppercorn leaped to the ground and started off. His little legs took him along so fast that Peter could only just manage to keep up. Soon they came to a lovely garden. There were white roses and red roses, iris, lilies and lupine, purple pansies and golden primroses. And here and there was a dandelion that had managed to keep out of the gardener's sight long enough to blossom.

Uncle Peppercorn stopped by a bush with pale pink roses. A big golden bee fumbled past Peter and crept into a half open rose.



"What's he doing?" asked Peter.

"He's getting honey from the rose," said Uncle Peppercorn.



"That isn't all he's doing," smiled Rose. "He's picking up pollen on his woolly coat and taking it over to the other roses."

"What for?"

"Because the pollen has to go to other roses so they can grow seeds. The bees all help us and we help them. Didn't you know that everything works together?"

Peter was thinking. "I think I see," he murmured. "The brook helps the ocean, the ocean washes the land, the land feeds the trees, the flowers feed the insects, the insects carry the pollen. Gee, it's wonderful, isn't it?"

Then a new thought struck him.

"What do I do?" he asked. "I seem to be the only useless one in the whole lot. Maybe I could carry pollen or something. I'm afraid I'd be too clumsy, though," he added sadly.

"Don't worry, Peter." Uncle Peppercorn's voice was unusually kind. "You'll have your own work to do. You can't ever do somebody else's, so you'll just have to find your own. But you will in time."

He jumped up on Peter's shoulder, and snuggled into his collar.

"Walk along a bit," he whispered, "I don't want Rose to hear this."

"Just a minute, " said Peter, remembering his promise to Violet. "Violet sent you her love, Rose. Goodby now."

"Goodby," whispered Rose, opening a new petal.

As Peter walked away from the rose-bush, Uncle Peppercorn said:

"I don't want to hurt her feelings, because she can't do the wonderful things you are going to do."

"Me! Why I'm no good for anything," said Peter unhappily.

"You are good for much more than these others." Uncle Peppercorn was stern again. "Remember I said you can think?"

"M-m-m - yes."

"Well, ALL this is a great big thought," said Uncle Peppercorn, waving his arm to the garden and the fields around. "It's a beautiful thought of a great and wonderful mind."

"Oh , Gee! Do you think I can think . . . "

"Now, wait a minute," said Uncle Peppercorn, "you're only just starting. But you can think fine and useful thoughts, and if, you remember not to think of yourself, some day you'll be a thinker of worlds like this too."

Suddenly Uncle Peppercorn was gone and Peter was alone again. But he didn't mind. He had so much to think about.



Chapter Eight

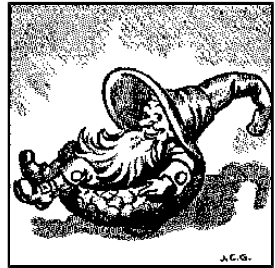
You've Got Something Very Precious

All through the summer Peter wandered through the Woods and fields and learned to speak the different languages of all the woodland creatures.

"Oh, dear, he was thinking to himself, "the sunshine is starting to move south again and autumn is coming. Soon my Big Year will be over and I'll never be able to talk to the fields and the trees any more."

"Cheer up, Peter," said the voice of Uncle Peppercorn. The little man was sitting in an acorncup, rocking gently back and forth.

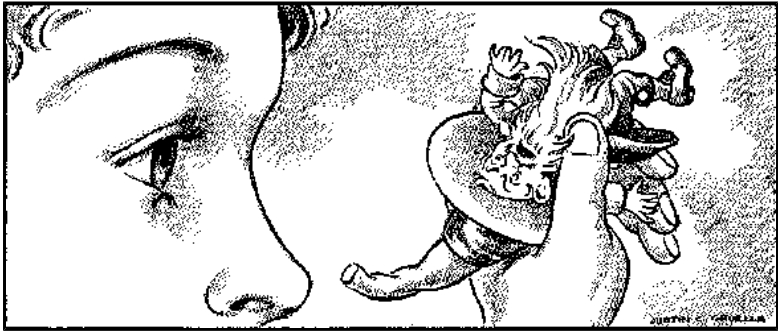
"You've got something very precious, that you can keep forever."



"What's that?" asked Peter, surprised.

"You've got Memory. If you can keep your mind from getting cloudy with all the cobwebs people collect as they grow up, you'll continue to have the Big Year for ever and ever. It will be a Big Life instead of just one year."

"Oh, Uncle Peppercorn!" Peter could have hugged him, but



he was afraid of hurting his little friend. So he just picked him up and held him high in front of his face. "Do you really mean that?"

"If you'll put me down. . . !" spluttered Uncle Peppercorn indignantly. "This is no position for a dignified old gentleman!"

Then Peter saw that he was holding Uncle Peppercorn upside down. He quickly apologized and turned him over. Uncle Peppercorn straddled Peter's little finger and went on talking:

"You still have some time left before the year is over, anyway, and the more you manage to find out, the more treasures you'll have to remember. So you'd better get on with it," he added sternly and vanished.

Chapter Nine

I'm Getting Very Sleepy

Peter was in a hurry. He wanted to find out as much as he could before the Big Year was over, and he didn't know where to begin. He rushed along so fast he hardly noticed that a twig from his old friend Maple had caught in his shirt and held him back.

"Oh," he gasped. "Let me go."

"Where are you going so fast?" asked Maple, but Peter was already far away.

He stumbled over a root of the big oak and fell flat on his face.

"What's your hurry?" grumbled Oak. "You might stop and say how-do-you-do to your friends."

"Where are you rushing to, anyway?" rustled Birch.

Peter, who was just ready to run on, stopped short.

"I - I don't know," he stammered.

"If you took time out to look where you're going you might not miss so much," grouched Oak. "And it would save wear and tear on your knees, too," he added, looking at Peter's legs.

"Oh, dear!" said Peter. "They're bleeding."



"Here!" said a new voice, and Peter saw a broad flat leaf on the ground. "My name's Dock. Put me on your knee and it'll stop bleeding."

"Thank you!" said Peter as he wrapped the dock-leaf around his sore knee.

"Say," he said, looking at Maple, "you ARE pretty. And you too," he added to Birch. Birch shook her golden leaves gaily and said: "Nice, aren't they? They won't last long though."

"Oh, that's too bad," said Peter.

"It doesn't matter," said Birch, "I'll grow new ones in spring. I like green better anyway."

"You vain little thing," mumbled Oak. "In a way, I'd rather like to be an evergreen."

"What's the difference?" asked Peter.

"You know those firs and pines," said Oak, "they have needles for leaves, and they're green all the time."

"I heard a juniper say he was tired of it, though," said Peter. "You're probably better off as you are."

"Peter's right," said Maple, rustling her crimson dress. "I wouldn't want to change my brilliant colors for little green needles, even if they do last. Besides, they don't. They're changing all the time. That's why the tree always looks green."

"Why, that's what I do," said Peter. "I always look like me, but I know I'm not, because I'm changing so fast I'm never the same twice."

"I guess we all do," said Oak. He yawned loudly. "Ho,



hum! It's going to feel good to go to sleep." Suddenly he shouted loudly:

"Hi, there! Going back?"

Peter looked up and saw a flock of wild geese flying overhead. They flew in two lines like a big V.

The leading goose answered without breaking the beautiful formation:

"Hullo there, Oak. Still awake?"

"Just going to turn in," answered Oak. "Would you mind giving me a shout to wake me up when you come back?"

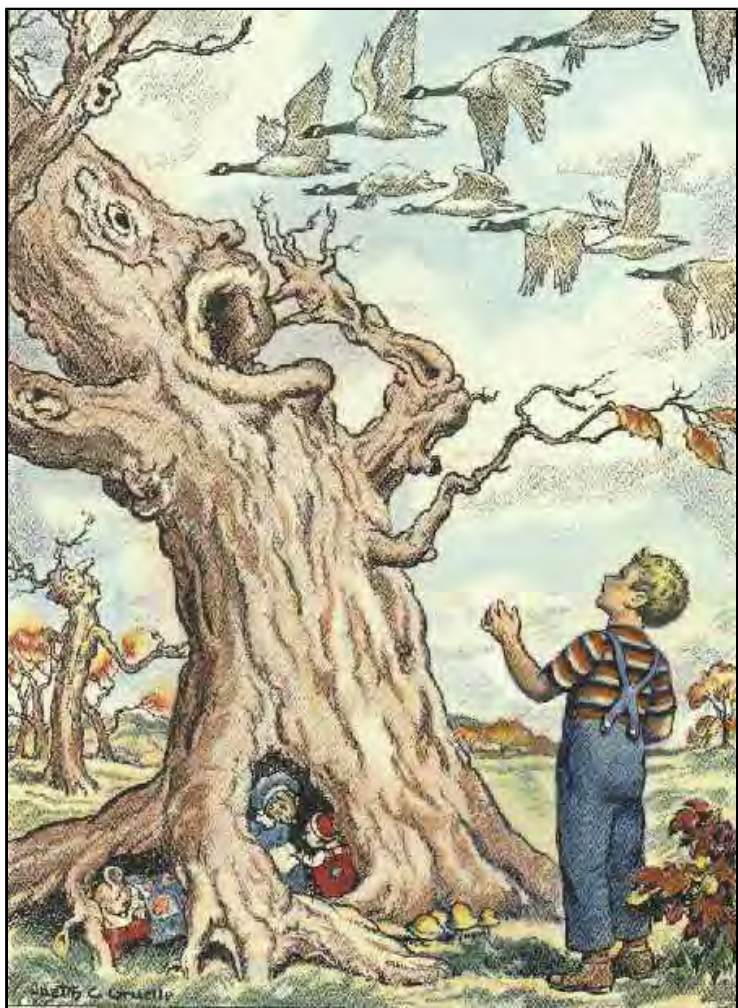
"Sure, don't we always?" said Goose. "We'll be back with the sunshine. Goodby now."

"Goodby, goodby!" came the echo, as all the geese made their farewells, still keeping perfectly in line, and disappeared quickly to the south.

"Well, I don't know about you fellows," said Birch, "but I'm getting very sleepy. Most of my sap has gone back down to my roots already and they're starting to grow, so I think I'll say good-night. You'll excuse me if I go to sleep?" she asked Peter.

"Of course," said Peter. "Goodnight."

The oak was already asleep, so Peter quietly walked away.



He felt rather lonely, and he wished Uncle Peppercorn would come and talk to him, but Uncle Peppercorn didn't show up. By this time Peter knew that the little man only came to answer questions, so he tried to think of a really difficult question to make him come, but he couldn't think of one. Then he began looking around to see what he could find out for himself. Suddenly he thought of something. The geese! What were they doing, going south?

"Uncle Peppercorn!" he called. "Oh, Uncle Peppercorn!"

"Don't make such a deafening noise!" said Uncle Peppercorn. "I can't hear myself think. What do you want to know?"

Uncle Peppercorn was perched on Peter's shoulder, with his fingers in his ears.

"The geese, Uncle Peppercorn. How do they know where they're going?"



"That's a good question," said Uncle Peppercorn. "How does your blood know where it's going in you?"

"In me?" Peter was surprised. "What's that got to do with . . . "

"Answer my question!" said Uncle Peppercorn sternly.

"Well, there are veins and things."

"Exactly! just as there are veins and arteries in you, there are veins and arteries in the earth and the air too. The geese just follow those streams of life. Easy when you know how."

"Oh!" Peter thought for a moment. "You mean they go and come back along a road you can't see?"

"That's right."

"Oh!" cried Peter. "Isn't that what the earth is doing when it goes round the sun?"

"Got it the first time!" Uncle Peppercorn looked pleased and he beamed at Peter.

"Peter, my boy, you're doing ALL RIGHT!"

Then he vanished, leaving Peter with a warm feeling in his heart.

Chapter Ten



I'm Going to Take You Back Now

The ground was hard and it was getting colder. Peter knew that the Big Year was almost over.

"Round the sun! Round the sun!" he was thinking to himself. "Wonder what the sun goes round?"

"Peter!" said the voice of Uncle Peppercorn.

Peter looked around and saw the little man leaning on a small mushroom.

"You've got to go home now," said Uncle Peppercorn.

"Oh, Uncle Peppercorn," Peter almost cried, "I haven't found out half the things I want to yet." Then he remembered he had been away a whole year. He wondered if his mother and father would be very worried. Funny how he had forgotten all about them for a whole year!

"Don't worry," said Uncle Peppercorn. "They don't know you've been away."

"But a whole year!" exclaimed Peter.

"That's what you think," said Uncle Peppercorn.

Suddenly he jumped up on Peter's foot and quickly scrambled up to his shoulder.

"Hang on tight!" he shouted, and they were suddenly off, away into the blue sky.

They landed as before on the big beautiful star that Peter remembered.

"The beginning and the end," said Uncle Peppercorn. "Always the same, you know."

Peter didn't quite understand.

"Why do we have to come here?" he asked.

"Because you have to see for yourself," said Uncle Peppercorn. "Now, where is the earth?"

"The third speck from the little sun to the left of the big one.

"Quite right! Can you see whereabouts it is on the track?"

"The same place as last time," said Peter.

"What does that mean?" asked Uncle Peppercorn in his sternest voice.

"Well, doesn't it mean that it has been once round the sun and come back?" said Peter.

"Peter, said Uncle Peppercorn, patting Peter's neck - it felt like a kiss from a firefly, thought Peter - "Peter, you are a credit to me. I'm going to take you back now. just remember this. If you always love the earth and everything on it, as you do now, you'll continue to have the Big Year all your life. And you must never be afraid of anything, because INSIDE you are the real Peter, and nothing can ever hurt YOU."

Uncle Peppercorn gave Peter's ear a friendly tug. Then he shouted:

"Come on!"

They raced through the heavens with the thousand flashing diamond-stars. Peter felt as if he were a star too, shooting along a great road that nobody could see, but that he knew about somehow.

Suddenly he found himself in his little white bed and felt himself just waking up. His eyes opened slowly. It was his own room. Nothing was changed. His rollerskates lay in the corner where he had left them last night. The wildflowers on the dresser weren't even faded.

"Why!" Peter cried, sitting up, "it was only a dream after all!"

But was it only a dream? For years later Peter could still hear the voices of nature. And sometimes, when he listened very carefully, he could understand.

the end

