

Oooh, I hope you're back, because the story's starting up again and I wouldn't want you to miss any of it.

After the loooooong silence, the Boggart asked Joe: 'It wouldn't be that you were after a reward, would it?'

'What reward?' asked Joe, who didn't read newspapers.

'Nothing, nothing at all,' said the Boggart, twirling his tail charmingly and lying through his teeth.

(Sorry to keep interrupting, but that is a strange phrase, isn't it? How else can you tell a lie, except through your teeth? Unless you are writing, of course, as I am doing ...)

'So can you help?' asked Joe, gloomily.

'Well, as it happens, I can and I can't,' said the Boggart, ferreting about in his rucksack. He then drew out a scroll and waved it in front of Joe's face. Joe wrinkled his nose.

'It smells of socks.'

'Socks?' snarled the Boggart. 'Socks? It's made of finest green cheese, flattened paper-thin by water buffaloes. I keep it in my rucksack to save it from mice.'

Joe held his nose and peered at the scroll.



'Forgive me for saying so, but that's not very helpful,' said Joe.

Stationery Is Never Stationary

By Morris Gleitzman

'Come on, both of you,' said Mum. 'We'll be late. Jack, switch that game off and get your shoes on. If we don't leave soon, it won't be worth going.'

It's never worth going, thought Jack gloomily. Big family get-togethers should be banned.

While he tied his shoes, Jack imagined a world without Christmas, Easter, birthdays, engagements, weddings, babies, anniversaries, funerals, public holidays, exam results, holiday videos, new houses, overseas trips, footy grand finals and hearing about people's operations. Heaven.

Because that would be a world where big families wouldn't have any reason to get together. And innocent dads wouldn't feel like losers just because of their jobs.

'Amazing,' said Dad, still on the couch gazing at his laptop. 'There's a company in Japan that makes teflon-coated staples.'

'Archie,' Mum said to him, her voice loud with exasperation. 'We'll be late.'

'Do we have to go?' said Jack to Mum, like he always did.

'Yes,' said Mum, like she always did. 'Uncle Pete wants us all to see his new home entertainment set-up. Plus it's Auntie Sue's birthday tomorrow, my cousin Niall's just back from Venezuela, Auntie Anthea wants us to meet her new boyfriend and we have to talk about where we're going to have Christmas. Archie, if you don't switch that computer off, I'll brain you with it.'

In the car on the way there, Jack felt miserable like he always did when he and Mum and Dad got together with the rest of the family.

Then he made a vow.

This time he'd try even harder. This time he'd do it. This time he'd make the rest of the family respect Dad's job.

In the driver's seat, Dad turned to Mum. 'You know what this means,' he said.