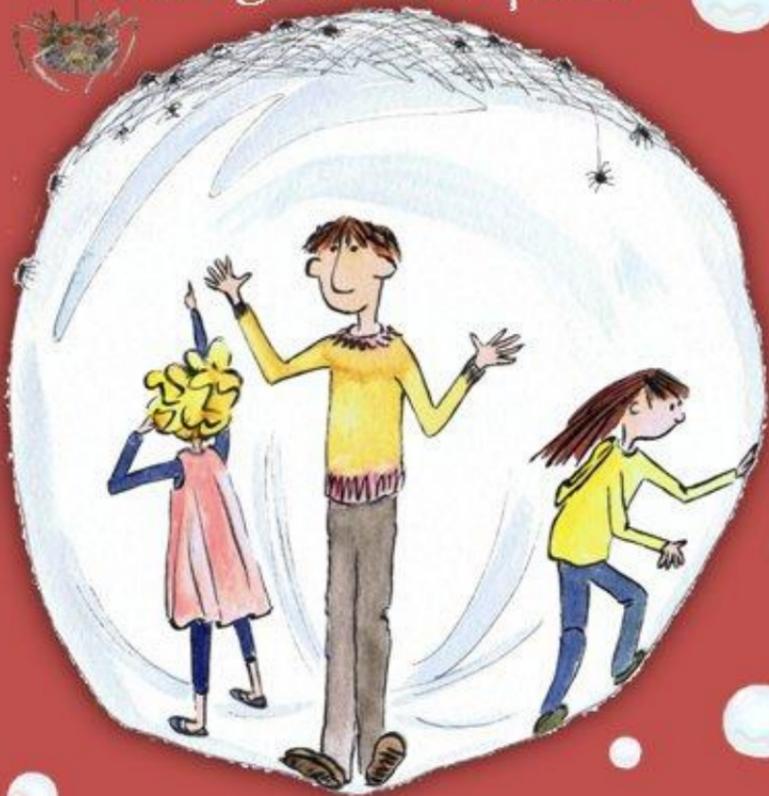


Polly's
Magic
Bubbles

Revenge of the Spiders



Mark Dorey



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Belongs To:



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To Lizzie with much Love



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Polly's *Magic* Bubbles

Revenge of the Spiders



Mark Dorey

illustrated by Liz Dorey



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Polly's *Magic* Bubbles

Revenge of the Spiders

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Chapter One

BEING FOLLOWED...

Polly thought she was being followed.

Polly sensed she was being followed.

Polly **knew** she was being followed.

There were other kids walking home from school on the opposite side of the road and they were definitely not following her.

But someone, or worse still, *something* was.

Polly tried her absolute best not to glance over her shoulder, but the skitterings in her stomach were getting worse and worse – *she just had to know*. She tried half-looking, almost, sort of, but not quite just innocently turning her head, but even that was no good. She couldn't see anything.



The longer she walked, the more certain she became. Something was there, and it was following her.

What she needed was a good look. A very definite 'turn around and look' look. But deep down, Polly was too afraid of what she might discover if she did look.

If only Marcia were here. Of all the times for her best friend to be ill.

SHE NEEDED MARCIA NOW!

Polly was on her own with someone or *something* following her. She slipped her right hand into her pocket, scrabbling with desperate fingers.

Empty.

Trying not to panic, she plunged her left hand into her other pocket.

Empty.

Wait a minute – *what was she searching for?*

Unable to answer her own question, Polly weighed up her options, quickly realising that short of breaking into a run (and who knew what might happen then?), there was really only one other option left. She would have to turn around and confront whatever it was.

Polly slowed, taking a deep breath as she quietly built up her resolve. Before she could change her mind, she decided that she would spin around on a count of three...

One... Two... Three!

Polly spun on her heel.

No one was there. Well, not quite no one.

A squirrel – looking more like a skunk than a squirrel – stood motionless about twenty feet away, looking every bit as startled as Polly was. In the endless seconds that followed, the nine-year-old and the skunk-squirrel stared at each other. Then in a flash it was gone, scampering up a nearby tree at the side of the road.

The skitterings in her stomach now gone, Polly turned to continue on her way home with a new lightness in her step.

Then, without warning, the skitterings returned.

There was something else about the squirrel.

But what was it?

Polly turned again.

The skunk-squirrel was nowhere to be seen.

DANGER! DANGER! DANGER!

An overwhelming and unrelenting sense of menace gripped her, its cold fingers squeezing tighter and tighter...



POLLY'S MAGIC BUBBLES – REVENGE OF THE SPIDERS

Some boys across the road were shouting and messing about, up to their typical boy nonsense. Slowly, deliberately, Polly began to approach the tree, all the time scanning its leafy canopy; the leaves quite, quite still.

Wait... a movement, just up and to the left.

Polly pushed her shivering senses aside as she took a few more steps. Standing right next to the tree trunk, she became transfixed by the sunlight dancing and mottling its knobbly bark.

Something caught her peripheral vision.

There it was again.

A definite movement.

Red, glowing eyes peered, sharp and defiant from the clumps of leafy green.

Then down it came. A mass of legs and a giant black bulbous body. The spider was already weaving a large web, impossibly quickly. The silken net entrapped her.

Unable to move, Polly looked on helplessly as the spider closed in, dark eyes blazing with hatred as its giant pincers clicked with deadly menace.

Polly tried to scream.

TOO LATE!

Another web gagged her mouth.

Gasping for breath, Polly fell to the floor wondering what on earth was going to happen next...







Chapter Two

A MESSING WITH TIME

Polly stared at the ceiling.

She was in her bed with no sign of spiders or creepy squirrels anywhere to be seen.

What a strange dream!

Polly looked towards the window, still a little breathless, her heartbeat racing. She closed her eyes to try and calm herself.

DISASTER!

Giant spiders imprinted like dark shadows crawled along the insides of her eyelids. Opening her eyes, Polly just lay there as motionless as possible, letting her heart begin to slow back to its normal rhythm.

The nightmare firmly behind her, Polly sat up, brushing her hair away from her face. Something snagged her mouth. Polly's eyes grew wide in horror as she pulled at the slender thread.

It wasn't a dream after all – it was real!

Polly tried not to panic.

She needed help. She would go and see Marcia. Then she remembered, her best friend was still unwell. Polly strengthened her resolve – she would go and see her anyway. This was an emergency.

There was a knock on the door.

"Pol?" Jake's voice sounded from behind the door. Her older brother rarely talked to her, and even less so since becoming a teenager. "Pol, it's Dad!"

Polly hurried to the door, swinging it open. Jake's greasy face bobbed up and down nervously on his scrawny neck, beneath a mop of unkempt hair.

"What's up with Dad?"

Jake stared.

"Jake, what's up with Dad?"

Her brother was pointing, staring intently, almost mesmerised. "You've got something hanging from your mouth. Is that a spi—?"



THE RING AND THE BOOK

“For goodness sake, Jake, it doesn’t matter what it is! What’s up with Dad?”

“Oh, nothing really, he’s lost his pipe and was wondering if you’d seen it.”

Polly stared at her brother, incredulously. *“Is that it?”*

“Yeah, guess so,” shrugged Jake, a little sheepishly.

Polly slammed the door.

Dad’s pipe was his most treasured possession and a bit of a curiosity, even by pipe standards. Obviously very old, it was quite long and intricately carved with what looked like vines winding all along the pipe stem, eventually wrapping themselves around an over-sized bowl. On each side of the pipe bowl, small faces could be seen peeping out from behind the vines, happy on the one side and angry on the other. The inside of the pipe bowl was unusual in that not only was it spotless with no evidence of ever having been ‘smoked’, but also it had funny swirly patterns carved on the inside, like some sort of ancient writing.



Dad had been drawn to the pipe as soon as he spotted it in an old antique shop when Mum, Dad and a very young Jake were on holiday, and Mum was pregnant with Polly. Dad loved walking around with the pipe in his mouth, puffing away even though he never put tobacco in it. Mum insisted that Dad's 'pipe romance', as she called it, had something to do with his liking for dressing in antiquated tweed waistcoats and jackets (always bought from charity shops), and watching old black and white movies whenever he got the chance.

Both Polly and her Mum suspected that Dad had a secret yearning to be a 1920s college professor, and his pipe and old-fashioned clothes were the closest he ever came to achieving his ambition. Despite all his quirkiness, everyone was secretly relieved that Dad kept his pipe unlit – there would be nothing worse than Dad going around puffing like an old steam engine filling the house with pongy pipe fumes.

Polly extracted the sticky spider strand from her mouth for a closer look.

Was the dream just a coincidence?

'You can never be too sure of spiders!' whispered a strange voice.

Polly spun around.

No one was there.

Was she dreaming again?

Could this be a dream inside a dream?

Was anything ever going to make sense?

Polly pinched herself. **OUCH!**

Definitely not a dream! The spider's web was real, her brother was real, and as for Dad's missing pipe, well, who really cared where that was.

'The spiders are real too!'

The whispering voice from nowhere was starting to freak her out.

There was another knock on the door.

Polly nearly yanked the door off its hinges. "What is it now, Jak—!?"

"Spiders are real too," said the man, doffing his battered top hat. "Have you seen—?"

Polly slammed the door shut, throwing her full weight against it just to make sure.



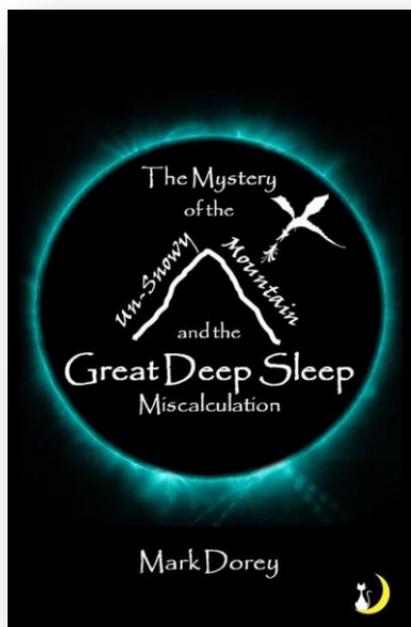
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