



## I THINK EVERYONE SHOULD BE A GRICKLE!

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They're not grubs, and they're not pickles. They're not beans and they're not pebbles. They're Grickles! A Grickle looks like all kinds of things and it looks like nothing you've ever seen before. It can bounce like a rubber ball but it's not one. It's as colourful as a lollypop, but you can't eat it. There are big Grickles and little Grickles. Some Grickles are fat, other Grickles are thin. They're forever coming and going but you can never tell where from or where to...

### I THINK EVERYONE SHOULD BE A GRICKLE!

There's an abandoned meadow somewhere in the world and there live seven Grickles...

It was a sleepy sunny morning like many other mornings in the abandoned meadow. The Grickles were lying around lazily on the the velvety grass that grew green and glossy on the top of their mound.

"Has anyone else noticed that all the stories start just like this?" Jello said in a dreamy tone.

(Are the Grickles lying around again?)

"We just lie around here," Bela mumbled, "and then something always seems to happen..."

"And do you think something will today, too?" Firdle asked still half asleep.

No sooner had he said this than the Grickles heard the sound of heavy hoofs clip-clopping close by.

"There you go!" Titus sighed, and stood up to see where the strange sound was coming from.

(Ladies and gentlemen, we are just flying over the abandoned meadow...)

A six-legged horsehound was standing at the base of the mound.

"Oh, you Grickles live a long way away!" it panted.

"A long way away from where?" Titus asked.

"From there!" the horsehound said, pointing a hoof into the distance.

"Everyone lives a long way away from the horizon," Titus shrugged. "What brings you here, pal?"

The horsehound then produced a roll of scroll from its pocket.

(This is the horizon)

This attracted the attention of the other Grickles. The horsehound carefully unrolled the scroll so they could read what was written on it.

(Dear Grickles,  
You are invited to a New Year's Eve fancy dress party in the middle of the meadow! Come in costumes! Today! Music! Dances! Party! Signed: Meadow-FlockFolk.)

"Can you understand that?" Hilda whispered to Titus.  
"I think the meadow-flock have invited us to a fancy-dress party. I mean folk!"  
"New Year's Eve?!" Firdle said staring hard. "But it's nearly summer!"  
"Don't be so picky, Firdle! Just be grateful for the invitation!" Zoz said giving his friend a dig in his twiggy ribs.

"Thanks for thinking of us!" Titus shouted as he turned to the horsehound.  
"It was the magic mushrooms' idea," the messenger shouted back. "The party starts this evening in the middle of the meadow. Will you find your way?"  
"I went there once with Lilwed," Titus nodded.  
"Super!" the horsehound nodded. "See you there then!" And he clip-clopped off.

(I saw Grickles reading on the page before last.  
No way, José!)

"That's wonderful!" Hilda sighed. "But where are we going to get costumes from?"  
"Let's all go and look in our burrows!" Titus suggested. "Maybe a few will turn up..."  
"A few what?" Zoz asked.  
"Well, you never can tell..." Titus told him and hopped back to his Grickle burrow.  
The rest did the same.

(Do clouds need costumes, too?)

If Grickles look for things in their burrows, it looks like this from outside:

"Fasten your seatbelts! We've flown into a storm...  
I didn't know we were having a spring clean...")

The Grickles searched high and low for an hour and a half and this is what they managed to find: Hilda dug up a broken umbrella, Jello discovered three empty tins, Zoz unearthed a deflated bouncy ball, Titus found an old suitcase and a wonky whisk, Lilwed turned up with a yellowed fashion magazine and a tangled ball of string, Bela brought out a dented sieve and a box of nails, but Firdle only managed to produce a purple button.

"Where did all this stuff come from in the first place?" Lilwed said with a shake of her head.  
"It's called the Secret Movement of Stuff," Bela replied. "It's happening all the time but not many people know about it," he explained. "It's pretty boring being stuff. Just sitting around and gathering dust isn't so exciting..."

(Stop yawning all the time...)

(Dust)

(Apparently it's lucky to see a Grickle carrying a sieve.)

(FASHION)

“... And so that's why stuff wake up at night and set out to see the world. They stroll the streets and go for long walks in the country. Braver stuff go so far that they get lost and never manage to find their way back to where they came from in the first place...)

“That's so sad!” Lilwed said with a sigh.

“Not at all!” Bela shook his head. “Stuff love adventure.”

“Where do you know all this from?” Jello asked the oldest Grickle.

“I used to be pen pals with an odd sock,” Bela told them. “And he told me all about how it works.”

(Dear Bela...)

“If I wasn't a Grickle, I think I'd like to be stuff best!” Firdle said.

“That's sounds fine but we really should be more worried about our costumes,” Titus told them all.

“You're quite right!” Hilda nodded. “And I know exactly what I'm going to be!”

The other Grickles waited to hear what she was going to say.

“A palm tree!” she announced with an enthusiastic smile.

(What are they up to?)

“I'm going to be a robot!” Jello shouted.

“I'm going to be a giant ladybird!” Zoz told them.

“I'm going to be a knight in shining armour!” Titus added.

“I'm going to be a flutterby!” Lilwed flapped.

“And I'm going to be a prickly pig!” Bela bellowed.

(What are all these bubbles doing here?)

“And what about you?” the all asked Firdle.

“I think I'm going to be a Grickle who can balance a purple button on his nose.”

“But you're already a Grickle!” Lilwed said as she stared at her friend.

“I'll pretend I'm a totally different Grickle,” Firdle told her.

“Do you think that's a good idea?” the others asked.

“What else can I do with a single purple button?” Firdle asked, and flung his thin arms in the air.

By the time the afternoon arrived, all the Grickles had finished their fancy-dress costumes. Firdle had even put a dickie bow on.

“I've dressed up as an elegant Grickle,” he explained to the others.

“Elegant Grickles don't exist!” Hilda said.

“Just like purple palm trees,” Firdle informed her.

As soon as it got dark, the Grickles made their way to the fancy-dress party.  
“If we bumped into someone now, that someone would surely wonder who on earth we are and that they’ve never seen us around these parts before!” Lilwed said with a chuckle.

(Who on earth are they? I’ve never seen them around these parts before...)

By the time they got there, the party was in full swing in the middle of the meadow.  
“I’m so pleased you’ve all come along!” said a welcoming magic mushroom. “Everyone’s here now and so the fancy-dress competition will start soon!”  
“Where’s the food?” Zoz asked.  
“At the front on the right, next to the cloakroom,” the mushroom replied.

The band were playing their latest hit, *A Shrew Ate My Stew*, when a masked mushroom shouted for quiet.  
“It’s time for the fancy-dress competition. Can everyone please parade in front of the judges’ table!” she said in her best fancy-dress voice.  
“I’m so nervous!” Hilda whispered, and made a few final adjustments to her purple palm leaves.

And so all the competitors paraded up and down.  
“Have you seen that others have dressed up as Grickles?” Jello asked his companions.  
And it was true...  
(Everyone has gone mad here...)

While the judges were debating the final result, a couple of cool carp did a doodaddle dance demonstration for all the partygoers.  
(Toppiry-doppiry-pompiry-bopp!)  
(Hurray!)

After the longest while, a magic mushroom in a marvellous hat walked up to the microphone.  
“Ladies and Gentlemen!” he shouted. “I’m now going to announce the result! And the winner is the *elegant Grickle balancing a purple button on his nose!* Let’s give him a warm round of applause!”  
“Hurray! Hurray!” came the shouts from here and there.

“That’s not fair!” Lilwed sulked.  
“You’re wrong,” Zoz said. “Dressing up as an elegant Grickle is really a very hard thing to do! Not to mention balancing a purple button...”  
“Quite right! We should all be happy for our good friend Firdle!” Bela nodded.

“Grickle costumes are all the craze this year,” said a legged snail that was sitting on a nearby tree stump.  
Then, as if they had heard the snails exact words, the band began to play their latest number *Do the Grickle!*  
“Can you hear that? They’re singing about us!” Jello whooped.

(Happy New Year!)

Everybody was in a perfect party mood.

“I think everyone should be a Grickle tonight!” a zebrabbit shouted into the microphone, and they all immediately started to bounce like Grickles.

A good-looking shrew asked Hilda to dance and a mole dressed as a rocket strutted his funky stuff with Lilwed. Everyone was dancing, even Firdle, who was delighted to be dancing with the prettiest anteater girl he’d ever seen.

The party went on until dawn and the sun was high in the sky by the time the last guests had left.

The Grickles slowly started to make their way back to their mound in the ground.

“I had such a super time!” Lilwed said with a shining smile.

“My bouncing bump is worn down to the bone,” Bela added with a wince.

When they eventually got back, they all flopped down on the side of their mound.

“We should organise the next fancy-dress party!” Hilda told them all.

“Yes, a fancy-dress party,” Firdle added, “where everyone dresses up as themselves!”

“Then who’ll get the first prize?” Jello asked.

But the only answer she got was the sound of loud snoring...

## **A Bag of Stuff for Titus**

(Not another story so soon!)

This happened sometime at the end of the summer. The sun spun across the sky above the meadow like a giant golden pancake.

“Does anyone know what day it is today?” Jello asked the others.

“It’s the somethingth of August,” Bela replied.

“Wasn’t that yesterday?” Firdle asked with a puzzled giggle.

(It’s the tickyeth today!

More like the floppyeth!)

“That’s not right!” Hilda shook her head. “That must mean that today is Titus’s birthday!”

“Again?” Firdle said sounding slightly surprised. “He had one at the same time last year!”

“Some people have a birthday every year,” Lilwed informed her grey friend. “And some people have even more. Like me, for example. I have three...”

“Then we need to get Titus a present!” Jello said.

“It’s lucky that he’s gone off to play prickleball with the hedgehogs,” said Hilda. “That’ll give us time to think up the best present for him.”

All the Grickles began to wrack their brains. These are the things they thought off:

(frozen spinach

battery-operated moustache curler)

“I’m not so certain,” Bela told the others. “Are you sure he’d like things like that?”

“Maybe if everyone goes and has a look in their burrow,” Firdle interrupted. “Perhaps something good will show up...”

“But that’s exactly what we all did in the last story!” Hilda cut in. “Won’t it be boring?”

“What else can we do when there isn’t a single shop in the whole of the meadow?” Jello said holding his arms wide apart.

(No shop this way

No shop this way either

No shop down here!)

Their search didn’t work out all that well.

(A bag of seeds!

A gizmo!

There’s nothing here!

There’s nothing here either!

Or here!

Or here!

What’s going on?

Are you lot looking for something?)

“So, a bag of seeds,” Hilda decided. “I think we can forget the gizmo...”

“Well, it’s more than nothing but still less than something,” Firdle said with a shake of his head.

“It’s not much of a present,” Lilwed said sounding sad.

“That depends!” Jello added. “A bag of *ordinary* seeds isn’t such a big thing, but a bag of *extraordinary*...”

(Nothing•Something)

“They could be anything seeds,” Zoz said as he took a peek into the paper bag. “Spring worm weed, snootle grass, possibly even meadow fur flowers...”

“Or dragon drops,” Lilwed added. “The seeds look exactly the same!”

“Dragon drops only grow in regions inhabited by blood bears,” Bela informed them. “How would a whole bag of those have found its way to the middle of our meadow?”

(Yum, yum! Dragon drops!

I could eat some Grickle meat!)

“Maybe they’re not dragon drop seeds but tropical monkey-paw plant seeds,” Jello conjectured. “And a one-eyed pirate captain brought them to Zoz all the way from the southern seas...”

“Oh, a pirate captain...!” Hilda sighed with a dreamy look in her eyes.

(Monkey-paw plant seeds all the way from Mattress Island!)

“I think they look much more like berries from the fluffy walrus tree,” Firdle said after he took a quick look,” and you got them as a present from a friendly sea lion.”

“I don’t make friends with sea lions, friendly or not,” Zoz said with a shake of his head. “And definitely not with pirate captains or blood bears either...”

“That’s not important now!” Lilwed interrupted. “You should be busy picking flowers instead so that we can decorate the mound for Titus!”

“And while you’re doing that, I can wrap his present with Hilda...”

Thankfully, the meadow was full of flowers at this time of year. Zoz picked a big bunch of spider lilies, Jello plucked a bundle of liondandies, and Bela managed to get his hands on a whole load of cat-lace bell. Oh, and Firdle found a couple of rag-tag weeds, the sort that grow by the side of the road and have little white flowers.

By the time they got back, the present sat neatly wrapped on top of the mound.

“Hilda’s gone off to bake a special carrot cake for Titus!” Lilwed announced with a grin.

“Now the only thing missing is the birthday boy,” Jello said and rubbed his hands together with glee.

“He could be here at any minute!” said Lilwed. “We need to decorate the mound as quickly as we can!”

(I can smell carrot cake!)

“Are you lot preparing for a party?” Titus asked when he eventually arrived back from his prickleball match.

“Hurray for Titus!” the Grickles all shouted at once.

“Happy birthday!” said Hilda, and passed him his present.

Titus could hardly wait to unwrap it.

“If-only bush seeds!” the happy Grickle shouted when he opened the bag.

“What kind of plant is that?” Firdle asked.

“That all depends what you wish for when you plant them...” Titus told him. “That’s why they’re called that.”

“If I say *if only they grew into poppy-seed cakes*, then I’ll get a poppy-seed cake bush?”

“That’s right,” Titus nodded.

“There are exactly seven seeds in the bag,” he added. “That means one for each of us!”

“You’re very kind, Titus, but they’re your present not ours!” the Grickles told him.

“I think the best presents are the presents you share!” Titus said, and he offered the bag around.

“We’ll plant them all by the side of the mound,” he told his Grickle friends. “Then everyone will have their very own if-only bush!”

“But only after we’ve all had some birthday cake!” Zoz said with a hungry smile.

The Grickles made themselves comfy on the grass while Hilda cut the cake and Lilwed poured everyone a glass of pippleberry juice.

“I always thought that if-only bushes only exist in stories,” Jello muttered with his mouth full of cake.

“Nyum!” Bela said, and that could have meant *yes* or *no*. And after that, the sound of crunching, munching, gurgling and slurping filled the sweat-smelling meadow...

(You can draw your very own if-only bush here!

I’m going to see what’s on the last page.)

(Ladies and gentlemen! We are now flying over a cluster of if-only bushes. Which bush belongs to which Grickle?)