

## **Digging Up Dad by Morris Gleitzman**

Every Thursday afternoon, while I'm sitting here with Mum, I think about my dead rellies.

I call them my great great greats.

You know, like in great great great grandad or great great great grandma or great great great dog etc. Except most of my dead rellies need heaps more greats than that, cause most of them lived bulk amounts of time ago.

As Dad always says, life is short.

So make the most of it.

Which is why, as I'm sitting here waiting, I like to pretend I am them, my greats.

Which isn't as crazy as it sounds. We've all got bits of our greats inside us. We're actually made of them, inheritancely speaking. Ask your teacher, if you don't believe me. Or a rellie if you've got one who's still alive and very old, like over fifty.

Today I'm being my great great great etc. Uncle Thyroid. Who was a fearless sloth hunter on the icy slopes of the tundra an incredibly long time ago when they hadn't even invented ski lifts.

The truth is I'm not completely sure his name was Uncle Thyroid.

So I'm partly guessing.

But one thing I do know, which is why I like pretending to be him, he was mega brave.

Gee, it's cold here on this icy tundra that in only a few thousand years will be known as the BP petrol station on the A12 near Colchester.

It is I, Thyroid The Brave, following the tracks of a giant sloth.

I'm doing it because I'm desperate to feed my family, who are shivering in a cave near what one day will be called the Clacton-On-Sea turnoff.

Oops, information update. When I say I'm following the tracks of a giant sloth, it's really just one single track, but a very wide one.

Giant sloths always drag their tummies along the ground when they flee, they can't help it, which makes them much easier to hunt than say, giant stick insects.

Trouble is, this giant sloth's gone high up an icy slope. And I'm having trouble following because of how my hunting boots, which I carved out of ice, keep slipping on all the other ice.

I wish there was a way of getting up there that didn't involve slithering on my tummy.

I know. I'll find myself a walking stick.

Here's a pile of old branches and twigs, must be something here.

Yes, that looks like a good one. Sturdy and stout, perfect for a fearless sloth hunter.

I'll just reach in and drag it out . . .

Oh no, what's tickling my arm?

Please, don't let it be what I think it is.

Let it be a liver-eating tundra wolf instead. I'm nowhere near as scared of those as I am of . . .

Oh no, I don't think this is a wolf up my sleeve. My hunting jerkin isn't that loose. And liver-eating tundra wolves don't tickle like this.

I shake my arm. I see what's crawling out of my sleeve. I scream.

'Aaaaaaaarrrrrrgh, a spider!'

I run.

Down the slope.

Sliding, howling, desperate to get away.

This is an outrage. There's not a single handrail anywhere around here.

My feet slip and I hurtle down the icy slope on my tummy, straight towards the glacier below.

With its deep dark ice chasms.

Which, legend says, are bottomless.

Except, I think as I hurtle into one, that can't be right. There's got to be some sort of bottom down there eventually.

And a bottom would have a pile of snow on it, probably, just waiting to break my fall.

Deep, soft, fluffy snow.

Full of frozen spiders.

'Aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaarrrrrrgh.'

The good thing about being a great great great in your imagination is you don't have to hang around for funerals etc.

You can check with Mum that it's still not our turn yet, then sit back and move on to the eleventh century, where I am now.

It's lovely weather in France at this time of year.

These big blocks of stone that I'm clinging to as I climb up this castle wall are really warm from the afternoon sun. They're so pleasant to the touch, I'd hate to be shot through the head with an arrow and not be able to enjoy them any more.

So far, so good.

And here's a window ledge to help me up.

Oh dear. This isn't so good.

A young woman inside the room has spotted me. She's getting up from her spinning wheel and coming over to the window.

She's about my age, and she actually looks quite friendly. Maybe she doesn't get out much with other young people and so she's a bit lonely. Just a guess, from the way she's not pouring boiling oil on me.

'Bonjour, interesting stranger,' she says. 'Who are you?'

'Gaston at your service, mademoiselle,' I say, with a flourish of my helmet, which is a bit difficult with both of my hands hanging onto the window ledge, so I have to ask her to flourish it for me. 'Junior soldier, second class.'

'Nice to meet you, Gaston,' she says.

We smile at each other.

I'm too embarrassed to say that my boss is the Countess of Orleans, who has commanded me to slip into this castle unnoticed and open the drawbridge from the inside so she and her army can seize the castle for herself on account of her other castle needing re-grouting.

'Gaston,' says the young woman. 'Can I share a secret with you?'

I nod, feeling a bit guilty that I haven't shared mine with her.