

Chapter 1

Meet the Carrot-Tops

A long, long time ago, in the year 1850, there was a man by the name of Sam Carrot-Top. He was a well educated man, slender in build and always wore a dusty old cap that covered his orange hair and broken glasses. He was an honest and wealthy man, but you would never guess that he and his family were well off; he never showed his wealth or bragged about it. He used his money to help the poor and needy.

His wife, Jane, was oh so beautiful, with lush red hair, a petite figure, and smooth, creamy pale skin. She loved all the children in the neighborhood, always fixing a broken heart or a scraped knee. She was the perfect housewife, the kind any man could want.

They lived in a small town in Georgia called Valdosta. Sam and Jane were the talk of the town; they grew the largest vegetables and fruits the eyes have ever seen. Their watermelons were the size of houses and carrots as long as 20 feet!

All the neighbors began to whisper, and became jealous of the success of the Carrot-Tops; farmers came from near and far to see the great Carrot-Top plantation. Because of

the popularity of their fruits and vegetables, they became a household name. Merchants came from all over the world to buy their fruits and vegetables.

Some of the other farmers became extremely jealous of the success of the Carrot-Tops. They tried to sabotage their land, either by overflowing it with garbage or water, but it never worked. The fruits and vegetables kept on growing and growing. Some were so tall that their leaves touched the clouds. Nevertheless, Sam and Jane ignored their rivals and continued to be good neighbors.

Their pride and joy was their son and only child, Peter Carrot-Top, a 10-year-old boy who was as skinny as a Beanpole with bright orange hair and deep freckles on his face. He wore the same old clothing over and over again, brown khaki pants and a rainbow-colored shirt with two different colored shirt sleeves.

Peter was teased by all the kids. Not only was his hair funny, but his name, Peter Carrot-Top, was as well. The kids teased him all day. Every day it was the same thing, kids singing, "Peter Carrot-Top, Peter Carrot-Top," in an annoying and devilish tone.

Peter was sick of it. Unfortunately, every time he got upset, his head would swell up like a big orange balloon and his orange hair would gently stand up at attention.

This made the kids laugh even harder.

Peter was all alone in the world; he didn't understand or fit in. There was nothing the principal or the teachers could do. He was just a special boy. His mother and father were hurt the most; Peter got the orange hair from his father, and the freckles from his mother.

His parents went to the school regularly to seek help for him. Just a poor farmer, Peter's father did not know what to do. He would pace the school hall as he talked to the Dean of the school asking for help for his son, but Mr. Snicker, the Dean, just walked around with his fat gut stuck out, and only made the Carrot-Tops feel worse by telling them their child needed to be placed in a special school.

Peter's father slammed down his hat in frustration as the Dean sat back in his leather chair, and smoked his cigar with a smirk on his face.

Mr. Snicker shouted at Peter's father, "Boy, calm down before I have you thrown out on your ears!"

Peter's father grabbed up his hat; took his wife by the hand and stormed into Peter's English class. "Peter, get your things. We're taking you out of this school!"

By the look on his father's face, Peter knew that his dad was very upset. All Peter's mother could do was cry and

sob as they walked out the doors. The kids began to laugh, and once again, Peter felt distant and alone.

Peter and his family jumped into their wagon, and off they went. He could see the concentration on his father's face, and the sadness in his mother's eyes. Peter began to tell his parents how very sorry he was, but a gentle touch on the hands from his mother let him know it was all right. Peter lay back in the seat of the wagon and didn't say another word.

Suddenly the wagon began to lift until it started to fly. Peter jumped out of his seat and gazed in awe; he was speechless. He looked down and saw that they were above the world.

He could see the cows and trees, and he even spotted his house. Peter was tickled to death; he began to laugh hysterically until his parents started laughing with him.

Peter said, "Father, what is going on?"

Peter's dad didn't say anything, then his mother jumped in and told Peter that they were from a different kind of generation.

"What kind is that?" Peter asked, dumbfounded.

Then a stronger, sterner voice jumped in; it was Peter's father. He went on to tell Peter the story of the Carrot-Tops.

Peter listened intently, and hung onto his father's every word. Peter's eyes began to move back and forth as every word spilled from his father's lips. He waited patiently to hear the story of the Carrot-Tops.

Peter's father went on to tell him that they are not alive, at least not on earth, and that they were from a world the living call "Death".

Peter stuttered and said, "Do you mean we're dead?"

"Yes, we're dead," Peter's father replied. He went on to tell Peter that they had been dead for years. He said they didn't belong to this world. He told Peter the world they belonged to was called Baja, a place of mysticism and power, a place so beautiful, and yet so evil.

"Wellllll, why aren't we there?" Peter asked his father, but his father could not do or say anything. He just hung his head down low and began to wipe the tears from his eyes.

Suddenly Peter's father parked the wagon on a hilltop way above the trees, where no one could see them; then he began to tell Peter why they were here on Earth.

"Well, son, many years ago I was one of the chosen ones to protect Baja and make sure that the city was preserved for all our generation, but I failed at my job."

Peter's father told him of how he was in charge of

leading an army of men to get the eighth key. This key opens the door to the eighth elder of the world. The elders were in hibernation. When they awoke, they protected not only Baja, but also Earth.

He told Peter that he failed when he lost the key. Because he lost the key, the eighth elder was never awakened. The other seven went back into hibernation because they can only function with each other; all eight have to be awake at the same time.

"Well, why did you lose the key?" Peter asked.

His father told him that the key was so powerful there was a rule to never touch it with your bare hands. He did anyway, and the key gave him so much power that he could not handle it. His hands began to burn and his skin began to rot and fall to the floor.

When he woke up, the key was gone and Baja was at risk. The remaining elders were very angry, and before they fell back into hibernation, they exiled Peter's father and mother from Baja. Peter's mother jumped in and began to tell Peter that she loved his dad so much that she was willing to take banishment with him, and one day their names would be cleared.

She also let Peter know that his father was being very modest and taking the entire blame. She said what really

happened was that Peter's dad, Sam, was forced to touch the key by his brother, Marcus. Instead of Sam turning his brother in to the elders, he took the blame for something that was not his fault alone.

Jane told her son that Sam's brother was evil and mean; but Sam didn't like to admit the fact that his brother set him up. Suddenly the wagon was quiet. No one made a sound.

Peter's dad began to look back at Peter in shame, but Peter jumped up and gave him a big hug.

Sam was relieved. In a trembling voice, he looked into Peter's eyes and asked, "So you aren't ashamed of us?"

"No!" Peter replied.

Peter then asked his father about the wagon flying.

"Oooohh! Yes, son, I will tell you about the flying wagon."

They all began to laugh. Sam told Peter that in Baja everyone has some special ability, from making objects fly to growing large fruits, vegetables and plants.

Peter suddenly looked at his mother and figured out that she was the one growing all the fruits and vegetables on their plantation.

She smiled with her cherry lips and said, "I was gifted with the green thumb."

Peter laughed and told his parents he was finally free. His parents looked bewildered and asked him what he meant. He told them that he knew now why he was different from the other children at school. Peter also told his parents he had something to show them.

"Up here?" Jane asked.

"Yes, come out of the wagon," Peter replied.

Peter's mom and dad looked at each other in amazement and shock as they jumped out of the wagon. Peter held his hand to the ground and began to shake. Suddenly a big hole appeared in the ground. The hole was so big that it swallowed up the trees. Peter looked at his parents with pride. They looked back at him in amazement.

"Why didn't you tell us, Peter?" his parents asked.

"Well, I did not want you to be ashamed of me. The kids at school were already calling me 'weird' and 'strange'. I didn't want to disappoint you."

"Never," said his father.

Jane asked Peter how long had he been keeping this secret from them, and Peter told them, for many years. He did it only because he was afraid of his own powers. That was a great power for a little boy to handle. Peter's parents knew that there must be something extra special about their son.

Their brains began to think of what all of this could mean; the wheels in their heads were turning so fast you could see smoke coming out of their ears. But nevertheless, Peter was happy that his conscious was clear, his face began to get some color and his eyes began to twinkle.

The family decided it was time to go home, and as soon as the rooster crowed in the morning, it would be time to see the Oracle. Off the hilltop they went, swaying through trees and mountains. Everyone had had a rough day, but now it seemed to be a day of joy and happiness.

Peter hung his head out of the wagon and began to feel the breeze on his face.

"Be careful," said Peter's mother.

"I will," he replied.

All that afternoon, they went flying over rivers, lakes and streams. They even passed a drunk sleeping under a tree. The man jumped up and began to scream, "The sky is falling!" He ran through the village telling the people, but no one believed him since he was the town drunk.

Peter and his family continued to ride the high hills and mountains until it got dark so they could return home without being seen. He was so excited that he had finally figured out why he was so different than the other children.

As for his parents, they were relieved that they were

not hated by their son, but they were also worried about his tremendous gift. It was a gift that no child should have, but they did not ruin the moment by being sad. They remained happy and upbeat all the way home.

As nightfall grew, Peter and his parents arrived home. Nothing was the same anymore; their house began to look old and rotten. They could see the tiniest imperfections, and they knew in their hearts that it was time to leave.

Peter was so excited he could not sleep, but his parents forced him into bed with the hopes of seeing a land the living only dreamed about. Peter asked question after question as he drifted off to sleep. His parents only smiled as they rubbed his orange hair and tucked him tightly into bed.

But as midnight approached, his parents found themselves pacing the floor. They discussed how long they had been away from Baja and how they would be accepted after 10 years. It was very stressful for them; their faces became blank and sad. Finally, they went to bed anticipating a meeting with the Oracle, the only one who could get them back into Baja.

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