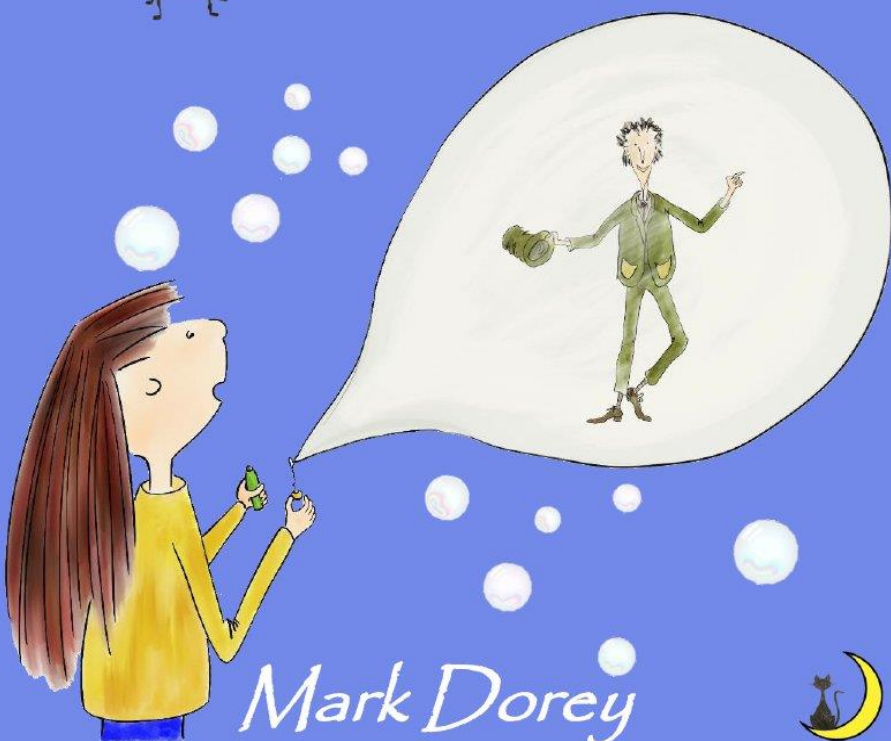




Polly's *Magic* Bubbles

and the Quest for Dizzelwood



Mark Dorey



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Polly's *Magic* Bubbles

and the Quest for Dizzelwood



Mark Dorey

illustrated by Liz Dorey



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Chapter One

TOO LATE!

“**S**orry,” said the man peering into his empty suitcase.
“They’re all gone.”

“All gone?” Polly gaped in disbelief. “But you had three left; a blue one, a green one and a—”

The Bubble gun seller shrugged, his grubby T-shirt failing miserably to cover his bulging stomach. “Sold the last one a few minutes ago.”

“But I wasn’t that long, and you promised!” Polly gave him her best annoyed stare, her £2.50 weighing heavily in her hand.

The man scratched the patchy clumps of hair stuck to his chin like bits of dirty cotton wool, clearly not used to being stared at by disappointed and very annoyed eight-year-olds. “Sorry,” he said sheepishly.



"You snooze, you lose."

Polly definitely hadn't snoozed, so she didn't know how she could have lost anything, but lost she had. Tears started to well up in her eyes.

"Look, come back next week," said the man, hastily packing away his empty case before shuffling off.

The park was filled with kids, laughing and playing with bubbles floating everywhere, some of them most probably coming from a bubble gun that should have belonged to Polly.

She stared down at her unspent £2.50 in despair.

"Excuse me..." said a voice.

Polly nearly jumped out of her skin. A wiry old man wearing an ill-fitting suit stood behind her.

"You like them, don't you?" The old man bent close, his crooked, tall green hat teetering above blue eyes that sparkled and danced. A stale smell wafted from his crumpled moss-brown suit, much too close to Polly's crinkling nose. "The bubbles," he said. "I saw you watching the bubbles."

Polly didn't know what to do – she knew that she shouldn't speak to strangers. She looked around to see if she could see her parents or the park keeper, but there was no one around, so she just nodded.

The old man smiled a surprisingly dazzling smile. "Well, today is your lucky day!"

TOO LATE!

Polly wasn't sure whether to make a run for it. "Sorry, but I really have to go..."

"Oh no, no, no, there's no need to go – today is your lucky day!" his big beaming smile and twinkling eyes somehow made him look a lot younger.

"Sorry mister, you must be mistak—"

"I've got some bubbles, bigger and better than any bubble gun!" Then he bent in very close, his wrinkly face filling Polly's vision with a sudden deadly seriousness. "How much money do you have?"

Transfixed and unable to move, Polly opened her hand as a fresh waft of his stale pongy-ness slapped her in the face and filled her nostrils.

"Mmmm..." the man examined the £2.50 in her hand carefully. "I'm not sure whether that's going to be enough." He glanced over his shoulder, looking this way and that, before turning his attention back to Polly. "But then again," his eyes twinkled mischievously, "I think I can trust you." Another dazzling smile flashed across his face before once again it turned really serious; the most serious looking face that Polly had ever seen as he bent in even closer. "I can trust you, can't I?"

Not sure of what else to do, Polly nodded dumbly.

The old man rummaged inside his crumpled jacket.



Feeling increasingly nervous and desperate to leave, Polly blurted out. "I have to go, my parents will—"

"Ah-Ha! Here it is!" The old man waved his hand in the air with a flourish, as if conducting an invisible band.

Polly turned to walk away. "I have to go!"

"Don't you want to see?" The old man was somehow in front of her, his hand outstretched.



"Bubbles," he said, his blue eyes sparkling.

There in his wrinkled hand was a tiny green bottle, crowned with a gold top that shone like the sun – like a normal bottle of bubbles but a lot prettier and a lot, lot smaller.

Polly dodged past his hand. "I really have to go..."

"Magic bubbles!" said the old man triumphantly, his eyebrows coming alive.

Polly stopped dead in her tracks.

Magic bubbles!

"Yes, indeed!" said the old man reading her thoughts, his head bobbing up and down on an invisible spring.

Polly turned for a closer look.

The old man snatched his hand away. "Ah, ah, ah... money first."

There can't be many bubbles in there...

"Oh, I promise you, little one, there's all the bubbles you'll ever need right inside!" The old man's eyebrows danced up and down like fluffy caterpillars.

Maybe, thought Polly, but they'd be too tiny to see.

"These bubbles are much bigger than you could possibly imagine, and each and every one jam-packed-filled with adventures!" The old man bent in again, so close that their noses were almost touching, and in a loud whisper added. "Bigger and better than any bubble gun!"

Polly thought for a moment. "How much?"

The old man scratched his chin thoughtfully. "Well, normally a lot more than what you have there, but I would hate for you to be disappointed twice in one day."

Polly looked around again to see if she could see her parents. "I don't know – I was supposed to get a bubble gun... Sorry to waste your time, but I really have to go..." She turned back to face the old man, but he had vanished into thin air!

How strange!



Polly breathed a sigh of relief. The old man was a bit creepy, but at least he was gone now.

Magic bubbles, what nonsense!

Polly went to put her money back in her pocket, but her money was gone! There in her hand was the tiny green bottle with a top that shone like the sun. But that was not all. The bottle was resting on a crumpled piece of yellowed paper. Polly unravelled the paper, which was weathered and worn like old parchment.

The paper was blank.

She was about to crumple it up and put it in her pocket to throw away later, when to her amazement some writing began to appear on it:

Thank you for purchasing your Magic Bubbles!

Twelve blows – but not too hard!

Only twelve and no more.

use your last Bubbles very carefully!

Refunds definitely not available.

Before Polly could examine the paper and its peculiar message any further, a sudden gust of wind blew the parchment out of her hand, where it promptly vanished in a puff of smoke!



Chapter Two

MAGIC BUBBLES

Polly stared at the shiny green bottle in her hand.

What a waste of £2.50!

Carefully unscrewing the gold top, she took out the blower. The stick was as thin as a needle, all jagged with a tiny hole hardly big enough to see through, let alone blow a bubble!



*'Much bigger than you could ever imagine!
Bigger and better than any bubble gun!'*

The old man's voice stirred on the breeze, although he was nowhere to be seen.



Polly held the blower up for a closer look. A sudden gust of wind caused the teeny-tiny amount of soapy liquid to form a bubble, which grew *Bigger...*

and **BIGGER...**

and **BIGGER...**



The bubble was bigger than the size of her head!

Polly stared, open mouthed as the bubble detached itself and started to bounce over the grass like a large see-through football.

TOO LATE!

With each bounce, it picked up flowers and blades of grass as if plucking them with an invisible hand. Quickly screwing the top back on the tiny container, Polly gave chase.

Closer and closer and closer, the bubble now almost in reach...

Another gust of wind launched the bubble skywards, up and over the trees until it vanished from view.

'Eleven bubbles left,' said the old man's voice, although he was still nowhere to be seen.

Polly sighed as she gazed at the tiny bottle in her hand.

Maybe they were magic bubbles after all...

*'Oh yes, they are! They are indeed,
but there's only eleven left.'*

Polly looked all around. There was no sign of him anywhere.

Perhaps the old man was spying on her from somewhere in the trees?

Polly stared at the bottle again. This needed a little more investigating.

"POLLYANNA!"

Polly nearly jumped out of her skin.

"What *are* you doing?" barked her Mum, marching

briskly towards her.

Polly was in **BIG TROUBLE** – Mum had used Polly's full name.

"Sorry, Mum. I was... er... chasing bubbles."

"Well, would you mind chasing them where I can see you? Come on, it looks like it's going to rain."

Polly sighed. *Why did it always rain on school holidays?*

They re-joined her Dad and two brothers, Jake and Joshy. Jake, her older brother by four years always had his nose in some magazine or other; Joshy, having just turned two was relishing his new found walking and exploring ability and getting into just about anything and everything. Dad, as always, was dressed in old fashioned clothes (at least thirty years too old for him), puffing on his permanently unlit pipe.

As they walked back home, Polly's mind tumbled over and over with thoughts of magic bubbles and her curious encounter with the strange old man.



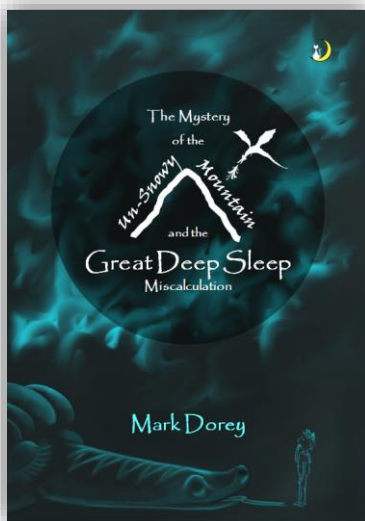
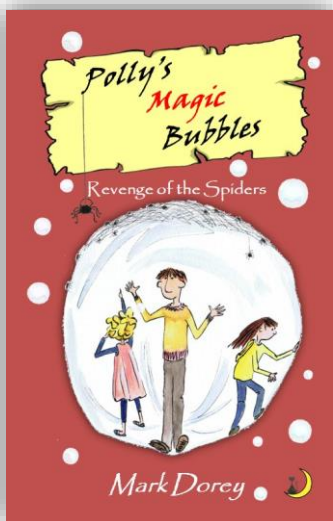
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