



Peter and I

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Storybook, fiction

Age: 6+

Her name is Angie. But since she is so tiny, has long, fair hair, and people usually think she looks so lovely, she is called Angel by almost everybody. Angel has an older brother named Peter, who is not as angelic as his sister. He is full of little tricks and ploys, and wherever he is, some mischief will happen. That's guaranteed!

The two siblings play tricks on absolutely everybody. Not only on their own parents and friends, but on complete strangers as well – at the beach, for example, or at the park, where they play the age-old wallet trick. No one knows what will happen when those two little tykes decide to help their mother, or even worse – to help their lovely neighbour. By the end of the book, one thing is certain – in this household, secrets never stay secret for long.

Award:

2012 Nukits competition, 3rd place

Reading sample

Peter and I oil the balcony furniture

Every spring, Mum takes out a white sheet of paper and writes down a long list of all the projects she plans to finish before Mother's Day. Then, she tapes the list onto the door of the kitchen cupboard so she sees it each time she takes out a pack of coffee. Every time a chore is finished, she draws a red line through it. This year, the list looked like this:

SPRING CHORES

Wash the windows

Wash the rugs

Plant flowers in the balcony flowerbox

Switch the curtains

Change the flower dirt

Take winter clothes into the back room cupboard

Oil the balcony furniture

Mum usually took on the easier or more fun tasks before the others. For example, hanging new curtains in the kitchen window so that the glass itself no longer seems so dirty and washing it could easily be pushed back until autumn.

Mum began with planting flowers on the balcony this year, because "flowers bring summer to the balcony", she said. Plus, Grandma and Aunt Katrin were supposed to come visit during the

weekend, and Mum planned to serve coffee and admire the flowers with them on the balcony. She likewise hoped that if the flowers were very pretty, then maybe the guests wouldn't notice that the balcony table and chairs had not been oiled yet and looked slightly grayish.

Dad, Peter, and I then all came up with the same good idea at once. We decided to give Mum a hand.

Right after Mum drove off to buy flowers at the large gardening center – and she always took an incredible amount of time at such places – Dad dragged all of the threadbare rugs in the entryway and kitchen outside and started thwacking them.

"They'll get nice and clean this way," Dad reasoned. "Then we won't need to wash them at all this year."

Peter and I took a large bottle of brown wood varnish out of the vacuum cleaner closet along with a couple of dust rags, and started to scrub the balcony furniture. It was really great work – I couldn't understand at all why Mum was never especially excited by the task.

We poured oil onto the rags one by one, and spread a good, thick coating onto the table and chairs. The grayish-brown wood turned a dark shade of glistening chestnut as if by witchcraft, and afterwards looked brand new.

We finished our work just as Dad came back into the room with the rugs, and we helped to roll

them back out onto the floor. Mum returned home soon afterwards with two bags of dirt and two paper bags, from which very pretty yellow flowers that looked like chamomiles popped their heads out.

Mum made her way straight to the balcony and started planting the flowers in a long blue flowerbox. She came back inside half an hour later with dirty hands and a satisfied expression, and drew a red line through “balcony flowers” on the list of chores to do.

“Doesn’t the balcony just look so much prettier when there are live flowers there!” Mum sighed, admiring her handiwork from the window. “Even the table and chairs appear much nicer now.”

Peter and I didn’t say anything. We merely giggled quietly and thought: let’s rather let Mum figure out why they seem so nice all of a sudden on her own.

Mum indeed figured this out the next day, but she was not one bit as happy about it as we had hoped.

Mum, Aunt Katrin and Grandma were drinking coffee on the balcony. Aunt Katrin had just leaned over to sniff the flowers that Mum planted, when Mum noticed something dreadful. Firstly, she discovered that the back of Aunt Katrin’s pink skirt and her white sweater had acquired brown stripes. Then, she noticed that the same thing had happened with Grandma’s lavender silk dress.

Finally, Aunt Katrin noted that Mum’s new jeans

and lovely light purple jacket were striped on the backside, just as everyone else’s clothes.

Peter and I did not receive a single word of thanks or song of praise for oiling the balcony furniture. As soon as the guests had left – and they left promptly after they found clean clothes that were more or less suitable to wear from Mum’s closet – Mum jammed clean rags into our hands and ordered us to scrub the excess oil from the balcony furniture. This took us several times longer than just oiling the furniture and was no longer carefree and fun at all, but was horribly difficult and sweaty work instead.

From that day onwards, Peter and I decided to never help Mum in secret again, because nothing good comes of it anyways. Luckily, at least Dad fibbed and said Peter and I had also beaten the dust from the rugs. Still, he could have been a gentleman and said that he was the one who oiled the balcony furniture.

Peter and I dry tree leaves

During fall, everywhere outside is full of leaves fallen from the trees. It’s great to gather up such beautiful leaves, at least as long as they are still colourful and have not curled up and all changed into a monotonous, bleak shade of gray. Mum does not like these crinkled leaves either. She becomes angry when they crumble up on the rug or the couch.

Dad is very fair, on the other hand.

“Let the children enjoy the autumn display of colours,” he tells Mum. “What will that little mess really do? Don’t get mad over it.”

However, Mum says that Dad can clean up all those bits of leaves himself next time; then he will see how great a job it is to kneel on the floor and fish leaf crumbs out from between the rug fibres.

Luckily, Peter and I got the same task from school at the very same time. We were supposed to collect various leaves from trees and bushes, dry them between the pages of a book, and then tape them into a binder. That way, they won’t curl up or crumble so easily.

Peter announced that he planned to gather up at least fifty tree leaves, because his teacher said the more species he could collect, the better. I didn’t quite believe that Peter would even collect half that amount, or else he would have to travel somewhere abroad where there are different kinds of trees than those at home.

“I don’t have to go especially far,” Peter said. “There are a lot of different plants closer to home.”

Only the next day did I find out what Peter meant by this. When I came home from school, I brought with me an entire bundle of maple-, mountain ash-, birch- and other tree leaves that I planned to press in a book. However, Peter had not collected a single tree leaf.

“Where are all your leaves?” I asked Peter.

“Pressed in a book,” Peter replied, and took Dad’s large world atlas off of the shelf.

The atlas was Dad’s pride and joy. It was very old, but very well preserved. Dad only allowed us to flip through it after we had washed our hands. Peter and I thought he was over exaggerating. There is nothing you can do with that atlas, anyways. Mum also said that it showed lands and countries in a completely different way than they are today.

Nevertheless, Dad’s atlas is still our largest and most impressive book; and now, Peter had placed his tree leaves between its pages to dry. Dad will definitely not be happy.

“Dad will definitely not be happy that you are stuffing your maple leaves into his book,” I told Peter.

“Ha!” Peter laughed. “There aren’t even any maple leaves there!”

Then, Peter showed me what he had put between the book’s pages. Each page held one leaf from each of mother’s houseplants: a sharp, lengthy palm leaf; an entire seedling spider plant; a leaf from a Swiss Cheese Plant so large that its edges were visible along the edge of the book; several leaves from plants, the names of which I didn’t know; and a long, thick aloe leaf. White gook had flowed out of one end of the leaf and onto a map of Spain. The book wouldn’t even shut in the spot where the aloe leaf was pressed.

I told Peter an aloe leaf is too thick and messy to put between the pages of a book, but Peter replied that it would certainly dry up to become as paper-thin as the others if the book was simply put underneath something heavy.

I also wanted to put something weighty on my leaves, and Peter promised to stick mine between the pages of Dad's large book as well. Peter thought the atlas was just the right kind of book for such a project, as two maple leaves could fit onto a single page.

We thought for a while about what kind of heavy thing we could put the book under. Peter proposed I stand on top of it for a few hours, but I said he could do that himself. In reality, he could do it even better, as Peter is much heavier than I am.

We finally decided to stick the book under the living room coffee table. The coffee table is incredibly heavy, and sweat even beaded up on Peter's forehead when he raised the corner of the table. His glass of juice fell onto the floor, too, as he had left it on top of the table. All the same, Peter said that sacrifices had been made in the name of science for hundreds of years, and people had suffered the consequences. I told him that puddle of juice on the rug could bring Peter quite unpleasant consequences.

I was right about that.

When Mum came home, the first thing she saw was the crooked living room coffee table, and

then a red stain on the rug. She started to scold Peter, and sent him to get a rag and some cleaning spray.

Then, Dad came home and spied his atlas under the leg of the coffee table.

"I'd like to know: what is my atlas doing on the floor?" he asked in an extremely angry tone.

"And for crying out loud, what is my atlas doing under the table leg?" he asked even more angrily, and lifted the coffee table off the book.

"And what junk have you shoved between the pages?!" he bellowed when he saw the leaf of the Swiss Cheese Plant sticking out of the book.

I don't even want to say what happened when Dad saw the aloe leaf and the map of Spain, or what happened when Mum saw her aloe leaf and all of the other houseplant leaves.

I'm not exactly sure whether it was worth it for Peter to make so many sacrifices in the name of science and suffer the consequences, especially when the teacher still ordered Peter to collect leaves from under maples, mountain ash, birches and other absolutely ordinary trees.

Peter at least already decided that this time, he will put his leaves to dry between the pages of a nature textbook so that no one can say a thing about it. He also decided to put the book under the leg of the television stand. I definitely don't believe that Peter can manage to lift the television stand on his own. You need at least two children for that.