This story is dedicated to my almost Grandchildren, Noah Tess and Owen Berland and to all the peanut and dog lovers in my family.
SPARK, NOAHROOTI & JANE

This is the frightening story of what happened to three characters: Spark, Noahrooti and Jane. And of course, I wouldn’t be telling it to you if it wasn’t completely true.

We must start at the beginning. After all, every story must have a beginning. If you don’t start at the beginning you get lost. You can’t even know where you are going without a beginning. So that is why you always start at the beginning. Everyone knows that.

This beginning happened not very long ago. It started way after the sun was created. Long after human beings started walking around. It started even after planes and rockets were built, and after dinosaurs could only to be found in museums. (Of course dinosaur bones can be found in lots of places, but whole dinosaurs, they are only in museums.) It starts way after the big city of Philadelphia was built. I think it started the same day a man named Evan got himself a new bicycle to go to work. But that man and his bicycle have nothing to do with this story.

All beginnings happen somewhere. This one happened on Farmer Bob’s Peanut Farm in a place called South Carolina. A peanut farm. As you know (you do know everything, don’t you?), peanuts grow high up in a tree. No, I’m only kidding, peanuts grow underground! They grow on the roots of peanut plants. (Did you know that?) In a shell. Sometimes the shell contains only one peanut. But most of the time there are two peanuts in each shell. (Sometimes you can find three or even four peanuts in a shell. But then it gets pretty crowded.)

At the beginning of this story there were two peanuts growing underground right next to each other. Each was in a shell of its own all alone by itself. And each was on the root of a different plant. In one shell was Noahrooti, and in the other was Jane. Being in a shell, all alone, they had no idea there was anything else in the world.

One cold day when the soil was very damp, Noahrooti sneezed. Loudly.

A loud sneeze is a noise. And a noise is just a shaking of air that shakes a little something in our ears. The noise of a peanut sneezing wiggles the air. And when Noahrooti sneezed loudly the air inside his home wiggled a lot. Of course that meant his peanut shell was blown by the wind of his sneeze and it wiggled too. When his peanut shell wiggled, the ground around it wiggled a bit too, and that wiggled the peanut shell next to Noahrooti’s. And when that shell wiggled, well of course that wiggled the air inside Jane’s shell. That wiggled the little something in Jane’s ears. And as I just told you, if the air in the ear wiggles there is a noise. So Jane heard the sneeze.

Jane had never heard a noise before. She immediately wondered “What’s that?” Then she said in her loudest voice “Hello! Is anyone there?” As you now know that was a wiggle in the air . . . all the way back to Noahrooti’s shell.

Soon they got to talking all the time except when they were sleeping. (Now you might wonder how a little peanut began talking. I have no idea. I didn’t even no little peanuts had ears! But that is just how their conversation started.) They shared everything that was going on, which was not very much of course. After all, they were each in their little peanut shell and underground. Not much to see or do down there, you know. But one day . . .

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One day Noahrooti woke to a terrible noise. “Are you alright Jane?”

“I’m fine, but what is that noise?” answered Jane.

The ground was shaking. The noise was getting louder. Farmer Bob was coming on his tractor to dig up his peanuts to bring them to market.

He was hauling a machine in back of the tractor. It grabbed each peanut plant and pulled it out of the ground. Then it tossed the plant in the air and let it fall on the ground. Farmer Bob then would leave the plants out on the dirt to dry.

But neither Noahrooti nor Jane could know any of this. They were just peanuts hearing a terrible noise. Suddenly Noahrooti was moving. He was being pulled through the ground. Then he was sent flying through the air and fell flat on the ground. Farmer Bob then would leave the plants out on the dirt to dry.

But we know this is not the end. We just got past the beginning. A few minutes went by and nothing happened. Noahrooti summoned his courage and called out for the only friend he knew. “Jane? . . . Jane? Are you there?”

But Jane didn’t answer. Noahrooti called again, “Jane? . . . Anybody . . . is anybody there?” But most peanuts don’t talk. And most don’t even listen. Jane was listening, and calling. But she had fallen further away and peanuts don’t speak very loud, even when they are shouting. They couldn’t hear one another. Noahrooti couldn’t hear Jane. Jane couldn’t hear Noahrooti. There was to be no answer to their shouts. So each of the two peanuts was totally alone.

Living under ground and in a shell had meant that they knew nothing of days and nights. They didn’t know of sky and clouds. Or rain and dew. They had stayed cool in the ground because it was always cool down in there. And he had never been thirsty because the ground was always moist.

Today was different. Noahrooti’s day had only begun. Although from inside his shell, he couldn’t know it, there were no clouds in the sky. The South Carolina sun rose in the sky. As it got higher it baked Noahrooti’s shell. It baked Jane’s shell too. They both got hot, and very thirsty.

Later, the sun went down. It cooled off a bit. Dew collected on their shells. Noahrooti was happy to be cooler and to have the dew to ease his thirst.

Weakened by the heat and lack of water he tried once more to find Jane, but again, there was no answer. Night came and turned to day and again the sun came out baking hot. Noahrooti had nothing to drink. He began to feel sorry for himself. Days passed.

“Is this what it means to be alive? Is there nothing more than one hot day after another?” he wondered. Soon he had his answer. The fearful noise that came before he was torn from his home in the ground could be heard again. Bob on his tractor was coming closer.

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Suddenly Noahrooti was again picked up. He was tossed and shook. The shaking continued. It was so violent that his shell broke away from his plant’s root. Then he was tossed
into a big blue metal box as big as a big car. The box was so big a kid could stand up, or lie down in it. Soon, he was covered up by the other peanuts the machine threw in the box. But Noahrooti couldn’t see outside his shell. He couldn’t know what was going on. He felt like he was going to be crushed by all the other peanuts that had been crammed on top of him. He was traveling on a very bouncy path. He had no idea where he was going. Alone in the world, Noahrooti the peanut no longer had any hope. But just then, Farmer Bob stopped the tractor.

Noahrooti heard a small voice, “Noahrooti are you here?”

Noahrooti thought, “Am I dreaming? Could that be Jane? Is she in here with me? Am I imagining Jane’s voice?” He refused to answer. He had given up.

But no, there it came again, “Noahrooti are you here?”

Maybe it was Jane! So he answered as loud as he could, “Is that you Jane?”

The answer, “Yes it’s me,” seemed to come from a far place.

A new noise broke into their conversation. He cried out to Jane, “Remember, even if we get separated, remember I am your friend. And if you have a friend you are not alone,” he called. But there was too much noise for a small peanut to hear, and so he got no answer.

Farmer Bob had pulled his tractor up to the barn. There he took a big chain and attached it to the big box with all the peanuts inside. He pressed a button and the box was raised and swung onto an awaiting truck marked “Mr. Johnson’s Peanuts, Fresh off the Farm.” There were many boxes on the truck. After it settled on the truck, there was quiet and Noahrooti tried one last time to find Jane. But then the noisy truck engine was started. Once again, there was no answer.

“That’s the last one, Jake. Take it away!” And Jake started up the old truck to drive the peanuts to their destination.

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Again, Noahrooti found himself heart broken, lonely and hopeless. And while he was feeling sorry for himself, the truck with all the barrels of peanuts rumbled along the old rutted road from the farm to the market. You can imagine those big metal boxes were banging against one another making a horrible racket. Finally Jake got to the market. The boxes were put in big grey building where it was cool and quiet.

Noahrooti found it was a perfect temperature. He was now all alone in the world of silent peanuts. He cried himself to sleep. But quiet was not to be part a big part of his new life. Soon again he was awakened and bounced around once more. A man with a big scoop was scooping up some of the peanuts and putting them in a big bag. In one of those big scoops lay poor Noahrooti. The bag was carried into a store and the peanuts were poured into a long plastic chute. And there they lay. Noahrooti found himself near the top of the pile of peanuts in the chute.

After some time, Noahrooti thought to himself, “Maybe I should try to discover if Jane is here? I mean, she might be.” And so he called out, “Jane!” But there was no answer. But Noahrooti heard a sound. He didn’t know it, but it was a little boy.

The boy said, “Momma, can we make some peanut butter?” because he was in a big food store and people were going by.
“Sure,” said his mother. “The peanuts are right in this chute. Why don’t you open it and we’ll grind up the peanuts in the peanut grinder and get some fresh peanut butter.” Suddenly the chute opened and Noahrooti fell down a bit toward the bottom. Many peanuts fell down.

Then a man poured more peanuts in the top of the chute. A terrible grinding noise made Noahrooti shudder. He understood what was happening. He was to be ground up along with all the peanuts in the chute. Could anything worse happen?

A great fat lady came next. She opened the chute, and down fell hundreds of peanuts. Noahrooti was falling toward a big plastic cup. Just at that moment, the lady scratched herself and the cup she was holding moved. Noahrooti and a few other peanuts, missed the cup and fell onto the floor. Without seeing them, the big blue shoe of the lady covered most of those fallen peanuts. They popped open and were crushed into the floor. But not Noahrooti.

Noahrooti’s shell had cracked, but he was not crushed. He could suddenly see! He was rolling, along with some of the other peanuts, to a point just under the counter where the peanut butter making crusher was standing.

“I can see!” he thought. But there was so much going on it was hard to make sense of all he saw. He saw colors and shapes. He could see that he was on a flat surface and that he wouldn’t be rolling anymore. But he had no idea that it was the floor of a big super market. He could see some big things stamping on this surface. Most of them just came and went. He couldn’t know they were the shoes of shoppers.

He watched a few of the peanuts that had fallen squashed under the shoes of the shoppers. It was horrifying. Noahrooti had no idea what was going to happen next, but he was sure it would be terrible when suddenly he heard a soft cry near him.

“Is that you Jane?” he called. “Are you OK?”

“Noahrooti? Oh, Noahrooti I am so happy you are alive. And here! With me! I was so alone! After I fell, I popped out of my shell. I’ve seen such frightening things!”

“Me too. But we are together again. Are you all right?”

“Yes. You?”

“Yes.”

“Do you think we can live here, lying here? Will we get water? Remember, I have lost my shell. Does that matter? Do you think we will grow roots here, like where we came from?”

“Gee, Jane, those are a lot of questions. My shell is cracked open. I really don’t know, but I am so glad we’re safe and together again.” But was safe the right word?

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Suddenly, there was a big ruckus. A dog had pulled away from her owner and gotten into the super market.

“Spark, you come right here!” yelled someone with a woman’s voice. “Spark, stop right where you are!”
“Get that dog!,” yelled the manager. He was shouting at Bud. Bud was in charge of fruits and vegetables.

Spark was a big brown and white dog. She was very strong and very fast. Faster than Bud. And unlike Bud, she was able to leap over some of the displays.

She raced by Bud. As Bud reached for her leash, Spark jumped over a display of potatoes, knocking many onto the floor. She raced down another aisle. Bud ran after her but couldn’t keep up. Her leash caught on some bottles of dish soap and they fell. One of the bottles broke and the soap flowed on to the floor. Bud slipped on the soap and hit a tower of tomato cans. They rolled down and scared Spark. She now was racing toward the cooler that held all the yogurt and cheeses.

On the way to the cooler, Spark passed the peanut butter machine. It smelled of peanuts. Spark loved peanuts! She stopped and sniffed along the floor. She smelled peanuts. Suddenly Spark’s hot breath was all over Jane. A big drop of Spark’s slobber fell right on her.

Noahrooti saw the dog’s teeth. Was he about to lose Jane forever! He yelled out as loud as he could, “Spark, stop! Be a good dog!”

Now those are words all good dogs learn to follow. And Spark was a good dog. What we don’t know is how Noahrooti ever came to say those words. But thank goodness he did! Then he said, “Please, Spark, please help us. The people who are running after you and trying to stop you from having fun in this store want to grind us into peanut butter. But you can save us. Just get us out of the store and get us to a bit of dirt. Please. You are our only hope.”

Spark was a well trained dog. She usually did what she was asked to do. But right now she took her big tongue and slurped those two peanuts right up into her mouth. She wasn’t about to stop this adventure! She ran back and leaped over poor Bud who was still on the floor. Then she ran toward the lady who was calling her. But she didn’t stop.

Spark sped right past her. She ran out the door and right into the street. A big truck slammed on its brakes. The drivers yelled at the dog. The lady, who loved Spark a great deal, almost fainted in fright. But the dog had already made it into the park across the street. There, she ambled over to a big tree, dropped the peanuts and squatted to relieve herself.

After she watered the two peanuts and the ground under them, she kicked some dirt over them. Her owner, the lady, was waiting for the walk sign. When it said ‘Go,’ she crossed the street into the park. “Spark, you come right here!” And Spark came. She was a good dog.

Both Noahrooti and Jane were terribly frightened by being sucked into Spark’s mouth. They thought the would be eaten. But then they fell on the ground! They were not eaten. Jane screamed “Thank you, Spark!”

When Spark caused it to rain such warm yellow rain all over them, Noahrooti laughed, and then said, “Spark, you be sure to come back and visit!” Of course, when Spark kicked dirt on them they lost sight of everything. This made them sad. But in almost no time a funny thing began to happen under the ground. Noahrooti and Jane began to change. Roots began to grow from their peanut bodies. Soon each of them was growing into a little peanut plant. Then they poked their heads out above the ground. Leaves came out. They could see again.

The next day Jane heard Noahrooti say to her leaves that were touching him, “Jane, is that you?” He added, “Jane, you look beautiful! Those leaves look gorgeous on you.”
Jane thought, “Noahrooti you’re a handsome dude yourself.” And if one were very small, and listening very carefully, one could hear Jane answer, “Oh Noahrooti aren’t we lucky! We will be friends together here for a long, long time.”

And who do you think came to visit whenever she could? Spark, of course.