

HOW TO BUILD A NO-MAN

By Gerard Foster

It was a lovely sunny Saturday morning... "Perfect for building a No-Man!" said Dad.

"A snow man...?!!!" said Jamie.

"No, a No-Man!" said Dad. "Come on everyone, outside now!"

So Jamie, Emily and Scrotch all put on their shoes and followed Dad out into the front garden.

"Hmm this looks like a good spot", said Dad. "Now, let's get making our No-Man!"

Jamie and Emily scratched their heads. Scrotch just scratched all over really.

"Well, what are you waiting for?" said Dad.

"We don't know how to make a No-Man", said Emily.

"You don't know how to make a No-Man?!!!" cried Dad. "What on earth do they teach you at school?"

"Maths and reading and writing", said Jamie.

"And a fat lot of use all that is if you don't know how to build a No-Man!" said Dad.

"Now to make a No-Man you need lots and lots of one thing. Can anyone guess what that one thing might be?"

"Mud...?" said Jamie.

"Carrots...?" said Emily.

"Biscuits..?" barked Scrotch hopefully, though as usual he may as well have been talking double-dutch.

"No! No! And no again!" said Dad. "To build a No-Man all you need is lots and lots and lots of nothing! Now can anyone see any nothing round here?"

"Yes!" said Jamie. "Under the bench!"

"Yes!" said Emily. "Behind the big bush!"

"Yes!" barked Scrotch, "Inside this old bucket!"

And soon they were all gathering up lots of nothing.

There was nothing here and nothing there.

There was nothing in the dustbin and nothing under the tree.

There was a great big hunk of nothing in the garage and tiny bits of nothing between the blades of grass.

There was hot nothing and sticky nothing.

There was heavy nothing and prickly nothing.

There was nothing on legs that ran round and round and nothing with wings on that zipped through the air.

“Look at them! At it again! They’re all crazy!” muttered Mr Gravelly-Walsh-Curtain as his wife poured him out a fresh cup of tea. “Fooling around in their own front garden! And still in their pyjamas at this time of day! I mean, honestly what will the neighbours think?!”

“We are the neighbours”, said his wife.

“Exactly! And we think it’s wrong!”

“Yes dear” sighed Mrs Gravelly-Walsh-Curtain. “Would you like some more snails on your toast?”

Meanwhile Dad, Jamie, Emily and Scrotch were all still busily collecting up nothing.

“Surely we must have enough by now”, said Jamie as he struggled with a particularly heavy piece.

“You can never have enough nothing!” declared Dad.

“Morning all!” chirruped Vicky the post-woman as she wheeled her trolley past the house.

“Hold up!” shouted Emily. “Haven’t you got anything for us?”

Vicky looked through her pile of letters.

“Nothing” she said, shaking her head.

“Splendid! That’s just what we need!” said Dad.

“We’re making a No-Man” Jamie explained, as they added Vicky’s nothing to the pile.

“A No-Man..?!” cried Vicky, “Well I’ll be blown! I haven’t made a No-Man in years!”

Watching from the next door window, Mr Gravelly-Walsh-Curtain twitched with rage.

“They’ve got the post-woman at it now!” he growled at Mrs Gravelly-Walsh-Curtain. Look at them prancing around like savages! What in the name of rubber gloves are they doing?!”

“They’re building a No-Man”, said his wife.

“Building?!!!!” roared Mr Gravelly-Walsh-Curtain. “Not without planning permission, they’re not!!!!” And he strode off to phone the council forthwith.

Meanwhile word of the No Man was spreading.

The twins brought nothing in matching boxes.

Ms Taylor had some nothing hidden under her hat.

Then a man with a big moustache arrived with a great big wheelbarrow-load of nothing that he said he’d found just lying around.

Jamie and Emily couldn’t believe their luck. Their pile of nothing was almost as big as the garage. But still Dad wanted a little bit more.

“Hmmm...” he said looking over the fence into the Gravelly-Walsh-Curtains’ front garden. “There’s certainly lots of nothing in there...”

“You can’t just take it without asking them first” said Jamie.

“You’re right”, said Dad. And before anyone could stop him he’d hopped over the garden fence and was walking up the Gravelly-Walsh-Curtains’ front path and knocking on the Gravelly-Walsh-Curtains’ front door...

The door opened with a horrible creak -eeerrrrreeeeeeegggggghhhhh...

“Can I help you?” said Mr Gravelly-Walsh-Curtain, though it didn’t sound like he wanted to help anyone at all.

“Good morning Mr Gravelly-Walsh-Curtain!” said Dad. “Lovely weather for this time of year, wouldn’t you say?”

Mr Gravelly-Walsh-Curtain made a noise that sounded like he’d got something stuck in his throat. A piece of snail on toast perhaps.

“I was just wondering” continued Dad, “Whether we might have some of your nothing?”

“I beg your pardon?” said Mr Gravelly-Walsh-Curtain.

“Oh we’ll give it you straight back when we’ve finished with it,” said Dad. “It’s just you seem to have an awful lot of it lying around and we thought we might be able to put it to good use.”

Mr Gravelly-Walsh-Curtain looked very confused. His little piggy eyes darted this way and that as if he was trying to spot a large trap.

“So would that be OK then Mr Gravelly-Walsh-Curtain? If we just helped ourselves to some of your nothing?”

Mr Gravelly-Walsh-Curtain’s mouth opened and closed but no words came out, just a hiss and a gobble.

“I’ll take that as a yes” said Dad and he bent down to pick up a piece of nothing that he’d spotted at Mr Gravelly-Walsh-Curtain’s feet.

“Stop! Thief!” shrieked Mr Gravelly-Walsh-Curtain as Dad headed off down the front path with his nothing.

“But I thought you wouldn’t mind?” said Dad.

“Give me that back!” yelled Mr Gravelly-Walsh-Curtain, trying to wrestle the nothing out of Dad’s grasp. “Maureen! Call the police this instant!”

“Yes dear and what shall I tell them this time?” asked Mrs Gravelly-Walsh-Curtain from the patio window.

“Tell them there’s a man stealing nothing!” shouted Mr Gravelly-Walsh-Curtain at the top of his voice.

“Yes dear” sighed Mrs Gravelly-Walsh-Curtain and decided she’d rather just go back to bed.

Meanwhile Mr Gravelly-Walsh-Curtain and Dad were still wrestling over the piece of nothing.

“Raaarghhh”

“Uggggghhhh”

“Nnnnggghh”

“Ggggrrrrhhhh....!”

With a roar Mr Gravelly-Walsh-Curtain wrenched the nothing out of Dad’s hands.

“Now clear off of my land!” he boomed.

“Erm perhaps we ought to go inside and play” said Dad, when he was back on his side of the fence.

“But we haven’t built our No-Man yet,” said Jamie.

Dad stopped and hummed and then grinned like a dolphin and said “You know what, Jamie, you’re right! We can’t let all this nothing go to waste! Come on everyone, let’s build our No-Man!”

And that’s exactly what they did. They took all of the nothing they’d collected and first they rolled out three big feet – because of course No-Men are three-legged, said Dad.

Then on top of each foot they put a big strong leg. And on top of the legs they put a great big body with two long arms as thick as tree trunks and a tummy button the size of a cabbage, as No-Men generally have, explained Dad.

And on top of the body they put a nice long neck.

And on top of the neck they put a big square head.

And on top of the head, with the last few scraps of nothing, they put a wisp of curly wurlly hair.

“Now that’s what I call a No-Man!” said the man with the big moustache.

“That’s what I call a waste of time!” growled a voice from the other side of the fence.

“Ah Mr Gravelly-Walsh-Curtain!” said Dad. “What do you think? Pretty impressive, eh..?”

Everyone else nodded in agreement.

“Have you all completely lost your marbles?” snorted Mr Gravelly-Walsh-Curtain. “There is clearly nothing there!”

“Yes there is, there’s a No-Man” said Emily. “Just there!”

“And you can actually see this No-Man can you?” Mr Gravelly-Walsh-Curtain huffed.

“Well only if you close your eyes”, said Dad. “Then you can see him very clearly. Look.”

And Dad and Jamie and Emily and the twins and Ms Taylor and Vicky the post-woman and the man with the big moustache and even Scotch all closed their eyes.

“Wow!” said Jamie.

“Wicked!” said Emily

“Woof!” said Scotch and wagged his tail.

“You’re all doolally!” shrieked Mr Gravelly-Walsh-Curtain. “Bananas! Sprockets! Wobblybobs! You’re all cock-a-doodle-woodle-doo!”

“Gustave! Will you keep the noise down!” shouted Mrs Gravelly-Walsh-Curtain from the bedroom window next door. “Some of us are trying to sleep!”

“Morning Mrs Gravelly-Walsh-Curtain!” Dad called up to her brightly. “What do you think of our No-Man?”

“Wonderful!” said Mrs Gravelly-Walsh-Curtain, with one eye firmly fixed on her husband. “A fine addition to the street!”

“There’s nothing there!” stormed Mr Gravelly-Walsh-Curtain. “You can’t see it! You can’t hear it! You can’t touch it! You can’t smell it! You can’t taste it! There is nothing, I repeat, NOTHING there!!!!”

“Not apart from a great big No-man” said Dad.

“And you’d be willing to lay money on that, I take it?” said Mr Gravelly-Walsh-Curtain with a sickly sneer.

“Absolutely”, Dad smiled back, and Jamie and Emily exchanged nervous glances.

“In that case”, oozed Mr Gravelly-Walsh-Curtain, offering Dad a fat-fingered paw, “I’ll bet you a thousand pounds in cash, there is absolutely nothing there”.

“And I’ll bet you a thousand pounds there is” said Dad and Scotch couldn’t help but let out a whine.

“Well, prove it” said Mr Gravelly-Walsh-Curtain.

“I will,” said Dad. And then he bent down and pulled a fresh carrot out of the soil.

“No No-Man” said Dad, climbing back up the ladder “is truly complete without a nose.”

“What’s he doing?” Jamie whispered to Emily.

“I don’t know” replied his sister. “But I think we’ve just lost a thousand pounds”.

Mr Gravelly-Walsh-Curtain’s grin grew wider as Dad climbed up to the top of the ladder.

“So that carrot is in fact this No-Man’s nose...?” he snickered.

“Exactly” replied Dad. “Now where shall I put it?”

“I believe between the eyes and the mouth is the usual position,” jeered Mr Gravelly-Walsh-Curtain.

“Right, well that’ll be just here then” said Dad and very carefully he positioned the carrot where he guessed the No-Man’s nose should be...

Jamie and Emily held their breath. Scotch put his paws over his eyes. Even the birds in the tree stopped singing. And far away the town hall clock stopped chiming exactly one stroke short of twelve...

...As Dad slowly took his hand away... and the carrot stayed there, stuck in mid-air!

“What the blazes...?!” snorted Mr Gravelly-Walsh-Curtain, turning a nasty shade of red.

“Wow!” said Jamie

“Wicked!” said Emily

“Woof!” barked Scotch and he wagged his tail.

“But it can’t be! It’s impossible!” stammered Mr Gravelly-Walsh-Curtain and coughed up a piece of snail.

“Now that’s what I *really* call a No-Man!” said the man with the big moustache.

Mr Gravelly-Walsh-Curtain turned even redder and lots of tiny bubbles of hotness popped and fizzed and crackled inside him.

“Looks like you owe me a grand” said Dad and a few little wisps of smoke crept out from Mr Gravelly-Walsh-Curtain’s ears.

“It’s a trick! It’s all done with mirrors and wires!” fumed Mr Gravelly-Walsh-Curtain, growing redder and redder and hotter and hotter.

“Gustave! You’re smoking!” shrieked Mrs Gravelly-Walsh-Curtain, emptying a bowl of water over her husband.

“Maureen!” exploded Mr Gravelly-Walsh-Curtain.

“Tsssssssss!” sizzled the water on his blistering head.

“There’s nothing there! I tell you! Nothing!” stormed Mr Gravelly-Walsh-Curtain, waving his arms wildly up at the carrot... which slowly, slowly turned towards him.

“Waaaaarrrrrrrrgggggh!!!!!!” screamed Mr Gravelly-Walsh-Curtain and he splash-waddle-legged it back to his house and slammed the door behind him – bang!

Pop – the carrot fell out of the air.

Dong – the town hall clock struck twelve.

Tweet-tweet – the birds began to sing again.

Jamie and Emily looked around. Scotch sniffed the carrot. It wasn’t a biscuit.

“The No-Man... He’s gone”, said Emily.

“Yes” said Dad, and for a moment he looked a little bit sad.

“No wait!” said Jamie, and he closed his eyes. “There he is! I can see him! Over there!”

And sure enough when everyone else closed their eyes they could also see the No-Man moving off with a cheery wave, out of the garden and down the street...

And the truth is he’s probably still wandering around somewhere.

He could even be sitting right next to you now, a three legged square headed twelve-foot-tall No-Man with a tummy button the size of a cabbage.

Close your eyes. Can you see him?

No?

Well in that case you can always make one of your own. All you need is lots and lots and lots and lots and lots of nothing...

THE END

(P.S. And, if you like, a carrot.)