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Opening extract from

The Astounding Broccoli Boy

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While the City Sleeps, an Unknown Hero Watches Over It from His Lonely Outpost in the Rooftops

Every story has a hero.

All you have to do is make sure it's you.

On my first night in Woolpit Royal Teaching Hospital, I thought my chance had come. The boy in the next bed sleepwalked. Hands straight down by his side, head held high, like a piece of spooky Playmobil he sleepwalked right up to the ward door, which is locked with a security code. I didn't want to bother the night nurse, so I followed him. He typed some numbers into the keypad. The door opened and off he went along the empty hospital corridors, through a staff canteen – where I was distracted by cheese – and out of the fire door.

I thought we'd walked on to the street.

I'd forgotten we were twelve floors up.

We were standing in the doorway of a kind of hut

thing right up on the hospital roof.

Miles below, the city twinkled like a massive Christmas tree. The boy did the Spooky Playmobil right to the edge of the roof. One more step and SPLAT! he would be a splodge of jam on the pavement hundreds of feet below. I thought about shouting his name, but what if he woke up, got scared and fell?

His name by the way was Tommy-Lee Komissky – though everyone called him 'Grim Komissky'. And mine is Rory Rooney. We were in the same class at school. He was the biggest and meanest. I was the smallest and weakest. I could tell you stories about the times he squashed my sandwiches, the times he threw my bag off the back of the bus, the times he threw me off the bus. But I wasn't thinking about that now. I was thinking – this is it, this is one hundred per cent my chance to be a hero.

All I have to do is save his life.

As long as he doesn't take another step, it'll be easy.

There was a flash of lightning.

He flinched.

I blinked.
There was a rumble of thunder.
He took another step.
Then Grim Komissky fell off the roof.

The Next Thing I Knew . . .

I saw him fall. I was standing in the doorway on the far side of the roof. There was nothing I could do to help him. But the next thing I knew . . .

I was standing next to him.

On the ground.

Between a row of wheelie bins and a skip.

I'd saved him.

I looked up at the roof twelve storeys above us. How had we got from there to here?

How?

Well the truth is, I am astounding.

And this is the story of how I became astounding.

We had fallen off the top of a twelve-storey building. We didn't splatter into pavement jam. We didn't crash through the pavement. We didn't bounce.

We weren't even scratched. Our fall had left us completely unharmed, though it had woken Grim up.

He looked around, stretched and growled, 'What's going on? Where are we? Are you trying to dump me in a wheelie bin?!' (This might seem an unusual question, but while we were at school, Grim Komissky had once dumped me in a wheelie bin. He probably thought I was trying to get Revenge.) He shoved me into the corner so I couldn't dodge past him. But I wasn't scared.

Tonight – for the first time since I met him – I was not scared of Grim Komissky.

Tonight I was not scared of anything.

'What are we doing here? How did we get here?'

I looked up at the top of the building – way, way above my head, so high I could hardly see it. 'We jumped,' I said. 'From up there.'

He looked up too. 'You laughing at me, Rory Rooney?' He pulled back his fist ready to thump me.

'No.'

'We can't have jumped. We'd be dead.'

'But we did jump. And we're not dead. And,' I

said, 'the jumping isn't the only inexplicable thing. When we came off the ward, you unlocked the door in your sleep. When we were on the roof, I teleported slightly. What does it mean? Think about it.'

Grim Komissky looked as if he'd just swallowed a furious wasp.

I worried he was going to be sick. 'What's up? What's happened? Are you OK?'

'I'm thinking.'

'Oh. Right.'

'No. No good. Nothing's coming.'

'OK, Tommy-Lee, listen.' That was the first time ever I called him by his real name by the way. 'They put us in the isolation ward here at Woolpit Royal Teaching Hospital because they think we're sick. What if we're not sick? What if what we are is . . . superheroes?'

How We Became Astounding . . .

No one is born Super (except Superman obviously).

The Incredible Hulk was mild-mannered scientist Bruce Banner until he was blown up by his own Gamma Bomb.

Spider-Man was ninety-pound weakling Peter Parker until he was bitten by a radioactive spider.

Swamp Thing was a botanist. He was trying to find a way to make deserts fertile, but he died and his soul got stuck in a bush.

They didn't choose to be heroes. They didn't even want to be heroes. Something weird happened and they became astounding. Maybe they could have gone to hospital to have their astoundingness removed. But no. They chose to use it for Good. That's what made them heroes.

That's exactly how it was for us.

When I looked up at the hospital roof, I seemed to see all the weird things that had happened to us, trailing after us like the tail of a comet. My life was flashing past me like the pages of a *Spider-Man* comic!

And I don't even like comics! (My dad does but I don't.)

On the front page of this comic was a picture of me and Tommy-Lee and the words, 'How We Became Astounding . . . Now read on.'