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Opening extract from

Demolition Dad

Written by

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DEMOLITION DAD

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1

Working nine to five

Jake's dad was a Demolisher.

There's no other or better word for it. No word that could make Jake prouder. From nine to five, Monday to Friday, Jake's dad took buildings from the clouds to the floor, sometimes in the blink of an eye.

There was no one smarter, quicker, or better at it than George Biggs, which was just as well, because there were lots of buildings in the seaside town of Seacross that were, frankly, an eyesore, a carbuncle, a green pus-filled wart on the face of the landscape.

Dad had been a builder once, a good one too, apparently. But that was before people had stopped coming to Seacross on their holidays in favour of a week toasting

themselves in the Costa Del Hot. When the tourists dried up, so did Dad's building work.

Jake thought his dad deserved to be rich and famous for what he did. He thought crowds should gather to watch him, cheering as he climbed the crane's ladder, whooping when he took the front of the building clean off with a single glance of his wrecking ball.

But no one ever watched George at work apart from Jake (peering through the fence) and he couldn't understand why. It wasn't as if there was anything else for the people of Seacross to do. After all, George had destroyed the crumbling old cinema three years ago.

And the bingo hall.

And the art gallery.

The leisure centre had collapsed on its own (though that's another story).

Yes, Jake was George Biggs's number one fan, the proudest son in the history of demolisher's sons, probably ever. The greatest days were the ones where he was allowed to

squeeze into the crane's cab with his dad, wedged between his bulging gut and the controls. On special occasions, like his birthday, he was even allowed to manoeuvre the wrecking ball into action, his dad's pudgy sausage fingers wrapped softly over his. It was moments like this that made Jake want to burst with pride. Only the thought of cleaning the mess off the crane window actually stopped him from doing so. I mean, can you imagine the mess?

To everyone else, George might have been fat and balding, with a ponytail as bushy as a shire horse's mane, but Jake knew something that everyone else didn't. And he had a plan. A secret sort of plan. So secret, even HE didn't know how it worked. Not fully. He doesn't find out for a good few chapters yet. But bear with him. It's well worth it when the penny finally drops.

You see it wasn't just buildings that George Biggs demolished. Oh no. At weekends, he knocked other things down. And that's when Jake got REALLY excited because once this secret was out, everyone would know how amazing his dad

was.

He could hear the crowd now, jumping to their feet, chanting louder and louder as Dad hoisted Jake victoriously onto his shoulders . . .

DEMOLITION MAN . . . DEMOLITION MAN . . . DEMOLITON MAN . . . DEMOLITON MAN!

2

The Weekend Job

Tinny music poured through the speakers and the crowd went bonkers.

Well, I say a crowd – that depends on your definition of a 'crowd'. If a crowd to you means three hairy truckers, two bored businessmen, a gaggle of gummy old women, and a pair of teenagers snogging each other's faces off, then yes, this was a crowd. A BIG one. It certainly was to Jake. He'd been to shows where a lot fewer people turned up – and quite a few when the only person applauding and going mad was him.

No, tonight, the atmosphere was electric, and as the familiar theme tune rumbled around the sports centre walls, Jake felt the hairs on the back of his neck stand on end, just as they always did. No matter how many times he heard it.

The music was familiar because Jake had written it on his laptop, on one of those fancy app things: a swirling mixture of rolling drums and thrashing guitars – the perfect way of introducing Dad to his legion of fans.

Jake knew that right now Dad would be hiding behind the curtain, costume on, biceps oiled and flexed as he leaned into the microphone, waiting for the guitars to screech to their peak.

'Laydeeez aaaand gentlemeeeen.' His voice exploded over the speakers, causing a hysterical hiss from the hearing aids in the audience. 'Readying himself for the ring, is the Master of Disaster, the Eighth Wonder of the World, the King of Sting, the one, the only, De-mo-lit-ion Man, GEOOOORGIIIIIE BEEEEEEEEE!!!'

The microphone howled its approval and the tatty black curtain bulged to reveal Jake's dad in all his weekend glory.

Six foot five and twenty stone of Man Mountain, swinging a rubber wrecking ball round his head, and decked out in a tatty black leotard which barely kept his rampaging belly

under control. At his feet, an old desk fan blew his ponytail out behind him.

Jake whooped his approval, fighting the chorus of boos from the pensioners.

There he was, the Demolition Man, the wrestler everyone loved to hate. Well, everyone except his son.

George threw his hands in the air. He pointed menacingly at the grannies, threatening to break their Zimmer frames for the disrespect they were showing him. Only when he saw Jake ringside, did he let the persona slip for a moment, and winked slyly before straddling the top rope and removing the slice of cold pizza that had been thrown – *splat* – between his shoulder blades. Instead of throwing the pizza back into the crowd, the Demolition Man grinned and yelled over the noise.

'Pineapple on pizza is a crime! I ordered pepperoni!' With a mock grimace, he picked off the offending fruit and flicked it to the ground, before folding the entire slice into his gaping mouth.

The crowd lapped it up, and so did Jake. Dad was used

to having things thrown at him on his ring walk – it happened a lot to wrestlers as they made their dramatic entrance. Pizza, boiled sweets, beer bottles, Dad had once even had to remove a pair of false teeth from his bum cheek after a particularly aggressive grandma became overexcited. She'd never got her gnashers back though – they were sitting in a shoebox under Jake's bed, along with other souvenirs from Dad's wrestling career. Ticket stubs, flyers, an eyebrow ripped from Pretty Boy Brian's head. Each object was precious to Jake, more loved than any toy he'd ever owned. One day, he knew, there'd be a museum in Dad's honour. There'd be exhibits and plaques, statues made of solid gold . . .

Jake took a deep breath. He was getting carried away. Dad had only been wrestling at weekends for about a year, after all. But as for watching it together? That had been going on for as long as he could remember – he and Dad would snuggle on the settee to watch the fights. It was their special time, after Jake's little brother Lewis was tucked up in bed and Mum was relaxing with a book. They'd laugh, boo and shout at the TV,

‘Did you see that move, Dad?’

‘I did, son, I did.’

‘He won’t be able to sit down for a week after that!’

‘Not without a rubber ring, no.’

Then they’d play-fight once the programme had finished, re-enacting their favourite moments.

By the time Jake was eight, he couldn’t help noticing the similarity between the hulks on the screen and the one next to him on the sofa. In fact, Dad was bigger and tougher than most of them put together. How amazing it would be, Jake thought, if it was his dad up there, strutting his stuff? So amazing, Jake decided, that it HAD to happen.

He started to put a plan into action one evening after their favourite wrestling show finished.

‘You should be a wrestler, Dad.’

Dad laughed. ‘Me? I don’t think so, son.’

‘Course you should. You’d squish everyone they put it front of you.’

Dad growled mock-fiercely, before hoisting Jake one-

handed above his head, and up the stairs to bed.

But Jake knew Dad was destined to wrestle, even if Dad didn't, and he took every opportunity to tell him so. He drew pictures of Dad in costume, came up with an alter ego and a finishing move for him; he even found a wrestling organisation advertising for new fighters, and printed off dozens of application forms, leaving them in Dad's pockets, under his pillow, even, once, inside a sandwich. Mmm, tasty.

In the end (and after a nasty bout of indigestion), Dad got the message.

'But *why* do you want me to wrestle?' he said.

Jake stared at him, incredulous. Why couldn't Dad see what he did?

'Are you kidding? You're the strongest person I've ever met. You're already the best demolisher in town. So I know if you body-slammed anyone in the world, well, you'd be the best at that too. And then I'd be even prouder. The proudest!'

Well, that was it. When your boy thinks that about you,

there's only one thing you can say.

'Grab your coat then, son. If I'm doing this, I need you in my corner.'

*

And so The Demolition Man was born, though he came with one simple rule:

'There's one condition,' Dad said. 'It stays a secret. Our secret.'

'Oh.' Jake felt a pang of disappointment. If Dad was a champion wrestler, he wanted *everyone* to know about it. He thought quickly.

'But we can't keep it a secret. What about Mum?'

Dad looked thoughtful and a little bit scared,

'Hmmm. Good point. We'll have to tell her. Not that she's going to like it. No one else, though. Deal?'

Bummer, thought Jake, before having another brainwave. 'What about Lewis?'

‘OK, Lewis too.’

‘He’ll never keep it quiet. We might as well tell everyone.’

‘No!’ insisted Dad, his eyes as stern as a headmaster who’s caught you nicking his favourite sweets from the tuck shop. ‘No one except family can know. Not even Mouse and Floss.’

‘But, Dad!’ Jake said. ‘I don’t understand why it’s such a big deal. Jack at school boasts about how good his dad is at football all the time. Why do I have to hide this?‘

‘Because Jack’s dad doesn’t appear in public dressed in Spandex, does he? Nor does he have to cover himself in baby oil before a big match.’ Dad dropped his voice, as if suddenly worried someone over the sea in Holland might hear him. ‘And besides, Jack’s dad is a bit . . . well, thinner than me, isn’t he?’

‘That’ll be your secret weapon, Dad. Look at The Terror. As soon as he sits on someone, that’s it. Game over!’

‘The Tsunami Terror doesn’t have to spend five days a week on a site with fifty mouthy builders. If they saw a photo of

me in a leotard, I'd never hear the end of it. Plus there's your mum. Can you imagine her face if she thought the neighbours knew I spent the weekends jumping about in Spandex? She'd never live it down! No, that's it, Jake. That's the promise we make here and now. No one except Mum and Lewis can know – or we give up before we start. Deal?'

Jake bit his lip. It wasn't perfect, far from it, but they had to start somewhere.

'Deal,' said Jake, shaking on it, keeping the fingers of his other hand crossed behind his back.

He wouldn't tell a soul. Oh no. No way.

At least, not yet.