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Opening extract from

My Dad's a Birdman

Written by

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Published by

Walker Books Ltd

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My Dad's a Birdman started life as a play. It was first performed at the Young Vic in December 2003.

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places and incidents are either the product of the author's imagination or, if real, are used fictitiously.

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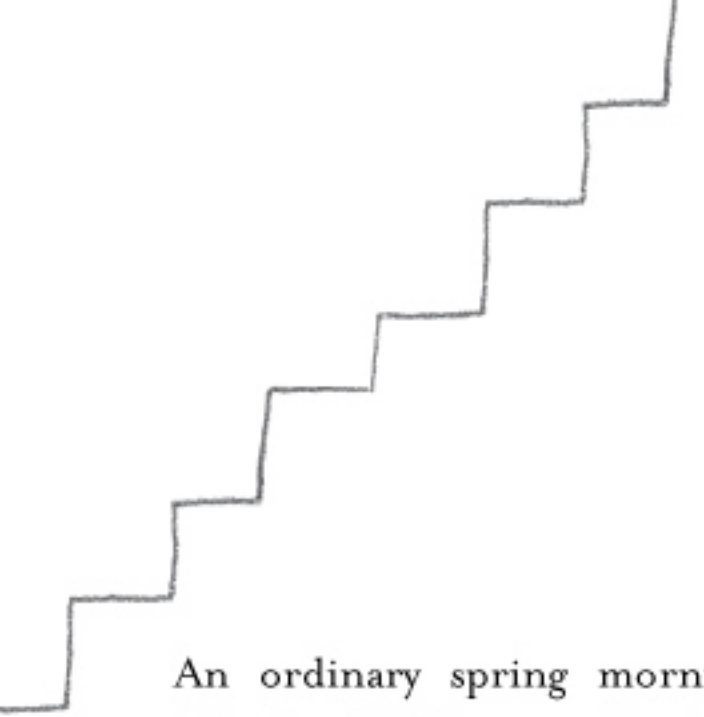

I

An ordinary spring morning in 12 Lark Lane. The birds were tweeting and whistling outside. The city traffic rumbled and roared. Lizzie's alarm went ringadingding. She jumped out of bed, washed her face, scrubbed behind her ears, brushed her teeth, brushed her hair, put on her uniform, went downstairs, filled the kettle, switched it on, put bread in the toaster, set the table with two plates, two mugs, two knives, milk and butter and jam, then she went to the foot of the stairs.

"Dad!" she shouted. "Daddy!"

No answer.

"Dad! Time to get up!"

No answer.

"If you don't get up now, I'll come up there and…"

She stepped heavily onto the first step, then onto the second step.

"I'm on me way!" she shouted.

She heard a grunt and a groan, then nothing.

"I'll count to five. One … two … two and a half… Daddy!"

There was a muffled shout from upstairs.

"Oriyt, Lizzie! Oriyt!"

There was a crash and another groan, then there he was, in a scruffy dressing-gown and his

hair all wild and his face all hairy.

"Downstairs now," said Lizzie.

He stumbled down.

"And don't look at me like that."

"No, Lizzie."

She tugged the dressing-gown straight on his shoulders.

"Look at the state of you," she said. "What on earth have you been doing up there?"

He grinned.

"Been dreaming," he said.

"Dreaming! What a man. Now sit at the table. Sit up straight."

"Yes, Lizzie."

He sat down on the edge of a chair. His eyes were shining and excited. Lizzie poured him a mug of tea. "Drink this," she said, and he took a little sip. "And eat that toast." He nibbled at a corner of the toast. "Eat it properly, Dad." He

took a bigger bite. "And chew it," she said. He chewed for a moment. "And *swallow* it, Dad."

He grinned. "Yes, Lizzie." He took a big bite, chewed, swallowed, and he opened his mouth wide for her to look inside.

"All gone," he said. "See?"

She clicked her tongue and turned her eyes away. "Don't be silly, Dad," she said. Then she smoothed his hair down and brushed it. She straightened the collar of his pyjama jacket. She felt the thick stubble on his chin.

"You've got to look after yourself," she said. "You can't go on the way you are. Can you?"

He shook his head.

"No, Lizzie," he answered. "Certainly not, Lizzie."

"I want you to have a shower and a shave today and to get properly dressed."

"Yes, Lizzie."

"Good. And what plans have you got for today?"

He sat up straight and looked her in the eye.

"I'm going to fly, Lizzie. Just like a bird."

Lizzie rolled her eyes.

"Are you now?" she said.

"Yes, I am. And I'm going to enter the competition."

"Competition? What competition?"

He laughed and leaned forward and held her arm.

"The Great Human Bird Competition, of course! Have you not heard about it? It's coming to town! I heard about it yesterday. No, the day before yesterday. Or that day a week gone last Tuesday. Anyway, the first one to fly across the River Tyne wins a thousand pounds. And I'm going to enter. It's true, Lizzie. It's really true. I'm going to win! I'm going to make me mark at last."

He stood up and held his arms out straight and flapped them.

"Are me feet off the floor?" he asked. "Are they? Are me feet off the floor?"

He ran and flapped, like he was flying.

"Oh, Dad," said Lizzie. "Don't be silly."

She ran after him. He led her round and round the room. She caught up with him at last, and smoothed his hair down again and straightened his dressing-gown.

"OK," she said. "Mebbe you are going to fly like a bird, but make sure you get some fresh air and get a good lunch inside you. OK?"

He nodded. "OK, Lizzie," he said, and then he flapped again and giggled.

"Oh, and Auntie Doreen said she might pop round today."

That stopped Dad in his tracks. His face crashed.

"Auntie Doreen?" he said.

He twisted his face and sighed.

"Not her again!"

"Yes, her again. She'll bring you down to earth."

He stamped his left foot. He stamped his right foot.

"But Lizzie…" he groaned.

"Never mind But Lizzie," said Lizzie. "Auntie Doreen loves you, just like I do. And she worries about you, just like I do. So be nice to her."

His shoulders drooped and his arms dangled by his side. Lizzie got her school bag, then kissed his cheek. She smiled gently and shook her head. He was just like a little boy standing there.

"What am I going to do with you?" she said.

"Don't know, Lizzie," he muttered.

She hesitated.

"I don't know if I should leave you on your own."

He laughed at her.

"Course you should," he said. "You got to go to school and do your sums and your spellings."

He was right. She did need to go to school. She liked school. She liked her sums and her spellings

and her teachers, and she liked her head teacher, Mr Mint, who had been so kind to her and to her dad.

"All right," she said. "I'll go. Now give me a kiss bye-bye."

He kissed her cheek. They hugged each other. She held her finger up.

"Now remember," she said.

"Yes, Lizzie. I'll remember. Wash. Shave. Get a good lunch. Get lots of fresh air. And be nice to Auntie D."

"Good. That's right."

"And I'll remember to fly."

"Oh, Dad."

He put his hand to her back and guided her towards the door.

"Go on," he told her. "You haven't a thing to worry about. Off you go to your lovely school."

She opened the door and stepped out into the garden. She peered at him.

"Bye-bye," he said.

"Bye-bye, Dad."

She walked away down the garden and through the garden gate and into the street outside. She stood there for a moment, and looked back at him. "Go *on*," said Dad. "I'm *fine*." She set off walking again. He waved until she was out of sight, then he closed the door. He flapped his arms and started giggling.

"Tweet tweet," he said. He poked a piece of toast out from under his tongue. He spat it out. "Tweet tweet," he said. "Tweet tweet, tweet tweet." Then he saw a fly crawling on the table.

"Yum yum," he said, and he set off after it.