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Opening extract from

Grandpa's Great Escape

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Spam à la Custard

Jack was a child who was happiest alone in his bedroom. A naturally shy boy, he didn't have many friends. Instead of spending his days playing football in the park with all the other kids from school, he would stay inside assembling his prized collection of model aeroplanes. His favourites were from World War II – the Lancaster bomber, the Hurricane and of course his grandfather's old plane, the now legendary Spitfire. On the Nazi side, he had models of the Dornier bomber, the Junkers and the Spitfire's deadly nemesis, the Messerschmitt.



With great care Jack would paint his model planes, then fix them to the ceiling with fishing wire. Suspended in the air, they looked like they were in the middle of a dramatic dogfight. At night, he would stare up at them from his bunk bed and drift off to sleep dreaming he was an RAF flying ace, just like his grandfather once was. The boy kept a picture of Grandpa by his bed. He was a young man in the old black and white photograph. It was taken sometime in 1940 at the height of the Battle of Britain. Grandpa was standing proudly in his RAF uniform.

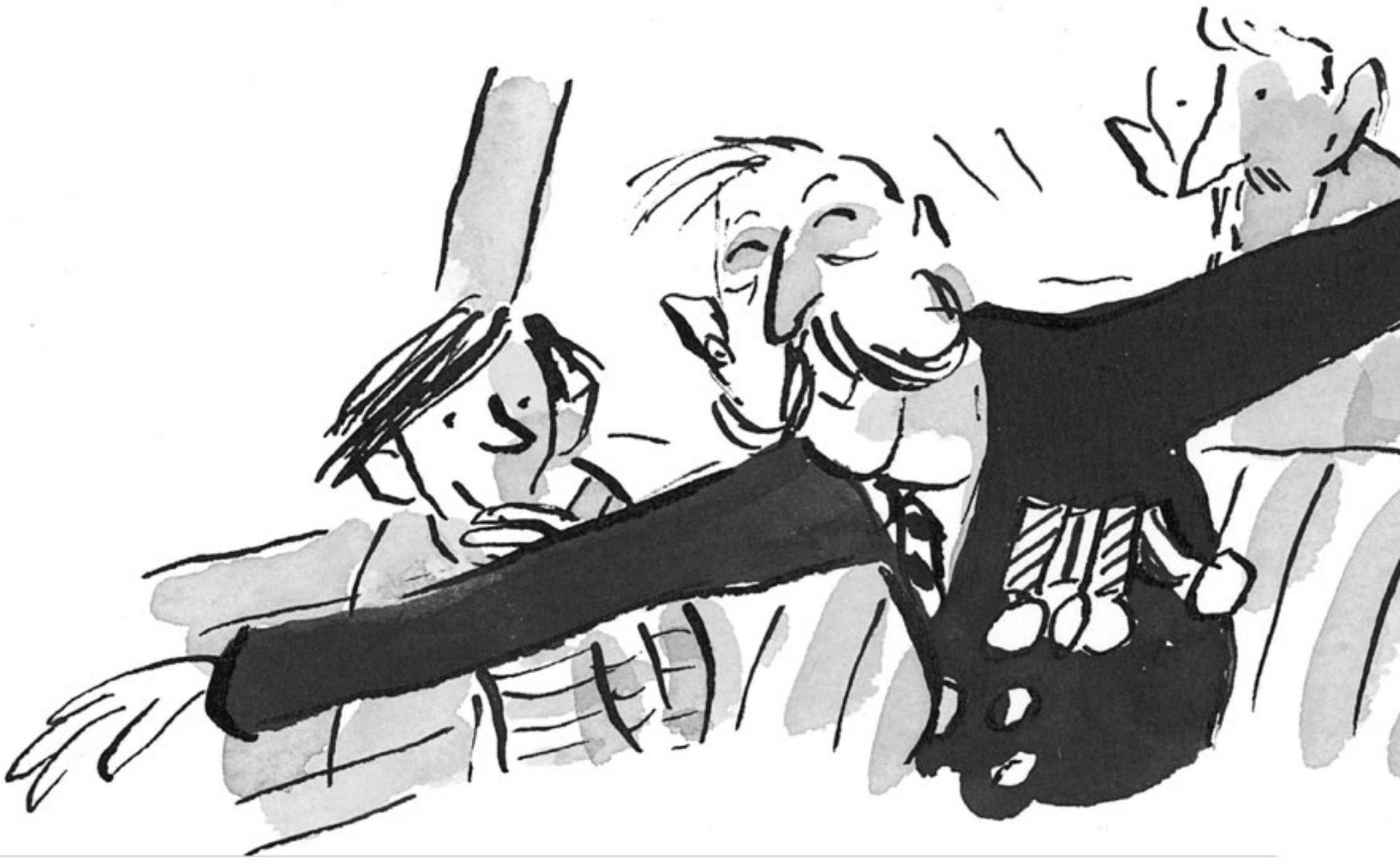


In his dreams, Jack would go *Up, up and away,* just like his grandfather had. The boy would have given everything he had, all of his past and all of his future, for one moment behind the controls of Grandpa's legendary Spitfire.

In his dreams he would be a hero.
In his life he felt like a zero.

The problem was that each day was exactly the same. He would go to school every morning, do his homework every afternoon, and eat his dinner in front of the television every night. If only he wasn't so shy. If only he had lots of friends. If only he could break free from his boring life.

The highlight of Jack's week was Sunday. That was the day his parents would leave him with his grandfather. Before the old man had become too confused, he would take his grandson on the most magical days out. The Imperial War Museum was the place they loved to visit the most. It was not too far away, in London, and was a treasure trove of all things military. Together the pair would marvel at the old warplanes hanging from the ceiling of the Great Room. The legendary Spitfire was, of course, their absolute favourite. Seeing her always brought Grandpa's memories of the war flooding back. He would share these stories with his grandson, who devoured every word. On the long bus



journey home, Jack would bombard the old man with hundreds and hundreds of questions…

"What's the fastest speed you ever went in your Spitfire?"

"Did you ever have to parachute out?"

"Which is the better fighter plane, the Spitfire or the Messerschmitt?"

Grandpa loved answering him. Often a crowd of children would gather around the old man on the top deck of the bus home to listen to these incredible tales.



"It was the summer of 1940," Grandpa would begin. "The height of the Battle of Britain. One night I was flying my Spitfire over the English Channel. I had become separated from my squadron. My fighter plane had taken a pounding in a dogfight. Now I was limping back to base. Then just behind me I heard machine guns. RAT TAT TAT! It was a Nazi Messerschmitt. Right on my tail! Again. RAT TAT TAT! It was just the two of us alone over the sea. That night would be an epic fight to the death…"

Grandpa enjoyed nothing more than sharing stories of his World War II adventures. Jack would listen intently; every little detail fascinated him. Over time the boy became something of an expert on these old fighter planes. Grandpa would tell his grandson that he would make "an excellent pilot one day". This always made the boy burst with pride.

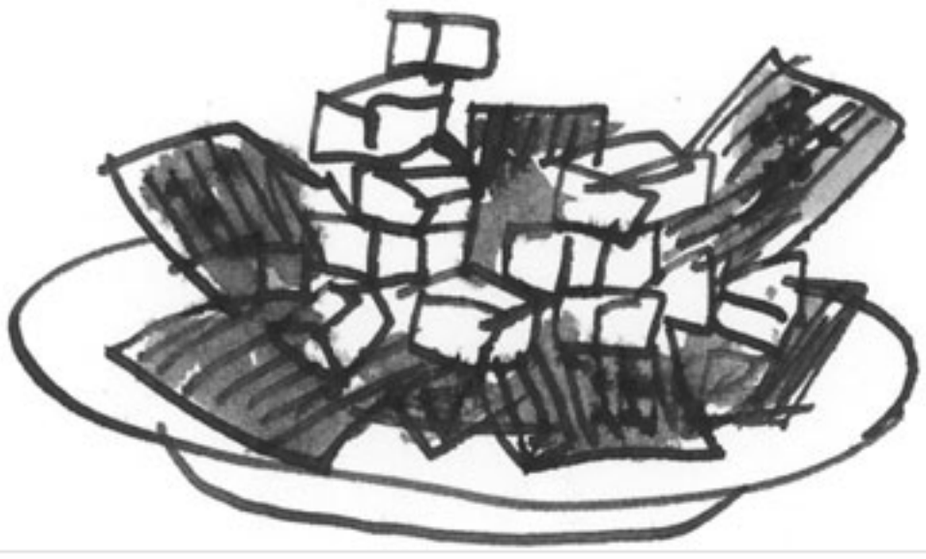
Then later in the day, if ever an old black and white war film was on the television, the pair would snuggle up on the sofa together in Grandpa's house and watch it. *Reach for the Sky* was one they watched over and over again. This classic told the story of a pilot who lost both his legs in a horrific accident before World War II. Despite this, Douglas Bader went on to become a legendary flying ace. Rainy Saturday afternoons were made for *Reach for the Sky*, or *One of Our Aircraft is Missing*, or *The Way to the Stars* or *A Matter of Life and Death*. For Jack there was nothing better.

Sadly the food at Grandpa's home was always

Spam à la Custard



diabolical. He called it "rations", as he had during the war. The old man only ever ate food from tins. For dinner he would select a couple at complete random from his larder and empty them into a pan together.



Corned beef with
pineapple chunks.



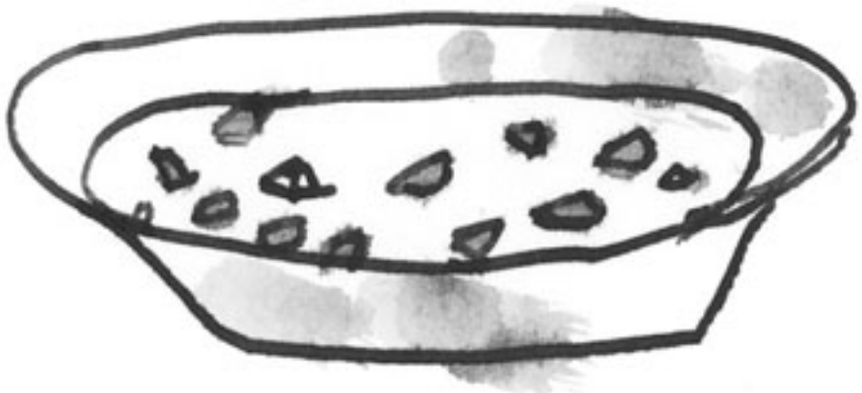
Sardines and rice
pudding.



Treacle sponge
with peas.



Baked beans mixed
with tinned peaches.



Diced carrots in condensed milk.



Chocolate pudding covered in tomato soup.



Pilchards with spaghetti hoops.



Steak and kidney pudding and fruit cocktail.



Haggis topped with cherries in syrup.



And Grandpa's speciality, *Spam à la Custard.*