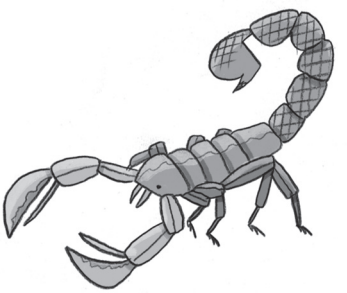
Rocco

and the Big Bear Trick



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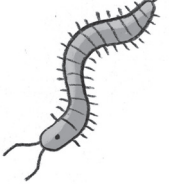
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1 CAVE PAINTING

Rocco the cave boy hurried to the back of the vast cave classroom.

Rocco liked being at the very back of the class. He liked to lurk behind the stalagmites, where he knew he could get up to a little mischief during lessons.

"Psst! Don't go too near the front," he hissed, grabbing his best friend, Grit, by the arm. "Stay back here with me."

"But I can't see anything from back here," moaned Grit, standing up on his tiptoes. Grit was by far the smallest of all the cave kids in the class. "I'm not tall like you."

Rocco was as long and thin as a pine tree.

"If we go near the front of the cave class, Mr Boulderbrain will see us playing tricks," Rocco warned.

“I don’t play tricks,” said Grit.

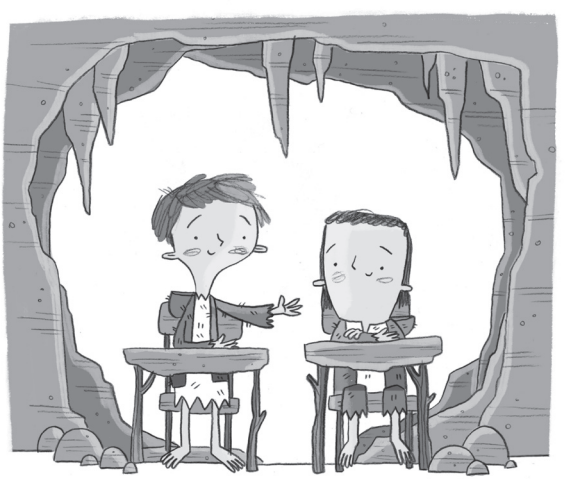
“No. But I do!” Rocco grinned.

Mr Boulderbrain, their teacher, spun round, “Is anything wrong back there? I can hear whispering.”

Rocco scrabbled around on the cave floor. “Sorry, Mr Boulderbrain. I dropped my charcoal drawing stick. That’s all.”

“Hum!” said Mr Boulderbrain, twiddling his long, ginger beard. “Carry on with your cave painting then.”

The class were drawing cave stories on the wall. Mr Boulderbrain had asked them to each paint a picture with the theme ‘What I Did in My Summer Holidays.’



"Be sure to make your paintings lively and interesting," he had said. "Include plenty of detail."

Rocco dipped his finger into a pot of brown nut juice. He tried to think. "What did I do in my summer holiday?" he wondered out loud.

They'd only been back at Cave Clan School for one day. The summer holidays seemed a million moons ago already.

"You played tricks on your dad," whispered Grit. "Remember?"

"Oh yes!" Rocco gulped as he pictured the time he'd filled Dad's slippers with sticky honey. Dad was so furious when he put them on that people heard him bellowing from three caves away.

"And you played tricks on your mum," reminded Grit.

“Poor Mum,” said Rocco with a sheepish grin. “She really did think she’d lost her best bone necklace. Who knew it would turn up in the bottom of her bowl of soup?”

“You even played tricks on the baby,” said Grit.

“Oh dear,” said Rocco, feeling truly guilty now. He really hadn’t meant to frighten his sister quite so much. He just hadn’t been able to resist popping out from behind the cooking pot with his head inside that old sabretooth tiger skull.

“And you played tricks on me, of course,” Grit groaned.

“Oh yes.” Rocco giggled. It was all coming back to him now. There was that brilliant prank when he’d hidden a giant puffball fungus inside their football and it exploded when Grit kicked it.

In the end, there wasn't enough space on the cave wall for Rocco to draw all of the tricks that he had played during the holiday. Instead, he painted one big cave cartoon of his family and Grit. They all looked very cross. Then he drew an arrow pointing to a picture of a tall, skinny boy. The boy was fleeing for the wilderness like a long-legged moa bird.

"That's me," Rocco explained when Mr Boulderbrain came over.

"Hum!" said Mr Boulderbrain. Mr Boulderbrain said "Hum!" a lot, especially when he was talking to Rocco.



“Hum,” said Mr Boulderbrain. “I hope you won’t play tricks in school this term, Rocco. You’re in Flint Class now. You need to set an example to the little ones in Pebble Playgroup.”

“Of course!” said Rocco earnestly. But he had already played a trick. He had taken the bowl of paint that Grit was using and hidden it inside his baggy fur sleeve.

“That’s very strange,” said Grit, glancing at the stone table. “The red paint was right here and now it has vanished. Where can it be?” He scratched his head. “Paint doesn’t just disappear into thin air, does it?”



"Rocco?" said Mr Boulderbrain sternly. "This missing paint wouldn't have anything to do with you, would it?"

"Me?" said Rocco innocently. He was glad he was standing in the shadows right at the back of the dark cave. Nobody saw him slip the bowl of paint back on to the table.

"There it is," he said, trying to sound surprised. "It must have been on the table all along."

"Hum," said Mr Boulderbrain.

"Exactly," said Grit. "Hum!"



They both stared very hard at Rocco, and Rocco blushed as brightly as the bowl of red paint.

I'll have to find a better trick next time, he thought.