MY PARENTS CANCELLED MY BIRTHDAY!







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CHAPTER ONE

THE FALL

It all started when a pig fell off the roof.

It wasn't just any old pig. It was our pig, Tiny.

Tiny was my sister Meg's pet pig. Tiny was a pygmy pig, which is a special kind of cute, small pig. At least, that's what the man we bought her from said. 'Oh yeah, she won't grow bigger than a pug,' he said. Only Tiny kept on growing.

Bigger than a pug.

Bigger than a spaniel.

Bigger than a Labrador.

Bigger and bigger and bigger, until she ended up regular pig size. And regular pigs are surprisingly BIG. They weigh a lot, too.

The hugeness of Tiny meant she couldn't live in our house, as Meg had planned, and the garden was too small. In the end, Dad decided to make a home for her on the garage roof. He built a fence around it and put a little pig house up there. Once a week, he'd climb through the bathroom window, on to the roof, and muck it off, which meant shovelling all the pig mess and old straw over the side.

This was Dad's least favourite job. He always swore while he was doing it, but

using made-up words. This is something he does. He thinks not using real swear words makes him a Good Dad. If you were standing in the garden you'd hear him shouting **Branoch!** and **Zerk!** and other weird words. Only, thinking about it, you really wouldn't want to be standing in the garden as he shovelled the mess over the side. Too risky.

Anyway, it was a Sunday. A normal Sunday, or so I thought. How wrong.

We were all sitting out in the garden: me, Mum, Dad and Meg, plus my nana Maureen, with her tiny chihuahua dog, Margherita. Nana had recently dyed her hair again – blue this time, with purple tips. She had just come back from seeing Mystic Morris's show. Mystic Morris could talk to dead people. Someone in the audience would ask him to

see if their dead uncle Bill was OK and he'd make contact with him and pass on a message. 'Bill says not to worry, he's fine and is wearing his favourite socks,' or something like that. Dad said it sounded like a load of **bippits** to him, and I thought he was right, but I didn't say anything.

The grown-ups were drinking tea and me and Meg were sitting on the grass, eating some of Nana's famous vegan carob cake. Dad says it could be used to repair motorway bridges after an earthquake, but it was all we had. Everything was normal. Normal, normal, fine, fine, fine, just a regular Sunday in August. My nana's been to see a psychic, my dad's teasing her using made-up swear words, great, fine, normal, then … **crack!**

There was a crack.

Then … **thud!**

There was a thud.

A big thud. In fact, a really massive **thud**.

We all jumped up in shock. Then Meg cried out, 'Tiny!'

That's what had caused the humungous thud sound. It was the sound of a huge pig falling off a roof.

We all rushed over. Everyone was shouting, 'Tiny, are you OK?' All of us except Nana. She was shouting, 'Margherita, where are you?'

I looked around. Margherita had vanished.

Had she run off, frightened by the falling pig?

Was she inside?

Out on the street?

Where could she be?

Where could she … And then we all had the same thought at exactly the same time.

Oh no!



Mum looked at Dad, her eyes as wide as dinner plates. Dad muttered, **Spanjo**, Meg twizzled her hair nervously. Then Tiny stood up. Dad gasped. Nana shrieked.

Then … **thud!**

Another thud, a bit less massive than the pig-falling thud, but still pretty big.

This was a Nana-falling thud.

So that's where Margherita was. She hadn't run away – worse luck for her. She had been on the patio and Tiny had fallen straight on her – a direct hit. What were the chances of that happening? But there was no time to puzzle that out. Nana had collapsed! Mum rushed to help and I saw Dad, spreading a large pair of pants that he'd pulled off the washing line over the exact spot on the patio where Tiny had crashed down.

Dad turned to me. 'Tom, find something

to put the dog in, for goodness sake,' he said. 'Something big enough to take a two-dimensional chihuahua.'

'What?' I said, confused.

'For Margherita!' he said. 'She's completely flattened. I need a box or something to put her in.'

I had never been asked to find a container for a squashed dog before. It threw me a bit, I'll be honest. I quickly searched the kitchen cupboards: ice cream containers, sandwich boxes … Nothing was right. **Curses!** I ran up to my room and emptied Lego from an old shoebox.

'Will this do?' I asked Dad, giving him the box. He tried to get flattened Margherita into the box. I looked away, but I could tell he was struggling. He was swearing quietly again and sweating.

'Zablash!' he said. 'Too small. We need something wider. The dog's as flat as a pancake. You wouldn't think a chihuahua could spread so far.'

I ran back inside. I checked the recycling. Perfect – an old takeaway pizza box.

'Perfect,' said Dad. 'An old takeaway pizza box.'

As Dad put the dog into the pizza box, I realised that we had actually had a margherita pizza in that box. And now there was Margherita the dog in that box. This is known as ironic. I didn't say anything.

Dad handed me the box.

'Get rid of it,' he said.

I had never been asked to do that before either; to get rid of a squashed dog. There was nowhere in the garden I could bury a box

that size – the garden was too small and mostly patio.

I ran out into the street. That's when I had an idea. There was a nursery at the end of the road. It was shut for the summer holidays. Great. I hopped over the fence and buried the box in the sandpit. Nice and deep. By the time the kids were back in September, it would all be long gone.

I sprinted back to my house. There was an ambulance outside. The ambulance men were helping Nana into the back of it. She reached out to me. 'My baby!'

I had never been called that by Nana before. Maybe she had banged her head.

'Yes, yes, I'm your baby,' I said, trying to be nice and calm.

'Where is my baby?' she wailed.

Then I got it. She was talking about

Margherita. I didn't know what to say. I couldn't tell the truth – Margherita's in a pizza box, in the sandpit at Bright Futures nursery. That would definitely upset her.

So I said nothing. The ambulance doors shut. The blue lights came on. It drove away.

Then I was aware of something short standing close to me – my sister, Meg.

'Look,' said Meg, holding up a small white thing. 'My tooth's come out.'

CHAPTER TWO

DEAD DOG DISASTERS

So that was Sunday. A day of drama and disaster and lots of Dad's made-up swear words.

Luckily, Monday started out better. Mum went to work. Dad shut himself in the dining room. Only you had to call it the study, and you weren't allowed in if the

DO NOT DISTURB,

WRITER AT WORK

sign was up. Dad was writing his book.

Dad had been writing his book for a long time. Years. He said it was nearly finished though. Everyone was excited about this, especially Mum. She hoped Dad's book would be a bestseller so she could stop working so hard to pay the bills while Dad worked on his book and earned zero money.

The house was nice and quiet and that suited me fine. I had a very important job to do. Something was coming; something was just five days away. Something very, very, very important indeed.

MY BIRTHDAY!!

Super exciting! In fact, beyond exciting! I know, I know, everyone gets excited about their birthday, but mine is different. Here are the facts:

1. It is right at the end of the summer holidays. Which means I am the youngest in my year at school. And which also means that every year I have to wait, and wait, and wait for my birthday, while all my friends have theirs one after another, before me. Bah!
2. Some people even have birthdays in September, right at the start of the school year, so they get to go first with all the birthday fuss, and no one is ever away on summer holiday to spoil things like they are with my August birthday.
3. These September birthday people include Chas Cheeseman. He is the oldest in our year. He had, I have to admit, an amazing party last September for his eleventh birthday. There were fireworks, a personal chef who made anything you wanted

to eat (I had an ice cream and doughnut sandwich, while Harry, aka the Hulk because he is freakishly big for his age, had custard and chips). Then, at the end, we all got given a drone. Not a slice of cake wrapped in a bit of kitchen roll. A drone! It was seriously amazing, although I slightly hate to admit it. Annoyingly, it was so amazing that everyone was *still* talking about it, nearly a year later!



And on the last day of term, before we broke up for summer, Chas was already talking about his next birthday – and I hadn't even had mine yet!

But finally it was August. Finally it was my turn to have a birthday. Finally my turn to be eleven. I felt like I had waited **FOREVER** for this moment.

I wanted my birthday party to be the best, most exciting one ever.

Better than Chas Cheeseman's.

I wanted people to talk about my birthday for even longer than a year afterwards – two years; even three! I wanted them to say, 'Chas's eleventh birthday was fun, but what about Tom's? Now *that* was a seriously awesome day. That's how you do a birthday!'

As luck would have it, this year was

also my **LUCKY BIRTHDAY**. It's a Bostock family tradition. Your Lucky Birthday is when your age matches your birthdate. My birthday is 11th August and this year I am eleven on 11th August. My Lucky Birthday! Meg had already had her lucky birthday. She was only four then and I was six. We can't remember a lot about it, because we were only small, but we definitely remember it was a big deal, with extra presents, tons of food, decorations and non-stop fun. And now it was finally my turn. I just knew it was going to be amazing. I couldn't think about anything else!

'There was bunting, wasn't there?' said Meg.

I was drawing birthday party invitations in Meg's room. I sometimes hung out in here. Her room was bigger than mine. Meg was colouring in her tooth, the one that came out yesterday, using a green pen. Apparently, the

tooth fairy had not turned up last night, so she was making it more eye-catching. We were trying to remember what a Lucky Birthday involved.

'Yeah, but then Harry tried to swing on it and pulled it all down,' I said.

Meg laughed.

'There was a big cake, too, which somebody fell in, I think,' I said. 'I really want a big cake for my Lucky Birthday. Chas Cheeseman's had three levels, and sweets all spilt out when you cut into it.'

I worked hard on the invitations. All morning, in fact.

They had to be good.

Everything had to be good.

I had done one for my best friend, Keith, and for Harry the Hulk and also for Jonny. He was quite a new friend. I got to know him

last year after he became famous in my school for trying to swap his brother on the internet. It didn't work out, but that's another story.

I planned to design a particularly amazing invitation for Chas, using fluorescent pens and glitter, but first I needed lunch. Dad made it. Dad does most of the cooking in our house. He's a really good cook. Mum loves his food, but worries Dad spends too much time cooking and not enough time finishing his book. Dad says Mum is a terrible cook, so he has no choice.

After lunch, while I was busy working on Chas's invitation, the doorbell rang. It was Nana. She had come home from hospital in a taxi. She had a walking stick. She had banged her hip when she fell over in shock yesterday. It wasn't broken, just bruised, but she needed

to live with us until she was properly better. Then she said:

'Where is she?'

'Who, Jill?' said Dad (Jill is another name for Mum). 'At work, as usual.'

'No! Margherita, my baby!' said Nana.

'Oh, right, yes,' said Dad. 'She's gone, I'm afraid.'

Gone where? I wondered. Then I remembered the sandpit at Bright Futures nursery. And I also remembered people sometimes say 'gone' when they mean 'dead'.

Nana shook her head. Her blue-with-purple-tips hair flicked about. She started limping through the house, stroking the walls and sniffing the air. She said she'd seen Mystic Morris, the man who could talk to dead people, do something similar during his show.

Suddenly Nana gasped and spread her arms wide. Her walking stick thwacked Dad on the chest and he made an 'oof' sound.

'She's here!' cried Nana.



And then …

'She's gone!' cried Meg, running in from the garden.