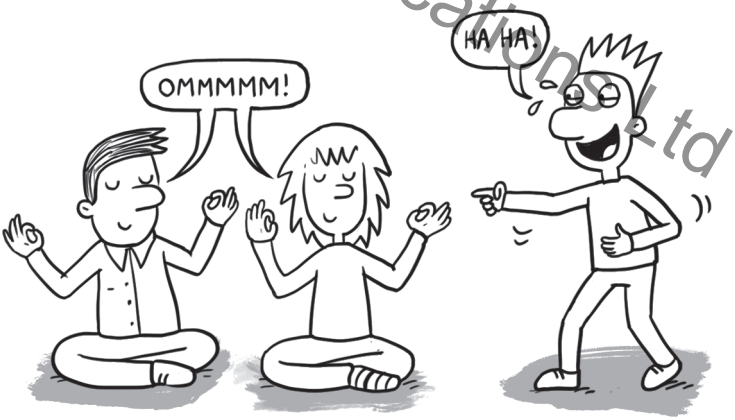
How to Change Your Parents into Superstars

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Pete Johnson



AWARD PUBLICATIONS LIMITED

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ISBN 978-1-78270-396-9

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First published by Award Publications Limited 2020

Published by Award Publications Limited,
The Old Riding School, Welbeck,
Worksop, S80 3LR

www.awardpublications.co.uk

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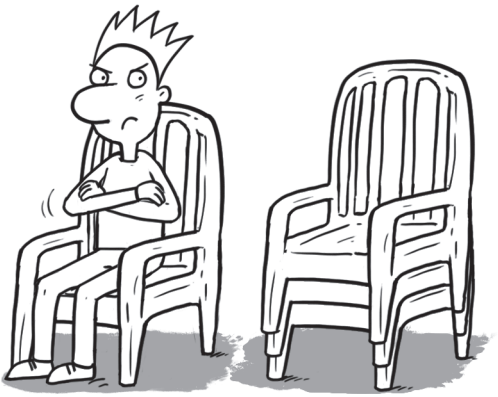
Printed in the United Kingdom



To the peerless Jayne and Claire,
of the Sheffield School Library Service,
with love and huge thanks for all your
support and encouragement.

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A Favour

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I've been kidnapped by the grumpiest man in the universe.

He held me prisoner in a large cupboard full of hideous plastic chairs. I had to stay there until my mum and dad rolled up.

So when I got home, what do you think was the first thing my parents did? Bake me a cake? Give me extra pocket money to make up for all the stress I'd been through?

NO. THEY SENT ME TO MY ROOM!

'You do realise the police were nearly involved today,' Dad wailed, shaking with anger.

'But, Dad, I was the one who was locked away in a cupboard…' I pointed out, not unreasonably.

'Louis… just go to your room!' he cried, in total exasperation.

‘But I haven’t told you what happened,’ I began. ‘It was something totally amazing.’

‘We know exactly what went on,’ sighed Mum wearily.

But they don’t.

No one does – except Maddy. And me.

And I’m bursting to tell someone. So will you do me a favour? Let me fill you in on my incredible afternoon.

You will? Brilliant!

Shall we race on to the next page?

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Chapter One

Slow-acting Magic

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Tuesday April 22nd

5.30 p.m.

I'm Louis. Full name: Louis the Laugh. Pronounced Lou-ee, not Lewis like my old head teacher used to say all the time. I never corrected him though: he was a scary man.

I've only one talent – making people laugh. And I've dreamed of being a comedian since I was an amoeba.

Right now, I'm at school of course – yawn – but on Sunday afternoons I've been appearing on a vlog. You'll never guess which one! Prepare to be impressed.

Noah and Lily's vlog.

They're huge, aren't they? I mean, over three million teenagers have watched them cleaning their teeth.

Well, I've been featured on the end of some of their vlogs. You might even have seen me. I'm the cheeky-looking boy, with a head shaped like an onion, who helps kids with their problems and tells jokes.

Recently Noah and Lily even let me join in on one of their pranks. I was slapped across the face with a wet fish. I can't tell you how proud I felt. Shortly afterwards they Skyped me…

'You're so funny, Louis, and we really, really like you,' said Lily.

I beamed and quipped, 'I can understand that.' (I'm one of those people who has to make a joke about everything.)

'So we're going to miss you so much,' said Noah.

I stopped beaming. Miss me? But I wasn't going anywhere.

Only they were.

They were leaving to do a whole series of special interviews and pranks across America.

'I've got a passport,' I laughed (hint, hint). Noah and Lily chortled merrily. 'And a good friend of mine – Poppy, who's an ace conjurer –

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is in America right now with her grandad doing some shows. I'm sure I could stay with them. So you needn't worry about my accommodation or my meals, or my washing…'

Noah and Lily laughed and laughed, then said they really had to go. I didn't understand why they weren't taking me seriously! Surely, they realised their ratings would plummet without me!

'Well, it's a brilliant opportunity for you both,' I croaked. 'How long will you be away?'

They didn't know. Months and months, anyway. 'Keep watching our show, won't you?' said Noah, just before they vanished out of my life.

Afterwards I sat there for ages in a kind of shocked daze.

Finally I told Maddy, my agent – and girlfriend, what had happened. She was stunned too, but then she said, 'Louis, I'll never forget the way you looked when Noah and Lily slapped that wet fish into your face. You were hilarious. And I'm so not letting a talent like that go to waste, no matter what Noah and Lily do.'

Two days later, Maddy found out about *Make Me Laugh*. A new talent show for young comedians. The producer, Marcus Capel, was

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doing auditions all over the country ('I could be in your town next week!'). But he also invited kids to send in three-minute audition tapes to give him a 'flavour of your personality'.

Maddy and I spent a whole weekend capturing 'my flavour' and then we waited eagerly for Marcus Capel's reply. One massive week crashed by. Then another…

NOTHING. There was, of course, only one explanation. My tape must have gotten lost in the post. So Maddy and I made another one and sent this off by recorded delivery (ingenious or what?).

Here I'm going to briefly interrupt my story to let you in on a secret, which no one – not even Maddy – knows about. I was so desperate for Marcus Capel to reply, I made a wish.

I wished very quietly, 'If there's any magic out there in the world, let me hear from Marcus Capel.'

I don't actually believe in magic but there were so many books about wizards and all that carry-on, I figured it was worth a go, just in case. Anyway, absolutely nothing happened.

UNTIL THIS AFTERNOON!

It was the last day of the Easter holidays and Maddy and I had been to London where we'd met up with her two older sisters, Vicky and Zoe.

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We'd had a day wandering round and watching the street performers in Covent Garden before they'd taken us out for a truly epic meal. We'd caught the train back and were slowly trudging out of the station – both of us had eaten far too much – when a loud, confident voice said to us, 'Excuse me, folks!' A guy with a hipster beard and wearing an open-necked white shirt and a velvet jacket bounced past us. A woman and a boy, about my brother Elliot's age (seven), trailed after him – lugging two hefty suitcases.

'What do you bet that man's an actor?' said Maddy.

'He even looks a bit familiar,' I said.

We watched him stride purposefully over to a dead posh car parked next to the taxis.

'I believe you are expecting me,' he said.

'That's class,' I murmured to Maddy, 'having a car waiting just for you.'

Then his name swept across the station like a tsunami: 'I'm Marcus Capel.'

That was so incredible it felt like, well… magic. Slow-acting magic – I'd put my request in weeks ago.

But just think, if Maddy and I had caught an earlier or later train, we would have missed Marcus Capel! Instead, our timing was magically perfect.

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'He must be doing auditions,' I spluttered. 'We've got to find out where.'

Maddy didn't answer. She just stood there with her mouth slightly open, looking exactly as if someone had cast a spell over her. Then, all at once, she shook herself out of her stupor and said, 'We mustn't lose him.'

The next thing I knew, Maddy was charging after Marcus Capel. For a crazy moment I actually thought she was going to dive into his car with him. But instead she jumped into the back of the taxi, yelling, 'FOLLOW THAT CAR!' I hurtled after her. The driver twisted his head round and stared at us curiously. 'I've always wanted to say that,' she grinned.

As we took off, I asked, 'Maddy, what exactly are we doing?'

'Following Marcus Capel, of course,' she said, before adding, 'What do you bet he's going to a hotel? Probably the Belle Vue, that's the poshest hotel around here.'

'So, then what do we do?' I persisted.

Maddy was indignant. 'How do I know? I can't think of everything at once, can I?'

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