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opening extract from

Beware! Killer Tomatoes

written by

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Ask Jeremy



Of all the books you have written, which one is your favourite?

I loved writing both **KRAZY KOW SAVES THE WORLD – WELL, ALMOST** and **STUFF**, my first book for teenagers. Both these made me laugh out loud while I was writing and I was pleased with the overall result in each case. I also love writing the stories about Nicholas and his daft family – **MY DAD**, **MY MUM**, **MY BROTHER** and so on.

If you couldn't be a writer what would you be?

Well, I'd be pretty fed up for a start, because writing was the one thing I knew I wanted to do from the age of nine onward. But if I DID have to do something else, I would love to be either an accomplished pianist or an artist of some sort. Music and art have played a big part in my whole life and I would love to be involved in them in some way.

What's the best thing about writing stories?

Oh dear – so many things to say here! Getting paid for making things up is pretty high on the list! It's also something you do on your own, inside your own head – nobody can interfere with that. The only boss you have is yourself. And you are creating something that nobody else has made before you. I also love making my readers laugh and want to read more and more.

Did you ever have a nightmare teacher? (And who was your best ever?)

My nightmare at primary school was Mrs Chappell, long since dead. I knew her secret – she was not actually human. She was a Tyrannosaurus rex in disguise. She taught me for two years when I was in Y5 and Y6, and we didn't like each other at all. My best ever was when I was in Y3 and Y4. Her name was Miss Cox, and she was the one who first encouraged me to write stories. She was brilliant. Sadly, she is long dead too.

When you were a kid you used to play kiss-chase. Did you always do the chasing or did anyone ever chase you?!

I usually did the chasing, but when I got chased, I didn't bother to run very fast! Maybe I shouldn't admit to that! We didn't play kiss-chase at school – it was usually played during holidays. If we had tried playing it at school we would have been in serious trouble. Mind you, I seemed to spend most of my time in trouble of one sort or another, so maybe it wouldn't have mattered that much.

14½ Things You Didn't Know About

Jeremy Strong

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1. He loves eating liquorice.
2. He used to like diving. He once dived from the high board and his trunks came off!
3. He used to play electric violin in a rock band called THE INEDIBLE CHEESE SANDWICH.
4. He got a 100-metre swimming certificate when he couldn't even swim.
5. When he was five, he sat on a heater and burnt his bottom.
6. Jeremy used to look after a dog that kept eating his underpants. (No – NOT while he was wearing them!)
7. When he was five, he left a basin tap running with the plug in and flooded the bathroom.
8. He can make his ears waggle.
9. He has visited over a thousand schools.
10. He once scored minus ten in an exam! That's ten less than nothing!
11. His hair has gone grey, but his mind hasn't.
12. He'd like to have a pet tiger.
13. He'd like to learn the piano.
14. He has dreadful handwriting.

And a half . . . His favourite hobby is sleeping. He's very good at it.

1 How I Ended Up in Hospital

Is life wonderful? No. Am I enjoying myself? No. Am I surrounded by disease and despair? Yes. Which is hardly surprising, because I'm in hospital. Again. Do you think I like coming here? No. In fact I take great pains to try and avoid it but somehow, somehow, I always seem to end up here, often with a great pain.

Mum says I'm a walking disaster. Dad says I don't have accidents. 'You're an accident waiting to happen, Jack,' he told me. 'In fact, you *are* an accident.'

'A Jackcident,' sniggered my little bro, Ben. The whole family laughed. Even me.

You'd think I was tied to this hospital with elastic. The moment I escape – boyoyoing! I come zooming back. Dad says he's plain fed up.

'I'm fed up with you ending up in hospital,' he says. (See, told you.) 'I spend more time here than I do at home, all because of you.'



'Dad, you're exaggerating.'

'Not a lot. You were here a few weeks ago with a broken foot.'

'It wasn't broken, Dad. It was badly bruised.'

'And last term you had an operation.'

'The doctors didn't operate, Dad. They thought they might have to, but they didn't.'

'I don't know why you swallowed that coin in the first place,' Dad said.

'Ben said it would stop my hiccups if I put a cold coin on my tongue.'

'That is unbelievably stupid.'

'I know that now, Dad, but I didn't know when I did it. I only realized how stupid it was when I swallowed it by mistake. Anyhow, it was Ben who said it. He's more stupid than me.'

'No, you're more stupid than Ben. He only said it, and he's seven, but you actually went and did it, Jack! And then it went straight down the toilet! Talk about chucking money away.'

Parents are lovely, aren't they? There you are on your death bed and all they can think about is money. I could have been choking my way to heaven!

ME: Uhuhh! Urhurrhh! URRRHHH! Dad!
(*CHOKE CHOKE CHOKE*)

DAD: Just tell me where the money is, son!
TELL ME WHERE THE MONEY IS!
Oh, now you're dead! What did you go and die for? Wake up!

Yep – that's all the sympathy I get. I'm always having accidents. Some people reckon I am just humongously clumsy. Others think I'm plain stupid. But I can tell you this for sure – I don't do

it on purpose.

So I'm stuck in hospital, again, and you would not believe how boring it is. What's the most boring thing you can think of? Socks? School? Auntie Rachel? Whatever it is that you are thinking of I can tell you now it's not boring enough because my boredom is as BIG AS A PLANET. (Jupiter probably – the biggest planet in the universe.)

HELP! I AM DYING OF BOREDOM! I NEED VISITORS! (But not Ben – he just winds me up.) Just to prove how bored I am, I miss school. Exactly. That much. I even miss



my teacher, Mrs Fetlock, and that's saying something. Do you know what her favourite subject is? Repetition. Here are a few examples of things she constantly repeats.

'Did you hear what I said?' Secret silent answer: *What?*

'Are you listening to me?' Secret silent answer: *No.*

'Jack Lemming, what did I just say?' Secret silent answer: *Jack Lemming, what did I just say?*

So I am lying here, on my back, twenty-four hours a day. Not allowed to move. Broken leg. Bad break. Top half of the leg, where the big bone goes, the femur. I may never walk again. My life lies in ruins, and my leg lies in plaster. Takes about six weeks to heal – four of them on my back, 24/7, leg covered in bandages and a giant bag of sugar hanging off my foot.

That's how doctors cure a broken leg. It's true. They hang bags of sugar from your toes.

Yeah – gotcha!! Had you fooled, didn't I? OK, here's the truth, and I mean the true truth. There is a weight hanging from my foot, but it's not a giant bag of sugar. It's a bag of . . . well, actually I don't know what's in the bag. Could

be jam. Or dynamite. Or someone's brain, left over from an operation. Yuk. What's in the bag isn't important, but the weight is, because it helps to keep the leg stretched and straight. It's called traction.

Most broken legs aren't mended like this any more, not in plaster and everything. The doc pins it – not pins like you have at home – big steel pins. You don't feel it because you get anaesthetized first. When you wake up it's all been done.

Unfortunately, and that should be my middle name, *unfortunate* – Jack Unfortunate Lemming – my leg couldn't be mended the new, easy way of course. The break was complicated, and the leg got shoved into plaster. Typical. Will I ever get a lucky break? Ha ha. Lucky break! A hospital-type joke. There might be more of those. Don't say you weren't warned.

So I lie here festering and rotting away. Now I know what it's like to be an apple left in the fruit bowl for weeks and weeks, slowly going mouldy.

And what have I got to look at while I'm lying here? I will tell you – a small TV and the ceiling. If I turn my head to the left I can see the rest of



the ward I'm on. It's not all that big. Opposite me there's Kirsty, although I call her Princess La-La. She thinks she's above everyone else because she's thirteen and goes to secondary school. Big deal. Kirsty has multiple food allergies and all she gets to eat is some horrible slop-stuff. It looks vile but she says she doesn't care because at least it stays inside her.

I said, 'How do you get multiple food allergies?'

'I was born with them, if you must know,' she muttered. Honestly, having a conversation with

Kirsty is like jumping into a patch of stinging nettles, so I shut up after that. Liam didn't though. Liam never shuts up. He said, what if you're not allergic to the food? Suppose it's the food that's allergic to you? She said he was stupid.

'Is that a medical definition?' he asked.

'In your case, yes,' said Kirsty (aka Princess La-La). I think she won that argument. Rats. She usually wins. Double rats. Still, it can't be very nice for her. There are loads of things she's not allowed to eat. Chips, ice cream, chocolate, cheese – that's just a few. Sometimes she has really bad weeks and can hardly eat anything without being ill. Then she has to come into hospital and get fed on the slop-stuff.

There are two other beds: one's empty and the other is *inhabited* by Liam (already introduced). I say inhabited because Liam lives in his bed a bit like a caveman in his cave. His bed is a mountain of sheets and covers and pillows and books and toys and I don't know what. Liam sits in the middle of it all, staring out, picking his nose and making 'ugg-ugg' noises. I'm not quite sure what's wrong with him, apart from being a

complete clown. I did try asking. I said, word for word: 'Why are you in hospital, Liam?'

He said, word for word: 'Can't find the way out.'

See? I told you he was a clown. He reckons he should be going home soon. 'Can't be soon enough,' said almost anyone who heard him. He's a laugh, Liam, and I need all the laughter I can get because this place is killing me, and I don't think hospitals are supposed to do that, are they? They're supposed to make you



better, to help you live – but I am DYING OF BOREDOM. I've said that already, haven't I? That's how bored I am. I hope I get out soon. I've got to get out.

I suppose you're wondering how I broke my leg in the first place, and that's where things start getting edgy. Everyone thinks I came off my mountain bike and it's true, I did. The thing is though that nobody knows *why* I came off my mountain bike. That's why I have to get out of here, get out before they come to *get me*, and they will come, I know they will, because they know what I did. I'm not brave enough to tell you everything yet, but I will, I promise. All I can say at the moment is that it was a tomato-related accident. And someone died. And it was my fault.