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opening extract from

My Granny's Great Escape

written by

Jeremy Strong

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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

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

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 Granny and the Boy Next Door





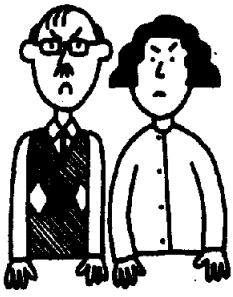
Yurrgh! I don't believe it – my granny's in love! She's at least five thousand years old (well, sixty-two really) and she's gone all soppy about this man next door.



'He's such a handsome boy,' she told me. *Boy!* He's older than she is! Do you know what she did next? She whispered into my left ear, 'Do you think he fancies me, Nicholas?'

I tried to escape, but she clung on to me. 'You've gone very red, Nicholas. You're not embarrassed by your granny, are you?' Embarrassed? I wanted to crawl into a hole and hide. Come to think of it I wanted *Granny* to crawl into a hole and hide.





I'd better give you more details. Next door to us live a fussy couple called Mr and Mrs Tugg. Mr Tugg doesn't get on very well with us. He's always complaining about something, and Dad keeps calling Mr Tugg 'The Martian', as if he's some kind of alien.

Here is Mr Tugg's general list of complaints:



1 *My dad* Mr Tugg says that my dad is unhelpful, thoughtless and lowers the tone of the neighbourhood.

2 *Our garden* Mr Tugg says people should not be allowed to build dinosaurs in their gardens. (Dad tried to make me a slide in the shape of a Tyrannosaurus rex, but he never finished it.) Mr Tugg also says that our lawn lowers the



tone of the neighbourhood, because Dad doesn't cut it properly. (I've seen Mr Tugg trimming his lawn with *nail scissors*!)

3 *Singing* My dad's got a karaoke machine and he loves singing with it – very loudly. Mr Tugg doesn't like my dad singing on his karaoke machine. He says it gives him a headache.



4 *Our car* Mr Tugg says our car is noisy (true), smelly (true again), doesn't work properly (also true), and lowers the tone of the neighbourhood (possibly).



As you can see, Mr Tugg is very concerned about the neighbourhood. He's even trying to set up one of those neighbourhood watch groups and he wanted Mum and Dad to help. He came round the other morning to speak to



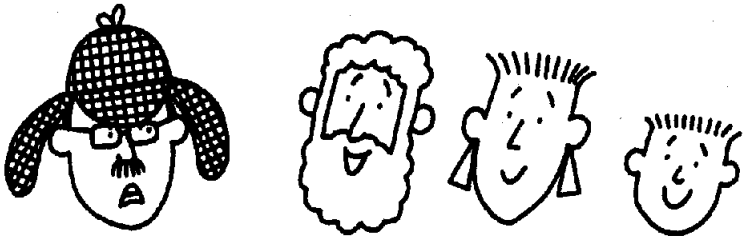
them. He stood on the doorstep looking very important with a deerstalker hat stuck on his head and a pair of binoculars hanging round his neck. (In other words, Mr Tugg *thought* he looked important. My dad thought he looked a bit of a twit.)

'Are you going birdwatching, Mr Tugg?' asked Dad cheerfully.

'Of course not. This is for my neighbourhood watch scheme.'

'Neighbourhood watch?' echoed Mum. 'What's that?'

Dad's eyes lit up. 'It must be when we all watch the neighbours. It sounds fascinating. Who starts first? Shall we come round and watch you, Mr Tugg, or are you going to watch us? Are we allowed to hide? You shut your eyes and count to a hundred while we run away and hide.'



'Don't be so ridiculous!' growled Mr Tugg, and his little moustache began twitching. 'It's not like that at all. Neighbourhood watch means that we keep a lookout for burglars and car thieves and vandals. Why do you think I've got my binoculars and notebook and whistle?'

Dad looked at me in astonishment. 'Phew! Do you hear that, Nicholas? Mr Tugg has got a notebook and whistle! I wouldn't like to meet him in a dark alley.' Even Mum had to hide a little smile.

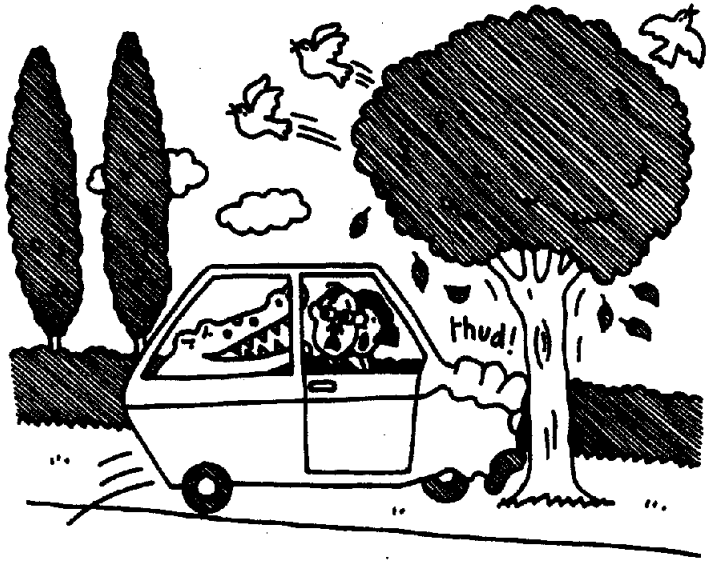
'It's nothing to laugh at,' snapped Mr Tugg. 'There's too much crime about these days. I've just bought a new car and I don't want it stolen, so I have started up a neighbourhood watch scheme. Everyone

else thinks it's a good idea.'

'It *is* a good idea, Mr Tugg,' Mum offered politely. 'Is your new car nice?'

Mr Tugg shot an icy glance at all three of us. 'I hadn't been planning on buying a new car, but if you remember I found an alligator in the last one. I wasn't expecting to find an alligator in my car and I drove off the road.'

(I think I'd better explain. Dad brought a pet alligator home a couple of months ago. We called it Crunchbag, but it



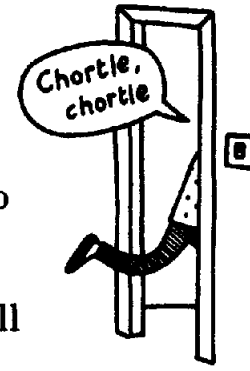
kept escaping and one day it slipped into the back of Mr Tugg's car. He went out for a drive with his wife when Crunchbag popped up his head and opened his jaws. Poor Mr Tugg crashed into a tree. Now he's got a new car and Crunchbag has gone to live in a nearby zoo.)

Mr Tugg said he was planning a meeting about the neighbourhood watch scheme and Dad said he would go along. 'I don't want to be burgled either,' he pointed out. 'The thieves might steal my karaoke machine.'

Mr Tugg bristled at once, which was exactly what Dad had intended. 'Quite frankly, robbers would be doing everyone a great service if they *did* steal your karaoke machine,' he snapped.

'I don't think that's very neighbourly of you, Mr Tugg,' said Dad, trying to look immensely hurt. 'Nevertheless, I shall come

to your meeting, but I insist on being given a free notebook and whistle.'



How my dad managed to keep a straight face, I don't know. Mum couldn't. She disappeared giggling into the front room.

'Everyone who joins will get a notebook and whistle,' announced Mr Tugg importantly. 'I already have a small supply laid in. Now, there's one other thing I should mention while I am here –'



'Our grass is too long?' interrupted Dad.

'No –'

'It's the wrong colour?'

'What's the wrong colour?' asked Mr Tugg, whose logical brain had now been thoroughly derailed by Dad's off-the-wall questions.

'I don't know,' said Dad. 'Everything probably.'

'What *are* you talking about?'

'I don't know,' admitted Dad with a shrug. 'What are *you* talking about?'

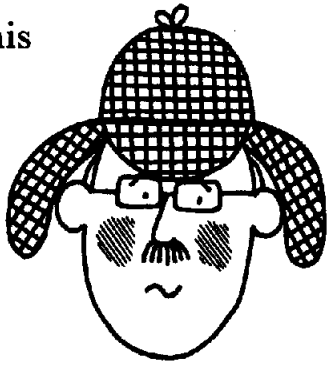
'I was about to say that my father is coming to live with us.'

'Good heavens!' cried Dad. 'I didn't know Martians had fathers.'

'If you were funny I'd laugh,' retorted Mr Tugg. 'My mother died a year ago and he's been getting lonely on his own, living in a big house. He's moving in with us.'

Dad scratched his head. 'Why are you telling us?'

Mr Tugg shuffled his feet and I could have sworn he blushed. 'No particular reason. I thought I had better mention it – in case you



think he's a burglar or something.' Mr Tugg tapped his deerstalker. 'That's the sort of thing we have to look out for. Anyway, my father moves in tomorrow.'

Have you put two and two together yet? Brilliant isn't it? Mr Tugg's father is my granny's 'boy next door'! But you don't know the half of it yet!

Mr Tugg senior is sixty-five and he's called Lancelot, although he's hardly a knight in shining armour and he doesn't ride a horse – he rides a big motorbike and sidecar. In fact, he's a Hell's Angel. He has long grey hair tied back in a ponytail and he wears leather trousers and a leather jacket with

MAD, BAD AND ARTHRITIC

written in silver studs on the back. No wonder Mr Tugg looked so nervous when he was telling us about his father.

