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opening extract from

# The Quigleys in a Spin

written by

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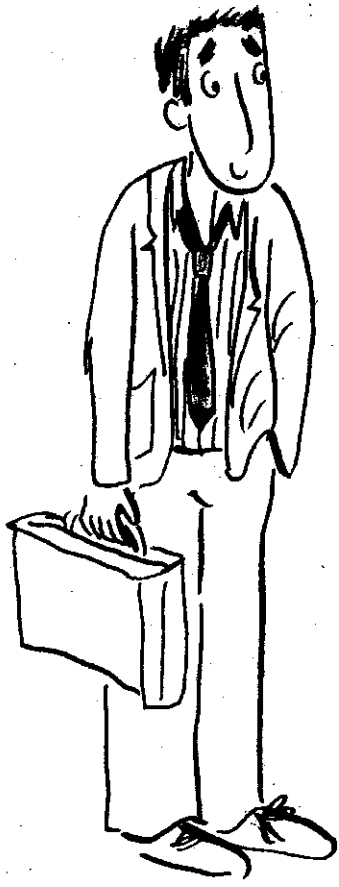
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# Dad's Big Toe



# Dad's Big Toe

Dad was a hard worker. He had a little office upstairs, and he worked there all day and sometimes all evening. At night he was usually tired.

One night, Lucy and Will sat in their bedroom, watching Dad being tired as he searched for a story to read.

'You're all full of yawns,' Lucy said to him.

'The funny thing about yawns,' Will said thoughtfully, 'is they're not like sneezes.' He began to explain the difference between a yawn and a sneeze, but it was hard to hear him because he was lying squished face-down on the floor with his feet up on Lucy's bed and his head under the bedside table. Will liked to invent new positions.

'Will!' Dad said. 'What are you doing?'



'Relaxing.'

'Relax on your own bed,' Lucy said.

'I can't get my feet on the top bunk from here,' Will said, spitting out carpet fur. They began to bicker.

'No bickering,' Dad said. 'I'm too tired.'

'We're not asking *you* to bicker,' Will said. 'Lucy and I can manage on our own.'

'I mean I'm too tired to deal with you bickering,' Dad said, but he couldn't make himself sound cross because at that moment he began to yawn. In fact it was such a long, stretchy, blind sort of yawn that when it was over and he could see again, Will had finished bickering with Lucy and had gone downstairs to bicker with Mum instead, and the bedroom was quiet.

'Are you going to read to me now?' Lucy asked. 'Can you read if you're full of yawns?'

Dad sat on the bed, yawning. 'I'll try,' he said.

Five minutes later, as he was saying, 'For the first time in his life he was face to face

with a silk-monkey,' he fell asleep. He didn't say he was going to fall asleep, he just did. He slid slowly sideways along the wall and sprawled on Lucy's bed with his eyes closed and his chin on his chest.

Lucy crawled out from under her duvet to have a closer look. 'Dad, you've fallen asleep,' she whispered.

Dad didn't disagree. Lucy watched him for a while. His face was slack and he was breathing through his nose in deep, whispery breaths. She put her finger out to feel the breaths, and they were warm and damp. She grinned to herself. Then she put her finger behind his right ear, and tickled him. A puzzled, frowny look went across his face, but he didn't wake up. Lucy grinned again. She tickled him behind his other ear, and in his sleep he smacked his lips together as if he were tasting something odd, and Lucy had to put her hand over her mouth to stop herself laughing. Then she sat back and looked at him a bit longer while she decided what to do next.



What would it be like, she wondered, if she tried to take his shoes off without waking him up? She thought it would be hard.

But it turned out to be easy.

Then she wondered if she could take off his socks without waking him up, and she did that too.

His bare feet dangled over the edge of the bed, and she sat looking at them, and grinning. His toes looked like small hairy animals dozing in a row. One wriggled in its sleep. Naturally Lucy thought about tickling them, but then she had a better

idea. A much better idea. She got up and went to the drawer where she kept her precious things, and searched through it until she found what she wanted, and went back and sat cross-legged next to Dad's feet and got to work.

At first she found it difficult, and she made a few mistakes. It was hard to keep her hands steady all the time. But in ten minutes, she had painted all Dad's toenails in her favourite purple sparkly nail polish.

Feeling very pleased with herself, Lucy sat looking at the gleaming toes. They were much nicer purple and sparkly, she thought. She thought all toes should be sparkly



purple, even Dad's. And then, quite suddenly, she thought that maybe Dad wouldn't think so, and she was scared at what she'd done. Downstairs she could hear Mum and Will coming to the end of their argument, and she began to panic. As quickly and carefully as she could, she put Dad's socks back on, and his shoes, and just as she was finishing doing up the laces, Dad woke with a grunt, saying, 'And the sulky-minkey said . . . the silly-money . . . Oh.'

He sat on the edge of the bed, looking baffled. 'I think I must have nodded off for a few seconds,' he said at last. Lucy waited anxiously for him to ask her what she'd been doing while he was asleep, but he didn't. He tucked her into bed, kissed her goodnight, and went downstairs. A few minutes later, Will came up to read on his own, and he didn't ask her what she'd been doing either. She lay in bed, thinking nervously about what would happen when Dad found out that his toes were purple and sparkly. She felt very worried, but somehow

it didn't stop her being tired, and, before she knew it, she was asleep.

Next morning, Dad went off early to catch a train to London, so he wasn't at breakfast. By now he must have seen his toes, and Lucy wondered how cross he was. It was peculiar that Mum didn't say anything about it while they were having breakfast, but perhaps Dad wanted to tell Lucy off himself. Thinking that made her sad.

There wasn't much she could do about it, but she thought that if she was good all day Dad might forgive her a little bit, so she cleared the table for Mum and brushed her own hair, and at school she didn't get cross when Miss Petz spoke to her in her dark green voice, and when she came home from school she tidied her room without being asked. And to her surprise, her good behaviour worked so well that when Dad came home later in the evening he didn't say anything at all to her about his toes. Nothing.