TOO MANY TIMS





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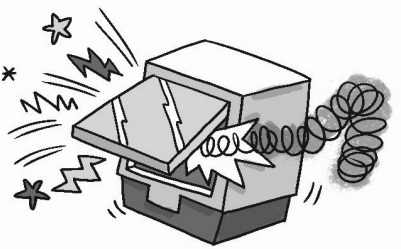
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To Bella, Betsy and Sylvie – the nicest of nieces





CHAPTER ONE

A RIGHT OLD PLATEFUL

Right, then! It's time I told you about Tim. Or should I say *Tims*? Because there are lots of him. Actually, you know what? I'm getting ahead of myself. I'll start with just the one Tim. Ignore those other ones I mentioned. You don't need to know about them yet.

Because, when it comes to this story, there's only one Tim that matters, and that's our one: Timothy Arthur Spode of 37 Spungleford Mews, Grundlebrook, England, the world, the universe, etc. . . . Ten years old, blond hair, one scraped knee and a lot on his plate.

It's a funny expression that: 'a lot on his plate'. Personally, I like having a lot on my plate. I like bacon and sausages and chips and cheese and jelly and pizza and ice cream and jam. That's a very good plateful in my opinion.

But Tim's plate was the other kind. His was filled with loads of complicated stuff that made it very hard for him to get any Tim-Time. You probably call it 'free time' but that's cos your name's not Tim. Unless of course it is, in which case, hello, Tim. Hope you're enjoying the book.

Anyway, if you wanna see just how jam-packed with guff Tim's life had become, there's no better place to start than his average-sized, average-looking, average-smelling house. Because that's where his dreadful parents lived. And trust me when I tell you, those two were a right old pain in the earhole . . .



It was a Monday or Tuesday or Wednesday morning (I forget which) and Tim had just walked into the kitchen when he was walloped in the face by a foul



gust of furious mum-breath.

'Tim!' screeched his mother, Brenda Spode. 'This school report is a disgrace!' She was holding a sheet of paper in one hand, and waving it about so violently it looked like she was trying to swat a fly.

'But I got straight As,' replied Tim, frowning.

'Anyone can get straight As!' shouted his dad, Barry Spode, who was polishing a snow globe with such force that he'd gone quite red in the face. 'We expect more from you! We expect straight Bs!'

'But Bs are worse than As,' spluttered Tim.

'Not instead of! As well as!' barked his mother.

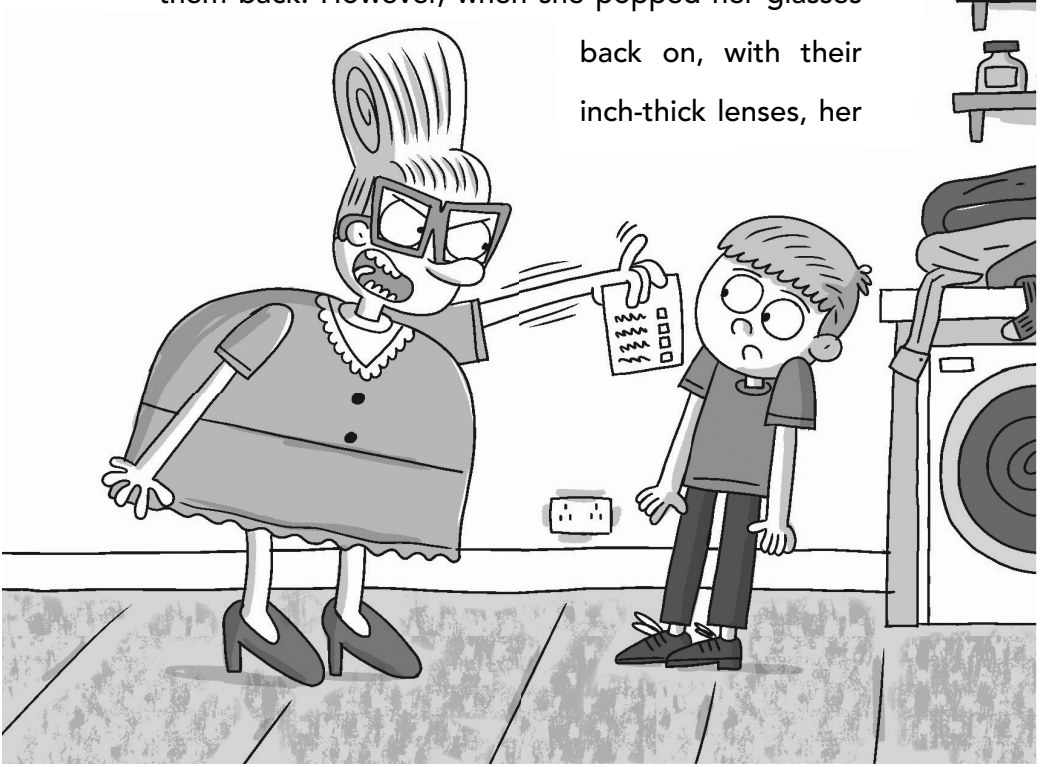
'You want me to get . . . two sets of grades?' asked Tim, struggling to wrap his head round it. 'In each subject?'

'That's right!' snapped Dad, banging down his snow globe. A flurry of flakes swirled around the Leaning Tower of Pisa. 'Any idiot can get one grade per subject.'

'But a Spode can do better!' added his mum with a sneer so pointed it could burst a balloon.

Five foot tall from heels to hairdo, Brenda Spode was built like a pink igloo (a pigloo). The top eight inches of her were made up entirely of rock-solid red hair, styled to look like a beehive. And the bottom four inches were crimson high-heeled shoes that cost more than Tim's bed.

When she took off her maroon horn-rimmed spectacles, she had the smallest eyes Tim had ever seen on a human being. It was as though she had borrowed them from a shark and forgotten to give them back. However, when she popped her glasses back on, with their inch-thick lenses, her



eyes became so massive they gave her the look of a particularly alarmed gecko.

Tim's father wasn't a great deal taller than his wife, and was shaped like a bullet made of leather. His head was as wide as his neck, and his neck was as wide as his body. To say he was stocky was an understatement. If you saw his silhouette against the moon, you'd assume you were staring at a tombstone.



He had a moustache that looked like a particularly bushy eyebrow, and two eyebrows that looked like a moustache.

But his parents' appearance wasn't the issue for Tim. They could have looked like a pair of shaved gibbons and Tim would have still adored them if they'd just been nice. Just a tiny, little, teensy bit nice. But were they? *Ever?*

He once saw his father leave the phrase '*wear more deodorant*' as the tip on a waiter's receipt. He'd seen his mother stick a used plaster to the head of a passing baby (at least twice). In his entire life, Tim had received precisely one birthday present from them: a tetanus shot (and that was free). They were simply not very nice human beings.

Tim suspected the only reason they even spoke to other people was so they'd have someone to boast to about their own superiority. Which, of course, meant they just *had* to have an OUTSTANDING son. Hence why Tim suddenly needed to get Bs as



well as As on his next report card.

They'd heaped so much pressure on the lad, he felt like he was carrying a submarine on his head. Tim had to be in every school club, on every sports team and at the very top of every single class.

And, as if that wasn't enough, they even made him get a paper round *and* a Saturday job at the barber shop. When Tim had asked his parents why he had to have two jobs, his dad had thrown a prawn mayonnaise sandwich at his head.

'You think these prawn mayonnaise sandwiches pay for themselves, do you?' his dad had shouted. 'Well, they don't! They cost money! So we all need to do our bit!'

'But . . . maybe if you just threw fewer sandwiches at people,' Tim had replied, 'we might save some money. Then I wouldn't have to work two jobs.'

His dad hadn't liked the sound of that at all and had made his displeasure known by throwing the other half of his sandwich at Tim's head. Tim didn't

bother arguing about it after that.

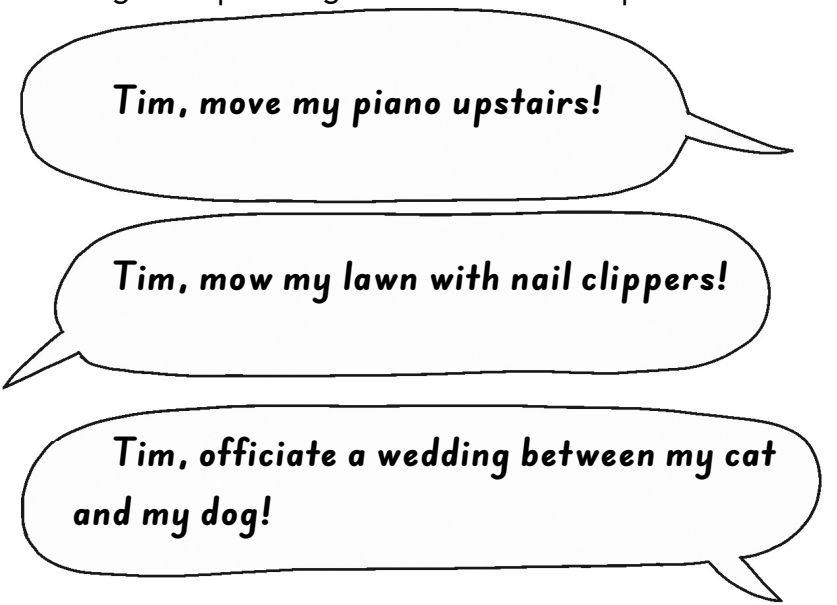
Truth was, Tim knew exactly why he had to have two jobs. Snow globes. His parents were OBSESSED with them. They spent every penny Tim earned collecting as many of the ridiculous little trinkets as they could. They had an entire room devoted to them. And not just *any* room, the *BEST* room in the house! His parents had taken down a wall at one point just to make space for more.

At the last count, there were 4,267 of the tacky little souvenirs. Tim was confident of this fact because it was his job to count and catalogue them every day. It was just another pointless thing he had to do before he was allowed to sleep or use the loo.

Tim's life was one endless, thankless, joyless chore. He'd been pushed around since the moment his mum had pushed him out into the maternity ward. It was all he knew. And it didn't stop at home, either. Tim was always getting roped into doing favours for every last scum-bum in town. He took on tasks faster than



belly buttons collect fluff (or is that just my one?). He couldn't even walk home from school without some neighbour pouncing on him to ask for help:



By the age of five, Tim's 'Things to Do' list had been as long as his arm. By the age of eight, it was as long as his leg. And by the age of ten, it was as long as the leg of someone else who had much longer legs than Tim.

His best friend, Nora, said he was stretched so thin he was almost see-through. She reckoned if someone

was to sneeze on him hard enough he might well burst like an over-inflated balloon. She'd tested this theory by sneezing on him for a bit, but unfortunately nothing happened.

By the end of each week – what with his loopy parents, his demanding teachers, his two jobs, his snow-globe duties and all the other bits and bobs that packed out his jam-packed schedule – Tim was about ready to turn into a pile of purple goo and slip down the nearest drain.

Still, don't worry *too* much about all this awfulness I keep banging on about. Yes, Tim's life is dreadful, and yes, his parents are a right pair of old villains, but, trust me, if things weren't a bit rubbish for him, I wouldn't even have a story to tell you. I'd just say: Meet Tim. He's fine. The end.

But he wasn't fine! In fact, he was SO *not* fine that it makes for the perfect place to begin our tale. Because when things are *that* awful something's gotta give. And, for young Timothy Spode, life was about

to change in the most remarkable, magical, ridiculous way. I'm not even kidding. Tim's world was about to get weird.

And, just like the worst breakfast I ever ate, it all began with a bowlful of worms . . .