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Opening extract from

My Brother's Famous Bottom Goes Camping

Written by

Jeremy Strong

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{chap head} 1 Captain Birdseye and Cecily Sprout

My sister's got a pet carrot. She has, really – a proper carroty carrot. It has green hair and she dresses it in Barbie doll clothes. My sister calls it Cecily Sprout.

'Because my friend at nursery is called Cecily,' she told Mum and me.

'Yeah, but Cecily's not a sprout,' I laughed.

'I think you mean Cecily Carrot,' suggested Mum, but Tomato shook her head firmly.

'No, I don't. I mean Sprout.' She clasped the vegetable doll close to her chest and whispered in the carrot's ear. 'You're a sprout, aren't you? Yes, you are.'

'Has your friend at nursery got green hair?' I asked.

'Stop teasing her!' Mum murmured with half a smile. 'Tomato's only three.'

Of course, you've guessed that the green hair is really leaves growing out of the carrot top, and you may be thinking my family must be vegetable mad. Why is my sister called Tomato, and why does she have a carrot-doll?

Well, first of all I have a twin brother and sister. My sister's called Tomato and my brother's name is Cheese. They do have proper names – James and Rebecca – but they were born in the back of a pizza delivery van and my dad called them Cheese and Tomato. It was just a joke, but it kind of stuck and now everyone calls them that, even Granny and her husband, Lancelot.

As for the pet carrot, that was sort of my fault. We grow vegetables in the back garden and the other day I dug up this weird carrot. The top half was normal but the bottom half had split into what looked like two long, pointy legs. I showed it to Tomato and told her it was a dancing carrot-woman. And now she won't be parted from it. She got me to draw a little smiley face on paper. Then we cut it out and stuck it on the carrot.

We grow loads of stuff. It's like a mini-farm out the back, with a goat and chickens and a tortoise. I know you don't usually find tortoises on farms but my dad got him. Yes – that's the same dad who named the twins after his favourite pizza. My dad's daft. (And great fun!) Dad says that Schumacher (that's the tortoise), is the garden's security guard.

'We haven't had a single cabbage stolen since we got him,' declared Dad.

'We never had cabbages stolen *before* we got him,' Mum pointed out.

My dad's good at thinking up names. He used to have a pet alligator called Crunchbag – don't ask! – and our pet goat is called Rubbish. (Guess what she eats!) He's named the chickens too. We only got them a few days ago – four hens and a cockerel. The hens are supposed to lay eggs, but they haven't produced a single one yet. I'm not sure what the cockerel is supposed to do. At the moment all he does is wake up the whole street in the morning before it's even got light. Our neighbour, Mr Tugg, isn't too happy about that and keeps coming round to our house to show off his impressions of an exploding volcano. (In other words he gets very, VERY angry!)

Dad has named the cockerel Captain Birdseye, and he calls *all* the hens Chicken Nugget. He thinks that's very funny. Mum says it's cruel. Dad told her she was being silly because hens don't understand English. Mum said that was just as well, because if hens *could* speak they'd tell Dad that he was a nasty, horrible man who ate chickens. Dad replied that she ate chickens too. Mum said yes, but she wasn't the one calling them Chicken Nugget. Then they started laughing. My mum and dad are always having daft arguments.

'Anyway,' Mum went on, 'you can't call *all* the hens Chicken Nugget. Maybe the twins can think of some names. Come to think of it, where have they got to? I thought they came outside with us.'

'They did,' I agreed. 'They went to look at the chickens.'

There was a startled squawk from the hen house and a hen came zooming out, half running, half flying and three-quarters falling over itself. There were several more protests from deep inside the coop and two more hens burst out into the pen. They looked upset and rather ruffled. Mum folded her arms.

'I think I know where the twins are,' she muttered. 'Nicholas, you're just about small enough to get inside. Would you mind rescuing the hens from the clutches of the evil pizza twins?'

Honestly. I'm always having to rescue something in our house. If it's not the twins, it's the hens, and if it's not the hens it's my dad! I folded myself up as small as I could and squeezed into the hen house.

It was pretty gloomy inside but I soon spotted Cheese and Tomato. They were sitting on the birds' perch. Cheese had his arms firmly wrapped round the last hen and appeared to be introducing the poor creature to his sister's pet carrot.

'This is Cecily Sprout.' Cheese looked up and beamed at me. 'This is my hen, and she says Cecily Sprout can ride on her back.' Tomato tried to stick the carrot on the hen's back, but without success – surprise, surprise.

I groaned. Sometimes I think madness must run in my family. We all get it from Dad, probably. Not only is my whole family crazy, but I hardly dare mention Cheese's famous bottom. Did you know about that? Cheese has probably got the most famous bottom in the country. When he was one he used to make TV adverts for a nappy company. His bottom has been seen by millions! (But that's another story!)

'Has your hen got a name?' I asked him.

'Poop,' grinned Cheese, pointing at Tomato's jeans. There was a dirty white-brown smear on one leg. It could only be – you know!

'Poop did that.' Cheese smiled. 'She's a super-dooper-pooper!' The twins burst into giggles.

So there we are. Cecily Sprout, the Barbie-carrot, has a new friend – a hen called Poop. As for the other hens, they're called Mavis Moppet, Beaky and Leaky. So now you've met everyone!

{chap head}2 The Two-legged Tent

Boy, oh boy! What a rumpus – big time! We've had a fox in the garden. It was after the chickens, of course, in the middle of the night. Dad said he reckoned the fox fancied a five-course meal.

'It would have Captain Birdseye for starters, then Chicken Nugget One, then Chicken Nugget Two, then Chick–'

'Yes, Ron,' Mum cut in. 'We get the picture. There's no need to go through the whole menu.'

'Want a chicken nugget!' demanded Cheese.

'See what you've started?' Mum complained. 'I knew those hens would be trouble. It's all your fault.'

Dad's eyes boggled. 'My fault? How come?'

'You got the hens.'

'Yes, because you said you wanted some eggs,' Dad protested.

'Exactly. I wanted eggs, Ron. I sent you out to get some eggs and you came back with five chickens.'

'So? I got you eggs on a time delay. They'll be fresher that way – new-laid,' smiled Dad.

'And how many eggs have they laid so far? None. And now we have a fox. It may not have got any of the hens this time but it will be back. You can be sure of that, and then you can say goodbye to your hens, not to mention all the eggs they haven't even laid yet.'

Dad went stomping off wearing a dark frown on his face. It's best not to talk to him when he gets like that. I knew that frowny face. It didn't mean he was cross. He was thinking, and he was bound to come up with a plan sooner or later. He always does. My dad's clever like that.

Sure enough, he came stomping back an hour later and announced his brilliant plan. He was planning to keep guard over the hens all night.

'You can't stand out there right through the night,' Mum told him.

'I'll lie down,' said Dad.

'You can't lie down either, Mr Dopey-drawers. Suppose it rains?'

'I shall be safe and snug in my tent,' Dad said.

'What tent? You haven't got a tent.'

'Yes, I have. I shall use the twins' play-tent.'

Mum burst out laughing. 'It's for babies!' she giggled. 'It's too small for you, you . . . elephant!'

'Isn't!' scowled Dad.

Mum had to go off to another room, but we could still hear her laughing. Dad looked across at me.

'Don't pay any attention to your mother, Nicholas,' he said. 'She doesn't know what she's talking about. I'll show her. You wait and see. You'll be very impressed.' Dad nodded a lot, as if he was trying to convince himself that his plan would work. 'Oh, by the way,' he added suddenly, 'can I borrow your old water-gun? Foxes can't stand getting wet. They're like dogs, you know – they hate water.'

'Er, Dad? It's cats that aren't supposed to like water.'

'Really? Oh well, they're much like cats, foxes are. They both have long tails. If I had a long tail I wouldn't like to get it wet. Would you, Nick?'

'I might if I was a crocodile,' I pointed out, and Dad gave me a sharp look.

'The trouble with you, Nick,' he said, wagging a finger at me, 'is that you go to school and you learn things and then you come home and upset me with what you know.'

I grinned back at him. 'You don't like me being right,' I said.

'Exactly,' Dad agreed. 'Now, can I borrow your water-splurter, or not?'

'Of course you can.'

So last night Dad set up the twins' little play-tent right beside the hen run. Then we all watched while he tried to squeeze inside.

'Daddy's too big,' said Tomato.

'Fat Daddy,' said Cheese.

'I am not fat!' shouted Dad. 'This tent is stupid. I've never seen such a small tent. A mouse couldn't go camping in this.'

Dad finally managed to make himself reasonably comfortable, even though his feet were sticking out one end of the tent and his head and shoulders were sticking out at the other. The tent only covered a little bit in the middle.

'There,' said Dad. 'That's fine.'

The rest of us couldn't speak for laughing. You've never seen anything like it!

'All right, laugh if you must,' snapped Dad. 'I'll show you. When that fox comes he's going to get the biggest surprise of his life.'

'He certainly will when he sees you wearing a tent like a miniskirt!' shrieked Mum.

We left Dad to it. I went up to bed and fell asleep. And then, shortly after midnight, I was woken by the most dreadful noises and a bright light streaming through my curtains. I thought the Martians had invaded.

I whisked back the curtains and peered outside. A giant beam of light had flooded our garden. It came from next door. Mr Tugg is not only the world's angriest man, he also runs the local Neighbourhood Watch. He's always trying to get people arrested. I dropped a crisp on the pavement near his house last week and he tried to get me arrested for dropping litter. Then a pigeon waddled up and ate it. Mr Tugg was furious! He accused the pigeon of eating the evidence! I think he wanted to arrest the pigeon too.

Anyhow, Mr Tugg is very hot on security and he's got searchlights mounted at the front and back of his house. He switches them on if he thinks there are burglars around, and it looked like he'd spotted one in our garden.

Mr Tugg was chasing a tent on legs round and round the hen run, while the tent on legs kept spraying Mr Tugg with high-powered jets of water from my water-gun. Then Dad tried to escape by dashing into the run and hiding behind the hen coop. Mr Tugg came roaring after him, slid on all the wet mud and went crashing into the hen house.

Hens came hurtling out, flapping and clucking as if the sky had fallen in on them. Mr Tugg threw himself on top of Dad, blew his whistle and tried to arrest him, while Dad made several useless attempts to get back on his feet.

After that the whole thing turned into the weirdest pyjama-party you can imagine. Mum rushed out of our house in her pyjamas, closely followed from next door by Mrs Tugg in her nightie. They dashed over and tried to separate the two mud-wrestlers. It wasn't long before they ended up in the mud too and that was when Mum finally snapped.

'STOPPPPP!!!' she bellowed.

The fighting ceased at once. At last Dad and Mr Tugg looked at each other properly for the first time.

'You idiot!' hissed Mr Tugg. 'I thought you were a burglar!'

'And I thought you were a fox,' Dad growled.

'Do I look like a fox?' cried Mr Tugg.

'No! You look like a hard-boiled egg with a moustache!'

'You're crazy!' roared Mr Tugg, trying to brush great wodges of mud off his clothes and only smearing it even further. 'I always knew you were off your head.'

And so it went on. It took Mum and Mrs Tugg ten minutes to get them calmed down. Eventually Mr Tugg was dragged back to his own house and my mum persuaded Dad he should come back into our house for the rest of the night.

After that everything was peaceful, at least until morning. Breakfast was a very quiet affair. Mum would hardly speak to Dad, she was still so cross with him. Dad pretended he hadn't done anything wrong.

'And besides,' he pointed out, 'the fox didn't come back, did it? I told you I'd protect the hens, and I did.'

Mum took a deep breath. 'I don't suppose those hens will ever lay eggs now. First they almost get eaten by a fox and then they have to put up with you and Mr Tugg playing at cops and robbers.'

Dad opened his mouth to protest but one look at Mum's face told him he'd do a lot better to keep quiet, so he did. However, I was wondering what he would do next.

{chap head}3 Look Who's Come for Breakfast

Dad's not very pleased with Mr Tugg.

'He's an interfering old moan-bag,' Dad complained as we put away the breakfast things. 'If he wanted to play at being a policeman why didn't he join the police force?'

'Perhaps he prefers a quiet life,' suggested Mum. 'He runs the local Neighbourhood Watch to help everyone protect their property.'

Dad snorted. 'No – he runs Neighbourhood Watch because he likes blowing whistles, waving torches and setting traps for burglars. I bet he was a boy scout when he was a kid and had so many badges he had to have a special jumper with extra sleeves to make room for them. Mr Goody-Goody, that's who he is. And why are you laughing at me?'

'I'm laughing at the idea of a jumper with extra sleeves.'

'Well, don't. It's cruel to laugh at a man when he's in pain. Have you seen the bruise I've got on my shin from when Mr Tugg pushed me into the hen house?'

'You said you slipped on the mud,' Mum reminded him.

'I slipped because I was pushed.' Dad rolled up a trouser leg to show off his bruise. 'Look at that. It's the size of a melon.'

Mum bent down to get a better look. 'Hmmm, more grape-sized, if you ask me.' she muttered, winking at me. 'I'm not surprised Mr Tugg wanted to arrest you, creeping about with a tent wrapped round your middle.'

'I thought I heard the fox and I got up to look but I couldn't get out of the tent fast enough so I had to stand there with it on. You can hardly blame me. The tent was too small.'

'Oh! It was the tent's fault?'

'Exactly,' Dad nodded, and then he brightened up. 'But it did give me a good idea.'

Mum's eyes narrowed. 'Oh dear. Now I'm really panicking,' she said. 'Your ideas are always off the planet.'

Dad smiled. 'That's because I'm a free-thinker. It's important to try and think differently. Anyhow, what I thought was why –' Dad broke off suddenly and frowned at something on the table. 'Am I right in thinking that there's a carrot sitting up at the table wearing dolls' clothes?'

'Yes,' said Mum.

'But it's a carrot,' Dad repeated.

'Yes. Her name is Cecily Sprout,' Mum told him.

'But it's a carrot,' Dad repeated.

'Yes. It's Tomato's latest doll.'

'But it's a carrot,' said Dad again.

'Yes, Ron, we all know it's a carrot. But for Tomato it is actually her favourite doll. Think of it as a free-thinking carrot – a carrot that has gone beyond the boundary of just being an ordinary carrot, a carrot that has become almost a person. Tomato was giving her breakfast before you came down.'

Dad's eyes almost fell out of his face. 'She was giving a carrot breakfast? The whole family's bonkers. I think I'm the only sensible person here.'

Mum burst out laughing. 'That really takes the biscuit. Now, are you going to tell us your good idea or not?'

But we still didn't hear what it was because Tomato appeared in the kitchen pushing her toy wheelbarrow. 'Giving Cecily a ride,' she said, lifting the carrot-doll from the table and sitting her up in the wheelbarrow. 'We're going to the shops to get some lunch for Cecily.'

'I thought she'd only just had breakfast,' Dad muttered darkly.

'What does Cecily Sprout eat?' I asked, just out of curiosity.

'Fish and chips and chocolate scream,' Tomato declared. She always says 'scream' instead of 'ice cream'. My sister began to wheel the carrot outside. She turned at the door and looked back at Dad.

'You brokened our tent,' she said accusingly. 'Bad daddy.'

'Sorry,' muttered Dad. 'And you say "broke", not "brokened".'

'Yes, and you brokened a lettuce.'

'Yes, and you put mud on your clothes.'

'All right, I know,' growled Dad, looking more and more like the world's worst criminal.

'Yes, and Cheese says he can touch the moon from the top of the hen house.'

'Is that so?' Dad shook his head in disbelief. 'Hang on, what do you mean, from the top of the hen house? Cheese isn't on top of the hen house, is he?'

Tomato peered out through the open door and nodded solemnly. 'Yes, and he's standing up too. No, he isn't, he's just slidded off.'

There was a loud yelp from outside, a moment of silence and then an even louder wail went up. We all rushed to the rescue. Cheese was more surprised and cross than hurt, but Mum calmed him down with a biscuit.

'Who didn't shut the gate properly?' demanded Mum, looking accusingly at Dad.

Dad's face puckered. 'I want a biscuit too,' he moaned, trying to change the subject. 'Look at my bruise. Boo hoo. Want a biscuit.'

'Big baby,' laughed Tomato.

'Yes,' agreed Mum. 'Your dad is the biggest baby of all. And what we still don't know is what Big Baby's Big Idea is. Come on, we're bursting to hear what it is, aren't we, Nicholas?'

'Bursting,' I grinned, wondering what crazy scheme Dad had in mind now.

'Well, I think we all need a holiday.'

'Great!' I yelled.

'Heavens above, you've actually come up with a good idea for once,' Mum chuckled.

'I know. And I think we should all go camping,' Dad went on.

Mum's smile vanished. 'You don't want us to wear little tents like you did, do you?'

'No! I am thinking of proper camping, with proper camping equipment. What do you reckon?' Dad beamed at us.

'OK,' nodded Mum.

'It'll be brilliant!' I said.