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opening extract from

We Want to Be on the Telly

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WE WANT TO BE ON THE TELLY!
Jeremy Strong

1. The Baby Now Arriving at London Airport.

It started at breakfast.

‘We’re going to be on the telly,’ said Mum. Dad stood behind her, grinning as if he’d just won a million pounds AND free chocolate for the rest of his life.

‘Really?’ I said. ‘On tv? What for?’

‘Don’t know,’ said Mum. ‘We haven’t decided yet. The thing is, your Pa and I have always wanted to be on the telly and now we’re going to do it.’ (Mum always calls my dad ‘Pa’ and Dad always calls my mum ‘Ma’. Don’t ask me why. I haven’t a clue.)

‘We’ll be famous,’ said Dad. ‘We’ll walk down the street and people will look at us and point and say “Look! It’s Pa and Ma off the telly!” We’ll be famous,’ he repeated.

‘But people look at you anyway,’ I pointed out.

It’s true. People always stare at my parents because, to be honest, they are VERY STRANGE. They like to sport giant sunglasses and put on silly hats. Dad wears trousers that are too short and socks that don’t match. Mum’s got one of those trick arrows that looks as if it’s gone right through her head.

People stop them in the street and say: ‘Why are you dressed like that?’ And do you know what my parents say?

‘It’s fun!’

NO IT ISN’T! STOP DOING IT! YOU JUST LOOK STUPID!
AND YOU MAKE *ME* FEEL STUPID TOO!

Why can't my mum and dad just be ORDINARY? You can imagine what it's like when I go to school. The other children are always pestering me.

'Heathrow, your parents are total bonker-plonkers.' That's the sort of thing they say. It's not nice is it?

And imagine what it's like when mum and dad come to school for parent-teacher interviews! Dad sits there with a pretend axe stuck in his head while mum wears plastic Dracula fangs and has fake blood dribbling from the corners of her mouth.

Even my teacher, Mr Jollop, asks questions, and he reckons he's seen everything. (We know this because he's always shaking his head at our work and saying: 'Now I've seen everything.') Anyhow, even Mr Jollop has started asking questions.

'Heathrow, your parents... um....?' His voice trailed away, his eyebrows knitted themselves into half a sock, and he looked confused.

'Yes?' I said, helpfully.

'Your parents, are they... um....?'

'Mad?' I suggested.

'Oh, oh, not exactly, no, not mad, just a bit... um...?'

'Off this planet and possibly somewhere in an entirely different universe altogether? I offered.

'Oh, oh, no, no, I wouldn't go that far. It's, it's, it's just they're a bit... um..?'

'Weird?' I prompted.

'Oh, oh,' Mr Jollop began, his eyes as round as his oh-oh-oh-ing mouth. 'Weird? Hmmmm. Well, yes, in a way, weird might be the um... the word. Yes, in a word, weird IS the word. Hmm.' And his eyebrows knitted the rest of the sock.

So as you can see most people think my parents are strange.

By the way, in case you're wondering why I'm called Heathrow, you can blame my parents again. When they got married they used to spend every Sunday afternoon having afternoon tea at the café in the Arrivals area at London Heathrow airport. They used to try and spot famous people arriving.

My mum was getting fatter and fatter. She thought it was all the cakes she was eating at the café. Then one Sunday she came over all faint and before they knew it she was giving birth – to me! I was born in the Arrivals area of a major London airport. That's why they called me Heathrow. My life has been going downhill ever since.

Now they want to be on the telly. That means that soon the WHOLE WORLD will know how strange my parents are. I sat there at breakfast and my heart turned into one of those small, cold, unidentifiable slobbs you find lurking at the back of a fridge. It's been there for three years, going mouldy, and nobody can remember what it was.

Mum and Dad stood beside the breakfast table, smiling and grinning with excitement. 'On the telly!' Dad cried. 'Isn't that wonderful!'

And my heart cried out inside me: 'No Dad. It's not wonderful. I don't want everyone to know how daft you can be. I just want you to be normal and ordinary. I'd like to be able to look at you without wanting to curl up and get back into the fridge.'

Bu it's not going to happen is it?