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Monstroso

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'Oscar, we're going away for the night and Grandad will be looking after you.'

'What?'

'We're going away for the night and Grandad will be looking after you.'

'What?'

'I said we're going away for the night and Grandad will be looking after you.'

'What?'

‘Grandad will be looking after you on Saturday night, because we’re going away . . .’

Oscar was beginning to think that no matter how many times he said ‘what’, his dad wasn’t going to get it. He didn’t mean ‘what’ as in ‘What was that you said, darling Papa?’ He’d meant ‘what’ as in ‘Please tell me I haven’t heard you correctly, you old fool; *please* tell me you are joking – I had plans for this weekend and being stuck with Grandad wasn’t one of them.’

Oscar didn’t mind too much being left alone with a normal babysitter. He could spend the whole time playing on his computer without being told to stop. But

Oscar's room was used as the spare bedroom, so if guests came to stay he'd be kicked out and have to sleep on a sofa in his dad's office that turned into a bed. (The office didn't turn into a bed, the sofa did. It was a 'sofa bed'. Which meant that it was quite uncomfortable as a sofa and very, very uncomfortable as a bed.)

And if Grandad was in his bedroom Oscar wouldn't be able to get at his computer. Dad kept a laptop in his study but Oscar reckoned it was probably made in the Middle Ages and was the sort of rubbish laptop that King Arthur and His Knights of the Round Table would have used. It was really slow, it kept crashing, the Internet didn't work properly on it

and – even worse than that – Oscar wasn't allowed to install any of his games on it.

'You'll slow it down and fill the memory up,' was all Dad ever said if Oscar asked him to put a decent game on it. 'It's not for playing with, it's for work.'

What a stupid thing to say. Everyone knew that computers were for playing with; only idiots used them for work. Dad's computer was nearly as bad as the computers they had at school. There was only one game on the school computers: a really babyish fishing game that Oscar had soon realized was a trick, because it was actually all about learning maths.

So not only would Oscar have to sleep in his dad's horrible office, he would also

have to spend half the weekend without his computer.

That wasn't the worst thing, though.

The worst thing was Grandad.

Oscar didn't like his grandad. He was a nuisance. He was always quoting poetry and talking about people Oscar had never heard of and giving Oscar books to read.

'I loved this when I was a boy, Oscar,' he'd say, like that was supposed to make a difference.

At least he didn't smell.

Oscar had heard that some grandads smelled. Oscar's grandad was quite clean and tidy and he didn't have anything mad like a big beard or a wooden leg or a glass eye. It was just that he *would* keep on

trying to talk to Oscar. Oscar didn't want to talk to any adults, least of all a prehistoric one like his grandad. The only interesting thing about him was that he'd fought in the Second World War. But he never wanted to talk about it. Oh, no, not Grandad. Grandad loved to drone on about recipes and Charles Dickens and foreign countries and Shakespeare and stupid paintings, but he never wanted to talk about good stuff, like war and battles and killing people and blowing things up.

What was the point of fighting in a war if you never wanted to talk about it?

War was the thing that interested Oscar most in the world. He loved playing at

soldiers and playing with soldiers. His room was absolutely filled with toy guns, Action Men and boxes and boxes of little plastic figures. He would happily spend hours drawing pictures of men fighting, the bullets squirting out of machine-guns and zooming away across the paper like swarms of mad bees, aeroplanes raining bombs, little stick men with their heads flying off and big sprays of blood coming out of their necks.

But the best thing was playing war games on his computer.

He could spend whole days doing that. Weeks. Years, if only his mum would let him.

His favourite game was *World of*

Warcraft. It wasn't modern soldiers. It was set in a huge fantasy world of warriors, monsters and magicians, where you could create your own characters and send them out to kill anything that moved.

'Why are you going away?' Oscar asked his mum when he got the chance. 'Where are you going?'

'It's our wedding anniversary and we're going back to stay in the hotel where we had our honeymoon. It'll be romantic.'

Romantic? The more Oscar heard about the hotel, the less he liked the sound of it. It was somewhere in Dorset on a beach with lots of pebbles on it. Why would anyone want to go to a beach that was full of pebbles? Oscar didn't pretend

to understand what went through grown-ups' minds, or why they did some of the strange things they did.

'You'll be all right with Grandad, won't you?'

No, of course he wouldn't be all right with Grandad! Grandad was about a million years old and Oscar was just ten. The only good part of Grandad coming to stay was when he left, because he always gave Oscar a sweet. He slipped it into his hand just before he got into the car, like it was a secret between the two of them.

But that wasn't the answer his mum wanted to hear.

'Sure,' he said casually, and then added, 'I'll miss you, though.'

His mum made a wobbly sad face and gave him a big hug.

What Oscar had really meant was that he was going to miss his computer, but he knew that if his mum felt bad about leaving him for the night, she'd spoil him when she got back and maybe let him play extra computer.

'And you'll be all right in Dad's office?'

'Sure. I like it in there.'

Hah! What a terrible lie. It wasn't even a *real* office. Oscar had always pictured an office as a big place full of people wearing suits and working at computers and having important meetings in bright rooms with charts and graphs on the walls. And there would be someone like Sir Alan

Sugar pointing his finger and saying 'You're fired!'

Dad's office was small and dark and gloomy. There was only one window, which looked out on to the wall of the house next door and let in very little light. Mum had tried to brighten things up a bit by hanging some flowery curtains, but they just made things worse. The room had originally been a sort of cupboard with an old boiler in it. The boiler had been taken out and replaced with wonky bookshelves and a tiny desk that was always piled high with paperwork. There was just enough space left for the tatty old sofa bed, a waste-bin and a framed poster for a concert by somebody in a

leather jacket called 'Bruce Springsteen'.

'Who's he?' Oscar had asked Dad when he put it up.

'He's The Boss.'

What an idiot Dad was. This wasn't a proper office and by the look of him Bruce Springsteen wasn't a proper boss.

This was going to be an awful weekend.