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Opening extract from

My Brother's Christmas Bottom Unwrapped

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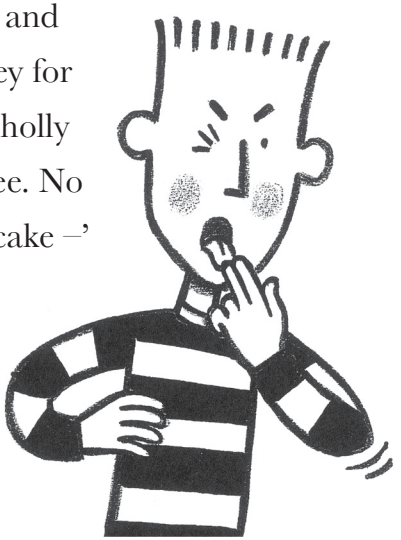
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1 Doom and Gloom for Christmas

BIG PROBLEMO! Dad's lost his job. He's been working at the paper factory for YEARS AND YEARS. Now it's going to close down. Dad's fed up and not like his usual cheery self at all. He hardly speaks to anyone and when he does he says very gloomy things.

'It's almost Christmas and there won't be any money for food or presents or jolly holly stuff like a Christmas tree. No balloons, no Christmas cake –'



'Hooray!' I shouted. 'No Christmas cake! I HATE Christmas cake. It tastes like YUCK. In fact it

tastes like yuck with muck.'

Mum was upset. 'Nicholas, if you don't mind, I go to a lot of trouble to make our Christmas cake each year and most people love it.'

'I don't,' I reminded her.

'It's YUCK!' laughed Cheese. 'Nicky said it's yuck.' He stuck out his tongue and made revolting noises. Cheese is my little bother, I mean *brother*. I've also got a little pester, I mean *sister*. She's called Tomato. Cheese and Tomato are twins.

Odd names, aren't they? That's because they were born in the back of a pizza delivery van and Dad said they ought to be called Cheese and Tomato. The names stuck. My dad's always thinking up silly things. At least he was before he lost his job.

Anyhow, Mum wasn't going to give up. 'Some people,' she went on, 'LOVE my Christmas cake. So there.'

None of this cheered up Dad. 'There's no

point in making one this year,' he muttered. 'We'll have to cancel Christmas.'

'It'll be all right,' Mum said. 'No need to panic. We can get by. We'll just have to cut back a bit.'

Our house was getting more dismal by the second! Tomato stuck out her lower lip and did her best to look like a picnic in a downpour.

Cheese threw himself across Mum's lap and wailed, 'I WANT CHRISTMAS!'

'There are still five weeks to go before Christmas,' Mum said evenly. 'I'm sure by that time everything will be all right.'

Cheese sniffed loudly and looked at Dad to see if he agreed but Dad was standing at the window, staring gloomily out at the rain.

BOY OH BOY! Were we getting miserable, or what? Maybe I could do something to help. I thought hard. Aha! 'I could get some work,' I suggested. 'I could do a paper round or something like that.'

At least it put a smile on Mum's face. 'That's a

kind idea, Nicholas, but I'm sure we can get by. I have my part-time job at the school, so that's one good thing, and maybe we can make our Christmas presents this year instead of buying them.'

Cheese stared at Mum, aghast, and collapsed on the floor in a crushed heap. 'You can't make a space ship!' he sobbed.

'Of course we can,' Mum said cheerfully. 'We can get some old yoghurt pots and used toilet



rolls and some tin foil and you can use your felt tips and . . .'

'NOT A SILLY TOILET POTTY SPACE SHIP!' yelled Cheese. 'A, A, A REAL SPACE SHIP THAT REALLY GOES INTO REAL SPACE!' He gave an almighty sniff and hurried on. 'And I'm on board and so are Rubbish and, and, and Captain Birdseye and Poop, Beaky and Leaky and Mavis Moppet and ALL the rabbits.'

By this time we were all staring at Cheese in



amazement. He wanted to take all the backyard animals into space! Even Dad came out of his World of Gloom.

'Jumping jellyfish! You can't put our goat and all our chickens and rabbits into a space ship. It would be like Noah's Ark – and the messiest, smelliest space ship ever.'

Tomato looked across at her twin brother and shrugged. 'Anyway,' she began, very matter-of-factly. 'You can't go into space because you won't be able to breathe and if you don't breathe you DIE, don't you, Daddy?'

'Um, yes, that is true,' Dad admitted. 'Unless you have a space suit. It's always a good idea to wear a space suit if you're going into space.'

Cheese frowned hard for a moment and then suddenly hit on the answer. 'That's my second present I want – a space suit.'

Dad raised his eyebrows at Mum. 'Don't think you can make a space suit out of yoghurt pots and toilet rolls,' he said, getting gloomy again.

'Well . . .' Mum started.

'Aha!' cried Dad, interrupting, and the gloom vanished. 'I've got an idea.' He waggled a finger in the air for a moment and then stopped. 'Hmm. No I haven't. It won't work.'

'What was it?' asked Mum.

'I told you, it won't work,' Dad insisted.

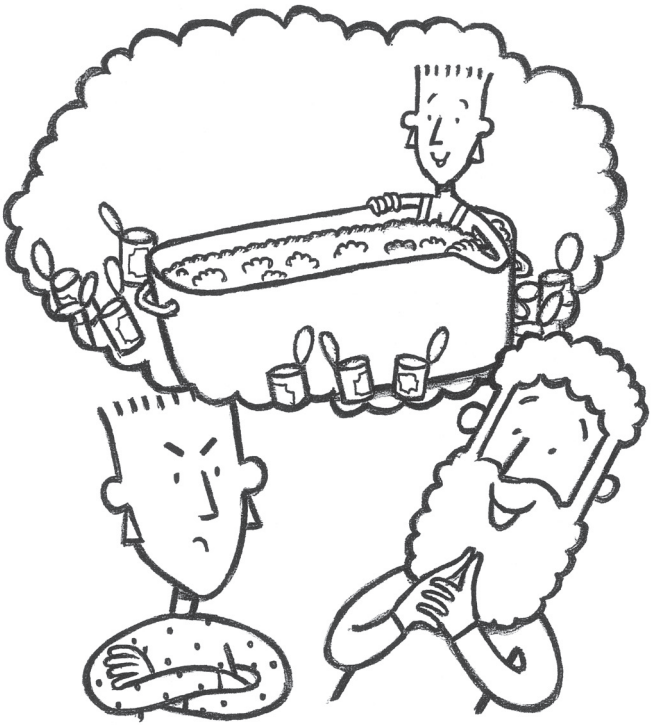
'Tell us!' snapped Mum.

'OK. We get a bath and we put it outside the shopping centre in the middle of town. We fill the bath with something daft – baked beans, tinned tomatoes, marmalade, sausages, cold chips –'

'All right,' said Mum. 'We get the idea. Then what?'

'Well, there'll be loads of people watching us by then, so I say: "I bet you one pound that my wife will lie down in that bath." And they say: "Of course she won't. You're on." And then you get in the bath and lie down and we get a pound from everyone!'

Mum folded her arms. 'I'm not getting into a



stinky old bath full of splodge,' she said.

Dad sighed. 'That's why it won't work. I told you it wouldn't. Then I realized that we haven't got a spare bath to get into and that's another reason why it won't work.'

Silence fell. Tomato's bottom lip started to quiver again.

‘Maybe we could sell something?’ I suggested.

Dad’s face exploded into a huge smile. ‘Of course! Sell something! We’ll sell Cheese and Tomato! They could be used as ornaments. They could sit at either end of a mantelpiece and make cheerful chirpy noises!’

Dad flopped his hands like little paws. ‘*Wheep, wheep, wheep!*’ he squeaked in a tiny voice. ‘I’m a Christmas Elf, and I’m sitting on your shelf!’

‘You’re a Christmas Turkey, more like,’ Mum laughed. ‘And you know we can’t sell the twins.’

‘OK, how about we sell our car?’ Dad said.

‘I need it,’ Mum replied flatly.

‘How about we sell Mr Tugg’s car?’ Dad suggested.

Mum smiled. ‘He’s our next-door neighbour, you daft bumblebrain! He’d probably explode.’

Mum was certainly right there. Mr Tugg is famous for exploding. He’s really good at it. In fact he’d make a brilliant firework. This is what he’d be like:

1. Light the blue touch paper and stand well clear!
2. Smoke pours out of Mr Tugg's ears.
3. Sparks shoot out of his eyes.
4. *BOOM! BANG!* Aerial bombs whizz from his mouth and explode all around.
5. His arms and legs whirl round like Catherine wheels.
6. And finally – his head explodes and falls off!

Anyhow, all that talk of cars had given me a better idea. 'Why don't we set up our own car wash?' I suggested. 'We could stand out on the street with a sign that says CAR WASH. All we need is a bucket of soapy water and some sponges and cloths.'

Mum relaxed back into her armchair. 'Thank

heavens there are at least two sensible people in this family,' she declared.

'Two? Who are they?' asked Dad, puzzled, looking at Cheese and Tomato and shrugging his shoulders.

'Me and Nicholas,' Mum answered sharply. 'You were born daft and you'll stay daft.'

'Thank you very much,' said Dad happily. 'Right then, I shall just go and have a bath. Where are the baked beans?'

'Daddy's going to have a bean bath!' shouted Cheese.

'Silly Daddy!' added Tomato.

Mum laughed. 'And I'm going to get the bucket and sponges,' she said. 'Car washing, here we come.'