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Shrunk

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SHRUNK!

F.R. HITCHCOCK



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Chapter 1

We were standing in the model village when it happened.

I was really tired and really cold. So cold, I'd been holding a torch to my cheek to keep warm.

It wasn't working, I still had brain freeze.

Grandma droned on about constellations but I was thinking about beds, warm cosy ones; with me in them.

'Tom, pay attention.' Grandma slapped me on the back. 'Look up, you two, it's supposed to be the best night in the year for seeing Jupiter.'

'But we've only got one pair of binoculars,' whined Tilly, my little sister. 'And you've got them, Grandma.'

'Honestly,' muttered Grandma. 'You've got young eyes. Just look up.'

So we did. I tipped my head back and without thinking stepped backwards into the model duck pond. I remember

the crunch of a tiny fibreglass duck under my shoe and the shock of the icy water shooting up my sock. I probably should have looked down, then none of this would have happened, but I couldn't take my eyes from the sky because it was so beautiful.

I'd no idea it could be so lovely.

I stared, and as I stared, more and more tiny stars burst out of the blackness. There were millions of them, billions, trillions, squillions. How far was I looking?

Something flickered in the corner of my eye.

'Oh!'

'See that?' said Grandma.

A trail of silver shot through the sky. Racing towards us, whizzing and whistling.

BANG.

'Oh my word!' said Grandma.

The shooting star was still hurtling our way, even though it sounded like it had hit something pretty hard.

'Wish!' shouted Tilly.

'No, don't – not on this one,' said Grandma.

But it had already disappeared. In fact it disappeared the moment I made my wish, and something clattered near the model castle.

'I shouldn't bother looking,' said Grandma, a bit quickly.

'I expect it landed in the sea, dears. Just as well, it'll be sizzling hot.'

'No, Grandma – I'm sure it's in the model village,' I shouted, running off through the knee-high houses, shining my torch at the ground. I checked the village square, the bowling green and the high street. I swung my torch over the roofs in case it was caught in a gutter. Grandma loomed out of the darkness, so I ran on towards the tiny castle.

'Wait for me,' Tilly shouted, and ran after me with her torch, picking out the chimney pots.

'For goodness' sake, you two,' said Grandma, close behind us. 'We're supposed to be looking at the night sky. You'll find it in the morning. It'll be easy enough if it did land here. Come on.'

'Yes, Grandma,' I called, catching sight of a flattened line of miniature bicycles outside the post office.

Yay! Something really did fall out of the sky.

I shone my torch the other way, so that Tilly wouldn't see, and snatched up the small meteorite that lay in the middle. It wasn't hot at all, but warm.

I stuck it in my fleece pocket and sort of skipped back over to where Grandma was standing. Tilly joined me. I could almost hear how far her lip stuck out. She knew I'd got it.

'Did you find it?' asked Grandma.

I think I took slightly too long to say, 'No.'

Grandma hesitated. She was probably staring at me, but I couldn't see her face. 'Right.' She swung her arm around, bumping her elbow off the top of my head. Her finger stopped over the sea. 'There's Jupiter, looking particularly glittery tonight.'

I followed her finger. There was a really bright star hanging over the bay.

'That?' I said. 'That's a star, not a planet.'

'It is a planet, love. At least, it's a ball of gases. Amazing, isn't it?'

'But it's all shiny,' said Tilly.

And we stood there, our feet turning to blocks of ice in the high street of the model village. The backs of our necks aching with leaning back, staring at the black sky filling with more and more tiny lights, twinkling and pushing out from the blackness like they wanted to be seen. I put my hand up, put my middle finger against the tip of my thumb and made an 'O' like I was looking through an imaginary camera. I held it about six inches in front of my eye. I turned the meteorite over in my pocket.

The planet sat like a diamond in the middle of the 'O'.

Click.

And it disappeared. Jupiter disappeared.

Chapter 2

That was last night. Nine hours and fifty-two minutes ago to be precise. After we came to bed, I saw Grandma snooping about in our garden, otherwise known as the Bywater-by-Sea model village, looking for the little meteorite. But she didn't get it, cos it's here, right in front of me. And so's Jupiter.

Oh yes it is.

Crazy, isn't it?

I've got Jupiter inches from the end of my nose. Me, Tom 'Model Village' Perks, has Jupiter, the actual planet, as a guest, in his bedroom.

Oh yes. Oh yes.

It's only tiny, only a speck – really. A little bit brown, a little bit glittery.

I get out of bed for the millionth time and dance around

the room. I can't believe it, I need to go and have another look.

My billionth look.

Jupiter.

In my bedroom.

I know what it is, but it looks like a sparkly bead. It's resting in a toothpaste lid on the wonky bedside table. Next to it is the alarm clock and Dad's catch-the-baby-from-the-burning-building ancient games console; and the meteorite.

I've just tried to shrink a plastic dinosaur, but nothing happened.

I don't understand how it works.

Perhaps I can only shrink planets?

My door starts to open, and I leap back into bed, pretending to be asleep.

'Sweetie.' Mum's voice. 'Time to get up, lovely fresh scrambled eggs for breakfast.'

Yuk – I hate scrambled eggs. And I really hate things that I know Grandma's made. There's no way my mum or dad would manage to have anything cooked by seven thirty in the morning. They're far too dippy. They gave up sensible jobs in London so that we could come and live here with Grandma in her ancient house on the edge of the model village.

So that they could be stage magicians.

'Toast!' Grandma yells up the stairs. 'Seven thirty! Bus leaves in half an hour – don't be late.'

I leap out of bed again, wide awake. The planet's lying there, by the bed, sort of safe – yes; but Grandma might come in. She might decide to clean my room. She'd blunder in like she always does, knocking things over, talking to the furniture. Her eyesight's shocking; she'd never notice if she'd knocked it off. It might even go up the ancient vacuum.

I imagine Jupiter caught up in the fur balls of the vacuum cleaner, jostling with the cat fluff and Tilly's hair-bands. Lost for ever in the local tip.

Or Mum might have a tidy moment, see the little thing sparkling and take it off and stick it on one of her glittery costumes or something – or worse, she might think it's Tilly's.

No way. If I've been given Jupiter to look after, then I will look after it. I will guard it with my life.

I look around for something to carry it in, something proper, with a lid. It'll have to come to school with me. I know you're never supposed to take precious things into school, but I can't leave it here.

I pull on my school uniform while I search. I stick the

meteorite in my pocket, although it would probably be safe in my bedroom, and find myself staring at Jupiter again. Wait till I show Jacob Devlin this, that'll shut him up.

'Tom! Toast. Now.'

I stuff my shirt down the back of my trousers. I rummage under my bed. There's an egg-sized plastic capsule. I won it on the pier, it's got a pink fluffy kitten-thing inside. I chuck the kitten-thing in the bin and gently tip the planet from the toothpaste lid into the capsule, and it sort of rolls up the side, still spinning, still glowing.

I jam the lid on till it clicks.

In my pocket I can feel it vibrating. I hope it doesn't burn through the plastic. So I've got a meteorite in one pocket and a planet in the other.

Yes.

And, it's my birthday in three days. I'll be eleven.

Yes, yes, yes.

Downstairs, Mum's feeding the rabbits. Dad's sawing something out in the yard. I put the scrambled egg in the cat's bowl, stuff singed marmalade toast into my mouth, slurp half a chipped mug of hot chocolate with white bits floating on top, and head for the front door.

'Have you done your teeth, dear?' asks Grandma. So I

drop my school bag, charge upstairs, turn on the taps in the bathroom, rinse my toothbrush in the cold water and make spitting noises.

Tilly appears in the doorway. 'I know you didn't clean your teeth properly – I'll tell Grandma...' I lunge at her and she screams and Grandma shouts up the stairs:

'Tom! I'm sure she's annoying, but she's three years younger.'

So I wave my fist under Tilly's chin and belt back down the stairs.

Grandma's outside the front door, holding my school bag, and snapping off bits of box hedge with a pair of scissors. She looks up at me. 'You look tired, dear. Have a busy night?'

'I'm OK, thanks, Grandma. Don't want to miss the bus.'

She pulls my collar out from my sweatshirt. 'Anyway, you can bring any of your new friends back for tea, you know that. I can rustle up a nice liver and bacon, drop of a hat.'

'Thanks, Grandma,' I say, thinking of the smell of the liver on Friday night. Ugh. I walk six steps, get to the miniature bowling green, and race on through the stupid model village.

Tilly follows after, humming. I'd like to have another

crack at shrinking, but Tilly's too close behind me. I run down the badly painted model high street, she slips past the model castle to the bus stop on the other side. In my pocket, Jupiter's spinning and I can feel the plastic capsule getting warmer.

No chance of any more secret clicks, then. Not with Little Miss Perfect watching me.

So I stand puffing at the bus stop, gazing down the street. Tilly pants beside me.

She puts on her sweet voice. 'I know you picked up that shooting star last night. I think Grandma knows too – where is it? Can I see?'

I ignore her. It's the best way to deal with Tilly.

'To-m, please.'

The bus appears round the side of the pub and grinds up the hill towards us.

I can't imagine bringing anyone back for tea, not to this house, not in the middle of a model village, not with Tilly, not with Mum and Dad, and certainly not with Grandma cooking.

Anyway – I don't have any friends. I don't know anyone in this stupid place.

But today, I don't mind. I've got a planet in my pocket.