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Opening extract from

SHRUNK! Mayhem and Meteorites

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Prologue

Did you know? If you have a shedload of marshmallows, they burn really well, for a really long time . . . with really big flames.

I know that because when it all kicks off, Mrs Worthy makes it right across Mr Burdock's donkey field, onto the beach and into the sea, and her bowl burns like a flare, the whole way.

We're on the first of this summer's 17th Field Craft Troop camps, and Jacob and Eric have been arguing. Or, rather, Jacob's been arguing and Eric's been answering him back like a really wise grown-up.

This has gone on ever since Mr Worthy, our Field Craft leader, announced that he was banning meat sausages and white bread on health grounds, and that, from August, he would be admitting girls. The camping trip to the top of Mr Burdock's donkey field will be the very last of our weekly sausage-fuelled 'boys only' trips.

Jacob hasn't taken either piece of news well – which is how he ended up with the job of lighting the fire. Mr Worthy felt sorry for him, and handed him the matches. Personally,

I would have handed them to Eric, but Mr Worthy's new, he doesn't know Jacob.

I hope we don't all live to regret it.

'Jacob, things have changed. We live in the 21st century. Women run countries, vote, have their own cars,' says Eric.

'But they're girls,' says Jacob, striking the second-to-last match in the box and holding it next to a sheet of smouldering newspaper. 'They won't want to do manly things – like . . . like . . . we do. They'll want to do cutting and sticking.'

I know I should be on Eric's side about girls coming to Field Craft, that would be the mature response, but I'm not that keen on spending every Friday night in the Field Craft hut with my sister, Tilly, her friend Milly and a glue stick. So I keep quiet.

'You, Jacob,' said Eric, 'are in danger of becoming a dinosaur.'

'Dinosaur – me? You're the dinosaur! I'll tell you I'm already prestiged at level 27 on *Dragon Blitz*. Anyway, I'm not going to argue with you two losers.' Jacob lets out a long puff of fury and the smouldering newspaper springs into life. 'Yay!' he cries.

I chuck over a twig and he holds it in the flame. We all hold our breath as the tiny, yellow tongue flicks across the strands of wood. This fire is our only defence against a night of death-by-boredom out here by the sea. Other activities include singing 'One Man Went to Mow', or cooking marshmallows with Mrs Worthy, or both.

The twig lights, and Jacob piles more wood onto the

fire, which doesn't go out. Instead it begins to resemble a respectable campfire. A few minutes more and we might have an almost-out-of-control bonfire.

Other Field Crafters emerge from the shadows to sit near us. Everyone knows Jacob, so no one sits too close.

I lie back against my sleeping bag, listening to the crackle of the flames and the chatter. The sky's turned a delicious midnight blue, and the stars are clear and twinkly. The Worthys might have banned pork sausages and white bread, but they can't ban the night sky.

Eric thumps back onto the ground next to me, while Jacob huffs and puffs at the fire.

'Look,' says Eric, pointing. 'There's Jupiter – just where it ought to be.'

'Where?' I ask.

'Between those two big stars – to the left of the moon.'

I focus on the sliver of moon, and a little to the left, at what appears to be a bright star.

I put my hand up to make an 'O' by putting my thumb and my middle finger together.

'Don't,' says Eric, pushing my arm sideways, so that I can't see my fingers. 'No one would want what happened last time to happen again, would they?'

'I'll kill you if you even think of it, Model Village.' Jacob jabs the fire and the flames light up his face like a demon. 'I do not want to be three inches high, nor do I want the world to end in the next week, because Dad's promised an all-expenses-paid trip to Mega Games World and I'm not missing it.'

I let my hand fall onto my chest. I wasn't really thinking of shrinking Jupiter. Having my own tiny planet was . . . mad, crazy, wonderful, but I wouldn't do it again. It was like being a superhero – except, they don't do stupid things – not REALLY stupid things.

Anyway, I don't have my meteorite; so I can't shrink anything. It's safely tucked up at home.

Sparks from the fire throw themselves up against the clear sky and fade.

I roll over onto my stomach and gaze across the bay towards the town. The castle, normally a dark splodge, is encircled by yellow workman's lights, as if it's wearing a necklace. Underneath me, my belly turns over with hunger.

Mr Worthy appears from the darkness, carrying his guitar, silhouetted against the sky. I can see his baseball cap, sticky-up hair escaping from the gap at the back and the lump behind his neck that's probably the hood of his hoodie. 'Yo!' he yelps. 'Now, dudes, let's pull together around Jacob's fire, and have a musical moment. Mrs Worthy might even break out the marshmallows if we're lucky – all right, Janey, hun?'

'Yuk,' mutters Jacob.

'Yes, Simon,' says Mrs Worthy, like we were all five years old, including Mr Worthy. 'Ready when you are. Marshmallows and tea, coming up in a jiff.'

There's a murmur which might be enthusiasm, but I doubt it.

I shuffle up next to Eric as some of the Hedgelings – they're junior Field Crafters – come to sit by the fire. Mrs Worthy

produces a kettle which she hangs over the flames on a long wire attached to a stand and settles a bowl of marshmallows on the ground next to her, handing sticks out to everyone around the fire.

The first chords emerge from Mr Worthy's guitar. It's out of tune. When Mr Worthy starts singing, he's out of tune too.

I close my eyes. It's a shame ears don't have lids on so that you can close them when you need to. The sound's worse when I can't see, so I open my eyes again.

The fire seems to enjoy Mr Worthy's singing, and the flames get stronger, splitting and doubling in size. It actually gives off some heat.

I look up at the stars and wonder how far up the sound can travel. Could someone sitting on the edge of space hear this?

Wheeeeeeeeeeeee

What's that noise?

Wheeeeeeeeeeeee

I've heard it before.

Wheeeeeeeeeeeee

Oh no.

I look up. A shooting star whizzes towards us, a streak of light racing through the sky. A second star slices across the horizon, on a different course, heading towards the town.

BANG.

But I know they're still moving; that they haven't hit anything yet.

'Wish!' yells Jacob.

'Don't,' I say, but my voice is lost.

CLANG.

And then –

THUD.

I think it hits the kettle – the kettle certainly hits the fire.

WHOOOSH.

A fountain of sparks bounces up, showering Mr Worthy and his guitar so that he staggers backwards, brushing himself down in horror. The kettle rolls across the grass, spewing boiling water and steam. Everyone runs, especially Mrs Worthy, who runs fastest. Clutching her bowl of flaming marshmallows, her skirt glowing with embers, she charges off across the field, trailing sparks like a giant firework, all the little kids following, and most of the bigger ones too.

'Wait – dudes – I'll put her out!' shouts Mr Worthy, running for his car. 'I've got a fire extinguisher.' Which is almost exactly when Mrs Worthy throws herself and the marshmallows into the sea.

It leaves me, Eric and Jacob, the remains of the campfire – and the meteorite.

'What was that?' whispers Eric.

'It fell in the fire,' says Jacob. 'Did you wish?'

'Leave it!' I say. 'It'll be boiling hot!'

Around us Field Crafters stamp on spots of flaming grass, people shout, and a team forms to drag a smouldering tent into the sea.

'Ace work, team Field Craft,' shouts Mr Worthy from a safe distance.

Eric pokes the meteorite with a stick, rolling a lump from the ash to the grass where it lies, steaming.

'It's just like yours, Tom,' says Eric.

‘Yes,’ I say quietly.

We sit staring at the lump of rock glittering in the last scraps of firelight. Behind us two of the Hedgelings are crying, and Mr Worthy’s on his phone to their parents.

‘Don’t touch it,’ I warn. ‘Leave it alone, or flip it into the sea.’

For one foolish second, I think that’s what’s going to happen, before Jacob lunges forward to snatch at the meteorite, and Eric leaps to his feet and tries to stop him.

‘Mine!’ shouts Jacob.

‘No!’ shouts Eric.

In the dark, I can’t see who touches it first, but deep down inside, I know there’s trouble ahead.

Chapter 1

It's the following afternoon, and Eric and Jacob are still arguing.

'I got it, it's mine,' says Jacob. 'Look, you can see the burn.'

'That's not true. I've got a burn too.' Eric holds his hand under Jacob's nose.

'Whatever,' says Jacob, emptying the last of a bag of Buttercup Suckers down his gullet. 'Nothing happened – it's not like Tom's meteorite. 'S'useless.'

Eric picks up baby otter and flies him through the air. Baby otter's tiny cloak flares out like a miniature superhero. 'Not necessarily. We just might not know yet. It might be something really weird. What did you wish for? Jacob?'

'Not telling,' says Jacob.

Eric arranges the Woodland Friends badger family into a group around a table.

'Don't tell me,' says Jacob, a look of disgust creeping across his red cheeks, 'you wished for world peace and a box of Woodland Friends.'

Eric's ears flush dark red. I bet he did wish for world peace. That would be just like Eric.

We're in my bedroom, in Grandma's house. Tilly's room is still being repaired after the Jupiter episode. Grandma told Mum and Dad that the roofers she had in must have been shoddy workmen because it was only a year ago that she had the roof repaired and now it was all over Tilly's bedroom floor. Dad had looked confused, but you don't challenge Grandma if you don't have to. Unfortunately, because Tilly's room was almost completely destroyed, I've now got all her Woodland Friends living on my floor. It was either them, or Tilly. Although the Woodland Friends are only four inches tall and made of plastic, I decided they were more fun. Mum and Dad got Tilly.

'I tried your meteorite,' I say. 'I tried holding it and shrinking something – but nothing happened.'

'Perhaps Model Village has lost his magical power?' says Jacob, a smile on his face, leaning back against a landslide of Tilly's soft toys.

'Of course not,' I say, but my heart sinks. He could be right – I haven't actually shrunk anything for ages. I wonder which is more scary – shrinking things, sometimes the wrong things, or finding that I can't shrink things? For a moment, I feel about 1% good.

And then Eric says: 'You haven't, have you, Tom? Could we test it?'

I take a deep breath, and take my meteorite from the bedside table. It's smaller than the one that fell last night and fits neatly in the palm of my hand. 'What shall I shrink?'

Eric picks up a comic. 'This? It can't do any harm.'

I stand back, holding my hand about six inches in front

of my eyes. The comic lying on the bedside rug fits neatly inside the circle of my thumb and my middle finger.

I turn the meteorite over in my pocket and

Click.

BANG!