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opening extract from

My Brother's Famous Bottom

written by

Jeremy Strong

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Ask Jeremy

Of all the books you have written, which one is your favourite?

I loved writing both **KRAZY KOW SAVES THE WORLD – WELL, ALMOST** and **STUFF**, my first book for teenagers. Both these made me laugh out loud while I was writing and I was pleased with the overall result in each case. I also love writing the stories about Nicholas and his daft family – **MY DAD**, **MY MUM**, **MY BROTHER** and so on.

If you couldn't be a writer what would you be?

Well, I'd be pretty fed up for a start, because writing was the one thing I knew I wanted to do from the age of nine onward. But if I DID have to do something else, I would love to be either an accomplished pianist or an artist of some sort. Music and art have played a big part in my whole life and I would love to be involved in them in some way.

What's the best thing about writing stories?

Oh dear – so many things to say here! Getting paid for making things up is pretty high on the list! It's also something you do on your own, inside your own head – nobody can interfere with that. The only boss you have is yourself. And you are creating something that nobody else has made before you. I also love making my readers laugh and want to read more and more.

Did you ever have a nightmare teacher? (And who was your best ever?)

My nightmare at primary school was Mrs Chappell, long since dead. I knew her secret – she was not actually human. She was a Tyrannosaurus rex in disguise. She taught me for two years when I was in Y5 and Y6, and we didn't like each other at all. My best ever was when I was in Y3 and Y4. Her name was Miss Cox, and she was the one who first encouraged me to write stories. She was brilliant. Sadly, she is long dead too.

When you were a kid you used to play kiss-chase. Did you always do the chasing or did anyone ever chase you?!

I usually did the chasing, but when I got chased, I didn't bother to run very fast! Maybe I shouldn't admit to that! We didn't play kiss-chase at school – it was usually played during holidays. If we had tried playing it at school we would have been in serious trouble. Mind you, I seemed to spend most of my time in trouble of one sort or another, so maybe it wouldn't have mattered that much.

14½ Things You Didn't Know About

Jeremy Strong

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

1. He loves eating liquorice.
2. He used to like diving. He once dived from the high board and his trunks came off!
3. He used to play electric violin in a rock band called THE INEDIBLE CHEESE SANDWICH.
4. He got a 100-metre swimming certificate when he couldn't even swim.
5. When he was five, he sat on a heater and burnt his bottom.
6. Jeremy used to look after a dog that kept eating his underpants. (No – NOT while he was wearing them!)
7. When he was five, he left a basin tap running with the plug in and flooded the bathroom.
8. He can make his ears waggle.
9. He has visited over a thousand schools.
10. He once scored minus ten in an exam! That's ten less than nothing!
11. His hair has gone grey, but his mind hasn't.
12. He'd like to have a pet tiger.
13. He'd like to learn the piano.
14. He has dreadful handwriting.

And a half . . . His favourite hobby is sleeping. He's very good at it.

1 The Big Plan

My dad's got a Big Plan. He told us all about it at a special family meeting. All of us were there – Mum, Dad, Granny and her husband, Lancelot, me and the twins, even though they're only one and a bit.

Dad banged a big spoon on the table to get our attention and made his announcement. 'We need a Big Plan,' he told us.

'A big flan, dear?' said Granny. She's a bit deaf and gets the wrong idea sometimes. 'What kind of flan? Strawberry? I like strawberry flan. As long as it's not gooseberry, or Marmite.' Granny pulled a face. 'Marmite flan is horrible.'

I stared at Granny. What was she going on about?

'It's nothing to do with flans,' shouted Dad. 'I said we need a Big Plan.'

'Oh,' smiled Granny. 'I thought a big flan seemed silly, but then so many of your ideas are silly, aren't they, Ron?'

'You're so kind, Mother dear,' Dad said icily.

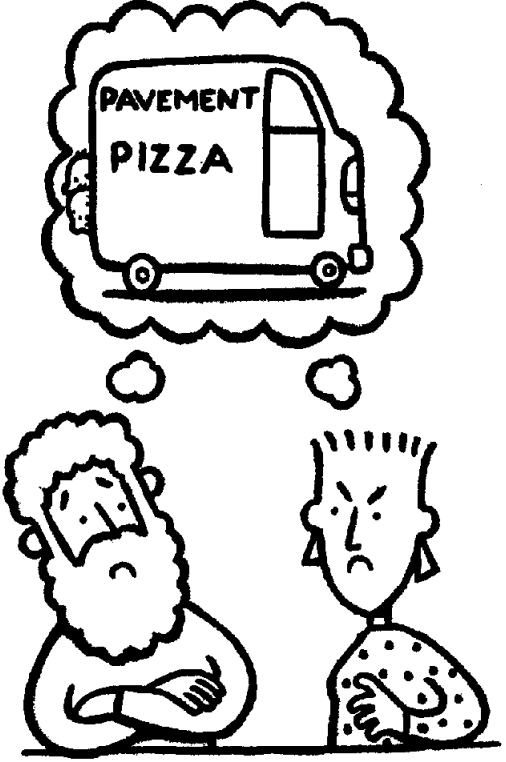
Mum sighed. Dad frowned and pulled at his beard. 'We have money problems. And the money problem is – we don't have any. We've nothing in the bank. In fact we have less than nothing in the bank.'

'Dad, how can you have less than nothing?' I asked.

'It's called an overdraft, Nicholas,' Lancelot explained. 'It means your mum and dad owe the bank money.'

'Exactly,' grunted Dad. 'It's because Cheese and Tomato cost so much.'

Mum glared at Dad. 'How many times do I have to remind you that the twins are called James and Rebecca, not Cheese and Tomato?'



Granny shook her head. 'I don't know what the fuss is about. After all, they were born in the back of a pizza delivery van. You should see the faces my friends pull when I tell them my two newest grandchildren are called Cheese and Tomato.'

'I don't want your friends pulling faces,' snapped Mum. 'Grannies are supposed to say things like "cootchy cootchy coo" to babies, not "ooh, cheese and tomato, my favourite, yummy yum"!'

'Whatever they're called, they cost too much,' grumbled Dad. 'They eat too much. They need too many clothes and they get through far too many nappies. They are costing us a fortune.'

'They can't go round without clothes or nappies, Ron,' Mum pointed out.

'I know that. I'm simply saying that we need to do something.'

'So, have you got an idea for a Big Plan?' asked Mum.

Dad smiled triumphantly. 'I have. In fact I have thought of several ways we can either make money, or save money.' No wonder Mum looked worried. Dad's plans for anything usually lead to trouble.

'OK,' he announced. 'Here is my first idea for making money: we sell the twins.'

'You can't sell Cheese and To– I mean, James and Rebecca!' protested Mum.

'It's only a suggestion,' said Dad hastily. 'Don't get your knickers in a twist. I can see you don't like that plan and I'm not very fond of it either, so here is my second idea: we sell Nicholas.'

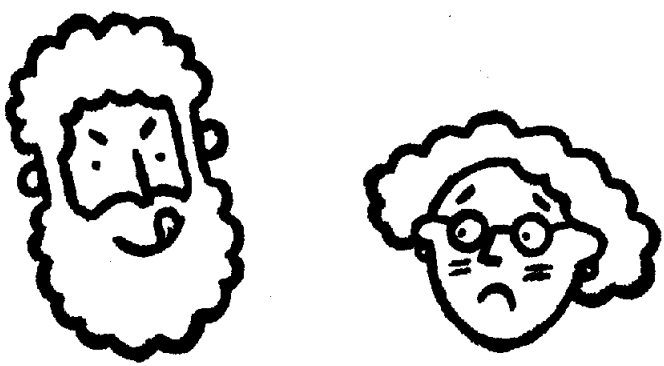
'Dad!' I yelled.

'You don't like that either? OK, quieten down. You'll love this next one, I promise. Idea number three: we sell Granny.'

'Oh for heaven's sake, Ron, will you stop trying to sell off the entire family and come up with some halfway decent suggestion? And you can stop looking at me like that. I am not up for sale.'

Dad glanced round the table. He flashed his eyebrows up and down.

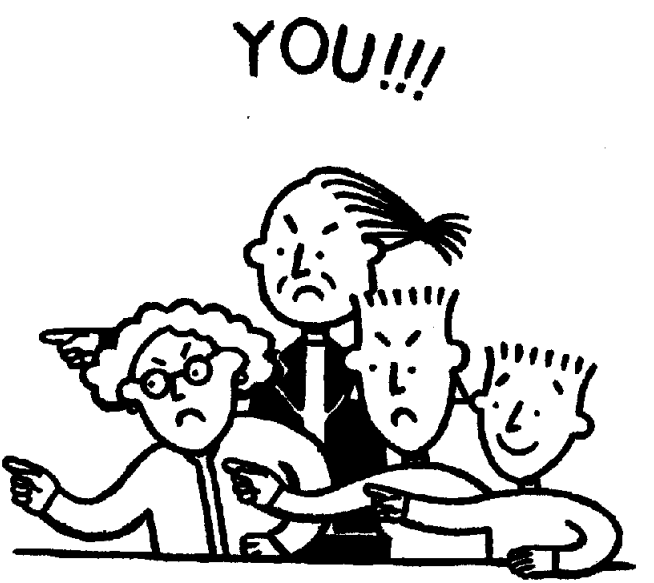
'Do stop grinning like that,' said Granny. 'You look like a cannibal wondering how tasty we might be to eat.'



'What an excellent idea,' said Dad. 'That would save us buying food for ages. We could eat each other. Who shall we start with?'

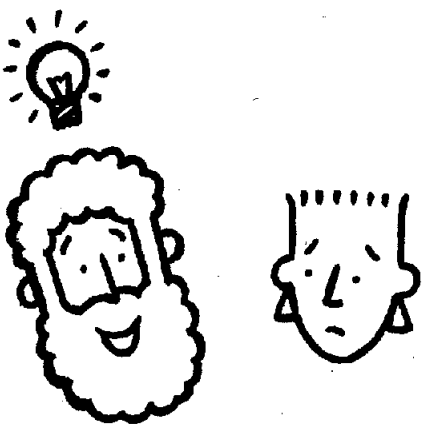
'YOU!' everyone shouted in chorus.

'Aagh!' Dad gave a startled jump back. 'All right, I get the message. Quieten down and listen because I do actually have a Big Plan. We're going to start a farm.'



2 What Do Cows Lay?

My dad's always thinking up fantastic ideas and I thought this was one of his best. The others didn't seem nearly as excited as I was though. They just stared at him in stunned silence.



'Phew! You'll need more than a bit of dosh to start a farm,' Lancelot pointed out.

'And I don't want to move house,' said Mum. 'I like this house.'

'Me too,' I murmured. Under the table I crossed my fingers. I didn't want to move.

'No, no,' protested Dad. 'We're staying here. This place will be the farm.'

'That's the most stupid idea you've ever come up with,' declared Mum.

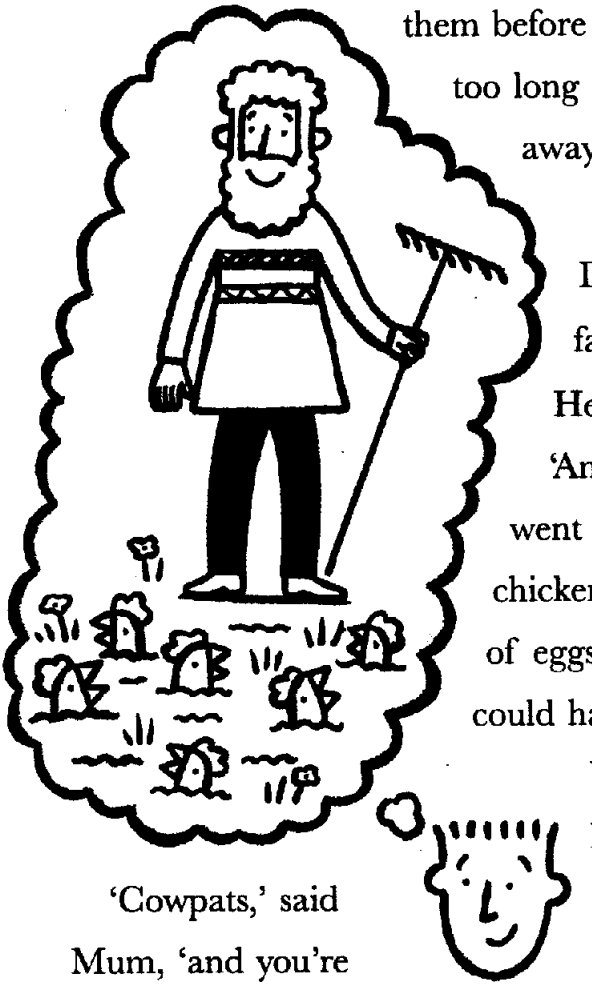
'We could have a mini farm,' Dad pressed on, 'with just a few animals, and we could grow our own vegetables.'

'That's what we did in the war,' said Granny. 'We had such fun. I was only a little girl, of course, but we had vegetables and chickens and rabbits.'

'That's it,' nodded Dad. 'We are going to grow as much of our own food as possible. In fact I shall grow some chickens too.'

Mum rolled her eyes. 'You can't grow chickens.'

'Yes, you can,' said Dad. 'You plant eggs and they grow into chickens, and you have to pick



them before their legs get too long and they run away.'

See? I said Dad has fantastic ideas. He's great!

'Anyhow,' Dad went on, 'the chickens will lay lots of eggs. And we could have a cow.

What do cows lay, Brenda?'

'Cowpats,' said Mum, 'and you're talking nonsense. The garden is too small for a cow.'

'How about a goat then? We could get a small goat and every morning you could go out

and shake it and get butter from it and cheese and milk and cream.'

'You have some very strange ideas about farming,' said Mum. 'Come to think of it, you have some very strange ideas about everything.'

'All part of my charm,' smiled Dad.

'I know how to milk a cow,' announced Lancelot.

Granny patted his arm. 'Lancelot is very clever with his hands,' she said.

'We're not having a cow,' repeated Mum.

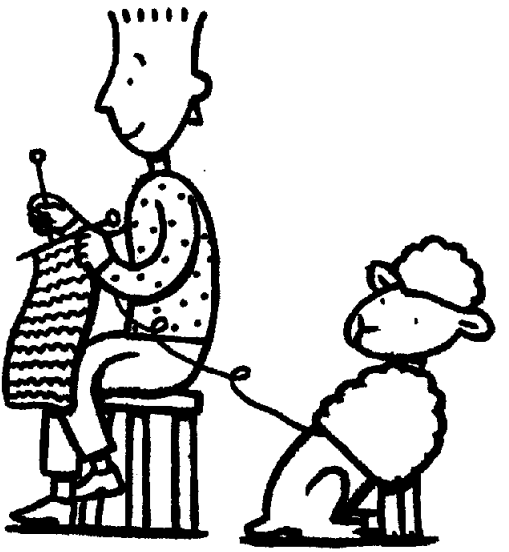
Lancelot nodded. 'I know. But it works on goats too. I could teach Nicholas how to milk the goat.'

'Urgh! I don't want to milk goats.'

'Lancelot and I could take the milk to our house and make it into yoghurt and cheese,' suggested Granny.

'You should have some sheep,' said Lancelot. 'You could knit things then.'

'I think chickens and a goat will be quite enough to start with,' Mum murmured.



'Are we really going to get chickens and goats and everything?' I asked, getting quite excited.

'Oh yes,' said Dad. 'And a rhinoceros.'

Mum sighed. 'Just ignore him, Nicholas.'

'Yes, ignore me, Nicholas,' said Dad. 'Go and dig the vegetable patch instead.'

Did I say my dad's great? I've changed

my mind. Sometimes he can be very *un*great.

'And before you do any digging you can change the babies' nappies,' smiled Mum.

'Thank you,' I scowled. 'I'm just your slave really, aren't I?'

'Yes,' they answered.

I turned round to find the twins and of course they'd vanished, hadn't they? They're always disappearing. I think they do it deliberately. I tracked Cheese down eventually in Mum and Dad's bed. He was pulling Dad's pyjama trousers over his head, saying, 'Big dark! Nighty nighty!'

And what about Tomato? She was sitting in Mum and Dad's wardrobe, on the second shelf. *The second shelf!* How on earth did she get up there? She was pulling out Mum's T-shirts and throwing them all over the floor. So not only did I end up changing their nappies, I had to tidy the bedroom too and put

everything back. Like I said, I'm just a slave really.

Anyhow, I'm really excited about the farm. It's going to be brilliant!