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The Jam Roly-Poly
of Doom

‘Is Grandad planning on growing potatoes on your head?’ Mum asked when I walked into the kitchen.

She pointed to my hair.

‘You’ve got half the garden in there. Shower, now. And be quick – tea’s nearly done.’

I groaned. But there was no point arguing. Not when Mum had her ‘I will not be moved even by a runaway rhinoceros’ look.

But I didn’t make it to the shower. And not just because I spotted the latest Spider-Man comic I’d left at the top of the stairs – and stopped to check I hadn’t missed anything the six times I’d already read it – but because when I went into my room to grab my dressing gown, I noticed something very odd.

The dragon fruit was glowing. Properly glowing! I went over and peered down at it. Reaching out, I prodded the spiky skin. It started pulsing orange, red and blazing yellow. And then I remembered what Grandad had said about mould. Maybe it was toxic? I yanked my hand back and stared at it, half expecting my fingers to shrivel up and drop off in some fatal reaction. They didn’t. And the relief was slightly sprinkled with disappointment. Not because I *wanted* my fingers to fall off, but because when you’ve read as many comics as me, you can’t help but hope that you might just absorb some

superpowers when this kind of thing happens. Not that this kind of thing *had* happened to me – ever.



The fruit had stopped pulsing and now looked pretty normal, apart from the glow. Before I could prod it again, I heard Mum shouting from downstairs that tea was ready and if no one was there to eat it in exactly thirty seconds she was

giving it all to next door's dog and we could have cereal for all she cared. I might have taken more notice of this if the neighbours actually *had* a dog – which they don't. Just a ferret. And a fussy one at that. So I doubt it'd eat Mum's lasagne anyway.

Dad stuck his head around my door and shouted, 'Tea up, Tomas.' Then headed off down the hall.

I waved. 'Just coming, Dad.' I didn't bother telling him he didn't need to shout. He wouldn't hear me. He wears a pair of massive headphones pretty much permanently. Music is Dad's job, and his hobby, and what he does in every second between those times too. He writes music for commercials on TV (and one very-low-budget film that no one's heard of, let alone seen), but I think secretly he still wants to be a rock star and imagines being discovered by some TV talent show or something. Anyway I've got used to communicating with him mainly through mime.

Aware that I hadn't made it anywhere near the shower, I swapped hoodies then ducked into the bathroom and quickly stuck my head under the tap. Looking at the state of the sink after I'd finished we'd probably be growing potatoes in there too!

Mealtimes are interesting in our house. Not because we talk about interesting things or anything like that, but because of my not-yet-three-year-old sister, Lolli. In particular, watching my parents trying to field the flying food and make sure some of it at least goes into Lolli's mouth.

Plus, since it's the only time Dad doesn't wear headphones or isn't plugged into his keyboards, Mum seems to feel she has to make the most of it by talking non-stop at about a hundred miles an hour. No one could possibly process the amount of information she churns out in between mouthfuls. In fact, I'm pretty sure Dad is actually composing tunes in his head while she's talking, and the

nodding Mum takes for his agreement is just him keeping time.

After Mum wiped up the lasagne that Lolli had generously shared with the floor, she brought out dessert. She's working her way through a cookbook Nana gave her last Christmas, called *Great British Puddings*. That night it was jam roly-poly and custard. Well, lumps of custard.

'The roly-poly's a bit flat,' she noted, as she offered it up to us apologetically. 'It's meant to be a nice spiral of dough and jam. You know, rather than a splodge.'

She was right. It looked as if someone had sat on it. And that wasn't unusual.

Mum is a vet, you see, and although she can wrestle an uncooperative Doberman into a head cone, she can't seem to wrestle pudding ingredients into anything that resembles cake. Despite all the shows she watches on TV.

Of course that could've had something to do with her leaving out half the ingredients to make it healthier. Sugar-free cake is not cake in my book. But being bombarded with shows about producing the perfect pudding, while at the same time being programmed to make sure everyone eats their five a day of fruit and veg, makes desserts more difficult for Mum than for the rest of us.

I wanted to say something nice to make her feel better, but I'm really not great at lying. Dad was staring out the window humming under his breath. I needed him to step in quick before I blurted out something that'd probably end up making Mum hurl the whole dish at the wall. Which was not necessarily a bad idea.

Just then Lolli grabbed a piece and stuffed it into her mouth. And then spat it out. Mum looked horrified. We watched as Lolli picked up another piece, unravelled the dough and happily started

licking the jam out of the middle.



‘See? Lolli likes it,’ I spluttered.

Mum didn't look convinced, so I dived for a piece and started making what I hoped were believable yummy noises.

Mum sighed and just said, ‘Can't you call her Charlotte for once?’

‘But she likes being called Lollibob – don't you, Lollibob Bobalob?’ I replied, still chewing a tasteless lump of dough.

Lolli giggled and stuck out two jammy hands to me.

‘See?’ I said, finally managing to swallow the leaden ball of dessert. It lodged in my throat and I had to take an enormous gulp of water to get it down.

Mum turned and, while she was wiping Lolli clean, I grabbed the rest of the roly-poly pudding from my bowl and stuffed it in my hoodie pocket. Thanks to my sister, I was going to be saved from eating any more. We stick together, me and Lolli. Even without jam.

Suddenly there was a loud THUMP from upstairs.

Mum stared at the ceiling. ‘Whatever’s that?’

‘It’s probably just Tomtom messing with my stuff,’ I said.

‘That cat is like a furry wrecking ball,’ Mum moaned. ‘Go and sort out your pet, Tomas.’

I didn’t need telling twice, not with half a roly-poly still sitting on the table staring at me menacingly. I raced upstairs.

‘Tomtom, come out,’ I said crossly as I stepped into my room.

I looked around for the ginger cat, ready to give him his marching orders, but he wasn’t anywhere to be seen.

Then I noticed the dragon fruit wasn’t where I’d left it on the desk. It was on the floor by my bed. And what’s more, it had grown.

