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Yeti Another Bad Thing

The bad things started happening one at a time.

At first I hardly noticed. It was just small stuff like Mum buying the wrong cereal – porridge instead of Coco Pops. Then it was the juice – she accidentally bought bottled water instead. Shortly after that she started reading this weird book about how to stay calm, which had exercises in it that she made me help her with. I had to ring this tiny tinkly bell every fifteen seconds or so while she stared at the pips on a strawberry and *stilled her inner self*. Strawberry pips are very calming apparently. But not calming enough; after about a week Mum flung her copy of *101 Ways to Stay Calm* across the room at me and said if I didn't stop playing the tune to Harry Hill's TV show on the tinkly bell, she'd have me adopted. But I didn't believe her: everyone loves that tune.

Still, I went and had a lie-down in my room after that and practised Way to Stay Calm No 89. The book said you should not make negative statements such as *I don't like cheese on toast*; you should practise saying what you *do* like. I tried really hard to do that exercise but it was impossible: what's not to like about cheese on toast?

I held on to the book anyway. I thought maybe it would come in handy if the bad stuff kept happening. And I was right, because the very next day, disaster struck.

I was walking down to art class minding my own business when it happened. A yeti had its hands around my throat and was throttling me. I tried really hard to stay calm by thinking of something positive to say, but you try being positive when someone has their great big sausage fingers wrapped round your neck and see how far you get. Actually, I love sausages so I tried saying *I like sausages* but then I started imagining myself eating The Yeti's fingers. (With beans. And chips.) And that had the reverse effect of making me very, very *un-calm*.

Now, before I go any further I want to apologise here and now to yetis everywhere. They get bad press and I hate to be the one to add to it, but the fact is I am being bullied by a yeti lookalike. Eddie Lyttle.

Eddie Lyttle is this great big fat bully who wears his hair down the front of his face so you can't see his eyes and goes around terrorising normal people who cut their hair because they actually want to see where they are going. If The Yeti wore glasses, like me, he'd appreciate his eyesight more. Anyway never mind that, back to being strangled.

I was very possibly laughing to myself when the attack happened. And no, I'm not some kind of giggling-freak-weirdo type; I'm a comedian. Well, OK, I'm not a comedian yet, but I'm going to be one when I grow up, like Harry Hill (except maybe not bald). So I need to get in lots of practice and I tell myself jokes all the time. Yetis don't like jokes.

They prefer strangling people. I don't even know where The Yeti came from. A stealth bully, that's him. Which is pretty impressive because he is only fourteen and already he is nearly six foot tall and he's about six foot wide as well, so stealth operations are a big deal for him.

'What you laughing at?' he grunted.

Why do bullies always grunt? Is it something they learn in Bully Club?

Rule one: On no account speak clearly so that your victim might understand you and give you what you want. Grunt at all times to prolong the agony.

It's psychological warfare, that's what it is. I considered telling him that his grunting tactic was probably illegal under the terms of the Geneva Convention. But he was squeezing my neck so tightly that my tonsils were in danger of coming out my nostrils, so a history lesson was really out of the question.

'Agh, lugh, aah monchk, bachk,' I said instead, which translated from the original Chokingese means, 'Lunch money's in bag. Take it.'

The Yeti knew exactly what I was saying. He let go of me, plundered my rucksack, shoved my lunch money into his pocket and trudged off, leaving me late for art.

'You are late,' the teacher said.

Have you noticed how teachers are masters of stating the obvious?

'You are making a habit of this, Philip,' Miss Franks said.

'I'm really sorry, Miss,' I said in what should have been my normal voice, but the words came out in this high-

pitched squeal, like some kind of high-frequency signal intended to search out dolphins and other marine life. My voice is always doing that these days. And that's when the next bad thing happened: Lucy Wells burst out laughing at me.

Girls' hearing must be on the same frequency as dolphins', because they all heard me and joined in laughing too and pretty soon the whole class was having a laugh at my expense, but it was Lucy Wells's laughter that stung. She is this blonde goddess who inhabits my art class. I know that sounds a bit sappy and I don't want you to go thinking I am some kind of saddo lovesick muppet, but you should see her: she is perfection.

She has beautiful hair and beautiful teeth and beautiful eyes and beautiful ears and beautiful hands, even her knuckles are beautiful. And even when she is sniggering at you for being late and getting told off, she has a beautiful laugh.

Oh, yeah, and one other thing: she hates me.

My best friend Ang (weird name, I'll explain later) is the only person who knows about Lucy and me. I told him about her one lunchtime after I thought she'd smiled at me. Turned out she was smiling at the guy behind me, who is a year above me.

'Behind you *and* above you?' Ang laughed. 'That could prove tricky.'

'It's a spatial challenge,' I said.

'A spatial challenge for a spatial boy,' Ang said.

'Aww,' I said, 'you're spatial too.' And we both fell about laughing.

Good times.

‘Philip!’ Miss Franks said. ‘Are you listening to me? You look like you’re in a world of your own.’

‘Yes. No. I am,’ I said. I can be very articulate when I try.

‘That’s three weeks in a row,’ Miss Franks went on. ‘I’m sorry, Philip, but I’ll have to give you detention again. It’s policy.’

‘I’m sorry, Miss Franks,’ I said. ‘I got held up.’

‘*Literally*,’ I whispered to Ang as I slid on to a seat beside him.

‘The Yeti?’ he whispered back.

I nodded. ‘He ransacked my rucksack.’

‘He rucksacked your ransack?’

‘No, he sackranked my sugrag.’

‘Your sugrag! The big pervert!’

Then we both burst out laughing and we both ended up with detention. Yet another bad thing.

2

Inspector Clueless

It was nearly five o'clock by the time I got home. I was tired, and I was starving on account of The Yeti relieving me of my lunch money, so I was in no mood for Mum's 'School days are the happiest days of your life' lecture – her default position when I get a detention. I really don't think adults should say stuff like that. It could give a kid a very warped view of adult life. Couldn't they at least pretend there's something to look forward to in the sixty-odd years we'll spend *not* being in school? Anyway they should say pre-school days are the best days of your life because you've never even heard of homework or bullies or goddesses.

And, well, I'm not going to lie to you, I felt like finding my old teddy bear Sir Fluffington and hiding under the doona and inhaling the old days. But I never got the chance because Mum was waiting in the hall when I got home.

She led me into the living room and sat me down in front of a tray of tea and homemade buns. Hang on – tea plus buns plus detention does not compute. And another thing, Mum had this face on like she was going to tell me something really serious, or worse, something really embarrassing. It looked suspiciously like her facts-of-life

face. A face I will never forget. Had she forgotten that I already knew? Please no. Anything but the facts of life again.

I stared at the buns. They had exploded over the sides of the bun cases and were black around the edges. Some were iced, presumably covering up a near-cremation. Mum hardly ever bakes. I looked at her, trying to figure out what was going on. She said nothing. She just looked at me in a creepy sort of way, like she was seeing me for the first time ever.

‘What’s up?’ I said, thinking the sooner this started, the sooner it’d be over.

‘Nothing’s up,’ she said.

Well, that wasn’t true. Something was definitely up. Mum trying to bake was a dead give-away.

‘You’re up to something,’ I said.

Mum said, ‘I can get nothing past you, inspector.’

She sort of laughed it, but her voice was a bit wobbly, like she was going to start singing but wasn’t ready. And yes, my mum does often burst into song for no reason, and yes, it is *very* annoying. She opened her mouth to speak again but her voice had gone all squeaky so she stopped.

‘You need to be oiled,’ I said. ‘You squeak.’

Now, I know that’s not the funniest line in the world but Mum is my number one fan and you’d expect your number one fan to laugh at your jokes, no matter how lame they are. Instead, she burst into tears, ran up the stairs and locked herself in the bathroom.

Hang on, we don’t have a lock on the bathroom door.

I'm always going on about how I am a growing boy and how I need my privacy and how Mum is an ageing woman and she needs her privacy but she'd never listened. Until now.

I climbed the stairs and stood outside the door. Tried the handle, definitely locked. She'd done it, taken my advice for once and never even told me. I could hear her blowing her nose like she was trying to blow her brains out through her nostrils. I didn't feel right stalking someone on the toilet so I rattled the handle. Just to let her know I was there.

'I'll be out in a minute,' Mum said through a hail of snot. 'Have a bun. They're wholemeal.'

I went back downstairs and picked the icing off one of her buns and tried to think up some fresh jokes to cheer her up.

When Mum came down I noticed her eyes; they were all red and piggy-looking. That's when I knew things were bad. I remember the piggy-eyed look after Dad left.

'What's up?' I said in my best fake-cheerful voice. I thought maybe Dad had come back to upset her and I was already planning how I could trip him up and knock him out and have him disposed of.

'Hayfever,' Mum said and tried to feed me another bun.

Hayfever? Hmm, that was new. I looked her up and down in a theatrical, exaggerated way, which I am very good at. Then I pointed my finger at her and said in my best detective inspector voice, 'I see no hay.' I felt her forehead. 'And no fever. I can only conclude, madam, that you are lying.'

Mum didn't laugh. I really was losing my touch. She looked away and stared at the curtains as if they were the most interesting thing she had ever seen.

'You can watch a Harry Hill DVD if you like,' she said.

Mum *NEVER* lets me watch TV until all my homework is done. Something was definitely up.

I usually laugh myself sick watching Harry Hill, but I couldn't concentrate. My mind was racing: Mum had put a lock on the bathroom door, baked buns and, worst of all, cried at my jokes. What did it all mean? And what was going to become of me now? If I couldn't make people laugh any more my whole life plan was ruined: the stand-up circuit, the TV appearances, the big house in the country with the granny flat for Mum. I'd have to rethink it all.

I watched another ten minutes of Harry Hill, hoping for inspiration. When it didn't come, I went off to do my homework. I had to research the Reformation for history but I was too distracted to concentrate so I just sat at the computer and researched Harry Hill instead. I went through his website, hoping some of his genius would rub off on me. Mum always says greatness inspires greatness, so I know she would have approved. I felt sure that if I could only get closer to Harry Hill, I'd get my comic touch back.

And that's when I had this brilliant idea.

It took me a while before I found an address where I could contact him. There was one address for his agent and one for fan mail. I decided on his agent. I reckoned he probably gets tonnes of fan mail every week and it would take ages to reach mine, but who in their right mind would

want to write to his agent? I took a sheet of paper from the printer and started writing.

You have no idea how hard it is to write to your idol without sounding like a total weirdo. My first attempt started out ‘Dear Harry Hill, You don’t know me but I know you.’ It sounded more like a threat from a psycho-loony stalker than a charming cry for help from a hilarious twelve-year-old boy. In the end, though, I think I did all right.

Dear Harry Hill

I know you must be really busy with all the TV and home videos you have to watch but please, please take a minute to help me. I am a twelve-year-old boy and I plan to be a comedian when I grow up, but recently I’ve sort of lost my touch. Has anyone ever cried when you told them a joke? If so, how did you overcome the problem? Please write back because I really need help.

Yours sincerely

Philip Wright

3

We're No Angels

I promised I'd tell you about Ang's name, didn't I? Well, wait for it: it is Angel. Seriously. And it's pronounced *Ang-hell*. What kind of parents call their child *Ang-hell*?

'Spanish ones,' he said. 'My dad's name is Angel too. I'm named after him.'

'Blimey,' I said. 'What's your mum called – Saint?'

'Encarnacion,' he said.

I thought that was a weird name too but I didn't say so because, at the time, I hardly knew Ang. He'd just moved into our street and I was trying to be friendly, partly because my mum told me to and partly because it was the summer holidays and there was no-one else around to play football with.

'Ang-hell. That's rough,' I said.

'What's wrong with it?' he said.

'It's a bit sort of – holy,' I said. 'And – um – wing-y.'

I never even saw the punch coming. It landed in my stomach.

Boy! This *Ang-hell* business really bugged him. And then just to prove it he punched me again. And then I punched him back and – what do you know – we were having an

all-out fist fight. Nice way to welcome a new neighbour, don't you think?

We were best friends after that. I got a bloody nose and Ang got a black eye, which I was kind of jealous of because a bloody nose isn't that dramatic once the blood's been cleaned up. Whereas a black eye – that has mileage. For days everyone kept asking Ang about his black eye and giving him loads of sympathy and attention. It wasn't fair, because I'd given him the black eye yet he was the one getting all the glory.

After that, we set about solving the Ang-hell problem. We were both starting the same secondary school that September and he said he couldn't take any more where-are-your-wings jokes.

First of all, we tried changing his name to Brian, but every time I called him Brian he just ignored me because he couldn't remember that *he* was actually Brian. That's when we realised it would have to be something closer to his real name.

'What about Angus?' I suggested. I've always liked the name Angus.

'Nah,' Angel said. 'Isn't that the name of a cow?'

'That's Aberdeen Angus. Different thing altogether,' I said, thinking this Angus thing could really work.

'Still don't like it,' Angel said. 'Too cowy.'

'You could shorten it,' I said hopefully, 'to Ang.'

He stopped chomping on the chocolate bar he'd been eating (without sharing) and stared at me with a look of cold contempt that was impressive.

‘Du-uh!’ he said. ‘I could shorten my *own* name to Ang.’

‘Well, why don’t you?’ I said.

‘Well, I will.’

‘Well, do, then.’

‘Watch me,’ he said and stomped off to find his parents.

His mum didn’t like it. She said the whole idea was ‘loco’. And asked him why he wanted to shorten his name to Ang.

‘Because Ang doesn’t *mean* anything,’ he said in a slow voice that sounded like he was explaining two plus two to a toddler.

Bad move. His mum started shouting at him in very rapid Spanish. It sounded like a machine gun going off. She could definitely win the world speed-talking championships.

It wasn’t long before Ang joined in and was rattling away with his mum. Then his dad came in to the room and he joined in too and the whole thing started to sound worryingly like a great big fight. Obviously, I had no idea what they were saying. The only word I could make out was ‘Ang-hell’, which they were over-using, in my opinion.

I mean, come on! ‘Ang’ is not a million miles away from ‘Angel’. It’s practically the same.

Just then, they all stopped yelling and looked at me. That was when I realised I’d said that last bit out loud.

There was a long silence, then Ang’s mum said ‘Si,’ which even I knew meant yes in Spanish.

Just then Ang’s dad started making this rasping sound at the back of his throat like he was going to choke and

throwing his arms up in the air as if to say, 'Kill me, I am ready to die.' Which was impressive, if a bit melodramatic.

He was wasting his time. Ang's mum had made her mind up and no amount of choking to death was going to change it. She pinched Ang's cheek and said something decisive-sounding in Spanish (which ended with the word 'Ang') and that was that. Problem solved. Ang wasn't an angel anymore.