

A FRANKLY SHOCKING TALE



CHAPTER 1

THE EVIL SCIENTIST



Yesterday my big brother Mark turned into a real-life actual **EVIL SCIENTIST**. I mean, he always was mostly evil anyway – you know, knocking me down things or over things, locking me in things or out of things, squashing me under things or between things, that kind of mostly evil stuff. But lately he’s slid up the evil scale from ‘mostly evil’ to ‘nearly totally evil’. It started with the way he talked.

‘Oi! Tom!’ he shouted. ‘Remote! Now!’

Mark spoke in short words, like his brain had shrunk or something. He grabbed the remote and kicked my foot away. ‘Moron,’ he mumbled.





My best friend, Pradeep, who lives next door, says that 'moron' is a big-brother word for little brothers. His brother Sanj, who's also mostly evil, calls him that too. Luckily Sanj is away at boarding school though, so he can only be mostly evil to Pradeep during school holidays.

I told my mum about Mark going more evil, but Mum said it's just that Mark is 'home-moanal'. Which I think is why he's moaning at

home a lot. She said he can't help acting evil (well, she didn't say evil exactly, but she should have). She said it's because he has lots of 'home-moans' racing around his body.

Just when I thought Mark couldn't get worse, Granny and Grandad got him a chemistry set for his birthday. It came in a huge box with big official writing on the front that read:

WARNING! Only for use by children over twelve years old. To be used solely under the supervision of adults.

While I was reading the box Mark thwacked my head from behind.

'Don't touch this – got it?' he said.

I walked away rubbing my head. Mostly because it hurt, but also to get my head out of the way in case he decided to thwack me again.

He took out a white scientist coat and looked at all the stuff inside the box. There were bottles



and test tubes and cups and little stirring things, all made of glass. Real breakable glass! Mum looked at the chemistry set and leaned over to me.

‘Maybe you shouldn’t touch it, dear. It looks like an accident waiting to happen,’ she said.



Mark put on the coat and turned around. He folded up the collar, shoved his hands in the

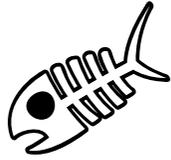
pockets and let a creepy smile spread over his face. And you know that squirmy, prickly feeling you get when you let a millipede crawl on your arm? I had that feeling, but in my stomach.

Mark had turned into an **EVIL SCIENTIST**. But I didn’t know how evil he could be until he came home the next day with the goldfish.



CHAPTER 2

A FISH IN A BAG



Now, we'd had goldfish before. We won them at a church fete by throwing ping-pong balls into the little bowls they were swimming in. They didn't live very long though. Mum said it was because the fish all had concussion from being hit on the head with the ping-pong balls.

I had concussion once when I was four, after I accidentally ran into the front door that Mark *accidentally* slammed shut just as he *accidentally* yelled, 'Run, Tom, run.' That was back when he was just mostly evil.

I remember the doctor shining a tiny torch into my eyes and then asking me if I could name

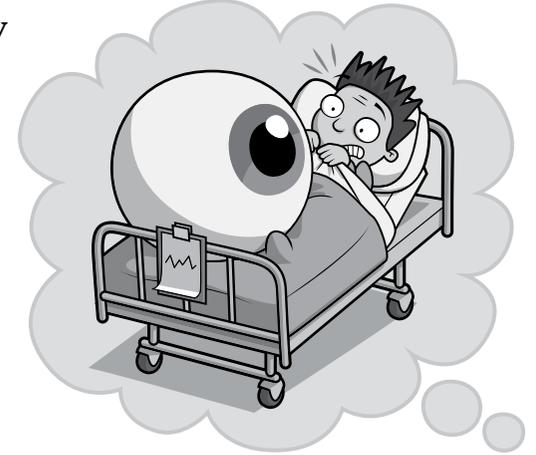
all the Teletubbies. I told her that Teletubbies were lame and then threw up on her shoes. Not to be evil, just because I had to, you know. She said I had concussion and needed to stay in the hospital overnight so they could keep an eye on me.

So, the day after Mark got the chemistry set he came home after school with a goldfish in a little plastic bag and headed straight upstairs. Mum and I followed.

'Did you go to a fete?' I asked.

'Moron.' He shot me a look as he pulled his earphones out of his ears. 'It's from the pet shop. For school. Science week.'

'Why do you need . . . ?' Mum started to ask,



when Mark shoved a letter from his bag into her hand.

She read aloud: 'Class 7M will be doing experiments on the effects of pollution on marine populations. Students will show photos of their experiments to the class tomorrow.' She looked at Mark. 'OK, if it's homework,' she said as she headed down the stairs. 'At least you're doing something green.'

Mark put on his white scientist coat and took out his chemistry set. As he unpacked the box I got that crawly-millipede feeling in my stomach again. Mark should have done one of those 'Mwahaha!' **EVIL SCIENTIST** laughs at that point, but I guess he was still learning the ropes.

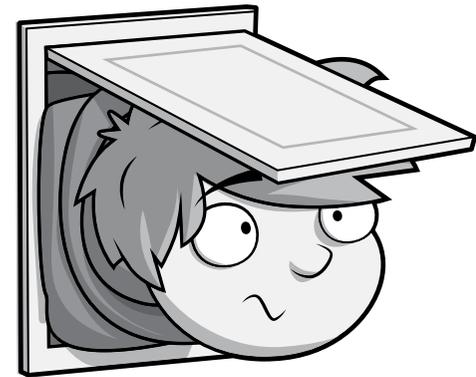
Mum shouted up from downstairs, 'Mark, look after your brother while I run to the shops. I'll be back soon.' I heard the door close and looked over at Mark.

Normally, as soon as Mum left, Mark would start acting mostly evil to me. Like when he

caught me reading his mint condition *Return of the Attack of the Undead Zombie* comic. He wrapped me in beach towels and wedged me in the dog flap till the neighbours complained about my shouting and Mum had to come home from work to un-wedge me. Oh, the good old *mostly* evil days. But now that he was an actual **EVIL SCIENTIST**, he was too busy to think of things to squeeze me into or trap me under. There was definitely less torture, but more shouting.

'Touch nothing, moron,' Mark growled at me as he went out to the hall cupboard.

He came back with the old goldfish bowl, filled it in the bathroom sink and dumped the fish inside. I pressed my face up against the glass. This goldfish was fatter than the ones from the



fete. It had big bulging eyes and a long wavy tail with three fins. It kind of looked like a really ugly bug-eyed mermaid, if you squinted enough. Then, as I squinted at the fish, it squinted back. Mark was too busy reading the back of a jar from his chemistry set to notice. The fish swam up to the side of the bowl and peered at me through the glass, its little mouth opening and closing. I know it sounds crazy, but I swear it looked like the fish was saying, 'Help me.'



Mark unscrewed the lid of the jar.

My millipede feeling got worse. He took out some test tubes and mixed up a bottle of a truly evil-looking green mixture.

'What are you doing?' I asked.

'Polluting,' he grunted, and tipped some of the green stuff into the water with the fish.

'Stop! It could hurt the fish!' I shouted, and tried to grab the bottle.

Mark shoved me back on the carpet with one hand while he added some brown powder and grey flakes to the fishbowl. I tried to get up but he held me firm by pushing his size-7 trainers down on my chest. He grabbed his phone and snapped a picture of the fish swimming around in the gunky water.

'What will . . . it do to . . . the fish?' I gasped with the last bit of air left in my lungs.

'Dunno,' he said. 'That's the experiment.' He laughed an absolutely perfect **EVIL SCIENTIST** laugh. Man, he was a fast learner. Then he put his phone back in his pocket. 'I'll come back later to take another picture, and then I can flush it.' Mark lifted his foot off my shirt and I sucked in a lungful of air.





'Flush what?' I spluttered.

'Duh, the fish.' He put his earphones in again and headed back down the stairs, shouting back, 'Remember, touch nothing, moron. Got it?' 'Got it,' I said.

But I totally didn't get it. I stood up and tried to rub off the footprint Mark had left on my T-shirt. Then I glanced over at the fishbowl. It didn't look good. The fish was squirming in the bowl and sucking in gulps of mucky water. Then it swam up to the glass again.

I stared through the cloudy green water, right

into the fish's big bulging eyes, and did the most dangerous thing I've ever done in my short life.

I touched it.

