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The Heroes

It was morning. Not just any morning – Adam’s favourite kind:

- Sunny (for October)
- Warm (except his feet, which at age thirteen no longer fitted in the bed he’d had since he was eight)
- Lazy. Slow enough for him to gather his thoughts, try to remember his dreams, plan which YouTubers to catch up on first ...
- And best of all, it was the weekend. Nothing beats a long, relaxing lie-in on a Sunday mor—

‘ADAM! You better be out of bed! We’re leaving in ten minutes!’

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Let's start again.

It was morning. Not just any morning. Adam's least favourite kind – the kind when you think it's the weekend, when actually it's a

MONDAY!

Adam had never literally leaped out of bed before, but there's a first time for everything. He had never tried to get both his gangly legs into his school jumper, or tried to brush his teeth with the handle of his toothbrush before, but hey, give him a break, he had been a teenager for a whole six weeks now, and teenagers are supposed to be rubbish at getting up in the morning, right?

'Oh, so you *are* alive?' his frazzled-looking mum managed to joke as Adam launched himself down the stairs and did a sock-slide into the kitchen, where his mum and brother were hurriedly finishing up breakfast.

His mum grabbed her keys from the side and began making for the front door, but she didn't get far before Adam had hold of her and was spinning her around



the kitchen, doing one of his ‘dances’, while singing one of his ‘songs’. The dance in question was an Adam classic, and mostly involved him jumping around in circles. The song was also an Adam original, and, like all his other songs, consisted of two words, bellowed in what can only be described as a ‘non-tune’.

‘Ohhhh ... Weeeee’re ... late, we’re late. We’re late, we’re late, we’re laaaate!’

It was common for Adam to try to irritate his mum when she was already on the verge of erupting into a full-on, code red, fury extravaganza. You’d

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think that it would be the final straw for her, but in fact, weirdly enough, it almost never failed to make her laugh. Making people happy, even when ‘happy’ seemed like a million miles away, was one of Adam’s greatest skills. He was a world-class cheerer-upper. Or, as his mum put it –

‘You’re a whirlwind of annoyingness, that’s what you are!’ she yelled between howls of laughter. ‘Now pack it in before you make us so late that you get detention and I get fired.’

‘Nice hair, Adam,’ mocked Adam’s brother between huge mouthfuls of toast. Callum was only two years younger than Adam, but he looked *four* years younger, acted *eight* years younger, and was a genuine contender for Adam’s title of ‘Whirlwind of Annoyingness No. 1’. And Adam couldn’t have been prouder of that.

‘How long did it take you to make it look like you just got out of bed?’ chuckled Callum as he stretched his arm up in an attempt to reach all the way to the top of Adam’s stratospheric head, to mess up his shock of bed-hair even more.

‘Probably about as long as it took you to make

your face look like it just got pushed out of a pig's bum,' quipped Adam.

'Adam!' his mum gasped. 'Too far!'

But Callum didn't think it was too far at all – he was chuckling toast out from between his teeth, and high-fiving his big brother in recognition of the funniest put-down of the day so far.

'Seriously, though,' said Callum, once he'd finally regained his composure, 'you need to sort your hair out. You look like Mum after the time we put glue in her shampoo!'

Now it was Adam's turn to get gross with the toast. It sprayed all over the kitchen floor as he doubled over at the memory of that day.

'Her face!' He howled with laughter as he played the moment back in his mind. 'When she opened the bathroom door – her *hair* – I've never seen anyone so shocked!'

'Oh, not shocked,' his mum corrected him, '*furious*. Which is exactly what I'll be in five seconds' time if you don't get a move on!'

They had fifteen minutes before they would be marked as being officially late for school, and Mum

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had one hour and fifteen minutes before she'd be late for work, so Adam knew they weren't really in any serious danger. But Mum never saw it that way. All Mum saw was the multiple things that could go wrong to slow them down on their way.

Like, for instance, their car, which today took five attempts to splutter to life before choking to a standstill at the end of the road.

The false start reminded Adam to dig in his pocket, fish out the 40p change from yesterday's lunch money and pop it into the cardboard box he'd wedged between the two front seats three months ago. It was a shoebox, with the lid taped on, a coin slot cut into



the top and the words ‘New Gearbox Fund’ scrawled across it in purple marker pen.

They’d only had the car for four months, after their old car – the beloved ‘Dadmobile’ – was stolen from outside their house. Mum thought she’d found a real bargain with the used Ford Focus. The ad had read – ‘*New tyres, new brakes, new gearbox!*’ so she spent every last penny on it. Sadly, after getting the car home, she discovered that the advert hadn’t listed all the things the car *had*, it was a list of all the things the car *needed*.



A new gearbox was right at the top of that list, but, at six hundred pounds, they were a loooooong way from being able to afford it. Luckily Adam had the problem under control – so far his ‘New Gearbox Fund’ idea had raised a whopping twelve pounds and twenty pence!

‘Listen to all that money!’ Adam gasped in mock amazement as he gave the box a shake. ‘Not long to go now, Mum! This time in three years we’ll be halfway saved up!’

‘Adam, don’t even joke,’ his mum groaned, knowing he was probably right. ‘I’ve had enough of this horrible old banger!’

It was a sentence that Adam struggled to make sense of. OK, he knew that, to Mum, a ‘banger’ was an out-of-date, unreliable car, like the Ford Focus they were sitting in, which was two years older than Adam, and was presently making a noise like an asthmatic donkey. But to Adam, a ‘banger’ was YouTube slang for a video that was an unstoppable, runaway, viral mega-hit. In Adam’s mind a ‘banger’ was an amazing thing, not something that could ever be used in the same sentence as the words ‘horrible’ and ‘old’.

And a ‘banger’ was what he was watching right now. (Or trying to watch – his phone was almost as useless as their car. It was bashed and beaten, with a camera that barely worked, and was five models out of date. But Adam was grateful for it, all the same. He knew his mum struggled to pay the six-pound bill every month, but he made sure it was money well spent.

His phone was a window to another world, a window that he gazed through for hours each day, where no matter how down, or stressed, or worried he was feeling, there was always someone like him – another world-class-cheerer-upper – uploading content that would put a smile back on Adam’s face. Through the window of his phone he could escape to the land of TikTok, surf the waters of Instagram, and, best of all, explore the endless realms of YouTube – a place where he dreamed he might one day migrate to and become a fully certified citizen. To be a YouTuber was Adam’s greatest dream – a dream where he could follow in the footsteps of all his favourite YouTubers and deliver his cheering-up skills not just to his mum and Callum, but to *millions* of people across the globe. *Just imagine making that many people happy*, he marvelled to himself.)

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His favourite YouTuber, Ed Almighty, had posted a new video overnight, and even though Adam could only watch a few seconds at a time between bufferings, it was still one of the funniest things he had ever seen.

‘I seriously don’t understand what all the hype is about that guy,’ groaned Callum, trying to lean himself forward from the back seat enough to see Adam’s stuttering screen. ‘He’s so overrated. He didn’t deserve *any* of those awards he got at WebCon last year!’

For the online community, WebCon was like the Oscars. It was where every web-fan like Adam dreamed of going. Adam would have especially loved to go last year, when Ed Almighty was the star of the show. Callum wasn’t a massive fan of Ed Almighty. He was more into Jack-OJ.

Adam thought they were *both* heroes.

‘Adam, you could be a better YouTuber than Ed Almighty without even trying! I’m not even joking!’

‘Ha!’ Adam laughed as he reached a hand back to give Callum an affectionate hair-ruffle, like he was an obedient puppy. ‘You’re a good little brother, Callum, you know that? Yesh you are! Yesh you *are*! Who’s a good boy? You are!’

While Adam appreciated Callum's compliment, he knew that Callum was very, very wrong about him. Sure, Adam would have loved to be a YouTuber. There was nothing in the world he wanted to do more! That's what that glue-shampoo prank on his mum had been all about – it was practice! He and Callum had made *dozens* of YouTube videos. But that's all they ever were – 'practice' videos, which sat on Adam's hard drive and had never even so much as sniffed the bandwidth of a journey to the realms of YouTube.

The dream was never going to happen, and Adam knew it. And it wasn't just because his ancient laptop took all night to upload a five-minute video, and it wasn't because the camera on his brick of a phone was half dead. It was because there was something about Adam that Callum didn't know. Something that Adam didn't *want* Callum to know. A 'secondary school something'. Something that, if he ever found it out, would change Callum's opinion of Adam forever. And now that Callum was in his last year of primary school, and would join Adam's secondary school next year, Adam knew it was only a matter of time before his secret came out.

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