

SHRUNK!



The
Sunday
Times
Children's
Book of the
Week

F. R. HITCHCOCK

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HOT
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BOOKS

The logo for Hot Key Books features a stylized key with a sunburst or starburst effect at its top, positioned to the right of the text.

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For
Ian,
Rufus and Rosa

Chapter 1

We were standing in the model village when it happened.

I was really tired and really cold. So cold, I'd been holding a torch to my cheek to keep warm.

It wasn't working, I still had brain freeze.

Grandma droned on about constellations but I was thinking about beds, warm cosy ones; with me in them.

'Tom, pay attention.' Grandma slapped me on the back. 'Look up, you two, it's supposed to be the best night in the year for seeing Jupiter.'

'But we've only got one pair of binoculars,' whined Tilly, my little sister. 'And you've got them, Grandma.'

'Honestly,' muttered Grandma. 'You've got young eyes. Just look up.'

So we did. I tipped my head back and without thinking stepped backwards into the model duck pond. I remember

the crunch of a tiny fibreglass duck under my shoe and the shock of the icy water shooting up my sock. I probably should have looked down, then none of this would have happened, but I couldn't take my eyes from the sky because it was so beautiful.

I'd no idea it could be so lovely.

I stared, and as I stared, more and more tiny stars burst out of the blackness. There were millions of them, billions, trillions, squillions. How far was I looking?

Something flickered in the corner of my eye.

'Oh!'

'See that?' said Grandma.

A trail of silver shot through the sky. Racing towards us, whizzing and whistling.

BANG.

'Oh my word!' said Grandma.

The shooting star was still hurtling our way, even though it sounded like it had hit something pretty hard.

'Wish!' shouted Tilly.

'No, don't – not on this one,' said Grandma.

But it had already disappeared. In fact it disappeared the moment I made my wish, and something clattered near the model castle.

'I shouldn't bother looking,' said Grandma, a bit quickly.

'I expect it landed in the sea, dears. Just as well, it'll be sizzling hot.'

'No, Grandma – I'm sure it's in the model village,' I shouted, running off through the knee-high houses, shining my torch at the ground. I checked the village square, the bowling green and the high street. I swung my torch over the roofs in case it was caught in a gutter. Grandma loomed out of the darkness, so I ran on towards the tiny castle.

'Wait for me,' Tilly shouted, and ran after me with her torch, picking out the chimney pots.

'For goodness' sake, you two,' said Grandma, close behind us. 'We're supposed to be looking at the night sky. You'll find it in the morning. It'll be easy enough if it did land here. Come on.'

'Yes, Grandma,' I called, catching sight of a flattened line of miniature bicycles outside the post office.

Yay! Something really did fall out of the sky.

I shone my torch the other way, so that Tilly wouldn't see, and snatched up the small meteorite that lay in the middle. It wasn't hot at all, but warm.

I stuck it in my fleece pocket and sort of skipped back over to where Grandma was standing. Tilly joined me. I could almost hear how far her lip stuck out. She knew I'd got it.

'Did you find it?' asked Grandma.

I think I took slightly too long to say, 'No.'

Grandma hesitated. She was probably staring at me, but I couldn't see her face. 'Right.' She swung her arm around, bumping her elbow off the top of my head. Her finger stopped over the sea. 'There's Jupiter, looking particularly glittery tonight.'

I followed her finger. There was a really bright star hanging over the bay.

'That?' I said. 'That's a star, not a planet.'

'It is a planet, love. At least, it's a ball of gases. Amazing, isn't it?'

'But it's all shiny,' said Tilly.

And we stood there, our feet turning to blocks of ice in the high street of the model village. The backs of our necks aching with leaning back, staring at the black sky filling with more and more tiny lights, twinkling and pushing out from the blackness like they wanted to be seen. I put my hand up, put my middle finger against the tip of my thumb and made an 'O' like I was looking through an imaginary camera. I held it about six inches in front of my eye. I turned the meteorite over in my pocket.

The planet sat like a diamond in the middle of the 'O'.

Click.

And it disappeared. Jupiter disappeared.