

## The Cardboard Box

by Sho Botham

Freddie placed a small pink cardboard box on the dinner table, next to his glass, before getting ready to climb up onto the thick cushion lying on his chair. He was quite a small boy and still needed to do the swivel-turn-sit manoeuvre. This was quite complicated for Freddie. It involved him climbing up the chair until he could get into position with his hands on the seat, balancing with one foot on the cross strut of the chair legs and swivelling his bottom round so he turned to face the table before plonking himself down heavily, onto the cushion.

Performing the swivel-turn-sit manoeuvre always involved a little bit of fear for Freddie in case he got it wrong and landed on the floor. This only happened once but he could still remember the pain of it, as if, it happened yesterday.

Freddie's family piled into the dining room chattering amongst themselves. His siblings were all a lot older than he was. They sat down without pausing their conversations. Hands reached out absent-mindedly picking up water jugs and filling glasses. Javin, the eldest brother sat next to Freddie and filled his glass halfway up with water before handing it to him mumbling the customary, 'be careful' to his little brother. As Javin moved the glass he noticed the small pink box and picked it up. 'Whose is the pink box?' he asked holding it aloft and speaking in a loud voice that everyone took notice of. Freddie wasn't paying attention. He was too busy trying to feed Barker the dog some old sweets that he had in his pocket.

Javin was in a jovial mood and as no one answered him removed the lid from the pink box with a flourish, followed quickly, by a scream. Freddie's head shot up. He was paying attention now. "What've you done?" he screamed at Javin as he tried to wriggle from his chair. "Where is she?"

Javin was dancing around as if he was stepping on hot coals. His sister Babs stood nervously against the far wall of the room. Her eyes glued to Javin's every move.

Freddie shouted gleefully, "I've got her," as he bent down to pick up the missing spider that had been unceremoniously dropped out of her pink cardboard home.

Babs shouted at Freddie from her wall, "don't put that back on the table. Get it out of here. Put it in your room." Freddie thought better of arguing and wrapped his small chubby fingers around the box and headed off in the direction of his bedroom.

After dinner, the adults - everyone apart from Freddie - retired to the sitting room. "That boy needs to learn some discipline. He can't go terrifying everyone at dinner with his bugs and beasts in boxes. Why can't he play computer games like everyone else his age does? Mother, you need to do something," said Babs.

"He's just being Freddie. He likes his bugs and beasts. They're quite harmless really," said mother.

"That's only until he puts something deadly in a box and leaves it on the table," said Javin with exaggerated, gravitas. "The boy needs friends of his own age. We're all too old for him. He should go to boarding school. He'd have friends his own age there."

Mother looked at Javin in shock. "Send Freddie to boarding school? Of course we can't do that. What would it do to him?" Mother nudged her husband's ankle with her foot. "Dave are you listening to what your son is suggesting? He's saying that Freddie should go to boarding school."

Dave glanced up and nodded his head at what, he didn't know.

At breakfast, next morning, Freddie stood with his face not much above the height of the kitchen table, his eyes bulging from his head. His bottom lip quivering. Snivelling, he asked, "what do you mean, I'm going to boarding school?"