

Little Horror

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Prize Chimp

What's the first thing you remember?

Was it your first day at school?

Maybe your third or fourth birthday party?

The day you learned to swim or ride a bike?

Or when you lost your first tooth?

Not me. I don't remember any of those things, for one very good reason: they haven't happened yet.

But I remember some other things. Like the time I set fire to an ice cream van. And the time I jumped out of my bedroom window at midnight. I remember the time I broke into someone's house through the cat flap, and the time I tried to steal a Porsche 911 Carrera S. I'll tell you about all of those things, but I'll start with the very first thing I remember. Something that happened when I was five months old.

That was a year and a half ago.

The very first thing I remember is lying on a plastic mat, with my bare bum sticking up in the air. Mum was holding my ankles with one hand, and wiping my bottom with the other one. I don't mean she was wiping my bum with her hand. That would be disgusting. She was using a baby wipe, and she had a fresh nappy all ready to slide into place.

But Mum wasn't moving. She was frozen mid-bum wipe, staring down at me with this weird expression on her face, like something spooky had just happened. I wondered what she had seen in my poo that had scared her so much.

'Say it again Rita,' said Mum.

"Quarter to three." Say, "quarter to three". Without taking her eyes off me, she shouted Dad into the room. He came in a few seconds later, tapping away on his phone and not looking up.

'What's up?' said Dad.

'Rita just told me the time,' said Mum. 'I was chatting away while I changed her nappy, and I happened to say "I wonder what time it is" and she looked me straight in the eye and said "quarter to three".'

Dad pressed something on his phone. ‘More like twenty to three I’d say.’

Mum looked annoyed. ‘That’s hardly the bloody point is it, Paul? The point is this girl’s five months old and she’s just said the words “quarter to three”. Doesn’t that strike you as a little bit weird?’

Dad shrugged. ‘Not really. Babies make all kinds of noises. They sound like words sometimes. I had her in the park yesterday, could have sworn she called me a prize chimp.’

Mum gave Dad a strange look. Then turned back to me. ‘Prize chimp,’ she said. ‘Rita, can you say, “Daddy’s a prize chimp”?’

‘Becky, she’s five months old. If she could talk that would make her some kind of freak.’

Mum kept staring at me. ‘Daddy’s a prize chimp,’ she said.

I kept my mouth shut. I could have said something but I didn’t want Dad to think I was a freak. So instead I made some random ba-ba-ba noises then put my big toe in my mouth and started chewing it. After a while Dad wandered off with his phone and Mum carried on changing my nappy. She must have thought she’d imagined it all.

Should I have been honest? Should I have told Mum and Dad I could talk? I don't know. If I *had* told them, what happened next would have been very different.