The Great Star

and the

Doom Doughnut



Deep

The cardboard spaceship had a hairdryer for an engine, a colander for a steering wheel, and a big red button labelled **DO NOT PRESS**.

Jack pressed it.

“JACK!”

“It said **DO NOT PRESS**. That basically means **PLEASE PRESS**.”

WHOOOOOSH! The living room melted away. Golden words crawled across the stars:

A long, long time ago, in a galaxy not far from the biscuit tin, the wicked Lord Sulkus had a plan so evil that even his own helmet was embarrassed…

“We’re in the middle of a Star Wars story!” yelled Oliver.



“Beep,” said a small, round, slightly burnt robot, rolling up. “I’m Crumb. Toaster droid. I’m brilliant at one thing.”

“What?”

“**PANICKING.**” POP! Two slices of toast shot out of his head.

PEW! PEW! PEW! A fleet of Tin-Pot Troopers swooped in, firing in every direction except the right one.

“Ow! That was MY foot!”

“Sorry, sir! The helmets don’t have eyeholes!”

“**Hairdryer to MAX!**” yelled Jack. The cardboard ship zoomed past a giant floating doughnut, Sulkus’s battle station, the Doom Doughnut, and screeched to a stop beside the biggest, brightest star either boy had ever seen.

Lord Sulkus’s scowling face filled the radio screen. “**BEHOLD** the Great Star! Tomorrow I shall switch it **OFF** with my Giant Spoon! The galaxy will be cold and sad, and **FINALLY** people will take me seriously!”

POP! More toast.

“You can’t switch off a star,” said Jack. “A star is a tug-of-war. Gravity pulls everything in, hot gas pushes everything out. They’re perfectly matched, so the star just sits there glowing, like two giants arm-wrestling forever.”

“So the Giant Spoon…” said Crumb.

“…will do absolutely nothing.”

“**FIRE!**” roared Sulkus. The Giant Spoon swung. **PLINK.** It bounced off. The Great Star didn’t even blink.

“Ha!” said Jack.

But Oliver wasn’t laughing. He was frowning at the star, counting on his fingers. “Jack. That star is fifteen times heavier than our Sun. And heavy stars live **FAST.**”



“Fast?”

“Our Sun will shine for billions of years. A star this big only gets a few million. Its fuel is nearly gone!”

“Nearly?” whispered Crumb.

“Maybe… today?”

POP-POP-POP-POP! Eight slices of toast.

“Crumb, scan the core!” said Oliver.

Crumb’s eyes flickered. “Beep. The core is made of… iron.”

Oliver went pale. “Iron is the **END** of the line. Every other fuel gives out energy when it fuses. Iron **EATS** it. It’s like a toaster that swallows the bread and makes the kitchen colder.”

“That’s the worst toaster I’ve ever heard of,” said Crumb, offended.

“And once the heat stops pushing out, gravity wins. The core’s going to fall in on itself!”

Jack grabbed the radio. “Lord Sulkus! The star’s about to explode! Move your Doughnut, **NOW!**”

“Nice try, children,” sniffed Sulkus. “I have a spa booked for this afternoon, and I will not be moved.”

Behind him, a Tin-Pot Trooper put up a hand. “Sir? The star looks a bit… wobbly.”

“Silence! Wobbly is how a star looks when it’s **THRIVING.**”

Deep inside the Great Star, something went *hic*.

Then the core fell inwards, and the whole star blew its outsides into space.



KA-BLAAAAAAM!

A wall of fire raced towards them.

“HAIRDRYER TO MAX!”

“IT’S ALREADY AT MAX!”

“THEN MAXIER!”

“I’d like it noted,” shrieked Crumb, “that I am a **TOASTER**, not a **ROCKET!**”

Oliver and Jack both blew into the hairdryer as hard as they could. The cardboard ship shot away, one inch ahead of the flames, toast flying everywhere like confetti. Behind them, the blast hit the Doom Doughnut and flicked it away like a doughnut off a table. Troopers tumbled. Helmets flew. One helmet got a burnt hole right through it.

"**I CAN SEE!**" yelled the trooper. "Oh. Everything's very pointy."

Then silence. In the middle of the glowing dust, one tiny dot shone.

"What's that?" whispered Jack.

"A neutron star," breathed Oliver. "What's left of the core. It's only as wide as a city, but it's heavier than our Sun. One teaspoon of it would weigh as much as everybody on Earth put together. Maybe more."

"Cool! Crumb, pass me a teaspoon..."

"**NOOOOO!**" screamed everyone, including the toast.



The battered Doom Doughnut came limping back. Out climbed Lord Sulkus, helmet burnt black, spa booking ruined.

“...You were right about the star,” he mumbled. “Is it all gone?”

“Not gone,” said Oliver. “Scattered. All the heavy stuff in the universe was made in stars like that one, then flung out when they exploded. The carbon in our bodies, the oxygen we breathe, the iron in our blood.”

Sulkus stared at his hands. “So I’m made of exploded stars?”

“Everybody is.”

“Hm.” He thought about it for a very long moment. “I think I’ll take up knitting.”

Jack stared at his own hands. “That explains the explosions in my sock drawer.”

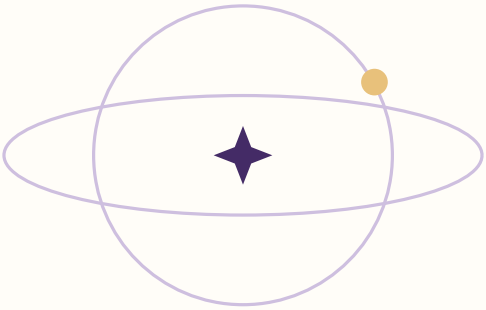
WHOOOOSH! Living room. Fridge box. Hairdryer. From the kitchen, a voice called, “**DINNER!**”



In the kitchen, the toaster went POP.

“Beep,” said the toaster.

Oliver and Jack slowly, very slowly,
backed out of the room.



The end

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