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Opening extract from  
**S.W.I.T.C.H. 1**  
**Spider Stampede**

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## Losing Piddle

‘AAAAAAARRRRRGGGGHHHHHH!!!!’

‘GETITOFF—GETITOFF—  
GETITOFFMEEEE!!!!’

Josh looked up from his book to see his twin brother running round in circles by the hedge, wearing nothing but swimming trunks and a look of panic.

Oh no—not true.

He was also wearing a spider.

‘DON’T just sit there!’ squeaked Danny, as he whirled about. ‘Get it OFF!’

Josh sighed and put his book down on the grass. It was amazing, he thought, that the spider could possibly hang on while his brother was thrashing about so wildly. It was a garden spider and quite large—probably female. It had



run up Danny's arm when he went to pick up his water pistol and then scarpered over his shoulder. Josh knew this because of the kind of dance his brother had just done across the grass. A sort of backwards shimmy, with gasps of horror, followed by madly flapping arms and then the whirling as his unwelcome passenger legged it down his shoulder blade.

'You should go in for the Under Nines Disco Championship,' Josh said, as he dodged under a flailing arm to scoop up the dizzy spider, now hanging on to the waistband of Danny's trunks.

'Oh very funny!' squealed Danny. 'Have you got it? Is it gone?!'

'Yes—calm down. Look! She's a beauty!' Josh cupped the spider in his hands and held it out for Danny to see. It was nut brown with mottled yellow patterns on its back.

'NOOO! Get it away from me!'

'But look—she's got these amazing feet that can hook on to stuff while she's hanging upside down and—'

'Just STOP talking about the S-P-I-D-E-R!'



growled Danny. He shuddered and refused to look while Josh gently dropped it behind the shed.

‘She’ll be back over by the hedge again in no time,’ said Josh, which didn’t comfort his twin much. ‘Along with all the others. You’re never more than a few feet away from a spider, you know.’

‘Not *one* more *word* to do with . . . those . . . *things!*’

Josh pushed his hands into his shorts pockets

and grinned. ‘Mandibles,’ he muttered, quietly. He didn’t think Danny would know what this word was. He’d read only yesterday that ‘mandibles’ were what spiders used for eating. Not teeth exactly—just sort of munchy bits on their faces.

Danny hated anything creepy-crawly. For twins, he and Josh were very different. Josh was fascinated by small creatures and bugs. He had loads of wildlife books. He used to bring woodlice, snails, and beetles into the house, but after Jenny, their older sister, found earwigs in her hairdryer and then Danny screamed loud enough to wake the dead after stepping into his brother’s box of centipedes when he got up for the toilet in the middle of the night, Mum said Josh could only look at bugs and stuff outside. It was probably just as well because if Jenny didn’t squash them flat with a sandal, Mum would suck them up in the vacuum cleaner—or Piddle would eat them. Piddle, their scruffy little terrier (named after a habit he had when he got overexcited) liked nothing more than to munch up a spider if he spotted one sauntering by.

‘How can you *like* those things?’ Danny asked,



pulling his shorts and T-shirt on over his swimming trunks. He'd gone off the paddling pool—too many dead flies in it. 'Eeeuw! I wish there weren't any insects in the world!'

'One—spiders aren't insects, they're arachnids,' said Josh, getting up onto the climbing frame, 'and two, if there were no insects in the world we would all die out. The human race depends on them.'

'You freaky little bug boffin!' muttered Danny.

'Lucky for you that I *do* like them!' added Josh. 'Or we'd *both* be screaming and disco-dancing all over the garden right now.'

Danny ignored him—but he checked his spiky fair hair with a shiver, just in case another spider had dropped in. Josh's hair was short and neat and he wouldn't mind a spider in it at all. How could twins be so un-alike? wondered Danny as he pulled on his trainers. He loved playing computer games and listening to loud music. Josh would rather play with newts and listen to birdsong.

But, Danny had to admit, he *was* useful for creepy-crawly removal.

Danny abandoned the water pistol and picked



up his skateboard. Soon he was pelting up and down the path with Piddle racing along beside him, yapping and nearly tripping him up every ten seconds.

Upstairs, from Jenny's bedroom window, a pop tune thumped loudly, while from the kitchen poured the burble of daytime TV, which their mum liked to watch while she did the ironing.

From the other side of the high wooden fence there came a thump. And then another thump. And then a crotchety voice. 'Will you all shut up! I'd have a quieter afternoon on the main runway at Heathrow Airport!' Josh grimaced. It was Miss



Potts who lived in the run-down red-brick house next door. People thought she was a bit eccentric. An old misery more like, thought Josh.

‘I SAID,’ came the voice again, louder. ‘Will you all SHUT UP?!’

But Mum and Jenny and Danny and Piddle were all making way too much noise to hear. ‘Sorry, Miss Potts,’ said Josh, feeling embarrassed. ‘I’ll ask them to be quieter.’

‘Oh, don’t bother!’ she snapped back, the top of her tweedy hat the only thing he could see over the fence. ‘I’ll soon be deaf and then it won’t matter!’

Josh made flappy ‘shushing’ movements at Danny and mouthed, ‘Miss Potts!’

Danny skidded his skateboard to a halt, shaking his head, and Piddle sat back on his furry bottom and waited, wiggling impatiently, for the fun to start again.

Josh ran past him and pushed the kitchen window shut and at once the noise from Mum’s TV programme dropped. He could still hear Miss Potts though, just on the other side of the fence.

She was muttering, 'Remember! Remember! *Oh, you stupid old biddy!* Remember! Where did you hide them? Where?'

Josh bent down and peered through a knothole in the wood and saw the old lady crawling along through the weeds, which were nearly as tall as he was, obviously searching for something. Then she suddenly bobbed up, thwacked her hand hard against her forehead and snapped: 'STUPID old woman! Had to go and get your brain burnt out, didn't you?' Then she stood up and stomped off into her ramshackle garden shed.



It was right what they said about Petty Potts, Josh decided. She really was mad.

‘She’s always moaning about noise,’ Danny said, suddenly, in his ear. Josh jumped. ‘Does she think this is a library or something? It’s a blummin’ garden! Kids play in gardens. Dogs play in gardens!’ And he picked up a rubber ball and threw it for Piddle. ‘There you go, Piddle! Catch!’

Piddle hurtled down the path and then threw himself into the heap of cuttings and compost in the far corner. ‘Don’t pay any attention to her—old whinge-pants,’ said Danny. ‘Come on, Piddle! Here, boy!’

They glanced back down the garden, expecting to see Piddle foraging through the leaves and cut grass—and then they both blinked, and stared back at each other in surprise.

Piddle had vanished.

