

# TOP DOG

a children's story by John Boyne

---

Ralph had always been the centre of attention in his house and that was the way he liked it.

When it came to dinner, he always got fed first.

When it came to storytime, he always got to choose the book.

And when Grandad came to visit, he always spent all his time playing with him.

But when Ralph's mother and father brought baby Lucy home from the hospital, he began to wonder whether things were going to change.

Over the next few weeks, when it came to dinner-time, Ralph found himself sitting at the table growing hungry while baby Lucy was fed first.

And when it came to storytime, Dad said that baby Lucy was too young to understand the stories that Ralph liked.

And when Grandad came to visit he spent half his time playing with baby Lucy instead of him.

Ralph wasn't sure about all this and one night he went over to baby Lucy's cot and looked down at her. She was lying on her back and kicking her legs in the air. She stared up at him and blinked a couple of times.

'Let's get one thing straight,' he told her. 'I'm in charge around here, I'm top dog, and I have been for four years now.'

'Goo goo,' said baby Lucy, dribbling a little. 'Gurgle gurgle.'

'I'm sorry,' said Ralph. 'I didn't catch any of that.'

'Glurgy groo ga ga,' said baby Lucy.

'You're not making any sense,' said Ralph. 'I'll come back later and we'll talk then.'

A few days later, Ralph was at home being looked after by his grandfather because his mother and father and baby Lucy had gone out the previous evening and hadn't been seen since.

'Where are they?' he asked, watching as Grandad tried to make lunch, which was only beans on toast but created a lot of mess.

'They're just out,' said Grandad. 'There's nothing to worry about.'

That night, they still hadn't come home and Grandad tried to make dinner, which was sausages, fried eggs and chips. He left them in the pan for too long though and the kitchen filled with smoke and the alarm went off.

'Why aren't they back yet?' asked Ralph, over the noise. 'And what's happened to baby Lucy?'

'Nothing's happened to her,' said Grandad. 'We just have to wait and see, that's all.'

Ralph didn't sleep very much that night. Something wasn't quite right and the house seemed empty without baby Lucy gurgling and googling and dribbling all the time.

In the morning, Grandad poured out two bowls of cereal and dropped the rest on the kitchen floor.

'They should be home by now,' said Ralph. 'What's going on?'

'Baby Lucy wasn't very well,' explained Grandad. 'And we just have to hope she gets better.'

Later that afternoon, Ralph's mother and father came home and baby Lucy was back in her cot. Grandad said she'd got the all-clear and there was nothing for them to worry about any more. Ralph went in to see baby Lucy and he thought she smiled when she saw him and he found himself smiling back. He was pleased to see her.

'I've made some changes around here while you were gone,' he told her. 'I'm still in charge, of course. I'm still top dog. But I've decided that maybe I need an assistant and if you want, you can be second-in-command.'

'Gurgle gurgle,' said baby Lucy.

'Alright then,' said Ralph, pleased. 'I'll take that as a yes.'