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Prologue

Let's get something straight. This is not a diary. Diaries smell like strawberry bubblegum and have stupid little locks that are easy to open. The book you are reading is a logbook, the sort sea captains and pilots and astronauts write. Someone will probably find it in a pirate's chest in a hundred years. It's not a diary. Remember that.

For Sophie and Georgia

13th

JANUARY

'Right, my boy,' said Dad, sitting heavily on my bed.

I cracked my knuckles. This did not sound good. The last time Dad came into my room and said, 'Right, my boy,' I was grounded for two weeks because I'd jumped off the water tank with an umbrella.

'Toby, I've decided to ban the double-bounce.'

'What?!' I sat up.

This was bad, bad news.

My sister Claire and I have double-bounced each other on the trampoline since forever. It's a wicked trick, especially if someone doesn't know you're going to do it. What you do is wait till you're both jumping really high, then bounce as hard as you can just as the other person is landing. When you land, they fly into space.

'But Dad, that's not fair!' I protested. 'Claire called me a dumb idiot!'

'I don't care.'

'And a no-hoper!'

'Toby, your sister has a broken arm because you were acting the fool. The double bounce is banned, period.'

Here's what happened. I was minding my own business on the trampoline when Claire came out with her friends. She jumped on without asking and then asked me loudly if I knew what a palindrome was. I said no. I mean, seriously,

who-ever heard of a palindrome?

'What a dumbo!' she said. 'What a complete no-hoper!' She laughed like a kookaburra, which made her friends all laugh like kookaburras too.

So I double-bounced her into infinity. Was it my fault she landed awkwardly and broke her arm?

Later, Mum told me a palindrome is a word that's the same spelled backwards.

From my bedroom I could see Claire sitting in Mum's comfy chair in the lounge room with her arm in plaster. She was watching a movie past her bedtime - and she was drinking fizzy!

'Not fair! We're never allowed fizzy!' I said to Dad.

'Correct. Especially not at this time of night.'

'But . . . look at Claire,' I said. 'She's got fizzy!'

'She's allowed to,' he said. 'She's in pain.'

I pulled the sheets up and buried my head. 'Life sucks! Why can't someone break *my* arm?'

'But I have got an offer for you,' Dad went on.

'What kind of offer?' I asked.

'The kind of offer you might like.' He cleared his throat. 'Toby, my boy, life is about redemption.'

'Yeah, yeah,' I sighed. Dad's got all these sayings from a CD he plays in the car on his way to work. Obviously this was one of them.

'It's a one-lap race.'

Ho hum.

'It's not about whether you get knocked down,' he continued, 'it's whether you get up. And if at first you don't succeed—'

'Try and try and try again,' I said.

'That's the one! Have you heard it before?'

'Dad, what's the offer?'

He moved closer and tried to whisper, but when Dad whispers it's like a

normal person yelling.

'I remember being your age and trying to do everything at once. Schoolwork, sports.' He punched me lightly on the shoulder. 'Having to get along with your sister.'

'Hmph,' I said.

'What if we move on from what happened with Claire and give you something to aim for?'

I looked at him.

'Your mum and I have decided that if you get twenty wickets and ten tries before the end of the season, we'll buy you a GameBox V3.'

Can you believe it? One minute I'm in trouble for double-bouncing my sister, and the next Dad is telling me I've got the new GameBox V3!

Shot!

The GameBox V3 is the best thing since the GameBox V2. It's so new no one in my class has got one. You can choose your players and your teams, what uniform they should wear and what ground they should play on. It's also got two-player and three-player so you can verse your friends. And I can have all this for twenty wickets and ten tries? Easy-peasy.

Mum says sport is in my blood. I get Player of the Day all the time, which is good for me, but bad for Mum because whoever gets Player of the Day takes all the team shirts home for washing.

In my cricket team, I bat at number six but I'm mainly a bowler. Coach says there are fast bowlers everywhere but leg spinners are rarer than hen's teeth, which I think is his way of saying I should learn to be a good one.

I play rugby too. I'm a fullback and my famous move is the up-and-under. Coach says I remind him of Christian Cullen, who used to play for the All Blacks. If you're wondering what an up-and-under is, it's when you kick the ball as high as the sky and run and catch it before someone on the other team tackles you. Just make sure you don't practise it in the lounge when your parents are watching the Sunday-night movie.

I could kick a ball all day if I had to. I dream about scoring goals. My best dream ever was scoring a hat trick for Manchester United against Arsenal and being on the six o'clock news in England. Then the manager of the club gave me a brand-new GameBox V3 and a Ferrari 250 GTO. (But then my best dream

ever turned into my worst when his wife said she loved me and kissed me on the lips. Yuck!)

I should tell you a bit more about my family and friends. You might have figured out that my name is Toby, but you won't know my surname. It's Gilligan-Flannigan.

There, I said it. I blame my parents. Thanks to them sticking both their stupid names together, I'm stuck with the stupidest, longest name in the school. All I want is to be called Smith or White. Then I wouldn't stand out like a chicken with no head every morning when Mrs Martin-Edge does the roll call.

I'm the middle one in the family. Claire is four years older than me, and my brother Max is seven years younger. They're both annoying, but at least Max doesn't use all the hot water in the shower. Then again, Claire doesn't poo her pants.

My two best friends are Terence and Sam, but I never call them Terence or Sam. None of the sports commentators on TV ever call each other by their first names. It's always Smithy or Foxy or Clarky. Terence's surname is Jones, so he's Jonesy; Sam's surname is Hughes, so he's Hughesy. My sur-name is more difficult to change so I stay as Toby, which we decided was fine because it sounds a bit like Jonesy and Hughesy.

We've got our own club called the CGC, which stands for Cool Guys Club. To join, you have to spit on a leaf and pass it to the next member, who has to lick it before spitting on it. In termtime, we have a meeting every day during spelling.

These holidays Jonesy, Hughesy and I have gone eeling lots of times. We wake up really early, go to the butcher and buy a sheep's heart for fifty cents. Then we go down to the creek and throw in a baited fishing line, which we tie to the jetty. Hughesy is best at this job because he's good with knots. Jonesy is worst because the only thing he likes on his hands is soap. Then we grab our spears and wait for the eels to take the bait.

Yesterday we caught an eel that was taller than Dad. Hughesy wanted to keep it as a pet, but his mum said no because he's already got a lizard, two geckos and a goldfish as big as a shoe.

Do you know the best feeling in the world? Coming home with dinner! Even though Mum says I stink and that I have to leave my clothes outside, she always smiles like crazy when she sees what we've caught.

Dad does too. When we put the eels on the bench, he always rubs his hands together and puts on his apron, the one with *Eat My Cooking and Always Be Good-looking* on the front, and he says, 'The hunter-gatherers are back!' Then he starts sharpening a knife. 'Good on you, boys! Let's smoke 'em!'

Dad loves fishing. He has fishing mugs, fishing T-shirts, fishing hats and fishing calendars. He's even got a smoker where he cooks the fish. We haven't got room in our garage for the car any-more because Dad's filled it up with fishing and boating gear. Dad's a part-time radio announcer on Beach FM. The 'beach' bit is important because that's where he spends most of his time when he should be emptying the dishwasher.

During dinner when Dad is grinding pepper on the smoked eel, he says things like, 'Proud of you, boy,' and 'You can be anything you want to be.'

I'm not so sure about that. I'd like to be good at schoolwork and spelling, but I'll never be any-where near as good as Claire. She's such a nerd she could do her homework with her eyes closed. She could probably do the crossword even faster than Mum, who's an English teacher and once did the crossword in five minutes and thirty-nine seconds!

Even Dad's CD has no saying about how to be smarter than your sister or how to remember what twelve times eight equals when your head feels as if it's got bricks in it.

But at least Claire could never win a GameBox V3 by getting twenty wickets and ten tries.

Shot!

JANUARY

Today I went to visit my grandma. She owns a shop called 'Junk and Disorderly' on the main street in town. She sells really old things, such as paintings and chairs and tables you normally only see in old photos. But she's also got cool stuff, like a wind-up monkey with wheels instead of feet, and lots of medals from the war.

There's a medal in a locked cabinet that no one is allowed to touch, not even me. It's a shiny, gold five-pointed star with a red-and-blue ribbon. It has 'GRI' written on it in big curly writing, and 'The African Star' in tiny plain writing. Grandma says the medal is worth a lot of money.

Every time I visit I go straight to that cabinet and look at the medal. It's almost my favourite thing in the shop, apart from the pinball machine with lots of girls with no clothes on.

Grandma told me she was offered heaps of money to sell her shop. The owners next door wanted to knock it down and build a mall with escalators. Dad says Grandma is crazy for not selling. He said to Mum, 'It's prime real estate! If she knew what was good for her, she'd sell it and buy a small island!'

'How much were they going to give you?'

I asked. 'A million dollars?'

'No idea,' said Grandma. 'And I couldn't give a tinker's cuss!'

'So what did you say to them?'

'I told them to go and jump in the lake.'

I promised your granddad I would never sell.'

Granddad used to work at Junk and Disorderly, but he died the year I got my best bowling figures. For a while afterwards Grandma did lots of dusting and

ate too many of her favourite red jubes, even though they're bad for her. Now all she has for company is her one-eyed cat, Clark Gable.

The reason why the red jubes are bad is that Grandma is sick. She's got diabetes and isn't supposed to eat lollies. I take things in to make her feel better. She doesn't have a DVD player, so today I took a video replay of the All Blacks winning in Sydney, when Jonah Lomu scored that try down the left wing. Normally Grandma watches old movies like *The Student Prince* and *Gone with the Wind* and *Moulin Rouge!*, but I thought she'd like a change.

So we watched the All Blacks match and I still jumped out of my seat when Jonah scored that try, but Grandma looked like someone who was in pain and trying not to show it.

'Toby, could you pass me the jubes?' she said.

'But . . . Dad says you shouldn't, not with diabetes.'

'What does he know? I've been his age, he hasn't been mine. Besides, I know what's good for me and it's not having your dad tell me what to do!'

I passed her the jubes.

'So are you looking forward to starting school again, Toby?'

'Not much. I hate being the dumbo of the family,' I admitted.

'Toby,' Grandma smiled, stroking Clark Gable, 'everything will fall into place. You know how proud I am of you. You're my hero.'

Hearing Grandma say that made me happy and sad at the same time, even though I don't think I'm an actual real-life hero like Jonah Lomu. Happy because it made me feel good inside, and sad because what if Grandma gets sicker and sicker and one day won't be able to tell me these things anymore?

She must have been able to tell that I was a bit sad, because she said, 'Guess what? I won five big boxes of birdseed and front-row tickets to a Filthgrinder concert!'

One of Grandma's favourite things is entering competitions. She does it all the time.

'But, Grandma,' I said. 'You don't even own a bird, and Filthgrinder play really rude music! Even Claire's not allowed to go to their concerts!'

'I might enjoy it, then,' Grandma said with a wink.

When I got home, Dad was watching a fishing show. Mum came back from shopping and thanked him for mowing the lawn, which must have been a joke because the grass is almost as tall as Max.

'I'll do it tomorrow,' Dad said, and turned up the volume on the TV. Mum rolled her eyes and took his empty plate to the kitchen.

Then Max came up to Dad. 'Goose?' he asked, which is his way of saying 'juice'.

'Ask your brother,' said Dad.

'No way,' I said. 'Ask Claire.'

But Claire was still acting like a queen with her feet up on Mum's chair. She's pretty clever at making Mum and Dad believe she needs to sit down all day with her broken arm. Last time I checked, you don't need your arms to walk.

After dinner I did my favourite thing. I got my sports books down from the shelf above my bed and looked at player stats. Hughesy and Jonesy have got the same books and sometimes we look for the worst players and the best players, players with the highest averages and the funniest names. Jonesy and Hughesy have found tons of players with their surnames, but I've never found anyone called Gilligan-Flannigan. I bet even if there was a cricketer better than Ricky Ponting, or a basketballer better than Michael Jordan, the coach wouldn't let him in the side if he had a name like Gilligan-Flannigan.

I wondered how many players must have been given GameBoxes for scoring a goal at Old Trafford or a try at Twickenham.

Then I had the best thought ever. Dad says there's no 'I' in 'Team', so it must be okay for me to tell the CGC to take lots of catches off my bowling and to pass me the ball so I can score. Jonesy and Hughesy can help me get the twenty wickets and ten tries! If they do, they can play my GameBox V3 as much as they like, because once you're in the CGC you're brothers for life. We all spat on the leaf.

1st

FebruAry

Yesterday was really cool, even though it was the last day of the holidays. Hughesy and his dad turned an old lawnmower into the coolest go-kart, and we took turns on it down Bunker Hill. We *smashed* the speed record we set last summer!

Afterwards, we went to the corner shop to spend all of Jonesy's money that his aunty visiting from overseas had given him. We bought important things like banana lollies and strawberry sherbet. We were going to buy hot chips, but Jonesy reminded me that the last time we did that I couldn't eat any dinner and Mum knew it was because I'd stuffed my gob. I tried telling her that if she cooked hot chips every night it would solve everything, but she said, 'Stop being such a smartypants.'

When I got home Dad asked me what I wanted for my birthday. I said I wanted a monitor lizard. I've seen them on *Animal Planet*. Imagine a big black lizard escaping from his cage and clawing his way up Mum's armchair! Claire wouldn't be able to run because she's so fat from drinking all that fizzy, and because she's been sitting for so long her bum is glued to the seat – the monitor lizard would eat her in one gulp. So yeah, that's what I want for my birthday.

So yesterday was awesome, but today stunk, mostly because it was the first day back at school.

Today also stunk because of the new kid, Malcolm McGarvy.

At first I thought he must have been in the wrong class, because he was as

big as a grown-up and had hairy caveman legs. I told Hughesy he was probably meant to be at high school and got lost on the way.

'Toby, you idiot!' whispered Hughesy. 'Of course he's not meant to be at high school. That's *Malcolm McGarvy!* '

Hughesy had heard from Jonesy, who heard it from Carla Fernandez, that Malcolm McGarvy could do amazing magic tricks, like bend spoons and make cards disappear. Jordi Flynn told us he saw Malcolm McGarvy being dropped off at school in a three-tonne digger with a bulldozer blade. Ravi Patel said he'd heard that Malcolm McGarvy lived with his uncle and was allowed to stay up all night.

Those are three things that make Malcolm McGarvy cool straight-away, even though it looks like he stole his legs off a gorilla.

And – get this – he was nearly eaten by a shark! He told Jonesy, 'A shark nearly bit my head off!' and pulled aside the collar of his shirt to show the huge squiggly scar down his neck. Then he lifted up a black leather string from around his throat. 'And this is the tooth that *belonged* to the shark! Everyone on the boat thought I was going to die, but then my dad jumped in the water and killed the shark with his bare hands!'

Anyway, when Mrs Martin-Edge announced that it was time for morning news I got ready to tell everyone how the CGC smashed the go-kart record, but then I remembered my *real* news.

I threw my hand in the air.

'Um,' I said. 'My news is that I'm allowed to have a GameBox V3 as soon as I can get twenty wickets and ten tries.'

'Whoah!'

'You're kidding!'

'Who's going to pay for it?'

'My dad,' I said.

'I hope he's been saving up,' yelled Ravi. 'You're the King of Sport. You could do that with your eyes closed!'

Everyone laughed.

Everyone except for McGarvy, that is, who sat there looking like someone who'd sucked on a whole bag of lemons.

All through school, I've been famous for doing the best underarm farts.

They're really loud and wet and sound exactly like the real thing. But everything changed at recess when McGarvy came and sat with the CGC at our HQ, which stands for headquarters. HQ is an old tree stump behind the sandpit where the CGC can talk without juniors annoying us, or anyone else who hasn't spat on the leaf. Anyway, McGarvy came over.

'Quick, guys!' I said to Jonesy and Hughesy. 'CGC huddle!'

We formed the CGC scrum, where no one can get in unless we let them.

McGarvy shrugged and pulled a drinking straw from his bag.

'Watch this,' he said.

He undid the top two buttons of his shirt and put the straw under his armpit, put the other end of the straw in his mouth, and blew.

It was the best fart sound ever.

Suddenly there were heaps of people around us. Everyone was laughing like kookaburras, even Hughesy and Jonesy.

The next thing he did was pull off Hughesy's beanie and throw it up our favourite climbing tree behind HQ.

Hughesy never takes his beanie off, mostly because it's a collector's edition signed by the whole Kangaroos team. It's so dirty you can hardly see the signatures anymore, but Hughesy would rather do homework for a thousand years than wash it.

He got pretty upset, and shouted at McGarvy, 'You won't be on *my* Christmas card list.' I don't know what that means, but I do know if McGarvy keeps doing things like that he won't be joining the CGC, not even if he buys banana lollies to share with us for the rest of the year.

Something about Malcolm McGarvy made me think Grade Five was going to suck.

Another bad thing about today was homework. Mrs Martin-Edge said we had to write an essay about a famous family. Straightaway I thought of Steve Waugh and Mark Waugh, the twin brothers who played cricket for Australia. But then I remembered Venus and Serena Williams, sisters who play tennis. They're way famous. I could name lots of families – Mrs Martin-Edge would be super-impressed!

Suddenly I had a thought. How horrible would it be to play your sister in front of thousands of people? Everyone would find out you were related. If I

played Claire at Wimbledon she'd probably tell TV reporters that I used to wet my bed and didn't know what a palindrome was.

I needed help with finding more famous fam-ilies, so I went to Claire's room to use her phone. I didn't ask her because she always says no. Anyway, Jonesy says it's better to ask for forgiveness than permission. Claire's phone has a bright pink cover and lip gloss all over the numbers and smells like strawberry bubblegum. I called Hughesy and told him about my famous family list.

'Toby, you idiot!' he said. 'You haven't even got Zinzan Brooke and his brother Robin – the famous All Blacks.'

I tried to write the names down but my pen was running out, so I used Claire's glitter lip gloss to write with instead.

'What about Matt Giteau and his sister Kristy? They both played rugby for Australia.'

A few minutes later, Jonesy called. Hughesy must have told him about my homework.

'Greg and Ian Chappell!' he said. 'And have you got Michael and Ralf Schumacher?'

I finally found a pen that worked, but Max must have put it in his mouth because it had fresh teeth marks on it. All I can say is, lucky he didn't find the glitter lip gloss. I wiped the pen on my pants and wrote everything down.

When Jonesy hung up, Hughesy called back. He always breathes heavily on the phone because he's got blocked sinuses and his head is full of snot. 'Jack and Bobby Charlton?' he said.

'Who?'

'Brothers who won the Football World Cup for England in 1966.'

Before I'd really started writing about all these sports stars Jonesy knocked on my bedroom window. He was holding a basketball. It was still light outside.

Mum saw me put my shoes on by the front door. She asked if I had finished my homework and I tried to say no but it came out yes. I know it was bad, but I told myself I would have it done by the time I went to bed.

Whenever we play one-on-one, Jonesy is the Celtics and I'm the Chicago Bulls. We don't have a scoreboard like in the NBA, so we remember points in our heads. But Jonesy didn't need to remember much because I starting dropping three-pointers like Larry Bird. Then I got four jump shots in a row and

pulled off rebounds like Kobe Bryant. I even sank a circus shot, which is the riskiest thing ever, but I learnt from the king, Michael Jordan. I was leading 18-2!

Jonesy was getting angrier by the second. Then he double-dribbled and I got a free throw, which never looked like missing.

The hoop was the size of a swimming pool.

'Nothing but net!' I yelled.

'Say that one more time and I'll smash you!'

Jonesy's next shot missed the backboard completely.

'Air ball!' I yelled.

It started getting dark, but I still didn't miss a shot. Jonesy was losing so badly he started trying crazy things. He threw one shot from halfway that hit the garage roof and flew into Grumpy Old Tompkins's backyard.

No one likes going to Mr Tompkins's house to get their ball back. He never opens the curtains. His yard is full of burrs and rusty nails and ghosts. He has lots of dogs and cats, but never seems to feed any of them so they prowl around starving and grumpy. He's also got funny eyes – you never know which one is looking at you. Jonesy reckons Tompkins has a glass eye and that he pulls it out every night to polish it. Dad says sports fans are one-eyed, but I don't think Mr T is a fan of anything.

'It's too dark,' Jonesy said. 'Let's knock on Old Tompkins's door tomorrow.'

'No way!' I said. 'I'm shooting like Michael Jordan.'

'Come on, Toby.' Jonesy headed towards the house. 'You can have first tip-off tomorrow.'

'The crowd is here to see me get the record,' I yelled.

'You're dreaming,' Jonesy said. 'What crowd?' Then he tried telling me the reason he couldn't get the ball was because he had to go home and feed his turtles, which is a ponging pile of rubbish because his dad always does that for him.

I decided to do something I'd only ever done once before: climb the fence.

'I'll watch out for Old Tompkins!' Jonesy said.

Normally when we lose a ball we look up to the sky and draw an imaginary line with our finger. We look at where the ball went over and work out where it landed. This is definitely more accurate than if someone doesn't draw a line in

the sky. But you can't do it in the dark.

I felt my way through the bush, trying not to think about burrs, rusty nails and ghosts. Or what would happen if Mr T came out.

Meow! It sounded as if someone had trodden on a cat. *Slam!* Other noises from inside his house made me jump like Claire when she sees a daddy-long-legs in the shower.

It was Old Tompkins opening the back door!

I sprang to my feet and started to run. A spot-light flashed on in my face and I tripped over something round. The ball!

I grabbed it and threw it up to Jonesy. I made a run for it and found two tennis balls and the perfect stick for sword fights by the fence as I scrambled over.

'WHO IS THAT? GET OUTTA THERE!'

Too late, Mr T! I was home and hosed. Jonesy gave me a high-five.

Commentators would call this a day of two halves! Okay, so there was school, and McGarvy coming to our school, and I didn't finish my homework, but we had half a bag of banana lollies left and I played one-on-one like Michael Jordan. I bet even Kobe Bryant hasn't scored five three-pointers in the dark.

Shot!

2nd

FebbruAry

Last night might have felt like scoring a goal in the FA Cup Final, but today felt like getting bowled out by a girl for a golden duck.

Everything started out cool. Mum made porridge with lots of brown sugar and cream. Dad was singing loudly and Max ate everything without spilling anything on the floor, which is good because I'm normally the one who has to clean it up. Claire even left some hot water in the shower for once. I think it's because she can't get her arm wet.

Then I walked to school with the CGC and told Hughesy about my five three-pointers and how I found two tennis balls, a new sword and got away from Grumpy Old Tompkins before he kidnapped me.

'You're just lucky I kept playing when it got dark,' said Jonesy.

'You're lucky I went to Tompkins's backyard to get the ball.'

'Did he take his eye out?' asked Hughesy.

'Jonesy wouldn't know, because he was too scared to go over.'

'I was not too scared!' protested Jonesy.

So I punched Jonesy in the arm. And then he kicked me in the back of the knee and ran ahead. He couldn't even beat Max in an arm wrestle.

Anyway, my bad luck started when McGarvy stole my seat and I had to sit on the wonky chair that everyone hates. Then Mrs Martin-Edge told everyone to get their homework out and I was the only one who hadn't finished. Normally the CGC are all in trouble together, but not this time. Jonesy wrote about *The Simpsons* and Hughesy wrote about *Modern Family*. Maybe my home-work wasn't finished, but at least I chose real families who played sport for their country!

'Firstly, Toby Gilligan-Flannigan,' said Mrs Martin-Edge, looking at my homework book, 'you didn't *complete* the assignment, and secondly, you didn't *listen* to what was asked of you.'

'I did so! There are fourteen famous families in that list!'

'Exactly my point,' said Mrs Martin-Edge. 'I said *write about a famous family*, not make a shopping list of families no one has ever heard of.'

'But the Waugh brothers played cricket for Australia! And who hasn't heard of Serena and Venus Williams?'

'You're not listening,' said Mrs Martin-Edge. 'That is a *list*, not a report.'

'Well, I wasn't finished,' I said, trying to think of a good excuse.

'Correct,' said Mrs Martin-Edge. 'That's the most accurate thing you've said yet. You'll stay in at lunchtime and finish it.'

I don't get it. I mean, I'll bet David Beckham never had to do spelling and look how famous he is. No one ever asks Jonah Lomu in an interview if he knows what twelve times twelve is.

While everyone was outside playing basketball I started to write about how the Waugh brothers both got ducks in their very first match. Normally I'd change seats, because the wonky chair digs into your butt and squeaks like a dolphin every time you move, but Mrs Martin-Edge said I wasn't allowed to. She sat at her desk and watched me as if she was a referee on the tryline.

'Stop staring out the window and complete your homework,' she snarled.

I wish we could have our PE teacher, Mr Doon, as a class teacher instead of Mrs Martin-Edge. Everyone likes him, mostly because he just plays sport all day and never wears grown-up clothes. Mr Doon is as big as Michael Jordan and even plays basketball like him. Once in a teacher's game he slam-dunked with two seconds to go and won the game.

I looked out the window again. Hughesy and Jonesy were getting thrashed at basketball.

But then Jonesy downed a circus shot! And a three-pointer! It must have been his new shoes, the ones that light up blue when he runs.

Those shoes got Jonesy up to the keyhole. He passed to Hughesy, who also shot a three-pointer! The CGC were only two points behind. But just as Hughesy was about to score a winning field goal, McGarvy pulled off his beanie and threw it into the juniors' playground.

Get this! Hughesy's such a pro he dribbled the ball back to his beanie, picked it up, kept control of the ball and got the two points they needed. The best part was seeing McGarvy try to make an intercept, and then fall over on the concrete.

All the time I was watching the game I heard someone calling my name. It was like a dream. 'Toby! *Toby!* TOBY!' It seemed to get louder. 'Toby, Toby, TOBY GILLIGAN-FLANNIGAN!'

But it wasn't a dream. Mrs Martin-Edge was so close she was almost kissing me. Her breath smelt like cat food. 'I am calling your mother!' she said. 'Again!'

When the end-of-lunch bell rang and every-one stampeded in, I felt jealous because they'd all had so much fun. Hughesy's face was red and puffy, but he

still wouldn't take his beanie off. Jonesy did what he always does after a game: took green sanitising gel out of his bag and rubbed it on his hands, mostly because his mum says he'll get diseases if he doesn't.

Unfortunately, McGarvy was sitting behind me, and when he took his shoes off it was as if someone had forgotten to flush the world's big-gest toilet.

'Right,' Mrs Martin-Edge said to the class. 'Time to concen-trate!'

Then Hughesy had the *worst* idea. He wanted to play Louder, which is a game where you have to say the same word louder than the last person. Yesterday when we played, the word we had to say was 'boob'. I started, which was good because Mrs Martin-Edge was facing the whiteboard and she couldn't hear me. Jonesy said 'boob' a bit louder, and Hughesy said it even louder.

Then it was back to me.

'*Boob!*' I yelled.

Hughesy and Jonesy thought it was hilarious. Mrs Martin-Edge also started playing Louder but with different words.

'Gilligan-Flannigan!' she screamed. 'Leave the room at once and think about your actions!'

Mrs Martin-Edge didn't believe me when I said I was just practising palindromes. I was held in that lunchtime too.

Anyway, today Hughesy remembered I was already in that big pile of horse poo for not doing my homework, so he said Louder could wait till tomorrow. Then everything went super well for the afternoon, until the bell rang.

As we were leaving, McGarvy pushed me from behind. I could tell he was near me because it smelled like two hundred toilets.

He whispered in my ear, 'So, about your silly little GameBox V3 challenge, *Gilligan-Flannigan.*'

He said my last name like a swearword.

'What about it?' I asked.

'All those tries and all those wickets! You've got more chance of flying to the moon.'

'It's none of your business.'

'I bet my dead grandmother is better at sport than you.'

'Leave me alone,' I said.

'Make me.'

'Nah.'

'Nah yourself,' McGarvy said.

That's when my fist flew forward and punched ... nothing, because McGarvy moved out of the way faster than an opening bowler on the first morning of a test.

I turned and saw Mrs Martin-Edge looking at me with her hands on her hips.

I've been in some trouble in my life, but this was the first time I'd ever been held in at lunch-time *and* after school!

Hughesy and Jonesy waited for me at the school gates. It's a CGC rule to wait for whoever has detention. We walked along kicking a drink can. Jonesy and Hughesy were going to flipper-ball, so I left them with the can and went home.

When I opened the front door Mum was sitting at the dining-room table with her crossword.

The house was all smoky. 'Has Dad been cooking?' I asked, dropping my bag by the door.

'Tandoori chicken,' said Mum. 'Now sit down, Toby. We need to talk.'

She put down her crossword puzzle and took off her glasses. I knew Mrs Martin-Edge must have called when the next thing Mum said was, 'Toby, I'm very disappointed in you.'

This was going to be bad. Real bad. Even worse than the time Mum found a dead bird in my lunch-box. I meant to put it under Claire's bed when I got home one Friday, but I forgot, and Mum found it the next Monday morning when she was making my lunch.

That day Mum said, 'Toby, I'm very disap-pointed in you,' and Dad said, 'Right, my boy' at exactly the same time.

'Toby, why did you lie to me about finishing your homework last night?' Mum asked.

'It was – I just – I forgot.'

'Toby! You told me before you played basket---ball with Terence that your homework was done. So why did you lie?'

'I don't know,' I said.

Mum gave me the same horrible look that Mrs Martin-Edge gave me at

lunchtime. 'And Mrs Martin-Edge told me you got into another fight.'

'It wasn't a fight!' I said. 'How could it have been? I missed him!'

Okay, that might have been the wrong thing to say.

'Toby, if you ever lie to me again you can forget all about that GameBox Challenge,' said Mum. 'And you can also forget about dessert until tonight's homework is done.'

This was serious – I could miss out on the Game-Box V3 *and* raspberry ripple ice-cream.

I opened my English book. Mrs Martin-Edge had told us to write about the most important people in the world.

This was tough. There's the Chicago Bulls coach. He's pretty important – but what about the All Blacks coach? Or Manchester United?

I was going to call Hughesy to see what he thought, but I didn't need to, because he was stand-ing outside my bedroom window holding his new remote-controlled helicopter.

Even after flying, I'd have enough time to finish my homework.

Boom!

6th

FebruAry

It's game on for the GameBox V3 Challenge!

Last night Dad set up a chart on the fridge. It has one column for wickets and one for tries. So far I have none in either. But when I woke up this morning I was so excited. First, because it was Saturday and there was no

school, and second, because we were about to play the Daredevils, the worst team in the history of cricket. Even Claire could score runs against this team. With a broken arm!

Dad normally comes to Saturday-morning cricket, but today he had to work at Beach FM.

As usual, Mum asked why he needed to take his boat to the radio station. As usual, Dad didn't answer, he just gave her a wave and a wink as he went out the door.

Outside, he wished me luck for the GameBox V3 Challenge.

'Don't forget, Toby,' he said, 'the biggest journey begins with a single step.'

'But my run-up is five steps,' I said.

'You know what I mean.'

When we arrived at the ground, Jonesy, Hughesy and I had some throwdowns and got ready for the game. It was cloudy and the pitch had heaps of grass, which meant the ball would spin.

That's the good news.

The terrible news was that McGarvy turned up.

We knew McGarvy must have arrived because Hughesy's beanie was up in a tree and Jonesy complained that someone had hidden his bat, which turned up later in the girls' toilets. And then we saw that McGarvy was turning his sports towel into a chicken. It's that trick everyone's seen a gazillion times where you roll the towel a special way. If you ask me, it looks more like a rabbit. Anyway, that's not the point.

The point is, it's such an *old* trick!

Why was everyone laughing?

When McGarvy finished with the chicken he opened Jonesy's cricket bag and took a ball without asking. We watched him mark his run-up. First he let the batter know he'd survived a shark attack, then he showed off his shark tooth. Then he ran in and bowled faster than a freight train wearing rollerblades. He turned into the angriest, most horrible person on earth. Hughesy said he looked like one of those big bulls that charge red blankets in Spain. Steven Turncoat faced him, but ran away before McGarvy even reached the bowling crease. All we could hear were three wickets smashing and McGarvy beating his chest like a gorilla. One thing the CGC had been told about McGarvy was

that you should never high-five him, because you wouldn't have any hand left.

I realised that with Malcolm McBully bowling and me at slip, our team could actually be as awesome as the Baggy Greens when they won sixteen tests in a row. Here's the thing: I *never* drop the ball. Coach says I've got the safest hands in the team. Once I took eight catches in an innings. If there were commentators at our games they'd say, 'Look at that Toby! He really does have the most reliable pair of hands on the park – much like Mark Waugh.'

It wouldn't be like that with Jonesy at slip. The commentators would say, 'There goes Jonesy dropping another one off the bowling of McGarvy. Honestly, that boy couldn't catch a train!'

Anyway, as it turned out, we won the toss against the Daredevils and batted first. As usual, Jonesy and Hughesy opened, but argued about who should face first ball. Hughesy said he always faces, so Jonesy should have a turn, but Jonesy said he couldn't face without a helmet.

'Well, where's your helmet?' Hughesy asked.

'I accidentally left it at home.'

Hughesy looked confused. 'You're going to have to face some time! What does it matter if it's first ball?'

'I just don't like facing first ball,' said Jonesy. 'It's something a lot of opening batters are scared of, like Rahul Dravid.'

'Yeah, but Rahul Dravid scores runs.'

'Shut! Up!' Jonesy said, and tried to hit him with his brand-new bat.

Coach saw the whole thing. 'Hey!' he said. 'Save that aggression for the field.'

Mum says Hughesy and Jonesy are like chalk and cheese, which I think is her way of saying Jonesy is a blocker and Hughesy is a basher. Hughesy doesn't wear a helmet because he's not scared of a cricket ball one little bit. Anyway, it wouldn't fit over his beanie. I wouldn't be surprised if Jonesy slept with his helmet on. Once Hughesy even batted with no shoes on, but Clay Mubbery got him with a yorker that made his toes bleed.

We scored 179. Caine Snyder scored 52, but ran out Jonesy and Hughesy. I only scored 13, but I didn't care, because the pitch was green and I was there to get wickets.

I'm a spin bowler so I normally have to wait till the fast bowlers have had a

turn, but today Scott Honeyford threw me the new ball, which was red like an oversized cherry, and so shiny I could see my reflection.

'There you go, Toby,' he winked. 'You can open.'

Opening the bowling is wicked, but there are lots of rules. No one is allowed to drop the new ball. It needs to stay shiny. If you drop it, it'll get dirty and won't swing or seam. *Everyone* has to rub the ball on their pants, even the boys who don't like getting muddy. Sometimes I can't even see the white on my pants, just grass stains and red marks from where I shined the ball all day. Mum says we should just wear black, then she wouldn't have to wash my white pants every week. But that's just Mum. Everyone knows you bowl better wearing white pants.

The Daredevils batted like five-year-olds, mostly because we bowled like demons. They lost four wickets for 39 runs. I didn't score any, but bowled four maidens in a row – which means they didn't get any runs. But McGarvy bowled faster than ever and knew I didn't want to field at slip. Which is why he said, 'Toby, field at slip. Drop anything and you're dead meat.'

When Caine Snyder got the fifth wicket, Coach gave us the thumbs-up from the sideline. We were smashing them! That's until a guy called 'the Wall' came out to bat.

'What a dumb name!' said Jonesy. "'The Wall'!"

'Yeah,' said Hughesy. 'Maybe his mum and dad didn't like him! Why would they call him "the Wall"?'

'Because nothing gets past him, you dopes,' said Scott Honeyford.

Scott was right. We tried everything, but no one could get the Wall out. I bowled my googly and topspinner, but he blocked everything. Nothing worried him! McGarvy even showed off his shark-tooth necklace again, but the Wall kept batting.

At the drinks break, Scott Honeyford had a plan. 'Toby,' he said, throwing me the ball, 'the Wall's not going to do anything stupid, because he doesn't want to get out. He's just batting for his average.'

'He's boring, like Jonesy,' laughed Hughesy.

'Hey!' said Jonesy, punching him in the arm.

We looked at the Wall. He was sitting away from his team reading a cricket magazine. He didn't even need a drink! He was a cricket robot!

'We'll get him,' said Jonesy.

'How?' Caine Snyder asked. 'Coach says he holds the world record for the highest score by a school-boy. He batted for *two days*, and scored 430 runs.'

'Boom!' said Jonesy.

The Wall changed his gloves and put his helmet back on.

'Why don't you try a fast short ball?' Scott asked.

I laughed.

'What's so funny?'

'I'm a *legspinner* !'

'Yeah?' said Scott. 'So surprise him, Toby. Put a square leg in. Bowl a fast, short one and wait for him to top-edge it.'

'That's an awesome idea!' I said.

Then McGarvy butted in. 'Good plan, boys.' But he had a funny look on his face.

'You'd better be ready,' I told him.

'Born ready, *Gilligan-Flannigan*.'

But when we started play McGarvy turned into the world's biggest goober. He took a straw out of his pocket and began making the loudest fart sounds ever. Everyone was cracking up until the umpire took away McGarvy's straw.

I did exactly what Scott said. I bowled a fast bouncer, which surprised the Wall so much that he jumped like a frog on hot concrete. Then he did just what Scott said he would. He top-edged the ball, sending it straight to square leg!

No one on earth could drop that catch. Not even if they had no arms and no legs and no eyes. Even Max could have caught it!

The ball went high. Then it was coming down fast.

Everyone looked at McGarvy, who pretended he was busy talking to the umpire.

The Wall started taking his gloves off.

'McGarvy!' yelled Jonesy. 'Catch it!'

McGarvy ignored him.

'McGarvy, wake up!' yelled Hughesy. '*Take it!* '

But McGarvy just let the ball fall right next to him.

'Whoops!' he said. 'Sun was in my eyes.'

I kicked the pitch and said some words that I can't write here because Dad

might read this logbook. That's when the umpire told me to cool it.

'But McGarvy deliberately dropped the catch!' I said. 'He's the one who should be in trouble!'

'He tried his best,' said the umpire.

'But . . . I could have caught that with my eyes closed!'

'Calm down,' said the umpire. 'New bowler, please.'

The Wall was licking his lips as if he was playing Beast Battle and had just got another life. If he batted the rest of the innings we'd lose the match, all because McGarvy is the world's biggest goober!

Actually, McGoober knew exactly what he was doing. If he dropped catches I wouldn't get wickets, and if I didn't get wickets I wouldn't get the new GameBox V3. It was a horrible plan, and it was working.

In the end McGarvy bowled the Wall out while I watched from the sideline. Even though we beat the Daredevils, I couldn't stop thinking how McGarvy dropped the easiest catch in the world just so I wouldn't get the wicket – and then he got Player of the Day for his bowling. And that's why I wish Malcolm McGarvy would fall off a waterfall or get eaten by a mountain lion.

It sucks big time. The only thing that makes me feel good right now is thinking about my birthday, which is in two sleeps.

But then again, maybe I won't be getting any presents because of what happened when Dad picked me up after the game.

It started well because he was in a good mood, singing loudly to the song on the radio because he had a chillybin of fish. Sometimes I think Dad's mouth looks too big for his head, but when he smiles it's like the sun shining on your face.

I guess the right thing to do would have been to tell him what really happened. How I should have got wickets against a useless team, but didn't because McGarvy fielded like a blind man with no arms and no legs. Then I should have said McGarvy was Player of the Day because he got the winning wicket.

But I put both thumbs in the air.

'I got Player of the Day!'

'For your first game of the season? How many wickets did you get?'

Even then I didn't tell Dad the truth. Instead, I opened my big mouth and

said, 'Seven.'

'Seven wickets? Out of the park! Let's celebrate by going straight to Grandma's and giving her some of this fish. She'd love to hear your news.'

At Grandma's name my head started buzzing like a beehive. I tried to swallow, but it suddenly felt as if there was a rock in my throat.

'Can't we go eeling instead?' I asked.

'Are you kidding me?' said Dad. 'We've got enough fish to feed the whole town!'

'Why don't we go and buy some bait for next time?' I asked.

'Trust me, Tobes,' he said. 'There's plenty of good eating fish and there'll be plenty of juicy bait left over.'

When Dad says, 'Right, my boy', it's always bad news. But when he calls me 'Tobes', it always means ice-cream, or staying up late, or money for lollies.

But not this time, not once he found out I wasn't really Player of the Day.

Dad turned the music up louder and wound down the window. I wanted to vomit. Because sure as sure, Gran would find out about my lie. And even though she was the one person in the whole galaxy who might understand why I told it, I didn't want her to know, even less than I wanted Dad to. I had to think of something.

Then it came to me. Dad loves watching docu---men-taries about the war, mostly because my grand-dad used to fly a Spitfire way back before I was born. Dad loves these programs so much he some-times forgets to go to work.

'If we can't go eeling,' I said, 'why don't we just go home and watch *World of War Tanks*?'

Dad turned and stared at me. 'Do you really want to watch *World of War Tanks*?'

'Yep,' I said. 'I just want to relax on the couch and think about my wickets.'

'It's a date.' Dad shrugged. 'I guess we can put Grandma's fish in the freezer.'

The rock in my throat went away.

Until Dad said, 'Better still, let's just drop by Grandma's while the fish is nice and fresh, and watch *World of War Tanks* straight after. Deal?'

The rock in my throat was there again.

When we got to Grandma's shop, she was in her pick-up truck with Clark

Gable next to her in the front seat and a huge wardrobe on the back. She was steering with one hand and eating a hamburger with the other.

'What the . . . ' said Dad. 'Tell me she didn't lift that wardrobe on there herself!' Then he saw the hamburger. 'Mum! That's so *bad* for you!'

He parked our car and jumped out and waved at Grandma through her windscreen. 'We've brought fresh fish,' he said. 'Throw that burger away, you'll kill yourself!'

Grandma rolled her eyes and beeped her horn. 'Do you want a tyre-tread tattoo?' she yelled, finishing the last bite of her burger.

Dad didn't move, so Grandma got out of her truck and slammed the door. 'All right,' she said. 'Suppose I can break for a few minutes.'

She gave Dad an evil look, but winked at me as she walked past.

'Great,' said Dad. 'Let's go inside and have a nice cup of tea. I'll put the fish in the fridge and then we'll tell you Toby's fantastic news.'

WICKETS I'VE GOT: 7 (but not really)

WICKETS I NEED (really): 20

TRIES I NEED (but not yet): 10

LIES: I didn't actually get Player of the Day

PERSON I HOPE GETS EATEN BY A MOUNTAIN LION: Malcolm McGarvy

7th

Feb**r**u**A**ry

I don't want to talk about our visit to Grandma, but last night I had the worst dream ever. I was at the FA Cup Final with lots of other people, and I was wearing nothing but Spiderman underpants.

Coach saw me shivering.

'I've got some cricket gear in the car.' He took keys from his pocket. 'But it mightn't be your size.'

'Please!' I said. 'Anything is better than wearing underpants! I'm freezing!'

Coach came back with one of Claire's bright red miniskirts and some frilly pink stockings. He even had a bikini top.

'Hey!' I yelled. 'You said it was cricket gear!'

'I lied!' said Coach. 'But you'd know all about that, wouldn't you? Because you're a liar too!'

Then Coach made me put the girly clothes on and I fell over in front of everyone because I was wearing high heels. The crowd booed.

'Liar, liar, red skirt on fire!' said McGarvy, who was sitting in the crowd next to my dad. They were sharing hot chips and drinking fizzy. Jonesy and Hughesy laughed and gave McGarvy a huge high-five from their seats in front.

'Ain't that the truth!' said my mum.

'Couldn't lie straight in bed, that boy.' It was Grandma, sitting between the commentators.

8th

FebruAry

I've had two long days of feeling like someone in jail because of my lie, especially because the lie involved Grandma as well as Dad. But today is a good day, because it's finally my birthday.

I didn't get a monitor lizard, but I did get a new watch. It tells the time in different countries, which is really cool if the Baggy Greens or the All Blacks are playing overseas. It doesn't have an alarm, but it is waterproof to three hundred and fifty metres.

I also got some drums. Mum told Dad to buy the quiet ones with the headphones. Guess what? He didn't buy the quiet ones with the headphones. And when Mum complains about the noise I say, 'But you guys bought them!' Then Dad tells me to stop being so clever. I guess he thinks you should be clever at school but not at home.

At Dad's work, people don't have to go in on their birthday. I wish it was the same with school. I'm sure whoever came up with birthdays didn't want anyone to do schoolwork on them. Your birthday should be a holiday when you can make water bombs and stay up past your bedtime.

In class, all I could think about was my watch and my drums and what cake Dad might be making.

At lunchtime Hughesy and Jonesy told me they had bought me the best present in the history of presents.

'I'm giving you that frog I found the other day,' said Hughesy. 'Mum doesn't want me to have it anymore.'

'He's joking,' said Jonesy. 'Your real present is a surprise!'

'It's a remote-controlled fart machine!' said Hughesy.

'Shut! Up!' Jonesy punched him. 'It's a *surprise* !'

'Sorry,' Hughesy said to me. 'It's not a remote-controlled fart machine.'

When I got to Grandma's shop after school she showed me the bright purple bionic ski jacket she had just won.

'But Grandma, you even don't ski!' I said.

'Might have to start, then!' Grandma replied.

I showed her my new waterproof watch and she gave me a present. It was a

jumper she'd knitted. The arms were too long and it was itchy, but I didn't say anything about that because Grandma has enough to worry about.

I started playing the pinball machine with the naked ladies on it.

'How's Claire?' Grandma asked.

'Same old,' I said. 'She leaves wet towels on the bathroom floor and drinks juice out of the bottle without getting told off.'

Grandma laughed. 'How's her arm?'

'Oh, man!' I said. 'I wish I'd never double-bounced her. She's lazier than a fat cat lying in the sun. All she does is sit in Mum's chair. Every time Max needs to go to the toilet *I* have to take him.'

'Ah well,' said Grandma. 'It's good to help your brother.'

'That's what Dad says. He thinks it's good to learn how to look after little kids. But *I'm* not Max's dad!'

'Your dad could help,' said Grandma. 'Then again, he's probably too busy spying on me to make sure I eat right.'

After Grandma hugged me goodbye I watched her walk back to her favourite armchair. I noticed she needed a stick to help her walk, and when she fell into her chair she closed her eyes.

One thing I didn't talk to Grandma about was The Lie.

Every time I got excited about my party, some-thing in my head told me I should tell Grandma. At least she would never tell Dad. I've told her lots of other stuff she's never told anyone. But how could I tell her on my birthday? It would have ruined my party!

Before my party started, we played our first after-school rep game. This is when teachers get together and choose twenty-two players. The boys who play the best get to play in the first eleven. The pitch was greener than the shirts Dad wears on Saint Patrick's Day, which is perfect for spin bowlers like me.

And here's the best bit. I got a wicket with my first ball! And then I got three more in the next over! On my birthday!

McGarvy must have forgotten to turn up, so the world's biggest goober wasn't there to drop any catches. Because it was my birthday I also got to choose a name for our team. I called us the Great Whites, like the shark. The other team called themselves the Hornets – like the insect.

I don't know much about hornets, but I do know they'd have no chance

against a killer of the sea. Everyone thought Hornets was a dumb name. What use is an insect on a cricket field? At least the Great Whites could eat the umpire if we didn't agree with a decision.

We won the toss and asked the Hornets to bat. For a while they smashed us everywhere.

'For insects, they're pretty good!' said Hughesy.

At 68-3, Scott Honeyford threw me the ball.

In cricket books it says famous players have their own ways of getting wickets and runs. Some batters say to themselves, 'Watch the ball' over and over like a mantra. Some bowlers say, 'Outside off stump.'

I decided to try it. When I ran in to bowl I said to myself, 'GameBox, GameBox, GameBox.'

It worked, because I bowled the most perfect slider and the batter missed it completely. Jonesy was supposed to be fielding but he still managed to record the whole thing on his phone, even the bit where the bails flew into the wicket-keeper's nose.

I got three more wickets. We got the Hornets out for 101, but Coach wasn't happy because we bowled 21 wides and 17 no balls. When we went into bat, Jonesy got no runs again and we were 21 for 2. Then we lost three more wickets. Suddenly the Great Whites were 46-5. It was my turn to bat.

When I got to the crease, Ravi Patel came up to me with a frowny face. 'Just go for the ones and twos,' he said, whacking my pads with his bat. 'Play sensibly and sneak singles when you can.'

Ravi must have forgotten I had birthday cake waiting at home. I smashed everything for six and we won by four wickets with five overs left.

Then back at my house we all played darts and made water bombs. My cake was shaped like a Manchester United jersey, with lots of red icing, and I ate a whole arm and felt sick. And the remote-controlled fart machine from Hughesy and Jonesy really is the best present in the history of presents, mostly because Claire says it's the most annoying present in the history of presents.

WICKETS I'VE GOT: 11 (but 7 of those are a lie)

WICKETS I NEED: 9 (but actually 16)

PEOPLE I'M ANGRY WITH: Jonesy and Hughesy for high-fiving McGarvy in my dream

PEOPLE I'M COOL WITH: Jonesy and Hughesy for giving me the best present in the history of presents

9th

FebruAry

I couldn't stand it anymore. After school today I told Grandma about the lie.

She just listened, as she polished an old lamp. When I finished, she said, 'So what are you going to do now?'

'I guess I should tell Dad one day,' I said. 'Maybe when he's caught some fish and is in a good mood.'

'Toby, I don't think that's the right way to handle this,' Grandma replied in a super-serious voice. 'Aren't you squirming inside about it?'

'Yeah, I am,' I admitted. 'I feel horrible.'

'Then why don't you own up?'

'Because I'm too scared! Plus I've got eleven wickets and if I tell him the truth I'll be back to four!'

'Well, Toby, it's up to you. I won't tell on you. But if you come clean, I'm sure your dad will understand you were carried away in the moment. I mean, I've lied myself on the odd occasion.'

'Whoa! Really?'

'Of course. Everyone has.' She winked. 'Your dad thinks I eat leek and potato soup for lunch, for one thing.'

When I got home Hughesy was watching the early news with Dad, a humungous bag of chips between them.

'Here he is!' said Dad.

I picked up the bag. Only a few crumbs left.

'You snooze, you lose,' said Hughesy.

It was the ad break, so Dad turned the volume down and took off his glasses. 'Hughesy was saying you had a good game yesterday,' he said. 'Four wickets!'

'Yep,' I said, feeling bad as bad.

'See?' Dad replied. 'Apply your mind and you can do anything. With your Player of the Day performance, you're halfway to finishing the Challenge!'

Once I watched a TV show where someone had been in a bad car crash and they said it was as if the whole thing happened in slow motion. Like a replay of a slam dunk when you're watching the basketball.

When Dad said the words 'Player of the Day' I looked at Hughesy, who opened and shut his mouth like a goldfish. In slow motion.

Then he looked confused. In slow motion.

I tried to open my mouth, but that was stuck in slow motion too. I knew exactly what Hughesy was going to say, but I couldn't stop him.

'Player of the Day?' Hughesy asked. 'When was that?'

'Last *weekend*,' said Dad, turning the volume back up on the TV. 'Toby got seven wickets – six bowled, one caught.'

'Huh? That was McGarvy!' Hughesy said.

You know those goosebumps you get down the back of your neck when you break your mum's favourite china plate? Or when you accidentally open Grumpy Old Tompkins's mail and hide it under your bed because you're too scared to tell him?

Multiply that by a thousand million and that's how I felt standing in the lounge with my big fat lie sitting where everyone could see it.

Dad stared at Hughesy.

Then at me.

And then Dad did something he never does. He turned off the news before

the weather came on.

'Toby,' he said, 'you told me *you* got Player of the Day last Saturday.'

'Whoops,' said Hughesy, sitting up straight.

'Well? Is it true or not?'

I pulled my fingers till they clicked.

'Toby, stop that! Did you lie to me?'

'Yes,' I mumbled. I couldn't look at him. My face was burning.

Dad got off the couch and walked towards the kitchen. 'Right, my boy. It's time Hughesy went home and you went to your bedroom.' He crossed out the seven wickets with one of Mum's red pens.

'Hey!' I said. 'What about my four wickets from yesterday? You took seven away, but you haven't added my other four!'

'Don't push your luck, Toby. I'll be talking to your mother when she gets home.'

I walked Hughesy out the front door, then pushed him against the garage wall as hard as I could. He fell down by the wheelie bins and looked shocked.

'Why did you *say* that?' I asked.

'Say what?'

'Why'd you tell Dad I wasn't Player of the Day?'

'Because you weren't! McGarvy was.'

'You could have made it up! I was going to tell him, it wasn't *your* job to!'

'I didn't know to make it up,' Hughesy said. 'If you'd told me to make it up I would have. But I didn't *know*.' Then he punched me so hard I fell against the front door and accidentally rang the doorbell.

'Toby!' Dad yelled from inside. 'Get to your room or there'll be trouble!'

Hughesy ran off without saying goodbye.

I went to my room, slammed the door, fell on my bed and cried into my pillow. I turned my stereo up so Claire wouldn't hear. A few minutes later my pillow was so wet I had to flip it over. I looked at myself in the mirror. My eyes were puffy and red.

Life sucked.

McGarvy hated me.

Hughesy hated me.

Dad hated me.

Claire hated me.

Mrs Martin-Edge hated me.

I was a liar and a failure. I hated myself.

I picked up my new drumsticks and tried to play something, but I was useless. So I played Tetris on my new watch, but that didn't make me happy either. There was a knock on my door. I quickly dried my eyes and got my homework book from my schoolbag.

It was Mum.

'Toby,' she said.

I groaned inside, but I didn't answer, just pre-tended to read my homework book. Today we were told to write about something important that happened in the last fifty years. I was going to write about the time Michael Jordan scored 69 points against the Cleveland Indians, when he got 23 field goals and 18 rebounds, but then I remembered how much I hated Mrs Martin-Edge and how much she hated me.

'Dad told me about your lie,' Mum said.

I still didn't answer.

'Toby, lying destroys trust. Plus, it was cheating when you included those seven wickets in your Challenge score. You give us no choice but to ground you for two days, and that's letting you off lightly. No sport. No playing with Terence and Sam after school.'

'What about the Knights?' I yelled. 'We're playing them on Thursday. This is my big chance!'

'You won't be playing,' said Mum.

'Oh, man!' I threw my pens and paper across the room.

'Next time think before you act,' said Mum. 'You need to apologise to your dad, and to all of us.' Then she pointed at the mess I'd just made. 'And you can tidy your room before dinner.'

Even my own mum hated me.

WICKETS I'VE GOT: 11 - 7 : 4

WICKETS I NEED: 16

WEATHER FORECAST: Big black rainclouds in my head

11th

FebruAry

McGarvy blocked my path into the classroom this morning.

'Gilligan-Flannigan!' he said. 'Who's been a naughty boy?'

'None of your business,' I replied. 'Go away.'

'Guess you won't be playing against the Knights after school, then?' he said.

The bell rang and I did my best to get past him, but he grabbed my books from my bag and threw them across the schoolyard. They skidded over the wet concrete where it had been raining overnight. When I bent down to pick them up he pushed me into a puddle.

'Whoops!' he said. 'Bit slippery today.'

I sat in class like a big wet dog. Worst of all, my pants were soaked, so when Mrs Martin-Edge told me to come to the front and help with a maths problem McGarvy screamed with laughter. 'Ha! Ha! Gilligan-Flannigan's peed his pants!'

I had the last laugh, though. This afternoon it rained cats and dogs and goldfish and that meant no game against the Knights, so at least McGarvy couldn't steal any more of my wickets.

13th

FebruAry

Hughesy and I are friends again. He made me a new slingshot. The CGC had an awesome game of BYB after school yesterday and afterwards Mum made hot dogs with tomato sauce and cheese.

All I can say is, there must have been some magic dust in those hot dogs, because this morning I bowled better than ever.

We played the Kings and I opened with a straight leg spinner, which the opening batter missed by a million miles. Next over I bowled a top spinner. The batter nicked it and Hughesy dived like a dolphin and took a screamer of a catch.

I got wickets with my googly, slider and flipper.

Coach said I had the ball on a string. One of the parents said I made the ball talk. McGarvy was on the field too, but Scott Honeyford didn't need him because I got most of the wickets.

And what about this? After the game McGarvy came up and shook my hand!

'Respect, Toby,' he said. 'That was some wicked bowling out there.'

'Thanks,' I said. 'Are . . . you joking?'

'Why would I? Six wickets! You were on fire!'

'Wow,' I said. I think I even went red.

'Maybe you need to give me some lessons,' McGarvy said. 'I might even change from fast bowling to spin.'

Wait till Dad heard about this! The meanest guy in school, the fastest bowler in school, the boy who threw beanies up trees and pushed people into puddles

was asking *me* how to bowl!

WICKETS I'VE GOT: 10

WICKETS I NEED: 10

FOOD OF CHAMPIONS: Hot dogs with tomato sauce and cheese

20th

Feb**r**u**A**ry

Dad calls it getting too big for your boots.

Mum calls it getting ahead of yourself.

But I didn't think there was anything wrong with saying I was going to get Player of the Day against the All Stars.

I didn't think I even needed to practise before the game. I just listened to music on my headphones, which is what David Beckham does when he's walking through airports and doesn't want to answer questions about what he ate on the plane and why his wife looks so grumpy.

We batted first and scored 269-4! I didn't even need to bat. But then things went down the toilet. The All Stars did the same thing to us and only needed ten runs with two wickets left!

That's when I kind of worked out what Mum and Dad had been trying to say in the car.

I ended up getting the two tail-enders out, but only because their brains exploded at the same time and they tried to win with a six.

WICKETS I'VE GOT: 12

WICKETS I NEED: 8

WHAT I WOULD EAT ON A PLANE IF I WAS DAVID BECKHAM: As much pizza and raspberry ripple ice-cream as I like, because I used to be the England Captain

27th

FebruAry

It was hot and sunny this morning as I jumped out of bed at eight-thirty and put on my whites. The game was due to start in half an hour. If you're late you don't get to bowl and you have to bat last.

I put some bagels in the toaster. Mum was looking for her tennis racquet and Claire was com-plaining that her phone was the oldest one in her class. Dad had already gone to work at Beach FM.

Once Mum had found her racquet she came into the kitchen to pour herself a cup of tea, and that's when I heard the worst possible thing you can hear on a Saturday morning.

'Oh, bad news, Toby,' said Mum. 'Cricket is cancelled.'

'How can it be?'

'Must have rained overnight.'

I looked out of the window. There was no water on the driveway and the grass in the front yard was as brown as my feet.

'Who said the game was cancelled?' I asked.

'One of the boys from your team rang. He said he was calling half your team and the coach was calling the other half.'

'Who was it?' I asked. 'Was it Hughesy?'

'No.'

'Jonesy?'

'Toby,' said Mum. 'All I heard was that cricket is cancelled today. I was asked to tell Dad and he is about to announce it on the radio.'

'But you're still going to tennis!'

'I don't know, Toby,' she said. 'I'm just going by what I was told. Now, where are those new balls I bought?'

I tried to forget that Hughesy hit Mum's new tennis balls into Tompkins's backyard after school last week. I turned the radio up.

'Once more, in case you've just joined us, all under-12 cricket matches are cancelled. Here's a song to put a smile on your dial. It's Kenny Rogers and Dolly Parton, turn it up!'

I had to call Dad. We have a special phone number straight through to the studio, but the problem is it takes at least thirty rings before someone answers. Dad says it's because everyone is so busy. I think it's because they're dancing to songs and drinking too much fizzy to hear it.

The phone rang and rang. Dad finally answered.

'Your game was called off,' he said.

'But *why*? ' I asked. 'It's perfect cricket weather!'

'Don't shoot the messenger, Toby,' he said. 'I just read out what's put in front of me. Look, I've got to go. My song's about to finish and I need to give away a CD to some lucky listener. Early bird catches the worm!'

'But Dad, how could it be *off*? It's like Fiji out-side! Can't you say something on the radio, like it must have been a mistake?'

'Toby, I'm busy!'

'Puh-lease, Dad!' I pleaded. 'Could you check?'

But he had hung up.

I went to my room and smashed my fist against the wall. My favourite framed picture of Kobe Bryant fell down and broke on the floor. I was so confused. What was going on?

I rang Hughesy, but his mum said he'd already gone to the game. 'Didn't he hear Dad on the radio?' I asked. 'Cricket is cancelled.'
'Good one, Toby!' Hughesy's mum replied. 'Today is perfect for cricket.'
Something wasn't right. I rang Jonesy's house, but he had gone to the ground as well!

Whether the game was on or not I had to get there.

I looked at my watch. Eight fifty-five. I'd wasted twenty-five minutes! Coach would be so mad if I was late. He used to be a boss in the army and is the scariest man on earth. He's probably related to Mrs Martin-Edge.

Nearly every week I ride my bike to cricket, but today I begged Mum to drop me off at the ground. So she did. I arrived at 8.59 and 13 seconds. I got my cricket bag from the boot and sprinted. I had to run across three fields.

Eight fifty-nine and 47 seconds.

The ground was dry and hard and the sun made me sweat. I could see Coach in the distance talking to the *whole team*.

My bag was getting heavier and I was puffing like Grandma. Why was everyone here if the game was cancelled?

Nine o'clock and 34 seconds.

I was *late*.

'Gilligan-Flannigan!' Coach pointed to his watch. 'What time do you call this?'

'Yeah!' said McGarvy. 'You're late! Can't bowl, and only bat last!'

'Sssh!' Coach told McGarvy. 'I'll deal with this.'

Hughesy and Jonesy were padding up behind Coach. I wanted to ask them why they were here, but didn't because Coach would have turned my guts into garters. He always threatens to do that when he's angry, and I don't know what it means but I'm sure it's not a free trip to the movies.

The umpires and fielding side walked out to the middle.

'I'm really sorry, Coach,' I said.

How could I explain why I was late? I guess I could have said I'd been told our game was cancelled, even though it was sunny, but because Coach is probably related to Mrs Martin-Edge I kept my trap shut. It can't have been Coach who called my dad at Beach FM to say that it *was*, because he was standing right in front of me!

'Coach, I'm really sorry. I...'

'No excuses!' he replied. 'If you're going to go all the way in life – and on the sports field – show up! On time, every time! Understand?'

'Yes, sir,' I said.

'Right.' He pointed at me. 'Put on your pads. You're in at number four.'

'What?' said McGarvy, throwing his bat at a tree. 'That sucks!'

Obviously the bad old McGarvy was back.

Coach went to get some balls out of his car. I ran over to Jonesy and Hughesy, who were walk--ing out to bat.

'Where were you?' Hughesy said to me.

'I heard the game was *off!*' I said.

'Off?' Jonesy pointed to the blue sky. 'Why would it be off?'

'Dad said it on his radio show. He said *all* cricket was cancelled.'

'Geez, Toby!' said Hughesy. 'I've told you before. No one listens to that station. It's for old people!'

I was still confused, but our game was about to start.

'Okay, Jonesy, try to get some runs today,' I said.

'I'm going to slay it!'

I put my pads on and McGarvy sat beside me. We hadn't spoken to each other since he told me how good I was against the Kings. I said hi.

McGarvy spat right next to my shoes.

'What was that for?' I asked.

McGarvy just stared at me sideways as if he knew something I didn't. Then he spat again, and this time it landed on my cricket bag. He kicked a pile of dirt and walked off. I felt dumber than a bag of rocks. I should have known he was never my friend. How stupid to think he was serious when he said how well I played.

Out in the middle Hughesy batted like Sri Lankan opener Kumara Sangakkara, and Jonesy got out for a golden duck. He sat next to me and told me how useless he was, but I was too angry at McGarvy to listen.

Why did that idiot annoy me so much?

And why did I even care?

I wouldn't even *want* to be his friend.

Luckily I managed to do what Shane Warne does, which is to block everything out when he gets out in the middle. I got 41 runs and four wickets

and we won the game.

When I got home Dad was working on his old truck, the one that hasn't moved from the backyard since before I was born. Most weekends Dad and his friends look under the bonnet and fiddle with the engine, but that's as far as they get. Which is fine by the CGC, because we use it for cops and robbers. It's got leather seats and cobwebs and a big gearstick like an army tank's.

I dropped my cricket bag and took off my shoes. Dad looked at his watch. 'So the game *was* on?'

'Sure was,' I said, getting some orange juice from his fridge in the garage. 'Even though the DJ on the radio said it *wasn't*.'

'Hey,' he laughed. 'Don't give me a hard time. Your mother called me and said she'd been told the ground was closed. Did you ask Coach who it could have been?'

'No way! I was forty seconds late, so he was down on me.'

'Oh well,' said Dad. 'How was your game?'

'Four wickets,' I said, letting out a huge burp. 'Two in one over. I was on a hat trick.'

'Really?' Dad had a funny look on his face.

'Yes, Dad,' I said. 'I'm telling the truth this time.'

'Wow,' said Dad. 'Well, as I've always said, success is two per cent inspiration and ninety-eight per cent...?'

'Luck?' I asked.

'*Perspiration!*' he said. 'Speaking of which, you need a shower – and take those stinky shoes inside before they walk off by themselves.'

Dad started singing as I left. I felt good. Maybe because I had the ball on a string and was getting tonnes of wickets and didn't have to worry about the lie anymore.

WICKETS I'VE GOT: 16

WICKETS I NEED: 4

LIES: Nil

4th

march

Tonight we've got a babysitter. Claire's grumpy. Mum and Dad say that when she's fourteen she'll be old enough to look after me and Max, but not yet. So she asked Dad a hundred times if she could stay the night at Nicki Wright's house. And Dad said no a hundred times.

Claire went the colour of a poison arrow frog and waved her arms around. 'Just because my *baby brothers* need a babysitter doesn't mean *I* need one!' she yelled. 'Why can't I go out?'

Then I started laughing, which made Claire angrier than ever. But I wasn't laughing at her, I was laughing at the tomato sauce bottle, which sounds like a fart every time you squeeze it.

I laughed so much I started to choke. Dad slapped me on the back and told me to stop being so ridiculous.

Then Mum walked into the kitchen. 'What's all the yelling about?'

'I never get anything I want!' said Claire.

'That's funny – I thought your father took you clothes-shopping this afternoon.'

'Call that clothes-shopping?' said Claire. 'We spent five minutes looking for

clothes and an hour in the fishing shop!’

‘I don’t get it.’ Dad shook his head. ‘I take my boys shopping: I buy them underpants, shorts and a toy, and they’re happy. I take my daughter shopping: nothing fits and it’s all my fault.’

‘Whatever!’ said Claire.

‘Do not use that tone of voice around here, young lady,’ said Mum. ‘Your father and I are going out and you’re being babysat, end of story. Today is our wedding anniversary. We’re off to a restaurant for dinner, and then we’re going dancing. Isn’t that right, darling?’ She rubbed Dad’s shoulders and kissed his neck.

Yuck!

The best thing about Mum and Dad going out is they always leave food for the babysitter. Claire and I figure that babysitters don’t like junk food, so we eat the good stuff and replace it with muesli bars and fruit.

Our babysitter is called Nadia and she’s really cool, mostly because she always has lots of home-work and lets us do whatever we want.

‘Do you *get* homework at uni?’ I asked.

‘Well, we call it study, but it’s basically the same thing,’ she said. ‘Speaking of which, your mum said you had homework to do as well. Have you done it?’

‘Um, yes,’ I said. I hadn’t done it very well, but who cares?

‘Fine,’ she said. ‘Amuse yourself until bedtime.’

I love being babysat!

Claire was watching a TV show about girls who go to malls and cry when someone else turns up wearing the same clothes, but I didn’t mind. All I wanted to do was to play my drums and read my stats book.

My stats book is the most important book I own, because it records every sports match I’ve ever played. It’s got all my wickets, overs, maidens, runs and catches for cricket. Tries and conversions for rugby. Goals, assists and rebounds for basketball. Sometimes Dad takes a photo of the scoreboard after a good game.

One day when I play for my country the TV reporter will ask if they can display my stats book at Lords or Twickenham. I’ll probably say yes, because by then I’ll be old enough to change my name from Gilligan-Flannigan to Tendulkar or Lomu or Jordan.

I flicked to our game against the Kings. Six wickets. The best I've ever bowled.

Then I saw that we only have one game left in this season, and realised I still need four wickets. Normally that would be as easy as eating a banana sundae with extra nuts, but what if it rains?

What if McGarvy gets to bowl instead of me?

What if McGarvy drops another catch for me?

I need these four wickets. Nothing is going to stop me.

This is the most important thing on the planet, in the galaxy, in the universe. If I don't get the four wickets, the whole GameBox V3 Challenge will be lost forever.

I have to get those wickets *no matter what*.

6th

march

Mum told me if I stop cracking my knuckles for a week I'm allowed takeaway pizza on Saturday night. She says knuckle-cracking is bad for my bones. But I only crack my knuckles when I'm nervous or thinking about something too much.

At the moment that's happening all the time, because if I don't get four wickets from the last game of the season I won't get the GameBox V3.

Mum has also been telling me how much I pong. That's because the CGC is having another com-petition to see who can go the longest with-out showering.

Whoever wins gets the Dirty Trophy.

So far we haven't showered for four days and five nights. The record is eight days. Hughesy won last year, but mostly because his mum never makes him wash. Anyway, Miss Martin-Edge always talks about how we should be saving water because there's not much left. Isn't it better to have one shower a week than a dozen a day like Claire?

Mum went for her usual Saturday-morning walk, so she didn't notice that I didn't have a shower. Dad didn't notice either when we drove to cricket, because his car smells like dead fish anyway.

Having Dad at today's game was awesome and not-so-awesome. Awesome, because if I got the last four wickets he'd see it with his own eyes. And not-so-awesome because you always feel like you need to get a hat trick and a hundred when your mum or dad watch. But that's cool, because I suddenly remembered what Coach said at practice last week. 'Courage first, power second, technique third.'

Sometimes I think Coach and Dad have been listening to the same CDs.

When we got to the ground Hughesy and Jonesy were waiting by the practice nets. I walked over to them while Dad did the same thing he does every time he comes to watch. He set up his deckchair, put sunscreen on his nose, poured himself a cup of tea from his thermos flask and started reading the newspaper.

Jonesy and Hughesy were arguing about the Dirty Trophy.

'You smell *clean!*' Hughesy said to Jonesy.

'It's my dad's deodorant!' said Jonesy.

Hughesy sniffed Jonesy's arm. 'Are you sure?'

'Yes! I swear! I haven't washed!'

Hughesy sniffed again. 'That's *soap!*'

'Okay, okay,' said Jonesy. 'I had to! Mum found out what we were doing and said it was the most disgusting thing she'd ever heard of.'

Hughesy looked so proud. 'It's down to you and me, Toby. And you're gonna choke.'

'Doubt it!' I said. 'The Dirty Trophy is all mine!'

'You guys are crazy,' said Jonesy.

'Whatever, loser,' said Hughesy.

'I might be a loser but at least I don't stink.'

'No one has ever drowned in sweat,' I said.

'You've been listening to Coach too much,' said Jonesy.

There were four bad things about today's game against the Tigers.

1) Their opening batter, who is called the Little Master because he bats just like Sachin Tendulkar. If you can get him out for under a squillion runs it's like winning first prize at the school fair.

2) Their spin bowler, who is called the Ter-minator. He's taller than a giraffe and never bowls a bad ball. One match last season he got all ten wickets.

3) The umpire, Slow Death. We call him that because he takes sooooo long before he gives a player out. He's the worst umpire on earth, including in all the countries that don't even play cricket. Once when I was batting, the bowler appealed for an LBW. Slow Death said nothing for about a minute, so I turned to tie my shoelace. When I was about to face the next ball he put his finger up!

4) The worst thing about this morning was that Coach was even grumpier than normal. It could be because he got out of the wrong side of bed, or it could be because Arsenal played a really late match and lost. Coach likes Arsenal more than anything else in the world. When they win he jumps up and down like Claire when she sees someone from her school at the mall. When they lose he looks like Dad when someone says he's losing his hair.

This morning Coach yelled more than usual and said things I can't put in here in case Max reads it one day. But here's what he said that I *can* write down: 'If you idiots lose against these sissies, there's something wrong with the lot of you!'

'But Coach,' said Jonesy. 'They've got the Terminator and the Little Master. They're way better than us!'

'Yes, they are!' Coach thundered. 'They have more natural ability. Half of them will make the national rep side. But I've taught you lot to be *mentally* tough. What you lack in skill you can make up for in passion and determination. Now get out there and smash them! And if you lose like a bunch of sooky bubbas, I won't want to know you.'

Coach can be mean sometimes, but I think he's amazing because once he started a Mexican wave at a basketball match that did seven loops. I've seen a

Mexican wave that went around four times, but never seven. Coach even had his photo in the newspaper.

Anyway, Scott Honeyford won the toss and told the Tigers they were bowling.

Good!

The Little Master had to wait. While Hughesy and Jonesy padded up I counted our team. We had eleven. And do you know the best news? I couldn't see McGarvy anywhere! At least that goober couldn't drop any of my catches or spit on my shoes in the most important match of my life.

We scored 207! Jonesy and Hughesy got a 100-run opening partnership. They were awe-some. I hit the last ball of our innings for six and everyone high-fived me. Then we sat down and had some Ice-Cold Motion Lotion. That's what we call our juice to make us play better. Everyone was so excited. We were going to beat the Tigers!

'Fifty runs short,' said Coach with a frown on his face.

'I agree,' said a voice behind me.

I didn't need to turn around, because I knew exactly who it was.

McGarvy.

No! Now we had twelve players. Everyone knows you're only allowed eleven, so someone would have to be subbed off. If this was any other match I wouldn't have cared, but this was the cruncher for me.

Four more wickets, remember?

Coach looked at me.

'Take a breather this innings, Toby,' he said.

'Me? Why? I'm in good form! Ask Hughesy and Jonesy!'

The CGC nodded together.

'Don't argue, boy,' said Coach. 'We need pace today, not spin. The Terminator didn't get a single wicket. Besides, the Tigers can play spin better than any other team I've seen. Now get out there! No wides! No extras! Drop a catch and you'll pay for it at practice.'

McGarvy winked at me as he walked onto the field.

Dad was still reading the newspaper, but heard everything Coach said. I sat beside him and kicked my gear bag.

'One door closes and another one opens, Toby,' he said.

'What's *that* supposed to mean?' I asked. 'This is the last game of the season and McDickhead is bowling when I'm supposed to be!'

'Watch your language,' said Dad. 'Keep an open mind. Something will come up.'

'Didn't you hear me?' I yelled. 'This is the last match! This is my last chance! If I don't get four wickets it's all a waste of time!'

'Mark my words,' Dad said, sitting back in his deckchair and pouring another cup of tea, 'something will come up.'

'How can you be so relaxed? This sucks!'

'Have faith, Toby. Positive thinking leads to positive outcomes.'

The Tigers were 111-5 and Coach was wrong. Our fast bowlers didn't get any wickets, but my spinning partner Corey Foley got five. McGarvy was bowling as fast as he could, but the Tigers just blocked him. So McGarvy started getting angry and swore at the batters. When Slow Death was looking the other way, he spat at them. He even showed them his shark tooth pendant, but nothing worked.

The Tigers needed 98 runs to win, but they still had five wickets left. The Little Master was still in. He looked about as comfy as Claire when she gets her school report card. But then the most amazing thing happened. When Corey Foley dived for a catch, the ball hit the ground in front of him and flew straight into his nose.

As he left the field, dripping blood, I looked at Dad. He was thinking what I was thinking.

And that was the same thing that Coach was thinking!

'Toby, get out there!' he yelled. 'Finish Corey's over.'

'Told you something would come up.' Dad put down his newspaper and took off his glasses. 'Now make it count.'

Corey had four balls left in his over. But I didn't need that many, because I got the Little Master with a slider that Coach said was straight from the top drawer! Everyone except McGarvy jumped on top of me. I couldn't breathe, but I didn't care. Getting the Little Master out was the best thing ever!

They had four wickets left and I needed three more. I got two in the next over! We only had two more wickets to get, and the Tigers were short by heaps of runs. We were going to be champions and I was going to get the

wickets I needed!

But then things went bad. Real bad. Normally the Terminator can't even hit the ball, but today he smashed everything. I couldn't believe Coach let McGarvy keep bowling. All I know is McGarvy bowled pies on purpose so that I wouldn't get any more wickets. The Terminator smashed one so far it hit Dad's thermos flask on the full. Lucky the lid was on.

Suddenly the Tigers needed just ten runs off four overs. I looked at Coach. He was waving his arms around like someone drowning.

'Line and length!' he yelled.

'We're trying!' said Hughesy.

'Not hard enough!' said Coach. 'I'm currently watching a team snatching defeat from the jaws of victory!'

'Huh?' said Jonesy.

'You're choking!'

Coach's angry face must have worked because Scott Honeyford got a wicket with his next ball. Everyone cheered.

This was good and bad at the same time. Good because it meant we only had one more wicket to get.

But bad because *I* needed that wicket!

The Terminator was still hanging around like a dog by a rubbish bin. The Tigers needed eight runs off one over with one wicket left. I had the ball, and gave my hat to Slow Death.

'How many more wickets do you need for your stupid little competition?' asked McGarvy.

'Why should I tell you?' I asked.

'Be like that,' said McGarvy. 'Where do you want me to field? Square leg?'

That really made me mad. He was at square leg when the Wall hit him that easy-peasy catch that he dropped.

'If you're going to win the game you'll have to bowl them out, because my hands are feeling *very* slippery again today.' McGarvy walked off.

Sometimes I wish McGarvy was a cricket ball, which would also be the only time I wouldn't care if one of my balls got hit for the world's biggest six.

Coach started yelling from the boundary. 'Fast game's a good game! Get on with it! Set your field, let's get this show on the road!'

Dad wasn't reading his newspaper anymore. He was standing – and Claire was next to him! This was the first time she had ever come to a match! But somehow I don't think she was there to watch my game. Instead, she was watching Hardman Hugh Honeyford, the captain of the first fifteen, who was watching Scott.

I had six balls to get the Terminator out. The Tigers needed eight runs to win. Even I know that's only two fours.

Two shots.

My first ball was a leg spinner. The Terminator swung like crazy but missed it! Five balls left. Eight runs needed.

I tried to bowl a slider next, but it fell out of my hand like a big slippery piece of soap and the Terminator hit it so far he should have been allowed twelve instead of six.

'Wow!' said McGarvy, standing at cover. 'That's a *big* one.'

'Keep your trap shut,' said Hughesy from mid-off.

He came up to me when we got the ball back from the bushes. It was all scuffed. There was no shine left. Suddenly I didn't feel like the best bowler in my team. I felt like a piece of chewing gum on the bottom of McGarvy's shoe. Hughesy punched me on the arm.

'Ow!' I said. 'What was that for?'

'Okay, so the Terminator only needs two more runs. But you only need one wicket! And he can't bat, remember? He's fluked everything so far.' He punched my other arm. 'You can do it!'

I pictured myself being interviewed by the TV reporter at the MCG or Old Trafford, and that must have helped because the Terminator missed my next three balls.

There was one ball left. The Tigers needed two runs. All I needed was one more like the last three and I was halfway to the GameBox V3.

I looked into the Terminator's eyes, then at his feet where I wanted the ball to land. I took a deep breath and ran in. But the ball slipped out of my hand again!

At first I thought I'd given the Terminator what Coach calls a Christmas present, because it's so easy to hit. The Terminator's eyes lit up and he smashed it, but then all it did was go up, up, up!

I looked to see who was under it.

Oh no! McGarvy!

Then out of the corner of my eye I saw Hughesy run to where the ball was going to land. McGarvy pretended not to see the ball, but Hughesy rugby-tackled him and caught it milli-metres from the ground!

The Terminator threw his bat at the wickets and bails went flying. We all cheered. But McGarvy wasn't happy. He got up and punched Hughesy. Then Coach ran onto the pitch and grabbed McGarvy.

I stood there with my mouth open. Hughesy had done it! Coach called us into a huddle.

McGarvy and Hughesy huffed and puffed and stood right away from each other. Coach pointed at them. 'I don't know what was happening out there between you two. But we'll sort that out later.'

'I'll sort *him* out later,' muttered McGarvy.

'Yeah?' said Hughesy. 'Can't catch the ball, how can you catch *me*?'

'Quit it!' said Coach. 'I said, we'll get to that later. In the meantime, congratulations to Toby, who bowled us to victory. And just as well, because I was getting ready to disown the lot of you. Now let's go and get some hot chips!'

'GameBox V3, here we come!' said Jonesy from behind me.

Dad put me in a headlock and squeezed me tight. I looked at Claire.

'What are you doing here?' I asked.

'I thought you might want some support.' Claire twirled her hair, giggled and looked side-ways at Hardman Hugh Honeyford.

'Um . . . thanks,' I said.

As soon as we got home after having hot chips, I went and had the longest shower ever. I was so happy that I smiled like a clown at the thought of McGarvy's face when I got the winning wicket.

But then I remembered something else.

'Oh no!' I yelled.

When I came out of the bathroom Mum was laughing. 'I wondered when you'd realise,' she said. 'You'd better call Sam and tell him he's won the Dirty Trophy. Again.'

'Oh, man!' I said.

'Did you crack your knuckles today?'

'Nope,' I said.

'Good.' She smiled. 'Looks as if we're having pizza tonight.'

One of my two favourite TV shows was about to start. I was so tired. From the couch I saw Dad cross out the wickets column on the fridge with the red marker.

'Halfway there, kid,' he said. 'Bring on the rugby season.'

This was the best day!

Shot!

WICKETS I'VE GOT: 20

WICKETS I NEED: 0

DIRTY TROPHY: Nil

26th

june

Rugby season is here! I'm fullback and my magic move is the up-and-under – I kick the ball really high, sprint down the field and hope the other team drops it. Then I pick it up like a seagull looking for rubbish at the beach and score.

Coach says my up-and-under is the best in the business.

But wait till he sees my new bullet pass!

I like rugby because you get to do things that you can't do in cricket, like go for flying tackles. I never used to be able to tackle the big guys, but now I'm stronger.

I know this because I've been practising on Claire. Last week I got into huge trouble because she flew into Mum's expensive new lampshade that Dad got for their wedding anniversary. Dad said I should practise on Jonesy or Hughesy, not on my sister when she's on the phone minding her own business.

I've got brand-new rugby boots. They're black with orange stripes and so light it feels as if I'm running on a cloud. I just hope I'm faster than lightning, because I need ten tries. My boots dry extra quick, which means I don't have to put newspaper in them after a rainy Saturday. For the first season ever Hughesy is also wearing boots, mostly because Coach told him he'd better put something on his feet if he wants to be an All Black.

Our team is called the Rattlesnakes, and our first game was against the Panthers. Coach says they play filthy rugby, but now I've learnt to tackle I don't have anything to worry about. Apart from a guy everyone calls Supermarket.

He's called Supermarket because he's the size of a supermarket. No one else I know has pockets in their rugby shorts, but Supermarket does. Mostly to put food in. He eats during the game and after the game. At half-time he eats leftover chicken. After the match, he shakes hands in between putting his fist into his bag of salt-and-vinegar chips.

When Supermarket tackles you it's like being hit by a building wearing rugby boots. That's when Coach says things about pain just being weakness leaving your body, which is easy to say if you've never been tackled by Supermarket.

If we win the toss, we normally kick into the wind because that means the wind will be behind us in the second half. It's kind of like eating all your vegetables before your crispy chicken – it's even exciting to eat cabbage when you know there's a crunchy drumstick and chips afterwards. The first half is always hard if you're kicking into the wind, but the second half feels as if Supermarket and his whole family are pushing you to the tryline. The worst thing that can happen is if the wind changes and you have to run into the wind

in both halves. As Coach would say, that's a bad day at the office.

Today we lost the toss and the Panthers wanted to run into the wind. That meant that we had to score lots of points in the first half, because the second half was going to suck.

Hughesy is our hooker. He throws the ball in at line-outs and is the boss of the scrum. Hookers never score tries. If Hughesy was doing the GameBox V3 Challenge he wouldn't get very far. Jonesy is our centre. He's really fast but hates tackling. Any time someone like Supermarket runs towards him, Jonesy throws the ball away as if it's a dead possum.

Coach called a team meeting before kickoff. 'Right,' he said. 'What kind of rugby do the Panthers play?'

'Filthy rugby!' we all said.

'So what do we need to do?'

'Play *really* filthy!' said Hughesy.

'Wash your mouth out,' said Coach, stepping on Hughesy's foot. 'Here's what we need to do to beat those grovelling little losers. Keep the pressure on close to the line. Strip the ball from the mauls. Most importantly, tackle first and tackle hard.'

'What if it's Supermarket?' Jonesy asked, rub-bing his arms.

'What if *what's* Supermarket?'

'Do we have to tackle him as well?'

'Jonesy,' said Coach. 'If you can't handle a punch, stay at home in front of the heater and play ping-pong in your slippers.'

Jonesy looked as though he actually wanted to stay at home in front of the heater and play ping-pong in his slippers.

'Now,' said Coach. 'We're one player short today. McGarvy is sick.'

For the first time ever, I wanted to hug Coach!

It was a new season. I had new boots. And Malcolm McGarvy wasn't playing.

Shot!

The whistle went and Hughesy charged down the field like a bulldozer. We followed him as if our pants were on fire.

The Panthers couldn't keep up, which doesn't make sense because the panthers on *Animal Planet* can run faster than almost anything. But we knew they'd get better. And if they didn't get better they'd get filthy. And I don't

mean so dirty that your parents make you wash your own shorts after a game. I mean illegal things like late tackles, eye-gouging and nose-punching when the ref is checking messages on his phone.

It started to rain and the ball was like a piece of soap, but our forwards somehow got it and passed back to me. I did my famous up-and-under and thought I would catch it no problem, but Supermarket finally stopped eating and ran straight for me.

I jumped up and caught the ball, then threw my new bullet pass to Jonesy, who flicked the ball back to me. Supermarket tried to turn quickly, but he tripped over his shoelace and fell like a fridge. I ran straight past him and scored the first try of the season.

At half-time it was 10–5 to us. That's the good news. The bad news is that then we had to run into the wind *and* Supermarket, who was fullback.

We were all sore, but Coach said that always happens in the first game back. Joe Draper's mum got out the Motion Lotion and oranges. Jonesy said he needed an ice-pack because Supermarket had run over his foot.

'Pain is just weakness leaving your body,' said Coach.

'That still doesn't help my foot,' whispered Jonesy.

'Don't forget these guys are losing, which means only one thing. They're going to start playing what kind of rugby?'

'Filthy rugby!' we yelled.

'That's right,' said Coach. 'Stick to your guns, stick to the rules and stick it to those no-brained no-hopers! Don't forget about the surprise trip for a certain team in our grade at the end of the season!'

'Where to?' I asked.

'You'll find out,' replied Coach. 'Now get out there and smash 'em.'

Coach was right. In the second half the Panthers turned into the Cheaters, and I don't mean Cheetahs! They tripped us up when we didn't have the ball and stripped it away when it was ours. Then Hughesy punched their halfback when he thought the referee wasn't looking. Guess what? The referee *was* looking and Hughesy had to sit next to Coach, who looked like Mum when she's stuck on a crossword.

We got lots of possession, but it was too windy for our passes to go straight. Then out of nowhere Jonesy grabbed a loose ball and made one of his

trademark charges to get over for a try. We were 17–5 ahead with fifteen minutes to go.

It should have been time for chips and fizzy, but then Supermarket turned into *Superman* and scored two tries in two minutes! Everyone started biting their nails.

It was 17–15 to us.

Luckily the Panthers' kicker was as about as good as a blind man with no arms and no legs, and they missed their conversion. The clock was ticking.

All we had to do was hold onto the ball, which someone should have told Supermarket because next time someone passed to him he dropped a really simple catch. Mum would have said he was getting too big for his boots. Supermarket looked down at the ball as if he'd dropped his grandma's favourite dinner plate. He didn't even try to pick it up! I swooped on it like an eagle and ran over for the world's easiest try. And because I wasn't a blind man with no arms and no legs I kicked the conversion right between the posts. And then the ref blew the whistle.

22–15.

Remember the cricket season when it took ages for me to get all those wickets? And McGarvy the goober tried to ruin everything? Well, things have changed!

'Keep going at this rate,' Dad said, 'and you'll have that GameBox V3 in no time.'

'Hope so!' I replied.

'You're in a purple patch,' said Dad.

This was the best start to a rugby season since forever!

TRIES I'VE GOT: 2

TRIES I NEED: 8

SOMEONE I HOPE DOESN'T COME OVER FOR LUNCH: Supermarket

3rd

july

When we arrived at the ground to play the Condors, Jonesy heard their captain say they were going to tear us apart, which was funny because it took thirty seconds to score our first try. Each team only had fourteen players, so we played with seven forwards and seven backs.

And Malcolm McGarvy didn't show up again!

This was like Christmas and my birthday all rolled into one. We started the way we did against the Panthers. Three tries in ten minutes, one for me. I also kicked two conversions. The Condors got a few tries, but mostly because we couldn't be bothered tackling or getting our shorts dirty.

We were never going to lose.

At half-time we were 35-10 ahead and I had two tries! In the second half we scored *six* more tries and won the game 72-20. Our top scorer was Joe Draper, who got 27 points.

Four tries from two games! It could be my new boots or my new bullet pass. Who cares? Our team is on fire. Coach says we're playing top-drawer stuff. Mum says not to get too big for my boots, but what does she know? She's never played rugby in her life. All I know is our team is the best.

No one can beat us. We're awesome!

I hope McGarvy never comes to another game, because when he's not there I play like Sonny Bill Williams. Dad is right. I'll have that GameBox V3 in no time.

Shot!

TRIES I'VE GOT: 4

TRIES I NEED: 6

LIFE-ROCKS RATING: 9.99 out of 10

6th

juiy

I bet most people would save their pet kitten or their parents' wedding photos if their house was on fire. If it was our house, Dad would probably save his fishing rods and Mum would save her dictionary because she can't live without long words. Claire would save something dumb like lip gloss and Max would save Wabby, the toy rabbit he sucks that smells worse than my rugby boots on a Saturday morning.

If it was me, I would save my collection of All Blacks toys, my framed David Beckham team shirt, my ceramic mould of Michael Jordan's shoe, my 2008 Cricket World Cup coin and my complete set of 2010 FIFA World Cup bubblegum cards. If I had time, like if the fire was only in the kitchen, I'd also save my stats book for the TV reporter who's going to need it when I'm interviewed at Lords or Old Trafford. But if the fire was everywhere and I couldn't get to my bedroom I'd save my remote-controlled fart machine, which I now keep under Claire's bed just in case.

I'm only saying all this because in class today Mrs Martin-Edge told us that we had to write two hundred words about what we would save if our house was on fire and why. 'Ha!' I whispered to Jonesy. 'Not my homework book!'

We both laughed, but then remembered Mrs Martin-Edge has hearing like an NRL ref. 'Stop being so smart, Gilligan-Flannigan,' she said. 'Why not try something new? How about you actually *complete* your homework this time?'

'Yes, Miss,' I said.

'And what do you say?' she asked.

'Sorry, Miss,' I said.

'You're mumbling, I can't hear you!'

'I said, sorry, Miss.'

When Mrs Martin-Edge turned around to write a whole lot of French words on the white-board, McGarvy leaned across the aisle.

'Want to know why I wasn't there on Saturday, *loser-boy*?' he whispered. 'My uncle came first in the Strong Man competition. He lifted four car tyres at once. There was a huge party afterwards and I was the only kid there, so I could eat as many hot dogs as I wanted. But I'll be back for this weekend's match.'

I ignored him, because I didn't need any more trouble.

'Looking forward to scoring *lots* of tries this season,' he continued. 'All by *myself*. Maybe I'll pass to someone else so they can score too, but not you. You've already got enough this year.'

I had to say something.

'I know what you're doing, McGarvy,' I hissed. 'You're trying to make me angry so I get into trouble. But it's not going to work, so why don't you just sit there by yourself and think about all your friends? Oh, that's right, you haven't got any!'

Mrs Martin-Edge turned and headed towards us like a truck coming down the main road. The floor bounced and the windows rattled. All the eyes in the class were glued to her. I covered my face and got ready for I-don't-know-what.

'*Who said that?* '

I turned and pointed at McGarvy. He started it, after all!

'Don't be so stupid! It was *directed* at Malcolm. So who said it?'

McGarvy pointed at me.

'Toby Gilligan-Flannigan! First you *disrupt* the class. Now you *lie* in class. See

me afterwards.' Mrs Martin-Edge clomped back to the board.

My brain tried really hard to tell me not to turn and hit McGarvy as hard as I could, but my gut told me the best thing to do was to turn and hit him as hard as I could. So I did. He fell like Coach's big bag of rugby balls.

This time everyone *e/se* laughed and for three seconds I felt like a hero from a movie. The baddie had been knocked out! He'd fallen off his chair and was lying on the floor looking like a scared baby bird. And I did it!

That's the good news. The bad news is that in the movies there's never a teacher like Mrs Martin-Edge. She turned and headed towards us like a Mack truck on the freeway.

McGarvy started crying and clutching his leg.

The classroom was silent except for McGarvy's sniffing. Hughesy and Jonesy were looking at me as if I'd just dropped the ball on the tryline.

I didn't feel like a hero anymore.

What if McGarvy had to go to hospital?

What if his uncle drove his digger through my bedroom while I was sleeping?

What would Mum and Dad say?

'I'm sorry, Miss,' I said desperately. 'I really am . . . but he laughed at me. And he spat on my cricket bag! And he dropped the easiest catch when the Wall was batting! And now he's not going to pass the ball to me so I can't get tries, and if I can't get tries I'll never get the new GameBox V3!'

'*Quiet!*' yelled Mrs Martin-Edge. 'It's all *déjà vu* with you, isn't it, Toby Gilligan-Flannigan? Do you know what that means?'

'No, Miss.'

'You would if you'd been listening earlier instead of acting the fool.' Mrs Martin-Edge pointed at the strange words on the whiteboard. Then she pointed at Jana Hendriks, who is smarter than all the teachers in our school put together. She's even smarter than Claire. If their brains were fruit, Jana's would be a watermelon and Claire's would be an orange. 'Jana, would you care to tell Toby what *déjà vu* means?'

I was hoping Jana would say, 'Who cares! Let's go outside and play basketball. Toby is a hero and Malcolm McGarvy should be in jail!' But instead Jana cleared her throat and said, '*Déjà vu* means we've seen it before, or it's already happened.'

'Correct!' said Mrs Martin-Edge. '*We've already seen it.* Toby disrupting the class and not doing his homework are perfect examples of *déjà vu.*'

'But McGarvy started it! Honest!'

'Whether or not Malcolm started it is beside the point. You never – and I repeat *never* – hit anyone in my class.'

'What about in someone else's class?'

I knew I shouldn't have said it, but it just came out. Mrs Martin-Edge's head turned into an erupting volcano. Her ears were as red as molten lava. Her nostrils went in and out like a bull's.

'You're about to get a whole lot more familiar with the term *déjà vu*, Toby,' she said. 'Because something *that has already happened is about to happen again.*'

'No,' I said, because I knew what she was going to say.

'Yes. No basketball game for *you* this after-noon.'

'But . . . we're playing the Wasps! I have to play!'

'*Déjà vu.*'

McGarvy was smiling like a crocodile. When Mrs Martin-Edge turned to him he screwed up his face and cried as if he had a tap in his head. Whenever she looked away he smiled again.

I felt my head getting hotter. I didn't feel sorry anymore. I wanted to hit McGarvy harder.

'Malcolm, go to the sick bay with this pass for Ms Stefanovski,' said Mrs Martin-Edge. 'Toby, get the bin and collect all the rubbish on the playground. I want it spotless by lunchtime.'

'*What? '*

'You heard.' Mrs Martin-Edge turned and walked to her desk. McGarvy moaned and limped like an old granddad all the way to the door.

Hughesy patted me on the back as I got up. 'That sucks,' he said.

'Yeah,' whispered Jonesy. 'The CGC will wait for you at HQ.'

Outside, I swore in my head as loud as I could and punched the wall. I punched it so hard I thought my hand was broken. But I didn't care. Who needs a dumb hand when you're not allowed to play against the dumb Wasps? Why was Mrs Martin-Edge so dumb? How come McGarvy could do anything he wanted and not get into trouble?

I looked back at our classroom. The blinds were down because it was sunny. At least no one could see me picking up rubbish. That would be the worst thing in the history of the universe.

I got angrier and angrier. Why did I even *need* school, anyway? All the famous sports stars I know never did homework. They never got told off. And Mrs Martin-Edge might know the capitals of all the countries in the world but she's never had to tackle Supermarket.

Or kicked a conversion when the wind was in her face.

Or scored five three-pointers in the dark.

She knows nothing!

And her breath smells like cat food!

Anyway, all that dumb thinking was useless because I still had a dumb rubbish bin in my hand and had to pick up rubbish on the dumbest day of the year.

After a whole hour the schoolyard was as clean as a new pair of rugby boots still in the box. I was hot and sweaty. All I wanted was to go home, watch cartoons on TV and eat chips with sauce.

But when I started walking back to class I found McGarvy hiding behind the hedge near the teachers' car park where you go when you don't want teachers to know where you are.

'What do *you* want?' he asked when he saw me.

'What do *you* want, more like?' I said.

'Pwoah!' he said when he saw my bin. 'You smell like a dog's butt!'

'At least I'm not a real dog's butt!'

McGarvy spat by my feet and kept playing a game on his phone.

'That was a dirty trick you played in class,' I said.

'Boo-hoo,' McGarvy replied.

'Anyway, I thought you were supposed to be in the sick bay. You don't look very sick to me.'

'Oh, *that*?' he said. 'Didn't even hurt. I'm a *real* man. Might even have a go against the Wasps later. You playing? Oh, that's right, you're not *allowed* !'

This time he was going to get it! I dropped the bin. Rubbish went everywhere. My face got hotter and I started breathing fast. But just as I got ready to turn Malcolm McGarvy into the biggest pile of mashed potatoes, I

heard a voice from the classroom steps.

'Gilligan-Flannigan! Will you get a move on? How long does it take to pick up a bit of rubbish?'

It was Mrs Martin-Edge. I looked at McGarvy.

'I know what you're thinking,' he said. 'You're going to tell *Fartin-Edge* that I'm out here when I'm supposed to be in the sick bay.'

He was reading my mind! That's exactly what I was going to do, because if I told Mrs Martin-Edge that McGarvy was playing games on his phone instead of being sick in the sick bay *he'd* have to pick up rubbish tomorrow.

'If you tell her I'm here,' he said, hiding deeper in the bush, 'your life will not be worth living.'

'Okay, I'll tell your uncle, then.'

'My uncle won't care! He got expelled from four schools when he was a kid. He'll just laugh. I told him about the time I tied your shoelaces together and he thought it was hilarious! But if *you* get into trouble you've got a *whole lot to lose*.'

'Like what?' I asked.

'Like your stupid little challenge with your dad.'

I still wanted to punch him, but if I did I would be in even more trouble. Was the rugby season going to go bad? Was McGarvy going to ruin everything?

'Toby!' Mrs Martin-Edge yelled. 'Get on with it!'

'Coming, Miss!' I said. 'Just found some more rubbish.' I put all the stinky banana peels and iceblock sticks back in the bin and headed back to the classroom.

McGarvy called after me, 'I'll think of you when I'm top scorer against the Wasps.'

Mrs Martin-Edge made me stay behind after school. I had to watch my team play the Wasps from the classroom. McGarvy scored *five* easy hoops. I got madder and madder. They should have been *my* hoops.

By the time Mrs Martin-Edge called me over with her crooked finger, I was boiling like the whistling kettle in our kitchen.

'Right,' she said. 'Get your bag. So, have you learnt your lesson?'

'Yes, but I didn't start anything. McGarvy was the one who—'

'Stop the excuses, Toby!' she yelled. 'Pull up your socks or you will *fail*. You

will end up with no life, no job, no house, no career and no friends. You will be a *big fat failure* with a capital F! What's the matter? Are you crying?'

'I've . . . got something in my eye,' I said.

I walked out of the classroom. I was angry with a capital A. I needed the CGC, but their game was still going. I couldn't stay and watch McGarvy score any more hoops, so I walked towards the school gates. To get there I had to walk past the teacher's car park.

The blue sports car with mags belongs to my favourite teacher Mr Doon. Mr Morris, the art teacher, has a big Kombi van with bright flowers and palm trees painted on it. Mrs Martin-Edge owns a really old car that she tries to make look new. It's got no mags, no electric windows and there's a dumb plastic dog with a jiggly head by the back window. It's the same disgusting colour as the blob of hot green stuff Dad puts on his sushi. There's a big sticker on the bumper bar that says 'World's Coolest Teacher'.

Ha! What a joke!

When I saw Mrs Martin-Edge's car I got angry all over again. So I made sure no one was looking, took the fat black Posca pen Hughesy lent me yesterday and wrote 'Smelliest' in big letters over the top of 'Coolest'.

Then I picked up the sharpest rock I could find, and I scratched an unsmiley face on the flap where you put the petrol in.

After that I ran home.

8th

juiy

I felt bad all night and all morning about Mrs Martin-Edge's car. I could see it from the class-room window. I tried to look the other way, or think about a Michael Jordan move, but I couldn't help looking at the unsmiley face on the petrol flap. It seemed to get bigger and bigger. Mrs Martin-Edge looked extra grumpy, but I didn't know if it was normal grumpy or Toby-is-in-a-world-of-trouble-grumpy.

The other weird thing was that I couldn't see McGarvy anywhere.

But then the weirdest thing happened. It was lunchtime and I was shooting hoops with Ravi Patel when the CGC came over. Jonesy looked as if he had just seen an alien.

'Did you hear about McGarvy?' he asked. 'What he did to Martin-Edge's Volvo?'

'No,' I said, feeling sick. 'What?'

'He scratched a frowny face on it with his shark tooth!' said Hughesy.

'You're kidding,' I said in my best surprised voice. 'When?'

'Yesterday,' said Jonesy. 'It was when McGarvy was supposed to be in sick bay – after he fell off his chair.'

'Fell off?' said Hughesy. 'More like Toby *smashed* him off!'

'Yeah,' said Jonesy. 'What a shot that was!'

'But I don't get it,' I said. 'I mean, how do they know it was McGarvy?'

'Because Mr Morris saw him standing near Martin-Edge's car during class and Ms Stefanoski said he never went to the sick bay!'

'But he might have just been standing around,' I said. 'How do they know for sure?'

'Hello!' Jonesy knocked on my head as if it was a door. 'Because there's a frowny face scratched into the car and McGarvy is the only one in school with a shark-tooth pendant!'

'Hilarious, eh?' said Hughesy. 'That muppet is going to get what he deserves. Acting like a cry-baby in class and getting you in trouble. You know what they call this? *Karma!*'

'Karma?' asked Jonesy. 'What's that?'

'Kind of like if you do good things, good things will happen to you. If you do bad things, like McGarvy, look out!'

'Karma,' said Jonesy. 'I like that. This was Mrs Martin-Edge's *car-ma!*'

'So what's happened to McGarvy now?' I asked.

'He's been suspended!'

A light bulb went off in my head at exactly the same time as a chill went down my spine. 'Is that why he wasn't in class this morning?'

'Boom!' said Hughesy. 'You got it!'

'But if he did that *yesterday*, how come he was allowed to play against the Wasps after school last night?'

'Because Martin-Edge only noticed it this morning! What's your problem, Toby, you should be happy! McGarvy is on *suspension*. For *three days*.'

'Yeah,' I lied. 'I *am* happy. It's . . . really good news.'

'Shot!' said Jonesy.

He and Hughesy laughed but I wanted to be sick.

10th

juiy

I wasn't going to say anything about today's game because it stunk like a skunk, but then I remembered what Michael Jordan said. 'I've failed over and over again in my life which is why I succeed.' That's cool and everything, but Michael Jordan never had to worry about Mrs Martin-Edge's scratched car or

Goober Boy.

Speaking of McGarvy, before we started the match Joe Draper asked where he was, so Hughesy told him and they laughed like hyenas who had sucked too many helium balloons. Hearing this made me drop the ball every time I saw it. Jonesy called me Butter Fingers. Coach said I couldn't catch a cold.

Then, it was raining so hard and I thought I had scored a try, but when I wiped the water from my eyes I realised I was lying on the 22.

Fail.

Grandma is in hospital. Her legs are really bad. She can't even walk around her shop.

Dad and I went to visit her after the game. She was in a big white room with no doors, just curtains, and a lot of people with white coats and super-serious faces. The whole room smelt like the stuff Mum cleans the bath with.

'Here they are!' said Grandma. 'Good timing! I need ice-cream.'

'No way!' said Dad, putting fresh flowers in a vase by her side. 'You've got to stick to a strict diet now more than ever.'

'Poppycock!' said Grandma. 'Rules are made to be broken.'

'This is your *health* we're talking about,' said Dad.

'Be like that.' Grandma winked at me. 'Toby'll get me a double scoop with choc topping when you're not looking.'

Dad gave me a look that said *If you get Grandma a double scoop with choc topping you're dead meat.*

'Dad's right,' I said to Grandma. But then I winked at her and she knew what that meant.

A nurse came in and did horrible things to Grandma. She stuck a needle into her. It made Grandma cry. She looked away because she didn't want us to see.

I wish real life was more like sport.

In sport, even if you miss a kick everything is okay in the end. You sometimes even get injured, but then you play the next Saturday and win and Coach buys everyone hot chips. In real life people like Granddad die and it doesn't matter how many runs I score or how many tries I get, he won't be coming back.

What if Grandma has to live in the hospital? What if she never gets to watch old movies in her shop again? Or what if she dies like Granddad did? No one will even notice because she's not famous like David Beckham. They won't do a minute's silence before the next international football game, because Dad and I will be the only ones in the crowd who knew who she was. And what about all the things she'll miss out on? Like, when I *do* play for my country she won't be here to see it!

I wanted to say all of this stuff to Grandma, but I didn't because it might worry her too much.

When Dad went to the hospital shop I told her I scratched Mrs Martin-Edge's car. Then I told her about McGarvy getting the blame.

Grandma put on a super-serious face. 'I think you should own up to Mrs Martin-Edge.'

'What? Grandma, she's the fiercest teacher ever. I can't!'

'But Toby, you can't expect someone else to pay for your mistake! That's almost the same as lying, and you don't want to go down *that* path again.'

Grandma took a deep breath. 'If I were you—'

But just as she was about to tell me what she would do, Dad came back with apples and bananas and magazines.

'Rabbit food!' said Grandma. 'Where's the ice-cream with chocolate topping?'

While Dad and Grandma whispered in long hospital words, I wondered what McGarvy would do if he found out it was me who got him into trouble.

On the way home in the car I cracked my knuckles. When Dad asked me what was wrong I said I was worried about Grandma, which was true, but I was really thinking more about Mrs Martin-Edge and about McGarvy and all the horrible things they might do to me.

TRIES I'VE GOT: 4

TRIES I NEED: 6

SOMEONE I HOPE MCGARVY MARRIES AND HAS TO KISS: Mrs
Martin-Edge

12th

juiy

After school today Jonesy and Hughesy went straight to Stefan Mildew's birthday, but I wasn't invited because it's flipperball people only. Jonesy said it was going to be really boring, but I know he was just trying to make me feel better, because I saw the invitation. Everyone was going to drink buckets of fizzy and go ten-pin bowling, then paintballing, then watch a movie with the lights off at Stefan's house.

I felt so sad that I kicked a soda can halfway home. The only good thing was that Jonesy had lent me his MP3 player. Jonesy's parents don't know how to use a computer, so he can download stuff like X-Rate and Slagg Dogg and Filthgrinder that even Claire isn't allowed to listen to!

You know when people say life couldn't get any worse, but then sometimes it does? That's exactly what happened to me, because just when I was thinking how I'd really like Malcolm McGarvy to vanish back to his old school, or to have never come to ours at all, I felt a huge whack on the back of my head. I fell over and hit the concrete.

Jonesy's MP3 player broke into three pieces. Blood was coming out of my hand. My head felt as though someone had dropped a piano on it. But before I could get up to see what happened I was whacked again.

I saw blurry stars like in those cartoons on TV.

Then I wiped my face and felt tears.

I know how to fight, but right now I couldn't even see who was hitting me.

Whoever it was punched me in the stomach. I swung a fist really hard and hit something. Whoever it was didn't hit me back for a few seconds so it must have hurt. Then the stars went away and I saw who it was.

McGarvy!

Before I had a chance to defend myself, he kneed me in the stomach. Let me tell you, if Supermarket had a big brother who had eaten a pig for lunch and then tackled me, that's exactly how it would feel.

I couldn't breathe.

McGarvy punched me again, then kneed me in the face. He grabbed me around the neck and threw me on the ground. We got up and held hands, but we weren't dancing – we were trying to pull each other down!

He tried to punch me again, but I ducked. His knuckles zoomed past my ear. Then he did hit me and I had thunder and lightning and everything frightening in my head.

I fell back and McGarvy jumped on top of me.

'Why are you doing this?' I asked.

'Don't play dumb,' he said. '*You* did it and *I* got suspended.'

'I don't know what you're talking ab—'

'It didn't take *Sherlock* to work it out, *loser-boy*.'

Something happened in my head. It was as if someone swept away all the times tables and all the compound words, and all I heard was: *beat him*.

McGarvy tried to hold me down but I rolled away and managed to stand up. It was hard because he's heaps bigger than me. His arms are like my dad's. But McGarvy isn't as fast as me, so I jumped on top of him. He flipped me over, then when I tried to stand up he grabbed me from behind and put his foot in front of mine. I tripped over.

Luckily I remembered a hockey fight I saw between a Chicago Black Hawk and a Detroit Red Wing. I pulled McGarvy's shirt over his head so he couldn't see. Then I hit him hard.

All of a sudden there was a crowd. People were recording the fight on their phones.

'Smash him, Toby!'

'Let him have it!'

'Bring it!'

I sat on top of McGarvy. We were both puffing and no one had the half-time oranges or Motion Lotion. I had him trapped. He couldn't move.

'I'm sorry,' he said. 'I'm sorry!'

'Are you going to stop?'

'Yes!'

'You promise?' I asked.

'I promise,' he said.

I stood up slowly and walked back to get my bag. That's when he rugby-tackled me from behind and spreadeagled me. I rolled over, jumped up and whacked him. My fist was sore, but I wasn't going to let him know that.

The next time I walloped McGarvy, the leather cord on his shark tooth snapped and it fell into the gutter. As he bent down to pick it up, Mr Doon's blue sports car stopped right next to us.

'Break it up!' He pulled McGarvy and me apart, then stood between us.

'Boys! What's going on?'

'He started it!' I said.

'Whatever!' said McGarvy. 'I was just walking home and Toby attacked me.'

'Walking home from where?' I asked. 'You're *suspended!*'

Everyone laughed.

'Is that true, Malcolm?' Mr Doon asked.

No one lies to Mr Doon, mostly because he can shoot threes from anywhere. McGarvy didn't say anything. He had a cut lip and a ripped shirt. He looked like one of those football players who trips a player without the ball but doesn't know the ref is watching.

Everyone put their phones away. My hand was still bleeding. Jordi Flynn was putting Jonesy's MP3 player back together.

'Lift your game, guys,' Mr Doon said. 'Go *straight* home and I won't mention a word of this to anyone. But if you start it up again you'll enter a world of pain. Do I make myself clear?'

'Yes, Mr Doon,' McGarvy and I said.

He punched both of us lightly on the shoulder. 'Save your energy for the basketball court, okay?'

When he got back into his car I could hear Slagg Dogg playing on his radio. Mr Doon is as cool as a fridge on top of an iceberg.

Everyone had left. It was just McGarvy and me. We hadn't moved any closer. I stared at him and he stared at me.

McGarvy sighed, just like Dad does when there are no fish on his rod. I started walking and he followed me.

'Just going the same way,' he mumbled. 'I'm not walking with you because we're friends or anything.'

I watched McGarvy hobble. One of his eyes was red and puffy from where I punched him.

I'd given McGarvy a black eye!

My hand felt broken. I wiped my bleeding nose. 'Are you sore?' I asked.

'Nah!' he said.

'Me neither.'

We passed the fire station and the hospital and the transport museum and Oakley Park. What was I going to tell Mum if she asked about my nose?

'Why did you drop all those catches when we played the Daredevils?' I asked. 'Why did you do all those *horrible* things?'

McGarvy stopped and stared at me.

'Because it's so *easy* with you,' he replied. 'Any-way, you can handle it, you've got that cool dad.'

'Cool? My dad? You sure you've got the right person? Your dad was awesome, saving your life and everything.'

'Huh?'

'The shark attack,' I pointed to the broken necklace in his hand. 'I don't know anyone else whose dad saved them from a shark! That's like, whoah.'

McGarvy started walking again. He looked at the ground and mumbled something.

'What?' I asked.

'I *said*, there's something you don't know.'

'About what?' I asked.

'About the shark attack.'

'What about it?'

'It's not true.'

'What's not true? That's a shark tooth! I know, because I watch *Animal Planet*.'

'What I mean is,' said McGarvy, 'that *story* isn't true.'

I stopped walking, but McGarvy didn't.

'Your dad *didn't* save you?' I yelled.

He turned around. 'No.'

I ran to catch up with him. 'So who did? Your uncle?'

'No one saved me, because there never *was* a shark attack.'

'So . . . how did you get the huge scar on your neck?'

'I fell out of my cot when I was a baby. I was trying to climb out and fell right through a glass table.'

'For real?'

'Uh-huh.'

'So where did you get the shark tooth?'

'My uncle gave it to me for Christmas when I was seven.'

I thought about all the times McGarvy had *almost* made me cry. All those times I was scared of him because his dad had *killed a shark*. I cracked up, laughing like a kookaburra.

At first McGarvy looked at me suspiciously and I thought he was going to punch me. But then he couldn't help himself. He snorted like a pig. Then he farted, which made him laugh even more, and I couldn't help laughing too. We laughed until we had tears in our eyes, all the way to Grandma's shop.

'Why are we stopping here?' McGarvy asked.

'It's my grandma's shop,' I said. 'Do you want to come in? She's got some wicked stuff. It's all really old!'

McGarvy shrugged. 'Mm, okay.'

I knew Grandma would be in her shop because they let her out of hospital last night. That's the good news. The bad news is she has to use a wheel-chair. When I opened the front door the bell rang. I heard Grandma humming.

'Toby, what is going on?' she asked when she saw us. 'Are you hurt?'

'I'm okay, Grandma,' I said. 'I just came here to get cleaned up.'

'And who's this?' she said, pointing at McGarvy.

McGarvy's lip was bleeding and his eye was cut. His shirt was ripped from when I pulled it over his head. He looked like a WWE wrestler.

'It's Malcolm – you know, the boy I told you about?'

Grandma scowled. 'So *you're* the one who's been giving my favourite boy a

hard time!

'Please, Grandma,' I said. 'It's okay now.'

'Well, I'll have none of that nonsense in my shop. Tidy yourselves up and I'll get some hot chocolate with marshmallows.'

Mum always keeps spare clothes at Grandma's shop in case I have sports practice after school and smell like a football changing room. I lent McGarvy my Chicago Bulls shirt and I wore my All Blacks one. Grandma brought out the hot chocolates. Four marshmallows in each one.

'Yum!' I said, scoffing them. 'My favourite.'

'There are plenty more,' said Grandma. 'I'm sick of them. Won four boxes last week.' She wheeled herself to the front door. 'Look after the shop, will you, boys? It's been one of those days. I need red jubes.'

'What if I tell Dad?' I asked.

'I'll tell him that you gave that poor boy a black eye!' she said.

McGarvy was busy eating marshmallows and finding new old things in Grandma's shop. Like the monkey on wheels and the red telephone box. And the rocking horse all the way from Russia and the cuckoo clock with a bluebird that comes out.

'Are you sore?' I asked again.

McGarvy sighed. 'Yep, my head hurts.'

'Same,' I said. 'Hey, check this out!' I showed him the naked-girl pinball machine. It seemed to stop his head from hurting. He even smiled a bit.

'Hey,' he said after playing pinball for a minute. 'Remember that day when everyone dropped those catches off your bowling?'

'Yes!' I said.

'I paid the team in chocolate.'

'What do you mean?'

'It's called a bribe,' he said. 'I gave everyone chocolates and they dropped catches.'

'You did that?' I asked.

'Yep, and it worked.' McGarvy laughed. 'Well, *you* were tricked.'

'I just thought everyone was having a really bad day! What about Jonesy and Hughesy? And Scott Honeyford?'

'I didn't tell them. They would have just told you.'

The silver ball rolled down the chute and the pinball machine started. McGarvy was good, but he was never going to beat my high score of 356.

'And remember when you almost didn't turn up to cricket because you thought the game was cancelled?' McGarvy asked.

'Yeah,' I said. 'Because Dad said so on the radio.'

'Yours truly.'

'What do you mean, *yours truly*?'

'That was me. I called your mum and pretended I was Coach's son. She called your dad and he said it on the radio!'

'No way!'

'Yes way.'

'Why are you telling me all this?'

'Because . . . I don't know.'

'I'm sorry you got suspended,' I said.

'I don't care!' he said. 'Get no homework if you're suspended.'

Then McGarvy got a triple cherry score on the naked-girl pinball machine. The lights went crazy and the silver ball bounced around like a cat being chased by a dog. There were buzzes and bangs and crazy noises I'd never heard before.

My highest score was 356.

McGarvy got over 500 on his first go!

'Shot!' he said, taking a gulp of hot chocolate.

'Hey,' I said. 'I say that all the time!'

'I know. But now I say it too.'

I tried not to smile, but I did.

'Hey,' I said. 'Can you teach me some of your tricks?'

'As long as you promise not to tell anyone how to do them.'

'I promise.'

'All right then,' said McGarvy. 'Bring a banana to school tomorrow. I'll show you how to turn it into a penguin.'

'Awesome!'

Grandma came back with a ginormous bag of red jubes. McGarvy and I were sitting by the locked cabinet no one is allowed to touch, not even me. He couldn't stop staring at the gold five-pointed star with the red-and-blue ribbon.

'It's worth *lots* of money,' I said. 'It's from the war.'

Then I thought Grandma must have lost her brains completely because she opened the cabinet for the first time ever and took out the medal! 'Here,' she said, passing the medal to McGarvy. 'It's a gift to make up for my grandson giving you a black eye.'

'Grandma!' I said. 'It's . . . that's . . . you can't do that!'

'Of course I can,' she said. 'What's the point of keeping these things in a shop? People should get to enjoy them.'

McGarvy went the colour of a Manchester United uniform and Grandma looked like she'd just scored a three-pointer in extra time. 'What do you think of that, *McGroovy*?' she asked.

'It's *McGarvy*, Grandma!' I said.

'Oh, poppycock,' said Grandma. 'McGroovy sounds much better.'

He held the medal in both hands, close to his shirt pocket. 'It's the best present I've ever got,' he said.

'Look after it, or else,' said Grandma.

'I will,' said McGroovy.

13th

juiy

Dad always says, 'Be a man, Toby.' So at lunchtime, when the class was outside, I stayed in. I cracked my knuckles until they hurt and then I told Mrs Martin--Edge that I was the one who scratched her car.

'You!' she said. 'I should have known!'

Suddenly I thought of all the fun McGroovy said he'd had while he was on suspension. No homework. No spelling. No compound words!

'So . . . am I suspended?' I asked.

'Yes – but not from school. You'd enjoy that too much, wouldn't you, Gilligan-Flannigan?'

'What am I suspended from?'

'The rugby team.'

'Please, Miss, anything but that!' I was just sorted with McGroovy, and now Miss was going to ruin the GameBox V3 Challenge all on her own!

'You should have thought about that before you damaged my car – and much worse, let someone else take the blame for it. Speaking of which, do your parents know about this little incident?'

'No, Miss,' I said.

'Well, they will. Now get out of my sight,' she said. 'I've got things to do, not least of is which finding someone to fix Gertrude.'

Gertrude's what she calls her dumb go-cart that couldn't even beat Max in a race.

I picked up my bag and walked to the door. I wanted to tell Mrs Martin Edge what I really thought. That's what a man would do. But I didn't feel like a man, I felt like a dog that had just pooped on the lounge-room floor.

But there was one more thing I needed to know, even if Mrs Martin-Edge screamed at me again. 'Um . . . Miss?' I asked.

'What?'

'How many games am I suspended for?'

'I've a good mind to ban you for the rest of the season. But I will keep it to four – *and* you are to clean my car after school every day for a week.'

'Four!' I screamed. 'That's so unfair!' I slammed the classroom door behind me and said to myself, 'I'll clean Gherkin, all right – with a toilet brush.'

McGroovy was sitting under a tree playing a game on his phone.

'Why did you tell Fartin-Edge?' he said. 'She would never have found out.'

'Yeah,' I said. 'But Grandma said I should tell the truth. And anyway, if I lie I always have nightmares, like this one time when I dreamt I was wearing Claire's red miniskirt at the FA Cup Final.'

McGroovy laughed. 'Who's Claire?'

'My sister.'

'Yuck,' he said.

'Tell me about it,' I said. 'She's annoying. Like you used to be.'

He laughed again.

Whoah! That's something I could never have said to McGarvy before he was McGroovy. Then I remembered the banana in my bag.

'You said you'd turn this into a penguin, remember?'

McGroovy took the banana and told me to turn around. After a moment he said, 'Okay, you can look now.'

He had peeled the skin to make it look like two wings and a head.

'Magic!' I said. 'It *is* a penguin!'

'Told ya,' said McGroovy.

We looked out to the field. Jonesy and Hughesy were walking towards us.

'What do *you* want?' Hughesy asked McGroovy.

'Yeah, McGarvy,' said Jonesy, hiding behind Hughesy. 'Why don't you leave Toby alone and sit with someone else?'

I stood up. 'It's okay,' I told the CGC. 'Every-thing's . . . cool. We're friends now. He got the high score on Grandma's pinball.'

'Huh?' said Jonesy. 'For real? Even better than you?'

'Yep,' I said. 'Five hundred points.'

'Probably beginner's level,' snorted Hughesy.

'Oh yeah,' agreed Jonesy. 'Anyone can get five hundred on beginner's!'

'*Pro* level,' I said.

Hughesy and Jonesy were quiet like mice.

'Probably did it with multi-ball, which doesn't count,' Hughesy said after a minute. 'And I bet he tilted the table. That's not allowed either.'

'Nope,' I said. 'He got five hundred, fair and square.'

Hughesy and Jonesy stared at each other, then at McGarvy as if he were a superhero.

'Shot!' said Hughesy.

'Boom!' said Jonesy.

'And anyway,' I said. 'He's not McGarvy any-more. We went to Grandma's shop yesterday and she gave him a nickname. Now he's *McGroovy!*'

The CGC laughed. Then McGroovy did too, but only a bit.

'Could he join the CGC?' Jonesy asked.

'He's got to spit on the leaf first! It's the rule!' said Hughesy.

'Do you want to be in the CGC?' I asked McGroovy.

He nodded.

Hughesy pulled a leaf from the tree we were sitting under.

'Welcome to the CGC,' I said. 'The coolest club in the world.'

Jonesy took the leaf, spat on it and passed it to McGroovy.

Now we have four members. That's the good news.

The bad news is that I have to wash Gertrude every day for a week and I'm suspended from rugby for *four whole games*.

19th

juiy

I don't understand why Gherkin needs to be cleaned every day after school. She's not even dirty. But I can't skip doing it because Fartin-Edge watches from her desk the whole time.

Luckily tomorrow is the last day. No more car-cleaning. Three more games and then I can play rugby again.

But there's big trouble in Little China, as Grandma would say.

Remember that team trip Coach mentioned a while back?

Well, the deal is that if the Rattlesnakes beat the Bonecrushers they'll be going to Fiji!

But I won't be in the team because I'll have been out too long and won't have played enough matches!

That sucks, big time!

24th

july

I tried to write a list of things that are worse than being suspended from rugby, but all I could think of was having a nuclear bomb under your bed, or sitting on a toilet with a black mamba in it who decides to eat your butt for breakfast.

But at least you could do something about those. Like getting your dad to call the bomb disposal squadron so that they can neutralise the bomb without destroying your Batman bed-spread. And putting a dead mouse in the toilet to distract the snake while you finish your business – which you had better hope would work, because who'd want to go to school without a butt?

Anyway, so being suspended is still worse than both those things – especially when it means your team will probably get to go to Fiji without you.

28th

jUly

Why doesn't Dad just go out and buy the Game-Box V3 and give it to Joe Draper? Hughesy told me Joe scored four tries for the Rattlesnakes, and even converted them. Coach bought him extra chips after the game!

Now I know exactly how Ricky Ponting felt when the selectors were trying to boot him out.

1st

AUgUst

Do you want to know the absolute worst news I've had all week? The Rattlesnakes beat the Bonecrushers 78-9! Everyone's going on the team rugby trip to Fiji! On a plane! Overseas!

Everyone except for me. There's no way Coach'll include me after I've been out half the season. This is the worst, awfulest, smelliest, dumbest, evillest, baddest, suckiest day of my life.

EVER.

EVER EVER.

TIMES ONE MILLION.

Just when I thought things couldn't get any worse, the CGC came over and showed me their new passport photos. No one's allowed to smile on their passport because the computer at the airport has to recognise your face. And no one smiles all the time, not even David Beckham with all his flash cars. Jonesy's photo looked as grumpy as I felt.

I tried to be happy for them, but it should have been *me and my best mates* on that trip, winning the last tries I needed for the Game-Box V3 Challenge.

Hughesy said not to worry, they'd bring back presents from Fiji, but it didn't help. They couldn't stop smiling and I probably looked like someone smelling a shoe with dog poo on it.

7th

AUGUST

I hate rugby now. And cricket. And basketball. And football. Maybe I'm growing up. Have you noticed that adults never *play* sport? They're way too busy doing way more important things.

13th

AUGUST

Guess what? I'm not suspended anymore!

I feel sorry for anyone who gets in my way tomorrow, because I'm hungry for tries. Starving for tries, actually, because I need heaps of them. Now I feel as if I'm under pressure, like Ricky Ponting when he forgot to retire.

The CGC are *relying* on me.

'So when do you get the GameBox V3?' McGroovy asked me at lunchtime. 'I'm gonna waste you guys at Beast Battle!'

'Hey!' I said. 'I might not even *get* the GameBox V3. I've got all the wickets I need, but I've only got four tries.'

'Dude, that's easy!' said Hughesy.

'Yeah, but I've been out for four whole games, re-m-ember? I need six more tries and there's only one game left before you all go to Fiji.'

Hughesy and Jonesy went quiet.

McGroovy slapped me hard on the arm. 'I've got an idea how you can get the other tries!'

'How?' I asked, rubbing where he hit me.

'What are your best moves again?' he asked.

'The up-and-under and the bullet pass,' I said. 'Everyone knows that.'

'Exackery,' said McGroovy. 'I'm the steamroller, so I smash players all over the place and have the best through-the-leg-flick in the business.'

'I think I know where he's going with this,' said Hughesy.

'Put it all together and we're like a rugby superhero who eats other players for breakfast!' said McGroovy. 'If we team up we'll be better than anyone. I'll just pass the ball to *you* so *you* can score. At least you'll have a chance of making those six tries. Then ... Beast Battle!'

Suddenly it all clicked. 'No one would be able to stop us,' I said. 'We'll score

loads of tries!’

‘And get the GameBox V3!’ put in Jonesy.

‘We’re a *team*,’ I said.

‘Of superheroes!’ finished Hughesy.

‘Boom!’ said McGroovy, giving me a high-five before I remembered that’s a bad idea if you want to keep your hand. ‘I’d hate to be on the other team!’

14th

AUGUST

If the GameBox V3 Challenge was on TV, the commentators would have said that today was my last roll of the dice. Grandma would call it Last Chance Saloon.

I call it Super Suckville.

I know the CGC were trying to make me feel good when they got out their old costumes and dressed up as superheroes before today’s match against the Wizards, but everything fell as flat as a pancake.

Mostly because I played like *Super Zero*.

At first I laughed when I saw Jonesy dressed as Spiderman and Hughesy dressed as Batman. McGroovy was wearing his normal rugby gear.

‘Where’s *your* outfit?’ I asked.

‘I don’t need tights and a cape to be awesome,’ he replied.

‘Yeah, well, just be careful you don’t get caught in my *web*!’ said Jonesy.

‘Ha! You’re a *joker*!’ said Hughesy. ‘Get it? Joker? *Batman!*’

‘Yeah, we get it,’ said McGroovy. ‘Now let’s get Toby these tries so we can

smash him at Beast Battle!’

Anyway, I should have known the game was going to suck, because we started ten minutes late. Both coaches were as red as a stop sign.

The hold-up was because of the superheroes. Jonesy needed two people to help pull his pants off because they were too tight, and Hughesy got his Batman mask stuck because it was made for tiny kids. In the end Coach had to cut it off with scissors from his first-aid kit.

So that was bad, but what’s worse is that I dropped balls, missed passes and tackles, and even missed a penalty right in front of the sticks.

If I had superpowers, I’d make myself invisible.

16th

AUGUST

The CGC came over after school today and we had a game of BYB. McGroovy and I were on the same team and we were on fire! But that’s not all.

There’s something else that’s so exciting I feel like my brain is about to explode out of my head.

When we finished our game, Mum asked the CGC to stay for dinner and ordered pizza. When we sat down, Dad told me Coach had called.

‘Apparently Scott Honeyford broke his leg falling out of a tree this afternoon,’ said Dad. ‘Coach is missing a fullback for that rugby team he’s taking to Fiji.’

I stood up so fast my pizza and fizzy flew everywhere. I looked at the CGC, then at Mum, then at Dad.

Dad sighed. ‘Coach says that for the sake of your bullet pass, he’s prepared

to overlook last Saturday's disappointing performance and the matter of Mrs Martin-Edge's car. And so are your mother and I. As long as—'

'Can I go?' I yelled. 'Can I?'

Dad looked at Mum, shrugged, then smiled. 'Better ask the team if they want you.'

But I didn't need to ask, because Hughesy high-fived me and his fizzy spilled into Jonesy's lap. Then Max started laughing. Then McGroovy slapped me on the back and I fell on the floor. Max laughed even harder. Then I got up and hugged Dad.

'I'm going to Fiji?' I yelled. 'Let's pack!'

Can you believe it? Fiji!

And Dad says the GameBox V3 Challenge is back on!

Shot!

19th

AUGUST

It's only one sleep before we go to Fiji, and this morning, out of nowhere, Dad said it was okay to double-bounce on the trampoline again. This is great news if you want to make your sister go into infinity, but bad news if she does it to you.

When I fell back to earth from infinity, I caught my big toe on the edge of the tramp. *Really hard*. It felt as though a concrete elephant wearing boots made of brick had stomped on it.

I tried to scream but nothing came out. I didn't want Claire to see me cry,

but couldn't help it.

Then something really surprising happened. Instead of laughing like a big fat kookaburra, Claire turned into one of those nurses with the nice smiles you see in old movies and helped me inside to my bedroom.

At first I thought it would be cool to go to the doctor with a sports injury, because that's what Michael Jordan and Shane Watson do, but then I thought about what might happen if the doctor said I couldn't play any sport!

We're leaving for Fiji tomorrow!

And my toe is killing me!

But how can I tell Coach and the team I can't go to Fiji because I got double-bounced off a trampoline by a girl?

I told Claire not to tell Mum and Dad. She seemed relieved about that and promised not to. But I made her lend me her phone so I could call an emergency meeting of the CGC.

When they arrived I limped to my bedroom door and shut it so Mum and Dad wouldn't hear. I took my sock off. The CGC crowded around me.

'It's way bigger than your other big toe,' said McGroovy.

'Does it hurt when you walk on it?' said Jonesy.

'Of course it does!' I said. 'I forgot about it for a moment, but when I stood up I thought I was going to be the first person to die by flying into the ceiling like a human rocket.'

'But you have to come to Fiji!' said Hughesy.

'Coach will never know!' said Jonesy. 'We'll cover for you.'

McGroovy shook his head.

'It'll be okay,' I said to him. 'If you set up the tries and I'll just run behind you. Then pass to me at the last minute. It's only two games. I *need* these six tries.'

'Ha!' said McGroovy. 'Six tries with a broken toe!'

'It's not broken!' I said. 'It's just *sore*.'

'My cousin did exactly the same thing to his toe,' said Jonesy. 'And he was told he had a ninety-six per cent chance of being better in two days!'

After the CGC meeting I almost got busted. I had no idea Mum and Claire were

in the kitchen, so I hobbled in like Dale Steyn after he bowls forty overs in a day. Mum looked at me with a worried face.

Then Claire did the most amazing thing. For the first time since forever, she stuck up for me!

'Have you got a stone in your sock again, Toby?' she asked.

'Huh?' I said, confused.

'You're hobbling like an old granddad.' Claire winked at me.

Then it clicked.

'Um, yeah!' I said. 'Must be a stone. In my sock.'

'Well, if you washed your socks more than once a year like most civilised human beings it wouldn't be a problem!' said Claire. 'Would it?'

I poked my tongue out at her and Mum didn't suspect a thing.

Tonight I watched an ESPN program about Michael Jordan. He's just like me because he hates being injured. He said, 'My body could stand the crutches, but my mind couldn't stand the sideline,' which I think is his way of saying sisters and trampolines ruin everything.

20th

AugUst

When the airport doors opened in Nadi it was like standing next to the oven when Dad gets our dinner out. Hughesy was happy because lots of other people in Fiji weren't wearing shoes. But he was still wearing his beanie.

'I don't know how you can wear that thing!' said McGroovy, trying to take it off when Hughesy wasn't looking. 'It's, like, forty degrees here!'

'It helps me think,' said Hughesy.

'It hasn't helped you yet!' said McGroovy.

I was probably the only person in Fiji wearing socks and shoes, mainly because my toe still looks like a squashed plum.

Ravi Patel asked me why I wasn't wearing thongs like everyone else and I said I was still getting used to my new rugby boots, ready for the game when we'll have to wear rugby boots, even in Fiji.

Even though my toe was throbbing, I couldn't help being excited.

We were in Fiji!

A few hours ago I was at home, where Mum would now be picking up Claire from fencing and Dad would be feeding Max and watching sport. It was probably raining back there.

But not in Fiji!

Our bus driver was called Moses. His teeth were whiter than my new cricket pads, and he had a huge scar that went from his elbow to his hand.

'Look, McGroovy!' I said. 'Shark bite, just like yours.'

'Very funny, Gilligan-Flannigan!' he replied.

'Maybe he fell out of *his* cot as well,' said Hughesy.

Hughesy got a punch for that, but he didn't notice because we were in Fiji!

Moses closed the bus doors and started singing songs no one knew. We drove through villages on bumpy dirt roads. Every house had a straw roof and banana trees in the front yard. Imagine having a banana milkshake whenever you wanted!

We saw four Fijian friends walking home from school kicking a can.

'The Fijian CGC!' said Hughesy.

There was a school bus with no windows. And a Mobil service station, just like at home. And a little kid Max's age on the back of a motorbike with no helmet! Further along, an old man in a skirt pulled in a huge fish from the blue sea.

'Whoah,' I said. 'Dad would love it here.'

This was the first time any of us had stayed in a hotel without our mums and dads. Normally on holiday you have to keep your room tidy and put your dirty socks away. But all the mums and dads were back at home!

We looked in every cupboard, and McGroovy poured us all a Coke with lots of

ice. Then we sat back like one of those sports teams on tour and watched Fijian TV. There were only two channels but we didn't care.

I took a ginormous sip of fizzy and looked at my winning team. We had Jonesy the best centre ever, Hughesy the best hooker ever, and King of the Wing, McGroovy. And my toe was ninety-six per cent certain to get better overnight so that I could be the Flying Fullback. Life was as sweet as a banana lolly factory.

Then – *wham!* – Jonesy whacked me across the head with a pillow. 'PILLOW FIGHT!'

Hughesy sconded Jonesy, and I walloped McGroovy with two pillows at once. When I turned around to get Hughesy, McGroovy was standing there with a huge jug of water.

'WATER FIGHT!'

At home Dad would have yelled, 'Right, my boy,' and I would have been in a whole heap of trouble.

But not in Fiji!

Wait till everyone back home found out we drank fizzy till we burped and smashed each other in the Combined Pillow and Water Fight Championships. They'd be so jealous.

But Mum always says it will end in tears. She was right this time.

Jonesy trod on my foot.

Imagine if T-Rexes weren't extinct and one jumped from a diving board as high as a double-decker bus right onto your toe. I almost blacked out from the pain.

The CGC looked at me, then at each other. No one was laughing.

'Okay,' said Jonesy. 'I think maybe there's only a seventy per cent chance you'll be okay by the time the first game starts.'

I carefully undid all the laces on my shoe and peeled it off.

My toe looked like a big purple balloon ready to pop.

McGroovy turned away when he saw it.

'We'll smash them!' I said. 'Remember our plan?'

'Toby,' said McGroovy. 'Our plan will only work if we're both on fire. Like at home. Coach said Fijians are *really* good.'

'Please?' I said. 'Think of Beast Battle.'

Morning, 21st

AUGUST

Today we've got two games against two Fijian teams. One in the morning and one in the after-noon. Coach said Fijians don't play in the middle of the day because it's too hot. He also said they would be used to being hot, but we would need lots of Motion Lotion. As if we didn't know that!

When I woke up this morning, my toe was bigger and purpler than ever.

Before we left our hotel room, I taped up my toe with lots of the bandaids Jonesy's mum had packed for him. It was hard to get my shoe on.

We jumped in the bus and Moses drove us to a village. My toe was crying like a baby, but I didn't tell anyone.

As we jumped out of the bus it started to rain. I couldn't believe that. On the postcards it never rains in Fiji! It wasn't just spitting, either. It was raining cats and dogs and Fijian turtles.

And what about this? The Fijian boys didn't even have a ball!

They were playing rugby with an *empty plastic Coke bottle*.

'Coke bottles instead of balls? We're gonna waste them!' said McGroovy.

'Complacency will get you nowhere,' said Coach from behind us.

'Comp-what?' said Hughesy.

'Complacency,' said Coach. 'If they can score tries with plastic bottles, think

what they'll be able to do with a ball.'

'Yeah,' said McGroovy. 'Nothing!'

'We're gonna leave them in our dust!' said Jonesy.

'You boys have a lot of growing up to do,' said Coach. 'Many kids here don't have the luxuries you take for granted.'

'But who doesn't own a rugby ball?' said McGroovy. 'I've got four.'

We stood at the halfway line and faced the first Fijian team. They were so big they made McGroovy look like a stick insect. It made me feel slightly better that they smiled at us.

'*Bula!*' they said.

'Um, *bula,*' I said, which Mum had told me was Fijian for 'hello'.

'You ready for game?' said the biggest Fijian boy.

'Yep,' said McGroovy. 'But be careful, we're stronger and faster than any of you guys.'

'No, we're not!' whispered Jonesy. 'Especially not since Toby—'

McGroovy hissed and punched Jonesy.

'Shh!' he said. 'Look right into their eyes. 'Don't let them know we're scared. Make out we're tough as tough.'

Hughesy and Jonesy and I gulped.

We stared at the Fijians and they stared at us for a long time. They all had hairs under their arms. One of them even had a moustache. Their captain was bigger than Dad. And none of them had shoes on.

'Are . . . we tough?' Jonesy whispered.

McGroovy didn't bother to answer.

The captain put his hand on my shoulder. It felt like a rock.

'Did you bring a ball?' he smiled. 'Ours is flat.'

Luckily Hughesy had one under his arm from the bus.

We kicked off.

The Fijians were like cheetahs. Quick like fire.

And we sucked. Our team were like fat, blind hippos who dropped the slippery ball every time.

Coach was right.

How come we needed Motion Lotion but the Fijians weren't even sweating?

They scored nine tries and we scored two. The good news is that I got both

of them, but by that stage we'd already lost the game.

No one even tried to tackle me. The Fijians just wanted to lie under a coconut tree and talk about how much we sucked.

So did Coach.

'I know you've never played here before, boys,' he said. 'But that was diabolical. Maybe we should practise with a plastic Coke bottle next time.'

'They're so fast!' said Hughesy.

'So shut down their open style of play. Get the ball to McGarvy or Toby.'
Coach looked at me. 'You weren't yourself out there, Toby' he said. 'What's going on?'

'Just hot, Coach,' I said, trying not to listen to my purple toe screaming like Max when he drops his lollipop in the sandpit.

It hurt so much I couldn't even think.

Nighttime, 21st

AUGUST

Moses sang all the way to the second village, but everyone else on the bus was quiet. We were embarrassed.

The rain got really heavy. Coconut trees swayed like crazy. It was a storm! Our next ground was like a gigantic bowl of chocolate sauce.

This time Fiji kicked off. There was water and mud everywhere. Everyone was soaked.

Then a dog ran onto the field and stole our ball. Everyone except me chased the dog. Even the referee!

The dog was smiling when the Fijian cap-tain tackled him, but the rugby ball

was as flat as a pancake with teeth marks all over it.

Luckily Coach had his big bag of rugby balls in the bus. But when he went to get them, Moses was gone.

'Where did the driver go?' Coach asked some kids who were watching.

'Fishing!' they said. 'He said he will be back when you finish your game.'

The rain got heavier and now we didn't even have a ball. Then the Fijian captain ran to a hut by the field and came back with a big plastic Coke bottle.

'Game on!' he said. 'Let's go!'

The Fijians ran off with the bottle and we watched them score the first try. They were pros!

'This is ridiculous!' growled Coach. 'We didn't come all this way to throw a plastic bottle around!'

All I can say is, Coach must have forgotten everything he said earlier about taking things for granted. Like balls.

At half-time Fiji were 15 points in front. We had hardly touched the bottle. Coach sat in the rain with his head in his hands.

'It's impossible to throw or catch that thing!' he said. 'Toby, your bullet pass is wasted here.'

'I reckon we need to surprise them somehow,' I said. 'Invent a new pass.' And we did.

All I can say is, I wish the second half was on TV, because we played like world champions.

We passed and flicked and threw the plastic bottle as if we'd been doing it forever. There was mud in our ears and eyes and nostrils.

Everyone was laughing so much I forgot all about my sore toe.

Even Coach was laughing.

'When in Fiji do as the Fijians do!' he yelled.

The thing was, I couldn't do my famous up--and-under because you can't kick a plastic bottle very far, especially not when your toe is purple. But that didn't stop the CGC, because McGroovy and I had developed a secret move called the Bula Bottle.

This is how it went. McGroovy ran up the wing to Fiji's tryline, and when they tried to tackle him he flicked the ball through his legs to me.

And that's how I scored three tries!

It was 15–all with two minutes to go.

I needed *one more try* to win the GameBox V3.

Hughesy got the bottle from a ruck and passed back to Jonesy. I was already running when I caught it. The first Fijian who tried to tackle me slipped over, then I saw Jonesy by my right shoulder. I passed to him just as the Fijian captain crashed me over. When I got up McGroovy had the bottle. Four Fijian players tackled him, but they ended up lying in the dirt like pigs on a farm!

There were two defenders to beat. I ran straight up the middle. I heard cheering and the *slosh slosh* of my feet. I thought about Mum and Dad and Max and even Claire. The Fijian number 13 missed me. Only the fullback to get past. Easy! I'd done it a gazillion times. Run towards him, pretend to go one way, but then go the other.

And that's what I did.

The Fijian fullback huffed and puffed. He had so much mud on him he looked like he had wrestled an alligator. I could see only his teeth and eyes. But he was slow.

I had him!

The tryline was just there!

But the Fijian must have watched the same games on TV as me, because he knew my move.

I went right and he went right.

Then he stood on my purple toe!

I fell over like an antelope on *Animal Planet* about to be swallowed by a lion. My toe hurt so much I couldn't stand up. I just curled in a ball and clutched my foot.

I could hear McGroovy from a long way away. But I couldn't see him. I wiped the sludge from my eyes.

There he was, right next to the tryline with the bottle.

'Toby!' he yelled. 'Come on, I've got you covered!'

He could have scored, but he was waiting for me. The fullback and all the rest of the Fijian team were running back to get him.

All I can say is, my nine other toes must have *really* wanted that GameBox V3, because they pushed me up and, like magic, started to get me down the field.

McGroovy waited as long as he could. Just as the Fijians whacked him, he looped the bottle to me.

I caught it.

And then I scored my tenth try.

When Jonesy high-fived me he stood on my toe, but I hardly noticed!

After the match the sun came out and we swam in the ocean until all the mud was gone. Then the Fijians showed us how to climb coconut trees. Coach was so happy he bought everyone a bottle of Coke.

'We should save these.' Jonesy held up his bottle. 'We might need them if someone else wants a game!'

'Good work, boys,' said Coach, putting sun-screen on his nose and ears. 'That's what you call *adapting to the conditions*.' I'm pretty sure he stared straight at my aching foot. '*Thinking on your feet*.'

Then I had a really bad thought. What if Coach thought this wasn't a *real* game because we didn't play with a *real* ball?

'So, do our tries still count as tries?' I asked.

'I mean, *real* tries?'

'Well, Toby,' said Coach. 'Were we playing rugby?'

'Yes.'

'There's your answer.'

TRIES I'VE GOT WITH A RUGBY BALL: 6

TRIES I'VE GOT WITH A PLASTIC COKE BOTTLE: 4

TOTAL TRIES I'VE GOT: 10!

GAMEBOX V3s I'M GOING TO GET: 1!

28th

August

We've been home from Fiji for almost a week. My toe still hurts but it's getting better. It's been so cold since we got back that Hughesy has been wearing shoes. The CGC has been practising with an empty Coke bottle every lunchtime.

But the most awesome thing about the whole week is that today was the day Dad had promised to buy the GameBox V3.

I tried not to get excited when I heard the car pull into the driveway, but I couldn't help it. I stood at the door like a dog waiting to go for a walk.

'Well, Tobes,' said Dad, reaching into the back of the car and taking out a bag with a box inside it. 'You've had a few ups and downs, but on the whole your mum and I are very proud. You've achieved some great things, which just proves what I've always said. The harder you work, the . . . '

' . . . luckier you get!' I said. 'I know, Dad! Can I just have it?'

'Have what?' he asked.

'The GameBox V3!' I said. 'Come on!'

'Before I do, shut your eyes.'

What was he *doing*? I heard something big and heavy scrape across the kitchen floor.

'Okay,' said Dad. 'Turn around.'

He and Mum were standing in front of some-thing the size of my school desk and covered with brown wrapping paper.

'I stopped by Grandma's shop,' said Dad. 'She wants you to have this.'

I unwrapped the mystery present. It was the pinball machine with the naked girls on it! There was even an envelope with coins so I never had to pay. I smiled as wide as the moon!

So did Dad. 'Thought you might like it,' he said.

'But . . . Grandma said she was never going to sell this!'

'She's not,' said Mum. 'She's giving it to you.'

This is going to sound like the craziest thing in the history of the universe, but that present from Grandma was even cooler than the new GameBox V3.

Maybe one day the GameBox V3 will run out of batteries, or break like Claire's old phone, but the pinball machine with the naked girls on it has been working ever since Grandma was at school. And Grandma won't be here forever, but I'll always have the pinball machine. And I'll never sell it. Even if I play for Manchester United or the All Blacks or the Chicago Bulls, I'll always keep it.

Maybe we can use it on the team bus.

There was a knock at the front door, but I hardly heard it because my eyes were glued to the pinball machine and Dad's yellow plastic bag. It wasn't easy looking at both at once.

'That'll be for you,' said Dad.

'Huh?' I said. 'Dad, let me open the game!'

'Get the door, Toby,' said Mum.

I opened the door. It was Hughesy, Jonesy and McGroovy.

Hughesy passed me my schoolbag. 'Goober,' he said. 'You left this in class.'

'What? That's impossible. I had it just before.'

'You better check it's yours, then,' said Jonesy.

There was the Chicago Bulls badge Mum had sewn on. 'Of course it's mine!'

'Have a look,' said Hughesy. 'You never know.'

'It's my bag!' I said. 'Who else has that badge on their bag?'

'Just *check*,' said McGroovy.

Something was up. The CGC looked as if they'd done something really bad but didn't want anyone to know.

'If this is a dead bird,' I said, unzipping my bag, 'or a fish head from Dad's chillybin, I'm going to . . . '

And then I saw them. Four GameBox V3 games!

A basketball game!

A football game!

A cricket game!

And Beast Battle!

'Where did you get these?' I asked.

'We all chipped in,' said a voice.

It was Claire! That's when I nearly fainted like one of those people on *Fear Factor* when they have to eat a scorpion.

'Well, don't go getting a big head,' she said. 'And don't turn into a lard butt playing video games all day. And never when I want to watch *Mall Girls*.'

I opened the yellow plastic bag and held the GameBox V3 up to my chest.

'You look pretty happy,' said Dad.

I couldn't think of anything to say.

'But that's not the best news, eh, McGroovy?' said Hughesy.

'Oh yeah!' said McGroovy. 'How could we forget? Mrs Martin-Edge is coming over for pizza!'

I punched McGroovy as hard as I could. Then I punched Jonesy. Then I double-punched Hughesy. 'She'd better not be!' I said. 'She'll ruin the whole day! She'll never let me play the new GameBox V3 and she definitely won't like the nude ladies on the pinball machine!'

'Just joking,' said McGroovy. 'But we got you real good!'

'Shot!' said Jonesy.

'Boom!' said another voice from behind Dad.

It was Grandma, with Max and Clark Gable. She winked at me. 'Still proud of you, Toby,' she said.

So that was my year of cricket and rugby. Awesome, right? Which is why I wrote it all down in this logbook, which is not a diary because diaries smell like strawberry bubblegum. Maybe whoever finds this logbook in a hundred years will wonder who Toby Gilligan-Flannigan was, but they'll never find out, because by then I will have become rich and famous and will have changed my name to something cool. Something that isn't double-barrelled.

So what about just Toby? I mean, if you were a really famous sports

star people should know you even by half your name.

Like Pelé.

Or Jonah.

Or Beckham.

Or Jordan.

But maybe not. So what if whoever finds this logbook discovers it was written by a guy who played for Manchester United and the All Blacks and the Chicago Bulls and the Australian cricket team and his name was Toby Gilligan-Flannigan?

Boom!

about THE AUTHOR

Justin Brown is an author, and TV and radio host. He wrote his first book when he was seven (complete with ISBN and recommended retail price) but waited a few more decades to publish his next book. He has since written twenty-five books, including several popular stories for children. When he's not writing, Justin hangs out with his family, plays the ukulele, watches and plays sport, and perfects his one and only party trick: making penguins out of bananas.

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