

ME



OLI

(LITTLE BROTHER)



MAM

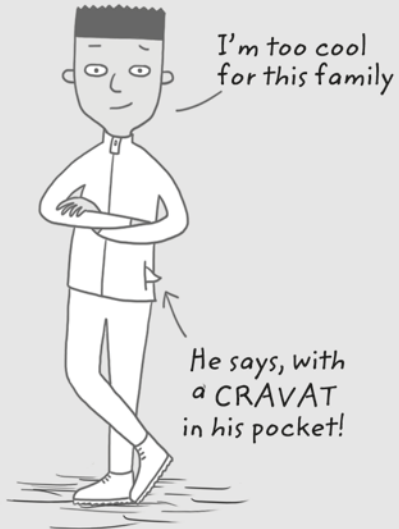


DAD



JACK

(BIG BROTHER)



AGUNG

(GRANDAD)



FUZZFACE



DEV

(BIZZIE FRIEND)

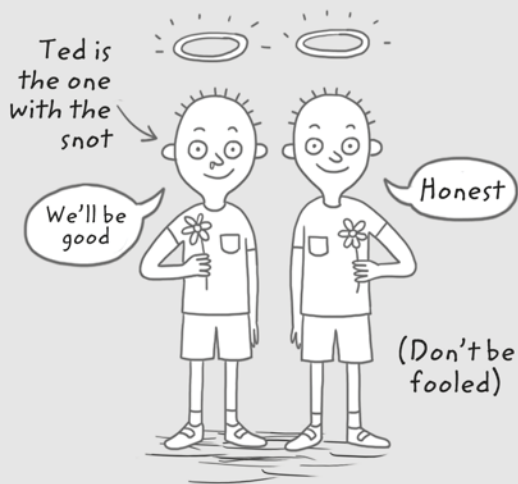


HULK

Oli's scabby guinea pig

A cartoon guinea pig is shown. It has a neutral expression. A speech bubble above it says "Oli's scabby guinea pig".

## EVIL TWINS



## MR PIKE

Gerroutofit you  
manky moggy



## HEENA

(DEV'S LITTLE SISTER)

TOOTY-  
TOOOOOT-  
TOOTY-  
TOOOOONO  
OOT!!!



Marginally  
less annoying  
than Oli

## GRAHAM

(DEV'S DOG)

WHOO-WHOO-  
WHOOOOOOOOOOO!!!

Marginally less  
annoying than  
Fuzzface



## GED SPONGER



## THE CHANS

The best cooks in Plunkthorpe

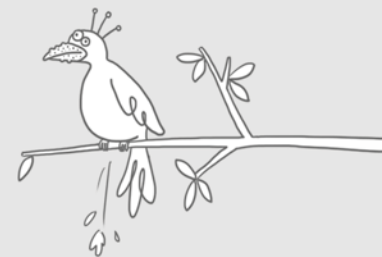


## KAYLA DIGBY

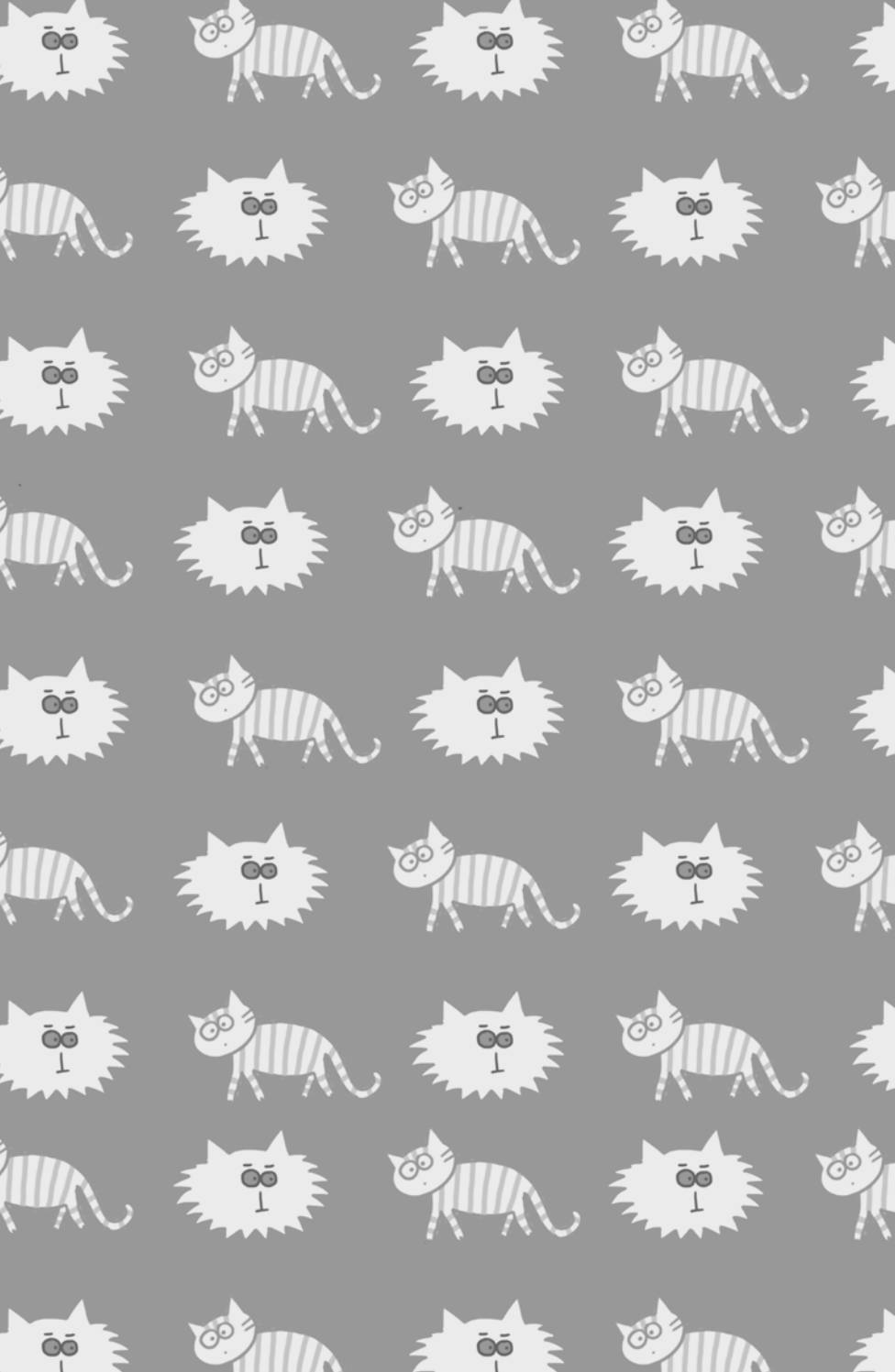


No way is  
Jack going  
out with an  
intellectual!

## FLAMING LYCHEEBILL



The most exciting  
thing to happen to  
Agung since instant  
cup noodles



*Saturday*

**UGH.**

Weekends are officially ruined.

Mam was only meant to childmind the Tatlocks' twins during the week, but now they are coming on Saturdays too! Yesterday while I was at school, they sneaked into my room and painted a **stegosaurus** on the wall with ketchup. Then they wiped their dirty hands



all over my favourite Kermit T-shirt. How can three-and-a-half year olds be so evil? Dad thought I was overreacting when I asked for a lock on my door. Just wait until they smear goo all over his pristine magnolia walls, we'll see who is crying then!

I planned a trip to the shop with Dev so I didn't have to be in when Ted and Tod (AKA **EVIL TWINS**) arrived. Dev is my best mate. We're both eleven but bonded at infant school after discovering our shared love of armpit farts. We were about to leave the house when Mr Tatlock came walking down the path with **EVIL TWINS**. He gave Mam a bag of toys, said thanks and left.

When me and Dev went to leave, Mam said, 'And where do you think you're going?!'



I said, 'To buy snacks.'

'No, you're not,' she said, 'the pipe's just burst under the sink and water's going everywhere, so you're looking after the twins while I fix it.'

**WHAAAT?!**

But I wasn't qualified to be in charge of these . . . mini thugs! I've seen them smash ladybirds in with a hammer. Imagine what they could do to me. Dev said he didn't mind helping. He thinks the twins are 'entertaining'. He *would*. He goes to drama club where everybody loves a scene. I was about to argue back, but Mam was giving me that glare that can crack concrete a mile off,



so I thought better of it. (She goes boxing at the gym and is hard as nails).

We took the twins into the back garden where Tod immediately picked up a plant pot and smashed it on the ground to smithereens.

## BRILLIANT.

I grabbed them both and shoved them on their tricycles while we swept up the mess. The next thing we heard was Mr Pike shouting next door. We turned round and Ted was trying to chuck our cat over his fence. Mr Pike is a **GRUMPY CODGER** with a 'face like a chewed toffee' (Dad's words, not mine). He hates **FUZZFACE** and has threatened to take the law into his own hands if she ever uses his alpine rockery as a litter tray again.



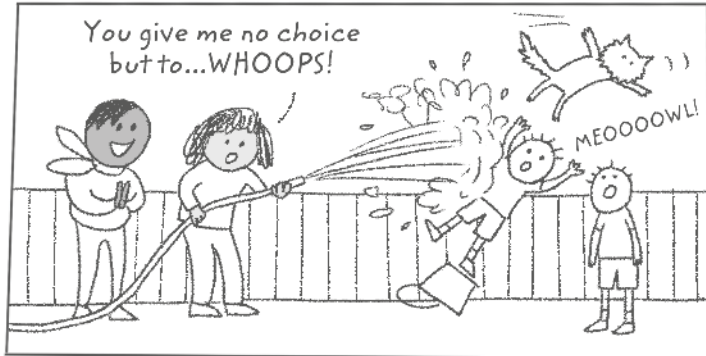
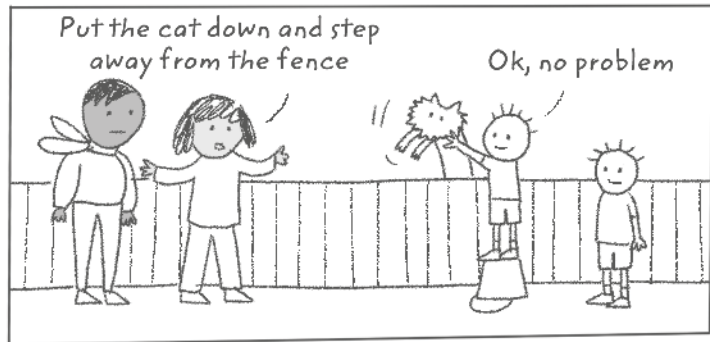
(WHY MR PIKE THINKS  
FUZZFACE IS VERMIN)



I didn't want any trouble so I grabbed the hose and aimed it at Ted. 'Put the cat down and step away from the fence!' I told him, in my most authoritative voice. He didn't respond so I signalled to Dev to turn on the tap. It was only meant to be a light spray but the water came blasting out and knocked Ted off the bucket he was standing on. **FUZZFACE YOWLED** and pounced on Tod, who also fell over.



## How to control naughty toddlers



Then all three got up and ran into the house covered in mud.

**'QUICK, DEV, STOP THEM!'** I yelled, but it was too late.



Mam marched out, pointing at the house, **'HAVE YOU SEEN THE MESS IN THERE?!'**

Mr Pike looked pleased that we were in trouble. I turned the tap off sheepishly. Agung, my grandad, wandered out to see what was going on. He was dunking a coaster into a cup of tea thinking it was a biscuit. He is as blind as a bat without his glasses on.

Dev rubbed off some specks that had landed on his tie-dye leggings and tried to be helpful by saying to Mam, 'I've heard Sparklez Liquid's oxi formula is proven to remove a hundred per cent of stains.'

'Yeah, well get on with it then!' said Mam. 'This house needs a proper clean and you're





all doing it now!’ She pointed at me and said, ‘There’s still dried ketchup on your bedroom wall for a start.’ Which I thought was unfair considering it was the twins that did it.

‘**And Jack can clean his petri dish of a room too!**’ she shouted up at his bedroom window.

The window opened and my big brother Jack shouted down at me aggressively. ‘**You owe me for this!**’

He is fourteen and trying to grow a moustache. He was probably mad at me because he’d planned to go to town to impress some girl with the three wispy chin hairs and monobrow he has managed so far.



Dev shuffled out of the side gate and sang out, ‘**See ya, wouldn’t want to be ya!**’

So much for being a loyal friend.

While Mam cleaned up **EVIL TWINS** I had to clean the living room. It seemed like a relatively easy job until I saw the billion cat paw prints on every single surface. My arm was aching by the time I got to the cabinet. I am not cut out for manual labour. I am only four foot six. The cabinet is full of trophies and prizes. Oli, my little brother, has the most. One for swimming, one for football and one for hacky sack, whatever that is. I noticed he didn’t have one for **Biggest Blabbermouth** though. He is excellent at that. Jack has two framed school certificates, Mam has a boxing medal and Agung has a



**Best Exotic Vegetable** rosette. Dad doesn't have a prize, he's got a silver tankard with a miniature schnauzer on that he hand-etched himself. He is dead creative.



It was then that I suddenly realised. All my family are good at something, **except me!** I tried to think if I had any talents. I did knit a scarf once. It never got finished so I gave it to Dad for Christmas as a bookmark.

I tried roller skating too, but could only go in one direction.

Unfortunately that direction was straight into a gigantic bramble bush. It took Mam a whole day to tweeze the thorns out of my shins.

I was trying to think of more things, when Dad appeared with the Hoover. 'I didn't realise the carpet was this colour underneath all this dirt,' he commented, surprised. He is not used to tidying. He is normally riffling through people's





skips in his spare time and bringing back rubbish so he can make useful things out of them.

I went upstairs out of his way and scuttled past Jack's open door.

**'Oi, Nut, come here!'** he shouted.

**UGH.** I crept into his room.

'Yes?' I said.

'I was meant to be meeting mates in town. Now look at me!'

He was holding a pink feather duster, so I couldn't look at him (without laughing in his face). Nut, by the way, sounds like an



affectionate term, but it's not. He calls me that because I once got a roasted peanut wedged up my nose when I was five. I nearly got taken to hospital but Dad threw pepper in my face and I sneezed it out. Jack thought it was so gross he has never let me forget about it since.

**'You're not getting away with this,'** he said.

'OK, I get the message,' I answered, holding my hands up.

I still wondered what I was good at so I asked Jack what he thought and he said, 'Shoving peanuts up your nose.'

**GREAT.**



Nobody had warned me that spring cleaning required effort! I had disinfected the skirting boards, removed cobwebs and even hoovered the curtains. I didn't go as far as sorting my socks into matching pairs though, **I will never be that dull!** While tidying, I found a miniature plastic trophy under the bed which had been forgotten about. I'd won it in a game of

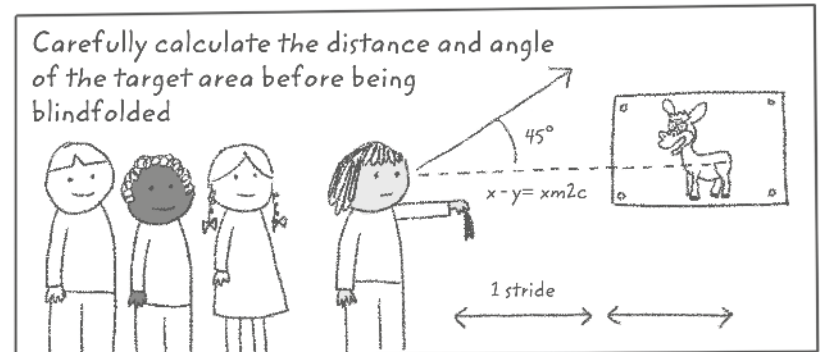


. . . at Bella Brady's birthday party when I was six. It might have been a pretend trophy but it was evidence that **I WAS GOOD AT SOMETHING!** I thought about putting it in



the cabinet but worried if Jack found it he would probably ridicule me with yet another stupid nickname such as 'Donkey' or even worse . . . 'Ass!' I didn't throw it away. You never know when a miniature plastic trophy might come in useful one day.

### How NOT to win Pin the Tail on the Donkey

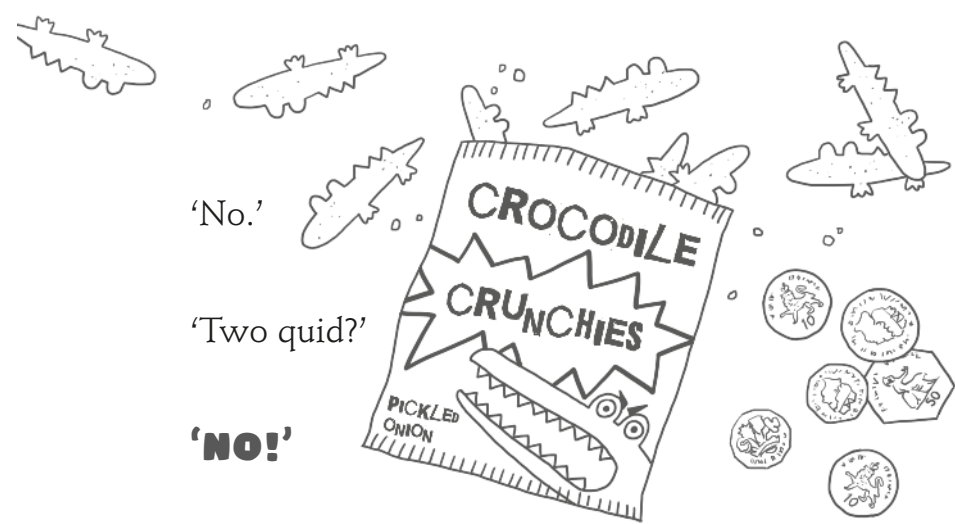


Maybe Oli knew what I might be good at. He was in our room too, cleaning. That's right, I have to **SHARE** a room with my seven-year-old brother. Dad put a 'divider curtain' across the middle. It hasn't helped. It just means that even though I am shielded from Oli's ugly mug, I can still hear him talking to **Luke Skywalker** (his action figure, not the actual greatest Jedi the galaxy has ever known).

'What do you think I'm good at?' I asked Oli.

'Ruining my life,' he sulked.

'Yeah, sorry about that,' I said, not sorry at all. 'Will you clean my half of the room if I give you a quid?' I asked.



'Two quid and packet of pickled onion **CROCODILE CRUNCHIES?**'

**'MAAAAAAMMMMM!!!!'**

God, little brothers are such a **pain**. I didn't want Mam going mad at me again so I went downstairs and hid in Agung's room. Agung is Dad's dad. He moved over from Hong Kong (glam) a few years ago and lives in the garage (not so glam). People might think that is cruel but the garage



conversion is actually the best room in the house. It is massive and has a bed, sofa, telly and kettle. A total palace compared to my pathetic half-room hovel!



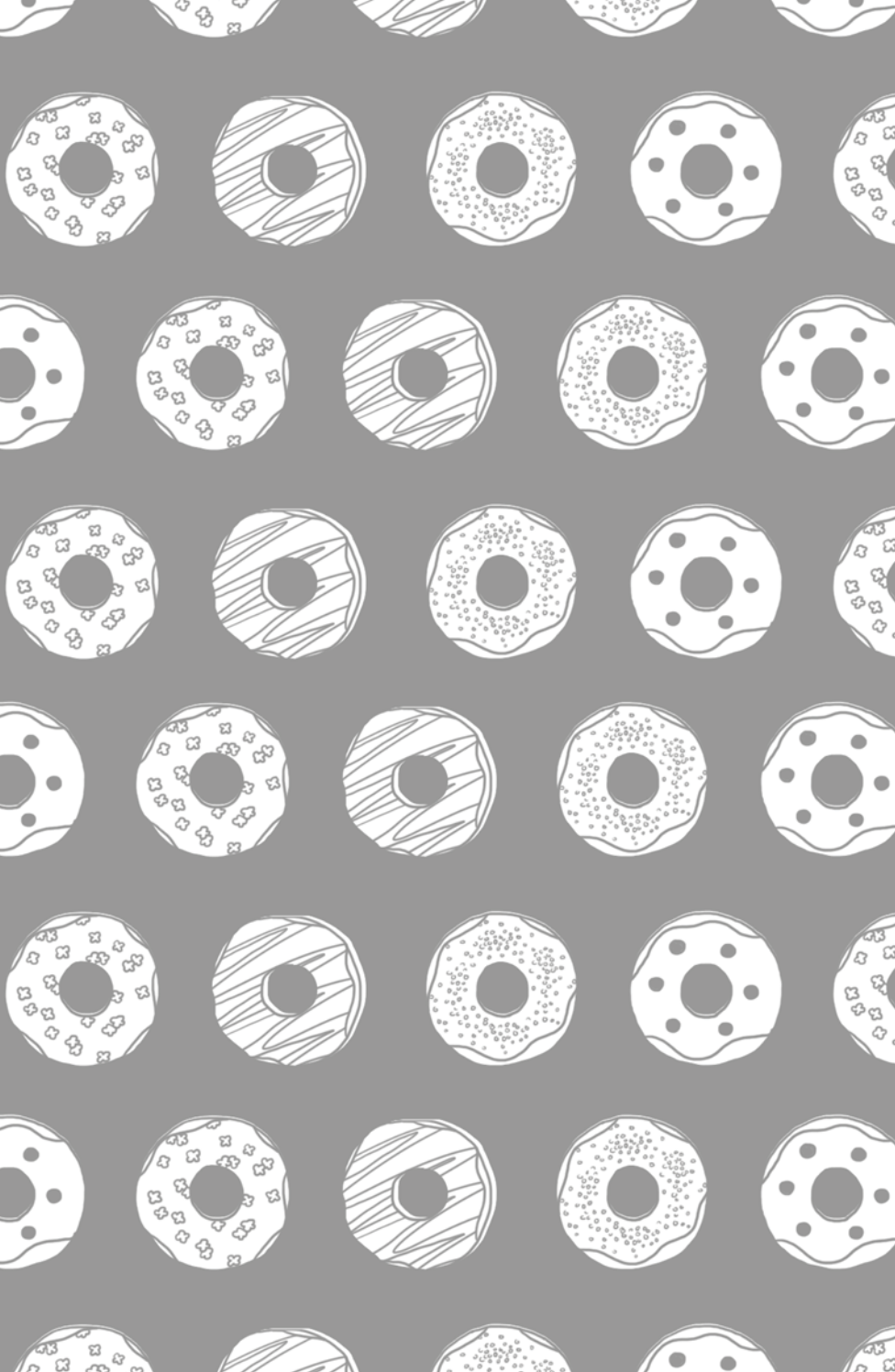
Agung was watching a quiz show, which is **bonkers** because he can hardly speak English.



Apart from Dad who speaks Chinese, everyone else has to communicate with Agung by talking English in slow motion and doing terrible sign language.

Someone on the telly had won and was getting handed a trophy. Then I remembered the cabinet full of trophies and it made me feel depressed again . . .

I needed to find my talent or **I would forever be a loser!**

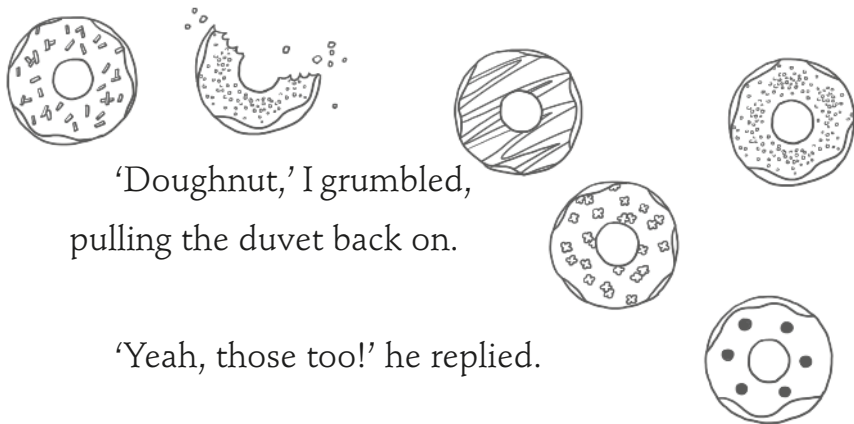


## *Sunday*

I was still in bed the next morning when Dev came round to get me. He woke me up by pulling off the duvet and shouting, '**Get up, you're late for school!**' I almost had a heart attack. Then I realised it was Dev being a pillock . . . and it was Sunday.

'Come on, let's get chocolate!' he said. We never made it to the shops yesterday so snacks were overdue.





‘Doughnut,’ I grumbled,  
pulling the duvet back on.

‘Yeah, those too!’ he replied.

The thought of **doughnuts** eventually got me out of bed. I must have burned the equivalent of twenty-five just folding my pants yesterday. I got dressed and we headed off to the shop to replenish the calories.

Afterwards we went back to Dev’s house where he has his own bedroom and no annoying little brother. He has a five-year-old sister called Heena, but she has her own bedroom and is only mildly irritating. He has a mongrel called Graham too who is just as nuts as **FUZZFACE**. Unlike me, Dev has many



talents. One of them is turning his eyelids inside out, which is totally **VOMIT INDUCING**. The others are singing and dancing. He has two certificates hanging on his bedroom wall. One for Grade One singing and the other for tap dancing.

‘I wish I was talented,’ I said, having a closer look at his certificates. ‘I had to clean our trophy cabinet yesterday. None of them were mine. I’m the untalented one of the family.’

‘Don’t be daft,’ said Dev. ‘Everyone has a talent. I bet I can find out what yours is.’

Well good luck to him, **HA!** I thought it would take him **AGES** but within seconds he had a brainwave. He chucked a bag of marshmallows





at me and said, 'I know, let's see how many of these you can cram into your mouth at once!'

'I know, why don't you come back to me when you've thought of something less idiotic?' I answered.

Dev tapped his phone and showed me the screen. 'Look, the world record is fifty-one by a great-granny in Flemingsville, Kentucky, USA. You could beat that easy with your **massive gob!**'



I wasn't sure if that was a compliment or not.

Dev scrolled through his phone again, looking puzzled.



'But it doesn't say whether she had her teeth in.'

**UGH.**

I wasn't about to **humiliate myself** by trying to beat some toothless nonagenarian who lives in a place where they don't have anything better to do – plus what a waste of marshmallows! I racked my brain and remembered the plastic trophy that I'd found under the bed.

'I've got a better idea,' I said.

Dev didn't answer. He was too busy squashing a handful of marshmallows into his gob in an attempt to break the world record himself.





‘I won a **Pin the Tail on the Donkey** game when I was six,’ I said.

‘Yeah, amph?’ said Dev, shoving another in.

‘So then I must be good at doing things with my eyes shut!’



‘**Mmmph mmmamph mumph,**’ Dev replied.

He was half suffocating and unable to interrupt so I took the opportunity to tell him about the trophy I got at **BELLA BRADY’S PARTY**. Dev responded by regurgitating pink, fluffy goo into the bin.

‘If that’s what you think then forget about it!’ I said.

‘No, that’s a great idea,’ said Dev. ‘But how do we prove you’re good at doing things with your eyes shut?’

There was only one way to find out. I grabbed a pencil and pad, got him to blindfold me and said, ‘Ask me to draw something.’



‘The cross section of a sixteenth-century galleon,’ he replied.

Winding me up on purpose is another of Dev’s many talents. I gave him my ‘seriously?’ face.

‘OK, a warthog then,’ he said.

I have only set eyes on a warthog once. It was when Agung was watching a nature documentary about their social behaviour in savanna habitats. Basically they are just angry pigs with revolting body hair and oversized teeth. (Maybe Warthog could be my nickname for Jack. HA! HA!). I pictured one in my head and started scribbling, certain that the lines were going in all the right places. When I finished



I took off my blindfold to take in my accomplished masterpiece.

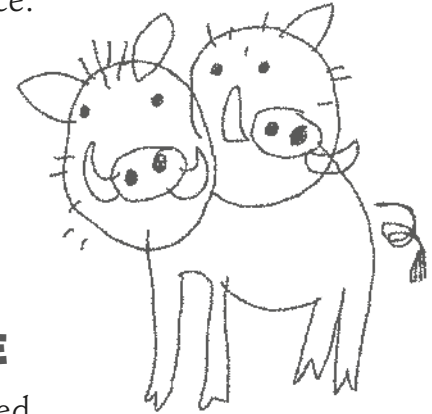
‘It’s got two heads,’  
Dev muttered.

**‘THEY HAVE A  
COMPLICATED BONE  
STRUCTURE!’** I replied,

throwing down my pencil in a strop. I was *sure* that was going to be my talent. How disappointing.

‘Anyway, who gives prizes for drawing anatomically correct warthogs with their eyes shut?’ Dev pointed out.

I was sorry to admit it, but he was right.



He brought the subject back to his drama club, which he has mentioned a **BILLION** times before. He has wanted me to join since I was five, even though he knows I can't sing, dance or act. I reminded him about the infant school nativity when I played a shepherd. Mary was handing me baby Jesus (a doll, I'll add at this point), and as I stepped forward the tea towel on my head slipped over my eyes and I **tripped** over a hay bale. Jesus went **FLYING** out of my arms and landed on Miss Wimple's (one of the dinner ladies) lap on the front row. She was so shocked she **jumped UP** and her bag of mint humbugs launched into the air like a fountain of hailstones. I went to retrieve Jesus but **slid** on a humbug, **fell** off the stage and **knocked** Miss Wimple flat on her backside. The whole place erupted with laughter and she

was utterly humiliated. She never did give me a full serving of chips after that.



‘And that’s what put me off drama ever since,’ I said.

‘Maybe comedy’s more your thing then,’ Dev replied, unhelpfully.

I didn’t want to be a comedian. I wanted to be taken seriously for once. I went home feeling *deflated* and a **BIT SICK** after too many marshmallows. Unlike my warthog, Dad was sketching an actual masterpiece at the kitchen table, which made me feel even more nauseous.

‘What’s that?’ I asked.

‘I’m designing a bird table for Agung. Well, not for his own personal use, it’ll be way too small!’ he snorted, laughing at his own joke.

Then Agung walked in and said something to me in Chinese. I don’t know why he does that because he knows full well I can hardly understand a word. Dad translated and said, ‘There’s been rare sightings of the Asian **Flaming Lycheebill** in the area, according to Agung’s sources, and he’s hoping this bird table will lure it in.’ Agung’s sources are his second cousins, the Chans, who run the **BAMBOO GARDEN** Chinese takeaway in the high street.

So Dad is going to build a bird table, probably made from bits of old scrap he finds in skips. It will end up looking like a work of art as usual. I will never be as good as him at anything. Or anyone else in the family for that matter.





## *Monday*

Mam made pancakes for breakfast. I thought it was a special occasion but I couldn't think what it was.

It wasn't my parents' anniversary, as Dad normally buys Mam an expensive bunch of flowers. Not because he is kind, generous and thoughtful, but because his mate at work's wife is a florist and can do him a good deal.





It was nobody's birthday either. It couldn't have been **FUZZFACE**'s or Hulk's. **FUZZFACE** was a stray that turned up in our hallway two years ago. Nobody ever claimed her. I am not surprised, she is out of control! Hulk is the ancient-looking school guinea pig that Oli is currently looking after. Despite his name, Hulk is not threatening in the least. He is the size of bellybutton fluff and could probably blow away in the wind. He used to live in a hutch in the

classroom, but because of his nervous disposition he couldn't stand the screaming kids and his fur fell out. None of the other kids would go near him after that because he looked so



weird. But Oli thought he resembled a **Star Wars** character called **Babu Frik**, so on that basis he volunteered to take him home.

It didn't matter what the occasion was, I was just looking forward to something other than cheapo, own brand Ricicle Krisps. Mam is going through a healthy-eating phase so she made the pancakes sugar-, gluten- and dairy-free. The excitement soon wore off when she told me that. I noticed Agung was using one of them as a tea coaster. He has a problem with coasters. And to be honest, it was probably the best use for it anyway.

'Thought you might need cheering up,' said Mam.



Pancakes that weren't sugar-, gluten- and dairy-free would have done the trick.

'You've been a bit glum lately, everything all right?' she added.

I lifted my chin off the table and sighed.

'It's just... **I'M NOT GOOD AT ANYTHING!**' I blurted. 'Everyone except me has got something in the trophy cabinet. **I'M A TOTAL LOSER.**'

Mam laughed as if I was making a big fuss over nothing. How would she like it if her highest achievement in life was winning a ridiculous party game?



'Don't be silly, you're clever at loads of things!' she said, all high-pitched.

'Like what?' I said, taking a slug of orange juice and spilling it all down my jumper.

'Well er, there's er . . .'

**'ARMPIT FARTS!'** shouted Oli.

'Shoving peanuts up your nose,' Jack added.

The world is a sad place when you have to live with brothers as immature as mine.

**'You two, shut your traps!'** said Mam, giving them the concrete-cracking glare.



She raised her eyebrows at Dad in a strange up and down way. I could almost hear the cogs grinding in his head as he thought long and hard of something. ‘Oh, there was that time you won the **Pin the Tail on the Donkey** game!’ he said.

Agung burped loudly.

‘My thoughts exactly,’ I commented back.

He chuckled and said something in Chinese.

The conversation came to an abrupt end after that. It was probably for the best as we would have been sitting there until nightfall thinking about what I was good at.



At school Dev was late for lunch which meant that Ged Sponger came and sat opposite me. I’ve never got on with him because quite frankly, he is the **biggest plonker in Plunkthorpe**.

Hold on . . . that means even Ged has a talent!

**AMAZING.**

I avoided eye contact with him by arranging the rice on my plate into the shape of a Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtle. A second later a spade-like hand reached across and tried to pull my plate away.

‘You eatin’ this?’ Ged said, gruffly.

It was chilli con carne. I didn’t want a reason

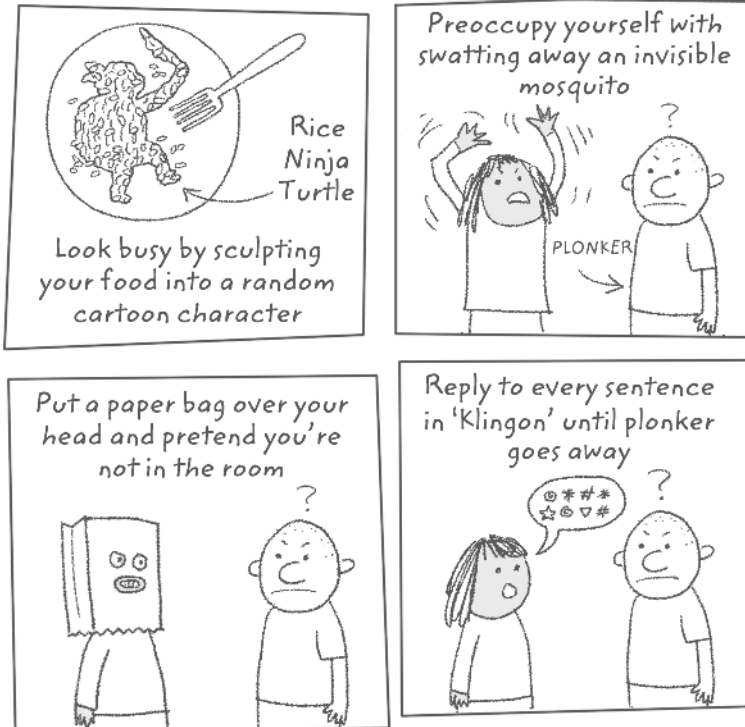


to make Ged mad so I warned him it was spicy.

‘Eugh,’ he growled, pushing it back. ‘Next time, get something I can eat.’

**HA!** Anyone would think I was Ged's humble servant or something!

## How to avoid conversations with PLONKERS



Dev (literally) waltzed in a moment later.

‘Where have you been?’ I said, annoyed at being left with Ged, the medieval tyrant.

'It's a surprise,' he replied.

**I hate surprises.** Unless it involves snacks, spending money or evidence that unicorns exist.

‘Listen,’ he went on, ‘about the talent thing. I have an idea!’

Dev reckons everyone is good at something if they look hard enough. It's all right for him, he was born multi-talented, while I sing like a **strangled crow** and dance



like I'm being **ELECTROCUTED** on an ice-rink. Also, his sole ambition in life is to own a **CRYSTAL-STUDED** jumpsuit and star in an award-winning Broadway musical, while mine is just to get through the day without stepping in dog muck.

'What you need . . .' he announced, flouncing his arms in a big arch.

I braced myself for another one of his madcap plans.

'... is a **MENTOR**.'

'What, like a teacher?' I said, confused.



'Yeah, but a teacher of **talent**,' Dev replied. 'I've got the skills to transform you into one of Plunkthorpe's finest legends.'

Not exactly Broadway, but beggars can't be choosers.

'OK, so you want to be my mentor, fine,' I said.

Anything to get a proper trophy of my own in the cabinet.

**'Awesomesauceness!'** said Dev, clutching his palms to his chest. 'I'll do some research and get back to you with ideas, pronto. Oh, and this is the surprise.'



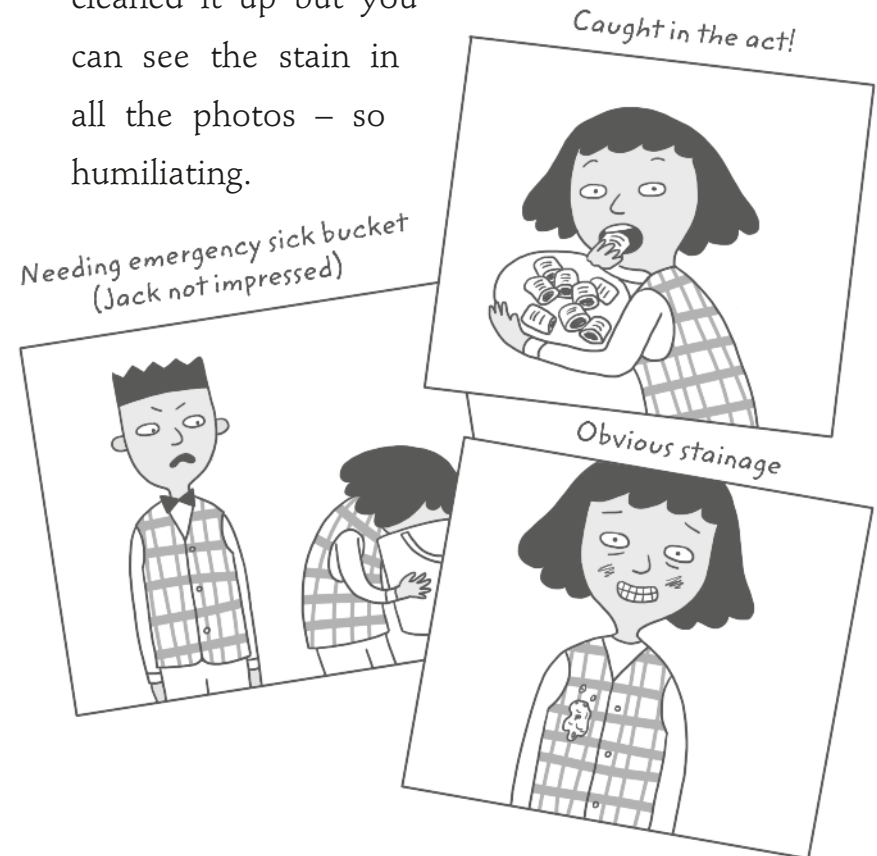
He reached into his rucksack and pulled out something *gold* and *sequinned*. I was almost blinded by the dinner hall's fluorescent lights reflecting off it.

‘What’s that?’ I asked.

‘This is the lucky waistcoat I wore when I got my certificates for singing and tap dancing. I don’t need it now I’m on a certain path to **STARDOM**, so I’m passing its magical powers on to you.’

Dev doesn’t half talk a load of baloney. But I must say after my eyes adjusted, the waistcoat did have a certain enchanting quality to it. Mind you, even a wooden spoon would seem enchanting after sitting next to Ged Sponger for

half an hour. Then I remembered I had a slight phobia of waistcoats, ever since Mam made me wear one for Aunt Tanya’s engagement party when I was four. I’d eaten a plate full of sausage rolls and was sick down the front of it. Mam cleaned it up but you can see the stain in all the photos – so humiliating.





‘You can be my mentor, but I am **NOT** wearing that thing,’ I said.

Dev sniffed it and replied, ‘Hmm, it smells of boiled onions anyway.’

## CHARMING.



Jack gave me the **evil eye** all evening. He still hasn’t forgiven me for making him miss out on going to town with his mates on Saturday. As far as I’m concerned I did him a favour because while cleaning he found **Ninja Banana 2** stuck behind the radiator. He has been looking for that video game for six months. Also there was a mug under his bed that Dad had to

retrieve with a pair of barbeque tongs and chuck straight into the outside bin. It was full of furry, blue mould. I have saved Jack from contracting a deadly bacterial disease and get no thanks in return. **Typical!** His silent treatment made me uncomfortable so I went to my room. Oli was in there making **Luke Skywalker** fight Hulk with one of Agung’s chopsticks in the absence of a lightsaber.

I reminded Oli to go gentle on Hulk, he wouldn’t want him turning bald again. (Hulk has grown back all his fur since leaving the bedlam of the classroom.)

I wonder what Dev has in store for me. It is making me nervous.

