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25 YEARS

THE LAST WORD

BEN BAILEY SMITH

BLOOMSBURY



CHAPTER 1

Gotcha

People say I've got a big mouth for a little guy. Some people say I'm a know-it-all, a joker, a clown, a troublemaker. Other people say I'm cheeky, sneaky, sarky, snarky ...

Who are these people? I hear you ask.

Well, basically everyone. At least everyone in my school at Wainbridge Academy, everyone in my area of Queen's Crescent in Camden, North London, and definitely everyone in my house.

That must be sad for you, I hear you add sympathetically.

Ha, I reply to whoever you are, *on the contrary,* *these 'people' are absolutely correct.*

And I love it.

You see, my name is Carmichael Taylor – Car for short – and what I lack in good first names I make up for in Last Words.

I always get the last word. Always. Don't believe me? Try me. Go on. Say something.

I'll wait.

Go on, off you go.

You can write it in here if you prefer:

That all you got? Fair enough.

What I'm saying is, for as long as I can remember I've refused to leave any situation without saying my piece, making a comment, hitting back and having that sweetest of desserts – the very last word. Like once when this tough kid in my year, Tosun Kendall, threatened to 'batter' me and I said I'd prefer breadcrumbs. His confusion bought me time to do a runner.

Or when my best friend Alex Kember and I accidentally set off a school fire extinguisher – it really was an accident, by the way. Alex wanted to know how they worked and I investigated a little too closely. Our Head

of Year, Mr French, was not impressed. He dropped the classic ‘And if Alex told you to jump off a bridge, would you do that too?’.

I paused for a second.

‘If it was a bungee situation, I have to say I’d consider it, yes.’

I should stress here, I’m really not a bad kid. At least, I don’t think I am. I’m thirteen years old, I’m the size of R2-D2, I’ve got hair like candyfloss and a freckly face that looks a bit like a dot-to-dot puzzle, but you’d better bring your A-game if you think you’re going to outwit Car Taylor.

There’s not a teacher on earth who’s managed it yet, so if you want to feel sorry for someone, you can pray for those guys.

This tale is about one teacher in particular who found himself in what some of those people who talk about me might call ‘a horrific Car accident’.



CO₂



For thirteen-year-old Car Taylor,
school is one big joke – and he'll always
get to the punchline before you.



The kid's a wordsmith for hire: no prank
too big, no gag too small ...



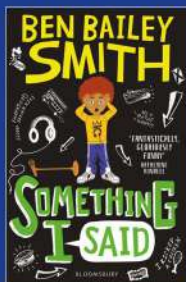
Just pray you're not on the wrong end of one!
But when a joke on his supply teacher ends
in disaster, can Car save the day
and still get in *the last word*?



$F=ma$



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Cover illustration by Aleesha Nandhra