

# **Disappearing Dinners**

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# Disappearing dinners

A blog by me, Sam Price, aged thirteen minus a little bit

## *Wednesday 1 July*

Why can't mum lock me in the cupboard? Then she wouldn't be able to see me and wouldn't know what I was doing.

It's all Miss Bains' fault. She's a teacher and for some reason mum thinks teachers know what they are talking about. Miss Bains, who is my English teacher at St. George's Academy told mum that my writing is boring and I don't have any good ideas. Not her exact words – but it's what she meant. She actually said something about, “dynamic narrative structure”, “character development” and practicing “free writing”, whatever that is.

That's why I'm sitting here with my computer tap-tap-tapping rather than getting out my screwdriver and working on my POSH machine. Miss Bains said I had to write stuff just for me. She said I had to write every day and she gave me a choice between writing creative descriptions or making up stories. I made my own choice and decided to blog instead :-). Who says I don't have ideas!

I've got to write something every day until the summer holidays.

“Samantha,” says mum, “you should be writing.”

“I am.”

Mum's squatting like a beetle, scrubbing away at the school hall floor. Her dreadlocks are tucked into her waistband and her tattoos wobble when she moves her arm. Every minute or two a drop of sweat splashes and disturbs her perfect floor – ruining her efforts to get the best polish in the whole of London.

“If you let me fix my POSH machine you wouldn't have to scrub. You could polish the whole hall in about ten minutes.”

“Don't you worry about that,” she says. “You get on with your work.”

But I don't. I tap-tap-tap and then I delete-delete-delete. She thinks I'm writing tonnes but I'm just typing nonsense like this.

Nasdh jdh adjh asuh w oiw n aduiy jn ad u djahkhy adh hsk sku h wn skhuyd a adkhdy , asdjhkasduy aksjhewkj nm,suxcy jshrnk kjyhds csjf siuyh sfjsh.

## *Thursday 2 July*

My name's Samantha Price but everyone calls me Sam, otherwise I punch them on the nose. Not really, I just ignore them. I often ignore people but only if they're boring or call me the wrong name.

It's great. I can write whatever I want and no one will know, not Miss Bains, not Caleb-the-bully, no one.

If you **are** reading this then you'd better keep your mouth shut - - - - - or I'll send my ninja-assassin-hover-mower-vacuum-sucker to chop your tongue off so you can't tell my secrets!!

### ***Friday 3 July***

Miss Bains is my second best teacher and scores six out of ten. All the other teachers score less than five except Mr Mack who gets nine. He'd get a perfect ten if he'd do his mad-cap practical experiments all the time and stopped trying to teach us the boring science theory.

### ***Saturday 4 July***

I don't know what to write.

### ***Sunday 5 July***

I still don't know what to write. It's not easy writing every day when nothing interesting happens. What should I write about?

### ***Monday 6 July – the Dinner Tube***

For lunch today I had hot pasta with cheese sauce. This may not sound interesting, but it is. Caleb-the-creep claims it was only hot because of him. It wasn't. It was hot because of Mr Mack and me.

Our school is in turmoil (Miss Bains – you would be proud of my great word choice, but as you will never get to read this you'll just have to take my word for it).

Half the school has been demolished and re-built. Stupid. We've got a brilliant new school canteen to eat in, but until they build the new kitchen, Mrs Mack, the worlds-best-school-cook, has to use the old kitchen on the other side of the playground. The dinners have to trundle across the playground or go up and down two flights of stairs. For the first two weeks of term everyone had cold dinners no matter what they ordered.

Even Mrs Mack's brilliant cooking couldn't make cold pasta with congealed cheese sauce and rain-splattered broccoli taste good.

That's when Mr Mack, my favourite teacher and Mrs Mack's favourite husband, got his crazy idea of building *The Dinner Tube*. I helped him make it. Caleb-the-liar, says he helped but all he did was connect the wiring to send messages from the hall to the kitchen. I could have done that – easy. The hard bit was getting the conveyor belts working inside the Dinner Tube. Mr Mack said he couldn't have done it without me.

I'm good with my hands. That's what my dad says when I fix things for him. My mum taught me to take things apart and put them back together again. I never had Lego like normal kids. Mum gave me an oily motorbike engine instead. I soon learnt not to put things in my mouth.

We needed loads of oil to get the conveyor belts running smoothly. The first couple of times only half the dinner survived on the plates, while the other

half splattered all around the inside of the tube. It took ages to clean out the mash potato and stop it gunging up the conveyor belts.

Everyone was amazed when they saw the Dinner Tube. Some kids ordered two dinners just to see their meal appearing as if by magic out of the tube.

Caleb-the-glory-seeker somehow got to order the first dinner. He typed in his number and then grabbed the plate of hot food as it slid out of the tube. It was a Mrs Mack Thai Curry special. He lifted his plate and everyone cheered as hot steam tumbled up to the ceiling. I stood at the back stretching my neck to see.

Wow – what a long blog. I'm getting the hang of this. It's easy.

### ***Tuesday 7 July***

No it's not.

### ***Wednesday 8 July***

Why doesn't anything interesting happen?

### ***Thursday 9 July***

Nothing happened – again.....come on life – you can do better than this.

### ***Friday 10 July – A-maz-ing – life you totally delivered***

So much happened today. I'll have to write it quick before dad shuts me down for the night.

I dropped into my usual lunch-time seat on the oddball's table with a mix of outcasts from year seven, eight and nine. Some of us have been sitting there so long that we occasionally think about talking to each other.

As usual, Caleb-the-centre-of-attention was surrounded by his scrum. Year-nines are the oldest group during the first dinner sitting so Caleb-the-pompous acts like he owns the place.

I spotted a new kid and wondered if he'd mistake my table for a group of friends. He stood in front of the dinner counter with his slightly wrong-colour green jumper stretched across his stomach.

You could tell he was new but not because of how he looked. Mum says anyone could fit into our school even a Klingon-speaking alien covered in purple spots. We have forty-three different languages here and Mum says the most common ethnic background is mixed race. That's why she likes it.

The new kid looked mixed race. He was tall, so he'd be year-nine like me, or an overgrown year-eight. What made him stand out was the way his

eyes scanned the counter trying to find something that wasn't there. I felt sorry for him – I know it's not easy being the outsider

"You having school dinners?" I said.

"I would if I could," he laughed and pointed at the empty counter.

"Where's the food?"

I told him he had to use the Dinner Tube and showed him how it worked. It's so simple. You put your dinner token in the slot, type a number and out comes your dinner. Today it was one for lasagne, two for curry, or three for sausage and mash.

He typed in a number and then almost dropped his plate when he saw it.

"Errggh, what's that?" I said, looking down at the smear of white and green gloop. It looked disss---gusting.

He told me it was sausage, mash and mushy peas and then for a second time he almost dropped his plate as a huge shout startled everyone in the hall.

"Don't eat the dinners," Caleb-the-shouter moaned, before bending down and sicking up into a bucket.

Kids rushed over to look. I didn't want to go anywhere near Caleb-the-puker.

I didn't understand; the dinners are usually brilliant; Mrs Mack's a great cook.

"What I don't understand," the new kid told me, "is how come he's got a bucket just when he needs one?"

I hadn't thought of that.

### ***Friday 10 July. The sickquel***

Dad stopped me and made me turn the light off. I slipped my laptop under the pillow until he'd gone. Who needs lights when you've got a laptop with retina display?

In the dinner hall Caleb-the-puke-face had thrown up into a bucket that magically appeared just when he needed it. A crowd surrounded Caleb-the-popular checking out how gross the sick looked. The new kid picked up a glass of water and pushed through to Caleb-the-sickly.

"Here, do you need a drink?" said the new kid.

"Yeah, cheers," said Caleb-the-smug. "I need something to wash the puke out."

Caleb-the-friend-stealer put the puke bucket down and smiled at the new kid.

I'd lost him. I'd been kind to him, helped him, shown him what to do and already the new kid had abandoned me and gone over to THAT crowd.

And then – something a-may-zing happened.

The new kid turned his back on Caleb-the-shunned. He glanced down at the bucket and carefully kicked out with his foot. The revolting contents sloshed across the floor, right over Caleb's feet and splattered the trousers of all Caleb's admiring hoards.

Un-be-lievable!

"Idiot," shouted Caleb-the-angry.

"Sorry, I slipped," said the new kid, as he pushed his way back through the crowd to join *me*.

Mrs Brown, Caleb's mother, hurried into the hall pushing a trolley suffocating under a landslide of sandwiches. She explained that something had gone wrong with the Dinner Tube and told everyone to line up.

It told the new kid it wasn't worth it. Mrs Brown makes the worst sandwiches in the world. I'd rather eat Caleb's sick than her scrambled egg rolls.

That's when the new kid told me it wasn't sick in the bucket. It was rotten food made to look like sick. That didn't make sense. What was Caleb-the-schemer up to?

A big woman with tattoos and wild dreadlocks burst through the door, glanced around and shouted, "Who's been messing on my floor?"

I grabbed the new kid's arm and pulled him out of sight.

"Quick, let's get out of here before she sees you," I said.

I led him to safety in the corridor and thought it polite to introduce myself, "I'm Sam," I said.

"I'm Adam," said Adam. Then he asked a question he shouldn't have asked. "Who was that mad woman with all the tattoos?" he said.

"That's my mum," I told him.

It wasn't the best way to start a friendship.

"That's your mum", said Adam. "Sorry."

"I'm not," I said. "She's the best mum in the world. She's also the caretaker and when she sees sick on her floor she'll get so mad she'll make you clean it up with your tongue."

I don't look much like my mum - luckily. Don't get me wrong; I like her. It's just that she does stand out a bit. She's tall, with pale skin, a big belly and gorgeous red hair, but most people only notice the tattoos and the dreadlocks that stretch past her bum.

I'd like red hair like hers, but unfortunately I got my dad's hair. Jet black and straighter than Debbie Roe's even though she uses hair-straighteners and a ruler. I also got my dad's darker Nepalese skin. Sometimes people think I'm Chinese.

I decided to dump Adam and scoot off to class. No one calls my mum mad.

My foot was already on the first step when Adam asked if I knew the way to the science lab.

He'd been rude to my mum, but he also totally dissed Caleb-the-arrogant. Maybe I'd give him a second chance.

"Follow me," I said, "I'll introduce you to Mr Mack the mad professor; he's bonkers."

### ***Friday, 10 July – Part Three: Egg on your face***

I can't believe I'm still writing my blog for yesterday. It's like I'm writing a book or something and I haven't even reached the best bit. Last night Dad caught me writing and took my laptop downstairs. I was worried he'd confiscate it for the rest of the weekend but he's got a presentation to prepare for work so I'll have the whole day to do whatever I want.

I'll play on my X-box later but first I'm going to blog what happened yesterday afternoon – it was brill-i-ant

Mr Mack spotted Adam straight away and told him to be my partner because Shaun was off sick. Shaun's almost always off sick and unless someone else is missing I have to work on my own or make an uncomfortable three-some

Caleb-the-slouch slunk through the door, stooping down and clutching his stomach. I knew he was acting and scowled at him.

"Sorry I'm late sir," said Caleb-the-stirrer. "The school dinners made me sick."

Mr Mack's face crumpled on hearing his wife's cooking being criticised. His smile slipped and his eyes looked down. I noticed brown paper bags – a clear sign of a crazy afternoon.

Slowly Mr Mack's smile crept back under his nose. "The chemicals for today's experiment haven't arrived," he announced.

Everyone groaned.

"So we've got a playground challenge."

Everyone cheered.

"Each pair pick one of these bags and see what you find inside."

"You'll like this," I told Adam.

Mr Mack always does these crazy challenges and they usually involve eggs. Mrs Mack has twelve hens and whenever they lay too many eggs we get to do a challenge. Last week we had to catapult eggs through basketball hoops.

Adam grabbed a bag and held it up. "I think there's an egg in here," he said.

Suddenly, Caleb's fist crashed into the bag.

"Hey," shouted Adam.

"Sorry, I slipped," said Caleb-the-slippy, with a huge grin showing off his perfect white teeth. "Looks like scrambled egg now."

I grabbed hold of Adam and held him back. I think otherwise he might have gone for Caleb-the-smirker and been excluded on his first day.

I picked up a spare bag and headed back to the workbench, thinking how unfair that Caleb-the-spiteful is so good looking. I'm sure that's the only reason he gets away with all his nasty tricks.

The bag contained one egg, an elastic band, four wheels, loads of cogs, some rods, balsa wood, paperclips, string and glue. The challenge was to build a machine to carry the egg as far as possible.

The next two hours flew by. Time does that. When you're not looking it speeds up, but if you're bored and watching the clock it slows down.

Adam and I worked brilliantly together. I twisted the elastic band and suggested we could attach wheels to it. Adam shook his head and said we should use the stretch of the elastic, not the twist. You get more power if you can stretch the elastic as much as possible and let it slowly pull back together – the slower it goes the better it is.

I chewed my pencil trying to think while Adam carried on talking to himself. He did that a lot and didn't even realise he was doing it.

"We could use a pendulum as a regulator," he mumbled, "and gears... cogs... large wheels..."

I'm not one for talking when I can build. I grabbed the glue and before he'd finished muttering I'd constructed a working pendulum. I used the egg as a weight, which was pretty clever. Once we got the pendulum sorted the rest was easy.

Mr Mack led the class to the playground. The finished machines were reverently placed in a row. The bell went for home time but our excitement stopped us complaining. The rest of the school swarmed out and most crowded around in expectation of mayhem.

A whistle sounded and chaos reigned. Four machines didn't move, three disintegrated, two set off in the wrong direction and one launched its egg straight into Mr Mack's glasses. Fortunately, for him, he was holding them, not wearing them.

The remaining seven machines headed across the playground. The one in front and speeding away from the rest was Caleb's. Crawling slowly behind all the others was ours.

One by one the machines stopped, until only two were moving. Caleb's, out in front, finally stopped after crossing an incredible distance. Adam and I walked slowly behind our machine as it steadily moved past the others and into second place.

It was like an unstoppable tide. Centimetre by centimetre our machine kept going. Across the tarmac. Nearer and nearer to Caleb-the-worried, until finally, it sauntered past his feet.

I erupted into a huge cheer and a load of kids joined in. Caleb-the-runner-up turned and stomped back towards the school. Adam bent down and turned our machine around so that it followed Caleb.

Caleb-the-sulk heard the giggling and turned to see the machine stalking him. Everyone laughed and he stormed out of the playground.

I rushed off to tell my mum everything, before dad came to pick me up – how I had met Adam, how we beat Caleb-the-not-so-invincible, and most importantly, how for once everyone had laughed at Caleb-the-joker, instead of laughing at me, the joke.



## ***Friday 10 July – Part four: an extra bit about what happened to Adam after school***

I didn't actually see or hear any of this – but Adam told me about it when I saw him on Monday. I wasn't sure if it was allowed to go back and insert it into my blog but then I realised I am writing for myself not anyone else. That means I make up the rules!

At the end of his first day at St George's Academy, Adam collected his things and went out the wrong gate. You'd think someone as clever as Adam would be able to get the right gate!

He was meeting his mum in Brown's café, which is right next to the school. At least it is if you use the front entrance. If you go out the back then you have to go along a road and down a narrow alley on the outside of the school wall.

The alley was made even narrower by scaffolding, especially near the end, where there was also scaffold on the building opposite.

Adam was squeezing slowly sideways to slip through the scaffold. (What brilliant alliteration. Miss Bains was getting us to do alliteration in English today. She gave me top marks for my description of dinner. I wrote that my dinner was a delicious, delectable, double- dipped doughnuts dancing in daringly delightful, divine dark chocolate. It's a pity that there's no word for chocolate that begins with the letter D.)

Anyway, back to the story – as I said, Adam was slipping sideways through the scaffold when he overheard an argument mentioning a familiar name.

"Mrs Mack has got to go before the new school kitchen opens," said a man.

"But you can't nick everything", said a woman. "People will get suspicious and we don't want investigations."

"What shall we do?" said the man.

"Don't worry; Caleb's got it in hand. It'll all be sorted before the dinner-dance next week. Come on, we need to get those dinners reheated."

Adam walked on and as he turned the corner, he realised the voices had come from the back of Brown's café.

Adam's mum was waiting for him inside. She'd missed lunch, so decided they would eat tea there. Adam looked at the chalkboard menu; lasagne; curry; or sausage, mash and mushy peas. He still fancied mash so ordered item number three.

"Um, this is good," said his mum.

Adam nodded. It was good. But something was bugging him. Something wasn't right. Adam didn't have time to think before his mum dragged him off house hunting.

## ***Saturday 11 July***

I'm not going to write anything about today because I spent so long catching up on everything that happened yesterday. It doesn't matter, nothing exciting happened. Weekends with dad mean boring stuff like washing, cleaning and going on walks. When I'm with mum I get to strip down motorbike engines or rebuild my POSH (Polish Our School Hall) machine – which is the most amazing machine I've ever built and won me the Young Engineer of London award in an inter-school competition.

## ***Sunday 12 July***

The only excitement with dad happens in the kitchen. Today he pulled a chicken out of the fridge and got the noodles down from the cupboard. He left me in charge of the noodles while he prepared Thupka, which is a chicken stew. It's my favourite. It's not my absolute favourite. My absolute favourite is Thupka with my mum's dumplings. It's sad to think that since my family split up, no one in the world eating Thupka-with-Dumplings.

## ***Monday 13 July – Part one: name games***

As usual I was early to school on Monday morning. I leant against one of the columns in the playground that hold up the first floor corridor and scanned the crowds coming through the school gate.

Adam was hard to spot. He eased through the gate in the middle of a bunch of kids. He then edged along the outside of the playground not taking part or talking to anyone. I could see his eyes scanning the playground calculating before making his next move. As his head moved in my direction I turned to the side so that he would see me, but wouldn't know I'd been watching him.

I expected him to walk over and say good morning, but nothing happened. I waited a minute and then glanced back in Adam's direction. His head was facing away from me, watching Caleb-the-show-off striding through the gate while demonstrating some new mobile phone app to about half the kids in our class.

The bell sounded and I hurried into school. I sat at my usual desk and started to regret talking to Debbie Roe. I had persuaded her to move so that Adam could sit across the aisle from me. I saw her smirking. She thinks I've got a crush on Adam. But I haven't.

Adam came into the classroom, smiled and gave me a wave. I smiled back and pointed to the empty desk. His smile grew larger and I heard a snigger from Debbie Roe.

Miss Hobble opened the register and I noticed Adam grimace.

"Adam Adams," she called out.

There was a ripple of laughter.

“Here”, said Adam, and then under his breath I heard him mumble, “Don’t say it. Please don’t say it.”

“So good they named him twice,” chuckled Miss Hobble.

I didn’t know what she was on about, but her comment made Adam put his head in his hands and groan. I asked Mum about it at break-time and she laughed. She said it was from New York, New York a film by Martin Scorsese. The film was from ages ago so only old people remember it, but it was probably good because he directed the film Hugo, which is the best film ever. There’s a boy in the film who builds an automaton – it was like a robot fixed to a desk but human looking.

Who on earth would name their son Adam when his surname is Adams. What were they thinking of? Why didn’t the just hang a label round his neck saying “Bully me?”

“Quite please,” said Miss Hobble. “Caleb Brown.”

I nudged Adam. He shrunk away from me as if expecting me to tease him about his name.

“Hey,” I said in a whisper loud enough for the whole class to hear, “you even got in front of Caleb on the register.”

Everyone heard me and almost everyone laughed. That’s twice in less than a week that everyone has laughed at Caleb-the-maybe-not-so-popular-anymore.

### ***Monday 13 July – Part two: Of mice and men***

I can’t believe how much I’m writing. I can’t stop. I’m writing every playtime, during lunch break and even under my desk during boring lessons.

At lunchtime Adam’s dinner was much better than Friday’s disaster. He said it tasted great but it was too small.

Suddenly the hall was silenced again by another loud shout.

“Aggh, that’s disgusting.”

We turned to see Caleb-the-disgusted staring intently at a spoonful of dinner.

“I can’t believe it,” continued Caleb-the-drama-queen in a bellowing voice that bounced off the walls. “Someone should get the health and safety inspectors.”

Adam moved closer to see what Caleb-the-intent was staring at.

“You can have it if you want it,” said Caleb-the-chuckler and tipped the contents of his spoon into Adam’s bowl.

It was a mouse. A dead mouse, covered in tomato soup.

Adam took it back to his place and pushed a spoon handle down its mouth.

“You’re not going to eat that are you?” I asked.

“Look,” said Adam. “Do you see anything funny?”

“Apart from a dead mouse in your dinner, you mean?”

"There's no soup inside," explained Adam. "This mouse was dead before it went in the soup. I bet Caleb put it in himself."

"Why?"

Adam had no idea but said that he intended to find out.

\*

After school, Adam and his mum met at Brown's café again. This time he managed to go out of the right gate – I guess he's a quick learner. While waiting for his mum he spotted a review of Brown's café in the paper.

*"Brown's café has seen a remarkable turn around in the past few weeks. Suddenly the food is not only palatable, it actually tastes good. The ingredients are fresh and despite the obvious re-heating, retain their flavours. Perhaps Mr Brown has finally learned to cook."*

*Report by D. Luscious*

Adam's mum snatched the paper and read a different headline.

*"Are school dinners safe? Special investigation by Artie Choke."*

His mum only glanced at the article and then ordered tomato soup. Adam kept a careful lookout but didn't see any suspicious objects in it.

## **Day 5 – Tuesday. Adventures in the dark light**

Adam arrived early again today and this time he immediately came looking for me. I couldn't wait to tell him what I had found out. My dad told me the school might get rid of Mrs Mack and replace her with Mrs Brown.

Adam asked if she was married to Mr Brown who runs the café. She is, and like his wife, Mr Brown can't cook. I told Adam that next Friday was the leaver's dinner-dance. My dad and the other school governors are coming to eat and if the food isn't good they plan to sack Mrs Mack.

"The Browns nick stuff from the school dinners," said Adam. "I'm sure of it. They must have done something to the Dinner Tube."

He wanted to inspect it, but we couldn't do that during the day. I told him to come back after tea when the place was empty.

The sun was still shining when we met outside the main gate. That's the trouble with summer; you don't get the right conditions for sneaking around.

The gate was unlocked, which worried Adam. He thought a teacher might still be working in a classroom. I knew better. My mum was busy polishing the school hall. She does it every night because she desperately wants to win the Best School Hall in Britain competition.

I led Adam over to the kitchen block.

"How do we get in there?" said Adam.

I held up a bunch of keys. That's the advantage of being the caretaker's daughter.

The Dinner Tube has two conveyor belts inside – one to take food to the hall and the other to return empty plates. Adam followed the tube along the corridor outside the kitchen until it poked up and cut through the wall into the playground.

We went back up the stairs to ground level and out into the warm night. Adam pulled out a note-book and walked into the middle of playground.

"What are you doing?" I said. "Someone will see you."

"Don't try and hide," he said, "walk right across the middle as though we belong here. Anyone seeing us will think we're doing a project or something."

We followed the Dinner Tube along the wall around the edge of the school grounds until it disappeared under the scaffolding.

"I bet this is opposite where I heard the Browns talking," said Adam. "We need to check this out."

We climbed the scaffold and discovered how the Brown's were pinching stuff. They'd cut into the Dinner Tube and put a diversion through the wall to the back of their café.

"We've got to stop them," I said. "Let's tell my mum."

"No," said Adam. "All we need to do is cut off the diversion and then they can't nick anything. You helped make it – surely you can fix it?"

"I can't do it now," I said. "I need a blowtorch."

"Where do we get that?" said Adam.

I smiled. "Don't worry, I've got one in the cleaning cupboard, but I can't get it now because my mum's still polishing the hall floor."

"OK, let's fix it tomorrow," said Adam.

## ***Day 6 – Wednesday evening. A Spot of Bother***

We took extra care the next night. It's hard to be inconspicuous carrying a blowtorch.

I decided to put a crossover in the tube to swap food from one conveyor belt to the other. Then the Browns could only steal leftovers and with Mrs Mack's cooking we didn't get many leftovers. The best place to do the switch was in the dark corridor near the kitchen. The kitchen is in the basement at the bottom of some steep stairs and there's a corridor that's like a dungeon with no windows at all.

I'd just lit my blowtorch when someone came down the stairs. I snapped the blowtorch off but it was too late.

"Hello, who's there?"

It was Mrs Brown with Caleb slinking along in her wake.

"Hide," I said to Adam. "I'll distract them so you can escape."

"Hello Mrs Brown," I said, "it's me."

"What are you doing here?" she said.

"I'm working on the lights for the dinner-dance," I said. "I've come to get a screwdriver."

"That's a funny looking screw-driver," said Caleb.

I looked down.

"It's a blowtorch," I said.

I could tell this wasn't enough by the creases snaking across Mrs Brown's forehead. Then I came up with a brilliant idea. I decided to tell them I'd done something naughty – then they were sure to believe me.

"I'm not meant to use it on my own," I said, "but I wanted to see what it looked like in the dark."

It worked like a charm. Mrs Brown almost smiled but couldn't manage it. I'm sure her face would split open if she did.

"That's dangerous," she said. "You could do a lot of damage with that. Imagine what would happen if you started a fire. I'll have to have words with your mother."

"Please don't," I said. "I promise I won't do it again."

Mrs Brown paused for a moment with a finger scratching her stubbly chin.

"You promise?" she said.

I nodded.

"Okay," she said. "This can be our secret. We won't tell anyone. That means you too Caleb."

Caleb grinned and nodded.

"Could you help find the screw-driver in the kitchen?" I said. "Mum said it was in the cutlery drawer but I don't know which one that is."

"Come with me," said Mrs Brown.

I clattered the cutlery to give Adam a chance to escape. I was amazed when Mrs Brown found a screwdriver.

"Thank you," I said.

"Now off you go," said Mrs Brown. "We need those lights working for next week. The dinner-dance is such an important event."

Mrs Brown chuckled so much that spit started leaping out of her mouth as if it wanted to get away from her.

I quickly moved out of spitting distance and as I passed Caleb he leant towards me and whispered, "I know you're up to something. I'm watching you."

I smiled and pointed the screwdriver at his nose. That made him jump back and he crashed into a pile of saucepans. As I ran out the door I heard his mum shouting at him to be quiet.

### ***Day 7 – Thursday night. Shadows in the night***

We were back in the corridor. Adam stayed near the kitchen door so that he could watch for anyone coming down the stairs. I got to work with my saw and blowtorch.

I cut open both tubes and put in a cross-over piece. I was just starting to seal up the holes when Adam saw a shadow at the top of the stairs and came running down the corridor. As planned, we moved back into the darkest reaches of the corridor and covered ourselves with an old blanket. It was impossible to see us.

Impossible if you didn't have a torch.

Impossible if you weren't coming down the stairs specifically to lie and cheat and get people into trouble.

It was Caleb. He'd been hiding in the playground waiting to see what we were up to. Even worse – he wasn't on his own. He'd called the police.

"It's this way officer," said Caleb. "I heard them talking. They said that if anyone came they'd hide at the end of the corridor."

Adam and I were trapped. We couldn't escape.

"Look," said Caleb, "it's like I said, they were rigging things up so they could steal the school dinners."

Suddenly, the blanket was ripped away and blinding torchlight seared into our faces. That's when I got a real shock.

"Adam!" shouted the police officer.

Oh no, I thought. Adam is a criminal known to the police.

Ready for shock number two – here it comes. For a moment everyone was silent, then Adam spoke.

"Mum, what are you doing here?"

Adam and his mum were staring at each other and Caleb's mouth hung wide open. I almost laughed but nothing could escape my tightly clenched tummy.

Suddenly the torch stabbed directly into my eyes, "Who are you?"

"S... S... Sam," I stuttered.

"And where should you be Sam?" said Adam's mum.

"Home?" I said.

"Right, I suggest you run along now."

"Aren't you going to arrest her?" said Caleb.

"I'm sure there's a simple explanation," said Adam's mum. "Now what's your name?"

"Caleb Brown."

"Right, Caleb, you run along as well and if I need you I know where to find you."

Adam told me later that he was even more shocked than me when his mum turned up. She solves murders and stuff. She doesn't follow-up crazy calls like Caleb's. She happened to be talking to a normal policeman and heard the school mentioned on his radio. As it was Adam's new school she decided to tag along.

I got home without Mum knowing anything. She was still busy polishing the hall with heavy metal music blasting out of her earphones. You could blast the school to smithereens and my mum wouldn't notice until the dust settled on her precious floor. It wasn't until the morning that she discovered what had happened.

## ***Day 8 – Friday. Grounded***

Adam's mum arrived early. I only recognised her because she was wearing her uniform. Last night I was blinded by her torch and didn't see what she looked like. You could tell she was Adam's mum. She was the same slightly rounded shape and had the same bright, sparkling eyes, which stood out even more against her darker skin. Her hair was helmeted onto her head. It was cut very short and straightened to get rid of the natural curls.

It wasn't too unusual to see a black woman police officer but I'd never seen one with a black shoulder patch with a red crown indicating she a superintendent. Adam told me she was one of the first black woman detective superintendents in the country and she has plans to become the first black woman commander ever.

The uniform worked its magic and she was shown straight into Mr Warshaw's office. The bell hadn't even gone before Adam and I were summoned. I won't bore you with details, let's just say we got a right good talking to, no one listened to us, and were both grounded for a week.

It didn't even make sense. How could we steal dinners by swapping the tubes over? And why would we want to?

Adam told them it was Brown's café stealing the food but I don't think they even heard him.

Adam's mum said that Adam needed to be taught a hard lesson and perhaps a short, sharp shock would nip things in the bud and stop Adam going off the rails like so many kids did at his age. Adam told me later that she was a right troublemaker when she was young and it was only after seeing a policewoman stop two friends from shooting each other that she changed.

She told Mr Warshaw to exclude Adam. I couldn't believe it. Time off school! What sort of punishment is that!

Mr Warshaw wasn't hard on me. I've never been in trouble before, so he assumed it was Adam leading me astray. He did tell my mum and she grounded me for a week. She said I had to stay in the cleaning cupboard every day after school while she polished the hall. It's not as bad as it sounds. The cleaning cupboard is as big as a room and my favourite place in the whole world. It's where I make most of my machines.

Adam's mum marched him back to the hotel where they were living. His mum's rich, she earns over five times what my mum earns. That's how come they can afford to stay in the Hilton Hotel. It's dead posh and has a right shiny hall floor. Adam says he'd rather live in a normal house but I pointed out that his mum might not let him have a telly in his bedroom if he did.

Adam plopped down on the bed and flicked on the TV.

"None of that," said his mum, grabbing the remote. "You're not at school, but that doesn't mean you can play all day. You need to do some school stuff."

Adam pulled out his tablet PC and opened some educational web pages to satisfy his mum. Then he switched on a secrecy programme, which he wrote himself. I don't really understand how it works but if you look at the screen from



the side you see one thing (like school work), but if you look straight on you see the real thing, like the game or whatever. Adam tried to explain it to me but I got lost as soon as he mentioned an artist called Bridget Riley – what's art got to do with computer programmes.

Adam was busy on the Internet while his mum paced up and down like an animal in a cage. She soon realised her mistake. She was a police officer and ought to be at work – but she couldn't tell them her son had been caught stealing. How bad would that look!

Back at school Caleb was gloating. It started at register time.

"Adam Adams," said Miss Hobble.

"He's been excluded," said Caleb. "I hope he doesn't come back. He's a criminal - Adam the bad man."

Most of the class laughed.

"That's enough," said Miss Hobble. "Caleb, I take it that you haven't been excluded."

That got more laughter and Miss Hobble was able to continue with the register.

Debbie Row whispered to me, "I'm glad I moved desks. You better watch out sitting next to the Bad-Man."

"He's not," I said. "It wasn't his fault."

Debbie smiled and turned to Lizzie, "I think she still fancies him."

"I do not," I said.

"Then why are you sticking up for him?"

"Because it wasn't him," I said. "It was all Caleb's fault."

Debbie and Lizzie gave me a you-must-be-joking look and turned away.

By dinnertime Adam's story had spread like a virus and morphed with each re-telling.

"He was trying to poison everyone in the school..."

"He's a terrorist from Africa ..."

"The dinners have been rubbish since Adam Bad-Man came to school. They're safe again now."

I couldn't believe what people were saying. Anything that went wrong was Adam's fault. He even got blamed for a flood in the girls' toilet!

Most people didn't know I'd been involved. I wish mum hadn't phoned dad to tell him. He's a school governor – at least he was. When he heard that I had been caught trying to steal from school he came straight in and resigned.

I said he was over-reacting. He said it was because he was from Nepal and therefore has a strong sense of honour and justice, but my mum has a strong sense of honour and justice and she's from Islington. Mum says it was their shared sense of justice and human rights that brought them together. Dad says it was more to do with how mum looked wearing her leathers and straddling a Harley Davison motorbike. Neither of them says anything about what made them split up.

By the end of school I was desperate to get away. I stuffed my books into my bag and headed for the cleaning cupboard. I'd just got my key out when Adam came running through the hall doors.

### ***Day 8 – Friday after school. Infernal devices***

"What are you doing here?" I said.

"Don't worry about that," he said. "I've only got a few minutes. My mum thinks I've gone to the toilet in Brown's café."

"What do you want?" I said.

"Here, take this," Adam said. "It's a spy bug – a listening device. See if you can plant it on Caleb. Put this ear-piece in and you'll be able to hear what he's saying. I've got one as well."

"Where did you get these?" I said

"They're my mums," said Adam. "Take them quick, I've got to rush back to Brown's."

"Hang on a minute," I said. "You take it. The best place to plant it would be in Brown's kitchen. Caleb goes and helps his parents after school."

"Right, I'd better get back," said Adam. "Put the ear-piece in and you'll hear everything."

I swung open the cleaning cupboard door.

"What's that?" said Adam.

"My POSH machine," I said.

"POSH?"

"Polish Our School Hall. I made it for my mum."

I'm very proud of my POSH. It's one of the best machines I've ever made and should give mum a good chance of winning the Best School Hall competition.

Adam stared in awe. The POSH is a cross between a motorbike and a combine harvester, with dusters instead of blades.

"I thought you had to go," I said.

"Oh, yeah. Don't forget to listen," said Adam.

Adam rushed off and I slipped the earphone into my ear. It sounded like the microphone was broken. All I could hear was the loud rustling and crackling. Then I heard a flush of water that sounded suspiciously like a toilet. I was about to remove the ear-piece when it suddenly picked up voices. I was stunned by Adam's boldness and cheek.

If it had been me I probably would have done something stupid like stick the micro-phone on a dirty plate hoping it would be taken back to the kitchen. All I would hear would be crashing plates and a gurgle as the spy bug sunk into the washing up bowl.

Adam was much braver – he barged straight into Brown's kitchen.

"Excuse me," said Adam.

"What do you want?" said Caleb.

"Oh its you, what are you doing here?" said Adam.

"None of your business," said Caleb. "I belong here. What are you doing here?"

"I thought you might want to know that the toilet is blocked," said Adam. "Someone's dropped a great, big, wodge of toilet roll in the gents."

"Damn," said Mr Brown. "Caleb, go and see if you can sort it out."

"Why me?" said Caleb.

"Because, I'm the chef, your mum is working as the waitress, and you're the dogsbody with the rubber gloves who does all the jobs no one else wants to do."

Adam followed Caleb out of the kitchen, but not before placing the spy-bug on a shelf behind a mug.

For a while everything was quiet. Mr Brown was alone in the kitchen and wasn't talking to himself.

I listened intently hoping that something would happen. I wasn't disappointed. Caleb and Mrs Brown both re-entered the kitchen at the same time.

"That police-woman is here again," said Mrs Brown.

"That kid who came in, Adam Adams, that's his mum," said Caleb. "If she wasn't his mum then Adam and his girlfriend would both be in serious trouble."

"You don't think she suspects anything do you?" said Mrs Brown.

Caleb laughed, "All she suspects is that her son is stealing."

Mr and Mrs Brown joined in the laughter.

"Let's keep it that way," said Mr Brown. "It's going to be much harder to get Mrs Mack sacked now the pipes have been switched."

"Don't worry, love," said Mrs Brown. "Caleb's got it all sorted. Haven't you dear?"

"course I have," said Caleb. "Just you wait and see."

"Well you better sort it quickly," said Mr Brown.

"I'll do it on Monday," said Caleb.

"Look at this," said Mrs Brown, "someone sent it back saying it wasn't cooked. Can you believe it?"

"Miserable bunch, the lot of them," said Mr Brown. "They wouldn't know good food if it bit them. That's a beautiful piece of steak, I paid good money for that."

"That's right, darling," said Mrs Brown. "But if our plans work out you won't have to spend a penny on food ever again."

Mr and Mrs Brown laughed.

"And when I'm the school cook they'll actually be paying me to steal," chuckled Mrs Brown.

I had to take out the earpiece. I couldn't stand all the sniggering. It was disgusting. I couldn't believe anyone could be so mean. They were going to steal food from school and then sell it in their café. That wasn't right and somebody needed to stop them.

I wanted to talk to Adam but I didn't have anyway to contact him. If only he knew, then he could tell his mum and she'd arrest them all. The horrible

cackling laughter seemed to have finished so I carefully put the ear-piece back in. I was hoping to hear more about what Caleb planned to do but all I could hear was Mr Brown singing – loudly – and badly. Adam’s mum could have arrested Mr Brown on the spot. I’m sure any judge hearing him sing would soon lock him up in a sound-proofed cell.

“Sam, Sam,” someone was shouting my name.

“Sam, it’s me Adam.”

I was so surprised that I looked around the cleaning cupboard and said “Hello.”

“I don’t know if you’re listening,” said Adam through my earpiece, “But we need to talk. I hope you’re listening. I can speak to you, but you can’t speak to me. So I’ll give you my mobile number. You’ll have to text so my mum doesn’t catch me on the phone. Are you ready I’m going to give you my number?”

I quickly grabbed my mobile and stored Adam’s number. He repeated it about five times – I guess he wanted to make sure I got it. And then he said he was going to repeat it every 15 minutes until he heard from me. I quickly texted to save him the bother.

hi adam - it's me sam

That was it – now we were talking we could put a stop to Caleb’s plans.

## ***Day 10 – Monday morning. Locked up***

It wasn’t as easy as I thought. For starters we didn’t really know what Caleb was planning to do. That meant we had to watch him, which would have been easier if Adam wasn’t still in the custody of his mum.

Adam’s mum swished open the curtains letting light flood into Adam’s sleepy eyes and then she shook him awake.

“Time to get up,” she said. “I’m on an early shift at work, and you’re coming with me.”

Adam rubbed his eyes and managed to squint at the clock. It was only five o’clock.

“Can’t I just go to school,” he moaned.

“What, so that you can get in more trouble?” said his mum. “You’re suspended, so you’re coming with me.”

“But, mum...”

“That’s enough, your coming and that’s it. I suggest you get a move on before I drag you there in your pyjamas.”

At first Adam thought it was going to be fun being with all the detectives at the police station. He sat in the corner of his mum’s huge office and pulled out his tablet computer. He’d manage to rig it up to the Spy Bug so that everything was recorded. He was hoping that Mr or Mrs Brown would say something incriminating, which he could use as evidence to persuade his mum to arrest them. Unfortunately all they seemed to do was moan about the customers and complain every time a plate came back with uneaten food.

Suddenly, the door to the office burst open.

“Detective Superintendent,” said the red-faced policeman, “I’ve got something you need to see.”

“What’s that?” asked Adam’s mum.

The policeman looked over at Adam and signalled with his head. He wasn’t going to say anything interesting while Adam was in the room.

Adam’s mum sighed and followed the policeman out into the corridor. Adam tried to hear what they were talking about but couldn’t make anything out.

After a few minutes, Adam’s mum came back in, plonked herself down in her chair and snatched the phone into her hand. She quickly dialled a few numbers before looking up at Adam and putting the phone back down again.

“This just isn’t working,” she muttered, before walking out again and picking up a phone in the main office.

Adam sneaked a look at her computer screen but it was password protected and he was worried that she’d come back and catch him if he tried to break her password.

Suddenly, her phone rang and his mum rushed back into her office.

“Yes,” she said, “Um, right. You’ll need to give me the details and then I’ll meet you. Hang on a moment. I’ve someone here. Call me back in one minute.”

She turned to look at Adam, “What are we going to do with you?”

“PC Wilks, can you come here,” she shouted out the door.

A woman PC came into the room.

“I’ve got to go out on an important case,” said Adam’s mum. “I need the boy out of my way.”

PC Wilks yelped in surprise and then tried to turn it into a cough so that she didn’t upset her new boss. But she was a brave policewoman.

“I’m sorry, madam,” she said, “I’m not sure I can think of anyone to help you. Shouldn’t the boy be in school or with a child-minder?”

“No, no, it’s me who’s sorry,” said Adam’s mum. “I didn’t call you in to baby-sit.”

“No, madam,” said PC Wilks.

“And I didn’t call you in because you’re a woman,” said Adam’s mum.

“Of course not, madam,” said PC Wilks.

“I called you in because you were the first person I saw when I looked out of my door and I need someone to take Adam down to the cells.”

“What?” said PC Wilks.

“What?” said Adam.

“I’m sure there’s a spare cell. Tell the duty officer to lock him in until I come down and collect him.”

“You can’t,” said Adam, “I haven’t done anything wrong.”

“Adam,” warned his mum. “Do you really want me to charge you with something first?”

“No,” said Adam quietly.

“Well, go with PC Wilks.”

“He’ll be fine,” said Adam’s mum. “He’s got his computer with him and that’s all he does all day anyway.”

The phone started ringing. Adam's mum shooed Adam out of the room. PC Wilks took him gently by the arm and led him along a corridor and down some stairs.

"A new one for you," she said to the duty officer.

"He's a bit young isn't he," said the duty officer.

"Don't be fooled," said PC Wilks, "he's probably the most dangerous person we've ever had down here."

"Who the heck is he, then?" said the duty officer.

"He's none other than the new Detective Superintendent's son!"

"What, you're kidding me?" said the duty officer.

"No kidding, you better make sure this one doesn't escape."

The duty officer laughed and asked Adam, "What have you done to upset her?"

Adam didn't think it was funny.

"Broke into school," he said, "stole all the dinners and blamed it on the assistant dinner lady."

The duty officer laughed again. "Kids," he said.

He unlocked a door and led Adam down a corridor to a bare room with just a chair, table and bed.

"I'm sorry," he said, "I'm going to have to lock the door. I can't let you wonder along the corridor because of all the real criminals."

Adam burst into tears.

"Hey, hey," said the duty officer, "come on. It's not that bad."

"I didn't really steal the dinners," said Adam.

"course you didn't," said the duty officer.

"It's just I didn't want to move school again," said Adam.

"It's hard starting in a new place," said the duty officer.

"I need to say sorry," said Adam.

"That's right," said the duty officer.

He leaned back into the corridor and loudly said, "That's proper remorse that is. We could do with a bit more of that down here."

"I need to say sorry to my mum," said Adam. "Please can you take me back so I can say sorry."

"No," said the duty officer, "I can't do that. I can't leave my post."

Adam cried even louder.

It worked. The duty officer led Adam back along the corridor and out through the security door. He called another officer to take his place and led Adam back up the stairs.

When they reached Adam's mum's office, Adam stepped in front of the duty officer and still sobbing opened the door a tiny fraction, looking like he was scared of what he would find inside. As he hoped the room was empty and he positioned himself carefully in the doorway so that the duty officer could hear but couldn't see.

"I'm sorry," he sobbed. "I won't do it again. Please don't send me back down the cells, please, please. Can I... can I... just sit in the corner? No I won't mum, honest. Just there, okay."

Adam turned and gave the duty officer a small wave. He then stepped into the office, closed the door behind him and leant against it listening.

He couldn't hear anything; phase one of his plan was complete. He decided to wait for two minutes to make sure the duty officer had time to get back to his position.

Adam found it hard to wait. He was itching to get to his mum's computer and try breaking into it.

As soon as the second hand reached the twelve he dashed across the room and clicked the mouse.

"Damn," he said.

The computer was switched off. It was too risky to turn it on. Adam pulled at his mum's desk drawers.

Locked.

Adam smiled. There must be something interesting in them. He dug into his rucksack and pulled out his bump key. He slowly inserted the key into the lock, applied a gentle turn and then quickly bumped it into the lock. The key rotated and Adam was able to slide the drawer open.

Inside were two boxes both marked surveillance equipment. Adam slipped them into his pack and re-locked the drawer.

Adam walked across to the room and confidently opened the office door. He turned and waved to the empty office.

"See you after school," he said before walking calmly between the desks to the main entrance. He pressed the green button to unlock it and escaped from the police station.

## ***Day 10 – Monday lunch time. The tree-house***

The first thing Adam did was to text me. He'd done that a lot. That's how I knew what was happening.

Sam, I'm on my way to school. Have to catch Caleb in the act or I'm in big trouble. Do you know anywhere I can spy from?

Adam should have realised that we can't use mobiles during lessons. Fortunately I checked my phone at lunchtime. I texted back with directions to the perfect hideout - Mark's tree house.

Mark lives next to the park opposite the school and the tree house has a great view. It's the perfect place for a stakeout, so I sneaked out of school to meet Adam by Mark's back gate.

The tree house is about three metres off the ground and looking up all you can see is solid floor, continuous walls and the 360-degree double glazed mirrored windows. There's carpet on the floor inside and a cable runs from his house to power the heater and kettle.

“Wow,” said Adam. “It looks like a flying saucer with a tree growing through the middle of it.”

The tree-house is the home of Mark’s Lateral Thinkers gang. To become a member you have to pass a test that demonstrates you are brilliant at solving problems and having clever ideas. I never took the test, but because I built the tree house I know how to get in, and I’m allowed to use it when no one else is around. Sometimes they let me sit in on their gang meeting. I don’t usually follow what they’re saying but it’s great being in the tree-house with everyone.

“How do you get up there?” said Adam. “I can’t see a doorway.”

Getting into the tree house was another test. I’m sure Adam could have solved the problem and found his way in but we didn’t have time to mess about.

“Watch this,” I said.

The trick was to climb the oak tree on the other side of the garden. At about five metres high there was zip wire that stretched all the way across to the tree house.

“Geronimo,” I shouted as I zoomed across.

“Watch out,” said Adam, “you’re going to crash into the tree.”

He was right. I was going to crash – but one second before the deadly impact a strange thing happened.

A heavily padded hatch swung open, lifting high above the tree house roof and resting against the trunk of the tree. I crashed harmlessly into the soft pink pillows attached to the hatch and fell into the arms of the waiting cushions below.

I reached up and pulled a lever. The hatch swung down and small motor whirred as it sent the zip wire handles back to the oak tree.

“Cool,” said Adam.

I stood up and turned towards the windows. I was just reaching down to lower the entrance ramp when the hatch sprung open and Adam crashed down into the cushions.

“What are you doing?” I said. “You could have been killed. There’s a trick I haven’t shown you and the hatch won’t open unless you know it.”

Adam smiled, “Wow, you get a great view from here.”

“You wombat,” I said. “Only one person needs to come on the zip wire.”

I pulled a lever below the window and a whole section of the wall folded down and a ladder extended to the ground.

“That’s the way you’re supposed to get in.”

“The zip wire was much more fun,” said Adam.

He propped himself up on several beanbags and turned to watch the school. I passed him some binoculars that are always hanging around the tree-house.

“Don’t worry,” I said. “No one can see you. The glass has a one-way coating on it. I’d better get back to school before I’m missed.”

I quickly shot down the ladder and turned back to watch as the ladder was sucked back into the tree house.



“Make sure you don’t hang around on your way out,” I said. “You only have five seconds before the ladder closes up again.”

I waved to Adam from the park. I’m sure he saw me and he probably waved back but the one-way coating meant I couldn’t see him at all.

### ***Day 10 – Monday lunch time. Watching and waiting***

Adam kept a careful watch on the school, wishing he had thought to bring some food and drink with him.

He didn’t see Caleb or spot the damage he was causing. I was in the dinning hall when it happened. The hall was full. Everyone had started having school dinners again. A queue was snaking back from the counter almost to the door.

“What’s taking so long?” someone shouted.

I moved up to the counter to investigate. I bent down and stared up the Dinner Tube. I could see that the conveyor wasn’t moving. It should be moving all the time.

“Something’s wrong,” I said.

“I bet it’s that Bad-Man Adam Adams,” said a year seven boy.

I pushed past him, “Don’t be stupid,” I said. “He’s not even in school.”

I rushed down to the kitchen where poor Mrs Mack was surrounded by plates of food.

“Sam,” she said. “The food’s not going down the tube. You’ve got to do something.”

I stepped back into the corridor and that’s when I saw the broken pipes. It was obvious what had happened and a voice behind me confirmed who had done it.

“Is something wrong?” said Caleb.

I didn’t reply. I was busy checking to see if I could fix things, but it was hopeless. Caleb had really smashed it. I’d need about ten new parts before I could do anything.

Caleb opened the kitchen door.

“Can I help?” he said sweetly to Mrs Mack.

“Only if you can figure a way to get these dinners to the hall,” she replied.

“We could carry them,” I said.

“We’d never get them safely up the stairs,” said Mrs Mack.

“We could use the old dumb-waiter lift,” said Caleb. “It still goes up to the first floor corridor which runs along to the new hall.

“Are you sure it’s safe?” said Mrs Mack.

“Oh yes,” said Caleb, “My mum used it last week to send up some sandwiches.”

“I’ll get a few of my friends to help,” he said. “They can carry meals from the kitchen to the dumb-waiter. I’ll send them up and then some others can take them into the hall.”

“Brilliant,” said Mrs Mack. “Oh Caleb, I don’t know what I’d do without you.”

“You’d still have working Dinner Tube,” I thought.

Caleb gave Mrs Mack a beaming smile, turned and winked at me. He then stuck two fingers in his mouth and whistled. Four of his cronies suddenly sprung down the stairs.

“You two bring those plates along to the dumb-waiter,” he told them, “and you two go up to the corridor and take them to the hall.

It was obvious he’d had this all planned.

\*

Adam was still watching from the tree house. He couldn’t see any of what was going on in the kitchen or in the first floor corridor.

What Adam did notice was that someone was on the scaffolding. It was where the school scaffold and the scaffold from Brown’s café touched above the alleyway.

It was too far to see clearly from the tree-house even with binoculars so Adam pulled the leaver and scampered down the ladder. From the edge of the park he could see Mrs Brown standing on the scaffold and passing two plates to Mr Brown. Mr Brown scraped half the dinner off each plate onto a café plate. Mrs Brown then placed the half-filled plates back into a hole in the wall, while Mr Brown ran down to the café with a lovely full plate of food.

Adam waited until Mr Brown was back in his kitchen and Mrs Brown was looking intently into the hole. Then he rushed across the road and slipped along the alleyway until he was directly below where Mrs Brown was crouched.

Unfortunately, that’s when I phoned him. I wanted to tell him what had happened and work out what to do next.

Adam turned his phone off as quick as he could. He looked up and saw that Mrs Brown was still busy with the hole in the wall. He didn’t notice Mr Brown, who was half way up the scaffold.

“Do you remember the signals,” shouted Mr Brown.

“Of course I do,” said Mrs Brown.

“Well give Caleb the five tugs to say we need a five minute break,” said Mr Brown. “He’ll have to send the dinner straight up to his friends in the corridor.”

“But...” said Mrs Brown.

Mr Brown cut her off, “Just do it woman and then get down here quickly.”

Mr Brown rushed back to the kitchen before Mrs Brown could reply.

“What a cheek,” said Mrs Brown. She reached into the hole and gave five tugs on the rope. Then she stomped down the scaffold stairs and in through the back door of Brown’s café.

“Now let’s find out what they’re up to,” thought Adam

## ***Day 10 – Monday afternoon. Caught in the act***

Adam expected to hear shouting but the kitchen was quiet. He quickly climbed up the scaffold, knowing he only had five minutes to find out what was going on. It wasn't easy getting up the scaffold because there were plastic sheets covering the sides.

It took him two minutes to climb up the side and over the top. Fortunately there was no roof on the scaffold or he wouldn't have been able to get in. A whole section of the school wall had been removed. He could see the Dinner Tube passing by, with a slice taken out and a small diversion so that each plate could be seized as it passed, but there nothing was moving in the tube.

He could also see that the hole in the wall had recently been extended by about a metre so that it broke into the dumb waiter lift shaft. Adam stuck his head in the shaft and glanced down. Below him was dark but a faint light was coming in from below. Suddenly the ropes started moving and a tray shot up towards his face. Adam pulled his head out of the way as a tray with a plate of steaming hot sausage, mash and mushy peas came flying up. The dumb waiter didn't stop but Adam grabbed the plate and managed to pull it out as it passed.

"So that's what they're doing," he thought, "there stealing stuff off the plates again."

Suddenly a deafening siren shattered Adam's thoughts. A police car skidded to a stop at the entrance to the alleyway.

"Stay where you are," shouted a voice from the Brown's kitchen. It was a police officer who looked suspiciously like PC Wilks.

Adam dropped the plate, and saw it smash on the scaffold and almost stab into another police officer who was approaching from below. Adam stretched up to the scaffold bars and started to climb.

"Oh, no you don't" said a familiar voice.

Adam looked back and saw his mum coming out of the Brown's kitchen. She quickly grabbed him by the belt and yanked him down.

"This time, you're for it," she said.

"But mum, it wasn't me," said Adam.

His mum looked down at the broken plate and pulled Adam's hands towards her.

"You've been caught red-handed," she said. "Or in your case, green-handed."

Adam looked down. Mushy peas were splattered across his palms.

"Mum..." he started to say.

"Adam, I've already smoothed things over for you once. It's about time you faced up to your own responsibilities."

Adam's mum turned to PC Wilks. "Take him back to the station, and this time make sure he stays locked up."

Adam's mum spoke to Mr Brown, "Thank you for your help. I'm sorry that he's caused you so much trouble."

"I understand," said Mr Brown, "Kids nowadays. Huh, they get into all sorts of trouble. We're lucky with our Caleb. He's such a helpful boy. I guess we've always set him such a good example."

Adam's mum nodded to Mr Brown, glared at Adam and signalled to PC Wilks that it was time to move out.

PC Wilks took Adam by the arm, but this time she wasn't so gentle. She led Adam through Brown's café and out to the police car. A crowd of kids were watching from the school gate.

"See I told you it must be that Adam Adams," said one.

"He's trouble alright," said another.

Adam looked up, saw me watching and shrugged his shoulders before being pushed into the police car.

"Did you see that," said one of the kids, "he doesn't even care."

I turned away and walked back into school. I'd only known Adam about one week but he was the best friend I'd ever had. I couldn't let him get arrested for something he hadn't done.

Caleb was walking towards the gate, "I see they've caught your boyfriend."

I charged at him, "Arrghhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh."

Caleb turned and ran. If I'd caught him, he'd be dead, but my mum stepped in my way and caught me instead.

"What's wrong love?" she said. "You don't usually get so worked up."

I wrapped my arms around mum. "It's Adam," I said. "He's getting blamed for something he didn't do."

"Well, if he didn't do it, I'm sure it'll all work out okay in the end," said mum.

I wasn't so sure. I walked slowly up the steps for science. It was science theory and although Mr Mack is a great teacher, even he couldn't make science theory exciting enough to distract me. Caleb kept looking over and grinning. I kept my head down and tried to concentrate on reflection and refraction. Usually I'd love this stuff. I'd forget all about what Mr Mack was saying and let my mind buzz with ideas of how to incorporate lenses and prisms into the lighting display for the dinner-dance. Today I couldn't be bothered, my mind kept repeating *it's not fair, it's not fair*.

## ***Day 10 – Monday after school. Making contact***

I was still grounded and at the end of school I stomped into the cleaning cupboard. Mum was busy pulling out all her hall polishing stuff. I kicked my stupid POSH cleaning machine. Last time mum used it the motor overheated and scorched a patch of the hall floor. Mum's not risking using it again as she wants the hall to be perfect for the dinner-dance on Thursday.

"I've run out of polish," said mum. "I'm going into town to buy some more. You can come with me, go home or you stay in here. Which is it going to be?"

"I'll stay here," I said. "I've an idea how to shield the POSH motor using that biscuit tin."

"Have you got your mobile?" asked mum.

"It's back in the house, charging," I replied.

"Here, you take mine and I'll get my old one. Call me if there's any problem."

I stared down at mum's Smart Phone. I'm hoping she'll buy me one for Christmas. The phone has unlimited data connection as well as oodles of free texts and minutes. As long as I deleted the sent items I could use the phone as much as I liked without it costing my mum a penny.

"If only I could call Adam", I thought, "I am sure he'd have a plan."

\*

Adam sat on the hard bed staring at the blank wall. In his head he kept repeating, *it's not fair. It's not fair.* If only his mum would listen to him.

PC Wilks had confiscated his bag containing his computer and mobile. She had even made him remove his shoelaces, which would make it difficult to run away.

A key rattled in the lock. Adam hoped it was his mum and that she would give him a chance to explain, but it was the same duty officer carrying a plate of food.

"Here's your grub, I'm not sure you deserve it myself, playing a trick like that. Good acting though, with all those tears. You ought to see if you can get in the movies."

Adam looked at the plate – more sausage mash and mushy peas. For once Adam didn't want to eat it and pushed the plate away.

"Can't say I blame you," said the duty officer, "the mash is always lumpy. It's part of the punishment, ha, ha, ha."

Adam didn't laugh. His eyes were starting to fill with water.

"Ahh – don't think you can fool me again," said the duty officer.

Adam wiped his sleeve across his eyes and turned to stare at the wall.

"Hey," said the duty officer, "now I don't know if that's real tears or some sort of game you're playing. But anyway you might like this."

Adam turned to see a cake box. It had already been opened and slice of cake was missing. Adam glanced up at the duty officer.

"Now don't you look at me like that," said the duty officer. "This is how it came. That girlfriend of yours said she bought it for you but then she got hungry on the way and took some herself. I don't even eat cake. Well do you want it?"

Adam took the plate and stared at it.

"It's not going to bite you," laughed the duty officer, "and you never know, you might find a file in there so that you can escape."

He picked up the untouched plate of lumpy mash and chuckled his way back down the corridor.

Adam waited until he heard the corridor door clang shut before pulling the cake out of the box. It was a plain Victoria sponge with a layer of jam and icing.

"You never know," thought Adam. "Why would Sam send a cake unless it had something in it?"

He stuck his fingers into the middle and pulled the cake apart. He was surprised to find a small plastic bag containing a Smart Phone.

I'd put a note in with the phone:

This is my mum's phone so don't answer it unless you know it is me. Sam

Adam smiled and turned the phone on; ready to text me. Suddenly, he frowned as he realised he didn't know my phone number. He looked at the screen wondering what to do. Suddenly the phone vibrated in his hand.

You have 1 new message

Adam tapped the button to read.

Hi Adam, I hope this is you. What are we going to do?

Adam smiled again and texted a reply:

How did you manage this?

It was only a matter of minutes before Adam received my reply:

Mum went shopping so I ran to the shop, bought a cake and ran to the police station. Mum is still shopping. I'm shattered now and worried about what to say to mum about her phone.

Adam texted back asking me more questions and then he told me how to handle my mum.

I immediately dialled my mum's old phone and put his ideas into action.

"Mum," I said. "It's me Sam."

"Sam, are you alright?" said mum. I could hear supermarket sounds in the background.

"I'm fine mum but... but.."

"What is it love," said mum.

I put a croak in my voice, like I was upset. "It's your phone mum. I've lost it."

"Lost it?" said mum.

"I put it down somewhere and I can't find it. I know it's here in the cupboard somewhere but I can't see it. I've looked everywhere."

"Hang on, how are you phoning me?" said mum.

"I went home and got my own phone," I said.

"Have you tried ringing it?" said mum.

"What?" I said.

"Ring my new phone and see if you can hear it."

"Oh. I tried that. I didn't hear it." I said. I went for the sad voice again. "It's gone, I'm sorry, it's all my fault."

Mum laughed, "Don't worry it'll turn up. I'll be back soon and we can look for it together."

I smiled. It had worked like Adam said. The cleaning cupboard was so full of stuff that mum and me could spend days looking for the phone.

I've spoken to my mum. Now how do we stop the Browns and make your mum understand the truth?

Adam's reply was not encouraging:

I don't know.

### ***Day 11 – Tuesday at school. Public enemy number one***

It took two hours for mum to give up looking for her phone. We ransacked the cleaning cupboard, dug into boxes that hadn't been disturbed since the roman empire and emptied shelves to discover stuff we'd lost when I was a baby!

It was hard for me to pretend to look when I knew exactly where the phone was and who had it. It wasn't a waste of time. Some of the stuff we found was brilliant, including the missing Electrostatic Base Unit for our Powder Coating Gun. My new POSH 2 machine is going to look amazing with a mirror finish in either silver or gold – it depends which powder paint we find first.

It's not fair. I'm so busy on the school lights and trying to stop Caleb Brown that I haven't any time to work on my POSH.

Caleb was being as obnoxious to me as usual. It started before we even got into class. He spotted me in the playground before I saw him. I was texting Adam to see if he had any ideas – he didn't. Caleb came right behind me.

"You texting your boyfriend?" he said. "I hear he's been locked up by the police – again."

I didn't say anything. I walked across the playground trying to ignore Caleb laughing behind my back.

I was last to arrive in class. The whole room fell silent when I came in. Debbie Roe leant over and whispered to me, "Are you still going out with that Adam Adams?"

"Actually," I said, "I've never been going out with him. He's just a friend."

"I don't know how you can be friends with him," Debbie said. "He's trouble."

I wanted to give a good answer but couldn't think of one. Caleb was grinning and doing his big-eye face at me.

Miss Hobble started the register.

"Caleb Brown," she said.

Caleb didn't reply

"Caleb?" repeated Miss Hobble.

"Oh sorry miss," said Caleb. "Haven't you missed someone?"

Miss Hobble frowned and looked down at her register shaking her head slowly.

"Adam Adams," said Caleb. "I thought he was first on the register."

"Yes," said Miss Hobble, "but we all know he's not here today. So are you here Caleb?"

Caleb smiled, "Yes, I'm here Miss Hobble."

“Miss,” said Sharleen. “Is it true he was going to set fire to the new school buildings and burn them down?”

“I heard,” said Evie, “that he was putting poison in all the dinners.”

“No,” said Anthony, “he was putting crushed up glass in the dinners so anyone who ate them would get cuts inside their stomach and bleed to death.”

“Enough,” said Miss Hobbie. “We need to get to assembly and I haven’t even finished the register yet.”

“But Miss,” said Sharleen.

“No Sharleen,” said Miss Hobbie, “that’s enough speculation. I’m sure the police will sort things out.”

“Not with his mum being the sergeant,” muttered Caleb.

“Will you be quiet,” shouted Miss Hobbie. “All of you.”

The class was stunned to silence. Miss Hobbie doesn’t usually shout.

“Sarah Cunningham, are you here?” demanded Miss Hobbie.

“Yes Miss,” said Sarah.

Miss Hobbie finished the register in record time and we were the first class into the hall for assembly.

Mr Warshaw made his usual dramatic entrance and we all jumped to our feet. He started on his speech before we’d even sat down.

“Boys and girls, as you know it’s the leavers’ dinner-dance tomorrow. I’d appreciate your help at the end of assembly today could you all take your chair and place it carefully, I repeat, carefully at the back of the hall.”

Some poor year seven kid must have only been half listening. He picked up his chair and started walking towards the back of the hall straight away. I felt sorry for him when everyone laughed.

Mr Warshaw smiled at him, “Not now Bernard, after assembly.”

After the notices, the singing and the good work presentations, Mr Warshaw stood to make another speech. I assumed he’d go on about the chairs again but it was much worse.

“Can I remind you all, that once you have left the school grounds we don’t expect you to come back in again. I guess it shows what a good job we are doing. Some of you are so keen to learn that you keep coming back for more...”

Mr Warshaw paused and chuckled to himself. A few teachers joined in but the laughing soon petered out.

“... but we cannot have children wondering around the school grounds after hours.”

Caleb turned and pointed at me.

Cheek – if he hadn’t been nosing around after school none of this would have happened.

I was exhausted by the end of the day. Everywhere I went people looked at me and whispered to each other. Only two people talked to me; Debbie Roe gave me ‘advice’ about not spending time with Adam in case I get tarnished with the same brush, and Caleb kept singing ‘Bad Boys’ and then smiling at me and asking if I had heard from my Bad Boy recently.



Caleb smiled at me so much that Debbie Roe got jealous. She thought he must fancy me. As if! Urrghh.

At the end of school I texted Adam, hoping for good news.

Any ideas?

Adam's reply was even less encouraging than yesterday.

no

## ***Day 12 – Wednesday morning. Party invites***

There was only one day until the dinner-dance. Adam was still trapped with his mum in a hotel room or locked in the police cell when she was busy. I was grounded in the cleaning cupboard every evening and struggling to finish the lights for the dinner-dance. We knew the Browns were poised to strike but had no idea what they were planning to do.

I'd hardly slept. I kept on thinking about what we could do but nothing I thought of would work. I texted Adam:

Any ideas???

Adam must have been on his own and quickly replied.

No but I have connected this phone through the Internet with the spy bug in browns café. Will tell you if I hear anything. Worried about phone – have you got a charger for it?

That was all we needed. Mum's phone must be getting low on battery. I knew where she kept her charger but how was I going to explain that disappearing and I could hardly fit the charger in a sponge cake.

I decided not to reply. I'd save Adam the battery and anyway I didn't have anything to say. I rushed out of my house and saw a plain-clothes police car pull into the school playground. I knew it was a police car because of the policeman in uniform driving it; hardly a great disguise.

Adam's mum got out of the passenger door and strolled towards the school entrance. She was only half way across when Mr Warshaw came out and bounded over to join her.

I walked quickly towards them so that I could hear every word they were saying.

"It would be wonderful if you came," said Mr Warshaw.

"I don't see how," said Adam's mum. "I've still got the trouble-maker to look after."

"Hrmm," said Mr Warshaw. "I suppose you could bring him with you."

"And a wonderful evening that would be," said Adam's mum. "I'm sorry, I can't see the point of coming to the dinner-dance with him in tow. And if the food is as good as you say then I hardly think it would be right for Adam to enjoy it."

I took a deep breath and stepped in front of Mr Warshaw with my head down.

"Excuse me," I said.

Both of them stopped and I felt their eyes boring into the top of my head.

"Yes," said Mr Warshaw.

"I'm sorry sir," I said, "I don't think the lights will be ready in time."

"Oh dear," said Mr Warshaw.

I stood quietly, waiting and hoping, for what seemed like hours.

"Isn't there anything you can do?" said Mr Warshaw.

I shook my head.

"Can't someone else do it?" said Adam's mum.

"Sam's the only one who knows how the lights work," said Mr Warshaw.

"Well what's wrong with them?" said Adam's mum.

"I don't have time," I said. "If I had more time I could do it."

"Isn't she the one who was stealing the food with Adam?" said Adam's mum. "I bet she's just trying bunk off school."

That was my plan. If I had more time, then perhaps I'd come up with an idea how to stop the Browns. I'd failed again. I wasn't as clever as Adam.

Then I had another of my brilliant ideas.

I looked up at Adam's mum.

"It's not that," I said. "Doing the wiring is hard on my own. I have to keep going up and down the ladders all the time. I could do it after-school if I had help."

Adam's mum turned to Mr Warshaw, "There you go. Simple – there must be someone who can help her."

Mr Warshaw smiled back at her and asked me, "Is there someone who could help?"

"Adam," I whispered.

"What?" said both the grown-ups together.

"Adam," I said. "He really understands the lights."

"Hmm," said Adam's mum.

Mr Warshaw turned to look at her. "How about it?" he said. "If Adam was doing the lights then you could come along for a dance."

"I don't dance," said Adam's mum.

"The dinner, then," said Mr Warshaw. "Mrs Mack is such an excellent cook that the dinner-dance is the highlight of the year. The tickets are sold out months in advance."

"I don't have a ticket," said Adam's mum.

"I'm hoping you'll come as my guest," said Mr Warshaw.

"Okay," said Adam's mum.

The two of them gave each other a sickly gaze before remembering I was standing in front of them.

"I'll bring Adam after school," she said and marched back to the waiting police car.

Mr Warshaw absentmindedly patted me on the head and I heard him mutter to himself, "Well done, jolly well done Alfred."

I thought he'd confused me with someone else, until I remembered the nameplate on his door – Mr Alfred M. Warshaw.

I was already late for my English lesson so a minute longer wouldn't make much difference. I rushed to my locker and texted Adam the good news.

## ***Day 12 – Wednesday – Fixing things.***

They say that bad news soon blows over and that people only have fifteen minutes of fame, but I don't think that is true. Today was a repeat of yesterday, with Adam still the only topic of conversation and me the only one not allowed to join in.

I watched Caleb all day trying to figure out his plan. I saw him disappear down the kitchen steps and decided to follow him.

"Mrs Mack," said Caleb, "my mum sent me."

"And why was that?" said Mrs Mack.

"She's worried about your cooking," said Caleb.

"What?" said Mrs Mack.

"She's worried it's not going to get to the hall."

"Urrm," said Mrs Mack. "I'm sure that Mr Mack will think of something."

"The dinner-dance is tomorrow," said Caleb. "Will it be done in time?"

Caleb had a point. Mr Mack has so many good ideas that he forgets the one he's working on and starts a new one. Mrs Mack told me that they have a shower that Mr Mack has been fixing for eleven years. When he's finished they'll be able to watch tv, listen to the radio and even search the Internet while showering. When he started the plan was just to have hot water.

"I'm happy to help," said Caleb. "We could carry on using the dumb waiter and my friends could then carry stuff into the hall."

"Are you sure?" said Mrs Mack.

"On one condition," said Caleb.

"What's that?"

"You let us all have a pudding."

Mrs Mack laughed, "I'll tell you what. You can each have two puddings – how about that?"

"Yes," shouted Caleb. "It's a deal."

He shook Mrs Mack's hand.

"See you tomorrow," he said. "Don't worry I'll sort everything out."

I quickly ran up the stairs and back into the playground. Mrs Mack was too trusting. Caleb's idea of sorting everything out was to get Mrs Mack sacked.

\*

Adam arrived in the arms of the law – his mum's tight grip.

"I'll be back at eight," she said. "Don't go out of this building."

"Hi Adam," I said, "want to come and see my prison?"

I led him across to the cleaning cupboard and shifted some junk so that he could sit down on box of body parts – motorbike body parts, of course.

"Well," I said. "Any ideas what they're up to?"

"I listened all day," said Adam. "At first I thought it was business as usual – stealing food from the plates – but this time they're going to swap plates and

send revolting food into the dinner-dance. They didn't say how they are going to do it, but presumably they are going to tamper with the Dinner Tube again."

"The Dinner Tube is still broken," I said, "so Caleb's arranged to use the dumb waiter. He's getting stuff from the kitchen and sending it up. We've already seen that Mr Brown can get stuff off the dumb waiter before it gets up to the first floor corridor."

"There's only one thing to do," I said.

"What's that?" said Adam.

I picked up a large spanner and smacked it into my palm.

"Let's take Caleb out," I said. "I'll whack him."

Adam grinned, "Good idea. He can't do anything if he's not there."

"Are you mad?" I said. "I was only joking. We can't go around killing people."

"No, but what if he was injured. A broken leg or something. Just shove him down the stairs."

"No way," I said. "What if he bashed his head and really did die?"

Adam smacked his own palm repeatedly against his forehead.

"Come on," he said. "Think. There must be something we can do."

"The lights," I said.

"What about them?"

"We better get them fixed up. Come on, you can think while you help."

"I thought that was just a cunning plan to get me out of jail," said Adam.

"It was," I said. "But the lights still have to be fixed."

For over an hour we were both busy. Adam was my gopher – running up and down ladders fetching things and fixing things.

My mum made the whole job a lot harder by putting her final polish on the floor. We had to keep moving ladders out of her way and then once she'd polished I had to attach new sticky rubber pads to the feet of the ladders to stop them sliding all over the place.

"That's it," I said. I gave one final tug on the cable tie and climbed carefully down.

"Have you thought of something?" said Adam.

"No, I mean that's all the lights fixed," I said.

"But how are we going to fix the Browns?" said Adam.

"That's your call," I said. "What are the options?"

"Urrm," Adam hesitated and then gave me a list of possibilities.

"We could remove Caleb – but you're too squeamish for that. We could divert the supply line – but you said there's no way to do that in time. We could sabotage the whole dinner-dance so that the Browns can't swap the dinners."

"That's no good," I said. "You'll still get all the blame and the Browns will get away with what they've already done. We need to catch them at it and prove that you're innocent."

Adam paused. "You're right," he said. "We don't want to stop them – we want to catch them. I've got an idea. Are you any good at taking cars to bits?"

I smiled, "It's as simple as taking two motorbikes apart."

“Great,” he said. “My mum will be here in ten minutes. We need to be ready.”

### ***Day 13 – Thursday – Disabling the police***

It shouldn't have worked. You'd think that a senior policewoman would be more careful.

As soon as Adam's mum arrived in her brand new unmarked Audi A6, Adam rushed over to her.

“Mum, quick, quick.”

He practically dragged her out of the car and into the hall, gabbling all the time as though there was some kind of emergency.

I loved the new car smell as I dived through the open driver's door. The key fob was still in the lock and it was so hard to resist turning the key in the ignition to hear the roar of the v6 3-litre engine. I bit hard on my knuckles to stop my hand reaching out.

It wasn't as easy as two motorbikes. In a car, everything is hidden behind panelling and body trim. Even after I popped open the bonnet I couldn't see much. The engine itself was wrapped up like a cosy baby in a plastic body warmer.

I only had minutes before Adam's mum would return. I soon spotted the tracking device Adam had told me about. A quick turn of the screwdriver and it was safely in my pocket. Stage one complete.

Stage two didn't go so well. I desperately searched for a way to disable the car but there was nothing I could do. There wasn't even a battery I could disconnect. I discovered later that the Audi keeps its battery hidden in the boot under a carpet.

I heard the school door opening and quickly closed the bonnet. As Adam and his mum came out I ducked down beside the passenger door.

Adam almost walked into me as he came around the car. His eyes asked if I had done it. I shook my head in reply. I needed more time.

I held up one finger and then twisted it around like a clock. One more minute.

Adam got the message and walked back around the outside of the car and tapped on his mum's driver's side window.

“Now what,” she said.

“I forgot to say goodbye to Sam,” said Adam.

I stopped listening and started thinking. How could I disable a brand new, top of the range, police specification car?

With the right tools and an hour undisturbed I could think of seven ways of doing it. With one minute, an angry police mother in the driver's seat and a solitary screwdriver it seemed impossible.

Then it struck me. I was being too clever. Of course I could disable it.

I rolled over to the nearest wheel and got to work. Thirty seconds later I was done.

I rolled to the back of the car and stood up. I was just in the nick of time. Adam's mum had reached semi-ballistic stage and Adam had cracked under her withering stare. He was reluctantly walking slowly back to his side of the car.

"Hey Adam, see you tomorrow," I shouted and gave him a carefully hidden thumbs up.

"Right, see you Sam."

He climbed into the car smiling until his mum turned the ignition and the car burst into life.

Adam turned to me with a look of horror on his face, "What's happening?" he mouthed.

I tapped loudly on the window.

Adam's mum looked at me and with a sigh the window slid down.

"Have you seen this?" I said. "You better not drive or you ruin your wheel."

Adam's mum's eyes slid up till they almost disappeared and she mouthed a silent "What now?" She stomped out of the car and kicked the flat front tyre.

"Damn kids," she said.

"It could be a puncture," I said.

"Use your eyes," she said. "The dust cap's off the air inlet. Some damn kid thought it would be fun to sabotage a police car."

"Adam, pop open the boot will you."

"What's that?" I asked.

"It's a teddy bear," said Adam's mum. "It's useful if we have distressed kids."

The teddy bear was sat painfully on a spike strip. If I'd had one of those then I could have simply laid it across the ground and easily punctured the tyres. There was also a broom, a shovel, a blanket, fire extinguisher, a small battering ram, some traffic cones, and a torch.

"Brilliant," said Adam's mum. "All this stuff and where's the pump when you need one."

"I'm sure I've got one," I said.

Adam waved his arms to stop me speaking but I knew what I was doing.

"It might take me a while to find it," I said. "You could always leave the car here and pick it up tomorrow. I'll pump the tyre up for you so it's ready to drive away after the dinner-dance."

Adam's mum wasn't convinced. My attempt at disabling was pretty feeble. It wouldn't be hard for her to go and get a pump. I also realised that she probably didn't want to explain to her work-mates that she had lost her car in her first week at work.

"I know," I said. "I can get my mum to turn that security camera around. Then you can catch the kids who did it. I bet they come back to do the other tyres."

Adam's mum nodded, "You do that. I'd like to have words with those kids."

Adam gave me a thumb's up behind his mums back.

### ***Day 13 – Thursday – after school. The perfect view of disaster***

I couldn't concentrate in school. I was too distracted, even when Mr Mack gave us half a mile of copper wire and told us how to build electric motors.

I kept on thinking about the dinner-dance. Mrs Mack was cooking like mad. Every time I passed near the kitchen my nose would be enveloped in the wonderful smells wafting out of the steamed up windows, but they made me feel sick. I knew that even if everything went according to plan we still couldn't stop the Brown's stealing the food. All we could do was hope they got caught, locked up in prison and never, ever be allowed near a kitchen again.

The school hall was transformed for the dinner-dance; glittering lights sparkled and reflected off the polished floor and Mr Warshaw was showing off to Adam's mum.

"And this," he said, pointing to the Dinner Tube, "will make sure that all the dinners arrive piping hot."

No one had told him the tube was broken and that the dinners would be sent up the dumb waiter and then carried along the upper corridor.

Caleb was standing behind Mr Warshaw, smirking and waving. Then I realised, he was waving a blowtorch. My blowtorch.

I charged down from the lighting tower and pulled Adam to the side.

"Caleb's done something," I said, but didn't have time to explain. Mr Warshaw was signalling that he needed the spotlight for his speech.

"Caleb's got my blow torch."

It was hopeless. I was stuck high above everything with a perfect view of the disaster unfolding below.

### ***Day 13 – Thursday – after school. Disappointing dinners***

I could have given Mr Warshaw's speech for him. It's the same every year. He's got it printed out on a sheet of blue paper and he doesn't change a single word. Mr Warshaw welcomed all the guests, including the school governors. My dad was not one of them.

Mr Warshaw told everyone how the current year eleven were the best he had ever seen. Finally, he said the dinner-dance was the highlight of the year and he couldn't wait to tuck into the delicious food Mrs Mack always produced.

Mr Warshaw sat down and I noticed that plates of food started emerging from the Dinner Tube. Somehow Caleb had got it working. The plates of food were pouring out and being snatched up by year seven kids and delivered to the staff, guests and year eleven leavers.

I saw Mrs Brown take a plate off one of the passing kids and elbow her way to the top table where Mr Warshaw was beaming and grinning at Adam's mum.

"These dinners are so disappointing," said Mrs Brown and placed the plate of food down on the table.

Mr Warshaw looked at the mess on his plate.

"Shouldn't you be helping in the kitchen," said Mr Warshaw.

"I'm sure I should," said Mrs Brown, "but Mrs Mack was insistent. She wanted to show her best."

"I shouldn't say this," Mrs Brown continued, "but I don't think she's safe. She's getting on a bit and I think she is losing her marbles. I'll go and check on her. If I'm not there, who knows what she might do."

I abandoned the lights and rushed to find Adam.

### ***Day 13 – Thursday – after school. Only a cake***

"The Dinner Tube, it's working," I said.

"I know," said Adam.

"But how," I said. "It was completely smashed. There's no way Caleb could have fixed it."

"It was Mr Mack," said Adam. "He cut the tube short about half way along the corridor. Caleb's getting the food from the kitchen and putting it in the tube."

"So what can we do?" I said.

"Let's go to the kitchen?" said Adam. "Have you got the tracker device?"

"I left it hidden under the back wheel arch of your mum's car," I said. "I didn't want her to notice it moving around school."

"Good point," said Adam. "Come on let's go."

I looked around to check that the lights were working on automatic. As long as Mr Warshaw didn't want to do another speech, everything would be fine.

We slid out of the hall and into the playground. I knelt by the car and reached behind the wheel. Nothing was there.

I bent down and looked but still couldn't see anything.

"What's up?" said Adam.

"Nothing," I said and breathed a great sigh of relief as I saw the tracker, which had fallen to the ground. It was small enough to fit in the palm of my hand but I still couldn't see what use it would be. How were we going to hide it in a plate of food?

Adam led the way to the top of the kitchen block stairs. We listened carefully and could hear Caleb going backwards and forwards from the kitchen along the corridor.

"I've an idea," I whispered. "I need to get into the kitchen. Can you keep Caleb out of the way?"

"Sure thing," said Adam with a grin.



“Don’t do anything silly,” I said. “We don’t want to get in any more trouble.”

I edged the door open a crack and peered down. Caleb passed the bottom of the stairs with a plate of scrumptious looking food.

“Here goes,” I said.

I quickly dashed down the steps and through the kitchen door. I heard Adam follow behind and call out to Caleb, “Hey, that food looks a lot better than the stuff arriving in the hall.”

I could imagine Caleb smirking back and laughing at his cleverness but I didn’t have time to hang around. I had my own clever plans to put into action.

“Mrs Mack,” I said.

“Oh hello Sam,” she said. “How’s the dance going?”

“It’s great but have you got the cake?” I asked.

“It can’t be time for the cake yet? Can it?”

“Mr Warshaw wants it set up ready in advance. I can take it over so you can carry on cooking.”

“Are you sure you can manage it?” said Mrs Mack.

I looked at the cake. It was bigger than I expected. It was a fantastic mountain scene that reminded me of photos dad had shown me of Nepal. There was no way that cake was going to fit in the Dinner Tube. My idea was not going to work.

The door swung open.

“What are you doing here?” said Caleb.

Adam came in behind him and shrugged.

Suddenly I knew what to do. I ignored Caleb and walked over to the cake. I reached around behind it and pushed the tracking device into the soft sponge.

“Blast,” I said. I pulled out my hand, which was covered in icing. “Sorry, Mrs Mack. I’ve smudged the icing.”

“Don’t you worry dear,” she said. “A quick flick with the knife and it’ll look as good as new.”

It wasn’t quite as good as new but the tracking device was well hidden.

“I’m not sure I can manage to carry the cake,” I said. “Adam can you do it.”

“No,” shouted Caleb. “You can’t trust him with it. I’ll do it.”

“It’s okay, I’ll manage myself,” I said.

“I’ll take it,” said Caleb.

“You can’t,” I said.

“Why not?” said Caleb.

“You need to carry the food to the Dinner Tube,” I said.

Caleb smiled, “You and your boyfriend can do that, while I take the cake.”

I looked at Mrs Mack. She just smiled.

“You better be quick,” I said. “I’ve got to get back to the lights.”

“No problem,” said Caleb.

“Be careful,” said Mrs Mack.

“Yeah,” I said. “That cake is the most important part of the dinner-dance. If anything happens to the cake the whole evening will be a disaster and Mrs Mack would probably get sacked or something.”

“I wouldn’t go that far,” said Mrs Mack. “It’s only a cake.”

### ***Day 13 – Thursday – after school. The final dance***

“Only a cake,” I said, “that’s not a cake, it’s a masterpiece.”

Mrs Mack’s face broke into a huge smile, “Do you think so?”

Adam had worked out what I was up to and joined in.

“That’s fantastic,” he said. “I can see what Mr Warshaw means when he says the cake is the highlight of the whole dinner-dance.”

“Yeah,” I said, “you better get going Caleb and make sure it gets there.”

As soon as he had gone Adam and I picked up some plates of food and headed down the corridor. The food on the plates was marvellous, the gravy glistened and shone, the Yorkshire pudding was brown and crisp, the chicken looked like it would melt in your mouth and the roast potatoes glistened like gold.

“What do you think he’ll do with the cake?” said Adam.

“He’ll steal it,” I said.

“Are you sure he won’t just drop it,” said Adam.

“No way, it’s Caleb we are talking about. He’s as greedy as his parents.”

Adam nodded. He’d known Caleb less than a fortnight but he already knew what Caleb was like.

“I’ve one more trick to play,” I said.

I went back into the kitchen and picked up a tray of buns I’d spotted earlier. I put six buns on a plate.

“Can I add a bit of icing to these buns?” I asked Mrs Mack.

As usual she said yes.

I grabbed the icing pens and quickly wrote a single letter on each bun. I then covered the plate with a dish and set off to the Dinner Tube. I was just in time. Caleb came clattering back down the stairs.

“Right, you can clear off back to your lights now,” said Caleb.

We didn’t argue, we ran. We sprinted up the stairs and across the playground.

I rushed over to the PA system and flicked a switch. Suddenly the music in the hall was silenced so everyone could hear Adam and his mum.

“Mum,” said Adam, “look at this.”

“What?”

Adam lifted her phone and pointed to a map on the screen.

“That’s the tracer from your car,” he said.

“Someone’s stealing my police car?”

Adam nodded, “Quick let’s catch them.”

Half the school poured into the street behind Adam's mum. She frowned as she followed the trace into Brown's café and out the back into the kitchen.

"What's going on?" said Mrs Brown.

Adam pointed to the cake on the table. He walked across and slowly cut through the icing.

"There's your tracking device, mum" he said. "This is Mrs Mack's cake. We put the tracking device in it and Caleb stole the cake."

"And look at this," I said. "This is a plate buns from the school kitchen."

"No it's not," said Mrs Brown. "I made those buns."

"If you made them," I said, "then you can tell everyone what is written on them."

I reached out my hand and held it dramatically on the dish covering the plate.

Mrs Brown muttered, "You can't prove anything."

"Oh yes I can," I said.

I lifted the dish to reveal the six buns.

Everyone looked down and read the message emblazoned in pink icing.

"G O T Y O U"

"These are definitely the buns Mrs Mack made, and I decorated."

"Well how on earth did it get here?" said Adam's mum.

Adam led her out of the back door and quietly up the scaffolding. At that moment two dinner plates slowly trundled past the hole in the Dinner Tube. Mr Brown took the plates.

"Here you go," said Mr Brown. "Take these and get us two of the crap stuff will you."

Mr Brown looked around. He'd been expecting to see Mrs Brown, not a police woman with a serious face.

He was still holding the two plates of good food out. Adam took them off him.

"He's been stealing all Mrs Mack cooking and replacing it with his own horrible food," said Adam.

"And Mrs Brown," I said, "She's trying to take over from Mrs Mack so they can carry on stealing when the new kitchen is built."

At last Adam's mum was listening. We told her everything and by the time we finished six police officers arrived to arrest the Browns.

Adam's mum sat down at the kitchen table in Brown's café. Adam put the two plates of Mrs Brown's food on the table.

"Alfred," she said. "Would you care to join me?"

Mr Warshaw sat down opposite her. Adam's mum passed one of the plates to him.

"Now that's what I call a decent dinner," she said.

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Adam and I left the two of them gazing across the table at each other with gravy starting to dribble down their chins.

We followed the police officers and watched as the Browns were led away. I was disappointed that the police didn't use handcuffs but Adam says they only use them if someone is dangerous. I thought the Brown's cooking was dangerous but that didn't count.

Back in the hall everyone was buzzing. The food coming out of the Dinner Tube was now perfect and all those who had already eaten came back to get a proper dinner.

Suddenly Adam was the hero.

"Is he some sort of policeman?" said one of the year six waiters.

"An undercover spy," I said. "Sent here to solve the mystery of the disappearing dinners."

I climbed back up to my lighting tower. I flicked the switch from automatic to manual and started to make the place come alive with dancing lights. It wasn't long before the hall floor was crowded with dancing people. All the year eleven girls were asking Adam to dance, even though he's only a year nine and shouldn't really have been at the dinner-dance at all.

I trained a spotlight on him whenever he was dancing. He wasn't that good but when you're a hero nobody notices if you can't dance.