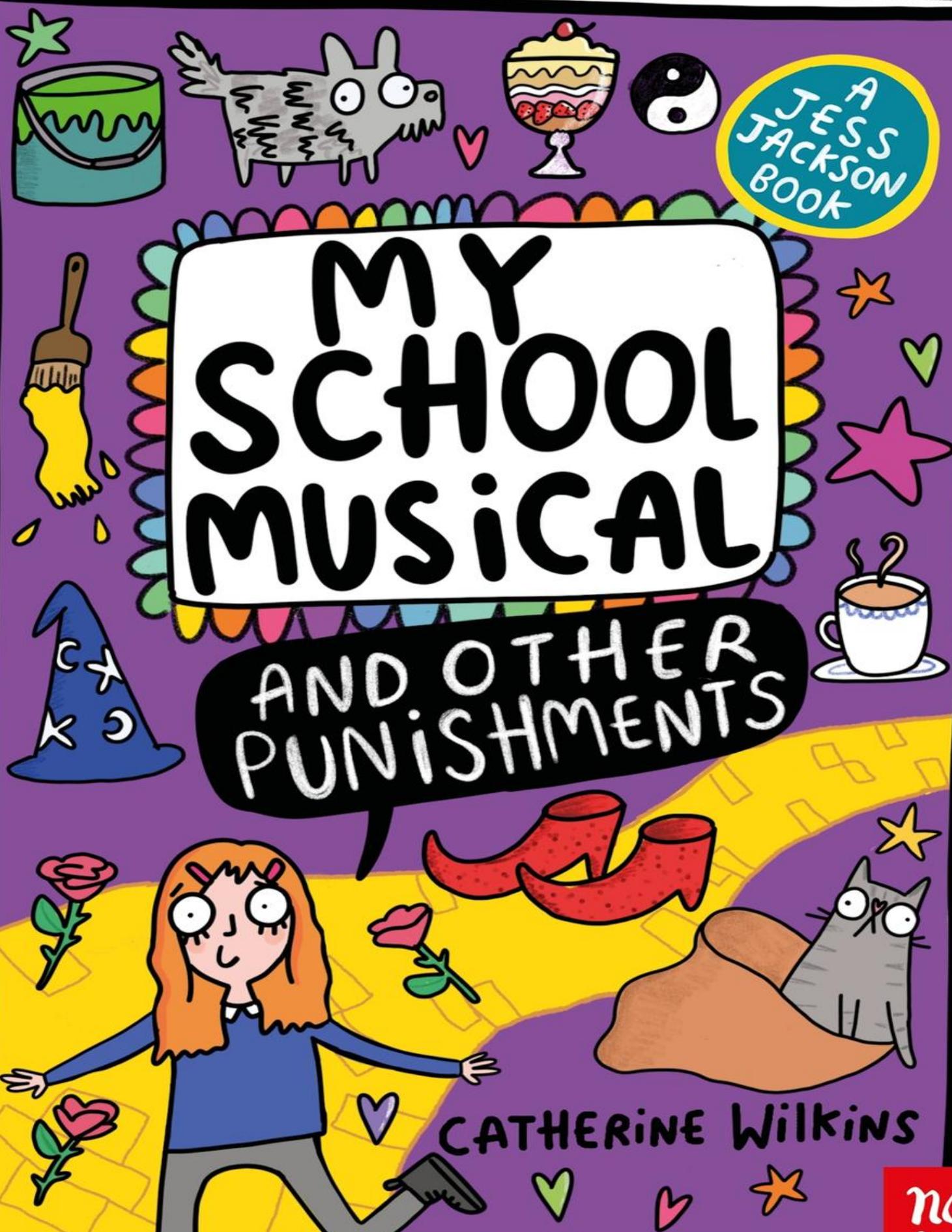


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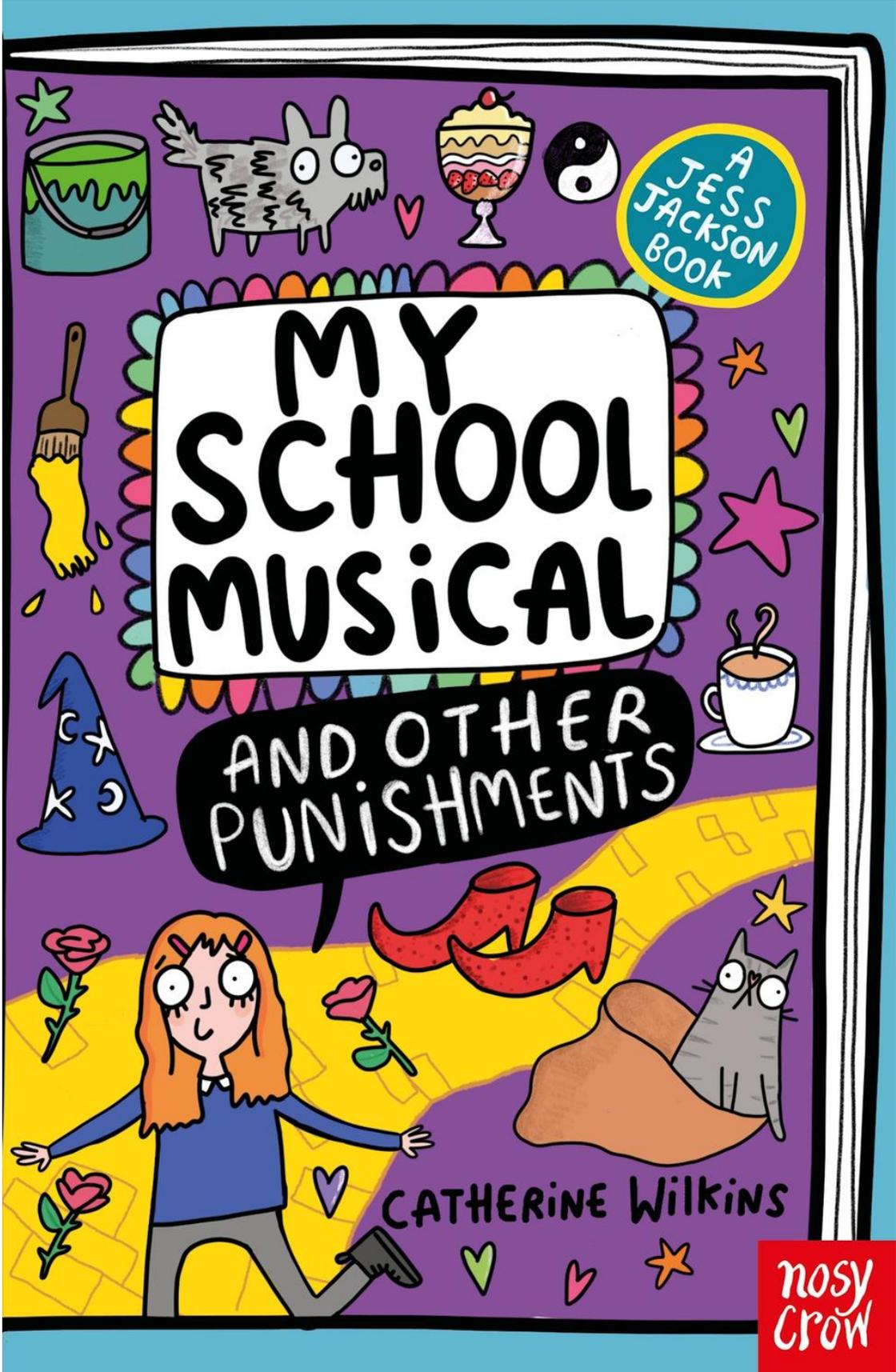
MY SCHOOL MUSICAL

AND OTHER
PUNISHMENTS



CATHERINE WILKINS

nosy
crow



A
JESS
JACKSON
BOOK

MY SCHOOL MUSICAL

AND OTHER
PUNISHMENTS

CATHERINE WILKINS

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MY
SCHOOL
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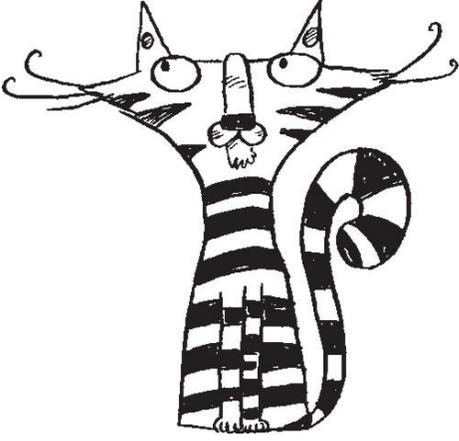


For just Rich.

Happy now?

C. W.







CHAPTER I

“Can I tell you about my brilliant idea now?” I ask. “I’m kind of on a time limit here.” I’m pretty sure I’ve managed to phrase this politely rather than arrogantly.



“Hah. *Arrogant much?*” laughs Joshua. Then again, maybe I haven’t.

Sometimes I find it tiring being a genius. (By the way, I know I may not be a genius *yet*, but I read somewhere that you have to *act as if*.)

I attempt to be more tactful. “It’s just we keep having the same old arguments about whether to put the price of the comic up, and I have to be--”

“Rules is rules, Toons,” interrupts Tanya Harris. She then indicates the pad of paper on her lap, as if it’s the sacred word of law, rather than a manifesto for a cheeky comic about our school made up by four eleven-year-olds. I think it’s a bit rich Tanya telling me *rules is rules*, when

she used to be the naughtiest and scariest girl in our school up until about five minutes ago (practically).



Which *rule* was she obeying when she spat in Mrs Cole's face, I wonder? Or when she kept putting chewing gum in Amelia's hair? *Exactly*. (I'm not about to ask her this, though, I'm not *stupid*. She's still a tiny bit terrifying, even though she's now a "businesswoman".)

But I don't have time for all this - I need to get back to my form room to stop Amelia doing something I will regret. Or to help her not do it. What I mean is, I have to stop her from making another huge mistake, which will ultimately be very helpful of me. We need a new word that means stop and help. Stelp? I need to *stelp* Amelia.

STELP

"We all have other things going on," says Joshua. "The school-musical auditions are tomorrow - I could be going over my lines, or practising."

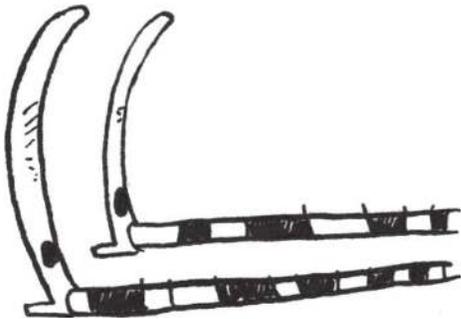
"Are you ... *auditioning*?" I can't really hide my surprise.

"Yes," replies Joshua.

"*Really*?" I guess I sound incredulous.

“Yes!” repeats Joshua crossly.

It’s just I never really had Joshua down as an all-singing, all-dancing kind of guy. He’s always acting like he’s so cool and above everything. His tall aloofness, constant eyebrow-raising and being on the school basketball team made me assume he wouldn’t necessarily want to be in *The Wizard of Oz*. I mean, he loves *comics*, for goodness’ sake! (Starting our own was his idea.)



“Jessica, you’re the one making this take way longer than it needs to,” interrupts Lewis. The voice of reason, as ever. Pedantic and shy, Lewis is also good at drawing cartoons. He and I do pretty much all the drawing.

I want to be a cartoonist when I grow up, like my hero Matt Groening. Or, at least, some kind of artist who draws things. Anyway, that’s not important right now. Must stop being distracted by my own brilliant mind. Hmm, maybe Lewis is right. I *am* dragging it out a bit.

“OK, OK,” I say. “Sorry. Can we move on to new ideas?”

“No,” says Tanya. “We’re still on Any Other Business.”

I sigh and look at my watch. They’re probably voting *right now*. My best friend, Natalie; my best ... frenemy, Amelia; Cassy, all those other--



“So!” booms Tanya. “Any Other Business?” Silence.
“OK, on to new ideas.”

Finally. “Right,” I say.

“Wait,” instructs Tanya.

“For *what?*” I ask.

“Does anyone have any new ideas?” asks Tanya.

“Yes! *I do!*” I say, frantically.

Tanya bursts out laughing. “You’re well easy to wind up, Toons. Classic. You should see your face!”

Joshua and Lewis look annoyingly amused as well. Part of me wants to storm out of the Quiet Reading Area, but the bigger part of me is trying not to laugh.

“Hilarious,” I say drily.

BRILLIANT

“Come on then, let’s hear it,” smiles Joshua. “Let’s hear this amazing, fantastic idea of yours.”

“For the record, I only said it was brilliant,” I say. “But I can’t help it if *all* my ideas are brilliant. It can be lonely up here, at the top, being brilliant all the time.”

Joshua chuckles. Lewis frowns and says, “I thought you were in a hurry?”

Oh, *I am. Amelia!* I snap back to attention. “OK. My idea is called the *Parents’ Handbook*. It’s kind of like a jokey *do’s and don’ts* for parents. Like:



‘Always give your children sweets, it makes them happy.’ It’s basically the opposite of what my parents do do.” (*Ha ha - I said “doo-doo”*.)



“That is actually a pretty good idea,” says Joshua, as a grin spreads across his face.

“Love it!” cries Tanya. “Done it again, Toons! Knocked it out the park, innit.”

“I think it has comic potential,” Lewis adds more sedately.

“It could even be a series!” enthuses Joshua. “We could do all sorts of other ones like, the *Teachers’ Handbook*, or--”

“The *Being Cool Handbook*,” interjects Tanya.

“Yeah!” agrees Joshua.

“*Teachers’ Handbook*: item one,” I joke. “Don’t interrupt pupils when they are talking.”

The others laugh. I *love* it when they laugh at my jokes. And when we all build on each other’s ideas like this. We’re a really good team (you know, apart from all the arguments).

“Hey, maybe we could all work together on it?” says Joshua. I glance at my watch again.

“Sure,” I say. “But at the next meeting, I really have to go now.” And then I scarper away and pelt towards my form room.



“OK, what did I miss?” I say, as I arrive, panting, at our desks in 6C.

6C

“Uh, try *everything*?” Amelia replies disdainfully.

“You missed the vote, Jess.” Natalie smiles sadly at me.

“Oh *no*.” I moan, putting my head in my hand. Then I look back up at them. “What are we?”

“We’re the ‘Discerning Awesome Fit Team’,” replies Emily. The - what? *Nooooooo!*

“I added the *fit*,” says Amelia’s snooty friend, Cassy, proudly. “I think it’s important to be healthy. And pretty.” She smiles.

I can’t help myself. “You idiots!” I blurt out.

IDIOTS!

“Um, *hello*?” snaps Amelia. “For your information, *discerning* means *intelligent*, so we most certainly are *not* idiots.”

“But don’t feel bad that we know more words than you,” adds Cassy smugly, making her and Amelia chuckle.

“It spells out *DAFT*!” I cry. “You’ve renamed our gang DAFT. You absolutely *are* idiots. I *told* you, whatever you choose, make sure the initials don’t spell something stupid!”

“Well,” Amelia pauses, looking uncomfortable for a moment. “You don’t say it DAFT, you say it D.A.F.T.”

D.A.F.T



"It's not that bad, Jess," says Natalie, as people start moving back to their own desks at the end of lunch.

"And we gave you *plenty* of warning about the meeting," adds Amelia huffily. "You were the one that kept complaining about the old name. If you cared so much, you should have come to it."

Honestly. I have to do *everything* myself. This is what happens if I am not around to babysit everyone every two minutes.

I sigh loudly as the remaining members of DAFT trail back to their own classroom. DAFT, formerly known as GUF. Formerly *formerly* known as ACE and CAC.

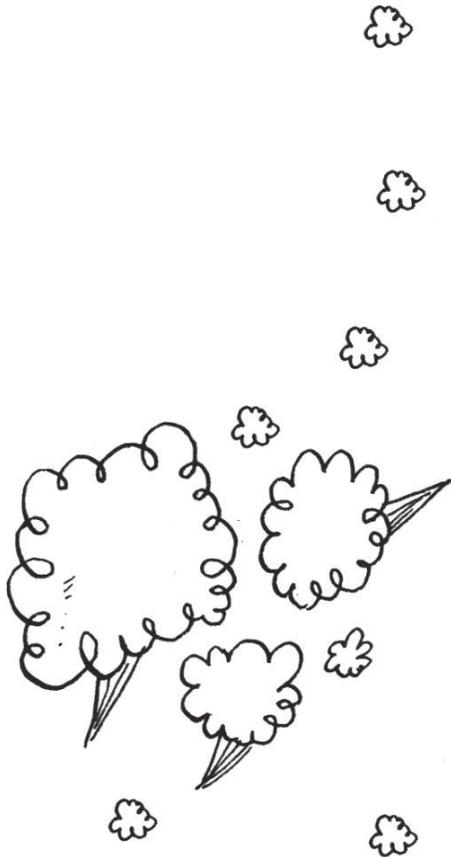


Spot the name *I* came up with. *ACE*. (I thank you.) It stood for Awesome Cool Enterprises because *I* understand how acronyms work. And Amelia - despite being one of the top in the class - still doesn't.



I *knew* I should have been here. I knew I couldn't trust them to at least *check* what it spelled out before they voted. Amelia's track record speaks for itself. Leaving aside for a moment the fact that she originally only started a secret gang with Natalie to deliberately exclude *me*, her name choices have always been terrible.

First she came up with Cool Awesome Chicks, or CAC (which I've always said made it sound like one of the milder swear words for poo). Then, when we buried the hatchet and merged our two warring gangs of ACE (which I had started to get back at them) and CAC, she named it Great United Friends, or GUF. (I missed that meeting, too.) So then we sounded like a gang of fart clouds.



I suppose at least we do seem to have moved away from poo and smelling like it, and into a new arena of

general stupidity. Maybe I *should* be grateful.

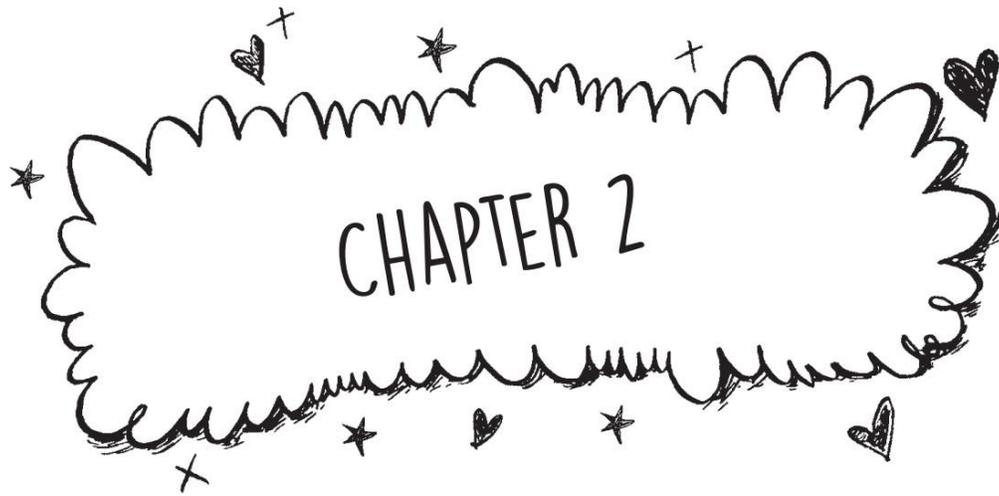
“Yeah, maybe it’s not too bad,” I lie. I don’t want her to feel bad for being a party to this tomfoolery. She was probably distracted anyway, thinking about her audition for the school musical. She’s been very focused on that lately.

And the rest of the nice ACE gang all have reasons not to point it out. Cherry and Shantair, my chess-club friends, are clever enough to have spotted the whole DAFT pitfall, but they don’t care enough about the gang thing to be bothered. In fact, they sort of think it’s all a bit stupid but harmless.

My other friends, Emily, Megan and Fatimah (who I sit with in art and French) just mess about most of the time. They’re always getting told off for talking in class. So they probably didn’t even notice what was happening.

But Amelia’s snooty, supercool friends like Cassy all pride themselves on their academic excellence. They think there are two things in life that are really brilliant: (1) being clever, and (2) knowing about fashion. So they totally *should* have noticed.

But no doubt they were so busy showing off because they knew the word *discerning* and then desperately trying to crowbar in the word *fit*, they missed what was staring them in the face. And yet they say *I’m* the idiot.



CHAPTER 2

“Oh my gosh, next time you see me, I’m going to be auditioning!” Natalie gives me a massive hug as I stand up to get off the bus after school. It’s slightly disconcerting.

OMG!

“Well, there’s a whole morning of lessons tomorrow first,” I say. “And presumably I’ll see you then?”

“You know what I mean! I’m so nervous. I don’t think I’m going to get any sleep tonight!”

“You’ll be brilliant,” I say firmly, then disembark and head towards my house.

I hear the new dog barking as I put my key in the front door. *Yay! The new dog! I love the new dog. Everyone does. Well, my mum maybe not so much. But everyone else.*

Though, actually, I think my mum does love the new dog *now*, but she sort of went through this stage where she kept saying, “We are absolutely not keeping it.” But I mean, that’s open to interpretation, right? (Ha ha, I am funny.)

What happened was this: my older sister, Tammy (who's already left home to be a student) and my barmy (in a mainly fun way) Auntie Joan turned up at our house one day with a rescued dog.

Tammy had been threatening to do this for ages. She's very into saving things. And I think Auntie Joan's *act now, think later* spirit finally tipped her into action.

I'm pretty sure the only reason my mum let them over the threshold and into the house *at all* was so we could argue in the privacy of the living room instead of out in the street in front of the neighbours.



So we all sat in the living room while the dog sat panting and wagging its tail at us. With its mouth open so it kind of looked like it was smiling.

"We are absolutely *not* keeping this dog," said my mum. "Let me tell you that right now."

"I completely agree with your mother," my dad said. Then, optimistically, "Maybe we could call him Bilbo?"

"It's a girl," said Tammy.

"Lady," said my little brother, Ryan.

"Yes, lady, whatever," said Tammy.

"No, we could *call* her Lady," explained Ryan.

We all looked at the dog. Despite panting loudly with her tongue lolling out of her mouth she did have a sort of haughty, regal look about her. She held her head quite high, so it was a bit like she was looking down on us. And she was all golden because she was a mixture of a collie and a golden retriever.

Then she rolled over and Ryan started patting her stomach. She loved that, you could tell. She started rolling around uncontrollably, then sat up again, licked Ryan's hand, and laid her head mournfully in his lap, gazing up at him.

"I love you, Lady," said Ryan. Then he looked at my mum with tears in his little six-year-old eyes, and added, "Please don't take her away."

I remember thinking: *Well played, Lady, well played.* So really it was Dog: 1, Mum: 0 from the off.

I really wanted to keep the dog, too. But I didn't want my mum to be upset either. She's mainly a really nice person. You know, really nice *for a mum*. Like, she only spoils all my fun *some* of the time. Which is pretty generous, if you think about it.

She tends to be a bit angrier than the mums you see on yoghurt adverts, but luckily my dad can usually calm her down with a cup of tea.

"It's me. Lady, you can stop barking now," I say pointlessly, as I open the front door.

Lady always barks when someone comes to the house. She is a brilliant guard dog in this way. Except, once you open the door, she stops barking and just wags her tail loads because she's so pleased to see you.

So, Lady is a great guard dog if you think that burglars would be terrified of her wagging her tail at them. Maybe if they had cynophobia? (That's a fear of dogs, fact fans.) But if they did, they probably wouldn't choose to be burglars in the first place, I'm guessing.



I stroke Lady's head, and she sits down in my way so I can stroke her more. "Nice try, Lady, but I'm not staying here all day stroking you," I tell her. Oh well, maybe just for a minute.

Lady had already had a couple of litters of puppies when she was found, living as a stray. But she was neutered at the dog's home so, much to mine and Ryan's disappointment, she can't have any more puppies.

And she's totally safe for us to have around. She's surprisingly well behaved for a previously wild animal. She sits on command, loves playing with us and is completely house-trained.

The only slight issue is the whole chewing-stuff thing. But I'm sure that's just a phase. Like when my dad wanted to grow his own tomatoes, or when Mum said we had to take our shoes off as soon as we came into the house.



I finally sidestep Lady and make it to the kitchen, where my mum is putting together the finishing touches to macaroni cheese, with *Super Saver Value* pasta and *Super Saver Value* cheese. My dad has just made her a cup of tea.



“*And,*” says my dad, not yet noticing me, “I saw eight *more* birds at the bird feeder just *now*. It’s a real hit with them, I tell you.”

“Great.” My mum sounds completely uninterested.

“And I think you and I can both agree that the new energy-saving light bulbs that Horace recommended have definitely been a success. He’s just great, you know. I check his website daily now. It feels good to be doing something to help the planet again.”

“Oh hello, Jess,” says my mum. “Your dad has had some very good news today.”

“Eight birds at the bird feeder? Epic,” I say, faintly sarcastically, as I sit down at the table.

My mum ignores me and addresses my dad. “This is nearly ready. Where’s Ryan?”