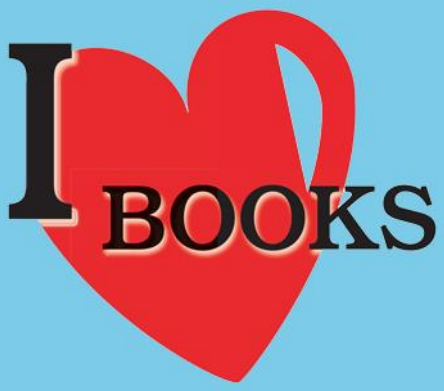


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Opening extract from

Worst Ever School Trip

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For Jane Harris, editor extraordinaire
~ Barry Hutchison



For my parents Dawn and Dave,
even though they never bought me a Furby
~ Katie Abey

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CHAPTER 1

THE PERMISSION SLIP

It was morning break and I'd spent most of it hiding out from … well, pretty much everyone really. I was sitting on the back bumper of the school minibus, tucked out of sight, when my best mate, Theo, popped his head round the side.





"There you are," he said, spraying crumbs everywhere as he munched on a slice of toast. A slice of toast I knew could only have come from one place.

"Did you go to the canteen?" I asked.

Theo nodded as he crunched away.

"Was Miss Gavistock there?" I asked.

Theo groaned. "Not this again."

Miss Gavistock was one of the school dinner ladies. I'd owned up to fancying her a few days ago and kept bringing it up at every opportunity – despite trying very hard not to.

"I want to marry that woman," I continued. "I'll make her dinner every day and serve it to her on a dirty plastic tray. While scowling angrily, just like she does. How we'll laugh!"



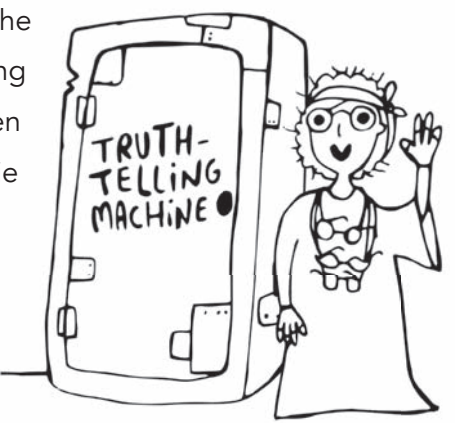
"What are you talking about? Shut up!" Theo said. "Stop going on about Miss Gavistock. It's weird."

The bell rang. I stood up and we both shuffled towards the school's front door, hanging back so I didn't accidentally start talking to anyone.

"I know, but I can't help it!" I reminded Theo. "Trust me, I don't want to say about ninety-nine per cent of the stuff that comes out of my mouth these days."

The truth is, it had been ninety-two hours since I'd last told a lie.

Before then, I'd been something of a lying expert. If they gave out black belts for telling fibs, I'd have been a seventh Dan master. All that changed, though, when I stepped inside a rusty metal box that turned out to be the world's only truth-telling machine. I haven't been able to utter a single lie since.



It was Wednesday morning now and I'd survived two full days of school with only three light beatings from my classmates, two tellings-off from teachers and one wedgie from Helga Morris in the year above. Everyone says you should always tell the truth but it turns out that, when you do, it can get you into all sorts of trouble.

It's amazing, for example, how much offence people take when you remark on their bad breath and body odour. Particularly if they're your head teacher, and they're giving an assembly at the time.

And you're standing on a chair, shouting.





See, being unable to lie isn't my only problem. Whatever that box did to me, it means I struggle to keep the truth *in*. It's like it's always there, waiting to come out at the worst possible times. I can be sitting quietly doing my work when I'll announce out of the blue that I'm planning to copy the person sitting next to me or that I've just stuck a particularly sticky bogey under my desk.

Luckily I sit next to Theo in most of my classes. Theo knows all about my lack of lying ability and is great at helping me cover it up – even though I've accidentally announced pretty much every secret he's ever told me, including the one about him being born with six nipples, four of which had to be surgically removed when he was two.