
THE
DAY
MY DOG
GOT
FAMOUS

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For Jo



PUFFIN

FRIDAY. TEN MINUTES UNTIL A FORTNIGHT OF FREEDOM

Drum roll, please!

Miss Grogan makes a final circuit of the display boards, then clip-clops back to her desk.



'You've made it *very* tricky for me, Year Five,' she says, her eyes twinkling. 'But I've made my decision. Drum roll, please!'

Some kids rap their knuckles on their tables. Others use pencils and rulers. Most also stamp their feet. Usually, I'd join in with this rare opportunity to make as much noise as physically possible in class. Today, I stay as still as I can, squeezing my thighs together to hold on to the nervous wee bubbling

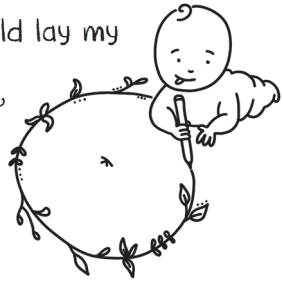
inside me. If I'm to believe my classmates, my entry into the end-of-term art challenge has a high chance of winning. A wet patch on my pants would definitely ruin the moment.



I make the mistake of catching Destiny Dean's eye across the table. She flashes me a confident sneer, then flutters her eyelashes in Miss Grogan's direction, her right index finger placed firmly across her lips. Typical Destiny. As if our teacher's decision will be swayed by noticing who's pointing at their nostrils. Although, to be honest, Destiny's a regular winner of our class competitions. But we've never been set an art challenge before. And drawing's my thing.

My mum says I was born holding a felt-tip pen and announced my 'artistic genius' by drawing the intricate ring of leaves that circle her bellybutton.

I used to scrawl on anything I could lay my hands on when I was little – walls, floors, clothes, my own naked body(!) – so I totally didn't get this was a joke until I was about six and discovered what tattoos were. I'm *such* a doofus.



Nowadays, I stick to paper and my favourite things to draw are cartoons. That's what I've entered into the competition: a comic strip of my most popular character: ***Astoundog***.

'It's got to be you, Ferris!' whispers Cal, my best mate, nudging me in my ribs as Miss Grogan makes a grand show of writing the winner's name on the certificate. He jerks his head to the display boards. 'That ***Astoundog*** cartoon you entered is brilliant.'

I smile. ***Astoundog*** is a regular feature of *The Hoot* – the monthly comic I make – and all my friends love him. For a moment, I let myself dream that Miss Grogan might love my genius super dog too.


EXPENSIVE JEWELLERY
STOP! THIEF!
Hey, buddy! You dropped a bracelet!
CLICK!
JAIL
Astoundog, you are ASTOUNDING!

'Without further ado,' announces Miss Grogan, 'the winner of the end-of-term art challenge is . . .' She flaps her hands up and down to silence the drum-rolling. Her eyes scan the classroom, stopping at my table. My stomach flips a somersault. A few of my friends turn to grin at me. Cal grips my knee. I cross my fingers and squirm in my seat. Miss Grogan picks up the certificate and smiles. 'DESTINY DEAN!'



A collective gasp sweeps the classroom. I feel my insides go cold. Destiny punches the air, then, to a ripple of unenthusiastic applause, skips to the front to collect her certificate. She sneers at me on her way back to her seat and, after checking Miss Grogan's not looking, whips her hand to her forehead and throws me the L for loser sign.



I shrug and pretend I'm not bothered. Inside, I'm reeling.

It's not that Destiny's entry was rubbish. She's a pretty good artist. Just like she's a good

writer, and a talented musician, and a fast runner. Art's the *only* thing I'm any good at; I thought this was my chance to finally beat her.

When the bell sounds for home time, I run to the toilets as fast as my crossed legs will take me. Two minutes later, I head to the cloakroom feeling deflated, and not just because my bladder's empty.

'Told you I'd win, Ferris!' snipes Destiny, barging past me to grab her glittery backpack from her peg. 'Cartoons are for babies.'

Jenson scowls at Destiny on my behalf. 'No, they're not!' He turns to me and smiles. 'Hard luck, Ferris. I thought your entry was best by MILES.'

'Me, too,' says Penny. 'I can't wait for the next edition of *The Hoot* to come out.'

'Yeah!' adds Idris. 'When will it be ready? After the holidays?'

'I hope so,' I say. That's my aim anyway.

Alfie thrusts his fist towards me. 'Wicked!' he shouts, as we bump knuckles.



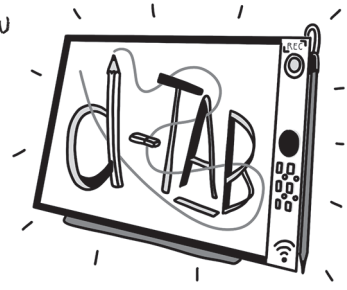
'I'll save some of my spends!'

I smile. My friends are brilliant. Not just because they defend me against Destiny. They appreciate the work I put into my cartoons and not one of them complained when I started charging for *The Hoot*.



Creating ten pages of original content every month has been pretty full on. But boy, it's been worth it. So far, from four issues, I've made £76.50, one green yo-yo and three packets of chewing gum. I'm OK with swapsies; I know what it's like not to have money for the things you desperately want. It's the reason I had to stop giving my work away for free: I'm desperate for a d-TAB.

You probably already know this, but d-TABs are THE BEST drawing tablets money can buy. I've been dying for one since the day I watched



a video of Clare-the-Flare, my comic-strip hero, using theirs to demonstrate how to draw Brainy Baz – the genius toddler that landed them a job as one of the chief content creators at KidToon, the biggest comic company in the world. Basically, d-TABs have EVERYTHING I need to take my cartooning to the next level: whizzy digital drawing software; tons of built-in pen styles; every colour in the world available at the tap of a button; unique animation features; and nifty functions that will make it mega quick and super easy to share my best work with comic companies, get my characters noticed and move a step closer to my dream of becoming a professional comic-strip artist. Ideally, I'd love a d-5000, but I'd be happy with a d-4000. Both come with a d-Pen.

The problem is, even the cheapest d-TABs cost five hundred pounds, and my mums are very particular about the difference between 'need' and 'want'. One of their favourite phrases is telling me that two pounds a week spending money is

'more than enough for a ten-year-old boy who has everything he really needs'.

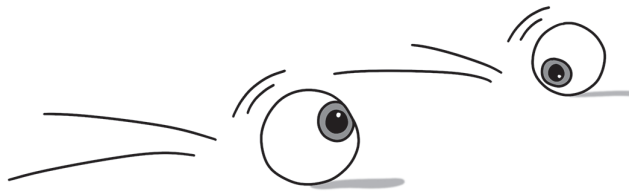
As you can tell, it's a long time since my mums were ten. And, as far as I know, they've never been boys. What do *they* know?

'You were robbed, Ferris,' says Cal, jolting me from my thoughts. He manoeuvres his wheelchair over to me, claps me on the back, then turns to face Destiny. 'You only won because your entry was a portrait of Miss Grogan and it made her look twenty years younger than she is. Everyone knows Ferris is a better artist than you.'

I'm not. Not really. We just have different styles. But most people nod. No one likes Destiny when she's in one of her showy-offy mean moods, which, unfortunately, is more often than not these days.

Destiny waves her certificate so close to Cal's face his fringe wafts up and down. 'I think this proves otherwise, California!'

'Whatever,' says Cal. He rolls his eyes at me. 'Ignore her.'



I glance over my shoulder as though Destiny's invisible. 'Ignore who?'

As usual, Cal dissolves into a fit of giggles at my quick wit. 'Enjoy your holiday, Ferris. I hope you don't encounter that annoying neighbour of yours.'

Did I mention, not only is Destiny Dean my classmate, she's my next-door neighbour, too. Can you believe my luck? I literally have no escape.



As Cal wheels himself to After School Club, the scowl on Destiny's face is replaced with a sly smile. 'Face it, Ferris, I'm SO MUCH better at art than you.'

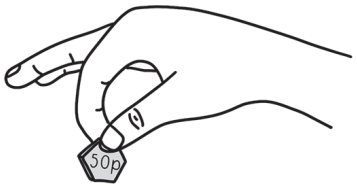
Grrr. If I had 50p for every time Destiny Dean told me she was SO MUCH better than me at something, or that she owned something that was SO MUCH better than mine, I'd be able to buy a d-TAB for everyone in Year Five. I bite my tongue to save myself getting into an argument, then grab my bookbag and pull out the only copy of *The Hoot*

I didn't manage to sell at afternoon break. 'Anyone want to buy this?' I ask no one in particular.

'Me, please!' says Destiny.

Wait, what?

Of all my classmates, Destiny's the only person who's never bought a copy of *The Hoot*. I frown. What's the catch? There's got to be a catch.



'Here you are!' she says, pulling a 50p piece from the front pocket of her backpack and thrusting it towards me.

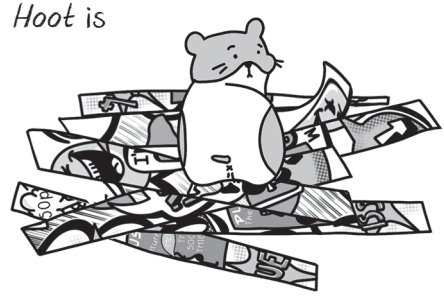
After a moment of suspicious hesitation, I un-narrow my eyes, take the money and hand her my creation. 'Thanks,' I say. 'And well done on winning the art challenge. You deserved it.'

She didn't. Cal was right. Her entry was a suck-up. But it's the start of the spring holidays tomorrow and, like I mentioned, she's my next-door neighbour. There's no way I can avoid her for a whole fortnight. Playing nice is probably a good

call, especially as she's finally supporting my comic venture. Plus, I feel a bit sorry for her. Not a single person has congratulated her for winning the art challenge.

Destiny examines *The Hoot* and nods her head. 'Just as I thought. Flimsy! And the perfect size to put through Daddy's shredder. Harmony will love pooing on this.'

The cheek of her! *The Hoot* is a work of art. How dare she suggest all it's good for is hamster poop.



I've a mind to grab my comic back and tell her to stuff her money where the sun doesn't shine. But 50p's 50p at the end of the day, and I need every penny I can get.

Hmph. So much for playing nice.