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sales@bouncemarketing.co.uk
020 7138 3650

DISTRIBUTION
Macmillan Distribution Services
Brunel Road, Houndmills,
Basingstoke, Hampshire RG21 6XS
E-mail: mdl@macmillan.co.uk
Tel: 01256 302692
Fax: 01256 812521

PUBLICITY
Tatti de Jersey
tatti@dejersey.co.uk

ALL OTHER ENQUIRIES
Laura Albery
laura@otterbarrybooks.com

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COMING 24 APRIL 2025

THE FIRST YEAR

by **Matt Goodfellow**

Illustrated by **Joe Todd-Stanton**

Matt Goodfellow's riveting, eagerly awaited sequel to his bestselling and multi-award winning verse novel, *The Final Year*

Nate's eleven and has just finished Primary School. After a challenging final year, life is looking up. His brother has recovered from a life-threatening heart condition, he's got the love of his mum, brothers and Auntie San, and he's off to Secondary School with his two best mates.
But while he's making new friends and avoiding the fists of Turner, his old nemesis, and struggling to come to terms with a strict new teacher and a sense of isolation from his brothers, a sudden surprise appearance in Nate's life threatens to throw him completely off course. And The Beast – the anger he tries so hard to control – reappears. Will Nate find a way to keep himself and his family together?

£9.99 • 198 x 129 mm • Paperback • 480 pages
9781915659606 • Age: 9+

A short extract from *The First Year* follows…

And just like that, he's gone

I blink hard as the rest of the school
swarm out onto the park
screamin and wailin
and kids are huggin and cheerin
and jumpin all over each other.

And on the far side of the park

there's nothin but sun

and shadows

and a single swift
blazin a trail across the sky.

Y'aright, Natey?

Mum says
strokin my fringe.

Ya look like you've seen a ghost or summat?

She looks at me deep in the eyes,
little wrinkles of concern on her face.

Yeah, Mum, I just…
I just thought… I… saw… summat.
Dun't matter…
was nothin… I s'pose…
Just me bein daft.

HEY, NATEY! COME AN' PUSH
MEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEE!

Comin, Dyl! Comin my brother!

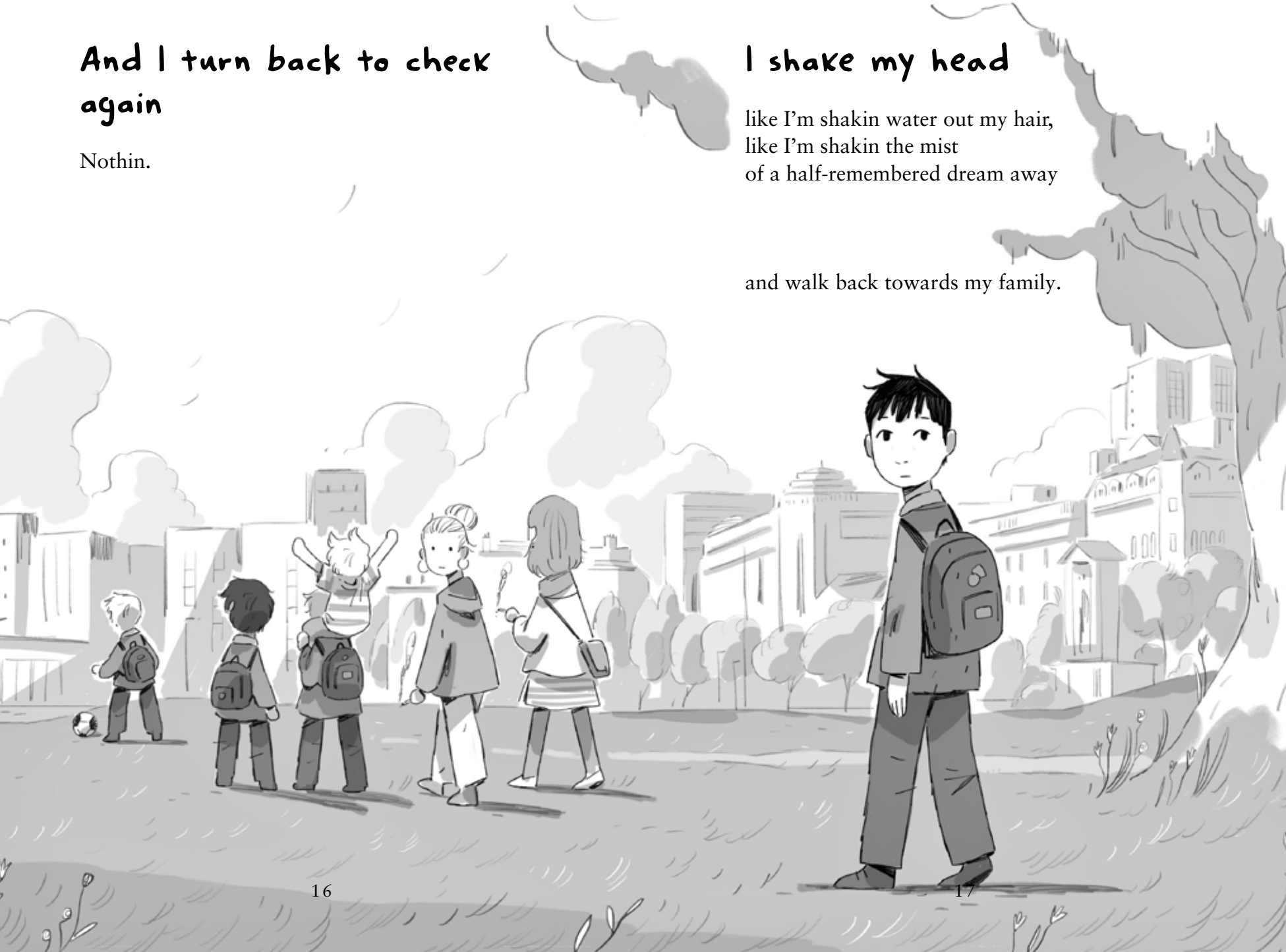
And I turn back to check again

Nothin.

I shake my head

like I'm shakin water out my hair,
like I'm shakin the mist
of a half-remembered dream away

and walk back towards my family.



Later that night, when Dyl's in bed

and Jax is hammerin the controller and bangin in goals on FIFA
and Auntie San's doin that mad eyes-closed dancin thing by the speaker,
I'm in the kitchen tidyin up the last of the Chinese
when Mum comes in to get another drink.

Ha! What a night, eh, Natey?
Can ya believe that kid, eh?
It's like nothin's happened.
Like he's brand new!
He's a miracle, inee?

She cracks a can and sparks a fag,
blows the smoke outta both nostrils
leans her head right back
and she's laughin to herself
and swayin to the music.

Mum, ya know at the park before
when ya said I looked like I'd seen a ghost?

Yeah, I was proper worried for a minute, love.
Ya went white as anythin,
thought ya were gonna faint.

As if we need owt else dramatic happenin after this year!

I put the last plate in the sink.

Well, maybe I did see summat, Mum.
Not a ghost… but… summat…

I turn around
and she's already swirlin away
off out towards San and the music.

Aw, San, it's our song! Turn it up girl, c'mon!

I stand for a second.

Nah, man,
c'mon, Natey,
get a grip, dude.
It
couldn't
have
been

him.

I get my ideas book out my bag

from where I chucked it by the fridge,
sit down at the table and let words roll:

The only thing that's left behind
when I wake up from this dream,
is the sound of someone leavin
before they're even seen.

Jax is 6-0 up and still attackin

as I slide under my duvet

away into shadows and sun.

The Final Year

by Matt Goodfellow,
illustrated by Joe Todd-Stanton

AWARDS

Winner

The CLiPPA Award for Children's Poetry 2024

The Children's Book Award for Older Readers 2024 (Federation of Children's Book Groups)

The Spark! Book Award for Readers 11+, 2024

Books for Topics – Best Classroom Read-Aloud Book (Upper KS2)

The Redbridge Children's Book Award, 2024

Shortlisted

The Week Junior Children's Book of the Year: Poetry 2024

The Indie Book Awards 2024

The Branford Boase Book Award 2024

The Sheffield Children's Book Award 2024

The Diverse Book Awards: Children's Books 2024

Tower Hamlets Book Awards 2024

The Juniper Book Awards 2024

Longlisted

The Little Rebels Award 2024

UKLA Book Awards 7–10 2025

What reviewers and readers are saying about *The Final Year*

'EXCELLENT', 'INCREDIBLE', 'STUNNING', 'EXTRAORDINARY', 'UNIQUE', 'BRILLIANT'

"A profoundly moving verse novel about change, adaptation, the power of words and the struggle to find your people."
Imogen Russell Williams, *Guardian*

"If you give this book to someone, they'll need a big hanky with it. Written by a children's performance poet and former schoolteacher, this tearjerker is a novel in free verse about a working-class boy's experience of Year Six . . . It's one to read aloud to leavers so they will never forget their final year."
Nicolette Jones, *The Sunday Times* – Children's Book of the Week

"This incredibly powerful novel, written entirely in free verse, really packs a punch."
Book Trust

"I am pleased to report that it is EXCELLENT in every way. . . Think friendships, SATs, family life. This book will steal your heart, rearrange it and return it. Lovely references to David Almond."
Fiona Sharp, *Independent*

"Written with compassion and sensitivity by Matt Goodfellow and blessed with Joe Todd-Stanton's distinctive illustrations, this eminently relatable coming-of-age verse novel revolves around Nate's troubled journey into the final year of primary school."
Waterstones: The Children's Books You Need to Read in 2023: July – December

"Goodfellow's writing is outstanding and this book is beautifully designed and illustrated. Powerful, compelling and heartwarming, I can't recommend it highly enough."
Sarah Webb, *Irish Independent*

"Believe the hype and the praise, this book is every bit as good as everyone is saying."
Books for Topics – Book of the Month

"This is an extraordinary book . . . Everyone should read it . . . 100% recommended."
Suzanne Chinnock, *English 4–11*

"Highly accessible, lyrical and life affirming, this is a must-have novel that will authentically resonate with so many under-represented children and perfectly captures what this crucial transition period feels like. As such, it is a must-read for adults as well as the children who will devour it."
Joy Court, *LoveReading4Kids* – Book of the Month

"I'm sure that this book is going to find a place in a lot of classrooms and that, just like *Skellig*, it will become a book that many people remember as 'that book' that turned them on to reading and the power of language."
Just Imagine

"Well-written, authentic and very moving.
And could really help to inspire children to write
their own stories in their own voices."
David Almond

"It is heart-wrenching and heart-warming
and I love it."
Maz Evans

"A beautiful story of friendship, family, grief,
falling apart and putting yourself back together
again. Also a love letter to David Almond, who
I agree is one of the Greats of All Time."
Manjeet Mann

"*The Final Year* is a book that needs to be read
in one sitting in a quiet room where no-one
can hear you sob. Beautiful verse novel
about a boy heading into Year 6.
Joe Todd-Stanton's illustrations are perfect
for Matt Goodfellow's words."
Caroline Fielding , Youth Libraries Group, CILIP

"Matt Goodfellow is a stunning poet, well known
for his beautifully crafted, often poignant work.
In *The Final Year,* he has brought all his skill with
language to create a very powerful verse novel
which is sensitive and incredibly relevant."
Through the Bookshelf

"It's an important and powerful story to tell
because it's a celebration of a way of life which has
too often in the media been stereotyped
and maligned."
Letterbox Library

"A powerful story about growing up and coping
with loss – both at school and at home. Written in
verse, it plays with words so cleverly, so beautifully,
carrying all kinds of emotion and conflict between
its lines that linger long after you've finished."
Book Clubs in Schools

ABOUT THE POET AND THE ILLUSTRATOR

MATT GOODFELLOW

Former primary school teacher Matt Goodfellow is now a full-time author and poet who visits schools across the country to give hugely popular, high-energy performances and workshops. His first poetry collection for Otter-Barry Books, *Chicken on the Roof*, received wide acclaim. He is also the author of *Caterpillar Cake*, illustrated by Krina Patel-Sage and shortlisted for the CLiPPA award; *Shu-Lin's Grandpa*, illustrated by Yu Rong and shortlisted for the CILIP Kate Greenaway Medal and *The Final Year*, winner of the CLiPPA award 2024, and he is a contributor to CLiPPA-shortlisted poetry collection *Being Me: Poems about Thoughts, Worries and Feelings* (all published by Otter-Barry Books). He has written two poetry collections for older readers: *Let's Chase Stars Together*, shortlisted for the CLiPPA award 2023, and *Tomorrow We Begin*, published in 2024. Matt lives in Stockport.

JOE TODD-STANTON

grew up in Brighton and has a first class degree in Illustration from UWE, Bristol. He is a widely acclaimed author and illustrator of picture books and graphic novels.

The Secret of Black Rock was longlisted for the CILIP Kate Greenaway Award and won the Waterstones Children's Book Prize. *The Comet* won the Shadowers' Choice Award for the Yoto Carnegie Medal for Illustration, 2023. His latest book is *Luna and the Treasure of Tlaloc*, published in 2024. Joe lives in London.