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Opening extract from

The Stuff of Nightmares

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Published by
Doubleday

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There's something about running. Something . . . well, if you don't get it, you won't get it. Every time my foot smacks the pavement, it's like an echo of my heartbeat slamming inside me, telling me that 'I'm here, I'm now, I'm *alive*'. I don't jog – jogging is for posers showing off their latest designer gear. No, I *run*. Tunnels like the one down by the canal and dark places are best. Places where I can't see my shadow chasing me or tantalizing me by running ahead. In tunnels and dark places there are no shadows, no ghosts. There's only me.

This morning was just right, mid spring cool rather than early spring cold, and the air tasted of the new and fresh instead of the usual diesel and dog poo, so I decided to run through the park, which was kind of a mistake, 'cause it wasn't long before I wasn't alone as I ran. *He* crept into my head, where he wasn't welcome. Sometimes, if . . . *when* I inadvertently let my guard down, he does that.

I picked up the pace until I was sprinting just as hard as I could. But I couldn't escape. Instead I found

myself running into the past, into a memory of him and Mum – into the very thing that scared me the most.

This morning's memory was the beginning of it all, for me at least. And it started just over a year ago with, of all things, a jar of strawberry jam. A new one. Unopened. I remember everything about that day. It was a sunny, late winter morning and unseasonably warm. Out of our kitchen window I could see a few pale pink blossoms already decorating the tree in the middle of our garden. (Don't bother asking me what kind of tree. I haven't got a clue. I'm not a tree hugger.) Dad and I were sitting at the table eating croissants. Mum was making me a cup of coffee while her croissants sat on the table, getting cold.

'Mum, is there any more jam?' I asked.

Without a word, Mum went over to the cupboard and retrieved a jar of reduced-sugar strawberry jam. Hand wrapped round the lid, she tried and tried to untwist it. After at least ten seconds of Dad and me watching her, she gave up.

'Fitz, could you open this for me please?' she asked.

Dad took the jar, an indulgent smile playing across his face. 'Useless or what?' He shook his head. 'Londie, what would you do without me?'

It was nothing Dad hadn't said before, but I'll never forget the way Mum looked at him, an intense stare that at first rested on him, then lanced into him, then burned straight through him.

'Fitz, if I didn't have you, I'd buy a jar opener.'

‘You probably wouldn’t be able to work that either,’ said Dad.

He turned to wink at me so he missed the *nothing* look Mum gave him. I can’t describe it any other way. It was a look full of nothing at all. Just enough nothing to make me frown, but not enough for me to realize what was going to happen. Take it from me, when you have two people living and sharing a life together and one gives the other that nothing look, it means something. It means one hell of a lot.

I ran that far into the memory before I turned round and ran out of it again. I raced for home, concentrating on the precise placement of each foot. No cracks in the pavement, no slab edges, no litter of any kind to be allowed under my feet. *Concentrate, Kyle. Think of nothing. That way you won’t think of something you shouldn’t.* I sprinted so fast that my breath was too far behind to catch up with me. I reached my front gate with my heart rocketing inside me. And it felt *good!* Bent over, my hands on my knees, I looked up at our house as I gulped down oxygen. Not much of a run today. Only about four kilometres. And my time was crap too. Just under half an hour. I could do much better than that. I *would* have done much better than that if Dad hadn’t crept into my head. Again. He’s been doing that a lot lately.

I try to run for half an hour each morning, and at least three times that long at weekends. The moment I wake up, I pull on my sweats and my trainers and tiptoe downstairs to head out the door before

Mum can catch me. She doesn't like me running so early in the morning. She doesn't like me running. But what else should I do? Stay home with her and play happy families? Yeah, right. Running before most people even have their breakfast calms me down for the rest of the day. I still make it home in time for a shower and a quick bowl of cereal in my room, so what's the big deal? Running fills me with anticipation, like I'm running *towards* something or *for* something. Like all I have to do is run just that little bit faster, stretch out my hand just that little bit further to grab whatever is just outside my grasp, and then my life will be transformed. That's the word: *transformed*.

The only time my life makes any kind of sense is when I'm running.

Only, this morning, it didn't do its usual trick.

So now here I am on the train platform with my classmates and I swear, if my legs could take off without me, they would. I'm jittery and twitchy, I can't keep still. Six kilometres is usually my minimum distance and I really feel it when I don't do the minimum. I want to crawl out of my skin and *run*. That's what I do best. Running. Alone. No Mum in my thoughts – those days are over. And, more importantly, no Dad. Even now, even after all this time, just thinking about my dad makes me feel hollow inside, like an empty gift-wrapped box.

'You're very quiet,' said my mate Steve, nudging me. Hard.

I rubbed my upper arm to get the blood circulating

again. Steve was only slightly shorter than me and wore his hair just about collar length in thin dreads. He had to be the coolest boy in the class, probably because he wasn't the least bit interested in appearing cool. All I know is he didn't lack for girls buzzing round him – that was for sure.

'Well?' Steve prompted.

'I was thinking about my dad,' I admitted quietly. Steve was the only one in the class who knew what'd really happened to my dad. He was the only one I'd told, after making him swear seven different oaths not to tell anyone and promising to break his legs if he ever did.

'I wouldn't bother thinking about him if I were you,' said Steve. 'He's not worth it.'

I shrugged noncommittally. It was all right for him. Steve's dad doted on him, hanging on his every word and celebrating his every action. How could Steve possibly imagine the gap I felt inside about my dad? Steve and his dad had what I'd always longed for. I would've gladly settled for just half of what they had. The emptiness inside began to feed on me. Time to change the subject.

'What's that train doing?'

I leaned forward over the train platform to peer down the line. The train was like an obscene snake, slinking along the track some way back. Stop. Start. Stop. Start. And the windows at the front were like eyes regarding all of us on the platform.

'Kyle, step back before you get your fool head

knocked off,' Miss Wells, our form teacher, called out.

'Miss, let him stick his head out then!' Naima called out. The girls she was standing with all started laughing. If there was one girl I couldn't stand in our class, then Naima was it.

'Bite me, Naima!' I called out.

'You wish, Kyle! You wish!' Naima winked.

Once again her crew started laughing. Kendra's donkey-bray laugh was unmistakable. One of them, Roberta (or Robby, as she liked to be known), just smiled at me, a smile of almost apologetic sympathy rather than amusement. If I wasn't so sure that Roberta would say no, I'd ask her out 'cause she's a babe. Not Naima though. Naima's totally toxic. She's too busy loving herself to care about anyone or anything else. Her friends only hung around her because they were terrified that if they turned round, Naima would stab them in the back. It was a shame too 'cause Naima was quite pretty on the outside. She had auburn hair cut short and wild and kinda funky, and her big green eyes were framed by some of the longest brown lashes I'd ever seen. She smiled readily, but more often than not it had a sneering edge to it that was all hers. Like I said, on the outside she was a winner. Shame what was inside didn't match. She should've been more like Roberta or another girl in our class, Elena. With them, what you saw was what you got.

After scowling at Naima, I stepped back as Miss Wells had ordered. At the speed the train was going, it

couldn't have knocked the head off a pint of lager, but I wasn't in the mood for one of Miss Wells's lectures. A chill Spring wind had picked up since my earlier run. The wind was travelling in the same direction as the train but moving considerably faster, and it kept ripping at my face, which didn't help my mood. I was trying to wrap my head around why I wasn't more excited about our forthcoming trip. After all, for me a trip to the city was about as rare as Action Man poo. Now that we were together again, Mum never, and I mean *never*, left our small town. She shopped locally or used the Internet to order furniture and the like from the websites of bigger department stores nationwide.

'Miss Wells, can we all move up the platform so we can sit in the first carriage?' asked Perry.

Miss Wells looked at the train, which *still* hadn't reached us, before turning back to Perry. She shrugged, and I knew what was coming.

'I don't see why not. Let's—'

'Miss Wells, we should stay here,' I interrupted.

'Why?' she asked.

Think, Kyle. Think. Fast.

'Because everyone always heads for the first carriage and it'll be very crowded and much harder to keep track of all of us if we're in there as well,' I said.

Miss Wells nodded. 'Good point, Kyle. I think we'll stay where we are.'

She moved down the platform to stop Robby and Naima from arguing about who was wearing the best earrings. As if anyone gave a damn.

Perry scowled at me, sucking in his cheeks in his already narrow face. 'Thanks a lot. What did you do that for?'

I shrugged, but didn't reply. How could I? No doubt it looked like I'd scuppered Perry's idea just to be bloody-minded. But it wasn't that. I swear it wasn't. To be honest, I'm not even sure why I'd said what I did. But the thought of going into the first carriage . . . I looked away from Perry, who was still glaring at me. If looks could kill he'd have been banged up for life. Perry was the shortest guy in our class but he never let that hold him back. He was my opposite. Over the last year I'd sprouted up so much that everyone in the class, including Miss Wells, was shorter than me. But although Perry was shorter than the rest of us, he was always the first to volunteer, the first to speak, first to voice his opinion – whether it was wanted or not. No way would he ever let anyone in the class forget he was around. I glanced down the track again, jiggling from foot to foot.

'Come on, train,' I muttered.

Steve nudged my arm with his bony elbow. Although 'nudged' was putting it mildly. 'Damn near broke my forearm' was closer to the mark.

'Are you OK?' he asked me.

I nodded. 'Yeah. Why?'

'You seem a bit . . . restless.'

'No run this morning?' asked Joe, another of my mates.

'No, I ran. But not for long enough,' I replied.

‘Ah, that explains a lot.’ He smiled. ‘I thought you were a bit on edge.’

Joe was a strange one. Dark hair, darker eyes, darkest disposition of all my friends. He was the thinker of our group. Steve was the doer. Perry was the talker. And me? I wasn’t quite sure what I was, where I fit in. Perry often said that Joe thought too much, which was true. Joe over-analysed everything to death. He was overweight but not massively so, with mid-brown hair framing a round face and lime-green eyes – lime like the fruit, not the drink. His black jacket flapped in the wind like a bird’s wings until he impatiently dug his hands into his pockets to keep the sides down. The train must have been early because it still hadn’t reached us, but at least it was moving. I watched it creep along, emptying my mind of all thoughts as I got lost in its slow motion.

Why did you do it, Dad?

I didn’t deserve that. Whatever you felt about me, I didn’t deserve that. Or was it just that you didn’t feel anything for me at all?

Or maybe you had the right idea and none of this is worth a damn . . .

‘Watch out! Kyle’s lost in one of his daydreams again,’ said Joe to the others.

I snapped out of my reverie and back to the train platform. ‘What’re you on about?’

Joe shrugged. ‘You went offline – again.’

‘I don’t know what you mean,’ I said with studied calm. ‘I don’t daydream.’

'If you say so,' he said, turning to watch the train's progress.

'I do,' I replied, needing to have the last word.

As it was, the train didn't travel much past us. We all bundled into the second carriage. The heat hit me almost at once, blasting out from the vents above my head. The driver must have had the heating on full throttle. I stepped aside to let an elderly couple get off the train and got a dirty look from him and a tut from her for my trouble. Luckily the carriage was almost empty. Only a few heads were visible above the high-backed, blue-patterned seats. Our class were off to the city to see a matinée performance of *Romeo and Juliet*. We'd been studying the play for the last term and a bit, and this theatre trip was our teacher Miss Wells's idea of a treat.

The train doors shut with a hiss and the train started off before we'd all found our seats. Steve sat next to me, Joe and Perry sat directly opposite. Elena and Conor sat across the central aisle from us, opposite each other, holding hands and generally being too wet for words – as usual.

'Conor, what's the matter, babe?' asked Elena softly.

Conor didn't answer.

'You're worrying about your nan, aren't you?' she said.

'It's just ... she's getting more and more ... forgetful. A few nights ago she made herself a hot chocolate and left one of the cooker rings on all night. Mum and Dad are starting to talk about putting her in a home for her own good.'

‘Well, maybe it would be for the best—’ Elena began.

‘No way!’ The words exploded from Conor. ‘Nan would hate it, just hate it.’

‘Conor, I only meant . . .’ Elena gave a quick glance around, only to see me and my mates watching them and earwigging every word.

‘How about I write down our conversation so you nosy toe-rags can have a permanent record?’ she bit out.

‘No need.’ Perry grinned. ‘Just speak up a bit!’

Elena and Conor shuffled further away from us and lowered their voices.

‘Spoilsports!’ said Perry.

Elena gave him a two-fingered salute.

Steve turned away from her. ‘Wasn’t interested in your conversation anyway,’ he muttered.

It was strange about Steve and Elena. She was the only one in our class that he didn’t have much time for, though I think I was the only one who knew that. I looked around the carriage, taking it all in. Miss Wells was further along – thank goodness. Some of the girls sat in the next set of seats behind us, already twittering away about not much. As if to make up for its previous tardiness, the train moved out of the station, getting faster and faster until the passing scenery was just a frenetic blur. Hot air blew up from the vents underneath the windows as well as from above the doors and the heat was beginning to make me feel a bit queasy, but apart from that, it was great. Outside the

train it became almost impossible to focus on anything at eye-level or below. And in a strange way, I found that restful. It required no thought, no interpretation. The sky was the only thing that was constant. The grey clouds drifted along and wouldn't allow our train to dictate their pace. Below the sky though, the scenery was a smudge of poster-paint colours: mid-green fields merging with the beginnings of darker green crops, merging with brown tree trunks and darker brown branches. Those were the few things I could make out. The rest was pure guesswork.

Even the tropical heat in the carriage couldn't spoil my mood. Less than ten minutes into the journey, I had to take off my jacket and roll up my shirt sleeves, as did my friends, but it didn't matter. I didn't travel by train often enough to make the trip mundane. I loved the speed and the regular rhythmic hum of the train wheels moving along the tracks. We trundled along, pulling in and out of stations for at least forty minutes. I stared out of the window, watching the sky get greyer and darker while my friends chatted around me.

Steve nudged my side, almost breaking my ribs in the process. Man, I wished he'd stop doing that!

'Kyle, d'you wanna have a go?' he asked, indicating the very latest portable games console in his hand.

I glanced down at the screen. Cross-hairs were trained on some creature, its face a mouth filled with razor-sharp pointy teeth and nothing else. I shook my head.

'You sure?'

I nodded. Typical Steve! He didn't own a single

game which didn't involve blowing holes in something. People, aliens, mutants, rabid dogs – Steve didn't care. If the game didn't involve guns, it didn't involve Steve either. Yet in our class, he was the one always prepared to give others the benefit of the doubt. And he'd hand over the shirt off his back without even being asked. Steve told me a while ago that his dad was beginning to question what his son wanted to do with the rest of his life once he left school.

'My dad has become an absolute nightmare,' he admitted. 'All I hear these days is "the army this" and "the army that".'

'Tell him you're not interested,' I advised.

'Don't you think I've already tried that?' Steve shot back. 'Dad loved being in the army and now he's dropping all kinds of unsubtle hints about me following in his footsteps.'

But at least Steve's dad gave a damn. That counted for a great deal.

'I'll have a go.' Perry leaned forward and tried to snatch the game console out of Steve's hand. Steve pulled his hand back indignantly but that didn't stop Perry. Frowning, I turned to look back out of the window as Perry and Steve got into it.

'Just one quick go, you selfish git!' Perry complained.

'Back off! I mean it.' Steve leaped up, his arm up and out of Perry's reach.

Perry jumped up. 'Go on, give us a go,' he insisted, still leaping up and down.

I must admit, it did make me laugh. Perry resembled a terrier jumping up for snacks, his blond hair flopping up and down over his face as he leaped.

'Oi!' Miss Wells shouted from further down the carriage. 'Behave, you two. If I have to come over there and sit between both of you, I will.'

Steve and Perry sat down immediately, but that didn't stop the fight for the console. Usually I would've been in there, joining in on one side or the other – it didn't matter which.

But not today.

Ten minutes later the train slowed then stopped, but not at a station. The signal ahead of us must have turned red. Shame, really. We'd really been moving there for a while. The grey clouds had delivered on their earlier promise and now the rain was really teeming down. The wind slammed the rain into the train windows, making it difficult to see much. The minutes ticked by and still we didn't move. How much longer were we going to have to sit here? I looked out of the train window, wondering what was holding us up. A signal failure? Engine trouble? The wrong kind of rain? I'd heard enough people moaning about the train service to know it didn't take much.

It wasn't even as if the view was anything to take a photo of either. This railway bridge we'd taken root upon was way above a busy city street, and all around us there were office blocks – high, ugly buildings with tiny windows. Outside, on Elena and Conor's side of the carriage were any number of train tracks, at least

five pairs that I could just about see from my seat. But on my side there was only the edge of the bridge, with a low brick wall separating the train from the road below. I craned my neck to look down. We had to be at least three storeys above the ground. The people rushing around below looked like blurry beetles scurrying to get out of the rain. Where were they all going in such a hurry? And was it worth it?

Maybe Dad got it right, after all . . .

Funny how I was beginning to think that more and more often recently.

Searching for the cause of the faint unease that stirred within me, I looked around. Joe, opposite, pointed to Steve and Perry, who were still bickering. I shrugged, then turned back to the window. Joe didn't say much at all. If he raised his hand in class it was a miracle. But when he did speak, somehow everyone shut up to listen. I wondered where he'd be in ten years' time, twenty years, thirty? I could imagine him running some vast company making multi-trillions, a diamond fist in a velvet glove.

Sometimes, I found myself wondering what we'd all do once we left school. Would we still remain mates or would we go our own separate ways? Where would I be in ten years' time? My trouble was, I had trouble thinking that far ahead. My friends all had plans. Perry wanted to be something artistic, he wasn't quite sure what. Maybe a film director. Steve wanted to travel the world. Joe wanted to study medicine at university. He wanted to specialize but he wasn't sure

in what. Maybe psychiatry. My mates had it all sorted. I didn't. What was the point? I mean, look at my dad. He'd had plans, big plans, for the rest of his life with Mum. They were both going to retire in their early fifties and move down south, maybe to Devon or Dorset. Those were Dad's choices.

'Fitz, I think I'd rather move up north than live down south,' said Mum. 'My mum and two brothers are up north.'

'God spare us from your family,' said Dad.

'I could always go and live up there by myself,' said Mum.

'That'll be the day,' laughed Dad. 'What on earth would you do without me?'

Mum didn't answer. Funny how she never bothered to answer that question.

Mum: Fitz, could you take the rubbish out please?

Dad: Of course, love. What would you do without me?

Mum: Fitz, the computer isn't working.

Dad: Hell, Londie! Can't you do a damn thing for yourself? What would you do without me?

Without me . . . Without me . . . Without me . . .

Slowly I became aware that it'd gone quiet. I turned to find my friends watching me.

'What's up?' I asked.

'You were light-years away *again*,' said Joe. 'What gives?'

'Nothing.' I shrugged.

'Liar. Go on, tell us what took you so far away.'

I glanced at Steve. Even though he said nothing, I could see from his expression that he thought he knew exactly what I'd been thinking. And he wasn't far off either.

'If you must know, I was just wondering where we'll all be in twenty years' time.' It was as good a story as any.

'Joe'll be working for his brother,' said Perry cheerfully.

'Perry, don't even start with that crap,' said Joe. 'I'm not in the mood. Not today.'

'That'd be your worst nightmare, wouldn't it? But who knows? It could happen,' Perry insisted.

'Perry, shut up,' Joe said with menace.

'Come on then,' urged Perry. 'If that's not your worst nightmare, what is?'

Joe's lips, like his eyes, were getting narrower and more pinched. I shook my head. Perry never did know when to back up and back off.

'See what you've started,' Steve said to me.

'What're you so afraid of?' Perry asked Joe directly.

'Perry, I'm going to deck you if you don't shut the bloody hell up!' said Joe harshly.

'OK, Joe. Calm down,' said Steve, with mild surprise.

Seems I wasn't the only one who had unpleasant things on my mind.

'Well, he gets on my nerves.' Joe scowled. 'He's worse than Jon – and that's saying something.'

The last thing any of us wanted was to get Joe

started on the subject of his twin brother, Jonathan. I'd met Jon just a few times. There was smug, then there was arrogant, and then there was Jon.

'So how is your twin anyway?' Perry asked on a deliberate wind-up.

'The less said about him the better,' Joe snapped.

'Joe, what's up with you and your brother? In primary school you guys used to be so tight,' said Steve, ever the peacemaker.

'Used to be,' Joe said pointedly.

'Joe, maybe you should let it go,' said Steve as gently as he could.

'Steve, maybe you shouldn't go there,' I warned.

'Let *what* go?' asked Joe, the tone of his voice giving all of us frostbite.

But for once Steve wasn't going to take any kind of hint. 'OK, so Jon passed the entrance exam and got into Peltham College and you didn't,' he said. 'Is our school really that bad? Are we really so terrible?'

'That's not the point,' said Joe.

'Then what is?' asked Steve.

I must admit, I'd been wondering the same thing.

'The point is,' Joe said, exasperated, 'that had our positions been reversed, I wouldn't've gone to Peltham College without Jon.'

'Bullcrap!' Perry barely let Joe close his mouth before launching in. 'If you'd got into Peltham and your twin hadn't, it would've been "*hasta la vista*, brother" – and you know it.'

'I'm telling you, I would've turned the place down,'

Joe insisted. 'I wouldn't've gone to a school that didn't take Jon as well.'

'Well, if you'd turned down a place at one of the best private schools in the country just because they didn't take your twin brother, then you're an arse,' said Perry, tactful as ever. 'Which is probably why you didn't get in. Your brother obviously has all the brains in your family.'

'Uh-oh!' Steve muttered.

Joe was a nanosecond away from going nuclear. The scowl he gave Perry spoke volumes. And anyone but Perry would've shut up.

'What's that look about? Stressy much?' asked Perry. 'Or is it your time of the month?'

Joe launched himself at Perry. It took both Steve and me to pull him off.

'Enough! Joe, you need to take a chill pill, and Perry, you need to change the subject,' said Steve firmly. 'Unless you want Miss Wells to split us up.'

'He said—' Joe began furiously.

'We all heard what Perry said,' said Steve. 'But what he meant was that maybe it's just as well it wasn't your decision to make.'

'Meaning . . .?' Joe frowned, his attention now directed at Steve.

'Meaning I know you and your brother are inseparable – or rather, you were – but sooner or later you both had to go your separate ways and do your own thing. That's just the way life works. Maybe Jon realized it before you did, that's all.'

Joe sat so far back in his seat, I'm surprised he didn't fall through it. Each of us got a look that was pure daggers before he turned to look out of the train window.

'What did I say?' asked Perry, rubbing his arm where Joe had managed to get a punch in.

'Leave it, Perry,' I said.

'I can't believe all this started just 'cause I asked Joe about his worst nightmare,' said Perry petulantly. 'It didn't even have to be about his brother. My worst nightmare is being buried alive. See? I'm happy to share! So what's the problem? Kyle, what're *you* most afraid of?'

Perry obviously wasn't going to shut up.

'Oh, come on, Kyle,' he wheedled.

'I thought we were dropping this subject,' I tried, knowing it was futile.

'I'm only asking,' Perry persisted. 'So what is it? Or don't you ever have nightmares?'

'Of course I do,' I said impatiently.

Perry looked at me expectantly, waiting for me to carry on. When I didn't, he turned with an exasperated huff to Steve. 'What about you, Steve? What're you afraid of?'

'Disappointing my dad,' Steve replied immediately.

Perry nodded, with no smile or witty, snitty comeback for once. Enough said.

'And you, Joe? What frightens you?'

'Me . . .' said Joe, his eyes burning into Perry's.

'Huh?'

'I frighten myself,' said Joe, the merest hint of a smile twisting his lips. 'So what must I do to the rest of you?'

'Very funny,' said Perry. 'I'm serious. What scares you, Joe?'

Joe shrugged and smiled. Perry gave up on him.

'Your turn, Kyle. What's your weakness?'

'I'm afraid . . .' My mates were watching me. I could feel my face glowing warm. I changed my mind and decided not to confess to the thing that scared me the most. I plumped for one of the things that still made me . . . anxious; had always made me anxious. 'I'm afraid of ghosts.' One look at my friends' faces and I instantly regretted the admission.

'Are you kidding me?' Perry scoffed. 'There's no such thing as ghosts.'

I shrugged. 'As the saying goes, "There are more things in heaven and earth, Perry, than are dreamt of in your philosophy."' '

'Where's that from?' asked Perry. '*Star Wars*?'

'Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, you moron,' I replied.

'My name's in *Hamlet*?' said Perry, astounded. 'Cool!'

I opened my mouth, only to snap it shut again. Joe looked at me and smiled ruefully. At least he wasn't angry any more. The train finally began to move. 'Bout time too!

'Go on, Kyle, have a go,' said Steve, trying to thrust his game console at me again.

'No, thanks,' I said, exasperated.

‘Why’re you being so dry?’ he asked.

‘I’m not. I just . . .’

Steve regarded me, eyebrows raised.

‘Give it here then,’ I said with a sigh.

I’d barely got my hand on it when all at once there was a colossal bang like nothing I’ve ever heard before. So loud, it was like the whole world exploding. And beneath the bang there came the sound of metal twisting and crunching and crushing, like the train carriage ahead was being chewed up and spat out.

Our train had been hit. Hit hard.

Our carriage was slammed backwards, then began to tilt up sharply. I pitched forward, then fell back. Joe and Perry opposite fell towards me as the train was pushed up at a sharp angle.

That’s when the train began to turn.

To actually flip over.