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opening extract from

Jiggy McCue: The Toilet of Doom

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Chapter One

Ever had the feeling your life's been flushed down the toilet? I have. And it wasn't just a feeling. I knew something was wrong the moment I woke up that Sunday morning, but if I'd had the faintest idea *how* wrong I would have jumped straight out of the window on to my mother's favourite rose bush and ended it there and then.

Before I get to the Big Flush, though, I'd better fill you in on how it all started. It was the previous Friday – another day I woke up feeling something wasn't quite right. This time it was my nose. I rolled out of bed and plodded to the bathroom with dread in my heart. The mirror over the basin told me everything I didn't need to know. There was a lump on my hooter the size of a satellite dish. 'Oh terrific,' I said, imagining the day's pathetic jokes at my expense. I left the bathroom.

Left it…tripped over something…landed nose-first in a big potted plant on the landing.

The day was not starting well.

I pulled my face out of the leaves to see what had tripped me. Our cat, Stallone, lay across the doorway like a draught excluder. He must have seen me go into the bathroom and thrown himself across the door to catch me on the way out. Never misses a chance to trip me up, that cat. Me or Dad. Never trips Mum. He's nice as pie to her. Any female actually. My mother says he's a woman's cat. Dad says they're welcome to him.

'You did that on purpose, you…you…*animal*.'

Stallone stared back at me with those mean green eyes of his as if to say, 'Wanna make something of it, pal?'

The worst of it was the potted plant. It had only been there since yesterday and suddenly, day two, half its leaves and earth were on the carpet. Mum would go berserk. I got up and raced to my room. I rummaged under the bed, found what I was looking for. At last I had a good use for my Maths exercise book! While I was down there I grabbed the ball of chewing gum I'd been building up piece by piece for months. I licked the fluff off and jammed it in my mouth to soften it. It tasted like the inside of a fisherman's boot, but I wasn't

rearing it for a taste contest. Another couple of months and my gumball would have been big enough to break some sort of record. Would have. If Stallone hadn't made me use it to stick leaves back on a potted plant.

I was on my knees scooping earth back in the pot with my trusty Maths book when Dad strolled along the landing in his boxer shorts and "I'm not old, I'm a recycled teenager" T-shirt.

'What happened?'

I took the softened gumball out of my mouth. It wasn't easy. Almost broke my lips.

'Tripped over cat, fell in plant.'

'Your mum'll crucify you.'

'Only if we have a snitch in the family,' I said, starting on the leaves.

'She won't hear it from me, Scouts honour.'

'Since when were you in the Scouts?'

'What's that got to do with anything? Leaves fell off, did they?'

'Yeah. Sticking 'em back.'

'Chewing gum?' I nodded. 'Good move,' Dad said. 'Just what I'd have done.'

'When you were a kid, you mean?'

'I mean now. You know what the old girl's like with her rotten plants.' He noticed Stallone sprawling across the bathroom door and raised his foot. 'Gertcha!'

Stallone got up, glaring at him with real hatred, and slunk off lashing his tail like a whip.

'Jiggy, are you up yet?'

My mother's voice from downstairs. Dad shot into the bathroom and bolted the door. I looked down. Mum stood at the bottom of the stairs in her sad quilted dressing gown, glaring up at me like I'd committed some crime. I had – the potted plant – but she didn't know that. Yet.

'On my way,' I said. She started up the stairs. Panic. There were still some leaves on the floor, and quite a bit of earth. 'I said I'm on my *way*!'

'And I'm coming up to get dressed, d'you mind?' she said.

I grabbed the leaves, crammed them in my mouth – useful things, mouths – chewed like a starving cow, swallowed hard. Then I scooped up the earth and dropped it in my pyjama trousers. It would have helped if I'd been wearing bicycle clips, but you don't usually get those with pyjamas. I headed

downstairs, casually rubbing my nose.

'You'll be late,' Mum snapped, coming up.

'And good morning to you too,' I said, going down.

We drew near. It was going to be a close thing. Half the Garden Centre was trickling down my legs. My knees couldn't keep it off the ground for ever. But of course Mum stopped. Squinted at me.

'What's that on your nose? Looks like earth.'

'Earth?' I said. 'Well thanks very much. I mean I know it's big, but I didn't think it was the size of a *planet*.'

I carried on down, with no idea that the thing on my nose was going to be the one bright spot of my day. Next six days actually. By this time next week I would have been to hell and back.

Twice.