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opening extract from

Jiggy McCue: The Meanest Genie

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Michael Lawrence

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CHAPTER ONE

I can hardly bear to tell you this, but I have to tell someone. If I keep it to myself I'll have nightmares about it for the rest of my life, and if there's one thing I don't need in my life it's an extra portion of nightmares. It all started with the stupid genie. If the genie hadn't...

No, that's not right. It actually started with me feeling sorry for myself. Why was I feeling sorry for myself? Because I'm Jiggy McCue, the unluckiest kid in town. I'd never thought of myself as particularly lucky, but just lately luck and me had been complete strangers. I'd been haunted by a dead goose, held prisoner by a pair of evil underpants, and flushed down a computerised toilet. You have to admit, these aren't normal, everyday, run-of-the-mill things to happen to a person. But I had a pretty good idea why I was getting all this stuff thrown at me while it missed everyone else. It was because of what happened at



the Piddle Pool the night before I started school for the first time.

What didn't happen, I should say.

The Piddle Pool was called the Piddle Pool because it was a pool people piddled in. Boys anyway. There was this tradition in our town that if a boy weed in the Piddle Pool the night before he started in the Infants he'd have a lucky school life. I don't know what the girls did for luck, never asked, maybe they didn't need it, but boys had been widdling in the Piddle Pool for as long as anybody knew. Smelt like it too. Looked like it. There was always this dirty foamy scum on the surface, and flies all over it, licking their zzz-zzy little lips. It wasn't the sort of pool you wanted to practise the backstroke in.

Where was I? Oh, yes, the night before I started in the Infants. All the boys in my class-to-be at Ranting Lane School had gone to the Piddle Pool with their fathers or older brothers or someone. They stood in a circle round the Pool peeing long and high for luck. It was quite a moment, all those golden arcs falling into the reflected scummy moonlight while proud relatives cheered and the

boys grinned happily, knowing they were going to have a really cool time at school.

Every boy except one, that is.

Me.

Because I – I alone – couldn't go.

Maybe it was nerves, having to do it in front of all those others, I don't know. I should have been able to, I'd been saving it up since way before tea. When Dad and I left the house I was cross-legged, thought I'd never make it. But what happens when it's time for the most important pee of my life? Nothing. Not so much as a trickle.

And then everyone was finished and all eyes were on me. On my useless bone dry widget. I didn't know many of the kids yet, so mostly they were strangers' eyes, which made it worse. And then...

'Whassamatter, mate, got a knot in it?'

Those words are embroidered on my heart. They came from almost-five-year-old Bryan Ryan. This was the day we met. The day Ryan became my arch-enemy. If he hadn't said those words the other kids wouldn't have picked up on them and turned them into a chant.

Whassamatter, got a knot?



Whassamatter, got a knot?

Whassamatter, got a knot?

Pee-wee-wee.

And then the water came. Not from where it should though. From a little higher up. My eyes. I turned and ran, followed by jeers and name-calling. My dad came after me, caught me up, walked me home with his hand on my shoulder. And halfway home...

I wet myself.

So that's why I was so unlucky. So I thought anyway. It was also why I'd been secretly sneaking off to the Piddle Pool every chance I got all through my schooldays, and peeing like a maniac in the hope of improving things. Hadn't worked so far, and I didn't have long to make it work. In a matter of days the Piddle Pool would become part of a car park attached to the new leisure centre being built on the site of the old brick works. I wouldn't get much luck from peeing on tarmac.

The day my latest batch of troubles started I told Mum I was going to Pete and Angie's and snuck off to the Piddle Pool instead. Nice day. Big fat sun, brilliant blue sky, fluffy-wuffy little clouds. I took

up my usual position beside the Piddle Pool. Just across the scummy water was the almost-finished leisure centre. Over to one side was all that was left of the brickworks – three tall thin chimneys that no longer smoked. No one about. I unzipped, flipped out, shut my eyes, got down to business. I'd hardly started when a chilly wind ruffled my hair and pumped my shirt. I opened my eyes. And gasped. Six seconds earlier the world had been all bright and warm. Now it was all gloomy and chilly, and there was a little black cloud parked directly over my head. Then two terrifying things happened, one after the other. First a great puff of purple smoke shot out of one of the dead brickworks chimneys, then lightning sprang from the little black cloud above my head. The lightning struck the Pool right in front of me – kerzoom! kerpow! kerpat! – and the scummy water started churning and bubbling like there was something huge down there that was seriously thinking of leaping out and turning my throat to marmalade. My hair stood on tiptoe, my spine became a jigsaw with a piece missing, and I suddenly thought of several other places I'd rather be. Like my bedroom, with a chair against the door.



I spun round. I picked up my feet. I skedaddled.

To get home from the Piddle Pool I had to pass the library, my school, and Butch & Betty's Unisex Hair Salon. I don't do a lot of running, think it's bad for your health, and I reckoned it must have showed because people kept pointing at me, girls giggled, and a couple of nuns covered their eyes, as if running without practice was a mortal sin or something.

When I shot through the front door of *The Dorks* (our house) the first person I met was Dad, on his way in from the garden for a beer.

'If that was mine I'd put it away, Jig,' he said. 'If your ma sees it she'll probably have you arrested.'

'What are you on about?' I said.

He looked at the front of my jeans. So did I.

And groaned.

No wonder people had pointed. No wonder they'd giggled and covered their eyes. I'd run all the way home from the Piddle Pool with my flies open, and everything – the whole kit and caboodle – had been...

No. I can't say it. Just thinking about it makes me sob into my fist.

CHAPTER TWO

Three weeks earlier, Mr Dent our Resistant Materials teacher had given us a project. 'Construct something,' he said. 'Anything you like, use your imagination.'

'Imagination, sir?' This was me. 'You mean instead of wood?'

'If I had enough wood, Mr McCue,' he replied with a wooden smile, 'I'd use *my* imagination to build an escape-proof cell for you lot.'

'Ah, but then I'd use *my* imagination to escape, wouldn't I?'

'And how would you do that, seeing as I wouldn't have equipped the cell with tools for you to escape *with*?'

'Simple. I'd use Ryan's head as a battering ram. Nothing more wooden than that.'

Ryan snarled at me. I waved some spare fingers at him across the class.

By the end of Week Three most of our projects



were finished. I was quite pleased with mine. Very pleased actually. Mr Dent patted me on the shoulder, and some of the others said nice things. Not Pete though. It would kill Pete to be impressed by anything I do.

'A kennel,' he said. 'Brilliant, seeing as you haven't got a dog.'

'We were told to make something out of wood, not something a dog would live in.'

He held his effort up proudly. 'At least mine's useful.'

'Useful? Pete, it's an ashtray.'

'So?'

'Well for one thing no one in your house smokes. For another it's made of wood. Leave a ciggy smouldering in that and you'll be over a fireman's shoulder before you can burp twice.'

Suddenly there was this great whooping, laughing, cheering sound. A crowd had formed around the benches on the other side of the room. Pete and I went to check it out. Couldn't see a thing till we'd torn some shoulders apart and forced our way through. When we got to the front I immediately wished we'd stayed at the back,

because the thing that was getting everyone so worked up was Neil Downey showing off his woodwork project – a little guillotine. The guillotine on its own would have been OK, but Downey was putting it to work, which wasn't so OK. He was executing maggots. He'd brought in a tin of the things, thousands of them, all white and wiggly. No one wanted to touch them, and no one did except Downey, who just dipped in, no gloves, no tweezers, picked one up, dropped it in place. His guillotine had a razor blade on this pulley sort of thing that came down at the flick of a switch. Splat! Maggot in two halves, still wriggling. It was horrible. Disgusting. Downey had never been so popular.

Not with me, though. I have this thing about squiggly-wiggly things. When we were little, Pete would spend hours pulling worms out of the ground to see how far they'd stretch before they snapped. I used to get physically sick just watching. I mean literally throw up. And that was just garden worms. I'd probably turn to a quivering heap of jelly if I ever met a snake on a dark night. Spiders, fine. Rats, no big deal. But put me next to a squirmy creature like a snake or a worm – or



a maggot – and I almost pass out. I didn't pass out the day Downey brought his tin of maggots in and turned them into small twins, but it was a near thing. I certainly gulped a bit. I grabbed hold of Pete to keep from falling to my knees, but he shook me off. So I dropped to my knees anyway, backed out through all the cheering legs, and staggered over to the window for some lungfuls of pure clean maggotless air.

After school we had to take our woody masterpieces home. No problem for someone with an ashtray or a baby guillotine, less of a breeze for a kennel king. Normally I'd have asked Pete and Angie to help, but Pete had detention for copying my Maths homework error for error, and Angie was at Miss Weeks' Kick-Boxing For Girls Workshop. So I set off alone, kennel on shoulder. I didn't fancy carrying it through the crowded shopping centre, so I did a detour down Effluent Lane. This wasn't a short cut, but there are no shops in Effluent Lane, so you don't see too many people looking for stuff to buy. The kennel was quite heavy and I kept having to stop and put it down, or change shoulders, but in the end I found

the best way to carry it was on my back, like a big wooden hump.

I came to the bit of land where the brickworks used to be and the new leisure centre almost was. Passing the Piddle Pool I remembered what happened yesterday. It didn't seem so scary, looking back. Sort of a freak weather thing. Well, the cloud and lightning part. I didn't want to think about the suddenly puffing dead chimney. I decided to take a good-luck leak as I was there. I set the kennel down beside the Piddle Pool, unzipped and took aim. I kept my eyes open this time.

Tinkle, tinkle, tinkle. (That was me.)

'Right. A thousand and one. Here we go.' (That wasn't me.)

You have to picture this. There I am standing on the bank of this stinking old pool, dogless kennel at my side, one hand on hip, the other not, when the stuff I'm peeing into leaps up like a great wave, then comes back down and drenches me all over. I didn't need reminding to zip up this time. Zipped so hard I almost broke my jaw. Then I stood gasping and dripping, wet clothes clinging, yellow piddle



scum on the end of my nose. My eyes were waterlogged, so I had to blink hard to see, and what I saw sent me into an immediate jig.* I was no longer alone. A teenager with dreadlocks and no shirt stood waist-deep in the Piddle Pool. And he was speaking.

'Your wish is my command, O...'

He paused after 'O', and his mouth twisted, like his lips were wrestling with one another, but finally said, through his teeth:

'*Master.*'

'What?' I spluttered, jigging around and spitting ancient pee.

'That's you,' he said.

'What's me?'

'You summoned me, which makes me your Humble Servant. Don't let it go to your head, it's just one of those dumb things we have to say. I don't do humble.'

'My servant?' I said, wiping my face on my sleeve.

'I'm a genie,' he said, swiping at some flies. '*Your* genie. That means I have to obey you, like it or not. If I refuse, I go straight back where I came from,

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* In case you don't know, I wasn't born with the name Jiggy. It's a nickname I got when I was still in my pram. People noticed that whenever I got agitated or nervous or upset my feet started to dance, my fingers twitched, and my elbows flapped. Still happens to this day. Quite a lot actually. Drives some of my teachers up the wall.

and let me tell you I could do with a break from here.'

'Whoa,' I said. 'Back up. Genie? You're a genie? *My* genie? You have to obey me? *Me*? Jiggy McCue, unluckiest person on the planet?'

He took a step towards me in the scummy water. I took a step back. Someone who snorkels in urine is more likely to be a dangerous psychopath than a genie.

'Relax,' he said. 'I won't hurt you. I'm here to make your dreams come true. With wishes.'

'W-wishes?' I said, twitching wildly. This was getting serious.

'Wishes. Three. You just won the Piddle Pool lottery, kid.'

He waded to the side and climbed out. I gave him the once-over. Then I gave him the twice-over. He looked about seventeen, and he wasn't just short of a shirt. He wasn't wearing *anything*. I stopped jigging and twitching. So genies came fully equipped, did they?

'Oh, I get it,' I said. 'Some kids from class are setting me up. Ryan? Yeah, probably Bry-Ry. What are you, some pal or sick relative of his?'



The nudist from the Piddle Pool scowled. 'Are you suggesting I'm not what I say I am?'

I said nothing. Just smirked, averted my eyes, dripped quietly.

'You need proof, is that it?' he said.

'What are you gonna do?' I said. 'Conjure up a flying carpet for a grand tour of the ex-brickworks chimneys?'

He mumbled something foreign-sounding and waved a hand. I heard a growl behind me. I jumped. Looked. There was a dog in my kennel. A Rottweiler. In a bad mood.

'Where did that come from?'

'Don't ask me, I'm just the neighbourhood joker,' said the dripping naturist with the dreadlocks.

The Rottweiler came out of the kennel, snapping and snarling at my knees and ankles. I whirled and twisted about, trying to defend myself without actually putting my hands between me and his ferocious jaws.

'It's all right, he's only playing with you,' my new friend said, the way people do seconds before their favourite pet takes your leg off.

'I am not a toy!!!' I screamed.

He laughed at this, but he must have done something because the Rottweiler stopped attacking me. Stopped everything, sort of dissolved. Became a little pool of scummy water draining into the earth.

