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Opening extract from

Operation Eiffel Tower

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CHAPTER 1

The ball flew clean over the Atlantic Ocean and dropped – *plop* – into the hole by the Statue of Liberty's size-twelve feet.

'A hole-in-one!' Jack cried. 'Hole-in-one, hole-in-one, hole-in-one!' He lifted the club and twirled it as though he were leading a brass band down the High Street. 'Did you see that?' he asked.

Lauren looked up from her magazine. 'Nope,' she grinned. 'I wasn't watching. You'll have to do it again.'

'I want a go of the stick,' Ruby said.

'It's called a club,' Jack said.

'I want a go of the club,' Ruby said. There was a determined crease between her eyebrows. Sometimes Ruby looked just like Mum.

'Let her have a go,' Lauren said, and looked back at *Teen Thing*.

'I was going to. I just wanted her to learn the right name, that's all. Come on, Ruby, it's a par-three hole. That means you should be able to get it in three hits. Or, if you're a genius like me, you might do it in one.'

Jack handed the club over to Ruby. He fished the ball out of the hole and wiped it on his jeans; it left a green slug-trail on his leg. *Yuck!* In winter, it would be his job to scrub all the crud out of the holes. And glue down curling greens. And nail up wobbly fences. And a hundred and one other odd jobs that needed doing once all the visitors went home. But now it was summer and he was allowed to play for free at William's World of Wonders Golf Tour.

Jack smiled a secret smile.

A hole-in-one.

'My go, my go,' Ruby said.

'I know. Hold your horses.'

He teed up the ball, balancing it on its plastic holder. It was all set for Ruby to swing. The club was too big for her; it waved from side to side, like jelly in a high wind. She tried to steady herself, then gave the ball a good hard shove towards the Statue of Liberty. It rolled forward along the causeway to the island, then veered left and dropped, with a splash, into the miniature Atlantic Ocean, where it bobbed gently up and down as though it were enjoying the swim.

'Hey!' Ruby yelled indignantly. 'It went in the water.'

Jack couldn't help himself – he laughed. Lauren looked up and even she smiled.

'You want a go?' Jack asked her.

Lauren sucked her teeth in a way that meant, 'I'd rather roll in horse poo than play adventure golf,' and lifted *Teen Thing* in front of her face.

Last year she would have played. Last summer, when Paul was still around and it was his job to look after them and Lauren wasn't quite so grown-up, then she would have taken a turn.

Jack reached into the miniature ocean and grabbed the ball. He gave it a few shakes to get rid of some of the water, then put it back on the causeway.

'Have another go,' he said to Ruby.

She tried again. This time the ball rolled in a straight line towards Ellis Island, but slowed too soon, as though its batteries had run down.

'You do it,' Ruby said, handing him the club. 'Make it go in the hole.'

'OK, if you're sure. He held the club with a firm grip but with loose wrists, just like Dad had taught him. Then he gave the ball a gentle tap. It rolled steadily up the slope towards the three-metre-high statue and dropped neatly into the hole with a soft puttering sound.

Ruby clapped her hands together, her dark curls bouncing. 'I got it in the hole!' she yelled.

'Did you?' Jack asked.

'Yes. If I hadn't got it to there,' Ruby pointed to Ellis Island, 'then you wouldn't have got it in like that.'

'I see.' Jack grinned. 'Do you want to do a harder one, then? The Eiffel Tower is tricky.'

'We need to get back,' Lauren said. 'Mum will be wondering where we've got to.'

Jack sighed.

'One more go?' Ruby asked hopefully.

Lauren paused, then shook her head. 'No.'

Jack retrieved the ball. He squeezed it in his palm. He liked the feel of its hard dimpled shell. He threw it up and caught it.

'Jack,' Lauren said, 'come on.' She got up off the bench and closed her magazine. The girl on the cover had a wide lipstick smile, as though nothing bad could ever happen in the world.

Jack nodded slowly. Lauren was right – it was time to go back. He just wished they didn't have to.

Near the exit, William, owner of William's World of Wonders, sat in his booth. Jack handed back the club and dropped the ball into a glass dish on the counter top. 'See you tomorrow,' he said.

'Jack.' William nodded curtly. 'Something's up with the Niagara pump. It's more of a Stumble than a Falls today. Come and give us a hand in the morning.'

'OK.'

The baking-hot pavement was crowded with tourists, toddlers with buckets and spades, kids with bodyboards. A horse and carriage trotted past carrying a dark-haired woman and a tattooed man towards the prom. Near the beach steps a busker played Beatles songs.

Jack and Ruby weaved their way around holdalls and windbreaks, trying to keep up with Lauren.

But Lauren kept her head down and walked fast.

Ruby's steps slowed. 'Ja-ack,' she said, almost singing his name.

Jack sighed as Lauren disappeared completely from view.

Ruby stopped dead outside the amusement arcade. 'Ja-ack, can I have twenty pence?'

'I haven't got twenty pence,' he said.

'Yes you have. This morning you gave Mrs Khalid a pound when you bought a comic and she gave you fifty pence change. Two twenties and a ten.'

'When did you get so good at maths?'

'Pwease can I? Pwetty pwease with bells on?'

Jack grinned. 'Don't put on a baby voice. It won't work with me.' Then he handed over twenty pence.

Ruby rested her hands on the grab-a-bear machine, looking in. It was a teddy bear explosion inside – bear faces, bear arms, bear legs and bear bums all pushed up against the glass. Jack grinned. Above the hundreds of bears a mechanical arm hung down, its three claws closed in a trap.

'I want that one,' Ruby said, pointing to a pink smiley bear and pushing Jack's coin into the slot.

The mechanical arm whirred into action as Ruby pressed the controls. It juddered one way, then the other. Finally it came down, claws open, and snatched.

At thin air.

The claws came back up empty. *For a change*.

'Oh!' Ruby said.

'Never mind,' Jack said. 'There's always tomorrow.'

They moved away from the arcade. Ruby scuffed her feet against the pavement.

When they got to the launderette, Lauren was standing outside. Jack could see Mum inside, talking to Auntie Joyce. Billy was in his pushchair by Mum's side. He was asleep, cuddling Teddy Volvo. Mum whipped off her tabard and handed it to Auntie Joyce. That meant her shift was officially over. She smiled and waved at Jack and Ruby.

Now they could all go home.

Jack felt his heart sink.