

WORRYBOT

For anyone who's ever felt anxious (including me).

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Chapter One

Halfway to the top of the water slide, I start feeling a bit wobbly.

“Josh, look!” says Willow. “It’s Mum and Dad.”

I’d prefer not to let go of the handrail but I just about manage to give them a quick wave.

“Hi Mum! Hi Dad!” screams Willow. “Look at me. I’m on top of the world.”

They seem so tiny from up here. It’s probably best if I don’t look down again.

“Stop dancing, Willow. These steps are really slippery.”

She grabs my hand and drags me up to the next one. “This is so cool, isn’t it, Josh?”

“Yes . . . really cool,” I say, checking the inflatable octopus in the main pool for anyone else in Year Six. “But are you sure you want to do it?”

Willow looks at me like I’ve just turned



down an invitation to one of her Sylvania Families' wedding barbecues. "Course I do. Don't you?"

"Yeah of course," I say, trying hard to stop my hands shaking. "I just want to make sure you're definitely ready for it. Maybe we should do the slow one again first."

"I'm seven years old," Willow says proudly. "Come on Joshy. Let's do it!"

Last year, I probably wouldn't have made it as far as the changing rooms, so I'm quite pleased with myself as we step onto the platform at the top.

"Who's going first?" asks the lifeguard.

There are two water slides at the leisure centre: the yellow one, which is completely open and dawdles down to the pool in a couple of gentle loops. Then there's the dark, twisty tunnel, which I've never done before, but everyone at school calls 'the black hole'.

"I will," I say, goosebumps prickling up all over me as I stare into the murky tube.

"Keep your arms by your sides and don't go until you see the green light."

I edge closer to the black hole. I really, really want to do this. I'm just not sure if I—



“Josh, *Josh*,” says Willow. “That’s the green light. It’s your turn.”

The lifeguard starts playing with her hair. “OK, in your own time.”

“Maybe you should go first, Willow.”

My little sister smiles and shakes her head. “Come on, Josh. I’ll see you at the bottom.”

What’s the worst thing that can happen? Last year I could probably have come up with at least six major catastrophes. (Like, I puke up on the way down or my trunks fall off and the whole of Year Five is waiting for me at the bottom.) Now, I’m not like that at all. Well, most of the time, anyway.

“You can do it,” whispers Willow. “I know you can.”

“Everything all right?” calls the lifeguard. “If you don’t want to, you’d better let the next one go.”

“It’s OK,” I say, managing to come up with the worst possible excuse since swimming pools were invented. “I’ve just got some . . . water in my eye.”

“Well, you’d better hurry up,” says the lifeguard. “The pool closes in six hours.”

I grab hold of the metal bar and swing myself



into the mouth of the tunnel. At first, I don't even move but as soon as I lean back, my bum shoots forwards and I can't stop myself.

“Whooooooooooooaahhhhh!!!”

The next thing I know I'm hurtling through a black tunnel that twists and turns when you're least expecting it and throws you around like a football shirt in a washing machine. It's cold, and dark, and wet and . . . scary.

And I . . .

And I . . .

AND I LOVE IT!

“Whooooooooooooaahhhhh!!!”

I don't even care that I'm totally out of control. This is amazing. OK, I'm *slightly* relieved when I see the light at the end of the tunnel but part of me wants it to last forever.

The next thing I know, I emerge feet first into the little pool at the bottom and a stream of water shoots up my nose.

“That looked incredible!” says Dad. “I wouldn't mind a go myself.”



Mum flashes him one of her ‘meaningful’ looks. “I don’t think there’s time, Al. We need to . . . do that *thing*, don’t we?”

“Oh, right, yeah,” says Dad, nodding at the man in the flowery swimming trunks who seems to be staring at him. “I’d forgotten about that.”

“Forgotten about what?” I say.

I don’t get to find out, because seconds later Willow shoots out of the tunnel in her Wonder Woman swimming costume. “Did you see me? Did you see me? Did you see me? Did you—?”

“Yes my love, we saw you,” says Mum, wrapping her arm around Wonder Woman. “Was it fun?”

“It was super-amazing-fantastic-brilliant,” says Willow. “Wasn’t it, Joshy?”

“Er . . . yes,” I say, hoping she’s not going to tell them about my panicky moment at the top. “Yes, it was . . . really cool actually.”

Willow’s not like that anyway. She never told them when I accidentally broke Dad’s ‘World’s Greatest Actor’ mug trying to recreate a Ronaldo free kick, and she even helped clean the microwave after me and my friends did that science experiment with the bowl of jelly and the baked beans.

“Let’s do it again,” she says. “Come on, Joshy. I’ll race you to the top.”

“Hang on, guys,” says Mum, flashing Dad another meaningful look. “I don’t think we’ve got time, have we, Al?”

Willow makes a disappointed noise. “Maowwwa.”

“Sorry Willow Pillow,” says Dad. “We need to get home, I’m afraid.”

“What for?”

“It’s just a . . . work thing,” says Mum. “We’ll tell you when we get back.”

“Why can’t you tell us now?” I ask.

Mum doesn’t get a chance to answer. The man in the flowery swimming trunks, who’s been staring thoughtfully at Dad, suddenly breaks into a knowing smile. “Wait a minute. Are you who I think you are?”

Dad smiles modestly. Mum checks the inflatable octopus for potential health and safety issues.

“I *knew* I’d seen you somewhere before,” says the man. “It is you, isn’t it? You’re the—”

“I don’t think so,” says Mum, taking Dad’s hand and dragging him towards the changing rooms. “He’s just got that kind of face.”

My Spidey sense was already tingling when I heard



Mum and Dad whispering by the lockers. It's only after we climb into the back of the car that a slightly suspicious Sunday afternoon turns into a fully grown, Netflix Original sci-fi movie.

"Daaaad?" says Willow, in her best wheedling voice.

"Yes Willow?"

"Can we have takeaway tonight? Can we?"

Dad's seat belt flies back over his shoulder.

"I don't think—"

"Good idea," says Mum. "We'll have the stir-fry tomorrow. I really fancy a pizza. How about you, Josh?"

"Great," I say, checking the roof of the leisure centre for alien spaceships. "Can we get garlic bread too?"

"And spicy wedges?" adds Willow.

"I don't see why not," says Mum. "And how about some of that cookie dough for pudding?"

Even Dad looks surprised.

It's a Sunday. Never in the long and glorious history of the Patterson family have we ever had takeaway on a Sunday.

Now I *know* something's wrong.