

CHAPTER 1

It was surprising what you could do to pass the time when you were in detention.

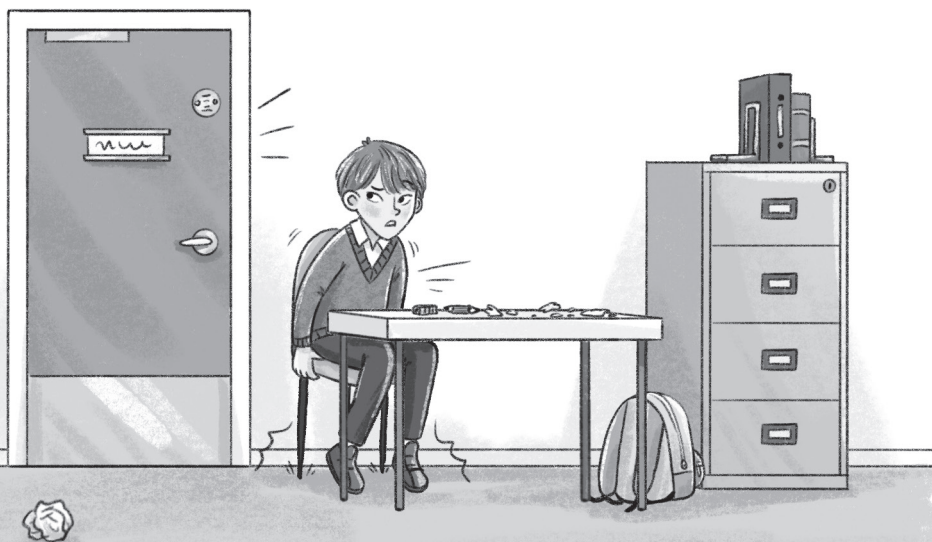
I was the only one who had to stay behind, so they put me at the desk outside the headmaster's office. I had a whole hour to kill. Ms Crook, one of the office staff, gave me a sheet of paper. It had questions on it, including:

If you owned a company, what would it be?

What are your favourite things about school?

What would make you proud?

If you had a superpower, what would it be and why?



At the top of the sheet, it said I had to answer one of the questions. There was no way I was going to waste my time doing that, so this is what I did instead:

1. I asked Ms Crook for a pencil sharpener and sharpened both ends of my pencil. I didn't stop until the pencil was the size of my little finger.
2. I wrote "BUM" on the desk using the pencil shavings.
3. I remembered something our Maths teacher had said in class – that you can't fold a piece of paper more than seven times. So I tried folding the sheet of questions more than seven times.
4. I couldn't do it, so I screwed up the paper and threw it across the room.
5. I shuffled my chair closer to the headmaster's door and listened to what was going on in his office.

The headmaster, Mr Bentley, was on the phone to my mum. I heard him say, “Mrs Spencer, I would like you and your husband to come in to discuss how we move forward. Noah’s behaviour is becoming intolerable.”

(I was in trouble for writing “NOAH RULES THE WORLD” on the lockers in big black marker pen. I thought it looked cool, but Mr Bentley didn’t think so. He’d given me after-school detentions for a whole week.)

A pupil appeared at the window hatch and began to tap on it. If *I* had done that, I’d have ended up in a whole heap of trouble. You’re supposed to stand at the hatch and wait to be seen. But the pupil got away with it because she was Grace Whitlock, school prefect and all-round goodie-goodie.

Ms Crook slid the window of the hatch to one side.

“Hello, Grace,” said Ms Crook. “How can I help you?”

Grace put her thumbs under the straps of her rucksack and stood up taller.

“I want to speak to Mr Bentley about an urgent matter,” Grace said.

“I’m afraid Mr Bentley is busy right now,” said Ms Crook. “Maybe you can come back tomorrow to talk to him.”

Grace screwed up her nose. “But it’s urgent,” she said.

Ms Crook stood up to get something from the printer in the corner of the office.

Grace stuck her head into the hatch. “It’s about the old oak tree on Waterford Avenue!” Grace yelled. “Did you know that it’s being cut down to make a road for some new houses?”

“I see,” said Ms Crook.

“I want the school to start a campaign to save the tree!” said Grace.

Just then, the door of the headmaster’s office opened. Mr Bentley came out.

“Sir! We need to save the oak tree on Waterford Avenue!” Grace yelled.

Again, if I had done that, I would have been in so much trouble!

“Hello, Grace,” said Mr Bentley. “Yes, I’ve heard about the tree coming down. It is a shame.”

He turned the light off in his office and closed the door.

“We need to do something about it. As a school!” said Grace.

Mr Bentley sighed. “We can’t do anything about it now, Grace,” he said. “It’s all been decided, and, besides, I’ve got a hundred and one things to do.”

“But we can’t just let it happen,” said Grace. She looked really upset.

“Grace, I’m sorry, but there is nothing I can do,” said Mr Bentley. “Now off you go and get home.”

Grace opened her mouth, then closed it again. She stormed off out of the main doors.

Mr Bentley turned to me. “You can go too, Noah.”

I quickly packed my bag.

“And I would appreciate it if you told your parents we all need to have a chat as soon as possible. Can you do that for me, please?” said Mr Bentley. “Your mum doesn’t seem keen.”

I knew why that was. She and Dad couldn't stand being in the same room at the moment.

"Yes, sir," I lied.

"Thank you," said Mr Bentley. "Let's see if you can stay out of trouble for the rest of the week, shall we?"

I stood up and said nothing. I didn't want to lie to him again.