

The  
Go-Cart  
Kids

JENNY PAUSACKER

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## CHAPTER ONE

The paddock at the bottom of Panorama Drive was the best place for bike riding around Sturt Vale. And Panorama Drive was the best place for go-carts.

Sturt Vale was a new suburb and there weren't many houses on Panorama Drive yet. So go-carts had a clear run, down the steep hill and round the corner. Mini-bikes were not allowed on the road. They stayed in the paddock.

Any kid with a go-cart or billy-cart could take it to Panorama Drive on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday or Sunday. It's a free country. But on Saturday the hill belonged to some kids from Sturt Vale School.

They weren't a club because they didn't have a special name or special rules. They weren't really a gang, because they all had their own friends at school during the week. But the same kids turned up every Saturday, just the same and raced their carts and bikes.

There was Tony Chicarelli, who was thirteen years old, one hundred and seventy centimetres tall and still growing. Tony had a smile like a baby in a pram but he was big, so no one ever noticed that. Tony had hardly ever been in a fight in his life but all the kids did what he told them.

Then there was Harry Quon. Harry was a crazy speed freak. He crashed his cart almost every week but he would just laugh. Then he would try to borrow some other kid's cart, so he could crash that too.

Mace always wore her big brother's old leather motor bike jacket. She hardly talked at all and no one knew her well. At school the teachers called her a problem but on Panorama Drive she rode a mean go-cart.

Roger Walker was waiting till he could own a motor bike. He talked about bikes all the time. One week he wanted a Ducatti most of all; next week he wanted a BMW. He knew all about bikes but not much about anything else.

Andrew MacIntyre and Jo Simpson lived next door to each other. They had been friends for as long as they could remember. Andrew could mend anything that rattled and Jo could ride anything with a wheel.

So every Saturday these six kids met at Panorama Drive. Sometimes they asked a friend along. And sometimes some kid who wanted to be a big deal would come along without an invitation.

Mostly the newcomers didn't fit in. Some went home straight away and tried to pretend that they only came for the view. Others tried to be tough. Then Tony would stand over them - or Harry Quon would ride his go-cart at them - or Mace would hitch up the sleeves of her leather jacket and march over. Then the kid would decide to go home, after all. Or there would be a fight and the newcomer would lose.

So the same six kids went to Panorama Drive every Saturday. They were all very different, except for one thing: they were all keen on go-carts and mini-bikes. So it wasn't a club. It wasn't a gang. It was just one of those things.

## CHAPTER TWO

It was Saturday and Andrew was checking the motor of Jo's go-cart.

"I think that's okay now," he said. He started up the motor. It coughed a few times, then started to purr. "Little ripper," Andrew told it.

Jo watched the engine jump up and down. "What did you do to it?" she asked.

"I'll show you later. We should go now."

"Okay. Are you taking the cart or the mini-bike today?"

"Harry asked me to bring my bike," said Andrew. "He wants to ride it."

Jo rolled her eyes. "Why not just write it off now? Harry'll wreck your bike."

"Oh, Harry's not bad." Andrew grinned. "Anyway, I want a bigger bike. If he smashes it ..."

"Your dad might get you another one," Jo finished. "Wowee. You're a real con-artist, Andrew MacIntyre."

"Come off it. You're just jealous."

"I know." Jo sighed. "Mum and Ted still just say I can ride your bike."

"Well, you can."

"Big deal."

"Big deal yourself." Andrew punched Jo high up on her arm, where it hurt.

"Oh, stop it," she said.

Andrew kept on punching and grinning at her. At last she punched him back and straight away he grabbed her in a neck lock. Jo didn't want to fight; she wanted to ride her go-cart. So she stood perfectly still. Andrew got bored and let go of her.

“Come on slowcoach,” he said. “Let’s go.”

Jo made a hideous face at him, pulling her eyes down and sticking her tongue out. Andrew ran off to fetch his bike. He wheeled it out lovingly. Andrew wanted a bigger bike but in the meantime he looked after his first bike like a parent. He did all its repairs himself, with the help of his dad, who was a mechanic.

Halfway to Panorama Drive they met Mace with her go-cart.

“You’re late,” she said in her flat voice. This was a bit strange. Mace never said anything, if she could help it.

“Well, then, you’re late too,” Andrew pointed out.

“That’s right,” said Mace, surprised. She pulled a watch out of her jeans pocket. “It’s after one,” she said.

“Ah,” said Andrew and Jo to each other. Now they understood. Mace wanted to show off her new watch.

“It’s a beauty,” said Jo. “Can I have a look?”

Mace silently passed her the watch. It was a big silver pocket watch, with a flap over the front and a winding knob on top.

“It’s a real pocket watch,” said Andrew. “Where did you get it?”

But Mace had gone quiet again. She only shrugged. They walked the last block in silence.

On Panorama Drive Tony and Roger were already racing their go-carts down the hill and Harry was hanging around on the corner. He rushed over to Andrew.

“Terrific, you brought the bike. Can I have first go?” His hands were on the handlebars already.

“Go for your life,” Andrew grinned.

“You can ride my cart,” Harry shouted over his shoulder.

“Great!”

Andrew was joking. Harry’s cart was as crazy as Harry. The motor was fine but the cart itself showed the marks of all Harry’s crashes. Every time he crashed the cart, he nailed on a new bit of wood. So the cart looked like a wooden spiny anteater.

“Your backside will be full of splinters if you sit in that thing,” warned Jo.

“I wish I had my plane here,” said Andrew. “I could smooth it down in a second. Oh well, I’ll give it a try.”

He hopped in the cart and set off down the hill. Jo and Mace stayed at the top to watch. No one else had ever ridden Harry’s cart before and Andrew wasn’t the best rider on the hill. In a second they could see that the cart was out of control.

“Oh no,” said Jo. “The steering’s out.”

Andrew spun the wheel to the right but still the cart veered on to the left. Andrew couldn’t stop it. He ploughed up on to the front lawn of one of the new houses. The cart left deep wheel marks on the lawn. Finally Andrew turned it and swung out on to the

footpath.

“Wow,” said Mace.

Now the cart was going too far the other way. The wheels were hanging over the gutter before Andrew managed to swing it back.

“He’s done it again,” said Jo, dancing up and down. “That’s too far, Andrew. Turn the wheel, you ape.”

Andrew was heading straight for the next house, two blocks down. From where they stood, Jo and Mace could see an elderly man in the garden, happily watering his roses. He obviously didn’t see Andrew and the go-cart.

“Oh no. Watch out,” she yelled to both of them.

But it was too late. Andrew couldn’t have stopped the cart with a two-ton anchor. He rode up on to the lawn at top speed, straight into the rose bed. There he came to a sudden stop, with his front wheels deep in the garden bed. The man’s hose sprayed full on to him.

“Wow,” Mace said again, with feeling.

For a long moment they all stayed there in a state of shock. Andrew sat in the go-cart and stared at the man. The man stood and hosed Andrew, who was soaked to the skin by now. Mace and Jo held on to each other and rocked with laughter.

Then the spell was broken. Andrew jumped out of the cart and the man turned the hose away.

“What do you think you’re doing?” shouted the man. “Look at my lawn.” He pointed to the deep brown tracks in green grass. “You can just get to work and fix it right now or I’ll have a word with your father.”

Andrew was still a bit stunned. He pulled at his wet shirt.

“Go on, jump to it,” barked the man.

“Okay, mister,” said Andrew. “Mind if I go home and get a clean shirt? You’ve messed this one up for me.”

“You could *do* with a good wash, you long-haired lout. A bit of water won’t do you any harm. And a bit of hard work will do you the world of good. Go on, get cracking.”

Andrew looked at the wheel marks in the lawn. “What do you want me to do?” he said.

Mace and Jo had been enjoying themselves but now they saw that Andrew was in trouble, so they came down the hill to help.

“Use some initiative, boy,” the man was saying. “Use your head.”

“But I don’t know what to do,” Andrew repeated. He really meant it. He hated gardens as much as he loved motors and bits of wood. But the man thought he was trying to dodge the work.

“You wrecked my lawn. Now you can fix it.”

“Oh, come on,” said Jo. “Give him a go.”

The man turned on her. His white eyebrows jumped up and down. "As for you, I don't know what your mother is thinking of — letting you wander the streets like this. And as for this little boy ..."

Mace popped her bubblegum at him. "Girl," she said simply.

"Well, you certainly don't look like a girl to me. You look like ..."

"What's the trouble?" said Tony. He had seen the crowd and had come up to investigate. They all turned to him and started to explain.

"Okay, okay, okay," said Tony, holding up his hands. "One at a time, please."

The man won. "This young hooligan has dug up my lawn with his noisy motor and I ..."

Tony looked at the marks in the couch grass lawn. He gave the cart three short sharp kicks. The lumps of lawn fell back into place and Tony stamped them down.

"Right you are," he said to the man. "Everything okay now?"

"It most certainly is not," snapped the man. "I'm sick and tired of you kids and your noise. You'd better stop riding up and down in front of my house or I'll get the council on to you."

The kids stared at him in horror. Stop riding on Panorama Drive? The idea was impossible.

But Tony gave his sweet baby's smile and nodded. "All right then, sir," he said. "We'll stop." And he turned and walked up the hill.

The other kids followed, very unwillingly. Tony didn't usually give up so easily. They felt disappointed, cheated of a fight.

The man stared after them. He looked disappointed too. He had just retired from work and he missed the arguments he used to have there.

"Are we going home?" asked Jo, tugging on Tony's denim jacket.

"I won't let him boss me around like that," stormed Andrew.

"Pig," said Mace.

Tony stopped. He turned around and faced them all. "Look," he said. "We didn't come here to argue with that bloke all day long. We came here to ride. He doesn't want us to ride in front of his house. Okay, we'll ride on the other side of the road from now on."

They all gave a sigh of relief. Tony had the answers, after all. Jo smiled a slow smile.

"That's clever," she said. "We don't want to waste time on him."

"That's sense," said Tony firmly.

## CHAPTER THREE

Jo stood at the top of Panorama Drive, looking down. On either side of the road were green vacant lots, with half a dozen orange houses dotted in between. At the bottom of the hill the road turned sharply to the left, then stopped suddenly.

At the bottom of the hill, there was the paddock as well. Harry was zooming up and down there on the mini-bike. Beyond the paddock, green-brown trees marked out the billabong, a side loop of the city's main river.

Jo took a deep breath. The elderly man was still watering his roses in his front garden. He'd better not try to stop them riding here!

She turned back to the others. Roger had come up and Tony and Andrew were telling him the story.

"I'm going home, anyway," said Andrew. "My shirt's still soaking and I've got splinters from that rotten cart. I'm going to get my tools and plane it down for Harry."

He fixed his eyes on Jo meaningfully, as a hint that she should come with him. But Jo didn't want to miss out on more of her Saturday riding. "See you," she said cheerfully.

Andrew grunted and stumped off, looking cross. Roger, Mace, Tony and Jo decided to have a competition to pick the fastest go-cart rider.

Roger and Jo went first. Only two go-carts could fit on the footpath at a time. They started their motors and pushed off. The wind whipped at them. Houses and trees flashed past. Jo saw the elderly man's angry face over his roses. Then she rode on and

forgot him.

There was a crack in the footpath ahead. Jo rode straight at it and went over it like a bird. But Roger's wheels caught and his go-cart spun round. Jo sailed on around the corner and ran her go-cart into the grass at the end of the road.

"Yay, winner," she cheered. Roger rode up behind her.

"I'll be umpire," he said, parking his go-cart at the edge of the paddock. "At least I don't have to climb the hill again."

Mace and Tony raced next. Mace slowed down to make a rude sign at the man, so Tony won easily.

"Stop it, Mace," he said to her afterwards. "We don't want to make him really mad."

Mace shrugged and went to sit on the fence beside Roger. But she didn't look at the man again.

Now the race was between Jo and Tony. They lined up together.

"Good luck," said Tony. "Ready, steady, GO."

Jo lost time on her start. She leaned forward, pushing the cart on. "Come on, come on," she whispered. She drew level with Tony and he pulled out, trying to force her off the footpath. But Jo was ready for him. She rode as close to the gutter as she could. Then she shot down into the dip of a driveway and up in front of Tony.

Jo was moving fast. She knew Tony wouldn't crash into her but Tony wasn't so sure. He slowed down for a moment and Jo sped off down the hill as fast as she could. She didn't dare look around, in case she lost a second.

The world was a green blur in front of her eyes. She took the corner safely and headed towards the finishing line. As she rode into the grass, Tony was beside her again.

"It's a draw," yelled Mace.

"Nah — Jo won," said Roger. They started to argue.

"It was a good race, anyway," said Tony. He slapped Jo on the back, forgetting how big he was, and she tried not to fall over.

Mace had pushed Roger off the fence and now he was pulling her after him. "Break it up," yelled Tony.

"I liked the race too," said Jo to Tony. "I cheated, though." They grinned at each other.

"That's not cheating," Roger cut in. He sat up and pulled grass from his hair. "That's gamesmanship. I read this article in *Bike World* last week. It said that gamesmanship is just as important as good riding. They interviewed ten top riders and asked them all -"

"Yeah, yeah," interrupted Jo. "Hey, Andrew's back. Andrew! I won the race!"

She charged up the hill, head down, towing her go-cart. Roger could recite all the articles from the latest *Bike World* — and he did, if you let him. But she liked that word, "gamesmanship". She only had Andrew's old motor on her cart, so she needed

gamesmanship as well.

Jo almost passed Andrew without noticing. When she looked up, he was crouched over Harry's go-cart, his toolkit beside him. Another boy was standing and watching him. He was small and stocky, with shiny brown hair and a smooth tan. His clothes looked as good as his tan.

"Hey, what are you doing here?" asked Jo.

"Minding my own business." He smiled easily, as if the hill belonged to him.

"Well, this hill is for go-cart riders. Go and mind your business somewhere else."

"Says who?"

"Says me."

"You and whose army?" said the boy.

Jo glared at him. "Who are you, anyway?"

"I've just moved in next door and I met Andrew here, so I came along with him."

Andrew took no notice of all this, rubbing away at Harry's go-cart. Then Tony came up.

"This hill is for go-cart riders," he said, hands on hips.

The boy looked up at him. "Okay, I get the message," he said coolly. "Maybe I'll come back with my go-cart." He strolled off.

"Maybe you won't," Jo said to his back. She turned on Andrew. "What did you bring him for?" she demanded.

"I didn't," said Andrew. "He just came. He helped me carry my tool-kit. It's pretty heavy, you know."

"Gee, you're a bludger," said Jo. "Since when do we have people next door, anyway?"

"Since today. The moving van was there when I went home and Jason was outside."

"Well, you get to know him," said Tony. "Maybe he's all right."

He set off down the hill again. Jo still felt cross, so she got in her go-cart and zoomed down the hill at top speed. Her anger blew away in the wind and she went to watch Harry on the mini-bike.

"Hey, Harry," she said after a while, "can I have a go on your cart?"

Harry rode straight at her and stopped an inch away. Jo jumped back.

"Chicken," he said, so Jo flapped her arms and made clucking noises. Harry laughed and threw up his hands. The front of the bike swivelled and the bike fell over. Harry went down with it and lay in the grass, still laughing.

"Yes, you can have a go," he said. "Watch out for the steering though." He gave a screech of laughter and picked the bike up.

"I saw Andrew," said Jo. "I just want to try it."

"You're brave," said Harry. "It knows me. That's different."

He gave the bike to Mace and followed Jo up the hill. Andrew had cut off the ends of

the packing case pieces and now he was sandpapering the edges.

“There, that’s better,” he said to Harry. “I can’t fix the steering, though. I’d like to show it to my dad.”

“Jo wants to ride it first,” said Harry.

“Then Jo’s crazy,” said Andrew. “Go on, kill yourself.”

Jo bent her arm and patted the muscle. “I’ll show you,” she boasted.

She checked out the cart, while Andrew made more rude comments. Then she pushed off down the hill.

At once the cart swung to the left. Jo spun the steering wheel but nothing happened. So she spun the wheel harder. The cart veered hard to the right. Now Jo knew how Andrew had felt.

But at least she was still on the footpath. She turned the wheel back, bit by bit. Suddenly she was travelling in a straight line. She cheered herself wildly.

The cart was swinging to the left again. It wanted to run off the footpath. But Jo knew its tricks now. She turned the steering wheel hard but not too far.

Away she went. The footpath rushed up under her wheels. The lawns ran by in a straight green line. The wind went through her hair like a very hard hairbrush.

Jo fought the cart at the corner and made a very wide turn. Then she was racing along the flat into the grass at the end. She had ridden Harry’s go-cart without a crash!

Harry and Andrew came running up to her. They pulled her out of the go-cart and thumped her on the back.

“That was fan-tan-tastic,” shouted Harry. “No one but me has ever ridden that go-cart properly. Good on you, Jo.”

“I thought you were a goner at first,” said Andrew. “But you did it. Beauty.”

Mace shouted from the paddock, “What’s happened?”

“Jo rode my cart.”

“Wow!” said Mace and Tony and Roger yelled, “Well done.”

Jo shone with pride. She knew she rode well but she liked to be told. She took the cart up the hill again and this time made a perfect run. Then Harry wanted the cart back, so Jo went down to the paddock. She lay in the long grass by the billabong and watched the thick brown water and thought about go-carts.

“Coming home?” said Andrew and Jo jumped. She was almost asleep.

“I thought you could carry my tools in your go-cart,” he said. “I have to wheel the bike.”

“All right,” said Jo. “I’m in a good mood. I’ll be generous.” They said goodbye and set off home through the afternoon shadows.

“It was a funny day,” said Jo thoughtfully. “First that man, then that smartypants boy. But riding Harry’s cart was great. I like Saturdays.”

“Yeah,” Andrew agreed. “I wish Harry would show his cart to my dad, though. He’d

fix that steering in no time.”

Andrew was always practical. Sometimes he drove Jo mad but today she just grinned. They trudged on home together.

## CHAPTER FOUR

“I still don’t know what to call you,” said Jo to her parents at breakfast the next day.

“No, I noticed that,” observed her mother. “What’s the problem?”

“Well, I feel too old to say ‘Mummy’ and ‘Daddy’ any more. That’s baby talk. Ted’s easy, because I used to call him Ted before you got married. But I *can’t* call you Eve.” Jo blushed at the word.

“I say ‘Mummy’ and ‘Daddy’,” said Sue firmly.

“Well, you *are* a baby,” said Jo.

“Am not. Am not. Am not.” Sue went red in the face and threw the top of her boiled egg at Jo. Jo picked it off her t-shirt and threw it back in Sue’s face.

“Baby,” she said again. Sue burst into tears and Ted picked her up.

“There, there,” he said soothingly. “Stop crying and prove to Jo that you’re not a baby.” Over the top of Sue’s head, he said to Jo, “Why not call me Ted and call Eve ‘Mum’?”

“Because it’s not fair,” Jo explained earnestly. “I want to call you the same thing. But I think of you as Ted and I think of her as ‘Mum’.”

“Well ...” Ted was starting, when her mother marched over with the toast.

“I think of myself as Eve,” she said briskly. “What’s wrong with it? Perfectly good name.”

Jo wriggled. “But it’s like Adam and Eve. It’s funny.”

“Huh,” said Eve. She didn’t believe in wasting words. “Lot of silly nonsense. Call me what you like.”

“Well, I *will* call you Eve,” said Jo all at once. “For a while, anyway,” she added.

“All right, you do that,” said Eve, as if she were daring Jo.

Ted laughed. He always laughed when Jo and Eve had mini-fights. They didn’t fight nearly as much now, just to show him. “Out you go, Daughter and Daughter,” he said to Jo and Sue.

“Can I play with you today?” Sue asked Jo.

“No,” Jo said in horror. “I’m going over to Andrew’s. We don’t want babies. Goodbye, Ted. Goodbye, M — Eve.” And she went quickly, before Sue could start to grizzle.

Andrew was in the garage, working on his go-cart. Jo wriggled around the family car and saw the boy from next door, leaning on the back wall.

“Oh, *you’re* here,” she said. “Hello, Andrew.”

“This is Jo,” said Andrew, looking up at the boy. “Jo, this is Jason. He just moved in next door.”

“Gee, I thought he’d just jumped off a flying saucer,” said Jo sarcastically. “You do say stupid things sometimes, Andrew.”

“No stupider than you, smartypants Simpson.”

“Says who, Andrew Mucky-tyre?”

“You think you’re so clever.”

“I *am* clever.”

“Prove it.” Andrew jumped on her and grabbed her arm, twisting it behind her back. “Say, ‘I’m stupid,’” he ordered.

“Oh, lay off,” said Jo impatiently. She didn’t want to fight in front of Jason.

Andrew wouldn’t let go. “All right,” he said. “But you have to say ‘I’m stupid.’”

Jo didn’t want to fight but she didn’t want to give in that easily either.

“Okay,” she said. “You’re stupid.”

Andrew was furious. He twisted Jo’s arm harder, so she kicked him on the kneecap. He let go and hopped on one leg. Jo kicked his other knee and pushed him over, in a clatter of tools. Then she sat on him.

“Do you give in?” she asked.

Andrew pushed back at her but Jo was heavy and she was kneeling on his arms.

“Do you give in?” she asked again.

“Oh, all right,” he mumbled.

But as soon as she got up, Andrew grabbed her leg and pulled her down again. He rolled on to her and hit her head on the concrete floor.

“Give in?” he said and hit her head again. “Give in?”

“Oh, all right, I give in,” said Jo crossly. She sat up and rubbed the back of her head. Her fingers prodded the sore spot and she squeaked. “You’re a stupid cheat all the same,” she snapped.

Andrew caught her by the shoulders. “I’m not stupid. You’re stupid.”

Clearly he wanted another fight. Maybe he was showing off in front of Jason, Jo thought. But probably not. Andrew was always fighting to win these days.

“Okay, okay, you’re not stupid,” she said, bored with the whole thing. “You’re the smartest idiot in the street.”

Luckily Andrew missed this one but Jason glanced her way for the first time. Jo saw the start of a smile on his face and then he looked away quickly.

Jo kept on studying him. Next to her and Andrew, he looked very clean and neat and somehow older. She wondered what he was like.

“Now I’ll show you how to put a wheel on,” Andrew said to Jason. He was acting as if Jason was his new pet. But Jason raised his blond eyebrows.

“No, I’ll show *you* how to fight,” he said. “You can’t fight for peanuts.”

“Hang on. I won, didn’t I?” Andrew was indignant but Jason just smiled a grown-up smile.

“Oh yeah. Fighting with a girl.”

His voice was lightly scornful and Jo was enraged. She had won the fight but then Andrew had broken the “give in” rule. That wasn’t gamesmanship; that was just cheating.

She pushed in front of Jason. “Do you want to fight with a girl?” she asked, looking as tough as she could.

“No, thanks,” said Jason politely. “I don’t fight with girls.”

“Why not?”

“Girls can’t fight.”

Jo was speechless. What was she supposed to say? She had just beaten Andrew in a fair fight and now Jason was calmly telling her that girls couldn’t fight. Still speechless, Jo followed the boys to the back lawn.

“Now, I’ll stand like this and you try to hit me,” Jason said to Andrew.

Andrew rubbed his hands and ran at Jason happily. He swung a punch but Jason put out his hand and stopped it. Then he took hold of Andrew somehow and tipped him over. Jo clapped and Andrew glared at her.

“That was a trick,” he grumbled to Jason.

“That was judo,” said Jason. “I’ll show you how to do it, if you like.”

“Yeah,” said Andrew, pleased. “I can try it on some of the other guys at school.”

Jo sat near by and watched. She had seen some judo on TV and thought it looked good. She tried to remember the holds that Jason was showing Andrew but sometimes it was hard to see properly.

“Show me that one,” she said to Jason.

Jason stepped back from her. “I might hurt you,” he said.

“Huh,” said Jo. “I know how to fall. Anyway, I don’t hurt easy.”

She fell flat on her face and lay still. Jason dropped on his knees beside her and

tried to roll her over.

“Are you all right, Jo? Jo?”

Jo sat up and laughed into his worried face.

“I told you,” she said. “I know how to fall. I learnt it for the school play. It’s dead easy.”

Jason looked disgusted. “Typical girls’ trick. I’m teaching Andrew, anyway. I don’t have to teach you.”

Jo waited for Andrew to speak. He was her friend — he would be on her side.

“Come on,” he said to Jason. “Show me that throw again.”

Jo stared in amazement. Andrew was almost pretending that she wasn’t there at all. To her own surprise, she sat meekly down on the lawn and watched the judo. Maybe Jason would go home. Maybe Andrew would notice her ...

In the end Jo decided that being invisible was no fun. She gave up and went into the kitchen to see Andrew’s mother. Mrs MacIntyre came from Scotland and had a lovely lilting way of talking. Also, she liked Jo. That was a help, at the moment.

## CHAPTER FIVE

Jo helped Mrs MacIntyre to make scones for afternoon tea and listened to her Scottish voice. She had tried and tried to talk like that but she never got it quite right.

“Now, go and call the boys in,” said Mrs MacIntyre.

Jo went to the wire door and called. As Andrew and Jason turned around, she suddenly felt like the odd one out. It was a strange feeling, especially when she’d been eating scones in the MacIntyres’ kitchen for years. She shook her head until her hair fluffed out, trying to clear her brain.

“Hey,” she said to Andrew as he came in, “It’s nearly tadpole time. Maybe we’ll grow a frog this year.”

“Mm,” said Andrew. “Hey, Mum, did you see me doing judo? Jason goes to a judo class on Wednesdays. Can I go too?”

“You play with Jason for a while first, then we’ll see,” said Mrs MacIntyre. “You must teach Jo some judo, Jason. It’s very handy for a girl. I saw a programme about it on TV.”

“See, I told you so,” said Jo quietly.

Jason gave her the very smallest of smiles and moved over to the scone plate. But Jo felt that she had scored a point.

Mr MacIntyre came in. “Hello, Jason, how’s tricks? Nice to see you, Jo,” he said, biting into a double layer of scone. He was a small, thin man who ate enormously. “Well, have you fixed the date of the wedding yet?”

Mr MacIntyre always made this joke, pretending that Andrew and Jo wanted to get married. Usually they groaned and told him to shut up. But today neither of them said anything.

“They’ve been sweethearts since they were so high,” Mr MacIntyre explained to Jason. “Andrew’s like me — I started young with the girls.”

He laughed heartily. No one else was laughing but he didn’t seem to mind. Andrew heaved a big sigh and Jo hid at the sink, washing her tea cup very carefully. She glanced sideways at Jason and sure enough, he was looking at Mr MacIntyre as if he had sniffed a noseful of bad smell.

Mrs MacIntyre came to the rescue, saying, “Go on, now, back to your judo. I’ve got work to do.”

She gave them a scone each and shoed them out. They sat on the lawns and ate their scones in silence, like stranger-cousins on a family visit.

“Well,” said Jo, with nothing better to say.

“Well, what?” asked Andrew.

“Oh, nothing.”

There was another silence, then Andrew said, “I wonder ...”

“Yeah?” said Jason.

“Oh, it wasn’t important.”

Finally Jason stood up. “I’ll show you some more judo, if you like,” he said to Andrew.

Jo was tired of being invisible. “Show *me* some judo,” she demanded, placing herself in front of Jason.

“I’ll show you,” Jason repeated to Andrew, over the top of Jo’s head. “You can show your little sweetheart.”

Andrew blushed dark red. “She’s not my sweetheart,” he said angrily. “It’s just a stupid joke.”

Jo thoroughly agreed with him but she was still hurt. He kept talking to Jason, not to her. She opened her mouth and a shout came out.

“Too right, I’m not your rotten sweetheart. I wouldn’t be your rotten sweetheart, not if you paid me a million dollars.”

Then she was marching down the drive.

“Don’t worry, I wouldn’t pay you,” Andrew yelled after her.

Jo marched on. She turned at the end of the drive and looked round. They were back at their judo already. She felt very flat. There was no fun in walking out, if Andrew didn’t care. She kicked the tyre of their family car.

“Hello, snooks,” said Ted, who was washing the car. “Where’s Andrew?”

“Playing with that Jason,” said Jo. She picked up a rag and started polishing the car.

“Who are you going to play with, then?” asked Ted.

Jo brightened. That was a good idea. She'd show Andrew that he wasn't her only friend in the street.

"I'm going to see Nettie," she said.

She polished the car a bit more, as a thank you to Ted, then ran down the street to Nettie's place. Nettie was a year older than Jo but they played together sometimes.

She found Nettie in her big sister Tracy's room. She was trying on Tracy's t-shirts in front of the mirror.

"Hey, Jo," she said proudly, "I've got a bra."

"So what?" said Jo. "I've had one for years."

Nettie looked down at herself, then across at Tracy and Jo. "It's not fair," she moaned. "You're as big as Tracy and you're only eleven."

"You can have them," offered Jo. Her breasts bounced when she ran and people made comments about them. As far as she was concerned, Nettie was welcome to them.

"Well, go on," said Tracy. "Hand them over."

Jo looked puzzled and then she laughed. She put her hands under her breasts and held her hands out to Nettie. Nettie pretended to take the breasts and stick them on her chest. The three girls laughed and laughed, until they had forgotten the joke altogether.

"Oh, that was good," said Tracy, taking a deep breath. Then she made Nettie tidy up the t-shirts before they left.

Nettie showed Jo her new swap cards and they went to Jo's place and swapped cards and talked. Nettie told stories about the kids in her year and Jo told stories about the kids at Panorama Drive.

"Everyone says the Panorama Drive kids are really tough," said Nettie. "All the kids want to go up there on Saturdays."

"Yeah?" said Jo, pleased. She had never thought about other people's ideas of her before.

Then Nettie went home and Jo ate her tea in front of the television and did her homework. She was surprised when Andrew walked in.

"Where's Jason?" she asked.

"Dunno," said Andrew, looking surprised in his turn. He always came over to watch TV in the evenings. Mr MacIntyre liked to watch his own favourite programmes but in the Simpson household, Jo was allowed to choose.

"Just wondered," said Jo. "I went to see Nettie this afternoon."

"Oh yeah, how's she going?"

"She's got a bra," said Jo and giggled at the afternoon's joke. Then she was sorry. This was girl talk. Jason would turn up his nose, if he were here.

But Andrew didn't care. He had an older sister himself. He just said, "Yeah?" in a vague way and asked her about the maths homework. They spread out on the floor with

some chips and their maths books, while a pop show started on the TV.

Jo heaved a sigh of relief. The afternoon had been a bit of a shock but now things were back to normal again.

## CHAPTER SIX

Next Friday Jo and Andrew were watching *City Patrol*, when Andrew said, “Jason got his new bike today. It’s a Honda 80.”

“Oh yeah?” said Jo. She didn’t care much. She had met Jason a few more times and he still didn’t speak to her. Clearly he didn’t like her, so Jo had decided that she didn’t like him.

“I asked him to come to Panorama Drive with us this Saturday,” Andrew went on.

This time Jo sat up and took notice. “Andrew!” she wailed. “That stuck-up creep. You can’t ask him.”

“Well, I have,” said Andrew calmly. “What’s wrong with him anyway? He’s not a bad sort.”

Jo opened her mouth, then shut it again. Andrew was her friend. How could he like Jason, when Jason didn’t like her?

“Well?” said Andrew, waiting.

Jo tried to explain. “Jason ignores me all the time. He won’t teach me judo or anything. I don’t want him at Panorama Drive.”

“But he’s got the biggest bike around,” said Andrew. “The others will love it. Harry and Roger will go wild.”

“So will I, if Jason comes too,” said Jo firmly. “He probably won’t even let me ride the bike, because I’m a girl.”

Andrew looked guilty and Jo knew she was right. “Jason’s a bit funny,” he said. “He has a thing about girls. I told him you’re different but he doesn’t understand.”

“Thanks a lot,” said Jo. “I’m not different. I’m just normal.”

“Well, most of the boys at school don’t have girls for friends,” Andrew pointed out.

“Go and watch Jason’s TV then. See if I care.”

“I didn’t say that. You’re my friend. But I like Jason too. You play with Nettie sometimes, anyway.”

“Nettie isn’t horrible to you,” said Jo.

Andrew turned back to *City Patrol*. He didn’t want to talk about it. Neither did Jo. It was too hard. They passed the chips and talked about other things.

But the next day Jo went out to meet Andrew and Jason with a grim look on her face. Jason could ignore her at home but on Panorama Drive she was the best go-cart rider of all and he’d have to accept that. Jo wasn’t going to be pushed out of his way all the time.

Andrew rushed up to her and dragged her over to the new bike. He made her look at everything, bit by bit. Jo was impressed, even though she didn’t want to be. A new bike was always great, even if it belonged to creepy Jason.

“They’ve improved the handlebars out of sight on this model,” she said. “It looks terrific.”

“Wait till you feel the power,” raved Andrew. “My bike feels like a push bike in comparison.”

Jason waited patiently until they had finished. “Can we go now?” he said. He looked in between Jo and Andrew but at least he didn’t just look at Andrew.

Jason’s bike was heavier than Andrew’s and Jason was soon looking puffed and sweaty.

“Do you want to swap?” Jo asked.

Jason looked longing at Jo’s little go-cart but he shook his head. Jo waited for half a block, then asked again.

“Oh, all right,” he said grudgingly. “It’s heavy, though.”

Jo grinned and took the handlebars. She had won the first round.

Harry and Roger went wild about the bike, just as Andrew had said. They checked it out in detail. Then Tony came up to check Jason out.

“Is this your friend?” he asked Andrew.

Jason spoke for himself. “I’m Jason,” he said. “We’ve met before.”

He held out his hand to Tony. Tony looked surprised, then he shook Jason’s hand.

“I’m Tony,” he said, trying to be polite. “Welcome to Panorama Drive.”

The two boys looked each other up and down for a moment and then Tony nodded towards the bike.

“Can you ride it?”

Jo felt a sudden rush of hope. Maybe Jason couldn’t ride the bike. Then everyone would see he was a no-hoper. She shut her eyes and saw a vivid picture: Jason sailing

over the handlebars into the billabong.

When she opened her eyes, Jason was wheeling the bike down the hill. Jo followed, her fingers crossed for luck. They passed the old man, mowing his front lawn. He frowned across at the big bike.

“Keep your noise down,” he shouted.

Harry put his hand behind his ear. “I can’t hear you, mister,” he shouted back.

The man turned his lawn mower off. “I said, ‘Keep your noise down’.”

“Oh, thanks,” said Harry. “I can hear you now. Lovely day, isn’t it?”

He went off whistling. The man was left staring after them and trying to start his lawn mower again.

Jason frowned. “You should be careful,” he said. “He might complain to the police, if you give him cheek.”

Tony had said the same thing to Mace last week. But Jason was new. He wasn’t supposed to give orders, so Tony said, “Harry’s right. His lawn mower is noisy.”

Jason looked as if he would like to argue but he wasn’t stupid. He could see Tony was the boss. So he held his tongue, even when Harry made faces at him.

They wheeled the new bike into the paddock and hung around hopefully. Everyone wanted to ride it but Tony said firmly, “Okay, Jason. Show us its tricks.”

Jason put on his crash helmet and started the bike. It started easily for him. New bike, thought Jo to herself. He set off across the bumpy paddocks, with Jo praying hard for a rabbit hole. Suddenly the bike reared up and everyone gasped. But Jason kept his seat and the bike kept on going.

“He’s only been riding for a week,” said Andrew proudly. “I showed him.”

“He’s not bad,” said Roger, watching Jason critically.

Jo had to agree. Jason was a good rider. He was still very careful. He didn’t speed and he didn’t ride straight at the bigger bumps in the ground. But he cornered well and, most of all, he wasn’t afraid. Jo sighed. He wasn’t going to make a fool of himself after all.

Tony had the next turn on the bike. He was very pleased with it, because Andrew’s bike was a bit small for his long legs. Then Jason offered the bike to Harry.

“Jo should go next,” said Harry. “She’s the best rider.”

Jason shrugged and held out the handlebars to Jo. She ran over but he let go of the bike before she had a proper hold on it. The bike leaned towards her and she had to lean back on it for a moment to stop it falling over. Jason sighed loudly.

Now Jo was rattled. She wanted to prove something to Jason but she was scared. What if she made a mess of things?

The bike started easily again and she gave a sigh of relief. She set off around the paddock at a fair speed, leaning in hard at the corners. Now she had the feel of the bike. She accelerated to a greater speed and decided to ride at one of the mounds of grass in

the middle of the paddock.

The bike hit the mound and went up. It hung in the air for a moment. Jo glanced quickly at her friends. Then she looked back at the ground. It was coming towards her too fast and from totally the wrong angle.

The bike hit the ground again, tilting crazily. Jo fought against it but the wheels were stuck in a track between tufts of grass. There was only one thing to do and Jo did it. She fell off and the bike skidded away.

Jo picked herself up and ran over to the bike but Jason got there first. He righted the bike and checked it over. Jo checked with him. Her eyes met Jason's with a look of horror.

The bike had landed on one of the few rocks in the paddock and there was a long jagged scratch down the shiny new paint.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

It was just bad luck. Everyone knew that. It could happen to anyone. Jason was very nice about it. He said, 'Fine, no worries,' and gave the bike to Harry straight away. But while the other kids were running over, he had looked at Jo and hissed one word.

"Typical!"

Jo was miserable. She knew it was just bad luck too. But she hated to see a mark on a new bike. And she felt that it was her fault. She had wanted Jason to fall off and now she had fallen off herself.

She sat and watched the others ride the new bike, turn by turn. They all rode it perfectly, even Andrew. But Andrew must have ridden it before. He'd said he taught Jason to ride.

Only Mace didn't get a ride.

"That crash helmet's too big for you," Jason told her.

Mace snatched it out of his hand and pushed it down over her head. She tightened the straps as far as they would go. "There," she said.

Jason put his hand on the helmet and wobbled it to and fro. "See," he said. "It's too loose."

Mace looked at Tony, ignoring Jason.

"Sorry, Mace," he said. "Jason's right. It *is* dangerous."

"Huh," said Mace. She didn't look convinced.

Jo wasn't convinced either. Funny how Jason won't let Mace ride the bike and Mace is the other girl here, she thought. Then she kicked herself. Before Jason came, she had

never thought of her friends as boys or girls. They were just go-cart riders.

The others laughed and shouted. They boasted about their rides and complimented Jason on the new bike. Jo sat silently, with a knot of misery in her chest.

“What are you doing?” said Harry, coming to stand beside her. “Are you still sad about the poor little bike?”

“Sure,” said Jo. “I’ve wept a bucket of tears. Now I’m going to wash the bike with them.”

Harry gave a shout of laughter and ran off to grab the bike again. Jo felt more cheerful. She went to find someone for a go-cart race.

Roger and Andrew were on the hill with their go-carts already, so she went over to Tony, Mace and Jason. Tony was asking Mace for the time. He knew she liked to use her new silver watch. She pulled it out and showed it to Tony.

“Where did you get that?” Jason asked, peering over her shoulder.

Mace looked at him with no expression on her face and said nothing.

“It’s a really expensive watch, isn’t it?” said Jason. “Look, it’s sterling silver. That costs a lot. Did you buy it, or did someone give it to you?”

Mace snapped the watch shut and put it back in her pocket, then turned and walked away to her go-cart.

“Did I say something wrong?” Jason asked Tony. “Did she pinch the watch or something?”

Tony looked down at Jason for a moment. Then he put his hands on his hips, hitching up his jeans. He looked very big.

“Keep your mouth shut,” he said slowly and deliberately. “Or I’ll help you with it.”

He stared Jason down and then followed Mace. Jason raised his pale eyebrows and hummed to himself. He looked as if he had done a sum for homework and the answer was right. Then he noticed Jo beside him and ran off towards Harry and the bike.

Jo, Mace and Tony walked up the hill together in silence. Mace looked her usual tough self but Tony looked thoughtful. At the top of Panorama Drive, he put his hand on Mace’s shoulder and said, “Watch it.”

Mace shrugged. She started her go-cart noisily and set off down the hill at breakneck speed.

“Race you,” said Tony to Jo and they lined up their go-carts.

Jo’s cart wouldn’t start first time and Tony zoomed away ahead of her. Luckily the cart started on her second try. She hurtled after Tony and she had nearly caught up with him, when he started to weave back and forth in front of her.

“Oh-oh,” Jo muttered. Tony was using gamesmanship. She laughed but she had to slow down.

They went on down the hill at a snail’s pace. Tony gave Jo no chance to pass him. Then he turned the corner and sped away.

Jo's motor wasn't very powerful. She needed the speed from the hill. Tony had won before she turned the corner. She rode up to him, still laughing.

"Beauty," she said. "I'll try that on someone else one day."

"Yeah, it wasn't bad," said Tony, looking pleased with himself. "I saw it in a movie on TV – with bikes, that time, but I thought it would work with go-carts too. Want another go?"

"Okay. I'll start properly this time."

But when they got to the top of the hill again, Andrew was showing Jason how to start his go-cart.

"Just be a minute," he said.

"This hill's for racing," said Jo, "not for L-plates."

"We can wait," said Tony.

"I can't," said Jo.

She pulled her cart over to the other side of the road and set off. She wanted to feel the wind on her face again — and to get away from Jason. She started beautifully and sailed down the hill on the smoothest of rides. Then she heard a great roar, like a mad bull.

She jumped. The cart skidded and ran up on to someone's lawn. Jo looked around for the mad bull and gasped. She was on the elderly man's lawn. Her cart had dug up the grass. And the man himself was standing at the front door, shouting at her and actually shaking his fist.

"Oops," said Jo and rolled her eyes. *He* was the mad bull who had shouted at her as she rode past. Now she had ruined his lawn again.

She jumped out of the cart and started patting at the lawn, like a mud pie. It didn't look too good. Jo bit her lip. This wasn't her lucky day.

The man stomped over, still shouting at the top of his voice. "And as if your confounded noise wasn't enough, you have the cheek to come and destroy my lawn. I'll see your parents. I'll have your pocket money stopped. You'll pay for my lawn, you little good-for-nothing vandal. Vandal!"

Jo crouched on the lawn like a scared rabbit, staring down at the broken grass. The man didn't stop for an answer but she had nothing to say, anyway. Her mind was a total blank.

At last the man stopped shouting. He told her to fetch a bucket of sand and sprinkle sand on the lawn. Jo couldn't find the sand, so he came and shouted at her again.

She stood and sprinkled sand on the lawn, head down. She had broken Tony's promise and got them all into trouble. Now the man could shout at them with good reason.

"All right," he said. "Off you go. And don't let this happen again."

"No, sir," said Jo. She trailed wearily up the hill, feeling utterly defeated. The others

were waiting for her.

“You’re riding really well today,” said Andrew, rubbing it in. He looked pleased, because he had done the same thing last week.

“Yeah, she rides nearly as well as you,” cracked Harry. Jo grinned. She knew the joke was unkind but at least Harry was helping her out.

“What did you do it for?” asked Roger. “Idiot. Now he’ll go to the council for sure.”

“No, he won’t,” said Tony. “He had his fun, making Jo fix the lawn. But we’d better be careful.”

Jo felt better, until she looked across at Jason. He said nothing but she could almost hear his thoughts.

*Typical ...*

## CHAPTER EIGHT

The next day was Sunday. Jo didn't know what to do. She felt a fool twice over. She had spoiled Jason's bike and she had made trouble with the angry man. She didn't want to go to Andrew's place. She wanted Andrew to come to her place and cheer her up.

After breakfast she played *Snap* with Sue, who cried when Jo snapped her hand, instead of the cards. So she went into the kitchen, where her mother and step-father were reading the newspapers. Jo took a few bits of the papers and went to sit on the floor. Soon she heard Eve and Ted arguing.

"No, I haven't got it."

"You must have. I haven't."

"Well, I haven't either."

Jo looked up and laughed. "Do you mean the paper?" she said. "I've got it."

"I'll swap you," said Ted, holding out his bit. Eve glared.

"I don't want it anyway," said Jo annoyingly. "I only read the comics."

She strolled towards the door, tossing the paper on the table. Ted grabbed her as she passed and pulled her on to his knee. He bounced her up and down.

"I'm not a baby," said Jo crossly.

"Well, you're acting like one," said Ted, still bouncing. "You're making everyone fight today. Why don't you go round to Andrew's?"

"I can't be bothered," muttered Jo.

"Are you fighting with Andrew too?" said Eve from behind her paper.

"No!" wailed Jo. "It's him. He's always with that Jason now. He hasn't even come

round today.”

“Hm,” said Ted slowly. “Well, all boys go through a stage of feeling funny about girls, take it from me. Luckily, we get over it.”

“Yes, but Andrew’s my *friend*,” Jo explained patiently.

“Maybe,” said Ted. “But don’t blame him too much if he wants to spend more time with Jason for a while.”

“Uh-uh,” said Jo, getting off Ted’s knee. She didn’t agree. She would blame Andrew as hard as she could, if he went along with Jason. It was all very well for Ted but she couldn’t just sit around waiting for Andrew all her life.

“Silly business anyway,” said Eve. “Andrew MacIntyre’s a born follower, if you ask me. Followed you round for years. Now he’s following Jason.”

Jo stared. This was a new idea. It gave Jo a picture of herself from the outside, like Nettie saying that the Panorama Drive kids were tough. “What do you mean, Eve?” she said.

Her mother shrugged. “You were the one with the bright ideas. Andrew MacIntyre didn’t decide to shave the cat ... or walk to the beach ... or paint the chook house ... or ...”

Jo was giggling. “No, *I* did,” she said. “Wow! Wish I’d known at the time I was so smart.”

“You weren’t *smart*,” said Eve, fixing her with a steely look. “You just had the ideas. But why are you worrying? Go and see Andrew. He may be all right today.”

“What if he doesn’t want to see me?”

Her mother shrugged again. “At least you’ll know for sure.” She picked up her paper again and Jo went slowly out the back door.

Andrew and Jason were sitting in the MacIntyre’s drive, with pieces of Andrew’s go-cart motor all around them. They were laughing like mad.

“What’s the joke?” said Jo with a friendly grin. She sat down beside them.

“Look what Jason did!” Andrew held up two parts of the motor and kept laughing. Jo smiled politely. She didn’t get the joke.

“Well, that piece doesn’t fit anywhere else,” said Jason. “I swear it doesn’t.” He laughed too and waggled the badly fitting parts.

“Oh come on,” said Andrew. “Try again.”

Jason sorted through the parts again, muttering to himself. Jo sat and watched him put the motor together. She felt bored at first and then she began to be unwillingly impressed with Jason. He knew more about motors than she did and she had been riding go-carts for years. But Andrew had always fixed her go-cart for her.

At last all the parts were together again. Jason went to start the motor. It didn’t work. Andrew and Jason started laughing again.

“You boobed,” said Andrew. He poked at the motor. “I don’t know what’s wrong.

We'd better ask my dad."

Jason was laughing so hard that he sat down. "All that work," he gasped. "Rotten thing." He kicked at the motor and had one last try at starting it. It sputtered and roared.

Andrew rolled around on the grass. "Oh, you're a born mechanic, Jase," he groaned. "Just kick it ..."

"Nothing to it!"

Jo got up. "I'll be off now," she muttered and walked away. Behind her, the boys gave another yell of laughter. Jo went bright red and held her back stiff. She hoped they were not laughing at her.

All through Sunday lunch she thought about Jason and Andrew. She had never wondered before how Andrew fixed her go-cart. She was the rider and he was the mender. He had never offered to show her how to do it but there he was, showing Jason. Had Jason asked? Or was it something that boys did with boys, not with girls?

She realised that Ted was talking to her. "Huh?" she said.

"I said, how was Andrew? Not too good?"

"He was fine. They were taking his go-cart motor to bits. Ted, will you teach me about motors some time?"

Ted looked embarrassed. "Well, actually, I don't know much about motors myself. I always rode a push bike, until I joined up with you lot. They're much easier to fix."

"Oh, I remember!" said Jo. "Mum taught you to drive. I mean, Eve did."

"I remember too," said Sue.

"No, you don't," said Jo. "You were only two. Eve, can you tell me about motors then?"

"Sorry," said her mother. "I don't know much either — just the garage phone number. There's a car handbook somewhere around, though."

After lunch Jo lay on her bed and tried to read the car handbook. It was as bad as homework. She soon got bored. So she took the book out to the car but the car's motor didn't look at all like the pictures.

"Stupid," she said and flung the book away. She needed Andrew to help her.

Finally she decided to go round to Andrew's place again. Anything was better than messing around by herself. But Andrew and Jason were not in the drive any more. Oh-oh, thought Jo. They've gone to Jason's place.

But she felt bold enough for anything, so she marched on to the house next door. Jason was sitting on the front verandah. He had just closed a book and put it down.

"Oh, it's you," he said.

"Is Andrew here?" Jo asked.

"No, he's gone out to some cousin's birthday party." Jason looked scornful, as if Andrew was stupid to have cousins in the first place.

Jo wanted to go but it would look rude. Besides, she remembered Jason laughing

and looking happy that morning. Maybe he wasn't awful all the time.

"What's the book?" she asked.

It was the right question. Jason looked her in the eye for the first time. "Oh, it's great," he said. "It's all about battles and sorcerers and good and evil. It's a sort of fantasy but it was written for adults, not kids. More like science fiction, really. It's very long."

"Yeah." Jo's fingers itched. She took a step nearer to Jason and picked up the book. "*The Lord of the Rings*. Never heard of it."

She flipped through and saw weird names on every page — Gandalf, Bilbo, Sauron, Galadriel. Jo read anything, from her mother's school prizes to her gran's *Women's Weeklies*, but this looked like a feast.

"It sounds great," she said regretfully, putting it down. Since she and Jason were rivals, she couldn't very well borrow books from him. Anyway, he was disappearing into the house. "See you," she said.

Jason turned in the doorway. "See you," he said. Then from down the passage he called back, "You can borrow that book if you like."

## CHAPTER NINE

All that week Jo read and read. She read on her way to school and arrived late. She read in her homework time and got low marks. She read after her bedtime and was ticked off by Eve. But Jo didn't care. She was living in a world of magic and adventure.

On Saturday she met Andrew and Jason to go to Panorama Drive. She hadn't seen much of Andrew that week. He had failed some tests and his parents had stopped his TV watching for a week.

"Hi, Jo," he said, looking pleased to see her. "Hey, guess what?"

"Hi," said Jo and looked past him to Jason. "Here's your book. I finished it. You're right, it's terrific."

"Gee, that was quick," said Jason. He sounded almost admiring. "Which parts did you like best?"

He and Jo started to talk about the book. Andrew was bored. He said, "Let's go," a few times but they ignored him. At last he made a big show of looking at his watch.

"If you two bookworms have finished ..."

"Bookworms!" said Jo. "Just because you only ever read *The Boy's Home Guide to Go-Cart Repairs*."

Jason laughed and before she could stop herself, Jo grinned at him. To her surprise, he grinned back.

"Well, I'm going," said Andrew crossly and stumped off.

Jo and Jason stood still for a moment. Their grins slowly faded away. Then Jason ran back to the house with his book and Jo followed Andrew.

She felt stunned. When Jason grinned at her, he looked quite different. Suddenly she liked him – or at least, she knew she could like him, if he relaxed a bit. She could hardly believe it. In fact, she felt a bit scared by these new ideas.

“Wait for me,” she called to Andrew.

He stopped and waited but he looked very cold and distant. “Sorry,” he said in an unsorry voice. “I thought you were talking to Jason about that stupid book.”

“Well, I was,” said Jo, “and it’s not a stupid book. Anyway, you don’t have to read it, if you don’t want to.”

“I practically had to read it just now. You and Jason went over every little bit of it. That’s pretty boring, you know.”

“Well, it’s pretty boring for me, watching you and Jason doing judo.”

“Don’t watch, then.”

Andrew marched on and Jo followed behind him. They’d always had fights but their fights had been fun before. These fights weren’t fun at all. They were real fights. She was starting to feel that she and Andrew were very different.

That was a *really* scary thought. She had been friends with Andrew for ever. She didn’t want things to change.

So she yelled, “Hey,” and hurried after Andrew again. He still looked cross but she gave him a big warm smile. “What were you going to tell me before?” she asked.

Andrew’s eyes brightened. He couldn’t stop himself. “Oh, Jo,” he said, “my dad’s going to buy me a new bike. Isn’t that great?”

“Hey, fantastic,” said Jo. “We can have proper bike races now, as well as go-cart races.” She remembered her crash on Jason’s bike. “Can I ride your bike, Andrew? Please?”

She smiled nicely at him. Andrew screwed his mouth up thoughtfully. He remembered Jo’s crash too.

“Well ...” he said. Jo waited anxiously. “You have to be careful,” he warned her.

“I’ll be careful,” said Jo. “I’ll be as careful as ... as careful as anything.”

“All right,” said Andrew kindly. “You can use the bike.”

He sounded like Father Christmas with a stocking full of goodies. But Jo was happy.

“What will happen to your old bike?” she asked.

“Dad’ll trade it in,” said Andrew. “I asked him to sell it to you but he said it was no go. He doesn’t really believe you can ride it. That’s the problem. Sorry.”

Jo shrugged. “Thanks for thinking of it.” She was sad about the bike but pleased with Andrew.

Then Jason came along, panting and pushing the heavy bike. “You might have waited,” he said to Andrew.

“Sorry, Jase,” said Andrew. “I thought you’d gone home for something. Hey, will we race the bikes today?”

“Sure thing. I’ll give you a start, though. What do you think is fair?”

They argued about this for a while. Jason had a better bike but Andrew insisted that he was a better rider. Jo put a word in now and then but they didn’t listen to her. She was glad to see Harry Quon and his go-cart.

“Wow! Harry,” she called out. “You’ve painted it.”

Harry had definitely painted his cart. It was shiny black and red, with a huge white skull on both sides. On the back Harry had painted, “DEATH OR GLORY”.

“It looked so good when I got home,” he said to Andrew. “All smooth. So I found some old tins of paint and did it up.”

“It’s really neat,” said Andrew, feeling the paint. “You’ve done a good job.” He sounded surprised.

Harry gave his crazy laugh. “It’ll all go when I have my first crash. Death or glory!”

Andrew looked worried. “That’s a waste,” he said. He frowned at the cart. “I know! You could get some old tyres and nail them on to the sides of the cart. The tyres would protect the cart in a crash.”

“Yeah ...” said Harry doubtfully.

“Ted’s got some tyres. We used them for swimming,” said Jo. “Ted’s my dad,” she explained to Harry and Jason.

“Okay, we’ll have a look at them later,” said Andrew. “Can you manage not to crash the cart this afternoon?”

“I’ll try,” said Harry. He looked unhappy, though. Andrew was changing his go-cart too much. Harry wasn’t sure he liked it.

By now they were at the top of Panorama Drive. Tony and Roger and Mace were there already but they weren’t riding their go-carts. They were standing together and looking down the hill.

The others looked too and saw an enormous pile of old rubbish on the left hand footpath. They looked again. It wasn’t really rubbish. There were chairs and tables, old doors and metal garbage bins, all in a great heap.

“The rotten old thing,” said Harry. “He’s built a barricade across the footpath. He wants to stop us riding our go-carts.”

“Well, come on,” said Jason. “Let’s take our bikes down to the paddock.”

Andrew hesitated for a moment, then followed Jason.

“Cop-out,” said Mace.

Andrew must have heard her but he didn’t turn round. He said something to Jason and Jason laughed. The others stood around with their go-carts, feeling angry.

“He thinks he owns the hill,” said Roger. “We’ll show him.” He tried to look mean, like a bikie in a film.

“We should all rush the barricade and knock it down,” said Harry excitedly. “Your cart’s the biggest, Tony.”

“There he is!” said Jo. The elderly man was talking to a young woman and man in the house opposite his. He was waving his hands a lot. “I’ll go and listen.”

She ran after Jason and Andrew. “Walk slowly,” she hissed to them. “I want to hear what he’s saying.”

“Are we playing cowboys and Indians today?” sneered Jason. But he walked more slowly.

The elderly man was raving on about hooligans again.

“Yes, I know, Mr Ryan,” the woman said. “They *are* noisy. But they have to play somewhere.”

“I think it’s against the law to block up the footpath like that, anyway,” said the young man. “You should ask the council for the rules about go-carts. But you may get into trouble yourself, with that heap of rubbish.”

Mr Ryan snorted. “Don’t I have a right to protect my own property? Those vandals have ruined my front lawn. The council didn’t stop them, did they?”

“Well, no,” said the young man, backing away. “Um ... We have to go now.”

They almost ran up the drive. Jo giggled. Mr Ryan was a trouble to everyone, by the looks of things. She left Jason and Andrew and strolled back up the hill, walking quite close to Mr Ryan. He scowled at her but Jo just grinned cheekily. She was used to him by now.

Then she heard a roar of go-cart engines and looked up. Harry and Mace were charging down the hill, straight at the barricades.

## CHAPTER TEN

Mr Ryan let out a roar almost as loud as the go-carts. He sprinted over to his barricade and stood in front of it. Harry came whipping down the hill. He looked up, saw Mr Ryan and swerved.

But he swerved in front of Mace, speeding down behind him. So Mace had to spin her cart around too — and she nearly hit Mr Ryan in her turn. He had jumped away from Harry and landed in front of Mace.

Harry and Mace both rode straight on towards the barricade. At the last minute they turned aside, bumped over the gutter and thundered off down the hill. Mr Ryan swayed to and fro in front of his barricade. Jo ran over to him.

“Are you all right?”

He looked grey and faint but his temper was still healthy.

“All right?” he whispered. “Two maniacs try to run me down and another maniac asks if I’m all right.” He was shouting again by now. “I’m not all right and I won’t be all right, until you get these jumped up lawn mowers off my street!”

“They’re go-carts,” said Jo coldly, “and this is the only decent hill in Sturt Vale.”

She turned and marched up the hill to Roger and Tony. Roger was torn between two feelings. He admired Mace and Harry for their nerve but he was scared of losing Panorama Drive. Tony, on the other hand, was just angry.

“Those idiots,” he said to Jo. “They don’t understand a bloke like that. He loves a good fight. They’re just giving him something to fight about.”

Jo nodded in agreement. “But you can’t stop Harry. Or Mace.”

“They showed him, anyway,” said Roger. “They nearly ran him over. He looked pretty silly.” He grinned at the memory.

“Yes, and Mace and Harry would look pretty silly now, if he’d had a heart attack,” said Tony. “It makes me mad. They’ve been in trouble round our way already. And this business — them against him — it’s sure to get out of control. Stupid idiots.”

He strode off down the hill and Jo and Roger followed.

“It was a bit stupid,” said Roger in a low voice. As they walked past Mr Ryan’s place, he smiled and called out, “Afternoon, sir.” Mr Ryan stared back suspiciously.

Down in the paddock Harry and Mace were sitting close together and giggling. Tony went and stood over them.

“It’s time we had a talk,” he said. “Jo, get Andrew and Jason.”

Harry and Mace looked up at Tony and went quiet as mice. Jo waved Andrew and Jason to a stop and shouted her message at their crash helmets, so they came over too. When they were all sitting on the grass together, Tony opened fire.

“Well,” he said, “Mr Ryan means business. He wants to get us off Panorama Drive. So we’d better decide what we’re going to do.”

Jason shrugged. “The way I see it, the go-carts are the problem. So why don’t the girls find somewhere else to ride their go-carts? Then we can ride our bikes here in peace.”

“Not all of us have bikes,” observed Harry. “Not all of us are that rich.” He gave his kookaburra laugh.

“Roger’s getting a bike soon,” said Jason.

Roger nodded proudly. “With my birthday money, I’ll have saved enough.” He started to describe the size and shape and colour of the new bike but Jason cut him short.

“Anyway,” he said, “we can lend three bikes around five people easily enough. Seven people would be too many though.”

He looked very calm and self-assured, as if everyone would obviously agree with him. Jo looked around the circle in alarm. All the faces looked blank. Except for Andrew, who was nodding away.

Tony sat up straight. “So you want to kick Jo and Mace out?” he asked. Jo held her breath. Mace went on looking blank, as usual.

“Well, whoever heard of a gang with girls in it?” said Jason. Andrew and Roger both nodded this time. Jo kept looking at Tony.

“So what?” Tony said. “This isn’t some kids’ gang. We come here to ride. And Jo and Mace have both been riding for longer than you.”

Jason snorted. “Jo wrecked my bike. Some rider. And Mace doesn’t even have a crash helmet.”

Mace got up, went over to her go-cart and came back with a shiny new crash helmet. She sat down with it between her knees and waited for Jason to go on.

Jason looked at the helmet. "Well, well," he said. "I suppose you nicked that too."  
"You're a rotten liar," Jo shouted, unable to keep quiet any more. Jason laughed at her.

Suddenly everyone was shouting and no one was listening.

"Now hang on."

"Jason's right."

"Jason's a trouble-maker."

"*You're* a trouble-maker."

Mace stretched out in the grass, her arm round the shiny crash helmet, and closed her eyes. The fight raged on. Even Tony was shouting and Harry Quon was waving his fist at everyone in turn.

Then a shadow fell on the group. They turned around. A young man was standing beside them.

"Police," someone whispered.

"No, I'm not from the police," said the young man pleasantly. "I'm Simon Ryan, Mr Ryan's son and I want to talk to you about the go-carts. Can I sit down?"

They nodded uneasily. Simon Ryan sat down in the grass and asked their names. Harry and Mace were silent, so Jason introduced them.

"Well, I'm not here to yell at you," said Simon. "I'm a youth worker myself, down at the Port area, and I think go-cart riding is a great thing to do at the weekend. But my dad seems a bit upset, so I thought I'd ask you for help. What should we do?"

The kids were still steamed up from their fight. They all started to talk at once again — except for Jason. He sat quietly and looked at Simon. When there was a break, Simon said, "Well, Jason, what do you think?"

"We were just talking about this before you came," said Jason in a very polite voice. "We're not quite sure but we think we'll be mostly using the paddock from now on. I hope that's agreeable to Mr Ryan."

"Oh, that'd solve all the problems," said Simon, heaving himself to his feet. "I'll tell Dad about it. Thanks for talking to me, all of you. I'll see you around." He gave a cheery wave and went.

"Thanks for tawking to him," said Harry in a posh voice. "What do you think you're doing? We can't ride go-carts in the flaming paddock, mate."

"Well, I got him off our backs," said Jason, trying to sound friendly.

"Thanks for nothing. He can't do anything to us. This isn't the Port area — or hadn't you noticed?"

Jason went red. "I was only trying to help . . ."

"Next time, ask me and I'll tell you where to put it," said Harry with finality. "Tony, let's get on with it."

Tony looked worried. "I've got to go," he said. "I promised my dad that I'd help shift

some things in the shop.” He stood up and looked down at Jason, hands on hips. “But you needn’t think you’ve got it all your own way. I’ll go and see Mr Ryan next week.”

Jason wriggled sulkily. “Do what you like,” he muttered. “Come on. Let’s ride the bikes while it’s still light.”

He and Andrew and Roger headed off. Tony stood there frowning.

“You’d better not ride the cart today,” he said to Jo. “Not on the hill, anyway.” Jo nodded and he turned to Harry and Mace. “Are you coming home now?”

Harry screeched. “Okay, boss. If you say so, boss.”

“Well, I do say so. You’ve caused enough trouble today. Mace?”

Mace scrambled up, crash helmet in hand. She gave Tony a sudden sweet smile. “Okay.”

When they had gone, Jo rode up and down the stretch at the bottom of Panorama Drive for a while. But the footpath only went for half a block. It wasn’t much fun. Andrew was still riding his bike, so she set off slowly home.

The sunset was starting. All the dark colours looked darker and the light colours looked more bright. The yellow weeds on the empty blocks shone like bike lamps but the few houses were dark with shadow. Jo felt dark too. Everything was changing and she didn’t like it. And she hadn’t had a single proper ride today.

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

“I’m going out,” said Jo’s mother, “and you’ll have to look after Sue for an hour.”

“Oh, no, Eve,” wailed Jo. “I’m going down to Nettie’s.”

“Then you’ll have to take Sue with you,” said Eve. “She can play with Nettie’s little brother.”

“But she always wants me to play too.”

“It won’t hurt you to play with Sue for once.”

The real problem was that Nettie liked Sue. She thought Sue was cute. And, sure enough, they ended up playing in the sandpit, instead of listening to Nettie’s records. Luckily, Jo liked Nettie’s little brother, Garry. Between the four of them they made a very good sand-castle, with tall towers and gates and windows and pine leaves for trees.

They were sitting back and admiring it, when Andrew and Jason and Ollie from up the street marched in.

“Where’s your dad? I’ve got a message for him,” Andrew said to Nettie.

“He isn’t home yet.”

Andrew turned to go but Jason came up closer. “Oh, look. They’re making pretty sandcastles,” he said. “Having fun, Jo?” Jo looked away.

“We always used to kick our sandcastles down when we’d finished them,” grinned Ollie, edging over.

“No,” shouted Sue and Garry. The boys laughed.

“All right. Let’s help them,” said Andrew.

He kicked the main tower of the castle and it fell into crumbs of sand. Then all three

boys jumped into the sandpit and started kicking. They walked off, grinning broadly. Sue burst into loud sobs and Garry's lip trembled. Nettie and Jo had to cuddle them and take them to the kitchen for biscuits.

Then Nettie said, "That friend of yours, that Andrew, he's turning into a real pig."

"He'll go along with anyone," said Jo sadly.

Andrew turned up to watch TV that night as usual. They chatted away. But Jo had realised something, when the three boys marched on the sandcastle. There was a boys' side and a girls' side. Andrew was on one side and she was on the other.

She worried about next Saturday. And she wasn't surprised when she found Jason teasing Mace at school next day. He and two other boys were in a ring around Mace.

Jason was looking smart, with his blazer over his shoulder. "What's the time?" he kept asking.

Mace stared at them blankly.

"Come on," said Jason. "Where's your watch? Your lovely expensive silver watch? Or have you nicked a digital watch now?"

"Don't have a watch," said Mace in her flat voice.

"Don't believe her," said Jason to the other boys. "It's in her jeans pocket, the little liar."

"Well, we'd better have a look then," said one of the boys, advancing on Mace in a threatening manner.

Mace stood quite still, until he was nearly on her. Then she ducked and ran. The three boys set off after her. Jo was watching from a distance, leaning on the fence. Then suddenly she was lying on the asphalt. Mace had charged into her and knocked her down.

She lay there, stunned, while Mace and the boys disappeared behind the shelter shed. Then she got slowly to her feet. She looked down at the silver watch that Mace had pushed into her hand.

Jo looked around. Jason and his friends would be back soon. She needed to get rid of the watch quickly. Then she chuckled. A school blazer was lying on the ground where Mace and the boys had been. Jason's blazer.

Jo strolled over to the blazer, dusting herself down. She knelt down and fiddled with her shoelace. Quickly she slipped the watch into the blazer pocket. Then she sat on a nearby table and waited. The boys came back, dragging Mace by the collar of her leather jacket.

"You've hidden it," Jason was saying. "But we'll find it." Then he caught sight of Jo. His eyes widened. "You gave it to her," he said triumphantly.

Mace yawned, a tiny cat's yawn. The boys surrounded Jo.

"Where's the watch?" said Jason.

"Is this some kid's game?" asked Jo. "Are you playing Hunt the Watch, Jason?"

“You know what I’m talking about. She gave it to you.”

“So you know where it is? Why ask me then?”

“All right. I’ll get it from you,” said Jason.

He grabbed hold of Jo and started to go through her pockets. Jo was furious at being touched. But she had learned a lesson from Mace. She stood still.

Of course the watch wasn’t there. Even better, Mr Henderson, who was on playground duty, came over and asked Jason what he was doing. For once, Jason was lost for words.

“He’s looking for a watch, sir,” said Jo.

“Oh. Where did you lose your watch, Jason?”

“It’s not his watch,” Jo explained. “It’s Mace’s watch. He thinks Mace has stolen it.”

“He thinks Mace has stolen ... Mace’s watch?” Mr Henderson frowned. “Do you really, Jason?”

“It’s a really expensive watch, ” said Jason. “She must have stolen it.”

“Can I see this watch?” Mr Henderson asked Mace.

“He’s barmy,” said Mace. “Don’t have a watch.”

Jo thought this was a bad move. Mr Henderson might have seen Mace with the watch. “She borrowed her brother’s watch once. That might be it,” she said. To her relief Mace nodded.

“Well, I hope you don’t start stealing watches,” Mr Henderson joked with Mace. “As for you, Jason, you need a few lessons in minding your own business. All right?”

“Yes, Mr Henderson,” muttered Jason. When the teacher had gone, he hissed, “Liars,” at Jo and Mace. He turned away to pick up his blazer. The silver watch plopped out of the pocket and on to the gravel.

Jason stared. “So that’s where it was. You cunning little ... I’ll take it to Mr Henderson.”

“That’s a bit silly,” said Jo and he stopped in his tracks.

“Why?”

“Well, it’s not Mace’s watch. You said so yourself. So whose watch is it? They might even think you stole it.”

“Very funny. It is so Mace’s watch.”

Mace peered at it and shook her head.

“There you are,” said Jo. “It looks quite different to me too.” She looked warningly at Jason.

Jason understood at once. “Your word against mine, huh? Okay, you win this time. I suppose you can only win by lying. It’s a pretty poor trick though. Typical.”

You had to hand it to Jason, thought Jo. He knew how to make you feel bad. She almost admired the way he could use words. But she wasn’t going to give in, for Mace’s sake. She stood firm and stared Jason down.

The siren went and they turned and walked away. Jo had a nasty feeling that Jason had won this round. Then there was a yell from behind them and Jason came pounding up.

“Hey,” he said, thrusting the watch at Mace. “What am I supposed to do with this?”

Mace inspected the watch. “Dunno.”

“You take it.”

Mace shook her head. “ ’Snot mine.”

Jason glared at her, baffled. He was on the spot now. This was his own idea, handed back to him. He’d said that the watch didn’t belong to Mace. Now Mace agreed with him and he was stuck with it.

“You can take it to the police station,” said Jo kindly. “Tell them you found it somewhere. That’s perfectly true. You won’t be a liar.”

Then she headed off to her classroom, smiling at the picture of Jason’s screwed up face. She had won, after all.

A flat voice came from beside her. “It was a nice watch.” Mace looked rather sad.

“Maybe,” Jo told her. “But you’re better off without it.”

Mace nodded regretfully and went off to her class. Jo sighed. She didn’t know what to make of Mace.

## CHAPTER TWELVE

Saturday came around at last. Jo felt sick to her stomach. It was worse than being in the school play. This time she felt like she didn't even know her lines. Would she be able to stop Jason from sending her and Mace away? He wanted to do that, for sure.

Jo hadn't seen Andrew all week, so she set off to Panorama Drive without him. As a result, she was early. There were two go-carts at the top of the hill, Harry's and Mace's. But Harry and Mace were nowhere to be seen. Jo sat down by her cart and stared down the hill, thinking sad thoughts.

Then Mace and Harry came running up, giggling.

"Where have you two been?" Jo asked.

Mace stared blankly at her and Harry said, "It's better if you don't know."

Jo's heart sank. That sounded like trouble. What had they done? But Tony arrived, before she could ask them, and then Andrew and Jason and Roger turned up together, with Andrew's new bike.

Roger wanted to tell everyone how *his* bike would be better. Tony wasn't saying anything and Harry and Mace were still giggling together, so Roger was able to get away with reciting whole pages of *Bike World*. He looked a bit surprised but he made the most of it.

Jo stood there, feeling hurt. Andrew hadn't come round to show her his new bike, which made her feel even worse than before. She nodded and smiled at Roger, so she wouldn't have to look at Andrew.

"Well," said Tony suddenly.

They all looked at him. That was what they'd been waiting for.

"Well," he said again, more slowly. "We'd better talk about Jason's idea from last week. He wants to cut out the go-carts and Mr Ryan thinks we're really going to do that."

Jason and Andrew and Roger looked at each other. Then Jason spoke for all of them.

"That's right," he said. "We think go-carts are for kids. We'll lend our bikes to you and Harry but not to girls." He sounded polite and distant, as if he were talking to a teacher.

Harry gave his kookaburra laugh. "That's big of you. But I happen to like my go-cart. Anyway, I don't see why Mace and Jo should be kicked out. Especially by a poshy snob like you, Jason Moneybags-ask-his-father-to-buy-him-a-mini- bike."

There was a small silence. Then Tony said, "I agree with Harry. I mean, I don't want to ask the girls to go."

"Well, that's all right," said Jason easily. "We'll get along okay without you."

They stared at him. Then Mace wailed. "But what about *Saturdays*?" Her pale face went red with anger. "You ... you ..."

Tony put his hand on her arm and she sat down and shut her mouth tightly. "Roger, Andrew," said Tony. "Do you agree with Jason?"

"Yes, I do," said Andrew stonily. Jo gasped and he looked away.

"Roger?"

Roger squirmed. "Oh well, Tony, I dunno. I like bikes and, well, maybe it would be good if we all had bikes." He looked up at the sky and had an idea. "Maybe Jo and Mace could get bikes."

"My parents have said no for ages," said Jo. And I won't ask again just because of Jason, she added to herself.

"And bikes are too hard to steal," Jason said nastily.

Jo glared at him. "We can be two different groups then," she said. "A go-cart group and a mini-bike group."

"We'll have to go and see Mr Ryan," said Tony. "I'll ask him -"

"No need," said Roger. "He's coming to see us."

They turned around. Mr Ryan was puffing up the hill.

Tony frowned. "I wonder what he wants."

Jo gasped, remembering Mace and Harry's giggles. "Maybe he wants to thank us," she said quickly.

But Jason had guessed her thoughts. Quick as a flash he turned to look for Mace. She was climbing into her go-cart, looking as deadpan as usual. Jason grabbed her arm.

"You better stay here for the moment," he said and even Tony didn't stop him.

Jo watched Mr Ryan coming closer and closer. It was like a terrible dream, where everything moves slowly. At last he was standing beside them, puffing and panting.

“Well,” he said in a new, quiet voice, “you’ve gone too far this time. You can all stay where you are till the police arrive.”

Roger gave a loud groan. “I didn’t do anything,” he protested. “I only just got here. I want to try Andrew’s bike.”

“Maybe you didn’t do anything,” said Mr Ryan. “But one of your friends did. This’ll teach you to pick your friends more carefully.”

Roger grumbled to himself and Tony stepped forward. “Can I ask what has happened?” he said.

Mr Ryan gave him a quick look and decided to trust him. “My house has been vandalised,” he said curtly. “Someone has painted rude slogans on the sunroom window.”

Harry laughed and everyone glared at him. Jason pushed Mace forward. “She did it,” he said. “She’s got a criminal record. My father says she sounds like a classic case.”

“Huh?” said Jo, surprised. “Your father hasn’t even met Mace.”

“My father’s a psychologist,” said Jason proudly. “He knows all about people. He knows more about Mace than you do, even if he’s never met her.”

“Yeah? You tell him to leave Mace alone. He can talk about you instead,” said Harry.

Jason turned his back on them. “She did it,” he repeated to Mr Ryan. “Go on, ask her.”

Mace pulled back her shoulders and stuck her chin out. She looked ready for a fight. But Mr Ryan didn’t ask her anything. He looked almost shy.

“I don’t want you to tell tales on each other,” he said. “I want to ask you a question. Which one of you did it? If you own up and fix the damage, I’ll tell the police it’s all settled.”

There was a moment’s silence, where they all looked at their feet.

“All right,” said Harry resignedly. “It was me. I did it. I reckon I’m sorry too, now you’re getting all serious about it. I’ll scrape the paint off and I’ll clean your windows. Okay?”

Mr Ryan frowned at Harry. Then he said, “Good lad”, in his crossiest voice. Harry gave him a big grin and he frowned harder.

“Very well then, I’ll see you tomorrow, sonny. Clear off now, all of you, and I’ll explain to the police. And I hope you behave yourselves better in future.”

He turned and stumped down the hill again.

“Hey,” yelled Jason after him. “What about her?” He shook Mace’s arm.

Mr Ryan turned back. “Clear off!” he roared in his old angry voice and marched into his house.

“That’s not fair,” said Jason. “We didn’t do anything. But we get punished and *she* gets off scot-free. I’m going to stay and talk to the police.”

He shook Mace again and she turned and kicked him in the knee-cap. While Jason

was hopping, she grabbed her go-cart and tore off up the hill. As Harry followed her, he gave Jo a special wink. He knew she'd kept quiet about Mace and him.

"Yeah, well, I reckon I'll be off, too," said Roger.

"Mm," agreed Andrew. "Not much point in riding today."

Jason looked livid. "Well, I'm staying," he said. "You do what you like." But he looked surprised when they all set off up the hill.

At the corner they saw the police car coming down the road and Simon Ryan walking along the footpath. Andrew and Roger hurried ahead, keeping out of trouble, but Tony stopped suddenly.

"I'd better go back," he said. "He's going to dob Mace in. One of us ought to be there."

Jo stopped too. She looked down the hill at Jason. "Good luck," she said. "I think I'll go home."

"Fair enough," said Tony. "I'll do my best." He waited on the corner for Simon Ryan and Jo towed her go-cart on home.

## CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Jo spent the rest of the weekend thinking. Why had Mr Ryan been so nice? Why hadn't Mace owned up?

She couldn't ask Eve and Ted for the answers. She had never talked to them about Panorama Drive and she didn't know how to start. Besides, she didn't want to tell them about the police.

She couldn't go to Andrew's place either, because of Jason, and Andrew didn't come to see her. Andrew wasn't her friend any more, by the looks of things. Jo felt sad about that. But she wasn't sure she wanted Andrew for her friend any more.

Jo badly wanted to know what had happened next at Panorama Drive. Jason knew, of course, but she could hardly ask him. So on Monday morning she went to school early and hung round the gate until she saw Tony. She grabbed at his jumper as he passed.

"Tony!" she said urgently. "What happened on Saturday?"

"Mr Ryan was terrific," he said. "But Jason went on and on about Mace. In the end the police went round to talk to her ... and she ran away."

"Oh no!"

"She's been in trouble before. She was scared they'd send her to a home. Simon says he'll help her ..."

"*Simon says?*"

"Mr Ryan's son, you nit. Anyway, we have to find her, Jo. If you have any ideas, tell me and I'll tell Simon."

Jo looked doubtful. She wanted to help Mace but she wasn't sure about Simon Ryan. Tony frowned.

"I know," he said. "I'm not sure what's best, either. But Mace can't get by on her own forever."

Jo nodded. "Okay," she said. "Thanks for telling me." And she ran off to her classroom.

All day Jo saw pictures of Mace in her mind. She saw Mace walking down big highways, dusty and tired; Mace in the rain, soaked to the skin; Mace in her leather coat, facing gangs with knives.

At last she decided she'd have to find Mace. It wasn't easy. She didn't know where Mace lived and she had no idea where Mace would run to. She knew only one thing about Mace: she rode a mean go-cart.

So Jo went back to Panorama Drive. Mr Ryan was in his garden again. He waved to her and Jo waved back. She sighed to herself. Things were pretty strange these days. She wasn't talking to Andrew but she was waving to Mr Ryan.

Jo went on to the paddock. She climbed over the fence and looked around. There was no Mace to be seen. Jo laughed at herself. What did she expect? A tent and a camp fire and Mace cooking sausages?

But she didn't want to go home, all the same, so she wandered down to the billabong. She had never explored the billabong, because she was always too busy riding go-carts.

The gum trees were olive green and peaceful. Jo stood and watched the lacy patterns of the sun on the brown water. Up in the air birds made small noises. Jo started to feel better.

She walked along the narrow path by the billabong, ducking under trees and pushing past bushes. Soon she couldn't see the road or the houses at all. She felt as if she were in the bush, all alone.

Until Mace called out, "Jo!"

Jo spun round but she couldn't see anyone. I'm hearing things, she said to herself. She had been thinking about Mace and now she was hearing her voice. She walked on.

"Jo!"

This time Jo believed her ears. "Mace," she whispered. "Where are you?"

The bushes rustled and crackled. "Up here."

Jo followed the sound. She crawled under the bushes and bumped straight into Mace. Mace crawled back and Jo crawled on. Then they were sitting in a cave of bushes, looking at each other.

Jo didn't know what to say. Mace looked just the same, She sat there and said nothing and Jo said nothing too for a while. Then she said. "Well, here you are." It sounded a bit stupid.

But Mace just grinned and said, "Yeah." Jo felt better. She looked around. Mace had a blanket and a cardboard box full of tins and a packet of cigarettes. That was all.

"What are you going to do?" asked Jo.

Mace shrugged. She threw a twig at some ants. "Dunno," she said.

"I saw Tony," Jo said. "He reckons Mr Ryan's son'll help you."

"Nah," said Mace. "They'll put me in a home. They said so last time."

"But you can't live here."

Mace looked at the bushes. "No," she said. "It'll rain." She sighed heavily and Jo sighed too.

"You need a tent," she said, remembering her first idea. "I've got one at home."

"Yeah?" said Mace, looking hopeful.

"I could bring it up here if you liked."

"Yeah, too right. And some food?"

"Sure. You could have a fire and cook things."

"Wow," said Mace. She gave a big slow smile and Jo smiled back. Then she thought again.

"You couldn't live here forever though," she said.

"Nah," said Mace. "Just a week or two. The cops'll forget about me, see? Then I can go home."

"Oh, that's all right, then," said Jo with relief. "I'd better go and get the tent now. It might rain tonight."

She started to crawl out but Mace grabbed her belt. Someone was coming down the path, calling, "Jo. Mace." They froze. "Simon Ryan," Jo whispered. He crunched up and down outside the cave. They sat as still as mice in front of a cat.

Jo looked a question at Mace but Mace shook her head hard. They sat and waited. Simon pushed into the bushes, once, twice, three times. Then he pushed right into their bush cave.

The cave was suddenly very small. Mace ran at Simon but he was blocking the way out. Jo didn't move. She wanted to burst into tears.

"Well, Mace, you gave us a fright," said Simon. "Luckily my dad saw Jo on her way here. Otherwise we might never have found you."

Then Jo *did* burst into tears, just for a moment. "I'm sorry, Mace," she sobbed. Mace shrugged and Jo pulled out her hanky and blew her nose. She glared up at Simon.

"Why can't you just leave her alone?" she said.

Simon squatted down, his arm around Mace. "I was worried," he said to Jo. "You were worried too, weren't you?"

Jo frowned and nodded.

"Well, you see? My dad called the police because he was angry. But he didn't mean to make trouble for Mace. He was upset, so I said I'd try to find her."

“Huh,” said Mace.

She pulled away from Simon and picked up her cardboard box and blanket. They crawled back to the path and walked back in silence to Panorama Drive. Mr Ryan was waiting at his door.

“So you found the runaway?” he said. “Your parents must be out of their minds with worry, you naughty girl. I hope this will be a lesson to you. You’re a bunch of trouble-makers.”

“No, we’re not,” shouted Jo. “We had a good time, till you moved here. It’s all your fault, both of you. You made Mace run away and I hate you.”

Mr Ryan glared, Simon looked kind and Mace stared blankly, clutching her cardboard box. It was all too much for Jo. She turned and ran.

## CHAPTER FOURTEEN

For the next few days Jo felt as if there were a lump of iron in her stomach. She felt sad about Mace and she wished Mace could have stayed by the billabong. But she was glad Mace wasn't lost any more. So that wasn't the problem. Something was wrong and Jo didn't know what.

By Thursday she didn't want to wake up. She lay in bed long after the alarm. Get moving, she said to herself. But her legs wouldn't move. She lay and stared at the ceiling.

Then Ted came in. "Up you get," he said.

Jo tried again but nothing happened.

"Oh dear, are you sick?" said Ted, looking worried. He didn't like people to be sick.

"I don't know," said Jo. "I feel funny."

Ted put his hand on her forehead. "You're a bit hot," he said. "Do you have a pain?"

"No," said Jo in a little voice. "I just feel funny."

She looked up at Ted and Ted looked back doubtfully. Then he made up his mind.

"Well, you'd better stay home today. Eve'll be back at nine-thirty and I can stay here till then."

"I'll be all right," said Jo.

But Ted shook his head. "I'd only worry about you. And we've got flexitime at work now, so I can work late another day. Now, can you eat breakfast? Toast and orange juice, maybe?"

Jo sat up and had her breakfast on a tray. She felt better already. It was nice to have

Ted fussing over her. Then Eve came home from driving the school bus and took over from Ted. Eve knew more about sick people. She took Jo's temperature and asked her a lot of questions.

"Hmm. Temperature's normal. We won't call the doctor this time," she said. "But a day in bed won't hurt. Do you want the TV?"

Jo nodded, so the TV was wheeled in and she watched a movie about Roman slaves. Eve gave her chicken sandwiches for lunch and came and talked to her in between the housework. Then she had to go back and drive the afternoon bus.

"Ted'll be home at four-thirty," she said. "But you'll be on your own for an hour. I could ask Mrs MacIntyre to come in ..."

"No, Mum!" said Jo loudly. "Eve, I mean. I'm not a kid. I can stay here for an *hour*."

"All right. I'll tell Mrs Mac to keep an eye on the house then. Take care."

Eve planted a quick kiss on Jo's forehead and went off to her job. Jo felt great. She had rested up and been spoiled a bit and now she knew why she had been so unhappy.

She had shouted at Simon and Mr Ryan but they hadn't meant to hurt Mace. Jason was the one who dobbed Mace in. She should've taken it out on Jason. Jo wanted to tell Mr Ryan she was sorry straight away. But she was supposed to be sick and Mrs MacIntyre was keeping an eye on the house.

Jo looked at the clock. Twenty to four. She had lots of time. She dressed quickly and went out the back door. She ran down the side of the house and crawled through the bushes in the front garden. Then she ran down the street towards Panorama Drive.

Mr Ryan wasn't watering his roses today, so Jo had to go and ring the front door bell. Her knees shook as she waited. At last Mr Ryan opened the front door. He looked surprised.

"Oh, hello," he said. "What do you want?"

"I've come to apologise," said Jo in a rush. "I shouted at you and I was wrong. It wasn't your fault about Mace. Or Simon's."

"No, Simon's a good boy," said Mr Ryan. "A bit soft, if you ask me. But he's looking after your friend, don't you worry. He's seen her parents and they're very upset but they want to help her."

"Could you tell him, please? That I'm sorry."

"Yes, of course. But he hasn't been crying himself to sleep over it, you know. Simon's seen everything in his job. Young toughs with knives and the lot."

Jo hadn't come to talk about Simon. "Please tell him, all the same," she repeated. "And I'm really sorry I shouted at you, too."

Mr Ryan looked at her harder. "Well, never mind," he said, almost kindly. Then he turned cross again. "Mind you, I'm seeing the council tomorrow about my rights. I won't be soft on you, just because you've apologised."

Jo sighed. "Oh well, Jason's trying to stop the go-carts anyway."

“I don’t take to that young lad,” Mr Ryan said unexpectedly. “He’s smarmy. Not like the tall boy.”

“Tony,” said Jo. “Yeah, he’s great.” They nodded together.

“Well, well,” said Mr Ryan. “How about a cup of tea now you’re here?”

“Oh ... well, the thing is ... I’m supposed to be sick.” Mr Ryan took a step back. “No, nothing catching. But I’ve been in bed. I only got up because I had to see you.”

Jo tailed off but Mr Ryan looked understanding. “Nerves,” he said. “Some of the toughest fellows I’ve known have been the same. Well, thank you for your apology, Jo.”

He held out his big hand. Jo put her small hand into it and they shook hands seriously. For a moment Jo felt very grown up and then she felt very embarrassed. “G’bye,” she said and ran.

She was in bed when Ted came home. “You look very pink,” he said. “Feeling better?”

“Much!” Jo said happily. “Can I get up now?”

“Hmm,” said Ted. “We’ll see what Eve says.”

But Eve made her stay in bed. Jo had to play snakes and ladders with Sue. Sue was very pleased but they had a fight as usual. Then Sue went to bed and Jo played monopoly with Eve and Ted. She went to sleep feeling light as a feather.

All the next day she thought about Saturday at Panorama Drive. She didn’t want to go. Jason and Andrew and Roger all wanted to ban go-carts and Mace wouldn’t be around. She was the only girl now.

But Jo knew she would go, all the same. She wouldn’t be beaten by Jason without a fight. She had to do it, for her own sake. And for Mace as well.

So on Saturday she set off early for Panorama Drive. Harry arrived first, followed by Tony. They stood around and talked. But they didn’t talk about the big fight ahead.

Then Harry looked up and laughed. “Here come the bikies,” he said.

Jason, Andrew and Roger were wheeling their bikes down the hill, three abreast.

“Wow,” said Jo. “Very tough.”

Tony gave them a warning look. “Cool it, you two,” he said. “We may be able to sort this out.”

“Pigs may fly,” said Harry.

## CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Jason looked surprised to see Jo. "I thought we'd got rid of the go-cart brigade."

"Well, you haven't," said Jo. "Besides, I'm a bike rider too."

"Yeah and I'm Prince Charles," said Jason. "You wrecked my bike."

"I scratched it," Jo corrected him. "That was bad luck. But I can ride, all the same."

"You can't ride my bike," said Jason. "Or Andrew's or Roger's. We don't want girls around here."

"Says who?" said Harry, pushing in front of Jo.

"Says us," said Jason. "You don't have to stay, you know. You can go and join the girls' club."

Harry opened his mouth for his next smart remark but Tony stepped forward. Even Jason still had to listen to Tony.

"Right," he said. "It's time we settled this. Jason, you better tell us what you've got against girls."

Jason looked sulky. "I don't have to," he said. But Tony clenched his fists and Jason changed his mind.

"Okay, okay," he said. "Well, girls can't ride. They're soft. Besides, Jo and Mace only have go-carts. Go-carts are for kids. We want to make Saturday a time for real bike riders. I know other guys at school with bikes but they won't come and ride with girls."

"Uh-huh," said Tony. "Jo, do you want to answer that?"

"Yes," said Jo. She looked around the group. Tony was nodding encouragingly. Harry gave her a cheery grin. Roger was puzzled. Jason yawned. And Andrew looked

away from her.

“Well, the others know I can ride. I’ve won our go-cart races lots of times and I’m pretty good on the bike. And I reckon it’s stupid to talk about girls like that. Some girls can ride and some girls can’t. And the same with boys.”

“Why won’t these famous guys at school ride with girls?” asked Harry. “Are they scared they’d lose?” He gave his kookaburra laugh.

“They just don’t want to be seen around with kids,” said Jason. He looked at Harry meaningfully.

Harry just grinned and took no notice. “So you reckon you can ride better than Jo?” he said.

Jason looked startled. “Oh — yeah.”

“Prove it.”

“Well,” said Tony, “that seems fair enough. We’ll have a race. If Jo wins, she stays. If Jason wins, Jo goes. Is that okay, Jo?” Jo nodded. “Jason?”

“Oh, all right,” said Jason. He didn’t look happy. “But why bother to race? Just kick her out now.”

Jo sighed. Jason was making a fool of himself. He had been riding for about a month and she had been riding for years. At the very least, the chances were even.

“What rules will we have for the race?” she asked.

Tony thought for a moment. “Three times round the edge of the paddock. You can’t go more than two metres away from the fence. You start even and we’ll draw a finishing line.”

Jo nodded. “Okay. Whose bike can I use?”

She looked at Roger and Andrew. Andrew looked away. It figured — Jason was his friend. But Jo felt bad. Luckily, Roger spoke up.

“You can use my bike, Jo. My new bike. Let me show you.”

He took her on a tour of the bike, from tyres to mirror. Jo felt sorry for him. Roger had his new bike at last but he couldn’t show it off. Not today. “Thanks, Rog,” she said. “I’m ready now.”

“Wear my coat, Jo,” said Harry. “In case you fall off.”

“Yes, you’ll need it,” said Jason nastily.

“You won’t need it, of course,” said Harry, pretending not to hear. “But wear it for luck.”

So Jo put on Harry’s studded denim jacket and Roger’s crash helmet and started the bike, checking it over. Then she wheeled it to the starting line. Jason was there already, revving noisily.

“Good luck,” Tony said to both of them.

“You’ll beat him hollow,” Harry shouted to Jo and Andrew raised his hand to Jason. Tony gave the countdown and they were off.

Roger's new bike leapt from the starting line like a greyhound. Jo felt very calm. This might be her last ride. At least she would make it a good one. She glanced over at Jason. He was just behind her, in the outside lane.

As they came up to the corner, Jason swung his bike in. He wanted to force her into the fence. Jo went in. She watched the fence all the way and turned sharply at the corner. She swung her bike back at Jason and he veered out.

Jo was angry now. Jason wasn't riding for speed. He was riding for gamesmanship. It was a fight with bikes, not a race. Okay, thought Jo. I'll use gamesmanship too.

She pushed the bike for its last bit of speed. Now she was a metre or so in front of Jason. She started to weave to and fro across the track, using Tony's trick.

Jason tried to press forward but he wasn't ready to crash the bikes, so he had to slow down. Jo was weaving to and fro but she was still going fast. She waited until Jason had lost speed, then accelerated and shot away.

This time she took the outside lane. She zoomed around the paddock, passing the finishing line once and then twice, lost in the joy of speed. Then she heard the noise of another bike. Jason was beside her again.

He was crouched over the handlebars, looking very grim. Jo was still a bike's length ahead of him. There were two sides of the paddock to go. Jo nearly rode him into the corner but she changed her mind at the last minute. It was a stupid trick. Anyone could do that.

Then, as she turned, Jason swung his bike out. He wanted to push her over the two metre line. But he had turned his bike too hard. He was riding straight at her. Jo spun her bike around and rode at the fence. Then at the last minute she turned again.

For several metres she was riding along close to the fence, bumping up and down on tufts of grass. Then she turned the bike back on to the well-worn bike track. She looked back over her shoulder. Jason had fallen off. He must have turned his bike too hard. She heaved a sigh of relief and rode over the finishing line.

Harry was cheering wildly. Tony gave her a warm smile. Even Andrew said, "Good ride". And Roger was really excited.

"What a bike," he kept saying. He obviously thought his bike had won the race, not Jo.

Then Jason rode over the finishing line and dismounted.

"Well, it was close," said Jo. She held out her hand, like Mr Ryan.

Jason glared furiously at her and Harry shrieked with laughter.

"Close!" he yelled. "You were a lap in front. You got a head start on him and he never made it up. Girls can't ride — hey, Jason? Girls can't ride."

Jo smiled to herself. She remembered seeing Jason beside her for the second time. She'd thought he was overtaking her — but actually she had been overtaking him. She must have been enjoying the ride!

Jason saw her smile and lost his temper. “All right, smarty-pants, you can ride. But it won’t do you any good. No one will lend you a bike round here. So get out — fast.”

He started to push Jo towards the gate. Jo swung the crash helmet and hit his elbow. Jason shouted with pain. Andrew came and grabbed the crash helmet and Harry jumped on Andrew’s back. They went down in a whirlwind of punches.

Then Jason was coming at Jo again. He knocked her over and twisted her arm. Tony started to pull him away and Jason hit out at Tony. But Tony hit back, with his full weight behind the punch. Jason went flying into Roger.

Next Tony tried to pull Harry away from Andrew. Harry jumped up and tried a judo throw on Tony. It didn’t work but Tony lost his balance slightly. Then Harry butted him in the stomach. Tony fell over and Harry jumped on Andrew again.

Jason was fighting Roger by mistake, until Roger threw him at Jo. “Not me — her, you goon,” he shouted. Jason had forgotten his judo. He rained punches on Jo and she blocked them, moving back further and further. Then she bumped into someone.

She turned round. Jason hit her in the back and she shot forward into Mr Ryan’s stomach. Jason stopped still, horrified.

Jo picked herself up. “Sorry,” she said to Mr Ryan again.

“Humph,” he said to her. Then he looked at the others. “STOP THAT!” he roared, louder than ever before.

They all stopped, even Harry.

“Well,” said Mr Ryan, deadly quiet. “You should be ashamed of yourselves. But I’m sure you’re not. You’re a pack of ruffians. Well, you can brawl all you like down here but from now on you’d better keep off Panorama Drive. I’ve checked with the council and motorised go-carts aren’t allowed on the road or the footpath. So you can go and annoy someone else.”

He drew himself up tall and gave them a winner’s look. Jo’s first thought was: oh bother, I thought Mr Ryan was on my side. Her second thought was: oh well, he hated the noise. He won and good luck to him.

Then it started to sink in. She had lost Panorama Drive.

“Good riddance to bad go-carts,” said Jason.

Harry gave a yell and ran at him. But Tony tripped him up.

“Go on,” he said. “Get out.”

Jason started to walk towards his bike but Tony kept on shouting.

“Get out! I mean it! All of you! I’m sick of the lot of you. Get out!”

Roger scuttled to his new bike and started to wheel it to safety. Harry and Jo just stared.

“You too,” Tony shouted at them. “Get out!”

“That’s the spirit, boy,” yelled Mr Ryan. “You tell ’em. Get moving. Shoo! Off you go, trouble-makers.”

Jo ran to her cart and Harry followed. The others were wheeling their bikes as fast as they could go. They stumbled up Panorama Drive like frightened sheep. Tony and Mr Ryan followed, still shouting.

Harry and Roger left them at the corner without a word. And without a word, Jo and Jason and Andrew hurried on down their street. Jo was bawling like a baby, from the shock of it all. She stopped outside her house and Jason looked at her.

“Just like a girl,” he said.

That was the last straw. Jo turned and spat at him. Jason’s eyes widened and he took a step towards her. But Andrew grabbed his arm and pulled him away.

Then Andrew and Jason went into the MacIntyres’ house and shut the door.

## CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Jo was sitting in her room when Nettie came round. She sat in her room and read every night now. Eve and Ted were worried but Jo didn't care. She liked them to worry. She wondered what they would do. Maybe they would send her to the school counsellor. Then she could be rude to the school counsellor as well.

"Hi, Jo," said Nettie.

Jo nodded. She put her book on the table but she kept on looking at it. She was showing Nettie that she'd rather read.

"I was wondering," said Nettie. Then she stopped.

"Yes?" said Jo at last, feeling cross.

"If you'd like to come to the disco at the church hall. I went last week and it's really good. A bunch of kids pick the records and that."

"Wow," said Jo. "I could wear a dress and make up and ..."

Nettie grinned. "No, stupid. Everyone wears jeans. Otherwise I wouldn't have asked you."

"Nah. I don't want to go." Jo put out her hand for her book but Nettie wouldn't give up.

"How do you know?" she demanded.

"I just don't like that sort of thing."

"What do you mean — 'that sort of thing'?"

"Sitting around and waiting for some stupid boy to ask me to dance. Yuk!"

"Who sits around?" said Nettie. "We danced together at first — me and Tracy and

Tracy's friend Sharon."

"Didn't you feel silly?" asked Jo in surprise.

"You go to a disco to dance, not sit around."

Jo liked that — "You go to a disco to dance". It reminded her of something. Maybe she should give dancing a try.

"But I can't dance," she said. "I hated dancing lessons."

"That's not real dancing," said Nettie scornfully. "You like dancing at our parties."

"Oh, that's just mucking around."

"Well, it's more like disco dancing than that stuff you do at school. Come down to my place and I'll show you."

"Not tonight," Jo said. "I've got homework."

"Okay, tomorrow then. See you."

Jo grunted and went back to her book. She wasn't sure about the whole idea.

As she made a sandwich after school next day, she still wasn't sure. Then Eve said, "Blast!"

"What's up?"

"No milk. Sue's been making milkshakes."

Jo looked at her watch. "I could go to the shops," she said. And then I won't have to go to Nettie's, she added silently.

"Thanks," said Eve. "Here's the money. Keep the change."

Jo set off on her push bike. She pedalled the three blocks to the shopping centre and parked her bike outside the milk bar. She looked in and saw Tony Chicarelli behind the counter. He was helping in the shop after school.

Jo was still a bit scared of Tony. She remembered him angry and shouting. She wanted to turn round and go home but he had seen her too. He waved at her and Jo had to go in. She took a carton of milk from the fridge and paid Tony, who smiled at her with his old friendly smile.

"Hi," she said. "How's things?"

"Okay," he said. "Hey, can you stay and have a chat? I never see you now."

Jo thought for a moment. She could say she had to go home. But Tony seemed okay.

"Yeah. Why not?"

"Great," said Tony. He turned and called, "Maria! Can you mind the shop for a minute?" Someone shouted back and Tony said, "I want to talk to Jo."

Maria bounced in. She was black-haired and brown-eyed like Tony but she was as little as he was big. "Well, if you want to see your girlfriend ..." she said cheekily.

Tony tugged her plait as she went past. "Come on, Jo," he said. He led her through the back of the shop into the kitchen. "Do you want Chinotto?" he said. "It's like Italian Coke."

Jo nodded and he poured two glasses of brown fizz. They sat and watched the bubbles rise, feeling tongue-tied.

"I didn't mean to lose my temper at you," Tony said suddenly. "I was cross at Jason — and the fighting — and Mace — and everyone just doing what they wanted and leaving me to look after things. But it wasn't your fault, Jo."

Jo looked up. "Thanks," she said. "That's okay." She sipped her drink and made a face. "It's bitter."

"No, it isn't," said Tony. "Coke's too sweet." They smiled together. "So how are Jason and Andrew these days?"

Jo stopped smiling. "Don't see them much," she said. "They still go bike-riding at Panorama Drive with Roger and some other kids. That's all I know, really."

"But you and Andrew used to be really good friends."

"Not any more," said Jo. "Not since that Jason."

"You sound like you really hate him."

"No," said Jo, surprised. "One time he lent me this book. I reckon I've got more in common with him than Andrew, really. I know how he thinks."

She stopped, embarrassed, but Tony looked interested, so she tried again.

"He wants to be popular. He isn't keen on bikes really. He just wanted to get in with us. But he mucked it up, instead."

"*You* aren't like that," said Tony.

"No, but I could be. I'm not good at people, like you, but I don't just ignore them, like Andrew."

"Yeah ..." said Tony. He didn't look convinced. "Well, I guess I just don't like Jason. All that stuff about girls — I reckon it would've been 'wogs' and 'slants' next. Me and Harry," he explained, when Jo looked blank.

"Oh, right. Maybe." Jo stared into her drink. "I hate Andrew," she said.

There was silence for a while.

"Yeah," Tony said finally. "I would too."

Jo sighed deeply. Then she remembered something. "What about Mace?"

"Simon talked to her and her parents and she's good as gold at the moment. But she could do something mad tomorrow. She doesn't understand rules. Harry likes breaking rules but Mace just doesn't understand them."

"Mace is all right," said Jo.

"I know," said Tony. "But — oh, I don't know. I've talked a lot to Simon Ryan about Mace and Harry."

"How come?" Jo looked surprised.

"Well, I go up to see Mr Ryan every now and then. He kind of took a liking to me."

Jo gave a shout of laughter and Tony raised his eyebrows at her. "Well," she said, "first you had to look after us and now you look after him."

Tony looked embarrassed. "It's a bit like that," he admitted. "He's not so bad when you get to know him. But he's a trouble-maker in his own way. He's on about the drains at the moment. Simon says it keeps him happy."

"So what about Simon?"

"Oh, he's great." Tony's eyes lit up. "We have some beaut raves. He reckons I ought to be a social worker and help kids like Harry and Mace."

Jo nodded, impressed. She'd never thought about jobs before but she could see that Tony would be good at helping people. But ...

"Mace and Harry?" she said. "What would you do about them?"

Tony waved his hands excitedly. "That's what I said to Simon. He thinks I'll have all the answers, better than him, because I come from the same suburb. I don't know about that. But I like talking about people."

"Me too," said Jo. She didn't actually talk about people much. But she liked talking to Tony. Then she looked down at her Chinotto and saw her watch. "Oh no," she said, jumping up. "I have to go."

"I'll see you around," said Tony. "Come in again some time."

"Thanks," said Jo. "And thanks for the drink." She tore out of the kitchen and through the shop. Tony emptied the glass of Chinotto down the sink with a grin.

Jo pedalled frantically home. Eve would think she had been run over. But she felt happy all the same. She had actually said, "I hate Andrew," aloud to Tony and he hadn't been shocked at all. "I would too," he'd said. Wow! It was funny but she didn't seem to hate Andrew as much after that.

## CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

After tea Jo went down to Nettie's place. Nettie put on her records and told Jo to dance. At first she felt stiff and silly but Nettie bopped around happily. So Jo tried to dance and felt a bit better.

"Not bad," said Nettie. "But you have to loosen up. Listen to the music."

"I can hear it," snapped Jo.

"Well, *dance* to it."

Jo glared. Dancing was silly, she thought. She stopped trying and just went up and down to the music.

"That's it," shouted Nettie.

"What?" Jo was amazed.

"I said, 'That's it'."

"But I wasn't doing anything."

"Well, don't start, then."

"Oh," said Jo.

After that, it was easy. Nettie showed her a few steps but mainly Jo followed the beat of the music. After a while she started to put in her own bits. She danced like a clown, or a ballerina, or an Olympic athlete.

Then she noticed that Nettie was following her ideas. So she started to watch Nettie and dance along with her. The music pounded over them. They danced at each other. They swapped happy grins.

At last they slowed down. The record stopped and Nettie turned the player off.

“That was great,” she said. “You can really dance when you get into it, Jo.”

“You’re pretty good yourself,” said Jo. “Um ... maybe I’ll come to the disco. Just to see,” she added quickly.

“Terrific. We usually go about eight.”

“I’ll have to ask Eve and Ted. But it should be all right.”

She said her goodbyes and ran home. At the back door she stopped to look up at the dark blue sky and remembered something. When Nettie said, “You go to a disco to dance”, it was like Tony at Panorama Drive saying, “We come here to ride”. That seemed lucky somehow. I’m going to be good at dancing, she thought.

When she went inside, Ted and Eve were sitting at the kitchen table. “Do you want some cocoa?” asked Ted.

“No, thanks. Just cordial. I’ve been dancing down at Nettie’s and I’m pretty thirsty. Hey, can I go to the disco up at the church on Saturday? Nettie and her sister Tracy and Tracy’s friend Sharon are going.”

“Do you know anything about it?” asked Eve.

“Oh, it’s just for kids,” said Jo. “Not like the discos in town.”

“All right, I’ll check with Nettie’s mother. But it should be fine.”

“Thanks,” said Jo. “Oh and ... could I have the little record player in my room?”

For the next four days Jo danced whenever she got the chance. Dancing was new and she liked it. It was like sport and day-dreaming in one.

There was a song called *I’ll get you* that was about Jason. And there was a song about Andrew too, called *When you lose someone*. The song was about losing a boyfriend but it was just as bad to lose a boy friend.

Jo liked those two songs best of all. Someone else had felt the same way. She wasn’t the only one.

Then Saturday came and she got scared. “I’m not going,” she said to Nettie. “I don’t want to dance in a whole room full of people.”

“Oh, come off it, Jo,” said Nettie. She was dressed up in new jeans and a fancy t-shirt. “Hurry up.”

“You look smart,” wailed Jo. “And I look really daggy.” She pulled her shirt off, opened the wardrobe and stared hopelessly at all her clothes.

“Well, I like looking smart,” said Nettie. “There’s no law against it. Here — wear this then.” She pulled out a blue shirt with darker buttons.

“Will it be all right?”

Jo put on the shirt and combed her hair again. She stared into the mirror but she could only see her eyes, big and frightened.

“If you don’t like it, you can go home. It’s only down the road,” said Nettie. “Now, come on. Tracy and Sharon are waiting.”

Jo felt very young as she followed Nettie out. Eve and Ted kissed her goodbye. They

acted calm but Jo knew they wanted her to have a good time. If only there weren't any boys, she thought. I don't like boys.

The church hall was bursting with light and noise. Nettie made a joke with the boy at the door but Jo couldn't hear. Her ears were buzzing with panic.

Then she heard one of her special songs — *I'll get you*. No one's going to get *me*, she decided. She and Nettie and Tracy and Sharon walked straight on to the dance floor and started to dance. Everyone sang along with the music: *I'll get you down*. Stamp, stamp, stamp, went their feet on the floor.

When the song was over, two boys came up. One stood next to Nettie; the other stood next to Jo. "Dance?" they said.

The music started and they danced. It felt good, dancing with so many people. When the next song came on, the boy was still there. They swapped names — he was Bob — and danced on.

Jo wasn't scared now, so she started watching Bob. She wasn't impressed. He danced the same way all the time — up, down, up, down. Jo got bored. They danced for a few more songs but she stopped smiling and Bob went away. Jo saw Sharon standing by the wall and went to stand with her.

"What was he like?" yelled Sharon.

"A lousy dancer," Jo yelled back and Sharon pulled a face at her.

Maybe she thinks I should have gone on dancing with Bob, thought Jo. Just because he's a boy.

She looked round. The middle of the hall was full of boys and girls dancing in pairs. A group of boys were whispering together at one end of the hall and there were some small groups of girls at the other end.

It's just like Panorama Drive, thought Jo. There's a boys' group and a girls' group. Okay, there are pairs here, as well. But boys and girls can't be together in a group. She wanted to go home but Sharon was shouting in her ear again.

"This is my favourite song."

Jo listened.

*I can call you sunshine.*

*Let me call you sunshine.*

*You can make the sun shine*

*Even on a rainy day.*

That's nice, thought Jo. I'd like to dance to that.

She looked at the dance floor. The pairs of boys and girls moved around and in the middle of the floor she saw a group of girls and boys dancing together. There were about six of them and they were all dancing in the maddest way she had ever seen.

They jumped about and made a joke out of everything. They all danced together.

“Hey, look at them,” Jo said to Sharon, pointing.

One of the boys saw her. He stuck out his tongue like a little kid. Then he winked.

“Come on,” said Jo. “Let’s go and dance next to them.” And she ran on to the dance floor, dragging Sharon with her.

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