

# Chapter 6



## CAKES

Fruit Cake	\$1.00
Insane Cake	\$-1.00
Muffins Choc Chip (large)	\$1.80
Muffins Choc Chip (small)	\$1.00
Muffins Micro Chip (very, very small)	\$1000.00
Lamington	\$0.90
Sheepington	\$0.90
Mud Cake	\$1.30
Mud Pie (ingredients fresh from school creek)	\$1.30
Poppy seed (a lot of things in the old days...)	50 years ago
Apricot Tart	\$1.10
Custard Tart	\$1.10
Busted Heart	\$1.00

*Pat Flynn*

Mrs O'Neill is shorter than many of the students. She speaks soft and slow, leaving the yelling to our deputy, Mr Brown. His thunderous voice can scare the pants off kids (or scare something wet into their pants). So you might think that a talk with Mrs O'Neill in her air-conditioned office isn't so bad.

You'd be wrong.

'Sit down, Matthew!

She leans back and holds her chin in three fingers, not saying anything for a long time, and looks at me. Just looks. Though not at my flabby arms or my messy hair or even the one freckle on my nose, but at my eyes. Right *into* my eyes. And for some reason I find it impossible to look away. It's like her stare is a bright light and I'm a kangaroo about to get bowled over, or shot. I realise she's giving me the infamous 'O'Neill look', the one that Andy Reynolds reckons can make the toughest boy cry. I haven't cried in months so I'm quietly confident I can stave off tears, but know I'm in deep doo-doo.

'Tell me what happened,' she says, finally.

Now a lot of things have happened to me lately. I've fainted, been to the doctor, eaten a sandwich without butter. But I suppose I know what she's talking about.

'I was playing handball,' I say slowly, 'with some of the boys. There were other boys watching. Someone served me the ball. I think it was Andy Reynolds or Joe Haase. Or it could've been David Garrett, I dunno...'

*THE TUCKSHOP KID*

*Why aren't I fainting? Stupid, good-for-nothing diabetes.*

'Anyway, I hit this really hard shot and it came off the side of my hand ...'

*Side of my hand? Where'd you pull that one from?*

'... and it accidentally hit Craig Withers in the eye. Accidentally.'

She doesn't say anything, just gives me another 'O'Neill look'. I start feeling like I would if one of my pets died, although I don't own any pets.

Eventually, she speaks. 'I'm disappointed in you, Matthew. Very, very, very disappointed.'

*Please. Whatever happens, don't cry!*

'I would've thought you'd be able to tell me the truth.'

More silence, another 'O'Neill look', and tears start to show up like unwanted relatives.

'Now, tell me again. What happened?'

'I threw the ball at Craig,' I blubber.

I reckon I've reached a new low, turning into a wuss in less than five minutes. I'm worse than Withers.

'Why?' she asks.

'Because. Just because.'

'Did he say something to you?'

I don't answer.

Last year I made a decision to stop telling teachers when I got teased. It's not like it never helped - sometimes it did. The comments would stop for a while, and the worst kids would act all nice to me in front of the teachers, trying to suck up. But I realised there's only so much teachers can

*Pat Flynn*

do. I don't want kids to act nice to me because they have to. I don't want to be no charity case. And I don't want Kayla to think I'm a bloke who can't handle his own problems.

"Craig said you were mad at him because he doesn't want to be your friend anymore,' Mrs O'Neill says. 'Is that true?'

*No!* I think. But I don't say anything.

She sighs, like I said, I'm disappointed. Just because you're bigger than other kids doesn't mean you can hurt them. Violence is not acceptable in our school. Do you understand?'

I nod.

She continues: 'I should suspend you, you know that. But because you've never done anything like this before I'm going to let you off with a week of detentions.'

'Thanks, Mrs O'Neill.'

I can't believe I've just thanked someone for giving me detention. I get up to leave.

'And Matthew.'

I turn around.

'Next time tell the truth. If you don't, you're only lying to yourself.'



That afternoon I open the front door to my house and get a huge scare. Mum's home.

*Pat Flynn*

'What are you doing here?' I ask.

She kisses me on the forehead. 'Just wanted to spend some quality time with my son.'

After a day like today, the last thing I feel like is quality time with my mother. I'd rather veg out in front of the tube.

'How was school?' she asks.

I start getting suspicious. Perhaps Mrs O'Neill called her at work?

'It was... okay. How was work?'

She bites her lip. 'Okay!'

'Good.'

'Good.'

There's a pause.

'I baked you a cake for afternoon tea,' she says. 'A fruit cake. It's supposed to be both healthy and delicious.' I have a small bite. It'd better be healthy because it's certainly not delicious. In fact, I reckon it's the worst thing I've tasted that hasn't been able to run away after I've bitten it. 'Mum, this is shockin'.'

She gives a little smile. 'I know.'

We walk to the park and chuck the Frisbee around. I don't think we've done this since the X-Box was invented. One slips through Mum's fingers and hits her right in the noggin. Falcon. It doesn't hurt her, though, 'cause she's got a hard head. I go for a between-the-legs grab and catch one in the groin. It kills.

Apart from minor injuries, the afternoon is a lot more

*THE TUCKSHOP KID*

fun than I thought it would be - although I hope no kids from school see me playing Frisbee with my mum. Afterwards, we take the cake out of the car and feed it to the birds. Well, bird. There's only one around. It takes a peck, squawks, and flies off like it's running late to migrate.

Mum and I look at each other, and laugh like we've never laughed before.