



Chapter 1

Nanna's Purple Underpants on her Head

SUNFLOWER. Can you believe that Mum wants to call our new house SUNFLOWER? I like sunflowers. I made a half-edible sunflower once, except it died. My great scientific experiment didn't die. Jack's PONTO – a half potato-onion. I was nearly famous. I wish I'd written down how I did it. I've just grafted Ponto Number 24. It's looking good. I check it everyday. Ponto 24 is in a glass jar on the window sill next to my bed.

I write in my scientific record book: – Saturday: One green shoot spouting. Smells like onion. Then I draw a sketch. I'm super careful to record everything now.

Back to sunflowers. Calling our house SUNFLOWER, could wreck my life. For a start, everyone at school would destroy me – 'Let's go to Sunflower's (Jack's) place.' 'Jack is a stupid Sunflower. Oh no, I mean a blooming idiot.' 'What are you doing petal?' (I

would be PETAL.) So you can see my point?

My Mum, Nanna and sister Samantha all love flowers, so they think SUNFLOWER is a 'gorgeous' name. That's Mum's word. It's desperate. The more I say Sunflower is a BAD name, the more Mum and Samantha giggle and dance around the house singing and doing star jumps. 'Sunflowers are lovely. Sunflowers look nice. Sunflowers will make our house a beautiful sight.'

Nanna doesn't sing because she's half-deaf and thinks everyone is having a great time. I'm NOT. Luckily my step-dad-to-be, Rob interrupts them. 'I'm planting sunflowers in the garden.' Mum and Samantha stop singing. They like that idea. 'That'll be enough sunflowers around here. What's another name for the house?' Rob winks at me.

Mum thinks about that for a while. 'Jack, you really don't like the name?'

'NO Mum,' I shake my head. Mum doesn't get it. I'd be the butt of every joke at school. It's not like I mind a joke. I used to call Christopher, DONUT because of his parent's bakery. By the way, they make great chocolate donuts. The other day Christopher cracked. It was funny as he chased me around the soccer field, yelling, 'Don't call me Donut, you Porcupine Skull.' I do look like a Porcupine Skull since my haircut. My hair is short and prickly just like Rob's. It's a great haircut. I don't care that Christopher calls me Porcupine Skull, but I don't call Christopher DONUT anymore. It was just a joke. Didn't mean to get him so crazy. I won't let anyone else call him DONUT either.

Mum's blonde fuzzy hair frizzes. 'Jack, I want you to like our house name.'

The house is now called, 'Sea Breeze.' Mum and Samantha paint blue ripples around the name. I want to paint a whale under it but Mum and Samantha say 'NO JACK'. It would look so much better with a whale, but girls win.

You can smell the salt in the air from our house. It's only a ten minute walk to the beach. The house is around the corner from the Napolis' Super Delicioso Fruitologist Market as well. Mr and Mrs Napoli and Anna Napoli still live at the back of their fruitologist market. Anna is twelve like me and my nearly best friend. She's really my equal best friend. Sometimes she's my best, best friend. I'd never tell her that.

I love our house. It's so much bigger than the unit we used to live in. 'Sea Breeze' has a backyard and a garage with a workshop. A real workshop. Rob and I set up our benches and I nailed a board to the wall to hang my hammers, chisels, pliers and screwdrivers. Rob made a special bench for Leo, his other son. Leo doesn't even like working in the shed. I couldn't say anything to Rob. It's okay because Leo lives with his mother up the coast. He'll hardly visit. I can stack my drill and parts on his bench.

Mum and Rob have the large front room. I screwed in three dream-catchers into the ceiling for Mum. The crystals catch the light through the window and sprinkle rainbows across the walls. When the feathers flutter Mum says they are catching hopes and dreams.

Rob nudges me and we both try not to smile. Poor Mum.

My bedroom is at the back, so I can get to the workshop quickly. It's got a trundle bed that I can pull out for when a friend sleeps over. It's so good. Samantha has the smallest room but she doesn't mind. I stick my head into her room. There's dog-mania in there – puppy posters, Floppy her flat stuffed dog, the A plus dog project, her dog-eared (joke – ha, ha) Selby the Talking Dog books in her bookshelf. Puss is curled on her bed. I tease her. 'Puss will love a dog. A dog will love Puss more. As dog food.'

'Jack you're mean. Puss will love a puppy.'

I pretend to eat Puss' tail. Samantha chases me out of her room. 'You're not funny Jack.'

If Mum and Rob don't get Samantha a puppy, I think she'll need serious medical help.

Puss will just have to get used to a puppy.

'Nanna,' I call out. She lives with us since her last bad fall on holidays. Her room is the old verandah that's been glassed in with windows. Nanna loves it because she can see the garden. I stomp into her room. There's a snort and her teeth do a flip-flop in and out of her mouth. I laugh. Nanna's asleep in her armchair with her mouth open flashing her set of teeth. I dash to my room to grab my camera. Snap – Nanna's mouth is wide open. Snap - Puss has jumped into her lap. Snap – she's chuckling in her sleep. That's so funny.

Rob says that I'm the official photographer of the move into 'Sea Breeze'. He bought me a really good digital camera. I have a professional camera too and a dark room. Still a digital is really easy to use and I've been working on editing photos on the computer. I've taken fantastic photos moving into 'Sea Breeze'. All that packing and unpacking and Nanna's purple underpants. When we unpacked the purple underpants, Nanna put one on her head. 'Everything is covered now,' she chuckled. (I get my excellent joke-making talent from Nanna.) Of course, Mum stuck a pair on her head, then Samantha copied. Mum and Samantha chased Rob around the lounge room with a BIG pair of purple underpants until they landed on his head too. Poor Rob. Click, click. I was laughing so hard that the photographs are double exposed with underpants everywhere.

Rob has hung four thermometers in the house. We like thermometers. A house isn't a home unless you know the temperature in every room according to Rob. It's true. 'The weather is just right,' he checks. 'Twenty eight degrees – not too hot and not too cold.' Click. Photo. Rob's prickly head is nodding at the thermometer. Samantha makes me take five photographs of Floppy on her bed, Floppy on her desk, Floppy on her carpet, Floppy and Puss in Nanna's lap. Just Floppy – a portrait photo. Samantha HAS to get a dog soon.

It has been hard work moving into 'Sea Breeze'. I've had to fix leaking washers and wobbly drawers. I have a whole book shelf of plumbing and fix-it books. Rob bought me a spanner kit and showed me how to fix our leaking toilet. Mum says I'm her plumber. Rob goes around the house banging pipes with his hammer. He thinks HE is Mum's

plumber. But I am.

Luckily I have Grandad's tool box. Except for Rob, NO ONE else is allowed to touch it. Every tool is in its right place. Every nut and bolt has a home. I'm checking out my tool box when I discover something missing. I feel my face going red. I bet it is Samantha. 'Where is the screw driver?' I grit my teeth.

Rob scratches his prickly head. Mum twirls her blond hair. Nanna says she'll buy me another screw driver. As if that's the point? I charge into Samantha's room. She's sitting next to Floppy plaiting her hair as if nothing has happened. 'Where's my screw driver?' I shout.

No answer, but Samantha looks guilty. I am just about to squash Floppy when Mum star jumps into the room with the screwdriver in her hand. 'Sorry Jack. My fault. I used it for an emergency.' Mum squeezes Samantha's arm. I can just hear her whisper, 'our secret.' They both stare at the dream-catcher screwed on Samantha's bed post. It's obvious that Samantha took the screw driver. Mum is covering for her. I flick Samantha's dream-catcher as I stomp out, 'Next time ASK.'

Rob and I change light bulbs, unblock sinks, replace tap washers. We're a dream-team. Mum has taken this Saturday off from working at the shop. I'm glad. Mum can see how good I am at making breakfast. It's my Saturday job. I cook great scrambled eggs. Rob isn't a great cook. His eggs are either too sloppy or hard like chicken poo. Rob's dish

washing makes up for it. They sparkle that much that I need sunglasses. Ha, ha. Mum and Samantha are the best chefs. Better than. Still I cook a great breakfast. I hand Mum a plate with fluffy yellow scrambled eggs, two crispy bacon rashers, sliced tomato on the side and buttered brown toast.

‘You’re so clever Jack.’ Mum smiles. Nanna nods with yellow bits sticking out of her teeth. Rob slips me a quick grin.

‘This is really good, Jack.’ Samantha gives Puss a bit of her bacon.

‘Hi,’ echoes through the kitchen. It’s Anna. She climbs up the back steps carrying a dripping brown bag. ‘Over ripe bananas.’ They’re from the Napolis’ Super Delicioso Fruitologist Market. Anna’s chocolate brown eyes twinkle. My face flushes. What’s wrong with me?

Rob’s ready. Boiling hot water, forks and knives in line, plates piled, ready for the operation. Breakfast dishes are wiped and washed and stacked and stored. He stands back to check his work. ‘Good job’ he says to himself.

‘Coming Jack?’ Rob waves towards the garden. He’s planting sunflowers.

‘In a minute.’ I just want to check out the big banana bake-out first.

‘You can go, Jack,’ Samantha has her head in the fridge. ‘This is for the girls.’ I ignore

her. I love banana cake. Nanna sits in her favourite armchair eating a banana. She drips some of the soft yellow bits onto her clean shirt. I can't watch but Mum goes over and wipes it off. Samantha produces the secret ingredient from the fridge. Mango yogurt. I like mango yogurt and grab a spoon. 'Don't eat the yogurt,' Samantha shoots me a serious look. I laugh, stick my spoon quickly into the tub and gulp down a big mouthful.

Samantha grabs the tub away from me, then gives me an evil look. Suddenly a flick of yogurt hurls across the kitchen table and hits my head. Mum doesn't even see it. Nanna's concentrating on her banana. That's it. I chase Samantha around the kitchen. Samantha is squealing, 'Don't Jack, don't.' Anna shakes her head making her licorice curls bounce.

Mum sings out, 'Stop Jack. Go away now Jack' All the girls including Nanna put their hands on their hips and stare at me.

It's so unfair, but hey. I don't want to make the banana cake. I want to eat it. I head for the backyard. Rob's in the garden. He leans on his shovel. 'Getting the soil ready. For the sunflowers.' Rob rubs his prickly head.

'Good one.' I grab the other shovel.

The sunflowers are happy. We're planting them in the best part of the garden, with lots of light. They love it. We pile on plenty of mulch and leave lots of room between each plant. It's hot in the sun as we dig and plant and water.

‘Shed,’ Rob heads inside. We’ve our own shower in the shed, so when Samantha and Anna call out, we’re clean and starving.

‘Banana cake,’ Anna waves to us from the back door. As I wave back, my face flushes. It must be all that digging.

I race up the stairs. The smell is delicious. When Mum slices the cake, it becomes even more delicious. Banana cake feasting starts seriously. Nanna’s in heaven with crumbs dotting her blouse. We’re all eating banana cake and laughing. Anna’s laugh tinkles through the kitchen.

‘Napolis’ Super Delicioso Fruitologist Market is the best,’ I call out. Anna goes red this time.

‘We’re lucky Anna to have you and your parents as our neighbours,’ Mum smiles. ‘And friends. It’s really generous of your parents to give us the fruit for the wedding.’

Oh no. It’s the wedding. The wedding. Please don’t talk about the wedding. I start making chomping sounds. ‘The banana cake is great.’ I grab Puss. He squeals. I tell a joke. No laughs. There’s nothing I can do to stop it. The wedding conversation begins. Anna lists the ingredients of the fruit platters - watermelons, passion fruit, mangoes, paw paws and every other fruit possible. Groan.

I'm okay about Rob and Mum getting married but why does everyone have to talk about it so much? It'll be in our garden with a marquis and flame lights and sunflowers now. Christopher's parents are making the wedding cake. It will be a fabulous wedding cake, and we're going to eat it, okay? Anna and Samantha are the flower girls. I don't care what necklaces they are wearing and the colour of their shoes and if their dresses are going to flounce or not. Leo and I have to look like penguins in bow ties and suits. That's scary. Leo will be my official step-brother or step-penguin. Mum said our bow ties will be floral, so we won't be penguins. AND Leo is staying with us after the wedding in MY room.

This is not good news.