



‘Cannonball!’ Pete shoved past me, dashed along the wooden diving board and launched into the air. Gripping his knees to his chest, my best mate plummeted towards the muddy water of the Swimming Hole.

*Splash!*

Cockatoos flew from trees.

Kangaroos bounded into the surrounding bush.

In the middle of the Swimming Hole, Nathan and Holly bobbed in the shockwaves.

‘How good was that?’ yelled Pete. He answered

his question before we could, ‘So good someone’s clapping me.’

‘That’s not applause.’ Nathan nodded towards a council worker in a fluoro yellow shirt.

*Whack!* The man drove a metal stake further into the ground with another blow from his mallet.

‘That sign he’s putting up is to attract tourists,’ guessed Pete as he treaded water. ‘Come see the world’s greatest cannonballer ... Pete—’

‘Steele Buckle!’ I leapt from the wooden plank, grabbed my ankles mid-air then bombed into the water, centimetres from Pete’s head.

Pete coughed a mouthful of water from his freckled cheeks. ‘Not bad, mate,’ he said. ‘But you over-rotated slightly on entry. I’m still number one.’

The council worker leaned on his sign. 'Enjoy your swim, kids. It could be your last.'

'Our last!? Are we swimming in toxic water?' Pete raced for the bank. 'You could've put up your warning sign *before* we jumped in!'

The worker shook his head. 'It's a "For Sale" sign. The council's selling this land and opening it up for development.'

'What kind of development?' I asked.

'Whoever buys the land can do whatever they want. There's nothing stopping the next owner bulldozing the bush and putting in a car park.'

'What about the animals that live here?' asked Holly. 'The kangaroos, koalas, cockatoos ...'

'Animals don't have enough money to buy

land,' laughed Pete.

Nathan slapped his forehead.

'I'm serious,' blurted Pete. 'Kangaroos don't have any cash, they're all paw!' Pete held his hands up like a kangaroo's paws.

The council worker broke into a smile. It didn't last long. 'Hopefully someone who loves wildlife buys the land and preserves it.'

We surveyed the area. We knew we couldn't let the Swimming Hole and surrounding bush be cleared, concreted and constructed. But what could a bunch of kids do?

Pete sat at his desk, writing furiously. That's a rare sight *during* school hours, but spotting him writing *before* school was like seeing a wombat up a tree.

'You okay, mate?' I asked.

‘Never better,’ replied Pete, the pen a blur in his hand. ‘Why?’

I could’ve mentioned that it normally takes him half the morning to find his pen, and even then he’s no guarantee to start writing. But I didn’t. Pete could have discovered a new work ethic ... and pen.

Holly shouldered her way in to peer at Pete’s page. ‘What’re you writing?’

‘Hopefully not another list of words you can write upside-down on your calculator.’ Nathan sighed. ‘Calculators have more important uses.’

Pete grinned. He proudly grasped his work. ‘Finished!’

‘C’mon,’ I said, ‘let us hear it.’

Pete began reading. ‘Position vacant: teacher needed for Grade 6B at Outback Creek Primary School.’

‘You’re advertising for our new teacher?’ gasped Nathan. ‘That’s not your responsibility.’

If that worried Pete, he didn’t show it. ‘Since Mr Brown left we’ve had heaps of Crazy Relief Teachers. If our next teacher is mega-rich, they can buy the Swimming Hole and save it.’

Holly read over Pete’s left shoulder. ‘Applicants must be suitably qualified. Preference will be given to billionaires, however millionaires will be considered.’

Nathan peered over Pete’s right shoulder. ‘Ownership of a stretch limousine for excursions would be beneficial but not compulsory.’

‘What do you think the chances are?’ I asked.

‘About fifty-fifty,’ replied Pete.

‘Fifty per cent you’re insane and fifty per cent you’re crazy,’ scoffed Nathan.

‘What about the other fifty per cent?’ asked Pete. ‘*That* fifty per cent says we’ll get a big-spending billionaire to teach us.’

Nathan sighed, ‘Start using your calculator right-way up.’

A voice more Australian than meat pies boomed down the corridor, ‘Stop slithering you slimy serpent!’

Students screamed and schoolbags dropped.

Our classroom door flew open. A man burst in, wrestling a gigantic green and brown snake that was coiled tightly around his khaki shirt.

Lunging forward, the snake sent the man’s akubra hat flying.

‘Settle down, big fella!’ called the man.

Hissing viciously, the snake tightened its grip around the man’s waist.

The pair fell to the ground. Tables tumbled

as they rolled and wrestled across the room. The man thumped into the far wall. ‘Righto, you’re in for it now!’ He wriggled and writhed, releasing the snake from his belly.

Baring its razor-sharp teeth, the snake sprung towards the man.

The man leapt to his left. ‘Whopping wallabies, this carnivore’s cranky. Get up on the tables!’

We didn’t wait to be told twice.

The snake launched again.

The man shot out his right hand and gripped the snake under its elongated head. He pointed its scaly face towards his. ‘That’s no way for a Scrub Python to behave at school! Trying to eat the teacher is not on!’ He pulled a large bag from the back of his shorts and forced the snake headfirst into the white cloth. ‘Take a breather, snaky-boy.’

The snake safely packed away, the man dusted himself off. ‘Leaping lizards, what a way to start to the day! G’day, my name’s Mr Crikey.’

We checked out our new Crazy Relief Teacher. His shorts looked like they’d been made from one of Mr Sergeant’s army tops. His shirt was unbuttoned halfway down his chest. A blond mullet bulged under the akubra hat he’d returned to his head. The blond hair on his legs was almost as thick as the whiskers in his beard.

‘I’m guessing you don’t have a billion dollars in your bank account?’ Pete asked.

Mr Crikey shrugged his shoulders. ‘What bank account?’

I took Pete’s job vacancy ad and tore it in half.

‘Do you own a stretch limousine?’ asked Nathan.

‘I’ve got a quad bike,’ said Mr Crikey.

Nathan took the application from me and ripped the two pieces into four.

We waited for Pete’s sigh. It never came. He grinned from ear to ear. ‘This bloke’s awesome!’