

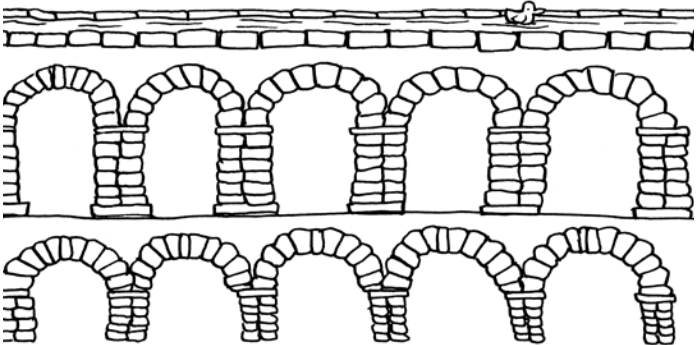
CHAPTER TWO

THE NEW GIRL

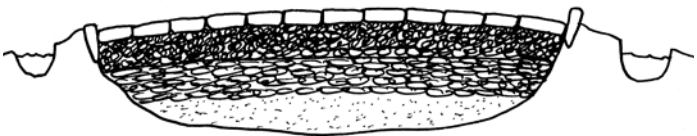


Ruth liked being back at school. She even liked history classes now. They were studying the Romans and she got extra marks in her homework when she drew pictures of Roman technology.

The aqueducts,



the Roman roads,



and how the Romans used to heat their houses.



She bet that those Roman houses were warmer than hers in the winter.

English classes were fun because she, Jake and Trevor were writing a play together. Sometimes the parts they wrote were so funny they couldn't stop giggling and Miss Nohmer would give them hard stares.



Which made them giggle even more.

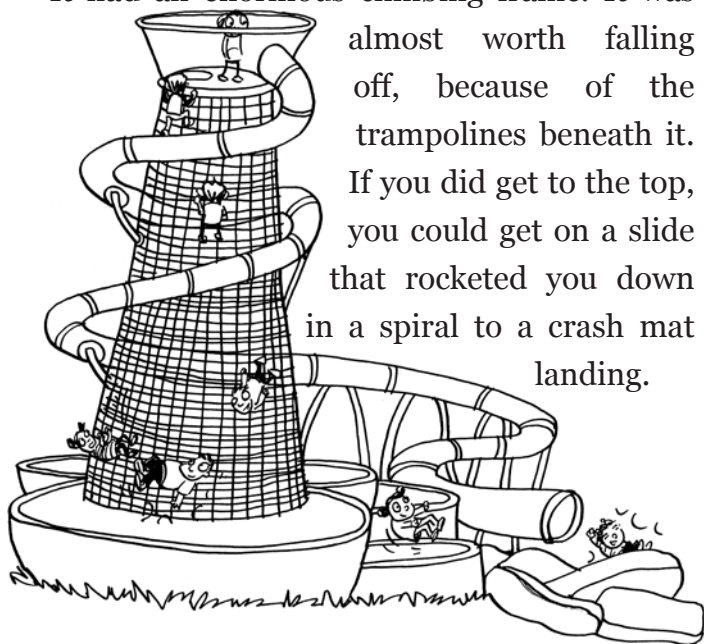
But Ruth still liked Art class the best. The school had enough money to employ models to draw from. Her favourite model came with a couple of dogs. The kids were allowed to experiment with all sorts of materials, from pastels and charcoal to collages, watercolours, acrylics and oil paints. It was lucky that they wore artist's smocks because Ruth wasn't the tidiest of painters.



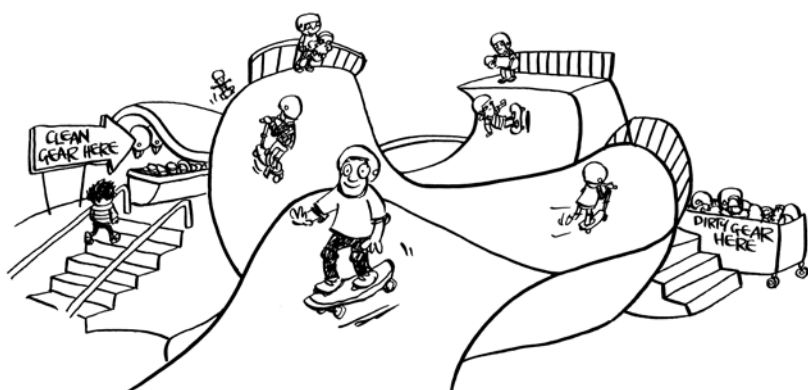
All of the club members were doing better in their classes. The school had the most up-to-date textbooks, which they could borrow all term. And they were able to help each other with their homework when they met in the clubhouse.

But let's be honest, the best time they had at school was when it was break time and they could meet up in the playground. The playground was now awesome.

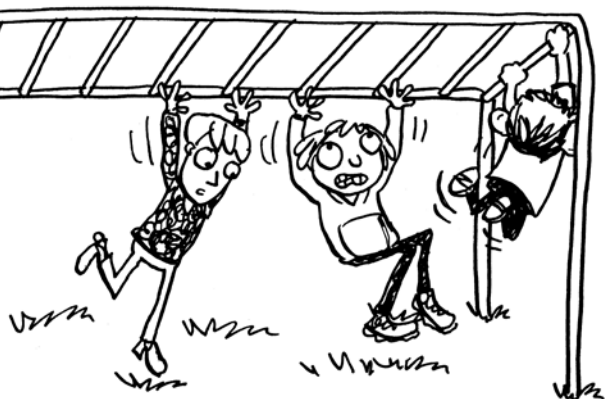
It had an enormous climbing frame. It was almost worth falling off, because of the trampolines beneath it. If you did get to the top, you could get on a slide that rocketed you down in a spiral to a crash mat landing.



There was a skate park with skateboards and scooters you could borrow.



There were brightly painted monkey bars that were three times as long as the old ones. So far, Toby was the only one who was able to go the distance. But Ruth was getting stronger and was now falling off with only a couple of rungs to go.



One of their favourite parts of the playground was the towering whirly-go-round. They dashed over to use it during the first break. After they got off it, they were so dizzy that they collapsed in a heap. They were all laughing until the boys suddenly stopped. They were staring in the same direction. The direction of a new girl.

Ruth looked at her. She was beautiful. She had long, wavy hair and light brown skin. She was as tall as Ruth, but she moved so smoothly she seemed to float across the playground.

“Who was that?” asked Jake.

“That’s Alisha,” said Trevor.

“Oh,” said Ruth, “so you know her?”

Trevor went bright red. “No, no...er... it’s not that I know her, it’s just that, um, she –”



“She was in our French class just now,” said Ravi. “She’s flippin’ fluent. She lived in Paris for two years before she came here.”

Toby gazed over at her, all moon-faced. “She’s gorgeous, isn’t she?”

Trevor looked at Ruth and then at his shoes. “I suppose so. I mean, I don’t know. I can’t say I’ve noticed.”

Ruth got up and brushed herself off. “You guys are tragic,” she said.

“What does she mean?” asked Toby.

“Don’t worry about it,” said Nancy, and they all went back in as the bell sounded for the next lesson.

