



## Chapter 1: A Spectacularly Bad Day

“Oh no! How could my trainers have melted?”

Just hours earlier, when Janey Brown had hung up her PE bag in the cloak room, there had been a pair of sturdy little black running shoes nestled in the cotton sack like a couple of plump baby blackbirds. Now her bag contained two flat discs of rubber, with tatty bits of cloth flapping around on the top. Her trainers had actually melted.

“Why me?” Janey moaned. “Why is it always me these days?”

She pressed a finger onto her tear duct to stop herself crying, but a small tear still managed to squeeze out onto her nose. It always did. Anyway, today Janey felt she had the right to cry, just a bit. It was a spectacularly bad day. It had started almost as soon as she left home that morning, when the postman tried to stop her taking her own letter.

“But it’s addressed to me!” Janey had pointed at the scribbled name on the large white envelope.

“Well, I suppose,” the postman replied unhelpfully.

She couldn’t see much of his face; his peaked cap was pulled down tight against his nose. For a moment, though, his mouth

opened and closed in confusion. In fact, thought Janey, he looked a bit like a nervous goldfish. Dark rings of sweat edged from his grey armpits towards his maroon collar.

“Must be his first day,” she thought. Janey knew all about first days. She had started at a new school herself only a couple of weeks ago and it had been pretty scary

Suddenly the postman grinned and pointed at the postmark. “Not paid enough for it, have they, whoever sent it? Look, it’s only got two stamps and it should have, errrr, four. I’d better take it back to the office.”

Janey looked at the envelope. It did only have two stamps, but someone had scrawled between them the number 4 and then two quarter signs. Janey, however, barely glanced at that as she recognised the smiley face of her Uncle Solomon beaming at her from the postmark. Her uncle owned the iced lolly manufacturer Sol’s Lols, and a drawing of his smiley, round face was the company’s logo. Even though Janey had never actually met him, her Uncle Solomon did sometimes send her presents. And here was a letter from him!

“Look,” she said, trying to tug the envelope out of the postman’s grip. “Those numbers must mean I owe you another four

and half pence. I haven’t got a five pence piece, but I can give you ten.”

“Haven’t got any change,” smirked the postman, pulling harder.

“You can keep the extra money!”

Janey gave the letter one last pull and at last it slipped from the postman’s grasp. She’d been pulling with such force that her fist flew backwards and smacked her in the face. Her eyes smarted painfully and tears spurted down her nose. The postman looked doubtfully, first at Janey and then at the letter, then abruptly scurried off, pulling out his mobile phone.

“Hey!” called Janey. “Please don’t report me to the Post Office. I wanted to pay you the extra money, honestly!”

It was too late. He had already disappeared around the corner.

Janey stuffed the letter into her bag. There was no time to read it now anyway – she was already in danger of missing the school bell. Which would mean more bad luck. Janey just couldn’t believe how much of it she’d had since moving house and starting at the new school. She’d never been unpopular at her last school. In fact she’d had quite a few friends – even though she was pretty shy – but here no one wanted to get to know her. Everyone seemed confident and clever and happy with the people they had already

paired up with. Maybe if she hadn't started one term into the year she'd have had a better chance. But no. None of the other kids were interested in Janey, and she was beginning to feel she might as well have 'Boringly normal and normally boring' stamped across her forehead.

And someone obviously agreed with her. They'd even said so, though not to her face. After only a few days at Winton School, little notes in distinctive, rounded hand-writing had started to appear in her bag, or on her chair, even pinned to the back of her jumper.

POOR OLD JANEY – BROWN BY NAME AND BROWN  
BY NATURE.

IF JANEY BROWN WAS ANY MORE BORING SHE'D BE  
INVISIBLE

JANEY BROWN WILL NOT BE IN SCHOOL TODAY.  
THE UGLY-POLICE HAVE HER LOCKED UP FOR THE SAKE  
OF THE REST OF US

Janey had no idea who was writing the notes, or why. She only knew that they were making her hate the idea of getting up in the

morning. And they didn't exactly help her cause with the other kids. The notes were so embarrassing, like Janey's very worst nightmare, the one she had when she was feeling really anxious. It was pretty much a nightly event at the moment – she opens her eyes, it's dark, and then suddenly a spot-light falls on her and she's standing on the school stage, alone, singing the national anthem, but she's in fancy dress, and not just any old fancy dress but the fairy outfit she wore when she was five years old, and as her eyes adjust she can see that everyone is sniggering at the straining seams of the pink tutu, at her voice which sounds like a cat in yowling, terrible pain...

Janey reached the school, bile rising in her throat. It was tempting to turn past the wrought-iron gates and not go in at all. With a sigh, she hoisted her bag onto her shoulder and stepped across the threshold into the school grounds, just as a small body cannoned straight into her, sending her flailing onto the floor.

"Watch out, idiot!" The small boy in slightly too-short grey trousers glared at her indignantly.

"It wasn't... I didn't... sorry!"

"You should watch where you're going, dreamy," said the boy gruffly, shoving one of Janey's books back into her bag for her.

Janey felt terrible, even though she was fairly sure that it hadn't been her fault. "I know. I was in a bit of a dream. Well,

more of a nightmare really. Hope I didn't hurt you. Look, you don't need to do that." She grabbed her belongings together hurriedly. "Better go. Don't want to be late as well as ... everything else."

"Yeah, whatever."

Hands in pockets, the boy turned away from the school gates and wandered down the street, trying to look very grown up with his shoulders back and his feet stepping away in a steady saunter. Janey couldn't help smiling at the little boy, trying to act like a big man, and not quite getting it right. Feeling slightly more cheery Janey took a deep breath and walked into school. There were no nasty notes that day but still Janey didn't have a single discussion with anyone. No chats about what she'd done last night (mostly some puzzles in one of her beloved books of dingbats). No worrying together about homework. No offers to swap her disgusting ketchup sandwiches for something less, well, disgusting. But at least it was peaceful.

Until that last lesson of the day, when Janey reached into her PE bag and discovered that the Someone-Who-Had-It-In-For-Her had got there first.

She pulled the liquidated trainers out of her bag and peered underneath. Nothing had escaped her enemy's attention. Janey's navy shorts looked like they had been put through a shredding

machine, and now lined the bag like hamster-bedding. Her regulation white aertex top had been wogged into a sticky ball with what appeared to be treacle.

Her whole PE bag was a disaster area.

A bit like Janey Brown's entire life.