

I shake my head. "I'm not drinking today."

"Why? Because of Jackson Gatlin?" he whines sarcastically. Mac doesn't appreciate my obsession with Jackson. He calls him my "fictional fix." Because he's my hero. Because I choose to support Jackson's newfound teetotalism. Because I spend nearly all my wages on Regulators T-shirts, CDs, and limited-edition DVD box sets of all their South American concerts. Because they're my band, my sanctuary. Because, because, because, because . . .

"You need something to get you through the day," he says. "Might freshen you up a bit."

"I don't want it. I want my grandad." I take the moon rock from my hoodie pocket. I rub it, as though the grandad genie is going to plume out of it. But all I see is him in my head on that last day, sitting in his wheelchair.

"Don't Dream It, Be It," he says. Then he's gone. Down and down and down. The tray of drinks falls to the pavement. Our foot soles thump down the street. My screams. My fault.

I feel the rush of tears coming, like water surging up a broken pipe, but Mac sees it, too, and kneels down before me, placing one black-fingernailed hand on my knee.

"OK, maybe alcohol's not the best idea," he says in his serious voice. "It's OK, come here." I don't like Mac's serious voice. He sounds like a doctor or something. A doctor with spiky black hair with a shock of magpie blue flashed through one side. It smells like lemons, and hugging him is like hugging a warm summer tree.

"He'd have really hated this, Mac," I sniff, pulling back from his shoulder. "Every second."

"You're right. You know what I can hear him saying? 'Where's my bloody sushi?' 'Why'd you let your mother pick Valium FM? You canny dance to that!'" he says in a near-perfect imitation of Grandad's Scottish accent.

I smile, wiping my eyes. Some opera woman mourns over the buffet-room speakers. "I'm not going back in there. I swear, if one more hairy-lipped granny kisses me on the cheek and asks me how school's going, they're going to be booking the next wake here."

Mac sits on the step beside me. "Well, it's nearly over now, isn't it?"

"Yeah. And I've done nothing toward it. I've done nothing to make it better for him."

"Well, at the end of the day, your mum gave him a respectable send-off. She probably can't afford to do more, Jode. It all went smoothly, didn't it?"

And then it comes to me, like it's been stapled to my forehead.

"That's the problem, Mac," I say, getting up off the stairs and taking up my vodka-kicked Coke. "It's all gone way too smoothly."

"Whoa there, what are you going to do?" he says as I glug the Coke down, wincing at the huge injection of vodka lurking at the bottom of the glass. "Where are you going?" he calls after me.

"I'm going to change that bloody music."

Picture this: huddled groups of old people chatting over paper plates; the reek of lily of the valley and the rank smell of prawns. The tortured warbling of Katherine Jenkins comes to an abrupt end as I fix Mac's iPod to

the docking station behind the bar, find “Bedlam” by The Regulators, and lock the volume control. Speakers crackle in all four corners of the room. The chattering stops.

Sunlight breaks through the metal-gray clouds outside and floods the room like honey. A guitar noise kicks in on the sound system.

*Crank, crank.*

More guitars, louder than bombs.

*Crank.* The loudest voice in the world screams . . .

*“This is a warning, motherfuckers! You gotta deal . . .”*

A huge grin splits my face. It’s Jackson’s voice.

*“Surrender your weapons. It’s gonna get . . .”*

*Crank, crank, crank, crank, crank.*

*“Reeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeal!”*

Before I know what my own hand is doing, it’s sinking straight into a crystal bowl of pink Jell-O, grabbing a handful, and hoying a large rubbery splodge straight at the reverend’s face.

I see Mac heading toward me, all serious face. He’s coming to hold me back, talk me down, but I’m too hyped, I’m too riled, and some random kids (possibly the third cousins) are joining in.

Jackson’s screeching through the speakers that surround me. He’s cheering me on. One of the cousins lunges for the cherry pie and shoves a handful in my mouth. He laughs and I laugh and shower him with a plateful of mini lemon tarts, rubbing the custard into his hair. Another cousin grabs a fistful of chocolate mousse and flings it at an old lady in a green hat. More second and third cousins run in from the game room, squealing in delight and

grabbing handfuls of sandwiches and puff pastries and hurling them at us and each other.

I catch sight of Mac, just outside the private party room. He's given up trying to stop what's happening. He's standing beneath a pink-and-white floral umbrella.

The barman shouts and gets a face full of fish-paste sandwiches. Old women squawk and flap and wheel out of the way. The crabby old man from the post office gets a hunk of raspberry sponge cake smack in his mouth. A waitress skids on the mandarin jelly. Fondue splats against the walls. Quiche plasters the windows. Light fixtures drip with shredded lettuce. Multicolored squidgy lumps rain down as cheese balls pellet the air like machine-gun fire.

*"Give me what you got, don't hold back."*

The air is thick with egg mayonnaise, salmon sandwiches, mini kiev's, and cupcakes; the floor is a battlefield of bodies felled by blueberry pie and ice cream, all crawling and ducking out of the firing line. It is not a funeral anymore. It is a buffet bloodbath.

*"This is my war, this is my waaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaarrrrrrrrr!"*

With Jackson's help, I destroy that room. It is five manic minutes of loud music, helpless laughing, screaming, shouting, mayhem, magic, and mess. By the time me and the cousins have come to our breathless truce, it is a no-man's-land of sweet gunk and mangled pastry. I'm going to pay, we all are. My mum is going to go into rage overdrive with no shock absorbers and a double exhaust. But for these brief minutes, all is as it should be.

And I just know that somewhere in the universe my grandad is laughing his head off.