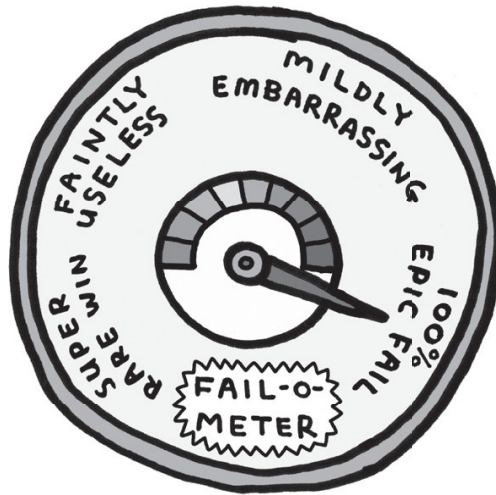


CHAPTER ONE



The single greatest FAIL of my life (one of MILLIONS, believe me) started with a slow handclap from the side of the swimming pool. It didn't *just* come from my classmates, who sat there, shivering, but from Mr Riley, AKA **Rocky**, Head of PE/torturer-in-chief.

'Finley Hope', he bellowed, so loudly that the water rippled around me in fear, 'this is your last chance. Come back up again without that brick and I'll fail not just you, but every member of this class. And when you have to do the test again, I'll have you do it down the local sewage plant. There's a lovely pool there with every one of your



names written all over it.'

As motivational speeches went, it wasn't *quite* what I'd hoped for, but with thirty-one pairs of eyes boring holes into me, I took a deep breath and dived, the weight of Dad's appalling pyjamas pulling me towards the bottom like an anchor.

If I hadn't been under so much pressure, I would've still been raging about why I was wearing pyjamas in the first place. I mean, who in the history of the universe has ever got out of bed and fallen straight into a swimming pool? Especially one as rank as this one. Half a dozen **manky plasters** had floated by me, and I swear blind I accidentally swallowed an entire toenail last time I dived for the stupid brick. Even the pyjamas I had on were ridiculous, as there was NO WAY I was wearing my own in front of everyone.



ME, FINN
THE FAIL!

Like 99.9% of all my clothes, my 'jamas are handed down from my evil (more on that later) big brother, **JONAH**. And because I'm smaller than he is, I have to wear his 'jamas from when he was nine, WHICH ARE COVERED IN cute dinosaurs.

'I can't wear those,' I'd moaned to Dad.

'You'll have to,' chipped in Jonah (helpfully).

'I'd rather wear Maisie's,' even though this was an impossibility. **MAISIE** is my little, sinister, sis, and is five.

Still, her unicorn nightie is cooler than Jonah's pterodactyl abominations.

'I don't see what else we can do,' Dad said. 'I can't buy new ones just for you to sink in them.'

Firstly, this didn't feel massively supportive, and secondly, DID HE WANT ME BULLIED FOR THE REST OF MY DAYS??!

The answer, given that I was now sinking in HIS nightwear, was a clear and emphatic **YES**. Lord, they were horrible, all burgundy and brown swirls in a material so dense that once wet, they felt like lead. The only wardrobe they belonged in was a deep-sea diver's.

He'd only worn them once, when he had to go into hospital. I've no idea what the operation was for as whenever I asked, he turned ALL the shades of red IMAGINABLE, so it must have been something **NASTY** and frankly I don't even want to think about it.

DAD,
AKA LYCRA DAD





Anyway, with the material finally pulling me to the depths of **Davy Jones's locker**, I managed, FINALLY, to rescue the brick and somehow thrashed my way back to the surface, where I was greeted by the most sarcastic cheers.

Rocky looked far from happy that I'd actually saved the brick, as per his demands. Just tapped his watch before sneering, 'You've **two minutes** to inflate your pyjamas. Take any longer and the bus will go without you, along with your uniform and towel.'

Rumour has it Rocky was a member of the SAS before retiring (with a pseudonym) to life as a teacher and is capable of chopping a tree down with a snap of his fingers and killing a man with a slightly narky look. He taught Dad too, and he said in the old days, Rocky used to hang naughty kids off the coat hooks and leave them there **ALL weekend** till they saw the error of their ways.

I WISH he'd do that to Jonah. Every weekend. And weeknights if at all poss.



You've probably worked out by now that I'm not the world's *greatest* swimmer. I mean, I'm not TERRIBLE, but as Dad's pyjamas had twenty-five anchors sown into them, I'd struggled a bit more than all the others, all right? Everyone else was sat on the side, shivering, as Rocky wouldn't let them get

NOPE

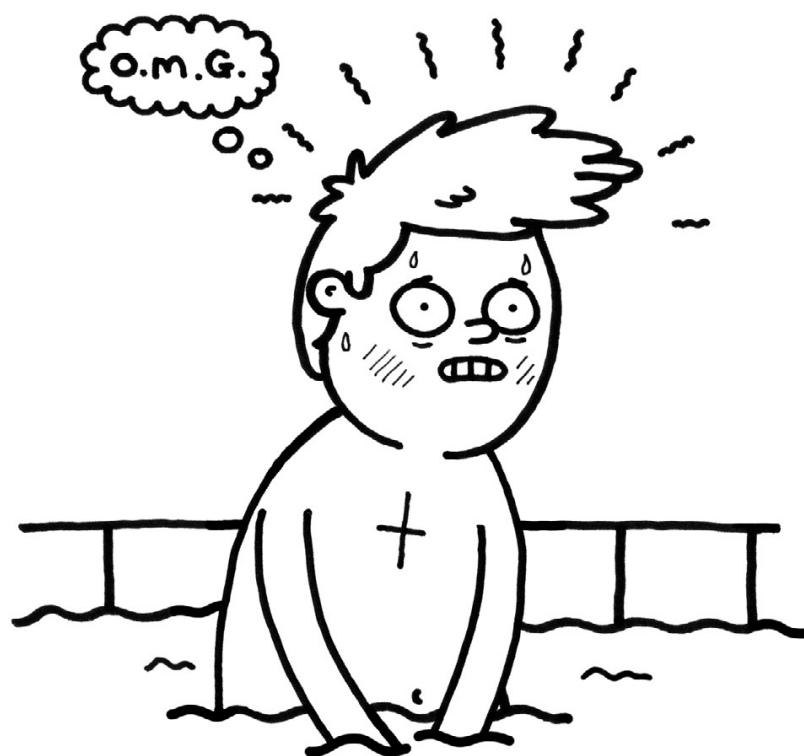
changed till I was out. They didn't look too happy about it, but **NEITHER WAS I**. Would you be with all those eyes shooting you venom-tipped daggers?

So, I did my best. In fact, I did better than that. I smashed it. Or thought I did. Pulled off the pyjama top, tied knots in the arms and waist before inflating it at the neck – the PERFECT float.

'Same again with the bottoms,' yelled Rocky.

I swear he was enjoying watching me struggle. Probably because I'm Jonah's little brother, who makes everything look **ANNOYINGLY EASY**. So I tried extra hard, pulling off the bottoms super-quick, before knotting and inflating them too. By now I was EXHAUSTED, plus the pool suddenly felt really cold, especially around my waist, so without thinking, I threw the inflated bottoms onto the side of the pool, before doing an untidy breaststroke towards the steps.

At first, I thought everyone was laughing at my swimming, but when I started pulling myself up the steps, I realized that had NOTHING to do with it. The reason they were laughing, the reason it suddenly felt colder around my waist, was that when I hastily removed the pyjama bottoms, **MY SWIMMING SHORTS WENT WITH THEM**, and were now semi-inflated and lying on the side of the pool,



leaving me exposed in every way possible.

'Finley Hope!' Rocky bellowed, unaware. 'Out the pool now.'

'Not a chance,' I wanted to roar, but of course I didn't say that. I just threw myself back down the ladder to hide everything and hopefully find a secret drain to flush me clean into the North Sea.

Rocky's shouting went on. And on. His face got redder and redder. I couldn't hear what he was shouting but could probably guess. I was too busy panicking and **dying of embarrassment** while trying to think of ways to escape without showing a single soul everything that I needed to keep private.

To make it worse, everyone poolside had worked out what had happened, and SOMEONE (I do not know

who) had taken my pyjama bottoms (and swim shorts obviously) and hidden them. All I could do was tread water and hope that the pool was dirty enough for no one to be able to see what was going on beneath the surface.

By this point, Rocky looked on the edge of sanity. He wore the kind of expression that I'd imagine he wore on secret missions in the SAS, but before he could toss a grenade to blow me out of the water, salvation came in the form of my great pal – **Google**.

Google, as her nickname suggests, is the smartest kid, not in our class, year, school or town, she is the smartest person in the **world**. EVER. And yes, she is my best mate, and **yes** she is a girl, and no there has not been a day in my life when I haven't been grateful since I met her at nursery school and she unjammed my finger after I'd gone hunting for an especially deeply buried bogey. Ever since, she has dug me out of holes so deep that I was perilously close to the earth's core. (I didn't know the earth had a core of course. Google told me.)

Knowing she wouldn't be able to retrieve my pyjama bottoms from the pranksters, she did the next best thing and threw me hers, in all their multi-coloured-polka-dot glory. It might have been better if they hadn't smacked me in the face as they

landed, but by then, I was past caring.

What followed was an awkward dance, as I untied the knots (not easy while treading water) and tried to slide the bottoms up my legs without **A. sinking** and **B. exposing myself** to everyone in the entire leisure centre. I swear even squash and badminton players had heard what was happening and stopped their game to watch.

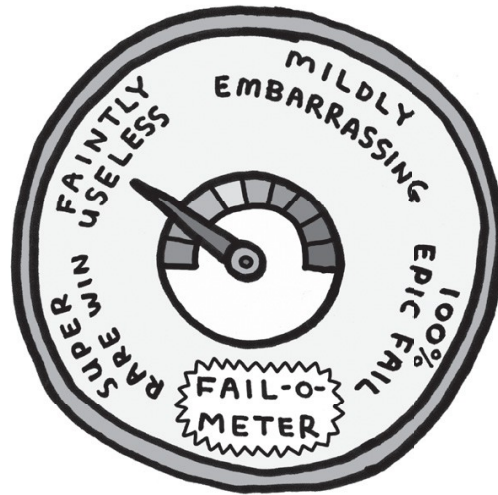
Some three and a half minutes later, I left the pool to the most sarcastic standing ovation ever and the world's longest detention. According to Rocky, I'm going to be seeing him every day after school until the end of year ten. Deep joy.

I'm not going to tell you what abuse I took on the bus back to school. Some of it I can't remember as the trauma seems to have scrambled it. That's partly why I've written it down, though I can't say it's making me feel any better. Maybe I'll feel better in time. When I'm thirty-eight, and old like Dad. Maybe.

In the meantime, I'm terrified I'll continue to be Finn Hope, son, brother, friend, and . . . **THE WORLD'S BIGGEST FAIL MAGNET.**



CHAPTER TWO



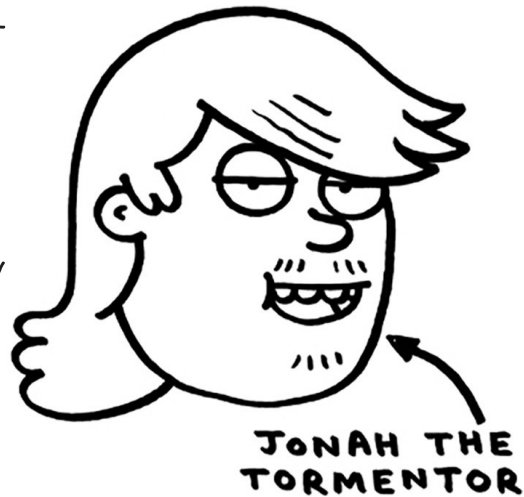
I know you probably think I'm making it up, or exaggerating, but I promise you, stuff like this happens to me ALL THE TIME. It's like I'm cursed, like the **entire world** is waiting for me to fall on my face again and again, so they can video it and slap it all over the internet.

It seems to be getting worse now I'm not protected by that beautiful bubble we call junior school.

I need help, guidance. I need someone out there, **ANYONE**, to explain to me how I'm meant to SURVIVE year seven when:

- my family are the BIGGEST, most UNSTABLE atomic bomb,
- my teachers are UNIVERSALLY cast from the scariest movie in Hollywood,
- year seven has put me under the biggest microscope known to man.

I don't even want much, you know?
I'm not greedy. I don't want to
be the most popular, the best-
looking, the sharpest-shooter
or even the biggest brain.
According to someone close
to me (AKA my **TORMENTOR**/
brother Jonah) I already
LIVE with that person (the
bighead).



All I wanted was to get through
life unscathed. Anonymity? I'd take it. Better that
than be known for **ALL** the **WRONG** reasons.

But the problem is, *it doesn't work like that for
me*. The **SECOND** I open my eyes . . . **WHAM**,
I am **UP TO MY NECK** in **FAILS**. It doesn't look or
feel pretty, and as for the smell?

Well, you wouldn't bottle it and give it to someone
for Christmas, believe me.

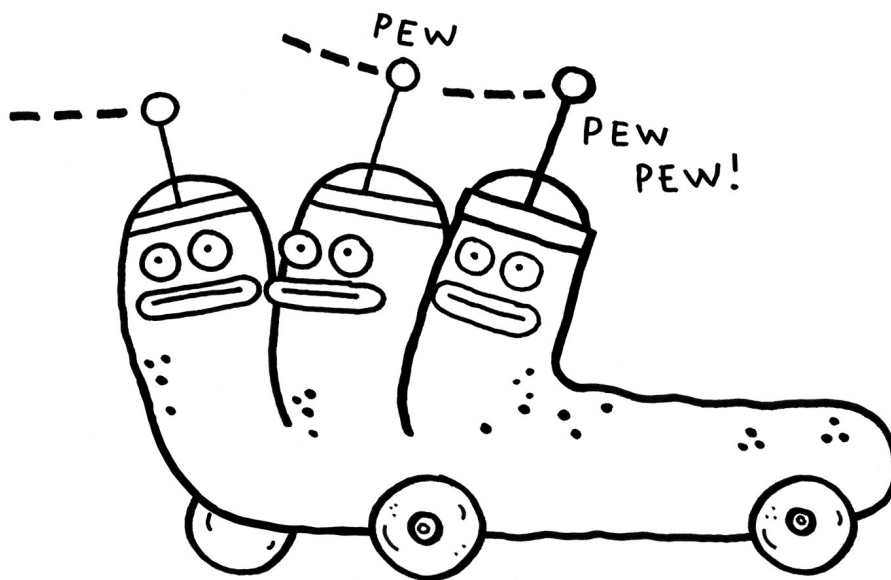
So things need to change. The scales need
rebalancing, because if I'm going to survive year
seven I'm going to need more 'Finn's Wins' and **WAY**
LESS 'Finn's Fails'. (See? **SEE?** I am witty, and sharp.
I can do this. **PLEASE**, let me do this.)

So I'm starting here, with this . . . whatever it
is. **IT IS NOT** a diary by the way. **No** chance. I'm

not that kid. There will be no *dear diary*, no deepest darkest secrets and definitely no *what does it all mean?*s.

If you want to read a secret diary, go find the key for your brother or sister's bedside drawer. That's where their diary will be hidden. Not that it'll be worth reading. It'll just make your head collapse with boredom and your ears bleed.

I'm writing this down so that my head doesn't explode, and also for mankind, so that in future centuries, when the earth is ruled by genetically enhanced mutant slugs on wheels with built-in laser antennas, they will be able to look back (if they're able to read) and see not **just** how mortifying my existence was, but how I WOULD NOT LET IT DEFEAT ME.



So, it starts, here and now. Every bit recorded so I can bask in my progress. On these pages you will see me transform from **ZERO** to **Hero** . . . small steps though. Tiny, microscopic ones, as after all, the odds are stacked against me. Let me explain.

Everything about senior school and being in year seven is designed for MAXIMUM humiliation and despair. I swear down it will be a miracle, A MIRACLE if I survive.

The uniform for starters equals PAIN.

- **BLAZER** - **fourteen** sizes too big (so there's room to grow into it if I suddenly become the Hulk).
- **SHIRT** - meant to be cotton but actually made from some kind of unbendable cardboard, especially the collar, which rubs the skin clean off every time you rotate your neck more than 13.666 degrees.
- **TIE** - instrument of medieval torture. Also, will I EVER learn how to tie it without Dad's help?!
- **TROUSERS** - made out of the world's scratchiest sack material.
- **SHOES** - designed to give you eighteen blisters per heel, per day.
- **RUCKSACK** - heavier than the prospect of FIVE more years at school. But only just.



Once you're dressed like this and limping, unable to bend your limbs because of the world's most HEINOUS clothes and WEIGHTIEST bag, then they throw you (and three hundred other unsuspecting souls) into a building that looks more like a **prison** than a school, with guards instead of teachers, and textbooks so old that the authors originally drew the pictures on **cave walls** using the blood of a woolly mammoth.

Then of course, they take you swimming, where you end up naked and humiliated and shouted at by the world's most dangerous teacher/super-soldier.

Despite all that, DESPITE the EPICNESS of the fail, I WILL NOT let them defeat me. Tomorrow, at dawn, or 7.32 when my alarm goes off, I shall rise. And it will be a fresh start, a new future.

NOTHING will go wrong.

