



How to ditch
your fairy



ALLEN & UNWIN

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*For Stephen Gamble and Ron Serdiuk,
my two favourite fairies*



NOTE TO READERS

How to Ditch Your Fairy isn't set in Australia or the United States of America but in an imaginary country, perhaps a little in the future, that might be an amalgam of the two. Like both those countries, it has an East Coast and a West Coast and there are islands too. But no one eats apple pie or Vegemite sandwiches and they play cricket as well as baseball.

CHAPTER 1

Killer Top

Days walking: 60

Demerits: 4

Conversations with Steffi: 5

My spoffs looked funny in the top, which is odd because my spoffs are tiny. I pulled the top up and tried to push them back where they belonged. Didn't work. Somehow the top was pushing my right spoff under my armpit and my left towards my neck.

I wasn't entirely used to having spoffs. I'm only fourteen and the lumps on my chest only started happening six months ago and, like I said, they're tiny. Mum says having any at all at my age is lucky. Except that all my friends have them. Anyway, up till now they'd shown no indication of straying far from my chest.

'Your fairy hates me,' I said to my best friend, Rochelle.

'No, she doesn't,' Rochelle said, admiring herself in the dressing-room mirror. The little black dress she was trying on looked perfect; her spoffs were where they were

supposed to be, not migrating to other parts of her body. The black brought out the gold in her eyes, which was strange seeing as how there's not any gold in black. Maybe her fairy was leaking dust.

'Your rentals won't let you wear that,' I told her. Her parents were strict about Rochelle's clothes being suitably becoming. I pulled off the spoff-destroying top. I stared at it. It looked like a top: two sleeves, a sweetheart neckline, straight seams. The material wasn't even stretchy. How had it attacked me like that?

'It's not that short.'

I looked at Rochelle in the dress. It managed to cover *most* of her thighs, but Rochelle is vastly tall, and dresses on her always seem shorter than they really are. 'Yeah, but it's *that* low. You'll be shopping-grounded again.'

'No, I won't.' Rochelle hoicked up the top of her dress, disappearing all spoffage. 'See? I'll wear it like this in front of the rentals and Dad'll think it doesn't reflect badly on him and won't say a word. Mum never notices what I'm wearing unless she thinks it's disgraceful.' She struck a pose in front of the mirror, shoulders back, chest out (Rochelle is not spoffs-lacking), and fingers splayed like a fancy dancer. 'Anyway, it's only twenty dollars.'

'What?' I exclaimed, though it wholly figured. You'd think I'd've stopped being surprised years ago. 'Those dresses are all two hundred dollars.'

Rochelle reached around to dig out the tag hanging down her back and awkwardly held it out while turning

so that I could see it. The tag was tattered and heavily crossed out. I peered closer. The top crossed-out amount said \$200, then \$150, then \$100, all the way down to the very edge of the ticket, where it said in teeny-tiny (dare I say fairy?) writing: *damaged, \$20 only.*

I sighed. 'Where's the damage, then?' The silk of the dress shone, exuding an aura of unwrinkled never-been-worn-before-ness. I couldn't even see a stray piece of thread. The top I'd just removed had several. The tag said \$75. It was not reduced.

'Isn't any.' Rochelle was staring at herself in the mirror, not smiling, but looking deeply satisfied.

'Your fairy never lets you down, does she?'

Rochelle nodded. 'Yes, she does. She didn't do anything for that top of yours.' She picked it up, turned it over, picked off another thread. 'I was so sure this would look fantabulous on you . . . I like her best when she works for you too. You know I read in *Stars Weekly* that Our Tui says that fairies work best for virtuous people? That when she's been a bit naughty her fairy won't—'

'Oh! Did she finally say what kind of fairy she has? It's a charm fairy, isn't it?'

Rochelle shook her head. 'Nope. She didn't. Anyway, I'm wondering if I've done something bad, and that's why she's only working for me today.'

'That's silly. If fairies only worked for good people, then how do you explain Fi-or-en-ze Stupid-Name? Her fairy never takes days off and she's vastly up herself.'

'You have a point,' Rochelle said.

'Also I have four demerits, which indicates badness, right? But I'm certain my fairy's working as hard as ever.'

'That's different! You got your demerits trying to *get rid* of your fairy!'

I sucked my teeth at her objections. 'Anyway, Ro, you never do anything bad.'

'I didn't let Joey come to practice.'

'Your brother's a brat. He's almost as bad as Nettles.'

'Nettles isn't a brat. Neither is Joey.'

I allowed as how they weren't always that bad, which was true. Just a week earlier Nettles had baked me a lemon cake – my favourite. On the other hand she had 'borrowed' one of my tennis racquets, broken all the strings, and stripped all the paint off it to use for one of her art projects. Instead of killing her, Mum and Dad had praised her creativity and then docked her pocket money to buy me a new racquet.

'Are you girls finished in there?' the shop assistant asked, yanking the curtains open before we had a chance to respond. Just as well we were dressed already.

'Oh,' she said, staring at Rochelle, 'that looks lovely. Wow! It's like the dress was made for you.'

Rochelle grinned, enjoying the new shop assistant. Suzy, her name tag said, though that most likely wasn't her real name. The owner of Best Dresses, Leatherbarrow, rarely got around to having new name tags made, so all the girls who worked there just swapped around the five old ones. As there were never more than three girls working at once,

even on super-busy days, it worked out. But it meant that everyone was called Suzy, Ilian, Daisy, Rhani or Lucinda.

The other girls knew Rochelle and her fairy and no longer bothered to compliment her. Too jealous, I reckoned. They were all standard boring pulchritudinous: big eyes, big mouth, little nose, and Rochelle wasn't, but she always looked better than them.

Rochelle, as you might have gathered, has a clothes-shopping fairy. Most people find it hard to like her because she has such a doos fairy, but they soon forgive her because a) she's a sugar, b) sometimes her fairy will work for her friends (though sadly not often), and c) her family is jaw-droppingly atrocious. Rochelle deserves her fairy.

Rochelle stripped off the dress and put on her own clothes (tartan skirt, white T-shirt, tailored black jacket with matching tartan cuffs and collar, which you'd think would look vile, but on her was far from it). She paid for the dress and we made our way out of Best Dresses, past Fairy World – where a stack of plastic Fairy Catchers were on sale (round hoops with sticky filaments attached that are supposed to catch fairies; I happen to know that they're useless) – and out of the shopping centre.

I slipped my lucky cricket ball out of my pocket, rubbed my thumb over the seam, and started spinning it. 'Time for ice-cream?' I asked. 'I haven't touched my fat allowance today.'

'Me neither. Plus Dad's picking me up there.'

'Fruit-flavoured fat it is then.'

CHAPTER 2

Rochelle

Days walking: 60

Demerits: 4

Conversations with Steffi: 5

Doos clothing acquired: 0

I had chocolate and strawberry in a crunchy nut and brioche cone, and Rochelle had lemon and lime in a vanilla cone. Neither of which put us over our fat or sugar limit for the day, though it did mean dinner was going to have to be lean. Worth it!

When I went to pay, Rochelle stopped me. ‘My shout. A little apology for my fairy not working for you.’

‘That’s okay, Ro. She hardly ever does.’

‘Yeah, but she doesn’t usually actively sabotage you . . .’

‘No worries. I’m used to doxy fairies.’ I took a bite out of my ice-cream and my brain went on the frizz. ‘Oh! Oh! Oh!’ I clutched my right temple, trying not to drop the cone.

‘Shouldn’t take such big bites,’ Rochelle said, demurely licking her lemon and lime to demonstrate how ice-cream

should be eaten. ‘Small licks and nibbles, Charlie, not big bites.’

I nodded even though stating the obvious is the most annoying thing in the entire world. Maybe her fairy did double duty as a saying-the-fragging-obvious fairy? The freezerisation in my brain started to ebb away. ‘Steffi isn’t—’

‘Steffi?’

‘The new boy. Stefan.’ His family had moved in just around the corner from my place, so we’d been hanging out.

‘The wholly pulchritudinous one?’ Rochelle said.

I felt my cheeks get hot. He *is* vastly pulchy – cheekbones so high they almost touch the sky, and glorious long black curls; not to mention his skin, which is the colour of a Chocolate Kiss, my favourite.

‘You still with me, Charlie?’ She took another demure bite of her ice-cream.

‘Oh, sorry. Yes, that boy. He says where he comes from everyone calls him Steffi.’

‘He does, huh? Isn’t that a girl’s name?’ Rochelle said, mock punching me.

‘Ow!’ Her mock punches are harder than most people’s *actual* punches.

‘Baby.’

‘Am not.’

‘Are.’

‘Not.’

'Are. Infinity times a million.' Rochelle punched me again, hard. 'You lose, I win!'

'Don't tell anyone else about his nickname, okay?'

'Fairy's honour,' Rochelle said solemnly. She always keeps her promises. 'You been hanging out with him a lot, have you?'

'Um,' I said. So far we'd had five conversations. Not that I was counting. 'He's smart. Funny too.'

'And pulchy.'

My face got hot again. I took a small bite of my ice-cream. 'It's not just that. He's not like anyone I've ever met before. It's hard to explain.' I thought I'd had crushes before. But this was different. As different as imagining summer on a cold winter's day. When your cheeks sting from the cold, it's hard to imagine being out in the waves under the sun, surfing. How I felt about Steffi was real; my other crushes had been vapour.

'You really like him, huh?' Rochelle said.

I nodded.

'And he likes you?'

'I think so. I mean, he likes me as a friend. He laughs at my jokes, but it's not like he has stacks of other friends. He only just got here.' I shrugged. 'It's hard to tell what kind of like it is.'

'Well, at least you get to hang out, right? Remember Sandra's crush on Freedom Hazel?'

I nodded. He hadn't given Sandra the time of day. There was much suffering before she realised that while

Freedom was pulchy, there wasn't much more to him than clear skin, big eyes and moppy hair.

'It could be that she's in a bad mood,' Rochelle said.

'Who? Sandra?'

'No, my fairy. My aura's been kind of thick today. You know? Soupy, almost.'

I pushed air through my teeth, mocking her. 'Auras? Please!'

'Fiorenze says fairies create an aura around you. If your fairy's in a bad mood they make it all hazy around your head.'

'You don't believe anything Stupid-Name says, do you?'

'Just because Fiorenze's vile,' Rochelle said, 'doesn't mean she doesn't know about fairies. Both her parents have PhDs in Fairy Studies.'

'From an old-country university. That doesn't count! I bet they only have those degrees 'cause they paid for them. You know how rich her family is.'

'But her mum teaches at UNA now. She wouldn't have a job *there* if her degree was dodgy.'

'Oh.' My mother studied biology at UNA. It's the best university in the city, which, naturally, makes it the best in the world. 'Well, I heard they're only rich because they inherited the money.'

'I heard that too. Apparently her grandmother invented some kind of computer thing.' Rochelle shrugged. 'That's not the point. Fiorenze's parents know about fairies, and

fairy auras are her mum's pet theory. She has these special mirrors and you can see your fairy's aura floating all around your head. Mine's purple.'

'You went to Firenze Stupid-Name's house! To our sworn enemy's home? You talked to her parents?' How could she?! We had a pact that neither of us would ever have anything to do with poxy boy-magnet Firenze Burnham-Stone, who's even more annoying and pretentious than her name.

'Basketball, Charlie. She's captain. Remember? It wasn't just me. The whole team was there! I *have* to socialise with her. Plus she was sick all last week and I agreed to fill her in on all the stuff that isn't in the notes.'

'Stupid basketball team.' Mention of it did not make me happy. I'm astral at sports – we're both at New Avalon Sports High, the best sports high school in the city, probably in the world – but I'm not very tall. Okay, I'm not even slightly tall. I'm the opposite of tall. The shortest girl in my class and I always have been.

My mum says that makes me more environmentally sound than everyone else, because I take up less space and use less resources. But that is no comfort when you try out for the basketball team and everyone laughs at you. 'Hey, shorty,' they called. 'You need a stepladder?'

Back at Bradman Sports Middle School I'd been the star point guard, averaging six assists a game. Six! And my ten points a game wasn't bad either. Tragically, none of that was on show at my high school basketball trial. I was

one for twelve from the floor with only two assists. It was like there was Vaseline on the ball. And my strength, free throws? I didn't make a single one.

I wasn't even selected for D-stream basketball. All because of one poxy day.

As long as I can remember, all I've ever wanted to do is play cricket and basketball. I couldn't wait for the New Avalon Sports High tryouts. It never occurred to me I wouldn't blitz in basketball. I'd actually worried that by the time I got to the final year of high school and had to pick one, I wouldn't know what to do. But I might not get to make that choice. My next chance to try out for basketball wasn't until the beginning of next year! So many months away . . . But I practised whenever I could. Next time I was determined not to have a bad day.

'Our basketball team is not stupid,' Rochelle said. 'Anyway, none of us like her. But she *is* our captain. I can't avoid her!'

Fiorenze Burnham-Stone wasn't liked by any of the girls at school because she's stuck-up and won't talk to the rest of us, but mostly because of her every-boy-will-like-you fairy. Even though she's not that smart, or fun, or pulchy, or anything really – all the boys want to be with her.

'I wasn't at her house for fun, you know,' Rochelle said. 'It was pep-talky and strategy and you know.'

'Is her house as big as everyone says?'

'Bigger,' Rochelle said. 'I only talked to her mum

'cause there were all these books about fairies, but not supermarket-lite books, serious books, with not-fun covers and long titles. I was curious. You're the one who always wants to know about fairies. You should talk to her parents. Her dad has written books about fairies. Whole books! They're, like, world experts.'

'Who believe in auras?'

'I saw mine in her mum's mirror. And this morning I had to blink and blink before I could see right, it was so thick.'

'You don't think it was just sleep in your eyes?'

'That's what I used to think, but now I know better.'

'Really?'

Rochelle nodded earnestly.

'Do you think fairies can read our minds?' I asked.

'No. They're not psychic or anything.'

'So auras, yes; mind-reading, no?'

'Yup,' Rochelle replied, ignoring my mockage.

'Hmmm, so how do they know if we're mean or not?'

'Don't you know *anything*, Charlie?'

I shrugged, not conceding ignorance, but not pretending I knew vast reams either.

'They can see what we do. That's all anyone needs to figure out if someone's mean and doesn't deserve a fairy. I mean, we can't read Fiorenze's mind, can we?'

I shuddered. 'The horror. Can you imagine? Who wants to go into her malodorous mind?'

'Exactly,' Rochelle said, finishing off her ice-cream.

I wasn't sure what was *exactly* about it; our not reading Stupid-Name's mind didn't have anything to do with whether fairies could read our minds. 'My mum reckons it's random – what fairy we have. No merit involved,' I said. 'Why can't we see them, anyway?'

'Because they're *in-vis-i-ble*. Why can't we see dust mites?'

''Cause they're really, really small. But, Ro, we *can* see them. Through a microscope.'

'That's cheating.'

'Do you reckon we could see a fairy through a microscope?'

'Please!'

A car honked. Rochelle's dad rolled down his window and yelled at her, even though she'd already stood up. 'Sure you don't want a lift?'

I shook my head. Even if I hadn't been on my walking-only regimen, I wouldn't have taken a lift with Rochelle's horrendous father.

'Still walking everywhere?' Rochelle asked as her dad honked again. 'You really think it's going to get rid of your fairy?'

'Hope so.'

'See you at school tomorrow!'

CHAPTER 3

Parking Fairy

Days walking: 60

Demerits: 4

Conversations with Steffi: 5

Doos clothing acquired: 0

I have a parking fairy. I'm fourteen years old. I can't drive. I don't like cars and I have a parking fairy.

Rochelle gets a clothes-shopping fairy and is always well attired; I get a parking fairy and always smell faintly of petrol. How fair is that? I love clothes and shopping too. Yes, I have a fine family (except for my sister, ace photographer Nettles, and even she's tolerable sometimes) and yes, Rochelle's family is malodorous. She does deserve some kind of compensation. But why couldn't I have, I don't know, a good-hair fairy? Or, not even that doos, a loose-change-finding fairy. Lots of people have that fairy. Rochelle's dad, Sandra's cousin, Mum's best friend's sister. I'd wholly settle for a loose-change fairy.

It can be arduous hanging out with Rochelle. She always looks doos in her perfect clothes. And sometimes

I get bored going shopping with her all the time, even when her fairy is working for me. Sometimes I look forward to rainy days even though it means we have to play tennis indoors. Her fairy doesn't work on rainy days.

My fairy has no objection to rain. She just doesn't do anything useful except make sure that whatever car I'm in finds the perfect parking spot. That's why I'm walking home and not getting a lift from Rochelle's dad: it's all part of my campaign to get rid of my fairy. I'm starving her of opportunities to do her thing so she'll want to go and be someone else's fairy. Our Zora-Anne says this is the best method for getting rid of a fairy you don't want. It's how she got a charisma fairy after having been born with a never-getting-lost fairy. Our Z-A never went anywhere for five years so she couldn't get lost and then one morning she woke up with a brand-new fairy, and before she knew it she was a star.

It could happen to me too.

So I walk. I could take the bus or the ferry or the light-rail, 'cause it's not like they need to park, but somehow walking seems much more wearisome for a parking fairy. For two months now I have walked everywhere. I haven't even ridden my bike or board. For all I know my fairy may be gone already. But I can't be sure and there've been no signs of a new one.

I've read everything in the library about fairies, especially anything that touches on the question of how to get rid of one, which hardly any of them do! Talking

to Stupid-Pants Fiorenze's parents was tempting. But all they'd have would be theories. That's all anyone's got – even the Fairy Studies experts – but there aren't any that fit all the facts, and make sense, and can be proved.

No one has ever seen a fairy. There are lots of fake photo sites, but, well, they're clearly fake. Or they're so indistinct and smudgy it could be anything. Like Steffi said, some people don't think it's a fairy that makes sure that every car I'm in gets a parking spot. Some say they're ghosts or some kind of spirit, and some people, like my dad and Steffi, don't believe it's anything but luck.

My mum has many theories. She's the one who figured out what my fairy was. I was still a baby. She'd had to go into town every day for a week because she was giving evidence in a court case (she's a microbiologist) and Brianna, who used to look after me back then, was sick, so Mum had to bring me in and hand me to the lawyer's associate to mind while she was on the stand. Anyway, every single day I was with her she got a parking spot in front of the courthouse in the only spot without a parking meter. It didn't matter how late she was running or whether it was raining or anything. The only time it didn't work was when Dad took a day off work to mind me. Mum ended up having to park practically where we lived and catch a bus in.

'Bingo!' she thought. 'My daughter has a parking fairy.' After that she put it to the test and found parking spots outside the Opera House, in the ranges, and right near

the NACG on the first day of the Millennium Test. Incontrovertible proof that her first child had a parking fairy.

And the beginning of my life in cars. I'm always being borrowed by Mum, or one of her sisters, or her best friend, Jan, or Nana and Papa, or just about everyone in our neighbourhood, whenever they're going to the doctor's, or grocery shopping, or anywhere that parking might be a problem. Every single day of my life someone asks me to get in their doxhead car.

I hate cars. I hate drivers. I hate their little squeals of joy when they find a parking spot.

But mostly I hate my benighted parking fairy.

CHAPTER 4

New Avalon the Brave

Days walking: 60

Demerits: 4

Conversations with Steffi: 5

Doos clothing acquired: 0

It was such a long walk home that I almost wished I'd accepted the lift from Rochelle. Then a bus got caught at the lights. There was hardly any traffic. I could cross against the lights, and if I ran flat out I'd make it to the next stop in time to catch it.

Two months of walking... I considered whether I was tired enough to give my fairy a sniff of parking possibilities.

Nope. I was not going to give in.

The lights changed and the bus zoomed away. I crossed the street at my own pace, walking by the baseball diamond, where littlies in uniform were doing catching drills and their coach was yelling encouragement. I walked past the bus stop and someone said *Charlie* in my ear. I dropped my lucky cricket ball.

'Gotcha!' It was Steffi, grinning. Black curls bouncing around his face.

I grinned back, wondering if it would be totally weird if I reached out and touched one of his curls.

He retrieved my ball, rubbed it on his shorts, though it was a long time since that ball had any shine, and then tossed it back to me.

'Thanks,' I said, wishing I could think of something else to say, but all I could think of was his pulchiness.

'Saw you from the bus, so I thought I'd surprise you. How's it going?'

'Not too horrendous,' I said, smiling. Especially not now that Steffi was here walking beside me.

'That sounds grim.'

I smiled. In the five – five! – conversations I'd had with Steffi since he'd started school last week, he'd used a mountain of words like 'grim'. Words so injured your parents wouldn't even use them. But somehow because he was saying them, they didn't seem so torpid.

'You heading home?' Steffi and his family had moved into Bradman Court, just around the corner from my place. Convenient, yes?

'Yeah. Was shopping with Rochelle.'

'Sounds like a ton of fun,' Steffi said sarcastically.

One of our five conversations had covered the topic of how tedious shopping is, but I'd meant grocery shopping – not clothes shopping! He was still grinning, making his eyes even more intense than they already were. I'd thought

they were light brown, but now they seemed to have gold streaks in them. Like a tiger's or something. Not that I'd ever seen a tiger. Yum. (Steffi, not tigers – though I'm sure tigers are also a pleasure to look at as long as they're not trying to rip your throat out or anything.)

'So what does Rochelle need all those clothes for?' Steffi asked. 'We have uniforms. Lots of uniforms! Ninety per cent of the time we're at school or at a meet.'

'She needs clothes to go shopping in.' I shot a look at him; he was looking back at me.

'Of course!' Steffi bounced from his left foot to his right, then skip-hopped in front of me.

I giggled. 'I tried on this top and it almost strangled me.'

'Now that sounds more interesting. Did you kill it?' Steffi drew a finger across his throat. 'You could have brained it with your cricket ball.'

I spun the ball the other way. As if I would deliberately damage a cricket ball. I mean in a way that wouldn't enhance its spinning. 'No, but I shoulda. It was vicious! It even mooshed my spoffs out of place.'

Steffi stared at me. 'Your spoffs?'

I gestured chestward, trying not to blush. 'You know, spoffs.' Why had I told him about the top?

'That's what you call them? Spoffs?' Steffi asked. 'You people are crazy.'

What else would you call them? 'Anyway, I wrestled the top into submission. I think its strangling days are over.'

'Excellent.'

I giggled again. No one says 'excellent'. It's even more injured than 'grim'. And here was Steffi telling me 'spoffs' was crazy. Hah!

'What?' Steffi asked.

He mock punched me (much lighter than Rochelle does) and I was so pleased he'd touched me, it was hard to keep from laughing. Then I worried that it was weird that I was happy that he'd just mock punched me. He'd probably do that with anyone he hung out with.

'What's so funny?' he asked again.

'Nothing.'

'You people are always laughing at me,' Steffi said.

'Sorry.'

'I'm not mad. It's just so different here. It's hard to fit in when we don't even seem to talk the same, you know?'

'I guess,' I said.

'Have you ever lived anywhere but here?' he asked, looking all serious, which made him even more pulchy.

'No. My family's been here for ages. My parents and my grandparents and their parents were all born here.'

'Hmm,' Steffi said. 'Well, my city's a lot different.'

I nodded sympathetically. There's no place in the world like New Avalon. It's one of the biggest cities in the world for one, and we have more sports, arts, design, and science stars than anywhere else. More of our politicians make it to the capital, and we have the strongest economy of any city in the world. It must be

hard coming here from somewhere else and realising how obscure your home is.

‘And you Avaloids—’

‘Avaloners.’

‘Avaloners,’ Steffi repeated. ‘Whatever. You act like I should know everything about your city and are surprised when I don’t know who some supposedly famous person is. You don’t believe me when I say that they’re not famous anywhere but here.’

‘Like who?’ I asked.

‘Zora-Anne.’

‘You don’t know Our Z-A?!’

‘I do *now*, but I didn’t. No one back home’s ever heard of her. Also, what’s with the *Our* thing? I never heard anyone say that before. Why is she always called *Our* Zora-Anne and not just Zora-Anne? Do you only use it for famous people? Does anyone call you Our Charlie?’

I laughed at the idea. ‘Maybe one day they will, but not quite yet.’

‘So only the famous people are *Ours*?’

‘Uh-huh. What do you call the famous people from your city?’

‘We just call them by their names. Stanislaw Leda is Stanislaw Leda, and Huntley du Sautoy is Huntley du Sautoy. No “Our” in front.’

‘Aren’t you proud of them?’ I asked. I didn’t have the heart to tell him that I didn’t know who those people were.

'Well, sure. I mean, some. But others are lame. We don't worship them like you Avaloids do.'

'Avaloners,' I said. 'We don't worship Ours. We're just proud of them.'

Steffi looked like he was going to say something and then flicked his hands instead. I wondered if it was supposed to be like shrugging, or teeth sucking, or if it was more like eye cutting.

'Is that why you said everyone outside New Avalon hates us? Because we call famous Avaloners "Ours"?'

Steffi laughed. His whole face changed and he looked even more pulchy. I started laughing too even though I wasn't sure what was so funny.

'Not everyone hates you. Believe it or not some people don't even think about New Avalon.'

'But last week in Statistics you said that everybody hates us.' The whole classroom had exploded.

'I did, didn't I?' he said, grinning. 'Sure set everyone off.'

He had. Everyone told him to go back to where he came from, and demanded to know what kind of a name *Stefan* was anyhow. (Just as well they didn't know about his nickname.)

Demerits had been handed out left, right and centre, but it had been a welcome distraction from calculating the shift in batting averages from the twenties to the present day. I have no love for statistics.

'It's true people hate New Avalon, but I mostly said

it to annoy Freedom Hazel. He doesn't seem to think anyone outside New Avalon has ever achieved anything.'

'Freedom can be a bother.' Which was an understatement. Freedom's good-skin fairy causes no amount of jealousy – fifteen years old and he's never had a pimple, or blackhead, or the faintest hint of heat rash. He gloats about it too.

But wasn't it true that most famous people were from New Avalon? I decided not to point that out.

'You still trying to get rid of your parking fairy?'

I nodded, pleased that he'd remembered. 'It is my life's mission.'

'I thought getting on the basketball team was your life's mission?'

'I have two life missions,' I said. I wondered if I should ask him to sit with me and Rochelle and Sandra tomorrow. Or if that would be too pushy. He'd spent last week hanging out with his soccer teammates.

'So how will you know when your fairy's gone?'

'The new fairy will start doing new fairy stuff.' I hoped so, anyway.

'What about vegetarianism?' he asked.

'Huh?'

'I read an article in the *New Avalon Times* that says statistically vegetarians have better fairies than meat-eaters.'

'Really?'

He nodded so solemnly that I wasn't sure if he was mocking me or not.

‘But Rochelle’s not a vegetarian,’ I pointed out. ‘Nor is Fiorenze, and they have the best fairies ever.’

‘Who’s Fiorenze?’

‘You don’t know? She’s in Fencing with us. Also Statistics and PR. She’s vastly popular.’ *Sort of.* Not with the girls, she wasn’t.

Steffi looked blank. How delicious was that? If he didn’t know who Fiorenze was, that meant her fairy wasn’t working on him. He was immune! I bit my bottom lip to keep the joy from bubbling out. ‘She has this fairy that . . .’ I trailed off.

Steffi grunted, clearly unintrigued. ‘Anyway, the article said *statistically*. You need a bigger sample size than just two. Not that the article said where those statistics came from. Do you have any doubts about fairies?’

I stared at him. ‘What’s to doubt? Every time I’m in a car, there’s a parking spot waiting for it. Every single time.’

‘I’m sure. I don’t doubt your parking abilities. But is it really tiny little invisible people with wings? When my grandparents were alive they talked about luck, not fairies.’

‘They were dumber in the olden days.’ I wondered again what Steffi’s fairy was. Did he have one? Not everyone does. My little sister doesn’t. (And, pox, do we hear about it!) My dad doesn’t either, but he doesn’t believe in fairies or luck. ‘I just want to be lucky at something other than cars finding parking spots. That’s not too much to ask, is it?’

'Nope. I guess not. Wanna shoot some hoops?'

'Sure,' I said. 'Nothing I'd like better.'

'You can show me how crazy they were not to pick you,' Steffi said.

'I sure will,' I said, slipping my lucky ball back into my pocket. I was starting to think Steffi might like me too.

'Race you to my place?'

'You're on!'