



Chegwin Toffle didn't notice the snowball hurtling through the air. This was odd because the projectile had been aimed directly at his nose, and the person who threw it was yelling with glee.

'Long-range shot, coming in!'

The powdery sphere – now locked onto its target – rocketed towards the curly haired boy. Such a threat would be enough to send most children ducking for cover behind the nearest snow bank or tree. But Chegwin

remained unmoved and unaware. He was too busy daydreaming.

His thoughts were focused on something more obscure than the early-morning snow fight with his friends. He was wondering what it would be like to be a tin of tomato soup.

Tomato-soup tins were unsung heroes, reasoned Chegwin. They were often plucked from supermarket shelves and then dumped at the bottom of a trolley to prop up more squashable groceries.

But the bravery of tomato-soup tins didn't end there. Film directors used the tins in their movies to create supermarket stunt scenes. Hundreds of cans would be stacked in pyramid formation, only to be knocked over, scattered and stomped on during an all-important chase scene.

Where was the respect for tins of tomato soup? It was a social injustice of gigantic proportion.

Chegwinn frowned – not because the snowball was closing in on his face, and not because the person who threw it was now jumping up and down in anticipation of the impact. No, Chegwinn’s frown was for the poor soup tins.

Due to their lengthy expiry dates, cans of tomato soup were too often pushed towards the back of the cupboard where it was dark and lonely. They could sit there for months – even years – before being remembered as a meal option. Then, when a tin was finally clutched by a hunger-driven hand, it would be ripped open, emptied and discarded in a heartbeat, while its contents were boiled on a cooktop.

Tomato-soup tins deserved better than this, thought Chegwinn. Their underrated contribution to society warranted state funerals, and Chegwinn’s whimsical mind took him to that very place now – to a fictional funeral.



He bent down and placed an imaginary rose on an imaginary gravestone where a tin of tomato soup had just been buried. As he did so, the snowball that had been aimed at his nose whizzed over his head and splattered against the trunk of a pine tree.

‘Blast it!’ cried the voice of the person who had hurled the icy ball. ‘Missed!’

This snapped Chegwin out of his

tomato-soup daydream and back to the reality of the snow fight. He straightened up to confront his attacker.

It was Rufus Corkindrop – a skinny, red-haired boy who Chegwin had befriended after moving to Alandale to manage the Toffle Towers hotel.

‘Nice try, Rufus,’ said Chegwin. ‘But you might want to keep an eye on your flanks.’

‘Huh?’ Rufus was wearing fuzzy earmuffs. ‘Who’s Frank?’

But it was too late. A massive snowball crashed into Rufus’s hip, spraying powdery white dust over the side of his jacket.

‘She shoots and scores!’

A green-eyed girl with dark hair stepped out from behind a pine tree. She rubbed her gloves together and grinned confidently. ‘Looks like victory to me. Again. That’s four days in a row, boys. You’d better lift your snow-fighting game.’

‘You’re the best in the business, Amy,’ conceded Rufus. ‘I don’t know how we’ll ever beat you.’

‘It’s impossible to beat me,’ teased Amy. ‘I eat snow fights for breakfast.’

Rufus’s stomach rumbled. ‘Mmm . . . breakfast . . . I could do with some pancakes.’

‘*You* need to watch your flanks and stop worrying about food,’ said Amy, pointing to Rufus. ‘And *you* need to stop daydreaming.’ The girl’s emerald eyes sparkled at Chegwin. ‘Rufus almost got you a beauty.’

‘Daydreaming has its perks,’ said Chegwin. ‘I do have *one* plan that will show you who’s boss of the snow.’ He tugged at a loose button on his winter jacket.

‘Uh-oh,’ said Amy, looking to Rufus. ‘I don’t like it when he does that. It means he’s come up with something ingenious.’

This was true. Chegwin was more naturally skilled than most at thinking outside the box.

Some even said there was not a box in sight when it came to the boy's thoughts. The creative side of his mind – if left unattended by his logical side – was capable of imagining the most extraordinary things. Which is exactly what had happened prior to the snow fight. Chegwin's creative mind had devised a cheeky plan to land a couple of surprise projectiles on his two best friends.

Chegwin beamed. Now was the ideal time to set his plan into action.

'Yes, I may have my weaknesses,' said the young hotel manager, 'but you do, too, Amy. *You* need to keep an eye on what's above.' He let out a bird-like whistle, which was the signal to somebody who was hiding nearby.

'Above? What are you talk–'

*Poof!*

A perfectly shaped snowball splattered on top of Amy's head.

Rufus snorted with laughter. ‘Ha! Even *she* didn’t see that one com—’

*Poof!*

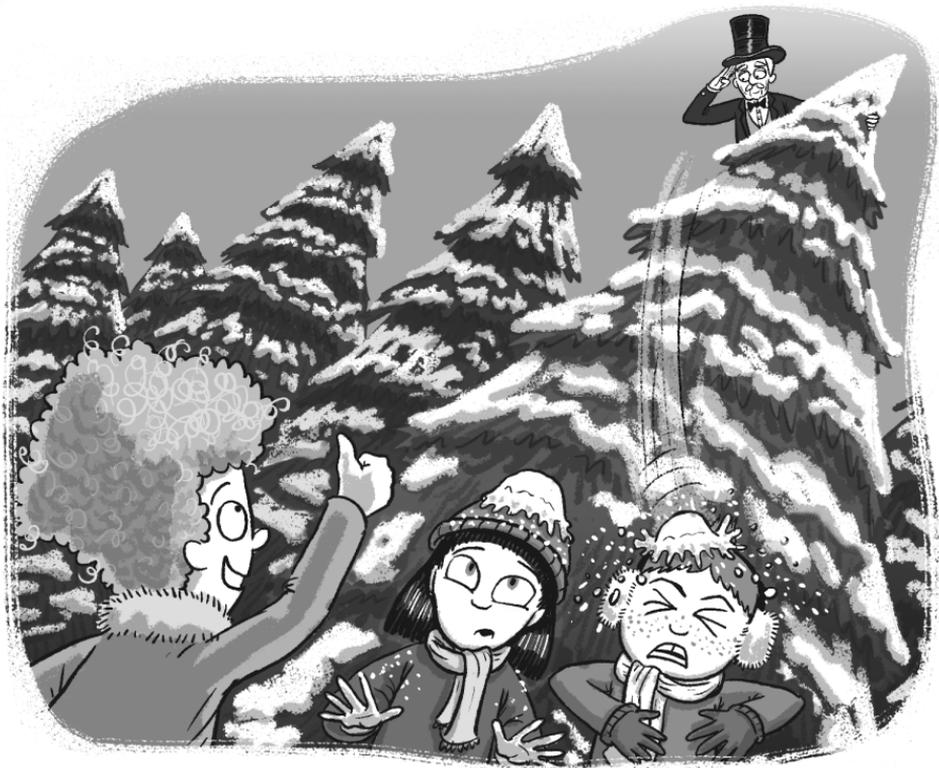
A second powdery missile exploded on Rufus.

‘Thanks, Lawrence,’ said Chegwin, looking up into the branches of a pine tree. ‘Perfect timing.’

The man in the tree was Lawrence Sterling, head butler at Toffle Towers and Chegwin’s most trusted employee. He was wearing a black tuxedo with matching top hat, and looked far more suited to hotel lobbies than to balancing precariously on the branches of a pine tree.

‘You’re very welcome, Master Chegwin,’ said Lawrence in his rich English accent. ‘May I come down now?’ He removed a pine needle from his buttocks and grimaced.

‘Of course,’ said Chegwin. ‘Some of the guests will need checking out soon.’



Lawrence awkwardly wriggled down the trunk like a tree-dwelling penguin might do, then made his way back through the pines to the hotel.

‘Talk about a sneaky manoeuvre,’ said Amy. She stomped across the shimmery snow to Chegwin and crossed her arms. ‘Just because you own a hotel, it doesn’t mean you can go

around hiding butlers in trees to ambush us like that. Snow fights should be –’

*Poof!*

Another snowball smacked into the back of Amy’s head.

‘Not *just* butlers,’ said Chegwin. ‘Waitresses also . . .’

*Poof!*

Rufus copped a hit to the shoulder.

‘Nice one, Katie,’ said Chegwin with a laugh. He looked to another tree – much further away – where the young waitress of Toffle Towers was hiding, nestled between two thick branches. ‘They never saw it coming. You should have seen the looks on their –’

*Poof!*

A snowball crashed into Chegwin’s face, splattering so much that it left icy droplets clinging to the tips of his curly blond hair.

‘Ha-ha-ha!’ Amy and Rufus doubled over.

*Honk! Honk!*

Rufus's pet goose, which had been pecking holes in the snow behind a bush, waddled out to join the fun.

'Yeah, yeah, very funny, Doc,' said Chegwin, dusting the snow off his shoulders.

Katie climbed down from the tree and chuckled, exposing her friendly dimples. She pushed through the snowdrifts towards Chegwin. 'Sorry, boss. You can't have it all your way. Thought I'd get in a bonus shot . . . Aim it like one of those meteors I was telling you about . . . Hello? Are you with us?'

A snowball to the face had initially startled Chegwin, but it had also given him something to think about. He stood motionless, deep in another one of his spontaneous daydreams.

'Snap out of it,' said Katie. She waved her hand in front of Chegwin's face, dragging him back to reality.

'I didn't realise what a wonderful throwing

arm you have, Katie,' said Chegwin, who had refocused.

The sound of a revving engine on the other side of the trees signalled it was time to head back to the hotel. Toffle Towers' famous flying shuttle bus was about to make the first of its morning runs into town.

'We'll see you this afternoon,' said Amy. 'Come on, Rufus and Doc, before we miss the bus.'

'See you later,' said Chegwin.

*'Honk!'*

The ten-year-old hotel manager watched his friends slip between the trees towards the hotel.

'Anything else I can do for you this morning?' asked Katie.

Chegwin pulled at the loose button on his jacket. 'Actually, there *is* something you can do. It's about that throwing arm of yours . . . It's given me an idea.'