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NORMAN

First rule of comedy: Timing is everything.

Timing is everything. First rule of comedy, Jax says. Because when push comes to shove, if you can get the timing right, you can get a laugh. He says. Well I don't really know how to tell when push is coming to shove, but I'll tell you something I do know. That rule works the other way too. Because when the you-know-what starts to hit the fan, if your timing's wrong there's pretty much zilcho you can do to stop it from splattering all over the place.

Stare straight ahead and think about nothing. That's a world-famous Jax Fenton tactic for what to do when you get yourself into a bit of a mess. Works every time he reckons, and he should know. Only maybe it doesn't. Because when I stare straight ahead all I can see is that big, shiny wooden box and instead of nothing I'm thinking about everything. And loads of it. Like does any light get in through the joins and did they let Jax wear his Frankie Boyle Tramadol Nights tour T-shirt. And does whoever put him in there know he only likes to sleep on his side.

The massive scab on my chest feels so tight that I'm scared to breathe too deep in case it splits down the middle and bleeds all over my new shirt. *Stare straight ahead.* I move just a bit so I almost can't see the box behind a couple of heads, and my arm touches Mum's. When I feel her, straight away the mess on my chest relaxes and lets me take half an almost good in-breath. Nearly a whole one. Right before it stabs me all the way through to my back and kazams like a rocket down to my toes. I'm pretty sure I can hear it laughing. *Timing is everything, sucker.*

And by the way, that's another thing I know. That you can't trust your timing, no matter how good it's been in the past. Not even for people as excellently funny as Ronnie Barker or Dave Allen or Bob Mortimer. Or Jax.

Because even if you nick a little bit of money for sweets every weekday morning from your mum's purse, even if you accidentally-on-purpose leave your stepfather's car door open so the cats get in and wee on the seats, and even if you're the naughtiest kid in the whole school by a long shot, when you're eleven years, 297 days and from what the paramedics can tell anything between twelve and sixteen hours old, it's definitely not a good time to die.

Stare straight ahead and think about nothing.