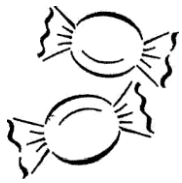
Chapter 4



LOLLIES

Jellybeans	$0.70
Jellypeas (green only)	$0.70
Jellybelly	$0.70
Redskin	$0.60
Blistered Skin	$0.60
Peeling Skin(served in bite-sized chunks	$0.60
Mixed Lollies	$0.50
Anti-social Lollies	$0.50
Lollipop	$0.40
Lollipop	$0.40
Oh Lolly, Lollipop	$0.40
Frogs – red, green, bull	$0.30

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THE TUCKSHOP KID

'Doctor Morrison will see you now,' the receptionist says in a hushed tone.

Mum and I walk into a small room packed with medical stuff. On a shelf is a jar with a blue eye inside, floating. I take a gulp. My eyes are blue.

The doctor shakes my hand. 'How are you, Matthew?'

Great! I think. *That's why I'm seeing a doctor.*

'He collapsed during PE,' Mum says.

'Mmm. What were you doing?' the doctor asks me.

'Running,' says Mum. 'Fancy making kids run in this heat?'

'Mmm. How far did you run, Matthew?'

Mum doesn't know the answer to that question.

'Umm. About two laps,' I say.

'Were you sprinting?'

Even though I don't remember it too well, I know the answer.

'No.' I never sprint.

'Well, let's have a look at you, shall we?'

Why do adults say 'we' when they really mean 'me'? Or in Doctor Morrison's case, him and his cold, metal equipment. After I take off my shirt and shoes he listens to my heartbeat, hits me on the knee with a drumstick (I wish it was fried chicken), takes a prick of my blood, and then full-on tortures me - making me stand on a weighing machine.

After the tests I get dressed. Doctor Morrison looks at Mum, then at me. 'I don't like to say this, but you're not a well boy, Matthew.'

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Pat Flynn

Mum looks stressed.

The doctor continues: “I’ll have to do some urine tests...’

I try not to giggle. He said 'urine'.

'... but I think you may have type 2 diabetes. I don't want to scare you, but it's a disease with serious complications - including possible blindness and limb amputation.'

He mightn't *like* to scare me but he's good at it. I blink and touch my arm.

Mum looks even more stressed. 'What sort of treatment will he need? Insulin injections? Tablets?'

'Perhaps. But first Matthew needs to lose weight, become more active, and eat healthy, balanced meals.'

What? My idea of a balanced meal is a pie in one hand and a coke in the other.

Mum's quiet for a moment. This usually means her can-do, business brain is ticking away. 'I have a client who had his stomach stapled. He lost 40 kilos in six months -'

'Impossible,' says the doctor. 'Matthew's far too young.' For once I agree with the doc.

Mum has another thought. 'I could order Slim Fit meals. They deliver healthy, ready-to-eat dinners for $200 a week.'

'Again, not really appropriate for a boy Matthew's age.'

No, definitely not. Healthy always means yucky.

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Pat Flynn

'It's just that, well, I'm very busy with work, Doctor. I don't have time to cook. Actually, I can't cook. I know Matthew's big for his age but he's a good kid. Never gives me any trouble. I bring home dinner at night, give him money for lunch. He doesn't eat that much, he's just naturally large.'

The doctor turns to me. 'What did you have for dinner last night, Matthew?'

I remember it well. 'Pizza. Meatlovers with barbeque sauce.' The thought of it makes me hungry. 'Can we have it again tonight, Mum?'

She doesn't answer.

'And for lunch today?' asks the doctor.

A cheese dog, barbeque chips and a chocolate milk. Well, two chocolate milks - I won a free one.' I smile at Mum but she doesn't smile back.

Instead, she takes out her mobile. 'Lincoln? Yeah, it's me. I won't be back at work today. My son needs some attention.'

I don't like the sound of this. Not at all. You see, Mum and I have an understanding. She lives to work, I live to have fun. As long as I get tuckshop money, a top-of-the-line TV/DVD entertainment system and my own computer, I don't bother her. I don't make her feel guilty for getting home so wound up from trying to please rich, fussy clients that the last thing she needs to deal with is a kid. I leave her alone and she pretty much leaves me alone, but it looks like that's all about to change. I think

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THE TUCKSHOP KID

I've just become her latest client.

We're there for ages. The doc writes out all the food I'm allowed to eat, and how much, and even gives Mum a cooking lesson. He talks about exercise - suggesting walking and playing games rather than cross-country running. Then he asks to speak to me on my own. I'm having a hard time concentrating because on his desk is a jar of jellybeans. I really feel like one. Preferably red, but I'd take any colour, even black.

'You know, people eat for a lot of different reasons,' the doc says. 'Sometimes because they don't feel so good about themselves. Why do you think you like to eat?'

I think for a second. 'Because it tastes good.'

He smiles. 'I want you to try something for me, okay?'

I don't nod. I want to see what it is first. Then again, nodding might help me get a jellybean.

'I want you to like the Matthew you are right now, while at the same time looking forward to the new, healthy Matthew you're going to become. Understand?

I don't, but I nod anyway. I'm still thinking about the jellybeans. Maybe I'll get a handful?

He shakes my hand. 'Your Mum's right, Matthew, you're a good kid.

I'll see you in a week, okay?

Damn! No jellybeans.

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