

Hero

My best friend Chris says I'm geeky.

"Is that bad?" I ask

"I'm still your friend," he says.

I ask my mum when I get home. "Am I geeky?"

She grabs the front of my jersey with her big hand and gathers me in a bear hug.

"You're the smart one in our family. When you go to University you can find out and tell us."

My mum and dad are convinced I'm going to Uni.

"We're saving for Arthur to go to Uni," they tell Miss Reidy at parent interviews.

"He's the smartest one in our family."

Miss Reidy smiles. "He is the best reader in his group."

"And maths?" asks Dad.

"He's a very hard worker," says Miss Reidy.

"See?" Mum says to Dad. "I told you he's smart."

There are 15 boys and 15 girls in my class. You'd think that would be a good thing. But fifteen boys in our class, divided by two, makes seven in each team and Arthur left over.

Take Jeffrey's birthday party. All the boys in the class are invited. It is my first party. I sit beside the table to look after the food.

"Come on everyone," calls Mrs Simpson. "Time for some games first."

"Can't we eat now?" I ask

"Don't be silly Arthur, you always have games first. Don't you know that?"

I don't know that. I only went for the food.

Jeffrey puts everyone in teams. Fifteen boys, two teams, Arthur left over. I wander around outside. A puppy runs over. I pat him and rub his tummy. At the back of the garden is a piece of wood. A sign says Please don't touch! I wonder what is under the wood. The wood is heavy. I push and shove until it moves. Underneath is a deep hole. Puppy and I peer in.

"Be careful with the puppy, Arthur," says Mrs Simpson, when we're back inside.

"His name is Hero. He's a pedigree. He's going to be a show dog"

"What does pedigree mean?" I ask.

"It means he's very expensive," says Jeffrey.

The puppy licks me all over. In my ears, on my neck, in my nose. "Hey, look at that, Arthur!" says Chris. "Your neck is all clean."

"Don't let Hero lick your nose, Arthur. Use a tissue," says Mrs Simpson.

"I don't have a tissue," I say. "We ran out of toilet paper at home and you can't use newspaper to blow your nose, can you?"

Mrs Simpson sighs. She hands me a tissue. One blow and it's full. I go in to the toilet and get the whole toilet roll off the holder.

The other boys are playing a game and they are REALLY noisy. I wish I could join in. I go looking for the puppy again.

"Hero, here Hero. Come on boy." He doesn't seem to be anywhere inside, so I

take the toilet roll and go outside, blowing my nose as I go.

I can hear Mrs Simpson. She is in the toilet, and is calling for Jeffrey. He can't hear her because of all the noise they are making.

Around the back of the house I hear whimpering. Hero has fallen into the deep hole. "Come on boy. You can do it. Come on, climb up. Good boy, Hero."

He wags his tail and woofs at me but he can't get out the hole. I try reaching down into the hole but it is too deep.

I run to the back door and call out, "Hey, you guys, Hero is stuck down a hole."

No one listens to me. I go in the kitchen and put my head round the lounge door. "Hey, you guys. Hey. Are you listening to me? Hey."

"Go away, Arthur."

"But Hero is trapped. In a deep hole. He can't get out."

"We're busy. Go and tell Mum."

"I can't. She's trapped in the toilet, yelling for you."

"GO AWAY, Arthur."

I go down the hall to the toilet. "Mrs Simpson, Hero is stuck in a deep hole and he won't come out."

There is a sound like a hiccup. "Arthur. Will you go into the bathroom and get me a roll of toilet paper from the cupboard."

"Here, use mine." I open the door and pass her my roll. It has a lot of mud on it, but I don't think she'll mind.

"Oh. My. God" she says. "Never again."

"What?" I ask.

"Leave me alone."

"But what about Hero? He's stuck."

"Go away. DO YOU HEAR ME? GO AWAY!"

Outside, Hero is still whimpering, the boys are making a noise in the lounge, and Mrs Simpson is slamming doors. The puppy is scared from all the noise. "It's alright, puppy. It's okay, Hero. I'll get you out," I say.

I climb into the hole. I hold on to a branch and slide in. The branch breaks. I fall the rest of the way and land on Hero's tail. He yelps. The noise in the house stops.

I pick up Hero. His tail is bent. "I saved you, puppy," I whisper in his fur.

It's very cramped in the deep hole. I can't reach the top. Hero whimpers and I yell.

Over the edge of the hole I see faces. Angry faces; worried faces.

"Hero fell in and I saved him but now I can't get out," I say.

Jeffrey lowers a rope down to me. I tie Hero to the rope and they pull him out. Then they send the rope down to me. I hold on and they pull me out.

The boys gather around me, patting me on the back. "Good on you, Arthur," says Chris. Everyone is smiling at me, except Mrs Simpson. We go inside to eat the party food. They give me cheerios and chocolate crackles and potato chips and ice cream and jelly.

Mrs Simpson says, "Arthur, would you like that puppy? He seems to like you. And we can't show a puppy with a bent tail.

Chris and I walk home with the puppy.

"Wasn't that a great party?" I say to Chris. "I'm a hero!"

"Yes, Arthur, you are. You're a hero with a Hero."