Guess what? I’m dead.

Luckily, there’s an afterlife, although I don’t know much about it yet. I’m waiting in some sort of limbo land but I must be leaving soon because I’ve been told to hand my voice recorder to an angel named Angel (how funny’s that?), who’ll give it to a lady named Michele, who I met on a bus.

That bus ride seems a long time ago. Before Rhiannon, Lacey and Ashleigh – all contenders for the title of ‘love of my life’. Before I got Kane out in cricket, and way before the best night ever, which only ended because Devo killed me.

But I’m getting ahead of myself. Let’s get back to the bus ride. I was riding solo that day and there were no hot girls to sit next to, so I plonked down beside a skinny lady. Before I could put my earphones in, she asked me a random question.
‘What’s your favourite book?’
‘I don’t read books.’
‘Why not?’ she asked.

I thought for a bit. ‘Because whenever we read a book at school all the characters sound like old people. Why can’t they speak like cool dudes like me?’

‘I don’t know.’ She adjusted her reading glasses and checked me out more closely. ‘So you’re saying that if someone like you were in a book you’d read it?’

‘Heck, yeah! If there was a book about my life everyone would read it.’

She stretched out her hand and I was a bit suss but I shook it anyway. It wasn’t often I got to touch a female who wasn’t related. Her grip was surprisingly firm.

‘My name’s Michele and I work for a company that makes books. Would you write one for us?’
‘Me? Write one of those things you read?’
‘Yes.’
‘No,’ I said. It sounded too much like school work.
‘I’ll pay you,’ she said.

I reached out and we shook hands again. ‘You’ve got a deal.’

*

The good thing was I didn’t have to do any actual writing, which was just as well because I’m not the best
speller in the world. I think I’ve got dysexlia. Michele gave me a voice recorder and I told stories about my life. It was easy because I like talking about myself and for some reason lots of funny and crazy stuff happens to me. Like getting killed, for instance. Michele typed the stories up and before you can say ‘bestseller’ – here we are at the end. Which for you is the beginning.

So this is it. I’m about to hit the ‘stop’ button on my life, but before I do I want to finish with a few shout outs.

To those left behind – I’ll miss you. Not only Rhi, Lacey and Ash, but my weird family and mad mates like Kane, Gavin and Brains. But one person I won’t miss is Devo. Even if his expensive lawyers twist the facts and keep him out of the slammer, everyone who reads this book will know the truth – he’s a killer and a really bad poet.

And to all the cool kids who spend their hard-earned money on this book – hope you enjoy flicking through the pages of my life. It wasn’t always pretty but it was pretty fun, and that’s all you can ask of a life, really. That and a girlfriend who knows how to kiss.

Yours faithfully, truly and sincerely
From the one and only
Tony Ross
Funniest Things That Teachers Have Yelled at Me

Miss Austen – English teacher
To speak or not to speak. There is no question.

Mr Relf – maths teacher
I’ll whack you square in the radius and then lock you in a rectangular prism!

Miss Apple – computer studies teacher
I’ll hack you into pieces and then delete you!

Mrs Keys – music teacher
I’ll take my drumsticks and whack your brass!

Miss Cook – home ec teacher
Turn the switch to the ‘on’ position, take out your fork and now place it inside the toaster.
Miss Mason – SOSE teacher
You’re history!

Mr Painter – art teacher
Do not fart in art.

Mr Fielding – PE teacher
If you do that one more time you’ll be practising javelin catching!
‘Hey, Kane. Can I’ve a go?’

‘I don’t know, Rossy. This controller’s really sensitive.’

Kane reckons he’s good at everything, even flying a remote-controlled helicopter. He’s only been doing it for twenty minutes so he can’t be that good.

‘I’ll be careful,’ I say.

‘Promise?’

‘Of course.’ I cross my heart with my thumb.

‘Hmmm.’ Kane strokes his chin. ‘That’s what you said when you borrowed my basketball. It came back looking like a football.’

‘Hey, that was Dad’s fault!’ It’s true. Dad forgot to look in the rear-view mirror when he was backing out of the driveway.

Now Kane scratches his head. ‘You also promised to be careful before you crashed my bike.’

I knew he’d bring that up. ‘I swear, mate, that

6
wheelchair ran into *me!* Anyway …’ It’s time he learnt that two can play the blame game. ‘… what about the time you broke my cricket bat?’

‘That’s because you bowled a shot-put at me!’

‘So? You didn’t have to hit it.’

He turns back to the chopper and my left eye starts twitching. I’m addicted to fun and if I don’t have some soon, my whole body will go into a spasm. ‘Come on, mate. Just one turn? Please?’

Kane sighs. ‘I’ll think about it.’

This is ridiculous! He can’t say no because I *gave* him the helicopter. Today is Kane’s birthday and I came around to drop off his present and eat his cake. He moved across the road years ago, back when I was still wetting the bed, and we’ve been friends ever since.

After a few seconds of thinking, Kane passes over the remote. But right before I can grab it, he pulls it away. ‘First, I’ll just show you how it’s done,’ he says.

I try not to roll my eyes. He’s been showing me for the past twenty minutes. The small red and black chopper is sitting in the backyard. Kane pulls on the lever and the helicopter slowly rises, hovers for about 30 seconds, and then lands back on the grass.

‘See that? Perfect!’

Looked pretty boring to me. I’d like to see it whiz and dive like an Apache helicopter. But I’m not gonna tell Kane that.
‘Yeah. Good one,’ I say. I hold my hand out like a beggar and this time Kane gives it up. Cool! Before he can change his mind, I yank up the lever. With a loud hum, the blades spin clockwise and the helicopter rises, heaps faster than when Kane did it. This is so awesome!

‘Careful,’ says Kane.

I’m too busy tipping the lever to the left to answer. The chopper tilts at a 45-degree angle, cutting through the sky like a bird as it heads towards the neighbour’s place. Now that’s what I call flying.

‘Bring it back, Rossy.’

‘Sure.’ I tilt the lever to the right and the helicopter obeys, turning and picking up speed as it zooms back towards Kane’s house.

‘Bring it down!’ he orders.

This is so easy that I don’t know what Kane’s worried about. But I better do what he says before he gives birth to a cow. I pull the lever downwards and expect the helicopter to dip back towards me.

It doesn’t.

‘Rossy! Bring it down now!’

I yank down on the stick but it’s like the copter’s got a mind of its own. It’s heading towards the brick wall of the house.

Far out!

The good news is the helicopter doesn’t slam into
the wall. The bad news is it keeps rising, right over the roof of Kane’s house and out of our sight.

Kane and I look at each other, then bolt around to the front yard.

‘There it is!’ he yells.

The chopper’s about as high as the telegraph poles and zooming down the street. Kane rips the controller out of my hands but the helicopter’s still not listening. As if it would listen to Kane and not me. It’s a runaway chopper.

We sprint after it, turning left on Wright Street and right on Wong Way. But even though we’re the fastest runners in our grade the helicopter flies even faster, turning into a red and black speck as it heads towards the Sunland Shopping Plaza. When we can’t see it anymore, we stop.

‘Maybe someone will pick it up when it lands,’ I pant. ‘Did you write your name on it?’

Kane’s eyes narrow. ‘I just got it, remember?’

I could point out that he could have written his name on it straightaway, but I don’t. I’m a thoughtful bloke. We begin the long walk home.

‘You owe me a helicopter,’ says Kane.

I could point out that if it wasn’t for me he’d never have had a helicopter in the first place, but I don’t. Thoughtful yet again. Besides, he’s in an extra bad mood because while we were chasing the chopper he
stepped in dog poo. He didn’t see it because he was looking up at the sky. It’s pretty funny, though I’m trying not to laugh.

To tell you the truth, I don’t want to buy Kane another helicopter because I’m saving up for tickets to the monster truck show. I won’t tell him that – I’ll just wait for him to calm down. By tomorrow, we’ll probably be laughing about all this, even the dog poo.

Back at Kane’s house, he reads out the instructions. He probably should have done that before he started using it.

‘The turbo mini-helicopter is very susceptible to wind gusts. Once out of range it will no longer respond to the remote control but keep flying until the battery is flat.’

‘Whoa,’ I say. ‘That baby is probably still going. Pretty cool, when you think about it.’

Kane looks at me. ‘I repeat, you owe me a helicopter.’

* 

‘What happened to you?’ I ask.

At school the next day, Kevin ‘Brains’ McMahon has a neck brace and a bandage over his nose.

‘I was in an accident.’

‘Did you blow yourself up in a science experiment?’ asks Kane.

I laugh. I can’t help it. It’s not nice but it’s funny.

‘No, Steele,’ says Brains. ‘Mum had a car accident.’
‘What happened?’ I ask.

‘We were pulling out of the Sunland Shopping Plaza when something landed on our windscreen. Mum got a fright, slammed on the brakes, and the passenger airbag did this.’ He points to his mangled face.

‘Whoa! That airbag should fight in the UFC,’ I say.

Kane frowns. ‘What did it look like?’

‘A giant grey balloon,’ Brains answers.

‘Not the airbag, the thing that hit your windscreen.’

Brains thinks for a second. ‘A remote-controlled helicopter. Dad says when he finds out who did it he’ll sue them.’

‘I don’t think Sue will scare them,’ I say. That’s Brains’ little sister.

‘No, dimwit,’ Kane says to me. ‘He means the type of sue where you get all their money.’

I can’t believe Kane called me a ‘dimwit’. He’s the one who whacked a shot-put with a cricket bat.

‘My dad’s a great lawyer so he’ll win for sure,’ says Brains. ‘We just have to find out who’s responsible. Dad’s already hired a private investigator so it’s just a matter of time.’

It’s quiet for a bit, except for the sound of Kane nervously tapping two fingers against his chest. I start doing it too. Then Kane says to Brains, ‘Let’s say someone owns the helicopter but someone else was flying it. Who has to pay the money then?’
I lean forward. It’s a good question.

‘I’d say it would be the person flying it,’ says Brains, ‘although the owner may have to pay a percentage if he didn’t take proper precautions like telling the person to be careful.’

Kane glances at me. I look at Brains. ‘What if the kid doesn’t have any money?’

‘Dad will get it from their parents. The family will be living in a cardboard box when he’s finished with them.’ Brains chuckles, then clutches at his jaw. ‘Oww! Remind me not to laugh.’

The bell rings and we head off to our English class. As we’re walking, Kane puts his arm on my shoulder and whispers into my ear, ‘If you don’t want your family living on the streets, I’d be dropping off a package to me very soon.’

That afternoon I stop at The Reject Shop and spend my last twelve bucks. Then I drop in at Kane’s house. He nods when I hand him the box.

I watch him fly his new helicopter for a while. We’ve gone down to the local cricket field, away from shopping centres, people and cars. Kane’s not bad – slowly learning how to make the chopper do circles. But I know I’d be better at it.

After ten minutes I start to fidget, and at twenty, I can’t stop myself.

‘Hey, Kane. Can I’ve a go?’
‘HOWZAT!’ Kane yells in his loudest voice.

The rest of the team follows his lead, spreading their arms wide and begging the umpire to give me out. At silly mid-on, Damien Parton even gets down on his knees.

I know why they’re doing it. Being the best batsman on our team means I’m a huge threat, and the opposition would love to see me back in the pavilion – or in this case, the oval shed – for only ten runs. Still, it annoys me. Even though Kane’s on the opposing team, he’s supposed to be my best mate. And as wicketkeeper he would’ve heard me get a bigger snick than on my first shave. Any fool knows you can’t be out LBW when you hit the ball.

Mr Fielding, our PE teacher and cricket umpire, stands twenty metres away, behind the stumps at the bowler’s end. Slowly, he raises his hand. I hope he’s just got an itchy head. He holds his pointer finger high in
the air, and Kane and his team whoop and cheer. I stand there in disbelief.

‘You’re out, Tony,’ says Mr Fielding. ‘Leg before wicket.’

I point to the edge of my bat. ‘But I hit it, sir!’

‘I didn’t hear anything,’ says Mr Fielding.

That’s probably because yesterday he got smacked in the ear with a discus.

‘Go have a cold drink, Rossy,’ says Kane. ‘It will take the edge off.’

The slips cordon laughs and I get even angrier.

‘You’re gonna pay for this, Kane.’

‘I already have. I slipped Mr Fielding twenty bucks at morning tea.’

They laugh again and I trudge off with only one thought on my mind. Revenge.

The under-14 trial cricket match is a big deal at our school. When Mr Fielding announced that I was to be captain of the B team, it was a proud moment. Then he announced the captain of the A team – Kane. I can’t believe Kane even made the A’s, let alone is captain. We’ve been playing cricket together for years and I’m as good as him, maybe even better.

After I get out, their fast bowlers knock the middle stump out of our middle order, and the bails off our tail. We’re all out for 43, which is an okay score if you’re playing basketball, but not so good in cricket.
As the A team walks off the field, they’re as lippy as a bunch of ladies.

‘We’ve got them on the ropes now, boys!’ yells Damien Parton.

‘Let’s win this game without losing a wicket,’ hollers Harry Visser.

‘We’ll show them why we’re the A’s, ay?’ shouts Kane.

‘And they’re the buzzy B’s.’

Their players laugh. Ours look down glumly at their white cricket shoes.

It’s time to turn this sinking ship around. ‘Team meeting!’ I yell.

They follow me over to the gum tree, where we make a circle in the shade. It’s quiet for a bit.

‘Any ideas?’ I ask. As captain, I like to give team members a chance to contribute. Especially when I can’t think of anything to say.

‘How good were their bowlers?’ exclaims Gavin Fox.

‘It felt like I was facing a team of Mitchell Johnsons out there.’

The boys murmur in agreement.

‘And their top five batsmen average over 50 in club cricket,’ says Jai Ritchie. ‘Let’s face it. We’re history.’

Most of the boys are nodding. This isn’t going like I’d planned.

‘We do have one chance,’ says Gavin.

‘What’s that?’ I ask hopefully. I’ve never heard Gavin
come up with a good cricket idea yet but there’s always a first time.

‘Cheat.’

As the team chuckles, a gumnut falls off the tree and bounces off my head. It knocks the seed of an idea into my brain. I’ll need time to think it through, though, and right now I need to give a stirring speech to lift my team’s spirits.

‘All right, lads,’ I say. ‘We need to keep our chins up.’

‘That’ll be easy,’ says Gavin. ‘We’ll be looking up every time the ball flies over our head for six.’

The team titters. Just what a captain needs, a comedian.

‘Don’t give up now,’ I say. ‘I’ve got an idea that will help us win the game.’

‘What is it?’ asks Jai.

‘I’ll fill you in later. But if you hear me appeal, I want you to yell your guts out, okay? Even if you don’t think it’s out.’

I get a few funny looks but they seem to agree.

‘Brains, I need to talk to you,’ I say. ‘Everyone else go get fuelled up.’

The team wanders off to drink cordial and eat peanut butter sandwiches while I chat with Kevin ‘Brains’ McMahon. He’s not the best player on our team but he’s by far the smartest.

After telling him my plan, it’s time for the million-dollar question. ‘Can it actually work?’
Brains purses his lips, thinking, ‘Your odds of success are 50/50 at best.’

I smile. I’ll take those odds any day.

*

Even though I’m ready for action, I decide not to use my plan at first. Who knows, we might get some early wickets and beat them straight up?

Gavin opens the bowling for our team. He’s got about as much swing as a 90-year-old golfer, but he works up to a good pace and is fairly accurate. He runs in and bowls the first ball on middle stump. Trouble is it’s a rank half-volley. Their opener, Usman Chetcuti, steps down the pitch and smashes a drive back over the bowler’s head. It lands just inside the rope. Mr Fielding bends his elbow and straightens it, signalling four runs. There’s dead silence from our team.

‘Let’s hear some encouragement out here,’ I yell.

‘Good shot, Ussie,’ cries Jai.

‘Not to him!’ I say.

‘Oh, okay,’ says Jai. ‘Look on the bright side, Gav. At least it didn’t go for six.’

This must fire Gavin up because the next ball he bowls is a bouncer, but it doesn’t bounce too high. Usman steps back and hooks it in the air towards Brains at square leg. The ball is caught. Not by Brains, but by the dirty school creek behind the oval.
Mr Fielding raises both arms in the air. ‘Six!’

While the A team searches for the ball in the creek, I have a chat with Brains.

‘I’m putting “Plan Snick-o-meter” into action,’ I say. ‘Any tips?’

Brains adjusts his glasses. ‘Stand directly behind the umpire so he can’t see what you’re doing. And wait until the batsman swings before you make the noise.’

‘Got it.’

I also have a word with Gavin. ‘New strategy. I want you to bowl full, fast and well outside off stump.’

‘Why bowl there?’ he says. ‘I thought the aim was to hit the wickets.’

‘Not today. I just want them to miss the ball.’

He looks confused.

‘Just do what I say and you’ll have better figures than a room full of models.’

He salutes. ‘Aye, aye, captain.’

Next ball, Gavin bowls a full-pitched delivery about a metre from off stump. Usman flails away but misses, and, as the ball flies past his bat, I put my plan into action. Whack!

Hidden in my left hand is a spare cricket ball, and in my right is a stick from the gum tree. When I clip them together, it sounds a lot like a bat hitting a ball.

As the real ball is caught by our wicketkeeper, I yell with all my might, ‘HOW IS THAT, SIR?’
The B team looks surprised by my enthusiasm, nevertheless they back me up by raising their arms and giving a half-hearted shout.

Mr Fielding stands dead still for a few seconds, and I realise my plan probably won’t work. How can it? Even though there was a noise, Usman missed the ball by a good ten centimetres.

But Mr Fielding’s eyes mustn’t be too good from the time he got hit in the face with a baseball, and he raises his finger. ‘Out!’ he says. ‘Caught behind.’

‘I missed it by a mile!’ says Ussie.

‘You heard the umpire,’ I say. ‘On your way, mate.’

Ussie walks off steaming and the next batter comes in, only to be caught behind two balls later. He looks very, very surprised.

‘I missed it by that much!’ he says, holding out his hands the length of a decent-sized fish.

‘I heard a clear noise,’ says Mr Fielding. ‘You’re out.’

Three overs later it’s 7 for 18, all of their players out caught behind. The plan is working a treat – only three more wickets and the game is ours! It’s Kane’s turn to bat and he strides onto the field, but instead of taking his position at the crease, he approaches Mr Fielding and has a word.

I can’t hear what they’re saying but I’m a bit worried. Even though my trick uses natural deception – no one ever looks at a fielder while the ball is bowled – Kane
is a talented scammer and may suspect that things aren’t on the level.

Mr Fielding orders me over. ‘Empty your pockets, Tony.’

Luckily, I was smart enough to drop the stick out of my right pocket while Kane and Mr Fielding were talking. Unfortunately, I didn’t have time to do the same thing with the cricket ball in my left pocket.

‘What’s this for?’ he asks when he sees it.

‘I’m just toughening up my hands between deliveries, sir.’ I throw the ball from hand to hand, showing him how it’s done.

Mr Fielding clicks his fingers. ‘Hand it over.’ After pocketing my ball he says, ‘Let’s play cricket.’

‘Bring it on,’ says Kane, smirking at me.

The equation is simple. The A team needs 26 runs to win and we need three wickets. Even without the trick, we’ve got a good chance if we bowl well. Except for Kane, all of their best batsmen are out. But there’s a slight problem: Gavin’s pulled a hammy and we don’t have any other strike bowlers. I approach Brains for advice.

He ponders the question for a few seconds. ‘I recommend giving myself an opportunity.’

‘You?’

He’s not the most coordinated guy in the world. Yesterday he took an air swing during our handball game.
‘I’ve been studying the biomechanics of swing bowling and have an excellent theoretical knowledge of how it’s done.’ He’s talking fast, which means he’s getting excited. ‘I’m fairly confident the batsmen won’t be able to effectively contact my outswinger.’

I don’t really know what he’s on about but it sounded good. I throw him the ball. ‘Win it for science.’

It quickly becomes clear that Brains is right – Kane can’t hit his outswinger. No one can because his bowls don’t land anywhere near the pitch. One actually goes backwards, scotching Mr Fielding on the left cheek.

‘Oww!’ Mr Fielding says, rubbing his face. I don’t know how he takes so much punishment – he must have a hard head.

Some blokes on our team laugh behind their hands. I’m not one of them.

Every time Brains bowls a wide not only does he have to bowl the ball again, the other team gets a run added to their total. Because Brains has bowled 22 wides, the A team is nearly level with our score without hitting a ball!

‘That’s enough from you, Kevin,’ says Mr Fielding. ‘Over!’

I breathe a sigh of relief. Even though the over isn’t technically over, Mr Fielding has had enough of Brains’ bowling. We all have. He’s been bowling so long that half of our team is lying down. I think Jai is asleep.
‘Who’s bowling next, Tony?’ asks Mr Fielding.

My brain races. We’re in big trouble. Kane’s team needs only four runs to win and we still need three wickets. I need someone who can pull a rabbit out of a hat – someone with skill, talent and the ‘X factor’.

‘I’ll be bowling, sir.’

After walking to the other end, I toss the ball from hand to hand, warming up. The nickname for my type of bowling is ‘chinaman’, although I’m not sure why. There are lots of Chinese men but only a few cricketers like me who bowl left-arm leg spin.

Jonty Dooley is facing and he knows how to swing a bat. I decide to start with a wrong ’un, deceiving him by spinning the ball the wrong way and hopefully knocking down his off stump. But it comes out of my hand all wrong, bouncing four times before reaching Jonty. He takes an almighty swing. I can see in his expression that he is looking to end the game with one humungous hit. Or he’s constipated. But because the ball is travelling so slowly, Jonty swings too early. He misses the ball and it trickles onto off stump, gently knocking off the bail.

‘You’re out, Jonty,’ says Mr Fielding.

Our team runs over and pats me on the back.

‘That was the worst delivery I’ve ever seen obtain a wicket,’ says Brains.

‘At least it wasn’t a wide,’ I say.
David Mulligan is in next. He’s big, crazy and an awesome fast bowler. Luckily, his batting is more hit and miss. My plan is to toss the ball up high. As Shane Warne says, ‘If you bowl above eye level, the batsman can’t see it properly.’

I execute my plan well. A bit too well. I bowl the ball so high that it seems to disappear into the low-lying cloud. It takes so long to come down that Mulligan yawns while he’s waiting for it. Finally, it drops like a hailstone and Mulligan swings with all his considerable might, hoicking the ball towards square leg.

Mulligan connected pretty well, but not perfectly. The ball hit near the top edge of his bat and goes even higher than when I bowled it. As it starts to come down, it’s clear that it’s not going to make it over the boundary, but is heading straight down the throat of Brains.

‘Catch!’ yells almost everyone on our team.

I don’t yell. Even though Brains hardly has to take a step, I’m ninety-nine per cent sure that he’ll either miss the ball completely, or it will smash his glasses.

The coaching manual says that to take a catch you need to cup your hands close to your body. Brains must have been too busy reading books about Einstein because his arms are straight out like a zombie’s. The ball comes down fast and drops right through his arms without Brains even touching it. Just like I expected.
But, sometimes, weird stuff happens on the cricket field. Instead of hitting the ground, the ball hits Brains on his rather large right foot that is well in front of his body. Amazingly, the ball bounces up off his cricket shoe and arcs towards his waist.

By this stage Brains’ hands have made a nice cup – maybe he did read the coaching manual after all – and the ball drops into his fingers. Brains looks down at it, perplexed. He can figure out the trickiest science problem but he clearly has no idea how the ball ended up in his hands.

Mulligan looks to Mr Fielding to see what just happened.

‘The ball never touched the ground,’ Mr Fielding says. ‘You’re out.’

‘Nooo!’ yells Mulligan. He looks like he wants to kill someone.

‘Yesss!’ yells our team as we sprint over to congratulate Brains and mess up his frizzy hair.

‘That was the most incredible catch I’ve ever seen,’ says Jai.

‘You’re a legend,’ adds Gavin.

Brains is still in shock.

‘Say something, Brains,’ I urge.

‘I think my toe is broken,’ he whines. ‘Can I go off the field?’

‘No way,’ I say. ‘One more wicket and we’ve won the game. We need you.’
‘But I can’t run!’
‘That’s okay. If the ball comes to you, hop as fast as you can.’

Before Brains can argue, I head back to my bowling mark.

‘Tony is going for a hat-trick,’ Mr Fielding announces.

I’d forgotten about that. If I get a wicket with this bowl, I’ll have dismissed three batsmen in three balls, which is the equivalent of getting a hole in one in golf. Their number 11 batsman is a bunny, but unfortunately I’m not bowling to him. While the ball was in the air, Kane and Mulligan crossed, which means Kane is on strike.

I feel a pang in my chest as I realise what’s at stake. Here’s my chance to win the game and prove that I’m a better player than Kane. This is the moment I’ve been waiting for my whole life.

I take a deep breath, run up and let the ball go. Because Kane likes to dance down the pitch, I bowl flatter and faster than usual. I also bowl a slider – hoping to fool Kane by making the ball not spin.

Kane must be feeling the pressure because he stays in his crease. The length of the bowl is perfect, putting Kane in two minds about whether to play off the front or back foot. He decides to go forward, but the moment’s hesitation means he can’t get to the pitch of the ball.
Anticipating the leg spinner, Kane plays inside the line as he tries a defensive push. But the ball doesn’t spin.

There’s a short but clear noise as the ball whizzes past the bat and into the wicketkeeper’s gloves. It takes me a second to realise what’s happened. He’s edged it to the wicketkeeper. For real this time.

‘HE’S GONE!’ I scream, punching the air so hard that my arm nearly pops out of its socket.

The whole team sprints towards me and soon I’m wrapped in an 11-man bear hug. We can’t believe that we’ve beaten the A team! The players take turns giving me high fives, until we’re interrupted by Mr Fielding’s booming voice.

‘Stop carrying on like pork chops, boys. He’s not out.’

We all freeze.

‘What?’ I say. ‘He got a clear snick, sir!’

‘It sounded different to all those other nicks,’ says Mr Fielding, ‘so I’m giving him the benefit of the doubt. The ball might have flicked his pad.’

We stand there dumbfounded, until Brains says, ‘He’s correct. According to law 27, the batsman must always receive the benefit of the doubt.’

‘Shut up, Brains.’ I turn to Kane. ‘Why don’t you do a Gilchrist and walk off? You know you hit it.’

Kane’s hero is an old wicketkeeper named Adam Gilchrist, who always gave himself out when he snicked
the ball. Fans loved him for it. Kane wants to be just like him and this is his chance to prove it.

After taking a moment to consider my request, Kane pulls off his batting gloves and starts striding towards the shed. I’m shocked.

Yes! We’ve won for real this time.

Then Kane stops dead, looks at me and grins. ‘Gotcha, Rossy.’ He walks back to his crease.

‘Nooo,’ I groan. ‘This can’t be happening.’ But really, I should have known he was no Gilchrist. He’s acting more like the Antichrist.

‘Tony, hurry up and bowl before I give you a detention for dissent.’ Mr Fielding doesn’t sound happy.

‘Dissent cement,’ I mumble to myself as I walk back to my mark and prepare to bowl. I try to think positively. If I can get Kane out once, I can do it again.

My run-up consists of a skip followed by three quick steps. After the last step, I let the ball go and it comes out well, curling and drifting in the air. It lands a fraction short and wide and Kane rocks onto his back foot, going for a full-blooded cut shot. Because of the leg spin I put on the ball, it’s the type of shot that could easily be edged to slip or caught at point. Except that Kane hits it right in the middle of the bat.

The ball flies across the turf and goes for four.

The A team boys sprint onto the field, throw Kane onto their shoulders, and run around the oval like
lunatics. I look on in disbelief. It’s so unfair. We should be the ones acting like lunatics.

‘Shake hands, boys,’ yells Mr Fielding.

The two teams line up – the A’s with big smiles and the B’s with slumped shoulders.

I squeeze each hand as hard as I can and say, ‘Tight game’ until I get to the last person in line. Kane.

He pumps my hand enthusiastically. ‘Great match, Rossy. This one will go down in the history books, I reckon.’

He’s always a good winner. But I’m not going to let him get away with it. ‘Yeah. You’ll probably get a medal for biggest cheat.’

He puffs up his shoulders. ‘Everything I did was within the rules of cricket. Which is a lot more than you can say.’

I can’t believe he’s accusing me of cheating! ‘I stuck to the spirit of the game,’ I say. ‘That’s more important than the rules.’

Kane raises his eyebrows. ‘I didn’t know the spirit of the game included a piece of wood and a ball in your pockets.’ He grins at me and I can’t help but grin back. Kane and I know each other too well. We’d both do anything to win.

‘You comin’ over to play Xbox this arvo?’ Kane asks. ‘I borrowed Skate 4 from my cousin.’

I hesitate. Just because Kane has made me smile
doesn’t mean that I’ve forgiven him. ‘Yeah. See you there,’ I say.

I’m awesome at skating. Kane might not know it yet, but he’s going down.
Kane’s Favourite Pick-Up Lines

Is your name Summer? Because you’re hot!

Is your name Winter? Because you’re super cool.

Is your name Spring? Because you should spring into my arms.

Is your name Autumn? Because I could fall for you.

Is your name Polly? Because you’re a cracker!

Is your name Cat? Because you’re purrrfect.

Is your name Alexia? Because I’ve never seen a girl who’s sexier.

Is your name Holly? Holly hell, we look good together.

Can I have directions? I need to get to your lips.

Hello, my name’s Kane and I’ve magically appeared. What are your other two wishes?