

Aussie CHOMPS

**There's
Money in
Toilets**



Robert Greenberg

Puffin Books

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Toilets

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藏书章

Every night, Peter and Nick sneak out to dig up really old bottles, which they sell for heaps of money. But with a snooping sister, two kids from school and now a policeman on their tail, will they be able to keep it a secret long enough to find the ultimate prize?

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*For my mother,
June Patricia*

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Chapter 1



'Fire in the hole! Fire in the hole!'

That's all I could hear. My best mate Peter was yelling it out and it made my heart pound in my chest. Get out! Get out! A man could die down here. Why? Because I was in the hole. Right next to Peter. Death was only seconds away.

I leapt up and hit my head on something. That something caused a landslide of dirt and broken glass to pour down on us. Then there was total blackness. It was so dark that I couldn't see my hand in front of my face. I could smell the dust

and dirt thrown up by the landslide. And those words were ringing in my ears. *Fire in the hole! Fire in the hole!* It was bound to hit me full on in the face in a matter of seconds. I screamed.

Peter was crouched down in the hole next to me. His hands hugged his knees as if he was biting his kneecaps. And he was laughing. Cacking himself. He sounded like he was going to choke and die right there and then. So I hit him hard on the head. He laughed some more. Was he insane? Had the pressure got to him? How was I going to save my best friend, let alone save myself?

Okay. I confess. I've lied to you a little bit. You shouldn't always trust what you read. Especially when it's written by someone like me. What my best friend Peter actually said was 'fart in the hole'. He had let one off. Right next to me. Two metres down below the surface of our school oval at three a.m. in the morning. But I wasn't lying to

you about dying down there. Because if you had ever smelt one of Peter's farts, you'd know how bad they were. So bad they had bones in them. But this is not a story about Peter's farts. Although toilets do come into it.

Peter and me had been digging since dark. First, we used our shovels to mark out the size of the hole we were going to dig. About a metre and a half square. We used our shovels to cut out a perfect piece of lawn. Then we lifted it up and carried it a couple of metres away. So then, right on the edge of our school oval, where it slopes down to the road, there was a square patch with no lawn. The soil was exposed. Normal brown soil. But what's below isn't normal.

We started digging. Straight down. Keeping the edges of the hole very square. At absolute right angles to the surface of the oval. We are miners. We are engineers. We know how to keep

a hole square so it won't cave in on us. Push the shovel into the sand. Not too hard. You never know when you're going to make contact. Gently push on the shovel with the heel of your shoe. Ease it into the sand. Right up to the hilt. And then, when your hole is somewhere around shin-height, your shovel makes a different sound. Not the soft sound of metal on sand. But the scrunchy sound of metal on glass. You can hear it. You can feel it right up the handle. You don't need light to get this far. Your ears do it all for you. The moment you hear that sound of glass, and feel the shovel hesitate on something hard just under the surface – well, the way your heart pounds, it's like you've just finished a running race.

‘Pay dirt, Nick!’ Peter yelled out. ‘We’re on the pay dirt!’

We are digging up old bottles. Bottles that are worth a lot of money. Because we are digging into

a rubbish dump that is over a hundred years old. That's what our school oval is built on. An ancient rubbish dump. And that's why I am in a hole two metres deep in our school oval whacking Peter on the head as he laughs so much he farts some more.

Then the small landslide that had started with me jumping up to get some air and hitting my head grows into a bigger landslide which weakens one side of our perfectly engineered hole.

WHOOMPF!

One side of the hole caves in. It is like a wall of bricks falling on me. The full weight of the soil catches me right in the shoulder because I am standing up. Peter is still crouching down in the hole. But he isn't laughing any more. Neither am I. I can't see him. He has disappeared beneath me in the cave-in. Buried alive.

I dig furiously with my bare hands and find his

hand. He had raised it above his head when the hole caved in. I touch his fingers. They wiggle. He's alive. Suddenly, the soil I am standing in up to my chest explodes outwards. It's Peter. He was still in a crouching position when he was buried, and he has pushed upwards with his legs like an Olympic weightlifter. He breaks through to the surface, dust and broken glass flying everywhere. On his head is a hundred-year-old cracked and broken toilet bowl.

It has saved his life. The bowl has protected his head and given him just enough time to take a gulp of air and push upwards to safety.

After more than a century in the ground, everything rots and decomposes. So there is nothing smelly or slimy or foul in the old toilet bowl. Just dust and soil. Like they say in the movies during a funeral scene, 'ashes to ashes, dust to dust'.

There is a bright full moon, and the millions of bits of smashed and broken old glass glisten and sparkle. I shine my torch on something that has fallen out of the toilet bowl. I pick it up. I can't believe it. My grin looks like the smile painted on a clown at the circus. A miniature whisky bottle! Exactly the same as a full-size one, with a horse embossed on it. A hundred years ago, salesmen would give away little miniature bottles of their products as samples. Today, they are sought-after collector's items and Peter and me know exactly where to sell it. The toilet bowl has protected this tiny bottle for a hundred years.

Peter grins at me. He knows what the miniature is worth. We're going to make some good money from tonight's dig.

'There's money in toilets,' Peter says with a huge smile. Then he farts.

Chapter 2



It took hours to dig out the cave-in. Even though the night air was cool, we sweated like we were in a sauna. The dirt stuck to the sweat and caked our foreheads. The muscles in our shoulders burned as we threw shovel-loads of dirt up and over the top of the hole.

Caved-in soil is loose. You can easily pierce it with a pointy-nosed shovel. They're the only ones to use for bottle digging. Soil that hasn't been disturbed for a hundred years is hard packed. You know it when you hit it.

Peter and I are puffing like broken steam engines when we finally hit the hard-packed stuff. Time to start hauling out the bottles. Peter is down in the hole. I'm up top, lying on my stomach. I'm shining a torch into the hole right where Peter is scratching away at the walls. Bits of glass and ceramic bottles poke out. Most of them are broken, smashed a hundred years ago when the dray full of rubbish was emptied here. Some of them don't look like they are broken, then you pull them out and there's only half a bottle. Peter digs around one. We can tell it's the bottom of an old beer bottle. Most hundred-year-old beer bottles are worthless. But some of them have writing on them, and how much money we're going to get depends on what that writing is.

Peter scratches around the bottle. I shine the torch, keeping the light glued to exactly where he's digging. The bottle loosens. Peter wiggles

it. Eases it out of the dirt that's compressed all around it. The bottle comes out whole. Peter spits on it, then rubs it, getting the dirt off, to see if there's any writing. Nothing. He tosses it up and out of the hole.

'Ow, that cleanskin nearly got me,' I shout down at him. I can see Peter grinning. He knows it didn't. And he can see the side of another bottle poking out. When you really get in the zone, its like they're winking at you. Teasing you. *Come and get me.*

Peter starts excavating this one. This one will be whole. This one will be rare. This one will be worth a lot of money. This one will be the ultimate. The cobalt-blue aerated water bottle.

'What if this is it?' Peter asks.

'Is it?' I say, leaning over the edge of the hole and nearly falling in.

'Dunno yet. But let's hope this is a pigeon pair I'm digging out here.'

‘Two cobalt-blue sodas? The rarest bottle in the world?’ I’m on the verge of needing a nappy I’m so excited.

‘Yeah,’ says Peter, ‘we need to dig two because that’s the only way we can settle our feud.’

‘What feud?’

‘The feud we’ll have when I dig up this one.’

If Peter was a girl, I’d call him a tease. Actually, he is a tease. Because he always winds me up when we have a conversation like this.

‘You see, when I dig up this one, single, incredibly rare cobalt-blue soda bottle, how are we going to decide what to do with it? I’ll want to sell it. I reckon I’ll make enough money to buy my first car. But you won’t let me. Because you’ll want to keep it, won’t you?’

‘I dunno. Can you just hurry up and get it out!’

But Peter keeps going. ‘You’ll want to keep it in