

ANNA KEMP

**FANTASTIC
FRANKIE
and the BRAIN-DRAIN
MACHINE**

Illustrated by
Alex T Smith

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CHAPTER ONE

A-BIT-OF-A-DREAMER

Some kids win all the prizes. You know who they are. The ones who are always top of the class, or first over the finishing line, or lifting that massive shiny trophy on sports day. The ones who are always picked to go on the cover of the school magazine, or to shake the mayor's hand, or to look after the class hamster at the weekends – even though you looked after the hamster all week long and it didn't die or turn green or anything! Well, Peggy Parfitt was one of those kids. If there was a prize to be won she just went out there and won



it: science prizes, art prizes, looking-after-the-hamster-prizes, not-picking-your-nose-prizes. OK, I made that last one up. But if there had been a prize for not picking your nose, Peggy would have won it hands down, along with the not-staring-out-of-the-window-prize and the not-putting-a-frog-in-teacher's-pocket-prize and... you get the idea.

Everyone loved Peggy. The teachers fought to have her in their class, her parents were as proud as parrots, even the hamster liked Peggy best – which was *really* unfair. Peggy was everybody's hero. But, unfortunately Peggy went to the zoo one day and got eaten by a tiger. So Peggy won't be the hero of our story. We will have to make do with that kid in the corner with the grubby knees. His name is Frankie Blewitt. Are you listening Frankie? Oh good. Now we can begin.

Frankie Blewitt would have done anything to

make his parents proud. But Mr and Mrs Blewitt were impossible to please. If he got a silver star for his school project, Mr Blewitt wouldn't pat him on the back and say well done. He would just shout, 'Silver? Cheap and nasty! Where's the gold!' Or, if he won the dressing-up race on sports day, Mrs Blewitt wouldn't ruffle his hair with pride. Instead she would say, 'Ugh, Frankie what are you wearing?! Get in the car now!' The truth is, Frankie Blewitt could have walked on water and his parents would have demanded to know why he couldn't tapdance on it as well. So when, one soggy December afternoon, Frankie Blewitt saw the postman delivering his school report he climbed into his wardrobe and shut the door.

As you can imagine, Frankie didn't look forward to his school report one little bit. However good he had been and however hard he had tried, it was never good enough for his mum and dad.

I'm not saying he was a dimwit – he wasn't. But Frankie wasn't very good at writing and counting and taking tests. When he looked at his schoolbooks, all the letters muddled together like alphabet soup, and he began to think about all the things he would rather be doing like flying helicopters or solving crimes or rescuing a dog from a burning building. 'If I was stuck on a desert island and had nothing to eat except sand,' Frankie would think to himself, 'I wouldn't need to know my seven times-table. I would need to know survival skills, like how to make a house out of coconuts. Why don't they teach that at school?' Then a voice far off in the distance would call, 'Frankie Blewitt!' the voice would get closer, 'Frankie Blewitt! What did I just say?' and Frankie would have to reply 'Sorry, Mrs Grimmet, I wasn't really listening'. School-report day was always bad news for Frankie Blewitt. But, as Frankie was

soon to discover, that day in December would turn out to be the worst one ever.



Frankie held his breath as Mr Blewitt thudded to the door to inspect the mail. He closed his eyes, crossed his fingers and hoped that maybe this time would be different. Maybe he would get an 'A' or something and his parents would take him out for pizza and let him eat all the topping without the crust, or maybe...

'FRRRRRRRRANKIE!' The walls of the house shook, 'WHERE ARE YOU?' Frankie squeezed himself into the corner of the wardrobe as Mr Blewitt's footsteps thumped up the stairs. 'I KNOW YOU'RE IN HERE!' Mr Blewitt burst into the room and Frankie started to panic. He had seen a film about some children who escape through a magic wardrobe into a marvellous land and, in his fright, he pounded on the back panel,

hoping it would open up and let him through. But all he got was some splinters in his knuckles and before he could say *Narnia*, the wardrobe doors swung wide open.

Mr Blewitt glared down at Frankie, snorting and flexing his shoulders like an enormous bull. Every muscle in Mr Blewitt's body was pumped up so tightly, Frankie thought that if he pricked his dad with a pin, he might shoot round the room like a balloon, then wrinkle up and drop to the floor. But he wasn't about to try it.

'You've got some EXPLAINING to do young man!' sneered Mr Blewitt. Then, pinching Frankie's left ear between his fingers, he dragged him down to the kitchen where Mrs Blewitt was sobbing extravagantly into a tea towel.

'My child is a delinquent, a no-hoper. And we gave him everything, EVERYTHING!' she howled like she was on TV or something.

'Just read what it says my precious peanut,' soothed Mr Blewitt. Mrs Blewitt wiped her smudgy eyes, and picked up Frankie's school report.

'Frankie,' sniffled Mrs Blewitt, 'has a marvellous imagination, but he is... a bit of a dreamer!'

'A-bit-of-a-dreamer,' repeated Mr Blewitt running his hand over the top of his head, which was completely flat as if he used it to bash down doors. 'Do you think I pay good money to those lousy teachers of yours...' He picked up the white booklet as if it were a snotty hanky, 'Do you think I spend my hard-earned cash, so that you can grow up to be A-BIT-OF-A-DREAMER? By the time I was your age,' he bellowed, 'I was captain of the rugby club, head-boy, prize-winner...'

'Milk monitor,' added Mrs Blewitt proudly.

'Milk monitor, AND I read the dictionary in

my lunch break! Do you think,’ he went on, practically cooking with rage, ‘that I could afford a spanking new house and a brand-new sports car and triple-quilted toilet paper if I spent my time floating off with the fairies like my nitwit son?’

‘But, Dad,’ Frankie protested, ‘I try, it’s just... it’s hard.’

‘Of course it’s hard, when your head is stuffed full of that *marvellous imagination* of yours!’ Mr Blewitt whipped out a red marker pen and drew a large “F” on the cover of Frankie’s report. ‘Can you read it?’ Frankie nodded, ‘Know what it stands for?’ Frankie shook his head, ‘Fail! “F” stands for Fail. It also stands for Frankie. There’s only one way you’re going to learn. No more toys, no more playtime, no more mucking about. You’re eight years old. It’s high time you thought about your future.’

Steaming like a kettle, Mr Blewitt rolled up



his sleeves, grabbed a bin bag and marched upstairs to Frankie's room. Any unlucky toy left lying around was immediately snatched up and thrown away – a pile of picture books, Frankie's sticker collection, his favourite toy castle. 'Time to focus!' bellowed Mr Blewitt, 'Time to get down to business!'

'Dad! Stop!' Frankie cried. But Mr Blewitt had made up his mind and there was absolutely no unmaking it. In went a robot, in went a jigsaw, in went a box of toy soldiers.

'This lot will make a nice little bonfire,' he hooted. Then, to Frankie's horror, he grabbed Albert, his beloved old teddy bear, and marched out the door.

'Albert! Albert!' Frankie yelled, but Mr Blewitt slammed the door behind him and turned the key.

Frankie ran to his bedroom window and

looked out into the garden. It was getting dark, but he could make out the hulking figure of Mr Blewitt stacking all of his things on to a heap of firewood. 'It's not fair! It's not fair!' he whispered as the flames whistled and roared. Frankie pressed his forehead against the glass and watched until his belongings had collapsed into a grey, smouldering heap. 'Albert!' he cried, and an angry tear spilled down his cheek.

Tat-Tat-Tat. There was a knock at the bedroom door. *Toc-Toc-Toc.* Frankie recognised the secret knock. A code known only to Frankie and one other very special person. The lock turned and the door was opened quickly and quietly. His old French nanny, Alphonsine, one finger pressed to her lips in silence, stepped into his room. She flicked her eyes from side to side to check she had not been followed then closed the door behind her.

‘I found Monsieur Al-bear,’ she whispered, producing the teddy bear from her apron pocket. Frankie sighed with relief.

‘You’re the greatest, Alphonsine,’ he said, hugging her tightly, ‘You’re amazing!’