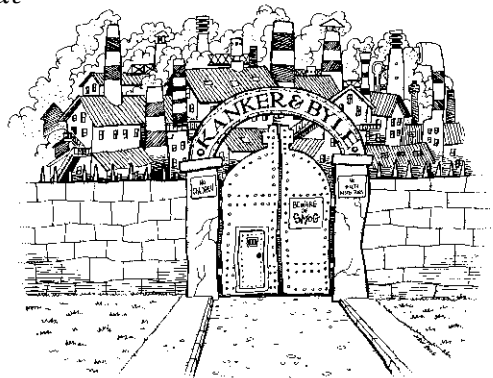


## Going Under The Wall

**T**hey called it ‘The Fart Factory’, it smelled so bad. The Kanker & Byle Chemical Company was a towering heap of buildings and pipes and walkways, just piled on top of each other. Then somebody had stuck some chimneys on the top, like candles on the world’s ugliest birthday cake. Gluey smoke rose out of the chimneys, but then fell over the sides and poured to the ground, too oily and lazy to float up into the sky.

And it was a spooky place too. Apart from the delivery trucks that only showed up late at night, nobody



was ever seen going in, or coming out. Nobody knew anybody who had ever been inside. Some people said the place was haunted, that it was run by ghosts and ghouls.

Or maybe robots.

There was only one piece of grass in the area, and it lay right next to the factory wall. Like most things near the factory, the grass was brown, and slightly greasy, but it was still better than the tarmac of the road for playing football. And you were less likely to get hit by a car. So this was where Gaz Flynn and the other members of the Root Street Gang played soccer.

It started out like a normal Saturday – Gaz, Joey, Damo and Hayley had gone out to the brown to play football. Gaz and Damo were always the captains of their teams, because Joey (Gaz’s baby brother) was only seven, and couldn’t kick a ball to save his life, and Hayley was, well ... *a girl*.

It stopped being a normal Saturday when Joey took careful aim at the goal painted onto the wall of

the factory and kicked the ball as hard as he could, sending it soaring into the air and over the factory wall.

‘You maggot!’ Gaz snapped at his little brother, grabbing him by his mop of thick, black hair. ‘That’s the third time you’ve done that.’

‘It was an accident!’ Joey snapped back, pulling himself free.

‘It’s *always* an accident with you, you little twerp,’ Gaz shouted at him, his brown face going a strange purple colour. ‘This is the last time. You’re going in there and getting that ball!’

The others gaped at him in shock.



‘You can’t send him in there, man,’ Damo gasped, in his best American accent. ‘Not into the *factory*. That’s way too cruel.’

Damo always tried to act like he was some US rap star (even though he was from Root Street like the rest of them) but he’d never even been to America. He wore his baseball cap crooked all the time and made strange shapes with his hands while he talked. He also wished he had African blood in him, like Gaz and Joey, but he was as white as vanilla ice cream and had red hair.

‘I’ve had enough of him,’ Gaz declared. ‘That’s the third ball he’s lost in there.’

He turned to his brother.

‘That’s it. If you ever want to play with us again, you’re going in to get that ball.’

Joey looked as if he was going to cry, but Gaz folded his arms and put on his grimmest expression. They were very alike, Gaz and Joey. With their brown freckled skin, their black hair and the same stubborn look on their faces, you could tell they

were brothers. But Gaz was bigger, and he had an earring, and lines shaved into the sides of his head that made him look even meaner than he was. And he was feeling pretty mean right then. Joey looked out from under his ropey fringe of hair at Hayley, who was normally nicer to him than the two older boys. He gave her his best baby-eyes look, but she just shrugged.

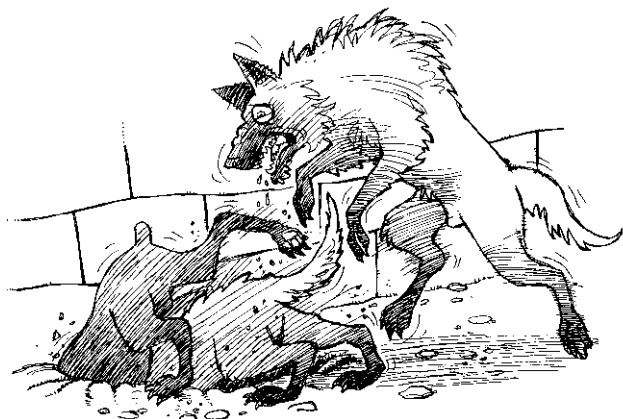
‘It’ll be okay. I can tell,’ she tried to reassure him. ‘I know you’ll find that ball, no problem.’

Hayley thought that she was a bit psychic. Nobody else did.

‘It’s only a factory,’ she added, one hand nervously twisting her curly, sand-coloured locks.

But it wasn’t just any factory. It was Kanker & Byle.

There had once been guard dogs in the yard behind that wall – rottweilers and german shepherds, the meanest you’d ever seen. The only thing was, a dog has a sense of smell that’s a thousand times better than a human’s. There was a hole under



the mossy, grey concrete wall around the back of the factory, where the guard dogs – in a desperate bid to escape the stink – had dug their way out and run howling down the street, never to be seen again.

This was where Joey would have to go in. The Root Street Gang made their way round to the back wall, where they found the hole, hidden by a half-dead clump of thistles.

‘Right, in you go,’ Gaz told him. ‘And don’t mess about. Your mission is to just grab the ball and come back. I’m timing you. And don’t make any noise. And if anybody catches you, don’t tell them about us. Nobody likes a squealer. Now, go on.’

Joey looked around wide-eyed at the other two,

still hoping that one of them would stick up for him. But Gaz was the leader of the gang, and nobody argued with him when his lips went all thin like that. He could get really worked up when things didn't go his way. Joey got down on his knees, trying to push the stalks of the thistles aside, but the prickly plants still snagged on his clothes as he crawled down into the hole. The wall was a metre thick, and he had to pull himself along on his elbows to get up to the other side. Gaz's eyes followed his little brother's



feet as they disappeared, and then they all knelt down to watch Joey go through.

'You'll be right as rain!' Hayley whispered, just before she lost sight of him.

They all sat back on the ground, eyes fixed on the hole, and waited for Joey to return. And they waited. And they waited. And they kept waiting.

Suddenly, the sound of a scream made them jump to their feet. It was Joey – there was no mistaking his voice. He screamed like he was seeing something that was scaring him out of his mind. Then he shrieked again, as if he was fighting for his life. Then he gave another, weaker scream; a horrible, final, despairing cry that was cut off abruptly, leaving an eerie silence. Gaz, Hayley and

Damo stood, clutching one another and trembling.

‘He could be having us on,’ Gaz said. ‘He’s just messing us about.’

‘That sounded real to me,’ Hayley whimpered, close to tears.



‘And his aura is in pain, I can feel it!’

‘I don’t know about his aura, but he’s good at screaming,’ Gaz told her. ‘He’s always screaming.’

‘Yeah, but, like normally you’re the one *making* him scream, man,’ Damo said softly, pointing at Gaz with both hands like a gangsta rapper. ‘He was all on his own in there. And that didn’t sound like he was trying to get you in trouble with your momma. That sounded like ... like ...’ He didn’t want to say what they were all thinking.

Gaz gazed down at the hole in the ground, anger boiling up inside him. Trust Joey to get in trouble. If he went home without his little brother, their mother would have a fit. And Gaz was bound to get the blame. He let out a yell and kicked the wall a few times until he was able to calm down a bit.

‘Right,’ he said, breathing deeply as he stared down at the hole. ‘S’ppose we’d better go and get him then.’