

# The Black Night

The pencil in Archie's hand moved quickly across the page. Archie looked up at the picture on the wall in front of him. Then he looked down again at his sketchbook and tried to copy the picture. He drew quickly. He took another pencil from behind his ear and drew some darker, shorter lines. He stopped, looked at his work and smiled.

Archie loved to draw. And he was good at it. The work at school was hard for him. And he hated games. He always dropped the ball or fell over. But he loved to draw.

Archie put his pencil down. His hand was tired. He really needed to go to the toilet too but he didn't want to stop drawing.

He was at the Tateson Art Gallery, in front of his favourite painting – *The Black Night*. He held up his sketchbook and looked at both pictures – his copy and the real one on the wall.

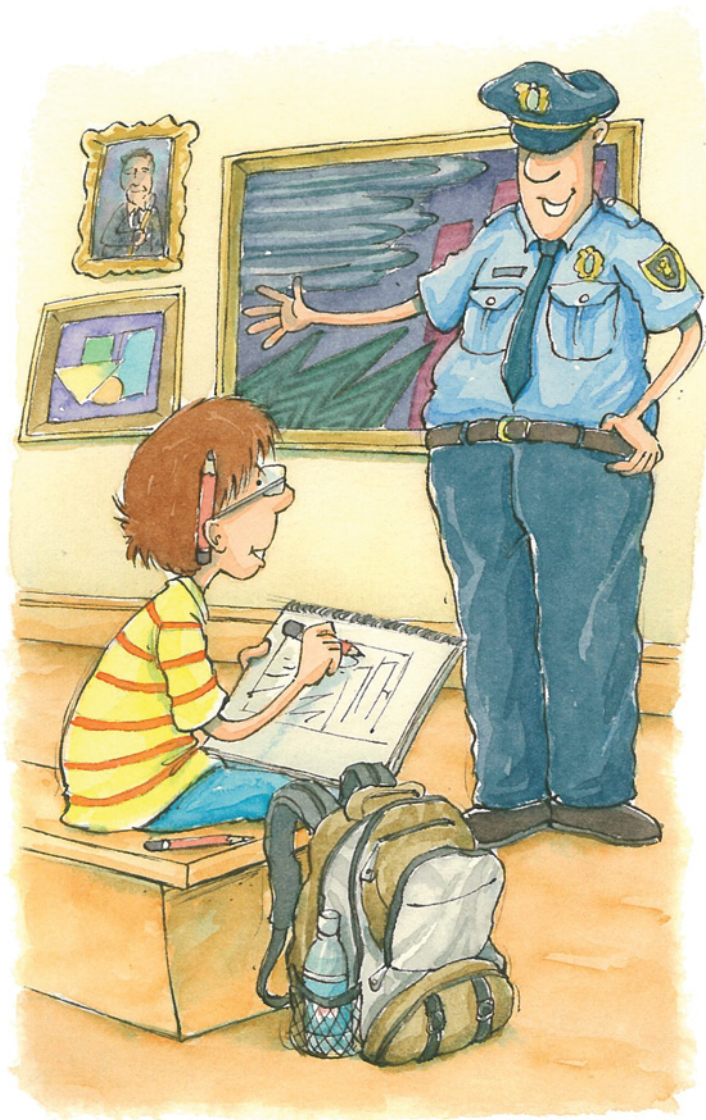
A security guard came into the room. 'The Gallery is closing now, son,' he said. 'It's time for you to go.'

Archie looked up at the guard. Then he looked at the high window at the end of the room. It was dark outside.

'It's raining,' said the guard. 'There's a storm coming.'

'Oh, no,' said Archie. He quickly closed his sketchbook and stood up. 'I have to walk home. I don't want to walk through a storm.'

He grabbed his heavy backpack from the floor and opened it. It was very full and two books fell out. Archie tried to pick them up but he already had three pencils, his sketchbook and the backpack in his hands. He tried to hold



the pencils in his mouth but one of them dropped on the floor.

The security guard tried not to laugh. 'Can I help?' he asked.

'Oh, thanks,' smiled Archie. He gave the guard his sketchbook and took the other books and put them in his backpack.

The security guard opened the sketchbook and looked at Archie's pictures. He looked up at *The Black Night*. Then he looked back at the sketchbook.

'Not bad,' he said. He looked at Archie. 'How old are you?'

'Fourteen.'

The guard looked back at the sketchbook. 'Not bad.'

'Emmett Blake is my favourite artist,' said Archie. He went to the picture on the wall. 'He painted *The Black Night*, you know.'

'Oh, yes?' said the guard. He didn't really know a lot about art.

'Blake is the best,' said Archie. 'He's really good. I want to be a good artist too.'

'You're young,' said the guard. 'You have lots of time to learn.'

'But my mother doesn't have the money for lessons,' said Archie.

'So, you come here and copy the paintings?'

'Yes.'

The security guard looked at *The Black Night*. 'That painting's new,' he said.

'Yes,' said Archie, 'the Gallery only bought it three weeks ago. But it's not a new Blake. He painted it in 1967. He was twenty-eight.'

‘Oh...so he’s not dead then.’

‘Oh, no,’ said Archie. ‘Blake’s not dead. I’ve seen him on television. He’s old now but he paints every day.’

‘Really?’ said the guard and he gave back the sketchbook.

Archie put it in his backpack and followed the guard out of the room. They walked through two other galleries. Then they came to the reception area. There was a large desk there and stairs up to the galleries on the first floor.

Suddenly two security guards ran in through the large front doors of the Gallery. ‘It’s raining,’ one man laughed.

‘A lot!’ said the other guard.

‘Hi, Pete. Hi, Tom,’ said the security guard with Archie.

The other guards smiled and went through a blue door behind the reception desk.

Archie looked out at the rain. ‘Listen, I really need to go to the toilet. Can I go, quickly?’

The security guard looked at him. ‘The toilet?’

‘It’s a twenty minute walk to my house,’ said Archie. ‘Please?’

‘Okay,’ said the guard. ‘But be quick. I’ll tell Pete and Tom.’ He pointed at the door behind the reception desk. ‘They’re the night guards. I have to go now and the doors will lock behind me. But Pete or Tom will open them for you.’

‘Thanks.’

Archie ran quickly to the toilets. They were at the end of a long, narrow gallery at the back of the building. He went into a cubicle and closed the door.

He quickly finished on the toilet, grabbed his backpack and tried to open the door. But he couldn’t. He turned the handle but the door didn’t open. He pushed the door. He

pulled it. He pushed and pulled and pushed and pulled, but it didn't open. It was stuck. He looked at the bottom of the door. It was only fifteen or twenty centimetres from the floor. He couldn't get out under it. So *he* was stuck too.

'Um...hello?' he called. His voice was very loud in the small room. 'Hello? Can you hear me? I'm stuck in the toilet. The door won't open. I can't get out. Hello?...Night guards, can you hear me?...Hello?'

There was no answer.

Archie called again. 'Hello? I'm in here...I can't get out. Hello?'

Again, there was no answer.

Archie tried the door again but it didn't open. He was stuck in there.

And suddenly all the lights went out.