



GOTCHA

A Disaster Story

By Wilson McCaskill

From his earliest days at school, Jack has been manipulated and manoeuvred by rewards, both physical and verbal. If he sat straight enough he would get picked to be a line leader. If he was one of the first on the mat he would get a sticker and if he sat still and listened to the story he would get another one.

He was learning that if he pleased his teacher and made her feel good, there was a strong chance she would reciprocate and make him feel special. He liked feeling special, after all what's not to like about it? And he especially liked it when he was used as an example for others to copy. "I like the way, Jack is..." uttered by Miss Guided never failed to make him feel superior and he took great pleasure in scolding those children who were not doing what would make *his* teacher happy.

Jack especially liked his school's *Gotcha* rewards. He loved been caught doing the right thing and especially loved it when a teacher he barely knew, would come up to him and say, "Gotcha!" - and give him a sticker. His Mum thought Gotchas were a really cute idea as did everyone who was proudly shown them.

Jack thought it was cool that his Mum gave him her own *Gotcha Surprise* for getting more than 3 Gotchas in a day and Dad gave him a *Super Gotcha Surprise* on Saturdays if he got more than 25 Gotchas in a week. So far this term he hadn't missed a Gotcha Surprise or a Super Surprise once! They both wanted him to be of more help at home more but they were still really proud Jack's teacher and the other teachers in the school were impressed with him and that they liked him so much.

He wanted to be the boy with the most stickers. He wanted to be the most special boy. So, he dedicated himself to doing as many things as he could to get Gotchas from his teacher and from other teachers at recess and lunch and sport and - whenever he could.

It wasn't easy, because those things had to happen where a teacher would notice them and that was where other children were, which meant teachers noticed those children too.

Jack was caught in a dilemma. He loved getting stickers and he loved people thinking he was special but he hated not being the most special.



He wasn't stupid! He knew that if everyone was getting Gotchas, then everyone was special and that just made him like everyone else. He didn't like being like everyone else. Special wasn't good enough. He had to be more than special. He wanted a smile from his teacher that was just for him. He wanted time from her that she wouldn't give anyone else. He wanted everyone to know that Miss Guided liked him more than the others – that he was more loveable – more important.

Jack was happy to please, if that got him stickers; but try as hard as he could to do the right thing, he just couldn't get to the top of the Gotcha pile. He had even resorted to going up to teachers and telling them of the good things that he had done, that they hadn't seen him doing, in the attempt to get more stickers. That worked to a degree but every time he went to a teacher to tell them what he had done, he had to join a queue of other children doing the same thing and even worse, some of them got more Gotchas than he did!

It was a terrible dilemma and it called for desperate measures.

During one lunch break, Jack tried a new strategy. After eating his lunch, he did not return the wrapper from his fruit bar to his lunch box but kept it in his pocket instead. He quietly slipped away from his friends and waited near a bin that stood in a relatively quiet corner of the play yard.

Earlier observations had shown him that whomever was on yard duty would, at some point during the break, pass by the bin to make sure all was neat and tidy. It was no different today and when he saw the yard duty teacher approaching he slipped the wrapper out of his pocket, let it drop to the ground, moved slightly away and waited. Then, just as the teacher looked in the direction of the bin, Jack ran up to the wrapper, picked it up and put in the bin.

The strategy nearly worked. However, just as the teacher was about to give Jack his Gotcha, Eloise ran over to expose Jack's deception. Eloise was Jack's main rival and the leading *Gotcha Girl* in his class.

She accused Jack of cheating and told the teacher that she had seen Jack doing that sort of thing before. He hadn't, but he couldn't prove it. It was his word against that of the most special girl in the class. He didn't stick a chance.

Eloise's friends ran over and heard Jack saying that the wrapper wasn't his and that Eloise was lying. They quickly rose to Eloise's defence and said that, like her, they had seen him cheat to get Gotchas heaps of times.

Jack broke down sobbing and in a flash of embarrassed rage pulled all the Gotchas he had amassed that day from his shirt, threw them on the ground, shouted, "I hate Gotchas," and ran headlong to the boy's toilet.



The yard teacher didn't know what to do.

“Serves him right for cheating,” said Eloise, and her friends agreed. The teacher thanked the girls for telling her and urged them to go and play. Eloise and her friends didn't move. “Off you go, please,” said the teacher. “But don't I get a Gotcha for catching Jack cheating and telling you?” inquired Eloise. “And what about us?” said her friends.

Trapped in the absurdity of the moment, the yard teacher had no option but to give each of the girls a Gotcha for which each of them said “Thank you” in their sweetest voices, in the hope they would each get another Gotcha for using their best manners.

Meanwhile, Jack had locked himself in a toilet cubicle and felt his life was going down the gurgler. He flushed the cistern to cover the sound of his crying. The bowl filled rapidly and water poured over the sides and onto his shoes. Someone had jammed a toilet roll in the bowl.

Instantly, Derek's face flashed into Jack's mind. It must have been him.

Derek was well and truly at the bottom of the Gotcha pile. He didn't care about them, wasn't impressed by people who got them and enjoyed sticking the few Gotchas he did get, in inappropriate and inaccessible places. For a second Jack was really mad at Derek but then a thought struck him. Even though Derek was at the bottom of the Gotcha pile he was the most talked about boy in school – and lots of people thought he was really cool.

Jack couldn't help but wonder that for all the trouble that Derek got into, it wasn't the teachers catching Derek, it was Derek catching out the teachers.

A head popped over the top of the cubicle wall. It was Derek.

“Gotcha!” he said.