

Toonhead: First Chapter

I suppose you'll want to know my name. Okay, it's Pablo. And before you ask, no I'm not Spanish,

not even a teensy bit. My parents are as English as a wet weekend. They called me Pablo because they're *artists*, you see, so as far as they're concerned, Pablo is just the wickedest name ever, because of Picasso, right? You know, the dead famous, supposedly biggest mega-genius artist ever in the entire

history of the universe? I know this all off by heart, (you can guess why): he painted every day of his life for ninety-two years, never stopped painting apparently even in his sleep, changed the way everybody in the whole world looked at things for ever after, and invented the theory of relativity. No, I made that last bit up. Oh, and all the women he ever met fell madly in love with him and he got to be really horrible to them, 'cause they wouldn't leave him alone, right, and they'd be banging on the door of his studio, whole crowds of them going, 'Pablo, Pablo, we love you, we love you', and all that sicky stuff. So he'd raise one hand and click his fingers, right, not saying a word, cool as a cucumber, and these fierce dogs would come out, whoosh, and bite their bums and chase them all away. Here I go again, making stuff up. I do that.

Anyway, he's the one they named me after. Boy, am I a disappointment to them! Even their clothes look disappointed. Because I *am* no Pablo Picasso, and I won't ever be. Ha! Sounds ridiculous, right?

I'm *twelve*, for Pete's sake! But it's true: they want me to be brilliant at art, totally in love with art, making art, talking art, art, art, art all the time just like they do, and I don't.

I just don't.

I remember back when I was four and for a minute there, they thought they had me sorted out. Because they figured, well hey, maybe Pablo's just suffering from Creative Block. That's it! Pablo's a brilliant artist really, it's just that he's stuck for ideas at the moment!

So there I was, sitting up in bed one morning, and Mum said, 'Somewhere at the base of your brain, Pablo dear, there's a juice box that's blocked.'

And Dad, getting into the metaphor, doing the 'let's explain difficult stuff to our four-year-old'

thing, said, 'Yes, son. That little foil bit that covers the hole where the straw goes? Well that bit is

probably still closed, and nothing's getting through the straw.' The Genius Juice was collecting in the box and had nowhere to go. Hey Presto!

So what did Mum do? Next day, she whizzed me off to see some friend of Aunt Dot's; Katinka Tinkar, Holistic Juice Box Un-Blocker. Me, I just screamed 'til I was blue in

the face, I wasn't having any of it. Well, wouldn't you? I mean, they might have been a bit more careful with their metaphors. I was convinced that Katinka Tinkar would be coming at me with a giant pointy-ended straw, trying to make holes in me. 'Specially as she described herself as a *holistic* healer. I mean, come on! Adults are so dumb sometimes.

Eventually I calmed down. Actually, it was easy to calm down in Katinka Tinkar's flat, as it was all

lush and green, just crammed with plants it was. So first thing I think is, wicked! Tarzan! Now here I've got to explain something. If my Mum and Dad had their way, I wouldn't ever have heard of Tarzan. It's not the sort of thing that comes up in our house. You wouldn't have Mum and Dad going, 'Shall we take a two-hour tube and train ride to Croydon to hear someone we slightly know give a talk on colour theory?' - 'No, I hear there's a fab movie about this kid that grows up in the jungle with the apes, and it's got loads of adventure and Pablo'll think it's just fantastic!' Not in a million years! That's just not the sort of thing we *do* ; it's what other families do. Oh, I get to see films sometimes. I saw one about Beauty and the Beast once, but it was in black and white and in French with not very good special effects. It gave me nightmares.

Anyway, Tarzan. The way I knew about Tarzan, I should say, was from my mates in nursery school (obviously, we don't have a telly in our house). Eventually the Tarzan game came to an end and instead I had to lie down while Katinka Tinkar pressed bits of me and wiggled my toes. Sounds daft, but I seem to remember being dead calm so I must not have minded it.

So after I'd been to her a few times Mum, Dad and Dot decided they should, you know, check the Results. They brought me to my room, where there were paper, paint, clay, the works. All laid on like I was Lord of the Manor arriving for dinner. I obediently sat down, and stared blankly at all the stuff. I looked up at Dad. 'Help me!' said a tiny voice inside.

He didn't hear. 'Just do anything you like, Pablo,' he said, spreading his hands. 'Anything at all!'

I looked at Mum. She just beamed at me eagerly.

Aunt Dot grinned her brown-toothed grin. 'Let your mind fly free as a bird in the sky,' she said, or some such twaddle.

Then the door was closed and I was alone. I stared at the great expanse of plain white cartridge paper, the grey lump of clay, the brushes and pots.

'Help me!'

Well, I did use my imagination, but they weren't very pleased. That's putting it mildly. I thought I'd done pretty well, actually, but apparently they didn't see it that way. I mean, if you were being Tarzan, and there's no jungle, well, you'd *imagine* it, wouldn't you? So if there was like, something dangling from the ceiling, then that's

just fantastic, because you could pretend it was one of those ropey things that he uses to swing from one tree to another. I had this mobile, you see - no, not a phone, but one of those dangly-jangly things. It hung pretty low, and well, after I'd made a snake with the clay I got a bit bored - they did leave me alone in there for ages - so I got into my Tarzan game.

Crash! Down I came, the mobile as well, and half the ceiling with it.

Mum rushed in. 'Pablo dear, what happened?'

Then Dad and Aunt Dot. Not worried about me like Mum, not checking me for broken bones or

anything. Aunt Dot barely glanced at me, and instead was straight away searching the room for evidence of creative genius; all she and Dad seemed to care about was a) why hadn't I been making Art, and b) how dare I destroy Art, because that's what the mobile was, Art. That's right, you understood correctly, I was four years old and I had a valuable piece of Art in my bedroom. Is that weird, or what?! Not any of those wicked things other boys had - you know, Action Men and fire trucks that go *WEEYOWEEYOW!* - no they'd have no truck with that, ha ha. Just a few wooden things, some serious books I couldn't read, and a mobile that was a real work of art. And here I was, their worst nightmare: I didn't just dislike Art, I must have hated It, because I killed It.

They finally had to admit that the Genius Juice must have skipped a generation.

My juice box was empty.