



What's the opposite of a bucket list? You know what I mean by a bucket list, right? It's a list of all the things you want to do before you die. Which when you're only a twelve-year-old boy could be quite a long list actually, as you haven't really done ANYTHING yet. But, to tell you the truth, I don't want to do anything much. It's easier and less scary to stay at home in my room on my computer.

So what would you call the opposite of a bucket list? A list of all the things you want to make sure you NEVER. EVER. DO. EVER. All the awful, terrible, horrible, embarrassing, dangerous, scary, dumb things you need to avoid. Like, I know I never want to do anything where you might have to use a parachute. I mean, why would anyone want to throw themselves out of an aeroplane? That's just stupid. And hot-air ballooning. How is it possible to make something that is

really boring and really dangerous at the same time? OK. Let's be clear. I want to avoid going up in the air in the first place. Actually, it's not so much the going up that worries me – it's the coming down.

What else? Anything where I might come across dangerous animals is right out. Obviously. Swimming with whales? No. Going anywhere near sharks? No. Canoeing up the Amazon? No. The Amazon rainforest is full of snakes, spiders, piranhas, crocodiles and those fish that swim up your willy if you have a pee in the water.

Backpacking in Australia?

NO. NO. NO. NO. NO.

Did you know that twenty-one of the world's twenty-five most poisonous snakes live there? And they have crocodiles. And spiders the size of footballs. And killer jellyfish. Plus they have a massive hole in the ozone layer so you basically shrivel up into a crisp and drop dead if you go outside. Australia is very far away and, as far as I'm concerned, it can stay there.

What else?

I definitely want to steer clear of octopuses.

And . . .

Well, maybe I should just show you my list.

Except I don't know what to call it.

Not a bucket list . . . The only words I can think of to call my list are a bit rude, but . . .

Oh yes. I know – duck it!

A DUCK-IT list.

So here's my duck-it list. Ten things to avoid at all costs (there's a law that says lists should always be ten things). Actually, I think most of the things on my duck-it list are things other people would probably put on their bucket lists, but I really hope I never have to do any of the following . . .

STAN'S DUCK-IT LIST

1. Bungee jumping.
2. Anything where you have to use a parachute.
3. Dancing.
4. Dancing in public.
5. Going on Strictly Come Dancing.
6. White-water rafting.
7. Fire-eating.
8. Alligator wrestling.
9. Kissing.
10. Going on holiday with people you don't know.
11. Octopuses.

All right, sorry – it's not ten things. I had to add number eleven in at the last minute. I panicked.

I panic a lot.

I'm panicking right now.

Why?

Because number ten is happening . . .

I'm going on holiday with people I don't know.

This shouldn't be happening to me. It's an absolute
DISASTER.

I keep thinking about how on earth I got here. 'Here' being the Shopping Maze Of Doom at Stansted Airport, completely lost at four o'clock in the morning. I wonder what I could have done differently – how I could have stopped this happening.

All right. Calm down, Stan.

Maybe I'm being overdramatic. I'm not actually going on holiday with complete strangers. I'm going on holiday with Felix, who is my best friend.

OK, to tell you the truth, Felix is not *exactly* my best friend. I don't really have a *best* friend. I have five friends and Felix is one of them. They're all about equal on the friend scale, I suppose. Sometimes I like one of them better than the others. You know how it is. Every now and then I'll have a fight with one of them and then we aren't friends for a bit, but it doesn't usually last long and mostly we forget what the fight was about. Right now, though, I'm having to pretend that Felix is my best friend, because his mum and dad are taking me on holiday to Italy for two weeks.

So, when I get there, if anyone asks me who I am, I've got to say, 'I'm Felix's best friend, Stan.'

Which will be a bit of a lie. To be honest, if I was forced to rank my friends in order, Felix would probably be number five. I don't mean to be rude, but we're not actually that friendly. And if you'd asked Felix before if I was his best friend, he would have said no.

Actually, what he'd have said would have been more like: 'What? Are you mad? Stan? Ha! No way.'

But you see what happened is that Felix was meant to be going on holiday with his *real* best friend, Archie (who is maybe my number four). Archie is really good at football and everybody wants to be his friend, even the girls, but Felix had to make a last-minute change of plan because three weeks ago Archie broke his leg playing football.

Well, he wasn't playing at the time. He was celebrating scoring a goal and tried to do a sort of somersault. He landed funny and there was a loud snapping noise. Like someone shooting a gun in a film. It was really horrible. His bone was sticking out of his leg. I felt sick looking at it. Although it was a little bit cool at the same time. I think Archie might not be able to play football for a while. I wonder if this will make a difference to how many people want to be his friend.

Anyway, Archie's still on crutches, so I've taken his place on the holiday. And I know I wasn't even Felix's

first choice of substitute. He asked a few other boys, but they were already going on holiday with their own families.

I didn't have any plans to go on holiday with my family. We don't really go on holiday in the summer because Dad says it's too expensive and crowded everywhere.

'The travel companies really rip you off,' he says every summer as he fills up the plastic paddling pool in our tiny garden with a hose. 'They totally put their prices up in the school holidays. It's criminal. All the airlines and hotels and holiday firms charge twice what they usually do.'

So we normally have our family holiday in the Easter break. We go to Wales. In case you don't know what Wales is, it's a country next to England where it rains all the time. We go to the same cottage every year. It belongs to my Uncle David. I think Uncle David rents it out in the summer, which is why we go at Easter. The cottage smells mouldy, and it never gets warm. Last time we went I recklessly decided to go for a swim in the sea and lost all feeling in my legs.

So this is all a bit different for me. Before today I'd only ever been on an aeroplane once before, when I was ten. Mum's dad, my grandad Johnny, died and left her some money in his will. She wanted to give us all a treat. We went to Spain for a week and Dad got the flu.

All he said about the holiday was: ‘Never again.’ Even though Mum really enjoyed it. Me too. You could get sausage and chips, it was warm, and you didn’t risk acting out the last scene from *Titanic* every time you went in the sea.

Whenever we go to Wales and Dad’s not around, Mum looks out at the rain and says, ‘Never again,’ and we both laugh. It’s ‘our little joke’ (that’s what Mum calls it). To tell you the truth, I don’t find the joke that funny any more.

So, as I say, we usually spend summer at home in London. But this summer is different because when Felix asked me if I wanted to go on holiday with him I panicked and said yes.

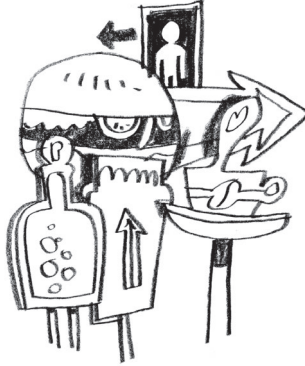
Oh god. What have I done? All I needed to do was to say no and none of this would have happened. I wouldn’t be lost in Stansted Airport in the middle of the night.

Maybe you don’t just need to avoid going on holiday with people you don’t know – maybe you need to avoid going on holiday altogether.

I definitely have to make a new list – REASONS NOT TO GO ON HOLIDAY.

Because this is hell.

30 REASONS NOT TO GO ON HOLIDAY



Reason 1: Airports

I know I said that all lists should only be ten things, but I can tell that this one is going to be much, much longer. I reckon we'll end up with at least thirty, so I'm calling it '30 Reasons Not To Go On Holiday'.

So, anyway, number one: airports.

What's wrong with airports? I'll tell you what's wrong. Airports cause you to go mad. You want proof? Well, right now, I'm surrounded by people who are shopping, even though it's half past four in the morning. You can't tell it's half past four because there are no windows and the lights are very bright, which is making me feel really weird. The bright lights have obviously

sent everyone else round the bend too, otherwise why would they be shopping? It's like some twisted scientific experiment to find out what would happen to people if you made it day all the time. (I can tell you what would happen – they'd go mad and start shopping.)

I mean, you don't go to an airport to do your shopping, do you? You go to an airport to catch a plane. But the people here have a dangerous, deranged look in their eyes and they're buying everything they can get their hands on.

I don't know what to do. I'm wandering around, totally lost, in a sort of maze made from shops. Actually, I can't tell if it's lots of smaller shops or one big one. I don't know where one part ends and another begins. And you can't escape. Everywhere you turn there are bottles of champagne, headphones, sunglasses, foreign plugs and perfume that's been made by pop stars. There's even a gleaming sports car. And why is everything so BIG? There are massive bottles of gin, huge packets of M&M's, giant Toblerones.

And tills. Hundreds of tills.

I'm beginning to crack. I feel an uncontrollable urge to buy something.

ANYTHING . . .

But I mustn't. Mum would kill me.

She gave me some money last night – a twenty-pound note and two twenty-euro notes – but there's a catch . . .

MUM: Here's some money. But whatever you do, don't spend it.

ME: What's the use of money if I can't spend it?

MUM: It's for emergencies.

ME: How will I know if it's an emergency?

MUM: If you're not sure whether it's an emergency, then it's not one. Just don't spend any of it unless it's life or death.

ME: So if I'm dying I'm allowed to spend it. Won't that be a bit late?

MUM: Just don't spend it!

Mum's always worried about me, but she's extra worried about this holiday because she's not going with me. And I'm extra worried because . . . well, because Mum's not with me.

This would be easier and less stressful if I was with Felix, but I'm not travelling with him because he's already out in Italy. His mum and dad own a house there and they're staying in it for most of the summer.

Dad shook his head and let out a long sigh when he heard how long Felix was going to be away.

'That's not right,' he said. 'Not right at all. Everyone knows a summer holiday is two weeks. You go on a Saturday and you come back on a Saturday fourteen days later. A fortnight. Anything else is just showing off. It's not right.'

So, anyway, that's why I'm travelling with Felix's Uncle Simon and Auntie Emma.

I've never met either of them before this morning, and we've already become separated.

Simon and Emma stopped to buy some duty free (which is another name for alcohol), and Simon said I should go on ahead and meet them outside Burger King. I can't see Burger King anywhere and I'm worried I'll never be able to find my way out of the shopping labyrinth. There are even some people sleeping on benches – they look like they've given up and decided to live here.

Maybe I'll end up sleeping on a bench. Maybe I'll end up living here and become an old man with a big beard.

At times like this I wish I wasn't a kid. I can't wait to be grown up and not have to worry about everything all the time. Life is so much easier for grown-ups. They can just walk about the place like they know where they're going, and . . . I don't know . . . buy things and understand the world.

Which way do I go? This would be a whole lot easier if I wasn't so tired.

I had to wake up at three o'clock, which was a bit freaky and sort of a bit exciting at the same time. Mum was already up. In fact, I don't think she'd gone to bed. And I think she'd been crying. I've never really been

away from her before. She hugged me for slightly too long when Simon and Emma arrived to pick me up.

‘Don’t worry, Mrs P,’ Simon said as I grabbed my backpack. ‘He’ll be in safe hands. I’ve only ever lost three children!’

This was a joke. Simon laughed. Mum didn’t laugh. I just smiled. I was too tired to laugh. Mum gave Emma my passport and a special note that says she’s allowed to take me abroad as I’m not allowed to travel on my own.

The night got even freakier as Simon drove us through London at half past three in the morning. There were all different people out on the streets and it was like I was seeing a secret world. After a while we left London and got on to the motorway. At one point Simon went to sleep and we nearly crashed. Emma didn’t notice – she was listening to her audiobook, and Simon pretended nothing had happened. He made me talk to him after that, though, which was awkward because I’d never met him before and I’m not used to talking to grown-ups, apart from Mum (and sometimes Dad). In the end all I could think of was to tell him the plot of *Guardians of the Galaxy 2*, which I saw the other day.

I don’t think he was very interested, but at least he didn’t fall asleep again and kill us all.

Wait a minute! There’s Burger King! I’ve made it. I’m free! I’ve somehow come out of the maze and into a busy

area that's surrounded by fast-food places and pubs and bars. Loads of people are eating. There's a queue at Burger King. At this time of the night! Are you even allowed burgers for breakfast? I don't know. But the strangest thing is that the pubs and bars are packed as well. People are drinking wine and champagne and cocktails and pints of beer. I tried beer once and didn't really like the taste and can't imagine why anyone would want to drink it at half past four in the morning.

And the thing that really makes this airport completely insane is that a lot of people are dressed for the beach, in shorts and vests, straw hats and flip-flops, as if they're already on holiday.

This airport has definitely sent everyone bonkers. Like we've all entered some kind of alternative universe where everything's back to front.

And then I see Simon and Emma and I relax a bit.

I won't be fully relaxed until I'm on the plane, though.

Actually, I won't be fully relaxed until we've landed.

Actually, to tell you the truth, I won't be fully relaxed until we get to the house in Italy.

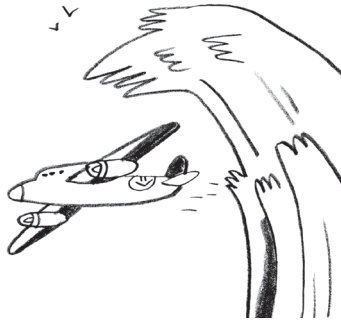
No.

You know what, I don't think I'll be fully relaxed until I'm back in my own room.

At home.

With Mum and Dad.

30 REASONS NOT TO GO ON HOLIDAY



Reason 2: Flying

So I made it on to the plane and I'm sitting by myself. Well, not exactly by myself. What I mean is, I'm not sitting with Simon and Emma. I'm in the middle of a row between two strangers. An old man with a big belly and a young man with headphones.

I didn't like flying when we went to Spain and I don't like flying now. At least last time I had Mum sitting next to me and she held my hand when we took off (which was scary). And when we landed (which was

very scary). And all the bits in between (which were slightly less scary, but still scary).

Flying makes me think of parachutes. And I know they don't have them on passenger planes. I looked it up. I can just imagine the captain coming on over the radio . . .

'Hello, ladies and gentlemen, this is your captain speaking. We are currently flying at 30,000 feet, sorry, 25,000 feet, sorry, 15,000 feet. Sorry . . . we seem to be crashing. There are no parachutes on board, so make yourselves comfortable and the cabin crew will come round with some soft cushions . . .'

I don't think it would go down very well if I asked the old man with the big belly or the young man with headphones to hold my hand. And, to tell you the truth, I don't really want to. The old man looks a bit sweaty, and the young man's hands are really hairy and look like giant spiders.

To try to distract myself from thoughts of doom, I fish out the envelope Mum gave me with the money in. She told me she'd put a note in it. I get it out and look at it.

It's an emergency list – ten holiday dangers and how to survive them – with helpful advice underneath.

I guess this might not distract me as much as I hoped. These are the different headings:

MUM'S HOLIDAY EMERGENCY LIST

1. *What to do if attacked by a jellyfish.*
2. *What to do if attacked by a rabid dog.*
3. *What to do if attacked by a shark.*
4. *What to do if attacked by a giant squid.*
5. *What to do if attacked by seagulls.*
6. *What to do if left behind by the rest of the group somewhere, e.g. at the beach.*
7. *What to do if you get food stuck in your throat.*
8. *What to do if you get food poisoning.*
9. *What to do if you're abducted by kidnappers.*
10. *How to survive a tsunami.*

I'm not sure how helpful this list is. I know I said I'm scared of jellyfish, but, let's face it, they don't really attack, do they? They just sort of drift about like plastic bags. If you see one on the beach, it's easy to walk round it. You don't need to call in a SWAT team or a bombing raid or anything. And Mum's advice is really complicated and confusing. It's all about 'nematocysts causing venom cells to fire' and 'dispersal of toxins' and 'diphenhydramine cream'. So that's not going to be a lot of use to me.

Her advice on what to do if attacked by a shark is much less complicated . . .

Punch it in the eye.

Yeah, right, like I'm ever going to punch a shark in the eye. I mean, what are the chances of even seeing one? Mum tried to convince me that recently a great white had been spotted in the Mediterranean. I said it was probably a shark tourist that had got lost trying to find Australia, where it was going to hang out with all the other deadly animals.

And giant squid? I don't know if anyone has ever been attacked by a giant squid outside of a pirate film.

OK, so I might get attacked by seagulls. That happens all the time. There are videos on YouTube called things like 'When Seagulls Attack!' but it's not really in the same league as being attacked by a shark. Mum's seagull survival advice is simple: *Move away to somewhere with a roof.* But I think I might just try punching it in the eye. Especially if it's stealing my ice cream.

I'm really not sure about a lot of Mum's advice, to tell you the truth. For choking on food, she advises doing the Heinrich Himmler manoeuvre, but I don't think she's got that quite right.

For being abducted by kidnappers, she says to keep calm and try to befriend them – show them pictures of my family and my dog. Apparently I should talk about my dog and how it will miss me if I never come home. She read somewhere that all kidnappers are sentimental about dogs. The problem is, we don't have a dog so she's put a photograph in the envelope of someone

else's dog that she said I need to carry on my person at all times.

I take it out and look at it, then check the money. I wonder if being kidnapped counts as a full emergency? If so, I'm not sure that twenty pounds and forty euros will be enough to pay my ransom. Although, as I'm only twelve and my mum and dad aren't rich, the kidnappers might think that was a good deal.

As for how to survive a tsunami . . . I told Mum I didn't think they had tsunamis in the Mediterranean, but then I said, 'They *do* have earthquakes, though.'

'Oh god,' she said. 'I hadn't thought about that. What do you do if you're in an earthquake?'

'Pray? Scream? Instagram it?'

'You're not helping, Stan. I'll look into it and I'll call you on holiday to let you know what to do.'

I can hardly wait.

You might think that me making a joke with Mum means I'm not worried about things. And all my talk about walking round jellyfish and punching seagulls in the eye makes me look brave and adventurous and heroic. I'm not. It's just my way of not letting Mum's anxiety get to me, because everything she does to try to stop me from worrying just makes me worry more. And I've got enough of my own things to worry about. Proper dangers. Things that might actually happen.

My own emergency list would look more like this:

STAN'S HOLIDAY EMERGENCY LIST

1. What to do if offered weird food.
2. What to do if the toilets are weird.
3. What to do if someone speaks to me in Italian.
4. What to do if I accidentally call Felix's mum 'Mum' in front of everybody.
5. What to do if I dive in the pool and my trunks come off.
6. What to do if I laugh when I'm drinking milk, and milk comes out of my nose.
7. What to do if they have that weird foreign milk that tastes different. And then it comes out of my nose.
8. What to do when I can't reach round my back to put sun cream on when Mum won't be there to do it for me.
9. What to do if we're all watching a DVD and an embarrassing bit comes on where people don't have any clothes on or something.
10. What to do if the plane starts to crash and I shout out something embarrassing.

You're probably thinking I make a lot of lists, but it's something Mum taught me to do. She says that when the world gets on top of you and you're struggling to cope (which is most of the time for me), you just need to put all your problems in a list and it makes them less scary.

It's not working, though. All I can think about is everything that can go wrong and now I'm having a mild panic attack, made worse by the fact that I'm miles up in the air sitting between two strangers inside a thin metal tube without a parachute.

If I was sitting with Felix's Uncle Simon and Auntie Emma I could hold Emma's hand, as long as she promised not to tell anyone. But we've been split up and we're nowhere near each other. The plane is Ryanair and apparently they charge you extra to sit together. It must be quite complicated for Ryanair to work out how to make sure nobody is sitting with a friend or a member of their own family.

Actually, they've probably got an algorithm. Dad says everything is run by algorithms nowadays: 'The robots are taking over, Stan.'

I don't really know what an algorithm is. I'm not sure Dad does either.

If I ever said anything to Dad about algorithms and how robots are taking over, he'd give me a sarcastic look and say, 'Ooh, profound . . .'

It's what he says when anybody says anything that sounds a bit clever. Like if somebody on the TV says something serious, or if me or Mum say something that sounds like we've thought about it for more than about two seconds, or when he's reading things on food packaging . . .

PROFESSOR BRIAN COX (ON THE TV): When we look out into space, we are looking into our own origins, because we are truly children of the stars . . .

DAD: Ooh, profound.

MUM: I sometimes think I've spent half my life doing laundry. I could measure out my days in ironed sheets.

DAD: Ooh, profound.

ME: You know, like, when you're feeling a bit moody and it starts to rain and you think the weather's copying you and sort of crying? They said at school that's called a pathetic fallacy . . .

DAD: Ooh, profound.

JUICE CARTON: Pure natural plant energy from three different types of super fruit and electrolysed smart water to make your life zing!

DAD: Ooh, profound.

You can't ever say anything serious around Dad. He doesn't like anything fancy, anything that sounds like poetry or philosophy, or in any way clever. That's his worst insult. 'Oh dear, Stan, are you trying to be *clever*?' You can get your own back on him, though, because he can talk for hours about football. Or 'the Beautiful Game' as he calls it . . .

DAD: You need depth, Stan. Strength in midfield is all well and good, but you need the support of a solid back line balanced with power and speed up front. Without balance you can't have coherence.

ME: Ooh, profound.

The thing is, I've picked up the habit. I often have to stop myself blurting it out in class, especially when we're doing English. Like Shakespeare or something.

HAMLET: To be, or not to be? That is the question.

ME: Ooh, profound.

Thinking about school makes me feel a little bit homesick, even though I don't really like school that much and I've only been away from home for, like, about five hours. But I just know everything's going to go wrong.

You see when I told Mum not to worry about tsunamis . . . the thing is, I *always* worry about

tsunamis – wherever I am. All right, maybe not *actual* tsunamis, but I have a feeling, all the time, that there’s a giant wave about to crash over me. That everything’s going to go wrong. That I’m going to be drenched and flattened. Even here, on this plane, I can feel the shadow of a huge wave hanging over me, ready to crash down. Just my luck to be the only boy in the history of the world to end up drowned while 30,000 feet up in the air on a Ryanair flight.

I’m distracted from my thoughts by a sudden thump and the plane shudders as if we’ve just driven over something. For a moment it feels like it’s dropping out of the sky, then there’s more bumps and shaking. Why is nobody panicking? All that the man with the big belly does is tut and mop up a puddle of spilt drink with a napkin.

‘Hello, this is the captain speaking. We’ve hit a spot of turbulence. So if you could return to your seats and observe the “fasten seat belt” signs . . .’

The captain sounds very calm, but I can picture him opening a window in the cockpit and strapping on the secret parachute he keeps hidden under his seat.

If this is the last you ever hear from me, tell Mum I love her.

And Dad, I suppose.

30 REASONS NOT TO GO ON HOLIDAY



Reason 3: Mad driving

We're in Italy. We landed safely and I'm still alive.

But at this rate it might not be for very long . . .

Simon is driving and sweating and swearing all at the same time. I'm sitting next to him . . . and also sweating. Partly because it's hot. But mostly because it's terrifying. There are cars and lorries whizzing around us, honking their horns and swerving about. We are on a motorway, or *autostrada*, as the Italians call them. (Simon told me that. He likes to tell me things.)

'In America they call them freeways, Satan.' (Simon thinks it's funny to call me Satan.) 'And in Germany

they're called *Autobahns*. Do you know what the German word for a motorway exit is?

'No.'

'*Ausfahrt!* Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha! *Ausfahrt!*' He laughs – but it's a sort of stressed, manic laugh.

A car comes zooming up very close behind us, flashing its lights, and Simon gets even more stressed out. His face goes all red.

'Look at this idiot, driving right up my bottom.'

Simon actually uses a different, much ruder word, but I know I'm supposed to say 'bottom', or 'bum', or 'behind'. (I think the scientific term is 'buttocks'*.) But that's not what Simon said.

Grown-ups can swear as much as they like. Another reason I'd like to be one. I mean, it's not that I *want* to swear all the time, but sometimes a bad word just sort of slips out. Like when you step on a piece of Lego in bare feet, or you bite your cheek when you're eating. And if I was a grown-up, it wouldn't matter. I wouldn't get so anxious worrying about it. I could just enjoy life. If I was a grown-up driving along this *autostrada* right now, I'd be like someone on *Top Gear*, laughing and making jokes and trying to go faster, instead of gripping the door handle so tight my fingers are about to drop off.

* In America they call it a 'butt'.

Anyway, if the word for bottom that Simon used was bad, you should hear some of the other words he's using. From now on I'd better bleep him out like a rapper on Radio 1.

'All right, all right,' he says to the car behind us, and swerves over into the slow lane. 'Jesus. Look at that bleep-bleep go. There's going to be the most god-awful pile-up. Oh, bloody Nora. What's up with this idiot, now . . .?'

I think 'bloody Nora' is a type of old-fashioned swearing. I don't know whether to bleep it or not. Simon said it because we're now stuck behind a little grey car that's going really slowly.

I can see the two people sitting in the front waving their hands about as they talk to each other. I'm not sure which one of them is actually driving because they drive on the wrong side here, but neither of them seems to be looking at the road or holding on to a steering wheel.

'They have only two speeds in Italy,' Simon says. 'Too fast and too slow.'

And then he swerves out into the fast lane to get past the grey car. There's the PAAAAARP of a horn and he swerves quickly back again as a big, shiny black car speeds past us.

'Bloody hell,' he says. 'That bleep-bleep-bleep came up so bleeping fast I never even saw him.'

Emma's sitting in the back, not really paying attention. When she got in the car at Brindisi Airport, she put her earbuds in and said, 'I just want to finish my audiobook. It's got to a really exciting bit.' After that she hasn't really seemed to notice anything that's been going on. She did laugh when we nearly hit the other car, but I think that was because there was a funny bit in her book, not because we nearly died in a screaming inferno of twisted metal and severed limbs.

Apart from the nearly crashes, the motorway (sorry, *autostrada*) is not really that interesting. There's not much to look at except swerving cars and trees. As well as palm trees, there are lots of other ones with silvery leaves and twisted trunks. Simon tells me they're olive trees, where olive oil comes from.

'They squeeze them like grapes,' he says. 'And the juice is oil. Amazing, really, when you think about it.'

There are bushes along the middle of the motorway (*autostrada*) covered in pink and red and white flowers. Simon says they are oleander bushes.

'All parts of the oleander plant are deadly poisonous.'

Simon really does like to explain things. Especially plants.

'That's an umbrella pine . . . That's a Norfolk Island pine . . . That's a date palm . . . Those are eucalyptus . . . Oh, look, a dead dog.'

Eventually we turn off the motorway (I won't say *autostrada* again) on to another busy road, and me and Simon relax a little. And then, after a while, we get on to a smaller road and we relax more, and soon I can see the sea.

Simon shouts out, 'Look! There's the sea!' even though I'd already seen it, as I said.

It looks warm, not like the grey sea they have in Wales. It's bright blue and all sparkly. I wish we were on the beach already and I could go for a swim. I feel really uncomfortable and sweaty, my jeans feel tight and my pants are stuck up my bottom*.

We pass a lorry parked by the side of the road selling watermelons and Simon stops suddenly.

'We have got to get one of those bad boys!' he says, jumping out of the car.

Me and Emma wait for him. He has a lively conversation with the farmer selling the melons. Simon is laughing a lot. The farmer looks slightly confused. I think Simon's speaking English. Simon pays him and brings the biggest melon ever back to the car and sits it on the back seat next to Emma.

We carry on. The road to Felix's house is narrow and full of holes. Bushes on the sides scratch the car as we go past. We pass more olive trees. Hundreds of them. Thousands. All surrounded by low walls.

* Or butt.