**The Toilet Mystery**

**By Alexia Blanchard**

There’s a saying that every man has two deaths; one when he is buried and the second being when his name is said for the last time. The late ninety-seven-year-old Joe Harrison is an exception for the second one. At his funeral, Joe’s partners in crime, one of whom he trusted too much at one point, buried his greatest achievement with him. An old, desolated diary with a smudged title scrawled down on the front. The title read “The Toilet Mystery”. However, to fully understand, we have to go back to the ancient year of 2022.

It was 2022 and all was well. Except for one thing. There had been a malicious attack on the boys’ toilets. Some people attempted to stake out to catch the culprit. No one could complete it because it smelt as if there had been an atomic bomb filled to the brim with a stench so foul that a garbage bag puked in its presence. Among all the students, one brave soldier figured it out. Joe Dustin Harrison; more commonly known as Joe, was eleven years old and halfway through his final year at Kittrail Primary School. He and his best friend Terry overheard a conversation between teachers and decided to find out who continues to steal the toilet paper from the bathrooms. One afternoon after intense preparation, Joe finally plucked up the courage to ask his mother for a bulletin board and she said yes. Joe’s mother came home an hour later with a bulletin board, red yarn and pins.

“Don’t get caught,” she whispered. It was at that moment that Joe realised that his mum was cool.

Joe arrived at school early the next morning alongside Terry looking like a man on a mission. Today was the day that Joe interrogated his peers. First up was Jacob. Known for arriving early and staying in. Prime toilet paper stealing time.

“We know what you did. It’s time to turn yourself in,” Joe said coolly.

“What have I done?” Jacob asked, genuinely confused.

“The toilet paper. We know you stole it. You stay late after school and come early,” Joe thought he had cracked the code. However, he could not have been more wrong.

“I come early to practice with Xavier and I don’t stay late, I leave out a quieter exit,” Jacob explained and Joe’s triumphant grin fell in a matter of seconds.

“Sorry. Bye!” The two boys walked away, feeling more than embarrassed. In class, they talked to seventeen more boys until Terry put an idea in Joe’s mind.

“Joe?” Terry asked in a soft, gentle tone. “What if the culprit’s a girl and not a boy?”

“Terry, you’re a genius!” Joe was ecstatic. Elated, even. But now, it was time to brainstorm. They hunched over and pondered, thinking of infinite possibilities. Until Joe had a lightbulb moment.

“MACKENZIE DID IT!” Joe blurted out.

“That’s a serious accusation-“Terry tried to warn him not to jump to conclusion but alas, it was too late.

“Terry I’m aware that you’re too innocent for this. That’s okay. I’ll bust her on my own.” The bell had rung and it was high time to blast Mackenzie, his mortal enemy, into oblivion.

He found her playing soccer and immediately went to confront her.

“Smith!” Joe’s persona changed immediately.

“Harrison!” Mackenzie replied, matching Joe’s rough cold voice.

“Admit it!” Joe said.

“Admit what? That you’ll never figure out the toilet mystery? Yeah. You won’t.” Mackenzie retorted.

“Ha-ha. So amusing.” Joe gathered his words and spat them out like a spider would with a string of venom.

“I’m aware,” Mackenzie emphasized, her smirk thickening as every second ticked by. After an uncomfortable five minutes of tense staring, Joe finally spoke up.

“I know you stole the toilet paper and you need to own up,” Joe explained.

“I didn’t. But Terry did. And I have proof,” Mackenzie replied in a low calm tone.

“That’s impossible. Terry’s too-“ And like clockwork, Mackenzie interrupted Joe.

“Innocent? That is what he wants you to think. What’s Terry’s signature joke?” She questioned.

“Toilet paper,” Joe began to chuckle. Then he realised the point that Mackenzie was attempting to reiterate.

“I’ll help you. I want to solve this just as much as you do,” Mackenzie admitted.

“Fine!”

 And so, their partnership began. They started to work on a plan, sharing and writing down numerous details down to the second. It was as if they were reading each other’s minds. Their vibes are so abstract from the other yet they both compliment the other. Joe and Mackenzie still had yet to realise that their personalities intertwined like vines in an orchard. After an hour, the plan was in motion. This godly plan began with a stakeout which Mackenzie couldn’t participate in. Joe was going to have to fly solo. And with a reassuring pat on the back, he ventured bravely into the toilets with much trepidation. Joe waited eagerly with anticipation, watching for Terry. I’m sure you’re wondering, how was Joe going to get proof of Terry? Well the answer is quite simple. Mackenzie’s fingers slipped and she must have accidentally taken an old camera from her attic. So Joe took that camera and used it as an evidence gatherer. “SLAM!” went the door. Footsteps were pounding against the sticky bathroom tiles. “THUD!” went an enormous black duffel bag as it was dramatically dropped on the floor. Joe briefly fumbled with the phone before hitting record and showing Terry commit the crime. After Terry exited the building, Joe cautiously looked around to check if the coast was clear. Once it was, he climbed the fence and clambered through the luscious, forest green foliage that led to the Mexican Standoff Arena. When he got there, he expected to find kids playing but instead found kids preparing for a Mexican Standoff. Joe looked over to see the nerf guns being handed to; Terry and Mackenzie?! Oh no. Joe ran faster than the speed of light all the way to the duelling ground.

“Mackenzie, what’s happening?” Joe questioned.

“Terry found out about what we were doing, challenged me to a duel and now here we are.” Mackenzie answered defeatedly.

“So just to be clear,” the ref began. “if Mackenzie wins, Terry turns himself in and if Terry wins, Mackenzie hands over the evidence.” Mackenzie consented and started to walk to the duel, nerf gun in hand. But something wasn’t sitting right with Joe. He needed to tell Mackenzie something that he genuinely meant regardless whether she won or not. Joe instinctively grabbed Mackenzie’s arm and looked her dead in the eye. It was now or never.

“Mackenzie. You are truly the most spectacular detective I’ve ever met and whatever the outcome of the duel is you are one of the smartest people I know.” Joe rubbed the back of his neck and looked around sheepishly.

“We don’t have all day.” Terry came over with a smirk you could practically hear and interrupted their bittersweet moment. Mackenzie gave Joe a weak smile before turning to walk away. It was time.

Mackenzie took the nerf gun and headed over to where Terry was. If looks could, kill, Mackenzie’s vicious scowl would have sent Terry six feet under. The ref came on the scene and signalled the start of the duel but not before doing the formalities and rules.

“Shake hands. I want a clean fight. This means no shooting before ten and accepting if you don’t win,” both parties nodded. The ref began to count.

“One. Two. Three. Four.” They both cocked their guns. “Five. Six. Seven.” Joe looked at Mackenzie. He once saw her as an ignorant, two-faced, egotistical brat. Now he saw her as the sweet, funny girl that gave everything up so she could solve a mystery with him.

“Eight. Nine. Ten paces, fire!” It was as if time had stopped. Joe turned to see two pistols flying through the air. Then as quickly as it stopped, time commenced again. Mackenzie’s bullet skimmed Terry’s head. Terry’s bullet, however, struck Mackenzie in the side. Terry looked as if he owned the world. Mackenzie looked as if she had lost everything and, in a way, she had. Joe looked in Mackenzie’s direction, sorrow evident in his piercing green eyes. She dropped the gun defeatedly and pushed past everyone before stopped to look at Joe. Then she opened up her mouth.

“I’m done with the toilet mystery. I suggest you do the same.”

 She walked away leaving a heartbroken Joe standing alone with his mouth agape. Everything around him was slow and echoey. The bell rang. Kids began to walk back to their respective classrooms. Joe began to walk back with them. Joe walked into his class, sat down, and gathered his thoughts. Joe had lost Terry. Joe had lost Mackenzie. He lost his why. His desolated symphony. Joe lost his spark. He wasn’t the same kid who made people cackle to the point where they needed to pee. He wasn’t the same kid who lit up every room he walked into. He was simply another pawn in the game of life. He doesn’t really matter. Joe thought he was hopeless. Then he looked over at his book. The one that started it all. He looked over at Terry. The person who he thought was his best friend. He looked over at Mackenzie. The person who was with him through his highs and lows and went through a duel for him. Then Joe stopped and realised. He was the main character in his life. He determined his storybook ending. Suddenly, motivation was vigorously flowing through every inch in his body. He was going to fix his sonata. Joe was going to solve the toilet mystery. The bell rang. Laughter and screams ran through the air with ease. Joe stomped over to Terry and made a singular request.

“I want a duel. If I win, I get the evidence. If you win, you get to keep the evidence forever and I will drop everything I know.”

Joe was willing to try one last time. He just hoped that Terry would do the same.

“I’ll do it. On one condition,” Joe nodded avidly. “If I win, you say that you did the toilet mystery.” Terry looked pleased with himself. Joe was torn. But eventually, he agreed.

“Give me five minutes,” Joe said. Terry accepted and went to go prepare.

Five minutes later, Joe entered the arena, a determined look written blatantly across his face. The ref came over and confirmed the deal, leaving soon after he came but not before lazily giving Joe the nerf gun. He looked around, examining the terrain. Joe glanced down at the sunset orange gun, meticulously meddling with the trigger as if it were a game. Joe then heard a loud static, signalling to get into the positions.

“You guys know what I’m going to say. Shake hands. Clean fight!” Joe reluctantly shook Terry’s hand, despising every second physical contact. The counting began.

“One. Two. Three.” Joe felt a pang of guilt tide over his body. If you told Joe two days ago that he would be right here, he would have thought you were crazy. Now, it didn’t seem so bad.

“Four. Five. Six.” In amongst the audience, he saw Mackenzie. She bared and immense look of horror. For the first time in seven years, she teared up.

“Seven. Eight.” Two more paces. Joe had worked too hard to throw it all away now. He thought about how much he had sacrificed. It was like a game of chess. Every move counts. He just had to lose a few pieces before he won.

“Nine. Ten paces, fire!” the bullets flew through the air. Joe heard a distant ringing sound blaring in his ears. But he didn’t make contact with the pistol. He stared in the near distance to see Terry with a scrunched-up face. But realisation hit Joe like a truck. His eyes sparkled with glee as extreme exasperation coursed through every vein in his body. He had won. In a fit of pure rage, Terry cocked his gun and aimed it at Joe. The pistol landed harshly, making an imprint in his left calf. Joe’s adrenaline skyrocketed, now on a mission to beat Terry once and for all. A series of bullets were being shot, landing in various places but missing the target. Finally, Joe’s pistol landed on Terry’s shoulder. Terry dropped the nerf gun and accepted his fate. He had truly lost. Joe walked over to Terry, knowing the correct thing to do. He held out his hand, offering Terry a handshake. Terry slapped his hand away and stormed off. Joe wasn’t fazed because something told him that Terry would soon get over it.

Joe was the happiest he had ever been. Then he saw Mackenzie. His face lit up like New York City lights after dark. Mackenzie wandered over to Joe. She smiled and hugged him, holding on like she would perish if she let go for even a second.

“I’m so proud of you,” she said.

“Thank you!” Joe replied, blushing furiously.

They both slowly staggered off the field, leaning indolently on one another. The two children were basking in their glory, feeling like they were in complete and utter ecstasy. Joe and Mackenzie sat down on a bench, taking in every sense of victory humanly possible. Joe heard the bell and they both walked back to class. The duo sat down. The teacher then pursed her lips and began to talk.

“Children, I am pleased to inform you all that the toilet mystery has been solved!” the teacher spoke in the same eloquent voice she always did.

The bell rang for the last time that day and kids flooded the corridors. The kids were walking alongside each other, jeering and chattering without a care in the world. Amid all the talking, Terry came up to Joe.

“Hi. I am deeply sorry. I shouldn’t have caused you all of that pain. I hope we can reconcile and become friends again,” Terry said apologetically.

“Thanks for apologising. We are able to become friends but it’s going to take time.” Mackenzie smiled at the intimate moment the boy shared. Joe looked up at the sky whilst walking with his friends. Then he remembered. He had solved the toilet mystery.

Through the years, Joe, Mackenzie and Terry solved various cases together and quickly became a world-renowned detective trio. They would eventually dedicate their time to running a program to allow kids to explore the profession if an investigator. The program was a massive success and those kids ended up carrying on their legacy. Over the course of sixty years, Joe, Mackenzie and Terry solved over three hundred cases but none of them quite matched the case they solved when they were eleven. After all, it was The Toilet Mystery.