



## SOMEONE WORSE OFF

- 1 Jane whipped the ball across court in an attempt to catch Chloe off balance. The ball was returned at speed down her backhand side and caught the edge of the white service line. Game, set and match. Chloe had won the school tennis championships again — in fact, it was now a record five times. Jane had been runner-up on every occasion. She thought she had Chloe in the second set, but the talented champion had prevailed again.
- 2 Jane jogged up to the net and put on a brave face as she congratulated her smiling opponent. Later, as she walked back to her gear, she fought back the tears that were welling up in her eyes. She dabbed the old training towel on her face, so as to feign a sweaty forehead. No matter how many extra hours of practice she put in, there seemed to be nothing she could do to beat Chloe.
- 3 Chloe was captain of the school tennis squad,

netball team and softball team; she was even the president of the chess club. Jane felt like the perpetual loser every time she came second to Chloe and, unfortunately, she did this with painful regularity.

Things were about to get worse.

Jane, like many of her friends, had a crush on Jack Rollings — the tall, handsome boy from the year above, who also happened to be captain of the football team. Jack, an outgoing student, was popular with everyone. He was the one boy every girl wanted to be seen with at the school formal.

- 4 Very few people were surprised when he asked Chloe if she would be his date for the formal.

Within ten minutes of Jack asking Chloe, the news had swept all over the school. Mouths whispered

words into eager ears, and soon it was Jane's turn to hear the "great" news. She smiled politely and went back to work; she had no intention of showing her disappointment.

"You're a loser," she told herself over and over again, as she walked home that afternoon, not waiting for any of her friends.

- 5 When her good friend Cassie rang that evening Jane told her she wasn't well and was going to bed early. This wasn't strictly true, of course. She just didn't feel like talking to anyone about anything. Straight after dinner she disappeared into her room to sit and brood.
- 6 During the next week Jane kept to herself, avoiding her friends when she could, and staying right away from the canteen and other common areas. When she did see her friends in class she said very little and refused all offers to go out after school or on the weekend. On Friday morning she visited Mr Sullivan, the Deputy Principal, to ask that her name be withdrawn from the upcoming ballot for next year's school captain. She told him that it would be a waste of her time.

- 7 On Friday night Cassie made an unannounced visit. Jane was sitting on her bed, playing idly with some rubber bands when Cassie poked her head around the door.

"I'm really tired Cassie. I was just about to hit the sack," complained Jane.

"This is important JD and it will only take a moment," pleaded Cassie. "Mr Sullivan told me you wanted to withdraw from the elections. What's going on?"

"It's a waste of time, and I've got no chance anyway." Jane shrugged. "I can't beat Chloe, so what's the point?"

"Maybe you will and maybe you won't, but there's

nothing wrong with being vice-captain anyway," explained Cassie.

- 8 "There's everything wrong with vice-captain! It's second place and I'm sick of always coming second to Chloe Winters," she sighed.

"Would you hand back a silver medal at the Olympics too?" asked Cassie pointedly.

"Only if Chloe got the gold!" replied Jane, flopping back on the bed.

"Wake up girl, there are heaps of people who are worse off than you. Get out there and help someone else who really has something to worry about. Then you'll understand," said Cassie firmly.

With that, Cassie spun on her heel and walked out of the bedroom. Jane was left staring after her, steam pouring out of her ears. "You just don't understand!" Jane yelled after her.

- 9 Jane spent most of Saturday cursing Cassie and it wasn't until Sunday evening that she began to ponder the other girl's parting words.

Fate is a strange thing. On Monday morning, Jane went into school early to search for a maths textbook she had left in one of the classrooms. While searching, she noticed two girls sitting at the back of a classroom. One of them appeared to be crying.

- 10 Jane's natural instincts kicked in and she walked up to the girls, who were huddled over a pile of maths notes, and asked what was wrong. The sobbing girl explained that she was having trouble with her maths homework, and this certainly wasn't the first time. The other girl admitted that she always tried to help her friend but she struggled with algebra herself.



