

**THE  
UNFLUSHABLES**



# Chapter 1

**He who controls the sewers  
controls everything.**

The Greeks knew it.  
The Romans knew it. Now you know it.

*Monday, 1:34 p.m.*

I'm a tiger, still and silent, waiting to pounce. That's what I keep telling myself. It might be easier to believe if this were a jungle instead of the third stall in the downstairs boys' restroom, but I go where the trail leads me. I'm hunkered down, gripping my knees for warmth. Why is it so cold in here? Probably because there's a weird hissing toilet poking me in the backbone. What do they make those things out of, ice? It doesn't matter. Right now, I'm only thinking about three things:

Who's it going to be?

When's it going to happen?

What did I just step in?

I'm not going to lie, that last one worries me a lot. I mean, I've seen Timmy Wattenberger use this stall. No offense, but I play basketball with Timmy—he can't hit the rim. Just thinking about his terrible aim gives me the willies. I'm tempted to scoot away, but a sound stops me...

Footsteps.

Not ordinary footsteps—heavy, trudging thuds like someone has given a musk ox a hall pass. The restroom door glides open, then slowly closes again. I take a deep breath, count to ten, and burst out of the stall like a claustrophobic rodeo bull.

“Hello, Mumford.”

Mumford Milligan lets out a high, piercing, baby-like squeal. It's embarrassing for both of us.

“Wh—what the...” he shrieks. “Are you stupid or something? You coulda gave me a heart attack!”

Please. We both know Mumford has no heart.

“What are you doing in here, Mumford?”

I'll be honest, it's not a great question to ask in the

bathroom. But someone in this school has been clogging toilets, and I don't have time for niceties.

"Nuthin'," he grunts.

It's the answer I expected, just not the one I want.

"So what have you got behind you?"

"What...this?" he says.

He pulls his hand out from behind his back, and it's like he's surprised to find there's a cigarette in it. But I'm not. My nose picked up that noxious death-stick the second he lit it up.

"It's not mine," he lies. "I, uh, found it. It was in the hall. I just came in here to get rid of it."

"Oh? You mean like you got rid of these?"

I show him the plastic bag I have in my pocket. Inside it is an ugly, mangled, moldy wad of partially decomposed bathroom-butts.

"I pulled these out this morning," I tell him. "They get stuck in the pipe."

Mumford looks like he might be sick.

"You mean you got those out of the toilet?" he asks.

I nod.

"And you carry them around in a little bag?"

Oh, sure, leave it to Mumford to turn this into

something weird. Do I like having half-flushed toilet tobacco in my pocket? No. But there's a Phantom Clogger out there, and I'm going to find him.

Unfortunately, it's not Mumford. I can see that now. Mumford's smoking some cheap, flimsy stink-log. The Phantom? He goes for the fancy stuff—Torpedoes. I've found them at the scene of every clog. They're his signature brand.

Which means I'm wasting my time.

"Just keep your lip-warmers out of my toilets," I growl.

It's probably not the smartest thing I could've said. I mean, first of all, they're not "my" toilets. If they were, Timmy Wattenberger would never be allowed near them. And second of all, it's pretty clear I've been doing some unauthorized plumbing in here, which makes threatening Mumford a dangerous game. The fact is, if he wants to get me in trouble, he can. Big trouble. But he won't. Guys like Mumford don't turn in people like me—they have other ways of handling their problems.

Did I mention Mumford is enormous? He's a big, bulky eighth-grader with arms like jackhammers and a personality that ought to come with a warning label. I

see an unsettling grin cross his face as he moves calmly to the nearest bowl and dangles the putrid puffer out over the rim. Am I scared?

Plenty. But I knew the risks when I walked into a middle school john.

I give him my fiercest glare, narrowing my eyes until they're squinty and hard. He gives one back to me. His looks tougher. Doesn't matter, it's too late to back off now. We're locked in a good, old-fashioned bathroom stare-down, and neither of us want to be the first to blink. It's only been a few seconds but my corneas already feel like walnut shells. The tension is unbearable. Suddenly, Mumford's hand twitches, I see his fingers move, and then...

He pulls the choker away from the bowl.

That was a close one. Quietly, I let myself start breathing again. But just when I think I'm out of the woods, Mumford flicks off the ashes, wads the cigarette into a ball—and swallows it.

"The next time I get rid of a butt, it's going to be yours," he says.

Then without another word, he turns and walks out the door.

It's over. Did I win?

Well, the Phantom Clogger is still out there, I just made Mumford Milligan's hit list, and my sneakers smell like somebody else's pee.

You tell me.

I rush down the hall toward Mr. Dunn's algebra class. Sure, he'll give me the stink-eye for being late, but I'm riding the line between a C and a B-minus, and if I fall any further behind—

The loudspeaker on the wall crackles.

“Sully Stringfellow, report to the principal's office. Sully Stringfellow to the principal's office.”

Oh, well. When was I ever going to use algebra, anyway?