

# FALLOUT

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*For David Dean*



# CONTENTS

Chapter 1	Pacifism Is Weird	3
Chapter 2	You Can't Trust A Pritchard	7
Chapter 3	Wrecking Everything	15
Chapter 4	Alsatian Pies	21
Chapter 5	I Am Nobody	26
Chapter 6	Seeing Stars	30
Chapter 7	The Tiny Woods	35
Chapter 8	Bigger On The Inside	40
Chapter 9	Survival	46
Chapter 10	Harassment	52
Chapter 11	Thick As Thieves	58
Chapter 12	Silence	63
Chapter 13	Cool And Dreadful	66
Chapter 14	Nasty Sheep	72
Chapter 15	The Brae Park	76
Chapter 16	Saving A Radio	81
Chapter 17	Boys Will Be Boys	86
Chapter 18	Chimps	95
Chapter 19	Good Onions	101
Chapter 20	Preparation V. Prevention	107

Chapter 21	Strangled Cats	113
Chapter 22	The Farm School	120
Chapter 23	Cocky Idiot	126
Chapter 24	Black & Decker	132
Chapter 25	A Sandwich And A Badge	140
Chapter 26	Problem-Solving	148
Chapter 27	World War Three	153
Chapter 28	No Choice	157
Chapter 29	Spirit	163
Chapter 30	The Land of OZ	170
Chapter 31	Bright And Clear And Powerful	176
Chapter 32	Boom!	182
Chapter 33	Vegetable	186
Chapter 34	Shin-Scrape Escape	191
Chapter 35	Hiding	195
Chapter 36	Sabotage	201
Chapter 37	A Dry Ham Sandwich	206
Chapter 38	Oddballs	213
Chapter 39	The List	219
Chapter 40	Evidence	224
Chapter 41	The Anti-Jezza	230
Chapter 42	Slimy Gavin	235

Chapter 43 A Backwards Burglar	241
Chapter 44 In The Coal Bunker	244
Chapter 45 That's Entertainment	248
Chapter 46 Tip Tops	251
Chapter 47 On The Outside	256
Chapter 48 Screeching	260
Chapter 49 The Roundabout	264
Chapter 50 The Big Scrap	271
Chapter 51 Forgiveness	279
Chapter 52 Classic Pritchard	283
Chapter 53 Emotional Blackmail	289
Chapter 54 The Palmer's Job	295
Chapter 55 His Pride And Joy	301
Chapter 56 Lossin Dant	305
Chapter 57 Going Straight	313
Chapter 58 Future Plans	317
Chapter 59 Escape	322
Author Note	327
Acknowledgements	331
About The Author	346





# **SUMMER 1980**





It was only meant to be a small explosion. Not exactly a nuclear bomb. Mr Mayfield can't take a joke, that's his problem.

He said I did it because I'm bad. He said I did it for attention, but why would I do that? I get enough attention. People are always watching me; in the street, at school, down the shops. That's what happens when you're a Pritchard.

I did it for a laugh. Because it was funny to see

Mr Mayfield go that special shade of red he keeps for his top-level fury. And I did it to get a round of applause from the whole class. Well, almost the whole class; the swots were horrified. And terrified.

Suppose that's why I'm suspended. Because of the terror.

Or because the broken glass flew everywhere and *could have seriously injured someone* (key words: could have).

Or that *science equipment is expensive*.

Or that I *spoil things for my fellow pupils who really want to learn*.

I head home to face the music, but Mam and Dad won't care about the suspension, just about the money to replace the broken equipment. Because to them I really am bad.

Which is just how they want me.

That stupid peace protest is still on the corner, outside the council building. Look at them – waving their banners and chanting. At least they aren't singing today. Swaying to the chorus of 'Give Peace a Chance'

over and over isn't going to make one speck of difference if some maniac presses the button.

BOOM!

Nuclear war. Everything and everyone gone.

But, yeah, wave a placard, shout some slogans, have a sing-song; see how far that gets you. We're not even *at war*. Not really, not like with invasions and tanks and prisoners. This is a *Cold War*, which, as far as I can tell, means world leaders make threats about pushing their nuclear buttons, but no one will. They just want us to *think* they will. And this lot have fallen for it.

Most of the protesters are the same old locals, but there's a couple of new faces. That's not unusual. They travel around, some of these people. Dad says they're a bunch of freeloading hippies who wouldn't know hard work if it bit them on the – Oh!

There's that floppy-fringe girl from the year above me at school. The one who moved here last year. Why's *she* not in lessons?

'Take a leaflet, son.' One of the new men holds out a piece of paper. He wouldn't do that if he knew me.

It says: *Refuse Cruise*. They mean cruise missiles, not sailing about on a big boat. I take it with a smile. I stand back to scan all the placards, then scrunch the flyer into a ball, toss it into the air and kick it – it smacks right into the middle of *BAN THE BOMB*.

*Score!*

The protesters look shocked, but calm. The girl scowls at me from under her fringe, but that's as aggro as they get. What I don't understand is, if they care so much, why don't they get angry?

Pacifism is weird.