

K. Peach



# Tales From Slacksville



**WELCOME TO SLACKSVILLE**

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K. PEACH



STRANGE GOOSE

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*For Ewan*

*I wrote this book to make you laugh, but if other people buy it, maybe  
you can go to college or whatever. It's a pretty silly book, though, so...  
we'll see.*



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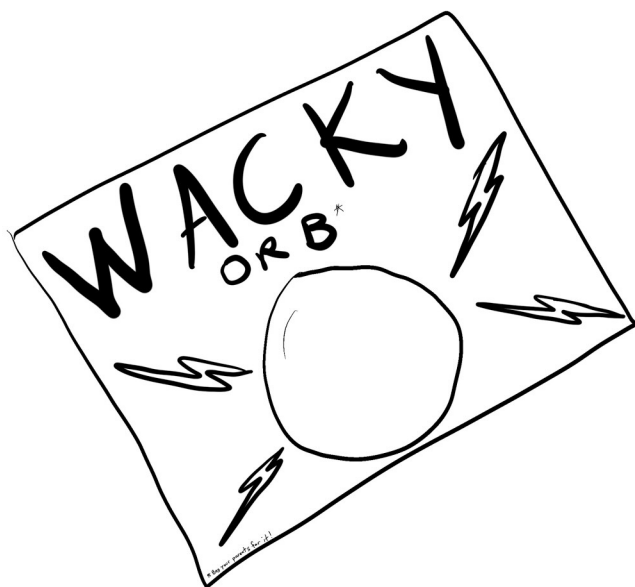
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## INTRODUCTION

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Welcome to Slacksville! The town with a factory just for slacks. The town where people are a little sillier than in other towns. The town where unusual things tend to happen because it was built in 1922 on an enormous patch of glow-in-the-dark scratch-and-sniff fungus that was exposed to radiation by a meteorite. Radioactive fungus can really make things silly.





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## CHAPTER ONE

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### Wacky Orbs

*WACKY ORB!*

*WACKY ORB!*

*WACKY ORB!*

*Smoosh it!*

*Throw it!*

*Crave it!*

*Annoy people with it!*

*Whack it!*

*Slam it!*

*Stick it!*

*Beg your parents for it!*

*WACKY ORB!*

On Monday, Diego showed off his new Wacky Orb. On Tuesday, five more kids brought Wacky Orbs to Slacksville Elementary School. On Wednesday, there were a few Wacky Orbs in every classroom. By Thursday, half the students at Slacksville Elementary had Wacky Orbs. It was all anyone could talk about.

Miss Maddy, a third grade teacher, stopped in her tracks on her way into the room.

"Not again," she whispered to herself.

"What's wrong Miss Maddy?" Wesley asked.

"It looks like we have a toy craze on our hands. I hate toy crazes. ALL teachers hate toy crazes."

Miss Maddy wasn't normally grumpy, so the students were confused. How could anyone be unhappy when they were looking at a Wacky Orb?

"Class!" Miss Maddy called out, "Let's start the day off by talking about these Wicky Globs."

"WACKY ORBS!" the students called out. "SMOOSH IT! THROW IT! CRAVE IT!"

Miss Maddy shuddered at the sight of twenty children shouting in unison.

"What are these things?" she asked. "Raise a quiet hand!"

Fifteen hands shot up.

"Wesley."

Wesley held up his green Wacky Orb.

"It's a squishy ball! You squeeze it!" he said.

Wesley demonstrated. When he clenched the Wacky Orb in his fist, it bulged out between his fingers.

"But also, they stick to stuff!" Diego said.

Diego whipped his blue Wacky Orb up to the ceiling. It stuck for several seconds, then dropped back down to his desk with a *slap*. It left a blue stain on the ceiling. In fact, everyone's hands were stained with the color of their Wacky Orb.

"Why did you say '*Crave it*'?" Miss Maddy asked.

"You can eat them too!" Meg said.

She licked her purple Wacky Orb, which turned it extra sticky.

"What else does it do?" Miss Maddy asked.

"Annoy people!" half the class said.

They began throwing the orbs as if it were a snowball fight.

“Stop!” Miss Maddy shouted. “Students, I don’t want to see any Wacky Orbs. Put them away. You can play with them during recess, but then I expect them to go right back into your desk or locker afterwards.”

All the students sighed and put their orbs away.

Then a knock came to the door. It was Trisha’s mom.

“Birthday treats for the birthday girl!”

Trisha clapped her hands together.

“You guys aren’t going to believe this,” Trisha said.

Miss Maddy brightened.

“Happy Birthday, Trisha! Please go ahead and pass out your treats.”

Trisha and her mother passed out napkins first, then-

“It’s MINI Wacky Orbs!” Trisha said.

Her classmates recited the commercial together.

“Pinch it! Toss it! Eat it!”

Miss Maddy’s jaw dropped.

“No,” she whimpered.

As soon as Trisha’s mom left, Miss Maddy spoke sternly.

“Class. You may eat your Mini Wacky Orbs now, or place them in your desk for later. In one minute I expect all of them to be out of my sight.”

Most of the students took a lick of their Mini Wacky Orb, then wrapped it in a napkin and placed it inside their desks.

At lunch Miss Maddy sat at the teachers’ table where they all complained about Wacky Orbs.

“It will rot their teeth!”

“My slacks are sticky!”

“I got hit right in the face by one! It didn’t hurt, but now my face is green!”

“We must ban Wacky Orbs!”

"The kids will get tired of them, won't they?"

Miss Maddy looked over at her students and was pleased that they obeyed her and left the Wacky Orbs in their desks. After a few minutes though, the cafeteria was dotted with the brightly colored Wacky Orbs.

"Wacky Orbs! Get your Wacky Orbs!" Fifth grader Cat called out, "Five bucks! Whack it! Slam it! Stick it!"

There was a crowd around Cat in no time. Before a teacher could stop her, she had already sold out.

The cafeteria soon became an uncontrolled orb spree. Wacky Orbs were stuck to the ceiling and walls. Girls were cutting out the orbs that got stuck in their hair, giggling all the while. The kindergarteners grew hyper from the sugar and couldn't stop laughing and crying.

Then one student had a terrifying idea. No one was sure who said it, but someone yelled "MEGA WACKY ORB!"

All the students combined their individual orbs into one giant orb. After the orbs were stuck together, it formed a ball that reached halfway to the ceiling. Several students began rolling it across the floor toward the teachers.

"HIDE!" Miss Maddy yelled.

The teachers ducked under the table. The table became enveloped in the giant orb with the teachers inside.

"Take over the school!" someone shouted.

The teachers weren't sure what happened after that, but around dinner time they were rescued by firefighters.

Wacky Orbs were officially banned the next day.

The teachers recovered and came to school on Monday feeling relieved. They would never have to see a Wacky Orb again.

Diego, however, had a new toy.

"Hey guys, check out my Slime Bot!"

"NOOOOOO!" Miss Maddy screamed and ran to duck under her desk.

“Is it just me or are the teachers a bunch of drama queens?” Trisha asked.

“Adults are just weird,” Diego said, and popped the Slime Bot into his mouth.



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## CHAPTER TWO

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### Cheesy Pablo's

Every year on Diego's birthday, he gets to choose a special restaurant for his parents to take him to.

"My friend at school told me about this place called *Cheesy Pablo's*! They do that thing where they toss the dough in the air and spin it on their fingers!"

It was a new restaurant in Slacksville in the Delish District between *All Pickles* and *Kathleen's Caffeine Coffee Machine*. Diego's parents loved pizza and were happy to take him.

"Welcome!" the server screamed at them when they walked in.

Diego's mom yelped.

"Sorry," the server said, "I'm Kathleen. I work at the coffee shop during the day. I've had too much coffee. Right this way!"

They sat in a red booth.

"We're gonna see a guy toss around pizza dough, right?" Diego's mom asked.

"YOU BETCHA!" Kathleen said.



Diego bounced around in his seat while he looked at the menu.

"I want a pizza with pepperoni! And root beer!" he said.

His parents added, "We'll take two iced teas and yes, an extra large pepperoni pizza and a root beer."

"Coming right up!"

As soon as Kathleen walked away, a chef came to their table with a wad of dough in his hands.

"Did somebody order a pizza?" he asked. "Have no fear! Cheesy Pablo is here to make your pizza dreams come true!"

Pablo wore a white apron and a white chef's hat. He had a thick mustache and only one shoe on.

Diego turned toward Pablo, ready for the show. Pablo began to spin the dough on his fingers and the dough spread into a large circle. He tossed the dough in the air and caught it.

Diego's family clapped.

Then Pablo spun the dough and passed it from hand to hand under his legs. He threw it in the air and caught it behind his back. He made it spin like a wagon wheel all around his body.

Diego's jaw dropped. He wanted to be just like Cheesy Pablo.

Pablo threw the dough in the air, lifted up his bare foot, and caught the dough on the tip of his big toenail. The dough continued to spin as he stood on one foot.

Diego's mom grimaced.

"Don't worry folks, Cheesy Pablo took a bath today!" Pablo said.

He kicked the dough up into the air, caught it on his hat, spun it onto one elbow, then his knee, then back to his big toe!

"Wow!" Diego said.

"He's not actually serving us this dough, right?" Diego's mom whispered to Kathleen.

"Of course he is!" Kathleen said.

Then Kathleen interrupted Pablo.

"Pablo, you have a phone call," Kathleen said.

"Take over for me," Pablo said.

Pablo passed the spinning dough to Kathleen. She was clumsy with it. She tried to toss it into the air, but it landed on the floor. She picked it right back up and kept spinning it as well as she could until Pablo returned.

When Pablo took over again, he shouted "Lights!"

The lights went out and Diego was delighted to see that the dough was glowing in the dark!

"What's in the dough?" Diego's dad asked. "That can't be safe."

"Don't worry!" Pablo said, "It's all natural! Lights!"

The lights came back on. Pablo squeezed red sauce onto the dough as it spun, grabbed shredded mozzarella cheese from his pocket and sprinkled it on top, pulled pepperoni from his sleeve and spread them around, and then shouted "Oven!"

He threw the pizza like a frisbee into the kitchen and it landed inside a brick oven.

Pablo took a bow.

"That was awesome!" Diego yelled.

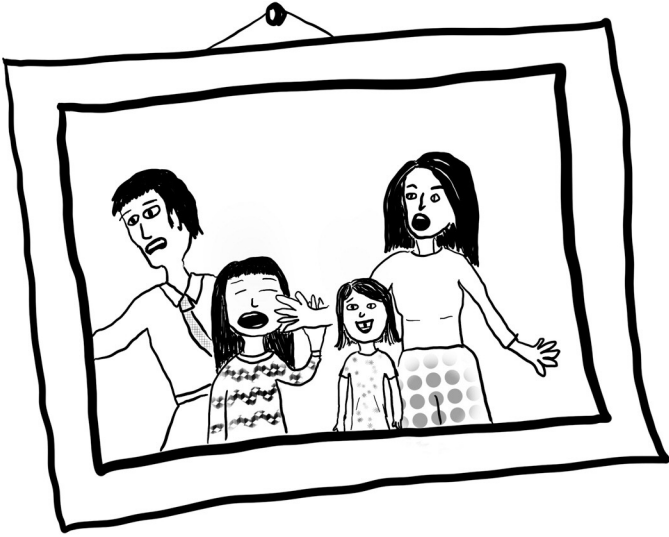
Pablo excused himself. There were more families to entertain. After a few minutes, Kathleen brought them their cooked pizza. Diego didn't hesitate to dig in.

"We have to eat this," his mom whispered to his dad. "It would be rude not to."

They didn't like the idea of eating a pizza that had touched a man's big toenail, but it turned out to be the most delicious pizza they had ever had. At the end of dinner, Pablo's special touch made them laugh.

When the lights went out and Pablo showed off his glow-in-the-dark pizza dough to a different family, Diego's family smiled. They all had glow-in-the-dark teeth.





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## CHAPTER THREE

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### Slacksville Unique Family Photo

Jillian hated, *hated*, HATED having her photo taken. She hated standing still. She hated being told to smile- *No, your smile is too big- Make your smile look natural- Put your arms down- Why didn't you wear the blue shirt? Don't stop looking at the camera! Smile!*

And the worst was when her mom licked her hand and wiped it on a hair that was sticking out. Yuck!

What was the point?! Wasn't a photo supposed to be of what was actually happening? Of what people actually looked like? On a normal day or even on a special occasion, her family didn't wear the same colored shirts, stand close together all facing the same way, and smile all at once.

Jillian hated when they all smiled at once. She could hear the wet sound of everyone's lips sliding over their slimy teeth.

Gross!

That's why it was so unfortunate that a new business opened in her neighborhood.

When Jillian's family first saw that a new business was opening, they talked about what it might be.

"I hope it's a candy store!" Jillian's little sister said.

"I hope it's a coffee shop," her dad said.

"I hope it's a bookstore," her mom said.

"I hope it's an arcade with milkshakes, a roller rink, and bunnies roaming around that you're allowed to pick up and pet," Jillian said.

But it wasn't any of those things.

It was *Slacksville Unique Family Photo Studio*. The sign promised an unforgettable family photo.

When they drove past on opening day, Jillian couldn't believe it.

"A crummy photo studio?" she said.

Before she could say another word, her mom was already calling for an appointment.

"We can wear yellow!" her mom said.

Jillian considered all the ways she could protest. Maybe she could stick out her tongue in every photo or dye her hair orange the night before. In the end, though, Jillian decided that her best move would be to get it over with as soon as possible.

When the family arrived at *Slacksville Unique Family Photo*, they were greeted by a photographer named Phil. Phil seemed like someone who had just eaten a lot of sugar and drank a lot of coffee.

"Howdy, folks!" Phil said.

He took the family to a backdrop of a forest.

"Let's line you up. Wow, yellow! You look fantastic! And here we go!"

Jillian's family stood perfectly still. Jillian had a smile on her face before anyone could even ask her to smile. Her hair was gelled down. Her arms were at her sides. Then POP!

Just before the flash lit up their faces, a cobra burst out of a box in front of them. Jillian's whole family jumped backwards, shielded themselves with their hands, and yelped with their eyes wide.

"The snake's a fake! A little something to get your hearts humming!" Phil said.

"Funny," Jillian's dad said, but he didn't sound like he thought it was funny.

Jillian, however, was laughing.

"Mom, you squealed so loud!" she said through snorts.

"Ok, that was a silly one, but now we'll do a real one," her mom said.

The family lined up again.

Phil stood behind the camera and said, "One, Two..."

And BOOM!

A new backdrop fell behind them. They all turned their heads, startled. The new backdrop was of a T. Rex with its mouth wide open and ready to feast on the family!

After being startled, Jillian laughed even harder and her little sister started pretending to run away from the dinosaur.

"That'll be a good one!" Phil said. "Shall we do one more?"

"Yes!" Jillian's mother said, "One where we all smile!"

Phil changed the background to a blue sky with fluffy white clouds.

"Okee dokee," Phil said, "One where you smile! I was thinking for this one we could use some props. How'd you all like to hold bright red umbrellas?"

"No, thank you," Jillian's dad said. "We don't want props, just a regular family photo where we smile."

"Alright, one unique photo where you smile, coming right up. Smile everyone!"

Jillian's smile was real this time because she was actually having fun. She thought the silly stuff was probably over, but she was wrong. What happened next felt like it was in slow motion.

The camera clicked...overturned buckets of water dangled in the air above them...the camera clicked...the water landed



on their heads...the camera clicked again...they stood there soaked...and the camera clicked again.

They all cried out in shock before Jillian and her sister started splashing their feet in the puddles on the floor. Jillian's mom grabbed her purse, ready to storm out of the studio.

"All right, folks, no refunds! Have a nice day!" Phil said.

Jillian's parents were angry, but after they all went home and changed into dry clothes, they laughed about it all throughout dinner. Jillian's dad even did an impression of Phil.

"Okee dokee, folks!"

When the pictures came back, each one was funnier than the last. Jillian even made copies to hang up in her room. Her parents said they were the best family pictures ever.





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## CHAPTER FOUR

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### Food Fight

When Davy found out that a substitute principal was starting at his school, he and his friend Pippy came up with a plan that would “welcome” the new principal.

Davy wrote a note on a tiny piece of paper during math class at Smirk Middle School.

*Food fight at exactly 12:07. Pass it on.*

Davy passed it to Kevin. Kevin passed it to Sharla. Sharla passed it to Kim. Pretty soon, everyone in math had read the note. Each one of the 25 kids wrote their own note and took it to their next class. Now four classrooms knew. Pippy told everyone in the girls bathroom at break time while Mo told everyone on the basketball court.

The new principal, Principal Kahn, heard whispers in the hall and knew the kids were up to something, but she didn’t know what.

At 12:00, all of the students filed into the cafeteria. Cassie was last in line because she was wearing a cast on her leg and it made her slower than everyone else. At 12:06, Cassie finished filling her tray with tuna salad pizza, glanced at the clock, and hobbled as fast as she could to the nearest seat.

With 30 seconds left, the cafeteria became nearly silent. The hairs on the back of the teachers' necks stood on end. Each student gripped a piece of food just waiting to throw. The red hand on the clock ticked one last second and it started.

"FOOD FIGHT!" Davy shouted.

Exactly half of the students stood on their chairs while the other half ducked under a table. Food was tossed and thrown everywhere. There were oranges bursting open on the chairs like water balloons, pudding on the ceiling, and ketchup on the cheerleaders' skirts.

"STOP!" Principal Kahn shouted.

Everyone froze. They didn't expect her to be so loud.

"Just terrible," she said, sternly.

Slowly, all the kids sat down.

"She can't punish all of us," Davy whispered to Pippy.

"You're right. She's kind of scary though," Pippy whispered back.

Principal Kahn stood with her hands on her hips and a scowl on her face.

"Your throws were weak. No one even tried to dodge. Look at this!" Principal Kahn picked up a milk carton. "Someone threw this milk without even opening it first. Every last one of you gets an F. You will spend the rest of the day cleaning and will try again tomorrow. I expect a better performance."

Davy and Pippy couldn't believe it. The custodian, Rudy, brought out rags and buckets of soapy water. They all finished just in time at the end of the school day.

The next morning, Principal Kahn made the announcements.

"Today is Friday, January 15<sup>th</sup>. Today's food fight will begin at 12:05- sharp! I expect every student to participate and you will be graded."

No one could believe it. They had two fewer minutes to get ready than the day before and they were being graded again.

At lunch time, they rushed through the line. Even Cassie was in her seat by 12:04. The students were so nervous, they couldn't eat.

At 12:05 a few students stood with food gripped in their hands. The cheerleaders opened their milk cartons before getting ready to throw. Still, no one wanted to be the first to throw food. They were worried it was a trap.

"Food fight! NOW!" Principal Kahn shouted.

Her voice was so terrifying, they all began throwing food at once. No one hid under a table this time. Davy and Pippy kept glancing at Principal Kahn to see if she looked pleased. She didn't. No one smiled. There was no fun in this food fight.

"Stop!" Principal Kahn shouted. "That was better than yesterday, but still, it was sloppy. Aimless. Cowardly. There are too many clean students. I give your performance a C. Now finish your lunches and you'll spend the rest of the day cleaning up. Again."

A gasp spread throughout the cafeteria. They had to clean up from a food fight they didn't even want to have?

"This is so stupid," Pippy whispered to Davy as she scraped mashed banana off a chair.

"On Monday, we're coming back prepared," Davy said.

Davy wrote a note and passed it.

*Meet at Sloth Park Saturday at 10:00 in the morning.*

Davy passed it to Amelia. Amelia passed it to Pete. Pete passed it to Tiana. All of them spread whispers under the tables of the cafeteria. Principal Kahn knew they were up to something, but she wasn't sure what.

On Saturday morning, Davy and Pippy commanded the students to make two snowballs apiece.

"Line up! My team will throw snowballs at Pippy's team and you will make sure you are hit!" Davy shouted.

"Then my team will throw snowballs at Davy's team and they will get hit," Pippy said.

Everyone trusted Davy and Pippy and did as they were told. Each student had an icy snowball smack them in the face. They tried not to flinch.

"Now we'll do it again, but this time, dodge the snowball so you don't get hit!" Davy shouted.

Davy's team chucked snowballs at Pippy's team and they all ducked. Pippy's team did the same. They practiced a few more times until they felt ready.

When Monday morning came, they were nervous, but confident.

"Today's food fight will begin at 12:05 and will be graded," Principal Kahn announced.

At exactly 12:05, the students formed two lines. Pippy winked at Davy and Davy nodded at his team. Davy's team threw today's special at Pippy's team: Hot dogs with mustard. Pippy's team picked up the hot dogs from the floor and threw them back. Every single student now had a yellow stain on their shirt.

Davy's team threw handfuls of fries at Pippy's team, which they dodged. Pippy's team threw handfuls of fries back.

Now everyone had successfully hit someone with food, everyone had food on their clothes, and everyone had dodged a flying french fry. That's what Principal Kahn wanted, right?

They stood and waited.

"That was the most professional food fight I have ever seen!" Principal Kahn said, "Everyone gets an A!"

The cafeteria erupted in cheers.

"We did it!" Pippy said.

"We never have to have another food fight again!" Davy said.

The kids all started picking up food without being asked.

“You know, I think I actually like Principal Kahn,” Pippy said to Davy.

“Yeah. I could get used to her,” Davy said, “She’s tough, but fair.”

After that, none of the kids played pranks on Principal Kahn or any of the teachers anymore. They worried that if they did something like set a chicken loose in the school, they might have to bring chickens to school every day until they learned how to be farmers or something. It just wasn’t worth the risk.





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## CHAPTER FIVE

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### Stuck on the Roof

Slacksville's most boring, most average kid was named Romeo. Nothing exciting ever happened to him. He had brown hair. He never scored the final goal in a soccer game. His family never went on road trips. Every night for dinner he ate a pile of macaroni with nothing on it.

But Romeo had a dream.

He wanted to be on the roof of his house. He wanted to see what Slacksville looked like from high up. He wanted the other kids to ride bikes past his house, look up, and see him waving down at them.

He also wanted to find the frisbee he accidentally threw up there last year.

The problem was, his family didn't own a ladder. The last ladder they had was eaten by gophers. The treehouse ladder was nailed to the treehouse. So how would he ever get up there?

Romeo made a plan. He would gather as many sticks as he could and next time his parents left him home alone, he would glue them together to make a ladder. He would climb up, look around, and get back down before his parents could

get home. If they asked about the ladder he would say "What ladder? It's just a tall skinny fence."

The day finally came when Romeo's parents left.

"Romeo! We're going to the market for a giant sack of macaroni! It's on sale! Be back in an hour!"

The moment his parents' car pulled away, he got to work in the backyard. He laid the sticks down on the ground in the shape of a ladder, and then glued them all together.

Romeo smacked himself in the face and realized he had a problem. The glue wasn't drying fast enough!

"Think, Romeo, think!" he said to himself.

He ran into the shed and got the leaf blower. He blasted the air all over the glue. Romeo remembered the time when his dad used the leaf blower to dry paint on the house faster. After a few minutes, the ladder was sticking together.

Romeo leaned the ladder against the house and climbed it carefully. When he got to the top, he crawled onto the roof, then CRACK! The ladder broke and fell into a pile of sticks. Romeo was stuck on the roof!

He knew he was in trouble and that there was nothing he could do, so he thought he might as well enjoy it while he was up there. He found his frisbee and threw it toward the yard, but it got stuck in a tree.

"Darn it!" Romeo said.

His friend Luke rode by on his bike.

"Hey, Luke! Look at me!" Romeo called.

Luke looked up and waved.

"What are you doing up there?" Luke yelled.

"I'm stuck!" Romeo said.

"Cool! My dad's a news reporter! I'll go get him!" Luke said.

Luke rode away.

Romeo spent a moment looking around Slacksville.

Mostly he just saw the tops of trees, but it was still pretty cool.

Luke came back with his dad. His dad took pictures and then started typing away on his phone.

After that, a news van showed up. A woman in a purple suit talked into a microphone in front of a camera.

*"Samantha here, reporting live from Slacksville where a boring child is stuck on a roof."*

"I'll call the fire department!" Luke's dad shouted.

Pretty soon, a firefighter was jogging down Romeo's street with no firetruck or ladder.

"Sorry, kid! The firetruck is getting washed right now. Maybe they can come tomorrow!" the firefighter said.

Romeo started to get worried. He thought someone would know what to do. Aren't adults supposed to be able to figure this stuff out?

His parents arrived home and ran out of their car with two sacks of macaroni.

"Romeo! What are you doing up there?" his dad asked.

"Making my dreams come true! But now I'd like to get down and I can't!"

"Do something!" Romeo's mom said to the firefighter.

"I'll get the coast guard!" the firefighter said.

A helicopter flew overhead and dropped a rope down to Romeo. By now, the sun was setting. The wind from the helicopter blew Romeo's hair in every direction and made it difficult to hear. The pilot spoke to Romeo with a bullhorn.

"Hang on to the rope and I'll lower you onto your treehouse! There's not enough room for me to land in your yard!"

Romeo wrapped his hands and legs around the rope. Being lifted into the air by a helicopter was the most exciting thing to ever happen to Romeo AND it was live on television! He couldn't hear the news lady, but if he could have, he would have heard her say *"I'm Samantha, reporting live from*

*Slacksville, where an exciting child is being air-lifted off the roof of his house!"*

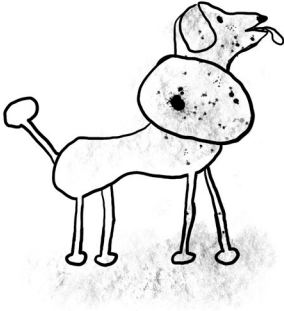
Romeo was lowered down to his treehouse. He waved at the pilot as the pilot flew away. His friends and family cheered. He sure was hungry and really had to pee. He took one step onto the treehouse ladder and CRACK! The treehouse ladder broke.

"Darn it!" Romeo said.

He had to spend the night in the treehouse while he waited for the firetruck with the ladder to come back from the car wash. His parents threw a wet sack of macaroni up into the tree for him to eat.

He decided that he liked being boring, and that macaroni was the best macaroni he'd ever tasted.





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## CHAPTER SIX

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### Pretty Pups Beauty Cuts

“Why are we setting up in the front yard?” Meg asked, “Our stuff is going to get dirty.”

“Our pet grooming shop won’t look real unless it’s close to the street like a real business,” Lily said as she started painting.

“But it’s not real! It’s just pretend!” Meg said.

Meg knew her big sister Lily wasn’t going to change her mind, so she gave up and just played the game.

“I’ll go get some supplies,” Meg said.

While she was away, Lily finished painting their sign:

PRETTY PUPS BEAUTY CUTS

Meg ran back outside with shampoo, scissors, and a comb.

“We need a spray bottle,” Lily said.

They didn’t have one, so Meg pulled the garden hose and their old kiddie pool to the front yard.

They stood back and looked at their pretend pet grooming shop and smiled.

“It’s perfect! Who wants the first haircut?” Lily called out.

“*Ruff! Me! Ruff! Ruff!*” Meg answered with her stuffy dog Trixie.



A shiny black car came to a screeching halt in front of their house.

"Our first customer!" Lily joked. They giggled at the idea of having a real customer, but before they could even stop giggling, an older woman with tons of sparkly jewelry and a fur coat stepped out of her car.

"Finally!" she said, "A proper groomer in Slacksville! I've grown tired of driving all the way to Blouseberg just to get Princess Posy looking halfway decent!"

Meg and Lily froze in place. They were unsure what the lady was talking about. As soon as the woman opened the back door of her car, they understood. From the back of the car, a tall poodle stepped out and shook its fluffy white fur.

The woman placed the leash in Lily's hand.

"I trust you'll give her a standard cut and that your prices will be reasonable. I'll be back in two hours. Ta-ta!"

The woman slipped back into her car and drove away.

Lily and Meg looked at the dog, then looked at each other.

"What the heck was that?" Lily asked.

"Are we seriously supposed to cut this dog's hair?" Meg asked.

"She seems like she'll be pretty mad if she gets back and we haven't done anything. Plus, she'll pay us. Maybe we should just try!" Lily said.

Meg looked down at her stuffies.

"Hey!" She said, "I have a poodle stuffy! All we have to do is make Princess Posy look like this!"

Meg held up a pink dog with round fluffs of hair on its head, feet, and tail.

"Perfect!" Lily said.

Princess Posy sniffed around, then squatted over a bed of flowers. Her fur was a little too long and a bit dirty.

"How do we make her pink?" Meg asked.

"Mom says kool-drink leaves stains. Let's get a packet of raspberry kool-drink and mix it into the shampoo!"

The dog sat as if it were waiting patiently. When Meg started filling the baby pool, Princess Posy started lapping up water. The poodle didn't mind getting wet.

Lily was right about mixing raspberry kool-drink powder with white shampoo. It was bright pink. Working the pink shampoo onto her whole body was a piece of cake!

"Let's hose her off now!" Lily said.

When they began to spray water on the dog, the dog shook and sent pink suds all over Meg and Lily's clothes.

"Mom's gonna be mad. These were our new summer clothes!" Meg said.

"Who cares?" Lily said, "We can buy new clothes after we get paid. She's looking amazing!"

The dog had a light pink tint, but was still soaking wet.

Meg ran into the house and found two hair dryers and an extension cord.

"Careful not to drop the dryer in the baby pool," Lily said. "Dad said that if you mix electricity with water, you're toast!"

It took what felt like ages, but finally Princess Posy was dry and combed.

Lily retrieved her dad's buzzer and got to work trying to make Princess Posy look just like the stuffed animal. Pink fluffy fur floated through the air and stuck to the girls' clothes and hair.

Meg squealed with delight.

"Lily, you did perfect!" she said.

Princess Posy's fur was very short almost all over, but had puffs of fur around her head, feet, and the tip of her tail.

"I'll make the hair look more roundy," Meg said.

She went to work with her scissors, being extra careful around the dog's face and ears while making sure she didn't accidentally cut the tip of the dog's tail.

The girls stood back and looked at their creation. Princess Posy was the perfect picture of a pink poodle.

Meg and Lily high-fived.

"Let's tidy up the shop while we wait," Lily said.

Lily dumped the kiddie pool water out. The pink water flowed down their driveway, collected dirt, and was brown by the time it settled in the gutter.

Meg saw the shiny black car coming from a distance.

"Here she comes!" Meg said.

Meg and Lily took Princess Posy to the end of the driveway and stood proudly.

The car, once again, came to a screeching halt in front of their house, but this time, there was a brown puddle in its path. The puddle splashed Lily, Meg, and most of all, Princess Posy. Her beautiful pink fur was now stained brown and speckled with bits of dirt. Lily and Meg's new summer clothes looked even worse than they did before.

The girls gasped.

When the woman stepped out of her car, she screamed.

"My Princess!" she shouted, "What have you done to my Princess?!"

She ushered Princess Posy into her car. Princess Posy didn't seem to mind being a little wet and dirty, but the lady was very upset.

"I am going to see to it that *Pretty Pups Beauty Cuts* gets shut down! You're lucky I don't sue!"

The woman drove away in a hurry leaving Meg and Lily dirty, wet, and miserable.

Just as soon as the woman drove away, Lily and Meg's mom arrived home from work.

"Look at this mess!" she said, "And your clothes! Clean up and come in for dinner."

"But, mom! We groomed a poodle and we did a really good job!" Meg said.

“Yeah, and then the owner splashed the poodle with mud and got all mad at us,” Lily added.

Their mom looked at the dirty stuffed animal poodle lying in the front yard. She sighed.

“Sounds very dramatic. I swear your imaginations are as big as the moon. Just clean up and come in,” she said.

Lily took down their sign and Meg gathered their supplies.

“So, tomorrow, can we just make a dog grooming shop *inside* the house?” Meg asked.

“I have a better idea,” Lily said. “We’ll set up outside again, but this time we bathe cats. We’ll call it *Meow and Purr Shiny Fur!* Cats love getting a bath. It’s going to be perfect.”



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## CHAPTER SEVEN

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### Go Tapeworms!

Violet's first day at Smirk Middle School went surprisingly well considering she was starting there partway through the school year.

"I was actually the head cheerleader at my old school," Violet told the cheerleaders. "Mind if I sit at your table?"

The cheerleaders welcomed her. Even Lisa, the head cheerleader at Smirk, was friendly to her. They knew how hard it must be to move to a new town.

"I have an idea," Lisa said as she dipped her fries in mayonnaise, "Why don't you try out for the squad tomorrow after school?"

"I'd love to!" Violet said.

Violet went home and dug through the moving boxes until she found her cheerleading uniform from her old school. She ironed the gray and yellow pleats and practiced some backflips in her yard.

The next day at her tryout, she dressed in her uniform and joined the cheerleaders in the gym. All the cheerleaders squinted at her top.

"Where did you say you were from?" Lisa asked.

"Baconton. It's a pig farming community," she said.

"So what's the mascot on your uniform?" Sharla asked.

"A tapeworm!"

The mascot on Violet's shirt was a long, gray, slimy tapeworm with two big yellow eyes and a circle with teeth for a mouth. It even had glitter to make it look wet and shiny.

"Why a tapeworm?" Lisa asked.

"You know," Violet said, "Because you can get tapeworms from eating undercooked pork or bacon. You know what tapeworms are, right? You eat them without noticing and then they grow bigger and longer inside your stomach and they eat the food that you eat until..."

"Stop!" Sharla said, looking ill. "We get it."

Each of the seven cheerleaders looked disgusted.

"Well, lucky for you, we're the Smirk Llamas. A lot cuter than a tapeworm. Why don't you show us some of your cheers?"

The cheerleaders sat on the bleachers and Violet took her place on the basketball court. She stood proud with her pom poms at her hips.

"GO TAPEWORMS! TAKE IT TO THE HOOP! IF YOU CAN'T DO IT, MAKE THEM..."

Violet was interrupted by Lisa coughing and choking on her water.

"Sorry. That cheer was..." Lisa didn't want to say 'gross,' "...special. But why don't you try a different cheer?"

Violet held her pom poms up to her chin before starting her next cheer.

"OPEN THE BARN DOOR! KICK OUT THE HAY! WIN THE GAME THE TAPEWORM WAY! CHARGE RIGHT THROUGH THEIR INTESTINAL-"

Violet was interrupted yet again when Sharla suddenly stood up and covered her mouth.

"Your moves are great!" Lisa said, "It's just, the words you're saying are kind of..."

"Too quiet?" Violet asked, "I'll do one louder."

Violet dropped her pom poms and did a backflip that made all the cheerleaders gasp. She landed in the splits, rolled forward, grabbed her pom poms, and sprang up into a toe touch jump.

"WIGGLE TO THE LEFT! WIGGLE TO THE RIGHT! TAPEWORMS! TAPEWORMS! TAKE A BITE! STEAL THE FOOD RIGHT OUT THEIR GUTS! TAPEWORMS! TAPEWORMS--"

"Stop!" Lisa yelled, "Please don't finish that cheer."

"Yeah," Sharla said, "The only thing that rhymes with guts is butts. Gross."

"Oh, actually the end of the cheer goes '*Tapeworms, Tapeworms, drive them NUTS!*'" Violet said.

Lisa and Sharla exchanged surprised glances.

"Well, that's not so bad. Huddle up girls!"

Violet waited while all seven cheerleaders gathered in a circle and whispered.

"Ok," Lisa said to Violet, "You can join the squad on two conditions: You can't write any of our cheers, AND you have to get rid of your old Tapeworms uniform."

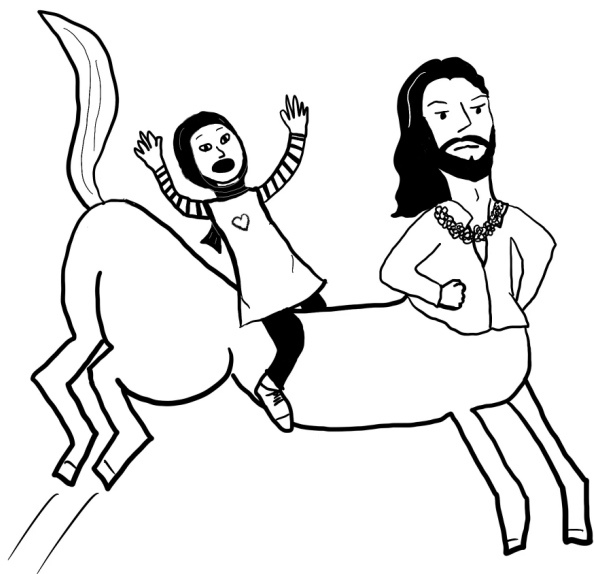
Violet shrugged.

"Ok, sure! Llamas for life!" Violet said.

But what the cheerleaders didn't know was that the kids who always hung out behind the bleachers were listening in. They started a petition to change Smirk Middle School's mascot to the Tapeworms. Nearly every kid in school signed the petition and the School Board was so impressed by their enthusiasm, they officially changed the mascot.

Go Tapeworms!





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## CHAPTER EIGHT

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### The Birthday Party Centaur

On the morning of her birthday, Min had one question on her mind- would she have pony rides at her birthday party? She had begged her mom to have pony rides. She told her mom that she didn't even need a present, she just wanted pony rides!

She and her friends loved playing ponies. Each of them pretended to have their own pony. Min's was light purple with golden hair and pink eyes. Her friend Sophie had a black pony with a mane that looked like fire. Ian had a plaid pony with a pink mohawk and glasses.

Min pulled on her party dress and ran out of her room.

"Mom! Mom! Is there going to be a pony at my party today?" she asked.

Her mom sat her down for breakfast.

"Well, let's talk," she said. "I tried really hard to get a pony, but I couldn't find one."

Min's heart sank. She understood, but she felt like crying.

"But," her mom said, "I got something else. Today at your party, instead of pony rides, everyone will get to ride a centaur."

"Sen-tar?" Min repeated, "What's a centaur?"

"A centaur is a horse, but instead of a head, it has a man's body. Or rather, it's a man with four horse legs. He's half-man, half-horse. Make sense?"

Min tried to picture it. Instead, her mother found a photo.

Min couldn't believe her eyes.

"This guy is coming to our house today?!" she asked. "And we can ride him?"

"Yup!" her mom said, pleased that Min wasn't too disappointed.

Being patient for the party to start was hard, but finally Ian, Sophie, and Min's other friends arrived. They danced, ate hot dogs, and took long looks at a big cake.

Then, the centaur arrived. Min heard him clip-clopping up their street and into their grassy backyard.

He was beautiful!

He had brown fur and a long black tail on the horse half of his body. On the man half of his body he wore a white linen shirt and a string of flowers around his neck. His hair was wavy and shiny.

"Wow!" all the kids said.

Min's mom tried to greet him, but he walked right past her. He was holding bales of hay that he released into a fluffy pile in the yard.

"Sit down!" he said, sternly.

All the kids obeyed and sat in the grass. Cody put his hands on his hips and looked down his nose at them.

"My name is Cody. I have been hired to spend 45 minutes at this party. Each of you will receive a three-minute ride on my back. I am strict about manners. You will not touch my hair. You will not pet me like a common dog. You will not bounce around as if you were in a rodeo. Before the rides, I will take your questions."

"Where do you live?" Min asked.

"The Slacksville Forest," Cody answered.

"Do you sleep on the ground or in a stable?"

"What am I- an animal? I have a house in the forest. I sleep in a king-sized bed."

"Where do you go to the bathroom?" Ian asked.

"How dare you ask such a crude question!"

"Do you think he has a king-sized toilet?" Ian whispered to Min.

"I heard that!" Cody said, "Any other questions?"

"Do you like giving pony rides?" Sophie asked.

"First of all, I do not give pony rides. I give centaur rides. And as for my job, I like being my own boss! No one tells a centaur what to do!"

Min didn't care if Cody seemed kind of grumpy. She jumped up.

"Can I ride you now?" she asked.

Cody knelt down and Min climbed on. She wrapped her arms around Cody's waist to hold on.

"This isn't huggy time! You may hold onto my flower necklace," Cody said.

Min held the necklace. Cody trotted around. After a minute, Min yelled "Faster! Faster!" She kicked Cody in the ribs like a cowboy and before she knew it, she was flying through the air and landing in the pile of hay.

"No one tells me how fast to go, and certainly no one kicks me in the ribs!"

Min wasn't hurt, but she was a little sad that her turn was over.

"My turn!" Ian yelled.

He ran to Cody, got on his back, and held Cody's flower necklace. He looked at his watch knowing that he had three minutes and he was on his best behavior until the last ten seconds of his ride.

"Hey, just between you and me," he whispered, "do you have a king-sized toilet?"

Then Ian was flying through the air and landing in the hay, just like Min. He was a little frustrated that he still didn't get an answer.

"You are hereby banned from all future centaur rides!" Cody shouted.

Sophie ran to Cody for her turn. Cody trotted across the yard and around a pine tree.

"You're so beautiful," Sophie said.

"I know," Cody said.

"I wish I had hair like yours," she said.

Sophie couldn't help herself. She reached forward toward Cody's brown, wavy hair just to feel how soft it was.

Cody bucked her off into the hay.

"Like I said, *Sophie*, I'm not a pet, so don't pet me!"

Sophie felt ashamed of herself.

One by one, each kid at Min's party offended Cody in some way and ended up in the hay.

Cody looked at his watch.

"I have five minutes left. I shall perform a dance routine for your enjoyment."

Cody began to play a flute.

"Where did the flute come from?" Min wondered out loud.

Cody performed fancy tap dance steps while he played a medley of popular songs by the boy band *2 Slick 2 Slip*. After five minutes, he abruptly stopped, walked to Min's mom to receive payment, and galloped away in the direction of Slacksville Forest.

"Ok, let's have some cake!" Min's mom said.

Cody the centaur had been odd, but much more exciting than a pony. From that day on, Min, Ian, and Sophie played

centaurs instead of ponies and each of their imaginary centaurs was very strict about manners.

Lemonade  
50¢  
←

Ice  
Cold  
Pink  
Lemonade  
\$2 →

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## CHAPTER NINE

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### Competing Lemonade Stands

Emma opened a lemonade stand. She mixed yellow powder in a pitcher, turned a box upside down to use as a table, stacked paper cups by the pitcher, and wrote LEMONADE 50 CENTS on the box.

She lived across the street from the park and many thirsty strangers bought her lemonade.

Her neighbor, June, walked over to say hello. They had gone to the same school, but June was a year older and in middle school now.

“Hey, Emma! I came for some lemonade,” June said.

“Thanks for coming,” Emma said.

“What are neighbors for?”

June pressed 50 cents onto the box and waited while Emma poured a cup.

June tasted it.

“Not very sweet, huh? Seems like you added too much water,” June said.

Emma didn’t know what to say back.

“Sorry?” she said, even though she wasn’t really sorry.



June guzzled the rest of the lemonade, crushed the paper cup in her fist, and left it on Emma's table.

"See ya!" June said, and skipped back to her house where her mother was waiting to drive June away to the grocery store.

Emma rolled her eyes and packed up her supplies for the day. She made \$5. Half of it was owed to her mother for the lemonade powder and cups.

"The cost of business," her mother had said.

The next morning, Emma set up her lemonade stand again. Most of the morning, she watched people jog in the park while she drew dogs in her sketchbook.

At noon, June came out of her house carrying a short table and chair. Her mother helped her bring out two big pitchers of pink lemonade, an ice bucket, and tall plastic cups.

June had a chalkboard where she wrote ICE COLD PINK LEMONADE \$2.

Emma frowned at her own setup and suddenly felt sort of sad about it. It wasn't as fancy.

A mother and her two kids came across the street. The mother walked her kids to Emma's stand, then her daughter shouted, "No, mama! The PINK lemonade! I'll scream my head off until you buy the pink lemonade! Not yellow! Pink!"

The mother looked tired. She bought two pink lemonades for her kids, then one of Emma's yellow lemonades for herself.

Emma made \$4 and also kept track of how much June made. June made \$16. They sold the same number of cups, but June made four times as much!

Now instead of feeling sad, Emma felt determined. She went to work on a bigger, better setup.

The next day, June had the same thing, but Emma had hot

dogs and a sign that said CLASSIC LEMONADE \$1, OLD FASHIONED HOT DOG \$3.

June wandered over to Emma's setup and crossed her arms.

"Do you honestly think this is a battle you can win, little girl?"

"I'm just trying to earn some extra money for a tablet," Emma said. "What are you doing it for?"

"Fun," June said, but she didn't look like she was having fun at all.

The next day June set up an espresso bar with a full menu of pastries, milk alternatives, and artisanal water. She hired two baristas who wore pink linen aprons with June's face embroidered on them.

It was a hot day and not many people were in the mood for hot coffee. Emma could see that June had made a mistake and decided to make a move that would win customers. Emma made a change to her sign:

CLASSIC LEMONADE \$1, OLD FASHIONED HOT DOG \$3, I SPRAY YOU WITH A HOSE \$5.

Word spread around the park. Families left their picnics and shelled out \$5 per person for Emma to spray them with a hose.

"Spray my face!" one of the moms said. "So much more refreshing!"

Soon it was like a party in Emma's front yard. She used all the different hose settings. Mist. Jet. Shower. Power wash. She could even shoot the water up into the air and make it look like rain.

By the end of the afternoon, she nearly had enough money for a tablet and June looked furious.

The next day after that, Emma set the hose up again. To her dismay, June set up a sprinkler, turned on some pop

music, and decorated with streamers. June sneered at Emma when she saw her.

When the day grew hot, people from the park wandered over to the girls once again. They looked at June's setup and the whispers began.

*Copycat.*

*Such annoying music.*

*Those streamers are going to fall apart when they get wet.*

*Sprinklers aren't as fun as a person with a hose.*

After an hour of watching all the customers go to Emma's house, June went inside and shouted at her mother to clean up.

Emma counted her money and could see that she definitely had enough for a tablet, but continued until dinner anyway, just because it made people happy.

When Emma saw June outside, she shouted, "Hey, June! I'll spray you for free! Come on over!"

June just rolled her eyes and played games on the tablet her parents bought her, hot and miserable.





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## CHAPTER TEN

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### The Trendsetter

Dawn was known at Smirk Middle School as a trendsetter—not just for the other girls, but for the boys too. On the first day of school, she showed up wearing a feather tied to a string as a necklace. At recess, everyone was looking for feathers. After a week, almost everyone had found a feather to wear. Then Dawn stopped wearing hers and everyone else stopped too.

“I hate when people copy me,” she said to her best friend Kim. Kim sheepishly took her feather off.

“It’s ok if *you* do,” Dawn added.

The next week, she came to school with a heart drawn on her cheek with a washable red marker. She waited until the first recess, then drew one on Kim’s face as well. All day long everyone was in search of markers. Some people used the kind that wasn’t washable because they just couldn’t wait to find a different one. A lot of the girls drew hearts, flowers, and skulls. The boys preferred stars, frowny faces, and dots that made them look like they had a rash.

In the last period of the day, Dawn excused herself to go to the bathroom. She came back with the heart washed off of

her face. Everyone started licking their hands to try to rub the ink off of their faces too.

"Would everyone stop licking their hands!" Mr. Miller shouted, "Think of the germs!"

"I hate when people copy me," Dawn whispered to Kim.

In the third week of school, Dawn wanted to make sure she did something that no one could or would copy. She came to school with her hair dyed pink, red, and purple.

She was wearing one of her dad's suits, walking on stilts, and for the duration of the day, she nibbled on a hard shell beef taco.

She started saying "Totally polka!" as a catchphrase, which no one else understood when or how to use, and the only music she would listen to was of monks chanting.

Everyone whispered about her style throughout the day.

"Man, I can't do stilts. We have basketball practice today!"

"My family is vegetarian. I don't eat beef tacos."

"Don't tell anyone this, but I don't really like the chanting monks. They're not as cute as *2 Slick 2 Slip*."

For once, no one wanted to copy Dawn.

She wore the same outfit, ate the same tacos, listened to the same music, and kept saying "Totally polka!" for a month.

In November, she came to school dressed in jeans and a t-shirt. Her hair was brown and she was listening to *2 Slick 2 Slip*.

"Hey Dawn, where are the stilts? And the suit?" Davy asked.

"I don't know what you're talking about," she said.

And she never wore anything weird again.







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## CHAPTER ELEVEN

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### Tornado Drill: The Musical

Mrs. Marfle, the music teacher, passed out booklets to the fifth graders, having no idea that they were about to practice a musical that would nearly destroy the school.

“Class, for our annual school play we’re doing *Tornado Drill: The Musical* written by Max.”

A few weeks earlier, the school had had a tornado drill. Max was always making up songs in his head. When he crouched in the hallway for the drill, he sang to himself about a real tornado. He imagined the junior cheerleaders could come up with a really good tornado dance and Mrs. Marfle could play piano. It would be better than doing *Uneventful Day: The Musical* again.

Mrs. Marfle gestured to one half of the room.

“Everyone on this side will be a student. Everyone else will be the tornado. Open your music books and let’s begin practice.”

And so Mrs. Marfle sat down at the piano and played the accompaniment while the students sang.

At first, the students thought it was strange, but they began talking about ideas for costumes and choreography and

before long, they were excited to perform *Tornado Drill: The Musical*.

On the night of their performance, the audience was packed full of their parents, siblings, and other family members. The lights dimmed. The students who were playing students filed onto the stage and sat in desks while they sang.

*“What’s that sound?”*

*It’s so loud and so shrill!*

*The tornado alarm.*

*Is this real? Or just a drill?*

*Single file!*

*In a line!*

*In the hallway!*

*Just in time!”*

The students crouched and covered their heads with their hands.

Lily called out her lines.

“I think it’s a real tornado! Look!” she said.

The other half of the fifth grade class whirled onto the stage wearing fluffy gray costumes like spinning storm clouds.

The parents oohed and ahed. They applauded the tornado players. Max grinned, proud that it was going so well.

The tornado players continued to spin. In fact, they were spinning so fast that they created a breeze that gently blew everyone’s hair back.

“Did they turn on a big fan?” someone in the audience whispered.

“No, I think they’re just spinning really fast!”

The tornadoes began to sing.

*"It's not a drill!*

*Students take cover!*

*We're spinning fast!*

*And we're getting bigger!*

*Hurry, warm air,*

*Hurry, cool!*

*Come together*

*Over the school!"*

The lights dimmed and the students screamed.

A green light filled the stage.

Cat, the best dancer in school, crouched down and two other players stood on her shoulders. Then three more players stood on their shoulders. Then four more stood on their shoulders! They kept building their reverse pyramid until all of the tornado players were stacked on Cat, and then she began to spin.

The breeze picked up. The faster she spun, the stronger the wind blew.

Mrs. Marfle's piano started rolling toward the edge of the stage, but she pushed it back while she continued to bang madly at the keys.

The students grasped curtains and desks, anything to avoid being blown away.

Everyone in the audience ducked and covered their heads. Creaking sounds filled the air as if the structure of the gymnasium was being tested.

This wasn't supposed to happen, Max thought.

"I can't stop!" Cat screamed.

The tornado of dancers lifted into the air, then landed, still spinning, on the floor of the gym. The audience ran for their lives, although a few remained seated thinking it was all part of the show.

"I think it's a hologram!" one of them said. "A really strong hologram!"

The tornado swept through the chairs, scattered all the basketballs, tangled up a volleyball net, and sucked jelly beans out of the concession stand.

"The show must go on!" Mrs. Marfle screamed as she continued to play.

The tornado drifted back toward the stage and Max thought quickly. He knew tornadoes stopped when they became colder, so he ran for the cooler of drinks backstage, dumped the ice out onto the stage, then ran to the thermostat to crank the air conditioning.

"No!" the principal cried. "Think of the electric bill!"

Cat directed the spinning mass of children back to the stage. They swept up the cold air and slowly, the tornado dancers dismantled their tornado. The students who were playing students returned to their desks and cheered.

*"We did it! We lived it!*

*We thought it was a drill!*

*It wasn't! It wasn't!*

*It turned out to be real!"*

The students all partnered up with tornado players and did a joyful dance to celebrate their successful disaster preparedness.

The tornadoes sang.

. . .

*"We apologize!*

*We can't help it!*

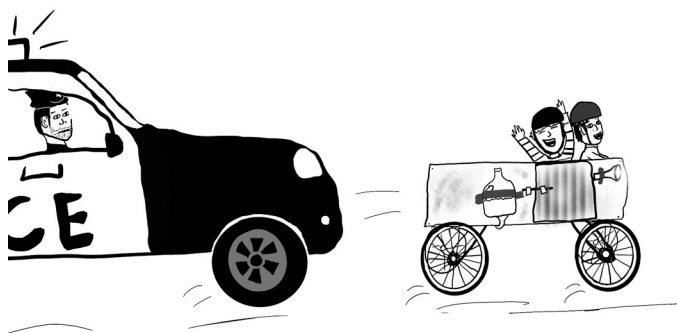
*We don't want to destroy you!*

*We just kind of happen sometimes!"*

They struck a pose. Mrs. Marfle stood and gestured to the students. They took a bow.

After a second of silence, the audience stood in uproarious applause.

Max had never felt prouder and he even had a new idea for a musical. It would be called *Tornado Drill: The Musical: The Near Disaster; Based on a True Story*.



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## CHAPTER TWELVE

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### The Boys Who Turned Two Bikes Into One Car and Drove It Around Town

After the snow from the winter ice melted away and it wasn't so sloppy cold outside, Ben felt like it was time to get his bike out of the shed again. He texted his friend Luke.

*Ride your bike over to my house?* He asked.

*On my way, after I eat this pancake.* Luke replied.

It was Saturday and Ben's parents were busy in the house doing something with important papers. After Ben spilled orange juice on an envelope, his dad yelled "My taxes!" and practically pushed Ben out the back door.

Ben yanked the shed door open, rolled his bike out, and found that he had a flat tire.

"Hey, man," Luke said, rolling into the backyard with his own bike.

"Bad news! My tire is flat."

Luke pushed his brown hair away from his eyes and took a closer look.

"Can't your dad fix it?" Luke asked.

"No," Ben said. "They're super busy with boring stuff."

Luke looked around in the shed. The shed was big enough to walk into and the walls were lined with shelves full of tools,



metal parts, tiki torches, wood stuff, and a bunch of junk. It smelled like gasoline and dead ants.

"Maybe we could fix it. My mom looks up videos about how to fix stuff all the time. I saw her fix our garbage disposal. Almost chopped her hand off doing it, but it worked."

"Let's try it," Ben said.

The two boys hunched over Ben's phone searching for videos about how to repair a flat tire on a bike. They even managed to find a video made by a kid their own age named Charlie Fixit. They followed his directions until the tire was as good as new.

*"And now your tire is sealed up tight,"* Charlie Fixit said, *"See my other videos to turn your bike into a car!"*

"Did he just say we could turn our bike into a car?" Ben asked.

"Dude, that would be amazing!" Luke said, "Let's do it!"

Ben frowned at the shed.

"I should probably ask my parents first. I gotta make sure it's ok to use all this stuff. Be right back."

Ben jogged to the back door, opened it up and yelled into the house.

"Hey guys! Is it ok if Luke and I use some stuff from the shed to build a car?"

"Whatever," his mom yelled back. "Just do it outside!"

Ben ran back with the good news.

"They said yes! Let's start the videos!"

And so they began building their car. The plan required two bikes, so it was lucky they were together. Ben did the work welding metal parts together and building the engine while Luke ran back and forth from the shed to get parts and tools for the job.

"So, are we going to be allowed to drive this thing around even though we're only eleven?" Luke asked.

"If the cops pull us over, we can just tell them it's a bike. We'll wear our helmets, it should be fine!"

They worked all day without stopping. They found old storm windows for the windshield, a milk jug for the gas tank, and plenty of wood scraps to build a floor, seats, and doors.

*"If you don't have a key to start your car, just touch these two wires together!"* Charlie said, *"Now, it's time to try out your new car!"*

They rolled the car to the street. It was a little shorter than most cars and it didn't have a roof, but when they touched the wires together, the engine roared into action.

"Yeah!" The two boys cheered and high-fived each other.

"Ok, I need to let my parents know we're leaving," Ben said.

Ben jogged to the backdoor. He noticed it was beginning to get dark so he ran into the house this time.

"Hey guys, is it ok if I take a ride with Luke? And can we use the flashlights from the emergency kit?"

Ben's parents were guzzling coffee, surrounded in papers, and had ink stains on their fingertips.

"Just around the block, and be back before bedtime," his dad said.

If Ben's parents had looked up from their work, they would have seen that Ben was covered in grease. Ben ran for the red emergency backpack and took the whole thing out to his new car.

"I got headlights for us!" he said.

Ben and Luke taped the flashlights to the front of their car, then flipped a coin to see who got to drive first. It was Ben.

Ben pressed on the gas pedal made out of a soup can and the car went forward. He pressed the brake made out of a tuna can and the car stopped. Perfect!

He pressed on the gas again and began their ride. They

weren't sure how fast the car was, but it felt fast. The wind blew their hair around the edges of their helmets and they kept laughing for no reason other than they were just so proud of themselves. After one trip around the block, they switched.

At the end of Ben's street, Luke kept going.

"My dad said I could only go around the block," Ben said.

"We're going to run out of gas, though," Luke said. "Let's fill 'er up!"

"Ok," Ben said, "I'll just text my dad to let him know so he doesn't worry."

The boys drove to the gas station, they gave two dollars to the guy at the cash register who was busy reading a magazine, took the cap off the milk bottle, and pumped their own gas. If any adults had been paying attention, they would have told the boys that pumping gas into a jug was dangerous, but no one seemed to notice.

When they got back on the road, the car was fast enough to keep up with all of the other cars. They drove down a big street past restaurants and shops. They stopped at red lights and used their arms as turn signals.

"I'm hungry," Ben said. "Burgers?"

Luke drove into the drive-through of the nearest fast food place.

"Quick, put grease on your lip so you look like an adult!" Luke said.

Each of them swiped their fingers against a dirty car part and gave themselves mustaches. Luke spoke to the drive-through speaker with his deepest voice.

"We are two men who want two hamburgers, please."

"That'll be \$5.98. Please pull forward," the voice said.

Luke drove forward. The worker leaned out of the window, took their money, and handed them a brown bag.

"Have a good night, sir," she said.

The boys ate burgers and were perfectly happy until they drove through a swarm of gnats.

"Bleh! I got bugs in my eyes. We gotta head home now," Ben said.

Luke turned the car around, but stopped when he heard a siren.

They were getting pulled over!

"Remember, Luke, it's just a bike," Ben said.

Officer Cop strolled up to the side of their car.

"License, please," he said.

"We don't have licenses," Luke said. "It's only a bike. Look at the tires."

Officer Cop could see that, indeed, their tires looked like bike tires.

"I see," Officer Cop said. "Alright, you boys can go, but hurry home, because this tire looks like it's going flat."

Ben gasped.

The patch they put on the tire earlier was starting to peel away. They were several blocks away from home, and Ben needed to be there in less than 5 minutes.

Ben gritted his teeth.

"Pedal to the metal, Luke," he said.

It was almost as if they had willed the car to go faster than ever. They zoomed down the street and the closer they got to Ben's house, the more the tire sounded like it was flapping against the pavement.

In front of Ben's house the car finally wouldn't go any further. They turned the car toward the driveway and pushed it into Ben's backyard.

"Shoot," Luke said, "I need my bike to get home."

They grew sad as they realized they needed to take the car apart. Luke gently pulled his bike away from all the parts they had attached to it.

"Maybe we can build it again tomorrow," Luke said.

Ben went inside and found his parents putting away all of their work.

"Taxes done!" his mom said.

"Hey, Ben. I'm really sorry we were busy all day. Tomorrow we can do whatever you want," Ben's dad said.

"My bike tire is flat. Can you fix it?" Ben asked.

"No problem, buddy," he said. "We'll tune up your bike and by the time we're done, you won't even recognize it anymore."

That made Ben smile, because maybe after his dad fixed it up, he and Luke could build an even better car.





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## CHAPTER THIRTEEN

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### The Chicken Prank

*“Good morning Slacksville Elementary! Principal Hooper is home sick today, so I’m your substitute principal, Mrs. Gunderson!”*

When Mrs. Gunderson’s announcement started, AJ’s fourth grade class was settling into their seats, and a mischievous grin spread across AJ’s face.

Hal noticed and knew AJ had something up her sleeve. After all, she was the pranking queen. One time, she brought a remote control from home so she could pause their teacher’s video about the water cycle, over and over until their teacher pounded on the TV and cried. Another time, she made the second graders believe the bathroom at their end of the hall was haunted by hiding a walkie talkie in a vent.

“Why are you smiling?” Hal whispered at her.

“You’ll see,” she said.

*“My main duty for today as your substitute principal is to make the announcements that I’m making right now. So here it goes... Umm... let me just find Principal Hooper’s notes here...”*

The students rolled their eyes while they heard Mrs. Gunderson rifle around drawers and cabinets.



The sighs of boredom ended when they heard her shriek.

*"Abbb! Who put this here?!"*

Hal's eyes widened at AJ. AJ put her fists up to her armpits and flapped her elbows around like wings, while the distinct sound of "bok bok bok" came from the loudspeaker.

*"It's a chicken! Who put this chicken in here? Is there always a chicken in here?"*

The laughter from each and every classroom was so great that it roared through the school hallways.

"Its name is Dippy," AJ whispered to Hal.

*"It's not funny!"* Mrs. Gunderson said, *"It's laying an egg on my sweater!"*

Another wave of laughter spread throughout the school.

"How did you make it lay an egg on her sweater?" Hal asked AJ.

"I didn't," AJ said. "It just happened! This prank is going even better than expected!"

*"It's flying everywhere! The school nurse closed me in so the chicken couldn't get out and now I'm stuck in here! Call animal control!"*

"Do you think anyone is going to help?" Hal wondered aloud.

Hal and AJ looked at their teacher who was merely rubbing his eyes like he had a headache.

*"I've spilled coffee on my lap and now the feathers are sticking to my clothes! And the egg looks like it's going to hatch!"*

"We want to see the baby chicken!" half the class cried out.

*"The chicken is digging through the potted plants to find a worm for its baby chick! Abbb! Now it's flying toward my ladybug necklace! It wants to feed my necklace to the chick!"*

It sounded like pure chaos in the principal's office.

AJ was frowning.

"This has gotten kind of out of hand, even for me," AJ said. "I think maybe I should do something."

"You'll get in trouble," Hal said.

"Nah," AJ said, "I'll be a hero."

AJ raised her hand.

"Mr. Grapnel? My family keeps chickens in our backyard. Can I go try to help Mrs. Gunderson?"

Mr. Grapnel nodded and AJ jogged down the empty hall until she reached the main office.

The secretary was standing on a desk and the nurse was holding her back against the door.

"Lice! Lice!" the nurse shouted. "The chicken could have lice! We could have a lice outbreak on our hands! You mustn't open the door!"

"Worry about the lice later," AJ said. "Someone's gotta catch that chicken!"

AJ opened the door and stepped inside. Mrs. Gunderson was cowering under the desk covered in coffee, dirt, and feathers. Papers were scattered everywhere and the cabinet where AJ had first placed the chicken was standing open. It was eerily quiet.

"Dippy? Dippy, where are you?" she said.

Dippy flew at AJ's face, briefly landed on her head, then flew out the door and toward the nurse.

"Lice! Lice!" the nurse screamed.

AJ chased Dippy down the hall, but Dippy constantly stayed out of reach.

"You're too fast, Dippy! How am I going to catch you?" she said to herself. Then she had an idea.

AJ chased Dippy toward the second grade bulletin board where they had made octopuses with pink yarn. She ripped a piece of the yarn down, held it in the palm of her hand, and offered the hand out to Dippy.

Dippy cautiously came near and when she was about to

peck what she thought was a worm out of AJ's hand, AJ wrapped her hands around Dippy's middle and held her wings down.

AJ triumphantly carried Dippy back to the principal's office, reunited the hen with her newborn, and closed the door to the office with no one in it this time.

The nurse was busy checking Mrs. Gunderson's hair for lice.

"Thank you," Mrs. Gunderson said through hysterical breaths.

"Sure. My family keeps chickens, so if you wanted my mom to come get it, she could take it away."

"That's a very nice offer," the principal said. "Yes, please call your mother."

In the end, the truth about AJ being the one to put the chicken in the principal's office was found out, but AJ found a good way to make up for it. After all, she felt bad that it got so out of hand. She knocked on the substitute principal's door one Saturday with a basket.

Mrs. Gunderson opened the door, took one look at the basket and cried out, "No! No more! Never again! Get them away!"

She slammed the door.


"Well, I tried," AJ said to herself.

She clutched her basket of eggs and went home.



Slacks to Suit you!

1. Slide into Slack subs. Do not submerge.
- 2 Exit subs for color selection and tailoring
- 3 Enjoy your custom slacks!



CAUTION!  
No CANNONBALLS



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## CHAPTER FOURTEEN

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### The Slacksville Slacks Factory

Saturday morning, Harry woke up and pulled on his blue slacks. He couldn't button them in the front.

He tried his green slacks. His ankles were showing. He didn't particularly care, but his mom did.

"It looks like you've had a growth spurt. We need to go clothes shopping," she said.

"Noooooooooooo!" Harry said, and he fell to the floor. Clothes shopping at the mall was the most boring way he could imagine spending a Saturday.

"It'll be fun! You're old enough to get custom slacks at the slacks factory," she said.

"How is that fun?" Harry asked.

"You'll see," she said, and gave him a wink.

Harry had only ever seen the outside of the *Slacks Factory*. It was the biggest building in town. It was all brown, and sometimes had steam coming out of the top. Pretty boring.

That's why it was surprising when they stepped inside and immediately heard cool electronic music. A perfumed hostess eyed Harry's slacks.

"Looks like someone needs a new pair! Right this way, young man," she said.

She whisked Harry away to a changing room and handed him a pair of swim trunks. She didn't give him any time to ask questions, so he changed into them. When he came out, his mom had changed into a swimsuit too.

"I'll get a pair while we're here. Why not?" she said.

The hostess walked Harry and his mom onto the factory floor and Harry's jaw dropped.

In the center of the room, there was a swimming pool full of foam. People of all shapes and sizes were riding down water slides into the foam, and then walking out.

"This is how slacks are made?!" Harry asked.

"Yeah. How'd you think they were made?" his mom asked. "Let's go."

Harry was nervous. He didn't know how deep the foam would be, so he watched his mom go first.

"Weeeeee!" she said sliding down into the foam. She didn't drown, the foam only came up to her waist, so Harry thought it must be ok.

Harry climbed to the top of the slide. It was more slippery than he imagined it would be and even faster than a water slide. He couldn't help but laugh the whole way down.

His mom helped him out. The foam started drying on their legs until it started to look like fabric.

"Right this way," the hostess said.

Harry and his mom walked up to a man with a giant pair of scissors. He snipped away all the parts of the fabric that weren't slacks.

"Color?" he asked.

"Maroon for me," his mom said.

"Um, blue I guess," Harry said.

The man took out a spray paint gun and expertly colored the slacks.

"Take them off please," he said.

They removed the slacks and put them on the conveyor belt. Workers on the other side of the belt added rivets, zippers, and buttons.

Harry was so excited, he asked his mom if he could get another pair.

"Sure," she said.

Without waiting, Harry darted for the pool screaming "Cannonball!!!"

If it weren't for the sound of the factory floor, he would have heard his mother and several other adults shouting "No!"

It was too late.

Harry cannonballed into the foam, popped up, wiped the foam from his face and climbed out.

His mother ran to him.

"Why are you upset? What's wrong?" he asked.

Then he started to feel the foam dry- in his ears, on his hair, under his chin, around his hands.

The man with the big scissors came to his side. Harry couldn't hear his voice with fabric in his ears, but he stood very still when the man started cutting.

After the man finished, Harry stepped out of his new jumpsuit and looked down at it. It was like a snake had shed its skin. It was a full-body Harry costume, except with a hole where the face would be. His hair was even on top.

Harry felt his head. He was bald. The hair had to be cut off with the fabric.

The man with the scissors kept cutting the fabric until Harry was walking away with slacks, a turtleneck, socks, gloves, and a wig.

"This is going to cost a fortune," his mom sighed.

"I'll help you out," the hostess whispered and gave them a wink.



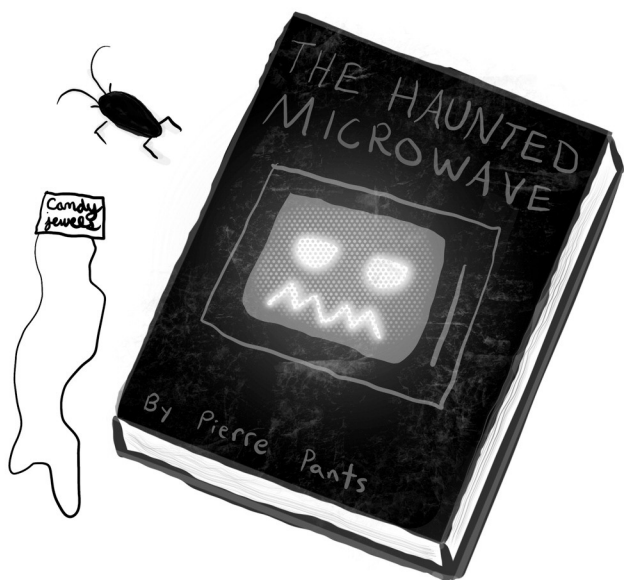
They only had to pay for the slacks and Harry got to keep the other stuff for free.

“Is Halloween coming soon?” Harry asked.

“In a couple of months,” his mom said. “Why?”

“This stuff makes a perfect costume! I want to go as *myself* for Halloween this year!”





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## CHAPTER FIFTEEN

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### Time Capsule

“Class, as we planned, today we will be filling a time capsule and exchanging out the time capsule that was buried 50 years ago in the schoolyard. Time capsules are a wonderful way to tell people in the future what was important to us and, likewise, we’ll find out what was important to kids just like you 50 years ago!”

Mr. Miller held the capsule in his hands. It was a plastic container. Nothing fancy, but it would work.

“Ok,” he said, “Who brought something to put into the time capsule?”

Several students raised their hands.

“Sharla,” Mr. Miller called out, “What do you have?”

Sharla came to the front of the room grinning. She held up a poster of 2 *Slick 2 Slip*.

“This is a poster of the best band of all time, 2 *Slick 2 Slip*. They will always be my favorite and everyone is going to love them forever, especially Danthony because he’s the cutest.”

“Thank you, Sharla. I’m sure kids in the future will enjoy seeing a piece of our pop culture.”

"Now I have that song stuck in my head!" Davy groaned, "*Girl you're 2 jam 2 scram.*"

"Me too, but there's nothing we can do about it now," Mr. Miller said. "Who else has something for the capsule?"

Cassie came forward.

"I was really excited about the Venus Rover landing this year."

"That's a very important event!" Mr. Miller said.

"Anyway, I don't really have anything about the Rover, but on the same day it landed, I broke my wrist, so I brought the leftover cast."

Cassie held up a dirty white piece of plaster cast.

"That's nice, Cassie, but how will kids in the future know about the Rover?"

"Oh, right," Cassie said. She took out a marker and wrote VENUS ROVER on the cast and placed it in the capsule.

Mr. Miller frowned and nodded at the contents of the box so far.

"Ok, who else brought something that tells about what life is like today?"

Kevin came forward.

"I brought a piece of... literature? Is that the right word?"

"Yes. Literature is a great idea!" Mr. Miller said.

"Good. Ok, I brought my favorite piece of literature."

Kevin held up a shabby paperback.

"It's called *The Day My Snot Came to Life and Destroyed a Large Portion of My School* by D. L. Grimes. It's really funny and a little creepy and a good example of what we read today."

Kevin set it in the capsule.

"Thank you," Mr. Miller said, but he didn't sound thankful.

"Davy, did you have something?"

Davy came to the front of the room and held out a Wacky Orb in his hands.

"I know Wacky Orbs aren't popular anymore, but earlier this year they were a pretty big deal, so I thought we should add one to the capsule."

Mr. Miller shivered at the sight of a Wacky Orb.

"I'm a little concerned about ants being attracted," Mr. Miller said.

Davy set the Wacky Orb into the container and Mr. Miller decided to let it be. A poster of a band, a dirty piece of cast, an immature kids book, and a toy that is also candy weren't what Mr. Miller had hoped for, but it's what he got.

He snapped the lid on top.

"Ok, now for the exciting part! We get to open the capsule that was buried just for you 50 years ago!"

It was a rusty tin container with a lid. Mr. Miller lifted the lid and gasped when a cockroach scuttled out.

"EWWWWWWWW!" everyone said.

Mr. Miller retrieved rubber gloves from his first aid kit and proceeded to take the first item from the capsule.

"I know, that bug was yucky, but let's see what kind of treasures we have here. It's a folded up picture torn from a magazine!" he said.

He unfolded the picture.

"It's of a band called The Rippy Henderson Gang. I've never heard of them, but there's a note written here on the back. It says *The Rippy Henderson Gang is the best band ever, they're so far out and they're going to be popular forever! I have no doubt that everyone in the future will already know exactly who Rippy Henderson is.*"

"So how come we've never heard of them?" Violet asked.

"Well, apparently they weren't popular forever," Mr. Miller said.

"Not like *2 Slick 2 Slip*. They'll always be cool," Dawn said.

"I'm sure they will be. Let's move on," Mr. Miller said.

He picked up the next item from the tin. It was a little glass jar with a small amount of water sloshing inside it. There was a note attached.

*"A piece of ice I held against a bump on my forehead while I watched the news talk about The Apollo Mission."*

"So... it's old melted ice?" Cassie asked, "All water is old melted ice. That's not so exciting."

Mr. Miller raised his eyebrows at Cassie.

"I think you're right. Ok, let's see what else."

Mr. Miller lifted a book up from the capsule. The pages were crumbling and it was difficult to even see the picture on the cover. Mr. Miller squinted at the title page.

*"The Haunted Microwave,"* he read.

"Microwaves aren't scary," Kevin said.

"Well, at the time, they were sort of new, so there could have been anxiety about... you know what? Nevermind. Let's look at the last thing in the capsule."

Mr. Miller pulled a string out of the capsule. There was a tag on it.

*"Candy Necklace: Part Candy, Part Jewelry."*

"But that's just a string," Pippy said, "Where's the candy part?"

"I think we know what that cockroach has been eating all this time," Mr. Miller said.

He put the contents of the capsule in the trash.

"Man, our capsule is way better than theirs," Davy said.

"Yeah," Sharla agreed, "We have way better taste, I guess. The stuff we put in the capsule is always going to be interesting and if the kids in the future don't think our capsule is cool, well, they just don't even know what they're talking about."

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## COMING SOON!

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### ***Slacksville's Worst Superheroes***

Speedperson was not good at being on tv or talking to, well, anybody.

"I'm a new superhero in town. Well, I'm going to try to be a hero," she said to the newswoman, "I can help if someone needs a very fast person to, I dunno, catch up with a bad guy-but not a really tough bad guy. I could stop a runaway stroller? My biggest weakness is parachutes. When someone puts a parachute on me, I can't run so fast anymore. Maybe I shouldn't have said that."

Speedperson rubbed her eyes. Her curly hair stuck out in all directions around the helmet that she wore.

"Why do you wear a helmet?" the newswoman asked.

"Well, I'm very fast, but sometimes I run into things, and when you run into things very fast, you tend to get hurt pretty bad. I guess tripping hazards are my other big weakness. I probably shouldn't have said that."

"Is there anything else you probably shouldn't say?" the newswoman asked.

"Yeah. Another problem is when I get bugs in my eyes.



Too many bugs and I can't hardly see. Gosh, I really shouldn't have said that. Stupid! Stupid!"

Speedperson slapped herself on her helmet.

The newswoman ended the interview, but had one last thing to say.

"You should have a little more confidence," she said, "Don't beat yourself up so much."

"Ok. Gosh, I'm so bad at having confidence," Speedperson said.

Speedperson ran through Slacksville looking for people who needed help, but she caused two car accidents and whenever she ran past someone holding a drink they spilled it all over themselves and a little on her. She had stains from three sodas, five coffees, and two juice boxes on her Speed suit.

### ***Slacksville's Silliest Spooky Stories***

Two identical mothers. One standing in the hallway and one standing in the closet. Wesley looked into his mother's eyes in the hallway and wondered how he could ever possibly know which mother was real.

He looked back at the closet mother and saw that they had the same eyes, the same body, the same expression of horror on their faces.

There was one difference, however, that, in the light, Wesley could finally see.

The mother in the closet had a bushy, brown mustache.

"Honey, I know you must be confused. I am too! But you have to believe me! I'm your real mother!" the one from the closet shouted.

Wesley and his real mother looked at each other.

"Uhhhhh... obviously you're not," Wesley said.

"What are you, like a boogie man or something?" Wesley's mother asked the thing in the closet.

"No! I'm..."

The thing in the closet touched its own face and felt the bushy mustache. It stopped pretending to be horrified and relaxed.

“Shoot! I didn’t transform all the way. Ok, you guys got me! I’m the boogie man!”

Wesley and his mother laughed.

“Nice try, boogie man,” Wesley said.

### ***Christmas in Slacksville***

*Now I just have to wait a little bit for them to go to sleep, then I’ll get up and watch for Santa,* Wesley thought. The only problem was, Wesley was very tired and couldn’t help but drift into a deep sleep while thinking of Christmas.

That’s when Wesley began to sleepwalk.

It wasn’t the first time he sleepwalked. Once, he sleepwalked into the kitchen, opened a jar of grape jelly, ate a handful, and awoke with a face so sticky that lint from his bed stuck to it. It looked like he had a beard.

On Christmas Eve though, he only had one thing on his mind while he sleepwalked; finding out if Santa was real.

Wesley sleepwalked to the living room, sleep-plugged the Christmas tree lights back in, and sleep-looked at the fireplace. Wesley sleep-realized that if Santa could see him, Santa might not come to their house, so Wesley sleep-needed to hide himself.

Wesley sleep-gathered all his toy bricks and sleep-built a fort with spy holes where he could sleep-watch for Santa. He was so pleased with his fort that he sleep-developed a taste for decorating.

Wesley sleep-gathered pine cones from the yard and extra lights from the basement and sleep-decorated the house. While he was sleep-decorating, he sleep-thought his parents might be mad if they found out that he stayed up late, so he sleep-baked cinnamon rolls.



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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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K. Peach is a writer in Portland, Oregon. She is also a former children's librarian, mother, wife, amateur roller skater, cleaning lady, and ghost story enthusiast. She guards the only known portal to Slackville, but suspects there may be another one.

Stay in touch! We'd love to see your art on Instagram. Don't forget to use #slacksfart (that's short for Slackville fan art). While you're there, follow [Tales\\_From\\_Slackville](#) .



