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Opening extract from

The it Doesn't Matter Suit and Other Stories

Written by

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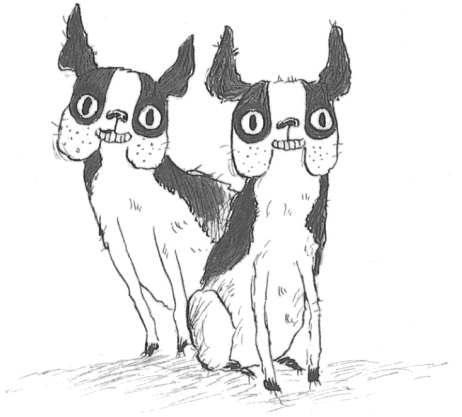
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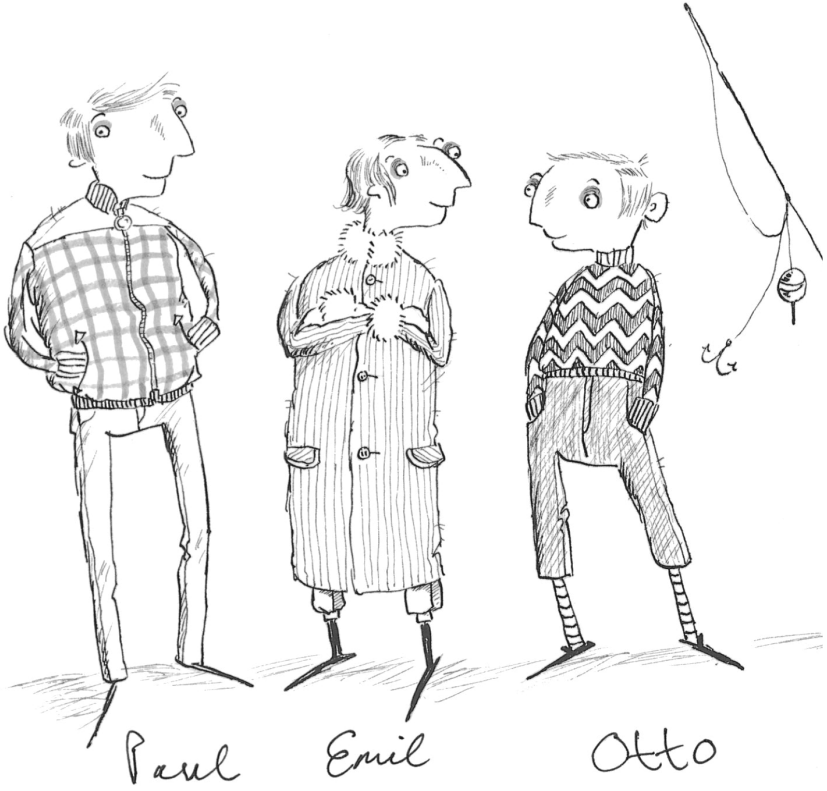
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The It-Doesn't-Matter Suit



Max Nix was seven years old, and the youngest of seven brothers. First came Paul, the eldest and tallest of all seven. Then came Emil. Then Otto and Walter, and Hugo and Johann.



Last came Max. Max's whole name was Maximilian, but because he was only seven he did not need such a big name. So everybody called him just Max. Max lived with Mama and Papa Nix and his six brothers in a little village called Winkelburg, halfway up a steep mountain.

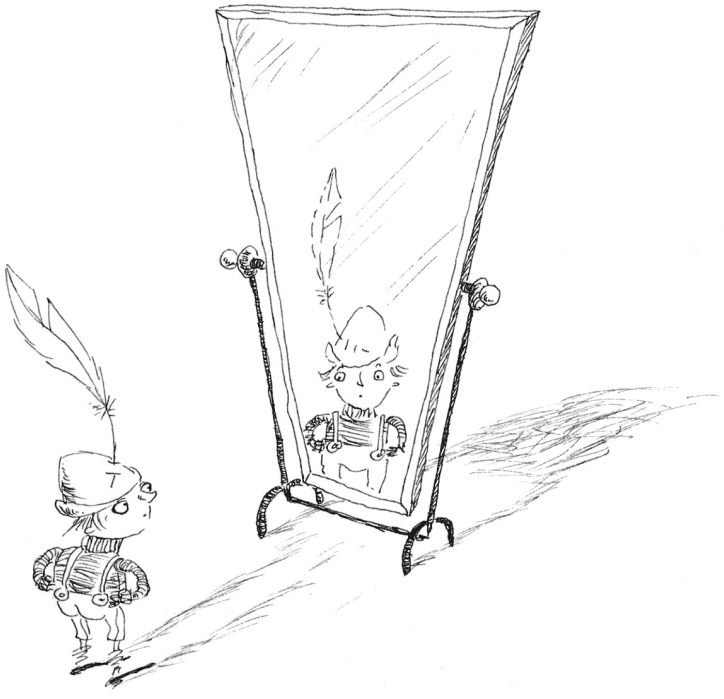


The mountain had three peaks, and on all three peaks, winter and summer, sat caps of snow like three big scoops of vanilla ice-cream. On nights when the moon rose round and bright as an orange balloon you could hear the foxes barking in the dark pine forest high above Max's house. On clear, sunlit days you could see the river winking and blinking far, far below in the valley, small and thin as a silver ribbon.

Max liked where he lived.

Max was happy, except for one thing.

More than anything else in the world Max Nix wanted a suit of his own.



He had a green sweater and green wool socks and a green felt hunting hat with a turkey feather in it. He even had a fine pair of leather knickers with carved bone buttons. But everybody knows a sweater and a pair of knickers are not the same thing as a suit – a made-to-order suit with long trousers and a jacket to match.

Wherever Max Nix looked in Winkelburg – east and west, north and south, high and low and round about – he saw people wearing suits. Some people had suits for work, and these were very sturdy suits of brown or grey cloth. Some people had suits for weddings, and these were very handsome suits with striped silk waistcoats. Some people had suits for skiing, and these

were gay blue or red suits with rows of snowflakes or edelweiss embroidered on the cuffs and collars.

Some people had summer suits of linen, white and crisp as letter paper. Papa Nix and Paul and Emil and Otto and Walter and Hugo and Johann all had suits. *Everybody* on the mountain had some sort of suit except Max.

Now Max did not want a suit *just* for work
(that would be too plain)
or *just* for weddings
(that would be too fancy)
or *just* for skiing
(that would be too hot)
or *just* for summer
(that would be too cool).



He wanted a suit for All-Year-Round.

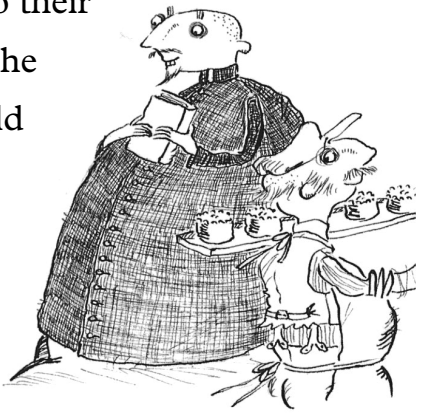
He wanted a suit for doing Everything. Not too plain a suit for birthdays and holidays, and not too fancy a suit for school and calling the cows home. Not too hot a suit for hiking in July, and not too cool a suit for coasting in the snow.

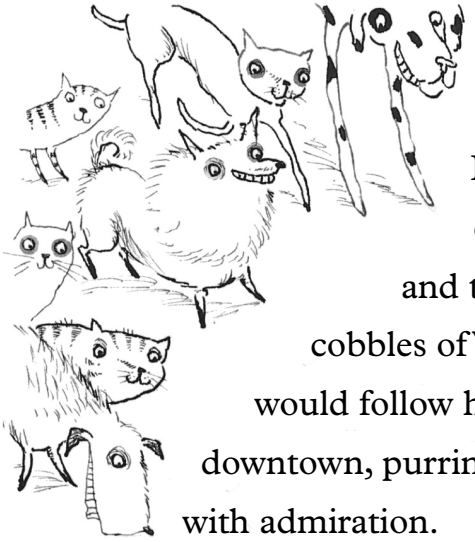






If Max had a suit for All-Year-Round, the butcher and the baker, and the blacksmith and the goldsmith, and the tinker and the tailor, and the innkeeper, and the schoolteacher, and the grocer and the goodwives, and the minister and the mayor, and everybody else in Winkelburg would flock to their doors and windows when he went by. 'Look!' they would murmur to one another. 'There goes Maximilian in his marvellous suit!'





If Max had a suit for doing Everything, the cats in the alleys and the dogs on the cobbles of Winkelburg would follow him uptown and downtown, purring and grrring with admiration.

That was the sort of suit Max was dreaming about the day the postman of Winkelburg knocked on the Nixes' door and delivered the big package.

The package was shaped like a long, flattish box.

It was wrapped round with heavy brown wrapping paper.

It was tied with red string.