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Opening extract from

Middle School: Just My Rotten Luck

Written by

James Patterson

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THIS IS NOT A DRILL

Ever since I've known you—how long has it been now?—I've been getting my butt kicked in about a hundred different ways. Well, the butt-kicking officially stops here.

On this page.

Before the next period

•

That's why this could be my best story yet. I've got a ton of stuff to tell you about. More than ever, in fact. For a while, I thought maybe I'd call this book *The Butt-Kick Stops Here*. Or maybe *Look at Me, I'm Special*. Or *First Kiss*. Or *Rafe Khatchadorian: Secret Agent Artist*.

But I didn't call it any of those things. In case you haven't already noticed, I called this one *Just My Rotten Luck*.

And even though that doesn't sound like the happy-go-luckiest title you've ever heard of (with plenty of good reason), there's a lot that happens in this book that's pretty awesome.

Like me being a football hero.

Yeah, yeah. I know *football* and *Rafe Khatchadorian* don't exactly go together like ham and eggs. But that really was me, hitting the field for the Hills Village Middle School Falcons. It really did happen.

Really, really.



Don't get me wrong. I'm not saying this story is going to be all about touchdowns and cheerleaders screaming my name. (*Obviously.* I mean, have you seen what I look like?)

I'm just saying…well, you know what? Maybe I should start at the beginning. And for that to happen, we have to go back in time a little bit. And *that* means I'm going to need a good old-fashioned flashback. Then a flash-forward, and then who knows what else after that.

So buckle up, people. It's going to be a bumpy ride.

All set? Good.

Here comes the flashback!





ROUGH START

Welcome to THE PAST! Don't worry, we didn't go that far. Just three weeks earlier, to be exact.

I was at the tail end of a pretty lousy summer, which is *supposed* to be the best time of the year for most kids. Me, not so much. Camp Wannamorra had been a disaster, and my time at The Program in the Rocky Mountains just about killed me in six different ways. (Well, okay, just *one* way, but still…)

None of that was the worst part, though. That happened on the Friday before school started, when Mom took me to Hills Village Middle School. We had a meeting scheduled with Mrs. Stricker and Mrs. Stonecase so I could get re-enrolled there.

You remember Mrs. Stricker, right? And Mrs.

Stonecase too? They're the principal and vice principal of HVMS. They're also sisters—for real. That's like getting twice the trouble for half the price. Not to mention, if there was a Worldwide Khatchadorian Haters Club, they'd be the president and vice president.



So anyway, as soon as I was stuck inside that lion's den (I mean, sitting down in Mrs. Stricker's office), I got a two-ton piece of bad news dropped on my head.

"If Rafe wishes to come back to Hills Village Middle School this fall," Mrs. Stricker said to my mom, "he'll have to be enrolled as a special needs student."

And I was like, "Say WHAT?"

But Stricker wasn't done. She kept going, like a tidal wave of meanness that just couldn't be stopped. "Whether he'll finish middle school on time or have to put in an extra semester or two—or *more*—well, we just can't say at this point," she told us.

And then I was like, "Say WHAAAAAAT???"

I don't know what they call it at your school. IEP. SPED. Special Education. Barnum & Bailey's Three-Ring Circus. At HVMS, the kids have plenty of names for it—just not ones they say when any teachers are around.

And now I was in it.

I tried to talk Stricker, Stonecase, and even Mom out of making this horrible mistake, but they

wouldn't budge. Mom wasn't being mean about it or anything. I know she wants what's best for me. She just said I should give it a try.

"We'll see how things go once the school year starts," she said. "Who knows, maybe you'll even like it."

Which is such a MOM thing to say.

In the meantime, if you're thinking this story is all about bad news, don't worry. Some cool stuff happens too, like that first kiss, and some other things I haven't even told you about yet.

But so far? My school year was off to the worst start ever.

And it hadn't even started yet.