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Opening extract from

Totally Spaced Ms Wiz

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CHAPTER ONE
PSYCHO PUPPY

Tilly Davis looked into her worm farm and sighed. There was no doubt about it, she thought to herself. Worms were not the greatest of pets.

With her finger, she gently turned the earth which she had gathered from the park and put into a plastic box to provide a home for her worms. Slither, the biggest worm, seemed to be asleep. So was Twisty, his friend. A smaller worm with a mark on its body, whom Tilly called Scar, moved slowly across the surface of the earth.

"Scar moved, Mum," Tilly called out.

Tilly's mother bustled into the room, brushing her hair, putting on her watch

and talking all at the same time.

"We're both going to be late," she said. "If I tell my boss that I missed the train because Scar the pet worm had decided to move a bit, I don't think she'll be very impressed."

Tilly covered the three worms with earth. "Don't you listen to her, Scar," she whispered. "She loves you really. What was that?" She leaned forward and seemed to listen to what the worm was saying. "Scar says you work too hard, Mum. He says you should chill out like he does."

Mrs Davis stopped brushing her hair and looked at her daughter. "Maybe it's time to let those worms go," she said more gently. "They aren't really meant to be pets, are they?"

Tilly nodded. "I suppose they've had their adventure in the world of

humans," she said, standing up. "I'll take them back to the park later today."

"Well done, love."

"And then I'll get some more worms."

Mrs Davis put her hand on Tilly's shoulder. "What about having a proper pet?" she asked. "A hamster perhaps. Or a lovely little guinea pig."

"I don't believe in keeping animals in a cage," said Tilly. "It's like putting them in prison."

"And we happen to live in a small flat on the fourth floor which is much too small for a cat," said her mother.

"What about a dog?" Tilly asked.

Mrs Davis winced. "They take a lot of time, you know, what with walks and vets and, I don't know . . . fleas and things. I'm a very busy woman and you're at school."

Tilly sighed and picked up the worm farm. "So," she said sadly. "Worms it is."

Mrs Davis glanced at her watch. "On your way, then. Jack and Podge will be waiting for you downstairs."

Tilly kissed her mother at the front door to their flat. Then, holding the plastic box in front of her, she made her way down the stone steps.

As she reached the landing below theirs, a door opened to the sound of snarling and snapping and two large dogs, tugging at their leads, emerged, followed by a big lumpy teenager who was struggling to control them.

"Hi, Nutter! Hi, Psycho!"

Tilly crouched down in front of the dogs. Seeing her, they began to wag their tails and whimper. Both of them licked her face – it was like going



through a very smelly car wash. She glanced up at their owner, who was called Gary but who preferred to use his nickname. "Hi . . . Gob," she said.

"You want to watch out for them dogs," he said. "They're killers when they get nasty."

Tilly laughed. "They're just telling me that they want to be let off their leads and have a run in the park."

"Yeah, like they really talk to you," said Gary.

For the briefest of moments, Tilly thought about telling him that it was true, that she really could understand what dogs wanted – it was as if she could hear their voices in her head. But then she realised that Gary would just think that she was a bit odd.

"'Bye, dogs," she said, then turned to make her way down the last flight of steps onto the pavement where Jack and Podge, her friends from St Barnabas School, were waiting for her.

It was not a perfect day at school. During the morning, Class Five's teacher Mr Bailey talked to the class about how the world's climate was changing. Lizzie, who was very interested in the environment, said that if the icecaps started melting, polar

bears might become extinct.

Jack said that would be really lame because polar bears were his favourite animals.

Caroline said she preferred hippopotamuses, especially when they yawned.

"I've got an aunt who's got two parrots," said Podge. "They fly round the sitting room and hang off the curtain and do poos on the mantelpiece."

"Excuse me, Class Five, this is not pet corner!" said Mr Bailey, rather more loudly than he intended. "We're talking about the future of Planet Earth not about pets and their toilet habits."

"Tilly's got worms," thought Jack. At least, he thought he had thought it but, when he noticed that everyone in the class was staring at Tilly, he realised

that he must have said the words out loud.

"Worms, Tilly?" Mr Bailey seemed to have forgotten about Planet Earth for a moment. "Is this true?"

Tilly was blushing. "What's wrong with having worms?" she muttered.

"That's quite enough of this discussion," said the teacher. "Tilly, the nurse is coming in this afternoon. Please tell her that you've got worms. She'll give you some pills."

"Pills?" said Tilly. "Why would I need pills?"

Mr Bailey seemed oddly embarrassed. "Well, sometimes if you eat something, these little worms can start growing in your stomach," he said.

"Tilly's worms are in a box," said Podge. "They're her pets and their

names are—"

"Podge!" warned Tilly.

There was a moment of unusual silence in class.

"Perhaps we could return to the subject of global warming," said Mr Bailey.

After school, Tilly, Jack and Podge went home together through the park. When they reached a flowerbed in the park, Tilly put the worm farm on the ground, then gently turned it over so that the earth and her three worms tipped out.

"'Bye, Scar. 'Bye, Slither. 'Bye, Twisty. I'll miss you."

Podge put his hand over his mouth and squeaked, "And we'll miss you."

Jack nudged him in the ribs and frowned.

"Sorry, Till," said Podge. "See ya, Twisty and the others."

They wandered towards the park gate in silence. On their way, Tilly noticed a small, wooden shed. She was just about to say to Jack and Podge that she had never noticed it before when something small, hairy and black and white appeared at the door of the shed and hurtled towards them. From the way that it nipped Jack's ankle, then Podge's, it seemed to be some sort of angry little dog.

"Ow!" shouted Jack.

"It's attacking me!" said Podge, doing a scared little dance.

The dog stopped in front of Tilly. It sat down, wagging its tail, and looked at her expectantly, one ear up.

"Where's that puppy gone?"

A woman in a long brown overcoat,

holding a broom in her hands, appeared at the door of the shed.

"It's psycho, that thing," Jack called out. "You should keep it on a lead."

"She just chews through leads." The woman walked towards them, then



looked down at the dog, which was still gazing up at Tilly. "She chews through everything."

"Yeah, like my leg," said Podge.

"Come here, Thingy," said the woman.

"Thingy?" Jack said to Podge. "Bit of a funny name for a dog, isn't it?

"Thingy!" the woman shouted. Then, sighing, she closed her eyes. A faint humming noise could be heard. As if being carried by invisible hands, the dog was lifted in the air and put down at the woman's feet.

As she leaned down to pat its head, Jack noticed that the park keeper was wearing black nail varnish.

"Ms Wiz?" he said. "Is that you?"

"Unless you know anyone else with a flying dog, it is," said Ms Wiz. "I said I go wherever magic is needed. The

litter in this park is a disgrace."

"What's with the dog?" asked Podge.

"It was lost," said Ms Wiz casually. "I said I would give it a home."

From Ms Wiz's pocket emerged the head of Herbert, the magical rat. In each of his ears was stuffed some cotton. "Oh yes, and we don't worry about rats, do we? Because rats don't have feelings, do they? That horrible little Thingy is doing my head in."

For the first time, Tilly looked away from the dog towards Ms Wiz. "I know you're magic and all that but you really shouldn't call a dog 'it'," she said. "And Thingy's not a very nice name either."

Ms Wiz sighed. "I know it's not, but there was nothing on the list of names for the dogs of paranormal operatives

that I particularly liked. I thought about Muttilda or Yapitha but they weren't quite her, somehow."

"She says her name is Ruby," said Tilly.

"Says?" Ms Wiz looked puzzled. "I know rats and cats can talk but Thingy – I mean, Ruby – has never said a word to me."

"Well, she's talking to me in my head," said Tilly. "She says she's called Ruby and she wants to find her mother."

Ms Wiz frowned slightly. "All right, I'll admit it. I'm impressed. I've seen all kinds of magic but I've never come across a psychic dog."

"Ruby says every dog can talk but that only a few humans can understand them. I happen to be one. And she really wants to know where

her mum is."

"There is a bit of a problem there," said Ms Wiz. "Thingy – I mean, Ruby – has come from rather a long way away."

Herbert had pulled the cotton wool out of his ears. "There is absolutely no question of my returning to that horrible place," he said.

"Excuse me, Ms Wiz," said Tilly. "I thought you always said that you go wherever magic is needed. Just because it's a dog and not a human that needs help, you start making excuses."

"Yeah, but Ruby's mum could be anywhere in the world, right?" said Jack.

"Er, yes," said Ms Wiz quickly. "Almost right."

"And the last time she did a

travelling spell, Class Five got stuck on the sunny tropical island of Sombrero," said Podge.

"And Class Four were turned into pigeons," said Jack.

"Almost right?" asked Tilly. "Why did you say that, Ms Wiz?"

"It's just a little thing," said Ms Wiz. "But in order to find Ruby's mother, we would have to cross the universe to a distant planet. There's just a possibility we might take a wrong turning and end up completely lost in space."

"Yeah, don't you just hate it when that happens?" said Jack.

"Poor Ruby," said Tilly. "She'll never ever see her mummy again."

Ms Wiz seemed to be thinking. "Oh, all right," she said suddenly. "Let's all go into space for a while."

There was a moment of unenthusiastic silence in the park.

It was Podge who spoke first. "The problem is, I've got quite an important appointment. It's with some baked beans on toast back at my place."

"I've really got to do my homework," said Jack. "There's this really important geography project."

Herbert the rat wriggled out of Ms Wiz's pocket and down the leg of her trousers. "You can include me out, old girl," he said. "I do get so frightfully travel-sick."

"So it looks like just you and me then," said Ms Wiz to Tilly. "You hold on to one of Ruby's ears and I'll get the other."

"Are you going to freeze time while you step into another dimension?" Jack asked. "Otherwise Tilly's mum will be

worried."

Podge groaned. "Why does time always stand still when it's time for my tea?" he said.

"There's no need for time to stand still," said Ms Wiz. "We'll be back soon enough." She closed her eyes and soon, all around them, could be heard a low humming noise. Gradually she and Tilly and Ruby faded from view.

Jack shrugged. "There's no talking to that Ms Wiz once she decides something."

"Well, at least I don't have to wait for my tea," said Podge.

"I think you do," said Jack, taking out his mobile. "We'd better call Mrs Davis and tell her that her daughter's in outer space looking for a dog."

From ground level, there was a small, polite cough. It was Herbert the

rat.

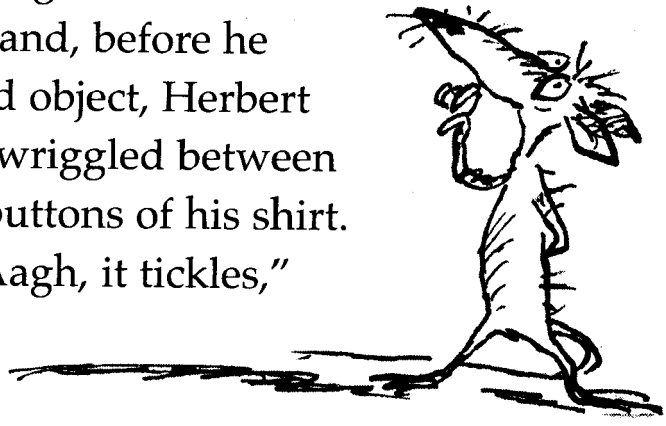
"Ahem, I think you chaps may have forgotten something," he said. "All I'll be requiring is a nice warm armpit to sleep in and the occasional chocolate biscuit."

"Can't you look after yourself?" asked Jack. "Rats are famous for being able to survive anywhere."

"I think you might be mistaking me for an ordinary rat," said Herbert. "Now, be good lads and just pick me up."

Podge reached down for him and, before he could object, Herbert had wriggled between the buttons of his shirt.

"Aagh, it tickles,"



said Podge, writhing about a bit.

"Mmm." A muffled voice came from inside Podge's shirt as Herbert snuggled down. "Nice armpit."