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Opening extract from

The Odd Squad Bully Bait

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Published by

Faber Children's Books

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Lovereading4kids.co.uk

First published in the USA by Disney • Hyperion Books, in 2013

First published in the UK in 2014
by Faber and Faber Limited
Bloomsbury House,
74–77 Great Russell Street,
London WC1B 3DA

Printed in the UK by CPI Group (UK) Ltd, Croydon CR0 4YY

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A CIP record for this book
is available from the British Library

ISBN 978–0–571–29440–4



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CHAPTER 1

I was stuffed in my locker.

Again.

It wasn't so bad. Lockers are a lot roomier than you'd think.

Especially when you're as short as I am. I might be the shortest twelve-year-old on the planet. Which would be cool if they kept world records for that sort of thing. But they don't. I checked.



ME → INSIDE MY LOCKER

Mum says to me all the time, 'Nicholas, you'll grow eventually.'

Eventually is a Mum word that means between now and never.



Mum's just trying to cheer me up. Which is fine. What's not fine is when she calls me Nicholas. My name is Nick. *Nicholas* sounds like some kid with head lice on Memaw's favourite show, *Dr Holmes*.



'Memaw' is what we call my grandmother. She doesn't think I'm short. She says, 'You're just stuck that way 'cause when you were four you were so cute we stacked bricks on your head so you'd never grow up. You'll get unstuck. Eventually.'

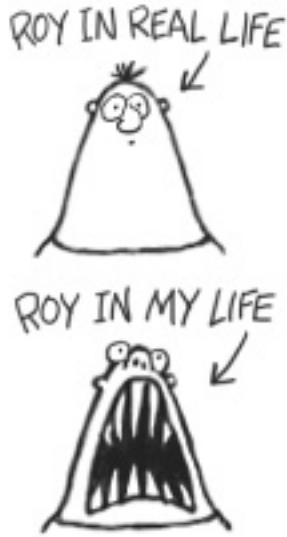
Memaw makes up a lot of stuff that almost makes sense but not quite.

The fact is, I'm short. Which is exactly why Roy stuffed me in my locker in the first place.

I fit.

Roy has issues. At least that's what Dr Daniels, the school guidance counsellor, says. The only issue I see is: Roy is a mutant troll.

Unlike me, Dr Daniels doesn't have troll-vision. She says Roy is just a regular kid who feels powerless and gets control by controlling me. She's full of beans. Roy is just mean. Some kids are, you know.

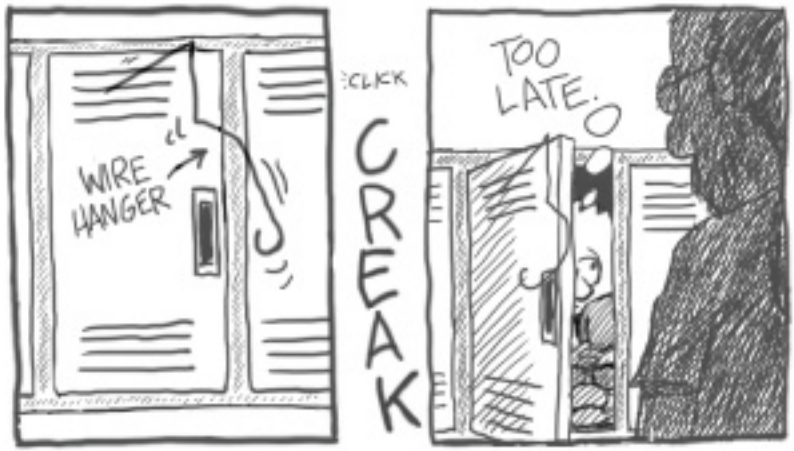


Even though I felt safe in my locker, it wasn't exactly comfortable. My butt had fallen asleep. Living-dead asleep. It's called zombie butt. And as everyone knows, zombie butt leads to log legs. You can sort of move with log legs.



But not really.

I knew if I didn't get out of that locker soon, I wasn't getting out at all. And I really didn't want to have to wait for a certain *someone* to come along to help me out.

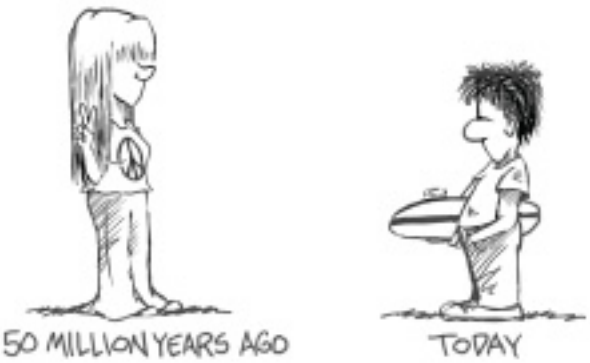


CHAPTER 2

It was the janitor, Mr Dupree, staring into my locker. He was the *someone* I didn't want to find me. Mostly because he's weird, but also because he would make me go see Dr Daniels in the office.



Mr Dupree isn't weird like all grown-ups are weird. He's way weirder. I think he's a hippie. Like Memaw when she was young. Hippies are dinosaur versions of skaters.



After he opened the locker, Mr Dupree stood there for a few seconds. Then he said, 'You seem to like it in there.'

I shrugged. The shrug is my go-to move when anything I say may be used against me later.

'Because I find you in there a lot,' he said.

I shrugged again.



'You want to tell me how you got in there?'

I shrugged a third time.

'Shrug, you're not going to tell me? Or shrug, you don't know how you got in there?'

I shrugged a fourth time. A new world record! Woo-hoo!

Mr Dupree wasn't impressed. 'Then I guess it must have been Emily.'

I guess I must have looked surprised because he added, 'Nick, I've been at Emily Dickinson Middle School a long time.'

Emily isn't real. At least, I don't *think* she's real. And she's definitely not the ghost of Emily Dickinson, the poet. Kids invented her years ago to explain all the weird stuff that happens at school.

Like, why do the last five minutes of class always seem to take forever? It's Emily (she holds back the minute hand). Why does the cafeteria serve beetroots (which no kid has ever eaten in the history of the universe)? Emily again (she's a beetroot freak). Who sets up the toilet paper dispensers so that only one teeny-tiny sheet comes out at a time? That's right – Emily (sometimes she's just mean).

Emily gets around. But she didn't shove me into my locker. And I was not about to tell anyone who did.

Mr Dupree shook his head, then reached in and pulled me out of the locker. That's when we both noticed the huge rip down the side of my shirt.

'Emily again?' Mr Dupree asked.

No shrug this time. You can't do five shrugs.