

The Adventures of Jimmy Chicklets
Book 1: Criminey Toodle – Poltergeist
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For Theo

Criminey Toodle – Poltergeist

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Chapter 1: A Rainy Night

Jimmy Chicklets curled up in his sleeping bag as the first drops of rain pattered against the outside of the tent.

“Rats,” he said. “Now Mom is going to make us come inside.”

Jimmy had been waiting all week to sleep outside in his tent. And now it looked like it was going to be ruined.

“Maybe it will stop,” said Criminey Toodle. “Maybe it ‘s just a quick shower.”

Jimmy listened to the raindrops. Instead of slowing down, they started falling harder and faster.

“Shows what you know, Criminey,” Jimmy said angrily. “And you can’t even get wet, anyhow.”

This was true. Criminey was, after all, Jimmy’s imaginary friend. And everyone knows imaginary friends can’t get wet.

“That’s not fair,” Criminey complained. “You know I can’t stay out here by myself. I’m imaginary. I have to go where you go.”

“I keep telling you you’re not imaginary,” Jimmy replied. “You’re just invisible. And only I can see you. And you have to go where I go.”

“Sounds like imaginary to me,” Criminey mumbled.

“Jimmy!” a voice called from inside the house.

“It’s Mom!” Jimmy yelled. “Hide!”

Jimmy quickly crawled inside his sleeping bag, and threw a blanket over Criminey.

“Jimmy!” Ms. Chicklets yelled again.

“Shh!” Jimmy whispered.

They remained as still and quiet as they could. All of the sudden they heard the backdoor to the house open and slam shut.

“Jimmy Chicklets, get inside at once!” Ms. Chicklets shouted from outside the tent. “It’s raining! Get inside at once!”

“Aw Mom,” Jimmy whined. “Can’t I stay out for a little while?”

“One more word, and there’s no tablet for a week!”

Jimmy sighed and grabbed his knapsack. He started packing up his supplies – his flashlight, his toy cars, his snacks, and, yes, his tablet.

“Jimmy!” his mom said impatiently.

“Coming,” Jimmy grumbled.

Jimmy put on his jacket and slipped his knapsack over his shoulders. As he emerged from the tent he saw his mom standing there in her housecoat and slippers, holding an umbrella over her head. She had an angry scowl on her face.

“We talked about tenting in the rain,” she said. “You could get a chill or worse. What were you thinking?”

“It was Criminey’s idea,” Jimmy replied sullenly.

“Criminey?” She asked. “Your imaginary friend? He’s just in your mind. Take responsibility for your own decisions.”

“Yea, don’t blame me,” Criminey said, “It was your idea.”

But Ms. Chicklets showed no sign of having heard him. Jimmy slowly followed his mom back into the house. And Criminey just as slowly followed Jimmy.

Chapter 2: A Rainy Day

The next morning Jimmy woke up slowly. He curled up under the covers for a few minutes before it occurred to him to open his eyes. When he finally rolled over he saw Criminey sitting on the edge of his bed, looking out the window.

“Good morning, Criminey,” Jimmy said, waving his hand through Criminey’s body. “How can you sit on the bed if I can’t touch you?”

“Because I’m imaginary,” Criminey replied, and after a pause continued, “It’s still raining.”

Jimmy finally noticed the sound of a heavy rain falling on the roof of his house.

“Great,” Jimmy said enthusiastically. “That means we can play with my tablet all day. I’m glad we didn’t sleep in the tent last night. We’d be soaked now.”

“Well, you’d be soaked,” Criminey answered.

Jimmy ignored him and got out of bed. He retrieved his backpack from where he’d left it on the floor and quickly pulled out his tablet. But when he tried to turn it on, nothing happened.

“It’s not charged,” he said, looking at Criminey accusingly.

“But I ...,” Criminey began.

“It’s your fault!” Jimmy interrupted angrily. “You should have reminded me!”

Criminey just stared back at Jimmy helplessly. Jimmy started rummaging through his desk drawers looking for his charger. Criminey sat back on the bed and watched.

“Where is it? Where is it? Where is it?” Jimmy mumbled to himself, as he systematically dumped the contents of his drawers onto the floor.

“Criminey, help. I can’t find it,” he pleaded after a few minutes of fruitless searching.

Criminey turned his back towards Jimmy and didn’t say anything.

“Criminey, are you mad?” Jimmy began. “I’m sorry I yelled at you. It’s not your fault.”

Criminey turned back and pointed at the electrical outlet next to the bed. The charger cord was lying on the floor with one end plugged into the wall.

Jimmy walked over and plugged the other end into his tablet. He had just turned it on when there was a light tap on his bedroom door.

“Jimmy,” his mother said softly. “Time to get up.”

“But Mom,” Jimmy replied. “It’s Sunday.”

“You need to get up and get dressed, Jimmy,” she said, a little less softly this time. “We need to get to Aunt Janice’s house in time for lunch.”

“Aunt Janice’s?” Jimmy replied, incredulously. “But I was going to spend the whole day in my room ... in my pajamas ... playing with my tablet!”

“I told you last week we were spending Sunday with Aunt Janice and the girls,” Ms. Chicklets said loudly. “Now get dressed and come down for breakfast.”

“But Mom,” Jimmy whined, “what am I going to do in the car? My tablet’s not charged.”

“You can listen to the radio, you can read a book, you can even talk to your parents,” she replied, exasperated. “And I packed you homework in case you get bored. It will do you some good to put that tablet down for awhile.”

“But Mom!”

“Enough Jimmy! Put on your nice clothes and get downstairs ASAP!” she said sharply, as she scanned his room. “And clean up this mess.”

Jimmy slammed the door after his mother left. When he turned around he saw that Criminey was wearing a black coat with tails, a top hat, and a bowtie.

“She said to wear something nice, “ Criminey offered.

Jimmy threw himself facedown on his bed.

Ms. Chicklets – Jimmy’s mother – was driving, while his dad – Mr. Bolger – sat in the passenger seat reading his newspaper. Jimmy was sitting in the back seat next to Criminey. There was a call in show about gardening playing on the radio.

“I’m bored,” Jimmy said to Criminey, who was staring intently out the window.

“I’ve never been in a car before,” Criminey replied. “Things race past us so quickly.”

“Don’t you know anything?” Jimmy said. “We’re the ones who are moving. Everything else is standing still.”

“I do know one thing,” Criminey replied. “You’re not very nice.”

“Am too!”

“What was that, Jimmy?” Ms. Chicklets replied. “You “are too” what?”

“Nothing, Mom,” Jimmy said. “I was just talking to Criminey.”

“Dennis,” Ms. Chicklets said to Jimmy’s dad, “you talk to him about this imaginary friend business.”

“Jimmy,” Mr. Bolger began without looking up from his paper, “you and Chimney Poodle need to talk more quietly. Your mom’s trying to listen to her show.”

“Dennis!” Ms. Chicklets snapped. “Stop encouraging him! We talked about this!”

“Yes dear,” Mr. Bolger said as he turned the page of his newspaper.

Jimmy and Criminey were laughing uncontrollably.

“Chimney Poodle!” Jimmy giggled. “What kind of name is Chimney?”

“Looks who’s talking, Swimmy Pickles,” Criminey replied.

They both started laughing even more hysterically.

“Keep it down back there,” Mr. Bolger said firmly. “Your mother is trying to listen to her show.”

After a few minutes they settled down. Jimmy picked up his book and started reading. Criminey continued staring out the window.

Jimmy’s cousins, Jessica and Elizabeth Cotton, had him trapped in their bedroom. They weren’t preventing him from leaving – Jessie and Bessie were just kids after all. But every time he tried to leave, Ms. Chicklets made him go back.

“But Mom,” Jimmy argued, “they’re just little kids.”

“You only see your cousins once a month,” Ms. Chicklets replied. “The least you can do is spend a little time with them.”

“Can’t I stay out here with you and Aunt Janice?” Jimmy pleaded. “I only see her once a month too.”

“My sister and I are having a grown up conversation,” Ms. Chicklets said sharply. “And we need our privacy.”

“Dad,” Jimmy appealed.

Mr. Bolger lowered his newspaper. He looked over at Ms. Chicklets and then back at Jimmy.

“Listen to you mother, Jimmy,” he said. “Clean up whatever she asked you to.”

Jimmy shook his head and slowly went back into his cousins’ room, Criminey at his side.

“Let’s play a game,” Jessie – or was it Bessie – said as he closed the door behind them.

“What do you want to play, Jimmy?” Bessie – or was it Jessie – asked.

Jimmy spied a tablet on the top of the dresser and smiled.

“Hide and seek,” he said. “You’re it.”

He quickly snatched the tablet and looked for a place to hide.

Jimmy’s plan was going less well than he had hoped. The tablet didn’t have any good games on it – just kid stuff – and his cousins kept finding him before he could download anything. He had already been It three times and hadn’t had a chance to do anything fun.

“Bessie’s It,” Jessie said.

Jimmy inwardly groaned, but after a few seconds he started to smile.

“Whole house!” he declared as he ran for the door, Criminey and Jessie at his heels.

“Jimmy!” Ms. Chicklets said sternly, as he dashed through the kitchen.

“No time, Mom!” he replied. “Hide and seek!”

Jimmy ran into the living room and looked around desperately for a place to hide.

“Ready or not, here I come,” he heard Bessie announce from the bedroom.

“Criminey, help,” Jimmy pleaded.

“Through here,” Criminey said after a moment, pointing to a half open door.

Jimmy followed Criminey through the door into another bedroom – a grown up’s bedroom – and quickly hid underneath a desk. He was about to start downloading a game on the tablet when he heard a voice.

“Who’s Criminey?”

Jimmy looked up and saw that Jessie had followed him into Aunt Janice’s bedroom.

“Criminey’s a monster who eats little girls!” he said.

Jessie shrieked and fled the room.

“Hey, that’s mean,” Criminey said indignantly.

“I had to get rid of her somehow,” Jimmy replied. “Monster Slaughter is almost downloaded. Come over and watch me play.”

Before he could start playing, however, he heard a voice at the door.

“Jimmy are you in here?” Bessie asked.

“Criminey, help,” Jimmy whispered. “Create a distraction.”

Criminey looked at Jimmy with a puzzled expression on his face. Then shrugged his shoulders and walked towards the door.

“Jimmy’s not in here,” Criminey said calmly. “Why don’t you go look for him somewhere else?”

Bessie gave no sign of having heard him. Jimmy just shook his head.

“Go back!” Criminey shouted. “I’m a monster!”

Bessie continued slowly walking into the room.

"Jimmy, are you in here?" Bessie asked. "We're not really supposed to come into Mom's room."

"Aaargghhh! Get out!" Criminey yelled, swinging his hand towards the door handle.

He fully expected his hand to pass through the door. Like usual. But instead his hand hit the door, slamming it shut.

"A monster! A monster!" Bessie yelled as she ran back towards her room.

Jimmy and Criminey just stared at each other in disbelief.

After dinner, Jimmy sat at his desk in his bedroom with his homework spread out in front of him. He was, however, too distracted to work on it. He looked over at Criminey who had a big grin on his face – the same grin that was on his face the whole ride home.

"Well that was cool," Jimmy began. "How did you do it?"

"I have no idea," Criminey replied. "It just happened."

"Can you do it again?" Jimmy asked.

"I don't know," Criminey said. "I've been trying but nothing's happened yet."

Jimmy looked down at his homework and then up at Criminey again.

"You know what this means, don't you?" Jimmy asked. "It means you're real."

Criminey nodded, smiling.

"The question now is what you are," Jimmy said. "So what do we know?"

"Well, I am invisible. Only you can see or hear me. I can change my clothes by thinking about it. And sometimes I can move things," Criminey replied. "And my name is 'Criminey Toodle.'"

"Well, my best guess is that you're a ghost, or," Jimmy paused, checking his tablet, "or a poltergeist."

"What's the difference?" Criminey asked, concerned.

“Well according to this,” Jimmy said, gesturing at his tablet, “ghosts haunt places while poltergeists haunt people. And you’re pretty clearing haunting me.”

“But I didn’t think ghosts – or poltergeists – existed,” Criminey said, unconvinced.

“Well you exist and you’re a poltergeist, so they must,” Jimmy said authoritatively.

“I’m not sure ...” Criminey began skeptically.

But before he could finish Ms. Chicklets opened the door to the room and stormed in.

“Jimmy Chicklets!” She said angrily. “I just got off the phone with your Aunt Janice. Someone downloaded some violent video games onto the girls’ tablet! Do you have anything you want to tell me?”

“That I want to tell you?” Jimmy asked

“Jimmy!” Ms. Chicklets snapped.

“It was only one game, Mom, and it’s not that violent,” Jimmy confessed.

“Jimmy Chicklets. You were supposed to be playing with your cousins, not playing video games,” she continued.

“But I did play with them,” Jimmy said, “at least for a little while.”

“And what’s all this nonsense about monsters and slamming doors?” Ms. Chicklets demanded. “The girls are so terrified they won’t even come into Aunt Janice’s room.”

“I don’t know, Mom,” Jimmy replied. “There’s no such thing as monsters.”

Ms. Chicklets looked confused for a few moments.

“Of course, there’s no such thing as monsters,” she said, scanning the room. “Now clean this mess up. And finish your homework.”

She turned and left the room, closing the door behind her. Jimmy looked over at Criminey – who was now wearing Monster Slaughter pajamas – and breathed a sigh of relief. Then he turned away and started working on his homework.

Chapter 3: Stormy Monday

Jimmy awoke with a start. He pulled the sheets off his head, sat up, and rubbed his eyes. There was a white sheet floating at the end of his bed. Moaning.

“Ooooo,” said the figure, eerily. “Ooooo.”

“Help!” Jimmy yelled. “Criminey!”

The figure quickly shifted into Criminey Toodle, still wearing his Monster Slaughter pajamas.

“What’s wrong, Jimmy?” Criminey asked innocently. “I thought you said I was a ghost?”

“That was mean scaring me,” Jimmy replied. “And I said you were a poltergeist, not a ghost.”

Jimmy rummaged through his sheets until he found his tablet. He grabbed it and thrust it in front of Criminey’s face.

“See! A poltergeist!” he said.

Criminey was about point out that the tablet wasn’t turned on when there was a light knock on the door.

“Jimmy,” Ms. Chicklets said softly, “time to get dressed and come down for breakfast.”

“Ah Mom,” Jimmy replied. “Can’t I have five more minutes.”

“You’re going to be late for school,” Ms. Chicklets said, still softly. “You’ll have time to play with your tablet after breakfast if you hurry. Otherwise ...”

“How did she know I wanted to use my tablet?” Jimmy asked Criminey.

“Maybe she’s a ghost too,” Criminey replied. “Ooooo.”

“I said your not a ghost, you’re a ... ,” Jimmy began, when he heard is mother’s voice at the door again.

“What’s that, Jimmy?” Ms. Chicklets asked.

“Nothing, “ Jimmy replied quickly. “Coming Mom.”

Jimmy rushed into some clothes, some of which he found on the floor. When he looked up he saw Criminey dressed in a pair of plaid shorts with suspenders, a white collared shirt with a bow tie, and a hat with a propeller on the top.

“Whatever,” Jimmy said. “Let’s get to breakfast.”

When they reached the kitchen, they saw Mr. Bolger sitting at the table reading his newspaper, absent-mindedly chewing on a piece of toast. Jimmy sat down next to him and glanced at his father’s paper.

“Isn’t that the same one you read yesterday, Dad?” Jimmy asked. “It says Sunday.”

“So it is,” said Mr. Bolger, after a pause, “so it is.”

He folded his newspaper and placed it on the table.

“Any big plans today, Jimmy?” Mr. Bolger asked. “You and Slimy Noodles?”

Jimmy and Criminey started laughing.

“If I’m Slimy Noodles, then you’re Squimmy Piglets,” Criminey said, and the two of them laughed even louder.

“Dennis,” Ms. Chicklets said crossly. “Look what you’ve started.”

“On that note,” Mr. Bolger said, and got up from the table.

He grabbed his hat and overcoat, picked up his briefcase, and walked over and gave Ms. Chicklets a kiss on the cheek.

“Would you and Caboodle there like a ride this morning?” Mr. Bolger said to Jimmy as he reached the door.

“Dennis, Jimmy will be walking to school. He needs the exercise,” Ms. Chicklets said firmly, looking out the window. “Here comes Tammy now.”

“But Mom,” Jimmy said, as his father waved and walked out the door.

Ms. Chicklets just glared at him. Jimmy sagged in his chair, defeated.

Jimmy and Tammy – Tamara Mugwort, Jimmy’s best friend since, well, forever – stuck their heads around the corner of Mrs. Greenbottom’s fence. Criminey stood behind them looking over Jimmy’s shoulder.

"I don't see them," Jimmy said. "I think the coast is clear."

"What coast?" Criminey asked. "I don't see any water."

Jimmy ignored him.

"That's what you said last time," Tammy said nervously. "And remember what happened. They took my homework and spat all over your backpack."

"I remember," Jimmy replied glumly.

"Who are we talking about?" Criminey asked.

"Mitch McGee and his jerk friends Tommy and Joe," Jimmy replied.

"What was that?" Tammy asked, puzzled. "Who are you talking to?"

Criminey ... Criminey Toodle," Jimmy replied. "Remember I told you about him."

"Oh, your imaginary friend," Tammy said. "Is he here?"

"Yes, only he's not imaginary any more," Jimmy replied. "He's a poltergeist."

Tammy looked confused.

"Like a ghost," Criminey said, "only something about people or places or something."

Tammy gave no sign of having heard him.

"Yea, like a ghost," Jimmy began, "but they haunt people not places. And Criminey is haunting me."

"I didn't think ghosts existed," Tammy replied skeptically.

"That what I said," Criminey added.

"What are you idiots talking about?" a voice behind them suddenly asked.

They all turned to look. It was Mitch McGee. And the next thing they knew, Tommy and Joe Blinger appeared in front of them. They were surrounded.

"What do you want, Mitch?" Jimmy asked, in his fiercest sounding voice.

“Yea, what do you want?” Criminey reiterated.

But no one seemed to notice.

“Who’s your girlfriend, Jimmy?” Tommy asked sarcastically.

“Yea, who’s your girlfriend?” Joe asked, parroting his brother.

“You know perfectly well who Tammy is,” Jimmy replied angrily. “You’ve known her your whole life. And she’s not my girlfriend.”

“I think a better question, idiot,” Mitch interjected, “is why your name is Chicklets when your dad’s name is Bolger. Maybe he’s not your real father.”

“Is too!” Jimmy replied. “Chicklets is my mom’s name. We’re progressive.”

“Progressive,” Mitch snorted. “Sounds like another way of saying you’re a girl.”

“Am not,” Jimmy replied, furious.

He rushed towards Mitch and tried to push him. But Mitch easily stepped out of the way and tripped Jimmy as he went by. Jimmy fell to the ground in a heap.

“Looks like someone needs another goober bath,” Tommy taunted.

“Yea, a booger bath,” Joe added.

“Well, which is it?” Tammy asked calmly. “Does he need a goober bath or a booger bath? They’re very different you know.”

The Blinger brothers – Tommy and Joe – looked confused. Jimmy took the opportunity to pull himself to his feet. At that moment, Criminey started running towards Mitch, arms out as if he meant to push him.

“Cowabunga!” he yelled.

Criminey ran right through Mitch, turned to look back, tripped over Mitch’s bicycle which got tangled in his legs, and, as he fell, flipped the bike up into the air and over the fence into Mrs. Greenbottom’s yard. Everybody froze.

“What the ...?” Mitch began.

“Run!” Jimmy yelled.

He and Tammy started running towards school, with Criminey right behind them. Tommy and Joe started running in the opposite direction. Mitch just stood there, staring at Mrs. Greenbottom's fence.

Jimmy and Tammy met at first recess behind the stage in the main gym: they wanted to be sure they didn't run into Mitch or the Blinger brothers. Criminey was there as well, wearing a trench coat and a fedora.

"What happened?" Tammy asked excitedly. "I've never seen a flying bike before."

"That was Criminey," Jimmy replied, "Criminey Toodle."

"Your imaginary friend?" Tammy said. "Are you saying you moved the bike with your imagination?"

"You mean televisionitis?" Jimmy replied. "No, I told you Criminey's a poltergeist. I didn't do it. He did."

"It's telekinesis," Tammy said. "And I don't believe in ghosts"

"Neither do I," added Criminey.

"Well how else do you explain the bike, then?" Jimmy said to Tammy testily, and then, turning to Criminey, continued, "And what are you then?"

"I don't know," Tammy and Criminey said, more or less at the same time.

"Hold it," Tammy said. "Is he here now?"

Jimmy nodded.

"Nice to meet you, Criminey," Tammy said to a wall nowhere near where Criminey was standing.

Jimmy and Criminey started laughing.

"Hello floor," Jimmy joked.

"Hello table," Criminey added, as they started laughing even more hysterically.

Tammy stomped her left foot and frowned.

“That’s not funny, Jimmy Chicklets!” she said angrily. “How am I supposed to know where your ghost friend is if I can’t see him? I’m sure he’s not nearly as rude as you are! And there’s nothing wrong with being a girl!”

“I never ...,” Jimmy began.

“Yes you did,” Tammy interrupted. “You tried to start a fight when he called you a girl. But you didn’t do anything when he took my homework.”

“I’m sorry, Tammy,” Jimmy said.

Tammy ignored him, and turned roughly in Criminey’s direction.

“And thank you, Mr. Toodle, for helping us escape from Mitch,” she said politely. “Throwing his bike over the fence was ingenious.”

Criminey changed into a top hat and tails, and bowed.

“You’re welcome,” he said, and then turning to Jimmy, “tell her I said she’s welcome.”

“It’s Criminey, not Mr. Toodle,” Jimmy began, “and he says your welcome. But throwing Mitch’s bike over the fence was just an accident. He tripped.”

“You need to learn to be more polite and thank people who help you,” Tammy said angrily, and then turning to where Criminey was when he bowed but wasn’t anymore. “I’m sorry if Jimmy is mean to you. He’s like that sometimes.”

Jimmy collapsed on the floor in frustration as the recess bell rang.

Jimmy kept staring at the clock in Mrs. Greenbottom’s classroom – yes, the same Mrs. Greenbottom whose yard Mitch’s bike had been flipped into. It had been a horrible day: Tammy wouldn’t talk to him, Mitch kept glaring at him, and Criminey was being insufferable. He kept changing his clothes and bragging about how he had saved the day. Jimmy couldn’t wait until it was over – the day, that is.

“Mr. Chicklets,” a voice said, “staring at the clock won’t make the time go any more quickly.”

Jimmy looked down – it was his teacher.

“Yes Mrs. Greenbottom,” he said mechanically.

She walked over to his desk.

“Haven’t finished your work today either, I see,” she said, looking down at the papers on his desk. “I think we should have a pop quiz tomorrow, class – you can thank Jimmy for that.”

The class groaned. And everyone scowled at Jimmy. Especially Mitch, who also started gently punching his right fist into his left hand. Or punching his left fist into his right hand. Jimmy was bad with his rights and lefts under pressure.

“And don’t forget your exam on Friday,” Mrs. Greenbottom continued. “If you don’t pass, you should start planning for summer school. Tomorrow’s quiz will be good preparation.”

The class groaned again. When the bell rang, Jimmy quickly gathered his books and papers and was first out the door. The main door to the school was to the left, but Jimmy turned right and hurried down the hall.

“Where are we going?” Criminey asked

“We’re sneaking out the backdoor,” Jimmy replied glumly. “Everyone in class hates me now and I want to avoid any trouble.”

“You don’t need to worry about trouble with me around,” Criminey said as he changed into a superhero costume with tights, a cape, and a big “C” on his chest.

“What are you going to do? Trip on someone again?” Jimmy replied.

Criminey frowned but didn’t say anything. Jimmy indicated for him to stop just before they reached the end of the hallway.

“Shh,” he said. “The teachers’ lounge is just around the corner.”

Criminey was about to point out that only Jimmy could hear him, but decided not to when he saw the look on his face. They crept carefully past the door to the lounge, which was partially ajar, and then scampered quickly out the exit at the end of the hall. They found themselves in the teachers’ parking lot, and Jimmy looked around for a few seconds to his bearings.

“What’s that?” Criminey asked, pointing at a long white trailer parked on the street beside the teachers’ lot.

“I don’t know,” Jimmy replied. “I’ve never seen it before.”

Almost immediately the door to the trailer began to open.

“Down,” Jimmy whispered sharply, as he ducked behind one of the teachers’ cars – Mrs. Greenbottom’s no doubt.

Jimmy peeked around the edge of the car in time to see two men wearing grey suits and dark sunglasses emerge from the trailer.

“Who are they?” Criminey asked.

“No idea,” Jimmy replied. “But if they see us we might in in trouble.”

They waited until the men disappeared into the school, and then they snuck out of the parking lot and headed home, careful to avoid anyone who might have a grudge with Jimmy over the quiz.

There was no one there when they got home, so Jimmy made himself a snack and sat in front of the TV in the family room. He was still mad at Criminey – and everyone else for that matter – so he just watched whatever was on without saying anything. Criminey sat quietly on the sofa next to him. Ms. Chicklets and Mr. Bolger arrived home about the same time: Ms. Chicklets started making dinner while Mr. Bolger sat in a chair next to Jimmy and Criminey and started reading his newspaper. Jimmy looked over – it was the Sunday paper again.

“Dennis,” Ms. Chicklets said from the kitchen, “I received a strange email from Jimmy’s teacher Mrs. Greenbottom today. Something about Mitch McGee and flying bicycles. Do you know anything about that Jimmy?”

“No,” Jimmy replied. “There’s no such thing as flying bikes, Mom.”

Criminey started giggling on the sofa, as Jimmy tried to hold back a faint smile.

“Strange business, flying bikes,” Ms. Chicklets said to no one in particular.

“Flying kites?” Mr. Bolger suddenly said. “What a great idea. Is there time before dinner, dear?”

Ms. Chicklets nodded, as Mr. Bolger went and retrieved Jimmy’s kite from the hall closet. Jimmy pulled his shoes back on and walked to the park across the street with his father – and Criminey – his mood much improved.

Chapter 4: Terrible Tuesday

Jimmy sat in the backseat of Mr. Bolger's car on the passenger side, while Tammy sat behind Mr. Bolger. Criminey was between them, wearing a preppy outfit he had seen on TV the previous night, staring straight ahead resting his chin on his hands and his elbows on his knees. None of them were saying anything.

"So how's the ankle, Tammy?" Mr. Bolger asked from the front seat. "Jimmy tells me you gave it quite a twist yesterday."

Jimmy had told his parents the previous evening that Tammy had hurt herself playing soccer, so they would need a drive to school in the morning. He didn't want to run into Mitch and the Blinger brothers again any time soon. He texted her and told her to start limping when she got close to his house. She never replied. But she did limp convincingly into the house when she got there.

"It's still sore, Mr. Bolger," Tammy replied. "But it's getting better."

"Soccer is it, Tammy?" Mr. Bolger asked. "I didn't know you played. And call me "Dennis." I hear kids are using the first names of their parent's friends these days."

"Yes, Dennis," Tammy began, looking over at Jimmy.

Jimmy cringed. He hated it when his friends called Mr. Bolger "Dennis." And Tammy knew this.

"I do play soccer," she continued. "But I think I might give it up. Weak ankles."

"Yes, of course," Mr. Bolger replied. "Too bad. I wish Jimmy ... well, there's always kite flying."

Tammy looked over at Jimmy again for a moment, and then looked away.

"Is she still mad at you?" Criminey asked Jimmy.

Jimmy nodded.

"Why don't you give her the card?" Criminey asked.

It had been Ms. Chicklets idea to make Tammy a card. When she had asked why Tammy wasn't there when she and Mr. Bolger got home, Jimmy blurted out the details of their fight. Well, not all the details. He left out the part about Mitch's bicycle. Originally she had planned to call Mrs. McGee – Mitch's mom – but Jimmy talked her down. He didn't need that kind of trouble. So they compromised on a card for Tammy, an "apology card" Ms. Chicklets called it.

“Here,” Jimmy said sheepishly, handing the card he and Criminey had spent a lot of good tablet time making the previous evening.

“What’s this?” Tammy replied suspiciously as she opened the envelope.

“It’s from me and Criminey,” Jimmy said. “It’s a card.”

Criminey and Jimmy had both worked on it, but Criminey’s role had been more on the idea side of things. After all, he couldn’t actually hold a marker. On the outside of the card it said “We’re Sorry!” And on the inside it said “Girls are Great!” above a picture of a girl in a superhero uniform, which was supposed to be Tammy but didn’t look very much like her. Portraits just weren’t Jimmy’s bag. There was also a picture of a bicycle with wings – Criminey’s idea – for comedic effect. Tammy looked at it carefully for a few minutes and then smiled happily.

“Thank you,” she said. “Both of you.”

Jimmy and Criminey high-fived, fully expecting their hands to pass through one another. They were quite shocked when they didn’t.

They tried to meet in the gym again, but it was locked. Which was strange because they never locked the gym. So they met behind the big tree in the far corner of the school playground. And they took turns being lookout to make sure that Mitch and the Blinger brothers didn’t catch them there.

“So when did this start?” Tammy asked enthusiastically.

“It started on Sunday,” Jimmy replied, “at Aunt Janice’s. Criminey slammed a door.”

“And Bessie thought I was a monster,” Criminey added, changing into a Swamp-man costume.

Jimmy laughed.

“Did Criminey say something?” Tammy asked impatiently. “You have to tell me when Criminey says something.”

“Okay, okay,” Jimmy replied. “He said Jessie thought he was a monster.”

“Bessie,” Criminey interjected. “It was Bessie.”

“What difference does it make?” Jimmy asked.

Both Tammy and Criminey frowned at him.

“Okay,” he grumbled. “It was Bessie, not Jessie. But the point is that it started on Sunday. And then yesterday Criminey tripped over Mitch’s bike, and today we high fived. You heard that, right?”

“Yes, yes, yes, I know all that,” Tammy said.

“Except for Jessie thinking Criminey was a monster,” Jimmy interrupted.

“Yes, except for Bessie confusing Criminey for a monster,” Tammy continued, a hint of irritation in her voice. “My question is when Criminey first showed up.”

Jimmy and Criminey looked at each other, confused.

“What do you mean?” Jimmy asked. “He never first showed up.”

“Yea,” Criminey reiterated, “I’ve always been here. I’ve been here as long as I can remember.”

“Well, no,” Jimmy said, “you haven’t always been here.”

“Did Criminey say something, Jimmy?” Tammy asked. “Tell me when he says something.”

“Sorry,” Jimmy said sheepishly. “He said he’s been here as long as he can remember. But he hasn’t always been here.”

“Well this is a mystery,” Tammy said excitedly. “Criminey’s been here as long as he can remember. He hasn’t been here forever. But he never first got here.”

Jimmy and Criminey looked at each other with puzzled expressions on their faces, and then looked back at Tammy, their expressions still puzzled.

“So Jimmy, what do you mean not being always here but never getting here?” Tammy asked. “And Criminey, how far back do you remember? Jimmy, you go first.”

“Well, I guess I started having this idea of something, and then it was an idea of Criminey, and then he started talking,” Jimmy said. “But I don’t know when it started. Just before the weekend. Thursday or Friday, maybe.”

“And Criminey,” Tammy began, “what’s the first thing you remember?”

Criminey paused for a few moments before answering.

“Being in your room, being imaginary, being in the tent in the rain,” Criminey said, and then Jimmy repeated – more or less accurately – for Tammy’s benefit.

“Very interesting,” Tammy said after reflecting on it for a few minutes. “You, Criminey, must be an idea who somehow turned into a person.”

“So you’re saying that I imagined Criminey into existence?” Jimmy asked, incredulously. “That’s just silly.”

“Look at me, I’m imagining a million dollars,” Criminey joked. “Tada! Here it is!”

Jimmy and Criminey started laughing. Tammy just stood and watched, a look of frustration on her face.

Jimmy slumped in his chair as the bell rang for the start of class. Standing next to Mrs. Greenbottom were two women in white lab coats. They were roughly Mrs. Greenbottom’s age, whatever that was. Old, in any event.

“Class,” Mrs. Greenbottom began, “we have some visitors with us today: Dr. Drake and Doctor Fluke. They’re sociologists.”

She gave the signal for the class to say “good morning” to the guests in unison. This rarely went well – the kids never spoke at the same time or got the guests’ names right – and this time was no exception. And some kids even got things quite creatively wrong.

“Good morning Count Dracula and Dr. Frankenstein,” Jimmy said.

“Good morning Crispy Bacon and Corn Flakes,” Criminey added, although no one except Jimmy heard him.

A lot of the kids starting giggling, Jimmy and Criminey included.

“Settle down, class,” Mrs. Greenbottom said sharply. “We are all going to participate in a sociological survey this week. And I expect your full cooperation. The Sociological Analysis Union has very generously offered to fund a much needed upgrade to the teachers’ lounge, and I expect you all to show your appreciation.”

She gestured for one of the sociologists to speak and then went and sat down at her desk.

“Hi class,” said the woman Mrs. Greenbottom had indicated. “My name is Dr. Drake and this is my colleague Dr. Fluke. I heard some of you give us more interesting names when you said hello. That was very funny.”

The class giggled. Mrs. Greenbottom definitely did not.

“We’re going to be doing a sociological study of imagination,” Dr. Drake continued. “We’re going to try to do individual interviews with all of the students in the school. We’re interested”

Before she could finish, there was a knock on the door. In walked a man wearing a grey suit and black sunglasses carrying a stack of papers. He whispered something in Dr. Drake’s ear as he handed her the papers, before heading back out the door. Jimmy and Criminey – who was sitting on the floor next to his desk – looked at each other excitedly.

“Class, you will need to get your parents to sign these permission slips before you can participate,” she said as she passed half of the stack to Dr. Fluke and they both began handing them out. “The class with the highest participation rate will win a pizza party and free games at the Video Emporium.”

The class cheered. Jimmy, however, wasn’t that impressed. Everyone knew that the Video Emporium was the third best arcade in town. And there were only four.

“Okay class, settle down now,” Mrs. Greenbottom said after the sociologists had left. “I’ve got something for you as well: the quiz we discussed.”

The class groaned. And some of Jimmy’s classmates shot him dirty looks. Jimmy slumped back in his chair.

After school, they snuck out the backdoor again. This time Tammy joined them. They made it back to Jimmy’s house without incident, although they had to hide when they saw more men in grey suits coming out of the trailer. And they took the extra long way home when Lucy Underhill told them she had seen Mitch hanging out by the main doors. Rather than talking about the day’s excitement, Jimmy and Tammy immediately started playing Monster Slaughter on Jimmy’s game console. The full version, not the mini-version Jimmy had downloaded onto Jessie and Bessie’s tablet. Tammy seemed to take particular pleasure in accidentally slaughtering Jimmy’s character rather than the monsters they were supposed to be after.

Ms. Chicklets looked poked her head into the family room when she got home and smiled when she saw Tammy.

“Would you like to join us for dinner, dear?” She asked. “Mr. Bolger is making his special lasagna.”

Tammy begged off. Special doesn’t always mean good, especially when it comes to Mr. Bolger’s cooking. Mr. Bolger arrived just as Tammy was leaving.

“It seems as if you’ve made a miraculous recovery, Tammy,” he said cheerfully.

“Mr. Bolger?” Tammy replied.

“Your ankle,” he said. “It looks like it’s all better.”

“Almost, Mr. Bolger,” she replied.

She made a point of limping, just a little, as she retreated from the house. Jimmy wasn’t sure if she was limping on the right leg.

Jimmy did his homework while he was waiting for Mr. Bolger to finish making dinner.

“That means we’ll have uninterrupted tablet time when we’re done eating,” Jimmy whispered to Criminey.

Just as Mr. Bolger started putting dinner on the table, Jimmy remembered the permission slip. He went and got it from his backpack and passed it to Mrs. Bolger.

“Mom, I need you to sign this,” he said.

Ms. Chicklets carefully read the form Jimmy had passed her.

“I’m not sure about this, Jimmy,” Ms. Chicklets said after a moment, “Who are the Sociological Analysis Union anyhow? Dennis, have you heard of them?”

“The Sociological Analysis Union? The SAU?” Mr. Bolger half-muttered. “How typically clumsy?”

“What was that, Dennis?” Ms. Chicklets asked.

“I said how clumsy of me, Dear” he replied, pointing to a small drop of tomato sauce on the table. “And no I’ve never heard of them.”

“I think they’re with the government,” Jimmy added helpfully. “They were dressed in suits and sunglasses, like secret agents.”

“Well that settles it,” Ms. Chicklets said decisively. “I’m not going to let any secret government agency collect information about my family.”

“But Mom,” Jimmy complained, “they’re having a competition. The class with the highest participation wins. If you don’t do it, the other kids will hate me.”

“What’s the prize for the winning class?” Mr. Bolger asked.

“A pizza party and free games at Video Emporium,” Jimmy answered.

“The third best arcade in town?” Mr. Bolger said. “Well you can’t miss out on that.”

He went and got a pen and passed it to Ms. Chicklets. She signed the form reluctantly, shaking her head the whole time.

Chapter 5: Weird Wednesday

Jimmy, Tammy, and Criminey walked into school on Wednesday. Tammy's ankle had just seemed too recovered the previous evening to fake a relapse. And Ms. Chicklets claimed Jimmy needed the exercise. Jimmy pointed out that he had spent a whole fifteen minutes kite flying with Mr. Bolger two evenings ago, but to no avail.

"So Criminey manifested three times last night," Jimmy said to Tammy excitedly.

"Manifested?" Tammy asked.

"Became solid, touched stuff: manifested," Jimmy replied authoritatively

Tammy was about to correct him, but thought better of it.

"First, he threw my shirt onto the floor...," Jimmy said.

"I needed somewhere to sit," Criminey interjected.

"... then he turned off my tablet," Jimmy continued, ignoring him.

"You wouldn't let me play!" Criminey shouted.

"You can't ...," Jimmy began, and then turned towards Tammy. "He said I wouldn't let him play."

"Typical," Tammy replied. "What was the third thing?"

Jimmy and Criminey looked at each other for a moment, embarrassed, and then looked back at Tammy.

"He caught my underpants for a second," Jimmy said, sheepishly.

"Your dirty underpants," Criminey added. "When you threw them at me. Tell her."

"My dirty underpants, which I threw at him," Jimmy repeated, chagrined.

"That's disgusting," Tammy said, laughing.

Criminey joined in, but Tammy, of course, couldn't hear him.

"It's not funny," Jimmy said angrily. "Criminey was being mean. He turned off ..."

Jimmy trailed off. He saw the Blinger brothers approaching from up the street.

“Criminey! There!” Jimmy whispered sharply, pointing at a freshly raked pile of leaves. “Like we talked about.”

Jimmy held his hands out in front of himself, menacingly.

“Stop!” he shouted in Tommy and Joe’s direction. “Or face my power!”

As the Blinger brothers paused nervously, Criminey jumped in the leaf pile and tried to grab a handful of leaves to throw in the air. His hands passed right through them. After a moment, the Blingers began cautiously approaching again.

“You don’t scare me, you girl!” Tommy taunted.

“Yea, you girl!” Joe emphasized.

“There’s nothing wrong with being a girl,” Jimmy said, looking over at Tammy. “Girls are great!”

“Yea, girl power!” Tammy shouted, holding her hands out like Jimmy had, grinning.

At that moment, Criminey attempted to throw some leaves again. This time it worked. A huge armful of leaves flew up into the air. The Blingers quickly turned and ran away.

Jimmy, Tammy, and Criminey were still laughing about it when they arrived at school. Tammy was demonstrating her girl power pose and Jimmy and Criminey were imitating the expressions they imagined had been on Tommy and Joe’s faces. As they entered the main doors, however, Tammy stopped and grabbed Jimmy’s arm, a serious expression on her face.

“Jimmy, don’t tell anyone about what happened,” she said. “It’s bad enough what Tommy and Joe are going to say.”

“Okay, okay,” Jimmy replied.

“And during your sociology interview, if they ask you about your imagination,” Tammy continued, “it’s probably best if you don’t mention Criminey.”

“Why would I mention Criminey?” Jimmy asked. “He’s not imaginary, he’s a poltergeist.”

Criminey nodded in at least partial agreement.

“Whatever,” Tammy replied. “Just don’t mention him.”

Before Jimmy could reply, Peter Burrows brushed past them in the hallway. Peter “Poopy-pants” Burrows.

“Hey Poopy-pants!” a chorus of voices called out as he walked past.

Peter just kept walking, looking at his feet the whole time, and continued on his way to his locker without stopping.

“I feel sorry for Peter,” Tammy said. “Everyone picks on him all the time. How did he get that name, anyhow?”

“Well let’s just say,” Jimmy began, “it involved a lot of poop.”

“And pants,” Criminey added enthusiastically.

“Yes,” Jimmy agreed, “pants too.”

Before he could finish the story, however, one of the grey-suited sunglass-wearing sociologists appeared in the hallway. And he seemed to be following Peter Burrows.

“Those guys are creepy,” Tammy observed as he passed.

Jimmy and Criminey nodded in agreement, and then the three of them went off to class.

In Mrs. Greenbottom’s classroom all anyone wanted to talk about was the pizza party at Video Emporium. Before she got around to collecting them, the kids were showing each other their signed permission slips and trying to keep a rough count of them. When Mrs. Greenbottom got up from her desk, most of the class started passing them forward. Only Peter Burrows sat there motionless, hands folded on his desk.

“I heard Poopy-pants’ mom called the office this morning to say he wasn’t allowed to do the interview,” Lucy Underhill said knowingly. “Something about government conspiracies.”

“You’d better not cost us our party, Poopy-pants,” Mitch said menacingly from across the room. “Or else.”

Peter pretended not to hear.

“As long at least one person in each of the other classes doesn’t sign, we can still win,” Tammy added authoritatively. “And since we’re one of the biggest classes, we have a real chance of having the highest percentage.”

“Is that right, smarty-pants?” Mitch growled. “Sounds like more girl talk to me.”

“It’s just basic math,” Tammy replied sharply. “But you wouldn’t know anything about that, would you, scruffy-pants?”

Mitch glared at her. A few of the kids giggled quietly. But most of the class glanced nervously at Mitch or just looked down at their desks.

“Settle down, class,” Mrs. Greenbottom said. “Those of you who are participating in the survey will go to the main gym in groups of five. You can spend your time waiting – and when you get back – studying for Friday’s exam. After grading your quizzes, it’s clear that most of you have a lot of work to do.”

After Mrs. Greenbottom called the names of the first five students – and sent them down to the gym – Jimmy opened his textbook. But he found it very hard to study.

Jimmy was in the group of students that left for the gym right after Tammy’s group got back. Tammy gave him a concerned look as she sat down. Mitch was in the group as well. Jimmy almost groaned out loud when he heard Mitch’s name called right after his. Almost. He did groan out loud when Mrs. Greenbottom announced she would be accompanying his group to the gym.

“Do you need to go to the nurse’s office, Mr. Chicklets?” she asked sarcastically.

“Can I?” Jimmy asked.

“No,” she replied dismissively.

When they arrived at the gym there were two grey-suited sociologists standing on either side of the door – a man and a woman.

“I will be observing your interviews of these five students,” Mrs. Greenbottom announced. “One of my responsibilities as their teacher is to ensure their interactions with non-school personnel remain appropriate. At least until the end of the school day.”

The female agent stuck her head through the door and talked quietly to someone on the other side. After a few moments, she stepped back out and nodded, a hint of irritation on her face. Mrs. Greenbottom confidently led Jimmy's group into the gym.

Dr. Fluke met them inside the door and directed them to a table.

"Cornflakes," Criminey said.

"Shh," Jimmy whispered, holding back a grin.

On one side of the table was a man in a white lab coat, while on the other side was a folding metal chair. A few feet away were four more folding chairs for the students to sit on when it wasn't their turn to be interviewed. There seemed to be a similar arrangement of tables and chairs for each class in the school. Mrs. Greenbottom was the only teacher in the gym and there was no chair set up for her to sit on. She didn't seem to mind.

"Hi kids," the man in the lab coat said cheerfully, looking up from his clipboard. "I am Dr. Gibblets. We'll start with Mitch McGee. The rest of you just have a seat."

Mitch sat sullenly in the chair across from Dr. Gibblets. Mrs. Greenbottom stood behind him, a little bit off to one side.

"So Mitch," Dr. Gibblets began, "I am going to ask you a few questions about your imagination. But do you have any questions for me before we start?"

"I get credit for participating no matter what I say, right?" Mitch more asserted than asked.

"Of course, Mitch," Dr. Gibblets replied warmly.

Mitch smiled and crossed his arms.

Jimmy went after Mitch. Dr. Gibblets didn't seem that friendly anymore. Having Mitch answer "No comment" – or worse – to all of your questions would do that to anyone. Jimmy thought Mitch was finally going to say something when Dr. Gibblets asked him about flying bicycles. But Mitch just called him an idiot. Dr. Gibblets ended the interview at that point.

"So Jimmy," Dr. Gibblets began, "Do you day dream a lot?"

"A lot?" Jimmy replied. "I don't know"

“Constantly,” Mrs. Greenbottom interrupted. “At least during class time.”

“And what sorts of things do you daydream about, Jimmy?” Dr. Gibblets asked.

“Um, I don’t know,” Jimmy giggled, as Criminey made a face.

“Cars and sports and computer games,” Mrs. Greenbottom interjected. “That’s all boys his age think about these days.’

“If you keep interrupting, Mrs. Greenbottom, I’m going to have to ask you to leave,” Dr. Gibblets said firmly.

“Well I never,” Mrs. Greenbottom replied angrily. “Criticizing a teacher for just doing her job? Ridiculous.”

“Do you ever daydream about mythical creatures?” Dr. Gibblets asked. “Faeries, elves, sprites ...”

Mrs. Greenbottom snorted but didn’t say anything.

“Sprites? Why not Pepsi’s?” Criminey – who was standing behind Dr. Gibblets – joked.

Jimmy laughed out loud.

“What’s so funny?” Dr. Gibblet’s asked.

“I was just thinking Sprites, why not Pepsi’s?” Jimmy replied.

A couple of kids in Jimmy’s group – not Mitch – giggled. Dr. Gibblets smiled coldly.

The interview went on like this for a few more minutes, until he asked one final question.

“We’ve heard rumors of an incident involving a flying bicycle,” he began. “Do you know anything about that?”

Mrs. Greenbottom snorted again. Dr. Gibblets held a finger to his mouth indicating that she should be quiet.

“No,” Jimmy replied, after a pause. “There’s no such thing as flying bikes, Dr. Gibblets.”

Jimmy was dismissed and waited with Mitch until the rest of the interviews were done.

When they snuck out the backdoor this time, Mitch was waiting for them. The Blinger brothers were lingering nervously by a car in the middle of the teachers' parking lot.

"Going somewhere, girls?" Mitch asked sarcastically.

"I'm not ..." Jimmy began and then stopped, looking over at Tammy.

"What was that, girl?" Mitch asked.

"Nothing," Jimmy replied, lowering his head.

"What do you want, Mitch?" Tammy asked.

"That's what I like about you, smarty-pants," Mitch said, "You get right to business."

Criminey pointed at a large stick lying on the ground. Jimmy gave his head a slight shake "no."

"You owe me, both of you," Mitch said angrily. "You broke my bike, somehow. And it's your fault we had that quiz."

Mrs. Greenbottom had returned the quiz during the last class of the day, and the results had not been good. Tammy had aced it, of course. And Jimmy had respectably muddled through. But most of the class had done poorly. And Mitch's quiz had been among the worst. Not as bad as Peter Burrows – who hadn't even tried to answer any of the questions – but bad. And what made things worse was that Mrs. Greenbottom announced how each student had done when she returned their quizzes: "excellent job, Tammy," "respectable performance, Jimmy," "awful, Mitch, just awful," "on a quiz, Peter, you're supposed to answer the questions and not just doodle."

"If I fail the exam on Friday, I'll have to go to summer school," Mitch continued, "and if I have to go to summer school, you're dead."

"What do you want us to do about it?" Jimmy asked. "Help you study?"

"Ha! You're funny, Chicklets," Mitch replied. "No, you're going to get me a copy of the exam – with the answers filled in – by the end of the day tomorrow. Or else."

"How are we supposed to do that?" Tammy asked, incredulous.

“You’re the smarty-pants, you figure it out,” Mitch replied. “Maybe you could use your special powers. Oooo.”

Tammy and Jimmy looked at each other, shocked. Criminey looked shocked too, but only Jimmy noticed.

“Oh and another thing,” Mitch continued, “if you don’t get the exam for me, if you tell anyone about this, if you try to use your “special powers” on me, I’ll talk to those secret agents about the bicycle. They seem really interested in it.”

After Mitch and the Blingers left, they walked slowly home. No one said anything.

Chapter 6: Thunderous Thursday

Jimmy woke up late. He hadn't slept very well: he couldn't stop thinking about what Mitch would do if they couldn't get him a copy of the exam. Tammy had already arrived by the time he and Criminey made it downstairs for breakfast. She was having an earnest conversation with Ms. Chicklets. That was never good.

"... and all the kids yell names at him when he walks down the hallway," Tammy said. "And he doesn't even try to do his schoolwork anymore."

"That's terrible, dear," Ms. Chicklets said. "He used to be such a good student. He was really good with computers, wasn't he, Jimmy?"

"Who are we talking about?" Jimmy asked. "Poopy-pants?"

"Jimmy!" Ms. Chicklets snapped. "That is totally inappropriate! Dennis, talk to your son."

Mr. Bolger lowered his newspaper. Jimmy was pretty sure it was the same paper he had been reading since Sunday. He looked over at Ms. Chicklets and then back at Jimmy.

"Totally inappropriate, Jimmy," he said, as he raised his newspaper. "Don't do it again."

"By using the names that bullies use, you become a bully yourself," Ms. Chicklets added. "Right Dennis?"

Mr. Bolger lowered his newspaper again, and looked over at Ms. Chicklets and back at Jimmy a second time. He even looked over at Tammy, just to be on the safe side.

"What names are we talking about?" he asked.

"Poopy-pants," Jimmy replied.

"Ah, Peter Burrows," Mr. Bolger said. "Terrible story. He picked up dysentery on a family vacation. Could have happened to anyone."

"What's worse," Tammy continued, "is that he's the only one in the class who didn't get permission to participate in the sociological study – the one on imagination and faeries or whatever. If we don't win the pizza party at Video Emporium, the whole class is going to blame him and pick on him even worse."

"That's terrible," Ms. Chicklets replied. "Jimmy, why didn't you tell me about any of this?"

"I've got other things on my mind," Jimmy said sullenly. "How is this my problem?"

"What's so important that you don't have time to help a classmate in trouble?" she replied sharply.

Jimmy didn't want to tell Ms. Chicklets about Mitch's ultimatum. If he did she'd call Mrs. McGee, and Jimmy would be the one to face the consequences. And he was starting to share Tammy's misgivings about the grey-suited sociologists finding out about Criminey and the bicycle.

"We have an exam in Mrs. Greenbottom's class on Friday," he replied. "She said anyone who fails has to go to summer school."

"That woman," Ms. Chicklets said, and then handed Jimmy a bagel with cream cheese to go, and put the breakfast dishes in the sink.

As soon as he finished his coffee, Jimmy, Tammy, and Criminey followed Mr. Bolger to his car.

They met again behind the stage in the main gym. The sociologists seemed to have retreated back to the white trailer. At least for now. Jimmy tried to talk about his plan during the car ride in, but Tammy had shushed him.

"What difference does it make?" Jimmy had asked. "He's not listening anyhow."

"Who are you talking to, Jimmy? Dipsy Doodle?" Mr. Bolger asked after a pause.

Jimmy and Criminey started laughing.

"No Dad, I was talking to Tammy," Jimmy pointed out.

"Oh hi Tammy," Mr. Bolger replied. "I didn't know you were back there."

Tammy just rolled her eyes.

Jimmy pulled an envelope out of his backpack. Criminey stood watching, with a satisfied grin on his face. He was wearing an outfit just like the one Mitch had worn on Monday, during the flying bicycle incident. "Classic Mitch," he had called it.

"What's that?" Tammy asked, eyeing the envelope suspiciously.

“That’s the plan Criminey and I came up with last night,” Jimmy said proudly, as he opened the envelope, “for getting Mitch a copy of the exam.”

“You’re actually planning to steal tomorrow’s exam and give it to Mitch?” Tammy asked, incredulously.

“It’s going to be easy,” Jimmy replied enthusiastically. “Criminey’s getting really good at manifesting. Watch.”

Jimmy started throwing quarters towards Criminey. Three of them passed though him, he caught two of them, and he dropped one. From Tammy’s perspective, three coins just landed on the ground where Jimmy threw them, two of them stopped in mid-air, and one of them seemed like it had hit something, something invisible. Tammy just stared at him as if he were crazy, apparently unimpressed.

“What? We don’t have any choice,” Jimmy said. “If we don’t, Mitch is going to kill us. And don’t forget about the guys in suits.”

“I don’t want any part of this,” Tammy said.

“Don’t worry,” Jimmy replied. “Me and Criminey are going to get the copy of the exam. All you have to do is fill in the right answers.”

“Jimmy Chicklets,” Tammy replied angrily, “that would be cheating!”

“No, Mitch would be cheating,” Jimmy replied, puzzled, “not you.”

“But I have to look at the exam questions in order to give Mitch the answers,” Tammy said slowly and carefully, “questions I am not supposed to see until the exam.”

“Maybe she could make a point of forgetting the questions after she writes in the answers,” Criminey offered helpfully.

Jimmy decided not to repeat Criminey’s suggestion, as Tammy walked away shaking her head. Instead he pulled the plan out of the envelope and held it up so Criminey could read it as well.

“So first,” Jimmy began, “I distract Mrs. Greenbottom.”

“And second,” Criminey continued, “I sneak into her classroom while you’re distracting her ...”

Not everything quite went according to plan. One thing that became apparent right from the beginning is that when planning to distract someone, it's always best to have a specific plan about how you're going to go about distracting them, a plan designed to get them to be distracted in just the right way. Jimmy tapped on the door to Mrs. Greenbottom's classroom.

"Come," Mrs. Greenbottom answered from inside the door.

"Mrs. Greenbottom," Jimmy said quietly, "can I talk with you for a minute?"

"If you must," she replied. "Come in and sit down."

"Can I talk with you out here," Jimmy asked, hoping to get her out of the classroom in order to give Criminey a chance to look for the exam.

"Don't be ridiculous," she replied sharply. "I'm having my lunch. Come in and sit down now."

Jimmy reluctantly entered the room, leaving the door open so Criminey could follow him in.

"What do you want, Mr. Chicklets?" Mrs. Greenbottom asked, after he sat down at his desk.

"Um," he said, wishing he'd thought through this part of the plan more carefully.

"Spit it out, Chicklets," Mrs. Greenbottom said impatiently.

"Um," Jimmy began again, "I was wondering if you could tell me what I need to study for tomorrow's exam."

"Everything," she said dismissively. "Please close the door on your way out."

Within a few moments Jimmy was back in the hallway and Criminey was trapped in the classroom with Mrs. Greenbottom. Jimmy was about to knock on the door again – still with no particular plan beyond general distraction – when the PA system crackled on.

"Mrs. Greenbottom to the Principal's office," a voice said. "Mrs. Greenbottom to the Principal's Office."

After a few moments, the door opened and Mrs. Greenbottom emerged, muttering angrily to herself. She pulled the door closed behind her and headed off in the direction of the main office. Jimmy quickly rushed over to the door and tried the handle. It was locked. He lightly tapped on the door and waited for a reply. Nothing.

He tapped again a little louder this time. Still nothing. He was about to bang loudly on the door when suddenly it opened.

“I got it,” Criminey said excitedly, holding up a copy of Mrs. Greenbottom’s exam.

The exam promptly fell, not out of, but through Criminey’s hand and onto the floor. As Jimmy bent down to pick it up, he heard the sound of running footsteps from around the corner.

“This way!” someone yelled.

Jimmy scooped up the exam and dashed into Mrs. Greenbottom’s classroom, closing the door behind him. Almost immediately someone started trying to open the door.

“We need somewhere to hide,” Jimmy whispered sharply.

“In here,” Criminey shouted, as he crawled into Mrs. Greenbottom’s supply cabinet.

Jimmy crawled in after him and closed the door. In a few moments they heard the door open.

“It’s in here somewhere,” a voice said. “Search everything.”

Jimmy and Criminey tried to be as quiet as they could, not saying anything, not moving a muscle. But they could hear the sounds of searching getting closer. Just before they – whoever they were – opened the supply cabinet, a large black shimmering circle appeared behind them.

“Come this way boys,” a familiar voice said. “Quickly.”

It was Mr. Bolger.

They emerged from the shimmering circle – a portal, Mr. Bolger called it – in the caretaker’s shed in the far back corner of the schoolyard. The caretaker, Mrs. Grubb, was helping Mr. Bolger disassemble some kind of machine. And pack away the parts in Mr. Bolger’s briefcase. Jimmy had questions, lots of questions. But Criminey spoke up first.

“That was close,” he said to Jimmy. “Who were those guys?”

“They were agents of the SAU – the Sprite Acquisition Unit,” Mr. Bolger replied, without looking up, “looking for you, Toodle.”

Jimmy and Criminey stared at each, shocked.

“You can see Criminey?” Jimmy said, incredulous. “Since when? And what’s a sprite? And why are they after Criminey?”

“Let’s see,” Mr. Bolger replied, smiling kindly. “Yes. Since he was born. A creature of great power from the Faerie realm. And because they want to use him as a weapon.”

Jimmy paused for a moment, trying to figure which answer was to which question.

“So since you can see me too, and not just Jimmy? That means I’m not a poltergeist, right?” Criminey asked.

“A poltergeist? No,” Mr. Bolger replied, amused, “there’s no such thing as ghosts.”

“See,” Criminey said to Jimmy, sticking out his tongue.

“So there’s no such thing as ghosts,” Jimmy replied angrily, “but there are sprites and faeries and unicorns!”

“Unicorns,” Mrs. Grubbs grumbled. “Don’t get me started on unicorns.”

“Who are you? Who are you people?” Jimmy asked in frustration.

“We’re agents with the SPA – the Sprite Protection Agency,” Mr. Bolger replied, still smiling. “A super-secret division of the SPCA.”

“So you’re telling me you’re not an accountant. You’re a secret agent who protects faeries. Right?” Jimmy asked.

“Well, strictly speaking we protect sprites. Faery-protection is another division,” Mr. Bolger replied. “And yes and no on the whole accountant thing. Being an accountant is my cover. But it also pays the bills.”

“Does mom know?” Jimmy asked, quietly.

Mr. Bolger finally stopped smiling.

“No, Jimmy, she doesn’t know,” he replied sadly. “And she can’t know. She wouldn’t understand. And it would be too dangerous. So be careful what you do and say around her. You too Toodle.”

All of a sudden Criminey pulled the exam out of his pocket and held it up.

“What are we going to do about this?” he asked.

“Oh no!” Jimmy exclaimed. “I almost forgot! Mitch is going to tell the faery chasers about the flying bicycle unless we get him that exam by the end of the day. And he’s going to kill us too!”

Mr. Bolger quickly snatched the exam from Criminey’s hand.

“I’ll take care of that,” he said, smiling again. “Now you two go to class.”

Jimmy glumly left the caretaker’s shed with Criminey right behind. They tried to listen at the door but Mrs. Grubb and Mr. Bolger were talking too quietly for them to hear. After a minute or so the school bell rang, and they reluctantly headed back to class.

Chapter 7: Funky Friday

It was raining when Jimmy and Criminey got up, pouring rain. And it was still pouring when they went downstairs for breakfast. Jimmy was worried and angry: worried about what Mitch was going to do when he saw him, and angry at Mr. Bolger for, well, everything. Criminey was worried and uncertain: worried about what the grey-suited agents might do if they caught him, and uncertain if being a sprite was any better or worse than being a poltergeist. Mr. Bolger didn't seem worried or angry or uncertain or anything. He just sat there reading the same newspaper he'd been reading all week.

"Tammy's mother called, Jimmy," Ms. Chicklets said as she handed him some toast. "Her father's going to drive her in this morning, because of the rain."

"I guess it's just you and me today, Jimmy," Mr. Bolger said cheerfully. "And Apple Strudle."

Criminey laughed a little. Jimmy didn't crack a smile.

"I'm walking in today," he said sullenly.

"But Jimmy, you'll get soaked!" Ms. Chicklets said, surprised.

"I need the exercise," Jimmy replied, and then put on his raincoat and rubber boots.

Jimmy and Criminey walked to school together in the rain. Well Jimmy walked while Criminey danced. He was wearing a suit and tie, carrying an umbrella, and singing.

"I'm singing in the rain
Just singing in the rain
What a glorious feeling
I'm happy again ..."

All of a sudden he stopped, a surprised look on his face.

"I think I'm wet," he said, smiling.

Jimmy looked over at him and saw several drops of water running down his face.

"Maybe you should open your umbrella," Jimmy replied.

"No, you don't understand, I've never been wet before," Criminey said, and started dancing again.

Jimmy smiled, for the first time that morning.

Criminey stopped dancing once they could see the school. They stared at the front doors to make sure Mitch wasn't waiting for them. He wasn't. They crept carefully towards the front doors, watching in both directions. And they waited outside, in the rain, for the bell to ring before they opened one of the main doors and walked quickly to Jimmy's locker. He dropped off his very wet jacket, changed out of his boots into his indoor shoes, and grabbed the books he needed out of his very wet backpack. When he turned to hurry off to class, he found Mitch and the Blinger brothers surrounding him with their arms crossed.

"So what have you got to say for yourself, Chicklets?" Mitch asked, smiling.

"Sorry Mitch," Jimmy began. "I did my best."

"Nothing to be sorry about ... unless those not all of those answers are right," Mitch replied, his eyes narrowing for a moment. "But with Smarty-pants on your team, I've got nothing to worry about, do I?"

Jimmy shook his head weakly, a confused look on his face. Mitch patted him on the shoulder and he and the Blingers headed off to class.

"So you did it, didn't you," Tammy said, appearing suddenly at Jimmy's elbow.

Jimmy just shook his head and followed Mitch in the direction of class.

Jimmy and Criminey sat alone at a table in the cafeteria. Jimmy was looking down, staring at his food. Criminey had his hands around a ketchup bottle, trying to squeeze it, but his hands kept passing through the plastic. After a few minutes, Tammy caught Jimmy's eye and walked up to the table.

"Do you mind if I sit here," she asked, pointing at the chair across from Jimmy.

"Criminey's sitting there," Jimmy replied.

Tammy sat down at the next chair over. As she did so, Criminey successfully squeezed the bottle he'd been playing with, sending a stream of ketchup into the air and onto the next table over.

"Watch it, Chicklets!" someone yelled.

Tammy and Criminey started laughing hysterically. Jimmy grinned.

“So Criminey’s not a poltergeist, he’s a sprite,” Jimmy said. “And Dad’s a secret agent.”

“What?” Tammy asked, surprised. “What’s a sprite?”

“A powerful faery or something,” Jimmy replied.

“Not a faery, from the faery realm,” Criminey interjected impatiently. “Tell her.”

“From the faery world, from the faery world,” Jimmy repeated. “Not a faery. But not a poltergeist either: there’s no such thing.”

“So let me get this straight,” Tammy said, skeptically, “Criminey is a powerful non-ghost from faery-land. And Mr. Bolger is a what?”

Jimmy was about to reply when the cafeteria video monitors – which normally just showed that day’s lunch offerings – suddenly started flashing. After a minute or so almost everyone in the room had turned to look. The words “Exam Cheating Scandal” were blinking on and off. After another minute, a video started playing. It started with images of Mrs. Greenbottom sitting at her desk. After a moment she got out of her desk and left the room, closing the door behind her. Jimmy and Criminey looked at each other, with worried expressions on their faces. The video next showed someone searching Mrs. Greenbottom’s desk. Although the his face was hidden, his outfit was, well, “Classic Mitch.”

“Oh no, it’s Criminey!” Jimmy whispered sharply, and then looked around to see if anyone had heard.

“I didn’t know there was a camera,” Criminey replied in a trembling voice.

Tammy grabbed onto Jimmy’s arm. The figure in the video eventually pulled some paper out of the bottom drawer of the desk. The camera zoomed in revealing it to be a copy of the Mrs. Greenbottom’s exam. An excited buzz filled the room, when the exam thief finally looked up at the camera and revealed himself. It was Mitch. Or at least Mitch’s face.

“What’s going on?” Jimmy asked quietly. “It was Criminey, not Mitch.”

All of a sudden Mitch – who was also in the cafeteria – leapt to his feet, knocking over his chair.

“You set me up, Chicklets!” he yelled.

He then ran from the room, followed by the Blinger brothers. Jimmy noticed a cafeteria worker slip out of the room after him, a cafeteria worker he had never seen

before. And although he couldn't be sure, Jimmy thought he was wearing dark sunglasses.

The room broke out in excited – and loud – conversation. Only Tammy looked back and watched the end of the video. For just a second, in the bottom right corner, the words “Brought to you by the Prime Benefactor” appeared.

“The Prime Benefactor. P B. Hmm, interesting,” Tammy said quietly.

But no one was listening.

Their afternoon class with Mrs. Greenbottom was cancelled and they had study hall in the library instead. Jimmy, Tammy, and Criminey sat at a table by the stacks. They hung a jacket on the back of Criminey's chair so no one would be tempted to sit on him.

“... no wonder they were so interested in what we were imagining,” Tammy said. “You even thought Criminey was imaginary for awhile.”

“And the bicycle,” Criminey added.

“Yes, and the bicycle,” Jimmy repeated, “Criminey says.”

“And Mr. Bolger is a secret agent?” Tammy asked, amazed. “Weird.”

“You're telling me,” Jimmy replied. “And Mom has no idea.”

“And Mrs. Grubb, too,” Criminey added.

“Yea, Mrs. Grubb, too,” Jimmy repeated. “She was there when Dad brought us through the portal.”

“Mrs. Grubb?” Tammy said, surprised. “Well that might explain why the girls' bathrooms are so dirty. She's too busy spying on us.”

“Who's spying on who?” Lucy Underhill asked, as she arrived unnoticed at their table.

“The government,” Jimmy replied after an uncomfortable pause. “My mom says they're constantly spying on us.”

“Your mother sounds a bit like Poopy-pants' mom,” Lucy replied. “All paranoid about the government.”

“What do you want, Lucy?” Tammy said impatiently.

“Did you hear about Mrs. Greenbottom?” Lucy asked enthusiastically.

Jimmy, Tammy, and Criminey shook their heads blankly.

“There was a big scene in the hallway this morning,” Lucy continued. “Mrs. Greenbottom was yelling at Principle Gardner about the sociology interviews. She said they were spreading fanciful ideas, being disrespectful to teachers, and wasting everybody’s time. Mr. Gardner just stood there saying “Yes Mrs. Greenbottom” and nodding.”

Lucy paused for a moment, for dramatic effect.

“And guess what?” she asked.

“What?” Jimmy asked in reply.

“Mr. Gardner made them all leave,” Lucy answered. “The guys in grey suits, the scientists in their lab coats, the long white trailer: all gone.”

Jimmy and Tammy looked at each other, shocked. Criminey looked at Tammy too. But she didn’t look back. Before anyone had a chance to say anything, the librarian came and handed each of them a sheet of paper.

“Please make sure you give them to your parents,” he said, and then headed off to give the handouts to the next group of students.

Jimmy glanced quickly at the paper in his hand. The heading at the top read “Parent-Teacher Forum on Privacy and Security.” He was about to ask Tammy what it meant when the PA system crackled on.

“With 100% participation, the winners of the “sociological study participation competition” are the students in Mrs. Greenbottom’s class,” a voice said. “There will be a pizza party at Video Emporium at 6:00 pm tonight for the winners.”

The library – which mostly contained Mrs. Greenbottom’s students – was filled with applause. There were also a smattering of boos from students in other classes, as well as a few shushes from the librarians.

When Jimmy arrived at Video Emporium – with both parents in tow – most of the class was already there. He rushed over and got some pizza and then looked for Tammy. She was in a corner talking with Peter Burrows. He slowly made his way

over in her direction, greeting various friends and acquaintances from school along the way.

“I guess my mom changed her mind,” Peter said to Tammy as Jimmy approached. “They interviewed me this morning. Mrs. Greenbottom was pretty angry when Mr. Gardner made her excuse me from the exam for it.”

“Hey Poo ... I mean Peter,” Jimmy said. “I guess that explains what set Greenbum off this morning.”

“Jimmy!” Tammy snapped.

“What?” Jimmy replied.

Peter glared at him and then started walking away.

“Hey Peter,” Tammy said. “Nice video.”

Peter looked back, smiled, and then continued on his way.

After they played a few videogames, Jimmy and Tammy saw Ms. Chicklets waving at them and went over and joined her.

“I saw you talking with Peter Burrows earlier,” she said. “Was he finally able to participate in the interviews?”

“Yes, his mother changed her mind,” Tammy replied.

“And we couldn’t have won without him,” Jimmy added. “We were the only class with 100% participation.”

“I have to admit I gave her a little nudge,” Ms. Chicklets said. “After our conversation yesterday, Tammy, I called Mrs. Burrows. I wanted to let her know that some things are more important than privacy.”

“Thank you, Ms. Chicklets,” Tammy said, elbowing Jimmy. “We wouldn’t be here tonight if you hadn’t done that.”

“Yea, thanks Mom,” Jimmy added, grudgingly.

“I also received a call from Mrs. McGee today,” Ms. Chicklets continued. “She said Mitch has been suspended from school. Something about cheating on an exam.”

“There was a video of him stealing it,” Jimmy blurted out.

“Yes, yes, and they found the stolen exam in his locker,” Ms. Chicklets said. “But he seems to want to blame you for it. I don’t think you should hang out with Mitch anymore. He’s going to get you in trouble.”

“No worries about that, Mom,” Jimmy replied.

Ms. Chicklets smiled contentedly.

After a few more minutes of chatting with Ms. Chicklets, Jimmy wandered towards the door to get a little fresh air. Everything seemed to have turned out okay: Mitch was suspended; the grey-suited agents were gone; he had passed his exam – he thought – without cheating; Tammy and he were still friends; and Criminey was getting better and better at manifestoing. As he stepped outside he saw Mr. Bolger and Mrs. Grubb talking with a third person in the parking lot. He thought it was probably secret agent business. He was curious who the third person was, though, so he crept closer to get a better look. As he peaked from behind a nearby car, she finally turned around: it was Mrs. Greenbottom.

Chapter 8: Sunny Saturday

Jimmy woke up late. It was Saturday after all. Criminey was at his desk, trying to play with his tablet. Which is difficult when you can't control when your hands are solid.

"Hey Sprite," Jimmy said with a grin.

"Hey Pepsi," Criminey replied.

They both started laughing hysterically. They took turns playing with the tablet until Jimmy got hungry. When they got downstairs – still in their pajamas – Mr. Bolger was sitting in his housecoat reading the paper.

"Where's Mom?" Jimmy asked.

"Ms. Chicklets is at her exercise class," Mr. Bolger replied. "And afterwards she is volunteering down at the kennel."

Jimmy nodded and made himself some breakfast – toast and jam and a banana. As he got up to leave, Mr. Bolger lowered his paper.

"Are you sure you don't want me to make you one of my famous omelets, Jimmy?" he asked.

"No thanks, Dad," Jimmy replied.

After all, famous doesn't mean good anymore than special does.

"So, Dad, I saw you talking with Mrs. Greenbottom last night ...," Jimmy said.

"Ah, Myrna Greenbottom. Interesting woman," Mr. Bolger replied. "Tough as nails and smart as a whip."

"Is she an agent too?" Jimmy asked.

Mr. Bolger smiled warmly and paused for a moment before he answered.

"I'm sorry, Jimmy," he said, "that's classified. Why don't you and Ninny Moodle get dressed and go outside and play?"

Jimmy and Criminey started to laugh.

"If I'm Ninny Moodle then you're Gimme Giblets," Criminey joked.

The boys laughed their way out of the room. Mr. Bolger winked and then raised his paper again. Jimmy paused in the doorway for a moment.

“Dad, can me and Criminey camp in the yard again tonight?” Jimmy asked.

“I don’t see why not,” Mr. Bolger replied. “But we’ll have to ask Ms. Chicklets.”

Jimmy skipped out the door and followed Criminey to his room. It was going to be a great weekend.