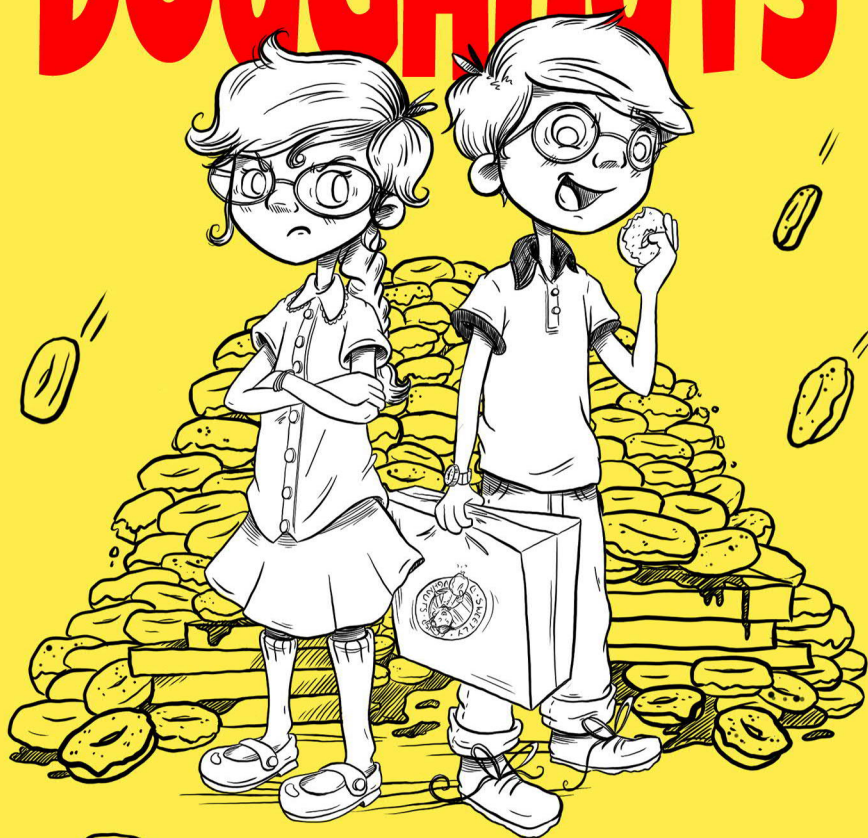


# SIX THOUSAND DOUGHNUTS



THOMAS TOSI

illustrated by Meghan Tosi



**SIX THOUSAND  
DOUGHNUTS**

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*This one is for Heidi, who taught me how to share—by sharing  
her life with me.*



# SIX THOUSAND DOUGHNUTS

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GOFFSTOWN, NEW HAMPSHIRE

# The First Day of School



**T**HE WHOLE THING STARTED with a chocolate-frosted doughnut. And really, it wasn't even a doughnut. It was a third of a doughnut. A third is a fraction. If you don't understand

fractions, don't feel bad—not everybody does. But I get math. Math wasn't my problem. No, what I had to learn about was all that other stuff—the touchy-feely stuff that happened after I discovered how to turn that one-third of a doughnut into six thousand doughnuts.

See, I'm one of five kids—that's one-fifth. Which means I never have anything of my own. Books, bathroom, video games, tighty-whitey underwear—you name it, we share it. Okay, maybe not the underwear. That would be gross. We do have our own underwear. But you get what I mean.

Me? My name's Abe Mitchell. I'm in Miss Sorenson's fifth-grade class at Green Hill Academy in Green Hill, New Hampshire.

And I'm tired of sharing.



"So, how was the first day of school?" Dad asked my older sister, Faye, as she plopped down on the front passenger seat of the beast. The beast was our decades-old station wagon with fake wood siding. It was already running and rattling. Dad tried not to shut it off if he didn't have to. There was only a fifty-fifty chance it would start again if he did. I hoisted up the pants of my hand-me-down school uniform while my little



sister, Peg, pushed past me, scrambling up onto the beast's middle-row bench.

*How was the first day?* Geez, we didn't even have our seatbelts on yet. It was school. How did Dad *think* the first day was?

"It's not fair to have the first day of school on a Friday," Faye said. "It utterly destroys the whole week. Sixth grade is going to be devastating."

"At least you're not gonna have to do mega-writing," I said. "Miss Sorenson says we're gonna have to write a ten-page report—without using giant fonts and pictures to make it seem longer."

Miss Sorenson was actually staring at me when she said that last part. It was like she could read my mind. I'd already calculated that if I switched the font size from twelve to twenty-four, the line spacing to triple instead of double, and threw in a few pictures, maybe I could get away with—

"We are so going to do reports this year," Faye said. "Besides, writing's not that hard. You wanna know what hard is? We're going to be working with fractions again. And this time, it'll be stuff like multiplying and dividing them."

"Fractions are so easy."

"For a nerd."

"I like second grade," Peg said, looking out the car window. "Can we get doughnuts?"



Peg asked because we were right across from the Sweetly Crisp doughnut shop. Peg has unusual eyes. They bypass her brain and connect directly to her stomach.

Faye and I gave each other a look. *Doughnuts in the middle of the afternoon? Yeah, right. There's no way Dad would—*

"Now, that sounds like a great idea, sweetie," Dad said, turning into the drive-through.

I opened my mouth to complain that he always gives in to Peg, but the words “I want chocolate-frosted” came out instead.

“Me too,” said Faye.

“Me too,” said Peg.

“Quit copying.”

Dad stopped the car. He let out a frustrated sigh.

“Um, in this case, copying is a good thing,” Dad said. “I forgot my wallet, guys. All I’ve got is change for tolls, and that’s just going to be enough for me to get a coffee and for you all to split one doughnut. So I’m glad that you’re at least in agreement with one another.”

*Forgot his wallet?*

That was just an excuse for when Dad didn’t want to spend extra money—like how none of us kids except my older twin brothers, Brian and James, had a phone. Supposedly, the rest of us were *too young*. But even the twins, who were in high school, only got *one* two-versions-too-old and not-so-smart phone to share between them. What was the deal with that?

“No. I’m not gonna split half a doughnut with these two,” I said.

"There's three of us, 'Mr. Fractions Are So Easy' genius," Faye mocked. "That means you get a third—not a half."

"Well, I'm not having any 'cause I'm sick of sharing."

"So, a half it is."

"Is a half more than a third?" Peg asked hungrily.



It's amazing how easily having a big mouth gets me in trouble. This is the thought that came to me as I watched Faye and Peg eat their halves of one chocolate-frosted doughnut and watched Dad drink his coffee while I sat there with my nothing.

But it's also amazing how sometimes—if I just quiet down, watch, and listen—bad luck can turn good.

"Hey, Dad, what's that on your coffee cup?" I asked.

He examined his cup with a glance. "I don't know; it must be some sort of prize thing." He tore the small paper game piece from the side of the cup.

"Can I have it?"

Faye said, "Hey—"

"No, no, Abe saw it and asked first," Dad said.

*Good guy one—evil troll sister nil.*

Dad handed me the game piece. I used my fingernail to peel away the Sweetly Crisp game logo so I could see the prize.

"Yes!" I said. "Dad, turn this crate around."



"Excuse me?"

I waved the small ticket in front of both Faye and Peg. "Read it and weep, girls. One free doughnut. And I do believe that means one free *whole* doughnut."

"That's not fair," Faye said.

"It's like rewarding him for refusing to share."

"Abe saw the game piece, and I gave it to him," Dad said.

"It's his. That's just how it worked out."

"Yes!" I said again.

"But we're not cashing it in today."

"What?" I couldn't believe it.

"We're almost home, Abe," Dad said in his calm don't-argue-with-me dad voice. "I'm not turning around and going all the way back there now. You can get the doughnut on another trip."

"Unbelievable." I sank down in the corner of the seat. What was the point of winning a free doughnut if I couldn't flaunt it in front of Faye and Peg while they ate their half doughnuts?

Since I didn't really have anything else to do but watch my sisters eat, I decided to examine my winnings instead. In the fine print on the back of the game piece, I read a very interesting word—*cash*. Maybe I'd won something even better than a doughnut.

"What's it mean, 'cash equivalent?'" I said.

"Cash equivalent?" Dad said.

"Yeah, it says, 'cash equivalent one-twentieth of a cent.'"

"Oh, I think they put something like that on just about every contest. It's probably so that someone who won a prize—like a doughnut—couldn't come in and say they'd rather have money instead. Because all they'd get would be one-twentieth of a penny."

"Like a penny cut into twenty pieces? But that wouldn't really be worth anything."

"I think that's the point. If you try to turn that in for cash, you're not going to get anything."

"Yeah, but what's it mean, 'equivalent?'"

"Equivalent," Faye said. "That's like—equal to."

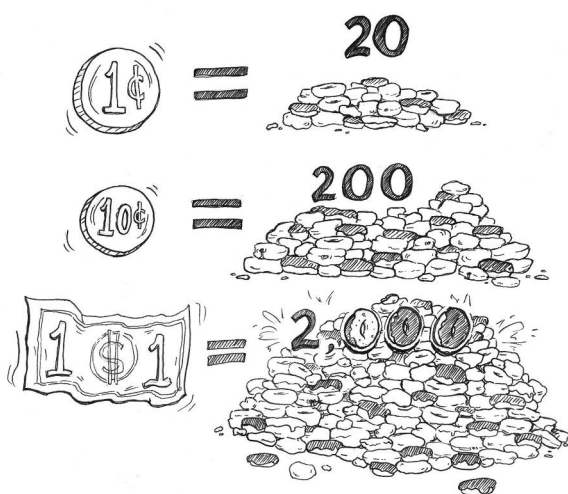
Peg laughed. "A doughnut is worth a little piece of a penny."

"Or...like a penny is worth twenty doughnuts?" I said.

"Well, I guess you could say that, Abe," Dad said, "though I hardly think that's what they mean."

"But they're saying it...." My mind began to work.

# Cousin Celia Crowds In



I WAS REELING WITH doughnut math. If I could get twenty doughnuts for a penny and there are ten pennies in a dime—ten times twenty equals two hundred. Two hundred doughnuts



for a dime! No way was I going to stop there. Two hundred doughnuts for a dime, and there are ten dimes in a dollar—two hundred times ten equals two thousand. Two thousand doughnuts for a dollar!

Now, I do realize that Sweetly Crisp doughnuts get pretty stale after a couple of days. I also know, of course, that it would take me at least a week to eat two thousand doughnuts. But that wasn't worrying me.

What was worrying me was the fact that I didn't have a dollar with which to buy two thousand doughnuts. I needed a plan. I decided that, as soon as we got home, I would head to the one place where I could think—my room.

Only, as I bet you already guessed, it wasn't really *my* room. The third floor of our house was sort of like an attic, except it was all fixed up like a big open room so you could live in it. I shared this space with Brian and James.

If you really had to share a room, I guess this is the one you'd want. Because of the roof, the walls were all at crazy angles, and, in some places, they stuck out and made way for windows. The planks on the stairs and floor were creaky—our own alarm system to warn us when somebody was coming. The air smelled woody and old, but I liked that. When you looked out one of the windows toward the side of the house, you

could see straight into the high branches of an old tree. It was an oak, I think. Those are the ones that make acorns, right? When the windows were open, you couldn't really tell where the oak ended and the house began unless you leaned out to get a better look. We could pretend that our whole room was a tree fort.

The only bad things were that it got pretty hot up there in the summer and that Brian and James were a pain. But it absolutely could've been worse. And, as I was about to find out, it soon would be.



I was still multiplying doughnuts by dollars when Dad pulled into our driveway and parked beside a little orange car I didn't recognize. Peg swung her door open and dinged it.

"Oopsie," Peg said.

"Peg," Dad said. "Be careful."

"Why? It's as crappy as the beast," Faye said. "Whose car is it?"

I didn't care to stop and find out. I had doughnut plans to make in my room. I burst into the house and leaped up the first staircase two steps at a time. At the top step, I grabbed the railing post thingy and swung around for a U-turn, spinning myself down the hall toward—

"Abe, I need to talk to you." My mom was carrying a stack of blankets out of her bedroom.

"Not now, Mom. I have some thinking to do up in my room."

"Yeah, that's what I want to talk to you about."

*Wait a second, what's Mom doing home in the middle of the day? Don't know, don't care,* I decided as I hit the second staircase, the narrow wooden one leading up to the attic. There was no railing, but I didn't need one. My elbows practically brushed the plaster of the walls on both sides. Partway up, the stairs took a sharp bend. I was just making that corner when—

"Dude! Gangway!" James yelled.

THUMP! THUMP! THUMP!

My twin brothers were riding a folded-over lemon-yellow futon mattress like a toboggan down the steps. James wore his BMX bike helmet and pads. Brian had on his old Darth Vader mask and cape, which I had supposedly inherited but never seemed to get to wear.



"I have you now," Brian said in a deep, breathy voice.

He grabbed me as I was falling over backward and yanked me onto the futon. We tumbled the rest of the way back down to the landing, where we ended up in a heap.

"Honestly," Mom said, shaking her head.

I shoved James's dirty gym-sock-covered foot off my chest and tried to get my face out from underneath Brian's sweaty, sour-smelling, hairy, high school armpit.

"Don't you three ever quit?" Mom asked.

"What did I do?" I said, "I was just trying to get to my room when these two Neanderthals ran me over with—wait, where are you going with that?" Brian and James were trying to push past me into the hall with the futon.

Before my brothers could answer, as if they even would, Dad, Faye, and Peg made their way upstairs.

"No. No. No. No," Faye said to Dad as she reached the top of the staircase.

We were all crowded in the hallway. Not that there was anything unusual about that—crowded was my natural habitat.

"She's a college student now," Dad was saying to Faye. "She's going to have a ton of work, be staying up late, and needing quiet—her own space."

"Who?" I asked.

*Faye complaining and Dad talking about someone needing their own space? It's crazy but, if I didn't know any better, it almost sounds like Dad is talking about cramming someone else into the house. But who could possibly—*

"Celia!" Peg bolted out from behind Faye and dashed straight into Mom and Dad's bedroom.

"Peg-ster! Shoot, look at you," said a voice from inside the bedroom.

My cousin Celia stepped out into the hallway, carrying Peg on top of two pillows.



Celia's mom and my mom are sisters. Most everybody in my family is normal and lives in New England, but Celia's mom married a guy from South Carolina, and that's where they lived and where Celia grew up.

I always thought Celia was okay because she was nice enough and smart enough—not in math like me, but smart anyway. I liked the way she said *y'all* all the time. I saw her as a visitor from some exotic far-off land. Also, whenever her family came to visit, they stayed in a hotel, which was good. Unlike my brothers and sisters, Celia didn't take up any space in our little—

"Celia's college messed up her housing," Dad said. "We're going to make room here and adjust."

"Just until they get the discombobulated, combobulated again," Celia said. "I appreciate y'all takin' me in. Hey, Abe."

"How?" I asked, trying to play catch-up in this conversation.

"Her schedule's probably going to be crazy," Mom said. "That's why Celia's getting the little bedroom to herself with the futon. We'll move Faye and Peg and their bunk bed out."

"To where?"

Dad raised his hands like he was trying to calm me down. But I wasn't mad—yet. "You boys have had the whole attic to yourselves for a long time," he said.

"To ourselves? There's three of us up there."

Dad sighed. "It's the biggest open space in the house. Faye and Peg...well, there's plenty of room for all—"

"We'll hang up some blankets as dividers between the boys and the girls," Mom said.

"Whoopee!" Peg said. "Faye and I get to go up to the attic with you guys?"

"It's not a good thing, Peg," Faye said.

"Yeah, whoopee," I muttered.



We finished the move after dinner. On what was now supposed to be the girls' side of the attic, Mom told Brian and James to finish putting the bunk bed together. She hung up the blankets that divided Faye and Peg from the three of us.

She did this by pounding some nails into the walls, bending them, and tying off a rope she stretched across the attic. I didn't know if it was because Mom was strong or the attic walls were weak but, on one of Mom's swings, she went a little wide. The hammer went right through the plaster.



"What's with all that pounding?" Dad shouted from downstairs.

"Nothing," Mom replied, wiggling the hammerhead out of the hole, sending little white chalky chunks of the wall to the floor. "You just worry about getting Celia settled down there."

"What did you break?" Dad hollered up.

"Nothing," Mom said, trying to see if some of the bigger plaster pieces would fit back in the hole. "Brian and James are putting the bed back together."

"Liar, liar, pants on fire," Brian said.

"You are so bad," James said, ruffling Mom's hair with his hand.



"Look, all this needs to get done tonight," Mom groaned as she pulled the rope tight. "I'm not bad. I'm...creative."

"Dude, that's where we get it from," Brian said to James with a laugh.

I wasn't laughing.

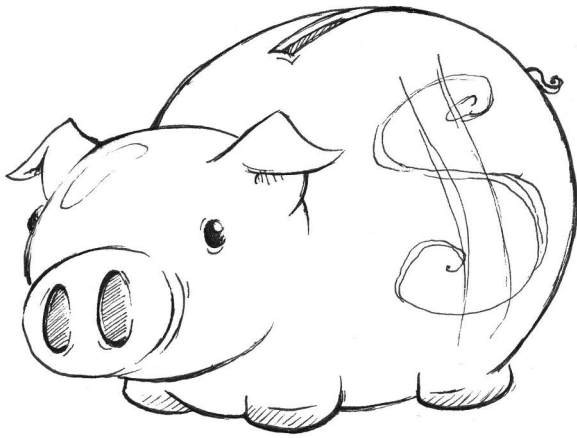
"Peg's asleep in my bed," I said as Mom was finishing draping the blankets over the rope.

"Well, it *is* ten o'clock," Faye said.

Mom put her hands on her hips and assessed the situation. She turned to Faye. "Grab your sister's shoulders under her arms. I'll get her feet. Help me get Peg over to her own bed."

"And out of mine," I said.

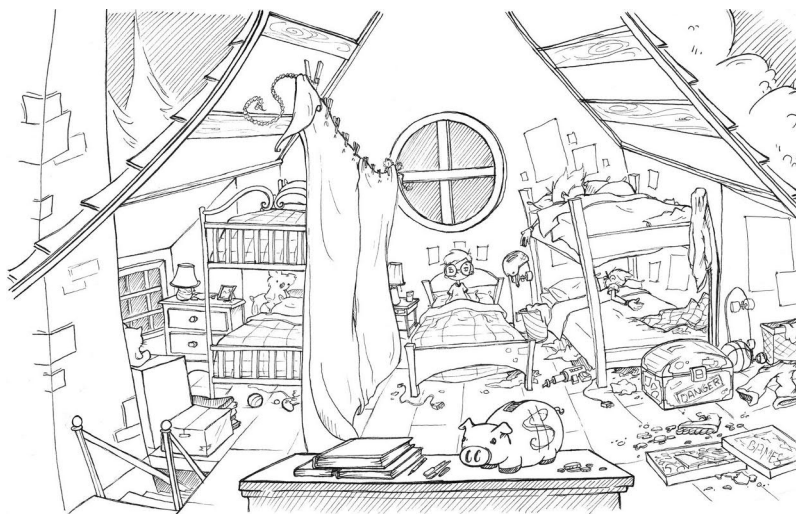
# A Deal with Peg



**I** WAS WITHOUT DOUGHNUTS. I was without dollars. I was crammed into three-fifths of an attic with my two brothers on one side of a blanket wall and my two sisters on the other.

And then, of course, there came the final insult. On my side of the attic, there was a pile of Faye and Peg's stuff and their dresser. On top of the dresser was Peg's "Peggy" bank.

Since I had seen the birthday cash that Peg had gotten a couple of weeks earlier in the birthday cards, I just knew that the chubby little ceramic porker still had some money in it.



"Abe?" Peg whispered. She had woken up.

"What?" I asked.

"Can I come over?"

"If you're having nightmares, you have to go to Mom and Dad's—"

"I'm not having nightmares. Can I?"

"No."

"How come?"

"Because then I'll have nightmares."

Everything was quiet for a minute, but then I heard the unmistakable sound of sniffles. Peg was crying.

"Peg," Faye said softly. "What's wrong? What do you need?"

"You know," Peg said. "Down under the covers with Abe."

*Under the covers with me? What the heck could be under the covers with me that would make Peg cry?*

I wasn't sure I wanted to know. At the same time, I couldn't help but slowly and timidly slide my feet back and forth under the sheets. Something tickled my big toe. Something furry.

I jerked up and away from it and banged my head on the headboard.

"Shush!" Faye said.

"Give it to me," Peg said.

Brian and James made no sound.

"What is it?" I asked.

"Just give it to her and be quiet," Faye said.

*Wait a sec. That's not fur. It's fuzz—or hair. Fuzzy hair.* I slid back under the covers and stretched my foot as far down as I could.

"Mrs. Fuzzy Hair," I said. Peg must have left her ratty dolly behind after she fell asleep in my bed. "I thought you weren't supposed to sleep with her anymore?"

"Abe don't—" Faye said.

"What?" I said, digging Mrs. Fuzzy Hair out. "It doesn't matter to me. I just thought Mom and Dad said Peg couldn't go to Franny's sleepover if she still had to sleep with a doll."



I got up, stuck the hand holding Mrs. Fuzzy Hair through the opening between the two blankets of the wall, and waited. I heard Peg pull her sheets back, swing her legs out of bed, and take three creaking steps across the floor. She gently took the doll from me.

"Thanks," Peg said timidly.

I got back into bed but, instead of lying down flat, I

propped myself up against my pillow and headboard. Sleep didn't stand a chance. In the moonlight, I looked around the newly arranged—and suddenly much smaller—attic and thought of crullers and dunkers.

"Hey, Abe?" Peg spoke quietly from her side of the divider.

"Yeah?"

"You won't tell, right?"

Well, ol' Peg made the mistake of asking me not to tell at the exact moment my eyes happened to scan once more across her "Peggy" bank.

I sat up a little straighter in bed and thought for a moment. It's important you understand that it was only for a moment. If I had thought any longer, I might have made a different decision.

"No, Peg, I won't tell."

"Thanks."

"But—" I said.

"Abe—" Faye said from the other side of the blanket wall.

"It's nothing bad," I assured Faye. "It's just a trade. You know, Peg, like in Monopoly."

Peg was silent.

"There's something that you want me to do or not to do," I said. "And there's something you have that I want."

"What?" Peg said.

"Peg, how much do you have in your 'Peggy' bank?"

"That's not Monopoly," Faye said. "That's called blackmail. Don't do it, Peg."

"I really wanna go to that sleepover, Faye," Peg said. "I think I have three dollars. You promise not to tell?"

"Absolutely."

"Abe," Faye said, "you're a stinker."



# Why Peg Felt Dumb



**S**ATURDAY MORNING ARRIVED WITH the wheezing and farting of our old push lawnmower. The smell of freshly cut green grass drifted in through the window. The grass wasn't the

only pleasant green sensation. I matted down my sleepy hair, sat up in bed, and noticed three crumpled one-dollar bills when they tumbled down from my chest to my lap.

I also noticed that I was alone in the attic. Just as I picked up the money, I heard footsteps creaking on the stairs.

"Knock, knock," Faye said from the other side of the blanket wall.

"Yeah, okay," I said, and Faye came through to the boys' side.

She looked at the dollar bills. "Peg left it out for you before she went down to breakfast."

"Excellent."

"She's a good kid, Abe. You shouldn't take advantage of her."

I knew what Faye was getting at. Peg was the youngest, sure, but Faye meant more than that.

Peg stayed back in school last year. She did first grade twice. Peg's birthday is near the end of August. Back when she had turned five, it was a really big deal for Mom and Dad to figure out whether they were going to let her start kindergarten then or wait a year. Peg started.

I guess it was tough, being so much younger than the other kids and always feeling you were behind. I heard her call

herself dumb once. She didn't think anybody heard, except maybe Mrs. Fuzzy Hair. But I did.

I never told her. I felt kind of funny about it and didn't think Peg would like it so much if anyone else knew how she felt. I kept her secret.



"What do you want from me?" I asked Faye.

"You know why she wants to go to that sleepover so badly—Franny and those guys are all her old friends from before she stayed back."

"So?"

"So think, genius. Why don't Mom and Dad want her going if she still has to sleep with a doll? They don't want her feeling like she's behind again."

Faye wasn't wrong, but she didn't really get it, either. My going after the doughnuts had nothing to do with how Peg felt.

"Look," I said, "even if I'd told Peg that I wouldn't blab, no strings attached, it wouldn't make her feel any better. And I'd miss the chance of a lifetime."

"Chance of a lifetime?" Faye's eyebrows went up, and her lips squished to one side—that oh-so-superior Faye look.

"You're the oldest girl," I said. "You don't have a clue. Look at me. Brian's old Star Wars jams and James' old Star Trek sheets."

Faye's oh-so-superior look turned baffled.

"They're two different things! And I don't like either!" I said. "You ever been giggled at by a gang of girls because your old uniform drawers are drooping? I don't think so. With thousands of doughnuts, I could finally have something that was my own—something amazing and entirely my own. And Peg doesn't care about the three dollars anyway. She cares about the sleepover."

"Thousands of doughnuts for three bucks? What are you up to?" Faye said.

"I'm not taking advantage. Peg and I have a deal. She's kept up her end, and I'll keep up mine."

# Sweetly Crisp Saturday

I WAS GOING TO pedal to the Sweetly Crisp that morning until I walked into the garage and saw that my bike was missing its front tire. Brian and James had the wheel on its side, spinning like a top on the floor. They were recording it with their phone.

“Dude, it’s totally gyroscoping,” Brian said.

“It’s still going,” James said. “That’s so sick.”

“Are you kidding me? What don’t you guys get about the concept of hand-me-downs?” I stepped on the rubber part of the tire. It left a short skid mark on the concrete garage floor and stopped spinning. “Once something’s handed down to me, it’s not yours anymore.”

"Relax," James said. "It's a physics project for Science class. The bike's hardly yours anyway. You only had it for one summer. I had it for five years."

"What does that even mean? I'm telling."

"Can y'all use your physics to make my backpack any lighter?" My cousin Celia had come out the front of the house and was standing in the driveway. She leaned back against her car, shifted her weight, and slipped off the shoulder strap of her pack. It landed heavily on the hood. That thing must've been loaded with books. The pack settled with a hollow metallic clunk that I was sure would leave a dent.

"Shoot. You don't want to be studying law unless you got a strong back," she said.

"Is there any law I can use to put my brothers in jail for wrecking my bike?" I said.

"Abe, darlin', you need a ride? I still feel bad puttin' y'all out like that. Least I can do is give you a ride. You don't wanna be pedalin' away on your little bicycle today anyway. It's supposed to rain cats 'n dogs later. So, you just tell me where to."

"I was going down to the Sweetly Crisp this morning."

"Doughnuts!" Brian and James said together.

"Not invited."

"Hold on now," Celia said, "there's room for everybody."



The Sweetly Crisp was packed. There were lots of moms and dads with kids in football and soccer uniforms. Some of the games they played in were already over. The smell of turf and dirt from their cleats mixed with the rich aroma of maple, chocolate, frying dough, and coffee.

"How can I help you?" asked the man behind the counter as I reached the front of the line. His face was as round as a jelly doughnut.

"I'd like to get some doughnuts please, sir." I figured that with what I was going to hit him up for, I'd better be as polite as possible.

"Sure. Assorted?"

"Um, yeah, great."

He expertly folded together a thin paperboard doughnut box, grabbed a piece of tissue paper, and stood there with his hand hovering above the racks.

"Ready when you are."

"All right," I pulled a crumpled list from my pocket. "I guess I'll have three jelly sticks, two honey-dipped, thirty Bavarian crème, three hundred thirty-five maple frosted, three



thousand forty-eight apple spice, twelve glazed crullers, one thousand six hundred eighty chocolate-frosted, eight hundred eighty-nine cinnamon...and one plain—please.”

The doughnut guy made it to the fourth Bavarian crème before he stopped and turned to me. That’s actually a lot further than I thought he’d get.

“Don’t listen to him, Dad,” said a girl behind the counter. “He’s just a kid from my school.”

I looked at her stupidly for a second. At first, I didn’t recognize her. It was Marlene Paczki. She was in the other fifth-grade class. Weirdness. She used to be shorter and had super thick glasses. You could never see her eyes right. Her hair was always kind of stringy, like it needed to be washed and pulled back with mismatched rubber bands.

She sure didn’t look like that now. Her new glasses were thinner and let you see that she had these pale blue eyes that looked like the community swimming pool on Wallis Island on a hot sunny day. Her hair was washed and looked soft where it was loose. A couple of strands curled on one side of her forehead near a small, soft, white smudge of powdered sugar. In the back, she had a braid I bet her mom helped her with because it was pretty fancy and—

“What are you staring at?” Marlene asked.

*Staring? I am not staring.*

Okay, maybe I did *look* a little longer than I should have.

"It's just the way your hair's tied," I fumbled. My face felt hot, and I fidgeted with the crumpled paper doughnut list in my hand. "I always liked knots and stuff—I used to look 'em up online, no big deal."

I could tell Marlene wasn't too crazy about my answer, but that didn't stop her from sneakily checking her reflection in the shiny side of the silver coffee machine. She reached up to swipe back one of the loose strands of hair from her forehead.

"Uh-huh," she said.

"No, really."

Mostly, what got me was how she was dressed. She had on a light-colored skirt thing instead of pants and a smooth white shirt that buttoned and had a kind of shine to it—the kind of shirt my mom would call a blouse. She was dressed way too nice to be behind the counter of a doughnut shop. I guess she knew how much she'd changed over the summer and—

"You're doing it again," Marlene said.

I turned my eyes away from her and down at my hands. I saw I'd twirled the doughnut paper list into a tight rope while I had been staring... I mean *looking* at her.

"C'mon, kid, it's Saturday morning, and we're busy," the doughnut man, Mr. Paczki, said. "See all those people behind you? They're hungry, and they don't think this is funny. Now, what do you really want?"

"I really want what I told you," I said. "You aren't going to make me say it all again, are you?"

"Well, we don't have that many doughnuts in the entire shop. Even if we did, do you have any idea how much ten thousand doughnuts would cost?"

"It's not ten thousand. It's six thousand. And I have the money right here in my pocket."

"Why would anyone need six thousand doughnuts? You have enough money on you to pay for six thousand doughnuts? In cash?"

"Sure."

I dug Peg's three dollar bills out of my pocket, slapped them on the counter, and tried to iron them out with my hands.

"Ha!" Marlene said.

Cousin Celia chuckled a little behind me, but I wasn't bothered.

"That looks like three dollars," Mr. Paczki said.



"That's right." I dug out the game piece and held it up.  
"Three dollars for six thousand doughnuts."

By now, everyone in the shop who was within earshot was looking over at us.

Marlene squinted at the game piece with her swimming pool eyes. "That says you've won a doughnut—*one* doughnut."

"No, no, no. This says I can buy twenty doughnuts for a penny."

"Where?"

Mr. Paczki took a jelly stick out of the box and set it on the counter in front of me. Some of the granulated sugar coating fell off, and some stuck to his fingertips.

"This...is one doughnut," he said slowly. "And, as you can see on our sign, it costs a buck."

"Y'all's sign says ninety-nine cents," Celia said from behind me. She slid her backpack off her shoulder again. This

time, it hit the doughnut shop floor with a thud. She was probably thinking that we might be in here a while.

Mr. Paczki stared at Celia before saying anything. I don't know if it was the thud or the *y'all* that made him pause.

"Whatever! The point is, it's right there in writing."

"It's right here in writing, too," I said, flipping over the game piece. "Cash equivalent, one-twentieth of a cent."

"That doesn't mean anything," Mr. Paczki said. "The prize is on the other side. That's just the lawyer gobbledygook fine print stuff."

"Lawyer gobbledygook fine print stuff!" Celia said. "That there's a disclaimer outlinin' the scope of rules and obligations of the contest and definin' the legal relationship of the parties, i.e., it is a contract."

Celia got a kind of hard shine in her eyes when Mr. Paczki dissed the subject she was studying at school. Behind her, Brian and James each had the look of a dog whose owner put a treat on top of its nose and told it to stay. They sensed that something great was about to happen but, for the moment, had to wait to find out what it was.

"What're you talking about?" Mr. Paczki said as Celia unzipped her backpack and began to rummage through the

books in it. "What obligations? What contract? I didn't sign no contract—that stuff comes from corporate."

Celia turned to me.

*Wow, she looks scary.*

"Abe, where'd that little game piece come from?"

"Dad's coffee cup."

She turned to Mr. Paczki and hefted just about the thickest book I ever saw right in front of his face. "And you sold that coffee."

"You better put that oversized doorstop right back where it came from," he said.

"Oversized doorstop!" Celia was about to explode. With two hands, she held the book as high as she could for everyone in the shop to see. "This here's *Dawson's Contracts: Cases and Comment*—tenth edition!"

Celia slammed the Dawson book down on the counter.

Except, there was a problem. Dawson didn't hit the counter directly. The textbook first smashed the jelly stick Mr. Paczki had set there, and the doughnut exploded.

Marlene looked like she'd been shot. Deep red raspberry jam had splattered her white shirt.



Since Celia's book hitting the jelly stick was technically an accident, I guess you could say what happened next was started by Marlene. I'd seen food fights in movies and on TV, but I didn't think they actually happened like that in real life. They do.

Marlene didn't just fling the first doughnut. Instead, red in the face, she flung an entire tray of Boston creams that was on the shelf behind her. They hit Celia and about five other people.

“Marlene!” Mr. Paczki shouted.

Two of Marlene’s victims were girls about my age. They had on blue soccer uniforms and were still wearing their cleats and shin guards. They even had blue headbands, and their hair was back in ponytails. You would’ve thought they’d be mad about getting hit like that, but they looked at each other and laughed.

Those two jumped to their feet, grabbed the food off the table in front of them—bagels with blueberry cream cheese that matched their uniforms and headbands—and threw, not at Marlene, but at a table full of girls in red soccer uniforms.

“Hey! Stop that,” Mr. Paczki said. “You girls there...”

“I got it, I got it,” said a guy at the blue table. He was trying to get the girls to sit down when the red table returned fire. A chocolate chip muffin knocked over his tall, iced coffee, and it splashed all over his T-shirt—which, when he turned around, I saw had the word *Coach* on the back.

“Who threw this?” the blue coach yelled as he stood, his T-shirt plastered to his belly and side where it was soaked with his iced coffee.

When Mr. Paczki saw how big and mad this guy was, he ducked into the back room. I saw him grab a phone.



The blue coach picked up the soggy muffin and held it back like he was ready to chuck it.

A woman at the red table stood up. "You throw that muffin at my girls, and it'll be the last thing you do."

"Oh sure, your little girls are angels here," he said. "Well, I saw 'em out on the pitch this morning, shoving and pushing like nobody's business. So, if that's how you teach them to play..." He threw the muffin. It hit the red table with its dry side, bounced off, and smacked into the wall, soggy side first. A spray of wet muffin spitball particles dotted four more people at a table with kids in football uniforms. What was left of the muffin stuck to the pink, green, and white tiled wall and began sliding down.

"Hey, hey, hey," said a man in black shorts and a striped referee shirt as he rose in-between the red and blue tables. "I think the adults here just need to calm down and remember this is all supposed to be about the kids."

Everybody pelted him with doughnuts.

That was when a bunch of kids from the football table climbed over the counter and started grabbing all the doughnut racks.



By the time the police got there, the battle had spread from the shop out into the parking lot. They asked a bunch of questions and wrote down all our names, our phone numbers, and where we lived. But since everyone agreed Marlene had started the actual food fight and Marlene's dad owns the shop, none of us got arrested or anything. The police just told us all to go home, get cleaned up, and think about what we did.

Celia's car was mashed with food all over the place—bagel chunks, frosting, jam, you name it. Brian grabbed a cruller off the roof, and James peeled free a strawberry-iced doughnut that was stuck to the side window. They hopped in the back seat and started eating. They were laughing and recording each other with their phone.

Marlene and her dad had gone back inside and were cleaning up. Marlene's clothes and hair were a mess. She sure couldn't have felt too good about how she looked now. Doughnuts were everywhere. A table was turned over, and the chairs were all knocked about. Some of the wire racks looked bent.

I was kind of thinking that none of this would've happened if they'd just let me buy my six thousand doughnuts like the game piece said I could. But they had a lot of cleaning up to do, and I felt bad for Mr. Paczki. You probably had to get up pretty early to make all those doughnuts, and he looked tired. The police looked sad, too. But I don't know if that was on account of Mr. Paczki or all the squished doughnuts.