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I don't know what Carl was talking about. Abe, the guy at Elwin Farms, wasn't a slime bucket at all. Though he didn't lower his prices, he did throw in free delivery because his delivery guy passed through Petersville anyway. He even said he thought the doughnut stand was a smart idea, and I'm pretty sure he meant it even though I was a customer, and *Starting Your Own Business for Dummies* says you should always say things to make your customers happy even if they're not true.

Once Josh and I had finalized the budget, I biked it over to Winnie, along with some molten chocolate cake to sweeten the deal. It took almost two hours and three molten chocolate cakes, but in the end, she settled for seven percent of the profit per doughnut. I knew Dad would have been impressed since I talked her down from twenty.

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The book says you should always get everything in writing, so I told her I'd type something up on the computer at home and bring it back for her to sign the next day.

"Why wait? What if you get home and decide I don't even deserve the measly seven percent. Oh no, Slick. We're getting this down right here and now," she said. Then she pulled a typewriter out from under the counter and set it down in front of me.

"Oh, okay." I studied the machine. I'd never actually seen one up close. It looked way more complicated than a computer, which is kind of funny when you think about how much more computers can do.

Winnie slid a sheet of paper into the machine, then rolled it into place with what looked like a metal rolling pin. "All set."

Each time I hit a key, I watched one of the little metal arms swing up and smash its letter into the ink ribbon. After a couple of words, I accidentally punched an A instead of an S and asked Winnie how you delete.

"You don't," she said.

"But what happens if you make a mistake?"

"Don't."

"Too late," I said. "Didn't people make mistakes back when they used typewriters?"

"The newer models had correction keys, but this one is from

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way back when people took enough time to be careful and just do things once."

"Well, I live in a time when we do things fast and sloppy and have to do them over and over again, so what am I supposed to do?"

"No need to get all snippy, Slick. Just X it out and start again, and this time don't make any mistakes."

Know what happens when someone tells you not to make mistakes?

That's right. It took me almost ten tries before I got it right, where right meant my own name had a typo.

"Congratulations," Winnie said. "Now we need another one."

"What?"

"Both parties need an original. Doesn't your book say that?"

Unfortunately, it did. "Can't you type the second one?"

"Oh, fine."

I turned the typewriter around and handed her the agreement.

"So let's see..." She squinted at the paper, then at the typewriter keys. "First word... agreement. A...A...A...A... There it is. A." She punched the key, then squinted back down at the paper. "Yup. A. Okay, what's next? G... G... G... G..."

She didn't make a single mistake, but she took even longer than I had.

When we finally had two agreements, and we'd each signed

both of them, Winnie pulled some cards from her pocket and handed them to me. "Don't screw it up or sell it to Martha Stewart."

"Is she that blond lady with the magazine?" I asked, flipping through the three chocolate-stained cards.

"All you need to know is she'd kill to get her hands on that recipe, and she's already done hard time so I wouldn't put it past her. Point is, you keep it to yourself. Got it?"

"Got it," I said.

Then I ran across the street to show Josh, and we celebrated by eating more molten chocolate cake and figuring out how many doughnuts we'd have to sell to become millionaires.

Biking home, I could feel Winnie's recipe in my pocket every time my right leg came up, and when it did, the smile I'd been wearing since I'd left the General Store got even bigger. The sides of my face hurt, but the smile had taken over, and I couldn't shut it down, no matter how hard I tried. My whole body was smiling.

Suddenly, Charlie popped into my head, but this time I didn't push him right back out again like I had been.

I had news...huge, smile-so-big-it-hurt news. I had to call Charlie now. I had to *want* to call him now. Didn't I?

I waited for my legs to pump faster because I couldn't wait to get home and call him.

I waited for my brain to start putting together the words I was

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going to use to tell him about everything I'd done to get those three cards in my pocket.

I waited to finally feel okay that he never was going to send me those sorrys I still looked for in my inbox.

But my legs didn't pump faster, and my brain didn't look for words, and I did not feel okay. My smile finally gave out, and I biked off the side of the road into a field of dead grass, tipped myself onto the ground, and looked up at the white sky.

I didn't want to talk to Charlie. I wanted to want to, but that wasn't the same.

I didn't want to hear him talk about basketball and how unfair it was that Coach Stiles wasn't giving him more playing time.

I didn't want to hear him repeat all that dumb stuff his dad always says, the stuff now he always says.

Most of all, I didn't want to hear him say how crazy it was to think a doughnut could change your life.

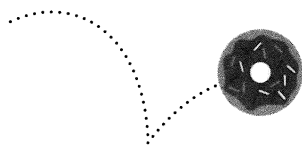
I did miss Charlie, but not the one who'd answer the phone if I called when I got home. I missed the Charlie who refused to go to yard the day I thought I'd killed Charlotte K. But that kid was gone. He'd slipped away so slowly, it had been easy to pretend he was still there. But he hadn't been, not for a long time, not since way before the move. And neither had Tris and Charlie.

I wanted to jump back on my bike and race home, leaving

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everything I was feeling out there. But I couldn't move. My chest hurt like something was trying to crush it, and I just had to lie there and take it.

I don't know how long I lay there staring into the blank sky pinning me to the ground, but by the time it finally let me up, it had started going gray.



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I'd planned Doughnut Day so I could have the kitchen all to myself. I didn't want anyone looking over my shoulder or telling me I was messing up. And I definitely didn't want anyone with me if it turned out these doughnuts weren't what I'd been dreaming they'd be all this time. Dad was taking Jeanine to the Solve-a-Thon. And Mom was going to keep Zoe busy playing Peter Pan in the basement, where, thanks to the zip line Jim the Kidnapper had installed, she could fly even without happy thoughts or fairy dust.

I didn't want to waste any time on Doughnut Day, so the night before, I got out the equipment I'd need, including the fancy pastry gun Mom had gotten me.

I'd been practicing using the gun, and if I pressed down the plunger really fast with the gun at just the right angle, I could shoot

icing onto a cake from halfway across the kitchen. Not that you'd ever need to do that, but it got me thinking that the police should consider trading in their guns for ones that mow people down with a stream of cream or mousse or something like that because then, if they've got the wrong guy, big deal. It's kind of genius, right? Not in an I-can-solve-three-hundred-math-problems-in-six-hours kind of way, but still.

When my alarm went off at seven thirty the next day, I got dressed, grabbed the pastry gun—I'd decided it was too valuable to leave out in the kitchen all night—and climbed down the ladder.

I knew Jeanine would have gotten Dad up at the crack of dawn for the Solve-a-Thon, but I was worried Mom might still be in bed. She'd been staying up late trying different chicken pot pie recipes. She'd decided chicken pot pie was a must for the restaurant but that hers needed some kind of twist. The one she'd made with beets had bright pink puff pastry on top, which was definitely different, but none of us loved the taste, so she was still experimenting.

"Levin. Tris Levin, licensed to fill." I threw open my parents' bedroom door, pastry gun aimed at the bed.

"Mom?"

The bed was empty, and the mattress had been stripped.

I heard a moan and followed it to the bathroom. There, lying

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on the floor, curled around the toilet in her bathrobe, eyes closed, was my mother.

This was bad—bad for Doughnut Day, bad for me, and, thinking about it now, bad for Mom too, though I have to admit, I wasn't so focused on her at the time. At that moment, seeing her there on the floor, all I wanted to do was shout, "Get up! It's Doughnut Day! My day! I've earned this day. I deserve this day. So whatever you have, suck it up!" But I didn't. Instead, I said, "Are you okay?"

She moaned a "no" and hugged the toilet a little tighter.

"Did you throw up?"

Yes moan.

"More than once?"

She held up four fingers.

"Feel better?"

No moan, louder and longer than the first.

"You wanna try to get up?"

"Tile. Good. Cold," she said, eyes still shut.

"But..." I knew I shouldn't say it, but I couldn't stop myself. "It's Doughnut Day, remember?" I held up the pastry gun. "So you *are* getting up soon, right?"

She opened one eye and glared at me with it.

"Okay. Sorry. I was just asking because," I said to myself as I moped away, "how do you *know* you won't feel better playing Peter

Pan in the basement than you do lying on the bathroom floor unless you try?"

What's the worst that could have happened? She'd already thrown up four times. What was once more? Maybe that last fifth vomit was just what she needed?

I'd thought my father and Jeanine had left already, but when I got downstairs there they were, Dad sitting at the kitchen table drinking tea and Jeanine standing at the front door, jacket zipped, earmuffs secured, several razor-sharp number two pencils in each mitten.

"Dad! It's 8:03 ... 8:03!" she shouted, pointing at the clock on the wall. "Remember what I said? No later than eight o'clock."

Dad sipped his tea. "Jeanine, you can't pretend you don't hear me just because you don't like what I'm saying."

"Oh yeah? What makes today different from all other days?" I said.

"I'm just thinking, maybe we shouldn't go because Mom's sick and you were going to make the doughnuts today."

"Really?" I said. Was Dad actually thinking about choosing my Doughnut Day over one of Jeanine's math competitions? Was it April Fools' or something?

"What are you saying?" Jeanine was still going with the "if I don't hear what you're saying, it's not happening" strategy.

"I know Tris could make the doughnuts another day, but he had

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this all planned. It seems a little unfair. Plus, it's just another Solve-a-Thon. Missing one isn't the end of the world."

"But it *is*! It is the end of the world!" Jeanine said, nodding like some creepy bobblehead.

"Honey, you've got to keep this stuff in perspective."

"Perspective? You want *me* to keep this in perspective? You want me to miss a *major* math competition so Tris can shoot cream into balls of fried dough?"

"Now that's not fair," Dad said. "He's put a tremendous amount of work into this project."

"What about the work *I've* put into studying for the Solve-a-Thon? I never get credit for doing work because I like to work. I work all the time, so it doesn't matter. You don't even care, but Tris wants to make a few doughnuts and you throw him a party!"

The craziest thing about what Jeanine was saying was that I could tell she actually believed it.

"We're not throwing him a party," Dad said, chuckling.

"Don't laugh at me!" Jeanine rushed at him with her number two pencils held out like daggers.

"Calm down. You know how proud we are of you. And we drive you all over the place for all kinds of things, the Solve-a-Thons, the spelling bees, the National Geography Bees—"

"The Math Olympics," I added.

"But you said I could go to *this* Solve-a-Thon."

"It's *one* Solve-a-Thon," Dad said. "What's the big deal?"

"You don't get it!"

"Come on, Jeannie." Dad tried to wrench the pencils away from her. "Take off your jacket. Sit down. Let's figure this out."

"No! I *need* this Solve-a-Thon. I *need* to be doing more math."

"So fine. Do more math. The internet's working. I can print out as many math problems as you want. You can spend a whole week doing math problems."

"It won't help!" She dropped her pencils and crumpled to the floor.

Dad crouched over her. "I still don't understand. How come?"

"Because there won't be other people. I won't be getting smarter."

"That doesn't make any sense."

"How will I know how good I am unless I can see how many people are worse than me?"

"Okay. Now you're scaring me."

"You don't understand!" She covered her face with her mittens and curled into a ball under the kitchen table.

I'd never seen her go quiet like that in the middle of a tantrum. Louder and whinier till her opponent can't take it anymore is her usual strategy.

"So explain it to me then," my father said. "What makes *this* Solve-a-Thon so important?"

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Jeanine didn't say anything. I was pretty sure she was crying.

"Come on." Dad stuck his head under the table. "Explain it to me."

"Because I don't have anything here." Jeanine's voice was so small it didn't even sound like hers.

"Where?"

"Here. Petersville. I don't have Mathletes. I don't have G&T. I don't have Kevin. I don't even have normal school. I don't have anything, and ... and Tris has everything!" she blurted out.

"What is she talking about?" I said to my father.

"You *know* what I'm talking about!"

I stuck my head under the table now too. "No, I don't."

She sat up and looked at me. "You like it here!"

"What?"

"You do! You like it here."

"I do not!" I said like she'd just accused me of picking my nose.

"Yes, you do. I've seen you!"

"Seen me what?"

"You like Josh, and you like that crazy lady at the General Store and hockey and your doughnut business. You even like biking around. You like it here!"

I opened my mouth to tell her she was wrong, but then something made me stop.

I couldn't believe it: she was right!

JESSIE JANOWITZ

When had that happened? When had I stopped waking up in the wrong bed in the wrong room in the wrong town?

"And I know you don't talk to Charlie, so you don't even want to go back. You're not even friends with him anymore!"

It was the first time anyone had said it out loud, and it hurt more because I hadn't seen it coming.

"Jeanine!" Dad said.

I couldn't tell if my father wanted her to stop because what she was saying about Charlie was mean or because it was true or both.

"And I don't have one thing here. Not one friend or activity, not one anything."

"I know," I said. "Because you never leave the house. You won't try."

"That's not it. You know that wouldn't matter. You know it! I'm just not like you."

"Yeah, I know. You're smart."

"Come on, Tris. You're smart," Dad said.

"Not like her. It's okay. I'm not stupid or anything, but I'm not smart like her."

Dad didn't say anything.

Jeanine got on her knees so that she was facing me. She wasn't crying anymore, but she looked sadder than I'd ever seen her. "But you're good at this. You just made all this stuff happen here. I can't do that. I'm not good at Petersville."

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I can't even tell you exactly what that meant, "good at Petersville," but she was right about that too. Whatever it meant, I was and she wasn't. And Petersville wasn't something like basketball she could choose not to do. She'd just have to get up and do it badly every day till one day she either got better or left. And maybe she would get better when she started school, but maybe she wouldn't. Maybe she'd wake up with that feeling that she was in the wrong bed in the wrong room in the wrong town every morning till she was old enough to go someplace right. My parents would have said that was impossible, that it would just take time, but that's what parents have to say. The truth is they have no idea.

"I'm sorry." I wasn't even sure what I was apologizing for, but I felt bad. Maybe Josh was rubbing off on me.

"It's okay. It's not your fault."

"But maybe I could help." I slid off my chair so I was kneeling under the table now too. "I mean, I know I was weird when you asked Josh to join your book club, but it's okay with me if you still want him to."

"Thanks." She gave a little smile, but she still looked so sad.

"And... maybe, maybe I could make the doughnuts while I take care of Zoe so you could still go to the Solve-a-Thon." I couldn't believe what I was offering.

"Really?" Jeanine said.

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"Really?" Dad said.

"Yeah, sure. As long as Dad makes sure Zoe gets that I can't play all day." Even if it didn't work, I could always make the doughnuts the next day. The Regional Solve-a-Thon wouldn't roll around again for a year.

"Done." Dad reached out to shake my hand before I could change my mind. "Zoe!"

"What?" Zoe yelled from the living room.

"Come here!"

"Why?"

"Now!"

A moment later, Zoe appeared in the doorway in her ski jacket and fairy wings. "Don't yell. It hurts my concussion." She'd been in and out of concussions since my father's accident.

"What did we talk about yesterday? When I call, you come. Period."

"I don't remember yesterday. You know, concussion," she said, pointing to her head like my dad was a complete nuddy.

Dad rolled his eyes and said something in French that sounded like, "*Deeeuh meh deh!*"

"What did I do?" Zoe said.

"Nothing," Dad said.

"Then why are you Frenching at me?"

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"Just listen. Mommy's sick and has to rest and I have to take Jeanine to the Solve-a-Thon, so Tris is going to play with you, but he's also going to be making his doughnuts, so you have to play quietly while he's working in the kitchen. Okay?"

"Okay," she said and skipped off.

"Okay?" he said to me.

"Okay." It so wasn't, but it was too late to back out now.

"All right, Jeanine, thank your brother. Let me just tell Mom. Hopefully, she's made it off the bathroom floor by now," he said as he climbed the stairs.

Jeanine and I crawled out from under the table and began collecting her pencils. "You really think you'll be able to make the doughnuts with Zoe around?" she said.

I shrugged.

"Hey, um, I'm sorry for before, you know, for what I said about Charlie."

"It's okay. It's true. But it's okay, I think. He and I weren't friends like ... like you and Kevin are. I just didn't know it."

"Oh. I'm still sorry." She looked down at her pencils.

"We missed one." I pointed to a pencil that had rolled over by the stove, and Jeanine picked it up.

"I know you haven't known him that long or anything, but Josh is really nice. It's good you met him."

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“Yeah, it is.”

“All right, let’s get this show on the road,” Dad called. A second later, he was jogging down the stairs.

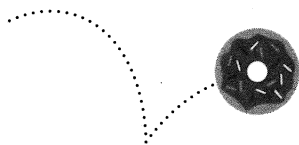
Jeanine pulled her hood up and Velcroed it under her chin.

“Hey, if you can’t get the doughnuts done, maybe I can help you make them tomorrow, okay?”

“Sure. Hey, good luck,” I said.

“Thanks ... also thanks for ...” She trailed off.

“I know. You’re welcome.”



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"But I told you we're taking turns!" I yelled at the bathroom door. Zoe had locked herself inside and was holding my pastry gun hostage.

"Dad said you had to play Peter Pan."

"Really? Is that what Dad said? Because what *I* remember him saying is that you have to let me bake."

"Oh, yeah! *I* remember that too," she said like she was all excited we had this in common.

"Okay, so come out, I'll bake, and *then* we can play Peter Pan."

"But Dad never said which came first, Peter Pan or doughnuts. Why can't Peter Pan go first?"

I thought for a minute. "Look, if you come out right now, and

be good till I finish making the dough, I'll give you fairy dust to play Peter Pan with."

The door flew open, and Zoe stood there, a band of lotion painted under each eye like a linebacker. "What fairy dust?"



Thirty minutes later, I had my first blob of doughnut dough. I'd followed the recipe more carefully than I'd ever done anything in my life, but since I'd never made doughnuts before, I had no clue how I'd done.

The dough felt good, soft like new Play-Doh and cold and sticky too, but it didn't feel different from any other blob of dough I'd touched before, so who knew? I'd just have to wait and see, which made me nervous but also kind of excited. I covered it with plastic wrap, then put it in the pantry to rise. It would need two hours, which gave me plenty of time to play with Zoe and make the cream.

"You can come out now!" I called.

Zoe climbed out of the cardboard box she'd dragged into the kitchen and pulled the masking tape off her mouth. "Where's my dust?"

Just so you know, the cage and muzzle were Zoe's idea. I'd told

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her that if she touched or said anything while I was cooking, our deal was off, and she didn't want to take any chances.

"It's coming," I said. Then I went back into the pantry and put two handfuls of King Arthur All-Purpose Flour into a ziplock bag.

"That's it?" said Zoe, frowning when I handed her the baggie.

"That's it," I said.

She studied it, then ran a finger through the powder. "This is just flour!"

"Sure, if you use it to cook, but not if you use it for, uh, whatever fairies use fairy dust for."

"But it's not special."

"Think of it this way—fairies have wands, right?"

"Yeah."

"And what are wands made out of?"

"I don't know. Sticks?"

"Exactly. They're just sticks till fairies use them as wands. This is just flour till a fairy uses it as fairy dust. Same thing, right?"

"I guess." She was studying the flour again. "But there's so little."

"That's because this is the powerful stuff, the deluxe dust. A tiny pinch goes a long way. But maybe you can't handle it. Maybe I should get the rookie stuff." I took the bag away from her.

"What's rookie stuff?"

"It's for the new fairies who don't know what they're doing."

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"It's not flour?"

"No way. The rookie stuff is cornstarch. Maybe that would be safer."

"Noooooooo, deluxe dust! Deluxe dust!" she said. Then she snatched back the baggie and raced to the basement door.

Down in the basement, I helped Zoe put on and tighten her harness. Then we climbed to the landing halfway up the basement stairs, and I clipped her onto the zip line.

"First, I must throw the fairy dust on you," she sang. Then she took a pinch of flour and tossed it in her face.

"Ready?"

She sneezed and gave me a thumbs-up. I let go, and she squealed all the way down to the other end of the basement.

After five minutes of *clip in, walk down, clip out, walk back up, repeat*, I was bored out of my skull. That's when I decided to see if I could teach Zoe to clip in and out herself. I would never have left her there alone, but at least that way, I could use the time to go over step two of the recipe.

It took a couple of tries but eventually she figured out that if she used both hands, she could pull back the little lever on the clip and slip it over the zip line. Once it was on, there was no way she could get hurt since Jim the Kidnapper had gotten these extra safe clips used by mountain climbers. So for the next hour, Zoe

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clipped herself in and out of the zip line, I memorized how to make the chocolate cream, and everybody was happy. Zoe didn't even complain when I told her it was time to go back upstairs, mostly because she was out of fairy dust by then.

Zoe didn't want to stay in the kitchen for step two, so I told her she could play in her room till I was done.

Winnie had warned me that the chocolate cream was the hardest part of the recipe, but it turned out that it was just like making pudding. With pudding, you have this runny, melted chocolate mixture, and you're stirring so long you feel like your arm will fall off, but the chocolate never looks any thicker. Then, just when you can't stir one more second, something changes. The runny mixture becomes something new that wasn't there before, something somewhere between liquid and solid. The secret is just the belief that if you keep stirring, you will eventually get there before your arm falls off.

It was that way with the cream. I'd been stirring forever when suddenly the waves I made with my spoon were there even when the spoon was gone.

I dunked my finger and tasted.

Sweet. Creamy. Rich. But something was wrong.

I took another bite.

Good, definitely good, but *just* good. No more than good.

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I hadn't done all this work just for good! People didn't write articles about good or dream about good or get up at the crack of dawn to eat good. Good was not life changing! My insides suddenly felt like they were on spin cycle.

Had I forgotten something? I grabbed the recipe. No. I'd done everything just like I was supposed to.

So what did this mean?

Were life-changing doughnuts like the Tooth Fairy or the Man in the Moon or every other bit of magic in this world? A complete lie?

Had the people of Petersville been deprived so long they couldn't tell the difference between a good doughnut and a life-changing one?

I put the cream in the fridge and sprinted upstairs.

"Mom?" I whispered. She'd made it to the bed and was pretty clearly asleep. "Mom?" I said again, louder this time.

"Mmm."

I lay down beside her and whispered right in her ear, "I made the cream."

"Mmm."

"It tastes like chocolate pudding."

"Mmm-hmm."

"Mom, please, wake up," I begged, squeezing her shoulder.

"I'm up. I'm up. What she'd do?"

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“Nothing. But the chocolate cream tastes like chocolate pudding.”

“What?”

“For the doughnuts. The chocolate cream tastes like chocolate pudding.”

She pressed her hand to her stomach. “Can you not talk about food, please?”

“Mom, please! I need your help.”

She sat up slowly. “Okay, okay. Let’s just not say the words. So the ... the C tastes like P. What’s wrong with that?”

“It just tastes like normal pud—sorry, I mean, P. Not amazing P or C or whatever, and it has to be amazing.”

“Ah, good not great. I’m familiar with the problem.”

“Yeah, good not great.” I knew she’d get it.

“Was it still hot, the C, when you tasted it?”

“Yeah, warm.”

“Finish. Finish the recipe. Make the doughnuts, I mean, the D. Make the D, fill the D, then decide. The whole is always bigger than the parts when you’re talking food. The magic happens when you put them together. PB&J is a totally different animal from the PB and the J and some B, right?”

“I guess. Okay, I’ll finish and then see.” I was still worried, but it’s not as if I had a lot of options. “Sorry I woke you.”

“Be careful when you fry, you know, because the oil—”

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"I know."

"How's it going with Zoe?"

"Fine. She's in her room."

Or so I thought. But as I found out when I went to tell her that I was ready to go back down to the basement, Zoe was not in her room.

Or the living room.

Or the kitchen.

Or Jeanine's room.

Or any of the other places I checked in the hope that I was wrong about where I thought she'd gone.

Finally, I went back to the kitchen and threw open the basement door. A powdery cloud wafted out.

"Zoe?"

"Don't come down here!"

I started down the stairs. The cloud thickened.

"Zoe!"

White powder carpeted the basement like fake snow in the Christmas windows on Fifth Avenue. Four empty gallon bags of King Arthur Flour sat crumpled on the landing.

"Go make doughnuts!" Zoe appeared out of the flour mist like a zombie in a horror movie.

"Mom's gonna kill you."

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“Na-unh. I’m gonna clean it up.”

“How?”

“Dustbuster, nuddy,” she said as she clipped in and zoomed off. But this time, instead of squealing, she coughed and was coughing so hard by the time she reached the end, she couldn’t unclip herself.

“My eyes hurt,” she said, rubbing them.

I helped her down. “Let’s get out of here.”

“But we have to clean up.”

“We? You mean you and Tawatty Tawatty Dabu Dabu.”

“They can’t help.” She plopped down on a mound of flour, and it whirled up around her. “They’re gone.”

“Where’d they go?”

She stared at the floor.

“Zoe, do you know where they went?”

“Home home.” Her bottom lip quivered.

I guess Zoe was still waking up in the wrong place too.

“C’mon. Let’s go,” I said.

She didn’t move.

“Don’t you want to help fill the doughnuts?”

The corners of her mouth twitched. A second later, both arms shot in the air.

“Forget it,” I said.

JESSIE JANOWITZ

Her arms jerked higher.

“Ugh, fine,” I groaned as I hoisted every last bowling ball of her onto my hip, and clawed my way up the stairs.

I poured water over her eyes in the bathroom until they felt better. Then we went into the kitchen and rolled out the dough together. Once it was half an inch thick like the recipe said, I let Zoe cut out circles with the top of a glass like Mom had taught us to do for biscuits.

Hot oil plus Zoe seemed like an even worse combination than chili peppers plus chocolate, so back in the box she went while I fried the doughnuts. It took only two minutes for the dough circles to puff up golden, but the whole process took a while because I could only fry two at a time, and as soon as I took them out of the oil, I had to roll them in a mixture of sugar, salt, and vanilla bean.

When all ten doughnuts were fried and sugared and cool enough not to burn off your fingerprints—I’m missing four—I put Zoe on a stool at the counter and handed her the gun filled with cream.

“Okay. Now, nice and slow,” I said and carefully pushed the tip of the gun into a doughnut.

As Zoe squeezed the plunger, the doughnut inflated like it was taking a breath.

“Whoa!” she said, her eyes widening with the doughnut.

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Before long, chocolate oozed out the other side.

"Okay, that's good ... Stop ... Stop! *Stop!*"

"You don't have to yell," she said, finally letting go.

"Watch it or I'll French at you."

Zoe rolled her eyes. "You can't French."

I held the doughnut up close to my face and breathed it in.

Cinnamon French toast ... funnel cakes ... hot chocolate ... My mouth went off like a sprinkler. *Please, please, please let them taste as good as they smell*, I prayed. I crossed my fingers, opened my mouth, and—

Ow!

I looked down just in time to see Zoe pulling away. There was a wet mark on my sleeve.

"You bit me? I let you use the gun and you bit me?"

Zoe's bottom lip puffed out. "I wanna doughnut."

"And you'll get one."

"But how come you get to go first?"

"Because *I* made them."

"I helped."

I thought for a minute then held up the I-mean-business finger my parents are always using on Zoe. "Don't ever bite me again. You want to bite everybody else, that's up to you, but not me. Got it?"

"Got it. We don't bite Tris."

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"All right then, here." I handed her the doughnut. "Don't eat yet. Just hold it."

Zoe cradled the doughnut as if it were a living thing.

I took another doughnut and shot it full of cream. "Okay, ready?"

She nodded.

"Three...two—"

"One!" Zoe yelled and crammed as much of the doughnut as would fit into her mouth.

I was still holding mine. It was weird, but after everything I'd done, suddenly I couldn't take a bite. If it *was* just a good doughnut, I didn't want to know.

"Mmm," Zoe moaned and gobbled up the other half. That was a pretty good sign, but it didn't mean much since I could fill a dog biscuit with chocolate cream and Zoe would go crazy for it. But then, with chocolate leaking out of the corners of her mouth, Zoe said, "I don't want to be president anymore. When I'm grown up, I'm gonna be a doughnut maker too!"

That's when I had to know: Had I really just made life-changing doughnuts?

I took a bite, then closed my eyes and focused on all the different things happening in my mouth: springy cake bursting with vanilla; sugar and salt crystals crunching between my teeth; waves of chocolate rolling slow and smooth across my tongue. Mom had

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been right. The whole was so much bigger than the parts, so much bigger even than something you just tasted. Taste was only in your mouth. This went zinging all over from my toes to my fingers to my brain.

Phew... these *weren't* just good doughnuts. They were picture-in-the-paper-get-up-at-dawn-flying-carpet doughnuts.

Phew? Yeah, it's not how *I* thought I'd feel either. Sure, I'd expected a little phew, but mostly what I'd expected was *Shazzam!* And there was none of that. Just phew and kind of a now-what emptiness.

What was wrong with me? Why wasn't I taking my victory lap around the kitchen? Or running for the phone to call Josh? Or running upstairs to tell Mom? Or just plain shoving another mind-blowing doughnut in my mouth?

"I don't feel so good," Zoe said and lay down on the kitchen floor.

I looked over at the tray of doughnuts. Two unfilled ones were missing.

Zoe lifted her shirt and looked down. "Belly says doughnuts are bad."

"Tell Belly not to be such a pig," I said and lay down on the floor next to her. The phew was gone, and all that was left was the now-what emptiness growing bigger every second like a black hole.

"Does your tummy hurt too?"

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"Sort of."

"Make circles. It helps," she said, petting her belly.

"I don't think circles will work this time."

As Zoe groaned and rolled around on the floor next to me, I tried to happy thought my way to *Shazzam*:

Happy Thought #1: Winnie's doughnuts were mind-blowing.

Happy Thought #2: Winnie's doughnuts were going to make the Doughnut Stop a huge success.

Happy Thought #3: Winnie's—

And that's when it hit me. I knew what was wrong. And I knew exactly what I had to do to fix it.

I jumped up and ran around the kitchen gathering ingredients.

"What are you doing?" Zoe groaned.

"Making more doughnuts."

"Uggg. Why?"

Mom always talked about needing to make a recipe her own, but I'd never understood why before now.

Anybody could follow a recipe. Robots could do that and even did in those big cookie factories where they made Oreos and Fig Newtons. But those robots weren't really *making* something; they were just following instructions the same way they do when they make cars or anything else. I didn't want doughnuts from the Doughnut Stop to be something a robot could make you

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with Winnie's three cards. I wanted to put something of me in there too.

Robots couldn't change a recipe. They did everything exactly the same each time. But I didn't have to. I'd followed enough recipes to know how they worked, and I could experiment and make this recipe my own. I didn't mean I wanted to make Tris Levin's Chocolate Cream Doughnuts. That's not what this was about. The chicken soup Mom made was still Grandma Esme's Cold Cure Soup even though she never made it exactly the same way. Without Winnie, Petersville never would have had chocolate cream doughnuts, and without her recipe, I'd never be able to bring them back. They'd always be Winnie Hammond's Famous Chocolate Cream Doughnuts. I just hoped I'd be able to get her to understand that when I told her that I'd tinkered with her recipe. I was less worried about how Josh would take it since I was pretty sure he'd be okay with it as long as the doughnuts were still mind-blowing.

I ran to the refrigerator and pulled a bowl of leftovers from the top shelf.

"What's that?" Zoe asked.

"Mashed potatoes."

"For the doughnuts?"

"Yup."

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"I don't want your doughnuts," Zoe said as she rolled over onto her side and closed her eyes.

I know. I know. Mashed potato doughnuts? Sounds even crazier than olive oil ice cream. But Mom had told me once that if you substitute mashed potatoes for some of the flour, they'll make whatever you're baking lighter. Winnie's doughnuts were awesome, but I wanted mine fluffier, and I was going to use mashed potatoes to do it. Mom's mashed potatoes were just potato. This was for Jeanine, who was always complaining about how Mom had to "fancy" everything up. Mom made them every week, and we always had a ton of leftovers. If this worked, I figured I could just chip in for potatoes.

So, as Zoe napped on the kitchen floor, I mapped out a new recipe.

After an hour of thinking and looking through cookbooks, I had a plan. I'd come up with three new ingredients: mashed potatoes for the dough and balsamic vinegar and instant coffee (no caffeine) for the chocolate cream. Since the doughnut was so sweet, I wanted to make the cream less sweet, more chocolaty. One of the cookbooks said a little balsamic vinegar gives chocolate a stronger flavor. The coffee was a trick I'd seen Mom use when she doesn't want milk chocolate to taste too sweet. The instant stuff just dissolves so it's easy to use. I'd have to be careful

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not to put in too much though, or I'd end up with mocha cream doughnuts.

I made three small batches of dough. In the first one, I used mashed potatoes for half of the flour, then in the second, I used it for only a third, and in the last one, just a quarter.

While the dough was rising, I experimented with the cream. On their own, the vinegar and the coffee gave the chocolate exactly what I was going for, but together, they made it a bit bitter. In the end, I chose the coffee because I liked the way it upped the cocoa flavor.

Once I'd fried and rolled the doughnuts, I tasted one from each batch. The winner was obvious. It was by far the lightest. It had the same yummy flavor as Winnie's, but it tasted more like cake. Since mashed potatoes were supposed to make the doughnuts lighter, it surprised me that the lightest one had the smallest amount of potato. It just goes to show you that in cooking, more isn't always better. That meant I'd just need one cup of mashed potatoes per batch, which would be easy to swing even if I ended up having to make them myself.

By the time I was ready to start stuffing, it was getting dark and Zoe was just waking up from her marathon nap.

"Feel better?" I said.

She rolled onto her side and sat up. "I'm hungry."

I wasn't surprised. It had been almost two hours since she'd

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eaten the doughnuts, and I'd forgotten to feed us lunch. We were both in need of some real food.

Minutes later, we were eating leftover chicken looking out the window at rabbits playing freeze tag on the front lawn. Something you may not know: rabbits are seriously good freezers.

"Did you really put mashed potato in the doughnuts?" Zoe asked, pointing to the empty bowl with her chicken leg.

"Yup, and they're awesome."

Zoe swore she wouldn't even taste my doughnuts, but she did want to stuff them. She was super into the pastry gun. So, when we'd finished our chicken and washed our hands, I spooned my new cream into the gun and let her fill the three doughnuts I had left from the winning batch. When she'd stuffed them all, she held one up and studied it as if she'd be able to spot the part with mashed potato and eat around it.

This time, I couldn't wait to taste my creation. I knew the cream was mind-blowing, and I knew the doughnuts were mind-blowing, but how would they be together? Had I made something entirely new like PB&J or just some D stuffed with some C?

I picked up a doughnut and knocked it gently into the one Zoe was still inspecting. "Cheers!"

The lighter, cakier doughnut floated for a second on my tongue, then melted into the chocolate...

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I'd done it!

Because the chocolate was more rich than sweet, my taste buds craved more doughnut. The doughnut and the cream worked together in a way they hadn't before. This wasn't just some D plus some C. It was picture-in-the-paper and get-up-at-dawn and flying-carpet just like it had been before. It was all those things, and it was mine and it was Winnie's and it was life changing.

I guess after seeing the look on my face, Zoe couldn't hold out any longer because she finally nibbled at the doughnut. As she chewed, her eyes opened a little wider, and before she'd even swallowed the first bite, she took another one that got her all the way to the chocolate. Her eyes rolled back a few seconds later, and she made this sound that was part giggle and part sigh, like this doughnut, my doughnut, was something she'd been missing forever and finally found.

"Let's put mashed potatoes in everything!" she said and sucked chocolate off her thumb with a loud smack.

After that, I was so full of *Shazzam*, I agreed to help Zoe clean up the basement. I even promised not to tell my parents about the mess she'd made.

I was just lugging the vacuum cleaner up from the basement when I heard Mom calling me. She was standing at the top of the stairs, still in her bathrobe but looking less green than before.

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"I think I could manage some ginger ale. Bring me some?" she called down.

"Sure."

I told Zoe I'd be back in a second, got the ginger ale, and headed upstairs.

I guess I did take longer than a second, because Mom and I got to talking about how the D turned out, and by the time I got back to kitchen, Zoe was gone. So was the pastry gun.

I found them both in Jeanine's room. The gun was empty.

"Okay, where's the cream?" I hoped she could hear how annoyed I was and that she'd actually care.

She grinned. Not a chance.

"You're gonna be so sick." I'd assumed she'd eaten all the cream. That's what I would have done.

"No, I'm not." She rocked from one foot to the other. "I like stuffing things."

"Things? Like doughnuts?"

Her eyes moved slowly from one side of the room to the other. "And other things."

"Things like that?" I pointed to Jeanine's model of the human heart. I thought I'd caught her eyes stop at it for a second too long as she looked around the room.

She shook her head but smiled bigger.

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"What about that?" I was pointing to the inflatable space shuttle next to it.

"Uh-uh."

"Come on, Zoe. Give it up. Where's the cream?"

"No, this is fun. Keep trying," she said, jumping up and down.

I didn't have time for this. I was just about to yell for my mother when I noticed Paws, Jeanine's bear, was on the desk and not on her pillow where she always left him.

"Please tell me you didn't." I reached for the bear.

Paws felt like he'd gained a few pounds and was disturbingly squishy. I gave him a little squeeze, and something dribbled out onto the floor.

Zoe clapped.

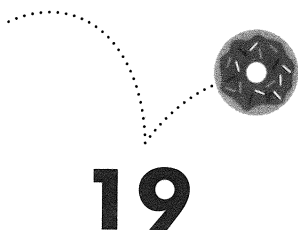
That was it. Enough. I'd done my best. My mother was off the bathroom floor. My shift was over.

I snatched the pastry gun out of Zoe's hands, dragged her and Paws into my parents' room, showed Paws's new trick to my mother, and then went back downstairs.

In case you're wondering, no, there is no way to clean chocolate cream from the inside of a teddy bear. Mom found this place in Nebraska though that can completely remake stuffed animals with new insides, so in six weeks Paws was back, even better than new. Zoe lost her Dessert Days for the entire time he was undergoing

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reconstructive surgery, but I'm pretty sure she'd tell you it was worth it and that she'd do it again if she got the chance. Just in case, we keep the pastry gun under tight security now.



A few days after Doughnut Day, I woke to Mom shouting, “I thought we were done with this!”

I leaned over the side of my bed and peeked through the hole in the floor. Mom, Jeanine, and Zoe were standing in a circle right under my room staring at something I couldn’t see on the hall carpet.

“Zoe, I don’t even know what to say,” Mom said.

Since whatever it was, it wasn’t my fault, I put the pillow over my head and tried to go back to sleep.

It was no use. Josh’s voice was playing on a loop in my head: “Why should *you* invest in the Doughnut Stop? The *real* question is: How can you afford not to?”

They were lines from our investor presentation. We’d rehearsed

for hours the day before because we were pitching my parents that morning. Before we'd practiced though, I'd come clean about how I'd made Winnie's recipe my own. Then I'd made Josh taste a doughnut I'd made from the original recipe and a new one and told him that if he didn't like the new one better, we'd go with the original. Luckily, the new doughnuts tasted a lot like yellow cake with chocolate frosting, which I now know is Josh's favorite, so there was no contest. If you like breadier, heavier doughnuts—and there's nothing wrong with those—you'd probably have gone for the original. But the Doughnut Stop's specialty is the light, cakey doughnut.

"There's just one problem," Josh had said after he'd wolfed down the doughnut.

I knew exactly where he was going. "Winnie."

"We have to tell her," he said.

"I know. And if she doesn't like it, I kind of feel like we have to use the original recipe unless we want to make completely different doughnuts, and I don't want to do that because the whole point was bringing the chocolate cream doughnut back to Petersville."

"So I guess we just tell her and pray she's okay with it."

"But we don't have to tell her like now or anything." I wasn't prepared to deal with Winnie yet.

"Nope. No rush." Josh clearly wasn't either.

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When Josh and I were preparing for our investor presentation, I told him everything my dad had taught me about making a good pitch. Josh was now a word-punching master. All his lines had these tunes you couldn't get out of your head like commercials on TV. I'd tried to convince him to do the whole pitch on his own, but he wouldn't go for it. He said I had to do it with him because the Doughnut Stop was my idea, and investors would want to see the brains behind the operation. In this case, since our only potential investors were *my* parents, I had to agree with him.

Even with me doing half the pitch, I still wasn't sure my parents would come through. I know what you're thinking: the project was their idea. How could they not support you after you did all that work? That's what Josh thought too. And it's not that I didn't see that. I did. But they'd said some things that worried me. Things like, "Tris, even if the doughnut stand never happens, think how much you've learned from this process!" Like I'd been playing a round of Life as the doughnut business guy and wasn't that a lot of fun. They didn't get that this wasn't just a game I was wasting time playing till school started. Maybe that's how it had begun, but it wasn't like that anymore. Now I was building something real, an actual business with real doughnuts for real people, chocolate-cream-doughnut-starved people.

I got out of bed, put on my good pants, a button-down shirt,

and my only tie. Josh and I had decided to dress up to show my parents how serious we were, and also because the book says you have to dress for success.

It must have been a while since I'd worn my good pants, because as I climbed down the ladder, there was a loud, ripping sound. I waited for somebody to laugh, but nobody even looked up.

"I'm just so disappointed in you," I heard Mom say as I climbed the rest of the way down.

"But I didn't do it," Zoe said, stomping her dress-up Cinderella heels.

"It's just gross," Jeanine said. "And it means you're still a baby."

"I'm not a baby. It's not mine. Look at it. It doesn't even look like mine."

Jeanine and Mom bent over and studied whatever it was on the floor.

"What are we looking at?" I said, peering over Jeanine. "Oh."

There, on the hall carpet, was a sizable pile of poop.

"She does have a point," I said.

"What do you mean?" Mom said.

"It *doesn't* look like hers."

"How would you know? Have you been studying her poops?" Jeanine asked.

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"No, I haven't been studying her poops," I said, giving Jeanine a dirty look.

Would it kill her to stick up for Zoe? I mean, what did I know? Maybe Zoe had taken a poop right there in the middle of the upstairs hall, and yeah, it was completely disgusting, but Zoe didn't need Jeanine on her case too. That was Mom's job. "She just never flushes the toilet," I explained.

Zoe doesn't like the flush. She doesn't trust it will be satisfied with sucking down only what's in the bowl, so when she does flush, which is only when my parents make her, she quickly pulls the lever and takes off like she's just lit a stick of dynamite.

Just then, my father came up the stairs. "So, *this* is where the party is."

"Zoe pooped on the floor, and now she's lying about it," Jeanine said.

Zoe stomped on Jeanine's foot with the Cinderella shoe. "I did not!"

Jeanine screamed.

"Let me see, honey," Mom said, bending over to examine Jeanine's foot. "You're okay. Go put some ice on it."

"What happened to using our words, Zo?" Dad said. "Say, 'sorry.'"

"Sorry."

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"That's it? You're not going to punish her?"

"What were you looking for? Firing squad, guillotine perhaps?"

"She broke my toe!"

"So the guillotine then," Dad said. "Come on, Zo Zo. We're going to chop off your head."

Zoe giggled.

"What kind of a message do you think you send by turning this into a joke?"

"Just go get some ice, Jeanine," Mom said.

Jeanine made a face and staggered off down the hall.

"Now, what are we going to do about *this*?" Mom pointed at the poop.

Dad squatted and studied it. Then he scooped Zoe up and leaned his forehead against hers. "Zo Zo, is that your poop?"

"No."

"Is it Tawatty Tawatty Dabu Dabu's poop?" I asked.

"I told you, they're gone."

"All right then." My father put Zoe down.

"All right then, what?" Mom said.

Dad raised an *aha* finger. "What we have here is a case of mystery poop."

"Tom." Mom rolled her eyes. "Would you please pretend to be an adult?"

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"Don't worry. The kids and I are on the case. Right, guys?" he said, bouncing his eyebrows up and down at us.

"Don't look at me. I've got work to do," I said.

"Then would my two remaining turd detectives start with cleaning it up, and would whoever left it, please not do it again?" Mom said.

She so still thought it was Zoe's.

When I got down to the kitchen, Jim the Kidnapper/Carpenter was sitting at the table drinking coffee out of Mom's "Number One Mom" mug.

"Oh, hi," I said.

"Morning," Jim said.

"I thought my dad said the roof was done."

"It is, Jax," Jim said, winking at me. He never told my parents about that day he picked me up in the flood, but he called me Jax every now and then just to show me he remembered, which felt like a typical, creepy kidnapper move.

"So, what are you doing here?" I said.

"Tris!" Mom yelled from the top of the stairs. "'What are you doing here?' Really?"

"Sorry," I said more to her than to Jim. It was weird the way he was just sitting there drinking his coffee in our kitchen like he belonged there. Why did I have to play host?

"No apology necessary. You were curious. Curiosity is useful. Certainly more useful than manners," Jim said, winking again.

"Thanks," I said, though I wasn't at all sure he'd meant what he'd said as a compliment. The wink had thrown me. Usually, a wink means the winker and winkie have a secret, like when he'd called me Jax. But what did this wink mean? It could have meant: both you and I know that asking a direct question isn't offensive even if your mother doesn't. But then it also could have meant: both you and I know that you're just a rude kid, and I'm making fun of you for it.

"I'm actually here for you," Jim said and then took a swig of coffee. "Winnie told me about your doughnut business."

"She did?"

I hadn't expected Winnie to be talking up the doughnuts around town, but it was great news that she was. *Starting Your Own Business for Dummies* says the best kind of advertising is word-of-mouth because it's free and creates something called buzz.

"Yeah, so she wanted me to get the process rolling on your business license." He leaned forward and pulled a square of folded paper out of the back pocket of his jeans.

"Business license? For a little stand."

"If you're selling stuff, you need a license."

This had to be some kind of joke he and Winnie had cooked

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up. No way a kid needed a business license, but I decided to play along. "Okay, let's say you're right. Let's say I need a business license. What's that got to do with you?"

"As mayor, I'm on the Chamber of Commerce," he said, his beard stretching wide with his smile.

Of course! Jim the Kidnapper/Carpenter was also the mayor. How had I not seen that coming? Jim the Kidnapper was the mayor, and a twelve-year-old trying to sell doughnuts on the street out of a cardboard box needed a business license.

This wasn't a joke. This was Petersville.

"Yeah, been almost five years now. Truth is nobody else wants the job, and I'm not too bad at it." Jim thumped his belly like the extra pounds in there had something to do with his success.

"Okay, fine. I give up. You're the mayor, and I need a business license. Can you just tell me what I need to do to get this done as fast as possible?"

All I really cared about was that this wasn't going to slow us down. We had a timeline: get funding; order ingredients; create buzz; grand opening. We didn't have time for paperwork.

"You just need to present your business plan to the Chamber of Commerce."

That minute, the front door swung open, and Josh burst through holding a gigantic, stuffed... thing. It looked like something you'd

win at a carnival, big and colorful and useless. It was almost as tall as he was, and THE DOUGHNUT STOP was stitched across it in red letters.

"Wow," I said. "That's...one big pillow."

"It's a doughnut," Josh grumbled.

"Oh, right, sorry. Now I see it," I said.

"I know. I know. I told her not to, but she felt bad that she doesn't have money to invest, so she did this."

"Your mom?" I asked.

He nodded. "I think she stayed up all night making it. I couldn't not take it."

"I get it," I said. Not just what it meant about his mom, but what it meant about him.

"I like it," Jim said, cocking his head to one side and studying the doughnut.

"You do?" Josh turned it around to look at the front of it.

"It would be great advertising if we can figure out the right place to put it," I said.

"We could strap it to the front of my truck," Jim suggested as he combed his fingers through his beard.

I laughed.

"I'm being serious," he said.

"Really?" I said.

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"Sure."

"What's the catch?"

"No catch."

"But you'll want us to pay you, right?" He was offering to let us use his truck as a billboard. Of course he'd want something in return.

Jim shook his head.

"I don't understand. Why would you do that?"

"Why not?" he said with a shrug.

I didn't say anything. I'd never met a "why not?" person before. In the city, there's generally more of a "why should I?" kind of vibe.

"Thanks so much," Josh said, appreciative, but not at all surprised. He must have seen this "why not" thing before.

"Yeah, thanks," I said. "That would be great. Talk about buzz. A giant doughnut strapped to the front of the mayor's car is sure to get people excited."

"Now we just need to get this business license squared away." Jim tapped the folded-up paper.

"What business license?" Josh said. "Aren't we doing the investor pitch now?"

Suddenly, I had an idea about how to get Jim what he needed for the license and stay on schedule.

"We're actually presenting our business plan to my parents this

morning," I said to Jim. "What if you just stayed for that? Then you could get all the information you need for the license."

"Sounds good to me. Just gotta make sure Harley can get over here."

"Harley?" I said.

"Harley Turnby. He's the other half of the Chamber of Commerce. In fact, if we don't agree, he's the deciding vote."

This seemed like good news. How tough could getting a business license be if Mr. Turnby of Turnby's Random Emporium was in charge?

"Hey, Jax, can I make a suggestion? Before Harley gets here, go change your pants." He pointed to my butt. "I don't much care, but Harley's kind of old school."

"Oh, right. Thanks." I quickly untucked my shirt and pulled it down in back.

Jim was no less creepy, but I had to appreciate a mayor who wasn't going to hold flashing my Knicks boxers through a hole in my chinos against me, not to mention a mayor who was going to strap a six-foot doughnut to the front of his truck just because he couldn't think of a reason not to.



20

Normally, I think anyone wearing a bow tie looks just like Orville Redenbacher, the guy on the popcorn box, but when Harley Turnby came through our door, which, by the way, required him to duck and turn sideways, the Michelin tire man is who popped into my head. It didn't surprise me that someone who sells the Flowbee (a haircutting attachment for your vacuum cleaner) didn't know that bow ties look ridiculous, but I couldn't understand why Harley didn't get that they were health hazards for someone his size. The bow tie was clearly strangling him. His face was bright red, and his neck exploded in sweaty rolls out of his shirt collar.

"Doughnuts, huh?" Harley said when he'd finally made it through the door.

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"Uh, yeah, doughnuts," I said and led him to the living room where everyone else was already waiting. I looked around for somewhere to park him, but the only place left was a stool, which he could have used for a number of things but a seat wasn't one of them.

Mom stood up. "Please, sit here, Mr. Turnby."

"Thanks," I mouthed to her as Harley squeezed himself into the armchair she'd been sitting in.

"Ready?" Josh called from a corner of the room.

Harley took a small spiral notebook and pen from his shirt pocket.

"Ready," I said.

The room went dark.

Zoe clapped. "Is there popcorns?"

"Is that really necessary?" Jeanine snapped. She was on the couch studying for the State Solve-a-Thon. Both she and Kevin had cleaned up at regionals.

"If you want light, go in the kitchen," my mother said.

Jeanine got up and stomped out of the room.

"Where's the popcorns?!"

"Shhh, it's not a movie," Dad said. "This is for Tris's doughnuts."

"So there are doughnuts?"

"No. There's no food. Quiet."

THE DOUGHNUT FIX

Josh switched on the projector his mom had lent us, and our first slide popped up on the sheet we'd hung on the wall:

The Doughnut Stop: What is it?

A doughnut stand on Main Street in Petersville
that will operate on Saturday and Sunday
mornings from 8:00 a.m. till we sell out.

Josh went first. He read the slide, then explained how we were going to limit each customer to two doughnuts. I'd come up with that after I'd read that a good way to keep demand high when you're starting out is to keep your supply low, like limited edition sneakers.

"So doughnuts, huh?" Harley said again. This seemed a little weird since he'd asked the same thing five minutes before, but I figured he just wanted to make sure Josh and I were on the same page.

"That's right, doughnuts," Josh said.

"Doughnuuuts," Harley repeated slowly as he wrote on his little pad.

"We'll probably increase our numbers over time but—"

"What about candy necklaces?" Harley interrupted.

"What about them?" I said.

"You gonna sell those?"

"Uh, no, no candy necklaces," I said.

“No caaanndyy nnecklaaces,” Harley repeated as he wrote.

Josh finished his lines, then flipped to the next slide:

Why is the Doughnut Stop guaranteed to succeed?

Simple: Winnie Hammond’s famous chocolate cream doughnuts have a devoted following. This product will draw customers from miles around.

After I read the slide, I did my lines about how people had gone crazy for Winnie’s doughnuts. I was just about to quote from the article when Harley said, “So, it’s not just any doughnuts then. It’s only chocolate cream doughnuts. Is that what I’m hearing?”

“That’s right,” I said.

“So no old-fashioned or glazed or sprinkle?”

“Nope.” Harley was beginning to get on my nerves.

“Noooo olllld-faaaasheeeoooded, glaaaa—”

“Okay, Josh. Next slide, please.” Harley’s questions were really messing with our flow.

Why should you invest in the Doughnut Stop?

- Great return on your investment.
- Give doughnuts back to the community.

THE DOUGHNUT FIX

Before Josh had even finished reading the slide, Harley was at it again.

"And what about Chinese checkers?"

"No! Of course not. Just doughnuts!" I'd completely lost my cool. "What's going on here?" I said, turning on the lights. If I'd let things go on like that, Harley would have ruined the whole pitch.

"I'm going to put everything you're not going to sell on the business license. That way, if you sell anything you're not supposed to, we can shut you down," Harley explained.

"Oh no!" Jeanine yelled from the kitchen. A second later, she was standing over Harley wagging a finger at him. "I know what you're doing."

"What's he doing?" I asked.

"He's trying to keep you from selling anything he sells at his store."

"Oh. But we don't want to sell anything he sells. Really," I said to Harley.

"That's not the point!" Jeanine said. "The point is you can sell anything you want. That's your right."

"No. *That's* not the point," I argued. "We only want to sell doughnuts. That's what this is about."

"But you can't let him refuse to give business licenses to people

unless they promise not to sell anything that he might. He's trying to stop people from competing with him."

"I'm so sorry, Mr. Turnby." Mom grabbed Jeanine's pointing finger and forced it down. "Jeanine, I'm sure that's not what he's doing."

"Oh, no, that's what I'm doing," Harley said, nodding. "But if these boys promise they're just going to sell chocolate cream doughnuts, there's no problem."

"No problem? No problem?" shrieked Jeanine. "You know what you are? You're a monopolist!"

"I am?" A smile exploded on Harley's face. He clearly knew about as much as I did about what a monopolist was.

"You can't keep people from selling the products you sell so you can force them to buy from you. It's illegal! And un-American!" Jeanine looked like she was seconds away from whipping out her Future Lawmakers of America badge and making a citizen's arrest.

"I can't?" Harley looked around like he suddenly didn't know where he was. "Jim?"

"Technically, it's a no-no, Harley," Jim said. "This is actually Harley's first term, so he's still learning. Jax, you want to sell candy necklaces or Flowbees, you go right ahead. You got my blessing and the license too. Right, Harley?"

Harley shrugged his shoulders. "I guess. I mean, if I have to."

THE DOUGHNUT FIX

"Thanks, but I think we'll stick to chocolate cream doughnuts," I said.

"But now you don't have to," Jeanine said, flashing her *Yes, I won!* smile at Harley.

"Fine," I said. "Can we get back to the pitch now?"

"Fine? Don't you mean thanks?" she said, her smile caving in to a big black hole of what's-wrong-with-you.

I could have tried to explain that Josh and I would have been perfectly happy promising never to sell anything but chocolate cream doughnuts even if it did violate the Constitution, but I knew that would have taken too long.

"Right. I meant thanks," I said.

Then we turned out the light and started from the beginning, and this time everything went perfectly. Nobody interrupted, and at the end, not only did my parents decide to invest but so did Jim and Harley.

By the time I went to tell Winnie we had the money that afternoon, I'd started to wonder why people had invested. Did they really think the Doughnut Stop would succeed, or had they given us money just to be nice?

"People don't give you money just to be nice, especially when people is Harley Turnby," Winnie said.

That should have made me happy. It meant people believed us

when we said the Doughnut Stop was guaranteed to be a hit. The problem was, we didn't actually know that, not for sure.

So what happened if we were wrong?

What happened if we couldn't even make enough money to pay them back? What if the business was a complete and total flop? What if we were the Flowbee of the doughnut world? We'd promised Harley Turnby we'd make his money back and then some. What would he do to us if it turned out we'd lied?

I knew where to go for answers: the only twenty-seven pages of *Starting Your Own Business for Dummies* I hadn't read ... Chapter 19: Bankruptcy. It seemed like a jinx to read about what happens when your business goes belly up, so I'd just skipped that part.

But now I wanted to know. Now I had to know.

Just in case.



21

My parents had all kinds of rules when we lived in the city: never take a shortcut through a parking lot; never take the subway by yourself; and if someone tries to take your stuff, just let them have it. But since I'd gotten to Petersville, my parents had given me just one rule: no biking after dark.

At first, I didn't get it. What did I need the rule for? Why exactly would I *want* to be riding around in the dark? Then the clocks changed and it started getting dark at four in the afternoon, and the rule didn't seem so dumb anymore.

Since I didn't have school or really anywhere I had to be, I'd stopped paying much attention to what time it was. I'd even stopped wearing my watch. The afternoons Josh and I spent skating on the pond, it didn't matter how late it got since he always stayed for

dinner and his mom just picked him up afterward. The problem was when he and I were hanging out at the library. We'd be sitting there making Doughnut Stop plans, and all of a sudden, I'd notice that the bookshelves opposite the front windows were lit up all orange. Then I'd jump up, yell goodbye, and race home. Even though the sun was usually behind the mountains by the time I got there, the sky just above them was still light or at least light-ish, which I thought was good enough. If my parents disagreed, they never said so.

The thing is, there are no windows in the little office behind the circulation desk, and that's where Josh and I met Winnie two days before the Doughnut Stop's grand opening. We'd *told* her we had to meet that afternoon to work out some stuff for the opening. The *real* reason for the meeting? We were finally going to tell her I'd messed with her recipe. That's not how I saw it, but I was pretty sure that's how she would.

"Oh, good, snacks," Winnie said when she came through the door. "I think better on a full stomach."

I'd made a batch of doughnuts using the new recipe and arranged some on a paper plate in the center of the table.

"You roll 'em right after you take 'em out of the oil, right?"

"Uh-huh," I said.

"Because it looks like you were being a little stingy with the sugar on these, Slick. Don't do that this weekend."

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"I won't."

"Don't forget."

"He won't," Josh said.

"Maybe he should write it down to make sure."

"Uh, okay." I looked around for something to write with and on.

"I got it," Josh said, writing in his Doughnut Stop binder. "Why don't you just tell Winnie about the ... um ... your news?"

"What news?" Winnie reached for a doughnut.

"No!" Before I knew what I was doing, I'd snatched the plate out from under her hand.

"What? Those just for decoration?"

"I need to tell you something first."

"I can eat while you talk. They call it multitasking."

"Actually..." Josh pushed the plate back across the table. "Maybe she should taste a doughnut first."

I shot Josh a look.

"What's wrong with you boys?" Winnie picked up a doughnut and took a big bite.

I squeezed the edge of the table and held my breath.

"Mmm. Mmm."

"Good, huh?" Josh said.

"Course, they're good."

"They don't taste ... a little different?" I said.

JESSIE JANOWITZ

"From other doughnuts? Yeah, a lot better." She laughed.

"No. I mean, from before."

She took another bite and chewed slowly. "I haven't made my doughnuts for more than a year, Slick. But these are them."

The pressure was killing me. I just had to say it and get it over with. "I changed the recipe!"

"What are you talking about? You don't think I know my own doughnuts?"

"They're *still* your doughnuts. I didn't change much. I just added a little mashed potato and instant coffee."

Winnie looked at her doughnut. "You expect me to believe there's mashed potato and coffee in here."

"There is. I'm serious."

"O-kay, Slick. Whatever you say. Maybe some chili peppers in here too?" She took another big bite.

"He's not kidding," Josh said.

"You know how I know you couldn't have changed my recipe?"

"How?"

"Because anything different would be worse. And these are just too good," she said as she helped herself to another one.

And just like that, what was right and what was wrong got all mixed up. It hadn't felt right not to tell Winnie what I'd done, but now that I had, it didn't feel right to make her believe it. I just knew

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she'd think I'd changed the recipe because I didn't think it was good enough and that wasn't true. Not even close.

I gave Josh a now-what look.

"Uh, I just remembered something," Josh said. "My mom wanted us to move some books. We'll be back in a second. C'mon, Tris."

"Take your time. I've got my doughnuts for company."

I followed Josh out of the room and into the computer nook.

"We have to let it go," he whispered.

"I know. That's what I was thinking. Does that make us liars?"

"No. We *tried* to tell her," he said. "I'm just worried that if we make her believe it, she'll think we thought there was something wrong with her doughnuts."

"I know, but there wasn't. Maybe I should just go back to using the recipe like it was."

"Why? She *loves* these doughnuts. *We* love these doughnuts. Plus, she thinks they're the exact same ones she was making anyway. What's she going to think if you go back to the other recipe?"

"She'll realize we were telling the truth, that these are different, and then ... probably think I didn't like the doughnuts the way she made them."

"Right. She'll feel ..."

"Bad," I said.

"Really bad."

"Okay, so we agree. We'll let it go, but not because we were too chicken to tell her the truth."

"Right," Josh said. "We told her. We just don't want to make her feel bad by making her believe it."

"Right. And everyone's—"

"You boys done whispering yet." Winnie's head popped up from behind a computer monitor.

I jumped. "Sorry. We were just..."

"About to come back," Josh said.

"Don't bother. I ate all the doughnuts. I'm going home to get some Pepto," she said. "See you Saturday, bright and early." It was only then as I watched Winnie walk out of the library that I realized that the sun had already moved all the way down the bookshelves.

"Oh no! What time is it?"

"After four thirty. Call your parents and tell them my mom will drop you off after closing."

I felt bad asking Josh's mom to drive just because I couldn't keep track of time. "Nah. I can make it."

And I did, but just. Only a thin band of light blue was still above the mountains when I reached the driveway.

I ditched my bike in the bushes at the bottom of Terror Mountain because I was too winded to drag it up. And even without it, the

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hike took forever. After blasting my legs biking home, they felt so heavy, it was as if I had bricks loaded on my feet.

"I'm here! I'm here!" I jumped up and down, waving my arms as I came out of the woods onto the lawn. My mother was at the kitchen window, and she waved. She must have heard me, but it was definitely too dark to see me by now. She didn't look like she was mad. She didn't look like she'd even noticed it was getting dark.

Safe!

I dropped to the ground and lay there in the dead leaves, breathing hard.

"Tris!"

It sounded like Jeanine, but I couldn't see her. I sat up and looked back at the house. My mother wasn't at the window anymore, and the front door was still closed.

"Tris!"

"Jeanine?" I stood up and looked around.

"Up here!" Something rustled high in the branches of a tall, nearby tree. I walked over to its base and looked up. In one of the highest branches, I could just make out the shape of a person.

"What are you doing?"

Jeanine made a loud, long, snot-slurping sound. "I'm stuck."

"Are you okay?"

"No! I'm stuck."

JESSIE JANOWITZ

"I meant, are you hurt?"

"Like physically?"

"Yeah, like are you too hurt to climb down?"

I listened for an answer. "Jeanine?"

"I got a scratch on my hand!"

"And you can't climb down?"

She didn't answer.

"Jeanine?"

Still nothing.

"Jeanine, did you try to climb down?"

"I can't. I told you. I'm stuu—" Her last word was eaten up by loud sobs.

"You're not stuck. You're just scared."

The sobs got louder.

I looked back at the house. Mom was afraid of heights, and she hadn't even let Dad climb a stepladder since his concussion.

"Okay, Jeanine. Just hang on." I reached up, grabbed onto a thick branch with both hands, jammed a foot in the groove where the trunk met the branch, and pulled myself up.

Climbing that tree was actually easier than climbing the rope ladder up to my room. Unlike a rope ladder, a tree does you the favor of standing still. Also, unlike other trees, this one had branches in just the right places so you never had to stretch too far.

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"This tree is awesome," I called when I was about halfway up.

"It scored highest for climbability."

I laughed. "You ranked the trees."

"I studied branch spacing and thickness to determine best climbability."

"Of course you did," I said to myself.

In no time, I was straddling a branch on the opposite side of the trunk from Jeanine.

"Cool view," I said. Sky was all around us. It was darker now, and a few stars had already popped out.

"Oh, yeah?"

I peered around the trunk and squinted at her. "Are your eyes closed?"

"Uh-huh."

"I think I know how to get you unstuck."

"I'm *not* opening my eyes."

"Jeanine." I laughed.

"This isn't funny! Can you please just help me?"

"I'm trying, but you have to open your eyes."

"If I open my eyes, you're going to make me climb down."

"That is the goal, isn't it?"

"What if I can't?"

"Then we'll get a crane."

JESSIE JANOWITZ

"I mean it." She squeezed the trunk tighter.

I thought for a minute. Climbing down was the big goal, but maybe I could start her on a small one. "Don't think about going down yet. Just open your eyes and see how cool it is up here."

"Just open my eyes? That's it?"

"That's it. Just open your eyes and tell me what the really bright star right over our heads is."

She was quiet for a bit. "It's not one star. It's four."

"Really?"

"Yeah, it's Capella. Two giant yellow stars and two red dwarves."

"It's super bright."

"Yeah, it is pretty," she said like she didn't like admitting it. "You know, I hate it out here, but I love how you can see the stars. That's *one* thing you can't do at home."

Home was still somewhere else for Jeanine.

For a while, we sat there, not talking, looking up the sky. I kept covering one eye and trying to see the four different stars in that one bright light, but it was impossible.

"Hey, can I ask you a question?" I said.

"I'm not climbing down."

"I know. I know. Relax. I just want to know why you climbed up in the first place."

"I don't know."

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"Come on. Yes, you do. You plan everything. You even ranked the tree for climbability."

"It's dumb. It's too dumb."

"I do dumb stuff all the time."

"But I don't."

"I hate to break it to you, but, yeah, you do. It's just a different kind of dumb stuff."

She took a deep breath and blew it out hard. "Fine. Mom got a call from Waydin Elementary, you know, just about stuff for when we start school, and it got me thinking about the kids here and how they're gonna to think I'm, you know, weird."

"Uh-huh."

"Thanks."

"Sorry. I just meant, 'Uh-huh, I'm listening, keep going,' not, 'Uh-huh, you *are* weird.'"

"Anyway, I was looking out the window, and I just started thinking about how I'd never climbed a tree. And how probably if you grew up around here, you'd have to, I mean you just would have, right? Like how could you grow up here and not? So I thought, I'm going to do it, just so I can be someone who's climbed a tree, so at least there'll be one thing about me that's not different."

"Okay."

"Anyway, it turned out to be super, super dumb."

"But just think about all the money you'll make selling your climbability formula to the other kids."

"That's not funny," she said, though I thought I heard her smiling against her will.

"Hey, you know, Josh and I were talking today about how if the Doughnut Stop does well, we may want to branch out to other flavors of cream. *Starting Your Own Business for Dummies* says customers get bored if you don't offer new product lines. Anyway, so I was thinking, it was good you made Harley say it was okay for us to sell things other than just *chocolate* cream doughnuts."

"See."

"Yeah, well, thanks."

"You're welcome."

Neither of us said anything for a while after that, and I began wondering if my parents were looking for us. Unlike when we used to live in the apartment, there were lots of places we could be in the house, and it could take a pretty long time before they thought it was strange that they hadn't seen us.

Finally, Jeanine peeked around the trunk and said, "I'm cold. I want to go home."

"You know the only way home is down, right?"

"I know. Can you, like, hold on to me somehow?"

"Like carry you? I don't think so."

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"No, just hold on to me. So I know you're there."

It took me a while to come up with a system that worked, but eventually we were making our way down the tree. First, I'd lower myself to the next branch. Then I'd reach up and guide Jeanine's ankle to the branch I was holding on to. Since it was almost completely dark now, we had to feel our way from branch to branch.

When my feet finally reached the ground, I held Jeanine's hand and she jumped down. Then she did something that is not at all Jeanine: she hugged me. And not a quick hug—a long one, tight like she'd hugged the tree.

"Okay, let's go. I got to get back," she said, suddenly taking off for the house.

"What's the hurry?" I called after her.

"I just wasted like two hours up in that tree. The Solve-a-Thon's in five days!" When she reached the porch, she turned around. "Hey, what do you think of butterscotch?"

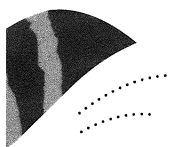
"For what?"

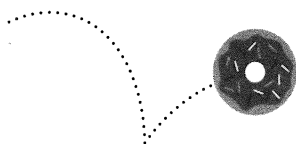
"Your next doughnut flavor. It's just an idea."

"I *love* butterscotch."

"I know," she said. "Why do you think I thought of it?"

"It's genius," I said and meant it.





22

Here's one thing *Starting Your Own Business for Dummies* doesn't tell you: if you're not a morning person, don't start a doughnut business.

The doughnuts and I would have to be ready to leave the house by seven thirty if we were going to be set up on Main Street by eight o'clock. Even if I made the dough and the cream the night before, I'd still need at least two and half hours to cut, fry, roll, and fill all forty doughnuts. That meant getting up at four thirty in the middle of the night. I know, technically, it's morning then, but who are we kidding? If it's dark, it's still night, and no matter what kind of clock-changing is happening, it's always dark at four thirty.

"Can't you fry and fill the night before?" Josh said when I explained the problem. It was the day before our grand opening, and we were on the pond.

"No way. There's no point unless they're fresh," I said.

"I know, but four thirty? That's crazy," he said, sweeping the puck from the goal and passing it to me.

I put out my stick but came up short, and the puck flew by.

"Maybe we can just open later," he said.

"I thought about that," I called as I chased down the puck. "I don't think we can. It says eight on the flyers."

The flyers weren't fancy or anything. Josh had just taken a photo of a doughnut and put it next to a photo of Winnie giving a thumbs-up. Underneath it said, "Winnie's Famous Chocolate Cream Doughnuts at the Doughnut Stop, Main Street, Petersville. Come and Get 'Em! Saturdays and Sundays at 8:00 a.m., starting Saturday, December 20."

"Oh, yeah. It says so on the bumper stickers too," he said. "And who knows how many people have seen those by now."

Honk if you like chocolate cream doughnuts! and *I stop for the Doughnut Stop!* were everywhere. Winnie was giving them away at the General Store. Clive, her brother, was in the printing business.

We had serious buzz. Changing the time was not an option.

"It's fine," I said. "I'll just go to sleep really early. You know, like seven thirty."

"Yeah, as long as you get the same amount of sleep, it shouldn't matter what time you're getting up, right?"

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“Right,” I said.

Wrong.

The problem was, I wasn’t tired at seven thirty. Really, who over the age of five is? It was just too early. Plus, I was too excited and too afraid my alarm wouldn’t go off, or that it would go off and I would just go right back to sleep. What kind of nuddy misses his own grand opening? Even if Josh made it, he wouldn’t have anything to sell, and the book says if you let your customers down once, they won’t give you a second chance.

I know I did finally fall asleep because when the alarm went off, I dreamed the beeping was the kitchen timer and that I couldn’t reach it because I was stuck under a doughnut the size of an elephant. When I eventually woke up enough to realize that I wasn’t actually stuck under an enormous baked good, I leaped out of bed.

Fear of failure must work a lot like caffeine does, but only if you care about the thing you might fail. I definitely never woke up feeling like I’d been sleep-guzzling Coke on days I had tests at school.

I’d left my clothes in a pile next to my bed, and in seconds, I was dressed and climbing down the ladder. Halfway down, I heard something scurrying around just below me.

“Zoe?”

Whoever it was took off down the hall.

JESSIE JANOWITZ

“Hey, I don’t care!” I whispered-yelled. I figured I’d caught her creeping into my parents’ room again. Since we’d moved, she preferred sleeping under my parents’ bed than in her own.

I climbed down the next couple of rungs and then jumped to the floor.

That’s when I heard it, the Darth-Vader-phlegm-breathing from the other end of the hall:

“Cchhhhuuuu Whlluuuhhhh Cchhhhuuuu Whlluuuhhhh...”

I froze.

Unlike Darth Vader, whatever it was didn’t sound calm. It sounded crazy angry, like rip-my-arms-and-legs-from-my-body angry.

If I’d been able to move, I would have run, but I was too scared. So I just stood there waiting to be wishboned.

But nothing happened, and suddenly, the noise stopped. When a minute had passed and it hadn’t started again, I ran my hand along the wall till I felt the light switch and flipped it.

Just outside the bathroom was a raccoon the size of a Big Wheel.

I’m not sure what happened next. I may have screamed, but if I did, I don’t think I managed to get much sound out because nobody came running. What I do remember is that for a while, we—me and the raccoon—just stared at each other, and the weird thing was he looked almost as surprised as I was, like this was his

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house and I had scared *him* on *his* way to the bathroom in the middle of the night.

As soon as I could get my legs to move, I ran to my parents' room at the opposite end of the hall, slammed the door behind me, and jumped onto their bed with both feet.

"Ow, my hair!" my mother screamed.

"Who is that?" Dad grabbed my foot.

"It's me." I dropped to my knees.

Dad sat up. "Tris? What is it?"

"A raccoon," I whispered, though I'm not sure who I was worried about hearing me.

"Where?" Mom said.

"Out there." I pointed to the door.

"Why?" She wasn't so awake.

"Really? A raccoon in the house?" I could almost hear Dad smiling in the dark. Of course. This was something different.

"Yes, really!" I said.

"Houses aren't airtight. It happens," Dad said like it was no big deal.

"It happens? This isn't a mouse! It's a raccoon, and he's bigger than Zoe!"

"Relax. We'll get someone to come set some traps," he said.

"Okay, so what are you waiting for?"

"How about daylight?"

"But I need to go downstairs *now*."

"So go."

"You want me to go out there by myself, unarmed?"

"He's not going to attack you," Dad said as he hunkered down under the comforter. "Raccoons are shy."

"How do *you* know?"

"I read it... somewhere."

Ah. I see. In addition to being a master handyman, made-up Petersville dad was also a wildlife expert. "He didn't look shy! He looked mad, really mad, like I'd invaded his territory. You should have heard this sound he made."

"You're bigger than he is," Mom said.

"Not by much."

"Stop exaggerating. You'll be fine," she said, snuggling up to my father.

"You guys aren't actually going back to sleep, are you?"

Uh, yeah, they were.

"What if he's rabid?" I said.

"Highly unlikely," said the wildlife expert, his eyes already closed.

"Fine! But I'm taking this with me," I said, grabbing *The Art of French Cooking*, the thousand-page cookbook Mom keeps on her nightstand.

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Mom opened her eyes. "You gonna teach it to make coq au vin?"

"It's for protection."

"Sounds good." Her eyes were closed again. "Have fun."

"You guys are never going to forgive yourselves if that raccoon attacks me."

"Good night," Dad said.

Jeanine would have been able to get them out of bed, and for a second, I thought about waking her up so she could do just that. But then what? She'd probably make us evacuate the house till some official from the National Wildlife Federation got there. Who knew when I'd be able to get into the kitchen then?

I opened my parents' door and peered out into the hall.

The raccoon was gone—or at least gone somewhere I couldn't see him. He was probably in the bathroom, which was fine by me. I was prepared to let him go about his business so long as he let me go about mine. He could have the upstairs bathroom. I'd use the one next to the kitchen.

I stepped out into the hall, hugging *The Art of French Cooking*, and started for the stairs. The light was still on, and that made me feel a little better.

I'd just made it to Jeanine's door when I heard a flush, and Zoe raced out of the bathroom.

"What happened?" I said, dropping the book and grabbing her arm as she sped by.

"Mommy promised me new glitter glue if I flush," she said, breathing hard.

"Oh. Everything okay in there?"

"Yeah. Just number one."

"No, I mean, you didn't see anything... weird?"

She shook her head.

I'd really thought he was in the bathroom. That had, after all, been where he was heading. I picked up the book and marched past Zoe into the bathroom.

I peeked behind the bathroom door.

No raccoon.

I ripped open the shower curtain.

No raccoon.

Zoe, who'd followed me in there, threw up the toilet seat.

"What are we doing?"

"Looking for a raccoon."

The second I heard the words come out of my mouth, I wanted to shove them back in. Zoe was scared of the flush and the blow-up rat. She wasn't going to be okay sharing the house with a rodent who weighed more than she did.

"Awww. Was he cute?"

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"Huh?" I'd gotten so lucky. "Uh, sure, yeah. He looked really... cuddly."

"And he was just walking around?" she said, laughing.

"Yup. Just walking around like he owned the joint."

Zoe stopped giggling suddenly. "The mystery poop!"

"What?"

"On the rug, remember?" She ran back into the hall and jumped on the spot where the mystery poop had been.

"Oh right."

"I *told* you it wasn't mine."

"I know. I believed you," I reminded her.

"Jeanine didn't."

"Jeanine won't believe that it was a raccoon either."

"Can we take a picture?"

"Of what?"

"Of the raccoon, so Jeanine knows."

"Sure. If I see it again, and if I have a camera on me, I promise to take a picture, especially if I see it pooping in the hall."

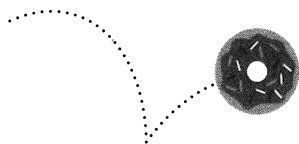
"Thank you!" She threw her arms around my legs and squeezed.

"Uh, no problem."

We stood there for a few seconds like that, then she unhugged me, wrapped as much of her hand as would fit around mine, and said, "What do you wanna do now?"

JESSIE JANOWITZ

Unlike my parents, Zoe wasn't going back to sleep with a raccoon on the loose, not even if it was the cute, cuddly kind.



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If I'm telling the truth, I never would have gotten the doughnuts done on time if Zoe hadn't helped. She cut while I fried, filled, and rolled. She kept pestering to fill too, but I'd learned my lesson so she stuck to cutting, and when she was done, I put her in that big, cardboard box till the last doughnut was rolled and the pastry gun had been cleaned and put in a secure location.

At seven, my parents came downstairs.

"Isn't it beautiful?" Mom said.

"Isn't what beautiful?" I said as I boxed up the last doughnuts.

"The snow." Dad pointed to the window.

There had to be a foot of snow on the ground, and cotton-ball-size flakes were still floating down.

"No! No! No!" I shouted. We hadn't planned for snow.

"How could you have missed that?" Jeanine said as she came down the stairs.

"I don't know. It was dark before, and I was concentrating."

"On what?" she said.

"On doughnuts."

"They're doughnuts, not brain surgery," she said, opening a box.

"Don't even think about it!" I warned.

"Jeanine, leave your brother and his doughnuts alone," Dad said.

"I have to go to this doughnut stand opening, and I can't even get a doughnut?"

Jeanine was on a mission to make my parents regret forcing her to come to the Doughnut Stop's grand opening instead of letting her stay home to study for the Solve-a-Thon. Of course, the person who was really going to regret my parents' decision was me. I'd told them I didn't care if Jeanine came. And I really didn't. She and I were okay. But my parents said there was no way she could miss it. They said we all had to support each other. I tried to get them to see that even though they could force Jeanine to come, they couldn't actually force her to support me, but if you haven't noticed, parents like to pretend they can control things they can't.

"Tris maked believe he saw a raccoon," Zoe said to my father.

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"Oh, that's right! I completely forgot you came in last night," he said.

"What *was* that about, honey?" Mom said.

"What *was* that about? It was about a raccoon in the house. Not a make-believe one. A real one. A very large, very real one."

"How would a raccoon even get inside?" Jeanine said.

"Good point," Dad said. "They're not like mice. They can't fit under doors. Okay, can anyone recall holding open the door for a raccoon? After you, Monsieur Raccoon."

Zoe giggled.

"Ha. Ha." So they didn't believe me. Let *them* bump into Monsieur Raccoon in the bathroom in the middle of the night. I hoped they did. They deserved it.

"It's just magical, isn't it?" Mom gazed out the window at the snow-covered trees. "It's like the world's been iced."

"Does everything have to be about food with you?" Jeanine said.

"This cannot be happening." I looked from the window to the doughnuts and back again.

"What did you think?" Jeanine said. "You're opening an outdoor stand in the middle of winter."

"I know. We just ..." What could I say? I was a nuddy.

"Go ahead. Have one." I shoved the box at her. "Nobody's going to show up now anyway. What's the point?"

JESSIE JANOWITZ

"Oh, no." Mom snatched the box. "You're going. Even if you've only got one customer."

"How will people even get there in this?"

"I'm sure there are plows out right now," Dad said. "And everyone around here has four-wheel drive and snow tires."

"I'm calling Josh," I said.

I went to the kitchen phone and dialed. There was no answer.

"See, he's already out in the snow waiting for you," Mom said. "Let's go."

She was right about one thing. Even if we didn't have customers, I couldn't let Josh down.

It was 7:44 on the digital car clock when we pulled up in front of Winnie's. Josh was supposed to have the card table set up there by then, but the table wasn't out and neither was he. Nobody was, and there wasn't a car in sight. Petersville was as dead as it had been that first morning, except now it was covered in snow.

"I'm telling you, Josh saw the snow and went back to sleep," Jeanine said.

"He wouldn't do that," I said, and I believed it. I did. But where was he?

"He probably thought nobody but a complete idiot would come out in a blizzard and try to sell doughnuts on a street corner," Jeanine said.

THE DOUGHNUT FIX

"Cut it out," Mom said.

"He would have called. He wouldn't just not show up," I said.

"So where is he then?" Jeanine said.

"Jeanine? Did you hear Mom? *Sa soofee!*" my father shouted.

That did it, and for a while the only sound in the car was the click-click of the blinkers as we sat there slowly disappearing under the snow.

"Look, don't those brighten up Main Street?" Mom pointed to flickering, white Christmas lights strung between the General Store and Renny's.

"Kinda weird," Jeanine said. "They're only on one side of the street."

"Maybe they just haven't finished putting them up," Mom said.

It was quiet again for a while. Then Jeanine said, "We should go."

"We're not going," Dad said.

"We're gonna get stuck," she sang to the tune of I-told-you-so.

"The tires are already covered."

"We won't get stuck," Mom said.

"People die in blizzards like this. They starve, and they freeze," Jeanine said.

"I don't want to starve and freeze," Zoe said.

"Nobody's going to starve and freeze. This isn't even a blizzard. It's a little winter snow, and it's gorgeous," Dad said.

JESSIE JANOWITZ

"A little winter snow? What do you call a hurricane? A little summer breeze?"

"If she wants to go, let her go!" I shouted, throwing open the car door. Then I climbed out and slammed it hard behind me.

If Josh wasn't going to show, if no one was going to show, I couldn't be in that car with them when I gave up.

"Tris, get back in!" Mom shouted out her window.

"Where are you going?" Dad called out his.

"Winnie's," I said, taking the doughnuts out of the trunk.

Winnie was all business. If it turned out nobody was coming, she wasn't going to feel bad for me. And no way would she put up with me feeling bad for myself. She'd make it about the doughnuts and the business, our business.

I was almost to Winnie's front door when something in her window made me stop. The sign. I'd seen it so many times I never even read it anymore, but the Christmas lights had been strung up on the outside of the window right around it so my eyes couldn't help themselves:

*Yes, we really do have chocolate
cream doughnuts!
Follow the flashing lights!*

I stumbled back through the snow as fast as I could.

THE DOUGHNUT FIX

"Look at the sign!" I called out as I put the boxes back in the trunk.

"Follow the flashing lights?" Jeanine said. "What is this? *The Wizard of Oz*?"

"Go, Dad, go!" I said as soon as I was back in the car.

By the time we reached the other end of Main Street, I knew where we were headed. The little station house exploded with so much light, you probably could have seen where we were headed from way out in space.

"Ooooooooooh! Pretty!" Zoe said.

Every inch of the little building flashed with tiny white lights that sparkled on the snow like a disco ball.

"It's a crime against the environment is what it is," Jeanine said.

"I don't believe it!" Mom said. "Do you see all those cars?"

"Where?" I said.

She put down her window and stuck her arm out. "Look!"

There, in the lot on the far side of the station house, sat mound after car- and truck-shaped mound of snow.

"They must have been here for hours," Dad said as he pulled up in front of the station house.

A hooded figure in an army-green parka climbed down the porch steps, waded through the snow to our car, and knocked on my window.

JESSIE JANOWITZ

I put the window down, but before I had a chance to open my mouth, Jeanine pushed forward and stuck her head out. "Do you have any idea how much electricity you're wasting?"

Winnie rolled her eyes. "This the sister?"

"Yeah, one of them," I said.

"Do you even *know* we're in an energy crisis?" Jeanine went on.

"Yup," Winnie said.

"Jeanine," my father warned.

"Oh, don't stop her on my account. I can take it," Winnie said.

"So, don't you think we all have a responsibility to conserve electricity?" Jeanine said.

"I sure do," Winnie said.

"You do?" she said sadly. I could tell she'd been gearing up for a good fight.

"Yup. That's why I have all these lights on solar-powered batteries. Quite a project, but me and Dr. C got it done. Now if you don't mind, Slick's got to get in there and make me some money," she said, opening the car door. "Get going, Slick."

"I just have to get the doughnuts out of the back," I said as I got out.

"My condolences," Winnie said as we climbed the porch steps. "My brother Clive's a peach compared to that one."

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"Camping blankets! Wool socks! Folding chairs! Beef jerky!" somebody called from inside the station house.

"What's that?"

"Harley. Gotta give the man credit. He certainly knows how to make the most of a business opportunity. I know it might seem like he was stealing your thunder, but look at it this way, if he hadn't brought in those portable heaters, no way people would have made it till now."

"Maybe I should thank him then."

"I wouldn't go that far. Let's just say it was mutually beneficial. He's made a killing on those folding chairs and wool socks. See for yourself," she said as she pushed open the door.

The place was packed, people everywhere, grown-ups, kids, some huddled around heaters, some sitting in circles of matching camping chairs, some lying on sleeping bags. Most I'd never seen before, but as I looked around, I spotted every person I'd met since coming to Petersville: Mr. Jennings from the turkey farm, Riley, Jim, Dr. Charney, Josh's mom, some families from the library, the kid from the Gas Mart.

And standing in the ticket window, opening the bag of napkins he'd brought from home just like he'd promised, was Josh. He smiled and waved.

"That kid's been up all night getting this place ready. Him and

his mom and me and Jim and Dr. Charney, all of us," Winnie said. "We knew you'd be busy with the doughnuts. Place cleaned up pretty good, no?"

"Way better than pretty good," I said.

The garbage that had covered the floor had been replaced by overlapping rugs of all colors, shapes, and sizes. Red paper lanterns hung from the rafters, and colored lights wound around the little tree growing out of the middle of the floor.

But the biggest change since I'd peeked through the window on my first day in Petersville? A floor-to-ceiling steam engine painted in whites and grays like it was made of clouds stretched across the entire back wall.

"Did Dr. Charney do that?"

"When he wasn't helping with the lights. Paint isn't even dry," Winnie said.

"Where'd all these people come from?" I said, looking around the room.

"Where do you think? From here."

I guess it made sense that I didn't recognize most of them. Where would I have seen them? They couldn't have had any more of a clue who I was than I did who they were, but suddenly, the whole room was on its feet, clapping and cheering, closing in on me.

"Is that for Tris?" Zoe said, coming in behind me.

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"Don't be silly, honey. It's for the doughnuts," Winnie said.

Just then, a man elbowed his way to the front of the crowd. From his yellow-white hair and matching teeth, I knew right away who he was.

"You back up," Winnie said, giving Clive a shove. "You get yours last."

"How come?" Clive said, frowning.

"Because. That's why," Winnie said, poking him in the gut.

"That's the thanks I get for printing you those nice stickers, free of charge?"

Winnie snorted. "Huh. Like that makes up for all the nonsense you put me through. Keep talking, and you don't get any."

"All right, all right. I'm going," Clive said and slunk back into the crowd.

"Hey, there, Mr. Doughnut Stop!" someone called. "Quite a turnout, huh?"

"Who was that?" I studied the crowd.

Winnie pointed to a corner of the room where Harley stood in front of a table piled high with surprisingly useful merchandise.

"Earmuffs?" He held up a pair with long, droopy dog ears.

"Nah, I'm good, thanks."

"C'mon, people, relax!" Winnie shooed everyone back. "We still got to get set up, so give us a little room here."

JESSIE JANOWITZ

It took some work—and threats to revoke doughnut privileges—but eventually Winnie cleared a path for us from the front door to the ticket window.

“So, what do you think?” Josh said, popping up over the ticket counter. “I figured we could sell from inside the booth and then pass the doughnuts out through the window. Good idea?”

“Great idea!” I said.

“Did you see the sign?”

“Yeah, that’s how I knew where to come.”

“No, the other sign.” He pointed up.

I put the doughnut boxes on the ticket counter and took a step back. Someone had hung Winnie’s YES, WE DO HAVE CHOCOLATE CREAM DOUGHNUTS! sign on the wall above the window.

Winnie gave herself a pat. “My idea.”

“Also your idea to set up here in the station house?” I said.

She laughed.

“What?”

“Jim told us it was yours,” Josh said.

“Really?” Was this some other wink-wink with Jim the Mayor/Carpenter/Kidnapper that I wasn’t in on? I scanned the room and spotted him standing by the back door, shovel in hand, talking to my mother. “Back in a sec.”

“Still not checking those weather reports, huh, Jax?” Jim said

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when he saw me coming. "Tell me, what do you think of all this?"

"It's so cool, but why are you telling people it was my idea?"

"Because it was. Don't you remember what you told me that day? Town needs somewhere everybody can get together. You said this place was it."

I did remember. I just couldn't believe that he did, and that he'd thought it was such a good idea he'd just gone and done it.

"Look around. You were right." He turned me to face the room.

Zoe had joined a group of kids sitting on the floor listening to Riley play the guitar and was throwing in her own strum of the strings when she could sneak it in. Gonzo and Ziggy were there too, spread across the floor, being used as pillows. Dad was over by Harley's table talking with some people, and even from all the way across the room I knew which corny joke he was telling. At first, I didn't see Jeanine and wondered if maybe she was freezing in the car in protest, but then I spotted her in a corner, crouched over a chessboard opposite a man with a long, gray ponytail. Even though the man had racked up twice as many pieces as she had, for the first time in a very long time, she didn't look like she were wishing she were someplace else.

"Jim also told me you thought the station house would make a great restaurant. And you're so right," Mom said, smiling her

biggest smile. "It's perfect! Even the name: the Station House. I love it. That's what we were just talking about. Putting my restaurant here. Since I wouldn't be serving breakfast, I'd be closed when the Doughnut Stop was open. You willing to share? You did see it first."

"I think we can work something out," I said.

"Very generous of you," Jim said, winking at me.

From across the room, Winnie waved me over. "Let's sell some doughnuts!" she called.

Jeanine jumped out of her chair and raced across the room to the ticket window. "Wait! Stop! I just had an idea. You guys should auction off the doughnuts."

"You mean sell them to the people who can pay the most?" Josh asked.

"Yeah. Think how much money you'll make. Look at these people. They're totally desperate."

"This girl reminds more of Clive every second," Winnie said.

"But then some people might not get any," Josh said.

"Yeah, but it's not as if you won't be selling them every week. They can get some next time. Come on. It's such a good idea."

I looked at Josh. He gave a little shrug like he wasn't sure, but I knew he was. He hated the idea, and so did I. How could we not give everyone a doughnut after they'd come out in the snow

THE DOUGHNUT FIX

and waited all that time? These were loyal customers, and they deserved to be rewarded.

That's when I got my own idea.

"No auction, but we're not going to just sell either."

"We're not?" Josh said.

"What's the best way to create customer loyalty when you're starting a business?"

Josh grinned. "Free samples!"

"You're going to give them away?" Jeanine said. She looked disgusted.

"My doughnuts?" said Winnie, who looked just as disgusted. "For free?"

"We'll make money, just not today," I said. "It'll be good for business long term. I promise."

"I don't know," Winnie said.

"I know what I'm talking about, and I'm telling you, this is a smart business move. I'm thinking big picture. Trust me," I said.

"Oh, fine! Give them away. But I can't watch," Winnie said. Then she grabbed a doughnut, took a bite, and squeezed her eyes shut.

"So, how should we do this?" Josh said.

"Like this," I said and climbed up on the counter. "Come and get 'em!"

After everyone got a doughnut, we still had one left. I tried to

give it to Jim, but he wouldn't take it. He said it would look bad for the mayor to get two doughnuts when everyone else had gotten only one. Jeanine agreed and told me that just by offering Jim the extra doughnut, I could be guilty of bribing a public official. Who knew? In the end, I gave the extra doughnut to Shane, the guy who'd beaten Jeanine at chess.

The party at the station house lasted way longer than the doughnuts did, so at lunchtime, Renny went down to the Gas Mart to pick up sandwich fixings. Unlike us though, he charged people for what they ate. Renny doesn't really think big picture, and I don't think he knows the first thing about creating customer loyalty.

We never regretted giving the doughnuts away that first day. It created so much buzz that the following week, we had twice as many people waiting for us when we showed up with the doughnuts even though they knew they'd have to pay this time.

That was three months ago, and business gets better every week. There's so much to do I've even given Zoe and Jeanine jobs. Winnie thought it was a huge mistake, but most of the time, Jeanine remembers she's not the boss, and when she forgets, I sic Winnie on her. Zoe doesn't make trouble because she knows if she does, she won't get paid, and she's saving up for a pastry gun of her own.

Since *Starting Your Own Business for Dummies* says your customers get bored if you don't offer different product lines, I've been

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experimenting with new cream flavors. None of the new flavors are life changing yet, but butterscotch and caramel are close.

You should come by sometime. I promise the Doughnut Stop's worth the trip. Just be sure to get there early. There's always a line, and we always sell out. Come when it snows, and the first one's free. Beat Jeanine at chess, and the second one's on the house too.

And, remember, ask for Jax, so I know who you are.



MOM'S MOLTEN CHOCOLATE CAKES

Makes 4 single-serve cakes

Ingredients

- 1 stick unsalted butter
- 6 ounces semisweet chocolate chips
- 2 egg yolks
- 2 eggs
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup sugar
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 2 tablespoons all-purpose flour

Directions

1. Preheat the oven to 450°F.
2. Spray the insides of 4 ramekins with baking spray. Put the ramekins on a baking sheet.
3. Microwave the butter and chocolate chips in a microwave-safe bowl for 1 minute. The butter should be almost all melted. The chocolate won't be completely melted.
4. Whisk the butter and chocolate mixture until smooth.

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5. Separate two egg yolks from their whites: Crack both eggs into a bowl without breaking the yolks. Then take an empty, disposable plastic water bottle, squeeze it, hold the opening to a yolk, and then release to suck the yolk into the bottle. Repeat with the second yolk. Then deposit both yolks into a clean bowl by squeezing the bottle and pouring them out.
6. Beat the egg yolks, eggs, sugar, and vanilla extract in an electric mixer on high or with a whisk until the mixture is thick.
7. Fold the butter and chocolate mixture into the egg mixture.
8. Add the flour to the mixture gradually. Don't overmix.
9. Divide the batter into the 4 ramekins.
10. Bake the cakes for 8 to 12 minutes or until the cakes have risen over the sides of the ramekins and the tops of the cakes no longer jiggle when the baking sheet is given a little shake. The cake centers should still be soft.
11. Remove the cakes from the oven and let them cool for 1 minute.
12. Cover the cakes with upside-down dessert plates, flip the ramekins over, and remove the ramekins from the cakes. Eat immediately!



PERFECT CHOCOLATE CHIP COOKIES

Makes 3 dozen cookies

Ingredients

- 1 cup light brown sugar
- ¼ cup granulated sugar
- 2 sticks unsalted butter, softened
- 2 eggs
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 1 teaspoon baking soda
- 1 pinch of salt
- 2 cups all-purpose flour
- 18 ounces semisweet chocolate, in bars
- ½ cup unsweetened shredded coconut
- 1 cup chopped walnuts

Directions

1. Preheat the oven to 350°F.
2. Cut parchment paper to cover baking sheets.
3. Put the light brown sugar, granulated sugar, and softened

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butter into a large mixing bowl and cream together in an electric mixer on medium.

4. In a small bowl, crack the eggs and mix them with the vanilla extract.
5. Combine the egg mixture with the sugar and butter mixture and mix thoroughly on medium.
6. In another bowl, combine the baking soda, salt, and all-purpose flour.
7. Add the flour mixture to the sugar and butter mixture in the large bowl and mix on low. Don't overmix.
8. Break the chocolate bars into chunks.
9. Add the chocolate, coconut, and walnuts to the mixture and stir with a spoon.
10. Once combined, scoop the dough out with a tablespoon and place the balls on the baking sheet. Leave about two fingers width between each cookie.
11. Bake cookies for 12 minutes.
12. Remove cookies from the oven and leave on the baking sheet for 1 minute. Then, transfer the cookies to a wire rack to cool.



ROOKIE CINNAMON SUGAR DOUGHNUTS*

Parental supervision necessary for frying

Makes 8 doughnuts and 8 doughnut holes

Ingredients

Vegetable oil

1 (8-count) tube of premade, large biscuit dough (found in the refrigerated dough aisle at supermarkets)

½ cup sugar

¼ teaspoon ground cinnamon

Directions

1. Fill a large saucepan with vegetable oil to a depth of 1 inch.
2. Heat oil over medium heat until it reaches 365°F. You can measure the temperature with a cooking oil thermometer. Or, drop a single kernel of popcorn into the oil as it's heating. When the kernel pops, you're ready to fry.
3. While the oil heats, open the biscuit tube and separate the

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rounds. Use a 1-inch-round cookie cutter to cut a hole in the center of each biscuit. Save the holes.

4. Mix the sugar and cinnamon in a large shallow bowl.
5. Add 2 doughnuts to the hot oil at a time. Cook, turning once, until golden brown—about 1 minute per side.
6. Drain on paper towels and immediately toss in the cinnamon sugar to coat. Cool on a wire rack. Repeat with the remaining doughnuts and holes.

* Ready to graduate from rookie to experienced baker? You can make the Doughnut Stop's life-changing chocolate cream doughnuts too. Visit jessiejanowitz.com for the original recipe.

THE CHEAT SHEET

(No, that doesn't mean you're a cheater! It means you're smart enough to read past the last page, so you get a recap of important information for starting your own business.)

✓ **The Secret: Find Your Thing**

Okay, you've got a business idea. Great. Here's what you need to ask before you get started:

- **Do I know anything about this?**
- **If not, keep looking.**

Hint: What do you like to do? Eat chocolate?
Skateboard? Draw bunny cartoons? That's
where *your* business idea is.

✓ **The Lingo (a.k.a. Fancy Words You Need to Know)**

No, you can't skip this part, or people will rip you off and your business will fail before you even start. Is that what you want? Yeah, didn't think so.

Business Plan

an explanation of what your business is, how it works, and why it will be a hit

Hint: If you're having trouble with this, you're not starting the right business. Go back and find *your* thing.

Hook

the thing that makes your product especially cool

Still don't get what a hook is? Some examples:

Our shoes are made from recycled milk cartons—cool!

Our pencil cases turn into rain jackets—cool!

Our Popsicles make you nicer—huh? But still, cool!

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If you don't have a hook, you're in trouble. Oh,
and if you can't explain the hook in one
sentence, it's not really a hook.

Revenue.....

money you get from selling your product

*Be realistic. People won't spend a million dollars on
a bunny cartoon even if it is really cute and funny.*

Costs.....

the money you spend to run your business

*Costs include stuff like what you spend to make your
product or pay your workers or rent your store/office.*

Profit.....

the money you make from your business

*Don't confuse this with revenue. Profit is the money
you get from customers minus all the money you
have to pay to keep your business going.*

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*Actually important math you will need to figure out
your profit:*

Subtract your costs from your revenue.

$$\text{\$ Profits} = \text{\$ Revenue} - \text{\$ Costs}$$

Budget.....

what you guess your revenue, costs, and profits will be

Hint: You can't just make this up. You have to
do research to figure out what your costs are
actually going to be and how much people will
actually pay for whatever it is you're selling.

Contract.....

an agreement

*When you make a deal with anyone, get what you
and the other person are agreeing to **in writing**
and make sure you both sign it.*

Negotiate.....

to talk your way to a better deal

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This takes practice, but it's worth it. And, no, you can't get arrested for negotiating, though people may yell at you.

Hint: Never take anyone's first offer.

Investors

people who lend you money to start your business and share in the profits

Hint: People don't invest to be nice even if they're related to you. They will invest if they believe in your product, and they see that you believe in it too. They can't get excited about your business unless you are.

Buzz

when people get so excited about your product that they talk it up all over town and on the internet

The Game Plan: Now What?

Once you've got the lingo down, make a road map, something like:

- **Step 1: Come up with a business plan and hook.**

- **Step 2: Figure out a budget.**
- **Step 3: Make sure your product does what it's supposed to. (It can't just be a cool idea; it has to work.)**
- **Step 4: Pitch investors.**
- **Step 5: Negotiate and make deals with investors and people you will need to buy things from to make your product.**
- **Step 6: Create buzz.**
- **Step 7: Launch business!**

Then give each step a deadline so you won't look up in a year and realize you never got past Step 1. Timelines have also been shown to prevent people from chickening out.

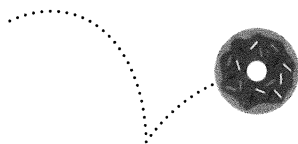
The Starting Line: 3, 2, 1...Start Your Business!

Go!

What are you still doing here? You know where to come if you need a quick refresher, but right now, you need to go find your thing, and that's all *you*, so get going!

Read on for a look at an exclusive deleted scene

Material gets cut from books for all kinds of reasons. I cut the following chapter from *The Doughnut Fix* because I thought the story would work better if Tris and his family got to Petersville a bit faster, and this scene took place before their move. It was hard to give it up, and I'm so happy I get a chance to share it now, particularly because Zoe, whom so many readers reached out to say they loved, plays a starring role. Happy reading!



TAG SALE!

Over the next few days, Jeanine, Zoe and I collected books, toys, and clothing we didn't use anymore from around our apartment and stashed them in pillow cases under our beds. We'd decided to hold the tag sale that Saturday because my parents would be away at a wedding all day, and they were leaving Greta in charge. Greta, our neighbor, was in tenth grade and basically let us do whatever we wanted as long as we didn't tell our parents, which worked out great for everyone. Except my parents, I guess. The timing couldn't have been better because it was only a week before Halloween, and I'd just found a bag in the back of our closet with all our old costumes that people would definitely be interested in.

Saturday morning, an hour after my parents left, Jeanine, Zoe

and I dragged eleven bulging pillowcases through our apartment to the front door.

"Hold on a sec," Greta said into her phone. "Hey guys?" she said to us, "where you going with all that stuff?"

"Tag sale!" yelled Zoe.

"Cool!" Greta yelled back. "I love tag sales. Where you guys gonna do this?"

"Just in front of the building," I said.

"Okay," said Greta. "But keep your eye on Zoe. I'll come down in a bit to check on you. Have fun!"

It took us three trips to get everything down the stoop to the sidewalk. When all the pillowcases were lined up against the building, Jeanine pulled out two flowered sheets Mom lays on the floor for art projects, and we spread them on the sidewalk. Then we started taking stuff out of the pillowcases.

I couldn't believe it. Almost all the toys Jeanine wanted to sell belonged to me.

"Those are my trains!" I said.

"When was the last time you played with them?"

"But... but they're mine and they're really good trains," I said.

"That's why we can charge a lot for them."

"But maybe I want to keep them," I said.

"For what?"

THE DOUGHNUT FIX

I didn't say anything. I had no idea for what.

"We could make a lot of money with those. People love these Thomas trains."

"Yeah, I know. People like me," I said, shoving them back in the pillowcase.

"Come on, Tristan. How about just some of them?"

"Fine," I said. I picked out my three favorite, put them back in the pillowcase and then laid the others carefully on the oilcloth.

I was still putting out toys when Zoe ran over shaking her fist at me. "Tristan, I won! I won tag sale! Look!" she said and opened her hand to show me a crumpled, one-hundred-dollar bill.

I was just about to ask her where she'd gotten it when someone behind me said, "Excuse me, do you have any bags?"

I turned around to find a woman as short and as wrinkled as Yoda grinning at me with messy, pink lipstick-ed lips.

"I'd hate to damage this on my way home." She held up her hands to show me what was in them.

For a second, I just stared, not believing what I was seeing. It was my mother's box. The painted china box Dad had given her on their wedding day. The box that was so valuable, it had its own special case on the piano. The box that made my mother smile whenever she saw it.

I felt sick. Just seeing the box in this woman's hands made me

feel like I was going to throw up. I'd never been allowed to even touch the box, and now, this complete stranger was holding it on the street where she could drop it onto the concrete any second, and it would smash into a zillion pieces.

"Zoe, tell me you didn't. Please tell me you didn't just sell Mom's box!"

Jeanine hadn't seen what was going on because she was too busy alphabetizing chapter books, but she must have heard what I'd said because the next second she was screaming, "YOU SOLD MOM'S BOX?!"

"I'm sorry. That's not for sale." I said to the woman. "It was a mistake."

"No, it wasn't," Zoe said.

"Keep your mouth shut," Jeanine said.

"But it wasn't," Zoe said, louder this time. "It's old and nobody uses it anymore. That's what you said to get. Old stuff nobody uses anymore."

"Nobody ever used it. It's not used because it's for decoration! It's just for looking at," I said. Then I turned back to the woman. "I'm really sorry but it wasn't hers to sell," I said and reached for the box.

"Well, I'm sorry, too," the woman said, stepping back, "but I've just bought it, so now it's mine."

THE DOUGHNUT FIX

She didn't sound sorry. She sounded crazy. She'd just bought an obviously valuable item off the sidewalk from a four-year-old. Shouldn't she have figured out that something was off? She even looked a little crazy. Her hair was dyed so black it looked blue, and her lipstick had melted all around her mouth and onto her two front teeth.

"Look, my sister will give you your money back, and then you can give us back our box," I said.

"I'm not giving it back," Zoe said, scrunching the money up in her fist.

"Oh, yes, you are!" Jeanine said.

"Give it to me," I said. "Right now!"

Zoe didn't move. I could tell she was digging in, and my yelling was only making it worse.

"Come on, Zoe. Think about Mommy," I said, trying to use that picture book voice Mom uses when she reads to Zoe. "She loves the box. She's going to be soooooo sad if she loses it."

Nothing.

"And she won't love you anymore," Jeanine added.

"Oh my," the woman said.

Unfortunately, Zoe had messed up enough to know this wasn't true.

"I guess that's it then," Lipstick Yoda said, turning to leave.

"Please, wait," I begged. "She's only four."

JESSIE JANOWITZ

Just then, Jeanine lunged at Zoe, but before she could grab the hand holding the money, Zoe mashed that hundred-dollar bill right into her mouth and began chewing.

"No!" I shouted.

But Zoe went right on chewing and swallowing while the three of us just stood there watching.

"See," she said when she was done. "I told you I wasn't giving it back."

"That settles it then," the woman said.

"No, just wait!" I said. There was no way I was going to let her have my mother's box. "Look, we're going to sell all this stuff. I'm sure we can make the money back. Just leave the box here and come back later. If we have the money, we'll give it to you. If not, you can take the box. Please."

Lipstick Yoda thought for a minute. "Oh, alright. I'll be back for it in a few hours. But if you're not here, I'll have to call the police."

"Don't worry. We'll be here," I promised.

As soon as she was gone, we quickly went to work setting up the rest of the stuff.

In addition to the box, here are the things Zoe had put in her pillowcase: the television remote, ten used coloring books, Jeanine's baby album, my baby album, and Paws, Jeanine's favorite teddy bear.

"The TV remote isn't old, and we use it all the time," I said.

THE DOUGHNUT FIX

"I know. It's for when we get bored," Zoe said.

"But there's no TV," Jeanine said.

"I know. It's for playing ATN."

"What?" Jeanine asked.

"The bank, nuddy!"

"She means ATM," I said.

"That's what I said," Zoe said, rolling her eyes.

Luckily, on weekends, lots of families walk past our building on their way to Central Park, so we had plenty of customers. It definitely helped sales that everyone thought Zoe was really cute. She'd squeezed herself into a pumpkin costume she'd worn when she was two and was standing there with her little stem hat sitting on top of all her crazy hair, wagging the television remote at people asking if they were using "crebit or debit." Everyone ate it up. I wonder how cute they'd have thought she was if they'd known she'd just swallowed a hundred dollars.

After we'd been outside for about an hour, a woman came up to me with an armload of books. "Would it be alright if I bought the entire Boxcar series?"

"Sure," I said. It would be our biggest sale yet.

"And also these and this," she said, showing me a handful of matchbox cars and a giraffe costume tucked under her arm.

"Great! Let me just add all that up for you," I said, pulling off

the post-its we'd used as price tags. "Jeanine, did you bring pencil and paper?"

"Why?"

"Because I need to add all this stuff up," I said, waving the post-its at her.

"Just give them to me," she said and snatched the post-its. "That will be \$31.45," she said two seconds later. Then she hurried off in the direction of a kid who looked like he was about to pocket a Playmobile pirate.

"So I guess it's \$31.45," I said to the woman.

"You know," she said, handing me the money, "I always like to do my sums on paper too. Just to be sure."

I shrugged. I knew she was just trying to be nice, but I wished she hadn't said anything at all.

After that, I let Jeanine handle all the math since it didn't make any sense for me to do it when I take forever and make mistakes, and she's a human calculator.

By the time Greta came down with sandwiches, we'd already made eighty-four dollars and sixteen cents.

"That's a lot!" said Greta. "You guys ready to call it a day?"

Jeanine and I shook our heads.

"I'm done," said Zoe. "Tag sale's boring." Then she jumped into Greta's arms. "Did you know that money tastes like cabbage?"

THE DOUGHNUT FIX

"No," said Greta, carrying Zoe up the stoop, "I didn't, and please don't tell me how you do."

"I could kill her," Jeanine said, watching Greta and Zoe disappear into the building.

A few minutes later, a boy, who looked about six, stopped in front of us. "Do you ...," he began and then looked back at the man who must have been his father standing behind him.

"Go on," the man said, smiling.

"Somebody at the park told me you were selling Thomas trains." The boy scanned the toys with a worried look.

"Oh, we were," Jeanine said. "But we're all out. Can I interest you in some matchbox cars?"

The boy shook his head sadly and looked back at his dad.

"Aw, come on, buddy. You wanna get something else?"

The boy shook his head again and started walking away.

"Hey, wait a second. I just remembered." I reached into the pillowcase at my feet and pulled out the three trains I'd been saving for myself. "We still have these."

The boy's face lit up. He picked up Clarabel and ran his hand along her side.

"Like it?" I said.

He nodded.

"You want to take all three?"

JESSIE JANOWITZ

The boy looked back at his father.

"How much are they?" the man asked.

"We're running a special," Jeanine said. "You can have all three for \$15.84."

The man laughed. "Okay. You got it."

The boy jumped up and gave his father a hug.

Half an hour later, Lipstick Yoda was back. When we showed her the money, she looked pretty angry. She must have thought there was no way we'd have it, but she didn't try to argue for the box. She just took the hundred dollars and stormed off.

"Anger leads to hate. Hate leads to suffering," I called after her. I'm not one of those kids who's always quoting movies, but Yoda's lines have a way of sticking with you.

The first thing Jeanine and I did once we got upstairs was put the box back in its case. Then we both dropped onto the couch.

"I can't believe she ate a hundred-dollar bill," Jeanine said. "Do you know how many people must have touched that money?"

"Do you think it'll make her sick?"

"I hope so," she said. "I mean, not really sick or anything, just a little."

"I know, like just enough diarrhea to teach her a lesson."

"Yeah," she said. "Just enough."