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THE QUIMBYS' QUARREL

“**B**ut Ramona,” said Mrs. Quimby on Saturday, “I’ve already told you that I boiled several eggs so I wouldn’t have to boil an egg for you every morning. I put the boiled eggs on one shelf in the refrigerator and the raw eggs on another. In my hurry, I took an egg from the wrong shelf. I am sorry. There is nothing more I can say.”

Ramona remained silent. She felt mean

and unhappy because she wanted to forgive her mother, but something in that dark, deep-down place inside her would not let her. Hearing her teacher call her a show-off and a nuisance hurt so much she could not stop being angry at almost everyone.

Mrs. Quimby sighed in a tired sort of way as she gathered up sheets and towels to feed into the washing machine in the basement. Ramona stared out the window and wished the misty rain, which fell softly and endlessly, would go away so she could go outdoors and roller-skate away her bad feelings.

Beezus was no help. She had spent the night at Mary Jane's house with several other girls, and they had stayed up late watching a horror movie on television and eating popcorn. Afterward they stayed awake talking, too scared to go to sleep. That morning Beezus had come home tired and grouchy and had fallen asleep almost immediately.

Ramona wandered around the house looking for something to do, when she discovered her father sitting on the couch, pencil in hand, drawing pad on his knee, frowning at one bare foot.

“Daddy, what are you doing that for?” Ramona wanted to know.

“That’s what I keep asking myself,” her father answered, as he wiggled his toes. “I have to draw a picture of my foot for my art class.”

“I wish we got to do things like that in my school,” said Ramona. She found pencil and paper, pulled off one shoe and sock, and climbed on the couch beside her father. Both studied their feet and began to sketch. Ramona soon found that drawing a foot was more difficult than she had expected. Like her father, she stared, frowned, drew, erased, stared, frowned, and drew. For a little while she forgot she was cross. She was enjoying herself.



“There,” said Ramona at last. She had drawn a good, not an excellent, foot. She looked at her father’s paper and was disappointed in what she saw. It was the kind of picture a teacher would pin up off in the corner where no one but the artist would notice it. Her father’s foot looked like a flipper. For the first time, Ramona began to doubt that her father was the best artist

in the whole world. This thought made her feel sad in addition to reminding her she was cross at that world.

Mr. Quimby studied Ramona's picture. "That's not bad," he said. "Not bad at all."

"My foot is easier to draw." Ramona felt as if she should apologize for drawing a better foot than her grown-up father. "My foot is sort of—neater," she explained. "Your foot is kind of bony and your toes are hairy. That makes your foot harder to draw."

Mr. Quimby crumpled his drawing and threw it into the fireplace. "You make me sound like Bigfoot," he said with a rueful laugh, as he threw a cushion at Ramona.

The day dragged on. By dinner time Ramona still had not been able to forgive her mother, who looked even more tired. Mr. Quimby had crumpled several more unsatisfactory drawings of his foot, and Beezus had emerged from her room sleepy-eyed

and half-awake, when her mother called the family to supper.

"I wish we could have corn bread again," Ramona said, not because she particularly liked corn bread, but because she felt so cross she wanted to complain about something. Corn bread was a pretty shade of yellow, which would have looked cheerful on a misty day. She leaned forward to sniff the plate of food set before her.

"Ramona." Even though her father did not speak the words, his voice said, "We do not sniff our food in this house."

Ramona sat up. Broccoli and baked potato, both easy to eat. Pot roast. Ramona leaned closer to examine her meat. She could not find one bit of fat, and there was only a bit of gravy poured over her serving. Good. Ramona refused even the tiniest bit of fat. She did not like the slippery squishy feeling in her mouth.

"Delicious," remarked Mr. Quimby, who did not feel he had to inspect his food before eating.

"Nice and tender," said Beezus, beginning to cheer up after her hard night.

Ramona seized her fork, speared her meat to her plate, and began to saw with her knife.

"Ramona, try to hold your fork properly," said her father. "Don't grip it with your fist. A fork is not a dagger."

With a small sigh, Ramona changed her hold on her fork. Grown-ups never remembered the difficulty of cutting meat when one's elbows were so far below the tabletop. She succeeded in cutting a bite of meat the way her parents thought proper. It was unusually tender and not the least bit stringy like some pot roasts her mother had prepared. It tasted good, too. "Yummy," said Ramona, forgetting her anger.

The family ate in contented silence until

Beezus pushed aside her gravy with the side of her fork. Gravy was fattening, and although Beezus was slender, even skinny, she was taking no chances.

“Mother!” Beezus’s voice was accusing.
“This meat has a rough surface!”

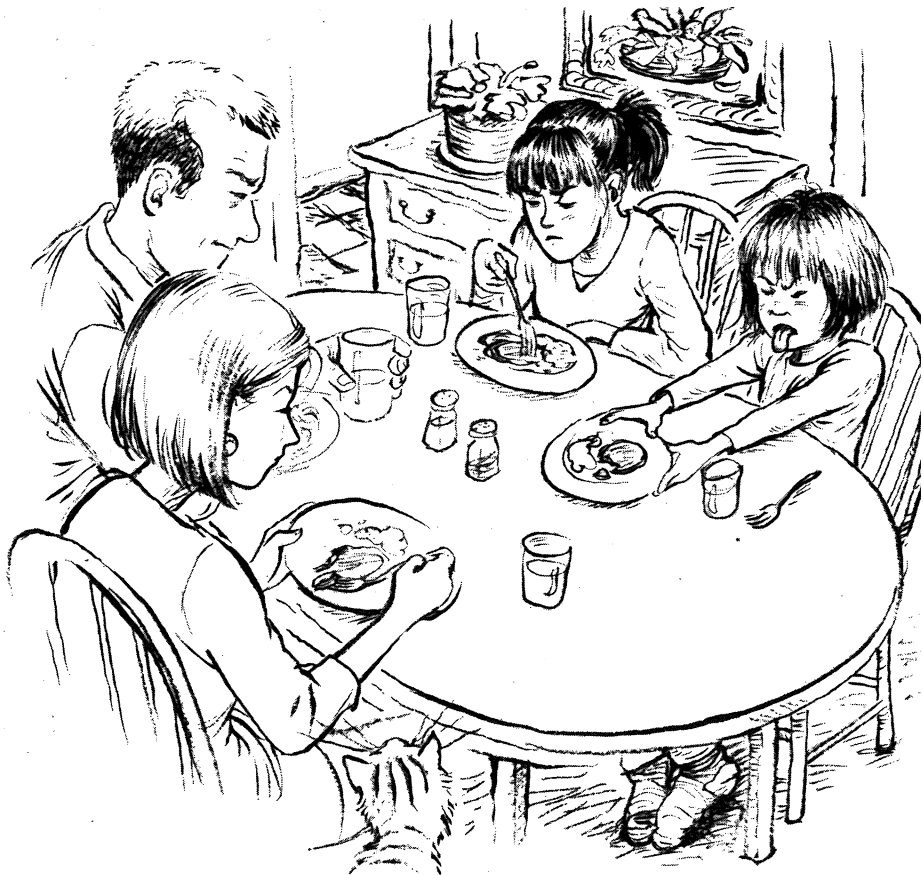
“It does?” answered Mrs. Quimby innocently.

Ramona understood her mother was trying to hide something when she saw her parents exchange their secret-sharing glance. She too scraped aside her gravy. Beezus was right. One edge of her meat was covered with tiny bumps.

“This meat is tongue.” Beezus pushed her serving aside with her fork. “I don’t like tongue.”

Tongue! Like Beezus, Ramona pushed her meat aside. “Yuck,” she said.

“Girls, stop being silly.” Mrs. Quimby’s voice was sharp.



“What do you mean you don’t like tongue?” demanded Mr. Quimby. “You were just eating it and enjoying it.”

“But I didn’t know it was tongue then,” said Beezus. “I hate tongue.”

“Me too,” said Ramona. “All those yucky

little bumps. Why can't we have plain meat?"

Mrs. Quimby was losing patience. "Because tongue is cheaper. That's why. It's cheaper and it's nutritious."

"You know what I think," said Mr. Quimby. "I think this whole thing is a lot of nonsense. You liked tongue when you didn't know it was tongue, so there is no reason why you can't eat it now."

"Yes, this whole thing is ridiculous," said Mrs. Quimby.

"Tongue is disgusting," said Beezus. "Picky-picky can have mine."

"Mine, too," echoed Ramona, knowing she should eat what was set before her, but tongue— Her parents were asking too much.

The meal continued in silence, the girls guilty but defiant, the parents unrelenting. When Mr. Quimby finished his serving of tongue, he helped himself from Ramona's plate. Picky-picky, purring like a rusty motor,

walked into the dining room and rubbed against legs to remind the family that he should eat too.

“I wonder,” said Mrs. Quimby, “why we named the *cat* Picky-picky.” She and Mr. Quimby looked at one another and only partly suppressed their laughter. The girls exchanged sulky glances. Parents should not laugh at their children.

Beezus silently cleared the table. Mrs. Quimby served applesauce and oatmeal cookies while Mr. Quimby talked about his work as Santa’s Little Helper in the frozen-food warehouse. He told how snow fell inside the warehouse door when someone opened it and let in warm air. He told about a man who had to break icicles from his moustache when he left the warehouse.

Snow indoors, icicles on a moustache—Ramona was full of questions that she would not let herself ask. Maybe working as Santa’s

Little Helper wasn't as much fun as she had thought.

"I'll tell you what," said Mr. Quimby to Mrs. Quimby, when the last cookie crumb had been eaten. "You need a rest. Tomorrow the girls can get dinner and you can take it easy."

"Good idea," said Mrs. Quimby. "Sometimes I do get tired of cooking."

"But I'm supposed to go to Mary Jane's tomorrow," protested Beezus.

"Call her up and tell her you can't come." Mr. Quimby was both cheerful and heartless.

"That's not fair," said Beezus.

"Tell me why it isn't fair," said Mr. Quimby.

When Beezus had no answer, Ramona understood their plight was serious. When their father behaved this way, he never changed his mind. "But I don't know how to cook," Ramona protested. "Except Jell-O and French toast."

"Nonsense," said Mrs. Quimby. "You are in the third grade, and you can read. Anyone who can read can cook."

"What'll we cook?" Beezus had to accept the fact that she and Ramona had no way out.

"The same things I cook," said her mother. "Whatever I have bought on special that you can find in the refrigerator."

"And corn bread." Mr. Quimby, his face serious but his eyes amused, looked at Ramona. "I expect to be served corn bread."

That evening, after the dishes had been put away, Picky-picky was polishing gravy from his whiskers and their parents were watching the evening news on television. Ramona marched into Beezus's room and shut the door. "It's all your fault," she informed her sister, who was lying on the bed with a book. "Why didn't you keep still?"

"It's just as much your fault," said Beezus.

“You and your yucks.”

Both girls recognized nothing would be gained by arguing over blame.

“But you like to cook,” said Ramona.

“And you like to make Jell-O and French toast,” said Beezus.

The sisters looked at one another. What had gone wrong? Why didn’t they want to prepare dinner?

“I think they’re mean,” said Ramona.

“They’re punishing us,” said Beezus.

“That’s what they’re doing.”

The sisters scowled. They liked to cook; they did not like to be punished. They sat in silence, thinking cross thoughts about parents, especially their parents, their unfair, unkind parents who did not appreciate what nice daughters they had. Lots of parents would be happy to have nice daughters like Beezus and Ramona.

“If I ever have a little girl, I won’t ever

make her eat tongue," said Ramona. "I'll give her good things to eat. Things like stuffed olives and whipped cream."

"Me too," agreed Beezus. "I wonder what there is for us to cook."

"Let's go look in the refrigerator," suggested Ramona.

Beezus objected. "If they hear us open the refrigerator, Mom and Dad will think we're hungry, and we'll get a lecture on not eating our dinner."

"But I *am* hungry," said Ramona, although she understood the truth of Beezus's words. Oh well, she wouldn't actually starve to death before breakfast. She found herself thinking of French toast, golden with egg under a snowfall of powdered sugar.

"Maybe. . . ." Beezus was thoughtful. "Maybe if we're extra good, they'll forget about the whole thing."

Ramona now felt sad as well as angry.

Here she had worked so hard to do her part by getting along at the Kemps', and now her family was not pulling together. Something had gone wrong. Beezus was probably right. The only way to escape punishment was to try being extra good.

"OK." Ramona agreed, but her voice was gloomy. What a dismal thought, being extra good, but it was better than allowing their parents to punish them.

Ramona went to her own room, where she curled up on her bed with a book. She wished something nice would happen to her mother and father, something that would help them forget the scene at the dinner table. She wished her father would succeed in drawing a perfect foot, the sort of foot his teacher would want to hang in the front of the room above the middle of the blackboard. Maybe a perfect foot would make him happy.

And her mother? Maybe if Ramona

could forgive her for not boiling the egg she would be happy. In her heart Ramona had forgiven her, and she was sorry she had been so cross with her mother. She longed to go tell her, but now she could not, not when she was being punished.

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THE EXTRA-GOOD SUNDAY

Sunday morning Ramona and Beezus were still resolved to be perfect until dinner time. They got up without being called, avoided arguing over who should read Dear Abby's advice first in the paper, complimented their mother on her French toast, and went off through the drizzly rain to Sunday school neat, combed, and bravely smiling.

Later they cleaned up their rooms without being told. At lunchtime they ate without complaint the sandwiches they knew were made of ground-up tongue. A little added pickle relish did not fool them, but it did help. They dried the dishes and carefully avoided looking in the direction of the refrigerator lest their mother be reminded they were supposed to cook the evening meal.

Mr. and Mrs. Quimby were good-humored. In fact, everyone was so unnaturally pleasant that Ramona almost wished someone would say something cross. By early afternoon the question was still hanging in the air. Would the girls really have to prepare dinner?

Why doesn't somebody say something? Ramona thought, weary of being so good, weary of longing to forgive her mother for the raw egg in her lunch.

"Well, back to the old foot," said Mr.

Quimby, as he once more settled himself on the couch with drawing pad and pencil and pulled off his shoe and sock.

The rain finally stopped. Ramona watched for dry spots to appear on the sidewalk and thought of her roller skates in the closet. She looked into Beezus's room and found her sister reading. Ramona knew Beezus wanted to telephone Mary Jane but had decided to wait until Mary Jane called to ask why she had not come over. Mary Jane did not call. The day dragged on.

When dry spots on the concrete in front of the Quimbys' house widened until moisture remained only in the cracks of the sidewalk, Ramona pulled her skates out of her closet. To her father, who was holding a drawing of his foot at arm's length to study it, she said, "Well, I guess I'll go out and skate."

"Aren't you forgetting something?" he asked.

“What?” asked Ramona, knowing very well what.

“Dinner,” he said.

The question that had hung in the air all day was answered. The matter was settled.

“We’re stuck,” Ramona told Beezus. “Now we can stop being so good.”

The sisters went into the kitchen, shut the door, and opened the refrigerator.

“A package of chicken thighs,” said Beezus with a groan. “And a package of frozen peas. And yoghurt, one carton of plain and one of banana. There must have been a special on yoghurt.” She closed the refrigerator and reached for a cookbook.

“I could make place cards,” said Ramona, as Beezus frantically flipped pages.

“We can’t eat place cards,” said Beezus. “Besides, corn bread is your job because you brought it up.” Both girls spoke in whispers. There was no need to let their

parents, their mean old parents, know what was going on in the kitchen.

In her mother's recipe file, Ramona found the card for corn bread written in Mr. Quimby's grandmother's shaky handwriting, which Ramona found difficult to read.

"I can't find a recipe for chicken thighs," said Beezus, "just whole chicken. All I know is that Mother bakes thighs in the flat glass dish with some kind of sauce."

"Mushroom soup mixed with something and with some kind of little specks stirred in." Ramona remembered that much from watching her mother.

Beezus opened the cupboard of canned goods. "But there isn't any mushroom soup," she said. "What are we going to do?"

"Mix up something wet," suggested Ramona. "It would serve them right if it tasted awful."

"Why don't we make something awful?"

asked Beezus. "So they will know how we feel when we have to eat tongue."

"What tastes really awful?" Ramona was eager to go along with the suggestion, united with her sister against their enemy—for the moment, their parents.

Beezus, always practical, changed her mind. "It wouldn't work. We have to eat it too, and they're so mean we'll probably have to do the dishes besides. Anyway, I guess you might say our honor is at stake, because they think we can't cook a good meal."

Ramona was ready with another solution. "Throw everything in one dish."

Beezus opened the package of chicken thighs and stared at them with distaste. "I can't stand touching raw meat," she said, as she picked up a thigh between two forks.

"Do we have to eat the skin?" asked Ramona. "All those yucky little bumps."

Beezus found a pair of kitchen tongs.

She tried holding down a thigh with a fork and pulling off the skin with the tongs.

“Here, let me hold it,” said Ramona, who was not squeamish about touching such things as worms or raw meat. She took a firm hold on the thigh while Beezus grasped the skin with the tongs. Both pulled, and the skin peeled away. They played tug-of-war with each thigh, leaving a sad-looking heap of skins on the counter and a layer of chicken thighs in the glass dish.

“Can’t you remember what little specks Mother uses?” asked Beezus. Ramona could not. The girls studied the spice shelf, unscrewed jar lids and sniffed. Nutmeg? No. Cloves? Terrible. Cinnamon? Uh-uh. Chili powder? Well. . . . Yes, that must be it. Ramona remembered that the specks were red. Beezus stirred half a teaspoon of the dark red powder into the yoghurt, which she poured over the chicken. She slid the



dish into the oven set at 350 degrees, the temperature for chicken recommended by the cookbook.

From the living room came the sound of their parents' conversation, sometimes serious and sometimes highlighted by laughter. While we're slaving out here, thought Ramona, as she climbed up on the counter to reach the box of cornmeal. After she climbed down, she discovered she had to climb up again for baking powder and soda. She finally knelt on the counter to save time and asked Beezus to bring her an egg.

"It's a good thing Mother can't see you up there," remarked Beezus, as she handed Ramona an egg.

"How else am I supposed to reach things?" Ramona successfully broke the egg and tossed the shell onto the counter. "Now I need buttermilk."

Beezus broke the news. There was no

buttermilk in the refrigerator. "What'll I do?" whispered Ramona in a panic.

"Here. Use this." Beezus thrust the carton of banana yoghurt at her sister. "Yoghurt is sort of sour, so it might work."

The kitchen door opened a crack. "What's going on in there?" inquired Mr. Quimby.

Beezus hurled herself against the door. "You stay out!" she ordered. "Dinner is going to be a—surprise!"

For a moment Ramona thought Beezus had been going to say a mess. She stirred egg and yoghurt together, measured flour, spilling some on the floor, and then discovered she was short of cornmeal. More panic.

"My cooking teacher says you should always check to see if you have all the ingredients before you start to cook," said Beezus.

"Oh, shut up." Ramona reached for a package of Cream of Wheat, because its grains were about the same size as cornmeal.

She scattered only a little on the floor.

Something was needed to sop up the sauce with little red specks when the chicken was served. Rice! The spilled Cream of Wheat gritted underneath Beezus's feet as she measured rice and boiled water according to the directions on the package. When the rice was cooking, she slipped into the dining room to set the table and then remembered they had forgotten salad. Salad! Carrot sticks were quickest. Beezus began to scrape carrots into the sink.

"Yipe!" yelled Ramona from the counter. "The rice!" The lid of the pan was chittering. Beezus snatched a larger pan from the cupboard and transferred the rice.

"Do you girls need any help?" Mrs. Quimby called from the living room.

"No!" answered her daughters.

Another calamity. The corn bread should bake at 400 degrees, a higher temperature

than that needed for the chicken. What was Ramona to do?

“Stick it in the oven anyway.” Beezus’s face was flushed.

In went the corn bread beside the chicken.

“Dessert!” whispered Beezus. All she could find was a can of boring pear halves. Back to the cookbook. “Heat with a little butter and serve with jelly in each half,” she read. Jelly. Half a jar of apricot jam would have to do. The pears and butter went into the saucepan. Never mind the syrup spilled on the floor.

“Beezus!” Ramona held up the package of peas.

Beezus groaned. Out came the partially cooked chicken while she stirred the thawing peas into the yoghurt and shoved the dish back into the oven.

The rice! They had forgotten the rice, which was only beginning to stick to the pan. Quick! Take it off the burner. How

did their mother manage to get everything cooked at the right time? Put the carrot sticks on a dish. Pour the milk. "Candles!" Beezus whispered. "Dinner might look better if we have candles."

Ramona found two candle holders and two partly melted candles of uneven length. One of them had been used in a Halloween jack-o'-lantern. Beezus struck the match to light them, because although Ramona was brave about touching raw meat, she was skittish about lighting matches.

Was the chicken done? The girls anxiously examined their main dish, bubbling and brown around the edges. Beezus stabbed a thigh with a fork, and when it did not bleed, she decided it must be done. A toothpick pricked into the corn bread came out clean. The corn bread was done—flat, but done.

Grit, grit, grit sounded under the girls' feet. It was amazing how a tiny bit of spilled

Cream of Wheat could make the entire kitchen floor gritty. At last their dinner was served, the dining-room light turned off, dinner announced, and the cooks, tense with anxiety that was hidden by candlelight, fell into their chairs as their parents seated themselves. Was this dinner going to be edible?

"Candles!" exclaimed Mrs. Quimby. "What a festive meal!"

"Let's taste it before we decide," said Mr. Quimby with his most wicked grin.

The girls watched anxiously as their father took his first bite of chicken. He chewed thoughtfully and said with more surprise than necessary, "Why this is good!"

"It really is," agreed Mrs. Quimby, and took a bit of corn bread. "Very good, Ramona," she said.

Mr. Quimby tasted the corn bread. "Just like Grandmother used to make," he pronounced.

The girls exchanged suppressed smiles. They could not taste the banana yoghurt, and by candlelight no one could tell that the corn bread was a little pale. The chicken, Ramona decided, was not as good as her parents thought—or pretended to think—but she could eat it without gagging.

Everyone relaxed, and Mrs. Quimby said chili powder was more interesting than paprika and asked which recipe they had used for the chicken.

Ramona answered, “Our own,” as she exchanged another look with Beezus. Paprika! Those little specks in the sauce should have been paprika.

“We wanted to be creative,” said Beezus.

Conversation was more comfortable than it had been the previous evening. Mr. Quimby said he was finally satisfied with his drawing, which looked like a real foot. Beezus said her cooking class was studying

the food groups everyone should eat every day. Ramona said there was this boy at school who called her Egghead. Mr. Quimby explained that Egghead was slang for a very smart person. Ramona began to feel better about Yard Ape.

The meal was a success. If the chicken did not taste as good as the girls had hoped and the corn bread did not rise like their mother's, both were edible. Beezus and Ramona were silently grateful to their parents for enjoying—or pretending to enjoy—their cooking. The whole family cheered up. When they had finished their pears with apricot jam, Ramona gave her mother a shy smile.

Mrs. Quimby smiled back and patted Ramona's hand. Ramona felt much lighter. Without using words, she had forgiven her mother for the unfortunate egg, and her mother had understood. Ramona could be happy again.

“You cooks have worked so hard,” said Mr. Quimby, “that I’m going to wash the dishes. I’ll even finish clearing the table.”

“I’ll help,” volunteered Mrs. Quimby.

The girls exchanged another secret smile as they excused themselves and skipped off to their rooms before their parents discovered the pile of chicken skins and the broken eggshell on the counter, the carrot scrapings in the sink, and the Cream of Wheat, flour, and pear syrup on the floor.

6

SUPERNUISANCE

Once more the Quimbys were comfortable with one another—or reasonably so. Yet Mr. and Mrs. Quimby often had long, serious discussions at night behind their closed bedroom door. The sober sound of their voices worried Ramona, who longed to hear them laugh. However, by breakfast they were usually cheerful—cheerful but hurried.

Ramona was less comfortable at school. In fact, she was most uncomfortable because she was so anxious not to be a nuisance to her teacher. She stopped volunteering answers, and except for the bus ride and Sustained Silent Reading she dreaded school.

One morning, when Ramona was wishing she could get out of going to school, she dug a hole in the middle of her oatmeal with her spoon and watched it fill with milk as she listened to the noise from the garage, the grinding growl of a car that was reluctant to start. "Grr-rrr-rrr," she said, imitating the sound of the motor.

"Ramona, don't dawdle." Mrs. Quimby was whisking about the living room, picking up newspapers, straightening cushions, running a dustcloth over the windowsills and coffee table. Light housekeeping, she called it. Mrs. Quimby did not like to come home to an untidy house.

Ramona ate a few spoonfuls of oatmeal, but somehow her spoon felt heavy this morning.

"And drink your milk," said her mother. "Remember, you can't do good work in school if you don't eat a good breakfast."

Ramona paid scant attention to this little speech that she heard almost every morning. Out of habit, she drank her milk and managed most of her toast. In the garage the car stopped growling and started to throb.

Ramona had left the table and was brushing her teeth when she heard her father call in through the back door to her mother, "Dorothy, can you come and steer the car while I push it into the street? I can't get it to go into reverse."

Ramona rinsed her mouth and rushed to the front window in time to see her father put all his strength into pushing the now silent car slowly down the driveway and into the street while her mother steered. At

the foot of the driveway, Mrs. Quimby started the motor and drove the car forward beside the curb.

"Now try it in reverse," Mr. Quimby directed.

In a moment Mrs. Quimby called out, "It won't go."

Ramona put on her coat, picked up her lunch box, and hurried out to see what happened when a car would go forward but not backward. She soon discovered her parents found nothing funny about this state of affairs.

"I'll have to take it to the mechanic." Mr. Quimby looked cross. "And then take a bus, which means missing my first class."

"Let me take it, and you hurry and catch a bus now," said Mrs. Quimby. "The answering service can take the doctor's messages a few minutes longer until I get to the office." Then, noticing Ramona standing on the sidewalk, she said, "Run along or you'll miss your bus," and blew Ramona a kiss.

"What if you have to back up?" asked Ramona.

"With luck I won't have to," her mother answered. "Hurry along now."

"So long, Ramona," said Mr. Quimby. Ramona could see that he was more concerned with the car than with her. Perhaps this knowledge made her feet seem heavier than usual as she plodded off to her bus stop. The ride to school seemed longer than usual. When Yard Ape said, "Hi, Egghead,"



she did not bother to answer, "Deviled Egghead to you," as she had planned.

When school started, Ramona sat quietly filling spaces in her workbook, trying to insert the right numbers into the right spaces but not much caring if she failed. Her head felt heavy, and her fingers did not want to move. She thought of telling Mrs. Whaley that she did not feel good, but her teacher was busy writing a list of words on the blackboard and would probably think anyone who interrupted was a nuisance.

Ramona propped her head on her fist, looking at twenty-six glass jars of blue oatmeal. *Oh-h-h*. She did not want to think about blue oatmeal or white oatmeal or any oatmeal at all. She sat motionless, hoping the terrible feeling would go away. She knew she should tell her teacher, but by now Ramona was too miserable even to raise her hand. If she did not move, not even her little

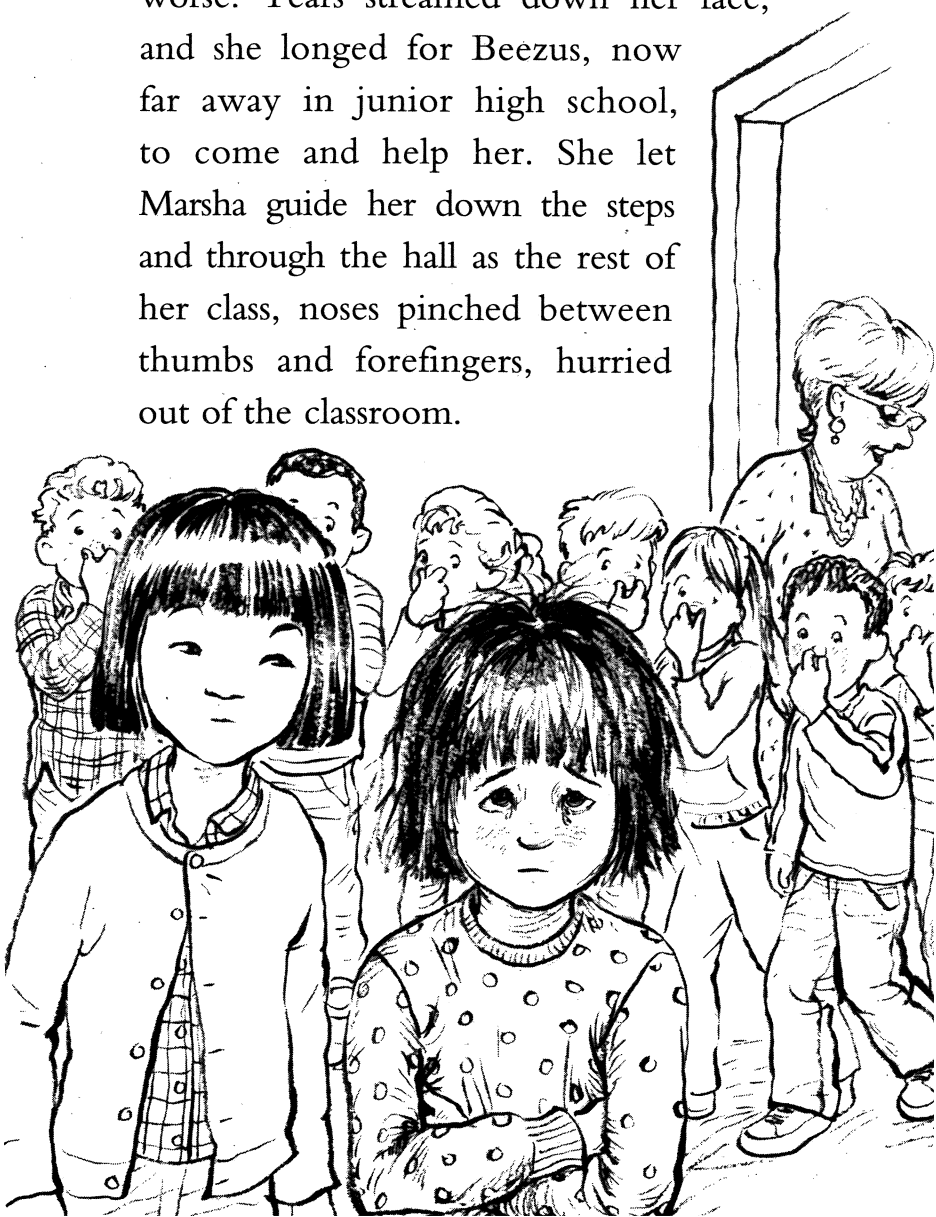
finger or an eyelash, she might feel better.

Go away, blue oatmeal, thought Ramona, and then she knew that the most terrible, horrible, dreadful, awful thing that could happen was going to happen. Please, God, don't let me. . . . Ramona prayed too late.

The terrible, horrible, dreadful, awful thing happened. Ramona threw up. She threw up right there on the floor in front of everyone. One second her breakfast was where it belonged. Then everything in her middle seemed to go into reverse, and there was her breakfast on the floor.

Ramona had never felt worse in her whole life. Tears of shame welled in her eyes as she was aware of the shock and horror of everyone around her. She heard Mrs. Whaley say, "Oh, dear—Marsha, take Ramona to the office. Danny, run and tell Mr. Watts that someone threw up. Children, you may hold your noses and file into the hall until Mr. Watts comes and cleans up."

Her instructions made Ramona feel even worse. Tears streamed down her face, and she longed for Beezus, now far away in junior high school, to come and help her. She let Marsha guide her down the steps and through the hall as the rest of her class, noses pinched between thumbs and forefingers, hurried out of the classroom.



"It's all right, Ramona," Marsha said gently, while keeping her distance as if she expected Ramona to explode.

Ramona was crying too hard to answer. Nobody, nobody in the whole world, was a bigger nuisance than someone who threw up in school. Until now she thought Mrs. Whaley had been unfair when she called her a nuisance, but now—there was no escaping the truth—she really *was* a nuisance, a horrible runny-nosed nuisance with nothing to blow her nose on.

When Ramona and Marsha entered the office, Marsha was eager to break the news. "Oh, Mrs. Larson," she said, "Ramona threw up." Even the principal, sitting at his desk in the inner office, heard the news. Ramona knew he would not come out and start being her pal, because nobody wanted to be a pal to someone who threw up.

Mrs. Larson, seizing a Kleenex from a box on her desk, sprang from her typewriter.



“Too bad,” she said calmly, as if throwers-up came into the office every day. “Blow,” she directed, as she held the Kleenex to Ramona’s nose. Ramona blew. The principal, of course, stayed in his office where he was safe.

Mrs. Larson then took Ramona into the little room off the office, the same room in which she had washed egg out of Ramona’s hair. She handed Ramona a paper cup of water. “You want to rinse your mouth,

don't you?" Ramona nodded, rinsed, and felt better. Mrs. Larson did not behave as if she were a nuisance.

The school secretary laid a sheet of clean paper on the pillow on the cot, motioned Ramona to lie down, and then covered her with a blanket. "I'll phone your mother and ask her to come and take you home," she said.

"But she's at work," Ramona whispered, because speaking aloud might send her stomach into reverse again. "And Daddy is at school."

"I see," said Mrs. Larson. "Where do you go after school?"

"To Howie Kemp's house," said Ramona, closing her eyes and wishing she could go to sleep and not wake up until all this misery was over. She was aware that Mrs. Larson dialed a number and after a few moments replaced the receiver. Howie's grandmother was not home.

Then the terrible, horrible, dreadful, awful feeling returned. "Mrs. L-Larson," quavered Ramona. "I'm going to throw up."

In an instant, Mrs. Larson was holding Ramona's head in front of the toilet. "It's a good thing I have three children of my own so I'm used to this sort of thing," she said. When Ramona had finished, she handed her another cup of water and said cheerfully, "You must feel as if you've just thrown up your toenails."

Ramona managed a weak and wavery smile. "Who's going to take care of me?" she asked, as Mrs. Larson covered her with the blanket once more.

"Don't worry," said Mrs. Larson. "We'll find someone, and until we do, you rest right here."

Ramona felt feeble, exhausted, and grateful to Mrs. Larson. Closing her eyes had never felt so good, and the next thing she

knew she heard her mother whispering, "Ramona." She lifted heavy lids to see her mother standing over her.

"Do you feel like going home?" Mrs. Quimby asked gently. She was already holding Ramona's coat.

Tears filled Ramona's eyes. She was not sure her legs would stand up, and how would they get home without a car? And what was her mother doing here when she was supposed to be at work? Would she lose her job?

Mrs. Quimby helped Ramona to her feet and draped her coat over her shoulders. "I have a taxi waiting," she said, as she guided Ramona toward the door.

Mrs. Larson looked up from her typewriter. "'Bye, Ramona. We'll miss you," she said. "I hope you'll feel better soon."

Ramona had forgotten what it was like to feel better. Outside a yellow taxicab was chugging at the curb. A taxi! Ramona

had never ridden in a taxicab, and now she was too sick to enjoy it. Any other time she would have felt important to be leaving school in a taxi in the middle of the morning.

As Ramona climbed in, she saw the driver look her over as if he were doubtful about something. I will not throw up in a taxi, Ramona willed herself. I will not. A taxi is too expensive to throw up in. She added



silent words to God, Don't let me throw up in a taxi.

Carefully Ramona laid her head in her mother's lap and with every click of the meter thought, I will not throw up in a taxi. And she did not. She managed to wait until she was home and in the bathroom.

How good Ramona's bed felt with its clean white sheets. She let her mother wipe her face and hands with a cool washcloth and later take her temperature. Afterward, Ramona did not care about much of anything.

Late in the afternoon she awoke when Beezus whispered, "Hi," from the doorway.

When Mr. Quimby came home, he too paused in the doorway. "How's my girl?" he inquired softly.

"Sick," answered Ramona, feeling pitiful. "How's the car?"

"Still sick," answered her father. "The

mechanic was so busy he couldn't work on it today."

In a while Ramona was aware that her family was eating dinner without her, but she did not care. Later Mrs. Quimby took Ramona's temperature again, propped her up, and held a glass of fizzy drink to her lips, which surprised Ramona. Her mother did not approve of junk foods.

"I talked to the pediatrician," Mrs. Quimby explained, "and she said to give you this because you need fluids."

The drink gave Ramona a sneezy feeling in her nose. She waited anxiously. Would it stay down? Yes. She sipped again, and in a moment again.

"Good girl," whispered her mother.

Ramona fell back and turned her face into her pillow. Remembering what had happened at school, she began to cry.

"Dear heart," said her mother. "Don't

cry. You just have a touch of stomach flu. You'll feel better in a day or so."

Ramona's voice was muffled. "No, I won't."

"Yes, you will." Mrs. Quimby patted Ramona through the bedclothes.

Ramona turned enough to look at her mother with one teary eye. "You don't know what happened," she said.

Mrs. Quimby looked concerned. "What happened?"

"I threw up on the floor in front of the whole class," sobbed Ramona.

Her mother was reassuring. "Everybody knows you didn't throw up on purpose, and you certainly aren't the first child to do so." She thought a moment and said, "But you should have told Mrs. Whaley you didn't feel good."

Ramona could not bring herself to admit her teacher thought she was a nuisance. She

let out a long, quavery sob.

Mrs. Quimby patted Ramona again and turned out the light. "Now go to sleep," she said, "and you'll feel better in the morning."

Ramona was sure that, although her stomach might feel better in the morning, the rest of her would still feel terrible. She wondered what nickname Yard Ape would give her this time and what Mrs. Whaley said to the school secretary about her at lunchtime. As she fell asleep, she decided she was a supernuisance, and a sick one at that.