# Assignment Calendar

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My email address is: cbarnes@burgettstown.k12.pa.us
There's a boy in the Girls' Bathroom
Bradley was terrible!

He dribbled with two hands. He passed the ball to people who weren’t on his team. But, worst of all, whenever anyone passed the ball to him, he said “thank you.”

He never shot at the basket. He didn’t dare. Finally, after his team was losing 28 to 6 anyway, everyone told him to try a shot.

He looked around for someone to pass to.

Jeff sat down so Bradley wouldn’t pass it to him. “Just shoot,” he said.

The rest of his team sat down too. “Shoot it!” they said.

Everybody on the other team sat down too. “Shoot the ball!”

Bradley faced the basket. His tongue slipped out the corner of his mouth as he carefully aimed, then threw the ball high in the air. It hit the back of the rim, bounced against the backboard, then dropped through the net.

“Great shot!” said Jeff.

“Way to go,” said Andy, patting him on the back.

At first he couldn’t believe it, but then he saw Carla’s book, lying on the ground at the base of the basket. No wonder, he realized.

Everyone headed for the water fountain. Bradley went along, too, even though he wasn’t thirsty. But then, once he got there, he realized he was thirsty. He just hadn’t noticed.

“Good game, Bradley,” said Brian.
“You just have to stop passing to people who aren’t on your team!” said Dan.

“Maybe you should give the rest of us on your team black eyes too,” said Robbie. “Then you’ll know who to pass to.”

Everyone laughed, even Bradley.

He and Jeff were the last two left at the water fountain. Everyone else had already started back to class. As they drank, their eyes met and they broke up laughing.

“How did you get the black eye?” Bradley asked after he stopped laughing.

“Melinda,” said Jeff.

Bradley nodded. “She’s strong,” he said.

“Oh boy, you can say that again,” said Jeff.

They laughed again.

“My book!” Bradley suddenly exclaimed. He ran back to the basketball court where he’d left it.

Jeff shook his head as he watched Bradley run away. Life’s weird, he thought.

He walked into the boys’ bathroom and splashed his sweaty face with cold water. He had to hold the faucet down with one hand and splash his face with the other.

Colleen Verigold walked in.

He stared at her.

She looked around, then screamed and ran outside.

Jeff watched the door swing shut behind her.
There was too weird for Jeff to return to class.

Anytime you want to talk again, Carla had said, please feel free to come and see me. Even if you just feel like getting out of class for a while.

He hoped she had really meant it. He had a lot he wanted to say to her, beginning with “I’m sorry.”

He slowly walked to her office. He hoped she wasn’t with somebody else. He knocked.

Carla opened the door and smiled when she saw him. “Hello, Jeff.”

He smiled. “Hi, Carla. I’m – ”

He stopped because he saw somebody else sitting at the round table.

“I believe you two know each other,” said Carla.

Jeff lowered his eyes. “Hello, Colleen,” he muttered.

Colleen Verigold covered her face with her hands.

“You don’t mind if Jeff joins us, do you, Colleen?” Carla asked.

Colleen shook her head with her hands still over her face.

Jeff awkwardly sat down. “Mrs. Ebbel doesn’t know I’m here,” he said.

“I’ll write you a note,” said Carla.

Colleen peeked out from between her fingers. “I’m not supposed to be here either,” she said.
Carla turned to Colleen. “So what’s the big emergency? Can you say it in front of Jeff?”

“He already knows,” said Colleen. She looked at Jeff. “You better not tell anybody!”

“I won’t,” Jeff promised.

“Tell anybody what?” asked Carla.

“Colleen walked into the boys’ bathroom,” said Jeff. “I was there washing my face.”

“Jeff!” Colleen exploded. “You just promised you wouldn’t tell!”

“Oops,” said Jeff. He blushed. “It was only Carla. You were going to tell her anyway, weren’t you?”

Colleen smiled at him. “I didn’t go there on purpose,” she explained to Carla. “It was an accident.”

“I don’t believe in accidents,” said Carla.

Colleen stared at her in amazement. She wondered how Carla knew she had gone in after Jeff on purpose. She turned to Jeff. “I’m sorry for saying hello to you when you didn’t like it.”

“That’s okay.”

“Anyway, how was I supposed to know you didn’t like it? You always said hello back.”

“I know. I can’t help it. Whenever anybody says hello to me, I always have to say hello back.” He looked at the picture of the green monster with six hands hanging on the wall. “If a big scary monster said, ‘Hello, Jeff,’ I’d probably say hello back to it, too.”

Colleen laughed.

“Well, what’s wrong with that?” demanded Carla. “If a monster says hello to you, you should say hello to it. If you don’t, then I have to wonder which one of you is really the monster.”
Colleen frowned. She suddenly remembered that Bradley Chalkers had said hello to her at the beginning of the lunch period and she had walked away without saying hello back. It made her feel terrible.

“You can say hello to me whenever you want,” said Jeff.

She smiled again. “Hello, Jeff,” she said.

“Hello, Colleen,” said Jeff.

“I read somewhere,” said Carla, “that in Zen, the most important rule is that when one person says hello to you, you have to say hello back.”

“What’s Zen?” asked Colleen.

“A religion,” answered Carla. She got a book from her bookcase. “Here it is.” She read aloud from Raise High the Roof Beam, Carpenters by J.D. Salinger: “‘In certain Zen monasteries, it’s a cardinal rule…that when one monk calls out “Hi” to another monk, the latter must call back “Hi!” without thinking.’ ”

“Jeff should be a Zen monk!” Colleen exclaimed with delight.

Jeff laughed. “I already say hello to anybody who says hello to me,” he said proudly.

“Can girls be Zen monks too?” Colleen asked.

“Why not?” asked Carla.

Colleen laughed with delight. Then she said, “Jeff, do you want to come to my birthday party next Sunday?”

“Yes!” said Jeff. “That’s the second most important rule about being a Zen monk. Whenever another Zen monk invites you to a birthday party, you have to say yes!”

Colleen laughed again. “You’re the only boy so far,” she said. “I’ll invite one more, but only one. I can’t invite too many boys.”
Suddenly she looked very serious. She knew what she had to do.
Before dinner, while it was still light, Bradley’s father, bad leg and all, taught Bradley how to dribble. Bradley could hardly wait to show his friends.

The next morning, when the bell rang for recess, everyone hurried outside.

Except Bradley.

First, he had to put his paper *neatly* in his notebook. Then he had to mark his place in his book and put all his pencils in his pencil holder. Then he put everything away, *neatly*, in his desk.

He rushed out the door.

“Hello, Bradley,” said Colleen.

He stopped cold.

Colleen closed her eyes tightly, then opened them. With the determination of a Zen monk, she asked, “Would you like to come to my birthday party on Sunday?”

Bradley stared at her.

“Jeff will be there,” said Colleen. “He’s the only other boy. Everyone else will be girls. I would have invited you sooner, except, um, I just found out when it was.”

Bradley nodded his head until his mouth worked. “Yes!” he said.

“Good,” said Colleen, then scooted away.

Bradley stared after her, then turned around in a circle as he tried to remember which way he was going.

“Bradley!” called Andy. “Hurry up! We need you.”
He ran to the basketball court. He forgot everything he had learned about dribbling.

§

“Is he coming?” asked Melinda.

Colleen nodded.

Lori stuck out her tongue and screamed.

“It’ll be fun,” said Melinda. “Bradley’s not the same as he was. I think he’s gotten better.”

“Oh, you can’t come anymore, Melinda,” said Colleen.

“What?” she asked, obviously very hurt.

“But they’re coming, and you beat them up!”

“But they started it.”

Colleen stared at her, hands on hips. She couldn’t believe Melinda was being so unreasonable.

“I thought I was your best friend,” said Melinda.

“You are,” said Colleen. “But they’re boys. Oh, okay. You can come. But you better not cause any more trouble.”

“I thought I was your best friend,” said Lori.

§

That night Bradley lay in bed, too excited to sleep. He couldn’t wait until tomorrow when he’d see Carla again. He had so much to share with her. And it was all because of her magic book.

He turned on the light above his head and read aloud to Ronnie and Bartholomew. They laughed whenever he did.

“I just met Ace. He’s my parents’ lawyer. Guess what? He’s crazier than my Aunt and Uncle put together.

The first thing he said to me was, ‘Do you like peanuts?’

‘They’re okay,’ I answered.
‘Good,’ he said. He gave me a peanut and I ate it.

‘Do you want another peanut?’ he asked.

I shrugged.

So he gave me another peanut and I ate that one, too. Big deal.

‘You must really like peanuts a lot,’ he said.

I told you he was crazy.

‘I want you to remember that,’ he said. ‘If anybody asks you, you really like peanuts a lot.’

‘Okay, I really like peanuts a lot,’ I said.

Then he gave me three more peanuts! ‘Eat these!’

I ate them.

‘You just ate three peanuts in five seconds,’ he said. Can you believe it? He had timed me. Tell me he isn’t crazy!”

“He isn’t crazy,” laughed Ronnie.

“Why is he making such a big deal over peanuts?” asked Bartholomew.

“I don’t know,” said Bradley.

There was a loud knock on his door, then his father entered. “It’s past your bedtime, Bradley,” he said.

“Okay,” said Bradley. He reached for his light.

“Oh, you were reading,” his father noticed. “Well, that’s all right then. You can stay up if you want to read.”

Bradley smiled. Once again, the magic book had kept him from getting into trouble.

“So, what did the kids think of your dribbling?”

“I forgot how,” Bradley admitted. He hated to disappoint his father.
“I guess we need to practice more,” said his father. “Maybe this weekend I’ll put up a backboard on the garage.” He said good night and walked out of Bradley’s room.

“Come on, I want to hear about the peanuts,” said Bartholomew.

Bradley continued reading.

“So then he asked me, ‘Are you good at math?’

Well, I don’t like to brag but math happens to be my best subject. Big deal.

‘Okay, here’s a math problem for you,’ he said. ‘If you can eat three peanuts in five seconds, how long would it take for you to eat fifty thousand peanuts?’

I got out a pencil and paper and figured it out. ‘About twenty-three hours and nine minutes.’

‘That’s less than a day, isn’t it?’ he asked.

‘Yes,’ I said. ‘There are twenty-four hours in a day.’ He’s supposed to be my parents’ lawyer and he doesn’t even know how many hours there are in a day!

‘Remember that,’ he told me. ‘If anybody asks you, you can eat fifty thousand peanuts per day.’

I laughed. ‘Who would ask me that?’

‘The police.’ ”

The chapter ended there.
Bradley giggled as he walked to Carla’s office for his regularly scheduled appointment. He couldn’t wait to tell her all that had happened to him. *She’ll be so happy!* he thought.

She was waiting for him in the hall, just outside her office. But before she could say anything, he beat her to it. “Hello, Carla,” he said. “It’s a pleasure to see you today. I appreciate coming to see you.”

She smiled. “The pleasure is mine,” she replied.

He laughed. He got a kick out of being polite.

They shook hands, then went inside to the round table. She was wearing a dark blue shirt, almost black, with little white stars on it. She looked like nighttime.

“So what’s new?” she asked.

He opened his mouth, but nothing came out. He didn’t know why, but for some reason he didn’t want to tell her. “What’s new with you?” he asked.

“With me?” asked Carla. “Nobody’s ever asked me that before.”

“You’re always asking me what’s new,” he said. “Why can’t I ask you?”

“You can!” she replied. “You can ask me anything you want. Let me see. What’s new? I bought a new shower curtain yesterday. But that doesn’t sound like very interesting news, does it?”

“What color?”
“Oh, sort of beige, I don’t know, it doesn’t really have a color.”

“That’s a good color,” said Bradley. “It sounds beautiful.”

“It’s okay,” said Carla.

“What happened to your old shower curtain?” he asked.

“It started getting a little rotten,” said Carla.

“Was it also beige?”

“Um, no,” said Carla. “I think it was yellow when it was new, but it was sort of a greenish brown when – ”

“Colleen invited me to her birthday party!” he blurted. Then it all came pouring out of him.

“Jeff’s invited too. We’ll be the only boys. Everyone else will be girls. Jeff and I are friends now. The other guys like me too. We play basketball together. At first I was afraid to shoot the ball, but then everybody said, ‘Shoot, Bradley, shoot,’ so I shot and made it! Everyone was amazed. So was I. I still miss a lot more than I make, but I’m getting better. Everyone says so. My father taught me how to dribble. He’s going to put a basket over the garage. At first they wanted to beat me up, but I said, ‘Hello, Jeff,’ and he said, ‘Hello, Bradley,’ and then Andy asked me if I wanted to play basketball. Then Colleen asked me to her birthday party and I said, ‘Yes,’ and she said, ‘Good.’ She would have asked me sooner except she just found out when she was born.”

Fortunately, Carla had heard most of it already, otherwise she wouldn’t have understood a thing he said.

“It’s all because of you,” said Bradley.

“You did it, Bradley, not me.”

“It was your magic book!”

“My book? What’s that got to do with – Bradley, what’s wrong?”
He was crying. One second he was beaming about her magic book, and the next he was sobbing and shaking all over.

“Bradley?”

He covered his face with his hands. Tears spilled out of his eyes.

“What is it?” asked Carla. “What happened?”

He shook his head.

Carla rose from the table, got a box of tissues, and placed it in front of him.

He pulled out a tissue, but didn’t use it. “I’ve never been to a birthday party,” he blubbered. Then he hiccupped. “Not a real one, where other kids are there.” He hiccupped again, then blew his nose. “A long time ago, when I was in the third grade I went to one, but then they made me go home because I sat on the cake.”

“Well, you’re a lot smarter now than you were when you were in the third grade,” said Carla.

“But I don’t remember what to do!” Bradley whined. “Do I have to bring my own chair?”

“Why would you have to bring your own chair?”

“For musical chairs. That’s why I sat on the cake. I got mad because there was no place else to sit.” He sniffled. “Will there be ice cream?”

“Don’t you like ice cream?”

“What if they don’t have enough for me? What if they only have enough for everybody else? And what about pin the tail on the donkey?”

“You don’t have to bring your own donkey,” said Carla.

He laughed through his tears. “But what if I stick it in a bad place?”

“You want to know what I think?” asked Carla. “I think you’re a little overwhelmed by all that has happened to you.
It’s scared you. You think you’re Cinderella.”

“Cinderella?” he repeated, and laughed again.

“You’re Cinderella and you’ve just been invited to the ball and now you’re afraid that right in the middle of Colleen’s birthday party, everything will suddenly turn into a pumpkin!”

He wiped his eyes on his tissue.

“You’re afraid all the good things that happened will suddenly disappear. You’re afraid everyone will suddenly stop liking you. But this isn’t a fairy tale, Bradley. Your friends like you for who you are. My book wasn’t magic. The magic is in you.”

“Do I have to bring her a present?” he asked.

“You don’t have to do anything,” said Carla. “But it’s a nice thing to do, don’t you think? Colleen invited you to her birthday party because she likes you, and you give her a present because you like her and because you want to help celebrate her birthday.”

“What should I get her? Should I get her a doll? Is that what girls like?”

“I don’t know. Everyone likes different things. Give her something you like. If you like it, then she probably will too. Give her a gift from the heart.”

“How about a shower curtain?” he asked.

“If it comes from the heart,” said Carla.

He smiled.

When it was time for him to return to class, Carla said, “I enjoyed our visit very much. Thank you for sharing so much with me.”

“The pleasure was mine,” he replied. He had been waiting to say that.
The meeting between Carla Davis and the Concerned Parents Organization was held after school in room 8, a second-grade classroom.

Carla sat in a chair that was too small for her and faced the parents. She crossed her ankles and folded her hands on her lap. The five members of the school board sat behind her. The principal sat next to her, at the teacher’s desk.

Bradley’s mother wasn’t there. She was out with Bradley, shopping for Colleen’s birthday present. Since she didn’t have any complaints, she didn’t come to the meeting. The only parents who came were those who had complaints.

“I’d like to know what we need a counselor for?” asked a father. “Kids have enough counseling. What they need is more discipline. If they’re bad, they should be punished!”

The other parents clapped their hands.

“We need to get back to basics!” said a woman. “Reading, writing, and arithmetic. And, of course, computers.”

Her husband had a chart that showed that if the counselor was fired, there would be enough money to put a computer in every classroom.

Everyone got very excited about that idea. They all loved computers.

“No one is being fired,” said the principal. “The purpose of this meeting is to give you a chance to ask Miss Davis questions.”

“She told my son it was good to fail!” shouted a woman standing under a poster of an octopus. “She told him grades didn’t matter.”
“I never said it was good to fail,” Carla calmly replied. “I simply tried to help him relax. Children learn better when they’re not under pressure. They do better when they can enjoy school.”

“My son doesn’t go to school to have a good time,” said the woman. “He has to get good grades so he can get into a good college!”

The principal reminded the parents that Miss Davis wouldn’t see any of their children without their permission.

“But why should our tax dollars pay for her to counsel other people’s children?” one of the mothers complained.

Several other parents agreed.

A woman with red hair stood up. “My daughter came home with one of those forms for us to sign, and we refused to sign it. We didn’t want her seeing the counselor. We try to give her all the counseling she needs at home. But then we found out the counselor’s been talking to her anyway.”

“What’s your daughter’s name?” asked the principal.

“Colleen Verigold.”

Carla admitted that she had seen Colleen without her parents’ permission. “Colleen came into my office very upset and said she had to talk to me. She said it was an emergency.”

“What kind of emergency?” asked the school board president.

“It was something very personal,” said Carla.

“But what was it?” asked the school board president.

“I’m sorry,” said Carla. “I never repeat anything a child tells me.” She knew Colleen wouldn’t want everybody to know she had gone into the boys’ bathroom.

“You’re not supposed to see a child without her parents’ permission,” said the school board president. “Now if it was an emergency, then you might have been justified. But we have to know the nature of the emergency.”
“I’m sorry,” said Carla.

“You can tell me,” said Mrs. Verigold. “I’m her mother. If there was an emergency, don’t you think I should know about it?”

“Ask Colleen. If she wants to tell you, she will. I can’t break my promise to her.”

“But Colleen’s just a child,” said a member of the school board. “You don’t have to keep promises to children.”

“I do,” said Carla.

“Her’s been trying to make her change religions,” said Colleen’s mother. “Colleen came home from school and announced she didn’t want to be Catholic anymore. She wants to be a Zen monk!”

Carla laughed, though she knew that was a mistake. She tried to explain about saying hello back to someone who says hello to you, but nobody seemed to understand what that had to do with being a Zen monk.

“You’re not allowed to teach religion in public school,” said the president of the school board. “And you weren’t even supposed to talk to her child in the first place.” He apologized to Colleen’s mother and assured her it wouldn’t happen again.

A woman in the front row raised her hand. “I never had a counselor when I went to school,” she said. “I don’t understand what they do, exactly.”

“Why don’t you explain to the parents what you do and how you help different children?” the principal suggested.

“ Mostly, I just talk with them,” said Carla. “I listen to their problems, but I never tell them what to do. I try to help them to learn to think for themselves.”

“But isn’t that what school is for?” asked the woman. “To tell kids what to think?”

“I believe it’s more important to teach them how to think, instead of what to think,” said Carla.
“But if they do something bad, don’t you tell them it’s wrong?” asked the man sitting next to her.

“No,” said Carla. “I think it’s much better if they figure that out for themselves.”

“What if there was a boy who bit his teacher?” asked a father.

“What?” Carla exclaimed.

“Wouldn’t you tell him not to bite her?” he asked.

“No, I’d talk to him about it and try to find out why he bit her, but – ”

“What if he keeps on biting her?” asked the man. “What if every day he sneaks up behind her and bites her on her butt? Then what would you do?”

“This is getting ridiculous,” said Carla.

“Tell him what you’d do,” said the principal.

Carla sighed. “I’d try to help the boy understand the reason he wants to bite his teacher, and then help him reach the conclusion that he shouldn’t do it.”

“How long would that take?” asked a woman.

“I don’t know.”

“A month?”

“Possibly.”

“And meanwhile he keeps biting his teacher!” said the first man. “She could get seriously hurt!”

“She could die,” said another man. “How would you feel then?”

“What if the kid had rabies?” someone else shouted. “Don’t you think he should get a rabies shot?”

“I bet you’d feel differently if he bit you on your butt!” someone called from the back of the room.

Everyone began talking at once.
“What if he bit you?”

“You’d punish him then, wouldn’t you?”

“Then you wouldn’t wait for him to think for himself, would you? Not if he bit you!”

“What if he bit you?”

Carla uncrossed her ankles, then crossed them the other way. As she looked at the angry group of parents, she had the horrible feeling that they all wanted to bite her butt.
Bradley Chalkers
Homework
Book Report
My Parents Didn’t
Steal an Elephant
By Uriah C. Lasso
Mrs. Ebbel’s class
Room 12
Red Hill School
Last seat, last row
Next to Jeff

My Parents Didn’t Steal an Elephant

by
Uriah C. Lasso

by
Bradley Chalkers

My Parents Didn’t Steal an Elephant was a very funny and crazy book by Uriah C. Lasso, a funny author to write such a book. It is a story told by a kid. The kid’s parents are in jail because they stole an elephant, except they are innocent. Hey! I just realized something. You know what? You never know the kid’s name! I just realized that. You know what else too? You don’t know if the kid is a boy or a girl! I just realized that right now as I
was writing this book report because I didn’t know whether to write he or she. I told you it was crazy!

The kid lives with his aunt and uncle. They’re crazy too. They put wallpaper up in the garage for no reason. I told you they were crazy.

Ace is crazy too. He’s the lawyer for the kid’s parents. He makes the kid practice crying for an hour every day so the kid will be able to cry good in court. Only when the kid finally gets to court, the kid doesn’t cry. The kid laughs!

Then everybody else laughs too. Then the kid’s parents get to go home because they’re innocent.

Except, do you want to know something? I’m not so sure! I mean, if they really were really innocent, then who ate all the peanuts?

I told you it was crazy. The end.

The End

“Absolutely wonderful!” said Carla.

“Is it good?” asked Bradley.

“You captured the very essence of the book.”

He smiled even though he didn’t know what essence meant.

They were sitting around the round table. It was Thursday before school. Bradley had to turn in his book report to Mrs. Ebbel, but he wanted Carla to see it first, just in case he ripped it up.

Carla was wearing a fluffy pink sweater. “I always wondered what happened to the peanuts too,” she said.

“Me too,” said Bradley. “And they could have hid the elephant in the garage. That’s why they put wallpaper there. To cover up the fingerprints!”

“Do elephants have fingerprints?” asked Carla.
“Maybe they have trunk prints.” He laughed. “Well, I have to go to Mrs. Ebbel’s class. Here’s your book back. Thank you. I didn’t write on it or spill food or anything.”

“I’d like for you to keep it,” said Carla. “It’s my present to you.”

“But I thought it was one of your favorite books?”

“It is. That’s why I want to give it to you. If I didn’t like it, then it wouldn’t be much of a present, would it?”

He smiled. “I wish I had a present to give you,” he said. “You already gave me one.”

“I did? What was it?”

“The book report.”

The smile left his face.

“What’s the matter?”

“Well, I’m supposed to give it to Mrs. Ebbel, but…that’s okay! You can have it. It wouldn’t be much of a present if I didn’t want it too.”

Carla laughed and shook her head. “That’s very sweet, Bradley, but that’s not what I meant. I want you to give it to Mrs. Ebbel. It just makes me very happy that you did such a wonderful job. That’s the present you gave me.”

“Really?”

“Really,” said Carla. “It was the best present I could have gotten.”

He thought that was great. He was able to give it to Carla and still give it to Mrs. Ebbel. “What’s wrong?”

Carla wiped her eyes. The corners of her mouth trembled.

“Are you crying?” he asked.

“Bradley, I have something I have to tell you,” she said. “I hope you can listen to what I have to say without feeling
He suddenly felt very scared and upset.

“Tomorrow will be my last day here at Red Hill School.”

“Huh?”

“That’s why I’m so glad you’ve written such a wonderful book report. I know you can continue to do good work without me. I’m very proud of you.”

“You’re leaving?”

She nodded. “I’ve been transferred. I’ll be teaching kindergarten at Willow Bend School. But I want to thank you, Bradley. You’ve made my short time here very special. I’m so glad we got to know each other.”

“You’re leaving?”

“We can still see each other,” she said. “Saturday, I’m –”

He shook his head. “No, you can’t go. It’s not fair.”

“I have to.”

He couldn’t believe it. “What if I don’t do my homework? Then you’ll have to stay and make me want to do it again.”

She smiled warmly at him. Her blue eyes glistened. “You’re on your own now, Bradley. I know you’ll do wonderfully!”

“No! It’s not fair!” He stood up. “You tricked me!”

Carla stood too. She walked around the table toward him.

“I hate you!” he shouted in her face.

“I know you don’t mean that.”

“Yes, I do. I hate your stupid book, too!” He picked up My Parents Didn’t Steal an Elephant by Uriah C. Lasso and
threw it at her. Then he picked up his book report.

“Bradley, please –”

He ripped it in half. He stretched his mouth so wide it was hard to tell whether it was a smile or a frown.

He tore his book report again and dropped the pieces on the floor. “I hate you!” he shouted, then ran out of her office.

He ran into the boys’ bathroom. He leaned over the sink and cried. His face throbbed as he watched the water wash down the drain.

There was a knock on the bathroom door. “Bradley?” said Carla. “Are you all right?”

“Go away!” he yelled. “I hate you!”

The door slowly opened and she stepped inside.

“You’re not allowed in here,” he said.

“I think it’s important that we talk,” said Carla. “That’s how friends handle their problems, by talking about them. That’s why we’ve become such good friends, because we’ve learned to talk to each other.”

“I’m not your friend. Why would I want to be friends with you? I hate you!”

“I like you, Bradley. I can like you, can’t I? You don’t have to like me.”

“I’m not going to Colleen’s birthday party,” he said. “And I don’t like Jeff, either, and I’m never going to do my homework, ever, and I’m going to fail all my tests.”

“Do you want to know what I think? I think you’re worried that now that I’m leaving, everything will turn bad again. You think that Jeff won’t like you anymore and Colleen won’t want you to come to her party, and Mrs. Ebbel will give you bad grades no matter how hard you try.”

“This is the boys’ bathroom!”
“But it wasn’t me who magically changed your life, Bradley,” she said. “It was you. You’re not Cinderella, and I’m not Prince Charming.”

“You’re not allowed in here,” he said coldly.

“Saturday, I’m going to need someone to help me move all my things out of the office,” she said. “I would appreciate it very much if you would come and help me. Then afterward, we could have lunch together. We can go to a restaurant, just the two of us.”

He wanted to go to her, to hug her in her soft pink sweater, but he couldn’t. He felt like his insides were being ripped apart.

“It will be lots of fun,” said Carla. “And it would be a great help to me.”

“I have to use the toilet.”

“Maybe I’ll see you on Saturday,” said Carla. “I would like that very much.” She turned and walked out the door.

Bradley stayed in the bathroom until the bell rang, then he went home, sick.
Ronnie hopped along, singing, “doo de-doo de-doo de-doo.”

All the other animals were gathered together.

“What are you doing?” asked Ronnie.

“We’re talking,” said the lion.

“And you can’t listen,” said the kangaroo.

“Oh, okay,” said Ronnie. She waited for the other animals to finish talking.

The other animals finished talking.

“We finished talking,” the lion told Ronnie. “We took a vote. We don’t like you anymore.”

Ronnie hopped away. Suddenly, she fell into quicksand!

“Help!” she cried. “Bartholomew, save me!”

“No, I won’t,” said Bartholomew. “And I’m not going to marry you either.”

Ronnie sank into the quicksand and died.
Bradley’s mother took his temperature and told him he was normal.

“I am not!” he argued.

“He’s not normal,” Claudia agreed. “He’s bizarre.”

Bradley felt as if his stomach were tied in a knot. Every time he thought about Carla, he felt the knot pull tighter.

“I hate her! I hate her!” he repeated as he slowly walked to school. When he said he hated her, the knot in his stomach loosened just a little bit.

He sat at his desk in the back of Mrs. Ebbel’s room – last seat, last row.

“Hi, Bradley,” said Jeff, sitting down next to him. “Where were you yesterday? Were you sick?”

He didn’t answer. Jeff wasn’t his friend. He didn’t have any friends.

“Bradley!” called Mrs. Ebbel. “Will you come here, please?”

He dragged his feet to her desk. “I was sick yesterday,” he told her. “Call my mother if you don’t believe me.”

Mrs. Ebbel waved that away. “I just wanted to tell you how much I enjoyed your book report,” she said. “It made me want to read the book.”

“Huh?”

“Miss Davis gave it to me yesterday,” Mrs. Ebbel told him. “She explained how she accidentally ripped it.”
He stared at her, amazed, then noticed his book report, taped together, lying on Mrs. Ebbel’s desk. At the very top, in red ink, was the word *Excellent!*

“I gave you a gold star,” said Mrs. Ebbel.

He picked up his book report and ran back to his desk.

There it was – next to the name “Bradley Chalkers” – a gold star! He slowly sat down as he stared at it. It seemed to shine brighter than all the other stars.

The knot in his stomach jerked tight and he had to look away. The star reminded him of Carla.

*She’s such a liar,* he thought. *She said she accidentally tore it up when I was the one who did it. I hate her.* He shoved his book report in the back of his desk.

The knot loosened.

He walked all recess. The other boys called to him from the basketball court, but he pretended not to hear them. He just kept walking.

*Okay, he decided. I’ll go see her at lunch. I’ll just say good-bye to her, that’s all.*

“Everyone was looking for you to play basketball,” Jeff said when he returned to class. “I told ’em you were still sick from yesterday.”

“I’m not sick,” said Bradley. “I’m normal.”

When the bell rang for lunch, he walked to Mrs. Ebbel’s desk to ask for the hall pass.

“Yes, Bradley?” she said.

He couldn’t talk. The knot in his stomach was so tight it choked off his vocal cords.

He stuck his hands in his pockets and walked outside. He sat in a far corner of the playground. Twice he thought he saw Carla. The first time it was a third-grade girl. The second
time it was a tree. His stomach was too knotted up to eat anything.

“I saw Carla,” Jeff told him after lunch. “I went to her office to say good-bye. She said she’d like to see you. She said she’d wait in her office after school for you in case you wanted to talk to her. She asked me to tell you that.”

Bradley closed his eyes until the knot loosened.

“Don’t you even want to say good-bye to her?” Jeff asked.

He shook his head.

He could picture her waiting in her office for him. He’d walk in and she’d say, “Hello, Bradley. It’s a pleasure to see you today. I appreciate your coming to see me.” She might even kiss him again.

When the final bell rang, he walked directly home. The knot inside him tightened with every step he took. *I hate her! I hate her! I hate her! I hate her!*
“Let’s go, Bradley!” his mother said on Saturday morning as she entered his room. “We’re off to a real barber shop!” She said it as if a barber shop was the most wonderful place in the world.

In the past, she had always cut Bradley’s hair herself. But this time he had asked to go to a “real” barber shop. That was earlier in the week, when they were out buying the birthday present for Colleen. “You make my head look like a chili bowl,” he had complained.

Now he sadly looked up at his mother and said, “I don’t want to get my hair cut.”

“You want to look nice for Colleen’s birthday party tomorrow, don’t you?” she asked. “You don’t want to go looking like a punk rocker!”

“I’m not going to her birthday party!” he snapped. “I hate her!”

Bradley’s mother left him alone.

He heard Carla’s voice in his mind. Saturday, I’m going to need someone to help me move all my things out of the office. I would appreciate it very much if you would come and help me.

The knot in his stomach tightened.

“No. I hate you!” he said out loud.

His father knocked, then came into his room. “Bradley, I think we need to talk,” he said, “man to man.”

Bradley stood up.
“Why don’t you tell me what’s bothering you?” asked his father. “Maybe I can help.”

Bradley didn’t want any help.

“I was very sorry to hear that your counselor had been transferred to another school,” said his father. “I know how much you liked her. At first I didn’t like the idea of you seeing a counselor, but – ”

“I have to get my hair cut,” said Bradley. “Mom said so.” He walked out of his room, leaving his father behind him.

His mother drove him to the barber shop.

Carla’s voice spoke in his mind. *We could have lunch together. We can go to a restaurant.*

The knot pulled tighter.

*Just the two of us.*

And tighter.

*It will be lots of fun,* Carla said. *And it would be a great help to me.*

And tighter.

*Maybe I’ll see you on Saturday,* said Carla. *I would like that very much.*

And tighter.

*You’re not Cinderella, and I’m not Prince Charming.*

And tighter.

*I like you, Bradley. I can like you, can’t I? You don’t have to like me.*

The knot pulled so tight, it broke. “Stop the car!” he shouted. “I have to go back!”

The car swerved. “Don’t ever do that again!” exclaimed his mother. “We could have had an accident.”

“I don’t believe in accidents.”
“I’m getting sick and tired of your nonsense, Bradley. What is your problem?”

“I can’t get my hair cut now. I have to go to school.”

“On Saturday?”

“I’m supposed to see my counselor. She is waiting to see me. Call the school if you don’t believe me.”

The car stopped in the parking lot in front of the barber shop. “We’re here!” his mother said sternly. “You’re getting your hair cut, now.”

He stepped out of the car and reluctantly followed his mother into the barber shop.

It smelled oily, like hair and hair oil and stale bubble gum all mixed together. All around him, mirrors reflected mirrors. The place was ugly and the mirrors reflected the ugliness, multiplying it a hundred times back and forth. They seemed to reflect the awful smell too.

He couldn’t believe he had asked his mother to take him to such a place. It was like some kind of horrible dungeon where kids went to be tortured. But worst of all, he had to wait his turn to be tortured. All the barber chairs were occupied.

He sat on a torn red couch.

“Do you want to read a comic book?” asked his mother.

“No thank you,” he answered quietly.

Finally, it was his turn. He climbed into a slippery, oily, vinyl barber chair. The barber tied a shiny apron tightly around his neck, nearly choking him to death.

The barber began by combing his hair. Bradley wondered why he had to comb it if he was going to cut it anyway.

At last, the barber picked up the scissors and began to cut. But he never cut off a big piece of hair all at once. Instead he kept snipping little bits of hair off of the same piece of hair, over and over again. The whole time, Bradley had to stare at
himself through the filmy mirror. He gritted his teeth and waited for it to be over.

The barber put down the scissors, but then he picked up the comb and started combing again.

*I knew he shouldn’t have combed it before,* Bradley thought. *Now he just has to do it again.*

The barber sprayed some kind of smelly junk on Bradley’s head, combed his hair one last time, then unhooked the apron around Bradley’s neck.

Bradley quickly hopped off the chair before the barber could change his mind.

But the barber wasn’t through. He made Bradley stand still while he ran a small vacuum cleaner across his neck. When he finished, he offered Bradley a piece of bubble gum.

“I hate gum,” said Bradley. He never used to hate gum. But after smelling it in the barber shop, he never wanted another piece again.

“You’ll be the most handsome boy at Colleen’s party,” his mother said as they walked outside.

“Can you drive me to school, please?” he asked.

She nodded.

Ten minutes later he jumped out of the car, ran up the steps in front of the school, and pulled on the double glass doors. They were locked. He pressed his face against the glass and looked inside. Mrs. Kemp, the janitor, was waxing the floors. He pounded on the door until she looked up.

Mrs. Kemp scowled at him as she opened the door. “What do you want, Chalkers?”

“I have to see Car – Miss Davis,” he said.

“Miss Davis is gone.”

He ducked under her arm which held open the door, and ran into the building.
“Chalkers!” she shouted after him. “I’ll call the police!”

He opened the door to Carla’s office and stepped inside. Except for the round table and chairs, the room was empty. But in his mind he heard Carla say, *Hello, Bradley. It’s a pleasure to see you today. I appreciate your coming to see me.*

Tears rolled down his face.

He noticed a large manila envelope lying on the table. He picked it up.

**BRADLEY CHALKERS** was written across it in big letters. Under that, in smaller letters, was the following:

> Mrs. Ebbel’s class Room 12 Good friend, Honest, Thoughtful, Caring, Polite, Whom I will never forget, And who I hope Will someday Forgive me Last seat, last row

“There you are!” said Mrs. Kemp as she came in after him. “If you don’t get out of here right now, I’m going to call the police.”

“Look!” he exclaimed, holding up the envelope. “She left this for me. See! We were friends. Carla and me. We were best friends.”

“You have ten seconds to leave this building,” said Mrs. Kemp. “One…two…”

He took the envelope and left.

He opened it on the playground, next to the monkey bars. Inside was the book *My Parents Didn’t Steal an Elephant*, by Uriah C. Lasso, and a letter.

**Dear Bradley,**

This book was a present from me to you. It was a gift from the heart, and that kind of gift, for better or worse, can never be returned.
I’m sorry for hurting you. I didn’t mean to. If it makes you feel any better, you hurt me, too, when you didn’t come see me Friday or Saturday. I kept hoping I’d see your happy face walk through the door.

I hope you didn’t mind that I gave your book report to Mrs. Ebbel. It was just too good to throw away. You can do such wonderful work. Now, if only you can learn how not to rip it up.

I hope you went to Colleen’s birthday party. If you did, I’m sure you enjoyed it. If you didn’t go, that’s all right too. There will be lots of other parties. You’re a very likable person. You’ll always be very special to me.

It was always a pleasure to see you. I appreciated your coming to see me. Thank you for sharing so much with me.

I love you,

Carla

Bradley’s father was leaning on his cane, on the front stoop, when Bradley came walking home. “I want to talk to you, Bradley,” he said sternly.

Bradley ran to him and hugged him, nearly knocking him over.
Bradley tried writing a letter to Carla. His father had suggested it. He crumpled up a piece of paper and threw it in his wastepaper basket. He didn’t know what to say to her. The words he wanted hadn’t been invented yet.

Ronnie hopped along, singing, “doo de-doo de-doo de-doo.”

The other animals were taking another vote.

“We took another vote,” the lion told Ronnie. “We like you the best.”

“I like all of you the best too,” said Ronnie.

Bartholomew walked up to her. “I love you, Ronnie,” he said. “Will you marry me?”

“Yes,” said Ronnie.

“And I saved you from the quicksand too,” said Bartholomew, “so you didn’t die.”

“That’s good,” said Ronnie. “I’m very glad to hear that.”
Colleen, wearing a new red dress, anxiously waited for her guests to arrive. Except for Lori and Melinda, she hadn’t told anybody that there would be boys at her party.

The doorbell rang.

Her heart jumped. She hoped it would be Jeff and also hoped it wouldn’t be. She composed herself and opened the door.

It was Judy and Betty. They each gave her a present. “Ooh, what is it?” Colleen asked as she took each gift, but of course they didn’t tell her.

“Who else is coming?” asked Judy as the three girls sat and waited in the living room.

Colleen counted on her fingers, naming her guests. “Well, there’s you two, and Lori and Melinda, Karen, Amie and Dena…” She paused, then said the last two names very quickly, “and Jeff and Bradley.”


Judy looked like she was about to faint.

“You didn’t say there were going to be boys at your party,” said Betty.

“Didn’t I?” Colleen asked innocently. “I thought I did.”

“I don’t think I’m allowed to go to a boy and girl party,” said Judy.

“Okay, but you already gave me my present,” said Colleen.
They decided to stay. When the bell rang again, all three girls screamed, but it was only Amie and Dena.

Amie and Dena were dressed exactly alike, right down to their shoes and socks. They were best friends and their parents often took them shopping together. They always bought the same clothes. Then, before a party, or even just before school sometimes, they’d call each other up and decide what to wear. Today it was a blue dress with white-and-yellow flowery things.

“Colleen invited boys!” Betty told them.

“Bradley Chalkers!” said Judy.

Amie and Dena looked at each other in horror. Colleen took their presents from them, before they could change their minds. Both presents were wrapped in the same purple-and-green paper.

Karen was the next to arrive. “Colleen invited boys!” everyone said to her as she stood in the doorway.

Her mouth dropped open.

“Bradley Chalkers,” said Betty.

“And the new kid,” said Amie. “Jeff Fishfood.”

Karen was very shy and quiet. If there were going to be boys at the party, she might not say one word all day.

The doorbell rang. Everyone except Karen screamed. She held a pillow in front of her face.

It was Lori and Melinda.

“Colleen invited boys!” everyone greeted them.

“Jeff Fishnose and Bradley Chalkers,” said Dena.

“So, we already knew that,” Lori said, as if it were no big deal to her.

“Oh, well, nobody else did,” said Judy.

The eight girls waited. They talked and laughed about how much Colleen would like her presents. They asked her
what there would be to eat and what games they would play. The one thing they didn’t talk about was boys, though it was the only thing on each of their minds.

When Colleen told Dena there would be a three-legged race, the room turned very quiet. Each girl wondered if she would have to run it with a boy.

Colleen planned to run the three-legged race with Jeff. It didn’t occur to her that if she was partners with Jeff, another girl would have to be partners with Bradley.

It was starting to get late. A new worry slowly crept into each girl’s head. What if the boys didn’t show up? It suddenly seemed that the party wouldn’t be any fun at all without boys. Where were they?

Colleen’s mother walked into the living room and counted heads. “Eight,” she said aloud. “Who’s missing?”

Nobody answered.

“Oh, the boys,” said Colleen’s mother. “Well, we can’t wait too much longer.”

Colleen looked like she was about to cry.

Where were they?
The doorbell rang at Bradley’s house.

Bradley, wearing a cone-shaped party hat, ran to the front door and flung it open. He had a wild look in his eyes.

“Hi,” said Jeff, holding Colleen’s present under his arm. “You ready?” He was wearing old, comfortable clothes. His blue jeans had a small hole above the knee.

“It’s wrapped!” Bradley exclaimed. “With a bow!”

“What?” uttered Jeff.

Bradley ran back to his parents’ bedroom. “It’s got to be wrapped!” he told his mother. “With a bow!”

She cut off a piece of tape and smiled at her son. “I’m wrapping it now.”

“Oh, okay, good!” He returned to the front door. “My mother’s wrapping it now,” he told Jeff.

He had been running around the house that way all morning as he desperately tried to get ready for the birthday party. He’d already changed his clothes six times. He didn’t know what he was supposed to wear. He didn’t know what he was supposed to do. He didn’t know what he didn’t know!

Claudia had given him the party hat to wear. She told him he wasn’t allowed to take it off.

“They wrapped my present at the store where I got it,” Jeff said.

Bradley hardly heard him. “Are you supposed to wear torn pants?” he asked.

“What?”
He ran into the kitchen. He took a sharp knife from the drawer next to the sink and cut a hole in his pants, just above the knee.

When he returned to the front door, Jeff was standing inside the house. Claudia was with him. “Is my hat on straight?” Bradley asked his sister.

She looked him over. “It’s hard to tell,” she explained, “because your head’s crooked.”

Mrs. Chalkers came down the hall holding Colleen’s present in front of her. “See, all wrapped,” she said. “Hello, you must be Jeff. I’m Bradley’s mother.”

“Hello, Mrs. Chalkers,” said Jeff.

“It doesn’t have a bow!” Bradley shouted.

“Oh, I couldn’t find any ribbon,” said his mother.

He stared at her in disbelief. “It needs a bow!” he wailed. He turned to Jeff. “Doesn’t it need a bow?”

“No.”

“Oh, okay,” he said happily. He took the present from his mother. She kissed him and told him to have fun.

He and Jeff started out the door.

“Oh, Bradley,” said his mother, “you ripped your pants.”

“I know.” He closed the door.

They headed up the sidewalk toward Colleen’s. She lived two blocks away.

“Do you want my bow?” Jeff asked. “I can take it off.”

Bradley nervously shook his head.

“Are you all right?” Jeff asked.

“Umukum,” said Bradley. He had tried to say “I’m okay,” but his mouth didn’t work.

“You’re acting kind of strange,” said Jeff, “even for you, I mean.”
Bradley sighed and stopped walking.

“What’s the matter?” Jeff asked.

Bradley trembled. He felt the same way as when he first tried to turn in his homework. “I don’t know what to do at a birthday party,” he said, shivering.

Jeff laughed.

Bradley sat down on the curb. “I haven’t been to one in three years!”

Jeff looked impatiently up the street, then sat down next to his best friend. “There’s nothing to worry about,” he said reassuringly. “Birthday parties are fun.”

“How many birthday parties have you been to?” Bradley asked.

Jeff shrugged. “A lot. What do you want to know?”

“Everything.”

“Okay,” said Jeff. “First take off that dumb hat!”

So, while the eight girls anxiously waited, Jeff was patiently trying to teach Bradley everything he knew about birthday parties.
Bradley watched Jeff poke his finger into the doorbell and heard it ring inside the house. Then there was a loud scream. A moment later Colleen opened the door.

“Hap-py birthd – ” he sang, but stopped when Jeff elbowed him in his side.

“This is for you,” Jeff said, handing Colleen his present.

“This is for you,” said Bradley as he did the same.

“Ooh, what is it?” she asked.

“It’s a – ” Bradley started, but Jeff elbowed him again, so he shut his mouth. They followed Colleen into the house.

“You’re not supposed to tell her what you got her,” Jeff whispered.

“But she asked.”

“She’s supposed to ask. But you’re not supposed to tell her. Don’t tell anyone.”

Bradley nodded like he understood, but of course he didn’t.

“Hello, Bradley,” said Melinda.

He looked to Jeff for help.

“Hello, Melinda,” said Jeff.

“Hello, Melinda,” said Bradley.

Colleen’s mother came in and led everyone out to the backyard. A picnic table had been set up on the patio with paper plates and cups. Bradley chose a seat and sat down.

“My, this boy must be hungry!” said Colleen’s mother.
The girls laughed.

Bradley looked around, puzzled. He was the only one sitting down. He quickly rose, bumping against the table. A paper cup fell onto the ground. As he bent down to pick it up, he knocked over his chair.

The girls were hysterical. Bradley looked around helplessly. Amie picked up the cup and Dena set the chair right.

“We don’t eat yet,” Jeff explained as Bradley made it safely away from the table. “First we have to play games.”

Bradley turned pale.

“Just do whatever I do,” said Jeff.

A large dog dashed out through the back door and jumped up on Bradley, putting his muddy paws on his clean shirt. Bradley nearly fell over.

“Chicken, get down!” scolded Colleen’s mother.

Chicken had wiry red hair and a square face. He got down, but stayed by Bradley’s side.

“Chicken’s usually afraid of everybody,” said Colleen.

Bradley patted his head, glad Chicken liked him.

Mrs. Verigold split the group into two teams for a relay race. She put Jeff and Bradley on separate teams because she said it wouldn’t be fair for the two boys to be together.

Bradley lined up with the other members of his team. He was in the middle. Amie and Betty were in front of him. Judy and Dena were behind him.

On the other team, Jeff was talking to Colleen. Bradley wondered if he should talk to one of the girls on his team, but he didn’t know what to say. Besides, they were all talking to each other. He petted Chicken.

“On your mark,” said Mrs. Verigold, “get set...go!”
Suddenly the race started and everyone on his team was screaming. “C’mon, Amie!”

“Go!”

“Run, Amie!”

“Faster!”

He watched Amie run and touch a tree at the end of the yard, then turn around and come back. She slapped Betty’s hand, then Betty ran toward the tree.

“Run, Betty!” everyone except Bradley shouted. “Slow down, Betty,” he whispered to himself, hoping his turn would never come.

He turned around. Judy was behind him, yelling to Betty. “Do you want to go next?” he asked her.

“Stick your hand out!” she hollered back.

He spun around and stuck his hand out just in time. Betty slapped it and he took off. He ran as hard as he could to the tree.

“Go, Bradley!” he heard someone yell. “C’mon, Bradley!” It made him want to run faster than he’d ever run before. Chicken barked at his side.

Melinda was running for the other team. She had started before him, but he beat her to the tree. He almost slipped and fell, but caught his balance and charged back toward his cheering teammates.

“C’mon, Bradley!” they all yelled.

He slapped Judy’s hand, then bent over to catch his breath. He turned and shouted louder than anyone, “Go, Judy! Run!” then, “C’mon, Dena!”

Dena crossed the finish line and everyone on his team jumped up and down.

“What happened?” he asked.

“We won!” said Betty.
He jumped up and down too.

“That means we each get two points,” said Judy.

That was something new. Jeff hadn’t told him anything about points.

Judy explained it to him. “Everybody on the winning team gets two points, and everybody on the losing team gets one point.”

Betty interrupted. “It would come out the same if they just gave one point to the winners and nothing to the losers,” she said, “but this way the losers don’t feel as bad.”

“I’m telling him!” said Judy. “After each race we trade teams, and then at the end of all the races, Colleen’s mother counts up the points and the girl with the most points gets first pick from the basket of prizes. Then the girl with the second most gets second pick, and so on.”

“Colleen’s mother has a chart with everyone’s name on it to keep track of the points,” explained Betty.

“I’m telling him!” said Judy. “Colleen’s mother has a chart.”

Bradley laughed with delight. “Are all birthday parties this much fun?” he asked.

Judy and Betty looked at each other. The only thing that made this party special was the boys, but they couldn’t tell that to Bradley.

“Haven’t you ever been to a birthday party before?” asked Betty.

“Not for a long time. I got kicked out of the last one I went to.”

“Well, if you have any questions, just ask me,” said Betty.

“Or me,” said Judy.
“I’ve been to more birthday parties than you,” said Betty.

“You have not!” said Judy. “She hasn’t.”

“What about Holly’s birthday party?” asked Betty. “You didn’t go to that one.”

“That’s because we were on vacation,” said Judy.

“So, you still didn’t go.”

They had to switch teams for the next relay race. This time Bradley was with Betty, Amie, Karen, and Melinda. For this race, everyone had to hop on one foot.

“On one foot!” Bradley exclaimed.

He rooted loudly for everyone on his team, and when it was his turn, he heard them all cheer for him. His team won again.

“You’re an excellent hopper, Melinda,” he said after the race. “You hopped twice as far as Colleen on each hop.”

Melinda beamed. “You’re a good hopper too,” she said.

Colleen’s mother marked the points on the chart, and they switched teams for the next race. This time they had to hop on both feet.

“On both feet!” Bradley exclaimed.

They continued changing teams for each new race. He and Jeff were never allowed on the same team, and since Colleen always made sure that she was on Jeff’s team, Bradley was never with her either.

He was glad about that. He felt comfortable with everybody else, but he was still a little scared of Colleen. He was afraid she might ask him another question he wasn’t supposed to answer.

Lori was on his team for the backward race. She stood behind him in line and screamed in his ear the whole time. He loved it. He had to shout twice as loud just to hear himself.
His ear was still ringing when Mrs. Verigold announced that the next race would be a somersault race.

The smile left his face. He didn’t know how to do a somersault! He looked anxiously at Chicken.

But as it turned out, nobody on his team could do a somersault! It was hilarious. Everyone was laughing. When it was his turn, he rolled and flopped in every direction except the way he was supposed to go. And every time he hit the ground, Chicken tried to lick his face. Perhaps he would have done better if he could have stopped laughing.

Everybody on the other team was good at somersaults. The teams just worked out that way. Karen was the best.

“You should be in the Olympics!” he told her after the race.

She smiled and blushed.

Bradley smiled too. Even though his team lost, he thought it had been the most fun race of the day.

Plus, when the girls somersaulted in their party dresses, he could see their underwear.
Colleen’s mother told everyone to find a partner for the three-legged race. Jeff and Colleen looked nervously at each other.

Judy and Betty paired up. They stood side by side with their arms around each other’s shoulders as Mrs. Verigold tied their inside legs together.

Lori and Melinda became another team. Bradley thought they looked funny since Melinda was almost twice Lori’s size.

Amie and Dena looked even funnier. Since they were both dressed the same, they looked like a two-headed monster. Except, of course, he didn’t believe in monsters.

Karen suddenly realized what was happening. If Jeff and Colleen became partners, it meant she’d have to be partners with Bradley!

“So, um,” Jeff said to Colleen. “Who’s your partner?”

“No one, yet,” said Colleen. “Who’s yours?”

“No one, yet.”

Colleen’s mother stepped in and paired up the final two teams. She didn’t think it would be proper for a boy and a girl to have their legs tied together, so she made Jeff and Bradley one team, and Colleen and Karen the other.

Bradley was glad that he and Jeff were finally on the same team. Colleen and Jeff were happy with the teams too. As much as they liked each other, they weren’t quite ready to put their arms around each other and tie their legs together. Karen was the only one who was disappointed. She thought it would have been exciting to have been partners with Bradley.
The five teams lined up. It wasn’t a relay race. Each team would go at the same time. They had to run past the tree to the fence, then back.

“Don’t try to run too fast,” Jeff cautioned. “The most important thing is that we keep together so we don’t fall down.”

Bradley nodded.

“On your mark,” said Mrs. Verigold. “Get set…go!”

They took two steps, then tumbled to the ground.

As they tried to get up, they kept pulling each other back down. At last they stood up together and started after the others.

“Inside, outside, inside, outside…” Jeff directed as they moved their legs in unison.

The other teams took a long time turning around at the fence. When Jeff and Bradley reached the fence, they simply fell down again and stood up facing the other direction. It was quicker that way.

Amie and Dena were just ahead of them. Amie tried to go to the left of the tree as Dena tried to go to the right of it. They smashed into it.

“Inside, outside, inside, outside…” said Jeff as he and Bradley charged around them.

Karen and Colleen were in the lead when they suddenly stumbled and fell on their faces. Judy and Betty tumbled over them.

Lori and Melinda had to stop and turn to avoid the pile.

Jeff and Bradley charged past, now in first place.

“Inside, outside, inside, outside…” called Jeff, but they must have missed a beat somewhere because when he said, “Inside,” they moved their outside feet, and when he said, “Outside,” they moved their inside feet.
“Hey, Bradley, you’re going the wrong way!” yelled Lori.

“Whoa, ahhh blbph!”

Amie and Dena dived across the finish line in first place, just ahead of Lori and Melinda. Jeff and Bradley crawled across in third. Judy, Betty, Karen, and Colleen remained tangled together on the grass.

After everyone got untied, they gathered on the grass next to the patio. “Now what?” Bradley asked nobody in particular.

“Colleen’s mother is adding up the points,” said Betty.

“Then we’ll get to pick our prizes,” said Judy.

“He asked me!” said Betty.

Everyone hushed as Mrs. Verigold prepared to announce the winner. “The winner is…” – she paused suspensefully – “…Bradley!”

He was shocked. He had been on the winning team every time except for the three-legged race and the somersault race, but he had been having too much fun to notice.

Everyone clapped their hands as he walked to the front. Mrs. Verigold gave him a blue ribbon that said First Place on it. No one had told him about the ribbon. Then he got to pick a prize.

He looked through the basket. There were lots of good things from which to choose: dolls, makeup, perfume, earrings, hair ornaments. He chose a harmonica.

Melinda came in second. Then Amie, Judy, Dena, Karen, Lori, and Betty, and Jeff was last.

Jeff knew he’d be last, since he was never on Bradley’s team. The only race he won was the somersault race. Actually, he had tied for last with Colleen, but Colleen didn’t get a prize because she’d be getting all her presents later.
Jeff took the only prize left in the basket, a doll’s dress. “Thank you,” he said politely.

“Now what?” Bradley asked.

“We have ice cream and cake,” said Melinda.

“Oh boy,” said Bradley.

Melinda laughed.

They sat at the picnic table. Colleen sat at the head of the table. Bradley sat between Jeff and Melinda. Judy and Betty sat across from him.

“Mrs. Verigold’s going to bring in the cake now,” said Judy.

“With candles,” said Betty.

“I’m telling him!” said Judy. “With candles.”

Mrs. Verigold brought in the cake and suddenly everyone started singing. Bradley was caught by surprise. He didn’t have time to remember the words, though he tried. He sang:

\[
\begin{align*}
Hap-py birth-day dear Col – to you. \\
Hap-py birth-day to you. \\
Hap-py birth-day to y – Dear Colleen, \\
Hap-py birth-day dea – to you, \\
Hap-py birth-day to –”
\end{align*}
\]

He suddenly realized he was the only one still singing.

Everyone laughed.

“It’s not his fault,” said Judy. “This is his first birthday party in a long time.”

“There are ten candles because she’s ten years old,” explained Betty.

“Oh, I get it!” said Bradley.
Lori laughed.

Colleen blew them all out.

“That means her wish will come true,” explained Melinda.

“But she can’t tell you what she wished for, otherwise it won’t come true,” Lori explained.

Bradley carefully ate his cake and ice cream, without making a mess. Then everyone went into the living room, where Colleen opened her presents.

“Open mine!”

“Mine first,” they urged. “That one’s mine!”

“Open mine, Colleen,” said Bradley.

After each present was opened, everyone said, “How neat,” and “Ooh,” and “I wish I had one of those.”

Bradley said those things too, and he meant what he said, although most of the gifts were things he never would have wanted.

Colleen picked up the next present.

“That’s mine!” he shouted.

Colleen read the card. On the front of the card there was a picture of a baseball player swinging a baseball bat. It said, “Here’s hoping your birthday is…” On the inside of the card it showed the bat smacking a ball and it said, “a big hit!” Under that it said, “Happy Birthday,” and it was signed, Love, Bradley.


Bradley’s heart sank as he realized he had made a terrible mistake.

“Bradley’s in love with Colleen!” said Dena.

“Oooh, Bradley,” said Judy.
“When are you getting married?” teased Lori.

“Shut up!” Karen shouted.

Everyone stopped talking and looked at her very surprised.

“Big deal!” said Karen. “You’re all so immature.”

Colleen tore off the wrapping paper and looked at Bradley’s gift. Her mouth dropped open. She showed it to everyone.

“Wow!” said Lori.

“Let me see!” said Amie.

It was a replica of the human heart. They could see all the blood vessels, the aorta, and all the capillaries. The heart valves opened and shut. It could be taken apart and put back together again.

“How neat!” said Melinda.

“I wish I had one of those,” said Betty.

Bradley smiled proudly. He felt happier about the fact that Colleen liked his present than about coming in first place. But, of course, he knew all along she’d like it. Carla had told him to give her a gift from the heart.

Colleen opened the rest of the presents, then everyone went home.

Jeff and Bradley left together. It was still light outside, although the street lights had come on.

“So?” asked Jeff.

“Wasn’t that fun!” Bradley exclaimed. “It was the most, at first when I gave Colleen her present and she asked me what it was, I almost told her! And then when I was the only one sitting at the table, ‘My this boy must be hungry,’ but then the races started and everyone got points, even the losers. Only next time I won’t sign it love. Karen’s a good somersaulter.
Chicken’s a funny name for a dog. Maybe if they get a chicken, they’ll name it Dog!”

He blew into his harmonica.

The doll’s dress dangled from Jeff’s hand.
Dear Carla,

Hi. What color shirt are you wearing today? I’m sorry I yelled at you. Guess what? I got a hundred percent on my arithmetic test. Can you believe it? And I didn’t rip it up! I would have sent it to you, but I can’t because it’s hanging on a wall in Mrs. Ebbel’s class. Do you like teaching kindergarten? I bet you’re a good teacher. Ask them to draw pictures for you. You should teach them how to do somersaults, too. Thanks for giving me back the book which you already gave me. I’m sending you a present too. It’s a gift from the heart, so you can’t return it.

Love,

Yours truly,

Love,

Bradley

P.S. Her name is Ronnie.

Bradley folded the letter and put it in the envelope. He wrote Carla’s name on the outside and addressed it to Willow Bend School.

Ronnie gave Bartholomew a big hug and kiss.

“Well, good-bye everybody,” she said.

“Good-bye, Ronnie,” said everybody.

“I’ll miss you,” said Bartholomew.
Bradley placed the little red rabbit with the broken ear inside the envelope.

He stared out his window for a moment, then looked back down at the bulge in the envelope. He frowned. But it was an unusual frown. In fact, it might have been a smile.
There's a Boy in the Girl's Bathroom

Louis Sachar
1. Why was Bradley not a good basketball player at the start?

2. Who walked into the boys’ toilets?

3. What Zen rule did Carla describe?

4. Who else will Colleen invite to the party, do you think? Explain your answer.

5. Do you think schools in Ireland should have counsellors? Give a reason for your answer.
1. What are Colleen, Melinda and Lori fighting about at recess?

2. How does Bradley's father plan to help Bradley with basketball?

3. What news does Bradley have for Carla?

4. Why does Bradley cry in Carla’s office?

5. Why, do you think, is Bradley’s behaviour changed so much?

6. Have you ever been to a birthday party? Describe what types of things happen at birthday parties.

7. What advice would you give Bradley about parties? Write down at least two pieces of advice.
1. Describe the atmosphere in the Concerned Parents Organisation meeting.

2. What would the parents prefer to have than the counsellor?

3. How do you think Carla feels in the meeting? What thoughts might be going through her head?

4. Do you think Carla could have explained her job better? Explain your answer.

5. Imagine you were Bradley Chalkers’ parents. What would you say to the other parents about Carla’s effect on Bradley?
Chapters 38, 39 & 40

1. What do you think the phrase ‘captured the essence of the book’ means?

2. What news does Carla have for Bradley?

3. What is Bradley’s reaction to Carla’s news?

4. How did you feel when Bradley was given a gold star?

5. Why does Bradley not say goodbye to Carla, do you think?

6. Do you think Carla will be a good kindergarten teacher? Why?/Why not?
1. Describe what happened at the barber shop.

2. Who does Bradley meet at the school?

3. What does Bradley find in Carla’s office?

4. Describe Bradley in this chapter.

5. How, do you think, Carla felt writing the letter to Bradley?

6. What effect do you think Carla’s letter will have on Bradley?

7. Imagine you were Bradley and Carla entered the office. What would you say to her?
1. Name the people who were invited to Colleen's party.

2. How do the girls react when Colleen mentioned that boys were coming to the party?

3. Do you think parties with boys and girls would be better than parties with just boys or girls at them? Give a reason for your answer.

4. Describe Bradley's mood when Jeff arrives.

5. Do you think you would be nervous if you were in Bradley's situation?
There’s a Boy in the Girls’ Bathroom: Comprehension Activity Sheet 26

Chapters 45, 46 & 47

1. In what different ways does Jeff help Bradley at the party?

2. What games do the children play at the party?

3. What does Bradley receive for earning the most points in the games?

4. What does Bradley get Colleen for her birthday?

5. Why, do you think, does Bradley choose that present for Colleen?

6. How do you think Carla will feel when she reads Bradley’s letter?

7. Why, do you think, does Bradley give Carla his toy animal, Ronnie the Rabbit?

8. If you were the author would you have made the ending different? Explain your answer.
Some of the following sentences are statements of fact. Some are statements of opinion. In the blank before each sentence, write the letter F if that sentence is a statement of fact. Write O if that sentence is a statement of opinion.

Example: ___O___ Bradley was a horrible basketball player.

______ 1. Bradley said “thank you” each time someone passed him the ball.

______ 2. Carla’s book gave Bradley good luck.

______ 3. Melinda gave both Bradley and Jeff black eyes.

______ 4. Colleen walked into the boys’ bathroom.

______ 5. You should always say “hello” back when someone says “hello” to you.

______ 6. Colleen invited Bradley to her birthday party.

______ 7. Bradley read aloud to his animals.

______ 8. Peanuts are delicious.

______ 9. Carla bought a new shower curtain.

______ 10. Beige is a beautiful color for a shower curtain.
Getting the Main Idea

Read each of the following paragraphs. Then read the four sentences below each paragraph. Choose the sentence that best states the main idea of the paragraph. Then neatly copy that sentence on the line provided.

a. Bradley passed the ball to the boys on the wrong team. He used two hands to dribble. He never even tried to shoot at the basket.

1. Bradley wanted the other team to win.
2. Bradley liked making baskets.
3. Bradley didn’t play basketball very well.
4. Bradley didn’t feel very well that day.

b. After the basketball game, the boys all told Bradley that he played well. They patted him on the back and gave him advice. Then they drank water and laughed together.

1. Bradley was a terrific basketball player.
2. Bradley and the boys were becoming friends.
3. The boys wanted to be mean to Bradley.
4. Everybody was thirsty.
Getting the Main Idea
Chapters 33-36

C. Colleen Verigold walked in on Jeff in the boys’ bathroom. Jeff thought that life was really weird. He walked to Carla’s office, even though he didn’t have a hall pass.

1. Jeff was trying to skip class.
2. Colleen and Jeff liked each other.
3. Jeff wanted to eat lunch with Carla.
4. Jeff needed someone to talk to.

D. Bradley told Carla that he was invited to Colleen’s birthday party. He started crying because he didn’t know how to act at a birthday party. He talked fast and asked Carla a bunch of questions.

1. Bradley was nervous about attending Colleen’s birthday party.
2. Bradley hated birthday parties.
4. Bradley and Jeff were going to a birthday party together.
Choosing Correct Meanings

The italicized word in each of the sentences below has several meanings. Some of the meanings are listed in the Glossary. Decide which meaning the word has in the sentence. Then write the number of your choice on the blank.

**Glossary**

back 1. at the rear  2. part of the body  3. into the past  4. to support  
5. to move backward  6. opposite of front
right 1. proper  2. opposite of left  3. privilege  4. directly
room 1. a part of the inside of a building  2. fitting occasion; chance  
3. occupy a room  4. sufficient space
face 1. to confront or deal with  2. to stand with the face toward  
3. front part of the head  4. exposed surface
turn 1. to go a different way  2. to change in nature  3. chance at something  
4. to move something

**Example:** ___3___ The parents felt that it was their right to hold a meeting.

_____ 1. Some parents had to stand in the back of the room.

_____ 2. The parents yelled that they wanted to go back to the basics.

_____ 3. It was the principal’s turn to speak.

_____ 4. Colleen’s parents thought that it was not right for Carla to talk to their daughter.

_____ 5. There weren’t any parents at the meeting to back Carla.

(continued)
6. Carla felt trapped and didn’t know which way to turn.

7. There was not much room in the second grade classroom.

8. Carla sat with her back straight in the chair.

9. Bradley turned right and walked into Carla’s office.

10. When Bradley found out that Carla was leaving, the smile left his face.

11. Bradley went right back to class.

12. Bradley didn’t want to face the fact that Carla was leaving.

13. Luckily, Bradley and his sister didn’t have to room together.

14. Bradley was afraid that his life would turn bad again.

15. Bradley played alone in his room.
Using Guide Words

At the top of each dictionary page are guide words. These words are the first and last words on a dictionary page. The other words on the page fall in alphabetical order between the guide words.

Put the words in the word box in alphabetical order under the correct guide words. The first one has been done for you.

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<th>leaned</th>
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Imagine that you are Colleen. In the sample journal below, tell about your experience at your birthday party.
The questions below ask you to describe the feelings you had as you read the book. Read each question carefully. Write your response on the lines provided. Explain why you felt the way you did. Be sure to use complete sentences.

1. How did you feel when Bradley made Jeff give him a dollar?
____________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________

2. How did you feel when Jeff went inside the girls’ bathroom?
____________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________

3. How did you feel when Bradley first met Carla?
____________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________

(continued)
4. How did you feel when Bradley decided to change but nothing went right for him?
____________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________

5. How did you feel when Bradley ripped up his math homework?
____________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________

6. How did you feel when Carla was transferred?
____________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________

7. How did you feel when Bradley was getting ready for the birthday party?
____________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________