

THE
ALMOST
EPIC
SQUAD
SUPER SKETCHY

Lesley Livingston

Illustrations by Britt Wilson

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*To Mark and Danielle —
superheroes, super friends.*
— L.L.

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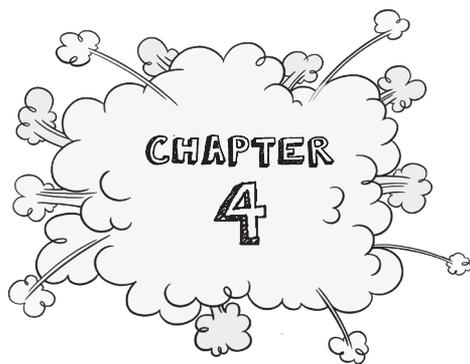
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CHAPTER 4



A TALE OF ONE WEIRDO

Daisy had never been able to talk about the annual treks from Dimly to Montreal with anyone other than Jess, who'd had to suffer through them too.

The whole thing was just too bizarre. Year after year, Daisy and her mom would go to Quebec, where a weirdo research specialist named Dr. Edgar Fassbinder from some weirdo government-funded think tank called the “Institut de l’ennui / Boredom Institute” would perform a series of weirdo poky-proddy tests.

Daisy and her mom would return home, where Daisy and Jess would exchange notes . . . and then pretend the visits had never happened as far as anyone else was concerned. Add to that Daisy’s mom’s

extreme reluctance to talk about anything to do with Fassbinder or the Boredom Institute — or pandas — and Daisy just never brought it up. With anyone. Ever.

But for some reason Daisy felt like she could confide in Kip. Maybe it was that they both had nutso grandmas. Or that he actually knew where — *what* — Dimly was. Or maybe it was that he was a little weird too, but seemed genuinely nice. Whatever it was, Daisy didn't get the impression Kip would turn around and snicker about her with his friends once she was gone.

"The place reeks of Gorgonzola and garlic," Daisy said, trying to describe the weirdness that was the Boredom Institute, that dingy office hidden away in the sub-basement of a Montreal hospital. Daisy's mom had taken her there for "gifted testing" every year since she could remember — with no tangible "gifts" ever having presented themselves. A waste of time, Daisy had always thought. But Jess had to go through it too. And Gary. And . . . probably Archie?

"And they have a serious pest-control problem," she continued. "All you can hear when you're in the examination rooms is scurrying and squeaking. And *nothing* ever happens! At least, nothing *usually* happens."

"Usually?" Kip asked, leaning forward.

“Well . . . last time we were there,” she said, trying hard to remember the details, “I had to fill out yet another weirdo questionnaire, only somebody had walked off with all the pens. I’m all hooked up to the machines and nobody’s around, so I go into my knapsack to get my own. All I’ve got is this box of pencils from my mom’s work . . .”

“And?”

“And, for the first time ever, *something* happens.”

Kip leaned farther forward. “What?”

“I get a shock. From the pencil.”

“The . . . pencil.” Kip leaned back a little. “Okaaay . . .”

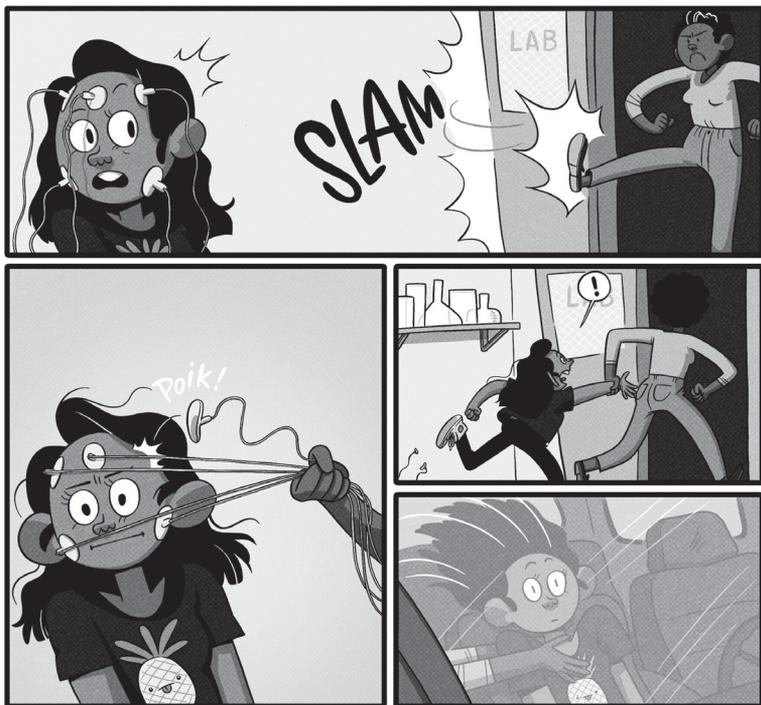
“Right?” Daisy shrugged. “It’s *so* no big deal but all of a sudden, the machine I’m hooked up to goes bonkers! Beeping and pinging and the needle zigzagging all over the graph paper like there’s an earthquake or something.”

“Weeeird . . .”

“*Right?* So I drop the pencil, and the machine goes instantly quiet. But the big mirror on the wall ripples — like someone’s leaning on the other side — and the scurrying and squeaking in the walls gets *really* loud.”

Now it was Daisy’s turn to lean forward. After all those months of not having anyone — not even Jess — to tell her tale to, the details came pouring out of her like a ghost story told around a campfire, weird and

spooky-cool. “And then I can hear Fassbinder and my mom talking in the waiting room. Then they’re yelling. Then the door opens, Mom busts in all crazy eyes, grabs me, tears off all the wire-stickers — which, *ouch!* — hauls me out of the institute, throws me into the car, and drives like a maniac back to Dimly. Like, non-stop.”



“Non-stop? That’s a heck of a drive!”

“I know!” Daisy nodded emphatically. “The only time she stops is at a Timmy’s for a whole tray of double doubles. And then, get *this*, when we’re walking back to the car, I see this . . . thing. In the sky.”

“Thing?”

“I’d call it a blimp,” Daisy said, instinctively checking the empty sky overhead, “but that’d be an insult to the average blimp. This thing looks more like a football that’s been kicked around by a water buffalo wearing golf spikes. It’s patched in so many places it’s more patch than blimp. And it’s droopy and lopsided and farting black smoke all over the sky—”

“I get it,” Kip grinned. “A derelict dirigible.”

“Of detestable demeanour, yeah.” Daisy snorted and grinned back. “Anyway, Mom spots it too, body-checks me down behind a camper van, and makes me hide there until it putt-farts away over the horizon. Next thing I know, I’m back in Dimly. Briefly.”

“Then it’s burnt-rubber, panda-suit dreams,” Kip concluded, “and suddenly you’re the new kid in a new school on the other side of the country.”

“Yup.” Daisy nodded. “With an unlisted phone number.”

Kip looked at her sideways. “Do you . . . Do you think, maybe, this has something to do with your dad?” he asked tentatively.

“I think it’s got more to do with me.” She shrugged, at a loss to explain. “I just don’t know what.”

“Well, at least you don’t have to deal with that anymore.”

“Yeah. If I never hear anything more about Doc Fassbinder or the Boredom Institute or gifted testing ever again, it’ll be too soon.”

Kip glanced at the sky then too. The sun had reappeared, but who could guess for how long. “I gotta go,” he said, reluctantly.

Daisy nodded. “Me too.”

“Hey,” Kip said, before they parted ways on Comox Street, “you picked a camp for the long weekend yet?”

“Nah. This morning I was pretty sure I had my destiny all figured out, but now . . . I dunno.” She glanced at Kip sideways, at his scuffed jeans and the scrapes on his elbows from his failed parkouring. “I don’t have a calling, I guess.”

Kip grinned at her. “How can you have a calling when you’ve got an unlisted number?”