

Chapter Five Past History

Fifteen minutes later Martin Boughtom left his office. Freddie Bent had come through in spades with information on the old Pruitt mine. Within minutes Martin had a number of faxes indicating the basic layout of the mine and he'd received via email a few of the documents Freddie had on the ownership. Martin had made three copies of everything; one for Coach Dribble, one for Lilly and Solomon and one for himself. He tucked all the copies underneath his arm. Martin planned on going through the material when he got home. He turned off the office lights, locked the door and then turned out onto Main Street and back along the route he'd taken just a few hours before.

It took Martin a little longer than usual to reach his home. He was tired, very tired and he just shuffled along. He did stop in front of Mrs. Tingle's shop, now closed, and sighed as he looked at her wonderful baked goods through the window. He turned right just past the shop onto Song Bird Boulevard. The slight incline on the street slowed his shuffling walk even more. Martin finally reached 14 Song Bird Boulevard and started up the pathway towards the house. He listlessly took the mail from the large, but whimsical mail-box. The mail-box was an exact miniature replica of his house and was situated at the bottom of the sweeping staircase that led to the front door. Martin climbed the stairs, unlocked the massive, hand-carved oak door and stepped into the house. He hadn't even noticed the sleek black car parked on the street. As Martin closed the door, the car started up and moved off into the night.

To say that 14 Song Bird Boulevard was imposing would be an understatement. The house quite dominated the street and from both the second floor balcony and the third floor attic window you could see practically all of Derry Dell. The view was magnificent. The river through the middle of the town, a dark ribbon at night, sparkled and twinkled when sun light hit it during the day. The gently sloped hills on the other side of the river were dotted with both large and small houses, often on plateaus cut from the hillside. Stands of trees, either bright leafy-green or intense spruce-blue, depending on the species, dotted the hill-side like giant buttons. If you

looked left you could see the Thimble River meandering to the flat plain beyond and at night, when it wasn't too hazy, you could see the lights of Bramberry Dingle. Martin had not seen these sights in years. If the truth be known, after his older sister left Derry Dell, Martin had never ventured from the first floor of the house.

Martin dropped the mail on a long, elegant table just inside the door and put down the mine documents. Judging by the neatly arranged stacks of mail each in their individual baskets – bills, personal mail and junk mail- Martin's bi-weekly cleaning lady, Mrs. Smitherwinky, had been in and tidied. The personal mail pile was definitely the smallest. Actually, there was no pile because as per usual, there was no personal mail. He continued his shuffling walk down the spacious front hallway and into the kitchen. He grabbed a cold soda out of the fridge, rummaged for a bag of chips in the cupboard and headed to his favourite chair in the cavernous living room. Eating healthy food was not part of Martin's health regimen. He plopped into the over-stuffed chair that sat facing the elaborate fireplace and then turned his gaze upward to the numerous pictures that adorned the mantelpiece. He focused on the picture that was front and centre.

"Well, Mil," he said out loud, "I've gone and done it. I've opened my detective agency." He paused, obviously thinking. "It hasn't turned out quite the way I thought it would, but I guess I have my first case, sort of. And my office is, well, different. And I've discovered that Derry Dell has some very peculiar residents. I don't mean just Coach Dribble, Flora Green or my cleaning lady, Mrs. Smitherwinky, but some, uhm fairies, and pixies and I think some gnomes and trolls and maybe an evil Leprechaun for good measure."

Martin paused and took a swig from his drink. He opened the bag of chips and stuffed a handful into his mouth. He chomped and crunched for a few seconds.

"And Mil, today I dropped the 'S'. Martin took in a deep breath and when he expelled it, it was like he was lifting a weight off his chest. "I'd almost forgotten how kids at school used to humiliate me and call me 'Smartin Bottom' but today the sprite, or elf - I'm not sure what he was - brought it all back. And then on the walk home I remembered how kids used to put you down – "Hey Miss S. Milly Boughtom, or is that 'Smelly Bottom'," they were so cruel. I know you used to hide it from me and Mummy, but I would hear you crying at night sometimes. I don't blame you for leaving this stupid town, I blame our ne'er do well father and his ridiculous names. It's just that it's been almost ten years and I really, really miss you." Martin sobbed and a single tear rolled

down his cheek. He continued to stare at the photo of Milly Boughtom.

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Coach Dribble unlocked his front door and pushed to open it. He only managed to open it a couple of inches and no amount of shoving or pushing could move it any further.

“Tony! Get away from the door!”

Coach Dribble continued to push against the door, to no avail.

“Tony!” He shouted again. “You great lumbering beast, wake up and move away from the door!”

Tony was the Coach’s bulldog. He looked like a brown furry barrel with legs. He weighed over eighty pounds and had an over-bite that made him look ferocious. He was in fact, a slobbering, farting, people-loving mush-ball, who at the moment was sound asleep on the carpet by the front door.

“Tony!” Coach Dribble hammered on the front door with his fist.

There was a snort and a loud fart from the other side of the door and the Coach could hear his beloved pet finally move away from the door. Coach Dribble stepped inside his tiny two-bedroom home and was immediately smothered with welcome home kisses.

“You silly mutt! How many times have I told you not to sleep at the front door!”

Coach Dribble peeled off his track suit jacket and headed for the refrigerator. He grabbed one of his favourite beers and a chunk of cheese for Tony. He flopped onto the living room couch and took a swig.

“Strange goings-on, Tony, very strange indeed.”

He sat quietly for a few moments, sipping his beer. Then he got up and went into the small bedroom office. Tony waddled in after him. The Coach reached up to the top shelf and pulled out a book. It was an old copy of the Derry Intermediate and Secondary School yearbook. He flipped past the clubs and sport team photos, past the junior students and class pictures and went to the senior graduating class. He stared at two pictures in particular.

“Stanley Marvin Boughtom and Leonora Buckhorn,” said Coach Dribble out loud. “You know Tony, similar strange events happened years ago, just after I started teaching at DISS.” He scratched the dog’s head and got a satisfied snort. “It changed, no, ruined people’s lives.”

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Young Dan Ribble had never intended to be a teacher. He wanted to be a pro-wrestler. The glitz and glamour was irresistible. He even had his

stage name picked out. He was going to be 'Ferocious Dan – The Rib Tickler.' But when his mother got wind of his so-called career ambitions, she promptly enrolled him into the Derry Dell Bee Brothers Seminary for grade nine.

The Derry Dell Bee Brothers Seminary was run by an order of monks who excelled at being apiarists – bee keepers. They had a reputation for being strict but fair and Mrs. Ribble was confident they would straighten young Dan out and keep him out of trouble. Unfortunately, she was wrong. Within days of arriving at the seminary, young Dan had been recruited into the Prankster Pros. The group had sprung up during the first year the seminary offered classes to students and had a reputation for silly pranks. Maybe it was a combination of engineering brain and daring-do brawn, but young Dan and the rest of the Prankster Pros would leave quite a mark on the Bee Brothers Seminary. The history of their pranks would be long-lived; their academic careers would not.

Every morning the Brothers at the seminary were woken by a 6 a.m. bell calling them to prayers in the chapel. The students had their alarms set for 6:40 a.m., but suffice to say, that even with the use of ear-plugs, most of the boys were awake earlier. None of the Prankster Pros remember who started the conversation, but it began with someone commenting on how the monks were like zombies when they heard the bell and ended with a discussion on Pavlov's dogs. Would the monks respond to the bell if it was rung at another time? Would they get up and go to chapel automatically? Enquiring boys' minds wanted to know.

It only took them a couple of days to come up with the prank. The next weekend home Freddie Bent borrowed a full reel of fishing line from his father's tackle box. On Monday morning they were ready. The Prankster Pros waited until the mid-morning break, when most of the brothers would be tending the bees, and then went into action. Nick Fludbutter, star quarterback for the football team, would dash across the common area, into the chapel and up the bell-tower. He would tie one end of the fishing line to the chapel bell and then toss the fishing reel down to Nigel Smarmley. Nigel would then run back across the grassy common area and hand the reel to Gus Nitlint and Diddy Mellow waiting by the dormitory building. Gus would scramble up the ladder to the first floor and then pass the reel to Diddy. Diddy would clamber up the rope from the second floor window and secure the other end of the line. Freddie acted as look out. The fishing line, almost invisible to the naked eye would then be tied discreetly to the head of - you guessed it - Dan Ribble's bed. The whole effort took less than five minutes to execute. The Prankster Pros couldn't wait until lights out.

Dan's small alarm clock buzzed at 1:15 a.m. He stretched, yawned and gave five short tugs on the fishing line. Bling. Bling. Bling. Bling. Bling went the chapel bell. The boys, eager to see if the prank had worked crowded into Dan's room and were staring out the window. Sure enough, out came the brothers, single-file from their dormitory rooms on the other side of the common area. They entered the chapel. The boys waited. After about three minutes one of the brothers raced out of the chapel and headed to the Head Brother's cottage. The boys could hear him pounding on the door. There was silence for a moment and then they heard the angry voice of the Head Brother. The young novice brother could be seen running back to the chapel and a few minutes later the brothers all filed out and went back to their dormitory.

It was caretaker Charlie Neigh's job to ring the bell at 6 a.m. every morning. Needless to say, he had no knowledge of the bell ringing at 1:15 a.m. Charlie would have slept through an AC/DC concert if his bed was on stage next to the amps. So the dutiful Charlie got up at 5:59 a.m., trotted over to the chapel and bell-tower from his quarters behind the main building and rang the chapel bell.

Breakfast at the Bee Brothers Seminary the next morning was a rather silent affair. The brothers looked punch-drunk from lack of sleep and the boys kept shoveling food into their mouths so they wouldn't laugh out-loud. The glowering Head Brother, who also served as Head Master, knew he'd been had, but he didn't know how.

The prank lasted for almost two weeks. Some nights the bell wouldn't ring, just to keep the brothers off-guard. Charlie Neigh had scoured the bell-tower looking for a solution, only to finally declare that it was the wind. Then one fateful morning, Ermadine Mudgley, the housekeeper, decided to hang her wash of table-napkins outdoors. It was a windy day and one of the napkins was whisked out of her hands as she went to hang it up. The napkin ended up mysteriously dangling over the common area, fluttering in the breeze. Charlie Neigh had just come around the corner of the chapel building. He stood there puzzled, but one of the brothers looked up, caught a flash of sunlight on the fishing line and went racing for the boys' dormitory. Luckily, Nigel Smarmley had seen the goings-on and raced to Dan's room and cut the line.

The plotting for the Prankster Pro's second effort took almost three weeks. The boys came up with the idea pretty quickly, but then soon realized that the execution would be complicated and the timing crucial. Finally the morning arrived. Nick, Gus, Nigel, Diddy, Freddie and Dan synchronized

their watches and then headed off to math class with Brother Farley Nosetotten. The boys arrived a few minutes early and purposely settled in seats towards the back of the class, near the large cloak closet. The rest of the students meandered in and finally Brother Farley, or 'The Nose', as the boys called him, sailed into class. To call 'The Nose' disorganized would be an understatement. His clothing was in a constant state of disarray and today was no exception. The order allowed the Brothers to wear street clothes while teaching, but had never posted any rules as to what might be fashionably acceptable. Brother Farley looked like he'd been forced to try on every article of clothing at a rummage sale, all at once. He had on a red t-shirt with some sort of sports logo on it, underneath a plaid flannel shirt, all of which was stuffed under a light brown, thread-bare corduroy jacket that was at least two sizes too small. His trousers, on the other hand, were dull-grey corduroy at least two-sizes too big. They were held on by a belt with metal studs. A six-foot multi-coloured scarf was wound around his neck. He had on one white sock and one green sock and was sporting one sneaker and one lace-up oxford. His brief case looked like it was going to explode with paper and books. The Nose's wire-rimmed glasses were held together with two safety pins and they balanced precariously lop-sided on his nose.

"Uh, sir, sir?" Right on cue, Aldo Santiago began pumping his hand in the air to get Brother Farley's attention.

The Nose descrambled himself from his briefcase and his scarf and pushed his glasses back on the bridge of his nose.

"Yes, Aldo?"

"Well, uhm, sir, I have a problem with the assignment from last class and uh, wondered if you could work it out on the board for me?"

Launching the prank from The Nose's class had been an essential part of the plan. It was their alibi. The boys knew that Brother Farley couldn't resist going over a math problem with long and complicated computations on the board. It meant that his back would be to the class much of the time. It also meant that The Nose would take his glasses off and put them on the desk. You see, The Nose was near-sighted. He could see the minutest detail close up, but focusing on anything over four feet away was a challenge.

"Most certainly," replied Brother Farley, placing his glasses on the desk. "Come up to the board and we'll work it out together Aldo."

The Nose started writing on the board as Aldo shuffled up to the front of the classroom. As Aldo passed the teacher's desk he quickly and quietly shoved Brother Farley's glasses on to the floor. Timmy Shankley uncurled one of his long legs and nudged the glasses under the desk. At the back of the class, the Prankster Pro's went into action.

One at a time the boys tiptoed into the cloak room at the back of the class. They each re-appeared with life-sized cardboard cut-outs of themselves. The blown-up digital photos were remarkably life-like and clear. They hid behind the cut-outs as they positioned them in their seats and then, one at a time, they stole out of the class room. The Nose did turn around once to emphasize a point and was quite impressed by how attentive the boys at the back of the class were being.

Jofferey Mangle-St. Knotworth was the geography teacher at the seminary and the only teacher who wasn't a brother. He was a pompous wind-bag, completely self-absorbed and the boys considered him a doofus. His classes were more like travelogues on where he'd been on the planet than geography and he was a notorious name-dropper. The Prankster Pros knew after the first two-weeks of classes that they had to prank him. They had twenty-five minutes to get it organized.

The younger students at the seminary, a combined effort of grade six, seven and eight, started their classes a half-hour after the senior students. This meant that all the younger students would be back in their dormitory brushing their teeth and getting their books for class. The boys raced to the junior's dorm, bolted into the small storage area by the front door, grabbed the materials they had stashed there over the last couple of weeks, divided into two teams and streaked up to the first and second floor. Nick, Freddie and Gus took the second floor and Nigel, Diddy and Dan worked on the first.

The Prankster Pro's had practiced repeatedly over the last few days and it was paying off. The boys felt like they were a Mission Impossible team. Nick quickly jammed the door to each room with a couple of well-placed nails. He'd then scurry to the next door while Freddie and Gus carefully fitted into place pieces of Styrofoam that had been cut precisely to fit into the recessed doorway. One side of the foam had been painted exactly the same colour as the rest of the walls. The paint had been acquired by Nick at his father's store, "Fludbutter's Hardware – At Fludbutter's its Better". Since his father had been the supplier of the original paint for the walls, Nick knew exactly what colour had been used. The boys continued their mission until all six doors in the hallway were completely covered up. Nigel, Diddy and Dan had accomplished the same results on the first floor. The final touch was to unscrew all the lights except the one at the end of the hallway. The boys stood back and surveyed their handiwork. It was perfect. Both the first floor and second floor hallways looked like two long door-less corridors. The dim light at the end of each hall made it quite eerie. They quickly stashed their tools back in the storage area and high-tailed it back to class.

Aldo had done a magnificent job keeping The Nose occupied. One at a time, Nick, Nigel, Freddie, Gus, Diddy and Dan removed the cardboard cut-outs of themselves and slid into their seats.

“So,” said The Nose as he turned and faced the class, “any questions?”

“Uh, sir,” piped up Diddy, “I didn’t quite get that, could you run through it again?”

“Tsk, tsk, uh,” Brother Farley searched the desk for his glasses, gave up and squinted out at the boys, “uh, Fludbutter, you really should pay better attention.”

He turned back to the board and went through the problem again.

It was finally at lunch that the Prankster Pro’s heard what had happened to Jofferey Mangle-St. Knotwood. As they expected, the geography teacher had waited no more than two minutes to find out what was delaying his grade six, seven and eight students from his class. He had stormed over to the junior dorm, huffed up the stairs and then had stood ashen-faced as he stared down the now door-less corridor. The junior boys had, of course, tried to open their doors, only to find them nailed shut. They were pounding and shouting from inside their rooms. The effect, to say the least, was disquieting. A long corridor, dimly lit with shouts of “help, get us out” and the sound of doorknobs being rattled, but with no apparent doorknobs in sight, would have been somewhat creepy for just about anyone who had stumbled on the scene. But for Jofferey Mangle-St. Knotwood it was his worst nightmare. As a student he’d accidentally been locked in the soccer equipment room that was, you guessed it, a long corridor with metal lockers in the walls and a flickering light-bulb at one end. Poor, pompous little Jofferey spent nine-hours locked up with smelly soccer equipment listening to other sports teams come and go. His banging and pleas of “help” were drowned out by the raucous camaraderie on the other side of the door. How could the Prankster Pro’s have known? According to the junior students Jofferey Mangle-St.Knotwood left the seminary grounds blithering and babbling. The word was that he wouldn’t be back teaching for the rest of the term, possibly the year.

The headmaster was furious, but since all the senior students seemed to be accounted for and in class when the unsuspecting geography teacher stomped over to the junior dorm, he had to let it go.

Prank number three became the talk of Derry Dell and resulted in Gus Nitlint, senior, getting a pile of business from the community. It probably sprang from an idle conversation the Prankster Pro’s had one day on a break from class. They’d been lounging around one of the picnic tables near the

school parking lot.

“D’ya ever think that you can tell someone’s personality from the kind of car they drive?” pondered Nigel, to no-one in particular.

“Nah,” replied Nick. “My cousin, Alfie, the computer whiz, drives a pretty cool car, but he’s a goof and a dork.”

“Well, I don’t know if I could figure out someone’s personality from their car, but I could tell you how long it would take me to take it apart.”

“You mean you’d take apart their personality?” Diddy said, puzzled.

Gus rolled his eyes. “No, ya twit. I can tell you how long it would take me to take their car apart,” he smiled smugly, “and put it back together.”

Nigel looked at Nick, who looked at Freddie; they looked over at Dan and Diddy. You could see the smiles creeping across their faces. Then all of them turned and looked at Gus who was still surveying the cars in the parking lot. “I’ve got an idea,” said Nigel.

Perhaps if the boys had known that the yellow, vintage Volkswagen belonged to the Head Master and it was his pride and joy, they would have settled on another car, but once they got it into their heads what the next prank would be, there was no stopping them.

They realized that it would be close to the Christmas season before they pulled the next prank off, so the Prankster Pro’s decided on a festive theme. Their little prank was going to be tied up with a large, very large, red bow. Once again, they practiced the routine over and over, so they could get it timed down to the last minute. This time the roles were assigned, with each one performing a precision task. R&R day – Remove and Reassemble-finally arrived.

Five minutes after lights out, the Prankster Pros were out the door of their dorm and zigzagging across the quad to the parking lot. They were all in dark clothing and Gus had supplied a can of grease from his father’s garage. They gleefully smeared the grease all over their faces. The Prankster Pros were pumped. They had 7 hours and 55 minutes to accomplish their task. It would be tight.

The Prankster Pros raced to the edge of the parking lot and stopped in their tracks. There was no yellow Volkswagen. They were perplexed. Where was it? It was Diddy who spotted the car. The little beetle was parked near Ermadine Mudgley’s garden so that Brother Fabioni could use the hose and wash it in the morning. The boys ran pell-mell to the car and began. Gus was in charge.

Some 7 hours and 35 minutes later they were minutes away from completing the ultimate prank. Unfortunately, then Freddie Bent slipped. His sneakers had no traction on the now dewy grass. His feet went out from

under him and he slid down the small incline. Directly in front of him were three tin garbage cans. Ermadine Mudgley used them for compost for her garden. There was no avoiding them. Only one had any compost in it, unfortunately. The other two were empty and so instead of just a 'thud', they went sailing into the air. Both cans and lids landed with a huge clatter. The kitchen lights of the house went on immediately and Ermadine Mudgley, in all her house-coated splendor yanked open the door that lead right into the garden.

"Alright you little pests," she yelled, waving a broom, "get out of my compost bins!" Ermadine had had a great deal of difficulty with a family of raccoons tipping over the bins and making a complete mess of the orange peels, apple cores and potato peelings she was using for compost.

Freddie darted his eyes around frantically to find a hiding place. He groaned inwardly. The only place he could hide was between the rows of raspberry canes. Ouch. He wriggled along and then with a few quick pushes he was in between the rows. It was way past raspberry season, so he couldn't even console himself with a taste of the perfumey fruit.

Ermadine huffed and puffed while she put the garbage cans back together. Freddie held his breath each time she got close to the gleaming Volkswagen bumper that he'd dropped.

Luckily for Freddie, the bumper was lying shiny-side down and Ermadine, aside from having her back towards the bumper, was far more concerned with the garbage cans. It seemed like an eternity, but she finally straightened up, grabbed her broom and huffed and puffed her way back to the kitchen door. Freddie waited until the lights went out. He wiggled his way backwards out of the raspberry canes, grabbed the bumper, raced to the bell tower and hurtled up the stairs.

"Geez" said Gus, breathing a sigh of relief as he took the bumper, "we thought you were a goner for sure."

"I was holding my breath and watching my watch at the same time," replied Freddie, as he slowly calmed down.

"Speaking of which," said Gus as he looked at his watch, "this is going to be tight. Let's get moving."

The boys hoisted the bumper into place. Gus grabbed the wrenches he'd borrowed from his father's garage, put the bolts in place and started turning. Dan handed him any extra tools that he needed.

"5:56," chimed out Diddy, the official timer-keeper of the operation.

Nick and Nigel scrambled under the car and unrolled yards and yards of red ribbon. Then standing up, they took the ends of the ribbon and traded ends.

“5:57,” a now panicked Diddy squeaked.

“Quick, tie a bow,” hissed Nick to Nigel.

“I don’t do bows, igit.”

“Well then do a knot with loops hanging out.”

“5:58.”

“Fast!”

Nigel tied a large knot, looped the remaining ribbon and stuffed it back under the knot. It looked sort of like a bow.

“Close enough,” whispered Nick, as he gave Nigel thumbs up. He wiggled back under the car and both boys bolted pell-mell down the stairs of the bell tower with Diddy following close behind.

Gus, Dan and Freddie had already removed the wrenches and hand drills and were waiting at the bottom of the stairs.

“5:59,” breathed Diddy, relaxing just a bit.

The boys scampered back across the main court yard and had just gone through the door to their dorm when Charlie Neigh’s light went on. A few seconds later Charlie, stretching and yawning, sauntered across the yard to ring the tower bell.

Nick, Nigel, Gus, Diddy, Dan and Freddie were blissfully unaware of the chaos that erupted just shortly after 6 am. They were all exhausted. They’d fallen into bed and completely conked out.

Charlie Neigh had given a few quick tugs on the bell rope. When no clanging ensued, he looked puzzled. He stood for a few minutes, thinking, and then decided to climb the stairs. Needless to say, if it had taken Charlie one minute to climb up the bell tower, it only took him a few seconds to come back down. He looked around frantically. Charlie obviously wasn’t too sure just what to do. How many mornings do you wake up to find a Volkswagen in the school bell tower? He flew across the quad yard and banged on Ermadine Mudgley’s door.

“Now I’ve had just about enough for one night,” Ermadine bellowed as she yanked open the kitchen door. “I know somebody’s up to mischief!” “Why Charlie, what on earth?” said Ermadine, as she hastily tied her housecoat.

“Uh, Ermandine, I think you should see this.”

“See what exactly, Charlie?”

“Uh, the Head Master’s Car.”

“Now Charlie,” scolded Ermadine, “I don’t find it particularly funny to be woken up at 6 o’clock in the morning to discuss the Head Master’s car. The last time I looked it was parked over by my garden to be washed and its bumper was lying by my garbage cans.”

Charlie just stared at Ermadine and blinked. She stared back. Then she realized what she'd said. Ermadine blanched. "I'll get my slippers," she managed to croak.

Charlie and Ermadine hustled over to the bell tower. Charlie scampered while Ermadine slowly hauled her ample form up the tower stairs. "Oh my," was all she could manage when she reached to top of the bell tower and gaped at the small car. The Volkswagen was placed perfectly inside the tower. The bell was leaning against the driver's door. There was a small towel protecting the car from the bell. The bell clapper was stuffed inside numerous pairs of socks. Ermadine and Charlie stood silently for a few minutes. "Oh my," Ermadine finally said again.

"Well, er, I guess we better tell the Head Master." Charlie was shuffling his feet. This was making him nervous.

"Yes, yes," mumbled Ermadine. She seemed transfixed by the vehicle. She finally blinked a few times, as if she was coming out of a trance. "Charlie, you go notify the Head Master, I'll go and phone the police." The no-nonsense Ermadine was back.

As they emerged from the bell tower Charlie nearly ran into the Head Master. He was stomping across the quad.

"Charlie, Charlie Neigh," bellowed the Head Master. "Do you have any idea of the time? It's now precisely seven minutes after six o'clock. I expect our chapel bell to be rung at precisely 6 am. This is unacceptable. We have rules to be followed here. How do you expect our students to follow rules and procedures if we don't follow them ourselves?" The Head Master looked up behind Charlie, "Mrs. Mudgley?"

"Good morning, Head Master. Charlie was just on his way to fetch you and I was just on my way to phone the police."

"The police?" The Head Master looked puzzled. "Why what on earth..." Before he could finish his question Charlie erupted.

"Well Sir, I don't know how they did it, very clever indeed. I have my suspicions, mind you. And it must have taken them all night. I know when I went to bed last night your car was safely parked by the garden. But Mrs. Mudgley here noticed your bumper earlier this morning. She thought it was the raccoons knocking over the garbage again, but now we know better. It was those rascals putting your car in the bell tower.

"The raccoons knocked over the garbage by my bumper?"

"Oh no, sir, from what I gather, your bumper was beside the garbage cans. My guess is they'd dropped it at some point while they were moving your car."

The Head Master continued to look at Charlie with a non-

comprehending expression on his face. He finally shifted his gaze over to Mrs. Mudgley.

“Mrs. Mudgley?”

“Your car uh, Head Master, is in the bell tower.”

“My car is in the bell tower,” said the Head Master, very slowly as if he was trying to understand a foreign language. He looked back and forth at Charlie and Ermadine Mudgley. They were nodding their heads up and down. Yes, it’s true was the expression on their faces.

“Mrs. Mudgley.”

“Yes, Head Master?”

“Call the police. Charlie, you come with me.” With that, the Head Master started to slowly mount the bell tower stairs.

Suffice to say, once the police were called, everyone knew that Jingo Spotwort, Reporter/Photographer of the Derry Dell Examiner Weekly would be right behind them. He always had his short-wave radio tuned to the police frequency, just in case something happened in Derry Dell. To Jingo, this would sound juicy. The Derry Dell Examiner Weekly or ‘The Dew’ as it was affectionately known wasn’t much more than a ten-page broad-sheet. It contained the occasional story, but was usually filled with comings and goings and lots of local merchants’ advertisements. The paper’s motto “New at the Dew” was a bit of a misnomer, since there usually wasn’t much new of anything.

Within minutes of the call, two of Derry Dell’s finest, Sgt. Frink Tisselgone and Sgt. Hawley Dangleforth of the Derry Dell Police Department, the DDPD, were on the scene. They were both graduates of the seminary and had been short-time members of the Prankster Pros. Their fathers’ were both police officers and it didn’t take them long to find out that Frink and Hawley were fledgling members of the Prankster Pros. The involvement ended quite abruptly, much to the dismay of the boys. Neither Frink nor Hawley were great fans of the Head Master. Their favourite chant for him was ‘what rhyme’s with ‘J’?’ The answer of course was ‘erk’.

After Sgt. Dangleforth and Sgt. Tisselgone had examined the car in the bell tower, they suggested a head-count of the boys in their dorms. It seemed to be a logical police-type thing to do. It should also be noted that both Frink and Hawley showed great restraint. Upon seeing the car in the tower, it was all the officers could do to prevent themselves from doubling over in laughter.

By the time the officers got to the senior boys dorm it was just after eight in the morning. Frink and Hawley were now being trailed around the seminary by Jingo and his ever-ready camera. They’d given a cursory look

at the younger students' dorm and had realized pretty quickly that the junior boys would have neither the planning skills nor the brawn to carry out such a complicated prank. The senior boys were lined up in the hallway to be questioned. Sgt. Tisselgone checked off all the names.

"Okay boys, we've got a little situation here and right now I'm missing six bodies. So can anybody tell me where Fludbutter, Bent, Smarmley, Ribble, Nitlint and Mellow might be?" bellowed Sgt. Tisselgone. Sgt. Dangleforth strode up and down the hall, trying to look tough.

"They're still sleeping, sir, sergeant, sir," said Georgie Milhaus, meekly.

"So, sonny, are you hiding them? Are they in your closet? Are you an accomplice?"

Georgie's eyes were wide with fright. "No, sergeant, sir, sergeant, they're in their rooms, still asleep."

"Ah ha! So you are hiding something! And just where might those rooms be? Hmmm?"

"At the end of the hall, sir, right there," said Georgie in a quavering voice, pointing to two closed doors at the end of the hall.

"Er, right." Sgt. Tisselgone straightened up. He'd been crouching down to match Georgie's four foot two height.

"I'll take one door; you take the other, Hawley."

"Ten-four Frink."

The two officers swaggered down the hall and simultaneously banged on doors two and four. There was no response. So they banged again, louder. This time they got a muffled, "Go away."

"Okay boys, wakey, wakey," shouted both Sgt. Tisselgone and Sgt. Dangleforth, as they continued banging. Jingo was right behind them snapping pictures. Behind him now loomed the Head Master.

Finally someone opened one of the doors. It was Diddy. There was a collective gasp from the two officers, Jingo, and the rest of the boys, who were now crowded into the end of the hall. The Head Master just stood there, stone-faced. Diddy looked like he'd just taken a bath in crank case oil. His t-shirt was streaked with black oil and his face was one huge smear of grease. Diddy looked stunned at first. Then he blinked, mostly from Jingo's flash. Then he muttered, "uh, oh."

The story, along with numerous pictures, ran on the front page of a special edition of the Dew the next day. Jingo reported the story in his usual verbose language. As per usual, he glorified his role in the goings-on – how he helped the officers detect the culprits and how scary and dangerous it was when they confronted the ring leader. He had quotes from the Head

Master, Charlie Neigh and Ermadine Mudgley. He had pictures and quotes from Sgt. Tisselgone and Sgt. Dangleforth on how they'd solved the case. The biggest picture was of Freddie, Dan, Diddy, Nick, Nigel and Gus. They looked like they were doing a bad and totally politically-incorrect impression of the Jackson Six. The boys were immediately expelled, but first, they had to get the car back down and make sure it was in mint condition. It took eight hours and almost the entire population of Derry Dell came out to watch the restoration the following day. With the Head Master's approval, Charlie sold drinks and Ermadine sold hot dogs and sandwiches. The proceeds went to the seminary. In the New Year's edition of the paper, Jingo called it the event of the year. Gus's fathers' garage was overwhelmed with business and the boys became local heroes of sorts. They were stopped for weeks after and asked how they did it. The Prankster Pro's ceased to exist at the seminary, but at least they'd gone out in a blaze of glory.

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Dan Ribble woke with a start. He'd fallen asleep in his office chair. The year book slid off his lap and thudded to the floor. Tony lay snoring under the desk. The Coach looked at the clock, 10:37 pm. He stood up and stretched.

"C'mon Tony, a quick bite of food and then bedtime, it's gonna be a big day tomorrow."

Coach Dribble yawned, stretched again and headed off to the kitchen to rummage for food.

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Lillian put the last of the dinner dishes into the dishwasher. She snapped the door shut and pushed the 'on' button. Then she quickly glanced at her watch, "10:40", she groaned quietly to herself, "I've got to get to bed, tomorrow is going to be a long day". She took one more look around the kitchen to satisfy herself that it was pretty tidy and then flicked off the light. Lillian had been working at getting things ready for the next day since they'd returned from the Fairy Inspection Agency. The walk back had taken considerably longer than the walk down. It was all up-hill. Lillian and Solomon could have quite easily run back home, but Gladly, with his very short legs had slowly huffed and puffed his way back to the Corrigan house.

As soon as they got through the front door, Lillian went to work. She quickly put together a list of things they would need if they were going to be out all day, let alone exploring an old mine. Warm clothes, check. Extra t-shirts, check. Hats. Hiking boots. Sun block. Bug repellent. Flashlights. Dad's compass and binoculars. Food. Water.

Over much protesting and grumbling, Solomon had been put in charge of getting the bikes and knapsacks together for the next day.

“I don’t know where any of it is!” Solomon complained as they stood in the garage.

“Solomon,” admonished Lillian, “you used your bike and backpack the other day, so don’t tell me you can’t find it! You’re standing in front of it!”

Solomon rolled his eyes. “Yeah, well what are we going to do about him?” He’d jerked his thumb towards Gladly who was madly ringing the bell on Darwin’s bicycle. They could both see that even Darwin’s bicycle was too big for Gladly. It was Solomon’s brilliant idea that saved the day. Gladly objected at first, but when he was told the option was to walk back into town the next morning, he did a lot of pouting, but reluctantly agreed. Solomon suggested using the two-wheeled baby chariot that was collecting dust at the back of the garage. He also pointed out that they could load their backpacks into it and the baby chariot would provide enough space to bring both Darwin and Gladly home.

Lillian checked that the front door was locked and then slowly plodded up the stairs. She checked Solomon first. He was sprawled on top of his bed, sound asleep, surrounded by a towel from the bathroom, dirty socks and clean laundry that should have been put away. Lillian sighed. “His room is always a disaster,” she thought to herself. She quietly closed the door and headed towards Darwin’s room. Gladly was curled up in Darwin’s bean-bag chair.

“Darwin,” thought Lillian. She suddenly felt a panicked feeling constrict her breathing. All day she had been trying to block the vision of Darwin she’d seen in Solomon’s game. She took a couple of deep breaths and closed her eyes. “We’re coming Darwin, we’re coming,” Lillian said quietly.

She tiptoed into Darwin’s room and silently picked the comforter off the bed and draped it over Gladly. Lillian turned off the small night-light on the desk and quietly closed the door. There was no way that she could have seen the smirk on Gladly’s face. Lillian headed down the hall and into her room. She peeled off her clothes, collapsed on her bed and was, in minutes, sound asleep.