



Chapter 2: The owner of the eye

“What did you get, Rock?” Jewel Dervin asked.

Rockville Turner pulled his eye away from his jar. He had blue eyes, light brown scruffy hair (never brushed) and a medium build, just right for a lacrosse player. “Oh, just an ant,” he said. “But the little sucker was really running when he ran into my paper towel tube and now that I’ve dropped him into the jar, he looks as if he’s passed out. Do ants pass out? Or do you think I hurt him?”

Jewel came over and peered into Rockville’s jar. She was tall and had long brown hair with blond streaks running through it. She also had great blue eyes, but hers were almond shaped whereas Rock’s were larger and rounder. “Dunno,” she said “He’s pretty small.”

“I can see he’s small, but I just want to know he’s okay. What’d you get?”

“Oh, not much. Just a beetle and two worms.”

Rockville looked into Jewel’s jar. “Well, they’re pretty cool and I bet ...” Just then the whistle blew. It was Professor Pethers telling everyone that time was up—it was 10:55 already.

Rockville looked back at his jar. “Geez, I hope this ant wakes up or I’m only going to have one insect for my report.” He shook the jar a couple of times.

“Here,” Jewel said as she reached into her jar and pulled out one of the worms. “I don’t need two worms.”

She didn’t even hesitate in picking up the worm nor did she wipe her hand off afterwards. Jewel was just that type of girl—she didn’t think about what she couldn’t do, only what was possible to do. Which is exactly why Rock liked her. They had been best friends since they were three and now, years later, they still hung out all the time. Jewel was cool.

“Hey, thanks Jules,” Rock said as he let the worm drop into his jar and they took off back towards the school.

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The worm nearly squashed Charlie—to be exact, he survived being hit by millimeters to. As luck would have it, Charlie escaped being hurt (for the time being), and the “thud” of the worm landing finally stirred him.

When Charlie regained his senses, every thing was moving up and down, up and down, and he could barely make out The Fence in the distance.

Charlie sighed. *This is worse than death*, he thought to himself, *It's going to be a long, slow torturous death. I'll never get out of here. Oh, chili peppers!*

(Ants can't eat chili peppers. It gives them horrid indigestion and burns their throats so badly that they need medical attention.)

He rubbed his face with his legs and then noticed that they had some sort of slime on them. “What the...?”

“Oh, get over it 'sect,” said a cranky, tough voice nearby.

Charlie looked up and saw the three inch long worm that had nearly crushed him wearing a backwards baseball cap. He was looking right at Charlie. “What did you say?” asked Charlie.

“I said ‘Get over it,’” spit back the worm, whose head bobbed to and fro like it was attached by some sort of spring, “It's just mucus, 'sect. You got a problem with that?”

“Oh gross! Worm mucus!” cried Charlie as he jumped up wiping off his legs even faster.

The worm gave a little laugh “Oh bro! What a scared-y ant! Can't stand a little mucus, eh?”

“Oh hush up,” Charlie shot back. “Worm mucus is enough to make most ants barf and pass out. It's

vile!”

“Oh yeah?” replied the worm swaggering right up to Charlie and peering down at him.

“Yeah,” said Charlie. The two stared at each other in silence. It was never polite to comment on a worm’s mucus and equally as rude to call an ant scared. Both were like telling a beetle he was related to a cockroach.

Just then, they heard a loud “bang” and noticed that their surroundings had changed. They appeared to have entered a building and since neither Charlie, the worm nor the caterpillar had ever been inside a provider made building, they all stopped their arguing and looked around.

They were headed down the main North wing corridor while Jewel and Rockville discussed their afternoon plans.

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“What’re you doing later, Jules?”

“Oh, I’ve got to stay late and work on a recipe project for UA. I swear, I don’t know how Ms. Jitherburrs has gotten ‘substitute teacher of the year’ for two years in a row. I think she’s awful. None of her projects make sense. Yesterday she asked us all to bring in hairs or scales or whatever from the pets we have for some kind house-cleaning project. It was weird.”

“Did you do it?”

“Heck no. Which is why I have to stay late.”

“Hey, well that’s okay. I was planning on helping Professor Pethers clean out the reptile cage anyway. I’ll come find you after I’m done and then we can ride home together.”

“Cool,” said Jewel. “Hey Rock, look—your ant’s standing up.”

“How ‘bout that? I thought the little guy was a goner for sure. Way to go dude.” Rockville peered closely at his jar and Charlie just barely managed to keep conscious this time. He certainly didn’t want to pass

out again in front of the worm.

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“Well, ‘sect, whoever that homeboy is, he certainly seems to have one mighty big interest in you,” said the worm to Charlie. “That’s good ‘sect. Maybe he’ll experiment on you first.”

“No way. They always start lower down the food chain,” Charlie bluffed his way back, which was pretty amazing because Charlie thought his head was going to burst with fear.

The worm suddenly looked worried. “Really? How you know?”

“Oh, I’ve got a buddy in the Army—he’s a spy,” Charlie lied. “He tells me everything about providers and what they do in here. It’s bad for all of us but for worms it’s...” Charlie paused for dramatic effect. “Oh, you know what, we’ve just met—crickets, I don’t even know your name. I don’t think I should be the one to tell you all this.”

“Tell me wha’? My name be Xavier Laverenth Locomous the 729th. My homies call me XL for short. Tell me wha’ ‘sect?” XL quickly spat out.

“You mean you really don’t know?”

“Know wha’??!”

“About the poisoned leaves? And the needle treatments?” Charlie let it roll. He was beginning to have fun.

“Needle treatments!” cried XL

“I can’t believe you don’t know about the needle treatments. Yeah, apparently they just do them on annelids because you guys really freak out or something. They start by putting hundreds of tiny needles all over your body and then twist each one to see which ones make you, well, squirm the most.”

All the pink color faded from XL so that he was now the dullest grey and looked as if he was on the verge of passing out. “You be kiddin’, righ’?” he whispered desperately.

Charlie couldn't take it anymore. He didn't have the heart. Charlie certainly liked adventures and he especially loved a good joke but, he also knew when enough was enough.

"Yeah," Charlie said softly as a small smile crept over his face.

"Yeah wha'?" cried XL. "Do you mean 'yeah, it's true' or 'yeah', you be jokin'?"

"Yeah, I'm only kidding XL. Look, we've all got to keep our sense of humor at a time like this, right?" Charlie had a big smile on his face now and, as every girl ant in his colony knew, Charlie's smile was just about the most contagious around. It was pretty hard for any ant, or worm, to resist.

XL stared in disbelief at Charlie for a moment—and for that brief moment Charlie wasn't sure if XL was going to laugh or slime him again with mucus.

"Oh crows! You totally had me going there 'sect," XL laughed with relief. He slapped Charlie lightly on the back with his tail. "Needle treatments! That was a good one." The two of them started to giggle.

Just then the caterpillar interrupted them, tipping his nose slightly in the air. "IIII wouldn't staaart laughingg iiif IIII were youuu."

Charlie and XL stopped laughing, looked at each other with concern and then turned to the caterpillar.

"Iii had a friend, disappeared as a caaterrpilller, returned assss a buttterflyyyy," the caterpillar droned. "He was caaaaptured alllll the same. Just like you and meeeeee. But when he returrnned he told ussss what had haaaappened. That he had beeeen able to cocooooon and change, as you might saaaaay, in the jar but thaaaat the otheeers he was withhhh weren't so luckyyy. He said they disappeaaaared one by onnnne from his jar- an aaant, a woorm, and ladybuuug- and he could hear them screaaam in the distance."

"You're kidding, right?" said Charlie, echoing the former words of XL.

"Nooooo. Caterpillar's seldom kid. Dooonn't see the needd," he chomped on.

XL and Charlie stood speechless. Then it got worse. Just as the caterpillar finished speaking, Rockville and Jewel entered their science classroom and placed their jars on the granite work tables in front on

them. From this view, Charlie and XL looked out at a world that left their jaws open in disbelief.

There were rows of glass vials, some filled with strange colored fluids, others with powders and some with sticks; on the wall, were diagrams of various animals with internal diagrams as well; also on the wall were glass boxes of frozen (at least they looked that way) insects all lined up with names written beneath each one; and on the large shelf against the far wall, there were actually frogs and mice floating in a clear fluid filled jar. All that the caterpillar had said now seemed as if it could be true. Even what Charlie had made up to scare XL now seemed as if it could be true. Charlie and XL were convinced they were going to be tortured. Doom literally hung all over the walls.

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Professor Pethers, meanwhile, was finding plenty to say to his students. "OK class. Listen up. We have just ten more minutes before the bell rings. Before you go, you will need to make sure that your specimens have plenty of air, food and water and that all your jars are labeled with your name. Don't forget to give any worms plenty of moist soil to burrow in. Then make sure you write on a piece of paper your name and the type of insects you found. Hand them in as you leave. You can leave your jars on the shelf along the back wall. Any questions, come and see me."

As soon as he finished speaking, there was a burst of activity in the room. Students dashed this way and that to get extra jars, dirt, water, bits of food, better lids and masking tape to make name labels. The Trixie triplets had been lucky enough to have a daddy longlegs crawl up Truly's leg and, after a series of loud shrieks, she had managed to get it into her jar. Tickly had found a caterpillar, while Taloula had found a ladybug. That, of course, was the Triplets prize possession and all three set out together to make it the swankiest jar ever.

Spencer Bluecraft III had yet to remove any of his protective gear and marched with his jar full of red ants out in front of him at arms length. He nearly collided with just about everyone in the room as he moved so slowly and deliberately he was making himself quite a nuisance.

Rockville decided to provide more dirt for his worm and poured a large scoop into the jar that landed all over XL and Charlie. Charlie was just recovering from the first scoop when the second one crashed on top of him. He was not at all happy having to claw his way back out when suddenly a delicious piece of bread landed beside him. "Now that's more like it," he thought to himself.

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Charlie turned to speak to the caterpillar who was now frozen in horror staring at a box on the wall. Inside it, lined up in perfect rows, with pins neatly stuck in the four corners of their wings, were various butterflies of every shape and size.

Charlie tried to comfort his jar mate. "Hey...uh,...oh gosh buddy, I don't even know your name yet."

"It's Gunther," replied the caterpillar never breaking his gaze from the wall.

"Hey, Gunther, I'm Charlie. Listen Gunther, you've got to stop staring at the wall. It's just going to freak you out."

Gunther didn't even blink.

"Gunther?" Charlie tried. "Gunther, man, snap out of it. Stop looking at the wall."

Still there was no response.

XL tried. "Gunther. Gunther, yo got to pull yo-self togetha."

Nothing. Not even a flicker.

XL slithered his way over towards Gunther. He came right up next to the branch where Gunther was possibly petrified solid and took a deep breath. Then XL very suddenly screamed "GUNTHER!!!" into the caterpillar's ear.

Gunther fell off the stick and landed on his back in the dirt. He lay motionless for a just a second before he finally came round. "What?" he asked rather annoyed.

"Gunther, we thought we had lost you. You were like a zombie."

"Wellll you didn't have to yellll in my eeear. You simply could have spooked in a reeeasonable tooone, like any respectable insect might do."

“Gunther, we did.”

“You diiid?” he replied puzzled.

“Yeah, of course we did, like five times,” responded Charlie.

“Ohhhhh. Well, then, I suppoose that means ear yelling is not a staaandard woorm practice?”

“No, of course, not,” replied XL quite exasperated and not at all happy that Gunther would suggest such a thing. He turned to Charlie, “Sect, this catapilli, he’s gettin’ on my nerves, ya know? I mean, wha’s up wit all dat ‘tude, like he be some kind o’ king or somethin’.”

“I aamm a Monarch Butterfly,” Gunther sniffed at XL, as if confirming that XL had gotten it right, that he was a king.

“Oh, well ‘cuse me your hienny-ness—“

“Hey listen guys.” Charlie interrupted, as he tried to pull things together. “We’re all in a pretty bad situation here so we’ve really got to try to work together to figure out what exactly we should do. So let’s just forget about it, okay, and try to figure out a way out of here.”

“I suppose you’re right,” said Gunther.

“Yeah,” XL grinned. “Now how do we be gettin’ ourselves out of here and back ou’ there?” XL nodded towards the window which looked out over the playgrounds.

And, of course, just then a nice thick piece of masking tape with black letters written on it blocked their sight of the playgrounds. Rockville was labeling his Jar.

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The bell rang to signal the end of class. Papers went flying, dirt fell on the floor and the sound of tops being screwed on jars filled the room. The Trixie triplets lined their jars carefully up on the back shelf one in front of the other. In the way back was Truly’s daddy longlegs, then Ticky’s caterpillar and in front, where everyone could see it, was Taloula’s ladybug. All three of them kissed the ladybug jar goodbye.

Spencer Bluecraft III carefully placed his jar on the shelf, used his elbow to slide his books off his desk and underneath his arm and did not remove his gloves or facial mask until outside the science room door. He took his mask off first, slipped off the gloves, dropped them in the wastepaper basket (although he personally thought they belonged in a container marked "biohazard") and headed straight for the bathroom to wash his hands.

Rockville put his and Jewel's jars up on the shelf next to each other. At first he put his jar down label side front like everyone else's but at the last minute he turned it around so that the clear side of the jar faced the classroom.

"Wanted to make sure you guys had a good view," he whispered with his face close up to the jar. "I'm Rockville, but all my friends call me Rock. I'll be back later to check on you guys, OK?" and with that, the owner of the eye, that had nearly frightened Charlie to death, stepped down from the stool and left the room.

Discussion Questions: *Take time to read through all the questions first to find out which ones you feel will be right for you and your family. Not all will be suitable for all families since these questions were made to appeal to many different ages. And, of course, they are simply suggestions. Feel free to ask any questions that come to your mind and don't forget to get CURIOUS about the answers your children give! Ask questions related to their answers if you can.*

1. Jewel had no problem picking up her worm. Would you? Do any insects or bugs scare you? Which ones? Do you like other insects/bugs? Which ones? Do you know what your favorite and least favorite insects/bugs do for the world? If not, look it up!
2. Jewel and Rock have been friends since they were three years old. Who is your oldest friend, meaning the one you have known for the longest? How did you meet? What do you like to do together?
3. Ants can't eat chili peppers... can you eat spicy food? Do you like it? Some people can't eat certain foods like peanuts or gluten. What do you think that is like for them? Can you name five foods with gluten in them? Do you have any food allergies?
4. In the ant world, calling someone scared is rude. Do you think calling someone scared is rude? What behaviors do you find rude? What does it mean when something is rude? What message does rude behavior send to other people? (And why would a beetle not want to be related to a cockroach?)
5. Charlie plays a joke on XL by making up scary things that would happen to XL, but then tells him he is only joking. Have you ever played a joke on someone that went too far or didn't feel good for the other person? Has that happened to you? Tell the story and how it felt. Then tell a joke! Jokes can be fun!
6. Worms like moist soil— why is that? What do worms do for the Earth?
7. Spencer Bluecraft III wears protective face masks and gloves even though their world is not experiencing a pandemic. Do you think he seems odd to his classmates? Do you think he would seem odd in our world right now? How does all of this make you feel about Spencer?
8. Gunther becomes so frightened that he can't hear his friends or talk. Has that ever happened to you? Have you ever been super scared? What happened? Tell the story. What did you do? How did you manage to get through that tough time? Would you do anything differently if the same thing happened again?
9. Gunther can be a little snooty because he's a Monarch Butterfly. Do you know of anyone who can be a little snooty? Do you know what the word snooty means?! LOL! How about pompous? Can you think of other words that mean the same thing? How do you feel when someone is snooty around you? How do you think the snooty person feels about himself? Why do you think anyone is snooty?