



Chapter 18: Calling cantaloupe

Rock's history class was right next to Professor Fahid's room so Jewel and Rock walked the entire distance trying to piece everything together. They agreed to meet right after class, to discuss any findings, but were disappointed when none of them had come up with anything new. After that, Rock headed to English, Jewel to Spanish.

Finally, it reached 10:40 and the bell rang dismissing the students from their second period class. Rock and Jewel both headed as fast as they could for Professor Pethers' science class. Charlie had forgotten his earlier angst with his friends and was now hoping to talk Jessop into another stay of duty in the jar. Now that he knew Jessop and XL were friends, he just might be able to get Jessop to hang out a little longer.

"Oh gross," Jewel exhaled.

"What?" responded Rock, wiping his mouth with the back of his hand to make sure none of the green Sprocket he had just popped into his mouth was overflowing. Sprockets had the unfortunate side effect of making people drool the corresponding color of the candy if they weren't careful.

"Jitherbugly's on patrol. Move to the other side of the hall, will you? I still didn't hand in that homework assignment."

Ms. Jitherburrs was standing just outside the door to the Unified Arts room, apparently monitoring the flow of students in and out of her classroom. Jewel was trying to avoid her, but unfortunately, her attempt to go unnoticed didn't work.

Ms. Jitherburr's hand shot straight out at Jewel. "Oh Jewel!"

It struck Rock straight in the head.

“Oh dear! Oh my Rock, I’m... it is Rock isn’t it?” Ms. Jitherburrs smiled falsely. “I’ve seen you play lacrosse.”

Jewel made a face like sour grapes. In all the sports events she’d been to this year, she’d never once seen Jitherbugly there.

Ms. Jitherburrs’ hand had not moved from Rock’s head. Apparently, the gargantuan supremely ugly Victorian cameo ring she always wore was now ensnared in Rock’s hair.

In the meantime, Charlie hid himself deep in a fold of Rock’s shirt. He had determined quickly that this was not a woman he wanted to meet. Anyone who wore a thing that big on their finger could not be in his or her right mind.

‘Oh sweetie, please don’t move now. I’ve almost got it,” Ms. Jitherburrs crooned.

Rock grimaced. He felt as if “it” was his entire head of hair.

Jewel, who had been purposely trying to avoid looking at Ms. Jitherburrs, now turned to look at her friend and help him this out of the situation. The look on Rock’s face silently screamed “Do. Something. Now. Fast.”

“Uh, here – let me see if I can help,” Jewel said coming around to the other side of Rock.

Ms. Jitherburrs used her free hand to abruptly put a stop sign in front of Jewel’s face.

“Wait! Don’t move an inch Jewel. It’s just about out.”

(Your ring or my brains? thought Rock.)

Jewel heaved a sigh and glanced at Rock. This was why she couldn’t stand Ms. Jitherburrs. She was just so authoritative and, well, weird. Who wears a cameo ring the size of a dinosaur’s egg on their finger?

“Oop! Now there we go!” Ms. Jitherburrs smiled as she pulled her hand away from Rock’s head and held it up to show that she was all clear. (Well, almost. About five pieces of short brown hair shot out from the sides of the cameo.) “I’m so sorry dear.”

Rock couldn't help but put his hand up to his head and rub it. "Uh, no problem. That's okay. Ms. Jitherburrs."

There was an awkward moment of silence as Rock continued to rub the sore patch on his head and Ms. Jitherburrs just smiled back.

Finally, Jewel spoke. "Uh, did you want me for something?"

"Oh. Oh, yes," Ms. Jitherburrs said as if coming out of a daze. "I just wanted to know if you remembered your homework assignment today. You know the one you forgot yesterday? Hmm?" She raised her eyebrows at Jewel.

"I, uh, I," Jewel stammered.

"Did you forget again Jewel?" Ms. Jitherburrs cocked her head to one side.

Jewel decided not to fight the inevitable. She looked down and let out a deflated, "Yes," while she waited for her second round of detention to hit. With everything that had happened last night, she had completely forgotten the awful assignment.

"Oh well. Try to remember it for tomorrow then, okay Jewel?" Ms. Jitherburrs said as pleasantly as a bluebird. She then smiled, turned and headed into her classroom without another word.

Jewel's mouth just hung open as she looked after her in disbelief.

"Wow. Besides a real lack of hand-eye coordination, she doesn't seem all that bad to me," Rock said, egging Jewel on.

Jewel shook her head and moved on towards Professor Pethers' room. She would never be able to figure that woman out.

Inside the classroom, Rock and Jewel made their way down the aisle by the shelves. They intended to stop just in front of Rock's jar so that Charlie could make eye contact with his friends, but Peter Fallows had followed them right down the aisle and did not give Jewel any breathing room (literally). She had to turn the corner and take her seat at the lab table.

Charlie, in the meantime, was twisting and turning his head to get a better look at his friends. He had noticed they were standing at the front of the jar and from the moment Jewel had walked in the door, they began jumping up and down to get his attention.

Just as Jessop and Charlie finally made eye contact, Adam Reiter stepped up to the end of the lab table blocking Charlie's view. "Hey Rock, check out this move." He dropped an open issue of *Sports Unleashed* onto the lab top. It was opened to a picture of Galvin Mixer, a.k.a the Mix Master, almost upside down in mid-air hurling the ball from his lacrosse stick over his right shoulder.

"Coooooolll," Rock said staring down at the picture.

"Look at the angle on that shot," Adam lowered his body down to point out the angle to Rock. This momentarily brought Jessop back into Charlie's line of vision. Jessop immediately started to mouth something, but Adam stood back up again before Charlie could make out anything.

"He is pure icing. Just juicy. I saw him play once at Centennial Arena and the moves he pulled were front page," Rock slipped into lacrosse lingo.

"No way. You saw him play? How'd you get tickets?" Adam leaned his elbow on the lab-top freeing up the view of the Jar again.

"My dad got them – they were sweet too. Right on the field, dead center."

Adam bolted upright, blocking Jessop again before Charlie and he could exchange a silent word. "No way! You're lying!"

"No. I swear, it's true."

"How come you never told me? I would've printed it in the *Fiercedale Fury*."

Rock just shrugged his shoulders as if it hadn't occurred to him to tell Adam but he knew better than to tell everyone about all the cool stuff he went to with his dad. Average men like Mr. Briggs Turner did not continually get prime seats to sports games.

"Anyway, I'd like to score like that in tomorrow's game," Adam said. He leaned back, almost doing a full back bend, mimicking the expression on Galvin's face in the picture. "Here comes Reiter down the field,

he's getting blocked, but no! He pulls a Mix Master move and scores!" Once again during his back bend, Jessop and Charlie had gotten a glimpse of each other, but on the word "scores!" Adam had jumped straight up with his hands in the air blocking the two friends from seeing each other.

Lucky for Charlie, the bell sounding the beginning of class rang and Adam moved away, hands still high in the air, his mouth making the sounds of fans screaming for him.

"He's so modest," Jewel deadpanned to Rock.

Rock just smiled back. Adam Reiter was a bit overly confident but he really also was an incredible lacrosse player. Rock was happy to have him on his team, even if it meant Reiter being named player of the year instead of him.

Charlie now had a clear view of Jessop who started making large overly-exaggerated motions with his mouth. He looked absolutely ridiculous doing this and Charlie had to control himself from laughing at his friend. He couldn't for the life of him figure out what Jessop was trying to say.

Professor Pethers began speaking. "Good day, my fellow biologists. I expect you've all handed in your homework for today, and now that you are all familiar with your insects..."

Taloula let out a large sob and her two sisters consoled her by rubbing her back amidst their own sniffles. Wads of crumpled up tissues were stranded all over their lab table top.

"...we shall be going around as a class to examine each jar and to discuss..."

"I thought we were going to work on the jars by ourselves," Jewel whispered to Rock.

"Me too," Rock replied.

"How are we going to let Jessop out then?"

"No idea."

On hearing Jessop's name, Charlie turned his attention from trying to guess what Jessop was going on about (he made a mental note: never pick Jessop as your partner in a game of charades) to Rock and Jewel's conversation, "What's going on?"

“Uh, slight hiccup in the operations, Charlie. I thought we’d be working on our jars individually today but it appears as if we are going to go around to each jar as a class. That means we might have a slight problem letting Jessop go and putting you back in.”

Charlie tried to hide his delight at this news. More time outside the jar meant more time with Rock and Jewel and more time to figure out what was going on at Fiercedale. However, he knew Jessop was going to be madder than a hornet protecting his hive.

Professor Pethers walked over to the shelf of jars and picked up the first one. He read the label on it. “Hmmm, let’s see. This one belongs to Adam Reiter. Adam, what did you find and what can you tell us about it?” Professor Pethers set the jar down in front of Adam and motioned for the rest of the class to gather around his lab table.

Jewel and Rock made their way over and carefully positioned themselves in the crowd of students now gazing at Adam’s jar.

Adam had managed to catch a very nice dime-sized, hearty, hairy spider and, so he said, a small tree mite which had now disappeared. “Well, really, there was a mite in there,” Adam gave the jar a shake sending the spider and the jar’s contents flying up against its side wall.

Professor Pethers interceded and removed the jar from Adams hands. “Easy there Adam. Now I very much believe that you had a mite in your jar, but tell me, in your essay for last night, did you happen to discover the dietary habits of spiders?”

“Uh, yeah, sure... spiders, uh, eat other insects. That’s why they spin their webs.” Adam looked up at Professor Pethers as if he had just told everyone a new, exciting, and previously undiscovered piece of information about spiders. He clearly had not caught on that his spider had most likely eaten his mite.

“Mmm, modest *and* perceptive,” Jewel joked under her breathe.

Professor Pethers opened the jar and tried to coax the spider out, “That’s it. Come here little one,” Professor Pethers cooed.

Jewel, Rock and Charlie watched the spider for a moment and then Rock asked Charlie if he thought of what he might say to Jessop when his jar was opened.

“Nothing yet. But I’m sure we’ll work it out. I mean the worst that can happen is that he tries to make a run for it and Professor Pethers tries to stop him,” Charlie reasoned.

“Who knows, maybe the Professor won’t take Jessop out, I think Magda got a couple of ants and her jar and its before yours. Maybe we’ll get lucky and he’ll just have a look at Gunther.”

Charlie thought to himself that if they could only actually understand Gunther, they probably wouldn’t consider his viewing such a fortunate event, but in this case, he had to admit, it would be better than letting Jessop out on the table. Jessop was going to be livid.

“OK, my little friend, back you go into your home...,” Professor Pethers was now putting the spider away. He screwed the cap back on, replaced the jar on the shelf and picked up the next one. It was Jeremy Smith’s.

“Well, you certainly seem to have a way with worms Jeremy,” the Professor’s eyes twinkled slightly as he said this. Jewel was not sure if he was being sarcastic or making some sort of hidden connection between Jeremy’s personality and worms. “Since you seem so talented, why don’t you go ahead and distribute a worm to each student so we can all get a first hand look at these amazing creatures.”

Jeremy eagerly took the jar, open it and with great enthusiasm handed out a worm to each of the students, taking particular care to drop one every once in awhile on someone’s lap. “Opps, sorry about that,” he’d say with a smirk. “Squirmy little buggers, aren’t they?”

After everyone had a good look at Jeremy’s worms, the Professor moved on to Truly’s daddy-longlegs, then Trixie’s caterpillar and the triplets all let out a sob of despair when Taloulah did not have a turn. Instead, the next jar was Jewel’s and it sat right next to Rock’s. Charlie sent Jessop and Gunther a hand signal indicating patience as the two of them were still desperately and pathetically trying to indicate something to Charlie. Charlie had to turn away again in order not to laugh.

Professor Pethers inspected the inside of Jewel’s jar, “Ah, I’ve been waiting to intro-“

Just then the loudest clanging noise that Charlie had ever heard erupted throughout the school and a flashing white light blinked over the door. The fire alarm was in full swing.

“Everybody line up at the door please,” Professor Pethers could be heard hollering over the din. He really

didn't need to say anything at all. As soon as the first note of the alarm had been heard, everyone in the room had made a dash towards the door. Every student at Fiercedale (except Earnest Wheetlebaum and Ashley Anderson, a.k.a. *miss brown nose*) loved a good fire drill.

"What's happening?" asked Charlie, slightly panicked by the sheer volume of the noise.

"Just a fire drill, Charlie. Nothing to be afraid of," Jewel said soothingly.

Charlie glanced up at Jessop and XL as Jewel joined the line at the door. He was going to offer them his own charade performance of "I'll be right back" but didn't have to. Jessop, on hearing the noise, had thrown his entire body over XL's as if to shelter him from a hand grenade attack. Charlie had no choice but to leave the room with the vision of XL and Jessop, huddled together, lying motionless on the ground.

Outside they marched in a semi-orderly line out onto the blacktop of the parking lot at the far end, where only visitor's parked.

Rock glanced down at his watch. "Well, you might not get to say anything to Jessop at all right now. We may just have been saved by the bell, literally."

"What do you mean?" asked Charlie.

"According to my watch it's 11:35 already. By the time we get back in, settle down, and look at Jewel's beetle, I think class might be over."

"Now that would be a stroke of good luck although I have to say, I am kind of curious to see what Jessop has to say. I think he's been trying to tell me something but I can't figure out what. His reenactments look like he's trying to smash a Godzilla-sized gadfly and he keeps mouthing something like, 'The man eats a cantaloupe.' He's been very peculiar."

"'The man eats a cantaloupe?' Now that's strange. Who cares what Professor Pethers had for breakfast?" Rock said.

Just then the "all clear" bell rang.

Professor Pethers led them back into the main entrance, down the hall and into the classroom. "Alright, quickly now I want you to gather around Jewel's lab top as we are going to have a look at her glorious

beetle. This beetle's a real beauty Jewel, a very nice find, I must say."

In the middle of Professor Pethers little discourse about the necessity and pitfalls of beetles in modern agriculture, the bell to switch classes rang. The room erupted into a chaotic mixture of papers being put away, books being shut, students revisiting earlier conversations and the Professor trying to remind people about the upcoming quiz at the end of the week. Charlie doubted if anyone had heard him.

In the meantime, Jewel rushed to get her beetle safely back into the jar without hurting him. He rolled down half the length of the jar and landed on his back. Charlie could hear him giggling, "Uh oh, Barnaby fell down!" He really was sweet.

Almost immediately, the next class was filing into the room, equally as chaotic and loud. There was no chance of getting to Rock's jar.

Charlie had one last glance over Jewel's shoulder as they headed out the door. He was sure Jessop was going to be turning into the Incredible Hulk by now.

Which was why Charlie was surprised when he looked over, Jessop and, now XL and Gunther, they were still mouthing "The man eats a cantaloupe." He just didn't get what breakfast had to do with anything—right now it was time for lunch.

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. How are you feeling about the chapter you just read? What are you wondering about now? What do you think will happen next?
2. Rock quips that Ms. Jitherburrs lacks “hand eye coordination.” Name three activities that require hand eye coordination. On a scale from 1-10, with 1 being “I have none” and 10 being “Mine is perfection,” how is your hand eye coordination?
3. Rock and Adam are fans of Galvin Mixter, the lacrosse player. Do you have any sports heroes? Who are they? Describe why you admire them as opposed to a different player. What makes them “fan worthy?”
4. Rock and Adam have words that are lacrosse lingo- like “Pure icing” and Front page.” What do each of these terms mean to them? Do you use any type of slang with your friends? What words do you use with them that your parents wouldn't understand? Make up a slang word for “delicious” and one for “rotten.”
5. Charlie tells himself never to have Jessop as his partner in charades. Have you ever played charades? Try playing a bit right now: Act out as many different sports as you can in one minute.
6. Jewel wondered if Professor Pethers was being “sarcastic” when talking about Jeremy's way with worms. What does “sarcastic” mean? Do you ever use sarcasm?
7. Professor Peters class was interrupted by a fire alarm drill. Describe what happens during a fire drill at your school. Where do you go? What are the rules? Do you like it or hate it when a fire drill occurs?