



Chapter 19: Word hash

The cafeteria was louder than the science lab and possibly more chaotic by a factor of ten. Rock and Jewel stood in line together each eyeing Sloppy Joe. His music selection for the day apparently was in the modern jazz department. Mashed potatoes were flying every where and the line was moving at a pretty swift pace.

Charlie couldn't believe the spread of food before him: salads, drinks, fried foods, grilled items, sandwiches, soups, and more desserts than a millipede had legs. The smells were positively overwhelming. He could barely contain himself from leaping off of Jewel's shoulder into the array at every station. He kept telling Jewel to put various items on her tray and then changing his mind almost instantaneously when he spied the next item in line. She was beginning to get slightly confused and after awhile she wasn't even sure what she had put on her tray for herself.

Sloppy Joe sprayed Melissa Nickenstein with a wallop of mashed potatoes. She was not amused. He didn't notice.

Rock let out a long sigh. "I just don't get how everything fits together. I mean, just look at our happy Goop-Getter. What could he be up to with a tankard of pickle juice and a barrel full of sugar?"

Jewel cast Sloppy a thoughtful glance. "I really don't get it either. He seems harmless enough, that is if you don't mind being thwacked by food occasionally."

Olivia Adams appeared to have been splashed with gravy, which landed directly in her eye. She held her hand over her left eye and moved quickly out of harms way.

"Oooh, ooh. Chocolate milk. We gotta have chocolate milk," Charlie salivated. Jewel mindlessly moved a box onto her tray.

"What does pickle juice and sugar have to do with the alien writing on Professor Fahid's blackboard?"

Rock slid a container of fruit salad onto his tray without even looking down.

“Maybe it’s an ancient recipe for Hungarian pickled goulash. For all we know it could be a secret love potion cocktail the Goop-Getter is planning for Lundiva the Beehive temptress.”

“Goop Getter’s Honey Hive?” Rock smiled.

“The Queen Freudian Bee.” Jewel countered.

“The Bee-haviourist?”

“The Certifiably Fly-able.”

“The Straight Jacket Yellow Jacket.”

“The Honeycomb Tower.”

“The Ego Super-fly.”

“The Luner Lunduner.”

“The Personality Predictor.”

“The Jungian Onion.”

“The... OK. Flag on the play. What the heck is Jungian?” Rock rolled his eyes and shook his head.

Jewel was just replacing the lima bean salad on her tray with corn on the cob for Charlie. (Charlie had opted for the latter fearing that the beans might cause him gastric distress.) “If you’d paid any attention at all in her class, you’d know that Carl Jung was the grand master of dream interpretation,” Jewel rolled her eyes back at him.

“Oh yeah. I knew that.”

“Yeah right,” Jewel winked at Rock. She was now rotating items on her tray in an aimless fashion. Charlie was ranting too much about everything to try to get his order straight. She just kept moving

things on and off to appear semi-compliant with his wishes.

Thankfully, they were nearing the end of the line which also meant they were approaching Sloppy Joe. He must have come to a more mellow stanza of his jazz selection as the last three people had been served without being doused. That being said, his head still bobbed like he was receiving electrical shocks.

“I wish I’d had more time to write every thing down last night,” Jewel lamented.

Rock pulled a veggie burger with cheese onto his tray and held up a hand to keep Sloppy Joe from adding any side order to his plate or shirt.

Jewel looked down at her tray. It was a complete mess and not a thing on it appealed to her—corn on the cob, neon-colored orange Jell-o, prune juice (how did that get there?) and an over ripe banana. She looked up at the specials board, sighed and daringly asked Sloppy Joe what was good today.

With his left pointer finger he conducted his imaginary jazz band and finally pointed to the container full of vegetarian three-bean hash. Jewel raised an eyebrow in disbelief. Maybe he’d hadn’t heard her properly. He did, after all, have earphones on. But before she could protest, Sloppy Joe had scooped out a serving for her and twirled the plate onto her tray in sync with the crescendo of his music (he was playing it so loudly, Jewel could hear it blaring out of his earphones). She moved away thinking she might as well just be grateful that she wasn’t now wearing three-bean hash for the rest of the day.

Jewel was just about to line up behind Rock at the register when she noticed Lundiva tottering up the side of the room. She was trying to catch Sloppy Joe’s attention by waving her left hand wildly in the air, as if with her enormous Beehive hair and Santa-Claus outfit she could actually be missed.

Rock noticed her as well and the two of them watched her beckon Sloppy Joe. She seemed to be trying to get him to come over to her but he immediately waved her off with a wild musical display of his hand and silver serving-spoon that sent three-bean hash just about everywhere behind him. If anyone had been wondering what vegetarian three-bean hash was, there was now a good size sampling of it right up there on the board.

Lundiva looked greatly annoyed, glanced down once more at the sheet of paper on top of her Abnormal Psychology teacher’s guide, shook her head and then pranced briskly back out of the cafeteria.

“What was that all about?” Jewel gave Rock a hugely puzzled look as she took her place in line behind

him at the cash register.

“Actually, what is *that* all about?” Rock pointed at her tray of random and wholly unappetizing items.

Jewel shook her head, “Don’t ask.”

Rock weaved his way in and out of students and tables. “The Jungian Onion certainly seemed keen on talking to the Goop-Getter again, wouldn’t you say?”

“Definitely. I am so perplexed. None of it makes any sense.”

Their usual table was empty. “OK Charlie, when we sit down, you’re free to go to town on this tray but if anyone else comes along, I’d suggest you high tail it back up to my shoulder.”

Jewel and Rock sat across from each other at the table and, while they went over the previous night’s events, Charlie sailed onto the tray with all the grace of an elephant attempting to master a pogo stick. He was just too excited about his feast and actually experienced vertigo trying to decide which item to attack first. He opted for the neon colored jell-o: not only could he eat it but he could play on it too. He was shoving a giant glob of gelatinous goo into his mouth when a thought occurred to him, maybe Jessop hadn’t been raving about cantaloupe during science class.

“Cantaloupe—antelope—ant elopes—can’t elope,” Charlie started turning the possibilities around in his head, “the man eats a—the man east of.” He put his head back and let a big chunk of orange guck wiggle down his throat.

It was at that moment that Earnest Wheetlebaum walked over and dropped a folded newspaper down onto Jewel’s tray, covering Charlie underneath.

“Have you seen today’s crossword? It’s monumentally absurd. Look—they want a three letter word describing a famous number beginning with “P.” Even Jake Ravenswift, would know that that’s got to be Pi and, although Jake would probably spell it with an ‘E’ I can’t believe that these guys could be so daft. It’s so annoying.”

Jewel quickly picked the paper up from her tray and beamed Rock a quick facial expression to check the back of the paper and the tray for Charlie. She then turned her eyes towards Earnest. “Did you ever think it might be P-H-I? You know, 1.618?” She tried not to sound condescending but she didn’t exactly want

Earnest hanging around either.

“Oh,” Earnest stopped short in his tirade. He was obviously embarrassed at his mistake (and if the truth be known, he didn’t even know there was a number 1.618 called Phi). He banged himself on the forehead with the palm of his hand (a little too hard actually). “Yeah, of course. Don’t know what got into me. That was an obvious one to miss wasn’t it?” He looked down at the paper in order to avoid looking at Jewel.

“Nah. I’m impressed that you know Phi. I only know of it because my aunt Belinda is an art buff.”

She pushed the newspaper back into his hands hoping he would take the hint and leave.

Earnest took the paper, getting a nice handful of orange Jell-o, muttered a flustered “Thanks” and shuffled off while scribbling the three letters into place on the crossword.

Jewel focused on the tray in front of her. “Charlie! Are you okay?” she whispered into her Jell-o.

Charlie was wiping an immense amount of orange jelly from his body. He had been flattened by the newspaper into it. He brushed at his legs with all four of his upper limbs but seemed only able to relocate the Jell-o to other parts of his body.

Rock felt sorry for Charlie. He was positively covered from head to toe and not making a bit of difference in his attempts to wipe himself clean. “Well, look at it this way. At least now you can tell Jessop that you know what he felt like last night.”

“What on earth do you mean?” Charlie looked at Rock bewildered. He had no idea what Rock was talking about.

“You know, when the manila envelope came crashing down on him.”

Charlie suddenly went very still. “That’s it! That’s it!” he screamed. “How could I have been so positively dumb?”

“What? What are you talking about?” Rock leaned in closer to Jewel’s tray.

Just then Adam Reiter dropped his lunch tray down next to Rock’s. On it lay the same picture of Galvin Mixter in *Sports Unleashed* that Adam had been raving about earlier. “Hey dudes. What’s rockin’ Rock?”

Rock jerk his head back away from the tray. "Uh, nothing. What's news with you?"

Adam ripped off a hunk of his Power Bar and shoved it into his mouth right as he answered, "Nothin'."

Fascinated by the depth of this conversation, Jewel returned to searching for Charlie and was relieved to find him already on his way back up to her shoulder (still slightly orange). In the meantime, she tried to appear interested in Rock and Adam's conversation.

"Dude. That move is just so juicy," Adam said pointing down at the picture with another piece of his Power Bar. "You want to try it out in practice this afternoon?"

"Yeah, sure," Rock said mindlessly; he was frustrated that Charlie had not gotten the chance to finish his thought before Adam had thrown himself onto the bench next to him. Plus, he could no more do a backflip with a lacrosse stick in his hand than he could balance six rhinoceroses on his head.

Adam was just about to go into details about how they could attempt the move when he groaned underneath his breath. "Oh no. Save me, will ya?" He suddenly retracted into himself and stared quickly down at the picture as if he had never seen it before.

Jewel looked over just in time to see the Trixie triplets bearing down on their table with their food trays. All three of them had a massive crush on Adam.

"Hi Jewel. Hi Rock. Hi Adam!," they sang in unison. They walked behind Jewel and then each one slid into place on the bench next to Jewel.

Adam kept his head down low. Rock smiled back at all of them and said "Hi" at the same time as Jewel. By this time Charlie was halfway up Jewel's arm. He couldn't wait to tell her what he'd discovered.

Taloula, who had slid in first and whose eyes looked as puffy and red as Mildred's, stared directly across the table at Adam. "What are you looking at, Adam?" The "Adam" came out as a sigh.

"Nothin' much. Just a lacrosse picture."

Rock couldn't resist. "Oh come on, Adam! That's not just any picture! That's the mix master pulling *your* famous move. Check it out, Taloula." Rock grabbed the magazine from Adam's tray and passed it across

the table to Taloula. Truly and Tickly leaned over to have a look at the picture while Adam looked over at Rock and silently mouthed the words, "You're dead." Rock grinned.

"You can do that?!" Truly put her hand to her cheek in amazement.

Adam was about to answer truthfully when Rock interjected, "Sure. He does it all the time in practice. He just doesn't show off with it during our games. But if you come to practice today, I'm sure he'll do it for you."

"Really?" Tickly gasped.

"Oh, that would be wonderful!" Taloula cooed.

"Could you please, Adam?" Truly just about begged.

Adam's whole body seemed to tense more and more with each statement that was flung across the table. He tried to deny the ability to do it, "I really can't..."

But Rock cut him off. "Of course you can, Adam. You don't have to be modest in front of us. We all know why you were named lacrosse player of the year last year."

"I heard your trophy is really big!" Tickly nearly screamed.

"Is it?" Taloula chimed.

"Can we see it sometime?" Truly asked.

Adam nearly groaned. Rock was beaming from ear to ear. Jewel just about spat out the prune juice she was drinking (she had gotten really thirsty) from laughing so hard at Adam's sour face.

Charlie, however, wasn't paying attention to any of it. He had just made it up to the top of Jewel's shoulder, after a full non-stop run, and was desperate to tell Jewel his discovery.

"The man (huff)-il- (huff)-a (huff, huff) on-(huff) veil-(huff)-oop (huff, Huff)"

Jewel heard Charlie, but for all his panting, she could not understand a word of it. "What??" she said out

loud in a perplexed voice.

All three Trixie triplets turned and stared at her with incredulous looks on their faces. Truly spoke first, “And what’s wrong with wanting to see Adam’s trophy? Hmmm?”

“Oh, uh, nothing of course. What I meant to say was, *what* does it look like?” She shot Rock a glance, begging for help.

The Trixie triplets were not convinced. They all eyed Jewel suspiciously but then turned to Adam as he stumbled for an answer.

“Really, it’s not that big of a deal. It’s like any other trophy.” He buried his face back down in the magazine which he had put back onto his tray.

Charlie was regaining his breath now and moved in even closer to Jewel’s ear so she could hear him properly this time. “The Manila Envelope! Jessop and XL didn’t say the ‘man eats a cantaloupe.’ They were saying, ‘The Manila Envelope!’”

Surprised and excited, Jewel blurted out, “They saw it?”

Once again, all three of the Trixie triplets turned and stared at Jewel. This time the annoyance on their faces was clear. Taloula had just finished saying that they all still really wanted to see Adam’s trophy. “Jewel! I just said we hadn’t seen it! And why would it matter if we had any way?” Taloula’s eyes squinted suspiciously at Jewel.

“Oh, no, really I don’t care if you’ve seen it. It really *isn’t* a big deal,” Jewel stammered.

Charlie was aghast at Jewel’s response. “*How could she think it was no big deal? And I didn’t say I’d seen it, Jessop and XL did! How could she not care either way?*” he thought. The envelope was a huge hint to this whole puzzle. If Jessop and XL had seen someone carrying the manila envelope then they would know for sure who the hooded figure was. Plus, if they could find out what was in the manila envelope, they might be able to figure out how everything fit together. It might even hold the key to Professor Fahid’s blackboards!

Charlie was fuming. She must not have heard him properly. He spoke into her ear again, “The manila envelope! I am sure Jessop and XL have seen the manila envelop and *that’s* what *they* were trying to tell

me!" He put emphasis on the words so that she would hear him correctly this time. (Charlie said all of this just as Adam was telling the triplets that he didn't feel well and might not make it to practice.)

"That's great!" Jewel blurted out.

All three of the Trixie triplets stood up in unison glaring at Jewel. Ticky spoke for all of them, "Why Jewel Dervin I think you might just be the rudest person we know. Adam, we all think it's horrible that you're not feeling well and we do hope that you are better for practice later today, and most certainly, for the game this weekend. We'll see you later in Unified Arts class if you feel well enough! Goodbye everyone!" With a great big "Humph!" all three triplets then turned their noses in the air at Jewel, marched their way away from the bench and made their way across the cafeteria with their trays.

Jewel sat in shock. She had no idea what had just happened. Adam, who had looked as if he was about to depart as well, changed directions and sat back down on the bench. "Uh, well, at least they're gone now."

Jewel looked to Rock for help. "So are you really feeling sick then?" Rock asked, trying to clarify the situation.

"No, I'm fine. I just said that so I could get out of here."

Jewel was beginning to understand what had happened. "Oh, uh, I didn't mean it was great that you were feeling sick Adam..." she stammered trying to cover her blunder. But she couldn't think of anything else to say that would explain why she had blurted out "That's great!" at the precise moment Adam had informed everyone that he wasn't feeling well.

Adam luckily interrupted her. "It's okay Jewel. Whatever you meant, it worked to get the triplets out of here and, so, that's cool." He then turned and glared at Rock, "But you, on the other hand, I will get *you* back! I can't believe you brought up player of the year!" He groaned.

Rock had a big smile on his face and was laughing, he was still so pleased at himself.

Jewel, in the meantime, desperately wanted to hear exactly what Charlie had to say about the manila envelope. "Hey guys? Um, how about if we head outside? It's beautiful out."

Adam's face dropped. "Nope. Sorry. No can do. I've got History later today and I didn't do my homework last night. Too busy watching the Mix Master on cable."

“Alright,” Jewel said as she stood up with her untouched tray. “We’ll catch you later then.”

“Sure, see you later Jewel,” Adam said popping another piece of Power Bar in his mouth. “And I’ll kill you later Rock.”

“Looking forward to it,” Rock smiled as he removed his tray from the table.

The two of them dumped the left over contents of their trays in the garbage (Charlie let out a large groan, watching it all disappear) and then headed outside. Jewel made her way straight for the far end of the bleachers where no one else was sitting while she got a full update on the manila envelope situation from Charlie.

“I’m sure Jessop and Gunther were mouthing the words ‘manila envelope.’ I can’t believe I missed it earlier. That’s why they kept repeating it over and over. I wonder where they saw it. We have to go back and find out,” Charlie rambled out loud.

“Well, we can’t go back right now. There’s class going on,” Rock looked at Jewel. “Any ideas?”

Jewel thought for a moment and then shook her head back and forth. “No. I think the best we can do, without raising any suspicions, is to check on them right after the last bell. I’m sure you can go in Rock and ask the Professor if you can check on your jar.”

“When’s the last bell?” Charlie asked, thinking over the plan.

“3:20,” Rock informed him.

Charlie checked his Chronopaw. “But that’s over two hours from now!” he exclaimed. “We’ve got to get back in there earlier.”

Jewel winced when she heard this. She knew Charlie was right and yet she also knew they had absolutely no chance of getting into the science lab any earlier than 3:20. She glanced down at her watch. Lunch period was about to end and she hadn’t even had a chance to focus on the blackboard writing from Professor Fahid’s classroom.

Jewel shook her head “no.” “Charlie, there’s just no way we’re going to get back into that classroom

before the end of the day. Rock's classes are all on the other side of the building. I've got Unified Arts, last period, which is right next door but I can't possibly be late or else Ms. Jitherburrs will give me more detention, I'm sure. We just have to be patient."

"Oh," Charlie's spirits fell.

"Listen, Charlie. You hang with me and together we'll try to figure out what this writing is about." She held the paper up for Charlie to see. "I'm having a tough time with it and you did say last night that it looked vaguely familiar to you. Maybe if we work on it together something will jog your memory. I'm positive if we figure this out, we'll know exactly what's going on and *then* when we talk to Jessop and Gunther, we'll be able to put *all* the pieces of the puzzle together. What do you say?" Jewel raised her eyebrows at Charlie.

Charlie remained silent. He was desperate now to talk to Gunther and Jessop and the thought of waiting two hours was equally as torturous as the hunger pains in his stomach.

"Aw, come on Charlie. I need your help," Jewel coaxed him. "And plus, I've got Unified Arts last period. I promise to let you try whatever we're making."

Food. It sealed the deal. "OK, I'm yours." Charlie smiled.

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. Have you figured out how all the pieces fit together yet? Are you curious?
2. The cafeteria had more dessert offerings than “a millipede has legs.” How many legs does a millipede have?
3. Jewel suggests that perhaps all the strange things are related to “an ancient recipe for Hungarian pickled goulash.” What is goulash? Do you think you would like it?
4. The psychologist Carl Jung specialized in interpreting dreams. Do you believe dreams have hidden meanings? What do you think the purpose of dreams is? Did you dream last night? About what? What is the funniest dream you have ever had?
5. Do you know what the number PI is? If so, how many decimal places can you recite by memory? If not, google it.
6. Jewel tried not to sound condescending with Earnest. What does the word “condescending” mean? Do you know someone who can be that way? Do you think they are that way on purpose? What might cause someone to act that way? How can you be careful not to be that way?
7. Adam won a trophy for being player of the year. Have you ever won a trophy or received an award? Have your parents?