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CHRIS GRABENSTEIN

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I Funny
I Even Funnier
I Totally Funniest
Jacky Ha-Ha
Treasure Hunters
Treasure Hunters: Danger Down the Nile
Treasure Hunters: Secret of the Forbidden City



CHRIS GRABENSTEIN

illustrated by **Brooke Allen**

Random House  New York

For my mom
and my memories of
Treasure Island, Florida
—CG

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Gator Tales

Like I told my friends at school, living in a motel is always exciting—especially during an alligator attack.

“To this day, nobody knows how that giant alligator made it up to the second-floor balcony of my family’s motel on St. Pete Beach,” I told my audience.

The cafeteria was so quiet you could’ve heard a taco shell snap.

“Maybe it took the steps. Maybe it just stood up, locked its teeth on a porch railing, and flipped itself up and over in a mighty somersault swoop. The thing was strong, people. Very, very strong.

“I heard Clara, my favorite housekeeper, scream, ‘*Monstruo, Señor Wilkie! ¡Monstruo!*’

“Run!” I shouted, because Clara’s always been like a second mom to me and I wanted her to be

alive enough to see her daughter graduate from med school.

“Well, she didn’t need me to shout it twice. Clara abandoned her laundry cart while that alligator raced toward the room at the far end of the balcony. And I knew why: the chicken.

“See, the family in room 233—a mom, a dad, two kids, and a baby—had just gone upstairs with a whole bucket of the stuff. Heck, I could smell it twenty doors down. The giant alligator? He smelled that secret blend of eleven herbs and spices all the way back at his little lake on the Bayside Golf Course, where, legend has it, he’s chomped off a few ball divers’ arms.

“Thinking fast and running faster, I made it to Clara’s deserted laundry cart. I grabbed a few rolls of toilet paper and lobbed them like hand grenades. The T.P. conked the gator on his head just as he was about to chomp through the terrified family’s door.

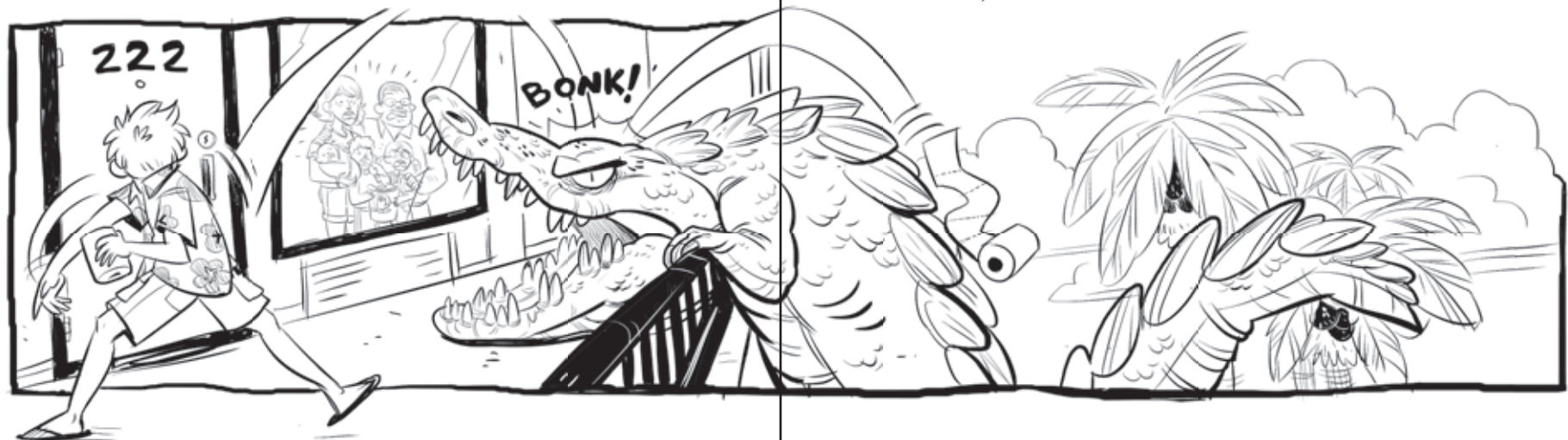
“That’s when the giant lizard whipped around.

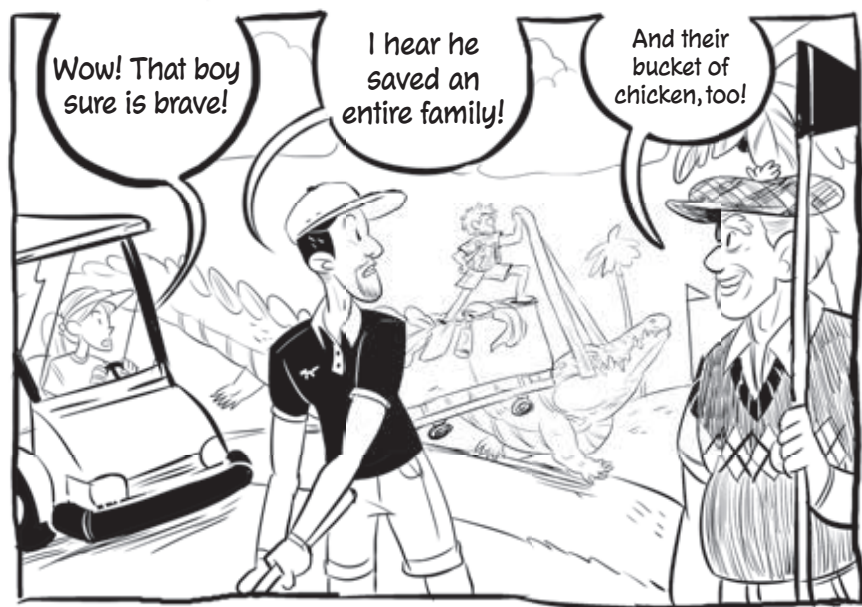
He looked at me with those big bowling-ball eyes. Forget the chicken. He wanted *me*! He roared like smelly thunder and sprinted down the balcony.

“I just grinned. Because the gator was doing exactly what I wanted him to do. While he barreled ahead on stubby legs, I braced my feet on the bumper of the laundry cart. I lashed several towels together to create a long terry-cloth lasso. I twirled it over my head. I waited for my moment.

“When the gator was five, maybe six, feet away, I flung out my towel rope, aiming for his wide-open mouth. He clamped down. I tugged back. My lasso locked on a jagged tooth. ‘Hee-yah!’ I shouted. ‘Giddyup!’ The monster took off.

“What happened next, you wonder? Well, I rode that laundry cart all the way back to the crazy alligator’s golf course, where I sent the gator scurrying down into its water hazard. ‘And stay away from our motel,’ I hollered, and I guess that gator listened, because he’s never dared return.”





When I finished, everyone applauded, even Ms. Nagler, the teacher on cafeteria duty. She raised her hand to ask a question.

“Yes, ma’am?”

“How’d you and the alligator get down from the second floor?”

I winked. “One step at a time, Ms. Nagler. One step at a time.”

She, and everybody else, laughed.

Yep, everybody at Ponce de León Middle School loves a good P. T. Wilkie story.

Except, of course, Mr. Frumpkes.

He came into the cafeteria just in time to hear my big finish.

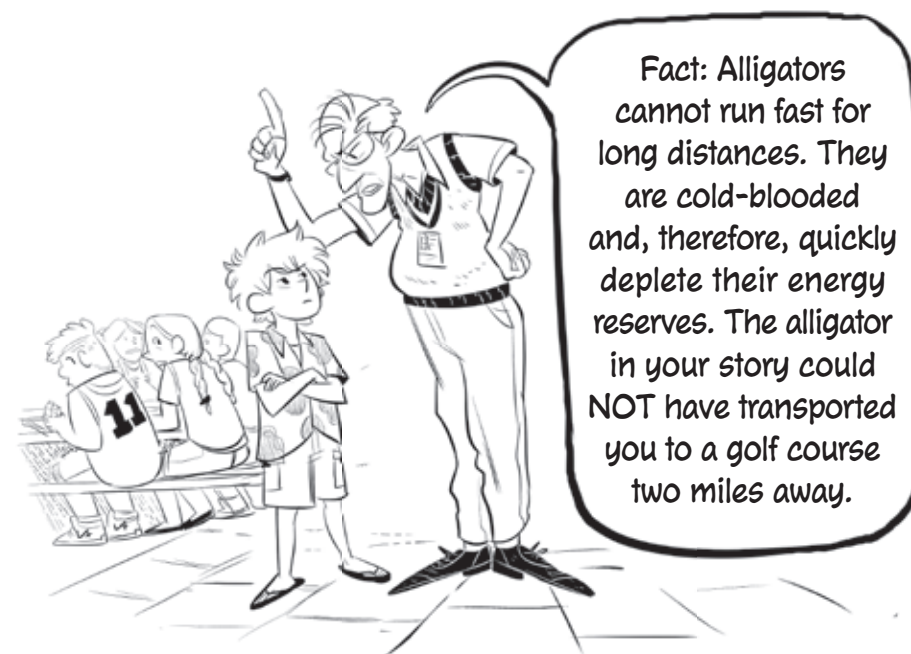
And like always, he wasn’t smiling.



Truth and Consequences

“Mr. Wilkie?” Mr. Frumpkes had his hands on his hips and his eyes on me. “Lunch is over.”

Right on cue, the bell signaling the end of lunch period started clanging.



Between you and me, I sometimes think Mr. Frumpkes has telepathic powers. He can make the class-change bell ring just by thinking about it.

“Ah,” he said, clearly enjoying the earsplitting rattle and clanks. “Now we don’t have to listen to any more of Mr. Wilkie’s outrageously ridiculous tales!”

My first class right after lunch?

History with Mr. Frumpkes, of course.

He paced back and forth at the front of the room with his hands clasped behind his back.

“Facts are important, boys and girls,” he said. “They lead us to the truth. Here at the Ponce de León Middle School, we have a motto: ‘*Vincit omnia veritas!*’ ”

I couldn’t resist making a wisecrack. “I thought our school motto was ‘Go, Conquistadors!’ ”

Mr. Frumpkes stopped pacing so he could glare at me some more.

“‘*Vincit omnia veritas*’ is Latin, Mr. Wilkie. It means ‘The truth conquers all.’ ”

“So it is like ‘Go, Conquistadors!’ because conquistadors conquered stuff and—”

“I’m beginning to understand why your father never shows up at parent-teacher conferences, Mr. Wilkie.”

Okay. That hurt. My ears were burning.

“But since Mr. Wilkie seems fixated on

conquistadors,” said Mr. Frumpkes, “here is everybody’s brand-new homework assignment.”

“Awww,” groaned the whole classroom.

“Don’t groan at me. Groan at your immature classmate! Thanks to Mr. Wilkie, you are all required to write a one-thousand-word essay filled with cold, hard facts about the man whom this middle school is named after: the famous Spanish conquistador Ponce de León. Your papers are due on Monday.”

“Whoa,” said my friend Pinky Nelligan. “Monday is the start of Spring Break.”

“Fine,” said Mr. Frumpkes. “Your papers are due tomorrow. Friday.”

More groans.

“Let this be a lesson to you all: facts are more important than fiction.”

I was about to disagree and tell Mr. Frumpkes that I think some stories have more power than all the facts you can find on Google.

But I didn’t.

Because *everybody* in the classroom was making stink faces at me.



I Scream, You Scream

I refused to let Mr. Frumpkes win.

“Oh, before I forget—quick announcement: you guys are all invited to the Wonderland Motel after school today. My grandpa wants to try out his new outdoor ice-cream dispenser. The ice cream is free, limit one per guest.”

The groans and moans of my classmates turned into whoops of joy. Mr. Frumpkes tried to restore order by banging on his desk with a tape dispenser.

“We’re here to discuss history, Mr. Wilkie! Not free ice cream!”

But everybody loves free ice cream.

That’s just a cold, hard fact.

Unless it’s soft-serve.

Then it’s kind of custardy.

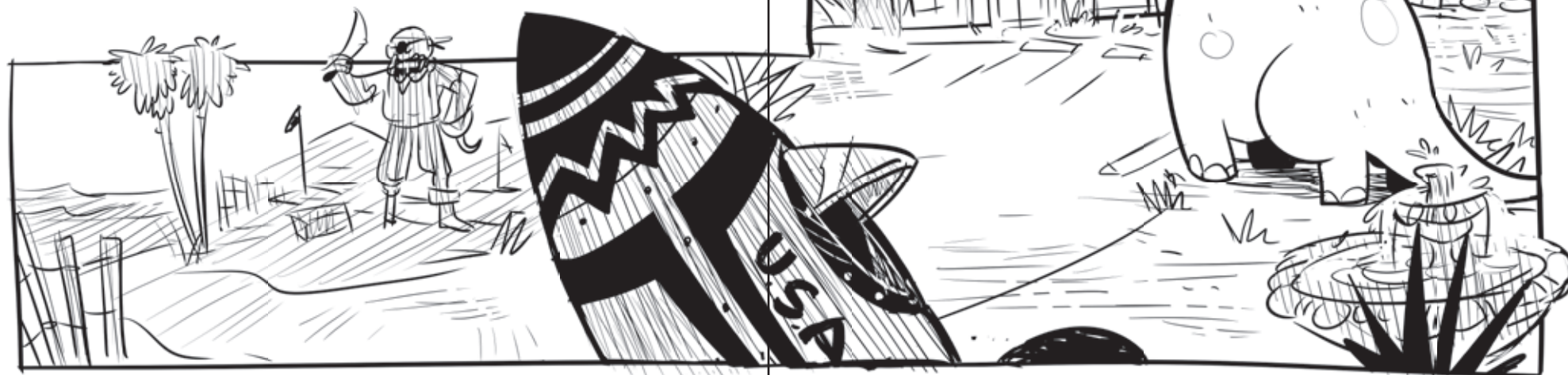




Welcome to Wonderland

The Wonderland, the motel my family owns and operates on St. Pete Beach, used to be called Walt Wilkie's Wonder World.

It was a resort and small-time amusement park my grandfather opened back in October 1970—exactly one year before that other Walt opened Disney World over in Orlando.



“We had a very good year, P.T.,” Grandpa always tells me. “A very good year.”

Now the Wonderland is just a motel with a lot of wacky decorations and tons of incredible stories but not too many paying customers.

There's even a sausage-and-cheese-loving mouse out back named Morty D. Mouse. Grandpa was going to call him Mikey Mouse, but, well, like I said, Disney World opened.

My mom is the motel manager. I think that's why she frowns a lot and nibbles so many pencils. The Wonderland can "barely make ends meet," she tells me. Constantly. That means we'll never be rich hotel tycoons like the Hiltons, I guess.

Mom and I live in room 101/102, right behind the front desk. The lobby is our living room (complete with two soda machines, a snack pantry, and tons of brochures).

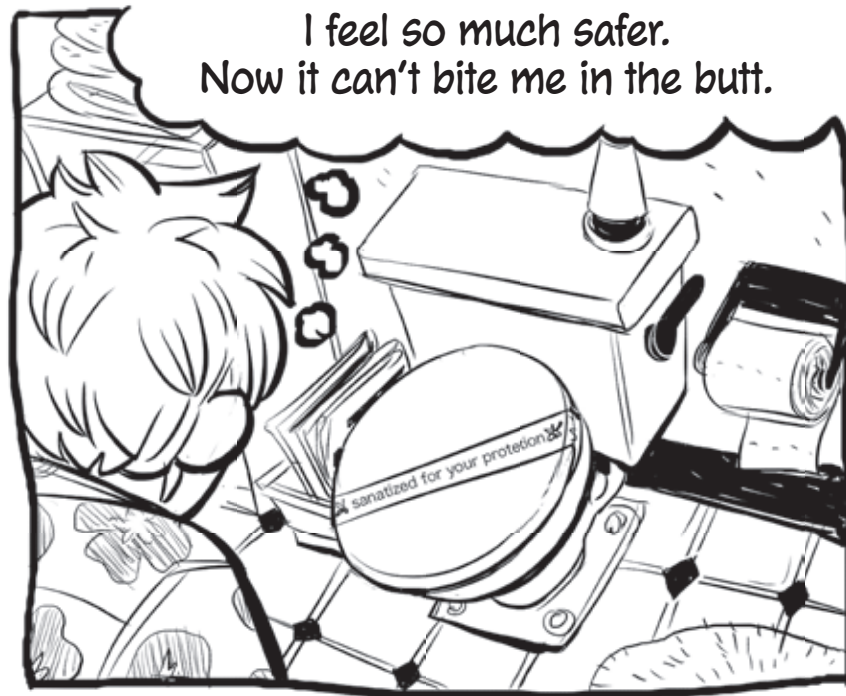
Grandpa lives in a one-bedroom apartment over the maintenance shed near the swimming pool.

He likes to tinker with his "attractions" back there. Right now, he is trying to fix up a smiling goober he bought from a "Hot Boiled Peanuts" stand in Georgia. He thinks with enough green, orange, and yellow paint, he can turn Mr. Peanut into some sort of smiling tropical fruit—like that's all the Wonderland needs to make it *Florida Fun in the Sun* magazine's "Hottest Family Attraction in the Sunshine State" (a title Grandpa really wants to snatch away from Disney World someday).

One thing's for sure: the Wonderland Motel is the best place a kid could ever live.



There's daily maid service. My toilet is sanitized for my protection.



We have more ice than Antarctica, plus free cable and HBO. Also, if you know how to bump the glass just right, you can score *two* bags of chips every time you buy one from the vending machine.

And now Grandpa's set up a soft-serve ice-cream dispenser poolside?

Yep. The Wonderland is kid heaven. There's always something wild 'n' wacky going on—which is just the way I like it.



Amenities

We can't afford to give away free ice cream, Dad," Mom told Grandpa when she saw me and my friends swirling our cones under the pump handle.

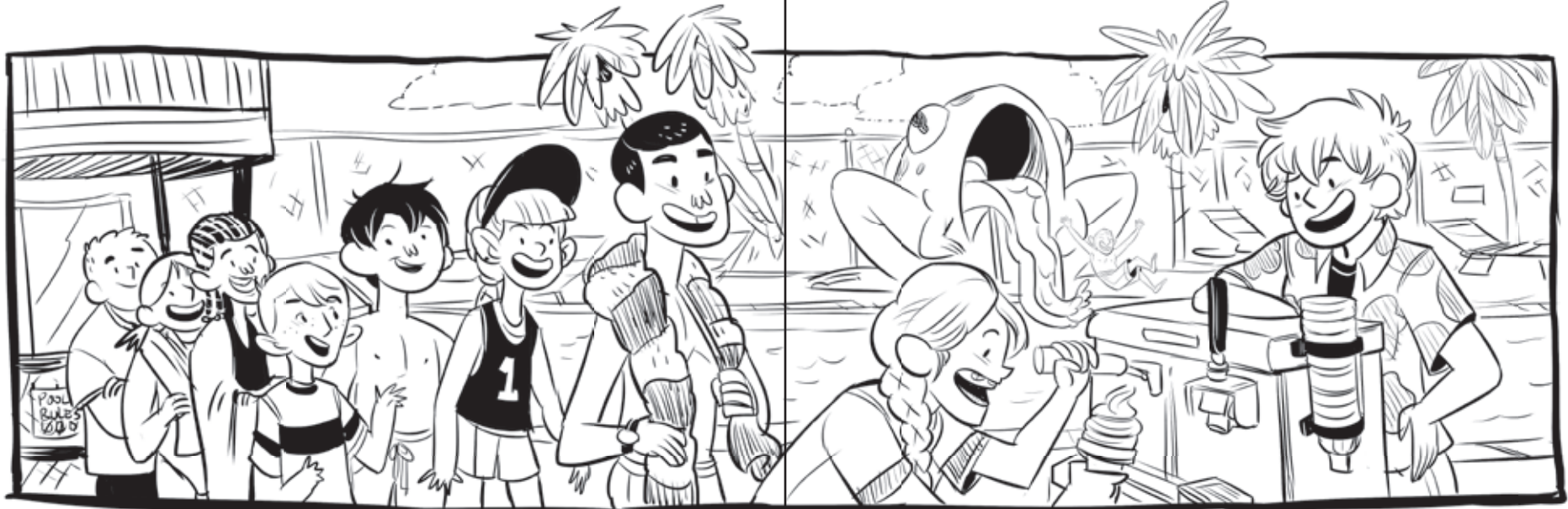
Pinky Nelligan wasn't using a cone. He just stuck his face under the nozzle.

I mouthed the words "We can barely make ends meet" before Mom said it out loud—for the ten billionth time.

"Relax, Wanda," said Grandpa. "This is a resort. We need the little extras, what they call amenities, to attract customers."

"These aren't customers," said Mom. "These are P.T.'s friends from school."

"Ah," said Grandpa, raising his finger the way he does when he's about to say something super important, "but one day they'll grow up and have



families of their own and they'll say, 'Remember that wonderful resort in Florida with the all-you-can-eat ice-cream buffet poolside? That was such a lovely amenity. Let's go there on our next vacation!'"

He slurped his can of Dr. Brown's Cel-Ray soda to punctuate his point. By the way—Cel-Ray soda? Yep. It's celery-flavored. Don't ask.

Mom sighed. "Dad?"

"Yes, Wanda?"

"These kids all live in Florida. They're not coming here for vacation when they grow up."

"What if they move to Maine? Maybe Canada?"

"I think my friend Julie Scarboro likes Canada," I said, trying to help Grandpa out. "I know she likes maple syrup. And Kip Rand over there knows somebody who lives in Maine."

"He's my cousin," said the Kipster helpfully. "He loves lobster."

"Can we have, like, seconds?" asked Porter Malkiel, another friend from school, who'd never been to Canada and didn't know anybody in Maine but could definitely scarf down ice-cream cones.

"Help yourself, Porter," said Grandpa. "It's an amenity."

Mom sighed again and walked away, mumbling what she always mumbled when she sighed twice and walked away: "Why do I have to be the only grown-up in this family?"

I don't know who she was asking.

Or if she ever got an answer.

I was too busy enjoying all that free ice cream with my friends.