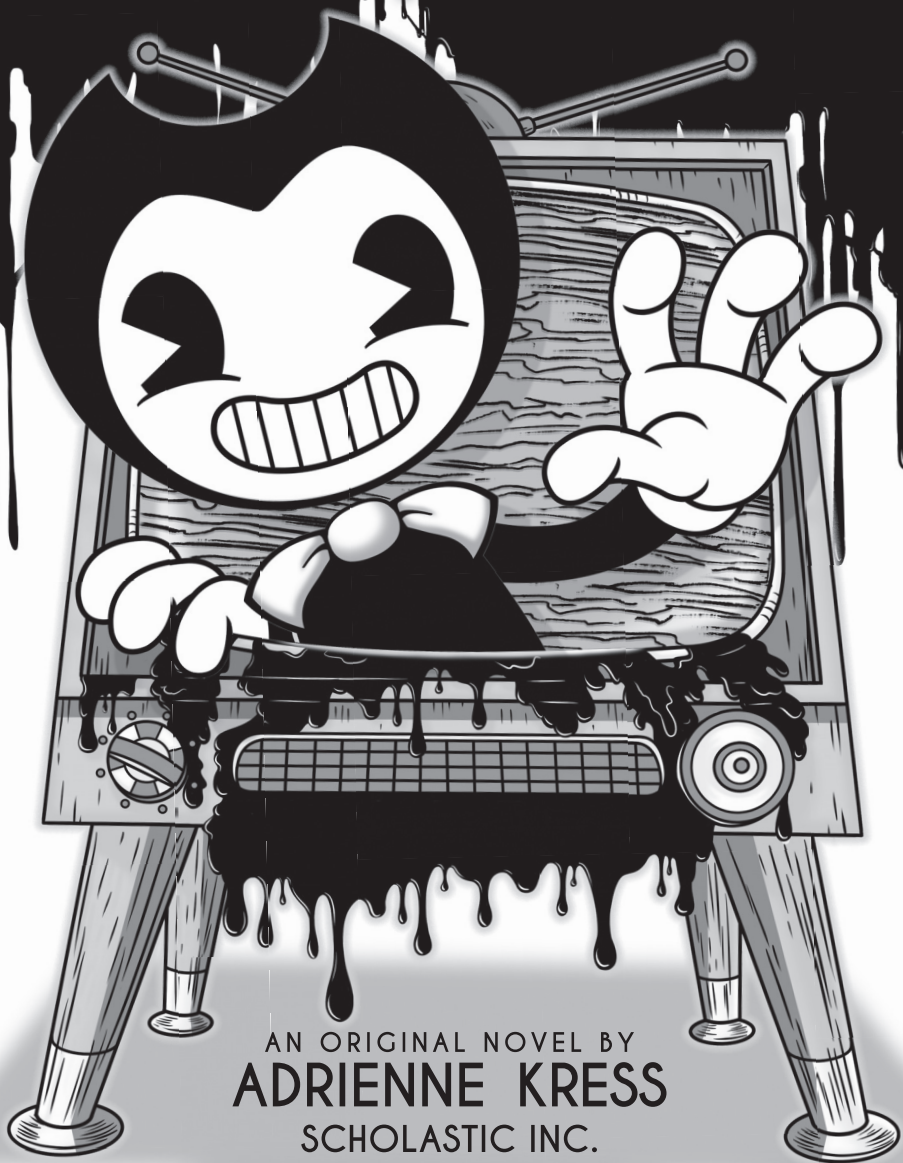


BENDY[®]

FADE TO BLACK



AN ORIGINAL NOVEL BY
ADRIENNE KRESS
SCHOLASTIC INC.

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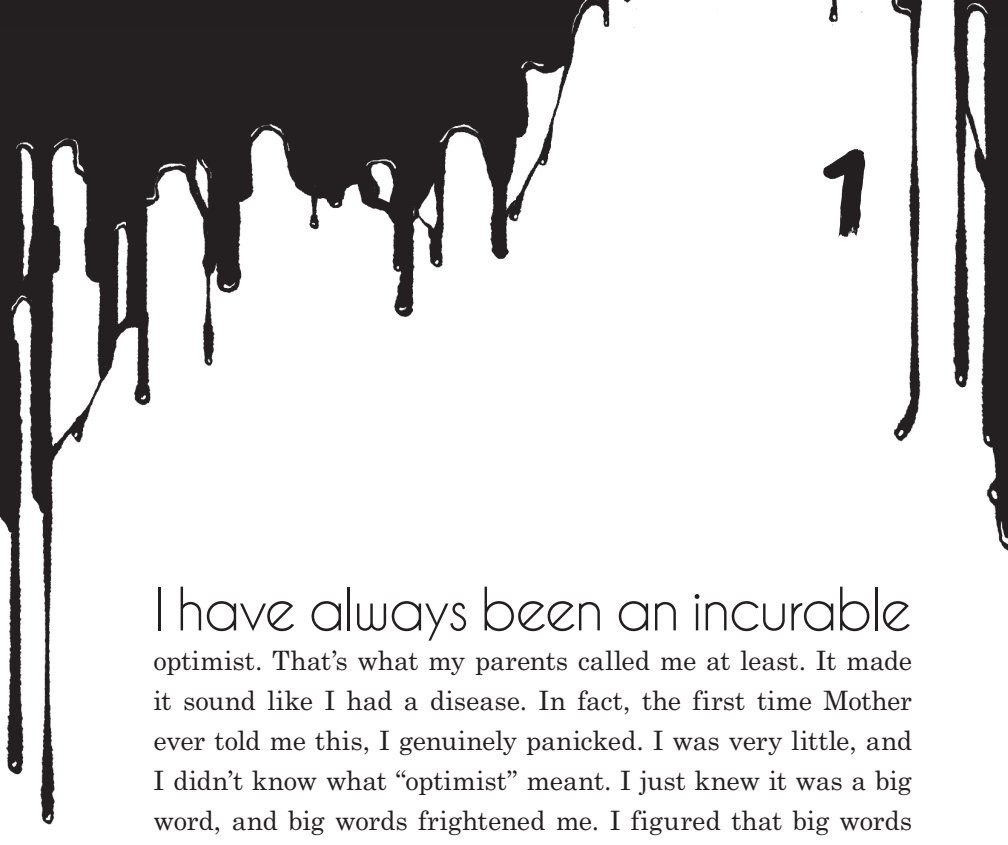
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I have always been an incurable optimist. That's what my parents called me at least. It made it sound like I had a disease. In fact, the first time Mother ever told me this, I genuinely panicked. I was very little, and I didn't know what "optimist" meant. I just knew it was a big word, and big words frightened me. I figured that big words were invented to hide the truth, because if you wanted to just say something, there were a lot of little words that worked. Of course now that I'm almost officially an adult I feel differently. Big words are marvelous and exist to be even more precise in our communicating.

But when I was little, well, I thought my mother was telling me that I was going to die.

I cried so hard I could barely breathe as she held me close, desperately trying to explain that being an optimist was a positive thing.

"An optimist sees the good in the world. They are happy and positive."

Still more sobbing.

"Don't you see, Rosebud, you bring us such joy!"

“I. Don’t. Understand,” I said between heaving sobs. Snot flowed out of my tiny nose. I remember that very well. The grotesque has always fascinated me, even as I evidently went through life as if skipping through a meadow. At least according to my mother’s perception of it all.

Mother’s hand released her tight grip on my heaving back. Even so young, I understood she was trying a different tactic with me. “Not everyone sees the world like you.” Her warm hand slowly started stroking my hair. I almost instantly felt calmer, even as I clung to her knee with my sharp little nails digging into her leg.

“I don’t see the world as anything!” I insisted, feeling desperate, but my breathing became more regular.

“Rose, we all have our own little ways of looking at the world. Some people see only bad things. They see dangers and grumpy people.”

“I see dangerous things! I always look both ways before crossing the street.”

“Of course you do because you’re a good girl.” A heavy sigh as my poor mother tried to explain the concept of internal bias to a six-year-old. “It’s like this: You know how yesterday it rained?”

“Yes, I know that.”

“But we still dressed you up in your raincoat and boots and went to the park and played?”

“Of course I remember. It was only yesterday.”

“Well, was it a good day?”

Five-year-old me rolled her eyes very hard at that, which was tough because my face was smushed into her leg. “Of course. We jumped in puddles.” Puddle jumping was amazing;

Mother understood I felt that way. What she didn't understand was why it was amazing. Sure, the splashing was the best part. But I liked how the world was all upside down in puddles, how it wasn't quite like a reflection in a mirror so it looked kind of like another world was inside there. I always thought that if you jumped hard enough you could jump right into a whole other world, the same as ours but a little different. Mother didn't know that part. She wouldn't have understood anyway. It was my own private little secret make-believe.

"Well, you see some people might have thought yesterday was a bad day because it rained. Because it was gloomy and not sunny outside."

"They would have?"

I pulled my face away and looked up at Mother. She was very pretty, and her halo of curls always made me feel warm inside. "Yes," replied Mother. She smiled that soft smile back. It was a special kind of smile, only for me. And for Ollie. Though Ollie wasn't around yet. So I thought at the time it was a secret thing between mother and daughter. But it turned into a secret thing between mother and daughter and son. Which, of course, I was perfectly happy with. Especially since Ollie and I had our own secret looks between us.

"They don't like puddles?" This was a hard concept for me to grasp.

Mother let loose a small laugh and sat us both down on the settee. She held me in her lap, her arms wrapped around my waist, mine around her neck as I stared at her intently.

"Some people can only see the disappointments, the bad things in the world. But you see the good."

"Because the good is there," I explained.

“Exactly,” she replied. She pulled me in close so I could feel her warmth and smell her perfume.

I thought about it all, about seeing the good in things and being an optimist. I thought it was funny: If I saw good in everything, then why had being called a word I didn’t understand fill me with fear? Shouldn’t I have thought it was exciting? Me, the incurable optimist? Maybe I was more complicated than Mother understood. I decided it had to be that. I also really liked the word “complicated.” It sounded complicated in and of itself.

“I still don’t understand,” I explained, though not able to articulate my doubts. “All I said was that Father would be home safe and sound soon.”

“I know.” She squeezed me tighter.

“That isn’t being an optimist. That is just the truth.” Now she squeezed me so tight it kind of hurt a little.

“I know, Rosebud, I know.”

And then it was Mother’s turn to cry.