



BIRTHDAY BUG

Max Darwin shuffled down the driveway toward his mom's car, keeping his black cape wrapped tightly around him.

His mom looked at her watch, rolled her eyes, and opened the passenger door. "Hurry up, or we'll be late for the birthday party!"

"I'm coming!" Max protested, bunny-hopping the rest of the way and wriggling

into the backseat. He could have moved a lot faster if he'd just let the cape go loose, but that would have ruined everything. Carefully, he set his backpack down beside him, not revealing the slightest glimpse of what might be inside his costume.

“I know you want to surprise Tyler, but I don't know why you can't let *me* see what you're wearing.” His mom sighed, starting up the car and accelerating onto the road. “After all, you did raid my fabric stash to make it!”

“I'm pupating,” Max insisted, as if that explained everything.

“Oh, right,” his mom continued. “So you can't come out of your cocoon too soon?”

“Exactly!” Max grinned, jiggling with excitement as his mom drove them through the streets toward Tyler’s house. He already knew what his best friend would be dressed as. Tyler was just as obsessed with superheroes as Max was with bugs. But Max’s costume had been a closely guarded secret so far.

“How about I guess?” his mom suggested.

Max just groaned—she’d never be able to figure it out.

“Let’s see. A pretty butterfly?”

“Nope,” Max said.

“Hmm. Maybe . . . a moth?”

“Wrong again.”

“Something nastier? A wasp?”