

the **TINY**
GENIUSES

HIT A HOME RUN!



by Megan E. Bryant

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For Sam, a true Work of art.

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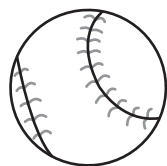
ISBN 978-0-545-90963-1

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

18 19 20 21 22

Printed in the U.S.A. 40
First printing 2018

Book design by Maeve Norton



CHAPTER 1

Out of the corner of his eye, Jake Everdale stared longingly at the ball field behind Franklin Elementary School. It was deserted today—no practice this afternoon—but that would change soon, Jake knew. Soon, his team, the Franklin Turkeys, would be facing off against their most ferocious rivals, the Pinehurst Piranhas. The game was more than a big deal.

It was *everything*.

The bleachers would be packed—not just with parents and siblings, like usual, but with teachers and friends and other people from town. After all, the rivalry between the Turkeys and Piranhas stretched back decades. It had been a big deal when Jake’s dad played for the Turkeys. Jake could imagine approaching home plate, the bat clenched in his fists . . . his eyes on the pitcher . . . the expectant silence of the crowd as they watched and waited, wondering—home run or strike out?

Thud!

Jake was jolted out of his daydream as someone shoved past him on the sidewalk, knocking him so hard that his backpack slipped off his shoulder and tumbled to the ground.

Jake didn’t have to look. He already knew who had bumped into him.

“Way to walk, Everfail,” Aiden Allen said, snickering as he loomed over Jake.

Ignore him, Jake told himself firmly. He knelt to pick up his bag and the stuff that had fallen out of

it, hoping Aiden wouldn't notice his burning ears. Whenever Jake was embarrassed or angry, his ears always gave it away.

Luckily, Aiden strolled off, still chuckling to himself. Jake tried to relax, but his muscles were too tight. *If only Emerson hadn't left early for the dentist*, Jake thought. If he and Emerson had been walking together, Aiden probably wouldn't have bothered him.

Jake stopped suddenly, his hand hovering over his Thursday Packet.

There was a white envelope sticking out of it.

An envelope that said *Mr. and Mrs. Everdale*.

Jake swallowed hard. A letter home to his parents in the Thursday Packet was not good.

What did I do now? Jake wondered, racking his brain. He hadn't gotten in trouble, not even with the super-strict cafeteria lady who yelled at everybody. He hadn't failed any quizzes or tests . . . or forgotten to do his homework . . . In fact, fourth grade had been going pretty well, much to Jake's surprise. Usually by now, his teacher had sent a

letter home asking for a conference because Jake “wasn’t living up to his potential” or “had trouble paying attention in class.” But this year was different. And Jake knew exactly why.

The old storm drain behind Franklin Field was legendary. According to the rumors, it was really a wishing well that would grant one wish to every student at Franklin—but only one. All you had to do was toss your most special belonging into the drain and make a wish. Jake had saved his wish since kindergarten, but when the fourth-grade science fair loomed, he knew it was finally time to use it. He hadn’t wanted to part with his precious baseball card collection, though. It was *too* special. So Jake bent the rules a little and tossed in the Heroes of History action figures when he wished for extra help. He had never expected that the Wishing Well would bring them to life! First, brilliant scientist Sir Isaac Newton and legendary pilot Amelia Earhart helped him with his science project. Then Founding Father Benjamin Franklin and

famous singer Ella Fitzgerald helped Jake with his big history presentation.

Jake realized he was still standing in the middle of the sidewalk, staring at the envelope to his parents. If only Jake could sneak a peek at the letter. Then he'd know how much he needed to worry. But the envelope was sealed.

With a sigh, Jake shoved the rest of his stuff in his backpack and finished walking home. His little sister, Julia, was sitting at the kitchen table dipping apple slices into peanut butter.

"Jake!" Julia cried. "I brought home so much good stuff in my Thursday Packet!"

"Great!" Jake said, trying to muster some enthusiasm. Thursday Packets in kindergarten *were* great, full of drawings and flyers for fun stuff in the community. Not mysterious sealed envelopes of doom.

"What's in yours?" Julia asked, trying to reach inside Jake's backpack. He twisted away from her.

"Cut it out!" Jake snapped.

Just then, Mom arrived with a bowl of pretzels. “Hi, Jake! How was your day?”

“Jake won’t show me his Thursday Packet,” Julia piped up.

“Can you *stop*?” Jake asked through gritted teeth. That was a mistake. Mom was instantly on alert.

“Whoa—what’s the problem?” she said.

“I don’t know,” he said, and he handed Mom the envelope.

It only lasted for a moment, but Jake saw it: the flicker of worry that flashed through her eyes.

That made him feel even worse.

Mom didn’t say anything as she opened the envelope. Her eyes moved back and forth while she read the letter. Then she looked up.

“Jake,” she began, “do you know what this is about?”

“No,” Jake replied, staring at the floor. “What?”

“It’s a big field trip!” Mom exclaimed.

Jake blinked. *A field trip?* he thought. That was *not* what he expected.

“You’re going to spend the entire day at the Museum of the World next Wednesday,” Mom was saying, “for workshops and educational programming. And then your whole class will eat at Señor Taco’s on the way home!”

Jake started to smile. Not just smile—*grin*.

“There’s a contract here,” she continued, “about behavior expectations. We’ll review it with Dad after dinner. Then we all have to sign it.”

“I wonder why Ms. Turner didn’t say anything about the field trip at school,” Jake said.

“Probably because it’s such a big trip,” Mom replied. “I appreciate that she told the parents before the kids could get all excited.”

“Mom, can I use your phone to call Emerson?” Jake asked.

“You have five minutes,” Mom said. “Then it’s time to start your homework.”

“Thanks!” Jake said. Then he charged up to his room, dialing on the stairs.

“Hello?” Mrs. Lewis answered.

“Hi! It’s Jake. May I speak to Emerson?”

There was a pause.

“Hi, Jake,” she replied. “His mouth is pretty sore. He can only talk for a couple minutes, okay?”

A moment later, Emerson’s voice came onto the phone. “Whassup?” he said. It sounded like his mouth was stuffed with cotton balls.

“How did it go at the dentist?” Jake asked.

“Orthodontist,” Emerson corrected him. “I got spacers between my teeth. It kind of feels like I caught a pop fly with my mouth.”

Jake cringed in sympathy. Maybe hearing about the field trip would brighten Emerson’s day. “Big news in the Thursday Packets,” he said. “Guess what! We’re going on a field trip to the Museum of the World!”

“What?” Emerson yelled. His voice was so loud that Jake imagined Emerson’s mouth opening wide, and all those spacers between his teeth *sproinging* out.

Jake told Emerson everything he knew about the field trip.

“This is going to be the best day of my life!”
Emerson was yelling again.

“I know!” Jake replied. “I can’t wait to try the Seven-Pound Burrito at Señor Taco’s!”

“No, it’s going to be even better than that,”
Emerson replied.

“What do you mean?” Jake asked.

Suddenly, Emerson got quiet. Too quiet.

“Tell you tomorrow,” he mumbled into the phone.
“I have to go. I have to . . . check something.”

“Wait! Tell me now!” Jake begged. “Emerson?
You there?”

But the phone was silent. Emerson had hung up.
Now Jake had no choice but to wait.