

The Rise of the Baker's Dozen

Chapter 2:

Reed Page
the Digestive Biscuit



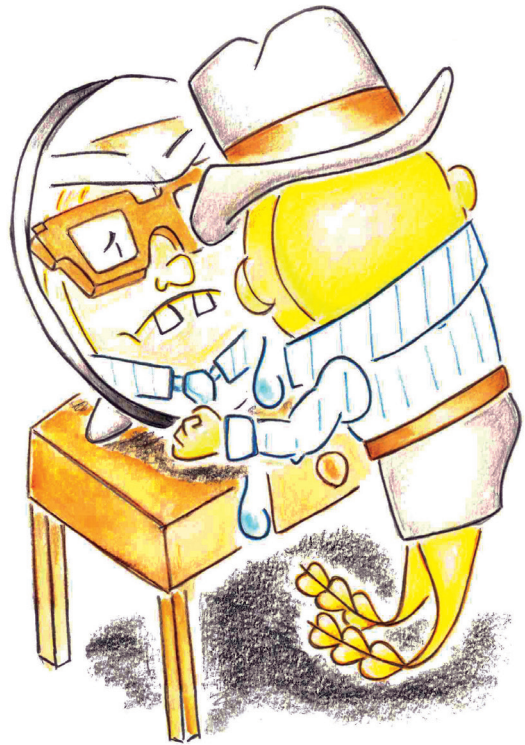
By Arnu Rausi



Avatar
English



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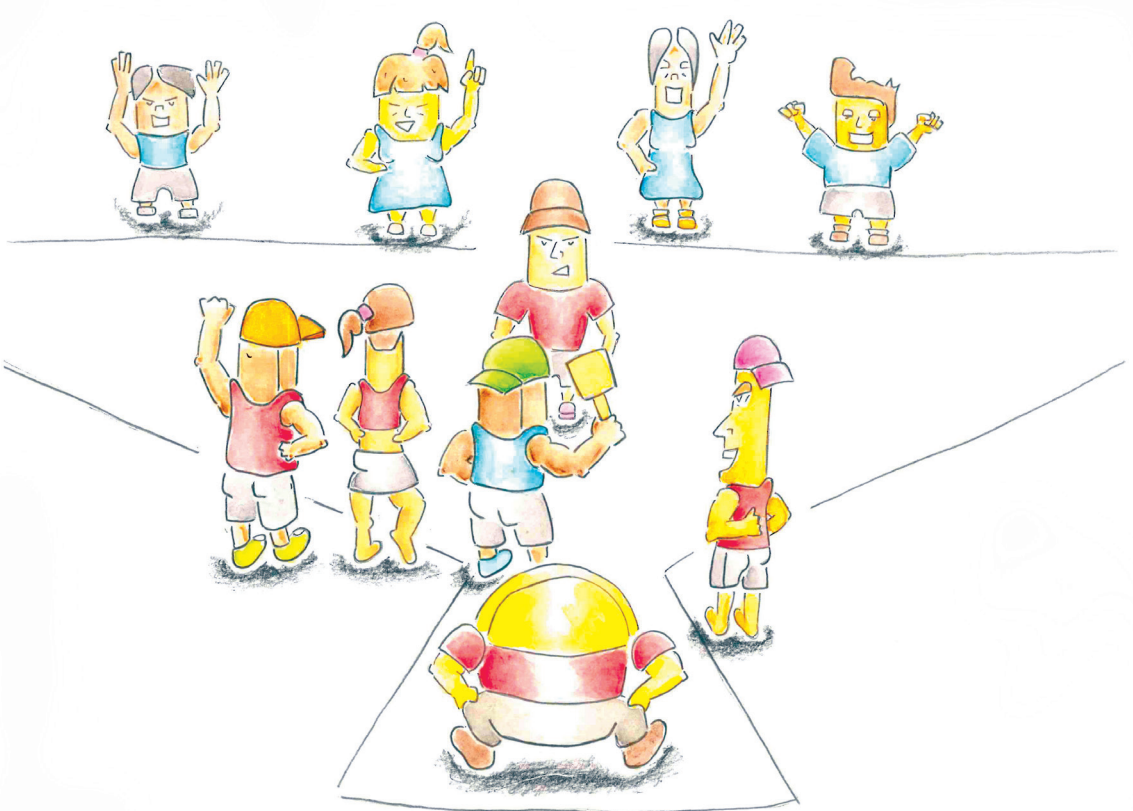


Chapter 1

Reed watched with envy as a game of biscuitball was about to begin. Two teams of five held their positions on a shell-shaped court. A bowler threw a ball at a batter who tried to hit it towards his four teammates, waiting at the other end of the court. Meanwhile, the opposing team attempted to take down their opponents before they could catch the ball.

An over-hit shot sent the ball rolling directly towards Reed.

“Come and join us,” a player offered him.



Reed exhaled sharply and walked towards the group. "Take my place," said one of the attacking team members.

"Anyone got a good plan?" another player asked.

Reed poked his glasses up his face. "I have a few."

"I have a better one," another player interjected. "And you will be the one to catch the ball," he told Reed.

Reed felt a sudden urge to pee, but it would have to wait. The group huddled round and the play was whispered. The idea was simple enough, leaving Reed no room to argue. All heads nodded and the players took up their positions.

The bowler threw the ball and the batter got a clean hit, sending the ball soaring towards Reed. His teammates instantly formed a line in front of him, blocking any oncoming tackles. Bodies clashed at high speed, but the protective wall held its ground, giving Reed all the time in the world.

He looked up and held his hands ready, when suddenly, his body weight swayed forward, throwing him off balance. He tried to take a step to steady himself yet his wimpy wheat feet were tightly locked together. He tripped and smacked against the grassy ground headfirst. "Damn it! Not again!" he cursed.



Wild laughter echoed throughout the park. Fingers pointing in Reed's direction clarified him as the cause of the comedy. Their sniggering and whispering filled his head with a burning paranoia. It was a scene he had become very accustomed to, and he would have to put up with the abuse while separating his tangled wheat feet.

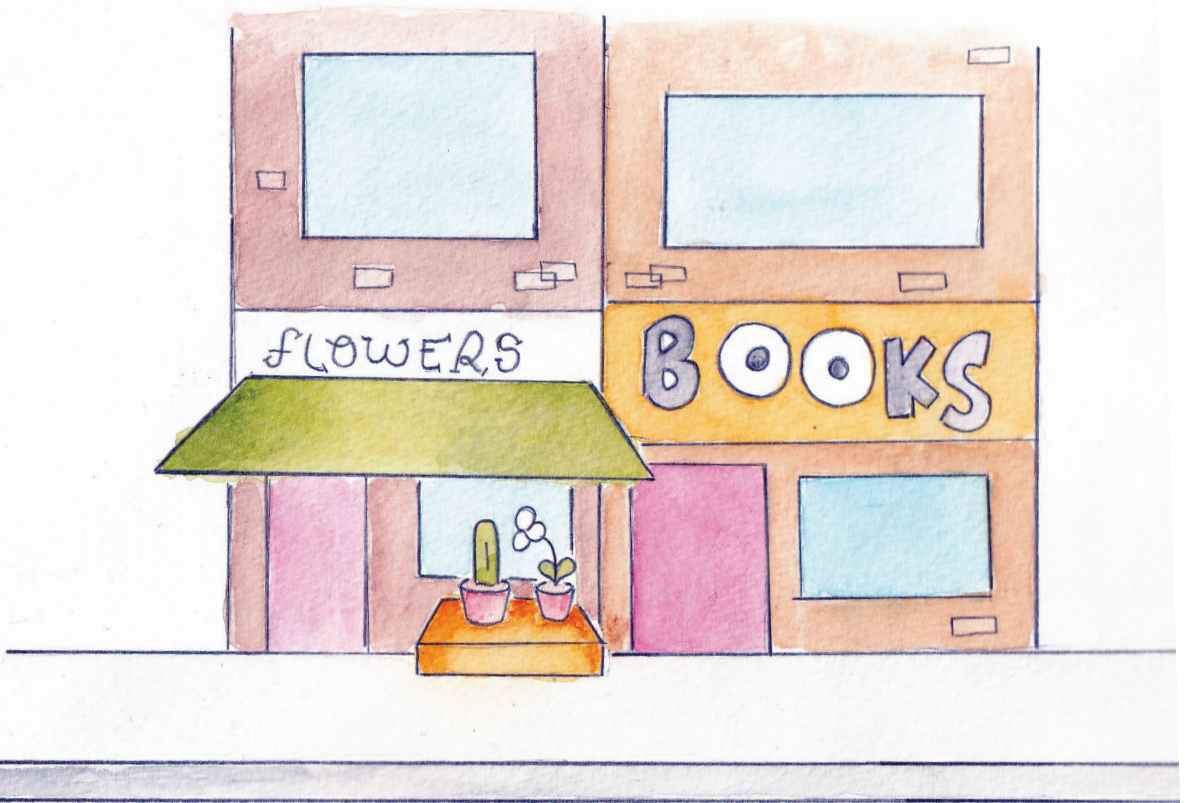


Once untying his abnormal feet, Reed got up and brushed himself down.

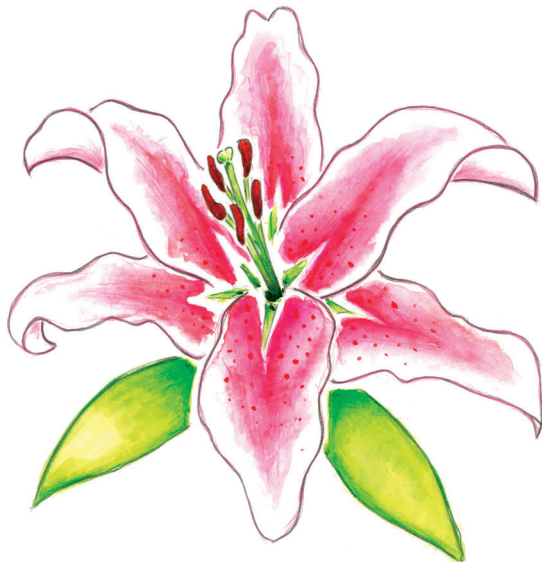
“Oh, come on! Stay for one last play!” a player said.

With his head hung, Reed walked away without saying a word and quickly made his way to work at the bookstore.





Next door to his workplace was the flower shop, and on his boss' orders, he bought a large bunch of stargazer lilies. With the flowers in hand, he stood and admired the bookstore for a moment. While the exterior was nothing more than four simple walls, the interior was home to his every dream and fantasy.



His boss, Mickey, opened the door and called out to him.

“Good morning, lad. Do you wanna start working, or are ya just looking?!”



Reed scurried inside. "Morning, boss. I got the flowers you wanted."

Mickey took the blooms and swirled them under his nose. He inhaled gently, and a blissful smile stretched across his face. "If love had a smell, that would be it."

In his bright green suit and bowler hat, curled leather slippers and a wooden cane, it was as if Mickey came from another time and world, which was no coincidence. On a horse-drawn wagon, the adventurer had crossed the globe selling books until arriving to Biscuitville and deciding to settle down.

He took a few puffs on his pipe. "Are you reading anything interesting at the moment?"

Reed nodded. "I'm half way through 'Amazonian Queen'. It's about this incredible female superhero. Every rich guy wants her and offers her the world, but all she wants is real love."

Mickey removed a single stargazer lily from the bunch. "Well, why don't you read a few more chapters while I pop out? I have to make a special delivery. I'll be back before you know. Just keep an eye on the store."

Mickey strutted out the door and down the street, leaving Reed with the bookstore all to himself. He scanned the shelves from top to bottom, rubbing his hands together. The wide array of literature was the only solid evidence in Biscuitville of the unknown world beyond the surrounding mountains. There was so much to learn, so much escape. "Amazonian Queen, where are you?" He found the novel in the romance section and sat behind the cash desk.

The story had him fully engrossed within an instant. Her intelligence and power superseded everyone else, but because of this, she failed to truly connect with anyone. Reed turned page after page, desperate to know how she would find her true love.

Suddenly, two loud bangs on the floor sounded and had him jumping from his seat. Mickey stood directly in front of him with an unimpressed look on his face. The boss pointed at two unattended customers skimming through books. "I see you're taking fine care of my store in my absence."

Reed shot to his feet. "Sorry. I lost myself in the book." He noticed that Mickey no longer had the stargazer lily in his hand. "What happened to the flower? Did you forget it somewhere, again?"

Mickey chuckled. "You ought to be more concerned about the customers than the flower. Maybe you want to share your passion for reading with that fine girl over there. She looks like she needs a hand." He pointed with his cane at the female customer in question. She was slender and tall and stunning, with a delicate little nose and giant blue eyes.

Reed's legs wobbled. "Please, Mickey. You talk to her. You're so much better with customers than I am."

Mickey frowned. "Don't you want your own love? Or do you just want to read about it in stories for the rest of your life? Show her your romantic side, and who knows, maybe she'll want to take you home rather than a book."

Reed felt his throat tighten. "What will I even say to her?"

Mickey poked Reed with his cane, forcing him in the girl's direction. "Start by asking her name. And pay her a compliment."

Reed concentrated on keeping his wheat feet apart while walking over to the gorgeous girl. He stood no further than a metre away from her, yet she still hadn't taken any notice of his presence.

He coughed deliberately. "C-C-Can I help you?"

Her head was still buried within the book. "Yes, please. I would like to know if..." she paused and scanned Reed from head to toe. Once she saw his wheat feet, her eyes and mouth widened.

Reed stepped forward. "What would you like to know?"

She jumped back, still staring at his wheat feet. "No, I'm fine thanks."

"My name's Reed. What's yours, beautiful lady?"

She covered her mouth like she was about to vomit. "Jenny," she finally mumbled.

They say a picture says a thousand words and silence tells everything you ever need to hear. Between her image of total horror and her inability to communicate, the message was crystal clear.

Reed's head dropped. "I'll be in the next aisle if you require assistance."

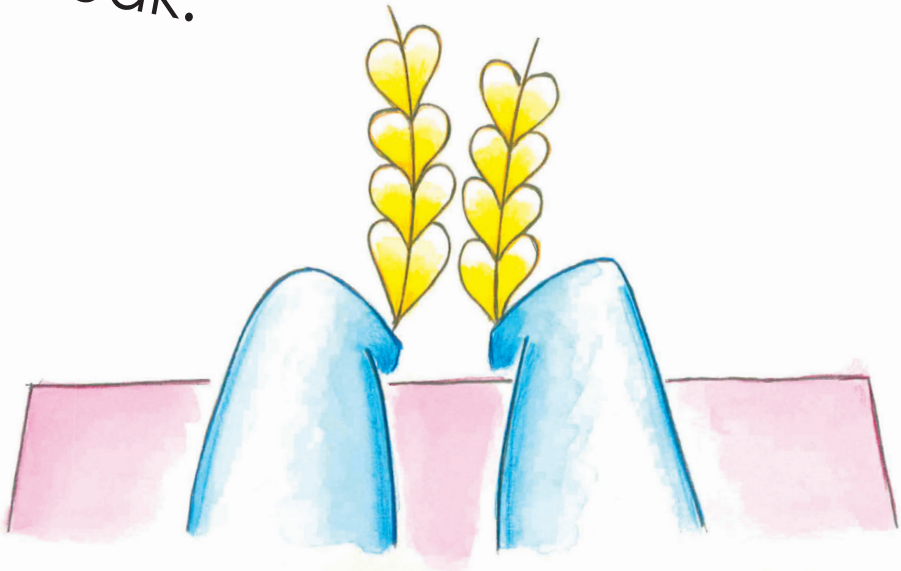
Reed collapsed on a chair. He bashed his wheat feet together, hoping they would magically turn into normal feet.

It was no use. Never had been.

“Kernel toes!”

“Freak.”

“Weirdo.”



Mickey approached and crouched down using his cane to hold balance. “You all right there, buddy?”

Reed covered his face. “I can’t even get a girl to look to me, never mind talk to me.”

Mickey placed a hand on his shoulder. “How about a riddle to lighten your mood?”

Reed’s head raised. “I’m listening.”

"I never was, I am always to be. No-one ever saw me, and never will. And yet, I am the grand reason for all, to live and to breathe on this planet shaped like a ball. What am I?"



Reed's mind ticked with ideas, yet formed nothing conclusive.

Mickey tapped his cane on the floor. "Give it a little time. Maybe in the morning you'll see the answer."

Reed's head lifted. "Ah-ha!" He walked up to Mickey and whispered an answer in his ear. "Am I right?"

Mickey smiled. "You're not wrong. You see, there's much more to life than what we biscuits first perceive. If you don't get lost in the illusion, and look a little deeper, you'll see the true beauty of this world."

Reed sighed. "There's very little beauty in this world with feet and a face like mine."

"There'll be no beauty at all with that negative mentality."

"I'd like to see you try and remain positive while you have an abnormality! What is the purpose of these stupid wheat feet?"

Mickey placed a hand on Reed's shoulder. "Honestly, I don't know. All I know is that while you remain hidden in the shadows, no-one will ever see your true colours, yourself included." He passed Reed a new book. "Have a read of this. There's a delightful twist in the tale."

Reed took it and wiped his eyes. "Why are you the only person who likes me?"

Mickey puffed his pipe. "Buddy, all the attention in the world will count for nothing if you can't love yourself for who you truly are."

Reed opened the novel. There wasn't anything special about the story until page ten, where an incredible illusion occurred. The words and letters on the page warped and wiggled, getting bigger and smaller. Reed cleaned his lenses with the bottom of his shirt, but nevertheless, the trickery persisted. He nervously turned the sheet of paper, unsure what was underneath. The discovery of a bookworm made him jump from his chair.

The worm smiled. "Easy there, fella! Would ya calm down? I'm only a harmless bookworm!"

Reed almost fainted. "WHAT?! You can speak?!"

The bookworm rolled his eyes. "The real mystery is not that we animals can speak, but why you biscuits choose not to listen. While every animal has its own form of communication, we all speak the Voice of Nature. My name's Jimmy. Let's go for a nature walk and I'll show you what the Voice of Nature is all about."



Chapter 2

Jimmy took Reed deep into the forest. The bookworm pointed out many animals and plants and explained their purpose. Flying over their heads, a huge vulture glided effortlessly.

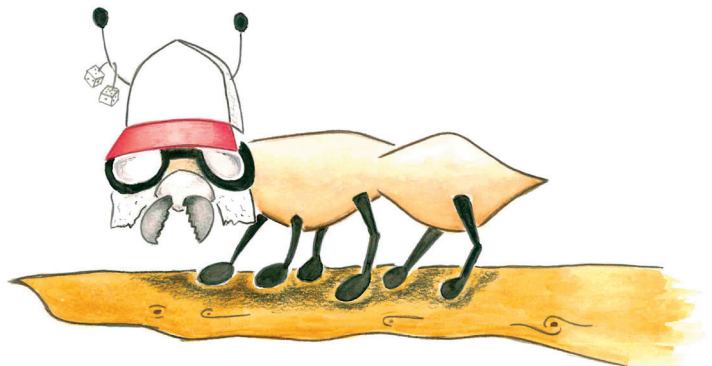
“Many think the vulture is the ugliest bird,” Jimmy said. “Yet, its service is the most beautiful I know. Its stomach has the strongest acids to digest almost anything. The bird only eats dead animals and kills all the viruses within the carcasses. Without the vulture, our world would be full of disease. You see, Reed, you can’t be judging things by just their appearance. True beauty comes from within and can’t be seen from the surface.”

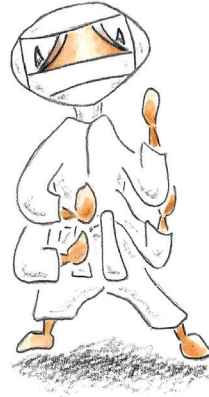
Reed removed his hat and wiped his forehead, the relentless Sun had him sweating heavily. “Of all that nature has to offer, which creature amazes you the most?”

“That’s a great question. For me, it’s the ants!”

Reed scoffed. “What’s so amazing about tiny little ants?”

“Physical size is not important when you have power in numbers. There are many types of ants—hundreds in fact—but each one holds a specific role designed for an essential purpose to serve the colony. The big ones are soldiers and royal guards to the Queen ant. The mid-sized ones are the delivery drivers who carry heavy loads to keep the nest full of supplies.





“The small ones are like sneaky ninjas that explore uncharted territory. They search for food or incoming danger. Together, they build great civilisations.”

Reed blinked repeatedly. “Incredible. So which one is the most important?”

“No ant is more important than the other, apart from the Queen ant, of course! It is she who gives them life and purpose. Yet, even she knows that she would be nothing without all those that protect and serve her.”

“How do you know all this, Jimmy?”

“Easy, Reed. It's the Voice of Nature. Our calling that tells us our role in this world.”

“So why can't I hear it?”

The worm sighed. “You biscuits are the only creatures who can choose to be whatever you wish. Yet, you spend more time worried about what you're not than what you are. What service do you wish to give to the world?”

Reed raised his eyebrows. “Strategy and tactics expert.”

Jimmy smiled. “Then it's time to put your skills to use and build your confidence.”

Chapter 3

It was Friday evening, which meant one thing in the bookstore: cleaning day. The radio was on, playing songs to get Reed and Mickey in the mood for the upcoming race.

“Next up, we have a classic from Coco!” the radio broadcaster announced. “First though, a quick message from our sponsors, the Teabags.” The programme turned to an advert, and Bean’s husky voice beamed through the store.

“Everyone knows that illuminice-tea is the only way to beat the heat. This week, we’re offering two teas for the price of one during the hottest hours of the day. Come taste the wonders of illumince-tea. We promise you won’t be disappointed. And the magic doesn’t stop there. We’re here to help you wif any personal problems. Remember, whatever the flaw, illumince-tea has the cure.”

Reed considered his own thousand flaws he would like correcting. “Maybe the Teabags can fix my wheat feet.”

Mickey frowned. “Don’t you dare.”

Once the advert finished, Coco’s song immediately played out—a tune called ‘Come and get it if you want,’ blasted from the small speaker.

Mickey climbed up his ladder. “Ready to lose again, Reed?”

Reed held back a laugh. “More than ever.”

“As always, start cleaning on my count,” Mickey said. “One, two, three, GO!”

The two instantly began wiping, drying, and dusting the shelves as fast as they could. They commenced at opposite ends of the store and raced to finish first. Mickey would stand on his wheeled ladder and clean the top shelves while Reed cleaned the bottom shelves on foot.

Mickey moved on the ladder much quicker than Reed could on his wimpy wheat feet. Because of this, Mickey had never lost a race. This time, however, the boss was in for a great shock. After only a few minutes, Reed was well in the lead, using a skateboard to glide across the floor while he cleaned.

"Hey! That's not fair," Mickey said. "You're cheating!"

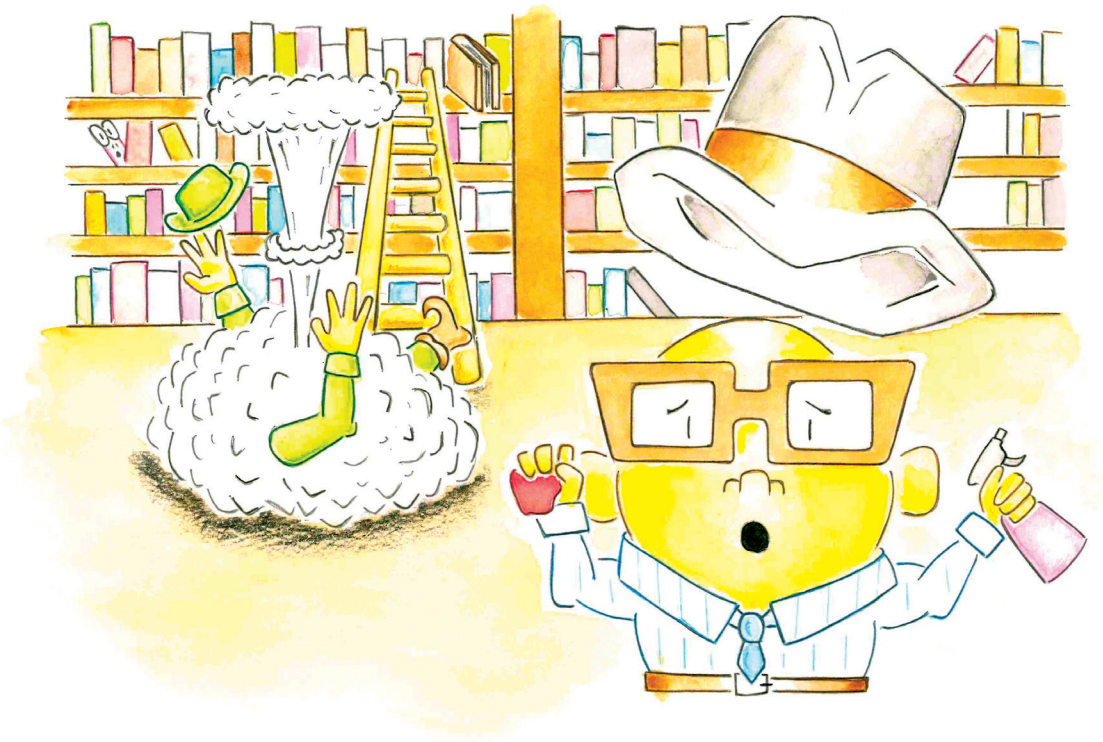
Reed continued to scrub the shelves. "You have a ladder with wheels. Why can't I have a board with wheels, too?"

Reed had hidden the skateboard behind some books until the time was just right. The element of surprise had played to his advantage. The kid was out-tricking the trickster, the apprentice out-mastering the master, and Reed loved every second.

Mickey, on the other hand, was clearly far from impressed. In a desperate attempt to catch up, he cleaned as fast as he could on the ladder, making the books shake and jump throughout the store. Suddenly, a heavy thump sent shockwaves through the entire building.

BOOM!

The skateboard underneath Reed vibrated from the impact. The radio fell from the shelf, bringing an end to the music.



Reed was too nervous to turn around at first, knowing that something a lot heavier than a book had just fallen. He called his boss' name but there was no reply. "Mickey, I hope you're not trying to distract me so you can win?"

Reed slowly turned around to find his beloved friend laying on the floor below the ladder. "Mickey! Are you alright?"

Mickey held his ribs and winced in pain. "I need a favour. Go to my desk and fetch the paper document from the top drawer."

Reed did as asked and returned with it in his hand.

“Speak the words out loud and tell me how it sounds.”

Mickey asked.

Reed dictated the article.



Will and Testimony of
Mickey Ovendone the
Lepro-corn Biscuit

In the event of something happening to me and leading to my untimely death, I, Mickey Ovendone the Lepro-corn Biscuit, wish to leave my bookstore and all my possessions in the very capable hands of Reed Page the Digestive. Whatever he does not wish to keep can be given to a charity of his choice.

Yours sincerely,

Mickey Ovendone

Mickey O

Tears filled Reed's eyes, blurring his vision.

Mickey took his hand. "You're like family to me, Reed, and you deserve to take on the bookstore. You're a bright, young, good-hearted biscuit, and there are many others like me who will see you for who ya truly are."

Reed continued to sob under a huge contrast of emotion. Sadness froze his soul to see his best friend suffering, yet at the same time, his heart warmed after receiving such touching words.

Mickey spluttered. "Take care of the bookstore. My life's work lies within these four walls."

Reed wiped his eyes. "You know this place is what I live for."

"You'll need to find something more than books to live for, buddy. Books can't cuddle you in your sleep or kiss you good-night. Nor can they listen to you when you need someone to talk to."

"Don't go, Mickey, please! You're the only friend I have."

"True happiness comes from within, so learn to be your own best friend. Don't be controlled by the opinions of others. Let your fears guide you, not hold you back." Mickey's eyes closed. "Once you're ready, I want you to read my book. It's called Chasing My Own Tale. You'll find it on the top shelf somewhere. And one final thing. Be careful with the Teabags. I've been watching them and their behaviour is very..."

Mickey choked and wheezed.

"Very what, Mickey?"

"Very su...su..."

Mickey's head fell back on Reed's lap.

"No, Mickey! Don't leave me!"

Mickey remained silent.

"SOMEONE CALL AN AMBULANCE!"

Chapter 4

All Reed had wanted was to win one race, but in his attempt to use his intelligence and build his confidence, he had lost the one biscuit important to him and had never felt worse about himself. His actions had led to the terrible loss of dear Mickey, his best and only friend, his inspiration, his rock. Reed's world crumbled beneath his stupid wheat feet.

He cried throughout Mickey's funeral, each second edged closer to the dreaded event of burying him. When the moment arrived, Reed fell to his knees. There was no-one to comfort him, the only thing he received were numerous cold looks of suspicion. Being that he was the only witness of the death and had now inherited all of Mickey's possessions, there were many who questioned the truth of the incident. None of this bothered Reed too much; he was already consumed with his own blame and guilt.

The only items of Mickey that Reed kept for himself were his slipper-like boots. The soft and flexible material fitted over his wheat feet without damaging them, meaning they no longer got tangled when he walked or ran. Covering up his abnormalities also made him feel less 'peculiar' in public. Typical of Mickey, it was the best gift Reed could imagine, apart from his miraculous reincarnation.

The boots would have to suffice.



He put Mickey's hat, suit, and cane in a commemorative cabinet in the bookstore and gave the rest of Mickey's possessions to charity, as stated in the will. When he found Mickey's book, 'Chasing My Own Tale,' the first pages indicated it to be an autobiography. Knowing how the story ended, Reed was too depressed to read it. Another day, maybe, when the pain had subsided a little.

Without Mickey, Reed's personal life became an ever stinking failure. Solitude hit a new low, and after reading every love story in the bookstore, he yearned for the fantasy to become reality. His heart cried out for his own Amazonian Queen, yet, with no self-confidence, he was clueless about where to find her or how to get her.

For all of his intelligence, Reed could not solve his own sorrow. What was the benefit of his intellect considering he was incapable of finding happiness or love or purpose in life? Every time he looked in the mirror, all he saw was disgust and embarrassment. Whether his face or self-esteem was uglier, Reed was unsure; both were in dire need of reconstruction.

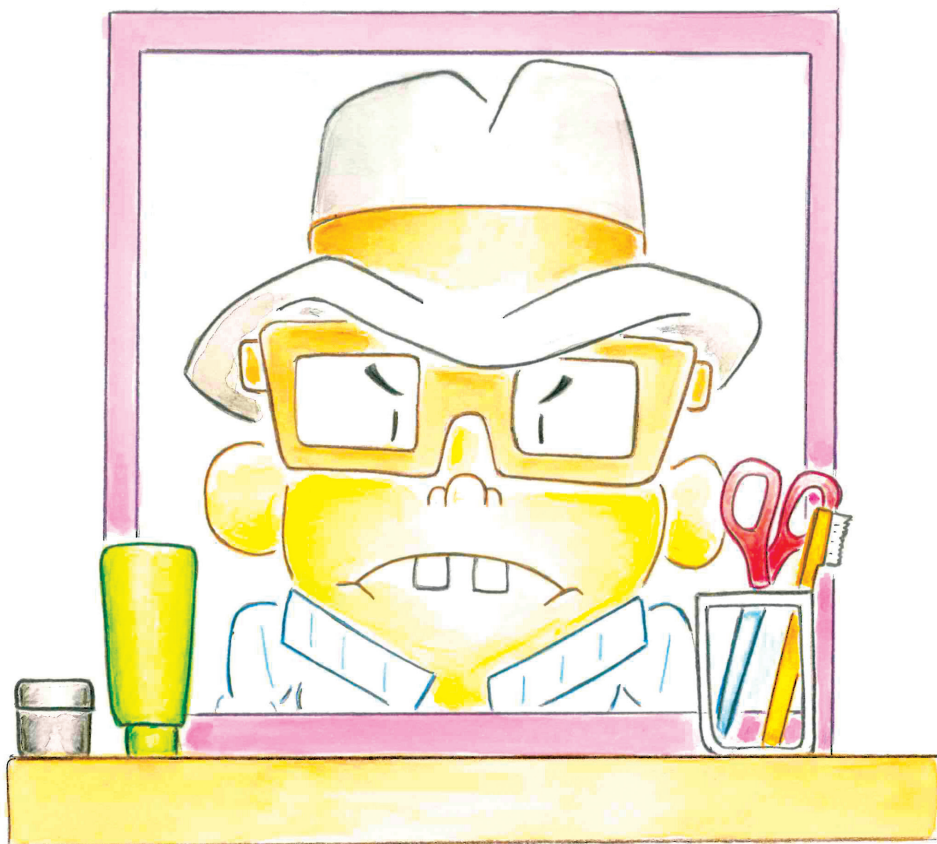


“If laughter was the best medicine,
your face would be the cure to every
disease!”

“Ugly!”

“Loser!”

“Loner!”



Jimmy the bookworm patted him on the shoulder. "You can't be so harsh on yourself, Reed. If you don't value who you are, how do you expect others to do so?"

Reed wiped his eyes. "What else can I do?"

"Even heroes need helpers. Why don't you go speak to Chip the Cupid Cookie? I'm sure he'll lend a hand."

Reed was aware of Chip's very special way of finding love; he had seen him flying around town numerous times playing his small harp. Once a couple fell in love with the same tune, he'd somehow know they would make a perfect match and then set up a surprise date between the two. Hundreds of loving duos had been formed under his guidance. If there was anyone in Biscuitville capable of loving Reed, Chip would be the one to find her.



Reed invited the Cupid Cookie to the bookstore and sat down with him at a table. There was one question which intrigued Reed the most. "How can music define whether two biscuits will make a perfect match?"

Chip tuned his harp. "They make the ideal match as they feed from the same vibration—a frequential collaboration that leads to pure elation. Every biscuit has a rhythm, a beat, and a melody. When an perfect pair align, they form a symphony of harmony."

Reed took a deep breath. "And there's even love out there for an abnormal biscuit like myself?"

"Stunned are many at the first sight of their new-found lover. True love passes much deeper than a superficial vision can uncover. Real love originates from the core, and once you feel that cosmic connection, the heart will search no more."

Reed closed his eyes and reclined in a chair, listening for hours as Chip played numerous ballads. At some point, a melody sent him into a hypnotic state of adoration; every aspect of the song pulsated to his pleasure. Hairs stood on end, goosebumps stretched his skin, and warm tingles raced through his body. Reed had found his melody. All he needed now was for Chip to find his partner.

The Cupid Cookie gave no promises as to how long it would take. "While Lady Love can be found everywhere, you can't hurry her destined chime. She's a lady who awaits the world, yet comes at her own time."

Reed was sure he could make a riddle out of that. 'What awaits us all but waits for no-one?'

After what happened to Mickey, he realised there were two possible answers.

Chapter 5

Only three days passed before Chip was back in the bookstore. Reed's first expectations were that the Cupid Cookie had come to give an update on the total lack of any possible match. However, to Reed's surprise, Chip was not alone.

He was accompanied by no other than Coco the Singer the Chocolate Finger. Stunning, confident and stylish, she was everything Reed believed he was not. In her hand was a single stargazer lily, a flower as divine as her own gracious appearance.

Chip pointed at the heavenly singer and gave Reed a wink, signalling she was the love he was so desperately seeking.

Rejection and suspicion absorbed Reed. This was surely another joke in the long list of terrible jokes. He saw Chip about to play his melody and trembled with nerves. Before Coco even laid eyes on him, he dived down and hid behind the cash desk where he stood. Then, he stuffed his fingers in his earholes, muting all sound.

Once Chip's song finished, Coco called out for assistance. "Hello? Is anyone here?"

Crouched behind the desk, Reed held his breath not to cause a peep.

Coco screamed in frustration. The sound of her heavy footsteps was followed by the slamming of the front door as she left. Reed slowly rose from behind the desk, peeking over the counter to be sure the coast was clear. He watched in agony as the biggest opportunity for love walked away.

Chapter 6

It was the day of the 232nd annual Biscuitville festival, an event which brings the whole town together. Reed had decided to stay as far away from it as possible.

Alone, he wandered the streets of Biscuitville. Over the horizon, the Sun sat on a mountain peak with only half its circumference visible. The giant ball of fire was at its lowest point. The skyline bled from a blood orange red to a sandy yellow and then a soft, baby blue.

Each day, Reed hoped the Sun would finally drop and let the night sky make its long awaited return.

Today was not that day. Instead, it would be the 847th day that the Sun refused to disappear beyond the horizon.

Long shadows stretched from the buildings, offering shade for Reed to hide from the rest of society. For the cover it provided, the hour was Reed's favourite. The only problem was that it was also the favourite hour of lovers, too. Numerous partners skipped down the road, hand in hand, kiss after kiss, touch upon touch. They were on their way to the Tea Bar where they would stay drinking for hours.

Seeing the place, Reed remembered the Teabags' famous slogan, 'Whatever the flaw, illuminice-tea has the cure.' He had so many flaws, he would have to hope the Teabags offered some sort of package deal.

Mickey's voice spoke in his head. "Be careful with the Teabags. Their behaviour is very su..."

He considered all the possible words. Surprising? Superficial? Surreal? Surreptitious? Suspect? Too many words began with 'su!' It was Mickey's last riddle, and if Reed were to figure it out, it would need investigating. Meanwhile, he could find out about what cures the Teabags had.

He came out of the shadows and made his way over to the Tea Bar. Standing at the door, his hands shook with nerves. He was about to enter, until the sound of crying caught his attention. Someone was in clear and desperate need of assistance.

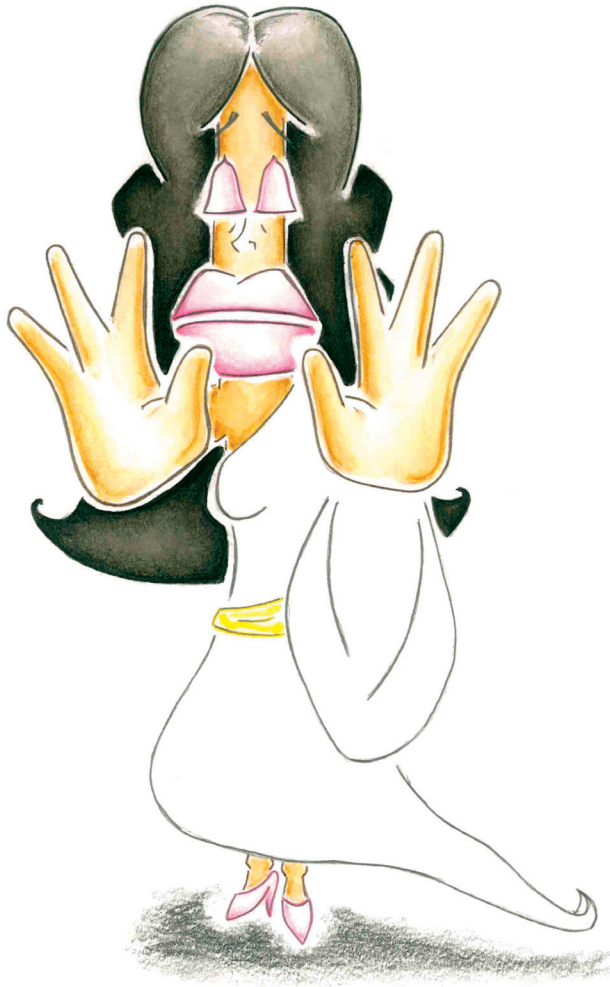
The noise came from the alley next to the Tea Bar. Reed poked his head around the corner to see who or what was causing the commotion.

The sight of no other than Coco the Singer the Chocolate Finger filled him with immediate shock. Alone and curled up in a ball, she cried her eyes out. Why would such a blessed and beautiful biscuit be so distraught and unaccompanied?

Just the thought of speaking to her made him shiver with fear, but his compassion to help outweighed his shyness.

He took a small step up the alley. "My dear, what is troubling you so wholesomely?"





She rushed to her feet. Her eyes remained closed and she held her hands out in front of her. "I CAN'T SEE A THING!" she said, panting. "My career is over and I have nothing left. Everything is gone!"

When Coco revealed how she was blinded by the Teabags' lotion, Reed was sickened to hear about the mistreatment she had received. Yet, with her incapable of seeing him, he relaxed and felt free to express himself. He was a master of the emotions Coco was suffering, and understood exactly what it meant to feel lonely, abused, and worthless.

He knew how much Coco liked the stargazer lily after seeing her enter the bookstore with it in her hand. He ran to the flower shop, bought one, rushed back, and placed it under her nose. She inhaled hard and took deep breaths, bringing an end to her hyperventilating and restoring some peace to her soul.

Reed could not remember the last time he had been hugged. So, when he lifted Coco to her feet and held her in his arms, he embraced her with the years of passion he had craved. In all honesty, he was probably in need of the hug more than the poor, blinded woman.

Knowing Coco for her unique voice, Reed wondered how she would be able to deny such a talent and blessing if she just heard it for herself. "I want you to sing, Coco."

She frowned at the suggestion. "Forget it! I'm not in the mood to sing for you right now! Anyways, no-one wants to listen to me sing anymore!"

Reed could see his message had been misinterpreted. "I'm not asking you to sing for me, or for the entertainment of others. Sing for yourself. Don't be controlled by the opinions of others. Allow your fears to guide you, not hold you back."

From the song's first note, Reed could have listened to Coco on repeat for an eternity. Her opening lines of anger, rejection and mistreatment pounded Reed's ego, knowing the feelings all too well. Yet when she sang pitch perfect vowels, he had never heard such true emotion expressed in the form of pure sound. Her voice soothed his soul and sent him into a state of euphoria. The song connected Reed with his true self, his purpose. It was the Voice of Nature.

A loud clang of a biscuit walking into a lamppost brought Coco's singing to an end. There was a pleasant surprise, however. The biscuit was one of the players from the previous biscuitball game, who had laughed at Reed when falling. He turned bright red and stumbled away speedily.

Coco approached Reed, sniffing repeatedly until finding the stargazer lily in his hands. She cupped the bloom and then passed her hands down the stem until finding Reed's fingers. The divine singer drew herself closer, running her hands up Reed's arms while gently caressing his skin. She now stood within kissing distance. Reed's whole body went stiff with excitement. This was the first time he had ever been touched so passionately and he could barely contain himself.

Coco squeezed his arm. "I would offer you something to drink at my house, but I have no idea where I am! Could you take me home, please?"

"It would be my utmost pleasure." He tucked in his shirt and organised himself, then took a deep breath and thought of his Grandma. Coco might not see the lump in his pants but the rest of the public certainly would!

Chapter 7

“Please, take off your shoes before you come in my house,” Coco said as they entered her home.

Reed reluctantly abided. He then carefully guided Coco to her dining room table from a distance that his wheat feet would not touch her. A singular stargazer lily stood proudly in a vase on the centre of the table. Reed smiled as thoughts of Mickey filled his head.

The two of them immediately opened up about their traumatic experiences and emotions with ease and comfort. It was as if they had known each other for years, and as interaction and connection flowed, they edged closer and closer.

Reed pushed his feet out wide. “It seems vision has been our disability.”

Coco nodded. “How could we truly embrace ourselves when we only saw ourselves through the eyes of others?” She bit her lip. “Can you help me get to my bedroom?”



The pair lay down in Coco's bed. She ran her hands all over Reed's face. His rubbery ears bended and flexed through her fingertips. She fondled with a smile and a giggle, her playful joy triggering immense sensual pleasure for Reed. With them so close, his wheat feet accidentally touched Coco's leg, causing her to shiver and laugh.

"Oh, that's nice," she said. "Is it a feather?"

Reed stood over her and softly drew his wheat feet up and down her fine body—her stuttered gasps and voiced exhalations a clear sign of her thrill. Her back arched upward, forcing her body against his feet and demonstrating her clear desire for more.

Reed laughed over what he previously hated about himself; his wheat feet were Coco's possessions now, and had found their purpose.

He took the stargazer lily from the vase on the bedside table and swirled it under Coco's nose. "If love had a smell, my Amazonian Queen, this would be it."

Coco pulled him closer, pressing their bodies together. "What will we do about the Teabags?"

Reed took a deep breath. "While we fail to stand up for ourselves, the Teabags will continue to abuse us, and we will only have ourselves to blame. We need a plan so they learn to respect us."

Coco placed a giant kiss on his lips. "Enough talking, for now."