

CODY

and the Fountain of Happiness

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For my genius brothers and sisters

T. S.

For Tiffany

E. W.

1 Today!

In this life, many things are beautiful:

Marshmallows

100% on your spelling test

Turtles, with their cute thumb-shaped heads

But if Cody had to name the most beautiful thing
in the world, it would be . . .

The first day of summer vacation.

Which was today.

Today!

The sun shone and the birds sang. Cody was making toast when her mother came click-click-clicking into the kitchen. On her feet were sea-green pumps with silver buckles. They were just the kind of shoes a mermaid would wear, if mermaids had feet.

Wearing gorgeous shoes was Mom's job. She was a shoe salesperson at O'Becker Department Store.

"You're already up!" Mom said.

"I don't plan to waste one minute of vacation," said Cody.

Mom nodded. She hated wasting time, too. *Click-click-click* (her shoes). *Gulp-gulp-gulp* (her coffee).





“Too bad camp doesn’t start till next week,” she said.

Camp! The word was a dark cloud on a bright day. Camp was hikes in the boiling sun and swim lessons in freezing water. Last year, Cody had almost died of thirst because she refused to drink bug juice. Bug juice! The name was an insult to insects across the land.

But Mom and Dad believed camp was a good environment, so what could Cody do? In this life, grown-ups hold all the power. It has been that way since ancient times.

“I’m a little worried about leaving you with Wyatt.” Mom’s forehead did its folding-fan imitation.

Wyatt was Cody’s big brother. He was a teenager who pretended that Cody drove him crazy. Wyatt was so good at pretending, many people were fooled. But not Cody.

“I’ll take care of Wyatt,” Cody said. “Promise.”

Mom and Cody hugged good-bye, and then *click-click-click*, Mom was out the door. Uh-oh. *Click-click-click*. Mom was back in the door.

“Remember, no screen time before five,” she said. “And no turning on the stove. Or bringing ants into the house.”

“I know very well,” said Cody.

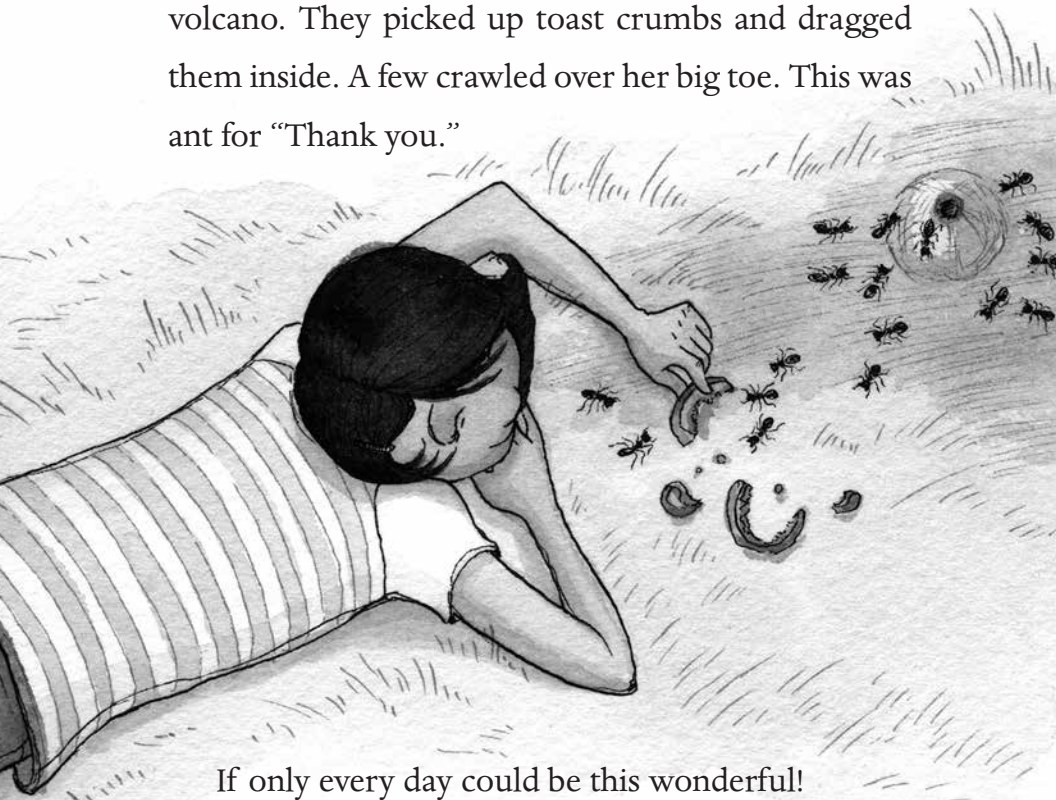
“Good-bye!”

“Good-bye!”

Cody practiced eating toast with her right hand. Though she was left-handed, one of her goals was to be ambidextrous. In an emergency, being able to use either hand could come in handy. Handy! Cody cracked herself up.

Afterward, she took the crusts outside to feed the ants. Cody loved all animals, big and small. But she had a special, tender place in her heart for ants. They were so serious! They worked so hard! She watched them bubble up out of their tiny ant

volcano. They picked up toast crumbs and dragged them inside. A few crawled over her big toe. This was ant for “Thank you.”



If only every day could be this wonderful!

Nothing to do.


No one telling you to hurry up or slow down.

Nothing to do.

No one telling you to speak up or quiet down.

Nothing to do.

Hmmm.



By now most of the ants had disappeared. Cody imagined them underground, having a giant toast feast together.

A tiny bit lonesome, that's how she began to feel.

But she knew how to fix that.

Time to wake up good old Wyatt.

2

Brain Pain

Wyatt possessed many talents:

Speaking Spanish for real, not fake

Giving headlocks even Houdini could not escape

*Eating an entire box of cereal in ten minutes (Cody held
the stopwatch)*

But his *numero uno* talent was sleeping. If people let him, he could probably sleep for a hundred years, easy.

Good thing Cody was an expert on waking him up.

First, she perched on his invisible bed. No one had seen the actual bed in years. It was like Earth, with its many layers. Only in place of an outer crust, the bed had T-shirts and underwear and dirty dishes and books.

Wyatt loved to read. He was so smart, you could practically hear his brain whirring inside his skull. Even when he was asleep.

But wait. That wasn't his brain. It was his iPod. Very gently, Cody pulled out an earbud. She whispered, "There is a tarantula on your arm."

Wyatt just rolled over.

Cody tickled his feet.

She sang "You are my sunshine."

On and on he slept. He was so talented!

At last Cody stood by the window.

"What do you know?" she said in a voice of surprise. "Payton Underwood is coming up our front walk."

Payton Underwood was the girl of Wyatt's

dreams. He had been in love with her forever, but Payton didn't love him back. How could it be? In this life, there are many mysteries.



“Waaa?” Wyatt rocketed to life. He tried to leap out of bed, but his feet got tangled in the sheets. Underwear flew. A dirty dish went into orbit. Wyatt



landed on his back. His arms and legs paddled the air like a beetle that can't flip over.



“Oh, wait,” said Cody. “I guess it was the mailman instead.”

Wyatt stopped moving.

Now Cody felt terrible. Terrible for tricking him. Terrible for Payton Underwood not loving him back. Quick-quick, she had to cheer her brother back up.

“It’s the first day of vacation, *amigo!*” she said. “Just you and me, all day long!”

Wyatt moaned softly.

“Want to go to the dog park and pick what dog we’d get if only we were allowed to get a dog?”

Wyatt put his hands over his eyes.

“No?” said Cody. “How about we look for rocks and have a rock stand and use the money to buy a skateboard?”

Wyatt slowly got to his feet. He was very tall and skinny. If he were a building, he’d be a skyscraper, but a droopy one.

“*Silencio,*” he said. He toppled back into bed and

pulled the covers over his head. “You are causing me pain. A big fat pain in my cerebral cortex.”

“Do you want some tea?”

“No, Brain Pain. I want you to disappear. Preferably forever.”

“I can’t,” said Cody. “I promised Mom to take care of you. I never break a promise.”

“Let me go back to sleep, or something else will get broken.”

Cody waited awhile. Lately, Wyatt could be in a rotten mood one minute and a superb one the next.

But the lump of covers didn’t move. Cody’s shoulders sagged. This wasn’t how the first day of vacation was supposed to go. She plucked a T-shirt off the invisible bed and pulled it over her clothes. The shirt was black, with a picture of an exploding alien robot. It smelled like Wyatt’s anti-pimple soap. Next she selected a fat book with a boring cover.

“I’m stealing your stuff,” she said.

The lump did not reply.

Dragging her feet, she crossed the room, but at the door, she stopped. Everyone deserves another chance. Cody believed that.

But Wyatt said not a word. Feeling sad, Cody left the room.

3

To the Rescue

It was a hot day. The ants were off on business. Cody sat on the front steps and opened Wyatt's book.

“The lining of the gut replaces itself every three days,” she read. “Eee-yoo. What is that supposed to mean?”

Too bad the book had no gut picture. Cody was a good reader, but she appreciated pictures. Especially of interesting things like guts.

“MewMew! MewMew, where are you?”

A boy a little bit younger than her walked slowly

by. His big, round head swiveled from side to side. When he saw Cody, he stopped.

“Have you seen a striped gray cat?” he asked. “Kind of fat? Fourteen and a half years old?”

“That’s how old my brother is!” Cody slapped her book shut and stood up.

“And she’s deaf,” said the boy.

“Deaf! Then why are you calling her?”

The boy’s glasses were smudged, but Cody could still see how sad his eyes were.

“It makes me feel better to say her name.” *Blink-blink* went his eyes. “She’s my grandma’s cat, and she’s not allowed out. But I let her. Just for a minute. To keep me company. But something scared her and she ran away!”

There is a certain kind of curly hair that is as irresistible as wet cement. This boy had that kind of hair. Cody longed to *sproing* a curl and oops! She did.

“We’ll find your cat,” she promised.

They walked to the end of the street, but no MewMew. Just as they turned the corner, Cody heard something. She cupped her fingers behind her ears, making them stick out. Wyatt had taught her this trick to catch extra sound waves.

Up in a tall pine tree, a furry snake swayed back and forth among the needles.

“I found her!” yelled Cody.

“MewMew!” The boy held out his arms. “You’re saved! Come to Spencer!”

But MewMew didn’t move.

“Maybe you need to talk slower,” said Cody. “So she can lip-read.”

“Come. To. Spencer.”

“You. Are. Saved.”

That didn’t work. Neither did trying to climb the tree. Cody ran home, grabbed a jug of milk, and ran all the way back. She waved it around under the tree, but MewMew was not interested.



By now Cody was very hot, so she drank some of the milk herself.

“What are we going to do?” Spencer balled his hands into fists and dug them into his cheeks. This was not a fun thing to watch. “It’s all my fault!”

“As long as we’re here, nothing can happen to her.” Cody sat down under the tree. “Cats don’t live in trees. She has to come down sometime.”

Spencer sat beside her.



“I wish I had a cat or a dog,” Cody told him. “But my brother is allergic. So instead I have ants.”

“Ants aren’t pets.” Spencer made a face of disgust. “Ants are pests.”

“An ant can lift an object that weighs a thousand times more than it does!”

“Are you sure about that?” Spencer pushed his glasses up onto the bridge of his nose and looked at her.

Cody wasn’t *exactly* sure, but sure enough.

“Also, when one ant meets another ant, they rub feelers to say hello. They are extremely friendly.” Cody put extra oomph into those last two words. In her opinion, Spencer had some work to do in the friendly department.

“At home I have rare and valuable tropical fish,” he said. “Our neighbor is feeding them while I’m here.”

“What about your parents?”

“They went on a vacation. They have their own business and they work twenty-four/seven and they

needed a grown-up getaway.” Spencer took off his glasses. Without them, his face looked naked as a baby bird.

“Do you wish you went, too?”

Uh-oh. Wrong question.

“I love Grandma Grace,” Spencer burst out. “But I really miss Dad and Mommy!”

A small pain stabbed Cody’s heart. Her dad was a trucker. He was gone for days at a time, and even though she knew he would come back, she always missed him, especially at night. Poor Spencer. Cody scrounged her brain for a cheerful thought.

“The lining of your gut replaces itself every three days!” she said.

“You act like you know everything,” he said.

“That is a very rude comment.” Cody stood up. “I promised to find your cat, and I did. Now I will be on my way.” She dusted her hands together.

Mew mew! Mew mew!

They both looked up. MewMew was inching down the tree. Headfirst. Her paws scrabbled on the bark, trying to keep a grip. A wild look lit her eyes. She was still far above the ground. One slip and she'd plunge to the sidewalk with a terrible, furry *splat!*

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