

Cody

and the Mysteries of the Universe



Tricia Springstubb

illustrated by Eliza Wheeler

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Welcome!

In this life, many things are hard to wait for:

Your turn

Your birthday

Being allowed to get a real tattoo

But if Cody had to name the hardest thing of all, it would be waiting for her best friend, Spencer.

This was not ordinary waiting. This was big-time waiting. Because Spencer wasn't just coming for a visit, like usual. He was coming for good! He was moving in with his grandmother, right around the corner. It was Cody's dream come true.

Except where was that boy, anyway?

Cody waited with Spencer's grandmother, otherwise known as GG, on GG's front porch. They'd made a WELCOME sign. They'd baked Spencer's favorite cookies: mucho chocolate chips, zero nuts.

Everything was at the ready.

Cody squinted toward the corner. She petted GG's cat, MewMew. MewMew was deaf, so Cody did cat sign language for "Any minute now!"



She did all this six gazillion times. Give or take.

“Patience is a virtue.” GG cleaned her glasses on her T-shirt. She put them back on, and then she squinted toward the corner, too.

Still no Spencer.

Maybe their car broke down. Or they got lost. Maybe his parents changed their minds and decided not to move here after all. A cloud of worry threw its dark shadow over Cody.

“Don’t worry.” GG was a teacher. She could read minds.

Cody tried her best to un-worry. She looked around the front porch, which was an interesting place. GG lived in a side-by-side. Her side had flower-pots and wind chimes. It had a swing with comfy tie-dye pillows.

The other side had a rusty chair and a plant that was dying of thirst. Taped to the window was a skull-and-crossbones flag. The name on the mailbox was MEEN.

So far, Cody had never seen a Meen. Which is a poem!

Also a mystery. Who were the Meens? Were they pirates out sailing the high seas? Vampires who feared the light? Or just extremely shy people?

Life holds many mysteries. Cody planned to solve this one. Just as soon as Spencer got here to help.

Squint, squint, squint.

Pet, pet, pet.

Sigh, sigh, sigh.

Whoa!

A car pulling a trailer turned the corner. GG and Cody rocketed off the porch.

One big hugging festival, that's what they all had.

Good old Spencer looked just the same—irresistible curls, round face, and thick glasses. He and Cody did their special, secret ant greeting. When ants meet, they touch feelers. That is ant for “So glad to see you, old buddy!” Now Spencer and Cody touched



foreheads and gave a little rub-a-dub-dub. One of the many important things Cody had taught Spencer was to admire ants.

The trailer was packed from top to bottom. Spencer's father, Mr. Pickett, looked from the trailer to GG's little house and back again. He scratched his head.

"Don't worry," said GG, Reader of Minds. "Everything will fit. Love always fits! It's a scientific fact."

Everyone started pulling boxes out of the trailer. Cody reached for an interesting-shaped case.

“Careful!” Spencer said in a voice of alarm.

“I’m always careful.”

“Not always,” he said. “Not in my experience.”

Careful was Spencer’s middle name. Cody was more of an action person, herself.

“What’s in that case, anyway?” she said. “Gold doubloons? A tiny mummy?”

“My violin.”

“Really?” Cody was impressed. “You never told me you play the violin.”

“Yes, I did.”

“No, you didn’t.”

“You just forget.”

“Me?” Impressed turned into insulted. “I never forget stuff!”

“Sometimes you do. In my experience.”

Whew. Cody had forgotten how difficult this boy could be.

No, she hadn't! She never forgot stuff!

"Cody." GG put an arm around her. She whispered in Cody's ear. "Spencer's had a long day. Poor pumpkin's tuckered out and a little cranky. Why don't you say good-bye and come back tomorrow?"

Good-bye? Tomorrow? This was not the plan. What about solving the mystery? What about eating the cookies?

"Remember," GG whispered. "Patience is a virtue."

If Cody was in charge of the English language, that word would go right out the window.

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Mr. Meen

Patience. The next morning, Cody gave it a try.

First she patiently practiced eating cereal right-handed. She patiently helped Mom choose her outfit for work. Mom was Head of Shoes at O'Becker Department Store, and appearances were very important.

After Mom left, she patiently fed toast crusts to the ants in the front yard and sang them "You Are My Sunshine." The ants loved this song, which was her and Dad's favorite. Back inside, she patiently counted

the calendar for how many days till Dad, who was a trucker, got home. Too many, as usual. She even read a whole chapter of her boring summer reading book.

Almost a whole chapter.

Patience really took it out of you. When she couldn't wait one second longer, Cody ran upstairs to her big brother Wyatt's room. He was still asleep, of course. Wyatt was a genius, so his brain required extra rest.

Wyatt's room was fascinating. Mom said someday she was going to call in archaeologists to do an excavation. Cody took the opportunity to examine some of his if-you-touch-this-you-die stuff. She dug through the piles of clothes on the floor and selected the T-shirt he got at doctor camp. I ♥ BLOOD AND GUTS, it said. She pulled it on. It smelled like Wyatt's anti-pimple soap.

"I'm going to GG's," she said. "Spencer and I are going to spy on the Meens. Want to come?"

Wyatt flopped his skinny arm around.

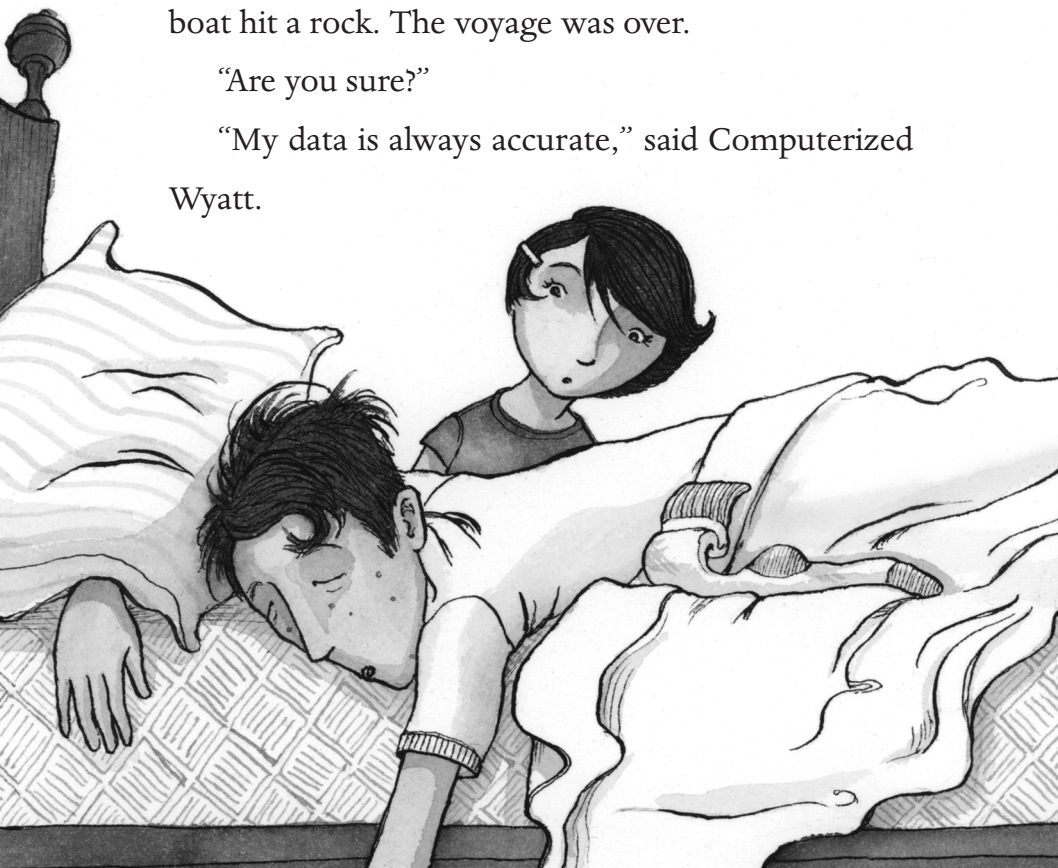
"Is that a yes?" Cody asked patiently.

"Three days till school," he said in his computer voice. "Must maximize sleep."

School? Already? This was the problem with summer vacation. First it was like a beautiful blue sea. You sailed along, having wonderful adventures. You were free as a dolphin! Happy as a mermaid! You forgot all about life on shore and then *clunk!* Your boat hit a rock. The voyage was over.

"Are you sure?"

"My data is always accurate," said Computerized Wyatt.



“Then there’s no time to waste. *Adiós, amigo.*”

Cody loved the in-between times of day, like now, when morning slipped into afternoon. Her neighbor, wearing a hat shaped like a flying saucer, was digging in the garden. Her baby sat in the grass, licking a Popsicle. A little brown dog licked the baby’s knee. Everyone waved to Cody—well, not the dog. Any other day, she’d stop for a chat. But today she had a mission.

A truck was just pulling up in front of GG’s. On the side was a picture of a beetle with its legs in the air and Xs for eyes. BIG OR SMALL, WE GET THEM ALL, it said.



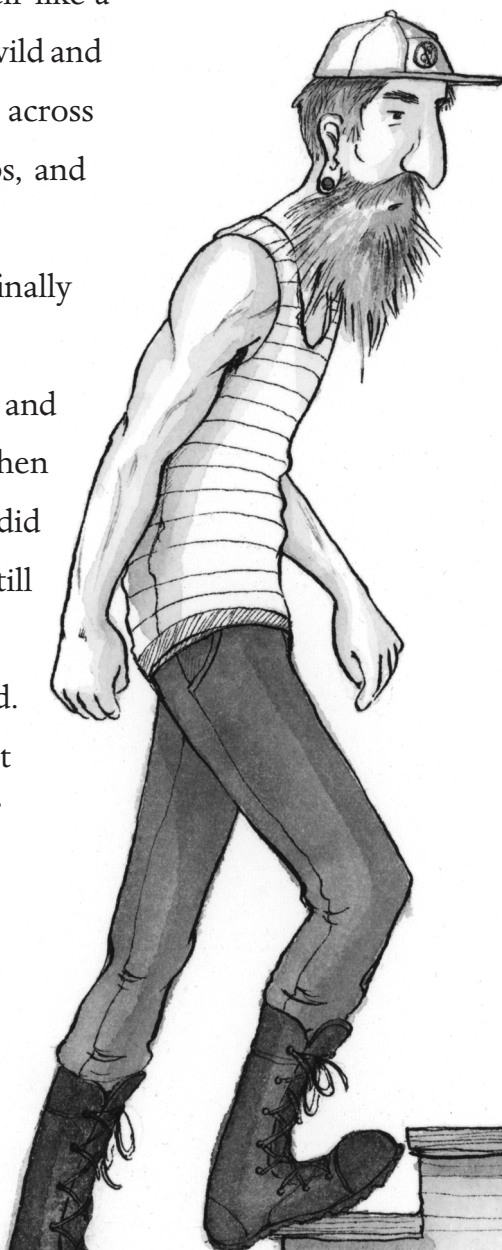
A man climbed out. He was so tall, he had to unfold himself like a beach chair. His beard was wild and red. His big boots clomped across the grass, up the front steps, and through the Meen door.

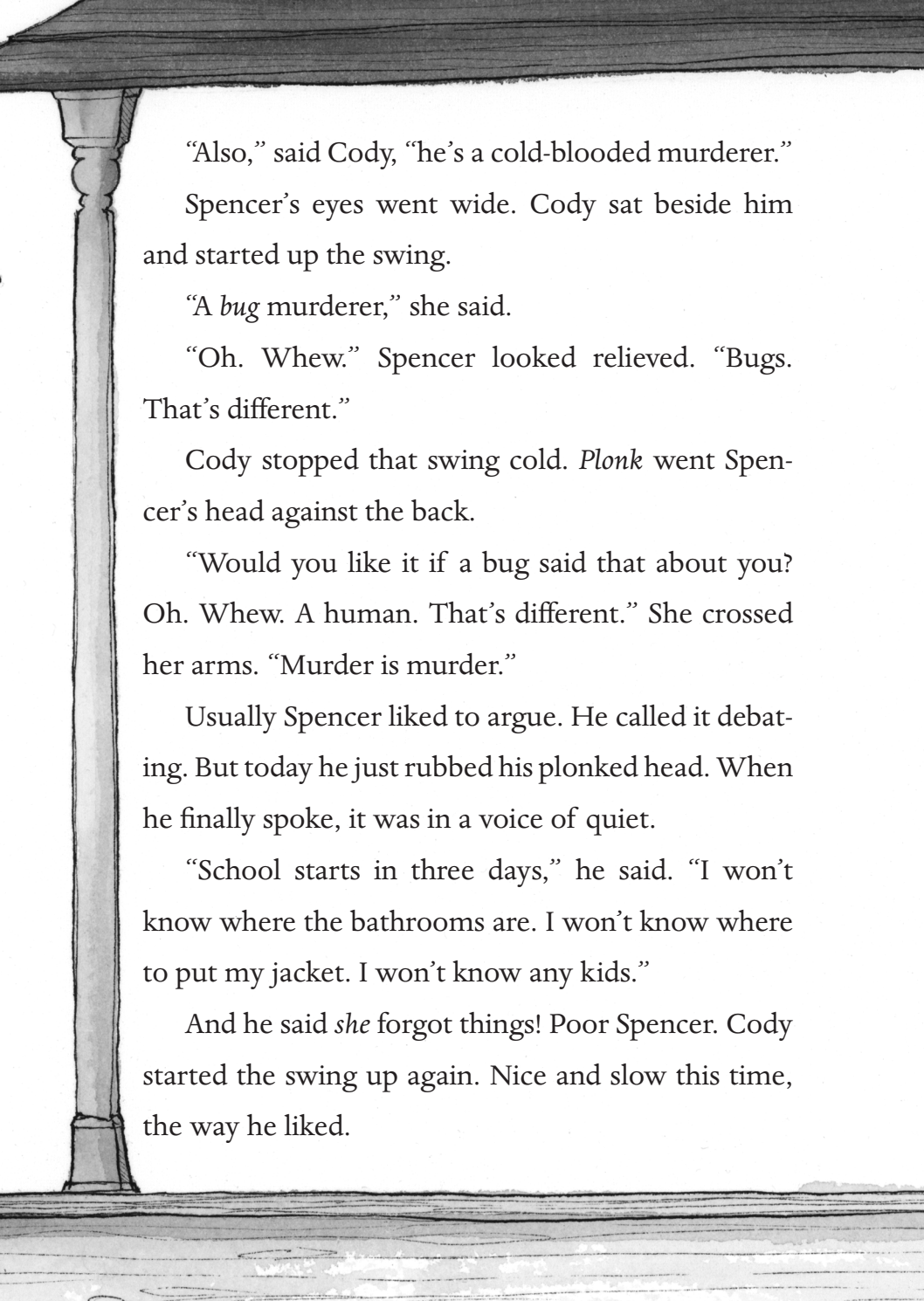
A Meen! Cody had finally seen a Meen!

She raced up the steps and knocked on GG's door. When Spencer came out, he did some blinking, like a boy still surprised to be here.

"Guess what?" Cody said. "I saw Mr. Meen! He's got muscles on top of muscles."

Spencer sat down on the swing. His curls were perky on one side but smushed on the other.





"Also," said Cody, "he's a cold-blooded murderer."

Spencer's eyes went wide. Cody sat beside him and started up the swing.

"A *bug* murderer," she said.

"Oh. Whew." Spencer looked relieved. "Bugs. That's different."

Cody stopped that swing cold. *Plonk* went Spencer's head against the back.

"Would you like it if a bug said that about you? Oh. Whew. A human. That's different." She crossed her arms. "Murder is murder."

Usually Spencer liked to argue. He called it debating. But today he just rubbed his plonked head. When he finally spoke, it was in a voice of quiet.

"School starts in three days," he said. "I won't know where the bathrooms are. I won't know where to put my jacket. I won't know any kids."

And he said *she* forgot things! Poor Spencer. Cody started the swing up again. Nice and slow this time, the way he liked.

“You’ll know me. We won’t be in the same class, but I’ll take care of you.”

Spencer stopped frowning. Cody made the swing go a tiny bit faster.

“I’ll teach you which lunch ladies are nice. And which water fountain tastes disgusting. I’ll introduce you to my friend Pearl. I already told her all about you.”

Like sun slowly peeping from behind a cloud, that was Spencer’s smile.

“Everything will be perfect,” Cody told him.

But then a terrible thought made her stop the swing so fast, both their heads hit the back. *Plonk plonk.*

“I mean. Unless . . .”

“Unless what?”

“Never mind.” Cody tried to start swinging again, but Spencer put his foot down.

“You have to tell me!”

“Unless . . . you get the Spindle.”

“The Spindle! Is that a teacher? Is she really mean? She sounds really, really mean.”

This was the wrong road to go down.

“Let’s not talk about school.” Cody poked his smushed curls to perk them up. “It’s not for three whole days. Anyway, speaking of mean, want to spy on Mr. Meen?”

Spencer took forever to decide things, even no-brainers like spying on a murderer.

Cody waited. Patience is a virtue, after all.

Also, patience is a pain in the neck.

“Sure, you do!” She grabbed his hand. “Come on.”

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