

THE CASE OF THE
PIGGY BANK
THIEF

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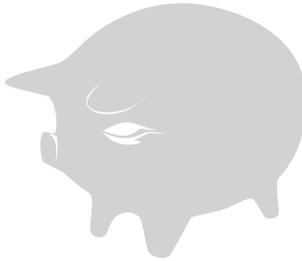
The Case of the Ruby Slippers

The Case of the Piggy Bank Thief

The Case of the Dinosaur Egg



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PIGGY BANK
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*For my friend and coffee date Rick Bryant,
who gives me all my best ideas*

THE CASE OF THE
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CHAPTER ONE



MORE than a million people come to my house every year.

And on Saturday, it felt like they all showed up at once.

Usually my family and I stay out of the way when visitors are downstairs, but sometimes that's just not possible—like when our big, furry, too-energetic dog is out of control, chasing I'm-not-sure-what on the ground floor, which is where tourists enter the White House.

Since January, when my mom got to be president, the White House is where my family lives.

Tessa, my sister, kept yelling at our dog, “Hoo-Hoo-Hooligan! *Stop!*”, which was pointless because when Hooligan gets going, the only thing that stops him is a rock wall or a yummy smell.

Up till a few minutes earlier, things had been pretty normal. Tessa had gone to ballet, and I had gone to soccer, like we always do on Saturday morning. Then we came home and changed into grotty old clothes. That's

because that afternoon we were supposed to go do something cool—help some college students working on an archeology dig out by the pool in our backyard, the South Lawn.

Meanwhile, it was almost lunchtime when Jeremy—he’s the tallest Secret Service agent, plus he has this really deep voice—pounded on our bedroom door with his radio going crazy: “Mayday on the ground floor! Urgent action required—send Fireball and Fussbudget! Someone’s got to control this dog!”

Fireball, if you’re wondering, is Tessa. Fussbudget is me. If the Secret Service has to protect you, they give you your own special code name.

The White House is big, 132 rooms, not counting the two wings where the offices are. You can move through it pretty fast, though, if you know the shortcuts. Tessa and I went from the second floor to the ground floor in two minutes, and there we found all those White House visitors scrambling, scattering, and screaming.

You would’ve thought Hooligan was Godzilla or something.

Tessa shook her head. “People, people, people—can’t you all just simmer down?”

But I felt bad.

Maybe you’ve never visited the White House, but how it works is, you have to make a reservation way in advance, then wait in a long line at the East Entrance, and you can’t bring in a purse, or a camera, or a bottle of water, or anything.

Once you’re inside, you pass through the Garden

Room to the East Wing colonnade, which has the Jacqueline Kennedy Garden on one side and the movie theater on the other. From there you enter the ground floor of the residence part of the White House, and you go by the Library and the Vermeil Room, then turn right and go upstairs to the State Floor.

All the time, you have to stay behind ropes, and there are Secret Service officers to answer questions and make sure you obey the rules.

Anyway, Tessa was worried about Hooligan, but I was thinking how these visitors had gone to so much trouble for their White House tour, and here came our dog—ruining everything.

“Sorry! Sorry! Sorry!” I said as we bumped and dodged, trying to catch Hooligan. “Excuse us! He usually doesn’t hurt anybody. I am so sorry. . . .”

You can probably imagine that with so many people and such a big dog, it was pretty loud down there, and then—above it all—I heard something shrill and unexpected: *Twee-twee-twee!*

Tessa grabbed my arm. “Is that Humdinger?”

I was going to say, “Can’t be,” but a flash of yellow feathers proved me wrong.

Oh, swell.

Now the White House visitors had two rampaging pets to worry about: dog on the ground and canary in the air.

“There he goes again!” Tessa pointed. Humdinger’s not much of a flier, so he was using the chandeliers to make progress, short-hop fluttering from one to the next.

Charlotte, the Secret Service agent who had radioed for us, was stationed at the bottom of the main stairs that lead up to the State Floor, and Hooligan was almost in her tackle range when I guess he heard canary wings, because he stopped and looked around before sitting himself down and howling: “*Awh-roohr!*”

Then he repeated his song for anyone who’d missed the first performance.

I stumbled up and grabbed his collar. “Gotcha!”

And Tessa threw her arms around his neck. “Poor puppy, were you scared?”

After that, Mr. Ng came up behind us and reached for Hooligan’s leash. Mr. Ng watches Hooligan on weekends, and he told us what had happened. They were on the South Lawn when Hooligan did his frenzy thing—lunged forward, thumped his paws, sprang high in the air and spun so fast he turned blurry.

Tangled up in leash, Mr. Ng had a choice: He could either let go or fall flat. He picked let go—wouldn’t you?—and the second he did, Hooligan charged through an open door.

“I don’t know what came over him,” said Mr. Ng.

“I do,” said Tessa. “He heard the Humdinger alarm system.”

It was quieter in the hall now, with Hooligan under control, and Tessa elbowed me. “Cammie, you have to say something. Everybody’s looking at you.”

“I think they’re looking at you,” I said.

“Maybe. But I’m only a second grader.”

I tried not to think how much I hated doing this, stood

up and turned to face the crowd. “Uh...hi, everybody. My name’s Cameron Parks, and—”

Tessa whispered, “They *know* that.”

I frowned. “Do you want to talk?”

Tessa pressed her lips together; some people laughed, and I felt better. “My sister and I...uh...and our dog...uh...and our canary are all really sorry,” I said. “So we hope you’ll go ahead and have a really nice day of sightseeing here in our nation’s capital.”

“Also,” Tessa added, “don’t forget to vote for our mom!”

This time, practically everybody laughed.

Meanwhile, Mr. Ng wanted to know: “What are we going to do about Humdinger?”

CHAPTER TWO



MR. Ng had asked a good question. Humdinger was still loose, currently perched on a sculpture of Benjamin Franklin's head. But now, as we watched, he took off flapping toward the stairs to the State Floor.

Here is something I learned that day: When you've got a bunch of people stuck in a hallway, a tiny, harmless bird causes almost as much freak-out as a big, galloping dog.

People jumped, they waved, they ducked—and the more they got excited, the more Humdinger fluttered and flew.

Everybody had a suggestion:

“Try birdseed!”

“A cat!”

“Who's got a net?”

Finally, reinforcements arrived, including a couple of Park Service rangers from outside. Together we ran after Humdinger as he fluttered up the stairs to the

East Room, where he found a perch above a famous portrait of George Washington.

The poor little bird's chest rose and fell like he was exhausted, and Tessa said, "Cammie, what if he has a heart attack?"

Next to me, a kid's voice spoke. "I can get him."

I looked over and saw our friend Dalton. He's seven like Tessa, and his family was staying with us for a few days. He must've heard the excitement and come down from upstairs.

As we watched, one of the rangers placed a ladder by the fireplace below the Washington portrait. Tessa waved to get the ranger's attention. "Let me try! I'm a good climber."

Dalton scoffed. "You get dizzy at the top of the jungle gym!"

"Do not," Tessa said.

"Do, too," Dalton said.

Oh, no. Not this again. My mom and Dalton's dad went to college together. Now Dalton's dad is some kind of money expert who helps out the government sometimes. Anyway, our two families have been friends forever, and Dalton and Tessa always compete. But we didn't have time for it now. And honestly? Dalton's a lot less of a klutz than my sister.

"Tessa," I said, "stay right where you are. Dalton, go on. Give it a try."

Up the ladder he went, and a couple of minutes later, Humdinger had hopped onto his finger. As Dalton

climbed down, everyone in the East Room—except Tessa—clapped and cheered.

Upstairs in the Family Kitchen, Dalton put Humdinger safely back in his cage, closed the cage door and latched it. Then Granny got three pink twisty ties from a drawer and wrapped them around the bars of the cage door.

“I always add twisties,” she said, “for extra security.”

Mr. Bryant—he’s our friend and Granny’s special friend—was in the kitchen with us. He had been studying the birdcage, and now he shook his head. “I don’t see how the little fellow escaped.”

“Plus,” I said, “how did he get all the way down to the ground floor?”

“Don’t look at me!” Dalton said.

“Of course not,” Granny said. “We owe you a debt of gratitude.”

Dalton looked confused.

Tessa said, “*Duh*, Dalton—she’s just using a lot of words to say ‘thank you.’”

“Oh,” said Dalton. “I knew that. *Duh*.”

“All right, everyone, time to wash up,” Granny said.

Dalton and his family were staying in a suite on the third floor. Tessa and I share a bedroom on the second floor over the North Portico—that’s the White House front door. I was soaping my hands in our bathroom when I heard an earsplitting scream.

What now?

I sighed, turned off the water, dried my hands and walked back into the bedroom. Tessa was standing in

front of her laundry hamper with her mouth open. The hamper was empty, and dirty clothes were scattered all over the floor.

“My piggy bank,” Tessa said breathlessly. *“It’s gone!”*