

*The Adventures of Brady Ladd*

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## The Booger Brother

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“Brady Ladd, get your butt down here right now!” This was not the first time I had heard those exact words. Lately, sentences using my last name were becoming common.

I popped out of my bedroom where I had been busy re-gluing the tail rotor on my broken one forty-eighth scale AH-64 Apache Helicopter with a tube of superglue I had found in my dad’s desk drawer. I rushed down the stairs, trying to separate my now super glued fingers, to see what I had done this time. Just as I had thought, it was bad - real bad.

Mom was standing over the kitchen table looking at my half-empty cup of grape juice. “What is the meaning of this?” she demanded.

It’s times like this when you’ve got to think fast or you could be spending the rest of your day on time-out. “I know, I know, finish my juice. Rinse the cup in the sink, then put the cup in the dishwasher. My bad. I’m so sorry, Mom, I’ll take care of it right now.”

I’ve learned that using the words, “I’m so sorry” and “I’ll take care of it,” were a sure ways to escape further punishment, especially when I lower my eyes and sound remorseful. I took a big gulp from my cup, and that’s when it all came back to me... the reason why I hadn’t finished my grape juice in the first place! Samantha!

Growing up in a house with an evil big sister is one of the true tests of survival. Samantha, along with her ever-present, fur-covered rat of a dog-named Ginger, were constantly driving me crazy.

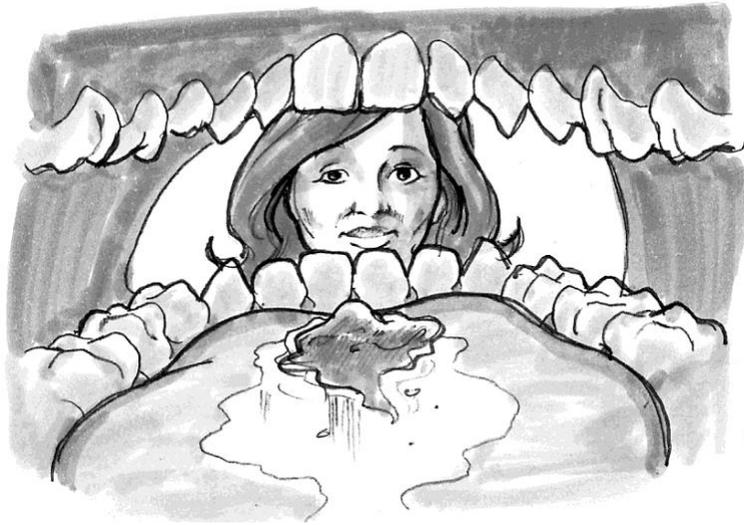
During my afternoon snack (one of the most important times of the day) she and I got into it, and when I say *got into it*, I mean it. First she poked me in the ribs, and then she hit me in the arm right as I was taking a drink. Well, I was left with no choice. I had to return fire.

You know those brown spots that grow on bananas? Well, I wiped some on her cheek. Just to let her know that a little brother could fight back.

Then just as I was taking a bite of my banana, she smacked my hand. That made some of it go up my nose. While she was busy laughing at that, I leaned over and blew the banana bits out of my nose and on to her plate. And that’s when she

paused...picked two giant green boogers from her nose... and flicked them into my grape juice.

I froze mid swallow, unable to move. I tried to force a smile for my mom. Who was starring intently at me. The apology had worked.



My mother just looked at me for a second, I could feel one of Samantha's boogers floating in the back of my mouth I tried desperately not to swallow any more juice and at the same time keep smiling at my mom as if nothing was wrong.

She smiled back... grape juice was beginning to seep out through my teeth. I was a second away from gagging. My mom seemed confused for a brief moment and paused. I raised the cup up to my lips and pretended to drink more. Finally, she patted my head and left the room.

I flew to the sink and spit out the juice. Then turned on the faucet and rinsed my mouth out with the hottest water I could handle.

## A New Career

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Mert scratched the fuzzy bumps on the back of his head. He was pleased. Most of his troops had already been loaded into the transports. He could see the garbage droids collecting the last of the Bipod corpses. The planet wasn't big as far as some planets go but it would make a nice addition to the Supreme Leader's growing collection.

Mert thought about his home, and how long it had been since he had been there. He remembered back when he was a kid, clawing for squigglers in the black swamp next to the stinkweed meadow. Lighting his sister's head fuzz on fire, and watching her run around screaming. Shooting the neighbor's pet klapper in the legs with a numb gun and laughing as it wobbled around for hours afterwards. Those were the good ol' days.

Mert missed his home, but when he went back, it wouldn't be as some military lackey taking orders. No, Mert was on a roll, all he needed was one more successful job, and he would return home a hero. "Hero." He said the word aloud. He liked the way it sounded. Heroes could get good jobs in the private sector, like a trade embargo specialist, or a sonic waste distributor. Those were the kind of jobs a hero could get.

"General Mert!" his First Mate, Kallen interrupted. "The planet is secured. The Supreme Leader himself sends his congratulations, and there's a message from Commander Dortmon."

It was the last thing his First Mate said that had caught Mert's attention - Commander Dortmon. He was one of the most powerful men in the galaxy. Why would he be calling?

Mert swiped his claw through the sensor on his communications unit. The unit verified his identification and displayed the message. He read the words from Commander Dortmon carefully. It was too good to believe; an offer to work for him in the private sector. Finally, Mert had made it.

He pressed a button on his wristband then spoke. "Kallen, set a course for Nival Six.

## CHAPTER 3

### **Busted**

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“Hey! Stop right there!” Oh no. It was Big Tim. He was a tenth grader with way too much free time. It seemed like every time I walked home from school, no matter which path I chose to take, I would run into Big Tim. Today I had decided to cut through the drainage basin and just as I was going under the hole in the fence, I heard the unmistakable twang of his voice.

The drainage basin is a cool place. It’s a low-lying patch of ground that is surrounded by a high wall of dirt. The perfect play area when you didn’t want to be seen by the outside world.

You could also stand on the inside edge of the north facing dirt wall and throw things at passing cars without being seen. Big Tim and a couple of his pals, Lenny and Clint, were doing just that. They were throwing rotted peaches from the old peach tree that grew in the basin. You could hear the cars on the other side as they honked and skidded. Big Tim and his buddies were having great fun causing so much chaos.

I had hastily scurried under the fence and retrieved my backpack that I had pushed through ahead of me. Now the question on my mind was how to survive the next few minutes. “Hey, boys, looks like we got ourselves a trespasser,” Lenny sneered. I wanted to tell him that I had as much right to be here as they did, but I thought better of it and kept my mouth shut.

In a matter of seconds the three oafs had me surrounded. I figured I had maybe two seconds to live - so - I ran. Lenny and Clint grabbed my arms and hoisted me into the air. I knew this because my feet were still running but I wasn’t going anywhere. Tim, or Big Tim, as everyone called him (I think his real name was Thermopolis, but nobody that wanted to see their next birthday called him that). Anyway, he picked up several rotted peaches off the ground and proceeded to mash them on my head. I did my best to stay strong as peach slime flowed across my cheeks, over my ears and down my back. They found this very funny.

High schoolers can be real pains in the butt. Remind me never to become one. “Now, maggot breath, open wide. I have a special treat for you.” Big Tim

grabbed the gooiest peach he could find. It was all brown and slimy, filled with bird pecked holes, and probably some ants and worms too. (But since Clint had his arm wrapped around my forehead, I couldn't see that well and I don't want to be accused of exaggerating the moment)

Lenny grabbed my chin and pried my mouth open. Big Tim took pleasure smashing the goop into my mouth. Lenny plugged my nose and waited for me to swallow. I held my breath as long as I could. Big Tim was enjoying the moment of my torture he moved close to wipe his peach smeared hands off on my shirt. Then an idea born out of desperation hit me. In their mean-spirited haste, they had forgotten to hold my mouth shut. With my last drop of air expiring I blew as hard as I could and spit the rotted peach guts all over Big Tim's face.

There was a moment of silence from the bullies while I gasped for air. Clint was so stunned that his grip on me loosened. I seized the moment, stomped down on his foot as hard as I could and dashed for my life. But Lenny was on to me; and my exciting moment of freedom quickly turned back into deep despair and captivity.

Big Tim wiped the oozy bits off of his cheeks and dried his hands on my hair. "You just made the worst mistake of your life," Big Tim hissed. Clint and Lenny threw me to the ground and used their combined body weight to immobilize me. Then Big Tim grabbed a stick from a dead branch and prodded it in some fresh dog poop on the ground. "And now for a little after-dinner mint," he growled. Big Tim held the stick with the blob of poop near my face. I tried to move away, but Clint held me tight. I panicked at the sight of the dog poop lollipop so close to my mouth and screamed!

Now normally I can take a lot of things. I mean, after all I have a big sister. But today was different. During recess, Ms. Fincher yelled at me on the playground for taking cuts in the handball line. I told her I had already been in line and had just stepped out for a second to grab a beetle that was flying near the swings.

Ms. Fincher lowered her head and cocked it to one side. She had heard a lot of lies in her days as playground monitor. So I thought the best way to prove to her that I was telling the truth was to show her the beetle. It was one of those large green ones. The kind you can tie a thread to and watch them fly around and stuff. I opened my hand, it flew out and up into her hair.

I have to admit I have never seen a grown woman move around like that before. "I mean how was I supposed to know she was deathly afraid of beetles?"

The man on the other side of the desk, Mr. Thorn, the principal, just looked at me for a moment. I was trying my best to look sorry but I couldn't get the image of

Ms. Fincher gyrating, jumping and screaming like some wild crazed baboon out of my head. It had left a permanent smirk on my face.

“Your attitude is not helping the situation, young man... I think if you stay after school and help Mrs. Hunter reorganize the library you might find yourself a little more sympathetic.”

I had walked past the principal’s office many times before but had always managed to stay on the outside until now. I glanced around his office. Principle Thorn had a lot of plaques and pictures of him with important people on the wall. The bright sun light from a small round window behind him made it difficult for me to see his face, but I could tell by his look that no explanation, no matter how good, would save me now. There was nothing else I could do. “Yes, Sir,” I said.

Luckily, for me the rest of the day had been uneventful. Now all I had to do was figure out what I was going to tell my parents. I knew that the news of my trip to the principal’s office would beat me home. That’s just one of the things big sisters are really good at.

The sound of the final bell for the day sent hundreds of kids scrambling for freedom. Hundreds of kids accept me. I grabbed my backpack and hustled over to the library. I wanted to get this over with.

Mrs. Hunter was an older woman; you could tell by the way her sweater smelled – like a mixture of mothballs and cat litter. She had a reputation for being a real book buster. But most of all she had a lazy eye that seemed to rove the world at will. A lot of the kids made fun of her. They called her the cock eyed book jailer, but I had better things to do with my time at school and had never joined in their blather. Mrs. Hunter glared up over her glasses at me, I froze, one of her eyes was boring into me and the other was staring off at a bookcase. I couldn’t decide which way to look. My eyes shifted nervously, and then much to my surprise, she smiled. I glanced down trying not to stare at her eye. Then she handed me a stack of books to catalogue and put back. The news of my playground antics must have reached her, as every book in the stack was a bug book. There was: *Insects of the Serengeti*, *A Bugs Life*, *Six Legs Are Better than Two*, *Creepy Crawlers of the Night*, *Anthill Diaries*, even one that showed how to dissect a cockroach. After I finished, she gave me an uncharacteristic pat on the shoulder, smiled once more, and let me leave.

Everyone had already gone home by the time I walked out the library door. That’s why I took the short cut through the drainage basin in the first place, hoping to beat Samantha’s big mouth home. Which is why I’m in the in the situation I’m in now.

Oh yeah, the scream. Well, let's just say it sounded more like a girl's scream than a boy's. Okay. There. I said it. I'm not proud of it, but with all that had happened today it just came out that way.

"Oh, the girly let out a scream," Big Tim said. He then put the dog poop-covered stick right under my nose. It's times like this when I wish I could breathe through my toes. The smell was unbearable; we're talking really gross. I tried as hard as I could to close my mouth, but Lenny was too strong and pried it back open.

I suspect that Big Tim must live for these moments. He waved the wand of smelly brown poop around my face. First in front of my right eye, then to my left, and finally back under my nose. I could see some of it starting to drip. He held it there until I finally had to take a breath.

It was at that exact moment the thought that I was about to eat dog poop became a terrible reality. He took the poop and moved it into my mouth.

I said a silent prayer. "Dear God, please oh please let me die before I have to eat this dog poop." I mean, hey, you never know, prayers do work. I began to get dizzy. I could hear Lenny say, "Stand back he might puke all over you."

Big Tim wasn't going to make the same mistake twice. He moved to the side. Clint's grip on me was so tight my arms were numb. This was it. This must be how it feels when you die. My mind and spirit began to leave my body. I could no longer smell the poop I could no longer feel Lenny's grip on my jaw. Darkness began to fill my vision.

Then suddenly Big Tim and his stick with the poop flew from my view and disappeared.

"You're gonna pay for this," a voice shouted. Lenny and Clint released me like a hot potato and ran for their lives. Standing over me, holding Big Tim up in the air with just one hand was a giant mutant, dressed entirely in black. His legs were the size of tree trunks. His head was shaped like a large rounded dome. His eyes were giant reflective ovals. He had enormous paws for hands, and looked angry.

His free paw reached for me... My mind struggled for an answer. It must be -The GRIM REAPER. You know, that guy who comes for you when it's time to die.

It had worked! My prayer was being answered; and it couldn't have come at a better time. I was saved! No eating dog poop, no explaining the whole principal's office thing to my parents, and best of all no more big sister with her obnoxious little dog, Ginger.

I was being taken back to God, to a place of peace and love. The Grim Reaper grabbed me and pulled me to my feet. I smiled and said, "I'm ready, you can take me."

He looked confused for a moment. That's when I realized, hey wait a minute, this wasn't the Grim Reaper. He was dressed in black all right, but he wasn't a skeleton and he didn't have that funky sword thing the Grim Reaper was supposed to carry.

This was some crazy kidnapper that was going to kill me in some very painful way. I was suddenly sure that I would rather eat dog poop than die by the hands of this monster.

"Are you alright?" It had spoken. Its voice was very gravelly, but there was no mistaking the kindness behind it. I was stunned. I looked up. I noticed bits of rotten peach on his black leather coat and helmet. I looked down and saw he was wearing motorcycle boots. And finally I understood.



I guess what they say about *what goes around comes around* must be true. He sat me gently down on a rock, and then turned his attention on Big Tim.

"So you like to throw peaches do you?" The giant had spoken again. He grabbed a handful of rotted peaches off the ground. Big Tim was mumbling in some completely unidentifiable language. The giant took the rotted peaches and smeared Big Tim's face with them. Big Tim instantly became a helpless blubbering baby and I couldn't have felt better about it. The giant then took Big Tim over to the pile of dog poop. "And you like to pick on smaller kids, huh?"

This was going to be good. I sat back, propped my feet up on a rock and watched. Big Tim started to cry. The tears making their way through the dog poop and rotted peach soufflé smeared all over his face. Satisfied the giant turned his attention to me.

"My name's Ed," the giant said, as he helped me to my feet.

“Brady,” I told him, as I pulled some of the rotted peach mush out of my hair.

“You look like you could use a ride home. Ever been on the back of a Harley?”

Now I know you’re not supposed to ride with strangers, but can I just say one word... Harley Davidson! Okay, so maybe that’s two words, besides this man had saved my life – what could go wrong?

There’s nothing like the wind blowing past your face going a hundred miles an hour. Well at least thirty miles an hour.

Everything was going great. The peach goo had mostly dried and blown out of my hair. I had completely forgotten my trip to the Principal’s office and the poop Popsicle. Riding on a Harley Davidson is everything they say it is... absolutely amazing.

As we rounded the corner to my house, I looked up, my face plastered with a smile, just in time to see my mom, dad and big sister standing on the front porch waiting for me to come home.

I thanked Ed, the nice biker dude and strolled as casually as I could up to the porch. A million thoughts flew in my head as my parents starred back at me, arms crossed in disbelief. My sister hovered nearby to watch, she wasn’t going to miss this. I knew there was no explanation in the world that could save me, so I marched right past everyone, head held high, “yeah, yeah I know I’m grounded.” I didn’t stop till I got to my room.