

THE  
SLIGHTLY ALARMING TALE  
*of the*  
WHISPERING WARS

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**GUPPY  
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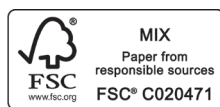
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# PART 1

## 1 FINLAY

Finlay here.

I'm starting the story, but a girl named Honey Bee takes over in the next chapter. You'll miss me then. You'll say, "Oh, I wish that Finlay was back, I liked him."

You won't like Honey Bee. Trust me on that. This is her fault. With some people, you don't like them and it's not their fault? They're accidentally annoying? But with Honey Bee, it's her fault.

Don't worry, though. I'll be back. Honey Bee and I are taking turns.

The story begins on the day of the Spindrift Tournament.

That's an annual competition that takes place on the Spindrift Town Green. (*Annual* means once a year. *Spindrift* is my town.) At the tournament, the local schools compete in athletics. (*Athletics* are running, high jump, and so on. *Compete* means—)

Listen, from now on, you can look things up in the dictionary if you don't know what they mean. Otherwise, this will take forever.

That morning, I woke up and dropped straight out of bed onto the floor-boards to do my push-ups. I do twenty first thing every morning. Only did seventeen that day, though, not wanting to wear myself out before the tournament.

Glim's bed is by the window and she was kneeling on her pillow, drawing pictures in the mist on the glass. She's not much of an artist, if I'm honest. But she tells us all crackerjack stories each night, pressing her nose against the glass as she speaks. (She likes to watch the goings-on in the town square.)

The twins, Eli and Taya, were reading newspapers under the covers. They always do that. They're big for ten, Eli and Taya, so every morning it's like a pair of boulders have got ahold of a paper each and climbed under the blankets to read.

I won't describe what the other kids were doing, as that would take too long. Also, I don't remember. Three beds were empty: I know that. Amie, Connor, and Bing had all been taken.

Back then, we didn't know who or what had taken them.

Jaskafar would have been on top of the wardrobe because that's where he always ends up. He climbs there in his sleep. It took Lili-Daisy about six months to stop screaming about this.

"A rat! A rat on the wardrobe!" she shrieked, the first time she saw him there.

"I am not a rat," Jaskafar replied, waking up. "I am a five-year-old boy—" And he bumped his head on the ceiling and realized where he was. "A five-year-old boy on a wardrobe!" He was that surprised.

Everybody had scolded Lili-Daisy for calling Jaskafar a rat.

"Jaskafar looks *nothing* like a rat!" we shouted.

"Still. Have a gander at his teeth," Daffo observed. "They stick out a bit." Then everybody shouted at Daffo to shut his trap. But he did have a point.

“They stick out in a cute-little-boy way,” Glim said. “Not a rat way. Also, he has no tail – we’d have noticed if he did.”

Glim also had a point.

Lili-Daisy had pulled Jaskafar down from the wardrobe and apologized for calling him a rat. It was just she could only see his hair at first, she explained; that’s where the mistake had come in. Then she sat on a bed, Jaskafar on her lap, and made up a song:

*“Not a rat! Not a rat!  
But a dear little boy, oh drat!  
Oh drat that I called you a rat!  
Oh, how foolish I can be  
When I’ve not had my morning tea—”*

“And when you’ve *had* your morning tea,” I interrupted – and now I had a point. Lili-Daisy can be foolish any time of the day. She raised an eyebrow at me and carried on singing:

*“Oh drat!  
You’re not a rat!  
If you were, I’d get a cat!  
To eat you!”*

Jaskafar had been very cheerful and said, “It’s okay! You can call me a rat if you like.” But we all bellowed, “No!” except Daffo, who said, “Thanks, I’ll do that.”

Lili-Daisy had sung more loudly, and then it was time for breakfast.

But the next day, Jaskafar was on the wardrobe again and Lili-Daisy came into the dormitory and screamed, "A rat!"

Anyway, she got used to Jaskafar being on the wardrobe in the end.

On the morning of the Spindrift Tournament, everyone was trying to brush Jaskafar's hair at the breakfast table. Lili-Daisy was dabbing at his face with a washer. Avril was brushing dried mud from his shoes. Jaskafar himself wore a thoughtful expression on his face.

"What if I accidentally eat the flowers?" he asked.

He had a special job that day, you see. The queen and the prince were coming along to the Spindrift Tournament as part of their tour of the kingdom, and Jaskafar was the child chosen to give the queen a bunch of flowers.

Queens always need bunches of flowers. I don't know why. I think they have a special interest in them.

"What if I accidentally eat the flowers," Jaskafar repeated, "before I give them to her?"

We asked him if he was in the habit of eating flowers and he said no, he'd never done it before. Well then, we said, it probably wouldn't happen today. Glim suggested he have extra toast for breakfast so as not to have an appetite for flowers.

I was having trouble eating breakfast myself. It's not that I get

*nervous* on the day of the tournament, it's just that it seems like grasshoppers are kicking each other around in my belly.

Here is what always happens at the tournament: I win most of the boys' events. My best friend, Glim, wins most of the girls' events. My other best friends, the twins, being a boy (Eli) and a girl (Taya), and both big and strong for their age, win the rest of the events between them.

Between us, we four make the Orphanage School the champions of the Spindrifft Tournament. Every single year.

Which is a big responsibility. I think that's why the grasshoppers.

This year, Sir Edgar Brathelthwaite Boarding School was competing in the tournament for the first time. That school is just outside town, and they're usually too rich and important to join in. But Millicent Cadger, local councilwoman and director of the Spindrifft Tournament, had begged them to come today, on account of the queen and prince attending. Royals need the *better* sort of children, see? The sort who polish their faces and shoes, and tilt their chins at the sky.

We were not worried about the boarding school kids winning anything. They just lazed about on cushions eating cake all day, as I understood it. They'd be clueless about sport. Even if they tried it, they'd run into a wall or a tree, on account of their chins pointing up.

We knew we would win.

We washed up, tied our shoelaces, and set off for the tournament. And that is the beginning of the story.

\*

(Honey Bee will probably say, “No, no, I cannot *abide* that beginning.” And she’ll try to tell you a different one. Ignore her.)

Okay, here she is. It’s Honey Bee. Good luck.

## 2 HONEY BEE

Ahoy there!

I am Honey Bee, and I *completely* agree with Finlay about the beginning of the story. It did start on the day of the Spindrift Tournament.

I do not know what *crackerjack* means, but I *did* like Finlay’s chapter.

He is funny! The joke about me being annoying, especially. That had me rolling on the floor. But he’s right that you’ll be missing him. I’ll try to be quick.

I live at Sir Edgar Brathelthwaite Boarding School.

The morning of the Spindrift Tournament we marched around the courtyard, chanting the school motto, as per usual.

*“Brathelthwaite students are  
Better than the best!  
Brathelthwaite students,  
Put us to the test!  
We will conquer all*