



# the Christy Kids Chronicles

stories springing from the imaginations of  
**Oliver Christy, Stella Christy & Miles Christy**

crafted by  
**Papa Keith**

*the*  
***Christy Kids***  
***Chronicles***

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I will fight for those who  
cannot fight for themselves.  
~ *Wonder Woman*

With great power comes great  
responsibility. ~ *Spiderman*

There is a superhero in all of  
us. We just need the courage  
to put on the cape. ~ *Superman*



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# *Preface*

**F**rom January to April 2019, I drove Oliver, Stella, and Miles home from school every day. Karla was doing her student teaching in the final semester of a masters program in elementary education, so I became the school bus driver for the after-school run.

During an afternoon trip home, one of the kids suggested that we create *The Christy Kids Chronicles*. The immediate outcome of that casual statement started the development of superhero characters. From that

day on, during our journey on the streets east and west of State Line Road, someone regularly identified an incident or idea as worthy of inclusion in *The Christy Kids Chronicles*.

Karla had a first-year teacher meeting on Tuesday, July 30, 2019, so Papa Camp was in session. While eating lunch at Loose Park in Kansas City, Missouri, Oliver, Stella, Miles, and I took the first steps in actually writing down some of the ideas we had generated in our after-school car rides. They talked—sometimes all three speaking at the same time—and I took notes.

The Christy Kids created the superhero chant at that Loose Park working session. They verbally tried several options, and finally settled on this:

“Never fear!” (Miles)

“The Christy Kids are here!” (Stella)

“Hoo-rah!” (Oliver)

“Oogah oogah! Hah!”

They rehearsed the chant again and again as we walked toward the car. Somewhere along the way they added arm movement to the oogah oogah exclamation. I recorded a six-second video of the Christy Kids chant before we left the park that afternoon. I still smile when I see Stella

stumble in laughter at the end of the clip.

We wrote the beach story first, mostly because just a few weeks before the Loose Park lunch we had been to Maui with the cousins. We played on Kama'ole Beach on our last full day in paradise. Their oldest cousin Judah had been floating in the water out farther than anyone else dared go. The cousins had been building a sandcastle village. Those memories set the stage for the first story put to paper.

The park story utilized a familiar scene because we often had been to the Thomas S. Stoll Memorial Park in Overland Park, Kansas. Stoll Park has walking trails often used by mothers with strollers. There is an off-leash dog area to the west of the parking lot. A large tree stands next to the play structure where Oliver, Stella, and Miles played their home-grown version of the American Ninja Warrior competition.

The tornado story, too, has familiar elements in that several years ago the family had been moved to the back of a big-box store during a severe weather alert. Memories of the instructions given on that day as well as emergency response practice sessions at school informed the setting for that story.

The house in which the Christy family now

resides has a creek behind it. Critters, including owls and raccoons, live in the trees and on the creek bank. The back deck is directly below the window of Miles's bedroom. The story about the rescue at the creek was written soon after they had new windows installed.

The baseball story was written with the Johnson County (Kansas) 3 & 2 East Complex in mind. Both Oliver and Miles have played games on those fields. For the Christy Kids not on the field, the concession stand tends to be the focal point, not the baseball diamond, with Ices usually included in the order.

All of those stories have settings familiar to the Christy Kids. The circus story, however, has a setting that the Christy Kids have not personally experienced. The Christy Kids have watched the movie *The Greatest Showman* a couple of times, but that is as close to a circus as they have come.

The subtitle of this book is “stories springing from the imaginations” of Oliver, Stella, and Miles. That is a completely true claim. For example, all of the really interesting words in these stories were fabricated by Oliver. You'll be among the first to read the word “verzippazing” in the history of humankind. Oliver created the magical incantation “hooper ziza azah doo.” Stella

recognized that “hooper ziza azah doo” could be sung to the tune used for “Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star.” In one story you’ll hear Stella say, “Let’s go wrangle up dem doggies.” That is a direct quote of what she said the day we generated ideas for that story. When an ice cream cone appeared in a story, Miles announced that it had five scoops: banana, chocolate, strawberry, vanilla, and cookies and cream. In the story about the rescue at the creek, Miles said that an old man gave cookies and milk to the neighbors who gathered in the back yard. Do you see what is common in Miles’s thinking? Yep, cookies.

Some characters in the stories are real people: cousins, a yackety mother in the park, the Nerd Herd, the Black Dragons baseball team. The fun folks, however, stepped out of the imagination onto the page. In *The Christy Kids Chronicles* you will meet Wilma, the woman with purple hair and red eyeglasses, an old man chanting in Hawaiian, a sweater-wearing woman with a ferocious pack of Chihuahuas. Have you ever seen a cross-eyed shark? A squirrel-bot? You are in for a treat!

Our writing process began when one of the kids had a basic story idea. Stella was the one, for example, who remembered the tornado warning experience and started the process of creating

that story. The baseball story was written during the 2021 summer season after someone wondered what might happen if the Kona Ice truck was stolen.

Once the basic premise had formed, we had a writers meeting to create details of the story. Sometimes I used a MadLibs approach where I provided prompts, said “tell me more about ...,” or asked questions. I tried to write down everything the kids said during those sessions even when the kids were firing off ideas fast and furious.

My task was to craft the stories. I read through my notes and arranged the plot points. Sometimes I had to decide what to leave out.

Now, as I read through the completed stories, I am impressed with how the personalities of Oliver, Stella, and Miles shine through. Some of the dialogue is based on how they interact on a daily basis.

After I had a draft ready, we would get together for a first reading. Sometimes this was face-to-face. When COVID-19 required that we stay-at-home in 2020, we used video conferencing for these work sessions. When the kids were on a road trip to Ohio in summer 2021, I called them and we had an audio book session while they traveled down the interstate.

Sometimes we knew at the first reading that we had more work to do. After living with the first draft of the creek rescue story for a few days, we recognized we needed more detail in one part of the story. The ideas started flying through the air and what was added are some of the best parts of the story. (Spoiler alert: it involves owlets.)

You'll see my fingerprints on these stories, of course, but throughout the writing process I diligently worked to keep the perspectives of an 11-year-old, a 10-year-old, and a 6-year-old (ages in 2019). They churned the cream; I put the butter in the molds.

So here are *The Christy Kids Chronicles*, six stories of superheroes extraordinaire. Grab an ice cream cone with five scoops. Read the stories. And take heart, the Christy Kids are here!

Oogah oogah!

Papa Keith

August 2021





# 1 *Smack-a-Shark*

**S**hark!”  
Heads popped up with the shout. It looked like Kama’ole Beach had become a Whack-a-mole game.

“What’d she say?” a mother asked the person next to her.

“Shark!” came the reply.

The mother immediately started looking for her children, like a hen gathering the chicks before a thunderstorm. “Kids,” she screamed, “out of the water!”

“Quick, get the lifeguard!” some-

one shouted.

“Not today,” another cried out. “The sign says that there’ll be no lifeguard on duty today.”

“We’re sunk,” said the person calling for a lifeguard. He started to cry.

“Judah!”

The people on the beach looked in the direction being pointed to by a frantic man. About 100 feet from the shoreline, a boy in florescent orange swim trunks lay face down in the water. You could see the tip of his snorkel slowly move up and down as his body gently rocked with the swells of the ocean.

“He followed a group of sea turtles,” the distraught man yelled, “and he doesn’t know that a shark is nearby.” The man brought his hands to his mouth for a moment, then shrieked, “Somebody do something!”

No one moved or said a thing.

“Do something ... NOW!” he wailed.

An outrageously loud boom shook the beach like the gods of Haleakala were drumming the skies. One man fell, shoved to the sand by the force of the sound. A resonant voice from deep within the volcano’s crater declared “Hooper zizza azah doo!”

The three Christy Kids had been building

a sandcastle village. Simultaneous with the heavenly announcement, they stood dressed in Spandex full-body suits, Oliver in magenta, Miles in turquoise, and Stella in lavender, darker leaves at her ankles with brightly-colored flower blossoms climbing her shins, hummingbirds encircling her waist, and butterflies covering her shoulders and arms as if a kaleidoscope had stopped for a rest on its journey. The colors were so vibrant it looked like someone had ripped open a bag and dumped Skittles on the table. A superhero badge lay over each of their hearts: the initials CK in sun-drenched yellow on a background of jungle green encircled by white trim.

“Never fear!” Miles declared as he raised his arms to show off his well-defined biceps.

“The Christy Kids are here!” Stella added with a ballerina’s sweep of her hands and a toothy grin.

“Hoo-rah!” Oliver growled, like a bear just waking from a long winter’s nap.

“Oogah oogah!” the Christy Kids said in unison, fists clenched, arms punching the air in front of their waists like a weightlifter showing off a sculpted physique.

“Hah!” Oliver added, a verbal exclamation point to the solidarity they had as superheroes.

The Christy Kids grabbed boogie boards and

ran for the surf. They lunged forward in unison, bellies to the boards as they landed on the water, and paddled toward their cousin Judah. Just beyond the first breaker, they began a synchronized boogie board routine that produced a communal gasp of delight from observers on the beach.

“Those kids could be in the Olympics,” a bystander said, a reverent hush in his voice.

The crowd began to clap, softly at first, then increasing in volume as the water show continued. The Christy Kids stood on their boogie boards and acknowledged the applause.

“Hey,” yelled the distraught man, “don’t forget about Judah!”

At that moment, Oliver saw movement in the water to his left. “Shark!” he yelled. Oliver raised his foot and, just as the shark was about to bite his boogie board, he jammed his heel into the shark’s face, pushing its nose back between its eyes. The shark’s eyes crossed as it tried to see what had happened to its nose. The shark lunged again at Oliver. It came up out of the water so the people on the beach could see its white underbelly. With a swift kick, Oliver launched the shark toward the open ocean.

A roar went up from the people on the beach.

The people on the beach saw Judah pull his head out of the water for a look at what was going on. Just then, two sea turtles swam under Judah and lifted him out of the water. Judah stood on the backs of the turtles.

The Christy Kids paddled their boogie boards around the turtles, the greatest finale to a synchronized boogie board routine in the history of humankind. Even the Greeks could not have topped this creative display of finesse and agility.

When they reached the beach, in unison the Christy Kids rolled off of their boogie boards and stood in the surf. Judah hopped off of the turtles beside them. They turned to face the turtles and gave them a shaka sign. Like a synchronized swim team, the turtles turned in the water, their flippers waving to the crowd on the beach.

The frantic man hurried to hug Judah when he walked out of the surf onto the sand. “Did you see the shark?” the man wanted to know.

“No,” Judah said, “not until the shark floated by. But something strange happened. I had been swimming with the turtles, but then they crowded around me. Do you think they were trying to protect me from the shark?”

An old Hawaiian man approached the Christy Kids while they still faced the open sea. The crowd

quieted as the man slowly walked into the circle of people who had been watching the spectacle. The man had a wreath of woven vines on his head, a shawl draped on his left shoulder and tied under his right arm, and a leafy lei hanging from his neck. These adornments framed a ruddy, weathered face. He looked frail as he walked, but his presence exuded a strength of spirit.

When the man began to hum the Christy Kids turned to face him. For a long time the man intoned just one pitch. Then he began to chant, “Welina mai i Hawaii, aloha, welina.”<sup>1</sup> As he repeated the chant six hula dancers swayed into position in a half circle around the old man and the Christy Kids. “Welina mai i Hawaii, aloha, welina.” The women were followed by six Hawaiian men, three carrying surf boards.

The men started humming the pitch the old man had intoned when he first arrived. When the old man raised his hands waist high with a slight gesture to the crowd, the people joined the singing. They matched the intoned pitch until a centered calm settled on the beach. People who had been playing in the surf at the other end of the beach came out of the water, slowly walked to where the group had gathered around the Christy Kids, and joined the hushed hum. The old man

chanted above the drone bass.

hai huali  
makani 'olu'olu  
kulu o ka lā gula  
e ho'ohanohano iā 'oe<sup>2</sup>

The whole crowd began to sing the refrain,  
“Welina mai i Hawaii, aloha, welina.”

“Do you know what we’re saying?” someone in the crowd asked. No one responded. Everyone continued singing.

A Hawaiian boy, about ten years old, pushed through the crowd. He extended his hand toward Stella. She shyly turned her head away, but then took the gift he offered. Stella’s new friend gave her a stalk with a dozen plumeria blossoms in vibrant colors: yellows and oranges, pinks and purples.

The old man changed the chant. When he did, the men laid a surf board beside each of the Christy Kids. “Nā akua mai ke kai,”<sup>3</sup> the old man chanted. “Nā akua mai ke kai.”

“What’s he saying?” Oliver asked the boy.

“Kupunakāne is blessing the gods from the sea,” the boy replied. “The village elders have come to carry the Polynesian gods to their new home.”



“Hold on,” Oliver said. “We’re supposed to get on the surf boards and be carried to the village ...”

“Shh, Oliver,” Stella said, “don’t go messing up a good thing.”

Oliver ignored Stella. “... to be carried to the village because he thinks we’re Polynesian gods?”

“Uh huh,” the young boy said. “And all people will be blessed by your presence.”

“Good grief,” Oliver said. “We’re just three kids from Kansas.”

When the old man heard Oliver say Kansas, he stopped chanting and looked a bit bewildered. “Auwe,”<sup>4</sup> he said and started walking down the beach. His entourage followed him.

“You are not just three kids!” The frantic man pushed through the crowd. “You are the Christy Kids. You saved Judah and countless others from a vicious shark.”

“Christy Kids, Christy Kids,” the chant began. The crowd pushed around the Christy Kids, patting them on the back. Everyone seemed to be talking at the same time, but you did not need to hear specific words to know what the people were saying.

Two men grabbed Miles and tossed him in the air. “Hip hip hurray. Hip hip hurray,” the people shouted.

“Shaved ice for everyone,” an old man called out. “I’m buying.”

A shout went up from the crowd. They immediately started for the food truck parked on the street.

As the crowd thinned out, the Christy Kids looked at each other and smiled. They came together for a team fist bump.

“Never fear!” they cheered, “The Christy Kids are here! Oogah oogah!”

By this time, the crowd had turned to watch the Christy Kids. Spontaneously, the crowd echoed the triumphant superhero chant: “Oogah! Oogah!”

“Hah!” the Christy Kids and the crowd whooped in unison.

<sup>1</sup>Welcome to Hawaii, aloha, welcome.

<sup>2</sup>glittering sea  
cool breeze  
droplets of the golden sun  
to honor you

<sup>3</sup>gods from the sea

<sup>4</sup>oops

## 2 *Dancing with a Tiger*

**O**liver pulled up the collar of his jacket. If he would have checked the weather forecast, he might have worn his winter coat this afternoon. He stood in line with Stella and Miles as they slowly made their way to the entrance of the arena hosting Circus Xtream. “Thrills and chills and good ol’ mayhem,” the announcer in the television commercial had promised. The Christy Kids were ready for some fun.

“Let’s get something to eat,”

Oliver suggested as they walked down the concourse toward the entrance to their seating section.

“Good idea,” Miles replied. “I’m hungry.”

“You’re always hungry,” Stella said.

Stella ordered first, a bag of Lifesavers Gummies and a bottle of water.

“May I have a large kettle corn,” Miles said, “and a lemonade, please?”

As Oliver stepped to the counter, he said, “Umm, I know I want a Mt. Dew. Make it a biggie. Let’s see, what else? Well, I’ll take a cotton candy. And a box of jelly beans. Do you have elephant ears? No? Okay, but elephant ears are my favorite. Umm, a box of animal crackers.” Oliver turned to Stella and Miles. “Hey, you guys, want some animal crackers, too? No? Okay.” He turned back to the woman taking his order. “This is the circus, so you got to have peanuts. Lots of peanuts. I’ll take two. And one candy corn. Let’s see. And three lollipops. That’ll about do it.”

Oliver could barely see over the pile in his arms, so Stella guided him through the crowd as Miles looked for the entrance to the section of the arena listed on their tickets. “We’re in row 12,” Miles said, “seats A, B, and C.” Fortunately, Oliver did not drop anything on his way to seat 12C.

Oliver took off his jacket as they got situated. He reached into a pocket and pulled out a package of donuts.

“Hey, wait,” Stella said. “Where did the donuts come from?”

Oliver grinned. “I came prepared.”

“Can I have some?” Miles asked.

“Get your own,” Oliver replied.

Just then, the circus orchestra began playing. The fanfare started low but with energy and quickly crescendoed into a brassy flourish. As the flashy introduction segued into the main theme, the side curtains on the left and right pulled back and a parade of circus performers came marching in: clowns in tiny cars, prancing horses, dogs jumping through hoops, performers in costumes that sparkled in the spot lights that swooped across the arena floor. All of the performers waved to the audience.

Stella and Miles stood with the crowd and applauded the performers. Oliver stayed seated as he opened the second bag of peanuts.

The crowd settled into their seats as the opening parade concluded. The ringmaster directed the audience’s attention to the trapeze artists already in the rafters. A gasp from the crowd immediately followed the first soaring

somersault by the flyer.

“I don’t feel good,” Oliver said.

“Uh huh,” Stella replied, her gaze uninterrupted as she watched the trapeze artists in their sparkly blue costumes.

“I’m going to the restroom.” Oliver pushed past Stella and Miles to the aisle and walked toward the concourse in search of a toilet.

Just when the trapeze artists took their final bow, the side curtains opened and workers dressed in dark blue coveralls pushed the wild animal cages into the center ring. The pacing tiger was the first animal Stella saw. Next came a cage with a lion sporting a billowing mane. In contrast to the tiger, the lion just sat and peered out the bars of the cage. The lion seemed to say, “I’ve got nothing to prove. After all, I *am* king.”

The workers looked to be finishing their task of positioning the cages when one of them screamed, “The tiger is loose.” He ran toward the staging area. The other workers scattered in a hurry.

One mother, just down the row from Miles and Stella, pushed her son to the floor and sat on him. Evidently the wild animal would have to go through her to get to her son. A father in row 8 fainted. His daughter, maybe six years old, climbed on his lap and put her hands on his

cheeks. “Daddy, Daddy, wake up, Daddy.”

Someone from across the arena yelled, “Run for your lives!” Just as if the crowd had shouted “Mother, may I?” and heard “Yes, you may” in response, folks were climbing over seats and pushing their way toward the exits.

A supersonic boom shook the arena. From high in the catwalks above the arena floor where the followspot operators were positioned, a deep voice declared “Hooper zizza azah doo!”

In that moment, Stella and Miles stood on seats 12A and 12B clothed in Spandex full-body suits, Miles in turquoise and Stella in lavender. “Never fear!” Miles called out. “The Christy Kids are here!” Stella added.

Under normal circumstances, at this point Oliver would have said “Hoo-rah!” followed by the trio of superheroes declaring, “Oogah oogah! Hah!” fists clenched, arms punching the air like prize fighters.

When Stella did not hear Oliver’s line, she looked over to see his magenta colored suit lying over the back of seat 12C. *He picked an inopportune time to go to the restroom*, she thought. “Well, Miles, it’s you and me this time around.”

In a single bound, Stella and Miles leaped over all of the seats in front of them, landing in the



aisle beyond row 1. “Miles,” Stella said, “go to the circus orchestra and tell them to get a waltz tune ready to play. You be the conductor. I’ll go to the tiger and invite him to dance.”

As Miles hurried to the orchestra pit, Stella went right to the ringmaster and took the microphone from his hand. “Ladies and gentlemen,” she said, “this is a time when we need some audience participation. Everybody stand. C’mon, on your feet. If we can get everyone swaying, we might be able to ...”

“Hey,” a voice called out, “Wait for me.” Stella looked up to see Oliver in the aisle near row 1.

“Get your suit on, Oliver,” Stella said. “You can’t be a superhero without a snazzy outfit, and it’s really bad manners for a superhero to be late. Go on. Hurry.”

Oliver ran to seat 12C and picked up his magenta body suit. He turned it over in his hands, looking for a zipper or a button or a snap. “How do you get into this thing,” he asked no one in particular.

Stella realized Oliver’s dilemma. She did not know herself the magic of suiting up except that it happened after the voice boomed “Hooper zizza azah doo!”

“Okay, folks,” Stella said, “we need everyone to

say ‘Hooper zizza azah doo!’ Try it!”

Some in the audience mumbled something, but Stella could not make out a single syllable.

“Okay,” she said, “let’s try it again. On three. One, two, three.”

The response was louder this time, but it was still indecipherable.

“I got it,” Miles called out. He turned to the circus orchestra and demanded that they play “Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star.” Miles lifted his arms, gave the downbeat, and the orchestra began to play.

Stella immediately got what Miles was up to. Still holding the microphone, she said, “Okay, folks, we’re all going to sing. The words are simple, ‘Hooper zizza azah doo!’ Sing it to the tune you know. Okay, here we go.”

A miracle occurred. Everyone began to sing. “Hooper zizza azah doo!”

People who had headed for the exits turned back and began to sing along.

“Hooper zizza azah doo!”

“Once more, with feeling,” Stella said to encourage the crowd. Their confidence swelled. The sound grew louder. “Bring it home,” Stella yelled.

Just when the mighty chorus arrived at the

final “doo,” a loud boom shook the arena a second time. Oliver stood dressed in his magenta full-body superhero suit. He looked at seat 12C to see his street clothes neatly piled: shoes, pants, shirt, underwear.

“Wait a minute!” Oliver demanded. “No one told me a superhero doesn’t wear underpants. This is embarrassing. I quit!” Oliver grabbed his pile of clothes and headed for the exit.

Just then, a low, vibrating rumble escalated into a sound so loud and ominous that it seemed to swallow the whole crowd. Everyone turned to see the lion on his feet pacing in his cage.

“Oh, right,” Stella said, “we’ve got work to do.” She looked at the lion, then to the tiger. “Miles,” she said, “the waltz.”

Stella slowly walked toward the center ring where the tiger stood. She slipped to the right to pick up the trainer’s whip that a worker had propped next to the door of the cage just before running for his life. Still facing the tiger—for the moment the big cat was content to just stare—she slowly backed toward the first row of seats.

A small child was about to take a bite of a hotdog. Stella snatched the hotdog from the child’s hands. “You’ll thank me for this later,” she said.

Stella tossed the bun aside. She tied the hotdog to the tail of the trainer's whip. She held the whip so that the hotdog dangled above and in front of her. As Stella approached the center ring, the tiger shifted. "Easy, boy," she said. She took a half-step. Then another. And another. As the tiger stared at the hotdog, Stella lifted it above the tiger's head. The tiger came up on his back legs.

"Hit it, Miles," Stella said.

Miles rapped the baton on the music stand three times, then gave the downbeat. The orchestra began playing The Blue Danube waltz.

Stella never took her eyes off of the tiger. When the music started, she urged the tiger to dance, using the promise of a stolen hot dog as the reward for obeying. The tiger, hesitant at first, took a tentative step that led to another step. By the time the orchestra had come to the first full theme of the Strauss waltz the tiger was dancing with the grace of a gazelle.

An audible gasp went up from the crowd. Stella smiled at the affirmation. She urged the tiger to twirl more quickly. The crowd applauded.

By this time, Stella had cleverly led the tiger to the door of his cage. With a quick flick of her wrist, she tossed the trainer's whip with the attached hot dog into the cage. The tiger leaped after the

snack. Stella quickly closed the door and latched the lock. A loud cheer went up from the crowd.

As the orchestra began the final presentation of the Strauss theme, Stella danced around the ring. Spotlights followed her as she plied and pirouetted, stopping occasionally to bow to the crowd now engaged in thunderous applause.

With the climactic end of the waltz, she hurried back to the door of the cage, gesturing dramatically to the locked door before raising her arms in triumph and swooping into a low, long-held bow.

The crowd went wild. A chant started: “Christy Kids. Christy Kids.”

Stella waved to Miles to join her in the center ring. They smiled and waved at the boisterous crowd.

Stella grabbed the ringmaster’s microphone again. “Thank you. Thank you,” she shouted over the roar of the crowd. She held up her hands to quiet the crowd.

“Thank you, folks,” Stella said. “You are most kind. Thank you.”

“Cotton candy for everyone,” an old man yelled. “I’m buying.” Another cheer went up from the crowd.

“Wait, wait.” Stella tried to keep the crowd

from storming the concession stands. “We’ve got one more thing,” she said. “Hang on for just a moment.” The people turned again to listen to Stella. “The Christy Kids usually do a superhero chant right about now, but Oliver has disappeared so we need your help. Miles goes first, then me. Then we need you to say Oliver’s part, ‘Hoo-rah!’ and then we’ll all say ‘oogah oogah!’ Got it?”

“Oogah oogah!” the crowd chanted.

“Good, you got it,” Stella said. “Here we go.”

Miles tried to take the microphone from Stella, but Stella would not let go of it. In a hoarse whisper, she said to Miles, “Stop being grabby. Just say your part.”

Miles glared at Stella. He finally turned to the crowd, raised his arms, and shouted “Never fear!”

“The Christy Kids are here!” Stella declared.

Stella pointed the microphone toward the crowd. “Hoo-rah!” they cheered in unison. “Oogah oogah! Hah!” Everyone laughed and clapped.

Just then, the door from the concourse opened and Oliver walked into the arena. In his left hand he held another cone of cotton candy. In his right hand he had an order of nachos.



# 3 *Scary Superhero*

**T**he car had barely come to a complete stop when three seat belt buckles clicked and three car doors opened. The Christy Kids ran for the play structure at Stoll Park.

The park had a high energy on the warm summer afternoon. Runners trotted around the perimeter of the park. Mothers with kids in strollers walked around the pond. Walkers with dogs pulling them headed for the off-leash area on the west side of the park. Just before the Christy



Kids arrived at the play structure, they stopped to watch an ice cream truck pull in, its annoying music playing at full volume.

The play structure looked like an archeological dig in process. The outer skin of a globe had disintegrated over time, leaving four bright-green ribs partially exposed. A series of ropes was suspended below the ribs, like ligaments that tied everything together.

To the Christy Kids, however, this was their home version of the American Ninja Warrior competition. Over several visits to the park, the Christy Kids had created an intricate set of rules on how the game was played. A player started at the base of the east rib, then climbed up and down as quickly as possible in the quest to touch each of the ball-joints where the ropes were tied into the structure. The final step was to traverse the curved monkey bars and slap an imaginary buzzer.

Oliver went first. He successfully made it all the way to the monkey bars before falling. Miles went next. He slipped part way to the monkey bars and gave up. Stella gracefully traversed the ropes, swung her way across the monkey bars—backwards—and triumphantly hit the buzzer.

“I’m thirsty,” Stella announced. “I need some water.”

“Me, too,” Oliver replied.

On the way to the drinking fountain, Oliver and Stella walked past a mother talking on her phone in the picnic shelter.

For the moment, Miles had the climbing structure to himself. He practiced going up and down without slipping. After several successful round trips, Miles stopped at the top. He watched a young boy playing with a ball on the grass just beyond the play structure. A bully rushed in, grabbed the ball, and started running away with the ball tucked under his arm.

The young boy yelled for help. Miles looked to the mother talking on the phone in the picnic area. She did not seem to know that her son was in trouble.

The young boy chased after the bully. “Give me my ball back,” he demanded.

The bully just laughed at him. He tossed the ball into the pine tree. The ball stuck near the top.

Miles heard a scream from the parking lot. He looked over to see an old woman standing at the back of a hatchback compact car. She appeared to be trying to put leashes on her dogs, five Chihuahuas. When a squirrel ran past the back of the car, all five dogs jumped out to chase the squirrel.

“This is better than watching TV,” Miles said to himself.

When the squirrel ran up the tree and was out of sight, the Chihuahuas gave up the pursuit. Then one of the dogs noticed the bully. That dog growled. Then all five dogs started yipping and yapping. The bully backed up. The dogs, shoulder to shoulder, took up the slack. The pace picked up until the bully turned and took off in a full run, chased by a pack of snarling Chihuahuas.

Miles, still at the top of the play structure, shifted so he could see the chase. The bully jumped over the fence into the dog park. Unleashed dogs inside continued the chase started by the Chihuahuas. Miles moved to the right to keep the chase in view. The last Miles saw of the bully, he had scaled the fence on the west side of the dog park and disappeared into the trees.

When Miles turned back, he saw that the young boy had climbed the tree to get his ball. Miles turned to look back at the mom. She was still on the phone. When Miles heard the boy start to cry, he turned back to look at the tree. “I’m scared,” the young boy cried out.

A boom louder than any Kansas summer thunderstorm shook the earth. A deep, deep voice that seemed to be coming from the fluffy cumulus

clouds proclaimed “Hooper zizza azah doo!”

Zing. Miles looked down to see that he was fully clothed in his turquoise Spandex full-body suit. He gently touched the Christy Kids badge that covered his heart. Clothed with power, Miles leaped from the top of the play structure to the ground at the base of the tree. “Never fear!” he called out, his arms spread wide in welcome.

Silence.

Miles looked around for the rest of the superhero gang, the Christy Kids. Stella finally rushed up, out of breath, and said, “The Christy Kids are here!” Stella straightened her lavender superhero costume that had bunched up around her neck.

“Boy, am I pooped,” Oliver said as he arrived.

Miles and Stella turned to look at Oliver. He had on his magenta Spandex outfit, but he lacked the energy usually associated with a superhero. Oliver returned the stare, then finally said, “Well, oogah oogah to you, too.”

“Hah!” Stella and Miles said in unison.

The boy in the tree screamed again.

“You’d think a mother would recognize her son’s cry,” Stella said as she glared at the yackety mom.

When Stella turned back, Miles had started

climbing the tree to help the young boy. As he did, however, the boy's cries became louder and more frantic.

"It's okay," Miles said, "I'm a superhero. See my badge? I have come to save you."

This made the boy cry even more. Miles stopped part way up the tree.

Stella walked closer to where Miles was in the tree. "You know," Stella said quietly, "some kids are afraid of clowns. Maybe it's your outfit. Take off your suit."

Miles turned to Stella and stared in silence. "I'm a superhero," he finally said through gritted teeth, "and I don't have on underpants. That's a problem, don't you think?"

"Oh, yeah," Stella said, "I forgot that part. Well, where are your clothes?"

Just then the old woman who lost the pack of Chihuahuas came up. "Here, sonny," she said to Miles, "put on my sweater."

Miles looked at what she offered: a bright pink sweater with purple flowers and yellow butterflies. "I sure hope my friends don't see this," Miles muttered as he slipped on the sweater.

Miles continued his climb up the tree. When he got to the boy, he told the boy to hang on tight. Miles climbed above him and shook the branch

until the ball dropped to the ground. He then said to the boy, “You start down, a branch at a time, and I’ll be right here in case you need me.”

In the meantime, Stella called to Oliver, “Let’s go wrangle up dem doggies.” They hurried off to get the pack of Chihuahuas.

A crowd had gathered to watch the superheroes in action. A cheer went up when the young boy and Miles dropped from the lowest branch to the ground and Miles hurried to return the sweater to the woman. Just then, Oliver and Stella carried the five dogs to their owner.

“Hip hip hooray,” the crowd shouted as they clapped their hands. Soon a chant started, “Christy Kids! Christy Kids!”

When the cheers subsided, an old man called out, “Ice cream for everyone. I’m buying.” Another cheer rang out as the crowd hurried to the ice cream truck in the parking lot. Miles put his arm across the shoulders of the young boy and together they walked to get their ice cream.

Stella looked over to see that Oliver was troubled. “What’s wrong?” Stella asked.

“I’m trying to figure out how in the world we end up in these snazzy outfits,” Oliver said. “And how do we get out of them?”

“Don’t you believe in magic?” Stella asked.

“Not really,” Oliver said. “There has to be a logical explanation for all this.”

“Okay, smarty pants,” Stella said, “what’s the secret?”

“Well,” Oliver replied, “you know how there’s the boom and the deep voice calling out ‘hooper ziza azha doo’? What would happen if you said that backwards? Could you change back into your regular clothes?”

“I don’t know,” Stella said. “Why don’t you try it out?”

In his deepest voice, Oliver said, “Ood haza azziz repoooh.”

Nothing happened. Oliver and Stella looked at each other in silence for a moment

“Okay, you’re trying to do the opposite,” Stella said, “so maybe the pitch of your voice needs to be high instead of low. Try it again.”

This time Oliver sounded like a Chihuahua chasing a squirrel. “Ood haza azziz repoooh.”

Ding. Stella looked down to see the t-shirt and shorts she put on that morning instead of her lavender superhero suit.

“Cool,” Oliver said. In a low voice, he said “Hooper ziza azah doo.”

Ding. In an instant, Stella had on her superhero suit.

“Ood haza azziz repoooh,” Oliver said in the shrill, high pitch.

Ding. Stella had on her t-shirt and shorts again.

“This is going to come in handy,” Oliver said. His laugh had a sinister tone.

Stella glared at him.

Just then Miles came up with an ice cream cone. Five scoops: banana, chocolate, strawberry, vanilla, and cookies and cream. “Never fear!” he declared.

“The Christy Kids are here!” Stella added.

“Hoo-rah!” Oliver said.

“Oogah oogah! Hah!” they said in unison.

The crowd that had gathered at the ice cream truck turned when they heard the Christy Kids chant. Another joy-filled cheer rang through the park.

“You guys need to get your ice cream,” Miles said.

Stella turned toward the ice cream truck. Oliver started to speak in a low voice. He barely got out “Hooper ...” when Stella turned to him and growled, “Stuff it, buddy!”





# 4 *CircleTee Twister*

**A**s Oliver, Stella, and Miles walked into the neighborhood CircleTee SuperStore to find a birthday present for their cousin Abel, Stella said, “Oliver, go to the candy section and get Lifesavers Gummies. Miles and I will go find something in toys.”

“But Abel would want Skittles,” Oliver declared.

“How do you know that?” Stella said.

“We were born the same year,” Oliver replied. “I just know these

things. And why are you bossing me around? You're not the boss of me."

"Whatever," Stella said as Oliver took off for the candy aisle.

As Stella and Miles headed for the toys, Miles said, "We need to get Abel a Lego set. He would like that."

"Miles," Stella said, "that's what you like. You need to think like Abel if you're going to buy a present for Abel."

"Okay," Miles said. "He likes soccer so let's get him Old Trafford where Manchester United plays."

"Buy him a stadium?" Stella asked.

"No," Miles replied, "just the Old Trafford Lego set."

"Oh, brother," Stella said. "But what if he likes Tottenham better than ManU? Besides, we don't have \$300 so that's not going to happen."

A siren started blaring. Everyone in the Heartland knows what that means: tornado. "Shoppers, please make your way to the back of the store." The manager used the store's speaker system to give instructions. "Please move quickly and help others while you are on the way. Repeat: please go immediately to the back of the store."

"Well, here we go again," Miles said. "Why is it that wherever we go it seems like something

goes wrong?" He let out a long sigh. "A superhero's work is never done."

Oliver came running to where Stella and Miles stood in the store with a large bag of Skittles in his hand. At that moment they heard glass shatter as a violent wind slammed into the front of the store.

Everyone in the store started screaming. "Did you hear that?" Stella asked her brothers.

"It's all so loud," Oliver said, "of course we heard it."

"The mother," Stella replied. "A mother is screaming because the wind jerked her baby stroller out of her hands. Her baby is in trouble. Hensley, the baby's name is Hensley."

"How do you know these things?" Oliver asked.

"I just do," Stella said. "It comes with being a woman."

As if the roaring wind and screaming people were not loud enough, a boom literally shook the whole CircleTee SuperStore. "Here we go," Miles mumbled to himself. "I told you this was coming."

A deep, powerful voice that seemed to be coming from the electronics section spoke to the huddled masses. "Hooper zizza azah doo!" Just as a second boom shook the place, the Christy Kids leaped to the top of the shelving. They stood

fully dressed in their Spandex outfits: magenta, lavender, and turquoise, each with the Christy Kids badge over their hearts. A spotlight shone on the trio of superheroes and reflected off of the magenta, lavender, and turquoise full-body suits like a mirror ball at a roller skating rink.

“I know fashion,” Stella said, “and you usually can’t get clothes so good at a store like this.” Neither Oliver or Miles paid any attention to Stella’s comments.

“Never fear!” Miles declared with confidence. “The Christy Kids are here!” Stella added.

“Hoo-rah!” Oliver said, then he started laughing. “That’s a great word,” he said. “I wonder who made up that word. Oh, yes, I did.” Oliver seemed quite satisfied with himself.

“Can we finish?” Stella asked.

“Sure,” Oliver said. “This next word is my invention, too. Remember to give credit where credit is due.”

“Back to business!” Miles demanded.

“Oogah oogah! Hah!” the Christy Kids said together, fists pumping the air.

“Look,” Stella declared, “there’s the baby stroller.” Stella leaped from shelf top to shelf top until she landed at the overturned stroller near the customer service desk. Stella scooped up

baby Hensley and ran back to lay the baby in her mother's arms.

"Thank you, thank you," the mother said as she hugged her baby. Miles joined them with a box of animal crackers for the baby. "How sweet," the mother said. "The Christy Kids think of everything."

The mother tried to shield the baby's ears as the tornado sirens started going off again. "Hurry to the back of the store," Stella urged the mother. Miles went with the mother and the baby, hovering over the baby to protect her from flying debris.

Stella hurried over to a man who was crying hysterically. "Wilma," he wailed.

"Have you lost your wife?" Stella asked the man.

"Well, duh," Oliver responded.

"Where did you last see her?" Stella asked the man.

"In the pharmacy," he replied, "but she said she was going to the restroom."

"What does she look like?" Stella asked. "What was she wearing?"

"She has purple hair and purple shoes," the man replied. "She always wants everything to match," he added. "And red eyeglasses with a

red handbag. I think she's wearing a green dress today."

*Interesting fashion choices*, Stella thought to herself.

"Oliver, escort this man ..." Stella stopped and looked at the man. "What is your name?" she asked as she reached out to touch his arm.

"Bert," he replied.

"Okay, Bert," Stella said, "you go with Oliver and I'll find Wilma. Oliver, escort Bert to the towels and pillows section. Grab any straggler you find on the way. Tell them to face the back wall and hold a towel or pillow behind their heads. That will help protect them if the tornado rips through the store tossing debris around. Go! Get going now! Escort these folks to safety."

As Oliver and Bert started toward the back of the store, Stella rushed to the restrooms in the front. "Wilma," she called out. "Wiiiiilllma." Stella listened for a response. She thought she heard a woman crying. She pushed on the door of the women's restroom. Something blocked the door. "Stand back," Stella commanded. Stella stood still for a moment, as if she was building up her strength, and then kicked open the door. Stella hurried into the women's restroom and found a woman with purple hair huddled in a toilet stall.

“Let’s go,” Stella shouted. “Wilma, stop crying. Wilma. Wilma.” The woman finally looked up. “I’m here to take you to Bert,” Stella said. “Let’s go before things get worse.”

Stella grabbed Wilma’s hand and they ran toward the back of the store. One of Wilma’s purple shoes came off in the pet food aisle. Wilma pulled to break free from Stella’s grip, but Stella did not let go. “My shoe,” Wilma wailed, “my favorite shoe.”

“Later,” Stella shouted, “we’ll get it later. Come on.”

When Stella and Wilma arrived in the towels and pillows section, Bert hurried to hug his wife.

“Why is everyone wet?” Stella asked.

“I did what you told me to do,” Oliver replied.

“What?” Stella said.

“You told me to squirt them,” Oliver said.

“I never said that,” Stella declared.

Oliver stood tall with his shoulders pulled back. “Yes you did,” he said. “You said to squirt them in the towels and pillows section.”

“I said to escort the folks, not squirt them,” Stella said.

“Stella, that was brilliant.”

“Wait,” Stella interrupted. “What did you say?”

Oliver thought a moment, and then said,



“Stella, you are brilliant.”

“I heard you the first time,” Stella said. “I just wanted to hear you say it again.”

“No, really,” Oliver continued, “if your clothes are wet you’ll be safe from a tornado. I read it on a plastic cup. It must be true.”

“Oh, brother,” Stella sighed.

“Attention, shoppers. This is the store manager. We have received an all clear from the city’s emergency response coordinator. Repeat: all clear.”

“Three cheers for the Christy Kids,” Bert shouted.

“Hip hip hooray,” the crowd chanted.

Hensley’s mother hurried over to thank Stella for saving her baby.

“Attention, shoppers. You know those photos they sell you at the end of the roller coasters at Worlds of Fun? We have FunPhotos, too. For just \$19.99, you can download any security camera photo you want from today’s excitement. Just see a clerk at the front of the store before you leave. And we’ll talk to the Christy Kids about coming back in a week or so to autograph the photos for you. How about that whee hah?”

The crowd started chanting, “Whee hah. Christy Kids. Whee hah. Christy Kids.”

The Christy Kids came together for a fist bump. Miles said, “Never fear!”

“Wait,” Oliver said, “I’ve been wondering about something. We always say ‘never fear’ but is it true that a superhero is never afraid?”

“I was scared,” Stella said, “when the wind got louder as I tried to get through the restroom door to save Wilma. I can’t say that I’m never afraid.”

“So what do we mean when we say ‘never fear’?” Oliver asked.

“Maybe the answer is in the next line,” Miles said. “Maybe because the Christy Kids are here—and we’re going keep being here until the danger passes—so you can be confident, not fearful. We’ll stick around until we figure it out.”

“I can buy that,” Oliver said. He put his fist up. The Christy Kids did another fist bump.

Not many people heard what followed. Miles quietly said, “Never fear!”

Stella matched Miles’s tone; “The Christy Kids are here, and we won’t abandon you when things get tough.”

“Hoo-rah!” Oliver said, “and all the goodness of oogah oogah for a lifetime.”

“Hah!” the Christy Kids said in unison.

The store speakers crackled alive again. “Oh, one more thing,” the manager said. “It would have

been awful if I forgot to mention this. There's an old man just outside with a gift for everyone. He says they are called Twisters. It looks like an ice cream lollipop, a frozen lolly on a stick. He wanted you to know that the selection today includes Twister Polynesian: pineapple, lime, and strawberry swirl; Twister PBJ: peanut butter ice cream wrapped in a plum fruit ice; and Twister Veggie: a flavor rush of rutabaga, egg plant, and carrot."

"Rutabaga, rutabaga," the crowd chanted as they headed for the goodies.

"Thanks for stopping by CircleTee Superstore today," the manager said. "Come back again soon. Y'all have a nice day."

"Oliver!" Stella said. "Why are you eating the Skittles? Those are for Abel."

## 5 *Rescue at the Creek*

Miles's mother came into his room just before bedtime. "What's going on?" she asked.

"Herobrine is locked in the nether," Miles said, "and Blaze is shooting fireballs at him thinking he's Steve."

"You really like that Minecraft quilt," his mother said. "Your Nana and Papa did a good thing when they made that for you."

"Yep," Miles replied.

"I sure hope all this Minecraft

action doesn't keep you awake all night. We've got a big day tomorrow. It's your Dad's birthday."

"Okay," Miles said. "Good night, Mom."

His mother turned off the light and closed the bedroom door. Miles laid his head on his pillow and closed his eyes.

After Miles was asleep, Oliver and Stella tiptoed into Miles's bedroom. "Look at that quilt," Stella said.

"It looks like a game board," Oliver said. "Wanna play a game?"

"Sure," Stella replied. "What shall we use as tokens?"

"I'll get a baseball," Oliver said.

"Mine will be a bottle of fingernail polish," Stella said. "I think I'll get traffic-cone orange."

Oliver and Stella hurried to their own bedrooms to get the tokens and returned to the Minecraft quilt that had magically transformed into a game board. Stella looked at the bottle of fingernail polish in her hand, then to Miles. "You know," Stella said, "I think he would look delightful with an orange mustache. What do you think?"

"Quit messing around," Oliver said. "Child psychologists say that playing games is serious work for kids. I might lose my membership in

the Nerd Herd if I fail to keep sharp at my game playing.”

“Oh, brother,” Stella said.

“Wait a minute,” Oliver said. “What are we going to use for a spinner?” Oliver and Stella looked at each other for a moment.

“Okay,” Stella said slowly. “Let’s see if we can figure this out.” Stella looked at Miles, then back to Oliver. She spoke slowly, “We know that Miles sleeps soundly.” Stella’s face brightened and she said, “Let’s use Miles as the spinner. We spin him around. If his head lands on the pillow we move one space. If his feet end up on the pillow it is three spaces. Something in-between is two spaces. How about that?”

“Okay,” Oliver replied. Oliver tried to spin Miles, but he barely moved. “Would you help me?” Oliver asked Stella. They worked together for a couple of minutes. They failed.

Then Oliver and Stella heard a voice. “May I make a suggestion?” the voice said.

They looked up on the shelf where Miles kept a stuffed owl. “Josephine!” Stella exclaimed. “Cousin. What are you doing here? And where’s the owl?”

“I’m the wise one tonight,” Josephine said. “Have you seen those guys spinning pizza dough?”

Spin him on your finger.”

“Good idea,” Oliver said. “This experience will help me when I try out for the Globetrotters. Here, Stella, help me get Miles up so I can spin him.”

Stella and Oliver struggled to get Miles on the index finger of Oliver’s right hand. Oliver just about had Miles balanced when Miles came crashing to the floor. Stella immediately looked up to the shelf to ask Josephine if she had another idea they could try, but all Stella saw was the stuffed owl.

Stella turned back to see Miles rubbing his eyes. “What are you guys doing in my room?” Miles asked.

Before anyone could answer, they heard a sound from the hallway. “Shh,” Stella whispered. “What was that?”

Oliver went to the bedroom door and opened it a crack. “It’s Dad,” he said quietly. “He has his arms out in front of him like a zombie. I think he’s sleep walking.”

Stella hurried to the door to see. “He’s gone down the stairs. Hear that? That’s the back door. He’s going outside.”

Oliver and Miles hurried to the window. “Dad is headed for the creek,” Miles said. “What if he trips on a stump? Or what if he slips on a snake

and slides down the bank into the water? We've got to help him!" Miles raised his fist as if he would smash the window with his fist.

"Miles," Stella yelled, "those are new windows and you'll get cut with the shattered glass."

"I'm a superhero," Miles replied. "I'm incredible!"

"Wait," Stella said, "as in *The Incredibles*? Like the movie?"

"Yep," Miles replied.

"So where's the snazzy outfit?" Stella asked. "You're not going outside in your pajamas."

"Oh, Stella," Miles said, "Stella, Stella, Stella. You should know by now that sometimes you take the leap and the outfit appears." With that, Miles crashed through the window and landed on the deck below.

"Well, okay," Stella said. She jumped out the window to join Miles on the deck.

Oliver went to the window and looked at the deck below. "Uh, guys," he said, "wait for me. I'll be down in a minute." Oliver traced the path his father had taken down the stairs and out the back door.

As soon as Oliver's foot touched the deck there was a brilliant flash. Stella started laughing. "Did you see the look on that raccoon's face? Up there,



in that tree. Boy, was he surprised.”

Miles looked down and he was still wearing his pajamas. “Stella,” he complained, “you interrupted the superhero transformation.”

“Sorry,” Stella said. “Is there a way to signal that we’re ready?”

A second bright blaze pierced the night sky. A deep voice from beyond the trees on the other side of the creek declared “Hooper zizza azah doo!” In an instant, Oliver stood dressed in a magenta colored Spandex full-body suit. Miles looked down to see his turquoise suit. Stella flexed her muscles—the weight lifting sessions had benefits—and made the butterflies twirling around her shoulders and arms seem to dance on her lavender outfit. Each of the Christy Kids had a superhero badge positioned over the heart.

Lights started coming on in the neighborhood houses.

“Never fear!” Miles yelled in defiance of the darkness. “The Christy Kids are here!” Stella announced. “Hoo-rah!” Oliver shouted, an intelligent declaration from a founding member of the Nerd Herd. “Oogah oogah! Hah!” they said in unison, fists pumping the air.

By this time, neighbors peered out their windows. Soon they started coming into the yard

behind the Christy house.

“Look,” Oliver shouted, “Dad is floating down the creek.”

Miles hopped off of the deck. Oliver and Stella followed him to the bank of the creek.

“Wait,” Stella said in a loud whisper, “did you hear that?”

“Hear what?” Oliver replied.

“A ‘hoot, hoot,’” Stella said.

“Watch out,” Oliver shouted as he ducked quickly. “Something just bombed me.”

“Look,” Miles said, “up in the crook of that tree. See the owl?”

“How precious. Look at the babies,” Stella said. “Is that two ... oh, look, there’s a third owlet, too. They are so cute. Makes you want to cuddle them.”

“Wow,” Miles said. “Did you see that loop de loop? These owls are quite the aerial acrobats.” The owlets took turns flying from the nest in the tree doing stunts in the air before swooping back up to land on a branch. “This is like the family that did the trapeze at the circus,” Miles added. “That’s cool.”

“Is that the mother or the father being the lifeguard?” Oliver wondered.

“It must be the father,” Stella replied. “You know how Mom is always doing something while

she sits, like cutting out stuff for her kindergarten class. That owl isn't multitasking so it must be the father."

"Dad," Miles yelled, "we forgot about Dad." Miles grabbed the end of a tree branch, pulled it back, and used it to catapult himself across the creek. He quickly climbed the side of the hill and ran in the direction of where he had last seen his father. When Miles finally spotted him, Miles leaped into the air, completed four-and-one-half somersaults with a twist, and landed in the creek just in front of his father as he floated downstream.

"Look," one of the neighbors shouted, "look at the owls in the tree." Everyone turned so they could see four signs side-by-side: 9, 9, 9, 6. The owls had judged the dive into the creek.

Someone shouted, "Boo, boo." Soon the whole crowd was jeering the judges.

One of the owlets glanced at the cards and said, "Hoot, hoot, hoot." The father owl looked at his card and then flipped it from a 6 to a 9.

The crowd roared its approval.

Miles grabbed his father under the armpits and hoisted him into the air. By this time Oliver and Stella had arrived and helped carry him to the bank.

The folks who had gathered in the backyard let

out a loud cheer. “Hip hip hooray,” they shouted. Then the chant began: “Christy Kids. Christy Kids. Christy Kids.” The joyful hymn made the nighttime sky seem as glorious as an Easter sunrise service.

“Miles, Miles.” Miles’s mother was shaking his shoulder. “Miles, are you okay?”

Miles sat up in bed. “What?” he asked.

“Were you having a bad dream?”

Miles smiled. “No,” he said, “it was a pretty good dream. Everyone was in their pajamas in our backyard.”

“That’s nice,” Miles’s mother said.

“Did you know that Mr. Brian, next door, wears Scooby PJs?” Miles asked.

“You obviously need your rest,” Miles’s mother said. “Now go back to sleep.”

“And Mom,” Miles added, “you know that old man who keeps showing up with treats for everyone? He was in the backyard giving people cookies and milk.”

“That’s nice of the old man,” Miles’s mother said.

Miles’s mother stooped to pick up the stuffed owl from the floor. “What happened here?” she asked. “Why is the owl on the floor?”

“I think it was doing trapeze tricks,” Miles said

with a smile.

“That’s nice,” Miles’s mother said as she turned to go back to her own bedroom.

# 6 *Kona Ice Heist*

**O**liver repositioned his baseball cap, grabbed his ball glove, and headed for the pitcher's mound. He would throw a few pitches to warm up for the third inning of the championship game of the end-of-the-season tournament.

A loud boom caused everyone to instinctively duck. Being the most fervent of baseball fanatics, some wondered if a batter had swatted a grenade rather than the old horsehide. Much deeper than the tinny sound you hear at most youth

ballparks, a silky, resonate voice declared “Hooper zizza azah doo!”

Oliver looked down to confirm his suspicion. Yep, his Black Dragons baseball uniform had been replaced with a magenta-colored, full-body Spandex suit. He glanced over at third base. Yep, Brett was staring at him. How embarrassing.

“Never fear!” Miles shouted. Oliver looked over to see Miles in his turquoise suit and Stella in her lavender suit on the roof of the third base dugout.

“The Christy Kids are here!” Stella added.

“Hoo-rah.” Oliver failed to exude even a sliver of enthusiasm .

“Oogah oogah!” Miles and Stella said.

“Oliver,” Stella called out, “get your oogah oogah on. All together now.”

“Oogah oogah!” the three Christy Kids said in unison.

Oliver finished the chant with a flimsy “Hah,” less than the confident declaration expected of a superhero.

“So what’s going on?” Oliver asked, his impatience evident in his tone of voice. “This better be good. Interrupting a baseball game is un-American. It’s the pinnacle of dishonor.”

Someone near the concession stand yelled,

“They’re stealing the Kona Ice truck.”

“Who is they?” Oliver wanted to know.

“Squirrels!” came the reply.

Squirrels?

The Christy Kids superheroes jumped into action. As Oliver ran off of the field Stella and Miles jumped from the dugout roof. Together they followed the Kona Ice truck toward the parking lot.

Oliver raced ahead to get close enough to see who was driving the truck. “Squirrels,” Oliver called out over his shoulder. “Three squirrels. One is on the dashboard giving commands. It must be the eyes of the operation. One is turning the steering wheel. One is pushing on the gas pedal.”

The truck moved through the parking lot toward the trees on the north end of the ballpark. By this time Stella and Miles were close enough to see into the cab of the truck. “What is that wire coming out of the squirrel’s head?” Miles asked.

“That’s strange,” Stella said.

“Those are not real squirrels,” Oliver said. “They’re squirrel-bots.”

“What’s a squirrel-bot?” Miles wondered.

“If I’m correct in that these are squirrel-bots,” Oliver continued, “then someone else is controlling them.”



“Forget the truck,” Stella said, “we need to find the mastermind.”

“Miles,” Oliver said, “the squirrel-bots operator might want all of the Kona Ice goodies for himself and has programmed the squirrel-bots to bring it to him.”

“How do you know it’s a him?” Miles asked. “I’ve seen girls do some pretty awful things.”

“Watch it, buddy,” Stella growled.

“Miles, Miles, forget the questions,” Oliver said. “Miles, you go through the parking lot. Stella, take a sweep around Field 7 to see if you find anything suspicious. I’ll retrace our steps. Let’s meet back at the concession stand in five minutes. Go!”

As Oliver walked back down the path, he heard a soft snore. He looked to his left and saw some boy’s grandparents in camp chairs under a tree. It looked like grandpa might be napping while they waited for the next game to begin. Then he noticed grandma using her thumbs to tap on a smartphone. *Maybe she is controlling the squirrel-bots*, Oliver thought. He discreetly walked behind her. She was playing Angry Birds 2.

Stella laughed as she walked up to Oliver at the concession stand. “What’s with the chuckles?” Oliver asked Stella.

“You know those guys who drive the carts around?” Stella asked.

“You mean the field managers?” Oliver replied.

“Is that what they’re called?” Stella said. “Anyway, I was going around the back side of Field 7 like you said to and this cart was coming my direction. The driver slammed on the brakes just before they got to me, about ten feet away. One of the guys said, ‘Nice costume.’ The other guy said, ‘Don’t you know that Halloween is in October?’ Then the first guy said to his friend, ‘She probably thinks she’s a superhero or something.’ And then they laughed at me.”

“So why are you laughing?” Oliver said. “I don’t see anything funny in what those guys said.”

“They wanted to see a superhero so I gave them quite the show,” Stella said. “I leaped to the top rail of the backstop, then jumped on the back of their cart. Those guys went flying, higher than the backstop. Each guy had a bad case of the googly eyes, like a kindergarten craft project gone bad. One guy just floated through the air with a smile on his face. The other guy frantically tried to find something to grab. After they landed, I did a handspring over the guy closest to me and a double somersault in tuck position over the second.”

“Sounds like the paparazzi would have enjoyed that glorious moment,” Oliver said.

“After I landed on the other side of them, I turned back and you should have seen their faces. It was like they had seen a ghost in a haunted house on October 31<sup>st</sup>. That’s why I’m laughing.” Stella struck a ta-da pose.

Just then Miles walked up with several baseballs cradled in his arms. “Stella,” Miles said, “you should have seen the squirrels! They were dancing like you do on the front porch all the time.”

“Tell me more,” Stella said.

“There were four squirrels in a line. They stood on their tails and back legs, strutted forward four steps, lunged to the left, lunged to the right, twirled and leaped while waving their front legs.”

“Miles,” Oliver said, “did you see wires coming out of their heads? Maybe those were squirrel-bot buddies of the heist crew starting the celebration for when the Kona Ice truck arrived.”

“Just kidding,” Miles said with a smile. “I didn’t see any wires because I didn’t see any squirrels.”

“Miles,” Oliver said, “you need to be serious about these things.”

“I’m practicing making up stories,” Miles said.

“Very funny,” Oliver replied.

“I know,” Miles said.

“What’s with all the baseballs?” Oliver wanted to know.

“I found these around the trees. It looks like Salvy may have been taking batting practice earlier today.”

“Yea, right,” Oliver responded.

“Great story, Miles,” Stella said. “But what’s that guy doing?”

“What guy?” Oliver asked.

“That guy over there with the headset,” Stella said as she pointed toward a man near the side door to the concession stand.

“That’s the concession manager,” Miles added.

“Wait here,” Oliver said. Oliver walked past the manager, then stopped to listen. “Stuck?” Oliver heard the manager say. “Turn the wheel you nut head and give it some gas.”

Oliver hurried back to Stella and Miles. “We’ve found the culprit,” Oliver said quietly. He ran to the dugout and rummaged through his equipment bag. “Help me,” Oliver whispered when he returned. The Christy Kids crept up behind the manager and wrapped him tight in cushioned bat-grip tape. When they finished subduing the bad guy, Oliver boldly declared “Oogah oogah!”

“Yeah, Oliver,” Stella said. “You’ve finally got

your oogah oogah on! Good for you.”

By this time the crowd had encircled the Christy Kids. “So what’s going on?” someone asked.

Oliver took a half-step forward to address the crowd. “We have more investigation to do,” he said, “but it appears that the concession manager was up to no good. With the Kona Ice truck parked here, the sales of Icees declined. So he had to get rid of the competition.”

“What happened to the Kona Ice man?” someone else asked.

“There’s no game right now on Field 7,” Stella said. “I saw the Kona guy with his girlfriend in the dugout.”

“I saw them,” another person in the crowd said, “and that’s the manager’s daughter.”

“Oh, this is good,” Stella said. “The manager used his daughter to distract the Kona guy so the squirrel-bots could steal the truck.”

“Let’s give a cheer for the Christy Kids,” someone in the crowd shouted. “They saved the Kona Ice for everyone.” The crowd started a chant: “Christy Kids, Christy Kids.”

Miles grabbed the headset from the concession manager and put it on his head. He gave several commands then instructed the crowd to open the

circle. The crowd cheered as they saw the Kona Ice truck coming towards them.

“Kona Ice for everyone,” an old man announced. “I’m buying.” The crowd shouted “Hip hip hooray” as the Kona Ice truck came to a stop.

When the crowd swarmed the Kona Ice truck, Stella said to Oliver and Miles, “Okay, here’s the oogah oogah dance.” Both Oliver and Miles groaned. Stella ignored their response. “You guys stand beside me. We’ll do four steps forward. Lunge to the left, lunge to the right ...”

“I liked it a whole lot better without the dance moves,” Miles said. “Never fear!” Miles threw his arms up in triumph.

The crowd turned to watch.

“The Christy Kids are here!” Stella declared as she twirled and leaped and twirled again.

“Hoo-rah!” Oliver added.

“Oogah oogah!” the Christy Kids said together. “Hah!”

The crowd cheered again.

The umpire had been watching the events unfold. “Okay, boys,” the umpire said, “we’ve got a game to play and a season to wrap up.”

Oliver trotted out to the mound. His teammates gathered around him while they admired his superhero outfit. “Nice uniform,

Oliver,” Sterling said.

“Thanks,” Oliver replied.

“I think the team needs uniforms like this!” Sterling added. The team enthusiastically agreed.

“Magenta?” Oliver was totally baffled by his teammates. “The Black Dragons in magenta Spandex?”

“Oogah oogah!” the Black Dragons said in unison.

“Play ball,” the umpire announced.

You may have heard me say to never laugh at live dragons. That was before I met the Christy Kids. Here's an adventure that has dangerous business written all over it, but you'll find yourself laughing at the end.

~ *Bilbo Baggins, ring bearer*

Out of all of the books that I have recommended in my career, this is the most enchanting of them all.

~ *Madam Irma Pince, Hogwarts School librarian*

If it seems that all you do is sit sit sit and you do not like it, not one teeny tiny bit, then tag along for a day with the Christy Kids.

~ *Cat in the Hat, adventure guide*

Zatwal<sup>1</sup> coik<sup>2</sup> glaji<sup>3</sup> vinfrey<sup>4</sup>.

~ *Sunny Baudelaire, private investigator*

<sup>1</sup>(exclamation of excitement). <sup>2</sup>"Thinking about all this is making me dizzy!" <sup>3</sup>(unknown). <sup>4</sup>"We better spend the day reading about what the Christy Kids are doing."