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The Three Stinging Caterpillars

Once there were three stinging caterpillars who lived in a hibiscus bush outside a big pink house in New Orleans. One was

yellow, and his name was Sun Boy; one was orange, and his name was Orange Boy; and one was all black. His name was Blackie. Everyday they would go to a school down the street called Katerpillar Korner, but they didn't have much fun there since they spent most of the day in time-out. Sun Boy liked to sting, and Orange Boy liked to kick, and Blackie liked to push so hard that the other caterpillars would fall down flat on the floor.

On this particular day, the three came home in a very bad mood. Not only had they spent an extra long period in time-out that afternoon, but the teacher had said that none of them would be given snack, and it was a good snack too; it was king cake. When they got back to the hibiscus bush they were so hungry that they didn't want to talk or play; they just wanted to eat.

Meanwhile, inside the house, a little boy named Andrés was asking his Daddy if he could make a bouquet for Mommy. The

hibiscus bush was covered in big orange blossoms, and Andrés thought Mommy would like a bunch of them. “Well,” said Daddy, “go ahead and pick some flowers, but be careful. I don’t want you to fall off the porch.” Neither Daddy nor Andrés knew that there was an even bigger danger than falling off the porch. There were stinging caterpillars hiding under the hibiscus leaves.

When Andrés reached into the bush to pick his first flower, Orange Boy felt the leaf he was chewing on shake. Then he saw a little hand come reaching right past his nose. “Hey, guys, check it out,” said Orange Boy. “There’s a kid picking flowers off our bush. Let’s sting him!” “Cool,” answered Blackie. “I’m going to sting him on the thumb.” “I’m going to do something worse than that,” said Sun Boy. “I’m going to sting him on the inside of the wrist where it really hurts.” “You guys are

amateurs,” said Orange Boy with a nasty laugh. “I’m going to crawl right up his arm and sting him on the neck!”

Daddy and Andrés may not have known about the caterpillars, but there was something the caterpillars themselves didn’t know. They didn’t know that living in the same hibiscus bush was a big green grasshopper named Hoppy. Hoppy spent the evenings listening to stories outside Andrés’s window, and he felt as if he knew Andrés well. Hoppy was not going to let those caterpillars sting a boy he thought of as a friend.

Just then Andrés reached his hand deep into the hibiscus bush, trying to reach an especially beautiful flower. All three caterpillars were just about to pounce onto that soft little hand when there was a flash of green, a puff of wind, and Hoppy’s legs and wings flashed into view. Hoppy whacked those caterpillars so hard that they went flying over the fence and landed on a pile of very hard bricks. “Ow!” screamed Blackie.

“Not fair!” yelled Sun Boy. And Orange Boy cried like a big baby. “I’m never going back to that bush,” he said between sobs. “Let’s go across the street and eat Willie’s petunias.”

Andrés carried his flowers back into the house, not realizing what had happened. He’d felt a sudden puff of wind, and he’d seen a flash of color in the sky, but he was so busy looking for flowers that he didn’t pay much attention. “Those are beautiful,” said Daddy. “Mommy is going to be so surprised. And I’m glad you didn’t get hurt,” he added. “It wasn’t dangerous at all,” said Andrés.

The three stinging caterpillars never came back to the hibiscus bush. And if you ever hear Willie yelling from his front steps, you’ll know that Sun Boy, or Orange Boy, or Blackie, or maybe all three of the stinging caterpillars have stung him.

The Story Chair’s Adventure

It was bedtime in the big pink house on Toulouse Street. Andrés was wearing his pajamas and waiting patiently for story time. Usually, this was the Story Chair's favorite hour, but tonight, when Daddy sat down on him, the Story Chair sighed. "Every night I listen to stories, but I've never seen the places Daddy tells about," he thought. "I've spent my whole life in this little room. I want to see the world."

So in the morning, when Daddy took Andrés off to school, the Story Chair snuck out behind them, past the hibiscus bush and into the yard. He wanted to look there for Hoppy, but he didn't have time since Daddy was just about to slam the gate shut. The Story Chair made it by the paint of his seat, and off he went to see the world.

The first thing he saw was the garbage can that the bad Christmas tree had been stuffed into. "So that's where it

happened!” the Story Chair thought. A few more steps and he came upon the banana tree. He poked his head in the clump of leaves, but no brown dog was hiding there. Up ahead he could make out Andrés, honking the horn outside Kiddie Korner’s gate. “I’d better hurry,” the Story Chair thought. “I want to see Miss Ashley, the way Zuma did when that poor boy’s balloon went up to the sky.”

He’s lucky he made it. The Story Chair didn’t know about cars or looking both ways before crossing a street. Luckily, a woman driving a garbage truck stopped, and the Story Chair waved as he hurried by. The woman gave him a friendly beep. Then before he knew it, the Story Chair was peeking through the Kiddie Korner fence. He saw a teacher with apples on a plate. “Sit down for snack time,” he heard her say. “That must be Miss Ashley!” the Story Chair thought. “She looks really nice.”

Up ahead the Story Chair could see a stand of oak trees and bridges over water. “That must be City Park,” he thought, remembering how Milton won that race. Before you knew it he was crossing a bridge and walking onto a wide green lawn. “This is it,” he said to himself. “The grassy place where the babies rolled.” He could almost see Milton blazing to the finish line and Doug digging up that clump of grass.

Next, he wandered over an old stone bridge and threw some acorns into the water. Then he stopped for a minute and closed his eyes. “It’s true,” he said. “I can hear the splashing of the dinosaur friends on the day the T-Rex learned to swim.”

He could also hear the sound of children and music and birds and cars. He followed his ears, and there they were: children sitting in little chairs that moved through the air. “Those must be swings!” the Story Chair cried.

But there was one thing he'd never heard of in any story that Daddy told. It was long and low and made for sitting, just like him. "Are you a Story Chair?" the Story Chair asked. "No, I'm a Park Bench," the strange thing replied. "What's a Story Chair?"

"I'm a Story Chair," the Story Chair answered. "You sit on me at bedtime and make up stories to help your children fall asleep." "How wonderful," the Park Bench said. "I've never heard a story before."

"But you live here," said the Story Chair, "where every day is different; every day is new." "Well," said the Park Bench. "It may sound like fun to you, but it's lonely out here. The nights are long, and the rain is cold, and stinging caterpillars fall from the trees. Look, it's getting dark now. All the children will leave, and I'll be left alone."

"Shall I tell you some stories?" the Story Chair asked. "Would you really?" the Park Bench replied.

So in his best voice as the darkness grew, the Story Chair told all the stories he knew. The Park Bench listened without making a sound. He learned about Hoppy and the bad Christmas tree. He heard about the Paw Patrol at the store and the time the balloon went up to the sky. Then right in the middle of “The Dog That Liked to Hide,” the Story Chair heard a snoring sound and realized the Park Bench was fast asleep. He finished the story just the same, as the dark got darker and the wind began to blow.

“Good-bye,” he whispered, so as not to wake up the sleeping bench. Then the Story Chair ran as fast as he could. “I’m missing story time,” he realized. And the sadness seemed to sit on him. He missed the hum of the humidifier and the quiet breathing sounds of Andrés asleep. He missed the company of Andrés by his side.

Luckily the gate wasn't locked when the Story Chair reached the big pink house. He hurried on in and knocked on the door. Mommy opened it and said with a smile, "The Story Chair's back!" "And just in time," said Daddy. "I thought I would have to sit on the floor!"

The story that night was "Ryder Lost His Voice." "Next time I'll tell that to the Park Bench," thought the Story Chair. But he knew this adventure would be his last. This room was his home; this boy was his friend. And just as he was thinking this, he heard Andrés ask, "Are you still here?" The Story Chair knew Andrés was talking to Daddy, but he answered just the same. "Go to sleep, Andrés. I'm right here."

The Paw Patrol at the Store

At the Target store in Metairie, high up on a shelf in the toy department, stood all six Paw Patrol figures, each with their own rig—a bulldozer, a garbage truck, a police car, a fire engine, a raft, and a helicopter. Every morning the toys would look at each other as the store opened up and say, “I hope a nice boy or girl buys us.” But they never knew who might take them home. And every morning they felt afraid.

On this morning Rubble saw a boy and his little brother coming down the aisle. “Uh-oh,” Rubble said. The boy was knocking toys off the shelf, burping very loudly (without saying “Excuse me”) and pulling his little brother very roughly behind him. “Let’s hope he doesn’t like the Paw Patrol,” said Skye. But just then the boy caught sight of the toys and said to his mother, “Oh, I love the Paw Patrol! Please, please, please, will you buy me one?” “Please say ‘no,’ please say ‘no,’” Marshall said under his breath. And just then the boy’s mother answered: “I think

not!” she said. “You’ve been very bad today; there are toys all over the floor where you knocked them off the shelf, and your little brother’s wrist is all red because you’ve been holding it too tight.” The Paw Patrol broke out in big smiles as the boy walked away, whining loudly.

But there were still hours left in the day and lots of shoppers to pass down their aisle. It wasn’t very long before another boy walked by the toys. He was coughing and sneezing and his nose was runny. Plus, he was using his tongue to lick up the snot as it dripped out of his nose. “Yuck,” said Zuma. “Let’s hope he likes dinosaurs instead of us. Can you imagine getting covered in snot while that boy played with you?” “No, I can’t,” said Rocky.

Just then the boy caught sight of the Paw Patrol toys. “Please, Mommy,” he said. “Can’t I have just one?” “Not today,” said his mother. “We’re not going to be doing any

shopping; we're going to go right home and put you to bed. You have a terrible cold!" "Whew," said Skye. "That was close."

Soon another boy came down the aisle. He was walking slowly and talking very nicely to his little sister whose hand he was holding. "Finally," said Chase. "There's the kind of kid I'd like to go home with." Just as Chase said this, the boy caught sight of the toys. "Please, Mommy," he said. "Could I have just one Paw Patrol figure?" "Which one would you like?" she asked. "I'd like Skye," he answered. "He's the one in the fire truck." "Huh?" said Marshall. "What?" said Skye.

Then the boy changed his mind. "On second thought," he said, "I'd like Zuma. He's the one in the police car." "Oh, brother," said Chase. "Good grief," said Zuma. In a second the boy changed his mind again. "No, I think my favorite is Rubble. He's the one in the garbage truck." "I'm the one in the garbage truck," said Rocky. "Oh, put a sock in it, kid," said Rubble.

The Paw Patrol members were all really afraid that this boy, who was well behaved, would be taking one of them home. But just then the mother said, “You’ve been a really good boy all week, but your birthday is tomorrow, and you’ll be getting lots of presents at your party. You don’t need a toy today.” “Ok, Mommy,” the boy said.

“Thank God,” said Marshall. Can you imagine someone calling you by the wrong name every day for the rest of your life?” “No, I can’t,” said Chase.

It was almost closing time at the store, but another boy was coming down the toy aisle. He had curly hair and was with his little brother. As the Paw Patrol watched, he bent down and gave his brother a kiss. “This is the one,” said Zuma. “Finally,” said Rubble. “He’s not sick, and he’s nice to his little brother.” “But does he know anything about us?” Skye wondered.

Just then the boy caught sight of the toys. “Look, Mommy,” he said. “Paw Patrol figures. I’ve got everybody but Zuma, the one who likes water. Could we buy him, please?” “Yes,” said his mother. “You’ve been a sweetie all week.” Zuma broke into a smile. He wished he could do a back flip like Skye, but instead he just wagged his tail.

As Mommy was taking Zuma down off the shelf, the curly-haired boy said, “Wait! I’ve got an idea. Why don’t we buy all of the toys. Then we’ll always have a birthday present ready when I’m invited to a party.” “Great idea,” said his mother, and scooped up the other five toys.

The pups couldn’t believe their luck. They were all going to the same house with the same nice little boy. And that boy would have nice friends who would be so happy as they unwrapped a pup at their birthday party. “It couldn’t have turned out any better,” said Rocky from inside the shopping bag. “I

can't wait to see his room," said Skye. "I hope he has a dog," said Chase. "That would be too perfect," said Zuma. "Let's just be happy that we're all together."

The Dog Who Liked to Hide

One hot afternoon in New Orleans, Andrés and Grandma were walking down the Greenway to the grocery. "I'm thirsty," said Andrés. "Just wait until we get to the store, and I'll buy you a bottle of water," said Grandma. "OK," Andrés agreed. But a second later he forgot all about his thirst: Across from the store there was a dog trying to squeeze out of the space between the fence and the gate in someone's yard. "He looks like he's going to get out," Andrés said, and in another second the dog gave a big final squeeze and did. He looked around, then trotted away.

A half an hour later, Grandma and Andrés were walking back from the store with some yogurt that tastes like ice cream,

some almond milk for Daddy, and a pack of diapers for Milton. When they turned the corner at Toulouse Street, they met a boy with a worried look.

“Have you seen a little brown dog?” he asked. “We saw him squeeze out of a gap in the fence,” Andrés answered. “Right across from the grocery store.” “That’s my dog,” the boy said. “I saw him run down this street, and he saw me too.” “Then why didn’t he come to you?” Andrés wondered. “Because he’s a dog that likes to hide,” the boy explained. “Every day, all he wants to do is play hide-and-seek. And he’s a good hider too. He’ll wait as long as it takes for me to find him, and he never makes a sound.” “I’ll help you look for him,” Andrés said

Grandma took the groceries inside while Andrés thought of all the places a dog might hide. “There are always cats hiding under these parked cars,” Andrés said to the boy. “You take this side of the street and I’ll take the other. Maybe we’ll find him.”

So up and down the street the boys went. They found a lot of cats and even one possum, but the dog who liked to hide was nowhere to be found. “We might have walked right by him,” said the boy with a frown. “He would have watched us without a sound. Do you know any other hiding places?”

“Well,” Andrés said. “Every house has a garbage can and a recycling bin. A dog could hide behind one of those.” So up and down the street went the boys again. There was a beer can behind Willie’s bin, but no dog. There was a grasshopper under Johnny’s can, but no dog. The boy looked as if he was going to cry. “Think hard, please,” the boy said. “There must be another place.”

Andrés thought and thought. Then it came to him. “Once when my Grandma was taking me to school, she hid in the banana trees just for fun.” “Banana trees?” the boy repeated.

“There’s a clump of them right at the end of the block,” Andrés explained. “Let’s go,” said the boy.

The stand of banana trees was mostly green, but mixed in with the new Spring growth were some dead brown leaves that were crunchy and dry. “Brown!” Andrés thought to himself, remembering the color of the dog who liked to hide. Then he climbed right into the dry brown leaves and sure enough. There was a small brown paw that blended right in and a little brown nose and two dark brown eyes.

“I found him!” Andrés yelled. “Rocky!” cried the boy as he snapped on the leash. “You’re going home with me right now. And no more hide-and-seek. We’re going to find a better game.” “I’m glad we found him,” Andrés said. “Thanks for your help,” said the boy with a smile, as they headed on home.

Just then Daddy drove up the street, on his way back from work. He rolled down the window and called to Andrés. “Hey,

buddy. I missed you. Come on inside and we'll play hide-and-seek." "Not today," said Andrés as they walked in the house.

"Are you sick?" Daddy asked. "I feel fine," Andrés answered.

"But today's not a hide-and-seek day. It feels more like a buddy-slide one." So Daddy took the couch apart.

Up onto the couch Andrés climbed and down the slide he went. Then he got some trucks and slid them down too. Linda watched from a cushion on the floor. "Sometimes I'm glad I have an old dog," Andrés said, as he played. "One who stays in her yard and doesn't like to hide." Then he climbed off the couch and gave her a hug. Linda didn't really like to hear the word "old," but her tail wagged just the same. "You're a good dog," Andrés said as he climbed back on the slide. Linda's tail wagged some more.

The Balloon that Went up to the Sky

One day Grandma and Andrés were sitting out on the porch of the big pink house on Toulouse Street just looking at the world. They had already seen two jet planes making an X in the sky and a cat jumping from the fence high onto the porch next door. Then, all of a sudden, they noticed something new rising higher and higher in the sky above the neighborhood. “Look, Andrés,” Grandma said. “It’s a balloon.” There was a long string trailing behind it, and it was clear it had belonged to someone. “There’s a little boy in this town who must be very sad at having lost his balloon,” Grandma said. “The sky took it,” Andrés answered.

When the balloon was so high that they could barely see it, Andrés said, “Let’s call the Paw Patrol.” “Great idea,” said Grandma and handed Andrés her phone. “Paw Patrol,” Ryder answered when Andrés dialed his number. “How can we help?” “Some boy has lost his balloon,” said Andrés. “It’s full of

helium, and it keeps going higher and higher in the sky. Can you help us get it back?” “No job too big, no pup too small,” Ryder answered. “I’ll send Marshall and Skye over right away.”

When the two pups arrived, Andrés pointed to where the balloon had been. Marshall got out his ladder and climbed as high as he could, but he was still too low to reach it. “Looks like you’ll have to take over, Skye,” Marshall said as he climbed back down the ladder. Skye did a back flip as she leaped into her helicopter. “This pup’s gotta fly,” she added, pulling back on the throttle.

Higher and higher Skye went until she could see a tiny dot in the sky. “I bet that’s it,” she cried as she sped up to reach the balloon. She kept one hand on the controls and stretched out the other. Then in one swift motion she swung around and grabbed the string of the balloon. “Woo-hoo!” she yelled, then landed in the grass next to Marshall’s fire truck. “Now what?” she asked.

“May I have your phone again, please?” Andrés asked Grandma. Then he called up Ryder. “Skye got the balloon,” Andrés told him. “But we need to find the boy who lost it.” “This will take more pups,” Ryder said. “I’m sending over the rest of the team.”

In just a few minutes there was a roar of engines and Chase, Rocky, Zuma, and Rubble pulled up outside the gate. “I’ll take Toulouse Street,” said Chase. “Rocky, you ride up to the red statue. Rubble, you check out City Park. Zuma, you drive by Kiddie Korner. Everybody be on the lookout for a party because that’s where children would be playing with balloons.”

Chase headed up Toulouse Street in his police car, but all he found there was a bunch of cats hiding under the parked cars that lined the street. Rocky drove up to the red statue in his garbage truck, but all he found there were a couple of two year olds riding their tricycles around the statue while their parents

watched. Kiddie Korner was closed when Zuma drove by. He could see Miss Ashley through one of the windows, but she was just cutting up apples for the next day's snack. There were no children to be seen.

But things were much more lively at City Park. Rubble could hear music playing, and a big group of people stood under the oaks. Someone was cooking carne on a grill, and a half-eaten cake sat on a table nearby. "Looks like a party to me," Rubble said to himself. Then he heard someone crying. A little boy was curled up in the grass, his shoulders shaking from his sobs.

"What's wrong?" asked Rubble. "Did you by any chance lose a balloon?" The boy jumped to his feet and stopped crying right away. "Yes," he said. "Did you find one?" "Hop in," Rubble answered.

All the pups were in the yard when Rubble drove up with the little boy in his bulldozer. "I found him," Rubble yelled. Then

Andrés handed the boy his balloon. “Don’t let go,” he warned. “This balloon is full of helium.” “Thanks,” said the boy whose face was one big smile. “There’s cake at the party if you’d like some,” he added.

Andrés jumped in with Chase, Grandma jumped in with Marshall, and they all raced over to City Park. Everyone at the party was so happy to see them and served them big pieces of chocolate cake. Skye wrapped up a piece to take back to Ryder. “Call us again if you ever need help,” she called to Andrés as she flew out of sight.

“I will,” said Andrés, swallowing his last piece of cake. Then he turned to Grandma who was eating cake too. “This has been the best day ever!” he said.

The T-Rex of City Park

Before there were boys and girls, before there were houses and cars, before there were swings and beignets, there were dinosaurs at City Park. One of these was a Triceratops who was friends with a Stegosaurus. All day long they would climb on tree branches, have friendly acorn fights, and swim in the waters that would one day be spanned by stone bridges with steps. But back then there were only trees and rocks and water AND a very bad T-Rex who lived there too.

You never knew where he was hiding or when he would pop out, teeth bared, to chase you and ruin your fun. One day Triceratops and Stegosaurus were having a perfect day. They had picnicked on a big patch of fresh spring ferns, and then played hide and seek in the oak grove. Now they were resting in the shade when out of nowhere a loud voice yelled, “Here I come, ready or not!” and from out of the shadows sprang the T-Rex.

It took a minute for the two friends to spring to their feet since they had been lying down, and that gave T-Rex a good head start. No matter how fast the two friends ran, T-Rex kept coming closer until Stegosaurus, who wasn't as fast as Triceratops, felt T-Rex's breath on his neck. "Help!" he called to his friend who had reached the bank of the lagoon. "He's gaining on me. What should I do?" "Follow me," Triceratops answered, and jumped into the water. A second later, Stegosaurus jumped too. And right behind him jumped the T-Rex, making a gigantic splash.

But the minute he had done that, T-Rex knew he was in trouble because T-Rex couldn't swim. Now it was his turn to cry for help. "I can't swim," he screamed. "I'm sinking! Help me! Help me!"

“Why should we help you?” Stegosaurus asked. “You were trying to eat us.” “But it was an accident,” said T-Rex, his mouth full of water. “I promise I won’t chase you ever again.”

Triceratops, who was floating on his back, saw that T-Rex was in trouble and called to Stegosaurus, who was treading water, “Come on! Let’s help him out.” “Are you crazy?” his friend answered. “You can never trust a T-Rex!” “Maybe not,” said Triceratops. “But it’s trust him or watch him drown. And I don’t think I could stand to witness that.” So the two friends swam to the T-Rex and used their heads to push him up on the bank.

When he saw that he was safe, T-Rex broke down and cried. “Thank-you. Thank-you,” he said. “And I’m going to keep my promise. Just watch me! Can I play with you?” Stegosaurus made a face that meant, “Huh? Are you crazy?” But Triceratops said, “Let’s give him one chance.” And the three dinosaurs

started racing through the trees. Then they gathered up acorns and threw them in the water. After that they were tired and napped in the shade.

Stegosaurus was the first to wake up. “Help!” he yelled when he saw there was a T-Rex sound asleep with its head on his tail. Then he remembered that they’d all become friends. “What should we do next?” he asked the others who were now awake too.

“I’ve got an idea,” T-Rex said. “Could you teach me to swim?” All afternoon Triceratops and Stegosaurus taught T-Rex to kick his legs and hold his breath and use his tail as a rudder in the water. Before long that T-Rex was the faster swimmer of the three.

T-Rex kept his promise all of his life. And to this day, on a late afternoon, if you’re very quiet and close your eyes, you can

still hear the three friends splashing through the waters in a place that is now called City Park.

The Bad Christmas Tree

It was Christmas in New Orleans. Daddy, Mommy, Andrés and Milton went to the Christmas tree lot to pick out a tree.

Andrés found one he liked, but Daddy said it was too small.

Mommy found one that she liked, but then she saw that it was too bushy. Milton didn't know what a Christmas tree was, so he didn't pick out one at all.

Then, around a corner, they came upon the most beautiful tree anyone had ever seen. It was tall and full, perfectly symmetrical, and it smelled of the deep piney woods. "Quick, let's buy it," said Mommy. And Daddy found a worker to take his money—just in time too. Everyone was noticing that tree

and digging in their pockets for their money. But it was too late. Daddy was already carrying the tree to the car with a big ball of string to tie it on the roof.

As they were walking to the car, the tree swung out one of its branches and stuck Andrés with its sharp needles. “Ow!” said Andrés. “What happened?” Mommy asked. “The tree hit me on purpose!” Andrés said. Nobody else saw it happen except Milton, and he couldn’t talk. “Now Andrés,” said Daddy. “Plants can’t move. Only animals can move. The only thing that can make a plant move is the wind, and there’s no wind today.” “It hit me on purpose,” Andrés said, but nobody was listening.

When they got home Mommy and Daddy started to put lights on the tree. They each hung one string of lights, then bent down to get another. When their backs were turned, the Christmas tree deliberately shook one branch so that the lights

Daddy had just put up were now all crooked. “Davy-G,” said Mommy. “Put them on straight.” “I did,” said Daddy. “The tree did it,” said Andrés. Nobody else had seen it happen except Linda, and she couldn’t talk. “Now Andrés,” said Daddy. “I told you before that plants can’t move unless the wind blows them, and there’s no wind in this house.”

After putting on all the lights, Mommy and Daddy started to put on the ornaments. They’d hung ten beautiful silver balls and were bending down to get ten more when the Christmas tree swung one of its branches very hard so that an ornament went flying across the room, hit the floor, and broke. “Andrés!” said Daddy. “The tree did it,” said Andrés. “On purpose,” he added in a quiet voice because he knew no one would believe him. The only one who’d believe him was Milton, who saw it happen too, but all he said was “Ah, goo.” “This is the last time I’m going to explain it to you,” said Daddy. “Animals move; plants don’t

unless the wind blows them.” I think you need to get ready for bed.

When Andrés came out of his room dressed in his pajamas, Mommy and Daddy were putting the presents under the tree.

“Oh, there are two more back in the bedroom. Let’s go get them,” said Mommy. And the minute she and Daddy were out of the room the tree stuck one of its branches down and ripped a big hole in one of the presents.

When Mommy and Daddy came back and saw the half-opened present they said “ANDRÉS!” in a very loud voice. “I know it’s hard, but you have to wait for Christmas morning to open your presents.” “I didn’t open it,” said Andrés. “The tree did. “I’m not going to explain to you again about plants and animals and wind,” said Daddy. “I’m going to put you to bed,” and off to bed went a very sad Andrés.

The next morning Mommy and Daddy got up early, before Andrés and Milton, and went into the kitchen to make coffee. The tree didn't realize that they were awake and started ripping open another present. Mommy and Daddy heard a rustling sound and then a loud R—I—I—P! "Look what the tree is doing," Mommy said. "Andrés was right," said Daddy. "Let's wake him up and say we're sorry."

"We're so sorry we didn't believe you," Mommy said to a very sleepy Andrés when they shook him out of a happy dream. "Yes we are," said Daddy. "You're a good boy, and that's a bad Christmas tree. And it's going in the garbage right now!"

They took off the lights and the ornaments and piled the presents on the couch. Then Andrés grabbed the tree's trunk and Daddy grabbed the spiky branches and they carried it out to the garbage can and stuffed it in.

A man and woman who were walking their dog saw something green poking out of the garbage can. “Oh my goodness,” said the woman. “Look at that gorgeous Christmas tree that someone put in the garbage! It’s a lot prettier than the tree we had last year.” “It is,” said the man. “I’m going to get the truck and take it home.”

Andrés looked at Daddy, and Daddy looked back. “Shouldn’t we tell them that it’s a bad Christmas tree?” Andrés asked. “Buddy,” Daddy answered, “they’d never believe us.”

The Baby Rolling Race

One day Mommy was reading the newspaper on her computer. “Oh, look,” she said. “There’s going to be a baby rolling race on the big grassy lawn in City Park.” “Let’s go,” said Andrés. “Milton is a very fast roller. I bet he could win.” “Well,” said Mommy. “You might be right. At least it’s worth a try. It says

here that each baby must be accompanied by a big brother or sister to help line the babies up at the start of the race.” “I could do that!” Andrés said.

Bright and early the next morning, Mommy, Daddy, Milton and Andrés headed out for the big race. Linda came too because it said well-behaved pets were welcome. Mommy took Andrés and Milton up to the starting line, then went back to join Daddy and Linda who were sitting on the grass to watch the race.

“We’ll be getting started soon,” said the woman who was judging the race. “Get to know each other while you wait.” So Andrés turned to his left. “I’m Andrés,” he said to the boy who was sitting next to him. “And my baby is Milton.” “I’m Jack,” said the boy, “and my baby is Tommy. What TV shows do you like to watch?” “I like ‘The Blaze Show’,” said Andrés and my

favorite character is Blaze.” “I like the Paw Patrol,” said Jack.

“And my favorite character is Chase.”

The boy who was sitting on the other side of Andrés overheard the conversation and butted in. “Blaze?” he said. “I watch ‘The Blaze Show’ too, but my favorite character is Crusher.” “Why do you like him?” Andrés asked. “Because he knows how to win, win, win,” said the boy, whose name was Doug. “And that’s why we’re here. My baby brother, Timmy, is going to win this race!”

Just then the judge announced the start of the race. “Line your babies up behind the white line,” she said. “And put your hands gently on their stomachs. When I say ‘Go’ take your hands off, and let the babies roll.” Andrés, Jack and Doug lined their babies up. “Ok,” said the judge, “Ready, set, go!” Andrés and Jack took their hands off their babies’ stomachs. Doug did

too, but first he gave Timmy a push over the starting line so that he was already ahead of the other babies. “I can see why he likes Crusher,” Andrés thought. “He’s a cheater too!”

Timmy was in first place, of course, but Milton did a very fast roll and almost caught up with him. Tommy didn’t move at first, but then he rolled too and was right behind Milton. It was a very exciting race. Everyone was clapping for the babies, and Linda let out some very loud barks.

“Hurry up, Timmy,” Doug yelled in a very mean voice. “What’s the matter with you? Do you want to be a loser!” “Keep rolling, Tommy,” Jack called out. “You’re doing great!” “Go, Milton!” Andrés yelled.

The finish line was getting closer and closer, and Timmy was still ahead. Then Andrés called out, “Milton, let’s blaze!” Milton knew what that meant because he had watched ‘The Blaze Show’ many times with his big brother. He smiled and

said, “Ah, goo.” Then he threw his arm and leg up in the air and did a fast roll over the finish line just ahead of Timmy. Milton had won the race! Tommy’s last roll put him in third place just behind Timmy, who came in second.

Doug was so mad that Milton had beaten Timmy that he ripped up a patch of grass and threw it at Andrés. “You cheated,” he said. “You said ‘Let’s blaze,’ and that made Milton win. And your dog’s bark also scared my baby, and that slowed him down. I’m taking Timmy and going home.”

“But Timmy came in second,” said Andrés. “That’s very good, and he’ll get a silver medal.” “Second place is no good,” Doug yelled, spitting on the grass right in front of Andrés. “Nothing matters but winning and getting the gold medal. We’re going home.” With that, he leapt up and yanked Timmy very roughly, then carried him away.

The judge heard what Doug had said to Andrés and saw the spitting too. What's more, she had seen Doug cheat at the beginning of the race. She was glad he had gone home, though she felt a little sorry for Timmy, who was a good baby and couldn't help having a bad big brother. "Here's your prize," she said to Milton, putting a gold medal around his neck. "And since the second place winner seems to have left, that makes you second," she said to Tommy, putting the silver medal around his neck. "You're the best little brother ever," Jack said, giving Tommy a kiss.

"I have a special bit of news for the big brothers and sisters," said the judge after all the prizes had been handed out. "I've noticed that you've all been very gentle with your babies, and I like the way you called out encouraging words to help them try hard in the race. So tomorrow morning at ten o'clock there will

be a tricycle for each of you here at the starting line. We'll have a tricycle race with prizes, then ice cream for all."

"Too bad Doug will miss all the fun," Jack said. "I think we're better off without him," Andrés answered. "Good luck tomorrow," Jack said as he carried Tommy home. "Good luck to you," Andrés answered. "I hope one of us wins!"

Linda's Christmas Present

It was the best part of Christmastime, putting the presents under the tree. Every day it seemed another gift was added to the pile. Some were red with green bows, and some were green with red bows, and some were silver with silver bows. And each present had a letter to show who the gift was for. Mommy's gifts had a big A for Angela. Daddy's had a D for Davy (though D could stand for Daddy too). Grandma's gifts had an S for Sally; Kate's had a K for Kate; Milton's had an M, and Andrés's presents

didn't have an A but instead a 2 because Andrés was two years old. If there had been a present for Linda, it would have been marked with an L because L was Linda's letter. But there were no presents for Linda under the tree.

Every night Linda would sit on the couch and watch someone add another gift to the pile. She would hope that maybe tonight would be the night that a present with a big L would be brought out for her, but every night the present had an A or a K or a 2. There were a lot of presents with the number 2, Linda noticed.

About this time Andrés started noticing something too. He noticed that when he looked at Linda he would see that her eyes were watery. Sometimes the water even spilled down her nose and got mixed in with all the burrs that were always stuck in Linda's muzzle. So he said to Daddy, "I think something's

wrong with Linda. Look how watery her eyes are.” “You’re right,” said Daddy. “Let’s take her to the vet.”

It was the vet that Linda had bitten once, but the vet understood dogs and wasn’t mad at Linda. She looked at Linda’s eyes, and she looked in Linda’s mouth, and she took Linda’s temperature, and then she said, “There’s nothing wrong with this dog. She’s perfectly healthy.” “That’s strange,” Daddy said.

On the way home Andrés started thinking. Then he said, “You know, my Daddy. I think Linda might be sad, and that water might be tears.” “Sad?” said Daddy. “How could Linda be sad? She has food and water, a nice family, walks around the block every day and a soft couch to sleep on.” “But,” said Andrés, “she has no Christmas presents.” “She’s only a dog,” said Daddy. “How could she know that?” “Well,” said Andrés. “I think Linda is smarter than most dogs. And I think she knows

her letter is L. There are no presents with an L under our tree.”

“Maybe you’re right,” Daddy said. “Let’s go to the store.”

So off they went to the pet store. At the store Daddy picked out a ball, and a stuffed cat, and a chew toy in the shape of a bone. “How about one of these?” he asked Andrés. But Andrés had a frown on his face. “I don’t think Linda would like a toy,” he said. “She’s an old dog now, and all she really likes to do is eat.” “You know, you’re right,” Daddy admitted. “Let’s go down the dog-food aisle.” There, they picked out a can of sliced chicken in gravy.

When they got home they wrapped it in white paper with red candy canes on it, and Andrés wrote a big letter L on the outside. Linda was watching when they put it under the tree, but she wasn’t looking very carefully because she had learned by now that there was never a present with the letter L. At first she thought it was another A, but then she looked more closely and

couldn't believe her eyes. Was it possible? Was there really a present for her in the pile? Andrés saw Linda's tail wagging, and when he looked closely at her he realized that her eyes weren't watery any more. "I think I was right about Linda," Andrés said to himself.

On Christmas morning everyone opened their presents with glee. Andrés got a train set and a new bike, not to mention a stocking full of Paw Patrol figures. Mommy got a new sweater, and Daddy got some genuine Cuban cigars. At last there was only one gift peeking out from under the pile of torn wrapping paper, Linda's. Linda looked at Andrés, and Andrés understood. "Go get it," he said.

Linda used both her paws and her mouth to rip open the paper. But when the present was opened, it was clear she didn't know what that can of dog food was. There had never been anything but crunchies in her bowl. "Follow me," said Andrés,

heading for the kitchen. There he opened the can and poured a big wet glob on top of Linda's dry food.

Linda ate it up as fast as she could, then turned around three times and did a very high pula. "I think Linda likes her present," Mommy said. And off Linda went, her belly full of chicken, to take a long Christmas nap on the couch.

Hoppy the Grasshopper

Outside a big pink house on Toulouse Street in New Orleans, there lived a great green grasshopper named Hoppy. He spent all day every day eating the leaves of the hibiscus bush that grew alongside the porch, and although he had bitten big holes out of the leaves of that plant, nobody seemed to care. At night Hoppy would hop up on the porch and sit outside the window of the little boy who lived inside, listening to the bedtime stories that his father told. It was a happy life for a grasshopper.

Then one day a red car pulled up in front of the house and out stepped a woman with a suitcase. “Oh, no,” thought Hoppy. “That woman’s going to stay awhile. I hope she doesn’t notice what I’ve done to the hibiscus.” But the woman ran right past Hoppy without so much as a glance in her hurry to get inside. It was Grandma, and all she cared about was seeing Andrés. “Whew, that was close,” sighed Hoppy.

That night when Hoppy climbed up on the porch to listen to the bedtime stories, it was Grandma, not Daddy, who was telling them. The first was a little scary to Hoppy, all about a skunk who got his head stuck in a coke can. But it had a happy ending. When Andrés nodded off to sleep, Hoppy climbed back onto his bush and fell asleep too. All night long he dreamed about skunks and gentle men saying, “Please don’t spray me”; “Please don’t be afraid.”

But when Hoppy woke up, he remembered Grandma and felt afraid himself. He heard Andrés's door open; he heard the coffee start to brew. Then he heard Grandma say, "Let's go out on the porch." "Uh-oh," said Hoppy, and sat as still as he could be.

At first Grandma and Andrés just watched Linda eat her treat and waved good morning to Johnny and the garbage men. But all of a sudden Grandma said, "Hey, what happened to the hibiscus bush? The leaves are full of holes." "Yikes!" said Hoppy.

Grandma stood up and walked right next to Hoppy. At first she didn't see him because the green of his body blended in with the green of the leaves. But then she said, "Why here's the culprit. A great big grasshopper! Come and see, Andrés!" Then quick as a flash Grandma grabbed Hoppy and held him out on the palm of her hand.

Hoppy was too scared to move. He thought he was soon to be squashed like a pancake on the ground. But Grandma liked animals as much as she liked plants. “Be gentle, Andrés,” she said. “Just give him a soft little touch.” But the minute Andrés touched him Hoppy leaped into the sky, spread his wings, and flew into the grass. “Where’d he go?” asked Grandma. “He’s in the grass somewhere,” said Andrés. “Well at least he’s not in the hibiscus,” Grandma said.

All day long Hoppy hid in the grass, afraid to come out. He was hot and he was hungry, but even when the sun went down he was too afraid to hop back onto his bush. He was too afraid to hop up on the porch for story time. It wasn’t until Grandma’s light went out that Hoppy dared to leave the grass. He climbed back onto his bush and ate and ate until the sun came up.

In the morning Andrés opened his door. Grandma put the coffee on. Then Hoppy jumped back into the grass in the nick of

time—just as Grandma opened the front door. Every day the same thing happened. Hoppy spent the day in hiding, then spent the night in the hibiscus bush. The holes in the leaves got bigger, and Grandma didn't know what to do. She couldn't find the creature who was making those holes. She was very unhappy.

Hoppy was unhappy too. Though he was filling his stomach up late at night, he was tired of hiding in the grass all day. He was tired of missing story time. Finally, the problem solved itself. Hoppy got tired of hibiscus leaves. He noticed Johnny's plants looked delicious and green. And one day he hopped across Toulouse Street and settled into his neighbor's yard.

Grandma noticed the hibiscus leaves weren't so holey anymore. She started smiling all the time. Johnny didn't care that his plants were now full of holes. He never even noticed. And Hoppy's belly was full day and night. He'd forgotten what it felt like to be afraid.

So one day he hopped back across the street when he knew it was almost story time. He heard Grandma's voice coming out through the window as he sat outside on the window sill. "What story would you like tonight?" she was asking Andrés. "How about Hoppy the Grasshopper?" he answered.

"I've got my own story!" Hoppy thought to himself. "I can't wait to hear how it turns out."

The Three-Year-Olds' Tricycle Race

Early in the morning, Andrés woke up. He couldn't wait to have his breakfast and set out with Mommy, Daddy, Milton, and Linda to the grassy field at City Park, the same field where yesterday Milton had won the babies' rolling race. And today the big brothers and sisters who had helped in that race would be rewarded with their own race with medals for the winners and then ice-cream for all.

Andrés knew he had a good chance of winning. He was the fastest rider of all at Kiddie Korner, just up the block. He imagined that his new friend Jack would be fast on a tricycle too. Then he remembered something that made him frown. Doug. Doug might show up too....And if he did Andrés knew

what might happen. Well, he didn't know exactly what, but he knew it would be bad. Just yesterday Doug had cheated in the babies' rolling race, then pulled up grass and spit when Milton blazed ahead and beat little Timmy. Maybe, Andrés thought, Doug will just stay home.

With his belly full of pancakes, Andrés ran ahead as the family set off to City Park. Ten tricycles were waiting at the starting line, and Andrés could see that Jack was there already, sitting on a bright green bike. Next to him was a sky-blue tricycle that seemed meant for Andrés. You see, blue was Andrés's favorite color.

"Hi, Jack," Andrés called out. "Hi, Andrés," said Jack. "I was hoping you'd be here." Andrés hopped on his bike. "And I don't see Doug," he added. "Good," said Andrés. "If he shows up, he'll do something bad--like crash into someone." "Like spit," said Jack. "Like fart," said Andrés. Then they both laughed so hard they could barely stay on their bikes.

"Ok, quiet everyone," said the judge. "I'm going to say just three words, "Ready," "Set," and "Go." When you hear "Go," but not a second before that, ride as fast as you can to the finish line. All the children were quiet as mice. "Ready." (Andrés took a deep breath.) "Set." (Jack put his head down.) "Go." At that very minute, just as Jack and Andrés were starting to race, Doug appeared out of nowhere, jumped on a tricycle and pushed on the pedals. It was the bright yellow tricycle right next to Andrés! "Yellow," thought Andrés, "just like the bad Flash." And he pedaled as fast as he could.

Almost at once, Andrés was ahead. He tried to concentrate on the race, but he could hear Doug's breathing just over his shoulder. "He's gaining on me," Andrés thought, and pedaled even harder. Then it happened. Something cold and wet struck Andrés in the head. He turned his head back to see what it had been. Then it struck him in the eye, something cold and wet and "OW!" It stung.

At any other time Andrés would have jumped off his bike and used his shirt to wipe the stinging liquid out of his eye. But this was a race and Andrés was not going to give up his chance to win. He blazed ahead, one eye closed and filling with tears, as Doug got closer and the crowd began to cheer. Linda started barking. Milton screamed. Two boys crossed the finish line at the very same time, Andrés and Doug, with Jack just behind them.

"Who won?" yelled a boy in the crowd. "I did," said Doug. Andrés said nothing at all. He was too busy wiping his eye with the corner of his shirt. The tears made his shirt all wet and orange. "That's strange," thought Andrés. "Tears aren't orange."

In an instant the judge was by his side. "Are you ok?" she asked. "I guess so," said Andrés. "And you, you little cheater," said the judge, grabbing Doug by his shirt. As the judge pulled the shirt, something fell out and onto the ground. A squirt gun! The judge picked it up and squirted it into her hand. Then she sniffed at the liquid. "That's not water," she said. "It's orange juice!" "No wonder it stung," said Andrés!

“You are disqualified for cheating,” the judge said to Doug. “That makes you the winner, Andrés, and Jack, that makes you second.” Now everyone meet under the big oak tree for ice-cream. That is everyone but you, Doug.”

Andrés was happy to have won but a little sad too. He remembered the T-Rex of City Park, how he’d become friends with Stegosaurus and Triceratops, how he’d promised to be good and kept his promise all his life. “Maybe Doug will learn some day, too,” Andrés thought. Then he took a big lick of his ice cream cone. It was chocolate, his favorite.