

# DR. FIXIT'S MALICIOUS MACHINE DOWNLOADABLE EXCERPT

Copyright 2012 Jessica Crichton. All rights reserved.

## CHAPTER 1



## AN INSIDIOUS MOMNAPPING

The vice principal had candy on her desk.

I always stared at the candy. I don't know why. Maybe it was because I knew I'd never get any. Mom says some things are like watching a train wreck, because they're so horrible we can't look away. That candy was like a train wreck. It was always lollipops. It's like Vice Principal Jackson knew those were my favorite and put them there just to torture me.

I wouldn't put it past her.

“What am I going to do with you, Trevor Tate?” She said. She always sounded chokey and stuffed up, like she wanted to sneeze out marshmallows.

I glanced at her, then back at the candy. I shrugged. “I don’t know. What do you usually do with me?”

“Look at me, Mister Tate.”

I did. Her puckery face wasn’t as train-wrecky as the candy, but it was close.

“What?”

“Your mother says you are a wonderful child. I’m sure she’s right, but for the life of me I can’t understand why you feel the need to try my patience every week.”

I shrugged. “It’s a game I play. What can I say?”

Her brown eyes narrowed. “Somehow I doubt Arthur Kamps enjoys your game very much.”

“Arthur Kamps is a jerk,” I said without thinking.

I say a lot of stuff without thinking. Sometimes it gets me into trouble, but this time I was already in trouble so it didn’t really matter.

Much.

Tearvey sat back and crossed her arms over her chest. “I don’t expect all of my students to get along, Trevor. You may dislike Arthur all you want. But as I have told you numerous times, we do not allow bullying at Lewis Elementary.”

“I’m not a bully,” I said, trying not to get mad. It was hard. I hate being called a bully more than almost anything.

“You punched poor Arthur in the mouth,” Jackson said. “That is what we call bullying.”

For once I held back the reply that first came to my head. That’s because it would have been something like ‘he started it’, and stuff like that never worked with the Vice Principal, even if it *was* true.

“Well? What do you have to say for yourself?” she asked.

I tried to think of something to say that would make her understand, but I realized it was pointless. So what if I’d heard Arthur picking on Amanda Byer at recess? So what if her crying had made me so mad I felt hot all over? So what if, when he laughed at her, my anger became impossible to control?

So what if the only way I could think of to make him stop was to punch his stupid jerk-face?

I wasn't the bully. Arthur was. But if I said that, Jackson would just ask me why I didn't tell the recess teacher and let her handle it. Again. And I wouldn't be able to convince her that my brain stopped working when I got mad.

Again.

So I just shrugged.

Jackson nodded like I'd said something brilliant, then opened her desk drawer. "So. No excuses this time? Good. I'll call that progress." She took out a pink pad of paper and started writing on it. "Still, I think a week-long suspension will serve to teach you the lesson that my talks have obviously failed at."

I took the paper from her hand without a word. It was probably pointless to remind her that this was my third suspension anyway.



"Mom's going to murder you. You know that, right?" Tabitha said as we walked home together through the late autumn leaves.

I sighed without looking at her. "I know. Get off my case, okay?"

"Sure," she said. "Sorry."

Unlike most people, my twin sister knows when to leave me alone. It's like she can feel my temper getting worse as easily as I can. She's great at calming me down, too. Nobody else can do that. And Tab never gets mad. She's never even been in a fight.

Of course she's never had to. Nobody at school would dare hurt *my* sister.

Mom says Tab's my Glory and I'm her Guts. I think that means we're like a yin-yang, that black and white symbol they use in the old Kung-Fu movies. On the outside we're almost exactly alike, with our crazy brown hair, blue eyes and tons of freckles. But on the inside we're as different as pencils and oatmeal. If I'm a devil, Tab's an angel. Course, she's not perfect either. For one, she's a Know-it-all. I'd be totally happy if she never again told me how creepastic spiders are good for the environment, or that light sabers are a scientific impossibility.

I don't care. I still want one.

I played with the suspension notice in my pocket as we walked into the kitchen. While Tab went to the fridge to grab her after-school snack, I looked at the attic door with growing dread.

Most of the time we weren't supposed to disturb Mom until she came downstairs to make dinner, but I wanted to tell her the bad news before she got a call from the school.

Sure, I was already toast, but if the school got to her before I had a chance to even try and explain, I would be *burnt* toast.

“Staring at it won’t make it open,” Tab said from behind me.

I groaned. “Mom *is* going to kill me. Or maybe just turn me into a toad or something.”

Tab laughed. “Don’t be dumb. Mom’s a scientist, not a witch. Scientists don’t turn people into toads.”

I glanced at her. “They could. You never know.”

She just gave me a look and bit into her cookie.

*It’ll be like ripping off a band-aid*, I told myself as I opened the door.

I got onto the first step and craned my neck, but I couldn’t see past the sharp turn a few stairs up.

*Do it fast. Like ripping off a band-aid.*

I took a deep breath and dashed up the stairs, taking them two at a time.

“Hey, Mom,” I said as I rounded the corner at the top. “I know you said not to bug you when—.”

I stopped dead at the top of the stairs in shock.

Mom’s usually spotless lab was a huge mess. The thick wooden workbench was covered in ripped-up strips of paper, shredded books, cracked pens, and twisted pieces of the metal beaker stand that normally stood there. All over the floor, broken beakers spilled out mysterious, colorful liquids, wetting more busted science equipment and making the place smell like a rabid raccoon had farted, thrown up, and died there. Worst of all, Mom’s prize microscope – the one she had worked years to afford – lay smashed and broken in a blue-green puddle of some kind of smoking liquid.

I saw all of that pretty fast, because my eyes were drawn almost right away to the back corner of the lab. There, an impossible wall of light flickered and rippled, like water over yellow flashlight beams. That was weird enough, but even crazier was the nightmare thing coming out of it – a long, coppery tentacle covered in sharp suction cup-looking barbs like broken bottles. It slithered around the floor, scraping slowly over the mess like it was searching for something.

I hoped it wasn’t me.

There was a soft movement to my right. I glanced over to see a shadow kneeling next to the watery doorway. The light behind made it too dark to see very well, but I would recognize that ponytail anywhere, with glasses perched on top like a double set of eyes, and a scarf – always a different color – wrapped around her forehead to keep her brown bangs out of her face while she worked.

“Mom?” I whispered, taking a step towards her.

Her shadowed hand went up. “Get back! He’s found us!”

At the sound of her voice the tentacle whipped back, sweeping under my feet and knocking me to the floor. I didn’t even have a chance to pull myself up before it wrapped itself around Mom’s waist and yanked her through the door of light.

And then she was gone.

I don’t remember when or how, but I managed to pull myself up again. Then I just stood there like my feet were frozen to the floor, staring at the oval of light, my mind completely blank from shock.

I was still there when Tab ran up the stairs behind me, followed by our fourteen-year-old sister Emily.

“I heard a scream,” Emily said.

“What happened?” Tab asked at the same time.

Their voices sounded foggy, like they were coming through piles of blankets. I managed to shake my head, but I still couldn’t talk.

As Emily pushed her way past me, the yellow glow in the back corner started to dim. Then with a low hum, the doorway began to fall slowly backwards as the watery stuff drained out, disappearing through a pipe at the bottom of the...

... bathtub?

I closed my eyes and tried to shake the crazy out of my head. I hadn’t seen that. No way. And sure enough, when I looked again the old tub Mom used in her lab was empty, resting on its four clawfeet as if it had been there – just like that – for years. There was no sign of the impossible glowy bathwater that it had held only moments before, or the wicked metal tentacle.

Or Mom.

As my mind raced with different crazy-person diagnoses I might give myself, I heard Mom’s ringtone. I blinked around at the ruined lab until my eyes landed on a flashing white light in the shadows under the tub. I rushed over – skirting the spilled liquids and broken glass – and knelt down to reach for her phone.

I had just curled my fingers around it when I felt a massive sting on the top of my hand.

“OW!” I jumped back, landing on my butt in green goo. At the same time, a tiny robotic voice spoke from the shadows under the tub.

*DNA confirmed.*

“DNA... what?” I whispered, staring stupidly at my hand where a small drop of blood had formed.

“What did you do this time, Trevor?” Emily said. “Mom’s lab is *ruined* !”

“Forget being turned into a frog,” Tab said. “She’s going to skin you alive for this.”

That’s when my brain-ice finally broke into a million pieces.

“But... but... *I* didn’t do this!” I said. “Mom-just-got-momnapped-by-some-crazy-scary-metal-octopus-that-came-out-of-this-bathtub-but-the-tub-wasn’t-like-this-it-was-full-of-weird-glowy-water-stuff-and-standing-on-its-end-and—”

“What are you *talking* about?” Emily said.

“I don’t *know*!” I said, honestly. “I just... I mean... but Mom... she...” Suddenly I remembered the robotic voice. “Wait!” I turned back to the tub. “Hello? Are you there?”

“I *did* see the glowing,” Tab said as my sisters joined me by the tub. “You did too, Em.”

“Maybe?” Emily said. “I mean, I don’t know *what* I saw, but—”

*Hello, Trevor Tate*, the robotic voice said from under the tub. *I have a message for you.*

Emily squeaked out a surprised scream and ran back to the stairs.

Tab knelt beside me. “What was that?”

“I don’t know.” I showed her my hand. “But whatever it was, it stung me good.”

As Tab leaned in to look closer, a huge, nasty bug with a billion legs scurried out of the shadows under the tub and ran straight at us.

Tab screamed and fell backwards onto HER butt next to me, while I kicked crazily at the thing. Too fast for me, it scurried right between my legs and jumped onto Tab’s hand. She screamed again and swatted it off into the corner, but not before it dug a scorpion-like tail into her skin.

“OW!” She slapped the back of her hand against her mouth and stared in horror at the now upside-down centipede-scorpion thing.

*DNA Confirmed*, the robotic voice said as the bug righted itself. *Hello, Tabitha Tate. I have a message for you.*

“I thought the message was for me,” I said.

Tab dropped her hand, though her eyes didn’t leave the bug for a second. “Maybe it’s for both of us?”

The bug didn’t bother to answer. Instead, it curled up so that its head met its butt and only a few of its many legs stayed on the floor, like a big, fringed bug ring. Then it started

glowing with a pukey yellow light, and a beam shot out of its center, landing against the far wall like an old-time projector.

The staticky film it played showed a man whose face was mostly hidden by a metallic half mask that covered his nose and mouth, and dark goggles over his eyes. His hair was short and light colored, and he wore a big shiny hoop earring high up on one ear.

“Hello Guts and Glory,” he said in a tinny, old-timey voice. “I’m Dr. Fixit, and I have come to help you fulfill your destiny.”