

## 12 Tootsie Speaks Out

One morning in May, Fudge woke me. "Hurry up," he said. "You're going to be late for school."

"Go away," I mumbled.

But he pulled off my blanket and shook me. "You're *really* going to be late for school."

I looked at my clock-radio. Ten after eight. *How come my alarm didn't go off?* I wondered as I jumped out of bed. I raced into the bathroom, splashed cold water on my face, threw on some clothes and headed downstairs. It was quiet in the kitchen. "Where is everyone?" I asked.

"Ha ha," Fudge sang, jumping up and down. "Ha ha ha . . . it's Saturday! I really fooled you, didn't I?"



"You little . . ." But he was out the back door and running before I could get my hands on him.

I clunked back upstairs and got into bed. *I'm going to kill that kid*, I told myself. *I'm going to tear him to little pieces. I'm going to . . .* I tossed and turned, but it was no use. I couldn't get back to sleep. I heard Tootsie babbling. I got up and walked down the hall to her room. She was sitting up in her crib, flinging out toys, one at a time. She stood up when she saw me, and held out her arms. I lifted her out of her crib.

"Yuck!" I said. "You're smelly." I set her down on her table and changed her diaper. "Yuck!" I said again. The worst thing about babies is diapers. I cleaned her up and dumped plenty of baby powder on her backside.

"Yuck," Tootsie said.

"That's right," I told her. "Yuck."

I carried her down to the kitchen, put her in her high chair, and gave her a bowl of dry cereal to nibble.

Fudge peeked in the back door. As soon as he saw me, he took off again, but this time I chased him. When I caught him I turned him upside down, tossed him over my shoulder and carried him back to the house.

"I'll scream!" he said.

"You do and you're dead," I told him.



"If you hurt me, I'll tell," he said.

"Go ahead and tell." I kicked open the kitchen door.

When Tootsie saw Fudge upside-down, she clapped her hands and laughed. By then Fudge's face had turned dark red.

"Put me down . . . put me down . . ." Fudge cried.

"Never!" I said.

"It was just a joke," he whined. "Can't you even take a joke?"

"Some joke!"

Fudge kicked and hollered, "Put me doooooown!"

"Say *please*," I told him.

"Please."

"Please, what?" I asked.

"Please put me down!"

"Say you'll never wake me up on a Saturday morning again."

"I'll never wake you up on a Saturday morning again."

"Or a Sunday," I added.

"Or a Sunday," he repeated.

"Or a holiday," I said.

"Or a holiday."

"Tell me how sorry you are that you did it today," I said.



"I'm sorry."

"*How* sorry?"

"Very sorry."

"Very *very* sorry?" I asked.

"Yes. Very, very, *very* sorry!"

I stood him up and watched as the blood drained from his face and his color changed from bright purple to flesh.

"Ha ha," he said, wriggling away from me. "I had my fingers crossed behind my back the whole time. So ha ha ha, none of what I just said is true!" He dashed out the back door again.

I shook my head.

"Yuck," Tootsie said. And then she tossed her bowl of dry cereal to the floor.

"How come you're up so early, Peter?" Mom asked an hour later, as she pulled her robe around her and yawned.

"It's a long story," I said.

"Well, it certainly is a beautiful day. No point in wasting it." She poured a cup of milk for Tootsie.

"Where's Fudgie?"

"Outside, with Turtle," I said.

"He's such an early bird," Mom said.

"The early bird catches the worm."



Mom nodded and made herself a cup of coffee.  
I went over to Alex's house. "Let's do something exciting today," I said.

"Like what?" Alex asked.

"That's the problem," I said. "I don't know."

"We could dig worms for Mrs. Muldour," Alex suggested.

"No, it's too early for worms. I told her the fattest ones aren't ready until late summer."

"Well then . . . what?"

"We have to think," I said.

We sat on the sofa watching stupid Saturday-morning cartoons for the next hour. I got an idea in the middle of *Spider-Man*. "How about a picnic?" I said. "It's a perfect day for a picnic."

"Where would we have it?" Alex asked.

"I don't know."

Alex scratched his head. "How about the lake? We could watch the university crew rowing while we have lunch."

"Yeah . . . that's a good idea," I said. "What have you got to eat?"

"Probably nothing," Alex said. We both went into the kitchen. "My mother shops on Saturday afternoons." He opened the refrigerator. "I was right," he said, slamming the door. "Nothing."



"My father shops on Fridays," I said. "Let's go see what we have."

At my house we found cold chicken, tomatoes, rye bread, fresh fruits and frozen lemonade.

"Great!" Alex said. "Let's pack up."

I went to work making sandwiches, while Alex fixed a thermos of lemonade.

"Don't forget the salt," Alex said.

"Right . . . and the mayonnaise," I added.

"You can't bring mayonnaise on a picnic," Alex said.

"Why not?"

"It's too gooey. And besides, it can make you sick."

"Says who?"

"My mother once got food poisoning from eating potato salad on a camping trip," Alex said.

"But we're not taking potato salad."

"It was the mayonnaise *in* the potato salad that did it," Alex said.

"But we're not going camping," I argued. "We're just going to the lake."

"I don't want any mayonnaise on my food," Alex said. "None!"

"Okay . . . fine," I told him, and I spread mayonnaise on my two pieces of bread.

"And don't forget the salt."

I took the saltshaker out of the lunch bag, held it up, and just to make my point, sprinkled some of it onto Alex's head.

"Very funny," he said, shaking it off.

The screen door slammed. It was Fudge and Turtle. Turtle dove into his water dish and started slurping.

Fudge looked around. "What are you doing?"

"What does it look like we're doing?" I said.

"Making lunch," Fudge said.

"That's right. We're going on a picnic."

"We are?" Fudge asked.

"Not we," I told him. "Us. Me and Alex."

"Where are you going for the picnic?"

"The lake."

"I'll come too."

"Oh, no you won't!" I said.

"Why not?" he asked.

"Because you're not invited . . . that's why."

"But I like picnics. And I like the lake."

"Too bad."

"And I said I was sorry . . . remember?"

"Yeah," I said. "And you also told me you had your fingers crossed behind your back, so everything you said was a lie."



"That was a joke," Fudge said. "I didn't *really* have them crossed."

"You know what happens to kids who lie?" I asked.

"No, what?"

"You'll find out." I shoved him out of the way.

He ran out back calling, "Mommy . . . Mommy . . . please can I go to the lake with Pee-tah?"

"No," Mom said.

"Why not?"

"Because it's too far . . . there's a lot of traffic on that road."

Fudge stomped his feet and yelled, "I want to go to the lake! I want to go on a picnic, too!" When he saw us come outside with our lunch bags, he raced toward me and attached himself to my leg. "Take me . . . take me . . . take me . . ." he begged.

"Get lost!" I said, kicking my leg free. "Call Daniel. Count ladybugs. Do something. . . ."

Fudge covered his ears with his hands, opened his mouth and screamed.

"He's going to wind up with a sore throat," Alex said.

"Come on," I said, "let's get out of here."

We hopped on our bikes and coasted down the driveway. Fudge picked up a couple of rocks and



hurled them at us, but he missed. We could still hear him screaming two blocks away.

Alex had to be home for his piano lesson at three-thirty. And by then we'd seen enough of the crew rowing, and more than enough of the bugs down by the lake. Mom and Dad were working in the garden when I rode into the driveway. And Tootsie was asleep in a lounge chair.

"Did you have a nice picnic?" Mom asked.

"It was fun," I said. "A lot of ants, but fun."

"Don't forget to rinse the thermos," Dad said.

"I won't," I said. "Where's Fudge?"

"I haven't seen him since you left," Dad said.

"He's probably at Daniel's," Mom said. "He was very angry."

"I noticed."

At four, the phone rang. It was Daniel's mother. She asked me to tell Daniel it was time to go home. "He's not here," I said.

"Then where is he?" she asked.

"I don't know," I said. "Wait a minute. . . ." I put down the phone, went to the back door and called, "It's Mrs. Manheim . . . she's looking for Daniel."

Mom ran into the house, wiping her hands on her jeans. She picked up the phone. "Mrs. Manheim . . .



we thought Fudge was at your house. . . . No, not since eleven-thirty or so. . . . You found what? . . . Oh, no. . . . You don't suppose . . . Yes . . . of course, right away. . . ." She hung up the phone.

"What is it?" Dad asked. He was standing at the door, listening.

"She found Daniel's piggy bank . . . smashed . . . all the money is gone."

Mom zipped upstairs to Fudge's room. Dad and I followed.

"Bonjour," Uncle Feather said.

"Where does he keep that bank Grandma gave him for his birthday?" Mom asked, ignoring Uncle Feather.

"Here it is!" I said, finding it on his shelf. "And it's empty!"

"Bonjour, stupid . . ." Uncle Feather said.

"Oh, shut up!" I told him.

"Shut up yourself . . . yourself . . . yourself."

"How much do you think he had in there?" Mom asked.

"About two fifty," I said. "He was counting it the other night."

"So between them, they have close to seven dollars," Mom said.

"Seven," Uncle Feather repeated. "Seven . . . seven . . . seven."



"They can't get far on seven dollars," I said.

"Peter, please . . ." Mom said.

A few minutes later, Mrs. Manheim pulled up in a red sports car. She was wearing cutoffs, a T-shirt that said *Ski the Bumps*, and sneakers with the toes cut out. Her hair was in one long braid that hung down her back.

"We think they might have gone to the lake," Dad told her.

"The lake!" Mrs. Manheim said. "My god . . . Daniel can't swim."

"Neither can Fudge," Mom said.

"Yes, he can," I told her. "He can doggy-paddle."

"Peter, please . . ."

"Anyway, why would they go swimming in the lake?" I asked. "It's too gloopy for swimming."

"Peter, please!" Dad said.

"Please, what?" I finally asked.

"Please be quiet. We're thinking."

"Let's not waste any more time," Mrs. Manheim said. "The sooner we start looking for them, the sooner we might find them."

"Warren," Mom said, "you go with Mrs. Manheim . . . I'll stay here with Peter just in case they try to phone us."

When they'd left, Mom asked me to bring Tootsie inside. She was still sound asleep on the lounge chair.



I picked her up and carried her into the house. She opened her eyes and when she saw it was me, she smiled and said, "Yuck."

At five the phone rang. *This is it*, I thought. *It's all over. They've found him, splattered across the road, his bike a mangled mess. Or maybe the Princeton crew has found him. Maybe they've dragged him out of the lake, his face blue and swollen.* I felt a big lump in my throat. *If only I'd let him come on the picnic with me, none of this would have happened. If only I hadn't wanted to kill him when he woke me this morning. Now it was too late.* I pictured the funeral. Fudge and Daniel, side by side, in small white coffins. . . .

"Peter, would you get the phone," Mom said.

I picked up the receiver. "Hello." I almost couldn't get the word out. How was I going to tell Mom if it was bad news?

"Hi, Pee-tah!"

"Fudge! Where are you?"

"Guess. . . ."

"The train station?"

"Nope."

"The bus station?"

"Nope."

"The *police* station?"

"Nope. Do you give up?"

"Yes . . . where are you?"



"At Sandy's Bakery."

"What?"

"Sandy's Bakery."

"Down by the highway?"

"Yes."

"You rode all the way to the highway?"

"It was easy."

"Is Daniel with you?"

"Yes."

Mom grabbed the phone out of my hand. "Fudgie, my angel! I'm so glad you're all right! We've been so worried. Don't move . . . not an inch . . . we'll be right down to get you."

We jumped into the car. I arranged Tootsie in her car seat and we took off. We found Dad and Mrs. Manheim driving around by the lake, told them the good news, and they followed us all the way to the traffic circle and the highway.

Fudge and Daniel were standing outside the bakery. They looked very small. Fudge was holding a paper bag with SANDY'S printed on it. Mom parked, jumped out of the car and hugged Fudge. "I'm so glad to see you!"

I felt another, different kind of lump in my throat this time.

"Be careful, Mommy," Fudge said. "You'll squash your brownies."



When we got back to our house, Fudge settled into Mom's favorite chair and said, "We went to the deli next to Sandy's for lunch. We shared a pastrami sandwich."

"We each had three pickles," Daniel added, relaxing in Dad's chair. "And a cream soda."

Mom, Dad and Mrs. Manheim sat in a row, on the sofa, facing the runaways.

"You know that what you did today was wrong," Mom began.

"It was inconsiderate and foolish," Dad said.

"Not to mention *dangerous*," Mom added.

"And stupid!" I said.

"And while we're very glad to see you," Mrs. Manheim said, "we're also very angry!"

"*Very!*" Mom said.

"And you'll have to be punished," Dad said.

Fudge and Daniel looked at each other.

"What do you suggest?" Dad asked them.

"Put us to bed at eight o'clock tonight," Fudge said.

"That doesn't seem appropriate," Mom said.

"Seven o'clock?" Daniel asked, yawning.

"Yes," Mrs. Manheim told him. "Because you're tired. But that's not a suitable punishment."

"Why don't you take away their bicycles for a



month?" I suggested, expecting everyone to shout "*Peter, please. . . .*" Suddenly the room was very quiet.

"No!" Fudge shouted.

"Not fair!" Daniel hollered.

Mom, Dad, and Mrs. Manheim exchanged looks.

"I think that makes a lot of sense," Dad finally said.

"I think so, too," Mrs. Manheim said.

"I agree," Mom said.

I couldn't believe it. They'd finally taken me seriously.

"But how will we get to school?" Fudge asked, pouting.

"You'll walk," Mom told him. "The way you did before you had bicycles."

"But, Mommy," Fudge began, "if you love me . . ."

"It's because I love you," Mom said. "It's because we all love you and care about you. . . ."

Fudge stood up and stomped his feet. "I'm sorry I bought you any brownies!"

Dad took their bicycles, chained them together, and set them on a shelf in the garage. "I hope you both learn that you can't run away every time something happens that you don't like."

"Running away doesn't solve anything," Mom said.

"We had a good time," Daniel said, "so ha ha!"



"And a good lunch," Fudge said. "And we showed you we *are* old enough to ride to the lake! So there!"

"Oh, no you didn't," Dad said. "You showed us you aren't ready for the privilege of riding your bicycles."

Fudge and Daniel looked at each other again. And this time they both started crying.

We ordered pizza for supper. Daniel stopped crying long enough to remind Mom, "I don't eat anything with peas or onions."

"How could I forget?" Mom said.

After Daniel and Mrs. Manheim had gone home, Mom put her new Mozart CD on the stereo and we sat around the living-room table, working on our family picture puzzle. It's a mountain scene at sunset, and so far we've got one corner of it put together.

"Pee-tah ran away one time," Fudge said, chewing on a piece of puzzle.

I took it away from him and said, "I *thought* about running away . . . but I never went through with it." I found a matching piece and snapped it into place.

"And Daddy ran away when he didn't want to work anymore," Fudge said, stacking up the orange pieces.

"What are you talking about?" Dad asked.

"That's why we moved to Princeton, isn't it?" Fudge said.



"No, of course not," Dad told him. "What ever gave you that idea?"

"I figured it out myself," Fudge said.

"Well, that's just not true!" Dad said.

"Then why did we come to Princeton?" Fudge asked.

"For a change," Dad explained.

"That's why I wanted to go to the lake," Fudge said. "For a change."

"Speaking of Princeton . . . and changes," Mom said, polishing off her third brownie, "Millie and George will be back soon, and we have to decide what to do."

"What do you mean?" I said.

"Well, either we have to find another house here, or we have to get ready to move back to the city."

"You mean we have a choice?" I asked. "I always thought we were living in Princeton for the year . . . and that was it."

Tootsie toddled over, reached up, grabbed a handful of sunset pieces, and ran away with them.

"Hey . . . come back with those," I said, chasing her across the room. I handed her a rubber mouse, and she dropped the puzzle pieces.

"I'm not crazy about the idea of commuting," Dad said, "but if the rest of you want to stay in Princeton, I'll do it."



"Commuting?" I asked.

"Yes," Dad said. "I'm going back to work at the agency."

"No more writing?" I asked.

"Not for now," Dad said. "I've found out I'm not very good at it. I may never finish my book."

I knew he wouldn't. But I didn't say so.

"I'm very good at advertising, though," Dad continued. "And I'm anxious to get back to work." He looked at me. "But that doesn't mean I want to be president of the agency, Peter."

"I know . . . I know . . ." I said. "What about you, Mom? What are you going to do?"

"Well . . . with Daddy going back to work at the agency, I'd really like to get started on my art history classes . . . maybe at N.Y.U."

"That's in the city, isn't it?"

"Yes," Mom said. "In Greenwich Village."

"So you *both* want to go back to the city?" I asked.

They touched hands and Mom said, "I guess we do."

"What about you, Peter?" Dad asked. "What do you want to do?"

"I don't know," I said. "I'm used to it here, but I still miss New York."

"I don't remember New York," Fudge said.

"Of course you do," I told him.



"No, I don't," he said. "Can I ride my bike there?"

"In some places," I said. "Like Central Park."

"I remember Central Park," Fudge said.

"And you remember our apartment," I told him.

"And the elevator and Henry . . ."

"Oh, that's right. I forgot about Henry and the elevator."

Mom and Dad laughed.

"What about you, Tootsie?" Fudge said. "Where do you want to live . . . Princeton or New York?"

"Yuck!" Tootsie said.

"Did you hear that?" Fudge asked.

"Yuck!" Tootsie said again.

Mom and Dad exchanged surprised looks.

"That's Tootsie's first word," Fudge said. "She wants to live in New York, too!"

"Nu yuck!" Tootsie said.

I realized that I was the only one who knew that Tootsie had been saying *yuck* all day. And I wasn't about to tell them that it had nothing to do with the city.

"That makes it unanimous!" Fudge said.

"What a big word," Mom said.

"I know a lot of big words," Fudge told her. "You'd be surprised at how many big words I know."

"Fudgie," Mom said, "you're just full of surprises."

. . .



So, we're going back, I thought. *Back to The Big Apple. Back to our apartment. Back to Jimmy Fargo and Sheila Tubman and my rock in the park. Back to walking Turtle and back to the Pooper-Scooper. But it's worth it. It's all worth it.* I picked up Tootsie and swung her around. I couldn't help laughing. And Tootsie laughed too. To some people there's no place like Nu Yuck. And I guess I'm one of them!