

THE DUTCH OVEN

AN ORIGIN STORY

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CHAPTER 1

THE SLIDETACKLE

I quickly rolled over onto my back. My face was red and dripping with sweat. I spat out the grass blades, which ended up in my mouth when Ike pushed me face first into the ground. This is ridiculous! The fifth grade is hard enough without this being the worst year of my life. In the last 12 months, my dad died. As if this wasn't bad enough, we moved to a new town to get a fresh start. My mom took a full-time job, which left me and my little sister to take care of ourselves. I have no friends, no life, and no hope for anything to change. Before dad died, I had a good life, a lot of friends, and a great school. Things were perfect. But now... it seems like I couldn't buy a friend, even if I was the world's richest person. On top of this, now the most popular kid in the fifth grade is out to get me. Life isn't fair.

I jumped up on my feet and got right in Ike's face. His face flushed with anger as he pushed me. I pushed him back. He pushed me again. Our classmates looked like they were watching the ball in a tennis match. This continued until Mr. Koontz, our PE teacher, broke it up and gave us both detention.

It's just more proof that the universe is out to get me. I

didn't push Ike to the ground. He pushed me. He pushed me and now I have detention! Why does this stuff always happen to me? Life was so much better before moving to this God-forsaken place.

I wanted to get through the day, and now detention, without further problems. I had to pick up my fourth-grade sister at her school, walk her home, make us dinner, and get us settled for the night. Aubrey went to a different school—a school for the brainiacs. She is everything I'm not: smart, well-behaved, and popular. Every day I picked her up was yet another reminder I was a disappointing failure. My mom worked late every night. This meant I made sure Aubrey ate, did her homework, and went to bed at a reasonable time. I can't believe I am in charge of my sister when I'm only in the fifth grade. But that's my life.

I made it through the school day without further incident. Because I was the new kid, no one ever talked to me. It didn't help my case that I had been in more than a few pushing matches with students other than Ike. I was no stranger to detention, but it was giving me the chance to know Whitman better. He looked like a real-life stick figure with a mustache. I didn't really hate Whitman, but I didn't like him either. From what I could tell, most students felt the same way.

I focused on my math homework for the first part of detention. It didn't take long before my stomach started hurting, which I knew was an ominous sign. What I haven't told you is that I love beans. Any kind of beans. Even garbanzo beans. I would eat beans for breakfast, lunch, and dinner if I could. My love of beans often came back to haunt me. Or better put, my love of beans often came back to haunt the people around me. They didn't call me Deadly Danny for no

reason. I didn't want more attention today, so I did my best to focus on my math to keep from thinking about my stomach.

I looked up and saw Ike across the room. He was trying to get my attention. What does he want with me? He'd done enough today. I looked up again. Ike was scowling at me as if to say, "I'm not done with you." This is a disaster. Nothing good would come from being Ike's enemy. I had no desire to be less popular than I already was. I looked back to my homework, put my head down, and focused on my math.

A few minutes later, I heard what sounded like someone trying to get my attention. I looked up and scanned the room. I noticed Ike's wide eyes staring at me. It didn't take long for Mr. Whitman to shut this down. Whitman looked at both of us and then shushed us. I waited for him to look away, but he never did. This was enough for Ike to return to his homework. I couldn't get back to work because I couldn't stop thinking about what Ike wanted from me.

As soon as detention was over, I packed up my backpack and escaped out the back door. I needed to avoid Ike and get to Aubrey's school to pick her up. I was already late. But she was getting used to that.

As I walked, Ike consumed me. What did he want from me?! All I could think was that Ike wanted to finish what he started on the soccer field. But the last thing I needed in my life was more trouble.

CHAPTER 2

DINNER, DREAMS & FARTS

I picked Aubrey up at school, where she was enjoying time with friends at the after-school program.

My fourth-grade sister is everything I am not. She's smart and gets perfect grades without studying hard at all. She's in the fourth grade and it's not as difficult as the fifth grade, but she is way smarter than me. Aubrey has a lot of friends and everyone seems to love her. I hate to admit it but I'm jealous of her. She doesn't understand how lucky she is, and this bugs me even more. She is comfortable with herself. I don't always treat her well. But no matter what I do, she is kind to me. This sometimes makes me even more angry. I don't get why she isn't mad about the unfairness of our lives. I don't understand why she's OK with the fact that our dad is dead, or that we moved to a new town. I also hate that I have to take care of her because of my mom's job at the hospital. I didn't ask for any of this. It's like someone is punishing me for all the bad things I've done.

We arrived home and stepped into our small little two-story house and the familiar feeling hit me. I don't hate everything about our new town. I love our home. It's small. But it's home. It's the one place where I feel safe. My two favorite

things are my upstairs room and the massive elm tree right in the middle of our front yard. I can see it from my bedroom window. Both my room and the tree are places I can escape, be alone, and feel safe. I could sit for hours on my bed or in the tree and remember how life used to be all while hoping life could be that good again.

“Danny!”

I snapped back into the here and now and raise my eyes to see Aubrey standing in my doorway. She is staring at me, waiting for an answer to a question I never heard.

“Hello?! Is anyone home? I’ve said your name at least 10 times.” Aubrey said this with the wide-eyed look of someone who had seen a unicorn farting lasers out of its butt.

“Sorry,” I mumbled.

“What’s for dinner?” Aubrey asked.

“I know what I’m eating,” I said with a grin. “What do you want for dinner tonight?”

“I definitely don’t want beans!” Aubrey said with a look of disgust on her face.

I worked on dinner, making lima beans for myself and a frozen pizza for my sister. I love lima beans. Who am I kidding? I love everything in the legume family.

My day went from bad to worse as I open the oven to check on the pizza and see a charred, warped frisbee in its place. This was the final straw. I’ve had enough of this day. My stomach rumbled and hurt as my anger grew. I grabbed the frisbee out of the oven and threw it across the kitchen, muttering a word which landed me in detention two times this year. In my anger, I forgot about the oven’s heat and it felt like my fingers were on fire. My stomach began rumbling with a force I knew meant only one thing—I could no longer hold back this butt bomb. I don’t always have control over my farts. Especially when I’m angry. Sometimes the retro-rocket launches itself without my permission. And they smell bad. Real bad. Some have even said they are lethal.

Three years ago, I was hanging out with some friends playing football at a park. Some kids challenged us to a game and we took them up on that challenge. We got lost bad. I'm not the best athlete in my school. I'm not even in the top 20. But I hate losing. It makes me angry. My anger, combined with the green beans I ate for breakfast, resulted in what I can only call, "breaking the sound barrier without a plane." Immediately after I farted, my friends took off running. They knew better than to stick around. Our opponents were unaware of my special talent so they didn't run. Regretting this decision, one kid began coughing and gagging. It sounded like he was going to toss his cookies. And his small intestines. Another kid began tearing up. He thought he had gone blind and could no longer see anything. The third kid got the worst of it. Without as much as a word, he fell to the ground and was out like a light. At first, I thought I had killed him. After shaking him for a few minutes, he came to and couldn't remember anything that happened. I couldn't believe my bean butt-gas was so powerful. My friends had no problem believing it.

Aubrey walked into the kitchen and started laughing at me, which only made me angrier. "Aww Danny, it smells like a large animal died in here," Aubrey smiled. "Your farts could be a superpower."

"That's a funny thought." I said. "Could you imagine?" This lightened my mood a little, but it also got me wondering why my farts didn't affect Aubrey like they did my friends. The timer interrupted this thought alerting me it was bean o'clock.

"Dinner time!" I shouted with a grin as I took my beans off the burner and dumped them into a bowl. "It's time to reload." I said with a chuckle.

The night wasn't a complete failure. I ate my delicious beans while Aubrey ate cereal. She didn't complain too much. At least I could do one thing right.

I couldn't wait to climb in bed, fall asleep, and not think about my day. I was ready for it to be over.

One of my favorite things about my room is my loft bed. My loft bed sits against my window, looking out over the front yard. I can sit or lie down on my bed and see that majestic elm tree in the front yard. I love falling asleep and waking up experiencing my two favorite things in the world.

That night I fell right asleep. I didn't even remember my mom coming home after her shift and kissing me good night. I was out cold. About 4 in the morning that changed, when I awoke to a sound outside my window. I opened my eyes, rubbing them to shake the sleep off, and couldn't believe what I saw! Peeking out from behind the elm tree, was Ike, his eyes boring holes in me. I immediately shook my head and blinked my eyes. When my eyes returned to the elm tree, instead of Ike, I saw what looked like a stray dog peeing on my favorite tree. I stared for what seemed like forever. The dog was still there but Ike was nowhere to be found. My mind spun like a hamster on a hamster wheel. Did I see Ike? Was I dreaming? Where did the dog come from? Is my mind playing tricks on me? Has my gas built up and spread to my brain, causing me to hallucinate?

I stayed up for hours thinking and watching the tree. It didn't take long for the dog to wander off down the street. I must have fallen asleep because my alarm clock jolted me awake at 6:45 in the morning for yet another day in paradise.

CHAPTER 3

A FART & A NEW FRIEND

All I wanted was to go unnoticed at school that morning. I wanted everyone to leave me alone. It's not that I don't like people. I genuinely want friends. I just don't see it happening this year. For whatever reason, the most popular kid in the fifth grade hates me. If I can make it through this year, next year might be better. It stinks because I've always had friends. I may not have been the most popular guy in the class, but I definitely wasn't the least popular like now. Life has changed for the worse.

The wind was not making life easy for me today. Ever since we moved to this stupid town, I developed allergies. It results in massive sneeze attacks, which make going unnoticed next to impossible. I spent the entire morning fighting off sneezes. That battle ended in one massively embarrassing moment.

It happened in the classroom immediately after lunch. My nose started tingling and I did all the usual things to keep from sneezing. Nothing worked. As I sneezed, I got so focused on the sneeze I forgot about the fart I had been holding in. When I sneezed, I also farted at the same time. I