

CHAPTER ONE

Jerome

ONE MONDAY MORNING, a couple years before my cousin Mike shot me in the forehead with an arrow, my eighth-grade homeroom teacher brought two cartons of raw eggs to school.

“Who can tell me what these are?” Mrs. Domino said. She was wearing her second-hottest skirt, the one with the cherries on it. Score.

I shot my hand up because that was an easy question, and if I answered something right at the beginning of the week, I could go the other four days without opening my mouth except to breathe.

“Jerome?” she said.

“Those are eggs.”

I put my palm out so Trip Wexler, who sat next to me, could give me some skin.

“I am sorry, that is incorrect,” Mrs. Domino said. Then Trip Wexler left me hanging.

She called on Darcy Parker, who was all, “Those are our egg babies? We get to take them home? And look after them for a week? You told us about them last Wednesday? In health?”

Darcy looked right at me when she answered, like she was getting extra points because I’d messed up again, but here’s what I think. Someone who is an encyclopedia with a decent set of legs doesn’t need to answer a question with a question.

“Very good, Darcy,” Mrs. Domino said. She turned and sort of swished to her desk, and I tried not to stare directly at her behind, which was tough because it was pretty much at eye level and ever since that one time I’d seen her on a weekend at a car show when she was wearing jeans and a flannel shirt tied at the waist, I was thinking of her more in a Bible sense than a schoolbook sense. I looked at Trip Wexler’s shoes instead, which helped because he had drawn pictures on them of the Devil with nunchuks.

Mrs. Domino picked up a stack of assignments and gave one to each of us, and when she got to my desk, I dropped mine on the floor. I was hoping she’d pick it up, because, *gold mine!* But she didn’t. She just gave me a look. I slid down in my desk until I was low enough to reach my assignment, only I couldn’t sink far enough, so I had to slide back up and then get out of my chair and bend over myself.

The sheet had all the rules of the egg-baby drill, but I just skipped to the cartoon on the bottom, which is how I found out about the prize for keeping our eggs alive: two free passes to the Uptown Cinerama.