

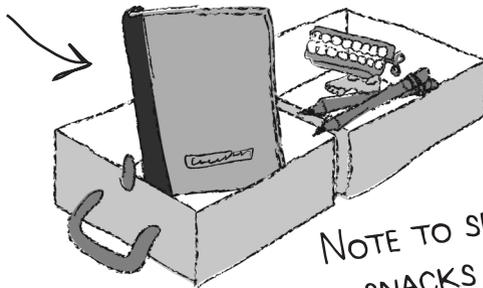
THE FOG TEST

Bee was in the fort, waiting for us. She's the new kid we hang out with sometimes, even though she's basically a girl.

I plopped down to rest, and Bee handed me the lunchbox we keep in the fort to store our stuff. Inside was a pencil and the brand-new, blank sketchbook my artsy grandma, Goosy, had given me—the very one I'm now writing in.

SKETCHBOOK B WHEN IT WAS STILL BLANK.

WIND-UP TEETH TOY WE FOUND AT THE POOL.



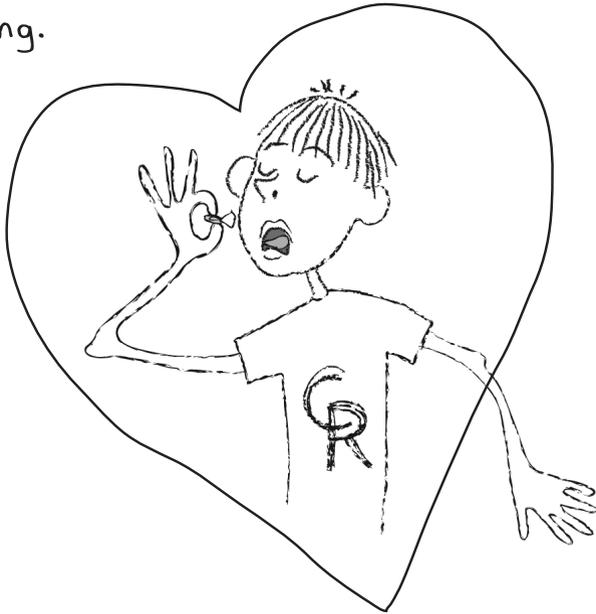
NOTE TO SELF:
BRING SNACKS TO KEEP
IN LUNCHBOX. WHAT'S
A LUNCHBOX WITHOUT
FOOD IN IT, ANYWAY?



It had been a couple of weeks since I'd finished filling up the "A" sketchbook. Summer vacation was almost half over, and both Goosy and Mr. Mot had been asking me how the second sketchbook was coming along. "Oh, it's fine," I kept saying. I didn't want to admit that I hadn't started it yet. I was only on B, and already I had cartoonist's block.*

So I was sitting there trying to think of something to write or draw. But instead I kept thinking about whether to get a) a taquito and a Slushie or b) a doughnut and a Slushie when we went to the convenience store later.

And then I noticed that Jack was kissing the ring.



“What?! Are you actually smooching that thing?” I asked.

“No, I’m breathing on it,” Jack said.

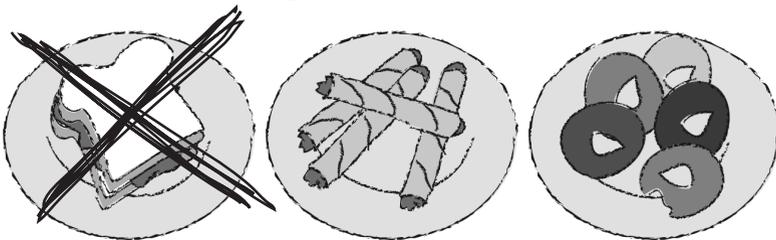
“OK...because rings enjoy...peanut butter breath?” (You know how some kids bring peanut butter sandwiches to school every single day in their lunchboxes? That’s Jack. Plain peanut butter sandwiches for lunch ad nauseum, even during summer vacation.)

“No, because one way to tell if it’s a diamond is to breathe on it. A diamond won’t fog up.”

“Look! It’s not fogging up!” said Bee.

“Nope,” said Jack.

“Ah c’mon,” I said. “There’s no way that thing is real. Besides, am I the only one who can hear my stomach growling? Let’s go get taquitos...or doughnuts...or taquitos...”



WHICH WOULD YOU CHOOSE?

Jack shrugged. "Well, I guess it is unlikely we'd find a real diamond in the gutter. Plus, it does look a lot like the toy ring I gave Sasha when I was little."



HE'S NICE, BUT HE'S NO PRINCE CHARMING.

Sasha is the girly-girl who lives next door to Jack. When he was 5 and she was 7, he asked her to marry him. Fortunately she said no.

"Let's just put the ring in the lunchbox for now," said Bee. "Time to race. Last one to the convenience store is a dung beetle!"

Sigh.

