

## Dumpster Diving

David hummed happily out of tune to the fast-paced song thrumming loudly in his ears as he bounced down the front steps and across the street. He may not be able to go up the front steps, but he could damn skippy go down them. He waved cheerfully at the school's crossing guard as he careened across the street and pulled a wheelie to get over the curb.

He turned down the deserted service lane a few blocks from his house. It was rough going as the service lane had potholes and uneven gravel from one end to the other. He was assaulted by the unpleasant aromas coming from the dumpsters that lined the service lane, but it was a small price to pay for his freedom after school.

*Phew! That one beside the white van must have a dead body in it,* David thought, picking up the pace. His meandering thoughts were abruptly cut short by a smack to the back of his head. His earphones slid in front of his face, and he grabbed at them while whirling his Quicky Eclipse space-age designed wheelchair around to see what had hit him. With his hand, he felt something slimy sticking to the back of his head and neck.

Looking at the goo in his hand, which strongly resembled decomposing garbage sludge, and at the source of the goo, David did his best Vin Diesel I'm-gonna-kick-your-butt look. Standing about twenty feet away was none other than his arch nemesis Brian. It appeared that Brian felt he needed backup and had brought along a couple of his demented cronies. Apparently, Brian was more steamed up about the garbage dumping than David expected.

"Look. I know you're ugly and your mother dresses you funny, but is that really a good reason to act like a schizophrenic homicidal egomaniac?" David cocked his head to the side and flashed his best you're-a-total-moron smile at Brian. "Oops, did I use big words you didn't understand?"

Brian's acne-marred face screwed up in anger. David wondered briefly if it was possible for Brian's eyes to become even beadier. They were rather small and pig-like to begin with, and the red blustering cheeks really didn't do much for Brian's complexion. The zits were fiery-looking enough without the added flush of rage. Someone seriously could use the benefit of Proactiv.

"You are sooo dead, dork!"

"Dude, seriously. What is your major malfunction?" David tried diplomacy.

"I know it was you! You dumped the garbage on me! It's payback time, gimp!" Brian sneered. David thought he more closely resembled someone trying to hold back a

wave of gut-wrenching diarrhea. *Constipation has a new name, and its name was Brian.*

The three bullies stood shoulder to shoulder, their backpacks now resting on the ground at their feet. Brian was slightly overweight and wore his shirts one size too small so that one couldn't help but notice his girth—his bowlful of jelly that shook when he laughed. Or ran. Or walked. Or pretty much whenever he did anything but sit and pick his nose. It was that girth, and not his charming personality, that landed him a position on the Junior Varsity football team.

Bulldozer Brian is what a lot of kids called him. Not that it mattered to Brian. In his mind, he attained his popularity just because he was on the football team. However, had he really been popular there would have been a crowd with him instead of two other boys. Well, if he'd really been popular and widely liked at school, he wouldn't be cornering some disabled kid in an alley, no matter what smelly pranks that kid had come up with.

Leroy and Gerald, the two boys with Brian, were also on the football team. They were both bigger than David. If he was a horse in a race, David wouldn't bet on his chances of winning at the moment. Or even finishing the race for that matter!

Leroy swung his baseball cap so that the bill faced behind him and took a step toward David. When Leroy smiled, the world became a brighter place. Actually Leroy's smile was a good look at a PPO dental plan gone wrong. Leroy grabbed David's backpack and, showing more of those rotten bicuspid, upended it and dumped all of David's things onto the ground. He then threw the backpack at David, which David caught with a pained grunt.

*Be calm, Grasshopper, wait for the right time,* David thought and tried to stare down Leroy. Or more accurately, stared up at Leroy. "So, does that make you feel like a man?" David asked, gesturing to his books in the dirt and miscellaneous papers floating around.

Leroy cackled. "I'm more of a man than you'll ever be, gimp."

"Ah, wounded to the quick," David grabbed his chest in imitation of a heart attack.

David's dad had always told him to turn the other cheek and walk away when facing a bully. Well, David only turned the other cheek to prevent getting sores on his butt, and he obviously couldn't "walk away". So, here was the dilemma. Should he stand and fight or wheel away? A Clash tune popped into his head. *Should I stay? Or should I go now? Reality check!* Instead, he opted for a third approach. He would use his superior intellect and talk his way out of trouble—or at least make the attempt.

"Seriously, guys. Let's talk about this. Do you really want the school paper to write about this? Imagine, if you will, the headlines reading, 'Three football jerks—I mean, jocks!—corner poor, defenseless, disabled kid in back alley!' I mean, c'mon! What would the cheerleaders say?"

"What did he mean by that?" Leroy asked Brian. "When did that happen? I didn't see that."

Gerald looked perplexed. "What *would* the cheerleaders say?"

"You think Coach would make us run extra laps for this?"

"Never mind! Wheels is just blabbing, so let's make him blubber instead. Payback time!" Brian grinned. "Talk all you want. This time you're going to walk the talk instead of talking the walk!"

Leroy and Gerald looked more confused than normal. "What?" they said simultaneously.

"Touche. As always, Brian, your oratory genius again leaves me speechless with wonder—as in I wonder if there is anything up there." David tapped his head as he spoke.

Brian's friends both laughed until Brian glared at them before lunging forward and pushing David hard in the chest. David's attempt to block the attack only earned him two, bruised forearms. Grabbing the front bar on David's chair, Brian gave a mighty heave, lifting the front and throwing David off-balance.

*Guess you can only talk your way out of something if the other party is willing to listen*, David thought. *Lesson learned*. He gripped his wheels tightly and tried to push them forward to ram the wheelchair into Brian in a futile attempt to get free.

"Give me a hand," Brian grunted. Each of his cronies grabbed a wheel and lifted. Together, they carried David toward the dumpster. Getting roughly jostled, David was too busy hanging on to effectively fight back. He felt like the unwilling sacrificial offering to the primitive dumpster god of football imbeciles.

Had he been in a mood to reflect upon recent events, David would have seen this as an ironic twist of fate as it appeared the dead-body smell had been a foreshadowing of things to come.

"Come on, guys! This isn't funny anymore. Put me down!" David demanded.

"What's wrong, smart boy? Nothing smart to say?" Gerald asked.

"Wow, Gerald. Finally he speaks! You write your own material or does Brian help you?" David replied before good sense could stop him. Gerald growled in response. *Yep. Brian definitely did have to help him write his own material.*

Reaching the dumpster, Brian looked David directly in the eye and smiled. "Up, up, and away! S'matter? Cat got your tongue?" For once David was, in fact, speechless. Did Brian just giggle? "Let's see you talk your way out of this one, gimp."

Together the three boys gave a mighty heave, lifting David, chair and all, up toward the lip of the dumpster. Forgetting he had his seatbelt on, David struggled frantically as he tried to jump from his chair onto the three goons. He wasn't going to go

down without a fight. As the chair reached the apex and started to tilt back, David thought he heard a low, menacing growl coming from somewhere below.

Too late, he finally got the seatbelt undone, and David felt himself slipping forward off his chair. The wheelchair balanced on the edge of the dumpster where it teetered but did not fall in. For a moment David thought he was going to luck out and manage to swing his weight back toward the ground instead of into the dumpster.

“Since you like playing with garbage so much, you should feel right at home, Wheels.” Then Brian, always the helpful one, gave one last heave and over the edge David and chair went to join the other dead body already inside the dumpster.