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My name is Sandy, and I'm twelve. Sandra Jean Johnson, if you're really mad at me. But usually everybody calls me Sandy, except my brother Tim. He calls me a lot of other dumb names . . . names that he makes up, mostly. Silly names . . . like *Sandy-Pandy* and *Sandra Jean, the Queen of Mean*. Which isn't fair, because I'm not mean. And he calls me *Munchkin*. I hate that one the worst. It even *sounds* bad.

Munchkin.

I'm a year older than he is, but I'm about an inch shorter. Just because of that, he calls me Munchkin.

I hate being called that.

I have sandy-blond hair that fits my name perfectly. It's just past my shoulders.

Once I got it cut real short, but I didn't like it. Now I wear it long, sometimes in a pony-tail or a French braid. Tim has hair a little darker than mine, only his is a lot shorter.

Of all the seasons, I like summer the best. We live in Birmingham, Michigan, but we spend the whole summer on Mackinac Island. It's about a five hour drive from our house in Birmingham.

Mackinac Island is an island in Lake Huron, which is one of the Great Lakes. Actually, in my opinion, it's bigger than a Great Lake. It's HUGE! Much bigger than any lake I've ever seen. It's so blue and beautiful that sometimes I never want to leave. There are lots of trees on the island, and I meet lots of cool new friends every summer. Every summer we have a blast.

Except for *this* summer.

This summer turned into a horrible nightmare—worse than I could have ever imagined.

But first, I guess I have to tell you about what went on *last* summer. That's when something really weird happened.

Tim and I were at our Uncle Jerry's house . . . that's the house we stay at on Mackinac Island. Mom and dad and Tim and I stay with Uncle Jerry and Aunt Ruth. We stay from June all the way till school starts. It's so much fun! Aunt Ruth and Uncle Jerry are really nice. Their house is really big and pretty and it's right near the water. They have a

dock that extends way out over the lake. There's even a diving board there! We swim a lot and go for boat rides.

I asked Dad one day if I could ride my bike all the way around the paved footpath that goes around the island. It's a long way . . . like eight miles or something.

"Okay," Dad told me. "But Tim has to go with you."

"Great," I whispered, rolling my eyes. I did NOT want Tim to go with me!

Tim was in his bedroom playing his Game Boy, but he heard us talking. "Hey, that sounds like fun!" he yelled. He ran into the living room where I was. "Let's go Munchkin!" he said.

Terrific.

"Come on, slow poke!" he said, running out the door. He already had his helmet on!

I wish I could do some things all by myself once in a while.

But something was about to happen on the bike trip that made me glad that we were together.

REALLY glad.

## 2

My bike is red. Tim's is blue. They're mountain bikes . . . we each got one for Christmas that year. Before that, we rented bikes from a store on the island.

Anyway, we peddled through downtown. I LOVE downtown Mackinac Island! They don't allow cars on the island—anywhere! We can ride our bikes in the middle of the street if we want to.

But—

You have to watch out! There are lots of other people on bikes and even more people walking . . . but the thing you really have to watch out for is the horses! On Mackinac Island, horses are used to pull carriages and wagons! Since there are no cars, horses pull buggies around the island. The buggies and

carriages carry everything from luggage to supplies to people. You can even go for a tour on a horse drawn carriage if you want.

But the best thing about downtown is the delicious aroma of sweet, tantalizing fudge! It's everywhere—drifting out from the stores, through open doors and windows—yum! I could eat fudge all day.

You probably could, too, if you stayed on Mackinac Island all summer.

“Watch out!” I suddenly yelled at Tim. He wasn't watching where he was going and he almost ran into a man pushing a cart! Tim swerved just in time. That was a close one.

We rode through town and continued on the paved blacktop path that winds all around the island. It's a fun ride. You can see boats on the water, and even the Michigan mainland in the distance. And seagulls! There are lots of seagulls whirling above and sitting near the shore.

When we were about halfway around the island, Tim stopped. “I'm tired,” he said. “I need to rest.” He hopped off and laid his bike against a tree. He took his helmet off and set it on his bike seat.

For the first time in my life, I think I actually agreed with him. I was tired, too.

I hopped off my bike and walked down to the water where Tim was. He was skipping rocks.

I picked up a nice flat rock and let it fly. It

skipped fifteen times!

“Showoff!” Tim said. But he was just jealous. He knew he couldn’t skip a rock fifteen times if he tried! I felt proud.

Suddenly, he turned and pointed. “Look at that!” he said.

I turned and I couldn’t believe what I saw. I mean . . . I just couldn’t! I had to get closer and get a better look.

And THAT’S what got us into trouble.

### 3

It was a man! A very small man, sitting in a great big tree. He had long gray hair that flowed over his shoulders and a long gray beard. And a tall, funny hat that was cone-shaped. The hat had silver and gold stars all over it. He was wearing a long white robe. Boy! Did he look out of place on Mackinac Island, not to mention the fact that he was sitting in a tree! He looked like he was a magician or something.

The tree he was sitting in was really old looking. It had a lot of long, black spiny branches, like thin fingers, but no leaves. I was sure that the tree was dead.

“Hello!” Tim shouted. He said it so loud and unexpectedly that I jumped. I hate it when he does

that.

The sound must have scared the man because all of a sudden he disappeared! I caught a flash of his white robe, and it looked like he just ran along the branch and into the tree!

Tim wanted to find out where he went. “Come on, Munchkin!” he said, running past our bikes and into the woods.

“Quit calling me Munchkin!” I scolded. But I followed him anyway.

The forest on the other side of the paved footpath was really thick. There was no trail so I had to use my arms to pull branches and limbs out of my way. It was so thick that it was hard to walk. Trees grew close together and there were vines and small branches everywhere.

I accidentally walked into a spider web and the thin gooey string stuck to my face. Pitooey! I hate spiders. I wiped the sticky web away with my hands and continued after Tim.

But there was something that was very strange.

We walked and walked, but we couldn't find the little old man! It was like he just disappeared completely. Weird.

Tim stopped beneath the old tree, looking up and around. “I wonder where he went,” he said, gazing up into the branches. I stopped walking too.

I looked up, peering through the dense limbs

above, but I didn't see any sign of the man. I was really hoping I would be the first to see the tiny man again. Tim is always discovering new things first, but I wanted to be first this time.

The forest was very quiet. On Mackinac Island you obviously don't hear any cars, because there aren't any. Once in a while you hear a plane overhead. But all we could hear in the forest were birds. Birds and crickets.

"He couldn't just disappear into thin air," I said.

"Maybe he disappeared into fat air," Tim said, making fun of me.

"There's no such thing as fat air!" I said. But then again, maybe there was. I didn't know for sure.

We stared up into the trees for a few more seconds, but we didn't see any sign of the man with the white robe and funny hat.

"Let's go back," Tim said finally, taking one last look up into the trees. I followed his gaze and we squinted up into the sky.

No funny old man. He had disappeared.

I turned and started to walk back to the footpath. My feet crunched on sticks and branches.

"Aaahhhhhgggghh!!" someone screamed in terror, and I recognized the voice instantly.

*That someone was Tim!*

We hope you enjoyed your preview!

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