



MY NAME IS BUZZY BAXTER

. . . and I have a story to tell about a fourth grade science experiment that led to a crazy result.

My full name is Bertram Aloysius Baxter. Dorky, right? Lucky for me, back in second grade, my best friend Jeff Woodhouse nicknamed me Buzzy, and the name stuck. I was born on April Fool's Day—my parents say that's why I'm such a joker. I have a little sister named Max and a baby brother on the way. Or maybe another sister, as Mom and Dad keep reminding me. Also living in our house is my grandma from California, who we call Grams. She's staying until the baby comes.

I'm in fourth grade at Filbert Elementary School in Mr. Del Duca's class. I have the best seat in the room, back by the table that holds the hamster cage.

Mr. Del Duca—Mr. D, for short—brought the hamster to class the first week of school. We named the little guy Nibbles because of the way he nib-nib-nibbles with his tiny hamster teeth. Nibbles has shiny brown eyes and fur the color of Goldfish crackers. He likes eating Goldfish crackers too, and I sneak him a few now and then. Hamsters usually sleep during the day and play at night, but the noise in our classroom keeps Nibbles awake a lot during school time.

Okay—you've met me and you've heard about Nibbles. Time to start the story . . .

CHAPTER 1



THE SCIENCE EXPERIMENT

Mr. Del Duca is the first man teacher I've ever had. He played basketball in college, and he keeps telling us that he turned down a thirty-million-dollar pro contract to become a teacher and mold impressionable young minds. I tell him he should have taken the thirty-mil and let someone else do the molding. But Mr. D has us do some pretty sweet stuff in school. Like the science experiments. That's why we like him.

“This year in science class, you're going to learn about the scientific method,” he told us the first week of school. “And”—Mr. D shot us a wink—“you'll have fun doing it. Here's the plan. Every week you'll perform an experiment, the way scientists work in their labs. Before the experiment, you'll predict

what you think will happen. Afterward, you'll draw conclusions."

The first experiment involved a hair dryer and a ping pong ball. Mr. D tossed the little white ball from hand to hand. "You all know what happens if I drop this ball?"

"Gravity grabs it," I hollered out. "And it hits the floor. Like this!" I flung myself sideways and toppled onto the floor. That brought laughs from the class.

Mr. D didn't look amused. "Thanks for reminding us how gravity works, Buzzy. Now, back at your desk and listen up. So . . . we all know how gravity works. But what do you think will happen if I turn on the hair dryer, aim the air flow at the ceiling, and drop the ball over the hair dryer?"

"The air will send the ball flying across the room," said Super Matt.

"You oughta know," I put in quickly. "Super Matt's an expert on flying, right?" That got another laugh from kids. Only Mr. D and Cari, the new girl across the aisle from me, looked puzzled. They didn't know we'd starting calling Matt Kelly "Super Matt" back in kindergarten, when he wore his Superman cape to school every single day.

“Okay, that’s our prediction.” On the board Mr. D wrote *BALL WILL FLY ACROSS THE ROOM*. “Now let’s try it out. Matt, come on up.”

Matt held out the dryer and aimed the air at the ceiling. Then he propped the ball on top of the air. You know what? The ball floated. It just hung there in space, like magic.

Mr. Del Duca explained that the air moved symmetrically around the ball.



“Symmetrically?” asked Lindsey Boren, her pencil hovering over her notebook, quivering with her eagerness to write down the definition of a word she didn’t know. Lindsey keeps a whole list of impressive words in the back of her notebook.

“Something is symmetrical if it’s the same on both sides,” explained Mr. Del Duca. “So the air held the ball in place the way airflow around an airplane keeps it steady.”

Wow. That was even cooler than magic.

Another time we mixed glue, liquid starch, water, and borax—a type of detergent. It made silly putty. Who knew! We stretched it into different shapes, and I made myself a fake mustache that I wore the rest of the day. It was awesome!

We did an experiment every Friday using all kinds of ordinary stuff—eggs, vegetable oil, food coloring, a rolling pin. By the middle of October, we’d done four experiments.

The day my story begins, we were doing our fifth science experiment. As we walked into the classroom that morning, Super Matt jabbed me with his elbow.

“Check it out.” Matt pointed to the table behind the teacher’s desk where Mr. D had

spread out the stuff for the experiment: paper cups (three rows of them), zip-lock baggies, a roll of paper towels. Under the table lay a thick stack of newspapers. We were going to do something cool for sure.

As soon as we finished morning attendance and math, Mr. D was ready to start science. He stood up front grinning and rocking on his heels the way he does when he thinks he has a spectacular idea. “Okay, team. Today”—Mr. D beat a drum roll in the air—“you’re going to make Bubble Blasts!”

I flung my arms up. “I’m a Buzzy Blast. BAM! BOOM! POP!”

Mr. Del Duca rolled his eyes. “Cool it, Buzzy. Save your enthusiasm for the experiment. Okay, you’ll be mixing chemicals, so you need safety goggles.” He got the box of goggles off the shelf. “Lindsey, Amaya, you two can pass them out.”

Lindsey came down the aisle, flipping out goggles. She dropped a pair on Cari’s desk and a pair on mine.

“Thanks,” said Cari.

“*De nada*,” Lindsey replied.

“*De nada*” means “you’re welcome” in

Spanish, and Lindsey loves to show off the fifteen words of Spanish she knows, even though Cari speaks English as well as anyone.

Caridad Perez moved here the second week of school because her mom got a job as a reporter on WKXR, the local TV station. Her mom's job must have rubbed off on Cari. She acts like she's a reporter, too.

I put my goggles on and waggled my fingers at Lindsey. "I'm Frog Man. Got any flies I can munch?" Lindsey made a face and kept going. That girl has no sense of humor.

"Today, you'll be working in teams," Mr. D said.

Frog poop! Since kindergarten, me and Jeff had been partners for everything. But this year, I'm in Mr. Del Duca's class, and Jeff is across the hall with Mrs. Ruiz. My mom said we goofed off too much in third grade. That's why we were split up.

"Pair up with the person who sits beside you. Row one with row two, three with four, and five with six."

Wait a minute. Cari Perez was sitting across from me. A girl! I was going to be stuck working with a girl. *Double frog poop!*