

## CHAPTER 13

I really did think Mr. Pignati would have wanted us to have a few friends over. Of course, he would have liked to be there so he wouldn't feel he was missing anything. I knew how much he'd enjoy hearing about a party when he came home. He'd want to know every little detail, just like he asked about everything we did in school.

Dennis came over first around seven thirty because I told him to steal a bottle of 80 proof out of his father's whiskey cabinet. His father's a building inspector, and everybody who doesn't want to be inspected too much slips him a bottle and a few bucks each month. Dennis also brought some soda mixers and two dozen glasses he got from his mother by telling her I was having a birthday party and they were needed for the lemonade.

I told Dennis not to invite Norton because if there was one thing this little cocktail party didn't

need, it was Norton Kelly. Norton has a reputation for going *especially* berserk at parties. Even when we used to have kiddie parties and play spin the bottle, the girls were terrified when it was his turn because he'd bite.

"I don't think we should use all of Mr. Pignati's food," Lorraine said, munching on a saltine.

"He only got the stuff for us."

"He likes snails, so I think we should save all of them for him," she said generously.

Once she started turning out the hors d'oeuvres, she gained momentum. In fact she started eating every other one she made. It was one for the plate and one for her stomach. She put ricotta cheese on crackers, frog's legs on crackers, bamboo shoots on crackers, and fish killies still with their heads on crackers. The only thing she didn't put on crackers was the chocolate-covered ants, which she just put on a plate so they looked like miniature chocolate candies.

At seven thirty Deanna Deas arrived with her best girl friend Helen Kazinski. The two of them together are known as Beauty and the Beast. Helen is so fat you need a shoehorn to get her in the door. Then a few others arrived: Jane Appling, Rocky Romano, Nick Cahill, James Moon, Marlon Brewery, Josephine Adamo, Tony Remeo, Bernie

Iatoni, Barney Friman, and Janice Dickery. They were a real nice bunch, but each one of them had a problem all his own. For instance, Jane Appling is six feet two inches tall.

"Saaaaaay, this is a nice house. Whose is it?" That's the kind of mind Jane has.

"My uncle's," I told her, with just enough hesitation so she'd know I was lying. There's no point in having a house unless kids wonder how you got it. We really didn't start out inviting too many kids, but the more Lorraine and I thought of the parties we had been invited to, the more we had to call. After all, it was the first time either one of us had a chance to return the invitations we had gotten. Lorraine's mother wouldn't allow anybody in her house, and my mother would've insisted on DDT-dusting anyone I wanted to bring home.

Lorraine dragged Jane away from me and over to the telephone while the kids were still quiet and nervous.

"Hello, Mether?" Lorraine started, looking like a thief. "I'm calling from the phone booth at the corner of Jane Appling's block. Her mother just made dinner for us, and I'm going to stay for a couple of hours, and we'll do our homework together."

There was a long silence, and Lorraine's face

looked like she was tiptoeing across thin ice. Jane was all set to give her routine because she's the only girl who doesn't have a telephone, so nobody can call back and check out the story.

"Saaaaaay, Mrs. Jensen, I really would appreciate it if you'd let Lorraine stay awhile because I don't understand this biology we've got, and your daughter's a real brain."

Most of the kids had been going to a dance down at St. Mary's Hall, but when they heard Lorraine and I were having a party, they ditched that idea. Rocky Romano is the real social organizer of the group. He looks a little bit like a constipated weasel, but he really keeps the party moving. Mainly it's this idiotic face of his.

Nick Cahill's problem is that he's terrified of girls, and Marlon Brewery would be fine if he'd learn how to drink. I mean he reads too much, and he's always worrying about getting liver trouble and things like that. Josephine Adamo is a complete waste not worth mentioning, and Tony Remeo's problem is that he likes opera.

"I think we should save the rest of the ricotta cheese for Mr. Pignati," Lorraine blurted as she went by with a serving tray.

"Miniature chocolates, anyone?"

Barney Friman is the big phony in the group



"The nuns across the street are going to complain," Lorraine yelled to me over the racket.

"Oh shut up," I bellowed back, getting a little high myself, but still rather furious about her telling me I made most of the garbage. I really can't stand it when anyone tells me something like that.

I mean, this was turning out to be the party of the year. The house was a great pleasure palace, it really was. And there wasn't that much damage being done. Somebody dropped a drink down the stairs, and a cigarette burned a small hole in a throw rug. Only one lamp went over, and that was during this frenzied dance when everybody was on the floor.

*Angel, baaaaaaby . . .*

*It's just like heaaaaaaaven. . . .*

I waited until about ten thirty before I put my roller skates on and came tearing onto the dance floor. Melissa Dumas dug Lorraine's pair out of the closet, and she and I did this dance you wouldn't believe.

"Are you enjoying my roller skates?" Lorraine asked.

"I didn't know they were yours," Melissa chirped.

"You never bothered to *ask* either." Lorraine

stormed back out to the kitchen, and her face was pink with jealousy.

"Saaaaay, John" I heard Jane Appling's voice screeching across the room. She was waving her hand like a buxom basketball player. "Where did you *really* get this house?"

Around ten thirty Norton Kelly arrived, and the party was in full swing. He was furious about not being invited—sort of like the witch at Sleeping Beauty's ball. I didn't want any trouble, so I met him at the door.

"Norton, baby, how are you?"

"So you're having a little party, eh?" His mouth twisted like he'd just slammed a car door on his thumb.

"I've tried to get in touch with you all night."

He looked carefully at me to see if I was lying or not. Anyone else would have known I was lying.

"I'll bet you did."

"I did, *really*. Everyone's been wondering where you've been."

"Who?"

"Do you want wine or beer?"

"How could you let that girl use my skates? Tell her to get them off!" Lorraine interrupted, shooting a dirty look at Norton and then dashing off again.

"*Wine*."

After I took care of him, I went back on the floor and did another skating routine, but I kept watching Norton out of the corner of my eye. He just stood quietly over on one side of the living room, sipping, but you could see him casing the joint like crazy.

"How was I supposed to know they were her skates?" Melissa said, whirling about.

Lorraine looked worried at first when she saw Norton there because she knows how he always goes ape at parties, but eventually she and Helen Kazinski went up to the bedroom to put on some of Conchetta's clothes. Lorraine had the same outfit on she had worn that other night, with the feather in her hair, and Helen Kazinski had this faded yellow dress on, which she couldn't zipper up the back because she's so fat. Helen also found a mangy fur stole that looked like it was made out of four hundred Angora alley cats so, needless to say, she was quite the sight coming down the stairs.

But Lorraine looked beautiful again. Even Melissa was staring at her.

"Don't rip the dress, Helen," Lorraine kept saying.

"I'm not ripping it!"

"I think we'd better take the clothes off, Helen. You're going to ruin that dress."

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"Saaaaray, Lorraine, are there any more Cokes? I need one to wash down those delicious miniature chocolates."

By now the band was blasting like nobody's business, and the usual confusing things happened. Jack Brahn came to the front door and demanded to see Janice Dickery, even though he refused to come in. Melissa Dumas and Chicken Dee, who plays bass, were making out on the porch, and she still had the roller skates on. If Gary Friman, who goes steady with Melissa Dumas, ever found out, there'd be blood on the floor.

About a half hour after Norton arrived, I noticed he had disappeared. I skated through the downstairs, and then I got a little worried. I mean, like I said, he's the type of psycho who'd set a house on fire if he felt like it.

"Did you see Norton?" I yelled to Lorraine, who was running around emptying ashtrays.

"I saw him go upstairs," she called back, blowing a strand of hair away from her face.

I went up with my skates still on—*clomph! clomph! clomph!*—and Deanna Deas and Janice Dickery were rushing down in costume.

. . . just like heeeeeeaven . . .

*dreeeeeeamin' here with*

*yoooooooooooooooouuuuuuuuuuuu . . .*

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My heart started pounding like crazy because I knew if I found what I thought I would, I'd really blow my lid. At the top I opened the door on the left, and sure enough there was good old Norton putting the guts of this junky old oscilloscope back in its case and getting ready to cart it out of the house.

"Hi there, Johnny-boy," he said. Then he broke into a little smile as he went on with what he was doing.

"Leave it alone."

"Leave what alone?"

I tensed, ready to punch him.

"Oh, you don't want to be rude to your friends, Johnny-boy, now do you? Share and share alike."

"I don't have any Marshmallow Kids for friends, you 3@#\$\$%!!"

"John!" I heard Lorraine yell from the foot of the stairs, and the split second in which I turned my head gave Norton the chance he was waiting for. He drove his fist into my stomach and knocked the wind out of me. I don't think I would have fallen down if I hadn't been wearing the roller skates, but Norton just picked up the oscilloscope and beat it. It was a piece of garbage, and if that got him out of the house, I would have felt lucky. But when I got to the top of the stairs, I saw him

ducking through the crowd toward the back of the house.

*Angel baaaaby . . . baaaaby angel. . . .*

I clomped down the stairs, which were draped with bodies by this time. The band was still clanging away, and Lorraine was motioning like she was going to drop from fright.

"There's a car outside, John. I think it's a taxi!"

I remember thinking that it couldn't be the Pigman. He wouldn't be coming home at night. He wasn't the type who would get a crazy idea like just checking out and coming back to us and his pigs because he didn't feel like spending another night in the hospital. They wouldn't have let him, I thought. Of course not.

When I got into the dining room, I heard the sound of things breaking. The noise was coming from the room with the black curtains. The pig room.

"John!" Lorraine screamed. "Someone's coming up the front steps!"

I pushed the curtains open, and there was Norton holding a large white pig, which he brought down suddenly on a table edge, knocking its head off. He looked inside and then threw it against the wall where it blasted to pieces. Several

other broken pigs were laying all over the floor, and the only thing I could think of at that moment was the proud and happy look on Mr. Pignati's face when he had shown us the pigs that first day. I felt like killing Norton as I plowed into him, punching his face like it was a sack of flour. After I got a couple of good blows in, he dug his elbow into my ribs and kicked the skates out from under me. That gave him a chance to pick up the oscilloscope and head for the door like a scared rat.

I went racing out of the room and noticed the band had stopped playing. I knew the place was emptying, and suddenly I realized what Lorraine was saying.

"The Pigmán's here!"

A second later my hands grabbed the back of Norton's neck, and I pushed him forward with so much force he must have traveled the length of the living room before we both fell to the floor. The oscilloscope shattered right near the front hallway, and when I saw the blood pouring out of Norton's nose, I was so happy I began to laugh. But then it was quiet.

Finally I managed to lift my head and saw Mr. Pignati at the door. He was just standing there looking down at me, and there was no smile on his face. No smile at all.  
That's when I passed out.

A policeman with a beer belly helped me get John into the patrol car—roller skates and all. Two nuns were walking on the other side of the street, and they watched us so closely one of them almost fell on the ice.

"You're just lucky the old guy isn't going to press charges," the cop said, practically slamming the door on John's foot and then getting into the driver's seat. I tried to get John to come alive, but he was motionless in the back seat next to me. The police had pulled up just as I was getting him off the floor, and everyone else had gotten away.

"Okay, let's go," the other policeman said, coming out of the house and getting into the front. He was so much taller and thinner than the other one that the two of them together looked rather incongruous.

"Is Mr. Pignati all right?" I asked. The last I had seen of him was when he climbed the stairs