



**the
misfits**

“A knockout, one of the best of the year.”
—*San Francisco Chronicle*

**james
howe**

I

SO HERE I am, not a half-hour old as a tie salesman and trying to look like I know what I am doing, which have got to be two of the biggest jokes of all time, when who should walk into Awkworth & Ames Department Store but Skeezie Tookis.

Now ordinarily I would be happy to see Skeezie, do not get me wrong. In my book, he is a fine fellow, although I have heard him more than once referred to as "that young hooligan." I suspect this may have to do with his fondness for black leather jackets and slicked-back hair, combined with a certain carelessness in the area of personal hygiene and what I guess you might call a direct manner of speaking, even to those of a more advanced generation. But all I can say is that if you are willing to dig below the surface, you

the misfits

will discover the real Skeezie Tookis, and there you will find as big a heart as was ever produced by the little town of Paintbrush Falls, New York.

If I seem to be going on at some length to defend a character you have barely met (remember, I myself have only just glimpsed him coming toward me through Ladies' Wear & Accessories, batting at the rows of white cotton nightgowns with hands that look like they may have spent the previous twenty minutes digging a nickel out of a recently tarred road); if, as I say, I am defending him before you've even met him, it is because of the look on my boss's face as he, too, beholds Skeezie's approach.

The manager of the Men's Wear & Accessories department is a Mr. Kellerman, although I have already learned that employees under a certain age refer to him as Killer Man. Apparently, he only smiles in private, if then, and he certainly isn't smiling this particular Friday afternoon.

"It is highly irregular," he told me right off the bat when I showed up for work after school, "to hire a twelve-year-old as a tie salesman."

“Yes, sir,” I said, trying to hide my light under a bushel, as my father had that morning advised me. He told me it might not pay to show off how smart I am. Well, I may be smart, but I did not get what a light and a bushel had to do with each other or anything at all, for that matter, but at the moment that was beside the point. I suspect it still is.

“Stock boy, fine,” Killer Man went on, polishing his glasses with the fine silk handkerchief he’d pulled out of the breast pocket of his gray flannel blazer. It is only September and it is still hot in Paintbrush Falls, even if we are pretty far north, but Killer Man has decided, I guess, that the season dictates gray flannel.

“I worked as a stock boy over the summer,” I told him.

“I am aware of that,” Killer Man said.

“In the lawn furniture and garden department.”

“Yes. It’s on your record.” He snapped his silk handkerchief in my direction, then shoved it back in his pocket with—there’s no other word for it—panache. You have to hand it to the guy, he has style, even if he has the personality of a doorstep.



Sticks and stones
may break our bones,
but names
will break our spirit.



★ "A fast, funny, tender story that will
touch readers."
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"[A] timely, sensitive,
laugh-out-loud must-read."
—*Voice of Youth Advocates*



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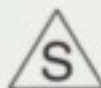
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