

T R O P H Y N E W B E R Y

Wrinkler

NOT ALL BIRTHDAYS ARE WELCOME



JERRY SPINELLI

WINNER OF THE NEWBERY MEDAL FOR MANIAC MAGEE

He did not want to be a wringer.

This was one of the first things he had learned about himself. He could not have said exactly when he learned it, but it was very early. And more than early, it was deep inside. In the stomach, like hunger.

But different from hunger, different and worse. Because it was always there. Hunger came only sometimes, such as just before dinner or on long rides in the car. Then, quickly, it was gone the moment it was fed. But this thing, there was no way to feed it. Well, one way perhaps, but that was unthinkable. So it was never gone.

In fact, gone was something it could not be, for he could not escape it any more than he could escape himself. The best he could do was forget it. Sometimes he did so, for minutes, hours, maybe even for a day or two.

But this thing did not like to be forgotten. Like air escaping a punctured tire, it would

spread out from his stomach and be everywhere. Inside and outside, up and down, day and night, just beyond the foot of his bed, in his sock drawer, on the porch steps, at the edges of the lips of other boys, in the sudden flutter from a bush that he had come too close to. Everywhere.

Just to remind him.

This thing, this not wanting to be a wringer, did it ever knock him from his bike? Untie his sneaker lace? Call him a name? Stand up and fight?

No. It did nothing. It was simply, merely there, a whisper of featherwings, reminding him of the moment he dreaded above all others, the moment when the not wanting to be a wringer would turn to becoming one.

In his dreams the moment had already come. In his dreams he looks down to find his hands around the neck of the pigeon. It feels silky. The pigeon's eye is like a polished shirt button. The pigeon's eye is orange with a smaller black button in the center. It looks up at him. It does not blink. It seems as if the bird is about to speak, but it does not. Only the voices speak: "Wring it! Wring it! Wring it!"

He cannot. He cannot wring it, nor can he let go. He wants to let go, desperately, but his fingers are stone. And the voices chant: "Wring it! Wring it!" and the orange eye stares.

Sometimes he wished it would come after him, chase him, this thing he did not want to be. Then at least he could run from it, he could hide. But the thing never moved. It merely waited. Waited for him to come to it.

And he would. He would come to it as surely as nine follows eight and ten follows nine. He would come to it without having to pedal or run or walk or even move a muscle. He would fall smack into the lap of it without doing anything but breathe. In the end he would get there simply by growing one day older.



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In Palmer LaRue's hometown of Waymer, turning ten is the biggest event of a boy's life. It marks the day when a boy is ready to take his place as a wringer at the annual Family Fest. It's an honor and a tradition.

But for Palmer, his tenth birthday is not something to look forward to, but something to dread. Because—although he can't admit this to anyone—Palmer does not want to be a wringer. But he can't stop himself from getting older, any more than he can stop tradition.

Then one day, a visitor appears on his windowsill, and Palmer knows that this, more than anything else, is a sign that his time is up. Somehow, he must learn how to stop being afraid and stand up for what he believes in.

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