

PROGENY 2001 SUPPLEMENT

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ORANGE CLOGS

KAYLA STOLLER

My sister was short, but she always made her presence known. Maybe it was her orange clogs. God, I hated those things, three-inch atrocities just begging for a sprained ankle. They didn't match anything, but she swore they made her look elegant. More like gaudy, I told her. I felt like everyone was looking at us when she walked around in them, head high and chest out. And when she wasn't embarrassing me with her clogs, she was doing it some other way...like the night of the fight.

"Come on, Jen, get your butt moving. I'm leaving in two minutes, with or without you."

"I'm coming," I mumbled to no one but my cat, who watched me trip over my jean leg and fall unceremoniously onto the bed. How typical of me.

"And she better not wear those darned clogs again," I mumbled even lower. The cat cocked his head to the side, and if I wouldn't have known better, I would have sworn he was smiling at me. I couldn't decide who I hated most, the cat or my sister.

I almost got out of the car when I saw a flash of orange push the accelerator.

"Gee, Vi, do you have to wear those god-awful shoes again?" I asked in my best don't-do-this-to-me voice.

"Fine, stay home," was all she said, with a smile, of course.

I would have. I really would have, but I knew Sam would be there. Plus, it was Friday night and there was nothing better to do.

We pulled into the parking lot just as it all started. I could see Sam, muscles ripped against his white jersey. I could see the other guy, too—Number 82—and things didn't look too good.

I opened the car door before my sister had the stick in park. I ran. Vi ran. I could hear the clump-clumping of her clogs as she tried to keep up with me. I didn't look back; my eyes were riveted on the football jerseys. I was hoping she'd trip and splatter on the pavement. I wouldn't have helped her up.

Number 82 threw the first punch, and Sam took it hard across the jaw, fell hard against a rusty, tan Celebrity. I felt like a voodoo doll as I flinched and threw my hand up to my face, almost feeling his pain rip through my body.

I watched the shouting crowd weave in, around, and out until there were two unmistakable sides. Husky, wild-eyed girls with big arms, thick thighs and thundering voices and guys with pecs popping out of their “wife-beaters” yelled, “Kick his butt, Mike.” “Kill ‘em!” They formed a wall behind Mike as one girl with fiery, red hair and a body the size of Goliath’s screamed, “Show him what ya’ got!”

I was scared, but I moved to stand behind Sam with the rest of his friends. When I looked around at them, my heart beat even faster. The girls on Sam’s side were skinnier and paler than me, and the guys looked like a bunch of thirteen-year-olds heading into their first year of puberty. I hoped that Sam wouldn’t look around for support. It was obvious only a miracle was going to save Sam. Mike was going to kill him.

I saw the orange clogs out of the corner of my eye and, for once, I wasn’t embarrassed. I was too scared for Sam. But then I noticed Vi wasn’t taking a side; she just stood in the middle staring like an idiot at the impending massacre. For a split second, our eyes met and she gave me a look that screamed, “Someone has got to do something!” I gave her a look that meant to say, “Don’t even think about it; get your butt on Sam’s side and stay put.”

My telepathy didn’t work. She just stood there, watching Sam run around like a chicken as Mike grunted like an unhappy butcher. Meanwhile, Mike’s side kept yelling, Sam’s side kept quiet and Vi stood in the middle, hands on her hips, chest out, and orange clogs flashing in the moonlight.

It was at that moment that everyone else, even Goliath and her army, fell unnervingly silent. It was as if everyone knew the fatal punch was coming next, including Sam, whose face was apple red and dripping like a window on a rainy day. Silence.

Then it happened. Mike never threw the punch. Instead, Vi farted. It was so loud and unexpected that the entire crowd in the parking lot turned incredulously to look at the girl in the orange clogs. She just smiled, turned to Goliath, and said loud enough for everyone to hear, “Man, I feel better.”

Soon, I heard a snicker coming from someone hiding in the back ranks of Sam’s crew, and it was soon followed by guffaws, giggles and an uncontrollable din of laughter. Mike and Sam laughed, too. Vi didn’t even blush.

I didn’t laugh—didn’t even smile—just turned and walked to the car.

THE LUNCHBOX

SHERYL GOONAN

“I think this could be the best treasure here.”

“I think you’re right. Do you know what makes it the best?”

“Of course, the question is, do you?”

“Yeah, on the end, the name scratched in. Ralph.”

“Ralph. Can we buy it?”

“Sure. The auctioneer is making his way over. So, what about Ralph’s story?”

“Hmm . . . I think he worked in a factory.”

“OK, that’s where I’ll start . . . Ralph was thirty-two years in the factory and still carried the same lunchbox with pretty much the same lunch every day. Different food every day, but all in all, the same. Left over meat loaf sandwiches, sometimes cold baked bean sandwiches with a little mayo (that was his favorite, but Ralph didn’t have it very often because usually there wasn’t much left over to make a sandwich with), always a couple of cookies, if he was lucky they were the soft, sort of gooey chocolate chip ones she was so good at making, fruit, the healthy portion of lunch, and icy, cold milk straight from the thermos.”

“You know, my dad had a thermos. It was just like the one on the table over there. He was in a car accident once, really smashed up the car. The thermos banged into the dashboard, even made a dent in the dash, but when they opened the thermos hours later the coffee was still hot.”

“And your dad was ok?”

“Eventually. He didn’t work for a long time. It was hard. For all of us. Even then, as a kid, I knew it was hard. Dad felt terrible. Terrible because he couldn’t take care of his family. It worked out though. So, back to Ralph’s story now?”

“Let’s see . . . there was a napkin in the lunchbox. She always wrote a note on the napkin. ‘You made me smile last night when . . .’ or ‘Let’s play checkers tonight,’ something that always made his day, always let him know she loved him.”

“I used to do that for my kids when they went to school. Put a little note in their lunchboxes. I wonder if it ever embarrassed them?”

“Probably not, like Ralph, it just let them know how much you loved them.”

“I hope. How long were Ralph and . . .”

“Alice.”

“Alice sounds good. How long were Ralph and Alice married?”

“What was it? Fifty-three years? No, must be fifty-four that Ralph and Alice had been married. Wow. And they were so happy. They still are. They were in love before he left for the war. He wasn’t so sure about what would happen when he returned, God willing he would return at all. Who knew?”

“I bet Alice knew.”

“Yeah, I think so too, she knew. Knew he’d be back and that he’d be her husband. What else could there be? Some things you just know. Things like when you better cover your tomato plants just in case there might be that early, unexpected frost.”

“Wait a sec. Does he have to have been in a war?”

“Yes, because it will explain all these postcards and letters I just found.”

“Oh my gosh, love letters from Ralph. She saved them all. All this time.”

“Ralph was a little quiet after he returned from the war. That was something she didn’t know about. Wars. Didn’t really want to know about wars, but wanted to know about Ralph in the war. That’s why she went to the library to find out about the war. Terrible stories. How could they have . . .? She learned just enough to know why Ralph didn’t want to talk about it and she figured she’d be a good listener when he decided he needed one.”

“Enough about the war. And Alice, she’s getting a little boring for me. You’re making it sound like her sole purpose is to take care of and worry about Ralph. Want a sausage? The lunch cart is open now. Let’s head over there, where the tools and garden stuff is.”

“I like the war. Let’s grab a sandwich later.”

“They must have had a garden.”

“Right, and it was Alice’s. Ralph helped, but mostly it was hers. She loved it because it was so beautiful; he loved it because it was hers. He was so proud of her and her garden. It was a pretty regular garden with lots of tomatoes. Good to can, you know for soups and sauces.”

“Which would explain all these fruit jars. My God, look at them all. See any ‘Strong Shoulder Atlas’ jars? You know the red fruit jar book says the blue quart Atlas Strong Shoulder jars are worth 40-50 bucks.”

“Whatever. Their garden was full of squash, cucumbers, lots of those little pumpkins that kids like to paint, and flowers.”

“Ralph and Alice had kids?”

“No.”

“I didn’t think so. Sort of sad for them, I love my kids.”

“Yeah, but also one of those things that if you never have, you just don’t miss.”

“Maybe. What about the flowers? What kinds?”

“Loads and loads of flowers. Marigolds, geraniums, giant sunflowers, cosmos, which were her favorite, so dainty and flower-like, and of course, daisies. She tried roses, loved the smell, but they were too prickly. Just too hard to avoid those stickers. They also tended to really attract the Japanese beetles and that was heartbreaking to see those bugs eat away at the beautiful buds before they ever had a chance to open up.”

“Japanese beetles???”

“Yes, beetles. There were also orange poppies and white daisies, and beautiful purple irises every spring. The irises came from Ralph’s auntie Delia’s. They dug them up from her garden before the house was torn down.”

“Hold it. This is getting a little too sweet, a little much on the sentimentality.”

“Fine. The iris bulbs came from the Burpee catalog.”

“Thanks. Better.”

“May I continue, or do you think you can do better?”

“Go.”

“Ralph acted as if he wasn’t too interested in Alice’s garden, especially when he was talking to the guys at the factory. You know, stuff like, ‘yeah, I don’t know what she puts so much time into that pile of dirt for,’ and ‘hey, if it makes her happy, whatever.’ But really, he thought her garden was the most beautiful thing he’d ever seen. He loved to just be in the back yard because it so reminded him of her. Also loved it when she needed his help. Of course she knew that. She loved that he loved to help. They had this little game; she’d ask for help with something that probably she could have done herself, and he’d say ok, but with a little sigh, then he’d finally do whatever it was she needed. Maybe move a wheelbarrow load of compost from the pile over to the garden, or maybe he’d hang up a birdhouse.”

“Look pumpkin, here are some chairs. Looks like they started to strip them.”

“Never finished them.”

“I wonder if she was going to paint them?”

“Paint them? And cover that beautiful wood with paint?”

“Paint can be good. You know, that’s the thing with sales like this. You just really never know, do you? Did you know that our “Alice” is here? I talked to her earlier. She’s really sweet. I hope their real life was as happy as our made up life for them.”

“They’re here? Sort of even sadder than if they were dead. I mean here we are pawing through all their stuff. And they’re watching.”

“It’s ok. You ready, sweetie?”

“Yeah. We need to stop and pay for the lunchbox. What do you think it will be like when they have my auction? Will people make up a story for me? I wonder.”

“Let’s get some ice cream on the way home.”

THE SPIKES

MAGGIE MALOY

Characters:

Left Spike

Right Spike

Red Nikey Spike

The Starter

Purple Adidas Spike

Scene I: Stuffed in a Nike shoe box.

Left Spike: Hey . . . psst . . . Swoosh . . . you awake?

Right Spike: How can I sleep when we’re crammed in this box and you’re on top of me, snoring?

LS: Think we’re there yet?

RS: We’re still in the box, right?

LS: Right.

RS: So, no, we aren’t there yet, Sherlock.

LS: Sorry. I guess I’m just nervous. Are you ready to run today, buddy?

RS: (*Yawning*) I’m always ready to run. But it is not up to us—we just do the leg work. It’s up to the kid to be ready to run. That’s where the race really is—in the runners head We just go on the feet.

LS: Yeah, but, the kid talks to us you know. Every night before a race. She pulls us out of her big scary closet and actually talks to us while she’s tightening up our teeth with that little wrench. She really believes the power to run fast is in us. With all the confidence she places in us, Swoosh, I hope we don’t let her down.

RS: We won’t. As long as you stay in the race and don’t pick any fights with other runner’s spikes like you did last week, you idiot.

LS: Hey, that wasn’t my fault. There were a lot of other cocky spikes in that race last week. Besides, I was getting all claustrophobic being boxed in at the beginning of that race like we were. You remember, once the gun went off and we all started biting into the ground for position.

RS: Yeah, I remember. The kid got out a little fast so I was plenty dizzy and sick once we reached the first mile mark. At least there wasn’t any pavement; I hate pavement. I can’t bite into it and it dulls my teeth to nothing.

LS: I know. Me too. But I think the kid likes the sound we make when we run across pavement.

RS: Yeah, she does. I heard her say something to one of her friends once when she was taking me off after some big race last year.

LS: Hey, did you see that purple Adidas spike next to us at the starting line last week? She had eight-inch teeth and looked to be about a size nine or nine and a half. She was hot! I was chasing her all during the race but I think she beat me to the finish.

RS: That's not hard to do.

LS: Shut up. I'm just as fast as you. (*Silence.*) Hey, Swoosh?

RS: Now what?

LS: What did you think of that course last week?

RS: It wasn't too bad. We'd been there before so I pretty much knew what the grounds were going to be like. Although I was a little ticked off to find that the creek was higher than it had been last time.

LS: (*Laughing*) No kidding! I felt so soaked and cold and gross after that race. The kid must've misjudged the distance this time and plunged right in. I distinctly remember hitting a rock last time and staying out of the water—but not this time. We both went straight in.

RS: We sure did. Straight into the washer. I think the kid felt bad for us and took pity on us. Fine with me. The dryer felt so warm and toasty.

LS: Yeah, but the washer . . .

RS: (*chuckling*) Oh, that's right. You can't swim.

LS: Bite me. At least we're all shiny now and have our sharp teeth back in. I'm ready to run. Are we there yet?

RS: Hey, Swoosh. Tell ya what. I'll let you be on top on the way home too if you quit asking that question.

Scene II: At the start line.

LS: Damn. The kid tied me nice and tight. I'm losing circulation in one of my laces from that double knot. Did she knot you too?

RS: Yeah, no thanks to you.

LS: Now what did I do?

RS: You're the one who always comes untied. If you'd just keep your laces tied, the kid wouldn't have to worry about tripping over them and sending us flying into the air.

LS: Oh come on, that was a long time ago.

RS: Yeah, a long time ago yesterday, when the kid wore us for practice to do those mile repeats.

LS: (*groaning*) I hate mile repeats. Since they never mow the grass back there on that mile repeat course I can never see where I'm going. It's annoying and I get frustrated.

RS: Who cares what you get! Don't be such a sissy. Tough it out! You're going to get us tossed into the dumpster one of these days if you aren't more careful.

LS: Oh yeah? Well, look at you, Mister "I hate to get dirty."

RS: So what? I don't like cross-country because it makes me all dirty and wet. Big deal. I have to do it anyways, for the kid's sake.

LS: You need to live a little, Swoosh. You prefer Track season, where you only run on a nice clean, smooth track. That way you don't get as dirty. Personally, it makes me sick. Running in a continuous boring circle. Having to stay in between those stupid lines or lanes or whatever they are. I love cross, the variety of ground we run on, the types of surfaces we run on. You never know what to expect until you hit it.

RS: Yeah, right, Mister “I hate tall grass.” You don’t like cross-country either.

LS: How do you know what I like?!

Red Nikey Spike: I know I’d like it if you two would shut the hell up so the rest of us can hear what the starter is saying so we can get an idea of where we’re going out there.

(All the spikes are quiet as the starter gives final instructions to the runners.)

Starter: Please be careful when you go to cross the bridge just before the two-mile mark!

Because of the previous night’s rain it may be a little slippery!

LS: Uh-oh.

RS: What?

LS: Did you hear that? There’s a bridge we have to cross. I hate heights and bridges—especially when they’re made of wood. I have splinters stuck in my teeth for days afterward.

RS: Well, too bad. That’s part of cross-country. So is dog poop.

LS: *(confused)* What are you talking about?

RS *(chuckling)* I’m saying that, if you’ll notice, there are a few dogs here today with their owners. So watch your step out there, buddy.

(Left Spike feels nauseated as the runners return to the start line for some last minute stretches.)

LS: *(groaning)* I don’t think I can run today, Swoosh.

RS: *(appalled)* What? Why not?

LS: Well, you’re comments are no help, but besides that, I’m getting a headache. The kid forgot to cut her toenails again and they’re digging into my head like mad.

RS: You can’t back out now, Swoosh. Mister, “I’m ready to run.” The kid needs us right now; she’s counting on us to get her through the race and if we stop, she’ll have to stop and that will upset her. We want her to have a good time today, so get focused on what we’re about to do. We’re both made for this and we can beat a lot of these other spikes. We’re faster, and inside, we’re protecting some pretty fast feet that belong to a pretty fast runner.

LS: Ok, ok. I’ll run. It’s not like I have much choice anyway. I can’t really go off and do my own thing. That wouldn’t make the kid very happy.

RS: What? Chasing after her stubborn, scared spike? No, it wouldn’t.

(All the spikes line up tensely next to each other just before the gun sounds.)

LS: Hey, Swoosh?

RS: Now what?

LS: *(sadly)* This is our last cross-country season isn’t it?

RS: *(sighing)* Yeah, it is. The kid is graduating this year.

LS: Think we’ll make it to track season after this? I mean we are pretty old.

RS: I hope so. I may not look it, but I’ve still got some competition left in me.

LS: Me too, buddy . . . me too.

RS: Even if we don’t make it to track season, Swoosh, I know the kid won’t throw us out.

LS: *(sobbing)* How do you know that?

RS: Stop crying! Because we’re the best spikes she’s ever owned. I mean, compared to those other old ones in her closet, we’re certainly better looking and we’ve been through a lot more competition with her. Running is one of her passions and I think when she has us on, she feels like an awesome runner.

LS: Well, she is, Swoosh. And that’s because she has two awesome spikes on her feet to get the job done. Right?

RS: Right?

LS: You're a great running partner, Swoosh. I've never run with such a fast, positive, competitive spike like you. We were made for each other.
RS: We were made for each other, dork. You fit on the kid's left foot and I fit on her right.
LS: Stop teasing me, smartass! You know what I mean.
RS: I sure do, my friend. I sure do.
(*Both spikes dig into the fresh ground beneath them as the gun is cocked.*)
Purple Adidas Spike: (*seductively*) Hey, Swoosh. What's up? You're looking quite fine. I love the knots in your laces. Maybe we could get tied up together sometime.
RS: (*before Left Spike can answer*) SWOOSH! THE RACE! Focus! I'll spike you if you don't snap out of it. Don't make me kick your ass!"
(*The gun goes off.*)

TOAD STORY (AN EXCERPT)

GEORGIA KOHART

Cast:

Seth: A tall, athletic, good-looking environmentalist, on the job in the field. He is investigating reports of amphibians with extra limbs for a gas pipeline company worried about environmental contamination. He is wearing tall rubber boots, a baseball cap, khaki shorts, and a dark T-shirt, over which he wears a field vest with many pockets stuffed with field guides, repellent, plastic bags for specimens. Binoculars and camera hang around his neck. He carries a small pocket recorder for field notes and thermos of coffee is sitting on the ground.

Tatiana: A toad, intelligent, obviously well educated, but flippant in her manner and speech. Although she is obviously a toad, her voice is lovely and melodic. Seth doesn't "see" her as she is for the first part of the play.

Dr. Peters: A good looking, older man, also a biologist, and Seth's superior.

Scene I: Outdoors, somewhere in a meadow with a meandering stream.

It's a beautiful summer day.

Seth: (*talking into recorder in a low voice*) Date, June 3. Have not found anything abnormal . . .
(*picking up a small object, looking it up and down*) to report . . .

Tatiana: (voice only) Hey! Put me down you big . . .

S: Wha-a-! (*flinging object as if it were hot to the touch*)

T: (*as the object sails away into the grass, her voice fades*) . . . dumb . . . ass . . . oof! (*She lands.*)

S: (*Scrambling through the grass, searching for the toad.*) I - I don't believe it!

T: (*Coming from behind Seth*) Hey! I'm over here. Behind you. (*Seth spins around still squatting.*) Watch it! You'll squash me like a . . . toad. Yick! What am I saying?

S: (*Frantically parting the grass*) It's a toad, a talking toad! A toad talked. Talked to me . . . the toad, talking, talking . . .

T: (*Still from down in the grass*) Oh, brother. You're a man of few words, aren't you? So far, I count about two: talk and toad.

While she has been speaking, he finds her. They both stand slowly and on the word "toad," she and Seth are face to face at eye level, practically cross-eyed.

S: (*He is incredulous.*) A talking toad.

T: (*After a very slow blink*) Like I said, a man of two words.

S: How . . . how . . .

T: How. (*She counts on her fingers.*) So, now we've worked our way up to three. A man of three words. (*She takes a step back.*) I know, I know, how is it that I can talk? I don't know. I don't know. I don't really care. I can't explain it. All I know is you picked me up, I said, "Hey! You big, dumb ass put me down." You flung me. You picked me up again. That's all I know.

S: (*The scientist once again, he sits. She follows suit and he looks her over.*) Did you ever talk before just now? I mean how long have you been around? How old are you?

T: In toad years or human years? (*She slaps her hand on her knee.*) Ha! (*Putting both hands to her cheeks, acting like Scarlet O'Hara*) Oh, my! A real gentleman wouldn't dare ask a lady's age.

S: (*Embarrassed*) Oh, well, I, uh, didn't know . . . must be some amphibian code of ethics . . .

T: What! (*She shoves his shoulder.*) Amphibian code of ethics? Get real! Are you kidding? It's every herp for himself out here. (*Seth is shocked and confused.*) Oh, you'll have to learn to never take me seriously. Well, almost never. (*Batting her eyelashes*) Even I have my moments.

S: (*Pouting slightly*) Sorry.

T: Oh, so we're one of those.

S: (*Instantly on the defensive*) One of those what? What do you mean by that?

T: Whoo-hooo! (*Crossing arms in front of her face, mockingly*) Ye-ow! Don't hurt me! Touchy! Touchy! (*Suddenly serious*) I meant overly sensitive, that you seem to be (*Enunciating, holding the back of her hand up to her mouth as if relating a secret*) a lit-tle o-ver sen-si-tive.

S: (*Embarrassed again*) Oh.

T: Hey, let's not get off on the wrong foot. (*She sticks out a back leg, then straightening up, extends her right hand in a businesslike manner*) Hello. I'm Tatiana Buf . . .

S: (*Interrupting*) . . . fonidae!

T: Bufonidae. (*She is smiling and nodding like she is at a cocktail party.*) Yes, it's an old Latin family name. But, being the biologist, you probably already know that, don't you! (*Laughs merrily, fake*) And you are . . . ?

S: Seth, Seth Smith.

T: (*With an exaggerated lisp*) THETH THMITH?

S: Oh, geez . . .

T: (*Holding up a hand and hanging head*) Sorry, sorry.

S: (*Smiling for the first time*) It's okay. I'm used to it. Kids made fun of my name because I used to lisp a little. Tatiana? That's unusual. Isn't it Russian?

T: Yes, yes, as a matter of fact, Tatiana is Russian. In Russia it's a pretty common name. Over there it isn't considered so unusual. Princess Tatiana has traditionally been considered the ideal of Russian womanhood.

S: I remember her! From one of my classes, it was . . . um . . . by that Russian novelist . . .

T: (*Coaching him*) Alexander Pushkin . . .

S: Yeah, Pushkin. It was this really, long boring poem. It was called . . .

T: *Eugene Onegin* . . .

S: Yes. But, I only read part of it. Isn't it the one where he blows her off and then when she marries a noble he decides she might be worth going for after all?

T: That's it in a clamshell.

S: I had a big biology exam coming up and, well (*He shrugs his shoulders.*) as you can see, I really needed the grade in biology more than in literature. I didn't finish reading it.

T: (*With meaning*) You should have.

S: Why? I mean, what possible use is Russian literature, or any literature for that matter, in the field?

T: We-ell, one never knows when one might have an intellectually stimulating conversation. It can happen anywhere. Although it might be true for me, most humans don't live their lives sitting out in the middle of a field. As you can surmise, I don't have occasion of many social interactions, unless you count those lounge lizards, the salamanders. (*She shudders.*) I just cannot stand them! They expect too much from a girl, if you get my drift. I would much rather open up that thermos of coffee you've got there and have a nice long chat about the virtues of Russian womanhood among other things. *Eugene Onegin* is one of my favorite works.

S: I'd rather have a nice long talk about how it is that you can talk.

T: (*Sighing, shoulders slumping*) Are you back to that again? I told you I don't know. Why does it matter? Here we are communicating along so nicely. I intend to try and coax your attention back to something infinitely more interesting and cerebral than scientific facts and figures.

S: Such as . . .

T: (*She crosses her legs, and leans one elbow on her knee, her chin in her hand*) Now, tell me all about yourself.

S: As I said, I would rather talk about you.

T: Aside from the fact that I'm bilingual, there's not a whole lot to tell . . .

S: Bilingual? You speak two languages?

T: (*Patiently*) Yes. English and . . . Toad. I mean really, how do you think we communicate? Through interpretive dance?

S: (*Laughing*) It's just that for a moment there, I thought, that you might speak Russian or something.

T: That's okay. You've got a really great laugh, you know that? (*Really looking at him for the first time*) Hey, you are some tall drink of water, aren't you? And good-lookin' to boot! M-m-m, yeah. (*Testing his bicep.*) You work out, don't you?

S: (*Wanting very badly to return the compliment*) Well, you . . . you are . . .

T: (*Finishing his sentence, pleasantly, not ashamed*) . . . a toad. I know. Isn't it great?

S: You're a very nice-looking specimen . . . (*Seeing the grimace on her face*) I mean toad. (*Overly eager*) You're a nice looking toad.

T: (*Shaking her head, still stuck on "specimen"*) Never cared for that word "specimen." I just don't relish the idea of spending all eternity on a shelf in some dusty college biology lab either pinned spraddle-legged to a board or pickled in a jar of formaldehyde.

S: (*Guiltily*) Oh, well, I didn't mean . . .

T: (*Patting his hand*) It's okay. I know what you've done in the name of science and I forgive you for it.

S: Forgive me for what? Research? What's to forgive about research?

T: I think we had best move onto something else.

S: Well, I guess so! Why, if it weren't for scientific research . . .

T: (*Changing the subject*) So, aren't you afraid of getting warts from me?

S: Toads don't cause warts, warts are . . .

S and T (*together*): . . . caused by viruses.

T: Ha! Had you going! I knew that, I was just teasing. You are so gullible, Seth.