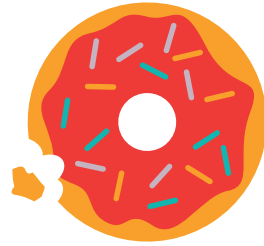
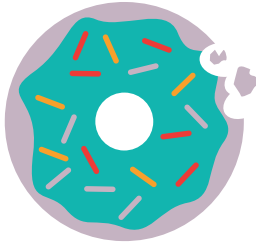
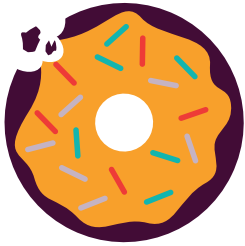


YES, WE DO HAVE CHOCOLATE CREAM DOUGHNUTS!



Those have to be the best seven words you can read when you're starving, and you've just moved to a town that it's pretty clear anyone who can has moved away from. Don't get me wrong. The strangeness of the sign wasn't lost on me. I mean, was that all they had? And if so, what about the general store was general? But I was willing to focus on the positive: CHOCOLATE CREAM DOUGHNUTS!

All I had to do was wait till the store opened.



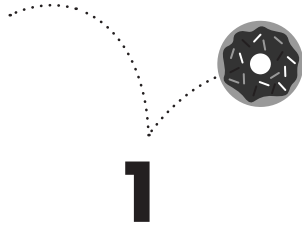
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**the DOUGHNUT
FIX**

JESSIE JANOWITZ



It started off like any normal Saturday with Jeanine, Zoe, and me flipping through cookbooks on the living room floor.

For Mom, teaching us to bake was right up there with teaching us to read. As soon as we were old enough to digest chocolate, we got a Dessert Day, one day a week to make whatever we wanted. We'd pick our recipes on Saturday morning, then shop for ingredients after eating breakfast at Barney Greengrass, a deli a few blocks up Amsterdam Avenue from our apartment.

I'd been working my way through *Roland Mesnier's Basic to Beautiful Cakes* since I got it for my birthday in July. Roland is king when it comes to cake. He was the White House pastry chef for twenty-five years.

That morning, I decided to tackle the white chocolate dome

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cake Roland created for President Jimmy Carter, minus the nasty orange syrup he uses. Except for cutting out stuff I hate, I usually follow the recipe exactly, which drives Mom crazy. She says you have to make a recipe your own, but she's a professional.

As usual, it took Zoe no time at all to pick her dessert, because she always chooses snickerdoodles and knows the ingredients by heart.

Jeanine couldn't make up her mind between triple chocolate chip cookies and banoffee pie. Jeanine is Gifted and Talented, which means no matter the question, she's always sure there's a right answer. So when there is no right or wrong, when it's just red or blue, plain or sesame, she totally falls apart.

I was rooting for the cookies for the simple reason that banoffee pie is disgusting. It never even gets cooked, so it's all cold and slimy like hand sanitizer. I kept my opinion to myself though. I may be two years older, but Jeanine never listens to me about anything, not even dessert.

According to the New York City Department of Education, I, Tristan Levin, am not Gifted or Talented. I can make a perfect chocolate chip cookie, but Mom made sure we could all do that. I'm not entirely clear on what about me isn't G&T material, but I'm guessing the fact that I still use my fingers to do the nines trick has something to do with it. When Jeanine turned seven, it was

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like God had downloaded every single multiplication fact right into her brain.

What I do get about the whole G&T thing is that it's not something I can change. I'm pretty good at knowing what I can control and what I can't. I guess that's not something G&T tests for because Jeanine never knows.

I used to think my name was one of those things that I was just stuck with, but then I found out you can legally change your own name. Charlie's Uncle Ralph, now Uncle Damien, did it. Personally, I don't think Damien's any better than Ralph, but neither are as bad as Tristan.

What do you think of Jax? There's something especially cool about a name with an X in it, right? But then, sometimes I wonder if it sounds too much like a dog: "Here, Jax! Roll over, Jax!" You can't change your name till you're eighteen, and I'm only twelve, so I've got some time.

When half an hour had gone by and Jeanine still hadn't picked her dessert, I told my parents I'd meet them at breakfast. Barney's opens at eight thirty, and if you're not there by nine, you'll never get a table, even if you are a regular.

Barney's isn't fancy or anything. The wallpaper is peeling and has food smears on it, and most of the chairs are crisscrossed with duct tape. But I'm telling you, none of that matters once you taste

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the food. If I could eat only one thing for the rest of my life, it would be Barney's eggs and onions. The eggs are so creamy, they taste like custard, and the onions are so sweet, you'd swear they were cooked in maple syrup.

Then there's the smell. Just one whiff of that air dripping with chicken soup, sautéed onions, and garlic bagels, and *Shazzam!* The whole world goes all Willy-Wonka-big-glass-elevator-crashing-through-the-ceiling happy endings. That math test I have Monday? Who cares. That gang of weight-lifting private school jerks taking over the basketball courts? No problem. It's all gonna work out just fine.

Not! That's the Barney's magic. And once you feel it, you can never get enough.

My grandmother puts up these fresh air things all over her apartment. They have names like Irish Meadow and Seaside. I want a gizmo I can plug in and *Wham!* My room smells like Barney Greengrass.

Normally, Barney's won't let you sit unless everyone in your party is there, but since we're regulars, Zippo let me go straight to our table.

"Hey, kid," he said, holding out his palm.

"Hey," I said, smacking it as I slid into a booth next to the window display of challah breads.

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“The usual?” he asked, rolling a toothpick from one side of his mouth to the other.

“Uh-huh.”

“What about Mom? I have to check if the kreplach’s ready.”

Zippo has known Mom all her life. She grew up coming to Barney’s with her parents, and Zippo was already a waiter back then. The guys in the kitchen love her because she gets the kreplach. According to Zippo, very few people order kreplach anymore, and nobody but her ever orders it for breakfast, so she’s something of a celebrity. If you don’t know, kreplach is like Jewish wonton soup. I’m not a huge fan, but you should decide for yourself.

“She and Dad both want kreplach,” I said.

“Really? Tom’s getting kreplach,” Zippo said, impressed. “And what about Thing One and Thing Two?”

“Plain bagels with cream cheese.”

“That’s it?”

“That’s it,” I said.

Zippo rolled his eyes and then disappeared into the kitchen.

I don’t know how long I was waiting, but by the time everybody else got there, the food was already on the table, and I was halfway done. When I looked up from my plate, they were making their way through the crowd by the counter. Zoe was crying, and my father was carrying her way out in front of him to

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keep from getting stuck with one of the many chopsticks poking out of her hair.

Mom puts her own hair up with chopsticks when she's cooking, but she uses only two. Her hair wouldn't even hold more than two, but Zoe's hair is like Velcro—curly, orange, gravity-defying Velcro. Of course, my parents love it because the rest of us, including them, have boring, dirt-colored hair. It's not just my parents either. Everyone loves Zoe's hair: teachers, waiters, bus drivers, strangers on the subway. And the ones who don't know about the biting will even try to touch it.

"No more crying, Zo Zo," Mom was saying as they got to the booth.

Zoe dialed back the wailing to a whimper.

"What happened?" I said.

"The you-know-what was out in front of that new restaurant on Eighty-Sixth," Jeanine said as she slid into the booth.

Zoe is terrified of this twenty-foot, blow-up rat with red eyes that shows up around the city whenever somebody hires nonunion workers. If you hire guys who aren't in the union, you can pay them less, but the union guys get really mad and park the rat outside your job so everyone knows you don't hire union guys. I'm not sure why it's a twenty-foot rat, except that it's gross and hard to miss.

"I wanna go home the other way," Zoe whimpered.

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“Don’t worry. We’re going to the garage anyway,” Dad said, groaning as he lowered Zoe into the booth. I don’t know how my parents can lug Zoe around everywhere. She feels like she’s made of bowling balls. It’s not as if she’s a big four-year-old either. Dad says it’s because she’s solid, which I don’t get. Aren’t we all made of the same stuff inside? How can her insides be more solid?

“What do we need the car for?” I said.

“Road trip,” Mom said. “Apple picking. They have those Pink Ladies, the small ones we got at the farmers’ market that time. And I found another farm on the way that makes its own ice cream.”

“Cool,” I said. “Do you know what flavors they have?”

“If you’re asking if they have olive oil, I think it’s unlikely,” she said.

I had been. Ever since my parents took us to this Italian restaurant downtown that made it, I’ve been on a quest. I know olive oil ice cream sounds like it violates some basic law of the universe, but the weirdest thing is, when you taste it, everything you ever thought about ice cream gets completely turned around. *Vanilla* seems wrong. *Chocolate*? Crazy. Olive oil? What God put on the earth so we could turn it into ice cream. The whole experience really messed with me. I mean, if olive oil is really supposed to be made into ice cream, maybe we’ve been using other foods all wrong too. Like maybe there should be a steak-flavored yogurt.

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“Sorry,” Mom said, “but maybe they’ll have some fabulous flavors they make with stuff from the farm, like pear or buttermilk.”

“Not the same,” I said.

“Get over it, nuddy,” she said, swatting me with her scarf.

“Nuddy” is what Mom calls us when we’re being thick. It’s short for *nudnik*, which means “stupid” in Yiddish, a language her grandparents spoke and pretty much nobody else does anymore. I guess that’s kind of the point. It’s not like she wants people to understand what she’s saying. Besides, “nuddy” sounds sort of nice the way she says it, and “moron” sounds bad no matter how you say it.

Mom tasted the soup and made a face. “Kreplach’s cold.”

“Zippo will reheat it,” Dad said.

“It’s busy. I don’t want to bother him.”

Jeanine pushed her untouched bagel across the table.

“What’s wrong with you?” I said through a mouthful of egg.

“Ask her.” She pointed at Zoe with one hand and showed me a Band-Aid on the other.

“She was taking too long,” Zoe said, looking at me through the holes in her bagel halves.

“It doesn’t matter how long she was taking,” Dad said. “No biting ever. We use our words.”

For some reason, when my parents talk to Zoe, it’s always “we.”

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We use our words. *We* don't blow bubbles in our milk through a straw up our nose. *We* don't scream when we see a bald person.

“But I *did* use my words. I told her she was taking too long. The words didn't work.”

I was with Zoe on this one. Sometimes Jeanine leaves you no choice. Besides, she's a drama queen. Most of the time, Zoe doesn't even break the skin.

