

BY THE AUTHOR OF GUINEA DOG

Patrick Jennings

ODD

WEIRD &

LITTLE



When the new boy enters their classroom, Woodrow and the other students are shocked into silence.

He wears a full suit, including a vest, and old-fashioned glasses.

He is **odd**. He is very studious and even wise.

He is **weird**. His sandwiches are gross—his favorite is mice on white bread!

He is **little**—but somehow he can spike a volleyball like an Olympic star.

The new student is not like any other kid, but he might be just the right friend for Woodrow.

Even if he isn't human.

Patrick Jennings crafts a story about overcoming bullying and finding one's own way into an absolute hoot.

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**For Peter and Tate,
Original, Wise, and Loopy**

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1. Our New Student

The new kid walks in.

“Excuse me, class,” Mr. Logwood says. “Our new student has arrived. His name is Toulouse, and he just moved here from Quebec, which is a province of Canada. A province is like a state. His first language is French, but I’m told he’s learning English quickly.” He smiles down at the new boy.

None of us smile. We just stare at Toulouse.

He’s short. Real short. Kindergartner short. And he’s wearing a gray suit with thin black stripes. And a black tie. Tell me that isn’t weird—a kid wearing a suit and tie to school. Plus, he’s wearing tiny, round wire-rimmed glasses over his very large, round eyes. And an old-man hat. And black leather gloves.

And he's carrying a black briefcase. He kind of looks like my great-grandpa, only smaller. Way smaller.

This is an extremely weird kid. Definitely weirder than me. Probably the weirdest in our school. Maybe the weirdest on earth.

I glance over at Garrett Howell. He's grinning. Probably dreaming of terrible things to do to poor Toulouse.

I know what Garrett is capable of. I've been one of his victims for years now. Why? Maybe because I have orange hair and an overbite. I'm also clumsy, and sometimes I can't speak clearly, especially when I'm stressed. My words get all jammed up. I don't like dodgeball, tetherball, chasing games, or making fun of people. I do like to read books. I also keep lots of stuff in my pockets. I like to make things out of duck tape, and occasionally I wear things I make out of it: wristbands, bow ties, caps. . . . I insist on calling it *duck* tape, not *duct* tape, which is what most people call it. It was invented during World War II to waterproof ammunition. Waterproof. Duck. Duck tape.

I don't think any of this makes me weird. Compared to Toulouse, I'm practically normal.

"How . . . do . . . you . . . pronounce . . . your . . . last . . . name, Toulouse?" Mr. Logwood asks, as if pausing after every word will help the kid understand a foreign language. He writes Toulouse's full name on the whiteboard: "Toulouse Hulot."

Toulouse Hulot doesn't answer. He just stares.

"That's . . . okay," Mr. Logwood says. "You . . . can . . . tell . . . us . . . later. Would . . . you . . . like . . . to . . . hang . . . up . . . your . . . hat . . . and . . . coat?"

Toulouse shakes his head. Some of the kids giggle.

"That's . . . fine," Mr. Logwood says, though you're not allowed to wear a hat indoors at our school.

Mr. Logwood leads Toulouse over to our group. Toulouse stares at us, one at a time, his head swiveling, his eyes frozen in their sockets. It's creepy.

"Toulouse will be in your group, people.

Please introduce yourselves and help him feel at home." Mr. Logwood turns and walks away.

"Hi, I'm Monique," Monique Whitlow says.

"Ursula," says Ursula Lowry.

"Garrett," Garrett says, sticking out his hand like he wants to shake.

His henchman, Hubcap Ostwinkle, whose real name is Vitus Ostwinkle, snickers.

Garrett's up to something. Joy buzzer? Death grip? Did he slobber into his palm? I would not put anything past the guy.

When Toulouse holds out his gloved hand, Garrett jerks his own back and runs his fingers smoothly through his stubbly hair. The fake-out handshake. Never funny.

I take Toulouse's hand and shake it. His glove is soft and sewn together with heavy black stitches. There's something strange about the way his hand feels inside it, as if it's too small, too light. His bones feel thin and fragile. I grip his hand gently, just in case.

"I'm . . .," I say, then momentarily forget my name. "Woodrow Schwette?" I say it like a question.

Hubcap snorts like a donkey. *Donkey* is a polite word for what he is.

Toulouse makes a little bow in my direction. Which is odd, but also sort of classy.

He hops up onto his chair. His feet don't reach the floor.

"Name's Hubcap," Hubcap says. "You're really short, kid."

So rude.

"Please take out your writing notebooks, class," Mr. Logwood announces. "Today we are going to write about how it might feel to be a new student in a new classroom. Of course, Toulouse, you ... can ... write ... about ... how ... it ... *does* ... feel ... to ... be ... a ... new ... student."

Toulouse sets his briefcase on his desk, unsnaps its two silver buckles, and takes out a small, square black bottle, a white feather, and a book with a plain black cover. He unscrews the top of the bottle and dips the pointy end of the feather into it.

Monique and Ursula stare at him like he just climbed out of a flying saucer. Ursula actually points.