

## CHAPTER THREE

### The Terrifying Bigness of the Washing Machine

#### SECTION 1

Lumphy has peanut butter on him. Here is how it happened.

He went on a picnic! The Little Girl and her father walked to a park, where there was a big pond and lots of grass and sunshine. The Girl carried Lumphy all the way there, holding on to his tail (it didn't hurt), and then they all three sat on a patchwork blanket and ate peanut butter and jam sandwiches, round green apples, and dried pineapple. They threw rocks into the pond.

Then the sky turned dark and it started to rain. The Girl and her father ran home as fast as they could, with Lumphy in the picnic basket.

The lid of the peanut butter jar was not on tight. Lumphy jounced and joggled and got goo all across his face and front legs. It was very greasy. When they arrived home, the Girl wiped him with a paper napkin, but he is still a very peanut-buttery buffalo.

The father says Lumphy will have to be washed.

"I don't see what the problem is," says Lumphy to StingRay, later that evening. The Little Girl is out for Chinese food with her parents, and the two of them are building block towers on the shaggy rug.

"You're dirty," says StingRay, placing a block on top of her pile.

"It's not dirt. It's food."

"Food *is* dirt when it's mashed in your fur."

"No it isn't. It's food. Why would it be dirt in your fur, but nice and tasty anywhere else?"

"It would be dirt if it was on the rug," says StingRay. "Or on the sofa."

“Food isn’t dirty, or you wouldn’t eat it. I have some nice clean food on me. I don’t see that it’s a problem that needs washing.”

“If people think it’s dirty, then it is,” StingRay claims.

Plastic rolls by on her way to visit the rocking horse in the corner. “People bigger than you,” she chimes in. “If people bigger than you think it’s dirty—that’s when it is.”

“Clean is better than dirty,” explains StingRay. “Like neat is better than messy,

and smart is better than stupid,

and chocolate is better than lentils,

and blue is better than orange.”

“I like orange,” mutters Lumphy.

“Some people do,” allows StingRay, lining up her blocks in a neat row. “But blue is better.”

Lumphy does not want to be washed, especially after what TukTuk told him earlier about the bumpity washing machine in the basement—how you go round and round in soapy water, and how it makes you dizzy and sick to your stomach.

Lumphy asks StingRay if she knows anything about washing machines.

“Not from personal experience,” StingRay admits. She is “dry clean only” and has never gotten wet. But she has a lot to say about basements. “They are dark and full of rats,” she explains. “And there are spiders in the corners with fifty-eight legs,

and ghosts hide there when the attic is full up,

and there are cardboard boxes that anything

could pop out of,

like sharks, or knives, or axe murderers,

and more dust than you ever saw in your life.

I don’t know why you would go to a basement to get clean,” muses StingRay. “Because basements are dirty places.”

## SECTION 2

That night, Lumphy tells Plastic and StingRay he'll be going away for a while. He keeps his planned hiding place top-secret, even from his friends. He doesn't want to take any chances of being discovered.

Then he creeps into the closet, squeezing himself back behind a shoe box on the floor. He figures that if the Little Girl doesn't see him for a few weeks, she'll forget all about washing him. When he emerges from the closet he'll still be greasy—but she'll think that's just the way he is, not anything that needs to change.

“I am a greasy buffalo,” he says to himself, and it sounds pretty tough.

For three days, he waits in the closet with only dust and socks for company. He hopes his peanutty smell doesn't give him away.

He waits . . .

and waits . . .

and waits.

He does not come out, even when the Little Girl is at school or asleep, because what if she came home early or woke up from a nightmare? He can't risk it.

He is lonely, all by himself in the closet.

One day, the Little Girl is searching for a particular pair of socks. She opens the door and begins rummaging right near where Lumphy is hiding. She's moving shoes and boxes and other bits of clutter. “Peanut butter,” she says to her mother. “What smells like peanut butter?”

Lumphy dives headfirst into a soccer shoe. It is muddy from the Girl's practice the day before. He's too big for it, and has to scrunch his head all the way down into the toe in order to hide. Even then, his bottom is sticking out pretty far, and he is so worried about being found that his tail wags back and forth without him doing it on purpose.

He holds his breath and tries to stop his tail. © Copyright 2012 Young Audiences, Inc. All Rights

It won't stop.

He tries to squeeze his bottom in, so it won't be sticking out.

It won't squeeze.

He tries not to smell like peanut butter.

But he stinks.

The Little Girl roots around in the closet for eight days. Well, it is really eight minutes, but it

feels

like

eight

days

to Lumphy.

Finally, finally, finally, the Girl finds her particular sock and goes away.

Lumphy tries to get out.

He wiggles. He woggles.

He grunts, and humphs, and pushes.

But he's still in the shoe, with his bottom sticking out.

"Help!" he yells, but he is too deep in for anyone to hear him.

It is a long day. And a long night. Stuck in the shoe.

Around 4 a.m., the one-eared sheep wanders into the closet, following an interesting smell that she smells. Lumphy can tell it is her, because she makes a snorty noise when she walks. "What are you doing in there?" Sheep wants to know.

"Hrmmphle wurrffle," says Lumphy.

"Come out. I can't hear you."

"Wurrffle wummpffle!"

"What? Sorry," says the sheep. "It's my ear. I've lost it."

“Wurrffle wummpffle purrmple!”

Sheep doesn't understand. She is distracted by the tasty-looking lace of the soccer shoe. It's not grass, and it's not clover, but it looks pretty chewable to the sheep.

She settles down next to the shoe and has herself a lovely munch, pulling the lace out bit by bit. She hears a Wurrffle Wummpffle noise, and it's irritating, but she doesn't let it bother her. Pretty soon the sound quiets down to nothing.

When she is done chewing the lace, Sheep is mildly surprised to find herself in the closet. She burps and goes out to play pick-up sticks with the toy mice.

### SECTION 3

Two hours later, Lumphy (who fell asleep wedged in the dampness of the soccer shoe) wakes up to find he can lift his head. The lace has been chewed into fourteen small pieces, and without it, the shoe flops open. Lumphy waggles his shoulders and stands up. Then he steps gingerly out, and creeps into the bedroom to find the one-eared sheep dozing on the rug.

“Thanks,” he whispers, nuzzling her wooly face. “You're a true friend.”

Sheep has no idea what he is talking about.

Just then, the Little Girl rolls over and makes a mumbly noise. She is waking up!

Rumpa lumpa, rumpa lumpa—Lumphy gallops at top speed and dives behind the rocking horse in the corner. The Girl stands and puts on her clothes. Then she begins looking around—under the bed, behind the bookshelf, even in the back of the closet, where Lumphy used to be hiding!

She's searching the room as if she's lost something, rooting through the toy shelf, tossing whirly tops and colored markers and board games and mice every which way.

Then Lumphy hears a sad sound. He has heard it before, but not often. The Little Girl is crying. “He's not here!” she wails. “I need him!”

Lumpy peeks through the legs of the rocking horse so he can see the Girl's face.  
Her cheeks are wet.

“Lumpy, Lumpy!” The Girl throws herself on the bed, buries her face in the pillow, and weeps.

*She misses me*, Lumpy realizes. *She thinks I'm gone forever.*

The idea had never occurred to him.

He rushes out from behind the horse.

Ag! He remembers the washing machine and runs back behind the horse's legs.

Ag! The Little Girl is *crying*. Out again.

Ag! The washer. Back behind the legs.

Crying!

Out.

Washer!

Back.

Cry!

Wash!

Out!

Back!

Ag!

Lumpy cannot stand it anymore. He loves the Little Girl and he hates to make her cry. So although he is desperately afraid of the washing machine—and of the deep, dark basement with its ghosts, and rats, and axe murderers—he creeps out from behind the horse while the Little Girl is sobbing into her pillow.

Quietly, Lumpy tips over one of the green rubber boots sitting near the foot of the bed. The he lies down (very cleverly) right in front of the boot, as if he'd been shoved down in there and only spilled out when the boot tipped over.

When the Girl stops crying and looks around for a tissue, she sees Lumphy lying there. She picks him up and kisses him all over his peanut-buttery face, squeezing him until he thinks his buffalo teeth might fall out. “Lumphy!” she cries. “You were in my boot!” She pets his head. “How did you get in my boot, you sweetie sweetie?”

For a moment, life is wonderful. Lumphy is happy.

Then the Girl smells him.

“You stink like peanut butter,” she says. “And you’re greasy. But don’t worry, Lumphy. I know just what to do about *that*.”

#### SECTION 4

The basement is dark, except for a single dim lightbulb shining in the ceiling. There are cardboard boxes piled up high, and a tremendous amount of dust, just like StingRay said there would be. Lumphy can’t see any ghosts or rats or axe murderers, but he is sure they are there, hiding in the corners, ready to pop out and scare a buffalo at any moment.

The Little Girl left him sitting in a laundry hamper. She’s gone to ask for help with the soap. Next to the hamper, the Washing Machine looms, towering in all its metal whiteness and terrifying bigness. Lumphy shuts his eyes and tries not to ponder it.

But he ponders it anyway.

He could scramble out of the hamper, he thinks, and hide himself in a corner.

But no, there might be a ghost there.

And the Little Girl would miss him.

He could try to climb the stairs, but he is not sure he can make it. And even if he got to the top, the Girl would just find him on the floor and wash him anyway.

“I am a greasy buffalo,” he says to himself, because it sounds tough. But he doesn’t feel much better, and shuts his eyes to block out the sight of the big Machine.

“Quiet, are you?” says a friendly voice. “Shoot. I was hoping for some company.”

Lumphy opens one eye. “Who’s talking?”

“Me, Frank,” says the voice. “Who else would it be?”

“Frank?”

“The washer,” says the Washing Machine.

Lumphy opens his other eye. The machine isn’t moving, but it is certainly making conversation. “I didn’t expect you to talk,” says Lumphy in a small voice.

“No one ever does. It’s a lonely life,” says Frank. “Just me and a dryer that never has anything interesting to say.”

“Hmmp,” rumbles the Dryer, a large brown contraption sitting next to Frank.

“Well, you don’t, do you?” says Frank testily.

“Ummph,” says the Dryer.

“This is how it is, all day,” complains Frank. “She’s never any fun. What’s that on you—applesauce?”

“Peanut butter.”

“Don’t worry, I can fix you right up. Peanut butter is no problem. Done it tons of times before.”

“It’s very greasy.”

“I’m an excellent washing machine. Top of my game, not that anyone really notices.”

“TukTuk never told me about you,” says Lumphy, standing up on his hind legs to peep over the edge of the laundry basket at Frank.

“What is TukTuk?”

“A towel. A yellow one, with frayed edges.”

“I think I’ve seen her around.”



“Ummmrgh,” complains the Dryer.

“Exactly,” says Frank. “Those towels are stuck-up. None of them ever says a word to either one of us. It’s like they think they’re so popular.”

“Do you talk to *them*?” asks Lumphy.

“Oh, they’re busy amongst themselves,” says Frank. “I can’t get a word in edgewise, not that they’d pay me any mind.”

“TukTuk is beautiful,” says Lumphy, who is very loyal.

“Pretty is as pretty does, that’s what I say.”

“Maybe she doesn’t know you talk?”

Frank had never thought of that.

“If you don’t talk to her, I bet she doesn’t know,” says Lumphy, feeling helpful.

## SECTION 5

The Little Girl’s father puts Lumphy into Frank’s washtub, adds a sprinkling of powdered soap, and presses a button. Warm water pours in. The tub is rumbling.

“Frank!” yells Lumphy, anxious to be heard above the din. “I don’t feel good. Will you stop, please?”

“Can’t stop,” says Frank importantly. “It’s a cycle.”

“I feel sick!”

“What a cycle means,” explains Frank, “is that I have to see it through to the end.”

“How long does it last?”

“Twenty-two minutes. Agitation, rinse, second rinse, and spin. You have nineteen minutes left.”

“It’s uncomfortable,” moans Lumphy, as the water sloshes him back and forth.

“Think of it like a dance,” says Frank. “Then maybe you won’t feel sick.”

“But there’s no music.”

So Frank begins to sing:

“Shuffle-o

Shuffle-o

Greasy little

Buffalo

Tough-y little buffle-y

Dance that buffalo shuffle with me!

Dance, dance, prance, prance

Dance that buffalo shuffle with me!”

Lumpy likes the idea of a buffalo shuffle. He does feel queasy during the agitation, but Frank keeps singing as Lumpy sloshes around, and by the first rinse cycle—when the clean, cool water pours in to wash the soap and peanut butter away—the buffalo is starting to enjoy himself. “Dance, dance, prance, prance!” he sings along with Frank, wagging his tail and clapping his front paws together.

By the second rinse he is kicking up his back legs and yelling “tough-y little buffle-y” as loud as he can yell. And when the spin cycle arrives, he forgets completely that spinning makes his stomach feel funny. “Wheeeee!” cries Lumpy. “Look at meeeee!”

Then the wash is over. The Girl’s father pulls him out to go hang on a clothesline in the open air.

“Goodbye, Frank!” Lumpy calls as the basement door shuts. “You have a wonderful singing voice.”

“Thank you!” calls Frank. “It’s nice to have someone appreciate it.”

“Urrgmh,” says the Dryer.

## SECTION 6

Lumphy goes on another picnic the next weekend. Same pond, same sandwiches. It doesn't look like rain, though, so his chances of going home in the picnic basket are slim.

When the Little Girl and her father are feeding the ducks, and Lumphy knows they aren't looking, he (very cleverly) unscrews the lid of the jam jar and dips his nose and forefeet into the apricot goo.

"I am a sticky buffalo," he says to himself. "And when I get home, I am going to visit Frank."

Sitting there on the picnic blanket, he begins to sing:

“Shuffle-o

Shuffle-o

Sticky little

Buffalo

Tough-y little buffle-y

Dance that buffalo shuffle with me!

Dance, dance, prance, prance

Dance that buffalo shuffle with me!”