

Dan Gutman

Mr. Burke Is Berserk!



Pictures by
Jim Paillot



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Burke Is
Berserk!**



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Dedication

To Emma

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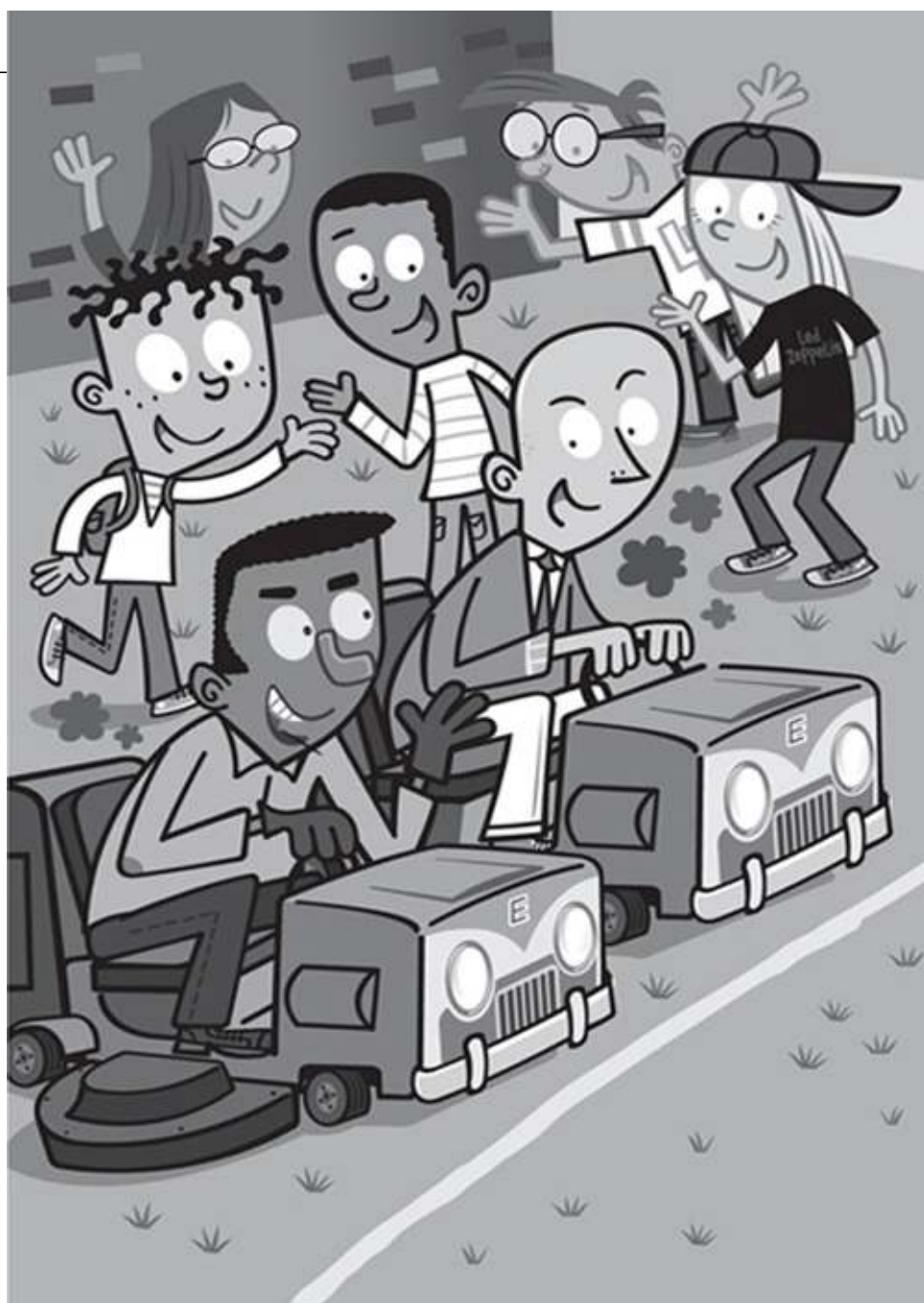
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The Big Race

My name is A.J. and I hate ice cream.

Actually, that's not true. I *love* ice cream. In fact, it's one of my favorite things in the world. I was just pulling your leg there.

No, I wasn't doing that either. If I was pulling your leg, I would actually be taking your leg and *pulling* on it. Why would anybody want to pull on a leg? That's a weird thing to do.*

Speaking of weird things, last week the weirdest thing in the history of the world happened. When I got to school, our groundskeeper, Mr. Burke, was sitting out in the playground on a riding lawn mower.

Well, that's not the weird part, because Mr. Burke sits on a riding lawn mower all the time. The weird part was that right next to him was our principal, Mr. Klutz. He was sitting on *another* lawn mower.

All the kids gathered around to see what was going on. I went over to my friends Ryan, Michael, Neil, and Alexia.

"What's going on?" I asked.

"Mr. Klutz and Mr. Burke are going to have a lawn mower race," said Michael, who never ties his shoes.

"The first one to reach the monkey bars wins," said Ryan, who will eat anything, even stuff that isn't food.

"Lawn mower races *rock*," said Alexia, who is a girl but is cool anyway.

"The loser has to pay the winner a dollar," said Neil, who we call the nude kid even though he wears clothes.

Mr. Klutz and Mr. Burke revved the motors of their lawn mowers and glared at each other.

"Get ready to *lose*, pardner!" shouted Mr. Burke. "Ah reckon Ah'm a-gonna give you a whuppin' you'll never forget."

He talks funny. He had a toothpick in his mouth, too. What's up with that?

"Kiss my grass!" yelled Mr. Klutz. "You're going *down*, Mr. Burke!"

That's when Andrea Young, this annoying girl with curly brown hair, came over. She was with her equally annoying cry-baby friend Emily.

"Hi, Arlo!" said Andrea. She calls me by my real name because she knows I don't like it.

I didn't say hello to Andrea because I knew the guys would start teasing me and saying I was in love with her.

"They shouldn't have dangerous races and gamble on school property," Andrea told us. "It sets a bad example for children."

"I agree," said Emily, who agrees with everything Andrea says.

"Can you possibly be more boring?" asked Alexia.



Andrea stuck out her tongue at Alexia. Alexia stuck out her tongue at Andrea. Emily stuck out her tongue at Alexia. Alexia stuck out her tongue at Emily.

Whenever somebody says something mean to you, always stick out your tongue at them. That's the first rule of being a kid.

"I'm not boring," Andrea said. "I just don't like violence."

"What do you have against violins?" I asked.

Everybody laughed even though I didn't say anything funny.

"Not violins, Arlo!" Andrea said, rolling her eyes. "Violence!"

Oh. Why can't a truckload of violins fall on Andrea's head?

Our gym teacher, Miss Small, came running out in front of the lawn mowers. She was carrying a big flag.

"On your mark," she yelled, "get set... GO!"

She waved the flag. Mr. Klutz and Mr. Burke took off.*



A Seesaw Battle

The lawn mower race was hilarious, because lawn mowers go *really* slow. I mean, I can *walk* faster than those things. It was like watching a turtle race. But it was still exciting, and everybody was yelling and screaming.



“Put the pedal to the metal, Mr. Klutz!”

“You can beat him, Mr. Burke!”

We all walked alongside the lawn mowers so we could see who was winning. First Mr. Klutz took the lead. Then Mr. Burke took the lead. Then Mr. Klutz was ahead. Then Mr. Burke was ahead.

“This is a real seesaw battle!” shouted Ryan.

“Are they going to fight on the seesaws?” I asked. “That would be *cool!*”

After about a million hundred minutes, the lawn mowers reached the other end of the playground. Mr. Burke jumped off and touched the monkey bars first.

“Yee-ha!” he shouted. “Ah’m a-grinnin’ like a weasel in a henhouse.”

Mr. Klutz gave Mr. Burke a dollar. All the excitement was over, and we had to go into school to start the day. Bummer in the summer!

“Mr. Burke is weird,” I said as we walked to class.



“Remember the time he grew a corn maze on the soccer field?” asked Neil.

“Remember the time he mowed big circles in the grass and told us they were made by UFOs?” asked Michael.

“Maybe Mr. Burke isn’t really a grounds-keeper at all,” I said. “Maybe he kidnapped the *real* groundskeeper and locked him in the equipment shed where he keeps the lawn mowers. Stuff like that happens all the time, you know.”

“Stop trying to scare Emily,” said Andrea.

“I’m scared!” said Emily.

“Mr. Burke probably escaped from a loony bin,” said Ryan.

“Yeah,” I said. “He probably snatches kids during recess and buries them under the monkey bars.”

“We’ve got to *do* something!” Emily shouted. Then she started freaking out and went running down the hallway.

Sheesh, get a grip! That girl will fall for *anything*.



The *T* Word

The rest of us walked to class with our teacher, Mr. Granite, who is from another planet. After we put our backpacks into our cubbies and pledged the allegiance, it was time for math. But you'll never believe who poked his head into the door at that moment.

Nobody! Poking your head into a door would hurt. But you'll never believe who poked his head into the *doorway*.



It was Mr. Klutz!

“To what do we owe the pleasure of your company?” asked Mr. Granite.

That’s grown-up talk for “What are *you* doing here?”

“Remember when I went to principal camp last year?” he said. “Well, I have to go again. I just wanted to say good-bye.”

“Bye!” we all said.

Principal camp sounds cool. I’ll bet the principals sit around a campfire and toast marshmallows. Maybe I’ll be a principal when I grow up so I can go to camp and eat toasted marshmallows.



After Mr. Klutz left, Mr. Granite went to the front of the room.

“It’s time for math,” he said. “Turn to page twenty-three in your—”

But he didn’t get the chance to finish his sentence, because at that moment an announcement came over the loudspeaker.

“All classes please report to the all-purpose room immediately.”

“Not *again!*” moaned Mr. Granite.

“Yay, no math!” I yelled.

We had to walk a million hundred miles to the all-purpose room. Along the way, we saw our art teacher, Ms. Hannah, and our music teacher, Mr. Loring. They were each pulling a rolling suitcase.

“Why did you bring suitcases to school?” Ryan asked them.

“We take them with us wherever we go,” said Ms. Hannah, “because you never know when you’re going to get fired.”

“We like to be ready,” added Mr. Loring.

Ms. Hannah and Mr. Loring are weird.

In the all-purpose room our class got to sit in the front row. But I had to sit next to annoying Andrea. Ugh, disgusting! I made sure not to let my elbow touch her elbow on the armrest so I wouldn’t catch her girl germs.

The vice principal, Mrs. Jafee, was on the stage. She held up her hand and made a peace sign, which means “shut up.”

“I’ll be in charge while Mr. Klutz is gone,” she told us. “We have a special guest who would like to speak with us today. How about a big round of applause for Mayor Hubble?”

We all clapped our hands in circles. Mayor Hubble came down the aisle with two secret service agents behind him. He was smiling, passing out buttons that said REELECT MAYOR HUBBLE, and shaking hands with everybody.

It would be cool to be the mayor. He’s like the king of the town. My friend Billy who lives around the corner told me that Mayor Hubble has a limo, and a big throne at city hall. Guys carry the mayor around in a chair, and girls in bikinis feed him grapes.

Mayor Hubble climbed up on the stage.



“I have bad news,” he announced. “The town is broke. The government has cut off all our money, but we still have to balance the budget.”

I didn’t know what he was talking about.

“Does this mean you’re going to raise taxes?” asked Ms. Jafee.

“Taxes?!”

Mayor Hubble suddenly groaned, grabbed his chest, and dropped to his knees. It looked like he was gonna die.

One of his secret service agents rushed over to help the mayor. The other one leaned over to talk to Mrs. Jafee.

“Never say the *T* word in front of the mayor,” he told her.

Mayor Hubble leaned into the microphone.

“I will *not* raise taxes!” he shouted. “I’m going to *lower* taxes!”

“If we don’t have enough money,” asked Mrs. Jafee, “shouldn’t you raise, uh, the *T* word?”

“Read my lips,” Mayor Hubble shouted at her. “No new taxes!”

“Why do we need to read your lips?” I asked. “You’re *talking*.”

“That’s just an expression, Arlo,” Andrea told me, rolling her eyes.

“I don’t understand,” said Mrs. Jafee. “How can we get the money to balance the budget if you don’t raise ... the *T* word?”

“I have an idea,” said Mrs. Roopy, our media specialist. “We could have a car wash. We could raise the money, balance the budget, and have fun all at the same time!”

“Yeah!” everybody shouted excitedly.

“No!” said Mayor Hubble.

“How about a bake sale?” asked Miss Laney, our speech teacher. “People love to buy cookies and cakes.”

“No!” said Mayor Hubble.

“A raffle?” suggested our reading specialist, Mr. Macky.

“No!” said Mayor Hubble.

“Why not just close down the school?” I suggested. “That would save money. Then we could stay

home and play video games all day.”

All the kids cheered at my genius idea.

“No!” said Mayor Hubble. “There’s only one way to balance the budget. I can tell you with just three little letters.”



Three Little Letters

The three little letters were *C-U-T*.

“Cuts!” Mayor Hubble shouted into the microphone. “We need to cut the amount of money we spend so we can balance the budget!”

Just saying the word “cut” seemed to make Mayor Hubble’s eyes light up with excitement. He had a crazy look on his face, the kind of look that evil geniuses in the movies have when they explain how they’re going to take over the world.



“The first things we’re going to cut,” Mayor Hubble told us, “are the art and music programs.”

“So long,” said Ms. Hannah, taking her rolling suitcase. “I’m outta here.”

“Right behind you,” said Mr. Loring.

“But we *love* art and music!” one of the kids shouted.



“You kids are here to *learn*,” said the mayor, “not to sit around drawing pictures and singing silly songs. That’s just a big waste of money.”

Everybody looked really sad when Ms. Hannah and Mr. Loring walked out of the all-purpose room.

“The next things we need to cut are school supplies,” said Mayor Hubble. “So from now on we’re going to stop buying glue sticks, rulers, erasers, tape, and markers. You can have one pencil per classroom.”

“That’s off the wall!” yelled Miss Small.

“Oh, stop whining,” said Mayor Hubble. “This will improve everyone’s schoolwork. If the students only have one pencil, they’ll make fewer mistakes.”

“What about crayons?” asked Miss Holly, our Spanish teacher.

“No more crayons,” said Mayor Hubble. “You can melt down candles and make them into crayons. That will save us a lot of money.”

“That’s loopy!” yelled Mrs. Roopy.

The mayor pulled a piece of paper out of his pocket to remind him of the other things he was going to cut.

“Starting today,” he announced, “I’m turning off the water fountains in the hallways. Do you know what the biggest waste of water in the world is? Water fountains! The water just shoots right out of them!”

“That’s bizarre!” yelled Miss Lazar, our custodian.

“Oh, give me a break,” Mayor Hubble said. “It’s not like people *need* water to live or anything. And I know you kids just go to the water fountain when you don’t want to sit in class. You’re not fooling anybody.”

Well, he was right about *that*.

“That’s daffy!” yelled Mrs. Jafee.

“From now on,” the mayor continued, “there will be no more toilet paper in the bathrooms. That stuff costs way too much money.”

“You’re getting rid of the toilet paper?” shouted Alexia. “What are we supposed to use?”

“Post-it Notes,” said the mayor.

“That’s loony!” yelled Mrs. Cooney, the school nurse. “And disgusting!”

“From now on the teachers will have their pay cut in half,” the mayor continued. “You teachers

make way too much money.”

Teachers get paid? That was a new one on me. I thought they just came to school every day because they had no place else to go.

“But we hardly make any money as it is!” yelled Mrs. Yonkers, our computer teacher.



“What do *you* teach?” Mayor Hubble asked Mrs. Yonkers.

“I’m the computer teacher.”

“Well, you’re fired,” said the mayor. “I’m replacing you with a computer. A computer should be able to teach a computer class much better than a human being anyway. And computers don’t whine and complain like people do.”

“He’s off his rocker!” yelled Mr. Docker, our science teacher.

“You crybaby teachers should be thankful you have jobs at all,” said the mayor. “Oh, and I want the coffee machine and the hot tub removed from the teachers’ lounge.”

“We don’t have a hot tub in the teachers’ lounge,” said Mrs. Jafee.

“You don’t?” said the mayor. “Hmmm. Then put a hot tub in the teachers’ lounge and then take it out. We have no money to spend on silly things like hot tubs for teachers.”

“He’s loco!” said Ms. Coco, the gifted and talented teacher.

Mayor Hubble was getting more and more excited as he talked about all the cuts he was going to make.

“After we get rid of the hot tub in the teachers’ lounge,” he said, “get rid of the tables and chairs there and sell them on eBay.”

“Do you expect the teachers to sit on the *floor*?” asked Mr. Granite.

“Yes!” said Mayor Hubble. “It will be like a picnic every day. You like picnics, don’t you? Who doesn’t like a picnic?”

“He’s gone mad!” said Dr. Brad, the school counselor.

“Come to think of it,” said the mayor, “why do you teachers need a lounge anyway? You don’t have time for lounging around in hot tubs and having picnics. This is a school, not some beach resort.”

“But we don’t *have* a hot tub!” yelled Miss Laney, our speech teacher.

“Not anymore you won’t,” said the mayor. “Not after I get rid of the one we’re putting in. All these cuts will help us balance the budget. And when the voters see how much money I saved, they’ll vote to reelect me in November.”

“Are *you* going to take a pay cut too?” asked Mrs. Jafee.

“Don’t be silly,” said Mayor Hubble. “I’m giving myself a raise for coming up with these great ideas to save money.”

“That makes no sense!” yelled Officer Spence, our security guard. “We *need* pencils and glue sticks and water fountains and toilet paper. We *need* tables and chairs. We need all those things that you’re going to cut.”

“Yeah!” shouted all the teachers.

“If Mr. Klutz was here, he would never allow any of this,” said Mr. Granite.

“That’s right!” shouted the teachers.

“Well, Mr. Klutz isn’t here, is he?” asked Mayor Hubble. “He’s at principal camp.”

Everybody was really mad. And you’ll never believe who poked his head into the door at that moment.

Nobody! Poking your head into doors is dumb. I thought we went over that in the last chapter.

But you’ll never believe who poked his head into the *doorway*.*

It was Mr. Burke, the groundskeeper!

“Ah mowed the lawn,” said Mr. Burke.



“Ah trimmed the bushes. Ah been busier than a one-armed man hangin’ wallpaper, and Ah am plum tuckered out. What do you want me to do next?”

“Next?” asked Mayor Hubble. “The next thing you can do is go home. There’s no money in the

budget for a groundskeeper anymore. So you're fired. Have a nice day.”

I think that was the moment when Mr. Burke went berserk.

The Class Pencil

None of us could believe that Mr. Burke had been fired. Who would mow the lawn? Who would trim the bushes? Who would rake the leaves in the fall and shovel the snow in the winter?

Mr. Burke didn't say a word. He just stood up and walked slowly out the doorway.

When we got back to class, I looked out the window and saw Mr. Burke sitting all by himself on the monkey bars in the playground. It was sad.

"Okay, it's time for math," said Mr. Granite. "Get out your pencils and turn to page twenty-three in your math books. Do the first problem and write the answer in your notebook."

Ugh. I hate math.

"I don't have a pencil," said Ryan.

"Me neither," said Michael.

"My pencil is gone!" said Neil the nude kid.

"Somebody stole my pencil, too!" said Alexia.

"Somebody took *all* of our pencils!" said Andrea.

It was true! All of our pencils were gone. Our glue sticks, tape, erasers, and rulers were gone, too.

"Somebody stole our stuff!" I shouted.

"Who would steal school supplies?" asked Andrea.

"Mayor Hubble!" said Mr. Granite. "He's probably going to sell our school supplies on eBay so he can balance the budget."

"Wow," I said, "he didn't waste any time."

"Mayor Hubble is *mean!*" said Emily.

"That may be true, but we still have to do math," said Mr. Granite. "There's one pencil on my desk. We'll just have to share the class pencil."

"Can I use the class pencil *first*?" asked Little Miss Perfect. "I already know the answer to the first problem."

Andrea always knows the answer to *every* problem. I hate her.

"I want the class pencil first!" I shouted. "Please, Mr. Granite?"

I didn't even want the dumb pencil. I just didn't want Little Miss Know-It-All to get it.

"Andrea and A.J. may *share* the class pencil," said Mr. Granite. "Then pass it down to the next person."

"Ooooooh!" Ryan said. "A.J. and Andrea are going to share the class pencil. They must be in *love*!"

"When are you gonna get married?" asked Michael.

If those guys weren't my best friends, I would hate them.

Andrea snatched the pencil from Mr. Granite before I could get it. I grabbed the other end of the pencil.

"I get to use the class pencil *first*, Arlo!" said Andrea.

"No," I shouted at her, "we're supposed to share it."

"Me!"

"No, me!"



“Both of you! Knock it—”

Mr. Granite didn’t get the chance to finish his sentence. Because at that moment the weirdest thing in the history of the world happened.

SNAP!

The class pencil broke in half.

“Look what you did, Arlo!” shouted Andrea. “You broke the class pencil!”

“I didn’t break it,” I shouted back at her. “*You* broke it!”

“I did not!”

“Did too.”

“Now we can’t do math,” said Michael.

“Yay!” said Ryan. “No math!”

“Mr. Granite, Arlo broke the class pencil on purpose so he wouldn’t have to do math!” Andrea yelled.

“I did not!”

“Did too!”

Andrea started hitting me, and I hit her back.

“Stop!” shouted Mr. Granite. “I will not have violence in my classroom!”

“What do you have against violins?” I asked.

“Not violins, Arlo!” said Andrea, rolling her eyes. “Violence!”

“Oh. That sounds a lot like violins to me.”

“Forget the class pencil,” said Mr. Granite. “We’ll use the whiteboard. You kids will *not* get out of doing math *this* time.”

I had to admit that breaking the class pencil to get out of doing math wasn’t a bad idea. I wish I had thought of it. But that gave me another idea.

“Mr. Granite,” I said, “can I go get a drink of water?”

“Mayor Hubble turned off the water fountains,” he replied. “Remember?”

“Oh yeah,” I said. “May I go to the boys’ room?”

“Do you *really* have to go to the boys’ room, A.J.?” Mr. Granite asked me. “Or are you just trying to get out of math?”

“I really have to go,” I lied.

“Well, okay,” said Mr. Granite. “Here, take some Post-it Notes with you.”

I was about to walk out the doorway when the weirdest thing in the history of the world happened

Brrrring! Brrrring! Brrrring!

It was the recess bell!

Yay! No math!

It was the greatest moment of my life.

Mr. Burke Goes Berserk

When we went out to the playground for recess, two big guys were there.* They were sawing off the bottoms of the monkey bars. When they finished, they picked the whole thing up and started carrying it away.

“Where are you taking our monkey bars?” I asked.

“To Rent-A-Monkey Bars,” one of the guys replied. “You can rent anything.”

They also took away our swings, slides, climbing wall, kickballs, volleyball nets, soccer goals, and jump ropes. They even took the tetherball pole out of the ground! Then they threw all that stuff into a big truck and drove away.

We were sad. There was nothing to do. What fun is recess when you have nothing to play with?

“Mayor Hubble is *mean*,” said Andrea. And for once I agreed with her.

We wandered around the playground until we saw Mr. Burke coming out of the equipment shed. He had something in his hand.

“Why is he still here?” asked Alexia. “Mayor Hubble fired him.”

“What’s he holding?” asked Ryan.

“It looks like a ... chain saw,” said Andrea.

A CHAIN SAW?!

We all started freaking out.

“Mr. Burke is crazy!” I yelled.

“He must have snapped,” yelled Neil the nude kid.

“He’s going to kill everybody in the school!” yelled Ryan.

“It will be like that movie *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre!*” yelled Michael.



Mr. Burke pulled a cord to start up the chain saw, and it made a loud noise like a motorcycle.

“We’ve got to *do* something!” yelled Emily.

We were about to run inside and warn the teachers when Mr. Burke went over to the biggest bush in the playground.

“Wait a minute,” said Andrea. “He’s not going to kill anybody. He’s going to trim the bushes!”

Andrea was right, as usual. Mr. Burke started cutting the side of the big bush with the chain saw. He carefully cut into one side and then he went around to cut the other side.

“Why is he trimming—” Emily started to say.

“He’s not trimming it!” Andrea said. “He’s making a *sculpture*. He’s making a bush sculpture!”

She was right again. And Mr. Burke wasn’t just making *any* sculpture. As he cut into the bush with the chain saw, we could see that he was making a sculpture of a *person*. And as he continued cutting, we could see that the person wasn’t just *any* person.

“It’s... Mayor Hubble!” shouted Alexia.

She was right, too. The bush looked just like the mayor.

“Mr. Burke is weird,” said Ryan.

Andrea had on her worried face, so I knew she was going to say something about her mother the psychologist.

“I’m worried,” she said. “My mother is a psychologist. She would say that Mr. Burke is obsessed with Mayor Hubble. He needs to move on with his life and get a new job.”

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