

DENNY THE DIMINUTIVE DETECTIVE:
THE GOLDEN BEETLE

This is Denny. He loves bugs! He really loves bugs. Bugs that fly, bugs that crawl, bugs that wiggle; Denny loves them all. In fact, at school he is called Professor Bug by his friends. They call him Professor Bug because no one has been able to show Denny a species of bug that he couldn't name. Even his teacher, Ms Calis, calls him her "little entomologist." (That's someone who studies bugs).

Denny is fidgeting in his seat and tapping his pencil on his desk. He blows a piece of his curly brown hair off his forehead and stares at the clock. Today is Friday and the weekend is just minutes away. He can't wait to rush home and finish the project he started. Denny has been making a town for all types of bugs to live in. The town has buildings and streets and a small park. This weekend is going to be the official opening of his bug town (eventhough he hasn't thought of a name for it yet).

In just a couple of minutes the bell would ring and Denny can jump on his bike and race home. Then he'll grab a quick snack and run to the giant tree stump in the meadow behind his house. The big stump was the perfect place for building a bug town.

3,2,1...the bell rang. Denny said, good-bye to Ms Calis and then he flew out the door. He ran straight to the bike rack and unlocked his bike. Jumping on his bike, he zipped out of the school grounds. He gave a quick salute to the school safety officer, then turned left and raced down Main Street as fast as he could. He flew past Dutch's Hardware store and right past Andy's Ice Cream shop, where he and his friends always went Fridays after school. At the end of Main Street he decided to take the forbidden short cut across old man Jenkins' property. Denny knew it was wrong but he was so excited. He felt for sure Mr. Jenkins would forgive him this time. As Mr. Jenkins' shouts faded behind him, Denny yelled out, "Sorry Mr. J, it's an emergency!" Denny sped out of old man Jenkins' property and down the hill towards home. He coasted into his front yard, jumped off his bike and ran into his house.

"I'm home, Mom!" Denny yelled. "I'm going to the meadow!"

"No need to yell dear. I'm right behind you" said Denny's mom. "Before you go carousing with those bugs, get upstairs and change your clothes. You know how dirty you get playing out in the meadow."

" Oh, ok Mom " Denny said as he grabbed an apple and a juice box and headed up the stairs.

As Denny was putting on his play clothes, he thought he heard laughter coming from the meadow. Denny's heart jumped because he knew this laughter all too well.

This was the evil criminal laughter of Horace Bean and Todd Belcher.

They were known as the "B boys". They were the school bullies. Many times they had picked on Denny by making fun of his love of bugs. Many times they had pushed Denny's face into the dirt and said, "What kind of bug is that, Bug Boy?" Then they would rap the top of his head with their knuckles and laugh like a couple of hyenas.

Denny was very afraid and didn't know what to do. If he asked his mom for help, he would be teased at school for having his mother fight his battles. If he ran out there, the "B boys" would probably beat him up for spoiling their fun. But if he didn't go, all the bugs in his town would be in danger. Denny went to his desk and took out the binoculars he kept in the desk drawer. He focused in on the two bullies. What he saw gave him courage. Horace was crouched over the bug town holding a magnifying glass. Todd had a sharp stick and was trying to get bugs out of the town's buildings for Horace to torture, by concentrating the sun's rays with the magnifying glass.

Denny became very angry. He remembered a couple of things his dad had told him, "Sometimes we have to fight for what we believe in. We should always help those weaker than ourselves."

Denny turned to look at himself in the mirror. He was definitely skinnier than the two bullies but maybe almost as tall as one. Denny gave a growl and flexed his muscles in the mirror. He wasn't sure what he was about to do but he couldn't just sit there and let the "B boys" burn his bug friends.

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He grabbed the apple that was on his bed and raced down the stairs and out the back door. He stopped for a moment at the back gate and took a deep breath. "This is it" Denny said to himself as he slowly opened the gate.

The laughter coming from the "B boys" made the hair on the back of his neck stand up, but he knew he had to face his fears and save his bug friends. Denny began to run as fast as he could straight for Horace who was holding the magnifying glass. As Denny got closer, he let out a giant yell, "STOP!" Denny's scream startled Horace and he dropped the magnifying glass. Before Horace could stand up, Denny jumped as high as he could into the air straight at Horace. Both of his feet hit Horace squarely on the chest. This knocked the wind out of Horace and sent Denny and Horace rolling on the ground. Denny got to his feet quickly and turned to face Todd. Todd was coming at Denny with the stick in his hand. He was swinging the stick back and forth and said, "Well if it isn't the bug boy. I gonna squash you just like I did the bugs in your little town." Denny stepped back a few feet, took aim and threw the apple with all his might at Todd's nose. The apple flew fast and hard and landed on target. Splat! Todd grabbed his nose and started crying. "You broke my nose. I'm going to tell my mommy!" Horace finally caught his breath and stood up. He took one look at Todd's bloody nose and ran away screaming. Todd ran after Horace, crying, "Wait for me!"

Denny wanted to make sure they would never come back again, so he started chasing after them, making giant whoops and hollers. In all the excitement, Denny wasn't looking where he was going. He didn't see the rake that he had left on the ground.

Denny's foot stepped on the head of the rake and sent the handle flying straight up towards his head. The handle smacked Denny right between the eyes.

Denny felt the Earth start to spin and everything around him was going black. The last thing Denny felt was a sensation that he was shrinking. He felt like he was getting smaller and smaller and smaller.

Slowly Denny started to wake up. The pain in his head was incredible. He tried to open his eyes but everything was still very blurry. Then Denny thought he heard the voice of a woman saying, "Look everyone, he's moving, I think he'll be ok."

Denny tried opening his eyes again. This time he couldn't believe what he was seeing. Standing over him was a giant ladybug wearing a doctor's coat. She was holding his head up and was saying, "Here Denny, drink this. It will make you feel much better."

Denny thought for sure he was dreaming so he took a sip from the cup. A sweet warm nectar filled his body with energy. He didn't feel as dizzy anymore so he took another sip. The funny thing was he was feeling better but the ladybug in the doctor's coat wasn't disappearing. Could she be real?, Denny thought to himself.

Suddenly, a large brown beetle in a three-piece suit appeared standing over Denny.

"Thank goodness you're ok, my boy. You really gave us quite a scare," said the beetle.

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Denny sat up wild eyed in bed and looked all around him. There were more giant bugs in his room. Two of them looked like nurses and there was another dressed in green who looked like a surgeon.

Denny screamed! He pulled the covers over his head and started saying to himself,

"I'm only dreaming, this can't be happening. I'm only dreaming. "

"Now look what you've gone and done, Mayor. You've frightened the poor boy half to death," said the ladybug. "Denny, I'm sorry Mayor Brown scared you but there really is no nice way to tell you this."

"Tell me what?" said Denny "That you're giant bugs from outer space and you're going to eat me! This is a dream and you can't be real!"

"We're not giant bugs" laughed the beetle. " We shrunk you down to bug size."

" But that's impossible. How could it happen?" asked Denny

"The Mayor is right, Denny. After the rake handle hit you in the head, we had no way to get you help in the human world. We had to shrink you down and bring you here, to our hospital, so I could treat your injuries," said the ladybug doctor.

"Denny, please allow me to introduce us," said the big brown beetle, "My name is Mayor Brown and the good doctor here is Doctor Wiggins. She can fix anything. On behalf of the citizens of Scuttle-Ville, I would like to express our gratitude."

"But, I don't get it. How did I get here? Where is here and what is Wood Mount? This has to be a dream," said Denny.

“Denny, you’re not dreaming. You’re here in Scuttle-Ville. That’s the name we gave to the town you have made for all us bugs. As for how you got here, I’ll let Mayor Brown explain it to you later,” said Dr. Wiggins.

“But this can’t be my little bug town. I never built a hospital with beds and lights and everything,” exclaimed Denny.

“It’s hard to explain but since you’re now bug size, you see everything as we do with bugs eyes,” explained Dr. Wiggins.

“Excuse me, but if you’re feeling better and the doctor has no objections, I’d like to introduce you to the citizens of Wood Mount. They’re all very excited to meet the boy who saved their town,” said Mayor Brown.

Denny sat up in bed and looked at Dr. Wiggins. She gave him a wink and the thumbs up sign. Denny got to his feet and slowly walked to the window. He opened the curtains and what a sight met his eyes. As far as he could see, the street was lined with bugs. They were holding banners with his name on them and everyone was chanting “Denny! Denny!”

“You’re a hero here, my boy,” said Mayor Brown, “Now let’s go meet your public.”

Denny stood at the window in amazement. He said to himself, “Yep, this is a dream.” Mayor Brown opened the door to the hospital and motioned for Denny to come out. The crowd let out a tremendous cheer as Denny stepped into the sunlight. Denny had never felt like this before. A tingle shot up his spine and ran through his body.

Denny wasn't sure what to do so he raised his hands and waved at the crowd. Another huge cheer came from the street and Denny couldn't help smiling. Mayor Brown approached a podium on the hospital stairs and held his hands in the air trying to quiet the crowd. It took a while for the crowd to settle down. Finally, the Mayor began his speech.

“Citizens of Scuttle-Ville, today is the greatest day of our lives. This young human boy named “Denny” risked his life to save ours. As you all may know, we bugs can choose a human who is kind, caring and courageous, to act as our protector. This human will receive the greatest award possible for bugdom to give. It is the gift of the Magical Golden Beetle. Our ancestors have handed down the golden beetle for thousands of years. With this golden beetle, the owner faces tremendous responsibility and sometimes deadly danger. Hmm, this reminds me of a story my great, great grandfather once told me,” said Mayor Brown.

Doctor Wiggins came from behind the Mayor and gave him a nudge.

“Mayor, that's enough talking, get on with the voting,” said Dr. Wiggins.

“Yes, yes you're quite right. As I was saying,” continued the Mayor, “the Golden Beetle gives the owner the power to shrink down to bug size and come to our aid whenever they are needed,”

Mayor Brown gave Denny a serious look and then asked him,

“Denny would you be willing to become the defender of Wood Mount? Would you be willing to accept the responsibility and dangers that owning the Golden Beetle will bring?”

Denny looked out at the crowd and his heart felt full of warmth. He had saved these bugs and they loved him for it. Here, in Wood Mount, he could make a difference. Here, he could be special, here he was a hero.

Denny took Mayor Brown’s hand and shouted, “Yes, I accept!”

A roar went up from the crowd. It was so loud the buildings started to shake. Mayor Brown raised his hands again to silence the crowd.

“Now citizens of Wood Mount, it is formally my duty to ask you to vote to give the Golden Beetle to Denny. All in favor say ‘YES’,” said Mayor Brown.

An enormous “YES” rang out through the streets. Mayor Brown looked at Denny and said, “Looks like you’re in, my boy. Now anyone who thinks Denny should not receive the Golden Beetle, say ‘No’,” said Mayor Brown.

A silence fell over the town. It seemed as though Denny had won by a unanimous decision. Then, from the rear of the crowd, a loud rough voice spoke up.

“We say “NO” Mayor! And we want you to give the human boy to us right now,” said the loud rough voice.

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Denny looked into the audience and saw a gang of cockroaches smashing their way through the crowd. They were throwing the smaller bugs aside and shouting, “ Get out of our way. We want that little human boy ”.

The leader of the roaches was a very scary character. He had a crooked antennae and a scar on the left side of his face. Denny heard one of the gang member’s shout, “Go get him, Grime.” Grime approached the foot of the stairs and scowled at Mayor Brown.

“We want that boy now, Mayor. Hand him over! His kind has been killing our kind for years. Finally we have a chance to get back at one of them. The only good human is a dead human,” grunted Grime.

Suddenly an enormously muscular brown centipede stepped onto the stairs blocking the path of the cockroach gang. He was wearing a black leather vest and leather gloves on the upper half of his body and black leather boots on the lower half of his body. To Denny, he looked liked the strongest toughest creature he had ever seen. He was even scarier than the cockroach leader Grime. The centipede turned to face Grime and with a sly smile said, “ Hey pal, if you want to get to this human, you’ll have to go through me first,”

“ Bagger step aside. This doesn’t concern you,” said Grime, the roach leader.

“ I saw this human boy risk his life to save this town. He saved my kid sister from becoming a crispy critter. This boy’s ok in my book and I’m not gonna let you touch him,” said Bagger

“ Don’t be stupid, Bagger. I got at least a hundred of my gang with me. You don’t want to fight us,” said Grime.

“ Yeah, it doesn’t seem fair, does it? Why don’t you go back to your hole and get another hundred just to make it interesting,” Bagger said still smiling.

The roach leader motioned his gang forward towards Bagger. Instantly, a large grasshopper in a karate outfit jumped next to Bagger. The grasshopper whispered into Bagger’s ear gave a nod and then took a karate stance.

The grasshopper jumped into the air and gave a swift kick. Denny could hear a loud swoosh as the leg of the grasshopper cut through the air.

“You boys better back down or your gonna meet my new friend here, Mr. Reeds,” said Bagger. “Take a look at his kickers. Wow! I’d hate to get hit with one of those monsters,” laughed Bagger.

All eyes were on Grime, the roach leader. Grime stood frozen in his tracks. Denny was standing nervously behind Mayor Brown waiting to see what was going to happen. Grime looked at Denny and back at Bagger and Mr. Reeds. Then he let out a hiss and said,

“Come on gang. This puny kid isn’t worth it. We don’t need him or his dumb little town. Let’s go find a human home to raid.”

Grime turned and pushed his way back through the crowd, throwing bugs as he went. Just before the roach gang got out of sight, Grime turned around and shouted,

“You guys haven’t seen the last of the roach gang. BEWARE!”

Bagger gave him a huge smile and a wave and then said, “We’ll be waiting for ya.”

“ Thank goodness that’s over. I really don’t like that Grime. He’s so, so... grimey,” said Mayor Brown.

“Thank you, Mr. Bagger and Mr. Reeds. I thought I was a goner,” said Denny.

“ Ah, that was nothing. Those roaches talk tough but that’s because they travel in gangs. Besides, the way you handled those two bullies, I bet you could of taken them yourself,” said Bagger laughing.

Mr. Reeds whispered something into Bagger’s ear and then looked over at Denny.

“ Uh Denny, me and Mr. Reeds here want to thank you for saving our families.

You saved my kid sister and you saved Mr. Reeds’ entire Grasshopper School of Self-Defense. So, if you don’t mind, we’d like to shake your hand,” said Bagger.

Denny stepped from behind the Mayor and reached out to shake hands with Mr. Reeds.

Mr. Reeds whispered a pleasant, “thank you” into Denny’s ear and gave him a firm handshake. As Denny was going to shake hands with Bagger, the centipede choked backed a few tears and said, “ Come here, kid” and pulled Denny tight in a friendly bug hug with ten of his arms.

“Sorry Denny, I get emotional at times like these,” sniffed Bagger.

“I’m just glad we’re friends,” said Denny, trying to breathe.

Bagger finally let go of his grip on Denny. Denny stood between Mr. Reeds and Bagger and he raised their arms in a triumphant wave to the crowd. The crowd let out a giant cheer and both Mr. Reeds and Bagger started to blush. After a few minutes of cheering, the crowd started to settle down.

Denny looked out into the street and he saw a lady slug trying to make her way towards him. Denny motioned to the bugs to make a path so she could get to the stairs.

She was wearing a little yellow bonnet and carrying a matching purse. As she got closer, Denny could see she had tears in her eyes and looked very sad. Denny walked down the stairs to meet her.

“Hi, I’m Denny. You look like you could use my help,” he exclaimed. The lady slug took out a handkerchief and wiped her eyes and blew her nose. Then she looked at Denny and said,

“ I’m sorry I’m usually not like this. I’m usually quite together, you know. But today I’ve just lost ten of my children when those two evil boys were destroying the town, and I don’t know what to do,” said the lady slug starting to cry all over again.

Denny moved closer to the lady slug and put his arm around her.

“ It’s going to be ok. I’m going to help find your children, don’t worry,” Denny said, trying to pull his arm off the sticky slug. Denny was wiping the slime off his arm when all of a sudden a huge smile came over his face and he said out loud, “That’s it! I know how I can find your children.”

Denny ran behind the lady slug and looked down at the ground. Then he turned to the lady slug and said,

“ You’re a slug and you leave a trail of slime where ever you go.”

“Oh, I do not!” exclaimed the lady slug.

Bagger came over and said, “eh, I don’t know how to tell you this but...you do”

“Oh, my. That’s so embarrassing,” said the lady slug “ I never knew.”

“Please, Mrs. Slug, it’s nothing to be embarrassed about. All slugs travel on a thin layer of slime. That’s how you get around. And because of this trail I’ll be able to find your children. All I have to do is follow your trail backwards. Then I’ll be able to see where you and your children became separated,” said Denny.

Bagger reached over and gave Mayor Brown an elbow to the ribs.

“The boy’s a natural Mayor. Good choice,” exclaimed Bagger.

Mr. Reeds bent down and whispered something into Bagger’s ear.

“Ah Denny, me and Mr. Reeds here think it’s a good idea if we go with you.

You never know if the roach gang is hanging around or something,” said Bagger.

“That would be great,” said Denny

The trio started following the trail left by Mrs. Slug. As they walked along, Denny was amazed at how the bugs had fixed up the town. There were stores of every type, a post office, restaurants and a library. As they got farther into town, Denny started to see signs of the damage caused by the “B boys”. This part of the town looked as though a tornado had gone through it. Windows and doors were broken, walls were crumbling and, in some places, entire buildings were crushed flat.

Denny was busy tracking the slime trail of the lady slug. In this part of town the trail was a little tougher to follow because rubble was everywhere. The trail ended at a huge pile of bricks and wood that had fallen into the middle of the street. Denny climbed to the top of the pile trying to pick up the slime trail on the other side.

Suddenly, Denny yelled out, “Oh NO! Bagger, Mr. Reeds come quick!

From the top of the pile Denny could see two different trails. On one side was the single trail of the lady slug. On the other side there was two trails, one larger and one smaller. Denny knew the smaller trail belonged to her kids. So that meant the kids had to be under the huge pile of bricks.

Bagger looked over at Denny and said, "If those kids are under, here they're gonna be as flat as a butterfly's wing. I'll go tell lady slug the bad news "

"Wait!" said Denny, "We can't give up now. What if that was your family down there? Wouldn't you want to know for sure if anyone was still alive?"

"You're right, Denny. I wouldn't give up and I know Mr. Reeds wouldn't either. Let's get to it," shouted Bagger.

Mr. Reeds began kicking huge amounts of rubble off of the pile. Bagger was picking up twenty bricks at a time and throwing them off to the side. In no time the three of them had almost cleared the whole mess but there was still no sign of the kids. Then Denny raised his hand into the air.

"Listen, did you hear that?" asked Denny.

From underneath a huge wooden beam came muffled cries for help. Bagger came over to the wooden beam and tried to lift it. He managed to move it sideways just enough to reveal a small opening in a deep hole in the street. Denny bent down closer to the hole and called out, "Hello, is anybody down there?"

"Yep, all of us are down here. But we're stuck together in a big ball of slime and we can't crawl out. Hurry please, it's getting harder to breathe," said a baby slug.

Denny said, “ Don’t worry, we’re here to rescue you kids. Just give me a minute to figure out the best way to get you guys out?”

Denny looked at the huge wooden beam that was covering the hole. More than half of the beam was completely buried under the rubble of a collapsed building. Bagger tried to move it some more but the beam wouldn’t budge.

“We need to cut this wooden beam,” stated Denny.

Mr. Reeds motioned for Denny and Bagger to stand back out of the way. Mr. Reeds stood in front of the beam taking a karate stance. He took a couple of deep breaths and began to focus his mind on breaking the beam. With a loud “Ki-ai,” Mr. Reeds brought his fist down hard on the solid beam. Nothing happened. Again Mr. Reeds focused and again he struck the beam. This time there was a loud crack and the beam began to give away.

“It’s starting to break,” yelled Denny.

Mr. Reeds tried again and the beam cracked some more. Then with one last mighty blow, the huge wooden beam splintered in two. Bagger reached down and grabbed the smaller piece of the beam and threw it aside.

“ Nice job, karate bug,” said Bagger, “Now let’s rescue those kids.”

Denny looked down the hole and could see a small gray ball of slime shimmering in the sunlight. The hole looked like it got smaller the further down it went. There was only one way for the baby slugs to be rescued. Denny was going to have to be lowered down the hole headfirst. So Mr. Reeds grabbed Denny by his ankles and started lowering.

When Mr. Reeds had gone as far as he could, Bagger took hold of Mr. Reed's legs and started lowering the two rescuers deeper into the hole.

Denny hated to admit it but touching slugs was not one of his favorite things to do. Denny didn't like how the slime never seemed to come off of his skin. Now he was going to have to hold ten slimy baby slugs while he was upside down! And to make matters worse, the only way to get a good grip on them was to cradle the whole bunch against his stomach.

Denny was now close enough to reach his arms around the slimy ball of slugs.

"Ok Bagger. I got them. Pull us up," said Denny

Slowly Bagger started to pull. Denny was covered in cold gooey slime. The slime was beginning to drip onto his neck and was heading for his face!

"Faster, Bagger, please!" yelled Denny.

Finally Denny saw the sunlight and Bagger grabbed him and turned him right side up.

" Oh, you look a little sticky there, boss," said Bagger

Denny set down the slug babies and helped them to get unstuck. He looked down at his body and he was covered in slime. Denny started to laugh. Then Mr. Reeds and Bagger laughed too.

" Come on baby slugs, your mom's waiting for you," said Bagger.

The baby slugs were loaded onto Bagger's back and everyone headed back to Mrs. Slug. The crowd spotted Denny and let out a giant cheer. Mrs. Slug was so happy, she gave each of the rescuers a big hug.

Mayor Brown shook hands with Bagger and Mr.Reeds. The Mayor didn't shake Denny's hand because Denny was covered head to toe with slime.

"Job well done, Denny my boy. Eh, Doctor Wiggins, do you have something to get this slime off of our hero?" said Mayor Brown

"I've got just the thing, Mayor," said Dr. Wiggins using a giant towel on Denny,

"There you go, Denny. Almost as good as new," she said.

Mayor Brown walked over to Denny and placed the Golden Beetle in his hand.

"Congratulations, Denny! You've earned this," said Mayor Brown.

Then Mayor Brown turned and pointed to a line of bugs.

"They're all here to see you. Each one of them has lost a loved one in the raid by the "B boys". You are much needed here," said Mayor Brown.

Denny looked over at Mr. Reeds and Bagger and said, "We made quite a team back there. What do you say, would you guys like to help me out?"

Bagger came over to Denny and put a couple of his hands in the middle.

"I'm in," said Bagger.

Mr. Reeds and Denny did the same. Denny stood silent for a moment and then he announced,

"The Diminutive Detective Agency is now open!"

The crowd cheered loudly and a marching band paraded around the three heroes. Doctor Wiggins gave Mayor Brown a huge kiss. Bagger grabbed Denny and Mr. Reeds in a great big bug hug. The citizens of Scuttle-Ville rejoiced for they were truly happy. They could all go to bed feeling a little safer knowing that Denny the Diminutive Detective was on the case.

THE END.

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