

A NOT SO BORING
SUMMER
(Special HMC Excerpt)

Hayden Madison

CHAPTER I

“Come on, Charlie!”

“Yeah! Get ‘em!”

The last day of school for McKendry Elementary in Madisonville, Georgia, had finally arrived, and Mrs. Ecklebert’s fifth grade class was more than ready for the day to come to an end. It was recess, and the class had decided to end the year with a game of kickball. Charlie Ernst was getting ready to kick, and Wendy Larson was pitching. For Charlie, this kickball game was more than just a game. It was his chance to show Wendy that he was better than her.

Charlie was a fairly scrawny boy with ratty blond hair, who was the best in the class when it came to playing marbles. Wendy was a well-kept girl with dark

brown hair, and was by far the best four-square player in the class. In fact, since third grade, she had never lost. Charlie hated Wendy because she always acted like she was better than everyone else, and Wendy hated Charlie because he was always reminding her that she wasn't. They had known each other since second grade and had never liked one another, but it wasn't until they entered the fifth grade that their hatred escalated to its highest peak. It was so bad that they had gotten into two fights that year.

The first time, Wendy and Mindi Jamison, Wendy's best friend, were making fun of Bob Lukeman, the dorkiest kid in Miss Ecklebert's class. Charlie stood up for him. This resulted in an unpleasant scene in the cafeteria. The second time, they were picking on Lauren Harm, who had just gotten braces, and Charlie pointed out that braces may have been a good idea for *them* because they would probably have helped decrease the size of their abnormally large, mutant-like jowls. While that wasn't true about either of them, it certainly did make them mad.

"Go Charlie!"

"Yeah!"

There were two students on base, and one out. Wendy rolled the ball toward Charlie, a look of vengeance in her light-blue eyes.

CLUNCK!

Charlie kicked the ball and fled toward first base.

When he reached it, FLOP! He turned and saw Wendy smack Billy Ray, who was heading for third base, in the back with the ball. He was out! Knowing she wasn't going to be able to get to him in time, Charlie continued to second, the other students on his team cheering him on.

FLOP! The kickball hit his legs with such a force that he fell over the ball and onto the blacktop.

Charlie's teammate's sighs and moans seemed like whispers behind Wendy's team's cheers.

Charlie moaned. He rolled onto his back and looked at his now scraped up hands.

"Not fast enough, I guess--are you Charlie?" said Wendy snootily.

Charlie's brows came together. "Guess not."

"Maybe next time you should stick to marbles, little farm boy," she said.

Wendy was always making snide remarks about how Charlie lived on a run-down farm with his parents, while most kids in the city lived in nice neighborhoods. It was for that reason that Wendy saw Charlie as being highly uncivilized and, quite plainly, below her. Of course, Charlie felt the same about Wendy, for while he worked and helped out on the farm, Wendy sat at home all day long, moseying about with her rich parents, who bought her anything she wanted, including a \$200.00 pair of Ibsen sandals that she had gotten a few days earlier for the summer.

“Whatever. Least I’m not a snot-nosed brat,” said Charlie.

Wendy’s eyes narrowed. “Don’t be jealous because you lost.” She picked the kickball up off the ground.

“What’s wrong? Ain’t got mommy and daddy here to buy you any good insults?”

Wendy’s eyes turned fire-red. “That’s it!” she growled. She threw the kickball aside, raced at Charlie, and lunged at him.

Charlie threw his hands in front of his face to shield himself from her attack, but before long, the two were rolling around on the ground, violently swinging at one another.

Mrs. Ecklebert hurried over, shouting, “Stop this! Stop right now, you two!”

She eventually separated the two and dragged them to the principle’s office by their arms.

“Well, well,” said Mr. Dordini, the principle of McKendry Elementary, his eyes moving back and forth between the two. “Three fights in one year. I must say that is *quite* a record.”

Mr. Dordini was seated at the desk in his office. He was a hefty man with a round face, and his hair was leaning to the right of his head. Charlie and Wendy sat in two worn out chairs before him, their eyes on the floor.

Mr. Dordini shook his head. “*One day*. Just *one* day left of school and you two couldn’t stand each other for just a little longer. What am I supposed to do? Huh?”

Charlie and Wendy’s heads slouched.

“Normally I would give you detention...But since this is ya’lls last day of elementary school, and considering the fight wasn’t that bad, I’m hoping that we can resolve this with a call to the both of your parents and be done with it. Do you think that’ll do it?”

“Yes sir,” the two muttered almost simultaneously.

“Okay. Now, you are to finish out the rest of the day--*without* any disruptions. Do I make myself clear?”

They nodded.

Mr. Dordini sighed. “Good. You may go back to class.”

They did as Mr. Dordini said, and for the rest of the day, they pretended that the other didn’t even exist.

When school finally let out, Charlie returned home on his bicycle, knowing he was in for a serious punishment. The first two times he had been in a fight with Wendy, his parents made him clean out the horse stalls for two weeks. Now that wouldn’t have been too bad. That was, if it hadn’t been for little Bessie Lou Ray Phillistine from Kentucky, the Ernst family’s prize horse that had won several first prize metals at the county fair for Best Looking many, *many* years earlier and was now

nowhere near as little and nowhere near as good looking. Bessie Lou Ray Phillistine from Kentucky was the messiest, filthiest horse Charlie had ever cleaned after in his life.

And by far, the worst part about cleaning the stalls was that he still smelt like horse manure for several weeks after his punishment was over.

Just as Charlie had suspected, when he got home, his mother sent him to his room for the rest of the day and told him that he would be cleaning out the horse stalls for two weeks. Summer had just begun, and already Charlie was in trouble.

The next afternoon, Charlie's parents went out to the grocery store.

"Ruff, ruff--"

"Ruff--"

"Heh huh heh huh heh huh heh."

Charlie was standing outside the dog pin, beside the woods, a hose in his hand, pouring water into the dogs' water bowls. All five dogs pranced about in a frenzy, barking as if being attacked by madmen.

What a boring summer it was going to be.

Charlie looked at a bandage on his hand from where Wendy had bitten him the day before during their fight. He shook his head. Every time he fought with Wendy, she bit him. He wouldn't have minded so much, had her teeth not been sharper than barbed wire.

Charlie smiled, thinking of how wonderful it was going to be being away from Wendy for an entire summer. There were only four things in the world Charlie hated: Wendy, beans, chili, and peanut butter. Beans, chili, and peanut butter were his least favorite foods. He especially hated those peanut butter commercials for Happy-Go-Lucky-Jolly-Olly Peanut Butter with the Happy-Go-Luck-Jolly-Olly Peanut Butter Cow-Clown, which was a cow dressed up like a clown that danced around a bunch of bug-eyed children as they ate peanut butter sandwiches.

Yes, Charlie would have been perfectly content if he didn't have to deal with Wendy, beans, chili, or Happy-Go-Lucky-Jolly-Olly Peanut Butter for an entire summer.

"Help!" Charlie suddenly heard a faint voice cry.

He jumped back, looking round for where the voice had come from.

There was no one in sight. He listened for the voice.

Nothing.

Thinking he was imagining things, Charlie shook his head and set the hose on the ground, preparing to head back to the house.

"Help!" the voice cried again. Charlie could tell it was coming from the woods. He moved toward it.

"Help!"

Realizing that whoever was calling was in dire need of help, Charlie raced into the woods. He sprinted in the direction of the voice.

"Help!"

Charlie ran through a field of briars and searched about frantically.

"Where are you?" he asked loudly.

"Here."

The voice was unusually close. Charlie stopped and looked down at the ground.

He gasped.

Lying beside his feet, was a small creature with pointed ears.

"*W--w-wha--what* are you?" asked Charlie, fighting to speak.

The creature motioned for Charlie to come closer to it. Charlie hesitantly knelt down.

The creature coughed.

"I am an elf," it said. "You must help me. I have come from the South Pole to deliver this pouch..." It took a pouch from a pocket in the small, ragged cloth it was wearing and held it in the air. "...to a man by the name of Edgar Vulward. Take it. You must take it to him, child."

"*What?*" asked Charlie, aghast.

"He lives in the town of Wondebuild. Find him and give him this," it said, setting the pouch in Charlie's hand.

“Wondebuild?”

“North of here,” it said. “about two hundred miles. East of Axiville.”

“How am I supposed to--”

“You must hurry,” interrupted the elf. “They’re following me. They’ve been following me all the way from the South Pole. I broke my leg running from them and won’t be able to make the journey myself.

Please...take it. It’s a key. Don’t open it no matter what...Find him...Edgar Vulward. Remember that name...Edgar Vulward.”

“Ah--ah--I--”

“Over here! It went over this way,” Charlie heard a voice say in the distance.

Charlie froze.

The elf’s eyes widened and looked in the direction of the voice. It turned back to Charlie and placed its arm on Charlie’s shoulder.

“Hurry!” it said. “If they find it then there’s no telling what could happen. You must take it. There’s no time to waste.”

Charlie rose from the ground as two men emerged from the woods. One was a stout man with practically no hair at all, except for the hair that was covering his face almost entirely. The other was tall and muscular and had a head of thick dark hair.

The two saw Charlie and scurried toward him as fast as they could. "Hey you!" the short one called. "Have you seen a small creature run by here?"

Charlie looked at the elf. The two men couldn't see it because it was hidden beneath the briars. He looked back at the men. "Ah--ah--no," he replied, his voice cracking.

The two men continued to approach him hastily. Charlie slipped the pouch into his back pocket.

What had this elf gotten him into? This was a question that would haunt his mind for quite some time.

"You sure?" asked the muscular man in a deep, rough voice. He cracked his knuckles.

Charlie could feel sweat sliding down his forehead. There was no way this was happening to him--how could it be?

"Something wrong kid?" asked the short one, as his friend searched around. "You look a little sick."

Charlie could feel himself shaking all over and tried to stop, but that only made it worse.

"No. I'm f--fine. Just a--a--"

"THERE IT IS!" boomed the short man, pointing to the elf.

Charlie's face turned bright red, and before either of the men could say another word, he dashed away like lightning.

"HEY YOU! COME BACK!" shouted one.

"STOP! WAIT A MINUTE!" boomed the other.

What was Charlie thinking? If these men caught him, who knew what they would do.

He ran deeper into the woods, toward the creek. He knew that if he could get there, then he would be able to use his parent's rowboat to escape.

The men were right on his tail.

"COME BACK HERE!" they continually screamed in rage.

Charlie could soon see the creek in the distance, and the rowboat sitting ashore. When he came to the boat, he pushed it into the water and jumped inside. He normally wasn't allowed to use it without one of his parent's there, but he knew that this would surely be an exception.

The boat soared downstream. Charlie became a little worried because he had left the paddles back at the dock. At the time, however, that was hardly his greatest concern.

The two men didn't give up. They sped along the shore, shouting at the top of their lungs:

"GET BACK HERE!"

"WHEN I GET MY HANDS ON YOU BOY, IZE GONNA TEAR YOU APART!"

"WHERE YOU THINK YOU GOIN'?"

Charlie turned round. He was losing them. He took a deep breath.

Twenty minutes or so went by, before Charlie's heart began to steady. He decided that the two men had probably given up by then. He began approaching the end of the creek, which entered the Chatahoochee River. He used his hands to paddle the boat to the shore and pulled himself out with a tree-stump that was growing ashore. He dragged the boat out and lied inside.

"What in the world's going on?" he asked himself. "Who were those guys?"

He wondered about that poor, helpless elf. He hoped they hadn't hurt it.

He took the key out from his back pocket and fiddled with it as he thought. How was he going to get to Wondebuilt? That elf had chosen the wrong boy to help him. Honestly, he was already in enough trouble with his parents. Now he was supposed to ask them to drive him across the state. They'd laugh their heads off if he told them he'd found an elf who'd given him a key to who-knows-what to give to some man in Wondebuilt. What was Wondebuilt even? The whole thing was absurd!