

KATE DICAMILLO

Flora & Willysses

*The
Illuminated
Adventures*

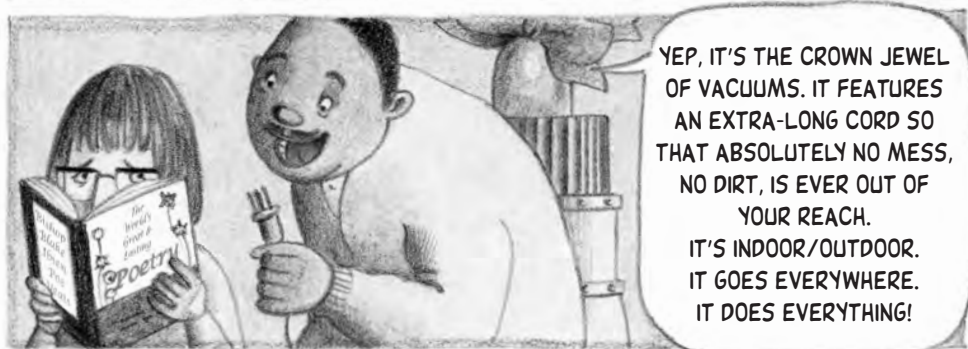


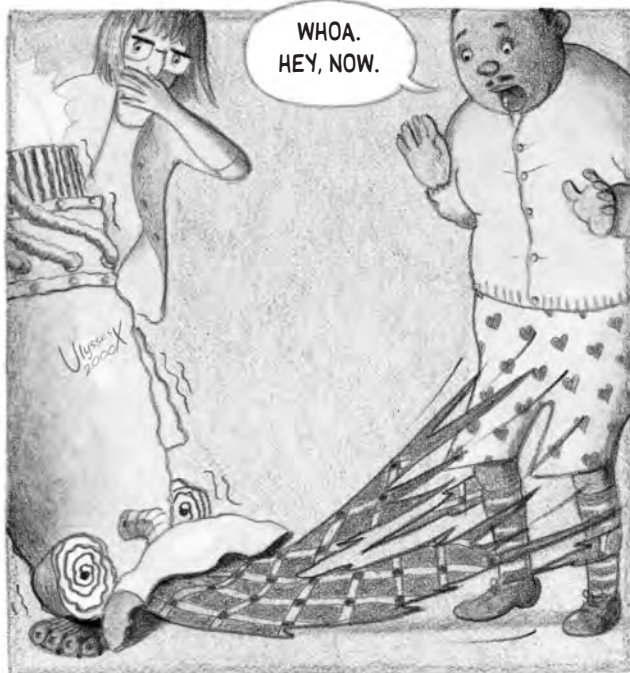
ILLUSTRATED BY

K. G. CAMPBELL

IN THE TICKHAM KITCHEN,
LATE ON A SUMMER AFTERNOON . . .

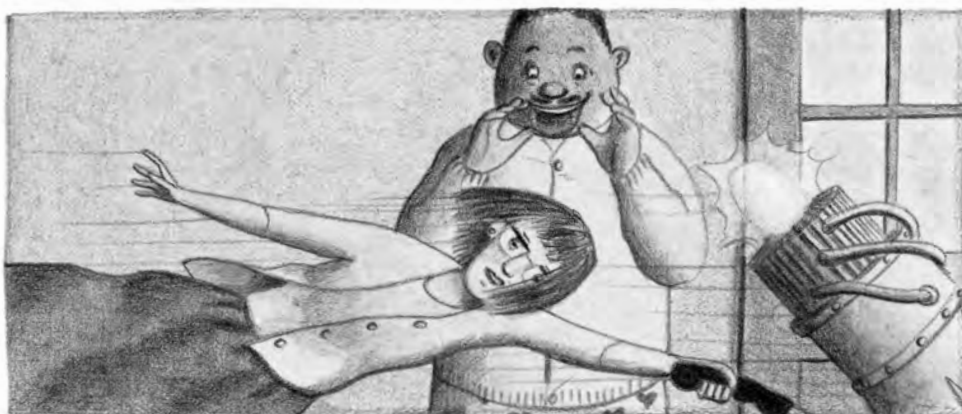
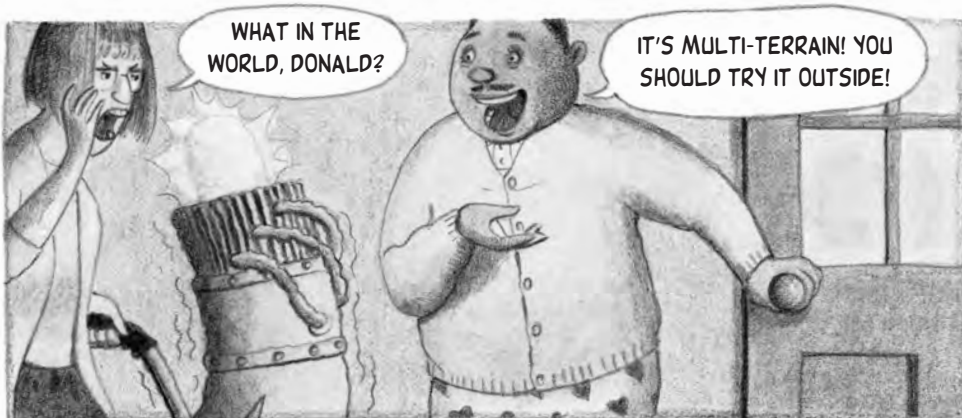






WHOA.
HEY, NOW.





*AND THAT'S HOW IT ALL BEGAN.
WITH A VACUUM CLEANER.
REALLY.*

CHAPTER ONE

A Natural-Born Cynic

Flora Belle Buckman was in her room at her desk. She was very busy. She was doing two things at once. She was ignoring her mother, and she was also reading a comic book entitled *The Illuminated Adventures of the Amazing Incandesto!*

“Flora,” her mother shouted, “what are you doing up there?”

“I’m reading!” Flora shouted back.

“Remember the contract!” her mother shouted. “Do not forget the contract!”

At the beginning of summer, in a moment of weakness, Flora had made the mistake of signing a contract that said she would “work to turn her face away from the idiotic high jinks of comics and toward the bright light of true literature.”

Those were the exact words of the contract. They were her mother’s words.

Flora’s mother was a writer. She was divorced, and she wrote romance novels.

Talk about idiotic high jinks.

Flora hated romance novels.

In fact, she hated romance.

“I hate romance,” said Flora out loud to herself. She liked the way the words sounded. She imagined them floating above her in a comic-strip bubble; it was a comforting thing to have words

I HATE ROMANCE.

hanging over her head. Especially negative words about romance.

Flora's mother had often accused Flora of being a "natural-born cynic."

Flora suspected that this was true.

***SHE WAS A NATURAL-BORN CYNIC WHO
LIVED IN DEFIANCE OF CONTRACTS!***



Yep, thought Flora, *that's me*. She bent her head and went back to reading about the amazing Incandesto.

She was interrupted a few minutes later by a very loud noise.

It sounded as if a jet plane had landed in the Tickhams' backyard.

"What the heck?" said Flora. She got up from her desk and looked out the window and saw Mrs. Tickham running around the backyard with a shiny, oversize vacuum cleaner.

It looked like she was vacuuming the yard.

That can't be, thought Flora. *Who vacuums their yard?*

Actually, it didn't look like Mrs. Tickham knew *what* she was doing.

It was more like the vacuum cleaner was in charge. And the vacuum cleaner seemed to be out of its mind. Or its engine. Or something.

"A few bolts shy of a load," said Flora out loud.

And then she saw that Mrs. Tickham and the vacuum cleaner were headed directly for a squirrel.

"Hey, now," said Flora.

She banged on the window.

"Watch out!" she shouted. "You're going to vacuum up that squirrel!"

She said the words, and then she had a strange moment of seeing them, hanging there over her head.

***"YOU'RE GOING TO VACUUM UP
THAT SQUIRREL!"***

There is just no predicting what kind of sentences you might say, thought Flora. For instance, who would ever think you would shout, "You're going to vacuum up that squirrel!"?

It didn't make any difference, though, what words she said. Flora was too far away. The vacuum cleaner was too loud. And also, clearly, it was bent on destruction.

"This malfeasance must be stopped," said Flora in a deep and superheroic voice.

"This malfeasance must be stopped" was what the unassuming janitor Alfred T. Slipper always said before he was transformed into the amazing Incandesto and became a towering, crime-fighting pillar of light.

Unfortunately, Alfred T. Slipper wasn't present.



Where was Incandesto when you needed him?
Not that Flora really believed in superheroes. But still.
She stood at the window and watched as the squirrel was
vacuumed up.

Poof. Fwump.

“Holy bagumba,” said Flora.

CHAPTER TWO

The Mind of a Squirrel

*N*ot much goes on in the mind of a squirrel.

Huge portions of what is loosely termed “the squirrel brain” are given over to one thought: food.

The average squirrel cogitation goes something like this: *I wonder what there is to eat.*

This “thought” is then repeated with small variations (e.g., *Where’s the food? Man, I sure am hungry. Is that a piece of food?* and *Are there more pieces of food?*) some six or seven thousand times a day.

All of this is to say that when the squirrel in the Tickhams’ backyard got swallowed up by the Ulysses 2000X, there weren’t a lot of terribly profound thoughts going through his head.

As the vacuum cleaner roared toward him, he did not (for instance) think, *Here, at last, is my fate come to meet me!*

He did not think, *Oh, please, give me one more chance and I will be good.*

What he thought was *Man, I sure am hungry.*

And then there was a terrible roar, and he was sucked right off his feet.

At that point, there were no thoughts in his squirrel head, not even thoughts of food.

CHAPTER THREE

The Death of a Squirrel

*S*eemingly, swallowing a squirrel was a bit much even for the powerful, indomitable, indoor/outdoor Ulysses 2000X. Mrs. Tickham's birthday machine let out an uncertain roar and stuttered to a stop.

Mrs. Tickham bent over and looked down at the vacuum cleaner.

There was a tail sticking out of it.

"For heaven's sake," said Mrs. Tickham, "what next?"

She dropped to her knees and gave the tail a tentative tug.

She stood. She looked around the yard.

"Help," she said. "I think I've killed a squirrel."

CHAPTER FOUR

A Surprisingly Helpful Cynic

Flora ran from her room. She ran down the stairs. As she ran, she thought, *For a cynic, I am a surprisingly helpful person.*

She went out the back door.

Her mother called to her. She said, “Where are you going, Flora Belle?”

Flora didn’t answer her. She never answered her mother when she called her Flora Belle.

Sometimes she didn’t answer her mother when she called her Flora, either.

Flora ran through the tall grass and cleared the fence between her yard and the Tickhams’ in a single bound.

“Move out of the way,” said Flora. She gave Mrs. Tickham a shove and grabbed hold of the vacuum cleaner. It was heavy. She picked it up and shook it. Nothing happened. She shook harder. The squirrel dropped out of the vacuum cleaner and landed with a *plop* on the grass.

He didn’t look that great.

He was missing a lot of fur. Vacuumed off, Flora assumed.

His eyelids fluttered. His chest rose and fell and rose again. And then it stopped moving altogether.

Flora knelt. She put a finger on the squirrel’s chest.



At the back of each issue of *The Illuminated Adventures of the Amazing Incandesto!* there was a series of bonus comics. One of Flora's very favorite bonus comics was entitled *TERRIBLE THINGS CAN HAPPEN TO YOU!* As a cynic, Flora found it wise to be prepared. Who knew what horrible, unpredictable thing would happen next?

TERRIBLE THINGS CAN HAPPEN TO YOU! detailed what action to take if you inadvertently consumed plastic fruit (this happened more often than you would suppose—some plastic fruit was extremely realistic looking); how to perform the Heimlich maneuver on your elderly aunt Edith if she choked on a stringy piece of steak at an all-you-can-eat buffet; what to do if you were wearing a striped shirt and a swarm of locusts descended (run: locusts eat stripes); and, of course, how to administer everyone's favorite lifesaving technique: CPR.

TERRIBLE THINGS CAN HAPPEN TO YOU! did not, however, detail exactly how someone was supposed to give CPR to a squirrel.

"I'll figure it out," said Flora.

"What will you figure out?" said Mrs. Tickham.

Flora didn't answer her. Instead, she bent down and put her mouth on the squirrel's mouth.

It tasted funny.

If she were forced to describe it, she would say that it tasted exactly like squirrel: fuzzy, damp, slightly nutty.

“Have you lost your mind?” said Mrs. Tickham.

Flora ignored her.

She breathed into the squirrel’s mouth. She pushed down on his small chest.

She started to count.

CHAPTER FIVE

The Squirrel Obliges

Something strange had happened to the squirrel's brain.

Things had gone blank, black. And then, into this black blankness, there came a light so beautiful, so bright, that the squirrel had to turn away.

A voice spoke to him.

"What's that?" said the squirrel.

The light shone brighter.

The voice spoke again.

"Okay," said the squirrel. "You bet!"

He wasn't sure what, exactly, he was agreeing to, but it didn't matter. He was just so happy. He was floating in a great lake of light, and the voice was singing to him. Oh, it was wonderful. It was the best thing ever.

And then there was a loud noise.

The squirrel heard another voice. This voice was counting. The light receded.

"Breathe!" the new voice shouted.

The squirrel obliged. He took a deep, shuddering breath. And then another. And another.

The squirrel returned.

CHAPTER SIX

In the Event of a Seizure

*W*ell, he's breathing," said Mrs. Tickham.

"Yes," said Flora. "He is." She felt a swell of pride.

The squirrel rolled over onto his stomach. He raised his head. His eyes were glazed.

"For heaven's sake," said Mrs. Tickham. "Look at him."

She chuckled quietly. She shook her head. And then she laughed out loud. She kept laughing. She laughed and laughed and laughed. She laughed so hard that she started to shake.

Was she having some kind of fit?

Flora tried to remember what *TERRIBLE THINGS CAN HAPPEN TO YOU!* advised in the event of a seizure. It had something to do with moving the tongue out of the way or stabilizing it with a stick. Or something.

Flora had saved the squirrel's life; she didn't see any reason she couldn't save Mrs. Tickham's tongue.

The sun sank a little lower in the sky. Mrs. Tickham continued to laugh hysterically.

And Flora Belle Buckman started looking around the Tickhams' backyard for a stick.

CHAPTER SEVEN

The Soul of a Squirrel

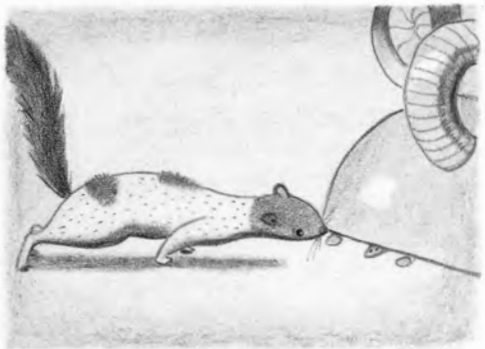
*T*he squirrel was a little unsteady on his feet.

His brain felt larger, roomier. It was as if several doors in the dark room of his self (doors he hadn't even known existed) had suddenly been flung wide.

Everything was shot through with meaning, purpose, light.

However, the squirrel was still a squirrel.

And he was hungry. Very.



WHO CAN SAY WHAT ASTONISHMENTS ARE
HIDDEN INSIDE THE MOST MUNDANE BEING?



Flora and Ulysses: The Illuminated Adventures

Kate DiCamillo

illustrated by K.G. Campbell

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