



The First Playground Whistle



In school days gone by, many recesses ago, there was a public school, P.S. 100 that had the most fabulous playground in all the land. No slide slid faster, no swings swung higher, and no climbing structure was more thrilling to climb than the one on P.S. 100's playground. The playground had the cleanest asphalt, the whitest lines, the greenest grass, and the roundest red rubber balls.

The students at P.S. 100 were proud of their playground. No one dared misbehave for fear of missing recess. Once outside, the students rarely played, but

preferred to scrub the equipment, tidy up the ball closet, and mop the blacktop. Instead of hanging from the monkey bars, the fifth graders polished them with velvet rags. A group of fourth graders whitewashed the hopscotch lines, a troop of first graders dusted the Hula Hoops, and a trio of third graders raked the sand in the sand pit.

Mrs. Spic-N-Span, a tall, stern woman, served as P.S. 100's playground monitor. At recesstime, she patrolled the playground inspecting it for wear and tear. If a leaf blew onto the blacktop, she would holler "Leaf!"

This prompted the Second Grade Sweeper Squad to rush over with wide brooms and brush it away.

If the monitor cried, "Weed!", the Fourth Grade Weed Team would charge onto the soccer field with their weeding tools.

One morning recess, however, the students at P.S. 100 had a surprise. While they vacuumed the basketball court and waxed the tetherball poles, an unfamiliar sound filled the air.

Tweet! Tweeet! Tweet! Tweet!

The students covered their ears, for the sound was as piercing as a steaming teakettle.

Tweet! Tweeet!

A silver snail, the size of a pencil sharpener, had crawled from the bushes onto the spotless playground.

Tweeet! Tweeet!

In horror, the students watched as the snail slid across the asphalt. In its wake, it left a shiny trail of silvery slime.

“It’s a tweet snail, children!” Mrs. Spic-N-Span shouted. “Fifth Grade Mop Squad on the double. Kindergarten Scooper get moving. A tweet snail is the worst thing to have at our school.”

Jogo, a kindergarten girl with speed and determination, was today’s scooper. While five fifth graders mopped up the silver goo, Jogo approached the tweet snail with a shovel. She slid it under the creature and carried it toward the bushes.

“Tweet! Tweet! Not this way!” the snail said. “I wish to eat the fresh clover at the other end of the playground. *Tweet! Tweet! Take me that way.* I’d dearly like some clover for my noonday. *Tweeet!*”

“You’re just a messy tweet snail,” said Jogo. “You’re going back to where you came from.” And she dumped the snail by a holly scrub.

But no sooner had the fifth-graders finished mopping up the snail mess, when--*Tweet! Tweet!*— the tweet snail returned to the blacktop.

Straight toward the clover it crawled, leaving a line of silver slime behind it. *Tweet! Tweet!* This time a large marble lay in its path. Without stopping, the snail crawled over the round thing and swallowed it.

“Not good,” groaned the snail. It now thrilled like a warbling bird. *Treeeep! Treeeep! Treeeeeeeep!*

“Moppers! Scoopers!” shouted Mrs. Spic-N-Span.

Again the fifth graders raced for the mops and Jogo ran for the shovel. The kindergartner scraped up the snail and headed for the bushes

“*Treeeep! Treeeep!*” the snail trilled. “No, no, not this way. I would so much like some fresh clover. Please take me to the other end of the playground. Clover! Clover! Let me cross over. *Treep! Treeeep!*”

“Tweet snails are good for nothing, but making noise and messes.” said Jogo. “You belong in the bushes.” And she dumped the snail by the holly shrub.

Meanwhile, the playground dusting, sweeping, and polishing continued. The students were so busy cleaning that no one noticed a second creature, a long and skinny jump rope snake, slither onto the blacktop. It stopped by the spiral slide and coiled up like a tightly wound spring. Although this snake resembled a harmless jump rope--right down to its red, tube-shaped head and tail--it was

deadly. In a single gulp, it could devour any small child who was about to grab it, hoping to skip rope.

Now, the jump rope snake lay there by the slide, checking out the possibilities for lunch. While waiting, it made up jump rope a rhyme,

“Come luscious boy; come scrumptious girl.

Come for a jump; come for a twirl.”

Unfortunately, Jogo spotted the jump rope snake. “Naughty, naughty,” she said. “Someone left a jump rope on our tidy playground.”

The kindergartner stomped up to the snake. She bent over it. Down went her hand toward one end of the coil, the wrong end, the end that was really the snake’s mouth ready to open wide.

Watching Jogo’s hand, the snake made up another rhyme.

“Skipping me will be bad for thee.

For skipping meals is bad for me.”

At this point, Mrs. Spic-N-Span stood on the soccer field checking for crab grass. She glanced toward the asphalt and spotted Jogo about to grab the coil.

“Every jump rope is hanging neatly in the ball closet,” she told herself. “That means the coil can be only one thing.” And at the top of her lungs she shouted, “Jump rope snake! Run Jogo! Run!”

Mrs. Spic-N-Span voice was loud, but not loud enough. Jogo's hand kept coming closer and closer to the ravenous reptile. The snake was seconds from striking when--*Treeeep! Treeeep! Treeeeeeeep!*—the tweet snail returned to the asphalt.

Jogo stood up straight. She put her hands on her hips. “Naughty, naughty,” she said. “That tweet snail won't let us alone.”

As Jogo ran for the shovel, the jump rope snake uncoiled. It glided toward the grass, singing a new rhyme,

“That tweet snail picked a bad time for tweeting.

Now none of these kids will I be eating.”

Mrs. Spic-N-Span charged onto the blacktop. “My voice was not loud enough!” she said, still breathing hard. “Thank goodness the tweet snail drew Jogo's attention away from that ropy snake.”

By now, the silver snail had reached the far end of the playground. It entered the patch of clover and began to eat. It trilled with delight.

Treeeep! Treeeep! Treeeeeeeep!

From that recess on, despite its silvery slime, the tweet snail was a welcomed guest on the playground at P.S. 100. Over the next week, however, the snail ate so much clover it grew too big for its shell. As tweet snails will, it crawled from the silver chamber to grow a bigger one.

The following recess, Jogo found the hollow shell with the marble still inside it. She attached a plastic lanyard to the shell to hang it around her neck.

“I owe a lot to the tweet snail,” she said. “If not for its loud tweet, I’d be snake poop by now.”

She raised the shell to her lips to give it a thank-you kiss. At the last instant, she thought of blowing into the flat, narrow end. To her delight, out came the familiar trill—

Treeeeeeeeeep!

At once, every student on the playground stopped working. Was there more slime to mop up? Did the jump rope snake return?

“That caught everyone’s attention,” said Mrs. Spic-N-Span. “Blowing on a tweet snail shell could be helpful.”

Jogo presented the silver shell to the playground monitor. After that, whenever Mrs. Spic-N-Span saw a playground problem, she gave the shell a blast.

Treeeep!

“The slide needs waxing,” she said.

Treeeep!

“I see fingerprints on the tetherball pole!”

Today, teachers still use tweet snail shells for playground whistles, although silver metal whistles molded in the same shape are more common. Whatever type of

whistle a teachers blows at recess-- *Treeeeeeeep!*—it's thanks to a determined tweet snail of long ago, a silver snail who simply desired some clover and had to cross a very clean playground to get it.