



The First Playground Whistle

The Perfect Playground

In school days gone by, many recesses ago, a public school, P.S. 100, had the tidiest playground in all the land. The blacktop shone without a speck of dust. The soccer field was trimmed neater than a putting green. The slide gleamed, the tetherball pole stood as straight as a flagpole, and every rubber ball was inflated for the perfect bounce.

The students at P.S. 100 were proud of their playground. No one dared misbehave for fear of missing recess. But once outside, the students rarely played. Instead, they scrubbed the equipment, straightened the ball closet, and mopped the mats under the climbing structure. Rather than hang from the monkey bars, the

fifth graders polished them with velvet rags. The fourth graders whitewashed the hopscotch and four-square lines, the third graders dusted the spiral slide, and the second graders raked the sand in the sand pit.

Madame Spic-N-Span, a strong, stern woman, served as P.S. 100's playground monitor. During recess, she inspected the grounds like a general reviewing his troops, checking every corner for signs of wear and tear.

If a leaf fluttered down, she'd point and shout, "Leaf!"

At once, the first graders would dash out with wide brooms and swept it away.

If she hollered, "Weed!" the kindergarteners would storm the soccer field with their weeding tools.

The Tweet Snail

But one recess, as the students were vacuuming the basketball court and waxing the tetherball poles, the messiest thing of all appeared. A silver snail, no bigger than a pencil sharpener, slithered onto the spotless blacktop.

"Tweet! Tweet!" it sang, as loud and shrill as a steaming teakettle.

"Tweet! Tweet!"

As it crawled, it left behind a shimmering trail of silvery slime.

"Tweet snail!" called Madam Spic-N-Span.

Instantly, a fifth-grader named Yoyo and a fourth-grader name Pogo ran onto the blacktop. They carried a snow shovel and a scrub brush.

Yoyo scooped the tweet snail into his shovel and headed for the playground fence

“Oh, please don’t take me back!” the snail said.
“*Tweet! Tweet!* I’m just a slow snail who wants to nibble the fresh clover on the far side of playground. *Tweet! Tweet!*”

"You're just a messy tweet snail," Yoyo said, and with one swift motion, he dumped the creature over the fence.

As for Pogo, she dropped to her knees and began scrubbing the slimy trail. Pogo was especially fussy about keeping the playground clean. With her stiff scrub brush, she would erase the smallest bird dropping, the littlest orange juice spill, or the faintest smudge of mud.

“But tweet snail slime?” she said, scrubbing furiously. “This is the toughest stuff of all. It’s as gooey as gum, as sticky as syrup, and as thick as peanut butter.”

Pogo had just scrubbed away the last glop of slime when,

Tweet! Tweet! Tweet! Tweet!

The silver snail was back on the playground. Straight toward the clover patch it crawled, leaving behind an even messier trail of shimmering goo.

Tweet! Tweet!

This time, a large marble lay in its path. Without stopping, the snail opened its mouth and swallowed it whole.

“Scooper! Scrubber!” shouted Madame Spic-N-Span. “Quickly!”

Again, Yoyo and Pogo raced onto the blacktop with the snow shovel and scrub brush.

“Oh, no, not again” the snail said. This time, its voice trilled like a warbling bird. “Please let me reach the clover patch across the playground. *Tweet! Tweet!* I’m just a slow snail, and it’s such a big playground to crawl around.”

“Tweet snails are unwanted here,” said Yoyo, scooping it up in his shovel.”

“I need a sand blaster just to clean up your slime,” Pogo said, dropping to her knees.

The Jump Rope Snake

The playground dusting, sweeping, and polishing went on as usual. The students were so busy cleaning that no one noticed another second creature slither onto the blacktop--a long, skinny jump rope snake. It slid beneath the spiral slide and coiled up like a tightly wound spring.

At first glance it looked like an ordinary jump rope—right down to its red, tube-shaped head and tail. But it

was deadly. In a single gulp, it could devour any child who reached down, wanting to skip rope.

Now the snake lay in wait under the slide. As it searched for its next meal, it hissed a jump rope snake rhyme,

*"Come luscious boy; scrumptious girl.
Come for a jump; come for a twirl."*

Unfortunately, Pogo spotted the jump rope snake first. She had been scrubbing a stubborn shoe scuff beneath the swings.

"How careless," she said. "Someone left a jump rope on our tidy playground."

Without a second thought, the fourth-grader marched over to the coil. She bent down.

Her hand reached for one end—
the wrong end,
the mouth end,
the end already starting to open.

Eyeing Pogo's fingers, the snake hissed another rhyme.

*"Skipping me might be bad for thee.
But skipping meals is bad for me."*

At that moment, Madame Spic-N-Span stood on the soccer field, checking for crabgrass. From across the playground, she spotted Pogo reaching for the coil.

"Every jump rope is hanging neatly in the ball

closet,” she said. “Which means that coil can be only one thing.”

Then at the top of her lungs she shouted, “Jump rope snake! Run Pogo! Run!”

Her voice rang out, but not loud enough. Pogo’s hand crept closer and closer to the ravenous reptile.

The snake was ready to strike when...

“Tweet! Tweet! Tweet!”

The tweet snail had returned to the playground.

Pogo stood up straight. She planted her hands on her hips.

“That tweet snail just won’t let us alone,” she said. “Now there’s more slime to scrub.”

She took off toward the snail, scrub brush in hand. Behind her, the jump rope snake uncoiled and slithered off the blacktop. Miffed, it hissed another rhyme,

*“That snail picked a bad time for tweeting.
Now none of these kids will I be eating.”*

Madame Spic-N-Span rushed over to Pogo. “Thank goodness that snail distracted you,” she said, breathless. “Another second and that jump rope snake would’ve eaten you for lunch.

By then, the silver snail had reached the far end of the playground. No one, not even Madame Spic-N-Span, tried to stop it. They let it enter the clover patch and nibble all the clover it wanted. Its silvery slime trail sliced

the playground in two. But Pogo didn't mind.

"I owe that the tweet snail a lot," she said. "If not for its loud tweet, I'd be inside the snake by now."

The Playground Whistle

From that recess on, despite its messy trail of slime, the tweet snail became a welcomed guest on the playground at P.S. 100. Over the next week, however, the snail ate so much clover it outgrew its shell. As tweet snails do, it crawled out of its silver chamber to begin growing a bigger one.

At the next recess, Pogo found the hollow shell with the marble still rattling inside. Like a seashell at the beach, she raised it to her lips and blew into it. To her delight, the familiar warbling trill rang out:

Tweet! Tweet!

Pogo handed the silver shell to the playground monitor. "Now when you need our attention you can blow into this," she said. "It's loud, it's clear, and everyone can hear it for sure."

Mrs. Spic-N-Span looped a lanyard through the shell and hung it proudly around her neck. Then she gave it a sharp blast.

Tweeeeet!

"I see an ant crawling on the snack table."

Tweeeeet!

"There are fingerprints on the tetherball pole!"

To this day, teachers on playground duty still blow into tweet snail shells to get everyone's attention.

Tweet!

Stop running up the slide!

Tweet!

Don't kick the red balls!

But few kids know it all started with a determined tweet snail from long ago, a silver snail who simply wanted some clover and had to cross a spotless playground to reach it.

Some say that when the wind is just right, you can still hear the snail tweeting during recess--especially when the tetherball pole needs polishing.