

Digger resolves a science project disaster.

Project Digger

by Michael Marsh

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P R O J E C T
Digger



MICHAEL MARSH

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CHAPTER 2

What Could Be Worse Than Bugs?

First, they should take a picture of the bug, Beth had explained earlier in her best scientist voice, and then catch the bug in a jar. Once they had an example of all the types of bugs that lived in her backyard, they would build a bug world out of plants and dirt and rocks and things, showing the kinds of places where bugs liked to live. Then they could set the bugs in the jars next to their favorite homes with pictures in a book to prove they were the right kind of homes. It would be the most scientific project in the whole fair, and then they would win!

“How do you want to start?” Ariana asked, as they lined up their empty bug jars on the picnic table with the lids lying next to them.

“Well,” Beth said, “the best places are going to be the bushes.” She pointed at the hedge nearby, where Digger

was raising a cloud of dust as he delved deeper into the ground. "And the brick pile." She turned to point at the jumble of bricks next to the garage. "What do you think?"

"I'll take the bushes," Ariana said, knowing that the really gross bugs were the ones that lived under things and the not-so-yucky ones lived in the bushes.

"Okay," Beth slowly replied. She also knew which place was going to have the gross ones. But it was her idea to go after bugs, so she didn't say anything. She just pulled on her gloves, grabbed a jar, and headed for the bricks.

Behind her, Ariana also chose a jar, but she just stood in the same spot and watched her friend. Under-stuff bugs were nasty, and she wanted nothing to do with them. Ariana knew Beth felt the same. She also knew that Beth had hoped they would be doing this together, but she just couldn't bring herself to go after her friend. She was afraid of bugs, and she felt bad. She felt bad about the whole project, but she mostly felt bad about not being able to go and help her friend.

Standing with a jar in her hand and a knot in her stomach she watched as her friend picked up a stick and jabbed at the pile of bricks to push them aside. Suddenly a scream of horror tore out of Beth's throat.

"Eeeeeeee!"

She threw the stick one-way and the jar another as she skipped backwards and turned to dash back to where Ariana stood, her hand over her mouth.

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“What?” Ariana screamed. “What is it?” She scrambled up onto the picnic table behind Beth, who had jumped to the top in one great leap!

“A snake!” Beth screeched, grabbing Ariana in a tight hug. “A...a...a great big, black snake! It came right out of the bricks and touched my foot!”

Ariana knew right then, as she hugged her shaking friend, that she didn’t need to worry about bugs anymore. Snakes weren’t just gross; they were nightmare-scary and dangerous! If one bit you, it could kill you, or maybe make you ill with some kind of snake sickness.

“Where is it?” Ariana asked, searching the grass around them.

Beth, who seemed to be calming down a little, whispered, “I don’t know. I don’t see it now, but I bet it’s there, hiding in the grass—waiting for us.”

“What about Digger?” Ariana looked toward the busy hound where he was getting down to really move some dirt.

“No snake is going to go after him,” Beth said proudly. “He’s too big.”

“He isn’t any bigger than we are.”

“Yeah, but he’s got teeth and claws, and he’ll use them. That snake knows I’m not going to bite him.”

“So what do we do now?”

“Call him, I guess.”

“The snake?” Ariana gasped. “Are you crazy?”

“Not the snake. Digger. If we call him, he can protect us while we make a run for the house.”

But despite how loudly they called and whistled, or tried to whistle, Digger was too busy with his digging. In fact, he was so far down now that only half a tail stuck up out of the top of his new hole.

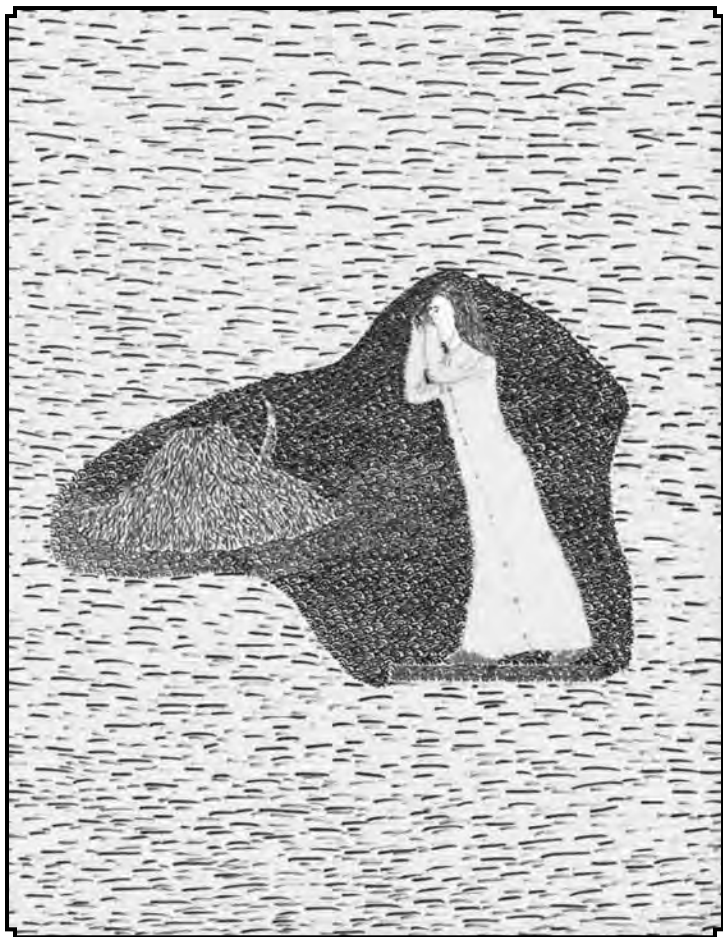
Beth walked back and forth across the top of the picnic table, clutching her lab coat and lifting it up to her knees as she tried to see if the snake was sneaking up on them. In little cries, she kept repeating, “Come on, Digger! Come on, Digger!”

Ariana sat in the very middle of the picnic table, her feet tucked up under her. She used her magnifying lens to look through the cracks in the tabletop. She was afraid the snake was slithering right under the table, looking for a way to climb up to where the girls perched. As she peered through the lens, she noticed a spot on her hand. Trading hands, she focused the magnifying lens on the spot and moved her head to the side to better see what looked like a freckle on her hand. She was moving the lens up and down to focus it when the sunlight streaming through the lens in a tight circle burned her freckle! Just like a laser!

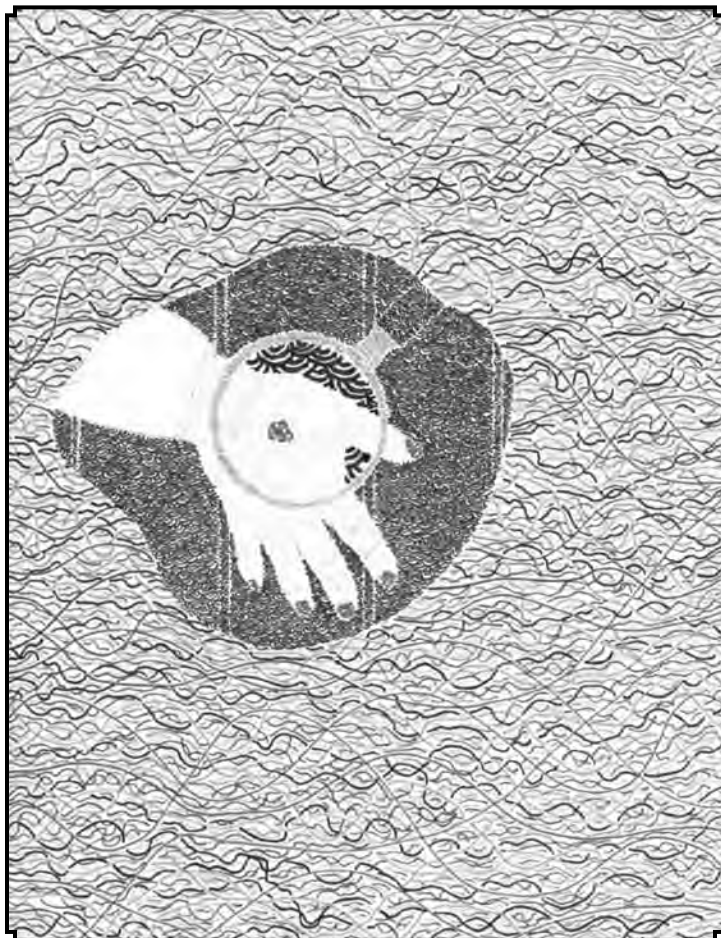
If she hadn’t moved so fast, she might have burned a hole right through her hand! “Ouch!” Even though it didn’t really hurt that much, it had burned—a little.

“Ariana!” Beth screamed, turning around so fast she nearly fell off the table. She was sure her friend had been bitten by the snake and was already turning green and yellow with snake poison.

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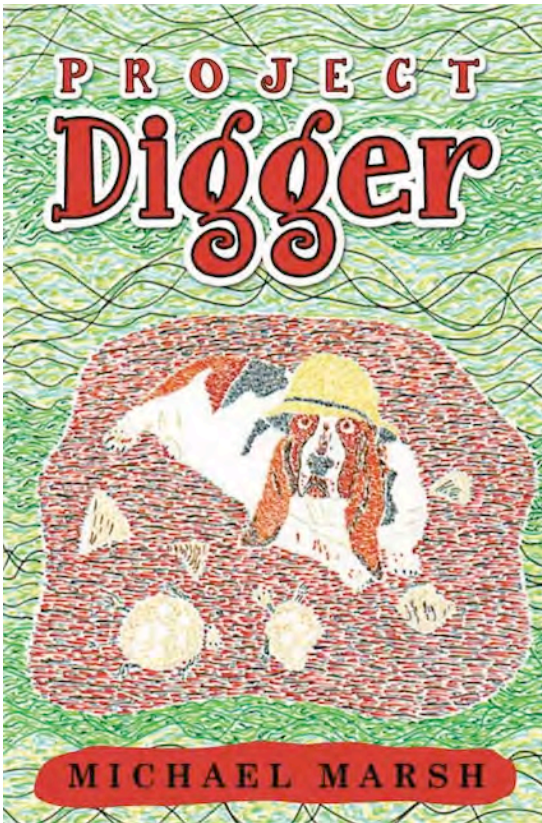
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"I'm okay," Ariana said quickly at the look of terror on Beth's face. "I just burned myself." She held up the magnifying lens.

Before she could explain about the laser, Digger heaved himself out of his hole and started shaking his dirty body like a little dust devil swirling through the yard. Then he began trotting toward the house.

The girls jumped from the table into his shield of protection and made it back to the safety of the house.



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