

# THE TRICK

Christof Whiteman

**H**E JUST WANTS TO GO HOME. He just wants to go home. He just wants to go home, but he can't go home so he bounces. BOING. Bounces to pass the time. If only he were a year older he could go to school and he wouldn't need to be dropped off here. He wishes that were the case. Because Roger doesn't yet know that schools can be much worse places.

All the girls are sitting in the grass, their hair adorned with daisies, their fingers searching for four-leaf clovers. Some of the boys have climbed the tree and dangle like monkeys in Osh Kosh overalls. Others are hunched around the trunk making plastic men do the climbing for them.

Roger is bouncing on the trampoline because he doesn't know what else to do until four o' clock and he doesn't even know when that is.

The lady looks out the window at everyone. She talks through the screen. She says the words "sandwich" and "almost" but the rest is lost in the creaky howls of the trampoline's springs. The lady, she says "Roger," but he keeps bouncing. BOING. She says "Roger" again and asks him about the trick, but he keeps bouncing and pretends not to hear.

It was his mother's fault. She made him do the trick when she brought him here a week ago. He was jumping on the trampoline watching them drink lemonade and talk on the patio. They both laughed and then his mom turned toward the trampoline and said to show the lady the trick.

Roger did it, and now the lady is using it against him. She keeps talking until Roger slowly turns his body, bounce by bounce, away from the window.

The lady's voice says, "All right." She says, "The ones with chunky are on the blue plate and the ones with creamy are on the yellow plate." She says, "Make sure everyone gets one before you come back for a second helping." She says, "Roger, isn't all that bouncing making you hungry?"

Roger turns around to face the world on which he's been eavesdropping, but he doesn't stop.

BOING. BOING.

"C'mon Roger," says the lady.

BOING. BOING.

Flash  
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*If only he were a year older  
he could go to school  
and he wouldn't need to be  
dropped off here.*

*He wishes that were the case.  
Because Roger doesn't yet know  
that schools can be much worse places.*

“I can cut up some apples if you don’t want a sandwich.”

BOING. BOING.

This lady, she doesn’t seem to get the hint. Roger just wants to bounce and she keeps pestering him to come and eat. But Roger doesn’t want a sandwich or an apple. He doesn’t want any animal crackers or Cheerios. He just wants to go home. He just wants to go to his room and punch his dumb stuffed animals and rip the heads off all his action figures. He wants to pee on the floor and chew on his shoes and be a dog for the rest of his life, because a dog doesn’t have to worry about making friends. A dog has to worry about sucking on bones and beating up cats. Roger could get used to that, if only he had the chance.

The lady says, “What about a nice glass of milk, huh?”

Roger’s bare feet sting with the wear of the trampoline grinding against his skin every second. His eyes are weary from not focusing them on anything and letting the world pass smoothly in front of him. His breathing slows and then quickens and then slows again. He stops bouncing because his brain feels dizzy like it’s being tickled. And at no one in particular, Roger goes, “Woof!”

The lady makes a frown.

Roger lets the fireflies in his eyes go out and once his skin has settled, he jumps up again.

BOING.

“Roger,” the lady says, “why don’t you do the trick?” Louder than usual, she says, “I’m sure everyone here would love to see you do the trick?”

The girls and boys look up from their sandwiches, peanut butter smeared around their mouths.

Roger’s heart goes cold and the feeling makes the rest of Roger start shivering.

The lady stares at Roger. “Or you could come over here and have a little snack.”

BOING. BOING.

Roger closes his eyes and he sees the sun zeroing in, becoming a spotlight shining on him. The twinkle of scattered eyes against the darkness almost makes Roger start sobbing. Each eye looking at him, acknowledging him, and pushing him to do something he doesn’t want to do. Roger realizes

*And at no one in particular,  
Roger goes,  
“Woof!”*

the lady has trapped him and it gives the skin on his arms goose bumps. Roger takes a deep breath and opens his eyes.

BOING. BOING.

Roger bounces up as high as he can, and when his toes touch the trampoline, he is launched into the air where he does a front flip with divine grace and unparalleled triumph before landing perfectly still on his feet.

The boys go, “Whoa!” and the girls go, “Oh my gosh!” And the sun opens up, turning the darkness into light, or at least that’s the way it feels as his skin releases its grip.

Roger climbs off the trampoline and takes a sandwich from the yellow plate, because chunky is gross. 🍞

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