

Zoey AND SASSAFRAS

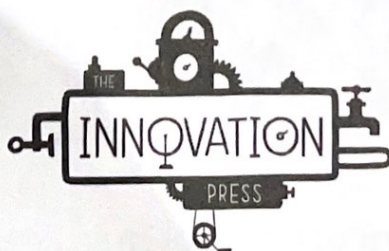
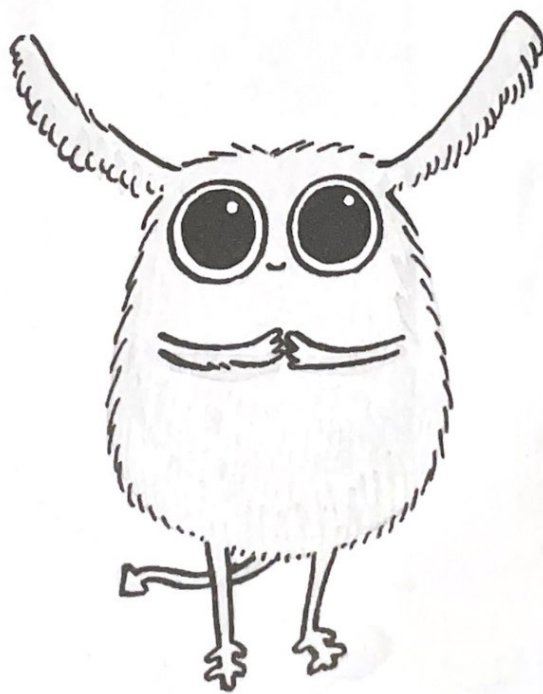
GRUMPLETS AND PESTS



STORY BY
**ASIA
CITRO**

PICTURES BY
**MARION
LINDSAY**

Zoey
AND
SASSAFRAS
GRUMPLETS AND PESTS





PROLOGUE

These days my cat Sassafra and I are always desperately hoping we'll hear our barn doorbell.

I know most people are excited to hear their doorbell ring. It might mean a present or package delivery, or a friend showing up to play. But our doorbell is even more exciting than that. Because it's a *magic* doorbell. When it rings, it means there's a magical animal waiting outside our barn. A magical animal who needs our help.

My mom's been helping them basically her whole life. And now *I* get to help, too . . .



CHAPTER 1

GROWING FOOD

"Blech!" Pip wrinkled his froggy nose as he poked at a leaf in my garden. "Humans really eat these things?"

I giggled and nodded. "Kale is totally delicious! My mom makes kale chips by tearing it up, adding a little salt, and baking it in the oven. They taste just like potato chips—yum!"

Pip narrowed his eyes at me. "Potatoes are also a weird thing to eat. Humans are so strange."

"Mrrowww?" Sassafras tapped a kale plant further down the row.

"Oh no, not you, too!" I scooted over and ruffled his fur. But he didn't look up at me. Instead he kept poking at a kale leaf. He sniffed at the leaf's underside and leapt backward.

"Oooh, what is that?" I touched what looked like a pile of tiny green dots on the bottom of my kale leaf. They moved. "Whoaaa!"

Sassafras started sneezing and snorting. He batted at his nose with his paws.

"Oh dear." I grabbed him and plucked a single green dot off his nose. I held it up to my face and squinted. "I see six legs! It must be some kind of insect?"

"Oooh, an insect?" Pip hopped over. "Finally, something delicious in your garden!"

"Ha," I said as I got down on my stomach to take a closer look at the kale

leaf. "Nooo! There are a ton of tiny holes. These bugs are eating my kale!"

I tried shaking the leaf, and Sassafras tried batting at it, but the bugs stayed put.

"Allow me!" said Pip. He reached out, pulled off a bug, and popped it on his tongue. But then he made an "O" shape



with his mouth and his eyes crossed. "Ew! They're so sour!" He handed the wet bug back to me. "Sorry, Zoey."

"Um . . ." I wiped the slobbery bug on my pants. "Thanks for trying, Pip." I sat down with a big sigh. "We can't get them off—and there are so many! Apparently they're too gross to eat. But they're going to eat all of my kale if we don't do something!"

Pip patted my arm. "I'm sure you'll think of a plan, Zoey!"

I turned to Sassafras. "What do you think, Sass? Any ideas?" But he wasn't listening. He was looking off into the trees, ears twitching.

"Maybe Mom will know what—" I started to say before Pip shouted at me.

"Why did you even invite me over if you're just going to go back inside?!" He crossed his arms and scowled.

"Well, I—" But before I could finish, he kept on yelling!



"Your garden isn't fun, anyway! I'm tired of playing with you and Sassafras! I'm LEAVING!" He gave a big stomp and hopped off. "Pip? Wait!" I called after him. But he didn't turn around.

"Well, that was weird," I said to Sassafras, but he was still super distracted.

I carefully plucked a tiny bug off the leaf to show my mom. I was almost to the house when I realized Sassafras wasn't following me.

"Are you coming, Sass?"

He looked between me and the forest, meowed, and then trotted inside with me.

CHAPTER 2 FARMER'S MARKET



Mom poked the bug with one finger. "Bummer. You've officially got your first garden pest!"

"Garden pest?" I asked. That sure didn't sound good.

"We aren't the only ones who like kale." Mom chuckled. "Slugs, snails, aphids—they're all creatures who can eat or damage your food before you get a chance to eat it. This little guy here is an aphid."

"But last year I didn't have any on my

kale! Did I do something wrong this year?

"Not at all! Depending on the weather and predators and other things like that, you'll see more or less of certain pests each year. Last summer was pretty cool out—I bet it wasn't warm enough for the aphids."

My shoulders slumped. "Will there be any left by the time it's ready to harvest?"

"Are you guys ready for the market?" Dad called from the front door.

Mom gave my shoulders a squeeze. "Don't worry, sweetie. There are things we can do to help your plants. Let's figure it out after the farmer's market."

I nodded, but I didn't feel a whole lot better. It would be so unfair if all that time I'd spent growing the different plants from seeds was a waste because the aphids ate it up.

I was grumbly on the way to the market, but I cheered up once we got there. There were always so many fun foods to taste, and I liked finding weird vegetables

and fruits to try.

I stood in front of my favorite fruit booth, trying to decide which sample to try first when two little arms wrapped around me and squeezed *really* tightly. Which could only mean . . .

"Sophie!" I squeaked.

Sophie laughed behind me and let go. I could breathe again! My friend could *definitely* give a tight hug. She'd make a good boa constrictor.



"Oh my gosh, Zoey, you have to come see this!" She grabbed my hand and dragged me to a new booth I hadn't seen before.

Sophie pointed to a container with weird black and orange bugs crawling around inside.

"GUESS! Guess what those are!"

"Ummm, some kind of beetle maybe?"

"They're BABY LADYBUGS!"

"No wayyy!" I peered closer. "Are you sure?"



"Aren't they neat?" A lady with a nametag that said "Nina" who was working at the booth smiled at us. "They look like skinny long beetles now. But after they shed a few times and grow, they'll pupate. And when they're done changing things up in there, perfect little ladybugs will come out!" She pointed to a pupa in the back of the container. It looked a little bit more like a ladybug—the right shape, anyway. "Do you like bugs?"

Sophie and I nodded furiously.

"Well, if you two garden at all, you'll love the bugs we have here today!" She waved her hand over some different containers.

"Ladybugs, lacewings, nematodes, and—oh, praying mantises!" I cheered. "I love those!"

"All of them eat garden pests, so they're pretty popular among organic gardeners. Do you guys know what organic gardening is?" Nina asked.

"It's when you grow your garden or food without using pesticide," Sophie said. "Pesticides are bad for lots of creatures," I added. "Plus, if you use a lot of them, like on a farm, and it rains, they can get into local streams and really hurt the things that live there—like merhorses!"

Both Sophie and Nina stared at me. "Mer-what?" Nina asked.

"Uhhh, I meant . . . mayflies!" Phew. That was a close one.

"Oh wow, you know about stream bugs?" Nina raised her eyebrows.

Sophie mumbled, "Merhorses?" and shook her head once.

"Pesticides can be bad for a lot of reasons—mayflies included!" Nina continued. "When you don't want to use pesticides, you have a few choices." She grabbed a jar and opened the lid and pulled out a HUGE green caterpillar.

"Whoaaa!" Sophie and I said at the same time.

Nina plonked the caterpillar in my hand. "Some pests, like this tomato hornworm or slugs, are big enough that you can pick them by hand."



I handed the caterpillar to Sophie so she could have a turn.

"If that isn't an option, another organic gardening method is planting a trap plant when you're making your garden." Nina lifted a flowering plant off the table.

"Nasturtiums!" I grinned. "I love eating those! The flowers are delicious!"

Nina laughed. "That's exactly how they work! If you plant them with your crop, often the pests will eat the nasturtiums instead."

I looked over the containers of insects. "So let's say you were growing kale, and you already planted it and there were a TON of aphids on it. Maybe some of these guys could save the day?"

"Exactly!" Nina said. "Ladybug larvae would be really helpful. And we're selling them today."

Sophie and I looked at each other and said, "Be right back!" at the same time.

We ran to get our parents from one of the fresh berry booths. I couldn't resist sneaking one sample raspberry before grabbing my mom's hand and telling her the great news. "Mom! Come see! I've got the solution for my garden pest problem right over here."



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Sophie and I saw a garden with two ladybug larvae b

"Whoa, look at one!" Sophie yelled and oohed and aaheo back.

Sophie didn't go home, but she ran to get the ladybug larvae. that we could re