

CHAPTER ONE

Edward was a young boy, about nine and a half years old, who was pretty much like any other nine-and-a-half-year old boy you've ever met. He did the same things - he went to school, he watched T.V., he usually forgot to make his bed in the morning, and sometimes refused to eat his peas at dinner. He didn't like girls, at least that's what he said, and he wanted to be a fireman when he grew up. There was one thing, though, that was a little different. He had a hobby. More like an obsession. He liked to collect things. Now lots of little boys like to collect things, but Edward *really* liked to collect things. All kinds of things. Bent, rusty nails he found on the ground. Caps from old pop bottles. Wrist watches in the grass in the park. Curb feelers by the curb. Egg beaters from the neighbor's trash. Rusted bicycle chains, small electric motors, broken toasters, pocket calculators, big electric motors, fans, toy guns, stretched out springs, lamp shades, nail clippers, rubber bands, rings, pencils, and rubber stamps. Just about anything, actually. And he proudly kept it all in a big shack in his back yard. When he found something interesting, and he did so almost everyday, he'd bring it home, take it apart, scrub it clean, put it back together, and carefully put it in the correct place in his shack. Everything had its correct place in his shack. Everything was organized. Things that whirred or buzzed were kept in the back left corner, second and

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third shelves. Things that spun or flipped belonged in the back right corner, first shelf. Things that were round with spikes lay on the fifth shelf, front left. Hairy things on the right side, second shelf. Slimy and gooey things on the table in the near left corner. And things that fell into no category at all were on the floor, right smack in the center.

One morning, Edward climbed up on the roof of his shack to check for leaks, because the rainy season was coming and although there had never been a leak in the shack, as far back as Edward could remember, he checked every year just to make sure. As he sat on the roof, after his inspection (there were no visible leaks) his eyes caught a glimpse of something sparkly and bright yellow in the yard of the house next to his. He squinted to see what it was, but it was too far to make out. But as the sun glanced off it, brilliant yellow dots were thrown in all directions. He had to find out what it was. So he carefully climbed down from the shack and went over to the wooden fence that separated the two houses. Jumping up, he grabbed onto the top of the fence and, with all his might, he strained and pulled and pulled and strained until his eyes were just over the top of the fence.

Now, Edward lived in a very nice house in a very nice

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neighborhood. It wasn't too big and it wasn't too small, his house. There was just enough room for his mom and dad and his baby sister. The house always looked nice since his mom was always washing the windows and cleaning the window sills, sweeping the driveway and watering the lawn, planting new flowers and brushing off cobwebs. His dad was always mowing the lawn and trimming the hedges, fixing the shutters and painting the trim, raking the leaves and washing the fence.

The house next door, however, was a different matter. The house next door was covered top-to-bottom with a thin film of grey-black soot. The windows were streaked with grey-white smudges or hidden by grey-green wooden planks. Grey-brown vines crept down the sides in the dark grey cracks of the light grey bricks. Blue-grey cobwebs hung from the corners and crevices. Brown-grey weeds, five feet tall, filled the entire yard so that there wasn't even a path from the sidewalk to the front door. And orange-grey smoke clouds coughed out of the red-grey chimney.

Out of the house, twenty-four hours a day, came all sorts of mysterious noises. There were bangs and plops and fizzes and whirrs and jingles and clanks and pops and burps. There were loud slams and quiet buzzes, big crashes and little plinks, tremendous zoings and teensy blips.