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# **THE GIRL WHO WAS NOT A BIRD**

*This one time there was a girl who was convinced  
beyond all reason that she could fly.*

She was shy and bold at the same time. No one knew where she came from. She mostly kept to herself, but she was always nearby, perched on roofs and fire escapes. If you caught a glimpse of her bouncing around in the air, you would probably squint and rub your eyes and think you got confused.

The first person to talk to her was Grackle McCart. Grack had a bicycle hot dog cart with the longest menu in town. Everybody loved him because he had every kind of hot dog—100 of them, in fact—seriously every kind, like tofu, turkey, tongue, and even toffee and tamarind.

Grack himself? He was just super chill, smart, silly, and charming. He was dorky in a cool way and cool in a dorky way. He'd always be pedalling his hot dog cart around the market, smiling, and then if he caught your eye he'd go, "Hungry? Good thing I got here in time," and then wink at you.

Shopkeepers and cashiers flagged him down all day for hot dogs: he'd sell them to the pet store and the Popsicle store and the broken electronics store and the scissors store and the misprinted T-shirt shop. Afterward, the loud, crazy punk rockers and art weirdos from the notorious trash-strewn five-dollar hotel would try to talk cheap hot dogs out of him all night.

Running a hot dog cart meant he was parked on the same corners for hours. Grack spent oodles of time watching the busy market streets, scanning for hungry hot dog buyers. So he noticed small details all the time.

Then came the day. Grack was refilling the ghost pepper chipotle mayo when he looked up and saw—he was pretty sure?—a girl jumping back and forth between the three-storey brick buildings. It was surely an unjumpable distance. There were two lanes of traffic and rows of parked cars, and a bunch of shuffling pedestrians too busy shopping or lugging giant boxes to notice.

The next day, it was a slow afternoon, and Grack was cleaning his grill and throwing stale hot dog buns to the pigeons. Out of nowhere a feral-eyed girl jumped down off the fire escape behind him, grabbed a bun out of the air, and landed atop a mailbox, all without touching the ground.



Grack's mind was blown. But as the youngest son of the biggest hot dog family in town, he had seen all kinds of crazy things, so he played it cool.

“What kind of bird are you?” he asked the girl.

She looked thoughtful while chewing her mouthful of hot dog bun, then said bashfully, “I’m not a bird, I’m just a regular flying girl.”

She stuffed the rest of the hot dog bun into her cheeks and scrambled up the fire escape. When she got to the top, she kept climbing up into the air and disappeared.

Grackle McCart was in awe and kind of smitten.



Ever after, the flying girl would roost on the phone poles and window ledges and fire escapes by Grack's hot dog cart. When no one was buying hot dogs, Grack would look up and search all the roofs and window-sills for the girl who seemed convinced that she could fly. Sometimes she'd bounce from the roof on one

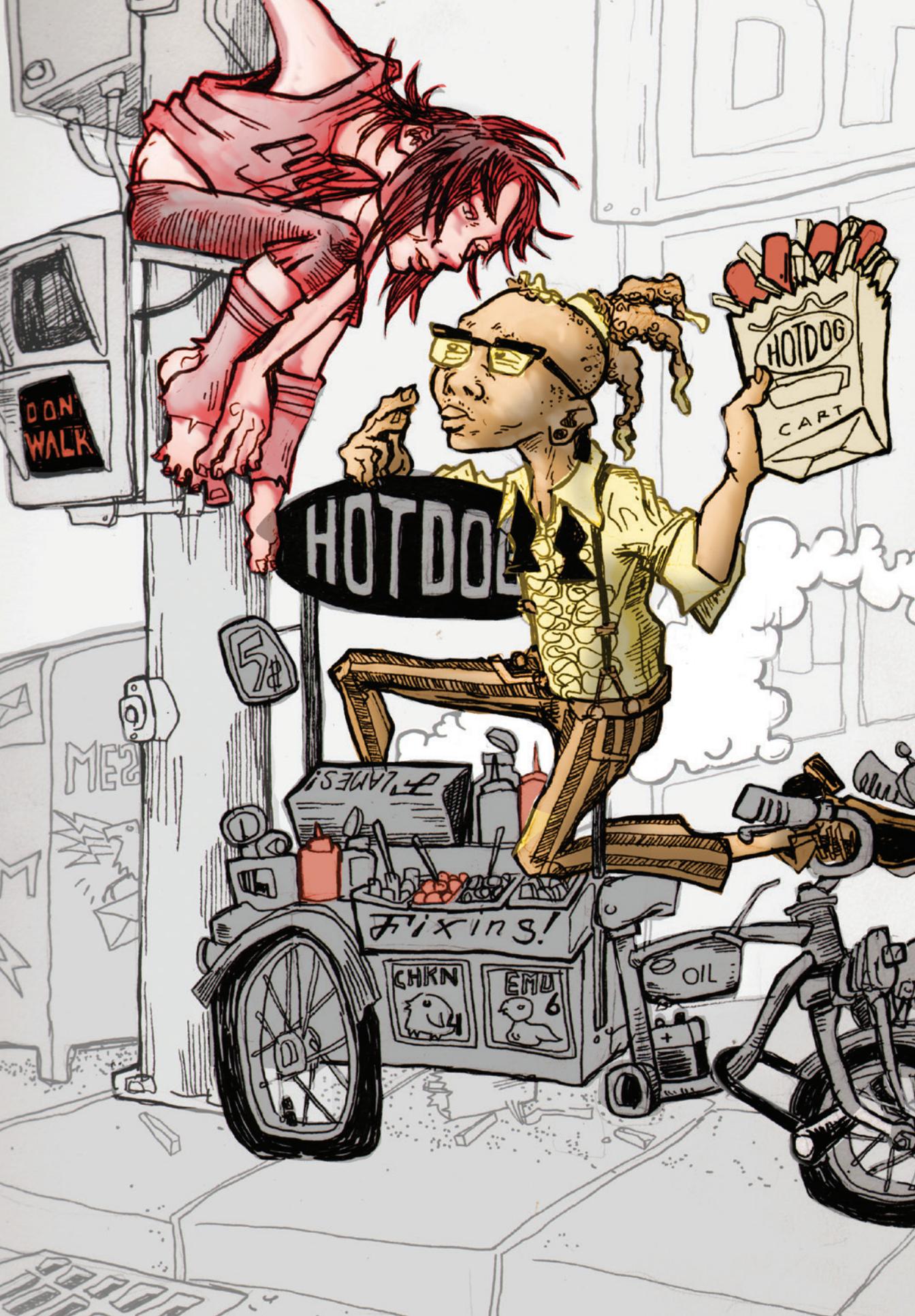
side of the street to the other. Other times he'd see her almost hidden next to an air conditioner or nestled in the awning of a shop.

One day, Grack honked his two AHOOGAH horns and rang his three bike bells until she looked his way. Then he made his cool-guy-eyebrows move and grinned.

“Hey, I got too many hot dogs again this afternoon. Help me eat a few?” He said the first thing he could think of to get this weird, wild girl to hang out with a regular, nerdy hot dog guy like him.

To his delight, she chirped, “Okay!” and launched—fell off the nearest roof, bounced off a store awning, floated over a parked car, and landed in a gleeful crouch on top of the closest trash can. She was all a jumble of motion that seemed like the routine of a clumsy, careless trapeze artist, except she didn't have any ropes.

Without discussion, the girl and Grack decided they should probably hang out every day from now on.



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The girl would drop out of the sky and stick around for brunch, lunch, snacks, and dinner. At first, they never talked about themselves. The girl would tell him about stuff she'd seen from up high, like a giant hats-and-guitars party in the courtyard of the burrito place, or the glow-in-the-dark Frisbee she'd found atop the ice cream shop. Grack would gossip about how he'd made hot dogs for a bunch of hip-hop stars and some big-deal sports guys, plus he knew a place with free video games as long as you kept buying milkshakes.

He invited her to check out the video game milkshake place maybe? But she said she wasn't really great with the indoors, and Grack didn't argue 'cause he didn't want to leave his hot dog bike alone for long anyways.

And then someone would come along for a hot dog and the girl would tumble sideways up the nearest building like a tumbleweed that made a ninety-degree wrong turn.