Title Waterworks

Chapter 1
The Birthday Present

Brad sat on the back steps with his best friend Cody.

“What are you going to do?” asked Cody. “I don’t know,” said Brad with a loud and long sigh.

Today was Mom’s birthday and he had no present. Yesterday he had spent the $5 Dad had given him on himself. He had bought the biggest ice cream cone and a cool magazine about trucks. It hadn’t been his fault that the weather had been so hot. And it hadn’t been his fault that the magazine had been lying on the counter waiting for him to buy it.

When Dad had asked about the present, Brad told him it was a secret. But now Brad knew that he had to think of something fast, before Mom and Dad arrived home from shopping. Why did he have to go and tell Mom her present would be waiting when she got back?

“Brad,” Grandpa called from inside the house. “Where are you?”

“Outside,” replied Brad.

“What are you doing?” called Grandpa.

“Nothing,” said Brad.

Grandpa was babysitting him—as if he needed a babysitter. Brad sat with a glum expression on his face, wishing instead that he was busy wrapping a present for Mom and not sitting here in a big panic wishing he was somewhere else.

“How about making something for your mom?” suggested Cody.

“Like what?”

Cody thought and then said, “How about baking a cake?”

Brad shook his head. “She’s on a diet.”

“Or doing something special for her.”

“Yeah. What?”
Cody examined the scab on his elbow.

“How about promising to do the dishes for a whole month?”

“Yuck! No thanks. Anyway, Dad will ask about the $5.”

“Oh. That’s right.”

There was a silence while Brad and Cody stared at the ground.

Brad picked up a stone and tossed it at the garage wall. It made a pinging sound on the tin before landing on the ground. His face brightened.

“Hey! I know what I’m going to do,” he said, jumping up. “I’m going to clear out the garden.” He pointed to where the stone had landed.

“That’s a garden?” said Cody.

“It’s meant to be. Mom’s always moaning about it. I could plant some flowers and other stuff in it.”

Cody blinked. “How are you going to pay for the flowers and stuff? You’ve already spent the money.”

Brad’s shoulders slumped. “Do you think Mom would like the magazine about trucks?”

Cody shook his head. “I know my mom wouldn’t.”

“Then the only thing left is to make the garden,” Brad stood up. “And don’t say anything about the $5,” he growled. “I’ll worry about that later.”

“Perhaps we’ll find a buried treasure and you can give that to your mom.”

“Yeah, right,” said Brad, “that only happens on TV.”

Chapter 2

The Pile of Junk

The garden beside the garage was a mess. It looked more like a dump. With bits of wire and wood, broken bricks and empty paint cans.

“It’s Dad’s pile of junk,” grinned Brad. “But Mom wants it for a garden. So come on.”

“Do we have to?”

“I thought you were my friend.”

“I am,” said Cody, “but cleaning up all that mess!”

“It won’t take long. But we have to work real fast. It has to be done before Mom and Dad get back.”
“If I help you, you’ll owe me.”

“Yeah. Yeah. Whatever.”

“Brad,” called out Grandpa. “You all right? The game is about to start. You and Cody want to come in and watch it?”

“It’s okay. We’re fine out here,” replied Brad. He knew once the baseball game started nothing would disturb Grandpa and that was just what he needed right now. Brad hurried over to the square patch of ground and gazed at it. His stomach gave a lurch. What a mess. It was worse than he had realized. Still, what choice did he have?

“Come on. We’d better get started.”

So both boys set to work. First they tossed out the broken bricks. Then they flung away the bits of wood and the empty paint cans. Next they pulled out all the old wire that seemed to be growing deep in the dirt. Then they discovered extra stuff. Two old tire inner tubes, a broken pump, and, last of all, several small jars.

“So much for treasure,” said Brad in disgust after opening the jars to see if there was anything exciting inside. When he saw that they were empty, he threw them onto the junk pile in front of the garage.

“Whew!” exclaimed Cody. “You owe me big time for this.”

“All right,” said Brad. “You have to agree it looks lots better already.”

He stood back and gazed at the garden plot. He felt pleased that the clearing-up had been so fast. The more Brad thought about it, the more he felt it was going to be a great birthday present for Mom. Better than anything he could have bought at a store. As long as he had enough time to finish what he had started and Mom and Dad didn’t arrive home early.
Chapter 3

The Fountain of Water

“Quick,” said Brad. “Can you stick all the trash in the trailer?”

“Yes, your kingship,” said Cody, bending low in a mock bow.

“I’ll go and find a spade.” Brad sprinted round to the far side of the garage, pushed open the door and stepped inside. He knew the spades were kept behind the door. He hoped that they hadn’t been left somewhere else. Yes! For once they were in the right place.

He lugged the smallest and sharpest looking one outside, around the garage, and back to the garden plot. Now all he had to do was dig it over and then it would be ready to be planted. But with what? Then a million dollar idea struck him. He would “borrow” some plants from other parts of the garden and put them in. Presto! A brand new birthday garden.

Yes! With a thud of excitement, Brad plunged the spade deep into the dirt.

The next moment, before he knew what was happening, there was a wild WHOOSH! A mad SQUOOSH! And a terrific TWOOOSH! as a spout of water flew up and up high over his head. High over the garage. High, high into the air.

“What was that?” yelled Brad, leaping out of the way like a frog. He stared in disbelief at the fountain of water. What had he done? What had gone wrong? Just when everything had been going so right.

“Help!” shouted Cody.

The sound of his friend’s frantic voice pulled Brad from his dizzy state. He raced around to see Cody standing there, looking like a half-drowned fish with his mouth opening and shutting. Water dripped down his face like heavy rain.
“What did you do?” he bellowed.
“I don’t know,” shouted Brad.
“You must have done something,” said Cody, getting away from the falling water and shaking himself like a dog.
Then Brad remembered why the garden hadn’t been tidied up before. His stomach sank to his sneakers. Dad had told Mom he couldn’t do it until he had buried the plastic water line properly. In the meantime he would put it just underneath the surface of the dirt.
Oh no! Don’t say he’d gone and chopped it in half.
“What?” said Cody, seeing his stricken face.
“I think I’m going to leave home,” said Brad.
“Why?” asked Cody, squeezing the water out of his T-shirt.
“I’ve just killed the water to the house,” he said. “And the garden, and maybe the street.”
Cody’s eyes grew large. “Wow!” he whispered.
The two of them crept back around the garage to where the garden was meant to be. Brad hardly dared to look. When he did, he let out a groan at the terrible sight. Where was the lovely garden filled with flowers? The only thing that was growing and flowering fast was a swimming pool of mud.

Chapter 4
The New Neighbor
The two boys stared at the waterworks firing up into the air. As well as shooting over the garage it was tumbling over the fence. At the sight of it going next door, Brad’s face paled. The water was falling right onto their new neighbor’s pile of neatly stacked firewood.
The new neighbor was called Big L. His real name was Lionel. Big L was really big. Nobody messed with him. Big L didn’t like kids very much. At least that’s what Brad had heard. But most of all Big L liked his firewood to be dry—not sopping wet.
There was no way out. No way to stop the gushing water. Yet Brad knew he had to stop the fountain. Stop it before Big L found out about his soggy wet firewood and who was to blame.

“What are you going to do?” breathed Cody, shivering with fright.

“I don’t know.” exclaimed Brad. “I’ve never bust a water pipe before.”

Then Brad spotted a red plastic bucket standing next to the garage. That might do the trick. He raced over. It was full of flower bulbs. He tipped them out and ran back.

“What’s that for?” asked Cody.

“To stop the water. What else?” Sometimes Cody seemed to be on another planet.

“Why don’t you tell your grandad? He could fix it.”

“No,” said Brad. “He hates missing his baseball games. Then I’d get the blame for that as well as everything else. I can handle this.”

His shoulders slumped. Who did he think he was kidding?

Brad rushed up to the fountain of water and thrust the bucket over the spout. He pushed at it hard, trying to squash the water down. It worked for about 20 seconds, until he couldn’t hold the bucket any longer. The force of the water was too great.

Brad let the bucket go and staggered back. The bucket shot up into the air before bouncing down onto the garage roof and disappearing over the fence right into Big L’s yard. Brad and Cody gazed in silent horror.

“Now you’re for it,” breathed Cody, backing away. “Mom said he’s got hands as big as elephant’s ears.”

Brad ignored Cody. It was no good being scared. Instead they had to do something. Well he had to do something. But what?

“Quick!” said Brad. “I’ve got another idea. We need a bigger bucket, and a heavier one. There’s a big metal one in the laundry room. You go and get it. And go check and see if Grandpa’s still watching TV.”

“Why is it always me having to do the dirty work,” muttered Cody as he trailed off.

“What are you going to do?”
“I’m going to stay here and take charge.”

“Take charge of what?” asked Cody.

Brad didn’t know. But it was what the hero always said on TV and it sounded
important.

“And don’t be like a snail,” he called after Cody. “And don’t let Grandpa see you looking.”

Cody slunk around the corner of the house, leaving a trail of wet footprints as he went. As Brad waited, he tried not to think what would happen if Mom and Dad drove up the driveway at this moment and saw the fountain of water. They’d think they had landed in a water circus. It wasn’t fair! He’d only been trying to do something really nice for Mom’s birthday.

Then he had another idea. What if he dumped some bricks over the spouting water? That way it might spread along the ground instead of up into the air. Yes! He knew where there was a pile of bricks.

Dad had been saving some to build into a barbecue. But like the garden, it hadn’t happened yet.

Brad sped off, away from the fountain of water, down toward the old shed at the end of the yard. He yanked open the door.

Yes, there they were. He pulled out the wheelbarrow and piled it full. Then he wheeled them back up the yard as fast as he could.

He felt more confident. He felt at last that things were about to change for the better. If the heavier bucket didn’t stop the water, then the bricks would do the trick.

Chapter 5
A Wheelbarrow of Bricks

Cody was waiting for him with the metal bucket. Brad parked the wheelbarrow beside the garage.

“Grandpa okay?”

“I think he’s asleep,” said Cody. Then he asked, “What are those for?”
“To stop the water.”

“What about the bucket? I went and got it especially.”

“Yeah. Yeah. I know that. We’ll try it first. Okay?”

Cody thrust the bucket at Brad. “Here, you go.” Then he went and stood over by the house.

Brad took a deep breath and rushed at the waterspout. With one swift action he pushed the metal bucket over the water. For a few seconds there was a gurgling sound and then the water rushed out from beneath the bucket.

“Yay!” thought Brad. “It worked!”

But it hadn’t. A second later the metal bucket was powered up and flung off. It hit the side of the garage with a heavy clank and fell into the mud.

“At least,” thought Brad with a desperate sigh, “it didn’t go over to Big L’s place. At least there was that.”

So Brad called out to Cody.

“Bring the wheelbarrow over. It’s our last chance.”

Cody did as he was told and wheeled the bricks into the muddy pool. Halfway in, the wheelbarrow sank down into the mud.

“There’s more stuff ending up here than we cleared out,” said Cody, letting go of the handles. “Now what?”

“We’ll have to lift them from there.” Brad plunged through the rising mud, lifted out a brick, and carried it back to the broken pipe.

“My mom’s going to go berserk,” said Cody. “These jeans were clean this morning.”

“Are you going to help or not?” yelled Brad, struggling with another brick.

“And she gets really mad when my sneakers get dirty,” continued Cody.

“Then don’t help! Just let me do everything.” Brad thundered through the mud, splashing bits over his arms, up onto his face and into his hair. His clothes were covered. Who cared about a bit of mud? This was an emergency. He knew he was fighting for his life!

“All right,” said Cody. “Keep your shirt on. I’m coming.”
A few minutes later, in the pile of mud there was a pile of bricks, heaped up one upon the other. Now instead of the water fountain flying up into the air, it was squirting out along the ground in different directions, like a bunch of hissing snakes. Two of them were headed right toward the bottom of the fence and Big L’s stack of firewood. So now it was going to be wet on the bottom as well as the top. Brad couldn’t believe how unlucky this was all turning out! If only he hadn’t spent Mom’s birthday money on himself.

Chapter 6
Big L Comes Over

Brad heard a door bang. It was the sound he had been dreading. He cringed and shrunk down farther into the mud. Oh, no, it was Big L on the prowl! There came the sound of big heavy boots down the path toward the fence, toward where the water was squirting through. Thud! Thud! Thud! Brad’s short life flashed before his eyes. He was sure his days were numbered. He could already feel himself being lifted up by those big elephant hands. He could feel them around his neck. “Hey!” bellowed a big, loud voice.

The hands were squeezing tighter and tighter. Brad glanced over at Cody. His eyes were popping out like the mad man in a horror story. He looked like a stone statue, frozen with fright. Brad poked him.

Cody jumped back to life. “I’ve gotta go,” he whispered.

Brad stretched out a hand and yanked Cody close. “If you do,” he hissed into his face, “I’ll never be your friend again.”

“Sounds good to me,” sniffled Cody.

“Hey!” yelled Big L. “I’m talking to you.”

“What me?” thought Brad, backing away, his legs trembling, fast following after his cowardly friend. Big L couldn’t possibly see them creeping backward could he? Nah! It was impossible. There was a tall fence between them. He might have heard them talking, though!
“Listen! I know you’re there!”

Brad tiptoed backward even faster, sloshing through the mud like a tractor without any tires, pretending he wasn’t there, while trying to get behind the garage and hide forever. At this particular moment he didn’t care if he was never heard from again. It’d be sad for Mom and Dad, but it couldn’t be helped.

“What are we going to do?” breathed Cody, flattening himself against the front door of the garage.

“Nothing,” said Brad, joining him.

It wasn’t that Brad was a coward. He’d done plenty of brave things in his life. For example, only last week he had rescued Cody’s football from old Mrs. Spink’s yard. And if you knew Mrs. Spink, you’d know that was a very brave thing to do.

But, at the moment, with the water crashing round a big person’s woodpile, he didn’t particularly feel like being a hero.

“Listen, kid!” shouted Big L. “What’s with the water?”

Brad put his finger to his lips to tell Cody not to say a word, not to move.

“Brad, boy. I know you’re there.”

Big L knew his name. That was bad. Worse than bad.

“If you don’t reply I’m coming over. You hear me?”

Oh, no! Big L coming over was ten times more terrible than him standing on the other side of the fence bellowing. Brad stepped away from the safety of the garage.

“What is it?” he squeaked.

“What’s going on over there?” thundered Big L. “How’s a guy expected to have a fire when his wood’s all wet?”

Then he growled and to Brad it sounded more like he was crunching up something ugly, like a mouthful of dead beetles.

“I think I’ve chopped the water pipe,” whispered Brad.

“What? Speak up. I can’t hear you.”

“I’ve cut the water pipe.”

“Then go and turn it off.”

“I don’t know how.”
“Don’t you kids know anything?”

There was a small silence. Except for the sound of the water hissing and squirting along the ground. Brad felt tired. He’d had enough of this. He wanted to go and lie down in his room, start the day again.

“Right!” thundered Big L. “Stay exactly where you are. Don’t move. I’m coming over. I’ll sort this out once and for all.”

“Did you hear that?” breathed Cody, clutching Brad’s arm. “He’s coming over.”

“I heard.” “So?”

“So what?”

“Are you going to let him get you?”

“Yep,” said Brad.

Suddenly, at the end of the driveway loomed a figure. He stood against the sun, dark and dangerous.

“Wow!” said Cody. “He’s huge even from way back here.”

“Yeah. He is, isn’t he,” replied Brad.

Then Big L stopped and bent down.

“What’s he doing?” whispered Cody.

“How do I know.”

Next minute there was a strange sound.

“Listen,” said Brad.

“What? I don’t hear anything.”

“That’s what I mean. There’s no squirting water sound.”

Both boys turned toward the mountain of bricks. The hissing snakes had gone. Brad grinned. “He’s turned the water off.”

“Maybe he’s not coming to get us after all.”

But before Brad could reply, Big L lumbered slowly toward them. The sound of his boots sent shivers through the boys. His big elephant hands swung back and forth by his side.

“It was nice knowing you, Cody,” said Brad.

“Yeah,” quaked his friend. “You too.”
Chapter 7
A Couple of Mud Rats

“So…” rumbled Big L when he arrived at the mud pool. “Which one is Brad?” He stood on the edge of the disaster zone, his arms folded, his legs apart.

“Me,” said Brad, forcing himself to look up at Big L. He seemed to stretch forever. “I’m sorry about the water. It was an accident.”

Big L burst into laughter. His big belly shook, his big shoulders shook, his big cheeks shook. “You should see yourselves. You two look like a couple of mud rats.”

Then he laughed some more. When he’d finished he said, in a not so fierce voice, “You’d better tell me what happened.”

“I was trying to make a birthday garden for Mom,” said Brad.

“That's because he spent the money his Dad gave him,” added Cody.

Brad gave Cody a withering look and then continued and when he had finished the whole story right from buying the ice cream cone and the truck magazine until this very moment, Big L was quiet and then he went, “Ah ha.” Then, “Yep.” Followed by, “Hmmm!” He scratched his head with his big elephant hands. “Soooo… what's the plan now, besides standing in a mud pool like two drowned mud rats?” He chuckled.

“Give up,” said Brad.

“GIVE UP!” The ground shook.

“What I mean is…” said Brad.

“Now listen here, kid. In my books you don’t ever quit, doesn’t matter how much of a mess you’re in. You hear?”

Brad and Cody both nodded as if they had wooden puppet heads.

“Because that doesn’t ever get you anywhere, take it from one who knows.”

“So I’m cleaning this up,” suggested Brad hopefully.

“Yeah! That sounds better. And…”

“And…” said Brad, thinking desperately, while looking at Cody for a bright idea.

“And we finish making the garden,” said Cody.
Big L grinned. “You bet we are.”

We?

“If we hurry we might get most of it done before your mom gets back. How about it? Deal?”

“Deal,” chorused Brad and Cody.

“Then,” said Big L, clomping into the mud toward them, “I say let’s get a move on. And hey, let’s get real creative! Let’s go to town with the best garden and the best birthday present your mom ever had.”

Chapter 8 Waterworks

Brad was just putting down the last brick when he heard the car.

“Quick,” he cried to Big L and Cody.

“Time to disappear.”

The three of them shot off around the side of the garage.

“I’ll wait until you tell me when,” whispered Big L with a wide grin.

Brad nodded. Mom and Dad drove up the driveway.

“What the…?” said Dad, stopping the car and jumping out.

Mom followed. “Oh my. Oh my.” She stood with her hands clasped and stared at the spectacular sight.

“Okay,” breathed Brad. “Now!”

At the instruction, Big L leaned over and turned on the tap. The birthday garden came alive. Water frolicked from the top of the old plastic bucket tower, spilling down over the edges into the wire pools below. Small fountains cascaded from between the used paint tins looking like jets of fireworks. And spirals of stars squirited from the two inner tubes.

“Happy birthday, Mom,” shouted Brad, leaping out from behind the garage, followed by Cody and lastly Big L.

“Wow!” exclaimed Mom. “It’s brilliant.”
“It sure is,” said Dad.

At that moment Grandpa wandered outside and stopped in his tracks. “Gracious me, where did that come from?”

They all laughed.

Later that night Brad lay in bed thinking about the day. It had started out not so good but had ended up okay—more than okay. Especially finding out Big L was a plumber who was top notch at fixing bust water pipes. So what if part of the deal with Big L was a promise to clean out his garden, too? And to help stack his new load of firewood? And paint his fence? Brad rolled over. Mom was worth it. How many others had a birthday garden of waterworks?