

ALL OF THESE THINGS ARE NOT LIKE THE OTHERS

By Jeff Dunne

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CHARACTERS

HARRY	A quirky elementary school teacher
LOUISE	Another elementary school teacher, not quite as quirky
ROY	An 8-year-old boy with a new pair of shoes
JIMMY	Another 8-year-old boy with a very active imagination

SETTING

An elementary school teacher's lounge.

SCENE

(Harry and Louise are sitting at a table in the teacher's lounge. They have just settled in for lunch, and are taking food out of paper bags.)

LOUISE

What is it today?

HARRY

BLT.

LOUISE

That seems unlikely.

HARRY

What are you talking about?

LOUISE

Yesterday you brought in a meat pie with lamb and chocolate pudding. Monday it was yogurt with tuna and crushed up Jolly Ranchers.

HARRY

Shoot! I forgot to bring you that recipe like I promised.

LOUISE

It's fine. Really.

HARRY

But I wrote it out and—

LOUISE

Please don't.

HARRY

Your loss.

LOUISE

Not really, but anyway, can you see why I find it hard to believe that you brought in a BLT?

HARRY

But I made bread. Fresh. Homemade.

(Harry starts taking out a Saran-Wrapped monstrosity with two pieces of brown bread around a fish – with a head sticking out – on top of pasta, and that on top of a folded flour tortilla. Each layer is glued together with a pink paste of some kind.)

HARRY (CONT)

I created this great new recipe that uses ground-up Coco-Puffs instead of—

(He sees Louise staring at him in horror.)

What?

LOUISE

I thought you said you brought a BLT.

HARRY

I did. Burrito, Lasagna, and Trout.

LOUISE

I'm gonna be sick.

(Louise has taken out a peanut butter and jelly sandwich.)

HARRY

Hey, I don't judge your taste in food.

LOUISE

Do I dare ask what the pink stuff is?

HARRY

Oh, that. Strawberry frosting. There was some left over from when I made gazpacho last week—

(Louise plops her sandwich back down on the table.)

LOUISE

You know what? I'll save this for later.

HARRY

But you were just saying you're famished.

LOUISE

And yet suddenly, I don't feel so well.

HARRY

Oh, wait.

(Harry pulls apart his "sandwich", takes out a pink Pepto Bismol pill, and offers it.)

Pepto Bismol. I usually tuck a few in there. You know, to head off any problems that might... bubble up.

LOUISE

Thank god you don't teach home ec.

HARRY

I asked, but they said no.

LOUISE

There's a shock.

(Suddenly the door opens, and Roy sticks his head in.)

ROY

Mr. Prosner? Can I talk to you for a minute?

(Harry and Louise share a look, then...)

HARRY

Sure, Roy. Come on in.

(He enters and approaches the table.)

ROY

I'm sorry, Mr. Prosner, I know you don't like being enrupted during lunch. Oh, hey, Ms. Davenport. Anyway, you know that Jimmy said that he was going to bring in his cat, Tickles, for show and tell?

HARRY

I remember. And I told him no. No animals.

ROY

Right. That's why I didn't bring my turtle. But he said that he couldn't find anything else that started with the letter T, so he brought him in anyway. And I brought in my sneakers.

LOUISE

That starts with S, Roy.

ROY

Nuh uh. They're high tops.

LOUISE

Wouldn't that start with H?

ROY

Nuh uh. It's tops-comma-high. Anyway, I just got them last week for my birthday, and Jimmy's cat ripped them all up while we were on recess.

HARRY

How do you know that it was the cat?

ROY

Cuz there's tooth marks and scratches like he scratched it all up. On the sides. Jimmy said that it wasn't his cat, but I know it was because it looks just like a cat. I mean, like cat bites and stuff. Like a cat did it.

(Suddenly Jimmy rushes in.)

JIMMY

Hey! What are you doing here?

ROY

What do you *think* I'm doing here?!

JIMMY

Mr. Prosner, my cat didn't do nothing to Roy's sneakers. He's just making that up because he wants to get me in trouble.

ROY

Am not!

JIMMY

Are too!

HARRY

Jimmy, did you bring your cat to school?

(Jimmy suddenly goes silent. He knows he's in trouble, and he's trying to figure out a way out of it. Then inspiration strikes, and a flurry of explanation comes tumbling out.)

JIMMY

I know you said that I shouldn't, but I told my mom about it, about needing to bring in something that started with the letter T, and she said that we didn't have anything in the house that started with T, just like I said. And we thought about it like a whole lot, but there really just wasn't anything, so she said that I should bring in the cat. And I told her that you said I shouldn't bring in the cat, but she said that I should and that it was better to bring in something than not bring in something because this way I might get a bad grade but at least I won't fail because you would think that I forgot about it. *(Big breath.)* Which I didn't.

(Jimmy stops. Everyone is just looking at him, and he's not sure what to say. There's a long silence.)

What?

HARRY

Where have you been keeping the cat all morning?

JIMMY

(There's another pause as Jimmy starts realizing that this is not going to end well.)

In my backpack.

HARRY

And where's your backpack?

JIMMY

(Swallowing hard...)

In my locker.

(They all stare at him, and then he breaks again.)

Which is why I had to let him out at lunch. He's a really good cat and everything, but he's still a cat, so he needed to get out and walk around and sniff things. You know how cats like to sniff things, right? Tickles does that all the time.

(They're all still staring at him, and suddenly Jimmy has an idea on how to change the subject.)

JIMMY (CONT)

Say, Mr. Prosner, you're really smart and everything. Can you tell me why cats like to sniff things so much? And rub up against things too. I bet if anyone knows, you'd know. I told my mom that you're the smartest teacher in the whole school, and... *(he suddenly realizes...)* I mean, you're really smart too, Ms. Davenport. I was telling her that you two are both really smart. Like *really* smart. But... in different ways, you know?

(They're all still staring at him.)

What?

HARRY

Where's the cat now?

(Jimmy looks a little stunned, then starts to shuffle his feet.)

Go find the cat, Jimmy.

JIMMY

Now?

HARRY

Yes, now.

(Jimmy starts running off, and as he's exiting Harry calls after him.)

And bring him here! Do NOT put him back in your locker!!

LOUISE

For the love of god, please don't add the cat to your sandwich.

ROY

You can do that?!?

HARRY

No, Roy. You cannot do that. Thanks, Louise.

ROY

(Noticing the food for the first time.)

Is that your lunch. That's awesome!!

HARRY

(To Louise...)

See? *He* thinks it looks good.

LOUISE

He's eight.

ROY

And a half.

LOUISE

Ask him if he wants a bite.

ROY

Would you pay me a quarter?

HARRY

Annnnyway... Roy, why don't you run and grab your sneakers.

LOUISE

And then Mr. Prosner can add *them* to his sandwich too.

(Roy is clearly confused.)

HARRY

Go, Roy.

(Roy rushes out.)

Just think of all the fun we missed when everyone was teaching remotely.

LOUISE

Why'd you ask him to bring the cat here?

HARRY

I have no idea. It's better than having it run loose around the school, though.

LOUISE

And the sneakers?

HARRY

Honestly, I have no idea. I guess I was on a roll or something.

LOUISE

I hope that's not tomorrow's lunch.

HARRY

If they covered how to handle these things in our education classes, then I was definitely sleeping—

(Roy bursts back in, waving his sneakers.)

ROY

Here they are, Mr. Prosner. Do you see right here where the tooth marks are?

(Jimmy enters, holding Tickles.)

And here on the side, that's where Jimmy's stupid cat scratched them. The leather's all ruined.

JIMMY

(Rushing up to join them...)

He did not! And he's not stupid!

LOUISE

(To the tune of "Chattanooga Choo Choo" ...)

Pardon me Roy, is that the cat that chewed your new shoes?

(They all stop to stare at her. The boys are totally confused, and Harry just looks at her in complete dismay, eventually shaking his head.)

Sorry.

HARRY

Anyway...

(He takes the cat, and tries to settle it down during the next line. He also looks at the nametag on their cat's collar.)

HARRY (CONT)

Now there are a few problems we need to address, and I suppose we can start here. Jimmy. Cat... does not start with the letter T. It does end with a T, but that wasn't the assignment.

JIMMY

His name is Tickl—

HARRY

Technically, his name is “Mr. Tickle”, at least according to his nametag, and that also does not start with the letter T.

JIMMY

But he's the only—

(Harry holds up a finger...)

HARRY

Somehow I think there probably were other items in your house that begin with T. Don't you?

JIMMY

There weren't! Me and my mom both—

HARRY

Did you brush your teeth this morning?

JIMMY

What?

HARRY

Your teeth. Did you brush them this morning?

JIMMY

Yeah.

HARRY

With a *hairbrush*?

JIMMY

No.

HARRY

What *did* you use?

JIMMY

A... *(The lightbulb goes on.)* Actually, I don't think I brushed my teeth today.

HARRY

Well, most people keep things in their house like... oh... tape. Teacups. A tv remote. Toaster.

ROY

Tampons.

(Everyone turns to look at Roy, all with very different expressions.)

What? I heard my mom talking about them. I think they're used for rock climbing.

(Even more confused looks. Harry decides to ignore this, and turns back to Jimmy.)

HARRY

So, no. Mister Tickles doesn't count for the assignment.

ROY

Told you so!

HARRY

Now, Roy. Your shoes also do not start with the letter T. *Shoes* starts with an S. As does *sneakers*. *High tops* starts with H, unless it is in a long list of other kinds of tops, and you're trying to make subcategories. Was that your intent?

ROY

(After a pause, as he fails to understand what Harry just said...)

Uh huh.

HARRY

I'll take that as a 'no'. So the problem here is that you also didn't bring in something that starts with the letter T.

LOUISE

You could call them tennis shoes. Then they'd start with T.

(Harry stares at her in silence for a long moment.)

HARRY

You, Ms. Davenport, are not helping.

ROY

That's what I was thinking! Ten-inch shoes!

HARRY

She said *tennis* shoes. Do you play tennis?

ROY

Uh huh.

HARRY

And you didn't think to bring in a tennis racket, which also starts with T?

(Roy just stares at him.)

Anyway, look. You boys need to understand that there are rules here. I know you're trying, so I'm trying to be fair, but isn't it possible that you each just decided to bring in something you... just wanted to bring to school... instead of actually doing the assignment?

LOUISE

(Quietly.)

You should make them share your lunch.

HARRY

(To Louise...)

Hush. *(To the boys...)* Now Roy, I want you to go put your shoes in your locker. I'm pretty sure that they are still going to work just fine.

ROY

But they're scratched and bit!

HARRY

That's right. And there are cultures around the world where that's a badge of honor. It shows that your shoes have survived a dangerous battle, and people will know to treat them with deference and honor. When you get home, you're going to see that they now command the respect of all your other shoes.

ROY

They will??

Definitely.

HARRY

That's so pog!

ROY

And Jimmy...

HARRY
(Harry shakes off the kid lingo, then...)

(He hands the cat back to the boy.)

I want *you* to take Mr. Tickles down to the main office and have your mom come pick him up.

JIMMY
(Clearly not a fan of this plan.)

Could we maybe just put him back in—

HARRY

No. No, no. No. You cannot. Mr. Tickles has been through enough today, and you might even find that your mother will be glad to know where he went.

JIMMY

I don't think she will.

HARRY

In the immediate, she will be very relieved. But you will probably have something of a tense evening ahead of you.

JIMMY

We don't play tennis.

HARRY

I said— You know what? Never mind. Just go to the office and have your mom pick up the cat.

JIMMY

And then go back to class?

HARRY

Let's see how things go with your mom first.

(The boys continue to stare at Harry, who shoos them off with a gesture. The boys leave, cat and sneakers in their respective hands.)

LOUISE

I think there's an important lesson to be learned here.

HARRY

Oh? What's that?

(A bell rings, and they both start packing up and preparing to go back to class.)

LOUISE

No idea.

(Lights out.)