

Under the Paw

The Incredible Whacky Air Hockey **SHOWDOWN**

A Kingsley Twins Novel - Book One

Anita M Shaw



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Contents

Dedication & Acknowledgements	1
1. A Pest & A Pet	2
About the Author	12
More By Anita	13

Dedication & Acknowledgements

THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED to every good Samaritans who has taken in abandoned animals and given them a second chance at life. Your compassion is a shining commendation!

Snowshoe Mal is a combination of cats my family has owned over the years, but Honey II especially. None were Maine Coon cats, so I did some research on the breed. I didn't try to cram in every unique thing about them in the story in boring information dumps. Just added enough, I hope, to give the sense of the breed. Likely, in other stories, more of the uniqueness of this fascinating breed will surface.

Please enjoy the fun and adventure as Jeoffrey and Jerrianna discover their new pet's surprising abilities and how they help shape the outcome of an eventful Saturday afternoon's competition.

—Anita M Shaw--

CHAPTER ONE

A Pest & A Pet

“JEFFREY, GO PICK OUT a couple boxes of cereal. Jerrianna, you get eggs, milk, and ice cream, and I'll grab the rest of the stuff.”

“Soda!” Jerrianna and I chorused.

“That’s near the cereal aisle. Jeffrey, get that, okay? Might as well get more popcorn too. Meet you in front of the store when you’re done!”

I shot Mom a thumbs up. “Okie doke!” Off I went to grab a shopping cart.

Northfield Supermarket had great food and stuff, but my parents didn’t always feel their prices were so super. They had a great cereal selection though, and I knew just what Jerrianna and I wanted.

Martian Mars Balls were the best tasting fruity multigrain cereal ever! Northfield Super’s own brand. Usually that sort of thing wasn’t as good as any original. But, MMB’s were terrific, even if the name was dumb.

I whipped along the aisle in a hurry to get what we’d come for. We had a family night planned tonight. Even Dad would be home for it. Lots of times he wasn’t home on a Wednesday.

He used to work for a computer company, but now he had his own business. He loves building computers and fixing them for people. He even goes to people’s homes to help them figure out how to use their PCs. Sometimes he’s gone a few days to set up networks for businesses out of town or even out of state. Mom misses him a lot then, and so do Jerrianna and I.

Tonight, we'd probably play some air hockey because that's Mom's favorite thing. Well, we *all* like playing, but she really, *really* loves it! We've got a decent table—not a professional sized one or anything like that—but a pretty good one just the same. We liked to play card games, too. Golf, right now, was everyone's favorite.

I found the MMB's right off and turned to toss a couple boxes of them into the cart. Bumped right into *Ralph Henry Dalton*! Man, my night got shot down on the spot!

"You *eat* those things?" He poked the boxes in my arms. "Nothing's better than *my* Mom's French toast! *She* makes French toast *better* than the President's chef! Pancakes, too!"

Well, I didn't know anything about the President's chef, but I did know about *my* mom's cooking. Probably *she* was better than *his* mom, but I didn't say it. Didn't want to sound anything like him!

The guy was The Biggest Pest Of All Time! No one wanted anything to do with him. When he first moved to Northfield in September everyone was excited. It's a small town and we like it when new people move in.

Not this time. We wished him back at his old school even before he'd told us the name of it.

"Know what else she can make *better* than *anybody* in the world? Chocolate chip cookies and hot chocolate!" Ralph Henry started turning circles beside me.

He had a problem standing still. At school, he drove Mrs. Jonesbury, our teacher, crazy. This was her last year teaching at our school for she was retiring and heading south to be with her daughter. She told Ralph Henry that in all her forty-two years as a teacher she'd never met anyone like him. He seemed to think it was a compliment.

I waited for a woman with six kids to pass by, and then I tossed the MMB's into the cart I'd parked across from me. "Yeah, well, my mom bakes good stuff too! Look, I gotta go. We're having family night tonight. I don't want to waste all my time here."

He didn't take the hint.

Walking in circles right beside me, he followed me to the soda aisle. Grabbing up a jar of the best popcorn as I passed by the shelf it was on, I tried to pretend I was alone in the store.

But it was impossible. He had to tell me all about what *his* family did. "We have family night, too, when my parents are home. Sometimes they're away a lot, so my brother and I get to do what we want when they're gone. He's nineteen. He's *the best*! He has a different mom, y' know, but she died. Ronny's my *best* buddy!"

Now he started poking at the bottles of soda on the shelves. Rearranging them when they didn't need to be.

I didn't know what to say about Ronny's mom, so I said, "Well, it can't be *the best* while your folks're gone. Who's making the French toast then?"

Ralph Henry climbed up the shelves to check out the top one. Hung there by one hand and looked down at me. "Ronny does. He's *almost* as good a cook as Mom! We do a lot of stuff together. You should come over sometime. You'd have *the best* time!"

Then he started telling me all about his games, his toys, and his TV set. *All the best there was in the world*. His video collection included every video known to mankind. In fact, Ralph Henry Dalton thought he was *The Best Kid* who could do *Anything the Best of Anyone*, and who lived in *The Best House on The Best Street in The Best Town of The Best State in the Best Country* in the world! His *Best Family* drove *The Best Cars*, wore *The Best Clothes* and on and on and on.

By the time I dropped bottles of soda into the cart, I was ready to stuff a grapefruit into his big mouth. Maybe I wouldn't mind so much if he shut up and let someone else say something. But he never does.

"... and my Dad got us *the best* computer ever! It's got a ten gig quad core processor, massive memory, and a 16 terabyte hard drive. I got all *the best* games on it . . ."

I grit my teeth. Even though I knew he was exaggerating Big Time, I wished I could say Dad had set us up with *the best* computer ever. But our computer needed upgrades and who knew when that would happen! Dad never seemed to get around to working on our machine like he did everyone else's.

Mom came out of the paper plates and napkins aisle, and Jerrianna hurried toward us with her stuff, plus a bag of Granny Smith apples. Our favorites! The *BEST*! And I thought that thought savagely like someone might take it away from me or try to convince me some other apple beat them out.

"Found a buddy, Jeffrey?" Mom asked as we met by the macaroni display at the front of the aisle.

We pulled over to let the mom with all the kids go by. They were bugging her, and the baby girl was bawling. I felt sorry for the mom, but I thought I'd rather be her with all those kids and all that noise than to be me with Ralph Henry's bragging face following me everywhere. I couldn't wait to check out and leave him behind. His hyperness was getting to me.

Before I could pipe up and say he wasn't even remotely a friend, never mind my buddy, Ralph Henry blabbed. "Hi! I'm Ralph Henry Dalton! You Jeffrey's mom? Hey! hey, I've seen you at the bowling alley! You're the one that beats everyone playing air hockey, aren't you?"

Mom never brags about that much. She always says if she started parading any of her talents before the world like that it'd be a sure bet someone would show up to put her in her place in no time flat. And that could happen any time.

Guess it could. But still, she was good enough to play in official air hockey tournaments if she wanted to.

We'd gone to watch a couple, and she got to play a few casual games with some of the people who'd played in them. They'd been pretty amazed at her abilities and had tried to encourage her to start playing professionally in matches and tournaments. She just said she wanted to keep it fun.

Now she said to Ralph, “They just need practice, Ralph Henry. You play pretty good yourself, I noticed—when you’re not showing off.”

Ralph Henry beamed, did this dumb little dance. I stared and groaned. *My* mother had *noticed* him? And he *was good* at it! Which she just now *recognized, acknowledged, and approved!*

Oh, great! Probably he’d be telling everyone my mom said he was *the best* at air hockey now! I let my head drop suddenly forward onto my chest. My night was *ruined*.

“Don’t let him get to you,” Jerrianna murmured in my ear. “We’re going to have a great time tonight. He won’t be there. Stop looking like that, Doom Dork! Mom’s just being polite.”

I twisted my neck enough to be able to give her a black look. She shook her head at me and went to put her stuff into Mom’s cart.

“Got jelly for neck muscles, Jeoffrey?” Mom asked. “Let’s head for the checkout. Nice meeting you, Ralph Henry. Maybe we can play a game together sometime.”

“Ho! That’d be the best! I’ll beat you in *five* minutes! *Less!*”

Mom smiled. In her look, I could see she’d formed the same impression of him we had. My head rose back up like a weed stealing a big sip of water from petunias as she said in her most casual manner, “You can try.”

“Ha! I won’t have to *try!*” He followed us to the checkout, pretended to be stalking man-eating lions on the way. “Jeoffrey says you’re having family night tonight. When my mom and dad get back we’ll have one too. We do all sorts of neat stuff. We have *the best* time!” As if no one else ever did.

“That’s the idea of it,” Mom replied in her mild way. “We have family night a couple times a week. But the most fun ones are when the kids’ father isn’t working on someone’s computer system. He’s been pretty busy lately.”

Ralph Henry shot at an invisible charging lion just as it was leaping over the candy display. “My parents are gone a lot too.

They decorate people's houses. Rich people's houses. They make *tons* of money. When they get back, we'll go shopping. That'll be the *best* time ever!"

I hung my head again. Saw Jerrianna roll her eyes before I did it. If this line didn't move faster I might just disappear out the door. Mom could handle the bags. That's what carts were for.

Yeah, but then he'd just follow me out the door.

Finally, it was our turn. The checkout lady listened to Ralph Henry's lips flap with a funny look on her face. She looked from Mom to Ralph Henry and said, "You must have fun with that one!"

"Oh, not so much," Mom replied. "He isn't mine!"

"Lucky you then! Pity his parents! That'll be twenty-seven fifty-seven."

Mom chuckled and dug around in her denim purse. "Who knows? Maybe they deserve him!"

The checkout lady laughed at that. "You could be right," she said as she took the money Mom held out to her.

Ralph Henry didn't seem to care they were talking about him. He just kept bouncing around, checking for lions, and rhinos, and poachers. Thought we'd get rid of him when we walked out the door but, no, he followed.

"Ralph! Ralph buddy!"

A tall guy with light brown curly hair strode toward us, almost getting run down by the woman with all the kids. Guess it was gonna take all night for her to finish shopping!

"Hey, buddy! I've been looking all over for you!"

"Look, Ronny!" Ralph hopped in front of his brother first on one foot then the other. "These are my friends, Jeoff and Jerri Kingsley. This is their mom—the one who beats everyone playing air hockey! Can I go over their house for a while?"

Jerrianna sucked in a dismayed breath, and I did my flop head thing. Mom didn't say anything. Without looking, I knew the expression she probably was wearing.

None.

I don't know how she can do that so good. If she doesn't want you to know what she's thinking, you don't. I bet she didn't want to hurt anyone's feelings now, so that's why she was doing it.

Who cares, for crying out loud? It was just Ralph Henry!

Ronny faked a punch at Ralph Henry's belly and then quick whacked him playfully behind the head. "I don't think so, buddy. Mom and Dad're calling us tonight. You don't want to miss that, do you? Maybe another time, huh? Glad you're finally making friends!" He looked at Mom. "Saw you play Saturday night, Mrs. Kingsley. Think you could teach me some things sometime?"

"I can try," Mom replied. She might have said more but Ralph Henry broke in with one of his conversation stoppers.

"I don't need *anybody* teaching *me*! Play me Saturday, Mrs. K. I'll show *you* a few things!"

"You can try," said Mom with the smile that meant he'd be sobbing his losses in less than three minutes. Dad says that's her subtle way of bragging. Just seems like the truth to me.

Ronny grabbed Ralph Henry's shoulder and kept him from bouncing in circles. "Well, it was nice meeting you. We gotta go, bud. We won't be home in time for Mom and Dad's call if we don't hurry up. Already got our stuff in the car. Let's go!"

"Hey, see you guys in school tomorrow!" Just as if we'd be thrilled to remember that.

I flopped my head forward. Mom put a hand out and lifted it up. "You're going to have your head rolling on the floor one day. Instead of wimping about people like him, Jeoffrey, learn to constructively deal with them. Makes your life a lot easier!"

"Yeah? How do you constructively deal with a guy like Ralph Henry Dalton?" Jerrianna demanded. "Why couldn't he be like his brother? *He* seems really nice!"

I had a solution. "Let's stuff the weasel in a box—"

"Jeoffrey, don't start," advised Mom, motioning for me to take charge of the cart.

“Wrap it all up good and tight,” I continued, heading out the automatic doors with the cart, “and put *that* box in another box and wrap *it* up and put that box in *another* box. And put *that* box in a *bigger* box! Tape it up and send it to the most outer regions of space! Only the ship gets pulled into a black hole and lands near a star going supernova—” Setting one foot on the lower rack of the cart, I rode it out onto the parking lot like it was a scooter.

“Jeffrey!”

“Well, it’s not *my* fault the star’s going super—”

“Jeffrey Kurtis!”

“Okay! Okay! But I can’t think of anything that’ll help me like him. Or anyone else who acts like that!”

“I’ll think of something,” Jerrianna declared positively. “I’ll think of something that’ll help us deal with him—*and* shut him up!”

Mom halted suddenly. She shook her head, threw her arms wide and wondered to the skies in complete bewilderment, “Who came up with the theory that kids learn by example? I mean the “They’ll learn the *Good* Things as well as the *Bad*” part!”

“What? At least I don’t want to send him into space where he gets blown to little itty bits in a supernova!” Jerrianna grabbed the cart as she spoke, pulling it around to the back of the car. I stayed on and took the ride.

“Not today, at any rate,” Mom remarked dryly, digging around for her keys and then opening the trunk of our car.

We stowed our groceries in, first grabbing out an apple for each of us. We were just about done when somewhere close by we heard, “*Meow!*” So close it sounded, it seemed like some cat could just jump right into my arms if it wanted to.

“Meow! Meow!”

We all looked around us. Jerri and I checked under the car.

“Meow! Meow!”

“Sounds like it’s coming from—” Mom slammed the trunk door. “—inside the car!”

We all stared straight into the glowing green eyes of a huge fluffy orangey-yellow and white cat laying up there in the back window. Biggest cat I've ever seen that wasn't a lion!

"Guess we shouldn't have left the windows open," said Mom. "Here, Geoffrey, run the cart over to the cart corral."

I did it in double quick time. Almost tripped myself up racing back to the car because I'd forgotten to call "*Shotgun! No Blitz!*" for the front seat privilege on the way home.

But I didn't have to worry about Jerri beating me to it. By the time I ran back, she had curled up in the backseat with the cat, making it her lifelong buddy. It snuggled up in her arms, butting her chin with its head. Licked her cheek with a sandpapery tongue.

Mom stood with a neatly folded note in one hand and a can of HappyKat Savory Stew in the other. She read out loud, "This is KittKatt. Our baby is allergic to cats, and the doctors say having one will seriously hurt him. Plus it is too big for our family.

I don't want to put it to sleep, so please forgive me for doing this. Here's some toys and food so you won't be totally burdened.

Thanks. A desperate dad."

"*Our* dad is gonna be desperate when he sees it! He's not a cat lover, you know!" I said. "And this one looks like it's the size of a leopard!"

"He doesn't really hate them." Mom shoved the note into her jeans pocket and moved the bag of cat food and toys over into the backseat so she could get in. "Just feels they're not as much fun as a dog. Get in, Geoffrey. Don't either of you get your hopes up. There's no guarantee we're keeping her. But we won't dump her in someone's car."

I went around the other side and jumped in the front. "How come you're calling it a her? How do you know what it is?"

"Just a guess. Buckle up."

“Hey, Jeoffrey, look!” Jerrianna poked me in the back. “Look at the size of these paws! This kitty’s got built in air hockey mallets! Mom, look!”

I craned my neck around to check it out as I buckled my seat belt. I’d seen doubled pawed cats before, but *these* paws were *humongous*! “Whooooaaa! Sweet!”

Mom said, “I think she’s a Maine coon cat, or at least part. That’s why she’s as big as she is. Boys are bigger yet. Be cool if she would actually play. I’d have a partner any time I needed one. One that wouldn’t be afraid to play me because they don’t ever win . . .”

“Well, jeekers, Mom. Winning is motivational!”

Jerrianna smothered a snicker.

“Expanding your vocabulary this week, Jeoff?” Mom teased. She ignored Jerri’s snicker same as I did. “If you’d just try a little harder and didn’t come to the table with the *“Who cares? What’s the difference? Why bother—I’m only going to lose anyway”* attitude, you might come closer to it!”

“I don’t wanna come *close*. I wanna *do* it!”

“Then lose the attitude and actually *try* to do it. Jerri plays me without crying. Must be a guy thing!”

Jerrianna laughed. “Dad doesn’t cry as hard as Jeoffrey does, though. You’re a pretty sad wimp, Jeoff!”

I tossed my apple core over the seat hoping to hit her with it. Her giggle told me it missed. “You’re a bad shot all the way around!” Then, changing subjects, she said, “Wonder if it *is* a girl. Hard to tell by the name KittKatt.”

“Stupid name!” I folded my arms and stared out the window. “Probably *is* a girl!”

About the Author



ANITA'S BEEN TELLING STORIES since she was four and writing them since the fifth grade. She has spoken in classrooms and at workshops about writing in general and self-publishing.

The next Kingsley Twins story is entitled *Mystery of the Missing Malley. Dancing in the Rain with Gramma* will be the third in the series.

Besides reading and writing, Anita enjoys horseback riding, bike riding; bowling, and playing card and board games with family and friends, and of course air hockey! Anita lives in Vermont with her family.

More By Anita

A Purrrfect Napping Spot – A Short Story

How do you find a comfy spot to snooze in a houseful of pets and people?

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If you love stories about pets and their antics, you'll love *A Purrrfect Napping Spot*. Download it today, and see where Zacq gets to snooze at last!

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Neenah Davis-Wilson

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