

THE EXTRAORDINARY LIFE OF A MEDIocre JOCK

TED A. KLUCK

**ILLUSTRATED BY
DANIEL HAWKINS**



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The Extraordinary Life of a Mediocre Jock

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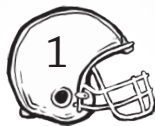
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For Tristan, Maxim, and the real “Pops.”



I HAVE TO POOP (OR, WHAT ANXIETY FEELS LIKE)



For me it is a rapid flushing of the face.

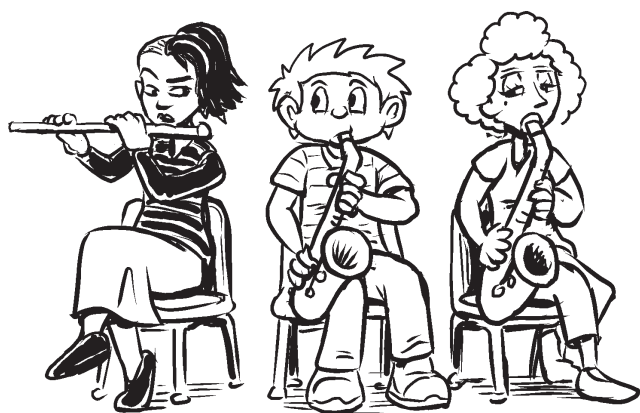
Meaning that my face gets, like, really, really hot and I feel like I have to poop. I get this anxious feeling several times each day, including (but not limited to) the following three occasions:

1. Right before band practice.

My band teacher is roughly 150 years old, has a face like a basset hound, and hates me. I play saxophone, meaning that for 55 minutes I sit and hold a saxophone and try to look like I know what I'm doing.



The people who sit on either side of me are girls who have really hot names like “Krissy” and “Elaine.” Names that aren’t hot themselves but are made hotter because the girls are in eighth grade.



They smell like hair spray and lip gloss, and I find that really intoxicating. To date, I have said zero words to Krissy because another thing happens when I get super nervous—my mouth gets dry and I have trouble making words. So, yeah, some challenges there.

My mom put me in the band because in Empty Factory, Indiana (that's my town), the "good kids" take band and get into classes with other good kids and good teachers. Everybody else is a "bad kid." I'm not sure this is true, but it's the prevailing wisdom in Empty Factory.

Aside: I'm Flex. I'm in seventh grade. I don't really know where the nickname "Flex" came from.



Actually, I do. I'm sorry I lied just then.

It came a year ago when I discovered push-ups and started doing hundreds of them (along with sit-ups) in my room each morning and night.

Full disclosure: I struggle with chin-ups because I'm a bigger guy. I can only do three.

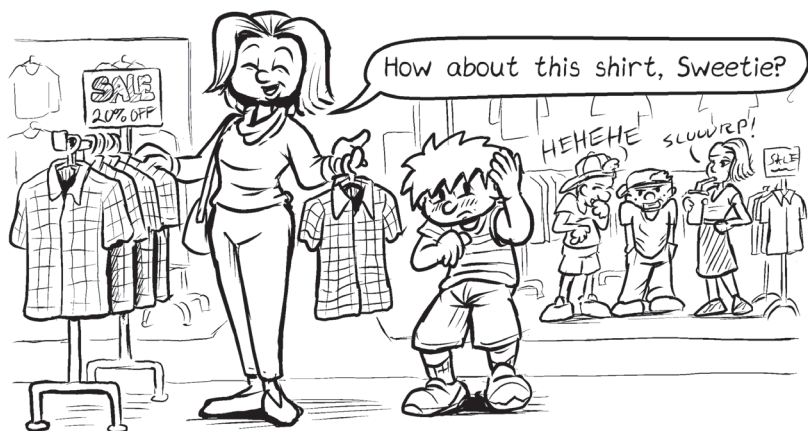
Anyway. I started with push-ups, and apparently, according to my friend Doug Smith (nickname: Dougie Fresh), every time I walked by a mirror, a window, a shiny piece of metal, or anything else that could reflect an image, I would flex (like, my biceps or triceps) a little.



Middle school kids can be ruthless when it comes to nicknames. Do I love the nickname? I should probably say no—because saying no would be the humble, self-effacing, and right thing to do—except that I kind of like it.

Empty Factory is in the middle of nowhere, in Indiana. It's about 90 minutes by car north of Indianapolis (where the rich kids shop) and about 30 minutes north of Muncie (where the regular kids shop). We shop at Murphy's, which is a department store in downtown Empty Factory. Sometimes we

make it to the Muncie Mall, where I'm mortified if anyone I know sees me with my mom (see: anxiety).



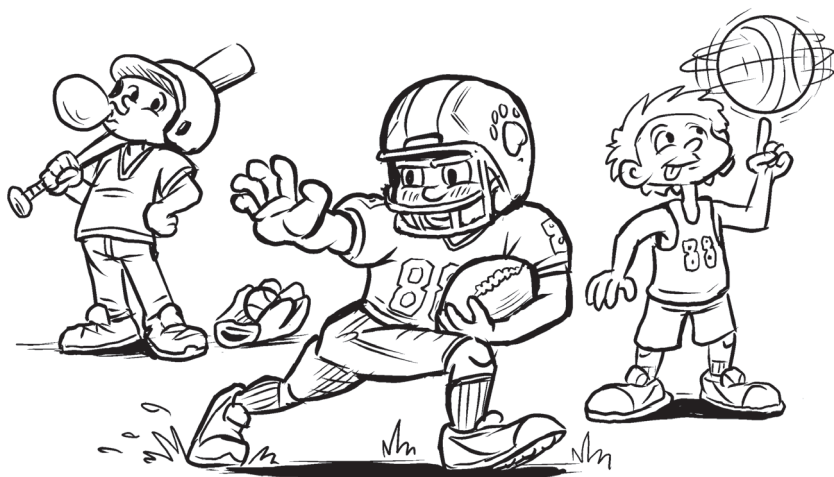
As you can imagine, Empty Factory got its name because of all the empty factories we have in town.



If we had more hipsters in our town, these buildings would be repurposed as coffee shops or

“gastropubs,” which is just a gross-sounding name for a restaurant. We have three stoplights, a public pool, and lots of tanning parlors. Our chief export is super-tan girls who go to college at Ball State in Muncie.

Everybody wants to get out of Empty Factory. My way out is going to be football. I’m probably going to play in the NFL.



Playing in the NBA is my fallback, with baseball a distant third.