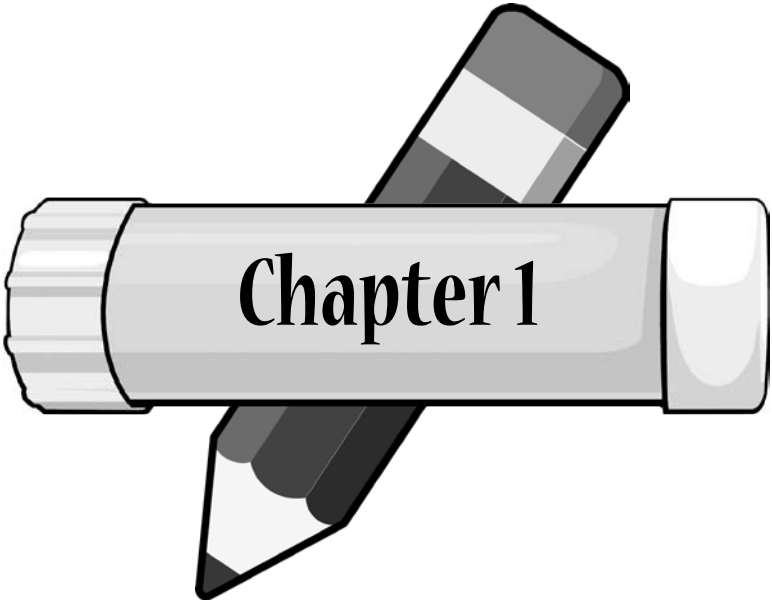
The Hyacinth CHRONICLES



Hyacinth Gail Pipsner was six and three-quarters years old, and as of this very morning, she was officially in grade two. School was not new to her, having done grade one the previous year, and she was quite sure she knew how things worked.

Hyacinth had a brother in grade three named Nolan Bartholomew Pipsner, but if you were to call him by his full name, you had better be his mother or start running! Hyacinth's father was the pastor of the local church, and her mother worked part time in an office downtown. They did not have pets, but

Hyacinth was always hoping for a large dog. You never know when your parents might change their minds!

This particular morning, Hyacinth and her brother, Nolan, were getting ready for the first day of school.

"You'd better not miss anything," her brother said. "Grade two is harder than grade one."

"*You* did it!" she said.

"Yes, but I'm smarter than you," Nolan said.

"No, you aren't," she said. "You're just older."

"Well, you are younger, so grade two will be harder for you," he said.

Hyacinth thought about this for a minute or two. It didn't quite seem right, but she couldn't figure out how.

"I have my new backpack!" she announced. "And I have all my erasers and pencils and paper and crayons—"

"Do you have a calculator?" her brother asked.

"No," Hyacinth said, looking down into her shiny and plastic-y backpack, which was carefully packed full of the new school supplies.

"Well, you'd better have one, or you'll fall behind in math," Nolan said.

"*You* don't have one!" she said.

"Says who?" he asked.

"Says me!" she said. "I saw what Mom bought you too. And you don't have one!"

"I do," he said. "I didn't need a new one. I have mine from last year."

"Mom!" Hyacinth hollered. *"Mom!"*

"Oh, stop, Hya-Bya," Nolan said.

"Don't call me that!" she said.

"Call you what?"

"That!"

"Hya-Bya?"

"Mooooooooom!"

Mrs. Pipsner came out of the bathroom. Her hair was half combed. She held a brush in one hand. She looked down at them and shook her head.

"Nolan Bartholomew, stop teasing your sister," she said. "And Hyacinth Gail, stop that hollering! If you two act like that in school, they'll call me to come get you, and then you'll see what's what!"

"Do I need a calculator?" Hyacinth asked breathlessly. "Nolan said I do!"

"I don't think so," Mrs. Pipsner said. "I didn't see it on your list."

She disappeared into the bathroom, and the water started to run.

"What if I do?" Hyacinth asked Nolan seriously. "Then I won't have one, and all the other kids will!"

"Well," Nolan said. "Kids who don't have all their

supplies can get behind. It might even land you in jail."

Before Hyacinth could ask Nolan what on earth he meant and start to worry about jail, too, she saw her father poke his head out of the kitchen. "Who has eaten breakfast?" Pastor Pipsner called.

"I'm not hungry!" Hyacinth said. "And I think I need a calculator!"

"Not hungry?" her father said. "How can you not be hungry on the first day of school?"

"Daddy," Hyacinth said. "I think I need a calculator!"

"You don't need a calculator," her father said. "You need breakfast."

Pastor Pipsner stood with a pot of porridge in one hand and a spoon in the other. He gestured towards the table with the spoon and a blob of porridge plopped from it and landed on the floor. Hyacinth followed the direction of the pointing spoon and slid into her chair at the table.

"I'm nervous," she announced.

"Are you?" her father asked.

"Yes," Hyacinth said. "Too nervous to eat."

"You shouldn't be," Nolan said. "You always say that you aren't new to school. You're in grade two!"

"And you will have the same teacher," her father reminded her. "Try to eat something. Just put it in your mouth and chew and see what happens."

"We didn't say grace!" Nolan said.

"Say grace, Nolan," Pastor Pipsner said.

"Dear God," Nolan said, bowing his head. "Thank You for the porridge. And the milk. And the sugar. Amen."

"You didn't say thank You for the toast!" Hyacinth said.

"And the toast and the first day of school," Pastor Pipsner said. "Now eat!"

Twenty-five minutes later, Hyacinth and Nolan stood outside their house, their backpacks on their backs. The big yellow bus lumbered up and slowed down to a stop. Hyacinth turned around and looked at the window where her parents were standing. Her father's arm draped around her mother's shoulders. They waved and smiled and nodded to her. There was a flash in the window, and Hyacinth was pretty sure her mother had taken a picture.

"I feel lonely," Hyacinth said, her voice quivering.

"Don't feel lonely," Nolan said. "I don't."

Hyacinth stepped into the bus behind her brother. The air was warm and smelled like orange peels and brown bread sandwiches. The front of the bus had the little grade ones, and the back of the bus had the high school kids. Hyacinth

stood in terror, looking at all the filled seats. Nolan found an empty one and sat down in it.

Hyacinth looked at the little kids. They were staring up at her with wide eyes. She looked at the big kids who seemed old enough to drive and vote, and she thought that she just might cry!

"Cinthy," Nolan called, and he slid over in his seat.

Hyacinth thought that she had the best brother in the whole world just then, and she instantly forgave him for all his teasing.

"Look, Mom is taking a picture of the bus," Nolan said, and Hyacinth looked out the bus window to see her mother standing in front of the house, her camera held up to her face. There was another flash.

"I'm sure you can see me in that picture!" Hyacinth said. "And she'll put it in the scrapbook!"

The bus lurched forward and started the long ride to Highview Christian Academy.

"Hey, Nolan," Hyacinth said.

"What?"

"Do I really need a calculator?"