

Help! My Spaceship Is Broken



By Danica Kassebaum
Illustrated by Chris Vallo

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Chapter One



Discovery on Cranberry Street

It was a beautiful fall day in Brooklyn, New York, and Poppy was walking home from STEAM club. As she turned the corner onto Cranberry Street, where she lived, she stopped in her tracks. Right in front of her was a spaceship!

What was a spaceship doing on her street? Poppy was shocked. She was also really excited. She had always wanted to travel to space, and now a part of space had traveled to her! Poppy rushed over to the spaceship to investigate. It had a big round base and a window on top.



She nervously peeked inside the window. It looked empty. She wasn't sure how she would feel if she actually met an alien. As she rounded the spaceship, she couldn't stop her startled scream.



Standing in front of her was a little green alien. It let out an “Eep!” and ran behind the spaceship. Poppy was frozen in place, and couldn’t think of what to say. Then, she remembered her manners and introduced herself.





“Hello, my name is Poppy,” she said.

Slowly, the little alien crept around the spaceship. It pulled out a little device and pushed some buttons. The device beeped and glowed. Timidly, it said, “My name is Zop. Can you understand me?”

“Yes, I can,” said Poppy.

“My translation device works!” Zop was pleased.

“Nice to meet you, Zop,” said Poppy. “What brings you to Earth?”

“I was trying to get to my home, Planet Z, but I started having some trouble with my spaceship,” Zop said, sounding sad.

“Do you think you could help me fix it?” Zop asked.

“Of course I’ll help!” Poppy said excitedly.

Chapter Two



A Zench?

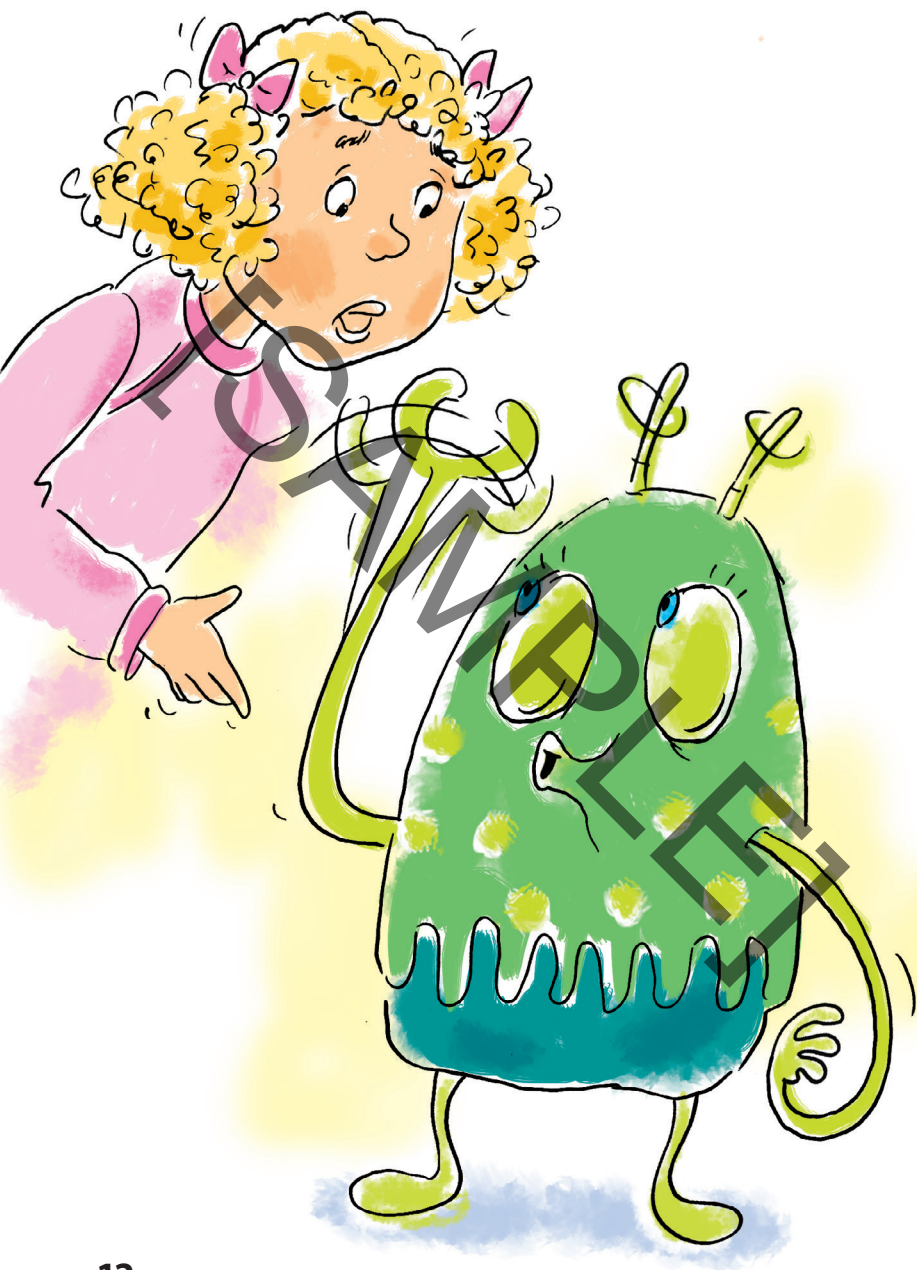
“But first things first,” Poppy said. “We need to move this spaceship out of the street. Who knows what will happen if someone sees it?”

“Excellent idea, my new friend,” said Zop.

The two of them pushed and pulled, but the spaceship did not budge.

“This is impossible. This spaceship is too big for a kid and a little alien to move,” cried Poppy. She was out of breath and her arms felt like limp noodles.





“Oops! I forgot something,” Zop said, running to the front of the spaceship. With the flip of a switch, wheels popped out of the bottom. Zop and Poppy effortlessly rolled the spaceship into a nearby alley.

“Whew!” said Poppy. “I was worried we wouldn’t be able to move it.”

“I cannot believe I did not think of that sooner,” Zop giggled. “Now, all we need is a zench.”

Perplexed, Poppy asked, “I’m sorry, a what?”

“A zench. It is a tool,” explained Zop.

“Are you sure that’s what it’s called?” asked Poppy, skeptically.

“You must have zenchs on planet Earth,” Zop replied. “They are long, and they twist back and forth. It is a very common tool,” explained Zop, acting out how to use a zench.

Poppy thought she knew what he meant—but she had never called it a zench. Turning back toward Zop, she shouted, “I’ll be right back. Don’t move! And be careful not to let anyone else see you!”

When Poppy returned, she was holding a shiny, silver tool. “Is this a zench?” she asked Zop.

“You found one!” Zop shouted and gave Poppy a hug.



“Well, here in New York, this is called a *wrench*,” explained Poppy.

“Oh!” said Zop, intrigued.

Poppy realized there was a good reason for the misunderstanding. “Zop, I think your translator isn’t working right for some words,” she said.

“Oh, I understand,” said Zop.

Poppy handed the wrench to Zop. “Alright, let’s take a look.”

The two quickly got to work. They looked at the different parts of the spaceship. Poppy nervously looked over her shoulder. She was worried that at any minute, someone would turn down the alley and find them.

Chapter Three



Help Is on the Way

“This is taking forever!” complained Zop. “I am never going to get home.”

“Well, at least we are making progress,” said Poppy. “We can do this, but I *do* wish we had a couple more pairs of hands.”

Just then, two kids turned down the alley. Zop ran and hid behind the spaceship, and Poppy followed.

Peeking around the spaceship, Poppy sighed with relief.

“Those are my friends from STEAM club! Maybe they will help us,” she said.





Poppy came out from behind the spaceship and called to them. “Hey, Kora and Mike!”

“Poppy!” Mike shouted.

“Are you OK? Is that a spaceship? What’s going on?” Kora’s voice rose with each question.

“Calm down because I—well, *we* need your help. But first, do you promise not to tell anyone what I’m going to show you?” asked Poppy.

“STEAM club secret!” Mike and Kora shouted and then giggled. It was a good thing that their panic had quickly turned into curiosity.

Poppy introduced Zop and explained that she was helping fix the spaceship to get Zop home to Planet Z. “Do you think you can help?” asked Poppy.

“I would love to help!” said Mike excitedly.
“I’ll keep watch.”

“And I’ll help too,” Kora said.

“Zop, what tools do we need now?”
Poppy asked.

Thinking for a second, Zop finally said,
“I think we will need a zipler and a ziscrew.”

“Hmm, a zipler and a ziscrew,” said Kora.
“Well, *zipler* kind of sounds like *stapler*—”

“Or it could be *pliers*,” shouted Mike.



“Oh, that’s a good point!” said Kora.
“And a *ziscREW* could either be *screws* or a *screwdriver*. I’ll get those and be right back.”

When Kora returned, Zop jumped up and down. “Kora, you did it! These are the tools I need to fix my spaceship.” Zop picked up the pliers and the screwdriver.

“Well then, let’s get to work!” said Poppy. Everyone grabbed a tool and started to repair the spaceship.



Chapter Four

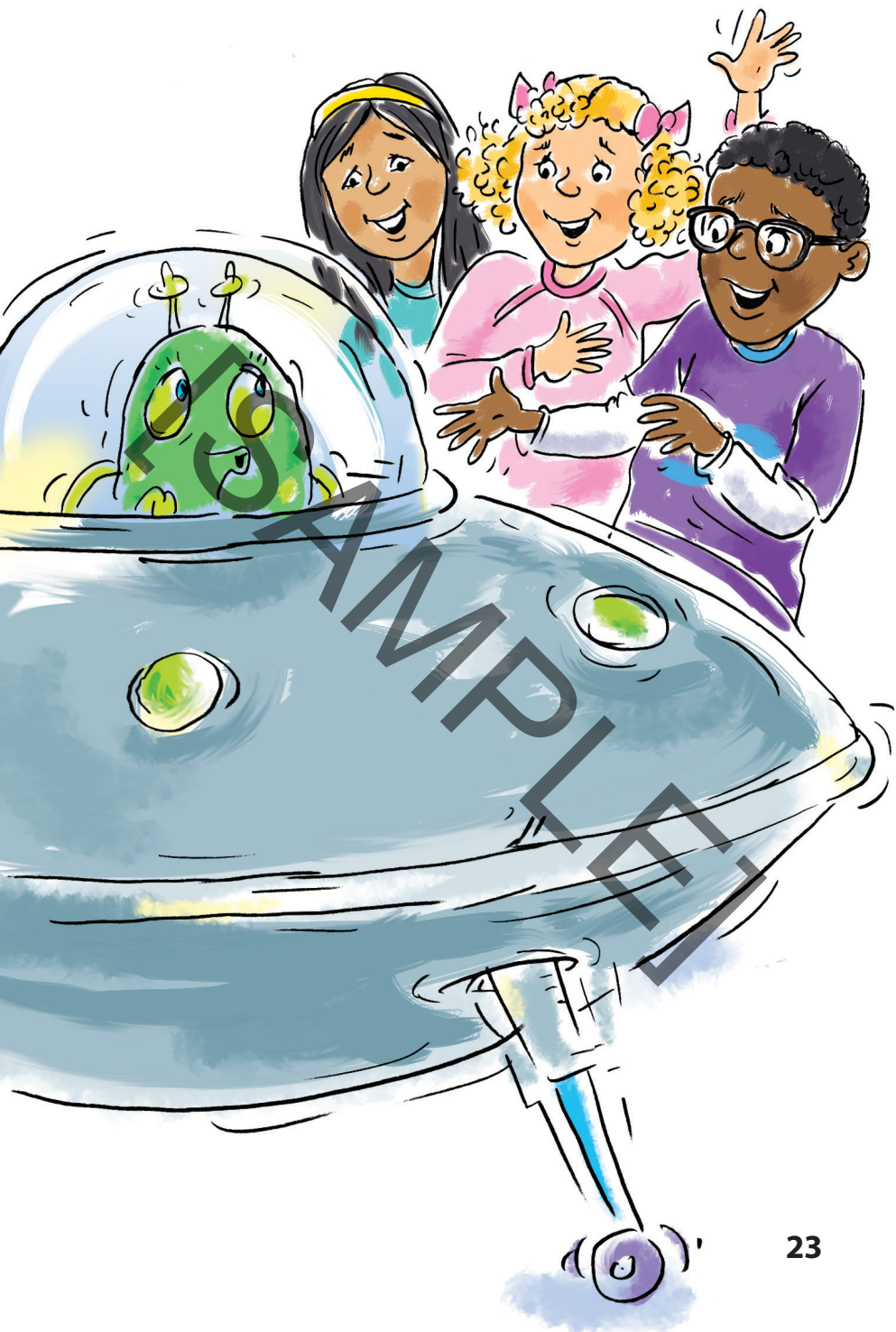


A Splash of Pink

“Well, I think that’s it,” said Poppy with satisfaction as she set down the tool she was using. “Zop, why don’t you give it a try?”

Zop climbed into the spaceship to start the engine. Poppy and Kora crossed their fingers as Zop pushed the button that would power the spaceship.

As the engine hummed to life, Zop jumped out and exclaimed, “We did it! We did it! Thank you so much for your help!”



Everyone jumped up and down in excitement. Suddenly, Poppy noticed something and stopped jumping. She had a weird look on her face.

“What is it?” Kora asked.

“Um, Zop?” Poppy asked. “Your spaceship is all scratched up.”

“Oh no!” said Zop, looking sadly at the spaceship. “I was so worried about getting the spaceship to fly. I did not even realize that it got scratched when I landed.”

Mike had an idea. “I think we can fix this before you head back to Planet Z. We have been learning about art in our STEAM club. I have some brushes and paints in my backpack. We can't let you travel back to Planet Z without your spaceship looking as good as new.” Mike passed out supplies, and they all got to work painting.





After working for a while, Mike walked toward the front of the spaceship. “How’s it going over here?” he asked Poppy.

“Don’t look!” she called. “I want it to be a surprise.”

“OK!” Mike laughed as he returned to the back of the spaceship to paint with Zop.

A few minutes later, Poppy shouted, “I’m finished! Come take a look!”

Mike, Zop, and Kora came running to the front of the spaceship, where Poppy had painted a pink wrench.

“It is a pink zench!” cried Zop.

“This can be a little reminder of your time here on Earth,” Poppy explained to Zop.

“I love it!” Zop said excitedly, giving Poppy a big hug.

Chapter Five



Blast Off!

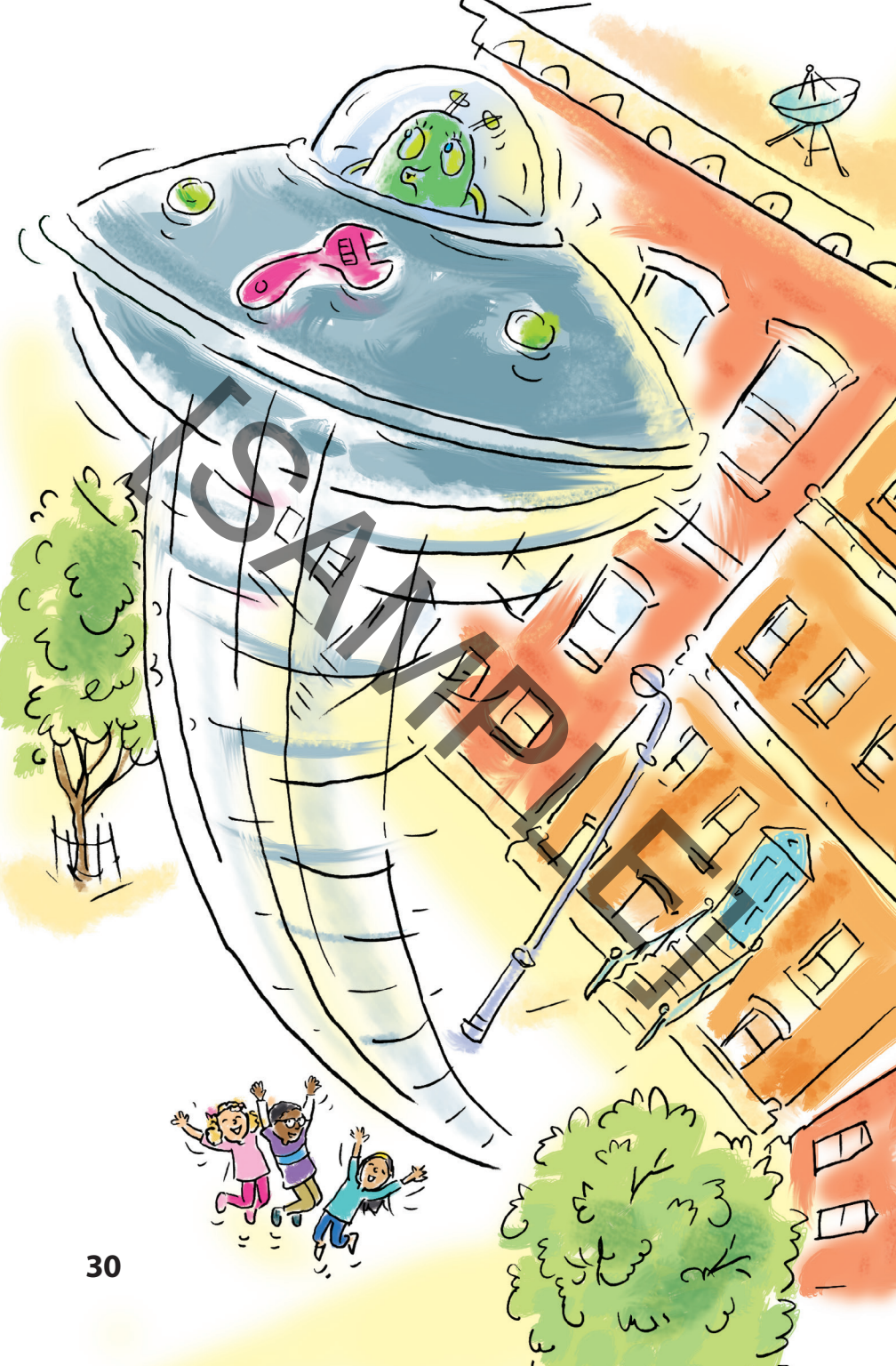
The kids helped Zop push the spaceship out of the alley and into the street.

“Well, I guess this is it then,” said Poppy sadly.

“Oh, Poppy,” said Zop. “I am so glad you walked down the street when you did. And I am happy that you and your friends were nice enough to help me fix my spaceship.”

“Of course, Zop! We were happy to help,” said Kora.





“Yeah,” added Mike. “It was really fun painting your spaceship.”

“And thanks to Poppy, I will always have a little reminder of my adventure on Earth,” added Zop. “I will never forget any of you.”

“And we will never forget you,” added Poppy.

Zop hopped in the spaceship. Poppy, Kora, and Mike waved goodbye as Zop flew off to Planet Z.

“Wow, what a crazy afternoon,” Mike said.

“One we can never talk about,” said Kora.

“STEAM club secret!” all three shouted before bursting into giggles.

About Us

The Author

Danica Kassebaum is a teacher. She has taught fourth grade as well as theater arts for fifth and sixth graders. She loves reading children's books and hopes you do, too!

The Illustrator

Chris Vallo lives with his wife and two talented children near Columbus, Ohio. In his spare time, he designs sets for local theaters.

Book Club Questions

1. Why does Poppy say they should hide the spaceship?
2. What do you learn about Kora and Mike from their actions?
3. How would you help if you were one of Poppy's friends?
4. Why does Poppy paint something extra on the spaceship?

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