Quick Intro-Notes to the Sample Chapter

Dear sample chapter reader.

Thank you for wanting to read the following chapter from our book "The Stories of Smirtz":

"Chapter 8: Smirtz at the Gym"
An Influencer, a Frankenstein, and a Divorced Lifestyle Coach (Oh My)

Before beginning on the next page, we just wanted to set the scene for the sample-chapter with this short **one-page** introduction.
(Obviously this page isn't in the book … that would be weird)

But if already know about the book and setup, feel free to turn the page – or rather "scroll down" – to start.

🌿 Who is the chapter (and book) for?

EVERYONE! It's for all ages, as it has fast-paced, funny adventures and hidden Easter egg references to books, movies, and TV series, plus ironic takes on the sometimes very strange behavior of adults.

🌿 Who is "Smirtz?

Smirtz is a kind-hearted 11-year-old boy with a talent for turning ordinary days into extraordinary disasters. He has lots of friends, incl. his best friend, *Heinrich*, and his quick-witted classmate *Tinka*.

🌿 Sometimes the narrator addresses the reader directly

The narrator occasionally addresses the reader directly with his own sensible/bizarre comments on what's happening. These comments are always written in the same ***special format and typography***.

Also, he begins his longer rants by addressing the reader as "Dear Children." *(Please don't be offended by that. Our narrator is severely unhinged, and this is the absolute least of his problems.)*

🌿 The Table of Contents & Another free sample chapter

After this chapter, we included the book's Table of Contents as we think it gives you a pretty good idea of humor we bring to the table … of contents. *(We'll find our own way out…)*
And on this website, you can sign up to receive another free chapter.

Best wishes 😊
Arendse, Esther & Jesper

CHAPTER 8:
Smirtz at The Gym

An Influencer, a Frankenstein, and a Divorced Lifestyle Coach (... Oh My)

Smirtz had just participated in the annual "*Sports Day*" at his school, where all the children took part in various competitions.

First, there was a push-up challenge.

Smirtz's class won it convincingly, even outperforming classes with older students. But only because they had Tinka, who by far had done the most push-ups.

Afterwards, she jokingly reminded Smirtz that a push-up not only involves lowering yourself to the ground but also pushing yourself back up. "Otherwise, it's not *a push-up* but *a nap,*" she had said with a warmhearted grin.

Later in the day, they all ran the same one-mile route as many times as they could in one hour.

During the race, Smirtz and Heinrich switched between walking and running, while Tinka ran the entire time. And every time she passed them, she shouted "On your left," followed by something teasing, like "Come on! If you go any slower, you'll go backwards."

In fact, Tinka was not only strong and fast but also smart and quick-witted. And she always had a cheeky remark … usually accompanied by a little smile.

Although Smirtz knew she was only kidding when she made those remarks – and he really, really liked the little smile – he still found it a bit embarrassing that she was so much better.

That day after school, Smirtz talked to Heinrich about how they needed to get into shape to make sure that Tinka

would not beat them at everything ... or so that they could at least put up a bit of a fight.

"I know what we can do!" said Heinrich. He pulled out a brochure that someone had given him the day before at the mall.

At the top it read:
"*SUPER X-TREME GYM*."

Below it continued:
"*Do you want to be stronger and faster? Then come down to our gym. The first visit is FREE!*"

The rest of the brochure was crammed with pictures of people running on treadmills and lifting weights ... All looking very happy.

Smirtz's face lit up as he read it. "You're right Heinrich! That's just what we need."

"But can we afford to go there?" Heinrich wondered.

"Look! The first visit is free," Smirtz replied, pointing to the brochure. "And I don't think we need more than one trip to the gym to get in shape."

Heinrich thought it sounded like a perfect plan, so they agreed to go the next day.

The brochure specified that children needed an adult's consent to train, so they got their parents to write them some permission notes.

"Full Speed Ahead, Mr. Heinrich!" – "O Captain! My Captain! I'm Givin' It All It's Got"

The next day, after school, Smirtz and Heinrich went to the gym, where a nice lady behind the reception desk welcomed them and read the notes from their parents.

She then gave them a tour of the gym, starting with the *treadmill room* before moving on to the *weight training area* where

the boys were even given a demonstration of a few exercises they could try. From there, she led them into a room filled with stationary bikes and explained that these were used for *spinning classes*.

Dear Children,

Perhaps I should quickly explain what "spinning" is.

It's when you ride a bicycle that doesn't move. In other words, you pedal and pedal, but you don't go anywhere.

And this takes place in a room full of other people riding bikes that don't move.

There's often also an instructor who screams: "Pedal faster!" so everyone can go nowhere in a hurry.

And you pay money to be allowed to ride these "non-moving bikes" in front of a screaming instructor.

Does that sound crazy? That's because it IS!

Now, where was I?

Finally, the lady showed the two friends to the changing rooms and wished them a good workout.

They thanked her for the nice introduction, changed into their gym clothes, and began their gym adventure by first heading to the *treadmill room*, where several machines were lined up in a long row.

Smirtz suggested that they get on the same machine as that would only make it half as hard. Heinrich agreed with that flawless logic.

On the treadmill, there was some kind of control panel with a bunch of flashing buttons and a pair of levers.

"Wow, it looks like something from a spaceship," said Smirtz.

Smirtz and Heinrich both loved watching a series about people traveling through space while "exploring strange new

worlds." And most of that show took place in a control room where there were lots of levers and flashing buttons.

The two *space cadets* soon became completely immersed in their make-believe spaceship fantasy.

Heinrich especially enjoyed this since the control panel really appealed to his "*pushing-big-buttons-and-pulling-levers-ism*." (***Heinrich just can't see a lever without pulling it, or a button without pressing it … It's "his thing."***)

He was therefore more than happy to take on the role of navigator, carrying out orders.

Captain Smirtz stood behind Heinrich on the treadmill and commanded in the same tone of voice as the captain in the series, "Full speed ahead, Mr. Heinrich!"

"Aye, aye, Captain," Heinrich replied as he pulled down on one of the levers. The belt on the treadmill started to move. First slowly, but then *faster* and *faster* – so much that both found it hard to keep up.

"Mr. Heinrich! Do something!" a very out-of-breath Smirtz shouted.

"Yes, sir!" Heinrich yelled back, thinking that if one lever made the treadmill speed up, the other lever had to slow it down, so he immediately pulled it.

However, this activated the "incline function" on the treadmill, making it rise up at the front. So not only did they have to run *fast* but also *uphill*.

"Mr. Heinrich, get that machine under control! We're '*Running Up That Hill*'!" Smirtz howled, feeling as if he was about to be catapulted off the belt.

"*O Captain! My Captain! ... I'm givin' it all it's got*," Heinrich answered – now in a somewhat weird Scottish accent.

Suddenly, to his delight, he saw a big red button with the words "Emergency Stop" written on it. His "pushing-big-buttons-and-pulling-levers-ism" prompted him to push it,

instantly stopping the treadmill and causing them to lose their balance and tumble off the machine.

"OMG! What's going on here? Do you think this is, *like*, a kindergarten or something?" a voice remarked out of the blue.

The boys looked up and saw a young woman with a long ponytail wearing very tight workout clothes and lots and lots of makeup. She was holding a phone in one hand and a water bottle in the other.

Clearly displeased, she reprimanded the pair. "This isn't a place where you, *like*, play games, but … you know … a place where you train. And now you little brats need to get out of my way because I have to go to work."

"To work? Here?" asked Heinrich.

"Yes. I'm a professional fitness influencer-*slash*-entrepreneur, and I'm about to live-stream my workout to all my followers. I have over 20,000," she proclaimed. (***And yes, she said "slash."***)

Smirtz and Heinrich were not quite sure what any of that meant, but it sounded very impressive. So they moved away and watched her silently from a distance.

She got on a treadmill and began walking. Then she poured some water from her bottle over her face, so it seemed like she was super sweaty. Holding her phone up, she started talking to it. "Hello darlings! Your favorite workout-diva-princess is back. *Phew*, I just ran, *like*, ten miles!"

The two classmates looked at each other.

"She didn't run ten miles," Smirtz whispered.

Heinrich shrugged his shoulders and wondered the same.

The woman then held her phone so it looked as if she was filming her butt while saying – what sounded like – incoherent, nonsensical sentences.

"Remember that the destination is not the goal, and the journey is not the destination, but the goal for the destination is the journey. And it is

important to believe in yourself and the process to feel the success at the bottom of the iceberg, which no one sees. Also, remember that the present is the past, and the past is the future, and the future is the past in the present."

Heinrich turned to Smirtz and asked in amazement, "What does all that mean? It sounds like code or something that's written on a note in a fortune cookie."

Smirtz shook his head. "I have no idea. But it has to be one HUGE fortune cookie to fit all that."

"And why is she filming her butt while saying those things? That's so weird!" added Heinrich.

Now the woman pointed her phone at her face again. She tilted her head and made a pouty gesture with her lips that resembled a duck beak as she held up two fingers in a V-shape.

"Aha!" Smirtz exclaimed, thinking he recognized this hand salute. "Look Heinrich! It's the 'intergalactic greeting' from the series … the one that means '*Have a long life and flourish*'."

"You're right Smirtz!" Heinrich answered, beaming with joy. "That must be what all that 'journey-talk' was about. Her followers are also spaceship enthusiasts, and the bizarre phrases were actually entries in her Captain's Log."

"Come on! Let's return the greeting," suggested Smirtz.

They both ran over and jumped in front of the woman, performing the *intergalactic hand-salute* while saying, "Have a long life and flourish!"

"HEY! What are you two creeps, *like*, doing?" she shouted.

"We're sending an intergalactic greeting, of course," Smirtz clarified.

The woman stared angrily at them. "I'm going to give you an *intergalactic ass-kicking* if you don't leave ... NOW!"

"Danger, danger, Mr. Heinrich! Shields up! Get us out of here!" Smirtz commanded as he ran out of the treadmill room.

"Engaging hyper-speed," Heinrich replied, who ran as fast as he could after Smirtz.

On their way out, they heard the woman talking to her phone again. "Sorry, my *fitness-munchkins*. Don't you just hate annoying children? I mean, when I have kids, they have to, *like*, be quiet all the time … and they cannot interfere with my training or my diet or my sleep."

Then she filmed her butt again.

"Did You Mean 'Frankenstein' or 'Frankenstein's Monster' ?" – The Unspeakable Joy of Correcting Others

After Smirtz and Heinrich left the treadmill room, they headed toward the *weight training area*.

"Let's go in there and lift some weights, so we can beat Tinka at doing push-ups," Smirtz suggested.

They went in and looked around. It was a huge, open space with mirrors on all the walls, filled with benches and various training machines.

Along one wall was a long rack with dumbbells arranged in pairs and in order of weight. They ranged from as light as *1 pound* at one end to as heavy as *100 pounds* at the other.

There were a few people in the room doing all sorts of exercises. Smirtz and Heinrich walked to the end of the dumbbell rack where the lighter weights were.

Heinrich took two *2-pound dumbbells* – one in each hand – and started alternately lifting them up and down.

Smirtz thought it looked a bit heavy with so many pounds, so he took a *1-pound dumbbell* in each hand and imitated Heinrich's exercise.

After doing what seemed like sixty repetitions (***but it was probably closer to six***), both boys felt their arms starting to hurt, so they put the weights down.

"*Phew*. I can really feel 'the burn' in my big muscle arms," said Smirtz.

Heinrich concurred wholeheartedly. "Yes, I think my arms just grew five inches."

Out of the blue, a deep male voice resonated through the room, causing everyone – including the two friends – to turn and look toward where it came from.

At the far end, near the heavy dumbbells, they saw a big man lying on a bench. A very, VERY big man.

He was pushing a couple of *100-pound dumbbells* up and down while shouting a new number after each repetition. "7-Argh! 8-Argh! 9-Argh! 10-Argh!"

He threw the weights to the floor after finishing, making the whole room, including the mirrors, shake. Then he yelled into the air, "PAIN IS JUST WEAKNESS LEAVING THE BODY! … YEAHHH!"

The children went closer to get a good look at this huge, roaring monster of a man.

"Woooow," they uttered in impressed unison when they saw the size of the dumbbells and how massive the man's arms were. On those arms he had a lot of tattoos, including a *flaming skull*, a *flaming playing card*, and a *koi fish* ... also *in flames*.

"Yep!" he replied, obviously very pleased with the admiring stares from the two young spectators. "If you train hard and eat lots of protein powder, you could one day get 'guns' like these." He flexed his arms, making them look even more massive.

"What's protein powder?" Smirtz asked, curiously.

"It's a powder that contains lots of protein, which repairs my muscles and makes them grow," the man explained as he showed them a large plastic tub with the words: "Power Protein 4000 – Tropical Flavor," written on the side.

He opened the tub, revealing a pink powder that smelled extremely sweet.

"I take protein powder *before* training, *during* training, and *after* training. I also put it on my oatmeal in the morning, on my lunch, on my chicken dinner, and in my coffee. I even put protein powder on my protein powder. It helps with *everything*, and it makes me a BEEFCAKE!" the man shouted, taking a spoonful of powder straight from the tub into his mouth, swallowing it with a big smile.

He then picked up the huge dumbbells, dropped back down on the bench, and began pressing them up and down. After counting each repetition, he let out a loud "*Argh"* sound to ensure everyone in the room noticed how heavy he was lifting. "1-*Argh!* 2-*Argh!* 3-*Argh!* 5-*Argh!* 7-*Argh!* 8-*Argh!* 9-*Argh!* 10-*Argh!*"

"It seems protein powder doesn't help your ability to *count to ten*," Heinrich whispered to Smirtz, who giggled.

Unfortunately, the big man also heard Heinrich's remark.

He threw the weights to the floor once more and confronted the two wisecrackers. "WHAT? Are you little worms making fun of me? I bet a couple of tiny wimps like yourselves can't even lift *one* of these 100-pound dumbbells together."

"We can try," said Heinrich, winking at Smirtz.

They leaned over one of the big weights and grabbed its handle, where there was just enough room to fit four small hands.

Heinrich initiated a short countdown: "Three, two, one. Now!" as he and Smirtz tried to lift the dumbbell.

After a few seconds, they felt it slowly coming off the floor but not more than a few inches, after which they had to put it back down.

"*Mwahahaha!* What a pair of weaklings!" the man laughed loudly and mockingly.

"Wow. Tinka's teasing is nothing compared to this guy," Heinrich muttered in a low voice.

Smirtz nodded and encouraged his friend, "Come on Heinrich! We need to lift it a little higher so we can show him that we're not weaklings."

They grabbed the handle again and – in one final heroic attempt – heaved with everything they had, causing the extremely heavy object to indeed rise higher than before.

But the weight was too much for them. First Smirtz lost his grip, then Heinrich, causing the dumbbell to crash to the ground ... right onto the big man's toes.

"Oooouuch!" he screamed, hopping around on one leg while clutching his injured foot before finally collapsing to the floor.

"Oh my goodness! I'm so sorry," Smirtz immediately apologized.

It was clearly a very painful experience for the big man, who rolled around on the floor shouting, "HELP ME!"

"What do we do?!" Heinrich asked in a state of panic.

Smirtz remembered what he had just heard: "Pain is weakness that needs to leave the body" ... or something like that. *That's probably what he needs to hear*, thought Smirtz as he bent over the man and yelled directly into his face: "YOUR FOOT WILL LEAVE YOUR BODY BECAUSE OF THE WEAK PAIN!!"

The big man and Heinrich stared bewildered at Smirtz until the man snapped back in frustration, "What are you talking about? Do something!"

Smirtz looked around and spotted the tub of protein powder. He now remembered how it supposedly "repairs muscles" and "helps with everything."

So – in a desperate attempt to take control of the situation – Smirtz grabbed the tub, tore off the lid, and poured some of the powder onto the man's foot.

"What are you doing?!" the man roared furiously.

"I'm fixing your foot," Smirtz assured him.

"He has to *EAT IT*, Smirtz!" Heinrich screamed, in an even more frantic, high-pitched voice.

"Oh, right!" said Smirtz.

At that moment – just as the big man opened his mouth to shout at them again – Smirtz seized the opportunity and poured the rest of the protein powder from the tub directly into the man's mouth. Well ... most of the powder went into his mouth, but some of it went into his nose and eyes.

The man wheezed and coughed, sending powder flying in all directions.

Then, he tried to get up to catch the boys, but the pain in his *foot* forced him to drag one leg slowly behind him. And the protein powder in his *eyes* made it almost impossible to see, so he stumbled forward with both arms stretched out in front of him … partly to avoid bumping into something and partly to try and grab the delinquent pair. To make matters worse, the powder in his *mouth* meant he could only produce a series of incoherent growling sounds.

The two friends watched this "giant of a man" slowly move toward them, arms stretched out, one leg dragging behind him, and a low *grrrr* coming from his throat.

To his horror, Smirtz suddenly realized, "Aaargh! He's turned into *FRANKENSTEIN*!"

Heinrich's face turned pale. "Yikes! You're right Smirtz. It *is* Frankenstein! Come on, we're getting out of here!"

Without hesitating, they sprinted out of the weight training area.

Dear Children,

What Smirtz and Heinrich probably meant was that the man looked like 'Frankenstein's MONSTER' and not just 'Frankenstein'. You see, 'Frankenstein' was the doctor who made the monster.

And now, you're probably thinking, "Why does it matter if they call him 'Frankenstein' or 'Frankenstein's monster'?"

The answer is: It DOESN'T. It doesn't matter at all. In fact, it's completely and utterly irrelevant.

BUT! When you grow up, you'll understand how incredibly rewarding it is to correct others in this way.

Like when someone calls a tomato a vegetable. Because then you get the opportunity to explain, "Actually, a tomato is a fruit."

Ahhh... The unspeakable joy of correcting others.

So, if you hear someone talking about Frankenstein and they mean Frankenstein's monster, feel free to set them straight.

As I said, it's completely irrelevant, but that way you can let them know how smart you are.

… Come to think of it, that's probably more of a grown-up thing to do. You kids are usually much better at not correcting others about stuff that doesn't really matter.

Now, where was I?

"Perform on the Bike, Perform in Life" – Insightful Insights from a Recently Divorced Lifestyle Coach

Smirtz and Heinrich ran out into the gym's hallway and into another room, closing the door behind them. They tried to catch their breath while making sure the big man was not following them.

"I think we lost him," whispered Smirtz.

"Are you also here to *spin*?" an unfamiliar voice asked behind them.

They turned around and realized they had run into the room that was full of spinning bikes. (***Remember what I told you about "spinning"? People who pay to ride bikes that don't move.***)

The room was empty, except for one man sitting on a bike. He looked "middle-aged" as Smirtz-Mom would say, or someone Smirtz-Dad would call "a man in his prime."

The man on the bike immediately started talking. And he talked ... And he talked ... *And he talked.*

He told the boys he was a lifestyle coach and that he had recently gotten divorced, so he'd taken up spinning as a hobby, which had given him a whole new outlook on life.

Also, that the divorce had been the absolute best thing that had ever happened to him, since he could now "perform" optimally both at work and at the gym.

"*Performance* is the key to success! *Perform* on the bike, perform in life," he declared, standing up on the stationary bike to pedal even faster ... going absolutely nowhere.

In fact, he used the word "performance" a lot.

Dear Children,

Now you're probably wondering: "What does 'performance' mean?"

Honestly … I'm not sure.

I know it's normally used to describe 'how well something is done', but when a lifestyle coach uses the word, it seems to lose all meaning and almost become a nonsensical sound instead.

Now, where was I?

Next, the man began talking about how extremely important it is to have *the right equipment* when spinning … which he, of course, had. And it was "VERY costly," he noted.

"Look at this!" he said, pointing to his shoes. "These special and expensive bike shoes are locked on to the pedals, allowing me to perform my best."

He then pointed to a weird, elongated helmet on his head. "This bike helmet is exactly like the ones some of the riders use for 'time trials' in the *Tour de France* (***a yearly, famous***

bike race). Super aerodynamic and made of carbon fiber, so it doesn't weigh anything. It costs 3,000 dollars."

Heinrich was baffled. "But the bike doesn't move. So why do you need a helmet?"

"That's not important," the man asserted. "All that matters is that it's made of carbon fiber and it's therefore expensive! And look at my clothes! Having the right clothes is essential when you *spin*. That's why I bought the best and most expensive bike clothing material there is: *Lycra!* See … *Lycra shirt*, *Lycra gloves,* and, most importantly, *Lycra shorts!*"

Neither Smirtz nor Heinrich had heard of this *Lycra* before, but they could tell from looking at the man that it was an extremely "tight" material. It was so closely fitted to his body that it seemed very uncomfortable to wear ... and they also found it a bit *uncomfortable to look at*.

"Shouldn't you have gotten the clothes in a larger size?" asked Smirtz.

"No, no. That's the point," the man replied. "It's *Lycra!* The tighter, the better. So there's less wind resistance."

The boys glanced around the room. Not a wind stirred. Not so much as a breeze from an open window.

Meanwhile, the man continued to talk. "And let me tell you guys: women love men in Lycra! I was on a date last week where I showed her a bunch of pictures of myself in my Lycra outfit and she actually told me that *'she'd never seen anything like it'*. Huh! How about that?" the man stated in a very smug voice and with a giant smile.

The smile, however, retreated a bit as he resumed. "I mean … she hasn't called me back yet, but she did mention that she had to *'wash her hair'* ... and that might take a week, right?"

"Umm..." Smirtz mumbled hesitantly, not knowing how to respond.

Luckily, Heinrich came to Smirtz's rescue. He had noticed that those Lycra shorts looked weird. As if something was attached to the inside of them at the bottom. So he asked the man, "Is that a *diaper* you're wearing underneath?"

"What!? No!" the lifestyle coach answered in surprise. "It's a built-in *seat cushion*. That's what the professionals also use in the Tour de France." He then picked up a banana from a bag hanging on the front of the bike and started eating it.

(***Sadly, that did not stop him from talking***.) "And besides having the right and expensive equipment, you also need the right 'nutrition' to really 'perform'. That way, you can lose weight and get fit. I always bring *four* energy drinks, *seven* energy bars, and *six* bananas for my *15-minute* spinning workouts. It gets me in shape. Well... I may have gained ten pounds since I took up spinning, but it's probably all muscle," he convinced himself as he finished the banana and now consumed an energy bar.

"Wow! How do you even have time to bike when you have to eat and drink all that?" Smirtz wondered.

"Maybe that's why you're wearing a diaper?" Heinrich suggested.

"IT'S NOT A DIAPER!" the man exclaimed. He was clearly getting annoyed by their questions and by the fact that they did not appear to be as impressed with his spinning equipment, nutrition, and performance as he thought they should be.

Attempting to calm himself down, he lowered his voice. "Okay, okay. Then just take a look at this! You haven't seen one of these 'bad boys' before, have you?" He pointed to a small digital display mounted on the bike's handlebars in front of him. "That's a *bike computer*. A very expensive bike computer." The giant smile had, once again, returned to his face.

Smirtz's eyes lit up. "Ooh, a computer! Can you play games on it and 'zap' aliens?"

"No, it's not that kind of computer," the man sneered. "It keeps track of *how far* I've biked."

"But you're not going anywhere ... The bike doesn't move. Do you really need a computer to keep track of that?" Heinrich wanted to know.

Seemingly upset, the man took a deep breath and answered, "It's not how far I biked in the *real world*, but in the *computer world*."

"And you can't 'zap' any aliens in that computer world?" Smirtz inquired again, hopefully.

"NO!" the man responded, even more irritated. "Listen! It doesn't just tell me how *far* I've biked, but it also tells me how *fast* I was going and how many *watts* I produced. For example, I can see that I was averaging *50 watts* in the last ten minutes."

"*Fifty what's*?" repeated Smirtz, clearly puzzled.

"*50 watts,*" confirmed the man.

"I don't know," said Smirtz. "You're the one who asked about the *fifty what*."

The man: "Watt."

Smirtz: "What?"

The man: "What? Watt?"

Smirtz: "What? What?"

The man: "What?"

"WHAT are you talking about?!" Smirtz cried out, extremely confused by this conversation.

"The *WATTS* in my legs!" the man shouted.

"WHAT's wrong with your legs?" Smirtz yelled back in sheer frustration.

"I don't think it's his *legs* but his *head* that's the problem," Heinrich added. "Maybe the Lycra's so tight that it's cut off all circulation to his brain?"

The man was now extremely red in the face and screamed, "WAAATTTS!!"

"Come on, Smirtz. Let's go. He's obviously not well," Heinrich concluded.

"You're wrong! I'm *very well!* My body is a temple!" the man noted firmly, gazing down at himself and his Lycra-wrapped figure.

Smirtz only knew the word "temple" from school, where they learned about temples in Ancient Greece and Ancient Egypt. So, he asked the man in all honesty, "Ah, a temple! You mean, because you once had a beautiful body that people worshipped, but now it's a dilapidated ruin that's falling apart?"

"ARGHHH!!" the man shouted at the top of his lungs. This was the last straw for him, and he had completely forgotten all about his "performance." Instead, he looked like he was ready to give the duo a butt-whooping.

But as he tried to get off the bike, his *bike shoes* stayed locked in the pedals, causing him to fall.

"Oh, so THAT's WHY you're wearing a helmet *inside* the gym," Heinrich remarked dryly while the man was lying on the floor, trying to free his shoes from the pedals.

"Let's get out of here!" hollered Smirtz as they ran out of the spinning room and into the reception area.

As if things could not get any worse, they found that not only had the receptionist left, but the big *Frankenstein man* was standing there ***(I mean "the big Frankenstein's monster man" … of course***).

And he was not alone. He was talking to the woman with the *butt-filming* and *crazy ramblings* from the treadmill. The boys realized that they were a couple as she kissed him on the cheek.

"YOU!" the big man roared, pointing at Smirtz and Heinrich when he suddenly spotted the pair.

"THEM?!" the woman exclaimed in surprise when she followed his stare. "Are those the ones who, *like*, smashed your foot? They're also the ones who messed up my livestream!"

"You're toast!" the big man threatened as he walked toward the two friends, accompanied by his influencer-*slash*-entrepreneur-*slash*-"unknowingly-intergalactic-greeting" girlfriend.

Behind Smirtz and Heinrich, the *underperforming* lifestyle coach had finally gotten free of the bike pedals and was also headed for them.

Well … that escalated quickly, Smirtz thought to himself.

Then he looked at his trusty sidekick. "You know Heinrich, I don't think 'going to the gym' is really 'our thing.' I prefer Tinka's teasing to this any day. How about we head home?"

Heinrich nodded and they ran through the reception area toward the exit.

On their way, Smirtz accidentally bumped into a display rack with healthy snacks. The rack rocked back and forth for a moment before finally tipping over, landing directly in front of the trio chasing them.

The big man hit the rack and fell, causing his girlfriend to tumble onto him. The lifestyle coach crashed into the couple and landed on top of them.

As the young troublemakers ran out of the gym, they heard several angry voices shouting behind them.

One voice yelled, "If I ever see you again, I will use you as human dumbbells!" *Another* screamed, "OMG! Kids are, *like*, totally the worst!" Finally, *a third voice* rang out, "You ruined my performance!"

When the fleeing friends had reached a safe distance from the pile of entangled *tropical-smelling, Lycra-wearing, confused-duck-faced* people, they stopped and looked at each other, realizing they were still in their gym clothes.

"What about our regular clothes?" asked Smirtz. "They're still in the lockers in the changing room."

Heinrich thought about it for a second before snapping his fingers. "I think I can get my mom to drive down and pick them up tomorrow."

"Great!" said Smirtz relieved, after which they began walking home along the sidewalk.

Heinrich suggested that maybe they could jog home, since they were wearing gym clothes anyway.

Smirtz felt he had enough exercise for the day – or for the year, for that matter – so they continued to walk while chatting and laughing.

***

The next day, Smirtz and Heinrich stood in the schoolyard during recess, talking about their trip to the gym and how they were NEVER setting foot in such a place again.

Tinka overheard the last part of their conversation and challenged them to a "running race" around the schoolyard to see if their workout had paid off.

The boys accepted, but when the race started, they soon realized that not much had changed. Even though they had "trained so hard" yesterday, Tinka finished far ahead of them.

However, as they stood bent over – gasping for air – Tinka came up to them and noted with a grin, "You know … You guys weren't quite as bad as you normally are. Perhaps that workout really helped." Then she smiled at Smirtz and went inside.

Smirtz looked at Heinrich. "Well ... maybe we *cooould* consider going to the gym again sometime?"

"Maybe," said Heinrich with a slight smirk, having noticed Smirtz's sudden change of heart after Tinka's smile. "But I think we'll have to find another one if we do," he added.

Smirtz agreed. "That's a good idea. I mean, there can't possibly be weirdoes like those in other gyms ... can there?"

The bell rang, and they headed back to the classroom.

Today, the class was going to discuss where they should go on their upcoming school trip.

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