

PURPLE BURT

by mitch friedman



CHAPTER 1

Hintroduction



Purple Burt is just like every other typical 11-year old boy, except for the fact that his skin is purple. He and his mostly purple family moved here just over a year ago, but if you had told me anyone would have given them a second thought, I would have looked at you like *you* were weird. I mean, c'mon, this is Shalala we're talking about. The place is a little nutty.

Located just a few miles south of Northwest Easterly, in the valley at the foot of famous Fountain Mountain, with its many geysers blasting high into the sky, tourists just can't stay away. In the spring and summer, the mountain is covered in waterfalls and waterslides. In the winter, everyone flocks here for the best skiing around. On the other side of town is beautiful Cake Lake, named for the thousands of pink, light blue, and white flowers on lily pads covering the water like icing. I'm staying at a place called the Yo-Yotel, which has hotel elevators that spin and swoop up and down like a yo-yo. Highly recommended, unless you've just eaten.

With its winding streets lined with quiet little houses, and a town square surrounded by stores and restaurants, the village itself seems pretty ordinary. But look closer and you'll notice the small groups of musicians on scooters zigzagging everywhere, strumming guitars and tooting horns. That's because a Shalala law requires people ten and older to break into song at least once per day. You're allowed to sing the same song every day, and it's okay to sing parts of songs in the shower or bathtub, but you can't just hum. You have to sing. And if you skip singing for more than five days per month and you don't have laryngitis, an officer from the Vocal Court will force you to listen to really bad singers non-stop for a whole week.

Purple Albert, Purple Burt's dad, is a famous inventor who was brought here because of his work on the Song Sound Sensor Sender. It's a stick-on microphone roughly the size of a freckle everyone in Shalala is required to wear. It helps the Vocal Court keep track of who's been singing and who's been shirking. From what I understand, the Song Sound Sensor Sender sends the sounds of songs after sensing them to the Song Sound Count Center, or something. To tell you the truth, I don't even understand what I just said. The good thing is, most everyone in Shalala is always singing, regardless of the rules, because they're so happy.

Anyway, life around here moseyed on in a pretty predictable pattern until Purple Burt showed up. Then, it wasn't long before everyone got a big dose of the unexpected remarkable.

CHAPTER 2

Purple Burt



Through the hallway of Upper Lower Middle School walked Purple Burt, trying to mind his own business.

"Hey, nice skin!"

"Ever hear of wiping your face after eating blueberry pie?"

"You can stop holding your breath now!"

"Tell Barney we say hello!"

"Which of your parents is blue and which is red?"

"Ha ha ha ha ha ha HA!!!!!!!"

The cruel words and vicious laughter of the three meanest and sleepest kids in the whole school, The Yawn Boys and Lazy Suzy, bounced off the walls directly into Purple Burt's ears, even as he squeezed his hands over them and ran as fast as he could in the opposite direction.

"Please leave me alone!" he cried.

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Barely holding in tears, Purple Burt pushed peas around his dinner plate with the end of his fork, while his five-year-old younger brother, Purple Herbert chowed down enthusiastically.

"Burt, aren't you hungry? I thought my chickpea chicken and peas was your favorite?" asked his non-purple mother, Petunia.

"What's wrong, son?" asked Purple Albert.

"I wish we hadn't moved here. I'm the only purple person in the whole school and some kids are really mean to me. Everyone was purple in our old town."

"How long has this been going on, Burt? You should have told us sooner," said Albert.

"It started on my first day," Burt said as his parents looked shocked.

"I'm so sorry for not picking up on it, Burt. That's just awful," said Petunia, giving a distressed look to Albert who returned her guilty gaze.

"This has been the worst year of my life. I was too ashamed to tell you because you might think I was being a baby."

"Oh, come here, honey," said Petunia, as she walked over to Purple Burt and hugged him tightly.

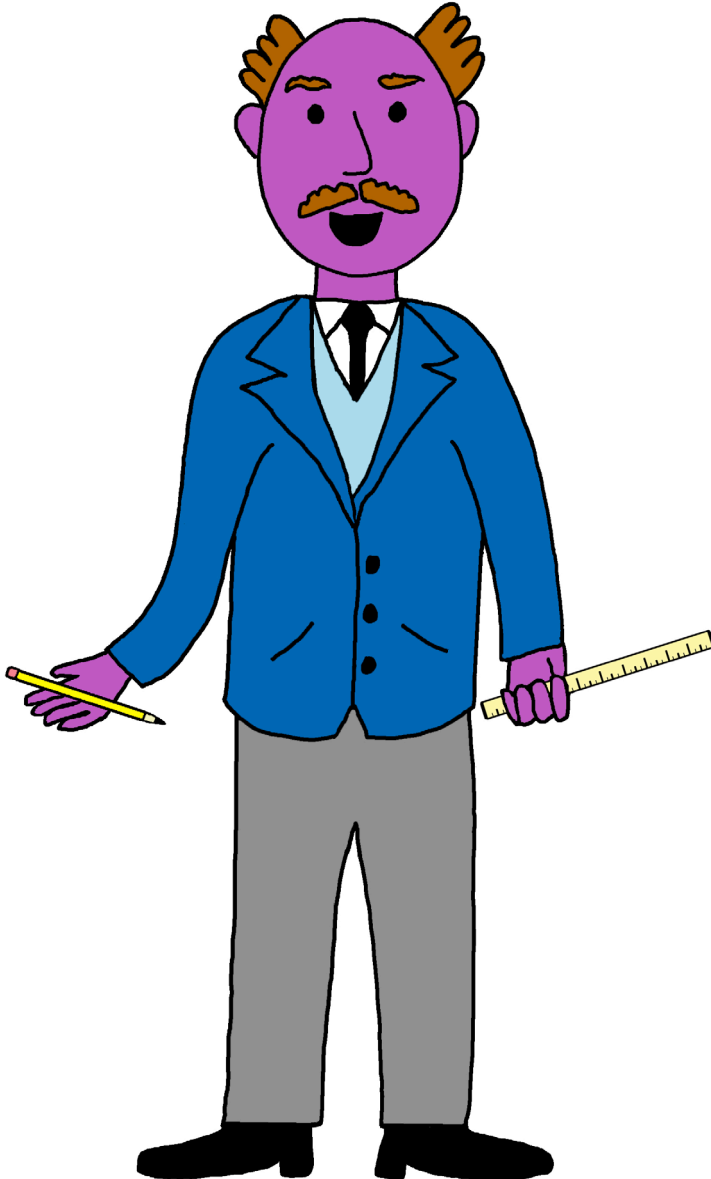
"You should never be afraid to tell us about anything that's bothering you, Burt. Especially if it's something as upsetting as being made fun of just for being yourself," said Albert.

"Listen, when I was your age I had a rough time of it, too. It didn't seem to matter that your Grandpa Purple Philbert was a world-famous inventor. Even though everyone bought his Carmonica and drove around all day long playing songs with their car horns, they still gave me trouble just because I was purple. But look at me now. I devoted my life to inventing

things that would make people happier and I'm as famous as my father, while most of those mean kids were never heard from again."

"Thanks, Dad, but I don't know what to do about it. Can you help me?" Purple Burt asked between sniffles.

"In fact, I think I can," said Purple Albert, slowly nodding his head with a faraway look in his eyes.



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One week later, Purple Burt was in his room with its walls covered in his beautiful, colored-pencil drawings of people and animals and nature. Sitting on his bed, sketching his latest creation, he heard his mother call up to him.

"Burt, please come here. Your father has something for you."

"Be right there!"

As Burt ran down the stairs, Purple Albert walked into the dining room carrying something odd.

"What's that, Dad?" asked Purple Burt, out of breath.

"It's a brand new invention I've just finished that will hopefully solve your problem," said Purple Albert.

"Is it as fun as your Tickle Pump? I love how when I push down the handle, little bursts of air fly out and tickle my skin."

"Little bursts of air with microscopic feathers in them, actually," said Albert.

"Oh, cool! I never knew that."

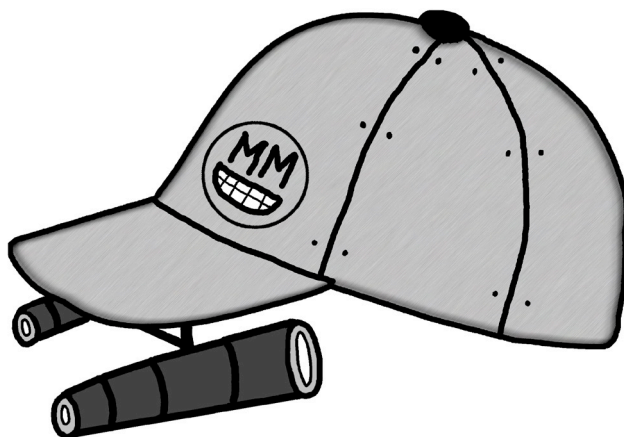
"It might even be as fun as my Cloud-Powered Ice Cream Oven. Though that thing only gets charged up to bake instant ice cream on really cloudy, hot days when it's about to rain, Otherwise, it's no good."

"Yeah, but I love it, Dad. Plus, if I eat way too much ice cream but I'm wearing your Sleeping Bag in a Shoe, I can just pop open the heel, roll it out and take a nap," said Burt.

"My fingers are crossed that you'll love this as much as all those other inventions. Let me introduce you to my Metal Mental Happy Cap!" said Albert, holding up a shiny metal baseball cap with tiny reverse telescopes built into the bottom of the bill.

"Oh, awesome! I love baseball," said Burt, excitedly.

"Here, son, put it on and close your eyes. Maybe memories of a happier time will cheer you up."



Snip! went the scissors. Slap! went the hand. Waaah! came the first sound to fly from the mouth of the newborn baby.

"Congratulations, Petunia and Albert! You have a healthy, purple boy," said the slightly surprised doctor as he wrapped the crying infant in a blanket and gently handed him to the proud parents.

"He's perfectly purple," said Petunia, holding her first child for the very first time. "Like father, like son."

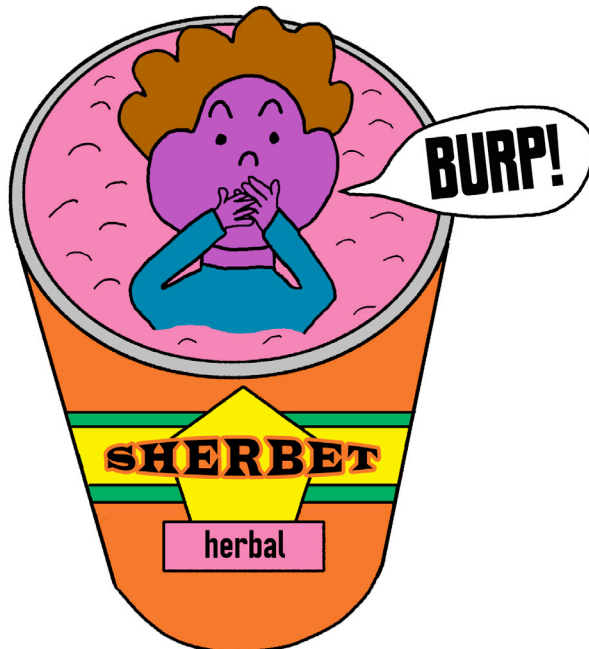
"Perfectly beautiful! Like mother, like son," proudly proclaimed Purple Albert as he kissed his non-purple wife softly on the cheek.

Click! went the switch, just above his nose as Purple Burt lifted the metal cap from his head, revealing a frowning face and sad eyes.

"I'm sorry Mom and Dad, but this Happy Hat is just not helping. I see how much you two have always loved me, and I feel special because I'm purple, but I want more than anything to *not* stand out from everybody else. Don't they know I'm really just like they are on the inside?" sobbed Purple Burt.

"Don't worry, son," comforted his mother, "one day everyone will see you exactly as the amazing, unique boy you really are." Purple Albert nodded in disappointed agreement.

BURP! echoed the sound from inside the gigantic tin of herbal sherbet that Purple Herbert happily sat in, slurping away. The whole family got a much-needed laugh.



CHAPTER 3

The Hope-Rope

WANNA FLY LIKE A BIRD?
HOPE-ROPE IT!
WANNA SPELL EVERY WORD?
HOPE-ROPE IT!
BE A HOLLYWOOD STAR?
HOPE-ROPE IT!
PLAY A MONKEY GUITAR?
HOPE-ROPE IT!

IF THERE'S ANYTHING THAT YOU WANT TO BE,
WANT TO KNOW, HAVE, DO, OR WOULD LOVE TO SEE,
THEN GRAB THESE HANDLES AND JUMP WITH GLEE
'CAUSE IT MIGHT HAPPEN INSTANTLY
IF YOU HOPE-ROPE IT!

THE HOPE-ROPE BY MAGICKO!
(SNEAKERS SOLD SEPARATELY)

Purple Burt's eyes almost popped out of his head with amazement as the television commercial ended.

A jump rope that brings you anything you dream of, and all you have to do is jump it? Purple Burt thought, as his heart pounded as fast as a rabbit runs. *This could solve all of my problems!*

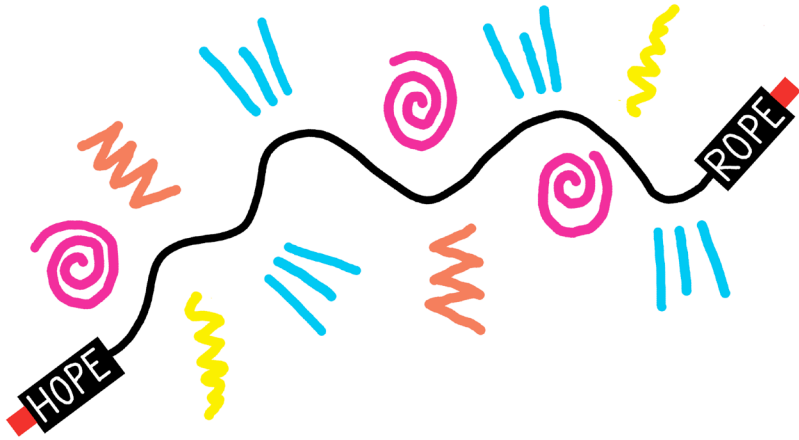
The moment he heard the fiddling of a key in the front door, Purple Burt leaped from his seat and streaked towards it as his dad entered the house.

"Oh please, please, please, Dad. Can I get a Hope-Rope? Pleeeeeeaaaaasssee?"

"Woah. Hold on now. What's a Hope-Rope?" slyly asked Purple Albert, knowing exactly what it was because he had secretly invented it over the past month without telling his son. *If Burt believes he can solve his biggest problem on his own, that could be what does the trick,* Albert thought -- and hoped.

A few minutes of rapid-fire explanation was all Purple Burt needed to convince his dad to head right back out the front door, into the car and off to the toy store.

"This might end up being the happiest day of my life so far!" Burt exclaimed, with a bright, hopeful smile on his face.



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How fast do I have to jump this thing to get it to work? wondered Purple Burt as he tried to catch his breath and wipe the sweat dripping off his forehead. It had been almost a week since he got his Hope-Rope and so far nothing had changed, other than losing a few pounds. But he told himself he would not give up hope, or the Hope-Rope until it made his dreams come true.

The swishing sounds near his ears grew louder and closer together as he began to pick up speed. With his feet bouncing like Superballs off the ground, and his arms swirling like mini-tornadoes, Purple Burt repeated over and over again in his head: *See past the purple. Make me more like them. Make me less like me.*

The windy whooshing from the Hope-Rope got stronger and stronger, blowing over a stack of magazines and causing the curtains to rustle rapidly. Smacking his sneakers with increasing force on the linoleum floor attracted the attention of his parents who ran in to watch. Not only did they truly wish the Hope-Rope would work as advertised, but they were also getting a bit tired of listening to Purple Burt's constant rope jumping for the last week!

With every ounce of energy he had left, Purple Burt built up to a speed even he couldn't believe. A high-pitched whistling noise reached a piercing volume as his eyesight grew blurrier. In his mind, pictures of being taunted at school shattered and reformed into a spinning kaleidoscope of smiles. In a final whirlwind of windmilling arms, leap-frogging legs and runaway repetition in his head, a sudden flash of light and jolt of energy knocked him to the carpet with a mighty *THUD*.

"Burt! Burt? Burt?!" screamed his mother dizzily running in his direction after watching the Hope-Rope spin wildly.

"Mom! Dad!" yelled Purple Burt as he began to regain his sight, struggling to get back to his feet.

Everywhere Purple Burt looked, everything he looked at was black or white or some shade of grey. He tried to rub his eyes, but couldn't find his hands in front of his face. Purple Burt thought he was seeing things because he was seeing nothing. Looking down at the floor, all he saw was the still-smoking Hope-Rope on the carpet. Gazing up at his mom and dad, he only saw his mom. If he could have looked at his own face, he would have seen that all the color was drained from it -- and not just the purple.

"Burt, Albert, where are you?!" cried out Petunia.

"I'm right here, Mom," said Purple Burt.

"Me, too," said Purple Albert.

"Where?" Petunia asked, looking around.

"Right in front of you. Ouch! My foot!" yelled Purple Burt. He looked down to where his mom had stepped on him and saw only her foot. He screamed in horror as he frantically felt around for his legs, which were right where he thought they would be, even though he couldn't see them. He ran to a mirror, took his eyeglasses out of their metal case and put them on. When he looked in the mirror, he saw his glasses -- only his glasses -- floating in empty space. There was no head, and no him, holding them up.

"I'm sorry Burt, but I don't see you! Albert?!" shrieked Petunia.

"Right here, honey. But something has gone terribly wrong!" he replied nervously.

"I can't see either of you!" she yelled back as she spun around, trying to locate them.

"Mom, Dad, there are no colors! Everything looks black and white! Everything except me. I think I'm invisible!"

"Oh Burt! I'm so sorry, but it looks like my Hope-Rope worked way too well. We've both gone from purple to invisible!" answered Albert. Petunia wiped her eyes, hoping this was all a bad dream.

"*Your* Hope-Rope?" asked Burt, very confused.

"Yes, son. I have to admit it's one of my inventions. When the Happy Cap didn't make you happier, I really got to work. But I fear I made the Hope-Rope a bit too powerful."

BURP! came from the tin of herbal sherbet, inside of which sat Purple Herbert. Smiling and happily slurping sherbet, he was still purple thanks to being shielded by the walls of tin. But now, no one laughed at Herbert's burpy, slurpy sounds.

"Albert, is there anything you can do to fix this?" asked Petunia, with growing concern.

"There's nothing *I* can do, but I think Burt can."

"Tell me, Dad. I don't want us to be invisible," said Burt.

"Okay, while the Hope-Rope is still warm, try jumping it again, but this time jump it in reverse. Instead of spinning the rope forward, see if you can spin it backwards," said Albert, with slight uncertainty in his voice.

"Backwards? Wow, I don't know if I can do that," answered Burt.

"Oh honey, please try. For all of us," begged Petunia.

Purple Albert crossed his invisible fingers.

Purple Burt bent down and reached for the Hope-Rope. The strange sensation of not being able to see his hands made him miss the handles a few times, but he finally grabbed them and stood up straight.

"Okay, here goes!" he said and slowly began to rotate the Hope-Rope in reverse. Bit by bit, he picked up speed as he got the knack of it.

"You can do it, son!" coached Albert.

"That's it, Burt. That's it!" encouraged Petunia.

BURP! SLURP! sounded Herbert from inside the sherbet tin.

Within a minute the swishing sounds and smacks of invisible feet on the floor grew louder. Petunia's hair blew wildly in the gusts of a mini-cyclone. Purple Burt could feel sweat roll down his invisible forehead as his vision blurred. The high-pitched whistling returned, but sounded like it was being played backwards. Geometric shapes of parts of his and his dad's face tumbled, broke apart and reformed like a kaleidoscope in Purple Burt's mind as he chanted to himself, over and over, *Please make the invisible go away.*

Purple Albert held onto a chair with one hand and Petunia with the other to keep them from being blown over by the strengthening wall of whooshes and whistling.

"Here it comes!" yelled Purple Burt, as a blazing beam of light blinded him. Then a sudden *BOOM!* knocked him and the Hope-Rope to the floor.

"Burt, Albert, are you both alright?" asked Petunia, crawling to her feet as everyone's eyes readjusted.

Purple Burt looked around but still only saw his mother. When he gazed down at his own hands, nothing was there.

"Dad? Where are you? Dad?!" pleaded Burt, but there was no answer.

"Albert! Albert?!" begged Petunia. There was only silence.

It took only a split-second for the terrible turn of events to dawn on them. Purple Burt was still invisible, and Purple Albert had disappeared completely.

"Oh no!" cried Purple Burt. "I can't believe what I did. I was only trying to fix it, Mom. I swear."

"I know, Burt. I know," she said, trying to soothe him but feeling helpless and unable to hide it. "We will find him. I know we will. We just *have* to."

As Purple Burt sat slumped on the floor feeling guilty and extremely sad, Purple Herbert sat silently in his tin of herbal sherbet, no longer slurping. Even he had lost his appetite.

