

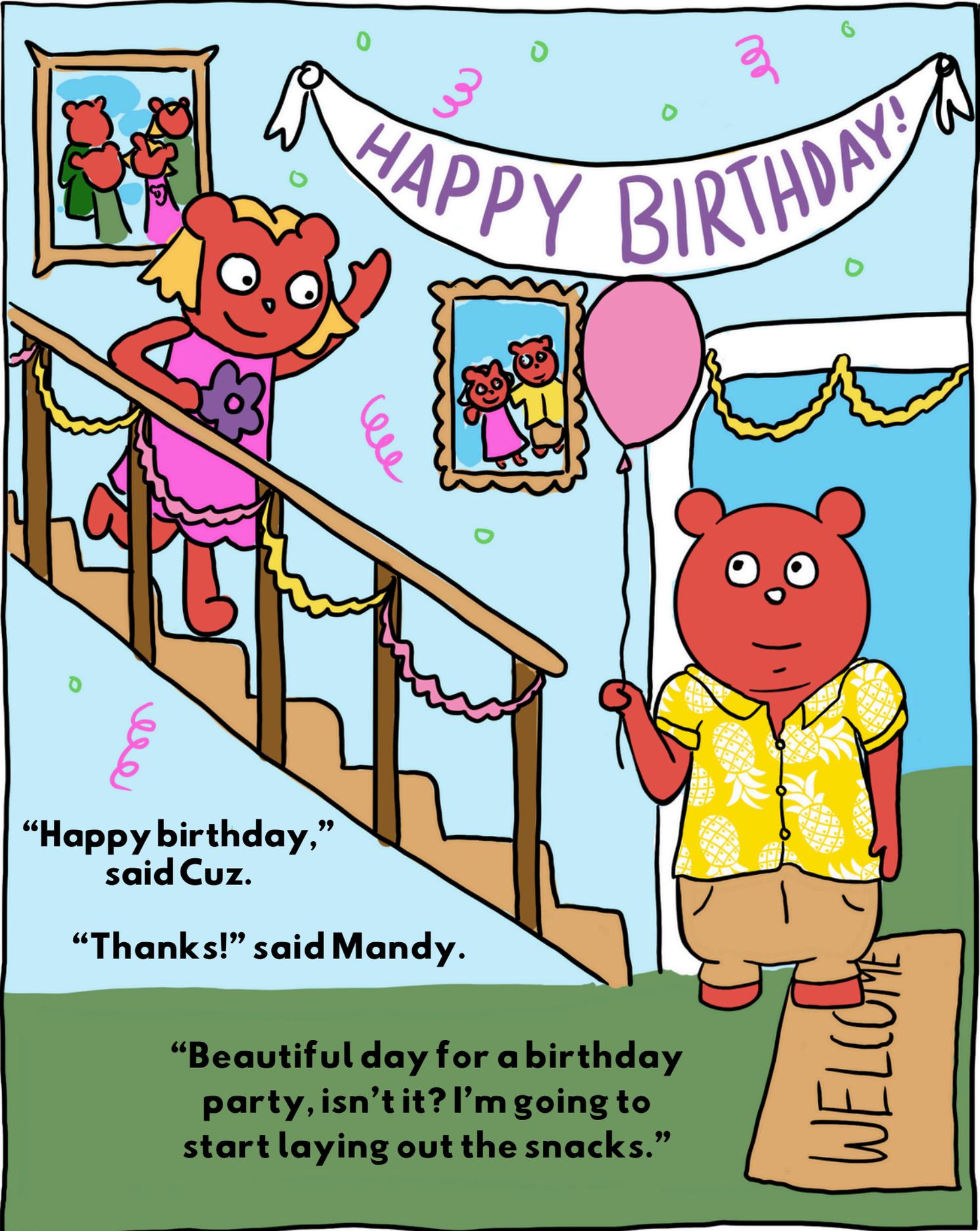
# JUST CUZ



by Barbara Miller



**“It’s here! It’s finally here!” said Mandy.  
“The greatest day of the whole year!”**

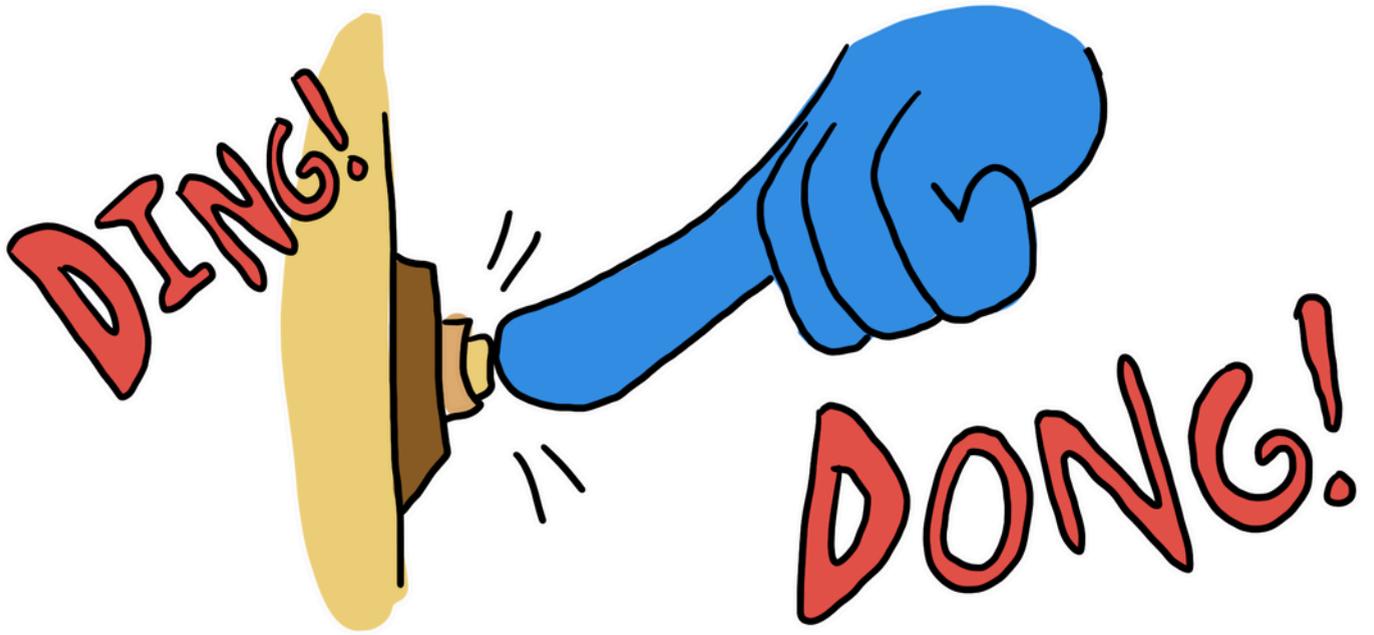


**“Happy birthday,”  
said Cuz.**

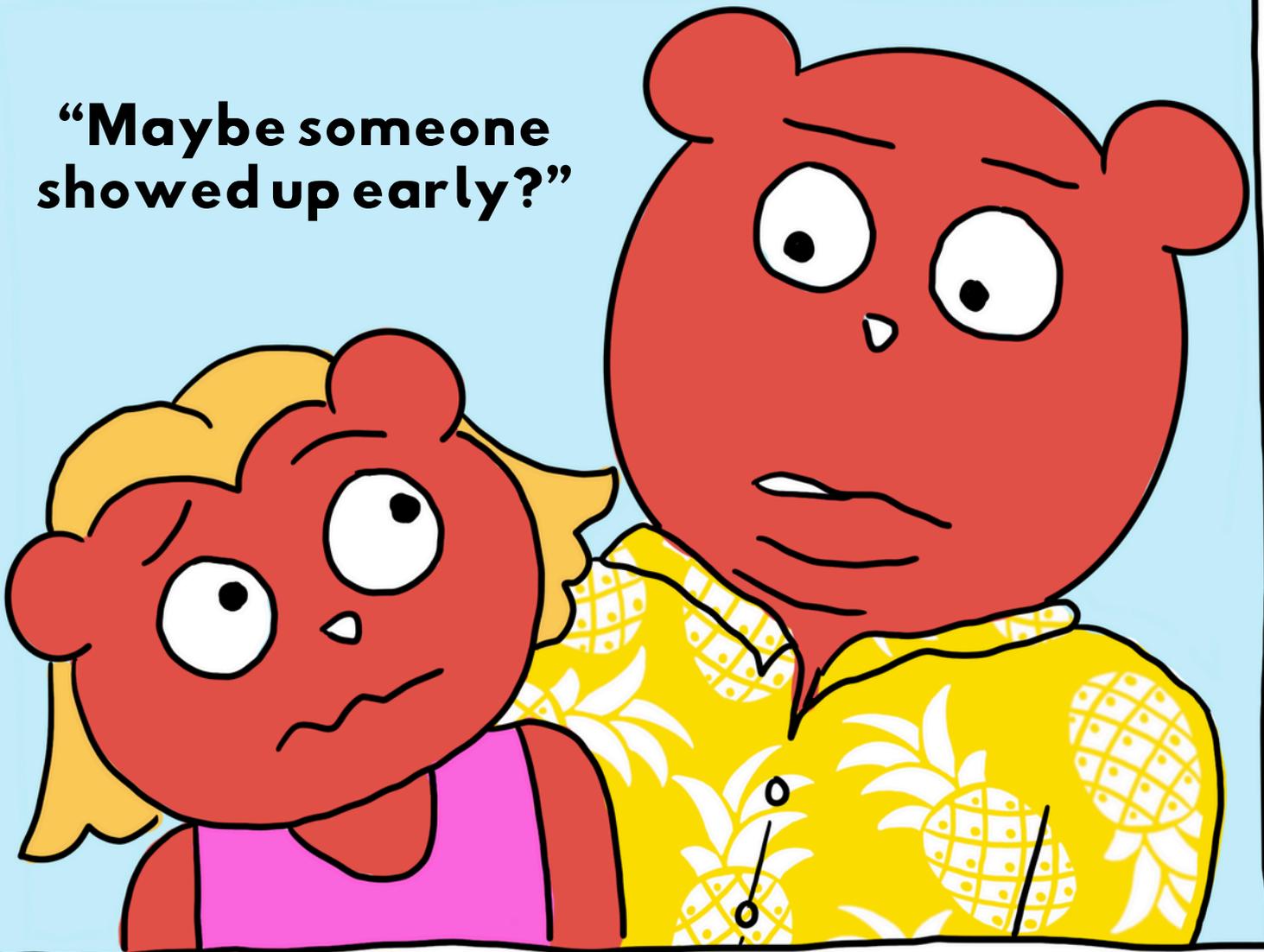
**“Thanks!” said Mandy.**

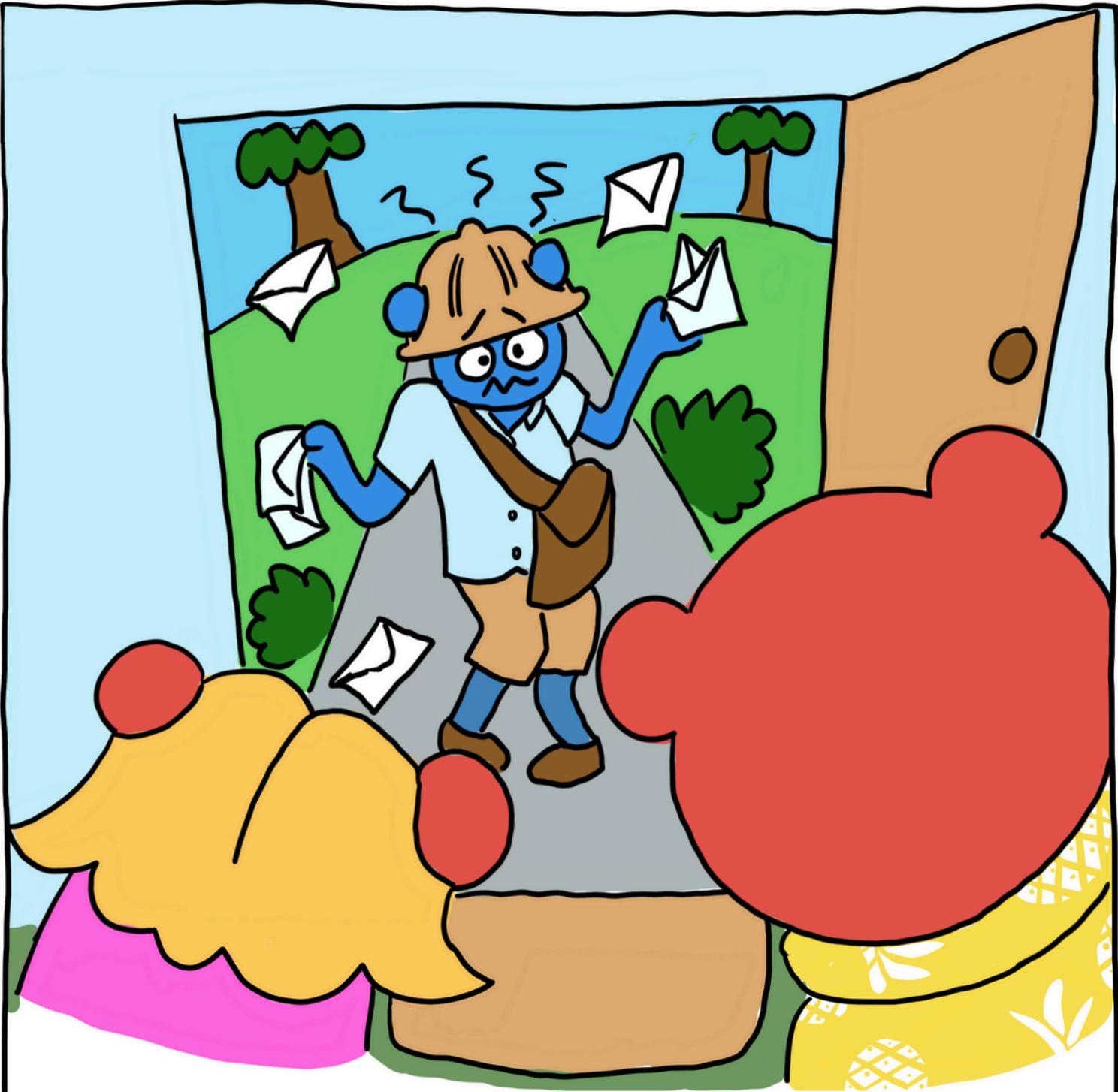
**“Beautiful day for a birthday  
party, isn’t it? I’m going to  
start laying out the snacks.”**

**WELCOME**



**“Maybe someone  
showed up early?”**





**“I have some troubling news,” said Mailman Marv.**

**“What sort of troubling news?” asked Mandy.**

**“I’m afraid I accidentally shipped the invitations to your birthday party...to Alaska.”**



**“Who’s Mandy?” asked Eskimo Elliott.**

**“I don’t know. But I do love birthday parties,”  
said Eskimo Ella.**

**Mandy gasped!**



**And she stomped!**



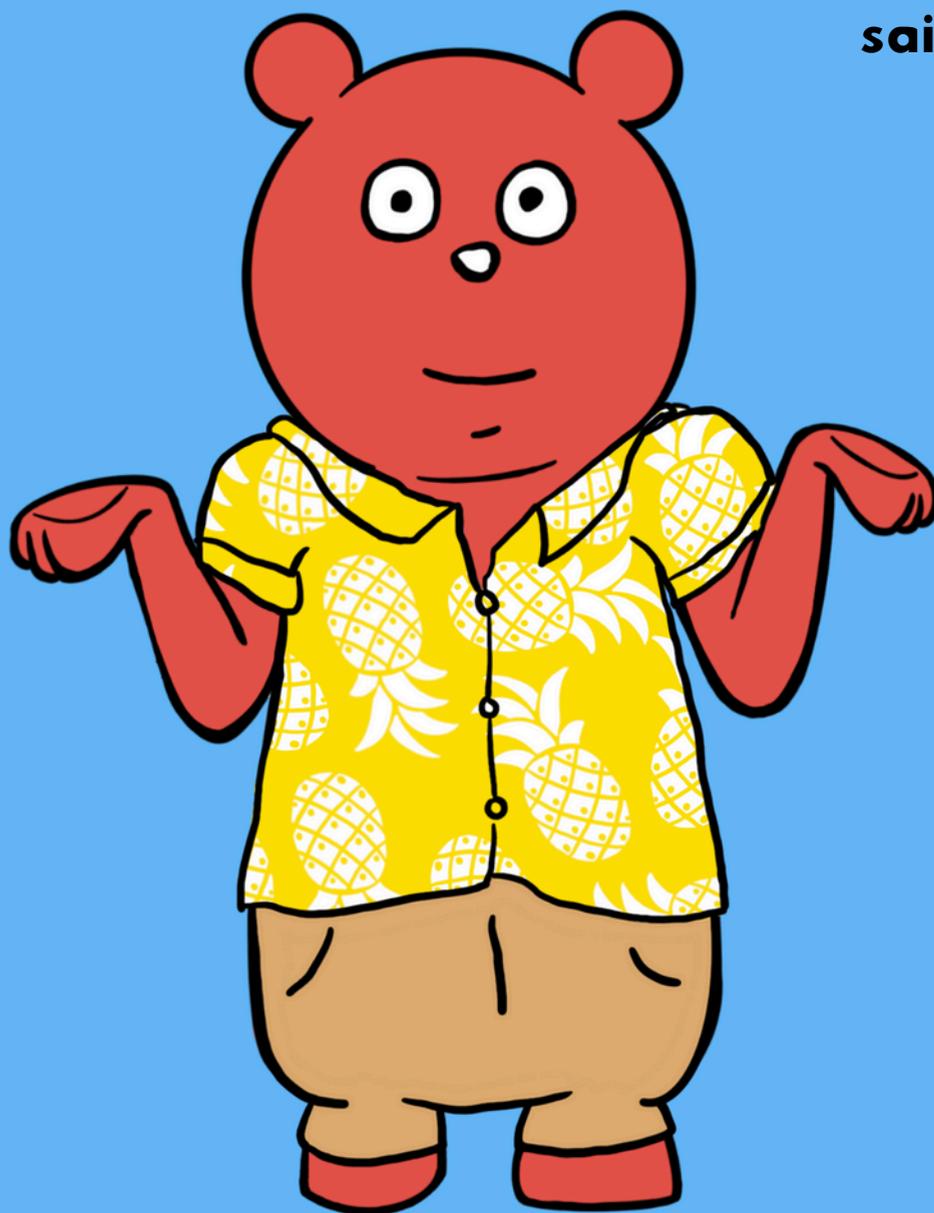
**And she cried out!**



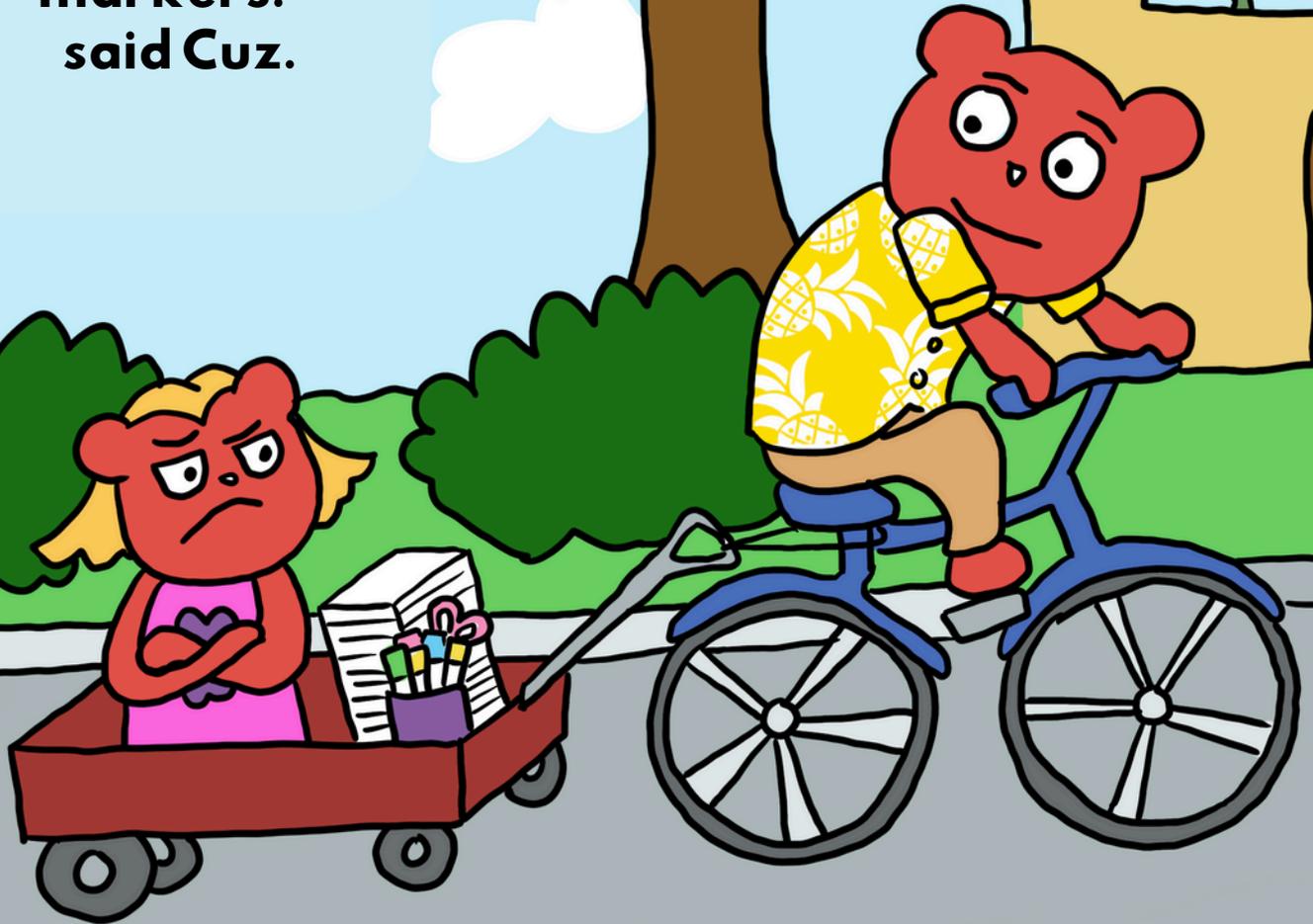
**“Why did my invitations end up in Alaska?!”**

“JUST CUZ”

said Cuz.



**“But we do have  
construction  
paper and magic  
markers!”  
said Cuz.**



**“How about we deliver our own  
invitations?”**

**Mandy and Cuz spent the next hour handing out homemade birthday invitations to Mandy's classmates.**



After, they took a walk into town to pick up Mandy's double-frosted chocolate-berry cake!



Mandy looked forward to seeing her name on a birthday cake all year long.



Merry  
Christmas,  
**GARY!**

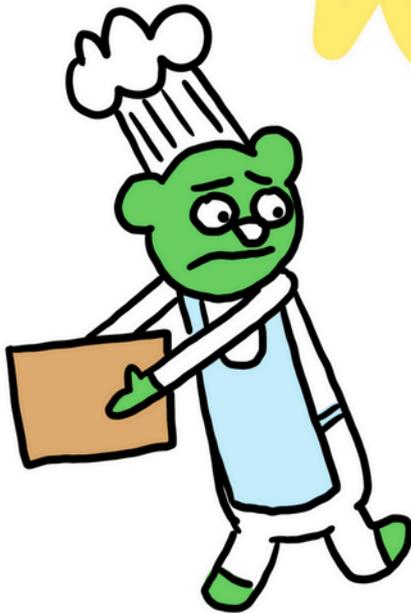
**Mandy gasped!**



**And she stomped!**



**And she cried out!**

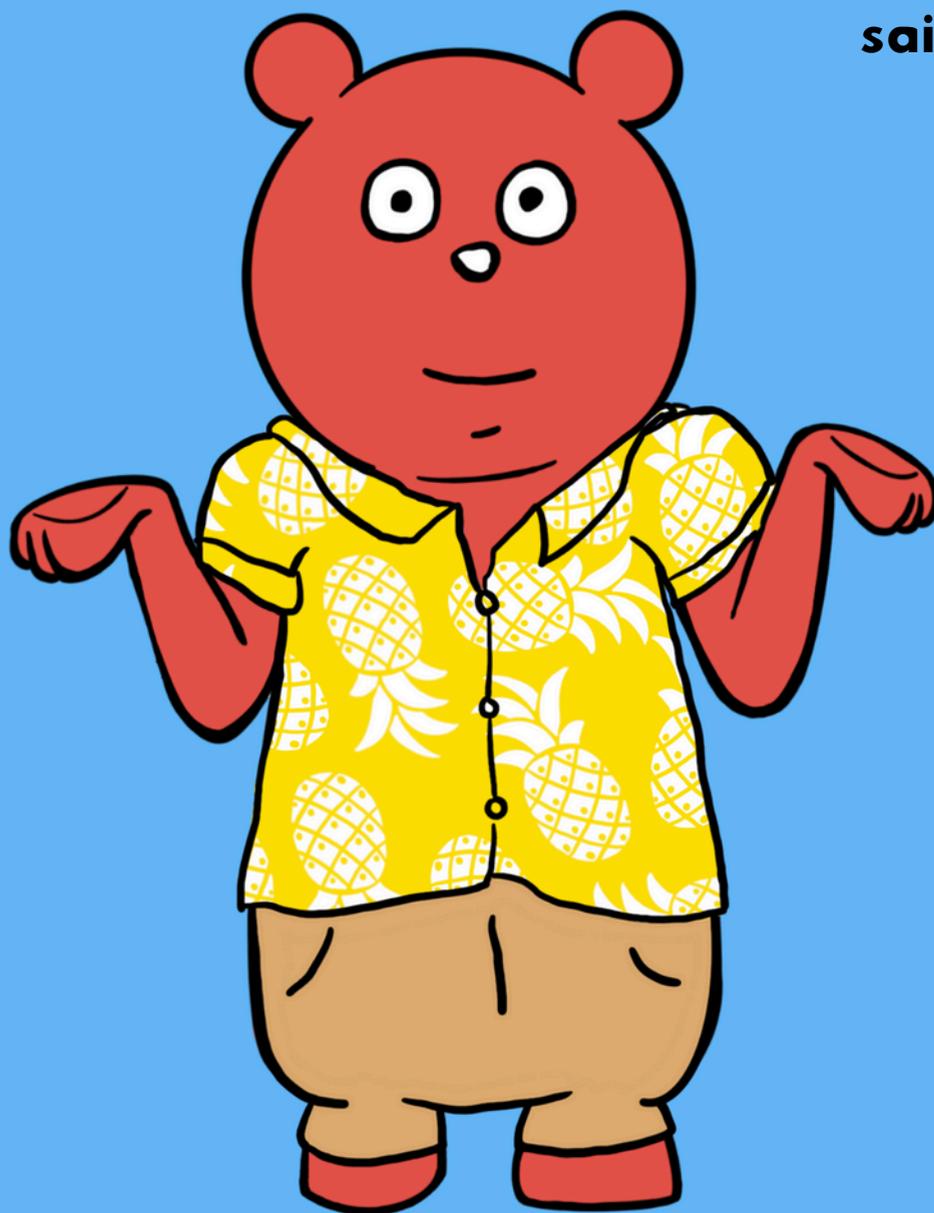


**“Bernie the Baker gave me the wrong cake?!**

**WHY?!?!?”**

“JUST CUZ”

said Cuz.



**“But I might have an idea...”**



“TADA!”



Happy  
Birthday  
MANDY!

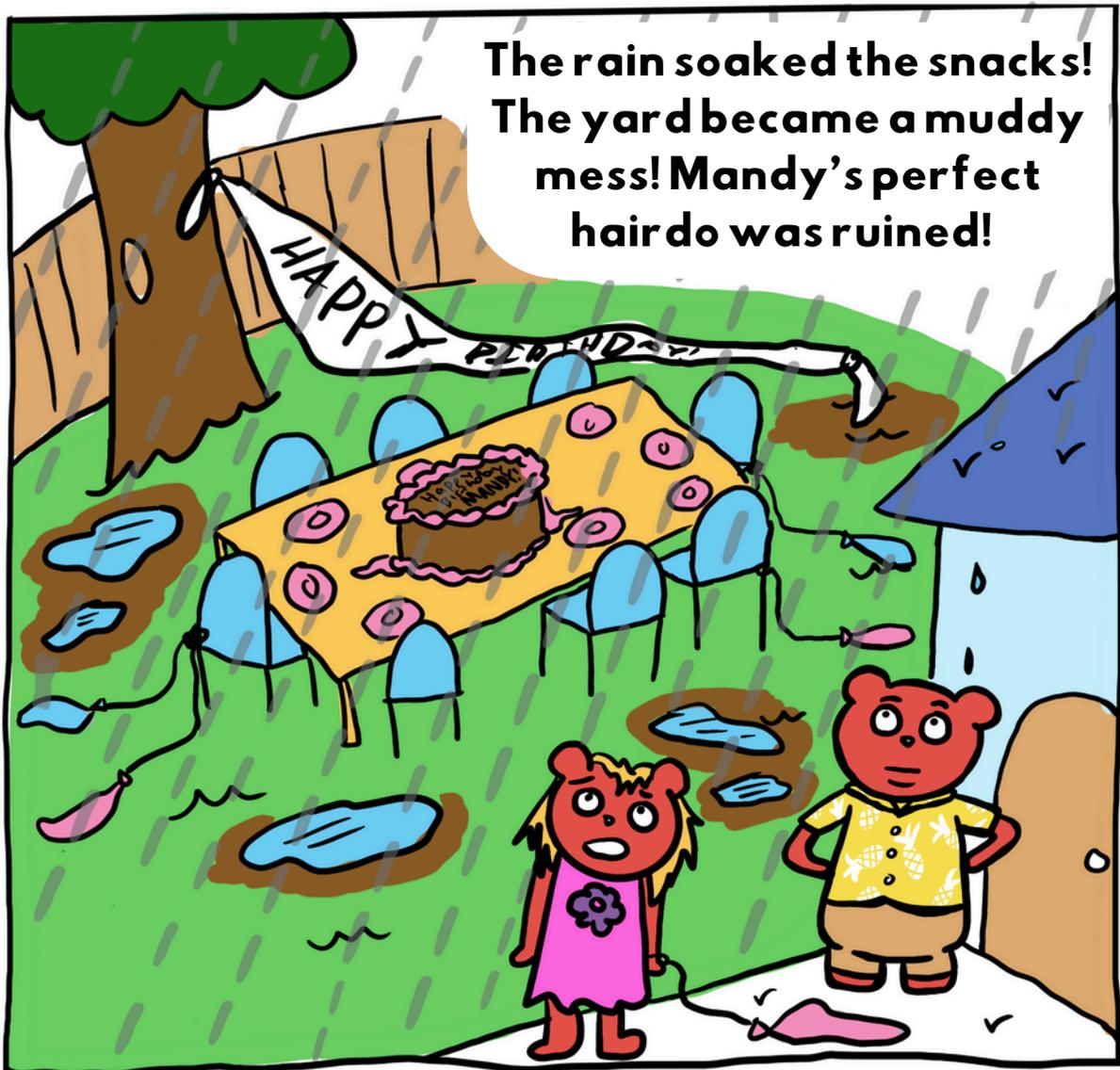
The cake was ready, the backyard decorations were set, and Mandy couldn't wait for her guests to arrive.



“And I’m even having a good hair day,” said Mandy.



**That's when she heard it...**



**The rain soaked the snacks!  
The yard became a muddy  
mess! Mandy's perfect  
hairdo was ruined!**

**Mandy gasped!**



**And she stomped!**



**And she cried out!**



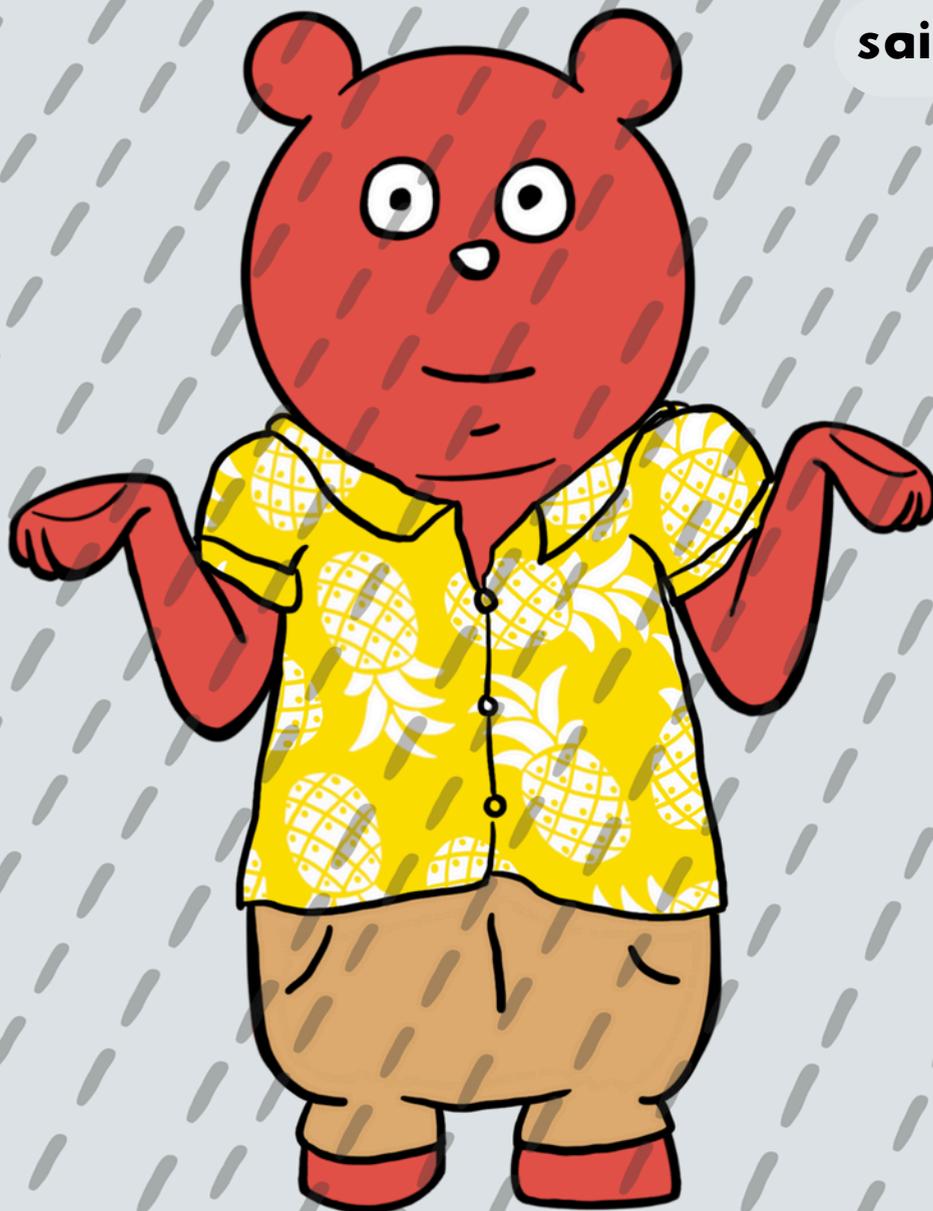
**And she shouted to the heavens!**



**“It wasn’t supposed to rain today!  
Why is it raining?!”**

“JUST CUZ”

said Cuz.



**“Stop saying that!  
Stop saying JUST CUZ!”**

**said Mandy.**



**Mandy fell into her bed, soaked and upset, wondering why the world was out to get her.**



**“I’m a good person,”  
Mandy thought.**

**“I play with  
everyone at school.  
I always eat my  
vegetables.**

**What did I do to  
deserve this?”**



**That's when she  
saw it...**



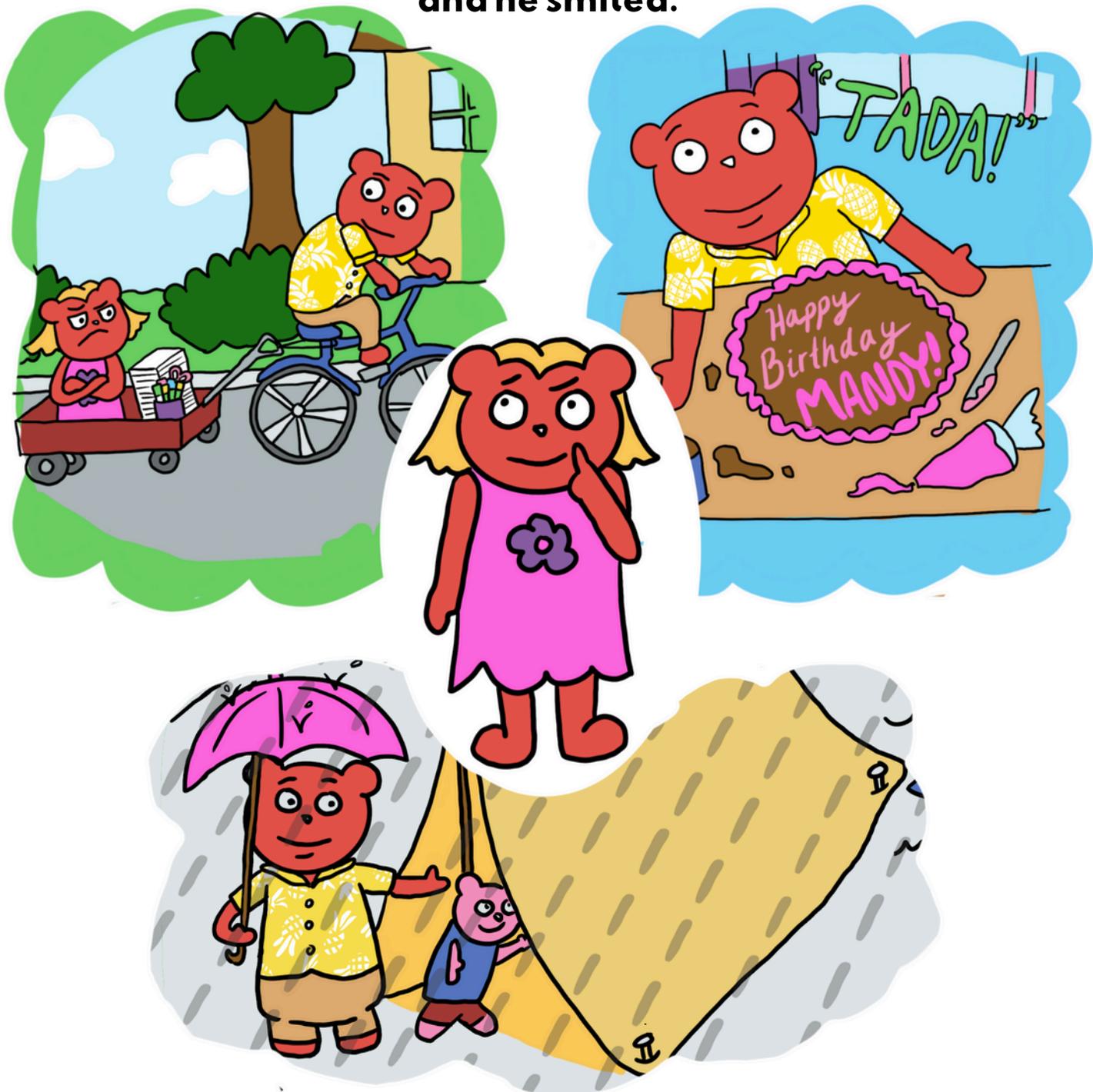
**Cuz had built a tent in the backyard. All of her friends were filing in, one by one, with big smiles on their faces.**



**“A tent party!” said Schoolmate Sam.**

**“I LOVE TENT PARTIES!”**

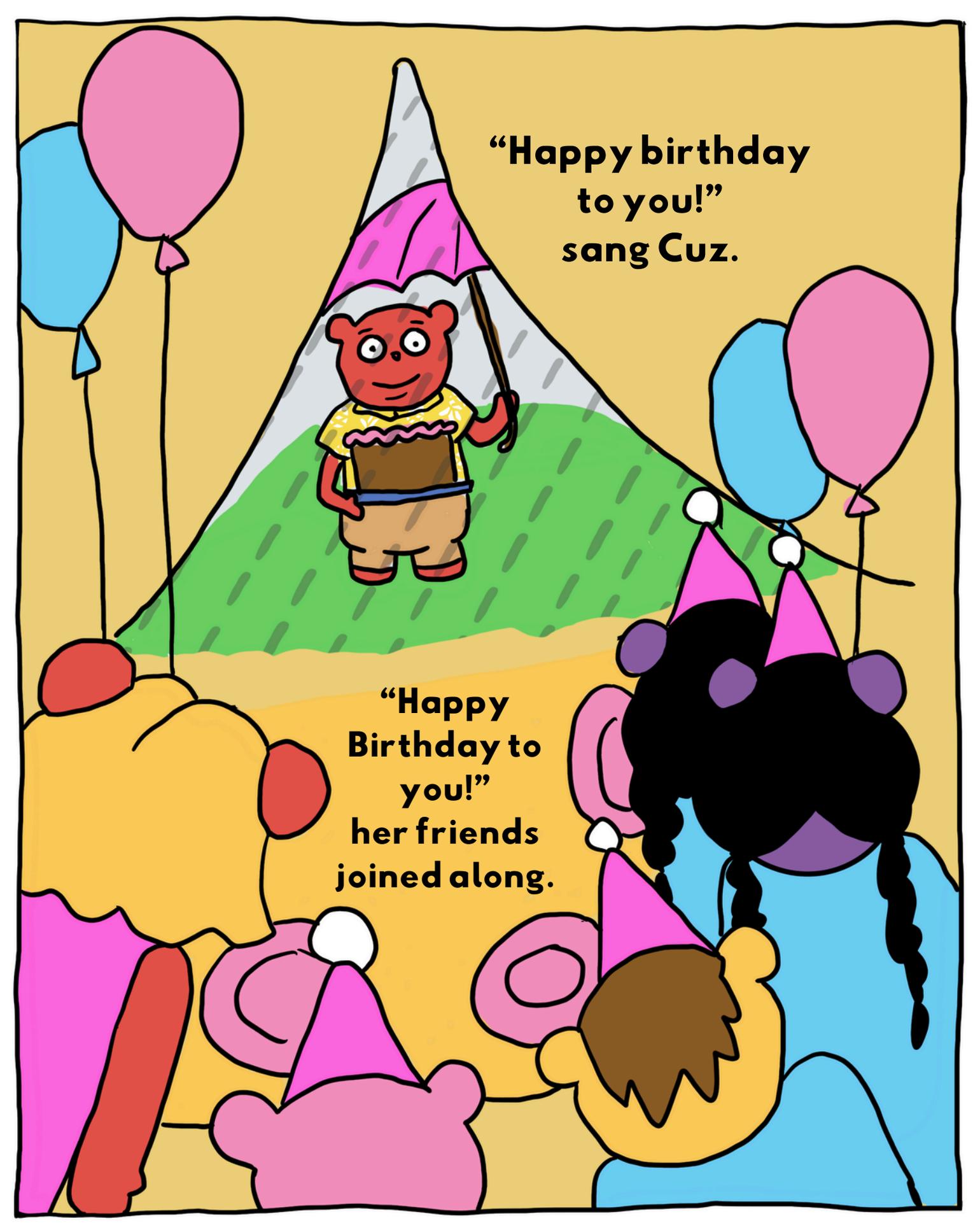
**Mandy realized something then. When problems arose throughout the day, Cuz never gasped, or shouted, or cried out. Instead, he shrugged, and he smiled.**



**And because he always kept his head up, he always came up with a clever solution to whatever issue lay in front of them.**

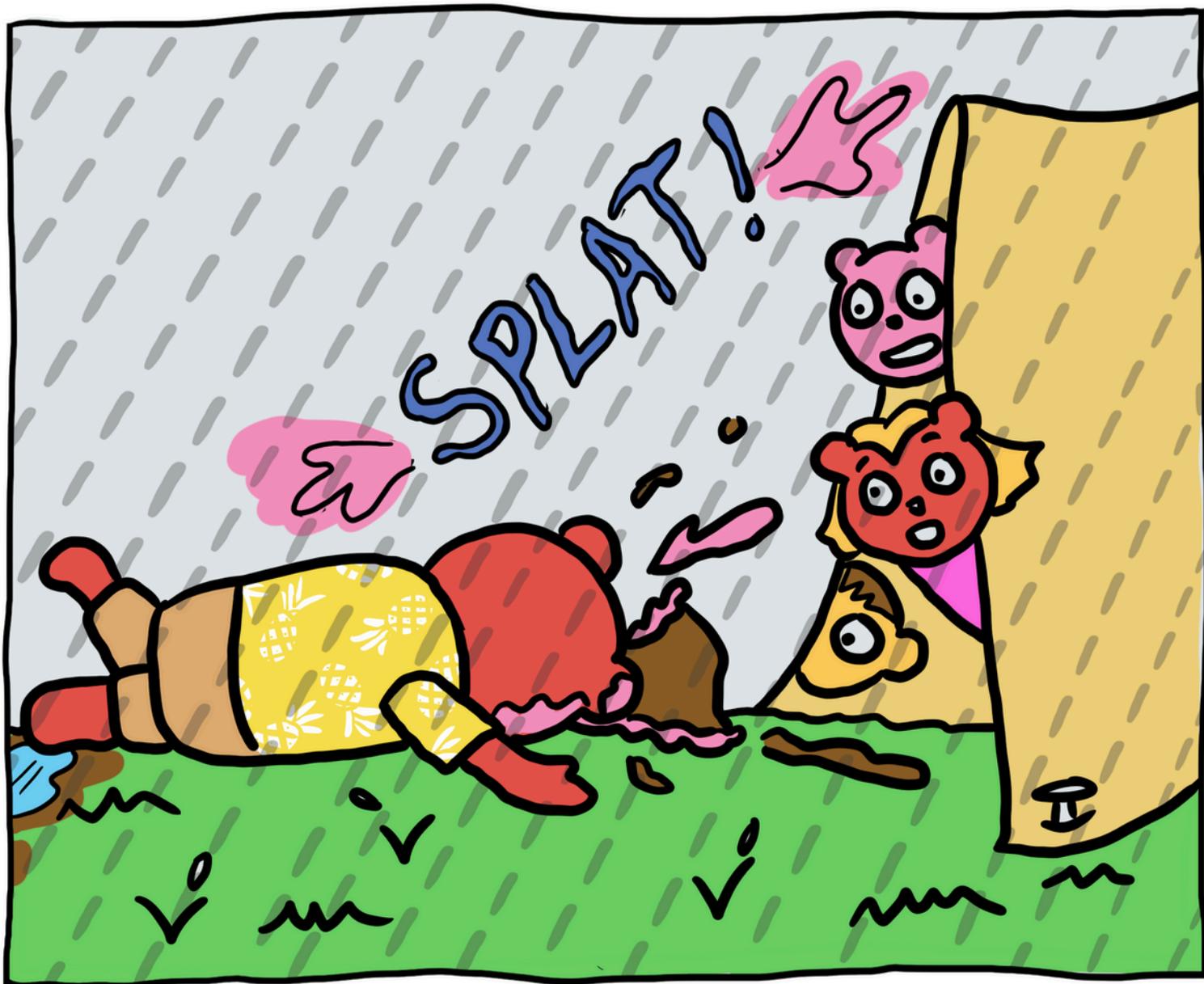
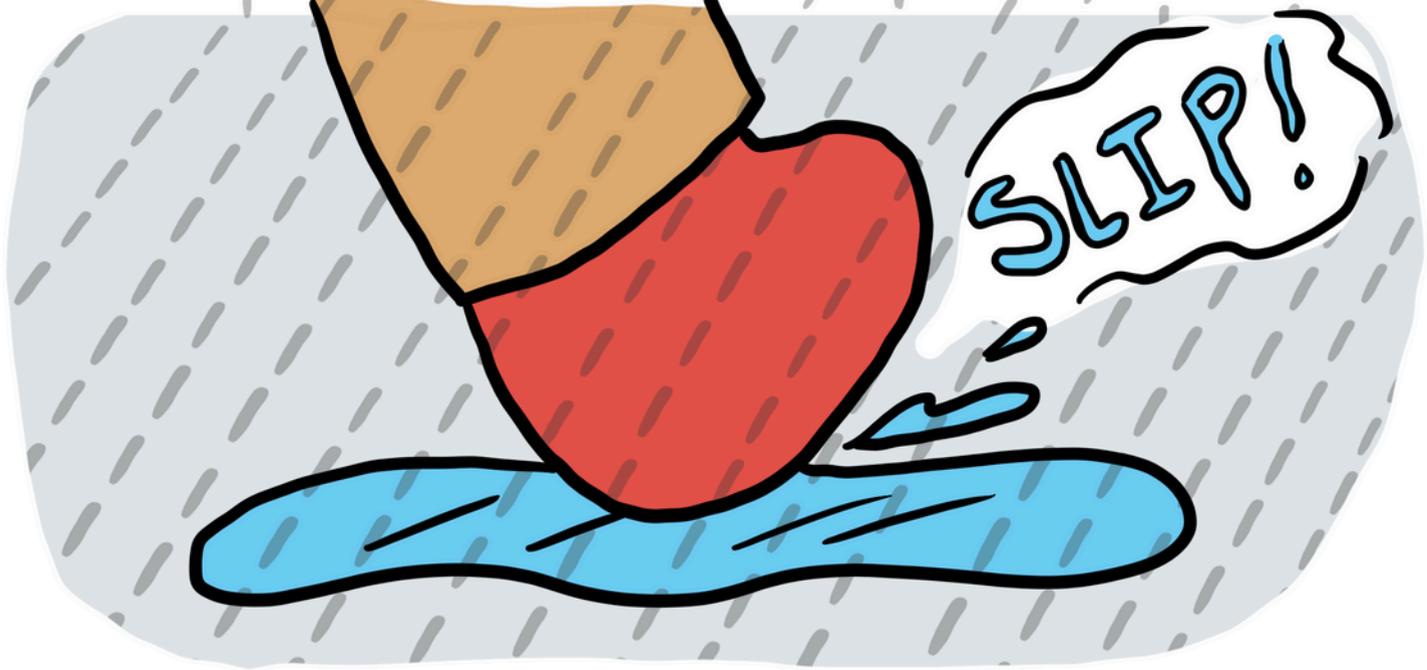


**Mandy felt a warmth growing in her belly as she joined the party. Then she heard a voice out in the rain begin to sing...**



**“Happy birthday  
to you!”  
sang Cuz.**

**“Happy  
Birthday to  
you!”  
her friends  
joined along.**



**“Oh no! Your birthday cake,” said Cuz.**

**“How could I be so clumsy?”**



“JUST CUZ”

said Mandy.



**This time Mandy had an idea.**



**“Frosting fight!” Mandy said.**

**And as her friends laughed and painted  
the tent and each other with sugary goo,  
Mandy realized something else.**



**The day hadn't turned out like she'd imagined.  
No, it had turned out better.  
In fact, it had been her best birthday yet.**

**“What a strange party we’ve been invited to,” said Eskimo Ella.**



**“Why are they having a frosting fight in a tent in the pouring rain?”**

“JUST CUZ!”

