

Chapter 5

Tamales, Tomatoes, and Worm Talk, Too

The girls raced to Cora's house. Cora's father had his famous guacamole waiting for them. It was chunks of avocado with little pieces of tomato and red onion and cilantro. And there were crisp tortilla chips to go with it. Then came tamales made by Cora's grandma. These were little packets of soft corn dough filled with chicken.

Cora's mother poured each girl a cold rice drink. It was milky-looking and tasted of lime and cinnamon. "This is called *horchata*," Cora said.

**Some Tongue
Twister Fun!**

Try saying this
tongue twister
really fast.

Cora chops coriander
to cheer her chum Chandra
and charm the chinchilla
who chitchats like a chatterbox
while chomping on chocolate.

The girls ate and drank. And they talked about the beautiful flowers and all their needs. Cora's mother listened in.

"The flowers asked you for worms? Those flowers have been asleep a long time," Cora's mother said with a laugh. "They don't just need worms. They need *worm composting*. You girls can help with that."

"Worm *what*?" Campbell asked.

"Worm composting," repeated Cora's mom. "It's a really neat way to make good soil for a garden. It's also a great way to recycle. You know how we put all our bottles and cans and newspapers in those special bins, right? That's recycling. Well, worms recycle, too. They recycle food scraps by eating them up. In fact, feeding worms food scraps is the easiest way to recycle that I can think of."

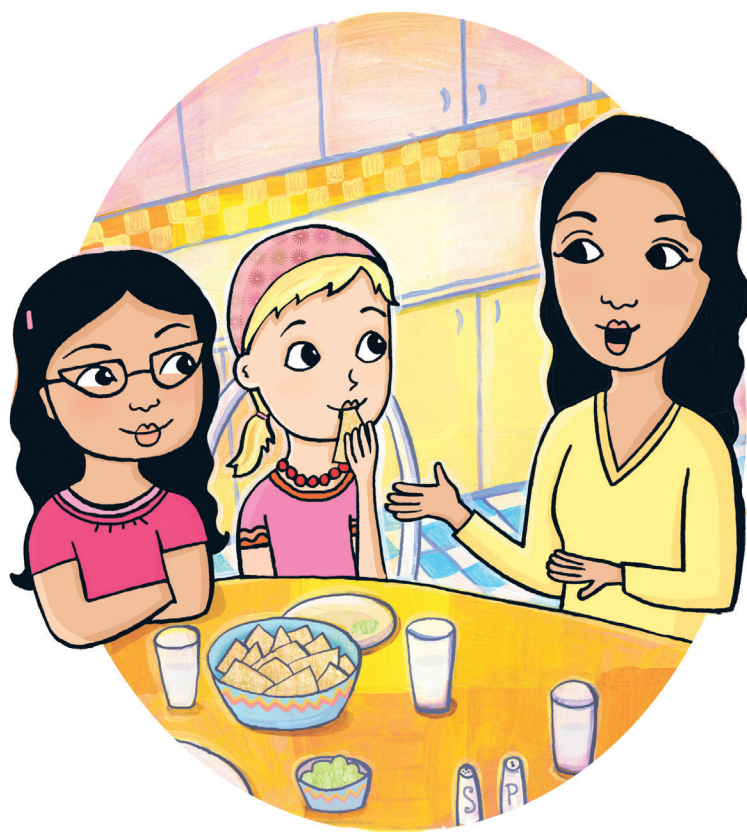


All three girls looked at Cora's mom. They wanted to know more.

"But, Mom," said Cora, "when we recycle bottles and cans and newspapers, a big truck stops by and collects them. Is someone going to collect our worms?"

"No, sweetie, you *keep* your worms. Worms eat up food scraps and turn out worm *castings*. That's a polite word for worm poop. That poop is very good for gardens."

"How come we never heard any of this before?" Cora asked.



Good-bye, Smelly Garbage

If every home had a worm composting box, there would be no food scraps to throw out. The days of smelly garbage would be over.

From Worms to Wonderful

Worms are a gardener's best friend. They make black, spongy stuff that's really good for the soil. It looks like bunches of tiny, black, stuck-together balls. Just mix those little balls with potting soil and sand, and you get perfect plant soil.

"Well, good gardening tips are sometimes hard to come by," Cora's mother replied. "But a lady named Mary did her best to teach people about worm composting. In fact, she is probably as famous for worm composting as Daisy Gordon Low is for Girl Scouts. People called her Worm Woman. She lived in Kalamazoo, in Michigan.

"I can show you girls how to make a worm composting box," Cora's mom added. "You can keep it in the kitchen. And then every week, you can take fresh compost to the garden."

"I don't know," said Chandra, looking glum. "I don't think my mom will let me keep worm poop in our kitchen. That sounds yucky!"

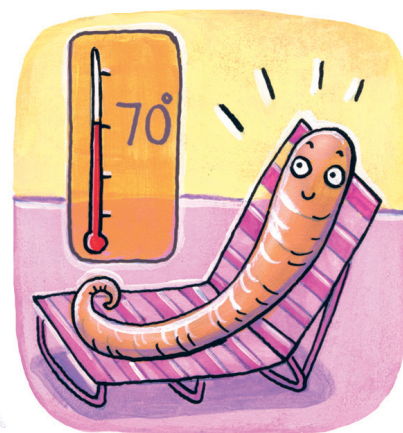
"Well, the worms stay right in their box. It's all very neat and clean. But as long as the weather's mild, you can keep the box in your backyard . . . or in the garage or the basement."

"Still," Chandra said, "wouldn't it be more fun to grow ladybugs? They're so pretty."

"Gardens are about choices, Chandra," Cora's mother said. "Every gardener chooses what she wants to grow."

Worms Like to Be Comfy!

Worms like mild weather, 59 to 77 degrees.



“Basil,” said Campbell, “that’s what I want to grow—for Gerri and Rosie. They want to have more good smells in the garden.”

“Basil is perfect then,” Cora’s mother said. “And maybe, since you love tomatoes, you’ll plant those, too. I can give you seeds for some beautiful **heirloom** tomatoes from Mexico.”

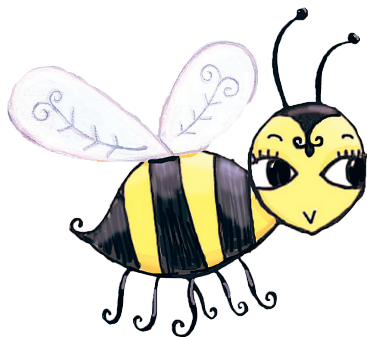
What Do Worms Eat?

Worms like vegetable and fruit scraps best. They will even eat banana peels.



Rainbow of Tomatoes!

Tomatoes grow in all colors—green, yellow, orange, pink. Mexico has a lot of pink tomatoes. Some people say tomatoes came from that country.





“Air loom?” asked Chandra. “What’s an air loom? A loom that floats in the air?”

“No, silly, H-E-I-R-L-O-O-M,” said Campbell. “That means old and special. I learned that from my grandma. She’s always talking to me about heirlooms. But not tomatoes. She talks about heirloom jewelry. She’s said she’s going to give me her heirloom charm bracelet when I turn 8 next year.”

“That must be a beautiful bracelet,” Cora’s mom said. “And heirloom tomatoes are beautiful, too. And delicious.”

WORDS FOR THE WISE!

Sometimes words look and sound alike. Sometimes they don’t. Heirloom starts with an H. But it sounds like it starts with an A!



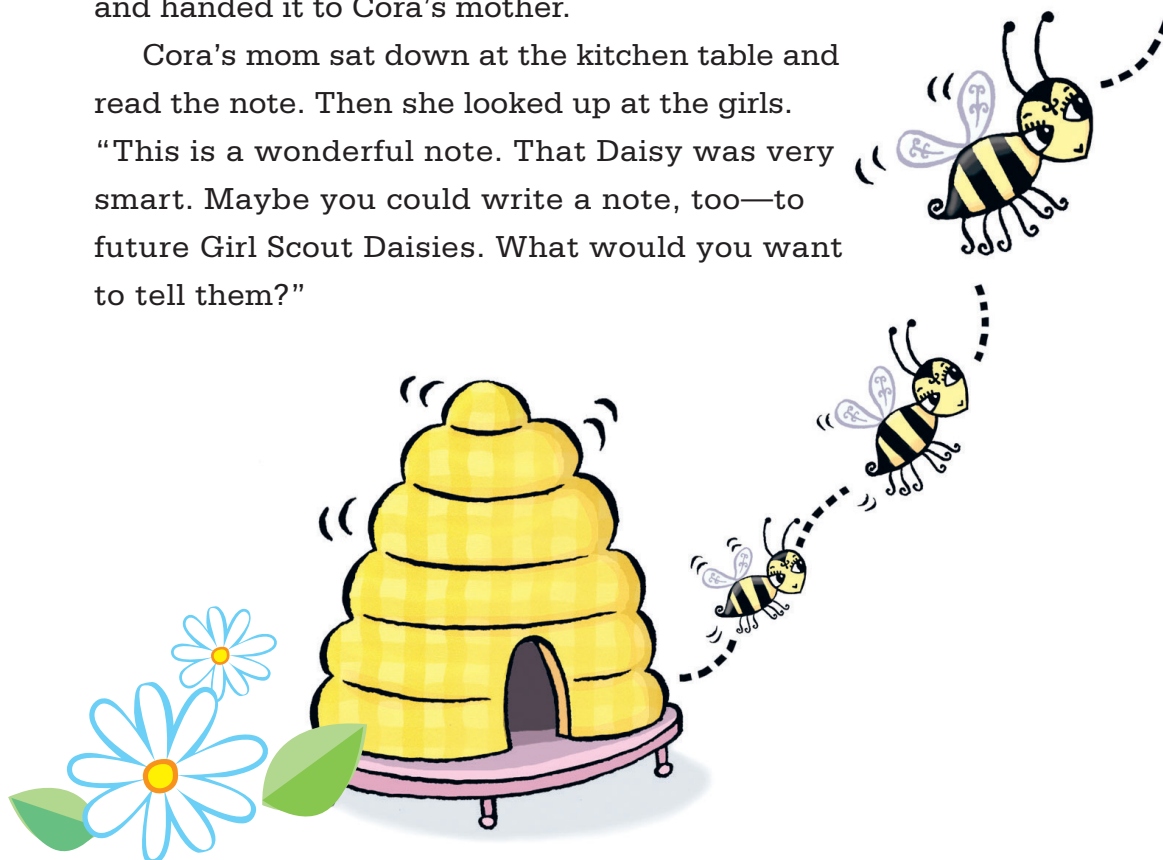
“What about honeybees?” asked Cora. “Clover wants her bee friend, Honey, to have some more bees to play with.”

“Honeybees? Hmm, that’s a tough one,” said Cora’s mom. “Bees aren’t doing so well this year. But I know all the beekeepers in town. Maybe you could visit a beekeeper and get some advice.”

Suddenly, Cora remembered the note from Daisy Gordon Low. “Chandra, show my mom the note,” she said.

Chandra pulled the rusty tin box from her backpack. She opened the box and took out the folded yellow note. She carefully unfolded the paper and handed it to Cora’s mother.

Cora’s mom sat down at the kitchen table and read the note. Then she looked up at the girls. “This is a wonderful note. That Daisy was very smart. Maybe you could write a note, too—to future Girl Scout Daisies. What would you want to tell them?”





"We have no *idea*," Cora, Chandra, and Campbell cried out all at once.

"Well, think about it a while. I'm sure the right message will come to you."

"Let's ask Tamiko," said Cora. "She's good at giving advice. She's almost 9 years old."

"Oh, Cora, I almost forgot," Cora's mother said. "Tamiko called this morning while you were at the garden. I told her to stop by around 1 o'clock, which is—" Cora's mother looked up at the big yellow kitchen clock—"right about now."

Just then the doorbell rang. It was Tamiko, a third-grader from down the street. She held a tray of beautiful little Japanese rice cakes. Some were pink. Some were green. Some were white.

Tamiko said hello to everyone and then set down the tray of cakes. "My mother sent these over for all of you to try," Tamiko said.



"Delicious!" said Cora's mom.

"Mmm, these are good," said Campbell. "Maybe when we finish helping the flowers, we could celebrate with a garden party. We could serve these cakes with tea. Garden parties are supposed to have tea, right?"

"What a great idea," said Cora. "We could start with guacamole and little tomato and basil sandwiches."

"Maybe rolled up like pinwheels so they're nice and pretty," said Chandra. "And we could have mint tea and these pretty cakes."

"Now that sounds like a *perfect* party," Tamiko said.

And everyone agreed.