TIMMY FAILURE
THE BOOK YOU’RE NOT SUPPOSED TO HAVE

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CANDLEWICK PRESS
I am Hawaii Joe.
And my sunglasses are large.
As is my polar bear.
Whom I have named after the state fish of Hawaii:
Humuhumunukunukuapuaa.

“Come here, Humuhumunukunukuapuaa,” I say to my polar bear. “Because I am about to make an announcement to all of the employees of our detective agency.”
(Well, it is not really our detective agency. It is my detective agency. But I like to be inclusive so as not to offend the feelings of Humuhumunukunukuapuaa.)

So I press the red intercom button on my telephone.

“Greetings, employees of Failure, Inc. This is your founder, president, and CEO, joined by my administrative assistant, Humuhumunukunukuapuaa.”

As I talk, I see my employees begin to gather outside the glass wall of my office.

“It is hard to imagine, but it was not long ago that I, Timmy Failure, was doubted by the petty masses, including my rotund best friend, Rollo Tookus; my tangerine-scented classmate, Molly Moskins; and my lifelong foe, She Whose Name Shall Not Be Uttered But Can Now Be Uttered Because We Have Defeated Her and No Longer Care, Corrina Corrina.”

There is a roar of approval from the employees.
“But those days are a distant memory. And now look at us. We are a massive detective agency with over a hundred employees, multiple offices, a global reach, and free donuts every Friday.”

Everyone applauds.

“Speaking of the donuts, I understand there has been a battle going on for the maple bar ones.”

Humuhumunukunukuapuaa nods.

“My administrative assistant here informs me that some of you have been seen racing to the donut box and licking the maple bar donuts so as to claim them as your own.”
A few of the employees look away.

“I am speaking specifically of Liz Bicknell, Carter Hasegawa, and Ann Stott. Please stop licking the maple bar donuts.”

Heads down, Liz, Carter, and Ann leave the group of gathered employees in shame.

“Now some of you are probably wondering how we got here. How I took my grand vision of a detective empire and made it reality.”

Humuhumunukunukuapuaa coughs.

“How we made it reality,” I say, correcting myself.

Humuhumunukunukuapuaa smiles.
“We did it by following one guiding moral principle. A principle that I have had printed upon a banner that will now hang in our office forevermore. And it is this:”
“You are not doing any detective work,” says my mother.

“For how long?” I ask.

“I told you already.”

“But you said six months.”

“And that’s what I meant.”

“But six months? You’ll destroy the agency!”

“We’re not going to keep having this discussion, Timmy.”

“But the punishment doesn’t fit the crime.”

“You ran away from home!”

“I chased a felon across state lines!”¹

¹. All the details of this event are contained in Timmy Failure 4: Sanitized for Your Protection, a modern-day classic of literature.
“Enough, Timmy,” she says, taking a meat loaf out of the oven. “Besides, this will give you more time to concentrate on your schoolwork, and maybe do some other things.”

“What other things?” I mutter, suspicious of my mother, her tone, and her meat loaf.

“I signed you up for piano lessons.”

“You what?” I cry. “You just said I needed more time for my schoolwork!”

“And you’ll have it. Giving up your detective work frees up all that time and more.”
“Oh, my God,” I mutter, staggering backward like a drunken sailor.

“And besides,” adds my mother, “I saw you trying to play the piano when we were at Aunt Colander’s house. You seemed to enjoy it.”

“What are you—a spy?” I shout.

“Nope,” she answers.

“So I guess you saw me help her gardener make his tapioca sculptures out of the bushes. Did you sign me up for tapioca lessons, too?”
“Topiary,” she says. “Tapioca is a pudding. And that reminds me. . . .” She reaches into the fridge and pulls out a bowl of Jell-O. “Tonight’s dessert.”

“I don’t want it,” I say. “My life’s sail is in tatters.”

“Oh, Timmy,” she says, kneeling down to put her arms around me. “Don’t you think you’re being a little dramatic?”


“Oh, okay,” she says. “How ’bout I make you a proposition?”

“Good. I think we studied those in class.”

“You studied prepositions, not propositions.”

“Please stop correcting me,” I answer. “I know what I studied.”

“Fine,” says my mother. “Then I’ll make you a deal.”

“What kind of deal?”

“A fair one.”

“Okay. But I’ll have to run it by my
lawyer. And my accountant, too. He can be very aggressive.”

My mom smiles. “If you promise me you’ll do your best with school and with your piano lessons, maybe I’ll cut your detective ban a little short.”

“How short?”

“When is the last day of school?” she asks.

“In 37 days, 18 hours, and 24 minutes,” I answer.

Not that I was counting.
“That’s a bit sooner than I thought,” my mother says. “But okay, the ban will end then. *IF* you do what I say.”

I hug my mother’s leg like it is a ship’s mast in a tempest.

“Now let go of my leg so I can put raisins on the pudding.”

“Raisins?” I say. “I loathe raisins.”

“They’re not for you,” she says. “They’re for Larry and Merry.”

And hearing those names, I am cast into the rolling sea.
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Stephan Pastis