

Crazy Luke

A Compilation from Jack and Noah's Big Day, Jay Patrick Slagle, published October 2013

Let me be clear. My parents have taught me right from wrong. They've told me not to call people names, or spread rumors, or talk badly about the dead. They've also said that a person is innocent until proven guilty, so I shouldn't judge them.

I'm not a bad person. I mean, sure, I call him Crazy Luke, but everyone calls him that, even his parents. This also isn't a rumor, because a lot of it was in the local newspaper. And this is for certain - Crazy Luke is not dead, although he almost killed himself and half of the neighborhood last summer. Is he guilty? Well, maybe not in a court of law, but he did all of these things, for sure.

I should know. My name is Greta Taylor. I'm 7 years old, and I was Crazy Luke's lawyer.

First, a little background. I live in Dundee, the best neighborhood in the world. My best friend is Mary Kate. Her house is right behind my house, so I see her all the time. That's good. However, Mary Kate has a little brother who is four. {Sigh} Crazy Luke. {Pause} There's a reason - well, actually about two thousand reasons - while his nickname isn't Well-Behaved Luke, Gentleman Luke, Follows-Directions-Luke, or some other cute nickname you'd think a four-year-old boy would have.

Crazy Luke is about the height and shape of a fire hydrant and, when I say that, I don't mean to insult fire hydrants. When I tell people that Crazy Luke lives in my neighborhood, that's really what I mean. I'm sure at some point he actually sleeps in his bed, but mostly he just wanders the neighborhood. He's in my backyard so much that my dad puts a food bowl in our garage for Luke. Once I woke up at three in the morning to go to the bathroom - I know ladies aren't supposed to talk about going to the bathroom, but why else would I be up that early? - and when I looked out the bathroom window, I saw Crazy Luke trying to kill a fifty-foot snake with a shovel. That's why we had to buy a new garden hose.

So when I say that Crazy Luke lives in my neighborhood, what I mean is that he terrorizes our neighborhood. Terrorize isn't a word that most seven-year-olds are supposed to know, but that's what Crazy Luke has done to us. Because of him, I've also learned words like menace, culprit, and bomb squad. It's funny, though. Crazy Luke is kind of cute. He's like a cuddly teddy bear that cuts the hair off all of your Barbie dolls.

Crazy Luke doesn't go to preschool yet, and I suppose that's part of the problem. If he knew what other kids his age were supposed to act like, maybe... I'm guessing... last summer he wouldn't have been on a first-name basis with the fire department.

One day in June Luke came over to our house, and he was supposed to stay there while his Mom went shopping, but after a while he disappeared. Of course, no one looked for him, because frankly, we were all pretty happy he'd left. But he didn't leave. He went up to our attic, crawled through a window, and then sat on our roof. That's like 100 feet up, and Crazy Luke refused to come down. My mom called the fire department, and they got him. Before they left, a fireman handed Mom a bill for one hundred dollars. I guess the fire department charges that much to rescue a cat, and the head fireman dude decided that Luke wasn't much larger than a cat but certainly as annoying.

A week after that, we had a high school friend visiting our house – this guy's name was Ralph, which I suppose is an entirely fine name for a grandpa or a basset hound, but frankly, I just don't approve of it as a name for someone in high school. Anyway, it's a long story, but Crazy Luke threw a large rock at Ralph's head. Crazy Luke wasn't being mean. Crazy Luke really thought the rock would bounce off Ralph's head, just like a soccer ball. Except that it didn't. Crazy Luke seemed surprised when Ralph fell asleep right there in our driveway. Mom called the fire department again, and they brought an ambulance too.

I suppose you could overlook both of those things. But the firecrackers... well, it's pretty hard to overlook firecrackers. Crazy Luke's dad loves fireworks, so when Crazy Luke turned three, his dad taught him how to light firecrackers. Crazy Luke really likes to scare people with his firecrackers. Once we had a party, and Crazy Luke kept lighting firecrackers behind my dad when my dad wasn't watching. After my dad had to change his underwear twice, he put Crazy Luke stay in the garage for the rest of the party. Now I know you're thinking that my dad is mean, but remember, Luke has his own food bowl in our garage, so it's not like he missed dinner. I think that's when Crazy Luke painted one of our cars, but I suppose it could have been someone else.

Later that summer, around noon one day, Crazy Luke blew up a house. You might want to let that one sink in. He. Blew. Up. A. House. It was the Logan's house. Apparently there was a natural gas leak in their house, so when Crazy Luke lit firecrackers on the Logan's back porch, it took about ten seconds before the Logan house exploded. Not a little explosion. A big one. You know, the kind of explosion where the front door falls off its hinges, a piano flies out the living room window, and a bunch of old people having coffee ten miles away stop and say, {in an old lady voice} "Frank, did you hear that?" {Normal voice} Yeah, that kind of explosion.

The fire department came again. This time they brought the police, including the chief of police. He was pretty mad at Crazy Luke, and it seemed like Crazy Luke was going to jail. Which wouldn't have been such a bad thing, if you want to know the truth. Crazy Luke's parents weren't around, so my dad called an attorney – Mr. Dooley grew up with Dad, so he must have been about 98 years old – but Mr. Dooley wasn't a very good lawyer. So I stepped in and defended Crazy Luke, which was hard because he really did. Blow. Up. A. House.

But here's the thing. I had looked up natural gas leaks on the Internet, and found out that if Crazy Luke hadn't lit the firecrackers at noon – when most of the neighborhood was at work – the house might have exploded on its own later in the day, maybe even when the Logans got home, and the explosion might have been even larger. You know, like two pianos might have flown out the living room window. It's possible, I argued, that Crazy Luke actually saved someone's life. The police chief agreed with me, and Crazy Luke didn't go to jail. That time, anyway.

My name is Greta Taylor. I'm seven and I'm Crazy Luke's lawyer. I live in Dundee. It's still the greatest neighborhood in the world, if you don't mind all the fire trucks and exploding houses.

