

Book Two: Martin Series  
2<sup>nd</sup> of 3 short stories

3,545 words

*FIELD TRIP*

by Jessica Scott Kerrin

Martin spied his *Tyrannosaurus rex* poster as soon as he woke up. He bounced out of bed, yanked on his clothes and flew down the stairs.

“Today’s the day!” he shouted to his mom. His class was going to see the new dinosaur exhibit at the museum. He whooped and gave her a hug.

She smiled as she looked up from the piece of paper she was signing.

“What’s that?” he asked.

“Your permission slip,” said his mom. “You’ll need this to go on the trip.”

She set it on the shelf by the front door. “Don’t forget it on your way out.”

“Not a chance,” said Martin.

“I wish I was going to the museum,” she teased as she packed her bag for work.

“Nothing but meetings for me today.”

“I’ll tell you all about it when I get home,” Martin promised.

She ruffled his hair.

Martin gulped down his bowl of Zip Rideout Space Flakes. Then he rushed upstairs to brush his teeth and grab his knapsack.

Hold on! He didn't need his knapsack or even his lunch bag because they were going to eat at the museum cafeteria.

"Bonus!" said Martin to himself as he set down his knapsack and bolted for the door. Without anything to lug, he felt as light as Zip Ridout on a moon walk. Martin jogged easily down the driveway to his bus stop.

"Amazing," muttered Mrs. Phips, his cranky-pants bus driver, as Martin bounded up the steps. For once he hadn't kept her waiting.

And yet as he sat beside his best friend Stuart, something began to niggle at Martin.

"What's wrong?" asked Stuart.

"I don't know," said Martin. "It feels like I've forgotten something."

"That's because you don't have your knapsack," said Stuart with a shrug. "I feel the same way."

"That must be it," said Martin, nodding.

When they arrived at school, the museum bus stood waiting. Martin's other best friend, Alex, was already on board.

Stuart slid in beside Alex. Martin sat across from them behind Laila, who was wearing a dinosaur tooth necklace. The engine of the bus began to rumble as their teacher, Mrs. Keenan, climbed on board.

"Wait," she said to the driver.

Instead of sitting down, she counted heads, then riffled through the papers on her clipboard.

“Martin Bridge?” she called out.

“Here,” replied Martin.

“Come with me, dear,” she said. Martin looked over at Alex and Stuart. Mrs. Keenan only called someone ‘dear’ when they were in big trouble.

Together they stepped off the bus.

“I don’t seem to have your permission slip, Martin,” she said.

“Oh,” said Martin with relief. “That’s because I left it at home. It’s on the shelf by the front door where I won’t forget it. I’ll bring it tomorrow.”

He turned to climb back on the bus, but Mrs. Keenan blocked the doorway.

“I’m afraid you can’t go without a signed permission slip.”

“But it’s at home,” pleaded Martin, opening his hands to show her they were empty.

Mrs. Keenan looked him over. “Tell you what,” she said. “Run inside and ask Mrs. Hurtle to call your mother. If she can talk to your mom directly, I’m sure we can let you come.”

Martin didn’t wait for Mrs. Keenan to finish her sentence. He bolted through the doors and into the school office.

“Quick!” he yelled. “Call my mom! I need her permission for our field trip.”

“All right, all right,” said Mrs. Hurtle, the school secretary. “Calm down!”

She fumbled through stacks of paper and pulled out the list of parent phone numbers. Martin tugged at his shirt. It was sticking to his back. As she dialed the number, Martin paced in front of her desk. He could hear the bus rumbling outside.

“Hello. May I please speak to Mrs. Bridge?” asked Mrs. Hurtle. “Yes, I’ll hold.” She nodded at Martin and covered the mouthpiece. “They’ll see if they can find her,” she whispered to him.

Martin rushed to the window and pulled back the blinds. There stood Mrs. Keenan by the bus, looking at her watch. Martin tapped on the window. She looked up and Martin waved. Mrs. Keenan nodded and waved back.

Then she did something totally unexpected. She climbed on board the bus!

Martin watched in horror as the door snapped shut and the bus eased into the driveway.

“No!” he shouted, realizing his mistake. “No! I wasn’t waving good-bye! I was waving for you to wait! Wait!!”

The bus kept going. It signaled a left turn as Martin banged on the glass. Then it disappeared down the street, belching exhaust. When Martin finally peeled himself away, he left a forehead print on the window.

“Oh, no. Did the bus leave?” asked Mrs. Hurtle as she hung up the phone.

Martin gave the tiniest of nods while staring at his feet.

“I’m sorry about that, Martin. And your mother’s in meetings all morning, so she can’t be reached.”

Martin slumped in the chair in front of Mrs. Hurtle’s desk. His throat felt so tight he could barely swallow.

“The question is, What shall we do with you now?”

Martin shrugged. He wanted to crawl under the desk.

“Wait here a minute,” said Mrs. Hurtle. She left the office, her heels clickety-clacking down the hall.

Martin got up and went to the window. Maybe the bus had turned around and come back for him. He pushed the blinds aside and looked out.

No bus.

With that, all hope inside him died. Martin let go of the blinds. They covered him so that only his feet stuck out.

“Ah, there you are,” said Mrs. Hurtle when she returned. “I’ve arranged for you to spend the day with Mr. Horner’s class.” She said it as if she was announcing they were going to the zoo.

“Mr. Horner? But I had him last year!” Martin wailed from behind the blinds.

“Yes, but that’s the best I can do. Now, come along.”

Martin followed like a prisoner being led to his jail cell.

“Hello, Mr. Bridge,” boomed Mr. Horner when Mrs. Hurtle opened the door.

“Welcome back!”

A sea of faces stared at Martin, and there were a few giggles.

“Why don’t you sit there, beside Clark?”

Martin’s eyes slid across the tops of heads and rested on a familiar face.

Clark.

Martin remembered Clark. Clark was known for eating anything on a dare.

Crayons. Eraser shavings. Even paste.

Last year, Clark had been in the same class as Martin. But Clark had missed a lot of school, so he had to repeat the grade. Martin hadn't seen much of him since then.

Clark nodded, and Martin slid into the desk beside him. He could tell Clark was still in the habit of eating odd things. An assortment of gnawed erasers covered his desk. Clark was chewing on one now.

Martin turned away. The girl on his other side gave a tiny wave. Her face was bright pink, and she batted her eyelashes at him. Martin leaned over to read the name tag on her math sheet.

Zoe Moffatt.

She must be Laila Moffatt's sister. She had big hair, too.

"All right, class," Mr. Horner blared like a foghorn. "Now, where were we?" He proceeded to teach a lesson on adding numbers.

Baby stuff, thought Martin. He scowled.

"Mr. Bridge, perhaps you would tell us the answer to this one," Mr. Horner called, pointing to a problem on the blackboard.

Martin felt a nudge. Zoe handed him a blank piece of paper and a pink pencil with a doll's head stuck on the end. Clark tossed him a soggy eraser with bite marks.

Martin sighed. He took the pencil and used it to push Clark's eraser to the far corner of his desk. Then he scribbled down a calculation and called out his answer.

"Correct," boomed Mr. Horner, giving Martin a thumbs-up.

Martin glanced around. Clark was tearing strips of paper and shoving them in his mouth. On his other side, Zoe was drawing hearts with Martin's initials all over her math sheet.

Martin vowed to stare straight ahead until the recess bell rang. When it did, he trudged outside to the playground.

“Hey, Martin,” said Clark as he bounced a ball near Martin’s feet. “What’s up?”

Martin stood with his hands shoved in his pockets. Without Alex or Stuart, recess was as dull as the news on television.

“Nothing,” he muttered.

“Want to play?” asked Clark. *Bounce. Bounce.*

“No, thanks,” said Martin.

“Why not?” asked Clark. *Bounce. Bounce.*

“I don’t feel like it,” said Martin.

Clark stood beside Martin and bounced the ball some more. Martin wanted to kick the ball away. Politeness held him back.

“Hey, Clark,” someone called from the field. “Show us that ball trick again.”

“Got to run!” said Clark.

Martin watched as Clark dazzled the crowd by somehow spinning the ball on his finger. Others began to try. It looked like fun. Maybe if Clark had asked one more time, Martin would have joined them. He sighed and scuffed at the ground.

Martin thought about the permission slip on the shelf by the front door. He hadn’t known that a piece of paper could be so important. He had seen his mom sign a hundred things. Book order forms. Report cards. Tests he brought home. Nothing could compare to that permission slip.

His throat tightened. It was getting hard to swallow again.

“Hey, Martin.”

Zoe smiled up at him. She held a pink jump rope.

“I was skipping.”

“Uh-huh.”

“Do you want to watch me skip?”

“Maybe later,” said Martin.

“What’s the matter?” asked Zoe, her face falling.

“I’m missing my field trip,” muttered Martin. “I don’t want to be here.”

“Oh,” said Zoe in a skinny voice. “So you’re only with us for today?”

“Of course,” snapped Martin. “What’d you think?”

“I thought you might be like Clark,” said Zoe. She chewed on her lower lip.

“Like Clark? You mean fail a grade?”

“No, I mean like Clark who is a lot of fun,” said Zoe, hands on hips. She wasn’t batting her eyelashes anymore.

“Clark? Clark who eats erasers?”

“So what? He knows lots of ball tricks. And besides, he makes us things.”

“Like what?”

“Things out of tape. He’s very good.”

“That’s ... bizarre!” It was the only word Martin could think of.

“It is not!” said Zoe in a tone like the one his mom used whenever Martin shoved everything under his bed, then told her his room was clean.

“Go back to your skipping,” said Martin with exasperation. He waved her away.

“I will!” said Zoe.



She stomped past all the hopscotch games on the playground before spinning around.

“You’re nothing like Clark!” she shouted.

The recess bell rang. Martin ducked into the school and slid behind the safety of his desk.

“Hey, Clark,” called Zoe when she flounced into the classroom. “May I borrow an eraser?”

“Sure,” said Clark.

He tossed her one. It whizzed past Martin and plopped on Zoe’s desk.

“Thank you, Clark,” said Zoe. There was a mocking edge in her voice as if she was going to make a big production.

She proceeded to vigorously erase Martin’s initials from all her hearts. Martin pulled his shoulders to his burning ears.

When Mrs. Baddeck came in with her music box, there was a mad rush as everyone jockeyed for the popular instruments.

“Here, Clark. Your favorite,” said Zoe, handing him the tambourine. She managed to grab the triangle for herself.

Martin hung back, so he got what was left.

Scratch sticks.

Martin hated scratch sticks. Their grating sound was bad enough, but even worse was Zoe ringing the triangle as loudly as she could right beside his ear.

Mr. Horner returned after music. When everyone settled, he pulled out his chair and sat down. He opened a book and cleared his throat. That was the signal for everyone to lay their heads on their desks and listen.

“Now, where’d we leave off?” boomed Mr. Horner. “Oh, yes. Zip Rideout was traveling back home to Earth when suddenly he had to veer off to dodge a hurtling meteor.”

Martin knew the story well. It was the same one Mr. Horner had read to his class last year, and since then it had been made into a movie. After avoiding a collision, Zip Rideout realized that the meteor was now plunging toward Earth’s moon.

Mr. Horner read and read. At last he came to a dramatic point. All heads lifted, and everyone leaned forward as Mr. Horner continued.

Zip was trying to send a warning to Earth, but his radio had been damaged by flying debris. The crackling signal got worse and worse, then suddenly ... silence.

Mr. Horner paused and surveyed the class before clapping the book shut.

“And that’s where we’ll stop today,” he announced.

“Awww!!!” groaned the class.

Martin knew how they felt.

“Don’t worry,” he called out. “Zip figures out how to trap flying rocks from the meteor’s tail into a huge space net, and he swings the net into the path of the meteor. When the meteor hits the rocks, it’s thrown off course and misses the moon completely!”

A hush filled the room. Jaws dropped. Eyes widened. The only sound was the scrape of Mr. Horner’s chair as he stood.

“Well, thank you for that, Mr. Bridge,” he said, his voice as cool as the dark side of the moon. “I’m sure the suspense would have killed us.”

“Sorry,” whispered Martin.

The lunch bell rang.

Chairs angrily scraped across the floor, making sounds like a pack of barking dogs.

For the second time that day, Martin wanted to crawl under a desk. He sat until everyone had left the room.

“Martin?”

Martin looked up. Mrs. Hurtle stood in the doorway with Clark.

“Your mom’s coming to visit during noon hour. In the meantime, Clark has offered to share his lunch with you.”

Martin trudged behind Clark to the lunchroom. They sat near the window.

“Let’s see what we have today,” said Clark with gusto. He flipped open his pirate lunch box as if it held a treasure.

“Ham and cheese okay?”

“Sure,” muttered Martin. “Thanks.”

Martin pried the sandwich apart for inspection. Cheese. Ham. No sign of eraser shavings.

“Martin?” said Clark. “You haven’t had a good morning, have you?”

“No,” admitted Martin as he took a trial bite. The sandwich wasn’t bad. But it wasn’t the hamburger he had been looking forward to at the museum cafeteria.

“Well,” said Clark. “Maybe the afternoon will be better.”

“Fat chance,” Martin grumbled. “I’ll still be stuck here while my whole class is at the museum.”

“Oh. The new dinosaur exhibit.” Clark nodded sympathetically. “I heard they even have a *T. rex*.”

Martin crossed his arms and frowned.

“Still,” said Clark, “we have science after lunch. Mr. Horner always has fun experiments. Remember?”

“Fun?” Martin repeated with an edge to his voice. His face grew red.

Just then Zoe plunked down beside Clark and glared at Martin.

“Well, not as much fun as the museum,” agreed Clark, “but —”

“But what?” Martin snapped. “You don’t know how it feels to be left behind!”

Cripes. As soon as the words were out, Martin knew he had gone too far.

Everyone stared.

Clark said nothing.

“Your mom’s here,” said Zoe flatly.

Martin followed her gaze out the window and saw his mom hurrying across the parking lot. He bolted for the door.

“Oh, Martin,” said his mom as she hugged him. “I’m so sorry about what happened.”

“Can we go home?” he asked, knowing the answer.

“No, honey. I have to go back to work. But I’ll tell you what. This weekend, how about I take you to the dinosaur exhibit?”

“Okay,” said Martin in a gulpy voice. He wanted to go, but it wouldn’t be the same without his friends.

“I hear you’re in Mr. Horner’s class today.”

Martin shuddered at the thought of going back.

“Clark’s in that class, right?”

Martin shot her a look. “Why?”

“Well, he must be a very nice boy. He got Mrs. Hurtle to call and ask me to bring you a treat. He said you needed cheering up.”

“He did?”

Martin’s mom pulled two Zip Rideout Space Bars from her purse.

“Here’s one for you. I thought you could give the other one to Clark.”

“Thanks,” whispered Martin.

After his mom left, Martin sat on the school steps and ate his gooey chocolate treat. It didn’t make him feel one bit better, so he ate the second one, too.

When the bell rang, Martin plodded back inside. Mr. Horner taught a science lesson on composting, and everyone jostled to pile their lunch leftovers into a bucket of soil. Clark got to stir the concoction. The class squirmed and squealed in delight, but Martin remained seated. Instead, he studied the graffiti on his desk.

After a lonely recess during which Clark was nowhere in sight, it was time for geography.

“Pop quiz!” Mr. Horner announced, handing out stacks of tests to those in the front row. “Take one and pass the rest back.”

Martin raised his hand. “Do I have to take the test, too?”

“I’m sure you’ll do fine, Mr. Bridge,” boomed Mr. Horner. “It’s material you’ll remember from last year.”

Martin looked at the questions. They were fill-in-the-blanks. The capital of China is \_\_\_\_\_. The capital of France is \_\_\_\_\_. The capital of Mexico is \_\_\_\_\_.

Martin couldn’t remember. Panic made his stomach flip-flop.

He scanned the list. It went on and on.

Martin took a deep breath and picked up his pencil. He filled in some of the blanks, but not many.

Never mind. Mr. Horner always included a bonus question. He would gain marks there. Martin read the question.

Name the oceans of the world.

Pacific. Atlantic. Indian. Arctic. Antarctic.

Good. At least he remembered those.

“Time’s up,” announced Mr. Horner. “Pass your quiz to your neighbor for marking.”

Wanting nothing more to do with Martin, Zoe passed her test the other way. That left Martin with only one option.

Clark.

“Here, Martin,” Clark said, handing over his test. Martin took it and reluctantly gave his to Clark.

Mr. Horner read out the answers one by one.

*Check. Check. Check.*

Clark was getting all the answers right.

*Check. Check. Check. Check. Check.*

He got the bonus question, too!

“Okay, class. Now add up the marks.”

It didn’t take long to add because Clark didn’t have a single wrong answer.

When he got his test back, Martin’s ears burned. Getting the bonus question hadn’t been enough. Nine out of twenty was written neatly across the top of Martin’s quiz.

Zoe leaned over to look. Then she whispered something to her neighbor. They giggled.

Martin covered his test with his arms. What if everyone found out about his mark? It was probably the lowest in the class! Would that mean he’d have to stay in this grade for the rest of the year? That he wasn’t just left behind today, he’d be left behind forever? Cripes!

Martin began to chew on an eraser.

“How did we all do?” Mr. Horner asked jovially.

The class murmured back.

“Zoe,” called Mr. Horner. “Any problems?”

“I got sixteen,” answered Zoe brightly. She shot Martin a wicked smile.

Mr. Horner followed her gaze and turned to Martin.

“Mr. Bridge,” he inquired. “I trust you did well?”

“I ... I ...,” stammered Martin. Once again, he wanted to crawl under a desk.

“I marked Martin’s test,” Clark piped up. “He really knows his oceans.”

Martin looked closely at Clark. Was he making fun of him?

But no. Clark merely smiled.

“Well then,” boomed Mr. Horner. “Why don’t we start packing up? The day’s almost over.”

Martin folded his test again and again until it was a tight square. Then he shoved it into his pocket along with the two chocolate bar wrappers.

The end-of-school bell rang. After making sure Zoe was nowhere in sight, Martin sidled up to Clark in the coatroom.

“Thanks,” he whispered. “You know. About my test.” He handed back Clark’s eraser.

Clark pocketed it and shrugged.

“But you ...,” fumbled Martin, desperate for Clark to forgive him. “You did really well.”

“You mean for someone left behind?” asked Clark quietly.

Martin stared at his feet while Clark looked him over.

Finally, Clark spoke. “Look, Martin. I *do* know how it feels to be left behind, so I made you something at recess.”

Martin watched in awe as Clark pulled the most exquisite *T. rex* from his knapsack. It was made entirely of tape. He handed it to Martin.

“Thanks,” said Martin, his voice full of surprise.

Clark turned to go.

Martin cupped the dinosaur in his hands and examined it from all sides. Clark’s gift was as thoughtful as two Zip Rideout Space Bars. As wonderful as remembering all the oceans. And as precious as a forgotten permission slip.



“Wait!” said Martin, looking up.

Clark paused, one hand on the door.

“My mom’s taking me to the dinosaur exhibit this weekend,” Martin said in a rush, “and it’d be great to bring a friend.”

Clark turned around with a wide smile, as if knowing where Martin was headed.

Martin pressed on, his voice now full of hope.

“Would you like to come?”