Mister Ezkiel loved caps and traveling. He religiously brought back a cap from every place he visited. So far, he had visited the Desert of the Water Monkey and gone swimming with the Stapler Starfish in the Gulf of Spaghetti Sand. He had been to the Marshmallow Marsh, the Sunbeam-Slide Glacier, and the Lair of the Panting Pails. But that wasn’t even half of the long list of places Mister Ezkiel wanted to visit.

What kept him from exploring every inch of the world? Hotels. The lingering musty smells, moth-eaten sheets, horrendous lighting, a noisy baby next door, the heavy-footed upstairs neighbour doing midnight jumping jacks. Mister Ezkiel hated staying at hotels with a fiery passion.

So one chilly evening in the Kibble Kennel, Mister Ezkiel decided it was time to come up with something new. He sat down by the desk light and worked until he had a solution. Mister Ezkiel cut his trip short and returned home. His perfect plan simply could not wait.

A home in a briefcase. Mister Ezkiel was going to build one. The first thing he did was to pick his favourite blue briefcase with a brass latch. Then he attached a metal slide stolen from the neighbourhood park to the opening of the suitcase, this would be his way in. The second thing he had installed was a ladder to get out of the suitcase; he quickly learnt that climbing up a steep slide was quite tiring. And when climbing up the ladder got too tiring, Mister Ezkiel installed a manually operated elevator with a pulley, a rope and a large bucket.

Next came a train to help him get around the suitcase. When the mall Santa was not looking, Mister Ezkiel grabbed the toy train that was a part of the Christmas display and stashed it into the suitcase. He attached a grabber arm to the train that would take the tracks from behind the train and put
them in front–his tracks would never end and he could make it to the ends of
the suitcase if he wished to. Of course, he also had a lavish room for himself
with a walk-in closet where he stored all his garments, except his caps. They
had their own room.

There was also a stable for Mister Ezkiel’s horses–they made for
excellent transportation around the places he visited. Both Cereal and Serial
had large chambers of their own with full length mirrors and dispensers that
gave them every flavour of hay.

Once Mister Ezkiel was satisfied with his suitcase, he grabbed it and
resumed his travelling. All he had to do now, when he was in a new place,
was find a quiet hidden corner (like under a bush or inside a half filled trash
bin) to stash his briefcase and retire for the night. But pretty soon Mister
Ezkiel learnt the hazards of living in an old briefcase.

On one of his trips, he and Cereal got out of the briefcase to explore
Projectile Pillows, only for Mister Ezkiel to realise he had forgotten their
helmets. He told Cereal to wait while he went back inside to get them. The
briefcase shut behind him and the latch with the loosened spring fell, sealing
Mister Ezkiel inside. Sadly, the suitcase only had one exit. It was sheer luck
that Cereal was outside and could open the latch to let Mister Ezkiel out.
Since that harrowing experience Mister Ezkiel used a bobby pin to prop open
the briefcase.

Which is why Mister Ezkiel went into a panic when he heard the latch
shut. And when Mister Ezkiel’s world started gently swaying from side to
side, he knew he was in trouble.

Getting to Goat-Ville had been no easy feat. It had been a harrowing
five legged journey with some rowing, sledding, and a lot more negotiating.
So it wasn’t surprising when Mister Ezkiel didn’t spend a whole lot of time
searching for a place to stash the briefcase. Tired as he was, he had shoved
his home for the night under an overgrown bush in the backyard of a house.
It was already late in the day, no one would be looking under any bushes.
Except Mister Ezkiel was clearly wrong. Someone had picked up the suitcase
and was taking it with them.

Mister Ezkiel bolted for the exit. Was it a useful move? Probably not.
Using the sides of the ladder to steady himself, Mister Ezkiel climbed. After
many pauses and a few almost-falls he made it to the top just as the swaying
stopped. There was a reverberating thud when the briefcase was put down.
The latch clicked open.
Mister Ezkiel’s initial thought was to burst out of his briefcase and confront the thief. But what if this thief had a weapon pointed at him? Then again the thief wasn’t likely to guess that there was a person inside. Perhaps Mister Ezkiel could quickly head back down and arm himself with a knife from the kitchen? He should have decided faster. The thief opened the briefcase.

Now, Mister Ezkiel braced himself for a thug looking for money in a discarded briefcase or a homeless person looking for a place to store all their possessions. What he was not expecting was a round face with even rounder eyes, full dimpled cheeks framed by short, loose curls that matched the dark brown of the eyes. Curiosity morphed into astonishment with a hint of fear as the face jumped back, allowing Mister Ezkiel to take a look around.

He was in a room with a different bright colour on each wall. The ceiling had glow-in-the-dark stars and the room’s door had a set of hooks. Hanging on them were a denim cap and what looked like a mini circular tapestry. A small bed shaped like a duck took up the corner of the room under an arched window. The floor was littered with toys of all kinds—a watch that didn’t actually tell time, rubber darts, a few picture books and a pair of googly-eyed glasses. Mister Ezkiel was in a toddler’s room. And sure enough when he returned to the face, it was a toddler’s face attached to a toddler’s body in goat pajamas. The little girl stared at him, a look of mild confusion and not so mild excitement on her face. It was Mister Ezkiel’s turn to be afraid. Surely this little girl knew a stranger in her room was cause for caution, she was going to call her parents any moment now. She pointed at the door and it looked like she was about to do just that but to Mister Ezkiel’s surprise the girl turned to him and said something that sounded like a question.

Mister Ezkiel hadn’t picked up any new languages from the places he visited so whatever the girl said was lost on him. She was pointing at the closed door so Mister Ezkiel assumed she was asking how he entered without using the door. Or maybe she was saying that was the way out. But he couldn’t very well stroll out of this girl’s room and chance an encounter with the others who lived in the house. The girl pointed at the door and repeated what she had said. Perhaps she was not asking a question. Perhaps she was threatening to call the others in the house. Though it would be lost in translation, Mister Ezkiel told the little girl not to call anyone. That he didn’t mean any harm. That things would be splendid if she could return the briefcase to its spot outside. Hearing Mister Ezkiel speak a foreign language piqued the girl’s interest. She carefully approached the briefcase with Mister Ezkiel’s head sticking out of the corner. Mister Ezkiel tried telling her again,
hoping she might understand some of it. But she was no longer paying him any attention. The slide had been spotted.

It was the pure joy of a child finding something new and amusing that fueled the little girl as she jumped on the slide and slid all the way to the bottom. Mister Ezkiel was not prepared for this! Muttering to himself, annoyed and confused, he hurried down the ladder. When he reached the bottom he found the girl looking around in wonder. She quickly jumped into the ball-pit near the base of the slide—a failed attempt at cushioning the end of Mister Ezkiel’s trips down it. She flailed around for a bit until she saw the train. Before Mister Ezkiel could blink the girl was in it, beckoning him to come. Perhaps taking her around his home would be incentive enough to get this girl with the round eyes into helping him leave her house. After all, the briefcase was an interesting place for a child to explore. Mister Ezkiel started the train.

The first stop, he decided, would be the newly added slushy bar. There were three large dispensers—a lime flavoured yellow slushy, a typical cola slushy and a pink one that was supposed to be strawberry but really wasn’t. Each of the dispensers had a cap to match their slushy colours. Mister Ezkiel handed the girl a large cup and wasn’t overly surprised when she went straight to the pink.

With a refilled cup splashing pink liquid on the floor of the speeding train and a small child with a manic, sugar high smile, Mister Ezkiel headed to the place he knew would win the girl over. The wall of caps looked as magnificent as ever. Mister Ezkiel stood in front of the wall with his hands planted on his hips wearing a look of equal parts pride and admiration. The look was quickly wiped off his face when the girl didn’t give the colour coded wall a second glance. She stared at Mister Ezkiel, as though expecting him to do something more. Mister Ezkiel pointed to the wall again, trying to draw the girl’s attention to its brilliance. She saw him desperately pointing to the wall and shrugged before reaching for one of the caps. A strangled cry left Mister Ezkiel and the girl shrank back as he put himself in her path, blocking the caps. No one touched his caps. The girl looked confused, threw her hands in the air and said something in an exasperated tone. Mister Ezkiel decided the cap room wasn’t the right place for a sugar bomb waiting to go off.

When he had decided to take the girl to the Laser-Tag cove, Mister Ezkiel had intended to play and have her watch him shoot at the glow-in-the-dark stuffed animals. So when the little girl decided she would be the one using the gun, Mister Ezkiel was forced to sit in the corner and sulk. The
sulking, however, was purely voluntary. But he couldn’t deny that the girl was actually pretty good. She was really giving those stuffed animals hell!

After hours of Mister Ezkiel trying to get the girl away from the cove, she finally gave up when the sugar high died and she stumbled into the train. It was time to take her home. Her sleep lidded eyes made Mister Ezkiel think she wouldn’t make it up the ladder. They both climbed into the bucket and Mister Ezkiel used the rope to pull them up. When the girl had clumsily gotten out of the briefcase, Mister Ezkiel told her that he hoped she’d had a good time and that he would appreciate it if the briefcase could be put back outside. He even pointed to the garden visible outside the window for good measure. The girl observed him for a while before nodding. Alright then! Mister Ezkiel could go right back to exploring Goat-Ville tomorrow. This evening would be just a tiny blip during the trip.

Mister Ezkiel lowered himself into the briefcase so he could be carried out, inconspicuously. The briefcase was shut, picked up but stopped moving far too soon for them to have reached the backyard. Mister Ezkiel wanted to see where he was but something above prevented him from opening the briefcase all the way. He peeked through the crack and found himself eye level with the toy-strewn floor. He was trapped under the duck bed with a little girl sound asleep in its covers.

Mister Ezkiel started awake when the briefcase moved with a jolt. Last night, after the girl had stashed him under her bed, he had tried and failed to wake her up so she might leave him outside. There was no waking up a child who had crashed after such a sugar high. Today when the briefcase was opened the girl’s face was waiting right at the opening. She pointed at her room’s door and asked Mister Ezkiel the same question she had yesterday. Mister Ezkiel held up his palms to show he still didn’t understand. The little girl scoffed and slid down the slide without waiting for an invitation.

Today Mister Ezkiel would be more persuasive. Slushies and Laser-Tag hadn’t been enough? He could do better. Mister Ezkiel considered taking her to the chocolate fountain. It was sure to win her over, but at such an early hour, it wouldn’t be one of his finest ideas. Instead the two of them rode the train to the kitchen where the girl was shown pictures of different breakfast foods and she settled on a berry smoothie. Mister Ezkiel whipped one up thinking it was rather responsible of her to make this choice. Until the girl drank it. Her face scrunched up in disgust and she stuck out her tongue trying to get rid of the lingering taste. The girl said something and handed the tall glass back. This was not a good start to more persuasive bribing. However,
when Mister Ezkiel sat down with his extra strong coffee to watch the girl wolf down a stack of pancakes he felt hopeful.

The magic that was this toddler’s forgetfulness really worked in Mister Ezkiel’s favour. By the time they were settled into the train for the day’s first stop, the berry smoothie fiasco was forgotten and the girl looked ready to take on a day in the bizarre briefcase. Today’s first stop would be the theatre. Mister Ezkiel had a plan. He would play a movie about a parakeet that, after deep contemplation from its owners, is finally set free of its cage. If that wasn’t the most obvious hint, Mister Ezkiel didn’t know what was. But such perfection wasn’t meant to exist. When the girl noticed the train was headed towards the briefcase’s exit, she got skittish, pulling at Mister Ezkiel’s arm to turn around. He tried explaining to her that they were actually headed towards the theatre and how exciting watching a movie could be but the girl wouldn’t listen. Mister Ezkiel didn’t know how many more free passes he would get that day—one seemed like plenty—so he turned the train away from the movie theatre.

Perhaps the puzzle wall was too complicated for a toddler. For one, it was a puzzle wall, the girl couldn’t reach the squares of the sliding puzzle that were all the way at the top. There were just too many moving pieces for her to comprehend. Mister Ezkiel helped her out for a while before the girl gave up and wanted to do something else. Horse riding was a bust. The girl wouldn’t go within six feet of Cereal and Serial. Interest in the trampoline room was quick to wane—jumping from one trampoline to the next got tiring pretty fast. Mister Ezkiel tried the cap wall again—the result was no different. The library was a no—Mister Ezkiel should have known better. So was the life sized snow globe and the roller skating rink. Finally when the two of them were leaving the arts and crafts room after a short-lived session of making animals out of pipe-cleaners, the little girl stood with her legs planted in a wide stance, her hands balled into tiny fists. She looked up at Mister Ezkiel and said something in a stern tone—or what passed for stem in toddler-speak. When Mister Ezkiel’s lack of comprehension grew embarrassing under the toddler’s scathing look, she let out an exaggerated sigh and held up finger guns. This Mister Ezkiel understood. When she was back in the Laser-Tag cove with the gun in her hand, shooting away at the targets, Mister Ezkiel thought he had cracked the girl.

Yet it would seem Laser-Tag wasn’t a bandage big enough to cover all the bruises left by the many failures of the day because once they called it a day in the suitcase and the girl was safely deposited back in her room, she promptly slid the briefcase under the duck.
The next two days weren’t all too different. When the house around her fell into silence, the girl would pull out the briefcase and slide inside. A short while would be spent doing something new in the briefcase of never ending entertainment until it was time for Laser-Tag. Mister Ezkiel didn’t stop to think about how the girl’s parents never seemed to miss her when she wasn’t in her room. The only thing on his mind was getting out of this house. His bribing was failing but Mister Ezkiel needed to get out. The secrets of a whole new place were waiting to be unravelled but here he was, trapped and entertaining a round eyed toddler. Although, if he was being completely honest, getting to show this little girl around and have her look at him in such open awe, made Mister Ezkiel feel like somewhat of a minor god. But this didn’t count for much when he remembered he was being held hostage on vacation. On the fifth day being stuck in a toddler’s room, Mister Ezkiel ran out of patience.

That evening, before the girl could slide the briefcase under her bed, Mister Ezkiel leapt out. He grabbed his briefcase, and, for good measure, the small denim cap that was still hanging on the girl’s door, before exiting the room. Outside, he found himself in a narrow, thickly carpeted hallway that ended with a staircase leading down. Framed photographs were hung up on the walls of the hallway at regular intervals. One showed the girl, smiling a gap-toothed smile as she played in the sand with a shovel and a pail. Another showed her riding a tricycle. As stealthily as he could, Mister Ezkiel made it to the top of the staircase. He peered down and could see a partially hidden kitchen on the left and a living room on the right. The exit had to be beyond the living room, right? Mister Ezkiel carefully stole down the stairs, looking for any signs of being discovered. He could hear nothing and quickly slipped past the kitchen, into the living room. The whole house had an air of stillness to it. It took very little for Mister Ezkiel to realise there wasn’t an exit around there. He headed back the way he came to find one elsewhere. Which is exactly when the shouting started.

Just as Mister Ezkiel was about to cross into the kitchen, a burly woman with a shorn head, made her way out of there. If he had been any slower in hiding behind a tall succulent, Mister Ezkiel would have been spotted. The woman was bellowing into a phone she held. Mister Ezkiel might not have understood what she was saying but the harshness of her tone was enough to keep him quaking in fear. In her red t-shirt and faded, ripped jeans he had no trouble believing she had been a school bully once upon a time. She was now pacing, in and out of the kitchen. Mister Ezkiel’s chances of slipping past her only got slimmer.
Shaking behind the succulent, he patiently waited for the woman to leave so he could slip past the kitchen and look for an exit on the other side of the house. The bellowing never stopped and Mister Ezkiel's knees began to wobble. If he was this nervous, Mister Ezkiel couldn't begin to imagine how scared the person on the other end of the call must have been. But both of them were spared because very soon, the bellowing stopped and the house was void of voices. Mister Ezkiel listened very closely. There was no sound. He carefully stole into the kitchen only to see the woman making herself a sandwich, her back turned to him. Just as she was about to turn around and grab a butter knife, Mister Ezkiel sprinted to the stairs. He didn't think the woman would think kindly of a stranger in her house, especially if she found out that the stranger had been camping out in her daughter's room.

Back at the top Mister Ezkiel paused to calm his racing heart and heavy breathing. He peered downstairs—the woman seemed completely engrossed in her sandwich. Right now, there wasn't much Mister Ezkiel could do. As he turned to make his way back to the girl's room, he spotted a photo that he'd missed earlier. It was the burly woman from downstairs, an even burler man and between them, swinging in the air with one hand in each of theirs, was the girl. Mister Ezkiel gulped.

Mister Ezkiel stepped back into the girl's room and the knowing look she wore sent him into a determined frenzy. He beelined for the window to partially get into the suitcase and flop out onto the backyard. He grabbed the window's handle and yanked. It didn't budge. The girl let out a little giggle from where she sat on her bed. He tried again only to realize it was locked, probably because he was in a child's room. Mister Ezkiel's shoulders slumped. The girl asked her question. Mister Ezkiel ignored her and returned to his briefcase. Not long after, he felt it slide under the duck.

It would take Mister Ezkiel a long time to figure out how to escape. With daily lazer-tag and slushy runs, he would get lost in the comfortable rhythm of it all and would sometimes forget escaping was something he needed to consider. Perhaps his escape would come in the next few weeks, perhaps a couple years. Perhaps Mister Ezkiel would grow old and shrivelled before he escaped. It was a good thing he had built himself a luxurious home.

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When Alora turned four her parents gifted her a magnetic dartboard. It very quickly became her absolute favourite thing. The only problem: nobody ever played with her, her parents and friends quickly got bored of the
game. Alora became pretty good at the game after playing for hours on end but it got lonely. So when she found a briefcase in her backyard, Alora thought it could be a new toy that others would enjoy playing with. But when she opened the suitcase a man popped out! Perhaps he would play darts with her. She’d asked him but got no reply. This didn’t really matter for very long because the Laser-Tag cove in the briefcase of wonder was way better. Shooting the moving stuffed animal targets after the stationary dart board was exhilarating. Since the man was kind enough to share his Laser-Tag with her, Alora offered her own dart game to him before going into the suitcase every day. When he wouldn’t show any interest, she would slide on down. Her summer days were filled with train rides, lasers and semi-frozen pink drinks. She even made friends with the two horses that lived down there. If Alora lived out the rest of her days like this, she would be perfectly content. Perhaps that is exactly what she did.