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Just Call Me Kate

Dannah Gresh

author of Secret Keeper Girl

and Janet Mylin

Moody Publishers
CHICAGO



When I got home after school, my mom handed me a huge piece of homemade lemon meringue pie.

“Hi, Katie. How was school?”



“Mom, *please* try to call me Kate! I’m twelve years old now. Katie sounds like a little kid’s name!”

She gave me a hug. “Honey, you’ve always been our little Katie and that’s a pretty difficult thing to change.”

I sighed. “I know. I know. Just please try. Okay, Mom?”



“Okay,” she said. “So did anything interesting happen at school today?”



“**No.** Nope. Nothing different happened at all. I didn’t do anything different or anything. Just the same old boring day of school I always have. I’m gonna go eat this in my room. See you later, Mom!” I bolted up to my room before she asked me anything else. I’m a terrible liar and if she kept probing, I would have ended up spilling everything about the bathroom wall.



It doesn’t usually take me very long to do my homework, but my brain was totally spinning. It was hard to think about anything except Zachary and how he might react when he finds out what I did. I finally closed my social studies book when I smelled burgers cooking on the grill through my open bedroom window.



“Meow! Meow!” Sharkey, my cat, was curled up on my bed and wanted some attention. I stroked his long white fur and began telling him about what I did in school that morning. Sharkey’s almost always on my bed. He weighs twenty-five pounds and doesn’t move much. Just as I was explaining the part about drawing the heart around Zachary’s name, I heard the front door slam and loud boy voices making their way into the kitchen. It was my brother, Pete, and his best friend, whose name happens to be . . . Zachary Donaldson.

Yes. I have a major crush on my seventeen-year-old brother’s best friend.

After I gave Sharkey one more good scratch under his chin, I looked in the mirror and made sure my ponytails weren’t crooked. Then I cleaned the smudges off my glasses with the bottom of my shirt and headed downstairs.

My brother and Zachary were going over that day’s football practice.

“Dude! You so totally rocked the house when you threw that pass!” Zachary said.

“I heard *that*, Z-Dog! It was sa-weet!” my brother agreed.

They speak in kind of a different language. I pretty much get it, which is good because sometimes my parents need an interpreter.



“Hey, Pete. Hey, Zachary.” I blushed as they both gave my ponytails a tug when I walked by them.

“Hey, little sis,” said Pete.

“Whussup, Kate the Great?” Zachary said. It’s so cool that he and Pete both call me Kate, not Katie or my full name, Kaitlin. When I become president of the United States, I plan to go by Kaitlin, but not now. I’m saving it.

I grabbed some soda and opened it, trying to be chill, like I didn’t care if they were there.

Pete turned back to Zachary and said, “Dude! I’m totally stoked for the game on Friday! If we beat Grant High that would be off the hook!”

Pete is the star quarterback for the Marion Sharks. I don’t understand everything about football, but I do know that my brother pretty much rocks. It’s mainly because of him that the team was undefeated last season.

“Yo, Pete,” said Zachary, “I was wondering if I could just hang here this weekend. The fam’s got a thing they’re doing and I just wanna get out, if that’s cool with you.”

You would think that since my dad’s a pastor, people wouldn’t want to hang out at our house or something. But that’s definitely not true. Our friends always want to come over—especially Zachary. He’s been spending the night at our house a lot lately. Mom says it’s because Mr. and Mrs.

Donaldson need lots of time to talk, but I'm **positive** it's because he likes playing video games with me.

"Whatever, man. My casa is your casa, right?" said Pete. They high-fived. That's how they hug, I think.

Grabbing a couple bags of chips, a box of snack cakes, and a two-liter bottle of soda, they headed down to the basement to watch TV and stuff their faces, even though we were just about to eat dinner. I guess Mom has finally realized that nothing can possibly spoil Pete and Zachary's appetites. They eat 24/7. It's unbelievable.

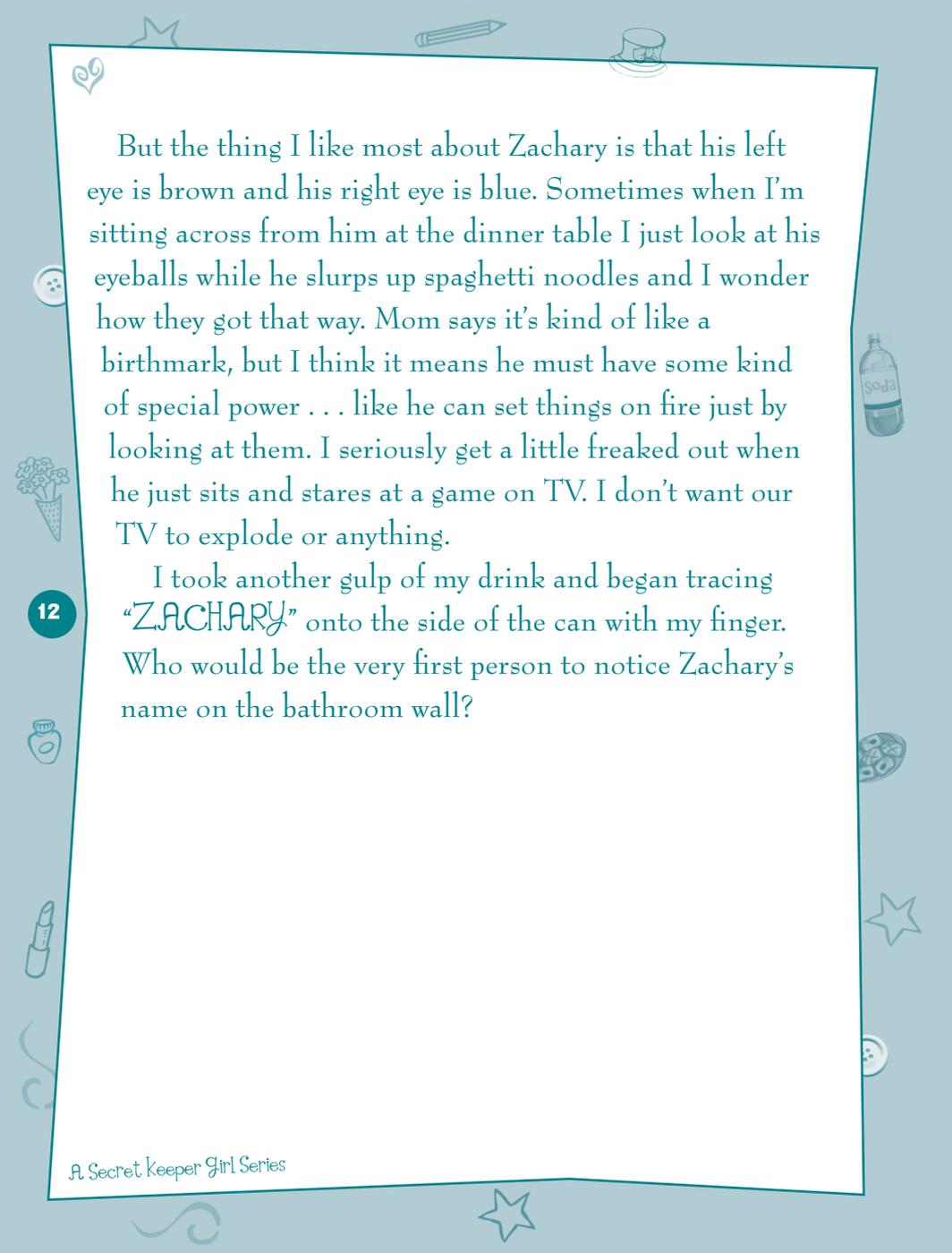
When they were out of sight, I sat at the table and made a list in my head of all the things I like about Zachary:

He's the coolest guy on the planet.

He's kind of short and shaves his head.

He has this really goofy laugh that sounds a lot like a big, barking seal: "Arf! Arf! Arf!"

He wears his grandfather's dog-tags from world war II on a chain around his neck, which is so mature. (He is 17, after all.)



But the thing I like most about Zachary is that his left eye is brown and his right eye is blue. Sometimes when I'm sitting across from him at the dinner table I just look at his eyeballs while he slurps up spaghetti noodles and I wonder how they got that way. Mom says it's kind of like a birthmark, but I think it means he must have some kind of special power . . . like he can set things on fire just by looking at them. I seriously get a little freaked out when he just sits and stares at a game on TV. I don't want our TV to explode or anything.

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I took another gulp of my drink and began tracing "ZACHARY" onto the side of the can with my finger. Who would be the very first person to notice Zachary's name on the bathroom wall?



"T" is for *Antonia*

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CHICAGO



They Can't Stop Me

I'm sorry, but there is **no way** they can stop me from doing this.

They can pour chocolate syrup into my ears while I sleep and then stick me in a freezer so the chocolate turns into Tootsie Rolls. I'm still going to do it.

I am trying out for the Rutherford B. Hayes Middle School football team.

Why wouldn't I play football? I have been in this amazing throwing and kicking contest for the past three years. Kids from all over the country compete. When I was nine years old, and last year when I was eleven, they even chose me to go to a real pro football game and compete at halftime. I could beat most of the boys in my age group, even though they always make me play in the girls' division.

I come from a family that eats, sleeps, and breathes football. My dad played for the Philadelphia Eagles.





But now he's the problem. All of a sudden he doesn't think that football is "appropriate for girls," to use his words.

"I think we'll have you take a break from *Kick and Throw, Junior Pro* this year," he said.

"What?" I just about dropped my cream soda on our new kitchen tile. Talk about getting hit by a train that you never saw coming!



"I was thinking that maybe we should give some of the other kids a chance to win." He winked at me.

"You're serious?" I was waiting for a laugh to follow, but it never did.



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"Your mom and I have been talking and, well . . . it's just that you're not a little girl anymore."



"That's kind of the whole point, Dad. I'm in sixth grade. I can play middle school football this year." I had been waiting *forever* to be old enough to play football for my school—just like my brothers.



"What are you two talking about?" My mom was passing through the kitchen carrying a basket of laundry the size of Mount Rushmore. Poor Mom—she constantly has a mountain of dirty clothes attached to one hip or the other. Three kids playing sports year round will do that to a woman, I guess.



"We're discussing football," Dad said. I decided to try a quick exit. Something about the way Mom and Dad looked at each other was making me feel nervous about my future in football.

"Can I go ride my bike?" I asked. Anything to get out of wherever this conversation was going. I would have gladly hopped into the dentist's chair at that moment if the sound of a drill on my teeth could drown out Dad's next sentence.

"Just a minute, Toni." Dad sighed. He threw one last pleading glance at Mom, but she just nodded. "Your mom and I have given this a lot of thought, and . . ."

I know my dad finished his sentence like two seconds later, but it felt like he paused for hours. Long enough for me to see all my dreams die right before my eyes. My whole life I've wanted to play football for my school. I can just see it: I'm the only Shark (that's our mascot) standing between the guy with the football and a touchdown. If I don't tackle him, we lose. He thinks he's going to run right past me—after all, I'm just a girl, and a kicker at that. But he needs to think again, because before he can take even one more step I hit him hard and he goes down. The crowd explodes . . .



“ . . . we think it might be best if you stick to soccer this fall,” my dad finished.



“That’s not fair!” I know it’s such a little kid thing to do, but I stomped my foot.



“Temper tantrums won’t get you anywhere, Big Foot.” Somehow my brother Marcos, who is seventeen years old and on the high school football team, had managed to sneak into the kitchen without anyone seeing him. I could tell by the wicked grin on his face that he was enjoying this. He grabbed a can of pop out of the fridge and jumped up on our new granite countertop.



“Down” was all Mom said. Marcos obeyed her like a whipped little puppy, but that crooked smile was still plastered to his face. **Ooh**, that smile always makes me so mad that I can’t think straight. But then Marcos took me completely by surprise.



“I think you guys should let her play,” Marcos said. He emptied the can in one huge gulp and crushed it flat with one hand. I have to admit, Marcos’s muscles are pretty impressive. I can barely fit two hands around his upper arm, and I have pretty big hands. I *can’t* fit both hands around his neck. I should know. I have tried plenty of times.

“I mean, I’m one of the captains of the high school team, and Big Foot here’s the future of Marion football.” He hopped up on the counter again, but no one seemed to notice.

“Marcos, please don’t call your sister Big Foot,” my mom sighed.

I have always been way off the growth charts. Now, in sixth grade, I am already 5’9”. One time the ladies’ basketball coach from Ohio State saw my mom buying me shoes at the mall. She came all the way across the shoe store, gave my mom her business card, and told her to keep in touch. I was *four* years old. Marcos was tagging along that day, and I’ve been Big Foot ever since.

“Marcos, thank you for your input, but you are excused to go upstairs.” Dad was looking at Marcos in that way that says he really means business.

“Sorry, Squirt.” Marcos crossed his eyes at me as he passed. Then he leaned in close. “I really meant what I said,” he whispered.

“Antonia, honey, come sit down.” Mom had abandoned her laundry chores for the moment and was patting the yellow-and-green cushion on a dining room chair.

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life history of girls
playing football!



“If it’s okay with you, I think I’ll stand,” I said.

“Toni,” my dad started again, “no one would ever argue your athletic ability. We have expected for a long time that you will play sports in college just like your brothers.”

Marcos is not my only amazing athlete-brother. My oldest brother, Milo, plays college basketball. I was so wishing he was here to defend me.



“We know you are only twelve, Toni,” Mom said, “but it’s right around your age that things start changing for boys and girls.”

“Like what?” I mumbled.

“Well, like boys and girls might begin to think of each other as more than just teammates.” Mom looked to Dad for some help.

He cleared his throat. “There are physical changes that start to happen around your age,” he said.

“Ew, Dad! That’s **gross!**” There was no way my dad just said that out loud.



“Here’s the thing, Toni,” Dad continued. “We have made up our minds. You will not be playing football. It’s just not appropriate anymore. After a good play—on the sidelines—we can’t have your teammates giving you, um . . . the universal football sign for ‘Good Job.’”

I threw up my hands and turned to my mom. “Can you please tell me what Dad just said? In English?”

My mom rarely blushes, but she suddenly turned as red as a beet. “They might pat you on the butt,” she said.

Could my parents possibly scar me any more in one short afternoon? As soon as I could I escaped to the freedom of my bike, but no matter how fast I pedaled I couldn’t escape the sound of my parents saying to me the most horrible word in the English language: *no*.

Then it occurred to me. No problema! I knew how to turn that “no” into a “yes” tomorrow. . . .



Yuzi's False Alarm

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Moody Publishers

CHICAGO

Under Corn-struction

This is not happening! This is NOT happening! I feel all prickly from head to toe—and not because it’s a hot day, either. Here I am totally sprawled on the ground with no hope of saving a scrap of dignity or I-meant-to-do-that-ness. Why can’t the warm ground split open and swallow me whole?

Maybe if I lie here perfectly still, no one will notice me. No one will notice the girl lying facedown dressed in a tight, itchy, horrible corncob costume!

Yes. I am dressed as a **cob of corn**.

This was not my idea. It’s all part of my mom’s twisted plan to help me feel welcome here in Marion, Ohio, which happens to be “The Popcorn Capital of the World.” My family just moved here one week, six days, and thirteen hours ago because of Dad’s job. Mom figured it would be a good idea for me to be a greeter at the town’s annual Popcorn Festival. No big deal, *except* I had to dress



from head to toe in bright green and yellow spandex! This is definitely not the best way to make a good impression in a new town. I know I'm feeling sorry for myself. But I should! Nobody else seems to be too bothered by the fact that I was volunteered, without being asked, to be a corny greeter.



When I came home from school earlier today to find the corncob costume lying on the couch, I asked my mom the obvious question, "What is *that*?"



"It's for you to wear when we go to the Popcorn Festival this afternoon," she told me. "I met a new friend today. Her name is Sue Kenworth and she is in charge of the greeters for the festival. One got sick, so she needs someone to fill in for her at one of the entrances. I told her you'd be glad to do it."



It all started to make horrible sense.



"Me?? *I'm* supposed to *wear* it?" My voice had gone so high, I was squealing. But I didn't care. "How am I supposed to get my hair in there?!"



Well, my hair *is* in there. And now, me and my hair can't wait to get out of this suit. I'm **never** gonna forgive Mom for this!

WELCOME

THE POPCORN CAPITAL OF THE WORLD



The stiff corn husks made it really difficult to get vertical again. When I finally got up, I ignored all the concerned faces looking at me. My nose is doing that tickly thing it does when I'm about to cry.



Don't you dare cry, I tell myself.

The only thing worse than being stuck in a corn-cob costume at a festival in a new town is bawling your eyes out in a corn-cob costume at a festival in a new town. I clenched my jaw, but one stubborn tear slipped out anyway.

"Well, hello. You must be the new girl in town!" The voice came from a super-smiley lady with lime-green glasses. Her short red hair was sticking out in every direction. On purpose, I think. I pretended to scratch the corner of my eye as I quickly wiped away the tear.

"Thanks for helping out today," she said, squinting in the sun. I assumed she was the woman who got me into this unfortunate comedy. "What's your name again, hon?"

"Yuzi," I answered.

"What?"

"Yuzi," I repeated.

"You're woozy? No wonder, in that getup!" She laughed.

"No. Yuzi," I said, slowly. "*Y-u-z-i*."

"Ohhh, Yoozy! *Wherever* did you get a name like that?" Spiky Red asked, grinning.

I took a deep breath and started to explain. "My full name is Uzoma Ukachi. It's Nigerian. Most people can't

pronounce it, so my nickname is just the first two letters of my first name: *u-z*. And I spell it *Y-u-z-i*. Yuzi.”

“Woo! That was a mouthful! I have never been sooo happy to hear someone has a nickname. I’m Sue. No story. Just Sue Kenworth.” She stuck out her hand to shake mine, and then laughed like someone had told a funny joke. “It is hot to-*day*. But that probably doesn’t bother you since you’re from Africa. I, on the other hand, feel like I’m melting,” Sue said, fanning herself with her hand.

People usually assume I can handle any kind of heat because I’m Nigerian. But hot is hot. Besides, I’m wearing a spandex corncob.

“My son’s around here someplace,” Sue said, looking around. “I’d love for him to meet you.”

I tried to stop her. “Oh, no . . . that’s okay . . . I don’t really . . .”

“I don’t see Trevor anywhere. He’ll be so sad he missed you,” she said with a sigh.

I smiled sympathetically, but inside I was relieved.

“Where are you going to school, Yuzi?” Sue asked.

“Rutherford B. Hayes Middle School.”

“Oh, that’s perfect! You’ll probably run into Trevor there. Maybe you’ll be in some of the same classes,” Sue said





excitedly. She looked at her watch. “I’ve got to run. But it was so nice talking to you. See you around, all right?”

I nodded and smiled.



“By the way,” she said, winking like we shared a special secret, “you speak very good English.” She waved, and then disappeared into the crowd.



I waved back limply. I’m getting used to that weird compliment. So many people I’ve met think that if I’m African, and my name is African, then English must be difficult for me. But it’s not. In my family, we speak to each other a lot in Ibo, a Nigerian language. But of course, when we speak to anyone else, we use English.



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12



I looked around, wondering where my family was. They were probably walking around, visiting different booths, and having a grand time dressed as *people*. I sighed. I hadn’t even asked Mrs. Kenworth when my torture would be over. A person can only handle so many hugs from cranky, sticky toddlers.



I heard familiar voices behind me and turned to see my dad, mom, two sisters, and little brother standing there with their hands full of hot, roasted corn on the cob,

towering ice cream cones, glistening hot dogs on soft buns, clouds of cotton candy in rainbows of color, and, of course, buckets of buttery popcorn. I grabbed a handful of Dad's popcorn and shoved it into my mouth.

My mom said, "Hello, dear! We just saw Sue and she said you'll be done in about fifteen minutes."

"Good," I said. "I feel like I've been wearing this forever." I still wasn't sure if I planned to forgive my mom and dad for ruining my life by moving me to this literally corny town. I did know the chances were slim that I'd recover from this traumatic start.

"But you look great—and leafy," my six-year-old brother, Ike, said, grinning mischievously. His real name is Ikechukwu, but most people call him Ike so they don't choke on his full name. His tongue was blue from his giant puff of cotton candy.

I rolled my eyes.

"Bye," I said pitifully as they walked away.

There's got to be a way for me to make friends in this new place, but I'm pretty sure it won't happen while I'm wearing *this* outfit.

I tried to make an effort for the last ten minutes. I smiled widely and put up with more hugs. Then, just as





I saw Mrs. Kenworth coming toward me again, my left foot somehow caught my right foot, and—yeah—I was on the ground again.



Lately, it's like my body's not mine. It's as if someone gave me a new collection of muscles and forgot to leave a manual. Mom says I'm going through a major growth spurt, as if moving to a new town isn't enough for me to deal with.



Sue hurriedly helped me up, concerned. “Are you all right, Yuzi?”

“Growth spurt,” I mumbled, humiliated yet again.

She looked at me with a puzzled expression.

Not wanting to be rude but dying to get out of there, I asked quietly, “Am I done?”



“Absolutely yes. You were a lifesaver. Fantastic job. Thank you so much!” she said. “I’ll be by next week to pick up the costume. Are you sure you’re all right?”



“Yes, I’m fine. Thanks. See ya.” And I stalked off toward our van. Yes, *stalked*. And it’s **not** funny.

I think I’m going to hate this town.





Danika's Totally Terrible Toss
The Legend of the Purple Flurp

Dannah Gresh
author of Secret Keeper Girl

Moody Publishers

CHICAGO





CHAPTER 1

Danika's Purple Flurp



Tonight I'm going to win the Miss Teeny Pop Pageant. There's no easy way to explain that absurd thought except to say that I'm growing up in Marion, Ohio. It's the Popcorn Capital of the World, and life revolves around the annual Popcorn Festival.

"Good luck tonight, Teeny Pop!" mocked Chad Ferner, slamming his locker shut. Ferner was once the awkward boy I'd survived second grade square dancing with. He wasn't so awkward anymore with his wavy chestnut hair and deep blue eyes. We have never liked each other, though, since those totally embarrassing do-si-dos.

"Here she is . . ." he sang, waving his arms dramatically toward me to the tune of the Miss America theme song, ". . . she's Miss Teeny Pop!" Everyone in the hallway was laughing, and I couldn't decide if they were laughing at him or at me.

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I glared really hard until I was sure that my dark-brown Asian eyes might possibly pop from their sockets. When Ferner didn't back off, neither did I. I leaned in to his face until I could smell the Nerds on his breath.

"Chillax, Da-nee-ka," Ferner said, mispronouncing my name on purpose. He always does that.



Then, as suddenly as he disrupted my day, he slipped silently away. I watched him walk down the hall and through the big red doors that led to the microcosmic world of the Rutherford B. Hayes Middle School cafeteria.



I opened my locker and carefully placed my *Advanced Pre-Algebra* textbook to the far left of the top shelf, right next to *Biology for the Young Scholar*. Arranging my books in alphabetical order seemed only natural to me, but Mom says it's odd even if my IQ rivals that of Einstein. I knew he was really messy based on those famous pictures of him and his wacky hair. I didn't want to end up like that, so I alphabetize my books . . . and my nail polish.



Adjusting my bright yellow headband, I checked my look in the pink marabou-trimmed mirror hanging on the door of my locker. For a moment, I dreamed of what

my black-as-night hair would look like topped by the Teeny Pop crown.

It doesn't matter what Chad Ferner or anyone else thinks, I want to win that crown! I thought.

My mom entered me into my first Popcorn Festival pageant when I was six. That was the same year they found out just how smart I was, and Mom thought it would be good if she and Dad let me do something “frilly and superficial” to “balance me out.” Those were the actual words my dad used. I remember.

So, that year I dressed up in a golden yellow dress for the modeling competition and then, like a can of Jolly Green Giant peas for the commercial presentation. I sang, “Peas, say you’ll love me!” It doesn’t get much more frilly or superficial than that! I got first prize in my age group, as I have every single year since then. This is the first year I’m old enough to win the big title, Miss Teeny Pop, and I want it so badly!

After all, this year’s big prize is four front-row seats to the Alayna Rayne concert. She’s a totally fab singer who sells out concerts in minutes. Even my dad, who’s richer than Daddy Warbucks and would pay *anything*, hasn’t been able to get tickets. He’s tried five times. Alayna’s coming to



Cleveland in two weeks and I really want those tickets.

When I had decided that every hair was in place, I grabbed my hot pink and lime green Vera Bradley lunch bag and a brown sack out of my locker.

I slammed the door and headed for the cafeteria. The brown sack had an extra-special dessert. Inside was a container filled with Mom's legendary Purple Flurp. It's a legend because it's the only food to ever win the Popcorn Festival blue ribbon that *didn't* have popcorn as an ingredient. It's *that* good!

"Hey, Laney," I said sitting down next to the most popular girl in sixth grade, blonde-haired, blue-eyed, genetically perfect Laney Douglas. She was wearing all pink, which she says is her "signature color."

"Hey," said Laney and her stuck-like-glue sidekick Riley Peterson. They always say hello in unison. If I didn't like them, it would honestly make me toss my cookies.

When I first stepped into the jungle of middle school, I quickly learned the first lesson of survival: you're not defined by who you are, but by who is sitting next to you at lunchtime. That week, Rachel, Chondra, Kiley, Abigail, and Kelsey—the other regulars who are seated with us

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today—took a vote led by Laney and Riley. They decided I could sit with them.

Our conversations never go any deeper than the pink clothes on Laney's back and the topic of boys. In a crunch, we talk about the food on our table.

"So, like, what exactly is *in* powdered soup?" asked Laney. She watched me pour the energy-boosting powder my mom had packed for me into a Thermos of hot water.

"Hmmm?" I said. "I dunno."

"Potato starch." I began reading the packet out loud. "Salt. Dried minced onion. Powdered pork?"

"Whoa!" exclaimed Laney. "Bad ending for that pig!"

We laughed much louder and longer than we should have. Why? Because we knew everyone in sixth grade was watching our table. As I fake-laughed, I caught the gaze of Katie Harding walking toward us. Our moms are practically best friends. I guess we used to be, too.

Katie was wearing a really cool T-shirt with a red heart on it over a striped long-sleeve shirt. I thought it looked really great. Apparently, Laney didn't think so.

"I wonder where she shops . . . UglyRUs?" Laney said almost loud enough for Katie to hear.

"I think it's UglyRHer!" whispered Riley.





The whole table laughed again really hard.

Keep walking, Katie! I pleaded in my head. I put my left hand up to my forehead like a visor and looked down.

Keep walking!

She took the clue and abruptly turned and walked to a table where she sat all by herself. She looked lonely.

I suddenly felt **sick**.



“Hey, Da-neeeka,” teased a guy’s voice from behind me. I was going to ignore it, but when I felt someone flick my hair, I looked back. Ferner!

“Hey,” I responded coolly. He moved on.

“He likes you,” whispered Laney, leaning across the table and into me.

My eyes grew wide in fear.

“*You like him,*” she accused.

“No way!” I said. Dad would kill me if I got boy crazy. I might as well start carving the tombstone.

“We just danced together . . .” I started to explain about square dancing in second grade and hating it, but Laney didn’t let me finish.

“You danced together,” she teased. “Hey girls! Danika and Ferner danced together!”

The laughter erupted even more loudly this time, drawing the attention of the world's most bizarre lunch lady, Mrs. Hefty. She lives up to her name quite easily. I'm not sure what body mass index really is, but I think Mrs. Hefty has it. The seams on her white uniform work really hard to hold everything in place.

"What's going on over here?" she asked as she waddled over to our table.

No one answered her.

"Was that joyful laughter?" she asked. She didn't stop for an answer, but started talking at a breakneck pace like she always does when she gives her infamous Cafeteria Life Lessons. "There is joyful laughter. Yes. That is laughing *with* people, and then there's another kind. That's when you laugh *at* people. We can't have any of that in my cafeteria. Can we? No, no, no. No we can't!"

She drew out that last word and when she cut it off with a sharp "t," she sprayed enough spittle from her wet lips to shine my dad's red sports car.

After a moment of staring at us to make her point, her cheeks burst into red bulbs as she smiled. Then she waddled off.





Laney quickly scrawled something on a scrap of paper and passed it to me. In curly handwriting it said . . .

“Mrs. Hefty is a big _____.”

Just as I read it and imagined what the blank would say, I felt the chill of a shadow looming over me. Mrs. Hefty was back.



“Well, Ms. McAllister, let me see that note there!” She paused to read it. “Oh, troublesome! Why don’t you finish that sentence for me?”

“But, I-I d-didn’t write it,” I stammered.

“I didn’t ask if you wrote it,” cooed Mrs. Hefty as she tried her best to be angry. She shook the note in her hand for effect. “I asked you to finish it.”

“*But!*” I pleaded.

She just stared down at me.

“Ummm . . . well . . . Mrs. Hefty is a big . . .” I stalled for time drawing my answer out, then I suddenly blurted out a terrible, no-good word . . .

“. . . meanie?” I said it more as a question.

Mrs. Hefty’s smiling face dropped. Her big, rosy cheeks sagged into puffy wrinkles. *Uh, oh*, I thought.

"Ms. McAllister, your lunch period is over," she announced as happily as ever. "Let's go! You and I have an appointment with Principal Butter. Up you go. This way. Follow me."

Fine! I thought. *I'll go, but I'm taking my mom's Purple Flurp with me!*

I grabbed the little brown sack and marched off.

"Hold it!" I heard Mrs. Hefty say from behind me. "What's in *that* bag, Ms. McAllister?"

I turned to look at her. Her chubby finger was aimed right at my prized sack of **Purple Flurp**.

"Is that *food*?" she prodded. "Ms. McAllister, what does *that* sign say?" She used her finger to emphasize the big sign above the red doors. I looked up to read it: *Positively No Food Outside the Cafeteria!*

Suddenly, a surge of anger flashed through every inch of me, turning my normally dainty, girlish twelve-year-old self into a hulk of fury. I placed my precious brown bag into my right hand. I wound my arm up like I'd seen softball pitchers do and aimed for the garbage can two feet to the left of Mrs. Hefty. I threw the bag like a slow-pitch softball with a long rainbow arc.

My Purple Flurp never made it to the garbage can.





It managed to find its way out of the brown bag. As it spiraled through the air in what seemed like slow-mo, the lid of the container disconnected like the launching sequence of a space rocket. In that moment, its purple-gooey contents were unleashed into space.

Then my Purple Flurp-pitch nailed Mrs. Hefty in the left temple.

Apparently, I'll never be a softball player.

