



Danika's Totally Terrible Toss





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.




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

GO TO
secretkeepergirl.com
and type in the secret word
"Flurp" to get the recipe
for Purple Flurp!

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-nee-ka,” 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.

