



Wonder

By R J Palacio

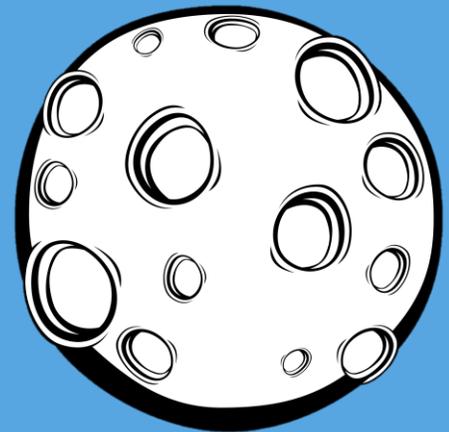
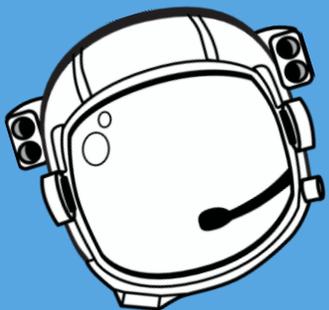
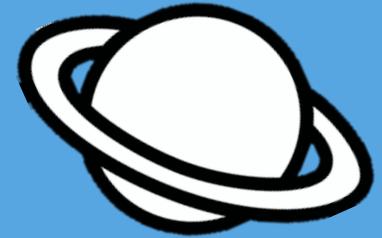
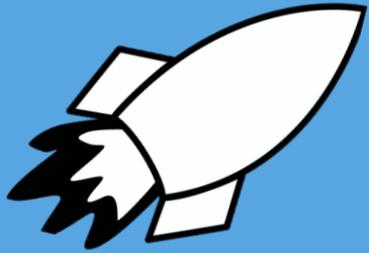
"Why blend in when you were born to stand out"

Part One



August

*"Fate smiled and destiny laughed
as she came to my cradle..." -
Natalie Merchant, "Wonder"*





'Ordinary'

Page 3

Read by:
Mrs Dicken

I know I'm not an ordinary ten-year-old kid. I mean, sure, I do ordinary things. I eat ice cream. I ride my bike. I play ball. I have an Xbox. Stuff like that makes me ordinary. I guess. And I feel ordinary. Inside. But I know ordinary kids don't make other ordinary kids run away screaming in playgrounds. I know ordinary kids don't get stared at wherever they go.

If I found a magic lamp and I could have one wish, I would wish that I had a normal face that no one ever noticed at all. I would wish that I could walk down the street without people seeing me and then doing that look-away thing. Here's what I think: the only reason I'm not ordinary is that no one else sees me that way.

But I'm kind of used to how I look by now. I know how to pretend I don't see the faces people make. We've all gotten pretty good at that sort of thing: me, Mom and Dad, Via. Actually, I take that back: Via's not so good at it. She can get really annoyed when people do something rude. Like, for instance, one time in the playground some older kids made some noises. I don't even know what the noises were exactly because I didn't hear them myself, but Via heard and she just started yelling at the kids. That's the way she is. I'm not that way.

Via doesn't see me as ordinary. She says she does, but if I were ordinary, she wouldn't feel like she needs to protect me as much. And Mom and Dad don't see me as ordinary, either. They see me as extraordinary. I think the only person in the world who realizes how ordinary I am is me.

My name is August, by the way. I won't describe what I look like. Whatever you're thinking, it's probably worse.



‘Why I Didn’t Go to School’ Page 4

Read by:
Mrs Dicken

Next week I start fifth grade. Since I've never been to a real school before, I am pretty much totally and completely petrified. People think I haven't gone to school because of the way I look, but it's not that. It's because of all the surgeries I've had. Twenty-seven since I was born. The bigger ones happened before I was even four years old, so I don't remember those. But I've had two or three surgeries every year since then (some big, some small), and because I'm little for my age, and I have some other medical mysteries that doctors never really figured out, I used to get sick a lot. That's why my parents decided it was better if I didn't go to school. I'm much stronger now, though. The last surgery I had was eight months ago, and I probably won't have to have any more for another couple of years.

Mom homeschools me. She used to be a children's-book illustrator. She draws really great fairies and mermaids. Her boy stuff isn't so hot, though. She once tried to draw me a Darth Vader, but it ended up looking like some weird mushroom-shaped robot. I haven't seen her draw anything in a long time. I think she's too busy taking care of me and Via.

I can't say I always wanted to go to school because that wouldn't be exactly true. What I wanted was to go to school, but only if I could be like every other kid going to school. Have lots of friends and hang out after school and stuff like that.

I have a few really good friends now. Christopher is my best friend, followed by Zachary and Alex. We've known each other since we were babies. And since they've always known me the way I am, they're used to me.



‘Why I Didn’t Go to School’ Page 5

Read by:
Mrs Dicken

When we were little, we used to have playdates all the time, but then Christopher moved to Bridgeport in Connecticut. That's more than an hour away from where I live in North River Heights, which is at the top tip of Manhattan. And Zachary and Alex started going to school. It's funny: even though Christopher's the one who moved far away, I still see him more than I see Zachary and Alex. They have all these new friends now. If we bump into each other on the street, they're still nice to me, though. They always say hello.

I have other friends, too, but not as good as Christopher and Zack and Alex were. For instance, Zack and Alex always invited me to their birthday parties when we were little, but Joel and Eamonn and Gabe never did. Emma invited me once, but I haven't seen her in a long time. And, of course, I always go to Christopher's birthday. Maybe I'm making too big a deal about birthday parties.





'How I Came to Life'

Page 6



Read by:
R. J. Palacio (Author
of 'Wonder')



I like when Mom tells this story because it makes me laugh so much. It's not funny in the way a joke is funny, but when Mom tells it, Via and I just start cracking up.

So when I was in my mom's stomach, no one had any idea I would come out looking the way I look. Mom had had Via four years before, and that had been such a "walk in the park" (Mom's expression) that there was no reason to run any special tests. About two months before I was born, the doctors realised there was something wrong with my face, but they didn't think it was going to be bad. They told Mom and Dad I had a cleft palate and some other stuff going on. They called it "small anomalies."

There were two nurses in the delivery room the night I was born. One was very nice and sweet. The other one, Mom said, did not seem at all nice or sweet. She had very big arms and (here comes the funny part), she kept farting. Like, she'd bring Mom some ice chips, and then fart. She'd check Mom's blood pressure, and fart. Mom says it was unbelievable because the nurse never even said excuse me! Meanwhile, Mom's regular doctor wasn't on duty that night, so Mom got stuck with this cranky kid doctor she and Dad nicknamed Doogie after some old TV show or something (they didn't actually call him that to his face). But Mom says that even though everyone in the room was kind of grumpy, Dad kept making her laugh all night long.

When I came out of Mom's stomach, she said the whole room got very quiet. Mom didn't even get a chance to look at me because the nice nurse immediately rushed me out of the room.





'How I Came to Life' Page 7



Read by:
R. J. Palacio (Author
of 'Wonder')

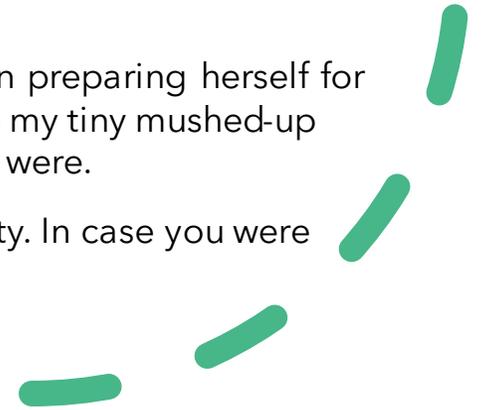


Dad was in such a hurry to follow her that he dropped the video camera, which broke into a million pieces. And then Mom got very upset and tried to get out of bed to see where they were going, but the farting nurse put her very big arms on Mom to keep her down in the bed. They were practically fighting, because Mom was hysterical and the farting nurse was yelling at her to stay calm, and then they both started screaming for the doctor. But guess what? He had fainted! Right on the floor! So when the farting nurse saw that he had fainted, she started pushing him with her foot to get him to wake up, yelling at him the whole time: "What kind of doctor are you? What kind of doctor are you? Get up! Get up!" And then all of a sudden she let out the biggest, loudest, smelliest fart in the history of farts. Mom thinks it was actually the fart that finally woke the doctor. Anyway, when Mom tells this story, she acts out all the parts—including the farting noises—and it is so, so, so, so funny!

Mom says the farting nurse turned out to be a very nice woman. She stayed with Mom the whole time. Didn't leave her side even after Dad came back and the doctors told them how sick I was. Mom remembers exactly what the nurse whispered in her ear when the doctor told her I probably wouldn't live through the night: "Everyone born of God overcometh the world." And the next day, after I had lived through the night, it was that nurse who held Mom's hand when they brought her to meet me for the first time.

Mom says by then they had told her all about me. She had been preparing herself for the seeing of me. But she says that when she looked down into my tiny mushed-up face for the first time, all she could see was how pretty my eyes were.

Mom is beautiful, by the way. And Dad is handsome. Via is pretty. In case you were wondering.



'Christopher's House'

Page 8

Read by:
Ms Walker



I was really bummed when Christopher moved away three years ago. We were both around seven then. We used to spend hours playing with our Star Wars action figures and duelling with our lightsabers. I miss that.

Last spring we drove over to Christopher's house in Bridgeport. Me and Christopher were looking for snacks in the kitchen, and I heard Mom talking to Lisa, Christopher's mom, about my going to school in the fall. I had never, ever heard her mention school before.

"What are you talking about?" I said.

Mom looked surprised, like she hadn't meant for me to hear that.

"You should tell him what you've been thinking, Isabel," Dad said. He was on the other side of the living room talking to Christopher's dad.

"We should talk about this later," said Mom.

"No, I want to know what you were talking about," I answered.

"Don't you think you're ready for school, Auggie?" Mom said.

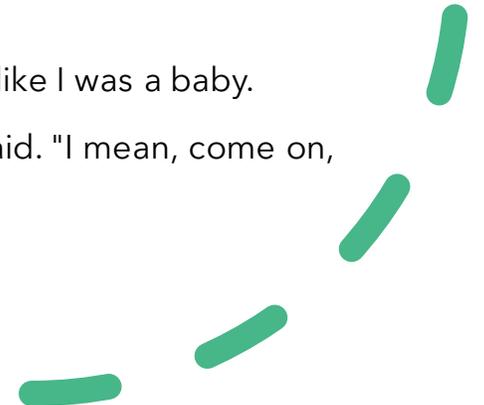
"No," I said.

"I don't, either," said Dad.

"Then that's it, case closed," I said, shrugging, and I sat in her lap like I was a baby.

"I just think you need to learn more than I can teach you," Mom said. "I mean, come on, Auggie, you know how bad I am at fractions!"

"What school?" I said. I already felt like crying.



'Christopher's House'

Page 9

Read by:
Ms Walker



"Beecher Prep. Right by us."

"Wow, that's a great school, Auggie," said Lisa, patting my knee.

"Why not Via's school?" I said.

"That's too big," Mom answered. "I don't think that would be a good fit for you." "I don't want to," I said. I admit: I made my voice sound a little babyish.

"You don't have to do anything you don't want to do," Dad said, coming over and lifting me out of Mom's lap. He carried me over to sit on his lap on the other side of the sofa. "We won't make you do anything you don't want to do."

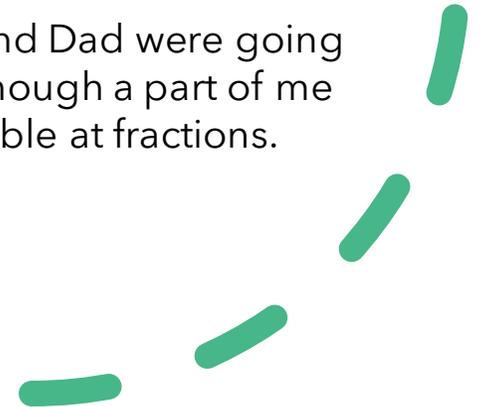
"But it would be good for him, Nate," Mom said.

"Not if he doesn't want to," answered Dad, looking at me. "Not if he's not ready." I saw Mom look at Lisa, who reached over and squeezed her hand.

"You guys will figure it out," she said to Mom.

"You always have."

"Let's just talk about it later," said Mom. I could tell she and Dad were going to get in a fight about it. I wanted Dad to win the fight. Though a part of me knew Mom was right. And the truth is, she really was terrible at fractions.



'Driving'

Page 10

Read by:
Mr Blower

It was a long drive home. I fell asleep in the backseat like I always do, my head on Via's lap like she was my pillow, a towel wrapped around the seat belt so I wouldn't drool all over her. Via fell asleep, too, and Mom and Dad talked quietly about grown-up things I didn't care about.

I don't know how long I was sleeping, but when I woke up, there was a full moon outside the car window. It was a purple night, and we were driving on a highway full of cars. And then I heard Mom and Dad talking about me.

"We can't keep protecting him," Mom whispered to Dad, who was driving. "We can't just pretend he's going to wake up tomorrow and this isn't going to be his reality, because it is, Nate, and we have to help him learn to deal with it. We can't just keep avoiding situations that . . ."

"So sending him off to middle school like a lamb to the slaughter . . .," Dad answered angrily, but he didn't even finish his sentence because he saw me in the mirror looking up.

"What's a lamb to the slaughter?" I asked sleepily.

"Go back to sleep, Auggie," Dad said softly.

"Everyone will stare at me at school," I said, suddenly crying.

"Honey," Mom said. She turned around in the front seat and put her hand on my hand. "You know if you don't want to do this, you don't have to. But we spoke to the principal there and told him about you and he really wants to meet you."

"What did you tell him about me?"

"How funny you are, and how kind and smart. When I told him you read Dragon Rider when you were six, he was like, 'Wow, I have to meet this kid.' "



'Driving'

Page 11

Read by:
Mr Blower

"Did you tell him anything else?" I said.

Mom smiled at me. Her smile kind of hugged me.

"I told him about all your surgeries, and how brave you are," she said. "So he knows what I look like?" I asked.

"Well, we brought pictures from last summer in Montauk," Dad said. "We showed him pictures of the whole family. And that great shot of you holding that flounder on the boat!"

"You were there, too?" I have to admit I felt a little disappointed that he was a part of this.

"We both talked to him, yes," Dad said. "He's a really nice man." "You would like him," Mom added.

Suddenly it felt like they were on the same side.

"Wait, so when did you meet him?" I said.

"He took us on a tour of the school last year," said Mom.

"Last year?" I said. "So you've been thinking about this for a whole year and you didn't tell me?"

"We didn't know if you'd even get in, Auggie," answered Mom. "It's a very hard school to get into. There's a whole admissions process. I didn't see the point in telling you and having you get all worked up about it unnecessarily."

"But you're right, Auggie, we should've told you when we found out last month that you got in," said Dad.

"In hindsight," sighed Mom, "yes, I guess."

"Did that lady who came to the house that time have something to do with this?" I said.

"The one that gave me that test?"

"Yes, actually," said Mom, looking guilty. "Yes." "You told me it was an IQ test," I said.



'Driving'

Page 12

Read by:
Mr Blower

"I know, well, that was a white lie," she answered. "It was a test you needed to take to get into the school. You did very well on it, by the way."

"So you lied," I said.

"A white lie, but yes. Sorry," she said, trying to smile, but when I didn't smile back, she turned around in her seat and faced forward.

"What's a lamb to the slaughter?" I said. Mom sighed and gave Daddy a "look."

"I shouldn't have said that," Dad said, looking at me in the rearview mirror. "It's not true. Here's the thing: Mommy and I love you so much we want to protect you any way we can. It's just sometimes we want to do it in different ways."

"I don't want to go to school," I answered, folding my arms.

"It would be good for you, Auggie," said Mom.

"Maybe I'll go next year," I answered, looking out the window.

"This year would be better, Auggie," said Mom. "You know why? Because you'll be going into fifth grade, and that's the first year of middle school—for everyone. You won't be the only new kid."

"I'll be the only kid who looks like me," I said.

"I'm not going to say it won't be a big challenge for you, because you know better than that," she answered. "But it'll be good for you, Auggie. You'll make lots of friends. And you'll learn things you'd never learn with me." She turned in her seat again and looked at me. "When we took the tour, you know what they had in their science lab? A little

baby chick that was just hatching out of its egg. It was so cute! Auggie, it actually kind of reminded me of you when you were a little baby . . . with those big brown eyes of yours. . . ."

I usually love when they talk about when I was a baby. Sometimes I want to curl up into a little tiny ball and let them hug me and kiss me all over



'Driving'

Page 13

Read by:
Mr Blower

I miss being a baby, not knowing stuff. But I wasn't in the mood for that now.

"I don't want to go," I said.

"How about this? Can you at least meet Mr. Tushman before making up your mind?" Mom asked.

"Mr. Tushman?" I said.

"He's the principal," answered Mom. "Mr. Tush man?" I repeated.

"I know, right?" Dad answered, smiling and looking at me in the rearview mirror. "Can you believe that name, Auggie? I mean, who on earth would ever agree to have a name like Mr. Tushman?"

I smiled even though I didn't want to let them see me smile. Dad was the one person in the world who could make me laugh no matter how much I didn't want to laugh. Dad always made everyone laugh.

"Auggie, you know, you should go to that school just so you can hear his name said over the loudspeaker!" Dad said excitedly. "Can you imagine how funny that would be? Hello, hello? Paging Mr. Tushman!" He was using a fake high, old-lady voice. "Hi, Mr. Tushman! I see you're running a little behind today! Did your car get rear-ended again? What a bum rap!"

I started laughing, not even because I thought he was being that funny but because I wasn't in the mood to stay mad anymore.

"It could be worse, though!" Dad continued in his normal voice. "Mommy and I had a professor in college called Miss Butt."

Mom was laughing now, too.

"Is that for real?" I said.

"Roberta Butt," Mom answered, raising her hand as if to swear. "Bobbie Butt." "She had huge cheeks," said Dad.

"Nate!" said Mom.



'Driving'

Page 14

Read by:
Mr Blower

"What? She had big cheeks is all I'm saying."

Mom laughed and shook her head at the same time.

"Hey hey, I know!" said Dad excitedly. "Let's fix them up on a blind date! Can you imagine? Miss Butt, meet Mr. Tushman. Mr. Tushman, here's Miss Butt. They could get married and have a bunch of little Tushies."

"Poor Mr. Tushman," answered Mom, shaking her head. "Auggie hasn't even met the man yet, Nate!"

"Who's Mr. Tushman?" Via said groggily. She had just woken up. "He's the principal of my new school," I answered.



'Paging Mr. Tushman'

Page 15

Read by:
Miss Nutting

I would have been more nervous about meeting Mr. Tushman if I'd known I was also going to be meeting some kids from the new school. But I didn't know, so if anything, I was kind of giggly. I couldn't stop thinking about all the jokes Daddy had made about Mr. Tushman's name. So when me and Mom arrived at Beecher Prep a few weeks before the start of school, and I saw Mr. Tushman standing there, waiting for us at the entrance, I started giggling right away. He didn't look at all like what I pictured, though. I guess I thought he would have a huge butt, but he didn't. In fact, he was a pretty normal guy. Tall and thin. Old but not really old. He seemed nice. He shook my mom's hand first.

"Hi, Mr. Tushman, it's so nice to see you again," said Mom. "This is my son, August."

Mr. Tushman looked right at me and smiled and nodded. He put his hand out for me to shake.

"Hi, August," he said, totally normally. "It's a pleasure to meet you."

"Hi," I mumbled, dropping my hand into his hand while I looked down at his feet. He was wearing red Adidas.

"So," he said, kneeling down in front of me so I couldn't look at his sneakers but had to look at his face, "your mom and dad have told me a lot about you."

"Like what have they told you?" I asked.

"Sorry?"

"Honey, you have to speak up," said Mom.



'Paging Mr. Tushman'

Page 16

Read by:
Miss Nutting

"Like what?" I asked, trying not to mumble. I admit I have a bad habit of mumbling.

"Well, that you like to read," said Mr. Tushman, "and that you're a great artist." He had blue eyes with white eyelashes. "And you're into science, right?"

"Uh-huh," I said, nodding. "We have a couple of great science electives at Beecher," he said. "Maybe you'll take one of them?"

"Uh-huh," I said, though I had no idea what an elective was.

"So, are you ready to take a tour?"

"You mean we're doing that now?" I said.

"Did you think we were going to the movies?" he answered, smiling as he stood up.

"You didn't tell me we were taking a tour," I said to Mom in my accusing voice.

"Auggie . . .," she started to say. "It'll be fine, August," said Mr. Tushman, holding his hand out to me. "I promise."

I think he wanted me to take his hand, but I took Mom's instead. He smiled and started walking toward the entrance. Mommy gave my hand a little squeeze, though I don't know if it was an "I love you" squeeze or an "I'm sorry" squeeze. Probably a little of both.

The only school I'd ever been inside before was Via's, when I went with Mom and Dad to watch Via sing in spring concerts and stuff like that. This school was very different. It was smaller. It smelled like a hospital.



'Nice Mrs. Garcia'

Page 17

Read by:
Miss Nutting

We followed Mr. Tushman down a few hallways. There weren't a lot of people around. And the few people who were there didn't seem to notice me at all, though that may have been because they didn't see me. I sort of hid behind Mom as I walked. I know that sounds kind of babyish of me, but I wasn't feeling very brave right then.

We ended up in a small room with the words OFFICE OF THE MIDDLE SCHOOL DIRECTOR on the door. Inside, there was a desk with a nice-seeming lady sitting behind it.

"This is Mrs. Garcia," said Mr. Tushman, and the lady smiled at Mom and took off her glasses and got up out of her chair.

My mother shook her hand and said: "Isabel Pullman, nice to meet you."

"And this is August," Mr. Tushman said. Mom kind of stepped to the side a bit, so I would move forward. Then that thing happened that I've seen happen a million times before. When I looked up at her, Mrs. Garcia's eyes dropped for a second. It was so fast no one else would have noticed, since the rest of her face stayed exactly the same. She was smiling a really shiny smile.

"Such a pleasure to meet you, August," she said, holding out her hand for me to shake.

"Hi," I said quietly, giving her my hand, but I didn't want to look at her face, so I kept staring at her glasses, which hung from a chain around her neck.

"Wow, what a firm grip!" said Mrs. Garcia. Her hand was really warm.



'Nice Mrs. Garcia'

Page 18

Read by:
Miss Nutting

"The kid's got a killer handshake," Mr. Tushman agreed, and everyone laughed above my head.

"You can call me Mrs. G," Mrs. Garcia said. I think she was talking to me, but I was looking at all the stuff on her desk now. "That's what everyone calls me. Mrs. G, I forgot my combination. Mrs. G, I need a late pass. Mrs. G, I want to change my elective."

"Mrs. G's actually the one who runs the place," said Mr. Tushman, which again made all the grown-ups laugh.

"I'm here every morning by seven-thirty," Mrs. Garcia continued, still looking at me while I stared at her brown sandals with small purple flowers on the buckles. "So if you ever need anything, August, I'm the one to ask. And you can ask me anything."

"Okay," I mumbled.

"Oh, look at that cute baby," Mom said, pointing to one of the photographs on Mrs. Garcia's bulletin board. "Is he yours?"

"No, my goodness!" said Mrs. Garcia, smiling a big smile now that was totally different from her shiny smile. "You've just made my day. He's my grandson."

"What a cutie!" said Mom, shaking her head. "How old?"

"In that picture he was five months, I think. But he's big now. Almost eight years old!"

"Wow," said Mom, nodding and smiling. "Well, he is absolutely beautiful."

"Thank you!" said Mrs. Garcia, nodding like she was about to say something else about her grandson. But then all of a sudden her smile got a little smaller. "We're all going to take very good care of August," she said to Mom, and I saw her give Mom's hand a little squeeze. I looked at Mom's face, and that's when I realized she was just as nervous as I was. I guess I liked Mrs. Garcia—when she wasn't wearing her shiny smile.



'Jack Will, Julian, and Charlotte'

Page 19

Read by:
Miss Heeley

We followed Mr. Tushman into a small room across from Mrs. Garcia's desk. He was talking as he closed the door to his office and sat down behind his big desk, though I wasn't really paying much attention to what he was saying. I was looking around at all the things on his desk. Cool stuff, like a globe that floated in the air and a Rubik's-type cube made with little mirrors. I liked his office a lot. I liked that there were all these neat little drawings and paintings by students on the walls, framed like they were important.

Mom sat down in a chair in front of Mr. Tushman's desk, and even though there was another chair right next to hers, I decided to stand beside her.

"Why do you have your own room and Mrs. G doesn't?" I said. "You mean, why do I have an office?" asked Mr. Tushman. "You said she runs the place," I said.

"Oh! Well, I was kind of kidding. Mrs. G is my assistant."

"Mr. Tushman is the director of the middle school," Mom explained. "Do they call you Mr. T?" I asked, which made him smile.

"Do you know who Mr. T is?" he answered. "I pity the fool?" he said in a funny tough voice, like he was imitating someone.

I had no idea what he was talking about.

"Anyway, no," said Mr. Tushman, shaking his head. "No one calls me Mr. T. Though I have a feeling I'm called a lot of other things I don't know about."



'Jack Will, Julian, and Charlotte'

Page 20

Read by:
Miss Heeley

Let's face it, a name like mine is not so easy to live with, you know what I mean?"

Here I have to admit I totally laughed, because I knew exactly what he meant. "My mom and dad had a teacher called Miss Butt," I said.

"Auggie!" said Mom, but Mr. Tushman laughed.

"Now, that's bad," said Mr. Tushman, shaking his head.

"I guess I shouldn't complain. Hey, so listen, August, here's what I thought we would do today.."

"Is that a pumpkin?" I said, pointing to a framed painting behind Mr. Tushman's desk. "Auggie, sweetie, don't interrupt," said Mom.

"You like it?" said Mr. Tushman, turning around and looking at the painting. "I do, too. And I thought it was a pumpkin, too, until the student who gave it to me explained that it is actually not a pumpkin. It is . . . are you ready for this . . . a portrait of me! Now, August, I ask you: do I really look that much like a pumpkin?"

"No!" I answered, though I was thinking yes. Something about the way his cheeks puffed out when he smiled made him look like a jack-o'-lantern. Just as I thought that, it occurred to me how funny that was: cheeks, Mr. Tushman. And I started laughing a little. I shook my head and covered my mouth with my hand.

Mr. Tushman smiled like he could read my mind.

I was about to say something else, but then all of a sudden I heard other voices outside the office: kids' voices. I'm not exaggerating when I say this, but my heart literally started beating like I'd just run the longest race in the world. The laughter I had inside just poured out of me.

The thing is, when I was little, I never minded meeting new kids because all the kids I met were really little, too.



‘Jack Will, Julian, and Charlotte’ Page 21

Read by:
Miss Heeley

What's cool about really little kids is that they don't say stuff to try to hurt your feelings, even though sometimes they do say stuff that hurts your feelings. But they don't actually know what they're saying. Big kids, though: they know what they're saying. And that is definitely not fun for me. One of the reasons I grew my hair long last year was that I like how my bangs cover my eyes: it helps me block out the things I don't want to see.

Mrs. Garcia knocked on the door and poked her head inside. "They're here, Mr. Tushman," she said. "Who's here?" I said.

"Thanks," said Mr. Tushman to Mrs. Garcia. "August, I thought it would be a good idea for you to meet some students who'll be in your homeroom this year. I figure they could take you around the school a bit, show you the lay of the land, so to speak."

"I don't want to meet anyone," I said to Mom.

Mr. Tushman was suddenly right in front of me, his hands on my shoulders. He leaned down and said very softly in my ear: "It'll be okay, August. These are nice kids, I promise."

"You're going to be okay, Auggie," Mom whispered with all her might.

Before she could say anything else, Mr. Tushman opened the door to his office.

"Come on in, kids," he said, and in walked two boys and a girl. None of them looked over at me or Mom: they stood by the door looking straight at Mr. Tushman like their lives depended on it.

"Thanks so much for coming, guys—especially since school doesn't start until next month!" said Mr. Tushman. "Have you had a good summer?"

All of them nodded but no one said anything.

"Great, great," said Mr. Tushman.



'Jack Will, Julian, and Charlotte'

Page 22

Read by:
Miss Heeley

"So, guys, I wanted you to meet August, who's going to be a new student here this year. August, these guys have been students at Beecher Prep since kindergarten, though, of course, they were in the lowerschool building, but they know all the ins and outs of the middle-school program. And since you're all in the same homeroom, I thought it would be nice if you got to know each other a little before school started. Okay? So, kids, this is August. August, this is Jack Will."

Jack Will looked at me and put out his hand. When I shook it, he kind of half smiled and said: "Hey," and looked down really fast.

"This is Julian," said Mr. Tushman. "Hey," said Julian, and did the same exact thing as Jack Will: took my hand, forced a smile, looked down fast.

"And Charlotte," said Mr. Tushman.

Charlotte had the blondest hair I've ever seen. She didn't shake my hand but gave me a quick little wave and smiled. "Hi, August. Nice to meet you," she said. "Hi," I said, looking down. She was wearing bright green Crocs.

"So," said Mr. Tushman, putting his hands together in a kind of slow clap. "What I thought you guys could do is take August on a little tour of the school. Maybe you could start on the third floor? That's where your homeroom class is going to be: room 301. I think. Mrs. G, is—"

"Room 301!" Mrs. Garcia called out from the other room.

"Room 301." Mr. Tushman nodded. "And then you can show August the science labs and the computer room. Then work your way down to the library and the performance space on the second floor. Take him to the cafeteria, of course."

"Should we take him to the music room?" asked Julian.

"Good idea, yes," said Mr. Tushman. "August, do you play any instruments?"



'Jack Will, Julian, and Charlotte'

Page 23

Read by:
Miss Heeley

"No," I said. It wasn't my favourite subject on account of the fact that I don't really have ears. Well, I do, but they don't exactly look like normal ears.

"Well, you may enjoy seeing the music room anyway," said Mr. Tushman. "We have a very nice selection of percussion instruments."

"August, you've been wanting to learn to play the drums," Mom said, trying to get me to look at her. But my eyes were covered by my bangs as I stared at a piece of old gum that was stuck to the bottom of Mr. Tushman's desk.

"Great! Okay, so why don't you guys get going?" said Mr. Tushman. "Just be back here in . . ." He looked at Mom. "Half an hour, okay?"

I think Mom nodded.

"So, is that okay with you, August?" he asked me.

I didn't answer. "Is that okay, August?" Mom repeated. I looked at her now. I wanted her to see how mad I was at her. But then I saw her face and just nodded. She seemed more scared than I was.

The other kids had started out the door, so I followed them.

"See you soon," said Mom, her voice sounding a little higher than normal. I didn't answer her.



'The Grand Tour'

Page 24

Read by:
Mr Otero

Jack Will, Julian, Charlotte, and I went down a big hallway to some wide stairs. No one said a word as we walked up to the third floor.

When we got to the top of the stairs, we went down a little hallway full of lots of doors. Julian opened the door marked 301.

"This is our homeroom," he said, standing in front of the half-opened door. "We have Ms. Petosa. They say she's okay, at least for homeroom. I heard she's really strict if you get her for math, though."

"That's not true," said Charlotte. "My sister had her last year and said she's totally nice."

"Not what I heard," answered Julian, "but whatever." He closed the door and continued walking down the hallway.

"This is the science lab," he said when he got to the next door. And just like he did two seconds ago, he stood in front of the half-opened door and started talking. He didn't look at me once while he talked, which was okay because I wasn't looking at him, either. "You won't know who you have for science until the first day of school, but you want to get Mr. Haller. He used to be in the lower school. He would play this giant tuba in class."

"It was a baritone horn," said Charlotte.

"It was a tuba!" answered Julian, closing the door.

"Dude, let him go inside so he can check it out," Jack Will told him, pushing past Julian and opening the door.

"Go inside if you want," Julian said. It was the first time he looked at me.



'The Grand Tour'

Page 25

Read by:
Mr Otero

I shrugged and walked over to the door. Julian moved out of the way quickly, like he was afraid I might accidentally touch him as I passed by him.

"Nothing much to see," Julian said, walking in after me. He started pointing to a bunch of stuff around the room. "That's the incubator. That big black thing is the chalkboard. These are the desks. These are chairs. Those are the Bunsen burners. This is a gross science poster. This is chalk. This is the eraser."

"I'm sure he knows what an eraser is," Charlotte said, sounding a little like Via.

"How would I know what he knows?" Julian answered. "Mr. Tushman said he's never been to a school before."

"You know what an eraser is, right?" Charlotte asked me.

I admit I was feeling so nervous that I didn't know what to say or do except look at the floor.

"Hey, can you talk?" asked Jack Will.

"Yeah." I nodded. I still really hadn't looked at any of them yet, not directly. "You know what an eraser is, right?" asked Jack Will.

"Of course!" I mumbled.

"I told you there was nothing to see in here," said Julian, shrugging.

"I have a question . . . ," I said, trying to keep my voice steady. "Um. What exactly is homeroom? Is that like a subject?"

"No, that's just your group," explained Charlotte, ignoring Julian's smirk. "It's like where you go when you get to school in the morning and your homeroom teacher takes attendance and stuff like that. In a way, it's your main class even though it's not really a class. I mean, it's a class, but—"

"I think he gets it, Charlotte," said Jack Will.

"Do you get it?" Charlotte asked me.

"Yeah." I nodded at her.



'The Grand Tour'

Page 26

Read by:
Mr Otero

"Okay, let's get out of here," said Jack Will, walking away.

"Wait, Jack, we're supposed to be answering questions," said Charlotte. Jack Will rolled his eyes a little as he turned around.

"Do you have any more questions?" he asked.

"Um, no," I answered. "Oh, well, actually, yes. Is your name Jack or Jack Will?"

"Jack is my first name. Will is my last name."

"Oh, because Mr. Tushman introduced you as Jack Will, so I thought . . ."

"Ha! You thought his name was Jackwill!" laughed Julian.

"Yeah, some people call me by my first and last name," Jack said, shrugging.

"I don't know why. Anyway, can we go now?"

"Let's go to the performance space next," said Charlotte, leading the way out of the science room. "It's very cool. You'll like it, August."





'The Performance Space'

Page 27

Read by:
Mr Gittins

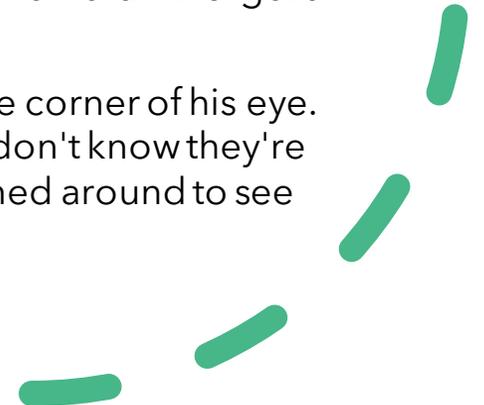
Charlotte basically didn't stop talking as we headed down to the second floor. She was describing the play they had put on last year, which was Oliver! She played Oliver even though she's a girl. As she said this, she pushed open the double doors to a huge auditorium. At the other end of the room was a stage.

Charlotte started skipping toward the stage. Julian ran after her, and then turned around halfway down the aisle.

"Come on!" he said loudly, waving for me to follow him, which I did.

"There were like hundreds of people in the audience that night," said Charlotte, and it took me a second to realize she was still talking about Oliver! "I was so, so nervous. I had so many lines, and I had all these songs to sing. It was so, so, so, so hard!" Although she was talking to me, she really didn't look at me much. "On opening night, my parents were all the way in back of the auditorium, like where Jack is right now, but when the lights are off, you can't really see that far back. So I was like, 'Where are my parents? Where are my parents?' And then Mr. Resnick, our theatre-arts teacher last year—he said: 'Charlotte, stop being such a diva!' And I was like, 'Okay!' And then I spotted my parents and I was totally fine. I didn't forget a single line."

While she was talking, I noticed Julian staring at me out of the corner of his eye. This is something I see people do a lot with me. They think I don't know they're staring, but I can tell from the way their heads are tilted. I turned around to see where Jack had gone to.





'The Performance Space'

Page 28

Read by:
Mr Gittins

He had stayed in the back of the auditorium, like he was bored.

"We put on a play every year," said Charlotte.

"I don't think he's going to want to be in the school play, Charlotte," said Julian sarcastically.

"You can be in the play without actually being 'in' the play," Charlotte answered, looking at me. "You can do the lighting. You can paint the backdrops."

"Oh yeah, whoopee," said Julian, twirling his finger in the air.

"But you don't have to take the theatre-arts elective if you don't want to," Charlotte said, shrugging. "There's dance or chorus or band. There's leadership."

"Only dorks take leadership," Julian interrupted.

"Julian, you're being so obnoxious!" said Charlotte, which made Julian laugh. "I'm taking the science elective," I said.

"Cool!" said Charlotte.

Julian looked directly at me. "The science elective is supposedly the hardest elective of all," he said. "No offense, but if you've never, ever been in a school before, why do you think you're suddenly going to be smart enough to take the science elective? I mean, have you ever even studied science before? Like real science, not like the kind you do in kits?"

"Yeah." I nodded.

"He was homeschooled, Julian!" said Charlotte.

"So teachers came to his house?" asked Julian, looking puzzled. "No, his mother taught him!" answered Charlotte.

"Is she a teacher?" Julian said.

"Is your mother a teacher?" Charlotte asked me.

"No," I said. "So she's not a real teacher!" said Julian, as if that proved his point.



'The Performance Space'

Page 29

Read by:
Mr Gittins

"That's what I mean. How can someone who's not a real teacher actually teach science?"

"I'm sure you'll do fine," said Charlotte, looking at me.

"Let's just go to the library now," Jack called out, sounding really bored.

"Why is your hair so long?" Julian said to me. He sounded like he was annoyed.

I didn't know what to say, so I just shrugged.

"Can I ask you a question?" he said.

I shrugged again. Didn't he just ask me a question?

"What's the deal with your face? I mean, were you in a fire or something?"

"Julian, that's so rude!" said Charlotte.

"I'm not being rude," said Julian, "I'm just asking a question. Mr. Tushman said we could ask questions if we wanted to."

"Not rude questions like that," said Charlotte. "Besides, he was born like that. That's what Mr. Tushman said. You just weren't listening."

"I was so listening!" said Julian. "I just thought maybe he was in a fire, too." "Geez, Julian," said Jack. "Just shut up."

"You shut up!" Julian yelled.

"Come on, August," said Jack. "Let's just go to the library already."

I walked toward Jack and followed him out of the auditorium. He held the double doors open for me, and as I passed by, he looked at me right in the face, kind of daring me to look back at him, which I did. Then I actually smiled. I don't know. Sometimes when I have the feeling like I'm almost crying, it can turn into an almost-laughing feeling. And

that must have been the feeling I was having then, because I smiled, almost like I was going to giggle. The thing is, because of the way my face is, people who don't know me very well don't always get that I'm smiling.



'The Performance Space' Page 30

Read by:
Mr Gittins

My mouth doesn't go up at the corners the way other people's mouths do. It just goes straight across my face. But somehow Jack Will got that I had smiled at him. And he smiled back.

"Julian's a jerk," he whispered before Julian and Charlotte reached us. "But, dude, you're gonna have to talk." He said this seriously, like he was trying to help me. I nodded as Julian and Charlotte caught up to us. We were all quiet for a second, all of us just kind of nodding, looking at the floor. Then I looked up at Julian.

"The word's 'supposedly,' by the way," I said.

"What are you talking about?"

"You said 'supposably' before," I said. "I did not!"

"Yeah you did," Charlotte nodded. "You said the science elective is supposably really hard. I heard you."

"I absolutely did not," he insisted.

"Whatever," said Jack. "Let's just go."

"Yeah, let's just go," agreed Charlotte, following Jack down the stairs to the next floor. I started to follow her, but Julian cut right in front of me, which actually made me stumble backward.

"Oops, sorry about that!" said Julian.
But I could tell from the way he looked at me that he wasn't really sorry at all.

'The Deal'

Page 31

Read by:
Miss Jones

Mom and Mr. Tushman were talking when we got back to the office. Mrs. Garcia was the first to see us come back, and she started smiling her shiny smile as we walked in.

"So, August, what did you think? Did you like what you saw?" she asked.

"Yeah." I nodded, looking over at Mom.

Jack, Julian, and Charlotte were standing by the door, not sure where to go or if they were still needed. I wondered what else they'd been told about me before they'd met me.

"Did you see the baby chick?" Mom asked me.

As I shook my head, Julian said: "Are you talking about the baby chicks in science? Those get donated to a farm at the end of every school year."

"Oh," said Mom, disappointed. "But they hatch new ones every year in science," Julian added. "So August will be able to see them again in the spring."

"Oh, good," said Mom, eyeing me. "They were so cute, August." I wished she wouldn't talk to me like I was a baby in front of other people.

"So, August," said Mr. Tushman, "did these guys show you around enough or do you want to see more? I realize I forgot to ask them to show you the gym."

"We did anyway, Mr. Tushman," said Julian. "Excellent!" said Mr. Tushman.

"And I told him about the school play and some of the electives," said Charlotte. "Oh no!" she said suddenly. "We forgot to show him the art room!"



'The Deal'

Page 32

Read by:
Miss Jones

"That's okay," said Mr. Tushman.

"But we can show it to him now," Charlotte offered.

"Don't we have to pick Via up soon?" I said to Mom.

That was our signal for my telling Mom if I really wanted to leave.

"Oh, you're right," said Mom, getting up. I could tell she was pretending to check the time on her watch. "I'm sorry, everybody. I lost track of the time. We have to go pick up my daughter at her new school. She's taking an unofficial tour today." This part wasn't a lie: that Via was checking out her new school today. The part that was a lie was that we were picking her up at the school, which we weren't. She was coming home with Dad later.

"Where does she go to school?" asked Mr. Tushman, getting up. "She's starting Faulkner High School this fall."

"Wow, that's not an easy school to get into. Good for her!"

"Thank you," said Mom, nodding. "It'll be a bit of a schlep, though. The A train down to Eighty-Sixth, then the crosstown bus all the way to the East Side. Takes an hour that way but it's just a fifteen-minute drive."

"It'll be worth it. I know a couple of kids who got into Faulkner and love it," said Mr. Tushman.

"We should really go, Mom," I said, tugging at her pocketbook.

We said goodbye kind of quickly after that. I think Mr. Tushman was a little surprised that we were leaving so suddenly, and then I wondered if he would blame Jack and Charlotte, even though it was really only Julian who made me feel kind of bad.

"Everyone was really nice," I made sure to tell Mr. Tushman before we left.

"I look forward to having you as a student," said Mr. Tushman, patting my back.

"Bye," I said to Jack, Charlotte, and Julian, but I didn't look at them—or look up at all—until I left the building.



'Home'

Page 33

Read by:
Mr Blair



As soon as we had walked at least half a block from the school, Mom said: "So . . . how'd it go? Did you like it?"

"Not yet, Mom. When we get home," I said. The moment we got inside the house, I ran to my room and threw myself onto my bed. I could tell Mom didn't know what was up, and I guess I really didn't, either. I felt very sad and a tiny bit happy at the exact same time, kind of like that laughing-crying feeling all over again.

My dog, Daisy, followed me into the room, jumped on the bed, and started licking me all over my face.

"Who's a good girlie?" I said in my Dad voice. "Who's a good girlie?"

"Is everything okay, sweetness?" Mom said. She wanted to sit down beside me but Daisy was hogging the bed. "Excuse me, Daisy." She sat down, nudging Daisy over. "Were those kids not nice to you, Auggie?"

"Oh no," I said, only half lying. "They were okay."

"But were they nice? Mr. Tushman went out of his way to tell me what sweet kids they are."

"Uh-huh." I nodded, but I kept looking at Daisy, kissing her on the nose and rubbing her ear until her back leg did that little flea-scratch shake.

"That boy Julian seemed especially nice," Mom said.

"Oh, no, he was the least nice. I liked Jack, though. He was nice. I thought his name was Jack Will but it's just Jack."

"Wait, maybe I'm getting them confused. Which one was the one with the dark hair that was brushed forward?"

'Home'

Page 34

Read by:
Mr Blair



"Julian."

"And he wasn't nice?"

"No, not nice."

"Oh." She thought about this for a second. "Okay, so is he the kind of kid who's one way in front of grown-ups and another way in front of kids?"

"Yeah, I guess." "Ah, hate those," she answered, nodding. "He was like, 'So, August, what's the deal with your face?' " I said, looking at Daisy the whole time. " 'Were you in a fire or something?' "

Mom didn't say anything. When I looked up at her, I could tell she was completely shocked.

"He didn't say it in a mean way," I said quickly. "He was just asking." Mom nodded.

"But I really liked Jack," I said. "He was like, 'Shut up, Julian!' And Charlotte was like, 'You're so rude, Julian!' "

Mom nodded again. She pressed her fingers on her forehead like she was pushing against a headache.

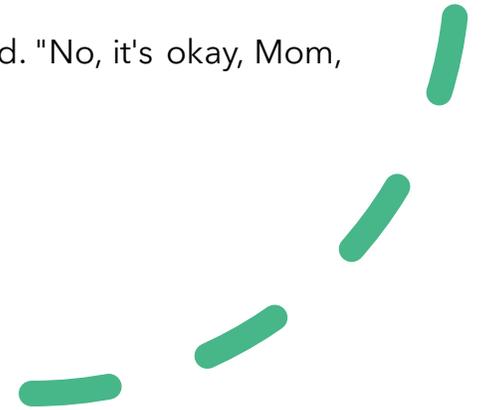
"I'm so sorry, Auggie," she said quietly. Her cheeks were bright red. "No, it's okay, Mom, really."

"You don't have to go to school if you don't want, sweetie."

"I want to," I said.

"Auggie . . ."

"Really, Mom. I want to." And I wasn't lying.





'First-Day Jitters'

Page 35

Read by:
Mrs Jackson

Okay, so I admit that the first day of school I was so nervous that the butterflies in my stomach were more like pigeons flying around my insides. Mom and Dad were probably a little nervous, too, but they acted all excited for me, taking pictures of me and Via before we left the house since it was Via's first day of school, too.

Up until a few days before, we still weren't sure I would be going to school at all. After my tour of the school, Mom and Dad had reversed sides on whether I should go or not. Mom was now the one saying I shouldn't go and Dad was saying I should. Dad had told me he was really proud of how I'd handled myself with Julian and that I was turning into quite the strong man. And I heard him tell Mom that he now thought she had been right all along. But Mom, I could tell, wasn't so sure anymore. When Dad told her that he and Via wanted to walk me to school today, too, since it was on the way to the subway station, Mom seemed relieved that we would all be going together. And I guess I was, too.

Even though Beecher Prep is just a few blocks from our house, I've only been on that block a couple of times before. In general, I try to avoid blocks where there are lots of kids roaming around. On our block, everybody knows me and I know everybody. I know every brick and every tree trunk and every crack in the sidewalk. I know Mrs. Grimaldi, the lady who's always sitting by her window, and the old guy who walks up and down the street whistling like a bird. I know the deli on the corner where Mom gets our bagels, and the waitresses at the coffee shop who all call me "honey" and give me lollipops whenever they see me.



'First-Day Jitters' Page 36

Read by:
Mrs Jackson

I love my neighbourhood of North River Heights, which is why it was so strange to be walking down these blocks feeling like it was all new to me suddenly. Amesfort Avenue, a street I've been down a million times, looked totally different for some reason. Full of people I never saw before, waiting for buses, pushing strollers.

We crossed Amesfort and turned up Heights Place: Via walked next to me like she usually does, and Mom and Dad were behind us. As soon as we turned the corner, we saw all the kids in front of the school—hundreds of them talking to each other in little groups, laughing, or standing with their parents, who were talking with other parents. I kept my head way down.

"Everyone's just as nervous as you are," said Via in my ear. "Just remember that this is everyone's first day of school. Okay?"

Mr. Tushman was greeting students and parents in front of the school entrance.

I have to admit: so far, nothing bad had happened. I didn't catch anyone staring or even noticing me. Only once did I look up to see some girls looking my way and whispering

with their hands cupped over their mouths, but they looked away when they saw me notice them.

We reached the front entrance.

"Okay, so this is it, big boy," said Dad, putting his hands on top of my shoulders. "Have a great first day. I love you," said Via, giving me a big kiss and a hug. "You, too," I said.

"I love you, Auggie," said Dad, hugging me.

"Bye."

Then Mom hugged me, but I could tell she was about to cry, which would have totally embarrassed me, so I just gave her a fast hard hug, turned, and disappeared into the school.

'Locks'

Page 37

Read by:
Miss Allman



I went straight to room 301 on the third floor. Now I was glad I'd gone on that little tour, because I knew exactly where to go and didn't have to look up once. I noticed that some kids were definitely staring at me now. I did my thing of pretending not to notice.

I went inside the classroom, and the teacher was writing on the chalkboard while all the kids started sitting at different desks. The desks were in a half circle facing the chalkboard, so I chose the desk in the middle toward the back, which I thought would make it harder for anyone to stare at me. I still kept my head way down, just looking up enough from under my bangs to see everyone's feet. As the desks started to fill up, I did notice that no one sat down next to me. A couple of times someone was about to sit next to me, then changed his or her mind at the last minute and sat somewhere else.

"Hey, August." It was Charlotte, giving me her little wave as she sat down at a desk in the front of the class. Why anyone would ever choose to sit way up front in a class, I don't know.

"Hey," I said, nodding hello. Then I noticed Julian was sitting a few seats away from her, talking to some other kids. I know he saw me, but he didn't say hello.

Suddenly someone was sitting down next to me. It was Jack Will. Jack. "What's up," he said, nodding at me.

"Hey, Jack," I answered, waving my hand, which I immediately wished I hadn't done because it felt kind of uncool.



'Locks'

Page 38

Read by:
Miss Allman



"Okay, kids, okay, everybody! Settle down," said the teacher, now facing us. She had written her name, Ms. Petosa, on the chalkboard. "Everybody find a seat, please. Come in," she said to a couple of kids who had just walked in the room. "There's a seat there, and right there."

She hadn't noticed me yet.

"Now, the first thing I want everyone to do is stop talking and . . ."

She noticed me. ". . . put your backpacks down and quiet down."

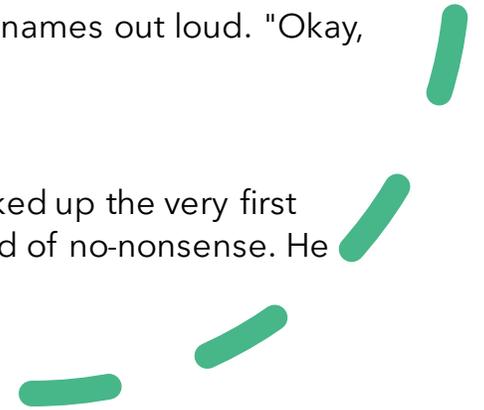
She had only hesitated for a millionth of a second, but I could tell the moment she saw me. Like I said: I'm used to it by now.

"I'm going to take attendance and do the seating chart," she continued, sitting on the edge of her desk. Next to her were three neat rows of accordion folders. "When I call your name, come up and I'll hand you a folder with your name on it. It contains your class schedule and your combination lock, which you should not try to open until I tell you to. Your locker number is written on the class schedule. Be forewarned that some lockers are not right outside this class but down the hall, and before anyone even thinks of asking: no, you cannot switch lockers and you can't switch locks. Then if there's time at the end of this period, we're all going to get to know each other a little better, okay? Okay."

She picked up the clipboard on her desk and started reading the names out loud. "Okay, so, Julian Albans?" she said, looking up.

Julian raised his hand and said "Here" at the same time.

"Hi, Julian," she said, making a note on her seating chart. She picked up the very first folder and held it out toward him. "Come pick it up," she said, kind of no-nonsense. He got up and took it from her. "Ximena Chin?"



'Locks'

Page 39

Read by:
Miss Allman

She handed a folder to each kid as she read off the names. As she went down the list, I noticed that the seat next to me was the only one still empty, even though there were two kids sitting at one desk just a few seats away. When she called the name of one of them, a big kid named Henry Joplin who already looked like a teenager, she said: "Henry, there's an empty desk right over there. Why don't you take that seat, okay?"

She handed him his folder and pointed to the desk next to mine. Although I didn't look at him directly, I could tell Henry did not want to move next to me, just by the way he dragged his backpack on the floor as he came over, like he was moving in slow motion. Then he plopped his backpack up really high on the right side of the desk so it was kind of like a wall between his desk and mine.

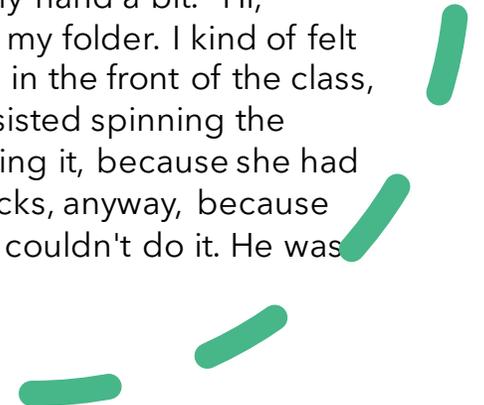
"Maya Markowitz?" Ms. Petosa was saying.

"Here," said a girl about four desks down from me.

"Miles Noury?"

"Here," said the kid that had been sitting with Henry Joplin. As he walked back to his desk, I saw him shoot Henry a "poor you" look.

"August Pullman?" said Ms. Petosa. "Here," I said quietly, raising my hand a bit. "Hi, August," she said, smiling at me very nicely when I went up to get my folder. I kind of felt everyone's eyes burning into my back for the few seconds I stood in the front of the class, and everybody looked down when I walked back to my desk. I resisted spinning the combination when I sat down, even though everyone else was doing it, because she had specifically told us not to. I was already pretty good at opening locks, anyway, because I've used them on my bike. Henry kept trying to open his lock but couldn't do it. He was getting frustrated and kind of cursing under his breath.



'Locks'

Page 40

Read by:
Miss Allman

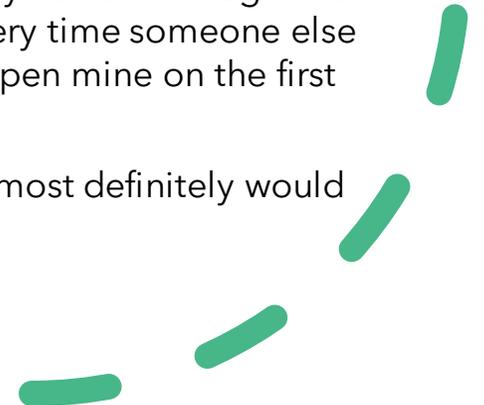


Ms. Petosa called out the next few names. The last name was Jack Will. After she handed Jack his folder, she said: "Okay, so, everybody write your combinations down somewhere safe that you won't forget, okay? But if you do forget, which happens at least three point two times per semester, Mrs. Garcia has a list of all the combination numbers. Now go ahead, take your locks out of your folders and spend a couple of minutes practicing how to open them, though I know some of you went ahead and did that anyway." She was looking at Henry when she said that. "And in the meanwhile, I'll tell you guys a little something about myself. And then you guys can tell me a little about yourselves and we'll, um, get to know each other. Sound good? Good."

She smiled at everyone, though I felt like she was smiling at me the most. It wasn't a shiny smile, like Mrs. Garcia's smile, but a normal smile, like she meant it. She looked very different from what I thought teachers were going to look like. I guess I thought she'd look like Miss Fowl from Jimmy Neutron: an old lady with a big bun on top of her head. But, in fact, she looked exactly like Mon Mothma from Star Wars Episode IV: haircut kind of like a boy's, and a big white shirt kind of like a tunic.

She turned around and started writing on the chalkboard. Henry still couldn't get his lock to open, and he was getting more and more frustrated every time someone else popped one open. He got really annoyed when I was able to open mine on the first try.

The funny thing is, if he hadn't put the backpack between us, I most definitely would have offered to help him.



'Around the Room'

Page 41

Read by:
Mrs Machin



Ms. Petosa told us a little about who she was. It was boring stuff about where she originally came from, and how she always wanted to teach, and she left her job on Wall Street about six years ago to pursue her "dream" and teach kids. She ended by asking if anyone had any questions, and Julian raised his hand.

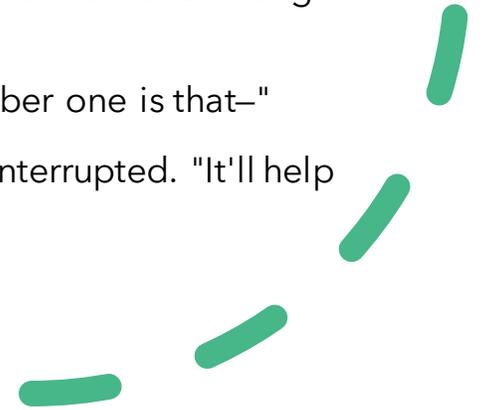
"Yes . . ." She had to look at the list to remember his name. "Julian."
"That's cool about how you're pursuing your dream," he said. "Thank you!" "You're welcome!" He smiled proudly.

"Okay, so why don't you tell us a little about yourself, Julian? Actually, here's what I want everyone to do. Think of two things you want other people to know about you. Actually, wait a minute: how many of you came from the Beecher lower school?" About half the kids raised their hands. "Okay, so a few of you already know each other. But the rest of you, I guess, are new to the school, right? Okay, so everyone think of two things you want other people to know about you—and if you know some of the other kids, try to think of things they don't already know about you. Okay? Okay. So let's start with Julian and we'll go around the room."

Julian scrunched up his face and started tapping his forehead like he was thinking really hard.

"Okay, whenever you're ready," Ms. Petosa said. "Okay, so number one is that—"

"Do me a favour and start with your names, okay?" Ms. Petosa interrupted. "It'll help me remember everyone."



'Around the Room'

Page 42

Read by:
Mrs Machin



"Oh, okay. So my name is Julian. And the number one thing I'd like to tell everyone about myself is that . . . I just got Battleground Mystic for my Wii and it's totally awesome. And the number two thing is that we got a Ping-Pong table this summer."

"Very nice, I love Ping-Pong," said Ms. Petosa. "Does anyone have any questions for Julian?"

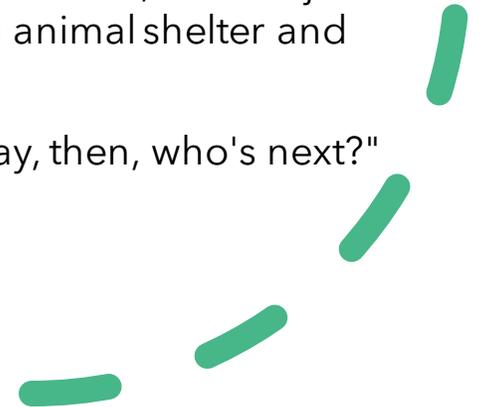
"Is Battleground Mystic multiplayer or one player?" said the kid named Miles.

"Not those kinds of questions, guys," said Ms. Petosa.

"Okay, so how about you. . . ." She pointed to Charlotte, probably because her desk was closest to the front.

"Oh, sure." Charlotte didn't hesitate for even a second, like she knew exactly what she wanted to say. "My name is Charlotte. I have two sisters, and we just got a new puppy named Suki in July. We got her from an animal shelter and she's so, so cute!"

"That's great, Charlotte, thank you," said Ms. Petosa. "Okay, then, who's next?"





'Lamb to the Slaughter'

Page 43

Read by: Mrs Jackson

"Like a lamb to the slaughter": Something that you say about someone who goes somewhere calmly, not knowing that something unpleasant is going to happen to them.

I Googled it last night. That's what I was thinking when Ms. Petosa called my name and suddenly it was my turn to talk.

"My name is August," I said, and yeah, I kind of mumbled it.

"What?" said someone.

"Can you speak up, honey?" said Ms. Petosa.

"My name is August," I said louder, forcing myself to look up. "I, um . . . have a sister named Via and a dog named Daisy. And, um . . . that's it."

"Wonderful," said Ms. Petosa. "Anyone have questions for August?"

No one said anything.

"Okay, you're next," said Ms. Petosa to Jack.

"Wait, I have a question for August," said Julian, raising his hand. "Why do you have that tiny braid in the back of your hair? Is that like a Padawan thing?"

"Yeah." I shrug-nodded.

"What's a Padawan thing?" said Ms. Petosa, smiling at me. "

It's from Star Wars," answered Julian. "A Padawan is a Jedi apprentice."

"Oh, interesting," answered Ms. Petosa, looking at me. "So, are you into Star Wars, August?"

"I guess." I nodded, not looking up because what I really wanted was to just slide under the desk.



'Lamb to the Slaughter'

Page 44

Read by: Mrs Jackson

"Who's your favourite character?" Julian asked. I started thinking maybe he wasn't so bad.

"Jango Fett."

"What about Darth Sidious?" he said. "Do you like him?"

"Okay, guys, you can talk about Star Wars stuff at recess," said Ms. Petosa cheerfully. "But let's keep going. We haven't heard from you yet," she said to Jack.

Now it was Jack's turn to talk, but I admit I didn't hear a word he said. Maybe no one got the Darth Sidious thing, and maybe Julian didn't mean anything at all. But in Star Wars Episode III: Revenge of the Sith, Darth Sidious's face gets burned by Sith lightning and becomes totally deformed. His skin gets all shrivelled up and his whole face just kind of melts.

I peeked at Julian and he was looking at me. Yeah, he knew what he was saying.



'Choose Kind'

Page 45

Read by:
Mrs Ireland



There was a lot of shuffling around when the bell rang and everybody got up to leave. I checked my schedule and it said my next class was English, room 321. I didn't stop to see if anyone else from my homeroom was going my way: I just zoomed out of the class and down the hall and sat down as far from the front as possible. The teacher, a really tall man with a yellow beard, was writing on the chalkboard.

Kids came in laughing and talking in little groups but I didn't look up. Basically, the same thing that happened in homeroom happened again: no one sat next to me except for Jack, who was joking around with some kids who weren't in our homeroom. I could tell Jack was the kind of kid other kids like. He had a lot of friends. He made people laugh.

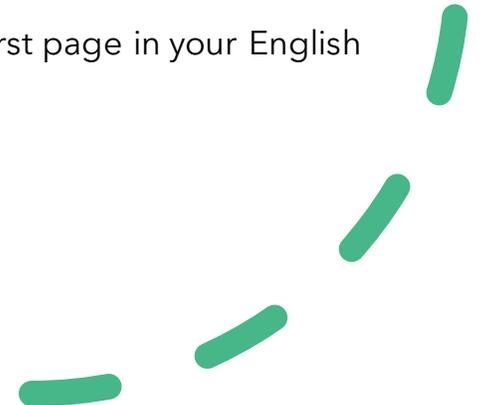
When the second bell rang, everyone got quiet and the teacher turned around and faced us. He said his name was Mr. Browne, and then he started talking about what we would be doing this semester. At a certain point, somewhere between *A Wrinkle in Time* and *Shen of the Sea*, he noticed me but kept right on talking.

I was mostly doodling in my notebook while he talked, but every once in a while I would sneak a look at the other students. Charlotte was in this class. So were Julian and Henry. Miles wasn't.

Mr. Browne had written on the chalkboard in big block letters:

P-R-E-C-E-P-T!

"Okay, everybody write this down at the very top of the very first page in your English notebook."



'Choose Kind'

Page 46

Read by:
Mrs Ireland



As we did what he told us to do, he said: "Okay, so who can tell me what a precept is? Does anyone know?"

No one raised their hands.

Mr. Browne smiled, nodded, and turned around to write on the chalkboard again:

PRECEPTS = RULES ABOUT REALLY IMPORTANT THINGS!

"Like a motto?" someone called out.

"Like a motto!" said Mr. Browne, nodding as he continued writing on the board. "Like a famous quote. Like a line from a fortune cookie. Any saying or ground rule that can motivate you. Basically, a precept is anything that helps guide us when making decisions about really important things."

He wrote all that on the chalkboard and then turned around and faced us. "So, what are some really important things?" he asked us.

A few kids raised their hands, and as he pointed at them, they gave their answers, which he wrote on the chalkboard in really, really sloppy handwriting:

RULES. SCHOOLWORK. HOMEWORK.

"What else?" he said as he wrote, not even turning around. "Just call things out!" He wrote everything everyone called out.

FAMILY. PARENTS. PETS.

One girl called out: "The environment!"

THE ENVIRONMENT.

he wrote on the chalkboard, and added:

OUR WORLD!



'Choose Kind'

Page 47

Read by:
Mrs Ireland



"Sharks, because they eat dead things in the ocean!" said one of the boys, a kid named Reid, and Mr. Browne wrote down

SHARKS.

"Bees!" "Seatbelts!" "Recycling!" "Friends!"

"Okay," said Mr. Browne, writing all those things down. He turned around when he finished writing to face us again. "But no one's named the most important thing of all." We all looked at him, out of ideas. "God?" said one kid, and I could tell that even though Mr. Browne wrote "God" down, that wasn't the answer he was looking for. Without saying anything else, he wrote down:

WHO WE ARE!

"Who we are," he said, underlining each word as he said it. "Who we are! Us! Right? What kind of people are we? What kind of person are you? Isn't that the most important thing of all? Isn't that the kind of question we should be asking ourselves all the time? "What kind of person am I?"

"Did anyone happen to notice the plaque next to the door of this school? Anyone read what it says? Anyone?"

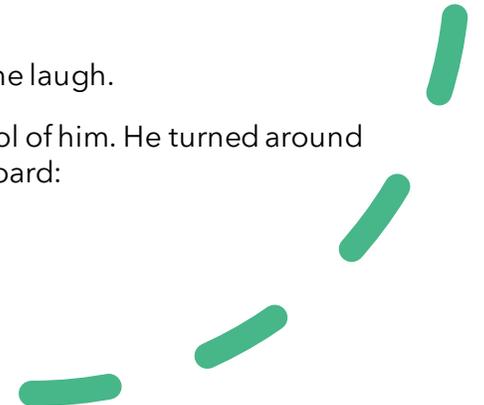
He looked around but no one knew the answer.

"It says: 'Know Thyself,' " he said, smiling and nodding. "And learning who you are is what you're here to do."

"I thought we were here to learn English," Jack cracked, which made everyone laugh.

"Oh yeah, and that, too!" Mr. Browne answered, which I thought was very cool of him. He turned around and wrote in big huge block letters that spread all the way across the chalkboard:

MR. BROWNE'S SEPTEMBER PRECEPT:



'Choose Kind'

Page 48

Read by:
Mrs Ireland



WHEN GIVEN THE CHOICE BETWEEN BEING RIGHT OR BEING KIND, CHOOSE KIND.

"Okay, so, everybody," he said, facing us again, "I want you to start a brand-new section in your notebooks and call it Mr. Browne's Precepts."

He kept talking as we did what he was telling us to do. "Put today's date at the top of the first page. And from now on, at the beginning of every month, I'm going to write a new Mr. Browne precept on the chalkboard and you're going to write it down in your notebook. Then we're going to discuss that precept and what it means. And at the end of the month, you're going to write an essay about

it, about what it means to you. So by the end of the year, you'll all have your own list of precepts to take away with you.

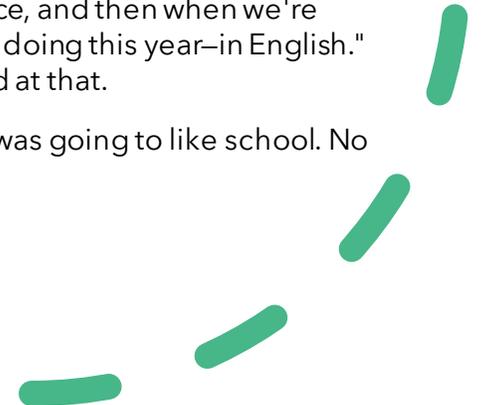
"Over the summer, I ask all my students to come up with their very own personal precept, write it on a postcard, and mail it to me from wherever you go on your summer vacation."

"People really do that?" said one girl whose name I didn't know.

"Oh yeah!" he answered, "people really do that. I've had students send me new precepts years after they've graduated from this school, actually. It's pretty amazing."

He paused and stroked his beard. "But, anyway, next summer seems like a long way off, I know," he joked, which made us laugh. "So, everybody relax a bit while I take attendance, and then when we're finished with that, I'll start telling you about all the fun stuff we're going to be doing this year—in English." He pointed to Jack when he said this, which was also funny, so we all laughed at that.

As I wrote down Mr. Browne's September precept, I suddenly realized that I was going to like school. No matter what.



'Lunch'

Page 49

Read by:
Mr Jones

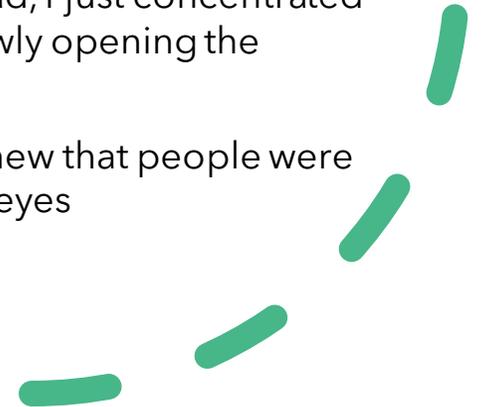


Via had warned me about lunch in middle school, so I guess I should have known it would be hard. I just hadn't expected it to be this hard. Basically, all the kids from all the fifth-grade classes poured into the cafeteria at the same time, talking loudly and bumping into one another while they ran to different tables. One of the lunchroom teachers said something about no seat-saving allowed, but I didn't know what she meant and maybe no one else did, either, because just about everybody was saving seats for their friends. I tried to sit down at one table, but the kid in the next chair said, "Oh, sorry, but somebody else is sitting here."

So I moved to an empty table and just waited for everyone to finish stampeding and the lunchroom teacher to tell us what to do next. As she started telling us the cafeteria rules, I looked around to see where Jack Will was sitting, but I didn't see him on my side of the room. Kids were still coming in as the teachers started calling the first few tables to get their trays and stand on line at the counter. Julian, Henry, and Miles were sitting at a table toward the back of the room.

Mom had packed me a cheese sandwich, graham crackers, and a juice box, so I didn't need to stand on line when my table was called. Instead, I just concentrated on opening my backpack, pulling out my lunch bag, and slowly opening the aluminium-foil wrapping of my sandwich.

I could tell I was being stared at without even looking up. I knew that people were nudging each other, watching me out of the corners of their eyes



'Lunch'

Page 50

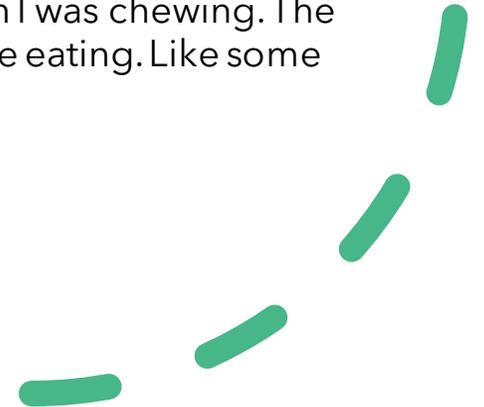
Read by:
Mr Jones



I thought I was used to those kinds of stares by now, but I guess I wasn't.

There was one table of girls that I knew were whispering about me because they were talking behind their hands. Their eyes and whispers kept bouncing over to me.

I hate the way I eat. I know how weird it looks. I had a surgery to fix my cleft palate when I was a baby, and then a second cleft surgery when I was four, but I still have a hole in the roof of my mouth. And even though I had jaw-alignment surgery a few years ago, I have to chew food in the front of my mouth. I didn't even realize how this looked until I was at a birthday party once, and one of the kids told the mom of the birthday boy he didn't want to sit next to me because I was too messy with all the food crumbs shooting out of my mouth. I know the kid wasn't trying to be mean, but he got in big trouble later, and his mom called my mom that night to apologize. When I got home from the party, I went to the bathroom mirror and started eating a saltine cracker to see what I looked like when I was chewing. The kid was right. I eat like a tortoise, if you've ever seen a tortoise eating. Like some prehistoric swamp thing.



'The Summer Table'

Page 51

Read by:
Miss Jones

"Hey, is this seat taken?"

I looked up, and a girl I never saw before was standing across from my table with a lunch tray full of food. She had long wavy brown hair, and wore a brown T-shirt with a purple peace sign on it.

"Uh, no," I said.

She put her lunch tray on the table, plopped her backpack on the floor, and sat down across from me. She started to eat the mac and cheese on her plate.

"Ugh," she said after the swallowing the first bite. "I should have brought a sandwich like you did."

"Yeah," I said, nodding.

"My name is Summer, by the way. What's yours?"

"August." "Cool," she said.

"Summer!" Another girl came over to the table carrying a tray. "Why are you sitting here? Come back to the table."

"It was too crowded," Summer answered her. "Come sit here. There's more room."

The other girl looked confused for a second. I realized she had been one of the girls I had caught looking at me just a few minutes earlier: hand cupped over her mouth, whispering. I guess Summer had been one of the girls at that table, too.

"Never mind," said the girl, leaving. Summer looked at me, shrugged-smiled, and took another bite of her mac and cheese.



'The Summer Table'

Page 52

Read by:
Miss Jones

"Hey, our names kind of match," she said as she chewed. I guess she could tell I didn't know what she meant.

"Summer? August?" she said, smiling, her eyes open wide, as she waited for me to get it.

"Oh, yeah," I said after a second.

"We can make this the 'summer only' lunch table," she said.

"Only kids with summer names can sit here. Let's see, is there anyone here named June or July?"

"There's a Maya," I said.

"Technically, May is spring," Summer answered, "but if she wanted to sit here, we could make an exception." She said it as if she'd actually thought the whole thing through. "There's Julian. That's like the name Julia, which comes from July."

I didn't say anything.

"There's a kid named Reid in my English class," I said.

"Yeah, I know Reid, but how is Reid a summer name?" she asked.

"I don't know." I shrugged. "I just picture, like, a reed of grass being a summer thing."

"Yeah, okay." She nodded, pulling out her notebook.

"And Ms. Petosa could sit here, too. That kind of sounds like the word 'petal,' which I think of as a summer thing, too."

"I have her for homeroom," I said.

"I have her for math," she answered, making a face.

She started writing the list of names on the second-to-last page of her notebook. "So, who else?" she said.

By the end of lunch, we had come up with a whole list of names of kids and teachers who could sit at our table if they wanted. Most of the names weren't actually summer names, but they were names that had some kind of connection to summer.



'The Summer Table'

Page 53

Read by:
Miss Jones

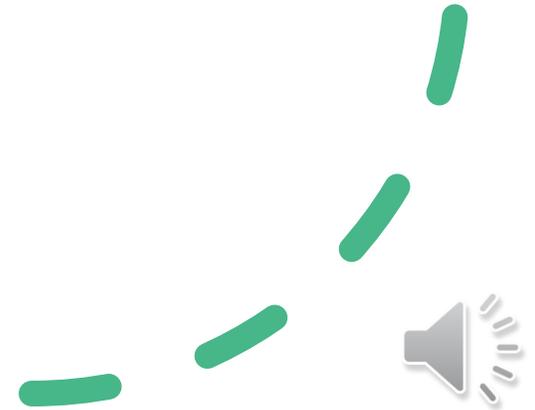
I even found a way of making Jack Will's name work by pointing out that you could turn his name into a sentence about summer, like "Jack will go to the beach," which Summer agreed worked fine.

"But if someone doesn't have a summer name and wants to sit with us," she said very seriously, "we'll still let them if they're nice, okay?"

"Okay." I nodded.

"Even if it's a winter name." "Cool beans," she answered, giving me a thumbs-up.

Summer looked like her name. She had a tan, and her eyes were green like a leaf.



'One to Ten'

Page 54

Read by:
Ms Brookes

Mom always had this habit of asking me how something felt on a scale of one to ten. It started after I had my jaw surgery, when I couldn't talk because my mouth was wired shut. They had taken a piece of bone from my hip bone to insert into my chin to make it look more normal, so I was hurting in a lot of different places. Mom would point to one of my bandages, and I would hold up my fingers to show her how much it was hurting. One meant a little bit. Ten meant so, so, so much. Then she would tell the doctor when he made his rounds what needed adjusting or things like that. Mom got very good at reading my mind sometimes.

After that, we got into the habit of doing the one-to-ten scale for anything that hurt, like if I just had a plain old sore throat, she'd ask: "One to ten?" And I'd say: "Three," or whatever it was.

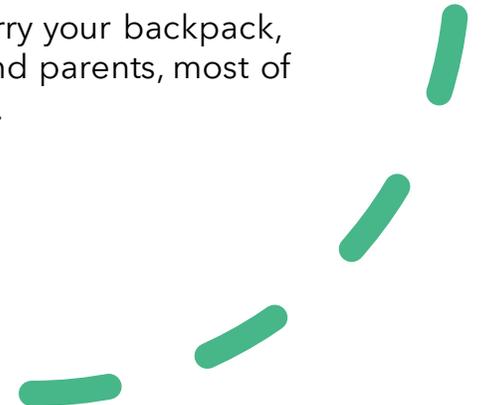
When school was over, I went outside to meet Mom, who was waiting for me at the front entrance like all the other parents or babysitters. The first thing she said after hugging me was: " So, how was it? One to ten?"

"Five," I said, shrugging, which I could tell totally surprised her. "Wow," she said quietly, "that's even better than I hoped for." "Are we picking Via up?"

"Miranda's mother is picking her up today. Do you want me to carry your backpack, sweetness?" We had started walking through the crowd of kids and parents, most of whom were noticing me, "secretly" pointing me out to each other.

"I'm fine," I said.

"It looks too heavy, Auggie." She started to take it from me.



'One to Ten'

Page 55

Read by:
Ms Brookes

"Mom!" I said, pulling my backpack away from her. I walked in front of her through the crowd.

"See you tomorrow, August!" It was Summer. She was walking in the opposite direction.

"Bye, Summer," I said, waving at her.

As soon as we crossed the street and were away from the crowd, Mom said: "Who was that, Auggie?"

"Summer."

"Is she in your class?"

"I have lots of classes."

"Is she in any of your classes?" Mom said. "Nope."

Mom waited for me to say something else, but I just didn't feel like talking. "So it went okay?" said Mom. I could tell she had a million questions she wanted to ask me. "Everyone was nice? Did you like your teachers?"

"Yeah."

"How about those kids you met last week? Were they nice?"

"Fine, fine. Jack hung out with me a lot."

"That's so great, sweetie. What about that boy Julian?"

I thought about that Darth Sidious comment. By now it felt like that had happened a hundred years ago.

"He was okay," I said.

"And the blond girl, what was her name?" "Charlotte. Mom, I said everyone was nice already." "Okay," Mom answered.

I honestly don't know why I was kind of mad at Mom, but I was. We crossed Amesfort Avenue, and she didn't say anything else until we turned onto our block.

"So," Mom said. "How did you meet Summer if she wasn't in any of your classes?"



'One to Ten'

Page 56

Read by:
Ms Brookes



"We sat together at lunch," I said.

I had started kicking a rock between my feet like it was a soccer ball, chasing it back and forth across the sidewalk.

"She seems very nice."

"Yeah, she is."

"She's very pretty," Mom said.

"Yeah, I know," I answered. "We're kind of like Beauty and the Beast."

I didn't wait to see Mom's reaction. I just started running down the sidewalk after the rock, which I had kicked as hard as I could in front of me.



'Padawan'

Page 57

Read by:
Miss Bhasin



That night I cut off the little braid on the back of my head. Dad noticed first.

"Oh good," he said. "I never liked that thing."

Via couldn't believe I had cut it off. "That took you years to grow!" she said, almost like she was angry. "Why did you cut it off?"

"I don't know," I answered.

"Did someone make fun of it?"

"No."

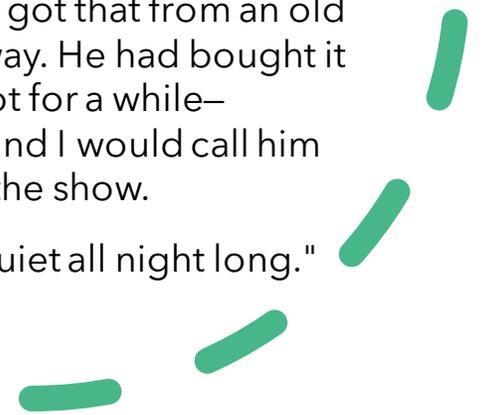
"Did you tell Christopher you were cutting it off?" "We're not even friends anymore!"

"That's not true," she said. "I can't believe you would just cut it off like that," she added snottily, and then practically slammed my bedroom door shut as she left the room.

I was snuggling with Daisy on my bed when Dad came to tuck me in later. He scooped Daisy over gently and lay down next to me on the blanket.

"So, Auggie Doggie," he said, "it was really an okay day?" He got that from an old cartoon about a dachshund named Auggie Doggie, by the way. He had bought it for me on eBay when I was about four, and we watched it a lot for a while—especially in the hospital. He would call me Auggie Doggie and I would call him "dear ol' Dad," like the puppy called the dachshund dad on the show.

"Yeah, it was totally okay," I said, nodding. "You've been so quiet all night long."



'Padawan'

Page 58

Read by:
Miss Bhasin



"I guess I'm tired."
"It was a long day, huh?"

I nodded.
"But it really was okay?"

I nodded again. He didn't say anything, so after a few seconds, I said: "It was better than okay, actually."

"That's great to hear, Auggie," he said quietly, kissing my forehead. "So it looks like it was a good call Mom made, your going to school."

"Yeah. But I could stop going if I wanted to, right?"

"That was the deal, yes," he answered. "Though I guess it would depend on why you wanted to stop going, too, you know. You'd have to let us know. You'd have to talk to us and tell us how you're feeling, and if anything bad was happening. Okay? You promise you'd tell us?"

"Yeah."

"So can I ask you something? Are you mad at Mom or something? You've been kind of huffy with her all night long. You know, Auggie, I'm as much to blame for sending you to school as she is."

"No, she's more to blame. It was her idea."

Mom knocked on the door just then and peeked her head inside my room.

"Just wanted to say good night," she said. She looked kind of shy for a second.

"Hi, Momma," Dad said, picking up my hand and waving it at her.

"I heard you cut off your braid," Mom said to me, sitting down at the edge of the bed next to Daisy.

"It's not a big deal," I answered quickly.

"I didn't say it was," said Mom.

"Why don't you put Auggie to bed tonight?" Dad said to Mom, getting up.

'Padawan'

Page 59

Read by:
Miss Bhasin



"I've got some work to do anyway. Good night, my son, my son." That was another part of our Auggie Doggie routine, though I wasn't in the mood to say Good night, dear ol' Dad. "I'm so proud of you," said Dad, and then he got up out of the bed.

Mom and Dad had always taken turns putting me to bed. I know it was a little babyish of me to still need them to do that, but that's just how it was with us.

"Will you check in on Via?" Mom said to Dad as she lay down next to me. He stopped by the door and turned around. "What's wrong with Via?"

"Nothing," said Mom, shrugging, "at least that she would tell me. But . . . first day of high school and all that." "

Hmm," said Dad, and then he pointed his finger at me and winked. "It's always something with you kids, isn't it?" he said.

"Never a dull moment," said Mom.

"Never a dull moment," Dad repeated. "Good night, guys."

As soon as he closed the door, Mom pulled out the book she'd been reading to me for the last couple of weeks. I was relieved because I really was afraid she'd want to "talk," and I just didn't feel like doing that. But Mom didn't seem to want to talk, either. She just flipped through the pages until she got to where we had left off. We were about halfway through *The Hobbit*.

" 'Stop! stop! ' shouted Thorin," said Mom, reading aloud, "but it was too late, the excited dwarves had wasted their last arrows, and now the bows that Beorn had given them were useless.

"They were a gloomy party that night, and the gloom gathered still deeper on them in the following days. They had crossed the enchanted stream; but beyond it the path seemed to straggle on just as before, and in the forest they could see no change."

I'm not sure why, but all of a sudden I started to cry.

'Padawan'

Page 60

Read by:
Miss Bhasin



Mom put the book down and wrapped her arms around me. She didn't seem surprised that I was crying. "It's okay," she whispered in my ear. "It'll be okay."

"I'm sorry," I said between sniffles.

"Shh," she said, wiping my tears with the back of her hand. "You have nothing to be sorry about. . . ."

"Why do I have to be so ugly, Mommy?" I whispered.

"No, baby, you're not . . ."

"I know I am."

She kissed me all over my face. She kissed my eyes that came down too far. She kissed my cheeks that looked punched in. She kissed my tortoise mouth.

She said soft words that I know were meant to help me, but words can't change my face.



'September'

Page 61

Read by:
Mr Hazell



The rest of September was hard. I wasn't used to getting up so early in the morning. I wasn't used to this whole notion of homework. And I got my first "quiz" at the end of the month. I never got "quizzes" when Mom home-schooled me. I also didn't like how I had no free time anymore. Before, I was able to play whenever I wanted to, but now it felt like I always had stuff to do for school.

And being at school was awful in the beginning. Every new class I had was like a new chance for kids to "not stare" at me. They would sneak peeks at me from behind their notebooks or when they thought I wasn't looking. They would take the longest way around me to avoid bumping into me in any way, like I had some germ they could catch, like my face was contagious.

In the hallways, which were always crowded, my face would always surprise some unsuspecting kid who maybe hadn't heard about me. The kid would make the sound you make when you hold your breath before going underwater, a little "uh!" sound. This happened maybe four or five times a day for the first few weeks: on the stairs, in front of the lockers, in the library. Five hundred kids in a school: eventually every one of them was going to see my face at some time. And I knew after the first couple of days that word had gotten around about me, because every once in a while I'd catch a kid elbowing his friend as they passed me, or talking behind their hands as I walked by them. I can only imagine what they were saying about me. Actually I prefer not to even try to imagine it.

'September'

Page 62

Read by:
Mr Hazell



I'm not saying they were doing any of these things in a mean way, by the way: not once did any kid laugh or make noises or do anything like that. They were just being normal dumb kids. I know that. I kind of wanted to tell them that. Like, it's okay, I'm know I'm weird-looking, take a look, I don't bite. Hey, the truth is, if a Wookiee started going to the school all of a sudden, I'd be curious, I'd probably stare a bit! And if I was walking with Jack or Summer, I'd probably whisper to them: Hey, there's the Wookiee. And if the Wookiee caught me saying that, he'd know I wasn't trying to be mean. I was just pointing out the fact that he's a Wookiee.

It took about one week for the kids in my class to get used to my face. These were the kids I'd see every day in all my classes. It took about two weeks for the rest of the kids in my grade to get used to my face. These were the kids I'd see in the cafeteria, yard time, PE, music, library, computer class.

It took about a month for the rest of the kids in the entire school to get used to it. These were the kids in all the other grades. They were big kids, some of them. Some of them had crazy haircuts. Some of them had earrings in their noses. Some of them had pimples. None of them looked like me.



'Jack Will'

Page 63

Read by:
Mr Gallagher



I hung out with Jack in homeroom, English, history, computer, music, and science, which were all the classes we had together. The teachers assigned seats in every class, and I ended up sitting next to Jack in every single class, so I figured either the teachers were told to put me and Jack together, or it was a totally incredible coincidence.

I walked to classes with Jack, too. I know he noticed kids staring at me, but he pretended not to notice. One time, though, on our way to history, this huge eighth grader who was zooming down the stairs two steps at a time accidentally bumped into us at the bottom of the stairs and knocked me down. As the guy helped me stand up, he got a look at my face, and without even meaning to, he just said: "Whoa!" Then he patted me on the shoulder, like he was dusting me off, and took off after his friends. For some reason, me and Jack started cracking up.

"That guy made the funniest face!" said Jack as we sat down at our desks.

"I know, right?" I said. "He was like, whoa !"

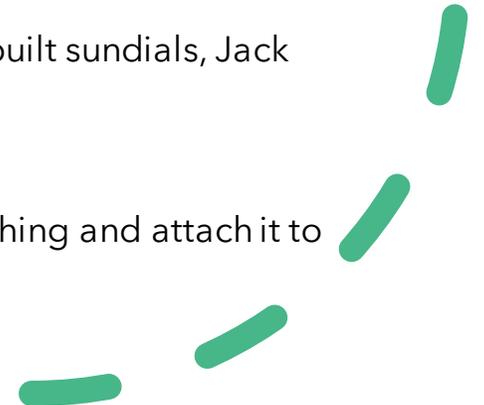
"I swear, I think he wet his pants!"

We were laughing so hard that the teacher, Mr. Roche, had to ask us to settle down.

Later, after we finished reading about how ancient Sumerians built sundials, Jack whispered: "Do you ever want to beat those kids up?"

I shrugged. "I guess. I don't know."

"I'd want to. I think you should get a secret squirt gun or something and attach it to your eyes somehow."



'Jack Will'

Page 64

Read by:
Mr Gallagher



And every time someone stares at you, you would squirt them in the face."

"With some green slime or something," I answered.

"No, no: with slug juice mixed with dog pee."

"Yeah!" I said, completely agreeing.

"Guys," said Mr. Roche from across the room. "People are still reading."

We nodded and looked down at our books. Then Jack whispered: "Are you always going to look this way, August? I mean, can't you get plastic surgery or something?"

I smiled and pointed to my face. "Hello? This is after plastic surgery!"

Jack clapped his hand over his forehead and started laughing hysterically.

"Dude, you should sue your doctor!" he answered between giggles.

This time the two of us were laughing so much we couldn't stop, even after Mr. Roche came over and made us both switch chairs with the kids next to us.





'Mr. Browne's October Precept' Page 65

Read by:
Miss Pound

Mr. Browne's precept for October was:

YOUR DEEDS ARE YOUR MONUMENTS.

He told us that this was written on the tombstone of some Egyptian guy that died thousands of years ago. Since we were just about to start studying ancient Egypt in history, Mr. Browne thought this was a good choice for a precept.

Our homework assignment was to write a paragraph about what we thought the precept meant or how we felt about it.

This is what I wrote:

This precept means that we should be remembered for the things we do. The things we do are the most important things of all. They are more important than what we say or what we look like. The things we do outlast our mortality. The things we do are like monuments that people build to honour heroes after they've died. They're like the pyramids that the Egyptians built to honour the pharaohs. Only instead of being made out of stone, they're made out of the memories people have of you. That's why your deeds are like your monuments. Built with memories instead of with stone.



'Apples'

Page 66

Read by:
Miss Lopez

My birthday is October 10. I like my birthday: 10/10. It would've been great if I'd been born at exactly 10:10 in the morning or at night, but I wasn't. I was born just after midnight. But I still think my birthday is cool. I usually have a little party at home, but this year I asked Mom if I could have a big bowling party. Mom was surprised but happy. She asked me who I wanted to ask from my class, and I said everyone in my homeroom plus Summer.

"That's a lot of kids, Auggie," said Mom.

"I have to invite everyone because I don't want anyone to get their feelings hurt if they find out other people are invited and they aren't, okay?"

"Okay," Mom agreed. "You even want to invite the 'what's the deal' kid?"

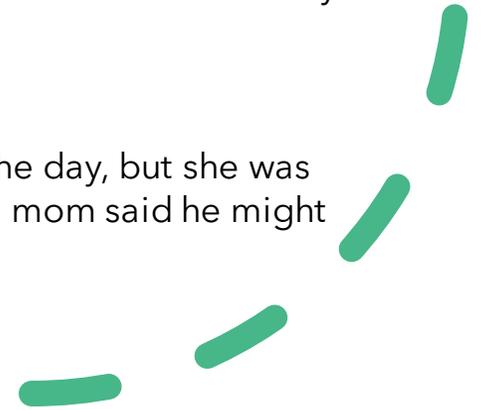
"Yeah, you can invite Julian," I answered. "Geez, Mom, you should forget about that already."

"I know, you're right."

A couple of weeks later, I asked Mom who was coming to my party, and she said: "Jack Will, Summer. Reid Kingsley. Both Maxes. And a couple of other kids said they were going to try to be there."

"Like who?"

"Charlotte's mom said Charlotte had a dance recital earlier in the day, but she was going to try to come to your party if time allowed. And Tristan's mom said he might come after his soccer game."





'Apples'

Page 67

Read by:
Miss Lopez

"So that's it?" I said. "That's like . . . five people."

"That's more than five people, Auggie. I think a lot of people just had plans already," Mom answered. We were in the kitchen. She was cutting one of the apples we had just gotten at the farmers' market into teensy-weensy bites so I could eat it.

"What kind of plans?" I asked.

"I don't know, Auggie. We sent out the invites kind of late."

"Like what did they tell you, though? What reasons did they give?" "Everyone gave different reasons, Auggie." She sounded a bit impatient. "Really, sweetie, it shouldn't matter what their reasons were. People had plans, that's all."

"What did Julian give as his reason?" I asked.

"You know," said Mom, "his mom was the only person who didn't RSVP at all." She looked at me. "I guess the apple doesn't fall far from the tree."

I laughed because I thought she was making a joke, but then I realized she wasn't.

"What does that mean?" I asked.

"Never mind. Now go wash your hands so you can eat."

My birthday party turned out to be much smaller than I thought it would be, but it was still great. Jack, Summer, Reid, Tristan, and both Maxes came from school, and Christopher came, too—all the way from Bridgeport with his parents. And Uncle Ben came. And Aunt Kate and Uncle Po drove in from Boston, though Tata and Poppa were in Florida for the winter. It was fun because all the grown-ups ended up bowling in the lane next to ours, so it really felt like there were a lot of people there to celebrate my birthday.



'Halloween'

Page 68

Read by:

Miss Cowlshaw

At lunch the next day, Summer asked me what I was going to be for Halloween. Of course, I'd been thinking about it since last Halloween, so I knew right away.

"Boba Fett."

"You know you can wear a costume to school on Halloween, right?"

"No way, really?"

"So long as it's politically correct."

"What, like no guns and stuff?"

"Exactly."

"What about blasters?"

"I think a blaster's like a gun, Auggie."

"Oh man . . . ," I said, shaking my head. Boba Fett has a blaster.

"At least, we don't have to come like a character in a book anymore. In the lower school that's what you had to do. Last year I was the Wicked Witch of the West from The Wizard of Oz ."

"But that's a movie, not a book."

"Hello?" Summer answered. "It was a book first! One of my favourite books in the world, actually. My dad used to read it to me every night in the first grade."

When Summer talks, especially when she's excited about something, her eyes squint like she's looking right at the sun.

I hardly ever see Summer during the day, since the only class we have together is English. But ever since that first lunch at school, we've sat at the summer table together every day, just the two of us.



'Halloween'

Page 69

Read by:
Miss Cowlshaw

"So, what are you going to be?" I asked her.

"I don't know yet. I know what I'd really want to go as, but I think it might be too dorky. You know, Savanna's group isn't even wearing costumes this year. They think we're too old for Halloween."

"What? That's just dumb."

"I know, right?"

"I thought you didn't care what those girls think."

She shrugged and took a long drink of her milk.

"So, what dorky thing do you want to dress up as?" I asked her, smiling.

"Promise not to laugh?" She raised her eyebrows and her shoulders, embarrassed. "A unicorn."

I smiled and looked down at my sandwich.

"Hey, you promised not to laugh!" she laughed.

"Okay, okay," I said. "But you're right: that is too dorky."

"I know!" she said. "But I have it all planned out: I'd make the head out of papier- mâché, and paint the horn gold and make the mane gold, too. . . . It would be so awesome."

"Okay." I shrugged.

"Then you should do it. Who cares what other people think, right?"

"Maybe what I'll do is just wear it for the Halloween Parade," she said, snapping her fingers. "And I'll just be, like, a Goth girl for school. Yeah, that's it, that's what I'll do."

"Sounds like a plan." I nodded.

"Thanks, Auggie," she giggled. "You know, that's what I like best about you. I feel like I can tell you anything."

"Yeah?" I answered, nodding. I gave her a thumbs-up sign. "Cool beans."

'School Pictures'

Page 70

Read by:
Miss Dyson

I don't think anyone will be shocked to learn I don't want to have my school picture taken on October 22. No way. No thank you. I stopped letting anyone take pictures of me a while ago. I guess you could call it a phobia. No, actually, it's not a phobia. It's an "aversion," which is a word I just learned in Mr. Browne's class. I have an aversion to having my picture taken. There, I used it in a sentence.

I thought Mom would try to get me to drop my aversion to having my picture taken for school, but she didn't. Unfortunately, while I managed to avoid having the portrait taken, I couldn't get out of being part of the class picture. Ugh. The photographer looked like he'd just sucked on a lemon when he saw me. I'm sure he thought I ruined the picture. I was one of the ones in the front, sitting down. I didn't smile, not that anyone could tell if I had.



'The Cheese Touch'

Page 71

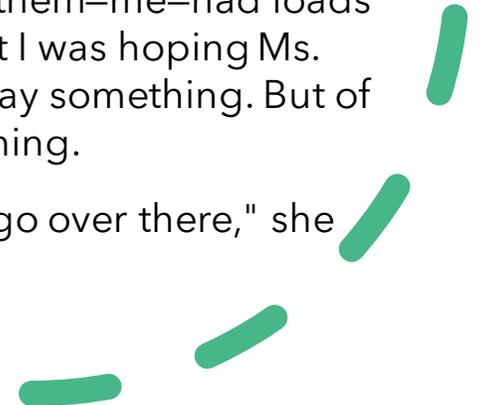
Read by:
Miss Picken



I noticed not too long ago that even though people were getting used to me, no one would actually touch me. I didn't realize this at first because it's not like kids go around touching each other that much in middle school anyway. But last Thursday in dance class, which is, like, my least favourite class, Mrs. Atanabi, the teacher, tried to make Ximena Chin be my dance partner. Now, I've never actually seen someone have a "panic attack" before, but I have heard about it, and I'm pretty sure Ximena had a panic attack at that second. She got really nervous and turned pale and literally broke into a sweat within a minute, and then she came up with some lame excuse about really having to go to the bathroom. Anyway, Mrs. Atanabi let her off the hook, because she ended up not making anyone dance together.

Then yesterday in my science elective, we were doing this cool mystery-powder investigation where we had to classify a substance as an acid or a base. Everyone had to heat their mystery powders on a heating plate and make observations, so we were all huddled around the powders with our notebooks. Now, there are eight kids in the elective, and seven of them were squished together on one side of the plate while one of them—me—had loads of room on the other side. So of course I noticed this, but I was hoping Ms. Rubin wouldn't notice this, because I didn't want her to say something. But of course she did notice this, and of course she said something.

"Guys, there's plenty of room on that side. Tristan, Nino, go over there," she said, so Tristan and Nino scooted over to my side.



'The Cheese Touch'

Page 72

Read by:
Miss Picken



Tristan and Nino have always been okay-nice to me. I want to go on record as saying that. Not super-nice, like they go out of their way to hang out with me, but okay-nice, like they say hello to me and talk to me like normal. And they didn't even make a face when Ms. Rubin told them to come on my side, which a lot of kids do when they think I'm not looking. Anyway, everything was going fine until Tristan's mystery powder started melting. He moved his foil off the plate just as my powder began to melt, too, which is why I went to move mine off the plate, and then my hand accidentally bumped his hand for a fraction of a second. Tristan jerked his hand away so fast he dropped his foil on the floor while also knocking everyone else's foil off the heating plate.

"Tristan!" yelled Ms. Rubin, but Tristan didn't even care about the spilled powder on the floor or that he ruined the experiment. What he was most concerned about was getting to the lab sink to wash his hands as fast as possible. That's when I knew for sure that there was this thing about touching me at Beecher Prep.

I think it's like the Cheese Touch in Diary of a Wimpy Kid. The kids in that story were afraid they'd catch the cooties if they touched the old mouldy cheese on the basketball court. At Beecher Prep, I'm the old mouldy cheese.



'Costumes'

Page 73

Read by:
Miss Mills



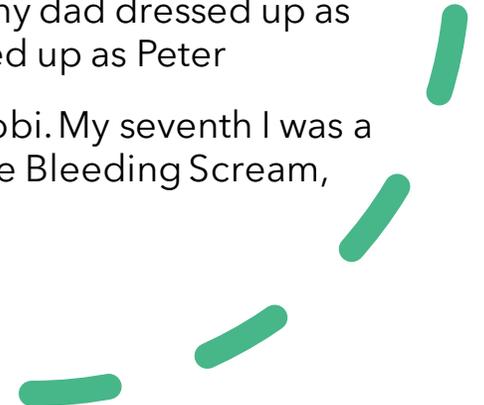
For me, Halloween is the best holiday in the world. It even beats Christmas. I get to dress up in a costume. I get to wear a mask. I get to go around like every other kid with a mask and nobody thinks I look weird. Nobody takes a second look. Nobody notices me. Nobody knows me.

I wish every day could be Halloween. We could all wear masks all the time. Then we could walk around and get to know each other before we got to see what we looked like under the masks.

When I was little, I used to wear an astronaut helmet everywhere I went. To the playground. To the supermarket. To pick Via up from school. Even in the middle of summer, though it was so hot my face would sweat. I think I wore it for a couple of years, but I had to stop wearing it when I had my eye surgery. I was about seven, I think. And then we couldn't find the helmet after that. Mom looked everywhere for it. She figured that it had probably ended up in Grans's attic, and she kept meaning to look for it, but by then I had gotten used to not wearing it.

I have pictures of me in all my Halloween costumes. My first Halloween I was a pumpkin. My second I was Tigger. My third I was Peter Pan (my dad dressed up as Captain Hook). My fourth I was Captain Hook (my dad dressed up as Peter

Pan). My fifth I was an astronaut. My sixth I was Obi-Wan Kenobi. My seventh I was a clone trooper. My eighth I was Darth Vader. My ninth I was the Bleeding Scream, the one that has fake blood oozing out over the skull mask.



'Costumes'

Page 74

Read by:
Miss Mills



This year I'm going to be Boba Fett: not Boba Fett the kid in Star Wars Episode II: Attack of the Clones, but Boba Fett the man from Star Wars Episode V: The Empire Strikes Back. Mom searched everywhere for the costume but couldn't find one in my size, so she bought me a Jango Fett costume—since Jango was Boba's dad and wore the same armour—and then painted the armour green. She did some other stuff to it to make it look worn, too. Anyway, it looks totally real. Mom's good at costumes.

In homeroom we all talked about what we were going to be for Halloween. Charlotte was going as Hermione from Harry Potter. Jack was going as a wolfman. I heard that Julian was going as Jango Fett, which was a weird coincidence. I don't think he liked hearing that I was going as Boba Fett.

On the morning of Halloween, Via had this big crying meltdown about something. Via's always been so calm and cool, but this year she's had a couple of these kinds of fits. Dad was late for work and was like, "Via, let's go! Let's go!" Usually Dad is super patient about things, but not when it comes to his being late for work, and his yelling just stressed out Via even more, and she started crying louder, so Mom told Dad to take me to school and that she'd deal with Via. Then Mom kissed me goodbye quickly, before I even put on my costume, and disappeared into Via's room.

"Auggie, let's go now!" said Dad. "I have a meeting I can't be late for!" "I haven't put my costume on yet!"

"So put it on, already. Five minutes. I'll meet you outside."

I rushed to my room and started to put on the Boba Fett costume, but all of a sudden I didn't feel like wearing it. I'm not sure why—maybe because it had all these belts that needed to be tightened and I needed someone's help to put it on. Or maybe it was because it still smelled a little like paint.

'Costumes'

Page 75

Read by:
Miss Mills



All I knew was that it was a lot of work to put the costume on, and Dad was waiting and would get super impatient if I made him late. So, at the last minute, I threw on the Bleeding Scream costume from last year. It was such an easy costume: just a long black robe and a big white mask. I yelled goodbye from the door on my way out, but Mom didn't even hear me.

"I thought you were going as Jango Fett," said Dad when I got outside.

"Boba Fett!"

"Whatever," said Dad.

"This is a better costume anyway." "Yeah, it's cool," I answered.





'The Bleeding Scream'

Page 76

Read by:
Mrs Dicken

Walking through the halls that morning on my way to the lockers was, I have to say, absolutely awesome. Everything was different now. I was different. Where I usually walked with my head down, trying to avoid being seen, today I walked with my head up, looking around. I wanted to be seen. One kid wearing the same exact costume as mine, long white skull face oozing fake red blood, high-fived me as we passed each other on the stairs. I have no idea who he was, and he had no idea who I was, and I wondered for a second if he would have ever done that if he'd known it was me under the mask.

I was starting to think this was going to go down as one of the most awesome days in the history of my life, but then I got to homeroom. The first costume I saw as I walked inside the door was Darth Sidious. It had one of the rubber masks that are so realistic, with a big black hood over the head and a long black robe. I knew right away it was Julian, of course. He must have changed his costume at the last minute because he thought I was coming as Jango Fett. He was talking to two mummies who must have been Miles and Henry, and they were all kind of looking at the door like they were waiting for someone to come through it. I knew it wasn't a Bleeding Scream they were looking for. It was a Boba Fett.

I was going to go and sit at my usual desk, but for some reason, I don't know why, I found myself walking over to a desk near them, and I could hear them talking.

One of the mummies was saying: "It really does look like him."



'The Bleeding Scream'

Page 77

Read by:
Mrs Dicken

"Like this part especially . . .," answered Julian's voice. He put his fingers on the cheeks and eyes of his Darth Sidious mask.

"Actually," said the mummy, "what he really looks like is one of those shrunken heads. Have you ever seen those? He looks exactly like that."

"I think he looks like an orc."

"Oh yeah!" "If I looked like that," said the Julian voice, kind of laughing, "I swear to God, I'd put a hood over my face every day."

"I've thought about this a lot," said the second mummy, sounding serious, "and I really think . . . if I looked like him, seriously, I think that I'd kill myself."

"You would not," answered Darth Sidious.

"Yeah, for real," insisted the same mummy. "I can't imagine looking in the mirror every day and seeing myself like that. It would be too awful. And getting stared at all the time."

"Then why do you hang out with him so much?" asked Darth Sidious.

"I don't know," answered the mummy. "Tushman asked me to hang out with him at the beginning of the year, and he must have told all the teachers to put us next to each other in all our classes, or something." The mummy shrugged. I knew the shrug, of course. I knew the voice. I knew I wanted to run out of the class right then and there. But I stood where I was and listened to Jack Will finish what he was saying. "I mean, the thing is: he always follows me around. What am I supposed to do?"

"Just ditch him," said Julian.

I don't know what Jack answered because I walked out of the class without anyone knowing I had been there. My face felt like it was on fire while I walked back down the stairs. I was sweating under my costume. And I started crying.



'The Bleeding Scream'

Page 78

Read by:
Mrs Dicken

I couldn't keep it from happening. The tears were so thick in my eyes I could barely see, but I couldn't wipe them through the mask as I walked. I was looking for a little tiny spot to disappear into. I wanted a hole I could fall inside of: a little black hole that would eat me up.





'Names'

Page 79

Read by:
Miss Pound

Rat boy. Freak. Monster. Freddy Krueger. E.T. Gross-out. Lizard face. Mutant. I know the names they call me. I've been in enough playgrounds to know kids can be mean. I know, I know, I know.

I ended up in the second-floor bathroom. No one was there because first period had started and everyone was in class. I locked the door to my stall and took off my mask and just cried for I don't know how long. Then I went to the nurse's office and told her I had a stomach ache, which was true, because I felt like I'd been kicked in the gut. Nurse Molly called Mom and had me lie down on the sofa next to her desk. Fifteen minutes later, Mom was at the door.

"Sweetness," she said, coming over to hug me.

"Hi," I mumbled. I didn't want her to ask anything until afterward.

"You have a stomach ache?" she asked, automatically putting her hand on my forehead to check for my temperature.

"He said he feels like throwing up," said Nurse Molly, looking at me with very nice eyes.

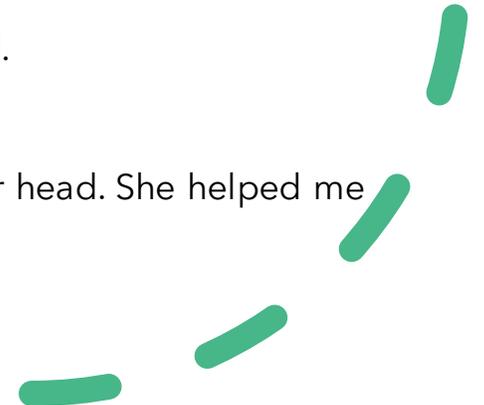
"And I have a headache," I whispered.

"I wonder if it's something you ate," said Mom, looking worried.

"There's a stomach bug going around," said Nurse Molly.

"Oh geez," said Mom, her eyebrows going up as she shook her head. She helped me to my feet. "Should I call a taxi or are you okay walking home?"

"I can walk."





'Names'

Page 80

Read by:
Miss Pound

"What a brave kid!" said Nurse Molly, patting me on the back as she walked us toward the door. "If he starts throwing up or runs a temperature, you should call the doctor."

"Absolutely," said Mom, shaking Nurse Molly's hand. "Thank you so much for taking care of him."

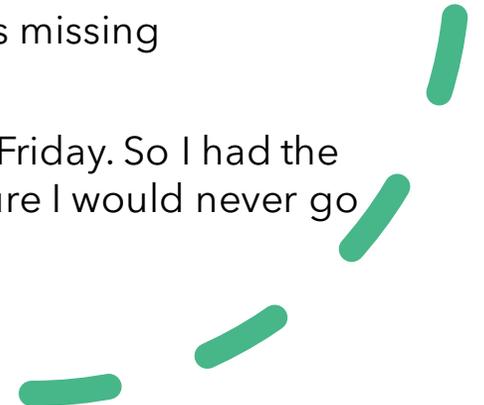
"My pleasure," answered Nurse Molly, putting her hand under my chin and tilting my face up.

"You take care of yourself, okay?"

I nodded and mumbled "Thank you." Mom and I hug-walked the whole way home. I didn't tell her anything about what had happened, and later when she asked me if I felt well enough to go trick-or-treating after school, I said no. This worried her, since she knew how much I usually loved trick-or-treating.

I heard her say to Dad on the phone: ". . . He doesn't even have the energy to go trick-or-treating. . . . No, no fever at all. . . . Well, I will if he doesn't feel better by tomorrow. . . . I know, poor thing . . . Imagine his missing Halloween."

I got out of going to school the next day, too, which was Friday. So I had the whole weekend to think about everything. I was pretty sure I would never go back to school again.



Part Two



Via

*"Far above the world, planet Earth is
blue, and there's nothing I can do." -
David Bowie, "Space Oddity"*





'A Tour of the Gallery'

Page 82

Read by:
Mr Ryan

August is the Sun. Me and Mom and Dad are planets orbiting the Sun. The rest of our family and friends are asteroids and comets floating around the planets orbiting the Sun. The only celestial body that doesn't orbit August the Sun is Daisy the dog, and that's only because to her little doggy eyes, August's face doesn't look very different from any other human's face. To Daisy, all our faces look alike, as flat and pale as the moon.

I'm used to the way this universe works. I've never minded it because it's all I've ever known. I've always understood that August is special and has special needs. If I was playing too loudly and he was trying to take a nap, I knew I would have to play something else because he needed his rest after some procedure or other had left him weak and in pain. If I wanted Mom and Dad to watch me play soccer, I knew that nine out of ten times they'd miss it because they were busy shuttling August to speech therapy or physical therapy or a new specialist or a surgery.

Mom and Dad would always say I was the most understanding little girl in the world. I don't know about that, just that I understood there was no point in complaining. I've seen August after his surgeries: his little face bandaged up and swollen, his tiny body full of IVs and tubes to keep him alive. After you've seen someone else going through that, it feels kind of crazy to complain over not getting the toy you had asked for, or your mom missing a school play. I knew this even when I was six years old. No one ever told it to me. I just knew it.

So I've gotten used to not complaining, and I've gotten used to not bothering Mom and Dad with little stuff.



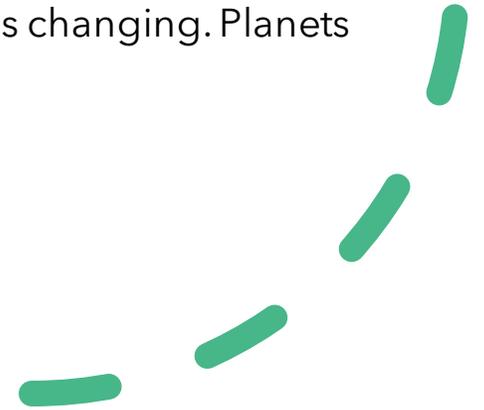
'A Tour of the Gallery'

Page 83

Read by:
Mr Ryan

I've gotten used to figuring things out on my own: how to put toys together, how to organize my life so I don't miss friends' birthday parties, how to stay on top of my schoolwork so I never fall behind in class. I've never asked for help with my homework. Never needed reminding to finish a project or study for a test. If I was having trouble with a subject in school, I'd go home and study it until I figured it out on my own. I taught myself how to convert fractions into decimal points by going online. I've done every school project pretty much by myself. When Mom or Dad ask me how things are going in school, I've always said "good"—even when it hasn't always been so good. My worst day, worst fall, worst headache, worst bruise, worst cramp, worst mean thing anyone could say has always been nothing compared to what August has gone through. This isn't me being noble, by the way: it's just the way I know it is.

And this is the way it's always been for me, for the little universe of us. But this year there seems to be a shift in the cosmos. The galaxy is changing. Planets are falling out of alignment.



'Before August'

Page 84

Read by:
Mr Blower

I honestly don't remember my life before August came into it. I look at pictures of me as a baby, and I see Mom and Dad smiling so happily, holding me. I can't believe how much younger they looked back then: Dad was this hipster dude and Mom was this cute Brazilian fashionista. There's one shot of me at my third birthday: Dad's right behind me while Mom's holding the cake with three lit candles, and in back of us are Tata and Poppa, Grans, Uncle Ben, Aunt Kate, and Uncle Po. Everyone's looking at me and I'm looking at the cake. You can see in that picture how I really was the first child, first grandchild, first niece. I don't remember what it felt like, of course, but I can see it plain as can be in the pictures.

I don't remember the day they brought August home from the hospital. I don't remember what I said or did or felt when I saw him for the first time, though everyone has a story about it. Apparently, I just looked at him for a long time without saying anything at all, and then finally I said: "It doesn't look like Lilly!" That was the name of a doll Grans had given me when Mom was pregnant so I

could "practice" being a big sister. It was one of those dolls that are incredibly lifelike, and I had carried it everywhere for months, changing its diaper, feeding it. I'm told I even made a baby sling for it. The story goes that after my initial reaction to August, it only took a few minutes (according to Grans) or a few days (according to Mom) before I was all over him: kissing him, cuddling him, baby talking to him. After that I never so much as touched or mentioned Lilly ever again.



'Seeing August'

Page 85

Read by:
Mr Blower

I never used to see August the way other people saw him. I knew he didn't look exactly normal, but I really didn't understand why strangers seemed so shocked when they saw him. Horrified. Sickened. Scared. There are so many words I can use to describe the looks on people's faces. And for a long time I didn't get it. I'd just get mad. Mad when they stared. Mad when they looked away. "What the heck are you looking at?" I'd say to people—even grown-ups.

Then, when I was about eleven, I went to stay with Grans in Montauk for four weeks while August was having his big jaw surgery. This was the longest I'd ever been away from home, and I have to say it was so amazing to suddenly be free of all that stuff that made me so mad. No one stared at Grans and me when we went to town to buy groceries. No one pointed at us. No one even noticed us.

Grans was one of those grandmothers who do everything with their grandkids. She'd run into the ocean if I asked her to, even if she had nice clothes on. She would let me play with her makeup and didn't mind if I used it on her face to practice my face-painting skills. She'd take me for ice cream even if we hadn't eaten dinner yet. She'd draw chalk horses on the sidewalk in front of her house. One night, while we were walking back from town, I told her that I wished I could live with her forever. I was so happy there. I think it might have been the best time in my life.

Coming home after four weeks felt very strange at first.





'Seeing August' Page 86

Read by:
Mrs Jackson

I remember very vividly stepping through the door and seeing August running over to welcome me home, and for this tiny fraction of a moment I saw him not the way I've always seen him, but the way other people see him. It was only a flash, an instant while he was hugging me, so happy that I was home, but it surprised me because I'd never seen him like that before. And I'd never felt what I was feeling before, either: a feeling I hated myself for having the moment I had it. But as he was kissing me with all his heart, all I could see was the drool coming down his chin. And suddenly there I was, like all those people who would stare or look away.

Horrified. Sickened. Scared.

Thankfully, that only lasted for a second: the moment I heard August laugh his raspy little laugh, it was over. Everything was back the way it had been before. But it had opened a door for me. A little peephole. And on the other side of the peephole there were two Augusts: the one I saw blindly, and the one other people saw.

I think the only person in the world I could have told any of this to was Grans, but I didn't. It was too hard to explain over the phone. I thought maybe when she came for Thanksgiving, I'd tell her what I felt. But just two months after I stayed with her in Montauk, my beautiful Grans died. It was so completely out of the blue. Apparently, she had checked herself into the hospital because she'd been feeling nauseous. Mom and I drove out to see her, but it's a three hour drive from where we live, and by the time we got to the hospital, Grans was gone. A heart attack, they told us. Just like that.

It's so strange how one day you can be on this earth, and the next day not. Where did she go? Will I really ever see her again, or is that a fairy tale?

You see movies and TV shows where people receive horrible news in hospitals, but for us, with all our many trips to the hospital with August, there had always been good outcomes.



'Seeing August' Page 87

Read by:
Mrs Jackson

What I remember the most from the day Grans died is Mom literally crumpling to the floor in slow, heaving sobs, holding her stomach like someone had just punched her. I've never, ever seen Mom like that. Never heard sounds like that come out of her. Even through all of August's surgeries, Mom always put on a brave face.

On my last day in Montauk, Grans and I had watched the sun set on the beach. We had taken a blanket to sit on, but it had gotten chilly, so we wrapped it around us and cuddled and talked until there wasn't even a sliver of sun left over the ocean. And then Grans told me she had a secret to tell me: she loved me more than anyone else in the world.

"Even August?" I had asked.

She smiled and stroked my hair, like she was thinking about what to say. "I love Auggie very, very much," she said softly.

I can still remember her Portuguese accent, the way she rolled her r's. "But he has many angels looking out for him already, Via. And I want you to know that you have me looking out for you. Okay, menina querida ? I want you to know that you are number one for me. You are my . . ." She looked out at the ocean

and spread her hands out, like she was trying to smooth out the waves, "You are my everything. You understand me, Via? Tu es meu tudo."

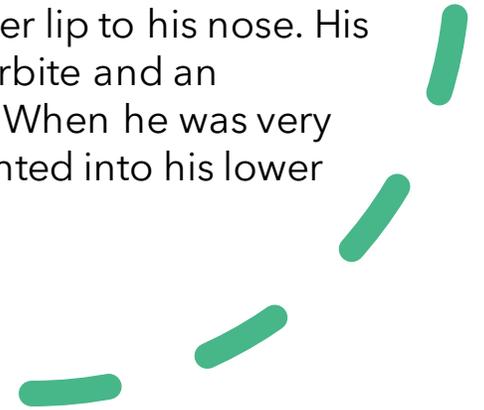
I understood her. And I knew why she said it was a secret. Grandmothers aren't supposed to have favourites. Everyone knows that. But after she died, I held on to that secret and let it cover me like a blanket.

'August Through the Peephole' Page 88

Read by:
Mr Esty



His eyes are about an inch below where they should be on his face, almost to halfway down his cheeks. They slant downward at an extreme angle, almost like diagonal slits that someone cut into his face, and the left one is noticeably lower than the right one. They bulge outward because his eye cavities are too shallow to accommodate them. The top eyelids are always halfway closed, like he's on the verge of sleeping. The lower eyelids sag so much they almost look like a piece of invisible string is pulling them downward: you can see the red part on the inside, like they're almost inside out. He doesn't have eyebrows or eyelashes. His nose is disproportionately big for his face, and kind of fleshy. His head is pinched in on the sides where the ears should be, like someone used giant pliers and crushed the middle part of his face. He doesn't have cheekbones. There are deep creases running down both sides of his nose to his mouth, which gives him a waxy appearance. Sometimes people assume he's been burned in a fire: his features look like they've been melted, like the drippings on the side of a candle. Several surgeries to correct his palate have left a few scars around his mouth, the most noticeable one being a jagged gash running from the middle of his upper lip to his nose. His upper teeth are small and splay out. He has a severe overbite and an extremely undersized jawbone. He has a very small chin. When he was very little, before a piece of his hip bone was surgically implanted into his lower jaw, he really had no chin at all.



'August Through the Peephole' Page 89

Read by:
Mr Esty



His tongue would just hang out of his mouth with nothing underneath to block it. Thankfully, it's better now.

He can eat, at least: when he was younger, he had a feeding tube. And he can talk. And he's learned to keep his tongue inside his mouth, though that took him several years to master. He's also learned to control the drool that used to run down his neck. These are considered miracles. When he was a baby, the doctors didn't think he'd live.

He can hear, too. Most kids born with these types of birth defects have problems with their middle ears that prevent them from hearing, but so far August can hear well enough through his tiny cauliflower-shaped ears. The doctors think that eventually he'll need to wear hearing aids, though. August hates the thought of

this. He thinks the hearing aids will get noticed too much. I don't tell him that the hearing aids would be the least of his problems, of course, because I'm sure he knows this.

Then again, I'm not really sure what August knows or doesn't know, what he understands and doesn't understand. Does August see how other people see him, or has he gotten so good at pretending not to see that it doesn't bother him? Or does it bother him? When he looks in the mirror, does he see the Auggie Mom and Dad see, or does he see the Auggie everyone else sees? Or is there another August he sees, someone in his dreams behind the misshapen head and face? Sometimes when I looked at Grans, I could see the pretty girl she used to be underneath the wrinkles. I could see the girl from Ipanema inside the old-lady walk. Does August see himself as he might have looked without that single gene that caused the catastrophe of his face?

I wish I could ask him this stuff. I wish he would tell me how he feels. He used to be easier to read before the surgeries. You knew that when his eyes squinted, he was happy. When his mouth went straight, he was being mischievous.

'August Through the Peephole' Page 90

Read by:
Mr Esty



When his cheeks trembled, he was about to cry. He looks better now, no doubt about that, but the signs we used to gauge his moods are all gone. There are new ones, of course. Mom and Dad can read every single one. But I'm having trouble keeping up. And there's a part of me that doesn't want to keep trying: why can't he just say what he's feeling like everyone else? He doesn't have a trache tube in his mouth anymore that keeps him from talking. His jaw's not wired shut. He's ten years old. He can use his words. But we circle around him like he's still the baby he used to be. We change plans, go to plan B, interrupt conversations, go back on promises depending on his moods, his whims, his needs. That was fine when he was little. But he needs to grow up now. We need to let him, help him, make him grow up. Here's what I think: we've all spent so much time trying to make August think he's normal that he actually thinks he is normal. And the problem is, he's not.





'High School'

Page 91

Read by:
Mrs Jackson

What I always loved most about middle school was that it was separate and different from home. I could go there and be Olivia Pullman—not Via, which is my name at home. Via was what they called me in elementary school, too. Back then, everyone knew all about us, of course. Mom used to pick me up after school, and August was always in the stroller. There weren't a lot of people who were equipped to babysit for Auggie, so Mom and Dad brought him to all my class plays and concerts and recitals, all the school functions, the bake sales and the book fairs. My friends knew him. My friends' parents knew him. My teachers knew him. The janitor knew him. ("Hey, how ya doin', Auggie?" he'd always say, and give August a high five.) August was something of a fixture at PS 22.

But in middle school a lot of people didn't know about August. My old friends did, of course, but my new friends didn't. Or if they knew, it wasn't necessarily the first thing they knew about me. Maybe it was the second or third thing they'd hear about me. "Olivia? Yeah, she's nice. Did you hear she has a brother who's deformed?" I always hated that word, but I knew it was how people described Auggie. And I knew those kinds of conversations probably happened all the time out of earshot, every time I left the room at a party, or bumped into groups of friends at the pizza place. And that's okay. I'm always going to be the sister of a kid with a birth defect: that's not the issue. I just don't always want to be defined that way.

The best thing about high school is that hardly anybody knows me at all.



'High School'

Page 92

Read by:
Mrs Jackson

Except Miranda and Ella, of course. And they know not to go around talking about it. Miranda, Ella, and I have known each other since the first grade. What's so nice is we never have to explain things to one another. When I decided I wanted them to call me Olivia instead of Via, they got it without my having to explain.

They've known August since he was a little baby. When we were little, our favorite thing to do was play dress up with Auggie; load him up with feather boas and big hats and Hannah Montana wigs. He used to love it, of course, and we thought he was adorably cute in his own way. Ella said he reminded her of E.T. She didn't say this to be mean, of course (though maybe it was a little bit mean). The truth is, there's a scene in the movie when Drew Barrymore dresses E.T. in a blond wig: and that was a ringer for Auggie in our Miley Cyrus heyday.

Throughout middle school, Miranda, Ella, and I were pretty much our own little group. Somewhere between super popular and well-liked: not brainy, not jocks, not rich, not druggies, not mean, not goody-goody, not huge, not flat. I don't know if the three of us found each other because we were so alike in so many ways, or that because we found each other, we've become so alike in so many ways. We were so happy when we all got into Faulkner High School. It was such a long shot that all three of us would be accepted, especially when almost no one else from our middle school was. I remember how we screamed into our phones the day we got our acceptance letters.

This is why I haven't understood what's been going on with us lately, now that we're actually in high school. It's nothing like how I thought it would be.

'Major Tom'

Page 93

Read by:
Mr Blair

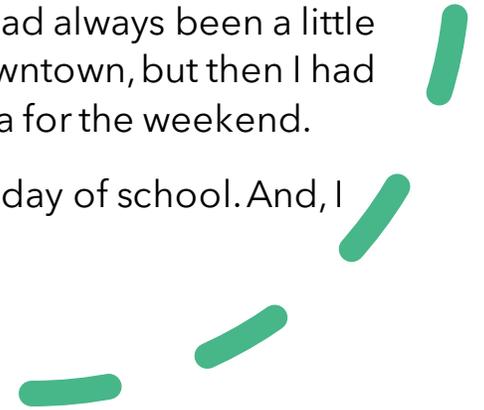


Out of the three of us, Miranda had almost always been the sweetest to August, hugging him and playing with him long after Ella and I had moved on to playing something else. Even as we got older, Miranda always made sure to try to include August in our conversations, ask him how he was doing, talk to him about Avatar or Star Wars or Bone or something she knew he liked. It was Miranda who had given Auggie the astronaut helmet he wore practically every day of the year when he was five or six. She would call him Major Tom and they would sing "Space Oddity" by David Bowie together. It was their little thing. They knew all the words and would blast it on the iPod and sing the song out loud.

Since Miranda's always been really good about calling us as soon as she got home from summer camp, I was a little surprised when I didn't hear from her. I even texted her and she didn't reply. I figured maybe she had ended up staying in the camp longer, now that she was a counsellor. Maybe she met a cute guy.

Then I realized from her Facebook wall that she'd actually been back home for a full two weeks, so I sent her an IM and we chatted online a bit, but she didn't give me a reason for not calling, which I thought was bizarre. Miranda had always been a little flaky, so I figured that's all it was. We made plans to meet downtown, but then I had to cancel because we were driving out to visit Tata and Poppa for the weekend.

So I ended up not seeing either Miranda or Ella until the first day of school. And, I have to admit, I was shocked.



'Major Tom'

Page 94

Read by:
Mr Blair

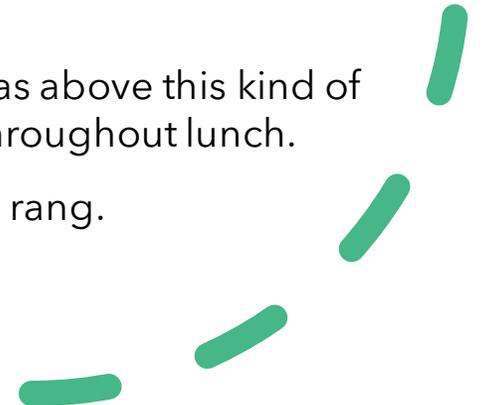


Miranda looked so different: her hair was cut in this super-cute bob that she'd dyed bright pink, of all things, and she was wearing a striped tube top that (a) seemed way inappropriate for school, and (b) was totally not her usual style. Miranda had always been such a prude about clothes, and here she was all pink-haired and tube-topped. But it wasn't just the way she looked that was different: she was acting differently, too. I can't say she wasn't nice, because she was, but she seemed kind of distant, like I was a casual friend. It was the weirdest thing in the world.

At lunch the three of us sat together like we always used to, but the dynamics had shifted. It was obvious to me that Ella and Miranda had gotten together a few times during the summer without me, though they never actually said that. I pretended not to be at all upset while we talked, though I could feel my face getting hot, my smile being fake. Although Ella wasn't as over-the-top as Miranda, I noticed a change in her usual style, too. It's like they had talked to each other beforehand about redoing their image at the new school, but hadn't

bothered to clue me in. I admit: I had always thought I was above this kind of typical teenage pettiness, but I felt a lump in my throat throughout lunch.

My voice quivered as I said "See you later" when the bell rang.





'After School'

Page 95

Read by:
Mr Gittins

"I hear we're driving you home today."

It was Miranda in eighth period. She had just sat down at the desk right behind me. I had forgotten that Mom had called Miranda's mother the night before to ask if she could drive me home from school.

"You don't have to," I answered instinctively, casually. "My mom can pick me up."

"I thought she had to pick Auggie up or something."

"It turns out she can pick me up afterward. She just texted me. Not a problem."

"Oh. Okay." "Thanks."

It was all a lie on my part, but I couldn't see sitting in a car with the new Miranda. After school I ducked into a restroom to avoid bumping into Miranda's mother outside. Half an hour later I walked out of the school, ran the three blocks to the bus stop, hopped on the M86 to Central Park West, and took the subway home.

"Hey there, sweetie!" Mom said the moment I stepped through the front door.

"How was your first day? I was starting to wonder where you guys were."

"We stopped for pizza." Incredible how easily a lie can slip through your lips.

"Is Miranda not with you?" She seemed surprised that Miranda wasn't right behind me.

"She went straight home. We have a lot of homework." "On your first day?"



'After School'

Page 96

Read by:
Mr Gittins

"Yes, on our first day!" I yelled, which completely surprised Mom. But before she could say anything, I said: "School was fine. It's really big, though. The kids seem nice." I wanted to give her enough information so she wouldn't feel the need to ask me more. "How was Auggie's first day of school?"

Mom hesitated, her eyebrows still high up on her forehead from when I'd snapped at her a second earlier. "Okay," she said slowly, like she was letting out a breath.

"What do you mean 'okay'?" I said. "Was it good or bad?" "He said it was good."

"So why do you think it wasn't good?"

"I didn't say it wasn't good! Geez, Via, what's up with you?"

"Just forget I asked anything at all," I answered, and stormed dramatically into Auggie's room and slammed the door. He was on his PlayStation and didn't even look up. I hated how zombified his video games made him.

"So how was school?" I said, scooching Daisy over so I could sit on his bed next to him.

"Fine," he answered, still not looking up from his game.

"Auggie, I'm talking to you!" I pulled the PlayStation out of his hands. "Hey!" he said angrily. "How was school?"

"I said fine!" he yelled back, grabbing the PlayStation back from me. "Were people nice to you?"

"Yes!"

"No one was mean?"

He put the PlayStation down and looked up at me as if I had just asked the dumbest question in the world. "Why would people be mean?" he said. It was the first time in his life that I heard him be sarcastic like that. I didn't think he had it in him.

'The Padawan Bites the Dust'

Page 97

Read by:
Mr Otero

I'm not sure at what point that night Auggie had cut off his Padawan braid, or why that made me really mad. I had always found his obsession with everything Star Wars kind of geeky, and that braid in the back of his hair, with its little beads, was just awful. But he had always been so proud of it, of how long it took him to grow it, of how he had chosen the beads himself in a crafts store in Soho. He and Christopher, his best friend, used to play with lightsabers and Star Wars

stuff whenever they got together, and they had both started growing their braids at the same time. When August cut his braid off that night, without an explanation, without telling me beforehand (which was surprising)—or even calling Christopher—I was just so upset I can't even explain why.

I've seen Auggie brushing his hair in the bathroom mirror. He meticulously tries to get every hair in place. He tilts his head to look at himself from different angles, like there's some magic perspective inside the mirror that could change the dimensions of his face.

Mom knocked on my door after dinner. She looked drained, and I realized that between me and Auggie, today had been a tough day for her, too.

"So you want to tell me what's up?" she asked nicely, softly.

"Not now, okay?" I answered. I was reading. I was tired. Maybe later I'd be up to telling her about Miranda, but not now.

"I'll check in before you go to bed," she said, and then she came over and kissed me on the top of my head.



'The Padawan Bites the Dust' Page 98

Read by:
Mr Otero

"Can Daisy sleep with me tonight?" "Sure, I'll bring her in later."

"Don't forget to come back," I said as she left. "I promise."

But she didn't come back that night. Dad did. He told me Auggie had had a bad first day and Mom was helping him through it. He asked me how my day had gone and I told him fine. He said he didn't believe me for a second, and I told him Miranda and Ella were acting like jerks. (I didn't mention how I took the subway home by myself, though.) He said nothing tests friendships like high school, and then proceeded to poke fun at the fact that I was reading *War and Peace*. Not real fun, of course, since I'd heard him brag to people that he had a "fifteen-year-old who is reading Tolstoy." But he liked to rib me about where I was in the book, in a war part or in a peace part, and if there was anything in there about Napoleon's days as a hip-hop dancer. It was silly stuff, but Dad always managed to make everyone laugh. And sometimes that's all you need to feel better.

"Don't be mad at Mom," he said as he bent down to give me a good-night kiss. "You know how much she worries about Auggie."

"I know," I acknowledged.

"Want the light on or off? It's getting kind of late," he said, pausing by the light switch at the door.

"Can you bring Daisy in first?"

Two seconds later he came back with Daisy dangling in his arms, and he laid her down next to me on the bed.

"Good night, sweetheart," he said, kissing my forehead. He kissed Daisy on her forehead, too. "Good night, girlie. Sweet dreams."



'An Apparition at the Door'

Page 99

Read by:
Ms Walker

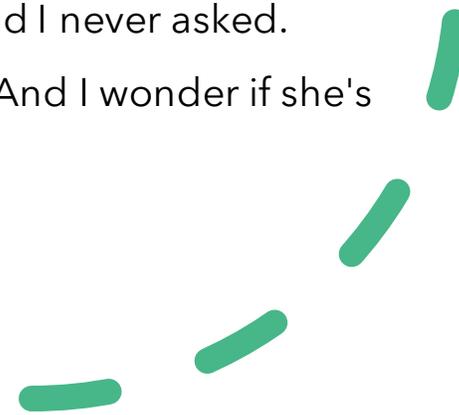


Once, I got up in the middle of the night because I was thirsty, and I saw Mom standing outside Auggie's room. Her hand was on the doorknob, her forehead leaning on the door, which was ajar. She wasn't going in his room or stepping out: just standing right outside the door, as if she was listening to the sound of his breathing as he slept. The hallway lights were out. The only thing illuminating her was the blue nightlight in August's bedroom. She looked ghostlike standing there. Or maybe I should say angelic. I tried to walk back into my room without disturbing her, but she heard me and walked over to me.

"Is Auggie okay?" I asked. I knew that sometimes he would wake up choking on his own saliva if he accidentally turned over on his back.

"Oh, he's fine," she said, wrapping her arms around me. She walked me back into my room, pulled the covers over me, and kissed me good night. She never explained what she was doing outside his door, and I never asked.

I wonder how many nights she's stood outside his door. And I wonder if she's ever stood outside my door like that.



'Breakfast'

Page 100

Read by:
Mrs Allen



"Can you pick me up from school today?" I said the next morning, smearing some cream cheese on my bagel.

Mom was making August's lunch (American cheese on whole-wheat bread, soft enough for Auggie to eat) while August sat eating oatmeal at the table. Dad was getting ready to go to work. Now that I was in high school, the new school routine was going to be that Dad and I would take the subway together in the morning, which meant his having to leave fifteen minutes earlier than usual, then

I'd get off at my stop and he'd keep going. And Mom was going to pick me up after school in the car.

"I was going to call Miranda's mother to see if she could drive you home again," Mom answered.

"No, Mom!" I said quickly.

"You pick me up. Or I'll just take the subway."

"You know I don't want you to take the subway by yourself yet," she answered.

"Mom, I'm fifteen! Everybody my age takes the subway by themselves!"

"She can take the subway home," said Dad from the other room, adjusting his tie as he stepped into the kitchen.

"Why can't Miranda's mother just pick her up again?" Mom argued with him. "She's old enough to take the subway by herself," Dad insisted.

Mom looked at both of us. "Is something going on?" She didn't address her question to either one of us in particular.

'Breakfast'

Page 101

Read by:
Mrs Allen



"You would know if you had come back to check on me," I said spitefully, "like you said you would."
"Oh God, Via," said Mom, remembering now how she had completely ditched me last night. She put down the knife she was using to cut Auggie's grapes in half (still a choking hazard for him because of the size of his palate). "I am so sorry. I fell asleep in Auggie's room. By the time I woke up . . ."

"I know, I know." I nodded indifferently.

Mom came over, put her hands on my cheeks, and lifted my face to look at her. "I'm really, really sorry," she whispered. I could tell she was.

"It's okay!" I said. "Via . . ."

"Mom, it's fine." This time I meant it. She looked so genuinely sorry I just wanted to let her off the hook.

She kissed and hugged me, then returned to the grapes. "So, is something going on with Miranda?" she asked. "Just that she's acting like a complete jerk," I said.

"Miranda's not a jerk!" Auggie quickly chimed in.

"She can be!" I yelled. "Believe me."

"Okay then, I'll pick you up, no problem," Mom said decisively, sweeping the half-grapes into a snack bag with the side of her knife. "That was the plan all along anyway. I'll pick Auggie up from school in the car and then we'll pick you up. We'll probably get there about a quarter to four."

"No!" I said firmly, before she'd even finished.

"Isabel, she can take the subway!" said Dad impatiently. "She's a big girl now."

She's reading War and Peace, for crying out loud."

"What does War and Peace have to with anything?" answered Mom, clearly annoyed.

"It means you don't have to pick her up in the car like she's a little girl," he said sternly.

'Breakfast'

Page 102

Read by:
Mrs Allen



"Via, are you ready? Get your bag and let's go."

"I'm ready," I said, pulling on my backpack. "Bye, Mom! Bye, Auggie!" I kissed them both quickly and headed toward the door.

"Do you even have a MetroCard?" Mom said after me.

"Of course she has a MetroCard!" answered Dad, fully exasperated. "Yeesh, Momma! Stop worrying so much! Bye," he said, kissing her on the cheek.

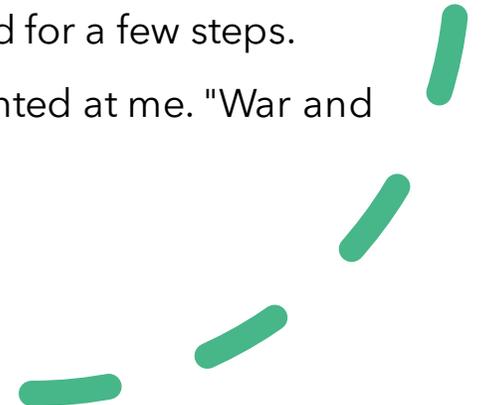
"Bye, big boy," he said to August, kissing him on the top of his head. "I'm proud of you. Have a good day."

"Bye, Daddy! You too."

Dad and I jogged down the stoop stairs and headed down the block.

"Call me after school before you get on the subway!" Mom yelled at me from the window. I didn't even turn around but waved my hand at her so she'd know I heard her. Dad did turn around, walking backward for a few steps.

"War and Peace, Isabel!" he called out, smiling as he pointed at me. "War and Peace!"



'Genetics 101' Page 103

Read by:
Mrs Payne



Both sides of Dad's family were Jews from Russia and Poland. Poppa's grandparents fled the pogroms and ended up in NYC at the turn of the century. Tata's parents fled the Nazis and ended up in Argentina in the forties. Poppa and Tata met at a dance on the Lower East Side while she was in town visiting a cousin. They got married, moved to Bayside, and had Dad and Uncle Ben.

Mom's side of the family is from Brazil. Except for her mother, my beautiful Grans, and her dad, Agosto, who died before I was born, the rest of Mom's family—all her glamorous aunts, uncles, and cousins—still live in Alto Leblon, a ritzy suburb south of Rio. Grans and Agosto moved to Boston in the early sixties, and had Mom and Aunt Kate, who's married to Uncle Porter.

Mom and Dad met at Brown University and have been together ever since. Isabel and Nate: like two peas in a pod. They moved to New York right after college, had me a few years later, then moved to a brick townhouse in North River Heights, the hippie-stroller capital of upper upper Manhattan, when I was about a year old.

Not one person in the exotic mix of my family gene pool has ever shown any obvious signs of having what August has. I've pored over grainy sepia pictures of long-dead relatives in babushkas; black-and-white snapshots of distant cousins in crisp white linen suits, soldiers in uniform, ladies with beehive hairdos; Polaroids of bell-bottomed teenagers and long-haired hippies, and not once have I been able to detect even the slightest trace of August's face in their faces.

'Genetics 101' Page 104

Read by:
Mrs Payne



Not a one. But after August was born, my parents underwent genetic counselling. They were told that August had what seemed to be a "previously unknown type of mandibulofacial dysostosis caused by an autosomal recessive mutation in the TCOF1 gene, which is located on chromosome 5, complicated by a hemifacial microsomia characteristic of OAV spectrum." Sometimes these mutations occur during pregnancy. Sometimes they're inherited from one parent carrying the dominant gene. Sometimes they're caused by the interaction of many genes, possibly in combination with environmental factors. This is called multifactorial inheritance. In August's case, the doctors were able to identify one of the "single nucleotide deletion mutations" that made war on his face. The weird thing is, though you'd never know it from looking at them: both my parents carry that mutant gene.

And I carry it, too.





'The Punnett Square'

Page 105

Read by: Mrs Jackson

If I have children, there's a one-in-two chance that I will pass on the defective gene to them. That doesn't mean they'll look like August, but they'll carry the gene that got doubledosed in August and helped make him the way he is. If I marry someone who has the same defective gene, there's a one-in-two chance that our kids will carry the gene and look totally normal, a one-in-four chance that our kids will not carry the gene at all, and a one-in-four chance that our kids will look like August.

If August has children with someone who doesn't have a trace of the gene, there's a 100 percent probability that their kids will inherit the gene, but a zero percent chance that their kids will have a double dose of it, like August. Which means they'll carry the gene no matter what, but they could look totally normal. If he marries someone who has the gene, their kids will have the same odds as my kids.

This only explains the part of August that's explainable. There's that other part of his genetic makeup that's not inherited but just incredibly bad luck.

Countless doctors have drawn little tic-tac-toe grids for my parents over the years to try to explain the genetic lottery to them. Geneticists use these Punnett squares to determine inheritance, recessive and dominant genes, probabilities and chance. But for all they know, there's more they don't know. They can try to forecast the odds, but they can't guarantee them. They use terms like "germline mosaicism," "chromosome rearrangement," or "delayed mutation" to explain why their science is not an exact science.



'The Punnett Square'

Page 106

Read by: Mrs
Jackson

I actually like how doctors talk. I like the sound of science. I like how words you don't understand explain things you can't understand. There are countless people under words like "germline mosaicism," "chromosome rearrangement," or "delayed mutation." Countless babies who'll never be born, like mine.





‘Out with the Old’

Page 107

Read by:
Mrs Jackson

Miranda and Ella blasted off. They attached themselves to a new crowd destined for high school glory. After a week of painful lunches where all they would do was talk about people that didn't interest me, I decided to make a clean break for it. They asked no questions. I told no lies. We just went our separate ways.

I didn't even mind after a while. I stopped going to lunch for about a week, though, to make the transition easier, to avoid the fake Oh, shoot, there's no room for you at the table, Olivia! It was easier just to go to the library and read.

I finished War and Peace in October. It was amazing. People think it's such a hard read, but it's really just a soap opera with lots of characters, people falling in love, fighting for love, dying for love. I want to be in love like that someday. I want my husband to love me the way Prince Andrei loved Natasha.

I ended up hanging out with a girl named Eleanor who I'd known from my days at PS 22, though we'd gone to different middle schools. Eleanor had always been a really smart girl –a little bit of a cry baby back then, but nice. I'd never realized how funny she was (not laugh-out-loud Daddy funny, but full of great quips), and she never knew how light hearted I could be. Eleanor, I guess, had always been under the impression that I was very serious. And, as it turns out, she'd never liked Miranda and Ella. She thought they were stuck-up.

I gained entry through Eleanor to the smart-kids' table at lunch. It was a larger group than I'd been accustomed to hanging out with, and a more diverse crowd.



'Out with the Old'

Page 108

Read by:
Mrs Jackson

It included Eleanor's boyfriend, Kevin, who would definitely become class president someday; a few techie guys; girls like Eleanor who were members of the yearbook committee and the debate club; and a quiet guy named Justin who had small round glasses and played the violin, and who I had an instant crush on.

When I'd see Miranda and Ella, who were now hanging out with the super-popular set, we'd say "Hey, what's up," and move on. Occasionally Miranda would ask me how August was doing, and then say "Tell him I say hello." This I never did, not to spite Miranda, but because August was in his own world these days. There were times, at home, that we never crossed paths.



'October 31'

Page 109

Read by:
Mrs Ireland

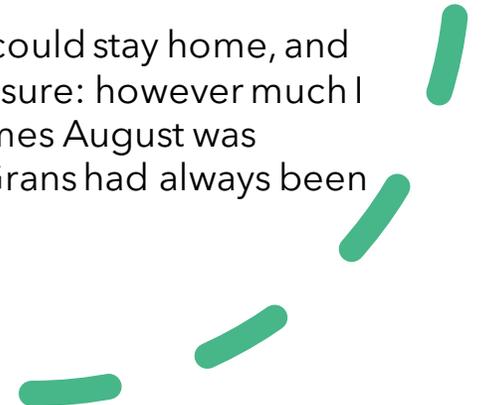


Grans had died the night before Halloween. Since then, even though it's been four years, this has always been a sad time of year for me. For Mom, too, though she doesn't always say it. Instead, she immerses herself in getting August's costume ready, since we all know Halloween is his favourite time of year.

This year was no different. August really wanted to be a Star Wars character called Boba Fett, so Mom looked for a Boba Fett costume in August's size, which, strangely enough, was out of stock everywhere. She went to every online store, found a few on eBay that were going for an outrageous amount, and finally ended up buying a Jango Fett costume that she then converted into a Boba Fett costume by painting it green. I would say, in all, she must have spent two weeks working on the stupid costume. And no, I won't mention the fact that Mom has never made any of my costumes, because it really has no bearing on anything at all.

The morning of Halloween I woke up thinking about Grans, which made me really sad and weepy. Dad kept telling me to hurry up and get dressed, which just stressed me out even more, and suddenly I started crying. I just wanted to stay home.

So Dad took August to school that morning and Mom said I could stay home, and the two of us cried together for a while. One thing I knew for sure: however much I missed Grans, Mom must have missed her more. All those times August was clinging to life after a surgery, all those rush trips to the ER: Grans had always been there for Mom. It felt good to cry with Mom.



'October 31'

Page 110

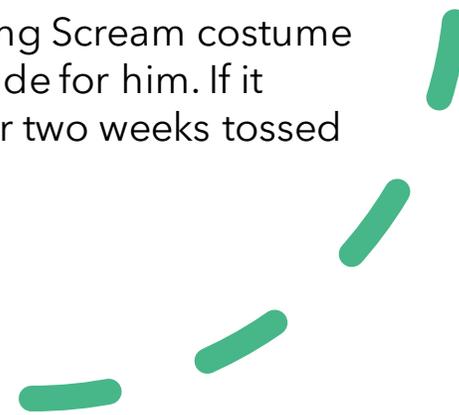
Read by:
Mrs Ireland



For both of us. At some point, Mom had the idea of our watching *The Ghost and Mrs. Muir* together, which was one of our all-time favourite black-and white movies. I agreed that that was a great idea. I think I probably would have used this weeping session as an opportunity to tell Mom everything that was going on at school with Miranda and Ella, but just as we were sitting down in front of the DVD player, the phone rang. It was the nurse from August's school calling to tell Mom that August had a stomach ache and should be picked up. So much for the old movies and the mother-daughter bonding.

Mom picked August up, and the moment he came home, he went straight to the bathroom and threw up. Then he went to his bed and pulled the covers over his head. Mom took his temperature, brought him some hot tea, and assumed the "August's mom" role again. "Via's mom," who had come out for a little while, was put away. I understood, though: August was in bad shape.

Neither one of us asked him why he had worn his Bleeding Scream costume to school instead of the Boba Fett costume Mom had made for him. If it annoyed Mom to see the costume she had worked on for two weeks tossed on the floor, unused, she didn't show it.



'Trick or Treat'

Page 111

Read by:
Mr Hazell



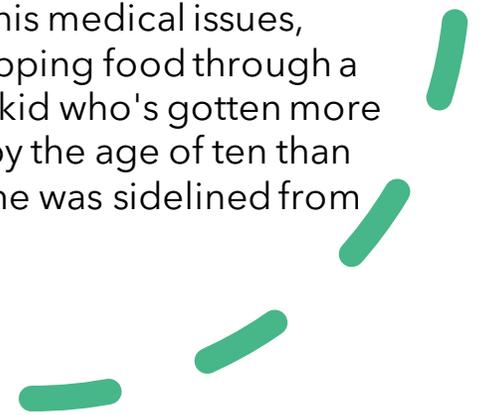
August said he wasn't feeling well enough to go trick-or-treating later in the afternoon, which was sad for him because I know how much he loved to trick-or-treat—especially after it got dark outside. Even though I was well beyond the trick-or-treating stage myself, I usually threw on some mask or other to accompany him up and down the blocks, watching him knocking on people's doors, giddy with excitement. I knew it was the one night a year when he could truly be like every other kid. No one knew he was different under the mask. To August, that must have felt absolutely amazing.

At seven o'clock that night, I knocked on his door. "Hey," I said.

"Hey," he said back. He wasn't using his PlayStation or reading a comic book. He was just lying in his bed looking at the ceiling. Daisy, as always, was next to him on the bed, her head draped over his legs. The Bleeding Scream costume was crumpled up on the floor next to the Boba Fett costume.

"How's your stomach?" I said, sitting next to him on the bed. "I'm still nauseous." "You sure you're not up for the Halloween Parade?" "Positive."

This surprised me. Usually August was such a trouper about his medical issues, whether it was skateboarding a few days after a surgery or sipping food through a straw when his mouth was practically bolted shut. This was a kid who's gotten more shots, taken more medicines, put up with more procedures by the age of ten than most people would have to put up with in ten lifetimes, and he was sidelined from a little nausea?



'Trick or Treat'

Page 112

Read by:
Mr Hazell



"You want to tell me what's up?" I said, sounding a bit like Mom. "No."
"Is it school?"
"Yes."

"Teachers? Schoolwork? Friends?"

He didn't answer. "

Did someone say something?" I asked.

"People always say something," he answered bitterly. I could tell he was close to crying.

"Tell me what happened," I said.

And he told me what happened. He had overheard some very mean things some boys were saying about him. He didn't care about what the other boys had said, he expected that, but he was hurt that one of the boys was his "best friend" Jack Will. I remembered his mentioning Jack a couple of times over the past few months. I remembered Mom and Dad saying he seemed like a really nice kid, saying they were glad August had already made a friend like that.

"Sometimes kids are stupid," I said softly, holding his hand. "I'm sure he didn't mean it."

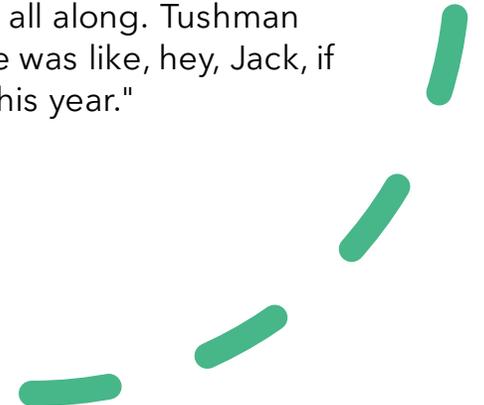
"Then why would he say it? He's been pretending to be my friend all along. Tushman probably bribed him with good grades or something. I bet you he was like, hey, Jack, if you make friends with the freak, you don't have to take any tests this year."

"You know that's not true. And don't call yourself a freak."

"Whatever. I wish I'd never gone to school in the first place."

"But I thought you were liking it."

"I hate it!" He was angry all of a sudden, punching his pillow.



'Trick or Treat'

Page 113

Read by:
Mr Hazell



"I hate it! I hate it! I hate it!" He was shrieking at the top of his lungs. I didn't say anything. I didn't know what to say. He was hurt. He was mad.

I let him have a few more minutes of his fury. Daisy started licking the tears off of his face.

"Come on, Auggie," I said, patting his back gently. "Why don't you put on your Jango Fett costume and—"

"It's a Boba Fett costume! Why does everyone mix that up?"

"Boba Fett costume," I said, trying to stay calm. I put my arm around his shoulders. "Let's just go to the parade, okay?"

"If I go to the parade, Mom will think I'm feeling better and make me go to school tomorrow."

"Mom would never make you go to school," I answered. "Come on, Auggie. Let's just go. It'll be fun, I promise. And I'll let you have all my candy."

He didn't argue. He got out of bed and slowly started pulling on his Boba Fett costume. I helped him adjust the straps and tighten the belt, and by the time he put his helmet on, I could tell he was feeling better.



'Time to Think'

Page 114

Read by:
Mr Blower

August played up the stomach ache the next day so he wouldn't have to go to school. I admit I felt a little bad for Mom, who was genuinely concerned that he had a stomach bug, but I had promised August I wouldn't tell her about the incident at school.

By Sunday, he was still determined not to go back to school.

"What are you planning on telling Mom and Dad?" I asked him when he told me this. "

They said I could quit whenever I wanted to." He said this while he was still focused on a comic book he was reading.

"But you've never been the kind of kid who quits things," I said truthfully. "That's not like you."

"I'm quitting."

"You're going to have to tell Mom and Dad why," I pointed out, pulling the comic book out of his hands so he'd have to look up at me while we were talking. "Then Mom will call the school and everyone will know about it."

"Will Jack get in trouble?"

"I would think so." "Good."

I have to admit, August was surprising me more and more. He pulled another comic book off his shelf and started leafing through it.

"Auggie," I said. "Are you really going to let a couple of stupid kids keep you from going back to school? I know you've been enjoying it. Don't give them that power over you. Don't give them the satisfaction."

"They have no idea I even heard them," he explained.

"No, I know, but . . ."



'Time to Think'

Page 115

Read by:
Mr Blower

"Via, it's okay. I know what I'm doing. I've made up my mind."

"But this is crazy, Auggie!" I said emphatically, pulling the new comic book away from him, too. "You have to go back to school. Everyone hates school sometimes. I hate school sometimes. I hate my friends sometimes. That's just life, Auggie. You want to be treated normally, right? This is normal! We all have to go to school sometimes despite the fact that we have bad days, okay?"

"Do people go out of their way to avoid touching you, Via?" he answered, which left me momentarily without an answer. "Yeah, right. That's what I thought. So don't compare your bad days at school to mine, okay?"

"Okay, that's fair," I said. "But it's not a contest about whose days suck the most, Auggie. The point is we all have to put up with the bad days. Now, unless you want to be treated like a baby the rest of your life, or like a kid with special needs, you just have to suck it up and go."

He didn't say anything, but I think that last bit was getting to him.

"You don't have to say a word to those kids," I continued. "August, actually, it's so cool that you know what they said, but they don't know you know what they said, you know?"

"What the heck?"

"You know what I mean. You don't have to talk to them ever again, if you don't want. And they'll never know why. See? Or you can pretend to be friends with them, but deep down inside you know you're not."

"Is that how you are with Miranda?" he asked.

"No," I answered quickly, defensively. "I never faked my feelings with Miranda." "So why are you saying I should?"

"I'm not! I'm just saying you shouldn't let those little jerks get to you, that's all."



'Time to Think'

Page 116

Read by:
Mr Blower

"Like Miranda got to you."

"Why do you keep bringing Miranda up?" I yelled impatiently. "I'm trying to talk to you about your friends. Please keep mine out of it."

"You're not even friends with her anymore."

"What does that have to do with what we're talking about?"

The way August was looking at me reminded me of a doll's face. He was just staring at me blankly with his half-closed doll eyes.

"She called the other day," he said finally. "What?" I was stunned. "And you didn't tell me?"

"She wasn't calling you," he answered, pulling both comic books out of my hands. "She was calling me. Just to say hi. To see how I was doing. She didn't even know I was going to a real school now. I can't believe you hadn't even told her. She said the two of you don't hang out as much anymore, but she wanted me to know she'd always love me like a big sister."

Double-stunned. Stung. Flabbergasted. No words formed in my mouth. "Why didn't you tell me?" I said, finally.

"I don't know." He shrugged, opening the first comic book again.

"Well, I'm telling Mom and Dad about Jack Will if you stop going to school," I answered. "Tushman will probably call you into school and make Jack and those other kids apologize to you in front of everyone, and everyone will treat you like a kid who should be going to a school for kids with special needs. Is that what you want? Because that's what's going to happen. Otherwise, just go back to school and act like nothing happened. Or if you want to confront Jack about it, fine. But either way, if you—"

"Fine. Fine. Fine," he interrupted.

"What?"

"Fine! I'll go!" he yelled, not loudly. "Just stop talking about it already. Can I please read my book now?"



'Time to Think'

Page 117

Read by:
Mr Blower

"Fine!" I answered. Turning to leave his room, I thought of something. "Did Miranda say anything else about me?"

He looked up from the comic book and looked right into my eyes. "She said to tell you she misses you. Quote unquote."

I nodded. "Thanks,"

I said casually, too embarrassed to let him see how happy that made me feel.

