

CHAPTER 1

THE BOY WITH GREEN HAIR

It was Tuesday.

Normally, Sarah enjoyed Tuesdays. Show and tell was on Tuesday, and music. Tuesday was also the day that Mr. Smith's class went to the school library. Yes, Tuesday was usually a pretty good day.

But this Tuesday Sarah was in no hurry to get ready for school. More than once, Mom had to tell her to hurry up or she would be late for the bus.

"It's bad enough that your sister's sick," Mom said. "I don't want to have to tell you to hurry up twenty times as well."

What Sarah didn't tell Mom was that her sister's cold was the very reason she didn't want to arrive at the bus stop until the last minute. Sarah looked at the clock on the kitchen wall. Ten minutes before the bus came. All she had left to do was to put on her shoes and coat, kiss Mom goodbye, and walk to the bus stop. There was no way she could drag that out to take ten minutes. But she could try.

The Boy with Green Hair

She put her shoes on — no laces to slow her down, worse luck — then slipped them off again. Then on again. Off again.

“What do you think you’re doing?” It was annoying the way Mom could sneak up like that. She never made a noise, so you never knew when she might be watching.

“Don’t be such a slowpoke. I’ve got to give Michelle her medicine. I can’t wait all day for you to get ready.” Mom was getting that look she sometimes got just before she got cross. Sarah put on her shoes for the last time. While Mom watched, she got her coat from the closet and put it on.

“Better put your thickest coat on instead,” Mom said. “It looks like it might snow later.”

Sarah wasted a whole minute taking off her coat and putting on another one.

Then Mom handed Sarah her backpack, gave her a kiss, and waved her out the front door. The door closed. Sarah sighed. It wasn’t going to be a good day, even if it was Tuesday.

Sarah, you see, had curly red hair. For as far back as she could remember, grown-ups had loved her hair. They would stop her when she was out with Mom and say, “My, what beautiful hair.” Or, worse, “What a cute little girl. I wish I had hair like that.” Or, worst of all, strange-smelling old ladies would pat her head, feeling the red curls spring up and down underneath their hand. Then they would say something like, “I had curly red hair just like this when I was a girl.” Then they would lean down and put their face close to hers, and Sarah would try to hide behind Mom, and the whole thing was so awful that Sarah tried never to think about it.

But worse even than the grown-ups were the kids at the bus stop.

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There were three of them: Mean Liza; her brother Meaner Billy; and, worst of all, their friend Meanest Madelaine.

Normally, Sarah was safe at the bus stop. Her sister Michelle was bigger than any of the Three Meanies. None of them dared tease her when Michelle was nearby. All they did was stick out their tongues and make faces. But today Michelle wasn't going to be there. Sarah knew what that meant. It was going to be awful. Mom said that the Three Meanies (although she never called them that) were really jealous that they didn't have curly red hair. But that didn't make it any easier when they teased her.

In Sarah's mind, she could already hear them.

Mean Liza would call out, "Sarah, Sarah, carrot top," in that awful, whiny, sing-song voice of hers.

Meaner Billy would bounce his hand off her hair and say "Boing, boing, boing." Then he would laugh that laugh of his that sounded like a cat caught in the waste disposal.

And Meanest Madelaine. Sarah didn't even try to guess what she would do. The only thing she was sure of was that it would be worse than anything the others did.

Sarah turned the corner. She had been dragging along, looking at the ground. Now she looked up. It had occurred to her that if Michelle had a cold, then so might the Three Meanies. Perhaps Sarah was the only kid in the neighborhood well enough to go to school. She hoped so.

But there they all were: Mean Liza, Meaner Billy, and Meanest Madelaine.

But there was someone else at the bus stop as well, someone Sarah had never seen before.

The Boy with Green Hair

It was a boy about Sarah's age. He was dressed in a thick red coat with dark pants, and he was standing still, looking miserably at the ground. The Three Meanies were gathered around him.

Sarah could hear Mean Liza's voice coming down the street. The other two were just laughing and pointing at the boy's head.

"Grass top, grass top," Mean Liza was saying over and over again in her ugly, sing-song voice.

Sarah stopped and stared at the boy.

The boy had green hair.

Some questions for you to think about

1. Would you like to have curly red hair? Why? Or why not?
2. What is your favorite day of the week at school? Why?
3. Are there any kids in your school like the Three Meanies? If so, do you ever wish that they would get sick?
4. What would you do if you saw a boy with green hair?
5. If you were writing this book, what would happen in the next chapter?