

|| GOLD STAR

LIZZY COYLE ||

I was just coloring in my math worksheet after a job well done when a gold star sticker was stuck to my desk.

“Mrs. Forrester,” I said “What did I..” I stopped my sentence as I looked up to find not Mrs. Forrester, my fifth grade teacher, but Julia Baker.

“Hey Julia B, why did you give me this?” I asked but she just smiled and walked away.

We really weren’t supposed to have anything stuck to our desks but our frog nametag, so I started to peel the gold star sticker off.

“Psst! Margo! No, what are you doing?” a voice loudly whispered behind me.

I turned in my chair, careful to not let my hair get caught in the metal dots on the back of my blue plastic chair.

Madison was glaring at me with her bulging eyes. I had heard a group of boys earlier in the year laughing and calling her Bug Eyes. It was a fitting nickname.

“What are you doing?” Madison repeated.

“I’m trying to get this gold star off my desk,” I said, wiggling my pointer finger under one of the points of the star. “Julia B stuck it on my desk, and that’s not allowed.”

Madison rolled her eyes and smacked a hand to her face. “Are you insane?” she asked. “Mrs. Forrester? Me and Margo have to go to the bathroom because she has a wiggly tooth,” Madison said as she hopped up from her desk. I began to open my mouth in protest but Madison bulged her eyes at me as she grabbed my hand and pulled me into the hallway.

“Madison, I do not have a wiggly tooth and I do not like to have lies told about me,” I said as calmly as I could, but I was really very angry.

Madison tugged me along as she walked. Her hands were sweaty

and she was holding my arm too tightly. I wriggled my arm free and said, “Madison, I refuse to take another step until you tell me what this is about.”

“Margo, that’s why I am taking you to the bathroom, silly. I can’t tell you out in the hallway because people are listening,” she said.

I looked around the hallway. The artwork of the first graders lined the walls, drawings of Santa Claus and what they wanted for Christmas. The linoleum floor was shiny from the sun that was coming in through the windows. It was quiet.

“There’s no one out here,” I said.

“Just come on,” Madison said as she grabbed my wrist again. I just let it happen this time.

Madison shoved the door open so hard that it slammed into the concrete block wall of the bathroom. “Is anyone in here” Madison asked. “Cause if so, you better leave ‘cause this girl’s about to puke!”

No one ran screaming from the bathroom, so Madison deemed it safe. “Madison, what on earth is wrong with you? You can’t just go around shouting things like that. I am not about to puke,” I said, crossing my arms.

“Okay, I brought you in here to tell you that Julia B is a crazy, psycho woman,” Madison said, her eyes bulging again.

“Why?” I asked. As far as I could see, Madison was the crazy one.

“It’s the thing with the gold star. See, she goes around and gives one of those gold stars out every week or so. Always on a Monday. She decides who she thinks would be good friend material and she gives it to that person.”

My ears perked up at that. I hadn’t made any friends yet. I’m glad someone thought I was good friend material.

“But, it’s like a test. She makes that person do things for her in order to win her friendship. You basically become her slave for a week, and at the end of the week, if you did a good job, she will let you be her friend. If not, she drops you. She makes everyone think you are lame and makes no one like you.”

“How do you know all this?” I asked. I immediately regretted it because I saw tears welling up in Madison’s eyes. I remembered the boys calling her Bug Eyes. She must have been one of Julia B’s rejected friends.

“I just wanted to let you know before you got your feelings hurt. You are still so new to school, I figured I would help,” she said.

“Well, what should I do? I don’t want to be her slave, but I don’t want her to make everyone dislike me,” I asked Madison.

“You have to be her slave,” Madison said. “It’s not so bad, really. I think she dropped me because I annoyed her about stuff. She just wants you to do tasks for her. I just kept asking why too much and she got annoyed.”

“If I become her slave and then her friend, will I still be able to be your friend?” I asked. I felt that I owed it to Madison to be her friend.

“Probably not. But we can go over to each other’s houses after school! We just can’t be friends at school. That’s better than having no friends ever, I guess,” Madison said as she looked down at her shoes.

“That’s not good enough for me,” I said. I turned and strode out of the bathroom. I heard Madison clamoring after me asking, “What are you going to do?”

My footsteps punctured the silence in the hallway. I was walking so hard and fast. I was mad, but I was also excited to have my first friend.

“Julia B,” I said when I got back into the classroom. Julia B turned in her chair and smiled at me.

“I guess you figured out what the gold star meant,” she said. “I have your first task for you.”

“Yeah, well I have your first task for you, too,” I said as I ripped the gold star from my desk. “Give this to someone who wants to play your stupid game with you. I don’t want to.”

I looked up and saw Madison looking at us from the doorway, mouth hanging open. I smiled at her.

“You have no idea what you just did,” Julia B said, eyes glaring and lips tight.

“I do. But I know who my friends are,” I said as I looked over to Madison again. She was still standing there, her eyes bulging and mouth open.

Walking into school the next day, I was excited. I hadn’t been able to sleep well because I was imagining all the fun things Madison and I would do as friends.

I walked into the classroom and hung my jacket up in my cubby,

and I saw Madison sitting at her desk.

“Hi Madison,” I said. “I couldn’t even sleep last night ‘cause I was so excited to be your friend.”

“Go away,” Madison said.

“What?” I asked. I was so surprised, I laughed.

“I said, go away,” she said again with anger in her voice.

“I don’t understand why you are being mean,” I said, my voice quivering.

Madison stood up from her desk and shoved me, hard. I fell and just sat on the ground in shock as she walked away.

After a minute, I recollected myself and stood up. I noticed a gold star stuck to Madison’s frog nametag on her desk.