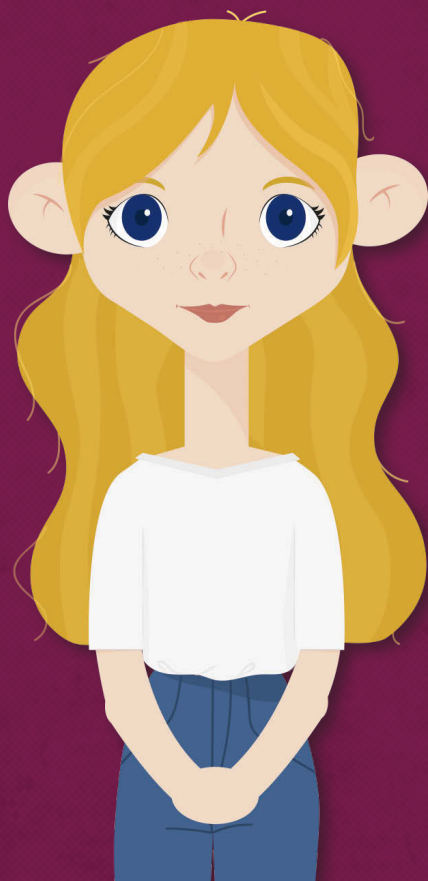
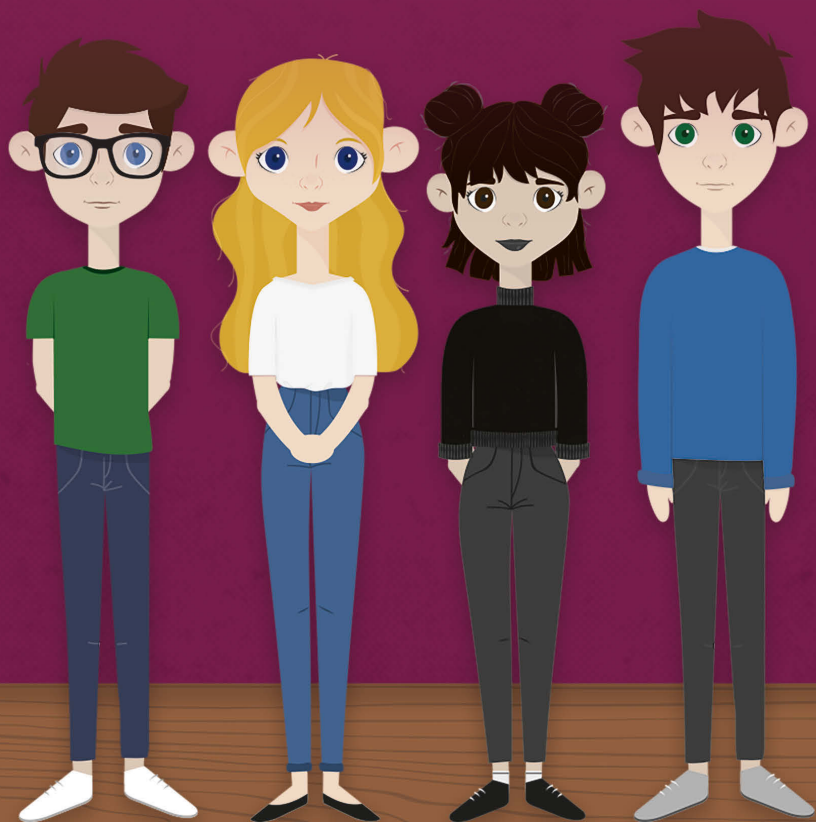


# PARTY OF FOUR



Jeff  
Gottesfeld



# PARTY OF FOUR



Jeff Gottesfeld

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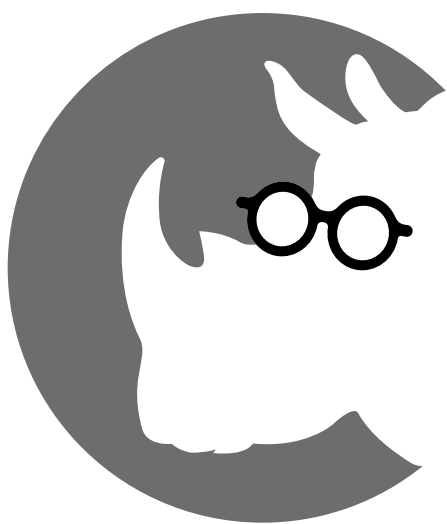
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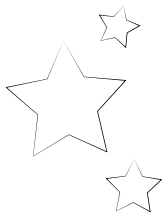
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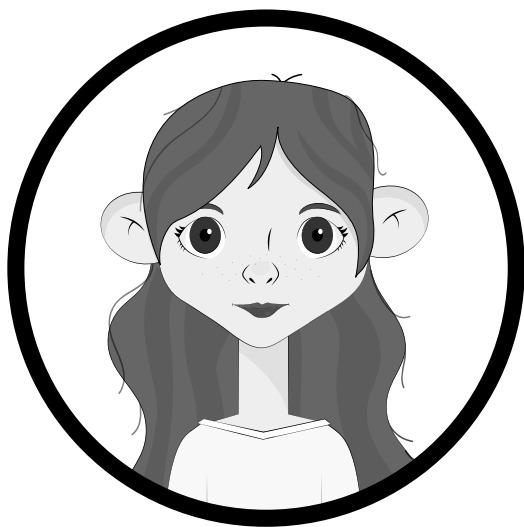
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MEET THE



Ava

**Age:** 12

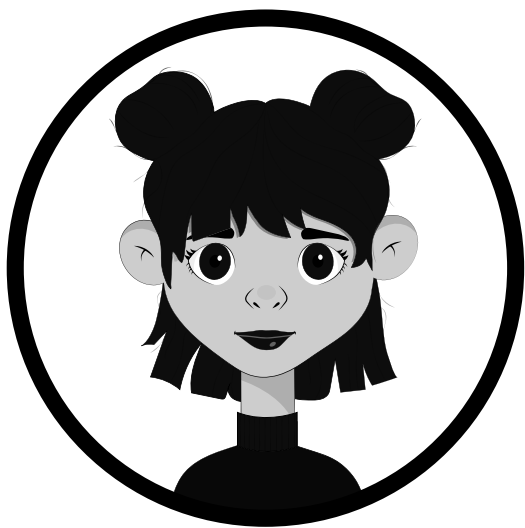
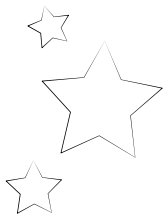
**Favorite Song:** “Girls Just Want to Have Fun” by Cyndi Lauper

**Hobby:** reading true stories and writing them

**Biggest Dream:** to become an Olympic swimmer

**Best Quality:** admitting when she’s wrong

# CHARACTERS



*Sammi*

**Age:** 12

**Favorite Music:** disco

**Life Goal:** to perform in a Broadway musical

**Greatest Challenge:** moving from New York to California

**Best Quality:** insightful



## PERFECT FRIENDS

Sixth grade was almost over for Ava. Tomorrow would be the last day. She looked around the school lunchroom. Then she smiled. Everyone was excited about summer break.

But Ava's smile quickly vanished. She frowned at two of her classmates. Ty and Alex had started chanting.

The boys sang the same chant every year. It was always on the last day of school. They started a day early this year.



Today  
←



“No more pens, no more ink!” they chanted. “No more tests and having to think!”

Soon other students joined in.

Ava looked at her best friend, Sammi. “Those two are so immature.” She rolled her eyes. “Everyone who sings with them is too.”

Sammi stared at the boys. “It *is* getting kind of old. I know they’re just happy about summer. But they could at least sing on key.” She giggled.

“This is not funny.” Ava flipped her long blonde hair. “First, they need a new song. My parents sang this one. That was forever ago. Second, we’re 12 now. We’ll be teens next year. They need to grow up.”

“Okay, okay.” Sammi held her hands in the air. “I get your point.”

Ava grinned. “Thank you.”

Sammi shook her head. Her short dark hair swung back and forth. “You better get used to Ty and Alex. They’ll be with us at camp.”

“Don’t remind me. I love helping at Stars Day Camp. But those boys may ruin everything.”



Sammi shrugged. “They’re really not so bad. Ty is pretty smart. And Alex is so creative. Have you seen his artwork?”

Ava was shocked. “Ty and Alex are not so bad? Are you kidding? Look at them!”

The two boys had stood up. They were enjoying their chant. Ty was directing the singing. He moved his hands in the air. Alex swayed from side to side.



Sammi glanced at the boys. “I see them, Ava. You know we have to be in the camp’s talent show. Ty and Alex could help us. Each act must have three or more people. I know you’re afraid to wing it.”

“You’re right. I’m terrified of that. You and I need a plan. We need more people too.



But there's no way I'm sharing a stage with those boys." Ava pointed at them. "Maybe we'll make new friends at camp. We could join someone else's act. Then I'll just stay in the background."

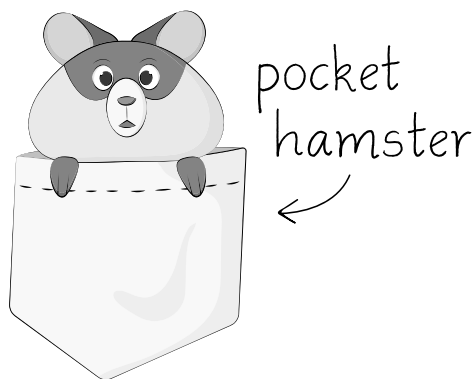
Sammi shrugged. "I don't know why you're scared. Talent shows are overrated. I was in so many when I lived in New York. They're the same here in California. Just have fun."

Ava couldn't take any more of the singing. She motioned for Sammi to follow her outside. "That's easy for you to say. You have all the talent in the world. Singing, dancing, playing instruments. All I do is write. That doesn't work for talent shows."

Sammi put her hand on Ava's shoulder.

“And you’re a great writer too. We’ll figure it out. I just think it would be easier if we had Ty and Alex’s help.”

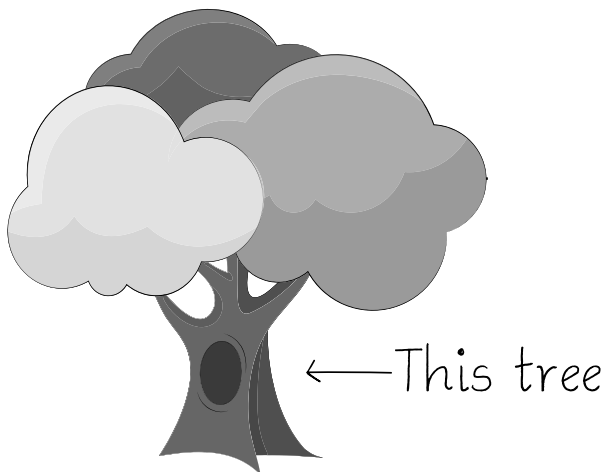
“Please stop, Sammi,” Ava said. “Remember what Ty did last winter? He took his hamster to the art show field trip. Ty had it in his pocket. Then it got loose. Ick! That poor thing ran everywhere. Our class was forced to leave the show. Did you forget?”



Sammi chuckled. “There’s no way I’d forget. That was hilarious.”

Ava smiled. “Yeah, it was pretty funny. But that doesn’t make it okay.”

Sammi leaned against a big tree. “So you don’t think you’ll ever be friends with Ty or Alex?”



“That’s right.” Ava folded her arms.

Sammi tilted her head to one side. “I’m just curious. What would make them the perfect friends for you? And you can’t say for them to be like me. That’s cheating.”



“Hmm. Let me think.” Ava pushed her hair behind her right ear. “They would be *mature*, first of all. I’d want them to be smart and love to read. Musically talented too. At least sing well.”

Just then, Ty and Alex came outside. Some students were still chanting in the lunchroom. The two boys walked over to Ava and Sammi.

“We really need a new song,” Ty said. “That one is so old.”

Alex looked at the girls. “Yeah. Do you two know any good ones?”

Sammi glanced at Ava and smiled.

Ava tried not to act surprised. But she was. She had assumed the boys loved that song. But clearly they didn’t.

She just nodded. “Changing it is a good idea.”

Ty grinned. “How about a classic rock song? Something like ‘School’s Out for Summer’?”

Sammi smiled and shrugged. “Maybe.” She knew Ava loved classic rock.

The bell rang. Lunch was over. Students started heading to class.

Sammi walked with Ava. “I told you! Ty and Alex *can* be cool.” She gave Ava a nudge.

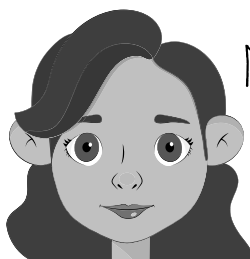
Ava thought for a moment. *Should I get to know them better? Nah. I already know enough. They still need to grow up.*

## FINAL ASSIGNMENT

Ava was in English class. It was her last class for the day. The room was quiet.

Most students were writing on their tablets. Ava wasn't. She just stared at her blank screen.

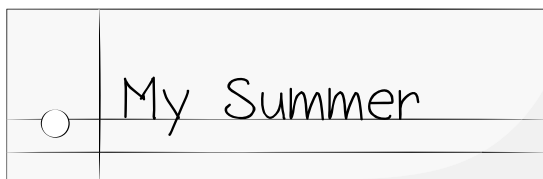
Other teachers had stopped giving assignments. The school year was ending soon. But Ms. Ellis was different. She did not stop assigning work.



Ms. Ellis



“Write a story,” she had said to the class. “Make it fictional. Call it ‘My Summer.’ Be creative. Have fun! These will not be graded. But participation will count. You’ll turn them in tomorrow.”



Ava thought of her summer plans. Helping with swimming at Stars would be fun. She liked working with younger children. But she couldn’t decide what to write.

Nonfiction was Ava’s favorite. That was easy for her. Fiction was challenging. It was hard to make up stories.

Then Ava had an idea. *Sammi asked*



*me about perfect friends. I'll write about someone like that.*

Nick was new in town. Eva had met him at camp. They both helped out there.

The day they met, Nick was reading a book. He had blue eyes, dark hair, and wore thick glasses. Eva learned that he loved art.



She had noticed Nick right away. He was

not like other boys Eva knew. Nick acted older. But he was only 12, just like her.

Nick's first words were the best. He'd said, "Challenge! Name this fictional character. I'll give you three hints."

"You're on!" Eva had said. "You must want to lose."



"Defiant. Smart. Brave."

"Oh, it's--"

“Hey, Ava!” Sammi stood in front of her.

Ava looked up. All the other students had left. Ms. Ellis wasn’t in the room either. Sammi was alone with Ava.

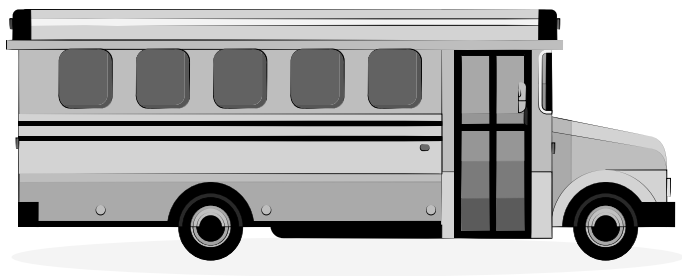
“Didn’t you hear the bell?” Sammi asked.

Ava shook her head. “I guess not. But I might like writing fiction now.”



# 3

## DAY CAMP



It was after school. Ava and Sammi headed to the camp's bus. The girls climbed aboard. They sat together.

Ava looked out the window. "I don't know why we have to do it."

"Do what?" Sammi asked. "Oh, wait. I think I know."

Ava turned to her. "I'm talking about the talent show. Why don't we have a choice?"

Sammi thought for a moment. "Maybe campers like it. Those kids look up to us and the counselors. We're older. I bet the kids love seeing us perform. It's a fun way to end camp."

"It's not fun for all of us."

"You never know. It may surprise you."

Ava gazed out the window again. "I'll just focus on helping with swimming."

"You'll love that. I can't wait to help with the music."

Soon the bus arrived at Stars. Helpers spent the afternoon in training. They split into groups. Each group trained in different areas. Then everyone met for dinner. Ava thought this was nice of Stars. Dinner was offered on each day of training.

Ava found Sammi in the dining hall. They sat at an empty table. Then Ava saw Ty and Alex. They were coming over.

“Oh, great,” Ava said to Sammi. “Here come your two friends.”

Sammi saw them too. “Just be nice, Ava.”

Ty wiped sweat from his forehead. “I love helping with sports. But we’re at the field. It’s terrible. I’m in the sun *all* day.”

“Yeah, look at me.” Alex pulled at his shirt. Sweat had soaked through. “I can’t wait to shower.”



So.  
Much.  
Sweat.

Sammi stared at them. “That’s gross.”

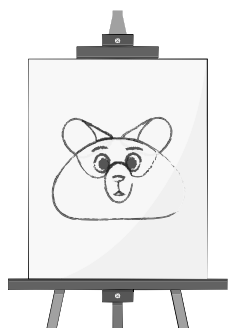
But just wait. I know you'll have fun with the campers."

"Hope so," Ty said. "I can't believe this is only training. Camp will start soon. We're going to sweat like crazy. It'll be every day."

"The field worries me too." Alex turned up his nose. "It might have mice. I heard some were there last year. They lived in the taller grass."

"Rodents, huh?" Ava smirked. "Ty, did you bring your hamster again? It might want some friends."

Ty grinned. "Nah. My hamster hates sports. She only likes art."



Self-portrait  
←



He and Ava thought about the art show trip. Ava tried not to giggle. But she couldn't help it. *I didn't know Ty was so funny.*

Then Ava's thoughts quickly shifted. She couldn't wait to write more of her story. Nick wouldn't like sports either.

It was evening. Ava sat in her room. She started writing again. Then she thought of Ms. Ellis. The teacher had told Ava to write what she knew.

Ava knew herself well. She made Eva just like her. Nick was a perfect friend for Eva. Ava wrote about that next.

Eva and Nick were sitting by a campfire. They talked about books. Nick was amazed. Eva had read so many.

The boys Eva knew didn't care. They never talked about books. But Nick enjoyed it. Eva loved that. Could they become friends? Only time would tell.

It was hard for Eva to be friends with other boys. But with Nick, everything was easy. He and Eva had so much in common.

"Who's your favorite main character?" he asked.

Eva didn't hesitate. "Meg Murry."

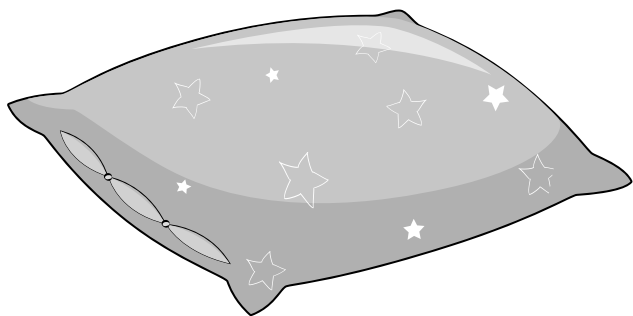
"No!" Nick gasped. "Meg is my favorite too! Well, Meg and Mrs. Whatsit."

Eva couldn't believe it. She thought Mrs. Whatsit was wonderful. "The boys I know don't like to read. What planet did you come from?"

Nick laughed. "You're funny."

Maybe Eva could be friends with a boy her age. Nick was making that possible.

Ava leaned back on her pillow. The story seemed good. But she wanted a second opinion.



She thought of Sammi. Ava texted her. "Hey! Can I ask you a favor?"

"Sure," Sammi texted back.

"Will you read my story? I wrote more."

"Of course! Send it to me."

“Thank you! Going to do that now.”

Ava attached her story to an email. She sent it to Sammi.

“Got it!” Sammi replied. “I’ll call when I’m done.”

A while later, Sammi called.



Ava was nervous. “What do you think?”

Sammi sounded excited. “I knew you were a great writer. But this is so good, Ava. I love it!”

Ava blushed. "Are you serious?"

"Yes, I am. This story rocks! But I have some ideas. Want to hear them?"

"Yeah, tell me!"

"Okay. Nick should wear great clothes. Make him speak with an accent. Those are awesome. And give him a tattoo."

Ava giggled. "That sounds good. But Nick is only 12. He can't have a tattoo."

### Sammi's ideas

☒ Stylish clothes

☒ Cool accent

☒ Body tats

"Just make it a fake one. Write that he drew it himself. You wrote that he loves art."

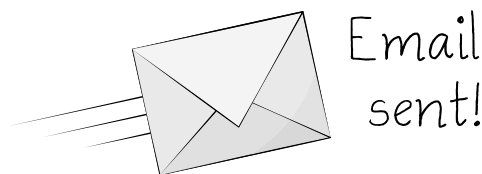
"Okay," Ava said. "I'll add the tattoo."

"Good," Sammi continued. "Then send

your story to Ms. Ellis. Get her thoughts. And copy me.”

Ava agreed. She added Sammi’s details to the story. Nick dressed well. He had a southern accent. His tattoo wasn’t real. But he drew it himself. It was three stars on his right arm.

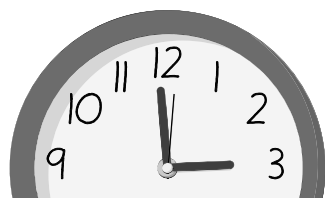
Soon Ava was ready. She had finished her email. Sammi was copied. Ava hit the send button.



## TRUE STORY

It was the last day of school. Ava wondered about her email. Ms. Ellis hadn't said anything.

Ava's teacher checked the time. There was a minute left.



The last  
minute!

She faced the class. “I hope all of you enjoyed writing your stories. You’ve been amazing students. Now are you ready to count down?”

The class cheered.

Ms. Ellis clasped her hands. “Let’s do it! And Ava, please see me right after class. All right, everyone! Ten. . .nine. . .”

The class counted down. Ava missed the first few numbers. *Ms. Ellis wants to meet with me. I know this is about my story. What will she say?*

“Three. . .two. . .one. . .school’s out! Have a great summer break!” Students cheered again. Then they left class.



Ava saw Sammi. Her friend pointed to the hall. Sammi would be waiting for Ava there.



Ms. Ellis leaned on the edge of her desk. She smiled brightly.

Ava walked slowly to her. “You wanted to see me?”

“Yes,” Ms. Ellis said. “I loved your story. I’m glad you sent it to me. It was different but felt real. Good idea to write about friendship. You have a gift. Keep writing.”

Ava blushed. “Thanks. That means a lot to me. You’re a great teacher, Ms. Ellis.”



“And you’re a wonderful student, Ava. Have a fun summer. Continue working on your story.”

“I will.” Ava waved goodbye.

Soon she and Sammi were on the bus. They were going back to Stars. Ava had told Sammi everything.



Sammi beamed. “I knew it was amazing. You’re a true writer. That story felt real.”

“Ms. Ellis said it did too.”

“See! You’re talented, Ava.”

The bus arrived at camp. Ava headed to the lake. Sammi went to the music area.

Then Ava noticed someone. She gasped.

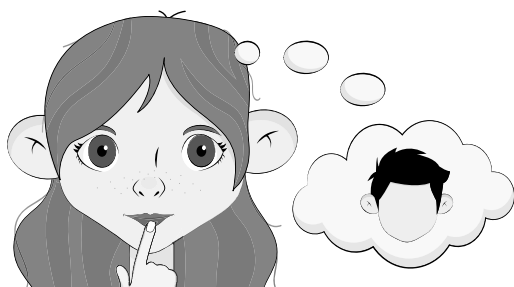
A new boy was at camp. He was talking to counselors. His hair was dark. Heavy black glasses rested on his nose. The boy had blue eyes. Ava loved how he dressed.

She walked past him. Then she saw his arm. He had body art. It was three stars.

Ava couldn't believe it. He looked just like the boy in her story.



## IS HE REAL?



Training had ended that day. Helpers were in a staff meeting. It was hard for Ava to focus. She thought of the new boy. Ava was relieved when the meeting was over. Sammi listened as Ava talked about the boy.

Just then, Ava looked away. Someone caught her eye.

It was the new boy. He was walking toward them.



“Oh, whoa,” Ava said. “He’s coming over here!”

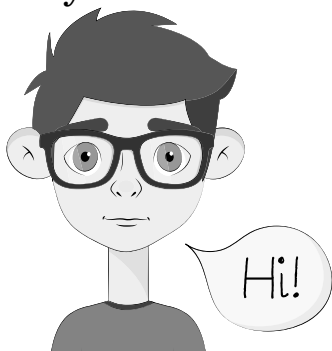
Sammi followed Ava’s eyes. She saw him too. “Wow, that’s wild. He really looks like your Nick.”

The boy reached them. “Hi.” He had a southern accent.

Ava was speechless.

“Hello,” Sammi said.

The boy grinned. “My name is Nick. I joined the training late. I’m trying to meet people. What are your names?”



Ava was still in shock. The boy not only

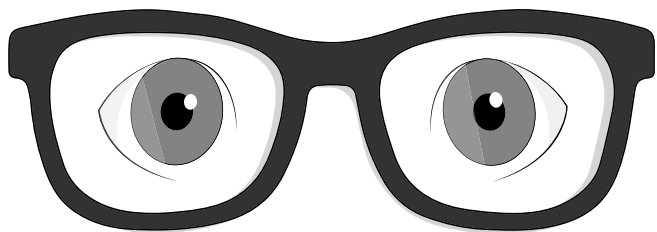
matched Nick's look. He had the same name and accent. It was too much to take in.

Sammi looked surprised. But she could still speak. "I'm Sammi." She pointed to her friend. "This is Ava."

At first, Ava could only nod. Then she tried to smile.

"So, Nick, did you get any training?" Sammi asked.

Nick shrugged. "Just a little. I'm from Texas. But I'm visiting my uncle for the summer. He knows this camp's owners. They said I could learn as I go. It sounded fun. So I came."



Ava tried to think. She needed to talk.  
“What activity are you helping with?”

“I’m on the water. I’ll help with swimming and fishing. Art is what I wanted most. But being around water is fun.”

“Cool!” Sammi said. “Ava is helping with swimming.”

Nick looked at Ava. “Nice! We can hang out.”

Ava smiled. “Right.” She tried not to seem awkward. “So, what do you like to do?”

“Read, of course.” Nick grinned. “There’s nothing like a good book.”

Ava’s eyes widened. She glanced at Sammi. Then Sammi nodded at her. She wanted Ava to ask more.

“What are you reading now?” Ava asked Nick.



He got excited. “My friends back home have a book club. We’re reading *The Little Prince*. The theme is loneliness.”

The girls shared a look. They were amazed at Nick’s answer. Was Ava’s story coming to life?

Nick exchanged numbers with them. Then Ty and Alex came over. They met Nick.



NEW CONTACT

Nick



NEW CONTACT

Ava



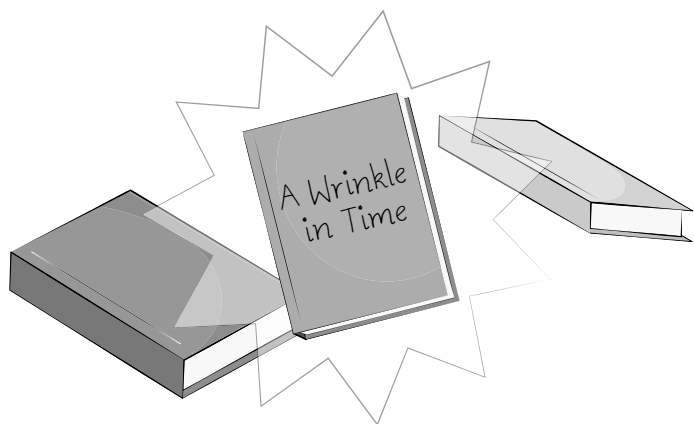
NEW CONTACT

Sammi



The five of them chatted. Soon it was time to leave.

Nick turned to Ava. “Let me know what books you like. I’ll tell you if I’ve read them. My favorite is *A Wrinkle in Time*. Meg Murry is the best.”



Ava was stunned. She could only mutter, “I agree. It’s my favorite too.”

Everyone headed outside. They walked to the buses. Sammi and Ava told the boys goodbye. The girls headed to their bus.

Sammi grabbed Ava's arm. "That was so weird. Nick is just like Nick in your story. Their names are even the same!"

Ava stared at her friend. "I know. It's hard to believe. Did you see his arm?"

"I sure did. The matching tattoo freaked me out."

Ava nodded. "Me too. It's like my story is coming true."

"This is so wild! But it's also kind of cool." Sammi thought for a moment. "Do you want to get to know him? Maybe you already do. Didn't you write him?" She giggled.

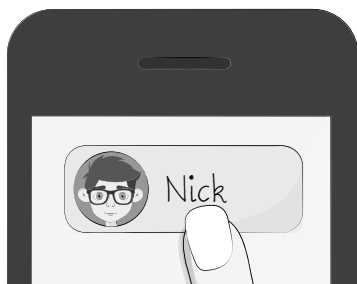
Ava smiled. "I'd like to know him better. He could be our third person. You know, for the talent show."

"Great idea. Write more. Then let's see what happens. Maybe this is magic."



## SLEEPLESS

Sammi spent the night at Ava's. They were in Ava's room. Ava was on her laptop. She added to her story. Then she paused to text Nick.



He responded quickly. Ava showed his text to Sammi.

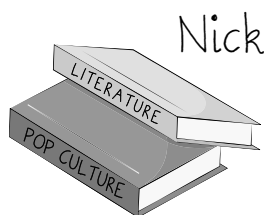
“Look at what he talks about.” Ava was amazed. “He’s nothing like Ty and Alex.

None of the boys I know are like him.” She texted Nick back.

## Topics of conversation



Boys Ava  
knows



Nick

Sammi nodded. “I see what you mean. You two have a lot in common.”

Ava handed her laptop to Sammi. “Look, I’ve added you now. You’re Pam.” She giggled.

Sammi laughed. “Oh, I made the cut! I’m honored.”

Ava smiled. “I couldn’t leave you out.”

Sammi read the story. “This is great. Keep writing.” She handed the laptop

back to Ava. “I won’t bother you. I’ll just be watching TV.”

Ava continued her story.



It was the night before camp started. Pam stayed over. Eva didn’t want to go to sleep. She wanted to text Nick. Pam wanted that too. The girls loved reading his messages.

Did he have any special talents? Maybe he could sing. Pam could dance well. Eva was okay at it. They could do a routine with Nick.

If he could sing, it would be perfect. He would stand in the center. The girls would dance behind him.

She texted Nick her idea.

He replied. "I'm the lead singer in my band."

"How's it going?" Sammi asked.

"Good," Ava said. "Nick's in a band. He's the lead singer."

Sammi grinned. "Problem solved! We may have our act."

"I agree. Nick is so much better than Ty and Alex."

"How about this?" Sammi asked. "Write that Nick has ideas for acts."

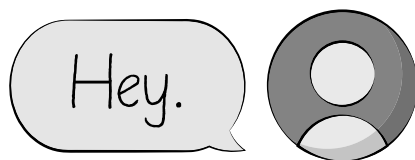
Ava nodded. "Yes! I love that idea! Maybe it will come true too."



**“Right,” Sammi said. “Go ahead. I’m going to get ready for bed.”**

**Ava returned to her story.**

Eva was about to go to bed. Then she got a text. It was from Nick.



"Are you busy?" he asked.

"Heading to bed now," Eva texted.

"Sorry. I have a problem."

"What's wrong?"

"Can't sleep. Thinking about some acts."

Eva thought that was cool.

Nick texted more. "Can you be at camp early tomorrow?"

"Why?"

"I have a list for you."

Eva asked what was on it. Nick said it was a list of ideas. Tomorrow was going to be great.

# 7

## IDEAS

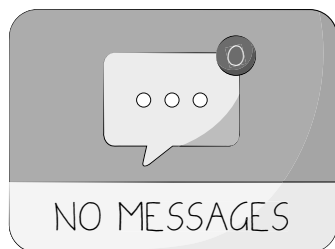
It was the next day. This was the first day with campers. Ava and Sammi arrived at camp early. They went to their separate areas.



Ava looked for Nick. She didn't see him. Then she texted him. "Hi! Are you here?" There was no reply.

She waited a while. Then Ava texted again. “Hey, where are you?”

Still, there was nothing.



Ava told herself she was being silly. No one wrote a story that came true.

She started walking to the lake. Then she heard her name.

“Ava! Hey, Ava!” Nick called. “I was looking for you.”

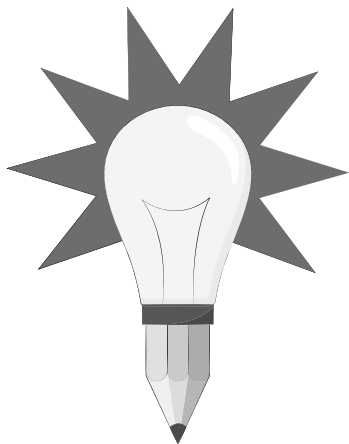
She turned around. Nick ran up to her. He handed her a paper.

Ava read it. Her eyes got big. *Whoa. My story really is magic!*

“What do you think?” Nick asked.

Ava was blown away. Nick had written a list of ideas. But the list was huge.

“This is a lot,” Ava said.



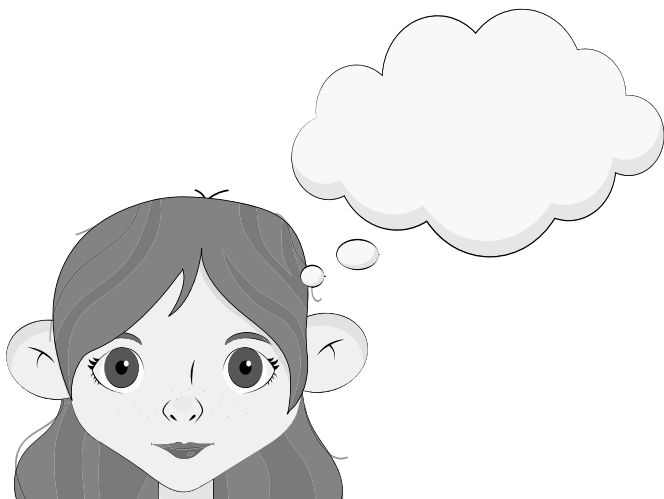
“I know.” Nick blushed. “I had so many ideas. My brain wouldn’t shut off.”

Nick was the star in each act. One was him singing. The girls were backup singers. Another had Nick rapping. Ava and Sammi were hip-hop dancers. Then there was Nick telling jokes. The girls would hold up emoji cards. It went on and on.

Ava was speechless. Then she said,  
“These are all great.”

“Thanks. I have more ideas. But my hand  
cramped up.” He chuckled.

Ava wanted to work on her story. But she  
didn’t have her laptop. She just thought  
about what to write.



8

## TOO FAR



That evening, Ava was at home. She added to her story.

It was the best day of Eva's life. She and Pam had the greatest talent show help. Nick would take the lead.

Eva had never known a boy like him. He fit right in with her and Pam. He had everything Eva wanted in a friend. Best of all, he didn't care about sports.

Nick texted more show ideas to Ava. That was what she wrote about next. Then she smiled. This was her greatest story ever.

The next day was weird. Nick started texting Ava early. She was still sleeping. He texted every five minutes. Then it was every three. Soon it was every two. Each text was a set of show ideas.

Hi Ava!



50 many ideas.

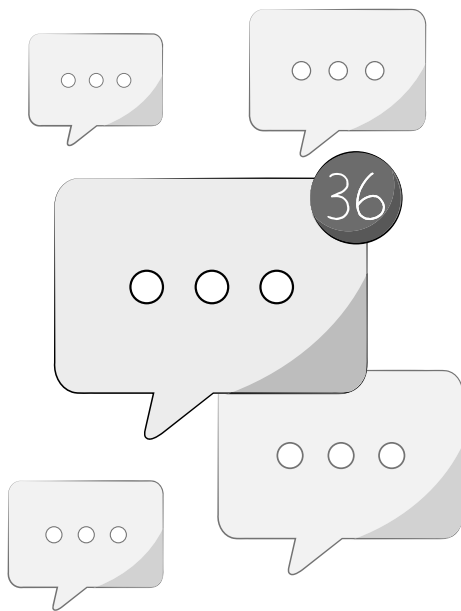


U there?





Nick wouldn't stop. His texts kept coming.  
There were too many for Ava to read.



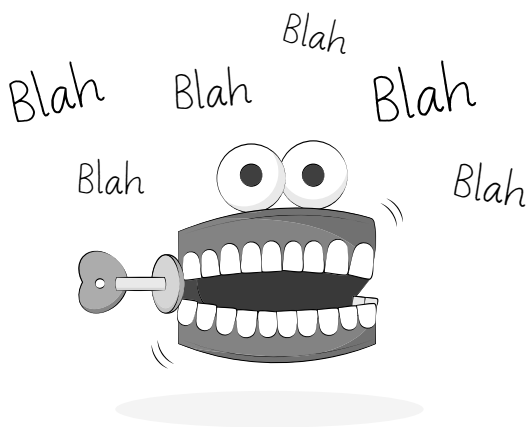
“Wait!” she finally texted.

“Wait for what?” he texted back.

Ava shook her head. “Never mind. I’ll just see you at camp.”

It was worse there. Nick followed Ava

everywhere. She couldn't get away from him. He never stopped talking. His words even started blending together.



Nick had gone to the restroom. Then Ava saw Ty. He was waving at her. The field was close to the lake.

Ty headed over. "Are you okay, Ava?"

"Sure," she lied. "I'm fine. Why?"

"Um, well, it's Nick. He seems to be bothering you. Is he? Want any help?"

Ty was worried about her. Ava thought that was kind.

“That’s so nice of you. But this is my problem. I’ll handle it.”

Ty nodded. “Okay, cool. I’m here if you need me. Good luck.” He gave her a thumbs-up. Then he jogged back to the field.

Ava started seeing Ty in a new way. Their differences didn’t matter. He wanted her to be okay. Had Ava been wrong about him?





## REWRITE

The day was over. Ava and Sammi were on the bus.



“You’ll try it?” Sammi asked.

Ava nodded. “Sure. Why not? It can’t hurt.”

They had talked about the day. Ava told



Sammi everything. Ty had surprised Ava. Maybe he wasn't so immature. But Nick was a problem. He needed to leave Ava alone.

Sammi thought of something else. She told Ava to add to the story. Ava could write that Nick stops bothering Eva.

That evening, Ava opened her laptop. Then she started writing.

Eva stopped worrying about the show. She didn't want Nick's help. He was too much. His ideas were great. But they had gotten out of control.

It was the next day. Everyone was in the dining hall.

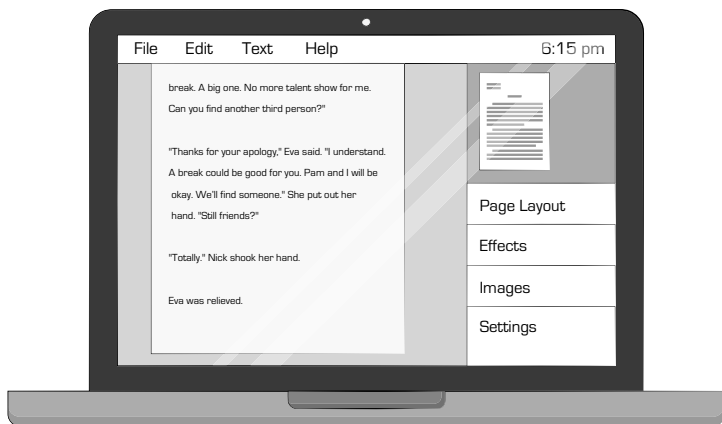
Nick walked over to Eva. "I've been acting weird. I'm sorry. I got carried away. It's

better if I take a break. A big one. No more talent show for me. Can you find someone else?"

"Thanks for your apology," Eva said. "I understand. A break could be good for you. Pam and I will be okay. We'll find someone." She put out her hand. "Still friends?"

"Totally." Nick shook her hand.

Eva was relieved.



Ava stopped there. She sent her story to Sammi. Then Ava waited.

Finally, Sammi texted. “Sweet. Good luck!”

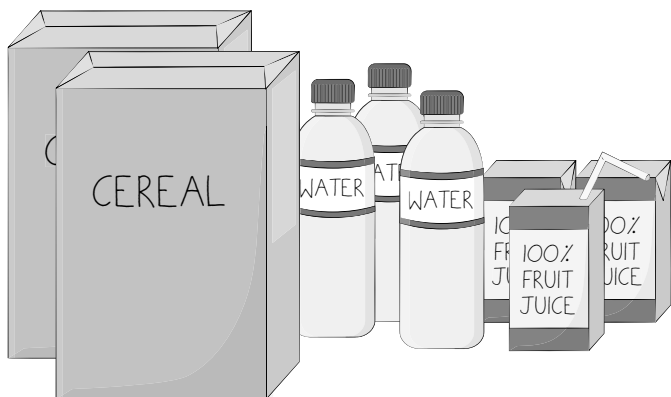
Ava went to bed full of hope. So far, her story had come true. Maybe this part would too.



10

## RICHIE

It was the next day. Ava was at camp. She and Sammi were eating breakfast. Everyone talked about the talent show. It would be in two weeks. But Ava thought about Nick. Would he do what the Nick in her story did?



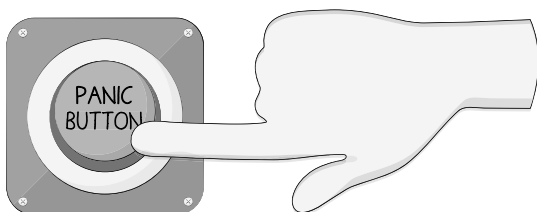
Then Ava saw him.

Nick ran over to her. “Ava! I have the best idea!”

*Oh no!* Ava thought.

Nick spoke loudly. “Last night, I had a dream. You and I were stars!”

Others stared at him. Ava cringed. She looked at the floor.



Then Nick got louder. He turned to everyone in the room. Nick started telling his dream.

Ava closed her eyes. This was too much. “Nick? Please stop talking.”

He went on. “Our act took us to—”

Sammi cut him off. “Okay, Richie. Like Ava said, stop now.”

Ava opened her eyes. *What did Sammi just call him? Richie?*

Sammi looked at Ava. “Yes, Richie is his name.”



The boy had stopped talking. He smiled. Then he sat down.

“Sammi, what’s going on?” Ava asked.

“Richie is my cousin,” Sammi said.

The boy waved at Ava.

Sammi continued. “You’re my bestie, Ava. I care about who you are. It hurt to see what you were becoming.”

Ava shook her head. “What do you mean?”

Sammi gave her a serious look. “You’re a great writer. But stories aren’t real life. I saw how you were with Ty and Alex. You never gave them a chance. Then I tried to tell you about them. But you ignored me. What I said didn’t matter.”

Ava’s head spun. “So you—”



Sammi nodded. “Yes, Ava, I did. I wanted to make a point. Richie matched your story.

He was your perfect friend. That mattered most to you. But what you wrote wasn't a real person. You weren't giving real people a chance."

Ava looked her friend in the eyes. "Wow, Sammi. Really? I can't believe you did this to me." She was fuming.

"I'm so sorry, Ava." Sammi's voice shook. "But I didn't know what to do. It was so hard to show you what I saw. I care about you. And how you treat others."

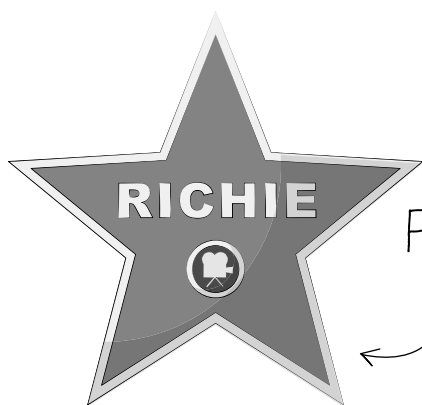
Ava shook her head. "This is hard to deal with. But I know you care. I started learning my lesson yesterday. It was when Ty wanted to help me."

Sammi smiled weakly. "That was cool of him. He and Alex are great."

Richie spoke up. "This was also good for me." He didn't have an accent anymore.

“Sammi told me her plan. I couldn’t pass it up. It seemed like a good cause. And I want to be an actor. This gave me a lot of practice.”

Ava stared at him. “You’re good.”



“Thanks!” Richie took off his glasses. “These are fake, of course.”

Sammi looked down for a moment. “Again, I’m sorry, Ava.” She shifted her gaze back to her friend. “Will you please forgive me?”

Ava smiled a little. “Sure. I needed this

lesson. There are no perfect friends, right? That goes for both of us.”

She and Sammi hugged.



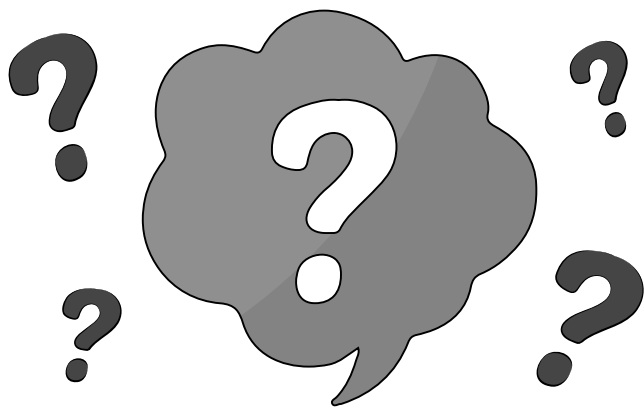
Ty and Alex came over. Sammi introduced her cousin. She explained almost everything. But she didn't mention Ava's thoughts of them. Sammi said Ava was being too serious about a story. Ava needed help returning to reality.

“I heard Nick, I mean Richie, earlier,” Ty said. “That dream was so weird. Alex and

I felt bad for you, Ava. But I remembered what you told me yesterday.”

“Yeah,” Alex said. “And we figured Sammi would help you out. I guess she really did. Just not in the way we’d thought.”

Ava nodded. “Right. But I have one question. Richie, how did you get to help at camp? You missed so much training.”



Richie grinned. “One part about my ‘uncle’ was true. He does know the camp



owners. But he's really my dad. I just told him I wanted to help out. The owners let me start late. They needed the extra help."

Ava's thoughts shifted from Richie. She looked at the others. *Ty and Alex like to have fun. It's cool. They wanted to help me out too. That was kind, not immature. Sammi was right about them. I'm glad she made her point.*

Perfect friends weren't real. But real friends were perfect for Ava.

She turned to Ty and Alex. "What are you two doing now?"

"Me?" Ty asked. "I'm standing here."

Alex grinned. "Yeah, I am too."

Sammi shook her head.

Ava giggled. "Very funny. I mean do you have anything to do right now? If not, can

we plan an act? You know, for the show. All of us.”

“Sure,” Ty said. “Alex and I need more people.”

“Right.” Alex held up one finger. “And we haven’t planned anything.”

“Great idea, Ava.” Sammi glanced at Richie. “That means Richie too, right?”

“Nah,” Richie said. “Being in talent shows isn’t my thing. I only like to be onstage when I can act. Plays are better for me. Stars is going to let me help out backstage. It’s nice that you’ll have an even number. All of you make a party of four.”

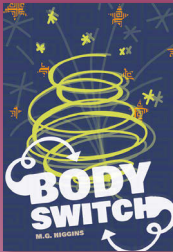
Soon everyone finished eating. Ava headed to the lake. She was glad about what Sammi had done. People would not always be everything Ava expected. But they all deserved a chance.

After this, being onstage would be easier. Ava now had more support than ever. She had three great friends.





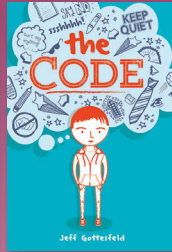
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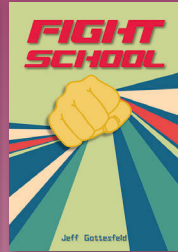
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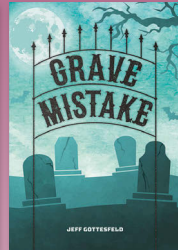
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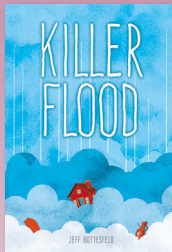
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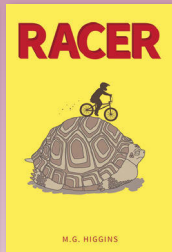
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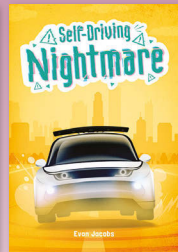
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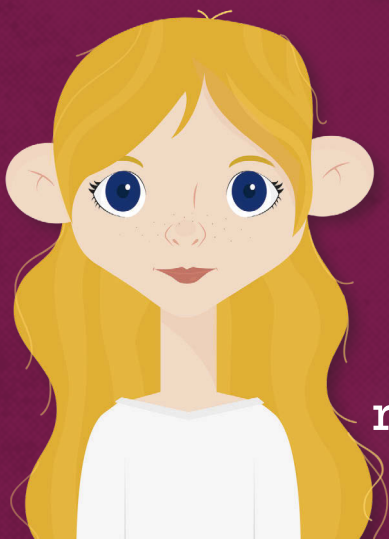
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