

For kids with big dreams.—P.M

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As I sat at my desk in a stinking-hot classroom, I longed to be somewhere else. Anywhere but school. If I had my choice, I'd be in a cool, dark theatre, eating a box of Maltesers, watching a musical with my grandma. We call my grandma 'Gigi' because she says she's too young and cool to be called 'Grandma'. Gigi used to be a famous musical theatre performer, but gave it up when she had my mum. Gigi takes me to see musicals in the city whenever a new one opens. She tells me it's because I'm her favourite granddaughter, which always makes me laugh because I'm her only granddaughter.

This year, we saw the musical *Matilda*, which I absolutely loved! I hope I inherit some of Gigi's talent, as I'm desperate to become a performer too. Not that my parents would ever allow it.

'Ouch!' I cried.

A scrunched-up paper ball hit me in the side of the head, rudely interrupting my daydream. The whole class erupted with laughter. I rolled my eyes. I seemed to be the target of flying objects in class more often than I care to admit.

I gazed out the classroom window at the crystal-blue ocean, trying to ignore the giggles from my juvenile peers. I'm sure most kids would be envious that I go to a 'surfy' school by the beach, but I hate it. I find sand to be truly offensive. And don't even get me started on the putrid smell of seaweed. I am actually pretty proud of the fact that I'm the only kid in Year 6 who doesn't own a surfboard. If I had it my way, I would attend a performing arts school, where I could learn to sing, dance and act. But that's never going to happen. I even once overheard Gigi telling Mum to enrol me in

the Fame School of Dramatic Arts, but Mum wouldn't hear of it. She said if Rydell College is good enough for my brothers, it is good enough for me. Gigi got really frustrated, telling Mum that our school has absolutely no appreciation for the arts. She said, 'It has no choir, no theatre and no orchestra! It's a cultureless cesspool!' I'm not quite sure what a *cultureless cesspool* is, but I loved Gigi for trying to help me. My big brothers, on the other hand, fit right in at Rydell College, as surfing is their whole life.

As I sat pondering my sad non-existent future in performing, I realised I was biting my fingernails . . . again. My mother frequently tells me it's a 'nasty habit'. I seem to have a lot of *nasty habits*, including but not limited to daydreaming, losing things, running late, nail-biting, fidgeting, forgetting instructions, and perhaps the worst of them all, talking too much. Maybe all my bad habits are why I don't have any proper friends.

I sighed and sat on my hands to stop myself from biting my nails, then tried to focus on what was happening in the classroom. Sophia Jekyll, who happens

to be the meanest girl in Year 6, had walked to the front of the room and was ready to present her History assignment. Her perfectly brushed, glossy, dark hair hung evenly over her petite shoulders, and her beautiful almond-shaped eyes sparkled as she spoke. Her teeth were so white and perfectly aligned, she could have been in a toothpaste commercial. Come to think of it, she probably *had* been in a toothpaste commercial. Sophia had been a model and an actor since she was three years old. Just ask her, she'll tell you *aaall* about it. Apparently, she has a talent agent who organises auditions for commercials, television shows and even musicals for her. Can you believe it? What I wouldn't give to audition for a musical!

As Sophia began to speak, every kid listened intently, most likely out of fear. Everyone knew Sophia would make their life unbearable if they didn't give her their full attention. Unfortunately, I had been the recipient of Sophia's bullying for several years now. The worst instance occurred in Year 4 when Sophia and I were chosen to debate each other in front of the whole

school. The topic was, 'Dogs make better pets than cats'. I don't have a dog or a cat, and couldn't have cared less about the topic, but ask me to talk on any given subject and I can rattle on for hours. My dad says I could talk underwater with a mouth full of marbles. I haven't actually tried that, but I'd give it a red-hot go. Anyway, my talent for non-stop talking meant I accidentally won the debate . . . and Sophia was furious. When I went to collect my school bag at the end of the day, I found stinky, wet dog food smeared all through it. I didn't actually have any evidence to prove it was Sophia, but it seemed fairly obvious to me that she was the mastermind behind it, as I saw her running away from the crime scene laughing her head off. It took a month of Dad throwing my school bag in the washing machine for the dog-food smell to finally disappear.

Sophia carried on speaking in her clear, confident voice. The assignment was to choose a famous person from history and present their life story to the class. I don't even know who Sophia spoke about, as everything she said went in one ear and right out the other. I've

never been a very good listener. Another nasty habit, I suppose.

Once Sophia finished, I joined the rest of the class in reluctantly applauding her (so as to not have a repeat of the dog-food incident) and Sophia gracefully took her seat next to her best friend, Chloe Hyde. Chloe had blonde, curly hair and a pretty, round face. She had been Sophia's sidekick since kindergarten, but if you ask me, Chloe didn't seem as naturally mean as Sophia.

I'd left this assignment to the very last minute, as usual. In my defence, Mr Cellophane set the assignment date for the day before the summer holidays were due to begin. Can you believe that? The rest of the school were throwing waterbombs at each other in the playground and we were presenting assignments. Oh the injustice of it all!

When Mr Cellophane, who looked suspiciously like The Grinch, called my name, my body involuntarily convulsed.

'Millie von Trapp!' he boomed from the front of the classroom. Mr Cellophane had a reputation for being

the grumpiest teacher at Rydell College, and after being in his class for a whole year, I understood why.

I stood up quickly, accidentally knocking my school books off my desk. The entire class burst out laughing again. I quickly picked up my books, threw them onto my desk and hurried to the front of the classroom. I tried to smooth down my frizzy, brown hair with my sweaty hands and adjusted my glasses back onto the bridge of my nose. Out of the corner of my eye, I saw Sophia and Chloe roll their eyes at each other. I tried to ignore them and asked Mr Cellophane if I could use his laptop for my presentation.

He huffed, then mumbled, 'If you have to.'

I moved towards the laptop, which was sitting on his desk, and typed some words into the search bar. I then turned around to face the class. They had stopped laughing and were now looking bored out of their brains. I'm not sure which was worse. Despite the uneasy feeling I had in the pit of my stomach, I began to speak.

'My presentation will be about the life of Alexander Hamilton,' I stated, trying not to let my nerves show.

I stared into a sea of bored faces.

‘Who?’ Mr Cellophane asked rudely, crinkling up his nose as if he had smelled something rotten.

‘He was a revolutionary soldier who lived in America in the 1700s,’ I responded confidently. Mr Cellophane let out a bored sigh. ‘Go on, then,’ he said without looking at me.

I tried to insert some energy into my voice to lift the class mood.

‘For your listening pleasure, I will be presenting my assignment . . .’ I paused for dramatic effect ‘. . . through song!’ I announced with enthusiasm. I heard a collective moan from the class.

‘Ugh! Again?!’ groaned Sophia before slamming her forehead onto her desk.

I ignored her and pressed ‘play’ on the laptop. The sound of drums and trumpets blared through the classroom speakers and I began to sing the title song from the musical *Hamilton*. I had listened to the Broadway cast recording so many times, I knew every single word.

I made sure I enunciated all the words clearly and kept in time with the beat. I tried to block out my irritating classmates as they rolled their eyes, and I sang through the entire song, word for word. The song began to build and tingles ran up and down my spine as the orchestra swelled in the music. Then, when it came time for my big finish, I punched my fist into the air and belted out the final lyrics.

I stood in silence, fist firmly in the air and waited for rapturous applause. But it never came. In fact, the classroom was so quiet you could have heard a pin drop. Everyone stared at me, a mix of confusion and amusement on their faces. Mr Cellophane just looked annoyed. He took off his glasses and raised his bushy grey eyebrows.

‘Millie, did you write that song?’ he inquired irritably.

I laughed so hard that I snorted. Unfortunately, he didn’t think anything was funny. ‘Um, no, of course not. Lin-Manuel Miranda did,’ I replied, looking at him like he was crazy.

‘Who?’ Mr Cellophane said, puzzled.

I was flabbergasted. How did he not know who Lin-Manuel Miranda was?! Had he been living under a rock? I decided it was my job to educate him.

‘He’s only the most amazing musical theatre composer of our time!’ I shrieked, my mouth agape. Mr Cellophane seemed to be getting more annoyed with me by the second.

‘Millie, this was supposed to be a *history* assignment, not a musical theatre performance. The assignment was to *research* and *present* the assignment, not sing a song someone else has written,’ he scolded.

I could hear muffled laughter from the class and I felt my ears begin to burn. This often happened when I felt embarrassed.

‘In my defence, Mr Cellophane, you didn’t say anything about writing the assignment . . .’

‘Please sit back down, Millie,’ he said, cutting me off. ‘And next time, *write* the assignment like everyone else,’ he huffed.

I slowly made my way back to my seat, ignoring the chuckles from Sophia and Chloe as I passed their desks.

After sitting through a few more boring, non-musical presentations, Mr Cellophane made some drab speech about ‘*mostly* enjoying teaching this year’ and then the end-of-year school bell finally rang. The class erupted into cheers and everyone ran out of the classroom, throwing books and paperwork behind them as they went. I had to duck so I wasn’t hit in the head for a second time that day. I looked around the empty, quiet classroom and slowly exhaled. *Freedom*, I thought. I wouldn’t have to come back to this *cultureless cesspool* for six glorious weeks.



# STAGE STARS

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