

## Chapter 7

I didn't want to go to school the next day. I just knew Bethany would be waiting for me. I figured she needed some time away from me to cool down. So I came up with Plan B.

"Mom," I moaned, "I think I'm going to throw up. I can't go to school today." I put on my saddest face.

My mom looked at me strangely. "You don't look sick, Lauren. Come here. Let me feel your forehead."

As soon as she said that, I knew I was out of luck.

"Hmm," Mom said, her hand resting on my brow. "No fever. I think you're okay to go to school."

She continued to look at me oddly. Oh



boy, I thought. I am in so much trouble.

But I shouldn't have worried. Bethany wasn't in school that day. Or the next. Or the day after that. It was like a little piece of heaven. I got to be partners with Aaron and not once during those days did my stomach clench into knots. We painted pictures of our summer vacation. I decided to show Mom, Dad and me camping at Vissers Beach. There was a crackling fire and we were all roasting hot dogs.

But on Friday my luck changed. Big Bethany came back.

She practically ploughed into the room. She nearly knocked down James in the process. Then she made a beeline straight for me. I swallowed. Oh no, I thought. This is it.

Bethany got real close to my face. I could feel her hot breath. Her eyes were narrowed little slits. “I’m not going to forget what you did, Shrimp. You’re going to pay for it. Big time. After school. *Today.*”

I gulped. What would she do? Stick gum in my hair? Punch me in the ribs? Dump Jell-O down my underwear?

“Boys and girls,” interrupted Ms MacArthur, “please line up. It’s time for our class picture to be taken.”

“Whew.” I breathed a sigh of relief. Safe for now.

I squeezed past Bethany, hurrying to stand in line next to Claire. Suddenly I felt myself falling. One minute everything was

perfectly fine. The next minute I was pitching backward. I felt something wet soak my front. I glanced down. *Paint!* Red paint was all over my new top — and on Picture Day! I couldn't believe it. How was I going to get my picture taken now? They always put me in the front row because I was short.

The paint spread slowly across my top. It reminded me of blood. My blood. The blood that Bethany was after. And then I heard her snicker.

“Oops, sorry, Lauren. I didn't see you coming. Honest,” she insisted. She made an X over her chest. “Cross my heart and hope to die if I should ever tell a lie.”

She did not look one bit sorry. I couldn't prove it, but I was sure she had spilled that paint on me on purpose. My face got red. My eyes started to water, but I would not give Bethany the satisfaction of seeing me cry.

“That's all right.” I stuck what I hoped was a smile on my face. “I'll just put my top on backwards for the picture.”



That's just what I did. I made a quick trip to the bathroom and switched it around. The paint felt cold and clammy on my back. When the photographer was ready, I gave my best million-dollar smile. After the picture I sneaked a peek at Bethany in the back row. She was staring straight at me. She didn't look angry. She looked . . . puzzled.

## Chapter 8

“Class,” began Ms MacArthur when we returned from having our pictures taken, “we’re going to start our very first project of the year. We’re going to use the computers to research different communities in Canada. Then you will present your information to the class.”

She paused and looked around the room. “I’d really like to stress that the presentations need to be *cre-a-tive*.” She drew the word “creative” out slowly.

This, I was good at. I’ve been using computers since I was four years old. I could find my way around on the Internet, use search engines and do all sorts of other stuff. This was my kind of project.

“And you’ll have a partner,” added Ms MacArthur.

I glanced over at Claire. I pointed to her and then back to me. She nodded and gave the thumbs-up signal. What a great team we were going to make.

“We’ll draw names to see who you will work with.”

The entire class groaned.

“Can’t we pick our own partner?” whined Nicholas.

Ms MacArthur smiled. “Maybe next time, Nicholas. This will be a good way to get to know someone new in the class.”

She began to circulate around the room, handing out little slips of paper for everyone to put their names on. I wrote Lauren Campbell in my best writing, folded it my secret way and dropped it into the basket. I crossed my fingers on both hands for good luck and hid them under the table.

Ms MacArthur began to pull names out of the basket. “Kris, your partner is . . . ” She





paused as she pulled another folded slip out of the basket. “. . . Rachael. Matthew, you’ll work with James. And Claire . . . ”

I held my breath. Please, please let it be me, I prayed.

“Your partner is Kirsten.”

I groaned. I so wanted to work with

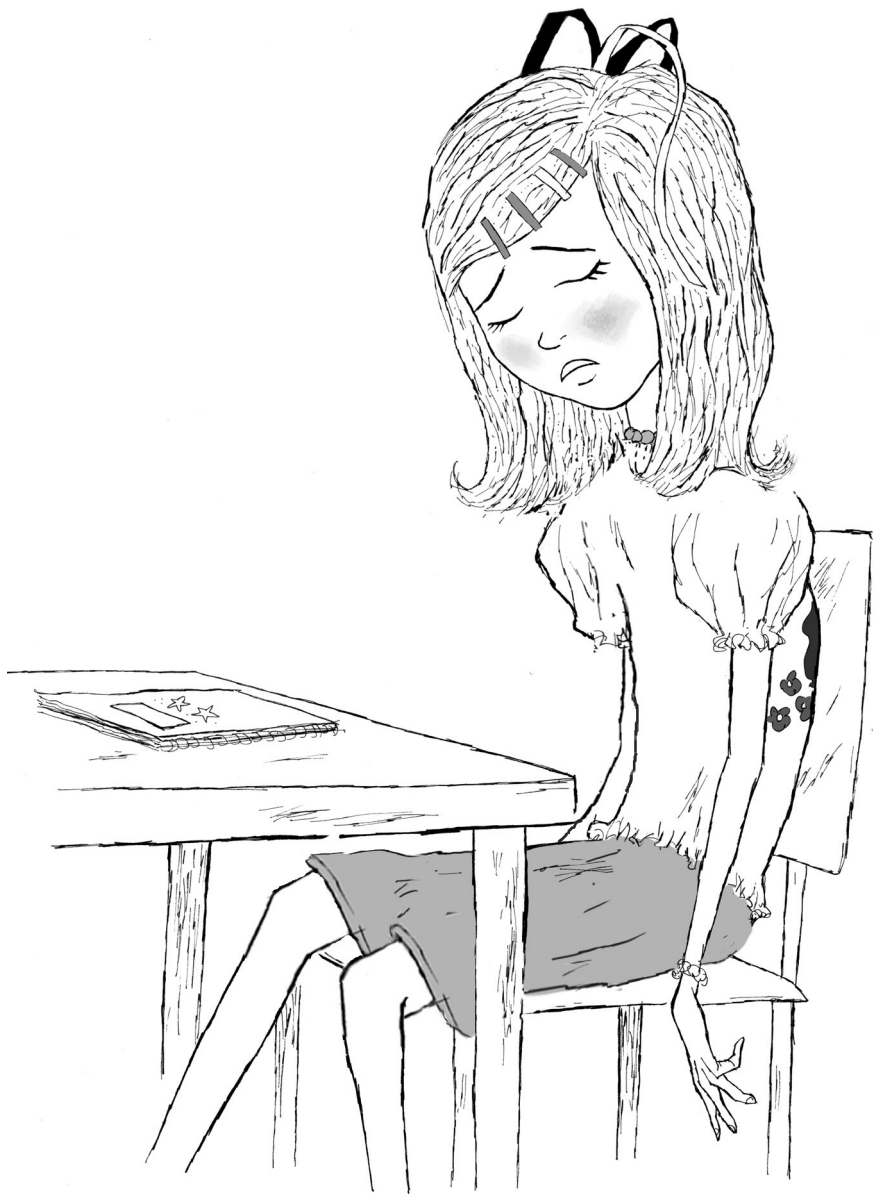
Claire. Now it didn't matter who I worked with.

“Bethany, your partner is . . . ”

Oh no! Bethany! Of course it mattered. I could end up with the biggest bully in the school as my partner. I held my breath and repeated silently: anybody but me, anybody but me.

And then through the noise in the classroom I heard, “Lauren. Bethany and Lauren will be partners.”

I closed my eyes and slumped in my seat. How could a day get any worse? My top was ruined. Bethany had after-school plans for me. And now I had to work with her for the rest of the day. What I thought was going to be my best year in school was rapidly turning into my worst year.



## Chapter 9

Bethany shot a sly smile at me. “So, Shrimp, it’s you and me.”

“I guess,” I answered, not meeting her eye.

“Well, too bad for you, I hate doing projects. So you can do it. All of it.” Bethany crossed her arms over her chest. “This will be the beginning of payback time.”

I gulped. “Well, I’m pretty good at using the computer. Why don’t you pick a few places and I’ll show you how to use a search engine.”

“I already told you,” Bethany raised her voice, “you’re doing the project and *we’ll* get the credit.”

“Girls,” interrupted Ms MacArthur, “is