

GREEN

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★ CHAPTER I ★

SAINTLY CARROTS

Green's life was pretty great, especially for a kid in middle school. They were queer and nonbinary, and had lots of queer and trans friends. Pretty much everyone used their name and pronouns, and they felt mostly comfortable with their body the way it was. They didn't have a nemesis or a bully or anything like that, and most of their teachers were at least halfway decent, if not rather good. Their family was small, just them and Dad at home, but Dad was way closer to awesome than awful. Yep, the going was sweet for Green Gibson.

One of the best parts in Green's day was lunch with kids from the Rainbow Spectrum, Jung Middle

School's group for LGBTQIAP+ students and issues. Not that everyone from the group ate lunch together. Dini ate with the kids who practiced magic tricks, and Devon usually hung out with the other soccer players, but Green, Rick, Ronnie, Melissa, Kelly, Leila, and sometimes a few other kids could be found at the same table most days, sharing laughs and snacks.

Green was first at the table that day, pulling a peanut butter sandwich, three clementines, and a juice box out of their red reusable lunch bag, same as usual.

They wondered where Ronnie was and spotted him and his signature pink sneakers by the lunchroom cashier. He had reddish-brown hair that fell in light curls around his soft white face. Ronnie's fourth-period teacher often let the class out a little early. Most days, he got to the table before Green, especially if Green had to go to the bathroom. Green used the gender-neutral one in the nurse's office,

which was out of the way, but it was also a private stall that never had a line.

“Don’t you ever get bored of the same thing every day?” Ronnie asked as he plunked down a plastic tray that held a cheeseburger in a silver pouch and a pile of waterlogged carrot slices mixed with waterlogged cauliflower florets.

“I’d rather be bored of my lunch than frightened by it,” Green said.

Ronnie put a white napkin over his still-wrapped burger and held it as if it were hovering in the air. “Woooooooh, I am a scary burger ghost!”

Green pointed down at the veggies. “I was referring to those. I wonder what they did to deserve that punishment.”

“It looks personal. I’ll bet they knew the cooks’ big secret!”

“Or they had some secret the cooks were trying to get out of them!” Green mimed holding a bunch of

carrots by their stalks and affected a growly, stern voice. “You will tell us all you know, or we will dump you into the boiling water, mua-ha-ha!”

Ronnie laughed. “It looks like they took their secret to the grave.” He poked at his vegetables with a plastic fork before unwrapping his burger and taking a bite. “The burger’s pretty good though.”

“And full of vitamins,” Green joked.

Ronnie shrugged.

“You want a clementine?”

“Sure.”

After Green passed it over, Ronnie put it to the side of his tray. But Green knew he would eat it soon enough. Ronnie always shrugged when Green offered him a clementine, but he always ate it. That was why Green brought three: one for themselves, one to share with the group, and one for Ronnie.

Green would have been happy to joke with Ronnie the whole lunch period, but then Leila, a short

Latina American girl with straight, long, jet-black hair, joined them, agreeing that the carrots and cauliflower had suffered for some great sin. Melissa, a freckle-faced white girl with a round nose and long brown hair held back with barrettes, arrived soon after, and with Melissa, of course, came her BFF Kelly, an exuberant biracial Black girl with her hair in two thick twists. Melissa sat down next to Leila, her girlfriend, and kissed her on the cheek. Green wondered what it would be like to kiss someone on the cheek when you saw them.

Kelly held out a plastic container with three parts. In one was the homemade spread, sliced pita strips filled a second, and a pile of neatly stacked carrot sticks rounded out the meal. Leila passed, but Ronnie and Green each took a carrot stick and dipped it lightly into the garlicky mixture. Melissa, who had tasted Kelly's dad's hummus before, grabbed a big scoop with a pita slice.

“Not bad,” said Green.

“And these carrots must have been saints!” exclaimed Ronnie.

Green and Ronnie laughed, but the rest of the table, even Leila, who had been there for the end of the carrot consequences conversation, looked at them oddly. They high-fived, and Green could feel Ronnie’s warm, soft palm against their own.

“*Ha’SNIT’inavu!*” Rick, a kid with a friendly smile who was mostly quiet except around his good friends, joined the table with a strange sneeze-like greeting that Green assumed came from *Rogue Space*, his favorite show.

“Okay, everyone’s here,” Kelly said, grabbing Melissa’s arm. “Tell them! Tell them! Tell them!”

“Kelly!” Melissa snapped in her best friend’s face with her free hand to get her attention. “Stop talking so I can tell them!”

Kelly made a sour face, but then turned to everyone and said, “Listen up! Melissa has an announcement.”

Melissa couldn’t help but laugh at her best friend’s enthusiasm. “I was talking to Mr. Sydney this morning, and tomorrow he’s *finally* going to tell us what the spring musical will be.”

Mr. Sydney, who had been faculty advisor of Rainbow Spectrum last year, was back in his role as spring musical director, now that Mx. Abrams had returned from parental leave and was running Rainbow Spectrum again.

“It’s the moment we’ve all been waiting for!” exclaimed Kelly.

“It’s the moment *I’ve* been waiting for, anyway!” said Melissa with a grin.

“Are you gonna audition?” Green asked Melissa, trying to act like they didn’t know the answer.

“Is Melissa gonna audition?” Kelly repeated the

question as if it answered itself, then answered it anyway. “It’s a play! Of course she’s gonna audition.”

Melissa cleared her throat. “Kelly, we’ve talked about this.”

“Right, sorry. It’s Melissa’s choice whether she will audition.” Kelly paused briefly, then attempted a whisper. “You *are* gonna audition, right?”

Melissa revealed a giant grin. “Of course I’m gonna audition. It’s *me* we’re talking about.” Melissa was a natural onstage, and had been since she was the surprise star of the fourth-grade play.

“So, any idea what it’s gonna be?” asked Rick.

“He wouldn’t tell us in class,” said Ronnie. “But he said it would be a classic.”

“You know *classic* just means *old*, right?” said Leila.

“That pretty much rules out anything with openly queer characters,” said Melissa, wrinkling her nose.

“Well, I’m gonna be in the band, no matter what

the play is,” said Kelly. “My dad said I’m gifted at the clarinet, and he’s a professional musician.”

“I’ll probably join the crew,” said Ronnie. “I love that behind-the-scenes stuff. What about you, Green? I’ll bet you’re a great actor.”

Green wondered what they had ever done to make Ronnie think they were a great actor. Green didn’t even know for themselves whether they were any good. But the idea that Ronnie thought so made them feel kind of warm and funny.

When it came down to it, though, Green didn’t really think of themselves as an actor at all. Or a crew member. Or a clarinet player. And even if Green did want to be an actor, most musicals didn’t have non-binary characters. They sighed and said, “I dunno. I agree with Melissa—*classic* sounds like it’s gonna have lots of boy roles and girl roles and not a whole lot of nonbinary roles.”

“I’ll bet Mr. Sydney would let you try out for whatever part you wanted,” said Leila. “Right, Melissa?”

Melissa shrugged. Sometimes Mr. Sydney was cool, but sometimes he wasn’t as cool as he thought he was. It was like he drove a shiny convertible but he didn’t realize the trunk was filled with outdated ideas.

Green picked at their clementine peel, enjoying the bright citrus scent that wafted up when they pierced it with their thumbnail. “Let’s see what the play is first.”

Even if Mr. Sydney let them try out for whatever part they wanted, the idea of playing a boy onstage wasn’t very exciting. It was certainly less terrible than playing a girl, but in order not to have a binary gender, they’d probably have to play a rock or something.

The conversation turned to the latest season of *Candy Pirates*, an animated show about three flamboyant pirates who lived together on a ship. They

were always hunting for treasure in the form of gum-drop islands, chocolate reefs, or some other sweet ocean treat. It was kind of silly, but also kind of fun, and the pop star Miss Kris voiced Green's favorite character, Peregrine the Parrot.

Green did their best impression of Peregrine's screech, and Ronnie responded with "Arrrrrrr, Polly wanna quit it?" in a perfect Percival Pirate.

Green tried not to notice how cute Ronnie was. And funny. Ronnie had never said he was queer, so Green didn't ever think they'd ever be more than friends. Which was fine. Except when Green noticed how cute and funny and friendly he was.

"*Squawk*, quitting is for losers, *squawk*," Green said back to Ronnie, quoting Peregrine.

It was true. Green's life was pretty great, but that didn't mean they had everything they wanted.