

I always go by Eve's house first. It's closest to mine, only three doors down. She has a green bike, her favorite color. My bike is blue and red. I think it's ugly, but Mom and Dad refuse to buy me a new one. They say my brother's old one is "just fine." They're the only ones who think so. At least they got me my own backpack for school. It's black with stripes on it, and I love it. I adjust the bag on my shoulder as I pull up to Eve's front yard.

I yell her name until she finally comes outside. She slams her front door shut and grabs her bike off the porch before joining me on the street.

"Hi, Harper. Ready?" Eve asks me as she mounts her bike.

I notice Mrs. Williams, Eve's mother, waving to me through her kitchen window. I quickly wave back, then hop on my bike.

"Ready."

We ride towards Sarah's house together, Eve on her green bike, and me on my ugly one. Sarah's house is always such a pain in the butt to get to. She lives on Big Hill. We call it that because it's the biggest hill in the neighborhood. The name of her street is actually Cherry Hill, but no one calls it that. It's always just Big Hill.

I pant heavily as I try to pedal all the way up the street. Eve has given up and decides to walk her bike, watching me as I struggle next to her. Sweat trickles down my forehead and armpits. I have only ever made it up the hill once, and that was in the third grade. I was very little back then. Now, as a sixth grader, things are very different. I'm older, more mature. My grandma tells me I'm turning into "quite the young lady." Whatever that means.

Eve is already way ahead of me and waiting on Sarah's lawn by the time I make it there. I don't even care that I

made it all the way up the hill without getting off my bike. I'm so exhausted I lay down on the grass next to Eve and close my eyes. Too tired to think, too tired to move. Sarah sees us from her bedroom window and comes running outside. She's dressed in a frilly, pink tutu and bedazzled shirt that reads Princess across the front of it. I roll my eyes as I prop myself up on my elbows. It is the ugliest shirt I have ever seen.

"Sarah, that's the ugliest shirt I've ever seen!" I yell from her lawn.

She stops on her front porch and looks down at her outfit. Then she shrugs.

"My mom said I look cute!" she yells back.

"Whatever." I say. I wasn't going to argue with her. I look over my own clothes that I chose to put on this morning. Jeans and my brother Aden's red baseball jersey. Mom and Dad won't buy me new clothes either, but I don't mind. I can get Aden's hand-me-downs as dirty as I want.

"How are you going to ride your bike in a tutu?" I ask Sarah as Eve and I follow her to the garage. I put my hands on my hips, watching her.

"Same way I always do," she replies.

"What if you get it dirty? Won't your mom be mad?" Eve asks, her head cocked to the left. Her long braids fall over her shoulder. She recently got her ends dyed green. They match her outfit. Today she's wearing overalls with her favorite green t-shirt underneath.

"She doesn't mind. She says that's what our heavy-duty washing machine is for," Sarah grins.

Eve and I exchange a look. Sarah's mom is always buying the newest technology. Mr. Evans, Sarah's dad, is a doctor. I always tell Eve that I think it's the only reason Sarah's mom married him. Eve says that's a mean thing to say. Am I wrong? Mrs. Evans loves fancy things. She even

calls herself "high-maintenance." Whatever that means.

Once Sarah hops onto her brand-new pink bike, completely engulfed in ribbons and lace, the three of us ride down to the river. Well, it's not really a river. Some people call it that, but it's really just a creek. Though a decent sized one at that. I throw my bike down into the dirt, and Eve does the same. Sarah props hers up nicely against a tree. We take turns leaping from stone to stone across the water to the bank on the other side. We begin walking to the edge of the dense forest that surrounds our neighborhood.

"Do you think he'll be there today?" Sarah looks worried.

"He's always there," I say. "He never leaves."

"But... what if something happened? We don't even know where he goes at night. Oh, I know I should have brought him to stay with me." Sarah bites her nails, though they've already been bitten down to stubs. I groan, throwing my head back dramatically.

"Sarah! Do you want to go home?"

"No..."

"Then stop acting like a quitter. Besides, your parents would kill you if you brought him home."

"Harper, don't be mean," Eve cuts in.

I open my mouth to argue back, but when I look up, I notice we've made it. The air is quiet as we enter our special spot. The morning sun struggles to shine through the branches overhead. The crunch of leaves underneath our sneakers fills the silence. Out of the corner of my eye, I see Sarah slip her hand into Eve's, and the two edge closer together.

"Jojo?" I whisper into the trees. "Jojo!"

There's a soft rustling in the bushes nearby, and the

three of us hesitantly approach the mysterious movement. My hand brushes Eve's, but I don't dare hold it. I couldn't be labeled a scaredy-cat. It would ruin my reputation. We all hold our breath. Suddenly, a ball of fur lunges out of the bushes, right towards the three of us. We scream and fall to the ground, giggling as Jojo licks our faces. The large dog looks as happy to see us as we are to see him. Once he settles down, I pull a bag of dog food out of my backpack.

"I bought it yesterday when I went with my mom to the store. She didn't even notice."

"You've got the money for that?" Eve asks in amazement.

"Yup. Took all my twelve dollars."

"But, Harper, what about the new bike you're saving up for? The black one?" Sarah asks.

"Yeah! You were really close," Eve adds with a frown.

"I needed almost a hundred more dollars. That's like a million lemonade stands. It was going to take forever. Plus, I can use the reward money we get for Jojo," I remind them.

Jojo bounces around happily as I pour his dog food onto the ground. We found him only two days ago when we were swimming in the creek. We didn't know how he got there, or from where, but then we saw the posters. Jojo belonged to the Jetsons. They're an old couple that live a few streets over from Eve and I. Jojo must've gotten out and ran all the way to the edge of the woods. The reward for his return was two hundred dollars. Two hundred! I told my friends I thought I should get all the money, because I was the one who saw him first. But, of course, Eve and Sarah were both quick to argue that they saw him first, so we've been stuck deciding how to split our reward.

"I was thinking, actually," Eve starts, glancing at Sarah. "Maybe we should reject the money?"

"WHAT? Reject the money? Eve, are you insane!? Two hundred dollars!" I exclaim, standing up in frustration.

"Harper, let her finish!" Sarah tells me as she tugs on my arm. I sit back down.

"You're in on this too?" I ask her.

Sarah gives me a look, telling me to be quiet, so I do. I turn back to Eve. I cross my arms. "Keep talking."

"Because we've been taking care of him for a little while, that's kind of like our reward, you know? Pretending he's ours. It's too hard to split the money, anyway," Eve says.

"I like the idea," Sarah smiles. "I think it's nice."

"Yeah 'cuz you're rich," I mumble under my breath.

Sarah turns to me. Her voice rises an octave, a clear indication of her annoyance. "I'm not stopping you, Harper! So, take the money if you want. You can choose to be selfish while Eve and I choose to be nice."

I sense Eve's worry as I watch her wrap her arms around Jojo, who also seems alarmed by the sudden tension in the air. I avert my eyes from Eve and turn to Sarah. Slowly, I rise, taking a step towards her. She stands too. She's taller than me. This is only something I notice now, as it feels as if she towers over me. I can smell the Glitter Rainbow Dry Shampoo Mist she douses herself with every morning as it emanates from her sleek blond hair. I scrunch up my nose. I hate that smell.

"If you're only doing it so people will think you're nice, then you're being just as selfish as me," I tell her.

"No we're not."

"Yes, you are."

"Guys, please..." Eve whispers.

"I want the money!" I yell. I turn my attention to Eve, who is still sitting on the ground. "Eve, don't you think we should take the reward? We're returning Jojo to them. We

deserve it." Eve's eyes widen. I feel a twinge of regret. I know she hates being pulled into our fights.

"I don't..." she stammers.

Sarah steps in front of me, blocking my view of Eve. "Eve already told you what she thinks. And we agree that we should decline."

"But that's not fair!" I cry.

Eve stands suddenly. Jojo barks at the sudden movement, and begins running circles around her ankles. Eve steps towards me. There is a determination in her eyes I've never seen before. Sarah quietly steps out of her way.

"Fair to who? To you?" Eve asks me. I say nothing. "We're giving the Jetsons their dog back. That's called being a good person, Harper."

Eve puts her hands on my shoulders. I feel the urge to shrug them off, but I don't. She looks at me with such seriousness, I have no choice but to listen.

"We don't need the money, Harper. Trust me. Besides, we can't keep him forever. We can't take care of him. We'll miss Jojo, but I think his owners might miss him even more right now. Don't you want him to be at home? Isn't that enough?"

The sincerity in Eve's eyes tells me to think about what this might mean. No new bike? Probably. Me being really annoyed with my friends right now? Definitely. Getting to see Jojo return home, though? I guess Eve is kind of right.

"It's two against one," Sarah reminds me, crossing her arms.

I glare at her. Sarah could get anything she wants. In fact, she never wants. Because she already has everything. This makes me want to slap that smug look right off her face. I know why it makes me angry. I can never have what she has. And that is unfair.

But it is two against one. We established this rule a long time ago. It means they win. My anger is not going to change anything about that.

I sigh. "Fine." I say, pushing Eve's arms off of mine. "Jeez."

"We'll take him back tomorrow?" Eve asks.

"Tomorrow," I huff. "But I'm doing this for you. Not Sarah."

Eve sighs and exchanges a look with Sarah. I don't like when they speak to each other with their eyes. I don't know what they are saying. But I don't care.

We spend the rest of the day at our spot in the woods. We say goodbye to Jojo and ride back to our houses.

The next morning, Sarah, Eve, and I walk towards the Jetson's house. I hold Jojo on a leash, his tail wagging as he happily walks beside us. I wish we were as happy as he was. He's probably excited to see his real owners again, but the three of us are miserable. Sarah even decided to wear black today. Granted, it's still a tutu, but it is black. She said she's in mourning. Whatever that means.

As we near the front porch of the Jetson's large white house, we all suck in a deep breath.

"Ready?" I ask them.

"Ready," they reply.

The door is flung open before we even get the chance to knock. Mrs. Jetson runs out onto her porch and wraps her arms around Jojo.

"Oh, Jojo! You're okay!" she exclaims. "Oh, girls, thank you!"

Mr. Jetson comes out behind his wife, bending down to hug the dog, too. We watch them, our lips curving up into smiles as we see how happy they all are. Especially Jojo. He

jumps and barks, his tail wagging wildly. I hand the leash to Mr. Jetson as he stands up.

"Where did you girls find him?" he asks us.

"The woods. He was probably hiding in there," I tell him. He must sense the sadness in my voice.

"Well, thank you, girls. Truly. We are so happy to have him back. I'll grab your reward from inside," he smiles, a sure attempt to cheer us up. I glance at Eve. She nods.

"Mr. Jetson, wait. We... actually don't want the money," I try to smile, but it comes off more as a wince. "Knowing Jojo is safe back home is enough of a reward for us."

The words feel strange in my mouth. Mr. Jetson looks surprised, but then he smiles warmly. He tells us how kind we are. We tell him we know. Mrs. Jetson tells us to feel free to visit Jojo any time. We tell her thank you. Both Mr. and Mrs. Jetson thank us one last time, and then the three of us turn and start the walk back towards Big Hill.

"So, are you gonna tell me I was right?" Eve asks me, nudging my shoulder.

I smirk. "Never."