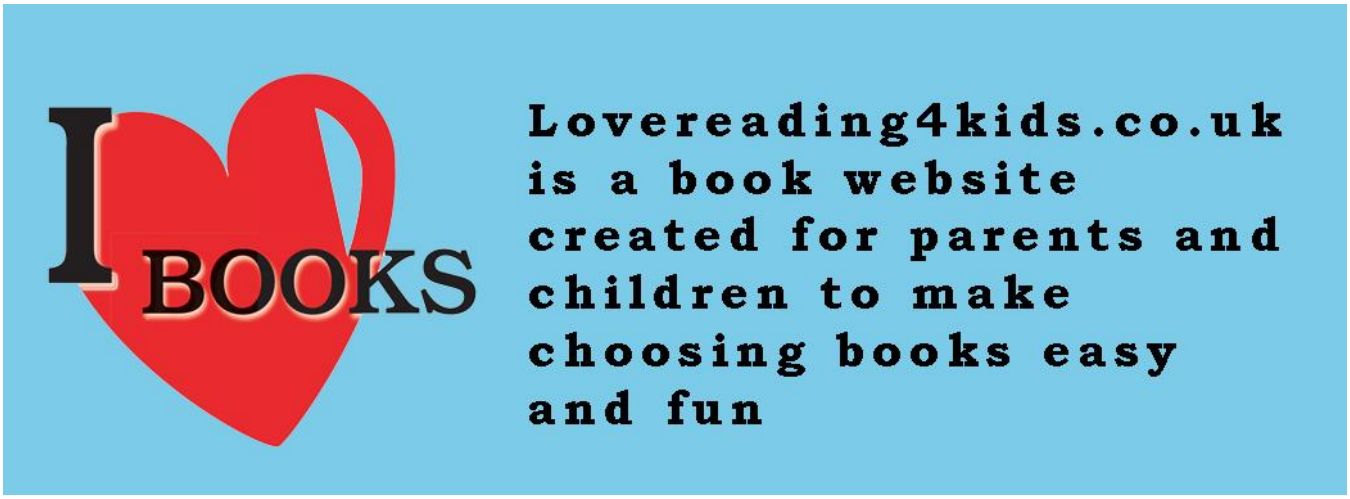


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Ann M. Martin

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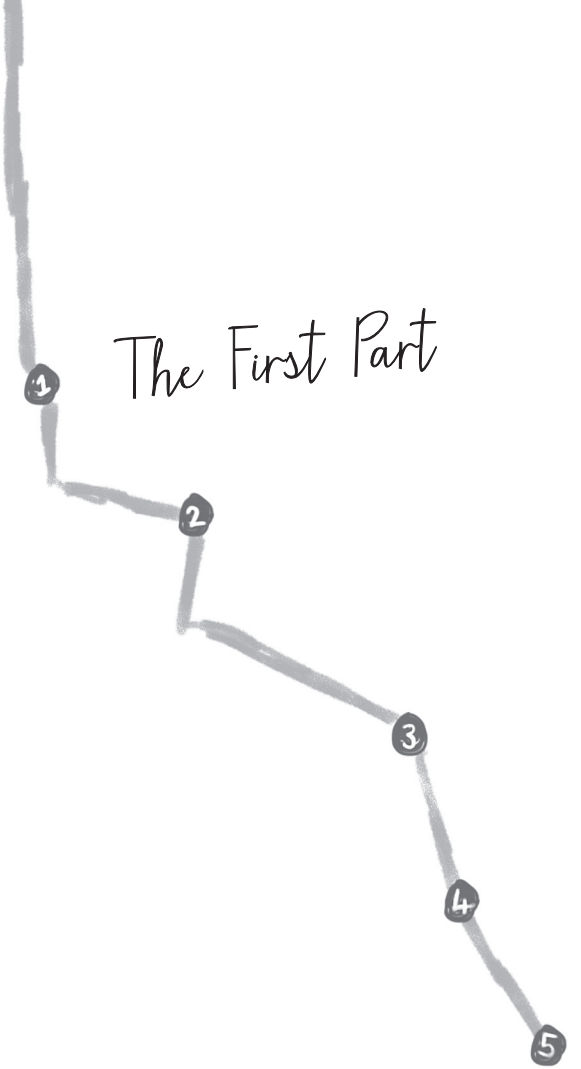
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This story happens in America, where we use imperial units of measurement. Please turn to the back for a guide to help you calculate them in metric.

The First Part





1

Who I Am – A Girl Named Rose (Rows)

I am Rose Howard and my first name has a homonym. To be accurate, it has a *homophone*, which is a word that's pronounced the same as another word but spelled differently. My homophone name is Rows.

Most people say *homonym* when they mean *homophone*. My teacher, Mrs Kushel, says this is a common mistake.

"What's the difference between making a mistake and breaking a rule?" I want to know.

"Making a mistake is accidental. Breaking a rule is deliberate."

"But if—" I start to say.

Mrs Kushel rushes on. "It's all right to say 'homonym' when we mean 'homophone'. That's called a colloquialism."

"'Breaking' has a homonym," I tell her. "'Braking'."

I like homonyms a lot. And I like words. Rules and numbers too. Here is the order in which I like these things:

1. Words (especially homonyms)
2. Rules
3. Numbers (especially prime numbers)

I'm going to tell you a story. It's a true story, which makes it a piece of non-fiction.

This is how you tell a story: First you introduce the main character. I'm writing this story about me, so I am the main character.

My first name has a homonym, and I gave my dog a homonym name too. Her name is Rain, which is special because it has two homonyms – rein and reign. I will write more about Rain in Chapter 2. Chapter 2 will be called "My Dog, Rain (Reign, Rein)".

Something important about the word *write* is that it has *three* homonyms – right, rite, and wright. That's the only group of four homonyms I've thought of. If I

ever think of another four-homonym group, it will be a red-letter day.

I live with my father, Wesley Howard, and neither of his names has a homonym.

From our porch you can see our front yard and our driveway and our road, which is called Hud Road. *Road* has two homonyms – rowed and rode. On the other side (sighed) of the road is a little forest, and through the trees you can see the New York State Thruway. The word *see* has a homonym – sea. But even better, *sees* has two homonyms – seas and seize.

I'm in fifth grade at Hatford Elementary. There's only one elementary school in Hatford, New York, and only one fifth-grade classroom in the school, and I'm in it. Most of my classmates are ten years old or about to turn eleven. I'm almost twelve because no one is sure what to do with me in school. I've stayed back for two semesters, which is a total of one year.

Some of the things I get teased about are following the rules and always talking about homonyms. Mrs Leibler is my aide and she sits with me in Mrs Kushel's room. She sits in an adult-sized chair next to my fifth-grade-sized chair and rests her hand on my arm when I blurt something

out in the middle of maths. Or, if I whap myself in the head and start to cry, she'll say, "Rose, do you need to step into the hall for a moment?"

Mrs Leibler tells me that there are things worth talking about besides homonyms and rules and prime numbers. She encourages me to think up conversation starters. Some conversation starters about me that do not have anything to do with homonyms or rules or prime numbers are:

I live in a house that faces north-east. (After I say that, I ask the person I'm trying to have a conversation with, "And which direction does *your* house face?")

Down the road, 0.7 miles from my house is the J & R Garage, where my father sometimes works as a mechanic, and 0.1 miles further along is a bar called The Luck of the Irish, where my father goes after work. There is nothing between my house and the J & R Garage except trees and the road. ("Tell me some things about *your* neighbourhood.")

I have an uncle named Weldon, who is my father's younger brother. ("And who else is in *your* family?")

My official diagnosis is high-functioning autism, which some people call Asperger's syndrome. ("Do *you* have a diagnosis?")

I will finish up this part of my introduction by telling you that my mother does not live with my father and me. She ran away from our family when I was two. Therefore, the people living in my house are my father and me. The dog living in our house is Rain. Uncle Weldon lives 3.4 miles away on the other side of Hatford.

The next part of my introduction is the setting of my story. I've already told you my geographic location – Hud Road in Hatford, New York. The historical moment in time in which this story begins is October of my year in fifth grade.

Now I will tell you something troubling about fifth grade. It isn't as troubling as what happens later in the story when my father lets Rain outside during a hurricane, but it is still troubling. For the first time in my life I'm being sent home with weekly progress reports that I have to give to my father. The reports are written by Mrs Leibler and read and signed by Mrs Kushel, which is my teachers' way of saying that they're in agreement about my behaviour. The reports list all of my notable behaviours for Monday through Friday. Some of the comments are nice, such as the ones about when I participate appropriately in a classroom discussion. But most of the

comments make my father slam the reports onto the table and say, "Rose, for god's sake, keep your mouth closed when you think of a homonym", or, "Do you see any of the other kids clapping their hands over their ears and screaming when they hear the fire alarm?"

In the last report Mrs Leibler and Mrs Kushel asked my father to schedule monthly meetings with them. Now he's supposed to go to Hatford Elementary on the third Friday of every month at 3.45 p.m. to discuss me. This is what he said when he read that: "I don't have time for meetings. This is way too much trouble, Rose. Why do you *do* these things?" He said that at 3.48 p.m. on a Friday when there was no work for him at the J & R Garage.

Uncle Weldon heard about the monthly meetings on October 3rd at 8.10 p.m. when he was visiting my father and Rain and me.

My father was standing at the front door, holding the letter in his hand and gazing out at the trees and the darkness. "These meetings are crap," he said.

Uncle Weldon, who was sitting at the Formica kitchen table with me, looked at my father from under his eyelashes and said, "I could go, if you want." Uncle Weldon has a very soft voice.

My father whipped around and pointed his finger at Weldon. "No! Rose is my responsibility. I can take care of things."

Weldon lowered his head and didn't answer. But when my father turned around so that he was facing outside again, my uncle held up two crossed fingers, which was his signal to me that everything would be all right (write, rite, wright). I held up my fingers too (two, to), and we each touched our hearts with them.

After that, Rain came into the kitchen and sat on my feet for a while.

Then my uncle left.

Then my father crumpled the letter from Mrs Leibler and Mrs Kushel and tossed it into the yard.

That is the end of the introduction to me.