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Opening extract from

Clementine

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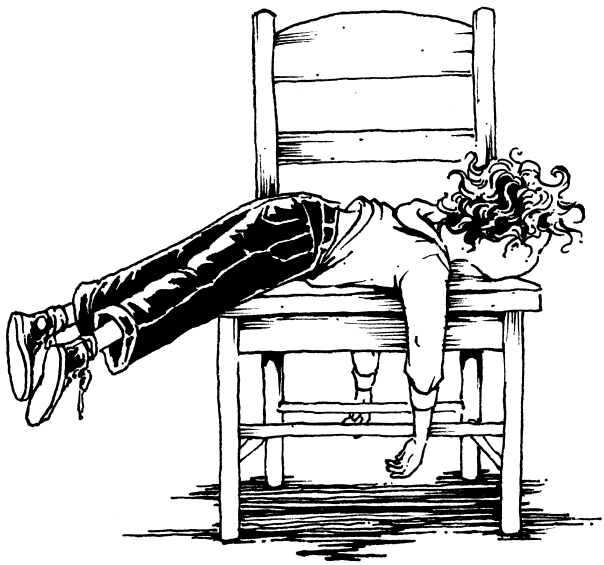
Marla Frazee

Published by

Egmont

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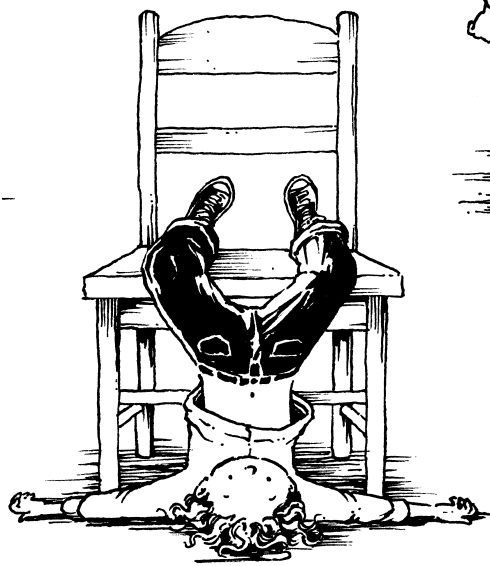
Please print off and read at your leisure.



For Bill, Clementine's father in every way

— S. P.





To my big brother, Mark Frazee, who thinks I'm an idiot

— M. F.



CHAPTER

I

I have not had such a good week.

Well, Monday was a pretty good day, if you don't count Hamburger Surprise at lunch and Margaret's mother coming to get her. Or the stuff that happened in the principal's office when I got sent there to explain that Margaret's hair was not my fault and besides she looks OK without it, but I couldn't because Principal Rice was gone, trying to calm down Margaret's mother.

Someone should tell you not to answer the phone in the principal's office, if that's a rule.

OK, fine, Monday was not such a good day.

Which was a surprise, because it started off with two lucky signs, which fooled me. First, there were exactly enough banana slices in my cereal: one for every spoonful. Then, as soon as I got to school, my teacher said, "The following students are excused from journal writing so they can go to the art room to work on their 'Welcome to the Future' projects." And I was one of the following students!

So instead of having to think up things to write in my journal, which I hate, I got to glue and paint stuff, which I love.

Margaret was in the art room, too. When I sat down next to her, she threw herself across the Princess-from-the-Future mask she was gluing sparkles on to. "Remember the rules," she warned.

Margaret is in fourth grade and I am in third. She thinks that that makes her the boss of me. I hate Margaret's rules.



"You can't touch my stuff," she said. Which she always says.

"Why?" I said. Which *I* always say.

"Because it's the rule," Margaret said. Which she always says.

"Why?" I said.

"Because you can't touch my stuff," she said.

And then I pointed out the window. Which wasn't exactly lying, because I didn't say there was something out there.

While Margaret was looking out the window, I accidentally touched her mask.

Twice. OK, fine.

Then I got busy working on my project so I wouldn't have to hear any "Clementine-pay-attention!"s.

Except I did anyway. Which was unfair because each time, I was the *only* person in the whole art room who *was* paying attention. Which is why I could tell everyone right in the middle of the Pledge of Allegiance that the lunchroom lady was sitting in the janitor's car and they were kissing. *Again*. No one else saw this disgusting scene, because no one else was paying attention out the window!

And after that, when it was my turn to pass around the stapler, I could tell everyone that the art teacher's scarf had an egg stain on it that

looked – if you squinted – exactly like a pelican, which nobody else had noticed.

"Clementine, you need to pay attention!" the art teacher said one more time. And just like the other times, I *was* paying attention.

I was paying attention to Margaret's empty seat.

Margaret had been excused to go to the girls' room, and when she left she had scrunched-up don't-cry eyes and a pressed-down don't-cry mouth. And she had been gone a really long time, even for Margaret, who washes her hands one finger at a time.

"I need to go to the girls' room," I told my teacher.

And that's where Margaret was, all right: curled up under the sink with her head on her knees.

"Margaret!" I gasped. "You're sitting on the floor!"

Margaret hitched herself over to the side a little so I could see: she'd placed a germ-protective layer of paper towels under her.

"Still," I said. "What's the matter?"

Margaret pressed her head down harder into her knees, which were all shiny with tears. She pointed up. Lying on the sink, next to a pair of Do-Not-Remove-from-the-Art-Room scissors, was a chunk of straight brown hair.

Uh-oh.

"Come out, Margaret," I said. "Let me see."

Margaret shook her head. "I'm not coming out until it's grown back."

"Well, I think I see a germ crawling up your dress."

Margaret jumped out from under the sink.

She looked at herself in the mirror and began to cry again. "I got glue in my hair," she sobbed. "I was just trying to cut it out. . . ."