

REMARKABLY
ruby

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TERRI LIBENSON

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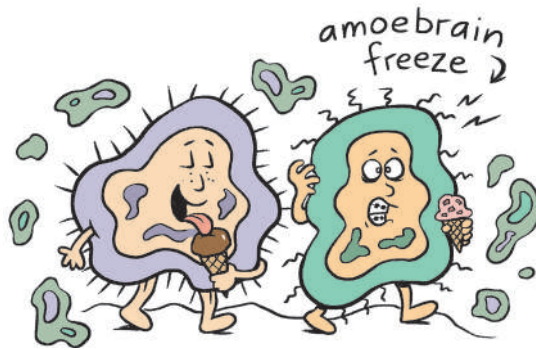
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First Edition

To my remarkable readers:
I'm always grateful



PROLOGUE: RUBY

I'm not what you would call a people person.

Circle the thing that doesn't belong:



It's not that I don't try. I do. But most of the time, making friends in middle school is a huge chore. I don't have the greatest social skills.



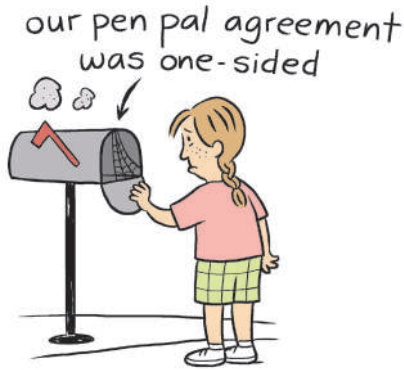
I also don't have a lot in common with the kids around here. Most of them are into things I'm not, like dances, social media, and sports.

Me?

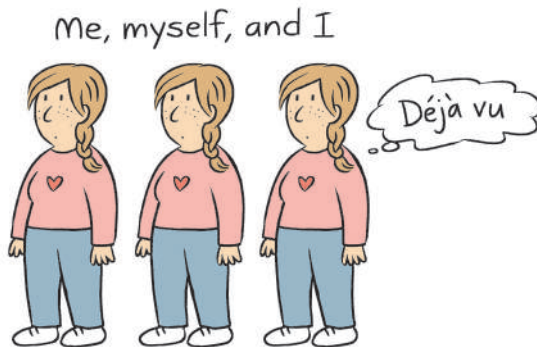


Back in grade school, it was another story. There were a couple kids I was close to. And yep, they were also a little different, which helped.

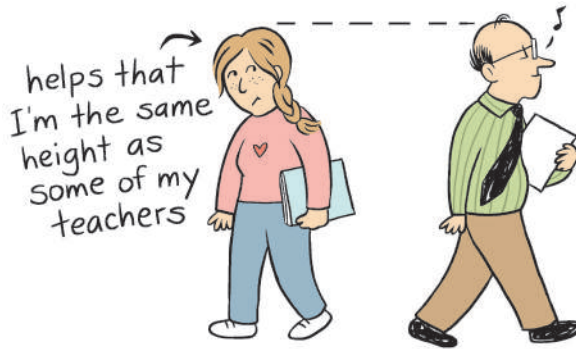
But one moved away in fifth grade. And since I didn't get a phone until this year, we didn't really stay in touch.



And the other . . . well, we had a falling-out.
I'll get to that later. In the meantime, it's just:



I'm mostly okay with it. People don't pick on me or anything. They leave me alone.



Besides, my mom says that the most important thing is to be "a strong, independent person." So that's what I'm attempting to do. And I think I'm succeeding.





On the outside, anyway.

RUBY

It all began in fourth grade. That's when I shot up.
And by "shot up," I mean "grew to the size of our money tree."



I love that tree. It's supposed to bring good fortune. (I'm still waiting on that.) My mom keeps it in the corner of the living room* near a window. So that it "thrives."

*If your house is older, you probably have a formal living room—which, in our house, never gets used except at midnight, when our cat gets the "zoomies."



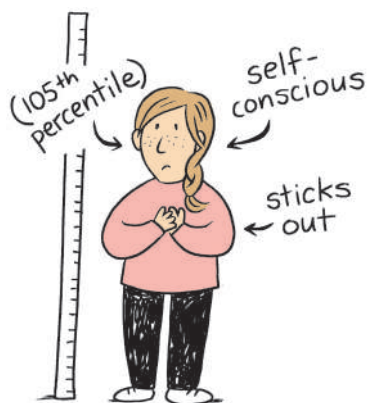
We have a ton of plants in that living room. Our cat, Buford, likes to hide behind them. He probably imagines he's a jungle tiger, ready to pounce.



I'm in charge of watering the plants. That's my main chore and I'm good at it.



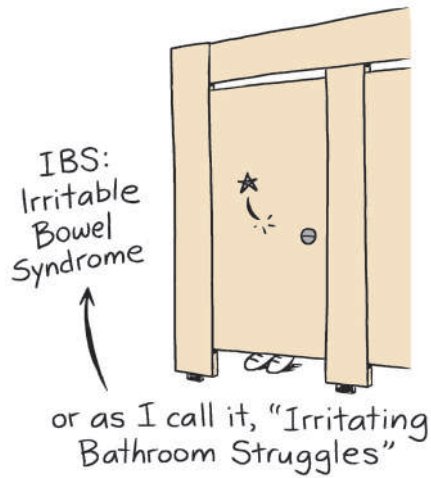
I find it kinda funny that when a plant gets nice and big, it's "robust" and "thriving." But when I did . . .



It makes my "aloneness" more noticeable.



Speaking of alone . . . right now, I'm in the restroom at school by myself. It's early, right before homeroom. My stomach is kind of bugging me. That happens sometimes. I've been to the doctor. She calls it a "nervous stomach," which is a nice way of saying what I really have:

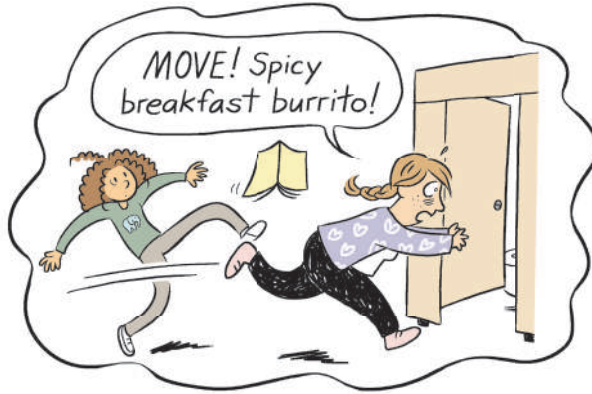


I've heard some kids call me "Baked Bean Girl," which is another way of putting it. It's 'cause I once had to rush to the restroom after a lunch of . . . Well, you get the idea. I told my mom, who thought it was funny and wanted to make me a T-shirt:

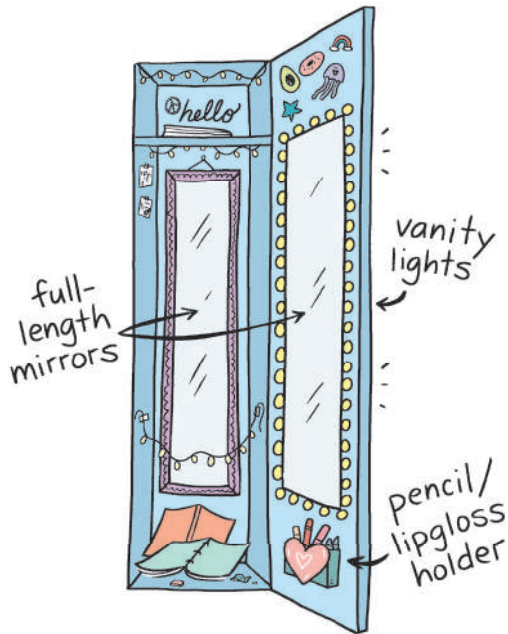


I didn't think it was that funny.

Anyway, I deal with it. I've stopped announcing my latest meals, anyway. And stopped eating stuff on the doctor's "do not ingest" list, like:



I leave the stall and try to find an open sink. It's not easy. This is the busiest restroom time, other than after lunch. It really bugs me that girls come in and hog the sinks to put on makeup and brush their hair and stuff, when there are people who actually need to wash up. It's not like they can't get ready at their lockers.







I don't know what to say to that. Sarah Reyes is really nice— one of the nicer kids in my grade—but it's not like I know anything about making clothes.



I finally think of something to say.

Hearts are tool.



She looks confused, smiles awkwardly, and leaves.

I meant to say, "Hearts are totally cool." Ughh!

I finally find a sink. A girl makes room, looking a little scared of me.



Being bigger than most kids sometimes has that effect on people, mainly sixth graders who don't know me. Doesn't help that I've accidentally knocked a few of them down.



I leave the restroom and head to homeroom. Mrs. Winn, my favorite teacher (English), is walking in my direction.



That's the school's art and literary magazine. Mrs. Winn always asks me and a bunch of other kids to submit.



A few months ago, Mrs. Winn encouraged me to enter my poem (an English assignment) in the Student Showcase. That's a big event around here. Kids show off their history and science projects, stories, and artwork. There's a contest for each category.

An' guess what?

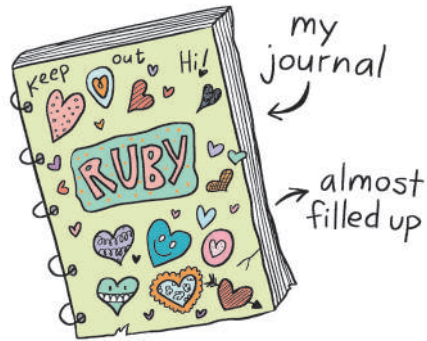


Yep! I won the poetry contest. I was totally shocked. I didn't even want to enter in the first place.

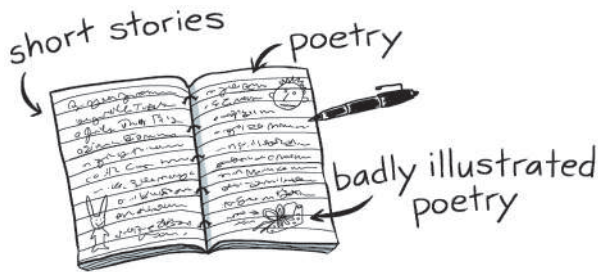


The thing is, I don't like attention. It just makes ... well, me ... that much more obvious to everyone.

But now I'm glad she entered it. 'Cause it made me want to write even more.



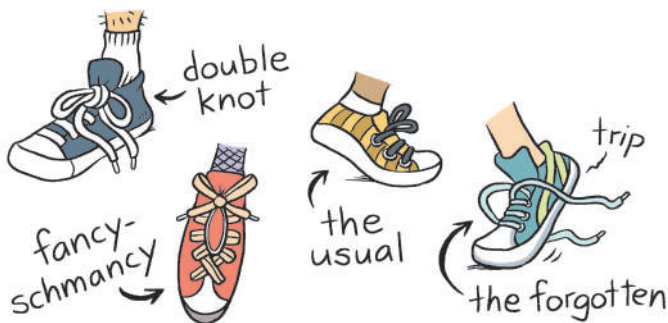
I write all the time now. I mean, I always wrote in my journal and stuff, but then I started turning some of those journal entries into actual things.



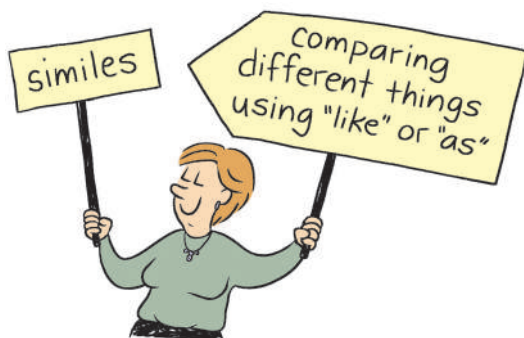
Usually they're about feelings, but sometimes they're also about little things I notice. Things a lot of people don't pay attention to. (When you're alone a lot, that's what happens.)

Like shoelaces.

You can tell a lot about a person by how they tie their shoes.



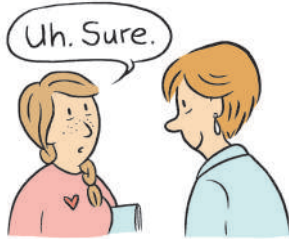
I once wrote an entire poem comparing people to shoelaces using what Mrs. Winn calls:



As for the Showcase poem—I wrote that about making patterns with my fingers on my fogged-up kitchen window in the morning. I really do that. It kind of calms me.

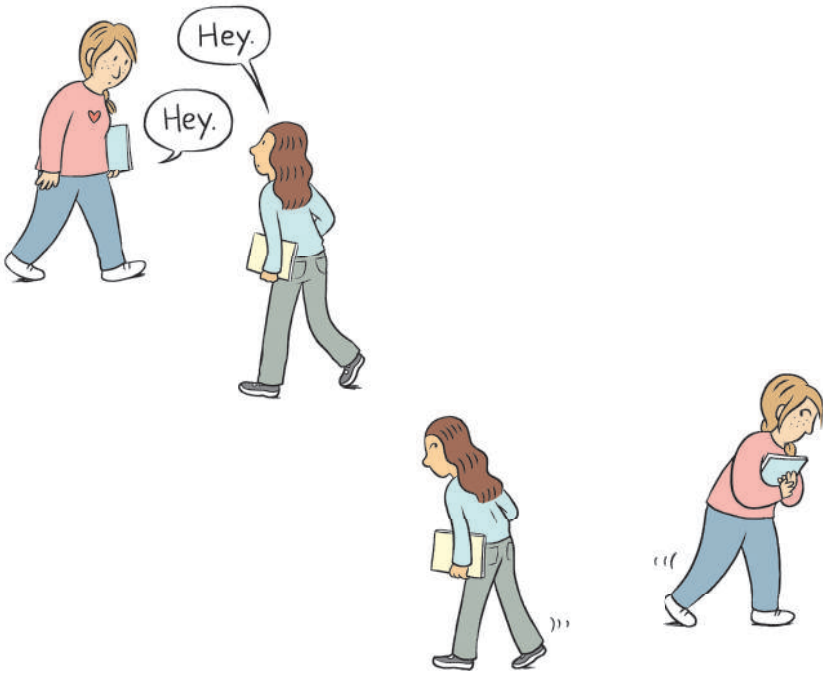


And as my nervous stomach knows, I could use some calming.



She leaves and I head for homeroom.



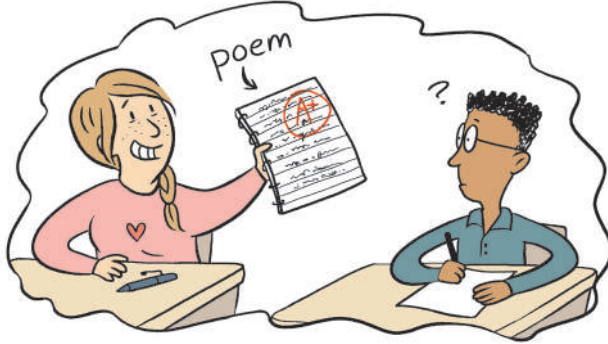


I feel my stomach act up again, but I ignore it.

I walk into homeroom and sit at my usual desk in the second-to-last row. Lindsay Donsky and Kyle Duncan sit in front of me and secretly text each other (as usual). Quiet Girl (Emmie Douglass) sketches away in her notebook. She quickly holds it up to show her best friend, Brianna, who sits across the room. I can't see the drawing, but Brianna giggles and gives her a thumbs-up.



Sometimes I pretend I'm like them.



But this time I don't. Instead, I take out my social studies notebook so I can finish an assignment, and I tell myself the same thing that I do every morning at this time:



Mia



So will you guys help me?

Of course!

I brought some masking tape and a glue gun.

Why a glue gun?

I dunno. It's all-purpose.

MY NAME'S MIA. THESE ARE MY BEST FRIENDS.

Keya

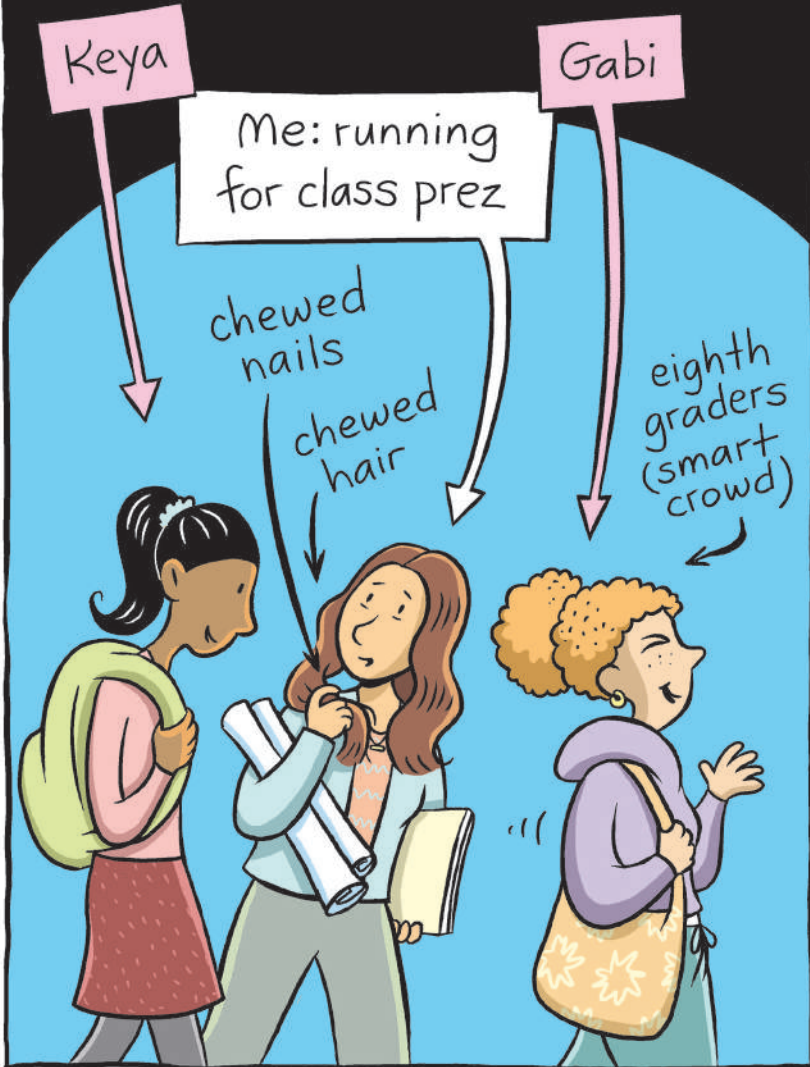
Gabi

Me: running for class prez

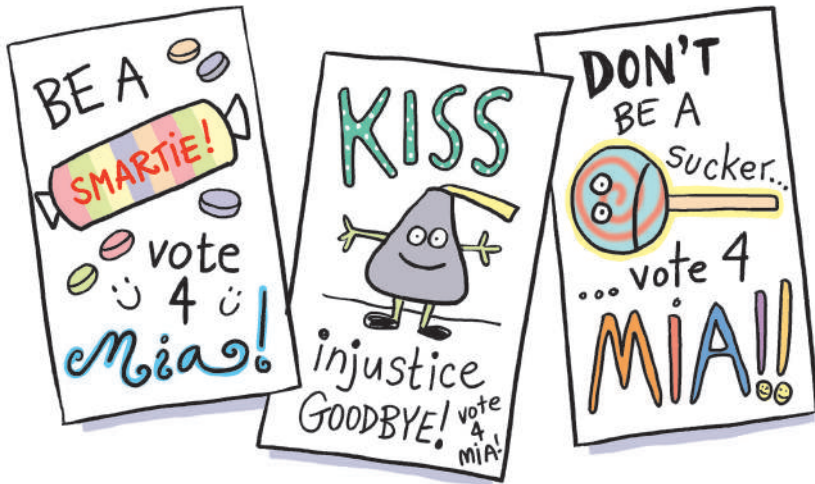
chewed nails

chewed hair

eighth graders (smart crowd)

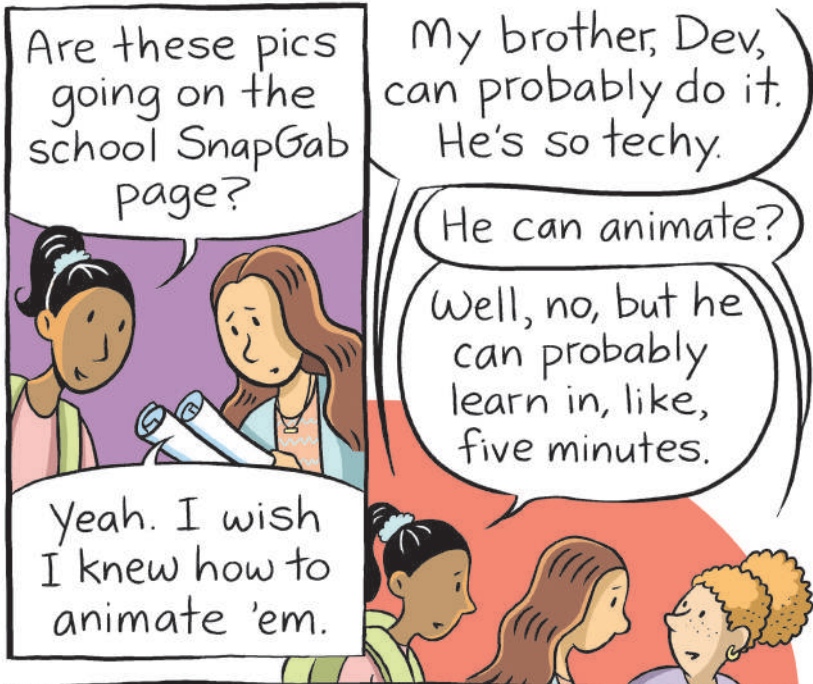


WE JUST GOT THE GO-AHEAD TO PUT UP POSTERS AFTER SCHOOL FOR THE ELECTION, WHICH IS IN (gulp) A MONTH.



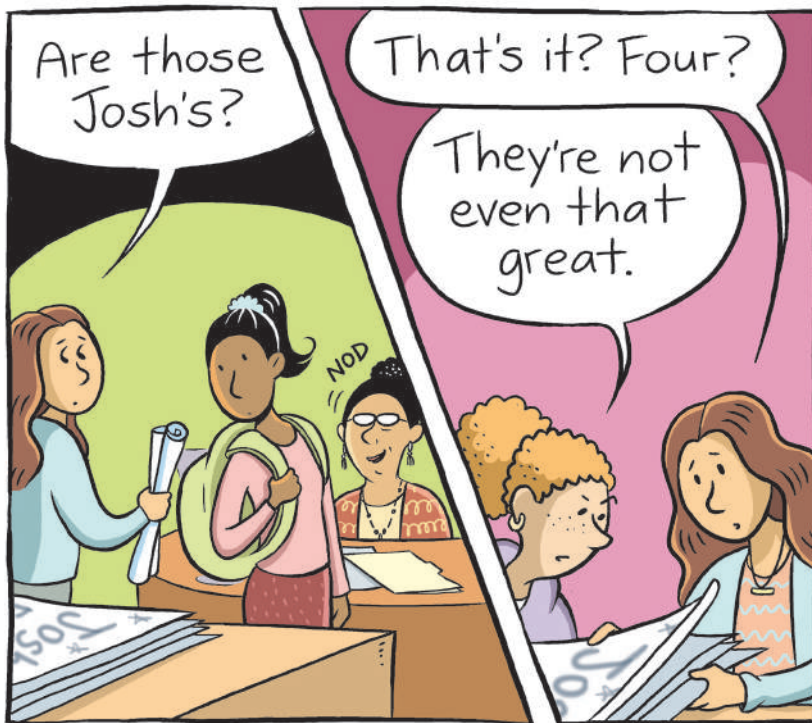
WE'RE NOT ALLOWED TO GIVE AWAY REAL CANDY, SO WE DREW THEM INSTEAD.





WE WALK INTO THE SCHOOL OFFICE. THE SECRETARY, MRS. MAYER, SMILES.



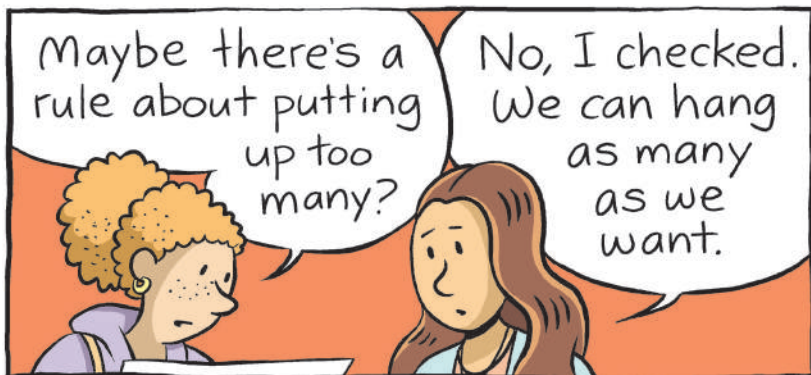


LIKE ME, JOSH BENTZ IS RUNNING FOR NEXT YEAR'S CLASS PRESIDENT. UNLIKE ME:

He doesn't seem to be taking it too seriously.

Which makes me both happy and furious.

SURE, HE'S NICE AND LAID-BACK. BUT THAT'S THE OPPOSITE OF GETTING THINGS DONE.



In fact...
Let's make
more tonight!



We have swim
practice.

Tomorrow?

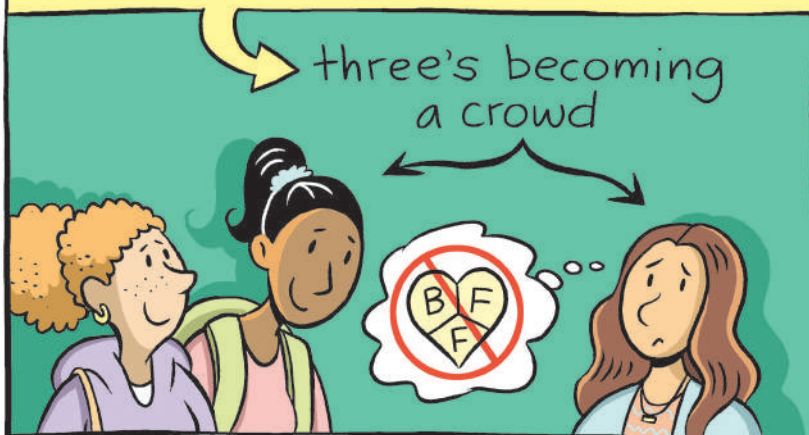
Band.



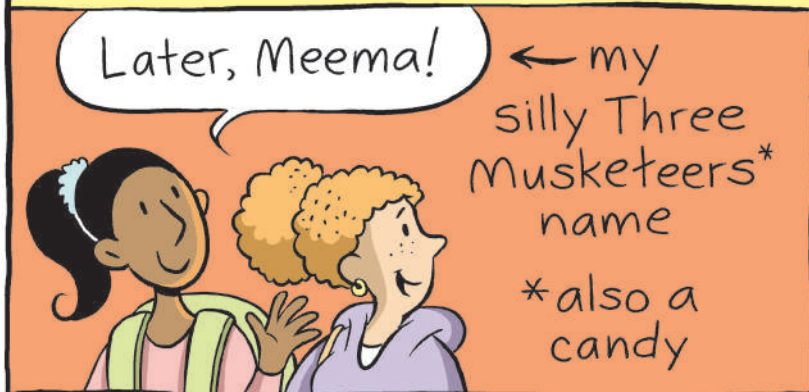
And then swim
again the next
day. And then
band—

I get it,
Gabs.

IT'S BEEN HAPPENING MORE AND MORE. THE THING I ALWAYS THINK ABOUT BUT NEVER TALK ABOUT:



WE HEAD IN OPPOSITE DIRECTIONS.



THAT WARMS ME. MAYBE
IT'S STUPID THAT I'VE BEEN
FEELING LEFT OUT.



MY HEART SINKS.
BUT I SMILE.

Nah. I've gotta
do more stuff
for the election.
TTYL!



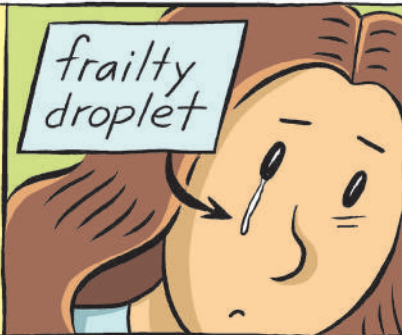
I WALK AWAY BEFORE
THE TEARS START.

This is stupid.
Of course
they're still
my best
friends.



They just do
the same
activities
together.
That's all.

I SHAKE
OFF THE
TEARS.
I HATE
CRYING.



LUCKILY, I'M INSTANTLY
CHEERED.

