

A HILARIOUS BODY SWAP ADVENTURE

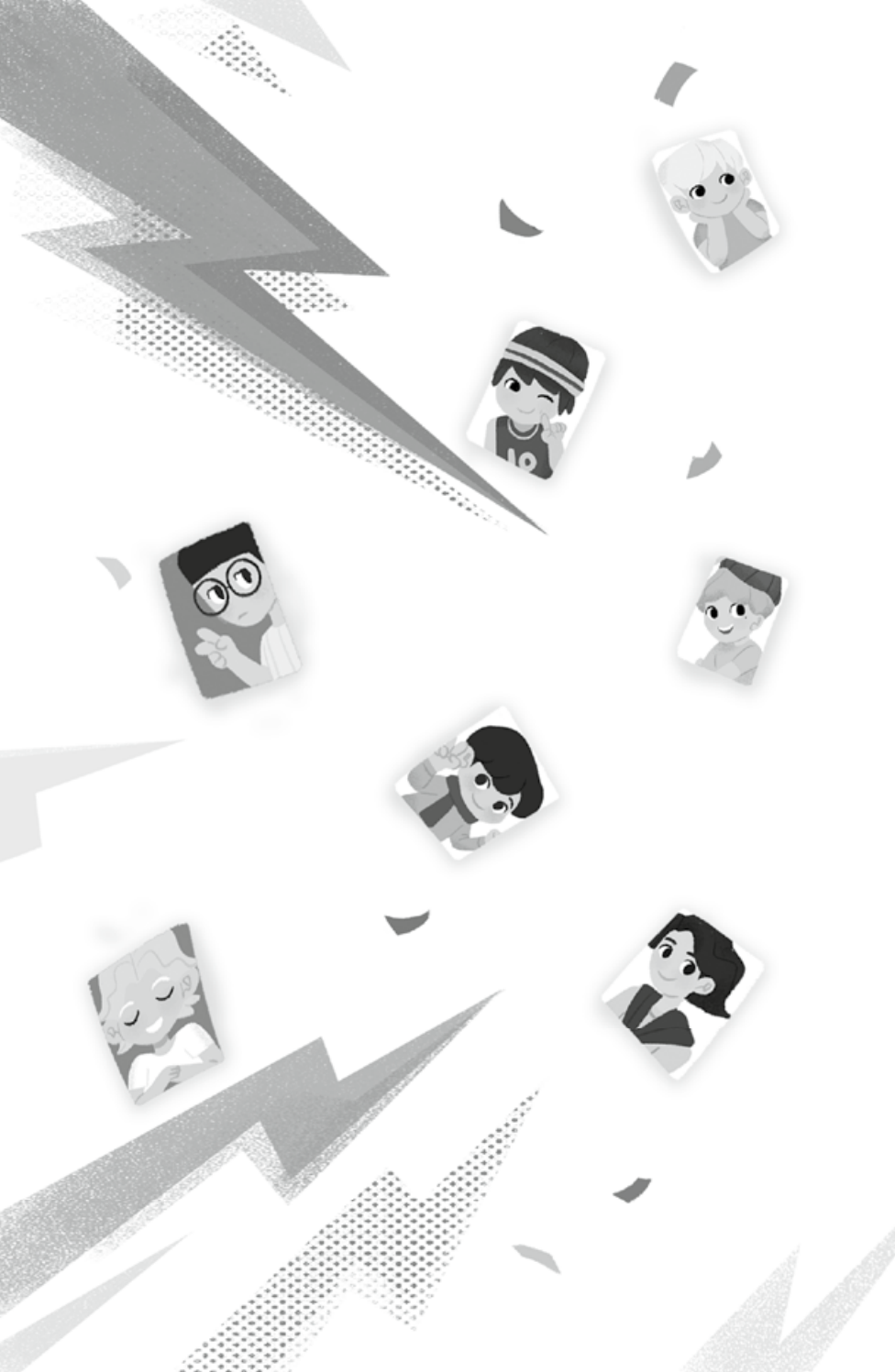
SKYLAR

AND THE K-POP HEADTEACHER



LUAN GOLDIE





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WALKER
BOOKS

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*For Annabelle,
the Golden Maknae*

The background of the page is decorated with various sizes of grey stars and light trails that resemble shooting stars or meteors, scattered across the top and sides.

1

APPROPRIATELY OBSESSED

My eyes ping open as Kookie scratches at my bedroom door and lets out her weird meow, which sounds nothing like a meow but more like an aeroplane tumbling from the sky.

“Neeowww.”

“Ugh,” I moan as I roll over to grab my phone off the charger. It takes a few minutes to switch on as it’s old. So old. It belonged to Dad, then Mum, then my brother, Jesse. It even belonged to Nana at one point but she was too embarrassed to be seen in public with it, so it was agreed that before it was sent to the Museum of Historical Objects, I could have it.

When it finally comes to life, I’m greeted by Woojin’s megawatt smile.

“Good morning,” I mumble as I kiss the screen. Now, of course I love all eight members of AZ8, the best boy band on the planet, equally. But Woojin is my favourite because he has the best hair and loves small animals.

I have four new messages, all from Dana, my best friend and fellow fangirl. First message:

Morning!!! Happy Monday.
Are you awake? Are you excited? I'm SO excited!

AZ8 are making a video comeback this evening, and while this is very exciting, Dana is generally an excited kind of person. Second message:

I LITERALLY can't eat breakfast.

Third message:

So EXCITED I just buttered a teabag.

Fourth message:

Michyeosseo!

Michyeosseo? While I listen to around a hundred hours a week of K-pop, also known as Korean pop music, I still rely on online translators for even the most basic of words. Hmm, let's see: *michyeosseo* means *crazy*. I text back:

Annyeonghaseyo!

Which means *hello* and is the longest Korean word I know how to spell. I really struggle with languages and have recently concluded that, like football and breast-stroke, languages are something I'm incapable of learning. Along with piano, singing in tune, ice-skating, boiling eggs and ninety-nine point nine per cent of mathematical concepts. Hmm, it's actually a really long list...

Kookie scratches at the bedroom door. "Neeeeow-
www."

"Skylar," Dad shouts, "*your* cat is crying."

I stick out my arm from under the duvet and pull open the door handle, which I can easily reach from my bed because I have the boxiest box room ever made. That's not a complaint, because my room is perfect. I have a big bed covered with the plushies I've dedicated the last two years of my life to collecting, a shelf where I safely store my one hundred and sixty page ring binder of AZ8 photocards, a window which overlooks a bakery – can

you imagine the smells?! – and every inch of wall space is covered with beautiful photos and posters of AZ8.

Kookie bounds in, climbs on my chest and pads right up to my face.

“Morning, Kookie.”

“I’m not happy,” Dad shouts from the doorway. He’s got his bright red running shoes on, which means either he’s going for a run, or he’ll spend the whole day *talking* about going for a run. “That moggy,” he says, pointing at Kookie, who is now covering my face with fishy licks, “has done her business in my yucca plant.”

Yikes.

Dad loves his plants. Sometimes, when I watch him stroke the leaves one by one with a damp cloth and tell them about his day, I think he loves them more than he loves Mum.

“My poor yucca. It’s never going to grow if that feline keeps using it as her toilet.”

“I’m sorry, Dad. I forgot to let her out last night. I fell asleep watching *Go Go AZ8!* It was a really funny episode. Tae and Jungwon had a challenge to make spicy Korean seafood soup while being sprayed with water guns and—”

“It’s your animal, Skylar,” Dad grumbles, cutting me off before I can tell him how hysterical it was seeing

Jungwon add sugar instead of salt to the soup. “And shouldn’t you be at school by now?”

I shake my head. “It’s seven o’clock, so no.”

Dad rubs his belly and looks confused. “Seven? No wonder I’m so hungry. I’d better be getting lunch ready.”

Lunch at seven in the morning? Yeah, that’s not unusual in this house. I live with a bunch of adults who have no concept of time. Dad drives night buses, so for him anything that happens after 6 a.m. is classed as late. Then there’s my older brother, Jesse. He stays out most nights and returns home at odd times of the day saying things like “Is it Wednesday?” Nana is also questionable, because in the five years since she came to live with us, I’ve never seen her go to bed. She just stays up all night reading cookbooks and watching reality shows where rich women shout at each other. Finally, there’s Mum. I have no clue what time she wakes up. Though I once got up at half five in the morning and she was already fully dressed and on her second cup of coffee.

I put on my disgusting school uniform – a tan pleated skirt, a boxy brown blazer, a mucus-coloured shirt and, the most unforgivable part, mustard socks – and head into the living room, also known as Mum’s textile HQ. After losing her job at the council last year, Mum became a mumpreneur and set up her own

company, Cushy Cushions, which is great except for when she has a big order and I have to help out.

She's sitting at her sewing machine with her headphones on and, judging by the way she's got a hand on her forehead, she's listening to one of her romantic audiobooks.

"Valentino's a scoundrel," she mutters. "Don't trust him."

Mum jumps as I tap her on the shoulder.

"Skylar." She stops to pull off her headphones. "You're still here?"

I resist the urge to sigh. "Yep."

"Darling, it's so late. Shouldn't you be at Bright and Brainy Breakfast Club?"

I shake my head, because it's now only seven fifteen and Bright and Brainy Breakfast Club stopped having me in for Nutella on toast when they realized I wasn't bright *or* brainy.

"If I'd known you were still here, you could have helped me. Your tiny hands are perfect for stitching on sequins." She looks at her teetering pile of sewing and tuts. "Never mind, you can help after school."

I shake my head quickly. "I can't. I'm going to Dana's after school."

"Anyone seen Jesse recently?" Dad asks as he comes in.

“Not since Saturday night,” Mum says. “He was going to a festival, I think.”

Dad looks out of the window at the heavy rain. “Hardly the weather for it.”

“Mum, AZ8 are launching their video comeback in less than twelve hours. Dana and I have the whole evening planned.”

She shrugs. “You can watch your three-minute music video while helping me sew.”

What is she talking about? It’s so much more than a three-minute video. For us AZ8 fans, known as Glows, a video comeback is a whole experience – an experience which consists of:

- 1** Learning the dance routine. AZ8’s brilliant dance routines take hours of dedicated practice to learn, but I usually pick up most moves on the first day. I’ve been dancing since before I could walk. I literally stood up at six months old, went “Goo-goo-gah!” and did the running man.
- 2** Working with Glows all over the world to break records. The last AZ8 video had one hundred million views in one day. Mum

said the majority of those were probably me and Dana.

- 3** Learning the words. AZ8 songs are mostly in Korean but you can just mumble “hmm-hmm-hmm” until the English chorus kicks in.
- 4** Arguing about which member looks the best and who your bias is: this means your favourite. Mine is obviously Woojin.
- 5** Talking online with other Glows about all of the above.

You do all this repeatedly until a non-Glow, usually a parent, shouts something like “My ears are bleeding. Make it stop!”

I live for video comebacks. How can Mum suggest I miss one to help her sew cushion covers? It’s bad enough that despite being AZ8’s number one fan I’m not going to their concert this Saturday. The reality of this hurts, but Dad said one ticket costs as much as our electricity bill, plus our council tax (whatever that is), plus a year’s worth of vet bills. Also, the tickets sold out in four minutes and six seconds.

I sigh, making sure it's long enough and dramatic enough to get both of my parents' attention.

"It's just a band, Skylar," Dad says while spritzing his bonsai tree. A bonsai tree, in case you don't know, is a tiny Barbie-sized tree. "Don't you ever get bored of watching those boys sing, dance and eat noodles?"

What a ridiculous question. "Don't you ever get bored of watching that tiny tree not grow?" I snap back.

Mum laughs. "When I was your age, liking a pop star never took up this much time. We watched their videos once a week on TV if we were lucky. There wasn't all this extra stuff to do."

"I can help you sew another day," I offer. "Just any day that's not this week."

"And according to this you have a maths test on Friday," Dad says, tapping the Saint Margaret's academic wall calendar.

Hmm, he's right, I *do* have a maths test, but it's not an important one or anything. Plus, I'm already in the bottom set for maths – what's another bad mark going to do? Send me back to primary school?

Mum unrolls some sparkly fabric. "You can come straight home today. Help me, do some maths and then spend a bit of quality time with Nana."

Nana loves "quality time", which basically involves me

chopping onions, unwrapping a ton of seasoning cubes and listening to her tell stories about her childhood.

“You’ll need to be home to repot my yucca plant too,” Dad adds while doing some very deep lunges.

“Sorry,” I say. “I really can’t do cushions or cooking or maths or replanting yuccas this evening. This evening is all about AZ8.”

“Enough,” Mum snaps, now getting angry. “You’re wasting too much time on those boys.”

“Mum, AZ8’s literally the only thing I care about.”

She shakes her head. “That’s the problem, Skylar. You’re too obsessed.”

“Yes, but *appropriately* obsessed,” I clarify.

“It’s time to have a break.”

Dad nods. “I agree. Also, I’m not ready to hear another K-pop song on repeat for months.”

“What are you saying?” I shout. And quickly realize my mistake, because raised voices are not tolerated in *this* house.

Mum looks at Dad and they do this weird thing where it’s like they’re speaking to each other without saying any words. Eventually they both nod, turn to me and say at the same time, “AZ8 is banned.”



2

BRAVERY GETS YOU NOWHERE

Dad was right about the weather, and by the time I walk through the grand entrance of Saint Margaret's Academy my shoes are soaked right through to my ugly mustard socks. Though soggy feet are nothing compared with the deep sinking feeling I have inside.

One whole week without AZ8.

Seven *horrible* days.

No posters. No plushies. No gazing at photocards. No phone and no watching video comebacks.

The only thing I managed to grab before my parents ransacked my room and my life was my light-up dancing bunny ears hat, which I stuffed in my rucksack. Ugh. How am I going to tell Dana that I can't watch the video comeback?

I sit through an especially confusing assembly titled “Cybercrime: Don’t Do It!” while shivering in my wet shoes as the forefathers of Saint Margaret’s stare down at me from the massive oil paintings which hang around the hall.

Saint Margaret’s was founded by Sir Charles Callus after he returned from the war – I’m not sure which war, but I suspect he wasn’t on the right side. He’s the one who came up with the school motto: “Achieve or hang your head in shame.” There have been five other Callus headteachers since then, though I imagine our current one, Ms Callus, is the meanest and pushiest of them all. Her portrait is the biggest, and even though some say she’s smiling in it, I’ve always felt she’s forty-nine per cent smirking, fifty-one per cent snarling.

At lunchtime I’m trying to digest Monday’s Mexican Mania menu, when Dana finally comes out of her top-set classes.

“We have got to do something about this,” she grumbles as she slides into the chair opposite.

I nod. “I know. I hate that we have hardly any classes together. Why can’t you be less clever?”

“No, I’m talking about climate change,” Dana says as she holds out long wet strands of her bright red hair. “It’s making the water cycle do weird things. Flash

floods, droughts, extreme thunderstorms. And look at this.” She thrusts a plastic spork in my face. “Do you know how long plastic cutlery takes to decompose? And on what planet do you need a spork to eat a chilli bean wrap?” She pauses for a breath. “I’ve sent you twenty-seven messages. Why haven’t you replied?”

“Dana,” I start, but can’t find the right words to break it to her. Since the first day of Year Seven, when we both flicked finger hearts at each other across the assembly hall, we’ve shared every AZ8 moment.

“It’s my parents,” I say.

Dana gasps. “Oh no, are they splitting up? Did your dad lose his job? Is the bonsai tree dead?”

I shake my head. “No. Worse. They’ve grounded me.”

“But I’ve already made a secure booking with my family to have the living room for the video comeback.” She grimaces. “Does this mean we have to watch it at yours?”

We both know this isn’t something that works. It’s really hard to enjoy AZ8 at my house with Dad sitting there saying things like “I can dance better than that” and “Ooh, are baggy trousers back in fashion?”

I take a deep breath. “I can’t watch the video comeback at all. My parents have banned AZ8 from my life.”

Dana’s eyes go wide. “No! Why?”

I shrug. “They think I’m obsessed.”

“You *are* obsessed. That’s the whole point of being a Glow.”

“They think I spend too much time on AZ8 when I should be studying fractions and removing poop from greenery and using my tiny hands to sew.”

“You do have remarkably tiny hands,” she agrees.

“Dana, this is serious.”

“How long is this ban for?”

“An entire whole week.”

“A *week*? That’s one hundred and sixty-eight hours without K-pop.” Dana slams the table. “Are they insane? Isn’t it bad enough that we can’t go to the concert on Saturday?”

I take my light-up dancing bunny ears hat from my rucksack and pull it on. “This is all I have left.” It’s the same hat Woojin wore in episode one hundred and twenty-four of *Go Go AZ8!* Except mine isn’t from some supercool shop in South Korea, but from a website called discountedfakestuff.com which Nana loves to shop at. Sometimes when I squeeze the pumps to make the ears dance it short-circuits and gives me a tiny electric shock.

Dana chuckles as I make the ears move.

The bell signalling the end of lunch goes and we clear

away our non-recyclables and make our way through the damp corridors to our next class. Dana talks the whole way about how to solve the double catastrophes of climate change and being grounded until a Year Eight girl with freckles and a large monobrow hisses, “Shh, Ms Callus is here.”

“Hurry along now, students,” Ms Callus shrieks in her super-high-pitched voice.

Our headteacher stands at the foot of the stairs, rosy-cheeked and wearing a pink-coloured twinset complete with pearl necklace and a huge helmet of grey hair. Sure, she might look like a sweet old grandma, but it’s all a front. Ms Callus is a true wolf in sheep’s clothing, a bully in a blouse, a menace in magenta, a threat in floral.

“Young man,” she screeches at a slouchy boy in front of us. “This is not a day at the beach. Chin up; look lively.”

The boy hoists his shoulders up hurriedly in an attempt to stand soldier straight.

Ms Callus loves good posture; she also loves perfection, achievement and triumph. Sounds good, doesn’t it? Until you find out what she doesn’t love. So far, I have found this list to include individuality, creativity, happiness, averageness and children. She especially

dislikes average children, as she reminded everyone last week when she sent a letter home headed: *How to be the best in a world filled with losers.*

“Time is ticking,” she trills, “and tardiness robs one of opportunities.”

As we get closer, she turns her beady eyes on us and her face hardens.

“Stop,” she commands icily. She raises a finger and points a pink fingernail right at me. “What. Is. That?”

“Er ... my head?” I reply.

Ms Callus gasps. “Do you think you are a comedian, young lady? Does the world look like your stage?”

I glance at Dana, whose eyes go wide as she mouths something at me. I try to read her lips. I think she’s saying *your mat*. Or *you’re a cat*. Maybe *ugly bats*? I’m not sure, but while I’m trying to work it out Ms Callus shouts, “Surrender that violation of uniform policy immediately.”

Oh. My dancing bunny ears hat. My hands feel jittery as I pull it off and clumsily try to stuff it into my bag. “Sorry, Ms Callus, I forgot I had it on.”

From all around me there’s giggling, and I feel my face burn hot with embarrassment.

Ms Callus snatches the hat from the opening of my bag. “What a monstrosity!” She holds it up by one of the

ears as if it were diseased. “If I ever catch you flagrantly flouting the rules of this fine establishment again, you will find yourself expelled. Do I make myself clear?”

“Yes,” I squeak.

“Yes who?”

“Yes, Ms Callus.”

“Very well,” she says. “Now move along.”

Dana takes me by the arm as we walk on. I’m shaking – I hate being shouted at and having everyone stare at me.

“I’m sorry that happened,” Dana says sympathetically, and gives my arm a squeeze.

“Me too,” I mutter miserably. “This is turning out to be a truly terrible day.”

“At least we have a class together now. Computing, yeah!”

I raise an eyebrow at her. “You hate computing.”

“Only because it’s the single hour of the timetable where I feel I’m losing neurons rather than generating them.”

As we enter the computer lab, Mr Keen is sitting on his desk and combing his facial hair. “Hey, dudes,” he calls as we take our seats. “Make sure you all sign the register-rooney and then we’ll get stuck into some awesome algorithms.”

“Register-rooney?” Dana repeats with a groan. “Oh, this is already horrible.”

“Who’s ready for some fun with the fundamental principles of computer science?” he shouts enthusiastically.

Dana rolls her eyes and whispers, “I can’t believe I need to be here. How did Mr Keen ever qualify as a computing teacher? Last week he called a microchip a microwave.”

Mr Keen bounces towards us. “Skylar, you haven’t switched on the thingamajig yet.”

“You mean the computer?” Dana says.

Mr Keen laughs. “Your brain amazes me, Dana Popa.”

I switch on my computer, though nothing can switch my heart back on after what just happened.

Mr Keen looks at me and tips his head to one side. “What’s up, kiddo? Usually you dance right in here. Why so glum? I hope you know you can always talk to me, because I’m not just your teacher” – he sprays his beard with a minty-smelling mist – “I’m also your friend.”

“Ms Callus shouted at Skylar for wearing a K-pop dancing bunny ears hat on school property,” Dana explains.

“A what?”

Dana gets out her phone, because you’re totally

allowed to use your phones in Mr Keen's class, and shows him a photo of Woojin in the hat.

"Whoa, that's a supercool accessory," Mr Keen says. "Very retro, funky, manga, swish swish." He rummages in his pocket and takes out a packet of bubblegum. "Hubba Bubba?"

"No thanks," I say. "I'm too depressed to enjoy Atomic Apple right now."

"Sure, sure. We all get that way sometimes. Don't worry about doing any work this lesson. Chill, Alt, Delete."

"That doesn't even make sense," Dana mutters as he wanders off.

A roll of thunder makes everyone jump. The rain is epic, falling so fast it looks like one big sheet of heavy greyness. I feel down, so very down. First my AZ8 plushies, posters and photocards, then my phone and now my dancing bunny ears hat. This really is the worst day ever.

"What does Ms Callus do with all those confiscated items anyway?" I ask.

Dana huffs. "I heard she has a ritual burning in the science garden every Friday. A huge bonfire of lipsticks, iPhones and Uno cards. Can you imagine how toxic those fumes are?"

I picture Ms Callus in the science garden, her head flung back as she laughs hysterically while my beautiful one hundred per cent polyester hat bursts into flames.

“I’m so fed up with adults,” I seethe.

“Me too, Skylar. My parents are point-blank refusing to invest in an electric car. What don’t they understand about being carbon neutral?”

I slam my hand down on the desk. “They don’t care.”

“Well, they should. Because *I* wasn’t the one taking all those cheap flights to Ibiza. Or cooking pasta with the pot lid off. Or taking bubble baths. Or—”

The thunder claps again.

“See?” Dana gestures outside. “Mother Nature is going bananas and what are we doing? Eating wraps with plastic sporks.”

“You’re right; you are *so* right.” I pause. “What *are* we doing?”

Dana squints at the learning objective Mr Keen has scrawled on the board. “We’re learning how to edit an online grocery shop.”

“No, really, what are we doing? These ridiculous adults are always telling *us* what to do and how *we* should be living our lives. When to wake up, when to study, when to eat, when it’s time to switch off *Go Go*

AZ8! even though it's the best episode ever and you've only seen it four times that day."

Dana puts a hand on my shoulder. "Breathe, Skylar."

I can't. I'm so angry right now. "We need to start standing up for ourselves." And with this, I stand up.

Dana looks worried. "Are you going to do something impulsive?"

"I'm going to confront Ms Callus. I'm going to tell her it's not OK to shout at me in front of the whole school just for wearing a hat to express myself and keep my head warm."

"She's the headteacher. Shouting is probably article 2.4 in her job description."

"It's not right," I say. "This school supposedly teaches respect. That wasn't respect. Are you with me?"

"Skylar, I can't get into trouble. I'm..." Dana drops her head and touches the gold badge on her blazer. "I'm a school councillor."

"Fine," I snap. "I'll go on my own. Mr Keen, can I go to the toilet, please?"

Mr Keen pops his Atomic Apple gum and makes a double gun with his fingers. "Sure thing, kiddo. Take as long as you need."

"Skylar" – Dana grabs my hand – "don't do it."

"I have to make a stand. Plus, I want my hat back."



The only sound in the hallway is that of the rain pounding against the windows. It's almost creepy. I walk past class after class filled with kids chanting Spanish verbs, reciting ancient poems and solving quadratic equations. I pause by a huge banner which reads *Hard Work Conquers All*. Under it are hundreds of photos of all the top students, each one the best or quickest or first at doing something.

I'll never make it onto this display.

"You!" a familiar voice yelps.

The whole reason I'm out of class is to find Ms Callus, but now that I have, my heart jumps out of my chest.

Her pastel-coloured kitten heels slowly click down the corridor towards me. Though not slowly enough for me to work out a plan of what to say. She stops in front of me and I notice my hat is slung over the top of the pink leather handbag which dangles from her arm.

"Why are you out of class?" she demands.

The thunder rumbles, rattling the window frames and making me wonder just how *michyeosseo* I am. I take a deep breath. "I came to get my hat back," I announce bravely.

Ms Callus's mouth turns down and she looks at

me like I'm an extra helping of overcooked broccoli. "You're in Year Seven, aren't you?" she sneers. "I detest Year Sevens. Always belly-aching that secondary school is not as fun as primary school. That there's too much moving around and not enough glitter and making things from old egg boxes."

"That's not true," I protest weakly.

"What's wrong, little Year Seven? Is it that teachers don't act like your mummy?" she says in a whiny voice which I think is meant to be me. Rude. Ms Callus is the one with the whiny voice here.

"My hat?" I nod towards it. "I want it back. Please."

A flash of lightning illuminates Ms Callus's face and she looks as if she's about to dish out a lifetime of detention. "What's your name?" she demands with a sneer.

I swallow hard. "Skylar Smith."

She turns her pointy nose up. "A little nobody. You're not one of the high achievers, the top setters, the award winners, the worker bees who are helping to cement my legacy as one of the greatest educators of all time."

She steps closer and I can smell her flowery perfume, like a park during peak hay-fever season. I don't know what comes over me. Maybe it's the rage which has

been building all morning, the crazy weather or the chilli bean wrap, but I lurch forward and grab my hat.

“How very dare you?” Ms Callus screeches.

“It belongs to me,” I say firmly as I put it on my head where it belongs.

“It is a banned item. Now, TAKE IT OFF!”

“No,” I retort, and I make the bunny ears dance.

With each flip of the ears Ms Callus gets angrier and angrier. “Silly little girl, that’s enough!” she screams.

“No! I’m fed up of adults telling me how to live my life. I wish I was in charge.”

“You wouldn’t last a second,” she yells.

“Yes, I would. Your life is easy. I wish I had it. Do you hear me? I said I wish I had your life! I wish I was in charge!”

I feel the familiar sensation of the hat short-circuiting, and a little shock tickles my hairline. I furiously press again and again to make the ears flip and Ms Callus finally explodes. She grabs the hat by the ears as a tingle runs down my face and body.

Suddenly a huge flash of green light shoots down the middle of the corridor, zigging and zagging like Sonic having an identity crisis. The light turns bright white, then surrounds us and lifts us off the ground.

“What’s happening?” I shout, panic filling me

as Ms Callus and I swirl around in some kind of luminous vortex.

“I don’t know!” she shouts back, her eyes wide. “But whoever is responsible is getting their parents called in.”

BOOM!

The white light bursts into thousands of tiny stars.

I try to scream but my voice is lost to a strange fizzing noise, until...

SNAP!

Everything goes dark.



About the Author

LUAN GOLDIE is a writer of children's books as well as short stories and novels for adults.

She worked in primary schools for over a decade where she loved teaching PE and anything which involved clay, paint or glitter.

When not writing, Luan can be found teaching writing to others, hanging upside down at a fitness class, or watching K-pop music videos. Her ult bias is Kim Namjoon from BTS.

**A LAUGH-OUT-LOUD TALE OF
FRIENDSHIP, FANDOM AND
CHASING YOUR DREAMS**



**"THUNDERINGLY
AWESOME!"**
RYAN HAMMOND

K-pop obsessed
Skylar is fed up with
grown-ups bossing
her around.

But when she confronts her
strict headteacher, **disaster**
strikes – they swap bodies!

Can Skylar figure out
how to switch back?
Or will an unmissable
**K-pop dance
competition** mean
she's stuck as an old
lady for ever?

"SPARKLES LIKE CONFETTI."
HANNAH MOFFATT

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