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**LONNIE WAS
DYING**

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BACK WHEN RUDI was in junior high—before she knew punk rock or had an attitude—or was even called Rudi—she was a shy and awkward thirteen-year-old with no friends. She was also often an object of ridicule.

One boy was her chief tormentor. His name was Lonnie, and he was handsome and popular—and everything came easy to him. Especially easy was making fun of Rudi. He would tease her about everything—her height, her clothes—even her bra size. He would tease her until she cried, and even afterward he wouldn't stop laughing about it.

Then, one day Lonnie didn't show up for school. He didn't show up for a long time—and when he finally returned he wasn't quite the same. He was thinner and sullen, and there was something about his hair that wasn't right. Everyone at school noticed this, and, during lunch period, a boy sneaked up behind him in the playground and yanked his wig off—exposing a side-effect of his recent chemotherapy.

Lonnie was dying, but the kids in the playground didn't know this. All they knew was what they saw: a strange bald boy—and they laughed at him and teased him and made jokes about him. And all he could do was cry. He cried and cried.

Though the laughter continued. It continued until Rudi unhesitantly marched up to Lonnie and just as unhesitantly took his hand, before crying along with him.

"Why?" he mumbled to her through his tears, unable to comprehend her act of kindness. "Why?"

"I saw me," she replied.

the end