

LEVELED BOOK • Q

First Day of School



Written by Katherine Follett
Illustrated by John Kastner

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Sarah had never been so apprehensive about school before. She stood in front of her bedroom mirror, smoothing her skirt; leaving it folded for too long had formed creases down the sides. She ran her hands down the sharp ridges again and again, hoping the sweat and heat from her palms would act as a steam iron. She also hoped no one would notice the subtle brown stain under the hem of her shirt, left over from spilling ketchup on her lap the last time she ate French fries. She scolded herself for not buying at least one new outfit for the school year. Even the cuffs of her shirt were beginning to grow a bit threadbare where she nervously rubbed them between her fingers.

She trudged down the stairs to fix herself breakfast. She was trying to balance two opposing feelings inside her—one was a nervousness that made her energetic and fidgety, and the other was a reluctance that made her slow and clumsy. Kent had already wolfed down his Frosted Flakes and dashed out to catch the bus, so Sarah didn't have anyone to banter with. Kent helped her calm down, even if he did mock her for being nervous. He'd been picking on her for a whole week.

"What if you're eating lunch and someone makes you laugh and the milk comes out your nose? Huh? What about that?" he'd said the night before. Sarah smiled a little at the memory—she knew he really cared about her and was only joking with her to make her laugh. He'd left his dirty bowl on the kitchen table, with three Frosted Flakes crusted on its rim. She rinsed the bowl, put it in the dishwasher, and tried to find something to eat.

Sarah had just moved to this new house in a new town. She kept forgetting where the food and dishes were kept, and had to rummage through almost all the cupboards before spotting a Pop Tart. She wanted to eat something better, something healthier, but the butterflies in her stomach were too active this morning.

Being new is always difficult, she thought to herself. *Everyone always feels uncomfortable at first, but eventually everyone makes friends.* She'd been reciting these things to herself for weeks: Since it was the beginning of the year, she probably wouldn't be the only new one. It wasn't as though she'd never been to school before. The kids here were exactly like kids everywhere else.

But still, each time anything reminded her of school, or even anything school-related, she felt the flutter in her tummy. Flutter when she bought her folders and pencils. Flutter when she saw a TV commercial that took place in a classroom. Flutter as she retrieved her bag and made the last few adjustments to her hair and glasses before stepping out the door.

Her new house was close to the school, so she walked. Other people were walking, too—there were students everywhere, it seemed. Some ran, some walked in groups, some got dropped off by their parents. None of them paid any attention to her. She tried to relax. “They don't know that you'll be at their school, so of course they won't pay attention to you. They just assume you're going somewhere else.”

But she still felt completely ignored when she walked inside the building. She had visited the school a few weeks ago and knew where her classroom was, so she got there early. She put her books on her desk and sat quietly, waiting anxiously for all the kids to come in and sit down around her. When they did, they barely looked at her. After the bell rang, she took a big, deep breath and stood up.

“Hello,” she said, trying to hide the waver in her voice. “My name is Ms. Parker, and I’m going to be your teacher this year.”



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