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Until Chrysanthemum started kindergarten, she believed her parents when they said her name was perfect. But on the first day of school, Chrysanthemum begins to suspect that her name is far from perfect, especially when her class dissolves into giggles upon hearing her name read aloud. That evening, Chrysanthemum's parents try to piece her self-esteem back together again with comfort food and a night filled "with hugs, kisses, and Parcheesi". But the next day Victoria, a particularly observant and mean-spirited classmate, announces that Chrysanthemum's name takes up 13 letters. "That's half the letters in the alphabet!" she adds. Chrysanthemum wilts. Pretty soon the girls are making playground threats to "pluck" Chrysanthemum and "smell her". Kevin Henkes displays great compassion for the victims of childhood teasing and cruelties, skilfully employing fresh language, endearing pen-and-ink mouse characters and realistic dialogue to portray real-life vulnerability. He also has great compassion for parents, offering several adult-humour jokes for anxious mummies and daddies. On the surface, the finale is overly tidy and the coincidences unbelievable. But in the end, what sustains Chrysanthemum, as well as this story, is the steadfast love and support of her family. And because of this, the closure is, ultimately, convincing and comforting. ALA Notable Book, School Library Journal Best Book of the Year, Horn Book Fanfare Honor List. (Ages 4 to 8) --Gail Hudson

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