

Excerpt 2: A Boy Named Queen

When the buzzer sounds at the end of the day, Queen and Evelyn set off together straight from the classroom. Usually they meet at the corner.

In the schoolyard, Parker and Connor are at the bicycle rack that looks to Evelyn like a giant half-submerged potato smasher.

Parker sees them first.

"Here comes the queen!" he sings, lifting an imaginary trumpet into the air and squawking a royal fanfare.

"And," Connor pronounces, looking at Evelyn, "her lady in waiting."

Evelyn flushes with heat. She's embarrassed. She trembles. She's angry. But she's not mad at Connor and Parker. She's mad at Queen! This is his fault. If he didn't have such a strange name. If he wore clothes like everyone else, and didn't start clubs.

Kids don't start clubs. Teachers start clubs.

As they pass the boys, Connor pushes Queen's skateboard from under his arm. It goes rolling across the schoolyard.

Evelyn is afraid Connor is going to hit Queen. Maybe he's going to hit her!

Queen walks calmly toward his skateboard and picks it up. He's...graceful, Evelyn thinks. Connor and Parker are taller than Queen, but Queen seems bigger than them.

Queen looks back at Evelyn.

"Ignore them," he says.

Wasn't that what Evelyn told him on the first day of school?

She's too upset to answer. She vows not to cry, but tears sting her eyes and her nose tingles. She wants to curl up right there on the sidewalk.

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Queen glances at her every few steps.

"It'll be okay," he says.

"No, it won't!"

All day, Evelyn has been looking forward to going to Queen's house. Now she just wants to go home. And find a glass of cold milk waiting for her in the fridge on a plate of oakcakes on the counter.

Queen stops. "You don't have to come if you don't want to."

Queen's eyes are so green, Evelyn thinks. Like summer ponds. She looks for her favorite freckles—the angular, umber one on the bridge of his nose and the milk chocolate smattering on his chin.

Queen smiles. His smile makes Evelyn laugh.

The thing is, she thinks, Queen is the nicest boy in the world. And today is his birthday!

"How do you stand it?" she asks once they're walking again.

"I put up a force field. All around me. The dumb things they say—even the dumb things they think—bounce off it."

"I'd like a force field like that."

"Just make one. Imagine it. See it. Mine is turquoise."

Evelyn closes her eyes. She imagines electricity spreading out from her, pushing Parker and Connor and their stupid words out, out, out.

It's like she's in an egg with a strong shell. It's blue.

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She opens her eyes again. She feels great!

"The force field works for good things, too," Queen says, "But the opposite way. If someone says something nice to you, the field lets it in. Right into your heart."

Source: Cassidy, S. (2020). A Boy Named Queen. Groundwood Books : House of Anansi Press.