

The
Broken
Bike
Boy

and
the

Queen
of 33rd
Street



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CHAPTER 1

I AM A QUEEN. I live in a castle, right across the street from the John Howard housing project. Every day right after school, I run to my bedroom window and open it wide—even in the middle of winter when the wind blows wet snow up my nose. I watch for my knight in shining armor. He's ten years old, in the fifth grade like me, and rides a bike—a two-wheeler with rusty spokes and a busted seat.

My friend Symone says that knights lived a long time ago and rode horses, not broken bikes with patched tires. But I think knights are still around today. I know for sure they are, because I know something that Symone doesn't know; that nobody knows about the broken bike boy.

You see, I was someplace I wasn't supposed to be. And a fire-breathing dragon started chasing after me. She had a tongue as long as a river and slimy fingers that ruined everything they touched. And right when I figured I was done for, my knight in shining armor rode up on that broken bike and, well, I think I will tell you the whole story right from the beginning.

You see, the first day I met him, it was a Tuesday, my most terrible day of the week. I remember the day because I was having a very nice dream, then Mother walks into my room, waking me up.

"Queen. Queen!" Mother says, pulling covers off my head.

I love to sleep, so I don't like people waking me. "Go away."

I don't like listening to my mother, only my father. Mother thinks I'm spoiled. So when he comes

into the room, rubs my back, and whispers my name, "Queen. Time for school," I get up smiling.

I hold my arms out so Father can give me my morning hug.

"You make it so hard," he tells Mother. "But it's as easy as pie to get the girl moving. See?" he says, carrying me to the bathroom and standing me on a thick, purple towel he puts on the floor just for me. "You are a queen," he says, bowing. "Queen of . . ."

"Queen of Thirty-third Street," I say, taking my purple toothbrush and touching him on each shoulder like real queens do with their scepters. "You may go now," I say, turning on the hot water spigot.

"Shall we wait breakfast for you, milady?" Father asks.

"Yes. Tea with milk, and lemon sugar cookies, please."

Father walks out the bathroom backward, because real queens never want to see a servant's behind parts.

Mother is in the living room, saying what she always says. "You're ruining her, John. She believes that queen stuff, you know."



"Queen is smart.
Queen is pretty.
But nobody likes her
except her kitty."

QUEEN'S HOUSE—the biggest one on 33rd Street—looks just like a castle, and in her bedroom she has dozens of beautiful dresses and crowns. Queen thinks she's a real queen, and she treats everyone, even her teacher, like her royal subjects.

When a new kid comes to Queen's school, riding a broken bike and wearing smelly, worn-out clothes, Queen joins her classmates in making fun of him. Her parents insist she be nice to Leroy, but Queen doesn't see why she should. Leroy doesn't just stink; Queen thinks he tells lies—whoppers, in fact. And when he says he's an African prince from Senegal, Queen makes it her mission to prove that Leroy is an impostor.

But as she gets closer to discovering Leroy's real story, Queen learns the unexpected from her broken bike boy: what being a good friend and "happily ever after" really mean.

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