

RULES



CYNTHIA LORD

 SCHOLASTIC

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Follow the rules.

“Come on, David.” I let go of his sleeve, afraid I’ll rip it. When he was little, I could pull my brother behind me if he didn’t want to do something, but now David’s eight and too strong to be pulled.

Opening the front door, I sigh. My first day of summer vacation is nothing like I dreamed. I had imagined today warm, with seagulls winging across a blue sky, not overcast and damp. Still, I refuse to grab my jacket from the peg inside the front door.

“Umbrella?” David asks, a far-off stare in his brown eyes.

“It’s not raining. Come on. Mom said go to the car.”

David doesn’t move.

I get his favorite red umbrella.

“Okay, let’s go.” I step onto the front porch and slide the umbrella into my backpack with my sketchbook and colored pencils.

“Let’s go to the video store,” David says, not moving one inch.

“You’re going to the clinic. But if you do a good job, Dad’ll take you to the video store when he comes home.”

The video store is David’s favorite place, better than the circus, the fair, or even the beach. Dad always invites me to come, too, but I say, “No, thanks.” David has to watch all the previews on the store TVs and walk down each row of videos, flipping boxes over to read the parental advisory and the rating — even on videos Dad would never let him rent. David’ll say, loud enough for the whole store to hear, “Rated PG-thirteen for language and some violence! Crude humor!” He’ll keep reaching for boxes and flipping them over, not even *seeing* the looks people give us. But the hardest part is when David kneels in the aisle to see the back of a video box a complete stranger is holding in his hand.

Dad says, "No one cares, Catherine. Don't be so sensitive," but he's wrong. People *do* care.

Beside me, David checks his watch. "I'll pick you up at five o'clock."

"Well, *maybe* five o'clock," I say. "Sometimes Dad's late."

David shrieks, "Five o'clock!"

"Shh!" I scan the yards around us to see if anyone heard, and my stomach flips. A moving van is parked in front of the house next door, back wide open, half full of chairs and boxes. From inside the truck, two men appear, carrying a couch between them.

My hands tremble, trying to zip my backpack. "Come on, David. Mom said go to the car."

David stands with his sneaker toes on the top step, like it's a diving board and he's choosing whether to jump. "Five o'clock," he says.

The right answer would be "maybe," but David only wants surefire answers: "yes" and "no" and "Wednesday at two o'clock," but never "maybe" or "it depends" or worst of all, "I don't know."

Next door the movers set the couch on the driveway.

NO TOYS IN THE FISH TANK.



Twelve-year-old Catherine just wants a normal life. Which is near impossible when you have a brother with autism and a family that revolves around his disability. She's spent years trying to teach David the rules from "a peach is not a funny-looking apple" to "keep your pants on in public" —in order to head off David's embarrassing behaviors.

But the summer Catherine meets Jason, a surprising, new sort-of friend, and Kristi, the potential next-door friend she's always wished for, it's her own shocking behavior that turns everything upside down and forces her to ask: What *is* normal?

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