



SCHOOLED

GORDON KORMAN

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NAME: **CAPRICORN ANDERSON**

I was thirteen the first time I saw a police officer up close. He was arresting me for driving without a license. At the time, I didn't even know what a license was. I wasn't too clear on what being arrested meant either.

But by then they were loading Rain onto a stretcher to rush her in for X-rays. So I barely noticed the handcuffs the officer slapped on my wrists.

"Who's the owner of this pickup?"

"It belongs to the community," I told him.

He made a note on a ring-bound pad. "What community? Golf club? Condo deal?"

"Garland Farm."

He frowned. "Never heard of that one."

Rain would have been pleased. That was the whole point

of the community—to allow us to escape the money-hungry rat race of modern society. If people didn't know us, they couldn't find us, and we could live our lives in peace.

"It's an alternative farm commune," I explained.

The officer goggled at me. "Alternative—you mean like *hippies*?"

"Rain used to be one, back in the sixties. There were fourteen families at Garland then. Now it's just Rain and me." I tried to edge my way toward the nursing station. "I have to make sure she's okay."

He was unmoved. "Who is this Rain? According to her Social Security card, the patient's name is Rachel Esther Rosenblatt."

"Her name is Rain, and she's my grandmother," I said stiffly. "She fell out of a tree."

He stared at his notes. "What was a sixty-seven-year-old woman doing up a tree?"

"Picking plums," I replied defensively. "She slipped."

"So you drove her here. At thirteen."

"I drive all the time," I informed him. "Rain taught me when I was eight."

Sweat appeared on his upper lip. "And you never thought of just dialing 911?"

I regarded him blankly. "What's nine-one-one?"

"The emergency number! On the telephone!"

I told him the truth. "I've talked on a telephone

a couple of times. In town. But we don't have one."

He looked at me for what seemed like forever. "What's your name, son?"

"Cap. It's short for Capricorn."

He unlocked my handcuffs. I was un-arrested.

How could an able-bodied teenager allow his grandmother to scale a plum tree? Simple. She wasn't my grandmother at the time. She was my teacher.

I was homeschooled. That was the law. Even on a tiny farm like ours, you had to get an education. No school bus could ever make it up the rutted, snaking dirt road that led to Garland. But transportation wasn't the only problem. If we'd been serviced by an eight-lane highway, Rain still would have handled my schooling personally. We wanted to avoid the low standards and cultural poison of a world that had lost its way.

So that's what I was doing when Rain fell—working on a vocabulary lesson. Most of the list came from the state eighth grade curriculum: *barometer, decagon, perpendicular . . .*

I could always spot the extra words Rain threw in: *non-violence, Zen Buddhism, psychedelic . . .*

Microprocessor? I frowned at the paper on the unpainted wooden table. Was that Rain or the state? I'd never heard that term before.

CAPRICORN (CAP) ANDERSON has never watched television. He's never tasted a pizza. Never even heard of a wedgie. Since he was little, his only experience has been living on farm commune and being homeschooled by his hippie grandmother, Rain.

But when Rain falls out of a tree while picking plums and has to stay in the hospital, Cap is forced to move in with a guidance counselor and her cranky teen daughter and attend the local middle school. While Cap knows a lot about tie-dyeing and Zen Buddhism, no education could prepare him for the politics of public school.

Right from the beginning, Cap's weirdness makes him a moving target at Claverage Middle School (dubbed C Average by the students). He has long, ungroomed hair; wears hemp clothes; and practices tai chi out on the lawn. Once Zach Powers, big man on campus, spots Cap, he can't wait to introduce him to the age-old tradition at C Average: the biggest nerd is nominated for class president . . . and wins.

Will Cap turn out to be the greatest president in the history of C Average? Or the biggest punch line?



★ "This rewarding novel features an engaging main character and some memorable moments of comedy, tenderness, and reflection."

—*Booklist* (starred review)

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