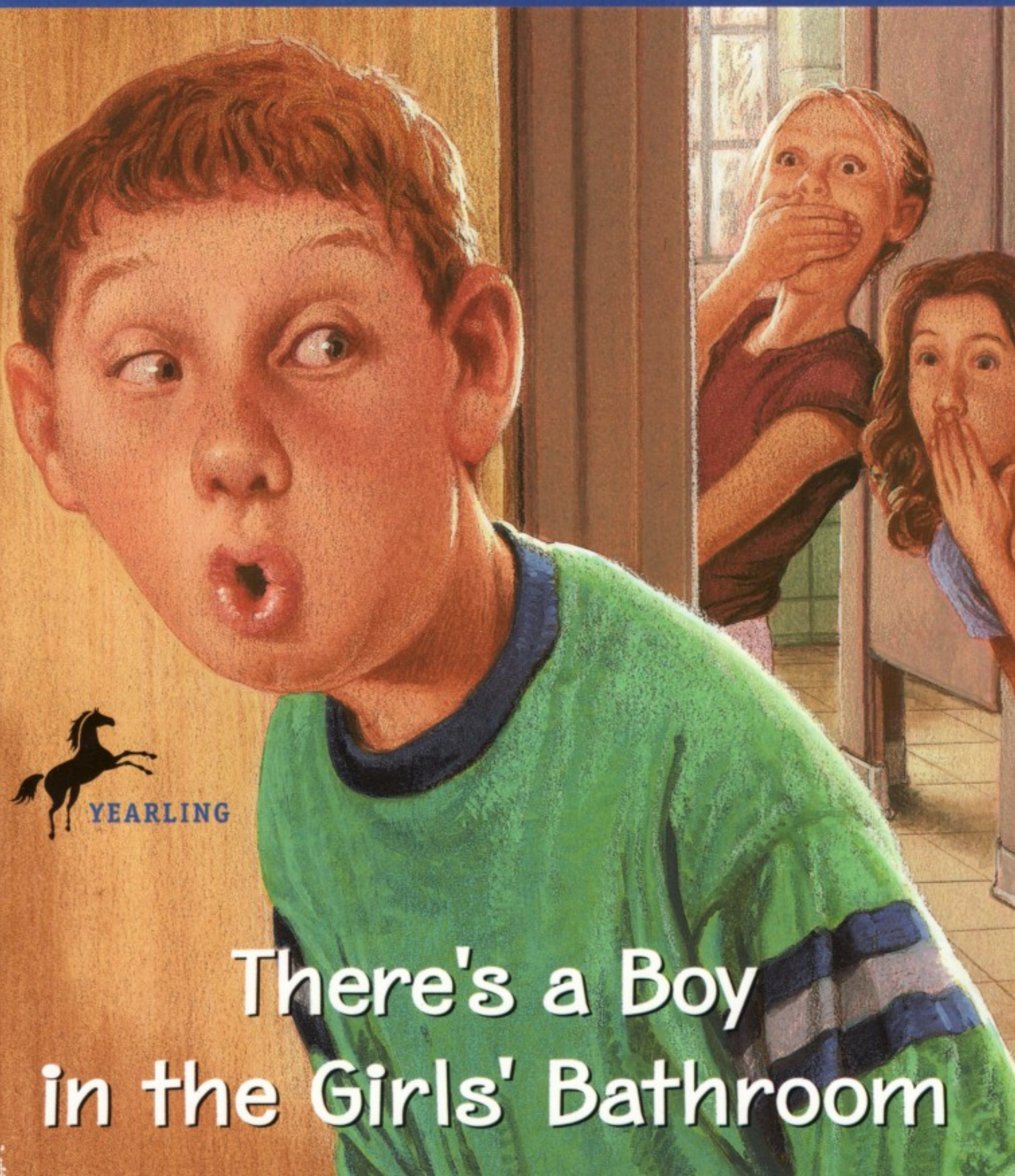


LOUIS SACHAR

WINNER OF THE NEWBERY MEDAL FOR *HOLES*



There's a Boy
in the Girls' Bathroom

1.

Bradley Chalkers sat at his desk in the back of the room—last seat, last row. No one sat at the desk next to him or at the one in front of him. He was an island.

If he could have, he would have sat in the closet. Then he could shut the door so he wouldn't have to listen to Mrs. Ebbel. He didn't think she'd mind. She'd probably like it better that way too. So would the rest of the class. All in all, he thought everyone would be much happier if he sat in the closet, but, unfortunately, his desk didn't fit.

"Class," said Mrs. Ebbel. "I would like you all to meet Jeff Fishkin. Jeff has just moved here from Washington, D.C., which, as you know, is our nation's capital."

Bradley looked up at the new kid who was standing at the front of the room next to Mrs. Ebbel.

"Why don't you tell the class a little bit about yourself, Jeff," urged Mrs. Ebbel.

The new kid shrugged.

"There's no reason to be shy," said Mrs. Ebbel.

The new kid mumbled something, but Bradley couldn't hear what it was.

"Have you ever been to the White House, Jeff?" Mrs. Ebbel asked. "I'm sure the class would be very interested to hear about that."

"No, I've never been there," the new kid said very quickly as he shook his head.

Mrs. Ebbel smiled at him. "Well, I guess we'd better find you a place to sit." She looked around the room. "Hmm, I don't see anyplace except, I suppose you can sit there, at the back."

"No, not next to Bradley!" a girl in the front row exclaimed.

"At least it's better than *in front* of Bradley," said the boy next to her.

Mrs. Ebbel frowned. She turned to Jeff. "I'm sorry, but there are no other empty desks."

"I don't mind where I sit," Jeff mumbled.

"Well, nobody likes sitting . . . there," said Mrs. Ebbel.

"That's right," Bradley spoke up. "Nobody likes sitting next to me!" He smiled a strange smile. He stretched his mouth so wide, it was hard to tell whether it was a smile or a frown.

He stared at Jeff with bulging eyes as Jeff awkwardly sat down next to him. Jeff smiled back at him, so he looked away.

As Mrs. Ebbel began the lesson, Bradley took out a pencil and a piece of paper, and scribbled. He scribbled most of the morning, sometimes on the paper and sometimes on his desk. Sometimes he scribbled so hard his pencil point broke. Every time that happened he laughed. Then he'd tape the broken point to one of the gobs of junk in his desk, sharpen his pencil, and scribble again.

His desk was full of little wads of torn paper, pencil points, chewed erasers, and other unrecognizable stuff, all taped together.

Mrs. Ebbel handed back a language test. "Most of you did very well," she said. "I was very pleased. There were fourteen A's and the rest B's. Of course, there was one F, but . . ." She shrugged her shoulders.

Bradley held up his test for everyone to see and smiled that same distorted smile.

As Mrs. Ebbel went over the correct answers with the class, Bradley took out his pair of scissors and very carefully cut his test paper into tiny squares.

When the bell rang for recess, he put on his red jacket and walked outside, alone.

"Hey, Bradley, wait up!" somebody called after him.

Startled, he turned around.

Jeff, the new kid, hurried alongside him. "Hi," said Jeff.

Bradley stared at him in amazement.

Jeff smiled. "I don't mind sitting next to you," he said. "Really."

Bradley didn't know what to say.

"I have been to the White House," Jeff admitted. "If you want, I'll tell you about it."

Bradley thought a moment, then said, "Give me a dollar or I'll spit on you."

“Give me a dollar or I’ll spit on you.”

That’s Bradley Chalkers for you. He’s the oldest kid in the fifth grade. He tells enormous lies. He picks fights with girls, and the teachers say he has “serious behavior problems.” No one likes him—except Carla, the new school counselor. She thinks Bradley is sensitive and generous, and she even enjoys his far-fetched stories. Carla knows that Bradley could change, if only he weren’t afraid to try.

But when you feel like the most hated kid in the whole school, believing in yourself can be the hardest thing in the world. . . .

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