

Saga and Storm Will NOT be Boyfriend-Girlfriend!

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Bonus is a Dad

When it gets way too noisy at home, when my two-year-old twin sisters are screaming their heads off and Leon won't stop throwing balls around inside, I go over to Storm's. Storm is my best friend, and has been for as long as I can remember. He's the nicest person in the whole world. We're in the same class at school.

We've been on winter break, and I've just been sitting around at home eating Christmas cookies and honey-baked ham morning, noon, and night. Storm went to Langedrag Nature Park and rode in a dogsled. When he got back, he brought me a t-shirt with a wolf on it. It's the nicest gift I've ever gotten. I wear it every single day. Even when it's hidden under a thick sweater and nobody can even see it, I like knowing it's there.

"Time to get back to business," Dad says when we're eating breakfast. He always says that when vacation's over, but I'm only in the fourth grade, so there's not exactly that much business going on.

Bonus, the best Dalmatian in the whole world, trots over as I'm taking a bite of breakfast sausage. He puts his head in my lap. When he looks at me with those eyes, it's hard *not* to drop something on the floor. Just a tiny little piece.

"Saga," Dad says sternly. "No feeding the dog at the table." He sighs. That means he doesn't have time for this.

"But he's hungry," I say.

"He'll get his breakfast in a bit," Dad says. I need to get you kids off to school first."

Dad puts on the twins' jackets and shoes. Leon takes forever zipping up his coat, but every time Dad tries to help him, he screams. Leon is five and wants to do everything

himself. I've been ready for ages and keep myself busy scratching Bonus' belly in the hallway. I think about Jippi's puppies and how much fun visiting them with Storm will be.

Bonus got lost in the forest early last fall. It ended with Jippi, Heidi's dog, having puppies. Storm and I have been helping Heidi with the puppies several times a week after school. She thinks it's a *lot* of work. Now, the puppies will be ready for adoption in a few weeks, and I'm *really* hoping she doesn't find homes for all of them. Then we'll probably have to take one, since it was Bonus' fault there are puppies, after all. Storm isn't allowed to have a puppy. That was a firm *no* from his parents.

Bonus looks into the kitchen, his eyes laser-focused on the rest of the sausage on the table.

"You're the father of three puppies," I tell him. "Now you have to be a grown-up."

Lots of fun things are happening these days. We're getting a new girl in our class. Now we'll have as many girls as boys. I like that. I like even numbers better than odd.

Some people have a lot of friends, but I only have Storm. He's really all I need, though.

Storm

Storm is waiting for me by the entrance when I get to school.

"Hey, I'm wearing the t-shirt," I say, pulling up my sweater so Storm can see the t-shirt from Langedrag. Storm opens his jacket and shows me his sweatshirt with a wolf on it.

"Mom said you can come next time," Storm says, jumping up and down. He's *always* freezing.

"Yeah!" I exclaim. "When's the next time?"

"Summer break," Storm says, hopping from one foot to the other. A girl comes up behind him. She stares at us.

“Hi,” I say, but she turns away.

“Is that the girl who’s starting in our class?” Storm asks.

“Probably,” I reply.

Storm howls like a wolf.

“What did I just say?” he asks, looking at me. I howl back.

“Exactly,” Storm says. “What we need right now is a big, meaty meal!”

“What are you thinking?” I ask.

“An elk,” Storm says, licking his lips.

I wrinkle my nose.

“An elk for breakfast?” I say. “Makes my stomach hurt.”

“But then you won’t get any food for the rest of the week,” Storm says.

“What is it with those two?” I hear the new girl ask Silje and Katrine. They laugh.

“That’s just how Storm and Saga are,” says Silje.

“Always,” says Katrine.

“Childish,” the new girl says.

Boel

Our teacher, Håvard, is standing by his desk at the front of the room with the new girl. Everyone is looking at them. The classroom is completely silent.

“This is Boel,” Håvard says. “I want everyone to make her feel welcome. I know you will.” He smiles at her. “Welcome to our class!” He hands her some books and a tablet.

Everyone looks at Boel, and she looks right back at us while Håvard is talking. She doesn’t look scared at all. I would’ve been *super* nervous. I would’ve looked straight down at the floor, and my hands probably would’ve been sweating like crazy. They’re sweating a little right now just looking at her standing up there in front of the class.

“This is the best class in the whole school!” Håvard says, grinning.

Boel doesn’t look like she really cares.

“Okay, now it’s time for math,” says Håvard. “And the last lesson of the day is the class’s lesson. That’s a lot of fun, because then the class gets to decide what we do!”

“I want to play hangman,” Boel says.

“Well,” Håvard says, sounding a bit surprised. “Should we let Boel pick since it’s her first day?” he asks. Everyone nods and says yes. I raise my hand.

“Yes, Saga,” Håvard says.

“What does Boel mean?” I ask, looking at her eagerly.

Boel frowns at me.

“Um, I don’t know,” she replies.

“I’m sure we can figure it out,” Håvard says, looking at Boel, who shrugs. Doesn’t she want to know what her name means?

Håvard points at the desk next to Silje.

I look at Boel as she walks past my desk. She stares straight at me and sticks her tongue out.

I don’t manage to say anything, but I can feel myself turning red all the way from my ponytail down to my big toe. Does she not like me? It’s hard for me to pay attention to what Håvard is saying for the rest of the lesson. I know where Boel is the whole time, but I don’t dare look at her. What does she think of me?

Puppies

Storm and I go over to Heidi’s after school.

“I think Boel is mad at me,” I say. I still don’t understand what I did wrong.

“She’s probably scared no one will like her,” Storm replies. “That’s how it was for Abid when he started in our class.”

“Oh,” I say, surprised. I hadn’t realized Abid had been scared. “I just thought he was shy.” Storm looks at me and shakes his head. That’s what he normally does when I don’t understand things he thinks are totally obvious. I usually laugh at it, but today, it upsets me for some reason.

“Boel is a weird name,” I say.

“I think it’s nice,” Storm says. He waves at Abid, who is running toward us from the garden up ahead. “I told Abid it was okay for him to come.”

Oh no, I think. It’s always different when Abid is with us. Then he and Storm do most of the talking while I just stand there, silent. I don’t like it.

I don’t have the chance to say anything before Abid reaches us. I guess there’s not much to say anyway.

Abid looks happy.

“I can’t wait to see the puppies!” he exclaims.

“They’re really cute,” Storm says.

It takes a long time for Heidi to come to the door after we ring the bell. When she finally opens it, she looks sweaty and stressed and has a rag in one hand.

“There’s *pee* absolutely everywhere!” she sighs. “Come in!”

Abid wrinkles his nose and looks like he wants to head right back outside.

The puppies are fast asleep in a tangled pile on the living room floor. We’ve only been there for a few seconds when Storm’s phone rings.

“I have to go home,” he says after having talked to his mom.

“But we just got here!” I protest.

“I’ll go with you,” Abid says.

“I’ll stay here for a little while,” I say, hoping that Dad doesn’t call me right away, too.

Once Heidi is done cleaning up after the puppies, she plops down on the sofa with a sigh.

The puppies are still sleeping in a pile on the floor. They’re *so* cute! I want to pet them, but I know they need to be left alone while they’re sleeping.

“We have a new girl in our class,” I say.

“That’s nice,” Heidi replies.

“I don’t know, it hasn’t really been going the way I want it to,” I say. “Even though we’re an even number of boys and girls now.”

Heidi nods.

“Maybe she wants to come by and meet the puppies?” she asks.

I shake my head. The puppies start waking up and make their way toward me. They lick my hand.

I wonder if Abid is going over to Storm’s house. I’m thinking about it when my phone rings, and the whole way home. I’m still thinking about it while we eat dinner.

“Please stop playing with your food and eat your dinner, Saga,” Mom says. I nod and keep poking at my beef stew.

“How was school today?” Dad asks.

“The new girl got mad when I asked what her name means,” I say, feeling a lump growing in my throat. I want to tell them about how Boel stuck her tongue out at me, but then the twins start throwing food on the floor and Mom and Dad have to clean it up, and then they have to change their diapers, and then they forget all about me. I get up from the table and go to my room.

Boel's the Boss

We get to know Boel over the next few weeks. It doesn't make things better. Hangman isn't the only thing Boel decides. She also decides that nobody will answer the substitute teacher, Sivert, when he asks the class about homework. She holds a finger up in front of her mouth and says no one can say anything. I don't know what it is about Boel that makes everyone in the class listen to what she says. Boel also decides that the girls can't get cooties.

"Ewww," she says when Sivert hands a worksheet to her, and refuses to take it. "I don't want cooties!"

Silje and Katrine laugh loudly, like Boel said the funniest thing in the world. When Silje and Katrine laugh, Nora and Emma start laughing too, just a bit more quietly. The laughter spreads through the classroom. When Lina laughs with her nice, contagious laughter, I laugh too, even though I didn't think it was funny. Storm looks at me, but I don't dare look back at him. Sivert just stands there with the worksheet in his hand. Then he sets it carefully on Boel's desk. She blows it onto the floor. Storm doesn't laugh. He gets up and picks up the worksheet. He hands it to Boel, and then she finally takes it.

During recess, Boel gathers all the girls around her. I'm standing with Storm. I can see them all staring at us.

"Saga, are you listening to me?" Storm asks.

"Yeah," I say, even though I didn't really hear what he said. It looks like Boel is talking about us, and I wonder what she's saying to the others.

"Hi," Abid says. "Cool sweatshirt." He points at Storm's wolf sweatshirt from Langedrag. Storm starts talking about dog sledding and wolf food. I've heard all this before, so I pay more attention to what the girls are doing. I can't hear what they're saying, but I can see they're looking at us. When we go back inside, I can hear Boel talking loudly.

“Hanging out with boys is *so* childish,” she says. The other girls nod.

I feel my stomach drop.

Katrine comes over to me.

“All the girls have to wear a green sweater tomorrow,” she says.

“Why?” I ask.

“Boel said so,” she replies. I nod, but afterward, I don’t understand why I did. Why do I care what Boel thinks of me?

Green Sweater

Boel is the first person I see when I get to the playground. She’s standing by herself next to the water fountain. She kicks it several times. Hard. It looks painful. Boel is wearing a green sweater. She smiles when she sees me, but only with her mouth. Her eyes don’t look happy.

“Show me your sweater,” she says. I zipped my jacket all the way up to my chin, even though it hurt to close it that much. Emma and Nora walk over. Silje and Katrine walk over. All of them are wearing green sweaters with open jackets.

“Can we see your sweater?” Boel asks again. Now, almost all the girls are standing around us.

“Yeah,” I say, because there’s not really anything else I can say. I unzip my jacket as slowly as I possibly can, hoping the bell will ring.

Ring, ring! I hear, but it’s just in my head. The playground is completely silent. All the girls are staring at me as I open my jacket and my t-shirt with a wolf from Langedrag comes into view. It has different shades of gray, black and white, but not green.

“You’ve been wearing that t-shirt for days,” Boel says. How could she know that?
“That’s so gross!”

Emma and Lina giggle quietly.

“I don’t have any green sweaters,” I say, and before Boel can reply, I turn around and head toward the entrance. I hope the bell rings before I get to the door, and it actually does. The classroom is still locked, though, so I stand outside, waiting. Boel comes over to me.

“You *have* to have a green sweater,” she says. “Green is one of the prettiest colors, don’t you think?” she asks.

“Sure,” I say, even though I think my wolf t-shirt is the nicest thing I own. I don’t know why I don’t just say that I like the t-shirt with the wolf better.

“Buy a green sweater, then,” Boel says. It’s like an order. When did Boel start bossing me around?

Then she turns away and starts talking with Katrine and Lina. Boel touches the soft yarn that Lina’s sweater is made of. I just stand there behind them. I count the pegs on the coat rack, guessing what number I’ll get to before Håvard comes to unlock the classroom.

“Hi Saga,” Storm says. I don’t respond. I can see that Boel is looking at us. Now’s my chance to show her that I don’t want to catch cooties.

“I don’t talk to boys,” I say, way too loudly. I feel my face get hot and red. It’s *Storm!* What am I doing?

Storm looks at me strangely. I guess he doesn’t understand what’s happening. Neither do I. It’s like Boel has bewitched me and I’m not myself anymore. I want to be with Storm, but I can’t when she’s watching.

Håvard comes and unlocks the classroom. I’ve completely forgotten what number of pegs I got to. I take my backpack and go inside.

I spend the rest of the day planning how I’ll say sorry to Storm. In my head, he’s already said it’s okay. *It’s okay, Saga*, Storm says when I imagine it.

Twigson

At the end of the day, I wait for Storm like usual. He takes his time putting his books in his backpack. I've decided to say sorry on our way over to Heidi's. *I'm sure he'll understand*, I think. He usually does. I can say anything to Storm without feeling awkward or lame.

"Hurry up, we have to get to Heidi's," I say.

"I'm hanging out with Abid today," Storm says without looking up from his backpack.

"What about the puppies?" I ask.

"Abid asked if I wanted to come over," Storm says. He's still looking down at his backpack, and doesn't say anything when I leave without another word.

It feels wrong to go over to Heidi's without Storm.

"There you are," Heidi says when she opens the door. "I just have to clean up a little before you come in." She points at a small puddle on the floor.

"Did they pee?" I ask.

"Peed, pooped, threw up, everything you can imagine," Heidi sighs. "Again. I'm just about ready for them to move out."

"Do they have to?" I ask. I look at the puppies. They've gotten so much bigger since they were born nine weeks ago. They're really cute, but it hurts when they bite me with their razor-sharp puppy teeth.

"Jippi has been a very patient mom, but I think she's starting to get sick of them, too," Heidi says. We look at the puppy trying to climb on top of Jippi. She shakes it off, hops up on the sofa, and lies down. The puppy stares up at her, not knowing what to do. It whines a little without making a difference.

"Have you given them names yet?" I ask.

"That's Zelda," Heidi says, pointing at the puppy whining by the sofa. "And that's Amundsen over there." She points at a puppy making its way up the stairs.

I sit down on the floor. One of the puppies shuffles over to me. He licks my hand and bites the drawstring on my sweatshirt. He's my favorite.

"Hi, Twigson," I say.

"Twigson!" Heidi says. "That's cute. Where'd you get that name, Saga?"

I look at Twigson. He's white with brown spots.

"I dunno," I say. "I just came up with it."

"That's how it is with good things," she says.

"And bad," I reply. I don't look at Heidi, just stroke Twigson's soft fur. He's mostly interested in the drawstring, pulling at it with all his might. I think about everything that's changed since Boel started in our class, and how getting a new girl wasn't exactly how I'd imagined it would be.

"Look," I say, holding a dog toy in front of Twigson, a little pig. He takes the pig in his mouth and shakes it. Heidi looks at me like she's waiting for me to say something else.

"The new girl in class isn't very nice," I say. "She's really bossy."

"Hmm," Heidi says thoughtfully.

"Boel doesn't want to get cooties, so now none of the other girls want to get cooties, and Storm is a boy so he has cooties," I say all in one breath.

Heidi nods, and I keep talking.

"I do whatever Boel says, even though I don't really want to."

I've forgotten all about the puppies while I've been talking, but now I see that Twigson is sniffing around in a circle. That's how I know he has to pee. I hurry to lift him up and take him outside, and make it just in time. He pees on the porch.

"Amazing," Heidi says. "It's about time they understood they need to do their business outside!"

On my way back home, I think about what Storm and Abid are doing right now, and whether they're going to be hanging out all the time without me.

Weekend without Storm

I usually spend my weekends hanging out with Storm, but we don't make any plans this weekend. He doesn't come over, and I don't go over to his place, either. It hurts. I feel really, really alone.

Once Leon and the twins have gone to bed, Mom gets a big bar of chocolate and a bag of chips from the pantry. It's my turn to pick a movie to watch, but I can't even focus. Dad pauses the movie about halfway through.

"Saga," he says. "You're so quiet tonight."

"Yeah," I say.

Mom is eating chocolate and scrolling on her phone, even though our phones were supposed to be put away tonight.

"Are you doing okay?" Dad asks, looking at me.

Then I start crying. I don't usually cry. The twins are the ones who cry the most in our family.

"It's..." I say, but I don't manage to get anything out besides a hiccup. Dad strokes my back gently.

"...Boel," I say before I start howling again.

Dad keeps stroking my back, and I slowly calm down.

"The girls all make fun of me for hanging out with Storm and Boel decides everything the girls do even though she's new in our class and all the girls are supposed to wear a green sweater at school but I don't have any green sweaters!"

“Well, that’s not okay,” Dad says. He looks over at Mom. They look at each other in that special way they do when there’s something I’m not supposed to know. It’s the same when they speak in English about buying candy on Saturdays. But speaking English doesn’t work with me anymore, so now they just have to look at each other in this weird way.

“We’re going to have to talk about this some more,” Mom says, and I nod, because I know she’ll probably have forgotten all about it by tomorrow. We finish watching the movie, Mom falls asleep on the sofa like she normally does, and Dad has to carry her to bed. Just kidding. He jokes that he’s going to do it, but she has to walk there herself.

Boyfriend-Girlfriend

Boel is standing by the water fountain when I get to school. She’s been in our class for two weeks now and *everything* has changed. I wish she’d never moved here.

“Hi, Saga,” she says with a big smile.

“Hi,” I reply.

“Abid is my boyfriend now,” she says.

“What about cooties?” I ask.

“We’re too old for that,” she says, rolling her eyes. “You have to go out with Storm. He and Abid are friends. Then all four of us can hang out.” She looks at me expectantly.

I don’t know what to say.

“I already asked Storm for you,” Boel says. “I gave a note to Abid to give to him.”

She smiles and looks at me. I guess she wants me to be happy about that or something.

“What?” I say. “Why’d you do that?” My stomach feels like it’s boiling like pasta water.

“You guys are good together,” Boel says.

“I don’t *want* to go out with Storm!” I exclaim before I remember that Boel’s the one who decides everything. “I don’t want to go out with anyone!” I add, because I can’t hold it in anymore.

Boel doesn’t care what I want, though.

“You’ll just have to wait for his answer,” she says. “I said he has to answer before noon.”

That’s all she says, then she walks away.

Answer

I have to wait until noon before I get an answer. I don’t look at Storm, and he doesn’t look at me either. I hope the math lesson never ends, that it just keeps going and going until everyone in the class is a math genius. But it’s over way too quickly.

“Are you excited?” Boel asks when we’re outside. She nudges me a little and laughs.

I shake my head.

“He’s going to answer yes,” Boel says. The other girls standing with us nod.

I hope the note never comes back.

I want him to check off “no”, but then everyone will see that Storm doesn’t want to go out with me. If he checks “yes”, then we’re boyfriend-girlfriend. And I don’t want that either. It’s a question that doesn’t have a right answer.

Then Abid waves at Boel. She rushes over. He hands her a note that’s been folded over and over. She opens it and reads it. Then she folds it again and comes over to me. She hands me the note.

“How did he answer?” I ask. Suddenly, I’m excited after all.

“You have to read it yourself,” Boel replies like she didn’t just open the note.

I open it slowly, everyone’s eyes on me. *Do you want to be Saga’s boyfriend, YES NO*

Storm has checked the box next to YES.

My face gets hot. What now?

Kiss

When Abid and Storm walk toward us at the end of the day, Boel shoves me toward Storm. I lose my balance and crash into him.

“Sorry,” I mumble, but I don’t look him in the eye. Storm doesn’t look at me either.

Abid is digging for something in his backpack.

“You have to kiss,” Boel says and looks at me. She stands there with her arms crossed. I shake my head.

“I don’t want to kiss,” I say.

“No way,” Storm says. He looks confused, the way he always does when he doesn’t understand what’s going on.

“Everyone who’s boyfriend-girlfriend has to kiss,” Boel says. Abid is leafing through a book he borrowed from the library. It doesn’t look like he’s planning on kissing Boel anytime soon, either.

“I have to talk to you,” Storm says to me.

“You guys are *sooo* cute!” Boel says. She makes a heart with her hands.

“Let’s go,” Storm mumbles. He pulls me after him.

“Look, they’re holding hands,” Boel says, but then Storm lets go of me.

“You have to come back to school at five today!” Boel shouts. What does she have planned now? I don’t respond.

We hurry away from school and walk side by side in complete silence. That’s never happened before.

“I checked off the wrong box,” Storm says. “The note was crooked. I wanted to check the box for no.”

“Boel’s the one who wrote it,” I say, hoping Storm will believe me.

It feels weird walking next to him. We don’t look at each other.

“What do we say to her?” I ask.

“I think we just have to tell her,” he replies.

He doesn’t understand how Boel is with us girls.

“We have to wait for the right time,” I say. I think about how Boel will probably be disappointed, maybe even angry. I don’t know.

“When’s that gonna be?” Storm asks. I just shrug. Storm doesn’t understand how it is when all the girls are standing there and talking and I know I’m the one they’re talking about, and then I hear them laughing.

Boel is a Dandelion

Mom is peeling carrots in the kitchen when I get home. Bonus is lying at her feet, waiting for something to fall on the floor.

“Hi,” she says when I come in. “Can you set the table?”

I get some plates and glasses and put them in their places on the table.

“How are things with Boel?” Mom asks.

“Not good,” I reply. I don’t want to talk about Boel right now.

“You need to be nice to her,” she says. Why does she say that?

“*She* is the one who isn’t nice,” I say. “She thinks she can boss us around!”

“Things aren’t that easy for her,” Mom says.

“What do you mean?”

“There was a meeting for the parents before she started in your class. Boel had a hard time where she used to live. It’s everyone’s responsibility to be nice to her.”

“Doesn’t Boel have a responsibility to be nice?” I ask. Dad is frying fish on the stove.

“Dandelion child,” Mom says. She says it to Dad, not to me.

“Boel is a dandelion?” I ask.

“It means she’s had a really rough time, but manages anyway,” Mom says. “That’s a dandelion child.” Mom sets a bowl of carrots on the table. The whole kitchen smells like fish.

If only Mom could see how Boel “manages” things, I think, but I don’t say anything.

There are so many sounds around the dinner table that no one notices how quiet I am. Leon talks the whole time.

“I can make my food disappear!” he shouts. “Abracadabra!” Then he takes a bite of fish so big he can barely fit it in his mouth.

The twins bang their spoons against their plates. They can’t get the fish onto their spoons by themselves. Dad helps them.

I imagine a withering dandelion. I blow on it, and all its white seeds float away. Away with Boel.

Kissing Class

We’re clearing the table after dinner when I remember Boel said we had to come to school at five. What does she want?

“Boel says we have to be at school at five. She thinks she can boss me around.”

“She probably wants to do something fun,” Mom says with a smile.

“I don’t know,” I pout. Mom doesn’t know Boel, and she doesn’t understand that whatever she has in mind probably *isn’t* going to be fun. “Do I have to bring Leon?”

“No,” Mom says. “Leon can stay here.”

That's something, at least, that I don't have to bring Leon.

I take teeny-tiny mouse-sized steps all the way to school. I hope they've already left by the time I get there. Why does Boel want us to come to school so late? She probably wants to decide something else for us. Maybe we have to wear yellow sweaters tomorrow. Do I have a yellow sweater? Will I have to buy one? Boel makes me feel so weird. Why do I have to be nice to her if she's not nice to me? I don't need to tell her Storm and I aren't boyfriend-girlfriend right now, I think. I can tell her that tomorrow.

"Hi, Saga," Boel says when I get to school. "We've been waiting for you."

All the girls in our class are here, standing in a circle around Boel.

"Kissing is *very* important in a relationship," Boel says. "Who's kissed someone before?" It's completely silent.

What is going on?

"Aren't we too young?" I ask. I *really* don't want to kiss. That's actually the *last* thing I want to do.

"No, Saga, we're just the right age," Boel says. "That's why we need a kissing class."

I want to say: *And you're the one who gets to decide that?* But then I remember that Boel is a dandelion and that I have to wait until the flower is white and then blow as hard as I can. I count to ten in my head just like I do when Leon breaks something he wasn't supposed to borrow.

"First, we'll practice on our hands." Boel holds up her hand, and then she kisses it. All the other girls do the same. We kiss our hands. It's weird, and everyone laughs.

"Now we're going to practice with each other," Boel says.

Then everyone stops laughing.

"I don't want to," I protest, but before I can say anything else, Boel marches over to me and kisses me right on the mouth. She presses her lips against mine.

“That wasn’t so bad, was it?” she asks. I see a soccer ball lying in the goal. I look at the ball, not at Boel. Then I run. I run away from the school as fast as I can. Boel shouts something after me, but I don’t hear what it is.

Alone

Once I stop being surprised, I get angry. My head is boiling. Why does Boel think she can just kiss me without asking? Why does she think she can do whatever she wants? I kick every stone I see on the road.

I’ve just been walking without thinking about where I’m going, but now I realize I’m almost at Storm’s place. The road to Storm’s house is my favorite one to walk, because then I know I’ll see Storm soon and that we’ll do something fun together. But can I go there now? Are we still friends? I can’t make up my mind, but my feet just keep moving, and then I’m there. Storm is sitting outside on the trampoline.

“Looks cold!” I shout.

I don’t tell him Boel kissed me. I don’t want to think about it.

“Just a little,” says Storm. “Did you tell Boel it’s over?”

I shake my head. Is that all Storm cares about? I want to ask if it’s over between us as best friends, too, if Abid is his best friend now, but I don’t ask—because what if he says yes?

“You said you’d tell her!” He looks mad. Storm usually never gets mad. Is going out with me really *that* terrible? When it’s not even real?

“I have to go now,” I say. The thought that Storm might not be my best friend anymore makes my stomach hurt. I’ve always thought that even though I only had one friend, that was enough. But what if I don’t have *any* friends at all now? I don’t want to start crying. I hurry out onto the road. Maybe it’s childish to run, but I do it anyway.

Am I going to be the only one in class without a boyfriend or a friend? I think as I stop to catch my breath. When Boel gets everyone to pair up, I'll be the only one left alone.

Carnival

Storm and I are boyfriend-girlfriend. We stand with Boel and Abid during recess. Storm keeps looking at me strangely. I guess he's wondering why I haven't told Boel it's over, but he doesn't say anything either. We stand next to each other, but we don't have anything to talk about. We don't hold hands, and we *definitely* don't kiss. Never in a million years.

"The carnival is coming!" Storm shouts, pointing. And then we all see it: a long line of carnival trucks is driving down the main road.

"It starts tonight," Abid says. "Should we go?" he asks, looking at Storm.

"Yes," says Boel. "That's exactly what couples do. Then you have to win a teddy bear for me." She looks at Abid. He doesn't seem to know what to say. He looks down at his feet and nods shyly.

"Cotton candy," Storm and I say at the same time.

"Romantic," Boel says.

"No," Storm protests.

"We always get cotton candy," I say.

"It's different now," says Boel. "Because you're boyfriend-girlfriend."

"I don't think so," I say.

"I do," Boel says. She waves as she walks away. I don't know what to say, left standing there with Abid and Storm. I lift my hand and wave, too. Then I walk off. Storm stays behind with Abid. It feels totally wrong.

I usually always look forward to the carnival coming to town. Now I'm just as nervous as I am excited. I don't know what Boel thinks couples are supposed to do at the carnival, but I'm sure she has some strong opinions about it.

First Prize

I can hear the music coming from the carnival the whole way over to the sports field. I want to run the last stretch like Storm and I usually do. But it doesn't feel right when I'm alone. Storm, Abid, and Boel are waiting by the entrance. My stomach flips with excitement. I love everything about the carnival: the bumper cars, spinning cups, booths, and especially cotton candy. After we buy tickets, I want to run over to the bumper cars right away, but Boel stops me.

"We have to do things in order," Boel says. She points at the Ferris wheel. Boel finds a seat for herself and Abid and another one for Storm and me. We usually ride together anyway, but now it feels different somehow. As the Ferris wheel goes around, I get a strange feeling in my stomach. I can't enjoy the view. It doesn't look like Storm can either.

"That was romantic," Boel says when we get off. She says that about everything we do. The spinning cups and the haunted ride are romantic, too. The three of us just go along with whatever Boel decides.

"Let's do the can toss now," she says.

"Yes!" I exclaim. I'm actually excited about that. Every year, I hope to win the big teddy bear. I'm probably too old for that now, but I can still hope.

"If you win the bear, can I have it?" Boel asks Abid.

"Sure, I guess," Abid says, and Boel grins from ear to ear like he's already won.

"If you win the bear, can I have it?" I ask Storm. Now I can double my chances of winning.

“Uh, I don’t know,” says Storm.

I toss first and hit the top of the pyramid. Three cans fall. I win a keychain. Abid tosses way over the top. Boel doesn’t want to try at all. Storm stands there for a long time. Then he hits the bottom of the pyramid, and the cans all tumble down.

“Can I have the bear?” I ask eagerly. Storm shakes his head firmly.

“I want it for myself,” he says and points to a big Winnie the Pooh bear. I would’ve picked Tigger, or maybe Kanga.

“Boyfriends are supposed to give bears to their girlfriends,” I say, and look at Boel. She doesn’t say anything, just shrugs. Her rules don’t seem to matter to her as much now, I guess.

“You would *never* have given me the bear if you’d won,” says Storm.

“Maybe,” I say, but I know he’s right. He hugs the bear, which is so big I can’t even see him behind it.

“I’m going home,” he says, and leaves with his arms wrapped around the giant Winnie the Pooh.

We just stand there for a while after he’s gone, but I’ve lost all interest in the bumper cars and the other rides. Boel doesn’t say anything about doing more either. She and Abid look at me like I ruined the whole afternoon.

On the way home, I think about how stupid it was to tell Storm he had to give me the bear. He’s my best friend—or at least he was before we started being boyfriend-girlfriend. Maybe Abid is his best friend now. Abid is nice. It’s probably easier to be friends with him.

I Tell Bonus Everything

Bonus is curled up in my bed. He's usually lying there when I'm not home. I let him stay and climb onto the bed next to him. I tell Bonus everything Boel has decided this week. He rolls onto his back. His legs flop out to the sides.

"She decided that Storm and I should be a couple, even though she knew I didn't want to," I say. Bonus puts his paw on my arm. Mom comes into my room with a pile of folded laundry. She looks at me like she can see right through me.

"What's going on, Saga?" she asks.

I pull the blanket over my head.

"Oh, sweetheart," says Mom. She strokes the blanket.

"Boel decides *everything*," I say. "She even decided that Storm and I should be a couple!"

"That's not okay," says Mom. She lifts the blanket and strokes my back.

"But she's a dandelion child," I say, looking at Mom. "You said so."

"That doesn't make it okay, though," says Mom. She talks in that voice she uses when she really means business. "I'm going to have a chat with Håkon."

"Do you have to?" I ask. I don't know what Mom will say to Håkon. Or how Boel will react.

"Yes, I do," Mom says firmly. "But right now I want pancakes with blueberry jam."

"I don't know if I'm hungry," I say, but I manage to eat two pancakes anyway.

Mom Creates a Disaster

I get dressed and eat breakfast, but really, I just want to get back in bed. What's going to happen when Mom talks to Håkon?

"What are you going to say to Håkon?" I ask her.

"Just leave that to me, Saga," Mom says.

I don't dare, but I guess I have no choice. Mom is wearing a big, bright-pink scarf. *Everyone* will see her. She's going to light up the whole schoolyard.

When I tell Storm my mom embarrasses me, he always says she's cool. That's because she's not *his* mom. But Storm doesn't get embarrassed by his mom either. That's because his mom never wears giant pink scarves when she comes to school.

During recess, I see—and so does everyone else—Mom marching out of the school with the long pink scarf fluttering behind her. It falls off halfway to the car, and Lars from sixth grade picks it up and runs after her. I'm paralyzed on the playground. I don't know how to stand, or where to look. It's always been Storm and me during recess. We used to play on the hill behind the school, but now it's not Storm and me anymore, and the hill is too childish.

"Hey," says Storm, looking at me.

"You're here?" I ask, surprised.

"I saw your mom and thought you might need some help," says Storm, looking at me.

"Is it bad?" he asks.

"Just a little," I lie.

"Just a little?" says Storm.

"Okay, it's a disaster," I say. "I knew it would be when she said she'd talk to Håkon."

"What kind of disaster? Nuclear disaster? Natural disaster?"

"Worse," I say. And then I have to laugh, because when Storm starts talking about the different kinds of disasters, it makes me feel a little bit better. He looks at me and rolls his eyes, and then we both laugh for a long time. Now *we're* the ones the others are looking at. Two boys from sixth grade start pointing at us, but I don't care. It feels so good to laugh with Storm again.

"Wanna come over after school?" he asks.

“Yeah,” I say. “Of course.” I throw my hands in the air and cheer like I’ve won the lottery, that’s how happy I am. Then I feel my face get hot and think that maybe it was silly to cheer. Why did I do that? Afterward, I feel confused. Are we friends again? I don’t dare ask Storm—what if it makes him change his mind?

Fight

We see Boel standing alone on the playground as we’re leaving.

She looks different when she’s alone and doesn’t have anyone to boss around—almost looks a little confused, like she doesn’t really know what to do.

“Did you tell her it’s over?” Storm asks, glancing at her. I shake my head. He looks disappointed.

“I haven’t had time,” I say, knowing that’s the worst excuse ever. “I’ll do it right now.” I walk over to Boel.

“What did you tell your mom?” she snaps at me before I manage to say anything. She takes a step toward me and shoves me. I almost fall over.

“What are you doing?” I shout. Boel doesn’t answer. “Do you want to fight?” I ask without thinking. Why did I say that?

“Sure,” Boel says, and shoves me again. I reach for her long hair, grab it, and hold onto it as tightly as I can. Boel screams. When I let go, she grabs my arm and twists it behind my back. It really hurts.

“Ow, let go!” I scream. She loosens her grip, and I manage to pull my arm free and kick her shin.

“Stop it, both of you!” Storm yells. “I’m getting Håkon!”

Boel grabs my arm with both hands—and I lean forward and bite her. She screams. It's like time stands still. I feel like I should say sorry, but I just can't do it. It's not all my fault, is it? She did start the fight, after all. Håkon and Storm come running.

"We need to get you to a doctor," Håkon says when he sees Boel's hand.

"I haven't gotten picked up yet," Boel says tearfully. Håkon looks around.

"We can pick up your foster dad on the way," he says. Boel's face is white. "Are you guys getting picked up?" he asks me and Storm.

"We're going back to my house," Storm replies.

"Alright, then," Håkon says, scratching his ear. "We'll talk about this tomorrow." He takes Boel to his car, and Storm and I start walking away from the school.

"My arm hurts," I say, holding it against my chest.

"Yeah," Storm replies. We both know that what I did was worse, though. Biting is never okay. I've never even gotten in a fight before. Maybe a little with Leon at home, but I've never bitten him. Mom and Dad would be *furious* if I did that.

"She has a mark," I say.

"Yeah," Storm repeats, and then he's quiet. My whole body aches. Who wants to be friends with a girl who bites?

"Do you think I'll get expelled?" I ask when we reach the street we take to get to Storm's house. I stop and hold my breath, waiting for him to answer. Expelled in the fourth grade... what would I do?

"No," Storm says. "But you'll probably have to make up with Boel."

"Ugh," I say. "That doesn't sound that easy. How am I supposed to do that?"

"Say sorry and stuff," Storm says. He doesn't look at me, just rocks back and forth on his feet.

"I didn't want to fight," I say.

“But you bit Boel,” Storm says. He looks serious.

“Do you not want to be friends with me anymore?” I ask. I couldn’t bear being expelled *and* losing Storm in the same week.

“Of course I do,” he says, but it doesn’t really sound like he means it.

“I have to go home,” I say. I don’t look at Storm, just at the big oak tree. I watch the branches moving up and down in the wind. Up and down.

“Okay,” he says. He doesn’t ask me to come over.

“Okay,” I say. Then I walk away quickly without looking back.

Håkon Calls

I stay in my room all afternoon, waiting for Håkon to call. Bonus scarfs down the treats I toss onto the floor in a heartbeat, then he looks at me, begging for more. Mom is at tumbling with Leon. When they come home, Mom and Dad give the twins a bath. They splash and giggle and push the rubber duck underwater, squealing when it pops up.

Mom’s phone rings.

“It’s Håkon,” she says. I don’t hear Dad’s reply.

“Should I pick up?” Mom asks.

“I’ll call him back later,” Dad says.

It’s only a little past six, but I hurry into the little bathroom, brush my teeth, and pee. I’m not hungry at all, so I skip my evening snack.

I crawl under the covers with the door open. I can hear Dad calling Håkon.

“Hmm,” Dad says. “Okay, I see.” I can’t hear Håkon’s end of the call. I imagine him telling Dad about everything I did. “You’d better sit down for this,” he’s probably saying. He’s probably telling Dad he has to have a talk with me. That they can’t have a girl in the class who bites other people. I think Dad is going to come straight up to my room once he

hangs up, and I'm right. I pull the blanket over my head, close my eyes, and try to breathe as calmly as I can.

"Saga," Dad whispers. "I want to talk to you for a sec."

No, I think. *I can't*. Dad sits on the edge of the bed and sings a lullaby, even though I'm too big for that and he probably thinks I'm sleeping.

He stands up and shuts the door. And that's when I start crying. I cry quietly into my pillow until I fall asleep.

Håkon Talks to the Class

Everything is different when I get to school the next day. The girls go straight over to Boel and give her a hug. Like she's been in the hospital for weeks and they've missed her *so* much. No one says anything to me, but they stare at me when they think I'm not looking. Boel doesn't look at me at all. That's even worse. The lump in my stomach gets bigger. I try to whisper something to Storm, but he just stares at his desk and doesn't look at me.

"Good morning," Håkon says. He looks straight at me.

Now I'm going to be expelled, I think.

"I have to go to the bathroom," I say, standing up.

"Hang on a second, Saga," Håkon says.

"But I really need to go!" I speed toward the door even though Håkon didn't say it was okay. Everyone is watching me. Håkon says something, but I don't hear it. I hurry down the hallway and into the bathroom, where I sit on the toilet lid. There are smiley faces drawn on the walls and names with hearts around them. I kick the door. I want to stay here for the rest of the day, with the door locked. For the rest of my life, maybe.

Then, someone knocks.

"Saga, can I come in?" I hear Storm's voice ask.

“You’re in the girls’ bathroom,” I say.

Did Håkon send him to get me?

“I know,” Storm says. “Open up!”

I unlock the door and open it a crack.

“Am I expelled?” I ask.

Storm shakes his head.

“You aren’t expelled, but you do have to be friends with Boel. Just like I thought would happen,” he says.

“I don’t know if I can do that,” I reply. “Boel is so…”

Storm interrupts me.

“Saga, you have to remember that Boel is brand new in our class. It’s not easy for her.” Sometimes Storm sounds like a grown-up when he talks.

“But you *know* how bossy she is!” What did Håkon even say to the class while I was sitting in the bathroom?

“Håkon read a story about two kids who stopped being friends,” Storm says, like he’d read my mind.

“I’ve *never* been friends with Boel,” I say. Storm sighs heavily and looks at me like I’ve done something wrong.

“You could at least try,” he says. “Boel wants to be.”

“She does?” I ask, staring at the wall and counting hearts. I get to five.

“Yeah. She wants to be friends with you,” Storm says. “Now come on!” He holds out his hand and pulls me to my feet. I follow him back to the classroom, but I don’t know where to look when I walk in. Everyone stares at me. I just stare at the ground.

The rest of the day is weird. Håkon smiles more than normal. Boel is unusually quiet. She glances at me sometimes, but I pretend not to notice.

Does she really want to be friends with me? Is it because of what Håkon said? What happened while I was in the bathroom? I have a thousand questions and no answers.

At the end of the day, I walk home as quickly as I can without waiting for Storm. I don't think he wants to walk with me today, anyway. Maybe not tomorrow either. It's like *I'm Boel now*. I'm the one who did something wrong. I'm the one who bit someone.

I count icicles on my way home and get to twenty. I think about when Boel was standing alone by the water fountain. She was kicking it and looked sad until she saw me. She couldn't boss the fountain around, I think. She can't boss around the icicles or the snow either. How would it feel if I had to move and start in a new class? *Think about that, Saga*, I say to myself, and then I smile a little, because it sounds like something Storm would've said to me.

Twigson and Amundsen

I don't know what to do with myself when I get home. The twins giggle and hit me with their mittened hands. I drop my backpack in the hallway and shout "bye," and before Dad manages to say anything, I've already shut the door behind me.

I know what I need. I need some puppy cuddles.

I head over to Heidi's and ring the bell.

"Ah, here comes my little helper!" Heidi says when she opens the door. "Come on in, Saga!" She looks me up and down. "Hey, are you okay?"

I have to bite my lip to stop myself from crying.

"A lot has happened, I guess," I said. "And now I got in a fight, too." I look at Twigson while I talk. He licks my hand.

"Did you and Storm fight?" Heidi asks, looking surprised.

“No, not with Storm. With Boel, the new girl in class. She was the one who wanted to fight.”

“Is that so?” Heidi says.

“But I bit her. And that’s unforgivable,” I say.

“Now, that’s a bit harsh,” Heidi says. “You might not believe it, looking at me now, but I used to fight quite a bit when I was younger. I had three brothers, so I knew how to throw a punch, let me tell you. The other girls were a little scared of me.”

“Did you ever get expelled?” I ask.

“No, but I had to go to detention a lot. That was bad enough.”

Heidi pats me on the back. One of the puppies is making its way across the floor toward the kitchen.

“He’s a little explorer, that Amundsen,” Heidi says.

“How’d you come up with that name?” I ask.

“Well, Roald Amundsen was a famous polar explorer,” Heidi explains. “He went on a lot of expeditions, including to the South Pole.”

She stands up and brings Amundsen back to the living room.

“Maybe I’ll become a polar explorer too,” I say. I figure that means traveling far, far away, and that’s exactly what I need right now.

“It’s always best to solve your problems at home before heading off on a journey,” Heidi says.

Amundsen starts sneaking toward the kitchen again. He moves slowly, so it takes a little while before anyone notices. His tail wags happily when he reaches the kitchen.

Twigson starts to follow him, but stops halfway and lies down to sleep.

“Tomorrow, Twigson, we’re working from home,” Heidi says.

“Did he get a job?” I ask.

“It’s a lot of work eating, growing, pooping, drinking and peeing. A full-time job,” Heidi replies.

“That doesn’t sound like a real job,” I say.

My pocket vibrates. I know it’s Dad trying to call me again. He’s already called several times. I don’t want to go home, but now he’s probably calling Storm. Maybe he already has, and then he’ll call Heidi next.

“I guess I should head home for dinner,” I say. “Before my dad gets mad.”

“Is it dinner time already?” Heidi says. “I’m glad you came by, Saga. You’ll have to put that polar trip on hold for now.”

“Yeah, maybe,” I say. I kiss the puppies goodbye before I go.

Amundsen to the South Pole

I stand outside Heidi’s house and Google “Amundsen” on my phone. Pictures pop up of a serious-looking man with a long moustache. I read a little before I put my phone in my pocket. Roald Amundsen decided he wanted to be a polar explorer the year after his father died. He was only fifteen years old. He slept with his window open and swam in the fjord every day to prepare.

“Saga!” Dad calls as I walk in the door. “Come to the kitchen.”

“Coming,” I reply. I take off my coat as slowly as I can and neatly set my shoes in place instead of just kicking them off. Then I go to the bathroom even though I don’t actually have to pee. I think about the South Pole, about all the snow and ice. How cold can it *really* be?

“What happened, Saga?” Dad asks, even though he knows, since he talked to Håkon yesterday.

“Nothing,” I say, but that’s not enough.

“We’ll talk about it later,” Dad says. “Boel and Storm are waiting for you up in your room.”

“What are they doing here?” I cry, glaring at him, but he’s busy stirring dinner.

“Storm said you left school before him. He brought Boel here, so I get to meet her, too,” Dad says.

“You can’t just let them into my room!”

Dad just laughs, and that’s the worst thing in the world—when something is really serious, and Mom and Dad just laugh at me.

Saga to the South Pole

Was this how Amundsen felt when he was preparing to go to the South Pole? I wonder as I climb the stairs to the second floor. No, it can’t be, because even though it was cold and icy, Amundsen was actually looking forward to his trip. I’m *dreading* this.

The door to my room is closed. I open it and see Storm showing Boel my drawings I hung up over my desk.

“What are you doing?” I snap before either of them can say anything.

“They’re really good,” Boel says, pointing at my drawings. I don’t respond. I don’t get why she’s here or why she’s complimenting my art.

Boel looks nervous. Did Storm make her come here? Did she even want to come? Maybe she’d rather be at home, eating dinner. They’re probably having spaghetti.

“Boel’s getting a puppy,” Storm says. It looks like he’s holding his breath.

“Yes!” Boel says happily. “I’m getting one from Heidi.”

“We can visit him at Boel’s,” Storm says.

Zelda is moving to Oslo, so it has to be Amundsen or Twigson. Amundsen’s a little bossy, so he’d be the perfect match for Boel.

“What color is your puppy?” I ask.

“The best color,” Boel replies. “White with light brown spots.”

Oh no... that’s Twigson. Amundsen is darker brown.

“You can’t take Twigson!” I say loudly.

“I’m calling him Milo,” Boel replies.

“You can’t do that,” I say. “His name is Twigson.”

“Well, now it’s Milo. You don’t get to choose my puppy’s name,” Boel snaps.

She looks at Storm. I do, too. Storm nods, then shakes his head, like he can’t decide.

“His name was Twigson first,” Storm says. “But now he’s Milo.” He looks down at his giraffe socks.

“I need to open the window,” I say. “I’m training for the South Pole.”

The wind blows right in. Now I’m going to get in trouble for having the heater on and the window open. It gets cold really quickly.

Dad shouts from the kitchen, and I go downstairs without saying anything else. I hear the door shutting when Storm and Boel leave. What is Heidi thinking? Is she really giving Twigson to Boel?

Milo

Amundsen is a polar explorer. Twigson is a stick. Milo doesn’t mean anything at all! How can she call him Milo?

After dinner, I sit in my room and Google “Milo”. I learn that it means *Beloved*, and that’s kind of nice, I guess, because I really do love Twigson. *Beloved, Milo*. Once I know that, Milo seems like a much nicer name. I don’t want to tell Boel I like it, though, and when I think that, I realize how childish I’m being. The other kids in class are starting to kiss and have boyfriends and girlfriends, and here I am arguing about a puppy’s name! Am I

immature? I remember Mom and Dad saying my cousin had to wait a year before starting school because he wasn't mature enough. Maybe it runs in the family. But I can't ask Mom and Dad, either—they'll just laugh and think I'm being silly.

Heidi Gets Visitors

I sit at my desk and look out at the clouds floating past like sailboats in the sky. Storm comes and hangs out with me at recess and things are almost like before, but not quite. Sometimes Storm hangs out with Abid during recess, and then I'd rather stay in the classroom. I have a good view and can see them chatting with Boel. Boel is smiling and laughing, and I bet Storm said something funny, something typical of him, and I try to figure out what it could be. Storm and Abid laugh, too. It looks like they're having a lot of fun together.

When Storm glances toward the window, I quickly look down at my book and pretend I'm reading. And when he comes in to try to get me to come outside, I'm already on my way to the bathroom. Boel doesn't tease us about being a couple anymore. Maybe Storm told her it's over?

I go over to Heidi's every day after school. She says that Boel can't take Twigson home until he's ten weeks old. He has to stay with Jippi until then. I hope Heidi will change her mind.

She always knows it's me at the door. She's said she can hear it from the way I ring the doorbell.

"Come in," she says. "I'm just taking care of something in the kitchen."

The puppies are awake and playing. Amundsen bites Twigson's ear. Twigson rolls over on his back and kicks his legs in the air.

"Amundsen isn't very nice," I say loudly so Heidi can hear me from the kitchen.

"Maybe he's a better fit for Boel? Can you ask if she wants him instead?"

Heidi comes to the living room doorway and looks thoughtful. I hope she doesn't laugh at me. Grown-ups think the weirdest things are funny. But she doesn't laugh.

"Hmm," she says.

"Will you think about it?" I ask, because that *hmm* sounded pretty promising.

"No," Heidi says. "They've made up their minds. They want Twigson."

"Okay, but is that really such a good idea? What if she wants to fight?"

"With the puppy?" Heidi says, raising an eyebrow.

"Boel gets Twigson. What about me?" I sigh dramatically, even though I know it's rude.

"You can visit him," Heidi says. But she's wrong. I can't do that.

She goes back to the kitchen and starts making coffee. I play with the puppies as she sets the table in the living room with plates and cups and an ugly little cake. The doorbell rings before I even have time to ask who's coming.

"Milo!" a familiar voice calls from the hallway. What is *she* doing here? I want to disappear. Without thinking, I hide behind the kitchen door.

Hide and Seek

Boel comes running into the living room. I stand completely still, trying not to make a sound. She's holding a small stuffed animal, and she waves it in front of Twigson. He licks her face, like they're already best friends. Her foster parents and Heidi chat in the kitchen.

"My little snugglepuff," Boel says sweetly. "My Milo." It's weird to hear Boel's voice sound so... nice. She lies on the floor and scratches Twigson behind the ears, just how he likes it. He makes soft snorting sounds. How do I sneak out of here without getting caught? Then, all of a sudden, Twigson starts walking toward the kitchen.

“Come, Milo!” Boel calls, but he doesn’t listen. He sniffs behind the door. When Boel opens it, Twigson wags his tail and trots over to me.

“Hi, Saga,” Boel says, like it’s perfectly normal to have found me hiding behind a door.

“Uh, hi,” I say.

“Are you coming out, or what?” she asks. Twigson licks my hand, then runs back to her and hops for the toy she’s holding in her hand.

“I’m not Storm’s girlfriend,” I say. “I don’t want a boyfriend.”

“I know,” Boel says. “Storm told me.”

“Is Storm best friends with Abid?” I ask. Boel dangles the stuffed animal in front of Twigson—Milo—then drops it on the floor.

“I think so,” she replies. “We’re all friends.”

I don’t know what to say or where to look. Then Heidi appears with a cake that’s a lot better-looking than the one that’s already on the table.

“Time for some cake, girls,” she says, as if it’s perfectly normal for Boel and me to sit down and eat cake together. I stare at Heidi and try to wink a signal or something, but she doesn’t get it—or doesn’t care.

Boel’s foster parents reach out to shake my hand. First the mom, then the dad.

“Hi,” her foster dad says. “Boel was so lucky to join your class.”

I feel a lump growing in my stomach. Are they going to bring up the biting? The cake looks good, but I don’t know if there’s room for it in my stomach with a lump this big.

Then the doorbell rings again.

“That’ll be your parents,” Heidi says, smiling at me. I don’t understand what’s going on. Did she invite them, too?

“Could you get the door?” Heidi asks Boel’s foster dad. He stands up and heads for the door.

Boel is playing with Milo on the floor. Heidi comes over to me.

“This is the South Pole, Saga,” she says quietly. “You don’t have to go far to find big challenges. They come to you.”

I nod. I think I understand what she means.

“Hi,” Mom and Dad say to Boel and her foster parents.

“Let’s eat!” Heidi says. “One successful cake and one not-so-successful. You’ll have to guess which.” Everyone laughs and grabs a slice. The grown-ups talk about how the snow hasn’t come yet and how dark it is without it. Boel eats her cake super quickly and sits down on the floor with Milo. I watch them. Then, I sit on the floor, too.

“Do you think grown-ups are boring?” Boel asks, looking at Milo.

I giggle a little because I do think they are a lot of the time.

“Me too,” Boel says.

“Milo too,” I say.

“Yeah,” Boel says. “Milo thinks they’re *sooo* boring. He’s ready for an adventure!”

“With Amundsen,” I say, and just then, Amundsen jumps on top of Milo. “He likes being in charge.”

“I think he wants to play,” Boel says. “He wants to play with Milo.”

Amundsen bites Milo’s neck.

I think about when we fought.

“Does Milo like that?” I ask.

“Look, he’s wagging his tail,” Boel says.

“So he’s having fun?” I ask.

“Lots of fun,” Boel says. “But Heidi says that sometimes Amundsen is a little too bossy. Then she tells him to stop.”

“It wasn’t fun when we fought,” I say without looking at her.

“Not at all,” she says.

I want to ask why she felt like she needed to boss us around, but I can’t get the words out.

“Does it hurt?” I ask, pointing at Boel’s hand.

She shakes her head.

Milo and Amundsen have fallen asleep, curled up next to each other. Zelda is sleeping on the doormat. Jippi is sleeping on her own in the dog bed.

“You can come visit Milo,” Boel says.

I nod and stroke Twigson’s soft fur. I can keep saying “Twigson” in my head and “Milo” out loud, I guess. Twigson blinks a few times, then falls back asleep.

“So nice to see that you two are friends,” Mom says.

Yeah, maybe a little, I think.

“I think that’s enough cake for now,” Dad says, laughing loudly. I roll my eyes at Boel.

Mom, Dad, and I leave first. Heidi walks us to our car.

“I think you’re ready for the South Pole now, Saga,” she says so only I can hear it.

“Am I?” I ask.

“You’ve solved your problems at home before heading out on your expedition.” She winks at me.

Boel is taking Milo home. Amundsen is staying with Heidi. No matter how stressful it’s been, she says she can’t give up her little polar explorer.

I like that.

Bonus

Bonus means getting something extra, a *bonus*, in English. When we get home, Bonus is lying in my bed—a real *bonus*. He rolls onto his back when he sees me. I rest my head on his belly. That’s our favorite snuggle spot. Bonus means *good* in Latin. A *good bonus*.

“Those are some pretty nice puppies you had,” I tell him, because he hasn’t met them yet. “We’ll probably see them out on walks. Amundsen’s staying with Heidi and Twigson moved in with Boel. Twigson’s the smallest and cutest, white with brown spots. Amundsen’s an adventurer. Twigson and Amundsen like playing together. Amundsen’s the bossy one, just like Boel was. Heidi liked that Boel and I are sort of friends now. She says it’s good to solve problems at home before heading off on an expedition. Anyway, I’m too young to go on an expedition. I’m too young to fall in love, too. That’ll probably happen when we start middle school. We can go visit Twigson at Boel’s. Storm’s probably gonna be surprised. Abid is nice, maybe I’ll get to know him better too. I’ve never had so many friends before. I’d call that a *bonus*,” I say to Bonus. He looks at me and perks up his ears.