

Sample Chapter

GRETA GRACE

by
Joanna Quinn



EMERALD LAKE
BOOKS
Sherman, Connecticut

Sample Chapter

Greta Grace

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This one is for you, Tom, Morgan and Tommy.

Chapter 1

CANCER. YUP. *That's exactly what Casey Cunningham is like. Just like the poisonous, hateful disease that riddled its way through my grandmother's body. She's toxic. Hateful. I'm not lying. She is.*

"Greta Grace, is it true?" Samantha frantically grabbed me by the sleeve of my shirt, which, by the way, I spent a lot of time picking out. "Sarah said that Casey was glaring at you and made a comment when Mrs. Barrett handed back your science test. Is that true?"

"Yeah, but it's not my fault she got a D." I threw the shredded straps of my backpack over my shoulder and started down the hall, with Samantha walking quickly beside me. "I mean, seriously. She's mad because I did good on a test? That's just so stupid."

"Okay, but do you remember how she tortured Emily last year? Remember, she 'accidentally' slammed her

into the wall. She ‘accidentally’ spilled neon-green paint all over her new boots, and she ‘accidentally’ made her face-plant in front of everyone at the chorus concert. And do you remember she managed to not get caught, not even once, and do you remember how she would post something humiliating online every morning? Even though Casey never used Emily’s name, everyone knew who she was talking about. Remember?”

“I know, but, like, what am I supposed to do?” I looked at Samantha to see if she had an answer to this impossible question. She was making me nervous! “For now, though,” I said, “we’re going to get on the bus and forget that that too-tall beast with red hair and brown hawk-like eyes even exists. We’ll show her we don’t even care.”

Samantha looked at me with a scrunched-up, not-so-sure kind of face and said, “That’s what we are going to do?”

“Yep. That’s what we are going to do.” I sighed and climbed onto the bus.

“Greta Grace! Oh, Greta Grace. Come sit here, Greta Grace!” From the back of the bus, the red-haired vulture sang my name out over and over in her deep, scruffy voice. I hated her. I walked past Charlie Tierney, and he didn’t even look up, but I didn’t care.

My moment of confidence disappeared. I knew I was in rough shape when I didn’t even care if Charlie noticed me. Then again, why would he when he hadn’t the other 1,888,222 times I was on the bus with him? Even if he did, I bet the same thing would happen that happened in fifth grade when I liked Kyle McKelly. As soon as he found out I liked him, he went from picking

me first for every team in gym class to leaving me to the other team to pick, usually last. It was awful. *Wait! Why was I even thinking of this?*

I needed to focus on Casey Cunningham right now. I sat in my seat, closed my eyes, took some slow deep breaths, and prayed to my angels that she would just shut up, but she didn't.

"Finally, our stop," Samantha whispered. We looked straight ahead so there wouldn't be any eye contact with Casey and then got off the bus and watched it drive away.

"If only that bus would keep going until it drove Casey Cunningham right off this planet." Samantha looked at me to see if I was still paying attention. "Don't you think it's weird that sometimes she gets off before us, sometimes after us, and that she's barely ever on the bus in the mornings?"

"I don't know, but it doesn't really matter. I'm sure she's here to stay." I sighed.

Samantha put her hand up for our daily departing personal handshake: high five, shoulder nudge, clap twice, and a hug. "I'll call you after my piano lesson, but don't worry. We'll figure this out."

Chapter 2

AS I SLOWLY ROUNDED THE CORNER to Mrs. McGee's house, I could see her kneeling in her front yard with potted plants and her spade. Brushing a bead of sweat off her upper lip, she stood up, took off her pink floppy sun hat, and pulled her white curls into place.

"Hello, my sweet girl. How was your day?" She peeled her flowered gardening gloves off and rubbed her hands together. "Gardening is not as easy anymore with these arthritic fingers, Greta Grace, but these arms are still good for giving hugs."

She always hugged me like she hadn't seen me in a week, even though I saw her every day. In fact, I bet that I've seen her practically every day since I was five years old, and I'm not even exaggerating. That was when Dad left, after he announced that he "just couldn't do this anymore." I still remember it perfectly. I'm pretty sure I was the "this" he couldn't do anymore.

Mom was so sad back then, so she and I spent tons of time at Mrs. McGee's house. They would talk while I drew and colored pictures and played with Rudy, Mrs. McGee's adorable, white fluffy dog. That was when Mom got all spiritual and stuff. Dad sent birthday cards for a couple of years, and then he disappeared. Maybe he's dead. I don't really care, but Mom insisted I talk to someone about it, so I went and talked to a therapist. He was super nice, but he just kept telling me the same thing Mom told me. "This has nothing to do with you. He has his own issues. Blah, blah, blah..." Whatever. I'm over it. We don't need him anyway.

"Greta Grace, are you okay, sweetie? You seem like you are in another world."

I pouted. "I was just about to tell you about how awful my day was, Mrs. McGee. Like, for real. It was the worst ever." I tossed my backpack on the steps and grabbed my gardening gloves off the white iron bench. They were a perfect match to the ones Mrs. McGee had, but much smaller. Everything about me is small. Mom said I am due for a big growth spurt but to remember that "good things come in small packages." Not sure what that means.

The one good thing about being small is that I'm the fastest one on our lacrosse team. Looks like I still am this year too. The coach said that's because I'm so close to the ground. I wonder if that's true?

Anyway, everybody knows that if Casey Cunningham starts calling out your name on the bus, you're in trouble. Big trouble. Her words are worse than paint tossed on you or something crazy like that.

She embarrasses people so badly. She'll make fun of anything—zits, weight, clothes and even your mother. So now, if she walks into the cafeteria and doesn't have a seat at the lunch table she sits at, two or three girls will get up and offer her their chairs. If she doesn't have a pencil in class, whatever girl sits closest to her will give her one. I think even the boys are scared of her.

Maybe it's all for show, though. Once, I caught her being nice to some of the little kids in the elementary school right next to our school, but she had no idea I saw. If she did, she probably would have knocked them down or something.

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