

***The Kid in the Red Jacket* by Barbara Park**

“Hey! I got an idea!” offered Molly excitedly. “Why don’t we go over to my house and sit there?”

It was like she hadn’t even noticed that we weren’t becoming friends.

I shook my head and moved to the middle of the yard. Molly sat next to me and tried to grab my hand again. Then she wrinkled up her nose and grinned.

“I like you, Howard Jeeper,” she said. “Do you like *me*?”

All of a sudden I just couldn’t stand it anymore. That happens sometimes. You’re going along, trying to put up with something, then all of a sudden it gets to you.

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“Listen, I think you’d better go home now, okay?” I blurted. “I think I heard your mother calling.”

Molly got a funny look on her face. “No, you didn’t.”

“Yes, I did!” I insisted, holding my hand up to my ear. “Listen. Didn’t you hear her?”

Looking puzzled, Molly stared at me a second. Then suddenly her face seemed to lose its happiness.

“I didn’t hear my mommy calling,” she said in a small little voice. “And you didn’t either.”

“I did too,” I persisted. “I’m almost positive that I—”

“No, you didn’t!” Molly yelled, interrupting me. “You didn’t hear my mommy calling me because I don’t have a mommy anymore! She and my daddy got divorced from me! I just live with my nonny now!”

I didn’t know what to say.

“Oh,” I replied, finally.

Neither one of us spoke for a while. Then Molly took a deep breath, like she had been doing some serious thinking.

“My mommy might come get me someday, you know. Or maybe my daddy will...”

I was still feeling like a creep, so I just nodded. I probably should have said, “Sure, they will,” or something nice. But I didn’t.

“Well,” declared Molly, suddenly shaking her wild, frizzy hair all over the place. “I’m not going to think about that anymore. My nonny said I shouldn’t worry my pretty little head about it.”

“Okay,” I replied stupidly.