

## *You Don't Know Me* by David Klass

I am afraid as I walk to school. Every time I see a member of the secret sorority of pretty fourteen-year-old girls I look the other way.

I walk past Billy Beezer's house and see no sign of him. Besides his being suspended and grounded, it would not surprise me if Mr. and Mrs. Beezer have also chained him up in the basement. They have high hopes for their young Beezer. They believe that he will graduate first in his class from our anti-school, go to Harvard, become President, and also discover a cure for old age.

They cannot have been too thrilled about his egg-roll-stealing caper.

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I believe that the full wrath of the disappointed Beezer parents had descended on my friend who is not a friend. I look for his face in the window, but the curtains have all been pulled closed as if out of a deep sense of shame.

I arrive at school two minutes early. My locker is on the third floor, in a fairly remote corner. I turn the dial on the combination lock three to the left, four to the right, five to the left, but there are no hopeful clicks and the door remains sealed tight. This does not surprise me. My locker does not work the way other lockers do. It is not at all impressed by correct combinations. My locker is far tougher and meaner than that.

I do not dial the combination again right away. "Open up," I whisper. "I am in no mood for this today. If you give me trouble, you will regret it."

My locker does not respond, because it has no mouth, but what it is thinking is, "Take your best shot, doofus. My grandfather was a vault at Fort Knox and I don't open for the likes of you."

I kick my locker so hard that I dent it. It is possible that I also fracture several of my toes. I begin to hop around in pain. And then I lower my injured foot and the pain vanishes because I see Glory Hallelujah herself in all her glory walking toward me, and she looks relatively happy, although she appears slightly baffled at something she has just seen. "Are you okay?" she asks.

"Oh, yes," I say, suddenly dizzy as the full force of her bright blue eyes is turned in my direction. Forgive me for being dramatic, but it is like standing on a high hill, looking into a sunrise. "Fine," I gasp, "just fine."

"You kicked your locker."

"Just practicing a soccer move."

“I didn’t know you play soccer,” she says.

“I play all sports,” I tell her. And then, because I have been rendered giddy by looking into the mountain sunrise of her blue eyes, I am able to blurt out, “Why did you eat my note?”

She smiles. The lights of the universe blink on and off. Matter and antimatter nearly come together. She is smiling at me. *At me!* “I was hungry,” she says.

So she is a goat. Well, no matter. Goat or girl, she is still my beloved. Her secret is safe with me. I will bring her pieces of paper and tin cans. I will tie a bell around her neck and lead her to green and grassy pastures.

“That was a joke, silly,” she says. “What else was I going to do with your note? I mean, you passed it to me right at the end of class. Mrs. Gabriel was about to turn around and catch us. I couldn’t risk having her find it.”

I am smiling back at her, and nodding at her response, and I am thinking. “Of course. It makes perfect sense. Eat the evidence. If Billy Beezer had swallowed the egg roll, he could have denied everything. He would be a free man now.”

“And I was a little bit surprised,” she says. “I didn’t know you liked me.”

“Well ...” I start to say, and run out of words.

“I mean, I kind of thought so. But you never said anything.”

“But ...” I try to point out, and don’t know how to finish the sentence.

“I thought maybe you might say something to me after math class yesterday, but every time I saw you after that, it seemed like you were embarrassed, and hurried away.”

“No...” I try to explain, but how can I begin to describe such a complex case of mutual misunderstanding?

Glory Hallelujah is watching me. “I guess you’re a little shy,” she says. “Is that it?”

I nod.

“Shy is good,” she says. “I have a horse, Luke. Well, actually I just own half of Luke. Isn’t that weird, to just own half a horse? Anyway, Luke is real shy. If he doesn’t know you, he won’t take an apple from your hand. Even if he’s hungry. But once he gets to know you, he’s the friendliest horse in the whole world.”

I am trying to follow all this, but I am still a bit dizzy and the words are flying thick and fast. I know that I am being compared to half a horse. Usually this would not be a good thing, but in this case it sounds just fine. I am quite willing to be either the front or even the back half of a horse if Glory Hallelujah thinks I am the friendliest horse in the world. I would eat an apple out of her hand. I would eat a pineapple from the crook of her elbow. If necessary, I believe I would be willing to eat a guava, skin and all, from between her feet.

The bell rings. We have to be in homeroom in three minutes.

“Oops, I better go get my books,” Glory Hallelujah says, and takes a step away.

I am surprised to hear myself say, “Wait a minute, Gloria.”

She turns. Waits.

My heart is going *Ka-wang! Ka-wang!* “Do you want to come to the game with me or not?”

Once again, I feel the intensity of her friendly smile. Not to be overly poetic, but I believe it is akin to the shaft of heavenly light the shivering polar explorer sees that cracks apart the treacherous ice flow, and opens a safe route home. “Of course I do, John,” she says. It is the first time she has ever spoken my name. I did not know until this very instant that she even knew my name. But apparently she does. Because her lips have just uttered it, more musically than it has ever been spoken before. “I love basketball. And I think we should get to know each other better. Do you mind picking me up at home?”

“No,” I say.

“You know where I live? Beechwood Lane, all the way down at the end.”

“Sure,” I say. I am thinking: “Of course I know where you live. There is nothing about you I don’t know, Glory Hallelujah! I know the different pairs of your white and yellow and pink socks, and how they stretch up you delicate ankles, which are in the habit of crossing and uncrossing beneath your chair during anti-math class. I have counted the tiny blond hairs on the side of your ear, and I am also intimately familiar with the pattern of freckles on your left elbow.”

“And do you think we should get something to eat after the game? Maybe at the Center Street Diner?”

“Absolutely,” I say, and hear myself babble, “Dinner, Diner, Done!”

“Great. See you in math class,” she says. “Bye, John.”

She walks away down the corridor. I turn to my locker. Dial three to the left, four to the right, five to the left. The door swings open.