

**Trudie Hamburger is the only Jewish kid living
in her small southern town in 1962.**

Nobody else at her school has a father who speaks with a German accent or a last name that means “chopped meat.” Trudie doesn’t want to be the girl who cries when Daniel Reynolds teases her. Or the girl who hides in the library to avoid singing Christian songs in music class. She doesn’t want to be different. But as Trudie confronts her fears and embraces what she loves—including things that make her different from her classmates—she finally finds a way to say her name with pride.

“A delightful novel in verse that’s filled with the complicated truth about the good and bad in people and how we can hurt or heal one another. Highly recommended.”

—Donna Gephart, award-winning author of
Abby, *Tried and True* and *The Paris Project*

MY NAME IS HAMBURGER

JACQUELINE
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KAR-BEN
PUBLISHING

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Rainy Afternoon, March 1962



The best place to spend a rainy afternoon
is Lila's basement, in the house beside mine,
swaying on her checkerboard floor,
singing along with Brenda Lee.

Lila likes the fast songs.
I like the slow ones, to feel
the shiver of each note
floating from the record player.

Lila's wearing a blue collared dress
with short, puffy sleeves. Her ponytail
tied up in a matching bow.

She says next time, I shouldn't come
still dressed for school, in a brown sweater
and plaid skirt. I should wear something nice
for pretending we're on TV.

We both dream of singing on Ed Sullivan's
Sunday night show, of being Brenda Lee,

who's only 4 foot 9 and gives us hope
that someone small can still be famous.

They've called her Little Miss Dynamite
since she was twelve, two years older
than Lila and me.

I'd love a nickname like that,
one I could be proud of.

I'd love to open my mouth one day
and show the world my big, beautiful sound.

But right now, I am happy just to be
dancing in my best friend's basement, believing
all my dreams will come true.

Two Babies on a Blanket



I met Lila when I was six months old,
not that I really remember, of course.

Momma says we were two babies on a blanket,
bows on bald heads, staring at each other.

Mrs. Cummings, Lila's momma, likes
to have coffee and cookies with mine.

"So cute, the way you two grew up together,"
Mrs. Cummings often says. "Side by side."

In houses, maybe—not in height. Lila's been smaller
than me, smaller than everybody our age,
since we took our first steps
in her mother's lemon-yellow kitchen.

That hasn't stopped Lila from
taking the lead. She's the baby of three girls
and has learned to speak up fast, before all the best
chocolates are gone from the box.

Unlike me, who usually waits, lets others pick first,
gets stuck with the leftovers no one else wants.

I don't like fights I can't win. I know better
than to argue with Lila, to choose *Monopoly*
when she wants to play *Concentration*.
That's why, when we're done singing
Mrs. Cummings is surprised
to find me still in her house.

"I didn't hear your voice, Trudie," she says.
"Only Lila's."

Spelling Bee News



Daddy comes home from his print shop at six,
the time I'm supposed to leave Lila's
and be home for dinner. I run through the raindrops
across her yard and mine, up the steps to our porch,
to find Daddy already there, waiting to hug me.

"How was school?" he wants to know,
like he always does, and I tell him "Fine,"
like I always do, even though it's rarely true.

Except today, I have extra news for Daddy.
My spelling test: 100 percent four weeks
in a row. It means Mrs. Bryan chose me
to represent our fourth-grade class
in the schoolwide bee,
coming this Friday.

"My daughter!" Daddy grins.
"The American!"

Daddy says kids in Germany,
where he grew up, didn't have contests
to learn how to spell.

"It's for English," he tells me, "because
so many words don't follow rules."

Daddy knows firsthand
there's a lot to memorize.
And he's helping me learn
every night with his red dictionary,
the one he used to teach himself
how to read and write
for a new life in America.

Hamburger



When I walk into the kitchen,
I can smell that Momma's broiling
hamburgers, the way our family likes,
with onion soup mix inside.

It's one of our favorite meals.
All for different reasons.

Momma likes how my baby brother
puts the soft chopped meat into his mouth,
not all over his high chair tray or on his head.

Daddy says he loves hamburgers because he ate them
for the first time at a barbecue, before he was married,
when he was learning to love American things,
including my mother.

I like how my family sits at our round table
just eating a tasty food, not a last name
I wish didn't go with my first.

At home, I'm just a girl enjoying
dinner, not the Trudie Hamburger
kids tease at school.

Daniel Reynolds



He squints his dark eyes,
which makes him look mean
before he ever opens his mouth.

And he thinks a Jewish girl
with the last name Hamburger
deserves that cackly laugh
I hear each time he looks my way.

Sitting beside him in Mrs. Bryan's class,
I can see the red marks on his papers.

Daniel Reynolds never came close
to qualifying for the spelling bee.

Not that it matters to any of the boys
who join him on the playground
to call me "chopped meat."

But Mrs. Bryan seems to care.
This happy morning, she's decided

Daniel should move his desk
closer to the blackboard, closer
to the words he writes down wrong.

For the first time since September,
I'm not stiff in my seat by the window,
careful not to move my eyes too far
to the right. I can look straight
across the aisle at Lila and wave
if I want to—even wink.