

"She still hasn't gotten over that Easter Bunny letter," said Zozo.

"So what?" said Penina. "If my parents want me to go to Peekskill, what can Ms. Anderson do? Kidnap me?"

"No," said Zozo. "She can't kidnap you, but she can flunk you."

Penina Levine has a bossy best friend, a tattletale sister, crazy parents, and a big, fat zero on her school assignment to write a letter as the Easter Bunny. It was a stupid assignment, completely impossible, totally unfair. Penina's never going to do it—not ever—and it's no use telling her parents about it. They never listen to her anyway. But Penina's grandmother does. Grandma doesn't think Penina should do the assignment. It's a matter of principle. It's a matter of strength. It's a matter of five thousand years of history and a couple dozen hard-boiled eggs.

"A thoughtful and often funny novel that should appeal to the world's many Peninas."—*Booklist*

"Well-crafted multiple themes are integrated into a captivating, realistic middle-grade novel where conflicts are addressed, if not resolved, in pragmatic and convincing scenarios."—*Kirkus Reviews*

**Go Fish**

Look inside for interviews with Rebecca O'Connell and Majella Lue Sue.

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# 1. Shut Up

Shut up, Mimsy!

Penina thought it. Inside her head, she shouted it, stood up on the dinner table and bellowed it until her sister stopped chattering, singing, rhyming, and humming. She imagined a world without Mimsy's nonstop noise.

But *shut up* was not allowed. *Shut up* had earned Penina more days of being grounded than there were green beans piled on her plate.

“Henin!” yelled Mimsy. “Henny-wenny-benny henin!” She took off her pointy pink princess hat and put it on the table. The trailing scarf landed in a bowl of applesauce. That kind of hat was called a henin. Their dad knew a lot about historical stuff, and he had told Mimsy her hat was a henin.

Penina's hat, really. It had been in Penina's dress-up bin, but since she didn't play dress-up anymore, and since Mimsy was a nosy little snoop who went through other people's things, and since Mom and

Dad let Mimsy have whatever she wanted, the henin now belonged to Mimsy.

“The royal henin of Her Highness, Princess Mimsy-kins!” Mimsy announced.

Penina put her hands over her ears. “Mimsy!” she shouted. She almost said, “shut up,” but she stopped herself in time. Instead, she said, “Look at this.”

She took a coin from her pocket and held it up for everyone to see. It was bigger than a quarter, and it gleamed with a golden glow. On its face, a smiling young woman with a baby on her back peered over her shoulder at Penina.

“It’s a Sacagawea dollar,” said Mom.

“Where’d you get that?” asked Dad.

“I got it in change at the Maple Street Market,” said Penina. She and Zozo sometimes stopped there after school. “And, Mimsy, you can have it”—Mimsy grabbed for the coin, but Penina jerked it out of her reach—“*if* you can do one thing.”

“I can do it,” said Mimsy. “I can jump down four steps without falling, and I can wink one eye.” Mimsy closed her eyes and opened them one at a time. “See?”

Mom and Dad oohed and ahed over Mimsy’s remarkable ability to open her eyes. Penina waited it out. She breathed on Sacajawea and shined her up with a paper napkin.

“Give me it!” yelled Mimsy.



“Not yet,” said Penina. “I will give you this genuine 2001 United States Sacagawea one-dollar coin if you, Mimsy Levine, can be quiet for ten whole minutes.”

“Okay,” said Mimsy. She put on her henin and leaned back in her chair.

“Come on, Penina,” said Dad.

“That’s not fair,” said Mom. “She’s only four. She can’t stay quiet for ten minutes.”

“Shh. You’ll ruin it,” Penina said. She took a bite of green beans. She could actually hear herself chewing them.

“She doesn’t know what ten minutes is,” Dad protested.

“I do so!” yelled Mimsy. She sat up suddenly, knocking her henin to the floor. Her hair made a swirly brown cloud around her head. It spronged all over the place unless it was trapped beneath a henin or something. Penina’s was the same way. She always kept her curls contained in braids or a ponytail.

“I should have known you couldn’t do it,” Penina muttered. She put Sacagawea away. Too bad. She would have been happy to trade it for ten minutes of Mimsy’s silence.

“That doesn’t count! I was talking to Daddy!” Mimsy screamed.

“Yes, it counts. The deal was you had to be quiet for ten minutes. You couldn’t even be quiet for thirty seconds.”

“That’s not fair!” screamed Mimsy.

“That’s not fair,” Dad remarked.

“Why not let her try again, Pen?” Mom suggested.

“No. Why bother? She’ll just do the same thing all over again. She doesn’t know how to stop talking. Nothing in the world can make Mimsy shut up!”

Except, of course, for Penina getting into trouble. That was one thing that could make Mimsy sit still and listen. When Penina said “shut up,” Mimsy’s eyes opened wide. She snapped her head around to stare

at Penina. Mom gasped. Dad put down his water glass with extreme care.

“Penina,” he said slowly. He almost sighed it.

Penina stared at her plate. Only a few green beans left. She had already eaten all her applesauce. She hadn’t touched her chicken. She didn’t like the kind with spicy coating.

“Tell Mimsy you’re sorry,” Mom ordered.

Penina lifted her eyes, but not her head. Mimsy shrugged one shoulder and tilted her head, her cuteness routine. Grown-ups loved it, but Penina knew it was totally fake. Mimsy was about as cute as a Burmese python, a vampire bat, a deep-sea tube worm.

“It’s okay, Pina,” Mimsy said, “I still love you.”

“Well, I hate you!” Penina screamed. She slammed down her spoon and pushed back her chair.

“I hate you!” she screamed again. She was bigger than Mimsy, and she could be louder, too. Her scream could break all the glasses on the table, bend the forks and spoons, push all the dishes onto the floor. “I. Hate. You!” she screamed, and before she got the last word out, she turned and ran out of the kitchen, up the stairs, and into her room.

She couldn’t *stand* Mimsy. Everyone thought Mimsy was so cute, but all she ever did was get Penina in trouble.