



“Funny, moving,
deeply researched, deeply felt
and, above all, hopeful. Deceptively
simple and simply marvelous.”

-Adam Gidwitz,
author of the Newbery Honoree
The Inquisitor's Tale

“A heartfelt glimpse
into Jewish family and
mourning rituals written with
empathy and, of course, humor.”

-Lisa Brown,
bestselling author/illustrator of
The Phantom Twin and *The Airport Book*

Evie is not obsessed with death.

She does think about it a lot though, because her family runs a Jewish funeral home. The kids at school call her “corpse girl,” but they don’t get how important it is to have someone take care of things when your world is falling apart. Evie loves helping out—dusting caskets, polishing pews and handing out tissues. She doesn’t normally interact with the grieving families directly, but one day she meets Oren, a boy overwhelmed by grief after a terrible accident. Oren hasn’t spoken a word since, but Evie is determined to help him deal with his loss and find his voice again.



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One

I am not obsessed with death.

But it's a bit hard to avoid thinking about death when your family owns a funeral home and everyone works there. Including me.

My part-time job at the Walman Memorial Chapel—my family's last name is Walman—includes cleaning and stocking the bathroom with paper towels and toilet paper. I am also in charge of making sure there are always plenty of tissues for the mourners. Dad calls me Purveyor of Paper Products. I call *him* His Royal Highness of Dad Jokes.

But right now I was thinking about a totally different kind of paper. I had just loaded up on craft supplies at my favorite stationery store.

"I can't wait to get started on my projects," I said to Suzanna, the owner, as she slid all my purchases into a bag. I bounced from one foot to the other. I was pretty excited about the vellum I had found. It was so delicate,

almost see-through. I'd also gotten some heavy card stock with pretty deckled edges and some fancy handmade papyrus. I guess you could say I *am* obsessed with paper.

This was all because of Sam showing me how to quill last summer. I couldn't help but think how much he would have liked what I'd bought today. He'd especially liked the delicate papers like vellum, which was maybe why I'd bought it, even though it could be incredibly hard to quill with.

"I'm looking forward to seeing them when you're done," Suzanna said with a smile, handing me the bag. "You're getting so good."

I love sharing my quilling projects with Suzanna because she is always so enthusiastic. And she was right—I really was getting good. "Can you let me know when that foil comes in?" I asked. "I have an idea for—"

Just then the big church bells outside bonged, announcing that it was two o'clock.

Shoot! I was supposed to *be home* by two.

The bells hadn't even stopped bonging when I got a text from Mom: **Where r u!!??**

Uh-oh.

My parents had wanted to send me back to summer camp like usual. They are always so busy at the funeral home, and they worried that once school was out I'd be bored and get in the way. But I'd told them I didn't want to go this year. I had my reasons. One of them was Sam, though they don't know anything about that.

Anyway, I am happy to work at the funeral home and make some money for my paper and other stuff. Plus, I am actually interested in learning more about how our family business works.

The deal was, if I didn't go to camp, I had to do all my chores, put in my hours at the funeral home and never, ever complain about being bored. Oh, and I had to promise to be on time for everything. Mom is a real "stickler for punctuality," as she likes to remind us all the time.

I said a quick goodbye to Suzanna and raced out of the store.

So fast, in fact, that I nearly took out a couple of people coming in.

"Whoa, sorry!" I blurted. But then I saw who it was. Miri and Sasha. Great. I had been hoping I wouldn't have to see them until September.

I muttered an apology I really wasn't feeling and tried to get past them.

Nope. They blocked the doorway and just looked at me.

I pasted a smile on my face. "Oh hey. How's your summer going? Can you believe we're going into eighth grade? Unbelievable, right? I am—having a good summer, I mean—even though I'm not going to camp this year. I'm helping out at the—well, at home, I guess. What are you two doing? Having fun?"

Finally I had to stop to take a breath.

Miri and Sasha just kept staring.

“Sorry,” I muttered, even as I felt my face grow hot. I clamped my lips shut.

Miri snorted and rolled her eyes. “She’s awfully chatty for a corpse, isn’t she, Sasha?”

Here we go.

“Right?” Sasha said. “I mean, I thought corpses were quiet. I didn’t realize they talk *nonstop*.”

Do I even need to say it? Miri and Sasha are *the worst*.

Sasha wasn’t done, either. She laughed at her own clever comment and then leaned in close. She took a loud sniff of my ponytail. “And ugh, she sure *smells* like death. Disgusting. You sure you’re not a zombie, *Evil*?”

After my speech in class about how I was going to be a funeral director when I grew up, the two of them had come up with all kinds of mean nicknames that I am now mostly used to. Sort of.

I’d washed my hair that very morning. With the shampoo I’d made my mom buy after the *last time* Sasha said I smelled like rotting corpses.

The shampoo is strawberry scented. A part of my brain drifted away and started wondering if dead people smell like strawberries. And if they do, how Sasha would know. I’d never gotten close enough to the actual dead people at the funeral home to sniff them, but the building didn’t smell like strawberries. Or any other type of fruit.

I wanted to tell them both to shut up. Also that, like I’d told them a million times before, my job at the funeral home doesn’t include getting close to dead

people, so I *couldn't* smell like one. But for once I kept my mouth shut. It wouldn't matter. They just didn't care. No matter how hard I tried to show them that I was a normal girl whose family just happened to own a funeral home, they kept picking on me.

After my speech, I'd made Dad come to career day to talk about what it was like to be a funeral director and how important a job it was. After all, eventually everyone needs one. I'd thought that would make things better. But no, it got even worse. Way worse. Now everyone at school thinks my *whole family* is weird and obsessed with death.

When you go to a small private school like I do, *everyone* knows everything about you, even the kids in different grades. I'd asked my parents to transfer me from Beit Sefer to a public school with a ton of kids who don't know me. But they said I should try to stick it out for eighth grade. After that, if I was still unhappy, we could talk about my going to a public high school.

Until then I was stuck with being known as Chatty Corpse Girl, Morticia, Evil and whatever other humiliating names they could come up with.

"What'd you buy, Goth Girl?" Sasha asked as she and Miri shifted to block my way completely. She reached for the bag in my hands. "Black eyeliner?"

I pulled the bag away before she could get it. "This is a *stationery* store," I said. "They don't sell eyeliner." And it wasn't like I even wore makeup. Duh.

“I know that!” Sasha barked. “I’m here to pick out my *bat mitzvah* invitations. For my *bat mitzvah*.” I guess she was emphasizing the words to make it sound like a very big deal. “That you won’t be invited to, by the way,” she added.

This was a lie. At our school, when someone has their bar or bat mitzvah, they have to invite the whole class. It’s only, like, twelve people, but is a rule.

“Like I’d even want to go!” I said. I added a “Pffft!” for good measure.

All right, so maybe I did sort of want to go, but only to show her and everyone else that I was a good person who didn’t hold grudges. I definitely wouldn’t have any fun though. Or maybe I *would* have fun just to show her how much I didn’t care that she and Miri were so mean to me.

“Whatever,” Sasha said, adding a loud cluck of her tongue as she leaned toward me.

Miri moaned and rolled her eyes back. “Don’t get too close, Sasha—she might try to eat your braaaaaaaain.”

It was a pretty lousy impression of a brain-eating zombie, if you ask me.

“Oh, yeah. Right,” Sasha said, backing up dramatically.

I fought back tears as I pushed past the girls. Just because I didn’t *want* any friends didn’t mean I was immune to these girls being so horrible.

I got on my bike, looping my bag over the right handlebar, and pedaled toward home. The tears poured out of me, but I took some comfort in thinking about

how when I grew up and became a funeral director like my parents, I wouldn't have to worry about my clients being mean to me.

Because they'd already be dead.