

**A Printz Honor–winning novel-in-verse
about a girl who is tired of being fat-shamed
and is ready to do something about it.**

EVER SINCE she wore a whale swimsuit and made a big splash at her fifth birthday party, Ellie's been bullied about her weight. To cope, she tries to live by her list of Fat Girl Rules, which are all about not standing out. And she's found a haven in her swimming pool, where she feels weightless in a fat-obsessed world. In the water, she can stretch out like a starfish and take up all the space she wants. She finds allies in her new neighbor Catalina—a girl who refreshingly doesn't judge—and in her new therapist, a woman who knows how to laugh at the right things. With these good people buoying Ellie up, it's a lot easier to face the bullies and starfish in real life—by unapologetically being her own fabulous self.

“This is a big beautiful book about a big beautiful girl. Meet Ellie, who looks in the mirror and sees someone lovable. Now, if only the rest of the world (and especially her own mother and brother) could see what Ellie sees. This is a story about the colossal cruelty that's hurled at her because of her weight, and how, with colossal strength, Ellie manages to triumph. An honest, heartbreaking, hilarious novel-in-verse from a debut author with a delicious voice.”

—**SONYA SONES**, author of *What My Mother Doesn't Know*

★ “Fipps's use of verse is as effective as it is fitting; Ellie dreams of becoming a storyteller and poet ‘to help people feel what it's like/ to live in/ someone else's skin.’ A triumphant and poignantly drawn journey toward self-acceptance and self-advocacy.”

—**PUBLISHERS WEEKLY**, STARRED REVIEW



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To every kid who's ever been told, "You'd be so pretty or handsome, *if* . . ." You ARE beautiful. Now. Just as you are. You deserve to be seen, to be heard, to take up room, to be noticed. So when the world tries to make you feel small, starfish!



FOR JUST A WHILE

I step down into the pool.
The water is bathwater warm
but feels cool
compared to the blisteringly hot air.
Kick. Gliiiiiiide.
Stroke. Gliiiiiiide.
Side to side
and back again.
Dive under the surface.
Soar to the top.
Arch my back.
Flip. Flop.

As soon as I slip into the pool,
I am weightless.
Limitless.
For just a while.

NAME-CALLING

Eliana Elizabeth Montgomery-Hofstein.
That's my name.

My bestie, Viv,
and my parents call me
Ellie or El.

But most people call me Splash
or some synonym for *whale*.

Cannonball into a pool,
drenching everyone,
and wear a whale swimsuit
to your Under the Sea birthday party
when you're a chubby kid
who grows up to be a fat tween
and no one will ever let you live it down.
Ever.

SPLASH IS BORN

Now, whenever I swim,
I use the steps to ease into the water,
careful not to make waves,
because the memory
of my pool party plays
in my head like a video on a loop.

It was my fifth birthday.
I wanted to be the first one in, so
I ran to the edge and
leapt into the air and
tucked my knees into my chest.

Water sprayed up
as I sank down.
I bobbed to the surface,
expecting cheers for
the splashiest cannonball ever.

That didn't happen.

"Splash spawned a tsunami!"
my sister, Anaïs, shouted.
"She almost emptied the pool,"
my brother, Liam, chimed in.
I dove under,
drowning my tears.

I wish I could tell everyone
how they made me feel that day—
humiliated,
angry,
deeply sad.

But every time I try to stand up for myself,
the words get stuck in my throat
like a giant glob of peanut butter.

Besides, if they even listened,
they'd just snap back,
"If you don't like being teased,
lose weight."

FAT GIRL RULES

Some girls my age fill
diaries with dreams and
private thoughts.

Mine has a list of
Fat Girl Rules.

You find out
what these unspoken rules are
when you break them—
and suffer
the consequences.

Fat Girl Rules
I learned
at five:
No cannonballs.
No splashing.
No making waves.

*You don't deserve
to be seen or heard,
to take up room,
to be noticed.*

Make yourself small.

WHAT, WHY, WHO, HOW, WHEN

The first Fat Girl Rule

you learn hurts the most,
a startling, scorpion-stinging soul slap.

Something's changed, but you don't know
what.

You replay the moment in your mind from
every possible angle, trying to understand
why.

Why the rules exist and
who.

Who came up with them and
how.

How does anyone have the right to tell you
how to live just because of your weight?

Mostly, you remember the smack of
the change.

One minute you were like
everybody else, playing around, enjoying life,
and then,

with the flip of an unseen cosmic switch,
you're the fat girl,

stumbling,
trying to regain your balance.

Acting as if you know what you're doing, like
when

you used to play dress-up
and tried to walk
in high-heeled shoes.

THE GIFT

Every time I see a pudgy preschooler,
I want to hand her my list,
like the answer sheet for a test,
to spare her the pain of learning
the rules firsthand.

But instead,
I give each girl the gift
of more days,
weeks,
and months
of a normal life.

Whatever that is.

BELLIES DANCING

Viv's mom caught her dad with
another woman and said Texas
wasn't big enough for the three of them.
So now my best friend has to move
to Indiana.

In my backyard, we livestream
the Latin Music Festival
on an outdoor screen
as part of her going-away party.

Viv starts belly dancing
like she learned in a class at
the Dallas Public Library,
where her mom was a librarian.
I follow her lead and
our arms morph into snakes
as our hips figure-eight.

My dog, Gigi, a pug,
runs circles around us as
we sing at the top of our lungs
along with the bands and
dance with complete abandon,
like you do when you're alone in your room
trying out some new moves
or making up some of your own.

Except it turns out
we're not
alone.

THE NEW NEIGHBOR

Mid-twirl, I open my eyes to see
a girl's head pop up over the fence,
then disappear and reappear.

This trampoline girl
saw me shake parts of me
I didn't even know I had.

"What do you think you're doing?"
I stop dancing so fast
I about give myself whiplash.

I see her head again.
"I heard *Días Divertidos*."
She says it so quickly it's like one word.
She disappears and reappears.
"Couldn't help myself."

In a flash,
she climbs over the fence
and lands in front of me.
"I'm Catalina Rodriguez."

A POET AND A MUSICIAN

Catalina points to the concert on the screen.

"Wow! So you like Días Divertidos, too?

I have all their songs on my playlist."

"Me too," I say.

"Who else do you listen to?"

"Don't get Ellie started."

Viv rolls her eyes.

If eye-rolling were an Olympic sport,
she'd be a gold medalist.

"I'm a poet, so

I love music because

lyrics are sung poems," I say.

"Rap and country are my faves."

"I'm a guitarist," Catalina says.

"I like all music but love Latin."

She chooses her words carefully, like me.

But she's not like me.

Catalina's skinny

like a pancake.

I'm more like a three-tiered cake.

My fatdar should be sounding the alarm.

Why isn't it?

THE THING ABOUT FATDAR

Fatdar is a lot like
Spider-Man's Spidey sense,
a sixth sense.

Somehow we just know when
someone's about to say
something hurtful or
do something mean.

Even in a crowd,
I can spot a fatphobe,
someone who's grossed out
by overweight people.
Fatphobes give off this vibe.
Part discomfort.
Part shock.
Part fear.
Part anger.

And all hatred.

SHADOWS

“‘Baila conmigo!’”

Catalina shouts as the next song starts
and she dances with us.

“Teach me that one move, Ellie,” she says.

“Which one?”

“The one where you were
kinda kicking your leg
while you spun.”

When I dance
knowing Catalina’s watching,
I feel every pound of my legs,
see my fat shake,
and notice how round
my shadow on the grass is
next to her angles,
so I stop.

Fat Girl Rule:

*Move slowly so
your fat doesn’t jiggle,
drawing attention to your body.*

But that uncomfortable-in-my-own-skin feeling
fades as the music blares
and Catalina squeal-screams,
going all bananas with us,
during the tribute to Selena.

If dance partners were food,
Catalina and I would be
peanut butter and jelly.
Cookies and milk.
Chips and salsa.
We're different, but
make a perfect combo,
heads, hips, and hands
moving in sync.

Right on cue as the sun sets,
the katydids start their singing,
fast and furious since
their tempo's based on heat
or maybe Selena's *bidi-bidi-bom-bom* beat.

"Catalina, dale las buenas noches
y ven a casa," a woman's voice calls out.
"Gotta go," Catalina tells us.
"Thanks for letting me crash your party."

She climbs back over the fence,
then trampolines.
"Can't wait to come over again."