

In the spring of 1973, Melanie Adler desperately wants to be accepted by the Shimmers, the popular kids in her class. But it's hard for Melanie to act as effortlessly confident and fun as the Shimmers—especially when she's constantly holding her breath at home. Her mom hasn't been the same since the accident, and her fears and sadness weigh on Melanie. She's convinced no one knows what it's like to have a parent who's afraid of everything . . . until Dorit Shoshani moves to town.

Clever, independent Dorit understands Melanie's home life thanks to her own family's struggles. The girls become fast friends.

But when the Shimmers finally start to pay attention to Melanie, she's torn between her bond with Dorit and her chance at popularity.

“Like Judy Blume before her, Deborah Lakritz navigates a teen girl’s world with a deft hand and a warm heart. Readers will cheer for Melanie and worry for her from page one, as she rides the roller coaster that is adolescence. Combining authentic Jewish representation with an engaging story of friendships lost and found, *Things That Shimmer* shows kids that it’s okay to make mistakes and sometimes say the wrong thing, and that everyone needs support from those they love, even moms and dads.”

—Stacy Nockowitz, author of *The Prince of Steel Pier*

“Deborah Lakritz shows the importance of understanding who you are—and who your friends are—in this story about growing up and being brave.”

—Madelyn Rosenberg, author of *One Small Hop* and
coauthor of *Not Your All-American Girl*

“A realistic and moving portrait of a young girl’s yearning to fit in as she tiptoes through the landmines of middle school and a troubled home life, setting her on a path to uncover what truly matters.”

—Betsy R. Rosenthal, author of *When Lightnin’ Struck*
and *Looking for Me . . . in This Great Big Family*



Things That Shimmer

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KAR-BEN
PUBLISHING

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To Ronit, of course.

Chapter 1

IT'S FUNNY HOW THOSE OLD SAYINGS YOU HEAR

over and over are sometimes the exact truth.

Dad has said, “The grass is always greener on the other side” more times than I can count. He used it on me when I was nine, after I begged to return my Hanukkah present, a paint-by-numbers set, in exchange for an Easy-Bake Oven like the one my best friend, Vicky, got from her parents.

He could say it this morning too—and lots of mornings—about the way I sit watching the Shimmers stake their territory at the flagpole before first bell rings.

I escaped the house this morning without any predictions of doom from Mom, I’m holding the bag of chocolate-drizzled macaroons I baked last night, and the April sun catches the sequins dotting my new shirt. I should be feeling happy, but I can’t shift my eyes away from the only people who matter at Ashford Junior High.

The Shimmers are bonded together like a golden fence surrounds them. They only let in the people

they think deserve to be there. They've even claimed special places everyone knows are only for them: the center tables in the cafeteria, the last row in the auditorium, and the flagpole.

Some girls from my typing class wave as they pass, and I smile when a neighborhood kid calls my name, but no one stops to sit down with me. And Vicky isn't here yet, of course. For our whole lives, she's never made it to school before the Pledge of Allegiance. Besides, I'm not even sure if she'd come sit with me or dart straight over to the flagpole to be with the Shimmers. That's how it is between us these days.

"Give it back, you thieves!" Shari Kaye, the actual queen of seventh grade, swipes the air to grab her hat from the boys. Marla Forstein and Jan Rosen, who stand on either side of Shari, look like they waltzed straight off the pages of *Teen Beat*, all cool and confident. Aaron Andrews flings Shari's hat up into the air, and it catches on a tree branch near where I'm sitting. "Oh, great!" she says. "How am I supposed to get it down?"

Everyone looks at me. I've climbed this tree hundreds of times, but never with an all-star audience. "I . . . I guess I can get it." My face sizzles as I hoist myself up and give the branch a shake. When Shari's hat plops to the ground, I watch and wait, imagining how she's going to smile and say thanks and ask me

my name (again), and I'll make a joke about being part mountain goat, and maybe we'll laugh together.

But she doesn't.

She jogs off, rosy cheeks and twinkly eyes, tugging the floppy rim over her head. Everyone follows like she's the grand marshal of the Tournament of Shimmers parade. It's a *thwack* straight to my gut like the time Jon and I wrestled in the living room and he accidentally kneed me in the stomach. I'm glad Vicky isn't here to see me pretend I'm okay.

As the bell rings and I slink into school, I can't help thinking that if the Shimmers wanted me, I could be somebody new.

Mom's worries wouldn't get under my skin anymore. Even if she circled the neighborhood in a panic (again) when I was late coming home from school, I'd brush it off instead of feeling guilty, as if I'd done something wrong.

No one else has a mom like mine, and even though I try to act like everything's normal, most of the time it's not. But being a Shimmer would be even *better* than normal; it would be perfect.

The first bell rings, and I hustle down the crowded hall until I reach homeroom. While kids chatter, I whip out a diagram to test myself on the parts of a typewriter for this afternoon's quiz. I studied all last night because

tests make me so nervous. Before I can find the carriage release lever, the wall speaker crackles.

“*Good morning! Lunch is tater tot casserole, tropical fruit cup, and milk,*” spits a student announcer whose mouth must be stuck to the microphone. “*Track-and-field practice meets at 3:45 sharp. Shortwave Radio Club still needs members; impress friends and family by communicating with people all over the globe!*”

I find the last two typewriter parts, the paper bail and the backspacer.

“And finally, Melanie Adler, report directly to Miss Roole after homeroom.”

“Ooh, Adler! Miss Model Student!” Jerry Finkel’s hands drum the top of my desk. “You’re in trouble,” he singsongs. “What did ya do, anyway—ditch a class?”

My heart springs to my throat. I jump out of my seat, the typewriter diagram sailing to the floor. Without waiting for the official end of homeroom, I race out the door, passing some kids with late passes and a bubble-lettered poster of Snoopy that screams *Pounce on Pollution!*

I wince thinking about Jerry’s taunt. I *have* become big on rule following ever since our accident. I don’t tattle on other kids or act like I’m better—I just hate getting in trouble because that’s one more thing Mom has to worry about. Kids like Jerry figure this means

all my grades are perfect, but lots of nights Dad has to explain my math homework for the bazillionth time. I’m so glad he’s patient—about everything.

Around the corner, a boy’s pushing the coin return buttons on the pay phones along the wall, checking to see if he can get any change. When he sees me, he shrugs. “No luck today.”

Isn’t that the truth.

Miss Roole and her immovable hair meet me under the sign that says *Vice Principal*. She’s not giving away any clues about why she sent for me—her mouth’s a straight line that could’ve been drawn by a cartoonist.

I follow her past secretaries filing attendance cards and the framed portrait of President Nixon. The atmosphere is more funeral parlor than school office. Other than the sound of the mimeograph machine humming out copies, it’s silent. *Why am I here?*

“Have a seat, Miss Adler,” she says, taking me into her office. She pushes away a desk calendar—*1973: A Year of Motivational Quotes*. The message for April is “Every problem has a gift for you in its hands.” She hoists herself up on the cleared space, as if there’s a chance she could look casual.

A girl I’ve never seen before sits on a flimsy chair next to Miss Roole’s desk. She flips through the school handbook and nods at me.

“Melanie Adler, meet Dorit Shoshani. Today she joins our community of learners. I’ve chosen *you* to show her around.” Dorit smooths the hair over her ears and tightens her long ponytail. It’s the color of the toffee Dad used to bring home from work conferences. Back when he could still go out of town without Mom freaking out that his plane was going to crash or his hotel was going to burn down. Back before the accident.

My body’s drenched with relief. I’m not in trouble. Miss Roole chose me!

For once it actually pays to be a “model student.” I get to know something before anyone else in school—even before the Shimmers.

Miss Roole launches into what my grandma would call “a whole spiel” about our award-winning school, while Dorit rests the student handbook on the worn-out legs of her jeans. Something tells me she’s been through this routine before.

“Blah, blah, discipline . . . blah, blah, hard work . . . blah, blah, courage,” Miss Roole says like she’s inducting Dorit into the army. It takes forever. But eventually she pats my shoulder and smiles, and I know what’s coming.

“Melanie Adler is one of our finest students,” she says. “Last year’s citizenship award recipient. You’re in good hands.”

My eyes bore into the ugly green carpeting. Could she make me sound any nerdier? The citizenship award was just a piece of paper with a gold sticker that meant I raised my hand instead of shouting out answers. This girl’s going to think I’m the biggest loser.

After more blabbing about our accelerated curriculum, Miss Roole finally leads us to the deserted hallway. I pull Dorit away before she can hear something else that makes me sound even weirder, but Miss Roole keeps calling after us. “I know you’ve attended schools all over the world, but it never hurts to have a helping hand. It’s what makes Ashford Junior High special.” I half expect the cheerleading squad to pop up behind her and burst into our school song.

When we’re safely past the office, homeroom’s long over and first period is about to end. “Let’s find your locker before the halls are packed,” I say. We hurry past the Girls’ Foods room where the smell of cinnamon wafts over us.

“Is Miss Roole always that serious?” Dorit asks, hiding a grin.

“Yeah, her nickname is The Ruler. Rumor has it she can recite the entire Constitution by heart.”

Dorit’s laugh is soft and wheezy. “She sure likes you. Citizenship award—”

“Never mind that,” I say, shutting her down. I don’t

need another person thinking I'm prissy and perfect. She doesn't even know me yet.

She gets it right away. "Don't worry; in sixth grade I won the Student Visionary award. Sounds like I tell fortunes, right?" We both crack up.

"Sorry," she says after a few coughs. "Allergies. They've been bugging me since we moved here." As Dorit adjusts her ponytail, I smile. Something about her seems so familiar. Maybe it's the freckles; we both have a ton. I wonder if she hates hers as much as I hate mine.

Dorit's cuffed bell-bottoms drag under her sneakers as we pass rows of lockers. "Here's 234," she says, like she's done this a gazillion times. Sticking to the metal door is a strip of masking tape with *Dorit Shoshani* printed in marker. She peels the tape off and rolls it into a ball.

"Doh-reet. That's so pretty," I say.

She shrugs. "My mom told me it means 'of this generation.' I hate it. It's Hebrew. I was born in Israel." Her words have a soft clipped sound. Not an obvious accent, but a little different.

"You just moved here from *Israel*?" I shift my books to my hip. Pictures from Sunday school pop into my head: soldiers, tanks, people working in fields, and maps with dotted lines for borders that our teacher said are always changing.

"No, I was *born* there. We moved away when I was little; I barely remember it because we've lived in so many other places."

"Oh," I say. "How come you left?"

"Lots of reasons."

Her eyes won't meet mine anymore, so I know something's up. New kids don't just show up in spring when the school year is practically over. Not unless they have to. It makes me super curious and I almost ask her about it, but I know better. After our car accident, people always butted in with personal questions about Mom, like why she was wearing an eye patch or why she stayed inside all the time, like it was even their business. I don't want Dorit to think I'm like that too.

"Hey," I say to change the subject, "Here's *my* locker. There's a math folder somewhere under this heap of junk." I swing the door open and scoop up a pile of old homework papers until I see the bottom. "Can I interest you in a fossilized lunch?"

Her smile comes back. I even make her laugh. "I guess they don't check how neat you are before they hand out the citizenship award, huh?"

It's my turn to laugh. "I'm good at staying out of detention, but I'll never get a blue ribbon for tidiness." The end of the first period bell rings as I click my lock closed. "Ahem. Ready for math, Miss Visionary?"

“I sense a fascinating morning ahead, Miss Citizenship,” Dorit says, pressing her fingers to the sides of her head.

News travels fast in seventh grade, and by lunch-time everyone knows about “the new girl who’s lived all over the world.”

At my usual spot off to the side of the cafeteria, something keeps me from pulling out my chair. It kills me that I can’t lead Dorit over to the Shimmers’ table in the center, plop down like it’s no big deal, and say, “Oh, by the way, this is Dorit. She’s new here.” As soon as she sees them, she’s going to wonder how she got stuck here with me instead.

But we dump our books on the floor and she digs into her lunch bag all casual, like she doesn’t even notice who the cool kids are and where they’re sitting.

I’ve barely unwrapped my sandwich when the visits to our table begin.

Lisa and Charlene, gossipy neighborhood kids I’ve known my whole life, are first up. “You’re really from Israel?”

Dorit takes a long sip from her juice can before she responds. “Yeah. Jerusalem. Have you been there?”

Lisa shakes her head. “My parents say it’s way too dangerous. Aren’t there always wars there?”

Pink splotches dot Dorit’s neck.

“Come on,” says Charlene. “Let’s eat.”

As they walk away, Lisa turns around. “*Leh-heet-rah-ote*—see you later,” she says, drawing out the word with a giggle. “That’s all I learned in Hebrew school.”

A moment later, Shari and Marla cruise up to our table. My heart jumps as I bite into my bologna sandwich.

“Hi! I’m Shari, and this is Marla—Are you Doreen?”

Dorit presses her lips together to stifle a laugh, but I swallow hard. They pay even less attention to me now than they did in front of school this morning.

“*Doh-reet*,” she says. “My parents’ fault. No one says it right.” You’d have to be living inside a locker to not realize that these are the coolest girls in seventh grade, but Dorit just flips the top of her yogurt container and keeps eating.

“Seats, ladies.” Mrs. Dooley, the lunch monitor, frowns.

“We’re only staying for a second.” Shari scans the cafeteria, then lowers herself to the edge of one of our empty seats as if she doesn’t want to sit on something gross. She signals Marla toward the other one. I take in every detail: Marla’s green cat-eyes and straight dancer posture. Shari’s dimpled smile and that floppy hat that people thought was weird the first time she

wore it. (But then everyone went out and bought one, of course.) They're both wearing jeans that are faded to powder blue and embroidered around the pockets. I rub my hands over my new cardboard-stiff ones that'll need a dozen washes to soften up like theirs. I saw their outfits hanging in the window of a shop in downtown Ashford. When I asked to go inside, Mom made one of her *I'm-not-wasting-my-money-there* faces. She insists on buying my clothes at Katt and Company, where you get what you pay for.

As Marla's fingers glide through her smooth locks, I pat my own curly layers. Why is my hair such a puff-ball today? Dorit spoons through her yogurt, barely noticing when Shari plunks her tanned arms on the table, clinking her row of bangle bracelets.

"So where do you live?" Shari asks. "I usually know when someone new moves in 'cause my mom is Sandy Kaye, the Ready Realtor. I'll bet she sold you your house."

Dorit gulps her juice and covers a burp with her hand. "We're renting an apartment for now. My mom says the houses here lack character."

I stop chewing and try to catch Dorit's eye before she offends the Shimmers. I tap my fingers on our table. Clear my throat. Blink at her until my eyes bug. But she licks her spoon without noticing my warnings.

"Tell your parents to check out Highland Hills," says Shari. "That's where we live." Along with the rest of the Shimmers. Shari looks Dorit up and down with her sure Shimmer eye. "So, what'd you do at your old school?"

Dorit answers all matter-of-fact, like she doesn't care about impressing them. "School paper and junior debate team." She dips a hunk of bread into a container of something creamy.

"Guess who!" a voice snorts behind us. Jerry Finkel sneaks up and plants his hands over Shari's eyes.

She wiggles out of his grasp with a fake scowl. "Jerry, I'm gonna kill you!"

"Take it easy, Kaye. Everyone sent me to bring you two back to our table." He shoots me a look. "Hey, how was the principal's office, Miss Model Student?"

My face burns. I'm so tired of that nickname, but it's stuck to me like gum under the typing room desks.

"Guess we'll see you, Dorit," says Shari, shrugging. As she and Marla follow Jerry to their center spot, I overhear him saying, "Her name is Dorito?"

Marla shakes her head and says, "Grow up, Jerry."

Once we're alone, Dorit says, "At my old school, those kids would've been called hotshots. Why do they act like they're better than everyone else?"

I study Dorit's face. I'm relieved they didn't snap

her up and away from me, but mostly I'm confused. "They're the two most popular girls in seventh grade. Couldn't you tell? People would kill to be their friends."

"By 'people,' do you mean you?"

I chew my lip. I've never told anyone—not even Vicky—how much I want to be one of them.

"What makes *them* so special?" asks Dorit. I catch her rolling her eyes.

"It's hard to explain," I say, "but . . . they never look out of place. Everyone wants to be their friend. They're always happy. Or if they get upset, it's because of something small, like their parents won't let them see some movie, not because of anything serious."

Like whether your mom's having another surgery. Or how she asks where you are every five minutes if you're not sitting where she can see you. Or how, even when you are sitting in front of her, she's so focused on the worries running through her head that you might as well be alone.

I don't say any of this to Dorit, but I think it. If I were a Shimmer, I'd never have to worry about belonging anywhere again. Maybe I'd never worry about anything.

"Hotshots. I can spot them a mile away," Dorit says, balling up her lunch bag. "Can you show me where the girls' restroom is?"

We toss our trash and head toward the girls' bathroom. But I feel like I need to do a better job of explaining the situation. "They're not hotshots," I tell Dorit. "They're called the Shimmers. They all live in houses around this lagoon in Highland Hills that people call Shimmer Pond because of how the sun sparkles on it. Everyone's always taking pictures there for weddings and graduations and prom, or whenever there's a reason they're all dressed up. No matter what season, people always say, 'Did you see Shimmer Pond today?'"

"So?"

"So, they're like that too."

We pass a poster of Earth, partially in shadow and hanging alone in the dark sky. It's a super-famous picture called *Earthrise*, taken a few years ago on one of the Apollo space missions.

Pointing to the poster, I say, "It's kind of like when we landed on the moon a few years ago. Did you watch it?"

"Yeah, we lived in England then, in this dinky apartment. We had to borrow someone's TV."

"When I saw Neil Armstrong set foot on the moon, it felt like magic, like he appeared out of nowhere. I'll never forget it. At first, the screen was dark and blurry, but then *POOF!* All of a sudden, he climbed out of that spaceship and down the ladder. My brother, Jon,