

What's more humiliating than your mom dating the assistant principal at your middle school? Evie's about to find out.

Her mom has volunteered Evie to tutor Joey Ceraco, a boy Evie hasn't spoken to since their playdates in kindergarten—a boy who, along with his best friend Tommy Halliday, is known as *trouble*.

Even after losing her dad, Evie's still known as "the cantor's daughter" at Temple Shir Shalom. She and her friends, Rachel and Spencer, couldn't be more different from Joey and Tommy. But a questionable science project spurs them to reluctantly join forces in a daring rescue that could land them all in lifetime detention. Who knows? Maybe getting into trouble is what it takes for Evie to become the person she's meant to be.

"A warm, witty, and incredibly engaging story about family, fellowship, and bringing out the best in others."

—**Terri Libenson**, author of *Becoming Brianna*

"The troubles that seem to seek out Evie come quickly and suddenly—and they're set within the greatest trouble of all: losing someone you love. What will keep you pounding through this book is not the question of whether trouble will find you, but the question of what happens when it does. In that way, what a splendidly hopeful and moving novel this is—for all of us."

—**Gary D. Schmidt**, Newbery Honor winner and author of *The Wednesday Wars*

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TROUBLE
— Finds —
Evie Lefkowitz

BY DIANA HARMON ASHER

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Chapter 1



My mom hates dating. And she hates sushi. So when she says she's going on a date with Mr. Mitchell for sushi, I figure she must be joking.

She's told me about a million times how she wasn't great at the whole dating thing the first time around and she hates having to do it again. She says the only reason she goes out is because friends keep calling with "the greatest guy" or "the perfect match" and she feels rude saying no over and over again. They're just trying to be nice, she says, trying to help her stop missing my dad.

But every date has been a disaster. We've even developed a disposal system. Well, let's call it a rating. My mom goes out the door, pretends she forgot something, comes back in and holds up her fingers, one to ten. It's her prediction—how she thinks the date is going to go. She's never gotten past four, and most have been demoted to a two by the time she gets home. If someone is an absolute zero from

the start, I wait about half an hour, then call and say I'm sick. Or sad. Which a lot of the time is the truth.

The system's worked out pretty well. In fact, I think it's strengthened our mother-daughter bond. And all these guys have gone away without a fight, which is okay with me. As far as I'm concerned, we're doing just fine on our own.

But now, all of a sudden, there's Mr. Mitchell, the new assistant principal at Canterbury Middle School. The middle school where my mom works as a substitute teacher. The middle school where I'm trying to survive the seventh grade.

He came here last April, taking over for Mr. Del Croce—who, if the rumor is true, ran off with our sixth-grade science teacher before she even finished marking the midterms. Mr. Mitchell came in all full of enthusiasm, putting a suggestion box in the front entryway, thinking up theme days like School Spirit Day and Pajama Day. I even defended him when he came up with Crazy Hat Day.

Of course, that was before I found out about Date Your Mother Day.

So today, when I get home from school, I sit down at the kitchen table and look her in the eye.

"Mom, is this a joke?"

"Is what a joke, Evie?"

"This sushi date with Mr. Mitchell."

"Of course not," she answers, avoiding my stare by scroll-

ing through Facebook posts. “I’m looking forward to it.”

“But it’s a terrible idea,” I say. Doesn’t she remember all those horrible dates? The podiatrist who spent an hour talking about bunions?

“Why is it a terrible idea?” asks my mom, finally looking up.

“Well, for one thing, you never eat sushi. How do you even know what you’re ordering?”

“I’ll use the picture menu,” she says. “I’ll make a safe choice.”

“And he lives with his mother,” I say, repeating what I’d heard just the other day from Tricia Baron, whose mother is president of the PTSA, so she should know.

“He does not live with his mother. Who told you that?”

I shrug. “A reliable source.”

“Well, they’re wrong,” she says. “Kids always say things about single teachers. We said things about Mr. Maloney when I was in junior high.”

“And?”

“And,” she answers, sitting up straight, “for your information, not only did he *not* live with his mother, but it turned out—”

I can tell this isn’t going in the right direction from the way she stops in her storytelling tracks.

“Never mind about Mr. Maloney,” she says. “Mitch doesn’t live with his mother.”

“Mitch? Is that his real name?”

“Yes.”

“Mitchell Mitchell?”

“Well, yes,” she says. This is going from bad to worse.

She stands up, grabbing the leash from its shelf. This always makes our dog, Sandwich, race around the kitchen, ricocheting off the walls and furniture. My mom is clearly using this as a diversion tactic, but it’s not going to work.

“Mom,” I say, feeling Sandwich’s twirly tail brush past my leg. “What if someone sees you?”

She pauses by the door. “Sees me walking Sandwich?”

“No, sees you with Mr. Mitchell.”

“What *if* someone sees me?”

“Won’t you be embarrassed? On a *date* with *Mr. Mitchell*? What if he turns out to be like that dentist? The one who flossed right there at the table after dinner.”

“Evie!” I guess I’ve hit a sore spot. “That was a blind date. I’ve met Mr. Mitchell. I’ve talked with Mr. Mitchell. He’s a nice guy.” I guess I sigh or roll my eyes because her tone gets firmer. “So, you’re going to drop this. And when he comes to pick me up, you’re going to be polite and say a nice hello.”

Comes to pick her up.

I hadn’t even thought of that. Somehow, I was picturing them meeting at the school, by the entrance or outside his office. I can see him now, at our front door, with the Robin

Hood hat he wore on Crazy Hat Day perched on his head. I'm starting to get a little queasy.

Sandwich is on his third loop around the kitchen, showing no signs of slowing. My mom pats her leg and he ends his celebration. He stands panting, just out of her reach—a playing-hard-to-get ploy I've never understood. My mom leans forward, clips on the leash, and opens the door.

“Want to come?” she asks.

“No thanks,” I mumble. I watch as Sandwich's little pug rear exits the door.

I start toward my room, but my mom pops her head back in the front door. “And no ratings this time. No one to ten,” she adds.

No one to ten? An unnecessary twist of the knife if you ask me.