

the
Spelling Bee
SCUFFLE

LINDSAY EYRE
ILLUSTRATED BY
SYDNEY HANSON



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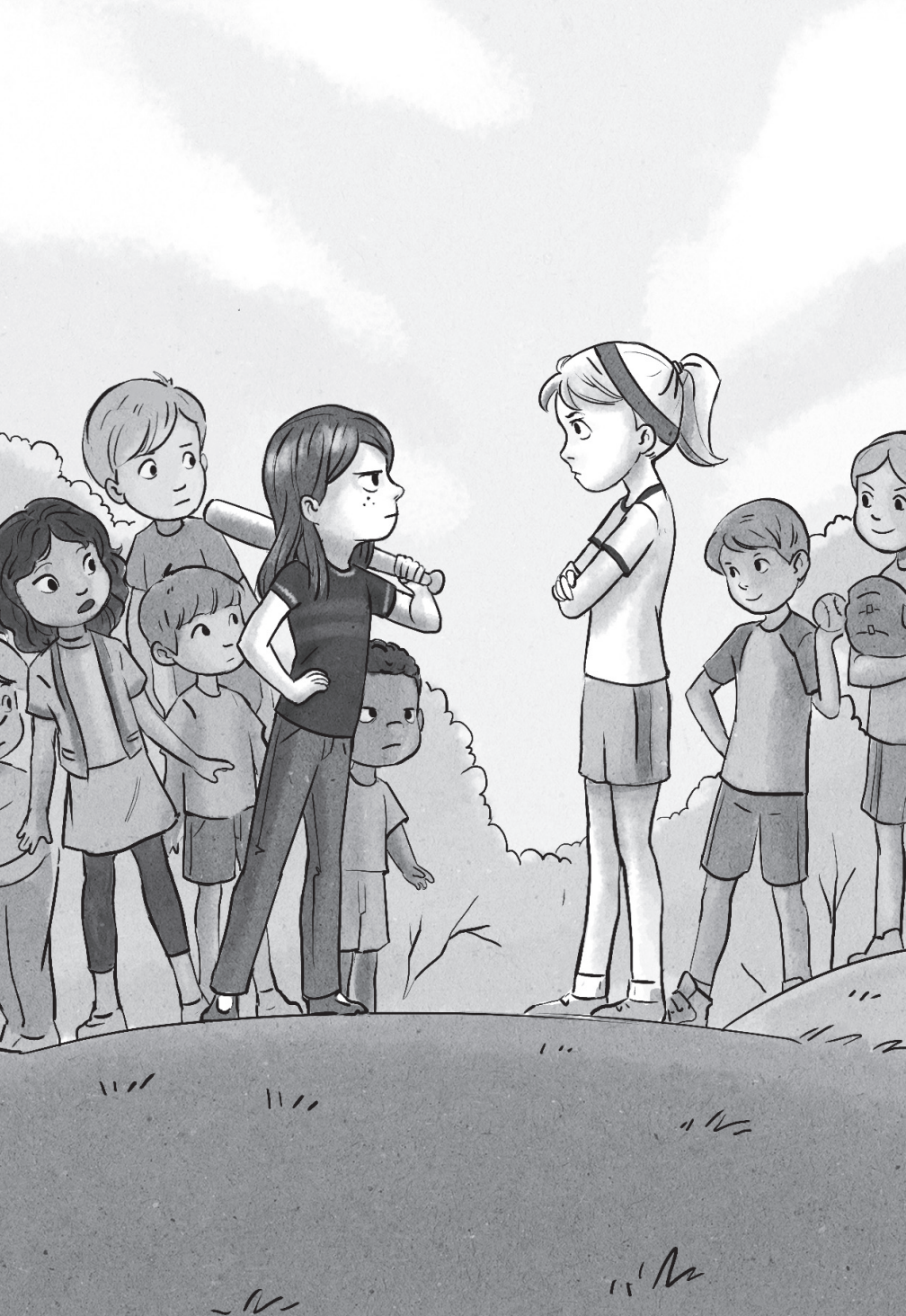
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**For Lucy, my sweet girl and
my kindest editor.**



Chapter 1

It was a normal Tuesday in April, and I was at school, because in April I'm always in school. The bell rang for recess at ten forty-five, just like normal. I grabbed the bats; my friend, Georgie Diaz, grabbed two balls; and we ran out to the upper baseball field, just like normal.

But the field was not empty like normal. It was filled with fifth graders, including Jamie Redmond and her munions — two of the meanest girls at Cherry Hill Elementary. They had bats and balls and mitts. They had smirkety smirks on their faces.

“What are they doing?” Georgie said.

“Maybe they want to play baseball with us,” said Josh Stetson, another one of my good friends. A clump of kids had gathered around us. There were tall ones and small ones. Girls and boys. Fourth

graders like Georgie, Josh, Miranda, and me; third graders like my friend Alistair Robinson; and even some second graders. There were people who were great athletes, and people who weren't. We were all very different, but we had one thing in common: we loved baseball and this was our field.

"They don't look like they want to play with us," Alistair said.

"Um, can you go away?" Georgie politely called to the fifth graders. "We want to play baseball now."

The fifth graders looked at each other. They all rolled their eyes at the exact same time, like their eyeballs were tied together with invisible string. Then they laughed, especially the munion. "You can't play on *this* field," munion number one said.

"Why don't you go down to *your* field?" I said, but as I turned to look at the lower field where the fifth graders usually played baseball, I saw the answer to that question.

"Uh-oh," Miranda Tan, my best friend in the universe, whispered.

The fifth grade's field was down the hill at the very bottom of Cherry Hill's playground. Someone had surrounded it with bright orange tape, parked a tractor on the pitcher's mound, and dumped bags the size of pillows everywhere.

"They're tearing it up to make a fancy playground for the kindergartners," Jamie Redmond said, her voice full of disgust. "Principal Stoddard wants the little kids to run up and down the hill as much as possible so they are exhausted and ready for a nap after recess. My mom tried to stop it, but the principal said the kindergartners were just as important as the fifth graders. Even though that's not true."

An invisible part of me understood the principal's point, because my twin brothers were kindergartners and it was always better when they were sound asleep. But the visible part of me opened my mouth in disgust and outrage. "Then where are you guys going to play baseball?" I said.

Smirks spread over the fifth graders' faces like poison oak. "Right here," munion number one said.

I looked at my baseball friends. There were sixteen of us altogether. None of us smirked. “But we play here!” I said.

“Maybe we’ll have to take turns,” Miranda said. “We could play every other day.”

“But what would we do on the days when we don’t play baseball?” said a small girl on our team. Her name was Giselle, she was in third grade, and she sometimes put her clothes on inside out. She didn’t have a lot of friends.

“There’s nothing else to do!” cried another kid, whose name was Tiger. Tiger was in second grade and he wasn’t very tigerish. Mean kids called him Tiger the Cry-ger.

“We are *not* taking turns,” Jamie Redmond said. “We have to play baseball every day — tryouts for the town league begin in two weeks.”

“Some of us are trying out too!” I said.

“But we’re the ones who matter,” munion number one said.

“Sylvie,” Alistair said, sounding worried. “Are they going to take the field from us?” Before we played hockey together, Alistair had no one to hang out with at recess. Now he had baseball, and he had friends. He was probably afraid that if we lost the field, all of that would go away.

I looked around for help from someone — anyone — but everyone on our side just stood there with their mitts hanging down. The fifth graders were playing catch with their balls and swinging their bats. They weren’t worried a bit.

“I’m sorry,” Jamie Redmond said, because she’s never nice, but sometimes she’s almost nice. “This stinks for you guys.”

“But *we’re* the fifth graders,” munion number one said. “So *we* get the field.”

“No way!” Georgie shouted. “It doesn’t matter what grade you’re in!”

“You’ll get the field when *you’re* in fifth grade,” munion number two called. The other fifth graders

nodded. Giselle and Tiger looked as if their hearts would break.

“You should make a bet.” The voice came from a group of trees near the outfield. We turned to see a huge kid I’d never noticed before, standing in the shadows by himself. “The winner of the bet gets the field,” he continued. “That would be more fair.”



“Shut up, Robot Boy,” munion number one said.

“Yeah,” said munion number two. “I bet you can’t even play baseball with a robot leg.”

Robot leg? I looked at the boy’s legs but saw only pants.

“A bet’s not a bad idea,” Jamie Redmond said. “It would be more fair.”

Georgie looked interested. “What sort of bet?”

“We could have a baseball game,” Jamie Redmond said. “You guys versus us.”

“No,” I said quickly. The kids who played baseball with us were all great, except they weren’t all great at baseball. We would lose a baseball game for sure.

“How about a race?” said munion number one, one of the fastest girls in the school.

“I don’t think a race is a good idea,” Miranda said.

“We could have a throwing competition,” said one of the fifth grade’s best throwers.

“No,” Alistair said. “Your arms are longer.”

“Or a hitting competition,” said the fifth grade’s best batter.

Georgie shook his head. “Bad idea, dude.”

“Or a catching competition,” said a great fifth grade catcher.

“No,” Josh said, because he usually played catcher.

The fifth graders were bigger and stronger, and even if I was a great thrower thanks to all my pitching, and Georgie was an awesome hitter, it was too risky. Jamie *might* throw faster than me by accident. One of the stupid muniions *might* get superpowers and hit the ball farther than Georgie.

“I don’t think a bet is a very good idea,” Josh said. “We should think of another way to figure this out.”

The shouting began once again. I bit my lip, searching for an idea. There had to be something we could bet on that we were guaranteed to win.

Miranda put her arm around Alistair to comfort

him. She was always such a good friend to everyone, always trying to make people feel better. She was good at other things too, even if they weren't sports. Things like math and science and spelling.

I gasped. Miranda! Spelling! That was it! The class spelling bees were today, and Miranda would win for sure. She almost won the school spelling bee last year when she'd only been in third grade, and third graders never almost win spelling bees.

"I know!" I shouted, and everyone turned to me, because I am great at shouting. "The school spelling bee is next Monday. Whoever wins the bee will win the field!"

"The spelling bee?" Georgie said. He looked at Miranda.

"You mean, if a fifth grader wins the bee, the fifth grade gets the field?" munion number two said, smirking a smirkety smirk.

"Sylvie," Miranda said in a warning sort of voice.

“For the rest of the year?” Jamie Redmond said.

“Yes,” I told Jamie. “And if a fourth grader wins the bee, we get the field for the rest of the year.”

There were grumblings and whisperings behind me as our side talked about my idea — they were worried it wouldn’t work and we would lose the field forever. I whispered to them that we had Miranda, the best speller in the universe, and they quieted down a little. The fifth graders were smiling and pointing at munion number two for some reason. That big, quiet boy was still standing in the trees, watching.

“What about this week?” munion number two said. “Who gets the field this week?”

“Nobody,” I said, because I didn’t want any of those munions playing on our field ever. “No one can play on the field until after the bee.”

“What?” the kids on our side cried. “We have to play! What else will we do?”

Jamie Redmond and her fifth grade buddies

laughed at this. Like we were a bunch of baby losers who had no friends.

“So is it a deal?” I said loudly, my arms crossed, my face triumphant like an elephant. If they agreed, we would win the field for sure.

“It’s a deal,” Jamie said, and we shook on it.

