

**JACKY  
HA-HA  
MY LIFE IS A JOKE**

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**AND CHRIS GRABENSTEIN**

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*For the Knoxville Children's Theatre*

—C.G.





# PROLOGUE



**G**reetings from jolly old England, darling daughters, where I am feeling anything but jolly.

In fact, I might be having a panic attack.

My heart is racing. My palms feel clammy, which is a strange expression, because how can hands feel like clams?

Anyway, I can barely breathe and it's not because somebody just told me what the cute-sounding British dish "bubble and squeak" actually is (left-over vegetables mashed together with cabbage,

potatoes, and anything else nobody wanted to eat the day before).

I haven't been this nervous since the time I climbed the Ferris wheel down the shore in Seaside Heights, New Jersey. (The second time. The time my dad caught me.)

I think I am freaking out because I am about to do something I've always wanted to do but am totally terrified of doing.

Yes, that makes about as much sense as a book titled *How to Read* or a waterproof towel.

As you ladies know, your famous mom is over here in London, rehearsing for William Shakespeare's play *As You Like It* at the Globe Theatre.



I'm playing Rosalind, one of Shakespeare's funniest, most kick-butt female characters. The new Globe is a re-creation of his famous theater from back in 1599, which, believe it or not, was a year or two before I was born.

Life is good, right?

No. Life right now is *terrifying!*

*Sh-Sh-Shakespeare.*

Just thinking about playing a part in a comedy by the *Greatest Writer Who Ever Lived* with one of the finest Shakespearean acting companies in the world (or, you know, the *globe*) makes me extremely shaky.

So why is my big opportunity such a huge nightmare?

Because it reminds me of one of the most colossal failures in my whole, entire life.

Most people may know me as the super-cool Academy Award-winning funny lady and star of *Saturday Night Live*, but that's not who I was one summer when I was about your age.

I was a mess.

And a failure.

The star of a one-woman disaster movie.

Yes, girls, you guessed it. There's an embarrassingly kooky but meaningful story from my younger days in your immediate future.

So beware: There are hazardous conditions up ahead.

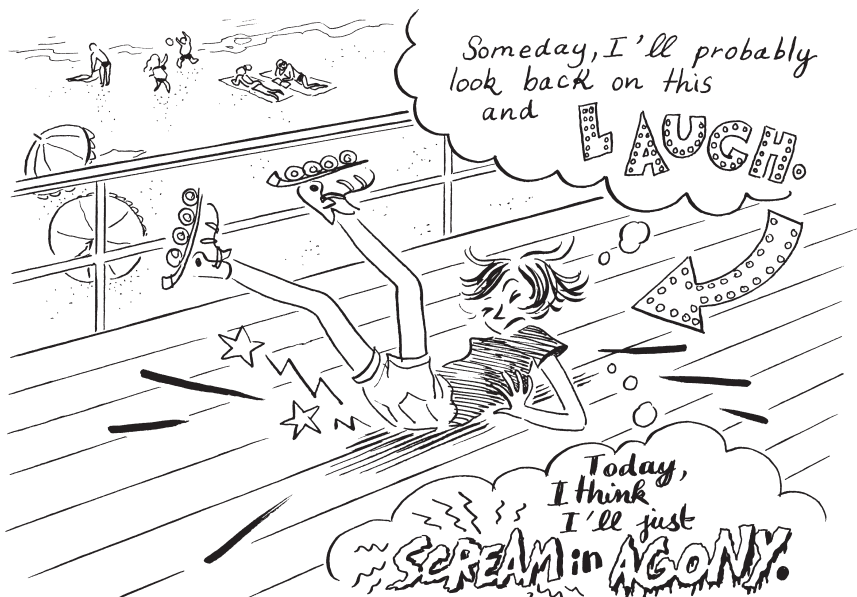


# CHAPTER 1



It's the summer of 1991.

Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles toys are huge. So is Rollerblade Barbie. What are Rollerblades? Don't worry, you don't need to know. Unless you want to twist your ankle, sprain your butt, and scrape most of the skin off your elbows like I did.



Everybody is saying “*Hasta la vista, baby*” to each other, and not just in Spanish class, because Ah-nold Schwarzenegger said it in a movie called *Terminator 2: Judgment Day*.

In fact, 1991 started out pretty good, especially if you ignored Boyz II Men on the radio. (Yep, they were a thing. And that *II*? It’s supposed to be a Roman numeral two, not an eleven.)

In March, Mom came home from Operation Desert Shield, which turned into Operation Desert Storm—a war that, thankfully, only lasted, like, six weeks. Now she’s back in charge of running the Hart house.

Did I mention my mom, Big Sydney Hart, was a marine? (She’s Big because my sister Little Sydney is named after her.)

“I want to see those dishes shine, girls!” she tells us every night after dinner. “I want this galley to glisten!”

“Aye, aye!” we all say.

“Hoo-ah!” says Mom.

Emma, the youngest, who we used to call the Little Boss, is now the Little Echo. She tells us to do whatever Mom just told us to do.

PUT SOME ELBOW  
GREASE INTO IT,  
GIRLS!

PUT SOME **GREASE**  
ON YOUR ELBOWS,  
**GIRLS!**



Things are humming along at school, too.

Yours truly hasn't had a detention since I played Snoopy in the fall musical, *You're a Good Man, Charlie Brown*. If you knew me at all, you knew that me not having detention was a miracle!

I also did the spring show—*You Can't Take It with You*. It was a comedy (yay!) and I played Essie Carmichael, a kooky candymaker who dreams of being a ballerina even though she's a terrible dancer.

I was hysterical, girls. Your mother always was (and always will be) a terrible dancer. Terrible can be funny. Especially if it's ballet.

So now it's June, and life is pretty sweet. Mom's home safe and sound. School's almost over. I'm looking forward to a fun-in-the-sun Jersey Shore summer. The beach! The boardwalk! Bill Phillips!

Yes, he still has those crazy-gorgeous hazel eyes and I still have a kind-of, sort-of crush on him. Hey, I'm twelve going on thirteen. It's summer. It happens.

My big plans when school's out?

Goofing off. Lazing around. Hitting the beach. Doing a whole lot of *nothing*.

Unfortunately, Dad and Mom have different plans. *Very* different.

# CHAPTER 2



"Girls?" says Mom when the dishes are cleaned, dried, and put away and she's all out of *hoo-ahs*. "Your father will be home in fifteen minutes."

"Should we have saved some chicken pot pie for him?" asks Hannah. She's fourteen and super-sweet. "I would've skipped my second helping if I knew Dad was coming home in time to eat..."

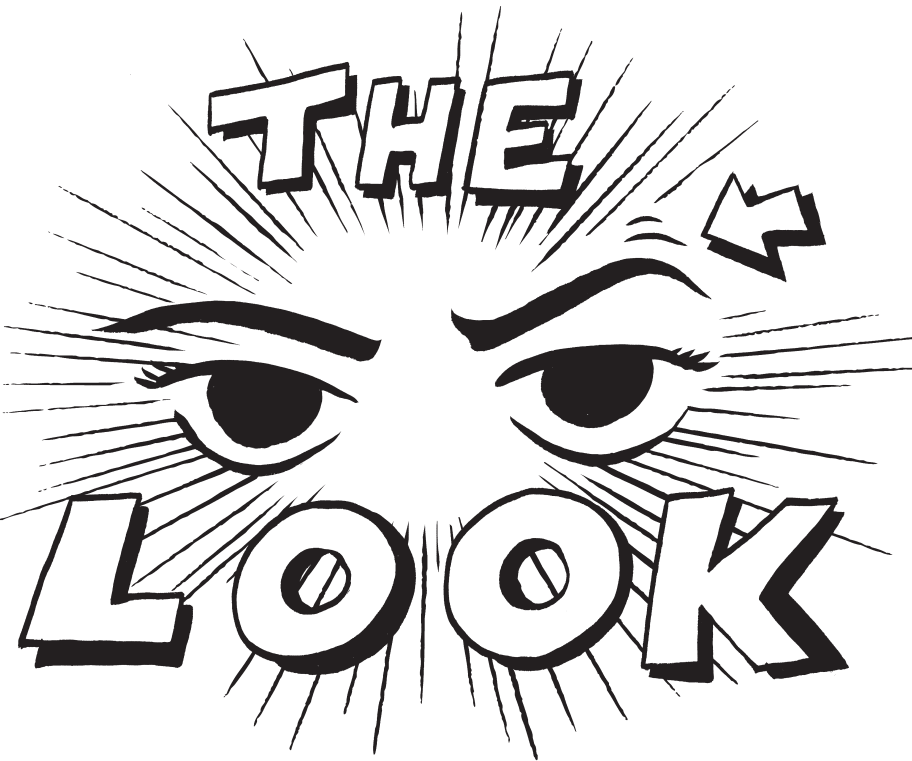
"What about the third helping?" asks Sophia. She's eighteen and the second oldest or, as she likes to put it, the "oldest sister still living at home," because Little Sydney, who's nineteen, is in college at Princeton. Hannah and Sophia are both kind of boy-crazy. And sometimes, they're both crazy about the same boy at the same time.

Awk-ward.

“If you want my opinion,” says Victoria, who’s only fifteen but already knows everything about anything, “it’s extremely rude for Sophia to count how many helpings of chicken pot pie Hannah had for dinner.”

“Girls?”

That’s all Mom has to say. Especially when she cocks her left eyebrow up half an inch and gives us...



“Your father already had dinner with some colleagues at the diner,” says Mom.

“Good,” says Hannah. “But if he’s still hungry, he can have some of my fudge. I hid some under my pillow...”

Yes, Hannah does that. A lot. Which is why, sometimes, she wakes up with melted chocolate in her ear.

“He’s fine, honey,” says Mom. “Your father and I need to see you all in the living room at nineteen hundred hours. Family meeting.”

“Nineteen hundred hours” is military speak for 7:00 p.m. I glance at the kitchen clock. It’s 6:46. “Between now and then,” says Mom, “finish your homework. *Dis-missed!*”

Everybody bustles out of the kitchen except Riley and me. Riley’s eleven and is in the unfortunate position of being my next-younger sister. That means she looks up to me, which is not always the best or wisest move. (I wasn’t exactly a super-duper role model when I was twelve. Okay, I was probably the worst role model ever. A dinner roll would’ve been a better role model.)

“What do you think’s going on?” Riley asks.

“I don’t know!” I pretend to panic. “The suspense is killing me. Literally!” I bring my hands up to my throat, bug out my eyes, and act like I’ve just swallowed poison, then collapse to the ground. “Gak! I’m dead! Killed by suspense.”

Riley laughs.

I take a little bow.

“Don’t worry,” I say. “It’s probably something good. Hey, maybe now that Mom is home, we’re all going somewhere cool for a family vacation.”

“Do you think it’s Disney World?” gasps Riley, her eyes going wide.

She’s been wanting to go to Disney World ever since she saw the *New Kids on the Block Wildest Dreams* special on TV. (FYI—New Kids on the Block were the big boy band back in the 1990s. They were sort of like whoever’s replaced Justin Bieber and One Direction on your lunch boxes.)

“I hope so,” I tell Riley.

Dad arrives home at 6:59, on the dot. We all assemble in the living room.

“Girls?” he says. “I have some terrific news.”

“We’re going to Disney World?” Riley blurts out, sounding like a Super Bowl commercial.



“Not this summer, dear,” says Mom. “Your father has a new job!”

“You’re not going to head up the lifeguards?” I say.

“No, ma’am,” says Dad, taking Mom’s hand. “In fact, I am taking the first steps on the road to my dream job.”

“You’re going to be a cop?” gushes sweet Hannah. “Oh, Dad, that is so wonderful! All your hard work, all your studying, all your nights away from home...”

It’s true. Dad worked really hard studying to take his police officer exam. So hard, we hardly ever saw him last fall. Some of us even got a little suspicious about where he was going all the time. (That would’ve been me.)

“Congratulations, Father,” says Victoria.

“Woo-hoo!” I say, giving Dad a hearty arm pump.

Emma just races across the room and hugs his leg.

Dad laughs. “Thank you, ladies. I couldn’t have done it without your support.”

“And,” says Mom, “he won’t be able to continue doing it without your continued support.”

“That’s right, girls,” says Dad. “I know school’s nearly over. That you all had big plans for the summer.”

Uh-oh.

Dad just said “had.” *As in, past tense.*

That means we probably shouldn’t have them anymore.