

INTERMEDIATE FICTION



BEACON STREET GIRLS®

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Can the Beacon Street Girls bring the house down at Abigail Adams Junior High's Talent Show? Or will the Queens of Mean steal the show? Maeve, Avery, Katani, Isabel, and Charlotte face their toughest challenges yet—saving the show, keeping the Movie House from going out of business, and dealing with an out-of-control soccer mom. On top of it all, Maeve's relationship with Dillon is shaky and Marty, the dog, has a crush on a mysterious pink poodle owned by the very interesting Ms. Razzberry Pink.

Will the girls be able to show everyone that sometimes you have to take things *out of bounds* to put it all back together?

"Once I started reading, I couldn't stop!"

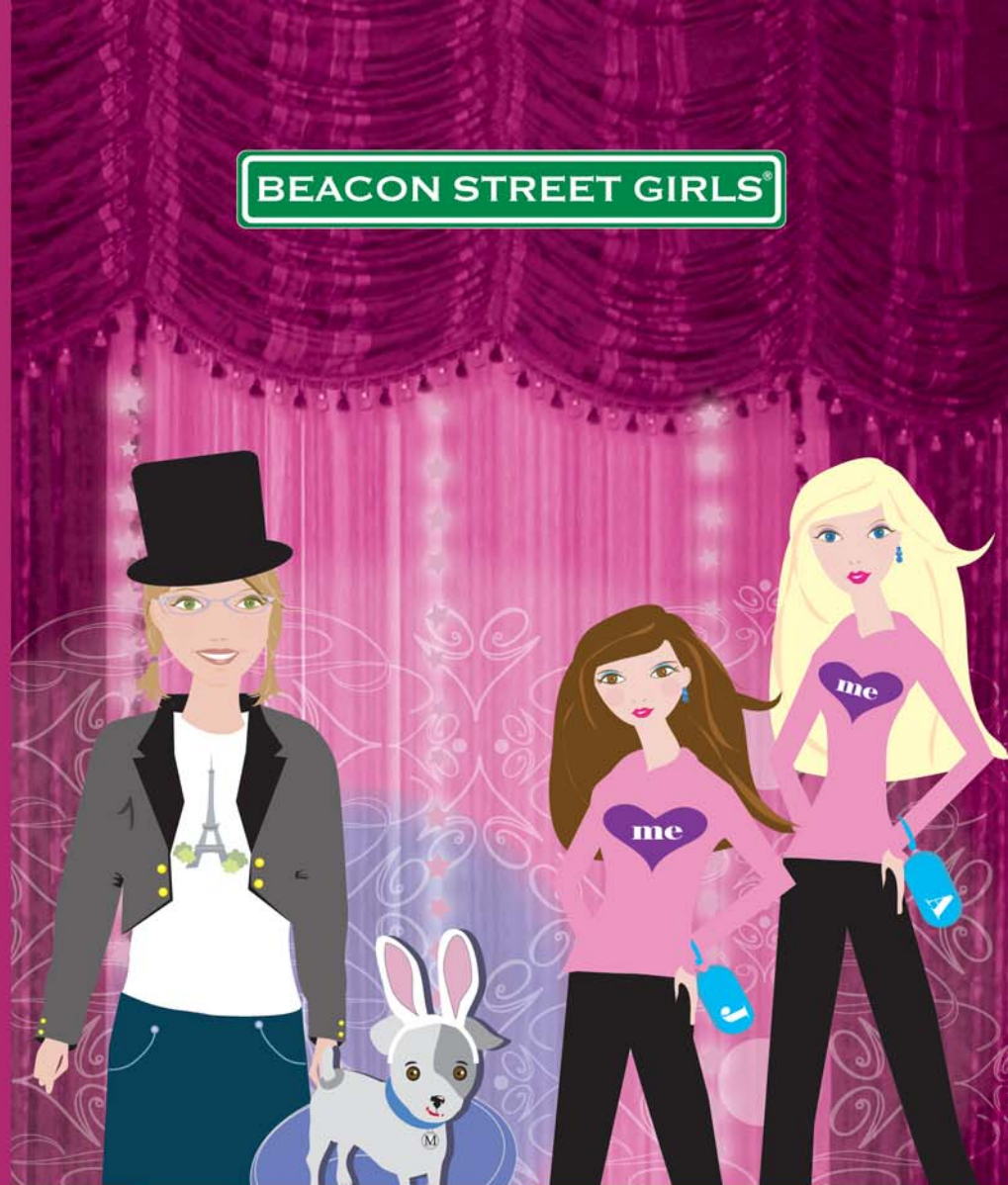
~ Megan, 12



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out of bounds

by **annie bryant** ✨

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THE SOCCER MOM

"IT CAN'T BE *this* cold," Maeve wailed.

"It's like we're in Alaska or something," Katani added, stomping her feet on the bleacher steps.

"My hands feel like polar bear snacks!" piped in Charlotte as she tucked her hands into the sleeves of her favorite hoodie sweatshirt.

"I'm thinking Mexico ... on the beach ... tropical sun beating down ... a cold drink," added Isabel dreamily. "Ooh! You have to try this. Think about sweating and being really, really hot. It helps. Try it."

Unseasonably cold, that's what Kristy B., the most popular weather woman in Boston, said. *Record breaking*. But it wasn't supposed to last. By Wednesday, it would be back in the 60s. That's just what fall was like in New England. What was it that Isabel's Aunt Lourdes said when they moved east to live with her? *If you don't like the weather in New England, just wait a minute.*

But all in all the Beacon Street Girls loved the fall.

"The air is just so crisp and clear," Avery always said. "It



makes you just want to jump around and do backflips.” Avery *would* say that because she was the only one of the Beacon Street Girls who could actually do a backflip and land on her feet!

Isabel decided that fall was her favorite season, too. The leaf colors were totally awesome—bright red to intense orange to vibrant yellow and even deep purple. You really had to be totally oblivious not to notice them. And the fall light—it cast the most amazing shadows. They called it northern light, the kind of light that all real painters love. Isabel thought everyone should live in New England at least once. At least all artists, or aspiring artists like her, as Isabel wasn’t ready to give herself the honor of being called a real artist yet.

Isabel, Katani, Maeve, and Charlotte were cheering at Avery’s soccer game. Well, it wasn’t her game exactly. Avery wasn’t *on* the team this time; she was an official referee in the fourth-grade girls’ tournament. And this game was a big one: the Twisters vs. the Tornadoes.

“Go Twisters, Go Twisters!” whooped Maeve as she stood, raised her arms, and rocked back and forth. It wasn’t as if she had any loyalty to either team, but they were sitting in the Twisters’ bleachers, so she figured she owed them her best cheerleading efforts.

“Sit down, Maeve,” scolded Katani. “You’re making Avery laugh, and she has to concentrate. She’s getting paid real money for this.” Katani was totally a business girl type. President of a major corporation was definitely in her future, or at least owner of her own fashion boutique. The Kgirl had some serious style.

They all looked down on the field and saw Avery grinning up at Maeve and shaking her head back and forth.

“OK,” sighed Maeve with a fake sorry look. “I guess my cheerleading abilities are not wanted here.”

Charlotte grabbed one of Maeve’s arms and Katani grabbed the other. They yanked her down, shouting in unison, “Sit down, Maeve!”

Behind them, a group of little boys repeated, “Sit down, Maeve,” and burst into uncontrollable laughter. Isabel, Charlotte, and Katani completely cracked up. “You are so busted,” they sputtered in between their giggles.

“The life of a performer is very trying,” complained Maeve in her best dramatic voice, and she went back to looking intently at the field. Her friends knew she wasn’t mad, though. Maeve hardly ever got mad at anyone. It just wasn’t her style. Sometimes her feelings got hurt, but her upbeat spirit always managed to shine through.

Avery once said that Maeve was like one of those wobbly dolls that whenever it gets knocked down, it bounces right back up again. So true, because with a mischievous little grin on her face, Maeve jumped up for one more quick whoop and roll before anyone could stop her. Then she turned and high-fived one of the little boys behind her.

“You are so hyper,” Katani said.

“It’s all this cold weather,” Maeve said once she settled herself back on the bench. “If I sit still, I am going to freeze to death.”

There was a shout from the field. One of the Tornadoes had just missed scoring a goal.

“Twisters and Tornadoes are the same thing, you know,” Isabel offered. She had recently moved here from Michigan, where they actually had some seriously big storms. Twisters were one of the only things about the Midwest that Isabel didn’t miss. Watching a house fly off its foundation and spin





around in the air was a pretty scary sight. Isabel shuddered as she thought about some of the news pictures she had seen.

"I don't think I ever want to see a twister. I mean, it's kind of fun in the movies, but in real life ... no, thank you," said Maeve, handing their adopted little mutt, Marty, to Isabel.

The Beacon Street Girls were taking turns passing Marty back and forth among them like a football. Not only did he seem to enjoy the attention, but cuddling with Marty was helping them all stay warmer. He was like a little heating pad. Everyone was glad that Avery had insisted they bring Marty to the game. If the truth be told, no one was too thrilled to be watching fourth graders play soccer.

"I mean, if somebody's sister was playing, this might be sort of interesting," said Charlotte.

Simultaneously, the girls looked at each other and as if they had some kind of immediate psychic connection, all said at the same time "Nah!" Of course, that set off another round of giggles. No, they were there because their buddy Avery was reffing. "You gotta be loyal to your friends," said Katani, when Maeve first complained that it would be too cold. "We would go and see you dance, Maeve, so we have to support Avery, too."

"Well, at least it got me out of cleaning my room," Maeve grinned. "My mother said loyalty to friends was more important than cleaning the Maeve Toxic Waste Dump." She did a perfect imitation of her mother's New York accent.

"Look at how completely cutified he is," Isabel said, hugging Marty for warmth.

"He is just a major charmball, and sooo adorable," Maeve agreed.

"I love those words—cutified and charmball. I think we should make them official BSG words. I think I'm going to start

a BSG dictionary," mused Charlotte, who loved everything to do with being a writer.

Maeve, Katani, and Isabel all looked at Charlotte with amusement.

"I think you should call it 'Word Nerd,'" offered Maeve.

"That works for me," laughed Charlotte.

"I think Marty just smiled at you," Katani said.

"No way," Isabel laughed.

"He did, I swear," Katani said. "See? He just did it again."

The corners of Marty's mouth were turned up in what looked like a grin.

They all laughed, glad the little guy was there. Avery had said Marty needed to get out more. She didn't want him becoming a couch potato. And Marty seemed to think it was fine weather, great weather in fact, but then again, he had a fur coat. Lucky little dude!

It was funny the way the girls always thought they knew what Marty was thinking. Avery, who had been reading up on the subject, said all pet owners give their pets human qualities. But she said that Marty was different from any normal pet. As people in the stands jumped up to see what was going on, Marty jumped up too. Marty was the kind of dog that thought he was a person. You could just tell the way he looked when someone tried to tell him what to do. It was as if he was saying, "Dude, I'm in charge here." He was definitely a small dog, big personality kind of mutt. Great Danes, stay away!

"I think Mr. Marté is a big soccer fan. Look how closely he's watching all the plays," Charlotte said, laughing. Having lived in Paris for a year, Charlotte liked to frenchify Marty's name. She thought it gave him "panache." That was another of Charlotte's favorite words. She said *panache* was





so much cooler to say than *style!*

Marty heard his name and took a running leap into Charlotte's lap.

Isabel saw the surprised look on Charlotte's face and started to giggle. "I guess he's decided it's your turn to hold him," she said.

Marty started snuffling around in Charlotte's pockets, looking for treats.

"All gone," Charlotte said to Marty, but that didn't stop him. Instead, his little legs started digging at Charlotte's pants at warp speed. This set off another round of hysterical giggles. He looked so funny scratching around for nonexistent treats.

Finally, Charlotte emptied her pockets to demonstrate to Marty that she had nothing there. The only thing she pulled out were some golden coins she had been carrying around to practice a magic trick. Charlotte had been studying "great illusionists" for her next English report that was coming up in Ms. R's class. She'd already read one book on the greatest magicians of all time and another that was a biography of Harry Houdini. At the moment, she was reading a *how-to* book on sleight of hand.

Once Charlotte became interested in a particular subject, she read everything she could find on it. Right now, her big thing was magic. It was just so challenging to learn how to make things disappear.

As she flipped the coins through her fingers, Charlotte wondered what it would be like to be invisible. She had seen an old movie called *The Invisible Man* at the Movie House. It was creepy and fascinating at the same time. Being able to walk into a room and hear and see everybody, but they couldn't see you—how completely weird would that be? Maybe time travel would be better, she thought. You could

go visit with Queen Victoria or something. Suddenly, Charlotte was in the English court, eating scones and having tea with the little queen who liked to dress completely in black.

"She looks so tall out there," Isabel said. "It's funny how she towers over everyone."

Oops, back to Earth, Charlotte admonished herself.

"That's because the other girls on the field are fourth graders," Katani said, and they all laughed.

Avery was athletic and strong. The one thing she wasn't was tall.

The wind shifted, and Maeve shivered under their blanket.

Katani, who'd brought a bright pink thermos of sweet tea, handed a cup to Maeve. "Go ahead and finish it," she suggested. "It'll warm you up."

Katani was the only one semi-prepared for the weather. She wore a poncho the girls had named the Kgirl Special. Katani had designed it herself by cutting up a bright yellow fleece blanket, adding a few tassels, and attaching vintage buttons all down the middle. It was the same color as some of the leaves that were falling behind her. With her poncho and her thermos, Katani looked as if she could be on the cover of *Style Girl* magazine. Still, Katani was not all that warm either. Her lips were starting to turn blue.

"You know, Katani, you look kind of cool with blue lips. Maybe you should get some blue lip gloss or something," Maeve offered.

"Maeve, blue lip gloss is for super rock star types. I am going for the New York '*Excuse me, but I own a major fashion empire*' kind of look. You go for the blue. It would suit you to a T, especially if you decide to sing in Riley's band. Think of it, blue lip gloss, red hair, red silk shirt. Don't give me that look. Redheads look fabulous in the right color red ... and





blue jeans with rhinestones down the side ...”

“I think we got the picture,” said Isabel, nodding her head. Once Katani got on a roll with fashion, there was no stopping her!

Hmm, Riley’s band, Maeve thought to herself.

Riley Lee, the class musician, had been asking her for weeks if she wanted to sing with the band. But singing with Riley’s band would be a lot of work because Riley was seriously serious about music. He lived and breathed it. Every week, he was talking about some fabulous new band. Maeve just didn’t know if she was ready for that yet. She liked hip hop dancing and drama, too. But there were only so many hours in a day. And now there were two places to live ... but she didn’t want to think about that now. Her parents’ recent separation was too new for her to be comfortable thinking about it even for a second.

By this time, the only one who looked really warm was Avery, who was running the length of the soccer field, blowing her whistle every few seconds. In fact, it looked like someone had painted two really big red circles on either side of her face. Refereeing fourth-grade girls wasn’t easy. They were sooo sensitive. But Avery was determined to do a super job. She loved soccer with a passion and had dreams of being a soccer coach someday, that is if she didn’t become a senator or a snowboarder in Colorado. “That’s the thing about being our age,” grumbled Avery the other day. “There’s so many amazingly cool things to do. How am I ever going to decide?”

“Avery,” Maeve had answered her, “You’re not supposed to decide now. You’re supposed to try a bunch of stuff first, see what you like, see what you are good at, and then when you grow up, decide on whatever you like best. Besides, if you decide now, you’ll get too serious and nothing will be any fun

anymore. I mean, geesh Avery, we’re only in seventh grade!”

All the BSG looked impressed. For someone who wasn’t the best of students, it was moments like these that made them realize that Maeve had a lot of common sense.

“But,” Avery had to add, “What if you like something that you are really bad at?”

“Well,” offered Katani in a serious tone, “I suppose you could work really hard at it, and you would definitely get better at it. But I don’t know if you would be as good as someone who was naturally really good at something and worked hard.”

At that point, Charlotte, Maeve, and Isabel had had enough. “Don’t worry about it,” they groaned. Avery had answered them with one of her now famous *snurps* (a combination of a snort and a burp), “I won’t.”

Anyway, Avery decided to take the refereeing course last summer. It had taken several weekends to get certified, but, by the end of the course, Avery had secured her first real job. She was a popular referee. Each game she reffed paid \$30, and today she had already reffed two games. But Avery wasn’t really in it for the money. She would have done it for free. She loved soccer that much. And she liked to help the younger girls.

All of a sudden, Avery blew a short blast on her whistle and the game came to a halt.

“What just happened?” Katani asked. She had been daydreaming about how fun it would be to design a whole line of cute dog products. She could see it now: the Martywear Collection. Debuted at *Fashion Week* with Marty jogging down the runway in a groovy Martywear ensemble. Paparazzi everywhere—rock stars with their own little chihuahuas.

“Off sides,” Charlotte said.



"I think they've called a time out," said Maeve

"They don't have time out in soccer," answered Isabel.

A woman behind them jumped up. "Come on, let's go!"

The woman yelled. She was wearing a red sweatshirt with the words: *Megan's Mom*, printed across the front.

The girls exchanged a look.

Katani checked her watch. The game was almost over. The score was tied. "I think they have to go into overtime. Because it's the championships, it'll probably be first goal scored wins," Katani predicted.

"Watch this," Charlotte said, taking advantage of the opportunity to try out one of her new tricks. She took one of the gold coins and passed it through her fingers from thumb to pinky and back again, over one, under the next, over and under again until she had done it several times.

"Whoa, I'm impressed. How did you do that?" Katani said, meaning it.

"Pay no attention to the man behind the curtain," Charlotte said in a stage voice, and they all laughed. It was a quote from *The Wizard of Oz*, which Maeve's father had screened for them over the weekend. They all agreed that they loved the movie, they were still afraid of the Wicked Witch of the West, and that "I'll get you, my pretties, and your little dog, too," was one of the all-time great movie lines.

Katani, who claimed she had no acting talent, in fact did an awesome imitation of the Wicked Witch. Donning a witch's mask and hat, Katani had scared them all by bursting into the Tower room one night at Charlotte's as they lay sleeping, and cackling the famous line.

The girls screamed so loud that Marty ran and attacked the bottom of Katani's pants, shaking them back and forth and growling madly. Katani fell to the floor laughing

hysterically. The other girls pummeled her with pillows so hard that one of them broke and the feathers burst out and floated throughout the Tower.

Mr. Ramsey, Charlotte's dad, came running up to the room to see what was wrong. When he walked in, a feather fell right on his nose. He just stood there, nodding his head back and forth at the laughing witch on the bed and the feathers in the room. The girls went crazy and laughed even harder.

"Try not to wake up the whole neighborhood," Mr. Ramsey said as he walked out of the Tower. "And ... don't let the bed bugs bite, girls."

Ever since then, all Katani had to do was crouch over and begin to speak in her witch voice and Charlotte, Avery, Maeve, and Isabel would crack up.



CHARLOTTE, THE MAGICIAN

At the soccer game, it was about Charlotte and magic.

"Now, you see it, now you don't."

Charlotte made a sweeping motion, and just like that, the old coin was gone.

"Et voilà!" said Charlotte in her best Parisian accent.

"Where did it go?" Katani laughed, checking her tea cup.

"How did you do that?" Isabel seemed genuinely interested.

"Nothing up my sleeves," Charlotte said, showing them.

"Hey, that was my coin," Maeve said. She had loaned the coins to Charlotte a week ago.

"You mean this coin?" Charlotte asked, reaching into Maeve's pocket.

"Or this coin?" Charlotte pulled another one from behind Katani's knee.





"Or maybe this one," she said, reaching into Isabel's sleeve. She handed all of the coins back to Maeve. "Un, deux, trois," Charlotte counted.

"Hey, I'm rich," Maeve grinned.

"Where *did* you learn that trick?" Isabel was clearly fascinated.

"From my father's friend Jacques in Paris. He used to be a magician before he gave it up to be a lawyer. He said the pay was better for lawyers. But it's also in one of my magic books. I wasn't this good at it before. The first time I practiced it, one of the coins landed in my dad's soup. We were eating dinner at Le Languedoc, this really fancy Paris restaurant in the Bois de Boulogne, for his birthday. The soup splashed all over the tablecloth. The waiter screamed, 'Oh, mon dieu!' ... He was not happy. The French are very serious about their food, you know," Charlotte explained.

"Excellent coin-in-the-soup performance," clapped Maeve.

"Well, I've been practicing a lot since then," Charlotte said. "You know me," she laughed. "I get totally into things."

"That's a sweet trick," Katani said.

"Very cool," Isabel agreed.

"Only a few seconds left," Katani said, turning back as the game started up again.

Maeve handed Charlotte back the coins. "Keep them for a while," she said.

Charlotte was about to put them back in her pocket when Megan's mom popped up again, knocking the coins into the air. Charlotte caught one of them, Katani caught another, but the third one fell under the bleachers.

"No!" Megan's mom yelled toward the field, oblivious to what she'd just done.

One of the Twisters had been running the ball toward

the goal when a girl from the Tornadoes suddenly appeared and stole the ball. It was close to the line, but Avery's whistle did not blow.

The whole Twisters' bench stood to watch in horror as the Tornadoes' player dribbled the ball all the way down to the other end of the field and scored the winning goal.

"No way!" Megan's mother was already off the bench and on the field. "That ball was completely out of bounds!"

From where they were sitting, it was difficult to tell who was right and who was wrong. But Avery hadn't called a penalty. And Avery knew what she was doing when it came to soccer.

Charlotte crawled under the bleachers to search for the coin. By the time she found it, there was a big commotion on the field. Megan's mom was arguing with Avery, who was trying her best to stand her ground. And Megan's mom was pretty scary with her yelling and her finger pointing right in Avery's face. Avery looked very little standing next to her. Suddenly, both coaches were on the field and everyone was talking loudly at once.

"What's going on?" Charlotte asked, poking her head out from under the bleachers.

Maeve had been totally focused on what was going on with the argument on the field. "Megan's mom keeps yelling that Avery's call was bad, that the ball was out of bounds, even though nobody says *out of bounds* in soccer."

As Megan's mom continued to shake her finger at Avery, Marty jumped off the bench, and, in a flash, was running toward the field barking his head off.

"Yikes," said Isabel as the girls began to chase after Marty, while poor Charlotte, who was still crawling through the bleachers and hurrying to catch up, caught her pants on





the corner of the bleachers and ripped the back of her jeans. Disaster! Underwear Showing Alert!

Great, another embarrassing moment in the life of Charlotte Ramsey. Why don't we just hold up a sign. Well, no time to think about it now, Charlotte thought. Standing up, she took off her warm, cuddly sweatshirt and wrapped it around her waist. Life was about to get very cold, she realized as she climbed back up on the bleachers to see what was happening and felt the fall wind whipping through her light jersey ... and her pants.

Maeve managed to catch Marty first and was doing her best to hold him still. He barked wildly at Megan's mom, who was barking wildly at Avery.

"You better keep a hold of that vicious dog," Megan's mom yelled over to Maeve.

"Vicious dog! I don't think so," whispered Maeve furiously under breath, but she did try to shush Marty.

It was easy to tell which girl was Megan. She was the Twister who'd had the ball stolen from her in the final seconds of the game. Even if Charlotte hadn't seen the play, she would have been able to tell from the embarrassed look on the girl's face as she listened to her mother rant on and on about how that ball was out of bounds, and how Avery had failed to make the correct call. Charlotte could tell that Megan wished she was anywhere but on that field.

"I feel really sorry for that little girl," Isabel whispered to Katani. "I would totally die if my mother acted like that."

"I know what you mean," Katani whispered back. "This is one of those things that every kid lives in fear of ... being embarrassed by your mother in front of hundreds of people. It's like every kid's worst nightmare!"

"That ball was clearly out of bounds," Megan's mother

screamed. "You need to have your eyes checked. I think you need glasses!"

Uh-oh! The girls could see that Avery was really under some serious pressure here.

"You can't be old enough to be a referee. How old are you?" Megan's mom continued.

"Ma'am," the Twisters' coach said, raising his voice, "You need to calm down and take your seat right now. No parents are allowed on the field during a game."

Megan's mom opened her mouth to say something, but the Tornadoes' coach interrupted her. "Ma'am, the goal was good. You know the rules. The ref calls the play. Please go back to your seat or leave the field," the coach said firmly.

The next thing they knew, Megan's mom turned on him. She apparently couldn't believe what she was hearing. "Well," she sputtered angrily, "the soccer board will be hearing from me." She grabbed Megan's hand and dragged her humiliated daughter off the field.

"What just happened?" Avery asked in a bewildered little voice. "I didn't mean ..."

"It's OK, Avery," the Twisters' coach said before she could finish. "Some of these parents get really carried away sometimes. It's totally inappropriate behavior ... way out of bounds," he added as he winked at Avery. "Although I wish it were different and we'd won the game, that ball was in. But even if you were wrong, the ref calls the play. That's the way the game goes."

Both coaches shook hands. Then they shook Avery's. "Don't let this discourage you, Avery," the Tornadoes' coach said. "You're a terrific referee, and I will talk to the soccer board about what a great job you did today. If you're worried, have your mother call me, and I'll be glad to talk to her about





all of this.”

Avery beamed. “That’s OK, Coach. I knew that reffing wasn’t going to be easy. But I didn’t think it would get this crazy.”

“Sometimes it takes people a long time to learn how to be a good sport,” the Tornadoes’ coach said.

Marty didn’t stop barking until Megan’s mom had driven away.

“You tell her, Mr. Marté,” said Maeve as she shook his little furry paw after Megan’s mom.

NO DOGS ALLOWED

After the game, Avery wanted to treat her friends to hot chocolates at Montoya’s, but first they had to stop at Charlotte’s house to drop Marty off and so Charlotte could change her pants. They all felt badly about leaving him. “If we were in Paris,” Charlotte said, “Marty could come.”

“That’s so cool,” enthused Avery, who had tucked Marty under her arm. “Let’s start a petition here. After all, dogs have rights, too!”

“You’ve gotta run for office someday, Avery,” cheered Maeve.

Avery grinned. “Maybe I will. Somebody’s got to save the planet from unfair rules ... it might as well be me!” Then she smushed her face into Marty’s face, whereupon he gave her a big slurpy kiss right on her mouth.

“That’s so gross, Avery,” said Katani as she made a face. Katani was not a fan of slurpy dog kisses. Too undignified.

“Did you hear that, Marty? You have just been insulted,” Avery said to Marty as she scratched his tummy.

“He’ll get over it,” added Katani sarcastically.

Charlotte laughed. “Katani, you have to come to Paris.

You would not believe how much people love their dogs there. They have better clothes for their dogs than even all those fancy movie stars do.”

Katani suddenly seemed interested. “You know, I was thinking of dog outfits at the game. Maybe I should design a few outfits for Mr. Marté here ... maybe a little beret and sweater.” Avery looked skeptical, as if the idea of Marty in a designer beret didn’t quite sit well with her.

Charlotte, who had lived all over the world before she came home to Brookline, clapped her hands enthusiastically. She had lived in Australia, Africa, and most recently Paris. And even though they wouldn’t let dogs into the cafés here, she thought Katani’s idea was awesome. “Marty in a French beret and a sweater would bring a little bit of Paris here. I love it.”

Charlotte really liked living in Brookline, Massachusetts. The Beacon Street Girls were here, and it felt like home. And it was where she had lived when she was a little girl, when her mother was alive. Sometimes Charlotte and her dad would have breakfast on Newbury Street, Boston’s fashion center. Afterwards they would walk around the corner and look up at the apartment they had all lived in when Charlotte’s mom was still alive. It seemed to comfort them both.

Avery settled Marty into the colorful little doghouse Isabel had recently painted for him. It had a cut-out door so he could come and go whenever he wanted to, and fancy *trompe l’oeil* (which means “trick of the eye” in French) painted windows with curtains and a window box and cute little tulips and daffodils.

Avery thought it looked kinda girly for a boy dog, but Marty loved his little house. Over the past few weeks, he had dragged all his toys inside as well as a few other items he fancied, like one of Katani’s pillows ... and an empty box of





dog cookies.

Still, even though he loved his house, Marty didn't want to stay there today. Determined to come along, he followed them to the door.

"Stay," Avery said firmly. Marty hung his head and looked a little crushed.

"I'll bring you back part of my buñuelo," Isabel promised. Marty licked his lips.

Everyone laughed.

"Sometimes," Isabel said as they turned to go, "I could swear that dog understands what we're talking about."

Avery stayed behind for a minute, tossing Happy Lucky Thingy, Marty's most favorite chew toy, around with the "little dude" until he got tired enough from his favorite game to lie down and take a dog nap.

"There you go," Avery said, putting Happy Lucky under his head like a little pillow. Before Avery reached the door, he was snoring softly.

"I wish I had a camera," Maeve said, looking back through the doorway. "I think we should send this picture to a famous movie producer. He is too adorable for words."

"Can't you just see it? Marty riding in a limo, pulling up to the red carpet for Oscar night. It would be so cool."

"Avery, you're beginning to sound like me," Maeve laughed. Avery joined in. There were no two people who were less alike than Avery and Maeve. Maeve was all pink and flashy, while Avery was the sporty girl. It was amazing they were such good friends. But they were.



Montoya's Bakery was warm and cozy. Steam streaked the windows. The whole place smelled of chocolate and cinnamon. Mouths watered before even ordering.

Avery ordered hot chocolate for her friends. Isabel had gotten everyone hooked on Montoya's buñuelos, so they all chipped in and shared one, saving a tiny piece of it for Marty.

Nick Montoya, whose parents owned the place, brought the hot chocolates over to the table. Nick was so cute. Even if they didn't have a crush on him, girls liked to drool over his big brown eyes, his black hair, and his friendly smile. The BSG felt lucky to get seats because it seemed like there were a zillion kids from Abigail Adams Junior High there.

Charlotte especially liked it when Nick was working. She remembered when Maeve told her that he was the cutest boy in the whole seventh grade. Maeve used to have a major freak-out crush on Nick. Charlotte did think that he had the most amazing eyes and a great smile. He was also really sweet and relatively easy to talk to.

But Charlotte just wasn't sure she was ready for the whole dating thing yet. It seemed a little complicated. Less complicated to worship from afar, she thought. That way there were no totally embarrassing moments or awkward silences when neither of you knew what to say. Although she and Nick usually had a lot to talk about ... you just never knew. Maybe later on the dating thing. But how much later?

"So, who won the game?" Nick asked Avery.

"The Tornados," Avery answered. "By one goal in overtime."

"Sounds exciting," Nick said, smiling. "Those fourth-grade games can really blow you away." Everyone knew he was joking.





“Actually, it was really exciting,” Charlotte said. “One of the soccer moms picked a fight with Avery.”

“No way,” Nick said.

“She didn’t really pick a fight, but she was yelling a ton,” Avery admitted.

“The mother kept yelling that the ball was out of bounds,” Isabel said.

“Sounds intense!” Nick said.

“It kinda was,” Avery nodded.

“I felt so sorry for that little girl,” Maeve said.

“Megan,” Katani added.

“She was so embarrassed. She looked as if she wanted to hide,” Charlotte said, suddenly empathizing that this would have been one of those times when being able to become invisible would have really come in handy.

“Why do parents act like that?” Isabel wanted to know. “It’s only a game.”

“Parents are so weird sometimes. They make such a big deal over stuff. They should just let the kids handle it,” Avery said. “You know what else is funny? Her mother couldn’t come to two of the games, and Megan played much better when she wasn’t around.” Avery took a big gulp of her hot chocolate.

“Big surprise,” said Maeve.

“Sounds like the only thing out of bounds was Megan’s mom, she probably needs to chill out!” Nick said, as he wiped the table next to them off.

