

INTERMEDIATE FICTION



Avery Madden Isabel Martinez Charlotte Romano
Maere Kaplan-Jordan
Summer Summers
bff
to

Avery Madden
for the
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JUNIOR
HIGH
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That's not all. Mr. Popular, Dillon Johnson, is running too, and he's making big promises. Can he keep them? Henry Yurt, aka the Yurtmeister, has plastered smiley face posters all over the school that are too silly for words, or ... maybe not.

Will the candidate with the best ideas win the election, or will big promises take the day!

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~ Kristen, 13



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promises, promises

by annie bryant

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CHAPTER 1



TICKLED PINK

“OH, OH ... I forgot. I’ve got some really interesting news!” Maeve exclaimed as she sank down in the middle of her sleeping bag, her giant, fuzzy pink slippers sticking out in front of her. “You’re not going to believe it!”

“Lights out!” Mr. Ramsey called up the steep, ladder-like stairs to the Tower.

Charlotte jumped up to flip off the lights. “OK, Dad,” she called down. “Good night!”

Charlotte’s dad was pretty great about letting the Beacon Street Girls have sleepovers in the Tower as long as the girls kept the noise level down and cleaned up after themselves. He’d even helped the girls make individual pizzas this evening, and the aroma of homemade dough still lingered in the air.

The sleeping bags were arranged in a starburst pattern so their heads came together in the center of the room.

“Oops,” squealed Charlotte as she tripped over Avery’s legs on her way back to her sleeping bag, catching herself at the last moment before crash-landing right on top of her friend.



She stumbled to the sleeping bag, flopped on her stomach, and propped her chin in the palms of her two hands.

“Good catch,” laughed Avery.

Charlotte shrugged. Her clumsiness was now just “pulling a Charlotte” to all her friends; her famous cafeteria disaster when the tablecloth got stuck in her zipper was hardly ever mentioned. Nope, she thought, she was just their friend ... clumsiness and all. It gave Charlotte a warm and cozy feeling.

Maeve lowered her voice now that the lights were out. “Seriously, I have totally important news,” she repeated as the other four—Charlotte, Isabel, Katani, and Avery—inched closer to the middle so they could hear what Maeve had to say.

Charlotte pushed up at her glasses and squinted through the grainy darkness trying to focus. Maeve’s animated expressions added so much to whatever story she was telling. Maeve could make a trip to the grocery store sound like an African safari.

“Anyway ...” Maeve paused dramatically. “Guess who’s running for ...”

A tiny snort filled the momentary silence.

Avery was the first to giggle, but almost instantly, Isabel and Maeve joined in.

Before Maeve could say another word, a louder snort punctuated the silence.

“Charlotte! Is that you?” Katani asked.

No giggle this time. Katani’s comment resulted in an out-and-out belly laugh from Avery. It was hard for the other BSG not to laugh when Avery did. They were all in hysterics now.

The next snort had them rolling on their sleeping bags.

“Charlotte!” Katani said.

“It’s not me!” Charlotte said. She could feel her cheeks

turn pink. She knew the girls didn’t really think it was her making that noise, but it was embarrassing just the same.

“But it’s coming from your sleeping bag, Char.” Maeve’s observation was followed by the loudest snort yet.

“It’s Marty!” Charlotte said, falling forward and laughing into her pillow. Marty, the Beacon Street Girls’ mascot, was a wiggly, cuddly, always-getting-into-trouble-but-so-cute-he-gets-away-with-it, dog.

Ever since Marty came to live in the second-floor apartment of the stately Victorian home that Charlotte and her dad rented from their mysterious landlady, Miss Pierce, he had been a constant source of amusement for the BSG.

Marty’s snores were the result of a full evening. First the “little dude” had greeted each BSG in ceremonial fashion, dancing around their legs and jumping up and licking their faces when they bent to pet him. Then he had supervised the making of the pizzas, dutifully snarfing up any dropped tidbits from the Ramseys’ kitchen floor. He had begged his share of pizza crusts by sitting up, cocking his head to one side, and making pathetic, yet somehow irresistible, whimpering noises.

When Maeve had changed into her pink nightshirt and pink fuzzy slippers, Marty had gone wild! He lunged and pounced on the advancing fuzzies with every step she took, growling, nipping each slipper, and shaking it with intense ferocity if he happened to grab ahold of it.

No wonder he was exhausted. When the girls had finally rolled out their sleeping bags, he’d snuggled into a cute little ball at the end of Charlotte’s sleeping bag and instantly fell asleep.

“How can such a little dog snore so loudly?” Isabel wondered.

Marty snort-snores and the five of them burst into



laughter all over again. It seemed the louder they laughed, the louder Marty snored.

“Does he always sound like that?” Isabel asked, her dark eyes wide with amusement.

Charlotte was laughing so hard she couldn’t answer. She buried her head in her pillow and nodded her head.

The next snort-snore sent Avery rolling around on her sleeping bag, clutching her stomach, legs kicking wildly in the air.

“Shhhhh! You’re going to wake him up,” Katani told Avery.

“I don’t see how he doesn’t wake himself up,” Maeve said.

As if he heard that comment, Marty lifted his little head, shifted his body so he was facing away from the girls and fell immediately back to sleep—this time without any snort-snores.

“Poor little puppy!” Avery said. “He’s exhausted from protecting us from your slippers, Maeve.”

“Who can blame him? Those things are as big as he is!” Charlotte said.

“Size has nothing to do with it. He just hates pink. Good boy!” Avery said as she reached over and petted the sleeping terrier.

Like Marty, Avery was a bundle of endless energy. Also like Marty, Avery was small—so much shorter than Katani, who looked like a contestant on *America’s Next Top Model* in her satin blue pajamas.

“Leave it to you Katani,” Charlotte said, “to look like a page out of a fashion magazine, even at a sleepover.”

“The Kgirl has to keep up her image,” Katani answered with a mock sigh. “You just never know when there might be paparazzi about.”

“Now you sound like me,” said Maeve, the budding actress of the group.

“No one could sound like you, Maeve,” Katani replied matter of factly, while Charlotte, Avery, and Isabel chorused in laughter.

Maeve shrugged her shoulders. “What can I say? I’m one of a kind. Now ... do you all want to hear my news or what?”

In response, Avery threw a pillow at Maeve and the battle was on. Pillows went flying, Marty started barking, and the BSG laughed until the tears came rolling down their faces. The mayhem subsided when they heard footsteps on the stairs to the Tower.

“Do I hear a pillow fight in there?” Charlotte’s father bellowed in a fake English accent, which also meant, “Please quiet down, I am trying to go to sleep.”

“No, Dad. We’re all done,” Charlotte shouted as her voice shook with the giggles.

“Excellent news, Charlotte, I shall retire in peace now.”

“Char, your dad is so funny,” whispered Avery.

“Well, I know he thinks he’s pretty funny,” Charlotte responded. She paused, then added, “No ... he *is* funny.” Her timing was perfect.

The BSG laughed in agreement. Mr. Ramsey was a pretty cool dad. He’d traveled all over the world, but he was a down-to-earth guy and pretty much let the girls do whatever they wanted in the Tower, as long as they didn’t damage any property ... and they let him get some sleep!

“As I was saying,” Maeve continued when the giggles died down. “I know who’s running for seventh-grade class president.”

“Duh! Who doesn’t?” Avery said, hitting the side of her head with the heel of her hand. “Dillon Johnson.”



Ms. Rodriguez, their homeroom teacher, had announced Friday morning that elections would be in three weeks. The news had started their Friday off with a bang of excitement that was still lingering on Saturday night. Charlotte was especially excited because this was a new experience for her. She and her father had lived all over the world and had only recently moved back to the United States. None of her other schools had held class elections.

Isabel pushed herself up on her elbows. "What's up with Pete announcing to the world in the middle of lunch that Dillon is running for class president? Didn't he hear Ms. R say that if you want to run you should email her by Monday morning? They want to post the candidates on the main bulletin board at the end of school on Monday."

"Pete Wexler isn't one to follow the rules," Avery reminded Isabel.

"But I still can't believe the way he did it!" Katani added. "I mean jumping up on the chair in the middle of the cafeteria and declaring that the seventh grade needed someone COOL to be president and that Dillon was the 'King of Cool.'"

"Well," Maeve said, tossing back her red hair, "he kinda is the King of Cool, but I'm not talking about Dillon. There's someone else running for class president."

"How do you know?" Avery asked.

"I found out when I stopped by to talk to Ms. R after school. I saw something on her desk."

"Whoa! Maeve! Were you snooping on Ms. R's desk?" Avery asked.

"I was SO not snooping, Avery Madden! I just happened to glance over. It was lying right on top! And it was all typed and formal looking. You couldn't miss it ... it was huge," Maeve added dramatically.

The girls exchanged looks. Charlotte knew they were all thinking the same thing. Typed and formal looking? That could only be one person! Betsy Fitzgerald. Betsy was nice enough, but besides being a bit of a know-it-all, she had a tendency to make simple things complicated.

"Was it from Betsy Fitzgerald?" Charlotte asked.

"Can you believe it?!"

"Betsy Fitzgerald's running for class president?" Avery asked.

"So, who do you think you'll vote for?" Isabel asked. "Dillon or Betsy?"

"I'm really not excited about either of them," Katani said. "Probably the only reason Dillon is running is so that we can have more school dances. He loves to show off what a great dancer he is."

"He's got a one-track mind!" Avery said. "I think we should have gym nights instead."

"Who has a one-track mind?" queried Charlotte with a hint of amusement.

She was remembering how Avery was like a fish out of water at their first school dance earlier this year. Super-comfortable and totally coordinated on the soccer field, Avery had two left feet on the dance floor. So did Katani, but unlike Avery she loved dressing up. More importantly, Katani loved helping the rest of the BSG dress up, too. Katani was the Makeover Queen of the BSG—a regular Style Miracle Worker! However, to Katani's eternal frustration, Avery refused to let Katani talk her out of her favorite sweats!

"Maybe you should run for class president with an anti-dance platform, Avery," Charlotte suggested.

"Well, a pro-dance platform would best represent MY interests," Maeve said. "In fact, I can't wait for the election



dance. Everyone dresses up fancy; they announce who won; and then we dance the night away. It's absolutely fantabulous," she added with a flourish.

The BSG grinned at that one. Not only was she a fabulous dancer, but Maeve had been the first Beacon Street Girl to go out on a date. Well, it was almost a date. Maeve and Dillon had gone to a Celtics basketball game with Dillon's dad and brother. Of course, Maeve wasn't supposed to be there, but that was a whole other story.

When Charlotte first met Maeve at the beginning of the school year, she had almost dismissed her as one of those "boy crazy" girls, but, as she got to know her better, she realized there was so much more to Maeve. Besides being eternally optimistic, Maeve was a bundle of fun, ready to drop anything to help out a friend. And, she was quite talented, too. Still, Charlotte wondered if Dillon became class president if that would make Maeve "First Girlfriend"? Of course, one almost-date does not a girlfriend make, so who knew.

"Give me a break," Avery said, rolling her eyes to the ceiling and flopping back on her sleeping bag.

"What's wrong with that?" Maeve asked. "I'd like more school dances."

"There are issues more important than school dances, Maeve," Avery told her.

"Avery's right," Katani said.

"You mean you'd rather have Betsy?" Maeve asked.

"Betsy Fitzgerald? Please!" Katani said.

"What's up with Betsy?" Isabel asked.

"That's a question I've never been able to figure out. What is up with Betsy?" Avery asked.

"She's not such a bad choice. Betsy is very organized," Charlotte pointed out.

"I'm organized," Katani said. "Betsy is obsessive. Besides, the class president should be more than organized."

"I don't know why you think Dillon's a bad candidate," Maeve chimed in. "He's very popular."

"Being popular has nothing to do with being a good leader!" Avery said. "In fact, to be a good leader you sometimes have to do things that aren't popular. That's why it's important that our class president know how to make good decisions."

"About what?" Maeve asked

"Oh, tons of things! Budgets, ecology. Stuff like that," Avery replied.

"Ave, I don't think kids really care about stuff like that," Maeve said.

"Well, I do," Avery answered emphatically.

"Me, too," added Katani as she and Avery high-fived each other.

There was a pause and it was suddenly very quiet. Not even a snort from Marty could be heard.

Isabel broke the silence. "Maybe YOU should run for class president, Avery."

"You've always dreamed of being president," Charlotte reminded her.

"President of the United States," Avery said.

"I thought you wanted to be a judge," interjected Maeve.

"Well, the President of the United States thing is not going to happen, Avery," Katani reminded her. "You have to be born in the United States to be President of the United States."

"Big Deal! So I'm adopted. I'm a citizen, just like you guys. So what if I spent the first four months of my life in Korea? I'm as American as ..."

"Apple pie ...?" Isabel suggested.

"Stop! You're making me hungry," Avery moaned.



“Still ... rules are rules,” Katani said.

“Well, like Ms. R pointed out at the beginning of the school year, rules are made to be challenged and changed! Arnold Schwarzenegger, the Governor of California, is already looking at changing that particular rule,” Avery said huffily.

“*I’ll be back ... as President of the United States,*” Maeve said in her best Arnold accent. “*And I’ll terminate anyone who gets in my way.*”

Maeve was definitely the performer of the group. Movies were her life. After all, she lived over the Movie House, and she could watch movies any time of day or night. Charlotte was convinced that someday she’d be on *E! True Hollywood Story* saying, “I knew Maeve Kaplan-Taylor when ...” And perhaps, Charlotte fantasized, she’d also be on A&E’s *Biography* telling the world about her junior high school days with Avery Madden, President of the United States. If anyone could convince someone to change a rule it would be Avery. She never gave up when she had a point to make.

“While Arnold’s working on that minor detail ... you might as well start getting some experience, Avery. Abigail Adams Junior High seems like the perfect place to start,” Charlotte told her.

“Well ... it did cross my mind ... but ... I can’t.”

“What do you mean you can’t?” Katani pushed herself up, swung her legs in front of her in a cross-legged position, and leaned toward Avery. “Avery, all the things you said ... about a leader being a team player and a good decision maker and being inspirational. That’s YOU! You were describing yourself!”

“It could be any one of us,” Avery said, looking around the group.

The girls looked into each other’s eyes.

“Not me,” said Maeve, who had learning problems. “I don’t think people with reading problems make good leaders.”

“That is completely not true, Maeve,” Katani said quickly, rising to her friend’s defense. “Remember your blanket project? You practically got everyone in the school involved in that one.”

“Oh, yeah. I forgot about that,” Maeve responded happily.

Charlotte wasn’t sure if she had leadership potential either, though one day she hoped to be editor of their school newspaper, *The Sentinel*. Maybe when she grew up, she could write speeches for the president someday. Now, that would be fun—telling the President of the United States what to say, she thought.

“Katani’s right,” Isabel said enthusiastically. “You’re a perfect candidate for class president, Avery. You have tons of energy and you aren’t afraid to speak your mind. I like that in a president.”

“I didn’t say I don’t WANT to run. I just can’t. I promised my coach that I’d help with the soccer fundraiser which starts in a few weeks,” Avery answered, secretly pleased that her friends were so enthusiastic.

“Avery, you have a passion to lead,” Katani cried, more excited by the minute about the idea of Avery’s candidacy. “Our class needs you! We need you!”

“But a leader is also someone who keeps the promises they make,” Avery said. “I promised Coach Graber I would lead our team’s fundraising efforts. I could never let my soccer team down. It just wouldn’t be right.”

“Couldn’t you do both?” Isabel asked hopefully.

Avery hung her head. “My mom just had a big talk with me about like not getting ‘overextended’ and stuff.”

“But that just leaves us with Betsy and Dillon,” Katani



said. “The seventh-grade class deserves someone who will represent our interests better than those two.”

Charlotte glanced at Maeve, who looked like she was about to say something, but changed her mind. The BSG knew that you never wanted to question Katani when she was on a roll. It was better to talk to her when she was all calmed down. She was much more willing to listen over a cup of hot chocolate at Montoya’s Bakery.

The subject switched to Avery’s soccer tournament and the game tomorrow. Soon the group quieted, and one by one, the Beacon Street Girls fell asleep.

WHO ELSE?

Long after their conversation had died down and the steady breathing of her four friends filled the Tower, Katani’s head was still whirling. No way could she vote for either Dillon or Betsy. Avery was right! Popularity was so overrated. Katani liked what Avery had to say about budgets and decisions. Those were important things that even kids should know about. Yup, she thought to herself, Avery would be a great class president!

As Katani lay awake thinking of things—issues the class president could take on—Avery, her face smushed down in the pillow, started snoring like a three-hundred-pound gorilla. Katani wondered how such a big noise could come out of such a small body.

Finally, Avery turned over, mumbled in her sleep and kicked her legs until she freed them from her sleeping bag. The snoring stopped. Thank goodness, Katani thought. Maybe she’d be able to get some sleep now. But for the next hour, Katani thought of nothing but the upcoming election. Somehow she just had to convince Avery to run.

Charlotte’s Journal

I just love Tower sleepovers! Last night Mr. Marté’s snoring was the big entertainment ... now they know what I have to put up with every night! Dad’s homemade pizza dough was a hit, too. Everyone brought toppings and we each made our own individual pizzas. Maeve and I smothered ours in four types of cheeses. Isabel brought a huge bag of pepperoni to share. Katani brought lots of veggies—mushrooms, onions, green peppers, and black olives—she and I were the only ones who liked the olives. She didn’t just toss them on her pizza. She arranged them in the most beautiful design. Leave it to the Kgirl to have a pizza that looks like it could be in a magazine.

Avery brought spinach for her pizza. Sounded pretty gross to me, but I had a taste and it wasn’t bad at all. Maeve refused to try it. She said, “Spinach on pizza is a food crime.”

In the morning, I woke up before the others and decided to climb on my window seat to write. (Serious writers have to practice all the time!)

When I looked across the room, I could see the full moon setting in the west, perfectly framed in Maeve’s window. It was the color of a huge Florida orange, and it seemed to just hang in the western sky over the lights of the cars on the Massachusetts Turnpike. I wished Isabel was awake for it. She loves the color orange so much. She would’ve flipped over this.

I like that my window faces east—I guess because I’ve always loved sunrises. They aren’t the same as sunsets at all. No matter where I’ve lived—Africa, Australia, Europe—sunrises have always meant new possibilities ... new adventures. (Ever see a lion walking toward you at dawn?)

This morning when I glanced around the Tower to each window—mine, Katani’s, Maeve’s, and Avery’s—it was painfully





obvious that SOMETHING WAS MISSING. I don't know why it never occurred to me, or to any of us, before.

Isabel doesn't have her own place in the Tower: no window of her own, no window seat, no name in lights. It doesn't feel right ... and it's not fair. She is one of the BSG now.

I don't know how to fix this. I don't even know how to bring it up without upsetting the others. Katani might have some real problems with this. She already has to share her room with her sister Kelley; I know she won't be excited about losing some of her space in the Tower.

How can we add space for Isabel without taking away space from the rest of us? Solution desperately needed.

