

She is a very strange woman, that Miss Weiss. She is a forty-five year old with no husband, no children, and no family. She has a strange sense of style, wearing tight, rainbow tie-dye skirts down to her ankles with gladiator looking sandals. She wears a different color tank top each day in the order of the rainbow. Monday she wore red; Tuesday she wore orange; Wednesday was yellow, and so on. Her dyed black hair stretches all the way down her back to her behind, knotted with noticeable split ends. She has very aged looking skin, probably because she always wears so much make up. On her eyes, she applies dark, black eye shadow and uses eyeliner to make her eyes look almost Egyptian at the edges.

This past year was her first year at *Jacobs Middle School* here in Rosewood, Pennsylvania. This is what I know about her so far: Miss Weiss is one of those “lonely cat ladies” that you hear about in movies. And I’m not kidding. She has three cats that she constantly talks about during class. She also has a dog, but she doesn’t talk about him very much. She has pictures all over our classroom of cats of all different colors and she names each one of them. Everyone thinks it’s funny.

On the first day of school at a few minutes before lunch, Miss Weiss sent us out to recess. No one knew why, considering we were going to go to recess after we ate, but no one disagreed, either. We were supposed to go outside to play kickball or sit in circles and gossip, but what we really did was peek in the window of the classroom to see what she was up to. As it turned out, Miss Weiss was playing spiritual music and dancing around the room, holding cat pictures and stuffed animals. At the end of the day, she played that weird spiritual music for us, claiming that it helped “heal the soul.” She’s done it every day since.

“Good morning, Elizabeth!” Miss Weiss’ enthusiastic voice rang in my ears as I entered the classroom.

“Hi, Miss Weiss,” I responded.

“Let’s get ready for our first period class, everyone,” she smiled at us creepily.

Miss Weiss has always had that enthusiastic, bubbly kind of personality that almost seems fake. She overdoes every “hello” and “good morning” and smiles even when saying something mean. I do not know what she is hiding, but it seems big.

My first period of the day is math class. I absolutely hate math class. Mr. McEnery keeps droning on about solving long division problems with decimals. I wonder if he is weird like Miss Weiss. Maybe Jack, Cole, and I can profile him for our next person, if we do profile another person. Growing up in a small town in Pennsylvania, there is not much to do. Jack, Cole, and I are always wandering around somewhere. We called ourselves the *Jacobs Middle School* Investigators, and we are the strangest bunch of eleven year-olds a person could ever meet. We have special meetings every Tuesday to plan our research and share the things we have already found. This is most definitely not our first profiling. There has been Crocodile Man at the zoo, Frizzy-Haired Maureen at my hair salon, and our very first was Jack's Uncle Sam. Let me just say, people never turn out to be who you think they are, especially when you're talking about—

“Elizabeth Marshall!”

“Yes?” I blurted, startled by the sound of my name.

“Next time you refuse to pay attention in my class I will have to give you a detention.”

We may only be in sixth grade, but Mr. McEnery gives out lots of detentions anyway. He gave me one just last week for helping Jack with his homework. The rest of the day dragged on, but when it was over, I was happy Jack and Cole were coming over.

It is Tuesday and we have a meeting in my tree house at 5:00. Jack brings the notebooks and pens, Cole brings the Oreos, and I provide the drinks—pink lemonade. At our meetings, we plan all the different ways to find more information on the person we research, to find his or her real identity. The loud clanks the ladder made let me know that Cole was here.

“Hey, Lizzie!” That is what Jack and Cole call me, even though my real name is Elizabeth.

“Hi, Cole. Find anything about Miss Weiss?”

“Yeah, but let's wait for Jack.”

“Good idea. Is Jack on his way?”

“Yeah, I just texted him. He is a block away. He had to walk because his mom is at work.” Jack's mom is always extremely busy with her job, and hardly has any time for Jack. Just

about everyone knows who Jack McNulty is. *McNulty Tools & Hardware* is his mother's business. Jack always tells me how much of a tomboy she was growing up, which led her to start her own hardware business.

"Hey, guys! What did I miss?" Jack's head popped up through the entrance in the floor.

"Nothing," I replied, "we decided to wait for you."

"Okay. Well, I have lots of plans for finding out who the real Miss Weiss is."

"Such as . . . ?" Cole said, stuffing a fourth Oreo into his mouth.

"I was thinking that one day after school we can hide in the bushes and wait for her to come outside," he said eagerly, "then—"

"Hold up! I am not hiding in those itchy bushes!" I interrupted. "I bet that if they experimented on those bushes, they would find poison ivy."

"Let me finish," Jack said. "Then when she leaves school, we follow her everywhere she goes all the way home. When we get to her house, we can sneak in and look around. Good idea, right?"

"Well," I sighed, "it's not a bad idea. We could follow her home, but I refuse to hide in those bushes."

"Isn't that kind of dangerous? Breaking into her house, I mean." Cole is always self-conscious about what we do.

"Trust me," said Jack, "it'll all be fine."

We all agreed that following her home was the best way to find out background information on her, and we decided that the next day would be best day to go. Jack and I never realized how dangerous the trip could be, and we later learned that Cole was the one being smart about the situation, but, hey, we were three eleven-year olds. What could someone expect? We took a few notes, made some back-up plans in case this plan did not work, and decided to adjourn our meeting and just hang out. Jack and Cole wanted to play video games at Jack's house, and I wanted to go swimming in the pond. Anyone could guess who won that battle

I let the boys go to Jack's, and I went inside. I hate video games. As I walked in the back door, my mother was sitting at the kitchen counter to greet me.

"How was school?"

"Good," I said, and I rushed up the stairs.

Mom and I do not have the best relationship. My dad left us when I was three, making my mother a "single mom." She has a job as an engineer and works night shifts at a gas station. We are close enough to middle class that I believe there is nothing to worry about, but mom disagrees. She still constantly works six days a week and never has time for me. I'm the only child and we have no family members within state. I guess that is why I'm always with Jack or Cole—they keep me company. Especially, Jack because we are in similar situations with our mothers.

The next morning I packed my bag with everything we might need. Food, drinks, notebooks, the camera, and all the packs of Oreos I could find. Cole is supposed to bring the Oreos and Jack is supposed to bring the camera, but they always forget.

School was dragging on forever—it always does. Instead of paying attention to my classes, I kept daydreaming about what was going to happen later today. What will her house look like? Where does she live? What does she do in her free time? I just could not stop wondering.

Finally, school ended. I packed my bags, checked to make sure I had everything, and headed outside to meet up with Jack and Cole. I found them sitting on a bench in the courtyard.

"You got everything?" Cole asked.

"Yeah. Do you have the camera, Jack?"

"I thought you were bringing the camera."

"Of course you did. I brought it anyways. Are you guys ready?" I asked.

"Yeah. Let's just sit here without looking suspicious and wait for her to come out," Cole concluded.

“Okay, so we’re going to need to split up. Lizzie will walk about a block behind her to make sure we don’t lose her, and Cole and I can both walk on the other side of the street,” Jack said.

“I don’t know, Jack. That seems kind of dangerous.” Once again, Cole always has to look out for me. Other kids bully Cole at school, which makes him feel the need to try to protect me or something.

“Oh, what’s the worst that could happen?” Jack, Cole, and I all looked at each other and laughed. She is a cruel woman. In addition, she is sneaky, too. There are many Miss Weiss stories, but my thoughts were cut off when Jack hit me in the arm.

“There she is,” he whispered excitedly.

“Wait for her to get a block away, and then the plan is a go.”

We watched her as she walked down the block, her long black hair swaying at every step she took. It looked as if her hair was dancing in the wind. She turned the corner and we jumped to our feet, beginning to jog down the block. Cole and Jack crossed the street at the corner, and I turned.

“Be careful, Lizzie,” Cole called from across the street. I froze, not knowing what to say. I do not know why, but I had a feeling that something bad was going to happen. We had done this with so many people without a problem, but there was something different about her. Miss Weiss is not just any old lady. She sings, she dances, and she is too nice. I just didn’t know if I wanted to do it anymore, but I could not let Jack and Cole down. On that note, I began walking again. Miss Weiss was already almost two blocks ahead of us.

We walked, and we walked, and we walked. We had already been past my neighborhood, by Jack’s house, and through another town. My camera battery was dead due to all of the pictures I took, and we were all tired. Cole was panting so heavily I thought he was going to pass out. Poor kid can barely run a block without water and we were making him walk miles.

“Are you okay?” I mouthed across the street, making sure Miss Weiss does not hear us a block ahead. Cole nodded, but Jack shook his head. I felt awful. Cole should call his mom and go

home, I thought. And I walked across the street to them.

“Cole, call your mom. You’re going to be sick.”

“No. I don’t want to go home.” I begged and I pleaded but he would not go. I resumed my spot back across the street and continued to walk. Miss Weiss had not looked back even once. She obviously knew exactly where she was going.

It was already a little while after sunset and people were swarming around. I knew where we were! We were in the most popular town around here called Oakland, which I knew from a past visit that it was about a fifteen-minute drive. I never even imagined how long that was to walk. Cole still looked sick to his stomach, and I was beginning to be nervous. Even though I volunteered to follow her, I was scared.

This was the town where it all happened. It was a long time ago, four years ago to be exact. My mom had to go into town to run some errands, and I decided to go with her just to walk around. We walked up to a store and mom said she had to go in by herself. She said I could walk around but to stay close. I agreed and began to walk down the street. As I was passing by the alley next to the store, I saw a bright pink balloon about thirty feet in. I looked around to see if anyone was going to claim it, and after about fifteen seconds, I ran to get it. As I grasped the string of the balloon, a big, vicious dog jumped on me. He bit my side and my arms, barking ferociously. I screamed. I screamed louder than I ever had done in my entire life. Eventually someone heard me, and I was rushed to the hospital; fifty-three stitches in my left arm, twenty-six in my right. I have hated alleys ever since.

As we walked past windows and restaurants, I could tell this was the main street. Streetlights were on and people were walking into movie theaters and ice cream parlors. After all, it was a hot night for May. There were so many people, mostly teenagers, bumping into me and blocking my view of Miss Weiss, but I could still see Jack and Cole across the street. Thank goodness Cole found somebody selling water bottles, because he already finished all the drinks I brought with me.

After walking twenty-five minutes on a straight path, I saw Miss Weiss turn to the right. Finally, I thought, we are making progress. I met up with Jack and Cole in front of where she

turned. It was the alley. The alley I swore to myself I would never go down again. The alley I was so brutally attacked by a dog. And then I was back.

“Are you ready?” they asked.

“Are we splitting up?” I asked, nervously.

“Yeah. You follow Miss Weiss down the alley, and we’ll walk along the street next to it.”

“Are you sure. . . ?” I never told anyone about the time I was attacked in the alley because I was too embarrassed.

“Yeah, it’ll be fine,” laughed Jack. “Call us if you need anything.”

As scared as I was, I was not letting Miss Weiss get away after following her this long. I turned away from my best friends and slowly moved down the dark, cobblestone alley. I could hear her footsteps progress down the alley ahead of me with a loud echoing sound. I followed the footsteps for about five minutes and then they stopped. Why couldn’t I hear them anymore? I began to feel ahead of me, observing the deep grooves in the surrounding walls. There were no back doors to homes as I remembered. It felt like those walls were going on forever. I could no longer see where I entered the alley, nor could I see an exit.

As I spun around looking for an exit, I realized that that was the place. That was the exact spot I was attacked when I was seven years-old.

My head was spinning. I no longer knew where I was. It was so quiet, too quiet.

Clank. Clank. Clank. I could hear her shoes again! Where was she? I was so dizzy. Everything was blurry. And then I could hear the bark of a dog. It was like the nightmare you never wished to happen. It’s getting closer, I thought, beginning to hyperventilate. The shoes were getting louder.

“Good night, Elizabeth,” laughed a familiar voice.

Then it was dark.