



## ***I Never Thought I'd Miss Dr. Malcontent***

Mrs. Sutcliffe's lectures were worst on Monday afternoons. As I fought to stay awake in fourth period, I couldn't help but think about—and dread—the next four days of listening to our replacement science teacher. Despite my best efforts to look alert, my head lolled forward, then snapped back up with a jolt just as Mrs. Sutcliffe wrapped up her lesson.

"So that's why we put salt into the water when we make spaghetti," Mrs. Sutcliffe concluded.

The class stared blankly at her.

"So to review, when you mix two substances, it creates a what?"

She got no answer.

"A solution," she answered herself. "And the boiling or freezing point of that solution—salt water in our

example—will be what? The same as or different from that of the solvent—plain water in this case? It will be different. That’s why in colder climates, cities will spread salt on roads to prevent them from icing over. Why? Because the freezing point is what? *Lower.*”

You had to feel bad for Mrs. Sutcliffe, the chubby blond home ec teacher who’d been roped into teaching science for the remainder of the year. Not only did she not know the subject—which meant she read every lesson directly from the textbook and was unable to answer any questions—but she was also taking over for the man who’d been the most popular teacher in the school.

“I don’t care if he did nearly kill us all,” my best friend, Teddy, groaned quietly to me. “Please let us have Dr. Content back.”

It had been three weeks since our science teacher, Dr. Content, had donned nuclear-powered armor, renamed himself Dr. Malcontent, and destroyed Ditko Middle School in a battle with Ultraviolet, Kanigher Falls’ own superhero.

Ultraviolet could fly and she had superstrength. It was hard to judge how invulnerable she was, but I personally had seen her get blasted through a cinder

block wall and hit by a dump truck without receiving so much as a scratch.

She'd also written some of the hardest pop quizzes I'd ever taken.

Ultraviolet just happened to be my sixth-grade history teacher, Ms. Matthews. Of course, only a few people knew that, including me, my obnoxious sister Denise, and my best friends Teddy and Fiona. I liked to think of myself as a sort of superhero advisor. Regardless of how I thought of myself, though, Ultraviolet thought of me as a twelve-year-old kid who shouldn't be mixed up in her life, especially after I almost died helping her fight Dr. Malcontent.

It's not as bad as it sounds. I got a couple of scrapes and bruises, but considering that I plummeted almost eleven miles from the stratosphere to the school's football field, things really could have been much worse. But until Ultraviolet recognized the value of my advice, I was stuck just doing my math homework after school instead of helping her fight crime. For the record, I'd like to point out that I was the one who figured out how to defeat Dr. Malcontent! Without me, where would she be?

Well, at the moment, she, like the rest of us, was stuck

at Eisner Middle School, where the superintendent had decided to have all the Ditko kids bussed every day until our school could be rebuilt. Fortunately, we'd just gotten good news on that front.

"Three minutes," Teddy sighed, looking at the clock. "Three minutes and we're out of here."

The city had been weighing bids from several companies to rebuild our school until Colleen Collins Construction stepped in with an offer the city couldn't refuse. In addition to donating four million dollars toward the construction effort, Colleen Collins had also purchased several shuttered old factories in the industrial zones near the city reservoir. I wasn't sure why that mattered, but my dad thought it did. He used accountant terms like "property taxes" and "revenue" to try to explain how it would help the city, but I didn't understand any of it.

Colleen Collins was rich and famous, though it seemed the only thing she was famous for was being rich. Whenever there was a big movie premiere, Colleen Collins was there. When someone was throwing the biggest party of the year, Colleen Collins wound up on the guest list. In addition to basically paying to rebuild our school, Colleen Collins had offered to help the city

raise more money by displaying her family's pride and joy, the Princess diamond—the third-largest diamond in the world—at the Kanigher Falls Historical Society Museum for a special three-month exhibition.

All I cared about was that the Ditko kids were leaving during fifth period to take buses to the empty lot where our school used to be to attend a groundbreaking ceremony. The Eisner students weren't too happy with the news. There had always been tension between the two student bodies, but it had been escalated by the inconvenience of our situation. No one appreciated the crowded classrooms, longer lunch lines, and tightly packed hallways. And finding out that we were leaving school early on a Monday to see a celebrity rubbed several of the Eisner kids the wrong way.

"Must be nice to get to do whatever you want," one Eisner student said to his friends in the hall between classes, making sure he was loud enough for any Ditko kids to hear him.

"Give them a break. The superintendent probably figures they're too stupid to learn anything in class, so why bother? Might as well send them home early," joked another.

Eisner students tossed insults at Ditko students, who tossed back more at Eisner kids. No one was left out and everyone was a target. Well, except one person. Me.

“Nate! Hey, slow down,” called Zach Jeter, an Eisner kid who had desperately been trying to make friends with me since my first day there. He caught up and slapped me across the back. “How’s it going? I heard you guys are getting out early. Lucky!”

“I guess so,” I replied, walking a bit faster.

“How was your weekend? Did you get to hang out with Ultraviolet? When are we going to do something?” he persisted, matching my pace.

“I didn’t get to hang out with Ultraviolet,” I assured him. “I see her every day, but I wouldn’t call what we do hanging out. I’m her advisor.” Okay, maybe that wasn’t exactly the truth, but the only reason Zach was even speaking to me was that he’d seen me on TV with Ultraviolet, so I didn’t feel the need to be completely honest with him.

“Right,” Zach said. “Cool, man. Well, next time you see her, tell her I said hi. And maybe you could get me an autograph.”

I shrugged, not at all in the mood to explain to yet

another person that Ultraviolet didn't sign autographs. Ever since I'd been on the news with her for about seven seconds, everyone I knew—and several people I didn't know—had asked me to get autographs or to set up meetings with her.

“Sorry, Zach, but this is my history class,” I said with a smile, pointing at the door to Ms. Matthews's temporary room. I was relieved that I could get away from the kid. “I guess I'll see you tomorrow.”