

Jim Benton's Tales from Mackerel Middle School

DEAR DUMB DIARY,

THE WORST THINGS IN LIFE
ARE ALSO FREE

BY JAMIE KELLY

SCHOLASTIC inc.

New York Toronto London Auckland
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ISBN 978-0-545-11614-5

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12 11 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 10 11 12 13 14 15/0

Printed in the U.S.A. 40

First printing, June 2010

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Jamie Kelly

FAVORITE VACATION: Summer

FAVORITE PLACE TO
GO ON VACATION: Amusement Parks
But not if they have clowns

FAVORITE KIND
OF MONEY: Money? What's money??

DO NOT READ
MY DIARY OR I
SWEAR IF I EVER
FIND A Genie, I will
ask him to MAKE ALL
of your Money DISAPPEAR!



And if you don't
have any money, first
I'll ask him to give
you a JILLION DOLLARS
and then

TAKE IT AWAY!!



Dear Whoever Is Reading My Dumb Diary,

So I suppose you think it's okay to just pick up somebody's diary and read it absolutely free of charge?

Well, it **isn't**. Things cost money in this world, cupcake, and if you want to read this diary, it's going to cost you. Have a look at our handy price list:

HOW MUCH IT COSTS TO READ JAMIE'S DIARY:

People: Five million dollars

Parents: Four million dollars (apiece)

Isabella: One million dollars
(non-counterfeit, and no offense, Isabella, but I'll need to have somebody at the bank check it out first)

Blond individuals: One arm and one leg. Plus five million dollars. Plus another five million dollars.



Thank you for shopping with us today!

Signed,

Jamie Kelly

P.S. Prices are **PER WORD**.

P.P.S. Except you, Angeline. For you, it's
PER LETTER.

Sunday 01

Dear Dumb Diary,

Sometimes teachers think it's okay to teach things to kids, and they are proven wrong. Like a little earlier this year, in science, when we were each assigned a disease to study. The diseases were written on little slips of paper, and we chose them by grabbing them at random out of a bag.



Angeline, of course, unfairly got the **BUBONIC PLAGUE**, which is like the most popular disease **EVER**. I was assigned **SUNBURN**, which I complained wasn't even really a disease. I asked for **DIAPER RASH** instead because that's sort of the cutest disease, but then the teacher said no and that I'd just have to pull another one at random out of a bag. I was afraid I might get **FAT BUTT** or something like that, although now that I think about it, I'm not sure that Fat Buttedness is a medical condition. Anyway, I decided to just shut up and live with sunburn.

Angeline offered to give me the plague, but I didn't want anybody's charity, you know?



The **REAL** problem here was that Isabella picked this condition called *neurapraxia*, which is not as famous as the bubonic plague, but believe me — more people have had it. Neurapraxia is the scientific name for that tingle when your arm or leg falls asleep. It does not have the horrible and gory symptoms that Isabella had hoped for (I can't remember them all because Isabella was laughing too hard while she was listing them), but Isabella seemed satisfied that left untreated, neurapraxia could become the kind of illness she could love.

So we all researched our diseases, and finally the day came when some of us were supposed to stand in front of the class and bore each other with our reports. We had a substitute the day Isabella was scheduled to give her report. I know that teachers think it's okay to be absent sometimes, but they are **wrong** about that, too.



Isabella stood up and began slowly and carefully describing neurapraxia, and how standing up and moving the limb seems to clear it up. But then she began to talk about various other gross things that could happen to you if your neurapraxia went on too long, and you couldn't get the symptoms to go away, or if you got it in your brain, maybe from a tight hat, or a pillow that was too soft or too warm or not soft enough. And believe me: Isabella is very fluent in gross. She can stretch the word "pus" into three syllables.

About five minutes into her report, just as everybody was totally sick to their stomachs, Isabella pulled out a test tube that she took from the lab where her dad works. She said that they had discovered a *contagious* form of neurapraxia and that what she had was a **REAL TEST TUBE** full of it.



The substitute teacher thought Isabella was joking, and didn't think it was a funny joke at that. She told Isabella to put the tube back in her backpack. Teachers also think it's okay to assume that Isabella is always just joking about things, and they are **wrong** about this as well. She isn't always joking.

When Isabella went to reach for her bag, she accidentally dropped the tube and it broke open. I've never seen Isabella look so frightened. In just a couple seconds, she started to twitch and foam dribbled out of her mouth.

By the time Isabella hit the floor, Mike Pinsetti was in a **full shrieking panic**, running into the halls and screaming, "EVACUATE THE SCHOOL! EVACUATE THE SCHOOL!"



This got the whole class freaked out and everyone ran out of the room, because, frankly, nobody is really sure what Isabella is capable of. Other teachers, hearing Pinsetti's shrill feminine screams, assumed it was coming from the mouth of a woman (like a teacher) and did the safe thing — they marched the kids out of the school. They kind of have to do this, because I think their pay depends on how many kids are alive at the end of each school year.

Angeline and I know that Isabella's dad doesn't work in a lab, and we've seen Isabella dribble foam from her mouth before. So when the ambulance guys and police officers came in about forty-five minutes later, they found me and Angeline and Isabella in the classroom playing cards.



By that time, Isabella had wiped the saliva froth off her chin, but they still didn't believe her when she tried to convince them that I was Isabella. She's a masterful liar, but Isabella is not unknown to the police.

Then she explained what happened. She told the police that the teacher gave us a disease assignment. It was supposed to have visual aids, and we were supposed to **dramatically communicate** just how our disease works. Isabella said she tried to talk our teacher out of it, since she feared this exact thing might happen — Isabella is just so naturally good at convincing people of things like diseases. Isabella told them that our substitute teacher was stubborn and insisted we do it this way, and that she also said a lot of suspicious things that struck Isabella as being very anti-cop.

Angeline and I nodded in agreement as Isabella talked. Not agreement to the anti-cop part, or even the tried-to-talk-her-out-of-it part. Also not the visual aids or dramatically communicating part. We were nodding in agreement that Mrs. Palmer, the science teacher, had given us an assignment.



Of course, by that time they had evacuated the school as a precaution, and sent everyone home. That would have been great except for one thing: If your school loses too many days during the year, like for weather, or power outages, or fake neurapraxia-C outbreaks, you have to make it up at the end of the year. Isabella put us one day over the line. So even though the **last day of school** was supposed to be Friday, now it's tomorrow.

(Oh, by the way, this is neat. I saw that substitute last week. She mows lawns for a living now. And she looks a lot happier than she did back when she was a sub and was running out of the school.)



what she was probably thinking