THE NEW GIRL
I stood at the corner of the street, staring silently at the ground. Everyone around me was calm and smiling, the exact opposite of me. Suddenly the bus rolled around the corner, screeching and pulling to a stop in front of us. Everyone climbed on and sat down with their friends, talking a hundred words a minute. I nervously sat in the back of the bus, staring out the window. At the next stop, a girl with a group of friends behind her came up to me and smiled. I smiled back. Was I actually making a friend?

Then she stopped smiling and snapped at me harshly, “What do you think you’re doing? You’re in my seat.”

I wanted to say that I wasn’t going to move, but I was too scared. She seemed like she had so much power: a bunch of friends, designer clothes, and her own seat on the bus. That made it even scarier. I nodded and stood up. I moved far up to the front.

“Oh, and one more thing...” she called after me, smiling a fake smile, “welcome to Ridgewood, new girl.”
After about twenty minutes, the bus pulled into the parking lot of a huge school. Everyone hopped off the bus and went inside. I followed the crowd, not sure where to go. After a while, I found my locker in one of the many confusing hallways. I turned around and saw the girl from the bus’s locker a few lockers away from mine. That was just what I needed. She was making high school scarier than was already going to be. I tried to open my locker as a girl walked past me, putting up flyers all over the walls. I approached one of the flyers, and it was a signup sheet for volleyball tryouts. I stared at the flyer, doubtful about whether I should tryout or not. I decided to sign up anyways because I really just want to adjust to this new school, and I really liked playing volleyball, even though I didn’t play it at my old school.

After I wrote my name, the mean girl on the bus walked up next to me and also looked at the flyer. She pulled out a pen and wrote “Rachel Jones” in big letters, taking up most of the signup sheet. She looked at me. “You know, new girl,” She began.

I gained enough courage to interrupt her and nervously whispered, “Actually, it’s Mia.”
She rolled her eyes. “Yeah, I’m going to call you new girl. Anyways, new girl, you know you’re lucky you got to write your name before me. I don’t think anyone else deserves to tryout when the coaches already have their star player right here.”

She walked away, leaving with the last word before I could reply anything back. It wasn’t like I actually would say anything back, anyways. Soon the bell rang and I ran off in search of my homeroom class.

My first few classes were a breeze, not having to talk in front of the class or to anyone at all. Then the hardest part of the day rolled around the corner: lunchtime. The thing about lunch in high school was that it was way different than back in middle school. There weren’t any little thirteen year olds saying, “Come sit over here!” making the new kid feel welcome. In high school, everyone has their group. Their clique. And they won’t allow any new kid to just show up. So when you’re in high school and you’re the new kid, the best thing you can actually do is sit in an empty back table, doing your homework. And that’s exactly what I had to do. I walked past Rachel’s table, which was overflowing with other kids wearing designer clothes and gossiping.
When she saw me walk past, she smiled and said to her friends loud, enough for me to hear, “Oh hey, it’s the new girl. Aw, and she has nowhere to sit? I would ask her to sit here, but I was afraid she would try to steal my seat again.”

Then she whispered something and they all burst into laughter. I nervously tried to ignore them and walked to a back table. I sat there hoping someone would just come up to me and introduce themselves. I looked around hoping it would happen.

No one. I ate my lunch in silence and tried to memorize my schedule.
“Hi, Mia! So, how was the big day? Make many friends? Did you learn a lot? Of course you did! Oh I’m just so proud of you. All grown up, going to a new high school. Oh I made dinner already so you can do your homework, because I’m sure you got homework, and then you can go on and text your new friends, because I’m sure you’re just dying to talk to your friends! Do you like your classes? Oh, of course you do! Oh, you’re going to have so much fun! I’m just sure of it! Now, what was it you wanted to tell me?” My mom stood at the doorway with a broad smile, barely even let me completely enter the house.

“Um,” I replied, “that I’m home from school.”

She smiled and gave me a big hug. “Oh, of course you are! Come, tell me all about your day.”

“Actually, mom, I have a lot of homework to do and I should really get started. Then maybe, I might text all my friends,” I lied. She seemed so proud of me. I couldn’t disappoint her. I went up to my room, with no homework and no friends.
The next day was the same process: Avoided conversation with anyone, sitting alone at the back table, and making sure to completely avoid Rachel. The only good thing about the day was my volleyball tryouts. I stood in line at the gym with a bunch of other girls, anxious and nervous to tryout.

“Okay, ladies, listen up!” the coach began, “We’re going to begin with some basic serving. Each of you will get a volleyball and you must over hand serve it over the net. Okay? Go!”

Each girl served, one at a time, many passed and many missed. Rachel, who was a few spots in front of me, confidently served the ball. It lightly flew, gently landing right in front of the other side of the net. It wasn’t the best serve, but apparently the coach thought it was.

The coach applauded, saying, “Looks like I know who my star server might be.”

She smiled and glared over at me. When it was my turn, I wasn’t nervous. I felt like it was just me, and the ball, and the net. I swung my arm, strongly slapped the ball, and made it fly way over the net. I watched as it landed in the middle of the other side of the court. Everyone fell silent.
The coach came up to me, her mouth wide open. “That was amazing! Can you do that all the time at every game? Because if you can, I think I just found my star server!”

I smiled. “Really? Does that mean that I made the team?!”

Angrily, Rachel came over to us. “But you said that I was your star server! This isn’t fair!”

The coach pointed at the volleyball I served across the gym. “But can you do that?”

After tryouts, in the locker room, Rachel approached me with two of her friends. “You think you’re so good don’t you, new girl? Stealing my position?”

I stared at them. They suddenly reminded me from *The Wizard of Oz*. Rachel would actually make a perfect Wicked Witch of the West, with her two flying monkeys. This idea amused me. More confident than ever, I replied, “Well, technically it was never your position, so you and your flying monkeys can just leave me alone.”

Rachel and her friends gasped and looked at me disgusted. “Well, if you think your life here at *my* school was bad so far, just wait and see! Just stay out of my way! Come on, girls, let’s go!”
Her and her flying monkeys turned around and stomped away, but I imagined her flying out of the locker room on her broom stick. I calmly ignored them while I changed into my clothes and went home. They might’ve tried to make my life here at “her” school miserable, but I wasn’t miserable. I mean, why would I? I made the volleyball team!

The next day at school, I was at my locker when Rachel walked past me and began to laugh. I turned around and looked at her. She was with her flying monkeys again, hovering over a phone. She looked at me, and laughed even harder. Then suddenly my phone went off and I quickly checked it. I had sixteen new messages from a blocked number.

“Loner.”

“If I were you, I would go back to your old school where all your friends are at.”

“The only reason I can serve so well is because I pretend the ball is your face!”

“If I were your parents, I would’ve sold you back to the thrift store a long time ago.”

“You don’t belong here. Why don’t you do us all a favor and get out of here!”

I turned off my phone, ignoring all the messages Rachel sent me and all the other ones I was sure she would continue to send. Her opinion didn’t affect me. Besides,
I had volleyball practice after school, so I definitely had something to look forward to. I began walking to my next period class when I felt a push. I was slammed into the lockers. I turned around and saw Rachel glaring at me.

“Oh, I’m sorry,” she said sarcastically. “but remember, I warned you: stay out of my way!” She stomped away. I carefully stood up and walked to my class, hoping her bullying wouldn’t continue the next day.
The day after that, and every day after, was the same thing: Commenting mean things on my Instagram, texting me mean things, repeating the comments and texts, but to my face, and every now and then “accidently” crashed into me, making me drop everything I was holding. I wanted to tell her to cut it out, but I wasn’t as confident then as I was at volleyball tryouts. I was too scared to even face her. Sometimes I easily ignored what she did, but other times I just ran to the bathroom and had a good cry.

It surprised me the teachers were never out in the hallway watching any of this. Or maybe they didn’t care. I knew I probably should’ve told my mom, but she was so proud of me for being responsible and independent. I would have let her down, dragging her into this mess. And I couldn’t have told any of my teachers! That would’ve made it worse. It wasn’t like kindergarten where if you told on a kid for stealing your crayons, she would’ve stopped. Not in high school. If you told on someone in high school, she would seek revenge. So I had to deal with it myself.

For example, today I woke up and looked in the mirror, saying, *Today is a good day.* *Today will be a good day.* Then I tied my brown hair in a ponytail and went to
school. When I got to school, I kept repeating *Today is a good day. Today will be a good day* in my head. I was actually fine until I felt a harsh yank in my hair. My hair fell down, my ponytail destroyed. I turned around to see who had pulled my ponytail, even though I knew who it was. Rachel stood behind me, holding my hair tie.

“Can I please have it back?” I asked her, putting my hand out.

She laughed, “Oh, please. Nobody wears ponytails anymore. They make you look like a freak. Well, you especially.”

Everybody around us laughed. She dropped the hair tie, and let it fall to the ground.

I got down to pick it up. Everyone continued to laugh. I wasn’t sure if they were laughing at how frizzy my hair looked or at Rachel’s comment.

She bent down next to me and whispered, “Do us all a favor and stay down here. This is where people like you belong. At the bottom.”

She stood up and walked away, leaving me in the middle of the hallway on the floor. I didn’t even bother to stand up. I just sat there. I watched people walk around me, not even paying attention to me. Then I turned around and saw a pair of green sparkly boots stop right in front of me. I looked up and saw a girl staring down at me.
“Oh, sweetie, what happened?” The girl asked, sounding sympathetic. She helped me up.

“Oh, what? Oh, I’m fine. It’s nothing,” I replied, not being able to find my words. I was too busy focusing on the bright purple mop on her head. She had purple hair! With green sparkly boots and a bright pink t-shirt! She must have really loved bright colors!

She gave me a look, like she didn’t believe me. “Let me guess. Rachel Jones?”

I looked at her surprised. “How did you—”

She linked arms with me and began to walk. “Oh, you never want to mess with her. She is the most popular girl in this school. Everyone worships her. I don’t even know why; she’s the biggest bully in the school. She bullies one person at a time until another person comes around the corner. After that, they know to never cross paths with her ever again. I’m guessing that she’s going to be bullying you until some other nerd or new kid shows up. Trust me.”

How did she know so much about Rachel? Unless... “Were you bullied by Rachel?” I wondered.

She nodded. “Of course. I mean, come on. I’m a weirdo with purple hair and wears something a two-year-old would wear!”
“Really? Then what happened? Some other person came and she messed with them instead?” I asked, realizing that I didn’t bother asking for her name. We just jumped right into a conversation. And I wasn’t really planning on asking yet.

“Actually,” she responded, “I told her to back off.”

I looked at her. She was confident and didn’t seem shy at all. She was happy, calm, and just unique with her bright clothes (and hair!). So, it didn’t surprise me that someone like her stood up to someone like Rachel, but what did surprise me was that Rachel backed off.

“She actually backed down?” I asked, completely curious.

She nodded. “Oh yeah. I told her enough was enough. She bullied me for how I looked. She even tried to dye my hair black. Black! She and her friends dragged me into the bathroom, and they shoved my head into a sink as Rachel poured the black dye. I luckily pulled away and ran off. The day after, I told her if she did it again, I would dye her hair green. I told her not to mess with me because she has no idea what I am capable of. Then she said ‘huh, yeah right,’ so I actually pulled the green dye out of my backpack. Then I said ‘why do all these innocent people deserve to get bullied but not you?’ That sent her off running and we never crossed paths again.”
I smiled. “Wow. If only I had the confidence to do that.”

She stopped walking. “You do. You just have to find it in yourself. I’ll help you.”

I put my hand out. “Mia,” I introduced myself.

She shook my hand. “Claudia.”

I smiled at my new friend. “Well, Claudia, I’m sure we’ll get along just great.”
After a few weeks of hanging out with Claudia, I began feeling more and more confident each time. Every day, I had to go up to five different people and introduce myself. The first few times I would nervously whisper, and they thought I couldn’t talk normally. Then soon, I got better and better. By the end of four weeks, I was practically able to talk to anyone. I think I might’ve talked to everyone. Except for...

“Today’s the day. You nervous?” Claudia stood at my locker, smiling.

She meant that today was the day I stood up to Rachel. I’ve had enough with her. Her and her bullying actually got worse, but I was too busy hanging out with Claudia that I haven’t gone on Instagram in two weeks. So her harsh threats didn’t really affect me, but still. I couldn’t continue letting her bully me like it’s okay. So today I decided to confront her.

“Yeah, but let’s do it,” I replied, smiling a nervous smile.

She noticed my worried expression. “You’ll be fine,” Claudia said, “and I’ll be right beside you.”
I hugged her and said, “I couldn’t have done this without you.” She laughed. “Hey, that’s what best friends are for,” She answered.

Best friend? I only been here for almost three months and I already have a friend. No. A best friend. It felt nice. Like I wasn’t alone. Then Rachel with her little clique walked past me, all of them on their phones. I slammed my locker and walked behind her.

“Hey! Rachel!” I called out, but at the same time the bell rang. She kept walking, not hearing me. “You got saved by the bell, Rachel Jones!” I exclaimed.

Claudia pulled my arm, “Come on,” she said, taking me away, “Let’s just go to lunch.”

I nodded. “But I’m not finished with her!” Claudia steered me towards the cafeteria, where Rachel was already at her table. Sitting by herself. Claudia and I approached her.

“Where’s your little group?” I asked. She turned around and looked at me.

“Wow, new girl, are you actually talking? To me? Who said someone like you, the bottom of the social pyramid, could talk to someone like-”
“If you could ever stop talking about yourself, for once, then you would notice that I’ve been here for about three months now, so I’m not the new girl anymore, and if I was the bottom of the pyramid, then I would’ve thrown the top into the ocean a long time ago,” I interrupted.

She laughed. “Wow, I didn’t know the new girl had sass. And who told you that you can just talk to me like that?”

“I did,” Claudia stepped forward. Rachel’s face fell.

“Claudia,” she said.

“Rachel,” She replied back.

I sat down across from Rachel. “Okay, Rachel, for the last three months you’ve bullied me. What’s your problem?”

She answered right away, “You’re my problem.”

I rolled my eyes. “Okay, when you’re done stealing comebacks from eight-year-olds, you’re going to tell me: what do you have against me? Or do you do this to everyone? Because if you do, then wow, what an exciting life you have; dedicating your whole life on picking on people who don’t really care.”
At this point, she had nothing else to lose. She finally spilled the truth. “Because I’ve moved eleven times and every single school I went to, I was bullied for being the new girl. And I was also the school’s freaky genius girl, so don’t you think I got bullied for that? Now I’m here and I’m popular and happy, and I think everyone deserves to feel what I felt.”

I stopped feeling anger and started feeling a little sympathetic. “Rachel, did you enjoy getting bullied?” She shook her head no. I continued, “So then how come you do this to people? Wouldn’t you much rather have people feel happy the way you do now? Or do you just want the whole world to suffer, and remember that you’ll suffer with us.”

She nodded. “So you’re saying that if I stopped making people miserable, I’ll be even happier than I already am? And that will make me even more popular?”

“That’s actually not what I’m-”

She sprang up to her feet. “I’ll do it!” She gave me a hug and whispered in my ear, “And I’m sorry, I’ll take down the comments. I’m really sorry for everything, new girl. I mean Maya.”

I smiled. “It’s actually Mia… but whatever. We should go. Just think about it.” She nods and we walked away. I linked arms with Claudia.
I smiled at Claudia. “Hey. Thanks for the support.”

She nodded, then looked over at Rachel. “So, are you friends or something?” she wondered.

I shook my head no. “You’re my only friend. Best friend. She’s just no longer my enemy. Frenemy!”

“Glad that train wreck is over?” Claudia asked.

I smiled. “It wasn’t a train wreck. It was… a train that didn’t know which direction to head in. We just directed it the right way.”

Claudia laughed. “Nice metaphor, new girl.”

I laughed along. “Hey, I’m a poet, and I know it.”

And so since then, Rachel learned to stop bullying. Sure, she’s still the popular girl at the top off the social pyramid, but now people like us, the bottom, don’t feel like throwing her into the ocean anymore. We just live with them. And they live with us.