

YOUNG ADULT NOVEL BY Mary Newton Lima

*Summary: Closeted high school junior double-dates to Prom with his sister's best girl friend's girlfriend, said best friend, and his secret crush. Chaos ensues.*

CHAPTER 1

Four more shots, and I'd crush my record.

I mopped my forehead with my t-shirt. My brows did nothing to keep the sweat from trickling into my eyes as I squinted at the soccer balls lined up in front of me, my chest heaving.

If I made these, maybe my life would get back into shape.

I lined up the first shot, and let loose.

“MOTHer!”

BAM!

“LOVing!”

BAM!

“JUNior!”

BAM!

Each soccer ball slammed into the center of my plywood target, bouncing the board against the dilapidated shed. Except the last one. My fourth and final effort—PROM!—careened to the right and shot away into the yard.

Dammit.

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Life was still off the rails. Prom loomed. I threw myself onto the grass and screamed incoherently at the sky.

“Control yourself, Jackson,” said a voice above my head. “The neighbors’ll think you’re being tortured.”

“Screw off, Katy.” My goth-clad sister plopped down next to me. Twin sister. Fraternal, obviously, her being a girl and all. Hard to see the resemblance, now that she dyed her hair jet black and wore more eyeliner than a Kardashian.

“Language,” she said, handing me a water bottle. “What did that poor wooden goal do to you?”

“That last shot, Sis,” I said, mopping my face with my t-shirt. “I’d have broken my record.”

“Big deal.” Katy ripped one of the many dandelions from the lawn. “So you can only hit a four-by-eight piece of wood twenty-four times.”

“In a row. From 50 feet. And it’s half as tall and only a third as wide as a regulation goal.”

“Which you’re generally standing in. You’re the goalie, remember?” She popped the yellow flower off its stalk, aiming it at my head.

“A goalie, I remind you, must kick to his forward line with pinpoint accuracy.” I batted the plant away with the bottle and kicked at Katy’s black tutu. Yes. My sister wore tutus. Some kind of retro, Black Swan thing.

She swiped at my leg. “So what’s really eating you?”

“Nothing.” I pressed the palms of my hands into my eyes, willing her to stop talking.

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No luck. “Totally not nothing,” she said. “I heard you from the house. You were killing those balls. What’s up?”

“Prom.” I said, my arms falling onto the grass. This was a conversation I did not want to have again. We both knew how it would end.

Clenching and unclenching her gloved hands, she started in anyway. “You know, this would be so much easier...”

“Katydid,” I said, struggling into a sitting position.

“...if you would just...”

“Do not. Say it.”

“Tell everyone you’re gay.”

I sighed, placing my hands on my chest. “You hurt my heart.”

She shrugged. “Had to be said.”

“Again,” I muttered.

“And again,” she agreed, “until you man up and tell Scott and the rest of your buddies.”

I groaned. “I just want to go to the dance!”

“Understood. C’mon,” she said, standing as half her mouth twisted upwards, “I’ll help you find your balls.”

I snatched at her toule, but she somehow eluded my lightning-fast reflexes. She somersaulted out of range and took off toward the house, leaving me to trudge towards the back fence.

In the back of my mind, I knew she was right. If I let my gay flag fly, or at least told my best friend Scott, things would be simpler. I’d known I was gay since I was three, when I drew a picture of me and Katy in matching purple dresses. Mom took it in stride (not surprising for a

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hippie jewelry designer), but the kids on my peewee soccer team were not as accepting of my skirts. By the time I met Scott in second grade, I figured out it was easier to look like one of the crowd.

Scott and I had become instant best buds. He was in my class, and on my soccer team. He'd practically lived at my house when he'd moved here so he didn't have to listen to his parent's marriage fall apart. For me, back then, being gay didn't mean I wanted a boyfriend—just a best friend.

I wrestled one ball out of the bushes along the back fence and carried it while kicking another toward the shed. Katy met me at the door, and we tossed all four into my soccer box. As we locked up and headed into the house, Katy asked, "Why don't you just go stag, like usual?"

"That was the plan, but Scott ruined it by getting a girlfriend." I slammed through the rickety screen door. Scott and I had gone stag to almost every dance, homecoming, and school event you could think of.

"So why the drama?" Katy asked as she followed me to the dining room table, location of most homework production, meals, and Big Talks. Which this was turning into. "Stick with the plan."

"Because of Mindy." I threw myself into a chair and slid my backpack toward me.

"Scott's girlfriend?" Katy's upper lip twisted. "I swear, I do not understand why Scott is dating that witch."

"She's not bad." Mindy wasn't my favorite person, but loyalty to Scott demanded a defense. "Problem is, she thinks it would be swell if I took her best friend to Prom."

Katy grabbed her throat and gagged. "Sarah Thromble?"

"Exactly. I shall not spend my prom with Satan's daughter."

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“Agreed.” Katy pulled a pen and an agenda book out of her pack. “We can’t have that.”

“Nope. But if I go stag, Sarah will be mad at Mindy, Mindy will be mad at Scott, and...

“Got it. So find a date.” Katy opened her agenda and started doodling.

“So not into girls like that.” Pretty much the definition of gay. “What I would like is to go to the dance, hang in the crazy-ass penthouse suite Hulk’s dad is getting him, and crash at the hotel.” Hulk was the oldest child of the richest man in town. That same man thought the sun shone out of Brandon’s ass. When his golden boy asked, he’d ponied up enough dough to pay for the penthouse suite so his favorite son could have an after-prom blowout.

“That plan is officially toast,” I said. “Scott and I got a room to share, now he wants it for him and Mindy.”

“And you won’t give it to him?”

“Of COURSE I will! I mean, I did. Actually, he paid for it. But that leaves me no place to crash.” I turned out my pockets and leaned my chair back on two legs. “Me gots no money for me own room.”

“Stop talking like a muppet,” Katy said. “Crash in Hulk’s penthouse.”

“And listen to him with his girlfriend? Watch everyone making out on the couch while I’m trying to sleep? No. And gross.”

“Not gross. I know for a fact you made out with Sarith Singer six months ago.”

I nodded solemnly. “Indeed I did.” It’s not that I hadn’t made out with other girls, either. I had, in fact, gotten some pretty good feedback. My mother, bless her feminist heart, sat me and Katy down when we were 11 and not only told us about the birds and bees, but gave us detailed anatomical descriptions of what organs went where and which areas should be caressed for maximum effect. There had been charts. And a whiteboard. Don’t make me say more.

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“I’m sick of faking,” I said. “It’s not fun. Plus, Mindy will be after me all night, asking what’s wrong with Sarah. I’m liable to tell her.”

“That would be unwise. Although you could avoid that if you went with a friend...”

“You can’t get a hotel room with a friend.”

“You can too.”

I tried another tack. “All my girl friends already have dates.”

“All of them?”

“All of the fun ones. I checked. I was even considering your friend Kelly, but I heard she’s already going.”

“I could have told you that. Kelly’s going with Lee Constance.”

“What?” My chair crashed to the floor.

“They’ve been dating for ages, didn’t you know?” Katy raised an eyebrow. “And what’s it to you, anyway?”

“Doesn’t matter to me.” I bent and rubbed my ankle. “But they’re a weird couple, no? Theater boy and cheerleader?”

“They’re both on the gymnastics squad. You should know.”

“Right. I knew that.” I’d been to every one of Katy’s meets, and she’d been to most of my soccer games. Mom had an art gallery in town and worked there most afternoons, so the two of us were each other’s primary cheerleaders. Plus we shared a car, so hanging around while the gymnastics team practiced wasn’t unusual for me. Never mind that Scott offered me a lift home nearly every day. Fact is, I liked watching them practice.

Some gymnasts more than others.

Lee more than the rest. Combined.