

# **Island Eyes, Island Skies**

**Richard Levine**

**FEATHERED TALE  
PUBLISHERS**

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**THE SECOND PART:  
SCHOOL AGAIN**



## STRUCK STUPID IN A STAIRWELL

Rob

The first day of school, I run right into a tall girl I don't recognize as I turn the corner in the stairwell. But the girl maybe recognizes me 'cause right away she smiles quickly and easily. And it's *some* kind of smile, big, bright and mesmerizing. I like that vocab word, *mesmerizing*, the way it slips so easily off your tongue, and when spoken slowly, almost *is* what it means: hypnotizing, spellbinding. And since I can't seem to look away from her smile, I'd say it's definitely both hypnotizing *and* spellbinding. And as long as she's spilling sunshine, I'm happy to stand here soaking up rays.

Above the fold in this afternoon's *Stairway Sentinel*: **Spellbound Boy Risks Burn From Girl's Big Sunny Grin.**

"Hey," she says, "remember me?"

Well yeah, sort of. Maybe. There is some vague recognition in the deep recesses of my imperfect and currently smile-mesmerized brain, and yet I can't immediately place this girl with the knock-out smile. I've known for some time that I'm not the brightest star in the sky, but *this* is just too frustrating. I stand there seemingly brain-dead in front of her for a few moments until I finally do remember—Becky's party. Now I smile a little myself, letting her know that I do remember, but my smile isn't wholehearted like hers, because like Miss Clavel says while turning on the light in that stupid *Madeline* book Mattie likes so much, "*something is not right.*" But no light turns on in my hypnotized head. I can't figure it out—just what *is* D.C. doing in the stairwell of my school?

"Hey," is all I manage to say. It seems I've got a way with words.

She must sense my confusion because she reminds me that her family moved to Old Westwood over the summer.

"Oh," I say. No question about it; I do have a very special way with words.

She looks at me funny like there's something wrong with me. Well, maybe there is—'cause I stand there like a brain-addled idiot until the faulty circuits or whatever there are up there in my cottage cheese brain connect, and I remember.

"Oh yeah." I say. "You *did* tell me that."

She still looks at me funny—like she's figured out my brain's about as sharp as a soft banana.

Front-page story in tomorrow's *Dummy Dispatch*: **Brain Freeze Grips Dumbest Boy Alive Who Struggles To Survive.**

It turns out she's going to Biology class, the same class I'm headed for, only she's going the wrong way. I recover from my extreme stupid moment, and gallantly, like the old middle school hand I am, offer to walk her there. Walking alongside me, she moves clumsily—as if she had grown six inches over the past month. Sitting next to her in class, I keep looking over at her and comparing her with Disney's Esmeralda in my mind's eye. When she catches me sneak peeking a few times, I pretend I'm looking elsewhere, but I'm

pretty sure I don't fool her. Once, towards the end of class, while Mr. Olafsen, our teacher, is trying to convince us all to join the Biology Club, she catches me red-handed looking at her, so I just smile sheepishly, not only red-handed but now red-faced as well. The good news is she's also in my Spanish class right after Biology as well as my study hall the second to last period of the day.

It's there in study hall right after Mr. Mulvaney, our proctor, announces to us that study hall is for studying, not socializing, that we talk a little about school, the summer, her new house (Mulvaney, knuckleheaded grown-up, what does he know?). D.C. tells me she had been to Wyoming where she had gone horseback riding and river rafting and had seen moose, elk and grizzly bears.

"I pretty much just hung out at home," I say, "but your trip out west sounds cool."

"Yeah," she says but without conviction, "it was." Now changing the subject, she asks, "You think you'll join the Biology Club?"

"I don't know. How about you?"

"Yeah, I think so. It sounds like fun, those trips Olafsen was talking about, to museums and bird sanctuaries," she says with a distracted air about her as if she's not really here with me but off somewhere else doing a mind travel thing; it's definitely different, this off-in-another-world manner she has about her, and for some reason I can't explain, it appeals to me.

"Yeah, definitely; I'm in," I say, although truthfully up until that minute, I hadn't given the Biology Club a moment's thought.

## D.C.

How could he not have remembered me right off? We had such a nice time together at Becky's party! And I'm not sure what planet he was visiting when we met in the stairwell, but I'm pretty sure it wasn't good ole earth. In Biology class, when I caught him looking at me a few times, he either hurriedly looked the other way or smiled sheepishly. It was cute.