

'Hazel Hill is
someone you're
going to want
to spend time
with.'

SARAH
HAGGER-HOLT



HAZEL HILL

IS

GONNA
WIN

THIS

ONE

MAGGIE HORNE

HAZEL HILL
IS GONNA
WIN
THIS ONE

Maggie Horne



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For Arthur, who is not a Tyler.

1

I've been told that it's impossible to know everything, but I think I've found a loophole.

Maybe I won't be able to know *everything*, but before I started middle school, I decided I could know *something*. I stayed up late making lists of all the subjects in which I might want to become an expert. Geometry. Giant pandas. Golf. And those were just the Gs. I thought that by the time I got to high school I'd know absolutely everything about one chosen subject, and maybe after that I could pick something else and go from there.

Not to brag, but we're only three months into seventh grade and I'm already the undisputed expert in one topic. Unfortunately, it's Tyler Harris.

I know which teachers he likes, and which

ones like him. I know his birthday and his favourite colour and his preferred candy bar. I know that, no matter how hard he tries, he always, *always* misspells the word *difficult* as *diffeicult*. I know the name of every girl he's ever had a crush on and, most importantly, I know when he has a secret.

I think the giant panda knowledge would have been much more useful in the long term.

Today it's raining, which means Miss A is running late and everyone's standing around talking at their desks. She's always late on rainy mornings because whenever there's a frog in the road she gets out of her car and moves it to safety.

That also means that today Tyler is free to rush up to our desks.

'I have something to tell you,' he says. 'A secret. Do you want to hear it?'

At first, it was kind of fun to know all of Tyler's secrets. I thought maybe he'd give me something good, like information on a criminal organisation or a ghost sighting. Then I realised that his secrets were always just that he had a crush on some girl which would inevitably go away by the end of the week. There are only so

many times a person can hear about Tyler Harris's feelings. He has *a lot* of feelings. For a guy always so obsessed with making sure everyone knows he doesn't care about anyone else, he *always* has a crush on someone. I've kept track and, so far, he's told me about having crushes on twenty-seven different girls between last year and this year.

There are forty girls in our grade. Tyler Harris had a crush on sixty-seven and a half per cent of them.

He's never asked me if I wanted to know a secret before. He's never really acknowledged that he tells me secrets, actually. There's a weird look in Tyler's eyes today: kind of wild, kind of scary. His hair is sticking out in a million directions, like he's been up all night performing science experiments. Except I know Tyler barely ever does his homework, so that can't be it. His big eyes keep darting around the room, bouncing off my face to Miss A's empty desk to the dreary cream-coloured classroom walls.

He looks angry, maybe. But I don't think it's at me.

'It's about Ella Quinn,' he says.

I groan loud enough that a few people look over at us, and Tyler shushes me.

‘I’m sure she’s great,’ I say. ‘I’m sure she’s perfect and you two are perfect and you’re going to grow up and get married and have twenty-four perfect children and live in a mansion or whatever.’

Ella Quinn and Tyler were the first couple to date when we got to middle school, if walking beside each other at recess counts as dating (in sixth grade it definitely does). It clearly left a mark on both of them – they dated for a whole three months, and none of Tyler’s other ‘relationships’ have lasted as long. I know everything about Tyler Harris and I can barely keep up with those two; it seems like every other week Ella Quinn is holding his popcorn at the public skate again.

Tyler had been one hundred per cent on-board the Never Again Ella Quinn train until I caught him staring out the window for way too long during class and knew something was up. Like clockwork, the day before Thanksgiving break last week he told me he was going to ask her out again.

‘It’s not what you think,’ Tyler says, still way too intense. ‘Do you want to know or not? I could tell someone else instead. I could go and tell the whole school if I wanted to.’

I lean back in my chair a little bit to avoid getting hit in the face with his spit.

‘You’re being weird. Are you OK?’

The second part slips out. Normally, I don’t really care if Tyler is OK or not. It’s just that this is the first time it’s seemed like maybe he isn’t.

Tyler rolls his eyes. ‘Do you even care what I have to say?’

The answer is no, but I don’t think that’s the answer Tyler wants to hear.

‘Tell me, then,’ I say. ‘If it’s such a big important secret, you have to tell me right away.’

‘Sit down please, Tyler!’ Miss A chirps, floating into the classroom. She’s wearing a dress that has cats printed all over it and it looks like she hasn’t brushed her hair in a week, and I’m so happy to see her. A grown-up in a room changes the energy immediately; everyone calms down and goes quiet and everyone knows where they’re supposed to look. Tyler can’t keep talking to me. It’s more of a relief than I expected.

‘I hope you all had a wonderful Thanksgiving break,’ Miss A says. ‘And I also hope you’ve all begun to think about our annual speech competition.’

I sit up as straight as I possibly can and wait for her to continue.

‘I won the coin toss this year,’ she declares, ‘so I got to set your theme. I don’t think anyone will be surprised to know that I’ve chosen history.’

People around me groan, but I’ve known the theme since last week. Miss A likes me, and she appreciates a polite request.

‘If that theme is too horrible for you, you’re welcome to sit this one out,’ Miss A continues. ‘The speech contest is always for extra credit, and never mandatory. But ... this year, I’ve decided that participation in the contest will exclude you from completing the final project in my history class. Whether you choose to compete in the speech competition alone or do the project with a partner, your assignments will be due the week before winter break. Those of you writing speeches, your work will be graded like an essay – it’ll be excellent practice for high school.’

I never realised that we were supposed to practise for high school. Then I got to middle school and every time we did *anything* our teachers told us that it would be ‘Great practice for high school’, and we ‘Won’t be able to get away with that in high school’. But my cousin Amelia is in high school and she seems way more relaxed than me, so I’m still forming my opinions there. Then again, I guess Amelia isn’t the ‘nightmares about being late for class’ type.

People are looking at their friends from across the room, trying to figure out if they’d be better off doing the group project or the speech. I smile before I can stop myself. I get to win the speech competition *and* I don’t have to do group work? Sometimes you just get handed a freebie.

‘I’ll give you guys some time to talk quietly amongst yourselves and work quietly on anything you need to get done this week,’ Miss A says. ‘You have just about three weeks to complete whatever it is you’re planning on presenting, so you should have plenty of time to make some magic. As soon as the volume gets too loud we’ll be back to our friends, the Pharaohs.’

I grab my speech notebook out of my backpack before anyone's even out of their seats and smooth my hands over its beautiful red cover. There's nothing special about my notebook really, but I know that the winning speech is tucked away inside here. It makes something kind of exciting and shimmery zing down my back when I see it.

I'm probably one of the only people working on a speech. My parents were surprised when I entered last year. I think they think that I don't have friends because I'm shy, but that's not it at all. I'm not shy, I'm just busy. My dad once told me he didn't have everything figured out yet, and he's at least thirty-five. If I'm going to figure everything out before then, I don't have time to do it with friends.

I've chosen a subject that's just cool enough for kids in my class to like, and just historical enough for Miss A to appreciate. 'Unsolved Mysteries of the Twentieth Century.' To be honest, I can't do any research at night because it freaks me out too much. But last year Ryden Stewart did his speech on puberty and he still gets laughed at, so I know I need to do something cool. Or at least just not

something the judges call ‘Certainly very ... brave.’

I almost won last year. *Almost won* is my least-favourite phrase in the world. I’d been so sure of myself, one of the only sixth graders competing against the rest of the school.

Then The Incident happened.

I thought it would be impressive for me to throw some big words in there – my parents always lose their minds when I whip out a word they didn’t think I knew, like *efficacy* or *egregious* or *specificity*. My speech was about speeches, because I thought that would be funny (I still think it was kind of funny, but I’m probably the only one), and I wanted to say that some people use hyperbole, which is when you exaggerate a lot to make your point in speeches.

Hyperbole is pronounced high-per-bull-ee. I said hyper-bowl, and Ella Quinn, the only other sixth grader competing against the whole school, won with her speech on the tooth fairy. The *tooth fairy!*

The memory makes me want to slam my head onto my desk, but I stop for two reasons:

1. I need my brain in top shape at all times.

2. Tyler has turned in his seat to face me and his creepy giant owl eyes are staring into my soul.

We look at each other and I try not to blink to show dominance, the way I read you have to do when you're training a puppy.

Ugh. Fine.

'What is it?' I ask. 'Do you like a set of triplets now? Have you discovered the cure for the common cold? Are you and Ella Quinn adopting a cat together and moving to Siberia?'

Tyler's face goes weird again at the mention of Ella Quinn, and then he almost laughs.

Tyler and Ella Quinn's big break-up was the most dramatic scene to hit the Oakridge cafeteria in the last decade, probably. First semester was almost over, and everyone was taking bets on whether they'd dance together at the winter dance. Three months of dating is like two and a half years in middle-school time – Tyler had even given Ella Quinn a little silver necklace that had a charm shaped like a *T*. (I always wondered why on earth he thought that would be a good idea. Why would Ella Quinn want a dog tag around her neck? 'If found,

return to Tyler Harris.')

They broke up because a new girl moved to Tyler's street and he wanted to, quote, 'try his luck' with her. For the record I know that that's ridiculous, but Tyler said that Ella Quinn was getting super possessive and demanding and rude to him anyway, and I have to assume no middle-school relationship is worth that effort.

Ella Quinn ripped the necklace right off her neck and threw it so high that it got stuck on top of the big cafeteria clock. Apparently it's still there, but I'm too short to see it.

'Not quite,' Tyler says. He looks like he's going to continue, but Miss A walks by and he shuts his mouth.

'I'll stop listening in ten seconds,' I say to Tyler after she's gone. 'Starting now.'

'Fine,' he says. He looks around one more time to see if anyone might overhear us, and then pauses again.

I'm about to roll my eyes and get back to my speech – he can tell me whatever it is he wants to tell me later if he's going to insist on making this so dramatic – but then he opens his mouth.

'Ella Quinn,' he says, 'has a *crush* on you.'