

A Crooked Election

Kyria Abrahams

Kelly is running for class president of Wright High School. Some of Kelly's classmates think elections are pointless. Kelly's best friend Maya doesn't believe in voting at all.

"I'm not voting," Maya tells her. "Voting is pointless."

"But if you don't vote, someone else will. And then they'll get what they want and you won't get what you want!" Kelly says.

"I don't want anything. I just want to be left alone." Maya responds.

Kelly is running for class president because she says she thinks the school can be better. She wants to see less meat served in the cafeteria and more vegetarian options. She also wants the school to stop bringing a live goat onto the field during football games.

"Kelly has good ideas, but won't be able to change anything," Maya tells her classmates. "She's just idealistic. No one can change anything."

Kelly's opponent, Roger, is running for class president of Wright High School because his brother was president last year. In fact, Roger has three brothers, and all three of them have been class president.

"I'm not losing to anybody," Roger tells his brothers. "Especially not a *girl*."

Roger has really nice banners professionally printed and hangs them around the school. Roger's banners say: "Roger Whitaker. The Right Man for the Wright Job." The phrase "right man" is a reference to the fact that Kelly is a girl. Roger says that girls can't be president because they cry too much. He only says this secretly to his brothers. He would never admit this opinion to his classmates.

"All Kelly cares about is that we have tofu in the cafeteria," Roger tells his classmates. "But I want to fix the broken doors in the bathroom!" Roger holds up a screwdriver as he says this and makes a grunting "man" sound.

The election banners were given to him as a gift by the Harrison kids. Their dad owns Harrison Sign Manufacturers and made the signs for free.

"Just make sure that when you get elected—and we are confident that you will—you tell the school that they need new signs." They shake hands and give him the free

signs, which suddenly don't seem so free.

Roger looks around the school and sees that they do, in fact, need new signs. The exit sign above the main door is cracked. The sign above the library just says "Librar." The menu next to the school cafeteria is so old it says you could get a peanut butter and jelly sandwich for 50 cents.

So, maybe it is a bit unfair to take something from a student who's going to vote for you. But Roger figures they have a good point about the signs.

Meanwhile, Kelly has been running around the school putting up signs of her own. They are all handmade from construction paper with fresh flowers on them. They say, "Make the school beautiful. Vote Healthy for Kelly."

Maya tells Kelly they look nice, but she doesn't think they'll do anything. "It's just lipstick on a pig," she says. "Just because you make it look nice doesn't mean it's not still a pig."

Kelly's handmade signs make Roger nervous, because they seem more honest and down-to-earth. Although his signs are really nice and professional, it's also obvious that they cost money. Roger feels like the students don't relate to him.

He wants the other students to think he's just like them, so he organizes a barbecue during school lunch hours with free hot dogs. Actually, it's the Harrison brothers' idea. They even get him a deal on the hot dogs, from their cousin's supermarket, of course.

A few kids come by, but Roger also notices that a good amount of students stay in the cafeteria, eating food they brought from home. He can't figure out why someone would want to eat a stale sandwich when he's offering free hot dogs.

The hot dog giveaway is definitely a flop. Roger goes home dejected and sad.

The next day, the school holds a debate between the two candidates. The debate is moderated by their civics teacher, Mrs. Graham.

Roger and Kelly sit on stage, opposite each other. The auditorium is filled with students, all of whom will have the opportunity to vote. All the students are watching with great interest, as this is how they will make their decision. One wrong answer today and it could mean losing the presidency.

Mrs. Graham asks the first question.

“As class president, how would you see fit to spend the school’s extra money?”

Kelly answers first. “Well, I certainly wouldn’t be spending our money on expensive signs and hot dogs,” she says.

The audience gasps. This is a low blow. It’s surprising that Kelly would say something like that.

Roger looks into the audience and sees the Harrison brothers sinking down into their seats.

Kelly continues, “I would like our school to be healthier, and I know we have many students who are vegetarian. They don’t have many options for lunch, and if they forget to bring lunch from home, sometimes they don’t eat lunch at all!”

At this, at least 50 students stand up and applaud. Even Maya stands and applauds, although she rolls her eyes a little, too. The other students join in the cheering.

Of course, a few students start booing, just to be jerks.

“Eat more bacon!” says one, cupping his hands around his mouth so the sound will carry.

“Eat a vegetarian!” says another, laughing and throwing pieces of paper.

“Okay everyone, that’s enough!” the moderator says from stage. The students who are booing the vegetarians just look like troublemakers now.

Roger looks into the audience. He finally realizes how many students are vegetarian; he has never thought to find out before.

“What about you, Roger? What will you spend money on?”

“Well, I would like to have a new sign for the cafeteria,” he says. “And that could certainly include any vegetarian options that the school may end up providing.”

“Oh please! Without me to push for it, the school will never change its menu,” Kelly says. “Roger offers empty promises. And he thinks he is better than me because I’m a girl!”

The students start to applaud and Roger watches the Harrison brothers sneak out the back door.

When the debate is over, Roger can tell that he lost. His failure is palpable; he can feel it. Students clamor around Kelly in a group, hugging her and telling her how they

can't wait for the new lunch menu.

Only a few people come up to Roger.

"I liked your nice sign," says Peggy, pushing her glasses up on her nose and squinting.

"Thanks," said Roger. "Can I count on your vote next week on election day?"

"Oh, that," Peggy says. "Well, actually, I'm voting for Kelly. I just wanted to be nice to you."

After school, the Harrison brothers are waiting outside to talk to Roger. He notices they are carrying some of Kelly's signs.

"We're going to have to withdraw our support," Boyd Harrison tells him.

"We just don't think you look like the winning candidate," Trent Harrison says. "And we really need to get behind someone who can help bring our dad more business."

"What are you talking about?" Roger says, angrily. "I was your guy! You supported me! I thought we were friends."

"Yeah, friends. Well, about that...You see, it's just that Kelly will bring in a lot more business for our dad's company," says Trent.

Boyd nods in approval. "It's nothing personal. You're a nice dude and all. But Kelly has a little more...*spirit*."

"Kelly? Oh please!" Roger is yelling now. "Her signs are all handmade! Didn't you see them? It's just hipster junk!"

"Oh, yeah, you noticed that? We went for a more 'indie' feel with these." Trent says.

"Tried to make them look handmade." Boyd interjects. "The hipsters love that. We're glad you noticed."

Kelly is coming out of the school now, and the Harrison brothers walk away from Roger without saying a word. Each brother puts an arm around Kelly.

"How's our best girl?" they ask.

Kelly smiles. "Doing just great now," she says. "Now that Roger looks like a woman-hating meat-eating loser."

"We've got this election in the bag," Boyd says. "A vegetarian bag, that is."

Trent holds up a bag of veggie burgers. “We’ve even been eating these at lunch, showing all those health-conscious kids that we’re one of them.”

“Well, you sure do look trustworthy now, don’t you?” Kelly says, laughing. “But do you have any real food? I’m so sick of this vegetarian junk. My stomach is killing me!”

“You bet we do,” says Boyd. “In fact, we have a whole bunch of hot dogs left over from Roger’s barbeque yesterday. Let’s go to our house and have dinner.”

“By the way,” Kelly says, “How did you convince people not to go get delicious free hot dogs? I think he could have really turned people to his side with that.”

“It was easy,” Boyd says. “We started a rumor that Roger left the hot dogs out in his car overnight. Nobody wanted to get sick. He was so depressed; he just left everything sitting there. We grabbed all the leftovers and took them back home.”

“That’s brilliant,” Kelly says. “I can’t thank you enough!”

“Well, you won’t have to thank us once you’re elected. Just make sure the school uses our dad’s business. And, oh yeah, when the cafeteria goes vegetarian, you know which veggie burgers are the best choice.”

Boyd dangles the bag in front of her and for the first time, she reads the label: “Harrison’s Burgers.”

“Victory has never tasted so sweet,” Kelly says.

Name: _____ Date: _____

1. Why does Kelly say she is running for class president?

- A She says the school needs new signs.
- B She says the school cafeteria should have more hot dogs.
- C She says she thinks the school can be better.
- D She says the football games can be more exciting.

2. What motivates the actions of Boyd and Trent Harrison?

- A They want to be elected class presidents.
- B They want to bring in money for their family's businesses.
- C They want to prove they are better than Kelly.
- D They want to embarrass Roger in front of the school.

3. The Harrison brothers give Roger free signs for his election campaign so that their father's sign company will get money from the school. Which evidence from the passage best supports this conclusion?

- A "The election banners were given to him as a gift by the Harrison kids. Their dad owns Harrison Sign Manufacturers and made the signs for free."
- B "They shake hands and give him the free signs, which suddenly don't seem so free."
- C "Roger looks around the school and sees that they do, in fact, need new signs. The exit sign above the main door is cracked."
- D "'Just make sure that when you get elected—and we are confident that you will—you tell the school that they need new signs.'"

4. How can Boyd and Trent Harrison best be described?

- A loyal
- B unintelligent
- C opportunistic
- D idealistic

5. What is this passage mostly about?

- A an election with two crooked candidates
- B a kindhearted and honest girl who runs for class president
- C reasons why teenagers don't believe in voting
- D why vegetarian food is healthier than hot dogs

6. Read the following sentences: "When the debate is over, Roger can tell that he lost. His failure is **palpable**; he can feel it. Students clamor around Kelly in a group, hugging her and telling her how they can't wait for the new lunch menu."

What does "**palpable**" mean as used in the passage?

- A unnoticeable and minor
- B disappointing and annoying
- C helpful and encouraging
- D obvious and intense

7. Choose the answer that best completes the sentence below.

In her election campaign, Kelly says that she wants more vegetarian food in the cafeteria; _____, she does not actually like vegetarian food.

- A therefore
- B however
- C obviously
- D particularly

8. Who made Kelly's posters?

9. Trent and Boyd Harrison want to use the class election to make money for their family. They give Roger free signs from Harrison Sign Manufacturers so that, if Roger is elected, he will get the school to buy new signs from the Harrison business.

What is another way that the brothers use the election to make money for their family?

10. The word "crooked" can be used to describe something that is dishonest or corrupt. Explain why the election and the people involved in it are crooked.
