

# I'm Not Eating That

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"I'm not eating that," said Rebekah.

"You have to eat it," said Carrie.

"Yeah," said Harriet. "It's the rules."

Rebekah looked at the glass in her hand and thought about the rules. She thought about how strange sleepovers can be and how hard it is to make new friends. She thought about her upset stomach and wondered what this strange concoction of corn syrup, frozen spinach, eggnog mix and licorice would do to her digestive tract. As she raised the glass to her lips, she thought about what it was that led her to this moment and where she went wrong.

It had started three days earlier, outside the science lab. Rebekah was organizing her locker, trying to quash the queasy back-to-school feeling she got every year around that time. Her pencils were all unsharpened, her notebooks were empty, and her nerves were an absolute mess. This was worse than any other first day of school. This was the first day of seventh grade, in a town she'd never lived in, in a school she'd never even heard of before two weeks ago.

The halls were crowded with other kids, hugging and high-fiving, and trying to catch up on several months of summer in one long, breathless exclamation. Rebekah knew none of them and wasn't sure she would want to. Her family moved so much—nearly every year—that it seemed like it wasn't even worth it to make friends. Better to keep her head down, do her homework, and—

"Hey!" said a squeaky girl standing beside her.

"I'm sorry," said Rebekah. "Is this your locker?"

"No silly, it's *your* locker. Mine is below yours. That makes us locker buddies!"

"Sorry. I'll get out of your way as soon as—"

"Take your time! I'm not in any hurry to get to class. And remember, being locker buddies means *never* having to say you're sorry. My name's Carrie."

"I'm Rebekah."

Carrie was tall for their grade, taller than most of the boys, and the squeak in her voice didn't seem to match her body. She didn't seem to mind this; she was comfortable with herself in a way that Rebekah absolutely was not. When she found out they had several classes together, Carrie didn't hesitate to invite Rebekah to sit with her, loudly, in a way that embarrassed Rebekah even as it made her proud. It seemed like Carrie was looking for more than a locker buddy—she wanted a friend.

"So since it's still the first week of school," said Carrie after math class, "and we don't really have homework yet, and I don't really worry that much about homework anyway, and you seem like a Grade-A cool girl, and my buddy Harriet who was my locker buddy *last* year invited me over for a sleepover this weekend, maybe you want to come?"

Her head spinning from the run-on sentence, Rebekah agreed without thinking about it. She'd only been in the school a few hours, and she had made not just one friend, but possibly two. But were Carrie and Harriet the sort of girls she wanted to be friends with? Carrie came

on so strong. What if she was kind of crazy? Rebekah wasn't really worried about looking popular, but she didn't like lunatics. Were these girls the type of friends she could trust?

Harriet was a short girl with a round face, cropped brown hair, and a house that smelled like itchy old blankets. This was probably, Rebekah thought, because there were itchy-looking blankets scattered all over her living room. The place was cramped but not unpleasant—like a mountain cabin where two people were planning on riding out a snowstorm.

“My parents are hippies,” said Harriet, and even though Rebekah wasn't quite sure what that meant, she got the general idea.

Whenever Rebekah had slept over at a friend's house in the past, they mostly watched movies and read magazines and gossiped about school. A sleepover at Harriet's, she quickly learned, was a very different story. She and Carrie had been friends for a long time, it seemed like, and they spoke in a strange sort of code. Everything was an inside joke, or had a funny song to go with it, or was the jumping-off point for another game with a crazy name. First they played Hot Light, where you had to get across the living room while impersonating a reptile. Then they played Dictionary Attack which involved flipping through the dictionary as fast as possible and looking for funny words. They played Island Paradise, a game that involved a lot of dancing. Doubletime Island Paradise involved much more dancing, and Reverse Island Paradise had no dancing at all.

By 7 o'clock, Rebekah was exhausted, desperate to eat something and get some sleep. She'd been having a good time—her sides hurt from laughing—but she was ready to settle

down. So when Harriet mentioned going to the kitchen, Rebekah's stomach did a happy leap. She didn't notice the cruel grin spreading across Carrie's face.

"What are you making in that glass?" Rebekah asked Harriet. "That seems like an awful lot of corn syrup."

"Nah, it's just right," said Harriet.

"This is the secret ingredient for the best game of all," said Carrie, in another one of her run-on sentences. "I just know you're going to love it, it's so much fun and it's gross and hilarious and scary and exciting all at the same time, and—"

"It's called, What's For Dinner," said Harriet. She slid a foul grey-green mixture across the kitchen table to Rebekah. "You go first."

That was when Rebekah began to regret making new friends. She would have done anything at that moment to disappear, to go back to her house, to find a way to make friends with nice, normal girls. But these were the best she could do. Harriet and Carrie stared at her, their eyes glowing, waiting for her to chicken out. But Rebekah was no coward.

She drank the mixture down in a single gulp.

"Mmm..." she said. "That was pretty good. Got any more?" For the first time all night, Harriet and Carrie were both speechless. They didn't have a song for this moment or an inside joke. "Okay. I guess it's my turn."

Rebekah raided the pantry, stocking up on every creepy looking health-food product she could find. Into one glass she poured kale juice, wheat germ, smoked tofu and soy sauce. Into

the other, she put a pile of flax, a handful of dried mushrooms, vegetable stock and nearly half a cup of molasses. She handed the first mixture to Harriet and the second to Carrie.

“Drink up,” she said.

“I’m not eating that,” said Harriet.

“I am *not* eating that,” said Carrie.

“But girls, you have to,” said Rebekah. “It’s the rules.”

After a bit more coaxing, the girls drank it down, and Rebekah knew the three of them would be friends for a long time to come.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

1. Who are Carrie and Harriet?

- A Rebekah's sisters
- B Rebekah's new friends
- C two of Rebekah's teachers
- D two hippies Rebekah meets

2. What is a conflict in this story?

- A Rebekah wants to be friends with Carrie but not with Harriet.
- B Rebekah wants to be friends with Harriet but not with Carrie.
- C Rebekah does not want to swallow the drink in her hand, but she wants Carrie and Harriet to like her.
- D Rebekah wants to try the drink in her hand, but she does not want Carrie and Harriet to like her.

3. Rebekah does not want to try the mixture that Carrie and Harriet have prepared for her.

What evidence from the story supports this statement?

- A "She thought about her upset stomach and wondered what this strange concoction of corn syrup, frozen spinach, eggnog mix and licorice would do to her digestive tract."
- B "She'd only been in the school a few hours, and she had made not just one friend, but possibly two."
- C "She drank the mixture down in a single gulp."
- D "Into one glass she poured kale juice, wheat germ, smoked tofu and soy sauce. Into the other, she put a pile of flax, a handful of dried mushrooms, vegetable stock and nearly half a cup of molasses."

4. Why do Harriet and Carrie say that they are not going to eat the mixtures that Rebekah makes for them?

- A They do not want to make Rebekah feel bad.
- B They do not think that the mixtures will taste good.
- C They want to play Dictionary Attack again.
- D They want to start doing homework for science class.

5. What is a theme of this story?

- A itchy blankets
- B cooking dinner
- C doing homework
- D making friends

6. Read the following sentences about Rebekah: "Her pencils were all unsharpened, her notebooks were empty, and **her nerves were an absolute mess**. This was worse than any other first day of school."

What does the phrase "**her nerves were an absolute mess**" mean?

- A Rebekah was not very good at keeping her pencils and notebooks organized.
- B Rebekah liked to cover the pages of her notebooks with messy drawings.
- C Rebekah was feeling very eager and happy.
- D Rebekah was feeling very nervous and worried.

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

Rebekah drinks her mixture; \_\_\_\_\_ she makes mixtures for Harriet and Carrie.

- A then
- B never
- C previously
- D particularly

8. Describe Harriet and Carrie after Rebekah drinks her mixture.

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9. What do Harriet and Carrie do with their mixtures after saying that they will not eat them?

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10. Why does Rebekah believe that she, Carrie, and Harriet will be friends for a long time to come? Support your answer with evidence from the story.

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