

## DANCING THE CHARLESTON

Earlier this afternoon I bought a purse full of pixie dust. I was rummaging in the clearance section at Target, and an oversize black and white purse caught my eye. Well, I should tell you, shopping is, for me, both a visual and tactile experience, because my vision is limited. I could see that the purse was large and patterned in what I thought was zebra. I could also feel that it actually had soft animal-skin on the outside, and that's what drew me to it. I loved its largeness, too.

I bought it, unaware of anything unusual about it, and holding the shopping bag with the purse in one hand and my dog guide's harness in the other, I started the walk home.

"Gemma, forward!" I say in a firm voice, and gripped the leather harness as Gemma starts forward again across the street. I cannot see well enough to read street signs, but my vision is good enough to orient me to my surroundings. I am crossing Killarney Road with Milan Hall behind me, and when Gemma and I arrive at the other side of the street I tell her, "Gemma, left," and we turn our steps towards 329 Killarney Road, where I live. I can see the houses on either side of the street, but not clearly. I cannot read house numbers. I have learned the landmarks around Naples Hall, my house, so I can find it and distinguish it from all the other houses on the street. There's a tree in front, for instance.

Since the house is locked on the Killarney side, Gemma and I walk to the back. She guides me down a narrow walkway between two houses, and we are in the parking lot behind Naples, Pisa & Verona—the three connecting houses, including mine. Soon we are at the back door to Naples, and I swipe my ID, and unlocking the door.

When we get in my room, I bend to remove Gemma's harness and give my beautiful yellow lab a hug. Then I look up and see that my roommate is in. Molly's lying on her bed, studying. I know she's tall with pretty light medium brown hair, but I can't really tell much else.

I take the purse out of the bag and hold it up for Molly and Gemma's inspection.

I bring the purse over to Molly, who looks up and signs, "Hey, what've you got there?"

I lay it on the bed in front of her. I sign, "I found a cool new purse. Whatcha think?"

"Yeah! It's cool!" she replies, making sure to sign close to my face so I could see her.

Gemma comes over and nudges her head against my side. I laugh and show her the purse. Of course, she's my best friend as well as my helper, her opinion counts. She sniffs inside the purse and licks inside it, who knows why. She wags her tail and it seems like she's smiling approvingly.

The next thing I know, Gemma begins floating off the ground. She's slowly rising into the air. Startled, Molly and I both grab for her. Molly gets a handful of yellow fur, but I miss. Molly struggles briefly and succeeds in pulling her back to earth. Gemma doesn't seem to have enjoyed her brief flight: she sits down, looking sad.

The offending purse still lies on the floor where I had put it for Gemma's inspection. We look down at it, wondering. Molly picks it up for a closer look, and exclaims in surprise.

"What?" I say, having seen her mouth drop open. She holds the purse out for me.

"There's sparkly stuff in here. I don't know, it looks like crystals or something." She says.

Wait... I think. This reminds me of something... but what?

“Does this remind you of something? Sparkly powdery stuff making people or animals rise into the air? It makes me think of something but I can’t remember what...” I say.

“Hey! I know!” Molly says. “Peter Pan! It’s pixie dust!” Yes! That’s what I was trying to think of! I thought. When I watched the animated Peter Pan as a kid, the sight of Gemma in midair put me in mind of Nanna hovering in midair unable to fly because she was held down by her leash.

I move the purse away from Gemma just to be sure she wouldn’t start sniffing the pixie dust again. She lies down with her head on my knee, content to be back on the ground with me.

Someone appears in our open doorway. From where I sit on the floor I cannot see who it is. I look to Molly inquiringly. She frowns and tells me it is Brandon, the guy who has a crush on me and who creeps me the hell out. And Molly knows it, so she isn’t happy to see him, either.

Brandon and I had been playmates as children. I hadn’t minded his seeming infatuation with me then, being a silly little girl who loved any boy paying attention to her. He used to like to play dress-up wedding with me, him being the groom and me being the bride.

But as we got older and he continued to be infatuated with me, I started to really feel creeped out. He was weird. The other kids didn’t like him, and when he kept approaching me in school and fawning all over me the other kids scorned me, wondering what I was doing associating with such an oddball. I remember one time he actually tried to kiss me. It was disgusting: the guy didn’t know how to kiss. Not to mention the fact that I didn’t want to be

kissed by him. Why couldn't he get the hint? Quite honestly, I've never been nice to him, not since we were children.

With a sigh I get up and approach Brandon, but keep my distance.

"Yeah?" I sign. He's also deaf. Brandon has long, straggly reddish hair, a goatee, and wore a baseball cap and plaid flannel shirt.

"Katie..." He says. "You're beautiful," Oh, jeez. I think, There he goes again. That was the kind of thing he kept doing in school, randomly approaching me and telling me that. I was getting quite sick of it. He doesn't make me feel beautiful, he just makes me want to hide under the bed. Halfheartedly, I thank him, then ask him, "What are you doing here?"

"I wanted to see you." He says.

Suddenly, things seem to be out of control. Brandon pushes his way into our room and tries to put his arms around me. He seems to have forgotten we aren't alone. He forces my head back and splays a wet, slobbery mouth on mine.

I try to get my knee up, but he's holding me too tight. Then he lets out a squeal of pain and lets me go. I look down and see my loyal Gemma has got his bottom in her teeth. I can't help it: I burst out laughing. As if to top it all off, Molly leaps up off the bed, grabs the purse, and throws pixie dust at him. Gemma has to let go of his butt as he begins rising off the ground. He floats away, kicking and struggling, and we slam the door behind him.

And away he floats, dancing the Charleston in midair.