

Kate Makes Her Mark

Zachary Donaldson. Zachary Donaldson. His name is like poetry or something.

As I lifted my pencil to the pink bathroom wall, I had a quick conversation with myself.

Maybe I shouldn't do this. But I need to do something to get his attention. The high school cheerleaders use our gym for practice sometimes when their gym is being used. So if one of those girls sees this, then Zachary's definitely going to find out about it since he's a football player, and that will be so perfect. And this isn't really graffiti since I'm doing it in pencil. It can totally just be erased. No big deal, right?

My hand was shaking as I began to write in huge letters "Z-A-C-H-A-R-Y D-O-N-A-L-D-S-O-N." I finished by surrounding his name with a big heart.

When the secretary's voice came through the speaker dismissing students to their buses, I jumped.

All right, Kate, I said to myself. Let's hope this works!



When I got home after school, my mom handed me a huge piece of homemade lemon meringue pie.

"Hi, Katie. How was school?"

"Mom, *please* try to call me Kate! I'm twelve years old now. Katie sounds like a little kid's name!"

She gave me a hug. "Honey, you've always been our little Katie and that's a pretty difficult thing to change."

I sighed. "I know. I know. Just please try. Okay, Mom?"

"Okay," she said. "So did anything interesting happen at school today?"

"No. Nope. Nothing different happened at all. I didn't do anything different or anything. Just the same old boring day of school I always have. I'm gonna go eat this in my room. See you later, Mom!" I bolted up to my room before she asked me anything else. I'm a terrible liar and if she kept probing, I would have ended up spilling everything about the bathroom wall.

It doesn't usually take me very long to do my homework, but my brain was totally spinning. It was hard to think about anything except Zachary and how he might react when he finds out what I did. I finally closed my social studies book when I smelled burgers cooking on the grill through my open bedroom window.

“Meow! Meow!” Sharkey, my cat, was curled up on my bed and wanted some attention. I stroked his long white fur and began telling him about what I did in school that morning. Sharkey’s almost always on my bed. He weighs twenty-five pounds and doesn’t move much. Just as I was explaining the part about drawing the heart around Zachary’s name, I heard the front door slam and loud boy voices making their way into the kitchen. It was my brother, Pete, and his best friend, whose name happens to be . . . Zachary Donaldson.

Yes. I have a major crush on my seventeen-year-old brother’s best friend.

After I gave Sharkey one more good scratch under his chin, I looked in the mirror and made sure my ponytails weren’t crooked. Then I cleaned the smudges off my glasses with the bottom of my shirt and headed downstairs.

My brother and Zachary were going over that day’s football practice.

“Dude! You so totally rocked the house when you threw that pass!” Zachary said.

“I heard *that*, Z-Dog! It was sa-weet!” my brother agreed.

They speak in kind of a different language. I pretty much get it, which is good because sometimes my parents need an interpreter.



"Hey, Pete. Hey, Zachary." I blushed as they both gave my ponytails a tug when I walked by them.

"Hey, little sis," said Pete.

"Whussup, Kate the Great?" Zachary said. It's so cool that he and Pete both call me Kate, not Katie or my full name, Kaitlin. When I become president of the United States, I plan to go by Kaitlin, but not now. I'm saving it.

I grabbed some soda and opened it, trying to be chill, like I didn't care if they were there.

Pete turned back to Zachary and said, "Dude! I'm totally stoked for the game on Friday! If we beat Grant High that would be off the hook!"

Pete is the star quarterback for the Marion Sharks. I don't understand everything about football, but I do know that my brother pretty much rocks. It's mainly because of him that the team was undefeated last season.

"Yo, Pete," said Zachary, "I was wondering if I could just hang here this weekend. The fam's got a thing they're doing and I just wanna get out, if that's cool with you."

You would think that since my dad's a pastor, people wouldn't want to hang out at our house or something. But that's definitely not true. Our friends always want to come over—especially Zachary. He's been spending the night at our house a lot lately. Mom says it's because Mr. and Mrs.

Donaldson need lots of time to talk, but I'm positive it's because he likes playing video games with me.

"Whatever, man. My casa is your casa, right?" said Pete. They high-fived. That's how they hug, I think.

Grabbing a couple bags of chips, a box of snack cakes, and a two-liter bottle of soda, they headed down to the basement to watch TV and stuff their faces, even though we were just about to eat dinner. I guess Mom has finally realized that nothing can possibly spoil Pete and Zachary's appetites. They eat 24/7. It's unbelievable.

When they were out of sight, I sat at the table and made a list in my head of all the things I like about Zachary:

He's the coolest guy on the planet.

He's kind of short and shaves his head.

He has this really goofy laugh that sounds a lot like a big, barking seal:
ìArf! Arf! Arf!î

He wears his grandfather's dog-tags from World War II on a chain around his neck, which is so mature. (He is 17, after all.)



But the thing I like most about Zachary is that his left eye is brown and his right eye is blue. Sometimes when I'm sitting across from him at the dinner table I just look at his eyeballs while he slurps up spaghetti noodles and I wonder how they got that way. Mom says it's kind of like a birthmark, but I think it means he must have some kind of special power . . . like he can set things on fire just by looking at them. I seriously get a little freaked out when he just sits and stares at a game on TV. I don't want our TV to explode or anything.



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I took another gulp of my drink and began tracing "ZACHARY" onto the side of the can with my finger. Who would be the very first person to notice Zachary's name on the bathroom wall?







Just Call Me Kate



The Most Embarrassing Thing EVER

As I was loading the dishwasher after dinner, my mom came in and said the ultimate weirdest thing she's ever said.

"Katie, I was thinking that we should go into town tonight and see about getting you a training bra."

I almost choked. "A what?"

"A training bra."

"What's it training for?" I carefully adjusted the plate I was loading.

"It's just a term used for a young girl's first bra," Mom answered.

"You want me to start wearing a *bra*? Have you *looked* at me lately? I definitely don't need one."

"Well, yes, but you're going to start changing soon and it would be good if you got used to wearing a bra. I thought you were excited about not being a little girl anymore," Mom said, moving her keys from one hand to the other.

"Sure I am, but I'm not into wearing all those straps and



buttons and things. I think it would feel like wearing a dog harness."



"Oh, honey." Mom smiled. "I think you'll be surprised at how comfortable and cute they can be. Now, start the dishwasher and we'll go."

"All right, fine," I said. "Hey, Mom?"

"Yes, honey?"

"Does Dad know?"



"Of course not, dear," she said with a smile.

"Cool."



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Mom took me to the lingerie department of one of those big stores in the mall. Everywhere I looked I saw racks of bras, tables of underwear, and rows of nightgowns. A really tiny old lady with a long pointy nose and tiny black eyes came over to us. I kept thinking of how much she looked like a bird. In my head, I named her the Bird Lady.



"Can I help you two ladies find something?" the Bird Lady said in a high tweety voice.

Mom put her arm around my shoulder and said very proudly, "We're looking for a training bra for my daughter!"



I wanted to dive under a table and hide.

“Oh, how lovely!” said the Bird Lady. “What a special time in your life, young lady! Come right over here. I think you’ll be very pleased with our delightful selection of starter bras.” This lady obviously loves bras.

When we first started looking, I didn’t care very much. But the more the Bird Lady showed us, the more I got into it. Some of them were kind of cute. There was a pink one with white polka dots on it that I tried on and really liked.

We were actually having fun. My mom was digging through the bras like she had struck gold or something. She kept saying things like, “Oh, Katie, look at this one!” or “Sweetie, I bet this one would be comfy!” and “Isn’t this one nice, Katie, with the lace around the edges?”

Then the most awful, horrible, terrible, humiliating, embarrassing thing in the whole entire world happened.

My mom found a bra she really liked and held it up high so the Bird Lady and I could see it. In a loud voice she said, “Katie! This training bra is adorable! It even has a little flower in the middle . . . oh, hello, Zachary!”

Zachary?! Zachary?

I turned to where she was looking and there he was,



walking past the bra section on his way to the sports equipment. Zachary Donaldson! I glanced at my mom, who was still holding the bra up like some kind of a flag.



"Oh, hey, Mrs. Harding. Hey, Kate-ster. Whussup?"
He was looking right at me.

I didn't know what to do. My tongue felt puffy. So, I did the first thing that came to my mind. I dove under one of the tables of underwear and I hid.



The guy I'd boldly declared my love for on the bathroom wall saw me shopping for a training bra!

From under the table, I heard my mom say, "Well . . . um, Zachary, we'll see you at the game tomorrow night, okay?"

I heard Zachary answer. "Sure thing, Mrs. H." Then he said a little louder, "Uh, later, Kater!"

A second later my mom looked under the table, crawled under it, and sat beside me.

"Oh, Katie, I am so, so sorry. I should have realized . . ."

My eyes stung. I was close to bursting into tears.



Mom put her arms around me and pressed my head into her shoulder, and I totally lost it.

"Mom, I was so embarrassed! I didn't know what to do!"
I sobbed.



Mom just held me and rubbed my back and said, "I know. I know. It's okay."

When we finally came out from under the table, the Bird Lady was standing there with her mouth hanging open, holding a bunch of training bras.



My mom walked over to her and said, "We'll take this pink polka-dotted one and this one with the lace on it. Thank you for your help."

As we walked out of the store, Mom said, "Katie, remember what we used to do when you were little and had to get shots?"



"Yeah. If I was really good, you took me to get an ice cream sundae that was as big as my head," I said. I remembered how much I loved that, even though I could never eat the whole thing.

She put her hands on each side of my head and said, "So . . . I wonder if your head has gotten any bigger since then, because I could use some ice cream. What about you?"

"Totally, Mom."



The next morning I put on my new polka-dotted bra under a black T-shirt. Mom said I could only wear it under darker shirts so the polka dots don't show through. It wasn't like wearing a harness at all. By the time I got to the bathroom to check that no one had erased Zachary's name, I forgot I even had a bra on.



Lunch was kind of scary, though . . . and I'm not just talking about the food. So far I sit by myself at lunch. I don't mind so much.



After I opened my chocolate milk, I tried to identify the bumpy meat on my tray. Suddenly I got a funky feeling like something totally bad was about to happen. I lifted up my head and turned around to see Principal Butter staring in my direction. It was like one of those scenes in a movie where everything around me seemed foggy and silent except for Principal Butter's super-shiny bald head and heavy footsteps heading my way.



"Good afternoon, Kaitlin," he said.



I gulped. "Um . . . hey, Principal Butter." I had a feeling that now wasn't the best time to tell him I like to be called Kate.

"Are you enjoying your lunch today?" he asked.

I glanced down at the alien meat on my tray and lied, "Yeah. It's totally tasty and . . . um . . . nutritious."



Principal Butter bent his gleaming head down and looked at my notebook. It was open to a page where I had doodled Zachary's name all over the place in bright colors. He said, "Is this your notebook, Kaitlin?"

"Yes, sir. It's new."





"I see you've decorated it with the name 'Zachary.'" Principal Butter was looking right into my eyes with a little closed-mouth smile. I knew I was in trouble in a big way.

"Is Zachary's last name 'Donaldson' by chance, Kaitlin?" he asked.

I looked at the notebook and stuttered my answer, "Um . . . y-yes . . . w-w-why?"



He straightened back up and said, "It seems that this Zachary Donaldson is a popular young man. Somebody wrote his name on the restroom wall. Isn't that interesting, Kaitlin?"

"Yes . . . it is," I said. I was beginning to feel really sick to my stomach.



He looked at my notebook again and said, "I'm sure we'll be talking again very soon, won't we, Kaitlin?" And he walked off.



I knew I was going to be sick, so I darted to the nearest garbage can and totally tossed my cookies. Thank God cafeterias are so loud. I don't think anyone even noticed.

This was *not* part of the plan.

Did Principal Butter really *know* it was me?