

THE NEW & IMPROVED REGGIE BROWN

Reggie jumped to her feet as the lunch bell rang, escaping from the room before Miss Ellis could complain that she hadn't been paying attention—again. Who could sit in class doing math problems on a day like this?

"Reggie!" called a voice from somewhere inside the crowd of students heading for the lunchroom. "Wait for me at the door!"

"Okay!" she yelled back. She didn't know where the voice was coming from, but she could tell it was Dexter.

Keisha Simmons and Gina James, the most popular girls in the fourth grade, were already at the table as Reggie and Dexter sat down. Reggie pretended not to see them look at each other, but she did wonder what they were thinking.

"You're Reggie, right?" Gina asked after a few moments.

Reggie nodded quietly, hiding her hands under the table. The two girls would probably laugh at her if they saw how much she was sweating.

"Your hair looks nice today," Keisha remarked, reaching for her soda.

Reggie had barely gotten out a "thank you" before the two girls turned back to each other, discussing their plans for shopping at the mall after school. Reggie ate her lunch quietly, feeling a little less nervous but still wishing CeCe was there with her. At least then she'd have someone to talk to. With Keisha and Gina pretty much ignoring her, and Dexter paying her almost no attention—except to ask her if she was going to Simone Askew's party on Saturday—she felt very alone. The only good thing was that she was sitting close enough to them to make all the other kids in the cafeteria a little jealous and wishing they were in her place.

"We've still got ten minutes," Dexter pointed out as they all started gathering their trash and tossing it into a nearby garbage can.

"We're going outside," Gina announced, flinging her long hair

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back over her shoulders. Keisha did the same with her braids as she slid out from behind the table.

"Are you coming?" she asked Reggie. Her tone wasn't very friendly, but it was good enough for Reggie, who nodded and walked alongside Dexter as they left the lunchroom.

It was drizzling lightly as the group stepped outside, heading for the far end of the playground, the way they did almost every day. Keisha and Gina took their usual spots on the bench there, and Dexter and his friends leaned against the metal fence behind them, the way they always did. Reggie tried not to feel nervous as she stood quietly between them, her hands deep in her pockets. Truth be told, she wasn't having any fun at all.

There was a sudden crack of thunder a moment later and they all jumped up, screaming and running as rain poured from the sky heavily, soaking them through and through by the time they reached the building.

"Ugh," Keisha groaned, holding her arms out as she dripped water on the lunchroom floor. "Look at me."

"Look at me," Gina whined too. Leaning forward, she grabbed her hair and squeezed water out of it. "I look terrible."

"We can go into the girls' locker room and dry off," Reggie suggested.

Keisha looked at her and nodded. "You're right. Come on, you guys."

This time Reggie had been included in the invitation. She tried not to smile too hard as she followed them down the hallway.

The bell rang as they held their clothes up to the heat dryers in the locker room, but neither of the girls seemed worried about it, so Reggie decided not to worry either.

They were much drier by the time they slipped back into their clothes and towel-dried their hair. Gina ran a brush through hers, and Keisha pulled her braids up into a high ponytail. Reggie turned to the mirror to fix hers and gasped.

*What has Reggie so horrified as she
stares at herself in the mirror?*

Find out in the pages of

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