

Dedicated to: Elaina, Matthew, and Sam

Middle School
Misfits:
The Stained
Glass Tree

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Boys Town, Nebraska

Table of Contents

Chapter 1: <i>Rose is Turning Red</i>	1
Chapter 2: <i>Leprechauns Wear Green</i>	7
Chapter 3: <i>White Picket Fences</i>	13
Chapter 4: <i>Under the Silvery Moon</i>	23
Chapter 5: <i>Bruises are Purple</i>	31
Chapter 6: <i>Piglets are Pink</i>	39
Chapter 7: <i>Green Frogs a Leapin'</i>	45
Chapter 8: <i>Crocodile Tears are Invisible</i>	51
Chapter 9: <i>Dirt Roads are Brown</i>	57
Chapter 10: <i>Gray Day</i>	67
Chapter 11: <i>Grandmas are Glorious</i>	75
Chapter 12: <i>Her First Dress was Ice Blue</i>	83
Chapter 13: <i>Sunsets are Brilliant</i>	83
Chapter 14: <i>Punch is Pink</i>	101
Chapter 15: <i>Friendships are like Rainbows</i>	109
Epilogue.....	118
Using Skills: Scenarios	120



CHAPTER ONE

Rose is Turning Red

“Welcome to your new nightmare, Jillian. Please tell us what color underwear you have on today.”

My new teacher might as well have asked that question on my first day at my new school. Don't teachers know how hard it is for new kids to stand up and talk in front of an entire room full of kids they don't even know?

“Jillian, we're waiting,” Ms. Jenkins said again. “Please stand up and tell the class your full name, where you moved from, and a little something about yourself.

It wasn't the first sixth grade class I'd been to this year – and it probably wouldn't be the last, either. You would think I'd be good at introducing myself by now. Nope. I have been to at least 12 new schools since kindergarten. Every time I started a new school I had to get to know new kids, new teachers, and new rules. No matter how hard I tried, every school I went to, it seemed I didn't fit in. Oh well, here I go again.

“Hi – my name is, is Jillian – Jillian Lee Hicklenbilly. And I go by Jilly, by the way,” I said to the room filled with brand new shoes – looking down at their feet made it easier to talk. I heard the kids

MIDDLE SCHOOL MISFITS

giggle and whisper as I said my name. Of course.

“I moved here from Fair Play, well, actually, Humansville last,” I said, which brought on even more snickers. “Those are *towns* in *Missouri*, by the way – that’s where I’m from.”

I needed to bring it to a quick close.

“And, I like to spend time outside, I guess,” I said. “And, that’s all.”

“*Humansville?*” one of the boys asked. “Is that where they make *humans?*”

“No, it’s not,” I said nicely, trying to hide the aggravation I felt. “Is your town blue since it’s named Blue Creek?”

“No, but the creek is,” he said with a funny smile.

“Creeks aren’t blue,” I said, which made the boy look a little confused.

“Students, that’s enough discussion,” Ms. Jenkins said.

When I went to my desk, a girl said, sarcastically, “My name is – is – is... Jeely the Heeeelbilly,” either because of my name, where I came from, or how I talked – all things that made me, *me*. I couldn’t really change any of them. Ms. Jenkins, suspiciously, did not seem to hear her.

As I sat back down in the bright white school chair with its attached shiny, new desk, I heard another girl whisper, “Jillbilly the Hillbilly,” behind my back, and of course, more giggles. Please don’t let that stick, please, please, *pleeeeeease!*

Oh well, I figured even if it did stick, I’d be outta here soon enough – probably over winter, or

CHAPTER ONE

spring break, at the latest. You see, my mom didn't like to stay in one place very long since her divorce. I switched schools at least once or twice every year. That made me kind of an expert at new schools.

I got to know what each school had in common, like the fact most schools had five main types of kids: the athletes, the smart kids, the popular kids, the bullies, and the misfits. In my opinion, you could be more than one type of kid. Some of the smart kids were also popular, and some of the popular kids could be bullies, and on and on. The misfits, like me, were the kids who just didn't really fit in with any one group of kids at all.

"Thank you, Jillian, and welcome to Blue Creek Middle School," Ms. Jenkins said.

"Ms. Jenkins, I prefer Jilly," I said.

"Actually, Jillian, *I prefer* we use our given names in this classroom," Ms. Jenkins said, kind of stuck-up like.

Really!?! I couldn't stand for that. I never went by my real name, *ever!* My name was the one thing that was *mine*, no matter where I was. This was not good.

"Oh, Ms. Jenkins?" I asked, in my most polite voice.

"Yes?" she said, just as polite as I did.

"Um, I have *never* gone by Jillian, so I would rather not start now if you don't mind," I said, with quite a lot of confidence. I added a nice smile to seal the deal. Whew, that was close.

"I do mind," she answered. "But the *good news* is you'll have a chance to become very comfortable

hearing yourself called by your *given* name, *Jillian*.”

She said it in such a way as to make it very clear there would be no more discussion on the topic. Some of the students giggled. Were they laughing at me? It was unacceptable. I had to act fast.

“Okay, *Rose*,” I said, in exactly the same way she said my name. Her given name was Rose Jenkins – I knew it because it said so on the enrollment paperwork I filled out, which I always did for myself. My mom didn’t like to mess with that kind of stuff.

Several kids burst into laughter, and Ms. Jenkins’ face started to turn the color of her given name. First, it was a slight pink, then it worked its way up to medium pink, then her ears turned bright red, just like the pretty red roses we used to grow in our summer garden.

As her face turned even more red, the class laughed louder, except for one girl who was clearly unimpressed. As I attempted to stand my ground with my new homeroom teacher, the girl rolled her eyes so hard, and squished her face up so tight, I thought her eyes might actually pop out of her head. They didn’t. That would have been bad if they did.

Ms. Jenkins’ face got darker, and everyone laughed louder. The louder everyone got, the more I feared things were not going to end well for me. I was right.

“Enough!” Ms. Jenkins shouted to the class. Then she took a deep breath and very politely sent me to the principal.

THINK CRITICALLY...

- Have you ever been the new student at school, a new player on a sports team, or the new kid in a class such as painting, dance, or karate?
- Can you remember how it felt to be the “new kid” on the block?
- What are some things you could do or say to make someone else’s first day better?

NOTES TO SELF:



Principal Michael

CHAPTER TWO

Leprechauns Wear Green

My daddy, *may he rest in peace*, used to say everything you did had unintended consequences. He said they were the things that happened *after* you did somethin' if you didn't think real hard about what you were doin' *before* you did it.

He said everything had 'em, and the only way they could be avoided was to try to figure out what they might be before you said and did 'em. I can still hear him in my head, "If you do it right, you might be able to see the stupid in what yer' doin' before you actually do it."

I wished I'd remembered that conversation with my daddy before I called Ms. Jenkins by her first name, but I didn't. So I had to deal with a few unintended consequences. My first day at Blue Creek Middle School was not going as I hoped it would.

And by the way, creeks really aren't blue – most creeks I'd been in were muddy and dirty – some were clear, but they were *never blue*. What a dumb name for a school, and a town, for that matter.

MIDDLE SCHOOL MISFITS

The first unintended consequence was I got to meet the school principal, Mr. Michael, and not in a good way. He seemed very strict. Mr. Michael was a short, round fellow, with a beard, and a puffy face. He looked a lot like a leprechaun. In fact, it became hard to look at him without feeling the overwhelming need to giggle! He was even wearin' a green shirt!

He just kept talking and talking, about how disrespectful I'd been to Ms. Jenkins and that his school had expectations and stuff. I didn't really listen. I knew what I did was wrong. I could see the stupid in it as soon as the words slipped out of my mouth – but by then, it was too late. I thought about arguin' with him. I coulda' said I was just doin' what she said we were supposed to do – callin' each other by our given names. But, I knew better. I was just tryin' to get her to let me be in control of what I was called, like she got to be!

Of course, I also knew better than to admit that, so I just played dumb when Mr. Michael asked me to tell him why I did it. After all, I wasn't crazy! Now I had to write an apology letter to Rose – I mean “Ms. Jenkins” – before school tomorrow. Based on our first meeting, I don't think Mr. Michael cared too much for me. Hopefully, I wouldn't be seein' him ever again.

The second unintended consequence that happened was several of the boys fist-bumped me after class. Then, a couple of the girls said “hi” to me at lunch. I wasn't sure if me being rude to Ms. Jenkins was what brought that on, but my experience with sixth grade, and I was pretty experienced by now, told

CHAPTER TWO

me it was. Kids in sixth grade seemed to like it when other students got in trouble. I have to admit, I liked that it took the attention off me and my name.

The third unintended consequence was I somehow made an enemy. Remember that girl who rolled her eyes at me like they were gonna' pop out of her head? It was her. She was the leader of some secret sixth grade club that still got away with bullying, even though my mom said we moved past that, as a society. Clearly, Blue Creek hadn't got the message yet!

Their leader, Brianna, pronounced, Bree-AHH-HH-nah, and I know, because she made it very clear to me at lunch. When she introduced herself, she took an extra, extra long time to pronounce the middle syllable in her name. She warned me to stay away from her and her friends. In my mind, I called them the look-alikes, because they all looked just like her from their pretty little heads and pointy noses, all the way down to their shiny new shoes.

As she walked away from me, she said, "You got that, *Jillbilly*?" and they all busted up laughing. Really!? REALLLY!?!? Why did that name have to stick? I knew I was stuck with it.

I couldn't even tell on her because sixth grade code doesn't allow for it. Everyone knows that. No one else tells, either. And where were the Bully Police in all of this anyways? Weren't they supposed to be out trolling school playgrounds, looking to take mean kids like Brianna down? Mom told me Blue Creek had a zero-tolerance policy for bullying so I did not have to worry about it here. But I knew better than to

MIDDLE SCHOOL MISFITS

believe that. In my experience, that just meant kids hid it really good so they wouldn't get in trouble.

I decided I was gonna have to avoid Brianna, and the look-alikes, for the rest of my life here at Blue Creek Middle School. That shouldn't be too hard, right?

THINK CRITICALLY...

- Why do you think Ms. Jenkins sent Jilly to the principal?
- Jilly thinks going to the principal was an unintended consequence of not thinking through a decision. What are examples of unintended consequences in real life?

NOTES TO SELF:



Pages 13-129 are not included in this excerpt.

MIDDLE SCHOOL MISFITS: THE STAINED GLASS TREE

LUGAN

MIDDLE SCHOOL MISFITS:
THE STAINED GLASS TREE

Drama defines middle school, ESPECIALLY FOR JILLY.

Not that she likes drama. She'd rather walk invisibly through the hallways than have any eyes turn toward her. But drama will always find Jilly. With Mom battling depression, and the family's financial struggles, they move frequently. As the family bounces from town to town, Jilly changes schools... a lot! And there is nothing scarier than coming into a new school smack in the middle of the semester.

With her country accent... clothes that are far from cool... an odd, funny-to-pronounce family name (that earns her a terrible nickname)... Jilly feels like an outcast. A misunderstood misfit. Can she find a way to fit in while still being true to herself? Independent readers and middle school students will relate to the challenges and joys that Jilly and her schoolmates experience in this timeless tale about facing your fears, making new friends (and frenemies), and avoiding, as much as possible, those humiliating middle school screw-ups. This story deals with some tough topics, so discussion points and tips are included at the end. The discussions can be led by students in small groups, or led by an adult.



LEONA LUGAN spent 10 years working with victims of crime and family abuse. She currently provides grant writing services, ghost writing, and consultation to nonprofit organizations and small businesses. Her educational background in communication, sociology, and guidance counseling has given her a broad base from which to approach many topics affecting today's youth. Her personal experience growing up poor in the Midwest, frequently moving from town to town, inspired her to write *Middle School Misfits*.

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