

Poopsie

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Melanie was ten years old. There were many special things about Melanie. One of them was her school bag. It was pink, and it had lots of interesting things hanging off it, key chains and ribbons and all kinds of decorations. It was a very cool bag, and she was quite famous for it. When she was at school, though, Melanie had to be very careful. There was something inside her school bag that she didn't want the other children to see. She always took something with her to school, and she wanted to keep it a secret.

Her mother, Gina, would sometimes say to her, “Are you sure you want to take that cuddly toy to school with you this time? It's a sweet little unicorn, but really, you're getting a bit big for it. Don't the other kids give you a hard time?”

Melanie said, “They don't know about it!”

But they did really. She kept it stuffed down the bottom of her bag, but when she took it into school other kids would whisper to each other, “Here's Melanie with that bag of hers. Want to see her get really upset?”

Then they would go up and say, “Hi Melanie. Cool bag. Oh, what a lovely unicorn you've got inside! What's it called?”

And Melanie would say, “Hrrmph.”

“Sorry, Melanie, didn't quite catch that.”

And Melanie would whisper something. It sounded like “Psss-psss.”

“A little louder, please, so everyone can hear.”

And Melanie would shout, “Poopsie!”

Melanie didn't want to stop taking Poopsie school. She wanted to take Poopsie wherever she went. Poopsie looked after her. Ever since she started taking Poopsie to bed with her, when she was a little girl afraid of the dark, she felt protected in some way she couldn't really explain. She didn't care what anyone else thought, and if they wanted to make fun of her for having a cuddly toy, well then she'd just say, “SHUT UP!”

The little teasing group would go away, a bit pleased to have made Melanie shout, and a bit ashamed of being mean, and they would all get on with their day.

The only opinion Melanie cared about in that whole school belonged to a boy called Jake. He was a bit lively, and bit boisterous. He always did risky things, in the playground or in the classroom. He was the one who put up his hand to answer questions when he didn't know the answer. He'd make a real fool of himself but he didn't care. He was the one who ran too fast and fell over and skinned his knees, trying to get the ball when they were playing soccer. He was the one who climbed everything that could be climbed and some things that couldn't, and ended up stuck, unable to go up or down. Eventually someone had to go and get a ladder and save him. But there was just something about him Melanie thought was really quite nice.

There was going to be a school disco. Melanie was very excited about it. She got her hip-hop happening, and she was all ready to get out there and show her moves. Maybe Jake would be there. Maybe he'd see her and think she was really cool.

The day before the disco, Melanie saw Jake in a tree. One of the little kids had thrown a hula hoop into the air, and it was stuck on a branch. Jake was trying to get it down. He was holding on to the hula hoop with one hand and the branch with the other, and was shaking both furiously.

Melanie said “Hi Jake,” and waved, then realised her mistake. “Don't wave back, don't wave back!”

She knew what Jake was like. It was very possible he'd wave with the only hand keeping him in the tree.

Sure enough, Jake let go of the branch and waved.

He was swinging from the hula hoop, which came loose from the branch, but before he could fall to the ground Jake hooked his legs over the branch below him and hung upside down with a big grin.

“Hi Melanie! Cool bag!”

“You know the school disco's on tonight, Jake?”

He said “Yeah!”

“Do you like dancing?”

“Oh, don't know, s'pose.”

“I like dancing. I love hop hop. Do you like hip hop?”

“Aw, maybe, s'pose. What's hip hop? Is that where you jump up and down?”

“Sort of. Going to go?”

“Yeah, s'pose.”

“See you there, then, Jake! Bye!”

Melanie made sure she was wearing something that looked pretty good. Then off she went. The disco was fabulous. The discs were spinning; the beat was boxing; the box was beating. Melanie started dancing like crazy.

Then she saw Jake. He was wearing a slinky shirt that caught the light. He danced like he did everything else: lots of energy, lots of risks. She waved to him and he waved back. They kept on dancing. After a while there was a break in the music.

“Oh Jake,” said Melanie. “It's so hot in here. Maybe I'll go outside for a breath of fresh air. Want to come?”

“Oh, yeah, s'pose.”

They went outside. Melanie said, “I think it might be cooler away from all these people. What do you think?”

Jake said, “It looks really cool over there. Dark and dangerous.”

So they walked over. Underneath the big, old trees there was almost no light. The chatter and noise of the disco seemed a long way off.

Suddenly Melanie saw a shadowy figure.

“Who's that?” she whispered.

“I don't know,” whispered Jake. “Why are we whispering?”

“Because it's a shadowy figure,” whispered Melanie.

“It would be, wouldn't it?” whispered Jake. “It's really dark.”

“But it looks really dangerous and scary,” whispered Melanie.

“It's probably one of our teachers,” whispered Jake. “So he is dangerous and scary.”

Suddenly someone reached out and grabbed Melanie. Another pair of hands reached out and grabbed Jake.

Hands closed over their mouths.

“Are these the kids we wanted to grab?” said a gruff, deep voice.

“Doesn't matter,” said an even deeper voice. “We'll find out who they are, we'll send a ransom note to their parents, and we'll get lots and lots of money!” And the two shadowy figures laughed in a terribly sinister way.

“Come on, let's get them into the van and make our getaway!”

And they dragged Jake and Melanie out from under the trees and into the parking lot. But suddenly a great shadow fell over them all. There, up in the sky, was an enormous winged horse. With a rush of air, it landed beside them. It reared up above them and gave a high whinny, waving its forelegs threateningly.

“Aaargh! A giant winged horse!” screamed the shadowy figures. They ran off and leapt into their van and took off with a metallic clashing of gears. The sound of the racing engine faded into the distance.

Jake was just as surprised as the bad guys. He was staring at the beautiful white horse, with its graceful wings furled along its back. From its forehead projected a long golden horn, twisted in an elegant spiral.

“I don't believe what I'm seeing,” he murmured.

Melanie was staring at the unicorn too. “Poopsie?” she whispered.

“Of course I'm Poopsie,” said the unicorn. “Now, Melanie, I can only protect you so much. Going into dark places at night is a very dangerous thing to do, and I have a feeling, now you're taking an interest in this young man, that you'll be doing even more dangerous things in future. So I'll try to be around to look after you as much as I can, but on the whole, it would be good if you took a little of the responsibility for trying to stay out of trouble yourself. And as for you, young man, I trust you'll behave with all proper respect towards this delightful young girl, who has taken me to bed with her for so many years.”

Jake said, “Uh ... duh ... buh ... muh...”

“That is not a language I understand,” said Poopsie, and there was a sound like a balloon popping backwards. There, lying on the asphalt of the parking lot, was a little cuddly toy unicorn. Melanie picked it up and cradled it in her arms.

“Oh, Poopsie,” she crooned. “You saved me. Thank you so much.”

“Melanie,” said Jake, “Does your cuddly toy changed into a huge winged horse and save you from bad guys often?”

“No,” said Melanie. “That was the first time, as far as I remember.”

“Well,” said Jake, “It was a good thing it happened when it did, because it looked like those guys were going to kidnap us.”

“Yeah, that was lucky, wasn't it?”

Jake shook his head. “Totally awesome. So, anyway, you want to come over to my place next weekend?”

“Yeah, sure!” said Melanie.

But what happened when Melanie went to visit Jake's house is something we'll have to leave for the next chapter.

