

BEST START

Jess Black
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Scholastic Canada Ltd.

Thank you to all of the coaches, managers and volunteers who give up their time to keep our kids playing! —J.B.

I dedicate this book to my dear family: Lidia, Carlos, Natalia, Augusto, Patricia and little Helena—M.G.

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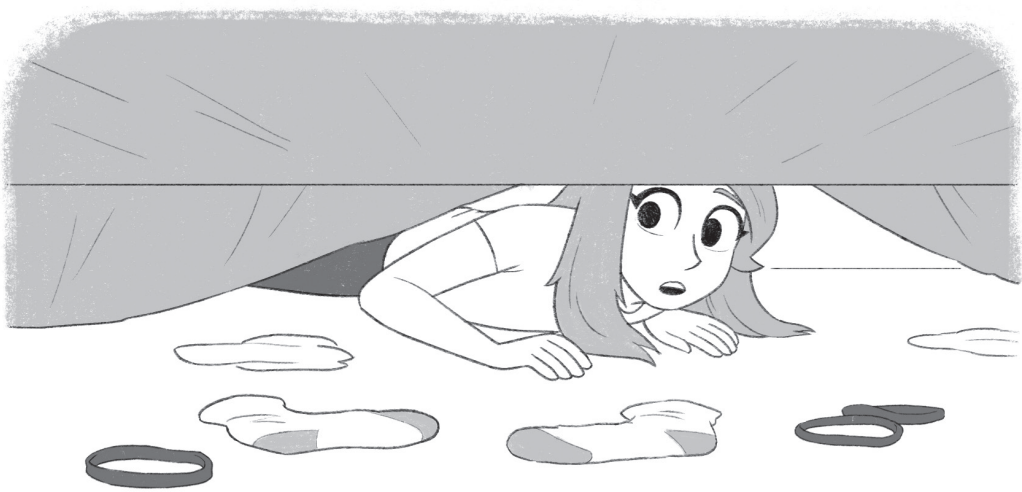
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ONE

"Alexandra!" Alex's dad called, "we should have left ten minutes ago."

"I know, I know!" Alex muttered to herself. She was lying on her stomach, **staring** at the array of hair ties and odd socks under her bed.



She found a book she thought she'd lost, but no sign of her hat. Her new school had a strict "no hat, no play" soccer rule.

"You'll just have to go without your hat," her dad said as he hovered **impatiently** in the doorway.

"Not an option, Dad," said Alex as she wriggled backwards out from under the bed.

I can't believe this is happening today of all days! thought Alex as she brushed cat hair from her new Kicking It Soccer Academy uniform. The red-and-navy top was adorned



with a KISA logo, and the navy shorts had a white stripe on each leg. Alex **loved it!**

Alex had been awake long before her usual wake-up time. She'd showered, dressed in the clothes she had laid out the night before, and eaten breakfast well before her sister, Gemma, had even stumbled out of bed.

Today was Alex's first real day at the elite soccer academy. They'd had an orientation day the week before, but today felt like the **actual** first day. Alex wanted to make a good first impression.

"It's got to be here somewhere!" Alex had turned her room upside down, with no luck. She looked at the floor of her room and the mess of clothes that now covered it. Walter the cat was curled up in a sunny spot, and

there were a few soccer balls here and there. It just didn't make sense! She had left her clothes neatly piled on the floor ready for the morning. Someone must have taken her hat.

"Gemma!" Alex called. **"GEMMA!"**

Alex's dad grimaced at the volume.

"WHAT?" Alex's sister appeared in the doorway in her pyjamas, bleary-eyed, with hair sticking up and covering her face.

"Do you have my Kicking It hat?"

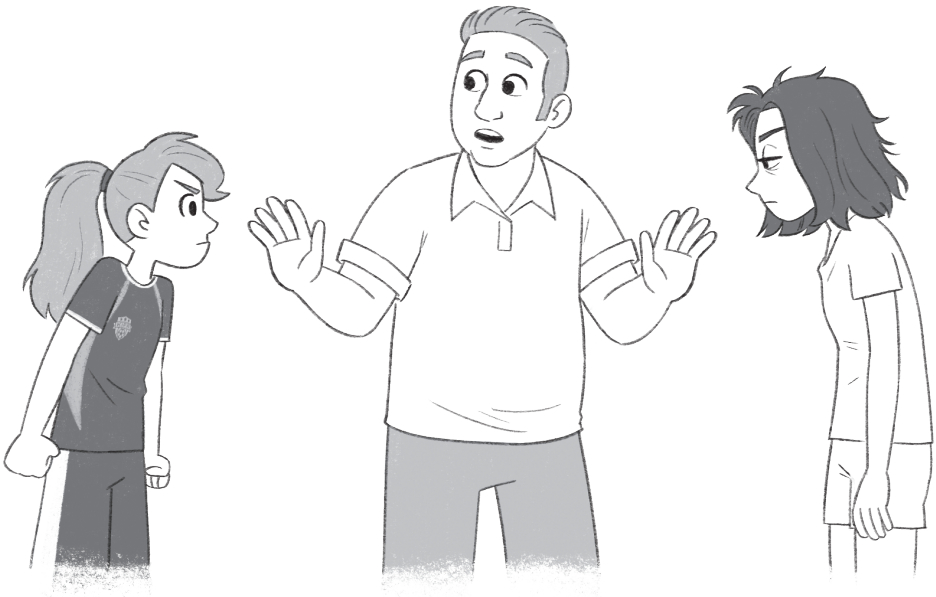
"No!" said Gemma indignantly. "Why would I want your dumb hat?"

"I don't know!" snapped Alex. "It can't just have got up and **walked** out of my room, so someone must have taken it."

"Well, it wasn't me," Gemma snapped back.

"Girls," Alex's dad intervened. "Let's not argue. We can all help Alex find her hat."

"Okay," muttered Gemma, "but she doesn't have to be so rude."



"Gemma," said her dad gently. "Alex is nervous as it's her first day of school, so we can all help her out, riiiight?"

"Okayyy," Gemma repeated as she shuffled down the hall back to her room.

Alex dodged past her and began to pull Gemma's clothes out of her drawers at random.

"Dad!" Gemma stared daggers at her sister.

Alex's dad sighed. "Alex, try to think back to when you last had your hat."

Alex threw a skirt and top onto the floor before pausing to think. "It was sitting on top of my clothes."

"And you're now dressed in those clothes."

"Yes, obviously." Alex tried and failed to keep the irritation from her voice.

Her dad ignored her tone. "Where were the clothes sitting?"

"Neatly piled on the floor," Alex replied.

"Let's go and have **another look,"** said her dad. He steered Alex by the shoulders out of Gemma's room and down the hall.

"See?" Alex gestured to the mess of her room. "It's not here." The room looked like a bomb had hit it. Every surface was covered in clothes since she had gone

through all of her drawers looking for the hat, except the one spot in the room where Walter was curled up.

"Oh," she said. It had suddenly dawned on her where her hat might be.

"Walter?" asked Alex, **tickling** his ear. "Do you have something to tell us?"

Walter yawned, looking angry at being woken up. He stretched, revealing the crumpled hat beneath him.



"Walter!" Alex pried her flattened and now fur-covered hat out from under his belly. Walter ignored her and curled up again.

"You've been Waltered," joked her dad.

"DAD!" cried Alex as she shook the fur from the hat. "We don't have time for dad jokes!"

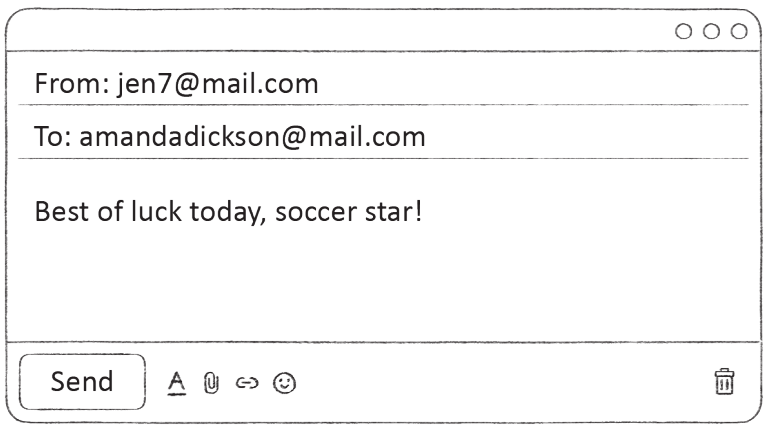
"You're right!" Her dad held his hands up in surrender. "This is a **cat-HAT-strophe!"**

Alex rolled her eyes but couldn't help smirking. She ran past him and into the kitchen.

"Quick, here's your lunch box," Alex's mom said as they hurried past her. She handed each of the girls a bag.

"Oh, Alex! I just checked my emails and Scarlett has sent you an email from her mom's account."

Alex smiled and raced to the computer to look at the email. Her **best friend,** Scarlett, loved to send emails from her mom's account.



Alex grinned. Then she saw the time.

"Hurry up, Dad!" Alex said, racing to the front door. "We're really late!"

"I was ready twenty minutes ago!" her dad said to her mom with a sigh.

"Have a great first day, Alex!" her mom called after them as they piled into the car.