

The background features a light beige color with faint, hand-drawn musical notes and a trumpet. The trumpet is positioned diagonally across the middle of the page, pointing towards the right. The musical notes are scattered around it, some appearing to be floating or blowing from the trumpet's bell. The overall style is artistic and whimsical.

The Club

**UNCORRECTED
ADVANCE READING COPY
NOT FOR SALE**

Eric Walters

**WINNER OF THE GOVERNOR GENERAL'S LITERARY AWARD
FOR THE KING OF JAM SANDWICHES**

**UNCORRECTED
ADVANCE READING COPY
NOT FOR SALE**

This advance reading copy may contain errors that will be corrected prior to publication. Please contact the publisher at publicity@cormorantbooks.com to confirm quotes.

The Club

Eric Walters

DCB

Copyright © 2024 Eric Walters
This edition copyright © 2024 DCB, an imprint of Cormorant Books Inc.

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted, in any form or by any means, without the prior written consent of the publisher or a licence from The Canadian Copyright Licensing Agency (Access Copyright). For an Access Copyright licence, visit www.accesscopyright.ca or call toll free 1.800.893.5777.



We acknowledge financial support for our publishing activities: the Government of Canada, through the Canada Book Fund and The Canada Council for the Arts; the Government of Ontario, through the Ontario Arts Council, Ontario Creates, and the Ontario Book Publishing Tax Credit.

Library and Archives Canada Cataloguing in Publication

Cover and interior text design: Marijke Friesen

Printed and bound in Canada.

DCB Young Readers
An imprint of Cormorant Books Inc.
260 Ishpadinaa (Spadina) Avenue, Suite 502, Tkaronto (Toronto), ON M5T 2E4, Canada
Suite 110, 7068 Portal Way, Ferndale, WA 98248, USA

www.dcbyoungreaders.com
www.cormorantbooks.com

To my family — and ALL families — no matter
what form they might take.

Chapter One

“Logan, how about if we pick up the pace a little?” I suggested.
“I don’t want to be late to start the year.”

It was the first day and we both had meetings before school even started — Logan with the basketball team and me with the school band. Our middle school was known as a basketball school, so the coach wanted to meet with potential players early. But Ms. Hooper wanting to talk to the band members? That was a surprise.

“Why is Ms. Hooper holding a band meeting this early?” Logan asked.

“She didn’t really say, but I guess she wants more time to audition and practice.”

“Judging from how the band sounded last year, I guess I understand that.”

“Nice, but the basketball teams didn’t even make it to the finals, as I recall.”

“Man, that was rough. Mr. Hammer said he hadn’t had two teams get eliminated so early in fifteen years of coaching.”

Mr. Hammer wasn’t just the basketball coach but also the principal of our school. He was a large man, a former jock, and he loved sports. I thought his name suited him. I always felt nervous around him. Even Logan, who didn’t seem fazed by much, was always a little cautious around him.

For a school used to winning, it was hard to lose. All along the walls of our gym were the banners and pennants that our basketball teams had won over the past twenty years — dozens and dozens of “Champions,” “Finalists,” and “Winners” from tournaments, divisions, and citywide competitions.

Logan had been the star of the junior team and figured, now that he was in eighth grade, he’d be the same on the senior team. A senior team that had to do better.

“But the basketball season doesn’t even start for six weeks, does it?” I asked.

“I figure he wants to get tryouts over quickly, set the team, and get in lots of practice so we don’t repeat what happened last year,” Logan said.

I looked at my watch. We didn’t have much time. “We’d better speed up.”

“We have plenty of time. Besides, I’m not going to move faster. This is my walk for the year,” Logan explained.

“Your walk?”

“Haven’t you noticed the way I’m moving?” he asked.

“Yeah, but I thought your new basketball shoes were too tight or you’d pulled something.”

“Funny. Very funny. Jaxson, you are *so* funny. Look, I’ve been practicing the way I move and this is it. Slow, deliberate, a little bit of a swagger, like everything is under control and I’m the *man*.”

“You’re hardly the *boy*, but you keep pretending you’re cool.”

“No pretending necessary. I’ve given this walk of mine a lot of thought.”

“I have trouble believing you’ve given *anything* a lot of thought.”

“Even my thought process is understated,” he replied. “But seriously, I’ve been thinking about how we’re going to *own* the school this year. We’re the top of the heap. Grade eight students.”

“I’ll give you that much, we are in grade eight, but I’m not sure if being part of any heap is what I’m after.”

“Jax, would you rather be the bottom?”

“You have a point,” I agreed.

“Grade six sucked completely and even last year the grade eights made it clear that the sevens weren’t much better. They always tried to make us feel like we didn’t count.”

“That never felt good. I guess we could treat the sevens a little better this year,” I suggested.

“Not a chance, Jaxson. I’m going to treat them exactly the same way. Look, I’ll be a star on the basketball team and you’ll be the first trumpet in the school band. Although that school band thing, when I say it out loud, just sounds sort of dorky. Maybe you should ditch the band meeting and come to basketball with me.”

“I’m going to stick with trumpet.”

What I didn’t say was that even if I did try out for basketball, and even if I did make the team, I’d just be spending a lot of time watching the game from the end of the bench instead of the bleachers. Besides, while I could play basketball, I could *really* play the trumpet.

“If you’d spent more time playing ball with me this summer instead of fooling around with the trumpet, you would have been a lock for the team,” Logan said.

“It wasn’t fooling around, it’s called practicing.”

I didn’t need to tell Logan that I liked the trumpet more than I liked basketball. Or any sport. Not that I didn’t like sports and didn’t play different sports, they just weren’t the same as music.

“Could you at least switch to a cooler instrument?” Logan asked.

“What are you talking about? The trumpet is the coolest instrument.”

“That would be the guitar, or saxophone or the drums or maybe the keyboard,” Logan said. “But at least you’re not playing the trombone.”

“What have you got against trombones?”

“You don’t have time for me to tell you what’s uncool about trombones. And speaking of time, are you going to be making a little time for Samantha today?”

“We might connect.”

“Now who’s pretending to be cool?” he asked.

“Okay, we talked.”

“Talked or messaged?”

“Messaged. Texts.”

“And just how many texts did it involve this morning?” he asked.

“A couple.”

“I can always tell when you’re lying. How many?”

“Six, no, seven.”

“Like I thought. Just out of curiosity, how many thousands of texts did you two send each other this summer?”

I smiled. “It’s not thousands, but it was a lot. A whole lot.”

“Your timing really sucked. You spent the whole year — correction, *two* years — sitting beside her and you wait until the end of the year dance on the last day of school to really connect and then she’s gone for the entire summer.”

“My mom said it was probably the best thing that could have happened because that meant we spent so much time exchanging texts and emails.”

“What exactly does that even mean?” Logan asked.

“She said that we had the chance to get to know each other without distractions.”

“Distractions!” he exclaimed. “Having a girlfriend is all about the distractions! And, as you start the live-and-in-person part of this relationship, are you planning on going to your mommy for advice?”

“And somehow you think I’d be better off getting my advice from you instead?”

“I know females. If you don’t remember, I do have five sisters.”

“Sisters aren’t females, they’re sisters. And it’s not like I haven’t spent a whole lot of time with them as well.”

Logan and I had been best friends since grade one and we always spend a lot of time at each other’s house. Besides his sisters — three younger and two older — there was a mother and a father, two very barky dogs, a cat, and hamsters that took up three separate cages. His house was like a combination zoo, rodeo, parade, and science experiment. Okay, maybe that wasn’t fair, but it had lots of moving parts and noises, and I liked it. There was so much happening all the time. It was semicontrolled chaos at its best.

Logan said he liked to be at my place for the quiet. It was just me and my mother in our house, and when she was at work, it was just me. Often, the only noise was music — most often jazz music — flowing through the speakers that lived in every room. I guess I got my love of music from her. Her and her brother.

“Jax, you should text Samantha and ask her to join you for lunch.”

“On the first day? She might want to sit with her friends.”

“She’ll say yes for sure — no question.”

“How can you be so certain?” I asked.

“The thousand texts between you two over the summer tell the story. She might even be offended or hurt if you don’t ask her,” Logan explained.

“I hadn’t thought of that.”

“And she knows that you and I eat lunch together every day, right?” Logan asked.

"I'm sure everybody knows that. After all, it's not like you can even eat and stay quiet."

"People naturally pay attention to me. It's part of my charm. Just text and it's guaranteed that she'll say yes."

"That sounds pretty confident."

"I am. All along I figured she was just being nice to you to get closer to me. So, this could be her chance to make her move on me."

"Funny how somebody who's never had a girlfriend himself feels so confident about them."

"My mother says I have an overdeveloped sense of confidence," Logan said.

"You realize that isn't a compliment, right?"

"If you had a *more* developed sense of confidence, you'd realize it *is* a compliment. And on the bright side, once you and Samantha are officially over, it'll clear the way for you to end up dating and ultimately marrying one of my sisters. That's the only way you'll actually become my brother."

"According to my mom and both your parents, that box has already been ticked," I said.

There had been arrangements made that if anything happened to my mom, Logan's parents would become my official guardians.

"I want it to be official but without anybody having to die," Logan explained.

"By the way, technically, even if I do marry one of your sisters, that wouldn't make me your brother. I'd be your *brother-in-law*."

“That’s what I’m saying, *brother in the law*. The *law* says you’re my *brother*. How much more official can that be?”

“Just out of curiosity, which of your sisters do you figure I’m going to end up marrying?”

“Isn’t it obvious?” Logan asked.

“Not to me.”

“Come on, Jax, don’t you see the way Emma acts around you? She’s got a really big crush on you.”

“Emma’s ten years old.”

“And that’s why you’re not going to marry her, or even date her, for years and years to come.”

“If you’re so anxious for me to become your brother, it could all happen sooner if I married Ella because she’s two years older than me instead of almost three years younger,” I suggested.

“Ella is *so* out of your league. But then again, so is Samantha. She just doesn’t seem like the sort to date a guy in the band.”

“Are you kidding? Musicians get all the girls.”

“Rock stars and rappers, and K-pop stars, not guys in the school band, but nice try. You keep believing that if it makes you feel better.”

We walked through the almost empty parking lot of the school. We were here before most of the teachers and almost all of the students. And, as Logan had said, we were here on time for our meetings.

“This is where we separate. Cool kids to the left to head for the gym and band guys to the right.”

“Have fun,” I said.

“I will.” I started to walk away and he called out. “Jax!”

I turned around.

“Send Samantha the text. She’ll say yes. Even if you don’t have confidence, I have enough of it for both of us.”