

BEVERLY CLEARY

RAMONA QUIMBY, AGE 8,

Life as a
third grader
is tough!



BEVERLY CLEARY

RAMONA
QUIMBY,
AGE 8

ILLUSTRATED BY
JACQUELINE ROGERS

HARPER

An Imprint of HarperCollinsPublishers

Ramona Quimby, Age 8

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Books, a division of HarperCollins Publishers,

195 Broadway, New York, NY 10007.

www.harpercollinschildrens.com

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 2012948575

ISBN 978-0-380-70956-4 (pbk.)

ISBN 978-0-06-246454-5 (paper-over-board edition)

Typography by Sarah Nichole Kaufman

Revised edition, 2020

21 22 23 24 PC/BRR 111

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A Letter from Amy Poehler

Great books connect us to a bigger world. Great characters ring true and resonate long after we have finished reading. Ramona Quimby is that kind of character. A boisterous bell that continues to ring for children and adults everywhere, Ramona Quimby is a young girl with a keen sense of justice. She is feverish and frustrated, driven by a passion that can come only from a kid who is in a hurry to grow up. She does not suffer fools. She is full of vim and vigor. She is a tiny warrior, a whirling dervish, and a funny five-alarm fire.

Author Beverly Cleary gave us Ramona. And Beezus. And Henry Huggins. And good ol' Ribsy. But it was always Ramona that kept me coming back. Beverly Cleary knew the secret to any classic children's book: never forget what it feels like to

be young. She understood how frustrating it could feel to argue with your sister or how exciting it could be to have your whole day stretching out in front of you. In today's world, where people are always searching for "strong female characters," Mrs. Cleary was ahead of her time. Ramona was a pest! She was irascible and uncompromising! She was allowed to be angry and was not afraid to stand up to boys! Ramona and Beezus had a complicated sisterly relationship that we could all relate to. Dorothy Quimby was a weary and warm working mother who tried to run interference. The Quimby family felt like our own, and Beverly Cleary created a world on Klickitat Street that felt exactly like our lives in Anytown, USA.

Which brings us to *Ramona Quimby, Age 8*. In the sixth book in Beverly Cleary's fantastic Ramona series, we find our little

heroine navigating the treacherous waters of third grade. Whether she is on the school bus or in the classroom or playing the silly baby games that Willa Jean forces her to play, Ramona remains a funny and fierce little girl. And attention, kids! Ramona cracks an egg over her head! And someone steals her eraser! And all she wants to do is sit quietly and read. Just like you!

It is a privilege all these years later to help introduce *Ramona Quimby, Age 8* to a whole new group of readers. And I am grateful to be able to thank Beverly Cleary personally. Like Ramona, I grew up with a mother who encouraged me to be myself. I also shared Ramona's love of reading. When I was eight years old, I wrote a letter to Beverly Cleary declaring my love for her books. She wrote me back. That letter has lived in a rainbow-colored scrapbook in my childhood bedroom until right now.

COMPLETE LIST OF BOOKS BY BEVERLY CLEARY

Age 4-6	Age 8-12	Age 12 up
The West Hills Two Dog Heroes	Henry and Ramona The Talcott Emily's Ramenway Imagination Henry and Ramona Henry and the Clubhouse Henry and the Paper Route Henry and Ribs Henry Huggins Mink and Amy The Mouse and the Motorcycle	Otto Spotted Ramona and Her Father (a 1978 Newbery Honor Book) Ramona and Her Mother Ramona Quimby, Age 8 Ramona the Brave Ramona the First Ribs Ramenway Ralph Rocks
		Fifteen Jean and Johnny The Luckiest Girl Stories of the Bible

 William Morrow and Co., Inc.
105 Madison Ave., New York, N.Y. 10016




Dear Amy,
I am pleased to know you enjoyed
one of my books, and I hope you will
enjoy many more.

Beverly Cleary



photo: Tom McInerney



Beverly Cleary

Dear Amy,
I am pleased to know you enjoyed
one of my books, and I hope you will
enjoy many more.

Beverly Cleary

Thank you, Beverly Cleary. Rock on,
Ramona Quimby.

—Amy Poehler

1

THE FIRST DAY OF SCHOOL

Ramona Quimby hoped her parents would forget to give her a little talking-to. She did not want anything to spoil this exciting day.

“Ha-ha, I get to ride the bus to school all by myself,” Ramona bragged to her big sister, Beatrice, at breakfast. Her stomach felt quivery with excitement at the day ahead, a day that would begin with a bus ride just the

right length to make her feel a long way from home but not long enough—she hoped—to make her feel carsick. Ramona was going to ride the bus, because changes had been made in the schools in the Quimbys' part of the city during the summer. Glenwood, the girls' old school, had become an intermediate school, which meant Ramona had to go to Cedarhurst Primary School.

"Ha-ha yourself." Beezus was too excited to be annoyed with her little sister. "Today I start high school."

"*Junior* high school," corrected Ramona, who was not going to let her sister get away with acting older than she really was. "Rosemont Junior High School is not the same as high school, and besides you have to walk."

Ramona had reached the age of demanding accuracy from everyone, even herself. All summer, whenever a grown-up asked

what grade she was in, she felt as if she were fibbing when she answered, "third," because she had not actually started the third grade. Still, she could not say she was in the second grade since she had finished that grade last June. Grown-ups did not understand that summers were free from grades.

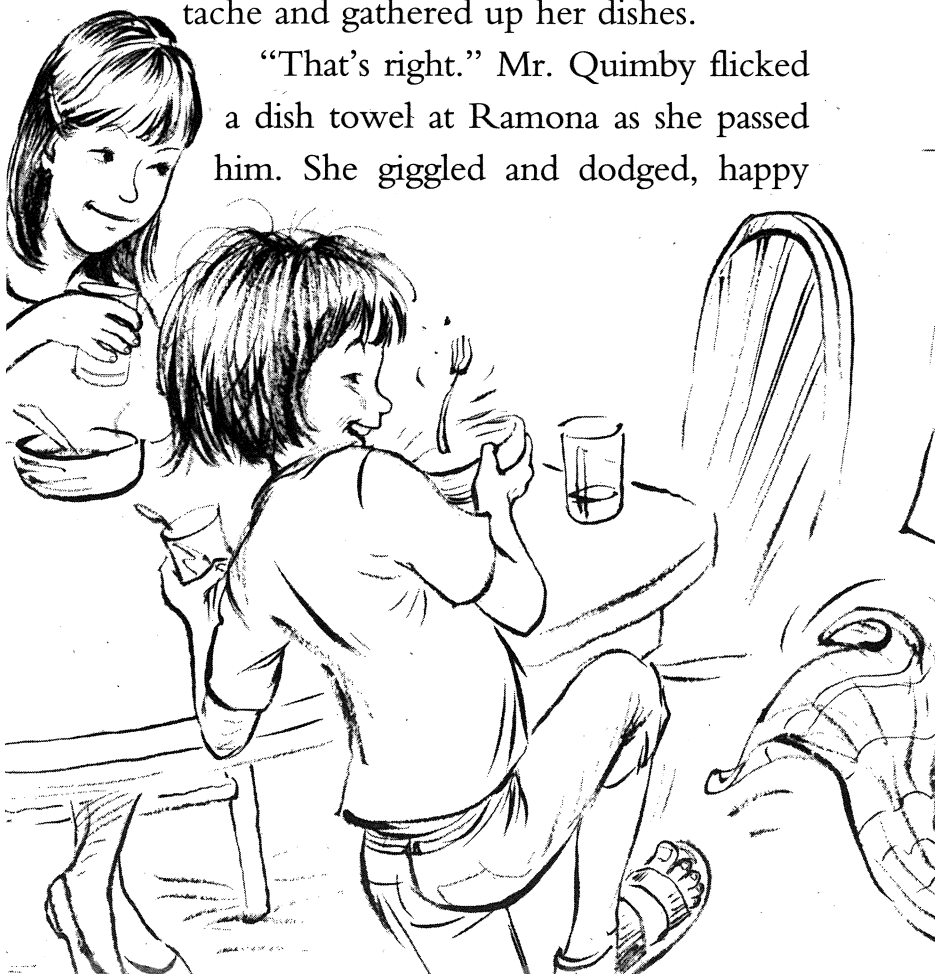
"Ha-ha to both of you," said Mr. Quimby, as he carried his breakfast dishes into the kitchen. "You're not the only ones going to school today." Yesterday had been his last day working at the checkout counter of the ShopRite Market. Today he was returning to college to become what he called "a real, live school teacher." He was also going to work one day a week in the frozen-food warehouse of the chain of ShopRite Markets to help the family "squeak by," as the grown-ups put it, until he finished his schooling.

"Ha-ha to all of you if you don't hurry up," said Mrs. Quimby, as she swished suds

in the dishpan. She stood back from the sink so she would not spatter the white uniform she wore in the doctor's office where she worked as a receptionist.

"Daddy, will you have to do homework?" Ramona wiped off her milk moustache and gathered up her dishes.

"That's right." Mr. Quimby flicked a dish towel at Ramona as she passed him. She giggled and dodged, happy





because he was happy. Never again would he stand all day at a cash register, ringing up groceries for a long line of people who were always in a hurry.

Ramona slid her plate into the dishwater. "And will Mother have to sign your progress reports?"

Mrs. Quimby laughed. "I hope so."

Beezus was last to bring her dishes into the kitchen. "Daddy, what do you have to study to learn to be a teacher?" she asked.

Ramona had been wondering the same thing. Her father knew how to read and do arithmetic. He also knew about Oregon pioneers and about two pints making one quart.

Mr. Quimby wiped a plate and stacked it in the cupboard. "I'm taking an art course, because I want to teach art. And I'll study child development—"

Ramona interrupted. "What's child development?"

"How kids grow," answered her father.

Why does anyone have to go to school to study a thing like that? wondered Ramona. All her life she had been told that the way to grow was to eat good food, usually food she did not like, and get plenty of sleep, usually when she had more interesting things to do than go to bed.

Mrs. Quimby hung up the dishcloth, scooped up Picky-picky, the Quimbys' old yellow cat, and dropped him at the top of the basement steps. "Scat, all of you," she said, "or you'll be late for school."

After the family's rush to brush teeth, Mr. Quimby said to his daughters, "Hold out your hands," and into each waiting pair he dropped a new pink eraser. "Just for luck," he said, "not because I expect you to make mistakes."

"Thank you," said the girls. Even a small present was appreciated, because presents of any kind had been scarce while the family



tried to save money so Mr. Quimby could return to school. Ramona, who liked to draw as much as her father, especially treasured the new eraser, smooth, pearly pink, smelling softly of rubber, and just right for erasing pencil lines.

Mrs. Quimby handed each member of her family a lunch, two in paper bags and one in a lunch box for Ramona. "Now, Ramona—" she began.

Ramona sighed. Here it was, that little

talking-to she always dreaded.

"Please remember," said her mother, "you really must be nice to Willa Jean."

Ramona made a face. "I try, but it's awfully hard."

Being nice to Willa Jean was the part of Ramona's life that was not changing, the part she wished would change. Every day after school she had to go to her friend Howie Kemp's house, where her parents paid Howie's grandmother to look after her until one of them could come for her. Both of Howie's parents, too, went off to work each day. She liked Howie, but after spending most of the summer, except for swimming lessons in the park, at the Kemps' house, she was tired of having to play with four-year-old Willa Jean. She was also tired of apple juice and graham crackers for a snack every single day.

"No matter what Willa Jean does," complained Ramona, "her grandmother thinks it's my fault because I'm bigger. Like the

time Willa Jean wore her flippers when she ran under the sprinkler, pretending she was the mermaid on the tuna-fish can, and then left big wet footprints on the kitchen floor. Mrs. Kemp said I should have stopped her because Willa Jean didn't know any better!"

Mrs. Quimby gave Ramona a quick hug. "I know it isn't easy, but keep trying."

When Ramona sighed, her father hugged her and said, "Remember, kid, we're counting on you." Then he began to sing, "We've got high hopes, try hopes, buy cherry pie-in-July hopes—"

Ramona enjoyed her father's making up new words for the song about the little old ant moving the rubber tree plant, and she liked being big enough to be counted on, but sometimes when she went to the Kemps' she felt as if everything depended on her. If Howie's grandmother did not look after her, her mother could not work full time. If her

mother did not work full time, her father could not go to school. If her father did not go to school, he might have to go back to being a checker, the work that made him tired and cross.

Still, Ramona had too many interesting things to think about to let her responsibility worry her as she walked through the autumn sunshine toward her school bus stop, her new eraser in hand, new sandals on her feet, that quivery feeling of excitement in her stomach, and the song about high hopes running through her head.

She thought about her father's new part-time job zipping around in a warehouse on a fork-lift truck, filling orders for orange juice, peas, fish sticks, and all the other frozen items the markets carried. He called himself Santa's Little Helper, because the temperature of the warehouse was way below zero, and he would have to wear heavy padded clothing

to keep from freezing. The job sounded like fun to Ramona. She wondered how she was going to feel about her father's teaching art to other people's children and decided not to think about that for a while.

Instead, Ramona thought about Beezus going off to another school, where she would get to take a cooking class and where she could not come to the rescue if her little sister got into trouble. As Ramona approached her bus stop, she thought about one of the best parts of her new school: none of her teachers in her new school would know she was Beatrice's little sister. Teachers always liked Beezus; she was so prompt and neat. When both girls had gone to Glenwood School, Ramona often felt as if teachers were thinking, I wonder why Ramona Quimby isn't more like her big sister.

When Ramona reached the bus stop, she found Howie Kemp already waiting with

his grandmother and Willa Jean, who had come to wave good-bye.

Howie looked up from his lunch box, which he had opened to see what he was going to have for lunch, and said to Ramona, "Those new sandals make your feet look awfully big."

"Why, Howie," said his grandmother,



“that’s not a nice thing to say.”

Ramona studied her feet. Howie was right, but why shouldn’t her new sandals make her feet look big? Her feet had grown since her last pair. She was not offended.

“Today I’m going to *kidnergarten*,” boasted Willa Jean, who was wearing new coveralls and T-shirt and a pair of her mother’s old earrings. Willa Jean was convinced she was beautiful, because her grandmother said so. Ramona’s mother said Mrs. Kemp was right. Willa Jean was beautiful when she was clean, because she was a healthy child. Willa Jean did not feel she was beautiful like a healthy child. She felt she was beautiful like a grown-up lady on TV.

Ramona tried to act kindly toward little Willa Jean. After all, her family was depending on her. “Not *kidnergarten*, Willa Jean,” she said. “You mean nursery school.”

Willa Jean gave Ramona a cross, stubborn

look that Ramona knew too well. "I am too going to *kidnergarten*," she said. "*Kidnergarten* is where the kids are."

"Bless her little heart," said her grandmother, admiring as always.

The bus, the little yellow school bus Ramona had waited all summer to ride, pulled up at the curb. Ramona and Howie climbed aboard as if they were used to getting on buses by themselves. I did it just like a grown-up, thought Ramona.

"Good morning. I am Mrs. Hanna, your bus aide," said a woman sitting behind the driver. "Take the first empty seats toward the back." Ramona and Howie took window seats on opposite sides of the bus, which had a reassuring new smell. Ramona always dreaded the people-and-fumes smell of the big city buses.

"Bye-bye," called Mrs. Kemp and Willa Jean, waving as if Ramona and Howie were

going on a long, long journey. "Bye-bye." Howie pretended not to know them.

As soon as the bus pulled away from the curb, Ramona felt someone kick the back of her seat. She turned and faced a sturdy boy wearing a baseball cap with the visor turned up and a white T-shirt with a long word printed across the front. She studied the word to see if she could find short words in it, as she had learned to do in second grade. *Earth. Quakes. Earthquakes.* Some kind of team. Yes, he looked like the sort of boy whose father would take him to ball games. He did not have a lunch box, which meant he was going to buy his lunch in the cafeteria.

A grown-up would not call him a purple cootie. Ramona faced front without speaking. This boy was not going to spoil her first day in the third grade.

Thump, thump, thump against the back of Ramona's seat. The bus stopped for other

children, some excited and some anxious. Still the kicking continued. Ramona ignored it as the bus passed her former school. Good old Glenwood, thought Ramona, as if she had gone there a long, long time ago.

"All right, Danny," said the bus aide to the kicking boy. "As long as I'm riding shotgun on this bus, we won't have anyone kicking the seats. Understand?"

Ramona smiled to herself as she heard Danny mutter an answer. How funny—the bus aide saying she was riding shotgun as if she were guarding a shipment of gold on a stagecoach instead of making children behave on a little yellow school bus.

Ramona pretended she was riding a stagecoach pursued by robbers until she discovered her eraser, her beautiful pink eraser, was missing. "Did you see my eraser?" she asked a second-grade girl, who had taken the seat beside her. The two searched

the seat and the floor. No eraser.

Ramona felt a tap on her shoulder and turned. "Was it a pink eraser?" asked the boy in the baseball cap.

"Yes." Ramona was ready to forgive him for kicking her seat. "Have you seen it?"

"Nope." The boy grinned as he jerked down the visor of his baseball cap.

That grin was too much for Ramona. "Liar!" she said with her most ferocious glare, and faced front once more, angry at the loss of her new eraser, angry with herself for dropping it so the boy could find it. Purple cootie, she thought, and hoped the cafeteria would serve him fish portions and those canned green beans with the strings left on. And apple wedges, the soft mushy kind with tough skins, for dessert.

The bus stopped at Cedarhurst, Ramona's new school, a two-story red-brick building very much like her old school. As the

children hopped out of the bus, Ramona felt a little thrill of triumph. She had not been carsick. She now discovered she felt as if she had grown even more than her feet. Third graders were the biggest people—except teachers, of course—at this school. All the little first and second graders running around the playground, looking so young, made Ramona feel tall, grown up, and sort of . . . well, wise in the ways of the world.

Danny shoved ahead of her. "Catch!" he yelled to another boy. Something small and pink flew through the air and into the second boy's cupped hands. The boy wound up as if he were pitching a baseball, and the eraser flew back to Danny.

"You gimme back my eraser!" Encumbered by her lunch box, Ramona chased Danny, who ran, ducking and dodging, among the first and second graders. When she was about to catch him, he tossed her

eraser to the other boy. If her lunch box had not banged against her knees, Ramona might have been able to grab him. Unfortunately, the bell rang first.

“Yard apes!” yelled Ramona, her name for the sort of boys who always got the best balls, who were always first on the playground, and who chased their soccer balls through





other people's hopscotch games. She saw her pink eraser fly back into Danny's hands. "Yard apes!" she yelled again, tears of anger in her eyes. "Yucky yard apes!" The boys, of course, paid no attention.

Still fuming, Ramona entered her new school and climbed the stairs to find her

assigned classroom, which she discovered looked out over roofs and treetops to Mount Hood in the distance. I wish it would erupt, she thought, because she felt like exploding with anger.

Ramona's new room was filled with excitement and confusion. She saw some people she had known at her old school. Others were strangers. Everyone was talking at once, shouting greetings to old friends or looking over those who would soon become new friends, rivals, or enemies. Ramona missed Howie, who had been assigned to another room, but wouldn't you know? That yard ape, Danny, was sitting at a desk, still wearing his baseball cap and tossing Ramona's new eraser from one hand to another. Ramona was too frustrated to speak. She wanted to hit him. How dare he spoil her day?

"All right, you guys, quiet down," said the teacher.

Ramona was startled to hear her class called "you guys." Most teachers she had known would say something like, "I feel I am talking very loud. Is it because the room is noisy?" She chose a chair at a table at the front of the room and studied her new teacher, a strong-looking woman with short hair and a deep tan. Like my swimming teacher, thought Ramona.

"My name is Mrs. Whaley," said the teacher, as she printed her name on the blackboard. "*W-h-a-l-e-y*. I'm a whale with a *y* for a tail." She laughed and so did her class. Then the whale with a *y* for a tail handed Ramona some slips of paper. "Please pass these out," she directed. "We need some name tags until I get to know you."

Ramona did as she was told, and as she walked among the desks she discovered her new sandals squeaked. *Squeak, creak, squeak*. Ramona giggled, and so did the rest of the

class. *Squeak, creak, squeak.* Ramona went up one aisle and down the other. The last person she gave a slip to was the boy from the bus, who was still wearing his baseball cap. "You give me back my eraser, you yard ape!" she whispered.

"Try and get it, Bigfoot," he whispered back with a grin.

Ramona stared at her feet. Bigfoot? Bigfoot was a hairy creature ten feet tall, who was supposed to leave huge footprints in the mountain snows of southern Oregon. Some people thought they had seen Bigfoot slipping through the forests, but no one had ever been able to prove he really existed.

Bigfoot indeed! Ramona's feet had grown, but they were not huge. She was not going to let him get away with this insult. "Superfoot to you, Yard Ape," she said right out loud, realizing too late that she had given herself a new nickname.

To her astonishment, Yard Ape pulled her eraser out of his pocket and handed it to her with a grin. Well! With her nose in the air, Ramona squeaked back to her seat. She felt so triumphant that she returned the longest way around and bent her feet as much as she could to make the loudest possible squeaks. She had done the right thing! She had not let Yard Ape upset her by calling her Bigfoot, and now she had her eraser in her hand. He would probably call her Superfoot forever, but she did not care. Superfoot was a name she had given herself. That made all the difference. She had won.

Ramona became aware that she was squeaking in the midst of an unusual silence. She stopped midsqueak when she saw her new teacher watching her with a little smile. The class was watching the teacher.

"We all know you have musical shoes," said Mrs. Whaley. Of course the class laughed.

By walking with stiff legs and not bending her feet, Ramona reached her seat without squeaking at all. She did not know what to think. At first she thought Mrs. Whaley's remark was a reprimand, but then maybe her teacher was just trying to be funny. She couldn't tell about grown-ups sometimes. Ramona finally decided that any teacher who would let Yard Ape wear his baseball cap in the classroom wasn't really fussy about squeaking shoes.

Ramona bent over her paper and wrote slowly and carefully in cursive, Ramona Quimby, age 8. She admired the look of what she had written, and she was happy. She liked feeling tall in her new school. She liked—or was pretty sure she liked—her nonfussy teacher. Yard Ape— Well, he was a problem, but so far she had not let him get the best of her for keeps. Besides, although she might never admit it to anyone, now

that she had her eraser back she liked him—sort of. Maybe she enjoyed a challenge.

Ramona began to draw a fancy border, all scallops and curliques, around her name. She was happy, too, because her family had been happy that morning and because she was big enough for her family to depend on.

If only she could do something about Willa Jean. . . .

2

AT HOWIE'S HOUSE

“**N**ow be nice to Willa Jean,” said Mrs. Quimby, as she handed Ramona her lunch box. Grown-ups often forgot that no child likes to be ordered to be nice to another child.

Ramona made a face. “Mother, do you have to say that every single morning?” she asked in exasperation. Deep down inside, where she hid her darkest secrets,

Ramona sometimes longed to be horrid to Willa Jean.

"OK, OK, I'll try to remember," said Mrs. Quimby with a little laugh. "I know it isn't easy." She kissed Ramona and said, "Cheer up and run along or you'll miss your bus."

Being a member of the Quimby family in the third grade was harder than Ramona had expected. Her father was often tired, in a hurry, or studying on the dining-room table, which meant no one could disturb him by watching television. At school she was still not sure how she felt about Mrs. Whaley. Liking a teacher was important, Ramona had discovered when she was in the first grade. And even though her family understood, Ramona still dreaded that part of the day spent at Howie's house in the company of Mrs. Kemp and Willa Jean.

Those were the bad parts of the third grade. There were good parts, too. Ramona

enjoyed riding the bus to school, and she enjoyed keeping Yard Ape from getting the best of her. Then another good part of the third grade began the second week of school.

Just before her class was to make its weekly visit to the school library, Mrs. Whaley announced, "Today and from now on we are going to have Sustained Silent Reading every day."

Ramona liked the sound of Sustained Silent Reading, even though she was not sure what it meant, because it sounded important.

Mrs. Whaley continued. "This means that every day after lunch we are going to sit at our desks and read silently to ourselves any book we choose in the library."

"Even mysteries?" someone asked.

"Even mysteries," said Mrs. Whaley.

"Do we have to give book reports on what we read?" asked one suspicious member of the class.

"No book reports on your Sustained Silent Reading books," Mrs. Whaley promised the class. Then she went on, "I don't think Sustained Silent Reading sounds very interesting, so I think we will call it something else." Here she printed four big letters on the blackboard, and as she pointed she read out, "*D. E. A. R.* Can anyone guess what these letters stand for?"

The class thought and thought.

"Do Everything All Right," suggested someone. A good thought, but not the right answer.

"Don't Eat A Reader," suggested Yard Ape. Mrs. Whaley laughed and told him to try again.

As Ramona thought, she stared out the window at the blue sky, the treetops, and, in the distance, the snow-capped peak of Mount Hood looking like a giant licked ice-cream cone. *R* could stand for *Run* and *A* for *And*.

“Drop Everything And Run,” Ramona burst out. Mrs. Whaley, who was not the sort of teacher who expected everyone to raise a hand before speaking, laughed and said, “Almost right, Ramona, but have you forgotten we are talking about reading?”

“Drop Everything And Read!” chorused the rest of the class. Ramona felt silly. She should have thought of that herself.

Ramona decided that she preferred Sustained Silent Reading to DEAR because it sounded more grown-up. When time came for everyone to Drop Everything And Read, she sat quietly doing her Sustained Silent Reading.

How peaceful it was to be left alone in school. She could read without trying to hide her book under her desk or behind a bigger book. She was not expected to write lists of words she did not know, so she could figure them out by skipping and guessing.

Mrs. Whaley did not expect the class to write summaries of what they read either, so she did not have to choose easy books to make sure she would get her summary right. Now if Mrs. Whaley would leave her alone to draw, too, school would be almost perfect.

Yes, Sustained Silent Reading was the best part of the day. Howie and Ramona talked it over after school and agreed as they walked from the bus to his house. There they found two of the new friends he had made at Cedarhurst School waiting with their bicycles.

Ramona sat on the Kemps' front steps, her arms clasped around her knees, her Sustained Silent Reading book of fairy tales beside her, and looked with longing at the boys' two bicycles while Howie wheeled his bicycle out of the garage.

Because Howie was kind and because Ramona was his friend, he asked, "Ramona,



would you like to ride my bicycle to the corner and back?"

Would she! Ramona jumped up, eager to take a turn.

"Just once," said Howie.

Ramona mounted the bicycle and, while the three boys silently watched, teetered and wobbled to the corner without falling off. Having to dismount to turn the bicycle around was embarrassing, but riding back was easier—at least she didn't wobble quite so much—and she managed to dismount as if she were used to doing so. All I need is a little practice, thought Ramona, as Howie seized his bicycle and rode off with his

friends, leaving her with nothing to do but pick up her book and join Willa Jean in the house.

Now that Willa Jean was going to nursery school, she was full of ideas. Dressing up was one of them. She met Ramona at the door with an old curtain wrapped around her shoulders. "Hurry up and have your snack," she ordered, while her grandmother



sat watching television and crocheting.

The snack turned out to be pineapple juice and Rye Crisp, a pleasant change for Ramona, even though Willa Jean stood impatiently beside her, watching every swallow until she had finished.

"Now I'll be the lady and you be the dog," directed Willa Jean.

"But I don't want to be a dog," said Ramona.

Willa Jean's grandmother looked up from her crocheting, reminding Ramona with a glance that Ramona's job in the Quimby family was to get along at the Kemps'. Did she have to be a dog if Willa Jean wanted her to then?

"You have to be the dog," said Willa Jean.

"Why?" Ramona kept an eye on Mrs. Kemp as she wondered how far she dared go in resisting Willa Jean's orders.

"Because I'm a beautiful rich lady and I say so," Willa Jean informed her.

"I'm a bigger, beautifuler, richer lady," said Ramona, who felt neither beautiful nor rich, but certainly did not want to crawl around on her hands and knees barking.

"We can't both be the lady," said Willa Jean, "and I said it first."

Ramona could not argue the justice of this point. "What kind of dog am I supposed to be?" she asked to stall for time. She glanced wistfully at her book lying on the chair, the book she was supposed to read at school, but which she was enjoying so much she brought it home.

While Willa Jean was thinking, Mrs. Kemp said, "Sweetheart, don't forget Bruce is coming over to play in a few minutes."

"Bruce who?" asked Ramona, hoping Willa Jean and Bruce would play together and leave her alone to read.

"Bruce who doesn't wee-wee in the sandbox," was Willa Jean's prompt answer.

"Willa Jean!" Mrs. Kemp was shocked.

"What a thing to say about your little friend."

Ramona was not shocked. She understood that there must be a second Bruce at Willa Jean's nursery school, a Bruce who did wee-wee in the sandbox.

As things turned out, Ramona was saved from being a dog by the arrival of a small boy whose mother let him out of the car and watched him reach the front door before she drove off.

Willa Jean ran to let him in and introduced him as Ramona expected, "This is Bruce who doesn't wee-wee in the sandbox." Bruce looked pleased with himself.

Mrs. Kemp felt a need to apologize for her granddaughter. "Willa Jean doesn't mean what she says."

"But I don't wee-wee in the sandbox," said Bruce. "I wee-wee in the—"

"Never mind, Bruce," said Mrs. Kemp. "Now what are you three going to play?"

Ramona was trapped.

"Dress up," was Willa Jean's prompt answer. She dragged from the corner a carton piled with old clothes. Willa Jean shoved one of her father's old jackets at Bruce and handed him an old hat and her blue flippers. She unwound the curtain from her shoulders, draped it over her head, and tied it under her chin. Then she hung a piece of old sheet from her shoulders. Satisfied with herself, she handed a torn shirt to Ramona, who put it on only because Mrs. Kemp was watching.

"There," said Willa Jean, satisfied. "I'll be Miss Mousie, the beautiful bride, and Bruce is the frog and Ramona is Uncle Rat, and now we are going to have a wedding party."

Ramona did not want to be Uncle Rat.

"Mr. Frog would a-wooing go," sang Willa Jean. Bruce joined in, "*Hm-m, hm-m.*" Apparently this song was popular in nursery school. Ramona *hm-med* too.

"Say it," Willa Jean ordered Bruce.

"Willa Jean, will you marry me?" sang Bruce.

Willa Jean stamped her foot. "*Not* Willa Jean! Miss Mousie."

Bruce started over. "Miss Mousie, will you marry me?" he sang.

"Yes, if Uncle Rat will agree," sang Willa Jean.

"*Hm-m, hm-m.*"

"*Hm-m, hm-m,*" hummed all three.

The two nursery-school children looked to Ramona for the next line. Since she did not remember the words used by Uncle Rat to give Mr. Frog permission to marry Miss Mousie, she said, "Sure. Go ahead."

"OK," said Willa Jean. "Now we will have the wedding party." She seized Bruce and Ramona by the hand. "Take Bruce's other hand," she ordered Ramona.

Ramona found Bruce's hand inside the long sleeve of the old coat. His hand was sticky.

“Now we’ll dance in a circle,” directed Willa Jean.

Ramona skipped, Willa Jean pranced, and Bruce flapped. They danced in a circle, tripping on Miss Mousie’s train and wedding veil and stumbling over Mr. Frog’s flippers until Willa Jean gave the next order. “Now we all fall down.”

Ramona merely dropped to her knees while Willa Jean and Bruce collapsed in a heap, laughing. Above their laughter and the sound of the television, Ramona heard the shouts of the boys outside as they rode their bicycles up and down the street. She wondered how much longer she would have to wait until her mother came to rescue her. She hoped she would arrive before Howie’s parents came home from work.

Willa Jean scrambled to her feet. “Let’s play it again,” she said, beaming, convinced of her beauty in her wedding veil. Over and over the three sang, danced, and fell down.

As the game went on and on, Ramona grew bored and varied the words she used to give Mr. Frog permission to marry Miss Mousie. Sometimes she said, "See if I care," and sometimes she said, "Yes, but you'll be sorry." Willa Jean did not notice, she was so eager to get to the party part of the game where they all fell down in a heap.

Still the game went on, over and over, with no sign of Bruce and Willa Jean's tiring. Then Beezus came in with an armload of books.

"Hi, Beezus," said Willa Jean, flushed with laughter. "You can play too. You can be the old tomcat in the song."

"I'm sorry, Willa Jean," said Beezus. "I don't have time to be the old tomcat. I have homework I have to do." She settled herself at the dining-room table and opened a book.

Ramona looked at Mrs. Kemp, who smiled and continued crocheting. Why did Ramona have to play with Willa Jean when Beezus did not? Because she was younger.

That was why. Ramona was overwhelmed by the unfairness of it all. Because she was younger, she always had to do things she did not want to do—go to bed earlier, wear Beezus's outgrown clothes that her mother saved for her, run and fetch because her legs were younger and because Beezus was always doing homework. Now she had to get along with Willa Jean—her whole family was depending on her—and Beezus did not.

Once more Ramona looked at her book of fairy tales waiting on the chair beside the front door, and as she looked at its worn cover she had an inspiration. Maybe her idea would work, and maybe it wouldn't. It was worth a try.

"Willa Jean, you and Bruce will have to excuse me now," Ramona said in her politest voice. "I have to do my Sustained Silent Reading." Out of the corner of her eye she watched Mrs. Kemp.

"OK." Willa Jean was not only impressed

by a phrase she did not understand, she had Bruce to boss around. Mrs. Kemp, who was counting stitches, merely nodded.

Ramona picked up her book and settled herself in the corner of the couch. Beezus caught her eye, and the two sisters exchanged conspiratorial smiles while Willa Jean and Bruce, now minus Uncle Rat, raced happily around in a circle screaming with joy and singing, "She'll be coming 'round the mountain when she comes!"

Ramona blissfully read herself off into the land of princesses, kings, and clever youngest sons, satisfied that the Quimbys had a clever younger daughter who was doing her part.



3

THE HARD-BOILED EGG FAD

With all four members of the family leaving at different times in different directions, mornings were flurried in the Quimby household. On the days when Mr. Quimby had an eight o'clock class, he left early in the car. Beezus left next because she walked to school and because she wanted to stop for Mary Jane on the way.

Ramona was third to leave. She enjoyed

these last few minutes alone with her mother now that Mrs. Quimby no longer reminded her she must be nice to Willa Jean.

“Did you remember to give me a hard-boiled egg in my lunch like I asked?” Ramona inquired one morning. This week hard-boiled eggs were popular with third graders, a fad started by Yard Ape, who sometimes brought his lunch. Last week the fad had been individual bags of corn chips. Ramona had been left out of that fad because her mother objected to spending money on junk food. Surely her mother would not object to a nutritious hard-boiled egg.

“Yes, I remembered the hard-boiled egg, you little rabbit,” said Mrs. Quimby. “I’m glad you have finally learned to like them.”

Ramona did not feel it necessary to explain to her mother that she still did not like hard-boiled eggs, not even when they

had been dyed for Easter. Neither did she like soft-boiled eggs, because she did not like slippery, slithery food. Ramona liked deviled eggs, but deviled eggs were not the fad, at least not this week.

On the bus Ramona and Susan compared lunches. Each was happy to discover that the other had a hard-boiled egg, and both were eager for lunchtime to come.

While Ramona waited for lunch period, school turned out to be unusually interesting. After the class had filled out their arithmetic workbooks, Mrs. Whaley handed each child a glass jar containing about two inches of a wet blue substance—she explained that it was oatmeal dyed blue. Ramona was first to say “Yuck.” Most people made faces, and Yard Ape made a gagging noise.

“OK, kids, quiet down,” said Mrs. Whaley. When the room was quiet, she explained that for science they were going to study fruit

flies. The blue oatmeal contained fruit-fly larvae. "And why do you think the oatmeal is blue?" she asked.

Several people thought the blue dye was some sort of food for the larvae, vitamins maybe. Marsha suggested the oatmeal was dyed blue so the children wouldn't think it was good to eat. Everybody laughed at this guess. Who would ever think cold oatmeal was good to eat? Yard Ape came up with the right answer: the oatmeal was dyed blue so the larvae could be seen. And so they could—little white specks.

As the class bent over their desks making labels for their jars, Ramona wrote her name on her slip of paper and added, "Age 8," which she always wrote after her signature. Then she drew tiny fruit flies around it before she pasted the label on her very own jar of blue oatmeal and fruit-fly larvae. Now she had a jar of pets.



“That’s a really neat label, Ramona,” said Mrs. Whaley. Ramona understood that her teacher did not mean tidy when she said “neat,” but extra good. Ramona decided she liked Mrs. Whaley after all.

The morning was so satisfactory that it passed quickly. When lunchtime came, Ramona collected her lunch box and went off to the cafeteria where, after waiting in line for her milk, she sat at a table with

Sara, Janet, Marsha, and other third-grade girls. She opened her lunch box, and there, tucked in a paper napkin, snug between her sandwich and an orange, was her hard-boiled egg, smooth and perfect, the right size to fit her hand. Because Ramona wanted to save the best for the last, she ate the center of her sandwich—tuna fish—and poked a hole in her orange so she could suck out the juice. Third graders did not peel their oranges. At last it was time for the egg.

There were a number of ways of cracking eggs. The most popular, and the real reason for bringing an egg to school, was knocking the egg against one's head. There were two ways of doing so, by a lot of timid little raps or by one big whack.

Sara was a rapper. Ramona, like Yard Ape, was a whacker. She took a firm hold on her egg, waited until everyone at her table was watching, and *whack*—she found herself with



a handful of crumbled shell and something cool and slimy running down her face.

Everyone at Ramona's table gasped. Ramona needed a moment to realize what

had happened. Her egg was raw. Her mother had not boiled her egg at all. She tried to brush the yellow yolk and slithery white out of her hair and away from her face, but she only succeeded in making her hands eggy. Her eyes filled with tears of anger, which she tried to brush away with her wrists. The gasps at her table turned into giggles. From another table, Ramona caught a glimpse of Yard Ape grinning at her.

Marsha, a tall girl who always tried to be motherly, said, "It's all right, Ramona. I'll take you to the bathroom and help you wash off the egg."

Ramona was not one bit grateful. "You go away," she said, ashamed of being so rude. She did not want this third-grade girl treating her like a baby.

The teacher who was supervising lunch period came over to see what the commotion was about. Marsha gathered up all the paper

napkins from the lunch boxes at the table and handed them to the teacher, who tried to sop up the egg. Unfortunately, the napkins did not absorb egg very well. Instead, they smeared yolk and white around in Ramona's hair. Her face felt stiff as egg white began to dry.

"Take her to the office," the teacher said to Marsha. "Mrs. Larson will help her."

"Come on, Ramona," said Marsha, as if Ramona were in kindergarten. She put her hand on Ramona's shoulder because Ramona's hands were too eggy to touch.

Ramona jerked away. "I can go by myself." With that reply, she ran out of the cafeteria. She was so angry she was able to ignore the giggles and the few sympathetic looks of the other children. Ramona was mad at herself for following a fad. She was furious with Yard Ape for grinning at her. Most of all she was angry with her mother

for not boiling the egg in the first place. By the time she reached the office, Ramona's face felt as stiff as a mask.

Ramona almost ran into Mr. Wittman, the principal, which would have upset her even more. He was someone Ramona always tried to avoid ever since Beezus had told her that the way to remember how to spell the kind of principal who was the principal of a school was to remember the word ended in *p-a-l*, not *p-l-e*, because the principal was her pal. Ramona did not want the principal to be her pal. She wanted him to mind his own business, aloof and important, in his office. Mr. Wittman must have felt the same way because he stepped—almost jumped—quickly aside.

Mrs. Larson, the school secretary, took one look at Ramona, sprang from her desk, and said, "Well, you need a little help, don't you?"

Ramona nodded, grateful to Mrs. Larson for behaving as if egggy third graders walked into her office every day. The secretary led her into a tiny room equipped with a cot, washbasin, and toilet that adjoined the office.

"Let's see," said Mrs. Larson, "how shall we go about this? I guess the best way is to wash your hands, then dunk your head. You've heard of egg shampoos, haven't you? They are supposed to be wonderful for the hair."

"Yow!" yelled Ramona, when she dipped her head into the washbasin. "The water's cold."

"It's probably a good thing we don't have warmer water," said Mrs. Larson. "You wouldn't want to cook the egg in your hair, would you?" She rubbed and Ramona snuffled. She rinsed and Ramona sniffed. Finally Mrs. Larson said, "That's the best I can do," and handed Ramona a wad of paper towels. "Dry yourself off the best

you can," she said. "You can wash your hair when you get home."

Ramona accepted the towels. As she sat on the cot, rubbing and blotting and seething in humiliation and anger, she listened to sounds from the office, the click of the typewriter, the ring of the telephone, Mrs. Larson's voice answering.

Ramona began to calm down and feel a little better. Maybe Mrs. Kemp would let her wash her hair after school. She could let Willa Jean pretend to be working in a beauty shop and not say anything about her Sustained Silent Reading. One of these days Willa Jean was sure to catch on that she was just reading a book, and Ramona wanted to postpone that time as long as possible.

Toward the end of lunch period, Ramona heard teachers drift into the office to leave papers or pick up messages from their boxes. Then Ramona made an interesting

discovery. Teachers talked about their classes.

"My class has been so good today," said one teacher. "I can hardly believe it. They're little angels."

"I don't know what's the matter with my class today," said another. "Yesterday they knew how to subtract, and today none of them seems able to remember."

"Perhaps it's the weather," suggested another teacher.

Ramona found all this conversation most interesting. She had blotted her hair as best she could when she heard Mrs. Whaley's big cheerful voice speaking to Mrs. Larson. "Here are those tests I was supposed to hand in yesterday," she said. "Sorry I'm late." Mrs. Larson murmured an answer.

Then Mrs. Whaley said, "I hear my little show-off came in with egg in her hair." She laughed and added, "What a nuisance."

Ramona was so stunned she did not try



to hear Mrs. Larson's answer. Show-off! Nuisance! Did Mrs. Whaley think she had broken a raw egg into her hair on purpose to show off? And to be called a nuisance by her teacher when she was not a nuisance. Or was she? Ramona did not mean to break an egg in her hair. Her mother was to blame. Did this accident make her a nuisance?

Ramona did not see why Mrs. Whaley could think she was a nuisance when Mrs. Whaley was not the one to get her hands all eggy. Yet Ramona had heard her say right out loud that she was a show-off and a nuisance. That hurt, really hurt.

Ramona sat as still as she could with the damp paper towels in her hands. She did not want to risk even the softest noise by throwing them into the wastebasket. Lunch period came to an end, and still she sat. Her body felt numb and so did her heart. She could never, never face Mrs. Whaley again. Never.

Mrs. Larson's typewriter clicked cheerfully away. Ramona was forgotten, which was the way she wanted it. She even wanted to forget herself and her horrible hair, now drying into stiff spikes. She no longer felt like a real person.

The next voice Ramona heard was that of Yard Ape. "Mrs. Larson," he said, as if he had been running in the hall, "Mrs. Whaley said to tell you Ramona didn't come back after lunch."

The typing stopped. "Oh, my goodness," said Mrs. Larson, as she appeared in the doorway. "Why, Ramona, are you still here?"

How was Ramona supposed to answer?

"Run along back to class with Danny," said the secretary. "I'm sorry I forgot all about you."

"Do I have to?" asked Ramona.

"Of course," said Mrs. Larson. "Your hair is almost dry. You don't want to miss class."

Ramona did want to miss class. Forever. The third grade was spoiled forever.

"Aw, come on, Ramona," said Yard Ape, for once not teasing.

Surprised by sympathy from Yard Ape, Ramona reluctantly left the office. She expected him to go on ahead of her, but instead he walked beside her, as if they were friends instead of rivals. Ramona felt strange walking down the hall alone with a boy. As she trudged along beside him, she felt she had to tell someone the terrible news. "Mrs. Whaley doesn't like me," she said in a flat voice.

"Don't let old Whaley get you down," he answered. "She likes you OK. You're a good kid."

Ramona was a little shocked at hearing her teacher called "old Whaley." However, she squeezed comfort from Yard Ape's opinion. She began to like him, really like him.

When they reached their classroom, Yard Ape, perhaps thinking he had been *too* nice to Ramona, turned and said to her with his old grin, "Egghead!"

Oh! There was nothing for Ramona to do but follow him into the room. Sustained Silent Reading, or DEAR, as Mrs. Whaley called it, was over, and the class was practicing writing cursive capital letters. Mrs. Whaley was describing capital *M* as she wrote it on the board. "Swoop down, swoop up, down, up again, and down." Ramona avoided looking at her teacher as she got out paper and pencil and began to write the capital letters of the alphabet in careful, even script. She enjoyed the work, and it soothed her hurt feelings until she came to the letter *Q*.

Ramona sat looking at the cursive capital *Q*, the first letter of her last name. Ramona had always been fond of *Q*, the only letter

of the alphabet with a neat little tail. She enjoyed printing Q, but she did not like her written Q. She had made it right, but it looked like a big floppy 2, which Ramona felt was a dumb way to make such a nice letter.

Ramona decided right then and there that she would never again write a cursive Q. She would write the rest of her last name, *uimby*, in cursive, but she would always, no matter what Mrs. Whaley said, print her capital Q's.

So there, Mrs. Whaley, thought Ramona. You can't make me write a cursive Q if I don't want to. She began to feel like a real person again.