

Pobody's Nerfect

How far will Mia go to impress her new friends?

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LOOK FOR WORD NERD'S 4 WORDS IN BOLD



Theme A theme of this story is friendship. As you read, ask yourself: What makes someone a good friend?



As usual, I'm last to arrive at our lunch table. I shove my backpack, which contains invitations to my birthday party, under the bench.

Stacy, Emily, Nadia, and the other girls eat macaroni and cheese. Why hadn't I gotten that instead of stupid fish sticks?

I smile and say hi, but the girls are talking and don't look up.

After sliding onto the bench, I poke at a greasy fish stick with my plastic spork.

Nadia finally looks at me. "Mia."

I hope she doesn't say anything about my stinky fish sticks.

"New shirt?" she asks.

Everyone turns to check out my new shirt, which cost me about six hours of babysitting for the Garcias—not an easy job. The shirt has a really cool **geometric** design on the front, and it reminded me of the shirts the girls all wear. They glance at each other, and from Nadia's slight smirk, I realize my new shirt is somehow nothing like theirs.



There's a loud crash. Everyone turns to look, and I'm grateful the attention is off me.

It's loco Paolo, my neighbor and used-to-be best friend. He's on the floor, waving an orange. "Caught it!"

His buddies cheer.

I bite my lip, remembering how much fun Paolo and I used to have. He made me laugh until my stomach ached. But that was before Stacy decided I could sit at her table.

"That Paolo," Stacy clucks. "He just wants

attention."

"Yeah," Emily says.

"Yeah," I hear myself mutter.

"Look at his shirt," Nadia says, shaking her head. "Why is it inside out?"

I know the answer. Paolo probably put it on inside out by mistake but then thought it would be funny to wear it that way.

"What an idiot," Stacy says.

I decide not to give out my birthday party invitations today.

Tuesday, in the lunch line, I choose the pizza, sure that's what Stacy and the rest will pick. But when I get to our table, french fries and chocolate milk are on everyone's trays. I hate that my class before lunch is so far from the cafeteria. If I arrived with everyone else, I could stand in line with them and see what they put on their trays, then make the perfect choice.

Emily nibbles a french fry. "What are we doing this weekend?"

Everyone looks at Stacy.

"It's only Tuesday." She shrugs. "I haven't decided yet."

I reach into my backpack and hand each girl an invitation. "You're coming to my birthday party."

"Cool," Stacy says, opening her invitation.

"You do have *Superstar Stage*, right?"

I tilt my head.

"You know, where you dance and sing and it shows up on TV like you're in a music video."

"It's the best," Emily says.

"The best," the other girls say.

I think of Papá's handmade piñata and Mami's special-recipe birthday cake and know I'll have to do something to make my party more perfect. "Um, I have—"

Laughter erupts.

I turn and see Paolo and his buddies barking like walruses with straws stuck up their nostrils.

"**Immature!**" Stacy declares.

"Babies!" Emily says.

"Dumb," I say, even though it looks like fun.

After school, I ask Papá to drive me to the mall. I have twenty-three dollars left from babysitting for the Garcias. When I see how much *Superstar Stage* costs, I say, "I'd have to babysit a whole year to pay for that!" Instead, I spend all my money at the toy store on a fun fortune-teller kit. We can tell ghost stories and read each other's fortunes, like we did at Emily's sleepover party last month.

Wednesday, at lunch, no one mentions my party. I decide to keep the fortune-teller kit, with its "crystal" ball and Tarot cards, a surprise.

After school on Friday, Mami, Papá, and I sit outside on our front steps.

Papá works on the crossword.

Mami waters the plants.

"Mia, why don't your friends call about your party? We wrote R.S.V.P. on the invitations."

"Kids don't do that anymore," I say as though it's no big deal.

Papá looks up from his puzzle.

"They don't have good manners anymore?"

"No, Papá," I say. "It's not like that. They'll be here."

Mami **huffs** and examines a dry, brown leaf on one of her plants before yanking it off.

Just then, Paolo jogs up the steps, sweaty and clutching his baseball glove.

"How was the game?" Papá asks.

"We shut 'em out." Paolo gives Papá the special handshake they invented a couple of years ago.

"You're coming to Mia's party tomorrow, no?" Mami asks.

Paolo looks at me, his eyebrows arched. I can't tell if he's surprised or hurt.

"Oh, I forgot," I lie and run into the house. I snatch the invitation from my backpack, go outside, and slap it into Paolo's glove. Then I hide in my room the rest of the day.

Saturday—party day—my stomach is a knot. I set up my bedroom with the crystal ball and Tarot cards and hope





Paolo doesn't come. How can I have the perfect all-girl party with Paolo here?

Downstairs, Mami and Papá sit at the kitchen table, wearing pointy party hats, like they did when I was little. I **pace**, not wearing a pointy party hat, and wonder if my friends will arrive separately or in a group. When they come, I'll rush them upstairs so Mami and Papá can't embarrass me.

The doorbell rings.

"I'll get it!" I fling open the door. "Oh," I say, my shoulders drooping. "Paolo." He's wearing his shirt inside out again and gripping a badly wrapped box.

"Happy birthday, Mia!"

We join my parents at the table. I rest my head on my hands.

Paolo grabs a party hat.

"Perfect," I mutter.

Every time I hear a car, I run to the door, but

no one is ever there.

Papá taps his fingers.

Mami checks her cake in the oven.

Paolo makes a slingshot from the rubber band on his party hat and flings Cheez Doodles at me.

I don't laugh because it's forty minutes after my party officially began and no one is here yet.

"C'mon," Paolo says. "This is supposed to be a party, not a funeral." And he beans me on the nose with a Cheez Doodle.

I push my chair back so hard it falls, and I run to my room. I toss the fortune-telling stuff into the trash and sink onto my bed.

There's a knock on my bedroom door. For one hopeful moment, I think it's Stacy and the girls. I wipe wetness off my cheeks. "Come in," I call, my voice cracking.

The door opens and Paolo enters, his party hat pointing sideways off his head. "C'mon, Mia.

Let's do something fun."

I shake my head, hoping I don't cry again. "My friends aren't here yet."

"What am I?" Paolo asks.

I sniff. "You know what I mean. Stacy, Emily, Nadia, and the others."

"Oh," Paolo says. "Those girls you eat lunch with."

"Yes," I say, glad he understands.

"They seem like tons of fun," Paolo says.

It takes me a few seconds to realize Paolo is joking. Without really meaning to, I smile. Then I follow Paolo downstairs.

We each eat two slices of Mami's homemade cake. It's perfect. Then we take turns bashing Papá's piñata until treats rain down on us. Afterward, Paolo hands me his gift. "You haven't opened my present yet."

I lift the lid carefully. Inside is a black T-shirt with white letters that say, "Pobody's Nerfect."

"It's perfect," I say, holding up the shirt so Mami and Papá can see.

"No, it's nerfect," Paolo says.

Monday, at lunch, I choose lasagna with a small salad and a banana, because I like those things.

When I see Stacy and the girls, they lean close and whisper while sipping smoothies. I think of the money I wasted buying a new shirt and that fortune-teller kit.

At Paolo's table, his friends eat lasagna and laugh. Their shirts are inside out too.

I grip my tray and walk over. "Mind if I sit here?"

Stacy glares at me.

"Sure," Paolo says, sliding along the bench. His friends slide too. Soon, they're in a heap on the floor, laughing.

I put my tray down and sit on the bench as they climb back on.

Paolo nudges my shoulder with his. "'Bout time you sat at the fun table, Mia."

"'Bout time," I say and unzip my jacket. Underneath, I'm wearing my "Pobody's Nerfect" T-shirt, but the words aren't visible because I'm wearing it inside out. 🍌



Donna Gephart

If you sat next to Donna in the cafeteria, she would give you a huge smile and make you feel like you were old buddies. Not only is she one of the nicest authors we know, she's also funny. Very, very funny. Her books, including *How to Survive Middle School* and *Olivia Bean, Trivia Queen* (coming out in March!), are hilarious. Donna says she never tries to be perfect. But in our eyes, she comes pretty close!

When Donna isn't writing, she is hanging with main men (from left): sons, Jake and Andrew; father-in-law, Jake; and husband, Dan.



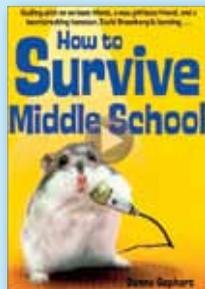
When we first saw this, we assumed Donna was 10 years old. In fact, this was last Halloween.



Donna started writing as a young girl and always dreamed of being a published author. We are happy that her dream came true.

WRITE TO WIN!

Mia's ideas about friendship change from the beginning of the story to the end. Write about this in a paragraph, using examples from the story. Send us your paragraph by Nov. 15, 2011. We'll send 10 winners copies of Donna's new book, *How to Survive Middle School*. See page 2 for details.



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