



Problems and Solutions In this story, the main character, Lilly, faces many problems. Look for these problems and how each is solved in a different way.



**LOOK FOR WORD NERD'S
7 WORDS IN BOLD**

The Uninvited Guests

Making friends is hard for Lilly, especially when some creepy-crawly creatures come to visit

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After school, the hallway swarms with kids heading in a million directions. Kneeling on the floor, I try my locker combination for the 10th time, hoping nobody will roll a wheelie backpack over my head. 7-27-17. Nothing. Why isn't it working? I hate this school. I hate being new. Again. Why does my dad have a job that basically means a new school every September?

Charlotte, the girl with the locker above mine, looks down at me with pity. "Oh, Lilly, not again." She opens her locker with three **swift** turns. Then she opens mine.

"How did you know my combination?" I ask her.

"You say it out loud every time you try to open it."

"Oh." My face turns candy-apple red.

"You'll get it. See you in gym class." She walks away. I nod, but in my brain I'm yelling, "Don't go! Please, be my friend, be my friend, be my friend. I'm begging you!"

And then, a miracle! She turns around and says, "I'm having a sleepover with some girls at my house next Saturday. Want to come?"

I almost faint with joy. But somehow I manage to nod and say, "Yes!"

When I get home, I find my mom giving Emma a bath in the kitchen sink.

I drop my backpack and run over to give Emma a kiss. Then I tell Mom my amazing news.

"Guess what? I have a friend," I announce.

"Hooray!" Mom says.

"Hooray!" Emma claps.

"And she invited me for a sleepover!"



all the time. It's a tradition for our dad to dress up to make it "special." At past parties, he's been a pirate, a Neanderthal, a country witch, and Elvis.

Sam says, "Mom, I want Dad to be a mermaid this year."

I almost laugh, knowing that Dad would never refuse Sam's request.

But I'm too upset to laugh.

Sam goes on and on about his amazing plans, but I can't listen. Somehow I'll have to let him know in a nice way that I'm going to miss the celebration. Because there's NO way I can miss out on going to Charlotte's house.

That night, I'm doing homework and practicing the combination on my practice lock when Mom and Dad come into my room. Dad says, "Lilly, we need to talk to you."

I know what's coming: They're going to make me miss the sleepover. I can't even believe them! I get ready for a fight.

"The school called," Mom said.

"Apparently, there's a lice problem over there."

"Only the second-graders have it," I say.

"The nurse said a fifth-grade girl has it too. She said we have to check your head because you could have been exposed."

"I'm sure I'm fine," I say. But I bend my head forward to get it over with.

Mom pulls my hair apart to check and jumps back.

Dad **peers** closer and says, "My goodness. Would you look at that?"

"What's the matter?" I try not to freak out.

"Quit scaring me."

"Don't be scared!" Mom plasters on a fake smile and hands Dad the car keys.

Dad speeds off to the store and comes home armed with three different lice shampoos and a special steel-toothed comb. He takes me into the bathroom and starts to pick the **nits** off my head like a mother gorilla. He says, "This could be a learning experience about not sharing combs or hats. Lice have a scientific name: *Pediculosis*."

I grit my teeth. "I don't share combs, and I

don't wear hats. And I don't want to know the scientific name either. Make them go away." I hate it when Dad tries to turn a disaster into "a learning experience." How can I tell Charlotte? What will she say? Not only will I be the new girl, I'll be the new girl with cooties. My life is over!

Mom uses the lice comb, which takes hours of combing and inspecting. Then Sam, who loves science, barges in, asking, "Ew, can I see the **parasites**?"

"Get out!" I yell, but does he listen?

"Cool!" Sam peers into the bowl of floating



"Great!" Mom says.

"Great!" Emma claps.

"Saturday night."

Mom gives me that look.

"What?"

"Honey, it's Sam's birthday."

At that very moment, my 8-year-old brother, Sam, bounces into the room.

"Lilly!" he says. "I've designed my cake, and it's going to be the lost city of Atlantis—I want it to look like the bottom of the ocean, with sharks and castles. . . . I'm thinking chocolate pudding, gummy sharks, and rock candy. Lots!"

Emma says, "Happy birthday!" splashing in the water.

"That's nice, Sam," I say.

Mom gives me another look that says, "I'm sure you'll make the right decision."

What am I supposed to do? OK, so birthdays are huge in our family since we move

lice. “I know a girl who got lice, and her mom gave her a buzz cut. Another kid’s grandma tried using mayonnaise to kill them.”

“Mom, make him leave!” I shout.

Sam says, “By the way, that girl Charlotte called, but I said you couldn’t come to the phone because you had lice and—”

“YOU WHAT? HOW COULD YOU?”

“What?” Sam says. “Lots of kids get it. It’s no big deal.”

“SAM!” I try to reach for his throat to strangle him, but he ducks out fast.

Mom drags the comb through my hair searching for more creepy-crawlies. She says, “When I was little, I got lice too. You know what we called it? Motorized dandruff.”

“Is that supposed to make me feel better?” I try not to cry, but it feels like my whole head is itching and shimmying to a new dance called “The Pediculosis.”

The lice camp out on my head, so I don’t go to school for two days. I don’t call Charlotte back either. No way—not since she knows the disgusting truth about me.

In desperation, Mom washes my head in olive oil, a treatment from the olden days. My scalp dripping with olive oil, she wraps a plastic bag around my head on Wednesday morning to wear until Thursday night. Then she ties a bandana over the plastic and assures me it will suffocate the lice. I pretend I don’t smell like salad dressing and that my life isn’t ruined.

Sam points a cardboard sword at my head and commands, “Die, lice, die!” Then he draws a picture of me as a blue octopus girl with giant tentacles and writes, “Sorry I told Charlotte about the you-know-what. Your brother, Sam.”

On Friday morning, Mom and Dad do another search and declare my head clean. At school, I see Charlotte at our lockers. I don’t talk to her, and she pretends not to see me. When I open my locker in three swift turns, Charlotte says, “That’s good, Lilly. First try.”

Then she whispers, “Are you mad? I hope you don’t think I gave you lice.”

“What? You had it too?”

“Yeah, my mom freaked out and sent me to a professional lice-picker. That’s why I called you, but when you didn’t call back I figured you hated me.”

“Wow. I thought I might have given it to you. How did we even get it?”

Charlotte says, “I bet it was those second-graders!”

“That’s right. Second-graders. Look at them. They’re everywhere,” I say as a posse of them scurries by.

“Do you still want to sleep over Saturday?” she says. “My other friends can’t come—their moms are scared of lice. But we could still get together.”

I open my mouth to say yes.

Then I have an even better idea.

“Hey, Charlotte,” I say. “Have you ever seen a grown man dressed up as a mermaid?”



AUTHOR SPOTLIGHT

A CLOSER LOOK AT ONE OF OUR FAVORITE AUTHORS!

Kerry Madden

Kerry Madden often finds inspiration for her stories in real life—like the time some “uninvited guests” took up residence in her daughter Lucy’s long, thick curls! We were delighted that she could turn the ordeal into a fabulous fiction piece for *Storyworks*!

Guess who dressed up like the Little Mermaid for a child’s party? That’s Kerry’s husband, Kiffen.

Lucy was in second grade when she braved hideous lice treatments. Now 21, she’s been lice-free ever since!



Norah, 13

Flannery, 23

Away from her writer’s desk, Kerry (center) enjoys time with her lovely family.



As a child, Kerry made up stories based on whatever book she was reading for her three younger siblings to act out.

Kerry moved to Knoxville, Tennessee, in high school and fell in love with the Smoky Mountains—one of the inspirations for her Maggie Valley trilogy.



WRITE TO WIN!

Lilly’s main problem in “The Uninvited Guests” is trying to make a new friend without giving up a family tradition. What makes this such a problem for Lilly? How does the problem get solved? Do you think Lilly’s decision in the end was a good one? Explain your answer in a well-organized paragraph. E-mail or mail it to “Lilly Contest” by March 15, 2012. Ten winners will each receive a journal signed by Kerry Madden. See page 2 for details.

OUR ONLINE ACTIVITY WILL HELP YOU WITH THIS!