



### *Ethan, Suspended* by Pamela Ehrenberg

“I hope you all enjoy this music as much as I do,” said Mr. Harper. “A classic jazz tune for the holidays: ‘Boogie Woogie Santa Claus.’”

“Hey, he said ‘booger,’” said Anthony.

“Shut up,” someone else said, “That’s a cool song.”

“I love that song!” I heard Sharita say.

“I’ll have the oboe part transcribed for you tomorrow,” Mr. Harper said to me.

“Thanks,” I mumbled.

It figured. Christmas music. What did I expect for a December concert. In case I wasn’t different enough, having to get my music specially transcribed, the world’s only jazz oboist also happened to be Jewish. I had never decorated a Christmas tree, never hung a Christmas stocking, and definitely never had Santa Claus boogie-woogie down my chimney.

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I thought about calling home, but my mom was probably at work, or having dinner with one of her friends at the Vietnamese restaurant near our house. She’d get home late and find my message on the machine, and if she called back, my grandparents would wake up and there would be shouting and chaos. Or she would decide it would be too late to call back, which would be worse. Things that were so simple in other families, things like making phone calls, were so impossibly complicated in mine. You’d think a hotshot lawyer mom and a dad with a fancy “consulting” job (whatever that was) would have the brain power to figure out a simple thing like conversation, but apparently it was just too much for some people.

I don’t know which I hated worse: being part of my family, or the fact that my sister Margo thought we were normal.

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In the hall, Sharita and I were quiet at first. I wanted to tell her I liked her socks (one blue and white striped, one with Coca-Cola logos), or that I was glad we were doing the Hungry for Music project, or that I was sorry for my stupid jokes.

Sharita finally said, “I’m glad we’re doing this Hungry for Music thing.”

“Me too. I like your socks.” There.

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BOOK EXCERPTS

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She laughed. Sharita was beautiful when she laughed, her white teeth against her dark lips, and her eyes behind the purple glasses looking like each one held a million jazz expressions.

“You’re crazy,” she said, still laughing. “Totally crazy.”

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