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Popular Decision

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It was 3 A.M on a Monday and Jane was not asleep. It’s going to be a very bad day, Jane thought as she stared at her feet. They had grown again; they were always growing; if this kept up soon no one would be able to sell her a pair of shoes with GAP Fashion decals on them. She would have to shop in the women’s section and get big, boring running shoes like her mom always wore. It would be just one more thing to separate her from all of the popular girls at school with little feet.

“I just want to be normal,” she whispered to herself. “I just want to be like everybody else.”

Jane looked at her hands. Normality wasn’t very likely. Where her feet were huge, her hands were tiny. They had almost no palm to them and protruding out from them like sticks on a snowman were five unnaturally long fingers. Her legs were long, gangly things with big knobby knees yet her torso was as short and stubby like a flamingo. She thought she looked like someone walking around on stilts. And if her lower body seemed oddly arranged it was nothing compared to her head. Her nose popped out from her forehead like the beak of a hawk, her mouth came up higher on the left than the right when she smiled, and it sat above a chin that was much too pointy, by even a stork’s standards. Her hair was a like a wild jungle that seemed devoted to giving her that freshly electrocuted look. And her eyes, the horrible thing that people always noticed first... one was green and one was blue. Why couldn’t they just have been one or the other? Jane often thought that she looked like two people who had been crammed into one body.

The worst of it though was her name. How could anyone be normal with a name like Jannabellia Articia Atticia? It had helped when she had moved schools and told everyone to call her Jane, but there was always that awful moment when there was some substitute teacher reading role. “Let’s see if I can get this one right,” they would say with a smirk. “Jannabellia Articia Atticia?” And usually commented with something like “My what a name,” or, “That sure is a mouthful.” Jane always would turn red to the chorus of classmates’ snickers and whispers. “It’s Jane,” she would mumble as she raised her hand. “Just Jane.”

She didn’t know what her mother was thinking when she named her. When she was seven and had come home from a particularly rough harassing by her peers, she had decided it was high time to bring up the subject at dinner. Dinner was the only time Jane ever had to really speak to her mother; for all her mother’s eccentricities, she firmly believed in dinner conversation. But that day had been a particularly annoying one for her mother as well and upon receiving of the question,

“Mom, why did you name me such an awful name? Were you trying to give me a hard life from the start?”
Her mother had rolled her eyes up to look at the ceiling, expanded her arms, and said theatrically, “Jannabellia Articia Attica, what a beautiful name. It makes you sound like a Roman Emperor.”

Jane hadn’t been moved by her mother’s theatrics. Whereas most people would have dropped the subject on such an act, Jane witnessed such melodramatic acting on a near daily basis. This is why she replied, “Mom, I don’t want to be a Roman Emperor. Why... why couldn’t my name have been more normal?”

Her mother had recognized the small defeat and so she had deflated and peered at her with a serious sarcastic glare, “More normal? Who wants to be more normal?”

Jane had just looked at her plate.

“Oh, come on girl. I could have actually stuck with your good for nothing father, Freddie Kellick and gone with the name he had wanted to give you, Frederica Udaya-Catherine Kellick and then just think what your initials would have been. Now, come on, eat your peas Jannabellia and smile; it could be normal?”

Jane had always gotten quiet when the subject of her father was brought up. She had heard varying stories as to why her mother and he no longer were together but due to their inconsistency Jane had just blamed it on her mother’s crazy tendencies.

Jane’s mother was an eccentric, the kind that most people associated with the word peculiar. She was born into a strict Catholic household, the kind they show in the movies, and was brought up to be a nun. As Jane’s grandmother tells it, typically after a few brandies, Jane’s mom turned thirteen; discovered puberty and built a small settlement there, which eventually thrived into a grand city. Grandma said that one day Jane’s mom went to school in her robes; it was the day of her first mass communion and she was to take the first steps towards her life as a nun. When it was her turn to receive the holy sacraments, however, Jane’s mother de-robed herself and revealed a body covered in painted words reading, “Queen of Adolescence!” In the midst of the shock, Jane’s mother grabbed the chalice of Christ and yelled to her peers, “IF CHRIST DEMANDS WE ARE ALL STRONG, I’M GETTIN’ A DIVORCE!!!”

It’s at this point in the story that grandma will usually start muttering “IF CHRIST DEMANDS THIS STRICT, I’M GETTIN’ A DIVORCE!!!”

But everyone else buys school lunch,” Jane would whine sometimes, “Why can’t I?”

“Because,” her mother would always respond, “School lunch is not nutritionally balanced, and you are not a lemming!”

So Jane just stared at her big feet clad in practical boots and saved up her allowance for school lunches, and cool shoes, and friendship bracelets. And hoped that would be enough to make her fit in, because nothing but a miracle could change her name or make her spiky hair lay flat.

Her mother would give her unusual features a once over and then sigh, “My, my, you do have character my darling.” Jane didn’t care about character. She had once seen a big white barnyard goose tagging along with a flock of sleek Canadian Geese. I’m like that, she thought, not an ugly duckling that will turn into a beautiful swan, just a big fat goose that will always stick out.

Jane was still staring at her feet as 4 A.M. rolled down her Sailor Moon clock radio. She was feeling especially sick today after going to a school dance function the previous night and being laughed right out of the dancehall. Jane’s mom didn’t believe in the decency of boys and so Jane was forced to go it alone last night, leaving her vulnerable to popular girl ridicule. Jane hadn’t stepped one foot through the dancehall doors before Krissey Derkins and her band of pre-Avon goddesses were all over her, demanding her immediate removal from the dance so it wouldn’t be ruined by her presence. Jane left in a fury of anger and sadness. She promptly came home, locked herself in her room and stayed up all night crying.

By morning she was sitting in total gloom, and feeling that there was no end to it decided to pray for a resolution to her sorrows.

“How long are you going to be unhappy?” The voice boomed in her head.

“Most of my life,” she whined, “I don’t want to be unhappy any more!”

“Please God,” she prayed, as she looked at the door to her room dreading the start to another day. “Please, I think you made a mistake somewhere... no one can possibly be meant to be as strange as me. Please, fix me.” Jane sighed, and reached for the door knob. There was never an answer. And today was just... “JANE.” A voice boomed in her head.

“Oh, God,” she swore and back peddled in panic, the last thing she needed was voices.

“YES JANE, IT IS GOD. YOU WERE RIGHT. THERE WAS A MISTAKE.”

Jane looked around frantically; she didn’t think she had been abducted by aliens. Her room looked the same, the morning sun still slanting through onto the red carpet. She glanced quickly under her bed, nope; no one with a bull horn was hiding there. Anyways she would swear that the voice echoed only in her head.

“Wha... What do you... Wait a minute, a mistake?” I knew it she thought; I was supposed to be petite and blond like the other girls.

“YES JANE, YOU WERE NOT SUPPOSED TO BE AS YOU ARE. YOU WERE SUPPOSED TO BE TWINS.”

“I was supposed to be what? Twins? There were supposed to be two of me?”

“YES JANE, TWINS, BUT MY ATTENTION WANDERED FOR A MILLISECOND AND YOU RECEIVED MORE QUIRKS THAN ANY ONE PERSON SHOULD HAVE.”

“Don’t I know it,” she complained. “Do you have any idea what it has...”
been like to live like this? My feet won’t stop growing and my hair is unmanageable!”

There was silence, “God? God, are you there?” Jane paused for a second. Maybe God wasn’t the best person to complain about unmanageable hair.

“JANE,” the voice felt more distant, like her mother would sound when she had done something particularly childish. “YOU NEED TO MAKE A CHOICE JANE.”


“THE CHOICE OF WHAT TWIN YOU WANT TO BE.”

“How?”

“LOOK AND CHOOSE, JANE.”

In front of the window floating above the carpet two transparent girls appeared. One was tall and athletic playing with a see-through soccer ball; she had green eyes, dark curly hair and a long straight nose.

I like being athletic, thought Jane. I would like to actually be good at sports.

The dark haired girl came more into focus and Jane looked at her face. She’s pretty, Jane thought, but she doesn’t really look like me.. . .

Jane glanced over at the other girl. She had blue eyes and golden blond hair, dainty delicate feet clad in pink, and she smiled slightly as she flipped through her book. One girl had green eyes, dark curly hair and a long straight nose.

“Jane, ” She’s probably really stupid; he’s never answered anyone before . . .

“THANK YOU! I NEED ONE BACK.”

Jane could feel her heart beating, thump, thump, thump. But I am smart she thought, and I am not that bad at sports either—true she did have one green eye and one blue but.

“No!” Jane said, “I won’t choose.”

“JANE.” The voice felt impatient, like a foot tapping inside of her skull.

“No, I won’t choose,” she yelled. “I won’t!” I’m like I’m meant to be, she thought, I’m better than either of these girls! I won’t choose I won’t! You can’t have one of my souls! You can’t! She cried inside her head.

Jane... “Jane, Jane... Jannabelle Articia Atticia! Wake up this instant!”

Something grabbed her shoulders.

“No!” She yelled. “You can’t have one!” She pushed violently back and SMACK...she fell and hit her head on the dresser.

“Jane what has gotten into you? You’re late! Hurry up; you probably don’t have time for breakfast. You’re going to miss your bus!”

Jane looked around the room. Her head throbbed where she had hit it on the dresser, and the rest of it felt like it had been beaten with a hammer from the inside. The girl apparitions were gone from the square of dusty red carpet. Jane realized she must have dozed off. One look from her clock told her she had less than ten minutes to get to the bus stop. Oh God, she thought. He took one of them! Jane jumped up and ran to her mirror.

“Jane you don’t have time to primp! You’re late for your bus!” Her mother scolded her.

Jane was checking her face; the hawk nose was still there, and there was one green eye and one blue. Her profile looked the same. She glanced down, yep; she still had huge feet and small hands.

“It’s me,” she said, “He didn’t take one.”

“God,” said Jane. “He said I was supposed to be twins, he wanted to take one of my souls! But he didn’t... I’m still me.”

Her mother’s face blanked. “Jane, are you feeling perfectly alright? Here, let me check your eyes. You didn’t hit your head too hard when you fell did you?”

Her mother began towards her and then stopped and squinted at her. “If you’re feeding me this God story to get out of school it’s not going to work.”

“No Mom. I just had a talk with God. We reached an understanding, I think. Where’s my bag? I’ve got to run to catch the bus.”

“But Jane!” Her mother yelled as she bolted for the stairs. “Jane, you haven’t had breakfast!”

“Mom, call me Jannabelle! Jane’s just too plain a name for a person who’s got two souls!”

“Jane, wait!” Her mother’s voice followed her out the front door.

Great, Jane thought. She’ll probably call the school and have the shrink waiting for me when I get there. She imagined the looks all of her classmates would wear as she was drug off in a straight jacket. It would be... classic.

She grinned at the thought and felt an answering whisper of humor grin within her head and then vanish. It was going to be a very good day.