

PRETTY
FUNNY
FOR A

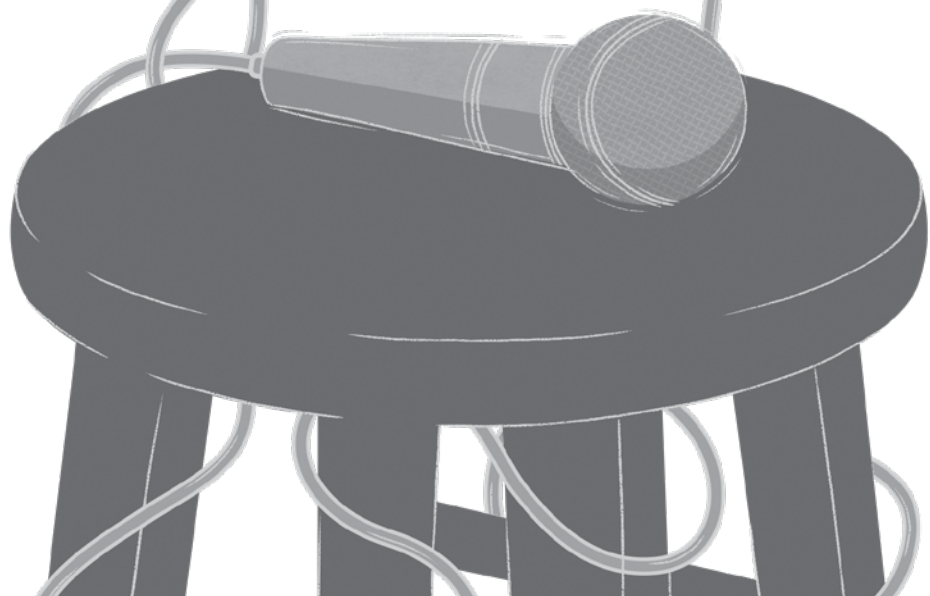
Girl

A blue microphone with a coiled cord is positioned on a dark brown stool. The cord loops around the stool and extends upwards, framing the word 'Girl' which is written in a cursive, neon-like font. The background is a red brick wall.

Rebecca Elliott

PRETTY
FUNNY
FOR A

girl



For Clementine. Always for Clementine.

—R. E.



Published by

PEACHTREE PUBLISHING COMPANY INC.

1700 Chattahoochee Avenue

Atlanta, Georgia 30318-2112

www.peachtree-online.com

Text © 2020 by Rebecca Elliott

First published in Great Britain in 2020 by Penguin Books Ltd.

First United States version published in 2020 by Peachtree Publishing Company Inc.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, or any other—except for brief quotations in printed reviews, without the prior permission of the publisher.

Printed in August 2020 by LSC Communications in Harrisonburg, VA

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

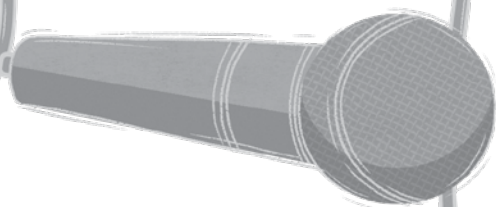
First Edition

ISBN: 978-1-68263-147-8

Cataloging-in-Publication Data is available from the Library of Congress.

PRETTY FUNNY FOR A

girl



Rebecca Elliott



PEACHTREE
ATLANTA

CHAPTER ONE

Dressed in a tight, gold, sequined, off-the-shoulder catsuit, I have my leg slung over the shoulder of Ron Weasley as we dance the salsa in front of an enthusiastic studio audience made up entirely of penguins.

Not real penguins. Penguin chocolate bars.

The dance finishes and the judges—Lady Gaga, Paddington, Winston Churchill, and Voldemort—all give us a ten. Ron Weasley kisses me on the cheek and says it's all down to me, that not only am I the best dancer, who moves across the floor like a goddess, but I'm also hilariously funny. I blush and crack a joke. The crowd howls with laughter as he drags me back onto the dance floor, and we salsa the night away.

It's possible I'm dreaming...

I'm a bit suspicious that chocolate bars aren't normally the size of people, that Winston Churchill is actually dead, that Ron Weasley's a fictional character, and that my normal body couldn't actually move like this

even if my life depended on it. But then my normal body is fat, and in this dream, as with all others, I'm not fat. I'm not thin either—I'm just me. Just the inside me, the *me* me. Although, judging by my current dream, the *me* me might not be fat but it is pretty weird and seems to have a crush on Ron Weasley that I was unaware of until now.

I try to hold on to it, but the dream floats away and rushing in to take its place is the realization that the music I've been dream-dancing to is actually my phone screaming "La Cucaracha" next to my head. It's my alarm telling me to wake up for school.

Meaning, eurgh, I actually have to get up.

Which means moving.

Which seems impossible.

Eyes still clamped shut, I concentrate all my efforts into one of my arms. It slowly rises into the air before maneuvering over to my bedside table and hovering above it. Like one of those claw machines at the arcade, I repeatedly lower my hand and grab blindly, hoping to chance upon my phone, still loudly singing the most annoying tune ever written.

Why oh why did I think that song was a good idea for an alarm? AND a ringtone. Must have thought it was funny. I'll change it later. (Except I know I won't. This exact same thing's been happening every morning for days now.)

On the bedside table, books, glasses of water, and jars of moisturizer (used only once or twice before I got bored of the whole idea of a “facial routine”) go flying until I finally locate the phone with my fingertips. I clasp it tight, trying to strangle the thing to death, then yank it toward me.

I pry open one eye just enough to squint at the time, inconceivable as it is: 6:45. No one should be awake at 6:45. It’s ridiculous. I blindly paw at the screen and eventually manage to turn off the alarm.

*
**

The next thing I know, Ron Weasley shouts my name in a high-pitched voice as he punches me in the stomach for messing up the foxtrot.

“Haylah!”

My eyes fly open as I realize it’s actually my four-year-old brother Noah who’s just jumped on my stomach to wake me up.

“Haylah! Hay... Hay... Hay!”

“Ow—Noah! What are you doing?” I mumble.

“I’m hungry! I want breakfukst!”

I make a sound halfway between a sigh and a sob as I look at my phone, still clenched in my fist. It’s 7:30. I’ve slept in. Again.

I stayed up way too late, watching comedy on the

internet. Again. Why is my midnight brain incapable of thinking, *You know what? I'll watch that next video tomorrow and go to sleep now, when I choose, rather than keep watching the next clip, and the next clip, until I slump into a coma and my phone hits me in the face.*

“Stupid midnight brain,” I groan as I hide my face back under the duvet and squirm around, trying to shift Noah off me. But, like a tiny champion rodeo rider on a bucking bull, there’s no way he’s coming off, no matter how much I thrash about or alert animal welfare organizations.

Noah giggles, loving our new “game,” so I give up the thrashing and slowly emerge from the duvet, squinting at the blinding daylight like a disgruntled tortoise woken early from hibernation by a psychotic squirrel.

“Fine, OK,” I say. “I’ll get breakfast— just get off and give me a minute, yeah?”

“Now, now, now!” he shouts as he bumps up and down on my belly.

“Ow—stop! Noah, that really hurts!”

“But it’s like a big bouncy castle!” he says, still merrily thumping up and down.

“Thanks,” I say, raising my eyebrows. Body positivity is not exactly one of my little brother’s strengths. Or perhaps it is—to him, resembling a bouncy castle *is* a body positive. After all, the ideal body to a four-year-

old *would* be bouncy or have a tail or five arms or be covered in rainbow-colored fur. It wouldn't be anything as boring as thin and beautiful.

He looks confused, but keeps bouncing. "Thank you? What for?"

"I was being sarcastic..."

Noah stops bouncing and leans his little round freckled face down toward me.

"What's 'star cat sick?'"

I prop myself up on my elbows so our noses are nearly touching. "That's a very good question, Noah," I say seriously. Then I grin. "Come on, let's get breakfast."

"Yay, break-fookst!"

A small laugh escapes through my nose. There are a few words Noah doesn't quite say right yet. Mum says we shouldn't laugh at him, but sometimes it's extremely hard not to.

"It's breakFAST," I say.

"Break-fookst!"

"No, look, try saying it slowly. Break...*fast*."

"Break...fookst."

I give up. "Yeah, that's exactly it. C'mon."

**

We plod down to the kitchen, past the toys, clothes, and books that Mum continues to optimistically pile on the

stairs for us to take to our rooms. We ignore them of course and head into the kitchen where every surface is covered with dirty dishes, pans, empty microwaveable cartons, half-eaten cans of beans and, well, you get the idea. It's a mess. And I know I should clear it up, but clearing up's just really, really boring. I'll clear it up tonight. Maybe. Except I know I probably won't. Tidying is not in my skillset, but procrastination? I'd totally win an award...if I ever got around to entering such a competition.

Look, I'll clear it up tonight, OK?

"Bring me food, woman!" says Noah, grabbing a spoon from the drawer and then sitting on his favourite chair at the kitchen table, a dark wooden thing with a bogey-green, stained velour seat pad. None of our furniture matches, and not in a trendy, eclectic way, because not only does our furniture not match any other furniture we have, it also doesn't match anyone's idea of what attractive furniture looks like.

"What do you want this morning?" I say, fumbling around in the cereal cupboard. "Cornyflakers? Rice-Krispicles? Chocopops?"

We never have the real brands of cereal, only the cheap, supermarket-brand knock-offs, but Mum insists

they come from exactly the same factory, only some get boxed for stupid rich people and the rest for smart poor people.

Noah ignores me, instead giving all his attention to his upside-down reflection in the spoon as he pulls tiny gargoyle faces at it.

“Come on, Noah—decide quickly. We’re in a bit of a rush,” I say.

Eventually, Noah shovels two “Wheaty Bixits” down his throat while I pile anything handheld and edible into his lunch box. After putting all the normal lunch-boxy stuff in, I grab a jar of Nutella, hold it up to the light, and put it in. This is one of our favorite games. We’ve not really got time, but I can’t resist.

“No!” he shouts, his spoon halfway to his mouth. “I can’t eat that!”

“No?” I say. “How about this?” And I put a potato in instead.

“Not that either!” he says, laughing, but still shoveling in the cereal.

“No? Oh, OK. These though, surely?” I say, putting in a tea bag and a couple of dishwasher tablets. He’s got the giggles now, and, by the time I prepare to sprinkle bouillon cubes over the top, he spits Wheaty Bixits across the kitchen in full-on hysterics.

“Noah!” I say, wiping up the mess. I’m not annoyed though. I love that I can make him laugh so much that cereal comes out of his nose.

“Do it again! Do it again!” he says as I wipe his face.

“No, we really haven’t got time, Noah. Come on—finish your bowl.”

I’m on a diet so I just have a yogurt.

And two pieces of toast.

And a Twix.

Then I install Noah in front of Mum’s iPad while I take a shower.

In the bathroom, I step on the scale. Then I realize I’m still wearing the T-shirt I slept in so I take that off and get back on again.

Then I realize my hair’s tied back in a scrunchy so I take that out and consider shaving my head—long hair’s got to weigh a fair bit too, right?

Then I remember long hair’s more flattering on a round face and I get back on the scales again.

Then I realize I haven’t used the bathroom yet so I sit down and squeeze out what I can and then get back on the scales again.

Then I realize I should have weighed myself *before* breakfast, not after—everyone knows that—so I figure I can probably take off around six pounds from the reading anyway.

Then I realize I ate pasta last night and they always say you shouldn't weigh yourself the morning after eating pasta as it throws the result completely off. So I ignore the reading entirely and hide the scales behind the laundry basket to stop them looking at me with their evil, judgmental glare.

While exfoliating in the shower (and surely all that exfoliated dead skin weighs a couple of extra pounds too?), I am alarmed to find a gold sticker firmly adhered to my outer right thigh. It reads MADE IN CHINA and probably came off one of Noah's toys. It takes some serious scrubbing to get it off, making me wonder how long it's been there.

Oh God, was it there last night when I went swimming?

My meddling aunt bought me an annual pass for the local swimming pool for my birthday. She said it was to help me get fit, but of course she meant it was to help me get less fat.

Now I think about it, I do remember a severe-looking middle-aged woman staring at my thighs as I got out of the pool last night. I just thought she was a weirdo, but she was probably thinking, *Good God, do the Chinese make everything now, even our fat kids?*

I guess at this point we ought to properly address the elephant in the room. The room being whichever room I'm in, and the elephant always being me.

Because elephants are fat. And so am I.

I'm not *crazy* fat though, if that's what you're thinking. I'm not the kind of fatty that inspires *TLC* documentaries or makes the news for rolling over and accidentally asphyxiating a cat and not realizing for two weeks. I'm just regular fat. Round, wobbly, that kind of thing. And I'm not one of these fatties who's all up top or all down below—nope, I'm fat all over, me. Big stomach. Big bum. And in recent times big boobs too. My norks came in around two years ago and since then my body's just been a collection of perfectly round, overlapping circles. Like a living Venn diagram or a really basic and badly drawn Spirograph pattern.

So, yeah, I've got a great rack. But even before the chesticles I've always been big. My mum used to call it “puppy fat,” but now I think even she realizes this puppy's not just for Christmas—it's for life.

The truth is, whatever I *look* like, I don't *feel* fat on the inside. Non-fat people think fat people must feel differently to them, experience the world in a different way to them, that everything we think and do must be affected by our fatness. But I feel normal (whatever “normal” is). I don't feel weighed down or like I'm wearing extra padding. I actually forget that I'm fat until I walk past a mirror or get called a name and suddenly I'm reminded, *Oh yeah, I'm fat*. And I don't

eat all the time either. Or daydream about food. Or sit and devour a cake in one sitting or binge and then starve myself.

I just get hungry. And I like to eat.

Eating quite a lot is normal to me. It's my normal. But this story isn't about my weight. So if you're thinking there's going to be a "happy ending" where I have an epiphany and become a slim, sexy, health freak who's into yoga and mung beans (they're a thing, right?) then think again, sunshine.

This is me. And these are my massive boobs.

Take us or leave us.