

Smart Cookie

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1

Headquarters, the Cookies, and the Storm

Sometimes to fix your family, you need to keep a few secrets. Even though secret keeping is not a thing that happens naturally when you live at the Greene Family B&B. So if I'm not tucked in my room under the giant Scrabble tiles that say *Frankie Greene Lives Here*, I'm in my once-fort-in-the-basement-now-headquarters with Elliot, my ghost-hunting best friend. Headquarters has rules, kind of like Dad's Greene Family B&B Rules. But here we can be barefoot, keep secrets, and experiment with food coloring. The only official rules are:

Rule # 1: Don't enter Headquarters unless invited.

Rule # 2: Standing outside Headquarters is not the same as being invited.

Rule # 3: Don't knock. We know you're out there.

Rule # 4: Headquarters is and must remain a secret to all nonmembers.

Elliot wasn't an original member but joined when he moved next door. The founders were me and Jessica Blaine. That was, of course, before Ms. Jessica Blaine became my friend-turned-not in the fourth grade. I haven't revoked her membership even though she stopped speaking to me over a year ago. Other members include my puppy, Lucy, my hedgehog, Winston, and Gram. I call them members, but really, they're more honorary guests—they can visit but can't call a meeting. Dad knows about Headquarters but is neither a member nor an honorary guest. He says it's better that way and has offered to feed all Headquarters members. Which I appreciate.

The rain beats against the windows as I grab a handful of cookies to bring down for my emergency meeting with Elliot. This morning, I texted him a Code Red—Hot Chili Peppers after I spent the night awake devising a plan and watching Winston burrow in a sock, eat two yogurt treats, and dig a hole in his shavings. I need Elliot's help.

The cookies are still melty-chips warm.