

Abigail: Reluctant Activist

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ABIGAIL: RELUCTANT ACTIVIST

First edition. July 9, 2020.

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Saguario Books, LLC
16845 E. Avenue of the Fountains, Ste. 325
Fountain Hills, AZ 85268
www.saguarobooks.com

Chapter 1

Round One - It All Begins...

Hiding in a corner bathroom stall at my high school wasn't exactly how I planned, or wanted, to start my Monday morning but sometimes sacrifices have to be made. Thanks to the paper thin walls, I was lucky enough to hear my mom as she searched for me.

"Abigail, Abigail," she screamed. Maybe everyone thought she was calling for Abigail Montgomery in the tenth grade or Abigail Peterson, a ninth grader whose mother spent her free time playing in an all-female Alabama cover band.

"Abigail Ruth Teller, where are you?"

Who am I kidding? My mom had once lectured a racist cashier for twenty minutes until the management kicked us out of the store. The cashier totally deserved it after being super nasty to the previous customer for taking too long getting her money out but, still, it only strengthened my belief she is probably a secret banshee—an avenging, principled banshee. *I wonder if banshee genes would be dominant or recessive...*

It probably would be dominant in me. Grams, my dad's mom, is a longtime activist, my dad is a progressive political blogger and my southern belle mom is surprisingly, or luckily, a kick-ass progressive, as well.

It seems there is no escaping my destiny as an outspoken, opinionated... *well, there is probably a better word than banshee such as Amazon or warrior, although I still have my suspicions about Mom's banshee blood.*

The only problem is Mom also likes to lead the charge for issues at my school I can handle myself. *I may only be sixteen but I can speak up for myself. My friends would probably say I speak too much but I like to think I am just passionate.* I know Mom just wants to help but I'm sure the principal, for the year he's been here, has developed a flight response to her fight. Mom's visits to the new principal on my older sister Mel's behalf were because Mel always seems to be blamed for things not her fault or at least things she claims are not her fault.

I shook my head to clear my thoughts and hopped off the toilet seat. Hiding wasn't really my thing. Plus the smell was starting to get to me and

it's not as if, when I passed out we had a nurse I could go to, thanks to the new budget cuts.

I emerged from the stall and glanced in the mirror. I brushed my shoulder-length, light brown hair out of my face, straightened my back and walked out the bathroom door right into my mother.

"I've been looking for you everywhere, Abigail. We meet the principal in five minutes."

I rolled my eyes in an ingrained response to her tone and sighed. "I still don't know why you came for this. I'm pretty sure your presence is just going to scare him to death again. I also told you I can totally handle this. We even practiced so I don't see why you have to come to the meeting with me."

"I'm here for moral support," she said. "If my presence happens to make him nervous, that's just a bonus. It can give you even more of an edge. I promise you'll be the one handling this."

I don't want to say Principal Schumacher is my mom's nemesis because I don't use that word lightly and because my mom has never had a nemesis who wasn't someone in politics but I think it's safe to say she believes he is unqualified to be principal. Most of the school, including the teachers, would probably agree with her. Principal Schumacher was only about thirty years old and has spent maybe a year in an actual classroom. He's also from Connecticut, which means some of the more strident Texans have nicknamed him "Yankee." Word in the halls was his wife is the daughter of the president of the school board, which explained his total ineptness.

I followed my mom through the halls into the principal's office. Mrs. Dias, his secretary, smiled delightedly when she saw us. I'm fairly sure she's not a fan of the principal either. She got up, knocked on the principal's office door and informed him we were here to see him.

The principal stood to greet us with his back rigidly straight, his head held high and his chin thrust out but his right hand shook as he held it out to my mom. "Mrs. Teller. Good to see you again."

I somehow held in my snort of laughter, successfully. As I walked in, I felt my mother following very closely behind.

I turned, gave a bit of a smile and, with a thrust of my chin, indicated the chairs in the waiting room.

With a pained look in her eyes, she gracefully said, "I guess I'm just a spectator today," She turned and settled into one of the main office seats

next to Mrs. Dias's desk. Mr. Schumacher immediately slumped in relief, his customary smirk once again overtaking his face.

Mr. Schumacher shook my hand. "Miss Teller. I guess it's just the two of us, come on in."

I followed him into the office, turning to give a brief look at my mother. She shot me a smile and an encouraging nod. I gave it three minutes before she convinced Mr. Dias to let her put a cup up to the door so she could listen in.

It was my first time in the principal's office by myself. My mom and I had been there my freshman year but she had handled all of the talking. This time I was all alone. I sat in one of the chairs across from Mr. Schumacher's desk, making sure to straighten my back and clasp my hands together to ease the slight shaking.

"What exactly can I do for you, Miss Teller?" Mr. Schumacher asked.

I leapt immediately into my practiced speech regarding the recent school cuts. The gist of it was that it wasn't only my school but other schools throughout the district in which nurses' jobs had been cut. They decided teachers could be taught to supervise diabetics. Most of my teachers are great but they don't have superpowers, except Mr. Turner. My friend Chelsea and I are convinced he has super-powered vision. Once he saw Chelsea's cell phone through her hoodie.

I am lucky. Five years after my diagnosis, I can take care of everything myself: testing my blood sugar, handling lows and highs and figuring out how much insulin to take before meals. I can even put in my own infusion sets.

Throughout my speech, Mr. Schumacher kept only vaguely nodding. When I finished, he shook his head slightly.

"I still don't understand what you want from me, Miss Teller."

My mom had coached me on this. "Well, I have a 504 federally required health care plan so I should have a nurse available for me. That's just one of the things I need, as well as more teachers trained. Texas law allows that but only one is available and it should be three, in case the others aren't around."

"I'm sorry, Miss Teller but we don't have the funds for that."

My mom knew he would say that. *One very important fact about mom is she is never underprepared. Over prepared is a different story. We even have four fire extinguishers in our house.* We had done everything required

by the state of Texas for a student with diabetes and Mom knew exactly what the state required from the school. Her being a child psychologist usually meant she could guess what others would say.

We had provided my required health care plan at the beginning of the year but with no nurse and no coordinator and only one of the three required volunteer trained diabetes care people in place, my needs had not been met. I was denied a bathroom break, was unable to keep food or water with me during a test and was shooed out of the classroom when I went to test my blood.

Even by Texas law, none of those things should have happened.

Isn't the principal supposed to help the students? It seems as if all he does is cut needed resources. The only reason he probably knows my name is because of my mom. He still calls my friend Reina, Jeana, even after she has corrected him three times.

I attempted to channel my mom's self-assured tone. "Mr. Schumacher, you're basically the healthcare coordinator now and I am not getting any of the things the law says I'm supposed to have. Without these things, I and the other diabetics could have serious problems."

As if to prove the point, my pump alarm sent out a sharp ring.

My immediate reaction was dismay. *Oh no, it's right before lunch, when my blood sugar can make a fast descent and this is the worst time to have any important meetings.* I looked down and saw 90 blood sugar, which looked fine, except it was right next to double arrows going down. Mr. Schumacher was glaring, no doubt thinking it was my cell phone ringing, though no self-respecting teenager has an old-school ringtone any more.

The office door suddenly swung open, as my mom rushed in. Her face was drained of color, as she knew exactly what that sound meant. Sometimes she would forget I'm old enough to handle these things and she rushed headlong into "protect the wounded bird" mode.

She turned her attention to me immediately and said, "Test. Now."

Although that was exactly what I was already doing, I took the time to turn and say, "Thanks but I totally have this covered,"

Before Mr. Schumacher could react, the meter was out of my purse on the table between us and I had slipped a strip in the meter and reached for the lancet finger pricker. Bull's eye. I lanced my finger, sending a bubble of blood onto the surface, which I gathered on the test strip and in three seconds the results were in. My real number was 70. As often happens, the

blood kept oozing a bit, sending an extra little drip that was absorbed in the piece of tissue I use to stop the bleeding. Testing wasn't for the faint of heart.

Speaking of "the faint of heart," I glanced up to see the principal had his hands over his eyes and his jaw was still descending. He also turned slightly green.

"Young lady, should you be doing that in my office?" he asked incredulously.

My mom pivoted and said yes emphatically. "That is exactly why she is sitting here in your office. My daughter's blood sugar is 70. That is not the time I want her walking miles to a specified place to test."

I couldn't say that much as I was busy grabbing for the glucose tabs and chomping them down so my mouth was a little full and truthfully, as usual when running low, I was not as able to concentrate on the discussion going on around me. Self-preservation rules when you're low and I was on autopilot. As often happens when blood sugar drops quickly, I hadn't felt any sign this was coming; only now did I begin to feel the familiar jitters and shakiness

I think even Schumacher could tell I was not as focused as usual and my mother immediately took the opportunity to say this was a perfect demonstration of why Texas and federal laws allowed either a little extra time on tests or a makeup test if we are too low or too high to be able to do our best. It's hard enough doing well on tests, especially when you want to get into a good college but when your blood sugar is all over the place, even with a pump, you're screwed.

As my focus slowly returned, I sighed inwardly at my mom's effective take over. Yes, I had a slight emergency but that just meant I needed a couple of minutes to regroup. It didn't mean my mom needed to take over. Even worse, the principal seemed to be taking her a lot more seriously than he had me. It wasn't fair. This was supposed to be my meeting.

I jumped back into the conversation in time to help my mom finish up my list of "must haves," which included three volunteers available who would have to be trained to help when needed and, most important to me, someone to travel with the debate team. The list continued with a complete carbohydrate count for school foods because let's face it, garbage info entered into my pump wizard might mean an emergency room visit to follow.

We talked for a little bit about the standardized tests coming up and the possible modifications needed; Schumacher agreed to it all. Really, it's not as if he had much of a choice, considering both state and federal laws were against him so we could sue the school.

My mom had her "I-just-took-you-down" grin on her face, as she shook Mr. Schumacher's hand and thanked him for being so helpful. He merely nodded up and down akin to a marionette, still looking somewhat in shock. My mom often has that effect on people.

Mrs. Dias gave us an enthusiastic thumbs-up as we left the office. When in the hall, my mom tried to give me a high-five, which we had to do instead of a hug or kiss. No PDA allowed in school, which really was more my rule. After years of practice, my Mom knew the rules.

I kept my hands at my side and gave my mom a disgruntled look. Yes, we had won, but my mom had barged her way in and taken over once again.

My mom sighed loudly. "Abigail, you were doing a great job but you can't expect me to just sit by and do nothing when your pump alarm starts ringing."

"I've handled it before and I'll handle it again. What do you think I do at school or any other time when you're not around? What do you think you can do when I go to college in two years? They don't let parents room with the students so I have to learn to do everything myself."

"I like to pretend it doesn't happen if I'm not there to help," my mom said, with a slight attempt at humor. "I'm sorry I took over your meeting but, hey, at least we won, right? Now I won't have to worry so much about you coming here every day without the proper assistance in place."

"I guess," I said reluctantly. That was the most important thing, after all and Mom had been willing to let me do it alone.

Mom held up her hand again and eyed me beseechingly. I smiled reluctantly and returned the high-five, trying to push aside my remaining resentment.

Thankfully, the bell rang for lunch, cutting short the possibility of any more conversation. I waved my mom off, turning to push my way through hordes of hungry students to get to the cafeteria to eat my much needed food and discuss my—our—victory with my best friends.

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