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The Red Blazer Girls: The Mistaken Masterpiece

By Michael D. Beil



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The perfect series for kids who loved THE LEMONADE WAR series and are ready for more mysteries!

"With wit, cunning, snappy dialogue and superior math skills, *The Red Blazer Girls* represent the best of girl-detectives while still feeling relatable and real. Nancy Drew would be right at home with this group." -- *Huffington Post's* 15 Greatest Kid Detectives List

Sophie, Margaret, Becca, and Leigh Ann are back in an all-new Red Blazer Girls caper. In the third installment, Sophie is nose to fist with her arch-rival, Livvy, all while taking care of movie-star Nate Etan's dog, when Father Julian hires the Blazers to help him authenticate a painting. Mayhem and mystery follows as the girls attempt to uncover the truth. Oh, and, uh, Sophie's friend-who-is-not-a-boyfriend, Raf, is back. . . .

Michael Beil, a New York City high school English teacher and life-long mystery fan, delivers a middle-grade caper that's perfect for middle-grade readers who have finished THE LEMONADE WAR series and are ready for more advanced mysteries!

From the Hardcover edition.



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Editorial Review

About the Author

MICHAEL D. BEIL teaches English at a Catholic high school in New York City. But lest anyone peg him as a mere mild-mannered academic, it should be noted that Mike and his wife are also intrepid hikers. This is the third installment in his Red Blazer Girls series for Knopf.

From the Hardcover edition.

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Chapter 1

Trust me, I thought it was a non-contact sport, too.

I glide through the water after a picture-perfect flip turn, the muscles in my arms and shoulders grateful for those two seconds of rest before my face bursts through the surface. With fifty meters to go and a comfortable lead, I could relax and cruise to the finish, but that's just not me. I'm not about to let a little discomfort get in the way of a personal best time in the 400 individual medley, so I come out of the turn and start the final lap with arms and legs churning. The last twenty meters feel like I'm swimming in oatmeal, and when I finally touch the wall, every molecule in my body is aching and I am struggling to get enough air in my lungs.

My swim coach, Michelle, is standing over me, smiling at the stopwatch in her hand. She bends down, holding it closer for me to see, but the chlorine in my eyes makes it hard for me to focus.

"Good?" I ask, squinting.

"Nope. Grrr-eat. You broke your own record by almost three seconds."

In the lane to my left, my teammate Olivia "Livvy" Klack touches the wall and lifts her perky, perfect nose to face Michelle.

"Nice job, Liv," I say, trying to be friendly. "Thought you were going to pass me in the backstroke." Of the four strokes in the 400 IM--butterfly, back, breast, and freestyle--the backstroke has always been my weakest, and it is Livvy's strongest.

Livvy doesn't even bother to look at me. She just kind of grunts and swims away, ducking under the lane markers to go talk to her friends, who are still finishing.

"What is with you two?" Michelle asks.

"Long story," I say.

And it is. For now, let me just say that while the Red Blazer Girls--that's me and my three best friends, Margaret Wrobel, Rebecca Chen, and Leigh Ann Jaimes--were busy solving the Mystery of the Vanishing

Violin, we had a little run-in with Livvy and her friends. I know it sounds incredibly juvenile, but she started it. It's not my fault she picked a fight with four girls who are smart, stubborn, and not at all above a little revenge if the situation requires it. It did. So we did. And while she used to just ignore me, she now appears to be embracing an active hatred of me.

It's our last practice before our first meet, which is against a team from Westchester that has been together for years and is rumored to be really tough. We, on the other hand, have only been practicing at the pool at Asphalt Green, on the Upper East Side of Manhattan, for a month. When I was nine and ten, I was on another of Michelle's junior swim teams, but I took a year off from the sport to concentrate on school and the guitar. Funny thing, though. It turns out there is enough time in the day to swim, too, if you're willing to get up at five in the morning. Margaret is still amazed that I'm doing it; after all, I used to grumble and be grouchy all day whenever she decided we absolutely needed an early start on the mystery of the moment and called me at six o'clock. After a few weeks of getting up at five, six is a slice o' strudel.

Michelle gives the stragglers a minute to catch their breath and then turns us all loose for our final cooldown swim--800 meters, alternating between back- and breaststroke. She assigns the center lane to Livvy and me because we're usually fairly well matched, speed-wise. The idea in sharing a lane is like driving a car--always stay to the right--which sounds simple, but nobody can backstroke in a straight line, so we're always running into each other.

When Michelle gives the signal, Livvy and I dive in from opposite ends of the pool. Even though I am definitely not slacking off, Livvy starts to creep up on me almost immediately. Each time we pass by each other, I get a whiff of pure intensity that overpowers the smell of the chlorine. I'll admit it--that all-out 400 took a lot out of me, and I am too tired to get into some weird grudge match with her in what is supposed to be a cooldown swim.

With two laps to go, she is still gaining on me, and Michelle shouts at me to hold her off over the last hundred meters. I groan to myself, but push hard off the wall before starting my breaststroke. When my face breaks through the surface, Livvy is right in front of me, backstroking like some kind of demented propeller-zombie.

"Livvy!" I shout, hoping to prevent a collision.

She veers right, arms still spinning madly, and the heel of her right hand karate-chops me right smack on the nose.

Direct hit. And instantly, the pool looks like a scene from Jaws--there is blood everywhere and Michelle is shouting at me to get out of the pool. Which I would be happy to do if only I could see something besides a gazillion stars. I feel someone's arms around me, dragging me to the side, where several more hands reach down and yank me out of the water.

Like most kids, I've taken a few direct hits to the noggin from soccer balls, but they were nothing compared to what is happening to my face as they lay me down on the pool deck and tilt my head back.

Michelle's first words: "Oh my God."

Not exactly encouraging.

"Sophie, we're going to have to take you to the emergency room. She really whacked you, and you probably

need to be checked out for concussion. And . . . um . . . I think your nose is broken."

Not my nose! I love my nose. It's not perky like Livvy's; it's kind of a miniature version of my dad's classic French schnoz. Some people (small-nosed, small-minded people, most likely) might think it's too big. Personally, I prefer to think of it as having a little character.

I reach up to touch it. Big mistake.

"Owwwww!" I scream.

From the Hardcover edition.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Michael Scott:

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