

fireplace smoke, might be disappointed if she knew Ramona had given her Q ears and whiskers, because lettering was different from drawing pictures.

Ramona loved Miss Binney so much she did not want to disappoint her. Not ever. Miss Binney was the nicest teacher in the whole world.

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Before long Mrs. Quimby and Mrs. Kemp decided the time had come for Ramona and Howie to walk to school by themselves. Mrs. Kemp, pushing Willa Jean in her stroller, walked Howie to the Quimbys' house where Ramona's mother invited her in for a cup of coffee.

"You better put all your stuff away," Howie advised Ramona, as his mother lifted his

little sister out of the stroller. "Willa Jean crawls around and chews things."

Grateful for this advice, Ramona closed the door of her room.

"Now Howie, you be sure to look both ways before you cross the street," cautioned his mother.

"You, too, Ramona," said Mrs. Quimby.

"And be sure you walk. And walk on the sidewalk. Don't go running out in the street."

"And cross between the white lines," said Mrs. Kemp.

"And wait for the traffic boy near the school," said Mrs. Quimby.

"And don't talk to strangers," said Mrs. Kemp.

Ramona and Howie, weighed down by the responsibility of walking themselves to school, trudged off down the street. Howie was even gloomier than usual, because he was the only boy in the morning kindergarten

who wore jeans with only one hip pocket. All the other boys had two hip pockets.

"That's silly," said Ramona, still inclined to be impatient with Howie. If Howie did not like his jeans, why didn't he make a great big noisy fuss about them?

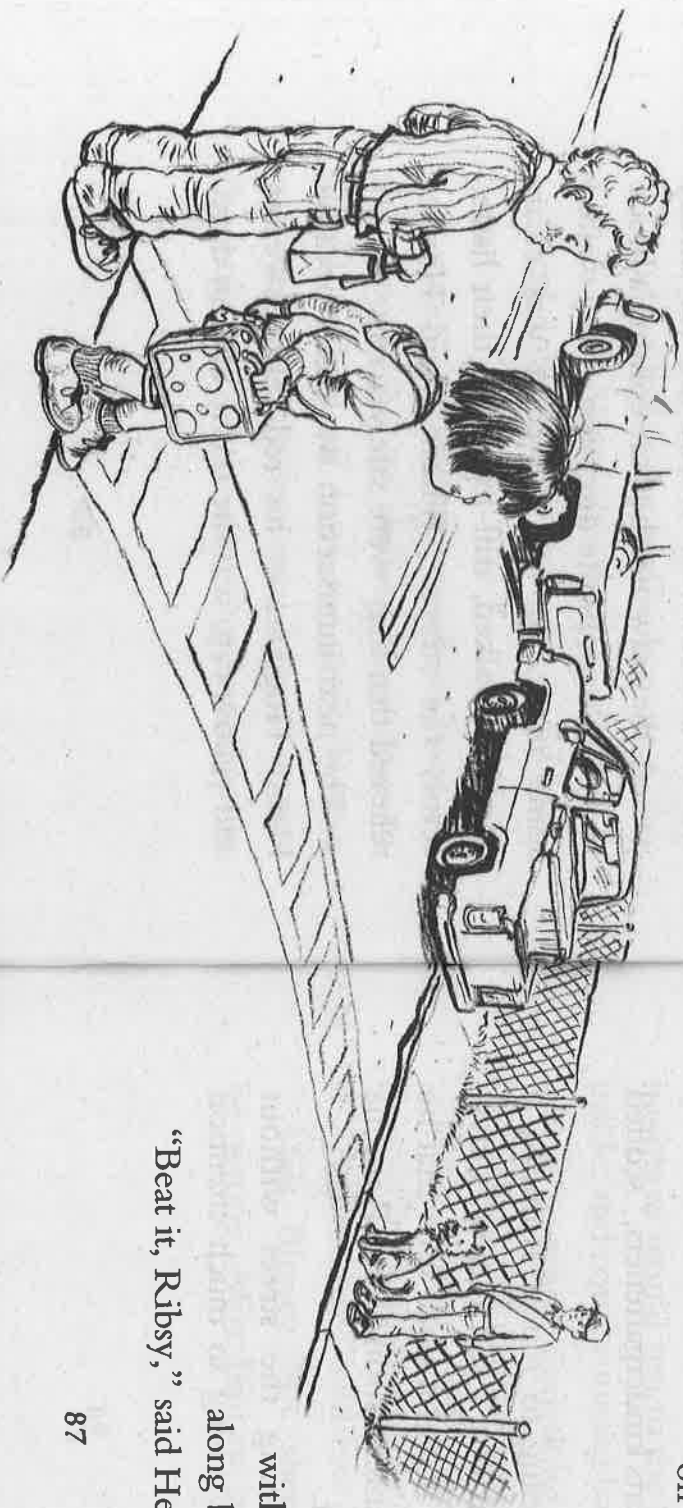
"No, it isn't," contradicted Howie. "Jeans with one hip pocket are babyish."

At the cross street Ramona and Howie stopped and looked both ways. They saw a car coming a block away so they waited. They waited and waited. When the car finally passed, they saw another car coming a block away in the opposite direction. They waited some more. At last the coast was clear, and they walked, stiff-legged in their haste, across the street. "Whew!" said Howie, relieved that they were safely across.

The next intersection was easier because Henry Huggins, in his red traffic sweater and yellow cap, was the traffic boy on duty.

Ramona was not awed by Henry even though he often got to hold up cement and lumber trucks delivering material for the market that was being built across from the school. She had known Henry and his dog Ribsy as long as she could remember, and she admired Henry because not only was he a traffic boy, he also delivered papers.

Now Ramona looked at Henry, who was standing with his feet apart and his hands clasped behind his back. Ribsy was



sitting beside him as if he were watching traffic, too. Just to see what Henry would do, Ramona stepped off the curb.

“You get back on the curb, Ramona,” Henry ordered above the noise of the construction on the corner.

Ramona set one foot back on the curb.

“All the way, Ramona,” said Henry.

Ramona stood with both heels on the curb, but her toes out over the gutter. Henry could not say she was not standing on the curb, so he

merely glared.

When several boys and girls were waiting to cross the street, Henry marched across with Ribsy prancing along beside him.

“Beat it, Ribsy,” said Henry between his

teeth. Ribsy paid no attention.

Directly in front of Ramona Henry executed a sharp about-face like a real soldier. Ramona marched behind Henry, stepping as close to his sneakers as she could. The other children laughed.

On the opposite curb Henry tried to execute another military about-face, but instead he tripped over Ramona. "Dog-gone you, Ramona," he said angrily. "If you don't cut that out I'm going to report you."

"Nobody reports kindergarteners," scoffed an older boy.

"Well, I'm going to report Ramona if she doesn't cut it out," said Henry. Obviously Henry felt it was his bad luck that he had to guard an intersection where Ramona crossed the street.

Between crossing the street without a grown-up and getting so much attention

from Henry, Ramona felt that her day was off to a good start. However, as she and Howie approached the kindergarten building, she saw at once that something was wrong. The door to the kindergarten was already open. No one was playing on the jungle gym. No one was running around the playground. No one was even waiting in line by the door. Instead the boys and girls were huddled in groups like frightened mice. They all looked worried and once in a while someone who appeared to be acting brave would run to the open door, peer inside, and come running back to one of the groups to report something.

"What's the matter?" asked Ramona.

"Miss Binney isn't there," whispered Susan. "It's a different lady."

"A substitute," said Eric R.

Miss Binney not there! Susan must be wrong. Miss Binney had to be there.

Kindergarten would not be kindergarten without Miss Binney. Ramona ran to the door to see for herself. Susan was right. Miss Binney was not there. The woman who was busy at Miss Binney's desk was taller and older. She was as old as a mother. Her dress was brown and her shoes were sensible.

Ramona did not like what she saw at all, so she ran back to a cluster of boys and girls. "What are we going to do?" she asked, feeling as if she had been deserted by Miss Binney. For her teacher to go home and not come back was not right.

"I think I'll go home," said Susan.

Ramona thought this idea was babyish of Susan. She had seen what happened to boys and girls who ran home from kindergarten. Their mothers marched them right straight back again, that's what happened. No, going home would not do.

"I bet the substitute won't even know the rules of our kindergarten," said Howie. The children agreed. Miss Binney said following the rules of their kindergarten was important. How could this stranger know what the rules were? A stranger would not even know the names of the boys and girls. She might get them mixed up.

Still feeling that Miss Binney was disloyal to stay away from school, Ramona made up her mind she was not going into that kindergarten room with that strange teacher. Nobody could make her go in there. But where could she go? She could not go home, because her mother would march her back. She could not go into the main building of Glenwood School, because everyone would know a girl her size belonged out in the kindergarten. She had to hide, but where?

When the first bell rang, Ramona knew

she did not have much time. There was no place to hide on the kindergarten playground, so she slipped around behind the little building and joined the boys and girls who were streaming into the red-brick building.

"Kindergarten baby!" a first grader shouted at Ramona.

"Pieface!" answered Ramona with spirit. She could see only two places to hide—behind the bicycle racks or behind a row of trash cans. Ramona chose the trash cans. As the last children entered the building she got down on her hands and knees and crawled into the space between the cans and the red-brick wall.

The second bell rang. "Hup, two, three, four! Hup, two, three, four!" The traffic boys were marching back from their posts at the intersections near the school. Ramona crouched motionless on the asphalt. "Hup, two, three, four!" The traffic boys, heads

up, eyes front, marched past the trash cans and into the building. The playground was quiet, and Ramona was alone.

Henry's dog Ribsy, who had followed the traffic boys as far as the door of the school, came trotting over to check the odors of the trash cans. He put his nose down to the ground and whiffled around the cans while Ramona crouched motionless with the rough asphalt digging into her knees. Ribsy's busy nose led him around the can face to face with Ramona.

"Wuff!" said Ribsy.

"Ribsy, go away!" ordered Ramona in a whisper.

"R-r-r-wuff!" Ribsy knew Ramona was not supposed to be behind the trash cans.

"You be quiet!" Ramona's whisper was as ferocious as she could make it. Over in the kindergarten the class began to sing the song about the dawnzer. At least the strange

woman knew that much about kindergarten. After the dawnzer song the kindergarten was quiet. Ramona wondered if the teacher knew that Show and Tell was supposed to come next. She strained her ears, but she could not hear any activity in the little building.

The space between the brick wall and the trash cans began to feel as cold as a refrigerator to Ramona in her thin sweater. The asphalt dug into her knees, so she sat down with her feet straight out toward Ribsy's nose. The minutes dragged by.

Except for Ribsy, Ramona was lonely. She leaned against the chill red bricks and felt sorry for herself. Poor little Ramona, all alone except for Ribsy, behind the trash cans. Miss Binney would be sorry if she knew what she had made Ramona do. She would be sorry if she knew how cold and lonesome Ramona was. Ramona felt so sorry for the poor shivering little child behind the

trash cans that one tear and then another slid down her cheeks. She sniffed pitifully. Ribsy opened one eye and looked at her before he closed it again. Not even Henry's dog cared what happened to her.

After a while Ramona heard the kindergarten running and laughing outside. How disloyal everyone was to have so much fun when Miss Binney had deserted her class. Ramona wondered if the kindergarten missed her and if anyone else would chase Davy and try to kiss him. Then Ramona must have dozed off, because the next thing she knew recess time had come and the playground was swarming with shouting, yelling, ball-throwing older boys and girls. Ribsy was gone. Stiff with cold, Ramona hunched down as low as she could. A ball bounced with a bang against a trash can. Ramona shut her eyes and hoped that if she could not see anyone, no one could see her.

Footsteps came running toward the ball. "Hey!" exclaimed a boy's voice. "There's a little kid hiding back here!"

Ramona's eyes flew open. "Go away!" she said fiercely to the strange boy, who was peering over the cans at her.

"What are you hiding back there for?" asked the boy.

"Go away!" ordered Ramona.

"Hey, Huggins!" yelled the boy. "There's a little kid back here who lives over near you!"

In a moment Henry was peering over the trash cans at Ramona. "What are you doing there?" he demanded. "You're supposed to be in kindergarten."

"You mind your own business," said Ramona.

Naturally when two boys peered behind the trash cans, practically the whole school had to join them to see what was so interesting. "What's she doing?" people asked. "How come she's hiding?" "Does her teacher

know she's here?"

In the midst of all the excitement, Ramona felt a new discomfort.

"Find her sister," someone said. "Get Beatrice. She'll know what to do."

No one had to find Beezus. She was already there. "Ramona Geraldine Quimby!" she said. "You come out of there this minute!"

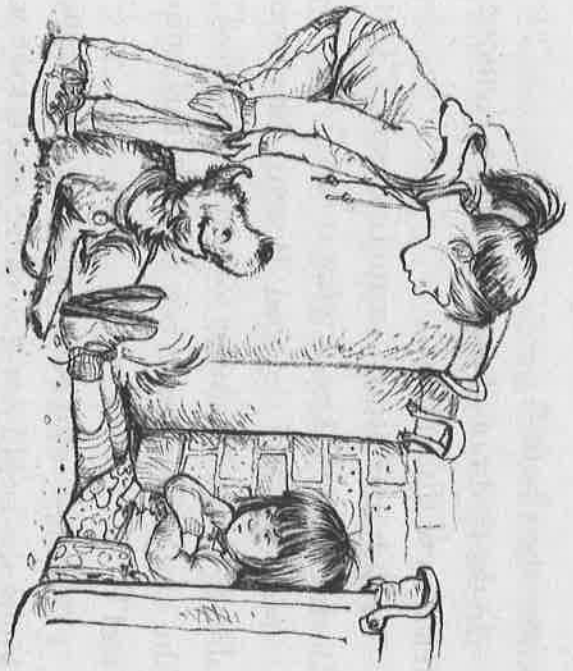
"I won't," said Ramona, even though she knew she could not stay there much longer.

"Ramona, you just wait until Mother hears about this!" stormed Beezus. "You're really going to catch it!"

Ramona knew that Beezus was right, but catching it from her mother was not what was worrying her at the moment.

"Here comes the yard teacher," someone said.

Ramona had to admit defeat. She got to her hands and knees and then to her feet and faced the crowd across the trash-can lids



as the yard teacher came to investigate the commotion.

"Don't you belong in kindergarten?" the yard teacher asked.

"I'm not going to go to kindergarten," said Ramona stubbornly, and cast an anguished glance at Beezus.

"She's supposed to be in kindergarten," said Beezus, "but she needs to go to the bathroom." The older boys and

girls thought this remark was funny, which made Ramona so angry she wanted to cry. There was nothing funny about it at all, and if she didn't hurry—

The yard teacher turned to Beezus. "Take her to the bathroom and then to the principal's office. She'll find out what the trouble is."

The first words were a relief to Ramona, but the second a shock. No one in the morning kindergarten had ever been sent to Miss Mullen's office in the big building, except to deliver a note from Miss Binney, and then the children went in pairs, because the errand was such a scary one. "What will the principal do to me?" Ramona asked, as Beezus led her away to the girls' bathroom in the big building.

"I don't know," said Beezus. "Talk to you, I guess, or call Mother. Ramona, why did you have to go and do a dumb thing like hiding behind the trash cans?"

"Because." Ramona was cross since Beezus

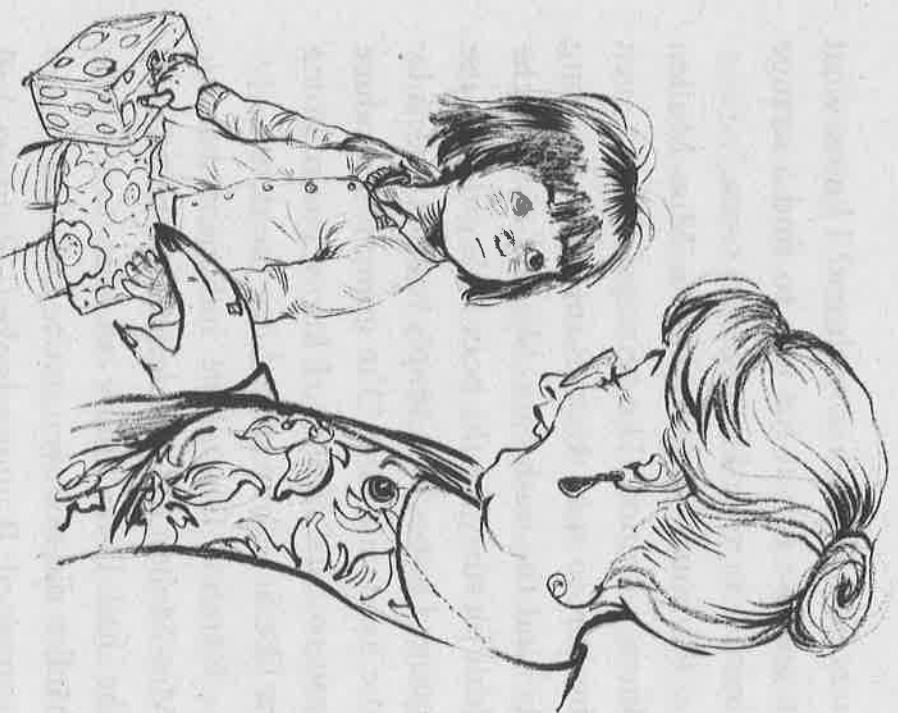
was so cross. When the girls came out of the bathroom, Ramona reluctantly allowed herself to be led into the principal's office, where she felt small and frightened even though she tried not to show it.

"This is my little sister Ramona," Beezus explained to Miss Mullen's secretary in the outer office. "She belongs in kindergarten, but she's been hiding behind the trash cans."

Miss Mullen must have overheard, because she came out of her office. Frightened though she was, Ramona braced herself to say, I won't go back to kindergarten!

"Why, hello, Ramona," said Miss Mullen. "That's all right, Beatrice. You may go back to your class. I'll take over."

Ramona wanted to stay close to her sister, but Beezus walked out of the office, leaving her alone with the principal, the most important person in the whole school. Ramona felt small and pitiful with her knees still



marked where the asphalt had gouged her. Miss Mullen smiled, as if Ramona's behavior was of no particular importance, and said, "Isn't it too bad Miss Binney had to

stay home with a sore throat? I know what a surprise it was for you to find a strange teacher in your kindergarten room."

Ramona wondered how Miss Mullen knew so much. The principal did not even bother to ask what Ramona was doing behind the trash cans. She did not feel the least bit sorry for the poor little girl with the gouged knees. She simply took Ramona by the hand, and said, "I'm going to introduce you to Mrs. Wilcox. I know you're going to like her," and started out the door.

Ramona felt a little indignant, because Miss Mullen did not demand to know why she had been hiding all that time. Miss Mullen did not even notice how forlorn and tearstained Ramona looked. Ramona had been so cold and lonely and miserable that she thought Miss Mullen should show some interest. She had half expected the principal to say, *Why* you poor little thing! *Why* were

you hiding behind the trash cans?

The looks on the faces of the morning kindergarten, when Ramona walked into the room with the principal, made up for Miss Mullen's lack of concern. Round eyes, open mouths, faces blank with surprise—Ramona was delighted to see the whole class staring at her from their seats. *They* were worried about her. *They* cared what had happened to her.

"Ramona, this is Miss Binney's substitute, Mrs. Wilcox," said Miss Mullen. To the substitute she said, "Ramona is a little late this morning." That was all. Not a word about how cold and miserable Ramona had been. Not a word about how brave she had been to hide until recess.

"I'm glad you're here, Ramona," said Mrs. Wilcox, as the principal left. "The class is drawing with crayons. What would you like to draw?"

Here it was seat-work time, and Mrs. Wilcox was not even having the class do real seat work, but was letting them draw pictures as if this day were the first day of kindergarten. Ramona was most disapproving. Things were not supposed to be this way. She looked at Howie scrubbing away with a blue crayon to make a sky across the top of his paper and at Davy, who was drawing a man whose arms seemed to come out of his ears. They were busy and happy drawing whatever they pleased.

"I would like to make Q's," said Ramona on sudden inspiration.

"Make use of what?" asked Mrs. Wilcox, holding out a sheet of drawing paper.

Ramona had been sure all along that the substitute could not be as smart as Miss Binney, but at least she expected her to know what the letter Q was. All grown-ups were supposed to know Q. "Nothing," Ramona said, as she accepted the paper and,

pleasantly self-conscious under the awed stares of the kindergarten, went to her seat. At last Ramona was free to draw her Q her own way. Forgetting the loneliness and discomfort of the morning, she drew a most satisfying row of Q's, Ramona-style, and decided that having a substitute teacher was not so bad after all.



Mrs. Wilcox wandered up and down the aisle looking at pictures. "Why, Ramona," she said, pausing by Ramona's desk, "what charming little cats you've drawn! Do you have kittens at home?"

Ramona felt sorry for poor Mrs. Wilcox, a grown-up lady teacher who did not know Q. "No," she answered. "Our cat is a boy cat."