

Chapter One

The Hair-Puller

Hi! My name is Penelope Pearl Pumpernickel, but my friends call me

“Penny” for short. When my mama is in a good mood, she calls me “Penny Pump.” I like that, don’t you? But when I’m in trouble, she yells, “Penelope Pearl Pumpernickel!” in that tone of voice that tells me I’m in BIG trouble. I don’t like that!

I also don’t like my middle name of Pearl. But my daddy says he picked that middle name for me because I am as precious as the pearl of great price. When I asked him what the pearl of great price was, he told me it’s a story in the Bible that tells us that Jesus thinks every person is more precious than the most valuable pearl in the whole world.

So, I guess I’m Pretty Precious. How do you like that alliteration? In fact, my whole name is alliterative. That means the first letters all have the same sound: Penelope Pearl Pumpernickel. P-P-P.

My daddy often tells me that I’m precocious—which means smart for my age. And my mama tells me I’m a problem-solver, although sometimes I wonder. There have been so many problems I couldn’t solve. Anyway, now I can add two more P’s to my alliteration chain: Penelope Pearl Pumpernickel: Precocious Problem-Solver. Wow! That’s a mouthful of P’s, isn’t it?

Some people don’t know how to pronounce my name. They call me Pen-A-Lope, to rhyme with hope. But if you want to know how to pronounce my first name, you can remember it like this: PEN + L + O + P = PENELOPE. Just say the word “pen” and then the letters L, O, and P in that order. There you have it!

Another thing about me is that I am eight years old, and I am a homeschooler. That means I go to school at home. My mama is my teacher. Every day, I get up at seven o’clock, wash my face, brush my teeth, and get dressed. Then I read my Bible and talk to Jesus for a while. Then I go downstairs to have breakfast.

After breakfast, I go to our homeschool room where Mama starts the lessons for the day. Recently, Mama gave me a delightful book to read. It’s called *The Phantom Tollbooth*, and it’s all about words. I love words!

Just because I go to school at home doesn't mean I don't have to work hard. Actually, I think I work harder than my friends who go to school away from home. But that's just my opinion.

Every Thursday, Mama and I go to our Homeschool Consortium. Consortium means group, so if you can't remember that big word, just think of it as our Homeschool Group. As for me, I like the word Consortium. I call it our Cool Consortium—or CC. Hey! Another alliteration to add to my list!

Speaking of our Homeschool Consortium, there is a boy in our group who is a thorn in my flesh. I first learned that phrase while reading my Bible. A thorn in the flesh is someone who annoys you. This boy in my Homeschool Consortium annoys me immensely because he teases me every time I see him. Tilly Mendoza, my BFF—that means *Best Friend Forever*—says he teases me because he likes me. But I'm not so sure.

Anyway, his name is Grandville Ungerleider. I want to call him by his full name when he teases me, just as Mama calls me by my full name when I'm in trouble. But since his name takes forever to say, I call him "Grandy" for short.

When I try to pronounce his whole name, my tongue trips over it. (Haha! Tongue trips. Another alliteration!)

Grandy started coming to Consortium last year. His father died last year, too, so he and his mother moved to our town because Grandy's grandmother lives here. It must be awful to have your father die when you're still a kid. Maybe that's the reason Grandy is always creating problems. Maybe creating problems keeps him from thinking about his father.

Anyway, one day, I was minding my own business at the lunch table, eating the nourishing lunch Mama had made for me. I had a peanut butter and grape jelly sandwich on two slices of whole grain bread, a bag of carrot slices, and a little box of raisins mixed with almonds for dessert. I also had a little carton of orange juice.

As I was quietly eating my lunch, I felt someone pull my hair. I hate it when someone pulls my hair! I immediately turned around to see who it was, and there stood Grandy, laughing his silly head off. He thought he was being funny pulling my hair, but I didn't think he was funny at all. How would he like it if I pulled his hair while he ate his lunch?

Of course, Grandy hardly has any hair to pull because his hair is cut short. Very, very short. Mine is long and thick and kinky. I wish it were long and straight, like Tilly's hair. But Daddy says I should be thankful for the hair God gave me because the Bible says that comparing yourself with another person is not a wise thing to do. And I want to be wise. Don't you?

Now, back to Grandy. So, there I was, eating my lunch and minding my own business when Grandy pulled my hair.

“Grandy!” I narrowed my eyes and crunched up my mouth. “Don’t pull my hair. It hurts my head, plus it interrupts my lunch.”

But Grandy just laughed and laughed.

My muscles stiffened, and I bit my tongue while I chewed my raisins. Ouch! I almost went to Mama to ask her what to do about Grandy, but then I remembered what she would say. “Be a problem-solver, Penny, not a problem-maker.”

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Penelope Pumpernickel: Precocious Problem-Solver

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