

Nanny X



Madelyn Rosenberg

illustrations by Karen Donnelly

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For Andrew, Melanie and Jules



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1. Alison

Nanny X = Spooky



Someone pounded on our front door at 7:29 A.M.

I didn't answer, even though it would have been the helpful thing to do. My brother, Jake, didn't answer, either, but not because he wasn't being helpful; he'd just invented a game called Breakfast Cereal Baseball and he had a batter up. My father didn't answer the door because he hadn't had enough coffee yet. Eliza didn't answer it because she's not even two, and Yeti didn't answer it because he's a dog. Also, my parents had locked him in my bedroom.

"Isn't somebody going to get that?" my mother called from upstairs. I didn't move. Jake flicked a Honey Berry Bomb across the table. It hit me in the neck.

"I didn't mean to," he said before I could call him a doofus. "Guess that's an out."

Thud. Thud. Thud. The knocks came louder this time, like somebody shouting at us in Morse code. Then came the

sound of my mother clomping down the stairs. You could tell it had been a long time since she'd worn high heels.

We heard the front door open, then voices.

"Kids? Richard?" my mother called. She sounded chirpy, like when she told us how much fun it would be to clean the toilets.

"Ahm!" yelled Eliza as my dad lifted her up.

"Come on, team," he said. "You have a date with destiny." Jake popped one last Berry Bomb into his mouth as we followed my dad to the front door.

"Kids," my mother said again. She sounded even chirpier, like she was going to lift up a sheet and reveal a shiny silver bicycle. Only she didn't have a sheet. And she didn't have a bicycle.

What she had was a woman with silver-gray hair, a straw gardening hat with pink flowers, and no smile. She wore a black motorcycle jacket and a pair of mirrored sunglasses. She smelled like a combination of chicken soup and motor oil, and it looked like she had borrowed her shoes from a Pilgrim.

"This is your new nanny!" my mother said. I could hear the *ta-da* in her voice, but I didn't feel like I'd won anything.

"Pleased to meet you," Jake said, sticking out his hand like he was trying to win the "Most Polite Kid of the Year" award. The nanny shook it.

I clamped my lips together so the word "hello" could not get through them. The nanny stood back and studied us through her sunglasses, though with the reflection it was hard to tell where her eyes were really looking. All I could see was my own face, also not smiling, staring back at her.

"Yes," she told my mother. "Yes, I think they'll do."

Do? I thought. Do what?

“Allow me to introduce myself,” the nanny continued, getting down to business. “I am Nanny X.”

This time I did open my mouth. “That’s weird,” I said.

“*Alison Pringle*,” said my mother.

“But X isn’t even a *real name!*” I pointed out.

“It is my *chosen* name,” said Nanny X. She spoke fast, like someone was timing her. “My given name is long and boring, and I’ve always felt sorry for the letter X. There aren’t enough words that begin with X.”

I had to admit she was right. Eliza has about a thousand alphabet books, and in every single one, X stands for xylophone.

“Not many names begin with Z, either,” said Jake. He is obsessed with initials.

Nanny X smiled for the first time. Her face didn’t look half bad that way. “Ah, but your middle name begins with Z,” she said. “Zachary, am I right?” My mother must have told her a lot about us, if she knew Jake’s middle name. My middle name is Theresa, but the nanny didn’t mention it.

“I think I should stick with X,” the nanny said.

“Not many names begin with Y,” said Jake. I wondered if he was going to go through the whole alphabet.

“But you have a dog, do you not?” Nanny X turned toward my father, who was still holding Eliza. “Yeti? How are his fleas?”

“His fleas are much better, thank you,” my father said. He cleared his throat after he talked, instead of before.

Yeti whimpered from my bedroom. My parents had put him there so he wouldn’t pounce on the nanny as soon as she came through the door.

“Well,” the nanny said. “I can stand here like a schlump or I can make your lunches. To the kitchen! Away!” She

snatched Eliza out of my father's arms and walked toward the kitchen like she owned the place. Her mirrored glasses were still perched on her nose. Then she paused and turned. "Please note, Alison, that your lunch today will not contain any bubble gum."

I could feel my face go red, like the time I tripped getting off the school bus and landed in dog poop. *She knew!* Somehow Nanny X knew that I had secretly chewed gum in Ms. Bertram's class on Friday. She probably knew that I'd gotten caught and had to spend the rest of the day with gum on my nose. I hadn't told my parents about it, or even my little brother. And why did a nanny know about Yeti's fleas? Who mentions fleas during a nanny interview? Especially if you're trying to get the nanny to *take* the job? Maybe Nanny X could read minds.

My dad took another gulp of coffee and hurried off to his job at the Museum of Natural History. My mother went to grab her briefcase for her new job as a lawyer. I followed her.

"Well, what do you think?" she asked.

"She dresses funny," I said.

"Of course she does; she's from New York."

"And she's spooky," I said.

"Spooky how?"

"Knowing about Yeti's fleas, and . . . other stuff."

"Look, I know you're still angry, Alison, but this is okay, isn't it? Me going back to work? Of course the biggest change is for Eliza. You and Jake will be in school all day. Anyway, you'll like Nanny X. It's just for a few weeks, until we find a permanent nanny. But the agency said she was special."

My mother was so busy getting ready for work, she didn't even notice that I didn't answer her. In the kitchen she gave the nanny a million last-minute instructions.

Then she kissed all of us (except Nanny X). “Wish me luck,” she said. We did, and she left for stupid old Mathers and Mathers, where she was going to work even though she was not a Mathers.

Nanny X was officially in charge.