

**Penelope
Penny
& the
Bubblegum Dress**



Sara Wagner

Penelope Penny
& the Bubblegum Dress
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*To my family for their inspiration,
enthusiasm, humor, and Sunday dinners
together*

Chapter 1



Penelope Penny eyed the tall wooden door, wondering if it was too late to turn around. “Oh well, here goes nothing,” she said to herself. She stood up straight and took a deep breath. She adjusted her glasses and tossed her braids behind her shoulders. Then she pulled open the door and was promptly met with a rush of warm air and an even warmer greeting.

“Ah, Penelope Penny, so good to meet you! I’m Mr. Ludbottom, the assistant principal. Let me take you to our morning gathering.” Mr. Ludbottom reminded Penelope of her grandfather, and she felt herself relax a little. “I think you’ll like it here, Penelope,” he said. “If you ever need

2 Penelope Penny & the Bubblegum Dress

anything please come find me.”

“Thank you, Mr. Ludbottom. I’m sure everything will be fine.” Penelope wasn’t sure of this at all, but it seemed like the right thing to say.

“Of course. Well, here we are.” Mr. Ludbottom opened the door. There was an eerie silence that was abruptly sliced by a shrill scream.

“Austin! Look what you have done! There’s no way I can be in the recital now and our friendship is over forever!”

“Whoa, Jennie. Let’s calm down. What happened?” Mr. Ludbottom approached a girl who looked to be about Penelope’s age.

“What happened? THIS is what happened,” Jennie pulled something from behind her back to show Mr. Ludbottom. “This is my brand new recital dress. I was supposed to wear it to my very first piano recital, but now that’s not going to happen thanks to him.” She jutted her chin toward a boy who was making every effort to keep his tears from spilling over. By now a crowd had

formed around them and Penelope was glad for the distraction so she wouldn't have to bear the embarrassment of being introduced as the new girl again. As she scanned the crowd of onlookers, most with their jaws hanging low and their eyes wide open, her gaze settled on a taller girl standing with her arms crossed wearing a slight smirk on her face. The girl sensed Penelope looking at her and quickly changed her expression to join the others.

“It's completely ruined, Mr. Ludbottom!” Jennie shrieked, pulling Penelope's attention back. Jennie held up the dress for him to get a closer look, but that was unnecessary. Mr. Ludbottom didn't have to get too close to see that Jennie's dress was covered and dripping with something pink and gooey.

“Hmm, Austin. Were you chewing gum again?” asked Mr. Ludbottom.

Austin looked at the ground and then reluctantly up at Mr. Ludbottom. “Yes,” he said

4 Penelope Penny & the Bubblegum Dress

quietly. “I didn’t mean for the bubble to burst on her dress. I’m really sorry, Jennie.”

“Yeah well, you can take your sorry and...”

“That’s enough. Austin, you’ll come with me. Jennie, I’ll bring your dress to Nurse Thermometer and see if we can get it clean. Please check in with her during recess and oh, Amanda, this is Penelope Penny. She’s new. Could you be sure she makes it to her homeroom please?”

“Sure, Mr. Ludbottom,” Amanda looked over at Penelope and smiled. Penelope smiled back and hoped she had found a new friend since she was sure the smirking girl was definitely not going to be one.

Chapter 2



Not only did Penelope find one new friend, she found herself surrounded by lots of new friends. Loud, talkative new friends, but that was fine with her. At her other schools it had taken weeks to make friends. “Guys, guys, stop talking for a minute,” Amanda said. “Penelope, this is Timmy, Pierre, Lily, Natalie, and Jennie, the one you heard before you saw.”

“Everyone hears Jennie before they see her. Isn’t that right, Jennie?” teased Pierre.

“Am I the only one who is angry with Austin? Did you not see what happened?” Jennie asked the group.

“We saw it,” said Lily.

6 Penelope Penny & the Bubblegum Dress

“And we couldn’t believe it,” added Natalie.

“They’re twins,” Amanda explained to Penelope, describing Lily and Natalie.

Penelope nodded and decided this was as good a time as any to chime in.

“Jennie, I’m really sorry about your dress. I hope you can get it cleaned before your recital.”

“Thank you, Penelope. At least someone cares about my dress,” Jennie glared at the group of friends.

“Well, Jennie,” began Amanda. “I just don’t understand why you brought the dress in to school. We all told you not to. In my opinion, you were asking for trouble.”

“Austin does have a gum bubble blowing history,” agreed Timmy.

“Yes, but he blows the biggest bubbles of us all and one has never burst, right?” asked Pierre.

The group thought about it and then nodded in agreement.

“Did you persuade your mom to let you

bring the dress in just like you begged for that ant farm?” asked Lily.

“You mean the one that all of the ants got out and stung us at her ant party?” added Natalie.

“Okay, how was I supposed to know they were going to be red ants? And no one was more upset about returning the kit than I was,” argued Jennie.

“Maybe, just maybe, for once, you learned your lesson?” asked Timmy, with a sideways glance at Penelope. “She claims she’s a genius in the art of persuasion and she’s always trying to prove it.”

But Penelope was barely listening. She kept going back to what Pierre had said about Austin blowing many big bubbles without one bursting. Was the smirking girl somehow responsible for the explosion, or was it just a coincidence?