

# 1

## A DAY IN THE LIFE

**W**hen you're interviewing yourself in the bathroom mirror, a fist under your chin makes the perfect microphone.

I pat my hair down so it falls around my head like a helmet. That's the way Drew Listerman, the reporter on the Channel 7 news, wears his hair. Every weekend he hosts a special called *A Day in the Life*, where he follows celebrities around and viewers get to see what a typical day is like for them.

I tuck a fallen strand behind my left ear, furrow my brows to make a wrinkle just above

the bridge of my nose, and round my shoulders like Drew Listerman.

And I'm on.

“Good evening, ladies and gentleman. Today we're celebrating a day in the life of Zachary Cooley. Maybe you saw his picture in the newspaper on the day he stomped out a bunch of smoldering cigarette butts in the Pinemont Woods, preventing what surely would have been Pennsylvania's most massive forest fire. Or perhaps you heard his name mentioned on the radio the morning he spotted a woman walking on the railroad tracks and got her to safety just moments before a speeding train whipped by. Certainly you saw the story on the evening news about the time Zack rappelled out of a helicopter and rescued a man swimming in the ocean below. Seconds later a school of great white sharks were spotted off the coast. Young Zack is credited with saving hundreds—no, thousands!—of lives. Please join me in welcoming birthday boy Zachary

Noah Cooley, a real-life superhero!”

I imagine viewers all over the country and around the world clapping and cheering and waiting to see me, and I run a hand through my hair so it’s back in my regular style, on the longish side and messed up like I just went for a superfast ride in a convertible, top down. Then I hold my fist out toward my reflection.

“Well, first off, Drew, I don’t know that I’d call myself a superhero.” I pause for a second, and in my head a few thousand voices talk back to their TVs: *What, Zack?! Of course you are!* “But second of all, I’m here to save even more lives with a special message. And that message is: Listen to your fears.”

“I thought the only thing to fear is fear itself,” Drew says.

“Sorry, Drew,” I say. “But you—and Franklin Delano Roosevelt—are sadly mistaken. There are more things to fear than you could possibly count.”

“Such as?”

“Such as: Aren’t you afraid to walk too close to the edge of a roof?”

I can see Drew nodding. Of course he is.

“You’re afraid because you could fall off,” I tell him. “And I bet you’re afraid to climb into the lions’ cage at the zoo because you know they can eat you. These are good fears to have because they stop you from doing something that could hurt you—or even kill you. Having fears saves lives.”

“I’ve never thought of it that way before,” Drew Listerman says. “But it’s certainly an important message you’re spreading. In fact, it’s practically a birthday present to us all. When really, we should be showering *you* with presents—especially on a birthday this significant. Tell me, how does it feel to hit double digits?”

“It’s a funny thing,” I say. “When I woke up this morning, something felt different.” I peer a bit closer into the mirror—closer into the camera.

“You ever get the feeling that something is changing in your life, that you’re in for something particularly extraordinary?”

As I say it I feel a tingle run down my spine, like it’s true. Like I’m onto something. Like there actually are people out there, right now, watching me, and something big is going to happen right before their eyes.

And then.

“BOO!” Quinn yells.

“Ahh!” I stumble backward. “You almost gave me a heart attack!” I shout at my sister. “What are you doing in here anyway?”

The bathroom door had been closed. I’m sure of it. I hadn’t locked it, but that’s because I broke all the locks in our house a couple of months ago. Do you know how many people die each year because they lock themselves into their bedrooms or bathrooms, and a fire starts up, and no one can get to them in time to save them?

Okay, I don’t know, either. But I bet a lot of

people do.

Mom was pretty mad about all the broken locks. But it was for her own good. Quinn's, too. Dad once told me that the three of us—Mom, Quinn, and I—were the most important people in his life, and he'd do anything to protect us. After what happened to him, it's up to me to make sure no one in my family ever gets hurt again. That's what Dad would want me to do.

But never mind that, because right now there's no fire, not even the thinnest curlicue of smoke. And in the absence of a fire, we all know that a closed door means don't come in.

Not that Quinn cares. She's bent in half, laughing. She laughs in a really squeaky, fingernails-on-the-chalkboard, little-hairs-on-your-arms-standing-up kind of way: *Hee-eee-eee-EEEEEE. Hee-eee-eee-EEEEEE.* Her laugh is just as embarrassing as my little interview. Even worse, actually, because my interview was supposed to be private. But Quinn laughs that

way all the time in public. She can't help herself.

Quinn stands straight and makes a big production out of trying to catch her breath, like it was just sooooo funny, she might not ever be able to breathe again. "You should've"—*pant, eeeee, pant*—"seen yourself." *Pant, pant*. "Only a grade-A official nut job would talk to himself in the mirror." She pauses to take one long, deep gulp of a breath.

"I've seen *you* talk to yourself in the mirror," I tell her. And then I mimic her in a high-pitched voice: "Quinn, your hair looks so good. Quinn, I love your nail polish."

"At least I'm not pretending to be brave to my *imaginary* friends, when the truth is you're scared of everything. Are you sure you're turning ten today? Because you're acting like a baby."

"Babies aren't scared, because they don't know any better," I say. "It's actually a sign of maturity to be scared."

"Whatever. It's no wonder you don't have

any friends.”

“I do so have friends,” I tell her.

“Yeah, right.”

“And besides, I—”

“I can’t wait to hear this,” Quinn interrupts.

If she can’t wait, she should be quiet and listen. “I’d rather have *no* friends than have *your* friends. Your friends are so . . . are so . . .”

Quinn is standing there with her hands on her hips, shaking her head at me like she’s the older sister. But really we’re twins, and if you want to get specific about it, *I’m* the older one. Seven minutes older. Seven minutes that I packed a lot of wisdom into.

“Your friends are so *slame*,” I say.

“Oh, you got me this time,” Quinn says. But she rolls her eyes so I know she doesn’t mean it. “I’m so hurt by one of your dumb words that’s not even a real word.”

“It is a word,” I insist. “*Slame*. Adjective. The same amount of lame as Quinn.”



One day I'm going to write a dictionary of all the words that should be part of the English language. *Slame* is one of my best words yet.

"Whatevs," she says. She flips her hand like she's waving me away. "At least I have people to invite to the party today. I mean, aside from the original nut job that is Uncle Max."

"And Eli," I tell her.

"Eli doesn't know any better, because he's the new kid. That's the only reason he's your friend at all."

"There are LOTS of reasons he's my friend," I say.

"Oh yeah?" Quinn counters. "Name one."

Okay, truthfully, I'm not exactly sure why Eli is my friend. But I'm not about to admit that!

"There's nothing special about you," Quinn adds.

"GET OUT!" I shout.

Quinn looks me square in the eye. "Make me," she says.

“You asked for it,” I say, and I make a pushing gesture with my hands, like I’m threatening to shove her or something. Man, I’d like to. She deserves it, after all: If you barge into the bathroom to spy on your brother, then you *should* be knocked over. But if I tried to hit Quinn, she’d just hit me back harder. She’s strong that way.

And all of a sudden, she’s swept off her feet.

I didn’t touch her, I swear. She tripped over nothing, all on her own. Now she’s on the floor, right on her butt.

“I see London, I see France, I see Quinn Cooley’s underpants,” I chant.

But Quinn doesn’t seem to care. “Whoa,” she says softly, her voice shaky. “Did you feel that?”

Before I can answer, Mom’s in the doorway, her arms full of party decorations. “You’re starting with each other already?” she says. “I thought we all agreed we were going to make this day a good day.”

That had been part of the dinner conversation last night: “Let’s not have any fights tomorrow,” Mom had said. “Let’s make it a good day.” Though, Quinn and I hadn’t actually *agreed* to that.

“You all right, Quinn?” Mom asks. She puts the streamers on the counter and reaches a hand down to pull her up. Then she turns to me, accusingly. “Did you do this?”

“Uh-uh, no way,” I say. “Quinn tripped all by herself. After she just marched right on in here—even though the door was closed.”

“But not locked,” Quinn says, straightening her skirt. “And whose fault is that?”

“She didn’t even knock first,” I say.

“I had to go. And Zack was taking forever.”

“Oh, for Pete’s sake, just use my bathroom,” Mom tells her.

In the background, the phone rings.

“Work it out, you two,” Mom tells us before grabbing the streamers and heading back down

the hall to answer the phone.

“Thanks for getting me in trouble with Mom, nut job,” Quinn says. But then she leaves, too. Finally.

I close the door behind her. Now I’m alone in the bathroom, but it’s not like I actually need to be in here anymore.

Another day in the life of Zachary Cooley.  
Leave it to Quinn to ruin everything.