

THE MISADVENTURES OF
Millicent Madding

**Bully
-Be-
Gone**



BRIAN TACANG



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Gone 章

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≡ **HarperCollins Publishers**

The Misadventures of Millicent Madding #1:

Bully-Be-Gone

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days to create an antidote before the local bullies wreak
havoc and her dearest friendships are destroyed forever.

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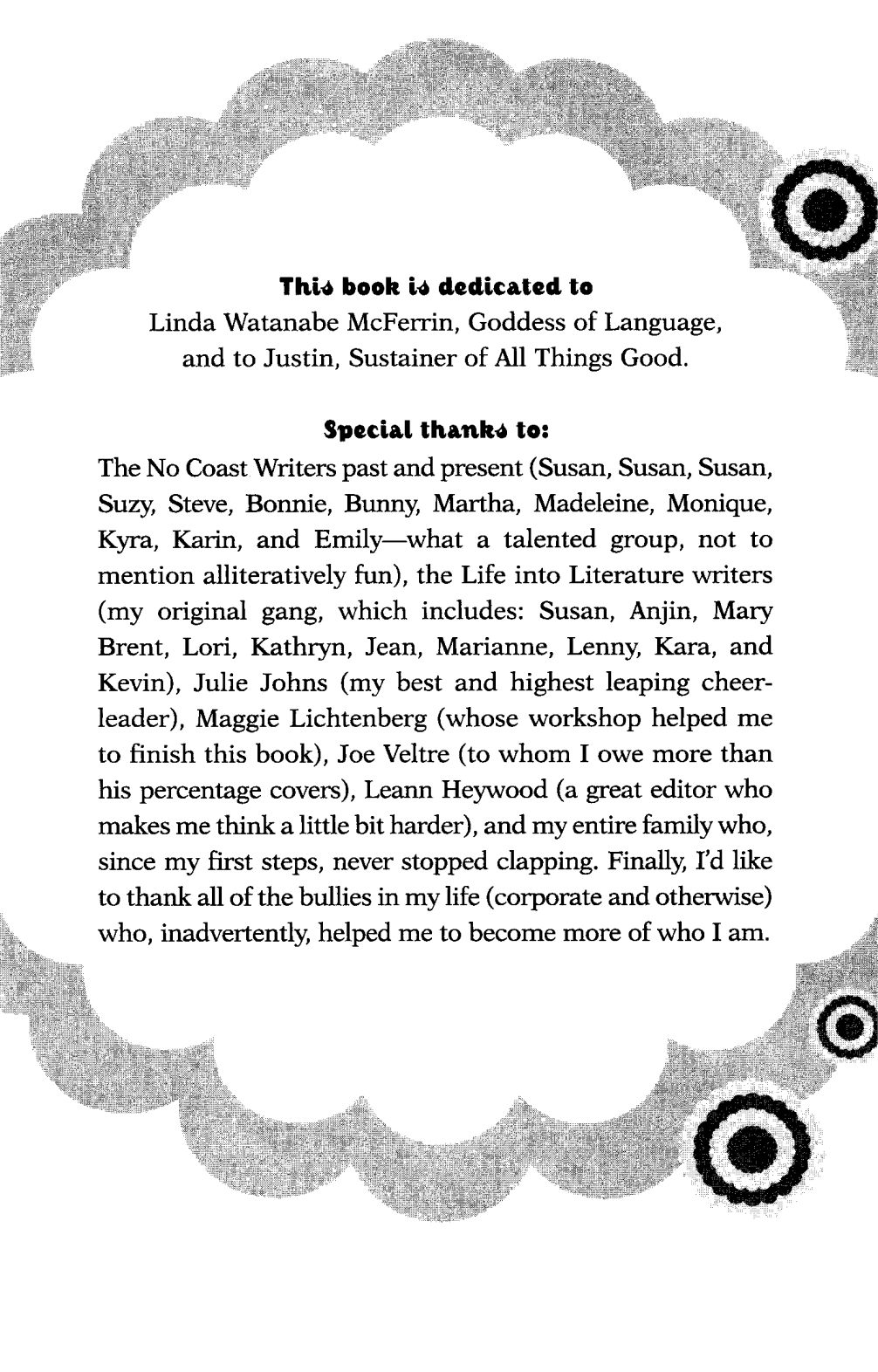
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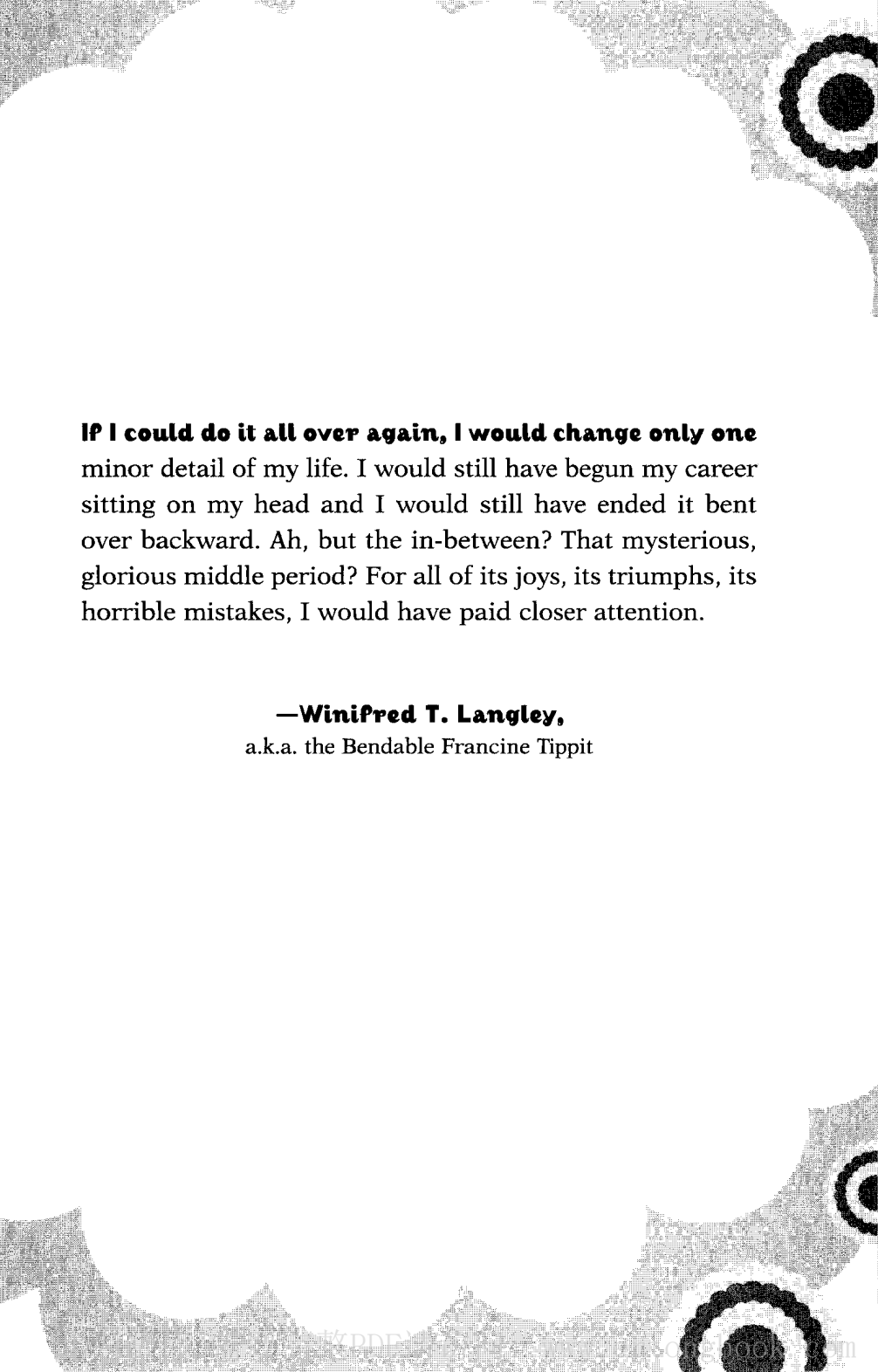
First Edition



This book is dedicated to
Linda Watanabe McFerrin, Goddess of Language,
and to Justin, Sustainer of All Things Good.

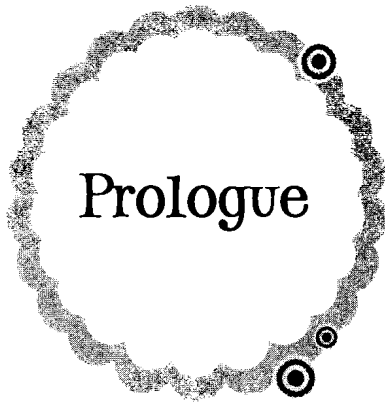
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If I could do it all over again, I would change only one minor detail of my life. I would still have begun my career sitting on my head and I would still have ended it bent over backward. Ah, but the in-between? That mysterious, glorious middle period? For all of its joys, its triumphs, its horrible mistakes, I would have paid closer attention.

—Winifred T. Langley,
a.k.a. the Bendable Francine Tippet



Prologue

Millicent poured a vial of clear liquid into the beaker of milky liquid. A layer of white fizz formed, but quickly settled. She hadn't expected that reaction and hissed a quiet, "whew." Thank goodness it hadn't exploded.

She checked the clock nearby. Midnight. She rubbed her eyes and yawned.

To her right sat three bottles of gels and liquids, each a different shade of blue, waiting to be added to the mixture. She took the first one, a turquoise memory-jogging gel she'd concocted, and added it to the beaker. Then she poured in a bit from the second bottle, a blend of every happy smell

known to humankind she called Blissaroma.

Millicent yawned again. "I am so tired," she murmured as she poured a little more Blissaroma into the beaker.

Referring to her notes, she squinted and tried to focus on her scribbled formula. Her printing looked blurry, as if it were moving across the paper like ballroom dancers on a white marble floor. She knew her next and final ingredient was her Propulsion Lotion, but she couldn't quite read how much to use. She rubbed her eyes. When she printed, she made her periods look like little o's. *Is that Propulsion Lotion: 1. milliliter? Or 10 milliliters?*

She measured out what she thought was the correct amount and added it to the beaker. Bang! A small explosion blew her bangs straight into the air, as if she'd just entered a wind tunnel.

"Yikes!"

She wiped her forehead with the sleeve of her lab coat and retied her braids, which had come undone. She swirled the beaker around for a few seconds, then placed it on a Bunsen burner. When the blue liquid bubbled to almost overflowing, she removed the beaker. While the concoction cooled and thickened, she prepared several bottles, plastic deodorant applicators, and foil packets.

When the beaker reached room temperature, she mixed some of the thick blue substance with a waxy deodorant base and some of it with her own special sunscreen formula. She put both blends into their respective containers. Finally, she injected the remaining gel into foil envelopes.

"There," she said, admiring her line of products, their blue labels staring back at her like an enthusiastic audience. She tipped her chair back and clasped her hands behind her head. Madame Curie, her golden Abyssinian cat, leaped from the floor to the lab table.

"What do you think, M.C.?" Millicent asked the cat, nudging a bottle toward her. "My best invention ever. Just in time for the new school year."

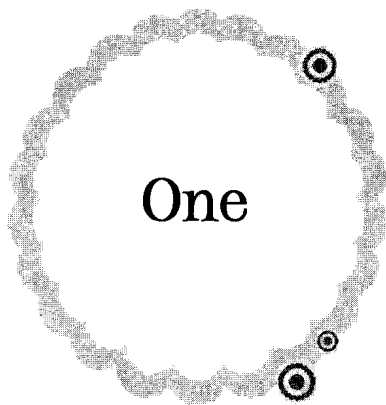
The cat sniffed at the bottle and jutted out her chin, which gave her a cynical air, a standard facial expression for an Abyssinian cat. She seemed to be thinking, *Smells to me like another dud.*

"Oh, ye cat of little faith," Millicent said, squeezing the cat's chin gently between her thumb and forefinger. She held a blue bottle up to the light with her free hand, turning it so that it sparkled. "This will guarantee that my friends and I will never be picked on again." She sighed and added, "I hope."

She yawned. "I'll just rest my eyes," she said, laying her head on her notebook. "Just . . . rest . . . for . . . a . . . bit." In seconds, she was asleep.

Outside, night had swallowed the house. The stars winked at Millicent as she slept on her notebook. The moon smiled at her and the streetlights beamed good fortune.

It had all the makings of a lucky night—except for the crickets, who were laughing hysterically.



A knock at the laboratory door woke Millicent. She sat up and felt the side of her face. The spiral binding of her notebook had left ridges down her cheek.

"Millicent," said her uncle through the door. "Fell asleep down here again, eh?"

"Yeah, Uncle Phineas."

"Product launch today. Yes, yes. Exciting."

"I know, Uncle Phineas," she replied. "I know." Last night, she had been filled with excitement as she completed her latest invention. But this morning, the mere mention of her product launch made her stomach feel as though it had

been shaken by a paint mixer at the hardware store.

“Hmmm. You sound nervous,” Uncle Phineas said. “No need for it, yes. Half the formula is effort, half is belief in yourself. Yes, yes. Well . . .” His voice grew faint as he shuffled back up the stairs.

“Geez,” she said, rubbing her eyes and looking around the lab.

Millicent and her guardian, Phineas Baldernot, shared the bottom floor of the house as their work space, otherwise referred to as Baldernot Madding Laboratories.

Uncle Phineas had renovated the entire basement many years ago, installing a network of sinks, tables, desks, and cabinets. He’d provided Millicent with every gadget and contrivance she would ever need to hone her skills as an inventor.

She had her own corner desk, five computers, and a granite-topped worktable, complete with a stainless steel sink. Metal cabinets lined one wall, each under lock and key. Millicent was free to use whatever chemicals, tools, or other materials she wanted from within the cabinets as long as she registered what she took on a master clipboard hanging from the middle cabinet.

Millicent liked the arrangement. And she liked working closely with Uncle Phineas. He didn’t peer over her shoulder and bombard her with advice. He treated her as an associate, not as a little girl. Even when she’d ask for his input on a particular combination of chemicals or a certain junction of wires, he’d bend over and peer into her eyes.

“What do you think will happen?” he’d ask. A question to which she didn’t always have an answer.

Whatever gadget or potion she invented, Uncle Phineas had only one requirement—that it improve someone’s life, even if it were in the smallest way. He said the desire to make people’s lives better was the hallmark of all great inventors.

Millicent looked up at the ceiling. “Good morning, everyone,” she said, trying to muster a cheerful tone. A league of Masonville’s most respected inventors and scientists stared back at her.

They were posters of her idols. Among them, a large photo of Inga Wymeronner, inventor of the PetLepathy Collar, a small screen your dog wore around his neck that showed his barks translated into English.

A few pictures of Bramwell Phitt, inventor of the Calorie Thermometer, a wallet-sized tool folks used to count their calories by sticking it in their food, were also sprinkled around the ceiling.

Mostly, though, huge posters of Uncle Phineas dotted the ceiling. His most popular invention, a hair growth tonic called Diffollicle Speed Gel, was available in curly, straight, or kinky formulas and in a variety of colors. With it, you could completely change your hair’s color and texture from the roots. Each of the posters of Uncle Phineas was different. One showed him with long, red, wavy locks, another with a blond afro, another with a black pageboy—all worn with his signature bushy white beard.

A huge metal box, as black as a black hole and as large as a walk-in closet, stood in one corner of the lab. It had a row of lights on top and a large red dial to the right of its front door. The words **MILLENNIUM TRAVEL CUBE** were engraved above the door. Taped on the door was Millicent's favorite picture, that of her parents, Adair and Astrid Madding.

Adair and Astrid were inventors, too. Together, they were responsible for a series of fine inventions from Espresso Toothpaste—for busy people with no time to grab a cup of coffee, let alone brush their teeth—to the Lint Knitter Dryer, a clothes dryer that knitted scarves, socks, and beanies from leftover fibers in the lint catcher.

But their one failed invention, the black metal box in the corner, loomed like a sad memory. It was their most ambitious invention and could have been their greatest.

Millicent got off her lab stool and went over to the Millennium Travel Cube. She stood there, staring at her parents' picture. She reached toward the cube and ran her hand along the smooth surface of the door, letting it linger near the latch. "I could use a little help. I'm really anxious," she said to the picture.

In the photo, her mom and dad looked as cheerful as the day they went away. Millicent was barely six when they had stepped into the Millennium Travel Cube. "Time travel, the wave of the future," her mom had said before entering the cube. "We'll be back shortly," said her dad before shutting the cube's door. They were never seen again.

For months after they disappeared, Millicent used to

knock on the Travel Cube's door saying, "Mommy? Daddy? Are you in there? Come out now. Please." Sometimes, she'd fall asleep at the door, swaddled in her favorite blanket. When she was older—eight or nine years old—she would tinker with the Travel Cube, hoping to get her mom and dad back. Uncle Phineas even tried helping her—to no avail. The Travel Cube was far too complex, its codes too complicated for either of them to crack. She often wondered where in time her parents were and what they were doing. Were they dining with Julia Child? Dancing with Josephine Baker? Painting with Frida Kahlo? Or were their journeys local? Were they hanging out with Masonville's own historic figures: Ellery Winkery, inventor of the prosthetic eyelid, or Hannah Over, the famed three-armed xylophonist? Wherever they were, the Travel Cube was a constant reminder they weren't here. Nowadays, Millicent regarded the Travel Cube as a dare. She wasn't yet ready to tackle it. One day, though, she'd be ready. In the meantime, Millicent often found comfort in talking to her parents' picture when she had a problem.

"You see, Mom and Dad," Millicent said, "I've got another product I've been working on all summer. I'm launching it at the Wunderkind Club meeting today."

The Wunderkind Club, a collection of the best and brightest students at Winifred T. Langley Middle School, held monthly meetings in which they shared their talents and accomplishments, safe from the teasing of their less-accomplished fellow students. Millicent used to introduce

her new inventions at these meetings. However, she hadn't introduced anything in a long time.

"I haven't had a successful invention in nearly a year," she said. "The last one? The Automatic Ponytail Retractor? A dismal failure."

Anita Ferratta, Millicent's best customer, had worn the Automatic Ponytail Retractor, designed to keep girls' ponytails out of the hands of mischievous boys, on her head. Disguised as a feathered headband, it had a cluster of gears and metal claws in back, through which Anita had threaded her ponytail. A pesky boy, who sat behind her in science class, was about to yank her ponytail. Anita saw him in the miniature rearview mirror—a bonus feature of the Automatic Ponytail Retractor—and hit the emergency button. Something went terribly wrong with the rewind mechanism. There was a horrible whirring and clicking, like a broken grandfather clock going backward in time. The machine sucked up Anita's ponytail, leaving it in a tangled clump that eventually had to be cut from her head.

The now boyish-looking Anita stopped speaking to Millicent. And that hurt her more than if Anita had gotten angry and yelled at her.

"So you can see why I'm nervous," she said to her mom and dad. "It's not like I can afford to lose any more friends due to a crummy invention."

Millicent glanced at the top of her granite worktable, where several bottles of the cobalt-blue liquid sat. Even though the bottles were pretty, Millicent knew their beauty

alone wouldn't cut it with the Wunderkind Club. The Wunderkinder had seen more than their share of her potions and gadgets. And with each one that failed, she lost a little more of her friends' respect.

"Hey, Mom and Dad, will you listen to this and let me know if it sounds okay?" she asked. "It's my sales pitch. Ready?"

According to Uncle Phineas, a pitch was an artful sales talk, a means of getting customers interested in your product. He said pitching your product was an important step to the final sale. He said you could never practice a pitch enough. And pitches had to be catchy and dramatic and a little bit corny. He would know. He pitched his products all the time. Her parents used to pitch their products, too.

"Fellow Wunderkinder," Millicent began. "There is a word for the kind of student that strikes fear in our hearts." Here, she paused for effect. She began her next sentence in a hiss and ended in a shout, her finger pointed at the ceiling. "They lurk in the halls, hide in the bathrooms, are sorry victims of trendy attire, and listen to music with poorly rhymed lyrics."

She took a step forward. "Then I'll ask, 'Do you know what that word is?' Before any of them has the chance to answer, I'll say, 'Bully.' The word is *'bully.'*"

Nice, she imagined her mom saying.

She folded her arms across her chest.

"A number of disruptive things could happen at this point," she said to her parents' picture. "But I'm prepared.

Don't worry. I can't afford to let things get out of hand."

True, she could hear her dad saying.

Millicent paced in front of the Millennium Travel Cube.

"I expect a wordy response from Tonisha Fontaine," she said.

Your best friend, her mom said.

"And a poet," Millicent added. "She has the very annoying habit of writing down everything you say in a spiral-bound notepad. Then she edits what you said and adds a few words of her own. She calls it poetry. Well, she does make your words sound somewhat better than when you said them, I'll give her that much. Simplicity works best with Tonisha—the fewer words you speak, the fewer you give her to rewrite—so I'll just have to nab her pen."

That's our girl, her dad said.

Millicent put her hand to her chin, thinking. "But—"

Yes? her parents asked.

"I'm most worried about Roderick Biggleton."

Roderick Biggleton, her parents mulled. *Is he the—*

"Third . . . of the West Side Biggletons," Millicent answered.

I remember the Biggleton clan, said her dad. *Barracudas.*

"That's them," Millicent agreed. "Roderick's father is Roderick Biggleton the Second, the well-known corporate attorney. His mother, Eloise Biggleton, is the glamorous owner and president of Beauty Goo Cosmetics. Her mottoes are plastered on nearly every billboard and bus stop in town."

Oh, wait! said her mom. *I remember them: 'Goo for You,*