

DANDI DALEY MACKALL

Larger-Than-Life
LARA



She's the kind of person you never forget . . .

Larger-Than-Life

LARA



江苏工业学院图书馆
藏书章

Dandi Daley Mackall

Dutton Children's Books

DUTTON CHILDREN'S BOOKS
A division of Penguin Young Readers Group

Published by the Penguin Group

Penguin Group (USA) Inc., 375 Hudson Street, New York, New York 10014, U.S.A.
Penguin Group (Canada), 90 Eglinton Avenue East, Suite 700, Toronto, Ontario, Canada
M4P 2Y3 (a division of Pearson Penguin Canada Inc.) • Penguin Books Ltd, 80 Strand, London
WC2R 0RL, England • Penguin Ireland, 25 St Stephen's Green, Dublin 2, Ireland
(a division of Penguin Books Ltd) • Penguin Group (Australia), 250 Camberwell Road,
Camberwell, Victoria 3124, Australia (a division of Pearson Australia Group Pty Ltd)
Penguin Books India Pvt Ltd, 11 Community Centre, Panchsheel Park, New Delhi - 110 017, India
Penguin Group (NZ), Cnr Airborne and Rosedale Roads, Albany, Auckland 1310, New Zealand
(a division of Pearson New Zealand Ltd) • Penguin Books (South Africa) (Pty) Ltd,
24 Sturdee Avenue, Rosebank, Johannesburg 2196, South Africa • Penguin Books Ltd,
Registered Offices: 80 Strand, London WC2R 0RL, England

This book is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents are either the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously, and any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, business establishments, events, or locales is entirely coincidental.

Copyright © 2006 by Dandi Daley Mackall

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or any information storage and retrieval system now known or to be invented, without permission in writing from the publisher, except by a reviewer who wishes to quote brief passages in connection with a review written for inclusion in a magazine, newspaper, or broadcast.

The publisher does not have any control over and does not assume any responsibility for author or third-party websites or their content.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Mackall, Dandi Daley.

Larger-than-life Lara / Dandi Daley Mackall.—1st ed. p. cm.

Summary: Using the writing techniques she has learned in school, fourth-grader Laney relates how an obese girl new to the class changes the lives of those around her, despite being bullied by her peers.

ISBN 0-525-47726-8 (hardcover)

[1. Authorship—Fiction. 2. Bullies—Fiction. 3. Prejudices—Fiction. 4. Obesity—Fiction. 5. Family problems—Fiction. 6. Schools—Fiction.] I. Title.
PZ7.M1905 Lar 2006 [Fic]—dc22 2005032757

Published in the United States by Dutton Children's Books,
a division of Penguin Young Readers Group
345 Hudson Street, New York, New York 10014
www.penguin.com/youngreaders

Designed by Beth Herzog

Printed in USA First Edition
1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

To Joe, my husband, my best friend, my first reader

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

I would like to thank my amazing editor, Maureen Sullivan, for sharing my vision and enthusiasm for this book from the very start. Working with you has been a dream come true.

Table of Contents

1	Character	3
2	The Beginning	5
3	A Frozen Moment	11
4	Villain	16
5	Setting	23
6	Dialogue	35
7	Opposition	44
8	Minor Characters	52
9	Conflict	62
10	Suspense	70
11	Cliffhangers	84
12	Twist	93
13	Details	101
14	Transition	109
15	Rising Action	113
16	Climax	123
17	The Return of Climax: Climax II	131
18	Resolution	141

Larger-Than-Life
LARA



I Character

This isn't about me. This story, I mean. So already you got a reason to hang it up. At least that's what Mrs. Smith, our English teacher says. She teaches fourth graders in Paris, Missouri. But I think she'd about a hundred million times rather be in Paris, France, writing her own stories, instead of teaching us how to write stories.

So anyways, she says you got to start with a character when you start your story. And since I'm the first "character" you hear from in my story, that should mean it's about me. Laney Grafton, age ten, or nearly

so, small for her age, but tough as a horseshoe, thanks to three big brothers and one bathroom. Stringy, brownish hair and brown eyes. Not much to look at, but couldn't make a living scaring crows neither.

But it's not. About me. Because once you get you a character for your story, Mrs. Smith says you give the character a problem. And the whole rest of the story's about that problem getting bigger and bigger, and the character getting to be a better and better person, and then the character solves the problem. And that's it. The end.

Only it's not me what's got the problem. And I'm not a better person than I was three months ago when all this stuff happened—just ask my dad or any of my three stupid brothers, if you don't believe me. So, like I said, this story's not about me. And Mrs. Smith, if you're out there reading it, well, I'm just sorry about that. But that's the way it is. Sometimes stories don't work out like they're supposed to.

2

The Beginning

The first thing that happened was that everybody in the whole fourth-grade class, and that includes Mrs. Smith, stopped talking. She was right in the middle of telling us about William Shakespeare, who invented plays in England. Plus, she was telling us about a play our whole school was going to put on and how some of us could be in it and others of us would be really important, but not onstage and that shouldn't make us feel bad. And we were all looking at Mrs. Smith because she gets real mad at us when we don't. I was watching the

way her eyes changed size when she finished each sentence, getting bigger, like periods stretching into exclamation points.

So anyways, that was the first thing. I heard quiet.

The second thing was the air changed. Now this is where Mrs. Smith and Amanda Catron and Tommy Otto would argue with me. But this is my story, and I say that the air in our classroom changed. It was hot, lemon-drop sweating hot, so as even Maddie Simpson looked like she'd tiptoed through a water sprinkler. And I'm not saying that the air turned to ice or nothing. But I stopped sweating. So there you have it.

There must have been footsteps because nobody, especially a kid who looked like this one, big as a sofa, could just sneak into a room without them. But I didn't hear any footsteps. And my daddy says I can hear a cat whisper. (When he's been drinking, he says the cats in China can hear *me*, which is his way of saying shut up, and he has other ways of saying shut up, but you can't write them into a story. Mrs. Smith would call this part a digression. So I'm thinking I can get away with it because it's all inside these parentheses.)

Before I saw who had come into our room and changed the air, I saw Joey Gilbert see her. Joey looked like he'd just spotted a ghost, or maybe his mother com-

ing to get him after the principal's kicked him out of school for a week for punching a littler kid. Then I saw Marissa see her. Marissa is so shy, you almost never see her face. But at that minute, her face was on full view, and it was nearly all eyes and mouth dropped open.

Then *I* saw her. I've seen her so much since that very first time that it's honest-to-pete hard to say what I thought she looked like. And this is something I never thought about as a writer of real things you haven't made up. It's not easy to write the truth, even when that's all you set out to do.

I guess I remember thinking that this was the biggest girl I'd ever seen. Right away I wondered if she was stuck in the doorway, because she was still standing there, filling up the whole space, it seemed to me, with no light from the hallway showing behind her. I figured she was about the most mountainlike human being I'd ever seen, or maybe hill-like, with ridges and rolling fields. And maybe I thought that because she was wearing a green dress, so it looked even more like hills, how the green swelled around her middle and arms. And I'm sure about the green dress because it's what she always wore to school.

"Whoa!" Eric Radabaugh was the first one to start up talking, of course. And Wayne wasn't far behind.

“Man, is the circus in town?” Wayne whispered. Only his whisper is about a hundred times louder than a normal person’s regular voice.

I risked looking at the stranger’s face to see how she took it. But her round cheeks didn’t even twitch, and those pale blue eyes stayed twinkling, like they were smiling, even though her mouth wasn’t. So I figured she hadn’t heard Eric and Wayne because when they call me “freak girl” or “Toughie” (and I guarantee they don’t mean it in a good way), or “hillbilly,” there’s no way I can pretend I didn’t hear.

“Can I help you?” Mrs. Smith asked, clearing her throat, like being hoarse was why she didn’t say something before Eric and Wayne got to.

“I’m Lara.” The girl’s mouth joined her eyes in that smile. She glanced around the room, like she was giving each of us a little piece of her smile.

I looked down at my fingernails when I could tell that smile was getting to my row. Dirt was packed under the nails that weren’t bit down to the finger. So I tried picking the dirt out. I don’t go around dirty. Really I don’t. But nails and ears, those are parts you forget about. At least I do. There’s this picture of my mama in the bottom drawer of my daddy’s dresser, underneath the magazines he doesn’t want my brothers to look at.

And it doesn't take but one look at that picture to know my mama never ever forgot about dirt under her fingernails.

"I'm sorry," Mrs. Smith said. "Laura . . . ?"

"Lara," the girl said, not like she was mad or anything. "L-A-R-A."

"I see." But you could tell our teacher did not see. "Were you looking for someone?"

L-A-R-A's smile got big enough to show us her tiny, white teeth. One of the front ones was missing, and that made her look stranger than fiction. She stayed there, standing in the exact center of the room.

Sometimes Mrs. Smith makes us do these exercises on describing characters when we write stories in class. Characterization, she calls it. She passes out papers that look like this:

_____ is the kind of person who _____
_____ is the kind of person who _____
_____ is the kind of person who _____
_____ is the kind of person who _____

Then we fill in the blanks for all the characters in our stories. Well, my mind was filling in all the blanks like this:

Lara is the kind of person who changes the air in a classroom.

Lara is the kind of person who would be the only one left in Kansas if a tornado blew everybody else to Oz. (Mrs. Smith wouldn't like this one, though, because it's too long.)

Lara is the kind of person nobody ever sees, even though she's the biggest thing in the room.

Lara is the kind of person who makes you feel almost normal.

Lara is the kind of person you never forget.

3

A Frozen Moment

All of this happened in just a couple of seconds, I guess, but it felt like it was a frozen piece of time. Mrs. Smith told us about “frozen moments.” Sometimes whole countries and even the whole world has stuff happen that people will remember for the rest of their lives. Like Mrs. Smith said she knows people who were alive when President John F. Kennedy got shot and killed dead. And every single one of them can tell you where they were and what they were wearing and who else and what else was in the room with them when that president got shot and killed.

And I believe her because I can tell you exactly where I was on the day of 9/11, when the planes flew into the World Trade Center. I was home sick from school, only I was faking sick. And I was all by myself, watching TV. Only I'm not supposed to let on I was by myself because the social worker will get after my daddy again. I was wearing the pajamas I hate because they have kites on them and I've never ever had a kite, even though I would really like one.

The room smelled like tobacco and bananas. There was a buzzing from the TV because Daddy hooked it up himself to cable so we didn't have to pay, and sometimes it looked like it was snowing, even on shows like *Jungle Animal Planet*. Then I was changing channels and saw a plane stuck in a skyscraper, with smoke and fire and people screaming. So I thought it was a movie and I'd watch it. Only . . . well, you know the rest. That was a really long digression, and I'm sorry I didn't put it in parentheses.

But the stuff about frozen moments is important because if you land into one, then you got some good material for your story. Because you can call it up in your head again and have everything you need right there. It doesn't go away on you, like other memories. It's frozen. And this can be a good thing or a bad thing.