

CHAPTER SAMPLER

I WON'T FEEL THIS WAY FOREVER



KIM SPENCER

PRAISE FOR
I WON'T FEEL THIS WAY FOREVER
AND *WEIRD RULES TO FOLLOW*

“Engaging, endearing and earnest, Spencer skillfully weaves together the simple joys of life with painful truths.”

—Emily Seo, award-nominated author of *The Science of Boys*,
endorsement for *I Won't Feel This Way Forever*

★ “Readers will be left with a rich image of Mia’s world and the family and people that surround her as well as a strong sense of how culture and class impact people’s experiences. A touching exploration of identity and culture.”

—*Kirkus Reviews*, starred review for *Weird Rules to Follow*

“Simply put, Kim Spencer’s *Weird Rules to Follow* is a gem of a novel. With sensitive yet sharply written prose, it beautifully inhabits the preteen world of Mia Douglas, which bubbles over with friends, family and adolescent confusion...Mia Douglas is a fictional star whom young readers will love.”

—Jen Sookfong Lee, author of *The Conjoined*,
endorsement for *Weird Rules to Follow*

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Summary: In this middle-grade, follow-up novel to *Weird Rules to Follow*, Mia's beloved grandmother gets sick and is sent to a Vancouver hospital. Mia travels with her family to be with her and spends weeks bouncing between motel room, visiting hours and city adventures as she begins to realize that her grandmother might not get better.

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For Indigenous grandmothers

Newspaper Columnist

It's the last day of school. No one is happier about this than me. Every day, bells go off and students spill into the hallways and make their way to their lockers, classes and the washroom. This repeats throughout the day—at recess, lunch and after school. And don't get me started on the hallway monitor. Herding us along like cattle, his trusty whistle inches from his mouth, looking for an excuse to blow into it. This is our routine, Monday through Friday, September to June. It's *go, go, go!*

Lara and I still aren't on speaking terms all these months later. It's so strange. We didn't have a fight or disagreement. It's like she's become another person. We went from being best friends throughout elementary school to suddenly—game over. It's like the end of a Pac-Man video game, sound effects and all.

I spent the last few months of the year hanging out in the library at lunch. I'd sit in a cubby, nose buried in a book. Nibbling on an egg sandwich. One wall is glass and faces the hallway. Sometimes I'd get distracted from reading and end up people-watching. There are so many Native students at this school I've never met before. I didn't think Prince Rupert was that big. One girl's father is a fisherman. Based on the truck she gets dropped off in, I can tell they have a lot of money. And the stylish clothes she wears. One day she wore pale-pink linen pants, a white short-sleeved shirt and matching pink suspenders. Pointy white flats completed her outfit—which looked straight out of a magazine.

I people-watched so much that I started narrating the happenings in the hallway in my head. Like I was a newspaper columnist. Just like Elizabeth Wakefield from the Sweet Valley High books. It's not the first time I've pretended I was good ol' Lizzie. Back in sixth grade, when our library got its first computer, I would hang out there and pretend our school had a newspaper and I wrote the daily-buzz column. I embellished the day's events of our otherwise boring school (more like *brought them to life*). When lunch was over, I would frantically press the *delete* button. Mr. Anderson, the librarian, started to notice this. He stood behind me once, trying to explain that I could print what I'd written. I could have died from embarrassment. I stretched my upper body to block the monitor

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so he couldn't read the screen. My shoulders and chest inflated like I was a linebacker. My head looking back at him, nodding. *Yes, Mr. Anderson, I know that.* He must have thought I was nuts. And maybe I was—just like an actual newspaper columnist, running from story to story with their little notepads, always chasing the next headline.

Old habits are hard to break. Only this time, I'm not in front of a computer. I'm reporting in my head like I'm covering Page Six: *Fisherman's daughter sports gorgeous new soft leather jacket.* Like most professional reporters, I leave my personal feelings out of the story. Can you imagine how the caption would read otherwise? *Mia Douglas—neon green with envy over fisherman's daughter's entire wardrobe!* No joke, the girl wears a cool outfit daily. I have to save my best clothes for Fridays.

I *do not* report on Lara. When I see her, I look away. She doesn't deserve a headline. Even though she's one of the most popular girls at school. Seriously, she has so many friends! She also dyed her hair blond and got a loose perm. It looks so good. It's the perm I wanted back in sixth grade, but mine ended up looking like Michael Jackson's. She also wears crop tops, exposing her stomach. I guess her mother forcing her to belt her waist has paid off.

I wouldn't say I envy the group of girls Lara's made friends with. They're the loud, obnoxious type who get on people's nerves. The annoying kind who make so

much noise at the movies. For real—when my cousins and I went to see *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade*, Lara and her friends were asked to leave. Thankfully, we were sitting on the other side of the theater.

I don't necessarily *miss* Lara. It's more like we outgrew our friendship. Like a favorite sweatshirt that no longer fits. It was the best, most comfortable shirt—you absolutely loved it, wore it all the time. Then one day you no longer have any use for it.

My imaginary newspaper column is hardly *Daily News*-ready, and the school year has now ended, but that doesn't stop me. Convinced I am a budding journalist, I continue seeking out the next exclusive, front-page-worthy headline. When you're observant enough, you'll find stories are everywhere.

Heck, I'm an only child—I was made for this.

Christian Revivals

My mom and I live at my grandma's house. My uncle Dan lives with us as well. I don't have a dad or siblings, but I don't dwell on that much. I don't know that I've ever thought about having a brother or sister except when people ask me about it. Besides, I've got more than enough cousins to keep me company or fight with.

Grandma's four-bedroom house is often filled with her visiting children and grandchildren—whether it's for Sunday or holiday dinners, someone stopping by for a cup of coffee or my cousins sleeping over.

Grandma and I are traveling buddies too. Every year we go to Vancouver at least once. She loves it there. We go often for holidays, to doctor's appointments, to the PNE (Pacific National Exhibition) amusement park or

to visit family. My first memory of flying in an airplane was with Grandma, when I was five. We were flying to Vancouver. It was a clear, sunny day. I sat in the window seat. Once we reached elevation, I leaned up to look outside. The sky was blue with puffy, brilliant white clouds scattered as far as the eye could see. They were like giant clouds of cotton candy, almost within reach. I'd never seen anything like it. I turned to Grandma and asked in amazement, "Are we in heaven?" I can still see the shiny laughter in her eyes. She'd responded in her best English, "No, we're just flying in the sky."

We stayed at a hotel on Hastings near Main Street on that same trip. After settling in, we went outside, Grandma holding my hand tightly. We bumped into a Native preacher Grandma knew. He was a zealous, cheerful man. He wore a blue suit with a striped tie and a brown tweed hat. He punctuated every sentence with "Praise the Lord!" Or "Praise Jesus!" He also referred to Grandma as "Sister Ruth." He wasn't Tsimshian, so Grandma spoke to him in English. When she was done, he replied, "Hallelujah. Praise Jesus." It wouldn't have been unusual if he were preaching these things from a pulpit. But he wasn't. We were standing on a busy street corner in Vancouver. I'd never seen anyone so enthusiastic. I was in awe, taking it all in. After we said our goodbyes, I asked Grandma, "Was he God?" She laughed even harder at this question. She didn't

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bother answering me. By her response, I gathered that the Native man in a blue suit at the corner of Main and Hastings was *not* the Almighty.

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Grandma and I have also traveled to communities to attend Native church gatherings called Christian Revivals. A preacher said *revival* means spiritually strengthening or renewing your interest in the church—though Grandma's interest has always seemed pretty strong. On one trip when I was nine, we took the ferry from Prince Rupert to Port Hardy, and it was delayed in Bella Bella. This meant we missed our connecting bus when we docked in Port Hardy. It was eleven at night and the summer season, so the hotel rooms were all sold out.

Grandma's older sister, who I call Mama Mary, was with us. She speaks even less English than Grandma does. Mama Mary and I sat in the waiting area of the ferry terminal while Grandma stood at the counter speaking to someone. I wished that I was older so I could help her. It felt like we were stranded, and I was tired. After several minutes Grandma returned, spoke to her sister in our Sm'algayax language and told me to bring our bags outside. I asked where we were going, and she said, "To a bee and bee." I didn't understand her. Was she speaking in our language or English? And I was too tired to question further.

We loaded into a taxi, Grandma gave the man the address, and we were off. Even though we'd traveled through Port Hardy before, this time it was late at night, and we were heading to an unknown destination. I felt uneasy. I glanced at Grandma sitting in the front seat—she didn't look worried. Her eyes were focused directly in front of her. Even with limited English, she had unquestionable problem-solving skills.

We arrived at a large older house. A white lady came out, helped us with our bags and showed us to our rooms in what seemed to be her home. Grandma and I were in a bedroom with two twin beds, and Mama Mary was in a room beside us with a double bed. The furniture was all antique-looking. The lady pointed to the bathroom, where she had towel sets out for us. We were all tired, so we went straight to bed. I was still a bit confused, though. Who was this lady? Did Grandma know her?

The following morning Grandma woke me. She was already showered and wearing a dress and blazer. I got up and got ready, and we took our bags downstairs. The lady of the house directed us to her kitchen, where a table had breakfast laid out. Something she called English muffins, which I'd never eaten before, with boiled eggs and coffee for the adults and juice for me. The lady left us alone, and the three of us ate in silence. There was a pamphlet on the table. I picked it up and examined it. It was a picture of the woman's house. It said, *Victorian Style B&B*.

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I continued reading. *Bed & Breakfast—ah, B&B, I get it.* Grandma was definitely speaking English. We slept in a *bed* last night, and now we're eating *breakfast*. Clever.

After all that, we returned to the ferry terminal, got our connecting bus and continued to our destination, which was Campbell River. We checked into a hotel and made our way to the revival. Grandma was looking forward to being with all the “Christian people,” as she refers to churchgoers. Whenever she's upset with her kids for partying too much, or is tired of life, she'll threaten, “I'm going to run away with all the Christian people.” Grandma loves her Christian people, their imperfections and all.

Grandma, Mama Mary and I found our seats in the gymnasium. These gatherings are attended mainly by Native elders, and they can be boring. But I'm used to it, and, thankfully, some elders bring their grandkids. I told Grandma I was going to look around. That was my first mistake. If I had been more obedient, I might have stayed and listened to the program. How else did I expect to be “revived.” Instead I went straight to the bleachers, found other kids playing and made friends with a girl my age. She eventually asked me if I wanted to play at her house. I asked where she lived, and she said pretty close. So we went to her place. We had so much fun playing that I lost track of time.

When I returned to the gymnasium, almost everyone had left, and Grandma was standing beside the bleachers.

When she saw me, her face flooded with relief, then quickly changed to anger.

I tried lying and said, “I was playing outside.”

She snapped, “You weren’t outside. I looked there.”

While we waited for a taxi back to the hotel, Grandma asked me, “Where were you?”

I didn’t know what the big deal was. I go off and play all the time.

Finally I told her, “I met a girl and went to her house.”

She was even more upset. “You shouldn’t go to different people’s houses.” Then she said, “You could have been *taken*. You’re a bad girl, Amelia!”

Grandma said that to me often, and she usually had a good reason. She always used my full name, too, which seemed to add weight to the delivery. I sank within myself because deep down I knew it was true. I should have asked permission to go to that girl’s house.

When we returned to the hotel, Mama Mary was napping. Grandma said she needed to rest before dinner as well. She settled on the bed, and I sat on the chair and looked out the window. I was still feeling bad. I hadn’t expected to be gone so long. I glanced over at Grandma, fast asleep. She had every right to be upset with me, and I was sorry I had worried her. I’d seen it in her face.