

Lie on a Yardstick

By Rita Hestand

CAST OF CHARACTERS: NARRATOR, JULIE, MISS CRABBAGE,
HEATHER, GREG, AND WILLIAM

ACT 1

Scene 1

NARRATOR: Julie Benton was always the new kid at school. Her father's work took him all over the United States, so Julie was in and out of schools like some people went to the malls. But just once, she hoped she could make—and keep some good friends.

She is just a few seconds late, and takes her seat as everyone turns to stare at her. She hides behind a dark lock of hair, and clutches her diary under her arm closer.

GREG: Have you met Ms. Crabbage, yet?

JULIE: No

GREG: Just you wait!

(Bell Rings and Ms. Crabbage walks in. She is a short, shriveled old woman, with painted-on eyebrows, and a wig that looks more like a mop on her head.)

Ms. Crabbage: We will now open our history books to page 23 for our first test of the semester. If you did your homework, you should know the answers by heart.

Narrator: Homework? Julie squirmed, slouching in her seat.

Scene 2

(Walking out of school on to the school steps, later that day)

GREG: So, what did you think of Ms Crabbage?

JULIE: I've never met anyone like her, and I've had my share of teachers

(Heather walks up to them)

HEATHER: What did you think of her wig?

JULIE: It was a wig? Why does she wear that ugly thing?

Narrator: Julie glanced around to see if anyone heard her. Her father would ground her if he heard her talking about anyone like that. She had better manners.

HEATHER: Who knows? She draws her eyebrows on her face too.

JULIE: Does she always have that yardstick?

GREG: Tap, tap, tap. All day long. She's mean, and no one likes her. By the way, my name's Greg, and this is Heather. Do you live around here?

JULIE: No, I live in an apartment, across the railroad tracks.

GREG: An apartment, that's cool. See ya tomorrow.

NARRATOR: When Julie told her dad about Ms. Crabbage he warned her not to judge her teachers by their looks, but by their deeds. Julie had to admit Ms. Crabbage hadn't called on her in class today. And a week later she won a prize after getting a high grade on her history test. But later that same day in the lunchroom everyone called her "Teachers Pet".

JULIE: Look, I don't like Ms. Crabbage either, but my dad expects good grades.

GREG: Yeah, so does mine, I just don't get them.

(Everyone giggles)

ACT 2

Scene 1

(A few weeks later, the bell has rang and everyone is leaving except Julie, who hangs back)

NARRATOR: Ms. Crabbage is leaving the school after nearly forty years of teaching. Everyone is pretty happy about it, except Julie. She's grown

to like Ms. Crabbage, only she can't tell the other kids, or they wouldn't like her.

JULIE: I'm sorry you're leaving, Ms. Crabbage.

MS. CRABBAGE: Why, thank you, Julie. I'll miss everyone, of course. And listen, if you ever need a friend, or just need to talk, come see me. You can find me at the library every Saturday afternoon. It must be very hard to have to move to different schools all the time, Julie. But it looks as though you've adjusted well here at Adams.

JULIE: Yes ma'am.

MS. CRABBAGE: I'm glad for you, Julie. You know, I've never lived anywhere but right here in Andersonville. Never been out of state. I was always afraid to go anywhere people didn't know me. Isn't that silly? My sister moved to New York last year. (she sighs sadly) She sent this beautiful yardstick to me, just before she died. She said every teacher must have one.

NARRATOR: Julie looks at the yardstick with greater understanding.

JULIE: Oh-then you must treasure it.

NARRATOR: Julie began to understand that Ms. Crabbage treasured the yardstick; just like she treasured the diary her mother had left her when she died.

MS. CRABBAGE: Yes, very much, Julie.

Scene 2

(Later, in the cafeteria)

GREG: I heard you talking to old Crabby. Why did you tell her that?
We're all glad she's leaving. She's mean, you said so yourself.

(Heather joins Greg and Juile at the table)

JULIE: I know I said I didn't like her, but....

WILLIAM (who is sitting at the next table over) Well, I do.

JULIE: (turns to look at William) You do?

WILLIAM: Sure, Ms. Crabbage is a nice teacher. She's only quitting because of her age and all.

HEATHER: Well, I'm glad she's quitting. She's mean.

WILLIAM: She just looks mean, Heather. She can't help that, anymore than I can help being fat, or Kenny over there can help being black. Does that mean you don't like us?

HEATHER: That's different. You aren't a teacher.

WILLIAM: Someone has to be our teacher, and Ms. Crabbage is a good one. Look, how many teachers around here give out prizes and gum in