

**THE STORY
OF
Q**

THE STORY OF Q



Marion J Chard

Illustrations by
Karla Rado Richey

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For my granddaughter Jessica

My great nieces, Mylah,

Mykaelah & Madison

My great nephew Kaden

&

All my 'little' girls in Alger

Love you bunches!

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*To mom and dad -
Thanks for letting me dream!*

PREFACE

While attending elementary school, I developed a real passion for science and space. While many of my friends were playing outside, I remained glued to my black and white TV set, eagerly watching the Mercury astronauts make their first brave attempts to go where no man had gone before. I even had a scrapbook (I still have it) with carefully cutout newspaper articles regarding the astronauts and their trips beyond the atmosphere. I was so enthralled that I sat in my room one day, carefully removed a piece of lined paper from my writing pad, and scribbled off a note to NASA. I don't believe I actually expected to receive a reply from the men who made it all happen; I simply wanted to share my unabated enthusiasm with anyone who cared to listen.

So imagine my surprise when my mother and father handed me an envelope from the National Aeronautics and Space Administration. I was on cloud nine while I excitedly tore open that manila envelope with shaking hands. Lo and behold, they

not only responded to my letter, they also included seven 8 X 10, color photographs of the original Mercury 7. I was in heaven and immediately hung their images on the walls of my bedroom, alongside my collection of dolls and pictures of rock stars. Hey, I had eclectic taste.

To this day, I maintain my love of the heavens and everything associated with them. While I never got the chance to work at NASA, I can still dream big and hope that young girls like Rachael, keep reaching towards the stars.

PRONUNCIATION GUIDE

Accuu: AH-coo

Arbi: AR-bee

Aundu-li: Ay-UHN-doo-lee

Cailla: KAY-luh

Daindi: Day-IV-dee

Duani: Do-AH-nee

Ennui: En-YOU-wee

Hainda: HAYN-duh

Hinna: HIN-nuh

Hanuu: HAH-noo

Huumq: WHO-muh

Kanii: Ka-NEE

Kasingi: KA-sing-ee

Lianna: LEE-uh-nuh

Lilah: LIL-uh

Miaanu: ME-ah-noo

Michio Kaku: Me-CHEE-oh Kah-KOO

Misha: MEE-shuh

Oma: OH-muh

Quibble: KWI-bull

Quinda: KWIV-duh

Raini: Ray-IV-nee

Taindu: Tay-IV-doo

Tinda: TIN-duh

Yume: YOU-Me



1

THE ONLY THING I REALLY WANT

“**G**irls, are you almost ready to go?”

It was Saturday morning, Rachael’s favorite day of the week - no school and she didn’t have to get up early. It’s not that she didn’t like school, she did. Rachael was an excellent student and enrolled in several enhanced classes. She also passed her qualification test in August and was accepted into the Advanced Elementary Studies program (AES), which met every Wednesday morning at 10:00 a.m. She enjoyed learning new things and meeting new people, and shared her father’s love of astronomy (he was a professor at a local university). However, she was still a normal ten year old, and couldn’t wait for the weekends.

Rachael loved snuggling beneath her comforter, but today she needed no prodding to be motivated, as she excitedly pulled back the flowing curtains surrounding her canopy bed and jumped to the carpeted floor.

She dressed in her favorite Marlo jeans, long-sleeved baby-blue cotton shirt, and fleecy white hoodie, embellished with the words, 'Girls Rock', and slipped on her headphones. Her shoulders began bopping up and down in time to one of her favorite songs, 'Girls Just Wanna Have Fun', as she mouthed the words, with special emphasis on 'fuh-unn'.

She found her mother singing along with the radio one day and before she knew it, Rachael herself was learning the words and joining in. She fell in love with the tune and even though it was an old song, she had to admit it was a good one.

Rachael's room was perfect; her parents granted her birthday wish and Rachael was able to redecorate her room just the way she wanted. She got to choose everything including the paint for the walls, and recalled how much joy she had leafing

through the pages of the big JC Penney catalog, picking out new furniture, window treatments and of course the fluffy white comforter with soft flecks of turquoise, green and purple. Her room reminded her of a lovely spring garden retreat, much like the one outside her bedroom window.

She didn't miss her old room adorned in pink and white, or the twin beds with their striped bedspreads. It was so nice having a full mattress and being able to stretch out. It was the best birthday present ever.

As she looked around her spacious bedroom this morning, she remembered how many times she had practiced her speech that day...

"Mom, dad, you know I'm gonna be ten soon and well, my room is, well you know, it's kinda childish, dontcha think?"

Her dad raised his eyebrows and let just a hint of his famous smile peer over the top of their local newspaper, the Lake Chalfont Gazette. He'd let his wife handle this one.

"And the point you are trying to make, is?" her mother inquired, while expertly adding a stack of

towering pancakes to the platter of link sausages and scrambled eggs.

“Well, um, I think I’m ready for a more grown-up décor. After all, I’m gonna be a teenager in a few years”, she exclaimed, as she added a third pancake to her plate.

Her younger sister sighed across the table. It was more than a sigh — it was a super sigh!

“Jeez Rache, why do you always have to egg-aserate?”

“I don’t and it’s ‘ex-ag-ger-ate’ ”, she retorted, her voice raising a couple of notches.

“Whatever”, snapped Melanie, stabbing the sausage on her plate, accidentally causing it to fly across the table, landing next to her father’s steaming cup of coffee.

“Girls”, he pleaded. “Must we always begin each morning like this?” and turned with an exasperated, but loving glance at his wife.

“Sorry dad”, they chimed together. Rachael and Melanie exchanged smiles and tried their best to stifle their giggles, as the meal continued on in silence except for the clanging of forks and knives.

After a few minutes, Rachael resumed her well-rehearsed speech.

“Uh, anyway, I was talking about my birthday and I’ve been doing a lot of thinking and I know what I want”, she paused, pensively looking at each of her parents, before beginning again.

“The only thing I really want is to redecorate my room, okay?”

Please, please, please she repeated to herself, and then held her breath anxiously waiting for her parents’ reply.

“Your dad and I will talk about it this weekend, okay?” then winking at her husband, she began clearing the dishes from the oblong wooden antique table, which once belonged to her grandparents. The table sat in front of a huge bay window, with tons of soft, thick, comfortable pillows. It was a great spot to view the rainbows cast by the leaded glass. It was also Misha the cat’s favorite place in the house. The girls loved watching him stretched out and asleep on his back, with his whiskers twitching back and forth. What do cats dream about anyway, they wondered.

Rachael's attention snapped back to the present as she heard her mother call out once more.

“Girls, are you ready to go?”





2

THE GARAGE SALE FIND

Rachael headed out the door with her mom, dad and younger sister and a pocketful of birthday money, anticipating what she would buy. She was looking for great mystery books, jewelry and whatever else caught her eye, but an enormous alphabet letter was certainly not on that list.

Each year her neighborhood held a several-block garage sale and she and her family always looked forward to the daylong venture. Each member would always come back with a trove of treasures (well it was to them), and this weekend was no exception.

After an exhausting, but oh so fun day, their last stop led them to Mr. and Mrs. Hollingsworth's home, their neighbors across the street. Rachael and

her sister loved spending time at their home and in fact, the Hollingsworths were just like grandparents to them.

“Hey girls, where are my hugs?” Mr. Hollingsworth called out as he knelt down, and both girls threw their arms around him, each taking a side.

“How’s my two favorite young ladies this afternoon?” he beamed, while adjusting his World War II veteran’s cap, which never left his head.

Meanwhile Mrs. Hollingsworth waved to both the girls, as she handed change to a customer.

“Hello Rachael, hello Melanie. Still have lots of goodies left for you two to go through.”

Not needing any prompting, they spent the next thirty minutes strolling past each table and rummaging through various boxes of puzzles, books, and assorted objects. Rachael was getting ready to pay Mrs. Hollingsworth, when she spotted a very large letter ‘Q’ made of porcelain, near the garage door. Hmm, I didn’t notice that the first time around, she thought to herself, and walked over to it, eyeing it curiously.

It stood about seven inches high, and five inches wide and sat on a base, and just happened to match the décor in her room. She felt a bit silly for even considering it, and looked around to see if anyone was watching. When she was certain that no one was staring at her, she placed it at the bottom of her ever-growing pile of sale items. For some reason she felt compelled to buy it; there was no simple explanation.

Mrs. Hollingsworth began ringing up her purchases, including the giant 'Q', and much to Rachael's relief, didn't question her about the 'letter'.

"That will be six dollars even, Rache", she said in her ever-pleasant voice.

"But Mrs. H, it's more than that. I came up with six dollars and eighty-five cents. I still owe you money."

"Oh my dear, I'm giving you a bargain this afternoon", she chirped. "It's my 'favorite ten-year-old' discount. I guess you weren't aware of that, were you", and a brilliant smile crept over her face, pushing up her violet-colored spectacles, just a little.

“Mrs. H, you are too good to me, but thanks. You’re the greatest!” she remarked, while blowing her a kiss from across the table.

“See ya later Mrs. H. See ya later Mr. H”, Rachael beamed, as she headed home on this sunny but slightly brisk day, crunching the brightly colored fallen leaves beneath her shoes. She looked both ways for oncoming cars, carefully crossing the street, and then slowly hopped up each stone step of the large covered front porch, savoring the sweet autumnal aromas that filled the air. She loved this time of the year.

Rachael returned to her room with two large bags of goodies, including a mint-condition trilogy entitled, ‘Where in the World is Penelope?’ She couldn’t believe her luck, for she’d been dying to read these and now owned the complete hardcover set. The ‘Q’ however, would remain in the bag, stuffed inside her closet for several days until she finally had the nerve to plop it on her desk. She was still mystified why she bought it in the first place, but felt justified because the colors blended so perfectly with her new décor.

The following is an excerpt
from Book Two - Misha Goes
Missing



1

CALL 911

Rachael eagerly opened the windows, as she knelt upon the seat cushions in her bedroom breathing in the lovely fragrances emanating from her mother's flowerbeds, below. A soft breeze fluttered through the windows as the morning sun caressed her face. This is going to be a wonderful day, she thought to herself, throwing her arms in the air, stretching as far as she could. If everything went as planned, she, Jenny and her little sister Melanie, would attempt to find their way back to Hanuu tonight, unbeknownst to her parents. She couldn't wait to see Daindi again, and all the other great friends they made several months ago.

It was late June and Rachael was not only thinking about the 'Q', but of her old school. She

had been doing that a lot lately. It had only been three weeks since she last walked its corridors; however, her heart yearned to return to Neil Armstrong Elementary with its familiar sights, sounds, and years of happy memories. She had so many mixed emotions — for she was actually excited about the prospects of attending Cranbrooke Middle School in the fall, yet... Life is full of changes, she kept reminding herself, before she returned her attention once again to the colorful view outside.

Her eyes followed Melanie as she tended the lilies among the perennial gardens with her mother. Her sister looked so adorable in her new straw hat with its flowered purple and white ribbon, and matching apron, and although her hands and face were smudged with dirt, she still looked like a tiny angel with her purple trowel in hand. Rachael grinned when she heard her sister shriek, “Oh mom, look, there’s a green caterpillar crawling on your apron”, and smiled even more upon hearing her mother’s peals of laughter and the six-year-old’s fits of giggles.

I could easily sit here all day, she mused, but she wanted to paint her finger and toenails, so headed off to the bathroom. She rummaged through the drawer until she found a bottle of blue speckled polish. "Perfect", she exclaimed, as she grabbed a handful of cotton balls and sat on the floor. She began shoving bits of cotton between her toes, when a sudden scream pierced her solitude.

"Melanie! Melanie! Oh my God, Melanie!"

Rachael raced to the window leaving a trail of white cotton balls behind her.

"Mom, mom, what's wrong?" she shouted from her bedroom window, and saw Melanie limp in her mother's arms in the middle of a bed of Shasta daisies.

"Ra-Rachael", her mother stuttered. "Rache call 911. Call 911 right now!"

"Mom, what happened?"

"I don't know Rache. Please call right now. Your sister fell and is burning with fever. She's having problems with her balance."

The next few seconds were a blur, as Rachael frantically looked for her phone and tried to call for

help. Her fingers suddenly felt clumsy and she couldn't think straight, however, she succeeded punching the emergency button on her phone, in spite of her nervousness.

"911. What's your emergency please?"

"Oh, oh thank God, my name's Rachael, and my little sister — she's six", she sobbed into the phone.

"Take a deep breath honey. It's okay. Tell me exactly what happened."

"I, I heard my mom screaming and she told me to call you. She said that my sister is having problems with her balance. Uh, she fell down and she has a fever too, and we, we don't know what's wrong with her."

"Where is she? What's her name? Are you with her right now?"

"Uh, I'm in my room upstairs. My, my mom is in the garden with Melanie. Oh, please, please hurry", she begged, as tears streamed down her face. "We're at 5355 Liberty Street — in Lake Chalfont."

"I have an ambulance on its way. It won't take long, I promise. You are doing a great job, Rachael, so try to remain calm. I know it's difficult, but that

will really help”, the sweet voice reassured her. “Do you want me to stay on the line with you?”

“Yes, for a little while if that’s okay?” she sniffed. “I’m gonna run downstairs to be with them. I’m going there right now. Hold on, okay?”

“I’m not going anywhere, honey.”

With tears obscuring her vision, she flew down the steps as quickly as she could, almost landing on top of the sleeping cat. Her heart was pounding so fast, she thought it would pop right out of her chest. As she stepped through the set of French doors, she yelled to her mother. “They’re on their way, they’re on their way. The ambulance is coming momma!”

When she reached the two of them, she fell to her knees and began caressing her sister’s hair. She met her mother’s swollen eyes and said, “Don’t worry; she is going to be okay. I just know it.”

She had forgotten that she was still holding onto her cell phone until she heard a muffled voice of the responder calling out.

“Rachael? Rachael, are you still there?”

“I’m here, I’m still here. I’m with them now”, she exclaimed, trying to hold onto the phone with

sweaty hands.

“The ambulance should be pulling up any second. Is she conscious Rachael?”

“Ah, yes, yes she is awake. Oh my gosh, she just got sick — I mean she just threw up on my mom. She doesn’t look very good at all — wait, I hear the ambulance. I’m gonna go out front and show them where she is.”

“Okay honey, I’ll hang up now. Be brave. You are doing a wonderful job.”

Rachael felt as though she were floating. It was a strange sensation, as though her feet weren’t touching the ground.

“Please hurry”, she begged the paramedics. “My sister is back here”, she added, pointing towards the backyard.

The next few minutes were a total blur as the two paramedics asked questions and tended to Melanie, eventually lifting her onto a stretcher and loading her into the vehicle.

“Oh my God Rachael, we have to call your father. I can’t believe I forgot...”

“Mom, it’s okay. I’m going to call dad right now.”

Suddenly Rachael felt a comforting hand on her shoulder. It was Mrs. Hollingsworth.

“Don’t worry Lilah. I’ll watch Rache. Go now. Call us as soon as you know anything. We’ll get word to Trevor and send him to Saint Mary’s. It will be okay, Lilah. Carl and I are praying.”

“But I wanna go with my mom”, Rachael wailed, throwing her arms around Mrs. Hollingsworth.

“Shh, shh — there, there honey. You can help most right now by getting in touch with your father and letting the paramedics do their job. Do you want me to call him?”

“Okay”, she cried, burying her face into her neighbor’s dress.

Just then, Mr. Hollingsworth knelt beside her, grabbing onto her hand.

“Come here sweetheart. Let my wife call your dad”, and Rachael melted into his loving arms.

The following is an excerpt
from Book Three - The Secret
of Mrs H



29

DAY ONE

Rachael gave her dad a final hug, then ran down the corridor lined with floor to ceiling windows that stretched eighteen feet in height. She followed the hall to the end, and as instructed yesterday, took a right turn to her classroom. ‘Team 6’, the sign read. Yep, this is me. The attendees were divided by grades — second graders were Team 2. Third graders were Team 3 and so on. Smoothing her reddish-blond hair, she took a deep breath, pulled on the silver-colored door handle, and entered the spacious room. The instructor smiled at her.

“Welcome. As you can see, you’re the first one to arrive. I like that. Shows you have a ready to go attitude. I’m Dr. Seffer, but everyone calls me Caleb. Just part of the furniture around here”, he chuckled.

“Been part of NASA for about fifteen years, so they think I have enough qualifications. Hmm, guess you’ll be the judge of that”, he laughed, reading her nametag. “Why does your name sound familiar? Rachael Lexington. Oh wait, are you Trevor Lexington’s daughter?”

Rachael nodded her head.

“Your dad and I went to university together. We received our doctorates from Cambridge. Jolly good time. Great fellow. Haven’t run into him yet, we should all have dinner one night”, he stated, bouncing a piece of chalk from hand to hand.

“I love your English accent”, she blurted, instantly regretting her choice of words. Gawd, she said to herself. That’s the first thing you say to your new instructor?

“Why thank you very much Rachael. And I love yours too!”

“Love my what?”

“Your accent.”

“My accent?” she blushed.

“Why yes. You sound just like an American!” he joked.

Now Rachael was laughing too. Ah, I like it here already and she immediately relaxed.



Dear Diary:

Here I am. Thought it would be fun to put my words on REAL paper pages, just like my mom used to do. She actually bought you for me. So...It's day one at Space Camp. I'm deliriously happy and it's only the beginning. My instructor, Dr Seffer is the most. He said we can call him Caleb, but I feel a little funny doing that. I embarrassed myself straight off by commenting on his English accent. I wanted to crawl under a chair or better yet, push the rewind button and start over. But he was so cool and made me laugh, so I guess we're off to a great start. And he's friends with my dad. He

told me that they went to Cambridge together. I never knew that my father studied in England. You do realize that's the school Sir Isaac Newton attended, don't you? And to think my dad actually walked down the very same hallways. Whoa, guess I need to ask him all about that! Anyhow... got to see the Atlantis space shuttle. Wow, sure is a lot bigger in person. And to think that it actually flew in space! Better yet, we ran simulations including our attempts at landing this colossal beast. Uh, yours truly wasn't so perfect. Can you believe that? Ha! But it was SO realistic that I swore I was actually flying it! Good thing I wasn't... Still can't believe I'm here. Tomorrow we get to watch a launch of a communications satellite — weather permitting that is. A real SpaceX launch! They say you can feel the earth shake under your feet. Gabberflax! Can it get any better than this? Gotta run for dad and I are

grabbing a late night snack. He has a craving for pistachios. Me? I'd love a piece of apple pie with vanilla ice cream. He's the best, isn't he? Til tomorrow...

Just R