

**BeTwixt:**

**Are you a boy or a girl?**

Picture book text by Hazel Edwards

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**BeTwixt**

Today is my first class.

At this school, all students wear a uniform.

But I'm different, inside.

Boys and girls wear the same.

Green floppy hats, shorts and tops.

My Mum says, 'The children look like beautiful flower-faces.'

But I'm different, inside.

We line up outside the 'portable' classroom on the dusty path.

Our classroom used to be in another school last term, too.

Like me.

'Where do I line up?' I ask as the boys line up near the taps.

I wait in the middle. They think it's because I'm the new kid.

Girls line up near the wall.

'Are you a boy or a girl?' the other children ask.

I shrug.

'If you're not a boy or a girl, are you an Alien?'

'What does an Alien look like?' I'd like to be an Alien and whiz around in a space ship.

'Spiky green space suit, a helmet and comes from Mars.'

'I come from Y Street near the hospital. An Alien jet-pack would be cool, but I've only got a bike.'

Just then, Miss Ryan opens the squeaky classroom door. Dinosaurs dangle from her ears.

She smiles at me. 'Welcome to our class. Hang up your school bag on the peg with your name.'

Mine has the wrong name.

'What name do you want me to write?' asks Miss Ryan.

I say 'Geni' but she writes 'Jeannie' so I explain to the other kids. 'I've got a few names. Call me Gene.'

'Geni?' yell the kids. 'Can you make wishes come true? Like out of a bottle?'

'Gene is my nickname,' I say for the millionth time.

'Like mine,' says Jordo who wears a t-shirt printed with:

"I am Jordan.  
I'm the best BOY footballer in the world.  
My Grandpa says so.'

'Do you play football, Gene?' asks Grace. Her saggy baggy bag is stuffed with pet mice, a leaking drink bottle and dinosaur stickers. Things fall out as she trips on the step.

'Yeah. I play football. I like sport.'

'Jordan is a boy-girl name,' says Zoe. 'My sister is called Jordan too.'

'Girls wear ear-rings, like Miss Ryan's dinosaur ones. Girls have lots of hair, and handbags,' says Grace.

'Some boys wear ear rings and have schoolbags,' says Jordo. 'But we haven't all got pet mice inside.'

Miss Ryan overhears, and says quickly, 'Today in art, we're making Alien jewellery. Here are the paints, clay and colourings.'

We make Dinosaur bracelets, Monster brooches and ear-rings for Aliens. It's fun messing around. Jack makes three rings for each Alien so they have a spare just in case they lose one.

'My Alien has three ears anyway,' says Jordo.

'My brooch is for a Bunyip,' says Grace. 'You can't see bunyips.' They're 'maginary.'

'You can't see dinosaurs,' says Jordo. 'They're dead.'

'Not the ones on Miss Ryan's ears. They move a lot,' says Grace.

At playtime I don't want to go outside because when the bell goes, we have to line up in the girls or boys' lines.

'Go out and get some fresh air,' Miss Ryan pushes me outside.

I run in the playground until the bell goes.

The girls are lining up. So are the boys.

'Let's line up in a different way today,' suggests Miss Ryan.

'Let's be a crocodile today, one behind the other....

Tomorrow we will be a snail, curling around, and one behind the other around the portable.

And on Friday, you can choose...'

'A sea horse,' I say. 'They are my favourite fish.'

'A Bunyip,' says Grace. 'Then we won't have to line up. They're 'maginary.'"

At lunchtime, I need to go to the toilet.

Jack uses the special Disabled toilet,

so he can do 'wheelies' up the ramp.

He's cool with that, but he's been at this school for ages.

Miss Ryan says quietly to me, 'Use the special toilet, near the staff room.'

'Why is Gene special?' asks Grace, dropping her sandwich.

'Everybody is special, in different ways,' says Miss Ryan. 'After lunch, we'll check out why names are special when we make the birthday wall chart.'

Miss Ryan lists all our names and takes our photos.

'Some names are specially chosen for people,' she says.

'What's my name mean?' asks Zoe.

'Zoe means 'life'. Miss Ryan knows important stuff. 'Grace means graceful.'

Grace laughs. 'I drop things. My Mum calls me Butterfingers!'"

'Not everybody matches their name,' smiles Miss Ryan. 'Outside we might be different from inside.'

The class agrees that Grace isn't like her name.

'If you don't use a person's name, what other words can you use?' asks Miss Ryan.

"'He' for a boy,' says Jordo.

"'She' and 'her' for girls,' says Grace.

'They' for girl mice when you have more than one,' says Jordo poking Grace's bag.

'Pronouns,' Miss Ryan writes on the wobbly board.

'What do you say if a person isn't a boy or a girl?' asks Jack.

Just then the bell goes.

'Maybe we can make up our own,' says Miss Ryan. 'Like when we all thought of a new name for our class goldfish.'

'What about shim?' says Grace.

'Or 'hir', says Jordo. 'It's shorter. Like a nickname.'

'Are you inbetween a boy and a girl?' asks Zoe as we play chasey after school until our parents arrive.

'No. I'm NOT a second best boy. Or a second best girl. I'm just me.'

'Doesn't matter what you're called. You're IT!'

Zoe tags me. 'Your turn to chase.'

I love running. It's my best thing after maths.

Next morning, when we have maths, I try to explain 'me', the way Mum told us last night. I draw a triangle.

'People are not like a line with boys at one end and girls at the other. People can be more like a triangle. See. Boys at this point. Girls at this point and I'm at the other point on the triangle. We're equal, not second best.'

'I like circles and wheels better,' says Jack.

'EEEEk.' Just then, Grace's pet escapes from her bag. The mouse races up the blackboard. And slips behind the birthday chart.

Children scream. Miss Ryan goes pale. 'Get it out!'

Grace cries and I chase the mouse.

I slide between and grope in the chalk dust. I pull out the mouse, by its tail.

It is trembling. I pat it gently and give it back to Grace.

'Thanks Gene.' Grace puts the mouse back into her schoolbag.

'The mouse was betwixt the board and the wall. 'Betwixt' means inbetween,' says Miss Ryan. She writes betwixt on the board. 'Use it in a sentence.'

'Miss Ryan loves dinosaur ear-rings, 'whispers Grace to me.' But I don't think she loves my mouse.'

'Stop talking Grace. Write your sentence.'

Grace writes, 'My mouse is called Betwixt.'

I like that name. It fits.

Soon it will be Sports Day and there are races.

'Gene's on our team,' says Jordo. 'That's right isn't it Grace?'

Grace nods. 'Gene's our second best runner in the mixed relay.'

'Who's the best?'

'My mouse called Betwixt.'

'Or Miss Ryan running away from Grace's mouse,' adds Jack,

'Is that a joke?' I ask.

Jordo laughs. 'Yeah.'

So I'm part of the relay team which has boys, girls and me.

And Jack was going to win the wheelies' race because he's the only one in his race.

But then Grace had an idea.

'Can we race you on our bikes?' Grace asks Jack.

'Cool,' says Jack.

Miss Ryan says we can start in different places.

That's okay. So we do.

Best known for 'There's a Hippopotamus on Our Roof Eating Cake', author Hazel Edwards also co-wrote the YA novel 'f2m:the boy within' with Ryan Kennedy, the first Young Adult novel co-written by an ftm ( female to male) about transitioning gender. Since then Hazel has had numerous requests for a 'fluid gender' story for younger readers. That's why 'Betwixt' is available here for readers to illustrate as an activity which allows discussion in the classroom and elsewhere. Often literature 'distances' a sensitive subject and allows questions to be answered.