



A Disaster in Gym

Writing prompts, discussion questions, and audio transcript

ABOUT THE STORYTELLER

Katherine Center is the author of five novels about love and family, all written for adults. They include *THE HAPPINESS PROJECT* and *THE LOST HUSBAND*. Her pieces have appeared in *Redbook*, *InStyle*, *People*, *USA Today*, *Vanity Fair*, *The Atlantic*, and *Real Simple*, as well as other periodicals and anthologies. Read more about Katherine here: <http://www.katherinecenter.com>.

Talk it Out

Read the following expression, which is one of Katherine Center's favorites:

The best revenge is forgetting.

Now discuss:

What do you think the expression means?

Do you agree this with statement? Explain your answer using examples from Katherine Center's story and from your own life, if possible.

If you saw a group of kids play this prank on one of your classmates, what do you think you would do? What do you think you should do? Brainstorm a list of possible, ideal steps to take.

Write it Out

Choose one of the following prompts and write 1-2 pages, double-spaced:

- Imagine that you are a news reporter. Write an article that details the moment Katherine describes above. Include imaginary quotes from Katherine, the girls perpetrating the prank, and a teacher or principal who finds out about the prank from you.

- Imagine that you are one of the girls who perpetrated this prank, and you have an older sister or brother. Write up a series of texts between this girl and the older sibling. In the texts, the girl describes her prank, and the older sibling responds.
- Imagine that those girls tried to prank Katherine in this way, but she stood up for herself and another kid in her class backed her up. Write up that story.

TRANSCRIPT OF THE AUDIO MEMORY

Katherine: There were some girls who came up to me during PE. So we would change out of our little uniforms for PE. And we would put on like a T-shirt and shorts; and I was maybe in, I'm gonna say fifth grade, and these girls were in sixth grade. And they came up to me; and they said, "Did you know that if you put your hands inside your sleeves of your shirt, and you can't get them back out again, that means you have cancer."

Julie: Oh my God.

Katherine: And I was instantly you know pulled in and urgently wanted to find out if I had cancer or not. Maybe I was in fourth grade. I want to make myself younger so I sound less gullible. So I instantly pulled out the sleeves of my little PE shirt and stuck my hands in on both sides. And once my hands were fully in, then I couldn't get them back out. But before I even had time to kind of think about what that might mean in terms of my prognosis, these girls reached down, and they pulled my pants down, my shorts down. And in front of all the boys...It was PE, right, so we were all out kind of near the track. You know I can't remember if they just pulled the shorts down—this detail is lost to me—or if they pulled everything down, I don't know. It's probably just shorts.

Julie: It doesn't matter. Right.

Katherine: But either way it was bad. And then I couldn't get my hands out of my shirt.

Julie: [Laughing] So you were dying on so many levels.

Katherine: It was so awful. I don't think I told the teacher. I don't think I told my mother, I don't think I told anybody. It was just this horrible thing that happened. And then I forgot about it, which I think is probably a good thing. I mean I love that expression the best revenge is forgetting.

Julie: Ooh, I hadn't heard that. That's a great one. That is great. If I had actually had my pants pulled down and –

Katherine: Even just the words of it –

Julie: Hard to say, right. And then in front of boys. And...can we just add all of the elements? First, you were duped. Second, you were really worried probably that you might have cancer. Third, you couldn't, you were struggling to get your arms out, that's really awkward. And then everyone's staring at you because your pants are down. That's a really difficult moment, and yet you didn't let it get you down. You're the hero. You are. You're an incredibly strong person. I'm serious.

Katherine: I will take that.

© Julie Sternberg and Marcie Colleen 2016
Illustration by Matthew Cordell