

Crazy

a short story
by Denise Vega

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Denise is the award-winning author of books for tweens and teens, including *Click Here (to find out how I survived seventh grade)*, *Access Denied (and other eighth grade error messages)* – which is the sequel to *Click Here*, *Fact of Life #31*, and *Rock On: a story of guitars, gigs, girls and a brother (not necessarily in that order)* and more. She lives in Colorado with her family and loves to hike and hang out when she isn't writing. Oh, and she hates cheese!

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My best friend Kara and I call it the BC disease. Boy Crazy. Or just the Cs--the crazies. It attacked most of the girls at our school in sixth grade. The symptoms: excessive hair flipping, make-up, high-pitched giggling at basically nothing, and my personal favorite--hitting, shoving, and smacking boys for no reason.

The worst thing about it: there seemed to be no cure for the Cs. And not only that, just about everyone caught it at some point.

Except us. We were two months, two weeks, and five days into seventh grade and neither Kara nor I had the Cs.

"I'm never going to act like that," Kara said, nodding to Steph Jamison. Steph was flipping her hair, wiggling her painted fingernails, and laughing at nothing near a group of boys.

"Which part?" I asked. "The finger wiggling? The hair flip? The laughing at nothing?"

"All of the above," Kara said.

"Yeah." I nodded. "Me, neither." If that's how I'd be if I started liking boys, forget it. Besides, my hair was short. What would I flip? And I played too many sports to do my nails.

Kara and I went off to kick the soccer ball and everything was fine.

Until Kara started to notice boys. Things like a guy's hair, or how cute his butt looked in jeans, or how so-and-so teased her in English.

"Tim Bartholomew said I had a wicked head butt," she exclaimed Wednesday after school. We'd had a big soccer game at recess and half the school played.

"Tim Bartholomew?" Tim was a seventh grader who everyone said was "hot." I guess he was cute, in a wavy-hair-cute-braces-smile-kind-of-way. But I didn't pay much attention to that stuff. Mostly I had been interested in getting the ball away from Kara, since she had been on the opposite team.

I knew Tim from playing soccer at recess. He was really good and he would actually pass to me even though I was a girl because he knew I could take it to the net.

I looked at her.

"A wicked head butt," she repeated. Okay. I'd heard. It's not like there's an Olympic Head Butting event and she'd won the gold medal. Sheesh.

"It sounds like you're getting the BCs." I laughed nervously.

"Nah," Kara said. But she didn't laugh. And she didn't look me in the eye when she said it.

On Christmas Eve, Kara and I exchanged gifts like we always did. We both gave each other new charms for our matching charm bracelets. Then I gave her a T-shirt and she gave me a new soccer ball.

"Love it!" we both said. And things seemed just the same as always.

Until January.

"What do you think of the Winter Dance?" We were sitting next to each other on the bus going home when she asked.

"I don't," I said. And if I did, I'd picture us having a sleepover at my house. We'd watch movies and eat candy and popcorn.

"I think it might be kind of fun."

I reached over and felt her forehead. "You've been infected with the BCs." I tried to laugh but I felt my stomach twist.

Kara brushed my hand away. "No, I haven't," she said. "I just think it might be fun." She looked at me. "We both like to dance, right?"

"Yeah," I said cautiously. But we only danced at *home*, in private.

"So, we should go. And dance."

"With *boys*?"

Kara shrugged. "With whoever we want."

"I don't think any of the boys can dance," I said.

"Then we'll dance with a bunch of girls. Come on. It'll be fun."

If she said it would be fun one more time, I'd stuff my soccer ball in her mouth. Biting my lip, I glanced out the school bus window. I didn't want to go. But I didn't want her to go without me, either.

"Okay," I said finally. "But they'd better play some good music."

She squeezed my arm. "It'll be great."

It was awful. I stood next to the snack table drinking punch. I drank so much punch that I had to keep running to the bathroom, which was actually a good thing because it gave me something to do while Kara danced with Joe, and Mark, and even Tim Bartholomew. I also watched Steph glaring at Kara and Tim. *Lame*. There were a lot of other boys willing to look goofy dancing with her. Why not just flail around with one of them?

Kara danced two more times with Tim, including a slow dance. I turned back to the punch bowl and waited for it to be over.

In a strange BC-Twilight Zone kind of moment, I actually had to fend off two boys who asked me to dance. I told them I had a knee injury from soccer.

"Why are you here, then?" one of the boys asked. Good question. Why *was* I at a dance when I wasn't going to dance? I'd tried, but was too embarrassed. Everyone who wasn't dancing stared at everyone who was and I didn't like them staring at *me*.

"It's just fun to be with friends." I shrugged as I took another sip of punch. "Excuse me. I need to use the restroom."

When the dance was over, Kara ran over to me. "Tim held me against him, like, two seconds longer than he needed to when the song was over."

"Really?" How did she know how long he was supposed to hold her against him to know that he'd held on two seconds longer than necessary? Was there a slow dance rule book I didn't know about?

"Really," she said. Then she kind of giggled. At nothing.

"My mom's waiting for us outside," I said, my stomach sank to my shoes. Kara had the Cs. Where did that leave me?

Out. That's where. At least that's how it felt sometimes. Kara and I still did everything together--homework, soccer, texting, and talking all the time. But a lot of our conversations were about boys now. Who she was crushing on that week and who liked who or had dumped who. I

tried to act like I was interested. I agreed with her about what boys were cute and that Mark might be cuter than Tim, even though I wasn't sure. I also tried to sound like I knew what I was talking about when I said that when Mark pinched her in the hallway it might mean he liked her. But it all made my head spin. Trying to fit in was making me feel stupid and out of it.

"Don't you like anyone?" Kara asked me one afternoon. We were sitting on her bed, listening to music and braiding each other's hair.

"I don't know," I said. I didn't want to admit that I didn't.

"I think Joey Bensen likes you," she said.

I wrinkled my nose. Joey Bensen picked *his* nose when he thought no one was looking. Gross.

"Well, I don't like him," I said.

"I'm sure they'll be someone."

Why? I wanted to ask. *Why does there have to be someone?*

✱

Saturday Kara invited me to go with a group of friends to the movies. Once we got there, everyone paired off and I was stuck with a boy I didn't know. I was so relieved when the movie started. Except then I noticed some of the couples holding hands. Suddenly, Unknown Boy grabbed my hand. His was sweaty and limp, like a wet sock in my palm. I was so aware of his hand touching mine that I couldn't enjoy the movie. And then he seemed to forget that he was holding my hand because he would swing it out with his to scratch his knee or rub his nose. If he got a booger on me, he was dead meat.

I couldn't understand it. *This* is what BCs wanted? To hold wet sock hands? I didn't get it at all.

After the movie, everyone wanted to go for fries and Cokes but I said I had a headache and called my mom to pick me up.

"It's okay," I told Kara when she offered to come home with me. "You stay and have fun." I could tell she wanted to. She squeezed my arm and ran back to her friends.

"Is everything all right?" my mom asked when I slipped into the car.

"I guess."

"But?" My mom raised an eyebrow.

I sighed. "But all the girls are really into boys and..." I let my voice trail off.

"You're not," my mom finished.

I nodded. "Maybe there's something wrong with me."

My mom reached over and squeezed my leg. "There's nothing wrong with you," she said. "Everyone gets there at their own pace."

"I don't want to get there at all," I said. Even though I'd washed my hands after the movie, it still felt like Unknown Boy's sweaty palm was against mine.

We stopped at a light and my mom looked at me. "I know it's hard to believe, sweetie, but someday you'll be there and you'll be glad. In the meantime, just be yourself and try to enjoy who you are." She brushed the hair off my forehead.

"But if I do that, I'll be all by myself."

My mom smiled. "I don't think you're giving your friends enough credit. Just be honest with yourself and with them." She

squeezed my shoulder as she pulled forward. "Listen to your gut and your heart will follow," she said. "And so will other people."

Yeah, right. No one was going to follow me, Megan Blake, just being myself.

That weekend Kara and I got together to practice soccer. I was glad the BCs hadn't caused her to quit.

"Are you kidding?" she said. "Soccer kicks butt."

I grinned.

We practiced kicking in her backyard, the goal net set up at one end. Afterward, we talked about who had improved the most on our team and whether we might make the finals this year. It was so great, I forgot all about Kara catching the BCs.

Until...

"You want to go to the Spring Dance?" she asked.

"What?" Weren't we just talking about soccer? What happened here? But I knew what had happened. Having the BCs meant you had other conversations but you always got back to boys.

Listen to your gut and your heart will follow, my mom had said. My gut said to stay home, not go to the dance. But my heart wanted to be with Kara and my other friends. Mom hadn't said anything about a split decision. But maybe if I went, I could figure out a way to live with the Cs. Maybe I could be comfortable being where I was, being myself. Maybe people would want to do things with me, even if I wasn't into boys.

Yeah, right. And maybe I'd sprout wings and fly.

I sighed. "Sure."



The Spring Dance was basically a repeat of the Winter Dance. Once again I found myself next to the snack table, sipping punch and watching everyone else move around the dance floor like they had rubber bands for arms.

"Want to dance?"

I looked up and found myself face to chin with Tim Bartholomew. I was so surprised that an ice cube caught in my throat. I started choking. He looked concerned and patted my back. "Are you okay?"

I nodded, choking and coughing before I was able to swallow. "Sorry," I said. "Ice."

Tim nodded. "That's happened to me before."

I took another swallow and my brain engaged. Why in the world was Tim Bartholomew asking me to dance? I didn't have the Cs so I wasn't giving off any C vibes.

I glanced over his shoulder. Had someone dared him?

Licking the punch off my top lip, I glanced around. Steph Jamison had turned her glare in my direction. Some boys cocked their heads. Kara smiled encouragingly at me from several yards away.

I knew I should say yes. Should go out there and dance with him so I'd be like everyone else.

"So, do you?" Tim tapped his finger on the snack table.

Did I? I took a deep breath and listened to my gut, hoping my heart

would follow. I didn't even care if nobody else did.

"Not really," I said. Then I nodded at a tub full of balls in the corner of the gym. "Want to kick the soccer ball around?"

He looked surprised. "Sure."

I grabbed a soccer ball and headed for the door. As we crossed the gym, Kara came hurrying over.

"Where are you guys going?"

"We're going to kick the ball. Want to come?" I raised an eyebrow at her. "It'll be fun."

She smiled. "Sure."

We pushed through the doors to the long stretch of grass behind the school. It was still light, though the sun would be fading soon. The three of us kicked back and forth, even running a few patterns to mix things up. Several other kids came out and joined us, even Steph Jamison, who was pretty good at soccer when she wasn't afraid of breaking a nail.

Afterward, Tim, Kara, and I flopped down next to the wall and cracked open some water bottles I'd taken from the snack table.

"This is much better than dancing," Tim said, catching his breath.

"Definitely," Kara and I said at the same time. I looked at her in surprise. She shrugged, hiding her smile behind another swig of water.

I looked around at the other kids who'd come out, I smiled down at the soccer ball between my hands. Kara was still Kara, even if she had the BCs. Maybe you could have the Cs and still be yourself.

"Whew." Tim stretched his arms over his head, then took another sip of water. His hair stuck up a little from his sweat, and for the first time I noticed a few freckles across his nose. They were kind of cute.

He was kind of cute.

Uh oh.

I looked at Kara. She looked at me.

Crazy.

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