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ACCEPTED 5/15/12

SIGNED CONTRACT RECEIVED 5/30/12

#90 Arizona, January 2012, New Neighbor, 919 Words

Dear Arizona,

A new family just moved into my neighborhood. My parents keep telling me to ask the kids if they want to play, but I'm too nervous to go over. What would you do?

Shy in Mount Shasta

Dear Shy,

When my neighbor Ollie and I saw a moving truck pull up in front of the old blue house on the corner, we crossed our fingers there'd be at least one cool kid for us to play with. It just so happened that the window next to the table in Ollie's kitchen provided the perfect view for us to watch everything while we happily munched on our lunch.

"That looks like a nice, comfy couch," I said, watching the moving men struggling to get it through the door.

"Look at all those boxes," said Ollie. "If they all go inside that house, there's no way there'll be enough room for any people!"

"Speaking of people," I said. "It looks like we're out of luck as far as this new family having any kids goes."

"How do you know?" Ollie said, crunching an apple. "We haven't seen anyone but the moving guys yet."

"Just look," I answered. "There's no kid stuff – just fancy furniture."

"I don't think you'd make the greatest detective," said Ollie. "All the stuff is still in boxes! You'd need x-ray vision to see if there was kid stuff or grownup stuff inside."

Just then, a man and a woman came out of the house.

"See," I said. "I told you – no kids!"

"Really?" Ollie said, pointing at a girl riding up to them on a bike. "Then what exactly would you call that?"

"Yay!" I said. "She looks nice!"

Ollie jumped up, "Let's go say hi!"

"Wait!" I said, "We can't just go over empty-handed. You're supposed to bring a treat when you welcome people to the neighborhood."

"How about a nice batch of homemade cookies?" Suggested Ollie's Grandma, Abuella. "You guys could pick a recipe from this cookbook if you like."

"Awesome!" I said. "Thank you!"

"The cookie thing's cool and everything," said Ollie. "But do we really need to follow a recipe?"

"YES!" Abuella and I said loudly.

You see, Ollie's kind of famous around here for getting way too creative with recipes and turning potentially delicious cakes and things into perfectly *undelicious* disasters. You know how some people are just naturally good at being able to play around with recipes, or don't even need a recipe at all to make something taste fantastic? Well – Ollie is not one of them!

"What a great job you two did!" Abuella said, pulling our cookies out of the oven."

The second they were cool enough to put in a container Ollie and I ran out the door, across the street, and up to the new girl on her bike.

"Welcome neighbor!" I smiled. "I'm Arizona, I live in that house right over there, and this is Ollie."

"That's my house," Ollie pointed across the street. "And," he said, handing her the container. "Hopefully you like chocolate chip cookies cause we made these for you."

"Wow, thanks!" She said, taking a bite. "I'm Gabriella, but everybody calls me Gabbie."

Then she made this really strange face and said, "Um – what kind of cookies did you say these are again?"

"Chocolate chip," I answered.

"Are you sure they're not chocolate chip and something else?" She asked.

"Ollie?!" I said, scrunching up my eyebrows and crossing my arms suspiciously.

"Regular old cookies are so boring!" Said Ollie. "I might have kind of snuck in a dash or two of extra seasoning when you weren't looking."

"Oh brother!" I groaned.

"Just a little cinnamon," said Ollie. "Like Abuela spices up our hot coco with!"

"Um, I kind of don't think the taste I'm tasting is cinnamon," said Gabbie.

Ollie and I both took a bite of a cookie.

"BLECH!!!" I said. "That is not cinnamon! That is pepper!!!"

"Oops," said Ollie. "I must have grabbed the wrong bottle from the spice drawer."

"Well," smiled Gabbie. "Cinnamon and pepper *are* both brown."

"Exactly!" said Ollie.

"And even though they taste pretty weird," Gabbie added. "These are definitely the very best 'welcome to the neighborhood cookies I've ever had!"

"Could that possibly be," I suggested. "Because they're the *only* 'welcome to the neighborhood cookies' you've ever had?"

Gabbie put her finger on her chin and looked up like she was thinking very seriously for a second.

"You know," she said. "That could *possibly* be!"

And that's when all three of us started laughing uncontrollably!

Gabbie's parents came outside to see what all the noise was about, and ended up inviting us in for juice and a snack.

"Thank you," I said. "This fruit salad is delicious!"

"Yes, thank you very much!" Said Ollie.

"But something's missing," said Gabbie. "It just needs one more thing..."

And at the exact same time, we all shouted out - "Pepper!"

So Dear Shy, as far as getting up the courage to greet your new neighbors goes, you really don't have to be nervous, cause those kids are going to be so happy that there's someone fun like you to play with in their brand new neighborhood. And if you really don't feel comfortable going over on your own, think about asking your parents to come say 'Hi' and 'Welcome' with you. Oh, and, you really don't actually have to bring a treat. But if you do, I'd suggest going pepper free!

Ciao for Now,
Arizona