LILLY'S PURPLE PLASTIC PURSE

BY KEVIN HENKES
I LOVE SCHOOL!

LILLY loved school.
She loved the pointy pencils.

She loved the squeaky chalk.

And she loved the way her boots went clickety-clickety-click down the long, shiny hallways.
Lilly loved the privacy of her very own desk.

She loved the fish sticks and chocolate milk every Friday in the lunchroom.

And, most of all, she loved her teacher, Mr. Slinger.
Mr. Slinger was as sharp as a tack.  
He wore artistic shirts.  
He wore glasses on a chain around his neck.  
And he wore a different colored tie  
for each day of the week.

“Wow,” said Lilly. That was just about all she could say. “Wow.”
Instead of “Greetings, students” or “Good morning, pupils,” Mr. Slinger winked and said, “Howdy!”

He thought that desks in rows were old-fashioned and boring. “Do you rodents think you can handle a semicircle?”

And he always provided the most tasty snacks—things that were curly and crunchy and cheesy.

“I want to be a teacher when I grow up,” said Lilly. “Me, too!” said her friends Chester and Wilson and Victor.
At home Lilly pretended to be Mr. Slinger.

"I am the teacher," she told her baby brother, Julius. "Listen up!"

Lilly even wanted her own set of deluxe picture encyclopedias.

“What's with Lilly?” asked her mother.

“I thought she wanted to be a surgeon or an ambulance driver or a diva,” said her father.

“It must be because of her new teacher, Mr. Slinger,” said her mother.

“Wow,” said her father. That was just about all he could say. “Wow.”
Whenever the students had free time, they were permitted to go to the Lightbulb Lab in the back of the classroom. They expressed their ideas creatively through drawing and writing. Lilly went often.

She had a lot of ideas.

She drew pictures of Mr. Slinger.

And she wrote stories about him, too.

During Sharing Time, Lilly showed her creations to the entire class.

"Wow," said Mr. Slinger. That was just about all he could say. "Wow."

AND AT THE VERY LAST SECOND MR. SLINGER SAID "THE COLD, STARVING, ELDERLY..."
When Mr. Slinger had bus duty, Lilly stood in line even though she didn’t ride the bus.

Lilly raised her hand more than anyone else in class (even if she didn’t know the answer).

And she volunteered to stay after school to clap erasers.

“I want to be a teacher when I grow up,” said Lilly. “Excellent choice,” said Mr. Slinger.
One Monday morning Lilly came to school especially happy. She had gone shopping with her Grammy over the weekend. Lilly had a new pair of movie star sunglasses, complete with glittery diamonds and a chain like Mr. Slinger's. She had three shiny quarters. And, best of all, she had a brand new purple plastic purse that played a jaunty tune when it was opened.
Lilly wanted to show everyone.
"Not now," said Mr. Slinger.
"Listen to our story."
Lilly had a hard time listening.

Lilly really wanted to show everyone.
"Not now," said Mr. Slinger.
"Let's be considerate of our classmates."
Lilly had a hard time being considerate.

Lilly really, really wanted to show everyone.
"Not now," said Mr. Slinger.
"Wait until recess or Sharing Time."
But Lilly could not wait.
The glasses were so glittery.
The quarters were so shiny.
And the purse played such nice music, not to mention how excellent it was for storing school supplies.

“Look,” Lilly whispered fiercely.
“Look, everyone. Look what I’ve got!”
Everyone looked.
Including Mr. Slinger.
He was not amused.
“I'll just keep your things at my desk until the end of the day,” said Mr. Slinger. “They'll be safe there, and then you can take them home.”

Lilly's stomach lurched. She felt like crying. Her glasses were gone. Her quarters were gone. Her purple plastic purse was gone. Lilly longed for her purse all morning. She was even too sad to eat the snack Mr. Slinger served before recess.
That afternoon Lilly went to the Lightbulb Lab.
She was still very sad.
She thought and she thought and she thought.
And then she became angry.
She thought and she thought and she thought some more.
And then she became furious.
She thought and she thought and she thought a bit longer.
And then she drew a picture of Mr. Slinger.
Right before the last bell rang, Lilly sneaked the drawing into Mr. Slinger's book bag.
When all the students were buttoned and zipped and snapped and tied and ready to go home, Mr. Slinger strolled over to Lilly and gave her purple plastic purse back.

“It’s a beautiful purse,” said Mr. Slinger. “Your quarters are nice and jingly. And those glasses are absolutely fabulous. You may bring them back to school as long as you don’t disturb the rest of the class.”

“I do not want to be a teacher when I grow up,” Lilly said as she marched out of the classroom.
On the way home Lilly opened her purse. Her glasses and quarters were inside. And so was a note from Mr. Slinger. It said:

"Today was a difficult day. Tomorrow will be better."

There was also a small bag of tasty snacks at the bottom of the purse.
Lilly's stomach lurched.  
She felt like crying.  
She felt simply awful.

Lilly ran all the way home and told her mother and father everything.
Instead of watching her favorite cartoons, Lilly decided to sit in the uncooperative chair.

"I'll stay here a million years for Mr. Slinger."

"Why does everything always happen to me?"

"One thousand fifty-one, one thousand fifty-two, one thousand ninety-nine..."
That night Lilly drew a new picture of Mr. Slinger and wrote a story about him, too.

Lilly was really sorry.
So everyone forgave her.
Even her parents.
Even her stinky baby brother.
Even her especially incredible teacher.

And then the sun shined its smiling face down on everyone and everything.
Even the bugs and worms.

THE END
Lilly's mother wrote a note.
And Lilly's father baked some tasty snacks for Lilly to take to school the next day.
"I think Mr. Slinger will understand," said Lilly's mother.
"I know he will," said Lilly's father.
The next morning Lilly got to school early.

"These are for you," Lilly said to Mr. Slinger.

"Because I'm really, really, really, really, really, really, really, really sorry."
Mr. Slinger read the story.

And he looked at the picture.
And he read the note.

And he sampled the snacks.

"Wow," said Mr. Slinger. That was just about all he could say. "Wow."
“What do you think we should do with this?” asked Mr. Slinger.
“Could we just throw it away?” asked Lilly.
“Excellent idea,” said Mr. Slinger.

During Sharing Time, Lilly demonstrated the many uses and unique qualities of her purple plastic purse, her shiny quarters, and her glittery movie star sunglasses.
Then she did a little performance using them as props.

“It's called Interpretive Dance,” said Lilly.

Mr. Slinger joined in.

“Wow,” said the entire class. That was just about all they could say. “Wow.”
Throughout the rest of the day, Lilly’s purse and quarters and sunglasses were tucked safely inside her desk. She peeked at them often but did not disturb a soul.
Right before the last bell rang, Mr. Slinger served Lilly's snacks, to everyone's delight.

"What do you want to be when you grow up?" asked Mr. Slinger.

"A TEACHER!" everyone responded. Lilly's response was the loudest.

"Excellent choice," said Mr. Slinger.
As the pupils filed out of the classroom,
Lilly held her purple plastic purse close to her heart.
Mr. Slinger was right—it had been a better day.
Lilly ran and skipped and hopped and flew all the way home, she was so happy.
And she really *did* want to be a teacher when she grew up—
That is, when she didn’t want to be a dancer or a surgeon or an ambulance driver or a diva or a pilot or a hairdresser or a scuba diver...