

Feeble golden streams of late-afternoon sunlight sparkled on Julia and Sophia's hair as they crouched thoughtfully over their math papers. The two young best friends had decided meet at Julia's house to work together on their homework, but they were struggling to solve the difficult problems. Julia stared despairingly down at the rows of math questions, her fingers fumbling impatiently as she attempted to figure out a problem in her mind. "Oh, this is too hard," she grumbled, slumping in her chair. "We'll never figure out all these math questions."

Sophia roughly shoved a loose strand of chestnut-brown hair out of her face. "Well, let's at least try," she muttered. "Let's do number seven."

Julia, clutching a blunt pencil tightly in her hand, scribbled out the problem on a piece of scratch paper. She formed the letters carelessly as she proceeded to solve the question. "The answer is forty nine," she announced dully.

They did the next few problems, but found themselves hopelessly stumped on number eleven. "How are we supposed to solve *that*?" demanded Sophia, yanking at her hair in frustration.

"Well, maybe we would be able to solve the problem if you tried to help for once and didn't expect *me* to do all the work," snapped Julia sharply. Her words came out harsher than she meant to.

Sophia leaped defiantly out of her chair, her icy green eyes flashing furiously. "*You're* the one who's not doing anything!" she protested accusingly. "You just sit there complaining and discouraging yourself instead of doing anything useful!"

"*Me?*" screeched Julia disbelievingly. "I've solved almost all the math problems and given you the answers! You just sit there making me do all the work!"

"*What?*" Sophia retorted defensively. "I don't make you do anything!"

"Yes, you do!" insisted Julia heatedly. "You make me solve all the problems because you're too lazy to do them yourself!"

"Ugh!" Snatching up her unfinished math homework, Sophia heedlessly scraped back her chair and jumped up from her seat, glaring ferociously at Julia. "I'm leaving!" she spat. She whirled around and stormed out of the house, purposely slamming the front door as hard as she could behind her.

The next morning Julia and Sophia did not walk together to school. The fierce quarrel between them still fresh in their minds, they made sure to avoid each other, glancing cautiously at one another from time to time. They both made it clear that they would not talk to each other until they apologized, which they both stubbornly refused to do.

During recess they did not play together; instead they chose other friends to hang out with. *Fine*, Julia thought grumpily, glaring furiously at Sophia, who was babbling endlessly to a group of giggling girls. *I don't need Sophia. She's not even a good friend, anyway. I've got better friends who I can play with.* She forced herself to forget about Sophia, shoving away the painful feeling of regret that gnawed at her.

The girls did not talk to each other for several days, until they became convinced that the strong bond of friendship between them was gone, blown away like an abandoned cobweb in the wind. Julia tried to tell herself that she didn't need Sophia's friendship, but she knew that she did, and she missed her best friend so much that it hurt.

As Julia walked home from school several days after the quarrel, she heard tentative footsteps behind her and she whirled around to see Sophia scrambling after her. Staring uncertainly into Julia's questioning blue eyes, Sophia muttered, "I was—um—wondering if . . . if maybe you'd like to work with me on our homework today?"

Julia stared at Sophia in confusion. Did Sophia want to be friends again?

"Just don't complain so much this time," Sophia added.

Something dark and hot began to bubble up inside Julia. Was Sophia still accusing her of complaining the last time they had worked together on their homework? "I never complained about anything!" Julia protested defensively. "I'm not going to work with you if you keep on blaming me for things I didn't do!"

"What? I never blamed you!" Sophia retorted furiously. "I'm just telling you not to complain so much this time."

"Complain? I never complained before!" Julia spat insistently. "*You* were the one who made me do all the work!"

"You didn't do a single bit of work!" accused Sophia fiercely. "You were just sitting there, moaning and groaning and complaining!"

"I was *not*! I was solving all the math problems and giving you the answers, and you weren't doing anything!" Julia countered indignantly.

"*You* weren't doing anything; you were too busy complaining!" retorted Sophia, her penetrating, emerald-green eyes flashing furiously. She carelessly shoved a tangle of hair out of her face, thrusting one last stinging accusation at Julia: "You're a terrible best friend!" She whirled around and stalked away.

"At least I'm not as terrible as *you*!" Julia spat, glaring bitterly after Sophia. Why was Sophia being so unfair? With a last disdainful glance at her former best friend, she whipped around and irritably stormed away.

The next morning, as Julia walked to school, she heard uncertain footsteps approaching behind her and she turned to find Sophia staring tentatively at her. Anger flared up inside Julia as she remembered their quarrel from yesterday, and she prepared herself for a volley of sharp, stinging insults from Sophia, but instead, Sophia muttered, “Julia, I’m sorry about the fight.” She raised her sparkling green eyes to stare cautiously into Julia’s confused blue ones, desperately searching her face for a reaction. “I . . . I’m sorry about everything I said, and how I accused you of things you didn’t do.”

Julia’s anger melted and she stared at her best friend in bewilderment. Was Sophia apologizing? Did she really want to be friends again? “No, *I’m* sorry, Sophia,” Julia whispered. “I’m sorry about how I said you weren’t working. I was just . . . frustrated, so I said things I didn’t mean to say.” She tugged awkwardly at a strand of tangled golden hair, steadily lowering her eyes.

“So . . .” Sophia said uncertainly, “are we friends again?”

Julia wrapped her arms around her friend in a warm embrace. “Of course we are,” she whispered, pulling away and gazing into Sophia’s penetrating, ocean-green eyes.

“After school today, would you like to work together on our homework?” asked Sophia hopefully.

Julia smiled. “You bet!”