## Excerpt: *Why Not Me? B*y Mindy Kaling

IN SEVENTH GRADE I STARTED AT A NEW school. On the first day, I was so anxious to make friends, I brought a family-size bag of Skittles to homeroom so I could pass them out and entice my new classmates to talk to me. "Do you like Skittles?" I asked. Kids would nod, cautiously. "Here, take some. I'm Mindy!" I said, trying to rope them into conversation. It didn't work very well. Even back then the kids thought this was suspicious behavior, like I was covering for something unseemly they couldn't quite pinpoint. Still, I persisted, striking up conversations like a middle school Hare Krishna, and cornering kids with aggressively banal chitchat. "That's so funny you like the color blue. I like turquoise. *We're so similar*." I did this until my art teacher, Mr. Posner, pulled me aside.

Mr. Posner was soft-spoken and wouldn't let us talk about the movie *Silence of the Lambs*, because it contained violence against women. I hated him. "You don't have to give people candy to like you, Mindy," he said. "They will like you . . . for *you*." I nodded meaningfully, knowing he wanted to see that my mind had been blown by his awesome humanity. Then he took my Skittles and

I thought, What a load of garbage. At twelve years old, I had experienced enough to have zero faith in the power of my looks or personality to reel in the friends I wanted so badly. I needed my Skittles. The next day I brought in more, and Mr. Posner called my parents. The Skittles stopped, and I wished that Mr. Posner was trapped in the bottom of a well, and later killed, like in *Silence of* *the Lambs*. My parents encouraged me to play field hockey, where I eventually did end up making a few friends. I remember that time as one of the most stressful periods of my life. Every kid wants approval, but my desire to be well liked was central to my personality.

As I got older, I got craftier and less obvious, but I've always put a lot of energy and effort into people liking me. That's why I've never understood the compliment "effortless." People love to say: "She just walked into the party, charming people with her effortless beauty." I don't understand that at all. What's so wrong with effort, anyway? It means you care. What about the girl who "walked into the party, her determination to please apparent on her eager face"? Sure, she might seem a little crazy, and, yes, maybe everything she says sounds like conversation starters she found on a website, but at least she's trying. Let's give *her* a shot!

And these days, I find I'm caring less and less about what people think of me. Maybe it's my age, maybe it's my security in my career, maybe it's because I'm skrilla flush with that dollah-dollahbill- y'all, but if I had to identify my overall feeling these days, it's much more "Eh, screw it. Here's how I really feel." The truth is, it's hard to get people to like you, but it's even harder to keep people liking you. You'd have to bring in Skittles every single day. The result of my not caring so much about what I say allows me to care more about *how* I say it. I think it makes my writing more personal and more enjoyable.

If you're reading this, you're probably a woman. Or perhaps you're a gay man getting a present for your even gayer friend. Maybe you accidentally bought this thinking it was the *Malala* book. However this book made its way from the "Female Humor/ Brave Minority Voices/Stress-free Summer Reads!" section of your bookstore to your hands, it doesn't matter. The important thing is you are here now. Welcome. I'm excited to share my stories with you, so you can see what I'm really like. If my childhood, teens, and twenties were about wanting people to like me, now I want people to know me. So, this is a start.

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