



# FOR THE 13TH TIME

**MATILDA**

"It is my firm belief that I, Verico Moname, am a rational educated human being who doesn't allow her life to be ruled or ruined by myths she heard about in her first grade Math class."

I'm currently alone in my room and chanting this to myself as I prepare to go out on a day many would consider inauspicious - Friday the 13th. As mentioned before, I am of course not one of those people who believes in such ridiculous ideas, but today is also the day where I am being forced to go to a place one can no longer avoid going to. Today is the birthday of one of my closest friends, and I've been missing her birthday for the past five years. She invites me every time, and after a week of sulking, she finds it in her heart to let it go.

The conversation on the phone went something like this: she called me to invite me to the party she was having, and I dutifully expressed excitement knowing fully beforehand that I wouldn't go. But she was onto me, and started listing all the incidents that she thinks makes me someone with triskaidekaphobia - the fear of the number 13. She began with the time I refused to stay in Room 13 even though it was the only room available in the hotel

that night, the 14th person I had invited (in her words "partially forced") to a dinner that had had 13 guests before, when I secretly threw away a candle from the cake at my niece's 13th birthday party, and the time I wore a paint-splattered jersey to our friend's first match and it accidentally blocked the jersey number which happened to be 13. I felt attacked by her detailed account of all these incidents and made a joke I instantly knew was shamefully lame enough to deflate the situation. It didn't work, and so I told her on the day before her birthday that she sounded like those stupid internet conspiracy theorists. Feeling sorry and stupid myself, I promised her I'd be coming tomorrow.

It is thus my guilt that is pulling me out of my bed right now. I even constructed another detailed lie to explain away how I was able to delay my four-hour appointment with the dentist and then my three-hour appointment with a hair stylist who would go to live on an island in the next week and never come back.

My day started out fine and I attributed the knot in my chest to the unpleasantness I would undoubtedly encounter at the party. I'd been seeing pictures of her birthday parties for the past five years. They almost always included a wide assortment of all kinds of delicious food

and were attended by people I hadn't seen in ages but would love to meet again in person. So yes, her parties were unpleasant.

I tried to think of warm, nice, and fuzzy things on the way to the gift shop but my mind went back to the incident from last October. It was a bright sunny day but also a 13th. I had seen the frail old woman from next door coming home with baskets full of fresh vegetables as I sat in the safety of my room wondering how I could opt out of that quiz worth 10 percent of my grade. I couldn't think of excuses that would seem plausible enough, and I had already tried a bunch of them on the same teacher in less than a year. I realised I'd have to leave the house. Each step was filled with dread and as I reached the bottom of the stairs I saw a colander beside me. I screamed. I didn't mean to, but I did, and the old woman who I mistook for Jason Voorhees shook violently and fell on the ground, sitting on the soft patch of soil with a thump. I ran and disappeared from her sight faster than she could recover and realise what had just transpired and came back quickly, looking shocked and composed at the state of the fallen old woman. I picked her up and helped her. She was understandably upset and I helped get her bags

inside her apartment. She wondered who had screamed, and I felt a bead of sweat roll down my temple. I don't know what happened, but at that instant, I told her that I had seen a young boy in a red t-shirt laughing and running away from the spot.

There was no such boy. But my neighbour still scowls at young and most probably innocent boys who come out to play outside their houses.

"Maybe I do have a problem," I tell myself as I step out of the car and go to the shop. "I mean, there are reports of loss of massive amounts of revenue due to absenteeism, cancellation, etc on such days. I shouldn't be ashamed."

Feeling good about myself, I take a breather and go out to the balcony while my present is being packed. I hum and snap my fingers, enjoying the cool breeze. But I make the mistake of looking down, and see that it's the shop's 13th anniversary. They have a ginormous poster with the dreaded number printed in blood-red letters. My face scrunches up and I open my mouth to scream. On the ground, a cameraman turns his camera in my direction.

*Matilda likes to pretend she is invisible and inconspicuous. Tell her you can read right through her at [matilda.tilda1234@gmail.com](mailto:matilda.tilda1234@gmail.com)*