

Raymie Nightingale

By Kate DiCamillo

Raymie turned away from the car and looked at Ida Nee, who shook her head, marched past Raymie, and went into her baton-twirling office (which was really just a garage) and closed the door.

Raymie's soul was not a tent. It was not even a pebble.

Her soul, it seemed, had disappeared entirely.

After a long time, or what seemed like a long time, Raymie's mother arrived.

"How were the lessons?" she asked when Raymie got in the car.

"Complicated," said Raymie.

"Everything is complicated," said her mother. "I can't even imagine why you would want to learn how to twirl a baton. Last summer, it was the lifesaving lessons. This summer, it's twirling. None of it makes any sense to me."

Raymie looked down at the baton in her lap. *I have a plan*, she wanted to say. *And the baton twirling is part of the plan*. She closed her eyes and imagined her father in a booth, in a diner, sitting across from Lee Ann Dickerson.

She imagined her father opening the paper and discovering that she was Little Miss Central Florida Tire. Wouldn't he be impressed? Wouldn't he want to come home immediately? And wouldn't Lee Ann Dickerson be amazed and jealous?

“What could your father possibly see in that woman?” said Raymie’s mother, almost as if she knew what Raymie was thinking. “What could he see in her?”

Ramie added this question to the list of impossible, unanswerable questions that adults seemed inclined to ask her.

She thought about Mr. Staphopoulos, her lifesaving coach from the summer before. He was not the kind of man who asked questions that didn’t have answers.

Mr. Staphopoulos only ever asked one question: “Are you going to be a problem causer or a problem solver?”

And the answer was obvious.

You had to be the problem solver.