



**I'm the only girl at
the sign-up desk.**

Tough as Daisy

by David M. Simon

The sign on the YMCA door says
Wrestling Tournament Today.

My dad always says, "Pound for pound,
no one's as tough as Daisy."

I enter the gym and take a deep breath.
It smells like old sweat socks and the stuff
they use to wash wrestling mats.

I see my family in the stands. I wave to
them and smile, but I'm nervous.

I love that smell. Weird, huh? Not to
me.

Lots of boys are already on the mats,
loosening up. I'm the only girl at the sign-
up desk. Some of the boys point at me and
laugh. We'll see about that.

I was raised around wrestling. My older
brothers wrestle for the high-school team.
My dad wrestled in college. So it was
natural for me to want to wrestle. Except
for one thing.

Back in Ohio, people got used to seeing
me wrestle. I kept showing up. I kept
winning. They stopped pointing and
started cheering.

I'm a girl. I even have a girly name—

Daisy.

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Then we moved to California. Now I'm weird again.

The man says, "Name?"

"Daisy McGill."

"Have you wrestled before, honey?"

He didn't call any of the boys *honey*. "Yes, sir," I answer through clenched teeth. I hand him my registration form.

"OK," he says. "Climb on the scale." I weigh 70 pounds. He writes a number on the back of my hand. I head to the girls' locker room to change.

First match. The kid looks strong. That's OK. Boys with muscles always underestimate me.

I snap the chin strap on my headgear. The ref calls us to the middle of the mat. We shake hands. The kid says, "I can't believe I have to wrestle a girl."

The whistle blows, and I hit him fast with a fireman's carry. He's on his back in three seconds. The ref's hand slaps the mat. Pinned. One match down.

The kid refuses to shake my hand. The ref raises my right arm. He tells me, "Beautiful takedown!"

The whistle blows. I shoot for his leg. He kicks back and snaps my head down. He spins around behind me and takes me down. Good. I love a challenge.

Final period of this match, and I'm down three to nothing. Time to make my move.

I escape for one point, then shoot a quick takedown. All tied up. Thirty seconds to go. He raises one leg and I take a chance. I reach around his head and knee. My hands close tight. I roll him onto his back.

The whistle blows. The ref holds up two fingers. I win by two points. Two matches down.

At least this kid shakes my hand. Some of the people watching even clap for me.

I'm in the finals for my weight class.

My brothers rub my arms and joke around with me. Dad says, "Just do your best, honey." It's OK when *he* calls me *honey*.

I head for the mat. The next kid I'm wrestling pinned both of his opponents. There's a huge crowd watching us. I can't tell if they want me to win or lose.

There's a lot of whispering going on. I hear someone say, "Man, she pinned him fast. No girl is going to beat me."

My family cheers wildly. I feel good. It always takes one match for the butterflies in my stomach to settle.

They call my number for the next match.

People crowd around the mat to get a look at Bizarro Wrestler Girl. Sounds like a good name for a superhero!

This kid is tall and thin. He looks serious about winning.

We're both gulping for breath as the last period starts. My brothers are screaming, but they sound far away. The kid shoots for my legs. I flatten out. He has one leg hooked. I force my forearm across his face like a wedge. We're locked up tight.

I can see the clock ticking down. With ten seconds left, his arms relax. Just what I was waiting for. I push down and spin behind him for the win. Yes!

Doesn't matter to me.

We shake hands. "You're pretty good," he says. "Good luck."

"You, too," I say.

The whistle blows. He shoots, and I'm on my knees before I can blink. Wow, he's fast. I feel my heart hammering in my chest. Easy, Daisy.

I spin away. Escape. He misses an arm-drag, and I catch him flat-footed. Takedown.

After two periods we're all tied up.

I hear cheering and realize it's for me. The kid says, "Nice match. But next time, I'm going to win." He just might.

My dad wraps my sweaty body in a big bear hug. He says, "Pound for pound, no one's as tough as Daisy."

I guess today he's right,