

CLEO

Cleo Edison Oliver

Playground Millionaire

SUNDEE T. FRAZIER

Illustrations by
Jennifer L. Meyer



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Summary: Fifth-grader Cleo Edison Oliver is full of money-making ideas, and her fifth-grade Passion Project is no different — but things get more complicated when she has to keep her business running, be a good listener when her best friend needs her, and deal with the bully teasing her about being adopted at the same time.

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◆ CHAPTER 1 ◆

A New Name, a New Business

Cleo wrote her new name in fancy lettering, the curlicue kind she'd learned from Caylee. It didn't look as good as it would have if her best friend had done it, but it would work. She took down the California license-plate door sign that said CLEO'S ROOM and hung her new sign in its place:

cleopatra edison oliver, CEO.

Perfect.

Josh appeared from his and Julian's room. He stared at her door, slurping his Dum-Dum. "Edison's not your middle name."

No, it wasn't. Lenore was. But she didn't want that one. Not since Lexie Lewis had gotten ahold of it and started calling her "LeSnore."

"It is now." She started into her room.

"But you can't just change your name." *S-s-slurp.*
"Can you?"

She turned. Josh ran into her, jabbing her with his dumb Dum-Dum stick.

"Ow!"

"Sorry." *S-s-slurp.*

She rubbed her chest where the stick had poked her. "You can do anything you want with your name. It's *yours.*"

Josh sucked thoughtfully, as if this obvious fact had never occurred to him. He followed her across the room. "But Edison is our grandparents' name."

Cleo reached under her bed and pulled out the signs she'd made the night before. "I don't think they'll mind."

"But you'll have two last names!"

"Women with two last names sound more professional."

Josh snorted. “You’re not a woman!”

“Well, I *will* be! Now, go away.” She grabbed the roll of masking tape from her desk drawer, dropped everything on her royal-purple comforter, and high-stepped onto the bed. She stood eye-to-eye with her poster of Fortune A. Davies.

Fortune had skin that gleamed like a polished chestnut, dazzling white teeth, and a sparkle in her eye that said, “I believe in you!” Her arms were flung wide, forever frozen in an almost-hug. How Cleo wished she could step into the picture and get that hug.

“Why’d you put your initials after your name?”

Cleo turned. The beads at the ends of her freshly braided hair clicked against one another. Josh was staring at her door again.

She jumped down from the bed and grabbed the signs and tape. “Those aren’t my initials. I mean, they *are*, now that I’ve changed my name, but —” She huffed. “Don’t you know anything about business, Josh?”

“Not really. Just what you’ve taught me.” He

grinned. He had a huge gap where his bottom two teeth had been.

What would he do without her? “CEO stands for Chief Executive Officer.”

Josh’s forehead wrinkled. “What’s that mean?”

“It’s the person in charge of a company.”

“Why don’t they just call it ‘Person In Charge,’ then? It’s easier to understand.”

Cleo rolled her eyes. She started down the stairs.

“But, Cleo, you don’t *have* a company.”

He had stopped following her. *Finally.*

“I do now! *Cleopatra Enterprises, Inc.!*”

Barkley greeted her at the bottom of the stairs, panting from his “long trek” across the kitchen. His tail slapped the wall. Cleo crouched to get her good-morning kisses. “Ew, Barkley. Not only are you seriously overweight, you’ve got a bad case of morning breath!”

Barkley barked.

“I think it’s this new low-fat dog food we’re feeding him,” Dad said, scooping kibbles from a ginormous

bag of Slim 'N' Trim Canine Sardine Meal. Mom wasn't about to switch dog foods until the whole entire bag was used, and as long as he had to eat that fishy stuff, Barkley's breath was doomed.

Barkley nudged the food with his nose but didn't eat any.

Mom turned from the counter where she was stirring something that looked like sticky birdseed in a bowl. Her T-shirt exposed her formidable arms. Not particularly muscular, but solid. "I don't think he likes it," Mom said, watching Barkley.

"I like it!" Julian slid into the room, wearing his Iron Man pajamas.

"What?" Mom's eyes popped wide.

"It's Fish Stick Cap'n Crunch!" Cleo's littlest brother snatched a piece of dog food and crunched it in his mouth. Barkley looked at him quizzically, then took a begrudging bite himself.

"When have you had Cap'n Crunch cereal?" Mom demanded.

"At Damon's house."

“That’s the last time I’m letting you go there,” Mom said. “That stuff isn’t fit for human consumption!”

Julian scowled. The rest of them laughed, even Mom. But then she added, “I’m not joking.”

Cleo was tempted to try a bite of fish stick–flavored Cap’n Crunch herself, but she couldn’t afford to have stinky breath on her first day of business. “Can I take the card table outside?” she asked.

“Uh-oh. Cleopatra ‘I Have an Idea’ Oliver is at it again!” Dad winked at her.

“You mean, Cleopatra *Edison* Oliver, CEO.”

“Ooo, my daughter, the company president.” Dad nodded. “I like the sound of that.” Cleo loved her dad, with his crazy, curly, nutty-professor hair. He knew nothing about business, but that didn’t keep him from being gung ho about it.

Mom fixed her bright blue eyes on Cleo. “What do you plan to *do* with the table?”

“It’s the grand opening of CLEO’S AWESOME AVOCADO STAND!” She held up her signs, then realized they were upside down. She flipped them around.

Dad read aloud. “‘Blowout sale!!’? ‘Everything must go!!!’?” He looked at her. “On your first day of business?”

“It’s advertising, Dad. I’m trying to get people’s attention.”

“Right . . .”

She produced the sign that said HUGE LABOR DAY SAVINGS!!! “It’s all about how you spin things. Marketing is eighty percent of sales, Dad.”

“Is that so?”

Mom cut in again. “So what’s your plan, exactly?”

“I’m going to sell the avocados from our trees! Barkley’s blown up like a balloon from eating too many of them off the ground. And let’s be honest, how much more guacamole can we eat?”

“A lot!” Dad said.

Mom’s eyes slid to Dad’s waistline. Dad scooped up Julian and tickled him all the way to the family room. JayJay shrieked with laughter.

“How much do avocados cost at the store?” Cleo asked.

“Oh, anywhere from a dollar to a dollar fifty apiece. Sometimes as much as two fifty if they’re big.”

Cleo’s heart did a happy dance. The day before, she had counted almost *sixty* avocados on their three trees. And she was going to sell them all!

Josh rushed into the kitchen. “Mom, can we buy my Nerf gun today? *Please??*”

Mom was forming the birdseed goop into balls and plopping them onto a baking sheet. “Do you have half the money yet?”

“No.”

“Keep saving!” she sang.

Josh scowled and stomped through the kitchen.

Cleo hurried across the room. “As always, I’ll give away ten percent of whatever I make.” She looked Mom in the eye. “It’s Fortune Principle Number Ten, you know.”

“That’s wonderful, honey. But for the record, that wasn’t her original idea.”

“What do you mean?”

“God told us to do the same thing about four thousand years ago.”

Oh no. Not another one of Mom's sermons. "What are you making, anyway?"

Mom shoved what looked like lollipop sticks into the balls. Her eyes lit up. "Longevity Lollipops!"

"Longevity?"

"Long life. They're full of stuff that's good for you."

Too bad. Cleo had been about to ask for one. "So can I? Take the card table outside?"

"If you think you can convince people to buy the fruit off our trees, by all means, sell away!"

If she could convince people? "Convince" was practically her middle name!

Except it wasn't. As of today, it was *Edison*. Cleopatra Edison Oliver, CEO. Person In Charge.