



The
**Principal's
Underwear
Is Missing**

Holly Korwitt



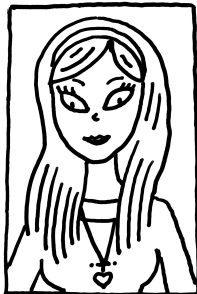
Feiwei and Friends • New York

Chapter 1

Oh no. No, no, no, *no*. Not her. Please, God. *NOT HER!*
Anyone but her.

Five feet away from me, the most beautiful, popular girl in school howled in pain. Sloan “Selfie” St. Clair, the undisputed Queen of Cool, Goddess of Eighth Grade, was on the gym floor, writhing in agony—

Because of me. A lowly sixth grader.



Her



Me

“Owwwwwwwwww. Ooooooh. Uggghhhhhhhh.” She clutched her arm like I’d blown it off with a hand grenade. Her friends looked on in distress, and the gym teacher, Ms. Doyle, swooped in like a giant bird.

“Stay calm! Stay calm!” the teacher shouted. “Give us some SPACE, people!”

The girls around me gasped and looked nervous, like they could somehow be blamed for it, too.

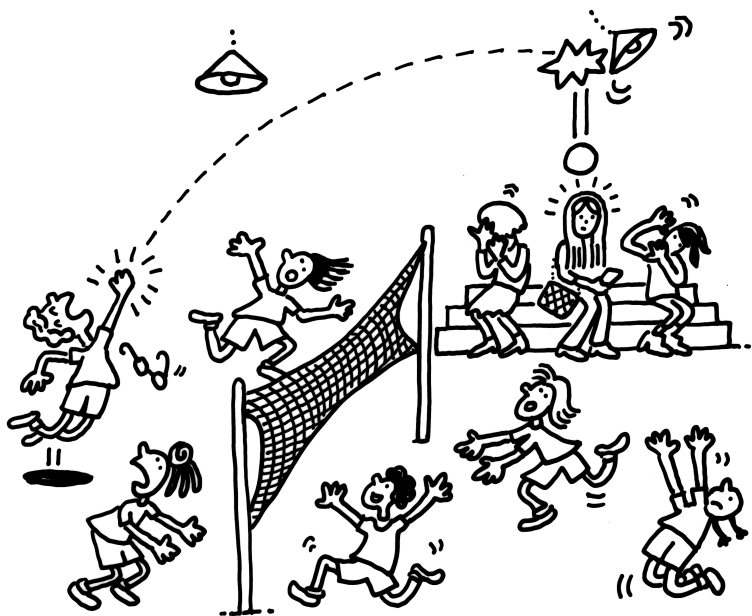


I replayed the past two minutes in my head. We’d been playing volleyball, and a gym full of girls were yelling, “C’mon, Birnbaum! Hit a decent serve for once!” Out of the corner of my eye, I saw some Beautiful People—eighth graders—in the bleachers. What were *they* doing in our gym class?

I didn’t need the distraction. Besides being lousy at sports, I was somewhere between Misfit and

Mathlete on the food chain. I gripped the ball in my sweaty hand. *Don't. Be. A. Total. Dork.*

My stomach tensed as I wound up and—*THOOMP!*—whacked the ball as hard as I could. It veered sideways, hit an overhead light, and shot straight down. That was when I heard the scream.



“OWWWWWWWWW!” Selfie wailed again, jolting me back to the present. She was on her back, clutching her arm and screaming. Someone whispered, “The ball hit Selfie, and she fell and hurt her arm! *That* girl did it.” I just stood there with my mouth open.

Stupid, stupid, stupid. Of all people to clobber, why did it have to be an eighth-grade fashion icon who looked like she'd walked off the cover of *Teen Vogue*? The wild child who wore sunglasses inside and carried a jumbo coffee cup, Hollywood starlet-style, as if she'd been up too late the night before? Selfie had gotten her nickname from the pics she always took of herself: at a movie premiere, on the Tilt-A-Whirl, at a swim-up snack bar in Cancún.

Everyone had heard about . . .

Her legendary parties



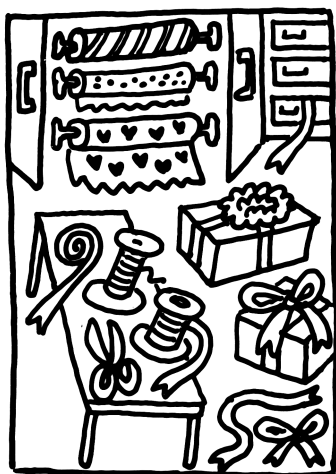
Her walk-in closet



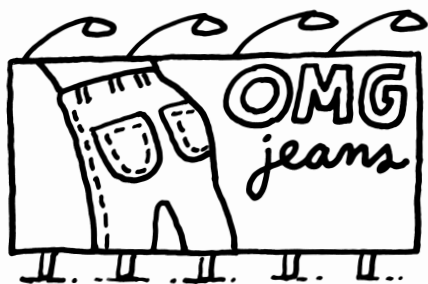
Her summer camp
in Switzerland



The room in her mansion
just for gift wrapping



Other rumors swirled around, too: She was offered a modeling contract. She had inspired a brand of blue jeans. She was dating a high school guy.



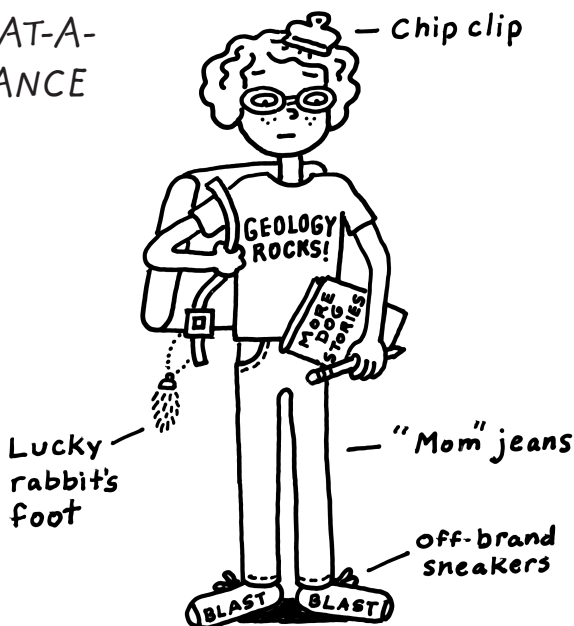
“You’re in BIG trouble.” Another popular girl, Roxxi Barron, wagged her finger at me. “Hitting an eighth grader. Now her arm’s probably broken.” She

looked me up and down, taking in my untamed hair and no-name gym shoes. “Who are you, anyway?”

“Nobody,” I mumbled.

Who was I? An easy-to-ignore sixth grader at James A. Garfield Middle School—short and freckled, with red glasses, a flat chest, and a closet that looked like the sale rack at Value Village. Killing it in Model UN wasn’t exactly the path to popularity.

ME AT-A- GLANCE



Name: Becca Birnbaum

Occupation: sixth grader

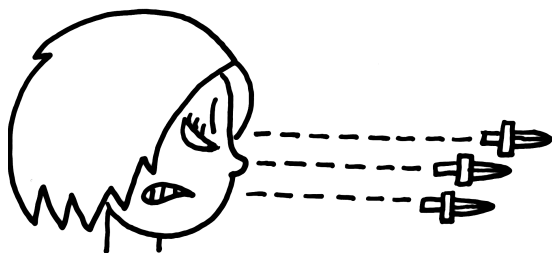
Profile: smart, organized, invisible

Bra size: AAAA

Least likely to say: "It's so hard being head cheerleader (sigh)."

Ms. Doyle was still crouched next to Selfie as the girl's sobs filled the gym. Taking a deep breath, I stepped forward to apologize. "STAY BACK!" Doyle shouted, holding up her hand like a policeman.

Like a frightened mouse, I obeyed. There was nothing to do but stand there awkwardly. Roxxi kept shooting me dirty looks, as if the injury were a personal insult to *all* gorgeous, popular eighth graders.



"CLEAR THE WAY! CLEAR THE WAY!" Two uniformed ambulance guys burst through the gym doors, wheeling a stretcher. People looked shocked, panicked, and secretly thrilled. Nothing this exciting had ever happened in gym.

“You okay?” My best friend, Rosa Hadid, squeezed my arm. Her dark eyes locked onto mine, worried.

I shook my head.

“Try not to freak out.” She lowered her voice. “Maybe it’s not as bad as it looks.”

The ambulance guys surrounded Selfie, poking, prodding, and asking questions. Her moans continued. Finally, one of them pulled out a walkie-talkie. “Possible right-side proximal to the scapula,” he said. “Rush the bus to Parkside.”

The hospital? *Oh, God.*

I tried to picture her there.



My stomach churned. Maiming the most popular girl in school was *not* the best game plan. At Garfield, it didn’t take much to get labeled radioactive. A roll of

the eyes, a sarcastic giggle, a slide away from you on the school bus—any of these, done by the right person, could seal your fate for the next few years.

“What was the glam crowd even *doing* here?” I whispered to Rosa as the ambulance guys lifted Selfie onto a stretcher.

“Measuring the gym for Fall Frolic.” Rosa rolled her eyes. She disapproved of dances, pep rallies, or any event that involved cheesy themes and crepe paper.

The ambulance guys strapped Selfie in. Suddenly, they were flying across the gym. “COMING THROUGHHHHHHHH!”

Her friends trailed behind, looking upset as the gurney crashed through the double doors. Roxxi glared back at me.

“You’re *dead meat*,” she hissed.

I believed her.



Chapter 2

The next day, I dreaded running into Selfie. *Please, please let her be all better!* Then I saw her in the cafeteria.



Crud!

The cast was huge. Just seeing it made me feel even worse. After she was rushed to the hospital, I cursed myself for not getting through to apologize. Now she was right across the room.

Unfortunately, so were all her friends. Talk about *intimidating*.



From my perch at the Geeks and Bookworms table, I could see her talking to popular A-list jocks like Zach Pirotta and “Six-Pack” Feldman, guys who rolled down the halls with lazy confidence. Selfie’s girlfriends were there, too—D’Nise Cousins, Vivienne Ling, Margaux Frost, and Roxxi Barron—the royalty of our school. Plus Chaz Green, a guy who hung out with the girls. They traveled together like a bored,

beautiful military brigade, marching through school, undefeated.

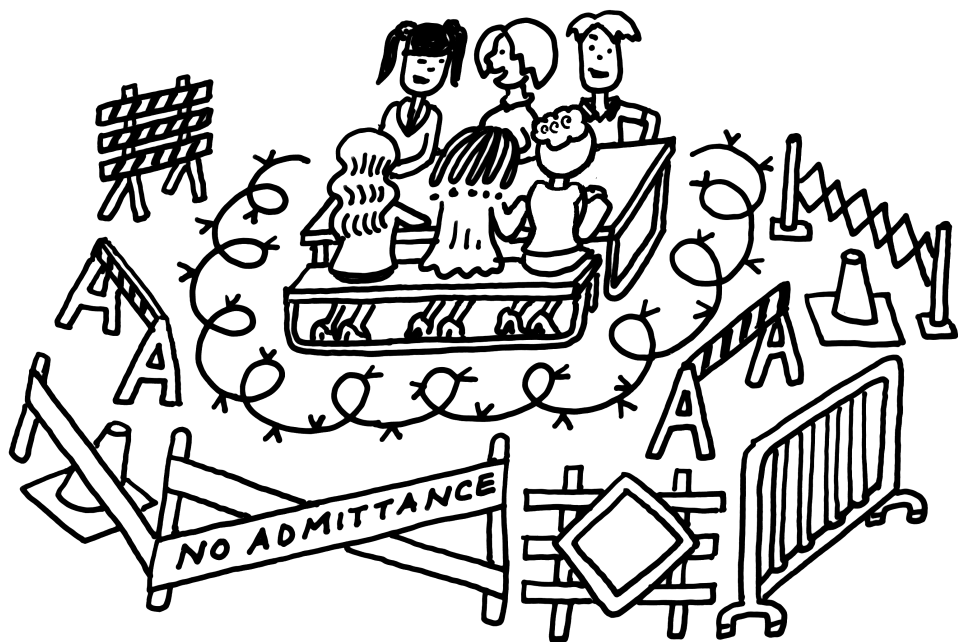
No way was I going over there. I was sitting with Rosa and our friend Prezbo. I ducked my head and sort of hid behind them.

“Go talk to her *now*,” Prezbo said. “This is your big chance.”

He was known for strong opinions. Preston Bollinger (“Prezbo”) could go on for hours about the Ten Greatest Guitar Solos or most unwatchable Godzilla movie. Although he was impatient with jocks and morons, he knew how to stay on their good side to survive at school. “Infiltrate the system, and then subvert it” was his motto.

“You have to apologize *sometime*,” Rosa agreed, finishing off a cream-cheese-and-olive sandwich. “Selfie never enters a bathroom with less than ten people, so you’re *never* going to find her alone.”

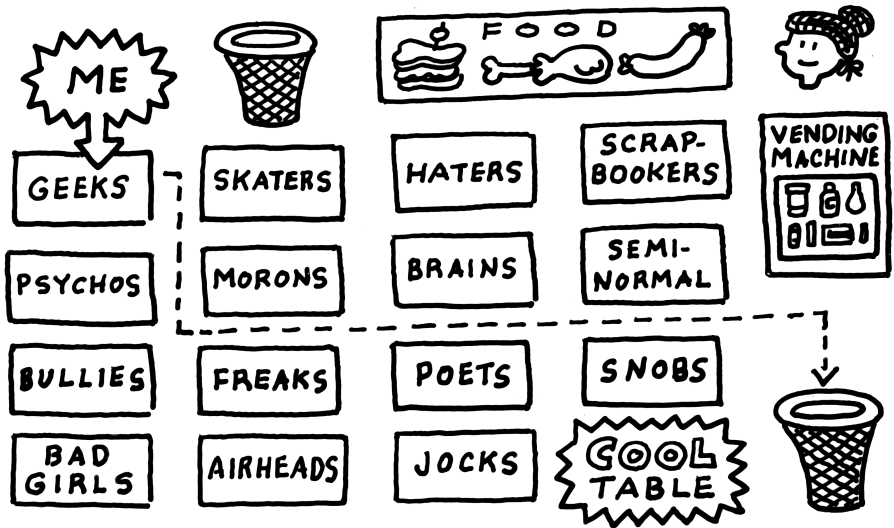
I glanced over there again and saw two guys chest-bump. The thought of going up to them made my stomach clench. The “cool” table wasn’t exactly welcoming.



Taking a deep breath, I forced my legs to stand. *What's the big deal? You're just going to another part of the cafeteria.* Like most people, though, I knew where I belonged. Skaters didn't sit with glee clubbers; mall rats didn't hang with tech geeks. You didn't cross borders.

I clutched my crumpled lunch bag. That way, if I chickened out, I had something to throw in the garbage. Brilliant, right? Like I always crossed the room to use a less convenient trash can.

CAFETERIA ROUTE



With shaky hands, I approached the table. I could hear them talking.

“Kovac, that is so rude—”

“DE-NIED!”

“On sale from Zappos. Seventy-nine dollars plus tax.”

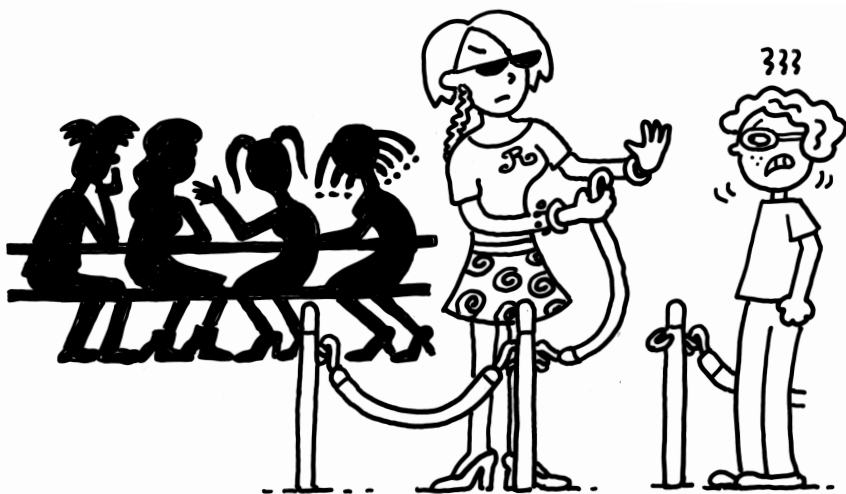
No one noticed me.

“Ahem,” I said.

They kept right on talking. I knew I wasn't popular but didn't realize I was *actually* invisible. I tried again.

"Um . . . hey . . . Selfie?"

The Queen Bee was talking to someone and didn't seem to hear. Roxxi jumped up and leaped between us. Like a self-appointed nightclub bouncer, she folded her arms and looked at me through slitted eyes. "What do *you* want?"



I mumbled that I wanted to see Selfie.

"Selfie!?" Roxxi sputtered, like I'd just requested an audience with the pope. "You want to talk to *Selfie*?"

Margaux looked up. “Who wants to talk to Selfie?”

Oh, *brother*. “I’m just trying—”

Everyone at the table turned around, alarmed at the security breach. Unaware, Selfie and Vivienne were still gabbing away.

“I . . . I need to tell her something,” I said.

“She can’t be disturbed.” Roxxi folded her arms.

Selfie chattered on. I heard the words *wedge heel* and *peep-toe*. Vivienne made a point about ankle straps. *Not exactly a conference on world hunger*.

“Go back to chess team, or whatever,” Roxxi said. “We’ll give her the message.” Her friends cracked up.

Their laughter burned my throat. “I want to tell her myself.”

Roxxi, Margaux, D’Nise, and Chaz exchanged a look that said, *Can you believe this sixth grader?* But I didn’t care. I hadn’t dragged myself all the way here just to be swatted away like a mosquito.



Suddenly, Selfie got to her feet. With her good arm, she hoisted up a fancy leather purse on a gold chain. *Oh no!* She was leaving—and I hadn’t gotten to apologize!

“Selfie!” I called. “*Selfie!*”

Roxxi looked furious—and astonished. But this time, I wasn’t giving up.

“SELFIEEEEEEE!!!” I yelled.

The cafeteria went silent.

Selfie turned toward me, slowly. Everyone watched as the Queen Bee approached me, with her nose-up, runway model’s way of walking. Suddenly, we were face-to-face!



"I'm, uh . . ." My voice trailed off. Now that I had her attention, I didn't know what to say. Selfie blinked and tilted her head.

"She's the one who bonked you." Roxxi's voice was flat.

"I'm, really, um . . ." My eyes were glued to the floor. "SorryboutwhathappenedletmeknowifIcanhelp."

Selfie stared at me a second. When she opened her mouth to speak, my hands started to shake. *This was it!* The moment I'd been dreading! Everyone held their breath.

And then, a totally weird thing happened.

A girl ran up and shoved a phone in Selfie's face. The Queen Bee looked at it and screamed—a cry of pain so raw I got chills down my back. Everyone started whispering. What the heck was going on?

A second later, D'Nise, Vivienne, Chaz, and Margaux surrounded her like a SWAT team for the super popular. They made soothing sounds, stroking her hair and handing her gum, lip gloss, and wet wipes. Someone threw an EIGHTH-GRADE SOCCER windbreaker over her shoulders.

They whisked her away, as if to a waiting helicopter. Stranded at the empty table, I stood there stupidly. Then Roxxi came over to me.

“Listen, sixth grader.” She poked my chest. “You lucked out today.”

I did?

“Selfie’s in the middle of a *major* crisis.”

“Oh. Wow. Uh—”

“Don’t ask what it is, cuz it’s *top secret*,” Roxxi cut me off, and then waited. When I didn’t press for details, she cleared her throat. “*No one* needs to know.”

“Okay.” I shrugged.

“Cuz it would, like, *totally* devastate her.”

Ha! I was dying to find out, but it was more fun to deny Roxxi the chance to tell me. “I understand,” I said calmly.

Roxxi’s eyes turned angry. “Listen, Diptard, you need to get something straight! Selfie didn’t have time to deal with you, cuz there was this *disaster*, and she totally *freaked*. But when she sees you again?” She whistled. “*Total* smackdown.”

Overhearing us, Jenna Dempsey, a semipopular seventh grader, came over and nodded. “*I* wouldn’t want to get on her bad side.”

“Remember Maya Wagner?” another girl piped up. “After Selfie dissed her, she started homeschooling.”

Pretty soon, a crowd had gathered. Everyone had a story:

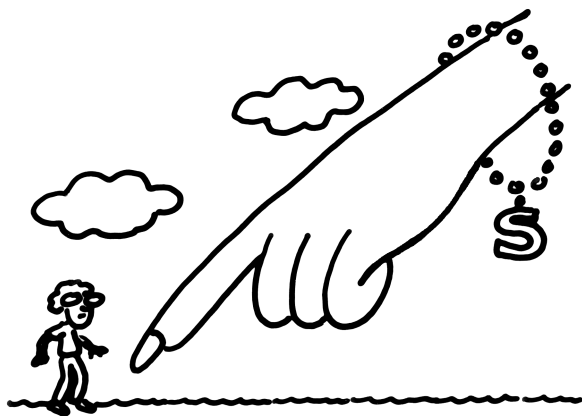
“Her dad owns half the city—”

“She’s gotten *teachers* fired!”

“They rescheduled graduation so she could go to the World Cup!”

Now I was sweating through my T-shirt. These rumors were really getting to me. What next—they changed daylight saving time so Selfie could sleep late?

Just how freakin’ powerful is she?

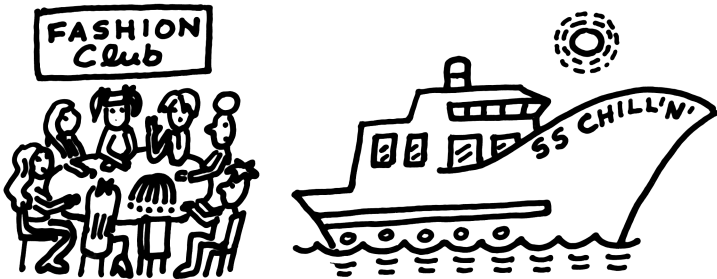


“This is ridiculous!” I burst out, exasperated. “No one is THAT big a deal! What the heck am I supposed to do? TRANSFER????”

Silence. My words hung in the air, uncontradicted, while everyone looked at the floor, their nails, or the ceiling tiles.

Chapter 3

For the next twenty-four hours, my mission was: Stay Away From Selfie. Luckily, most of her hangouts weren't that hard to avoid:



The only problem was the bathroom. The Beautiful People assembled there when they needed to apply lip liner, gossip, or discuss last weekend's Hawaiian luau. Having it off-limits all day wasn't easy.

On the other hand, the Mix 'N' Math picnic seemed like a secure location. So when the last bell rang, I bounced down the hall and headed to the East Courtyard.

But passing by the Multi-Purpose Room, I heard a gasp.

"UMMGH! UNH! UPF!"

I ran inside. Underneath a spray-painted sign that said CLOTHING-DRIVE DONATIONS, a rack of coats had fallen over, pinning someone under it. Frantically, I started clearing away wool and fleece. Finally, a hand appeared—yes! The hand led to an arm; the arm led to a cast.



A cast?

It was SELFIE! *Crud!*

I cleared away a raincoat, and our eyes met. “Oh!”
She sat up. “You’re the one who . . .”

Run! Go! NOW!

“It was an accident!” I shouted. “I *said* I was sorry.
For God’s sake, can’t you just LET IT GO?”

Selfie stared at me.

“You think I *wanted* to mangle the most popular
girl in school?” I yelled. “You think I *wanted* to com-
mit social suicide? That I woke up one day and de-
cided to . . . to . . .”

She blinked.

CRUD! What was I doing, yelling at the Queen
Bee? I shut up and waited for the ax to fall.

She blinked again.

Say something, I begged silently. Her mouth
twisted, like she was deciding how to kill me. Firing
squad? Shark tank? My head was about to explode.
Just get it over with!

Finally, she gave a little shrug.

“Don’t worry about it.”

Huh?

"I've moved on. Totes. No biggie." And then she smiled. A big, dazzling, Crest Whitestrip smile.

My jaw dropped.

"Obvi, you didn't mean to. It was a rando accident." Selfie wiggled the cast. "This thing's a drag, but people keep bringing me candy and carrying my books. Not too shabs. Twizzler?"

Whooooa!

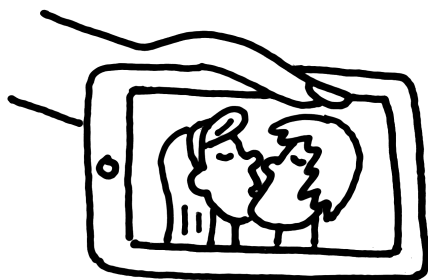
Was this the same hotshot eighth grader who ruled the school and scared us all to death?

Still in shock, I pulled up the clothing rack and helped Selfie shake off the last few coats. She sank into a chair and motioned for me to join her. I sat down and took a licorice stick, amazed. *In what world do super-popular Cool People you've injured turn out to be friendly?*

*Not at all
what I was
picturing*



“Sorry I bolted after you apologized the other day,” Selfie said. “An embarrassing pic of me and my secret crush just went viral. *Major* traumarama.” She showed me her phone.

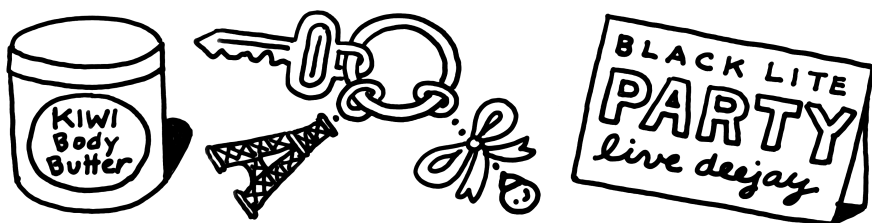


“I wasn’t up for going public yet. Things with Paolo and me are very delicate right now,” she said. “You know that stage where he lends you his sweatshirt and eats fries off your plate but won’t ask you on a non-group date?”

“Sure,” I lied. *Boy, do I have a lot to learn.*

“Hand me a brush?” She pointed to her purse. “My hair looks like dog barf.”

I reached into the overflowing bag on the table next to me. As I looked for a brush, other things spilled out:



“What’s this?” I pointed to a laminated card.

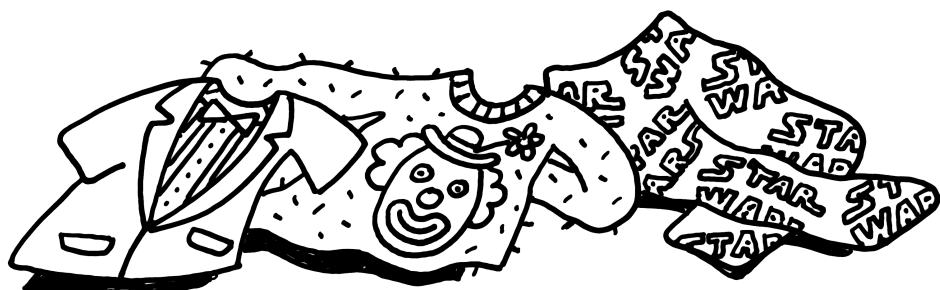
“Fake ID.”

Fascinating. It was like studying artifacts from some exotic tribe. Could our lives be any more different?

My hand plunged into the purse again and found the brush tangled in the straps of a bikini. I pulled it out and handed it to her, and she started brushing forcefully. “Now I have to deal with this clothing drive,” she said, looking around. “What a maj disaster.”

“It is pretty messy,” I agreed.

“Reindeer sweaters! *Star Wars* pajamas! Tuxedo T-shirts!”



Oh. It wasn't the chaos that bothered her; it was the bad taste.

"I promised to sort through donations." She sighed. "But Fashion Club meets in fifteen, and I'll never get through 'em all."

"Gosh, let me help." The math picnic could wait. "It would make me feel a *little* less guilty."

"Thanks, um . . ." Selfie blushed. "What's your name?"

"Becca. Becca Birnbaum."

As we sorted clothes into piles, Selfie had an opinion about every belt, turtleneck, and down vest. The death of various fashion trends was announced. Mittens were rejected for being "too last year." Sometimes she acted like she was handling nuclear waste.



PING! Selfie picked up her phone. As she glanced at the screen, her face darkened. “Uh-oh.”

“What?”

“Aaaaagh!” She picked up a rain boot and hurled it across the room, muttering a French swear word.

“Tell me!” I begged.

Selfie sat down and buried her head in her hands. “I got a D minus on my algebra test.” Her voice came out in a sob. “Lewison called my mom.”

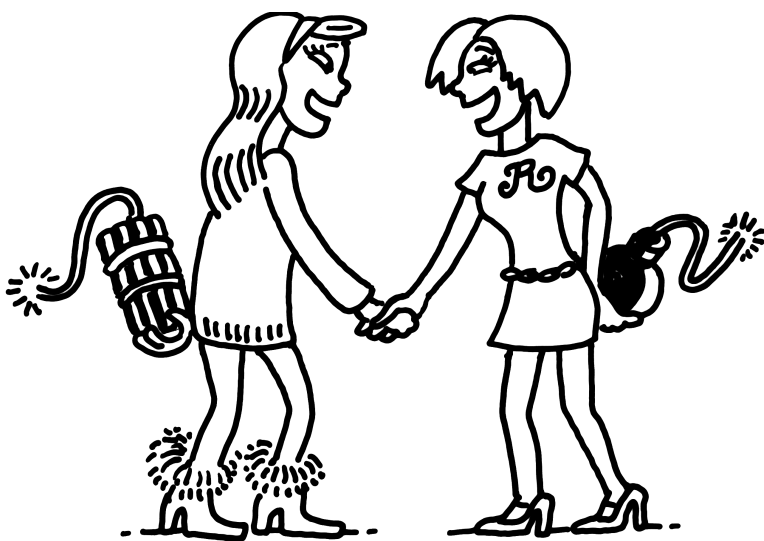
“Oh, boy.”

“It’s not just algebra.” Tears rolled down her face. “It’s *everything*. My mom’s bugging me to hang out with Bentley—her friend’s son—a brainiac who’s not too chill. And Roxxi’s been acting psycho since I got this injury. I think she’s actually jealous of the attention! Crazy, right?”

“Isn’t Roxxi your good friend . . . ?” I was confused.

“Yeah.” Her voice was bitter. “The kind of friend who posts an insta of you with flat hair and flirts with your boyfriend.”

Aha. Now I saw the two of them in a different light—rivals, not BFFs.



“I don’t have an art project to hand in,” she continued. “My mom wants me home ASAP—but Fashion Club’s in ten minutes, and I’m prez! My shopping bag got taken away cuz I was talking in class; now the principal’s got it.” She pointed to her feet. “And look what happened to my new high-heeled sneaks! They



got trashed when I spray-painted the clothing-drive sign.” Seeing her feet again led to fresh sobs. “Why am I telling you all this?”

I knew why. I was so out of her orbit it didn’t matter. It was like confiding to a goldfish.



“Don’t worry,” I said. “We can figure something out.” The we just slipped out.

“Maybe you’re right.” She wiped her eyes. “I just have to come up with a plan! And that’s what I’m *great* at. Let’s see . . . invent a jet ski accident? Family emergency? My cousin needs my kidney?”

Think, I told myself. Staring at the floor, I felt my mind go blank. Then I saw her paint-splattered shoes. “Huh.”

“What?”

“Maybe you could—” *No, that’s crazy.* “Never mind.”

“WHAT?”

I took a deep breath. Did I dare? “Okay, well, here’s another idea. Have the brainiac tutor you in math. Flatter Roxxi by asking her to run Fashion Club today—then you can go deal with your mom. Put *more* spray paint on your sneakers, and hand them in as your art project. And I’ll go to the principal and pick up your shopping bag.” I shrugged. “Just a thought.”

Selfie stared at me.

I gulped, feeling uncomfortable. Had I offended the queen?

Silence.

“*More* paint on my sneakers? That’s *ridic.*” But she was sitting up straighter. And eyeing me carefully, as if seeing me for the first time.

Suddenly, the door banged open. “More clothes!” Chaz Green, looking crisp in a striped button-down shirt, dumped two bags on the floor. “Fur boots from Mandy Southern, and nerdy baseball hats from Felix Needleman. As if anyone would want . . .” When he saw me, he stopped mid-sentence, shocked.

There was an awkward silence. According to the Unwritten Rules, the two of us didn't talk to each other. He belonged to the popular crowd but hung around the girls, not the jocks. I often saw him with three or four of them, straightening a collar, tying a scarf, or whispering in someone's ear. I suddenly saw myself through his eyes.



"You're not in Fashion Club," he said.

Selfie opened her mouth and closed it, as if changing her mind. Then she lifted her chin. "Yes, she is."

WHAT?

Chaz's eyes bulged. "But—!"

Selfie tossed her hair back with fierce confidence. The girl who'd been crying five minutes ago transformed back into the aloof Queen of Cool. Selfie swung a tanned arm around my shoulder.

"She's with me."