

MY LITTLE PHONY

A CLIQUE NOVEL BY
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poppy

LITTLE, BROWN AND COMPANY
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THUNK!

THUNK!

THUNK!

Three snowballs hit the windows, slithering down the glass like snot. A peal of high-pitched laughter followed the barrage. Kristen and Alicia threw on thick robes, and the four girls raced to the windows.

Claire, dressed in a My Little Pony cap and a bright red puffy coat, was pelting snowballs at Layne and their new friends—a willowy blonde and a petite brunette.

“They’re ruining my snow!” Massie stared at the once pristine yard, which was now covered with LBR boot prints.

“Cheap footwear leaves the most horrible tracks,” Dylan sighed. “Like the abdominal snowman.”

“You mean *abominable* snowman,” Kristen corrected.

Dylan pinched some snow off her fluffy hood and dropped it onto Kristen’s head. “Takes one to know one.”

“Ew, lice!” Alicia giggled, pointing at Kristen’s scalp. “Let’s go before we catch it,” she joked, backing away.

Kristen shook her blond hair in Alicia's face.

"Ahhhhhh!"

Massie drew an *X* on the foggy window, her finger squeaking on the pane. "It's too bad we can't give Claire lice. Maybe her ah-nnoying friends would leave."

THUNK.

THUNK.

THUNK!

The girls jumped back as another round of snowballs smacked into the barn.

Todd dashed in front of the window and bowed, proud to claim responsibility for the latest round.

Massie whipped her iPhone out of her robe pocket. "Unless . . ."

"Is there a lice app?" Kristen asked, twisting her damp hair into a sloppy bun.

"I wish," Massie smirked, her breath clouding the window as she coaxed her brain into constructing the ultimate plan—a plan that would accomplish her sinister goal without implicating her sinister mind. Seven breath clouds later, she had it. And sent an urgent text to Claire's younger brother.

Massie: Come 2 the barn ay-sap. Impt.

Bwoop.

The message had been sent. Seconds later, Todd and his best friend, Tiny Nathan, appeared in the doorway. Todd looked like a freckled Buzz Lightyear in his puffy white-and-

green snowsuit. Nathan resembled a poo in his three-sizes-too-big brown snow pants and matching hooded coat.

Todd sniffled. “You wanna join our team?” He pulled off his hood. His orange hair was spiked with sweat. “We’re called Big Balls.”

Nathan giggled. And then Todd giggled. And then Nathan giggled some more.

“No, this is nawt about joining your—”

Massie’s iPhone buzzed.

Kristen: ??? R U doing?

Alicia: ??? Does this have 2 do w lice?

Dylan: Ha! Big balls. ☺

Massie: Quit bugging me. ☺ Trust me.

Massie reached for the pack of Mango Surf–flavored Orbit sticking out of Dylan’s purse and popped a piece in her mouth. She bit down, recalling the satisfying flavor that squishing the competition usually left in her mouth. “I just learned a new massage technique that I’m dying to try on someone. It’s supposed to increase scalp circulation and prevent hair from sweating.” Massie waved away the imaginary smell coming from Todd’s head.

Alicia and Kristen exchanged confused looks. Dylan snatched the pack of gum out of Massie’s hand and stuffed four pieces in her mouth.

“Why didn’t you try it out on Kristen, then?” Tiny Nathan pointed out.

“This isn’t sweat.” Kristen smoothed the wet hair on top of her head. “It’s melted snow, okay?” She flashed Dylan a *thanks a lot* look.

Dylan blew her a glossy *you’re welcome* kiss.

Todd’s eyes darted between the two girls in confusion.

“So whaddaya say?” Massie asked Todd, putting the attention back where it belonged. “Wanna give it a try?”

“Oh. Okay.” Todd hopped up onto the couch and lay down. Tiny Nathan promptly pulled out his cell phone and started angling for a photo.

Kristen shrugged her athletic shoulders. Alicia finger-combed her dark locks to glossy perfection. And Dylan peeled a flattened gum-bubble off the tip of her nose.

Massie’s friends were the best that Octavian Country Day had to offer. Still, without Claire she felt emptier than Beyoncé after the forty-day master cleanse. But when betas defected to other crews, alphas didn’t beg them to come back. They drove the betas further away. And if a little brother got hurt in the process, so be it.

“Here I go.” Massie held her breath, stuck her hand into Todd’s matted locks, and gingerly began rubbing his head. Who knew when he’d last washed it? She made a mental note to Purell before eating.

“I can feel it working,” Todd muttered into the ecru linen cushion. After a few minutes, his breath became regular and heavy.

Dylan ran her hands through her hair the same way Massie was running hers through Todd’s. Alicia elbowed her.

“What?” Dylan asked, her red brows rising. “Todd said it was working.”

Kristen inched closer to Massie and mouthed, *What are you doing?*

Watch, Massie mouthed back. Then she fake-coughed and “accidentally” spit her gum onto Todd’s head. It disappeared inside a mass of red curls.

“Oh no!” she cried, quickly working the wad into his hair. “My gum!”

Todd’s head popped up. “Whhhaa?”

Tiny Nathan looked up from his phone and burst out laughing.

Massie widened her eyes in what she hoped looked like horror—and innocence. “Ehmagawd. I’m sooo sorry.”

Todd stuck his hand up and felt his sticky, artificially flavored Mango Surf–encrusted locks. “I’ve been gummed!”

Kristen and Dylan snorted back giggles. Alicia tightened the belt of her robe.

“It’s almost the same color as your hair. Maybe you should just leave it,” Tiny Nathan suggested. “You could stick stuff to it, like paper clips and things.”

Todd felt around the back of his head for the gum clump. “True.”

Massie shook her head vigorously. “No, no, no. We can’t leave it there. It’s dangerous. It can”—her eyes landed on Tiny Nathan—“stunt a person’s growth.”

In a flash, Todd sat up. His gummy hair stood up from his head like the Statue of Liberty’s crown.

“Stunting is not cool,” Tiny Nathan assured his friend.

“Ooookay,” Massie sighed. “There’s really only one thing to do.” She padded to the spa bathroom and opened the medicine cabinet. Inside was the silver-plated electric razor her dad kept in the cedar-planked room. She clutched it in her Essie Mint Candy Apple–manicured hands and returned to the main room, where Kristen, Alicia, and Dylan had settled on the couch, watching Todd like he was a monkey at the zoo.

“Now, not everyone can pull off the bald look. But you have such great bone structure. . . .” She held up the shaver and slid the button up to HIGH. The buzzing sound filled the room.

Todd stared at it, wide-eyed. “You want to *shave my head?*”

“No,” Massie nodded seriously. “*I have to.*”

The PC gasped. Todd’s mouth hung slightly slack. Tiny Nathan took out his cell phone and pressed RECORD.

“Think about it. Bald men are so . . .” She looked at her friends for help.

“Hawt!” Alicia added quickly. “Like, look at Bruce Willis.”

“Isn’t he dead?” Dylan asked.

Alicia shrugged.

“Britney Spears did it,” Kristen pointed out.

“So did Mr. Potato Head!” Dylan added helpfully.

Massie clicked to the Mirror app on her iPhone and held it up for Todd. “Think about how tough you’ll look.”

Todd looked at Massie and blinked. For a second she

thought he was going to freak out and run screaming to Mrs. Lyons. But then a huge grin spread over his face.

“And I’ll be so much more aerodynamic!”

Tiny Nathan ran over and gave Todd a high five. “We can beat our luge time!”

Massie’s high-glossed lips curved into a Cheshire cat grin. She held the buzzing shaver out in front of her. “Ready?”

Bean darted under the couch.

Todd nodded and sat down on a bamboo stool.

Kristen’s jaw dropped.

Dylan let out a shocked belch.

Alicia twirled her diamond studs at top speed.

With one last glance at her friends, Massie lowered the blade. A tendril of bright red hair fluttered to the floor like an autumn leaf. And then another, and another. The buzzing blades mowed easily through the orange glob of gum. She carved a path right down the middle of his scalp. Then she made another path right next it, first on the left, and then another on the right. More and more hair dropped down onto Todd’s skinny shoulders and then onto the camel-colored leather massage table.

“Looks like a motocross track,” Tiny Nathan marveled, lifting his camera.

Alicia covered her eyes.

Massie pictured each tuft of hair as one of Claire’s new friends. And with each strand she lopped off, she felt more and more like the Queen of Hearts, cutting off traitors’ heads in the name of control.

“Done,” she announced triumphantly a few minutes later, when Todd’s head was shinier than a new pair of patent-leather Choos.

Todd hopped off the stool and hurried toward the mirror opposite the fireplace. He sucked in his cheeks, unzipped his snowsuit, and popped the insulated collar. “You’re right,” he nodded at his reflection. “I *do* have a beautifully shaped skull.” He winked at his reflection, then rubbed the top of his head.

The Pretty Committee giggled into their eucalyptus-scented palms. They weren’t privy to the intricate details of Massie’s plan but were entertained by its execution nonetheless.

“Let’s hit that luge course again!” shouted Tiny Nathan. He punched his tiny fist in the air.

“Wait!” Massie stopped Todd by the door. “It’s too cold to go out without hair.” She reached into one of Dylan’s shopping bags and took out the baby blue cashmere Claire hat.

“Hey,” Dylan protested.

Massie silenced her with a glare. Then she tore off the tag with her teeth, put the hat on Todd’s head, and pulled the flaps over his ears. “Perfect. I actually got it for Kuh-laire. So make sure you give it to her when you’re done.”

Todd nodded that he would, the tassels bouncing around his chin. Massie picked up Dylan’s tray of hot chocolates and handed them to him. “Take these, too, for her friends.”

“Hey!” Dylan hissed. “Why are you doing that?”

“I’ll get you another hat,” Massie whisper-promised.

“I’m talking about the hot chocolates,” Dylan frowned.

“Let it go,” Massie narrowed her amber-colored eyes, arched one expertly plucked eyebrow, and peered out the window. Outside, Claire and her friends were innocently tending to an ill-proportioned snowman. A snowman that, thanks to Massie’s ingenuity, would be on the Block Estate longer than they ever would. Because now, it was only a matter of time. . . .

She opened the barn door and sent Todd and Tiny Nathan back into the cold. The Pretty Committee shrank from the sudden chill that swept in, but Massie faced the freezing temperature, heated by the promise of victory. A promise that warmed her more than a back loaded with hot rocks ever could.

CURRENT STATE OF THE UNION

IN

Snow day
Razor blades
Baldheads

OUT

School day
Razor scooters
Redheads (Except Dylan.
Her hair is Pantene-o-licious.
Always was, always will be.)

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