

MY LITTLE PHONY

A CLIQUE NOVEL BY
LISI HARRISON



poppy

LITTLE, BROWN AND COMPANY
New York Boston

THE BLOCK ESTATE
THE BARN-TURNED-SPA
Friday, December 5th
2:37 P.M.

“I love getting stoned,” Massie Block sighed happily from one of the three massage tables set up in her family’s barn-spa. Heated stones lay on her back, radiating warmth through her entire body like she’d just downed three soy caramel lattes.

“If we were in school right now, we’d be in third-period French,” Kristen Gregory mumbled through the face hole in her massage table. The stones lined her spine like stegosaurus plates.

“*J’adore* snow days,” trilled Alicia Rivera, lying on her back at the end of the row, her long, dark brown hair fanned out behind her head. Her masseuse, Amber, spritzed her with Evian mineral water.

“*Oui, oui*,” Kristen agreed.

“*Woof!*” Bean chimed in from her own mini massage bed.

“Tatiana, how do you say ‘snow day’ in Russian?” Massie asked innocently.

“Shhhhh,” hissed Tatiana. “Talking ees naht relaaack-sing. Jash theenk abut a bee-yoo-ti-ful snoh-flok.”

Tatiana claimed to be “frahmm RAH-shah,” but Massie had a feeling her accent was about as real as Heidi Pratt’s new body. Not that it mattered. Her hands were pure gold. And with all those rocks lined up on her back, Massie felt

like the black diamond stretch bracelet on her Christmas list: relaxed, beautiful, and almost a million bucks.

Massie turned her head to look out the barn's sophisticated yet rustic plate-glass windows. It had snowed more than two feet the night before. The patios were dusted with shimmery powder, and the trees sparkled in the early December sun. It looked as though the MAC fairy had sprinkled pearly White Frost eye shadow over the entire Block estate and then blown it a kiss with her Sugarrimmed Dazzleglass-coated lips.

"CLAAAAAAAAAAAAAIRE!" Layne Abeley's gravelly voice boomed from outside.

"AHHHHH! I've been hit!"

CRASH!

Outside, a body slammed against the barn wall, and the spa shook. A high-pitched giggle followed.

"Eh-ma-annoying!" Massie flipped over, her heated stones tumbling to the floor. Her ex-BFF, Claire Lyons, had been squealing and giggling with her new friends all afternoon. Leave it to Claire to find the only ninth-grade girls who thought snowball fights were more fun than high school gossip. It was a total waste of an upgrade.

"Eeeen-hayel the soo-theeng ah-rom-ah," Tatiana instructed, guiding Massie back down to the table and replacing the rocks. Spicy steam startled Massie's pores as the masseuse kneaded the tension from her shoulders. But it was a lost cause. No amount of eucalyptus-infused steam could ease the pain of Claire ditching the Pretty Committee for *Layme* Abeley and two fourteen-year-old theater geeks.

Suddenly, the barn's wooden door flew open. Dylan Marvil rushed in, along with an arctic blast of air. Snowflakes speckled the back of her black cashmere coat like dandruff. Her white-mittened hands grasped the handles of a dozen brightly colored shopping bags, and her cheeks were as red as her hair.

"Where've you been?" Alicia sat up, pressing a fluffy green towel against her C-cups.

"Shooooooooooooooooopping!" Dylan burped. She set down a cardboard tray full of venti Starbucks hot chocolates and wiped her brown-stache with the back of her mitten. A cocoa-colored skid mark cut across the cashmere. "Ooops!" she shrugged. "Good thing I got a new pair. I cleaned out Neiman's, Juicy, and Michael Kors. Snow-day shopping is the best."

"Point-t-t-t," Alicia agreed through chattering teeth.

Massie pressed a button on a sleek silver remote. A second later, the electric fire in the stone fireplace ignited.

Dylan tossed her stained mittens into the hungry flames and then shook her crimson locks.

"Nice lice, Dyl!" Kristen cackled. Alicia snickered, her freshly manicured toes dangling just above the heated tile floor.

As Dylan whirled back toward them, her Brazilian blowout whipped around her face. "Don't even joke! When Megan Lambert got lice, her friends scattered like roaches in a Raid storm." She stuck her butt out to warm it in the fire's glow.

“Let’s see what you got.” Massie stood, and once again the pile of rocks cascaded off her warm back and crashed to the ground. Bean bolted under the glass coffee table.

“Nyyyettttt!” Tatiana let out a yelp as one of the rocks bounced against her toe. “Off! Off!” she insisted, waving Kristen and Alicia to their feet. With a grimace, she nodded at the other masseuses, who quickly folded up their tables, packed up their oils, picked up their rocks, and followed her out into the cold afternoon.

“*Danke* very much,” Massie called after them sweetly, putting on a fluffy white robe.

The three women responded by slamming the barn door shut.

“Isn’t *danke* German?” Kristen giggled.

“Oh, whatevs,” Massie shrugged. “They dan-kare.” She padded over to Dylan’s pile of bags and pulled out a baby blue cashmere hat with earflaps and tassels. It looked like something Kuh-laire would wear. With a wince, she dropped it back in the bag. “You really did buy *everything*.”

“I maxed out my card,” Dylan admitted. “But it was totally worth it. I got open-toed booties in faux leopard *and* faux cheetah.”

“Ohhh,” Alicia whine-pouted. “I’m faux jealous.” Her shoulders were covered with spiderweb-like indentations from lying down on the massage table. “I can’t buy anything right now. My parents told me they would send me to the Spanish Riviera for a week if I didn’t shop from Thanksgiving to Christmas.” She buried her nose inside Dylan’s Saks bag

and inhaled a Ralph Lauren sweater-coat. “Ahhhh! It’s better than new puppy smell.”

Bean lifted her little black head and growled.

“She was only kidding, B,” Massie assured her pup, applying a coat of Pineapple Spice Glossip Girl to the pug’s mouth. The pug licked it off and then sneezed. “My parents would *never* shop-block me.”

“Must be nice,” Kristen said with a frown.

“It is,” Massie beamed.

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.)

THE BLOCK ESTATE
THE GUESTHOUSE
Friday, December 5th
3:02 P.M.

The ground glistened like Frosted Mini-Wheats. Claire Lyons's fingers were purple. Her Florida-born toes had gone numb before she'd packed her first snowball. And she was fairly certain she had bang-cicles. But the sight of Cara Whitman making a snow angel, Syd Martinez shaking snow off herself like a wet dog, and Layne Abeley eating the bag of carrot noses—it warmed her like July.

Claire stuck one blue-button eye then one green-button eye into the head of her snowman and stood back to admire her work. Her creation wore a green plaid scarf, a long orange nose, and twigs for the arms, and it had a snow-and-mud soccer ball at its feet. "Look, it's a snow-Cam!"

Layne burst out laughing. Little carrot flakes shot out of her mouth. Claire grinned, happy that her friend appreciated the homage to her longtime crush, Cam Fisher, and his different-colored eyes.

"Very avant-garde," Cara said, tucking a loose strand of blond hair under her white mohair cloche hat. Snow covered her belted black military coat, and her L.L. Bean duck boots were soaked clean through.

"Really?" Syd crinkled her pug nose in concentration and turned up the collar on her vintage plaid coat. "I think

if we got a pocket watch and a hair dryer, he'd be pure Dalí."

"I think . . . your snow-Cam is about to get Van Gogh'd!" Cara pulled out Cam's blue eye and pressed it into the side of his cheek.

"Ahhhh!" Claire cried in mock horror. "Get her!"

Instantly the air was filled with flying snowballs as Claire and Syd pelted Cara. After a moment, Cara spun around and lobbed a snow grenade at Claire. She giggle-jumped for cover behind an evergreen shrub, then peeked out to see Layne and Cara shaking a branch over Syd's head.

Syd and Cara, Layne's ninth-grade community theater friends, were the smartest girls Claire knew. She'd been hanging out with them for the past three weeks and had loved every second of it. With them, it was about *culture*, not *couture*, and they cared more about fun than fashion. The four of them had gone Thanksgiving caroling and had made gingerbread cookies shaped like little Claires, Laynes, Syds, and Caras. After being under Massie's tight rein for the past year, Claire found hanging out with Syd and Cara as comfortable as her favorite Old Navy striped sweats.

She crept out from behind the bush, fixed Cam's eye, and stuck it back in place.

"Et ezz peek-ture purrrr-fect," Syd said, stealing Claire's silver ELPH out of her coat pocket. She circled the snowman, snapping pictures. "I see zis as zee centerfold for *Snowteen Magazine!*" she said. "Bee-yoo-tiful, darling! Now, give me more, more, MORE. Now, less!"

Claire laughed until her sides hurt. Syd sounded like Luc Coulotte, the artist Massie always hired to paint Bean's birthday portraits.

Another snowball whizzed past her head and hit the barn's front door. As Claire watched it fly by, her eyes landed on the four sets of designer boot prints leading to the GLU headquarters, along with a tiny pair of dog-sized tracks. Just a few weeks ago, Claire's own square boot prints would have been right there next to them. But now, even though she stood only a few feet away from her former friends, she might as well have been back in her hometown of Kissimmee, Florida.

A few weeks before, Massie had launched a mission to get Claire and the rest of the PC to upgrade from their eighth-grade crushes to crushes in ninth. And when Claire had refused, their friendship had crash-landed—hard. But it wasn't until she had caught Claire karaokeing with her new friends that Massie had declared war.

Since then, things between the two of them had been icier than the Blocks' swimming pool in winter. And although Claire had IM'd with Kristen, Alicia, and Dylan over Thanksgiving break, she hadn't seen the girls, been invited to a sleepover, or been awarded any gossip points. But every time she felt a pang of Massie-itis, Claire reminded herself that Massie's friendship was like an Hermès Kelly bag: rare and beautiful, but it came at way too high a price.

Claire didn't know why Massie needed to control her friends, but she did know she was sick of being bossed around. In seventh grade she probably would have gone crawling back

to Massie and begged her forgiveness. But that was more than a year ago. She was already three months into eighth grade, and she planned to spend the rest of the year having no drama with her new drama friends.

“I’m going to make a snow Robert Pattinson!” Cara exclaimed, gathering piles of snow with her arms. “Just think how beee-yooooo-ti-fully he’ll sparkle in the sun.”

“Won’t that make Doug jealous?” Syd asked. Cara’s boyfriend, Doug, was the bassist in a band called Smells Like Uncle Hugh. They lip-kissed *all* the time—even in public.

“Jealousy is healthy in a relationship. When jealousy dies, passion dies,” Cara said, kneeling to pack the bottom globe of the snowvamp. “I read it on the bathroom wall at school.”

Claire felt a ping of jealousy herself. All the OCD bathroom walls said were things like *KATIE WAS HERE OR YOU’RE UGLY!*

“Me-ladies!” Todd emerged from the barn, his eyes lit up like the white Christmas lights strung around the Blocks’ windows. He wore a baby blue cashmere hat with earflaps and tassels. Claire frowned. The hat was totally cute but totally girly.

Tiny Nathan bobbed behind him, balancing a tray of hot chocolates. He held them out with a shaky flourish. “They’re from Massie.”

Claire wasn’t sure what the gesture meant. Was it a truce in the name of the Christmas spirit? Or were they venti-sized cups of steaming cat pee?

Cara, Syd, and Claire inched cautiously toward the offering.

“Hmmm.” Layne lifted a cup to the sun and examined the bottom. She shoved it toward Todd. “You try it first.”

Tiny Nathan snort-laughed as Todd took a big gulp. “He’ll do anything a girl asks him to!”

“All clear,” Todd announced, licking whipped cream off his lips.

The other girls shrugged and grabbed their cups.

“Wanna know what else he’ll do?” Tiny Nathan pressed.

“Not really.” Claire rolled her eyes, suddenly mortified that her older friends were being forced to hang with her younger brother.

“Okayyyy,” Tiny Nathan beamed. “You asked for it!”

“No, they didn’t.” Todd stepped back. But it was too late. Nathan jumped up like an anxious puppy and managed to grab hold of a blue tassel. He yanked twice. The hat slid off Todd’s slick head and landed on the snow with a muted thud.

“You’re bald!” Claire shouted.

Layne laughed so hard, hot chocolate sprayed from her nose. “You look like a Tootsie Pop.”

“Thanks,” Todd beamed, and then curled his fist under his chin and struck a thinking-man pose. “Massie did it. She says my skull is my best feature.”

“She got that right,” Syd joked.

“Even my snow-Cam has more hair than you!” Claire pointed to the little evergreen pine needles poking out the top of its head.

Layne clasped her hands together like a caroler and began to sing. “Frossssty the bald man . . .”

“Had a jolly, shiny skull!” Cara added.

Syd threw her arm around Cara. “With an earflapped hat and a button nose and two eyes made out of . . .”

Claire stared at her transformed little brother, rage fizzing through her veins like shaken Coke Zero. But was it really anger . . . or jealousy? She used to love getting a Massie makeover.

Todd slapped his bald head. “Oh! I almost forgot.” He picked the hat off the snow-covered ground. “Massie said this was for you.”

Claire stared at it, her heart pounding as she went through another loop on the roller coaster that was life with Massie Block. First the hot chocolate, now this. The muscles in her hands were dying to reach out and grab the hat. To rush the barn and throw her arms around Massie and ask if the hat—a soft, stretchy cashmere—meant that they were finally going to make up. That Massie was finally going to be more flexible and let Claire make her own decisions. But her memory ordered her impulses to sit this one out. Could the girl who forbade her to eat processed sugar, hang out with Cam on a Friday night, or sit with Layne at lunch suddenly be open to change? Yeah, maybe. When Gwen Stefani tans.

Claire glanced at the barn. A familiar pair of amber eyes stared back at her from the window. Massie smiled sweetly and motioned for Claire to take the hat. Was it possible? Was Gwen was on a yacht in St. Barts slathering on the Hawaiian Tropic oil?

Stranger things have happened, she thought. *Like . . . well . . .*

Actually, Claire couldn't think of anything at the moment. She was distracted by her tingling feet, which were finally thawing with the hope of reconciliation. It had been weeks since the girls had even acknowledged each other. And a part of Claire had been numb ever since.

She studied the hat. It was soft and pale blue, the same color as her own cornflower blue eyes. She had to hand it to the alpha: When it came to knowing what looked good on people, the girl had more vision than Bausch & Lomb.

She put it on. It fit perfectly and warmed the tips of her ears. As she tied the tassels under her chin, the Massie-shaped ice block around her heart began to melt.

"It looks adorbs," Cara said.

"Totally you," Syd pronounced.

Claire grinned. She looked at the window and raised her hand to wave her thanks, but Massie was gone.

THE BLOCK ESTATE
MASSIE'S ROOM
Friday, December 5th
9:37 P.M.

Hours later, Massie's Friday-night sleepover was in full swing. Four matching D&G sleeping bags were unfurled in flower-petal formation, with Bean's bed in the center. Belle Fleur Jasmine Verbena candles flickered on the long, white dresser. Mountains of Bliss face masks, Essie and OPI nail essentials, and yogurt-covered low-fat pretzels were strewn across the carpet. Everything was there, in its place. And at the same time, it felt like something was missing.

Massie stared out across the snowy lawn into the guest-house's warmly lit living room, where Claire and her neo-friends were engaged in some sort of sewing project. They kept throwing their heads back like they were having the most fun time in the history of Westchester. Massie swore she could hear their laughter from her sleeping bag. It was ah-nnoying squared.

"I've got it!" Dylan speed-waved her air-drying Sag Harbor Essie-polished fingernails. "Your plan is to make Claire think that Todd looks great so she'll shave her head too," she guessed.

"Opposite of right," Massie replied, zipping up Dylan's turquoise ankle booties. She examined her foot. "Cute for spring," she declared.

"Think we'll know why you shaved Todd's head by then?"

Kristen asked, rolling onto her back. Candlelight flickered across her flawless skin.

“You’re sending Claire a warning. Like, you could shave off her power at any time.” Alicia twirled a lock of hair around her index finger and mimed yanking it out of her head.

“Opposite of makes sense,” Massie giggled, and then she craned her neck to spy on Claire through the window, noting with satisfaction that her former beta was still wearing the blue hat. She watched as Claire threw something at Layne’s head. Layne sprang up and immediately caught whatever it was in her mouth.

“Are you trying to make the neo-friends think Todd has some sort of contagious disease?” Kristen asked.

“Something *lice* that . . .”

“Ehmagawd!” Kristen smacked Massie’s back. “You want them to think Todd has *lice*!”

Massie turned away from the window and applauded. “Yayyy! Opposite of wrong!”

Alicia gasped. Dylan tossed away the floaty green boho scarf she’d been weaving through her hair. “No!” they cried out in unison.

“Oh yes.” Massie grabbed her iPhone off her purple bedspread and fired off a text to Layne. “Phase two of the plan will be activated in three . . . two . . . one . . .” She tapped SEND.

Massie: Heads up! There’s a louse in the house. Y do U think Todd shaved his head? Make sure Claire

doesn't wear Todd's blue hat. Sleep tight. Don't let the head bugs bite! ^o^

"Massie, that wasn't very nice," Kristen smirked.

"I know," Massie admitted. "But her friends were really *bugging* me."

Everyone burst into laughter.

"*Shave* it for someone who cares," Dylan howled, tears running down her cheeks.

Alicia was laughing so hard, her boobs shook. "Life's an *itch!*"

Massie's iPhone *bwooped*.

"Is it Claire?" Dylan asked.

Alicia looked over Massie's shoulder. "OMG, it's Landon."

Landon: My birthday is Tues. U and Bean want to come 4 cake?

"Is 'cake' code for 'lip-kissing'?" Dylan balanced on her tippy-toes to get a glimpse of Massie's screen.

"Yeah, he just loves lip-kissing Bean," Massie snapped, feeling slightly unnerved by her crush's offer. It wasn't that she didn't like Landon. From his blue-green eyes to his rugged preppyness and his high level of pug appreciation, Massie had no complaints. But the idea of lip-kissing him threw her off-kilter. It had been months since she had lip-kissed Der-rington. What if she'd forgotten how? What if she got a sudden lip spasm and drooled on Landon? What if techniques had

changed and she'd missed the *Cosmo* article that detailed the updated kiss-dos and -don'ts? Landon was a hawt ninth-grader who was probably at least nine times more experienced than she was. What if she didn't measure up?

"Come awn," Alicia teased. "You know he's gonna want to give you a taste of his *cake*."

The girls giggled. Massie tried to smile.

"What are you going to wear for your first cake?" Kristen asked, spreading a dollop of face mask over her smooth forehead.

"Something by Anna Sui?" said Dylan, waving a frilly red ruffled blouse like a toreador.

Massie wrinkled her nose, hoping her friends thought her look of horror had to do with fashion rather than lip-passion. "Too sweet."

"Prada!" said Alicia.

"Nada," said Massie. "A little *too* sophisticated."

Dylan held up a black sequined top. "Marc always knows what men like."

"Maybe something French?" Alicia tried, slipping into a nude Lacroix heel.

Kristen's green eyes widened. "Ehmagawd. What if Landon wants to kiss you . . . *en français*?"

"In French class?" Dylan asked.

"No, like THIS!" Alicia stuck out her tongue and waggled it around. Kristen exploded into laughter. Dylan made fake smooching sounds. Massie tried her very best not to melt into a puddle of Chanel No. 19-scented sweat.

What if Landon was into extreme lip-kissing? She had seen people do it in movies, and there seemed to be a lot of neck movement involved. But what was actually going on *inside* their mouth? It was like the tapered harem pants trend—totally baffling.

But the alpha couldn't expose her jumpy nerves. Her betas expected her to know everything and to approach life with confidence and knowledge. Instinctively, Massie peeked out at the guesthouse again. Her subconscious guided her toward Claire, just as it always did during times of insecurity. But she was nowhere in sight. Massie would have to deal with this one alone.

Her iPhone *bwooped* again.

Landon: Is that a yes?

"Someone's hungry for some cake," Alicia giggled.

"Too bad," Massie declared authoritatively. "*No one's* eating *cake* with all that H1N1 going around. It's unsafe!"

"Puh-lease," Alicia rolled her big brown eyes. "That's so last year."

Dylan took a swig of her Red Bull. "Swiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiine fluuuuuuuuuuuuu," she burped.

Kristen laughed so hard, she snorted like a pig.

"See?" Massie pointed. "Kristen just got it!"

"Whatevs." Alicia petted her faux-rabbit pillowcase. "I'd get the *swine* from someone that *fine*." She grabbed Massie's iPhone.

“Hey!” Massie lunged toward her like she was at a Tory Burch sample sale and Alicia was the last pair of gold-embellished T-strap wedge sandals. “Give that back!”

“I WANT UR LIPS TO LAND ON ME!” Alicia typed, her fingers flying over the keypad. “Get it?” she asked. “LAND-on.”

Massie grabbed Alicia’s arm, knocking the phone to the floor. She reached for it, but Kristen busted out some crazy soccer move and leg-swept it away. Then, lifting it with her toes, Kristen popped it into her hand.

“Impressive,” Dylan marveled.

Kristen smiled her thanks while she typed. “LET’S SWAP SWINE!”

Dylan grabbed the phone. “I’ve got it: HAVE YOUR CAKE AND EAT IT TOO . . . OFF MY LIPS.”

“Hand that over, or I’m going to give you the Todd Cut while you’re sleeping!” Massie growled.

Dylan tossed her the phone. Massie caught it in her right hand, her thumb grazing the screen.

Bwooooooop!

Oh no.

No.

No no no no noooo.

The snow outside seemed to stop swirling. Dylan froze mid-laugh. Alicia paused mid-gloss. Kristen’s mouth fixed in a round *O*. Bean rolled over and played dead. Massie wished she would die for real.

“Eh-ma-killmenow!” she wailed. “That message just got sent!”

After a quick exchange of nervous glances, the girls snapped into emergency advice mode.

“Maybe he lost his phone,” Dylan said quietly.

“Maybe he went blind,” Kristen offered.

“Maybe Bark chewed his phone,” Alicia tried.

“Yeah,” Dylan added. “Like an iBone.”

“Opposite of funny!” Massie wailed.

Just then she heard the tune from “You Belong with Me”—Landon’s exclusive ringtone.

Landon: ☺ U read my mind. ☺

“Ehmagawd,” Massie gasped. “He thinks I sent those! Now what?”

Alicia tossed Massie her dented tube of Clarins lip balm. “Start moisturizing, that’s what.”

A yogurt-cover pretzel began inching its way back up Massie’s throat. It was obviously freaking out, too, and eager to escape. If only it could take her with it.

Copyright © 2010 by Alloy Entertainment

All rights reserved. Except as permitted under the U.S. Copyright Act of 1976, no part of this publication may be reproduced, distributed, or transmitted in any form or by any means, or stored in a database or retrieval system, without the prior written permission of the publisher.

“Defying Gravity” by Stephen Lawrence Schwartz (Greydog Music). All rights reserved.

Poppy

Little, Brown and Company
Hachette Book Group
237 Park Avenue, New York, NY 10017
For more of your favorite series, go to www.pickapoppy.com

First Edition: August 2010

Poppy is an imprint of Little, Brown and Company.
The Poppy name and logo are trademarks of Hachette Book Group, Inc.

The characters and events in this book are fictitious. Any similarity to real persons, living or dead, is coincidental and not intended by the author.

CLIQUE® is a registered trademark of Alloy Media, LLC.

Cover design by Andrea C. Uva
Cover photos by Roger Moenks
Author photo by Gillian Crane



alloy**entertainment**

Produced by Alloy Entertainment
151 West 26th Street, New York, NY 10001

ISBN: 978-0-316-08444-4

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

CWO

Printed in the United States of America