

BEST FRIENDS FOR NEVER

A CLIQUE NOVEL BY
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THE BLOCK ESTATE
DINING ROOM

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Massie Block hated herself for looking so beautiful. She angled a silver soup spoon toward her face and quickly glanced at her reflection. The new caramel-colored highlights in her dark hair brought out the amber flecks in her eyes and made them sparkle, just like her stylist, Jakkob, had promised. She was debuting a brown suede miniskirt that made her butt look even perkier than usual, and her arms and legs were lightly dusted with gold shimmer powder. Massie dropped the spoon and pushed it aside. She couldn't believe she was wasting this red-carpet outfit on her father's birthday dinner, especially since they were spending it at home with the Lyonses.

"Happy biiiiirthday, dear William, happy birthday to youuuuuuu." The two families finished their song with a round of light applause. William's face turned purple as he struggled to blow out all forty candles at once, and Massie couldn't help giggling. It was the first time she had smiled all night.

They were seated around an elegant oak table in the Blocks' dining room, unable to fully see one another because of the elaborate centerpieces that overflowed with seasonal fruits and flowers. The teardrop-shaped bulbs on the crystal chandelier had been dimmed. The soft warm glow from the red candles was the room's main source of light.

Massie had been forced to sit between the two Lyons kids thanks to her mother's need to micromanage. On her left, Claire was shoveling a massive piece of sugary cake into her mouth as if *Cosmo* suddenly declared "fat" was the new "thin." Massie turned away. To her right was Todd, Claire's ten-year-old brother. Massie watched in disgust as he reached his icing-covered fingers over her plate to grab the pitcher of grape juice.

"Eew," Massie said under her breath.

She folded her thin arms tightly across her chest and shot her mother a sarcastic *thanks-a-lot* look. Kendra smiled back innocently. Massie rolled her eyes. But before her pupils could finish their journey, she was hit with a wave of grape juice that soaked the front of her skirt.

"Ehmagod!" Massie yelled. She pushed away from the table and jumped from her chair.

"Sorry." Todd shrugged his shoulders. "It was an accident."

He was fighting a smile and Massie knew he was lying.

"I swear, it's like you were raised by a pack of unbelievably dumb wolves," she said, dabbing her skirt with a white cloth napkin.

"Massie," Kendra snapped. She looked at Judi Lyons and shook her head apologetically.

Massie blushed. She realized her comment was more insulting to Todd's parents than to Todd but was too upset to apologize. If anyone should be saying "sorry," it was *them*. Ever since Labor Day, when the Lyons family left Orlando and moved into the Blocks' guesthouse, Massie's

life had pretty much sucked. For the last two months Claire had been forcing herself on Massie. She crashed Massie's carpool, followed her around at school, and even tried to steal Massie's best friends. Lately Todd had been fighting for her attention too. The entire family was cramping her style and Massie was desperate to shake them. She hated that her dad chose to be "old college buddies" with Jay Lyons. Why couldn't he have picked Calvin Klein?

Todd grabbed a napkin and started rubbing Massie's skirt as if he was buffing the hood of a sports car.

"Lemme help you."

"Uchhh. Stay away from me, perv." Massie slapped his arm.

Massie saw her mother slide the diamond pendant back and forth on the platinum chain around her neck and shoot her husband a stern *do-something* look from across the table.

"Sweetie, relax," William said to his daughter. "Todd is only trying to help." His voice was firm and fatherly. "I'll buy you another skirt."

"But he did it on purpose," Massie said. "I saw him tilt the pitcher on me."

Kendra lifted the dainty china bell beside her dinner plate and shook it until Inez, the Blocks' live-in housekeeper, burst through the swinging door.

"Yes, Mrs. Block?" Inez smoothed the apron on her uniform, then cupped her hand around the tight gray bun on the back of her head. She liked everything in its proper place.

Kendra sighed and directed her gaze toward Massie.

Inez took one look at the stain and darted back into the

kitchen. She returned with a bottle of seltzer water and a sponge. Massie lifted her arms out to her sides and Inez started scrubbing as hard and fast as her bony arms would allow.

“Todd, did you do that on purpose?” Judi Lyons asked her son. She popped a chocolate-covered strawberry into her tiny mouth and did her best to chew it with her mouth closed.

“Of course he did,” Massie screeched. “He’s been staring at me with his big wet cow eyes ever since we sat down.”

“Son, it looks like you’re about as charming as your old man.” Jay Lyons smacked his big belly and let out a hearty chuckle.

Todd kissed his fingertips and winked. Everyone laughed except Massie.

“Congratulations, Todd. You finally got me to notice you,” Massie hissed. “What are you going to do tomorrow when I forget about you again? Blowtorch my bedroom?”

Claire took the napkin off her lap and threw it on her plate.

“Well, at least it’s just an outfit, right?” Claire said. “It’s not like you were hurt or anything.”

“It’s not ‘just an outfit,’ Kuh-laiiire.” Massie pinched her skirt. “*This is suede.*”

“Oh,” Claire said. Then she chuckled to herself.

“What?” Massie snapped.

“I was just thinking how funny it is that, you know, clothes are sooo important to you. That’s all.”

“Actually, Claire, I find it ‘funny’ just how UN-important clothes are to *you*. You’ve worn that poo-colored turtleneck

three days *this week*. And for some reason, you think those thick cords are for girls, when they're clearly for gangly dorks." Massie pointed to Todd. "You know, like your brother."

Massie moved away from Inez when she noticed how hard the woman was scrubbing. Chunks of yellow sponge had come off on her skirt. Massie was heartbroken. It was the most flattering skirt she had, and now it was destined to become a pillow for her black pug, Bean. She looked directly at Claire as if all of this was her fault.

"Hint, Claire. Next time you order your entire wardrobe from the J. Crew catalog, flip *past* the men's section," Massie said. "The women's clothes are always in the back."

"How would *you* know?" Claire said to her cords. "I thought you were *waaay* too fashionable to shop from a *cat-a-log*." She said "catalog" the same way she'd say "snot sandwich."

"Hey, whaddaya say we all take a trip to the mall and buy you a new skirt? It'll be fun!" Judi Lyons clapped her pudgy hands and smiled as if she had just announced they were going to start celebrating Christmas five times a year.

Massie chugged her Pellegrino so she wouldn't have to respond to the offer. She couldn't imagine anything worse than having to wear something Judi Lyons picked out. The entire family dressed like tourists—oversized T-shirts, light wash denim, and sensible shoes.

"At least my *entire* life doesn't revolve around what people think of my outfits." Claire reached for the bobby pin that kept her overgrown bangs out of her eyes and slid it out of her blond hair. She gathered the pieces of hair that

hung around her face and repinned them on the sides of her head.

“Hey, I thought we were supposed to be celebrating,” Jay Lyons said. “Last time I checked, this was a birthday party.” He pinched a piece of yellow cake off his plate and held it under the table for Bean.

Massie watched with satisfaction as her fit and trim puppy turned her tiny black nose up at the offer. She patted her thigh and Bean ran to her.

“Daddy, I didn’t mean to ruin your party,” Massie said to William. “It’s just that I take *pride* in the way I look.” She reached down and straightened the drooping turquoise feather boa around Bean’s neck. “You taught me that, remember?”

“Of course I remember, honey,” William said. “And you always look perfect to me.”

“No thanks to him,” Massie said, glaring at Todd.

Todd put his head in his hands and slowly rocked back and forth as if he was full of misery and regret. Massie knew he was faking, but Claire obviously had no clue.

“Massie, there is a difference between pride and obsession,” Claire said. She put her arm around Todd’s shoulders and continued. “Once you start screaming at ten-year-olds over a skirt, it’s an obsession.” Claire’s hand trembled as she reached for her glass of soda.

The room was silent.

“Claire has a point, sweetie,” Kendra said. She ran her fingers through her silky brown bob. “You haven’t walked

through the front door without a shopping bag since you were nine.”

“That’s not true.” Massie put her hands on her hips and stood tall.

“It is,” Claire said. “In the two months I’ve been here, you’ve gone shopping in New York City four times. And what about all of the after-school trips to the Westchester Mall?”

“Clothes are a necessity,” Massie said. “I can’t walk around naked, can I?”

“Says who?” Todd said with a devilish grin. “*I think you can.*”

“Todd!” Judi snapped.

“He’s just playing, dear,” Jay said. “Aren’t you, son?”

“No,” Todd said. He winked at his father, who chuckled and shook his head.

Massie looked at Todd and rolled her eyes.

“You’re a shopoholic,” Claire said. “I bet you can’t go an entire month without buying new clothes.”

“Oh yeah? Well, you’re a repeat offender. I bet you couldn’t go an entire month without wearing the same outfit twice,” Massie said. “Keds included.”

“Massie!” Kendra and William exclaimed at the same time.

“Okay.” Claire rose from her seat and stood to face Massie. “The first one to fold has to wear the other person’s clothes to school for a week.”

Massie’s eyes widened with horror at the thought of having to wear high-waisted Gap jeans and sneakers to school.

“No way,” Massie said. “You’d be lucky to wear my clothes. That’s not a punishment—it’s a reward. It’s got to

be something bad.” Massie twirled the charm bracelet on her wrist while she thought. “I know, the loser has to wear one of my old snowsuits to class for a week. That includes leggings, goggles, ski boots, gloves, and a hat.”

“Massie, you’re being ridiculous,” Kendra said.

Massie kept her focus on Claire.

“Fine,” Claire agreed. She extended her arm and Massie grabbed Claire’s hand. They shook over and over again, because neither one wanted to be the first to bow out and let go.

“This is great, Claire, thank you,” William said with a playful smile. “You just saved me a ton of money.”

The parents chuckled. But Claire and Massie’s expressions didn’t change. Their mouths were tightly pursed and both had a look of determination in their eyes.

Massie finally tore her hand away to answer her ringing cell phone. She lifted it out of the Louis Vuitton monogrammed case that was clipped to the belt on her skirt and walked out of the room. Bean followed.

“Hello?” Massie said. She was pacing around the cream-colored rug in the living room.

“Hey, it’s Alicia. I have news that’s worth at least ten gossip points.”

Massie felt her heart speed up like it always did when she was about to hear gossip. She knew Alicia Rivera wasn’t the type to ask for ten points unless she really deserved them. The Spanish beauty was a gossip expert and knew better than anyone that a decent piece usually earned about five points, max. This had to be big.

“Talk to me,” Massie said. She sat down in the white wing chair beside the fireplace.

“I was in my golf class after school, right?”

“Right.” Massie slipped out of the chair and started pacing again.

“And while we were stretching . . .”

“Yeah? Yeah? What?” Now she was bouncing on her toes.

“I heard Becca Wilder tell Liz Goldman that she thinks you are on your way *out*.”

“*Out?*” Massie barked at her reflection in the mirror over the mantel. “What do you mean, *out?*”

“Becca thinks that you’re slipping and that you don’t seem as in charge as you did last year.”

“What did Liz say?”

“Liz agreed,” Alicia said. “But that’s nothing new. Liz always agrees with Becca. Anyway, they came up with the idea to throw an amazing boy-girl Halloween party so everyone would be talking about *them* and not you for a change. They even called it a Halloweenie party.”

Massie was stunned. Her body felt frozen solid and burning hot at the same time. Her head was spinning.

Am I slipping? Are people starting to look at me as a popularity has-been? Why didn't I pick up on this sooner? Are Becca and Liz the only ones who think that, or is the whole grade over me? Why didn't I think of the boy-girl party? It should have been my idea. I always think of everything first!

“This can’t be happening,” Massie heard herself say. She

had meant to think it, but like everything these days, it hadn't worked out the way she had planned.

"If you want, I can have my dad's bodyguard scare the idea out of her," Alicia said with a soft giggle.

"No thanks, I'll do it myself," Massie said. "I'll show Becca and Liz and the rest of the grade that I'm not slipping. I gotta go." She was about to hang up when she realized Alicia was still on the line.

"Wait," Alicia asked. "What about the ten points?"

"This isn't about points, Alicia," Massie said. "It's about pride." And she snapped her phone shut.

Massie was about to walk back into the dining room but stopped when she heard her name. She crouched down behind the French doors so no one would see her and held her breath, trying not to miss a single word.

"I honestly don't know what it is with Massie and Claire," Judi said. "I thought they would be the best of friends by now."

Massie peered around the door to see Claire's reaction. But her seat was empty. She must have slipped out while Massie was on the phone.

"I agree with Judi," Kendra added. "I am so surprised."

"You don't look it," William said.

Kendra shrugged. "Botox."

"Just because they live on the same property doesn't mean they have to be joined at the hip," Jay said. "Maybe they need a little more time to adjust to each other. You know, like a couple of territorial house cats."

“Hissing cats would be a welcome change around here,” Kendra said. She moved a half-eaten strawberry around her plate with a small silver dessert fork. “I’ve tried everything to bring them together. I am fresh out of ideas.” She pushed her plate off to the side, moving the deep red herringbone place mat with it so the plate wouldn’t scratch the glossy oak table.

Massie stood up quietly, holding the dangling charms on her bracelet so they wouldn’t clang. She scooped up Bean and tiptoed up the stairs to her bedroom. She had a deliciously devious idea.

But before she did anything, Massie plopped down on her purple down-filled duvet and turned on her PalmPilot. Like other great historical figures, she had to sum up the latest events so future generations would have a record of her life.

CURRENT STATE OF THE UNION	
IN	OUT
Shoporexic	Shopoholic
Halloweenie party	Chic-or-treating
Claire	Becca Wilder

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