

THE PRETTY COMMITTEE
STRIKES BACK

A CLIQUE NOVEL BY
LISI HARRISON



LITTLE, BROWN AND COMPANY

New York a Boston a London

OCTAVIAN COUNTRY DAY SCHOOL
GEOGRAPHY CLASS

Wednesday, February 18th
2:45 P.M.

The thick, breathy smell of the artificial heat that blasted from the classroom's radiators made Massie Block's head pound. And the more her nature-loving geography teacher droned on about the Earth's surface and how it determines the flow of a river, the worse her headache got. Massie closed her eyes and massaged her throbbing temples until Mr. Myner finally had the decency to change the subject and talk about something that the seventh-grade girls at Octavian Country Day School actually cared about.

"Don't forget, Friday is the last day I am accepting checks for the Presidents' Day field trip to Lake Placid." Mr. Myner rolled up the sleeves on his navy flannel lumberjack shirt and revealed his muscular, too-tanned-for-February forearms.

Everyone cheered and woo-hoed.

"I am just as thrilled as you are." Mr. Myner's warm chocolate-brown eyes flickered with pride. "This is a fantastic opportunity to learn about topography, orienteering, and survival skills in the *real* outdoors."

Massie rolled her eyes. Everyone except Mr. Myner knew this trip had nothing to do with topography or survival skills. It was all about the three days they were going

to spend camping in the wild with the Briarwood boys. No parents, no homework, and no Principal Burns.

Anything was possible.

Even Massie found it hard to stay calm. Inside, her stomach felt all jittery, like it had grown wings and was flying around in dizzying circles. And on top of that she was starving.

For the last four days, ever since she'd given Derrick Harrington her rhinestone *M* pin, Massie had been unable to swallow anything other than Diet Dr Pepper, Luna bars, and the occasional reduced-fat Wheat Thin. She was officially hanging out with the star goalie of the Briarwood Academy soccer team, and that idea alone made digestion very difficult.

While Mr. Myner droned on about the majestic beauty of the Adirondacks, Massie made a list called:

FIVE THINGS ABOUT MY CRUSH

THAT MAKE IT IM-POSSIBLE FOR ME TO EAT

- His ah-dorable shaggy dirty-blond hair. Love, love, love when it falls in his brown eyes.
- The way he wiggles his butt after he saves a goal in soccer. Ahhhhh-dorable!
- He's the most popular seventh grader at Briarwood. And he likes *me*.
- IM'd me on Monday and said I was the cutest girl at OCD. (Take *that*, Alicia Rivera.)
- We'll be spending three days and two nights together in Lake Placid. OMG!

Massie also loved that he called her Block and that she secretly called him Derrington—a combination of his first and last names. They sounded like a gorgeous soap opera couple or a team of notorious outlaws. It was beyond hot.

Block and Derrington.

Block and Derrington.

Block and Derrington.

She was even starting to embrace the fact that he wore shorts in the dead of winter. It was his “thing.” And every famous athlete had to have a “thing,” or else his fans wouldn’t have anything to copy. Massie’s stomach suddenly tightened at the thought of Derrington surrounded by hordes of shorts-wearing fans, because in this scenario she would be the glamour girl standing by his side. The girl every other girl wanted to be. And nothing was more amazing than that.

Massie wiped her sweaty palms on the green corduroy of her Joie cargo pants, then slowly lifted her purple-Swarovski-crystal-covered cell phone out of her side pocket. She waved the phone under her desk until the sparkly rhinestones caught the attention of her BFFs, alerting them that an important text message was on the way. Alicia Rivera, Dylan Marvil, Kristen Gregory, and Claire Lyons nodded. The members of the Pretty Committee were armed and ready to receive.

MASSIE: Mandatory packing meeting Sunday
@ the iPad.

Everyone referred to Massie's bedroom as the iPad because it was all white except for a few purple accents mixed in, purple because it was the official color of royalty.

ALICIA: Can Olivia come? She's back from 2nd nose job. She'll be on the trip.

Massie couldn't understand what Alicia saw in that bubbly blonde but responded with a nod anyway. She had no choice. Last time she'd given Alicia a hard time for liking the knockoff-scarf-wearing airhead, Alicia had walked out on the Pretty Committee. And Massie didn't want to risk losing her again.

DYLAN: Need 2 shop. I went down a few sizes since the flu.

Dylan was pinching the skin on her stomach, probably wondering if she had gained any weight since lunch. Massie rolled her eyes. There were a million things Massie wanted to write back, most of them having to do with how annoying Dylan's I'm-so-fat-even-when-I'm-thin routine was, but decided to drop it. Upsetting Dylan would only drive her to eat, and then Massie would have to hear about it even more. Besides, it was nice seeing Dylan with some confidence. If anything, she was much more into shopping than usual, and there was obviously nothing wrong with that.

MASSIE: Shopping sounds gr8.

CLAIRE: Iin.

Massie giggled to herself. Claire was known for her late text message responses and her misspelled words because she'd only gotten her cell phone in December. If Massie hadn't secretly given it to her for Christmas, Claire would have had to wait until she was sixteen to get one from her parents. And that was *not* an option.

MASSIE: Kristen?

The girls immediately whipped their heads around and glared at Kristen. She was tugging at the sides of her recently cut-short blond hair, willing it to grow back faster. When she noticed them staring, waiting for her response, Kristen rolled her narrow aqua-colored eyes and lowered her head. Her thumbs quickly moved across her Nokia keypad.

KRISTEN: My parents still say the \$1,500 fee is too much. Won't pay. H8 them.

Kristen always had money issues, and it was a major bummer.

MASSIE: Even Claire's parents are paying. It's educational.

Claire lifted her head and shot Massie a thanks-a-lot smirk. Massie shrugged innocently and returned to her vibrating phone.

ALICIA: I'll pay 4 u.

DYLAN: Me 2.

Kristen's face lit up.

MASSIE: Me 3. What's one more time?

Massie hit send and lifted her head to nod at whatever Mr. Myner was saying, just in case he was getting suspicious. But he was too caught up in his lecture about shifting glaciers, mighty rivers, and dense pine forests to care about the only part of nature that really mattered, the birds and the bees.

KRISTEN: Forget it. I'm not going.

DYLAN: ?

ALICIA: ?

CLAIRE: /

CLAIRE: Oops. I ment ???

Massie felt a sudden wave of hunger-related nausea whoosh through her entire body. She lowered her arm into her black Prada messenger bag and quietly pinched off a piece of her half-eaten Nutz Over Chocolate Luna

bar. She used her fingers to grab onto her bracelet to keep the little gold charms from clanging together. The moment the chocolate-covered rice puffs grazed her lips, her cell phone vibrated. It was Derrington. Massie immediately dropped the Luna chunk back into her bag and pulled the phone close to her face.

DERRINGTON: Placid is gonna rule, fool!

She had hoped Derrington's message would be a little more personal but still chalked it up to flirting.

MASSIE:

She wanted to respond with a clever yet cute comeback. But Mr. Myner interrupted her.

"And Miss Block, let me remind you that this field trip is also a great way to add ten percent to your grade." Mr. Myner winked at Massie. His eyes seemed to look straight into her soul. Massie discreetly dropped her cell phone back into the green side pocket of her Joie cargos.

"Why are you saying that to *me*?" She slapped her French-manicured hand against her heart and widened her amber eyes. Did the whole class really have to know she'd gotten a C on the last test?

"I'm not *just* saying it to you." His voice was smooth and calming, like a late-night DJ's. "I'm saying it to everyone in the class who got below a B on the world hunger quiz."

The A students started giggling. Kristen was among them. Massie shot her a firm stop-that look. Kristen bit her lower lip and looked toward the window.

“Not all of us *need* to learn how to survive off the land.” Massie glared at Mr. Myner. “Some of us can actually afford groceries and electricity. And the ones who *can* should be tested on something relevant, like European resort towns or natural hot springs.”

The C students cheered and Massie bowed her head in gratitude. She knew she would eventually face Mr. Myner’s wrath, but she didn’t care. Their applause made it all worth it.

But before Mr. Myner could say another word, the bell rang. The high-pitched screech of chairs sliding back across the freshly waxed floors and the snapping sound of paper getting clipped back into binders meant they were done for the day.

“So, the iPad on Sunday?” Massie reconfirmed as they raced out of class. “I think everyone should show up early. This packing list may take a while.”

“Count me out.” Kristen pushed past them and raced down the hall.

“Why?” Massie yelled after her.

Alicia, Dylan, and Claire looked at one another and shrugged.

Kristen stopped, her back still facing them. She didn’t flinch when some girls in a hurry knocked into her with their bags and coats. She just stood there, motionless.

Massie and the rest of the Pretty Committee darted over to Kristen and stood by her side. Tears were rolling down her cheeks. A black mascara booger had formed in the corner of her right eye.

“I had no idea you guys were so sick of me borrowing money.” She sniffed.

Alicia nervously twirled her thick black hair into a chignon and dabbed a bit of pink lip gloss onto her full mouth. “We’re so nawt.” Alicia tried to sound sincere, but her voice was flat and unconvincing.

“Just let us pay,” Dylan said. “If we split it four ways then—”

Alicia cleared her throat and tilted her head toward Claire.

“I mean, if we spilt it *three* ways, we could totally afford it,” Dylan corrected herself.

Claire brought her thumbnail to her teeth and bit down.

“Seriously.” Massie rested her hand on the back of Kristen’s hot-pink-and-white Puma track jacket. “What’s the big deal?”

Kristen wiggled out from under Massie’s gentle grip. “Because I don’t want you to think I’m some pathetic charity case.”

Massie sighed. She didn’t have time for this. Not when Derrington was waiting for her to respond to his text message. Maybe a little humor would lighten Kristen’s mood. “You’re not *some* charity case. You’re *our* charity case. And we ah-dore you.”

Kristen's mouth fell open and tears started rolling down her flushed cheeks.

Alicia glared at Massie.

"What?" Massie was genuinely surprised by their reactions. "I was kidding." She grabbed Kristen's hand and held it like she was about to propose marriage. "Come on, Kris. This is going to be the best week ever. Just let us pay."

"No, thanks." Kristen dried her eyes on her polyester sleeve. "I'll raise the money myself."

"How are you going to raise fifteen hundred dollars in two days?" Claire sounded genuinely interested.

"I am going to teach memory skills," Kristen said.

"What?" the girls said together.

"I am taking a home course in photographic memory skills, and it's really working," Kristen explained.

"Okay, so what did we read about in geo today? Word for word?" Dylan pulled up her new size-two denim miniskirt, then checked to see if anyone noticed.

Massie quickly looked away.

Kristen cocked her head, ran her fingers through her short blond hair, and smiled. "We didn't read anything today. Mr. Myner spent the whole class talking about stupid Lake Placid."

"Hmmm." Dylan tapped her index finger against her pursed lips. "Not bad."

"Why tutor when we can just give you the money?" Massie asked.

"I'll be fine," Kristen insisted. "I have five hundred dollars in my savings account, so all I need is a thousand dollars."

Massie smiled. "Maybe you could teach math, too."

Kristen giggled, then wiped away her last tear. "I'm serious. If I charge ten girls a hundred dollars each, I'll be able to go."

"Great. Now can we please go shopping for earth tones?" Dylan whined.

"Yes." Alicia bounced up and down on her toes. "I'm desperate." She tightened the knot on her short ballet-pink tie-front cardigan and her cleavage practically tripled.

"Oh good, I need some new underwear." Claire's blue eyes widened with excitement. "Can we go to Victoria's Secret?"

"Given," Alicia agreed. "I need a new br—" She crossed her arms over her C-cups. "I need some things too."

The girls started walking toward the exit to meet Isaac, Massie's driver. He'd warned them that he might be late because a new fridge was getting installed in the backseat of the Range Rover. "See you guys." Kristen waved. Her voice was full of purpose and determination.

"Aren't you coming?" Massie asked.

"Nah, I'm going to use the Xerox machine to make flyers for my course," Kristen said.

"Want help?" Massie pushed open the wood doors and stepped into the cold.

"Yeah, I'd love some." Kristen's face lit up. "Wanna come with me to make my posters?"

Massie felt her stomach lurch. She hadn't actually expected Kristen to say yes.

"Uh, I can't because Isaac is on his way," Massie shouted. "Good luck. Call me later."

"Uh, thanks." Kristen turned toward the library.

"Good luck," the others echoed as they followed Massie outside.

"Think she'll be able to raise a thousand dollars by Friday?" Dylan pulled a hunter green knit cap out of her turquoise Marc Jacobs duffel and forced it over her mass of red curls.

"Only if your famous mother turns her morning talk show into a telethon," Alicia said. Dylan's mom, Merri-Lee Marvil, was the host of a super-popular morning show, *The Daily Grind*.

"That would be so cool." Claire zipped up her baby blue Old Navy puffy coat. "Do you think she could get Joss Stone?"

"She can get *anyone*." Dylan smiled proudly. "And I bet she could raise the money in like five minutes."

"Gawd, where's Isaac?" Massie stood on her toes and looked out into the empty parking lot. She would have said anything to change the subject. Kristen's whole poverty thing was a major snoozer. And Dylan's famous mother was running a close second. The only thing that held Massie's interest these days was Derrington.

A white Lexus and two black Audis pulled into the lot. Livvy Collins, Alexandra Regan, and Carrie Randolph waved to the drivers as they strolled down the school

steps, taking their time so they could finish their conversation.

“I *know* Nina was a total fake.” Alexandra buttoned up her winter white Banana Republic boiled wool coat. “But how great would it be to have her on this Lake Placid trip?”

“Totally agreed,” slurred Carrie, the notorious fast talker. “Nooneknewmoreaboutguys.”

Suddenly Massie felt dizzy. It was one thing to hear her classmates idolize Nina Callas—Alicia’s Spanish slutbag of a cousin, who was responsible for almost tearing Massie and Derrington apart—but it was quite another for them to consider her an *expert* in anything other than lying, stealing, and cheesy Euro style. Besides, Massie had assumed that when Nina returned to Spain, things would go back to normal and she would become the all-around expert again. So why wasn’t that happening? She lowered herself onto the stone steps. Alicia, Dylan, and Claire sat down beside her.

“Maybe we could get her e-mail address from Alicia.” Livvy bit down on her plump bottom lip, chewing off her clear lip gloss. “I bet she could give us some killer tips.”

“Lovethat.” Carrie clapped her lambskin mittens together. “Hey, look, theresheis!”

“Nina?” Livvy and Alexandra shrieked at the same time.

“No, *A-licia*.” Carrie stomped her foot. She pulled her friends by their coats and dragged them down the steps.

The well-coiffed woman inside the white Lexus honked the horn.

“Holdonaminutemah.” Carrie stomped her foot again and held up her index finger.

The two black Audis beeped next. Alexandra and Livvy held up their fingers the same way Carrie had.

“What?” Massie rose to her feet. Alicia, Claire, and Dylan immediately joined her side.

“We actually wanted to ask Alicia something.” Carrie seemed to be speaking to Massie’s burnt orange suede Michael Kors nonwaterproof snow boots.

“Well, if it has to do with her trashy cousin Nina, don’t bother,” Massie hissed. “She’s dead to us.”

“We just want her e-mail address.” Livvy stepped in. The blond ballet dancer–slash–basketball player was the thinnest and tallest one in the group, but Massie refused to look up at her. Instead, she spoke to the scratched rhinestone buttons on her tacky wannabe antique coat.

Dylan burst out laughing. “Stupid much? Like they have e-mail in Spain!”

Claire and Alicia giggled at Dylan’s ignorance but Massie shot them a look, warning them to stop.

Carrie, Alexandra, and Livvy seemed to believe Dylan, because they all turned red and looked away. It was the perfect time for Massie to pounce.

“Look, I know the only reason you would want to speak to that slut-o-rita is to get guy advice before the trip.” Massie softened her voice so she’d sound sweet and caring. The girls lifted their heads, and Massie stepped down and joined them on their level. “Am I right?”

“Yeah.” Livvy scraped more lip gloss into her mouth.

“I totally understand.” Massie patted Livvy’s shoulder. “That’s why I’m offering a secret kissing clinic before the trip.” She waved her hand behind her back so Claire, Dylan, and Alicia wouldn’t question her.

One of the black Audis honked again.

“ONE MINUTE, MAH,” Alexandra shouted. Then she leaned in toward Massie and whispered, “What’s kissing like? Tell me *everything*. Don’t leave one thing out.”

“It’s hard to describe.” Massie spoke louder than she needed to. “Derrington and I have been making out for a while now—since the holidays, to be exact.” She elbowed Alexandra in the rib and winked. “Thank Gawd for mistletoe, if you know what I mean!”

Claire cracked up. Massie waved her hand again.

“Who do you think taught Nina how to kiss?” Claire chimed in. Massie was grateful for the backup.

“What?” Alicia screeched.

“Is that true?” Massie heard Dylan whisper.

Massie stepped in front of her friends, blocking them from the conversation.

“I have a few spaces left in my kissing clinic if you want to sign up,” Massie offered. “But you can’t tell a soul. I’ve already had to turn a lot of people away, and it wouldn’t be fair.”

“Wewon’ttell.” Carrie squinted and shook her head, her saucer-shaped brown eyes barely open.

“Swear.” Livvy made an invisible cross on her tacky coat to prove her sincerity.

“Double swear.” Alexandra crossed her boiled wool twice. “This is gonna be so great.” Her smile revealed a mouthful of emerald green braces.

“Kay, we’re meeting in the OCD Serenity Chapel Friday after school.” Massie’s tone was hushed and secretive.

“Okay,” Livvy whispered back. “But are we actually gonna have to kiss someone?”

“Ignore her.” Alexandra giggled. “She’s a little bit of a wuss. But *I* can’t wait.”

The horns honked again.

“Coming.” Alexandra ran down the steps toward her impatient mother, and the other girls followed.

“I am *not* a wuss,” Livvy insisted to no one in particular.

“Thanks, Massie,” Carrie shouted. “I won’t tell anyone.”

“Shhhh.” Alexandra put her finger to her lips. “It’s a secret, remember?”

“Ooops.” Carrie laughed. “Sorry.”

“Oh, don’t forget the fee,” Massie yelled after them. All three girls stopped in front of their mothers’ cars and looked back at Massie. “Twenty bucks a person. Cash only.”

The girls smiled back and waved goodbye.

“Are you actually going to take their money?” Claire asked Massie as the girls pulled away.

“Of course.” Massie half smiled. “I’ll donate it to Kristen’s Lake Placid fund.”

“Nice.” Claire gave Massie a thumbs-up. “But do you think she’ll take it?”

“I’ll tell her I want to hire her to tape the clinic—you know, so I can put it on my new video blog,” Massie said.

“When did you start a video blog?” Dylan asked.

“And when did you become a kissing expert?” Alicia added.

Massie looked at Claire, silently begging her for help.

“Over the holidays.” Claire vouched for her friend. “I thought everyone knew that.”

Massie shook her head. “I don’t like to kiss and tell.”

“Ooops, sorry.” Claire hit herself on the head, like she should have known better.

Massie was pleased with her friend’s willingness to play along. Claire was the only one who knew the truth about Massie’s lack of experience with boys and was smart enough to know that Massie wanted to keep it a secret.

“It’s okay.” Massie continued her Oscar-worthy performance. “But if you must know, Derrington and I have been getting pretty busy these days.”

“No way!” Alicia slapped Massie’s arm.

“It’s true.” Claire jumped in. “I walked in on them back when Massie and I were sharing a bedroom. They were in a full-on lip lock.”

Massie shrugged and looked away, brushing her cheek against her shoulder as she turned. She wanted to look sweet in spite of her new racy reputation.

“Can we take your clinic too?” Alicia asked. “I played spin-the-bottle a few times in Spain, but those kisses were closed-mouthed. And I’m so beyond ready to go open.”

“Really?” Dylan teased. “With who?”

“Josh Hotz.” Alicia rolled her eyes. “Given!”

Dylan giggled, knowing full well that Alicia had had a crush on the preppy, Polo-loving Briarwood boy for weeks. But Massie, who knew the rest of the story, casually glanced at Claire, who was biting her pinky nail.

If Alicia knew Claire had already kissed Josh, she would send her back to Orlando in last year’s Louis Vuitton Cerises bag. And it was obvious from Claire’s nervous expression that she was well aware of this.

“What about you and Cam?” Alicia asked Claire. “Have you kissed yet?”

“Uh, not yet.” Claire’s fair complexion turned scarlet. “Any day now. Hopefully the clinic will help me get some confidence.”

Massie looked out at the emptying parking lot, knowing how hard it must have been for Claire to sound chipper when she talked about Cam. Because the truth was, ever since last weekend, when Cam had seen Claire and Josh kissing after the Briarwood soccer finals, he had wanted nothing to do with her. He wouldn’t even give Claire a chance to explain. If he had, he’d have found out that Nina had purposely made it seem like Cam liked *her*, not Claire. And once he understood *that*, he’d get why Claire was so hurt, and he’d have to forgive her for kissing Josh. But for now, Massie was the only one who knew any of this.

“I wanna kiss Chris Plover,” Dylan declared. “I’m a sucker for a wounded boy on crutches.”

“I thought you stopped liking him after the Love Struck dance,” Alicia said.

“I did, but now that I’m a size two, I have no goals.” Dylan pulled off her green hat and fluffed her hair. “My life seems boring and pointless. I need a good make-out to spice things up.”

“Great, so you’re all in?” Massie asked as her family’s silver Range Rover pulled into the parking lot, headlights flashing.

“In,” Alicia confirmed.

“In,” Dylan agreed.

“In,” Claire added.

Massie stepped down off the cement curb expecting Isaac, her driver, to step out of the SUV and open the door for her. Instead her mother, Kendra, rolled down the window and smiled. Some breathy Norah Jones song was playing at full blast.

“Guess who?” Kendra shouted above the music.

“Mom?” Massie sounded like she hadn’t seen the woman in years. “What are you doing here?”

Kendra smoothed her freshly manicured hands over her brown chin-length bob and tried to act shocked. But her recent round of Botox injections made her look more stunned than surprised. “Since when is it strange for a mother to pick up her daughter from school?”

“Since third grade,” Massie responded. “When we got Isaac.”

“Well, he lost a filling and had to run to Dr. Wilson, and

Inez was in the middle of making her scallop linguini so I thought it would be fun to—”

“You know we drive Alicia and Dylan home, right?” Massie asked.

“I do now.” Kendra popped the automatic locks on the door so the girls could get in. “All aboard.”

Massie slid across the buttery soft backseat with her friends, like she always did, leaving Kendra up front alone. She leaned forward. “Mom, we were going to go to the mall. You know, to get stuff for our trip.”

“Sounds good to me.” Kendra stepped on the gas and the car jerked forward. She slammed on the brakes and the girls fell on top of each other and broke into fits of laughter.

“Seat belts, everyone,” Kendra shouted over her shoulder. No one argued.

Once they were on the road, the girls started talking about what stores to hit first. But Massie had other things on her mind, like how she was going to teach a clinic on making out when the only guy she had ever kissed was her father. And a quick peck on the cheek was hardly what her friends had in mind. That much she definitely knew.

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