

IT'S NOT EASY BEING MEAN

A CLIQUE NOVEL BY
LISI HARRISON



LITTLE, BROWN AND COMPANY

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THE BLOCK ESTATE
MASSIE'S BEDROOM

Sunday, April 4th
4:14 P.M.

Dylan Marvil pig-pressed her nose against the bay window in Massie Block's bedroom and then craned her neck slightly left toward the gated entrance of the Block estate. "Um, Kuh-laire? You may wanna see this."

Dropping the armload of designer clothes she'd been color-coding for Massie, Claire Lyons scurried to Dylan's side. "What is it?" She pushed up the sleeves on her orange velour hoodie.

"Todd and Tiny Nathan are selling your itchy pink-and-red polka-dot scarf to that fast talker Carrie Randolph."

Alicia Rivera tossed her *Teen Vogue* on the hardwood floor, slid off Massie's fluffy, lavender-scented bed, and wiggled between them. Her black velvet leggings were spotted with purple lint from Massie's bedding. "Ew, that LBR rode her bike all the way over here? To buy *that*?"

"Todd!" Claire shouted at her brother while struggling to unhook the window's iron latch. "Party scarf wasn't on the list!"

Kristen Gregory balanced on her tiptoes, straining to see over their heads. Tiny yellow-and-green Puma shorts showed off her sharp soccer calves, which flexed as she bobbed to witness the unfolding scandal. "How much do you think he's made so far?"

“Too much.” Claire pounded on the soundproof glass. “I can’t believe people actually want to buy my stuff.”

“Me, either,” Massie mumbled, refusing to get distracted by the LBRs who suddenly thought Claire’s cheap machine washables were worth something because she’d starred in a predictable Hollywood movie with Abby Boyd and Conner Foley. She had more important things to think about.

Turning to her swiveling three-paneled full-length mirror, Massie studied her reflection, wondering if she should have saved today’s outfit for tomorrow. Her C&C California black-and-gray-striped V-necked sweater dress exuded confidence over a pair of mint green leggings and gray suede ankle boots. But still, the dress was boxy, and therefore would only know life on Sundays and snow days.

After letting out a long sigh, Massie returned to her life-size mannequin, which ruled the corner of her room between the walk-in closet and her mirror. She fastened a thin gold braided belt around its waist, then stepped back, tilted her head to the left, and took it all in. Cinching the brown Ella Moss T-shirt dress instantly elevated it from a seven to a nine. But still, something was off. Was it the tan linen vest? Too safari? Or maybe it was the espresso-colored Marc Jacobs ballet flats. Yup. It was the flats. They were a little too precious for her first day back at Octavian Country Day School. After her celebrity-studded three-week expulsion, she needed something that said, “I’m back and better than ever.” And right now all she had was, “Hey, guys, how’s it

goin'?" She took a long swig of Tab Energy, then tore the poo-colored clothes off the Massie-quin.

Time to start over.

"Ehmagawd!" Dylan squealed. "It's the pasty goth barista from Starbucks!" She shook her arms free of the long military-style jacket that covered her dark-wash Earnest Sewn pencil-straight jeans, revealing a faded pink Porky Pig tee.

"Buying my Kipling backpack!" Claire wailed. "Monkey and all!"

"Thank Gawd." Alicia rolled up the sleeves on her pin-striped Norma Kamali shirtdress. "That thing was eye-poison."

Kristen's narrow blue eyes widened, "It looks like your books are still in it."

"They *are*!"

"Massie, you have to see this!" Alicia giggled and kicked Dylan's jacket aside.

"Pass." Massie pulled the flats off her mannequin and replaced them with navy Michael Kors cork wedges. "I'm busy."

Besides, she already knew what Claire's stalkers looked like. They had been riding past the estate on bikes and scooters for the last two days to see where the star of the movie *Dial L for Loser* slept, ate, and peed. Massie was constantly fighting the urge to poke her freshly razored layers out the window and yell, "Didn't any of you stalkers watch

The Daily Grind? Didn't you see Alicia and me broadcasting live from the set every day for two weeks straight? Don't you remember those pictures of me with Conner Foley in *Us Weekly*? Why don't you want to buy *my* scarves? Why don't you want to take *my* picture? *Whyyyyyy?*" But all she said was, "Get used to it, Miss I'm-moving-to-California-to-be-a-Hollywood-superstar."

"Why should I get *used* to Todd and Tiny Nathan selling my things to strangers?" Claire pressed her entire left side against the bay window.

"A celebrity's life is public property. If you don't like it . . ." Massie grabbed a thin white remote off her bedside table and pressed her manicured thumbnail into the top right button. "Leave it."

The window clicked open and Claire fell forward.

"Whoa!" She steadied herself on the curved stone ledge.

Massie examined the newly naked mannequin. "Now will you puh-lease focus!"

Finally, everyone turned away from Todd, Tiny Nathan, and the red Radio Flyer wagon filled with Claire's personal belongings. They stood, their backs to the window, while Massie paced.

"In case you forgot, the Pretty Committee was just expelled from OCD for *three* weeks because we ran off into the woods on a class field trip and got lost." Massie put her hands on her narrow hips. "Instead of sitting on our couches watching *High School Musical*, we went to Hollywood and made something of ourselves and—"

“Speak for yourself.” Kristen exchanged an eye-roll with Dylan.

“Yeah, some of us weren’t *allowed* to go to California, remember?” Dylan stuffed a cube of watermelon-flavored bubble gum in her mouth, then immediately unwrapped another piece and jammed it in.

“Some of us stayed here, wrote a butt-kissing essay, and signed *your* name to it so you could get back into school, *re-mem-ber*?” Kristen glared at Massie.

“Of course I *re-mem-ber*. I was getting to that part,” she lied. “But seeing as you already mentioned how great you think you are, I’ll skip over it.”

Kristen and Dylan muttered apologies.

Massie took a cleansing breath, exhaled in frustration, and continued. “The point is, in less than twenty-four hours we’ll be walking the halls at OCD while hundreds of jealous eyeballs scan us, searching for flaws.”

“Why would they do that?” Claire scratched her blond eyebrows. “You always say everyone *loves* the Pretty Committee.”

“No. I always say they want to *be* us.” Massie swatted her flirty new chocolate-colored side part away from her amber eyes. “Which means they’re secretly studying us, hoping to spot a weakness so they can—”

“A weakness?”

“Yeah, like an out-of-place hair.” Alicia pointed to her perfect side part.

“Or bad grades,” Kristen offered.

“Or an open fly.” Dylan covered her crotch.

“Or smudged eyeliner, or last year’s boots, or peanut-butter breath.” Massie circled her hand to show that the list went on and on. “Anything they can use to put *us* down.”

“Why would they want to—?”

“It makes them feel better about their sorry selves. That’s why.”

“Point!” Alicia lifted her finger.

Massie took another swig of Tab Energy and slammed it down on her mirrored pedestal night table. She fell onto her bed beside her ah-dorable sleeping black pug, Bean, allowing herself to get swallowed by the cluster of white faux-fur pillows as if surrendering to an avalanche. “If we don’t look ah-mazing times ten, everyone will think the Pretty Committee’s lost its magic and we’ll be blog food.” She lifted her arm out of the fluff and checked her silver DKNY bangle watch. “It’s already 4:27 p.m., and not a single outfit has been approved.”

“Point!” Alicia plopped down beside her.

Bean lifted her head and growled.

“You’re right,” Dylan pouted. “Sorry.” She joined them on the bed.

Claire turned and closed the window.

“What about the soccer lesson?” Kristen grabbed the white wooden bedpost and stretched a hamstring.

“Ew! Why would we want to spend our last hours of freedom doing *that*?” Alicia shuddered, as if Kristen had suggested using their blush brushes to scrub toilets in the boys’ locker room.

“Um, starting tomorrow, you’re members of OCD Sirens. Remember?”

They all looked at her blankly.

“Gawd, don’t any of you want to learn how to play before you join the team?”

“Opposite of yes.” Alicia reached to the floor, picked up her *Teen Vogue*, and crawled under the feathery purple duvet cover.

“Leesh, I swear, if we don’t make it to the finals because you—”

“Hey!” Massie stood and held up her palm like a crossing guard. “Kristen, are you mad at Alicia?”

“No, I’m just—”

“Then why does it sound like you want to socc-er?”

Everyone cracked up except Kristen, who folded her arms across her green Juicy hoodie and looked up at Massie’s new multicolored crystal chandelier as if begging it to give her strength. “It was *your* decision to join the team.”

“We had no choice.” Dylan punched the mattress. “It was the only way Principal Burns would let us back into school.”

“You had to pick an extracurricular activity,” Kristen reminded them. “No one said it had to be soccer.”

“We thought it’d be a good way to bond with the boys.” Massie twirled the diamond stud in her left earlobe.

“And burn calories.” Dylan rubbed her flat stomach like someone who’d eaten too much chocolate-chip cookie dough.

“And tone.” Alicia curled into the fetal position.

“Claire, *you* like soccer, right?”

“Yeah, but I have to meet my agent in Manhattan, so I’m gonna miss practice.”

Clenching her fists, Massie fought another urge to tear Claire’s white-blond hair out of her ah-nnoying, conceited, movie-star head. “Are you seriously going to pass up a summer cohosting pool parties and gossiping about boys to *work?*”

“Um, yeah,” Claire said, in a who-wouldn’t sort of way.

“Point!” Alicia lifted her finger out from the duvet.

Dylan and Kristen giggled while Massie contemplated her sudden need to make Claire cry. She wanted to hurt her feelings and crush her confidence and treat her like an unworthy, unimportant, undesirable loser. Maybe then Claire would understand how Massie felt, being dumped for a stupid movie.

All of a sudden, a shock of angry boy music filled the room. Massie raced to her silver cube of an alarm clock and slammed the off button. But the electrified screaming wouldn’t stop. It sounded like someone had placed a gigantic set of Bose headphones around her alabaster-white walls and cranked up the volume on some basement dweller’s amplified nervous breakdown.

“It’s coming from outside.” Dylan assumed her old position by the bay window. “More fans.”

Bean jumped off the bed and barked her way to Dylan’s side.

Everyone followed.

“I wonder what they’re gonna buy?” Kristen pinched her bottom lip.

“Hopefully Todd.” Massie lifted Bean and stroked her ears.

“Ehmagawd!” Alicia covered her highly glossed mouth like a shocked *American Idol* winner. “It’s not a fan. It’s Skye Hamilton.”

“Listening to AFI?” Kristen crinkled her perfect, J-shaped nose.

“Imposs!” Massie marched across her ivory sheepskin area rugs and pushed the girls aside.

“Who is that?” Claire asked, catching her balance on the wall.

“Eighth-grade alpha,” Massie explained, her eyes fixed on Skye.

“Check out that yellow Porsche convertible,” Kristen ogled.

“Check out the driver.” Alicia rolled her shoulders back like she was offering her C-cups to the universe. “I fully heart guys who wear dark jeans with gray tees. And I double fully heart black wavy hair.”

“That’s the cutest guy I’ve *never* seen.” Dylan sighed.

“I’ve seen him.” Kristen fanned her cheeks. “On an Abercrombie bag.”

“How does her hair look so good?” Dylan twirled a shiny red ringlet around her finger, then burped. “I’d look all Chuckie from *Rugrats* after a ride in that thing.”

“Can you see what she’s wearing? Is it dance-y?” Alicia rested her forehead against the windowpane. “Her parents own Body Alive Dance Studio. Not only is she ah-mazing at ballet, modern, jazz, and tap, but she gets whatever she wants from the B.A.D.S. apparel store.” A steam puff of envy marred the glass as she sighed. “Can anyone see her legs? I bet she’s wearing a leotard, or maybe a unitard.”

“Um, you’re the only ’tard I see,” Massie snapped, refusing to publicize her Skye obsession.

“Why haven’t I noticed her before?” Claire asked, poking her head between Massie and Alicia.

“She’s always with the boys.” Massie tried her best to sound unimpressed. “That’s why her group is called the DSL Daters.”

“Why?”

“Because they make super-fast connections,” she replied flatly, like it should have been obvious.

“Do you think she’s here to buy something of mine?” Claire asked, sounding one part shocked and two parts psyched.

“Come awn!” Massie rolled her eyes. “That’d be like Paris Hilton asking Hermione Granger to borrow something for the VMAs.”

“Point.” Alicia lifted her finger. “She’s been a regular at Fashion Week since she was potty trained. I heard she sat beside the Harajuku girls at the L.A.M.B. show this year.”

“Con-firmed.” Dylan drew a check mark in the air. “My mom saw her there.”

“Look!” Alicia giggled. “Todd is giving her Claire’s Powerpuff Girls jammies.”

The almond biscotti Massie had eaten after lunch pulled a sudden U-turn.

“*No!* Those have a blueberry stain on the butt!” Tiny beads of sweat gathered above Claire’s cherry ChapStick-covered lips.

“There’s no *way* Skye Hamilton is an FOC,” Massie murmured in disbelief.

“A what?” Kristen let out a phlegmy cackle.

Massie lowered Bean into her white miniature four-poster bed, giving the girls a moment to ponder her latest expression. Finally, and with pride, she blurted, “FOC—fan of Claire’s.”

“I heart that!” Alicia beamed.

“Brill!” Dylan high-fived Massie, who then high-fived Kristen.

“TODDDDD!” Claire pressed her clammy palms against the windowpane.

“Wait! Skye is giving the pajamas *back*,” Dylan announced like a sportscaster. “Now she’s shaking her head and reaching into her stone-colored Juicy Couture Sienna bag, and pulling out . . . a gold envelope. She’s handing it to Tiny Nathan . . . no, Todd . . . no, Tiny Nathan . . . no, she’s taking it back, teasing them . . . and . . . Ehmagawd, she’s making them cross their hearts and hope to die. . . . Now she’s . . . Ew! She’s giving them each a . . . *Ewwwww!*”

“Ewwwwww!” everyone screamed.

“Did she just kiss my brother?” Claire shouted over the screech of Porsche tires and scream of angry guitars.

“And Tiny Nathan!” Alicia squealed as the bright yellow car zipped off down the street.

Relief warmed Massie’s icy fingertips like a pair of Chanel lambskin-and-fox-fur gloves. The beautiful blonde who hung out with high school guys and who had created the fashion trend Massie secretly labeled “dancey couture” wasn’t at the Block estate to buy something of Claire’s. She hadn’t lost her cool and become an FOC. Skye Hamilton was as alpha as ever. An anxious flutter wormed its way through Massie’s belly.

So why *was* she there?

Digging her thumb into the white remote, she shouted, before the window had fully opened, “Bring that envelope up here ay-sap!”

Todd and Tiny Nathan were too busy running around the wagon, giggling and punching each other, to respond.

“Todd, I mean it!” Massie shouted.

“Todddd!” Claire echoed.

Massie tugged the gold crown on her charm bracelet, desperate to know what was inside that envelope. And more important, whom it was for.

“Want me to sit on his chest and fart?” Dylan asked with a hopeful smile. “Kristen can tackle him and I can—”

“Not necessary.” Massie held her palm in front of Dylan’s emerald green eyes. “I got this.” She winked, then cupped her hands around her mouth and yelled, “Alicia, put your shirt back on!”

Todd and Tiny Nathan froze.

Alicia gasped. Massie quickly gave her a play-along-or-change-schools look.

The boys' shoulders were shaking with laughter as they buried their faces in their gray Gap hoodies.

"Let's *all* take our shirts off," Dylan bellowed.

"I'm in!" Kristen grabbed the brown Ella Moss T-shirt dress off Massie's floor and tossed it out the window. "Wow, I feel so free!"

"Me too!" Dylan lobbed a white Petit Bateaux tank.

Massie reached into the pile of clothes beside her mannequin, grabbed a handful of skinny jeans, and whipped them into the cool April breeze.

Moments later, the Blocks' lawn was covered in rejected back-to-school clothes, and Todd and Tiny Nathan stood panting in Massie's doorway, wearing matching army green Crocs and clutching a reflective gold envelope.

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