

SEALED WITH A DISS

A CLIQUE NOVEL BY
LISI HARRISON



LITTLE, BROWN AND COMPANY

New York → Boston

OCTAVIAN COUNTRY DAY SCHOOL
“THE ROOM”

Sunday, April 11th

4:19 P.M.

In the musty basement of Octavian Country Day School, eighth-grade alpha Skye Hamilton stood in front of Massie Block and the rest of the Pretty Committee and lifted her arms ta-da style.

“So? Whaddaya think?” A tinny clang echoed off the dark walls as an avalanche of gold bangles tumbled toward her thin wrists. “Is it everything you ever dreamed of, or is it everything you ever dreamed of?”

Massie Block was speechless.

The last time she’d felt *this* shocked was in the fourth grade. She was innocently flipping through *CosmoGIRL!*, passing time while Jakkob painted caramel-colored highlights in her glossy brown hair, when she discovered that bikini waxes were *not* tacky bathing suit-shaped candles. From that day forward, Massie had devoured every magazine, every month, so she would never be that embarrassingly clueless again. But nothing could have ever prepared her for what she and her best friends were staring at now. Not even *Vogue*.

“Do you luh-v the room or do you luh-v the room?” asked a bubbly blonde with Swiss Miss braids—one of Skye’s four BFFs, known collectively as the DSL Daters because they made super-fast connections with boys.

“Um.” Massie side-glanced at the Pretty Committee, who were staring into the secret room they’d just competed for and won. Their eyes were wide and their mouths hung like Elsa Peretti Open Heart drop earrings.

Kristen Gregory snapped the pink-and-orange terry Puma sweatband around her wrist. Alicia Rivera folded her arms across the black Nanette Lepore shrug that stretched tautly across her C-cups. Dylan Marvil twirled her curly long red hair. And Claire Lyons swiped the white-blond bangs away from her blue eyes.

They had spent weeks fantasizing about this mysterious room and all of the things they would do with it once it was theirs. Secret rendezvous with the Briarwood boys, spa treatments during lunch, an eavesdropper-free place to gossip, a spot to stash spare clothes and makeup. Connie from the Ralph Lauren store was on hold to decorate, and Yuki-San from Zutto was set to deliver sushi on Fridays. But none of that would happen now. Because their private, ultra-luxe eighth-grade retreat had turned out to be a dark cave lit by a single red lightbulb. It smelled like wet toilet paper and dirty fish tank.

Clenching her fists, Massie dug her French-manicured nails into her palms. The sharp stab was painless compared to the rush of humiliation that revved her heart like a massive swig of Red Bull.

How *dare* Skye trick her like that! She’d promised them paradise! This so-called secret campus clubhouse was supposed to give them *status* during their final year at OCD, not night terrors.

Everything blurred. Suddenly, Skye and the four DSL Daters, with their golden hair and matching light gray leggings, looked like a smeared painting of yellow balloons. If word got around OCD that Massie Block had fallen for Skye's stupid practical joke, she'd be done. D-E-A-D, done!

"Skye, you made us compete *Real World/Road Rules Challenge* style for an entire week to find the key to *this*? Gawd! Alicia's dad is so gonna sue you for fraud and mental anguish!" Massie wanted to shout. But that would mean losing control in public. And *that* would mean *lame*.

Instead, she flicked the brim on her olive-green army cap, cocked her chin, and applied a fresh coat of Glossip Girl Original Bubble Gum-flavored lip gloss.

The sweet sugary smell calmed her instantly and gave her the courage she needed to attack. She cleared her throat and the Pretty Committee instantly backed up, taking cover in the dank darkness of the school's basement corridor. They obviously sensed Massie was about to pounce and wanted to give her enough space.

"Skye, are you a Diesel turtleneck poncho?"

Alicia giggled in anticipation. Kristen slapped a hand over her mouth.

"No." Skye, who was casually stretching her hamstrings beside the open door, lowered her leg. The DSL Daters gathered behind the alpha and exchanged a round of what-is-she-tawking-about glances.

Massie took a confident half-step closer to the eighth-graders.

“Then why are you trying to pull one over on me?”

The Pretty Committee burst into hysterical laughter and high-fived Massie. She slapped them back with pride, not caring one bit if they were disrespecting Skye. After all, Skye had disrespected her first by making them compete for a fake room. And what self-respecting alpha would just roll over and take *that*? The days of kissing Skye’s Lycra-covered butt were more over than Nick and Jessica.

Pushing back the sleeves of her fuzzy pink angora sweater, Skye wore an expression that was oddly peaceful for an alpha who had just been mocked by a group of seventh-graders. Her robin’s-egg-blue eyes looked friendly. Her pillowy lips parted slightly, as though she were too relaxed to even smile.

“Maybe if you had the guts to go inside you wouldn’t feel that way.”

“Yeah, go in,” urged the DSL Dater with the pig nose and long blond ponytail.

“Yeah,” echoed the others. “Go on.”

Someone tried to shove Massie forward, but she planted the heels of her mocha suede Miu Miu clogs on the graying linoleum and stood firm. Claire stood on her tiptoes and peeked through the narrow space between Dylan’s and Alicia’s heads.

“What *is* this place?” she whimpered, looking into the dark, musty-smelling room.

“It’s OCD’s bomb shelter,” Skye announced with the enthusiasm of a Disney World tour guide. “It’s in the basement, and then even lower. Two stories below Principal Burns’s office. Isn’t it better than the best?”

“Opposite of yes.” Alicia tossed her thick mascara-black hair. “I’d rather get blown up.”

“Take a look inside,” Skye insisted.

The Pretty Committee instantly huddled together a few feet back from the door. Alicia reached for Massie, who shook her off, refusing to give Skye the satisfaction of knowing she was utterly creeped out.

“Does anyone have a flashlight?” Alicia whispered. “I think I saw the floor move.”

“What? Lemme see.” Dylan extended her neck. “Ehmagawd! That’s not the floor moving—it’s snakes!” She hid her face in Kristen’s post-soccer game armpit.

“Shut up!” Alicia squeezed past Claire, hiding behind the snickering DSL Daters.

Dylan stuffed her hands in the deep side pockets of her stylishly baggy Earnest Sewn denim overalls. “I think I just heard a tiger.”

“Same,” agreed the others.

The DSL Daters giggled.

“It’s so pathetic.” Skye sighed.

Sensing the beginning of a challenge, Massie stiffened. “What is?”

“So many girls fought to win this room. And now you don’t even want it.” Skye finger-combed her buttery blond waves. “Your fickleness makes me think of those haters who buy pet bunnies and then abandon them when they realize that their pweshious widdle wabbits are wild animals that chew leather flats and leave poo pellets all over their beds.”

Massie felt as though a Marc Jacobs wedge-heel boot had stomped down on her Pilates-toned abs. “Are you comparing me to an animal abandoner?”

Skye shrugged.

Massie gasped.

“Puh-lease! I so boycotted Burberry when they started using fur.”

“It’s true.” Kristen stepped forward. “She did.”

“Yeah!” Dylan cracked her knuckles. “Who do you think made all the WHEN PLAID GOES BAD signs around school?”

“Allie-Rose Singer,” blurted Skye as she straightened up from a demi-plié.

“True,” Alicia admitted. “But guess who forced her to make them?”

Massie grinned triumphantly.

“Well, if you really loved all creatures as much as I do, you wouldn’t be afraid of a few snakes and you’d go in that room.”

The prickly sting of adrenaline spread through Massie’s entire body. A challenge had been declared. Without a second thought, she reached for Alicia’s wrist. Alicia grabbed Kristen’s. Kristen grabbed Claire’s. And Claire grabbed Dylan’s. Like a group of first-graders crossing a busy intersection, the Pretty Committee held hands as Massie dragged them into the glowing red room with its low black ceilings and bone-chilling dampness.

The door slammed shut behind them.

“Ahhhhhh!” As if caught in a swarm of bees, Massie, Kristen, Dylan, and Claire hand-fanned the air with spastic urgency.

“Call 911!” Alicia shrieked.

“What’s the number?” Dylan screamed back.

“Ahhhhhh!” Massie ran straight into a sticky spiderweb that stretched all the way from the black stucco ceiling to the snake-covered floor. She batted it off her head but couldn’t escape its menacing tickle. It was on her cheek, her arms, and her neck.

Whoooooohooooohooooo. Stayyyy outttt offff myyyy roooooomm.

“Ehmagawd, a ghost!” Kristen shouted.

Claire buried her face inside her Forever 21 kelly-green sweater coat.

“Get out of my rooooooom. GET OUT OF MY ROOOOOOM!” the ghost moaned again.

“Ahhhhhhhh!” The girls raced to the door and pounded and kicked and scratched. “Let! Us! Out!”

All of a sudden, what felt like clumps of slithery, slimy insects dropped from the ceiling, landing in the girls’ deep-conditioned hair, on their shoulders and the tips of their designer shoes.

“Ahhhhhh!”

“Scorpions!” Dylan bear-hugged Massie.

“Roaches!” Kristen frantically mussed her sweaty blond hair.

“Locusts!” Claire covered her eyes and jogged in place.

“Ewwww!” Alicia ran in tight circles.

Massie’s lifelong credo—to remain cool under any and all circumstances—no longer applied. Snakes, spiderwebs, ghost moans, red bulbs, and tiger snarls made “cool” a nonoption.

“Let us out of here,” she panic-begged. “Claire can’t breathe!”

“What?” Claire palmed the black walls in search of the exit.

“Re-laxxxx!” cackled Skye as she yanked open the heavy black door.

She flipped a switch by the floor, and suddenly the room was flooded with warm golden light. The ceilings were low and the walls were a rich pearly black infused with winking glitter. A mirrored disco ball began spinning above their heads, casting shimmering squares across the hot-dog-shaped room.

“Rubber!” Kristen kicked a heap of black and snot-green toy snakes across the room with her Adidas soccer cleats. “They’re rubber.”

“*Told* you they weren’t real.” Massie put a reassuring hand on Claire’s shoulder.

Claire giggled with a mix of astonishment and relief.

Skye switched off the iPod docked on a white Bose speaker cube at the back of the room, putting an end to the tiger roars and ghost moans. She clapped twice. “Let’s clear this place out and show them what they really won.”

Massie stood fixed and firm in the center of the room, suffering from a full-body brain freeze. As the DSL Daters, armed with big green Heftys, whirled about, scooping up handfuls of fake reptiles and insects, she tried to formulate a fitting comeback or ultra-cool reaction. Something that would help her regain the pride she’d lost while banging on the dark walls, begging for mercy. Something that would show the DSL Daters they’d messed with the wrong girls. Something

that might convince them the Pretty Committee had known it was a joke all along. But nothing came to mind.

All Massie could think about was how angry she was at Skye for humiliating her in front of so many alphas. And how, in a weird sort of way, she was impressed by the intricacy of the joke. Maybe even *inspired*. Sort of like in those rare moments at school when someone showed up in a better outfit than her's. After the jealousy wore off, Massie always found herself reenergized and ready to do better. Of course, *this* was a zillion times more extreme than a case of outfit envy, but the desire to become a better alpha was the same. And for that, she was grateful and ready to move on.

"I'm flattered." Massie finger-tossed her bangs.

The Pretty Committee's perfectly waxed brows knit together in confusion, probably wondering where she could have possibly been taking this.

"*Flattered?*" Skye sounded slightly disappointed by Massie's sudden composure. *Perfect*.

"Yeah." Massie helped herself to one of the five pink faux-fur-covered director's chairs that faced a Samsung flat-screen mounted on the far wall. "You ah-bviously put a lot of effort into this. Which means you wanted to impress us. So thanks." She wiggled her butt toward the back of the fluffy seat and reclined. "I wish *we* had that much free time. But we're always sooo busy, right, girls?"

"Right," the Pretty Committee answered back with over-the-top enthusiasm as they filled the empty pink chairs beside Massie.

“It didn’t take us *that* long, did it?” Skye turned to the other DSL Daters for backup, but they were too occupied with their cleanup job to notice.

“Whatever.” Massie glanced around the dank, empty space, making it clear that she was unimpressed. “So where’s the *real* room?”

“Here.” Skye beamed, splaying her arms like a flight attendant indicating a plane’s exits.

The DSL Daters put down their trash bags and rallied beside Skye, under the silver monitor, their blond heads lining up with the bottom of the screen like a row of sunflowers.

“This is *it*?” Alicia’s MAC Lipglass-covered top lip rose in disgust.

Skye and the DSL Daters nodded with delight.

“It’s a long sausage with five chairs and a TV,” Kristen snapped.

“A burnt black sausage,” Dylan insisted.

Claire giggled.

“Too funny! They think this is an *ordinary* TV,” Skye said to the DSL Daters, who snickered at the thought.

“This *tee-veeee* just so happens to be the best-kept secret in the country.” Skye pulled a remote covered in pink Swarovski crystals out from under her rose-colored bra strap. “Maybe even the world.” She pressed a button and the screen hummed to life.

“We had a pink shag throw rug, five electronic foot spas, a movie-theater popcorn maker, a real Starbucks latte machine, two racks of spare clothes, and a makeup vanity fully stocked

with the complete line of Hard Candy cosmetics in here, but we moved them out for the prank,” offered the DSL dater with long blond braids. “Everything will be back next—”

“Move!” Skye hissed. Swiss Miss Braids hurried to the left of the screen and stood behind her. “It’s on.”

A black-and-white image appeared on the screen. It was a shot of an empty classroom. The picture was gritty but still clear enough that it could be deciphered. There were no desks, only plastic cafeteria chairs arranged in a semicircle. Behind them were posters of wide sunbeams searing through fluffy clouds; a single drop of rain in an otherwise still puddle; football players in a postgame huddle, hugging. Beside each image was a stanza of poetry written in white, swirling script that was too far away to read.

Massie side-glanced at the Pretty Committee, wondering if they had any idea what was so great about a low-def image of an empty classroom, in black and white, no less.

“Um, Skye . . .” Massie snickered. “Dylan doesn’t get it.”

Dylan smacked Massie’s dark-denim-encased thigh.

“Have you ever wondered what boys are thinking?” Skye waved the pink crystal-covered remote. “I mean, *really* thinking?”

Everyone nodded slowly, even the DSL Daters.

Skye clasped her hands behind her back and began pacing beneath the screen. “Sure, they say they like you, but then they never text. Or they invite you to a dance and then hang out with their stupid friends all night. And how about acting like they don’t know you in public even if you spent the

entire night before IM'ing? Don't *even* try to ask if something's wrong. All they'll do is shrug and grunt and punch their buddies."

"Too true!" the DSL Daters hollered back.

Massie shifted uncomfortably, crossing one leg, then the next. Skye's little rant was way too on-target. At boy/girl parties, her crush, Derrington, always spent more time with Cam Fisher, Kemp Hurley, Josh Hotz, and Chris Plover than with her. And he responded to texts with one-word answers. In fact, just last week Massie IM'd him with the latest on Melly Kantor's post-yoga B.O. And how did he respond?

With an *F*.

A lone *F* for *funny*. Not even a *TF* for *too funny*.

Just a single *F*.

All weekend long, Massie wondered if Derrington was turned off because she'd mentioned B.O., or if he was somehow related to Melly and offended by the incriminating gossip. More than anything, she wanted to run these possibilities by the Pretty Committee for analysis. But she didn't want them to think she was insecure about boys. So she suffered in silence.

"I never have boyfriend angst." Massie sighed, crossing her fingers.

The Pretty Committee shook their heads, signaling that they didn't either.

"That's because you don't have *boyfriends*," snickered Swiss Miss Braids.

"Opposite of true!" Alicia snapped.

Massie opened her mouth, ready to second that, but Skye didn't give her a chance.

"You may be too young for a serious relationship, but you're never too young to know what boys are thinking. Because once you know *that*, you'll know how to get whatever you want and *whomever* you want."

The DSL Daters giggle-agreed.

"Ehmagawd, that totally explains it!" Dylan blurted.

"Explains what?" Skye nibbled on her pillowy bottom lip and tilted her head. A mass of perfectly conditioned blond waves swung alongside her jaw.

"How you always get the A-list hawties."

Skye stopped pacing and stared deep into Dylan's green eyes. "Um, we're not exactly ugly."

Dylan's cheeks reddened. "I didn't mean it like *that*."

"She meant more like how you're so confident around boys and how you always know the right things to say," Kristen chimed in.

Skye affectionately tapped the TV screen.

The Pretty Committee leaned closer while Massie's brain flooded with possibilities, all of which led to her becoming a world-renowned guy expert. She would own a fleet of purple Lexus convertibles with license plates that read Boys R Us.

"Wait." Her brain suddenly snapped back to reality. "How is a room filled with tacky posters from Spencer's Gifts gonna teach you about boys?"

"Is this screen kinda like a crystal ball?" Claire made Massie-esque air quotes when she said "crystal ball."

“Better.” Skye grinned.

“How can it be *better*?” Alicia squinted suspiciously.

“Because *this* classroom is where the Briarwood Boys have ESP,” Skye whisper-announced.

“Huh?” asked Alicia.

“Emotional Sensitivity Powwows,” the DSL Daters said at the same time.

“You mean all that Dr. Loni stuff?” Dylan asked, half-jokingly referring to the famous radio PhD who taught “emotionally illiterate men” (and convicts) how to “tune into their thoughts” and “translate them into feelings.”

“Yup.” Skye nodded. “He’s their teacher. He’s been doing it on the DL for five years.”

The Pretty Committee gasped.

“Ehmagawd! My mom has been trying to get him on *The Daily Grind* forever.” Dylan pulled her mint-green LG Chocolate phone out of her back pocket. “But he won’t do women’s talk shows, only men’s.” She pulled out her phone and began to speed-dial. “Merri-Lee Marvil is nawt going to believe this.”

“Drop it!” grunted Swiss Miss Braids right before she slapped Dylan’s phone away from her ear.

Dylan fumbled to catch it.

“You can’t tell a soul.”

“Shhhh.” Skye lifted a pink-manicured finger to her lips, causing another bracelet avalanche. “The boys agreed to take the class if, and only if, it was kept under wraps. If they ever knew we had a camera in there we’d be . . .”

She slid her index finger across the center of her long neck, then dangled her tongue from the corner of her mouth, like a thirsty cat.

Massie could hardly sit still. She was being handed a gift that, until now, she'd assumed only gawd had. The ability to know what boys were thinking would guarantee that she'd always say the right thing—no more awkward silent periods when flirting! The fear of getting dumped would be gone, because the Pretty Committee would know all pre-dump signs, so they could do it first. They would never be heartbroken or embarrassed or insecure again. But most of all, Massie Block would finally become the all-knowing boy expert she had always wanted to be, running clinics and seminars on topics like “Understanding Boys,” “Outfits Guys Will Love,” and “Why Asking ‘What’s Wrong?’ *Is* What’s Wrong.” Everyone would turn to her for the answers, and for the first time ever, she would have them.

“Where’s the camera hidden?” asked Kristen.

“In the Share Bear.” Skye rolled her blue eyes, as if it should have been obvious.

Claire giggled. “My screen name is ClaireBear.”

“ClaireBear,” Dylan burped.

Kristen and Alicia burst out laughing.

“Enough,” Massie snapped, mostly to show Skye she had a tight rein on the Pretty Committee.

They stopped laughing and Skye shot Massie a thank-you nod before continuing. Massie nodded back, relishing the invisible alpha respect waves that flowed between them.

“The Share Bear is a blue-and-white stuffed animal. The guys can only speak if Dr. Loni gives it to them. It’s his *thing*.”

The girls leaned forward in their fuzzy pink chairs, anxious to hear more.

“Who put the camera in it?” Claire asking, sounding mesmerized.

Skye shrugged. “All I know is that it’s there, and that you’ll never have to wonder who likes who, why, and for how long again. It’s the best when you’re trying to pick a suitable date for a dance or something. Not that you’re ready for those things yet.”

The DSL Daters snickered.

Massie’s heart quickened. “What’s that supposed to mean?”

“It’s just that the only time we see you with boys is at the soccer games. And even then, you’re more into talking to each other than to them.”

Massie’s cheeks burned with rage and humiliation. Was Skye right? Did everyone at OCD think they were guy-shy? Her mother’s *Cosmopolitan* magazines always told women to act aloof and play hard-to-get. So that’s how she advised the Pretty Committee. But what if their advice was *wrong*? Was aloof *out*? Had she been reading old issues by accident? Or was the whole *Cosmo* thing just an excuse to avoid embarrassing herself in public? The questions came faster than the answers. All Massie knew for sure was that the Pretty Committee would have to put on a show worthy of the Pussycat Dolls at the next dance.

Skye placed her palm on the black-glitter-infused walls, turned to the side, and pliéed. “Maybe when you get to the eighth grade that will change and you’ll start to *really* discover guys and—”

“Wait!” Claire interrupted. “I *have* a boyfriend.”

“Same!” Massie insisted.

“I’m close,” Alicia lied.

“Anyone else?” Skye scanned the row of fuzzy pink director’s chairs.

Kristen lowered her head, focusing on an imaginary piece of dirt under her perfectly filed pinky nail, and Dylan tugged at her eyelashes as if trying to remove an annoying mascara clump.

“I thought so,” Skye boasted, pointing her left leg front, side, then back. “Anyway, I’m hosting an end-of-year costume party, and the theme is famous couples. Since you’re next in line for the room, you get an automatic invite.”

The Pretty Committee silent-clapped, knowing what an honor this was, while Massie tried to think of the fastest way to spread the news around school. An informative e-mail “accidentally” sent to the wrong person? A casual mention in a crowded bathroom? A detailed note dropped in the middle of an assembly?

“But you all need dates,” Skye warned. “*Suitable* ones. No B-listers,” she said, pronouncing the term “blisters.”

“Or they can go as the Cheetah Girls,” Ponytail scoffed, and then exchanged a high five with Swiss Miss Braids.

“We *have* boyfriends,” Dylan shouted above their laughter.

“And even if we broke up with them, we could always find newer, more *suitable* ones like *that*,” Alicia snapped. “Thanks to ESP.”

The Pretty Committee squealed with delight.

“Um, reminder.” Skye stepped in from of the screen. “This room isn’t yours until next year. Alicia, Dylan, and Kristen will have to find boyfriends all by themselves.”

“And if we can’t?” Kristen twisted the pink-and-orange terry Puma sweatband around her wrist.

“If you *can’t* . . .” Skye wound her thick blond waves into a high ballerina bun and fastened it with one of her gold bangles. “You cute, itty-bitty little seventh-graders will be forced to walk around my party sucking these.” She held out her hand and Thin-Pin, the DSL Dater with ultra-fine straight blond hair, slapped five pink pacifiers in her palm.

Alicia, Dylan, and Kristen gasped.

Massie and Claire exchanged “phew” glances, knowing that their pre-established relationships with Cam and Der-rington rendered them automatically immune to the humiliating ultimatum.

“FYI . . .” Skye slid the pacifiers onto her fingers, held out her arm, cocked her head, and admired them. “If one of you fails, you all fail.”

“Wait!” Massie heard herself protest aloud. “That’s not fair.”

The Pretty Committee gasped again in a thanks-a-lot sort of way.

“I mean . . .” Massie giggle-blushed. “This whole *thing* isn’t

fair. Everyone will ah-bviously *try* to get dates but if for some reason someone falls through at the last minute, you can't punish all of—"

"Do you *all* want access to this room next year?"

They nodded.

"Then you will *all* be treated the same."

"That's how it works," announced Swiss Miss Braids.

"We had the same rules when we were in the seventh grade," said Ponytail.

The other blondes nodded in agreement.

"No problem." Massie grinned. "If we got Birkin bags before Mary-Kate and Ashley, we can certainly find a couple of boyfriends."

"I like your confidence." Skye smiled, flashing a row of iPod-white, never-needed-braces teeth.

Massie half-nodded in thanks.

"I just hope you're right, or your lives are going to *suck*." Skye wiggled her pacifier fingers again, and the DSL Daters cracked up.

Instantly, the Pretty Committee turned toward Massie, anxious for her to unleash a paralyzing comeback.

But it was best to hold back. If Skye knew they were worried, it would only increase her alpha power and weaken Massie's own. Instead, she inhaled, yoga style, focusing on the sharpness of her breath until the sensation calmed her. Finally, she managed a cool smile. "Not a problem—we have more options than Match.com."

"I hope so, because the party's only three weeks away."

Skye clapped once, letting everyone know it was time to leave. She pressed her thumb into the remote and flicked off the lights.

And just like *that*, the Pretty Committee's excitement faded with the image of the TV screen.

CURRENT STATE OF THE UNION	
IN	OUT
GBS (Gossiping in Bomb Shelters)	GBS (Gossiping in Bathroom Stalls)
ESP	IM
Sucker practice	Soccer practice

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Little, Brown and Company

Hachette Book Group USA
237 Park Avenue, New York, NY 10017
Visit our Web site at www.lb-teens.com

First Edition: July 2007

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

ISBN-10: 0-316-11505-TK
ISBN-13: 978-0-316-11505-TK

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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Printed in the United States of America